

Making the most of fathers to . . . Improve maternal and infant health

PREGNANCY

Babies do better when they are planned for by both parents, so . . .

Engage boys/men in family planning, emphasising that since dads are so important, both parents should be well prepared for the timing of pregnancies.

Efforts to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV include mothers taking prescribed medication, as well as active support from their husbands or partners, so . . .

Invite dads into prenatal services, debunk HIV myths, help mothers disclose their status safely – and work towards the fathers being tested too (but not as your first approach to them!).

Mothers are more likely to stop smoking if their partner stops smoking, so . . .

Smoking cessation programs must engage both partners.

Pregnant women eat and live more healthily when their partner supports them, so . . .

Don't give health messages only to women – make sure the dads 'get the message' too.

BIRTH

Men who understand the risk of pregnancy complications will support their partner's use of appropriate services so . . .

Make sure fathers, uncles, brothers and community leaders understand why professionally supported childbirth is the safest option.

Mothers who have calm and supportive birth partners have better labours, so . . .

Make sure dads are knowledgeable and well prepared for their role as birth partners, and understand the importance of their presence in the labour and delivery process.

Sharing the birth of their child can strengthen parents' relationships, so . . .

Make sure the dad isn't 'crowded out' and make efforts to include him, even when family or friends are also at the birth (that goes for after the birth, too . . .)

AFTER THE BIRTH

Support from fathers is more likely when they're named on the birth certificate - and children need to know who their fathers are, so . . .

Encourage birth registration by both parents.

Breastfeeding rates are higher when mothers feel their partner supports breastfeeding, so . . .

Make sure dads fully understand the benefits of breastfeeding, and how they can help their partners.

Mothers' mental health is better and couples' relationships are stronger when dads are hands-on with baby care, so . . .

Help dads develop confidence and skills right from the start.

Father-infant bonding is stronger when dads develop their own ways of doing things, so . . .

Help dads spend time on their own caring for their baby.

HOW THEY DO IT :

Écoles des Maris ('Schools for Husbands') in Niger is a UNFPA-funded project which works to transform attitudes and behaviour around childbirth through the training of *maris modèles* ('model husbands') to spread the word about the benefits of mothers' using local health services. Health workers give the husbands the information they need to engage with other husbands, elected representatives and religious chiefs, so health messages are reinforced community-wide. The 'model husbands' have built new clinical facilities and work to combat malnutrition and improve hygiene. Fewer women and babies are dying or becoming very ill: in one district the percentage of expectant mothers attending prenatal care visits rose from 10% in 2008 to over 90% in 2011. Professionally-attended childbirth rose from 15% to 74% over the same period, with uptake of childhood vaccinations also growing rapidly.

To download other 'Bringing fathers in' resources and access relevant links and references, go to: www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2014/bringing-fathers-in-resources-for-advocates-practitioners-and-researchers/