



CHANGING SYSTEMS & PRACTICE

TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR
YOUNG FATHERS,
THEIR CHILDREN &
THEIR FAMILIES

Lisa Primus
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**Expectant & Parenting
Youth in Foster Care**
Learning Collective

CONTENT

| | | | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| 5 | INTRODUCTION | 13 | COPARENTING | 19 | DATA RECOMMENDATIONS |
| 8 | FATHER-INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE | 14 | FATHER-FOCUSED SERVICES | 21 | CONCLUSION |
| 9 | FATHER IDENTIFICATION | 15 | UNDOCUMENTED FATHERS | 22 | ENDNOTES |
| 10 | FATHER-FOCUSED PRACTICE | 16 | INCARCERATED YOUNG FATHERS | | |
| 12 | FAMILY TIME | 17 | INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE | | |



p.5

Introduction

Relatively little national attention has been paid to the importance of engaging young fathers under age 26, particularly young fathers who are involved in child welfare systems.

p.8

Policy Recommendations

We present a set of policy and practice action steps that agencies can take, as well as examples of how these steps are working in various agencies and jurisdictions.

p.19

Data Recommendations

To improve their services for young fathers, agencies and jurisdictions need to systematically collect better information and set and meet new performance measures.

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The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) works to secure equal opportunities and better futures for all children and families, especially those most often left behind. Underlying all of the work is a vision of a child, family and community well-being which services as a unifying framework for the many policy, system reform and community change activities in which CSSP engages.

Learn more about EPY by visiting: <http://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/expectant-parenting-youth-in-foster-care>.

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INTRODUCTION

Fathers matter. It is well established by best practice and research that the presence and involvement of fathers are important to healthy child development, thriving families and communities. When fathers are engaged in the well-being of their children, mothers tend to experience less stress and have better outcomes during and beyond pregnancy.¹ Children also exhibit better functioning in terms of cognitive and social skills, self-control, self-esteem and empathy, and they have a lower likelihood of experiencing negative outcomes, such as involvement with the criminal justice system if their fathers are involved.² Children who feel close to their fathers are twice as likely to enter college or find stable employment after high school, 75 percent less likely to have a teen birth, 80 percent less likely to spend time in jail and half as likely to experience multiple depression symptoms as those who do not report a close relationship to their fathers.³ Fathers who are engaged with their children and families also have better outcomes because they learn to cope better with stressful situations and feel more confident in their occupations and social relationships.⁴

The importance of father involvement has been emphasized at the federal level through the Responsible Fatherhood Grants and the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse.⁵ However, much of this focus has been on fathers generally. Relatively little national attention has been paid to the importance of engaging young fathers under age 26,⁶ particularly young fathers who are involved in child welfare systems. Young fathers—foster youth themselves, those exiting out of foster care and those whose children are in foster care—continue to be excluded from discussions about child welfare policy and practice. Young fathers of color in particular are often invisible in discussions about positive parenting and early childhood development. These fathers desire to be good parents and have the capacity to do so. All too frequently, however, systemic barriers get in the way.

One of the most significant barriers is child welfare systems' historical view of the mother as the primary parent.⁷ Child welfare workers are often ill-prepared to identify, engage and support fathers. At best, fathers are treated as an afterthought; at worst, fathers are stigmatized and alienated by the agencies making decisions about their children's lives. This general disposition is exacerbated by implicit bias, especially toward young fathers of color, which often predisposes child welfare workers to view these young men as absentee parents or potentially violent partners. Another significant barrier is the lack of quality data to

inform policy and practice. Child welfare systems often struggle with incomplete case records where many fathers are listed as unknown,⁸ which is often a result of incomplete birth records and caseworkers failing to identify fathers. Relatively few studies have examined fatherhood among young men who are or have been in foster care. According to data from the National Youth in Transition Database, which collects information on youth in foster care, six percent of the 19-year-old males who completed the first follow-up survey in 2014 reported fathering a child in the past two years.⁹ The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth showed that young men who aged out of foster care are almost twice as likely as their non-foster care peers to report fathering a child by age 26 and are 1.8 times less likely than their non-foster care peers to live with their children.¹⁰

Young fathers who interact with child welfare systems face significant barriers to fulfilling their paternal responsibilities and playing a meaningful role in their children's lives.¹¹ Child welfare systems are in a unique position to create opportunities, reduce risk and positively change life trajectories for multiple generations: young fathers, their children and their extended families.

This brief makes recommendations for child welfare system policy and practice changes that recognize the critical role young fathers can play in improving the outcomes of their

Intimate Partner Violence



Some young families may experience interpersonal violence and violence in their communities among a myriad of other challenges. Protecting the safety and well-being of all family members is paramount. Policy and practice should address the need for continuous assessment of safety, risk and challenges in ways that facilitate positive fatherhood involvement and do not stigmatize young fathers. More information on policy recommendations related to father engagement in situations of intimate partner violence are on page 17.

children and families. State and local policies and programs that seek to identify, engage and support young fathers are highlighted. Links to practice guides and other resources to support implementation of the recommendations are also included. Young fathers' voices and experiences with child welfare systems are embedded throughout the brief. Policy recommendations address the following challenges:

- The lack of attention to the dual roles and needs of young fathers who are simultaneously navigating a transition to adulthood while learning to parent;
- The invisibility of young fathers in child welfare systems and the dearth of opportunities for them to support the well-being of their children and families;
- The lack of data on the characteristics and needs of young fathers; and
- The lack of cross-system collaboration among the education, juvenile/criminal justice, early childhood education (ECE), child support enforcement, health care, homeless services, housing and mental health systems to support young fathers and their families.

