



ESTHER BUSH

Fatherhood

This month, the “Take Charge of Your Health Today” page focuses on the health benefits associated with fatherhood. Erricka Hager, health advocate at the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, spoke about this topic.

EH: Good afternoon, Ms. Bush. Today’s topic is quite timely with Father’s Day quickly approaching on June 16. I’m excited to have this conversation with you. Today we’re discussing the health benefits that are associated with the responsibilities of becoming a father. Research has shown that involved fathers positively impact their children’s health. Rarely discussed, however, are the impact and health perks that fatherhood can have on the man’s life.

EB: Yes, Erricka. I’m glad that we are discussing the health benefits of being a family man. As you mentioned, a growing body of research has identified the positive correlation between involved fathers and their children’s health. A study at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore, Md., concluded that children who have active fathers learn better, have higher self-esteem and are less prone to depression than those who don’t. But research also shows that becoming a dad has a profound impact on the man’s physical and mental well-being. A long-term study by the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, Md., found that men with healthy family relationships are less prone to stress-related health problems. And right here at the University of Pittsburgh, pediatric fellow Alicia Boykin, MD, is expanding her research to understand how support affects young fathers under the age of 26.

EH: It is great to see that researchers like Dr. Boykin are expanding their focus. Younger fathers are an understudied and under-represented population, despite them having similar needs as adolescent and young-adult mothers. However, Dr. Boykin is addressing the research gap with the Young Fathers Study. The purpose of the study is to help researchers learn more about the role that young fathers play in their children’s lives and better understand how health care providers may affect young fathers’ ideas about parenting. Researchers hope their findings will lead to better ways to support young fathers in the future.

EB: Dr. Boykin’s study is very important to mention; thank you, Erricka. However, researchers should be mindful that young fathers may be hard to engage for a variety of reasons. The Urban League can also aid in connecting fathers with support that is available for them.

EH: You’re right, Ms. Bush. And it is so important that our readers continue to volunteer for such research studies so their voices and opinions are included!

EB: This conversation is important, Erricka. Thank you for bringing this topic to the forefront. I hope all of our fathers have a great Father’s Day. I look forward to chatting with you next month about stroke research.

Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved.

Benefits of Fatherhood

The perception of fatherhood has expanded over the past few decades. Parenting is more widely seen as a partnership with equal responsibilities, with people in the fatherly role possibly having more involvement than in the past. As we celebrate the roles fathers, grandfathers and father figures have in our lives, it is also important to consider how that role affects them.

Longstanding research has shown that the role of father figures in children’s lives is important to their well-being. Children with involved fathers do better in school and have a reduced chance of criminal involvement or drug use (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr071.pdf>). The Fatherhood Project, a program in the Department of Psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, cites research that has shown that “[c]hildren who feel a closeness to their father are twice as likely as those who do not to enter college or find stable employment after high school; 75 percent less likely to have a teen birth; 80 percent less likely to spend time in jail; and half as likely to experience multiple depression symptoms.” The project also highlights that research showing that, when fathers are engaged



DADS PLAY—TYRESE GILBERT plays with his 3-year-old son, Benaiah, at the 10th annual March DADness basketball tournament, March 17, 2018 at Pittsburgh Obama. (Photo by Rob Taylor Jr.)

with their children during the prenatal period, they are likely to stay involved throughout the child’s life.

As people in the father role become more involved in their children’s lives, health care providers are learning more about how to support these fathers in their children’s health care. One University of Pittsburgh researcher and physician is studying, specifically, how to better support ad-

Through the Young Fathers Study, Dr. Boykin has noticed that the young fathers being interviewed want to be more involved and to make a difference in their children’s lives. Health care providers are in a unique position to support fathers as the roles and expectations of fatherhood change.

olescent and young-adult fathers. Alicia Boykin, MD, pediatric fellow in Pitt’s Department of Pediatrics, runs the Young Fathers Study to find out how health care interactions influence the notion of fatherhood. The study focuses on fathers up to age 26 who either have children up to age 5 or are expecting a child. These fathers

are interviewed about their thoughts on fatherhood and what their interactions with health care providers have been like. Dr. Boykin’s basic idea is that health care providers should be involving fathers more in health care because research shows that long-term health outcomes for fathers, mothers and children are better when

fathers are involved. “In this research, we’re finding that adolescent and young-adult fathers really enjoy being involved with their children,” said Dr. Boykin. “They have a lot of questions and concerns but often they feel that some of the attention—or a lot of the attention—is focused on the mother of the child. This focus is understandable, but we want to find ways to support fathers’ involvement both during health care visits and beyond.”

