

# Key Concepts: Including Dads in a WIC Setting\*

## YOU Matter!

Mothers and families see you as the expert on nutrition and family health. Your opinion truly matters to the families you serve. When you encourage positive father involvement, it sends a powerful message to fathers *and* mothers.

**What can you do?** Make it known (to everyone!) that you believe positive father involvement leads to better family health.

- tell your co-workers what you've learned about Dad's importance to family health
- talk to mothers in your office about the importance and the benefits of Dad's involvement

## Focus on the child(ren)

At first, you may feel uncomfortable talking with parents about their relationship, their parenting practices, or about dad's role in the family. Don't worry. Keep the discussions focused on the children and overall family health and soon you will find that parents really like to talk about these issues.

**What can you do?** You already know how to talk with the mothers who come into your office everyday. Here's a secret: you don't have to treat the fathers any differently! Still worried? Here are a few quick tips:

- Actively encourage dads to come into the office for at least one visit. Ask Mom to schedule her next office visit for a time when Dad can come in, too.
- Begin by letting Mom and Dad know that you see them as a team and you want to work with both of them on their family's health goals.
- Politely explore both parents' feelings about parenthood and how they each see their role in the family.
- Actively engage Dad in the office visit by speaking directly to him. Ask him if he has any questions or concerns. Ask him about his opinions or beliefs about his child(ren) or about parenting in general.

**Did you know?** One of the biggest influences on Dad's involvement with his children is Mom's attitude and encouragement (or discouragement).

Dad may really want to be more involved in caring for his children, but Mom might resist his help. Researchers have identified these main reasons that Mom might resist Dad's positive involvement:

**efficiency** – "It's faster if I feed the toddlers."

**quality** – "I do a better job of changing the babies' diapers"

**sympathy** – "I don't want to bother him while he's watching tv"

**admiration** – "He works so hard...he shouldn't have to come home and feed the kids, too."

**anger** – (this happens a lot when Mom and Dad are no longer romantically involved)

**cultural beliefs in gender roles** – "Men don't prepare meals or change diapers...that's women's work."

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As an advocate for family health and a person who knows the importance of positive father involvement, it is up to you to help Mom understand how important it is for her to encourage and support Dad's involvement in child care activities.

\* Information for this handout is adapted from the following resources:

1. William L. Coleman, MD, Craig Garfield, MD and Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, "Fathers and Pediatricians: Enhancing Men's Roles in the Care and Development of Their Children," *Pediatrics* (2004) 113:1406-1411.
2. Garfield, Craig F., Isacco, Anthony, "Fathers and the Well-Child Visit," *Pediatrics* (2006) 117:e637-e645.

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## Make your office more father-friendly

It sounds simple enough, but have you ever *really* thought about how dad-friendly your office is? “Friendliness” isn’t a poster on a wall or general feeling you have about fathers; “friendliness” is something you have to actively *do*.

**What can you do?** Lot’s! Here are a few basic ideas to start with:

- Offer flexible and extended hours to accommodate different work schedules.
- Make sure there is a Men’s restroom in your office, and make sure it is just as equipped for diaper changing as the Women’s restroom.
- Actively engage the dads who come into your office.
- Welcome dads and let them know how much you appreciate their showing up. Encourage everyone in your office to be welcoming of fathers.

**Did you know?** Research shows most Moms choose Dad to take care of the children when Mom isn’t available. Also, among poor families, married men are likely to be the primary caregivers when Mom is working, if Dad is unemployed or working part-time, or if the kids are young.

## Everybody wants this information

You have valuable information about nutrition and family health. Everyone caring for children needs the information you provide. Get it out there!

**What can you do?** Assume that no one parents alone...offer your information to everyone in the family!

- Ask Mom to share printed information with Dad. Ask her to give him copies of the information and to discuss the office visit with him.
- If Mom and Dad live apart, send extra copies of information home with Mom to pass along to Dad (or you can mail information directly to Dad!)
- Take time to write a short note to Dad about the office visit. Highlight what was discussed, how Mom and child(ren) are doing, and what he can do to contribute.
- When Dad is unable to attend office visits, encourage him to write down his questions or comments and to send them with Mom, through email, or mailed directly to the office.