

Family Engagement: A Collaborative Process for Systems Change



**Dennis Alford | Kodi Baughman | Robert Friend | Denise Moore |
Eugene Schneeberg | Marilyn Bruguier Zimmerman**



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES



Children's
Bureau

Objectives for Today's Session

- 1. Understand** the need to build an organizational culture that supports a commitment to engaging and strengthening families across the prevention continuum.
- 2. Review** strategies to establish, support, and reinforce collaborative development of a service array that is responsive to families and youth.
- 3. Explore** strategies to support family networks and systems.
- 4. Learn** about unique tribal practices and customs used to engage families.

Changing Systems



Robert Friend

National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness,
Seneca Family of Agencies



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES



Key Question for Examining Changing Systems

How do we change a system designed to protect children from their families to one that supports families to keep their children safe and healthy?

Presence and Power of Families

• Legal standards help identify, locate, and notify family members and connections when a young person enters care.

Involving families through a collaborative practice can produce better and more lasting positive outcomes.

Separation of children and youth from their families can have devastating health and development outcomes.

Activate the Change Process Through Shared Core Values

1. Adopt and consistently align core values and principles across child welfare agencies and system partners.

- Families are the primary asset needed to ensure the health and safety of their children.
- Families are the experts on their lives and the lives of their kin.
- Family experts should be included in all decision-making.

Opportunities for Child Welfare Agency Leaders and Partners

1. Establish shared agreement and accountability to core values.

- Work toward aligning relationships with every system partner.
- Hold each other accountable to core values and principles.

Examine families' experiences to help identify facilitators and barriers to family involvement.

- Conduct process mapping to identify successes and challenges in systems.
- Encourage practice theories and models that foster family involvement and communication.

Engaging Families to Change Systems

1

•Engage individuals with lived experience to help define success.

2

•Identify prevention partners that families trust.

3

•Discontinue use of practices that isolate and separate families.

Wisdom of Families and Individuals With Lived Experience

• Individuals with lived experience can help define authentic engagement.

• Measuring effective engagement is essential to success.

• Recruiting a workforce with relationship development skills is critical for effective engagement.

• Individuals with lived experience can support continuous quality improvement efforts.

Looking Ahead to Changing Systems

- Continue to address issues of racial inequality and disproportionality.

- Ensure that families are essential participants in all child welfare decision and actions.

Breaking Barriers



Kodi Baughman

Foster Care Alumni of America

Denise Moore

Capacity Building Center for States



Importance of Engaging Families

Involving young people and parents in policy-making and child welfare system planning can improve overall system culture.

What Worked Well: Denise's Perspective

- Working with a dedicated caseworker

- Being held accountable

- Developing parenting skills

- Knowing children were placed together

What Worked Well: Kodi's Perspective

- Placed with grandmother and kept together with siblings

- Ability to remain in school and community for support

What Could Have Worked Better? Denise's Perspective

- **Development of a plan and clear path to move forward**

- **Guidance, information, and next steps to help navigate the system**

What Could Have Worked Better? Kodi's Perspective

- Emotional and financial support for kinship families

- Ongoing training and education for kinship families

Breaking Barriers By Better Engaging Families

- Honor the voice of children and youth in the system.

- Reunification is a process and often requires support to navigate.

- Family counseling and other community support is vital in prevention work.

- Child welfare leadership is essential.

Engaging Native Families



Marilyn Bruguier Zimmerman

National Native Children's Trauma Center, University of Montana



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES



Understanding the History of Tribal Communities

- Family serves as the fabric of Tribal communities.

- The Tribal fabric was torn during European colonization.

- The boarding school experience was traumatic and deeply impacted Tribal culture.

The biggest impact may be the lack of knowledge about how to parent Native children in loving and cultural ways.

Trauma-Informed Engagement of Native Families

- Gaining a deeper understanding of intergenerational trauma to the family and the local Tribe

- Building trust with the families and trust as it is understood by the families

- Understanding the family's story from the historical and current context

Trauma-Informed Approaches for Native Families

- Understand and identify family members with trauma histories.

Depersonalize anger, frustration, and avoidance behaviors from family members, which may be a trigger response and not noncompliance.

Understand that each Tribal family is different and cultural engagement is fluid.

Trauma-Informed Approaches for Native Families

•Focus on the family's strengths and resources.

Look to kinship relationships across the Tribal community.

Focus on the outcomes the family identifies as important to their well-being.

Understand the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Check personal biases and trauma histories.

