



# Vital Topics for Staff to Discuss with Moms to Increase Dad's Involvement



**National  
Fatherhood  
Initiative®**

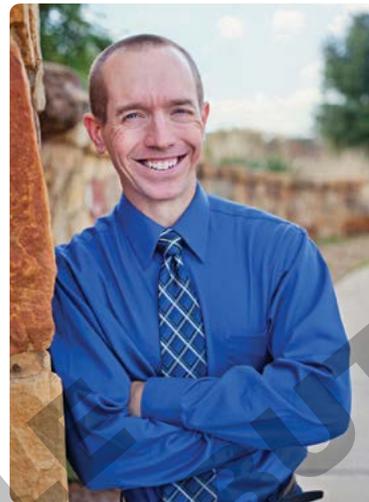
CREATING A WORLD IN WHICH EVERY CHILD HAS A 24/7 DAD<sup>SM</sup>

# About the Author

**CHRISTOPHER A. BROWN** is *President* of National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI). He received his bachelor's degree in Anthropology from the University of North Texas and his master's degree in Applied Anthropology from the University of South Florida. Chris lives in the Austin, Texas area with his wife.

Chris has played a critical role in shaping NFI's focus as the leading provider of fatherhood skill-building resources in the country and the leading trainer of practitioners seeking to offer fatherhood programs in their communities. In his long tenure with NFI, he has been the organization's foremost developer of its world-class fatherhood programs. Brown has authored or co-authored flagship NFI programs such as 24/7 Dad® and InsideOut Dad®, and its more recent, innovative programs such as Understanding Dad™ and Fathering in 15™. He has also authored many workshops, brochures, pocket guides, and other skill-building materials.

An applied anthropologist and author of several journal articles and book chapters on issues related to child health and well-being, he has studied masculinity cross culturally, especially as it applies to fatherhood and men's health and well-being. He has appeared as a fatherhood expert in media outlets, including the L.A. Times, New York Times, Nick Jr. Magazine, and CNN.



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## Introduction

Do you wonder how to convince a mother to encourage the father of her child to be more involved in that child's life? Have you tried to convince a mother to allow the father of her child to be more involved only to be thwarted in your attempt? Do you work with a mother who can't seem to say one nice thing about the father of their children? Do you work with a couple that continually fights and has poor communication and conflict-resolution skills? Do you ever wonder why a certain couple can't seem to put their children first—who think about no one other than themselves?



These are the kinds of questions asked by many staff and practitioners who work with mothers, fathers, and families that we've worked with through the years. Staff and practitioners often ask us, "What do you have for mothers? Do you have any resources that can help us improve the relationships between mothers and fathers?" Well, yes, we do! And this guide is the latest in National Fatherhood Initiative's growing line of those resources that include the **Understanding Dad™** program, **Mom as Gateway™** FatherTopics™ Booster Session, and several pocketbooks, brochures, and tip cards for moms. (Visit [www.fathersource.org](http://www.fathersource.org) for more information on these resources.)

## How to Use This Guide

National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) developed this guide to help staff in organizations that provide direct services to families and other individuals and practitioners (e.g. volunteers, coaches, and counselors) address the most critical issues in improving mother-father relationships. It is especially helpful for working with custodial mothers who do not live with the father of their children (i.e. he is non-residential and non-custodial), but it is helpful regardless of couples' romantic status and living arrangements.

Use this guide to design lectures, workshops, seminars, events, and other activities for mothers that cover one or more of the topics addressed in the following pages. While the guide addresses working with mothers one on one, you can apply the content to working with mothers in small and large-group settings. The content focuses on what moms can control in the relationship with the father of their children. As you review and decide how to apply the content, keep the following things in mind.

- There might be situations in which you should not encourage a mother to involve the father. These include situations in which the father is a legitimate threat or danger to the mother or children (e.g. he has a history of inflicting emotional or physical abuse).
- Some mother-father relationships are irreparable. No matter how hard you try to convince a mother to encourage father involvement, there are some relationships that are so far gone

that it isn't possible to bring them back to a place in which the mother will encourage the father's involvement.

- Some mothers will be very hostile toward the father, and vice versa. It might take a while to help a mother move to a place in which she is receptive to his involvement.
- Keep mothers focused on the impact on her children of the relationship between her and the father. Doing so will give you the best chance of moving a mother to a place in which she will encourage the father's involvement.

We have identified 14 issues (hereafter referred to as topics) that are critical to address when assisting mothers of any race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background to improve the relationship with the father of their children. How did we identify them? Two primary ways: 1) discussions with staff and practitioners that work with mothers, fathers, and families during our more than 20 years providing programs, resources, training, and technical assistance, and 2) the results of a survey of more than 350 staff and practitioners we conducted in December 2014 in which we asked them to identify the most critical topics to address in helping mothers encourage father involvement in the lives of children.

The guide covers each topic in two to four pages. You will find background information on the topic, which includes several important factors to keep in mind when working with mothers on the topic. The background information is followed by key learning objectives for mothers that you should build into the type of learning format you decide to use. Questions that mothers should ask themselves on the topic—that you could also build into your learning format—follow and are tied into the key learning objectives. Many of the topics end with a list of one or more NFI resources you can use with mothers to deepen their learning on the topic.

## Who We Are

National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) was founded in 1994 to stimulate a society-wide movement to confront the most consequential social trend of our time: widespread fatherlessness in our nation. Our mission is simple yet ambitious: We seek to improve the well-being of children by increasing the proportion of children growing up with involved, responsible, and committed fathers in their lives.

## Our 3E Strategy

NFI works to accomplish its mission with a focus on the following “3E” strategy.

### EDUCATE

**We educate and inspire all Americans, especially fathers, through public awareness campaigns, research, and other resources.** We educate Americans on the consequences of father absence, the positive impact of involved fathers on children, and the importance of promoting involved, responsible, and committed fatherhood. We have generated hundreds of millions of dollars across the country in donated television, radio, print, and the Internet advertising. Our campaigns focus on the unique and irreplaceable contributions that fathers

make in the lives of their children, and that as a nation, we must do more to encourage and support men to be good and responsible fathers. We produce *Father Facts*, now in its 8th edition, which is the definitive source of data on the consequences of father absence and the benefits of father involvement. We conduct original, cutting-edge surveys, such as *Pop's Culture: A National Survey of Dads' Attitudes on Fathering*.

## EQUIP

**We equip fathers and develop leaders of national, state, and community fatherhood initiatives through curricula, training, and technical assistance.** We provide workshops, training institutes, and technical assistance on fatherhood issues and programs to national, state, and community-based organizations and networks that operate in all sectors, including state and local government, civic organizations, faith-based groups, businesses, education, healthcare, and law enforcement. Our staff trains organizations on how to become father friendly, best practices in fatherhood programs, social marketing for fatherhood programs, evaluating fatherhood programs, and on how to create systems that support marriage. Through FatherSOURCE™, we provide several leading curricula on responsible fatherhood. FatherSOURCE™ also includes tip cards, brochures, guides, and posters.

## ENGAGE

**We engage every sector of society through strategic alliances and partnerships.** We support coalitions of national, state, and local leaders from all sectors of society (e.g., social services, business, healthcare, civic, philanthropic, media, government, education, and faith) that seek to create a culture that values and supports responsible fatherhood. We have also collaborated with nationally renowned community-service organizations and businesses—such as the Salvation Army, YMCA, Federal Express, Warner Brothers Records, Disney, Sony Pictures, and Auntie Anne's Pretzels—to create unique initiatives that engage fathers and their families.

*When working with a mother on this issue, remember that the mother-father relationship is the most important relationship in the life of a child.*

## Topic 1: Co-Parenting

### Background

When we've talked with or surveyed staff and practitioners that work with mothers, fathers, and families about the issues mothers and fathers need the most help with, co-parenting is always at or near the top of the list.

While some literature on the subject of co-parenting considers it to be an area of focus for all parents to work on, the terms "co-parenting" and "co-parent" refer specifically to situations where parents are separated by divorce or who were never married to each other. (Another term used to describe the same situation is "shared parenting.") In other words, co-parenting refers to parents living apart and trying to raise their children together.



The primary reason this issue appears at the top of the list is because it is often difficult for mothers and fathers who don't live together to agree on how to raise their children. Another reason is that the mother-father relationship is often a poor one. The feelings the mother and father have about each other can poison how they parent their children alone and together.

When working with a mother on this issue, remember that the mother-father relationship is the most important relationship in the life of a child. It is the blueprint that a child uses in every relationship she develops; at least until she is mature enough to separate her own relationships, and how to behave in them, from her parents. Helping mothers and fathers to effectively co-parent may be the most helpful way you can help mothers, fathers, and children.

It's vital to keep several things in mind. First, identify the quality of the relationship between the mother and father. Clearly, if the relationship is a good one, effective co-parenting might already exist or, at least, should be attainable. If the relationship is of poor quality, you'll have your work cut out for you.

Second, identify the level of abuse (e.g. domestic violence) that is or was once present in the mother-father relationship. If the father abuses or abused the mother, the emotional scars left in the wake of abuse will make it difficult for her to find a way to move past it, even if the father has had counseling or completed a treatment program for the abuse.

Third, keep the mother focused on problems she can solve alone or with the father rather than problems she and the father can't solve. Parents often focus on the most difficult and unsolvable problems (at least unsolvable in the present). As a result, their co-parenting relationship doesn't improve because they haven't focused on what's possible to improve. They set themselves up for failure.

Fourth, identify whether the mother tends to try to win and seek to see the father lose when it comes to solving co-parenting challenges, and even with any challenge they might face in their relationship. Encourage the mother to compromise. Help her understand that she will rarely, if ever, completely get her way. She must be willing to work with the father in a give-and-take or win-win context.

Fifth, keep her focused on what's in the best interests of her children. If you find she has a hard time keeping their best interests in mind, use the topic entitled, "For Your Children's Sake" to get her focused on her children's best interests.

Finally, encourage the mother to seek to understand the father's point of view. If she has difficulty doing that, use the topic entitled, "Listening" to help her understand the importance of understanding his view.

## Basic Learning Objectives

Mothers identify the main differences between them and the father of their children in raising their children.

Mothers identify how those differences affect their children.

Mothers might not think about how much the differences—and the difficulty they might have addressing them—can negatively affect their children. When mothers become aware of how the differences affect their children, it can provide them with the motivation they need to address the differences.

Mothers learn to focus on differences they can solve on their own or with the father of their children.

Mothers and fathers focus too often on the differences they can't solve rather than on the ones they can solve. Mothers need to identify solvable issues that will create "small wins" for them and the father and build from there.

Mothers learn to seek to better understand the father's point of view before sharing their own, and to help the father better understand the mother's view.

Learning how to listen first and talk second can pave the way for more effective communication between a mother and father on how to address their co-parenting issues.

Mothers learn the importance of respecting and valuing the father's point of view.

It's difficult, if not impossible, to resolve co-parenting issues when mothers don't respect or value the father's point of view.

## Basic Questions for Mothers

- What are the main differences the father of my children and I have in raising our children? How have these issues affected our children?
- What are the differences I/we can solve? How can I/we solve them? What are the differences I/we can't solve?
- How can I better understand the point of view of my children's father on how to raise our children? How can I help the father of my children better understand my point of view on how to raise our children?
- Do I respect and value the father's point of view? If not, how can I better respect and value it?

## NFI Resources ([www.fathersource.org](http://www.fathersource.org))

### *Pocketbook for Moms™:*

#### *A Pocketbook Full of Ways to be a Great Co-Parent*

This pocketbook focuses on helping mothers understand the challenges—and the importance of—being a good co-parent for the benefit of her children. It addresses expectations, how to handle difficult situations and differences, and acting with empathy to ensure the best outcome for her children.



