

## What Delaware Men Think About Fatherhood



# The Fatherhood/Healthy Marriage Survey

Sponsored by

**DSCYF/OPEI – Promoting Safe and Stable Family Program**

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*One strong pattern that emerges from the men in this study is a high degree of commitment to and focus on fatherhood. If these men are exemplary of the majority of men in the State, Delaware men want to be good dads. They embrace the role and desire to be good at it.*



## The Survey Background

The different role(s) men have in fathering, ideology building and as a spouse/mate has changed with societal demands and the evolving definition of being a *Man*. This fatherhood survey was created to gauge what men throughout Delaware felt about: the institution of marriage and the influences of government and religion on their raising a family.

After administering the Fatherhood Survey to nearly 300 fathers, throughout the state of Delaware electronically and face to face, the survey results were tallied and then tested in a focus group setting. In each of Delaware's three counties, fathers who completed the surveys were invited to participate in the focus groups where they had the opportunity to elaborate on the questions presented to them in the Fatherhood Survey.

The group that administered this Fatherhood Survey is the Delaware Fatherhood/Family Coalition (DFFC). This coalition was drawn together in 2006, as a conglomeration of State of Delaware government agencies, faith-based organizations and grassroots community based organization that all share an interest in helping fathers remove social economical barriers to developing and maintaining healthy relationships with his children as well as their developing and maintaining adult relationships and marriages.

**DFFC operates under this mission:** *Bringing together organizations to enhance efforts that promote fatherhood and healthy relationships to ultimately improve the social- economical well-being of children and families.*

In addition, DFFC is dedicated to using a renewable ten-year strategic vision planning model whereby coalition members can develop, implement and evaluate strategies that improve their services through resource sharing and strategic partnering.

After the survey was completed, Nonprofit Development Institute was engaged to analyze the results and write up the report.



# The Survey Dimensions

NDI determined from a content analysis of the questions that there were five underlying dimensions examined in this survey.

## Identification and Satisfaction with Role of Father

This dimension examined how important men felt fathers are in the lives of their children and how completely each man identified with himself as an active and informed father. This was thus, ultimately, an identity question.

## Barriers to Being Involved with Children

Having identified with being a father, this dimension examined the barriers men felt there were to being a good father.

## Importance of Marriage

This dimension sought to examine what role men felt marriage played in the raising of children. It was essentially an examination of their theory of childrearing and how important marriage is in the process. This is particularly important in the African American community given the relatively low rate of marriage compared with other American groups.

## Relationship with Child(ren)'s mother/guardian

This dimension sought to identify the actuality of their relationship with their children's mothers. Theory is one thing, reality is another, and examining the gap between the ideal (a child's parents ought to be married) and the actual (many of these fathers were not married to their child's mother and did not want to be) was very suggestive.

## Role of Government, Churches, and Agencies

This dimension sought to examine what help men wanted in their fathering role from government, churches, and agencies. The picture that emerged was troubling for the social service sector.



## Survey Participants

### Geography

New Castle: 24.7%  
Kent: 53.4%  
Sussex: 13.1%  
Non-Delaware: 8.1%

### Age Group

Under 18: 1.1%  
18-25: 9.5%  
26-32: 21.2%  
33-42: 30.4%  
42+: 37.8%

### Race/Ethnicity

African American: 78.4%  
Caucasian: 14.5%  
Hispanic: 4.2%  
Asian: .4%  
Other: 2.8%

### Education Level

Grades 1-8: 3.9%  
Grades 9-11: 10.6%  
High School/GED: 36.7%  
College 1-3 Years: 25.4%  
College Graduate: 23.3%  
Other: .7%

### Marital Status

Married: 43.1%  
Widowed/Divorced: 19.1%  
Single/Never Married: 25.8%  
Separated: 4.6%  
Co-Habiting: 5.3%

*The survey found that men had a significant dissatisfaction with their knowledge of what was going on in their children's lives.*

# Study Findings: Identification with Father Role



We'll take the identification and barriers dimensions first because they are flip sides of the same coin: how fully the men identified with their role and how much they felt they were able to live up to their role. The survey found the following:

## **Question 9. Fathers are as important as mothers for the proper raising of children**

14.1% agree or slightly agree; 83.8% strongly agree.  
1.1% disagree or slightly disagree; 1.1% strongly disagree

The Sussex County focus group of younger men and the New Castle County focus group had clear ideas about why fathers are important to children, which was good news to proponents of father involvement. The New Castle County focus group seemed to feel that fathers were better than mothers in their positive influence on children!

## **Question 14 I spend good quality time with my child(ren) at least once/week**

34.2% agree or slightly agree; 48.3% strongly agree  
12.6% disagree or slightly disagree; 4.8% strongly disagree

## **Question 15 I have the chance to spend good quality time with my child(ren) at least once/week**

29.2% agree or slightly agree; 51.4% strongly agree  
14.8% disagree or slightly disagree; 5.1% strongly disagree

## **Question 17 I would like to be kept informed about my child(ren)'s school, social life and medical matters**

21.2% agree or slightly agree; 75.1% strongly agree  
3.3% disagree or slightly disagree; .4% strongly disagree

The New Castle County focus group had a long list of things they wanted to be informed about, suggesting a strong concern with the totality of their children's lives.

