

A stylized logo consisting of a large blue silhouette of a person holding a smaller orange silhouette of a child.

TTAC

NYC Early Childhood  
Mental Health

Training and Technical Assistance Center

# Shifting Our Perspectives: Strategies to Engage Fathers

Presented by: David A. Jones, BA, MSW, LMSW,  
Post Graduate Clinical Institute  
(Jewish Board Children and Family Services)

# Who We Are

The New York City Early Childhood Mental Health Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC), is funded by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH)

TTAC is a partnership between the New York Center for Child Development (NYCCD) and the McSilver Institute on Poverty Policy and Research

- **New York Center for Child Development** has been a major provider of early childhood mental health services in New York with expertise in informing policy and supporting the field of Early Childhood Mental Health through training and direct practice
- **NYU McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research** houses the Community and the Managed Care Technical Assistance Centers (CTAC/MCTAC), which offer clinic, business, and system transformation supports statewide to all behavioral healthcare providers

TTAC is tasked with building the capacity and competencies of mental health and early childhood professionals through ongoing training and technical assistance

<http://www.TTACny.org>

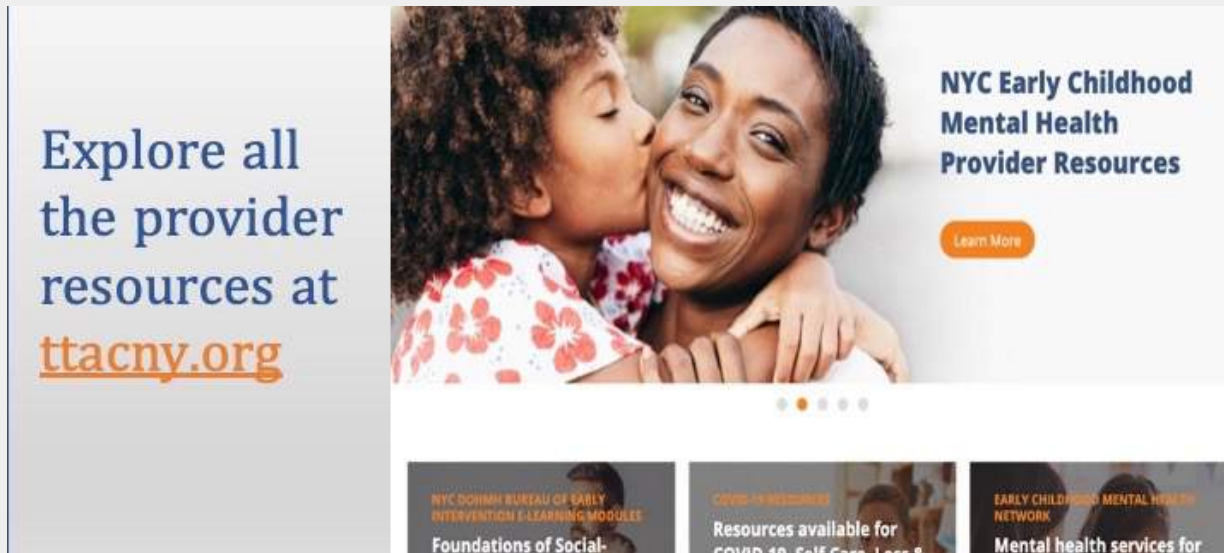


# Updated TTAC Website

## A Selection of Features:

- Seamlessly filter, toggle and search through upcoming and archived content, trainings and resources
- View videos, slides, and presenter information on the same training page
- Contact the TTAC team by clicking on Ask TTAC and filling out our Contact Us form
- And more!

Have questions or need assistance? Please contact us at **[ttac.info@nyu.edu](mailto:ttac.info@nyu.edu)** and we'll be happy to assist you



# TTAC Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Learning Modules are now live!

## Two Learning Modules:

- The first module in the series is **the Impact of Early Childhood Adversity (An Overview of the Topic)**
- The second module in the series is **Nurturing Resilience: Supporting Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health**
- CEUs Available upon completion!

