

At A Glance: How Involved are Fathers with their Children? A Study of Fatherhood Programs

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There is currently little published information describing the extent to which fatherhood program attendees are involved with their children. We sought to address this issue, drawing on interviews with 195 nonresidential, low-income fathers enrolled in programs and a comparison sample of 387 nonresidential, low-income fathers living in similar communities.

We assessed three dimensions of involvement.

Engagement: direct interaction with children, including caretaking and shared activities.

Accessibility: fathers' availability to their children.

Responsibility: the fathers' parenting role, such as ensuring that children were cared for and had access to resources including food and clothing.

Highlights: Fathers' Reports of Involvement

Fathers who lived with target children reported greater involvement than those who did not. Taking residency into account, there were no differences between program participants and non-participants. This may be due in part to the fact that many fathers in the participant group were in the early stages of participation in the fatherhood programs.

Engagement: More than 40% of nonresidential fathers reported hugging and sharing meals with children more than once per week. Over 90% of residential fathers reported hugging and sharing meals with children this often.

Accessibility: Among nonresidential fathers, 28% had no face-to-face contact with children in the previous month, and more than half had not spent any nights with their children in this time.

Responsibility: A substantial majority of fathers (64-96%, depending on residency and program participation) took part in deciding how to discipline children and how much money to spend on their clothes.

Implications for Programs

Providers may want to focus on nonresidential fathers' coparenting relationships in order to encourage shared decision making and responsibility.

Implications for Researchers

Researchers may want to conduct longitudinal studies to determine the extent to which similarities between program participant and non-participant fathers are due to selection issues and/or the effectiveness of fatherhood programs.