



## **Engaging Fathers: Understanding Challenges, Opportunities and Strategies**

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A photograph of a father and his young son sitting together, looking at a tablet. The father is in the background, and the son is in the foreground, pointing at the screen. The tablet displays some green text or code. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a home or office setting.

# Today's Presentation

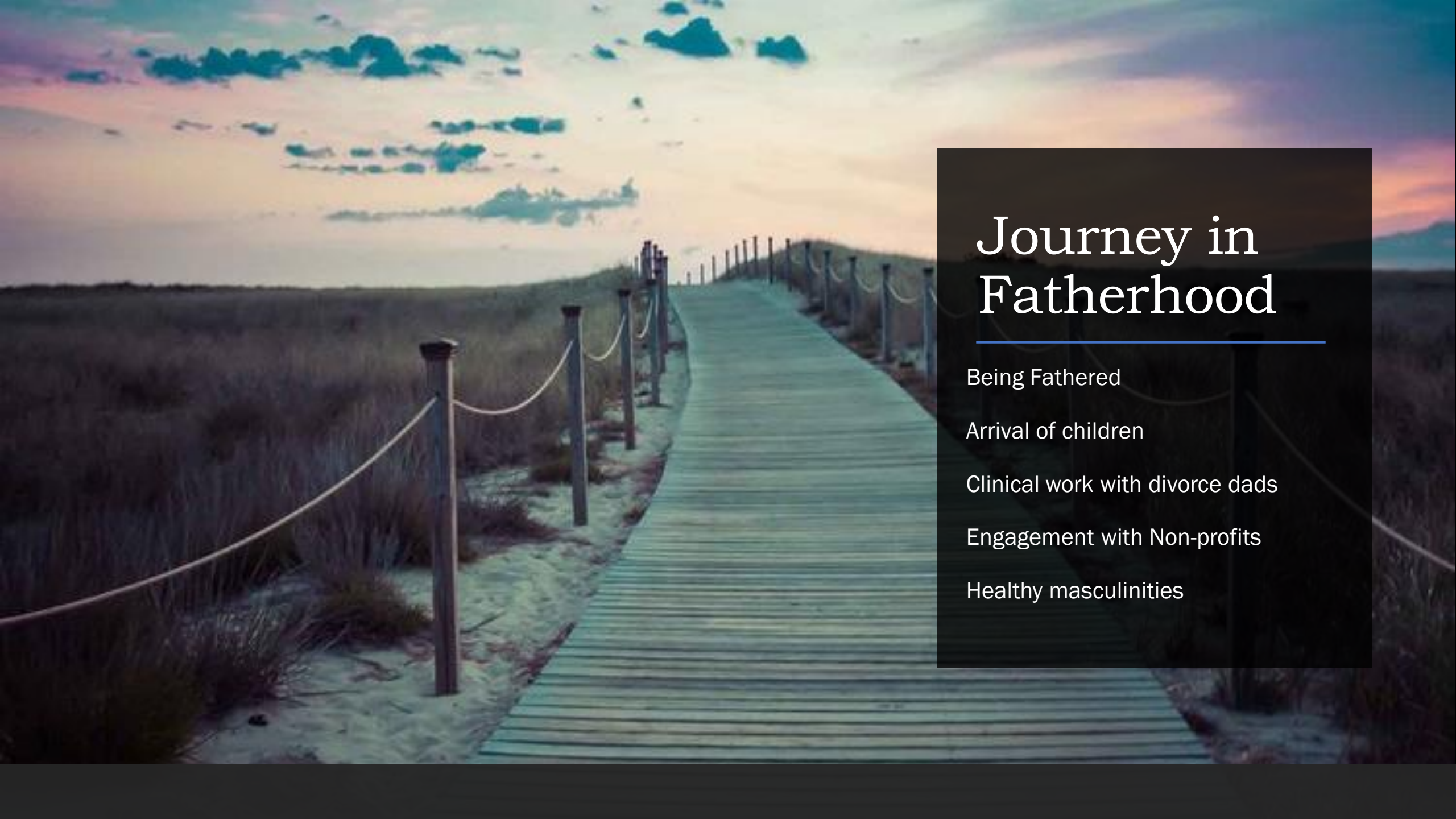
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Background

