

Father Friendly Check-Up



NATIONAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER
ON NON-RESIDENT FATHERS AND THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Introduction

The National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System, National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), American Humane Association, and American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law welcome you to the *Father Friendly Check-Up*TM for Child Welfare Agencies and Organizations¹. This tool will help you assess the degree to which your organization's operations encourage father involvement in the activities and programs you offer.

Today more American children are growing up in homes without their biological father than at any other point in American history. Trends such as divorce and remarriage, as well as more births outside of marriage, result in a diminishing role of fathers in the daily lives of their children. Involving fathers in the lives of their children becomes an even greater challenge when these children are involved in the public child welfare system. This is especially true in cases where the child has been removed from the home and placed in non-relative or stranger's care. Reunifying children with their birth families, as quickly as possible, without jeopardizing the children's safety is the first priority. However, identifying family resources, especially non-resident fathers and paternal relatives, continues to be a challenge for the child welfare system.

As discussed below, most foster children are not living with their fathers when they are removed from their home and placed in care. In such cases, child welfare agencies must identify and locate the non-resident father, ideally before such placement or at least soon thereafter which is often challenging. The agency's "reasonable efforts" to prevent placement should include a fair consideration of the father's home as a placement for a child who is considered unsafe in his or her mother's home due to abuse, neglect or maternal incapacity. They must also assess the benefits, detriments and difficulties associated with the non-resident father's

¹ For the purposes of this document, the term *child welfare agencies and organizations* includes all government entities or private entities that contract with the government to investigate and handle allegations of child abuse, abandonment and/or neglect.

involvement in the child welfare case generally. They should also consider whether there is the potential for an appropriate placement with or other assistance to the child from paternal kin.

In 2006, the Urban Institute, under contract with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, published its final report on child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve non-resident fathers in the child welfare process. The report, entitled, "*What About the Dads?*" reviewed 1,958 cases of children who were removed by child welfare agencies from their homes where their biological father did not reside. Telephone interviews with 1,222 child welfare agency caseworkers involved in these cases showed that:

88 percent of non-resident fathers were identified by the child welfare agency;

55 percent of non-resident fathers were contacted by the caseworker;

30 percent of the non-resident fathers visited their child; and

28 percent of non-resident fathers expressed an interest in assuming custody of their child.

Despite these diminishing numbers, the "*What About the Dads?*" report found that 70 percent of caseworkers had received training on engaging fathers. Moreover, caseworkers who received training were more likely to report having located fathers.

Based on all of the findings, the report recommends, among other things, that child welfare agencies 1) identify and search for non-resident fathers early in cases; 2) train caseworkers on identifying, locating and involving fathers; and 3) develop models for engaging non-resident fathers constructively (Malm, Murray, & Geen. (2006). *What About the Dads?* Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.).

This assessment is designed to help child welfare agencies and organizations take an active, positive approach in creating an environment that involves fathers and fosters the healthy development of children.

The Assessment

You will apply the assessment categories identified below to your organization.

- Leadership and organizational philosophy
- Program management policies and procedures
- Parent-involvement program
- Program physical environment
- Staff training and professional development
- Collaboration and organizational networking
- Community outreach

This assessment will encourage staff to examine their organization as well as their own attitudes about fathers.

Assessment Checklists

You will complete a series of assessment checklists designed specifically for child welfare agencies and organizations. There is one checklist for each assessment category.

The checklists consist of statements that might or might not be true about your organization. Quite simply, you will assess whether the statements are true of your organization. Complete the checklists by placing a checkmark in the boxes next to the statements that are true of your organization. If a statement on a checklist is not true of your organization, do not check the box.

Use your gut reaction to assess your organization on each statement. You might discover that you can check only a few boxes in each category. If that's the case, don't worry: a low score is not an indictment of your organization as being unfriendly toward dads. You might find that your organization includes fathers to a high degree in certain areas, but not in others. Use this assessment to identify areas for improvement, no matter what you discover.

Your Father-Friendly Score

After completing the assessment, you will receive a score for each category together with suggestions that the Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System has identified as best practices to increase the father friendliness of your child welfare organization. You will then have the opportunity to use the score from the *Father Friendly Check-Up*[™] to set goals and identify priorities that are unique to your organization's way of serving children and families.

Leadership and Organizational Philosophy

Check the box only if the statement is true of your organization.

