

Fathers of Children with Hearing Loss: Feelings & Service Provision

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Background

- Mothers have traditionally been the primary contact for professionals who work with children with disabilities.
- Research concerning families of children with disabilities has also shown a bias toward mothers, with little interest in fathers (Barr, 1999).
- Mothers' views, feelings, educational backgrounds, and social supports have been studied at length.



Quote from Bob Dale

Fathers have been described as the *secondary, peripheral, and even the imaginary parent.*



Research Bias

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- Where as research on mothers have traditionally focused on issues of parenting/nurturing, emotional bonding, language/communication stimulation, reactions to diagnoses, etc., most research on fathers has focused on *paternal pathologies*:
 - Abusive fathers
 - Fatherlessness (absent fathers/single parenting)
 - “Deadbeat Dads”
- We need to explore responsible, involved fathering as well as continue to understand parental problems.

(Dollahite, 2004)

Children with Special Needs

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- Research has shown that fathers experience intense emotions related to their child's diagnosis of a disability.
- Fathers often respond creatively & have a significant impact on their children with special needs.
- Fathers continue to be the “secondary” parent despite:
 - intense emotions related to their child's diagnosis
 - demographic trends that have led to an increase in shared responsibilities.



United Kingdom Study

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- Aimed to examine fathers' feelings about having a child with hearing loss and the services that support them.
- A total of 33 fathers in face-to-face focus group.
- Found that fathers wanted:
 - more involvement with their child, family, and support services
 - to receive information first-hand
 - their unique roles recognized and supported through networks
 - flexibility of employers to attend appointments, &
 - flexibility of service providers if employers were not flexible.

Current Study

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- A 47-question survey to determine if fathers in the United States demonstrate similar feelings to fathers in the United Kingdom.
- Proposed Research Questions:
 - A. Do fathers feel adequately included in support services and the intervention process?
 - B. How can professionals include and involve fathers in their child's services?
 - C. Do fathers feel that their child's hearing loss has a negative effect on their relationship with their child?

Methods: Collection and Analysis

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- SurveyMonkey.com was utilized to collect survey responses.
- Survey Monkey automatically reports number and percentage totals for each question and its corresponding answers.
- Surveys received by mail were manually entered into the online collector.
- Results were exported into a Microsoft Excel document for further evaluation.



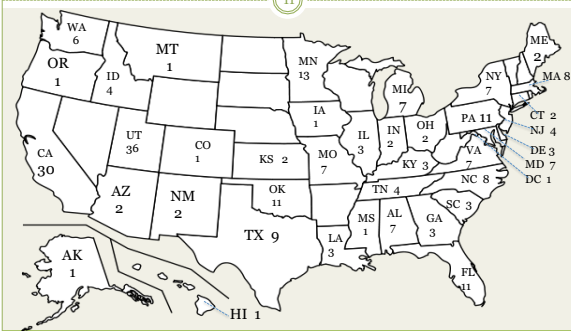
Methods: Participants

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- 152 paper surveys that included a link to the online survey were distributed to fathers. (51 returned; 34% response rate)
 - Sound Beginnings of Cache Valley
 - Cache County School District
 - Davis County School District
- The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (AG Bell) published a link in their weekly electronic newsletter to its members.
- Social Media was utilized to inform prospective fathers of the survey link (facebook, LinkedIn).
- Hands and Voices published a link on their website.
- Total number of participants: **262 Complete Surveys** (>300)

Fathers by State

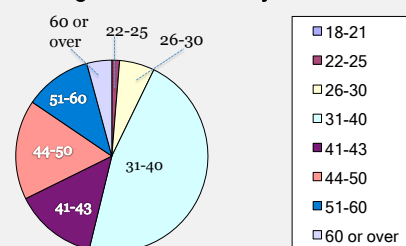
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Demographics of Fathers: Age of Fathers

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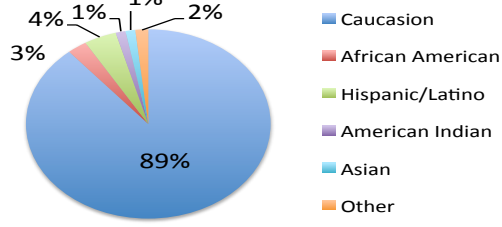
Father's Age at Time of Study



Demographics of Fathers

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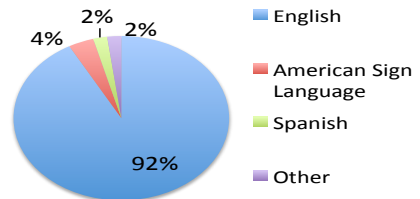
Ethnicity