These policy recommendations apply a trauma-informed, multigenerational and intersectional lens to fatherhood work in child welfare systems, and they address the unique barriers that young fathers face to being engaged and involved in their children's lives. The policy and practice recommendations are grounded in a commitment to parental rights, social justice and equity. All aspects of young fathers' identities—including their race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, marital status, disability status and socioeconomic status—must be acknowledged and supported. Understanding the diversity of experiences, backgrounds and circumstances of young fathers will help reduce institutional and individual bias against them and their families.

Child Welfare System Challenges and Opportunities

The most recent findings from the 2007–2010 Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) reveal that no state agency met federal standards related to father assessment, engagement, visitation or service provision. There are many possible explanations for this service gap, including the extra workload required of caseworkers to involve two parents who may not be cohabiting, the perception that fathers are not interested in being involved and the lack of resources for fathers who request services and supports. In addition, some mothers may withhold information about father identity or location and discourage father involvement,¹³ and fathers may feel intimidated by programs and services that seem to be directed toward mothers.¹⁴

Child welfare jurisdictions should prioritize fatherhood identification, engagement and involvement not only to achieve compliance with CFSR standards, but to contribute to opportunities for improved safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children, youth and families—both now and for future generations. Children with highly involved nonresident fathers are discharged from foster care more quickly than children whose fathers are less involved.¹⁵ Nonresident fathers' involvement with their children is associated with a higher likelihood of reunification and a lower likelihood of adoption,¹⁶ and father involvement is associated with a lower likelihood of subsequent maltreatment allegations among children whose permanency outcome is reunification, typically with their mothers.¹⁷ Finally, underscoring the importance of identifying fathers, studies examining risk factors for child welfare involvement indicate that listing the father as

Age Gap Between Parents



Although information on the age of fathers is often missing from birth certificates of children born to women under 25 years of age,¹² practitioners in the child welfare field anecdotally report significant age differences between fathers and mothers under the age of 18. This area is fraught with challenges that are difficult for the field to address. Policy and practice solutions must incorporate considerations for the safety and well-being of children and all family members, the nature and quality of the existing relationship between the parents and the legal implications, such as statutes, statutory rape and consent laws, which vary by state. This is a complex issue impacting expectant and parenting youth in foster care, with an urgent need for comprehensive research to inform policy and practice solutions.

unknown on the birth certificate is significantly associated with an increase in the incidence of severe child maltreatment and child fatality.¹⁸

Much of fatherhood engagement comes down to simply asking fathers to be involved. Fathers care about and take pride in their children, and they want to positively contribute to their children's lives and healthy development. Research suggests that being persistent in consulting fathers and asking what services they require can increase engagement with fathers.¹⁹ Home visiting programs, access to peer support and increased opportunities for fathers to spend time with their children have all been associated with more positive father involvement.²⁰ The most critical period for developing fathers' roles in the lives of their children is during the transition from pregnancy to early childhood. Therefore, engaging young fathers throughout the pregnancy and immediately after birth is critical to maintaining both the parenting relationship and the caseworkers' relationship with fathers.²¹ Fathers are more likely to stay involved with their children over time if they are involved in the first two years of their lives.²²

The ways in which young fathers in foster care experience paternity, the impact of stress and trauma on their developing adolescent brains and the types of services that might best support them remain unexplored issues. A strong body of research affirms the negative impacts of early and prolonged exposure to stressful experiences and environments on healthy development.²³ Young fathers who are in or who have exited from foster care are often exposed to many stressors, which can impact their health and well-being and shape their experiences as parents. Although trauma can further impede brain development, research shows that individuals at all ages can adapt and recover given appropriate supports.²⁴ Chemical changes in their brains prime adolescents to take risks, which may negatively affect their behavior, but this developmental period also presents windows of opportunity for them to learn from mistakes and change trajectories.²⁵ Child welfare systems can play an important role in the lives of expectant and parenting young fathers by providing them with the guidance and resources they need to become both successful parents and thriving adults.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Father-Inclusive Organizational Culture

Recommendation: Revise agency forms and materials and adjust physical spaces to promote father-friendliness and inclusion. *Both the language in agency materials and the look and feel of physical spaces may affect how welcome fathers feel. Through their materials, forms, posters and physical layout, agencies can communicate that fathers are welcome and are key players in their children's upbringing.*

Implementation

- Adjust language to include terms like “father(s) and mother(s),” rather than just “parents” or “mothers” in agency materials;
- Display positive images of young fathers of diverse backgrounds including LGBTQ2-S+²⁶ fathers and youth-friendly messages in photos, posters, bulletin boards and materials;
- Recruit and hire male staff;
- Systematically seek fathers’ input through surveys and focus groups on services received;
- Provide space for fathers and children to interact in waiting areas that are appealing to young fathers; and
- Include diaper changing areas in men’s bathrooms.



