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## The Paternal Presence: Its Unique Role and Power in the Lives of Young Children

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### Engaging Fathers; Strengthening Families

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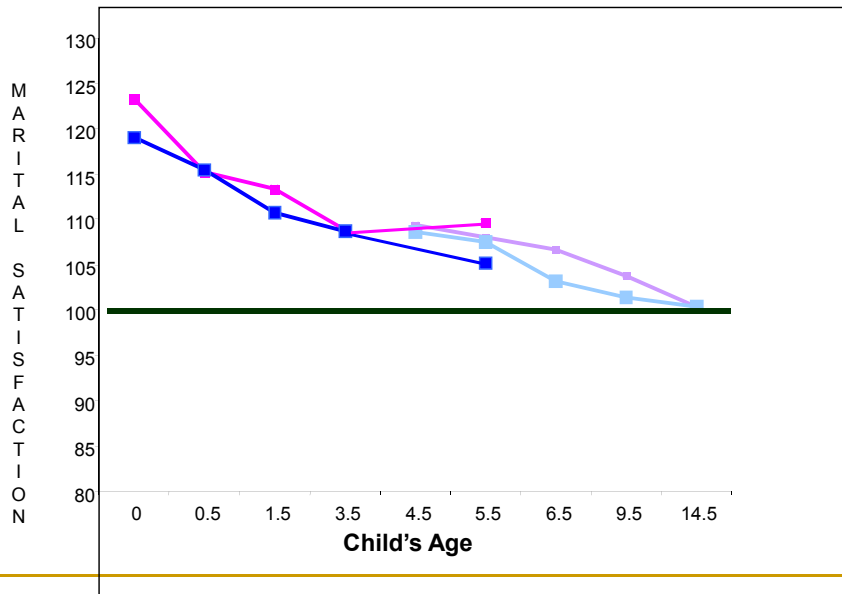
## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Parenting

- 'Quality time' as myth; children are/feel raised in ordinary time by *both* parents
  - 56% working men 'share parental work'
  - *Way* you parent matters more than whether you work
  - Kids want their parents to be less *stressed/tired*, regardless of socioeconomic grouping
  - Poor quality child care/education preoccupies mothers *and* fathers, raises stress, reduces productivity
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## Mothering/Fathering well at any age

- *Sensitivity* to needs
- Make children feel adored/valued
- Sustain strong values
- Discipline to teach
- Affirm uniqueness/expect competence
- Promote education as process
- Be an abiding presence – whatever comes
- -and is a risky undertaking...

Parents' Average Marital Adjustment Over Time



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*It is the primary task of every society to teach men how to father.*

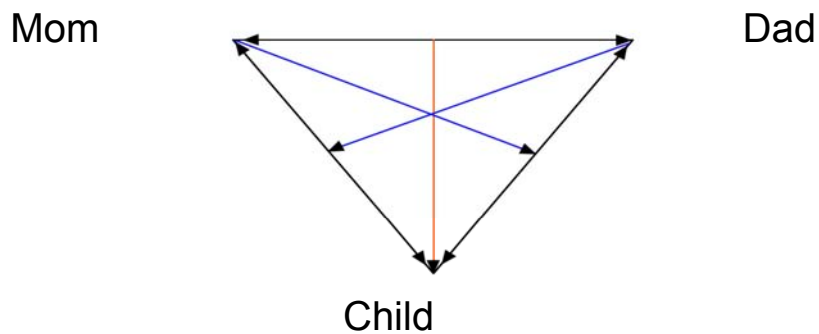
-Margaret Meade

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Because of this familial dynamic...

Coparenting  $\neq$  couple systems



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## Evidence that Men Respond to Children

- Biological equity & the colicky infant
  - Touch and smell recognition
  - Spontaneous speech patterns
  - Hormones and Fatherhood:
    - testosterone: drops 33% for 1 mo. at birth
    - estrogen: increases 1 mo. prior/ 3 mos. post birth
    - prolactin: increases 20% for 3 wks. post birth
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## Evidence that Children Respond Directly to Men

- 6 wk olds respond differentially to mother/father
  - Toddlers use clearer behavioral cues to father
  - Preschoolers use more advanced speech with fathers
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## Father-Child Interactions

Unique maternal vs. paternal comfort-seeking behavior depending on *age*

Salience of play in paternal intimacy (USA)

Strongly promoted by partner support (culture?)