The leadership/administration of my organization:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicates to caseworkers, attorneys and other staff that non-resident fathers (those who do not live in the home where a child has been abused or neglected) and paternal family members are a resource for the child (as a potential placement option or other care provider).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expects caseworkers, attorneys and other staff to engage and work with both non-resident and resident fathers proactively.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expects all staff to interact with fathers in a gender-responsive, non-accusatory, and non-blaming manner.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expects staff doing hiring for the organization to include fathers as participants/consultants in the new staff hiring process and in interviews.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourages the healthy development of the <i>father-child</i> relationship.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourages the healthy development of the <i>father-mother</i> relationship, whether or not the father and mother are together, except in cases where there is a history of domestic violence or other circumstances making such a relationship not in the child's best interests.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expects staff providing orientation and training for newly hired personnel to emphasize the importance of involving non-resident fathers in cases and to do so during the earliest days of employment.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expects staff doing hiring for the organization to emphasize through interview questioning the importance of involving non-resident fathers in cases and to determine whether candidates for employment personally support and value an aggressive approach to involving non-resident fathers in cases.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourages couples who are considering marriage to access pre-marital education including information on parenting issues.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supports fathers on the organization's staff in balancing work and family life.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provides adequate funding and staff to effectively serve

	fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provides families with balanced information on father involvement by discussing the negative impact of father absence and the positive impact of involved fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Believes that a child welfare organization's services should be provided as much to fathers as they are to mothers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expects caseworkers, agency attorneys and other staff to use fathers as a resource for the child (for example, for information such as health histories, to identify potential assistance to the child from paternal relatives and to identify potential kinship foster placements).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has developed a vision or mission statement that includes serving fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourages staff to communicate to families that fathers are just as important as mothers in raising healthy children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Helps families understand father involvement from a holistic perspective (i.e., physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual involvement).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expects staff to include a father component in new staff orientation and training activities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourages staff to connect fathers with individuals and community-based organizations that can provide them with the resources needed to become involved, responsible, committed dads.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Works with mothers to involve fathers in the lives of children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Examines and expresses their own attitudes and beliefs about supporting fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supports fathers with tools, information, policies and programs that help them in their fathering roles.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Experiments and remains flexible in creating, promoting, delivering and evaluating family-directed services.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Displays a positive attitude about fathers and men when interacting with families.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supports fathers in their cases in balancing work and family life.

Total Score

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Check the box only if the statement is true of your organization.

The policies and procedures of my organization:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Include a clear expectation that caseworkers and other staff will identify fathers early in child welfare cases and continue to attempt to identify them throughout the life of the case.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include a clear expectation that caseworkers and other staff will locate fathers early in child welfare cases and continue to search for them throughout the life of the case.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include a clear expectation that caseworkers and other staff will contact fathers early in child welfare cases and continue to contact them throughout the life of the case.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide clear case documentation methods to include specific identifying information about fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include a clear expectation that caseworkers and other staff will utilize child support enforcement staff to identify and locate fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include a clear expectation that caseworkers and other staff will utilize parent locator services and locator technologies including the use of public assistance records, motor vehicle records, hospital records and other public records to identify and locate fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage fathers/men in their cases to balance work and family life.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that a father who has not abused/neglected his child and who acts to gain custody is always subject to the same procedures and requirements that would be applied to a child's mother in the same situation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include a clear expectation that caseworkers, agency attorneys and other agency staff will make all relevant and appropriate case information available to fathers (for example, case plans, changes in placements, court dates).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that fathers are included in and know and understand what is expected of them under case plans, and are provided with resources to meet those expectations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that fathers are consistently treated in a gender-responsive, non-accusatory, non-blaming manner.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include a clear expectation that all policies and procedures will promote involvement of non-custodial parents and their kin in the life of the child.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Include a clear expectation that caseworkers, agency attorneys and other agency staff will proactively engage and work effectively with fathers in conducting the work of the organization.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that forms for families and staff (for example, intake forms, applications and questionnaires) are gender-neutral except where gender-specific information is vital to the case.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that caseworkers, agency attorneys and other agency staff explain to fathers their rights and responsibilities while also emphasizing the importance of their involvement in child welfare and court processes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include referrals to resources that help dads with personal development, parenting and family life in general.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use measurement tools and methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of services provided to fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate the effectiveness of staff in working with fathers when reviewing staff performance.
<input type="checkbox"/>	In situations where the mother does not want the non-resident father involved with the child, include procedures for caseworkers to assess promptly and fairly whether the father's involvement would create a risk of physical or emotional harm to the child.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Help both the mother and the father resolve differences among them, with the goal of the best interest of the child in mind.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide a system and tools to hire casework staff with the knowledge, skills and sensitivity to interact productively with fathers, as well as with mothers, and children.

