



TALKING

WITH MOM™

ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR DADS

FATHERTOPICS™
BOOSTER SESSION

**National
Fatherhood
Initiative®**

www.fatherhood.org

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Talking with Mom™: Essential Communication Skills for Dads

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an amazing fact and focus of life. Thousands of books have been written on it, colleges and universities provide degrees in it, and politicians and their “spin masters” focus on it to the detriment of substance. People struggle with it on a daily basis and often become so exasperated with it that they just give up trying to make themselves understood and to understand others. But when it comes to relationships and parenting, effective communication is vital. We must learn to effectively communicate with our spouse or partner and our children. After all, our children’s well-being is at stake.

Fathers often find it difficult to communicate effectively with the mothers of their children, especially when the situation is emotionally charged. Men and women communicate quite differently, generally speaking, because of the ways our brains are wired and the way we are socialized. The fundamental biological and sociological bases for our different communication styles and patterns create an inherent barrier that many parents never cross or attempt to cross. Parents and their children can suffer as a consequence.

The good news is that we can certainly learn to communicate better. This goal of this booster session is quite simply to help fathers to become better communicators with the mother(s)¹ of their children. Accordingly, National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) developed this booster session in response to the need expressed by facilitators of our programs and others who work with fathers and families. It goes more in-depth on the topic of communications than comprehensive fathering programs, such as NFI’s 24/7 Dad® and InsideOut Dad®. Most importantly, however, is that this booster session responds to the need for additional help in communication conveyed by so many of the fathers who have gone through our programs and who have contacted us directly by phone or email.

The objectives of this booster session are to help fathers:

- Learn how to create a safe environment in which to communicate with the mother of their children;
- Understand the foundation for problems in communication between fathers and mothers, their role in creating communication problems, and what they can do to build a foundation for effective, safe communication; and
- Learn how to listen effectively and with compassion to the mother’s point of view and to effectively share their point of view with compassion.

¹ Some of the fathers who will participate in this booster session might have fathered children by more than one woman. Even though this booster session does not deal with the unique challenges faced by these fathers, they will be able to apply the knowledge and skills they learn to communicate more effectively with each of the mothers.

NFI drew the information you will present and the skills you will teach fathers from several sources. The two primary sources are NFI's *The 7 Habits of a 24/7 Dad*² booster session and *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*³, the highly-regarded New York Times bestseller.

This booster session includes three smaller sessions each designed to last 1 and ½ to 2 hours.⁴ It includes interactive activities and handouts⁵ to create a fun, effective learning environment.

Session 1 starts with a fun icebreaker that drives home the importance of patterns of communication. It then moves in to a discussion about how patterns of communication over time affect the quality of fathers' communication with the mother of their children generally and how patterns of communication can lead to problems when communicating about specific issues. Dads then learn about the power of poor patterns of communication and their effect on their emotions and reactions when communicating with the mother of their children. The session ends with Dads learning skills to help them repair poor patterns of communication and create good patterns that will serve as the foundation for communication generally and about specific issues.

Session 2 moves deeper into skill building with a focus how to create a safe environment that is critical for effective communication. Creating a safe environment is at the heart of **Talking with Mom™**. Safety means a comfortable space in which fathers and mothers can share their views knowing that their views are respected and valued by the other person (e.g. they won't be verbally attacked), even when the issue they discuss generates strong emotions. Fathers learn how to create and reach Mutual Purpose and Mutual Respect — and build it over time like a healthy bank or investment account — as a key factor in creating a general sense of safety between them and the mother(s) of their children when communicating about any issue. They also learn how to focus on creating a positive outcome for them and for the mother that satisfies them both.

Session 3 helps dads develop listening skills that they can use to understand the mother's point of view and share their own view with compassion. Fathers learn how they "filter" the mother's point of view and how this filtering can affect how they communicate with her. Then they learn the importance of listening to the mother's point of view first before sharing their own. In doing so, they learn skills to help the mother feel safe sharing her view when she becomes angry or when she withdraws and won't share. And they learn how to share their view persuasively but compassionately.

2 The Emotional Bank Account®, Think Win-Win®, and Win-Win Agreement® are registered trademarks of the FranklinCovey® Co, and The Listening Filter™ is a trademark of National Fatherhood Initiative® and FranklinCovey® Co.

3 Patterson, K., J. Grenny, R. McMillan, and A. Switzler (2002) *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*. New York: McGraw-Hill. NFI strongly recommends reading this book before implementing this booster session.

4 If you use NFI's 24/7 Dad® program you will notice, in that program, each session includes a heading that identifies which of the characteristics of the 24/7 Dad the session addresses. The length of the sessions depends on the number of fathers in the group and the amount of discussion that takes place.

5 NFI gives you permission to make as many copies of the handouts as you need. You may not, however, make copies of this booster session in its entirety or other parts of it for distribution.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOSTER SESSION

You can easily conduct all three sessions in less than a day or break them up across several days or weekends. You can also integrate the three sessions into an NFI or any other fatherhood program or use them before the program starts or after it ends.

Use with 24/7 Dad®

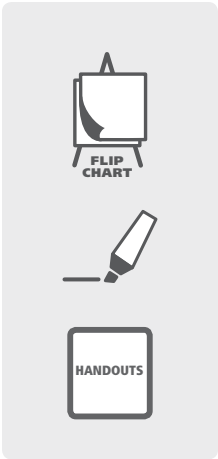
If you use NFI's 24/7 Dad® A.M. or P.M. programs, integrate the booster session between Sessions 5 and 6 or 10 and 11.⁶ If you use the P.M. program, integrate it between Sessions 9 and 10.

⁶ Integrate it between Sessions 5 and 6 if you want to have a heavy focus on communication because the module will follow Session 5 on communication. Integrate it between Sessions 10 and 11 if you continue with the emphasis on working effectively with the mother because the module will follow Session 10 on co-parenting.