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## Distinguishing Maternal/Paternal Behaviors

- Preference for activation/stimulation vs. soothing
  - Unpredictable vs. predictable/regulating style
  - Preparation for place in the world vs. relationships; 'real world' discipline vs. relational
  - Frustration tolerance vs. facilitating
  - Respect vs. gatekeeping
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## Child Outcomes of Involved 'Fathering' [N.B., MN!]

### **Behavioral**

- Reduced contact with juvenile justice
- Delay in initial sexual activity, reduced teen pregnancy
- Reduced rate of divorce
- Less reliance on aggressive conflict resolution

### **Educational**

- Higher grade completion and income
- Math competence in girls
- Verbal strength in boys and girls (literacy)

### **Emotional**

- Greater problem-solving competence, and stress tolerance
- Greater empathy, moral sensitivity and reduced gender stereotyping

## Bottom line example...

Measurable outcomes? Early Head Start and  
Fatherhood Involvement

- Less intrusive/ more responsive, less spanking/ more language
- More responsive interaction father/child
- Promote cognitive strengths in toddlers

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## Variations on diversity?

- All of the above relatively independent of the type of fathering, and instead...
  - Dependent on the sensitivity/quality of the fathering
  - Biological, step, adoptive, unmarried, never married, etc. - matters less than the nature of the relationship, its value to both child and man, and the culture that shapes that relationship – Native American, Hispanic, Asian, etc.
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## Adult Male Outcomes of Involved Fathering

### **Increased:**

- Longevity
- Length of marriage
- Level of health
- Responsibility for relationships

### **Decreased:**

- Accidental death
  - Suicide
  - Job Change
  - Aggression/impulsivity
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## ... and a new brain?

- Neurobiological changes seen on fMRIs at 2 weeks that are different than moms
- Highly involved fathers showed enhanced activity in regions of brain associated with:
  - 1) bond formation (*stria terminalis*)
  - 2) auditory processing (*sup. temp. gyrus*)
  - 3) discrimination between crying/laughing (*amygdala*)

*Diane Feygin YSM*

## Risks to Fatherhood

- Unemployment/Guilt
- Inexperience
- Isolation
- Exclusion from child's life
  - [divorce, gatekeeping, child care/health/educational settings]
- Work-family stress transcends gender, especially for men

## ...and who knew?

- Paternal Post-partum depression
  - Avon [UK] Longitudinal Population Study: Parents and Kids
  - Fa: 8K @ 8wks, 21 mos & Kids: 42 mos
  - Fa findings; 3.6% anxiety, mood swings, irritability and hopelessness (Depression)
    - Mo findings: 9.8%
  - Child Outcomes @ 42 mos. (with depressed dads)
    - Emotional/behavioral symptoms, esp. boys (2X)
    - Worry, sadness, hyperactivity
      - *Lancet, June 25/05 Ramchandani et al*

## So...

- Does the rubber meet the road?

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## Supporting Father Involvement (SFI)

A research and preventive intervention project  
Funded by the California Department of Social Services,  
Office of Child Abuse Prevention

Marsha Pruett (Smith), Kyle Pruett (Yale)  
Carolyn & Phil Cowan (UCBerkeley)  
Linda Hockman/Teresa Contreras- California DSS (OCAP)

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### Risks for Child Abuse and Neglect Reduced if We Affect Family Life in the Following Ways:

- 1) *Parenting*: Increase positive father involvement, decrease parenting stress, increase the range of age-appropriate parenting strategies
  - 2) *Individual Adjustment*: Reduce anxiety, depression, and stress, increase coping with internal stressors, find ways to meet individual needs
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- 3) *Couple Relationship*: Increase or maintain satisfaction with the relationship, increase collaborative problem-solving, decrease conflict
- 4) *Family of Origin*: Break negative intergenerational cycles of adversity, harsh treatment, exclusion, and abuse
- 5) *Stressors and Supports*: Develop strategies to cope with external stressors associated with poverty and underemployment, increase social supports