Total Score

PARENT-INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

Check the box only if the statement is true of your organization.

My Organization:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Uses approaches and programs with fathers that are intended to promote meaningful and sustained father engagement in the life of his child.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Includes a strengths-based approach to working with fathers that begins with where the father is in his development, not with where staff thinks he should be.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provides services that have equal regard and respect for parenting approaches typical of fathers and mothers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offers services specifically directed at fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provides families with balanced information on father involvement discussing the negative impact of father absence and the positive impact of involved fathers, as well as information on father involvement when there is a history of domestic violence.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Periodically surveys fathers to determine their needs, concerns and interests related to the organization's child welfare work.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provides fatherhood resources in the form of materials and information emphasizing the importance of responsible fathering and fathering skills.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Uses fatherhood resources, parenting curricula and educational materials that reflect the diversity of fathers served by the agency/organization.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provides effective measurement tools and methodologies for evaluating efforts directed at fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expects staff to support the belief that fathers can be excellent parents.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expects staff to make every effort to interact with fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Promotes father engagement by involving fathers and the father's extended family in case planning early in a case.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provides information for fathers that includes the benefits of a healthy marriage on child development and men's well-being.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provides information for fathers that helps prepare men for marriage or helps fathers strengthen their marriage.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Refers fathers to community-based father support groups when such groups are available and when referral is appropriate.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Presents information to fathers in ways that match men's typical learning styles (i.e., hands-on, interactive, visually engaging, opportunities for discussion and debate, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hires male staff to deliver child welfare services with the specific goal of enabling the agency/organization to interact more effectively with fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hires service delivery staff, of either gender, that mirrors the fathers served in culture, race, language, age, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Refers fathers to peer-led programs for parents in the child welfare system when such programs are available and when referral is appropriate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expects staff to avoid using language that is divisive and that stereotypes men/fathers and women/mothers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maintains lists of recommended father-oriented and male-oriented resources (for example, fatherhood classes and support groups, employment services, educational services, legal services) and expects staff to promote the use of these resources with fathers when appropriate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expects staff to be aware of and refer fathers to special community-based events that celebrate fatherhood and fathers.

Total Score

Program Physical Environment

Remember: Think about your organization’s overall physical environment that surrounds families being served (for example, waiting areas). Also, think about the ways in which your organization’s physical environment reflects/reinforces the values held by staff members. Is the environment clearly more “female-oriented” than “gender-neutral”?

Check the box only if the statement is true of your organization.

The environment/atmosphere of my organization:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Says, through visible father-related images in the waiting room and in caseworkers’ offices, that “Fathers are expected and welcome here.”
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has gender-neutral colors and decorating scheme.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offers reading materials (i.e., books, magazines and other literature) directed toward fathers/men as well as mothers/women.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has a staff listing containing photos of both male and female staff.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has male staff in positions where visitors are likely to have initial visual or telephone contact with the agency/organization (for example, receptionist, security guard).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has family restrooms or a diaper deck in the men’s restroom.
<input type="checkbox"/>	If a TV or video plays in waiting areas, some of the programs or videos appeal to men.
<input type="checkbox"/>	If a library is available to families, it includes parenting and other information directed toward fathers.

Total Score

STAFF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Check the box only if the statement is true of your organization.

The staff in my agency/organization:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained in how to ensure that a father/man who is contacted by the organization for the first time in connection with a case knows that he and his case participation are welcome.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are open to constructive criticism regarding personal biases, including biases against men/fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are comfortable with differences in parenting styles typical of fathers and mothers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Believe that fathers are important to the healthy development of children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Believe that fathers can be excellent parents.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained on the importance of identifying, locating and contacting fathers early in child welfare cases and continuing these efforts throughout the life of the case.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained in the use of parent locator services and other locator technologies in order to more effectively identify and locate fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained on how to work with fathers in a gender-responsive, non-accusatory, non-blaming manner.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been made aware of community resources that offer services specific to fathers, including those involved in the child welfare system.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained on how to work effectively with both mothers and fathers when the relationships are contentious, including identifying when domestic violence is a factor in the relationship.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained on how to work effectively with fathers who may express their opinions strongly and loudly, but who pose no physical danger to staff.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Perceive my organization's programs and services to be as much for fathers as for mothers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Avoid using language that is divisive and that stereotypes men/fathers and women/mothers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Make every attempt to interact with mothers and fathers equally when they come in together to receive services.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Seek fathers' input in decision-making situations involving important aspects of children's day-to-day lives.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Have participated in training that includes explicit discussion of the importance of fathers to the healthy development of children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage mothers to cooperate with fathers in raising children and vice versa.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained in gender differences in communication styles.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained in including a father component in new staff orientation and training.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained on the best practices of father involvement used by other child welfare organizations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained in including questions related to father involvement in new staff hiring practices such as interviews.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained to recognize and appreciate fathers' typical parenting styles, and how they differ from mothers' styles. This includes why responsible, committed fathering is important to children's well-being.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained in cultural and familial barriers to father involvement in the lives of children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained to examine their own attitudes, beliefs and behavior toward accepting and including fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained in helping fathers balance work and family life.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained in hiring casework staff with the knowledge, skills and sensitivity to interact productively with fathers, mothers and children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have been trained to recognize and know male cultural patterns and the ways they become evident when males/fathers interact with others.