Demographics of Fathers

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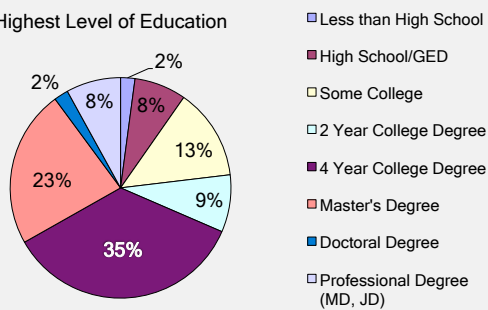
Primary Communication in the Home



Demographics of Fathers: Educational Level

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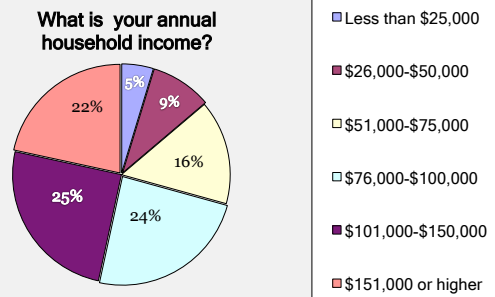
Highest Level of Education



Demographics of Fathers: Household Income

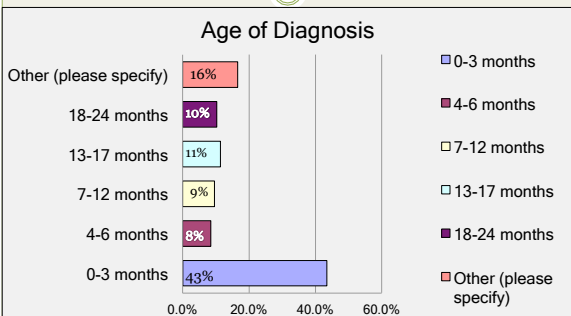
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What is your annual household income?



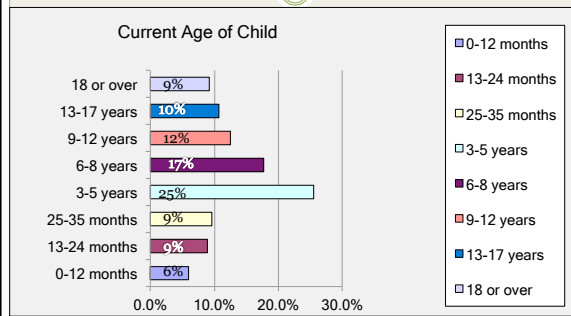
Demographics of Children: Time of Diagnosis

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Demographics of Children

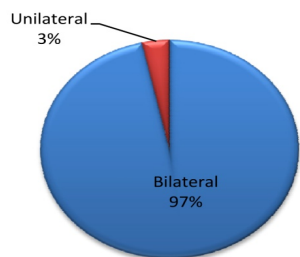
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Demographics of Children: Hearing Loss

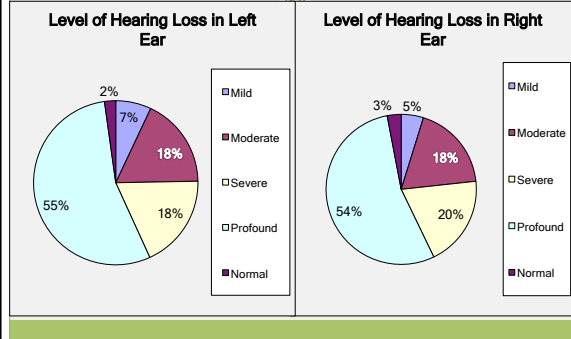
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Unilateral vs. Bilateral Hearing Loss



Demographics of Children: Hearing Loss

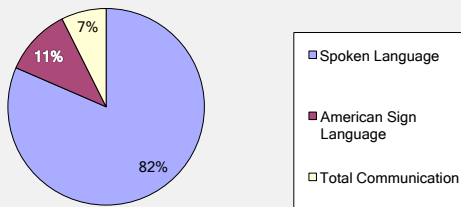
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Demographics of Children: Main Form of Communication

