Bringing Male Involvement to the Forefront is Imperative

Francisco J. Ronquillo
February 2017

NMAIMH competencies addressed

Direct Service Skills
- Responding with empathy
- Advocacy

Working with others
- Building and maintaining relationships
- Supporting others/mentoring

Reflection
- Contemplation
- Self-awareness

All children deserve loving, caring and nurturing parents. The first three years of life are three of the most important years of a child’s development. It is a time when many neuronal connections take place. Studies have shown that bonding early in life promotes a strong sense of security for the child and will promote healthy and trusting relationships with other people as the child grows. I would like to honor and acknowledge all the great males, fathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, teachers, coaches, counselors, and many other positive male role models that have had a positive influence on boys and young men.

Ideally, it would be great for every child to grow up with a mother and father actively involved in their lives. Unfortunately, more than 40% of children are growing up in a single parent home where in the majority of the cases, moms are the primary or sole providers.

Fatherlessness is one of the most compounding social issues with long lasting impact on children. Many children will go to bed tonight without a father involved in their lives. When fathers are absent from a child’s life, the adverse childhood experiences tend to be more detrimental and with long lasting emotional, social and economic impacts.

I have had the privilege of facilitating support and healing circles for young men and young adults for more than 20 years. Over the years, I have witnessed a common phenomenon; the majority of the males that are referred or voluntarily have participated in these circles,
present with “anger” issues. Once the males feel comfortable sharing their stories growing up as a child, developing into young men or an adult male, I noticed a common equation: anger = pain.

Many young men enter the group as deeply wounded souls. There have been multiple people and systems that have failed them or they experienced childhood traumas stemming from verbal, psychological, physical or sexual abuse.

One of the best interventions is offering the young men a safe place and space where they can connect with other young men that share common or similar life experiences. It is through the sharing of stories that they are able to see an immediate connection and begin to realize that they are not alone. They begin to identify themselves to the other young men’s situations and experiences. As time progresses, the young men are able to relate, connect and learn from each. They are able to offer each other advise, moral support and encouragement in their journey towards becoming better men and not make the same mistakes as some of the males in their lives.

Over 95% of the young and adult men that I work with come with a lot of emotional pain. It is very common to hear so many stories related to losses: loss or absence of a parent (in about 98% of the cases a father) due to death, drugs, incarceration or physical absence; loss of love and affection; loss or absence of a mother in their lives. I have come across so many young men that are very intelligent, creative and sensitive. It is the negative life experiences, people and systems that have failed them that inhibit those innate gifts and talents from coming out. In an effort to survive and keep moving forward, despite the lack of support and guidance in their lives, they put up this front of tough, “fuerte” invincible men, but inside they are crying for help. They simply want for someone to take the time to see inside and get to know the tender loving, compassionate and soft hearts they caring. They are looking for someone or something to help them heal from the wounds of their past.

It is imperative for social service providers, educators, faith-based leaders and other influential adults in our society to seriously consider creative and innovative ways to address this social issue. Research has demonstrated that the absence of a father in a child’s life will increase their chances by three times of becoming a teen parent, dropping out of school, get involved in a gang, drugs and many other unhealthy behaviors.

It is also important to consider the messages that we send through pictures, graphics and text regarding male involvement and inclusivity. There are so many great programs and initiatives to support young parents and parents in general; unfortunately, a good number of them do not include messages that encourage, inspire, motivate or invite males to become active participants of the service, event or initiative. I highly recommend considering having messages and images that depict males as positive, productive and contributing members of society.

A father’s role within the family is vital. We can make a difference by intentionally bringing the importance of male involvement to the forefront; especially considering that
approximately 80% of males in the United States will father a baby. There is hope and we can all make a difference, if we collectively design programs and initiatives that include males a part of the solution, especially in early childhood education.

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection

1. How does the information shared in the article reinforce or change your ideas about men and fathers?

2. How can you apply this information to your work as a supervisor in a home visiting agency?

3. How can you support perspective taking in home visitors about the involvement of fathers in home visiting?

4. What are some barriers that might prevent the involvement of fathers in your home visiting agency?

References/Additional Resources