### MODULE I

Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health and the Impact of Adversity



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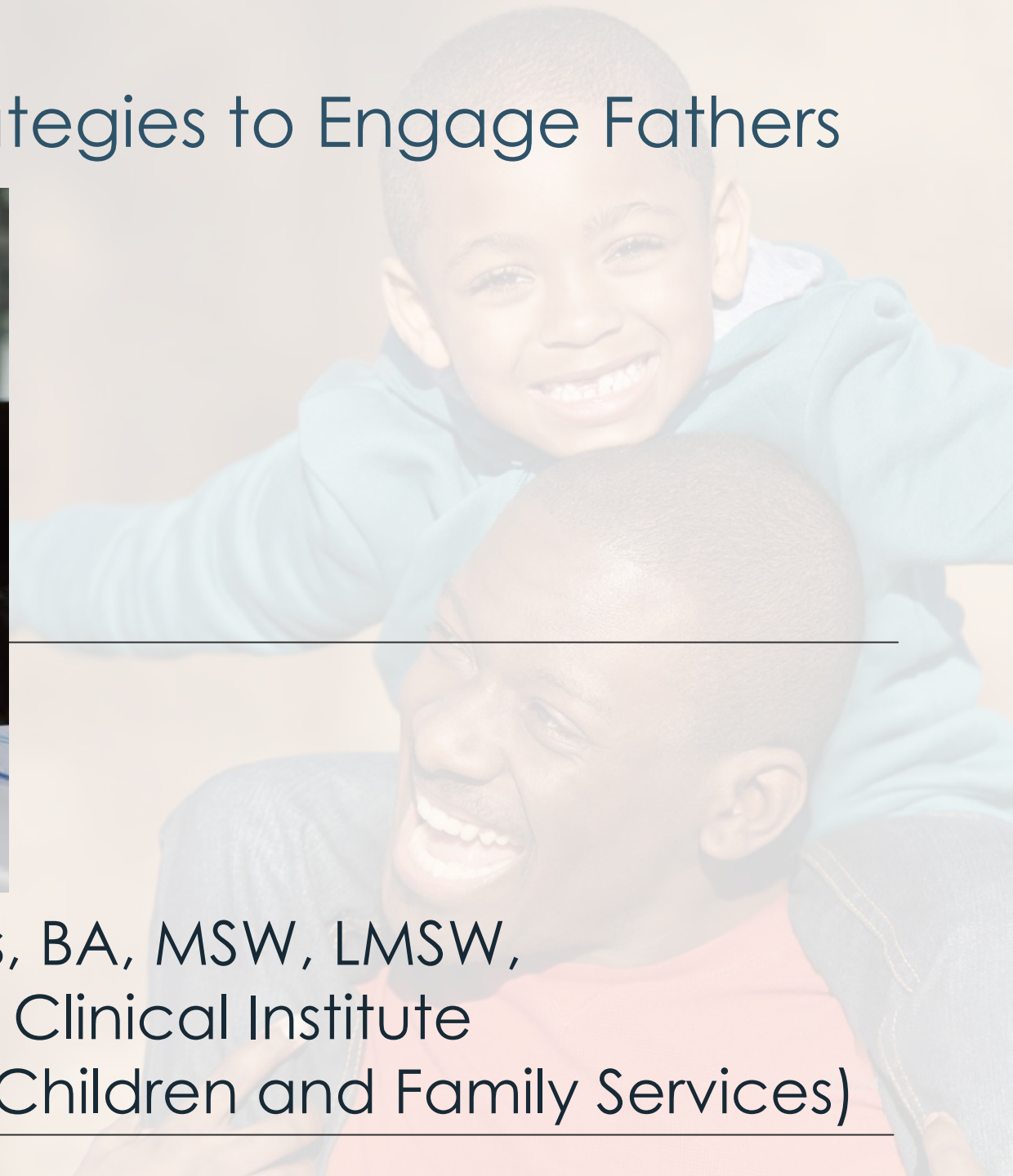




