

Policies and Programs Affecting Fathers

A State-by-State Report

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Chapter 3: Child Welfare

Most families become involved with the child welfare system when there is a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, also referred to as “child maltreatment.” Child maltreatment is defined as serious harm (e.g., physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect) to children by parents or primary caregivers. Child maltreatment also can include harm that a caregiver does not prevent from happening. Each state has its own laws that define abuse and neglect, the reporting obligations of individuals, and the required state and local Child Protective Services (CPS) agency interventions.

Fathers have been largely absent from research and writings on child welfare. A 2010 study concluded that fathers with children in the child welfare system are frequently unidentified and uninvolved.¹ When involved, they may also be treated more harshly. A recent analysis of CPS investigation outcomes found that child abuse and neglect perpetrated by fathers, compared to mothers or both parents together, was associated with more criminal investigations and criminal charges.²

The failure to engage fathers whose children are involved with child welfare cases is associated with negative outcomes for children. Research using the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being found that establishing a relationship between the biological fathers and the child welfare system reduced the likelihood that those children would be placed into out-of-home care.³ Similarly, Malm and Zielewski found that children with nonresident fathers who were not identified or contacted by the child welfare system experienced higher rates

1 Shapiro, A. F., & Krysiak, J. (2010). Finding fathers in social work research and practice. *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, 7.

2 Kobulsky, J. M., Wildfeuer, R., Yoon, S., & Cage, J. (2021). Distinguishing characteristics and disparities in Child Protective Services-investigated maltreatment by fathers. *Child Maltreatment*, 26(2), 182-194.

3 Bellamy, J. L. A. (2009). National study of male involvement among families in contact with the child welfare system. *Child Maltreatment*, 14(3), 255-262.

of adoption, lower rates of reunification, and longer periods of time in the child welfare system.⁴ More recently, studies find that when fathers have been identified in child welfare cases, children spend fewer days in foster care and are more likely to be reunified with parents.⁵ When fathers participate in court-ordered reunification services such as parent training classes, children are also more likely to be reunified with their parents.⁶ And the failure to engage paternal relatives may reduce the external support from extended family that is linked with children's well-being.⁷

Involving fathers in child welfare cases, however, includes several, often challenging steps: identifying the father, locating him, contacting him, and engaging him in services and in the system. As a result, despite the positive difference they may make, many nonresident fathers in child abuse and neglect cases are not identified or engaged. A study conducted 15 years ago found that the nonresident father had been contacted by the agency or worker in only about half of all cases (55%).⁸ A more recent study found that fathers were not identified in one-third of the 9,000 cases studied that had an assessment completed.⁹ A third study reported that 12% of caseworkers said that they did not know the fathers' identities and over a third said that paternity had not been established.¹⁰

This chapter examines the status of father engagement in child welfare cases in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. We present information drawn from a variety of sources: Child and Family Service Reviews, Child and Family Services Plans, federal research and demonstration projects, Children's Trust Programs, and newer policy initiatives.

Insights from the Child and Family Service Reviews

One method of assessing how well the child welfare system is doing in working with fathers is to consider items that are addressed in the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR). The Children's Bureau conducts the CFSRs, which are periodic reviews of state child welfare systems, to ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements, gauge what is actually happening to children and families in child welfare cases and improve positive outcomes. To conduct the review, the Children's Bureau sends each state a data profile containing aggregate data on the state's foster care and in-home services populations. After each state evaluates its own performance and compares it to national standards, a joint federal–state team conducts an onsite review of the state child welfare program. This includes case reviews; interviews with children and families engaged in services; and interviews with community stakeholders including caseworkers, courts, and service providers.¹¹

4 Malm, K. E., & Zielewski, E. H. (2009). Nonresident father support and reunification outcomes for children in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 31*, 1010–1018.

5 Burrus, S. W., Green, B., Volling, L., & Barr, R. (2012). Do dads matter? Child welfare outcomes for father-identified families. *Journal of Child Custody, 12*(3), 201–216.

6 D'Andrade, A. (2017). Does father's involvement in services affect mothers' likelihood of reunification with children placed in foster care? *Children and Youth Services Review, 81*, 5–9.

7 Erola, J., Kilpi-Jackson, E., Prix, I., & Lehti, H. (2018). Resource compensation from the extended family: Grandparents, aunts, and uncles in Finland and the United States. *European Sociological Review, 34*(4), 348–364.

8 Malm K., Murray, J., & Geen, R. (2006). *What about the dads? Child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve nonresident fathers*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/what-about-dads-child-welfare-agencies-efforts-identify-locate-involve-nonresident-fathers-0>.

9 Smithgall, C., Jarpe-Ratner, E., Yang, D-H., DeCoursey, J., Brooks, L., & Goerge, R. (2009). *Family assessment in child welfare: The Illinois DCFS Integrated Assessment program in policy and practice*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

10 Malm, K. E., & Zielewski, E. H. (2009). Nonresident father support and reunification outcomes for children in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 31*, 1010–1018.

