

RUNNING A FATHERS' GROUP

Skills, Knowledge & Attitudes *

Skills

1. Coordinate a group planning process:

- Opportunities for collaborative planning of the dads group activities are actively sought
- The purpose of the dads group is made clear and/or translated into a set of aims and objectives
- The potential impact on group operation of the values and beliefs of both the worker and the dads is analysed and clarified with those involved in planning and implementing the group
- Contributions and suggestions to group planning processes are dealt with in a way to promote continued participation
- Planned group strategies are designed that promote effective group operation and take into account the specific characteristics of the dads

2. Manage group processes including responding to conflict:

- Opportunities are promoted for open dialogue and active listening between the dads. Ground rules for the group are developed and agreed upon.
- Sensitivity to participants, regardless of their gender, culture, ethnicity, subculture, sexuality and ability, is encouraged and modelled
- When conflict threatens or arises:
 - Strategies to prevent it are implemented within the role, power and capacity of the worker
 - The outcomes of positive conflict are identified and reinforced
 - Relevant principles and practices of conflict resolution are clarified and confirmed and agreement sought to implement them

3. Facilitate group processes:

The facilitator implements the following strategies in facilitating the dads group:

- develop relevance throughout the discussion – the discussion needs to be relevant to the dads and respond to their family's needs
- uses faith building – the facilitator uses a strengths approach to convey the belief that the dads have the ability to commit, choose, care, change, create, connect and communicate
- responds to issues with respect and honesty/directness – Dads respect people who honestly and respectfully discuss with them the important issues in their life

4. Maintain a child focus:

The facilitator:

- maintains the focus of the discussion on the importance of the relationship between the father and the child

- encourages the use of respectful language concerning other key people in the child's life
- uses meaning attribution to connect all the discussion in the group and how the dads can apply it in their family's life

Knowledge

1. Experience with individuals

A good leader for dads groups has had exposure to a wide range of people. This will include dads from different socioeconomic backgrounds. It is important to be able to appreciate and see similarities and differences in the experiences that a range of people face.

2. Experience with groups

Good leadership skills will naturally increase as facilitators facilitate more groups. It is advantageous to have experiences with a wide range of educational groups and how to deal with different group dynamics.

3. Knowledge of topic

Many groups demand a good working knowledge of a particular topic area. Group leaders can draw on their personal experiences to supplement this knowledge about fathering or children's needs.

4. A good understanding of basic human conflicts and dilemmas

A group leader needs to appreciate the emotional challenges that are part of dads' lives. They need to be prepared for and aware of, issues such as guilt, grief and loss, anger, self-worth, fear of failure, addictions, love and relationships and key transition periods that people experience.

5. Knowledge of local services

Knowledge of the agencies and services that are appropriate to the fathers in the group will be an advantage.

Attitudes

1. Respect for human beings

An effective group leader of dads groups has a healthy respect for other people across a range of social classes. It is valuable to identify with the strengths that others use to deal with challenges.

2. Belief in fathers' abilities

Facilitators of dads groups need to believe that dads have the ability and interest in relationships to:

- commit - the physical and ongoing support that a father provides and involvement with the child/ren throughout their lifetime
- choose - the capacity to make day to day decisions for the child/ren that meet the children's needs
- care - the ability to attend to the important transitions in a child's life and work to provide the optimal conditions that maximises their growth
- change - the ability to adapt as children grow older and the father matures in his relationship with the children
- create - the creation of resources for material well being and the resolution of problems that allow opportunities for the development of emotional well being
- connect - the ability to form lasting and healthy attachments with the children and partner. These attachments will change over time to meet the child's evolving needs
- communicate - the capacity to relate with children by sharing meaningfully with them, both verbally and non-verbally

As supplied by Andrew King with minor adaptations through the Forum workshop See his biography at [Program for Father-Inclusive Practice Forum 2005](#) and the presentation [PowerPoint Andrew King](#)