

# PRACTICE NOTES

For North Carolina's Child Welfare Workers

From the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program

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*In summarizing recent research, we try to give you new ideas for refining your practice. However, this publication is not intended to replace child welfare training, regular supervision, or peer consultation—only to enhance them.*

## Let us hear from you!

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## FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD WELFARE

*This article is adapted from material that first appeared in Best Practice/Next Practice (Summer 2002), the newsletter of the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice. We encourage interested readers to obtain this excellent, 40-page publication at <[www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp)>*

On almost every indicator of child well-being, children today fare worse than their counterparts did just a generation ago.

The reason proposed by some is the dramatic rise, over the last 30 years, in the number of children living in fatherless households. In 1960, less than 8 million children were living in families where the father was absent. In 2002 it was 24 million. Where are the fathers?

Divorce, single unwed motherhood, child support and welfare policies, and incarceration are the prime suspects in their disappearance.

Couple this with the pervasive attitude, from

school systems and human services to the media, that "Dads don't matter. Men are inept parents."

Even those men who wish to be involved with their children, regardless of their marital or financial status, have often been overlooked or marginalized.

Yet research shows that children growing up without fathers are more likely to fail at school or to drop out, engage in early sexual activity, develop drug and alcohol problems, and experience or perpetrate violence. *cont. p. 2*



**Why are so few dads involved in the child welfare system?**

Photo Illustration

## FORGETTING FATHERS

Daniel was 3 and Dawn was 4 when their mother took them and disappeared.

Her estranged husband, a limousine driver, searched obsessively for his children. He posted rewards, enlisted help from a retired police officer, and hired a private detective, all to no avail.

As six years passed, he took to driving slowly through residential neighborhoods, looking for two blond children who looked like him.

"I never gave up hope," said the father, "But it was as if they were dead."

Instead they were in foster care. In 1991 the authorities had found the children alone in their mother's apartment. They were emaciated and had evidently been abused.

But for three more years, through 33 court hearings, multiple foster placements, and the children's complaints of new abuse, the foster care system failed to tell their father.

Adapted from the "When the Foster Care System Forgets Fathers," by Nina Bernstein, *New York Times*, May 4, 2000.

After Daniel had been placed in a foster home, his emotional trauma brought beatings, not therapy. Separated from his sister and transferred to a group residence where bigger boys routinely abused him, he began openly longing for his father.

He says the caseworker told him, "Don't think your father is going to come and rescue you, because your father's dead."

In fact, the father was living nearby with a listed telephone number.

The father finally received notifications about his children as part of a routine effort to free the children for adoption.

But reunion came too late. The children had no recollection of him as their father. Dawn, 17, ran to the streets before he could win her back. Daniel had a mental breakdown and was in a therapeutic foster home.

# FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD WELFARE

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FATHERS

A good father is critical to the optimal development and well-being of a child. A father's role is more than that of economic provider and includes nurturing, caregiving, and emotional support in both obvious and subtle ways. Successful fatherhood correlates strongly with many attributes of children successfully growing up:

### *Healthy child development.*

This includes physical and mental health habits, success in school, self-respect and self-esteem, respect for others and for appropriate authority, constructive social and peer activities, as well as the avoidance of substance abuse, delinquency, and other forms of high-risk behaviors.

**Gender identity.** An appropriate male role model is believed to help boys seeking to create and understand their place in the world, and girls formulating the terms of respectful and

## POTENTIAL IMPACT OF HAVING AN ABSENT FATHER

Children who grow up in father-absent homes are significantly more likely to do poorly on almost any measure of child well-being. For example:

- Violent criminals are overwhelmingly males who grew up without fathers, including 72% of adolescent murderers and 70% of long-term prison inmates.
- Children in father-absent homes are also more likely to be suspended from school, or to drop out; be treated for an emotional or behavioral problem; commit suicide as adolescents; and be victims of child abuse or neglect.

