

The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum

**A curriculum developed for the Parents'
Fair Share Demonstration**

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with Kay Sherwood

MDRC

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Although intended for use in a wide range of support groups, this curriculum was developed as part of a specific project: the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration (PFS), a national demonstration project that operated in the 1990s. PFS combined job training and placement, peer support groups, and other services with the goal of increasing the earnings and child support payments of unemployed noncustodial fathers of children on welfare, improving their parenting and communication skills, and providing an opportunity for them to participate more fully and effectively in the lives of their children. Organized around this curriculum, the peer support component — the “glue” of the program — was designed to accomplish a number of goals including encouraging positive parental behavior and sexual responsibility, strengthening commitment to work, and enhancing life skills.

Each of the seven PFS sites used the *Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum*, which originated in a curriculum — *Fatherhood Development: A Curriculum for Young Fathers* — that was developed by Public/Private Ventures and was written by Pamela Wilson and Jeffery Johnson. Made up of 20 sessions, the *Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum* guides each support group through activities, exercises, and discussions that help participants make progress on a number of issues, including communicating with their children and partners, managing conflict at home and on the job, and dealing with racial discrimination at the workplace.

Throughout the demonstration — with input, guidance, and feedback from peer support facilitators in each of the sites — the curriculum was refined, revised, and retooled. In carrying out this work, the senior author benefited greatly from her experiences as lead trainer of the facilitators and her ongoing association with them. Over the course of eight years, activities that promised to be helpful were added and those that were not as effective were discarded. Conferences were held at which peer

support facilitators from all seven sites came together to share stories about running peer support groups and to refine the curriculum. It is impossible to thank by name all the facilitators whose experience working with the curriculum led to its continuing improvement, but we want at least to acknowledge those who gave intensive feedback not only at the conferences but also in additional small group meetings: Larry Jackson, Dayton, Ohio; Ray Jackson, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Ofelia Parris, Los Angeles, California; and Vernon Washington, Jacksonville, Florida.

Along with the facilitators, Earl Johnson contributed invaluable feedback on the content of the curriculum through his active participation at all conferences as well as through his observations of many peer support groups in his role at MDRC as ethnographic researcher in the PFS project.

At MDRC, John Robertson drafted parts of the Introduction, and Mary Andes and Michael Sack offered valuable input, with Jackie Peters also providing assistance. Robert Weber was the dedicated and meticulous editor of the final version, which Stephanie Cowell prepared for typesetting. Nigel Vann, at NPCL, also offered helpful comments. Edward Rowe of Rowe Design Group and Regina Barcello created the lively and accessible typographical design.

Finally, gratitude is due the funders of the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration, who made this work possible, and the thousands of men who participated in PFS peer support groups.

We hope that all this effort by so many people has resulted in a curriculum that is a useful, creative, interactive tool — one that can be used productively in a variety of support groups for men. We are pleased to share it with you and welcome your feedback.

Eileen Hayes

Training for Facilitators Who Will Use the Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum

The leader or facilitator who implements this curriculum is central to its success. Facilitators need to feel very comfortable in their role, and with the material in the curriculum, before leading sessions. Therefore, we strongly recommend that all prospective facilitators receive training to prepare them to conduct the sessions effectively.

Training accomplishes several important goals:

- It provides a forum for facilitators to examine their own attitudes and stereotypes about men and fathers and to hear a variety of perspectives from others.
- It offers facilitators the opportunity to see trainers model many of the activities as they were envisioned.
- It gives participants a supportive environment to practice communication and facilitation skills and get constructive feedback from trainers and other facilitators.
- It gives facilitators the opportunity to network with others in similar positions and to share ideas. This network will be a useful resource to facilitators when they face challenging situations in their groups in the future.

Training can be obtained from the National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership (NPCL) in Washington, DC. They offer three-day skill-building workshops throughout the country. NPCL also developed and distributes a revised version of *Fatherhood Development: A Curriculum for Young Fathers*, which is best suited for fathers aged 16 to 30 and for early intervention programs that work with young fathers. Please contact them at 888-528-NPCL for additional information. Training is available also from Eileen Hayes, the senior author of the *Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum*. She may be reached at Amos House, 401-274-9372.