

Dan Griffin • Harrison Crawford

AMAZING DADS! FATHERHOOD CURRICULUM

Facilitator's Guide

WILEY

Praise for *Amazing Dads!*

"*Amazing Dads!* is a wonderful contribution and a long-neglected focus. Unfortunately, until recently the important role of fathering was minimized in child development. The focus, and understandably so, was on the quality and type of attachment that unfolded between the mother and her child. But where did men fit into this equation? They do, we do. We also play a crucial role in helping our children develop a positive sense of self which includes feeling worthy of love, self-acceptance and developing the self-confidence necessary to have an honest and appropriate relationship to reality. This is where Dan and Harrison's program shines. They have developed a curriculum that invites and inspires men to explore their concepts and ideas about fathering and replace their old ideas with a new conscious fatherhood, in a safe and yet challenging group climate. In my opinion any man who experiences this incredible opportunity will discover new possibilities in the way they show up as fathers so that they can become the dad they deep down desire to be but may not have had the experiences or information necessary to develop that part of themselves."

Allen Berger, Ph.D.

Clinical Director of the Institute for Optimal Recovery and Emotional Sobriety
Author of the bestselling book about Emotional Sobriety, [12 Essential Insights for Emotional Sobriety](#).

"*Amazing Dads!* is a much-needed work that fills a clinical curriculum gap on this topic. A majority of literature, support groups, and resources focus on supporting mothers. However, the authors have created a group process for addressing fathers' unique needs, trauma, and challenges from both their families of origin and current family systems. This work also validates the incredible influence fathers have on their family and how they can connect and support each other in striving for wellness and healing."

Sarah Allen Benton, LPC, LMHC, LCPC, AADC

Author, [Parents in Recovery: Navigating a Sober Family Lifestyle](#)

"As a father of five living in recovery and an advocate for mental health and family well-being, I cannot express enough the value and impact of *Amazing Dads!*, a groundbreaking curriculum developed by Dan Griffin and Harrison Crawford. This trauma-informed program offers a beacon of hope and support for fathers navigating the complexities of parenthood amidst life's challenges.

"One of the most commendable aspects of *Amazing Dads!* is its utilization of psychosocial group techniques. By fostering a supportive and empathetic group environment, fathers are provided with a safe space to explore their experiences, emotions, and relationships. This approach not only promotes healing but also cultivates a sense of camaraderie and solidarity among participants, which is invaluable in breaking down the stigma surrounding men's mental health.

"Furthermore, Dan Griffin and Harrison Crawford's expertise in trauma-informed care shines through in every aspect of this curriculum. By acknowledging and addressing the impact of trauma on fathers and their families, *Amazing Dads!* empowers individuals to heal, grow, and become the best version of themselves for their children. Facilitators will find the guides and tools easy to follow and appropriate for many practice settings.

"I wholeheartedly endorse *Amazing Dads!* as a transformative resource for fathers everywhere. Whether you're a new dad navigating the challenges of parenthood or a seasoned parent seeking support and guidance, this curriculum offers a roadmap for personal growth, healing, and ultimately, becoming the Amazing Dad your children deserve."

Andrew Brown

Deputy Secretary for Programs
Kansas Dept for Aging & Disability Services

“As someone who has studied and advocated for fathers for decades, I’m very impressed with the trauma-informed *Amazing Dads!* curriculum that Dan Griffin and Harrison Crawford have put together. For most dads, navigating the challenges of parenting along with everything that comes with being a man in our society is tough. But for dads who have suffered trauma in their lives, it’s even harder. I really appreciate Griffin and Crawford’s recognition that men do, indeed, experience trauma and that it often has a significant impact on our ability to be the fathers we truly want to be—and that our partner and kids need us to be. I wholeheartedly endorse this curriculum and am glad that it’s available for professionals, fathers, and their families.”