Source: *Best Practice/Next Practice*

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## HOW FATHERS ENHANCE CHILD FUNCTIONING

As part of the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect (LONGSCAN) consortium, researchers Dubowitz and colleagues examined fathers' effects on the functioning of 677 six-year-olds. The children rated support from their fathers or father figures in terms of companionship, emotional support, practical support, and tangible support.

Children who reported stronger father figure support felt more competent and socially accepted and had fewer depressive symptoms. Non-biological father figures had just as positive an influence on the children as did biological fathers. Father support did not affect children's externalizing behavior problems or cognitive development.

This study supports the idea that father involvement benefits children. Based on this evidence, child welfare workers should encourage positive interaction and support between fathers (including father figures) and their children.

Source: *Best Practice/Next Practice*, Summer 2002



happy relationships with the opposite sex.

**Responsible sexuality.** Understanding the emotional and social prerequisites and the consequences of sexual activity depends on a father's involvement. Programs to reduce teen pregnancy are a significant focus of father involvement initiatives.

**Emotional and social commitment.** The invisible bonds of affection and protection are strengthened in children through the demonstration of these bonds in day-to-day father involvement.

**Financial security.** Family self-sufficiency is greatly enhanced, even in poorly paid sectors of the economy, where father involvement is strong.

Programs to help men be better fathers, understand their roles and responsibilities of rearing a child, learn about child development, find out alternative disciplinary options, and, in some cases, how to be a man, are emerging nationwide. For example, Virginia had 15 programs for father involvement in 1997; in 2002 they had more than 80. Head Start programs, community-based initiatives such as the National Fatherhood Ini-

tiative, and programs for incarcerated fathers are developing and showing results.

But what about involving fathers and other males in child welfare?

## FATHERS AND CHILD WELFARE

If children's well-being is so closely tied to father involvement, why are so few fathers involved in the child welfare system? Does our family-centered practice truly include all the family? Or does "parent involvement" too often translate into "mother involvement" and family-centered practice mean only mother-and child-centered practice?

While research shows father involvement benefits children's well-being, the child welfare system seems to contradict this in its practice at all levels of the continuum—in child protective services, foster care, kinship care, adoption, and family preservation.

In focus groups of fathers and child welfare workers the issues facing fathers in child welfare elicited some sharp responses. Overall, focus group participants who worked in child welfare admitted that it was easier to work with families made up of single mothers and children.

One worker with 24 *cont. p. 3*

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years of experience stated flatly: “We don’t involve fathers. The system is mother focused.”

Another said, “If the mother says the father is dead, we stop right there. It quite simply is easier than trying to locate the father, especially if we feel the mom will not be cooperative.”

Yet another worker made the point, “A father in the family makes it harder. It’s easier to let dad stay in the background and not deal with him. Then I don’t have to deal with my own issues about men. It is easier to deal with mom only.”

Clearly, from this discussion, mothers are the gate keepers to the father’s participation. Mothers have to believe that the family will benefit from the father’s participation. Furthermore, this discussion implies a systemic bias for excluding fathers. It is easier to manage the ongoing interactions over the course of a case by working only with one parent, the mother. In frontline practice, the potential for a compliant relationship with the mother takes precedence over a comprehensive working relationship with all the family.

### **IMPROVING INVOLVEMENT**

There are many reasons why fathers and men are “missing” when it comes to child welfare. These reasons are magnified within the distressed circumstances that are characteristic of the child welfare population. To address this absence of fathers, with the goal of creating greater accountability and responsibility on all sides, we need to begin with this cornerstone fact: fathers and men are excluded within the policy, programs, and practice of child welfare.

To address the challenges of involving fathers in child welfare we must understand the following:

**Fatherhood is fragile.** Nonresidential fathers in child welfare are at very high risk for noninvolvement with their children. All child welfare professionals need to recognize the many possible reasons for this, and not view it as either a father’s lack of interest in the children, the removal of a “risk factor,” or a means to streamline case planning. Instead, we need to shore up these fragile relationships.