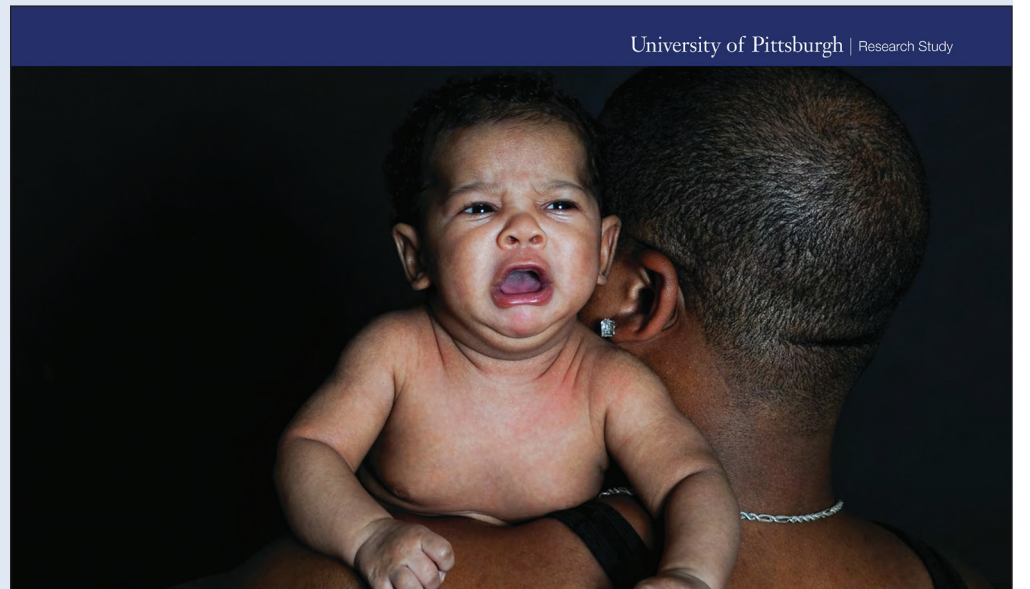
The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) notes that health care providers are some of the first people to engage with father figures in their father role. The organization encourages health care providers to support fathers and enhance their involvement by connecting with them early on. AAP offers guidelines to support fathers’ involvement. These guidelines include health care providers introducing themselves and engaging with both mothers and fathers during visits, emphasizing how children also look up to fathers as role models, taking time to understand each family’s composition and cultural beliefs and even screening fathers for depression (more information on these guidelines can be found here: <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/138/1/e20161128.full.pdf>). Screening adolescent and young fathers for depression, Dr. Boykin said, is especially important because as they are becoming parents they are also navigating adolescence.



TAKE A FATHER TO SCHOOL—Pittsburgh Public Schools celebrated “Take a Father to School Day” with a host of activities, May 18, 2018. These photos of various Pittsburgh fathers with their children were captured by Renee Rosensteel and Mercedes J. Williams.



TAKE A FATHER TO SHOOL—Pittsburgh Public Schools celebrated “Take a Father to School Day” with a host of activities, May 18, 2018. These photos of Pittsburgh fathers with their children were captured by Renee Rosensteel and Mercedes J. Williams.



Young Dads

Share Your Experiences with Us

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh are looking for fathers from the greater Pittsburgh area who are 16–26 years old and have children who are 0–5 years old to participate in a research study.

The study is being conducted to determine how young dads interact with the health care system and experience fatherhood.

The study involves a one-hour interview. Compensation will be provided.

Contact:

University of Pittsburgh
Adolescent Fatherhood Research Study

Call: 412-692-7933
Text: FATHERHOOD to 412-999-2758



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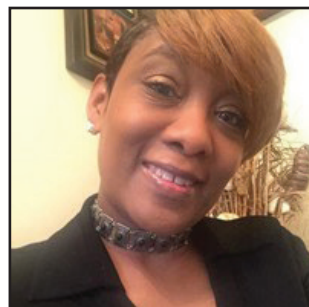
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Healthy Start Male Initiative Program (MIP)

by Nicole Singletary

Healthy Start, Inc. (HSI) is a public health organization whose mission is to improve maternal and child health and to reduce poor birth outcomes and infant mortality in Allegheny County. HSI believes fathers and male partners play a key role in reducing maternal and infant mortality, can help to support positive pregnancy outcomes and contribute to the ongoing health and well-being of their babies. HSI’s fatherhood program offers a variety of services and community-based activities designed to improve the health and resilience of fathers and male partners

through providing health education, strengthening life skills and addressing family self-sufficiency and economic stability. In addition to home visiting and individualized case management services, the fatherhood program uses a multidisciplinary approach, focusing on evidence-based curriculum and assessment tools from 24/7 DAD and the Nurturing Parenting Program. We offer a six-week Men of Standard peer-support course that focuses on 3 R’s—relationships, responsibilities and resources—and other topics like parent communication and bonding, relationship building and general health education



NICOLE SINGLETARY

and prevention education classes on prenatal/postpartum care, childbirth, breastfeeding support and HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The fatherhood program is a fully integrated component of HSI’s maternal

and child health programming. Much of the same education that is provided to our women participants is also made available to our fathers because it is equally critical that fathers and male partners understand the risk factors and biological components associated with perinatal outcomes. Our evidence-informed approach reinforces encouragement of paternal involvement in supporting the well-being of women and children as a part of the family system. Other services and collaborative efforts include a community health advocate paid training program that focuses on improving a commitment

to health, health advocacy, and addressing health disparities; working collaboratively with the Pittsburgh Public Schools’ Teen ELECT Program to support teen fathers; 412 DADS, a community partnership group formed to address issues related to fatherhood and Texting for Dads, in partnership with the National Healthy Start Association, to focus on new and expectant fathers who receive information through texting about child development that spans pregnancy, infant and toddler developmental periods.

(Nicole Singletary is director of In-Home Services, Healthy Start, Inc.)