11 Children's Bureau. (n.d.). *Children's Bureau Child and Family Services Reviews fact sheet*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cfsr_general_factsheet.pdf.

All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico completed their first CFSR by 2004, their second CFSR by 2010, and the third by 2018. Round 4 reviews will begin in 2022.

An August 2019 publication entitled *Parent Engagement—Reflections From the CFSR: 2015–2017* concluded that the CFSR reports contained some overarching themes regarding practices and strategies used to engage parents in their cases.

*First, the information points towards the importance of caseworkers working to establish effective relationships with parents. This may imply, looking beyond information in the current report Second, information contained within this report demonstrates the need for broad, responsive efforts on the part of caseworkers to engage parents, and the need to make these efforts consistently throughout the case. In particular, it is important to support or improve efforts to **engage fathers, as data indicates caseworkers engage them less compared to mothers.**¹²*

Selected conclusions on parent engagement from the Round 3 report based on 3,142 foster care and in-home cases reviewed from 2015 through 2017 are as follows:

1. Mothers' needs were accurately assessed in 64% of the 2,614 applicable cases, and in 59% of the 2,488 applicable cases, mothers received appropriate services.
2. Fathers' needs were accurately assessed in 47% of the 2,125 applicable cases, and in 44% of the 1,885 applicable cases, fathers received appropriate services.
3. The agency made concerted efforts to actively involve the mother in the case planning process in 64% of the 3,332 applicable cases.
4. The agency made concerted efforts to actively involve the father in the case planning process in 49% of the 2,532 applicable cases.
5. The agency made concerted efforts to support positive parent–child relationships beyond visitation with the mother in 66% of the 1,228 applicable cases.
6. The agency made concerted efforts to support positive parent–child relationships beyond visitation with the father in 55% of the 729 applicable cases.

Table 1 presents state-by-state results from Round 3 of the CFSR process. It features three items that explicitly address father engagement. The date when the review was completed is shown next to the state name. The three items included are Agency Made Efforts to Promote a Positive Relationship between Child in Foster Care and His/Her Father Beyond Visitation (Item 11); Fathers' Needs were Assessed and Addressed to Achieve Case Goals (Item 12); and Agency Made Concerted Efforts to Involve Fathers in Case Planning (Item 13).

The CFSR data patterns reveal a wide range of engagement rates across states. Nationally, agencies made efforts to involve fathers in case planning in 50% of the sampled cases.¹³ As Table 1 shows, 22 states were at or above this 50% threshold. Some were as low as 12% and others as high as 75%. Effective parent engagement

¹² JBS International. (2019). *Parent engagement — Reflections from the CFSR: 2015–2017*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (emphasis added). Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/parent-engagement-reflections-cfsr-2015-2017>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

includes caseworkers and parents jointly assessing needs and identifying services needed to achieve case goals. Nationally, fathers' needs were accurately assessed and addressed in 47% of the sampled cases reviewed.¹⁴ As Table 1 shows, 15 states were at or above the 47% threshold. Again, there was a wide range (2% to 73%). Nationally, efforts were made to promote, support, and/or maintain positive parent-child relationships beyond visitation in 55% of sampled cases.¹⁵ As Table 1 shows, 29 states were at or above this 55% threshold.



State differences may reflect variations in workers' exclusive reliance on mothers for information about fathers and use of other resources to identify him,¹⁶ inadequate efforts by workers to locate nonresidential fathers at the outset of a case including use of the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS),¹⁷ the reluctance of caseworkers to contact fathers,¹⁸ and challenges in engaging fathers that are identified.¹⁹

Chapter 3, Table 1. **State Father Engagement in Round 3 CFSR Data on Sampled Cases**

State	Percentage of Cases Where Agency Made Efforts to Promote a Positive Relationship between Child in Foster Care and His/Her Father	Percentage of Cases Where Fathers' Needs Were Assessed and Addressed to Achieve Case Goals	Percentage of Cases Where Agency Made Concerted Efforts to Involve Fathers in Case Planning
Alabama (2018)	36%	21%	25%
Alaska (2017)	69%	26%	30%
Arkansas (2016)	47%	48%	58%
Arizona (2015)	45%	54%	61%
California (2016)	46%	37%	41%
Colorado (2017)	58%	47%	68%
Connecticut (2016)	44%	23%	28%
Delaware (2017)	71%	49%	62%
DC (2016)	55%	14%	24%
Florida (2016)	29%	56%	67%
Georgia (2015)	40%	27%	39%
Hawaii (2017)	30%	33%	43%
Idaho (2016)	71%	73%	75%
Illinois (2018)	13%	30%	23%

¹⁴ JBS International. (2019). *Parent engagement – Reflections from the CFSR: 2015–2017*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (emphasis added). Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/parent-engagement-reflections-cfsr-2015-2017>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Malm, K. E., & Zieleski, E. H. (2009). Nonresident father support and reunification outcomes for children in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(9), 1010–1018.

