

**Fatherhood Connection Series:
Engaging Fathers in their Children's Learning and Development**

David Jones: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is David Jones, and I am the senior program specialist and co-lead of the Office of Head Start's father engagement efforts. On behalf of Ann Linehan, acting director of the Office of Head Start, and my colleagues from the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, I would like to welcome you to the final webinar in this three-part series, Engaging Fathers in their Children's Learning and Development. This work is so important to the Office of Head Start's mission to engage families with this specific focus on fathers. We are so excited about what we've been able to accomplish with this three-part webinar series. We have a team of skilled facilitators, a lot of expertise in the area.

What is even more exciting is we've included a number of voices, some you may not be familiar with, fatherhood champions from across the country. Our champions are advocates, defenders, promoters, and supporters who are fighting for a worthy cause, improving outcomes for children and families by engaging fathers and supporting staff in their efforts to do so, and assisting our team with thoughtful strategies to enhance your implementation efforts. Many are fathers themselves. One of our fatherhood champions is a mother, and yet, they are all familiar with the Head Start Birth to Five Engagement Guide.

Our first webinar, Welcoming Fathers: Program Environment and Strong Family Partnerships was about the efforts programs can take to create welcoming environments which can strengthen and solidify their communications, interactions, and relationships with fathers. We want programs to be thoughtful when creating welcoming environments and intentional in their efforts to build strong relationships with fathers. When you build a relationship with someone, you extend yourself because you have something to offer. You're seeking mutuality and reciprocity. You understand that they also have something to offer, so there is an expectation that you will get something in return. This creates fertile ground for a partnership which is essential because true engagement is really about how we partner with parents by learning what's important for them and their family. When we avail ourselves to the possibilities, we learn of the many strengths and innumerable roles fathers can play. They can learn to play in support of their children and families, and we can also co-construct strategies to help fathers who struggle. In the end, our goal is to be culturally responsive, tailoring the program seriously to meet their need.

The second webinar, Leveraging Community Partnerships to Support Fathers' Well-Being was really about the thoughtful assessment, evaluation, and establishment of meaningful relationships and partnerships that can build upon the great work you're already doing. It's important to find ways to leverage the expertise that exists within an external community. Our programs are in varying places with respect to negotiating the relationship building process where fathers are engaged in a variety of activities, but knowing who they are and a little bit about their needs as individuals and, of course, their role within a family system helps. Now although we share the resources, I don't have any frame for goal setting, it's really also important to be flexible and follow the father's lead. Listen to what's said and what's not being said, and do not be fearful of asking questions for clarity. Most importantly, help them round their goals into reality.

Another important point that we discuss is we know that we learn a lot about fathers through mothers. We understand the issues of excess unavailability. However, programs must evaluate ways to communicate directly with fathers, understand the community trends when establishing partnerships, and make sure that when you create memorandums of understanding, they are clearly spelled out and

evaluated over time. It's important we learn that it's important to have an elevator speech so you can share relevant information about your services. Developing the capacity to respond to special circumstances that fathers contend with can mean a variety of things. However, in my experience, it requires a deeper investment on the part of staff to initially provide concrete support, and then after some initial assessment, refer them to a more appropriate setting and the Head Start programs as we know to a tremendous amount. However, they can't address every issue, which is why establishing partnerships is so important. And another important thing is sometimes you're going to run into situations where it's advisable to meet with the program's mental health consultant for guidance and a development of a plan ensuring that the father is on board every step of the way. It's really important to know that programs are evaluating partnerships, typically have done their homework, and have met with success, engaging and developing strong relationships with fathers. So this is sort of like the next phase. Once you've already done the relationship building piece, it's important to be thoughtful as you create these partnerships and select partners who share a similar philosophical approach.

The last thing that we talked about was that, you know, the time between the topics that we covered in the first webinar and the second webinar, it varies across programs. Most importantly, it takes effort to build and sustain meaningful partnerships. We encourage you to stay committed, to stay focused, to trust yourself, and to trust the process. So I wanted to thank you all for joining us, and we hope that you enjoy the webinar.

John Hornstein: Hello, I'm John Hornstein, and I've been involved with fatherhood work for about 35 years, and it all started when I was noticing that fathers that I was working with were being excluded from conversations about their children. So I kind of backed into this, and I'm still backing into it.

Diedrick Burney: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Diedrick Burney. I'm with Smart from the Start. However, I've been working with fathers for several years throughout different Head Start programs within the DMV area. I'm excited to be here and share this discussion centered around father engagement.

