



FATHER-INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES FROM NATIONAL FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE®

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

Strengthening Families™ is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. It is based on engaging families, programs and communities in building five protective factors:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

Using the Strengthening Families framework, more than 30 states are shifting policy and practice to help programs working with children and families focus on protective factors. States apply the Strengthening Families approach in early childhood, child welfare, child abuse prevention and other child and family serving systems.

For more information, visit www.strengtheningfamilies.net.

WHY STRENGTHENING FAMILIES EFFORTS SHOULD INCORPORATE FATHER INVOLVEMENT

The parent and family characteristics identified in the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework are critical for all parents and caregivers. All parents need support for the protective factors in their lives, and children benefit when *all* of the important adults in their lives have the support they need.

Unfortunately, many parent engagement efforts do not effectively engage and support fathers, particularly in early childhood. Even programs and providers that recognize the importance of fathers in their children's lives often fail to reach out specifically to fathers, or to create environments where fathers feel they have a role. Intentional efforts are necessary to make fathers feel welcome and valued in the settings that serve young children, so that they can also receive support to build their protective factors, strengthen their relationships with their children and be the best fathers they can be.

Strengthening Families implementation teams at the program, community and state levels can take steps to recognize the strengths and needs of fathers and support father involvement. Some strategies that programs can be encouraged to use include:

- Employing men as staff members in varied positions and in significant roles
- Creating an environment that is welcoming and inclusive of all family members
- Consistently communicating with both fathers and mothers on all issues concerning their children – and making this policy explicit to both parents
- Hosting special activities and programs in response to men's expressed interests
- Intentionally inviting and encouraging men to become active participants in the program

Representatives of local and state fatherhood initiatives can be engaged as partners on Strengthening Families leadership teams to ensure that the needs of fathers are considered in Strengthening Families implementation planning. Materials and resources from National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) can support those efforts at all levels. For example, NFI's *Community Mobilization Approach*™ trains organizations and community leaders to mobilize their communities to address father absence and increase father involvement through broad-based and sector-specific fatherhood initiatives.

A 2016 white paper from NFI, *Mapping Father-Involvement Programs and Resources to the Protective Factors* (<http://www.fatherhood.org/hubs/Father-Involvement-Protective-Factors-Whitepaper-070716.pdf>), describes how these resources support fathers in developing each of the Strengthening Families protective factors. These points are summarized on the next page.



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ABOUT NATIONAL FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE®

National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) is the nation's leading non-profit working to end father absence. Founded in 1994, NFI's mission is to transform organizations and communities by equipping them to intentionally and proactively engage fathers in their children's lives.

NFI is the nation's #1 trainer of practitioners and organizations on the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed fatherhood programs and resources. Since 2002, NFI has trained more than 25,000 practitioners representing more than 6,500 organizations. NFI's programs and resources are used in every state, in U.S. territories, and in many other countries.

For more information, visit
www.fatherhood.org and
www.fathersource.org.

**National
Fatherhood
Initiative®**

HOW RESOURCES FROM NATIONAL FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE® SUPPORT FATHERS TO BUILD THE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Parental Resilience: NFI programs support fathers to build their resilience by addressing their individual developmental histories and capacity to empathize with self and others. Fathers who lacked involved fathers or positive male role models in their own childhood may need support to develop positive attachments to their children and other adults (e.g. the mothers of their children); pro-fathering attitudes and values; and healthy masculinity. Using Attachment Theory as part of their multi-theoretical framework, programs like *24/7 Dad®* and *InsideOut Dad®* teach fathers how to effectively nurture themselves (e.g. through sessions on greater care of their own physical and mental health) and others (e.g. through sessions on child development and communication).

Social Connections: Many of NFI's programs include sessions that build the relationship skills for fathers to effectively connect with others (including other fathers, the mothers of their children and their own extended family) in support of healthy child development and well-being. Father-specific programs and resources are particularly important to help men form social networks that will provide the emotional and spiritual support they need to be the best fathers they can be. NFI's programs create bonds among fathers and facilitators through delivery in a group setting. NFI also supports organizations to create "alumni programs" so that these powerful connections can live beyond the end of father-involvement programs.

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development: Interventions that focus on fathers are critical, particularly for men who were not "raised to raise children" but want to fulfill their important role in their children's lives. Families and American culture in general do not adequately prepare boys and young men in the care of children. NFI's programs focus on building the parenting skills of fathers, as well as providing information on child development at all stages of a child's life.

Concrete Support in Times of Need: Many men are reluctant to seek help for their basic needs, making it important to address this protective factor in father-specific programming. NFI provides technical assistance and training to help organizations understand the basic needs faced by specific populations of fathers and the importance of integrating father-involvement efforts into services that help families meet their basic economic needs.

Social and Emotional Competence of Children: NFI's resources address the unique contribution of fathers to the social and emotional development of children. By combating father absence, father-involvement efforts help children develop social and emotional competence by reducing children's stressors and the risk of limited, disrupted or arrested attachments to their primary caregivers.