



HOW TO...

engage, inspire and involve fathers in the First Thousand Days

Watch the **recording** of the Practical Workshop hosted by Sikunye, discussing how to engage, inspire and involve fathers in the First Thousand Days. Here you can listen to a panel discussion with Heartlines, The Parent Centre and church leadership on the state of fatherhood within our communities, as well as practical ideas of how you can engage fathers in the First Thousand Days.

fatherhood in South Africa – panel discussion

- **Heartlines** - Nkosinathi Sixabayi – info@heartlines.org.za or 011-7712540
- **The Parent Centre** – Jonathan Hoffenberg – [PACES programmes: 021-7620116](mailto:paces@theparentcentre.org.za) or paces@theparentcentre.org.za
- Sikunye Champion – Bishop Selepe

Research shows that *64% of children in South Africa do not live in the same house as their biological father* and are likely to live with a female primary caregiver. In about a third of households an adult man who is not the child's biological father is present; he could be an older brother, new partner to the mother, uncle, or grandfather. And so what we see is that the dilemma families face is that men are not involved enough in caregiving, whether these men are father figures, or resident or non-resident biological fathers.

Heartlines' research into fatherhood in the South African context shows many trends:

- A father's responsibility is more than providing money, but many people think if fathers can't provide money, they can't be fathers
- Women and extended families can be barriers in father's accessing children – even though fathers want to be involved – and this is due to a number of reasons such as cultural barriers, financial
- Father's battle with skills – playing with a child does not need a skill – but fathers feel inadequate in the basic skills to connect with children

- Social fathers are critical in the lives of children, and they play a significant role – as the biological father may not be present – so other men can play that role. Therefore it is important to promote the active positive presence of men
- The First Thousand days are so critical in the life of a child
- Wellbeing of a child can be developed if both mother and father are involved in the life of a child

why is positive father engagement so important?



- Positive father engagement is important because in the absence of that father children become victims of or perpetrators of violence, drug and alcohol abuse has been linked to the absence of fathers
- Mental health: there are a high number of young people committing suicide which speaks to the mental health of the child. We also see teen pregnancy; educational and economic outcomes are affected as children have no motivation and they drop out of school – all these are linked to not having positive father engagement

impact of engaging fathers

The Parent Centre is a Cape Town-based NGO working with families in various projects such as Community training of parents, counselling, fatherhood, and teen pregnancy. Currently we are experiencing a crisis in masculinity, and at the forefront is horrendous living conditions of women and children with high rates of Gender-Based Violence – and it is important to recognise that as men, we play a role in the protective atmosphere for children to thrive.

Sadly, in South Africa we live in a very male dominated world and the First Thousand Days is often seen as a woman's place – a place that often fathers find it difficult to engage and navigate through. But it is critical that fathers are engaging in their full spectrum of parenting. We see that fathers set boundaries, traditionally fathers provide for their families; and research is showing that it is thought fathering / fatherhood stops there – but there are strong benefits for fathers being involved in their children's lives, there are strong benefits for women when the men are taking an active role in being a

caregiver – and there is great benefit to the fathers themselves – such as it grounds them, makes them less likely to be involved in risky behaviour, and it has improvements on steady employment.

“Fatherhood is an opportunity to actively challenge a lot of the misperceptions around men we have around”

ideas to celebrate Father’s Day in your church

- **Launch a father’s group** on Father's Day that will be looking at the [Father’s Matter content](#) – it is a great way to get a regular dad's group that can be a men's Bible study group at a later stage. Watch this [video](#) about why Father's matter.
Fathers Matter WhatsApp 060 058 2107
- **Call up all dads** in the congregation and pray for them
- **Hand out a gift** such as a chocolate or book that dad can read with baby to encourage bonding with their child – whilst acknowledging dads on Father's Day
- **Have a braai** after the church service for all families in First Thousand Days to meet and dads can talk and cook together

For more ideas look at our [resource](#) on how to use key dates in your church to celebrate families in FTD.

check out these resources

To effectively encourage positive involvement, we need to understand and appreciate what fatherhood looks like in South Africa. This is a big topic, and to help deepen your understanding of fatherhood in South Africa, here are links to a few great resources:

- [Fatherhood, The Church & the First Thousand Days](#) look at this [resource](#) for more discussions on the role of the local church in engaging fathers in the First Thousand Days
- [State of South Africa's Father Report 2018](#) (specifically, chapter 4: Father Involvement in the First 1000 Days)
- [State of South Africa's Fathers Report 2021](#)

The local church has a great part to play in encouraging and supporting fathers to play an active role in the lives of their young children. Along with spirit-led discipleship, there are many initiatives that can create an environment for men to grow as fathers:

- **Begin with understanding** - learn on your own and with others
- **Encourage men to be more actively involved** - form a group to support them (see [Fathers Matter](#))
- **Speak up** - address the big issues affecting fathers in your community
- **Affirm male caregivers** - use moments in your church, like Father's Day, to encourage and celebrate these men and others for stepping into their much-needed roles (see [Father's Day ideas](#))
- **Getting equipped** - make an effort to learn how to reach and engage fathers
- **Examine the words you and your community use regarding fathers** - explore this more by [reading this blog](#)