






Fathers as Providers

Activity 5-1	What's New?	 10-15 minutes
Activity 5-2	Father of the Year	 35-45 minutes
Activity 5-3	Being a Provider: What Gets in the Way?	 35-45 minutes
Activity 5-4	Looking Ahead	 10-15 minutes
Activity 5-5	Feedback/Wrap-up	 10-15 minutes

Key Concepts

- Men who are successful as fathers work hard to care for their children. To be successful, a father must have the desire and commitment to put the needs of his children foremost in his mind.
- Fathers are legally, financially, and morally responsible for their children, regardless of their relationship to their children's mother. It is the right of every child to be supported by *both* parents.
- When a father declares paternity for his children, there are benefits for him as well as for the children.
- Noncustodial fathers have an obligation to pay child support, even if their children are receiving public assistance and their support is used to reimburse the welfare system.

Materials Checklist

Activity **5-2** **Father of the Year**

- Handouts, “Case Studies: Father of the Year” and “Father of the Year Award”
 - Pencils (for everyone)
 - Newsprint
 - Marker
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Activity **5-3** **Being a Provider: What Gets in the Way?**

- Leader Resource, “Questions About Candidates”
 - Handout, “Case Studies: Father of the Year”
 - Newsprint
 - Marker
-

Activity **5-4** **Looking Ahead**

- Handout, “My Personal Contract to My Children”
- Pencils (for everyone)

What's New?

Planning Note: Before conducting the next two sessions it will be important to know what the participants' experiences have been with establishing paternity, paying child support, and getting custody or visitation, so that you can emphasize the most relevant issues.

In this session, the men will explore their role as fathers and providers, and look at what gets in the way of their efforts to provide for their children. The next session, "Noncustodial Fathers: Rights and Responsibilities," is designed to give the men factual information about the child support system and clarify their rights and responsibilities as noncustodial fathers. To prepare for these sessions, you will need to know answers to technical questions about child support procedures, welfare, and the interaction between these two programs, as well as about establishing paternity. The Leader Resource in Activity 6-3, "Facts About Child Support and Paternity," summarizes key points about child support and establishing paternity that you should be sure to review before conducting these sessions. You will also need to know about Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and its grant amounts for families of different sizes in your locality.

In the next session, it may be useful to invite someone from the local Child Support Enforcement agency and a legal rights attorney who specializes in child support issues to present this information to the men. (If your group includes mothers who are noncustodial parents, be sure to adapt the case studies to include a case that resembles their lives. Also, change the activity "Father of the Year" to "Parent of the Year.")

▼ Discussion Questions

1. Would anybody like to share his reactions to Session 4, “The Art of Communication”? If so, what are your thoughts or feelings?
2. Did anyone try any of the listening skills we learned? If so, with whom did you try them? How did it go?
3. Did anyone ask for anything or respond to requests in an assertive way? If so, what happened?
4. Is there anything about active listening or assertive communication that you’d like more information about?
5. How do you think these listening and communication skills will help you in your relationships with your children? How will they help in your relationships with other people?
6. Did any of you have a situation this week where you noticed a difference in the way you communicated with your children? If so, would you like to talk about it?

Father of the Year

Purpose: To identify the qualities of successful noncustodial fathers.

Materials: Handouts, “Case Studies: Father of the Year” and “Father of the Year Award”; pencils (for everyone); newsprint and marker.

Time: 35-45 minutes.

Planning Note: Conduct Activity 5-2 either by using the handout of case studies or by following the optional procedure that is described after the handout.

Procedure: Begin this activity by saying something like, “In today’s session we are going to talk about what it means to be a successful father. We will talk about supporting our children. And by thinking about the father’s role in raising children, we will identify the qualities or characteristics that good fathers have. Then we will nominate one of you for the ‘Father of the Year Award.’ Finally, we will look at some things that keep a father from being a good provider for his children.”