# Shifting Our Perspective: Strategies to Engage Fathers



David A. Jones, BA, MSW, LMSW,  
Post Graduate Clinical Institute  
(Jewish Board Children and Family Services)



[Fathering Me: The Long Walk Home](#)  
[Trailer](#)





A photograph of a Black man and a young boy. The man is in the foreground, smiling broadly, wearing a red t-shirt and blue jeans. The boy is sitting on his shoulders, also smiling, wearing a teal hoodie. The background is a warm, out-of-focus brown. On the left side of the image, there are decorative elements: a dark grey arrow pointing right, and several thin, curved lines in yellow and white.

# Including Fathers

*"I can not think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection."*

*—Sigmund Freud*



# Session Objectives



- Enhance our thinking and reflect upon current knowledge
- Explore rationale for engaging fathers
- Expanding our definition of the father's role,
- Gain strategies and skills supporting father engagement



## Why Focus on Fathers?

- Children of fatherless families are:
  - Less likely to attend college;
  - More likely to be incarcerated;
  - More likely to have children out of wedlock;
  - Less likely to marry;
  - More likely to divorce, if they marry.





## Why Focus on Fathers? Cont'd

Children from single-mother households earn less as adults than children from two-parent families.

Children from single-mother households are more likely to be poor as adults and use government services.<sup>10</sup>





## Fathers Matter: What the Research Says

- Early father involvement predicts continued involvement.  
—Brazelton
- Men are fully capable of nurturing young children.  
—Pruett (1997)
- Fathers become attached to their infants.  
—Lamb (2004)



## Growth: Philosophical Approach

*"The course of development can be altered in early childhood by effective interventions that change the balance between risk and protection thereby shifting the odds in favor of more adaptive outcomes."*

*—(Neurons to Neighborhoods)*



# What important gifts did you receive from your father?



# Negative Attitudes About a Father's Role



- ➡ Dads viewed as “the other parent” by mom and other family members
- ➡ Societal prescribed definition — men are seen as financial providers
- ➡ Society often assumes men don’t want to be involved
- ➡ Dads sometimes see themselves as “part-time assistants” to the mom





# Barriers to Involvement and Engagement are Different

## Barriers to Involvement

- ➡ Adequate child care
- ➡ Bad weather
- ➡ Work obligations
- ➡ Transportation
- ➡ Scheduling conflicts