Armin Brott

Bestselling author of **The Expectant Father** and **The New Father: A Dad’s Guide to the First Year**.

www.mrdad.com

“The act of giving is a precious, priceless and valuable gift that we can offer to others. The *Amazing Dads!* program is a perfect gift for men, fathers, and anyone who works with them, as it provides incredible exercises to help men overcome the challenges of life. These exercises offer a detailed guide on how to move forward and find hope in difficult times. As a dad, a professional social worker, and a leader in fatherhood initiatives globally, I found immense gratitude in using these simple yet powerful exercises. Through exercises like “Palms Up, Palms Down,” I learned to visualize my difficulties and set them aside for a moment with hope and understanding. The curriculum is filled with opportunities to give men hope for a better life through the easy-to-apply program created by the authors. This is a must-read for anyone looking to inspire men or dads to overcome life’s challenges with hope and resilience!”

Dr. James C. Rodríguez, MSW

President & Chief Executive Officer
Fathers and Families Coalition of America

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Amazing Dads! Fatherhood Curriculum

Dan Griffin

Harrison Crawford

WILEY

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support for this project. They have grown up quite a bit over the course of this work and have continued to be an inspiration to Harrison to work at being an Amazing Dad himself.

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We would like to thank Bridges, Inc. in Sacramento, California and specifically John Weisner for being the first group to pilot *Amazing Dads!*. The feedback obtained from that first pilot run was instructive in how we could take the first iteration of the curriculum and build it into the program it is today.

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Our final pilot site was Terros Health, in Mesa Arizona. Harrison had the great fortune of being able to facilitate the curriculum at Terros Health himself, along with an excellent co-facilitator, Joseph Van Zant. This was an incredibly important experience and provided a unique opportunity to the authors for firsthand experience with running the program. It would not have been a possibility without

the commitment of Nathan Lamberth and Amanda Chavez, both of whom assisted in getting approvals and taking care of logistics needed to make the pilot a reality. Joseph Van Zant was a wonderful co-facilitator, and his feedback and insights were beneficial to moving this project to its final form.

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Lastly, we want to thank anybody who reads and uses this curriculum, and more broadly all people who dedicate themselves to helping fathers. There are countless individuals and organizations who contribute meaningfully to men and fathers with the aim of improving their lives. We are inspired by the commitment, passion, and determination shown by so many, and hope that this *Amazing Dads!* curriculum adds another tool to the toolbox to be used in that noble pursuit.

CHAPTER I

Research and Theory

This chapter provides an overview of the research that was used to guide and support the creation of the *Amazing Dads!* curriculum. Each of the building blocks of this program will be briefly discussed: the influence that male socialization has on boys and men, the fundamentals of trauma-informed care, the importance of father-responsive services, and the impact that various systems have on fathers. The authors of this program strongly encourage facilitators to continue expanding their knowledge in these areas as that will greatly serve them in further improving their skills when working with fathers. This chapter is not intended to be exhaustive in its description of these areas, but rather to offer a window into these topics while encouraging continued exploration on the part of those facilitating the program.

Male Socialization

The exploration of cultural and societal influences on how boys and men are socialized throughout the life span is the keystone concept for the *Amazing Dads!* program. Coupled with the importance of understanding trauma and the impact of trauma on men and boys, the ability to view fatherhood from the perspective of male socialization is critical to effectively facilitating the curriculum. The reason this is critical is that the path to creating a safe, trusting, and open environment for fathers

(or boys and men in general) requires an ability to address the concept of male socialization in a therapeutic, strengths-based, and solution-focused manner.

Perhaps the most important concepts to consider are those of gender and sex. *Sex* refers to whether one is considered biologically male, female, or intersex. *Gender* is a social construct in which specific messages are given to people regarding acceptable behaviors and characteristics. The role of gender varies from culture to culture and even within cultures and is impacted by many other factors: socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation to name only a few.

Understanding that gender is a social construct, it is important to recognize that masculinity and femininity come with culturally informed “rules.” Dan Griffin’s work on “The Man Rules,” as well as recognition of “The Woman Rules,” is the lens through which this socialization is explored throughout the *Amazing Dads!* curriculum. What is important to stress in Griffin’s work is why they are called “rules.” There is little to no choice involved in the creation of these gender rules or in the pressure to adhere to them. The reward for following the rules is: acceptance and even safety which creates an incredible unconscious connection to the rules. Boys are not introduced to the rules and offered choices about which ones they want to adhere to. The younger they are when the Rules first get imposed upon them, the less autonomy they likely feel to push back on detrimental ones. The Man Rules simply become part of their experience of the world versus something they feel that they have agency over.

