

STATUS: codeblue™



Addressing
the
Mental Health
and
Resiliency
of
Black Fathers



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Moynihan Institute
FOR FATHERHOOD RESEARCH AND POLICY





**Black and
Hispanic men
ages 18-44**



**Experienced daily feelings
of anxiety or depression
and were likely to have used
mental health services**

(NCHS Data Brief No. 206, 2015)



**Non-Hispanic
White men
ages 18-44**



MENTAL HEALTH

has long been stigmatized in society. This has especially been true for men, in general, and Black men, in particular. There has been a stigma attached to mental health challenges with descriptors like “toxic masculinity,” “being crazy,” “touchy-feely,” or “overly emotional.” Men have been encouraged to either address their mental well-being or “man up” and “keep quiet” about them. Likewise, in the Black community, mental health has been stigmatized. It has traditionally been seen as something that can be “prayed away” or simply dismissed. As a result, Black men underutilize counseling and mental health services. For example, only 26.4% of Black and Hispanic men ages 18 to 44 who experienced daily feelings of anxiety or depression were likely to have used mental health services, compared with 45.4% of non-Hispanic White men with the same feelings (NCHS Data Brief No. 206, 2015). Due to these and other negative connotations, raising awareness around mental health for Black men has been doubly challenging but all the more important.

Fatherhood can be a complex and challenging experience for any man, but for Black men, it can be challenging. The pressures and expectations placed on Black fathers can be overwhelming, and the lack of support and resources available to them can make it even harder. Statistics suggest that addressing the mental health of Black men in fatherhood is crucial, not just for their own well-being but for the health and success of their families and communities as well.

In an effort to address the aforementioned mental health issues many Black Fathers face, in 2020, Fathers Incorporated created a monthly group called Men’s Den where approximately 20 men gather to mental health challenges and needs. Mental health counselors/experts facilitate sessions and Fathers Incorporated staff (who are certified life coaches) create and help implement individual plans for each father.

Additionally, Fathers Incorporated facilitated its inaugural mental health weekend retreat entitled “Code Blue: Explore Fatherhood Trauma, Resiliency, and Healing.”

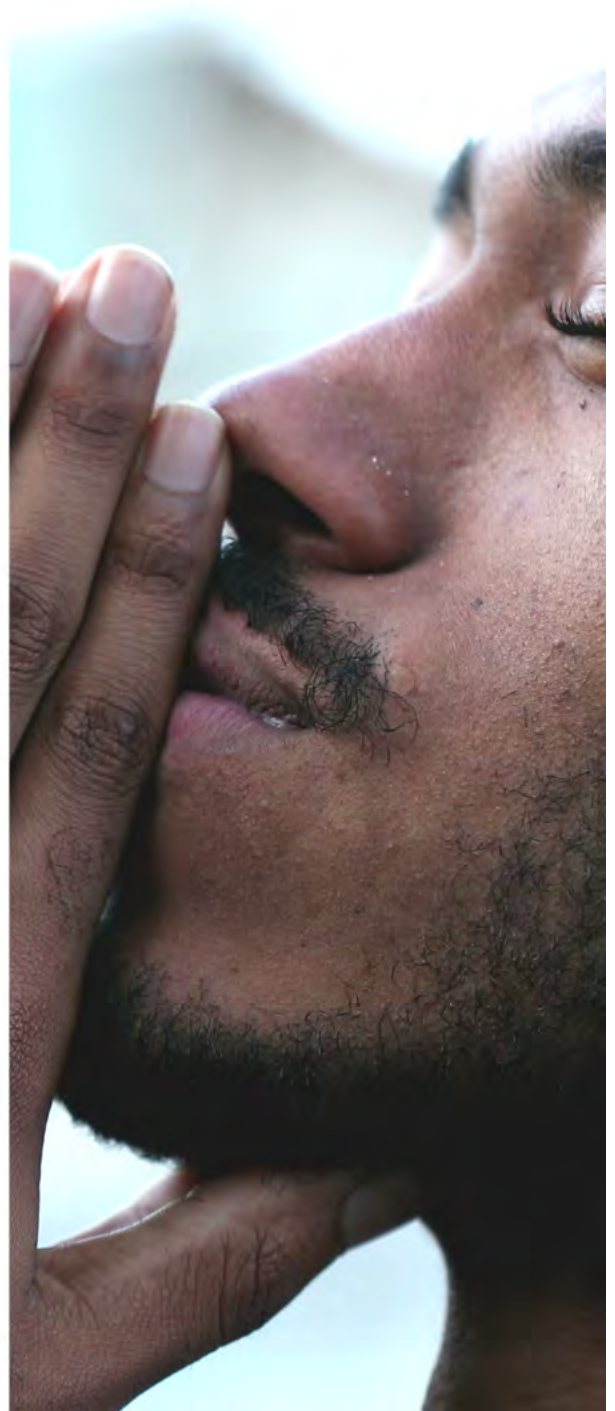
There was much interest surrounding the retreat, as evidenced by the 53 fathers who registered. Out of the 53 that registered, 21 fathers attended.