## Father Involvement?

- Direct care (feeding, dressing, soothing)
- Indirect care (preparing meals, arranging doctors' appointments)
- Active thinking, feeling, planning for child
- Play and recreation with the child
- Financial support

## SFI Overview

5 California counties involved:

- Housed in Family Resource Centers
- 289 low-income families (500+ phase 4)
- Primarily Latino and European American, and African-American

## Screening Families

- No open protective service case (phase 1)
- No severe mental illness, substance abuse
- Youngest child birth to 7 years (Mean age of child 2.3 -phase1)
- Biological parents, not necessarily married or living together but parenting jointly

## Random Assignment to:

Information  
Session

16 week  
Fathers  
groups

16 week  
Couples  
groups

Case management for all families

Bi-monthly consultation for site staff

Pre-intervention assessment for each parent

- Post-intervention assessment 9 months after baseline
- Follow-up assessment 18 months after baseline

“Experienced group leaders only”

Need Apply

- Deal with complex issues that arise in group settings
- Supportive but limit setting
- Manage dv, sub use, reporting issues that arise even after screening
- Use curriculum skillfully and flexibly to meet needs of individual groups
- Adapt materials as needed
- Work with team

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## Anatomy of the Curricula

- 2 hours per week for 16 weeks
  - Both parents welcomed briefly in both conditions at first session
  - In two sessions (5 and 13), fathers with children in supervised activities
  - In two sessions (5 and 13), mothers meet separately
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## Culturally Sensitive Modifications; *low income and minority families*

- Real life needs given priority
    - Skilled childcare provided
    - Meals provided and groups offered in evening
    - Focus on underemployment and job stress
    - Payment for questionnaires, more for final one
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## How does the group intervention strengthen family relationships?

Over the months, co-leaders listen and focus discussion so that fathers and mothers...

- Get their point of view heard
  - Learn to tolerate differences
  - Explore how experiences in their families of origin play a role in their reactions to each other and their children
  - Try more satisfying solutions to marital and parenting problems
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## What the *Groups* Provided Parents...

- Support, information, and hope
  - Normalization of experiences
  - Help recognizing family patterns
  - Help regulating emotions
  - Help with problem solving strategies
  - A secure base for the couple
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## *Lessons learned...*

- Low income families + skilled, respectful GLs = participation and retention
  - Mothers' help fathers' attendance (2x)
  - Pre-literacy a favorite among dads
  - Incentives – coupons [recrtnmt, ?aires]
  - Control conditions are necessary evils that are acceptable to staff & families
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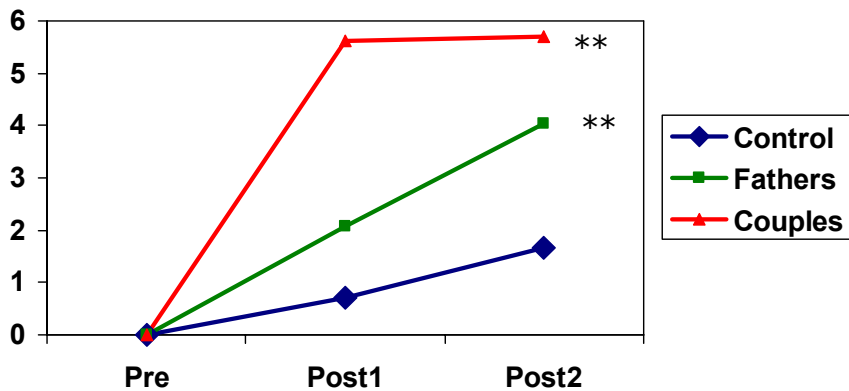
## Worth the trouble?