Ask the participants to describe men they know (or knew as children) who they think fit the description of a good father: Who are these men, and what qualities or characteristics make them good fathers? Record all responses on newsprint. (The list should include such characteristics as: loving, patient, nurturing, provides financial support, accepts responsibility, visits the child regularly, seeks employment, supports his partner, etc.). Use the following questions to discuss the list (allow approximately 10 minutes).

▼ Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to be a good father?
2. How realistic is the list of characteristics that we made? Do you know any fathers who have all these qualities? If so, what is it that makes these men so successful as fathers?
3. Which of the characteristics on our list do you think you have?
4. Are any of the characteristics we listed difficult for fathers who do not have custody of their children? If so, what makes them difficult?
5. What kinds of things (or which people) make it difficult for you to be a good father?
6. From our list of characteristics, which are the most important qualities that any father should have?

Now tell the participants to think about the problems facing fathers who do not have custody of their children. Say something like, “There are many qualities that make a father successful, and yet each father is different. Some have good jobs, but others don’t; some have good relationships with their child’s mother, but others don’t. Each father deals with a unique set of circumstances in attempting to be a successful parent. Therefore, to decide whether or not a father is successful, we must pay careful attention to each man’s situation.”

Explain to the men that in this activity they will consider case studies of five fathers in different circumstances, and they will be asked to nominate one of these men as Father of the Year. Distribute the handouts “Case Studies: Father of the Year” and “Father of the Year Award.” Repeat that the men must select their candidate from the five men in the case studies. (If time is limited, select three of the five case studies — the three that most closely resemble the situations of men in your group.) Explain that the men will have to identify the qualities that their candidate has, and remind them of the list they already made. They should identify the qualities of the winning father on the award certificate.

Form small groups, and then read the case studies aloud. Have the groups debate among themselves which father should get the award. When each group has picked a Father of the Year, ask for volunteers to tell the larger group which father was selected and why. Allow approximately 15 minutes for the groups to choose their candidates before reconvening the large group. Then ask the following questions about how candidates were selected.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. What positive qualities do all the fathers in the case studies have in common?
2. Consider each candidate separately. What is the most positive thing about him? Is there anything about him that hurts his chances of becoming Father of the Year? If so, what is it?
3. What characteristics were most important in choosing your candidate for the Father of the Year Award?
4. To what degree did the candidate's payment of child support help him become Father of the Year? Under what circumstances would you select someone to be Father of the Year if he did not support his children financially?
5. Does any candidate's life resemble yours? Which candidate's situation is most like yours?
6. What qualities would be listed if *you* were a candidate for Father of the Year? What do you feel you do best as a father?
7. What circumstances in your life would make it hard for you to be Father of the Year (such as not seeing your children, not working, etc.)?
8. Who and what gets in the way of your being a good father?
9. How do you feel when you think you can't be the kind of father that you want to be?
10. What do you hope to change about your situation as a father? What kinds of things do you plan to do to make these changes possible?

Case Studies: **Father of the Year**

CANDIDATE 1: JEFF. Jeff is 29 years old and is the divorced father of two boys, ages five and three. He works as a welder, and whenever he can find work, he gives his ex-wife money for child support. His ex-wife works nights as a checker in the local supermarket. Jeff sees his children one weekend a month, and he calls them about once a week. Jeff recently moved in with his girlfriend, whom he has been seeing for about two years. She has three children, ages seven, five, and three; although she receives some public assistance, she gets no support from the father of her children. Jeff sometimes gives his girlfriend some of the money he should be using to pay child support. He loves all five children, and he figures that this is the best way he can care for all of them.

CANDIDATE 2: MARK. Mark is a 33-year-old unemployed father. From his first marriage, he has a 10-year-old child, with whom he does not have a relationship. Mark also has two children from another relationship; they are now four and six years old. Mark left their mother, a drug addict, about a year ago. He loved her, but he could not deal with her drug use. For the last year Mark has been trying to get custody of the two children so that he can provide a more stable life for them. He has gone to court a number of times, but the judge refuses to give him custody until his girlfriend declares him to be the father of her children and he establishes paternity. This makes Mark extremely angry, but he continues to see his children as often as he can, while pursuing his efforts to establish paternity.

