

Tips for Engaging Dads

Adapted from Neil Tift's "Engaging Dads in Ten Seconds"

- Fathers may be reluctant to participate in program services for a variety of reasons. In order to engage fathers and men in families more fully, it is important to address some common barriers or misconceptions that typically limit father involvement.
- When scheduling appointments, ask if there are times that both parents are available. Try to schedule the visit to accommodate both. At the beginning of the appointment, mention that you have information about resources specifically of interest to fathers. (Be sure to have plenty of materials for fathers on hand!)
- When meeting the father for the first time, look at him and shake his hand. Tell him that you are glad he is able to be part of the appointment.
- Be aware that men's learning styles and parenting approaches tend to be action-oriented. Fathers tend to use their bodies more, so if you are going to discuss specific skills, consider demonstrating them and letting the fathers demonstrate them as well. Touching, holding, moving, walking, mixing, arranging, wiping, dressing, rocking, and other activities are more likely to be effective and to be retained by the men with whom you visit.
- During your conversations with Dad, try to look at him and to engage him as often as it seems appropriate. Try not to speak only to Mom; if he feels slighted or marginalized, he probably won't prioritize the next appointment.
- Ask him open-ended questions about his child rearing activities around the home. How involved is he in the baby's daily routine? What skills does he feel confident about? What are his strengths as a Dad? How does he feel when he is alone with the baby? Are there differences between how he parents their baby and how the mother parents their baby? How does he handle stressful times with the child? Crying, colic, running around, saying "no," arguing, temper tantrums, etc...
- Talk to Dad about how he can become more actively involved: holding the baby, getting up at night to bring baby in to be fed, feeding the child, playing with the baby, changing diapers, bathing the baby, calming the child, strapping the child into a car seat, taking the child on errands, packing the diaper bag, dressing the child, reading or singing to the baby, rocking the baby to sleep, etc.
- What skills would he like to improve or get some help with? What skills would he like both of them to improve?
- What tasks does Mom feel uncomfortable with him performing? What tasks does he wish the mother would let him perform more?
- Ask him if he was able to be present at his baby's birth. This is often a very transforming moment for fathers. What was that experience like? How has this changed him?
- How do they, as a couple, handle stressful times? What resources do they have to provide backup when they feel stressed?