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# Study Findings: Barriers to Being Involved with Children



The survey found the following on this dimension:

## Rank Order of Impact of the following on being an involved father:

1. Work schedule: 91%
2. Children's mother: 85%
3. Legal matters: 83%
4. Money issues: 79%
5. Relationship with children's mother: 76%
6. Transportation: 51%
7. Wife/Girlfriend: 40%

## Additional Findings:

The Sussex County focus group of younger men added:

- Lack of knowledge about relationships and parenting; no role models
- The feeling of a loss of independence due to becoming fathers too soon
- The fact that becoming a father was never intended or desired

The New Castle County focus group focused strongly on the need to educate males of all ages about fatherhood-related issues.

**Respondents were allowed to select multiple barriers. Because so many barriers were identified as important, further research is needed to determine what is occurring here. We note that all the barriers in the survey itself were external. What the focus groups suggests is a deeper issue: the fathers' sense of adequacy around being a father.**

***It may be that with increased competence, or sense of competence, fathers would find a way to not let the external challenges become barriers to their participation with their children.***

# Study Findings: Importance of Marriage

The survey found the following on this dimension:

## **Question 8. Couples who have children together ought to be married**

43.1% of men agree or slightly agree with this statement; 39.2% strongly agree.

14.7% disagree or slightly disagree; 2.9% strongly disagree

However, in the Sussex County focus group with younger men, they clearly did not want the fact that they had had a child with someone to obligate them to be married to that person. The involvement with the mother had been focused on the quick relationship (sex?) and caused some regret.

The New Castle County focus group had a variety of reasons for why this was not always possible or desirable, from a lack of desire to get married to a child's mother to life stage issues such as the desire for freedom or growing beyond the initial reasons for involvement with the child's mother.

## **Question 10. All things being equal, it is better for children to be raised in a household that has a married mother and father.**

29.2% agree or slightly agree; 61.5% strongly agree

9% disagree or slightly disagree; .4% strongly disagree

## **Question 11. I believe that marriage is as important today as it has been in the past.**

34.1% agree or slightly agree; 57.1% strongly agree

7.7% disagree or slightly disagree; 1.1% strongly disagree

## **Question 12. Marriage produces children who are better prepared to deal with life's many challenges.**

45.3% agree or slightly agree; 41.7% strongly agree

12.2% disagree or slightly disagree; 1.1% strongly disagree

This is significantly less strong than #10, but that may be because #10 says "all things being equal" and the men may have thought about marriages to the wrong woman in which they concluded it is best for the children for the parents to end the fighting. Only 43% are actually married at the time of the survey.

Thus #10 may be the ideal, theoretical situation, the hoped-for reality, while the rough-and-tumble of marriage and relationships may have left the men somewhat less positive (but still positive to some degree) about marriage's effect on children.

*The men in this study had high hopes and expectations for the role of marriage in children's lives, but the harsh reality of their relationships and in many cases their life stage left them feeling significantly less positive being married to their children's mothers. This is an unsurprising but still disturbing finding given the research-proven importance of marriage in children's lives.*

# Study Findings: Relationship with Child's Mother



The study found the following on this dimension:

## **Question 13 Good relationship with child(ren)'s mother/guardian**

36.8% agree or slightly agree; 49.8% strongly agree  
8.2% disagree or slightly disagree; 5.6% strongly disagree

The Sussex County focus group of younger men and the New Castle County focus group clearly saw the importance of this relationship for the sake of the children as well as the mother.

## **Question 16 Mother/guardian of my child(ren) keeps me informed about my child(ren)'s school, social life and medical matters**

31.6% agree or slightly agree; 46.5% strongly agree  
13% disagree or slightly disagree; 9.3% strongly disagree

*When taken together with question 17, a significant difference is noted between the number of men who want to be kept informed of their child(ren)'s lives and the number who feel the mothers/guardians are in fact keeping them informed.*

*Moreover, the children's mother is deemed by respondents as a significant barrier to their being involved in their child's life. We therefore conclude that the men are ambivalent about their relationship with their children's mother. It may be that they consider the relationship itself as okay (the criteria in their minds for this is unclear) but the co-parenting relationship is clearly more troubled.*

# Study Findings: Role of Government & Churches

## **Question 18 Churches and faith-based groups should have a role in helping me raise my children**

88.1% agree; 44.6% strongly agree

## **Question 20 Like to learn more about:**

1. Financial and budgeting: 30.1%
2. Understanding my legal rights: 29.7%
3. Parenting skills: 22.9%
4. Building adult relationships: 19.2%
5. Marriage: 18.4%

Sussex County focus group with younger men feel that agencies are more interested in and biased towards mothers and that the courts make it too difficult for them to be involved. They had mixed feelings about the role of the church/faith-based organizations. Still, their attitudes towards faith-based groups was clearly more positive than towards social service agencies, suggesting that agencies both private and government will need to become more father-friendly.

## Study Conclusion

This study, overall, is good news for Delaware. It shows in all three counties that Delaware fathers embrace their role. The bad news is that there are some real challenges for fathers to fulfill their roles, including their relationship with their children's mothers as well as some structural and economic issues. But overall, there is a determination to be a good father, and with the right assistance to these men, there is every reason to believe that the plight of children in the state can be improved.



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