

Introduction to Responsible Fatherhood

Activity 1-1	Overview of the Program	 10-15 minutes
Activity 1-2	Icebreaker What We Have in Common or	
Activity 1-3	People Hunt or	
Activity 1-4	Name Game	 30-40 minutes
Activity 1-5	What Can I Expect from Peer Support? and	 40-50 minutes
Activity 1-6	What Can Peer Support Expect from Me?	
Activity 1-7	Feedback/Wrap-up	 10-15 minutes

Key Concepts

- This program is designed to help the participants look at themselves as men and as fathers.
- It aims to further develop the skills that participants need to be successful fathers.
- It is intended to help the participants negotiate relationships with partners, children, family members, friends, employers, and the court system.
- The program will be interesting and practical. The fathers will help decide what is dealt with in the sessions. They will also be asked to apply what they are learning in their daily lives.
- There are ground rules to be followed during the sessions that will allow the men to get the most out of the peer support experience.
- The experiences that the participants have had up to this point in their lives affect how they see themselves as men and as fathers. Many of the men share similar experiences, but all of them have had experiences in their families, relationships, schools, and communities that are *unique*. These sessions will provide an opportunity for them to discuss their experiences and work out solutions to problems together.
- The focus of this program is *peer support*. The more the men are willing to share their experiences with others, the more they will get out of this program.

Materials Checklist

Activity 1-2 What We Have in Common

- Handouts, “What We Have in Common” and “Pick a Card”
 - Pencils (for everyone)
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Activity 1-3 People Hunt

- Index cards (for everyone)
 - Pencils (for everyone)
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Activity 1-5 What Can I Expect from Peer Support?

- Handout, “Main Session Topics”
 - Pencils (for everyone)
 - Newsprint
 - Marker
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Activity 1-6 What Can Peer Support Expect from Me?

- Newsprint
- Marker

Introduction to the Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum

The *Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum* is designed to help fathers support their children and be better fathers. The activities in the curriculum will promote decision making, thoughtful discussion, communication, and relationship building. This first session of the curriculum is crucial to the support group's long-term success, because its ideas and principles must be clearly communicated to the participants.

The way in which the facilitator communicates “sets the tone” for how members are to interact. It is important for the facilitator to make contact with *each* group member and to learn everyone's name. The facilitator also should assist members in learning each other's names.

In the first session of any group, members will “test” the facilitator, as well as feel each other out. For example, fathers might be thinking: Can I relate to this person? Can he or she handle my acting out? What are the boundaries here? Are these other guys like me, or am I the only one who isn't sure about this? Does anyone else here have the same problems with their kids or with their woman as I'm having? The better the facilitator demonstrates in this first session that he or she can handle anxiety, the more he or she communicates to the men that this is a place of safety where something can be gained by participation.

Part of feeling safe is knowing where you stand and what's expected of you. For this reason, the basic ground rules of the group need to be stated clearly, emphasizing that they are mandatory for everyone. Group members must discuss and agree on the rules together. Specific consequences for breaking the rules must be spelled out, such as suspension or expulsion and what results from these actions.

At a minimum, ground rules should include:

- No fighting or threats of violence.
- No hitting or abusive language toward any children who might be present.
- No weapons.
- No attending the group under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- No drug or alcohol use or selling on the premises.
- No stealing.

Bonding — or a feeling of belonging or “connectedness” — is vital to the group’s success, and Session 1 should be designed to *begin* the bonding process. A good way to start is to create *real* ways by which participants can accept ownership of the group. You could ask members to name the group; ask for their ideas about topics to cover; set rules together about smoking (for example, establish a smoking break); if possible, offer them choices about *when* the group will meet; decide on how and when new members can join the group; and, above all, be clear about *how* the issue of confidentiality will be handled both by members and by the facilitator.

Every session should promote the sharing of ideas, opinions, and feelings as well as provide new factual information; that is, each session should offer a *balance between doing and reflecting*. For instance, after each activity, be sure to have a discussion that highlights the key ideas you want to get across. Limit the amount of new information, to be sure that people have grasped the most important concepts.

Finally, the group should give the participants a sense of *hope, anticipation, and expectation*. If they leave Session 1 with some of these feelings (or even with an inkling of them), they are more likely to attend the next session. Wrapping up or concluding the work of each session is one way to give members an opportunity to articulate what they have gotten out of it — as well as what they didn’t get and what they hope to get at the next or subsequent sessions.

