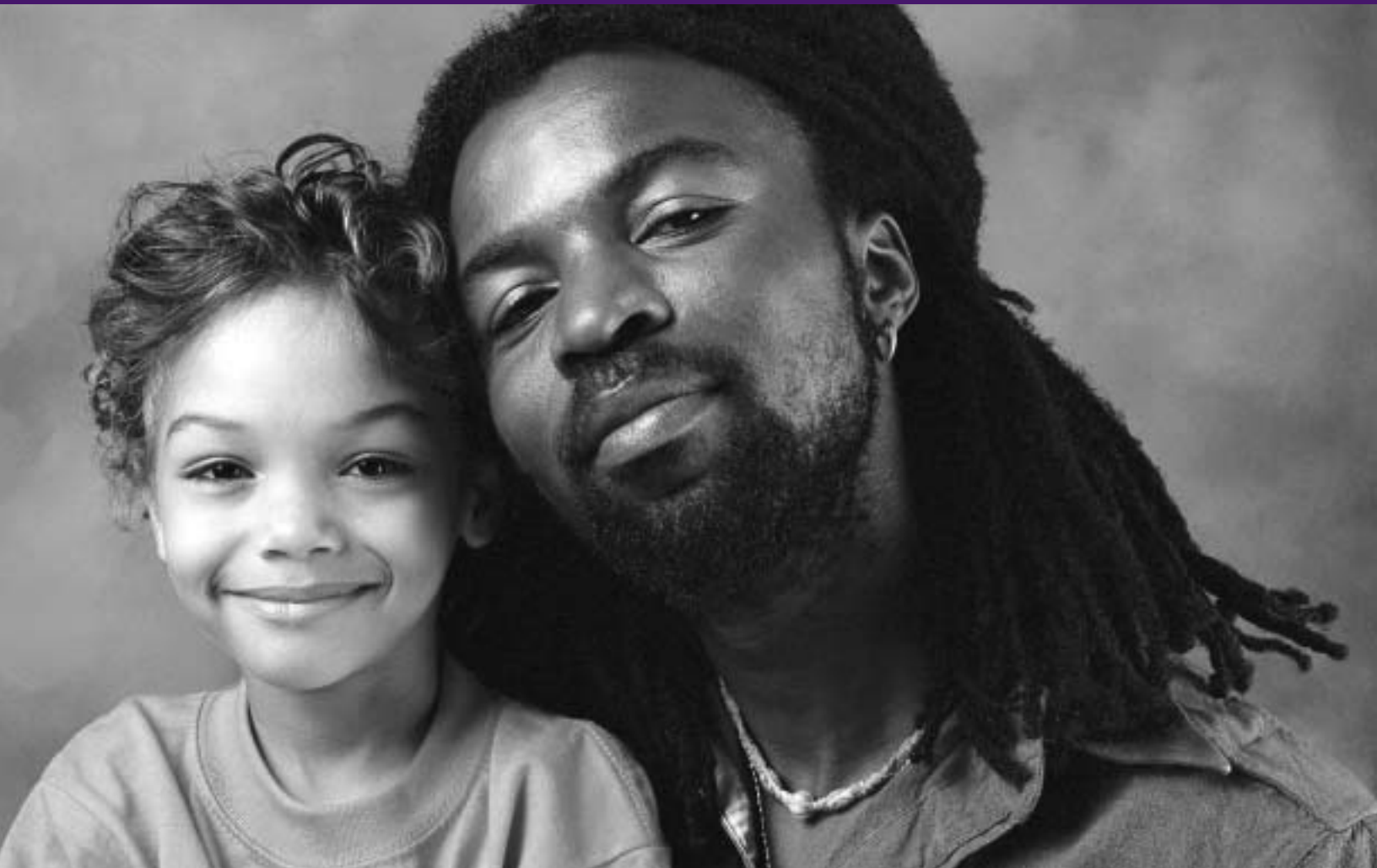


KEY PROGRAM ELEMENTS:

including men

5



strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

C E N T E R F O R T H E S T U D Y O F S O C I A L P O L I C Y

The graph below shows the programs strategies used by exemplary program to build the protective factors known to reduce child abuse and neglect.

how early childhood programs help prevent child abuse and neglect

Excellent early care and education programs use common program strategies to build the protective factors known to reduce child abuse and neglect.

QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Program strategies that:

- Facilitate friendships and mutual support
- Strengthen parenting
- Respond to family crises
- Link families to services and opportunities
- Facilitate children's social and emotional development
- Observe and respond to early warning signs of child abuse or neglect
- Value and support parents

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Parental resilience

Social connections

Knowledge of parenting and child development

Concrete support in times of need

Social and emotional competence of children



prevention
of child
abuse
and neglect

including men

Childcare centers are not typically places where men feel welcome, included, and part of the community. Less than one percent of childcare workers are men, and, in this country, there has been some debate regarding whether or not having male teachers in early childhood settings contributes to child sexual abuse. Traditionally, many of the activities for parents at childcare centers have been geared toward mothers. In the exemplary early childhood centers visited for this project, one of the most striking commonalities across all of the programs was the presence of men, both male staff members as well as family members. Fathers and grandfathers participated in a range of activities and were a presence at the programs largely because men on staff developed relationships with them.

Traditionally, many of the activities for parents at childcare centers have been geared toward mothers. In the exemplary early childhood centers visited for this project, one of the most striking commonalities across all of the programs was the presence of men, both male staff members as well as family members.

These centers are welcoming places, and part of their spirit of inclusiveness is demonstrated by the opportunities for men to participate. They work hard to create a community around children, and in so doing, they ensure that each child has many adults in his or her life and that the adults communicate and support each other in the best interests of the child.

HOW MEN ARE INVOLVED

Exemplary early childhood centers include men by:

- Employing men as staff members in varied positions and in significant roles: for example, as co-director, early childhood teacher, nutrition coordinator, mental health consultant, custodian, or bus driver
- Creating an environment that is welcoming and inclusive of all family members
- Intentionally communicating with both fathers and mothers on all issues concerning their children and making this policy explicit to both parents
- Hosting special activities for men, such as breakfasts or sports teams
- Developing programs in response to men's expressed interests
- Intentionally inviting and encouraging men to become active participants in the program

HOW DOES INVOLVING MEN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT?

- **It models flexibility around gender roles and expands both mothers' and fathers' understanding of what constitutes good parenting.** Research has shown that one of the attributes of a successful, non-violent family is role flexibility—especially gender roles. This means that family members expect to share responsibilities when necessary,

even if they are not consistent with traditional gender roles. Exemplary programs don't assume what moms want or what dads want, but give complete information to both parents and respond equally to parental questions. They break down stereotypes about fathering and mothering, showing both parents that they are equally equipped to nurture children. They show little boys and girls the example of both men and women in nurturing roles. Through these strategies, exemplary early childhood centers model a central aspect of successful family functioning.

- **It reduces social isolation and helps build a community of care for each child.** The more people who are invested in, take responsibility for, and care about a child, the less likely that child will be abused or neglected. By intentionally including the men in a child's life and building nurturing relationships between staff members and both parents,

programs increase the likelihood that parents will reach out if they are under stress or feel themselves at risk of abusing or neglecting their children.

- **It fosters good communication between the adults in a child's life.** Childcare centers can play a pivotal role in enhancing communication between parents by bringing developmental and safety issues to the attention of both parents. In cases where parents don't live in the same household and don't have an amicable relationship with each other, the childcare center's role as an advocate for the child can become extremely important. The center may provide otherwise rare opportunities for both parents to focus on the child, express their concern and care for the child to each other and to the child's teachers and other staff at the center, and work on resolving issues related to the child together.
- **It contributes to the social and emotional development of chil-**

dren. Involving men in a number of different roles at early childhood centers increases the opportunity for children to communicate their needs to different people in their lives. Some children do not have men in their day-to-day lives in a positive, consistent way. Experiencing men in nurturing roles helps children gain familiarity with men who are nurturing and, for some, reduces fear.

- **It strengthens the relationship between parents and their children.** Programs help fathers develop stronger relationships with their children by expanding both fathers' and mothers' ideas about what it means to be a good dad. Many fathers have a limited (and traditional) concept of what fathering entails and limited knowledge about child development. Programs promote the notion of a "good dad" as a multi-faceted role and encourage fathers to pay attention to and talk to their child, to show affection to their child, and



to be present in the child's life in a meaningful way.