Spotlights

[National Father Initiative's Father Friendly Check-Up](#): This comprehensive checklist provides information that organizations can use to make sure that their leadership, program and organizational development and community engagement are all in line with father inclusivity. The checklist has been used by the [Ohio Child Welfare System](#), the [Children's Institute](#) in Pittsburgh, [Community Action Inc.](#) in Beloit, Wisconsin and [Embrace Wichita](#) in Kansas.



I just feel like there needs to be more men in the child welfare system because honestly, the majority are women, and a woman's perspective on relationships can be different. As a man, there are certain things I don't feel comfortable talking to a female about because I don't feel like she'll understand.

—James

Father Identification

Recommendation: Require the identification of young fathers as early as possible during pregnancy using all available resources for identification. *When fathers can be present during the pregnancy and at birth, they are more likely to be involved with their children later in life.²⁷ The formal process of establishing paternity may be confusing, cumbersome and expensive for young fathers. Moreover, many young fathers may not be familiar with their legal rights and responsibilities. Identifying young fathers early and addressing the challenges they face may require extra effort by caseworkers, but is necessary to support those who wish to be involved.*

Implementation

- Train caseworkers, supervisors and managers on:
 - The benefits of establishing legal parental status;
 - The importance of establishing paternity and signing birth certificates;
 - The importance of young fathers' understanding their legal rights and responsibilities to their children;
- Provide staff with tip sheets and tools on all possible ways to identify fathers (e.g., mother questionnaires, database searches, paternal and maternal family members, friends and community members, community organizations, local, state and federal agencies);
- Require ongoing discussions about pregnancy and parenthood with all youth;
- Link youth to programs that help to establish paternity and cover any associated costs; and
- Establish consistent communication and data-sharing agreements between education, child support and juvenile justice systems to identify and engage young fathers involved in multiple systems.



Spotlights

[Indiana Fatherhood Programs Service Standard:](#) Indiana Department of Child Services contracts with providers throughout the state to implement fatherhood programs and provide assistance for fathers whose children are involved with the system. The Service Standard specifically outlines that providers must assist in locating and engaging fathers when family case managers have “exhausted all known diligent search efforts,” including those fathers who are incarcerated or live out of state.

[Texas Child Welfare Procedure for Father Identification:](#) Texas policy mandates caseworkers to conduct diligent searches to identify and locate any alleged biological father of a child, even if a child has one or more alleged biological fathers. In addition to a search of the paternity registry, the caseworker “must use investigative skills and work with the mother, with both maternal and paternal relatives, and with other persons who may have information that leads to the identification or location of an alleged father.”

[Minnesota Procedure for Identification of Fathers:](#) Minnesota’s child welfare system requires the identification, location and offer of appropriate services to both parents by statute. The expectation is that custodial and nonresidential parents be involved in case planning unless there is substantial documentation of a safety threat. If caseworkers have trouble locating a nonresidential parent, they can request a “Parent Locator” search through a partnership with the state’s child support system.

“My father died when I was two years old, so I never had a father. That is one of the main reasons why I have to be here for my child, because I know what it’s like.”

—Alex



TEXAS

Department of Family and Protective Services

RESOURCE

[Tips for Moms: Why Dads Who Are Not at Home Matter](#)

Father-Focused Practice

Recommendation: Issue policy and practice guidance that removes barriers to father engagement and creates opportunities for active and positive involvement in children’s lives. Father-focused practice involves creating opportunities and reducing risk for young fathers by building [protective and promotive factors](#) associated with healthy development and well-being as parents and adolescents. Young fathers are more likely than other young people to have experienced family violence and hardship in childhood.²⁸ This is likely to be even more common for young fathers that interact with child welfare systems. To promote healthy brain and social development, adolescent fathers need positive youth development services, opportunities and supports.²⁹ Equally as important are comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and ongoing conversations with young fathers on this topic.³⁰ The ways in which professionals regard young fathers directly impacts the provision of services and supports. Child welfare systems must recognize and address implicit bias in their work with young fathers. Creating opportunities for young fathers to participate in case planning meetings, family group decision making, home visits and all other discussions related to their children significantly contributes to child and family well-being.

Implementation

- Implement training programs for caseworkers, supervisors and managers on how to:
 - Establish trust and strengths-based relationships with young fathers;
 - Think critically about the role of implicit bias in their work with young fathers;
 - Apply cultural humility when engaging fathers of different ages, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and economic backgrounds;
 - Understand the impact of trauma on the brain and the value of building protective and promotive factors for adolescents;
 - Recognize differences in adolescent male development; and
 - Talk about sexual and reproductive health with young fathers.
- Train managers and supervisors to use reflective supervision and ongoing coaching of caseworkers, especially related to the possible influence of their own personal experiences with fathers and father figures on their view of young fathers;
- Hire father engagement specialists within local offices to support staff working with young fathers;
- Use social media and other nontraditional communication tools to engage with youth fathers (e.g., implement text message notifications to encourage fathers to attend meetings, gain knowledge about child development and increase family time);
- Send invitations or letters directly to fathers requesting participation in planning for their children (e.g., court hearings, family team meetings);
- Provide information to young fathers about their legal rights as parents and connect them to legal advocates;
- Develop parent guides for young fathers navigating child welfare systems;
- Create opportunities for young fathers to gain positive and enduring connections with adult mentors and strengthen their social support networks;
- Partner with home visiting and fatherhood programs within the community; and
- Work with child support systems to advocate for child support modifications and support young fathers in navigating child support.