The idea of gender-based “rules” for men and women is a cross-cultural phenomenon. Not only do we observe various sets of “Man Rules” across the globe in different cultures (admittedly with nuances specific to each culture), but there are themes that are ubiquitous. Some of the more detrimental themes we can observe cross-culturally are related to masculine norms and trauma:

“From ancient allegories to current pop culture, one consistent theme in male heroism is that of sacrifice and resilience in the face of adversity. Across history, geographies, and cultures, pervasive narratives idealize men who experience traumatic events and can endure hardship, suffering, and physical and/or psychological violence. Historically, the male body and mind have often been considered expendable, and men have been expected to be strong, tough, and defenders of honor. As such, male violence and subsequent trauma have always been, and continue to be, woven into the fabric of masculinity and humanity.”

(Slegh et al. 2021)

Recognition of the connection between male socialization and trauma is hugely important and needs to be a significant driver of how services are developed, marketed, and implemented with male populations. It is this recognition that drove us to develop the *Amazing Dads!* program to address the often-overlooked needs of dads.

Values-Based Paradigm

There are different models for service delivery. The one that informs this curriculum is called Values-Based Services. There are six foundational components to this particular iteration of the model developed by Dan Griffin. See the following for a brief description of each:

1. ***Gender-responsive:*** Services and systems that are created to respond to an individual's unique needs and issues based on their gender conditioning, particularly, but not solely, within the binary of masculine and feminine. Creating a space for all gender expressions and identities is an essential part of gender-responsive services.
2. ***Trauma-informed:*** Understanding that the phenomenon and experience of trauma is a universal experience and must be taken into consideration at all levels of a program.
3. ***Culturally humble:*** While the terms cultural competence and cultural responsiveness are often used, when it comes to trauma-informed systems the preferred term is cultural humility. The main difference is the focus on becoming knowledgeable about another's culture and lived experience by listening to them, being a witness to their story, and helping to create a space for them to explore.
4. ***Recovery-oriented:*** It is so easy to focus on the problem when dealing with addiction and mental health needs, so recovery-oriented services mean that providers and the system focus on recovery from the very beginning and throughout the entire treatment process. This should be infused throughout the whole treatment process, from the language that is used in services ("substance use disorder" instead of "substance abuse" and "recovery maintenance" instead of "relapse prevention") to the focus on recovery and strengths in the discharge process.
5. ***Spiritually enriched:*** The focus is on connection and community. While it may include religious beliefs and practices it does not have to. The primary focus is that one is able to connect to a reality bigger than themselves and find practices and beliefs that support their living in community, however, that looks for them.
6. ***Family centric:*** No individual is raised in a vacuum and their caregivers and the environment(s) in which they live have profound impacts on their experiences, their identities, and their lives as a whole. This also recognizes that people exist in family systems throughout the life span, so family-centric services are part of a whole-person approach to treatment.

This paradigm takes a holistic approach to working with dads by recognizing the differences, uniqueness, and complexities that each individual participant possesses. Using the approach outlined earlier is designed to improve the engagement and outcomes for participants, no matter what they are entering services to achieve.

A Trauma-Informed Fatherhood Curriculum

Knowledge of the impact of trauma has grown exponentially in recent decades, expanding understanding of how pervasive it is while also being a very individualized experience. Along with this increase in knowledge and awareness has come the recognition that providers of all types (doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, child welfare workers, teachers, principals, and probation/parole officers, among others) need to consider the work they do from a “trauma-informed” lens.

Trauma-informed care (TIC) refers to an approach in healthcare (and other arenas) that acknowledges the pervasiveness of trauma in the population, recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in all participants in the healthcare system (patients/clients, families, caregivers, staff/employees), uses knowledge of trauma and best practices to improve policies and organizational processes, and takes an active role in avoiding re-traumatization of those interacting within the system (Center for Healthcare Strategies, 2022). A TIC approach assumes that anyone within the care system may have experienced trauma, so everyone needs to be approached therapeutically and helped to feel safe in all interactions and environments. In addition, TIC does not apply only to interactions with healthcare consumers and employees but to the healthcare environments themselves: things like the layout of waiting rooms and patient rooms, literature and media visible in the environment, and training and support provided to non-clinical staff such as receptionists and security personnel.

