

Instructional Guide for Usage and Effectiveness

The *Father Times* parenting newsletter resource is intended to assist fathers, father figures and others in understanding and connecting with young children in fun, caring and meaningful ways. We believe this will happen largely as a result of how the newsletter resource is used and implemented in effective ways by those who are interested in it as an educational resource. Therefore, we have prepared this brief instructional guide on usage and effectiveness of the *Father Times* newsletter resource. We hope it will be useful to you in your educational efforts.

Keys to Effectiveness in Using the *Father Times* Newsletter

The following tips may be helpful in ensuring effective usage of the *Father Times* newsletter. Please follow carefully those suggestions which appeal to you and fit your circumstances.

- **Plan ahead on how you wish to use the newsletter and how you will get it to your target audience.** We have found that it is helpful to think about who you wish to reach with the newsletter, how to reach them and how you would like them to use the information. This makes it possible to plan your educational approach and adapt the newsletter to the needs of your audience and your circumstances.
- **Communicate the meaning and value of the *Father Times* parenting newsletter to parents, caregivers and staff members.** We have provided a rationale for the value of a resource such as the *Father Times* parenting newsletter in the introduction and overview. It is often helpful to discuss some of these ideas with parents (including mothers), caregivers or staff members who may have questions about why this educational resource is focused particularly on fathers and father figures.

First, children benefit generally from the meaningful influence of both parents, and fathers are much more likely to respond when they are specifically addressed.

Second, the newsletter resource is intended to support mothers and others who wish fathers to be involved in meaningful, responsible ways — it is a message of support for this kind of involvement.

Third, this resource is meant to create a dialogue about how parents, families and organizations can work in positive, supportive ways to enhance responsible father or male involvement in the lives of young children.

- **Identify the people you wish to receive the newsletter and the strategy you will use to share the information with them.** Some programs may share this information by sending it home from school in a child's backpack. Others may hand it directly to parents who drop by a program or office to visit. In either case, you should identify who you wish to receive the newsletter and how to get the material into their hands. It may need to be mailed directly to some parents if they do not live together with a child. Or, it may need to be delivered directly in other ways.

It can be placed in grocery stores, business offices, health-care offices, educational centers, schools or other locations. To be effective, plan who you wish to reach and how to get them these materials.

- **Create mechanisms of support for using the newsletter resource and doing the activities that are involved.** Some fathering programs have found it useful to use the newsletter as a basis for father-child activities and an educational discussion on parenting. Some parenting programs have used it to discuss a child's specific needs with a parent during in-home visits. Some programs have used it to lead up to larger educational events on father involvement. Think creatively about mechanisms of support that you might develop for supporting the newsletter as an educational resource and strengthening its impact.

- **Designate a specific contact person to coordinate the newsletter.** Each site that uses the newsletter series could designate a specific, responsible contact person to coordinate the newsletter. This individual will be the contact to handle copies of the newsletter and distribution to families, strategies for using it as a resource or follow-up efforts for evaluation. This person also could be the primary person to contact the NDSU Extension Service with specific questions or needs. The contact person is a liaison who can work to get new ideas or have questions resolved.

- **Copy and deliver the complete newsletter resource as currently designed.** Some people may wonder if the current version of the newsletter is too long or at too high a reading level for fathers and father figures. We have designed both four- and eight-page versions of the newsletter, so it is adaptable to the needs and resources of a program. If you would like to develop it in a new direction, please visit with us and we will work with you to meet needs and conduct research that assesses the effectiveness of the resource in new ways.

We find, however, that the effectiveness of the newsletter as a resource is diminished greatly if only small sections of it are used or implemented. Also, usage and delivery of the newsletter as it is designed will enable us to discover answers from fathers, father figures and others about their perceptions on it as an educational resource.

- **“Personalize” or “localize” the newsletter, if desired, by simply adding a two-page front-and-back insert.** Some programs would like to feature local events, upcoming activities, etc. If you would like to do this extra work, it is best to add a simple insert to accompany the newsletter.

Printing and Distribution of the *Father Times* Newsletter

The effectiveness of the *Father Times* newsletter resource in encouraging father involvement is directly related to its distribution. The two primary steps involved in this process are printing the newsletters and distributing it to families. The following steps can make the process more effective.

- **Review the file of each newsletter issue on CD and decide on the printing process you will use.** Each CD for the *Father Times* newsletter resource

contains all nine issues of the newsletter in both eight- and four-page formats in English and Spanish versions. The newsletters are in PDF format (Adobe Acrobat software). Also, each order includes a printed and bound sample copy of the newsletter to show how a final printed newsletter might look.

- **Copy or print the number of newsletters you will need for distribution in your program.** After estimating cost, you may want to run your entire supply needed for the coming year. A larger print run tends to save copying costs. Cost also will vary depending on the type of paper used and other factors. If you choose to print a full supply of newsletters for your program, then you will have your materials ready and easily can organize and prepare them to be delivered on a distribution schedule.
- **Set a distribution schedule to be followed for delivery of the newsletter.** The distribution schedule for the newsletter is probably most useful if you generally follow a semimonthly (twice a month) or monthly delivery schedule. However, this may vary based on particular program needs or circumstances. Examples of distribution schedules are given below, and a more specific sample schedule is included at the end of this guide.