When I was in foster care, they didn’t think they had to teach us about sex because we were too young, so like honestly, they didn’t get to me. They were too late. I turned 13 and had a kid.

—William

If a father is there, and he’s doing whatever he is doing, hitting him up with child support is just crippling him, he can’t afford it. Finding a second and third job means he is not spending time with his kids.

—Carlos



Spotlights

Texas' Child Welfare Policy Handbook: Texas policy stipulates that when a youth is pregnant, workers are expected to engage fathers in the case planning for the child, and if the father is in substitute care, the worker must address the plans for the child in the father's plan of service.

New York City's Office of Child Support's Parent Pledge Project: This program facilitates child support agreements between parents outside of court through mediation. Trained mediators work in a community-based setting to assist in child support solutions that work for the children and for both parents.

Alameda County Father Corps: Alameda County, California, has a partnership with the Public Health and Social Services departments to form a county-wide team of male service providers trained in strengthening families with young fathers. This team works with fathers to increase parenting skills and works with local organizations to advance their father-friendly principles.

New York Office of Children and Family Services: New York State developed a fatherhood engagement toolkit and training curriculum to support local districts in involving fathers in case planning for their children.

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services: Illinois' administrative policy states that the needs, rights and responsibilities of young fathers are equally important and that they should receive full attention in the provision of services and extend beyond the obligation of financial support.

Stoneleigh Foundation: The organization funded a three-year (2013–2016) project led by Dr. Rufus Lynch to integrate responsible fatherhood programming within foster care agencies in Philadelphia. One of the agencies, the Jewish Family and Children's Service, became certified as a Father Friendly Flagship Agency by changing its forms to become gender neutral, recruiting same-sex and single fathers as foster parents, recruiting more male staff, installing changing tables in men's restrooms and conducting male-only parenting classes.

RESOURCES



Minnesota Fathers and Families Network

Engaging Fathers Using Protective Factors Framework

Gatekeeping: Mom as a Pathway to Healthy Father Involvement

Talking with Moms about Engaging Dads

Linking Fathers: Child Welfare Sector Analysis



Healthy Teen Network

Engaging Young Men in Health Programs



Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

Social Worker Tip Sheet - Pregnant and Parenting Youth

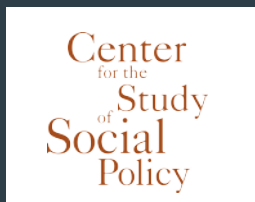


U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Working with Pregnant & Parenting Teens Tip Sheet

Practice Tools for Engaging Young Fathers

Fatherhood E-Learning Module



Center for the Study of Social Policy

Expectant and Parenting Youth in Foster Care - Addressing Their Developmental Needs to Promote Parent and Child Outcomes



Film - Daddy Don't Go

DaddyDontGoTheMovie.com



National Responsible Fatherhood

www.Fatherhood.gov



Fathers & Families Coalition of America

Fatherhood Practitioner Certificate Training

Effective Fatherhood Services Scale

Family Time

Recommendation: Ensure that young fathers have access to frequent and quality visits with their children. When fathers spend time taking care of their children, they have more opportunities to show affection and nurture their children, which supports positive interactions and leads to more confidence to be involved in the future.³⁵ Child welfare jurisdictions should prioritize parenting time with fathers in case plans and address and remove all barriers to quality family time.

Implementation

- Require that all resource parents create opportunities for young fathers to visit their children;
- Educate mothers on the importance of nonresident father engagement in visit services;
- Address and remove all barriers to visit for young fathers (e.g., provide supports for transportation and flexible scheduling, etc.);
- Cultivate visit spaces that allow young fathers to naturally and actively interact with their children;
- Collaborate with education systems to ensure young fathers in school or vocational training are encouraged to have flexible schedules to visit with their children and ensure that children's schools are prepared for and encouraging of young father involvement (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, PTA meetings, etc.); and
- Collaborate with child support systems to consider a reduction of child support payments by counting parenting time as a credit against their child support payment.



Spotlights

[Michigan parenting time guideline](#): Michigan implemented the Parenting Time Guideline to promote strong relationships between children and their parents. It helps ensure that children have a right to parenting time with both parents.

[Indiana child support guidelines](#): Indiana instituted parenting time credit for noncustodial parents. The amount of child support obligations to be paid by noncustodial fathers is reduced based upon the amount of time that these fathers spend with their children.

[California Compromise of Arrears Program](#):

California's child welfare system allows for the modification and reduction of child support payments based on an application process that may take into account visits time with children.

RESOURCE

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services:
[Child and Family Visitation Best Practice Guide](#)



“

To me, anybody can be a father but not everyone can be a daddy.

—James

Thirty minutes for you to see your kid is just not enough, and thirty minutes with your kid and five other kids in the room plus a bunch of other people you don't know, that's not a real connection.

