

Working with Fathers in Child Welfare



WELCOME!

What's our experience?

In the chat box, type...

- The county where you currently practice
- How many years have you worked in child welfare or other social welfare/ community practice?



Evaluation

In order to receive course completion status, trainees will complete all evaluations through the [California Child Welfare Training \(CACWT\) Statewide Learning Management System](#).

On your browser, navigate to:

<https://cacwt.dss.ca.gov>

and log in using your username and password.

Group Agreements

- Be collaborative
- Ask questions
- Be open to trying new things
- Be willing to make mistakes
- Maintain confidentiality
- Clear the way for your own learning
- Anything else?



KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES



KNOWLEDGE:

K1. Identify at least two ways engaging fathers and/or their relatives is important to the well-being of their children.

K2. Describe three elements of practice used to include and welcome fathers.

K3. Define two of the labels used to describe fathers in child welfare proceedings.

SKILLS AND VALUES OBJECTIVES



SKILLS:

S1. Assess current agency practice and/or policy regarding welcoming and serving fathers and paternal relatives.

S2. Examine personal biases and their effect on inclusion of fathers and paternal relatives in individual child welfare practice.

VALUES:

V1. Value the importance of maintaining and supporting relationships between children and their fathers and paternal relatives.

V2. Value a culturally-responsive, strengths-based approach to engaging fathers and their relatives.

Ice Breaker

1. Share something important you learned from your father or male role model.
2. Pick one or two words that summarize that experience.
3. Have one member of your group make a list of those words.

How are we doing at involving Dads?

2006 Study *What About the Dads?*

- 2,000 children removed from homes where father did not reside
- 88% - Agency identified the father
- 55% - Agency made contact with father
- 30% - Father visited child

