

ENGAGING FATHERS IN CONVERSATIONS

GROUNDING IN THE SPIRIT OF RESPECT, CONNECTION, CURIOSITY AND HOPE

Key Shifts:

- Follow a framework (map) for constructive conversations about challenging issues
- Ensure that fathers feel that they “matter.” Be inclusive. Support his valued voice
- Move away from a single story – What Dad did wrong; what led to where he is today
- Be open to possibilities for fathers to use identified strengths to build the lives they would prefer
- Move from just listening to listening justly

- I. **Mattering**ⁱ We all want to feel like we are being heard and that we matter. If we feel like we matter, we will be more involved. If we are involved, we will feel as though we matter.
 - a. Mattering is a motivator. It is the feeling that others are interested in us, depend on us, or are concerned for our fate.
 - b. Mattering brings us to “I am important.” “What I say and do makes a difference.” “I am listened to and I have influence.”
 - c. Mattering brings involvement – The more involved, the more invested we are in the outcomes
 - d. Being involved and invested builds collaboration and community and leads to positive, more lasting change.
- II. **Intentional Strengths**ⁱⁱ - Strengths as practices (e.g., things people do in their lives)
 - a. Move from “What” are you doing to exploring intentions – “Why” are you doing that? What are your intentions in doing that? What are you hoping to accomplish in doing that?
 - b. Elicit possible intentions, values and beliefs, hopes, dreams and commitments in life that might inspire those practices
- III. **Developing a community that can support fathers in those intentional practice**
 - a. Identify and/or work with father to develop a support network (family, connections, neighbors)
 - b. Reconnect father with those who have helped in the past or that he identifies as being supportive
 - c. Supports and/or services or people who are available to continue to nurture identified intentions (practices/strengths)
 - d. Validate, establish and follow through with next steps (concrete actions)

CONVERSATION STARTER

Note: These are principles to guide a conversation, not to be simply followed. Listen to responses. Follow up with disciplined improvisation – accommodate unexpected responses

Identify a strength: _____ [turn adjective “I’m determined” to noun “Determination.”]

- Can you tell me more about _____? (Would it be okay if I asked you more about _____)
- If _____ is not a quality that you have, but something you do, how do you do that?
- For you, how do you practice this (strength)?
- How did you develop those practices?
- Did you learn this practice from someone in your life? (Who?)
- Can you tell me a story about the first time you saw someone practicing this?
- Why is this (strength or practice) important to you?
- If I saw you practicing _____, what might I see you doing?
- When you are doing this _____, what were you hoping to accomplish?
- As you think about those intentions, what values and beliefs might sit behind them?
- When you think of those values, what hopes or dreams might they reflect?
- What might those hopes and dreams say about what you stand for in your life?
- As you think back across your life, who do you think might particularly appreciate your pursuit of _____?
- What do you think _____ might say if they knew you did this _____ in the face of [include any challenges or obstacles that were uncovered during *this* conversation]
- If they could see you putting _____ into practice, what do you think it would tell them about you?
- What’s it like for you to be thinking and talking about them (him/her) right now?
- Would you like them to be more present in your life today?
- Is this (strength/practice) something that you hope to pass along to your child(ren)?
- How can you see this (strength/practice) being passed onto to your child(ren)?

Note: (Move to forward thinking – how would you like your life to be in the future? With you child(ren)? How can we get there?)

ⁱ Mattering: Beth Root, MA

ⁱⁱ Intentional Strengths; Madsen, W. & Gillespie, K. (2014). *Collaborative Helping: A Strengths Framework for Home-Based Services*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.; Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; White, M. (2007). *Maps of Narrative Practice*. New York, NY/London, England: W.W. Norton & Company. See: Intentional Strengths, Mertz, Mike, MS, NIPFC, Seneca Family of Agencies, Oakland, CA