



Understanding Dad™ Pilot Program Evaluation Report August 29, 2013

Summary

The following report provides results from an evaluation of a pilot program of National Fatherhood Initiative's **Understanding Dad™: An Awareness and Communication Program for Moms**, an eight-session program for mothers that increases their pro-relationship knowledge, self-efficacy, and attitudes that lead to improved relationships with the fathers of their children for the sake of their children. The pilot program was conducted in two locations in the summer of 2013. It was implemented in Coshocton County, Ohio by the Family P.A.C.T. Center and in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania by the Allegheny Intermediate Unit. A group of 34 mothers that was diverse in race, age, marital status, and education completed the program across the two locations. The results illustrate that the program increased mothers' knowledge, self-efficacy, and attitudes, in some cases dramatically.

Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation was to inform National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) about the overall effectiveness of the Understanding Dad™ program and its ability to achieve its three-part objective of improving pro-relationship knowledge, self-efficacy, and attitudes. A primary focus of the program is on communication and conflict resolution. NFI used the results of the evaluation to improve the curriculum's materials (e.g. Facilitator's Manual, Mother's Handbook, and evaluation tools) and delivery of training to program facilitators.

Overview/Background

Understanding Dad™ is an eight-session program with the goal of improving mother's relationships with the fathers of their children for the sake of their children. NFI developed the program based on demand from its customers who wanted an in-depth program that would address one of the most vital factors that affects fathers' involvement in the lives of their children: maternal gatekeeping and its effect on the quality of the relationships between mothers and fathers. Before developing the program, NFI surveyed its customers and partners regarding the concept of a fatherhood organization creating resources for mothers. With overwhelming support for creating these resources, NFI proceeded to create the program.

The curriculum includes the following components:

- A Facilitator's Manual used by facilitators to implement the program and facilitate sessions.
- A Mother's Handbook that mothers use as they go through the program and can keep as a reference after the program ends.
- A CD-ROM that contains tools for program evaluation, marketing/recruitment, and public relations. It also contains video used during some sessions and a customizable graduation certificate that facilitators can give to each mother who completes the program.

NFI provides one-day and two-day training institutes on the program.

Methodology

The evaluation included a pre- and post-test methodology. Facilitators at each of the locations administered the 51-item evaluation tool that is part of the curriculum (called the Understanding Dad™ Survey) to the mothers before they started the program and again after they completed it. In addition to collecting basic demographic information on program participants, the survey uses 44 measures to gauge mothers' pro-relationship knowledge, self-efficacy (self-efficacy refers to mothers' confidence in their ability to use the skills taught in the program), and attitudes. By comparing mothers in each of these areas before and after their participation in the program, NFI staff was able to determine whether and how much change the mothers experienced. NFI staff experienced in data entry and analyses entered the data from the pre- and post-surveys, calculated frequency distributions for each measure, and compared those distributions to determine whether a change occurred for each measure and overall in each area.

Results

Impact on Knowledge

The results from the analyses of the pre- and post-survey responses show that the program **increased the overall knowledge of mothers by 88 percent**. As shown in Table 1 below, the mothers, as a group, correctly answered the 14 multiple-choice knowledge-based questions and statements 34 percent of the time. The percentage of correct answers rose to 64 percent at post-test.

Table 1: Overall Increase in Knowledge

Pre-Test Correct	34%	Increase ¹
Post-Test Correct	64%	88% (30% / 34%)

¹ NFI staff calculated the increase in knowledge by dividing the percentage increase from pre-test to post-test by the knowledge score at pre-test. Using the overall knowledge increase as an example, NFI staff divided 30 percent (increase in knowledge pre-test to post-test) by 34 percent (knowledge score at pre-test) to arrive at an overall knowledge increase of 88 percent.

The proportion of change in knowledge for the mothers as a group on each of the 14 questions and statements appears in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Increase/Decrease in Knowledge by Question/Statement