## Barriers to Engagement

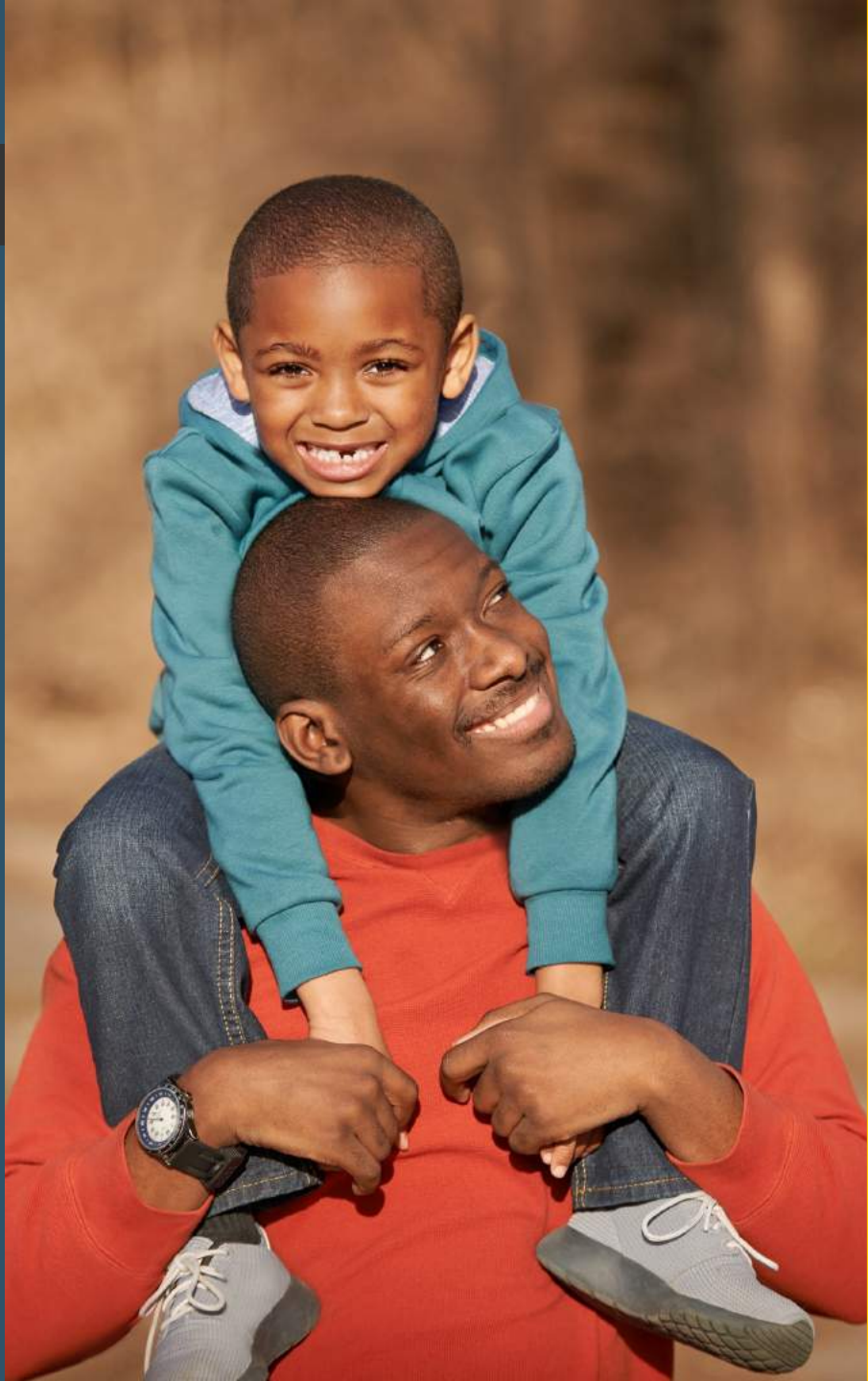
- ➡ Rigid expectations
- ➡ Fear/distrust
- ➡ Feelings of being unwelcomed/disrespected
- ➡ Misunderstood
- ➡ Power imbalance
- ➡ Role misalignment (parent/practitioners)



## Barriers

- What are some potential barriers for all men but young men especially?
  - Money/Lack of Resources
  - Education
  - Employment
  - Knowledge/Preparedness
  - Poor Communication
    - Child's mother
    - Maternal grandparents
    - Paternal grandparents





## Barriers Cont'd

- No father-specific programming
- Adolescent: development issues
- Poverty
- Feminized culture of child care, early education, and social services

# The Elephant

- Men sometimes behave badly
- Abandonment
- Authoritarian
- Disciplinarian (physical abuse)
- Domestic violence
- Substance abuser





A female staff person from a Head Start program reflects on how she improved her ability to engage fathers:

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*... To me, fathers were always looked at as secondary caregivers. In my eyes, they were good enough to drop off and pick up their children and attend a parent/teacher conference or two, but for serious matters, I thought that it was best to speak with the children's mothers, grandmothers or aunts....It was not until these issues were addressed and discussed during weekly staff developments that my outlook on fatherhood began to change. The staff developments were focused on the meaning of fatherhood and the important roles that fathers play in the lives of their young children. I had to not only pay attention to the positive interactions that the fathers in the program had with their children, but to my own interactions with the fathers when they came into the center. I became more self-aware and realized that I was rarely welcoming or engaging with the fathers and gave them the sense that they didn't truly belong in the center. The trainings and meaningful discussions that I had with my colleagues changed how I saw fathers and their children. It gave me a safe environment to tap into deep emotions that caused me to disregard fathers and I was taught how to overcome the results of negative past experiences so that I could move forward in a healthy way, serving both the mothers and fathers in the program.*

