

Making it Work:

**Co-parenting, a Key Factor in
Father Involvement**

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Three Studies Spanning Three Family Transitions: Pathways to Change in Parents and Children

Becoming a Family

Pregnancy to Kindergarten (Child 5.5)

Schoolchildren and their Families

Pre-school (age 4.5) to Gr. 11 (age 16.5)

Supporting Father Involvement

Children from birth to 7 followed for 2 yrs



Essential elements of the program

NOT JUST PARENTING AND
COUPLE COMMUNICATION

ADDRESSING THE RISK
FACTORS/BARRIERS TO
POSITIVE CO-PARENTING

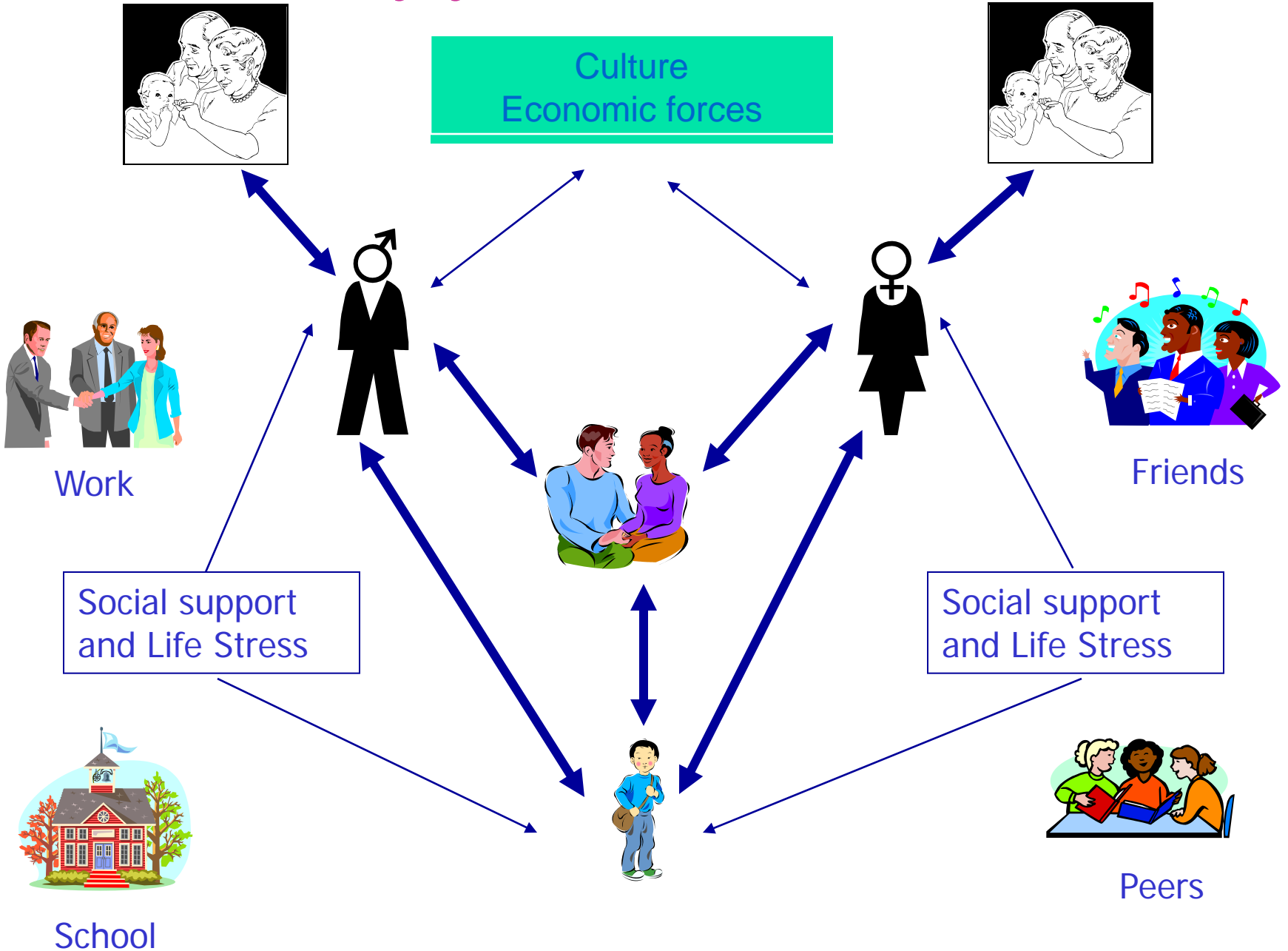


Our 5-dimensional model: Risk-Protection-Outcome

1. **INDIVIDUAL ADJUSTMENT:** Reduce anxiety, depression, and stress in individual parents; increase coping with internal stressors; find ways to meet individual needs.
2. **PARENTING:** Increase positive father involvement; decrease parenting stress; increase the range of age-appropriate parenting strategies

- 3. COUPLE RELATIONSHIP:** Increase or maintain satisfaction with the relationship; increase collaborative problem-solving; decrease conflict; foster better emotional regulation
- 4. FAMILY OF ORIGIN RELATIONSHIPS:** Break negative intergenerational cycles of adversity, harsh treatment, exclusion, and abuse; promote goals for more satisfying relationships
- 5. STRESSORS AND SUPPORTS:** Develop strategies to cope with external stressors associated with poverty and underemployment; increase supports from family, friends, and social services

Our Family Systems Risk/Protection Model





Supporting Father Involvement Project

Development and Evaluation Team

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RECRUITING AND RETAINING FATHERS AS WELL AS MOTHERS

WORK BEGINS "AT HOME"

MAKING THE AGENCY MORE FATHER
FRIENDLY



List of dimensions

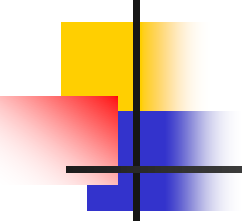
1. Organizational support for father engagement
2. Reputation for serving fathers
3. Father-inclusive policies and procedures