¹⁷ Sankaran, V. (2008). Advocating for the constitutional rights of nonresident fathers. *ABA Child Law Practice*, 27(9), 129–143.

¹⁸ Smithgall, C., DeCoursey, J., Gitlow, E., Yang, D., Jarpe-Ratner, E., Lansing, J., & George, R. (2009). *Identifying, interviewing, and intervening: Fathers and the Illinois child welfare system*. University of Chicago.

¹⁹ O'Donnell, J. M. (2001). Paternal involvement in kinship foster care services in one father and multiple father families. *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program*, 80(4), 453–479.

Indiana (2016)	64%	59%	57%
Iowa (2018)	50%	45%	50%
Kansas (2015)	92%	53%	66%
Kentucky (2016)	45%	37%	49%
Louisiana (2018)	32%	13%	18%
Maine (2017)	45%	36%	39%
Maryland (2018)	50%	34%	32%
Massachusetts (2016)	60%	40%	58%
Michigan (2018)	56%	33%	38%
Minnesota (2016)	50%	43%	41%
Mississippi (2018)	64%	19%	28%
Missouri (2017)	61%	37%	45%
Montana (2017)	44%	37%	45%
Nebraska (2017)	76%	55%	64%
Nevada (2018)	63%	45%	47%
New Hampshire (2018)	87%	27%	47%
New Jersey (2017)	61%	50%	45%
New Mexico (2015)	76%	66%	73%
New York (2016)	50%	34%	50%
North Carolina (2015)	59%	45%	48%
North Dakota (2016)	65%	45%	58%
Ohio (2017)	59%	51%	69%
Oklahoma (2016)	33%	2%	12%
Oregon (2016)	81%	56%	70%
Pennsylvania (2017)	71%	43%	48%
Rhode Island (2018)	59%	23%	21%
South Carolina (2017)	29%	22%	32%
South Dakota (2016)	57%	42%	54%
Tennessee (2017)	55%	21%	45%
Texas (2016)	55%	51%	57%
Utah (2018)	71%	51%	79%
Vermont (2015)	72%	54%	60%
Virginia (2017)	39%	32%	48%
Washington (2018)	71%	55%	66%
West Virginia (2017)	47%	32%	36%
Wisconsin (2018)	47%	45%	45%
Wyoming (2016)	83%	50%	63%

Source: Children's Bureau. (2021). *Reports and results of Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs)*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved from https://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb_web/SearchForm/.

Note: The date when the CFSR review was completed is shown next to the state name.



Insights from Child and Family Services Plans

Child and Family Services Plans or CFSPs are “five-year strategic plans that set forth the vision and the goals to be accomplished to strengthen the states' overall child welfare system.”²⁰ Though not necessarily exhaustive, CFSPs provide a thorough, standardized report on Child Welfare Services in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Each state submits a plan to the Children's Bureau each review cycle to ensure conformity with federal requirements and to renew funding. There are four sources of federal funding for which the CFSP serves as an application: general welfare funding under Title IV-B, Section 106 of CAPTA; the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP); and the Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV).

The following data was collected from five-year strategic state plans submitted by all states and the District of Columbia on June 30, 2019, for the FYs 2020–2024. Since Colorado and Wyoming lacked five-year plans, one-year strategic plans for the FY 2020–2021 were used for those states.

Policies and initiatives designed to engage fathers that were evidenced in the state plans can generally be categorized as one of the following:

- Staff training/professional development for Child Family Services (CFS) employees concerning father engagement/inclusivity
- Provisions for a specific CFS or Child Welfare Services (CWS) staff member whose primary job responsibility is to engage with fathers or develop resources that appeal to fathers
- Informal or formal fatherhood education and support for fathers with children in the caseload
- Initiatives specifically to engage noncustodial or nonresident fathers with children in the caseload
- Initiatives to engage incarcerated fathers with children in the caseload
- Statewide commissions/committees/councils on fatherhood (divided further into those within CFS and those including, but beyond CFS)

Of the plans published for all 50 states and the District of Columbia, 26 described having substantive, specific, father-supportive initiatives within their statewide Departments of Children and Families. Two additional states, Georgia and South Dakota, referenced supportive initiatives in at least one county but lacked statewide scope. The remaining 22 state plans and the District of Columbia provided no mention of specific father-inclusive policies or initiatives in their respective Child and Family Services department.

Father Engagement Activities that Involve Child Welfare Staff

CFS Staff Training on Father Engagement. The most common initiative states use is staff training with 20 state plans noting father engagement training for CFS workers. CSFPs describe training initiatives to better engage fathers, create a father-supportive environment within CFS offices, and to deconstruct the individual biases that CFS staff members may hold against fathers. Arizona, for example includes “an emphasis on engaging fathers” in the required core staff-training curriculum for the state's Department of Child Safety. New York, similarly, has developed staff training “specific to engaging and locating fathers.” Additionally, New Jersey's plan noted staff training aimed to “promote a culture and practice that prioritizes father engagement and assessment.”