The principles guiding *Amazing Dads!* are not just trauma-informed principles, they are the principles of *male* trauma-informed care, created by Griffin and Fallot and further expounded upon in the unpublished article by Fallot, Bebout, Griffin, and Dauer. While Fallot and Harris first identified five principles for TIC, and then SAMHSA identified six, the principles of *male* trauma-informed care developed by Fallot and Griffin highlighted a need for specific attention to be given to mutual responsibility and compassion as part of a TIC approach specifically working with male-identified individuals. Coming up, you will find a brief description of each principle along with examples, as well as descriptions of how the *Amazing Dads!* program incorporates each principle.

The following section explores SAMHSA's six principles while also incorporating the two additional principles from male trauma-informed care.

Components of TIC (Center for Healthcare Strategies, 2022; & SAMHSA, 2014):

1. **Safety:** Throughout the organization, patients and staff feel physically and psychologically safe.
 - a. Organize the environment to promote a sense of safety and calm, as best you can. From waiting areas, to security measures, to how people are greeted, the environment itself contributes to safety, either promoting it or detracting from it.
 - b. Develop consistency in your approach to dads you work with. Consistency can be making sure that you start and end each interaction in a similar way. Consistency gives them a sense of safety in knowing what to expect from their interactions with you.
 - c. Take opportunities to connect with the dad and build rapport and a relationship outside of being solely task oriented.
 - d. Teach practical skills to the dads in order to help them develop a repertoire of self-regulation skills such as grounding and relaxation.
 - e. **How Amazing Dads! addresses safety:** Safety is discussed right from the beginning in the first *Amazing Dads!* meeting and throughout the entire curriculum. Safety is framed as emotional and psychological safety in addition to physical safety, and we utilize the previous recommendations throughout. We developed a "safety check in" for every meeting as well when the men give a number from one to five indicating how safe they feel in the group.
2. **Trustworthiness and transparency:** Decisions are made with transparency, and with the goal of building and maintaining trust.
 - a. As a professional, it is important to model trustworthiness to the dads. It is possible that the dads have not had trusting experiences with professionals, so being a model of trustworthiness, partly through your transparency, is a way to build that relationship.
 - b. Hold yourself to the same standards you hold the dads with whom you work.
 - c. Offer insight and explanations of the "why" of things whenever possible.
 - d. Clearly communicate any program expectations.
 - e. **How Amazing Dads! addresses trustworthiness and transparency:** Developing trust is a key emphasis of the *Amazing Dads!* program.

Transparency is evidenced by consistency in the meeting structure, obtaining verbal commitments from the fathers at key points, and clear communication of the goals of each meeting.

3. **Peer support:** Individuals with shared experiences are integrated into the organization and viewed as integral to service delivery.
 - a. Tap into resources you may already have – create an alumni group of dads who have completed your program.
 - b. Seek opportunities to have multiple dads meet, connect, and share experiences, especially in small groups. It can be incredibly powerful to help the dads recognize that others are going through similar circumstances.
 - c. Encourage dads to check in on one another between meetings. Help them develop an ethic of supporting one another.
 - d. **How Amazing Dads! addresses peer support:** *Amazing Dads!* facilitates a cohesive group environment where the participating dads can support one another through their lived experiences. There are many opportunities throughout the curriculum for the participants to provide feedback to one another, support one another through pain and in their growth, and create an environment where all participants know they are not alone in their journey to become the best fathers they can be. The curriculum also does something that many do not by using small groups where the men are able to have an even more intimate connection with one another, something challenging for so many men.
4. **Collaboration and mutuality:** Power differences – between staff and clients and among organizational staff – are leveled to support shared decision-making.
 - a. Avoid shaming or blaming the dads for mistakes and missteps.
 - b. Give the dads opportunities to collaborate with one another in smaller groups.
 - c. Whenever possible, avoid being directive or prescriptive. Give the dads freedom to choose what works best for them versus telling them what they need to do.
 - d. Utilize calculated and appropriate self-disclosure, taking into consideration the setting and working relationship you have with the dads.
 - e. **How Amazing Dads! addresses collaboration and mutuality:** *Amazing Dads!* participants are recognized as experts in their own lives. The fathers drive the decisions they make and how they choose to utilize the information, resources, and tools that are provided in the *Amazing Dads!* program. The program does not take a prescriptive approach, instead encouraging the fathers to determine how to be the best fathers – and men – they can be.