—Carlos

”

Coparenting

Recommendation: Require the exploration of coparenting with young fathers and provide referrals for coparenting supports where appropriate and safe to do so. Coparenting is the relationship of two or more adults, who may or may not be involved in an intimate relationship, that emphasizes shared decision-making, support and collaboration between parents or caregivers, all focused on the well-being of the child.³⁶ Studies that examine the importance of expectant and parenting mothers forging a mutual agreement with the child's father suggest that a positive coparenting relationship is beneficial for their child's development and is associated with higher levels of adolescent father involvement over time.³⁷ In fact, the strongest and most consistent predictor of positive father involvement, for both adult and teen nonresident fathers, is a positive, cooperative coparenting relationship between the mother and father.³⁸ In addition, studies have shown that the health of the mother, and subsequently the health of the child, are associated with the quality of the mother-father relationship.³⁹ An effective coparenting arrangement should include the father's extended family, because paternal grandparents and other relatives can be an important source of nurturing, child care and financial support for the young family.

Implementation

- Issue policy and guidance to caseworkers, supervisors, managers and resource parents on coparenting and its benefits;
- Train all caseworkers, supervisors, managers and resource parents on how to:
 - Support young fathers in developing a positive coparenting relationship (e.g., clarifying how the coparent will be involved, the nature and timing of visits and the nature of participation their children's lives, etc.);
 - Equip young fathers with skills to foster and sustain healthy relationships with their partner or coparent, family members and friends;
- Require documentation of coparenting decisions and supports in case plans, contact notes and discussion in family team meetings;
- Make developmentally informed coparenting services (e.g., workshops, peer support groups, therapy, etc.) available either directly or by helping young fathers access community resources; and
- Collaborate with mental health and juvenile justice systems to ensure that coparenting is included as an option in therapy and educational curricula.



Spotlights

New York City's Administration for Children's Services' (ACS) **Provider Policy Guidance** and **Coparenting Curriculum**: ACS developed guidance for all staff and contract providers on coparenting interventions and created a developmentally informed coparenting curriculum, which includes outreach material and a young father engagement protocol targeting the unique needs of expectant and parenting youth in foster care.

University of Wisconsin's Young Parenthood Program: Through this program, social workers and mental health service providers help young people adapt to becoming parents by developing interpersonal skills and positive coparenting relationships. In an experimental evaluation, the program was found to have significant impacts on paternal engagement and fathers' reports of relationship quality with their children's mother.⁴⁰



I feel like there should be some type of mediation as far as trying to settle outside of court before the court system becomes involved, because once the court system becomes involved, now it's this person telling you how to take care of your child, instead of 'We can do this together.'

—William

RESOURCES

- Fatherhood Research and Practice Network: **Coparenting Relationship Scale**
- Healthy Families America: **Building Family Strengths by Engaging Fathers on Home Visits**
- MenCare: **Bringing Fathers in Fact Sheets**

Father-Focused Services

Recommendation: Ensure access to equitable services for young fathers that are developmentally and trauma-informed. *Child welfare jurisdictions must offer services to young fathers related to education, employment, stress reduction, social support, parenting and understanding child development. Services should focus on healthy relationships with the child, the partner or coparent and family members. In addition, services should address basic needs, including housing, child care, health care, transportation and financial resources. Providers of such services must keep in mind that young fathers are likely to have experienced adverse childhood experiences, including non-consensual early sexual experiences with older partners.⁴¹ Therefore, services must involve an understanding of previous traumatic experiences and developmentally informed practice for adolescent fathers. Research indicates that effective fatherhood services are those delivered in group settings with other fathers who can serve as peer mentors.⁴²*

Implementation

- Embed an explicit commitment to father-friendly service approaches within performance contract management;
- Provide incentives for young fathers to attend programs (e.g., transportation, diapers, meals, flexible schedules, fun activities, recreational and social events, etc.);
- Create opportunities for financial literacy, as young fathers are often socialized to identify fatherhood with providing financially for children and meeting their material needs;⁴³
- Connect young fathers with veteran fathers who can serve as peer mentors;
- Provide services that help fathers learn about child development and nurturing parenting through a wide range of engagement and learning styles;
- Create opportunities for fathers to discuss and learn about sexual and reproductive health, contraceptives, healthy relationships and sexually responsible behaviors;
- Collaborate with education, juvenile/criminal justice, early childhood education, child support, health care, homeless services, housing and mental health systems to ensure targeted service offerings for young fathers; and
- Develop public-private partnerships to incentivize hiring of young fathers.⁴⁴



Spotlights

[Fathers and Families Center for Indiana](#): This center delivers the Strong Fathers, Strong Families program, a three-week program for expectant fathers, which also helps with employment preparation and education services (both college preparation and high school equivalency). It has received numerous awards including the 2008 Champion of Compassion Award from the U.S. Department of Labor.

[Massachusetts Home Visiting Program for Parenting Youth](#): This program facilitates home visiting services for expectant and parenting youth to increase their knowledge of nurturing parenting skills and specifically targets young fathers. According to a Tufts University evaluation, participation in the program led to a 31 percent decrease in young parents' impulsive and risky behaviors, including alcohol and drug abuse.⁴⁵

[All Dads Matter](#): Merced County, California, provides training and support groups for new fathers. The program is facilitated by veteran fathers and supports them in becoming successful parents.

In parenting classes, you see all the fathers' emotions out there. You see when they're happy. You see when things go their way and when they don't. It's just having somebody outside of family and friends that actually cares. That's a big thing."