Question/Statement	Pre-Test Correct	Post-Test Correct	Increase/Decrease
1. When I expect something of someone, it means that I _____ that the person will say certain things or act in certain ways.	70%	79%	13%
2. How do the unrealistic expectations you have of men affect your relationships with men?	26%	38%	46%
3. The unspoken rules in my life _____ my behavior.	38%	55%	45%
4. Every rule has _____.	55%	70%	27%
5. The unrealistic expectations I have of my children's father are _____.	17%	38%	124%
6. Which statement below best describes what a mother wants when she tries to control the relationship with the father of her children?	29%	32%	10%
7. How a mother and father handle _____ in their relationship has a lot to do with whether their relationship is successful.	47%	85%	81%
8. Your relationship with the father of your children is like a _____ for the relationships your children will form during their lives.	38%	73%	92%
9. What causes problems in communication between a mother and father over time?	44%	73%	66%
10. Which of the following skills can you use to improve the communication between you and the father of your children?	20%	67%	235%
11. One of the best skills I can use to improve the relationship with the father of my children is:	8%	67%	738%
12. Another one of the best skills I can use to improve the relationship with the father of my children is to create:	38%	88%	132%
13. Four of the best skills I can use to better understand the points of view of the father of my children are to _____, _____, _____, and _____ after he shares them.	5%	55%	1,100%
14. Which of the following 3 C's can you use to effectively communicate your views to the father of your children?	29%	73%	152%

The mothers' knowledge increased on each of the 14 measures. Each of the measures increased by at least double digits with 6 of the 14 increasing by at least 100% (or doubling).

Impact on Self-Efficacy

The results from the analyses of the pre- and post-survey responses show that the program **increased the overall self-efficacy of mothers by 16 percent**. Mothers were provided with a series of statements that measured their confidence related to using the skills taught in the program. They rated their level of agreement with the statements on the following five-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Although this section of the survey does not contain “correct” answers, it contains “ideal” answers based on acquisition of the skills taught in the program. NFI staff converted the ratings to numerical scores to facilitate analyses. A higher combined score at post-test across the measures and on each measure indicates an increase in self-efficacy.

As shown in Table 3 below, the mothers, as a group, increased their overall score from 1,667 at pre-test to 1,937 at post-test. This change represents an increase of 270 points or 16 percent.

Table 3: Overall Increase/Decrease in Self-Efficacy

Pre-Test Score	1,667	Increase/Decrease
Post-Test Score	1,937	16% (270 / 1,667)

The proportion of change in self-efficacy for the mothers as a group on each of the 15 statements appears in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Increase/Decrease in Self-Efficacy by Statement

Statement ²	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Increase/ Decrease
1. Have a good relationship with the father of my children.	109	131	20%
2. Stay calm when I talk with the father of my children.	109	132	21%
3. See things from the point of view of the father of my children.	98	123	26%
4. Get my point across to the father of my children.	118	125	6%
5. Let go of the unrealistic expectations I have for the father of my children.	116	127	9%
6. Let go of the realistic expectations I have for the father of my children.	96	111	16%
7. Let go of the situations over which I have no control.	110	139	26%
8. Let go of the issues of control I have in the relationship with the father of my children.	96	125	30%
9. Do a good job of handling conflict between me and the father of my children.	113	134	19%
10. Control my emotions when talking about a difficult situation with the father of my children.	112	128	14%
11. Create a safe emotional environment when talking with the father of my children about a difficult situation.	124	138	11%
12. Another one of the best skills I can use to improve the Increase the amount of trust that the father of my children has in me.	122	137	12%
13. Care about what the father of my children wants when talking with him about a difficult situation.	112	123	10%
14. Share my point of view with compassion when talking with the father of my children about a difficult situation.	111	130	17%
15. Respect the father of my children when talking with him about a difficult situation.	121	134	11%

The mothers' self-efficacy increased on each of the 15 measures. With the exception of 2 measures, each of the measures increased by at least 10 percent with 5 of them increasing by at least 20 percent.

² Each statement began with the phrase, "When things are not going well for me, I am confident that I can:"

Impact on Attitudes

The results from the analyses of the pre- and post-survey responses show that the program **increased the overall pro-relationship attitudes of mothers by 9 percent**. Mothers were provided with a series of statements that measured their level of agreement with the statements on the following five-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Although this section of the survey does not contain “correct” answers, it contains “ideal” answers based on the attitudes that the program intends to address/improve. NFI staff converted the ratings to numerical scores to facilitate analyses. A higher combined score at post-test across the measures and on each measure indicates a better/improved pro-relationship attitude.

As shown in Table 5 below, the mothers, as a group, increased their overall score from 1,674 at pre-test to 1,828 at post-test. This change represents an increase of 154 points or 9 percent.

