

Father Involvement in Early Intervention: Meeting the Needs Of All Family Members

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Session Overview

- **Introduction**
- **Self-Reflection Activity**
- **Changing Perspectives on Father Involvement**
 - **Families**
 - **Early Intervention (EI)**
- **Benefits of increasing Father Involvement in EI**
- **Barriers to increasing Father Involvement in EI**
- **Strategies to increase Father Involvement in EI**



Personal History

(aka – how I ended up doing
what I am doing)

- Railroad Employee – 7 years
- Undergrad degree Ball State University
- Preschool/first grade teacher – 4 yrs.
- PhD – University of Maryland
- University of Georgia – 2 yrs.
- UIUC – 31 years
- Father 23-year-old w/disability



ILLINOIS

COLLEGE OF
ACES

Department of
Human Development
and Family Studies

UIUC Responsibilities

Teach graduate & undergraduate human development courses

- infancy & early development
- parenting

Active research program

- antecedents/consequences of father involvement
- antecedents/consequences of men's food related parenting behaviors

Leadership – Child Development Laboratory



Self Reflection



- How do I currently engage fathers in my work?
- Should fathers be involved in EI?
Why/why not?
- What are the barriers to getting fathers involved in EI services?
- What would I like to see my agency do to encourage father involvement?
- What can I do to encourage father involvement in EI services

Societal Expectations for Father Involvement

- **Slowly Evolving Expectations**
- **Generational Change**
- **Impetus for change**
 - Compensation vs. Modelling
- **Evidence of Changing Expectations**
 - federal, state & local policies
 - Work place settings
 - Educational settings
- **Changing Family Structures**



Does Father Involvement Make a Difference?

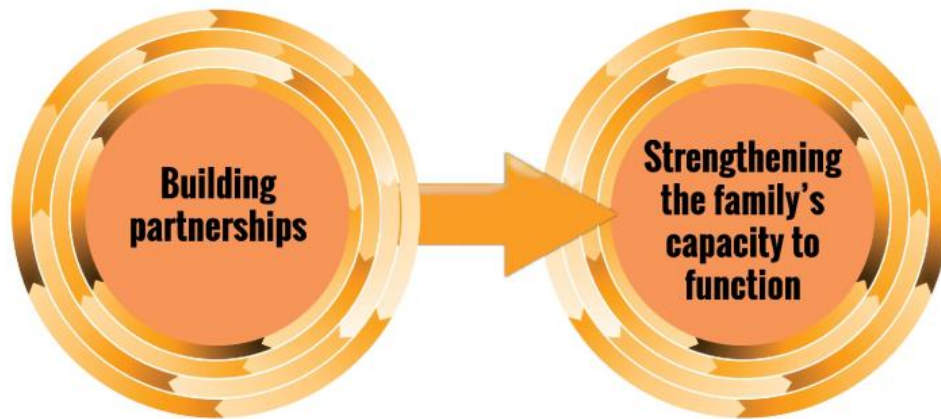
In Praise of Fathers
10 Research-Based Ways
Dads Impact Kids
For the Better



- Active Field of Scholarship
- Multiple Disciplinary and Theoretical Lenses
- Positive Father Involvement = Positive Child Outcomes
 - Positive social development
 - Fewer behavior problems
 - Greater emotional self-regulation
 - Enhanced language, cognitive and physical development
- Positive Father Involvement = Positive Family Outcomes
 - Marital/relationship quality
 - Maternal stress & role overload
- Quantity and Quality make a Difference