- **It can reduce stress in families by helping connect fathers with needed supports and services.**

Because of the way many of our service systems are set up (TANF, for example), services for parents are often easier for moms to access. It is often harder for men to get the supports they need. By connecting in a comfortable way with the center, it may be easier for men to get access to the supports and services they need when they are under financial or emotional stress.

PROGRAM EXAMPLES

Addison County Parent/Child Center

The Addison County Parent/Child Center serves teen parents, many of whom have had chronic negative experiences with their own parents. These young parents need positive role models for parenting and a sense of hope that family life can be different from

their experience. Addison County is intentional about modeling and assigns both a male and a female staff person to families that include mothers and fathers. The program reaches out to young fathers, who are generally not involved in their children's lives, and teaches them what being a responsible and caring father means. The program strives to teach both mothers and fathers that good parenting is not related to gender. As a result of the center's efforts, young parents often develop more full and positive relationships with their children and with each other around issues related to their children.

Carole Robertson Center for Learning

The center maintains a strong commitment to creating an environment that honors and welcomes male nurturers. It employs 15 male direct service staff, a number that is very high for a childcare setting. This is seen as very important to participating families, since most of them are single mothers raising

children. Male caregivers offer positive male role models for children. Seasonally, fathers and male caregivers meet for an informal exchange and to build networks. The center hosts a male appreciation day annually and includes activities geared toward men among its social events. Finally, the center makes an intentional effort to involve fathers in the intake process, during screenings, and at the annual parent-teacher conference where children's development is discussed. This is true even when the parents may not be together.

Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center

The former director of the Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center, Stan Seiderman, is a pioneer in father involvement and, through his leadership, fosters father involvement through programming, hiring staff, and the center's policies. Programming includes a monthly men's breakfast where fathers and children eat together after which the men do work around the center, have discus-

sions, or plan future activities (such as the annual camping trip). Seiderman developed the *Becoming a Father* curriculum, which is used as a basis for discussion with dads. The center employs nine male staff members in various capacities, including as caregivers of infants, who act as positive role models and make fathers feel more comfortable at the center. The center's policies reflect its belief that every child should have the advantage of both of his or her parents to the greatest extent possible. All caregivers of children—whether they are the biological parents or not—are recognized as the “parents” of the children and are treated accordingly. The center policy includes and communicates extensively with non-custodial parents—providing them with the same information about their children as custodial parents are given.

Palm Beach County Head Start and Early Head Start

The Palm Beach County Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide a formal male involvement program, with the expressed purpose of increasing involvement and positive contributions of fathers and other significant males in the lives of their children and families. The center reaches out to other males in a child's life—such as grandfathers, older brothers, stepfathers, and uncles—when the biological father is not available. It offers parenting education, life skills training (including relationship issues, money management, job training, and career development), and mentoring (including positive male figures from the community who have been trained as mentors). One of the most popular activities for men is *Cooking with Jim*, which is offered by the center's nutrition coordinator in response to men's expressed interest.

CHALLENGES FOR PRACTICE

- **Hiring:** Recruiting qualified men for positions in early childhood settings can be a challenge. It may be necessary to do extensive outreach in the neighborhood and among the families served in order to locate suitable candidates. Managers should be cognizant of the attitudes and beliefs of the community being served and plan for education of both staff and families regarding the importance and value of having men on staff.
- **Supervision and team building:** If the program does not have men on staff, it may be a challenge to support the first male staff members, to make them feel welcome, and to retain them. It is advisable to raise awareness among female staff members of the value and importance of having a co-ed team and to gain their support for the hiring, training, and team-building phases of introducing male staff members into the program.