5. ***Empowerment, voice, and choice:*** Patient and staff strengths are recognized, built on, and validated – this includes a belief in resilience and the ability to heal from trauma.
 - a. Maintain a programmatic culture that highlights how the dads are experts in their own lives. In areas where you are the expert, take an approach of being a guide versus being a director of what the dads “should” do.
 - b. Work with the dads to identify their own goals for completion of your program, separate from any mandatory goals that may be imposed on them.
 - c. Give the dads the opportunity to drive processes. Ask questions such as “How would you like to proceed?” or “What would you like to start on?”
 - d. ***How Amazing Dads! addresses empowerment, voice, and choice:*** The *Amazing Dads!* program takes a strengths-based approach by encouraging the fathers to use internal and external resources already at their disposal (e.g., internal: desire for change and external: supports they may have from people in their lives). The approach in this program is that of a guide and of offering information and insight. It is non-directive and non-prescriptive. We recognize that lasting change comes from offering dads information that they can use and fit into their own personal circumstances.
6. ***Cultural, historical, and gender issues:*** Biases and stereotypes (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and geography) and historical trauma are recognized and addressed.
 - a. Practice cultural humility, seeking to empathize with the dads versus making assumptions about their experiences. Show curiosity and compassion toward the dads’ life experiences and perspectives.
 - b. Whenever possible, give the dads opportunities to consider perspectives different from their own.
 - c. ***How Amazing Dads! addresses cultural, historical, and gender issues:*** An entire meeting is devoted to discussion of the toxicity that comes with biases and stereotypes along with a discussion of historical and intergenerational trauma. Facilitators of this curriculum are strongly encouraged to develop awareness of their own biases and respond accordingly to avoid those biases creeping into their facilitation. There are many opportunities for the dads to hear experiences of others who are different from them.

7. **Mutual responsibility:** Each participant in the relationship is responsible to themselves and the other, in equal measure, and regardless of any structural power differences.
 - a. This goes beyond holding one party accountable and emphasizes that the dads AND facilitator(s) are responsible for their own roles and accountable to each other. This helps mitigate the inherent power imbalances.
 - b. Accountability is important and something to emphasize but place extra emphasis on how you plan to be accountable to the dads, not just how the dads are expected to be accountable as participants.
 - c. **How Amazing Dads! addresses mutual responsibility:** Facilitators are repeatedly encouraged to complete many of the activities that are part of the *Amazing Dads!* program to improve their ability to help the dads explore the content. At multiple points in the program, facilitators highlight how the dads are asked to be responsible to one another, to the facilitators, and to their children. Facilitators also repeatedly emphasize their own accountability to the dads.
8. **Compassion:** Exercise compassion toward the experiences of all dads who enter services. Recognize that each dad has strengths that can be drawn upon to make positive changes. Model compassion for them so they can begin to hold compassion for themselves.
 - a. Hold unconditional positive regard for the dads you interact with and emphatically accept them for who they are versus who you or others want them to be.
 - b. Emphasize that behaviors do not define the man while still clarifying that certain behaviors are not okay (e.g., abusive behaviors directed at themselves or others).
 - c. Remember that compassion is not the same as collusion.
 - d. Showing compassion for dads who may not have experienced it much can go a long way to building safety in the relationship.
 - e. **How Amazing Dads! addresses compassion:** The participants have numerous opportunities to practice self-compassion through exercises like the loving-kindness meditation, teaching self-compassion. There are repetitive messages for the dads to focus on using the information in this program *consciously* versus having to be perfect dads, encouraging them to give themselves grace.

A core tenet of TIC is approaching others from the perspective of “What happened to you?” instead of “What is wrong with you?” This is especially important when working with participants to address any behaviors that may be harmful to them

or others. “What happened to you?” is an acknowledgment that the participant’s previous experiences, especially traumatic experiences, are likely the drivers of any maladaptive behaviors or behavior patterns that the participant is engaging in. Recognizing that such behaviors are likely stemming from a trauma response is key to avoiding shaming and blaming dads, but rather it opens up opportunities to build trust and a therapeutic alliance with a dad which research shows is one of the most important determinants of good therapeutic outcomes (Ardito and Rabellino, 2011).

