



Iowa Children's Justice

Iowa Children's Justice Update

To inform the courts and other interested members of our state community, Iowa Children's Justice will send out periodic information about issues and activities related to Juvenile Court.

Involving Fathers April 2009

April Topic Involving Fathers

For children in foster care, the federal Child and Family Service Review expects that **diligent efforts** are made to **identify, locate, evaluate** and **engage fathers** in planning for their children. Ideally, fathers should be included in all aspects of a case from assessment, through hearings to case closure - unless doing so would be contrary to the safety and well being of the child.

Research indicates that most parents want both father and mother to be actively involved in their children's lives, and most children desire a loving relationship with their father. Barriers to father's involvement often exist due to personal situations (e.g. mental health or substance abuse issues, domestic violence, incarceration, or unemployment) a strained relationship between mother and father, or ongoing custody disputes.

Why is this important?

The presence of a father is critical to the optimal development and well-being of a child. Research shows that a father's role in his child's life affects that child's health, development, gender identity, responsible sexuality, emotional and social commitment and financial security.

What the research says

Historically, child welfare agencies and program services have fallen short of involving fathers in both policy and practice. A number of recent changes in child welfare practices have increased the likelihood that non-custodial fathers will be involved with their children. These changes include ASFA and CFSSR requirements and aspects of the Fostering Connections Act that require a diligent search for fathers of children involved in the child welfare system and that both fathers and paternal relatives are considered as placement resources for children in care.

Additionally, promising practices such as the various 'Fatherhood Initiatives' in some child welfare agencies and in various Model Courts around the country; the increased emphasis on family centered child welfare practice; expedited permanency planning; concurrent planning, and Family Team Decision Making have been shown to increase the likelihood of positive involvement by fathers.

Although no research studies are currently available on the effects of fathers' involvement in child welfare cases, helpful summaries of available information about non-custodial fathers compiled by the Urban Institute can be found at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/CW-dads02/>

What contribution can judges make?

Judges can support a father's positive involvement with a child in foster care by encouraging practice that is truly family-centered. By supporting family-centered practice, judges help assure that fathers are not overlooked and that 'parent involvement' doesn't translate simply to 'mother's involvement.'

Ideally, both mothers and fathers should be involved from the very first hearing alleging abuse or neglect. This can help to assure that rights are supported, important connections are maintained, and that paternity issues [if they exist] can be resolved, thus avoiding court delays later in the process should or relative placement or TPR become an issue.

Judges can support family-centered practice that includes fathers by:

- Announcing at the first hearing that all family members are invited to participate in the court proceedings.
- Asking caseworkers what contribution the father has made in developing the case permanency plan.
- Encouraging the use of Family Team Meetings as a way to engage fathers in the case planning process.
- Asking the child about his/her desire to maintain regular contact with a father. If in-person interactions are not possible – or not in the best interest of the child - ask if there are other ways to maintain a connection such as phone calls, letters or video conferencing.
- Suggesting that a father take part in his child's 'normal' activities such as parent teacher conferences, school sports, doctor or dental appointments as a way to maintain regular family interactions.

For more information about involving fathers

For more information about involving fathers, contact Krysl Lange at klange@dhs.state.ia.us

For more information on Children's Justice

This e-mail may be forwarded to others you think might be interested. If you would like to add someone to our mailing list, please send their e-mail address to jane.kieler@iowacourts.gov

If you would prefer not to receive this newsletter, please let us know at jane.kieler@iowacourts.gov