Legal paternity and child support payments create the critical institutional supports for constructive father involvement. But they also raise many issues. Policies requiring TANF/Work First reimbursement with child support dollars hearken back to earlier policies that punished two-parent involvement and created

cont. p. 4

## **STUDY OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN KINSHIP CARE**

*Adapted and reprinted from Best Practice/Next Practice (Summer 2002) <[www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp)>.*

In the late 1990’s researcher John O’Donnell conducted a study to learn about casework practice with fathers of children in kinship foster care. The study gathered data through in-person interviews with 54 caseworkers responsible for services to 100 children in kinship foster care. It focused on 82 fathers whose identities were known to the workers, who were living, and whose parental rights had not been terminated. Most of the children and fathers were African American. The study found:

### **Workers Lacked Information about Fathers**

- They did not know the marital status of 41% of the fathers nor the housing status of 54%. (Of the 48 fathers whose marital status was known, 71% had never married and only 6% were married to the child’s mother.)
- They had no information about the education or income of most of the fathers.

### **Workers Focused on Fathers’ Deficits**

- For 67% of the fathers, workers identified problems that affected the father’s ability to care for his child.
- 50% of the time, workers said they did not know whether the fathers had any strengths for caring for their children; they stated that 15% of the fathers had *no* strengths.

### **Fathers Were Not Involved in Planning or Assessments**

- 82% of fathers had not contributed to the most recent assessment.
- 90% had not participated in drafting the most recent service plan for the child and family. Workers saw fathers’ lack of participation as an impediment to case planning in only 16% of these cases.

### **Workers Did Not Talk about Fathers with Others**

- Workers had at least monthly conferences with their supervisors. In 84% of the cases, workers reported no discussions about the father with the supervisor.
- In 83% of the cases, workers did not note any discussion about the father in their contacts with external agencies such as the juvenile court or community service providers.

### **Workers Often Did Not Try to Find Fathers**

- Workers typically made monthly visits to the homes of foster parents related to the father. In 61% of these cases, not a single reference to the father was made during these home visits with the fathers’ relatives, even though the worker often did not know the father’s whereabouts.

These and other findings of the study raise serious concerns about workers’ willingness and ability to work with fathers whose children are in foster care, especially minority fathers. Based on his findings, O’Donnell recommends that child welfare workers and their agencies take steps to develop workers’ knowledge about fathers and how to work with them.

## FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD WELFARE continued from page 3

incentives for single-parent families. An implication is that difficulties arising in poor families as a result of legal paternity and child support do not necessarily disqualify a man from involvement with his children.

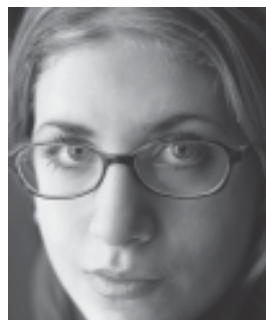
Father involvement is closely connected to the relationship to the mother. The father's relationship with the mother is the single greatest determinant of successful father involvement. Mothers exercise disproportionate control over parenting. Because of this, they need to understand and participate in a family system that is more open to male involvement, but in ways that does not threaten their own roles. Mediation and negotiation to promote the advantages of a father's involvement needs to be a standing and ongoing opportunity.

We have learned, however, that one-sided advocacy for fathers' rights is likely to increase polarization and exacerbate existing tensions between parents. A negotiation approach is also critical as domestic violence services grow and confront the difficult practice challenges of assuring family safety and well-being.

Grandparents and extended family influence father involvement. The mother's parents and kin influence access to children. The mother's parents' acceptance or rejection of the father can be critical to sustaining, rebuilding, or eliminating a father's role. Fathers' parents and kin are a resource for developing a new father's identity, especially if he is a young or teenaged father. The older generation can also be a force for maintaining conventional, and sometimes unproductive, gender roles.