CANDIDATE 3: ALEX. Alex is 37 years old and the father of three children, ages 12, 9, and 5. He has a good job as a carpenter and has always paid his child support on time. Unfortunately, Alex has not seen his kids in the past three years, because they moved with their mother to another state. Although he is sober now, three years ago Alex had a serious drinking problem. On occasion, he even hit his wife and children, although he was always drunk at the time. After his wife left him, Alex checked himself into an alcoholism treatment program, and he is now involved

in AA meetings and counseling. He is genuinely sorry for his past behavior and wants desperately to get his family back, but his wife will neither see him nor allow the kids to visit him. Alex refuses to give up hope that someday she will change her mind. He is also hoping that, as the children get older, they will be able to make their own decisions about seeing him. Meanwhile, he continues to send them child support money, and he has even opened a savings account to help pay their college tuition.

CANDIDATE 4: TONY. Tony is a 41-year-old father who has four children, ranging in age from 11 to 16 years old. He is living with the mother of his two youngest children, and he tries to keep in contact with his two older kids. Tony has not had steady employment for the past six years, and he has not paid child support during this time. He has given all his children money whenever he managed to get some work, but that has never been regular. He spends time as a volunteer in his church, and he has always been involved in local politics. Everyone considers Tony to be a nice guy who gets along with people. He has made it a point to be involved in his children's lives by playing ball with them, going to church with them, attending school functions, and the like. Tony is very proud of his kids and considers himself to be a good father. He has never legally established paternity and doesn't see the need for it.

CANDIDATE 5: VICTOR. Victor is a 24-year-old unemployed father. His girlfriend recently had their second child. Victor lives with his girlfriend and children, and he hopes that someday they can get married. He has not worked in over a year and therefore has not been able to pay child support, but he takes care of the children every day so that his girlfriend can go to school to get a GED. When he is not watching the children, he often goes out to spend time with his friends. Victor hasn't been looking for work because he says that his girlfriend needs him to be home with the kids. Their only source of income is her TANF grant, and money is often scarce. To make it through the month, they often go to Victor's mother's house for dinner, and they have borrowed money from her from time to time.

Optional Procedure

Instead of using the handout “Case Studies: Father of the Year,” tell the men that you would like them to think about the problems they are facing in trying to care for their children. Say something like, “Each of you is struggling to be the best father you can be for your children. Yet, like all fathers, you face personal obstacles that may get in the way of always being successful. So I would like you to think about your own situation to evaluate what you do well and also what you need to work on to be more effective in your role as a father and provider.”

Tell the men that this activity will help each of them to identify qualities they have that would make them a candidate for Father of the Year. Remind them of the list of qualities that the group has just generated, and invite each of them to declare himself as a candidate. Men who want to run for the award will have to list their special qualities on the award certificate and present it to the entire group. They will have three minutes each to convince group members of the reasons why they should get the award. The fathers who do not nominate themselves will act as judges. After all the candidates have had an opportunity to speak, ask the judges to select the winner, stating the reasons why he was chosen. Use the following questions to discuss how the Father of the Year was selected.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. What positive qualities do all the candidates have in common?
2. What is the most positive thing about each candidate?
3. Judges, which factors were most important in selecting the Father of the Year?
4. To what degree did a candidate's payment of child support contribute to his being selected as Father of the Year?
5. Candidates, what was it like to run for Father of the Year?
6. If you did not choose to run, what circumstances prevented you from running (such as not seeing your children, not working, etc.)?
7. How do you feel when you think that you cannot be the kind of father you want to be?
8. What do you hope to change about your situation as a father? What kinds of things do you plan to do to make these changes possible?
9. Would you vote to make your own father the Father of the Year? Why or why not?
10. Do you think that your children would vote for you? Why or why not?