²⁰ Children's Bureau. (2021). *Child and Family Services Plans*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/child-family-services-plans>.

CWS/CFS Father Specialist Staff Member. Three states have a specific child welfare or child and family services staff member whose primary responsibility is to incorporate father-friendly policies, to engage with constituent fathers, or to otherwise advocate for fathers: Delaware, Massachusetts, and Texas. Delaware describes this position as a “statewide fatherhood coordinator” whose duties encompass the “management of the growing work of the county specific fatherhood initiatives.” In Massachusetts, this person similarly “assesses how DCF Area Offices work with fathers” and “participates in . . . the development of Fatherhood Engagement Leadership Teams.” Finally, Texas, has hired a “fatherhood programming specialist” to encourage engagement throughout the state’s Department of Family and Protective Services. Additionally, Rhode Island contracts with an advocacy group which hires male staff and fathers to engage parents and prevent child removals.²¹

Table 2 summarizes, for each state and the District of Columbia, whether the state plan includes CFS staff training on father engagement and/or a CWS/CFS father specialist staff member.

Chapter 3, Table 2. Child Welfare Staff Activities to Engage Fathers Noted in State Child and Family Services Plans

State	Staff Training on Father Engagement	Father Specialist Staff Member	State	Staff Training on Father Engagement	Father Specialist Staff Member
Alabama	Yes		Montana		
Alaska			Nebraska		
Arizona	Yes		Nevada	Yes	
Arkansas			New Hampshire	Yes	
California			New Jersey	Yes	
Colorado	Yes		New Mexico		
Connecticut	Yes		New York	Yes	
Delaware	Yes	Yes	North Carolina	Yes	
DC			North Dakota		
Florida	Yes		Ohio		
Georgia			Oklahoma		
Hawaii	Yes		Oregon	Yes	
Idaho			Pennsylvania		
Illinois	Yes		Rhode Island	Yes	Yes
Indiana	Yes		South Carolina		
Iowa	Yes		South Dakota		
Kansas			Tennessee		
Kentucky			Texas	Yes	Yes
Louisiana			Utah		
Maine			Vermont		
Maryland			Virginia		
Massachusetts	Yes	Yes	Washington	Yes	
Michigan			West Virginia		
Minnesota			Wisconsin		
Mississippi			Wyoming		
Missouri					

Sources: Content analysis of Child and Family Services Plans retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/child-family-services-plans>. Phone call with Lisa Conlan Lewis, the Executive Director of the Parent Support Network of Rhode Island, on July 21, 2020.

Father Engagement Initiatives that Target Child Welfare Clients

Fatherhood Education. Seventeen states offer statewide fatherhood services for fathers with children in the child welfare system and an additional two states (Georgia and South Dakota) offer this type of programming in at least one county. Most of these programs, as noted in Connecticut's state plan, are intended to provide "fathers with the skills and supports they need to be fully involved in their children's lives." Iowa Child Services, for example, provides "a voluntary program for fathers to develop healthy coping, life and parenting skills. The program targets fathers currently involved in the child welfare system due to child physical/emotional abuse, neglect, or child exposure to domestic violence." While not mentioned in their state plan, Texas also has a Responsible Fathering initiative within Child Protective Services to provide men with support and services to help them be fully engaged fathers.²²

Initiatives Specifically for Noncustodial or Nonresident Fathers. Nine state plans note specific initiatives for engaging noncustodial or nonresident fathers. These programs might take the form of parenting education, or employment assistance for noncustodial fathers. Alabama, for example, has formed "a network . . . [of] organizations that work together to help noncustodial parents (mostly fathers), develop positive relationships with their children and to enhance their ability to support their children by providing counseling, education, and employment opportunities" as part of the state's larger fatherhood initiative. Similarly, the Virginia Department of Child and Family Services provides information on a Father Support and Engagement Initiative with the primary goal to promote "policies . . . and strategies to increase noncustodial parents' financial and emotional involvement with their children." Employment and fatherhood initiatives for nonresident fathers with active participation of child support agencies are also discussed in the chapter of this report dealing with Child Support.

Initiatives Specifically for Incarcerated Fathers. Five states noted programs intended specifically to engage incarcerated fathers. For example, Indiana described efforts currently underway to create a "memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Department of Corrections to continue contact between the incarcerated parent(s) and their children." Iowa, similarly, has provided more "extensive, intensive and targeted services to assure . . . incarcerated fathers maintain an on-going presence in their child's life." State offerings of parenting classes for incarcerated parents noted on Department of Corrections websites are presented in the chapter of this report dealing with Criminal Justice.