Did You Know?

In 2019, suicide was the second leading cause of death for blacks or African Americans, ages 15 to 24.



A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE...



Dr. Jeff stresses the importance of both physical and mental resilience and explains that exercising the mind and body can contribute to mental health. He shares his personal routine of constant learning, reading, and working out to maintain both mental sharpness and physical fitness. A participant asks about unconscious resilience, and Dr. Jeff confirms its role as a defense mechanism that helps maintain socially acceptable behavior. Gregory shares his story of physical and mental resilience after a severe accident, defying doctors' predictions by walking again through sheer determination and focus. —Jeff Gardere

THE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES FACING BLACK MEN IN FATHERHOOD

Black men in fatherhood face a range of mental health challenges that are often not acknowledged or addressed. These challenges can include:

STIGMA AND SHAME



Black men in fatherhood may feel stigmatized and ashamed if they are not able to live up to societal expectations of what a “good” father should be. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and even depression.

TRAUMA



Black men in fatherhood may have experienced trauma in their own lives, such as racism, discrimination, poverty, or violence. These experiences can impact their mental health and their ability to parent effectively.

STRESS AND BURNOUT



Fatherhood can be stressful and demanding, and Black men may face additional stressors such as financial difficulties, lack of social support, and racial discrimination. This can lead to burnout and exhaustion, making it harder to be present and engaged with their children.

MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS



Black fathers may be more likely to experience mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. However, they may be less likely to seek help or receive appropriate care due to stigma, lack of access to resources, and distrust of the healthcare system.

WHY ADDRESSING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF BLACK MEN IN FATHERHOOD IS IMPORTANT

Addressing the mental health of Black men in fatherhood is essential for a number of reasons:

BETTER PARENTING



When Black men are mentally healthy, they are better able to parent effectively. They can be more present, engaged, and responsive to their children's needs, which can lead to better outcomes for their children.

IMPROVED HEALTH



Addressing the mental health of Black men in fatherhood can also improve their physical health. Mental health issues are linked to a range of physical health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

STRONGER FAMILIES



Strong mental health in Black fathers can also lead to stronger families. When fathers are mentally healthy, they can provide a stable and supportive home environment for their children, which can lead to better outcomes for the entire family.

POSITIVE ROLE MODELS



Black men in fatherhood who prioritize their mental health can serve as positive role models for their children and for other men in their community. By breaking down the stigma around mental health and seeking help when needed, they can encourage others to do the same.



DID YOU KNOW?

One in 10 US Black men are put in solitary confinement before the age of 32.

New Scientist. Retrieved September 21, 2022



In the midst of a weekend gathering...

A diverse group of men came together, united by their desire for self-improvement and personal growth. They set aside their everyday lives, their families, and their friends, to focus on something greater than themselves. In a world where negativity often dominates the headlines, these men defied stereotypes and embraced positivity, peace, and harmony.

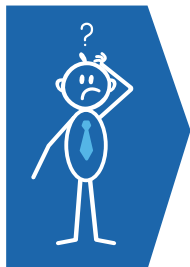
Darren Ferguson, a speaker at the event, praised the men for their dedication and determination. He emphasized the importance of heart and character over religious beliefs and reminded them that their unity and shared experiences were something to be celebrated.

Moved by Darren's words and stories, one of the attendees approached him to express his gratitude. He shared how the stories he heard that day not only touched his heart but also his soul. The power of these shared experiences would inspire him to carry these lessons with him and pass them on to future generations.

Through this gathering, these men found strength in their shared experiences and discovered the power of unity, love, and resilience. This inspiring event served as a reminder that positive change is possible when people come together with open hearts and minds, determined to make a difference in their lives and the lives of others.