--US Dept. of Health and Human Services



In That Same Study

Mothers were contacted in
100% of the cases

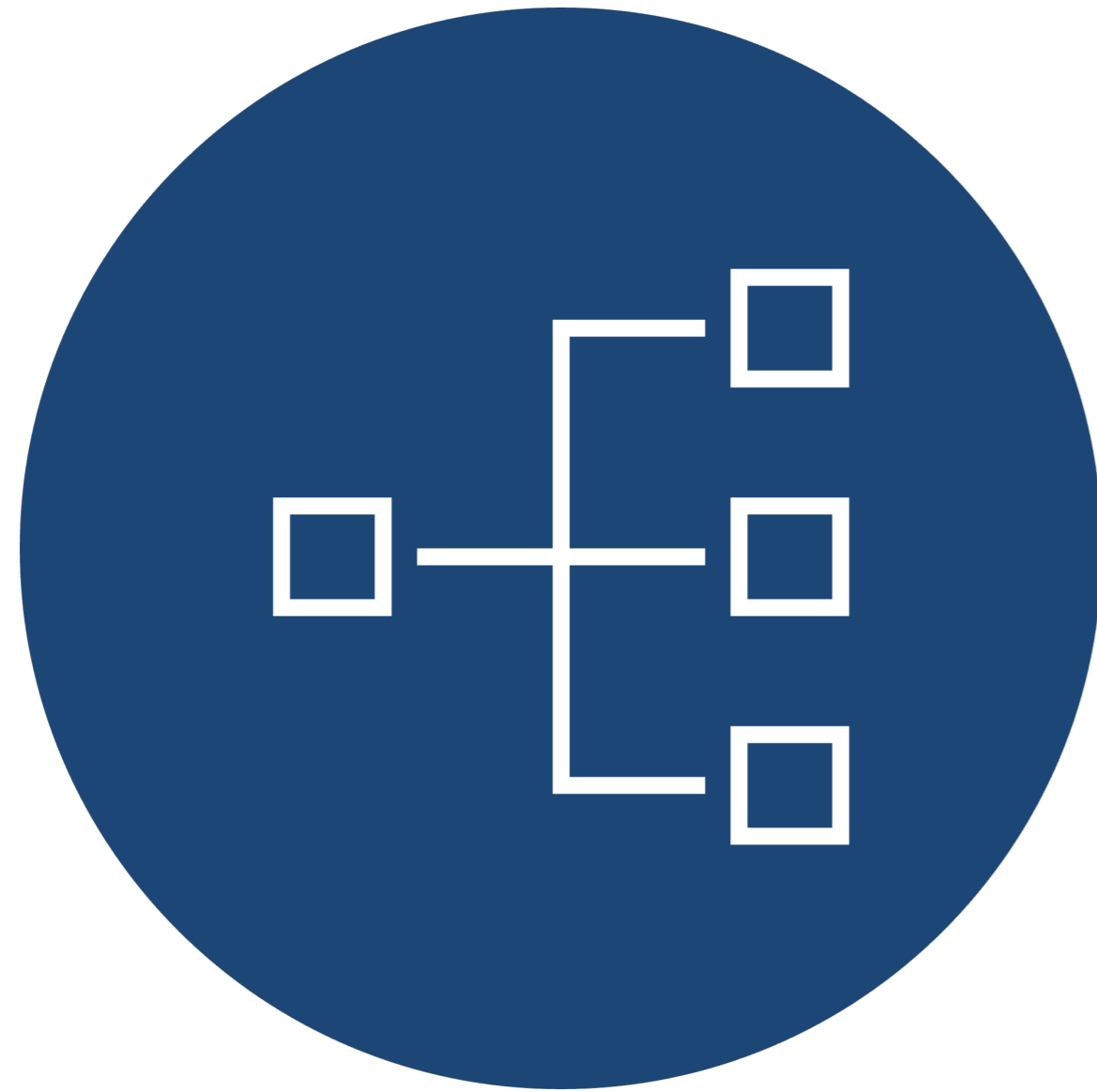
Another Study

Out of 4,000 families involved with
CPS, across the county:

73% of cases with “non-custodial”
parent listed, that parent had
contact with the child in the last
year

- Mostly dads
- Not the perpetrator of abuse
- Not necessarily “absent”

CFSR Reviews Reveal



- Fathers are not as engaged in child welfare as mothers
- Suggests that agencies are less likely to search for fathers when his location is unknown
- Fathers are not as involved in case planning as they could be
- Fathers are less likely than mothers to receive accurate needs assessments and appropriate services
- Overall, fathers receive fewer direct contacts from caseworkers than mothers do

Racial and Ethnic Disparities



Research found that agencies were:

- Less likely to identify, locate, and contact Black fathers
- Less likely to locate identified Latinx fathers and less likely to contact them once located
- Less likely to identify fathers of Multiracial children
- Social, political, and economic effects of colonialism (displacement, genocide) constrain Indigenous fathers' involvement more than most non-Indigenous men.

Why aren't we doing better?



- Issues such as race, class, gender, and culture may influence workers' attitudes towards fathers
- Perception that mothers are easier to work with
- Traditional gender roles: women are more nurturing and men are inherently dangerous and incompetent w/children
- Even as recently as 2017, public still views mothers as better than fathers at providing childcare
- Case workers, court personnel, and parents themselves can hold these views about gender and parenting

2021 National Study: A Seat at the Table



- Research continues to link a father's positive involvement in the family to children's well-being
- When child welfare agencies successfully engage fathers in their children's cases, they create a connection that can also improve children's outcomes
- Showed that not much improvement has been made in engaging fathers in the years since that 2006 study

Importance of Fathers

Children with involved, loving fathers are

- more likely to do well in school
- have healthy self-esteem
- exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior
- avoid high-risk behaviors such as drug use, truancy, and delinquent activity

Research also shows that fathers are as important as mothers in their children's outcomes

Lesbian and non-binary parents have similar positive outcomes



When Fathers are involved in child welfare services



- Children spend fewer days in foster care
- More likely to be reunified with parents
- Protect against future maltreatment
- Additional perspectives
- Social and financial resources
- Positive systemic effects beyond the individual family

Dads are a federal priority



Administration for Children and Families

- ...calls upon family services agencies to ensure that fathers feel welcome, supported, heard, and able to participate as fully as circumstances permit, and in accordance with applicable law, in all programs and services.
- ...strongly encourage all human services agencies to work together to jointly create and maintain an environment that prioritizes father engagement as a critical factor in strengthening families and adopt approaches to enhance paternal involvement in all programs

Effective case worker practice with fathers can:

- Increase the number of fathers who were located, contacted, appeared in court and referred to services and/or reunified with their children
- Increase referrals to father engagement or father-specific services
- Sharpen focus on engaging paternal relatives
- Result in more children being returned home to their Dad



DISCUSSION:

- What is keeping Dads from effectively working with the child welfare system?





