

## Engaging Fathers

### Best Practices in Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Video Series

[Music]

Narrator: The role of fathers has changed over the last generation.

Josh Miller: It's a different time now.

Dads are required to be parents, whereas before I think that they were "the father" and they were "the disciplinarian."

Narrator: Men long to be involved and engaged with their children.

Gershom Moore: I am a dad who wants to be part of his daughter's education and see what she's doing, and just try to – try to be there as much as I can despite all the differences between Mom and I.

Josh: Guys are involved in their kids' day to day happenings more than ever before.

Narrator: And recent research has shown that involved dads benefit their kids in many ways.

John Hornstein: Children who are raised with involved men actually do better at a lot of things. They're more self-confident, they do better in school.

Joshua Sparrow: Mothers and fathers tend to interact differently with their children, and often they complement each others' interactions. So although some fathers may behave more the way we tend to think of mothers behaving and vice versa, fathers typically are more physical in their play with their children, they're more challenging, and they push them more. They tend to encourage more constructive risk taking. And so, they often give something really different than what mothers do.

Narrator: But while much has changed for men, roadblocks to engagement still exist.

Debra Gass: For many years, there has – in this country, there has been a whole movement to – to really scaffold moms, and dads have been dismissed.

Narrator: Traditional notions of fatherhood linger in our culture, leaving men confused and angry.

Father 1: I wasn't satisfied and happy the way I was raised, but it was a different way of raising children then than it is now.

Narrator: Programs like Early Education Services in Brattleboro, Vermont have created multifaceted efforts to engage fathers.

Debra: We do so many things to make our dads feel welcome in this program: support groups; parenting groups; we have a training for new dads; lots of dinners for dads. And then locally, the dads are always willing to have a presence in the local parades and celebrations, and passion spreads.

Narrator: The approach is two-pronged. First, targeting the fathers themselves.

Josh: The exercise is going to be "Dear Dad," and this is what your – this is what your child would write about you at maybe a later date.

John: Men may need a little bit more support to get engaged in the way that they want to be engaged.

Narrator: The heart of the program is the dedicated dads group that meets every week.

Josh: We keep focused on fatherhood and what it means to be a man.

Father 2: My son and his friends often spoke about a man who was always there for them to tie their shoes, to ask them how school was going.

Josh: We have a core group of guys who are really invested in their kids, and that's helped a lot.

Gershom: For some of us, this is our sanctuary. This is our home.

Father 3: I just think about mornings when I go to wake McKenzie up sometimes; and it's so cool that I – I don't know – that I was able to do that.

Father 2: Seeing other fathers around, coming together to support somebody in what they're doing, it really helps me get, like, a lot of different vantage points.

Father: This is a letter to my son: Elijah, it's fun to see you in a race doing the best that you can, win or lose.

Narrator: The other major effort is changing the culture that pushes fathers away.

Debra: It's a philosophical shift.

Teacher: Did Adam get to bring you in today? And Mommy?

Debra: It's something that we need to constantly pay attention to, talk about, nurture, feed with information, with opportunities.

Father 4: I want a hug, too.

Debra: It's important to immerse our staff in the world of fatherhood so they understand and they can hear firsthand from dads how much they love their children.

Father 5: Dante, can I have a hug? I really need one. A big hug!

Lizzy Sheehan: Fathers play such an important role in a child's growing up. And the child really loves the dad's participation. See the smile on his face? This is the kind of kid he is. He's a happy kid. He's very curious.

Coretta Bliss: Here we really work on not just addressing the needs of the child, but the needs of the whole family. So we try to always make sure that we talk to both parents in the morning, and not just talk to mom and sort of ignore dad off to the side.

Tracey Kneeland: Yesterday, his friend wanted the car, and Jay said no and gave him a different car. We share information about their child's progress. We also have contact sheets that we write every day about what their child ate that day and what kind of things they're working on personally.

Teacher: Malia's been reading a lot of books lately, and she's been playing with friends.

Father 6: I get a summary and a review every day of what she's eaten, what she's done that day, what she's doing better, what we can work on, what we can do at home to help her.

Mother: I think that it's awesome that they go to a daycare like this where they do involve the dads and they, you know, have dad dinners and they have get-togethers for dads, and just a day with dads and the kids. So, I think it's very nice.

Father 7: Can I have your shoes? Ready? Step. You get that feeling where you matter, and that's what I've always wanted.

Father 5: Oh, I didn't know you were wearing that shirt. That's awesome. I feel it empowers my family. It gives me the platform to give my – my son, my other children, some of the things I didn't have growing up, which was a nurturing father.

Father 7: Can I have a kiss? Good boy.

John: I see here in Brattleboro that men are showing their passion for being fathers in a variety of ways, and with the support of a program that knows how to do it well.

Teacher 2: Want to go see Daddy?

Debra: I think we really need to pay attention to the research.

Teachers and Children: ♪ Hello James, I hope you have a great day. ♪

Debra: When we're talking about things like school readiness, if we really want to help our children, we really need to help their dads be part of their lives.

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