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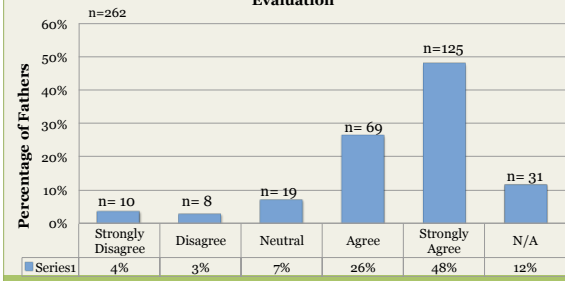
Children's Main Form of Communication



Results: Inclusion in Support and Intervention Services by Professionals

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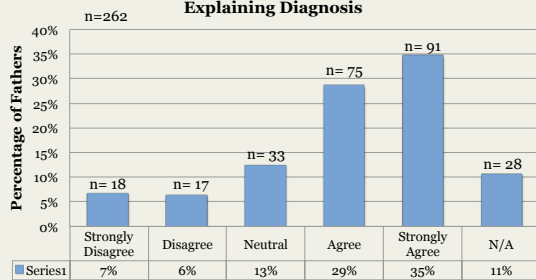
Professionals' Inclusion of Fathers at the Initial Audiologic Evaluation



Inclusion in Support and Intervention Services by Professionals

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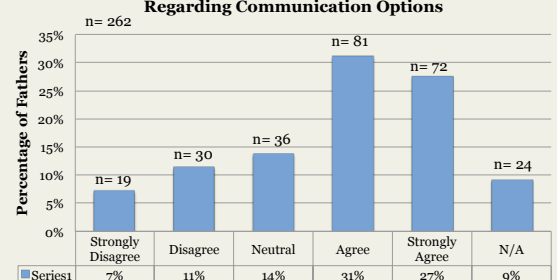
Professionals' Sensitivity to Fathers' Feelings When Explaining Diagnosis



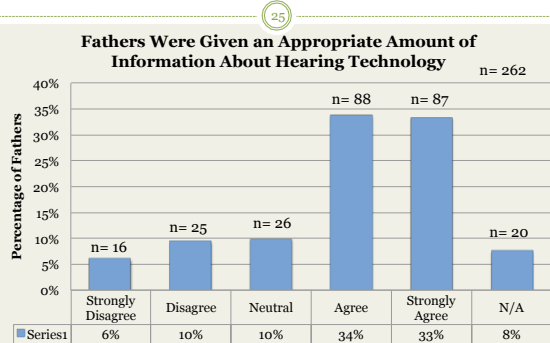
Inclusion in Support and Intervention Services by Professionals

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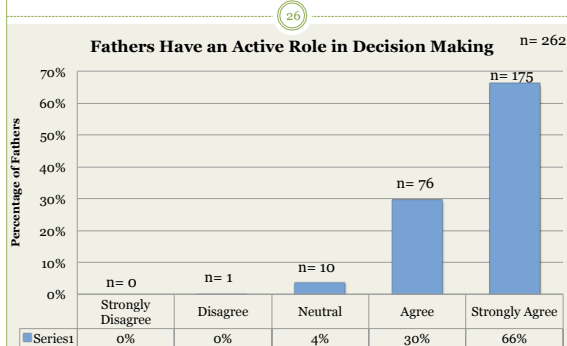
Fathers Were Given Appropriate Information Regarding Communication Options



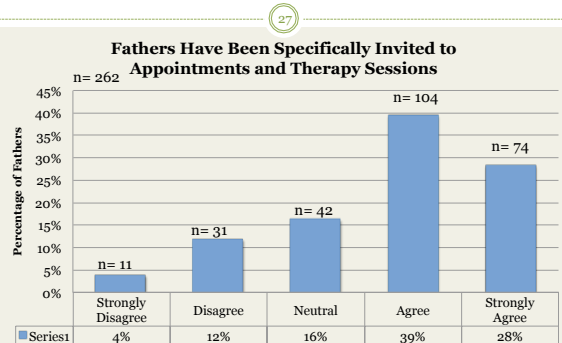
Inclusion in Support and Intervention Services by Professionals



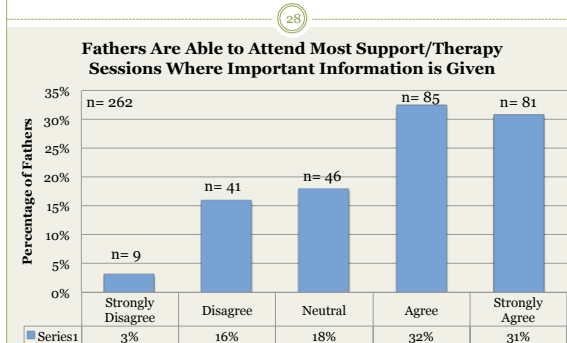
Inclusion in Support and Intervention Services