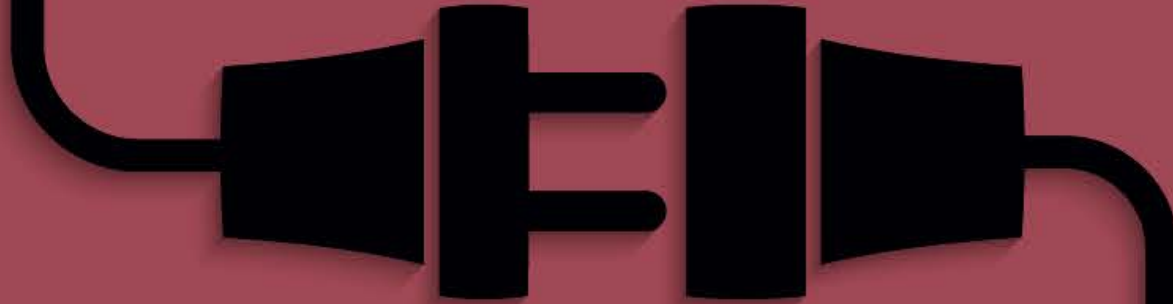
Family-Centered Early Intervention Programming

Family-Centered Practices in Early Intervention



- **Family-Centered Programming**
 - **central philosophical foundation**
- **Major Premise Underlying Part C of IDEA**
- **Division for Early Childhood**
- **10 recommended family engagement practices**
 - **Family centered programming**
 - **Family capacity building**
 - **Family-professional partnership**
- **Family-centered programming – positive outcomes**
 - **Parent**
 - **Family**
 - **Child**

Major Disconnect in Early Intervention



- **Family Centered Programming = Mother Engagement**
- **Fathers absent from EI services**
 - Mothers – primary targets for EI services
- **Limited knowledge base – role of fathers in EI**
 - How are fathers involved
 - How much are fathers involved
- **Vacuum – knowledge base**
 - EI Service providers
 - How to include fathers in family-centered programming
 - Major challenge – increase father involvement in EI services

Emerging/Limited Data

Father Involvement in Families of Children with Disabilities/Developmental Delays

- Fathers' positive attitudes = lower maternal stress
- Paternal support = lower maternal stress
- Father involvement = higher relationship quality
- Paternal involvement = higher maternal parenting quality
- Major limitations – this line of research
 - Definitions of father involvement/engagement
 - Non-representative samples
 - Reliance on cross-sectional data



UIUC Research to Address Limitations - #1



- **Longitudinal Examination of Father Involvement**
- **Families of children with and without disabilities/developmental delays**
- **ECLS-B data set**
- **8,000+ families/fathers/father figures**
- **Multiple timepoints**
- **Multiple child outcome data**
- **Multiple data sources**

Major Findings

Longitudinal Examination of Father Involvement

- **Higher father involvement = higher Kndg readiness**
 - Children with and without disabilities
- **No differences in father involvement**
 - children with and without disabilities
- **Timing of diagnosis matters**
 - Early diagnosis = decreased involvement over time
- **No differences - child gender and family SES**
 - Children with and without disabilities
- **Implications for EI service providers**



UIUC Research to Address Limitations - #2



- **EI Provider Perceptions of Father Involvement**
- **Survey and interview data**
- **Statewide Network of EI providers**
- **Multiple professionals contributing to EI Services**
 - e.g., speech/language pathologists; developmental therapist; PT; OT; nutritionists; etc.
- **Goal – identify disconnect**
 - perceptions vs. practice in EI
- **Focus on four topics**
 - Benefits of father involvement in EI
 - Barriers to engaging fathers in EI
 - Role of culture in EI and father involvement
 - Suggestions – how to increase father involvement in EI
- **Results – Inform Personal Self Reflections**

Major Findings

Benefits of Father Involvement in EI

- **More is Better**
 - Enhanced child outcomes
 - Faster child milestones
 - More opportunities to work w/child
 - Greater carryover of recommended activities
- **Impacts Entire Family**
 - Stronger father-child bond
 - Father empowerment
 - Strengthen family relationships
 - Support for mother
- **How dads make a difference**
 - Fathers' unique influences
 - Balanced approach to working with child
 - Additional insight for providers
 - More efficient service planning



Major Findings

Father Involvement and the Role of Culture in EI

- **Family Culture is not a factor**
 - No cultural differences – fathers vs. mothers
 - Cultural norms for EI providers
 - Who works
- **Culture is a Barrier to Father Involvement in EI**
 - Absent fathers
 - Limited paternal understanding of disability/EI
 - Traditional gender role expectations
 - Mom's role vs. dad's role
- **Culture facilitates father involvement**
 - Dad is involved
- **Culture is ambiguous**
 - Don't know
 - it depends
 - Societal norms shifting