- **Clear policies:** It is important for programs to have clear policies regarding the involvement of both parents, practices regarding engaging non-custodial parents, and procedures and protocols for excluding particular parents in specific situations when the safety and well-being of the child is at stake or issues of domestic violence are present. Parents should be oriented when they come to the program regarding all of these policies.
- **Programming:** Father-friendly activities attract men to a program. In order for this strategy to be effective, however, the activities must be of genuine interest to the fathers. Programs have found that activities tend to be most popular when they are planned by fathers themselves in collaboration with male staff members.
- **Cultural responsiveness:** Working effectively with fathers to develop closer relationships with their children requires a deep understanding of the

family's cultural context and the father's own experience. Fathers may need sensitive help in aligning nurturing attention to their children with cultural expectations of a father's role. Employing staff with experience in the father's culture, identifying and supporting cultural strengths, and encouraging open discussion about the roles of fathers across cultures will help.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Fatherhood Project

Founded in 1981, the Fatherhood Project—a national research and education project that is examining the future of fatherhood and developing ways to support men's involvement in child rearing—is the longest-running national initiative on fatherhood. Currently under the auspices of the Families and Work Institute, the project produces books, films, consultation, seminars, and training that present practical strategies to support fathers and mothers in their parenting roles.

<http://www.fatherhoodproject.org/>

Men in the Nursery: Gender and Caring Work, by Claire Cameron, Peter Moss, and Charlie Owen (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1999)

Noting that men make up less than one percent of childcare workers, this book details a study of gender in the workforce, exploring the experience of male childcare workers in England. The four central themes of the book are: the myth of caring work as mothering work, incorporating the self and gender identities, gender visibility and reflexive institutions, and gender equality and resistance to men. Issues covered include: the relationship between mothering, fathering, the self, and work; the purpose and ethos of childcare institutions; the working environment, including job conditions, exclusionary practices by staff, tensions between gender difference and individuality, and the issue of role models; staff practice and relations with parents; and the British and North American debate regarding a link between male workers and potential child sexual abuse.

National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF)

Established in 1994 at the Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, NCOFF is an interdisciplinary policy research center dedicated to expanding the knowledge base on father involvement and family development and informing policy designed to improve the well-being of children. NCOFF works to strengthen practice in family-serving programs by engaging practitioners in targeted conversations, information dissemination, and collaborative activities.

<http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/>

National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC)

The NCCIC website contains a compilation of organizations and resources with information about men in the childcare field. NCCIC, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is a national resource that links information and people to improve the childcare delivery system so that all children and families have access to high-quality comprehensive services.

<http://www.nccic.org/faqs/men.html>

National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (NPNFF)

The mission of this national individual membership organization is to build the profession of practitioners working to increase the responsible involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. NPNFF's publications, conferences, training events, technical assistance, and advocacy work foster communication, promote professionalism, enhance collaboration, and strengthen the practice of individuals working with fathers and fragile families.

<http://www.npnff.org/>

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

ABOUT STRENGTHENING FAMILIES THROUGH EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Beginning in 2001, the Center for the Study of Social Policy documented the role that early care and education programs across the country can play in strengthening families and preventing abuse and neglect. A new conceptual framework and approach to preventing child abuse and neglect emerged from this study. The approach is organized around evidence-based protective factors that programs can build around young children by working differently with their families. (See inside front cover for a list of the protective factors.)

The Strengthening Families approach is the first time that research knowledge about child abuse and neglect prevention has been strategically linked to similar knowledge about quality early care and education. Resources and tools have been developed to support early childhood programs, policymakers, and advocates in changing existing early childhood programs in small but significant ways so that they can build protective factors and reduce child abuse and neglect.

This program was initiated with funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation in New York and managed by CSSP staff Judy Langford and Nilofer Ahsan. You can contact them at judy.langford@cssp.org and nilofer.ahsan@cssp.org.

ABOUT THE KEY PROGRAM ELEMENTS SERIES

This paper is part of a series describing key program elements used in exemplary programs. The practices described in the series are based on site visits, interviews, and surveys with 21 exemplary early childhood programs.

The other papers in this series include:

Family Support Services

Promoting Children's Healthy Social and Emotional Development

Staff Leadership to Create Relationships that Protect Children

Mental Health Consultation

Use of Physical Space

Relationships with Child Welfare Agencies

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY

The Center for the Study of Social Policy's mission is to promote policies and practices that support and strengthen families and build community capacity for improving the lives of vulnerable populations. CSSP works in partnership with communities and federal, state, and local governments to shape new ideas for public policy, provide technical assistance, and develop and support networks of innovators.



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These and other publications and resources to help programs implement the Strengthening Families approach are available at www.cssp.org. The website also contains information about the exemplary early childhood programs that informed this project.