

CHECKLIST

Engaging Fathers in the Child Protection Process: The Judicial Role

Identify and locate all possible fathers early.

- Question the mother under oath regarding the identity of the father.
- Determine where the father can be located by questioning parties about his whereabouts.
- Order the social worker to follow up on information gained from the court hearing.
- Revisit the question of identity and location of the father at all subsequent court hearings.

Complete paternity testing as soon as possible.

- When a potential father comes to court, let him know the court is pleased that he has appeared because he is an important person in the child's life.
- Let him know that once his paternity is established, he will be treated as a parent in all subsequent court proceedings.
- Ensure testing costs are at state expense unless the father has means to pay.

Appoint counsel for the father.

- Appoint counsel as soon as paternity is established, with the possibility of reimbursement considering his financial means.

Engage fathers in the child protection case.

- Insist that social workers use good faith efforts to identify, locate, and support fathers throughout the case.

- Use the “no reasonable efforts” finding if necessary to ensure father engagement.
- Make it clear that the father may be a placement possibility for the child.
- Encourage developing community-based services that meet the needs of fathers, like parenting classes for fathers, fathers mentoring fathers, and other gender-specific programs.

Involve paternal relatives in the case.

- Identify the father’s extended family and ensure they know about the legal proceedings and that they will be considered as possible placements if necessary.
- Permit the extended family to participate in group decision-making processes, visitation, and court hearings, where appropriate.

Address domestic violence issues.

- Determine if the father is a danger to the mother or to the child and consider appropriate protective orders.

Download this and other checklists at www.fatherhoodqc.org/checklists