Each session in the *Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum* lasts anywhere from 90 to 120 minutes and includes a number of activities that take from 10 to 60 minutes. Time ranges will vary depending on the number of participants, the activity, the extent to which participants have personal experience with the topic addressed, the amount of time spent on discussing each activity, and the overall “personality” of the group. When planning activities, keep in mind the amount of time the group will meet, and allow at least 15 minutes to wrap up the session and exchange feedback about it. *Never start a new activity unless there is enough time to complete it.* Depending on the length of time set aside for your group, you may want to divide each session into two meetings. If so, always start each meeting with the “What’s New?” activity, and close with the “Feedback/Wrap-up” activity. Although a time estimate is provided for each activity, experience has shown that activities often take longer than the estimate. As you become familiar with your group and with the activities in the curriculum, you will become adept at assessing how much time an activity is likely to take.

Overview of the Program

Purpose: To provide basic information to the group about the purpose of and schedule for the peer support group.

Materials: None.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Planning Note: Choose one of the icebreakers — “What We Have in Common,” the “Name Game,” or “People Hunt” — based on what you know about the group members. For example, if you know that some members have difficulty writing, do not use “What We Have in Common” or “People Hunt”; instead, choose the “Name Game.” If you think the participants would be more comfortable with straightforward introductions, don’t use any of the icebreakers; simply ask each participant to introduce himself, stating his name, the names and ages of his children, how often he sees his children, and what it has been like for him to be a father. Meet with each father individually before Session 1, to establish rapport and get to know him as an individual. You can use these meetings to educate the men about the group process, including what they can expect from peer support. Individual meetings can also help you to assess each father’s ability to benefit from the group experience — and to determine who might not fit into or benefit from the group.

Procedure: As facilitator, you should introduce yourself to the participants and, in your own words, welcome them to the program and explain what you hope to accomplish together. You might list such goals as the following — in your own words — on a chalkboard or newsprint:

The overall goal of this peer support group is to assist you in your ability to support your children, both financially and emotionally. We believe that fathers can benefit from talking with other men about things that are important to them.

Therefore:

- The group will offer you a chance to talk about your lives as men and fathers.
- It will help you to learn about your child's development so that you can handle everyday situations that come up in parenting.
- It will assist you in your relationships with the mother of your children and with others who are involved with them (such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc.).
- It will show you ways to improve your skills in problem solving, decision making, and dealing with conflicts. The techniques we will discuss have helped others to better manage their lives, plan for the future, and achieve their goals.

Next, explain the schedule for group meetings. Tell the men when the group will meet, how long each session will last, and how many sessions they are expected to attend. When you are sure that the participants understand these points, ask whether they have any comments or reactions to the schedule. Also ask if anyone wants to talk about something that wasn't mentioned.

Next, say something like, "We will have a chance to get to know each other by doing something that is called an 'icebreaker,' or a way to get people talking and communicating." Then begin *one* of the following icebreaker activities.

What We Have in Common

Purpose: To get group members talking to each other. To establish the idea that they share things as fathers and men. To identify topics that will be addressed in future sessions.

Materials: Handout, “What We Have in Common”; pencils (for everyone).

Time: 30-40 minutes.

Planning Note: In conducting this activity, use the handout “What We Have in Common” or use the blank circle following the handout and write four of the suggested questions (or make up questions of your own). If you are using four of the suggested questions, write one question in each of the four parts of the circle; then make enough copies of your handout for every participant. If you prefer to focus on one question at a time, see the sample index card on page 1-13.

Procedure: Explain to the men that this activity will get them moving around the room and talking with each other, to see whether they have things in common.

Give the handout “What We Have in Common” to each member. Read aloud the questions in each of the four parts of the circle. Tell members to answer all four questions and then to get up, walk around the room, introduce themselves, and ask others what they wrote in the blanks. When they find someone who made similar responses, they should sign or initial each other’s part of the circle.

When everyone has had the opportunity to talk with his fellow members, the men should all take a seat while you lead a discussion of the activity by asking the following questions.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. How did it feel to meet someone this way, that is, by comparing your responses with theirs?
2. Did you find people who had similar responses?
3. Are there any major differences in your responses? If so, what are they?
4. What are some of the things that you would like to get out of this program?
5. What are some of the things that you need help with in dealing with your children?
6. What did you learn from doing this activity?