Major Findings

Barriers to Engaging Fathers in EI

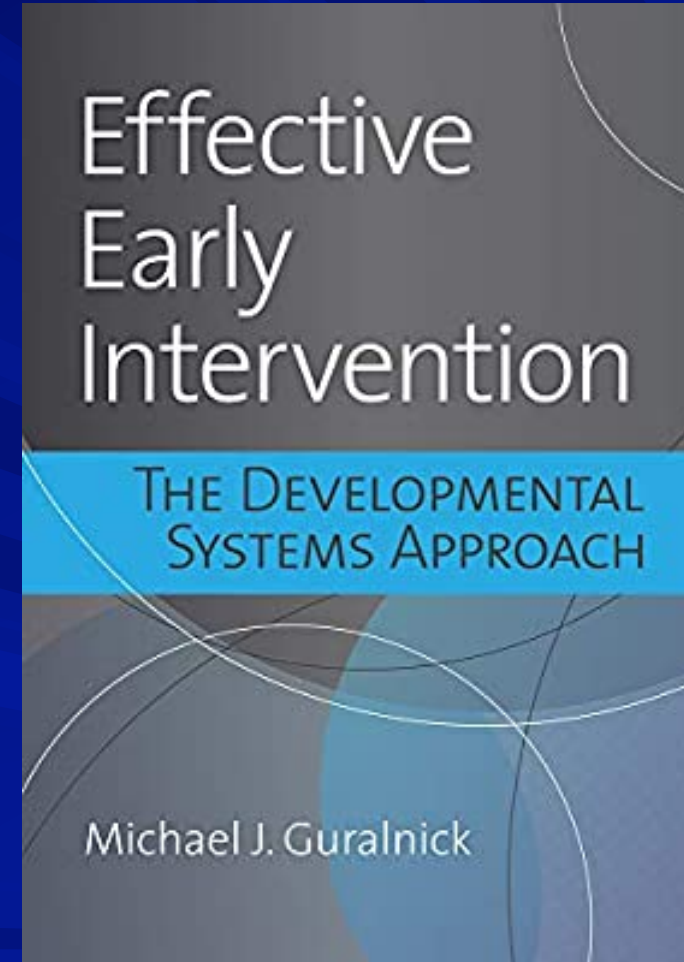
- **Lack of presence**
 - **Working**
 - **Absence in the home**
 - **Disengaged in parenting**
 - **Non-custodial fathers**
- **Men work/women care for children**
 - **Societal gender roles**
 - **Parenting efficacy**
 - **Fathers' beliefs about parental roles**
- **EI Providers' Ability to Adapt**
 - **Gendered services**
 - **Fathers' reactions to disability**
 - **Inflexible service hours**
 - **Partnerships w/female providers**



Major Findings

How to Increase Father Involvement in EI

- **It Is Not in My Hands**
 - Can't/don't know
 - No access
 - Blaming fathers
 - Fathers not present
- **Systems Level Approach**
 - Expectation for equal involvement
 - Mothers as liaison
 - Father-centered programming
 - Professional development for EI providers
 - Policy changes
- **Direct Intervention by Providers**
 - Build partnerships w/fathers
 - Alternatives to face-to-face services
 - Different service hours



Reflection On My Self Reflection



- How do I currently engage fathers in my work?
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Why/why not?
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- What would I like to see my agency do to encourage father involvement?
- What can I do to encourage father involvement in EI services

Moving Forward

Engaging Fathers in My Agency/Services

The greatest barrier to engaging fathers in my services/agency is:

The physical and/or human resources I will draw on to overcome these barriers are:

My greatest allies in my efforts to engage fathers in my services/agency are:

Three specific activities I would like to implement during the next year to engage fathers in my services/agency are:



Questions/Discussion