Contributions of Fatherhood

Multi-level look at Father  
Involvement

Strategies for Father Engagement



# Journey in Fatherhood

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Being Fathered

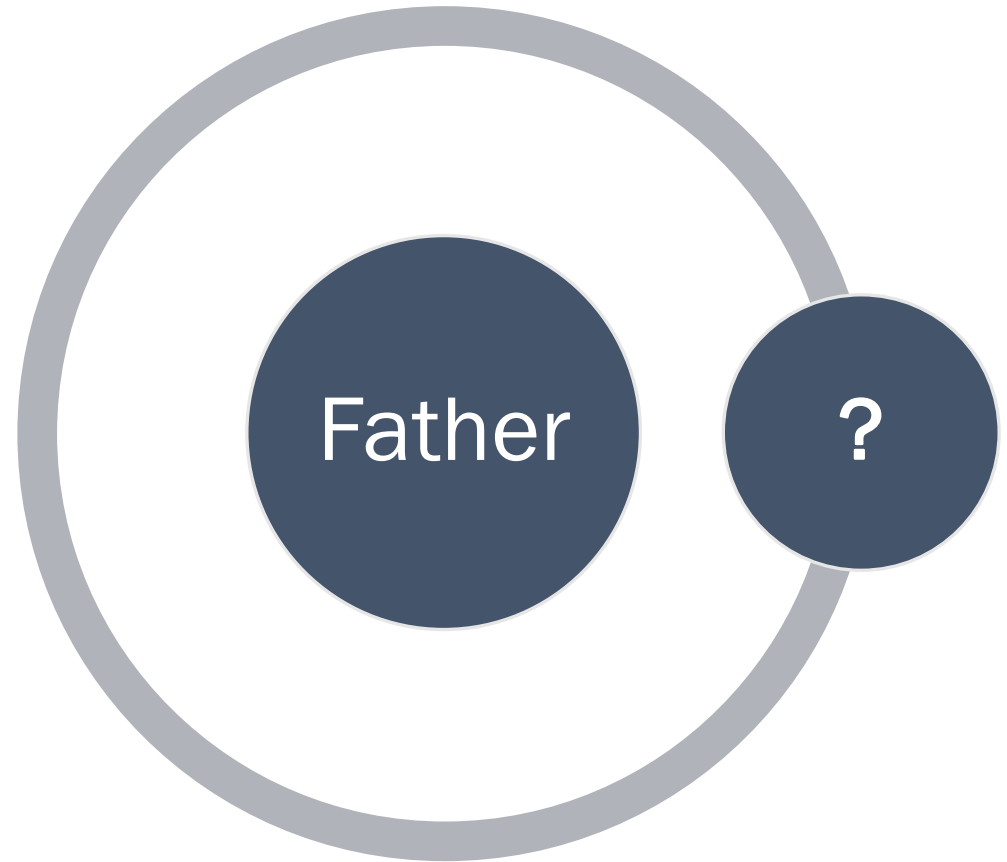
Arrival of children

Clinical work with divorce dads

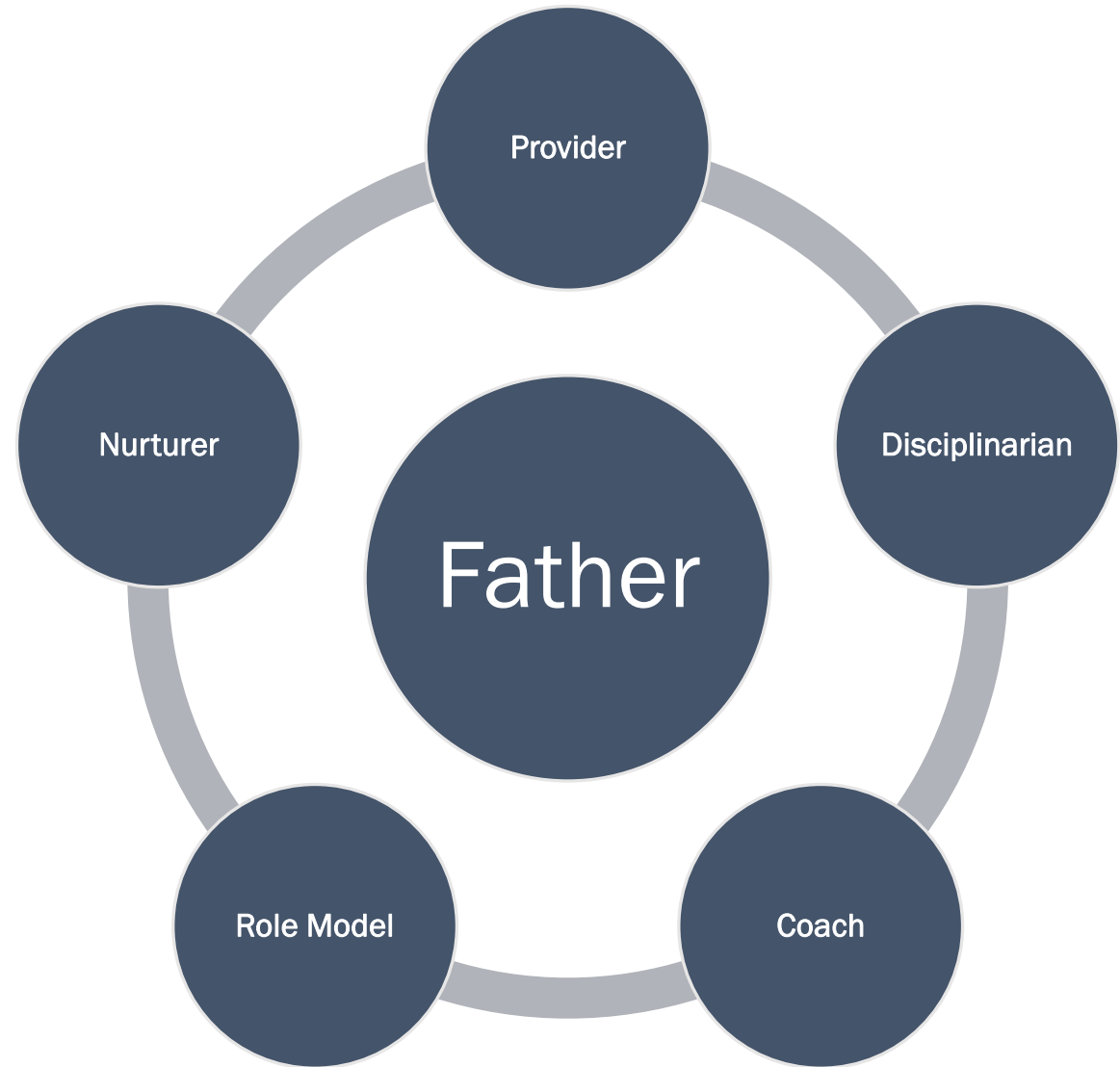
Engagement with Non-profits

Healthy masculinities

A Father is...



A Father is...



**Conflict and stress can emerge when different views are held**



To Be Inclusive Consider Types of Fathers & Time

# Quality of Father Involvement

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Caution on the  
assumption of father  
involvement is always  
good involvement

