



Handout 5-1: Engaging Non-Resident Fathers: Benefits and Barriers

The following are some key benefits to children when their fathers are involved in their lives. Outlining the benefits to children is useful in engaging both the mother and the non-resident father in the case involving their child. In addition, some common barriers to engaging non-resident fathers are listed. Awareness of the barriers that workers may experience increases the workers' knowledge of what they may expect when engaging non-resident fathers.

Benefits

- Infants of highly involved fathers are more cognitively competent at 6 months.
- Fathers' financial contributions help promote higher academic achievement.
- Father warmth and nurturance significantly predicts children's moral maturity and is associated with more social and positive moral behavior in boys and girls (Mosely & Thompson, 1995).

As opposed to children with low or no father involvement, children with highly involved fathers:

- Have better quantitative and verbal skills.
- Are more likely to enjoy school, have better attitudes toward school, participate in extracurricular activities and graduate.
- Are more likely to be securely attached to their fathers (Cox, Owen, Henderson, & Margand, 1992), better able to handle strange situations and more resilient in the face of stressful situations.
- Have higher academic achievement.
- Have better emotional and social development.

High father involvement:

- Promotes healthy child development.
- Ties into expectations of family involvement evaluated by CFSRs.
- Creates the opportunity to have more eyes on the child.
- Helps meet reasonable and diligent efforts.
- Broadens the circle of others by including paternal relatives who can be used in permanency planning.
- Creates more informal supports in a constrained system.
- Accelerates the process of termination when termination is necessary, as the search for the father has already been conducted.
- Is important in the adoption process.
- Facilitates concurrent planning/meets more than one goal.

Some barriers to engaging non-resident fathers include:

- Professional and systemic bias
- Reluctance to involve a father who has caused harm
- Issues related to gender bias from the caseworker and the non-resident father
- Hesitance by the worker to reach out for fear of the mother's hostility
- The mother gatekeeping/blocking access to the father
- A history of incarceration, child or sex abuse, unknown whereabouts, or homelessness
- Maltreatment by males in the household reinforcing concerns with males overall
- Inadequate financial resources
- Domestic violence
- The father being unaware he is the father
- Heavy worker caseloads, inhibiting identifying, locating and engaging fathers
- The father's lack of confidence in parenting skills
- The child's opinion
- The mother's hesitance or refusal to notify the caseworker of the whereabouts of the father
- The caseworker's belief that the father has little commitment to the child or children
- The father not being considered as an appropriate placement
- Lack of guidance and training
- Multiple fathers, one mother; potential separation of the children