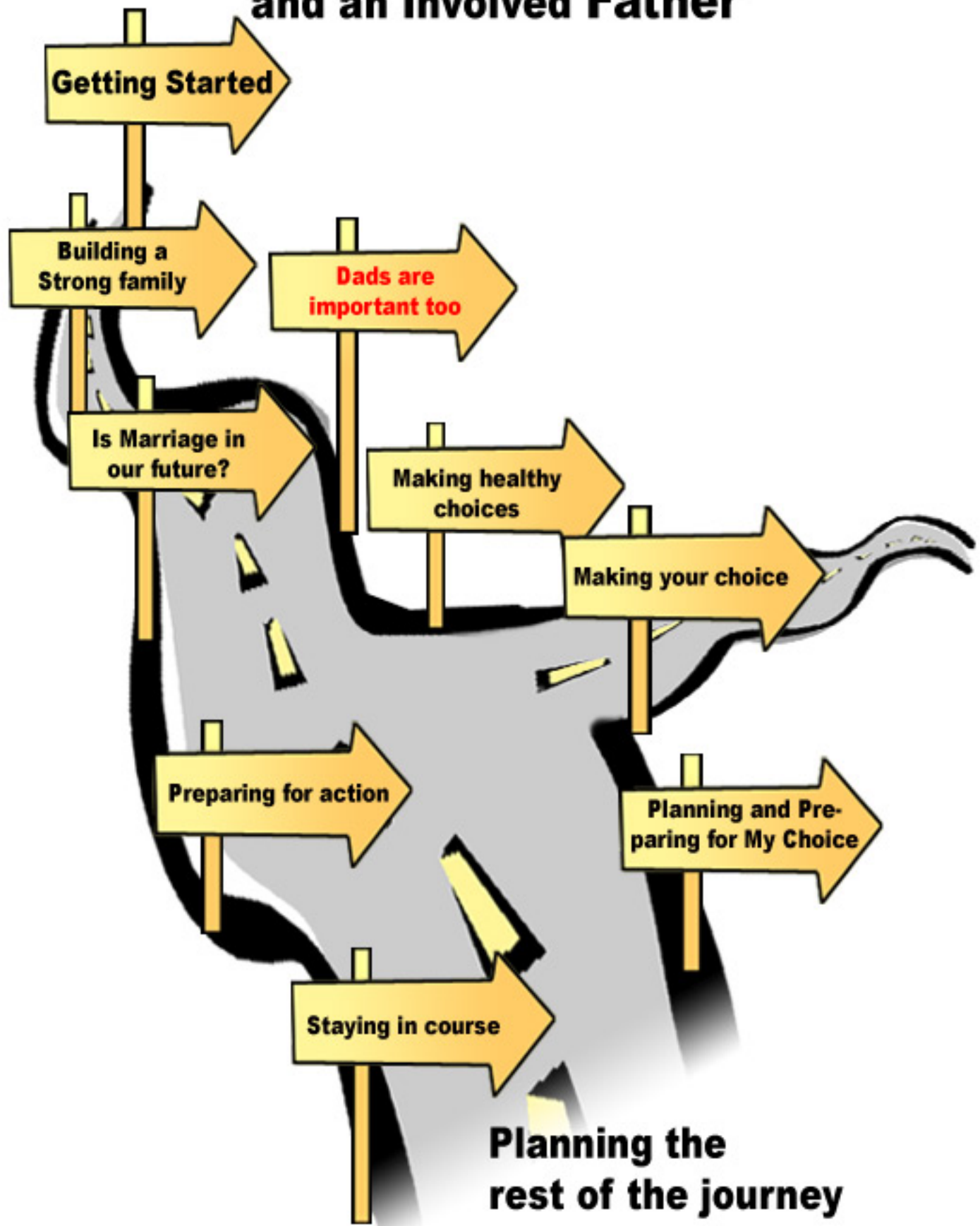


Road Map to a Stable Family and an Involved Father



TOOL BOX: LESSON 3

Materials

- Handouts
 - *My Hopes and Dreams for My Baby*
 - *Good vs. Bad Ways You Were Fathered*
 - *Why Dads are So Important*
 - *A Letter to My Child's Dad*
 - Case Study: *Maria and Felix* (Parts A and B)
 - *Facts about Father Involvement*
- Transparencies
 - What Is a Father?
 - Why Dads are so Important
 - Marriage graphs
- Flip chart paper
- Art supplies
- Crayons, markers
- Glue, paper, magazines
- Overhead projector/screen (or LCD)

Prior to the Lesson

- Collect magazines with pictures of families, children, and people engaged in activities.
- Collect art supplies for making pictures and attaching them to the Memory Book pages.
- Hang sheets of flip chart paper on walls for small group activity.
- Set up room to use overhead projector/screen (or LCD)
- Copy handouts and make transparencies

Lesson Three

Dads Are Important, Too

In this lesson, participants will explore the role of a father in a child's life.

