

Dan Griffin • Harrison Crawford

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# AMAZING DADS!

# FATHERHOOD

# CURRICULUM

Workbook

WILEY



Amazing Dads!  
Fatherhood  
Curriculum



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WORKBOOK

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# Amazing Dads! Fatherhood Curriculum

Dan Griffin

Harrison Crawford

WILEY

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## ABOUT THE *AMAZING* *DADS!* PROGRAM

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Congratulations on starting the *Amazing Dads!* program. Our guess is that you are already *amazing!* Our hope is that you will find tools in this program that will allow you to be even more *amazing* and maybe even confirm for yourself just how *amazing* you are.

*Amazing Dads!* is a program unlike any other. It is the first truly trauma-informed parenting curriculum tailored specifically for fathers. It is important to recognize that as a father, you have different needs, face different challenges, and want different guidance with parenting than mothers do. This program addresses that reality in a way that you will hopefully find both comforting in the way it speaks to you as a man and a father and challenging in that you will be asked to do a great deal of self-reflection. The goal of *Amazing Dads!* is to help you create a vision of the father you want to be and to provide you with the awareness, tools, and confidence to achieve that vision.

This program is designed to be trauma informed. That means that the language, activities, and tools throughout the program are meant to be challenging but in a way that is safe. Everything in the program was designed with an assumption that all participants have experienced some level or form of trauma in their lives, and creating an environment of safety for all participating dads was a top priority when creating the program. Trust and safety are key to creating lasting changes and becoming the father you want to be. Whether you have experienced trauma in your life or not, the trauma-informed approach is designed to create a safe environment for you to do the work that will help you become the father you want to be.

You are reading this because you have decided to make (or are considering making) fundamental changes in how you show up as a father. In most cases, you will be using this workbook as part of a program in which you meet regularly with a group of other fathers. As part of this process, you will attend 18 meetings with these other fathers and all of you will have opportunities to develop new skills and new ways of thinking about yourself, your children, your families, and about fatherhood. One of the most powerful aspects of this program is the group setting where you will



get to see just how common many of the issues are that fathers face but also to explore important differences that make each father unique and able to offer diverse perspectives. Again, the organization of the program is designed to make this group setting safe and trusting in a way that many fathers have not had the fortune of experiencing.

Topics covered in this program include:

- The impact of male socialization on boys, men, and fathers (a core theme that guides the whole curriculum).
- Trauma, how it shows up in men and fathers, and the importance of addressing any trauma history you might have.
- Skill-building and practical tools you can use with, and teach to, your children.
- Relationship skill development.
- Developing emotional understanding, particularly as relates to anger and shame.
- Enhanced communication skills for healthy conflict resolution.
- The influence of family of origin experiences.
- Exploring the relationships with fathers/father figures and mothers/mother figures.
- A candid exploration of sex, sexuality, and intimacy and how to begin having a healthy dialogue about these topics with your children.
- Differentiating discipline from punishment, how punishment can turn into abuse, and identifying what healthy discipline looks like.
- The effects of male socialization on the fathers' ability to create and maintain healthy relationships, offering them specific tools to help repair during times of disconnection.
- Finding balance and the importance of self-care as part of being a healthy father.
- Understanding and meeting the changing roles and expectations of men and fathers in the twenty-first century.

The hope is that your exploration of all these topics and your experiences will help you develop an idea of the father you want to be, whether that be confirming that you are already showing up in ways that align with the father you want to be, or identifying some changes you want to make to help align yourself with that vision of the father you want to be.

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## ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

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This workbook is meant for you to be able to record your experiences throughout this program. Using this workbook will help you reflect on and remember what you learn, think, and feel during the group meetings and as you continue to practice the tools you learn on your own between meetings. The workbook contains:

- Summaries of information you will receive in the group meetings.
- Many of the activities and exercises that you will do during the group meetings.
- Activities for you to work on between the group meetings.
- Space for you to reflect on what you learned in each session.
- A section where all of the grounding and relaxation exercises are listed so you have easy access to them whenever you might want to use one or refresh your memory of them.