Inclusion in Support and Intervention Services by Professionals



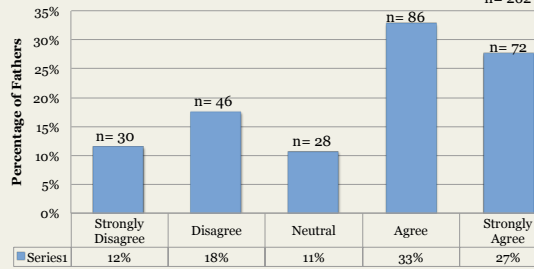
Inclusion in Support and Intervention Services



Inclusion in Support and Intervention Services

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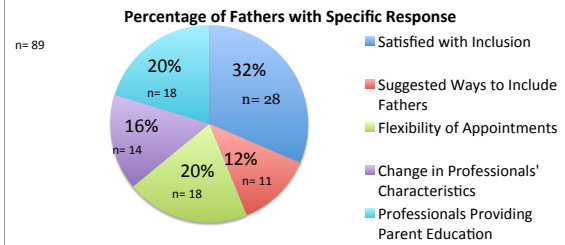
Fathers Choosing to Miss Work for Their Child's Appointment



Results: How Professionals Can Include and Involve Fathers

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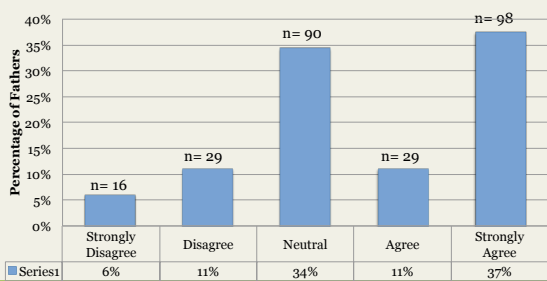
Fathers were asked to explain what professionals can do to include them and how they would like to be included.



How Professionals Can Include and Involve Fathers

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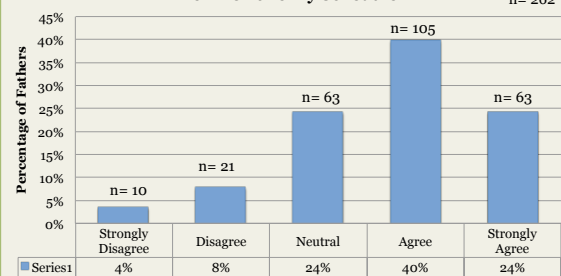
Meetings Scheduled at the Start or End of the Day Are Easier to Attend



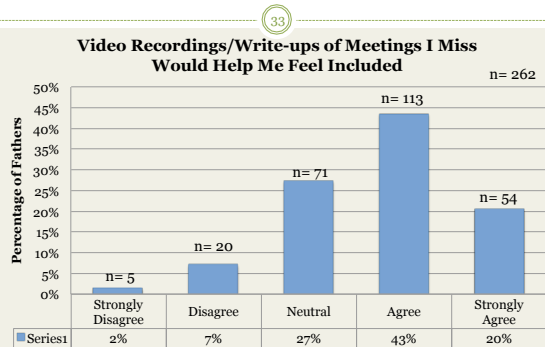
How Professionals Can Include and Involve Fathers

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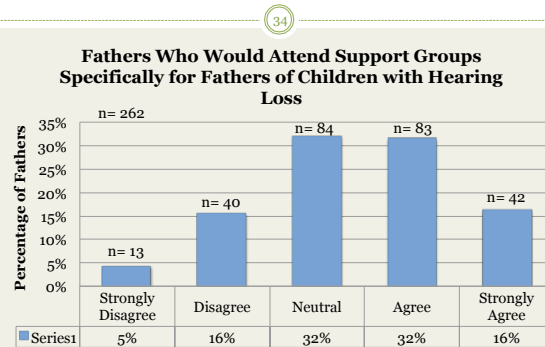
A Guide Showing Important Meetings Would Help Me Prioritize My Schedule



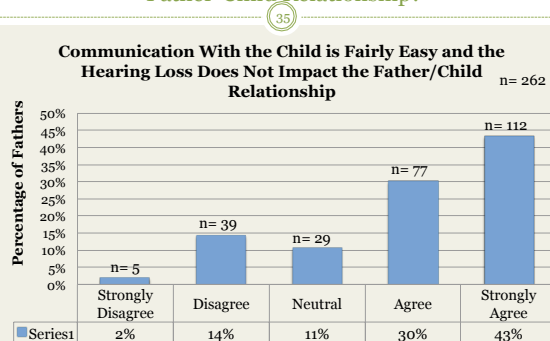
How Professionals Can Include and Involve Fathers



Results: Support Services for Fathers

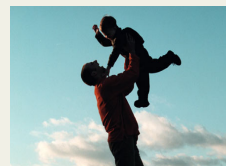


Does Hearing Loss Have a Negative Impact on the Father-Child Relationship?