We need to understand the dynamics of the intergenerational families and see their strengths. Social network service models, such as child and family team meetings, need to incorporate the knowledge and skills necessary to work with intergenerational dynamics to help fathers gain and maintain access to their children.

Father involvement requires



**Mothers are often the gate keepers to the father's participation in child welfare.**

understanding and transitions. Many fathers have difficulty sustaining emotional ties and social commitments when they experience risk factors such as substance abuse, poverty, mental health issues, and unemployment. To keep them involved requires understanding and emphasizing life transitions. We need to

give both residential and nonresidential fathers opportunities to understand the changing roles that accompany major milestones such as pregnancy, birth, and rearing a child.

Increasing their ability to provide familiar, stable, daily routines will help create important resources in a child's life. Fathers' participation during birthdays, holidays, school graduations, and other rituals are the building blocks of their engagement.

Not surprisingly, men may need help in transitions from married or residential fatherhood to divorced or non-residential fatherhood. cont. p. 5

### CHILDREN WITH NONCUSTODIAL FATHERS

*Reprinted from "Getting Noncustodial Dads Involved in the Lives of Foster Children" (Malm, 2003)*

	Foster Children	Children Served by Child Welfare Agencies	Children in General Population
<b>Children with noncustodial fathers</b>	80%	72%	28%
• <b>Paternity known<sup>a</sup></b>	81%	85%	60%
— <b>Contact with father in past year</b>	54%	66%	72%
— <b>Father contributed to child's support</b>	16%	40%	42%

Sources: Urban Institute tabulations of 1994 National Study of Protective, Preventive, and Reunification Services data, UHHS, and tabulations of Urban Institute's 1999 National Survey of America's Families (NSAF).

<sup>a</sup>Data on children in the general population are from the 1999 NSAF, which asked if paternity had been "legally established." Data on foster children and children served by child welfare agencies are from the 1994 National Study of Protective, Preventive, and Reunification Services, USDHHS, and are based on a caseworker's response to the question, "Is paternity of child known?"



continued from page 4

More intense services, monitoring, supervision, and support are needed to help fathers build continuity in the relationships that become fragile at these times. Divorce or separation within foster families is also important to consider.

Assessments, case planning, and case reviews should not be seen as opportunities to confirm a father's problems and deficiencies, but to promote responsible fathering. Protocols and standards for locating fathers, for engaging fathers through appropriate outreach activities, and for making them a part of child welfare case plans need to be included. "Reasonable efforts" to locate and involve fathers need to be part of child welfare case-work practice.

**Father involvement relies on integrating an employment dimension into child welfare.** Successful father involvement depends on a practice based on a solid understanding of the difficulties and challenges of balancing work and family, especially within the economically distressed circumstances prevalent in child welfare.

**Father involvement requires assistance in building relationships with community systems.** Fathers whose families are involved with child welfare have the additional burdens of meeting the terms and complying with many community systems: the courts, child support agencies, child welfare, social/health/mental health services, and schools. Without adequate community-based resources for coaching, brokering, advocating, and supporting fathers, adding these tasks to a father's everyday life can be highly stressful. This stress affects a father's relationship within the family.

## FINDING FATHERS

*Adapted from the Nat'l Res. Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning (Mallon, 2003)*

Sometimes we must find fathers before we can work with them. Although we should make a concerted effort to engage the fathers of all child welfare-involved children, finding the fathers of children in foster care is especially important. As Malm (2003) explains, "Not only do many of [the Adoption and Safe Families Act's] mandates necessitate it, but anecdotal evidence also suggests that quicker, more informed permanency outcomes are likely for children in the foster care system if fathers are more consistently identified and located."

**Sometimes we must find fathers before we can work with them.**

Agencies have several resources available to them for this task. On the federal level, ASFA specifically authorized child welfare agencies to use the Federal Parent Locator Service, which is used by support enforcement programs, to find fathers and other relatives. Unfortunately, some child welfare practitioners are unaware that this resource can be used by the child welfare system (Malm, 2003).