Fatherhood Commissions, Councils, and Committees. Twelve states provide information in their state plans on statewide commissions, councils, or committees that advocate for fathers and amplify the voices of fathers in the policymaking process. Four of these 12 states—Connecticut, Hawaii, New Jersey, and Ohio—report that their statewide commissions involve multiple agencies in addition to Child and Family Services. The remaining eight state plans reference fatherhood advocacy commissions, committees, or councils within their Departments of Child and Family Services. These 12 states also report providing programming for fathers and/or staff training on father inclusion. Fatherhood commissions, councils, and committees are also discussed in the chapter of this report dealing with Responsible Fatherhood.

Table 3 summarizes, for each state and the District of Columbia, whether their Child and Family Services Plan includes fatherhood education; initiatives specifically for noncustodial or nonresident fathers; initiatives specifically for incarcerated fathers; and fatherhood commissions, councils or committees in which the Child and Family Services agency participates.

²² Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. (2021). *Responsible fathering*. Retrieved from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Family_Support/Fathering.asp.

Chapter 3, Table 3. Activities to Engage Fathers in Child Welfare Cases Noted in State Child and Family Services Plans

State	Parenting Skills / Fatherhood Classes	Programming for Noncustodial Parents	Programming for Incarcerated Parents	Fatherhood Commissions, Councils, or Committees
Alabama	Yes	Yes		Yes
Alaska				
Arizona				
Arkansas				
California	Yes		Yes	
Colorado	Yes			
Connecticut	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*
Delaware	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DC				
Florida	Yes			
Georgia				
Hawaii	Yes			Yes*
Idaho				
Illinois		Yes		
Indiana	Yes		Yes	Yes
Iowa	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Kansas				
Kentucky				
Louisiana				
Maine				
Maryland				
Massachusetts	Yes			
Michigan	Yes			
Minnesota				
Mississippi				
Missouri				
Montana				
Nebraska				
Nevada				
New Hampshire	Yes			Yes
New Jersey				Yes*
New Mexico				
New York	Yes			Yes
North Carolina	Yes	Yes		
North Dakota				
Ohio				Yes*
Oklahoma				
Oregon				
Pennsylvania				
Rhode Island	Yes			Yes
South Carolina		Yes		
South Dakota				
Tennessee				
Texas	Yes			
Utah				
Vermont				
Virginia	Yes	Yes		Yes
Washington				Yes
West Virginia				
Wisconsin		Yes		
Wyoming				

Source: Content analysis of Child and Family Services Plans retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/child-family-services-plans>.

Note: * indicates that statewide fatherhood commissions involve multiple-agencies in addition of Child and Family Services.



Insights from Efforts Dealing with Research, Children's Trusts, and Policy

Fatherhood Research and Demonstration Projects

A number of states have been involved with federally funded research efforts to improve the engagement of fathers with children in the child welfare system. Conducted 15 years ago in Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Tennessee, *What about the Dads?* assessed the extent to which child welfare agencies identify, locate, and involve nonresident fathers in case decision making and permanency planning. It found that fathers could be found in only 55% of the cases, with workers reporting that 60% of fathers were unreachable by phone and 31% reporting that the father had been incarcerated at some point in the case. The study also found that workers relied chiefly on contacts with mothers and maternal relatives to reach fathers, and that they rarely used alternative sources of information such as child support agencies (20%) or the state parent locator service (33%).²³

A second demonstration project, the Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF), was conducted in Indiana, Texas, Washington, and Colorado. Created by the Children's Bureau in October 2006, the project involved two major practice interventions: gender-specific first contact with the nonresident fathers and a 20-week facilitated peer support group intervention using a 12-week curriculum designed by the QIC NRF project staff, followed by eight weeks of site-specific sessions. The study found that only 3% of the fathers of children removed from their homes during the project period attended at least three program sessions. Reasons for nonparticipation included being outside the service area (23%), being incarcerated (13%), and work conflicts that precluded participating in a 20-session intervention (11%). More significantly, many fathers could not be contacted in the first place, either because they were unknown (19%) or because identification information about them was insufficient (34%). Contact could not be achieved with another 20% of fathers, even though contact information was available.²⁴

A third demonstration project conducted in California, Colorado, Connecticut, and North Carolina, recently concluded. Funded by the Office of Family Assistance of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and conducted by Mathematica and the University of Denver, the project implemented and tested the use of the Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) to strengthen the engagement of fathers and paternal relatives with children involved in the child welfare system. After engaging in BSC, most of the 57 Improvement Team members considered themselves more knowledgeable and reported shifts and changes in their own behavior and the behavior of others in engaging fathers and paternal relatives. They also planned to keep using elements of the BSC after it formally concluded and thereby achieve greater cultural shift.²⁵

23 Malm, K., Murray, J., & Geen, R. (2006). *What about the dads? Child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve nonresident fathers*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/what-about-dads-child-welfare-agencies-efforts-identify-locate-involve-nonresident-fathers-0>.

24 Thoennes, N., Harper, C., Folaron, G., Malm, K., Bai, J., & Kaunelis, R. (2012). *Identifying, locating, contacting and engaging nonresident fathers of children in foster care*. *National Association of Social Workers*, 2.

