

# **Engaging Fathers – A Child Welfare Perspective**

by: John Telfer

“Every father bears a fundamental obligation to do right by their children.”

(Barack Obama)

# WORRIES

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- ◆ Father's absence contribute to other social issues affecting children/youth, (McLanahan, S., Tach, L., and Schneider, N.)
- ◆ 70 % more black Canadians in federal prisons that there were 10 years ago, (Howard Sapers 2016)
- ◆ Systemic racism in policing, courts, correctional institutions and child welfare
- ◆ Children are affected by domestic violence – emotionally and physically
- ◆ Abuse during pregnancy linked to adverse birth outcomes, (Gentry and Bailey, 2014)

## Influential Factors to Un-engaged/Absent Fathers

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- ◆ Removing abusive fathers solves the problem/creates safety for children
- ◆ Perception of the black man – ‘aggressive/violent’
- ◆ Perception of domestic abuse
- ◆ Absent fathers
- ◆ Fathers not seen as primary caregivers/perception of a ‘family’
- ◆ Lack of understanding by fathers



## Influential Factors to Un-engaged/Absent Fathers cont'd...

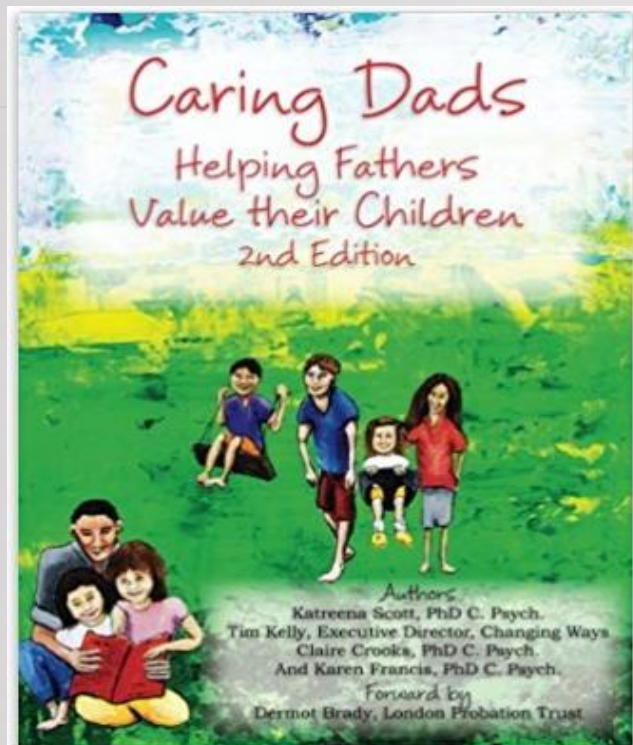
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- ◆ History of oppression and racism
- ◆ Being judged
- ◆ Fear of systems
- ◆ Lack of services for fathers – culturally specific

# WHAT IS WORKING WELL

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- ◆ A father-inclusive practice approach
- ◆ Recognizing father's needs – as provider as well as relationship with child.
- ◆ Connecting fathers to programs such as, Caring Dads, Being a Great Dad, Mindful Fathering
- ◆ Specialist services: domestic violence teams



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# ABOUT CARING DADS

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Purpose: A group intervention program for men who have abused, neglected, or exposed their children to domestic violence.

Aim: To change patterns of abuse, increase fathers' awareness and application of child-centered fathering and to promote respectful co-parenting with children's mothers.



# Engaging Black and Racialized Fathers

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- ◆ Father-inclusive practice
- ◆ Focusing on the father, not the abuse – Signs of Safety principle
- ◆ Acknowledge the contributions of black men
- ◆ Include fathers in assessments
- ◆ Share the child's voice with fathers
- ◆ Apply a critical reflection lens
- ◆ Apply an Anti Black Racism and Anti Oppressive Anti Racism lens
- ◆ Form partnership and collaborative practice with community agencies

## Encourage Fathers to be an Ally in Parenting

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- ◆ Respecting the mother of THEIR children
- ◆ To be present – emotionally, physically, financially, spiritually, encourage them to keep their word
- ◆ To support the mother of THEIR children
- ◆ To be bold and don't be afraid to mess up, fix it and try again
- ◆ To surround themselves with knowledge and support
- ◆ Above all, an ally is a peacemaker

# NEXT STEPS

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- ◆ Continue to engage fathers from the point of contact/investigation
- ◆ Make efforts to find, locate and reach out
- ◆ Invite to meetings/appointments
- ◆ Educating young males on healthy relationships and role of fathering
- ◆ More community involvement
- ◆ Involved fathers despite conflict/or child is out of the home
- ◆ Hire male staff

***‘You’re the man I look  
up to the most, the  
man I most want to be  
like...’***