DISCUSSION:

- What is keeping the child welfare system from effectively working with Dads?
- Are these the same lists?

Barriers faced by fathers involved with Child Welfare

2006 Study	2014 Study
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poverty• Low literacy• Substance abuse/ criminal history• Incarceration• Parenting skills• Lack of awareness of fatherhood• Conflicting DV orders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relationship difficulties with the mother• Lack of a valid address or phone number• Distrust of agency or social worker

What We Hear from Dads



- “My worker isn’t calling me back”
- “I don’t know why I have to do all of this stuff when the baby was removed from the mother”
- “They are saying that I am the alleged father, but I’m the dad”
- “Her mom (grandma) is telling the worker all of this bad stuff about me”
 - Examples from Joey Cordero, SF Fatherhood Program
Helping Fathers Navigate the System

None of these barriers limit a father's ability to love his child or a child's need to feel loved and connected



Father's Story:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duWt3Gzpb14>

Questions or Comments?





15 MIN BREAK (1)

Stretch and refresh



6 Photographers Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-TyPfYMDK8&feature=emb_title

Most case workers tend to rely on the story about Dad they heard from Mom, a previous caseworker or other third party.

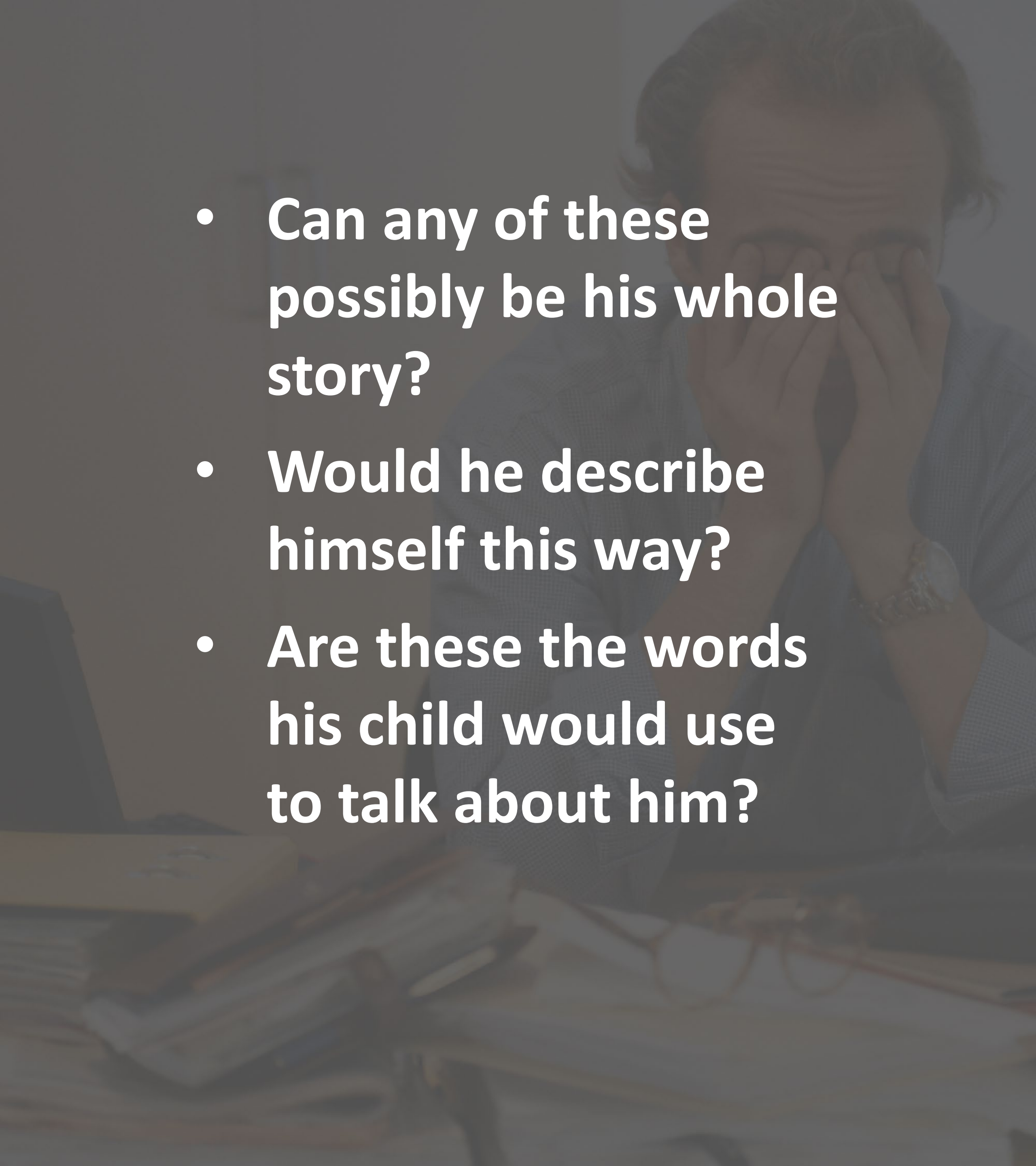
TRUE or FALSE?