25 Fung, N., Bellamy, J., Abendroth, E., Mittone, D., Bess, R., & Stagner, M. (2021). *A seat at the table: Piloting continuous learning to engage fathers and parental relatives in child welfare* (OPRE Report #2021-62). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/seat-table-piloting-continuous-learning-engage-fathers-and-parental-relatives-child>.



Children's Trust Programs

The Children's Trust Fund Alliance, a nonprofit organization that supports state Children's Trust and Prevention Funds in their mission to prevent child maltreatment, describes the purpose of State Children's Trust and Prevention Funds (CTFs) this way:²⁶

- Provide positive changes in systems, policies, and practices in their states to promote well-being for children, families, and communities.
- Hold vital and unique roles in their states as funders, collaborators, catalysts, implementers, overseers, and evaluators of the largest collective body of child abuse prevention work in the country.
- Invest \$200 million each year in community-based and statewide prevention and family strengthening strategies and programs.

Children's Trust Funds exist in 47 states and the District of Columbia. Only Delaware, Florida, and Illinois do not have such Trust Funds. A brief survey of the members of the Trust Fund Alliance elicited responses from 15 of the 48 programs (31%). Of these 15 programs, 11 reported some type of activity to engage fathers. In three states, father engagement efforts were being conducted in multiple settings; in five states, they were being conducted statewide. For example, Massachusetts reported having programs for fathers, doing staff training on father engagement, and organizing communities of practice for practitioners working with fathers. Ohio described a father program focused on screening for paternal depression. Wisconsin offers two fatherhood seminars each year in addition to other trainings. Children's Trust Program representatives in 36 states did not respond to the survey.

Thriving Families, Safer Children

Thriving Families, Safer Children is a prevention initiative that aims to mobilize community resources to strengthen new families and thereby reduce placements in the child welfare system. It is being conducted by Prevent Child Abuse America with support from the U.S. Children's Bureau, Casey Family Programs, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. It aims to achieve policy and systemic reforms that address racism, biases, and inequality in the child welfare system. The initiative's 2020 partnership with four states was recently augmented with the addition of 16 states, the District of Columbia, and the White Earth Nation.²⁷ Although the 2020 programs focus primarily on supporting mothers, they are expected to involve fathers. For example, the Colorado Thriving Families program, MotherWise, offers six weeks of one-on-one coaching for pregnant and new mothers, but also couple workshops to improve communication skills for couples using the Prevention and Relationship Education Program (PREP) curriculum.

²⁶ Children's Trust Fund Alliance. (2021). *State Children's Trust and Prevention Funds*. Retrieved from <https://ctfalliance.org/childrens-trust-funds/>.

²⁷ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021). *National partnership to reinvent child welfare expands*. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/blog/national-partnership-to-reinvent-child-welfare-expands>.

The Families First Prevention Services Act

The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 (Family First Act) aims to prevent foster-care entry by permitting states to use federal funding for prevention interventions with at-risk families.^{28, 29} To qualify for funds, each state must file a prevention program five-year plan. To obtain approval, proposed prevention programs must reach certain evidentiary criteria and be rated by the Title IV-D Prevention Services Clearinghouse as promising, supported, or well-supported. As of September 2021, 14 states and the District of Columbia had approved plans and 17 other states had submitted plans to the Children's Bureau for review and approval.^{30, 31} Although there was excitement about the possibility of fatherhood programs being able to qualify for Family First Act prevention funding, no fatherhood curricula have been rated as meeting requisite evidentiary criteria.³² A review of the approved plans indicates, however, that five states reference fathers or paternity in the context of providing services. Iowa's plan mentions funding to provide family preservation services and notes Caring Dads and Parent Partners as examples of those services.³³ The Kin-Tech program in Kansas assists kinship families, families where children live with non-related kin, with family law issues such as paternity.³⁴ Kentucky's plan mentions fathers in regard to the Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Team (START), an intensive child welfare program for families with co-occurring substance use and child maltreatment. Also, within the context of a prevention plan for pregnant and parenting youth, including the identification of parenting fathers is discussed.³⁵ In Maine, it is noted that statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Councils serve special populations and offer programming for fathers and for co-parenting/separated families as well as for substance-affected families and prenatal families.³⁶ Nebraska's plan indicates that it is not necessary for paternity to have been established in order for a youth to be defined as a parenting foster youth and eligible for services.³⁷

Table 4 summarizes, for each state and the District of Columbia, whether the state has participated in a federal demonstration project that focuses on father engagement in child welfare cases, whether their Children's Trust reports engaging in fatherhood activities and initiatives (and whether these activities and initiatives are reported to be statewide), and whether they are part of the Thriving Families, Safer Children partnership. We also note states that have received approval for their Families First Act plans (and whether the approved plan references fathers or paternity in the context of providing services).

28 Family First Prevention Services Act. (2018). *Part of division E in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018* (P.L. 115-123).

29 National Conference for State Legislatures. (2020). *Families First Prevention Services Act*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/family-first-prevention-services-act-ffpsa.aspx>.