Objectives

- Explore the importance of involving the father or a father figure in children's lives.
- Identify the barriers to involving children's fathers in their lives.
- Take one step towards increasing father involvement.

Activity

Handout: *My Hopes and Dreams for My Baby* Memory Book page

Lesson Plan

At the beginning . . .

Last class we talked about family and ways to make your family stronger. Do you have any reactions or thoughts? Would anyone like to share "intentional" activities they did with their families? Let's share your "One Step to Making My Family Stronger" work sheet.

My Hopes and Dreams for My Baby

[If fathers are participating in the session, you will need to adapt the language to include them.]

Your baby, your baby's father, and you make up a family whether or not you are married to your baby's dad. Together, you and your baby's dad have brought a new person into the world. What kind of life do you want for your baby?

Take a few minutes to complete the handout, "My Hopes and Dreams for My Baby." If you are the baby's dad, complete your own handout, and compare your answers later.

Group Discussion
My child's future.

Turn to the person next to you, introduce yourself if you do not know each other, and talk about your answers and show your picture(s) to each other. If another person, such as your baby's father, came with you, share your answers with each other.

- What kinds of pictures did you find or draw to show your hopes and dreams for your baby?
- What things do you most want to make sure that your baby has? (security, love, a family, health)
- What kind of things do you want to protect your baby from? (crime, drugs, abuse, poverty)
- What do you hope for your baby when he or she grows up? (happiness, education, a good job, health, marriage)

After looking at the answers on the flipchart and hearing others talk about their hopes and dreams for their children, would you add anything to your handout? Take a minute now to add this information to your sheet.

Dads are Important, Too

Many of the things you identified in the last activity are more likely to happen for your baby if his or her father is involved in positive ways in his or her life as he/she is growing up.

Before we talk about the importance of fathers for children, spend a few minutes thinking about your father. You may not have known your father. Instead, think of someone who served as a father figure for you. If you cannot think of a man who filled this role for you, think about what you might have wanted from a father when you were growing up.

Activity

Handout: *Good and Bad Ways you were Fathered*

Life with Father

In groups of three or four people, discuss and list the good things and things you didn't like about the way you were fathered. From these two lists, summarize as a group three to four important ways that you were affected by your father's approach to parenting. Write your lists on the flip chart paper.

Bring your final list to the front of the room.

Would you be willing to share your list and talk about what your group wrote? [If people are uncomfortable sharing their lists and small group discussion, briefly summarize the information on the flip chart for the group.]

Let's summarize what you discussed:

- Many fathers parent the way they were parented by their fathers. That might be all they know.
- Most fathers want to do a better job at parenting than their own fathers did.
- Some fathers, when they become adults, improve their relationship with their own fathers.
- Others find this difficult to do and need help dealing with their feelings.
- We each learn a great deal by thinking about our own fathering but it is more important to move forward in a positive way.

**Transparencies/Power
Point Slides:**

What is a Father?

What is a Father?

Being a father is more than the act of “fathering” a child.

Men parent their children based on:

- How they were fathered
- What they think a father should be
- What their partner thinks a father should be
- What they see on television or in magazines
- What their family and friends think about fathers

Fathers come in different shapes, sizes, colors, and personalities. They come from different backgrounds and have different ideas about the world and what is good for their children. They also have different ways of showing their love for their children.

Because fathers are so different from each other, there is no single right way to be a father. But when fathers are not in contact with their children, the children are more likely to have these problems:

- Dropping out of school
- Getting involved with drugs or alcohol
- Becoming pregnant as a teen for girls
- Committing crimes or violent acts for boys
- Living in poverty

Not all kids without a dad will have these problems, but they are more likely to have them if their father is not involved with them. Fathers are very important for children’s development. And the costs of not having fathers involved are very high.

[Optional: Refer to the “Fathers” fact sheet if additional information is needed by participants about the importance of father involvement.]

Optional

Handout: *Facts About Father
Involvement*

Activity

- Handout: *Why Dads Are So Important*
- Transparency/Power Point Slide: *Why Dads Are Important*

Why Dads Are So Important

Fathers make a difference in children's lives no matter what the child's age is. We are going to spend some time talking about ways fathers are important. In groups of two to three, complete the worksheet, "Why Dads Are So Important."

Together, let's list on a flip chart the different ways a father can be involved with his child for each stage of a child's life.

Based on our discussion, how would you summarize what fathers do?

- Fathers are involved in the day-to-day lives of their children.
- Fathers show love, talk to their children, smile, and make them feel special.
- Fathers provide support for their children (money, care, time).
- Fathers give positive and appropriate discipline.
- Fathers spend time with their children on a regular basis.
- Fathers are a consistent part of their children's lives.