Poll

Get ready to click...

Father's Single Story

- Violent
- Absent
- Unknown or
- Whereabouts Unknown
- Deadbeat
- Homeless
- Jobless
- Failed to protect
- In Custody
- Ex-con

- 
- A man in a blue shirt is sitting at a desk, looking thoughtful with his hands clasped. The background is a blurred office setting.
- **Can any of these possibly be his whole story?**
 - **Would he describe himself this way?**
 - **Are these the words his child would use to talk about him?**

Some labels are complex legal terms:

- Alleged
- Presumed
- Absent
- Legal
- Biological
- Unknown
- Non-Custodial
- NREFM

Fathers need help to understand these labels and how they affect their rights.



Why is “presumed” the label fathers’ want?



- Once designated a “presumed” father, he is *entitled*, as matter of law, to receive child welfare services to reunify with his child(ren).
- Very importantly, an alleged father **MAY** receive services, but they aren’t required as in a presumed father’s case

What do you think?

Before a man who has been identified as a possible father can come into the courtroom and *participate* in the Detention hearing, he must have his paternity established via a court order.

TRUE or FALSE?

POLL

Get ready to click...

Answer: FALSE

- The father or fathers, presumed and alleged, shall be provided notice and opportunity to be heard



Paternity Inquiry



- Case worker and court must pursue information about the father's identity
- Each identified man will receive a notice from the court that he is or may be the father
- Imagine receiving this information via certified mail, the child has been hurt/is already system-involved, you are required to show up in court
 - What emotions might you feel?
 - What kind of support would you want?

How can we support?

- Be there
- Explain what you know
- Ask what they need
- Even if they seem okay
- Be accountable



GROUP DISCUSSION: PRACTICE SHARE



QUESTIONS:

What have you found works when explaining the details of the legal/case process to parents and family members?

How do you explain the terminology and process specific to fathers?

In California

“The Legislature finds and declares that it is the public policy of this state to assure that children have frequent and continuing contact with *both* parents after the parents have separated or dissolved their marriage or ended their relationship, and to encourage parents to *share the rights and responsibilities of child rearing* in order to effect this policy, except where the contact would not be in the best interest of the child...”