Total Score

COLLABORATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKING

Check the box only if the statement is true of your organization.

My organization:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Works to promote the education of juvenile and family court judges and court employees (in the various types of courts) about the ways in which children benefit when fathers are responsibly involved in the lives of their children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develops a good relationship with local child support enforcement offices and staff members in order to be of mutual assistance in helping obtain appropriate financial support of children, learning more about individual family situations and better promoting the welfare of children in the families served by the child welfare agency.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Promotes coordination and collaboration with the larger father-engagement community, such as fatherhood programs and organizations that regularly work with fathers and families.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Works to promote education for attorneys (especially those who represent fathers and children as well as those who represent the state or county in child welfare court proceedings) about the importance to children of having involved, responsible, committed fathers in their lives, as well as how to use the legal system to better engage fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Works to educate courts, parent attorneys, child support enforcement staff and social service caseworkers about the importance of explaining to fathers their rights and responsibilities, while also emphasizing the importance of their involvement in child welfare and court processes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Actively works in partnership with one or more other public or private agencies to identify fathers of children the child welfare organization serves.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Actively works in partnership with one or more other public or private agencies to locate fathers of children served by the child welfare organization.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Actively works in partnership with one or more other public or private agencies to contact fathers of children served by the child welfare organization.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Actively works in partnership with one or more other public or private agencies to engage fathers of children served by the child welfare organization.

Total Score

Community Outreach

Check the box only if the statement is true of your organization.

My organization:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Is perceived by the <i>community at large</i> as “father-friendly.”
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is perceived by <i>fathers and men</i> as “father-friendly.”
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourages other organizations within the broader child welfare field (including court-related organizations and child support enforcement) to work with fathers on enhancing positive relationships with their children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourages organizations in other professional fields (such as healthcare, business, faith-based, law enforcement) to work with fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Makes presentations, holds workshops or presents papers at conferences on the organization’s work with fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Participates in a network or coalition of organizations and leaders that promotes responsible fatherhood community-wide.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Submits articles or article ideas on the organization’s work with fathers for publication in print media (e.g., journals, magazines, newsletters, newspapers).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Periodically issues press releases on the organization’s success in working with fathers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Promotes responsible fatherhood in the community as a preventive measure in the fight to reduce the incidence of negative outcomes for children, such as poverty, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is willing to share best practices in working with fathers with other organizations.

Total Score

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

How to use this worksheet:

1. Transfer your scores from each checklist to the corresponding row on this worksheet.
2. Don't combine the scores from all categories to arrive at a total score, because that score can mislead you.
3. Focus on the scores within each category, because the goal is to make your organization father friendly holistically. Determine whether your score in each category rates low, medium or high on father friendliness.
4. You should first target categories in which your score is low or medium on father friendliness. Then, revisit the statements that were not true of your organization within those categories and use them as specific target areas to work on.

Checklist	Score	Legend
Leadership and Organizational Philosophy		Low (0-8); Med. (9-16); High (17-25)
Program Management Policies and Procedures		Low (0-7); Med. (8-14); High (15-21)
Parent-Involvement Program		Low (0-7); Med. (8-15); High (16-22)
Program Physical Environment		Low (0-3); Med. (4-6); High (7-8)
Staff Training and Professional Development		Low (0-9); Med. (10-18); High (19-27)
Collaboration and Organizational Networking		Low (0-3); Med. (4-6); High (7-9)
Community Outreach		Low (0-3); Med. (4-6); High (7-10)