- Subset of violent and  
substance abusing  
fathers

Safety is paramount



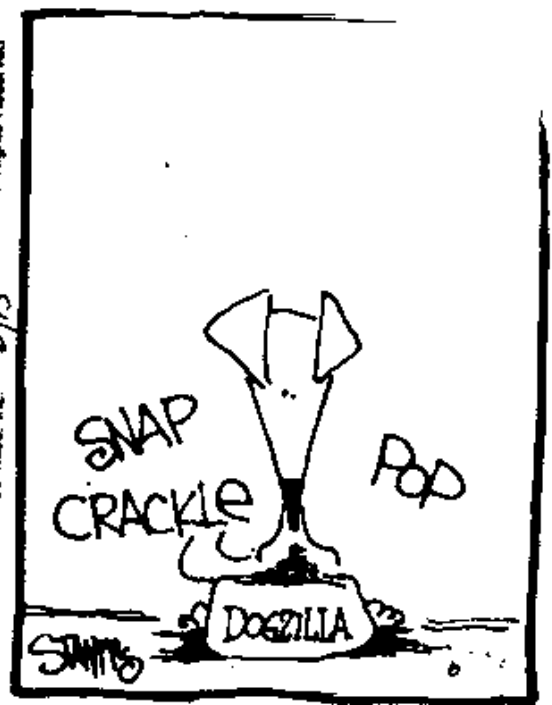
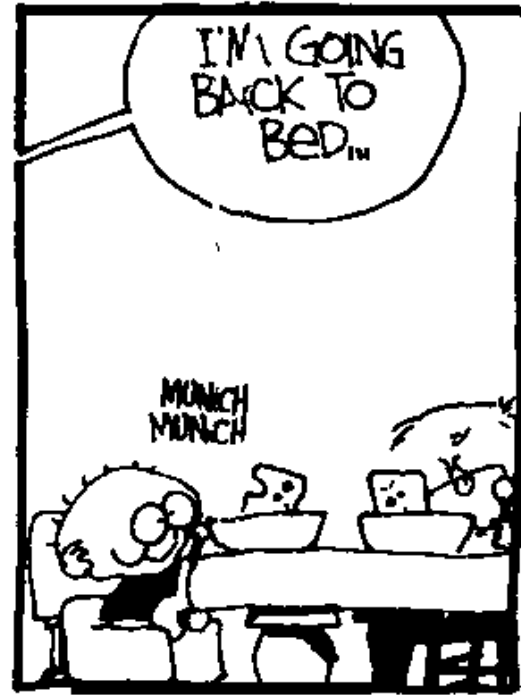


# Fatherhood

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MESSAGES FATHERS RECEIVE...CONSIDER THE EXTENT TO WHICH SIMILAR MESSAGES OF MOTHERS OCCUR