Another promising practice is collaboration. For example, an evaluation of South Carolina's Department of Social Services' diligent search project, which facilitates collaboration between child welfare and child support programs, showed that missing parents were located in over 75% of the cases referred by child welfare staff; more than half of these parents were located in less than a month. Most were fathers. The evaluation also showed that in 15% of families there were referrals to locate more than one father. This occurred in cases involving undetermined paternity and in families in which children had different fathers. Ten percent of fathers were found through the prison, probation, or parole systems.

Up to this point, South Carolina's project has focused on identifying and locating fathers primarily for the purposes of expediting the termination of parental rights, thereby hastening adoption proceedings. Few programs, with the exception of the parental involvement project in Illinois, focus attention on finding non-custodial fathers as placement resources.

### **Father involvement depends on fathers working with fathers.**

In the literature and program review on which these recommendations are based, peer support—fathers working with fathers—is the glue holding programs together. Child welfare workers who are male and have the knowledge and skills can make a big difference. "Support fathers," used as a component of safety planning, can make a difference. Father-to-father support within community-based partnerships works.

or creating a new program category to enhance male involvement at any one point in the system. The issue of father and male involvement is a deeply systemic one that touches on multiple points of the child welfare system. However, we hope that the information and resources presented in this issue will wrap the fabric of hope around father involvement in child welfare, enhancing safety, permanency, and well-being for children—and their fathers. ♦

### **CONCLUSION**

Addressing father and male involvement is not an easy task. It is not just a matter of adding statements about the role of fathers to training materials,

## WHAT CAN CHILD WELFARE WORKERS DO TO INVOLVE FATHERS?

This article is adapted from an article that first appeared in *Best Practice/Next Practice* (Summer 2002), the newsletter of the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice <[www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp)>.

The premise of this issue is that when it comes to including and serving the fathers of the children involved with child welfare, many child welfare agencies fall short. Though they think of themselves as family-centered, in truth their practice is really more “mother-and-child-centered.”

If you are at all persuaded by what you have read so far, the next natural, obvious question is: how can I and my agency improve our involvement of fathers? We hope the following suggestions will help you formulate an answer to this question, one that will help you ensure that your practice truly includes all family members.

**Engagement.** Encourage mothers to identify fathers early in the case. If they do not cooperate, use alternative means to identify and locate fathers. Possibilities include: interview relatives and family friends, access TANF and child support information, or use the court if necessary.

Engage fathers in ways relevant to their situation and sensitive to their culture. Make every effort to gain the support of mothers and reduce any barriers the mother has established that prevents a father’s engagement, using mediation and negotiation if necessary.

Establish trust and honesty with the father by clearly explaining the current situation, his role, your role, agency expectations, and all relevant policies. Continually state your willingness and desire to establish and/or maintain the father-child relationship.

Use child and family team meetings to bring all adults committed to the child together so they can work to ensure the child’s safety, permanency, and well-being. Successful family meetings require strong community partnerships, appropriate meeting sites, effective strategies for getting the right people to the meeting, and an

authentic family-centered decision-making process.

**Assessment.** Comprehensive assessments include all family members; therefore, fathers and paternal family members must be an active part in the ongoing assessment process. Initial assessments should include the strengths, needs, resources/assets, and supports of the father and the paternal family, as well as services and supports needed by the father. Explore fathers’ and the paternal family’s willingness and ability to contribute to the well-being of the child. The assessment process should be ongoing, with information continually gathered and regularly updated.

**Safety planning.** Fathers and the paternal family should be actively involved in the development of a safety plan based on information and support of everyone serving the child and family. Fathers and paternal family members should be considered as informal service providers in the safety plan—for example, as kinship placement providers or to supervise visits.