ADDRESSING THE STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH FATHERHOOD

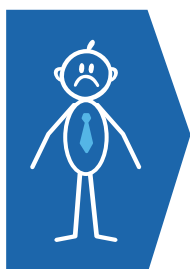
The role of fathers is increasingly being recognized, and they are now more involved in parenting (cite here). However, despite the progress, fathers face several stigmas that affect their parenting skills and their relationship with their children. Below, this report outlines the perceptions, consequences, and strategies to reduce stigma among fathers.



PERCEPTIONS OF FATHERS

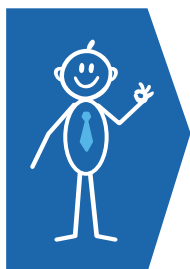
The perception of fathers as breadwinners and not caregivers is a common stereotype. This perception can be harmful to fathers as it limits their involvement in their children's lives. Society also expects fathers to be strong, unemotional, and authoritarian, which can be counterproductive in nurturing healthy relationships with their children.

Another perception is that fathers are not as nurturing as mothers. This perception can lead to fathers being excluded from parenting activities such as feeding and bathing their children, which is unhealthy for both the father and the child.



CONSEQUENCES OF STIGMATIZING FATHERS

The stigma associated with fathers can lead to several consequences. Firstly, it can lead to the father's lack of involvement in parenting activities, which can negatively impact the child's development. Secondly, it can lead to adverse mental health outcomes for fathers, including depression and anxiety. Fathers who feel stigmatized may also avoid seeking help, which can further exacerbate their mental health issues.



STRATEGIES TO REDUCE STIGMA AMONG FATHERS

To reduce the stigma associated with fathers, we need to start by challenging the stereotypes and perceptions associated with fathers. We need to promote the idea that fatherhood is a complex and varied experience that includes nurturing, caregiving, and emotional support.

Education and awareness campaigns can also play a crucial role in reducing stigma. Such campaigns can target both fathers and society at large, and they can highlight the importance of fathers' involvement in parenting activities.

Creating support networks for fathers can also be helpful in reducing stigma. Fathers can come together to share their experiences, offer each other support, and discuss the challenges they face. Support groups can also help to promote positive parenting practices and improve mental health outcomes for fathers.

Another strategy is for employers to create family-friendly policies that support fathers' involvement in parenting activities. Such policies can include paternity leave, FMLA, flexible work hours, and telecommuting options. These policies can help fathers balance their work and family responsibilities, which can lead to positive outcomes for both father and child.

Reducing the stigma associated with fathers is crucial in promoting positive parenting practices and improving the mental health outcomes for fathers. We need to challenge the stereotypes and perceptions related to fathers, create awareness campaigns and support networks for fathers, and promote family-friendly policies that support fathers' involvement in parenting activities. By doing so, we can promote healthy relationships between fathers and their children and improve the well-being of families.



Dads who actively participate in the lives of their families provide a steady source of stability and support. Re-imagining the Black Father means that policymakers must focus on specific industries as vehicles by which low-income Black fathers lift their families out of poverty.

KENNETH BRASWELL
CEO of Fathers Incorporated



www.themoynihaninstitute.com

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE...



Gregory shares that his four-year-old son has PTSD from abuse by his mother and grandmother. Sometimes, his son seems fine, but he goes through withdrawals, clams up, and acts out. Gregory tries to help him by teaching meditation, which has helped Gregory with his own PTSD. Dr. Jeff advises getting the child to a play therapist, who can help him work through his feelings. He explains that children act out as a defense mechanism when they can't verbalize what they're feeling, which is likely what's happening with Gregory's son. —Jeff Gardere

HOW TO ADDRESS THE MENTAL HEALTH OF BLACK MEN IN FATHERHOOD

Addressing the mental health of Black men in fatherhood requires a multifaceted approach that takes into account the unique experiences and needs of this population. Some strategies that can be effective include:

CULTURALLY COMPETENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



Mental health services that are culturally competent and sensitive to the needs of Black men in fatherhood can be effective in addressing mental health issues. This can include services that are provided by Black mental health professionals or that incorporate cultural traditions and values. In addition, all mental health providers, regardless of race, should receive cultural competence and cultural sensitivity training in working with a diverse population, especially Black male clients or patients.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT



Creating supportive communities and networks can also be effective in addressing mental health issues in Black fathers. This can include peer support groups, community programs, and mentorship opportunities.