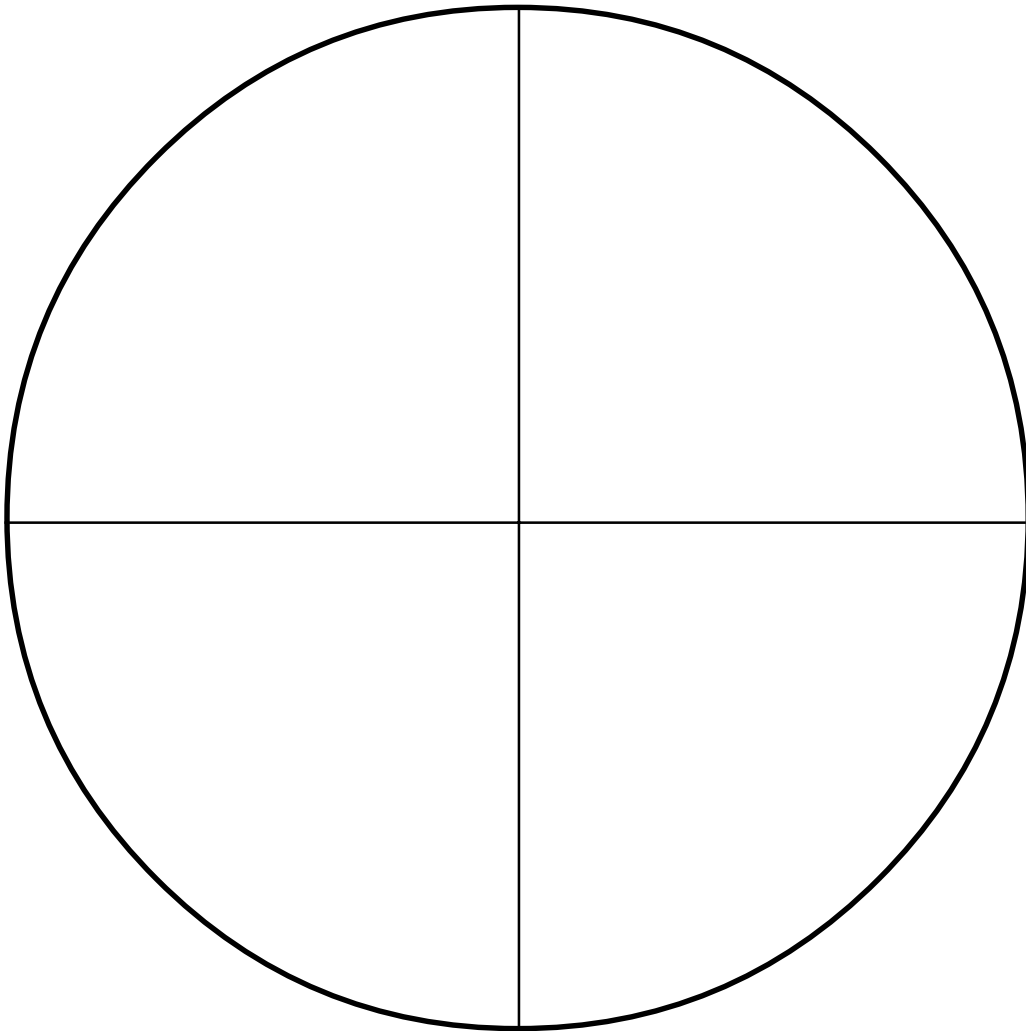
What We Have in Common

Suggested Questions



1. Name one thing about being a father that you feel good about.
2. What is your favorite way to unwind after a long day?
3. What is the hardest thing for you to handle as a parent that you would like help with?
4. What is one thing that you would like to gain from this program?
5. How did you hear about this program?
6. Where do you live?
7. How long do you expect it will take you to complete this program?
8. What would you like to accomplish in this program?
9. What kind of job would you like to have?
10. What kind of work have you done in the past?
11. What's the most important thing to you in your life right now?
12. If you were not in this program right now, what would you be doing?
13. If your children were here, what would they tell us about you?
14. Which three people would you pick to share an island with?
15. Give one word to describe each of your children.
16. Which person in your life is closest to you?
17. What words would this person use to describe you?