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*~ EHS Head Teacher*

# Fathers are Important to Their Children, Families, and Communities

- Focus on relationship building with fathers
- Explore how program leadership, continuous improvement, and staff professional development enhance father engagement.
  - Assess family and father interests
  - Hold “real” conversations with fathers
  - Assess and Plan interventions
  - Engage in staff development
  - Implement, evaluate, review







“A genuine desire to **engage** and **connect** can get lost in an environment that suggests otherwise. Everyone remotely involved in programs interested in supporting fathers/men can be instrumental in **“creating a culture of inclusion.”**

—D. Jones

# Program Impacts: Meaningful Outcomes

- Increased parenting competency and communication
- Increased number and quantity of positive parent-child interactions
- Improved parent communication and co-parenting relationships
- Increased self-initiated child support payments
- Increased educational, vocational, and workforce participation
- Behavior modification evidenced by decreases in:
  - Incidents of child abuse and neglect
  - Substance use and abuse
  - Court involvement
  - Domestic violence



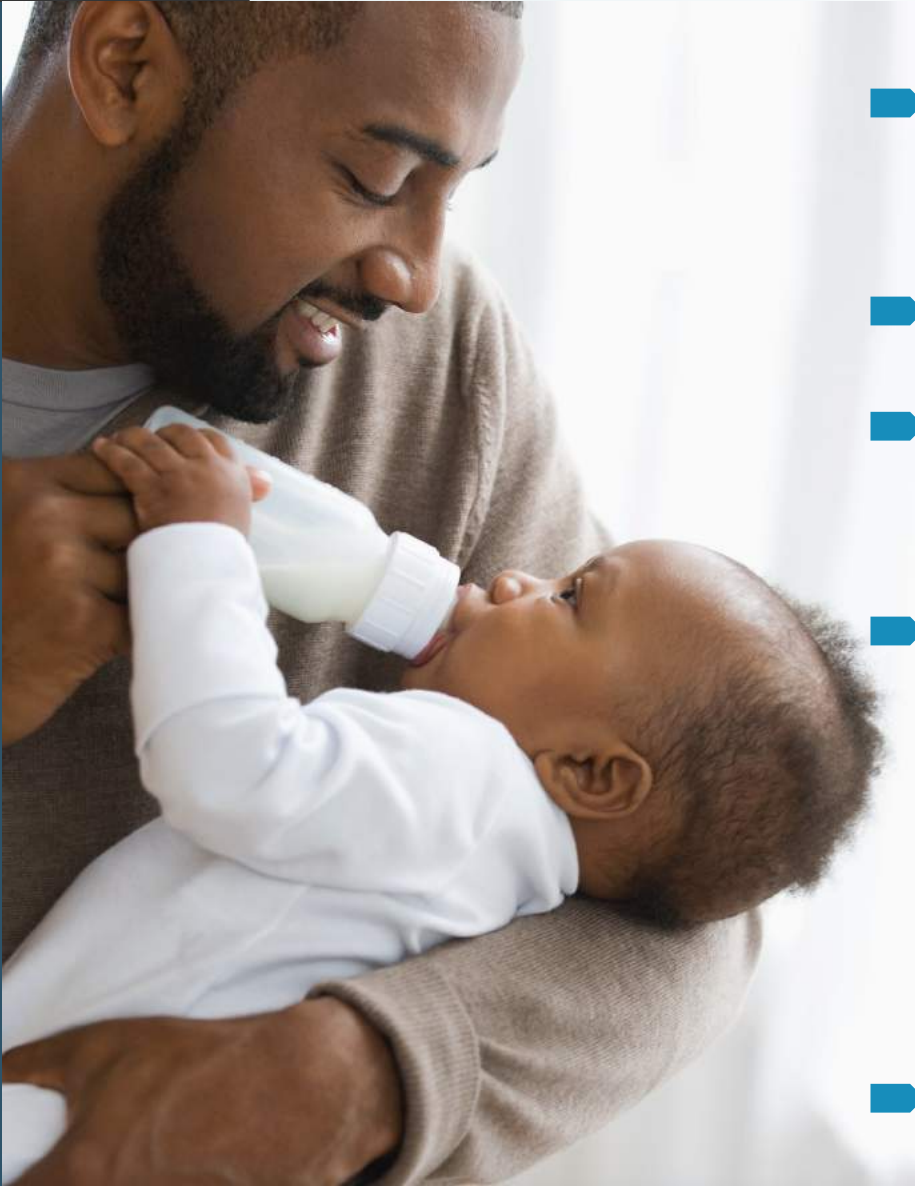
A photograph of a smiling man, a smiling woman, and two children laughing together outdoors. The man is on the right, the woman is in the center, and the children are on the left and right. They are all smiling and laughing, creating a warm and joyful atmosphere. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with greenery.