Primary Prevention With Native Families

•Promote knowledge of local Tribal parenting practices.

Establish authentic relationships with Tribal members and Tribal-serving agencies.

Utilize Tribal parenting programs that focus on Tribal customary child development.

Connecting Agency to Native Families and Tribal Communities

1

1. Develop relationships with formal service providers (including schools) and Tribal leadership.

2

1. Develop relationships with informal services, including spiritual leaders and cultural teachers.

3

1. Participate in the community by attending local cultural or social gatherings.

Final Thoughts

- Keep a rigid state of flexibility.

- Adjust, adapt, and change timelines, expectations, and outcomes.

- Bearing witness to trauma and the journey to healing is a privilege.

Engaging Fathers



Eugene Schneeberg

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES



Importance of Engaging Fathers

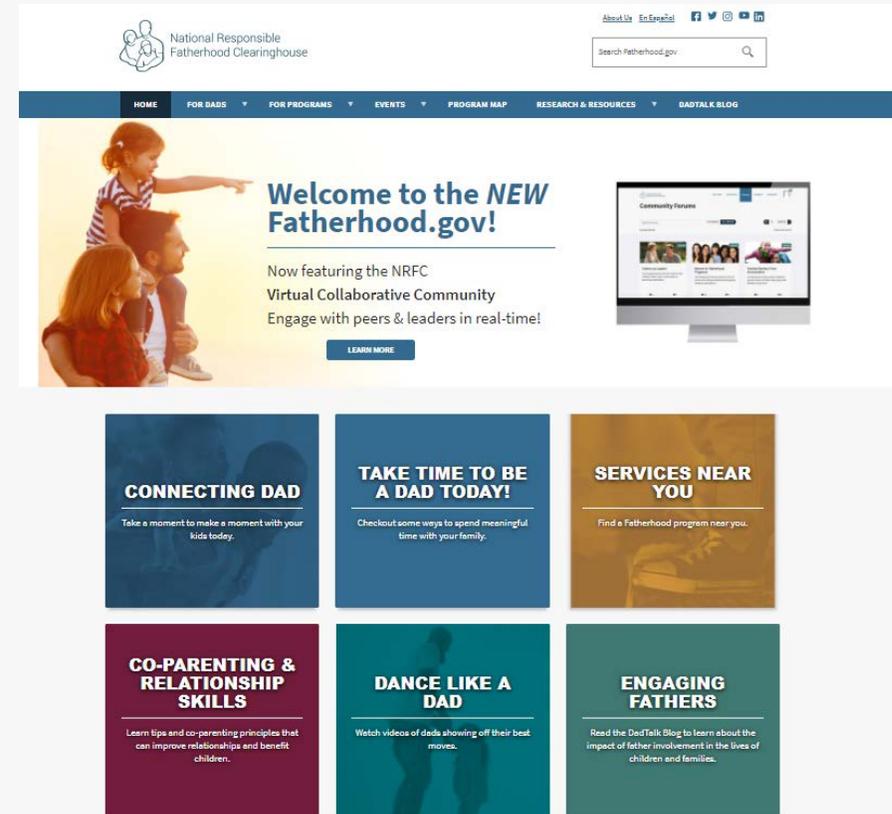
Successfully engaging the fathers of the children we serve can help improve outcomes.

Critical Partners for Engaging and Empowering Fathers

- 1 • Mothers and Women
- 2 • Responsible Fatherhood Grantees
- 3 • Local Fatherhood Programs

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

The **National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC)** is an Office of Family Assistance-funded national resource that provides, facilitates, and disseminates current research and proven and innovative strategies to encourage and strengthen fathers, families, and service providers.



Examples of Jurisdictions Investing in Fatherhood Engagement

Prince George's County, MD

Refers fathers involved in the family preservation unit to a fatherhood support group

Fairfax County, VA

Prioritizes father involvement and established a team dedicated to fatherhood engagement

City of Alexandria, VA

Hired a fulltime father engagement coordinator

Questions for Agencies to Assess Fatherhood Engagement

•1. Are we including fathers' needs in the agency delivery model?

2. Is our agency open, supportive, helpful, and inclusive toward fathers?

3. Are we portraying positive, diverse images of fathers in posters, brochures, and books?

4. Are we creating positions on staff that serve fathers?

5. Are we providing training opportunities for staff to enhance father engagement?

6. Are we expecting fathers to participate in programs?

7. Are we designing programs for fathers, as well as for mothers and children?

Research on Engaged Fathers

“I think the research [...] has shown that the stereotype of the uninvolved, disinterested low-income father is really misleading. That contrary to that stereotype, the research shows that these fathers have the same motivation and are as committed to doing whatever they can to promote their children’s welfare.”

