



The Supporting Father
Involvement Program

Media Kit

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The Supporting Father Involvement Program.

An evaluated preventive intervention program designed to enhance and maintain the positive involvement of low income fathers with young children. Group programs focus on fathers as individuals, parents, and co-parents.

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ABOUT: The Supporting Father Involvement Program

Recruitment

Men and their families are recruited from Family Resource Centers, community agencies, and broader neighborhood/community

Case managers/family workers screen parents to determine eligibility for the program

1. *Status.* Marital status not important, co-parenting interest primary criterion, Both parents or parent-figures must participate. Could be father-grandmother or father-aunt pairs, for example.
2. *Clinical considerations:* On a case by case basis, some fathers/families may not proceed for an initial interview with the group leaders: e.g., families with ongoing severe violence, substance abuse, mental illness that interferes with daily functioning and ability to participate in the study.

The Program Evaluation

Pre-interviews done with all couples and random assignment to conditions

Assessments for parents in all three conditions at:

Baseline

Two months following end of intervention

One year after entrance into study

18 months after entrance into study

30 months after entrance into study

A Quick Survey of Background Theory and Research

The family paradigm that exists now typically defines family as “a mother and her children.” This relegates fathers to a significantly diminished role and marginalizes their importance.

What Does Involved Fathering Mean?

Male behavior beyond insemination that promotes the well-being and healthy development of one’s child and family in active ways.

- a. Feeling and behaving responsibly toward one’s child
- b. Being emotionally engaged

Being physically accessible

- c. Providing material support to sustain the child's needs
- d. Exerting influence in child rearing decisions

Quality of fathering is much more important than the *quantity* of fathering; quality means sensitivity to who the child is and his/her developmental needs.

Why Fathers are Important to Child Development (A Generation of Research Findings) from Research

For children

Increases in academic, emotional and social competence

Less abuse and neglect

Protects children against (reduces probability of) delayed development, poor standard of living, smoking, criminality, truancy, promiscuity, depression and anxiety

For fathers

Better overall health

Greater work satisfaction

Involvement produces higher self-esteem, which produces more involvement

Early involvement leads to sustained involvement

For mothers

Lower stress

Less depression

Lower levels of impoverishment

The Relevance of Co-parenting

Mothers as Gatekeepers

A father's involvement with children, especially young children, is often contingent upon the mother's attitude towards, and expectations of, support from him.

Married fathers are more involved with their children than never married/separated/divorced fathers.

Fathers who are not romantically involved with their children's mother have lower levels of involvement than do romantically involved men.

Couple relationship distress is a risk factor for lower father involvement, especially with daughters.

The Importance of Mother-Father Cooperation

Cooperation between parents leads to a more positive father-child relationship.

Father involvement is higher when parents cooperate. That is,

They function more effectively as parents.

Both parents are involved in decisions about and care of the child(ren).

Both partners are reasonably satisfied with the division of labor around caring for the child(ren).

Partners support and do not undermine each other's parenting; they collaborate on childrearing issues even when they disagree.

Unresolved conflict between parents leads to negative outcomes for children.

The higher the conflict, the more the conflict is about the child, the more the child is involved in the center of controversy, the worse the child's outcomes.

When Father Contact does not Benefit the Child

Children do not benefit from a father's involvement when he is abusive to the mother or children.

Father involvement takes place in the context of a system

The Cowans and other researchers show that fathers' involvement with their children is not something that arises solely from the motivation of the father and his relationship with his child. Whether or not a father is positively involved with his child or children depends on what is happening in 5 aspects of his life:

1. Fathers' individual characteristics: ideas, beliefs, values, motivations, self-esteem, and personal adjustment.
2. The relationship between father and mother, with special emphasis on patterns of communication and problem solving, and division of labor in caring for the child.
3. The patterns of relationships in father's and mother's family of origin. Whether and how these patterns are passed down from generation to generation.
4. The relationship between each parent and their child.
5. The relationship between nuclear family members and individuals or institutions outside the family, with emphasis on the balance between life stress and social

support with friends and co-workers.