David: Thank you, Diedrick. And, Royace.

Royace Hagler: Hi, I am Royace Hagler, and I am a deputy director for the Office of Early Learning at the United Planning Organization in DC. I have a master's degree in social work and I oversee 12 directly operated Early Head Start centers and one of the home-based centers, and I became interested in fatherhood as a result of the close relationship that I had with my dad, and then I had twin sons, and I watched and observed the relationship that they had not only with my husband but all of the men in their lives. And following that, I had an opportunity to obtain a fatherhood grant where we were supporting new fathers or fathers with young children. And so I'm just committed to ensuring that we acknowledge and support the many fathers that we see every day working with their children.

David: Thank you, John, Diedrick, and Royace. And just quickly in addition to my federal role, I have more than 25 years of experience developing programs, two nationally recognized programs in New York. Fathers First and the Bronx Fatherhood Program, delivering direct service, providing training and technical assistance, professional development for staff. I'm working with fathers and father figures, and I hope that I will be able to do this work for a lot longer. So the learning objectives for today's webinar is we'd like to -- We hope that you will be able to recognize the value of engaged fathers in children's school readiness and overall learning and development. We want to discuss and help you think about how to apply strategies to partner with fathers to engage with their children and to support their learning and

development. And together, we're going to discuss and learn some strategies and exemplary practices from fatherhood champion in the community. Royace: We're going to start with asking you to chat with us. And you should see the questions on the screen, "What does a father's engagement in his child's learning look like? How would you describe what you see?"

So if you could type in the general chat, we'd love to discuss what you're seeing. And while you're chatting, I'm just going to tell you a little bit about my experience and what I've seen. One of the things when I think about a dad's engagement with his child, I think about the physical way in which dads often engage young children. Since I work at an Early Head Start program, that is really central to what we see because we're working with children who are negotiating their fine and gross motor skills so that they can crawl, and scoot, and walk. And watching how dads are so easy to crawl, and scoot, and do those things with their children, really helps them to negotiate those skills as well as the excitement that they get interacting with their dads in that way, climbing over them, those kinds of things which also leads to really lifelong skills and relationships. I'm seeing some -- I'm looking at some of the responses now and I see things like being present in their child's life and reading with them, playing games with them. I mean, my observation also is that oftentimes when fathers are in a school setting, they sometimes feel like they should be teaching, and so it's really important that we let them know that children do learn through play and they are teaching by just their everyday conversations and interactions. I'm seeing lots of comments like dad and children smiling at one another. So there's quite a bit going on. Or I'm hearing a lot that I think you're seeing in your centers.

John: Yeah, this is quite a list of things that we're seeing about fathers engaging with their children. So we're going to shift gears a little bit and start thinking about the strategies that we as professionals can use in helping fathers engage with their children. I think one of the key things is to be with the father and the child at the same time and notice how the father interacts. So we're going to move very quickly into the different places in development that these strategies for engagement can be applied, and we're going to give you some specific ones. But in general, it's about supporting the interaction, as Royace just said, the learning happens through a quality relationship, and there's good research on this. It's the relationship more than the teaching that leads to the academic success and success in social, emotional domains and furthermore. So we have to value fathers, we have to value the differences between fathers, knowing that each father is going to engage a little bit differently, and if we stand next to the father and watch him with his baby or with his toddler and then ask him what he thinks about the behavior, then we're joining that system. Now we'll move to infancy.

Royace: Okay, this is Royace, and I'm going to talk a little bit just about early infancy. And as you can see on this slide, we have a few ideas of things that dads can do, like singing during diapering, focused gaze during feeding, but it's also important that we begin during pregnancy. And I think sometimes we forget that. What can dads do or what can we do to encourage fathers to be participants in pregnancy? Reading and singing to children can start in utero, and that's always a great start, sharing with dads their role in breastfeeding. Just as pregnant women have questions about breastfeeding, so do expectant dads. And I had the opportunity to work with the health department and a breastfeeding institute in bringing some workshops to our families in which dads and moms talked about breastfeeding, we talked about the benefits, about the ways in which dads could support moms, and then we had breakout sessions, which we had a male facilitator to go with the men and a female facilitator to go with the women so they could ask questions that they had, that they didn't really want to talk about with both men and women present.

So those are some of the areas. It's important that we meet dads where they are. Our job is to let fathers lead us, not for us to force or lead them, but for them to lead us.