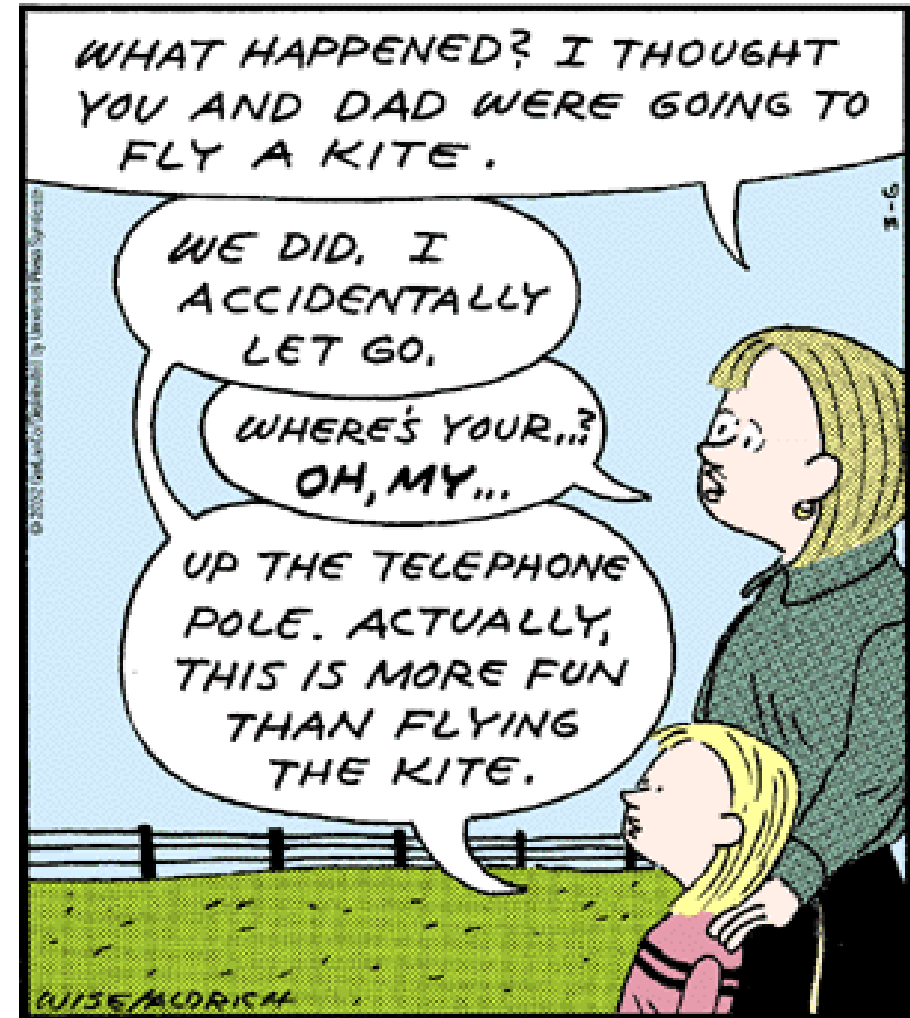


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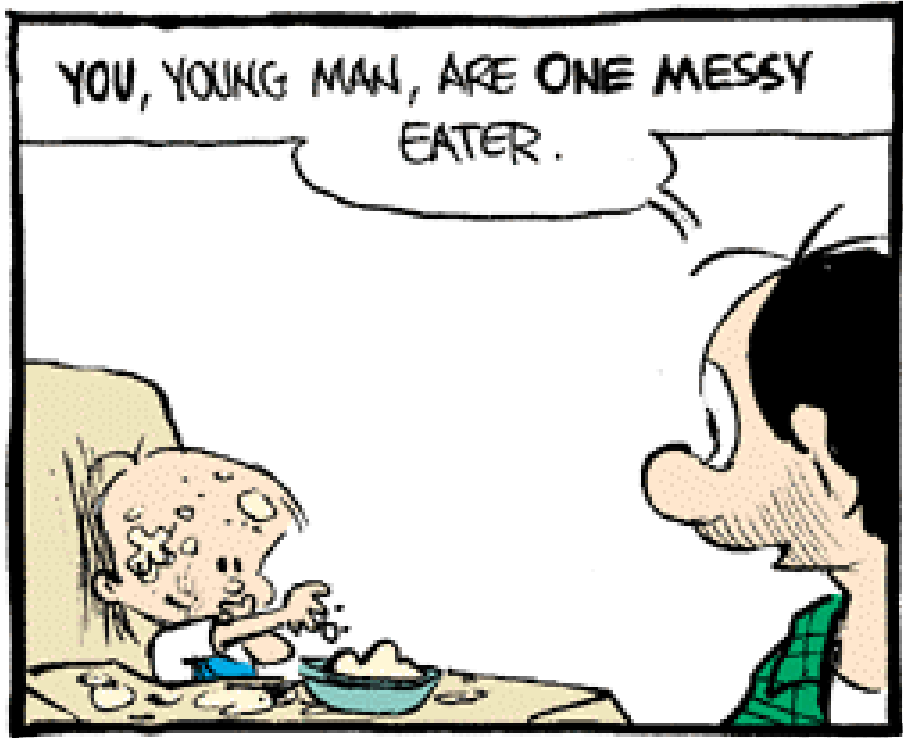
Competent?



I am the Broken Eggman, kookookachoo.