It is important to understand that a TIC approach that avoids blaming individuals for behaviors they have developed to cope with trauma *does not* encourage avoiding accountability or responsibility for one’s actions. Compassion and a therapeutic approach are not in conflict with accountability and responsibility. However, approaching participants with compassion will lend itself to a greater likelihood of real, positive behavioral change when coupled with offering participants needed skills and support to bolster their resilience.

In working to create a curriculum to effectively address the specific needs of fathers, the authors recognized that a trauma-informed approach was a necessity. Individuals socialized to being boys and men experience, express, and recover from trauma differently than those socialized to be girls and women. This means that fathers also have different experiences of trauma than mothers – not better or worse, but different. As a result, this program was designed to account for the trauma experienced by many of the fathers who will participate. Anyone facilitating this program should approach interactions with the assumption that each participant has a trauma history. This assumption of trauma history is part of actively avoiding retraumatizing the participants. This is particularly important when it comes to men and understanding that men are conditioned not to recognize their experiences as trauma nor to talk about them in any way that recognizes the incredible pain connected to them.

Male Socialization and Trauma

One of the more sobering realities that gets explored in this curriculum is just how entrenched trauma is in the process of socialization of young boys and men. Most often it is not *whether* boys experienced trauma as part of learning the Man Rules, but *how traumatic* that learning was to them. Multiple meetings within the curriculum address how the Man Rules are ingrained into young boys through traumatic means.

When babies are born, there are no differences between male-identified babies and female-identified babies in terms of their ability to emote, their desire for connection and attachment, their desire for intimacy and nurturing, and their ability

to be close to others. In fact, there is recent research showing that baby boys and toddler boys show significantly more emotionality than girls on multiple measures. And yet, as this program explains in detail, these characteristics are frequently devalued in boys from an early age. Boys and young men continuously receive messages that tear at fabric of this natural instinct to connect and seek intimacy via media (TV, movies, the Internet), peers, parents, and society at large. Each time boys do not live up to the expectations society identifies for “real men,” the resulting shame builds and builds, “like dust on the soul, dimming [their] zest for life” (Lyme et al., 2008). Shame is an incredibly powerful driver of boys’ and men’s behavior, almost never in healthy, adaptive ways. The repeated shaming that boys experience when being taught to navigate their worlds as “real men” is traumatic in its own right, but so often compounded by additional traumatic circumstances and events.

Of equal importance to note is how the socialization of young boys and men decreases the likelihood that they will admit to having experienced trauma and seek services or support to address it:

The connection between heroism and masculinity encourages men and boys to either cope with their vulnerabilities and traumas as trophies of manhood or act as though they did not happen. Social expectations of manhood to be strong, in control, and stoic define the responses of boys and men experiencing trauma. Loss of power and control and feelings of vulnerability and weakness may injure the perception of male identity and generate feelings of humiliation and shame, among other responses. Men and boys who subscribe to these masculine norms may find it difficult to process emotions and vulnerability. Acting out, avoidance, or denying unwanted feelings and thoughts in response to traumatic experiences may serve to maintain the self-image of “being a strong man.”

(Slegh et al., 2021)

Significant aspects of the epidemics of addiction (to sex, alcohol, and other drugs), violence, and depression among men and dads can be traced back to trauma and a desire to avoid acknowledging their trauma. That avoidance is often driven by their socialization to be “real men.” These are all topics that deserve specific attention, so facilitators are encouraged to explore them further outside of what is included in the *Amazing Dads!* materials.

Men with Trauma: What Happens Next?

When we recognize the prevalence of trauma in males, the next logical question is: how do we help? There is significant investment, education, and innovation needed in the mental health system’s ability to effectively support men, especially those who

have experienced trauma. There are important discussions to be had about increasing access to services and emphasizing the need for services to address trauma specifically in boys and men. However, offering treatment services is not the entire story. Services should be intentionally designed with the needs of the target population in mind, versus utilizing a one-size-fits-all approach.