One of the examples I have about that is that we were doing lots of programs for moms at a center where I worked, and I worked with the lot of children with special needs. And someone came in, one of the dads came in, and he said, "Hey, I don't feel comfortable holding my baby." His baby was in the neonatal ICU at a community hospital, and we had a grant to provide teaching parents or teaching dads how to take care of their newborns. And so what we did is we made a connection with the community hospital where his baby was and we were allowed to go and provide that kind of training to parents or to dads in the neonatal waiting room. And that's just an example of sometimes how we overlook dads. We might have those kinds of services when Dad is at work or when Dad is not available, and I think that's important for programs to really think about the times in which you schedule those kinds of things.

Diedrick: Good afternoon, everyone. This is Diedrick again. The next stage of development we will enter is the later infancy stage. And this is that transitional stage of development where the child actually transitions from that infant to toddlerhood. I think it's really important for programs to provide us to really, really look at the cultural impact on father engagement, specifically the cultural influence of the father that you serve directly. In doing that, it will allow us to see how fathers use their role as parents, it will also allow us to actually see their level of engagement, how they view their level of engagement, and then it will also inform us on how to address the barriers and some of those anxieties that fathers experience particularly during those infancy years of development. And when I say that, I think that it's really important that we become really intentional about the activities that we engage fathers in.

And when I say intentional, it's really being able to inform them about things that we're actually doing in the environment, for instance, we know that fathers can't breastfeed. However, they can take part in the whole feeding process and really, really identify when children are hungry to respond to those cues. Also, we can also, you know, create activity centered around potty training as Miss Royace just previously mentioned. A lot of fathers really, really experience a great deal of anxiety when it comes to diaper changing. So I think it's really important that we're intentional about the activities that we're engaging fathers and then I think it's really good for us to really, really look back at and document the process. I think it's really important to document these engagement activities or it empower fathers, and then it also allows them to see the outcome of the activity, and when I speak on documenting, I'm also talking about, you know, providing visuals, providing visuals of the activity and really, really looking back over and creating a reflection board where fathers can really look back on the activities that they were engaged in, in the classroom setting and be able to model that at home. I think it's really important, documentations are really a strict base practice, and it's really supported with getting families to see and increasing their level of comfort when it comes to engaging with their effort.

David: John, did you have something that you wanted to add?

ohn: I just want to read this slide which really, for me, captures the building relationship in infancy between the father and the child. So this is a father, I actually was in a group where the father said this and you can just see the relationship developing. "He slept for days and I didn't know he had eyeballs or what. The first time I got to lay down with him, we just stared at each other for an hour, and I was just blown away. I thought that was just the coolest thing, you know, I'm studying every detail of his face and he's doing the same thing back to me. It's just so amazing. I just spend hours thinking, 'Is that my nose? Are those my ears?'" You can feel the connection building here. This is, you know, what we were saying

earlier and why the word "relationship" is in so many of these slides that you'd all like to have because it's something more than simply doing things for the child or with the child, it's a change inside the father and the father recognizing that this person is part of me too.

David: So, John.

John: Yeah.

David: You know, what you're speaking about really makes me think of sort of the activity that we started with, rather or the question that we posed for the group to respond to in general chat about learning through play. And as you're talking about this quote, there's this notion of mutuality, there's this notion of reciprocity, and then there's this notion of being in a shared space. And what happens over time for the father and the child is that they begin to build this really strong connection, you know, where as adults, we kind of see people who have been around each other for a long time, you know, married couples, they have this way of communicating where they don't really have to speak to each other. Well, most of this was non-verbal, right? So you guys were just lock in through this shared space of reciprocity and mutuality without any verbal communication. And I think that is exceptionally cool, you know. And so again, if you're talking about the way in which a father can engage with a child through play and how they're impacting different aspects of development, yeah, there may be verbal communication, but that reciprocity, the shared space, and the mutuality, all have to exist in order for them to really have a meaningful experience.

John: You broke that down beautifully, David. [Laughing]

David: Thank you.

Diedrick: And what it is, is it's really establishing secure attachments. It's really getting fathers to understand that though during this time they're really establishing some secure attachments with their child.

John: That's correct.

Royace: You know, one of the things I was thinking as we were talking about that and just reflecting on myself, sometimes as moms, we have to step back to allow that to happen. We're so socialized to be the caretakers that sometimes we don't give dads the room to do that. And so that's something I think we all have to keep in mind and we need to keep in mind as we work with both moms and dads.