—Carlos



My biggest supports are two mentors that actually are father figures to me. I met them at a Young Fathers Program, which changed my life. Growing up in the foster care system, I didn't have a father figure; I was constantly moving from home to home and having different social workers. I didn't have support. I always heard people say that they're going to be there, and the next week they were gone.

—James

Undocumented Fathers

Recommendation: Require that when young fathers are identified as undocumented, caseworkers develop a strategy and work with immigration attorneys to obtain legal recognition of parenthood and legal status and incorporate it within case plans and transition services. Child welfare systems must recognize undocumented young fathers' unique fears of arrest, detention and deportation, which may prevent identification by partners, coparents and families. Youth who age out of foster care without legal status are at risk of deportation and arrest and lack the ability to obtain employment. Enhanced services to support these young fathers in identifying forms of immigration relief for which they may be eligible, including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA),⁴⁶ Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS),⁴⁷ asylum, or Violence Against Women Act (VAWA),⁴⁸ Victims of Human Trafficking (T),⁴⁹ Victims of Criminal Activity (U)⁵⁰ or family-based visas are necessary. The process for obtaining legal status in the United States can take upwards of a year from filing, and in some cases requires youth to file for adjustment of status before they reach age 21 or exit the foster care system. Thus, it is imperative that these fathers are identified as early as possible to begin the process and that their risk for deportation be assessed upon identification.

Implementation

- Train managers and supervisors to facilitate conversations with workers on the common fears that immigrants face in the United States and the impact of undocumented status on young fathers and their families;
- Train caseworkers on immigration policy and specific forms of immigration relief including DACA, SIJS, asylum and certain visas, including VAWA, T, U and family-based visas. Include local United States Citizenship and Immigration Services staff, attorneys and immigration advocates in training and discussions with child welfare workers;
- Continuously share federal, state and local immigration policy updates with all staff;
- Ensure that staff understand how local immigration courts grant Extreme Hardship Waivers and support undocumented fathers' family members in securing them;⁵¹
- Develop Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with local immigration lawyers to facilitate opportunities for immigration relief for young fathers, including eligibility determination for waivers. Immigration lawyers will have greater knowledge of the process by which local immigration courts rule on waivers and grant visas; and
- Develop and disseminate policy to staff at all levels that clearly states no caseworker, supervisor or manager can use the legal status of a youth or adult as a reason to deny services and that no information shared or collected by workers will be used, stored or shared for immigration enforcement activities.



Spotlights

New Mexico Best Practices: The Judicial Branch of New Mexico publishes a set of best practices for working with undocumented and mixed status immigrant children and families who are involved in the child welfare system. The bulletin highlights practices for determining a child or family's immigration status, training for staff on assessing children and families for their eligibility for relief options and guidance on services and rights afforded to immigrant children and families.

California Birth Certificates: The state of California allows caseworkers working with undocumented immigrants to work directly with the Mexican government to receive birth certificates for undocumented Mexican immigrants to help them obtain valid driver's licenses and ease administrative burdens to obtaining legal status.



RESOURCE

Center for the Study of Social Policy:
**Special Immigrant Juvenile Status:
A Critical Pathway to Safety and
Permanence Series**

- [Federal and State Policymaker Guide](#)
- [Practitioner Guide](#)

Incarcerated Young Fathers

Recommendation: Require the engagement and involvement of incarcerated young fathers in case planning, including the facilitation of meaningful contact or visits with their children. *Incarcerated youth have higher rates of parenthood than youth in the general population.⁵² Current data indicate that 14 percent of all incarcerated youth have children, with incarcerated young males at a higher rate of parenthood than young females.⁵³ Incarcerated young fathers often report viewing fatherhood as a transformative process and catalyst for positive change.⁵⁴ Improved practice with incarcerated young fathers will create opportunities for father involvement in case planning and maintaining healthy child, family and community connections.*

Implementation

- Train all caseworkers, supervisors and managers on the impact of incarceration on the parent-child relationship;
- Require workers to collaborate with providers in the detention centers, jails and prisons to coordinate care plans, visits and discharge planning;
- Partner with local organizations connecting children to incarcerated young fathers;
- Develop a systems agreement and/or procedure plan with detention centers, jails and prisons to better facilitate visits with young fathers and allow for video conferencing for case planning, court hearings and other meetings when they cannot participate in person; and
- Collaborate with juvenile justice and criminal justice systems and community organizations to offer father-specific therapies, programs and mentorship services during the period of incarceration.

RESOURCES

[Taking the First Step: Using Behavioral Economics to Help Incarcerated Parents Apply for Child Support Order Modifications](#)

[Adolescent Fathers in the Justice System: Hoping for a Boy and Making Him a Man](#)



Spotlights

Just Beginning: A video-based program developed by the Youth Law Center and Georgetown University that supports incarcerated young fathers and mothers, through structured visits in maintaining contact with their children. It uses Sesame Beginnings videos to support young parents to build positive relationships with their children.

California Child Welfare System: California enacted Senate Bill 962, which allows for video conferencing to emphasize the inclusion of incarcerated parents in service planning and court hearings.