What Do Men Say About Being Fathers?

It is important to consider what men think about being fathers. A group of researchers from the University of Pennsylvania interviewed a group of men that they wanted to learn more about. What do men who are African American, living in poor neighborhoods or communities, and making low wages feel about being fathers?

Here is what these fathers said about what it meant to be a father:

- "I can't imagine life without my children."
- Men found a sense of meaning and hope for the future in their children.
- Having children kept them from getting involved with illegal activities and other negative influences.
- They felt a sense of assurance that their name would be carried on.

- Men who were able to provide on-going financial support for their children were very proud of this fact.
- Some men who did not have much money tried to buy items like clothes, shoes and diapers for their baby.

But fathers also reported barriers to being involved with their children:

- When they were involved with the mother, fathers saw their children more often. When they were no longer romantically involved, they had far less contact.
- They reported disagreements with the children's mother over money.
- Many men could not get jobs that paid them enough to provide on-going support for their children. Mothers often nagged them about the lack of support and money.
- Men involved in the underground economy or illegal activities felt ashamed and didn't want their children to know about it. Some had been in prison and had not had much contact with their children.
- Disagreements with the mother's mother or grandmother often interfered with the father's contact with his children.

Although children were important to these men, they often were not able to do much for them in return, especially as the children got older. [See Module Four, Lesson 3: How to Parent Together.]

Activity

Case Study: *Felix and Maria*

The Case for Father Involvement

Felix and Maria are new parents who each have an important decision to make. Felix wants to be more involved in his new son's life. But Maria is unsure of whether or not she should have him involved.

Please form groups of three or four people. Half of the groups will discuss Felix's decision and half will discuss Maria's. Have a member of your group read the case study aloud, and then discuss the two questions that follow it. Pick someone to report back to the whole group.

Let's summarize your work by answering these questions:

- Why would Maria want to let Felix be involved in his son's upbringing?
- Why might she be reluctant?
- How can Maria and Felix work together to overcome the problems they face?
- Why is it important that they overcome these problems?

Next Steps

Reflect upon all the ways you would like to have your child's father (father figure) be involved in his children's lives. This may include such things as providing physical care, emotional support, financial support, spending time with the child, and serving as a role model.

[Have each parent write a letter to the child's father (father figure) on the memory book sheet called, "A Letter to My Dad." The letter should be written on behalf of the child.]

For example, the beginning of a sample letter might read:

Dear Dad,

"I love you and need your support. I want to spend time with you. I need to see your smiles and feel your hugs. . . " (The letter continues)

Love, Your Child

Activity

Handout: *A Letter to My Child's Dad*

Next Steps

Today we talked about involving fathers with their children. Before you return next week, think about one thing you can do in the next few days to get your baby's father more involved with his child.

[If the father is present, ask him to think of one thing he can do in the next day or week to be more involved with his child. Ask the parents to set a goal to carry out their idea during the week.]

Going Further

Lesson 3 of Module Four, "Caring for Our Family," provides additional information and activities on how to parent together.

References

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Matthews, W. (1988). *Fatherhood*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina University Extension Service.

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<http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/invol-nonres00>

My Hopes and Dreams for My Baby

Using magazines, glue and other art materials provided, please select or draw a picture or a series of pictures that show your hopes and dreams for your baby. When you are finished with the picture, complete the sentences below.

If I could make sure my baby has one thing, it would be . . .

I want most to protect my baby from . . .

When my baby grows up, I hope . . .

What is a Father?

Being a father is more than the act of “fathering” a child. Men parent their children based on:

- How they were fathered
- What they think a father should be
- What their partner thinks a father should be
- What they see on television or in magazines
- What their family and friends think about fathers

What is a Father?

- Fathers come in different shapes, sizes, colors, and personalities.
- They come from different backgrounds and have different ideas about the world and what is good for their children.
- They also have different ways of showing their love for their children.

What is a Father?

Because fathers are so different from each other, there is no single right way to be a father. But when fathers are not in contact with their children, the children are more likely to have these problems:

- Dropping out of school
- Getting involved with drugs or alcohol
- Becoming pregnant as a teen for girls
- Committing crimes or violent acts for boys
- Living in poverty

Why Dads Are So Important

- Fathers are involved in the day-to-day lives of their children.
- Fathers show love, talk to their children, smile, and make them feel special.
- Fathers provide support for their children (money, care, time).
- Fathers give positive and appropriate discipline.
- Fathers spend time with their children on a regular basis.
- Fathers are a consistent part of their children's lives.