## Generative Fathering

Generative fathering is thought to be for fathers — fathering that looks a lot like what mothers do with their children.

The social construction of gender is the pivotal question that often undermines a man's ability to demonstrate a particular competency with respect to nurturing care.

# What has our discipline taught us?



- To assess, evaluate, and support families based on our training
- What do we need to unlearn?
- Working with fathers begins with the belief that engagement is possible
- Fathers' Frame:
  - Parents
  - Individuals
  - Level of Comfort (navigating institutions)
- How to communicate with fathers



A close-up photograph of a man with short dark hair and a beard, smiling warmly while holding a young girl with curly hair. The girl is also smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is softly blurred, showing green foliage. A dark blue arrow points from the left towards the title text.

# Changing Definition of Family

Single parent  
family

Two-parent  
heterosexual  
family

Two-parent  
homosexual  
family

Blended  
family

Multi-  
generational  
family



A photograph of a Black man with a beard, smiling broadly while holding a young girl with curly hair in a yellow shirt. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage. The title 'Fathers: Who Are They Really?' is overlaid on a dark blue arrow-shaped banner at the top left.

# Fathers: Who Are They Really?

- Individual (Pressure)
  - Navigating Manhood
- Parent (Patience)
  - Fatherhood (Parenthood)
- Co-Parent (Purpose)
  - Defining Engagement
- Member of Society
  - Programmatic Expectations (Conformity)



A photograph of a diverse family consisting of a man, a woman, and a young girl. They are all smiling and looking at a tablet held by the man. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The image is used as a background for the presentation slide.

## Growth: Achieving Desirable Outcomes

- Mothers' gatekeeping
- Professional alignment/obligation
- 49-50% of children in ACF/ECE are male
- Employee self-assessment





# Engagement: Program Mandates

- Expectations for participation
- Conformity vs. flexibility
- Relating — cultural implications/authenticity
- Physical environments

