

# Overcoming The Barriers To Paying Child Support

## OBJECTIVES:

1. Explore the perspectives of unmarried fathers and mothers.
2. Identify the effects of these perspectives on child support.
3. Take two steps to improve the situation with one's co-parent.

## HANDOUTS:

1. *Getting Over the Barriers*
3. *Take Home Message for This Session*

## ITEMS NEEDED FOR THIS EDUCATIONAL SESSION:

- Handout materials for participant workbooks
- Scrapbooking materials
- Pencils and pens
- Flipchart and markers
- Projector, laptop, and Power Point

### GETTING STARTED

In an earlier session, we talked about the importance of both fathers and mothers in children's lives. Today we are going to continue this discussion but focus on the issue of child support. In the last session, we discussed the pros and cons of child support for yourself, your children, and your children's other parent. Now we are going to explore how our experiences with our co-parent may influence our attitudes about child support.

In addition, sometimes our past experiences with our child's other parent can form a barrier to making and receiving regular child support payments. In today's session, we are going to explore some of these barriers and identify ways that we might overcome them.

### ACTIVITY: Mini-Lecture—What Do Men Say About Being Fathers and Paying Child Support?

Prepare a Power Point presentation for the information below. Be sure to include the quotes, they are a very important part of the activity.

It is important to consider what men and women think about being parents and child support. We are going to start this activity by looking at what fathers say about being fathers and paying child support.

Researchers from the University of Pennsylvania interviewed a group of unmarried fathers and here is what these fathers said about what it meant to be a father:

*"I can't imagine life without my children."*

Men found a sense of meaning and hope for the future in their children.

*"Before her, I didn't really care too much about anything. I really just lived every*

*day for that day. But as of now, I'm living every day for today and tomorrow."*

Having children kept some of these fathers from getting involved with illegal activities and other negative influences. They felt a sense of assurance that their name would be carried on. Men who were able to provide on-going financial support for their children were very proud of this fact. Some men who did not have much money tried to buy items like clothes, shoes, and diapers for their baby.

*"Before I became a father I didn't really see no future. I wasn't trying to see anything because I was in a state of rebelliousness. I had no concept of what the future was even to bring or what the future was about. But after he was born, my first son, I began to look...and say, 'Well, I want more out of life because there are more things that I want to do for him as well as myself.'"*

But fathers also reported barriers to being involved with their children. When they were involved with the mother, fathers saw their children more often. When they were no longer romantically involved, they had far less contact. They reported disagreements with the children's mother over money. Many men could not get jobs that paid them enough to provide on-going support for their children. Mothers often nagged them about the lack of support and money.

*"They push you into a wall by asking for things you can't really do...You can't even support yourself, how are you going to support that person? What are they trying to do? And that is the anger we have embedded in us. But you know, society puts on us this 'deadbeat dads' label. We are not deadbeat dads. Dad is trying to survive."*

Men involved in the underground economy or illegal activities felt ashamed and didn't want their children to know about it. Some had been

in prison and had not had much contact with their children. Disagreements with the mother's mother or grandmother often interfered with the father's contact with his children.

Although their children were important to these men, they often were not able to do much for them in return, especially as the children got older.

Now consider your own situation or the situation of your children's fathers.

- Are you or is he facing a similar issue?
- If so, how are they similar?
- How are they different?
- How can issues like these affect one's willingness to pay or receive child support?
- What are some ways that you can help the other parent?

Write the answers on a flipchart and set aside to refer back to after the next mini-lecture.

### **ACTIVITY:** **Mini-Lecture—What Mothers Say About The Role of Fathers Paying Child Support?**

The same researchers also interviewed 300 single moms living in low-income communities. They asked them to talk about their relationships with their children's fathers. Here are some of the things the women reported:

"Men simply don't earn enough to support a family. This leads a couple to break up."

"I didn't want to be mean or anything but when he didn't work, I didn't let him eat my food."

"... he lost his job at the auto body shop when they went bankrupt and closed down ... he couldn't find another one ... I

told him he had to leave ... I had nothing in the house to feed the kids, no money to pay the bills, nothing. And he was just sitting there not working."

"I'm frustrated with men ... They bring drugs and guns into the house, you take care of their kids, feed them, and then they steal your rent money out of your purse..."

"I gave my child's father the money to go buy Pampers. He went on some street with his cousin and they were down there partying, drinking, everything. He spent my son's money on partying."

"I would like to find a nice man to marry, but I know that men can not be trusted. That's why I treat them the way I do ... I think that all men cheat on their wives regardless of how much he loves her. And you don't ever want to be in that position."

"Maybe I'll find a good person to get married to, someone to be a stepfather to my son. They're not all the same. There are three things in my life: my school, my work, and my son. Not men. At first they love you, they think you're beautiful, and then they leave. When I got pregnant, he just left. My father is like that. He has kids by several different women."

"Men can say, 'Well honey, I'm going out for the night.' And then they disappear for two months. Whereas, the mother has a deeper commitment, conscience, or compassion ... If [women] acted like men, our kids would be in the park, left. We'd say 'Oh, somebody else is going to take care of it.' Everybody would be orphaned."

These women faced issues of distrust with the men in their lives, especially as it relates to relationship commitment and money. They found that low-income moms worried a great deal about money because they had to. They paid a heavy price for not balancing their budgets—the security of their home and the safety of their

children. In addition, many women distrusted men's ability to remain faithful to them and to do what is best for their families.

Now consider your own situation or the situation of your children's mothers.

- Are you, or is your child's mother facing similar issues?
- If so, how are they similar?
- How are they different?
- How can issues like these affect one's willingness to pay or receive child support?
- What are some ways that you can help the other parent?

Write the answers on a flipchart and set aside to refer back to after the next mini-lecture.

### **ACTIVITY:** **Mini-Lecture—Getting Over The Barriers**

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Now let's compare the two lists we created.

- How do mothers and fathers face similar issues?
- How are their issues different?
- How do these issues become barriers to paying child support?
- What are some ways that you can help the other parent?

Pick an issue related to your own situation. Complete the handout **Getting Over the Barriers**.

### **ACTIVITY:** **Workbook Page And Homework**

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Participants will create a page for their

workbook that will demonstrate their commitment to overcome the barriers in their relationship with their child's co-parent.

Give participant the take-home message for this session and have them write down their action steps on the take-home message. Remind them to place the take-home message in the magnetic frame.

### **CLOSING:**

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*Even in the best co-parenting relationships, paying and receiving child support may be difficult at times. But child support becomes an even bigger issue when co-parents do not trust each other or have negative experiences with each other. Today we talked about these barriers. It was not an easy discussion and we appreciate your willingness to talk about a difficult topic. Hopefully, the steps you take will improve your co-parenting relationship and the payment of child support.*

# Getting Over The Barriers

Co-parents can face barriers in their relationship related to child support. Identify one barrier you have in your relationship with your child's other parent that have made it difficult to pay or receive child support. Write it down here:

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Write down two steps you can take before the next session to get over the barrier:

**1.**.....

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**2.**.....

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# Take Home Message for This Session

**Directions:** Think of one step you will take before the next session and write it down in the space provided. In addition, write down the time, date, and location of the next session.

**I respect my  
co-parents  
perspective.**

My Action Steps:

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The Next Session:

.....  
DATE

.....  
TIME

.....  
LOCATION