- Findings to date (compared to controls):
    - Reduced parenting stress and conflict
    - Improved communication, problem solving
    - Reduced parental depression and anxiety
    - Reduced harsh discipline
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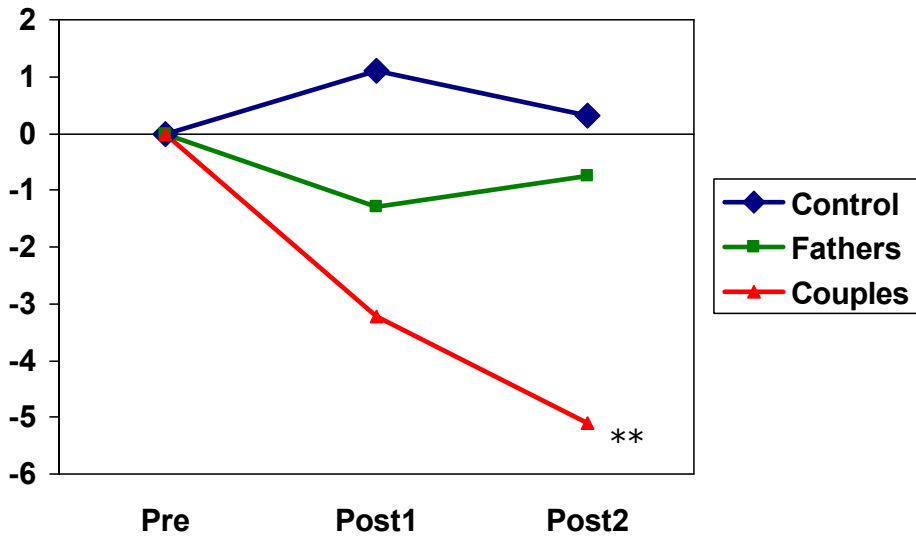
## Worth the trouble 2

- \* Findings in children (compared to controls):
  - Reduced hyperactivity
  - Reduced aggression
- \* Findings in institutions:
  - Improved overall 'Father Friendliness' for the life of grant

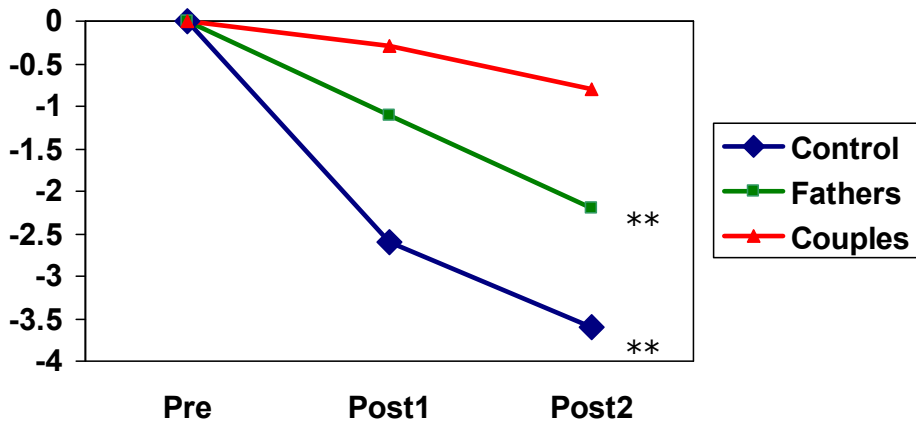
### Increase in father involvement with child



### Change in parenting stress



### Decline in couple relationship satisfaction



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## Testimonials

- What men found useful
  - What their spouses saw happening to them and their children
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## More info...

- [www.supportingfatherinvolvement.org](http://www.supportingfatherinvolvement.org)
  - *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Aug '09
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## Strategic Applications Which Exploit Benefits of Paternal Presence in Practice

- Use public health encounters to encourage father involvement:
    - Pregnancy, childbirth, illness, entrance into child care, school, marital separation, adolescence, job loss
  - Encourage fathers to establish paternity
  - Support of ongoing employment (providing is fathering for many)
  - Ongoing training of state employees (all levels!)
    - Maintain expectation of support for involvement, especially among female staff and administrators
  - Support maternal encouragement of father involvement ;  
Awareness of gatekeeping tendency, ongoing vigilance within Child Welfare
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*Are fathers the single greatest untapped resource in the lives of Minnesota's children?*

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“Thanks for coming...”

- the *Kids*