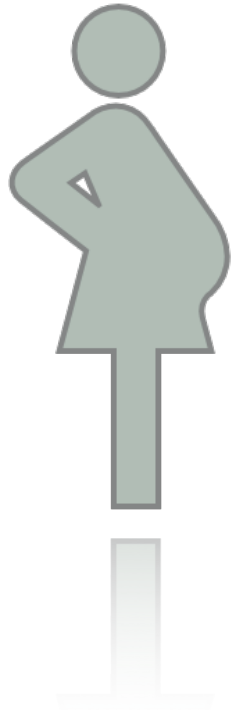


It Takes Two: Engaging Fathers Prenatal and Postpartum



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If it takes two, why do we only focus on one?



- Most “family services” are only delivered or oriented around mothers and children, completely leaving out or alienating fathers or significant others
 - **There are a growing number of fathers who are now the primary caregivers, how are we accounting for this in the services we render?**
- We know that the reality of a nuclear family or the image of a family is different now than it was 40-50 years ago
 - **Are we accounting for the fact that Fathers, grandparents, aunts, and/or uncles can be the primary caregiver for children we are trying to serve?**
- Sometimes even services that do serve fathers, the name may imply that it doesn't, a deterrent for fathers seeking support
 - **What's in the name of your program or organization? Is it inclusive or welcoming?**

*The
'standard'
unrealized...*

- To understand why men take a back seat in the birth process means to acknowledge:
 - **preconceived gender roles**
 - **What's considered the role of men or women**
 - **interpretation of masculinity**
 - **who defines masculinity, is it self defined or defined by society and community?**
 - **conscious and subconscious rejection of a fathers role from society and family**
- The standard of education, whether it be sex ed or sexual health for men is usually given from the standpoint that family planning is centered around a “woman’s responsibility”
 - **To help men understand their role in a larger scheme means to engage them at younger ages in a more holistic manner**



*Address them as
a family unit,
address fathers
with a different
approach than
mothers*

- Even in a male dominated society, birth work spaces, delivery rooms and family planning spaces are ***devoid of welcoming energy to men who are not doctors.***
 - Frequently, fathers are treated as if they aren't around even when they are physically present
 - Friends and family are also guilty of perpetuating this notion or "disappearing" the presence, feelings, and emotions of an expectant father
- Because many fathers are not used to being engaged, engaging them takes patience, earning of trust, consistency, and meeting them where they are.

The language used should be as if ***both parents are actively involved*** unless told otherwise

- How do we talk about coparenting?

*What baggage
exists?*

*Address the trauma
and gain
understanding first!*

- There has to be an understanding of what a relationship is between fathers and mothers (symbiotic, parasitic, cohabitation)
 - We talk to our children about sex, but no one talks to their children about what a **healthy relationship** is.

Have we self scanned and made sure we haven't brought our own baggage, trauma, or preconceived notions to the space?

- How can you think about a future (family planning) when your brain can only process the here and now?
 - Thinking about being an involved father comes secondary when you're **just trying to survive hour-to-hour of every day**
 - Without addressing traumas, many men will continue to self medicate, but unlike the common thoughts of drugs and alcohol, it can also **come through touch!**



*Prenatal
involvement
is
foundational*

- The best chance of success that a child has at reaching early childhood development milestones is to have both parents actively involved
 - Co-parenting is essential to child development and doesn't always mean that both parents are engaged in an active romantic relationship (~~single parenting~~, coparenting)
 - Professionals and families alike don't always understand the dynamics of co-parenting which leads to **miscommunication** and **alienation**

- The building blocks of successful co-parenting are built during the prenatal phase
 - Learning about one another's responses to this life-changing event is groundwork for knowing how to respond to one another in high-stress situations, as well as to **support** and **advocate** for one another
 - Understanding that both **the mother and father can and do experience postpartum depression**



What does a father bring to the table?

- Acknowledging what an involved father brings to the table helps every one, including fathers, become more comfortable with understanding that they do in fact have a role:
 - Advocating during prenatal visits
 - Being support for breast feeding mothers when one of the top deterrents is lack of support
 - Understanding how children develop
 - Language skills are formed in different ways depending on if mom or dad is working with them
 - Relationship dynamics

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