

Go Ahead... Use the F Word

By Patrick Houser
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Talking Points

- ❖ Patrick Houser began an education and support course for soon-to-be or new fathers, because he felt that fathers were not receiving the same sort of education and preparation that mothers were – on birth, child care or parenting.
- ❖ He realized the need for this sort of educational resource when he tried to google “father-to-be” and found nothing, even as Google suggested “mothers-to-be.” He understood the lack of parenting information geared toward expectant fathers meant that they “had no place in our parenting culture.”
- ❖ He, and his colleague, Elmer Postle, began *Fathers-To-Be*, assuming they could fill this hole in education for expectant fathers, but found that new fathers weren’t receptive quite yet, because “there was no social precedence for gender-specific education for dads... Our approach is gender-specific, delivered in a room with men only, and stimulates fathers to awaken their natural, instinctive nurturing abilities.” (23)
- ❖ Houser found that “most fathers are not aware that they are going to have an emotional experience surrounding birth. The intensity of labor can encumber them significantly if they are unprepared, under-informed or not feeling safe and welcome.” (24)
- ❖ The intention of *Fathers-To-Be* is not only to offer support and education to expectant fathers, but is now reaching out to birth educators, doulas, midwives, and other birth professionals on how to integrate and welcome fathers into the various processes of birth and infancy.
- ❖ Participation of fathers in birth, as well as time fathers spend with their children, has risen significantly over the past decades, but Houser found that the word “father” is often absent from much of the written policies and procedures, replaced with terms like “parent,” or “birth partner.” Houser felt that “fathers were completely invisible and unacknowledged.” Houser explains this as “father’s participation in early family life has evolved, but our culture of support has not.” (25)

- ❖ Houser does also recognize that the larger patterns of patriarchy have also had an influence. He does acknowledge that “the patriarchal model is responsible for over-medicalized birth, which has drugged, controlled and interfered with birthing mothers for generations.” These factors still influence the acceptance of, and trust of, men (fathers) in the birth experience.
- ❖ But, Houser explains, many men are “fathers first, and men second. They are keen to engage with and support their partner and child in every way possible. Yet they have few role models to draw on and virtually no social precedence of gender-specific community support.” (25)
- ❖ So, as Patrick Houser encourages, “go ahead, use the F-word. Fathers are listening... The more we use it, the more everyone benefits – children, mothers, fathers, healthcare providers and society. Everyone.”

Resources

Full references for each article are available at <http://pathwaystofamilywellness.org/references.html>

Fathers-To-Be - fatherstobe.org. A great list of resources for expectant and new fathers - www.fatherstobe.org/Links.htm

Great interviews with Patrick Houser on supportive fatherhood –
<http://www.youtube.com/user/PathwaysConnect>
<http://www.youtube.com/user/houserpatrick/videos>