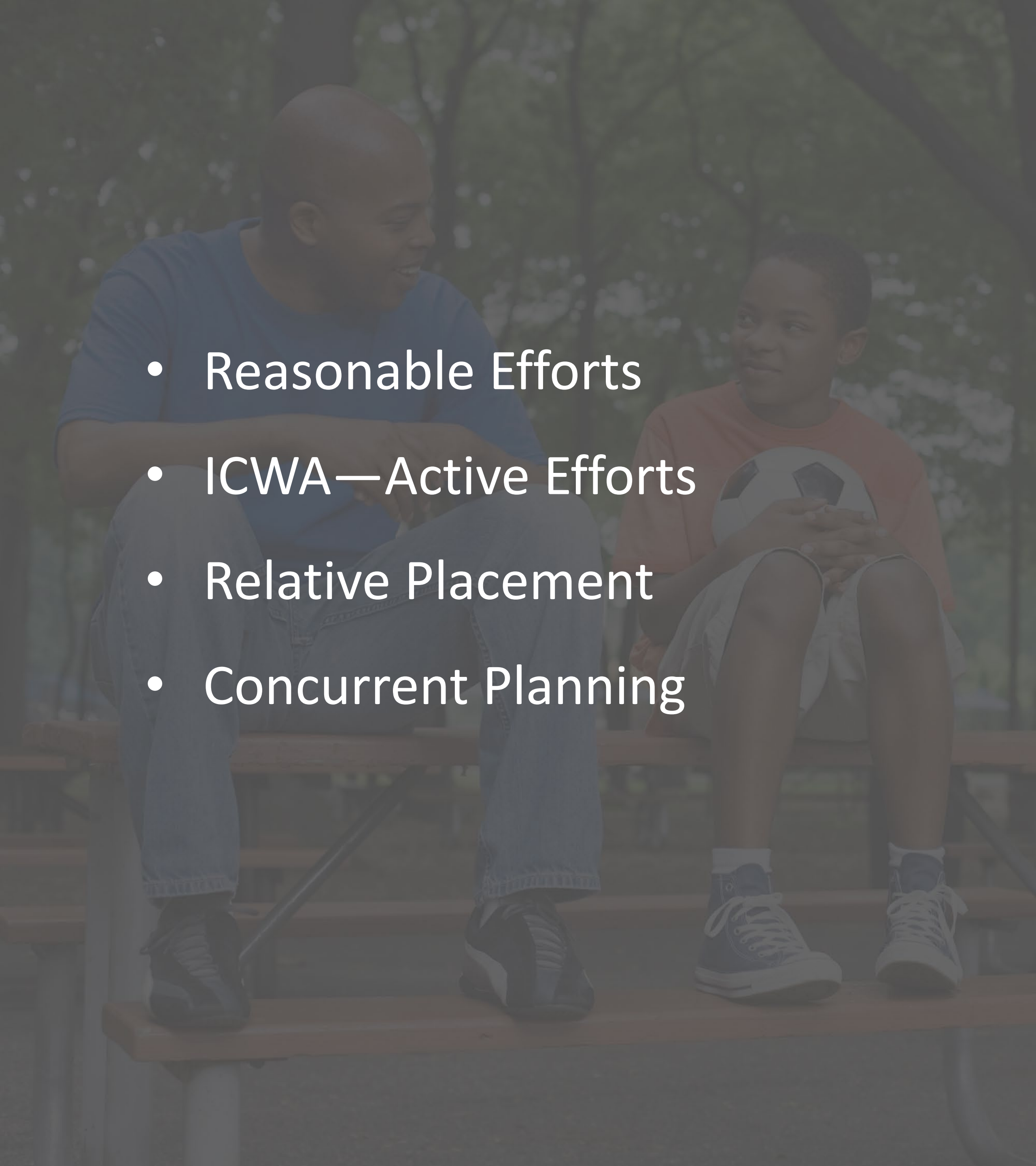
The mother of a minor child and the father, if presumed to be the father, **are equally entitled to the custody of the child.**

If one parent...is unable or refuses to take custody, or has abandoned the child, the other parent is entitled to custody of the child.

Family Finding Requirements-California

If the child is removed or is at risk of entering foster care the social worker or probation officer shall within 30 days, use due diligence to:

- Conduct an investigation to identify, locate, notify, and involve all adult relatives.(subject to DV exception)
- Adult relatives include; adult who is related to the child by blood, adoption or affinity within the fifth degree of kinship...
- An extended family member as defined by the law or custom of an Indian child's tribe. (25 U.S.C. § 1903(2).)

- 
- Reasonable Efforts
 - ICWA—Active Efforts
 - Relative Placement
 - Concurrent Planning

INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT

“Parent” means any biological parent or parents of an Indian child or any Indian person who has lawfully adopted an Indian child, including adoptions under tribal law or custom. It does not include the unwed father where paternity has not been acknowledged or established.



Looking for Connection

Remember that this is not just a technicality

- Permanent home
- Lifelong support and connection
- Heritage
- Health
- Identity