What We Have in Common



Pick a Card

Write each of the questions from the handout “What We Have in Common” on an index card. Pass the stack of cards around and ask each of the participants to pick one card from the pack and answer the question. Tell the participants that they have a right to pass (in which case they can pick another card or can tell something about themselves that they’d like the group to know). In addition, after each person answers the question on his card, he should choose another person from the group and ask him to respond to the same question.

Sample 3" x 5" card:

What is your favorite way to
unwind after a long day?

People Hunt

Purpose: To get members talking with each other. To give participants an opportunity to share personal things about themselves with people they do not know well.

Materials: Index cards, pencils (for everyone).

Time: 30-40 minutes.

Procedure: Explain to the men that this activity will get them moving around the room and talking with each other.

Give a blank index card and pencil to all participants. Instruct them to write three things about themselves that they are comfortable sharing with other members (such as favorite foods, music, number of children, etc.). Remind them that they should *not* write anything on the card that feels too revealing or personal. Also, they are *not* to put their names on their cards.

When each participant has completed his card, collect all the cards, and shuffle and redistribute them, making sure that no one gets his own card.

When everyone has a card belonging to someone else, instruct the members to get up, walk around the room, and “interview” all the other members until they find the owner of the card they are holding. Each man should continue standing until his card has been returned to him.

When everyone is holding his own card, the men should take a seat. Now lead a discussion about the activity using the discussion questions.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. How did it feel to search for the owner of the card you were holding?
2. What “clues” or statements led you to the owner of the card? (For example, did the card’s owner write something about himself that made him easy to identify? If so, what gave him away?)
3. What was it like to write three things about yourself that you could be identified by?
4. What did you learn about other members from this activity? What did you learn about yourself?

Name Game

Purpose: To give the fathers a chance to learn each other's names, as well as something about each other. To start the process of group "bonding" by building rapport.

Materials: None.

Time: 30-40 minutes.

Planning Note: The "Name Game" is a fun icebreaker that gives each participant something to say to relieve the tension and anxiety that are always present when a new group begins. It also "tests" whether the facilitator can remember everyone's name. If the facilitator can remember all the information about the men, it shows that he or she is paying attention and is a good listener. If the facilitator has trouble and asks for help, it shows that he or she is sincere and human, since the facilitator can acknowledge the need for help. The facilitator is modeling for the participants a way of communicating with others in the group. Thus, if the facilitator is being tested by the group members, it is important to avoid becoming defensive if he or she cannot complete the exercise. By going last, the facilitator shows a willingness to take risks, thereby paving the way for others to do the same. The facilitator should not attempt to get out of going last, particularly since this is the first opportunity to demonstrate to the group members that he or she is a willing part of the "team."

Procedure: The group members sit in a circle. One member (let's call him Raheem) is instructed to say the following three things about himself:

- His name.
- The number of children he has.
- One word to describe what it means to be a father.

The person to the right of Raheem (let's call him Dave) has to repeat Raheem's name, number of children, and the word Raheem used to describe how he feels about being a father. Then, Dave must give the same information about himself. The person to the right of Dave then repeats both Raheem's and Dave's information and then answers the three questions for himself. This pattern proceeds around the circle: Each participant repeats the names, the number of children, and the meaning of being a father for all members. The facilitator is the last person to go, and he or she has to repeat the information given by everyone in the group. After your turn, use the following questions to discuss the activity.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. How did it feel to talk in front of a new group?
2. How hard was it to remember people's names and information?
3. What kinds of words did people use to describe what it means to be a father?

Post a list of the words the fathers give so that everyone can see it. Then use the list to establish a sense of shared feelings and commonalities and as a reference for reasons why peer support can be helpful. For example, if several men say "left out" to describe what it means to be a father, then you can suggest that this is often how noncustodial fathers feel about their relationship to their children, while stating that the peer support group will offer all of them an opportunity to share ideas about how to change or improve this relationship.

What Can I Expect from Peer Support?

Purpose: To help the fathers to develop a sense of ownership of the support group by getting their reactions to the topics planned for discussion and by finding out what other topics they want to discuss.

Materials: Handout, “Main Session Topics”; pencils (for everyone); newsprint and marker.

Time: 20-25 minutes.

