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Learning objectives

• Describe key psychosocial elements in the transition to fatherhood and men’s perinatal mental health
• Cite examples of how fatherhood involvement impacts the family system
• List evidence-based approaches to better engage fathers with perinatal services, with their children, and with their partners during pregnancy and early parenthood

A series of sexist, heterosexist, age-ist, and racist observations!
Men’s Socialization – “Daddy 1.0”

- Traditional Masculinity (Brannon, 1976)
  1. Antifemininity – “No Sissy Stuff”
  2. Status and Achievement – “The Big Wheel”
  3. Inexpressiveness and Independence – “The Study Oak”
  4. Adventurousness and Aggressiveness – “Give 'Em Hell”

- Dad’s Role Is To Support Mom And Earn
- Uninvolved with Children 0-5

Men’s Socialization – “Daddy 2.0”

Generative Fathers (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1996)

- “The task of establishing and guiding the next generation.”

Nontraditional Masculine Norms

- Nurturing, Hands-On Care of Child
- Emotionally Open to Mom and Baby
- Few Models of Generative Fathers – “Generation Gap”

Mental Health Implications

- Changing Roles Brings Stress/Uncertainty
- One in 10 have depression; One in 20 have PTSD
- History of MH Issues/Abuse/Trauma
- Gender Role Conflict – ↑ MH probs, ↓ Help-Seeking

The Fatherhood Role

- Fostering a positive relationship with the child’s mother
- Spending time with the child
- Nurturing the child
- Disciplining appropriately
- Serving as a guide to the outside world
- Protecting and providing
- Being a role model

BE ACTIVELY INVOLVED WITH MOM AND BABY
Assertive Communication

Do NOT try to fix or win right off the bat
- Ask: Find out specifically why the issue is important to him/her
- Listen: Active listening – ask 3 open questions, followed by a restatement
- Assert: Communicate why this is important to you
- Compromise: Then find the common ground about what to do

Why is Fatherhood Involvement Important?
- Parenting of children 0-5 is really just mothering, right?
- Child Outcomes:
  - Higher IQ, school readiness, social skills, emotional regulation, and empathy
  - Increased attachment, emotional security, popularity, independence
- Paternal Outcomes:
  - Fewer mental health issues
  - Increased confidence, parenting satisfaction, relationship satisfaction
- Maternal Outcomes:
  - Fewer mental health issues
  - Increased responsiveness, confidence, and affection

Barriers to Father Involvement
- Blended / Inconsistent Family Structure
- Substance Use
- Fathers’ AND Mothers’ Socialization
- Low Self- And Other-Efficacy
- Anxiety/Gatekeeping
- Custody Arrangements/CPS
- Work/Life Balance
What Exactly Does Dad Contribute?

Attachment and the Paternal Activation Relationship

• "The affective bond that enables children to open up to the outside world, focusing primarily on parental stimulation of risk-taking and control." (Paquette, 2013)

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) Study
Dads’ Mental Health

- Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs)
- Depression, GAD, OCD, PTSD, Psychosis
- 10-20% of men experience PMADs during perinatal period
- DSM-5 “with peripartum onset” specifier – 4 postpartum
- Stress brings elevated risk for new episode and relapses
- Men’s socialization and expression of “weak” emotions
- Maternal PPD is the strongest predictor of paternal PPD

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Male “Masked” Depression

(Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000)

- Lower stress threshold
- Substance use
- Aggressiveness, low impulse control
- Feeling of being burned out and empty
- Constant, inexplicable tiredness
- Irritability, restlessness, dissatisfaction
- Difficulty making ordinary everyday decisions

Sleep problems
- Feeling anxiety – especially in the morning
- Abusive, hyperactive, or antisocial behavior
- Depressive thoughts
- Criticizing
- The “withdrawal response”

ANGER, ADDICTION, AND WITHDRAWAL

New Dads Game Plan

- “You should do everything but nurse the baby ASAP”
- Learn about the child’s development – scaffold
- Weekly “state of the union” meeting with mom
- Weekly “family operations” meeting with mom
- Providing more than materially – “Be the best you can be”
- Communicate assertively with mom
- Diversify social support portfolio – connect with other dads
- Expectant dads – take my Basic Training for New Dads class
- Getting therapy with a “coach”

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What Can Moms Do?

- Give dad “alone time” with child
- Encourage dad to hang out with buddies and get social support guilt-free
- Get their own social support needs met
- Recognize that dads’ approach to parenting is different, not necessarily bad
- Manage own mental health

Couple

- Keeping the relationship strong starts between your ears, THEN between the partners
- Did mom or dad experience ACEs?
- Reflective parenting/partnering
- Actively cultivate and use social support outside of the relationship
- Foster awareness that dad’s involvement might look different than mom’s, but his engagement with baby is important for everyone’s sake.
- Foster empathy and understanding regarding their own and/or partner’s abuse/trauma
- Actively work to have a clear understanding of perinatal medical care “decision trees” and required resources in the event of complications.

Organizations / providers

- Always assess moms’ AND dads’ mental health
- Healer, know thyself - Check your assumptions
- Ask the tough questions, assess with EPDS and know how to refer!
- Familiarize yourself with resources
- Is your organization set up to foster fathers’ attunement with moms and babies?
Father Involvement and the Workplace

- What Are Your Organization's Official and Unofficial Stances on Work/Life Balance and Family Leave?
- How Is Your Organization Already Father-Inclusive?
- How Are You Lacking in Father-Inclusiveness?
- Given Time and Resource Constraints – What Is a Concrete Next Step to Enhance Father Inclusiveness in Your Setting?

Resources

Basic Training for New Dads – www.menexcel.com
Postpartum Health Alliance – www.postpartumhealthalliance.org
Postpartum Support International – www.postpartum.net
Strategies Father Involvement - http://www.familyresourcecenters.net/projects-2/supporting-father-involvement/about/
Dudes to Dads - www.meetup.com/Dudes-To-Dads-North-San-Diego
The Good Men Project - http://goodmenproject.com/category/families/
Daddit - http://www.reddit.com/r/daddit
Dad Labs - http://www.dadlabs.com/
National Fatherhood Initiative – www.fatherhood.org

References


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References


And more references....


Thanks Very Much!

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• “You can’t babysit your own kid –
• that’s called ‘fathering.’”