



Birth to 5 Father Engagement Programming Guide

Program Strategies to Provide Access and Continuity of Services to Fathers



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Program Strategies to Provide Access and Continuity of Services to Fathers

Explore this practical guide to learn how programs can implement strategies to ensure access and continuity of services to fathers in Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Reflect on examples and consider ways to apply these strategies to support positive outcomes for children, families, and fathers.

Fathers and program staff helped develop this guide. It is one in a series of brief guides about how to use the [Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement \(PFCE\) Framework](#) to engage fathers.

This guide provides information about the following topics:

- What is the Head Start PFCE Framework?
- What are access and continuity in the PFCE Framework?

The three program strategies to provide access and continuity of services to fathers include:

- Implement father-friendly recruitment policies
- Prioritize child attendance and father engagement
- Work with community partners to support transitions

In this resource, the term “father” refers to fathers and other men who play a significant role in raising a child. This person may be a biological father, adoptive father, or stepfather.

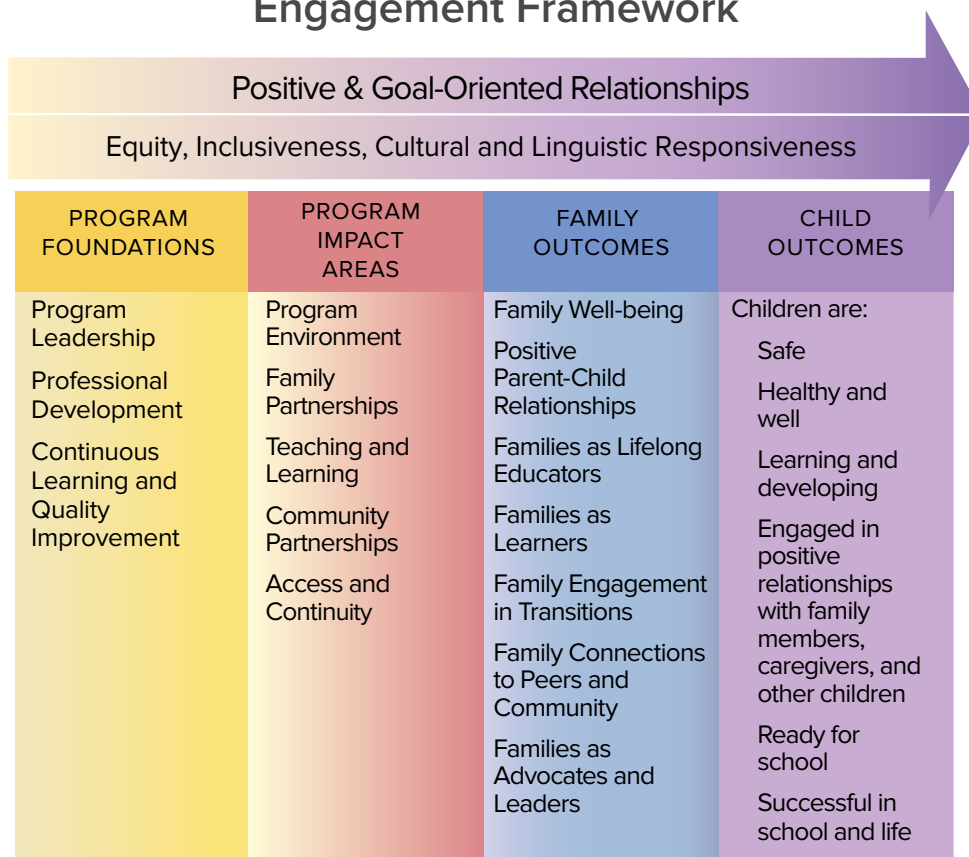
He may be a grandfather, another adult male family member, foster father, guardian, or the mother’s significant other. He may also be the expectant partner of a pregnant woman.

What is the Head Start PFCE Framework?

The Head Start PFCE Framework is an organizational guide for collaboration among families, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and community service providers to promote positive, enduring outcomes for children and families. The Framework identifies equity, inclusiveness, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, and positive goal-oriented relationships as important drivers for these outcomes.

