

# Ten top tips for attracting fathers to programmes

## 1. INVITE FATHERS DIRECTLY

While it can be useful to reach out to fathers via mothers and others, it is important whenever possible directly to invite the father himself. And because it is important for fathers to know that they are truly welcome, if he doesn't respond it can be good to reach back out to him after a sensitive interval.

## 2. INVITE FATHERS TO MAINSTREAM ACTIVITIES

such as baby massages or stay-and-play, child development classes, financial coaching, literacy support, nutrition sessions – whatever you are offering moms. And make sure these are welcoming to parents of both sexes.

## 3.

Make fathers' engagement **EXPECTED AND IMPORTANT** – right from the start. Put 'father-facts' up on notice boards or in parent-newsletters that explain and underline research findings about the importance of fathers to children's development. Display images of dads – photos, posters, collages, children's drawings. Whatever it takes to make dads visible.

## 4.

### REGISTER THE FATHER'S NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION.

Whenever you register a child it is a good opportunity to enter the father's information into your database. If the father himself didn't give you his contact details, then this is a great chance to make contact with him and ask if you can keep his details on file. Make sure he understands that you are doing this because you and your agency understand how important fathers are to children.

## 5.

If you **SET UP 'TASTER' EVENTS** (such as a "dads' breakfast") to signal that your agency is interested in fathers, make sure you collect the names and contact details of the fathers who attend. Follow up with them after the event to offer information, issue an invitation to another activity or to ask their opinions or advice on future activities.

## 6.

**REVIEW YOUR SETTING:** how will a father feel walking through the door? Is the place pink or flowery? Are there only women's magazines set out? Are there positive images of men, as well as women, with children? Does your receptionist understand the importance of fathers in children's lives? And does she/he feel comfortable talking with men?

## 7.

### ADDRESS LETTERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO BOTH PARENTS.

Use their name or, at the very least, use 'mom and dad'. If you think you need to say 'Dear Parent' in case a single parent receives your letter, remember that (a) just because a mother presents herself as a single mother, it doesn't mean that there isn't a father involved; (b) if a parent, mom or dad, really is a single parent, they may welcome an opportunity to talk with you about the other parent. In fact, very few 'single' parents raise children entirely without support, and you should be open to including others who are also involved in the child's upbringing.

## 8.

**CONSULT – DON'T ASSUME.** Find out what each father wants and needs, his circumstances and aspirations, and when he is available. Set some session times that fit with the schedules of working mothers and fathers, but don't assume all fathers can't come during the day. Many may not have daytime working hours, or formal employment. Others work night shifts.

## 9.

**AVOID THE 'P' WORD.** Don't keep saying or writing 'parents'. Where you find yourself wanting to use that word, consider first whether you could use 'mothers and fathers' or 'fathers and mothers' in leaflets, letters or signage. Fathers don't feel included when you say 'parents', although you may mean to be inclusive. They think that when you say 'parents' you mean only the mothers (and, very often, you do...).

## 10.

**GET MEN INVOLVED.** If you don't have male staff (please make real efforts to get some!) look for male volunteers. This can include approaching fathers for help in making your setting more comfortable for other dads by regularly putting in an appearance and helping out.

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/](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2014/bringing-fathers-in-resources-for-advocates-practitioners-and-researchers/)