30 Jordan, E., & McKlindon, A. (2020). *Implications of COVID-19 on the research and evaluation provisions of the Family First Act*. Child Trends. Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/implications-of-covid-19-on-the-research-and-evaluation-provisions-of-the-family-first-act>.

31 Children's Bureau. (2020). *Status of submitted Title IV-D Prevention Program Five-Year Plans*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data/status-submitted-title-iv-e-prevention-program-five-year-plans>.

32 Administration for Children and Families. (2021). *Title VI-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse*. Retrieved from https://preventionservices.abtsites.com/program?combine_1=&page=0.

33 Iowa Department of Human Services. (201). *State Title IV-E Prevention Services Plan*. Retrieved from https://dhs.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/FFY_2020-2024_IV-E_Prevention_Services_Plan.pdf?033120211216.

34 Kansas Department for Children and Families. (2019). *Kansas Prevention Plan*. Retrieved from https://familyfirstact.org/sites/default/files/KS%20Family%20First%20IVE_Prevention_Plan%20Approved.pdf.

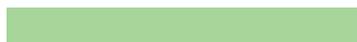
35 Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. (2019). *Title IV-E Prevention Plan*. Retrieved from https://familyfirstact.org/sites/default/files/KY%20Cabinet%20for%20Health%20and%20Family%20Services_Prevention%20Plan%208.23.19%20FINAL%20with%20watermark.pdf.

36 Maine Department of Health and Human Services. (2021). *Maine Family First Prevention Services State Plan*. Retrieved from <http://legislature.maine.gov/doc/6664>.

37 Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. (2020). *Nebraska's Five-Year Title IV-E Prevention Program Plan: 3rd Edition*. Retrieved from <https://dhhs.ne.gov/Documents/NE%20FFPSA%205%20Year%20Plan.pdf>.

Chapter 3, Table 4. State Fatherhood Research, Children's Trusts, and Policy Efforts in Child Welfare

State	Demonstration Projects on Father Engagement	Children's Trust Programs with Fatherhood Activities	Thriving Families, Safer Children Partnership	States with Approved FFPSA Plan
Alabama		Yes		
Alaska				
Arizona	Yes	Yes*	Yes	
Arkansas				Yes
California	Yes		Yes	
Colorado	Yes		Yes	
Connecticut	Yes			
Delaware		No Children's Trust		
DC			Yes	Yes
Florida		No Children's Trust	Yes	
Georgia		Yes		
Hawaii				Yes
Idaho			Yes	
Illinois	Yes	No Children's Trust		
Indiana			Yes	
Iowa				Yes**
Kansas			Yes	Yes**
Kentucky			Yes	Yes**
Louisiana				
Maine				Yes**
Maryland	Yes		Yes	Yes
Massachusetts		Yes		
Michigan	Yes	Yes		
Minnesota			Yes	
Mississippi				
Missouri		Yes		
Montana				
Nebraska			Yes	Yes**
Nevada				
New Hampshire			Yes	
New Jersey			Yes	
New Mexico			Yes	
New York			Yes	
North Carolina				
North Dakota				Yes



Ohio	Yes		
Oklahoma		Yes	
Oregon		Yes	Yes
Pennsylvania			
Rhode Island			
South Carolina		Yes	
South Dakota			
Tennessee			
Texas	Yes*	Yes	
Utah			Yes
Vermont			
Virginia		Yes	Yes
Washington			Yes
West Virginia			Yes
Wisconsin	Yes*		
Wyoming	Yes*		

Sources. Malm K., Murray J., & Geen, R. (2006). *What about the dads? Child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve nonresident fathers*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/what-about-dads-child-welfare-agencies-efforts-identify-locate-involve-nonresident-fathers-0>.

Thoennes, N., Harper, C., Folaron, G., Malm, K., Bai, J., & Kaunelis, R. (2012). Identifying, locating, contacting and engaging nonresident fathers of children in foster care. *National Association of Social Workers*, 2.

Fung, N., Bellamy, J., Abendroth, E., Mittone, D., Bess, R., & Stagner, M. (2021). *A seat at the table: Piloting continuous learning to engage fathers and parental relatives in child welfare* (OPRE Report #2021-62). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/seat-table-piloting-continuous-learning-engage-fathers-and-parental-relatives-child>.

Children's Bureau. (2020). *Status of submitted Title IV-D Prevention Program Five-Year Plans*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data/status-submitted-title-iv-e-prevention-program-five-year-plans>.

Content analysis of approved Title IV-E Prevention Program Five-Year Plans retrieved from <https://familyfirstact.org/>.

Notes: * indicates that that fatherhood activities are reported to be statewide.

** indicates that the approved plan references fathers or paternity in the context of providing services.

Other Information Needed to Assess How Child Welfare Works with Fathers

Other information would add to our knowledge about father engagement in child welfare agencies but is not systematically collected from all states:

- **The degree to which agencies are successful in locating fathers.**

Although some data sources, such as the CFRS, document father engagement, there does not appear to be a single resource responsible for recording how often child welfare cases involve nonresident fathers, how often such fathers are named, how often they are located, and how often they agree to participate in cases.