Planning Note: This activity gives participants an opportunity to have input into the topics selected for discussion. The men will be asked what they think about the existing topics and if there is anything else they would like to discuss. The handout “Main Session Topics” provides a brief description of each of the sessions in the curriculum. It is important to explain to the fathers how the curriculum is structured. The first group of sessions (Sessions 1 through 4) focus on personal development; Sessions 5 through 9 focus on issues related to the needs of the men’s children and to them as fathers; Sessions 10 and 11 focus on relationship issues; Sessions 12 through 14 deal with handling conflict and anger and getting along on the job; and so on. Also explain that the topics overlap among sessions.

As the men are reacting to the session topics, help them understand how each topic relates to their lives. Ask them what they think about each topic and what experiences they have had with it. If someone has a strong reaction to a particular topic and seems to want to talk about his reaction to it (for example, the issue of child support), you may need to spend time letting the men express their feelings. Often, letting people vent their feelings will help them move on to other issues. If the men can’t seem to move on, however, tell them that you will change the order of the sessions so that they can deal with this issue early in the program. Take notes about what they say so that, in planning a particular session, you can incorporate

their questions, concerns, and experiences into the agenda. (For example, you may want to create new case scenarios or revise role plays to reflect situations the men have presented to the group.)

If there is a session topic that the men do not want to discuss, spend some time exploring why they feel this way. Perhaps some group members have had negative experiences with a topic and are resistant to talking about it. Or they may not be comfortable with each other and may feel that some things are too personal to talk about in a group. In this case, ask them under what circumstances they think this issue could be raised in discussion, and suggest to them that you will bring it up for discussion after they have gotten to get to know each other. If the men suggest topics that are not in the Responsible Fatherhood curriculum, ask the entire group how important this topic is to them, and tell them that you will arrange for a time to address it. Assure the men that you value their opinions and that you invite their suggestions, comments, and reactions at any point throughout the sessions.

Procedure: Write the major session topics on newsprint in advance. Plan to keep this newsprint — and your notes about the discussion — to help you prioritize and order the curriculum for your group.

Now that the men have relaxed a little, tell them that you want to talk about the topics that will be covered in the upcoming sessions. Distribute the handout “Main Session Topics,” and ask each father to select the three topics that seem most important to him. Use the marker to put checks beside these topics. Then ask them to add other topics or situations that they want to discuss. If a father starts to talk about a personal situation that fits in with a topic on your list (for example, “I want to talk about how to get my baby’s mother to let me see my child more often”), explain to him that his situation will come up often in several sessions, such as those about relationships, being a part-time father, negotiating support, and conflict management. To generate a discussion about the session topics, use the following questions.

▼ **Discussion Questions**

1. In general, what are your reactions to the topics we have proposed for the peer support group?
2. Which topics seemed most important to most of you? Why?
3. Which topics seemed least important? Why?
4. What additional topics do you want to include in our list?

Remind participants that their presence is important. “Peer support” means talking with each other and helping each other out; what each man puts into the group will determine what he gets out of it. Let the men know that you will check with them each week to make sure that the group is useful to them. Tell them they should never hesitate to let you and their peers know when they want to deal with something in the group.

Main Session Topics

What Are My Values?

How do I feel about myself? What do I believe in? What values do I live my life by? How do I communicate these values to my children?

Boys to Men: Experiencing Manhood

What is a man? What does it mean to be a man in today's world? How have my past experiences shaped my view of myself?

The Art of Communication

What is communication? How do I communicate my needs, wants, and feelings to people who are important to me? What goes wrong in communication? How can I improve the way I communicate with others, verbally as well as non-verbally? How can I improve the ways in which I communicate with my children?

Fathers as Providers

What does it mean to be a successful father? What qualities would a "Father of the Year" possess? What does it mean to be a provider for one's children? What gets in the way of a noncustodial father's efforts to be a provider for his children?

Noncustodial Fathers: Rights and Responsibilities

What reasons do some fathers give for not paying child support? How will establishing paternity and paying child support help me and my children? What are the disadvantages to me and my children if I do not establish paternity? What are my rights and responsibilities as a noncustodial father?

Developing Values in Children

What are my roles and responsibilities as a father? What characteristics do I value in my children? How can I positively communicate and strengthen the development of these values in the lives of my children? How can I best influence my children's moral development?

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Coping as a Single Father

What are the struggles when fathers do it alone or when they have part-time child care responsibilities? What tasks and responsibilities are expected of parents in raising their children? How do you handle your children's daily needs when you are in charge? What are some free or inexpensive ways to spend quality time with your children?