Identifying paternal support/networks

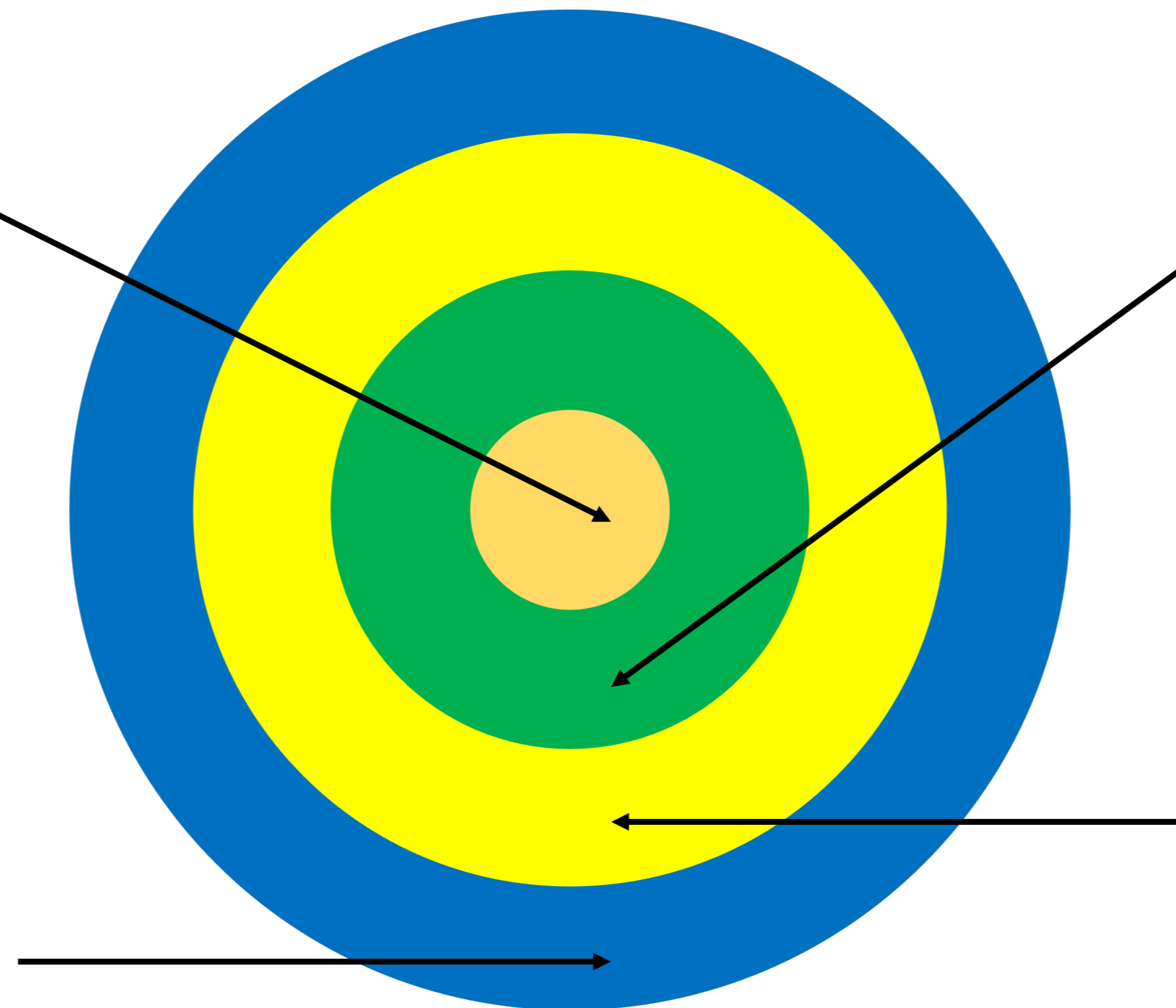
Circles of Support Tool

Name/Photo/Drawing
of family members

Who are the people who you
don't ask for support from
but maybe could in the
future?

Who are the people who
don't support you and maybe
make things harder for you
and your family?

Who are the people in your
life who don't know anything
about the hard things you've
been dealing with?



Who are the people who
support you the most?

Who do the children feel
most connected to?

Who already knows
everything that happened?

Who are the people who
support you a little?

Who do the children feel
some connection with?

Who already knows a little
bit about the hard things
you've been dealing with?