The Framework describes the program foundations and impact areas that promote systemic, integrated, and comprehensive PFCE. These foundations support the impact areas, which are service areas with the greatest influence on family outcomes. One impact area, access and continuity, aligns with other PFCE Framework elements to support effective father engagement.

Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework



Look for these icons throughout the guide to find strategies and key points from fathers, programs, and researchers:



Key Points from the Field



Strategies

What is Access and Continuity in the PFCE Framework?

Head Start and Early Head Start programs develop Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) procedures. Programs establish these procedures using community and program assessment data and by engaging former and current families, staff, and community members. ERSEA procedures help ensure access to services for families. Father-friendly ERSEA procedures help ensure that fathers are engaged with services of the Head Start program and its community partners.

“Each program needs to determine how to advertise its services in the community. Options include signs on city buses, flyers in medical clinics, and booths at street fairs. Without a concerted recruitment effort, the families who need Head Start the most might not get the services.” —Head Start director



Continuity of services means consistent access to services during transitions. Some transitions are anticipated, while others are unexpected. The program goal is to minimize the disruption of services to children and families in addition to ensuring that program and community supports remain in place. For example, a family who relies on food assistance in Head Start may still need access to a food pantry when their child transitions to kindergarten.

An Early Head Start father who was enrolled in a job training program may want to continue when his child enrolls in preschool Head Start. After a wildfire, a father has relocated and isn't able to meet in person with his mental health counselor, but he may want to continue his sessions online. Program leaders, staff, and community partners can plan for seamless transitions to promote lasting, positive child and family outcomes.

Implement Father-Friendly Recruitment Policies

ERSEA procedures for recruitment directly affect fathers' access to program services and community resources. Invite fathers as advisors and advocates in the development of program policies and procedures related to ERSEA.

“We redesigned our application forms to make them more inclusive. We have spaces for “caregiver” and “parent/guardian” instead of “mother” and “father.” During our very first contact with families, we want to send the message that children have families with diverse structures, and we welcome them all.”—Head Start director





Explore these recruitment strategies to reach fathers and their children:

- Use data to guide recruitment efforts.
 - Refer to the community assessment data about the number of eligible children and families as well as their demographic factors. Review the information about the typical work, school, and training schedules of parents who have eligible children, in addition to learning more about available community resources.
 - Identify the places where eligible families might live, visit, shop, practice their faiths, attend cultural events, or spend time. Consider places like laundromats, barber shops, or salons.
 - To learn what works, ask former and current fathers about how and where they learned about Head Start and what made them want to learn more.
- Develop a marketing approach.
 - Use promotional materials. Wear a button that says, “Ask me about Head Start.” Put stickers with the Head Start logo and contact information on pizza boxes.
 - Maximize use of technology and social media to communicate. During the intake process, ask fathers for their contact preferences (e.g., phone calls, emails, text messages, or other formats).
 - Develop recruitment materials in the preferred languages of families.
 - Use photos of fathers and their children on print materials.
 - Highlight what the program offers fathers by preparing, practicing, and sharing an elevator pitch in 30 seconds or less. Close with an invitation: “Will you join us?”
 - Partner with fathers to help recruit whenever possible. Ask them to share promotional materials with their networks on the job and in their neighborhoods.
 - Encourage fathers to speak honestly and openly about the challenges they have faced and the value of the program. Word of mouth can be very effective.
 - Ensure the program environment is welcoming to visiting fathers. Have comfortable furniture in the family rooms and posters of fathers and children on the walls.
 - Use technology and creative methods to recruit during community emergencies, when families might be homebound. Invite families to a virtual “open house” to meet staff and learn about the program.

- Collaborate with community partners.
 - Plan recruitment activities with community organizations and family-led networks.
 - Share promotional materials with local government agencies that provide employment, housing, and other services to families.
 - Make outreach efforts to nonresident fathers. Contact shelters and other living arrangements for fathers who are experiencing homelessness.
 - Speak at community gatherings, such as store openings, street fairs, festivals, recreation centers, and sporting events.
 - Invite entertainment or sports figures to a Head Start open house.
 - Speak at military bases and leave promotional materials at recruiting centers.
 - Contact officials in the justice system to reach incarcerated fathers.