FATHER OF THE YEAR AWARD

The National Association of Quality Fathers recognizes:

as the recipient of the Father of the Year Award.

This special father has the following qualities:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Signed: *The National Association of Quality Fathers*

Being a Provider: What Gets in the Way?

Purpose: To help fathers understand the things that get in the way of being able to provide for their children financially. To help fathers understand how their children benefit from regular child support.

Materials: Leader Resource, “Questions About Candidates”; handout, “Case Studies: Father of the Year” (from Activity 5-2); newsprint and marker.

Time: 35-45 minutes.

Procedure: Introduce the activity by saying something like, “In the last activity we talked about what it takes to be a good father, and then we read the case studies to select the Father of the Year. In deciding which candidate most deserved the award, one thing we considered was how well he provided for his children. Now let’s look at the case studies again, this time focusing on the candidates’ role as providers. What are the financial realities for their children?”

Tell the men that you will read one of the case studies aloud and then will ask some questions about that father’s success as a provider. Read the first case study, and then ask the corresponding questions from the Leader Resource “Questions About Candidates.” Repeat this process for at least three case studies.

After the case studies have been discussed, ask the following questions about being a provider.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to be a provider for your children?
2. Which of these candidates' problems with child support or paternity most closely resembles your situation?
3. Why do you think some men pay child support while others do not?
4. Does a father's relationship with his children change when he can't provide for them? If so, how? What about the father's relationship with the children's mother?
5. How do you think a child's life is affected when the father does not pay child support?
6. When you were a child, did your father support you financially? What was that experience like? Did your experience as a child affect how you support your children? If so, how?
7. What is it like for you when you can't provide for your children?
8. For those of you whose children receive some kind of public assistance, what concerns do you have about their future? How much money do they actually have to live on? What do you think will happen to them as they get older and may no longer be eligible for help?
9. What plans do you have to improve your child's financial circumstances in the future?

Leader Resource

Questions About Candidates

CANDIDATE 1: JEFF. Jeff is trying to do the best he can to support his own two children as well as his girlfriend's three children, who receive no support from their father.

- Should Jeff be giving his child support money to his girlfriend?
- What do you think it's like for Jeff's ex-wife, who is trying to support her children on a very tight budget?
- How do you think Jeff's children feel about his dividing up his child support money between two households?
- What advice would you give to Jeff? To his ex-wife? To his girlfriend?

CANDIDATE 2: MARK. Mark loves his children and is trying to gain legal custody. His main obstacle is getting his children's mother to claim him as the legal father.

- What could Mark have done differently at the time his children were born? What can he do now?
- What happens when a couple's plans to stay together forever just don't work out? How can children be protected from the things that go wrong when parents break up?
- How might Mark deal with his disappointment and anger over what his girlfriend is doing?
- What responsibility does Mark have to his 10-year-old son?

CANDIDATE 3: ALEX. Alex is paying for his past mistakes and feels bad about not being able to have a relationship with his children.

- How can he show his children that he cares about them?
- How might Alex deal with the pain and powerlessness he must feel over not being able to see his children?

CANDIDATE 4: TONY. Tony believes that informal relationships are best. He is a good father to his children, but he does not want to establish paternity and has not been able to live up to his financial obligations.

- How do you think Tony's children feel about his relationship with them? Do you think the older children feel differently than the younger children?
- How do you think Tony feels when his children want something that he can't provide for them?
- How do you think the two mothers of Tony's children feel about his relationship with their children? About his unwillingness to establish paternity?
- How might Tony's unwillingness to establish paternity affect the children as they get older?

CANDIDATE 5: VICTOR. Victor is a very involved father who is devoted to taking care of his children, and he supports his girlfriend in many important ways.