Good vs. Bad Ways You Were Fathered

Good Ways	Bad Ways

FACTS ABOUT FATHER INVOLVEMENT

A dad is an example to his kids of how to deal with life. Many dads are unaware of this effect on their children. Fathers can show their children how to dress and how to get along with other people. He can show them how important it is to do well in school and to work hard. Here is what researchers have found about father involvement.

Children do better when fathers are actively involved.

Children without an active father are more likely to:

- Drop out of school
- Join gangs
- Have sex earlier
- Use drugs and alcohol
- Commit crimes
- Have lower earnings as adults

When fathers are involved in school activities, children and teenagers have fewer behavior problems, have more friends, and do better in school.

- This is true of fathers who either live with their children or apart from their children.
- Children are more likely to get A's, enjoy school and take part in after school activities.
- If the father pays child support, he is more likely to be involved with the child's school.

Children whose dads pay support do better in school.

- Regular child support is linked to children staying in school longer, getting better grades, and having fewer problems in school.
- These children do not fall behind or drop out of high school. They are more likely to go to college.
- The more child support that is paid, the higher the kids' grades will be and the fewer problems they will have.
- The money helps to provide food, shelter and other basic needs. Moms and dads tend to get along better. Children feel their father cares.

A caring dad helps children with special needs.

- Kids with special needs do better when their fathers are very involved. They feel less helpless about their disability and paid attention better.
- These children had fewer problems with friends, did better in school, and were less likely to fight with other children.
- Talking to their father helped these kids feel more self-confident.

SOURCE: *Involving Non-resident Fathers in Children's Learning: A Father Matter Report*, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (September, 2000). URL: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/invol-nonres00>

Why Dads are So Important

For each age and stage write down ways that fathers can be involved with their children.

➤ During pregnancy and the first year

➤ For toddlers

➤ For preschoolers

➤ For kids in school

➤ For teen-agers

➤ For young adults

CASE STUDY, PART A: MARIA

Deciding on Whether or Not to Involve Her Baby's Father in Her Life

Maria is trying to make some tough decisions on how much energy she should put into trying to involve her baby's father in the baby's life. Here is Maria's story:

Maria's son, Juan, is ten weeks old and looks just like his dad, Felix. She says that he has Felix's personality, too. According to Maria, "Just like his dad, Juan can be very stubborn and then turn around and take my breath away with his smile."

Juan's father has not been around very much the last month or so. Maria says, "At first Felix was always providing for his son, like buying diapers, clothes, and baby food. But recently he has not been very helpful." Maria is trying to decide if she should go and file for child support. She knows the money would be good for her son, but she is not sure that she wants to get the authorities on Felix's back like that. Also, Maria thinks that a formal child support order would tie her to Juan's dad for a long time to come.

Maria is disappointed that Felix has not been able to keep a steady, good-paying job. His jobs have been seasonal, part-time jobs. She is proud of the fact that Felix has not been in trouble with the law. He has never "done drugs" or gotten involved with illegal activities.



Maria says that she sort of wishes that Felix would be more responsible about coming over to see his son. Juan loves to see his dad. Maria says, "He brightens right up as soon as his dad walks through the door. It is really something to see them play together. Felix swings Juan up into the air and they will both laugh and laugh." Also, Maria worries that Juan needs "a man" to be an example in his life. Maria says that, "Right now the only people in Juan's life are his grandmother, aunt and I."

- What would be the benefits of encouraging Felix to be more involved in his son's life?
- What would be the drawbacks of encouraging Felix to be more involved in his son's life?

CASE STUDY, PART B: FELIX

Deciding on Whether or Not to be More Involved in His Baby's Life

Felix is trying to make some tough decisions on how much he should be involved in his baby's life. Here is Felix's story.

Felix's son is ten weeks old and, according to the baby's mother, "He is the spitting image of me." He has my personality, too. "He's all boy. He has own ideas about how things should be done and a big temper to go along with it!"

Felix says that, "Since my son was born, it seems like I take things more seriously. Having a son has changed my life. Now I have someone to live for. I also know that I have someone that will carry on my family name.

I just wish I would do more for my son. It seems like the only jobs I can find are seasonal, part-time jobs. At first I was able to provide for my son by buying his formula and diapers, but things have been tough lately so I haven't been able to buy him very much. I have not been around to see him these last few weeks because I can't afford to buy him anything.

I know Maria is threatening to file for child support. That would be hard on me because my income has not been very steady. Besides, I like to know where my money is going. I would rather just buy the stuff, than hand over the cash."



*Caring
for My
Family*

A Letter to My Child's Dad

Dads can be involved with their children in many different ways. They can show love, talk to their children, smile, listen, make children feel special, give positive discipline, and spend time with them. It is also important for dads to provide financially for their children.

I am writing you this letter because I want you to be involved in my life in a healthy way. Here is the way I hope things can be with you.

Dear Dad:

