DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION

Over the past few years, as a result of changing attitudes and behaviours, our approaches have helped convey the image of the new father: more involved in the relationship with his children and in the handling of parental activities. We are increasingly seeing fathers in our organizations. Here are a few strategies for further boosting their interest and participation.

WHAT DO FATHERS BRING TO THE GROUP?

Fathers bring a great deal to the group, and their presence is enriching because they have a different view and they question certain preconceived notions about the father’s role. They also bring a different way of thinking to problem-solving, which encourages sharing and discussion.

Every human being is unique. There is also a difference between being a mother and being a father. That difference should be seen as a strength or an asset rather than an obstacle.

A GROUP EXCLUSIVELY FOR FATHERS

In a men-only group, through conversations about experiences, fathers have the opportunity to relate to situations that others may be going through which they themselves are also experiencing. That enables them to recognize their strengths and feel more confident in their role as fathers. Some fathers feel more comfortable expressing what they are experiencing and feeling when they are among men only.

RECRUITING

Unfortunately, there is no magic formula for recruiting, but a number of strategies can prove useful. Here are a few:

• Have contacts with the other community organizations in order to facilitate referrals. It is easier to refer someone to an individual than to an organization.
• Create networking activities among organizations in order to be better known.
• Go where men get together.
• Attend pre-natal meetings.
• Involve the fathers in your organization's other activities.
• In advertisements, take care to address them directly through the choice of words, e.g., “Info for fathers and mothers.”
• Offer evening time slots.
• Provide activities specifically for fathers.
• Educate fathers and mothers about the importance of the father’s role, and do it early.

HOW CAN YOU KEEP THE FATHERS THERE UNTIL THE END OF THE GROUP?

As with any group program, if the content and flow meet expectations and needs, the participants will return and will get involved in the process.

The NP program plans and promotes strategies for this purpose:

• Hold a warm up activity or review the experiences the parents have had since the last meeting. This way, the parents will realize that they have additional tools. (Learning that is not identified is a lost learning.)
• Announce the following week’s topic in order to generate interest in continuing with the group.
• At the end of each one, do a brief evaluation of how it went. That way, you can determine what the participants have retained and adjust the next meeting by factoring in what was mentioned.

HOW CAN YOU INTERVENE SO THAT EVERYONE HAS A PLACE IN THE GROUP?

• If it's possible within the organization, male/female co-facilitation is ideal. It helps the men relate.
• If a father is alone in the group, ensure that all the attention isn’t focused on him or, vice versa, that he is not ignored. Doing this may require bringing the group back on topic.
• Let each group member speak about something off-topic at the start of the meeting (warm up activity). This acts as an ice-breaker and creates connections.
• Focus on the fathers’ strengths, express the value of their role, and identify their good points.
• Emphasize action rather than words.
• Keep in mind that fathers don’t express their feelings the same way as mothers do, but that doesn’t mean that they don’t have any.

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