Dealing with Children's Behaviors

How does the way my parents raised me influence the way I treat my children? What are some effective ways of managing children's difficult behavior without hitting or yelling? How can I discipline my children in ways that help them feel good about themselves?

Relationships: Being a Friend, Partner, Parent, and Employee

How can I be what I must be for everyone who needs me? How can I get my needs met? How can I communicate effectively with all these different people?

Understanding Male-Female Relationships

What are the things that make relationships work? What gets in the way? How can I best communicate to my partner the things that are important to me? What do I value in a partner? How well do I know my partner? What do women want in relationships?

Managing Conflict and Handling Anger

We all get angry, yet sometimes our anger gets out of hand and backfires. How can we find outlets for our anger and manage life's conflicts without hurting ourselves or anyone else?

Handling Anger and Conflict on the Job

To keep their jobs, people need to know how to get along with supervisors, coworkers, and customers. How do we do this if we feel disrespected? How do we manage anger and conflict in the workplace so that we don't have to quit or be fired?



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Surviving on the Job

How do I get what I want from work? How do I know what my employer expects of me?

The Issue of Race/Racism

When racism affects everybody in all areas of life, how can people of color resist its power to destroy self-confidence? How can children be taught to be proud and to believe in themselves?

Taking Care of Business

What does it mean to be “self-sufficient”? How can I take care of my own and take care of myself?

Managing Your Time and Money

How can I manage my time and money? How can I fulfill all my financial responsibilities for myself and my family? How can I “make ends meet” and juggle all my responsibilities?

Building a Support Network: Who’s on Your Side?

All parents need help in caring for their children. How can you figure out who’s there for you, and how can you best gain his or her support? Dealing with your child’s mother and family sometimes requires special skills. How can you work out a relationship with them that leaves your child out of the middle?

Alcohol and Drug Use and Abuse

How do I know if I have a problem with alcohol or drugs? How can I help myself if I do have a problem? How can I help someone close to me who has a problem? How can I avoid becoming a substance abuser?

Healthful Eating

All parents and children should learn how to care for themselves by eating well, exercising, and getting plenty of rest. This session offers information about good health and nutrition.

What Can Peer Support Expect from Me?

Purpose: To establish clear expectations about the behaviors required of group members.

Materials: Newsprint and marker.

Time: 20-25 minutes.

Planning Note: Some facilitators may want to establish ground rules for the behaviors required of group members in Session 1. Other facilitators may prefer to begin peer support by establishing a more “friendly” rapport with the group.

Regardless of which activity you begin with, it is important for group members to understand what is expected of them — and the consequences of not meeting expectations. You could state the ground rules in Session 1 and reiterate them whenever a new member joins the group.

Procedure: After you have gotten members' ideas about session topics (Activity 1-5), go over the basic expectations that the program has of the fathers. This should be done as a group, even though certain things (such as ground rules and attendance) may not be negotiable. If a rule is required by some agency, be clear and honest about this and the consequences for not adhering to the rule. Your discussion should include the following:

- Ground rules (the minimum rules are listed in the introduction to this session, on page 1-5).
- Attendance requirements (what happens when members miss sessions or arrive late).
- What is considered confidential and how confidentiality will be handled.
- How peer support works (for example, explain that this group will be most effective if everyone participates; it is not like a classroom, where the instructor lectures).
- How members are expected to treat each other (ask the fathers how they would define disrespectful behavior).
- Which behaviors are OK and which are not OK (cover such things as being late, sleeping, eating, and smoking).

Ask the fathers if they want to add any other rule or operating principle to this list.

After a consensus has been reached about rules and operating principles, write these down on newsprint, and post them somewhere in the room where everyone can see them at all times. Avoid language that is negative or harsh, and limit the number of rules so that the ones you and group members agree to can be maintained.

Feedback/Wrap-up

Purpose: To give group members an opportunity to express what they thought about the session. To recap main points. To set up the agenda or expectations for the next session. To provide closure for the session.

Materials: None.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Procedure: End the session by asking each member to comment on what he thought about the group experience and how he is feeling at the moment. Ask each of them to state, if he can, one thing about today's session that would convince him to come back next time. When everyone has shared his reactions, tell the group what you got out of the experience, by summarizing some of the key points raised during the session. This is an opportunity to review your agenda and see whether you covered everything, and it lets you discuss your plans for the next session. Clearly say when the group will meet next, and thank everyone for participating.