The activities that are to be completed between the group meetings are designed to help you to reflect on what you have learned and to put some new skills and behaviors into practice. The “Into Action” exercises are meant to help you put what was discussed in the meeting directly into action in your own life. There are also additional Practical & Tactical exercises designed as deeper dives into the material and information discussed in the meetings. These are meant to be optional, additional ways you can explore the discussions and reflect on your own experiences.

Men tend to learn best by doing, and these activities also help you to see the benefits of what you are practicing. The activities are not things you have to do in order to pass a class. Some of them involve writing or drawing exercises, but your skills in these areas are not being tested. You do not need to worry about your handwriting or spelling. What matters is what you put into the activities and, consequently, what you get out of them. There are no right or wrong answers, no “shoulds” or “shouldn’ts,” and your work will not be checked or graded. This workbook is a tool to help you with your growth toward the vision of the father you

want to be, and something you can keep and look back on in the future to remind you of your growth and to use as a resource for things like grounding and relaxation exercises you will learn.

There will be opportunities during some of the group meetings for you to share what you have written in your workbook. You can share what you want and keep the rest private. The group meeting is a safe place, and there will be ground rules regarding confidentiality. If writing is difficult for you that is okay, you can draw pictures or simply make notes however works best for you.

You can use this workbook to highlight what you want to remember from each meeting and to make notes about what you are thinking and feeling as you go through this program.

You may be concerned about keeping your workbook private. If you live with others and are not sure they will respect your privacy, you should hide your workbook or lock it up. Or you can ask the facilitator or another trusted person to help you find a way to keep your workbook safe between group meetings. The facilitator is prepared for such requests. If the facilitator will be holding your workbook between meetings, he or she will respect your privacy and arrange for you to complete the extra activities after each meeting or at some other time.



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## MEETING I

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# Engaging the Father Within

Welcome! Congratulations on making the decision to work toward becoming the best father you can be. This is your first step toward becoming the Amazing Dad you have inside. Your first meeting in the *Amazing Dads!* program is an introduction to what you can expect throughout your participation in the meetings. There is discussion of the different goals of the program as a whole, and then you will have opportunities to explore your own goals for your time in the program as well as some important questions about what fatherhood means to you. This session is meant to “set the stage” for the rest of the program.

The goals of Meeting 1 are:

1. To discuss the structure of the program.
2. To go over the group agreements and expectations.
3. To explore what fatherhood means to you.
4. To commit to putting in the work to be the father you want to be.

# Group Agreements

At the beginning of Meeting 1, your facilitator will explain some group agreements that will be maintained during each of the group meetings. Part of creating an environment of safety and trust in one another comes from each father committing to follow these agreements. The group agreements listed here are the common ones that are recommended, but the ones in your particular group may differ if there are specific requirements that the facilitator needs to follow.

## **Safety**

We agree to create a safe space for everyone. This means physical safety, as well as a feeling of safety where each of us can share his experiences, opinions, and thoughts without fear of being shamed. We agree there will be no physical or verbal abuse. We agree to discuss any concerns for safety with the group facilitator(s).

## **Attendance & Participation**

We agree to attend all meetings. If a conflict keeps us from being able to attend, we agree to contact the facilitator(s) ahead of time. We also commit to choosing to be on time for each meeting. We agree to participate and stretch outside our comfort zone as best we can, even if it is challenging. Also, each of us has a right to decide something is too uncomfortable to share and we agree to respect each dad's right to decide that for himself. We agree to keep focused on the topics of each meeting. We agree to help each other stay focused, including helping the facilitator(s) stay on topic.

## **Confidentiality**

We agree to keep everything that is said in this group, in this group. We will not discuss the experiences or information shared by other dads outside this group. We are responsible for keeping the confidentiality in the group. We understand any limits to confidentiality on the part of the facilitator(s) will be explained to us as appropriate.

## **Respect**

We agree to respect each other – our time, our experiences, and our challenges. We do not have to agree all the time, but when we disagree, we will do so while respecting the other's experience. We agree to share the time in this group, showing others respect by allowing each dad opportunities to share and participate. We agree to show respect by being honest when we choose to share as well as when we give feedback to others.