David: Well, that's an important point as well, Royace, because as professionals, we are well intended, right, we really want to be facilitators of this process, we want to help moms, we want to help the dads, we want to help babies. But at the same time, you're right, if that's indicative of sort of the female culture, then professionals, teachers in the classroom, family service workers that are working with men may sort of not give him license or enough room for him to engage in meaningful ways without sort of interfering. And I mean it with the greatest of intention because they really are well intended. They want to help, but at the same time, since I'm duly to step in back and again, observing and watching and allowing him to make those mistakes to not necessarily get it right, this is probably an important course of action because then you can have some really meaningful dialogue around that, and then what that does, it also impacts the relationship that you're building with the father because he's going to trust you now in other situations where he may or may not know what to do.

Royace: I just saw one of the comments in the chat about someone who said that the first time her husband gave her daughter the bath, he was nervous, and she just, he wanted her to be there to support, but yet step back and allow him to do that, and that's exactly what I'm talking about.

John: Right.

David: Right, yep.

Diedrick: And I think it's also good for programs to identify those anxieties that fathers may have. Just like Mom identify that the father was nervous, I think as providers on programs, we need to identify the anxiety and when fathers maybe necessarily nervous about a particular engagement activity.

John: Two people love the same other person, they're going to get in each other's way. [Laughter] And what the person who's got the most power has to do, in this case, it's the mother because she has power over what happens with her baby, you need to get out of the way a little bit so that the father can come in or anybody else, you know, it could be a grandparent, but it always happens that there's this phenomenon called gate keeping, and I think it really applies here.

David: Absolutely. So, Diedrick, do you want to take us into the next slide?

Diedrick: The next slide, later infancy?

David: That's correct.

Diedrick: Again, that is that transitional stage of development, and that is when the infant is actually transitioned from infancy to toddlerhood. And what happens is that -- We may notice an increased level of motor development with the child, and at programs, it's really important that we engage fathers and educate them on this transition time and how we can engage in the different activities that we can actually do. I mean, you can engage the father throughout the whole potty training process. A lot of times when it comes to potty training, we don't necessarily and intentionally, we don't engage the father. But this is the time that we can really engage the fathers throughout that whole potty training. You know, also educating the father on this stage of development is when the child begins to explore and how as fathers we can support them throughout this exploration time, really, really being intentional about the activities that we do in the classroom with the father -- Educating them on things that we're doing in the classroom, be it motor time, dining time, potty training time, diaper changing, really being intentional and engaging the fathers and educating them on this stage of development.

David: Those are really great points, Diedrick. You know, when I look at this slide and I listen to some of the comments that you made, what I think about is sort of the importance of modeling during this phase, right? When you model with the child, like you were saying, you know, and this space of exploration, so they're going imitate it. So imitation is a really good way of helping them, repetition, and then you begin to see the aspects of the different developmental domains that you're beginning to influence, cognition, language development, the social, the fine motor, the gross motor, all of it comes into play. You know, the older they get, the more they have sort of the, you know, control over their bodies. They're able to actually do many, many, many more things.

Diedrick: And I think as providers, it's our goal to increase their comfort level when it comes to engaging with their child and really educating them on how every opportunity is a learning experience.

David: John, any comments or thoughts?

John: Yeah, I like this list of things. I feel like later infancy is like the beginning of something huge as far as the child becoming a person. But this last one I think is really hard for people to do, let your child lead the interaction.

David: Yes.

John: You know, that so many adults, and it's true across cultures, you know, we're raised to tell kids what to do and where my father said, you know, it's the way it is because I say so. He wasn't about to follow my lead. You know, and it was a mistake if he had, probably. But anyway, you know, the point here is we have to kind of let go of something in order to follow the child's lead, but we know in relation to child development that it's a process, it's a process of interaction that helps the child grow and learn, you know, what's right and wrong, what's good to do, what they need to learn, the child's brain is designed to explore. And what we as adults do particularly in this period is we join that process. We don't govern the process, join it in order for the child to actually turn himself or herself into himself or herself. So letting the child lead the interaction is hard even for teachers.

Diedrick: So what you're saying, John, is that maybe we should be more dad on the side.

John: Right, right, right.

Diedrick: I think what happens during that time is that unintentionally, we tend to over scaffold. Even as teachers, as you mentioned, we don't allow the child to lead. That is something that's hard for us as parents and as providers. But I think that when we begin to practice that every day and understand that this is the stage of development where the child is supposed to explore, then it becomes an everyday practice and we begin to scaffold when necessary as opposed to over scaffolding.

John: Exactly.