- **The use of alternative location resources such as the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS).**

Early identification is a key to ensuring father contact, but we have little information on the methods caseworkers use to identify and locate him. According to one study, only a third use the FPLS and only 20% report contacting the local child support agency for help with location. Agency tracking of the use of various identification and location methods would likely improve rates of successful location and contact.



- **The degree to which noncustodial fathers are used as placements rather than foster care.**

It is unclear how often nonresident fathers are evaluated as a suitable out-of-home placement for children who cannot safely reside at home. Agencies give preference to relative placements, but how often the placement is with the nonoffending parent is unknown.

- **The degree to which paternal relatives are used as placement options rather than maternal kinship care or foster care.**

Even when fathers may not be the right out-of-home placement, it is possible that paternal relatives would be willing and able to care for the child. Agencies and courts that use techniques such as Family Group Conferences or dependency mediation stress the importance of bringing paternal relatives to the table, but it not known how commonly this happens or what the barriers to engaging paternal relatives might be.

- **The participation of fathers and representatives of father-serving groups in state-level parent advisory groups created for the Family First Act as well as in service delivery.**

To date there is no information on the composition and activities of required parent advisory groups for the Family First Act. Nor do we know whether and how interventions being funded through the program will serve fathers, including those who are nonresident.

Conclusions

Father engagement with their children in child welfare cases is associated with a higher likelihood of reunification, a lower risk of adoption, and a lower likelihood of subsequent maltreatment. Despite these benefits, caseworker practice lags and assessments find that parent engagement occurs far more frequently with mothers rather than fathers and paternal relatives.

This compilation shows that some child welfare agencies are adopting training programs on father engagement and that three states have added staff with explicit father engagement responsibilities. In one federal demonstration project, agencies in four states experimented with the use of fatherhood organizations to assist with their father outreach and engagement efforts. In another federal demonstration project, six child welfare agencies in four states conducted culture change processes with 57 child welfare professionals to prioritize the engagement of fathers and paternal relatives. Children's Trust Funds in 11 states report pursuing father engagement activities.

Virtually all states need to take more concerted and focused steps to achieve the identification, location, and engagement of fathers and paternal relatives, particularly at the earliest stages of case processing when success is most likely. None of these activities are regularly tracked. One logical place for this information to be recorded is the State Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Policies Database, which compiles state-by-state data on the definitions and policies that states use in their surveillance of child maltreatment, including required investigation activities. Funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the project is led by Mathematica in partnership with Child Trends.³⁸

³⁸ Mathematica. (2021). *State Child Abuse & Neglect Policies Database*. Retrieved from <https://www.scanpoliciesdatabase.com/>.



The Board of Directors of the National Child Support Enforcement Association has called for more coordination between child support and child welfare agencies to improve the timely and correct identification of a child's parents and relatives. Through the Federal Parent Locator Services (FPLS), the child support agency often has information on the identity of parents, their legal parental status, their location, and the identity of relatives. Although child welfare agencies have the ability to access that information, few have pursued access.³⁹

With respect to the use of alternative location resources, accountability might be improved by requiring data on caseworker use of FPLS and other child support resources. Other improvements might be achieved through agency partnerships with fatherhood initiatives and activists who often enjoy more credibility and rapport with nonresident fathers. This is being done in Rhode Island, where the Department of Children, Youth and Families contracts with the Parent Support Network, which hires male staff and fathers to engage parents and prevent child removals. Although the recently enacted Family First Act FFPSA Prevention Clearinghouse does not recognize any fatherhood program as an evidence-based prevention intervention that qualifies for support, it does require the use of parent advisory groups, to which fathers might be added, and fathers may well be the legitimate target of approved prevention interventions. In a similar vein, several states have initiated fatherhood committees within their child welfare agencies or included the child welfare agency in multi-agency initiatives aimed at furthering father engagement in programs and policies. It is also hoped that the Thriving Families, Safer Children initiative, a national partnership to reinvent child welfare, will include father engagement.

With few exceptions, the engagement of fathers and paternal relatives in child welfare agencies remains in its infancy. Hopefully, this compilation highlights steps that agency might take to move the agenda forward.



39 National Child Support Enforcement Association. (2020). *Resolution for a national review of child support and child welfare referral and coordination policies*. Retrieved from https://www.ncsea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Resolution-for-a-National-Review-of-Child-Support-and-Child-Welfare-Referral-and-Coordination-Policies_2020.pdf.

Fatherhood Research & Practice Network

About the FRPN

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To the best of our knowledge, the information we provide is current as of report publication and/or the date indicated in the report and table sources. Nevertheless, since state policies and programs continually evolve, there are inevitable changes and developments that we have not captured. The views expressed in the report are those of the authors.

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