Promoting Father Engagement through Enhanced Coparenting

Mark E. Feinberg, PhD
Senior Scientist & Research Professor

Prevention Research Center
The Pennsylvania State University

PREVENTION.psu.edu
FamFound.net
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STANDARD PREVENTION

Mom

Kid
NUCLEAR FAMILY

- Mom
- Dad
- Kid
- Kid 2
CORE PIVOT POINT...

Diagram:
- Mom
- Dad
- Kid

Connections:
- Mom to Dad
- Dad to Mom
- Mom to Kid
- Kid to Mom
- Kid to Dad

Diagram shows the relationships between the core pivot point family members.
COPLE CONFLICT

Parent-related Outcomes:
• Depression
• Poor parenting quality (cold, harsh)
• Family violence

Child Outcomes:
• Attachment security
• Child depression, aggression
• School outcomes
• Substance use
• Poor peer relations
• Romantic relationship problems
WHAT WORKS TO ENHANCE FATHER INVOLVEMENT AND/OR MOTHER-FATHER RELATIONS AMONG “FRAGILE” FAMILIES?

Not much
Programs and Policies to Enhance Father Involvement

Catalog of Research: Programs for Low-Income Fathers
Avellar et al., 2011
Mathematica, for ACF
“SUPPORTING FATHER INVOLVEMENT”

Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009

32-hour, 16-week group curriculum

18 mos case manager services
Father’s group:
More psychological and behavioral engagement

Couples group:
Reduced parenting stress
More relationship satisfaction.

1/3 sample dropped out, largely higher risk

No significant effects on
• Parenting
• Child adjustment
BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES, ACF

-Mathematica, MDRC, Public Strategies

Funded program development

Multi-site trial, >2500 couples
Building Strong Families

- Recruitment
- Attendance
- Outcomes
- Lessons
Primarily couples with children

Services provided over 1 year:
• Healthy marriage curriculum,
  • 24-30 class hours
• Supplemental activities, events
• Support worker providing support
Randomized Trial

8 sites, each chose one of 4 Programs:

- *Within Our Reach* (based on PREP; Stanley and Markman, 2008)
- *Becoming Parents Program* (based on PREP, Jordan and Frei, 2007).
- *For Our Future, For Our Family* (adapted from PAIRS; Gordon et al., 2007).
- *Loving Couples, Loving Children* (adapted from Bringing Baby Home; Gottman)
N=6298 couples
Questionnaire and observation measures

**Intervention couples:**
Average of 23 contact hours per couple
   (17 hours of class time)
Average cost of >$9000/couple
Significant effects on:

- **Relationship** quality, obs. interaction, psychological abuse*
- **Individual** psychological distress

Effect Sizes range from .08 to .13

*No effect on coparenting
A MOTHER...

“I was very young when I had my son. I’ve seen other girls that were ...very rebellious and stubborn towards their baby’s father, and yes, I agree, I was one of those girls that were very, very hard on him. And it’s like back then I felt as though that’s what he needed. But now that I look back on it, he just needed somebody to encourage him more than instruct him, you know. They have feelings just like we have feelings. They just have a harder time showing it.”
A FATHER...

“I feel as though she makes all the decisions, important decisions about him, and I got no say so. And when I’ve been over and say something to her, she catch an attitude and I just leave it alone because I don’t want to [get into] it.”
A REFINEMENT: COPARENTING QUALITY

- Shared parenting responsibility & coordination
- More precise
- Linked, but separate
- Stronger predictor
- Buffer
“They’re not just my eggs. They’re your eggs, too.”
Domains of Co-parenting

- Joint Family Management
- Division Of Labor
- Childrearing Agreement
- Support/Undermining

Feinberg, 2003
Theoretical Model

- Parent characteristics
- Couple Relationship
- Coparenting alliance
- Parental Adjustment
- Parenting
- Child Outcomes

Diagram showing the relationship between parent characteristics, coparenting alliance, and child outcomes.
Build Coparenting at the Transition to Parenthood
Delivery--local childbirth education

- 8 sessions, 16 hours
- male/female co-leaders

Topics Covered

- Expectations
- Co-parenting
- Parenting
- Self-regulation
Randomized Trials
- Initial trial
- FF + Childbirth Education = “Childbirth Plus”
- DVD/workbook home-study version

Proposals Pending
- FF adapted for couples w/ autistic child
- FF adapted for couples at risk of violence
- Online version for military reserve couples

Large scale Implementation:
- UK, 12 cities in phase 1
- U.S. Dept of Defense, FY 2013
INITIAL RANDOMIZED TRIAL OF FF

N = 169 couples
Universal: wide range of income/education

Questionnaire and videotaped observation

Pretest = pregnancy
Posttest = 6-8 months post-birth
Follow-ups = 1 & 3 years post-birth
PARENT OUTCOMES: THROUGH CHILD AGE 3 (COMARED TO RANDOMIZED CONTROL GROUP)

Coparenting:
- more support
- More maternal inclusion of father
- less competition/triangulation

Parental Adjustment:
- More parental efficacy
- Less parental stress
- [Less depression -mothers only]
PARENT OUTCOMES: THROUGH CHILD AGE 3 (COMPAARED TO RANDOMIZED CONTROL GROUP)

Parenting:

- Decreased father-infant dysfunctional interaction (infancy)
- More warmth, sensitivity
- Less negativity, harshness, over-reactivity, physical punishment
CHILD OUTCOMES: THROUGH AGE 3 (COMPARED TO RANDOMIZED CONTROL GROUP)

- Better attention span
- More capacity for self-regulation
- Better social-emotional competence
- Fewer behavior problems
LESSONS

- Focus on coparenting, not overall couple relationship
- Integrate new programs into existing services and structures
- Move forward with deliberate speed
- What components effective for whom?
CAN THIS APPROACH ADDRESS HEALTH DISPARITIES?
1) DOES FF WORK FOR HIGHER-RISK FAMILIES?

Moderation of program effects by

- Parent education
- Father emotional security
- Prenatal couple conflict
2) CAN FF BE ADAPTED FOR SPECIFIC SUB-POPULATIONS TO ENHANCE FATHER INVOLVEMENT?

- FF adapted for low-income, urban teens (Children’s National Medical Center, D.C.)
  - Health system
  - Teen/tot

- FF integrated into Home visiting (Robert Ammerman, PI)
  - Pending Council Decision
FATHERS AND HOME VISITING:

GAPS
Home Visiting with Family Foundations (HVFF)

Father Involvement
- Enhanced participation
- More involved w/ child

Coparenting Quality
- More coparenting
- Low depression
- Low parenting stress

Parent Adjustment
- Parental Stress
- Parental Efficacy
- Depression

Parental Quality
- Warmth
- Engagement
- Negativity

Maternal Life Course
- Education
- Employment
- Repeat Pregnancy

Infant Care
- Safety
- Health

Child Outcomes
- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Behavioral

Proximal Targets of Family Foundations

Proximal Targets of Home Visitation
COMPONENTS NEEDED FOR HV:

- Father engagement, outreach
- Support father’s needs, goals
- Motivate positive coparenting
- Skills for coparenting
- Manage obstacles:
  - break-up, other romances, jealousy
  - obligations to other children and mothers
  - Grandparents
EMAIL:

LOVE@PSU.EDU

Research: PREVENTION.psu.edu

Dissemination: FamFound.net