To understand what happens to family members and relationships during major life transitions and throughout the family life cycle, it is necessary to examine the interconnections among all 5 domains. Our research shows that individual, dyadic, triadic, three-generational, and outside-the-family domains each contribute unique information to our understanding of adaptation in the early years of family life.

We believe that to be optimally effective, interventions concerned with fathers must also explore the links between the father-child relationship and the other family domains in our model. The state of affairs in each of these family domains can have direct effects on both the quantity and quality of fathers' involvement with their children.

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Carolyn Pape Cowan, PhD

Philip A. Cowan, PhD

Carolyn Pape Cowan is Professor of Psychology Emerita at the University of California, Berkeley where she is co-director of 3 longitudinal preventive intervention projects: Becoming a Family, Schoolchildren and Their Families, and Supporting Father Involvement. Dr. Cowan has published widely in the professional literature on family relationships, family transitions, and the evaluation of preventive interventions. She is co-editor of *Fatherhood today: Men's changing role in the family* (Wiley, 1988) and *The family context of parenting in the child's adaptation to school* (Erlbaum, 2005), and co-author with Phil Cowan of *When partners become parents: The big life change for couples* (Erlbaum, 2000), which has been translated into 6 languages. Prof. Cowan consults widely on the development, training, and evaluation of interventions for parents.

Philip A. Cowan is Professor of Psychology Emeritus and Professor of the Graduate School at the University of California, Berkeley. He is co-director of 3 longitudinal preventive intervention projects with Carolyn Pape Cowan. Dr. Cowan served as Director of the Clinical Psychology Program and the Institute of Human Development at UC Berkeley. In addition to authoring numerous scientific articles, he is the author of *Piaget with Feeling* (Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1978), co-author of *When partners become parents: The big life change for couples* (Erlbaum, 2000), and co-editor of four books and monographs, including *Family Transitions* (Erlbaum, 1990), and *The family context of parenting in the child's adaptation to school* (Erlbaum, 2005).

For more than three decades, Phil and Carolyn Cowan have conducted longitudinal studies that include randomized clinical trials of couples group interventions. The central theme of their work is that positive couple relationships play a central role in creating a positive context for parenting, and help to enhance children's development and adaptation. The Becoming a Family Project showed that a 6-month-long weekly couples group with clinically trained leaders was able to maintain marital satisfaction of new parents over a period of 5 years, while control group couples showed the normative decline in marital satisfaction found in more than 30 studies in the US and abroad. The Schoolchildren and their Families Project offered 4-month-long weekly couples groups in the year before their first child entered elementary school; these groups were able to reduce marital conflict, increase parenting effectiveness, and reduce children's behavior problems in kindergarten - effects that were maintained over ten years and facilitated the children's transition to high school. In 1999, the Cowans received an award for Distinguished Contribution to Family Systems Research from the American Family Therapy Academy.

In the Supporting Father Involvement Project, the Cowans work with Marsha and Kyle Pruett in collaboration with the Office of Child Abuse Prevention, a unit of the California Department of Social Services. In addition to their participation in creating the overall design of the intervention, they supervise the intervention evaluation arm of the project. In this project, couples groups and fathers groups meeting weekly for 4 months are able to increase father involvement, maintain couple relationship satisfaction, reduce parenting stress, and prevent the development of behavior problems in children – all central risks for child abuse.

Carolyn and Phil Cowan were among the founding members of the Council on Contemporary Families, an organization that has been devoted to working with the media on finding balanced ways of presenting family issues for the past 10 years.