Table 5: Overall Increase/Decrease in Pro-Relationship Attitudes

Pre-Test Score	1,674	Increase/Decrease
Post-Test Score	1,828	9% (154 / 1,674)

The proportion of change in pro-relationship attitudes for the mothers as a group on each of the 15 statements appears in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Increase/Decrease in Pro-Relationship Attitudes by Statement

Statement	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Increase/ Decrease
1. A good mother has a good relationship with the father of her children.	108	128	19%
2. A father's role in the life of his child cannot be replaced by another man.	90	95	6%
3. A good mother admits that she has a role in causing poor communication with the father of her children.	117	143	22%
4. A good mother can control her emotions when communicating with the father of her children.	124	136	10%
5. A good mother asks the father what he wants when she communicates with him.	117	143	22%
6. A good mother does not work with the father of her children when he won't work with her.	116	133	15%
7. A father's role in the life of his child can be replaced by the child's mother.	119	138	16%
8. A good mother does not let go of realistic expectations she has for the father of her children.	90	107	19%
9. A good mother focuses on what she wants for herself and her children more than she focuses on what the father of her children wants.	94	109	16%
10. It is the father's job more than it is the mother's job to create a safe environment in which to communicate.	134	132	(2%)
11. As long as one parent respects the other parent, it isn't necessary for effective communication that both parents respect each other.	123	117	(5%)
12. If a mother points out a mistake that a father made, it is a sign of disrespect for the father.	127	108	(15%)
13. When a mother and father have an issue between them and cannot agree on the same outcome, they should keep talking rather than walk away and try again.	102	102	0%
14. When talking about a difficult situation between them, a good mother shares her view first before asking the father for his view.	107	122	14%
15. When talking about a difficult situation between them, a good mother knows that it is not her job to help the father share his view.	106	115	9%

The mothers' self-efficacy increased on 11 of the 15 measures, decreased on 3 of them, and remained unchanged on 1 other. With the exception of 2 measures, each of the measures that increased did so by at least 10 percent.

Discussion

The Understanding Dad™ program had a profound impact on this group of mothers as indicated by positive/desirable movement on 40 of the 44 measures. It had an especially profound impact on increasing knowledge. With the exception of 2 questions, the knowledge at pre-test was minimal (i.e. less than 50%). Consequently, the program had a significant impact on knowledge that the mothers did not possess prior to their participation.

That the program had a less dramatic impact on self-efficacy and attitudes is not surprising. Group-based programs tend to have a more dramatic impact on knowledge than on self-efficacy and attitudes, certainly in the short term. Changing confidence in applying skills takes time and, often, hard work and practice. Participants don't often have the time to fully implement the skills they learn and experience the results of that implementation by the time a program ends to reach dramatic changes in confidence that can be captured in an evaluation of this type.

Attitudes can be even harder to change in the short term because they are so central to a person's character, self-worth, and identity. This program challenges mothers' attitudes about their relationships with the fathers of their children (e.g. who is responsible for creating issues between a mother and a father) and the fathers themselves (e.g. the father as a person). Consequently, it can take some time for some individuals to change their attitudes even when changing them in the near term has clear benefits for them and those they care about. Indeed, when NFI staff met with a group of mothers who completed Understanding Dad™ at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit to discuss their reactions to the program, many of them remarked that the program had challenged them to consider attitudes they had never examined. Many of these mothers had poor relationships with the fathers of their children and, as a result, held deeply-entrenched, negative attitudes about those relationships and attitudes towards the fathers.

Another factor that might have contributed to the less dramatic impact on self-efficacy and attitudes is a common one in program evaluations of this type. Before participants start a program, they can be less than honest when it comes to revealing their confidence and attitudes. They can also overestimate their ability to engage in certain skills. The self-efficacy and attitudinal scores on the pre-test support this possibility. As a group, the mothers' scores on 21 of the 30 pre-test measures were at least 70 percent of the maximum score, which means that there was less room for dramatic movement.

Despite the inherent challenges that any program faces in affecting changes in self-efficacy and attitudes in the short term, it is encouraging that 25 of the 30 measures of self-efficacy and attitudes moved in a positive/desirable direction. These mothers might experience even more gains as they practice what they learn and see how their own lives and the lives of their children improve because of improved relationships between the mothers and the fathers of their children. Facilitators should pay particular attention to the portions of the program that are designed to influence the attitudes that moved in a negative direction. Facilitators should consider taking more time to cover this content to ensure that these attitudes move in a positive direction.

Conclusions

The results of this evaluation reveal that **Understanding Dad™: An Awareness and Communication Program for Moms** accomplished its objectives with this group of mothers. Organizations and practitioners can be confident that using the program will help mothers increase their pro-relationship knowledge, self-efficacy, and attitudes so that they can improve their relationships with the fathers of their children for the sake of their children.