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS



Educating Black fathers about mental health and breaking down the stigma around seeking help can also be effective in addressing mental health issues. This can include providing information about the signs and symptoms of mental health issues, as well as the benefits of seeking help and available resources.

WORKPLACE SUPPORT



Providing workplace support for Black men in fatherhood can also be important. This can include flexible work schedules, paid time off for mental health, and employee assistance programs that offer mental health resources and support.

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC RACISM



Addressing the systemic racism and discrimination that Black men in fatherhood may face can also be important in promoting their mental health. This can include advocacy for policies and practices that promote equity and inclusion, as well as addressing disparities in healthcare, education, and employment.

In this conversation...

The speakers discuss the importance of recognizing the shared humanity in everyone, regardless of differences in appearance. They emphasize that people are more alike than different and that everyone has feelings, emotions, and families they care about. They mention instances of violence against individuals like Tyre Nichols and George Floyd and argue that such acts demonstrate a failure to see others as human beings.

The conversation then turns to mindfulness, which involves maintaining a complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis. The speaker encourages listeners to take responsibility for their lives and acknowledge that they are responsible for their own success. They discuss the importance of continually resetting and restarting personal goals, suggesting that instead of making New Year's resolutions, people should strive to make a fresh start every day. This approach can help individuals stay motivated and focused on their goals.



Testimonials



Gentle Warriors Academy Graduate



Yesterday's ceremony was major. Some brothers in the graduation had never graduated from high school, never thought they'd have another opportunity to Wear a CAP & GOWN 🏆🏆🏆 it put a HUGE SMILE ON MY BROTHERS!! Hearts and Faces 🤗🏆❤️ - Ayo

Fatherhood  Brotherhood

ADDRESSING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF BLACK MEN IN FATHERHOOD...

is critical for the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. By recognizing and addressing the unique mental health challenges that Black men in fatherhood face, we can promote better parenting, improved health, and stronger families. By providing culturally competent mental health services, community support, education and awareness, workplace support, and addressing systemic racism, we can promote mental health and well-being for Black men in fatherhood. It is essential that we prioritize this issue and work together to create a more supportive and inclusive society for all.

To that end, the inaugural Code Blue Retreat was designed to address the mental and emotional needs of young fathers of color. Fathers engaged in group sessions facilitated by local and national experts participated in physical exercise and had peer-to-peer discussions with other fathers.

A list of speakers and the retreat agenda are below:

RETREAT SPEAKERS: The Code Blue Retreat speakers boast former NFL players, fitness gurus, mental health professionals, faith community leaders, and life coaches. They included:

- **Dorsey Levens (NFL Veteran)**
- **Dr. Jerome Maultsby (Psychiatrist)**
- **Dr. Jeff Gardere (America’s Psychologist)**
- **Bishop Darren Ferguson (Board President & Pastor)**
- **Tamu Lewis (Author and Mindfulness Coach)**
- **James Gaudreau (Fitness and Wellness Coach)**

AGENDA SCHEDULE

FRIDAY 4PM - 7PM

- 4:00 Arrive at Pittsburgh Yards
- 6:00 Dinner
- 7:00 Intro and Agenda w/ Lawrence Wilbon
- 7:30 Mindfulness Training w/ Dorsey Levens

SATURDAY 8AM - 7PM

- 7:00 Breathing and Exercise w/ Coach Beau
- 8:30 Breakfast
- 9:30 - 11:00 Resiliency w/ Dr. Jeff Gardere
- 12:00 - 3:30 Lunch and Retreat Activity
- 3:45 - 5:00 Surviving the Mental Health Tank w/ Tamu Lewis
- 6:00 Dinner
- 7:30 Meditation w/ Dr. Jerome Maultsby

SUNDAY - 8AM - 12PM

- 7:30 Workout Walk w/ Coach Beau
- 8:30 Breakfast
- 10:30 Motivation and Takeaways w/ Bishop Darren Ferguson and Kenneth Braswell
- 12:00 Lunch and open camp activities
- 3:00 Depart



DURING THE SESSIONS...

Fathers had the opportunity to engage with speakers and peers and to reflect on what they heard in workshops and or sessions. Below are some examples of sessions.

MINDFULNESS

The first session in which fathers participated was on mindfulness facilitated by Dorsey Levens. This topic set the tone for the entire weekend. It centered on helping fathers focus on the most important things in life. Participants were encouraged to be more open and sensitive for better self-understanding. According to the presenter, Dorsey Levens, "Mindfulness is the practice of maintaining a complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions or experiences on a moment by moment basis." They were encouraged to be sure they are present in their thinking and focused on what matters to be better fathers. Participants engaged and added to the sessions through their conversations.