SAMPLE
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION!

SESSION 1:

Why Can't We Communicate?



24/7 Dad® CHARACTERISTICS (3):

- Self-awareness
- Caring for Self
- Relationships

PRE-SESSION PROCEDURES:

1. If you use this booster session with the second or later edition of the 24/7 Dad® A.M. or P.M. programs, review the standard pre-session procedures in Chapter VI of the Program Guide.
2. Write the names of the facilitator(s) on the flip chart.
3. Make enough copies of the Clues handout found in the Appendix for each group of Dads to use during Activity 1.1.
4. Identify a poor pattern of communication that you have that drives your spouse or partner nuts to share with the Dads during Activity 1.2. Be prepared to share why it drives your spouse or partner nuts.
5. Draw the **Prepare → Pause → Think → Choose** graphic below on a piece of flip chart paper and post it on a wall for use during Activity 1.4.



6. Identify an issue that many of the Dads have faced or might face in communicating with the mother of their children for use when you break them into groups during Activity 1.4. Consider the custody and residential status of the Dads and the age of their children in selecting an issue common to many of them. You can select more than one issue to give the Dads a choice.
7. Write the following questions on a piece of flip chart paper for use during Activity 1.5. Group the first three together and write the fourth one somewhere below and separate from the first three or on a separate piece of paper.
 - What do I really want for myself?
 - What do I really want for others (mom and the children)?
 - What do I really want out of the relationship?
 - How should I behave if this is what I really want for me, others, and the relationship?

- ACTIVITY 1.1** Welcome and Warm-Up
- TIME:** 15 minutes
- MATERIALS:** Flip chart, markers, pens or pencils, Clues handout found in the Appendix, (optional) pictures of objects instead of Clues handout

FACILITATOR'S GOAL:

To welcome the Dads to this session. To increase their awareness that patterns of communication between fathers and mothers over time can create a good or poor foundation for communication in their relationship and in specific situations; of their role in creating communication problems; and what they can do to build a foundation for effective communication.

PROCEDURES:

1. Welcome the Dads to the session. Explain that the three (3) sessions in this booster session will help them to better understand how to communicate effectively with the mothers of their children. They will learn how to create a safe environment in which to understand the points of view of the mothers of their children and to help them understand their own (the Dads') points of view when talking about any issue.
2. Tell them that this session focuses on what causes communication problems between dads and moms and what they can do to start to communicate well with the mothers of their children. Say that they'll do a fun icebreaker to get started.

PROCEDURES FOR THE CLUES HANDOUT OPTION

3. Divide the Dads into equal groups of Dads, but not more than four groups. Consider having the Dads count off 1, 2, 3, etc. with the 1s forming one group, 2s another, and so on.
4. After the groups form, give each group one copy of the Clues handout. Tell the Dads to work in their groups and solve the puzzle using the two main clues and the secondary clues that go with each one. Tell them they only have to write in the answer — the words — that fill in the blanks for the main clues. Give them 5-10 minutes.
5. After 5-10 minutes, ask the Dads to call out the answer to the main clue in Part I of the handout. Acknowledge the correct answer if someone shares it and offer it if no one solves it. (The answer is "Patterns.") After you cover the main clue in Part One, write the word **PATTERNS** on the flip chart.
6. Now ask the Dads to call out the answer to the main clue in Part II of the handout. Acknowledge the correct answer if someone shares it and offer it if no one solves it. (The answer is "Communication.") After you cover the clues in Part II, write the word **COMMUNICATION** on the flip chart a little below **PATTERNS** leaving enough space in between the words to write "of."

Patterns

Patterns
Communication



- To close out this activity, write the word **OF** in between **PATTERNS** and **COMMUNICATION**. Tell the Dads that the next activity will focus on “Patterns of Communication.”

Patterns
of
Communication

PROCEDURES FOR THE PICTURES OF OBJECTS OPTION



NOTE TO FACILITATOR:

Another option for Activity 1.1 is to acquire one set of pictures of objects (e.g. from magazines or printed from the Internet) that represent patterns and another that represent communication. This option is ideal if you have Dads who can't read well. Acquire 4-6 pictures of objects that reflect patterns and 4-6 that reflect communication. Place the pictures on a table, desk, or other piece of furniture that is high enough for the Dads to see as they stand around it and look at the pictures. Arrange the pictures of patterns together and of communication together so they form two distinct groups — don't mix the objects or pictures from the two groups. Examples of objects are:

- **Patterns:** butterfly (wings are a pattern — make sure the pattern in the wings shows); soccer ball (the diamond shapes are a pattern); flower with petals (petals are a pattern); a football receiver's route (also called a pattern); piece of fabric with a print on it; and a famous building with an architectural pattern (such as several columns)
- **Communication:** telephone; cell phone tower; the names of languages (e.g. several names on the same piece of paper); two people talking to each other; walkie-talkie; and someone using sign language

- (Optional) Ask the Dads to gather around the pictures that you laid out in preparation for this activity. Tell them that the pictures are in two groups. Each group represents something that is reflected or represented in each of the pictures. One group represents one thing and the other represents another thing. Tell the Dads that what each group represents can be described in a single word. Tell them they have about 5 minutes to look at the two groups of objects and decide what each group represents and that they can talk to each other as they decide.
- (Optional) After about 5 minutes, tell the Dads to return to their seats/tables. Ask the Dads to volunteer what they think the groups represent and why. Then share or reinforce that one group represents “Patterns” and the other “Communication” depending on what the Dads shared.
- (Optional) To close out this activity, write the phrase **PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION** on the flip chart and tell the Dads that the next activity will focus on “Patterns of Communication.”

Patterns
of
Communication

NOTES