- Highlight the opportunities for fathers in the program
 - Share how the family partnership process and setting goals promote family and child well-being.
 - Emphasize the program’s role in nurturing father-child relationships.
 - Highlight how fathers can make unique contributions to their children’s development. Focus on how the program engages fathers in school readiness activities with their children.
 - Provide information on how the program connects fathers with other fathers.
 - Ask for fathers’ input during the enrollment process to assess their child’s strengths and needs, and to plan for individualized services.
 - Ask fathers how they hope Head Start can benefit them, their children, and their families.

Prioritize Child Attendance and Father Engagement

ERSEA includes policies and procedures about children’s attendance. Children’s sustained participation in the program is important for their continued learning and development. When children’s attendance is sporadic or drops off, that usually impacts family engagement. If a child is consistently absent, the partnership process and service delivery to a father can be disrupted. As a result, progress toward positive family and child outcomes may be hindered.



“Our center is located in a neighborhood that isn’t very safe. Attendance was dropping because families didn’t want to walk to our center. We met with community groups and parents, and they decided to form a “Safety Squad” to walk with families at the beginning and end of the day. Fathers and some mothers help. Now children’s attendance is much better. Plus, many parents stay on in the morning to participate in parent activities and volunteer in the classrooms.”—Family services manager



Try these strategies to promote children’s attendance and father participation in the program:

- Include relevant stakeholders to develop policies to promote attendance and family engagement.
- Develop a plan for partnering with parents to promote consistent attendance in center-based programs.
- Consider guidelines to encourage parents’ consistent participation in home-based programs.
- Inform all staff of the direct impact regular attendance has on school readiness and future school success. Research shows that chronic absenteeism among 4-year-olds continues when they are in kindergarten.
- Create tip sheets to educate parents on the importance of consistent attendance and what to do when a child is absent.
- Help nonresident fathers find ways to support their child’s attendance.
- Partner with fathers and families to identify predictable and consistent routines and supports that promote regular attendance.
- Share your concern with a family when their child is frequently absent. Avoid placing blame. Take a problem-solving approach.
- Review the community assessment data to identify trends, health concerns, or cultural traditions that may impact consistent attendance.
- Work with parents and partners to address communitywide issues that may impact regular attendance, including transportation barriers and neighborhood safety.
- Use technology and creative learning approaches to promote children’s virtual attendance during a community emergency when families might be homebound. Engage fathers in their children’s continuous learning.

Homelessness and sudden housing moves can pose challenges for regular attendance and service provision. Consider these strategies to keep children engaged in a program:

- Connect with other grantees that can enroll families in their new location.
- Explore short-term services in learning-rich environments for the children and families. Short-term support for parents may give them a boost toward greater stability.
- Tap into community resources, such as transportation options. With reliable transport, children and their families may be able to stay longer in one location and participate consistently in the program.

Work with Community Partners to Support Transitions

Continuity of Services

Access to continuous, high-quality services provides opportunities for fathers to build on their strengths, identify immediate needs, and plan for the future. Disruption in services can affect the father’s partnership with staff and ability to achieve goals. Be prepared to address all kinds of transitions with fathers. They can range from changing a residence or a job to starting an educational or vocational program to forming new relationships with other adults or children. The birth of a child is a major transition too. Some transitions are intentional and expected. Other transitions are not planned, often precipitated by things like a natural disaster, serious illness, death, or job loss.

“When our apartment burned down, we were homeless. I thought we would end up on the street. Our Head Start family advocate helped us find temporary housing and gave us transportation vouchers to get my child to the center. I used the vouchers to get to my job training. I couldn’t have gotten through all this without this support.” —Head Start father



Partnerships provide resources so that the well-being and goal attainment of fathers is supported. As a father’s circumstances change, he may engage with new community partners. For example, if he has reached his goal of completing his degree, he may be ready to transition to employment support. Often, fathers use multiple agencies to obtain services, such as a housing support agency and a fuel assistance program. Helping fathers coordinate services also ensures they aren’t duplicated.

Refer to the [Program Strategies to Maximize Fathers’ Connections with Community Partners](#) for more information about working with agencies and organizations to support fathers.