Ridge Project Ohio: This program offers visitation support to its participants as a way of rewarding attendance at parenting and relationship education classes and encouraging family communication and contact. The program reimburses coparents who participate in family strengthening services for transportation and food expenses associated with prison visits, up to a maximum of \$50 per coparent.⁵⁵

Osborne Association: Located in New York City, the agency provides services to incarcerated parents to maintain relationships with their children. Several of their programs are specific to incarcerated fathers including televisiting (Clinton-Annex Correctional Facility) and prison day trips (Eastern, Fishkill, Greenhaven, Sing Sing, Shawangunk, Sullivan, Wallkill & Woodbourne).

Hope House: Located in Washington, DC, Hope House provides programs to strengthen and maintain relationships between incarcerated fathers and their children. Its theory of change makes clear that connections with children and family members are likely to reduce recidivism rates.



I actually took the classes, which helped a lot, I learned how to manage my temper and all of the stress I went through. Now I'm doing probation. So I'm just proud I actually went through it and I'm still going through it.

—Carlos

The system is just outdated. They need to update the system, the way they think, the way they process things. It's unfair mainly to men. Once you go in there, they just feel like kids should be with the mom. It doesn't matter what happens. Why is my child with her and not with me? Why is my child with her and not with my family or anybody from both sides? I felt like my voice wasn't heard because I was the one in handcuffs.

—Carlos



Intimate Partner Violence

Recommendation: Ensure that the relationship between young offending fathers and their children is supported and maintained unless it is not safe for the child and mother. *Working with young fathers to care appropriately and safely for their children is an essential part of violence prevention and ending violence against women and children. Young offending fathers must be held accountable for their actions, while simultaneously receiving support to change violent behavior.⁵⁶ There are multiple effective supervision programs to allow for safe facilitation of relationships between fathers who have committed violence and their children.⁵⁷ After contact has been discontinued due to violence, child welfare systems should support young fathers to re-engage with their children only when it is safe to do so. Research shows that when fathers receive consequences for violent actions and when services focus on developing their parenting skills, they are increasingly motivated to change their violent behavior.⁵⁸*

Implementation

- Assess on a case-by-case basis whether re-engagement of the father with the child is a safe option that will not negatively impact the well-being of the child or the mother;
- Incorporate safety and risk assessment tools that assess danger for both child and mother;
- Frame re-engagement of fathers after violence as a tool to enhance the safety and well-being of women and children, prevent violence by fathers and strengthen parenting practices and partnerships;
- Incorporate policies and procedures to facilitate ongoing communication between workers and mothers and ongoing assessments of safety and risk;
- Train caseworkers, supervisors and managers on how to:
 - Engage safely with parents separately (e.g., separate case planning meetings, Family Team Meetings, visits with children, etc);
 - Be vigilant about not disclosing information that may impact the safety and well-being of children and mothers;
 - Make referrals to supervised visits and safe exchange centers where appropriate;
 - Aid young offending fathers in developing personal goals for maintaining a nonviolent relationship with both children and mothers;
- Hire intimate partner violence experts at local offices to support staff in working with young offending fathers and their families;
- Train resource parents on:
 - The impact of trauma and the cycle of violence on children and families;
 - Risk factors for violence;
- Contract with agencies and organizations that provide a blend of batterer, fatherhood and violence prevention programming; and
- Collaborate with juvenile justice and criminal justice systems to encourage restorative parenting and evidence-informed services for offending fathers, to incorporate father-focused language and practice.



Spotlights

[Children's Trust: Fatherhood Initiative](#): This statewide initiative in Massachusetts provides resources and training for fathers, and the professionals who work with them, on intimate partner violence prevention and fathering after violence.

[North Carolina Strong Fathers](#): This is a 20-week strengths-based intervention for fathers who have engaged in intimate partner violence or are at risk of doing so. The curriculum incorporates a focus on the impact of violence on childhood development and engages offending fathers in assessing and managing their own risk to family members.

[Resources for Resolving Violence, Inc.](#): This program in Maine provides community and home-based clinical services for families and individuals addressing trauma, violence and sexual harm. The program includes specific services and practices for young fathers.

[Fathering After Violence \(FAV\)](#): Created by the Family Violence Prevention Fund, this resource serves as a guide for caseworkers working with offending fathers in supervised visits settings.

RESOURCES

- [Curriculum on Fathering After Violence](#)
- [Flexible Approaches When There is Domestic Violence Tip Sheet](#)
- [Assessing Levels of Risk for Domestic Violence Tip Sheet](#)



DATA RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Systematically collect, analyze and use data on expectant and parenting young fathers and their unique needs. *Understanding the experiences and needs of young fathers is an important first step in the development of effective policies and practice interventions. Child welfare systems need an approach to data collection and analysis that produces a reliable number of youth who are expectant and parenting and tracks their outcomes over time. This is supported by the recent Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Final Rule,⁶⁰ which requires data collection and reporting on youth in foster care who are fathers.⁵⁹ Fostering data-sharing agreements with other public systems that are intervening in the lives of these young families will yield greater results and is further affirmed by the recent Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) Final Rule, which promotes data sharing and quality research. Applying a race equity lens to data analysis is key to understanding the disparate impact of policies and practices on young fathers and families of color and promoting equitable change.*

Implementation

- Modify state and local data management systems by updating all existing data fields to include designation of father(s) and mother(s) and to allow for case naming options under both or either parent;
- Establish data sharing agreements across systems (education, juvenile/criminal justice, ECE, child support, health care, homeless services, housing and mental health systems); and
- Integrate systematic data collection and analysis on expectant and parenting youth in care into current child welfare data management systems by requiring the collection of data elements described below:

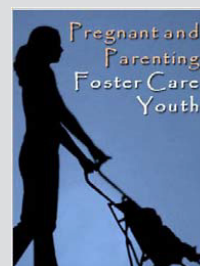
NUMBER AND PERCENT OF:

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| EXPECTANT/ PREGNANT | Young men and women in foster care who are pregnant and/or expectant and their demographic information (e.g., age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, placement history, length of time in care, current living arrangement and educational and/or employment status, etc); |
| FATHERS | Young men in foster care who are fathers and their demographic information (e.g., age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, placement history, length of time in care, current living arrangement and educational and/or employment status, etc); |
| MOTHERS | Young women in foster care who are mothers and their demographic information (e.g., age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, placement history, length of time in care, current living arrangement and educational and/or employment status, etc); |
| BIRTHS | Subsequent births for young fathers and mothers in foster care; |
| CUSTODIAL STATUS | Custodial status of young fathers and mothers in foster care; |
| PATERNITY | Children of young parents with established paternity; |
| HOME VISITING | Young fathers and mothers engaged in home visiting programs; |
| ACTIVELY INVOLVED | Young fathers who are actively involved in their children's lives; |
| COPARENTING | Young parents who are coparenting; |

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| HEALTHY BABIES | Babies of young parents in foster care who are born healthy; |
| CHILDREN OF FOSTER YOUTH | Children of young fathers and mothers in foster care and their demographic information (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, placement history and current living arrangement, etc); |
| CHILDREN IN ECE | Children of young fathers and mothers in foster care who are enrolled in high-quality early childhood education programs; |
| EDUCATION/ JOBS | Young fathers and mothers who complete high school, are enrolled in postsecondary education, job training program or employed; |
| EXITS | Young fathers and mothers who exit foster care to reunification and/or adoption; |
| HOUSING | Young fathers and mothers who are connected to housing prior to exiting foster care; and |
| HEALTH INSURANCE | Young fathers and mothers who have health insurance and are connected to a medical home for themselves and their children prior to exiting foster care. |

RESOURCES

Washington State Department of Social & Health Services
[Pregnant and Parenting Youth in Foster Care in Washington State: Comparison to Other Teens and Young Women who Gave Birth](#)



Recommendation #2: Establish performance benchmarks for engaging and serving young expectant and parenting fathers and create systems of accountability. *Embracing an accountability framework with a clear focus on results will allow child welfare systems to assess their performance and ensure that their work is effective in improving outcomes for young fathers and their families. Using both quantitative and qualitative data with feedback from young fathers regarding their experiences with child welfare services is essential to continuous quality improvement and sustaining impact.*

Implementation

- After establishing a baseline, secure input from staff at all levels and establish yearly performance benchmarks for:
 - Number of fathers identified;
 - Number of worker visits and contacts with fathers;
 - Number of fathers engaged in services;
 - Increased visits and contact between young fathers and their children;
- Develop a strategy for workforce communication of yearly benchmarks, progress and achievement;
- Conduct annual qualitative reviews with young fathers and their families to gain further insight into their needs, obtain feedback on their experience with the system and service providers and seek their recommendations for making policy and program improvements;
- Develop mechanisms for monthly/quarterly reports and ongoing review of data with staff at all levels to inform continuous quality improvement efforts; and
- Collaborate and share benchmarks across systems (education, juvenile/criminal justice, ECE, child support, health care, homeless services, housing and mental health systems) to promote shared goals and mutual successes.



Spotlights

[Washington State](#): The integrated client database draws information from over 30 public data systems and contains over 10 years of information about services, risks, history, service costs and outcomes. The database creates and publicly shares yearly reports on risk factors and outcomes for expectant and parenting youth and utilizes findings to inform strategies.

[Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, PA](#): The Pittsburgh Public Schools and Department of Human Services collaborate and share data to allow for data integration on issues ranging from student progress and attendance to housing, mental health services and child welfare involvement. These data are used to inform strategies to improve outcomes for children, youth and families.

[California & Hilton Foundation](#): This report, funded by the Conrad Hilton Foundation, uses data across the state systems to examine the intersection between teen births, child maltreatment and involvement with child protection as parents.

[North Carolina](#): The state's early childhood integrated data system collects education, health and social service data from participating state agencies. The database also connects with the state's longitudinal data system Pre-K to age 20/Workforce to better inform early childhood policies and programs.

[Community Performance Center](#): Colorado has a publicly shared data system for a range of outcomes for children in the state, including information at the county level, that are easily accessible to the public through their website.

CONCLUSION

Children and families are significantly impacted by father involvement or lack thereof, and young fathers face significant challenges during their transition to fatherhood. If child welfare systems engage these young men early and provide services that meet their unique needs, they are more likely to become lifelong committed fathers and will be more prepared to build strong foundations for their children's healthy development. Engaging and supporting young fathers should be seen as critical to achieving broader child welfare goals and ought to be embedded in a system-wide multigenerational focus on families. By embracing an explicit commitment to promoting father-friendly policies, programs and supports, child welfare systems are well-positioned to positively transform the life trajectories of young fathers, their children and families.



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