**Other (feel free to write any others that your facilitator or group identifies here):**

There are times when you may feel uncomfortable, anxious, or frustrated in the group. This happens to everyone at times, especially in unfamiliar settings and with new experiences. Many of us keep these feelings to ourselves as we have not learned how to deal with excitement, anxiety, and feeling uncomfortable in ways that are healthy. Throughout your time in this program, you will learn many different techniques that you can use to help you relax, calm yourself, and feel more grounded. The first two techniques (the ones you learned in Meeting 1) are listed here, and there is also an Appendix at the back of this workbook where *all* the techniques are housed for your reference later.

## Box Breathing

This exercise can help you calm your body and your mind quickly and efficiently:

1. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
2. As you take a few breaths, notice which hand is moving more. Try moving your breath deeper into your lower abdomen, so that your hand on your stomach moves more as you breathe.
3. Close your mouth and press your tongue lightly to the roof of your mouth. Let your jaw relax.
4. Take in a full breath slowly through your nose, counting to four.
5. Hold your breath, counting to four.
6. Exhale all the air through your mouth, counting to four.
7. Rest for a count of four.
8. As thoughts come up, acknowledge them, and then return your focus to your breathing and counting.
9. Go through three more rounds of this breathing on your own, slowly breathing in through your nose for four counts, holding for four counts, breathing out through your mouth for four counts, and resting for four counts.

Deep breathing can be helpful when dealing with feelings of anger, stress, fear, panic, or any other uncomfortable feelings. Plus, it is generally healthier to take controlled, deep breaths versus shallow ones. The more you practice this way of breathing, the more natural it will become for you.

## Palms Up, Palms Down

This exercise can help you move aside anything that is weighing on your mind, or even any physical discomfort, in order to allow you to focus your mind on the present.

1. Sit up straight in your seats, with both feet on the floor and your eyes focused on your hands.
2. Hold both your arms outstretched, with your palms side by side and facing up as if someone was about to put something in your hands. Make sure you don't rest your arms on anything, they should be out in front of you in the air.
3. Visualize any thoughts, feelings, and stresses bothering you right now.
4. Now imagine placing all of your stresses, problems, troubles, and anything bothering you into your hands. These emotions and thoughts are out of your bodies and lying in your hands. Picture them there.
5. Go back inside yourself and find any remaining pain, discomfort, and stress. Then slowly feel these sensations move out through your arms and into your hands.
6. Imagine the weight of holding all these problems, difficult thoughts and emotions, and physical distress in your hands. Feel the strain of carrying them and the weight pushing down on your hands.
7. Now, slowly turn your hands upside down letting your palms face the floor. Let all the problems, stresses, difficult feelings, and negativity fall to the floor. For now, drop your burdens.

All these problems have not disappeared or been resolved, but you have chosen to put them down for the time being to be able to focus on what you need to.

Consider practicing Box Breathing and Palms Up, Palms Down exercises between the meetings. Like any new skill, the more you practice these exercises, the more efficient you will get at using them and the more effective they can be at helping you calm your body and your mind.



A big part of the *Amazing Dads!* program is building a vision of the father you want to be and the ways you want to show up for your kids and as a father. One of the first exercises is to begin thinking about what you want to get out of going through this program. Whether you have been told you need to go through this program or you are participating voluntarily, you have an opportunity to think about what you can get out of this experience to help you as a father.

## Expectations – What Do You Want to Get Out of This Group?

There may be many reasons you choose to use this workbook and participate in this program. Whatever brought you to *Amazing Dads!*, it is important to consider what *you* want to get out of your participation. Consider what you want to get out of your time doing this important work, and how you want to use this work to become the father you want to be.

What is the work that *you* are here to do to become the best father you can be?  
What are some things you would like to learn through this process?

Feel free to write down your answers here:

## What Is Fatherhood to You?

You may not have had an opportunity to think about this before. It may sound like a simple thought, but there is value in taking some time to answer the following questions:

1. What does fatherhood mean to you?