Tips for providing continuous services for fathers include:

- Maintain the relationship with the father while identifying new supports and making an effective referral.
- Provide “warm” handoffs. Arrange introductions in person, if possible, rather than just passing on paperwork.
- Establish partnerships with agencies and organizations that value a strengths-based approach and use relationship-based practices with fathers, just as Head Start programs do.
- Work with culturally and linguistically responsive partners.
- Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of partnerships. Revise them and add new ones as needed.
- Review formal partnership agreements, referred to as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), based on the data collected.
- Ensure the communication channels between the program and its community partners are effective and timely.
- Explore options that strengthen the referral and follow-up processes.
- Maintain connections between fathers and community services during a community emergency when families could be homebound or suffering from homelessness. Use creative approaches and technology to reach out and deliver needed support services.
- Prioritize access to resources that will help fathers progress toward the goals they developed as part of the family partnership process.

Continuity Across Educational Settings

Strong partnerships between Head Start programs and other early education settings help children and their families transition with confidence and success. The transition may be from Early Head Start to Head Start or from Head Start to child care, a state-funded pre-K, or another early childhood program. When collaborating with families, program staff can learn how individual children experience change and develop ways to support the whole family during the transition process. Achieving seamless transitions is important for the positive experiences of families.

One of the biggest transitions is the Head Start child’s move into kindergarten. Head Start programs and the local school districts are community partners, often with MOUs in place to ensure continuity and communication. Programs can work closely with the superintendent, school principals, and others to ensure that transition policies and practices focus on optimizing the gains that children and families made in Head Start.



Review these leadership strategies to support continuity and smooth transitions for fathers when their children move into a new setting:

- Share information about fatherhood activities in the Head Start program. Highlight the role of fathers in child development and school readiness. Invite fathers to tell their success stories.
- Create flexible staffing patterns and work hours so that Head Start staff can partner with fathers and accommodate their schedules during transition activities.
- Encourage the use of father-friendly communication strategies in the new setting, such as gender-neutral forms and ways to reach nonresident fathers.



As a family service professional, apply these strategies to support continuous service delivery and ongoing father engagement:

- Partner closely with fathers to identify the services and resources they need in the new setting. For example, does a father need an interpreter at a PTA meeting or help writing a letter to his employer to request a work-schedule adjustment to attend a parent-teacher conference?
- Support fathers as their child's advocate. Remind parents that they know their child best. If necessary, help them share information with the new teacher. Encourage them to describe their child's strengths and how their child learns best.
- Remind fathers that when they are engaged in their children's lifelong learning, their children benefit from it. Encourage them to volunteer in the new program or school and attend parent-teacher conferences.
- Encourage fathers to take leadership roles in program governance activities, the PTA, or the school board. Remind them how fathers' and families' voices need to be heard.
- Inform fathers of their rights and responsibilities concerning the supports and services available for children with disabilities or children who are dual language learners.

Access and Continuity in Action

Explore this scenario in which a fatherhood coordinator describes the success of a new recruiting tactic:

“I went to my barbershop recently. A nurse was doing blood pressure screenings and passing out health information. It turns out the barber had reached out to the local hospital, knowing that his customers often complained of high blood pressure. This really interested me.



In some neighborhoods, barbershops are the “go to” place for men to seek conversation and guidance. This certainly is true in my community. I asked the barber whether I could leave some flyers about Head Start. He knew about the program and thought this was a great idea. I left some flyers in the shop. A month later, I went even further. I brought in some guys from my fathers’ group. They hung out, got a haircut and a shave, and chatted with other customers. Some other guys wanted to enroll their children in Head Start and took the forms home. This was the best recruiting idea I ever had.”



Reflection

Consider these questions:

How does your program use the community assessment data to locate eligible children?

Are the recruitment and enrollment materials reader-friendly? Are the families' home languages used?

Does your program have a list of key recruitment sites and organizations across the service area that are family- and father-focused?

Has your program informed staff and parents about the importance of regular attendance?

Reflection, cont.

How does your program partner with parents to promote regular attendance?

Do the community partnerships implement continuous service delivery with your program?

Resources

Explore these resources on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website:

- [Engaging Community Partners to Strengthen Family Services](#)
- [ERSEA: Developing Effective Recruitment Services](#)
- [ERSEA: Encouraging and Supporting Regular Attendance](#)
- [Head Start PFCE Framework: Integrating Strategies for Program Progress](#)
- [Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness](#)



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