



Handout 2-1: Engaging Non-Resident Fathers

Engagement Strategy	This strategy might be useful when...
<p>Start from the assumption that the non-resident father wants to be involved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The father has been absent for a period of time but demonstrates interest in the child's well-being. • The father has not returned your calls; consider that there may be some underlying reasons that you are unaware of. • The mother or someone from the maternal family tells you that the father doesn't want to be involved; however, this has not been directly confirmed.
<p>Facilitate the restoration of the father in the life of the child by co-creating goals based on the father's strengths, not his deficits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The father feels as though he doesn't have anything to offer his child. • The father has been absent for a period of time and doesn't know how to re-engage in a relationship with his child. • The father is struggling with joblessness, financial issues or multiple demands, or is caring for a new family.
<p>Treat each case on an individual basis, not based on experiences with other fathers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have your own personal struggles with fathers or "father figures" in your life. • You have multiple cases in which the fathers are absent and refusing to engage. When this is true, it is important to take a step back and examine how other cases are influencing the decisions in the current case.
<p>Suspend judgments and listen to all sides. There are two sides to every story. Give the non-resident father an opportunity to give his side.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have heard a lot of negative things about the father from the mother, maternal family members or even other workers the case was assigned to. • You have your own personal struggles with fathers or "father figures" in your life. • Allegations about the father have been made but not substantiated...weigh out all of the information. • The father has been absent from the child's life.
<p>Make room for expressions of anger. This emotion in men is socialized as "acceptable." It may be the only one they are comfortable expressing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You detect hostility from the father; acknowledging it may help defuse it. • The father has not been kept informed about his child by the mother or others. • Anger is the only emotion the father feels secure expressing, as it keeps him from feeling vulnerable to others.

Engagement Strategy	This strategy might be useful when...
<p>Help the non-resident father identify his tangible and non-tangible assets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It appears that the father is struggling with his identity as a father. • The father doesn't believe he has anything to offer his child. • The father is struggling with joblessness or financial issues, and/or is juggling multiple demands.
<p>Remind the father that he is a role model to his children. Boys learn about manhood from their fathers, and girls get a sense of what to expect from their fathers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The father isn't fully aware of how his presence in his child's life can benefit his child. • It would be helpful for the father to consider what type of messages he wants to send to his child through either his involvement or lack of involvement.
<p>Acknowledge your power as a caseworker but empower the father to use his assets and his often-hidden power to keep his child safe by remaining engaged and involved. Remember, some men struggle and "present" differently when feeling helpless and hopeless.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The father feels disempowered based on his previous and current life circumstances and the additional perceived "intrusion" of child welfare. • The father feels that the mother has all the power and he can't do anything to the change that; encourage him to look at what he can offer that may be different from what the mother can offer. • The father needs to understand the importance of his involvement to help keep his child safe and promote his or her well-being; let the father know about the benefits of involvement.
<p>Recognize and acknowledge the previous experiences the father may have had with child welfare workers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The father was removed from his parents and placed in foster care. • The father had a bad experience with his caseworker, judge, probation officer, attorney, etc. • The father has had indirect experience or knowledge of child welfare processes, fostering distrust of system personnel.
<p>Be clear and transparent about the reasons for the agency's involvement, the father's role throughout the process and agency expectations. Suspicion may be present and he may think he is being sought only to obtain child support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The father doesn't trust the system or those who represent the system. • The father's experience has suggested that he is only needed for the money he can provide. • The father fears he is unable to pay child support because of his own financial challenges. • The father feels shame for his inability to financially provide for his children.
<p>Remind the father of how important he is in the life of his children, how there are some things only he can provide and that his children will carry what he does with them forever.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important for the father to hear specifics about how he can positively impact his child's life; it is not enough to talk in general terms; the father needs to hear how his presence can benefit the child. Share some of the benefits identified in this training. • The father needs to consider how he would like his child to remember him 10 to 15 years from now.