David: You know, what both of you guys are saying, and Royace has a point that I think she wants to make, but this is so obvious to me and evident when you talk about parents reading books to their children, a lot of times, it's so important for them to get to the end of the book. But sometimes, a child will land on a particular page and becomes so excited about the colors and the pictures or a particular animal and parents are so challenged by being patient and staying there, but that's the piece about letting the child lead, right, because you can still build a whole conversation or completely change the theme of the story just by staying on that page. Royace?

Royace: Yes, one of the comments I saw was about How do you keep dads engaged or expectant fathers engaged before the child is born? And I think part of it is having programs geared towards expectant families and not just pregnant moms, that you want to look at what role the dad has in the delivery, the birth -- And even if they're not together but you know that there's a dad and he's expecting a child, being able to talk with him about the kinds of things he can do once the baby is born. I mean, I think that's crucial -- It may be having him come in and volunteer in the classroom, might not be with his own child at that point but volunteer so that he can feel comfortable with children until his child is born. You know, I think that what I've found is that dads want to know as much information as moms do. I have not found a lot of difference in that. I think one of the biggest, other than the breastfeeding, one of the biggest, because I did have a big program with breastfeeding, but one of the other biggest workshops I've ever had was on

brain development, and that was an all-dad workshop. From there, they asked for more and more information. So I think if we reach out and connect with dads on just a human level -- That kind of evolves, but you have to meet them where they are and you have to also look at it within the context of culture -- Because different cultures have different ideas, they have different ways of relating to children. So I think that is significant and we always have to keep that in mind.

Diedrick: Definitely, definitely.

David: So, yeah, John, you're up.

John: Yeah, I want to go back to what Royace said. You know, it's interesting, the brain stuff that you're referencing. We know that when babies cry and fathers hear it, their brains respond almost exactly the same way as mothers do to a baby's cry. What's different is how the culture or how the father's own upbringing has taught him how to respond to the baby's cry. The brain reacts the same way. So in a sense, with our programs, we're kind of opening up the possibility to use that brain with his child. So here's another quote. This is actually a mother who is saying this, and she says, "One perfect spring day as I sat on my deck, I looked up from the book I was reading to see my daughter, then 2 1/2, nose-to-nose with the daffodils in our garden. Bending from one flower to another, she gave each of them a gentle kiss. Swamped with love and pride that I had produced such a sweet and tender child, I rushed to sit beside her. That's when she calmly turned, looked me straight in the eye, and said, 'Go away, I don't want you here. I want Daddy.'"

So I think that this toddler, the two and a half year old is saying something extremely important about what she wants from the world. She spent two years plus being cared for by her mother, and her mother has sacrificed herself for her and has kept her really safe, and this toddler is saying, "Maybe this man who shows up every once in a while can show me something that you can't, maybe I can get something from him that's a little different." Now this could be two mothers or two fathers, it doesn't matter. It's another person that is providing something different to the child, and I think that this leads us into what toddlerhood is all about. This child is clearly jerking the mother around with emotional kind of comment -- Which is typical of toddlers. But like I said, she's also asking for something else out of development. Toddlerhood Okay, so toddlerhood, what's toddlerhood about? Well, it's play and discovery, it's about becoming a person, it's about exploring, it's about testing limits and taking risks -- It is very much about imitation. So in toddlerhood, what are some of the strategies? Well, I think one of the things that came up in the chat earlier, the participant chat was somebody mentioned the importance of rough and tumble play, and the research shows that, well, we know that fathers tend to engage in more rough and tumble play with their toddlers than mothers do.

That doesn't mean that some mothers don't do it as much as fathers do, just in general. But what does rough and tumble play do for the child's development? Well, when kids get wild with the father or with the mother and they get a little bit out of control, the parent sets a limit. And research shows that when it gets out of hand and the parent sets a limit, this rough and tumble play actually leads to better self-regulation on the part of the child in the long run. So I think that, you know, strategy wise, it's important to basically support the kind of play that leads to good self-regulation, it's to actually, like we said earlier, to get alongside the father and kind of join him in thinking about how to play with his child and not to discourage things that are helpful for development. Another thing that happens in toddlerhood that I think is really important, and it can happen earlier. But it's when the father actually realizes that because the child is taking a lot of risk, the parents on both sides, both mothers and fathers are concerned because

toddlers can get hurt. Toddlers often get hurt. And what happens in parents, and I think there is a particularly important for fathers, is you realize that when you're playing with your child, you're seeing your child take chances, you're seeing your child occasionally get hurt -- You start to realize that the well-being of your child is more important than your own well-being. And that's a real shift for a parent that somehow, and these are the conversations that you can have with fathers, you know, what you think about when your child actually does something and is likely to get hurt.