LUNCH BREAK

Stretch and refresh



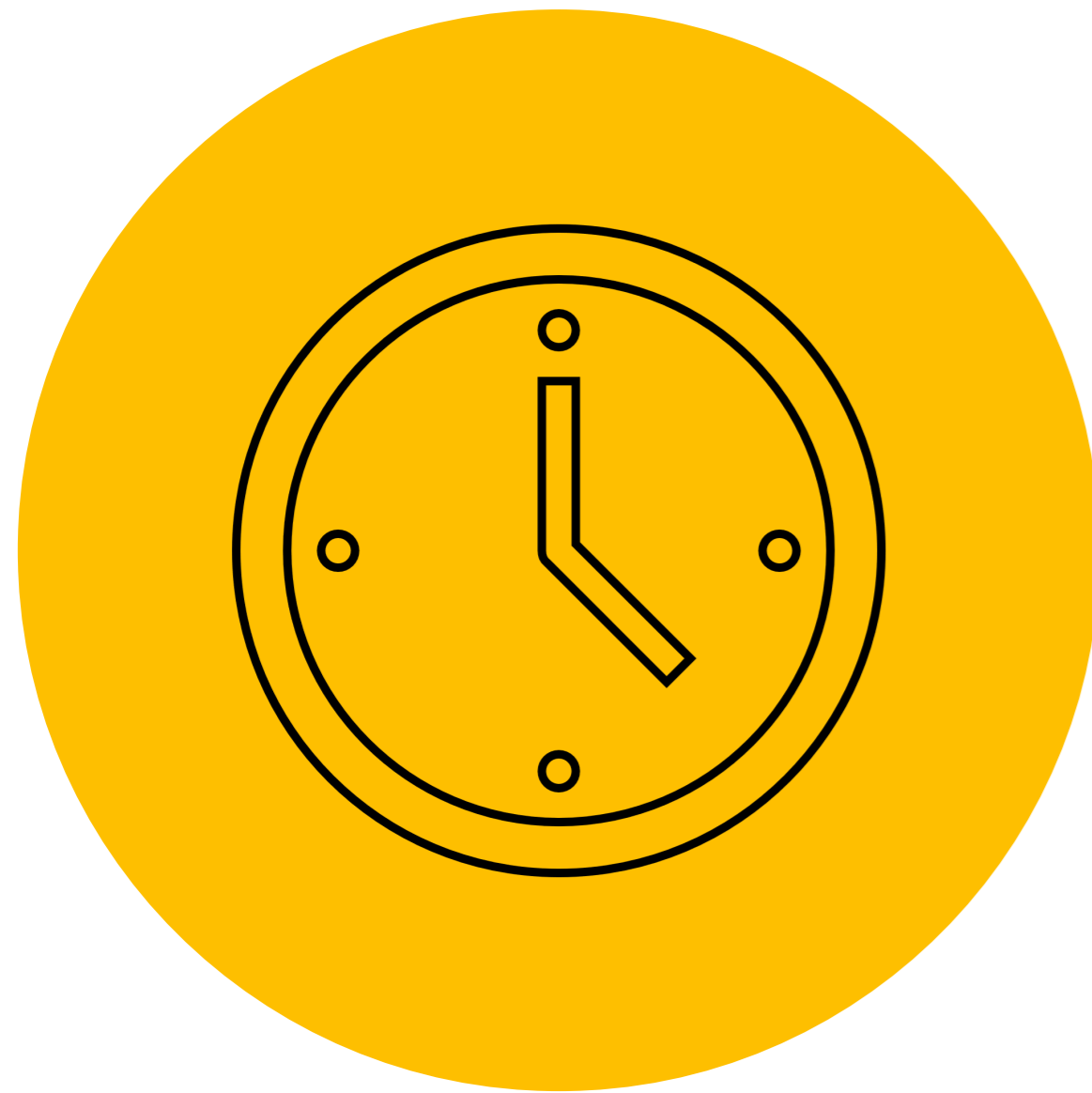
Working with Fathers Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Self-Assessment Discussion



- Thoughts?
- What would be different with more time, resources, training, support?
- How do workers' relationships with their fathers impact the child welfare system?

Time to change



- Humans built and maintain this system
- All humans have biases
- New policies, little change
- Changing your actions can lead to greater shifts
- Don't do it alone!

“We suggest that professionals should not necessarily strive to [always] be objective, but rather make their perceptions explicit so that they can be discussed and tackled among colleagues.” (Middel, et. al., 2022)

Fathers' views of case worker

Fathers mistrust system and/or worker at least initially

Case worker bias is a barrier

Worker attitude is more important than skills

How he feels is important to continue services

Compassion and respect are proven to matter

Internal and external dialogues



Action Plan

- Skills
- Resources
- Ongoing
- Support
- Big Dreams





Agency Father Friendliness Questionnaire

Agency Assessment Discussion Questions

- Have you seen any leaders in father friendliness? How could you tell?
- What practices or policies have you seen that work?



Beyond Invitation

- How can agencies cultivate a culture that values the involvement of fathers, that makes them feel as though they belong there?
- How can we move beyond just inviting fathers?

Post-Course Evaluation and Satisfaction Survey

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