- Dr. Michael E. Lamb, Professor of Psychology, Cambridge University

Research on Engaged Fathers

Research shows that children who grow up with involved fathers are:

- ▶ 39% more likely to earn mostly A's in school
- ▶ 45% less likely to repeat a grade
- ▶ 60% less likely to be suspended or expelled from school
- ▶ Twice as likely to go to college and find stable employment after high school
- ▶ 75% less likely to have a teen birth
- ▶ 80% less likely to spend time in jail

Source: Child & Family Research Partnership. (2015). "The Importance of Father Involvement" infographic.



Key Elements of Engaging Fathers

• Individualize each case.

• Avoid personal bias.

• Assume fathers want to be involved.

• Listen to each father's story.

Strategies to Recruit and Retain Fathers

1

•Consider hiring fathers who were formerly involved in the child welfare system to assist with engagement efforts.

2

•Use words like “fathers” or “dads,” not simply “parents,” in outreach and promotional materials.

3

•Offer incentives and support, including food, child care, and transportation services, to reduce barriers for fathers.

Breaking the Ice



Dennis Alford

Kansas Department for Children and Families



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES



Engaging Families Through Icebreaker Conversations

- ▶ **Background:** Kansas' icebreakers model was developed through an initiative supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- ▶ **Purpose:** Provide an opportunity for a child's parents and foster parents to meet each other during a facilitated but informal conversation to share information about themselves and their families and the needs of the child in care.
- ▶ **Timeframe:** The icebreaker is held as soon as possible after a child's initial placement in foster care and as soon as possible after any subsequent placement change.



Icebreaker Conversations Support Relationship Building

- Icebreakers exclusively focus on relationship building.

- Icebreakers open the door for shared parenting, which may enhance placement stability.

- Icebreakers provide the opportunity for meaningful engagement.

Icebreaker Conversations Support and Sustain Systems Change

- Storytelling is a powerful way to talk about successes.

- Offer parents and foster parents—and youth if they are there—the opportunity to complete a survey to share their feedback.
- Incorporate storytelling into training and capture family stories on video.

Create artifacts, tools, and supports that help others understand the culture.

- Include icebreaker language in policy and protocols and use with community partners.
- Provide online and in-person training modules on icebreakers.

Importance of Engaging Families

Engaging families is not a line you cross, it's a road you take.

Roll Up Your Sleeves



Amanda Cruce

Capacity Building Center for States

Elliott Hinkle

Capacity Building Center for States



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES



Roll Up Your Sleeves Sessions: Part 1

- ▶ **Purpose:** Identify those prevention strategies and interventions that are working well in your agency or organization.
- ▶ **Tool:** Download the "Roll Up Your Sleeves Part 1: Brainstorming" worksheet located in the handouts window.
- ▶ **Strategy:** Use the worksheet to document your responses to the guiding questions and share ideas and questions in the chat.
- ▶ **Timeframe:** 20 minutes

CWVE 2020
Child Welfare Virtual Expo
Strengthening Families Through Prevention and Collaboration

Roll Up Your Sleeves: Facilitated Discussion

This session challenges you to take what you just learned and put it into action giving you a path to making meaningful changes in your work. Using the questions below as a guide, brainstorm how you can utilize the resources, tools, and lessons learned from this session in your organization. You can write down answers in the worksheet, share your ideas in the chat, and/or discuss responses with your team.

1. What prevention strategies are working well at your organization? What steps can you take to amplify this work? Why are these strategies working? How can you amplify this work?	
2. What partners can you identify that will be able to help your agency continue to develop effective strategies for prevention?	
3. What tools, information, or data are you using, or can you use to strengthen prevention strategies and improve collaboration and communication?	
Additional thoughts:	

Capacity Building
OHIO

Children's
Bureau

Guiding Question 1: Identify Strategies

What prevention strategies are working well at your organization? Why are these strategies working?

Guiding Question 2: Consider Partnerships

What partners are you currently working with to implement these strategies? Are these partnerships going well? Why or why not?

Guiding Question 3: Measuring Success

What tools, information, or data are you using to measure success?

Up Next!

Thank you for your participation today!

Please be sure to explore the virtual Exhibit Hall, Resource Gallery, and Networking Lounge between sessions.

The next session will begin at 1:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