And so I think this is huge in terms of fathers just kind of saying, "Oh, wait a minute, my child's well-being is as important as my own well-being." That leads to less risk taking on the father's part. So the father realizes that he needs to take care of a child, a child who can get hurt but also models for the child the importance of things like generosity and compassion, which, in this society, we really need a lot more of. So I think toddlerhood is a real shift, it's an opportunity for fathers to jump in, in a way they couldn't before. And it's kind of a, it's a life changing thing for many fathers in this period.

David: Royace, Diedrick, would you guys want to add anything? For me, John, what you said, the safety piece becomes critically important. I think you're right. You know, the fear that the child can potentially be injured becomes, you know, timeout for a lot of parents. And so sometimes, that also can lead to their sort of restricting or inhibiting the normal development trajectory. Diedrick.

Diedrick: Yes, and I think also that, you know, there's still room for exploration, you know, while making sure that they're in a safe environment, and it's really an opportunity to create an environment that's safe and it's an opportunity for programs to really educate fathers on how children can explore throughout the whole, in different spaces all throughout the whole and just making sure that it's a safe space to explore.

Royace: You know, part of, I think, what happens is that we have to really, as parents and as providers, we have to look at how we are perceiving what is safe. Because I know, in myself, the kinds of things that my husband did with the boys were not the same kind of activities that I did. And but when I look at it now and I really reflect on it, it was safe, it was safe. But it was my own perspective and I knew that I was feeling that way even though I step back because I could feel it in myself, but I knew that I had to step back because it was a different way of interacting that I wasn't used to, but that doesn't mean that it was wrong or that it wasn't beneficial. And so I just kept going back to the fact that we have to take a look at our filter and how we're looking at things to make sure we're just not filtering it through our own lens and it's not, you know, accurate.

John: And the activities that we can plan for the programs. I mean, my impression when I walk into programs often is, "Oh, this is a room designed for women who take care of children." You know, so it's not a room designed for boys exploring the world. And when we go outside, I mean, yes, we have to keep everybody safe, that's our first job as people who take care of young children. But the fact is you can't keep everybody totally safe. And the activities that are designed, you know, is the room designed with a lot of table activities, a lot of pre-academic stuff? Well, this outdoor stuff and a little bit wilder stuff actually is pre-academic. The capacity that develops self-regulation comes from somewhat risky situations, not from controlled situations. So I think, you know, as much as we have a responsibility for safety, we also have to create opportunities for kids to take risks, and with fathers present, that can be managed really well. It strengthens the relationship between the father and the child but it also adds a little bit different character to the classroom.

David: Well, it does, you know. And, John, what you were just sharing I think is a really nice springboard. Sometimes, you know, when mothers are at a place of difficulty and there maybe some gate keeping taking place and programs really want to support and encourage the entire family, talking to them about the different contributions that each parents bring to the table, that's a really nice example of saying, you know, sometimes, the safety thing, we could put ourselves in a position where we're so fearful that the child is going to get hurt, we don't intend to do it, but we're going to inhibit or restrict that child's development in some way, but fathers have a tendency to kind of be a little bit more supportive around, "Okay, let him climb up that slide, I'm going to be here with him. I'm going to stay near him to make sure he doesn't fall." Whereas a mother might say, "No, we want to wait till he gets a little older, a little bigger before he performs that feat."

John: Yeah, you know, it reminds me of language development oddly enough, David. You know, in toddlerhood -- Child will try to say something and the mother will immediately know what the child is trying to say and get whatever the child wants, whereas the father won't know. The father will be standing there and going, "What are you trying to say?" And so the toddler actually has to work harder with the father to be understood and hence that's good for language development because he has to, you know, he has to come up with a way of communicating. So basically, David, it's saying that we men are kind of oblivious, you know, but in fact, it's a good thing not to give too much support when a child is trying to accomplish something.

David: Point well taken. I agree. Royace or Diedrick, do you want to add anything before we move to the next slide?

Royace: I think the one thing I did see something that someone commented or chatted that there was a parenting class in a high school and that the dads were eager to make their babies soft dolls, and I think we underestimate a lot of our young parents and exactly how invested they are and what they can do. A class that I taught was teaching young dads how to change their babies -- We actually started off with dolls because this is when they were expecting, so this was prior to having the baby, but they were all expectant dads and we had dolls and we taught them how to hold the dolls, to burp, to feed, to change diapers, that whole thing, and it's amazing how many dads were really invested in that, and I even had one teenage dad that came up and asked if we would speak to the mother of the child, the pregnant mom because he felt like she was depressed and we did actually detect perinatal depression and that came from a teenage father who was just so involved in learning about children and learning about pregnancy and what to expect that he picked up on it before anybody else did.