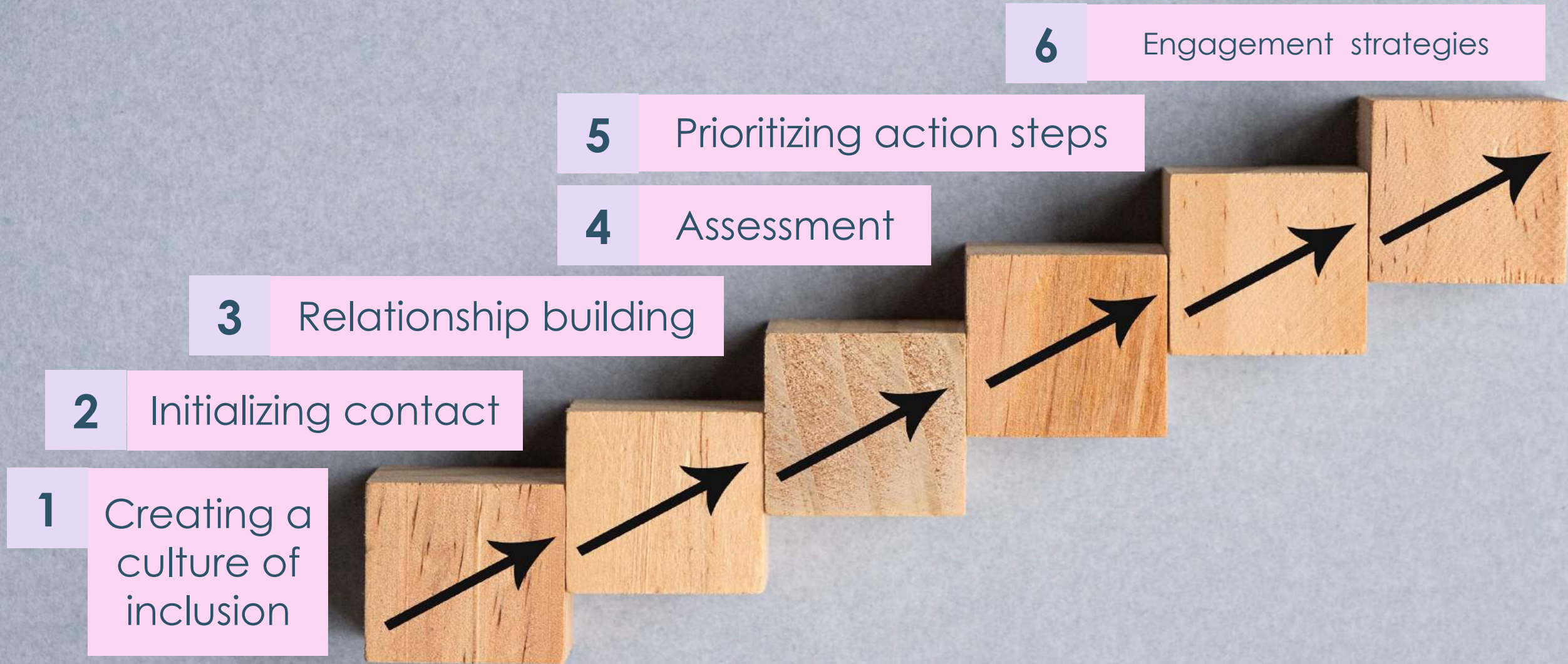


# Engagement: Barriers/Obstacles

- Absence of road maps
- Lack of preparation
- Attitude and behavioral adjustments
- Maternal history
- Paternal history
- Impatience
- Addressing concrete needs



## Scene B: Engagement Phase Fathers' First Evidence-Based Model



# How They Present: Men With a Compromised Past Are Often:

- Angry
- Avoidant
- Confused
- Depressed
- Lack Confidence
- Prone to Violence
- Risk Takers







## Rationale (Data)

Fatherless youth are:

Single-parent households have more than **tripled** since 1960

**60%**  
of youth suicides

**71%**  
of high school dropouts

**85%**  
of juvenile incarcerations

**90%**  
of homeless and runaway children

**One-third**  
of American children—more than 15 million—are being raised **without** a father

# New Era Fathers

- Have no fear of the mirror!
- Open to learning
- Confront and embrace challenges!
- Seize opportunities!
- Love their children openly, freely!
- Model respectable behavior!