Monthly – The newsletter will be delivered once a month on set dates, such as the first or 15th day of the month. This may coordinate with the school year calendar.

Semimonthly – The newsletter will be delivered twice a month on set dates, such as on the first and the 15th day of the month, the beginning of the first and third weeks, etc. The schedule beginning on a calendar year could be: January (two issues), February (two issues), March (two issues), April (two issues), May (one issue and evaluation).

- **Inform individuals or families in advance, if possible, that the newsletter will be coming.** It is helpful to send information home or let parents in the program know in advance that the newsletter will be available. Many fathers

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and families have told us they did not even know the newsletter was being sent home. Share information about what the newsletter is, why it targets fathers and father figures (see “Rationale” section in introduction), and when and how it will be made available. Fathers and father figures in particular need to be made aware and programs may want to send a “reminder” note home with the newsletter when it is delivered.

- **Decide on how the newsletter will be distributed and let families know how that will happen.** Will it be mailed to the home or residence? Will it be sent home in a child’s backpack? The full issue should be delivered regularly so parents have the opportunity to read and apply the material. Steps to ensure effective delivery may include:
 - Identifying the target parent to receive the newsletter and deciding how to best get it to that parent. In the absence of a father figure, this may be the mother or another person.
 - Providing the newsletter on a regular and timely basis
 - Using an “incentive approach” to encourage children who take the newsletter home to make sure it reaches the target parent. The reward might be a door prize (children’s book, etc.), snack or other appropriate incentives.
 - Encouraging mothers to help get the newsletter to the child’s father or father figure, especially if he works, has time challenges or does not live with the child’s family
- **Deliver the complete newsletter so it reaches the father or father figure on a regular and timely basis.** The primary objective is to deliver the full newsletter to fathers and father figures and encourage their feedback. Adjustments may be made as needed but generally should be exceptions to this main objective.
- **Brainstorm additional uses for the *Father Times* newsletter in your program.** In addition to using the newsletter as direct education for parenting, programs may wish to brainstorm about using the newsletter topics as parent discussion topics, doing some suggested activities as part of an involvement night or event for parents, reading the stories to discuss an issue, etc. Also, the newsletter can be used for staff training and discussion on key issues related to fathers and the well-being of children.

Extended Use of the *Father Times* Newsletter

It is our first hope that the *Father Times* parenting newsletter will be a useful information source on child development and parenting for fathers and father figures. We also hope it can be used in a variety of other ways that “extend” its value and provide a positive benefit to parents and other caregivers, couples or program staff who are interested in supporting healthy father and male involvement efforts. Some suggestions are given below.

For Parents and Other Caregivers

- Create a file of the newsletters and use them to bring up ideas or activities that can be done with young children.
- Use the newsletters to provide the basis for discussion topics as part of a parent support group or educational class.
- Share parenting tips and facts from the newsletter series with other parents and friends.

For Couples

- Use the *Father Times* newsletter topics as a discussion tool to create dialogue about parenting your children together and share your ideas with each other.
- Select activities from the *Father Times* newsletter to do once or twice a week together as parents with young children.
- Share the stories from the *Father Times* newsletter and talk about how the principles involved apply to you as a couple in parenting.

For Staff Members

- Use the *Father Times* newsletter monthly as part of staff training to focus on different aspects of father involvement with young children.
- Discuss ways to implement the *Father Times* newsletter and its themes into program activities and priorities.
- Make the topic from a newsletter issue the basis for a parent education night and use ideas and activities from the newsletter for parent-child activities.

Evaluation of the *Father Times* Newsletter

Individuals and programs making use of the *Father Times* parenting newsletter are highly encouraged to evaluate the influence of this resource with fathers and father figures, other parents and caregivers or staff members. A set of evaluation tools for such evaluation efforts has been developed and is included in the section on "Evaluation Forms to Use with the *Father Times* Newsletter."

There are two options for evaluating the newsletters. You may select either option that fits your needs and interests.

First, you may use the enclosed "Short Form" questionnaires and complete the evaluation effort on your own. Two different short evaluation forms are available for this purpose.

Second, you may partner with us to complete a more thorough evaluation. Examples of the questionnaires used for partnering in the evaluation for the eight-page version also are enclosed. These evaluations include questionnaires for fathers and father figures, mothers or other caregivers and staff members in programs such as Head Start or other early childhood settings.

Questionnaires for evaluating the four-page version of *Father Times* can be obtained upon request. Should you be interested in following the second option and partnering with us in the newsletter's evaluation, please contact us and we will provide further information on this process. To exercise the first option, you simply may copy or print the "short form" questionnaire and use it as needed.

Contact Information

For further information or to provide feedback regarding the *Father Times* parenting newsletter, you may contact Sean Brotherson at:

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