The quality time you spend with your kids, they'll remember forever.



Role Model?



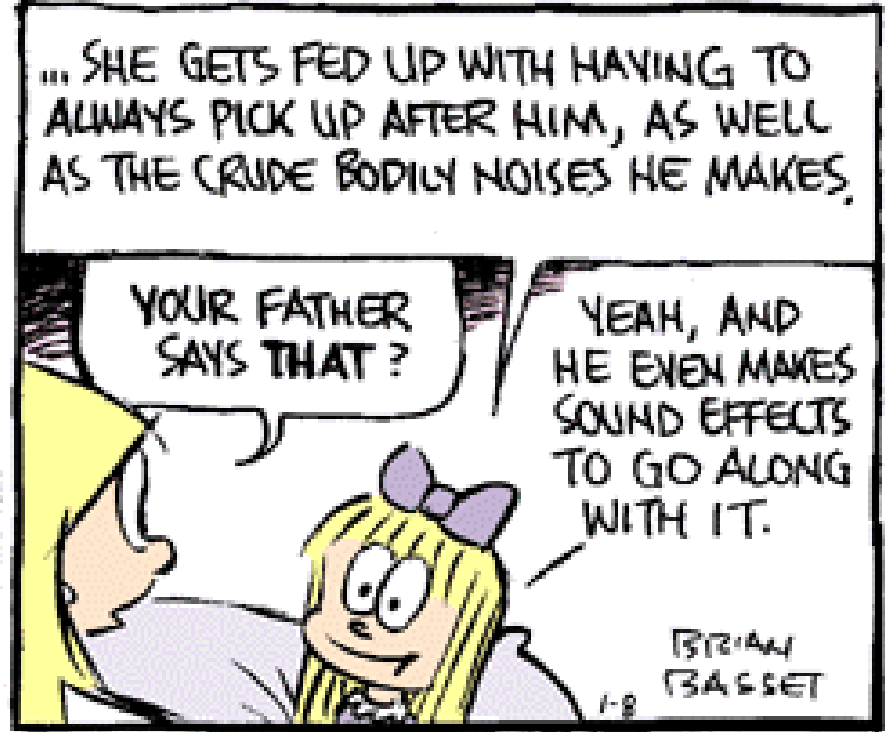
... AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER. THE END.

