

Bio

Doug Edwards is the founder and Program Director of Real Dads Forever, a Fatherhood Strategies Development organization. He has consulted with Connecticut's Department of Social Services, State Department of Education, Department of Children and Families, Department of Public Health, School Readiness and Head Start Centers, and many public and private schools and Family Development Centers in New England around parental involvement with a focus on Fathers and Family Men.

Doug is a founding member of the Advisory Council of The Fatherhood Initiative of Connecticut, co-chair of the CT Fatherhood Initiative Program Certification Review Committee, and a member and past President of the Board of Directors of The Children's Law Center of Connecticut. He is also the Statewide Coordinator for the Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (PSEE) program at the CT Center for School Change and is a consultant, and National Master Facilitator Trainer for the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI.) Doug currently chairs the Advisory Council of the Family Development Center of Eastern CT Health Network (ECHN) in Manchester.

Also a member of the advisory committee of the Parent Information Resource Center of CT and a member of the CT Department of Public Health Maternal and Child Health advisory committee, Doug has been a member of the Fetal Infant Mortality Case and Community Review teams and has designed, written and facilitated parent and fatherhood curricula, trainings and workshops. He has spoken with over 450 groups, and 5000 men, including dozens of school groups. He and his wife Hemmerda are the proud parents of five grown children, and the grandparents of nine beautiful grandchildren.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Doug Edwards
Program Director
Real Dads Forever
P.O. Box 684
Manchester CT 06045
860-643-7364 Office
860-930-3431 Mobile
Realdadsforever@aol.com Email
www.Realdadsforever.com Web Site

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Approximately 40% to 60% of children in Connecticut go to bed without a dad at home at night. Father-absence is connected to high out-of-wedlock birth rates, the inability of some men to form an emotional connection to their children, and high levels of separation and divorce among parents which has been exacerbated by high unemployment and the recession.

Research shows us that children who are securely connected to their fathers have better outcomes socially, emotionally and academically.

Fathers, the proverbial “bread-winners” get their self-worth largely from performance and in the absence of work, psychosocial dynamics wreak havoc with their relationships, even with their children. The recession has triggered an increased emphasis on job preparation, education, training, job retention, and the development of relationships with employment resources. In addition, programs have found ways to support fathers trying to navigate their relationship with their children in the present difficult environment.

Connecticut formed the Fatherhood Initiative as a result of legislation (PA 99-193) in order to “promote the positive involvement and interaction of fathers with their children.” There are presently six sites in the state that passed a rigorous certification process in 2006 and are currently in the process of recertification. Five more have applied for new certification. Connecticut is the only State in the Country that has a Certification process for fatherhood programs.

Representative John S. Martinez, who passed away in 2002, was the Deputy Majority Leader serving New Haven’s 95th Assembly District. He was especially instrumental in sponsoring the Fatherhood Initiative of Connecticut legislation, which was passed by the Legislature in 1999. In his honor, on July 9, 2003, Public Act 03-258 was signed into law and it is now called “The John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative of Connecticut.”

The six sites provide comprehensive fatherhood program services to low-income, non-custodial fathers including, preparation for the legal, financial and emotional responsibilities, the establishment of paternity at childbirth, fostering of their emotional connection to and financial support of their children, workforce skills development, and father support services.

There are 30-40 other fatherhood programs in CT in Head Start schools, prisons, churches and communities that provide one or more of the services mentioned.

In addition to providing some of those services, my program, Real Dads Forever, supported by CT Department of Public Health, developed a curriculum called “Prenatal Early Attachment” for dads supporting mom and the baby during the pregnancy and after birth. We are about to begin our second cohort, a collaboration with Fair Haven Community Health Center in New Haven and Centering Healthcare Institute’s Centering Pregnancy, a group prenatal care national model, which is being evaluated by UCONN.

We have experienced very promising short term results; increased caring and emotional attachment to mom; more consistent, timely prenatal visits by both mom and dad; greater understanding of prenatal development; a commitment to breastfeeding by mom *with dad's support*; an emotional attachment by dad to his unborn child; and a dramatic increase in communication between dad and mom, mostly initiated by dad. Research shows us that if these elements are in place early on, moms are healthier, babies are more likely to be full term, and there's a better chance co-parenting will be successful for the long term. Our evaluation team is designing protocol for follow-up of these families over time to substantiate the research.

There is a wealth of research that underscores the value of early prenatal father involvement, but a dearth of comprehensive programming that specifically targets fathers during the perinatal period. Fathers are especially vulnerable, open to learning, and welcome the group experience along with mom.

My work with fathers, over 5,000 of them since 1996, in small groups over several sessions has taught me that adults sometimes still have a yearning for that father-child relationship, imbedded in their subconscious since childhood. This, what I call, "yearning, churning and burning" impacts their social/emotional development, education, and relationship navigation for decades. This observation of residual emotional dis-ease led me to want to begin to find ways to address father-absence issues from a standpoint of prevention, rather than intervention, making it essential that we start as early as possible.

DPH has succeeded in forming a collaboration of agencies including the Public Health Foundation of CT and Hartford Health Department in the five year HHS Federal Grant to CT Department of Public Health to expand access to healthcare in Hartford for women nearing childbirth to ensure newborns get a healthy start. Real Dads Forever, with it's Prenatal Early Attachment Program is one of the community partners. Upon further evaluation, this program will be replicated after proper training and certification of facilitators.

As part of our evaluation, we will also focus on the Return On Investment of this program. At it's heart it is prevention. And we know, especially in this challenging economic environment, prevention is a more fiscally sound investment than intervention.

I have also been involved as facilitator and trainer with the Parent Leadership Training Institute and Parents Supporting Educational Excellence, both as part of the Commission on Children. They are two very successful programs preparing parents to advocate for, and lead their children and to partner with schools for school improvement.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my work, concerns, hopes and dreams for the present and future children of Connecticut, and thank you Senator Dodd for your many years of service to our State. In my opinion, there is no finer way to end your Senate career than having our children close to your heart.

SPEECH

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