**Out-of-home placement.** Before placing a child in an unrelated home, fathers’ and paternal family members’ homes should be assessed for placement. Include fathers in the discussion and in determining the best placement for the child. Foster parents, group home staff, residential treatment staff, hospital staff, and adoptive parents should be encouraged and supported to build and maintain partnerships with birth or adoptive fathers. The agency ought to provide supports to establish and maintain father-child relations through phone and mail contact, visitation, and case planning.

**Implementation of service plan.** Fathers should be actively involved in setting goals and encouraged to express their concerns or

**Suggestions for making sure your practice truly includes all family members.**



Photo Illustration

questions about services. Services should be created and provided to meet the individualized needs of the father and/or paternal family. Services must be accessible to working fathers. If they are used, father support groups should address issues such as empowering men to take an active role in parenting, emotional issues, child development, and developing key skills such as active listening, anger management, positive discipline, and basic parenting techniques.

**Permanency planning.** Fathers should be involved in all reviews of the service plan and in the development of the child’s permanency plan. Workers must ensure that fathers understand the permanency plan and emphasize the importance of the father’s role in the development and implementation of the plan. Fathers must not only receive court notices regarding permanency hearing, but workers should contact them to discuss the hearing and the agency’s recommendations to the court. During this discussion workers should encourage fathers to attend all hearings.

**Re-evaluation of service plan.** Workers should include fathers in the sharing of information between other family members, children, support teams, and service providers to ensure that intervention strategies can be modified as needed to support positive outcomes. Fathers can help monitor service provision and provide feedback so progress and modifications to services are made. ♦

## WILL MRS HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN NC?

North Carolina is currently in the midst of a significant effort to reform its child welfare system. Called the **Multiple Response System (MRS)**, this effort combines a set of core values with seven practice strategies to give child welfare workers a new way of approaching families, involving them in case planning, and identifying and strengthening their support systems.

Like other states involved in system reform right now, North Carolina hopes these changes will make our child welfare practice more consistent, effective, and family-centered.

However, as we have discussed, there are societal and systemic pressures that work against the inclusion of fathers in child welfare practice. Will MRS really make father involvement a basic part of family-centered practice in North Carolina?

### WHAT CHILD WELFARE WORKERS SAY

In fall 2005, as part of a course offered by the Jordan Institute for Families at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Social Work, we asked 29 child welfare workers and supervisors and family support workers from eight North Carolina counties what impact they thought MRS will have on father involvement in our state.

In general, workers and supervisors thought the effect would be positive. One worker even described MRS as “a breath of fresh air in a helping culture which in some ways has grown cold and stale.” Here are some of specific ways course participants thought MRS helped engage fathers.

**Family Assessment Response.** MRS’s family assessment response allows agencies to respond to some types of maltreatment reports in a more supportive, less blaming, less adversarial way. Several participants said they believed this approach **empowers fathers** because it allows families to set the time for their first meeting with the worker and encourages them to be involved in creating plans for their children. One person called this practice “more family friendly and less intrusive.”

Participants also suggested the family assessment response **lowers fathers’ anger and resistance**. One said, “I believe MRS’s policy giving agencies permission to involve everyone up front before interviewing children seems to help counter dad’s desire to ‘protect his kids’ from the mean ol’ social workers and gives back a little of the control.”



**“Seemingly hopeless families (including seemingly hopeless fathers) can grow and change.”**

— Worker from an MRS County

**Child & Family Team Meetings (CFTs).** MRS strongly encourages the use of structured, facilitated meetings with every family because they help bring family members together to create a plan that ensures child safety and meets the family’s needs.

Participants appreciated the way these meetings helped identify and connect the family to additional supports. They said that CFTs allow “a greater role for all family members,” including paternal family members, and that expanding the circle to include extended family can hasten progress. One said, “The family can put pressure on itself [to change] far more than any service worker ever could.”

An obstacle identified around CFTs was that the meetings tend to focus “on who the mother or immediate caregiver wants to invite. The facilitator or case worker must spend time [explaining] why inviting the father would be beneficial. Workers are not trained in [this].”