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WHENEVER DADDY READS THAT FAIRY TALE TO ME, HE SAYS THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER UNTIL ...

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... SHE GETS FED UP WITH HAVING TO ALWAYS PICK UP AFTER HIM, AS WELL AS THE CRUDE BODILY NOISES HE MAKES.

YOUR FATHER SAYS THAT?

YEAH, AND HE EVEN MAKES SOUND EFFECTS TO GO ALONG WITH IT.

BRIAN BASSET

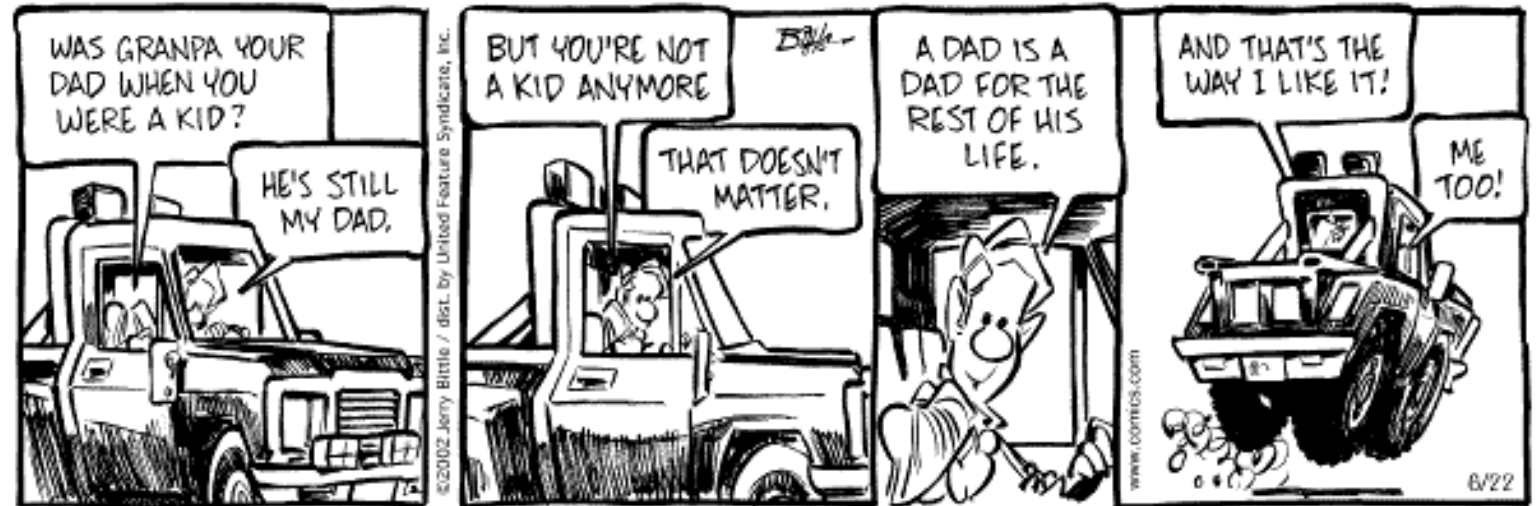
1-8



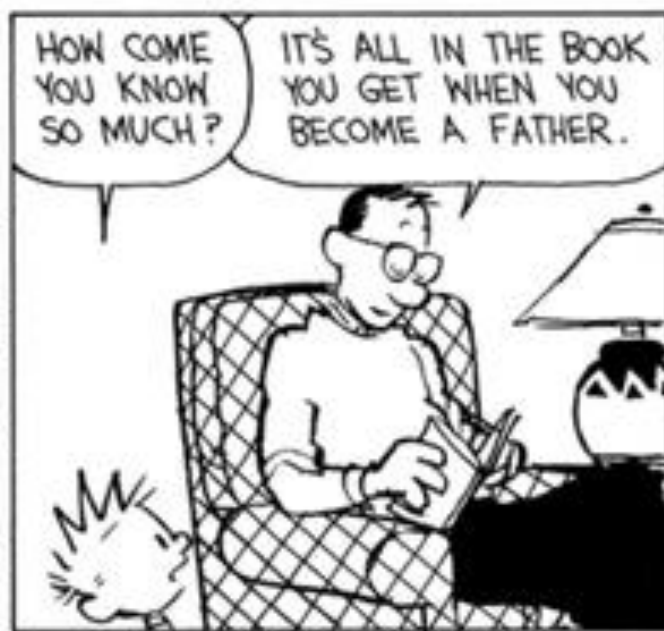
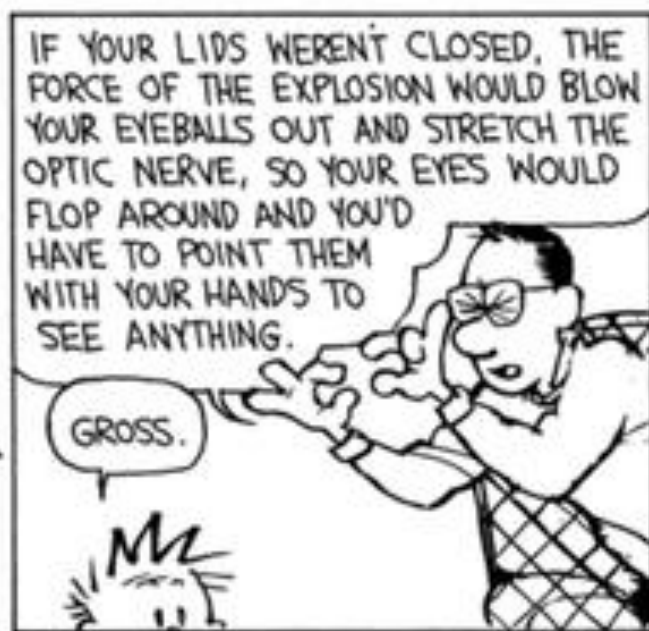
"Dear Dad, I hope you have a nice Father's Day. You are smart and funny and mom is two. Have a reely grate and speshul day today. PS: Thank you for sending me to collage!"

# A Father across time...

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# Perspectives on Fathering

## Equate it with Mothering

- “deficit approach” in that he does not compare to mother

## Provider role emphasized

- Focus on child support—especially among divorced fathers
- Other dimensions?

## Protector role

- Implications for Non-Residential Father?



# Common Misperceptions of Fathering and Father Involvement

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## More Father Involvement the Better

- Same level as mother seen as ideal
- If not at the same level--viewed as deficit

## Involvement Requires Proximity

- Some aspects of fathering/parenting occurs when not in contact

## Father Involvement Can Always be Observed or Counted

## Level of Father Involvement is Static--doesn't change over time

## Patterns of Involvement Should look the Same Regardless of Culture



## Context for engaging fathers in services

Most models initially designed  
with mothers in mind

Many programs have not yet  
examined the role of fathers

Efforts to engage fathers early  
hold particular promise

# Benefits to Children of Positive Father Involvement

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Better Social  
and Cognitive  
Skills

Buffer  
Mother  
Parenting

Closer Family  
Ties

Fewer Risky  
Behaviors

Fewer  
Delinquent  
Behaviors

# Benefits of Engaged Fatherhood and Men's Wellbeing

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Employment  
Outcomes

Involvement  
in Community  
Service

Effects on  
Health

# Father Involvement

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Four factors that influence the level of paternal involvement

Motivation

Skills and self confidence

Social supports

Institutional factors or practices



# Motivation to be a Father

Own Experiences of a Father

- modeling versus compensatory

Father's age, marital history

Early socialization

Beliefs about what it means to be..