John: Oh, that's a wonderful story. You know, your example of the fathers learning the stuff, were there any mothers there when you were teaching this class?

Royace: Yes, we did. We had classes with dads by themselves and then we had classes with moms and dads. Part of that was geared towards exchanging the communication and teaching about how there was a role for both of them and how important it was that they, even if they weren't together because some of them were not, it was important that they would communicate for the sake of the child.

John: Yeah, that's great. One thing that the research tells us about dads and being nurturant and doing some of the things that you are teaching them is they're much more likely the look nurturant, this goes back to the gate keeping thing we were talking about earlier. They're much more likely to look nurturant when mother isn't around. And so I think that there's, like you said Royace, you did some of the sessions

just with the dads, they might show their skills when the mother isn't around because, you know, in his mind or in society's mind, "Oh, that's her job, so, you know, I'm going to let her do it. But if I'm the one that has to do it, then I sure I can do it, and I like doing it." You know, it's an interesting strategy for programs to think of in relation to, "Oh, do I get dads together to do this or do I have the mothers there too?"

David: If the confidence sort of, you know, paradigm kind of thing, you know, the more they're able to understand what it is that needs to be done and they can engage in the activity, then their confidence, it's going to increase and they will be increasing more comfortable doing it. Preschool

Diedrick: Now this is really important to address that when we speak about dads, when we're speaking about any engaged father, any engaged male in the child's life, be it grandpa, be it uncle, be it big brother, any engaged male in the child's life.

Royace: Absolutely.

Diedrick: So that they are going towards the preschool stage of development. And what we're hearing a lot right now is school readiness. However, we all know that school readiness starts from birth, but these pre-school years of development is when we truly promote a lot of cognitive development, critical thinking skills, and so again, I think programs that provide us, we really need to be intentional about how our father child activities, really informing fathers on the curriculum that we're utilizing, informing fathers on the different assessment that are being utilized in the classroom right now. Class is getting utilized in almost every Head Start classrooms right now. And I think it's okay for us to educate families on this class too and also look at the interaction between the teacher and the child as well as the parent and the child. I think it's also good to actually create activities that will educate fathers on how to promote a positive climate -- And to help identify negative climate.

Physical activity, we also know that during these preschool years, we're seeing a lot of physical activities with fathers, really educating fathers on how to interact with their child throughout any given opportunity throughout the day, on family style dining, you know, right now, you know how that promotes language and dialogue and how that is also an opportunity for us to introduce new food options, just really, really being intentional about the outcome of the activity that we're doing with fathers. If we're inviting fathers in during circle time, you know, we can talk about literacy and the importance of reading a story every day. If we invite them during chores time, we can talk about the different areas in the classrooms and we can actually engage fathers and talk about, you know, those dramatic play areas, some of those areas that we may not necessarily see fathers engaged in. We've been talking about the importance of that and how that promotes, you know, language -- And how does it interfere with those gender type thinking role. A lot of times, we find that, you know, we don't really educate families on the classroom settings, we just invite them in and I think that we really need to be more intentional about things that we're doing in the classroom so that fathers can model those things at home.

Royace: I think one of the things in preschool that we need to remember is that because many times we're so focused on the person that enrolls the child, which a lot of times it's the mom, that uncustodial dad, it is our responsibility to make sure -- That they are involved to the extent possible as long as there's no kind of -- Domestic violence or anything of that nature, that sort of thing, but what can we do to parent-teacher conferences? If the two parents aren't living together and they're separate but both are involved, what can we do to give two copies of assessment? So I think those are things that are easy to do to make a dad

involved. But the thing that I've seen that's most impactful is recognizing and acknowledging the impact that fathers have on development. It is so empowering to a dad or a mom for that matter when a teacher shares with them the significant impact they've had on their child. Sometimes you see a dad come to the door and the child immediately stops everything she's doing and runs and squeals for that dad. And being able to acknowledge that especially for a non-custodial and our young parents, to be able to acknowledge, "My goodness, Mr. So and so, look at what happened when you walked in the door." That sort of thing is so empowering, and it's very simple to do. I mean, it's very easy to do.

John: Yeah, I think that's a great strategy, Royace, that noticing that when a father and a child are connecting, you know, whether it's in play and something that's of a pre-academic kind of activity or when it's in a reunion kind of situation but actually saying it, I think is, you know, I think it takes some of that. I also think sometimes it takes time. You know, we invite fathers into the classrooms, but we need to recognize that everybody is going to do that at their own pace and they may just want to observe a little bit before they get too involved and we need to give permission for that.