## ► New Era Fathers

### Fathering Tasks:

- Takes child to well-baby appointments
- Cares for child while mother/partner is at work overnight/weekends
- Collects important data on child
- Keeps important telephone numbers handy
- Meets with child's teacher
- Advocates for child
- Takes responsibility for child's school learning



## New Era Fathers

- Prioritizes his child/children
- Willing to admit his fears
- Talks about his weaknesses
- Willing to ask for help
- Willing to sacrifice
- Contributes willingly to his children's financial well-being
- Self-confident
- Learns to understand, embrace, and appreciate his role
- Shares common experiences with his child
- Teaches children about history, family, world
- Maintains a safe, secure, and stable home environment



# New Era Fathers

- Demonstrates (shows) affection
- Communicates (talks to his child)
- Is curious about his child's development
- Willing to learn about child development
- Plans child-focused activities



- Models appropriate behavior
- Admits mistakes!
- Understands his role as a teacher!
- Is concerned about attachment and bonding
- Not afraid to love his child

# Final Thoughts From Fathers of Children With Special Needs

*"If anyone had told me when you were born that you would never read, never write, or never carry on a normal conversation, I wouldn't have been able to handle it."*

*"Truthfully, I was crushed for a long, long time when I found out that you had autism."  
—Robert A. Naseef, Ph.D.*





A photograph of a man and a young boy looking out over the ocean. The man is in the foreground, wearing a denim jacket, and the boy is behind him, also wearing a denim jacket. They are both looking towards the right side of the frame. The background is a bright, hazy sky over the ocean.

## Obstacles

- Inability to reflect
- Moving past challenging historical experiences
- Domestic violence
- Sexual abuse
- How involved do we really want them to be?

# Strategies: Revisiting Our History

- The impact of our experiences with fathers, brothers, men in our lives
- Removing the blinders
- Rethinking our expectations







## Strategies: Families As Partners

- Invest a little more time in the beginning and it will in many instances save time in the long run.
- Although extremely powerful, we are a temporary influence in a child's/family's life. How significant could we be if we leave most of that influence with them in some capacity?



## Strategies: Families As Partners

- It is not until we can challenge our preexisting beliefs about men that we will be effective at including them in aspects of service provision as it relates to their children.
- Do not assume they do not want to be involved.
- When evaluating how best to include families, believe they are or have the capacity to become experts when it comes to their children.
- Involvement can look very different than what we can expect.
- Share in the small success of their involvement as it is not unlike all other developmental trajectories, it evolves over time.



## Strategies: Families As Partners

- Practitioners encompass multiple disciplines
- Our disciplines shape our focus
- Our journey towards our discipline is imprinted upon our memory
- We “are of course professionals, aren’t we?”



## Strategies: The Best Intentions

- During initial contact, be sensitive and compassionate.
- Consider what shapes the lens through which we view fathers.
- How do we become aware of the things we haven't considered (i.e., blind spots and micro-aggressions).







## Strategies

- Fathers are more than what is written about them in their case records.
- Remember fathers also wear several hats as individuals, parents, co-parents, and members of society.
- See the whole person standing in front of you.
- Walk a “minute” in their shoes.
- Commit to creating a culture of inclusion.

The background of the slide features a close-up photograph of two hands shaking. One hand is light-skinned and the other is dark-skinned, symbolizing partnership and agreement. The hands are positioned diagonally across the frame, with the fingers interlaced. The background is a solid bright yellow.

## Strategies Cont'd

- Unlearn some of what our discipline has taught us.
- Believe in the capacity of fathers.
- Collect information about fathers.
- Address concrete needs.
- Survive the test.
- Expect their involvement.
- Recognize the learning curve (i.e., they are willing to learn, grow, and partner with you).



# Families as Partners

- Our goal: family training
- Conversations with parents
- Show them how to do things
- Some therapists struggle and some are very effective.
- I suggest it's important to be open to the possibilities.



# Thank You

## Resources:

- David A. Jones, MSW, LMSW
- Award Winning Documentary - On Amazon Prime Video **Fathering Me: The Long Walk Home**
- <https://store.bookbaby.com/book/Fathering-Me-A-Journey-into-Fatherhood>
- Film Trailer  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtu5mHKk9kk&t=9s>
- Leon's Story  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbPm51FQNS0&t=56s>