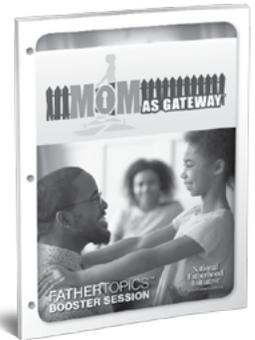
### *Tip Card: 10 Tips on Co-Parenting for the Sake of Your Child*

These 10 tips help mothers successfully co-parent, while keeping the impact on their child in the front of their minds.



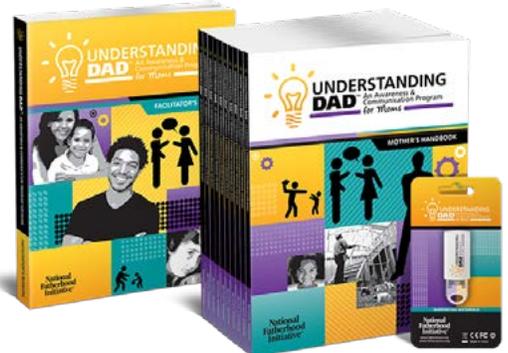
### *Mom as Gateway™ FatherTopics™ Booster Session*

This booster session helps you break down barriers between mothers and fathers by addressing “restrictive maternal gatekeeping”—when a mother’s beliefs about a father, as well as her behaviors, unnecessarily hinder a father’s involvement—and facilitate helpful discussions and efforts towards co-parenting.



### *Understanding Dad™*

This eight-session program designed specifically for mothers increases their knowledge, positive attitudes (e.g. toward fathers’ involvement), and skills (e.g. communication) associated with improving their relationships with the fathers of their children.



### Co-Parenting Bundle

Contains 9 NFI resources that will help you comprehensively address co-parenting with mothers and fathers.



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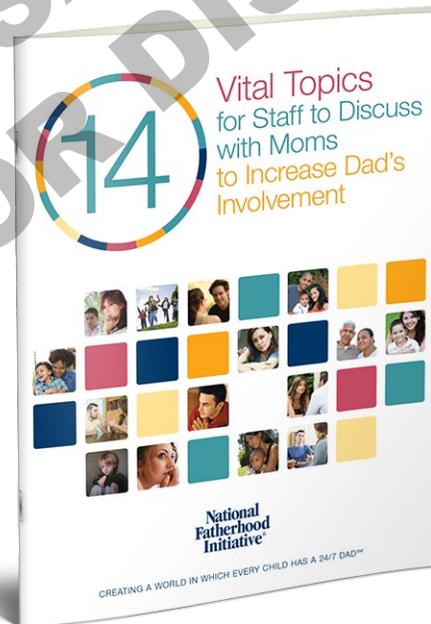
# A Guide for Staff and Practitioners who work with mothers, fathers and families

Do you wonder how to convince a mother to encourage the father of her child to be more involved in that child's life? Have you tried to convince a mother to allow the father of her child to be more involved only to be thwarted in your attempt? Do you work with a mother who can't seem to say one nice thing about the father of their children? Do you ever wonder why a certain couple can't seem to put their children first—who think about no one other than themselves? These are the kinds of questions that this guide helps to address.

- Customize a discussion with moms using the 14 Vital Topics guide in any way you want.
- Use the guide to design lectures, workshops, seminars, events, and other activities for mothers.
- Cover one or more topics at any depth you like, in any format you like, and within your time constraints.
- Use the guide to experiment with the topics, format, and discussion length that works best for you/your organization.

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Purchase your copy today!



**14 Vital Topics to Discuss with Moms - Buy Now!**

Visit: [store.fatherhood.org/14-vital-topics-for-staff-to-discuss-with-moms-to-increase-dads-involvement](https://store.fatherhood.org/14-vital-topics-for-staff-to-discuss-with-moms-to-increase-dads-involvement)

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