



1.3 “The Perinatal Period for Fathers” Activity

Supporting Father’s Perinatal Health & Mental Health

The concept of perinatal health for fathers is at first a bit confusing – the father himself is not pregnant, so why would his health and role matter during the perinatal period?

Because we all exist in a web of relationships, and our emotional and physical health depends upon a **healthy relational ecosystem** around us. So, during the months of a pregnancy, the health of the infant, the mother and the father are all intimately connected, as they are after birth. The emotional health of fathers, father figures and all those who are a part of the ‘relational ecosystem’ around the mother and infant are a crucial, inseparable part of the equation. We must work to foster a healthy relational ecosystem, so positive feedback loops come about – the father, mother, infant and the village of people around them are all happy, secure and supported.

Perinatal health, commonly defined as the health of the baby before, during and up to the first year after birth, has historically focused on the baby and the mother. Generally, the science that supports obstetrics medicine has made medically supporting the child birthing process fairly routine and predictable. The United States ranks last among all industrialized countries for maternal mortality. The mortality rates for women of Black women and Women of Color in the United States are two to three times higher than that of white women in America. Although the science of understanding and supporting the physical needs of the child and mother during pregnancy has become routine and reliable, the application or art of applying medical care to underserved mothers and families is deeply lacking, particularly for women of color. And, because we have established that we all exist in a web of relationships, the lack of support for mothers also affects the provision of perinatal support for those in the role of father.

Understanding and supporting the social emotional perinatal needs of fathers offers care providers a wonderful opportunity to support and engage fathers. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to normalize the inclusion and services for fathers and father figures! Although the creation of an array of services directed to fathers and father figures might certainly be welcomed by many fathers, the ability to enhance current perinatal services by acknowledging and including fathers in the current social emotional perinatal screenings and assessments

might be a more realistic approach for programs with funding and reimbursement considerations.

Take a moment to consider the well-documented stress that fathers face during the perinatal period. Numerous studies have uncovered reasons for fathers facing increased stress, including but not limited to:

- **feelings of incompetence related to infant care**
- **negative feelings about the pregnancy**
- **role restrictions related to becoming a father**
- **fear of childbirth**

Discussion Questions for Practitioners:

1. Although most social/emotional screening administered during the perinatal assessment process is focused on the mother, what are some adaptations that might be made to include fathers and father figures?
2. Think about past experiences where a father was present. How were they included in their visits? Could there have been ways to have them more involved?
3. How could your forms and language used throughout your programming be altered to make fathers feel more welcome and comfortable?

For questions 1-3, please consider submitting your reflections to our collective pool of answers from all practitioners on our Mentimeter link [here](#).

4. Considering that service expectations and impressions begin at the moment of first contact with a service provider, what are some strategies that staff members can employ to facilitate father inclusion?
5. Considering that fathers have expressed there are many junctures where service provision could be more father-friendly, brainstorm some ideas for changes to your service environment.

Perinatal Reflection Questions & Tips for Fathers & Father Figures

- If you're a dad-to-be, how prepared do you feel for what's coming soon?
- What has your experience been like during the pregnancy? Are there situations where you have felt left out or ignored?
- Have you talked with your partner about what role you will play during the delivery process? What role would you like to play? How do you think you can best support your partner?
- Do you have any friends or peers who are fathers themselves? Consider asking some other dads you know about what the birth and the first few months of parenthood were like for them. What are their best tips to share?
- In what ways would you like to grow between now and your baby's birth? Consider asking your partner for feedback on areas you could grow in.

- What has been joyful so far about your partner's pregnancy? How might you bring more joy and meaning into the birth process? What are you most excited about for this coming chapter of fatherhood?

Note: Some of these questions have been adapted from the National Center for Fathering.

Resources for Further Exploration

- [Journey Into Fatherhood Video](#)
- [Preparing for Fatherhood - National Center for Fathering](#)
- [Advice for New \(or Soon-To-Be\) Dads! - National Center for Fathering](#)
- [Get Ready to Be a Dad with a Fathers Assembly](#)
- [A Poem for Harrison, My Unborn Son - National Center for Fathering](#)
- [How Fatherhood Can Change You - National Center for Fathering](#)
- [Father-Inclusive Perinatal Parent Education Programs: A Systematic Review](#)
- [International Journal of Birth & Parent Education](#)
- [Promoting Fathers' Mental Health During Children's Early Childhood](#)
- [The Perinatal Dad – Engaging Fathers in the Perinatal Period to Support Breastfeeding: The Fatherhood Institute](#)
- [Anxiety in fathers in the perinatal period: A systematic review](#)
- [Assessing the Mental Health of Fathers, Other Co-parents, and Partners in the Perinatal Period: Mixed Methods Evidence Synthesis](#)
- [Most Ordinary Men: The Importance of Fathers During the Perinatal Period | WA Interagency Fatherhood Council](#)
- [The Experiences of First-Time Fathers in Perinatal Services: Present but Invisible - PMC](#)
- [JJ Parker: Why men's perinatal care matters: Healthy fathers create healthy families – Chicago Tribune](#)
- [Paternal perinatal depression: It's time we brought fathers into the perinatal agenda — Inspire the Mind](#)
- [Birth of a Father: Fathering in the First 1,000 Days - Bakermans-Kranenburg - 2019 - Child Development Perspectives - Wiley Online Library](#)