- What do you think about the way Victor is supporting his children?
- What financial problems do you think the family is having?
- How are children affected when their parents have little income?
- Is it more important for Victor to continue staying at home to care for his two children, or should he look for a job?
- What suggestions do you have for Victor and his family?

Looking Ahead

Purpose: To give participants an opportunity to think about how things will change as they become more successful in providing for their children. To help each father reflect on how his children will benefit from his efforts to be consistently involved in their lives.

Materials: Handout, “My Personal Contract to My Children.”

Time: 15 minutes.

Procedure: Tell the fathers that they will now have a chance to think about the future, when they will be in a better position to support their children. Say something like, “I’d like each of you to close your eyes for a few minutes and think ahead to the next few years. Imagine that you have accomplished your goals and are now working full time and paying child support each week. You are also seeing your children regularly. When you have a picture in your mind of what this will be like, open your eyes.” After everyone has opened his eyes, ask each man to describe what he hopes his life will be like. Use the discussion questions to help the men talk about what they hope for in the future.

End this activity by giving each participant a copy of the handout “My Personal Contract to My Children.” Ask the fathers to think about ways they can improve their relationships with their children. What would they like to do for and with their children to show that they are trying to be good fathers? Encourage them to list their ideas on the contract and to sign it.

For those fathers who do not have contact with their children, ask them to think of ways they can handle this difficult challenge. For example, could they send a card or a letter to their children? Could they stop by their children’s school, home, or job? Can they imagine a future time when they have reunited with their children? If so, what steps do they need to take now to make this happen?

▼ Discussion Questions

1. When you picture the future, what do you imagine your life will be like?
2. How do you think your relationship with your children will change? What about your relationship with your children's mother?
3. How do you think it will feel to be working full time?
4. What words would you use to describe how you will feel when you are working?
5. In what ways do you hope to have more control over your life?
6. What steps do you plan to take to accomplish your goals? What help will you need?
7. Imagine that it is 15 years from now and your children are adults. What will they say about you as a father? As a provider?
8. In what ways will your support and involvement change your children's lives?
9. What do you hope your children will say to their children about you as a provider?

My Personal Contract to My Children

I, _____

father of _____

want to be a good father to my children. I will show my children that I am working hard at doing the best job I can by making the following commitments to them:

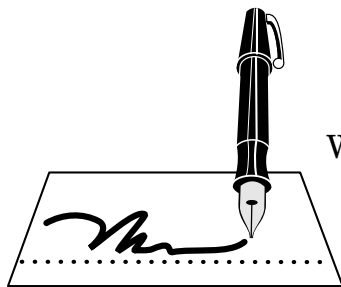
1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____



Signed: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Feedback/Wrap-up

At the end of this session, the fathers may have strong feelings about their ability to provide for their children. Remind them that they must overcome personal situations to be successful providers, but point out that each can make a commitment to put his children's needs foremost in his mind. The men may also have questions about what's expected of them as noncustodial parents, particularly concerning the Child Support Enforcement system. Tell them that their questions will be addressed in the next session. Then ask the following questions to get their reactions to today's session.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. Would anyone like to describe his reactions to today's session? What are your thoughts or feelings?
2. Would any of you like to add to what you have said about what it's like to be a father or about what you hope to see written on your Father of the Year Award?
3. Would anyone like to comment on how he views himself as a provider for his children?
4. As a result of today's session, what, if anything, do you hope to change about your role as a provider?

Close the session by saying something like, "In the next session, we will continue discussing child support. First, we will share opinions and feelings about having to pay support, and then you will have an opportunity to ask questions about your rights and responsibilities as noncustodial fathers. We will cover information about the Child Support Enforcement system, paying child support, visitation, custody, back debts, and so on. Before ending, let's spend a few minutes brainstorming the questions you have for the experts. We will share this list with the Child Support Enforcement staff so that they can come prepared to address your concerns." Thank the men for their participation, and remind them of when the next session will meet.