David: John, you know, that's a really, really good point. As we transition to the next slide, I think I'd just add that, you know, it sounds like there are some really great things happening across these programs as I look into the chat. But it's really also important to be flexible with our expectations as we begin to define what engagement is and what that looks like because it's going to vary depending on, you know, a father's capability, relationship with the mom, the program's level of readiness, and all those kinds of things that we've been talking about throughout these webinars. So a few closing thoughts. One of the things that we talked about in this webinar is we talked about the importance of following the father's lead. That is really critically and essentially important to leave judgment aside -- Enjoy the child, you know, it's important that fathers are able to do that and feel comfortable with their children, get to a place where they're increasingly comfortable and that they're okay with showing love. Be playful. There is so much that can be gained when a father engages in a playful activity with their child. And last but definitely not least, mothers and fathers are both important in the early years.

So what else is evident, again, is that many of you are very thoughtful and intentional in designing your father engagement activities. So I think on behalf of this entire team, we applaud you. You know, Head Start has been supporting families and engaging fathers longer than any other entity that is doing this work. Many of you are doing great work and it is our charge to ensure that you continue to do so. Some other really important points though is that organizational buy in and professional development are a must. Constantly continue to make sure that you're scaffolding the knowledge of the people who are going to engage with fathers. Draw upon relevant research to gain insight about how to best support fathers residing within your community. Constantly evaluate and reevaluate your efforts to engage and build relationships because as we said a number of times throughout this webinar and in the general chat that, that is the foundation. Families we serve are enmeshed in a number of challenges and yet they all have remarkable strengths.

You want to elevate those strengths and help them use those strengths to begin addressing their needs and finally, let this permeate throughout your program by drawing upon the guide and all other resources that we've highlighted throughout this series. So here we have the Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide. And what we want to do is just kind of point you to part three of the guide which is the toolkit. And this, it can be really, really useful to help programs to evaluate where clearly, many of you guys must be familiar with this, so you must already know that levels of readiness and areas

where they can strengthen their efforts, but it's important to kind of look at the self-assessments section at the end of the guide and also, again, as I talked about in a previous slide, some of those profession development activities that actually helps you to continue to do the great work that you're doing, taking it to the next level.

Just one word of caution, this research has not been updated with the new Head Start Program Performance Standards. So just know that. Hopefully, we'll be able to do that at some point. But all of the content is really relevant in terms of the way that it's laid out and connected to the framework. What's next? Next steps. There's a survey link that will be sent to participants via the PFCE webinar's email address either today or tomorrow. It's really, really helpful for us if you give us some feedback. This is how we kind of strengthen and ensure that future webinars will be more responsive to your needs, and, of course, you get a certificate. Let's Stay Connected And let's stay connected. You can continue to stay on and participate in the general chat until 4:15 P.M. And we'll sort of engage with you. But what's equally exciting when I began the webinar or as we begin the webinar, I opened up and talked about fatherhood champions. I

f any of you out there are really interested in sort of learning a little bit more about what that is, I'm going to put my email address in the general chat, and we would love for you to reach out to us. Essentially what we're attempting to do is have fatherhood champions across the country throughout the regions, and you'll be sort of individuals that will be passionate about this work, supportive of this work, and people who we can go to when we have questions, when we need more information about what's happening across the country and programs, and we may also invite you at some point to help us in future webinars. So with that, on behalf of the entire team, I want to just say thank you to everyone that joined us and some of you have been part of the entire series. Thank you so much for that. Any of the team members want to say anything before we close out?

Royace: Yes, that it's been a real honor to just be a part of this. I love some of the ideas I was reading in the chat -- In the chat some of the wonderful ideas that I'll be implementing some of those, and that I'm so glad that people are so passionate about this work.

John: Yeah, same goes for me, Royace, that I was reading some of the general chat ideas while I was trying to talk and I was finding that some of the ideas that were coming out from the group were better than what I was saying. So, you know, I suggest you all read your comments because they're great.

Diedrick: The same for me. I think it was really great to actually see the comments that were posted in the webinar. I just recently saw one that we were talking about more training for teachers when it comes to engaging fathers, and so --

David: Okay. Stella, do we kick it back to you?

Stella: All I can say after that is thanks, everyone, and we hope to hear from everyone again soon. We'll be on the chat, so we can stay in touch for a few more minutes.