

## Mission

The Fatherhood Project is an initiative started in 2013 by Dr. Raymond Levy in the Department of Psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). Our mission is to improve the health and well-being of children and families by empowering fathers to be knowledgeable, active, and emotionally engaged with their children.



*"The Fatherhood Project provided a great service to the young men at our school who are fathering. Our young dads were able to recognize how important they are in their children's lives and to think about what kind of dad they want to be. TFP's program is a great resource for our students."*

**Lauren Bard, CIS Site Coordinator at Boston English High School**

## The Challenge

A well-established body of research confirms that a father's active participation and emotional engagement with his children leads to improved social, emotional, academic and behavioral outcomes. Findings from the rapidly growing science of early childhood and early brain development show the positive, lifelong impact fathers can have by being engaged early in their children's lives. As an increasing number of fathers become front-line caretakers, there is a need for an expansion of fathering skills.

At The Fatherhood Project, we believe that professionals working with fathers, children, and families in healthcare, mental health, education, and social service settings have an unprecedented opportunity to make father engagement a priority.

## What We Do

TFP designs, develops and delivers programs at Massachusetts General Hospital and its affiliates, in Massachusetts and nationally. We work with all fathers while focusing on underserved, at-risk populations. In order to achieve our mission, TFP:

- Develops direct-service programs that strengthen emotional connections between fathers and children, focus on skill-building, and improve health outcomes for children across the life cycle, with special focus on underserved populations.
- Trains professionals in healthcare, mental health, education, and social services about the critical role fathers play in child development and family life, and how to best support father engagement in their particular context.
- Initiates research studies aimed at understanding men's attitudes and emotions in prenatal care and partners with leading researchers to discover how men can continue to help their children achieve improved outcomes.

## Current Research Initiatives

- **A Fatherhood Study in Prenatal Care** - TFP, lead by Dr. Milton Kotelchuck, conducted a survey of men attending prenatal appointments at MGH Vincent Obstetrics. We received over 800 responses and are disseminating the findings of what is likely the largest study of men in prenatal care by publishing in a professional journal, delivering talks to health departments and community health centers and making presentations at conferences around the country. We hope that obstetrics services and community clinics will value our findings and interventions and that our work will contribute to widespread institutional change to transform obstetrics services into more father-inclusive environments.
- **Engaging Fathers in Childhood Obesity Prevention** - In collaboration with Elsie M. Taveras, MD, MPH, Chief, Division of General Academic Pediatrics at Mass General Hospital for Children and her First 1,000 Days Study, TFP's collaboration is aimed at developing and evaluating focused interventions for fathers and families to decrease obesity in children.



## Programs and Training

### • Dads Matter Initiative

- **Pediatrics** – *Dads Matter* in Pediatrics, lead by TFP's John Badalament, is an ongoing collaboration with the MGH Revere Department of Pediatrics. Through a combination of full staff professional development training and direct service to fathers, this program is designed to help health care professionals serving a highly diverse patient population to develop simple, integrated approaches to engaging with men and promoting active fatherhood. Using an ongoing, drop-in format, the Dads & Kids Connect Group helps men develop fathering skills and increases their sense of confidence, competence and connection as fathers of young children age birth - 5 years old.
- **Obstetrics** – As a result of the findings from TFP's Father Survey in Obstetrics, TFP is collaborating with the staff at MGH Vincent Obstetrics to create a father-friendly approach to prenatal services. Through a combination of direct services for fathers (including classes, text messages, and a designated page on the TFP website) and staff training for practitioners, this program will increase father engagement during the prenatal period.

### • Teen Dads

- The Teen Dads Program provides expecting & parenting teen fathers with support, fathering skills and resources. Our co-facilitated group model provides these young men with a safe, educational and positive place to be with others going through similar experiences, as well as to learn important relationship skills. The content of the group meetings is based on the stories young fathers share about their everyday lives – the challenges they face, the strengths and resources they draw upon – interspersed with fathering skill-building activities.

### • Dads in Recovery

- Dads in Recovery is an innovative program offered to fathers receiving residential substance use treatment. By providing substance-using fathers with psycho-educational counseling that supports their recovery, this program helps them to establish or repair their relationship with their children, and parent with increased skills, confidence and competence.

### • Engaging Dads in Schools

- Through a series of workshops, TFP's program for schools focuses on strengthening the essential emotional connection between fathers and their children in the early years by offering the opportunity to have fun together while learning and practicing lifelong relationship skills. The program also empowers school and parent leaders to create a more father-inclusive school environment.

### • Divorcing Dads: From Disruption to Connection

- In an interactive group setting for fathers-only, the Divorcing Dads program is designed to address the emotional and practical aspects of fathering through all stages of divorce. This program teaches skills and addresses issues in greater depth than the traditionally mandated 2-hour class. The overall goal is to increase men's sense of confidence and competence as fathers and help them meet the challenges of parenting through a difficult time.



*"The dads group actually impacted their relationship as a father and son. I see them bonding more. Before, there wasn't a time where they sat down together and did their own thing without me. Since joining the group he has realized the importance of how he needs to be with his son more without me being present."*

**Majda Baraoui, wife of dads group participant**



*"I appreciate being here and having a place to come to get advice, and be listened to...otherwise I would keep it all inside because I don't have anyone else I can talk with about fatherhood."*

**TFP Teen Dads Program Participant - age 18 with twin 7 month old daughters**