Self Identity



# Skills and Self Confidence

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Self perceived competence

- Experience with children?
- Reactions of others to their attempts?

Beliefs about men with children

# Social Supports and Stresses

## Mother's employment

- Work hours—may need father involvement more
- Flexibility—lack may need father involvement

## Mother's characteristics

- Comfort with the father engaging in parenting
- Impact on her role
- “Gate Keeper”



# Social Supports and Stresses

## Marital or couple relationship

- Men who are satisfied with their relationships are more involved with children

## Other social supports

- Do friends and family expect/encourage/support father involvement?



# Institutional Factors

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Employment

Work-Family conflicts

School Policies

Agency's Policies



# Barriers for Fathers

# Practical and Motivational Barriers

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Old Stereotypes

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Competing responsibilities

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Unclear benefits

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No other male participants

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No male program staff

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Tension with child's mother

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Parenting Skills and Knowledge Not Valued

# Provider Barriers

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No active invitation  
to fathers to  
participate

Biases, e.g., not  
considering father  
participation  
important

Discomfort with  
inter-parental  
conflict

Unsure when and  
how to involve  
fathers

# Assess Your Father Friendliness

# Designing Father Programs Considerations

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## Agency/Institutional Biases

- How father friendly in terms of policies, recruitment, and support?
- How responsive are parenting interventions to gender related differences?



## Professional Biases

- Do staff capabilities and attitudes toward parents exclude fathers

CONTENT



## Content relevant to fathers as well as mothers



## Cultural Biases

- How culturally compelling are parenting interventions
- Relevant and attractive to fathers/parents

# Delivering Father Programs Considerations

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## When/Where and How

- Timing, place, and medium work to include fathers as well as mothers?
- Group, home visits, pros/cons
- Activities expected of both parents



## Training

- Are staff ready and skilled to work with coparents, fathers as well as mothers
- Approaches sensitive to gender-specific concerns



## Communication

- Are both mothers and fathers explicitly informed and individually reminded about program participation
- Are both mothers and fathers followed up in cases of nonattendance



## Holistic Support

- Are the needs of fathers and mothers recognized
- When support is needed, are relevant health, education and other social services for mothers and fathers provided



# Strategies for Positive Father Engagement



Consideration...

## Traditional Roles and Masculinity

Traditional Male Role Encourages

- Autonomy
- Emotional Control
- Competence

Accepting or Seeking Help May Be Seen as Weakness

*Efforts to encourage Father Involvement that are  
Perceived as Criticism of his Competence May Reduce  
Involvement*

# Strategies for Involving and Engaging fathers

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1

Communicate with fathers, including nonresident

2

Address practical barriers  
• Adjust schedule to meet family's needs

3

Create a father-friendly environment  
• Offer materials meant for fathers, images of fathers

4

Presume high interest

5

Reinforce father's contributions

6

Collaborate with other providers

7

Moments of Opportunity when Fathers Especially Motivated

# Keeping Fathers Engaged

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## Make a Positive First Impression

Great each father by name  
Hire program staff who have similarity



## Create a Comfortable Environment

Spaces for father-child interaction with things to do  
Decorate with photos of fathers and children



## Build a Thoughtful Program Structure

Offer incentives at points when drop-rates are expected  
Structure services in groups to foster relationships and accountability



## Incorporate Hands-on Learning

Learn something new, try it, reflect on it

# Influences on Attendance

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Intensity



Sequencing of  
Program Activities



Scheduling  
Services



Access to  
Transportation



Program  
Attendance  
Mandated

## Four Steps to Father- Friendly Practice

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Training professionals to  
support fathers

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Collaborations across  
agencies and systems

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Using technology to connect  
fathers with children

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Targeting outreach and  
marketing for dads

# Suggestions from fathers who have been in women-led groups

Don't call anyone out in front of the class

There is a danger in thinking too much about how men and women are different—this can lead to condescending behavior

Men like to be direct and to the point

Allow the men to be the experts of their lives and families

Be patient, and curious about what they have to say

Learn from your learners



# Questions

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