

Staffing a
Parent Education
Class for Fathers

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InfoSheet:

Staffing a Class for Fathers

Crucial to any successful Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), Head Start or Community Education father-friendly program is a staff that can recruit and retain fathers.

New families, in particular new fathers, face a world that can be very exciting but also very daunting. Most of the teachers in the early-childhood classrooms are women. Many of the parent education teachers are women. One way to help fathers feel at ease within these classrooms is to identify male teachers or volunteers who can help recruit and welcome men into the group. Here are a few thoughts for ensuring the fathers that need your help will ask for it.

Men As Teachers

Recruiting men for early education is a challenge that begins at the community level. Ask local teachers or workforce social workers if they know of any dads interested in the field of early education. Teachers and social workers have direct contact with potential staff members and volunteers every time they communicate with families.

Licensing has become the law with regards to anyone working with children. This is to protect children and assure that teachers and parent educators are prepared to deliver effective educational programs. Many colleges offer the necessary coursework for proper license requirements. Oftentimes, as coursework is completed, temporary licenses may be obtained.

Many of the jobs in the early education field are part time jobs without benefits. Collaborating with other district programs may be enough to create a full time position more appealing to men.

Don't Forget Mom!

One of the mistakes made by community-based programs in recent decades is that when they have provided programs and services for mother or children, they have often ignored the vital role that fathers play in children's lives. As a result, community-based programs have often failed to serve dads. From an ethical standpoint, fatherhood programs can't afford to make a similar mistake and eliminate mothers from the family equation. And from a practical perspective, working with moms enhance the success of fatherhood programs. Community-based organizations create win-win-win environments (for the organization, fathers, mothers, and children) when they create strategies that involve moms in programs and services that target dads.

The local business community serves not only as a place to recruit positive male role models, but also serves as a model to retain these men. Budgets are razor thin, but offering a fixed amount of money for 'continuing education' each year can make early education more appealing.

There is a good chance that any man hired in early education is a father, too. Very few families today can make ends meet with only one paycheck. Making schedules fit can be very challenging. Flexible schedules, schedules that extend to nights or even weekends, can actually help dads spend more time with their own children.

Women As Teachers

Often, agencies find themselves in a situation where they do not have any men on staff and they do not have any openings for new hires. There is no reason that women can't lead a class for a group of men. It will benefit any agency to offer female staff members professional development related to working with fathers. A number of organizations offer professional development opportunities for understanding differences in communication and learning styles.

It is important for educators to remember that fathers do not have the same needs or expectations as mothers. Fathers and mothers have different styles of interacting with their children and their children's teachers. According to a report published by the Social Policy Action Network and the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families, "Fathering is a parenting style distinctive from mothering. Thus fathers add an important dimension to children's intellectual and social development." ECFE teachers may be motivated by the challenge of finding ways to tap into this strength for the benefit of the children and the family as a whole.

Men as Volunteers

If a school district does not have any men on the teaching staff, there are a number of other options for bringing male volunteers into the program. A male presence can go a long way towards easing fears some fathers may have in the unfamiliar territory of the early childhood classroom.

ECFE staff can invite male guest speakers or fathers who have attended previous classes. The presence of men who are comfortable in the setting will do much to make new fathers feel welcome and comfortable. Additionally, teachers may invite a male principal or male coach who can help to recruit and welcome the new men into the group.

Resources for Early Educators

A Booklist for Reading with Dad, a list of quality children's picture books featuring fathers. Available from the Minnesota Humanities Commission by calling toll-free 866-268-7293 ext 263 or by email at famlit@minnesotahumanities.org.

Early Childhood Family Education, Minnesota Department of Education. Information about ECFE is available on the state's website: http://education.state.mn.us/html/intro_fam_ed.htm.

Expanding the Goals of "Responsible Fatherhood" Policy: Voices from the Field in Four Cities, 2002, Social Policy Action Network and National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families. www.span-online.org or www.npnff.org.

Fathers and Early Childhood Programs, 2004, Glen Palm and Jay Fagan.

Parenting Education Resources, University of Minnesota Extension Service. A variety of resources for parents and educators is available online at www.parenting.umn.edu.

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