

Guidelines for involving men

Why a guideline specific for men?

Men are part of the communities they live in and they play a vital role in the lives of their own and other children living in the communities. In many cultures, men are mostly expected to earn money for the family, whilst mothers take care of the children (Carrim, 2017). Raising income has already good impact on raising children. They also have a substantial impact on their children's development and wellbeing, and they also have a big influence on mothers (Garcia et al., 2022). It is also clear that parenting programmes that involve fathers can reduce child maltreatment and gender-based violence (Siu et al., 2017).

However, in many places where interventions are currently being implemented, men are not involved as much as women. Fathers often do not come along to meetings, especially when it concerns children. That is women's business according to them. Or they stop coming to meetings, because it is not interesting enough to them. Many activities are focused on women and children. Even in many parenting interventions, the focus often remains on the mothers and children.

It is important to involve men in community development and development of children. Without them in fact there will be no true development.

This guideline contains information on what to do and what not to do regarding involving men in the interventions. There will also be examples given of what worked in the past and some questions to ask before and during interventions.

What to do

- Find out about the interest of men in caring for supporting of their family and their community.
- Consider starting men-only sessions for more open discussions.
- Let the men work together on something extracurricular, like repainting a school or a child centre.
- Respect traditional values regarding roles of men and women.

- Explore men's pre-existing motivation to improve the development or the behaviour of their children, which may differ from women's reasons.
- When having difficulty of getting men to the places where interventions are held, visit them in the places where they are and conduct sessions with them at that place.

What not to do

- Do not ask the men to do exactly the same things as the women do to support their children. The roles of men and women are different. They can help in different ways.
- Do not push men to take part in mixed-sex sessions from the very beginning. Rather, let them share experiences in men-only sessions before participating in mixed-sex sessions.
- Do not specifically point out the bad behaviour or practices of individual men. This will only drive them away from taking part the interventions. Men need to discover for themselves whether they need to change their behaviour or mindset. As a facilitator, you should stay neutral.

What worked in the past

- Interventions that are interactive and participatory, rather than a lot of sitting and listening to theory from the facilitators.
- Not starting with, but working towards mixed sessions: this enabled spouses and people in general to clarify conflicting perspectives regarding spousal relationships and gendered norms.
- Addressing masculine norms which sustain violence. This can be done through activities that encourage self-reflection and activities wherein new behaviours

Example:

Peeling the bananas

After a parenting intervention in Malawi, one of the men participating explained he was drinking much less and was now helping out his wife more. He said he realised that his wife had to work very hard in the home and wanted to help her because he loved her. Quoting from the man: 'I want to help my wife, but please, do not let me peel the bananas! My friends are making fun of me'.

This man apparently thought that in order to help his wife, he had to do the exact same tasks.. Men can help their wives in different ways.

can be practiced. This creates a sense of responsibility and positive engagement.

- Raising many children can be overwhelming. Young men can learn from older men: looking back, what was good and what would they would have done differently in bringing up their children?
- Working with a combination of a parenting and financial program, since men are more inclined to participate when there is some financial gain.

Examples of interventions¹ that have been successful in involving men:

- Pride! → promotes the acceptance of men to let women (with and without disabilities) to learn skills and contribute to income generation.
 - [Empower2Protect](#) → project about prevention and response to Gender Based Violence.
 - What's Up Parents → a programme aimed at changing cultural practices towards girl education.
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Questions to ask before starting with an intervention:

- What is the issue and what is the goal?
- Is this intervention suitable for both men and women together, or is it better to start separately?
- Is the timing and place of the program suitable for both men and women?
- Are the needs of men as well as women recognized?
- Are the facilitators skilled to work with both men and women?
- Are both men and women explicitly informed about the importance of program participation, and the benefits to children?
- Is homework expected of both men and women and will this be clearly communicated?

Examples of questions to ask to encourage men to think about their behaviour and practices:

- What is the role of a man in a family?
- What is your role as a father and husband?

¹ For more information, please contact Liesbeth.speelman@redeenkind.nl

- How do you think your children see you?
 - How do you want your children to see you?
 - How do you envision the future for your children?
 - During your own childhood, what did you think of men in your environment?
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Sources

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