Marsha Kline Pruett, PhD, MSL

Dr. Kline Pruett is the Maconda Brown O'Connor Chair in Research at the Smith School of Social Work. She has a Master's degree in education from the University of Pennsylvania and a Master's degree in Legal Studies from the Yale School of Law, as well as a Ph.D. in Clinical/Community Psychology from the University of California at Berkeley. She also has training certificates in family therapy, mediation, and collaborative divorce. She is best known for the development, implementation, and evaluation of preventive interventions in schools and courts. Her writings include numerous scholarly articles, chapters, and a co-authored book, *Your Divorce Advisor: An Attorney and Psychologist Lead You Through the Legal and Emotional Landscape of Divorce* (2001 by Simon and Schuster). Dr. Kline Pruett's research interests revolve around the promotion of healthy family development during life transitions, particularly those transitions related to adverse events or circumstances. She specializes in family issues pertaining to communication, conflict, and family law.

Dr. Kline Pruett contributes to the Supporting Fatherhood Involvement (SFI) Development and Evaluation Team in several capacities. She took the lead in adapting the Cowans' intervention model for the specific purposes and populations of the SFI project. She also provides electronic supervision and consultation to staff at each Family resource Center, and works in conjunction with the Cowans on the evaluation design and dissemination aspects of the project.

She is known for creating and evaluating a model continuum of effective and cost-efficient co-parenting services in the Connecticut courts to assist in the preservation of each family's long-term well-being. The Collaborative Divorce Program helped reduce the psychological costs of divorce and child custody decisions for parents involved in the legal process, and improve child adjustment, parent relationships, and paternal involvement during and after separation/ divorce. Findings from the study point to new information about father involvement and parenting plans for very young children. The project produced some of the only data in the country about young children (infants through six years) and overnights after divorce. For this research and intervention, she was awarded the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts Stanley Cohen Award for Distinguished Research. Dr. Kline Pruett has maintained a clinical practice in Connecticut since 1990, where she has treated individual adults and children, couples, and families. Her current interests include couples counseling and consultation, father involvement consultation, mediation, parent coordination, and collaborative divorce. She disseminates her work through clinical and media consultations, and speaking engagements across North America and abroad.

Kyle D. Pruett, MD

Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Nursing, served as Director of Medical Studies at the Yale School of Medicine's Child Study Center, where he received the Lifetime Distinguished Teaching award. He also helped found the Performing Arts Medicine Association, and has been in the private practice of infant, child and family psychiatry since 1974.

As president of Zero to Three: The National Center for Infants, Toddlers and their Families, he headed one of the nation's most prestigious multi-disciplinary training programs for infant/family professionals. Both clinician and scholar, Dr. Pruett conducted a landmark study, which demonstrated the powerful, positive impact which early care-giving by fathers can have on a young child's social and intellectual development. Dr. Pruett's writings (including the classic *The Nurturing Father*, winner of the American Health Book Award, and more current *Fatherneed: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child* and *Me, Myself and I: The Child's Sense of Self*, which won the Independent Book Publisher's Award), frequent contributions to national and international print and electronic media, and television appearances have provided countless parents with useful information and guidance on early childhood development and effective parenting practices. He serves as consultant to *NBC Dateline*, *ABC News*, *CBS Morning News*, National Public Radio, PBS National Advisory Board, and Sesame Workshop, was chosen by Peter Jennings to co-host the *Children's Town Meeting* on ABC News the Saturday after 9/11, and by Oprah Winfrey to co-host with her the award winning video for new parents, *Begin With Love*.

Affiliations: American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Society for Research in Family Therapy, World Association for Infant Mental Health, the Yale University Program for the Humanities in Medicine, and the Annenberg Center for Public Policy in the Media. With his wife Marsha Kline Pruett, he is co-investigator in the Collaborative Divorce Project to reduce the trauma of divorce in young children's lives, and the prestigious on-going, multi-site abuse and neglect prevention study, Supporting Fatherhood Initiative for California's Department of Social Service, Office of Child Abuse Prevention.



Carolyn Pape Cowan, PhD



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"Jose" : Father Involvement



Water Balloons at a Father Involvement Program in Tulare, CA