Part of creating gender-responsive programs and services for men involves exploring what men really need and desire. Decades ago, service providers and program developers seemingly made assumptions about what men needed, wanted to talk about, and what would benefit them most. Luckily, in the ensuing decades, we have recognized the importance of not simply making assumptions, but relying on men, dads, research, and experience to shine a light on what approaches tend to have better outcomes.

Any treatment approach must recognize that a man's recovery, therapeutic progress, commitment, or whatever the desired outcome is, relies on honest acknowledgment that the men will be asked to go against much of what they were socialized to rely on for safety – the Man Rules. Griffin talks about this concept in much of his work pointing out that the Man Rules are effectively opposite of what we are asking men to do in therapy and the treatment process. Much of this “cognitive dissonance” is unconscious for men; if it is not pointed out to them explicitly it can easily be missed but greatly impact a man's ability to fully engage in his healing, especially for the long term. “This is the dilemma: How can we teach men, who are socialized to be incapable of sustaining trust, that their only hope of relief is to trust and to allow themselves to become vulnerable with their peers. . . In essence, when men enter treatment, we are asking them to challenge the very core beliefs they have lived by” (Lyme et al., 2008). The simplified answer to this dilemma is that we can facilitate men thriving in treatment by utilizing a male trauma-informed approach that places immense importance on developing safety through a gendered lens.

A male trauma-informed approach to working with men and dads involves the recognition that shame, trauma, and the aversion to admitting either are ubiquitous. By asking them to trust your process, or your program's process, you are asking them to place their trust in you. By consistently implementing the principles of male trauma-informed care, you can help the men and dads you serve begin to develop trust in you, one another, and their own abilities to be the drivers of change.

Why Focus on Fathers?

There is a robust, and ever increasing, amount of research available that confirms the importance of a father's involvement in the lives of his children from before their birth throughout the entire life span. Fathers have a significant impact on their children's

physical, emotional, social, and academic development, to name a few areas. The research on how a father's absence from the lives of his children impacts them is stark: children are four times more likely to live in poverty, experience two times the infant mortality, have seven times the risk for teenage pregnancy, have twice the rate of obesity, and are twice as likely to drop out of school, just to name a few (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2019). The data are clear: positive father involvement in the lives of their children is something to be promoted and nurtured for the good of the children as well as larger society.

Sadly, there is still a great amount of negative rhetoric, bias, and even prejudice against fathers in the media, the legal system, and child welfare systems (CWS). When we consider media portrayals of fathers, all we need to do is look at TV dads in sitcoms and commercials to see how significantly biased, and even lazy, the media can be in their representations of fathers. While trends seem to be shifting, historically (and still currently) dads are portrayed on TV as bumbling, silly, aloof, or even incompetent. TV dads such as Al Bundy (*Married with Children*) and Tim Taylor (*Home Improvement*) are examples of ways to depict foolishness on the part of the dad in those TV families. Look at pretty much any father on a Disney show. The same is true for dads in commercials: frequently portrayed as incompetent when it comes to household tasks, taking care of the children, or relating to others, dads in commercials are often portrayed as clueless, detached, or needing their spouse to swoop in and save them with whatever task they are trying to accomplish (Byers, 2015).

Looking at the CWS specifically, "Child welfare agencies historically have focused on the relationship between mothers and their children. This institutional bias is supported by the fact that mothers are recognized as the primary caregivers/nurturers. . ." (Brooks, 2010). When mothers are the default caregivers in the CWS mindset and fathers are relegated to secondary status, that messaging comes through clearly and disincentivizes father involvement. Understand, that means this bias permeates the whole system – from the way fathers are viewed, to the images on office walls, to how fathers are greeted when they walk through an organization's door, and the multitude of other infractions against dads. Less investment in involving fathers is a natural outcome of this mindset, despite the overwhelming research proving that father involvement has significant positive effects on the lives of their children. Fathers receive the message that their involvement is unnecessary, especially when they are non-resident fathers (i.e., not living in the same household as their children), which are exactly the fathers who would benefit from *more* outreach, investment, and involvement. Many approaches can be tried to involve fathers more consistently and make them feel like they are part of the solution, but it requires shifting from the mother-centric approach that CWS has employed for