Conclusions/Discussion

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- Overall, the majority of fathers reported satisfaction with their level of inclusion and involvement.
 - They reported:
 - that professionals have invited them to attend meetings and therapy sessions.
 - that they attended most important appointments.
 - that they were included and involved during support services.
 - that they had an active role in decision making.



Fathers' Voices

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- “The professionals I dealt with, ENT, audiologist, AVT were all equally professional with me or with my wife. As an engineer, I looked at the hearing loss as a problem, received information on what to do and went from there.”
- “My wife and I go to all meetings/appointments together as pertains to our child with hearing loss and I am satisfied with my level of inclusion at this time.”

Discussion

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- **Fathers suggested:**
 - phone consultations
 - email/blogs
 - father-only appointments
 - looking at fathers when talking to parents
 - summaries of appointments
 - teaching fathers what is to be expected
 - giving them permission to ask questions, seek further help

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- **Fathers suggested, *continued*:**
 - flexibility of appointments – time of day
 - would like meetings on weekends
 - extended hours (early/late)
 - separate notification of appointments

Discussion

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- **Father suggested that professionals should:**
 - Be knowledgeable, up-to-date with latest information
 - Share advice, information, & options right away
 - Be more **proactive** about including fathers:
 - Don't ignore fathers, eye contact, ask how they are coping, seek ways to support them in the process
 - Be unbiased in your recommendations

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- Professional Characteristics:

- Be sensitive & empathetic to their situation (fathers)
- Treat the father as equal partners in the parenting process
- Don't make assumptions about the father's role or level of interest
- Recognize the importance of fathers in the lives of their children with hearing loss
- Understand that fathers may respond creatively
- Be sensitive to cultural & religious differences and corresponding role of the father

Discussion

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- Professionals providing parent education:

- Provide father-specific education
- Provide information on meetings/conferences
- Pinpoint sources of information/materials (websites, books, support materials)
- Discuss/explain the latest technology
- Connecting to advocates & other parents, especially other fathers
- Navigating service delivery process (Part C, public schools)
- Activities, strategies, goals & targets for fathers to do at home to improve communication development
- Information on *father* support groups

Fathers' Voices

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"I was usually ignored during those initial visits. The audiologist stared at my wife, because he must have thought she was going to breakdown and cry, which she did of course. But, he hardly looked at me. I would say that he ignored me for the most of the so called counseling session. The confirmation of the hearing loss was delivered in a cold, matter-of-fact way that left me speechless. I was too busy trying to process what was happening as well as support my wife. It was a difficult situation. I just wish the audiologist could have handled everything with a bit more sensitivity. As a father, I really felt alone."

Limitations of the Study

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- Were fathers who participated in the current study already more involved than some?
- Fathers were contacted not only through public school systems, but also through non-profit organizations that offer information on hearing loss, resources and support networks (AG Bell, Hands & Voices).
- Does choosing to be a part of these groups mean they were more involved and more likely to feel included?

Limitations

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- The majority of participants were Caucasian males with high levels of education and high income levels.
- There was a lack of representation from more diverse ethnic groups and fathers with lower socioeconomic statuses.



Future Research

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- Reach out to fathers who may not be receiving support from non-profit organizations; target more fathers of older, school-age children.
- Evaluate how fathers of lower socioeconomic statuses as well as more diverse ethnic groups feel about services.
 - Were they included by professionals?
 - Did they receive appropriate information on communication options and hearing technology?
 - Did they have an active role in decision making?
 - How do these factors affect fatherhood?

Future Research

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- Fathers reported being generally satisfied with their involvement and inclusion in services.
 - Would spouses agree on the extent of the father's involvement? Would spouses rate them as highly?
 - Would professionals rate fathers as highly as fathers rate themselves?

Fathers' Voices

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"I have learned over the last 5 years that the responsibility rests with me if I want to know more or be informed or have a say. In other words, I think fathers need to know they should be proactive to find out about things and be involved."

Advice from a Father

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Advice for Parents



Advice for Professionals



References/Resources

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Thank You for Listening!

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