

Spotlight on Father Engagement

Involving Dads in Family Group Decision-Making

Family group decision-making (FGDM), which emphasizes the importance of reaching out to and including all members of a child's family, can be a powerful tool for improving the engagement of fathers and paternal relatives in the lives of children involved with the child welfare system. To support these efforts, American Humane recently published an issue brief that describes how child welfare agencies can use FGDM to locate fathers and more effectively use paternal family members as a resource for children.

Several studies have identified potential barriers to father involvement in child welfare, including workers' biased perceptions of fathers, the perceived difficulty of engaging fathers, and the gender dynamics of a largely female child welfare workforce. The brief highlights FGDM as a way to avoid some of these barriers by using an independent coordinator to organize family meetings and work closely with both the mother and father to reach as many family members as possible. Doing so ensures more family members play a role in determining the best options for the safety and well-being of the child.

The brief pays particular attention to situations in which the mother-father relationship is strained, such as cases of domestic or family violence. Although participants may have safety concerns, the brief describes strategies to minimize those concerns through careful preparation, attention to detail, and follow-through after the meeting.

Involving more family members in decision-making and case planning processes, particularly fathers and paternal relatives, can lead to better outcomes for children in the areas of permanency, stability, and cognitive, social, and emotional development. The brief recommends that child welfare agencies should consider the use of FGDM to improve family engagement and enhance supportive connections in children's lives.

"Dads and Paternal Relatives: Using Family Group Decision Making to Refocus the Child Welfare System on the Entire Family Constellation," was written by Molly Jenkins and Ellen Kinney. It is part of the series FGDM Issues in Brief, and can be downloaded on the American Humane website:

www.americanhumane.org/assets/docs/protecting-children/PC-FGDM-dads-paternal-relatives.pdf (171 KB)

Related Item

American Humane offers tools, research, and training in the areas of fatherhood and FGDM. Visit the website for more information:

<http://www.americanhumane.org/children/programs/fatherhood-initiative>
<http://www.americanhumane.org/children/professional-resources/program-publications/family-group-decision-making/>

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