

On May 13, 2021, NTTAC’s Infant and Early Childhood Team hosted a webinar ([link to webinar recording](#)) about *Important roles of fathers and grandfathers in families, programs, and systems*. In our webinar, we had the chance to engage with David Armstrong, a grandfather who grew into an advocacy role after accompanying his grandson, DeAndre, on his journey through school, health, and behavioral health systems. Considering David’s perspective helps us:

- Think about a multi-generational approach to our systems of care, based on the understanding that the health of caregivers is linked to the health of the children we serve;
- Further our thinking about how to center our systems of care work comprehensively on family voice, including non-custodial fathers, grandfathers who are caregivers, and other kinship caregivers;
- Understand the experiences of male caregivers attempting to navigate services and supports in child-serving systems designed for mothers and children.

The involvement of fathers and father figures has increased dramatically over the past several decades, and there has been an evolution from thinking about fathers as distant breadwinners to co-parents whose contributions to child development and overall well-being are invaluable. However, for many of us who have had the chance to work directly with infants, toddlers, and young children, it is still the case that the agencies that serve children and families are not always as welcoming of male caregivers, and that these important voices are underrepresented in our systems of care work.

Here are some considerations for approaching family engagement more inclusively in the context of systems of care:

<i>Comprehensive family engagement consideration</i>	<i>Selected Resource</i>
Continue to structure family engagement and development at all levels of the system.	The Family Run Executive Director Leadership Association (FREDLA) put out this helpful guide to supporting family participation in systems of care: https://www.fredla.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/SupportingFamily-2017-Revised2018-newlogo-print-1.pdf
Include a range of family members and kinship caregivers in inclusive and thoughtful ways.	Head Start’s Birth – 5 Father Engagement Guide provides comprehensive training resources to enhance father engagement: https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/professional-development/birth-5-father-engagement-guide/professional-development-strategies-promote-father-engagement

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Build and develop adult capacities to support social-emotional development in young children.	Harvard’s Center for the Developing Child’s released a 5-minute video on building adult capacities and community-level resilience to improve child outcomes: https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/building-adult-capabilities-to-improve-child-outcomes-a-theory-of-change/
Increase awareness of the contributions of fathers and father figures to children’s health and development.	This fast focus brief from the University of Wisconsin’s Institute for Poverty Research describes a growing consensus in research, policy, and practice that fathers influence their child’s development in unique and important ways: https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resource/involved-fathers-play-an-important-role-in-childrens-lives/
Draw on lessons learned about engaging fathers and father figures from analogous sectors in the early childhood system (e.g. home visiting, Head Start/Early Head Start).	A research snapshot was put together by the National Home Visiting Resource Center (NHVRC) to answer important questions about outcomes and common challenges associated with father engagement in home visiting: https://www.nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/NHVRC-Brief-041519-FINAL.pdf

If you or your colleagues would like to engage in the topic of engaging fathers and father figures more deeply, please [register for our Community of Practice](#) on this topic!