**In-home Services.** Workers also said they believe MRS’s emphasis on involving family members in the *cont. p. 8*

### ASSESSING FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN YOUR COUNTY

After reading about the challenge of engaging fathers, a North Carolina child welfare program manager we know was moved to take a closer look at her county’s performance with fathers. She consulted her agency’s information and found that there were 53 children in her agency’s custody at that time. Of these children:

- 11 had fathers involved (to some extent) with the child and the agency
- 24 had fathers the agency classified as father unknown, unable to locate, or never involved
- 7 had fathers who were offered services and had been involved with the agency to some extent but now were no longer involved
- 4 had fathers who had relinquished custody of the child or whose parental rights had been terminated
- 5 had incarcerated fathers
- 1 child’s father was deceased (paternal relatives not involved)
- 1 was placed with paternal relatives
- None of the children were placed with their fathers

Seeing these numbers encouraged this program manager to talk with her-supervisors and case managers to see what the agency had done to engage the 24 fathers who were unknown/uninvolved.

Using data and asking questions in this way can lead to insights and positive practice changes, not to mention improved outcomes for fathers and their children. If you have been touched by the things you have read in this issue we hope that you will consult your agency’s data to get a clear picture of how your agency is performing now and how it might improve its ability to involve fathers in child welfare.

## WILL MRS HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN NC? from p. 7

creation and monitoring of the family plan promotes father involvement. As one worker explained, "With MRS you do the case plans together. . . developing a case plan without [including fathers] can make them feel inferior in their family—a big problem."

### FEW SAFETY CONCERNS

We also asked participants how their agencies defined situations in which father involvement would be detrimental to the child or other family members. They recognized that domestic violence and substance abuse were cause for concern and agreed that under MRS the safety of the child and others is always the first concern. Participants said that even if domestic violence and paternal substance abuse are present, their agencies continue to work with fathers. Their strategies for doing this include involving the father separately from the rest of the family, continued visitation with the children (if safety permits), and providing needed services, especially treatment and counseling.

### CONCLUSION

Don't get the wrong impression from this article. Although the child welfare professionals we spoke with had plenty of good things to say about the impact MRS was having/might have on father involvement, they do not think the problem is solved. Most agree with the person who said, "We have a long ways to go."

But most would also agree MRS has us headed in the right direction. As one person put it, "If we continue to do things the same way, we will continue to get the same results. It's time to think out of the box. Hopefully, MRS will bridge this gap." ♦

To learn more about MRS, visit < [www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/mrs](http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/mrs) > .



Photo Illustration

## NORTH CAROLINA FATHERHOOD RESOURCES

- **NC Fatherhood Initiative.** Baptist Children's Home of NC, 201 W. Main St., Thomasville, NC 27361. 336/476-0888, [smeloy@ncfatherhood.org](mailto:smeloy@ncfatherhood.org)
- **Bridging the Gap of Eastern Carolina, Inc.** 215 Lexington St., Rocky Mount, NC 27802. Contact: Lois Watkins, 252/446-2134, [btgfatherlw@aol.com](mailto:btgfatherlw@aol.com)
- **DADS (Dads And Daughters & Sons).** Mountain Youth Resources, Inc., PO Box 99, Webster, NC 28788. 828/586-8958, URL: [www.mountainyouthresources.org](http://www.mountainyouthresources.org)
- **Sheila Bazemore.** A Parent Education/Fatherhood Coordinator with the NC Division of Public Health, Ms. Bazemore has information about the N.C. Fatherhood Development Advisory Council and other resources. 919/715-3422
- **Men's Center of Raleigh and Wake Co.,** PO Box 6155, Raleigh NC 27628. 919/832-0509, [theraleighmenscenter.org](http://theraleighmenscenter.org)
- **County DSS-based Programs.** Durham, Edgecombe, and other counties offer fatherhood programs through their depts. of social services.
- **Other Resources** can be found in the online version of this issue: [www.practicenotes.org](http://www.practicenotes.org)

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