4. Staff prepared to offer services to fathers
5. Specific staff available for fathers
6. Approach to mothers includes fathers
7. Specific approaches to fathers
8. Support for co-parenting
9. Fathers treated warmly and welcomed
10. Physical environment inclusive of fathers



RECRUITMENT

We have to go out and get the fathers; they won't come to us...Go where they are.....

- The key is NOT to say that we offer groups "to work on couple relationship issues" but "to help both partners to become the kind of parents and partners they want to be."

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- Don't let mom make excuses like "he's too busy" or "he wouldn't be interested."





RETENTION

- FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES HAVING CASE MANAGERS or GROUP LEADERS WITH ACTIVE FOLLOW-UP IS ESSENTIAL.
- PAY ATTENTION TO INDIVIDUAL FUNCTIONING (Depression, anxiety, anger) and have good referral resources.
- YOU'VE GOT TO CREATE A PROGRAM THAT PARTICIPANTS ARE EXCITED ABOUT



CREATING AN EXCITING PROGRAM FOR COUPLES

AVOID DIDACTIC LEADER-CENTERED
CLASSROOM APPROACH

HAVE MALE-FEMALE TEAM AS LEADERS

SPEND SOME TIME ON OPEN-ENDED
CHECK-IN

PROVIDE STRUCTURE IN REMAINING
TIME



USE A VARIETY OF INTERVENTION TECHNIQUES

- mini-lectures
- role-playing
- games
- exercises
- video/film



USE A VARIETY OF GROUP STRUCTURES

- WHOLE-GROUP DISCUSSIONS
- COUPLE DISCUSSIONS AND PRACTICE
- MEN'S GROUP AND WOMEN'S GROUP



ONGOING EVALUATIONS

- PERIODIC CHECKS ABOUT WHAT'S WORKING AND WHAT'S NOT.
- LISTEN WITHOUT BEING DEFENSIVE
- USE GROUP COLLABORATION TO HELP MAKE CORRECTIONS

Planning a court-based intervention for divorcing couples

With Gordon Harold, University of Leicester

Leslie Leve and David DeGarmo,
Oregon Social Learning Center

Child assessment of risk, followed by groups for divorcing couples, or individual/couple interventions for very high conflict couples



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