RESILIENCE

Fathers were part of sessions where they discussed resilience taught by Dr. Jeff Gardere and their mental health tank facilitated by Tamu Lewis. They identified symptoms of PTSD and highlighted ways in which individuals can cope with and overcome it. They were able to have an open conversation about their own challenges with symptoms of PTSD. Participants were extremely engaged and talkative. They were affirmed for attending the weekend and were taught to reframe their situation by looking at it from a different perspective. The benefit of doing so, as suggested by the speaker, is that "You have the power to reconsider past negative experiences..."

PHYSICAL EXERCISE & MOTIVATION

In addition to physical exercise and community meals, fathers had a motivational session before leaving the retreat. The speaker, Bishop Darren Ferguson shared his story of tragedy and triumph. He discussed his poor choices and told them lessons learned. He also talked about how his experiences made him a better father to his biological and chosen (god) children. As fathers reacted to his stories, they talked about those things that resonated with them. Most of them were moved deeply and used Bishop Ferguson's story as motivation to think about their own stories and how to become better fathers to their own children. It was a significant ending to a powerful weekend.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

There are several significant takeaways from the Codeblue Retreat:

- 1. A retreat where fathers can spend a couple of days with experts and peers that focus on mental well-being is imperative for identifying past challenges and moving forward.**
- 2. A retreat should offer the appropriate mix of topics and experts to make a holistic impact on fathers and families.**
- 3. Peer-to-peer sharing provides an opportunity for fathers to share and hear stories with which they can resonate and grow.**

The goal of Fathers Incorporated is to provide opportunities for fathers, especially fathers of color, to identify and share traumatic experiences and their potential consequences and to gain the necessary tools to move forward and become better fathers. One way to address those experiences is through "healing circles." Originated in aboriginal communities and especially important in communities of color, healing circles "provide group support for people who are dealing with issues such as addictions, violence, grief, and trauma." The Code Blue Retreat is an anecdotal example of how healing can be facilitated within the community in need.



A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE...

“ The speaker discusses her brother’s suicide and how it affected her. She was surprised by his death and felt guilt, thinking she should have done more to help him. She attended therapy for five years for grief counseling and had to see a psychiatrist for medication to cope with the loss. Now, she finds comfort in talking about her brother’s suicide and aims to normalize the conversation around it to help others who may be struggling. Through the stages of grief, she learned to remember the good times with her brother and uses her experience to support others, which provides her with some comfort and fulfillment. —Tamü Lewis



Fathers Incorporated is a non-profit organization based in Atlanta, Georgia, that aims to promote responsible fatherhood and support the development of healthy families. The organization was founded in 2004 by Kenneth Braswell, who wanted to provide resources and support for fathers who were struggling to be present and active in their children's lives.

Fathers Incorporated offers a range of programs and services to support fathers, including fatherhood training and development programs, job readiness training, and parenting education classes. The organization also provides support and resources to fathers who are facing legal or financial challenges, such as child support issues, custody disputes or housing challenges.

In addition to working directly with fathers, Fathers Incorporated also advocates for policies and programs that support responsible fatherhood and healthy families. The organization conducts research on issues related to fatherhood, and partners with other organizations and government agencies to promote positive outcomes for families.

Overall, Fathers Incorporated is dedicated to improving the lives of fathers and their families, and to promoting the importance of fatherhood in society.



The academy is dedicated to empowering fathers and families by providing a wide variety of programs designed to strengthen families through the development of responsible fatherhood, co-parenting, and life skills. Its core mission is to help fathers become positive role models for their children, improve their relationships with their partners and co-parents, and build the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in all aspects of their lives.



Thank you to the Anne E. Casey Foundation and ADP for their financial support and encouragement in addressing mental health issues for Black Men and their families.

"When you have little eyes and bodies literally looking up to you, it's important to remember that you are their blueprint. So, it's crucial that you do what's necessary to show them how to lead their tribe when the time comes. For 6 weeks, I was lucky enough to be surrounded by like-minded peers who were all on the path to be the best versions of themselves for them and their families."

Mmadu Ulasi

*Gentle Warriors Academy
Graduate of Fall Class of 2022*



**Gentle Warriors
ACADEMY**

www.fatherhoodisbrotherhood.com

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