



# THE BLUEPRINT

## Virtual Town Hall



### What You Should Know About Child Support

The Blueprint Virtual Town Hall

September 29, 2020

Transcript

**Speaker: James Murray**

James Murray ([00:17](#)):

Thank you, Kenny Braswell for your leadership at Fathers Inc. And for initiating this vital discussion, I'm beyond pleased. I'm honored actually to be a participant with you here today, you've done an excellent job of laying out the importance of addressing the needs of fathers and the eight areas of focus to improve their trajectory. Not only for black fathers, but also black families.

James Murray ([00:42](#)):

Two, you point out that engaging fathers through the child support program is an opportunity to spur their significant and sustained parental success. I can tell you that on the federal, on the state, on the tribal and even on the local level, there's widespread agreement. You are spot on and we've seen this take place in a lot of instances across the country with huge success. I've got to say too, that the topic of engaging fathers and responsible fatherhood is such an important one in the Administration for Children and Families.

James Murray ([01:19](#)):

The Administration for Children and Families is the parent agency to the federal office of child support enforcement. In addition to other programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Office of Head Start as well. But across ACF and the federal child support program and others, we aim to institutionalize a national culture that embraces the essential role that fathers play, not only in society, but also with their families and community. We also want to advance practice and systems to minimize barriers to make sure that they are inclusive and effective family services for fathers.

James Murray ([01:58](#)):

So what does that mean? That means that as an agency, collectively, we believe that the essential role fathers play in nurturing the wellbeing and long-term success of their children and families should be widely accepted across the country as a cultural norm. Our goal is to really see that into fruition to make it possible when we think of focusing on fathers and improving the plight of their families.



# THE BLUEPRINT

## REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

James Murray ([02:23](#)):

The second goal for us also is to make sure that fathers have full and easy access to family and child services that value and meaningfully engage them as critical factors in strengthening their families. So it's not a case of telling dads what they need but really working with them and partnering to make sure we hear their voices and incorporate their feedback and input across human services. This will reflect in connected family service delivery that's inclusive, welcoming, and designed to engage fathers. I'm just beyond excited today that our discussions about The Blueprint really help us continue to move in that direction.

James Murray ([03:03](#)):

In terms of help fathers be successful in human services and in child support, also, it's important that fathers understand what those systems do. For child support, is really unpacking it in a way that makes it more digestible for dads and makes sure that dads have the tools and resources that they need to navigate the child support system. There are a few core services that child support enforcement offers, some dads know about, some they may not, but fathers has the option of opening a child support case, there are services to help locate the other parent when needed, fathers are able to establish paternity of their parentage, they're able to have orders reviewed or modified if they already have orders in place and really get support to make sure that their families not only have the social resources they need to be successful, but also the financial ones, as well.

James Murray ([04:04](#)):

Both parents and guardians can receive services from their local child support offices and it's as simple as someone filling out an application and starting that request for services. There are services that child support enforcement offices provide to dads too, that are just much broader than collecting payments. Establishing paternity gives fathers their legal connection to their children and it also opens up the child's network to the father's paternal side of the family. It's important for fathers to know that they are not only regarded as sort of the superheroes to their children, but that each and every input they provide really is vital in their children's trajectory and making sure that they have the best and most successful lives possible.

James Murray ([04:59](#)):

Child support staffers can explain the child support program what program to file this as well. A dad can get an overview of his rights and responsibilities within the program, and that can really help him feel empowered and stay engaged with his family and better understand his options, if he has a child support order in place. Child support staffers at offices can also provide dad with a record officially of the payments that he's made over time. He can also be confident that once he makes those payments, they get to his family with them roughly 48 hours.

James Murray ([05:32](#)):

So the monies that dad provide through child support enforcement orders reach the families as quickly as



# THE BLUEPRINT

## REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

possible. Then again, if dad's earnings situations change and he needs to get a modification, he can have the child support office review and modify that order when necessary. I can't say enough about the importance of the partnership between child support enforcement offices, and their responsible fatherhood programs. Responsible fatherhood programs are vital to helping dads be successful, not only within the child support program and other human services programs, but just in life in general. We've seen this happening in amazing ways across the country and many of the speakers here today, for our event on The Blueprint are models of things that we can do on a broader scale, nationally.

James Murray ([06:31](#)):

Of course, Fathers Inc and the connections with the great State of Georgia and the child support enforcement program there, we've got other counties like Mecklenburg County in North Carolina, which are model as well. Then the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood provides that statewide model, and there's so many more, I mean, we'd be here all day if I tried to go into examples of all of them. But father programs can and do work directly with child support offices to help fathers. Some of the things that we really encourage from the federal level is both sides reaching out to each other, making sure that staff on the fatherhood side and staff within the child support enforcement program know who their colleagues are, that they meet on a regular basis to discuss mutual goals and also give information and updates within their programs. And that they invite each other to attend things like fatherhood sessions, just to make sure that the dads within the programs have the information they need to navigate child support. Of course, this year has been trying for us in many ways, we've been essentially separated from each other for months now, we're taking time to process everything that's going on. But there has been a surprise constellation, I would say, for many fathers at the same time. That's when the chance to spend more time with our children.

James Murray ([07:50](#)):

I mean, I'm a father of two children, and I can tell you firsthand, it's been life changing for me and the fathers that I'm in contact with and have spoken with across the country, it's been the same for them too. It's given us a renewed appreciation for what we've forgotten was possible because of the heavy work demands that we had in the past. It's given us the chance to be present at all times. We can have lunch with our children. We can log off the computer and we're instantly there. We don't have to put up with long commute times or long hours in the office, and we're able to quickly focus on what matters most and that's our relationships with our children.

James Murray ([08:25](#)):

I've heard roughly that it takes about 21 days of doing something new to make it a habit. So we've been in this space for longer than 21 days now. We've also been in a space where as responsible fatherhood programs and child support enforcement officers have collaborated for more than 21 days. So we can really say that this should be, and is the habit. Now more than ever, men are juggling so many things to help make sure that their families are in good standing, professional life, family life, and also the current challenges with the pandemic.



# THE BLUEPRINT

## REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

But we've got to keep the momentum going of helping men ensure that they are in their best shape and position to help their families be successful over time.

James Murray ([09:08](#)):

I would say within the child support program too, has been encouraging to see how quickly state, tribal and local child support offices have shifted to things like virtual services. Their commitment to helping fathers and families has really been paramount and it's helped the program evolve over the last few months. So it's not your father's child support program of old, if you will. The evolution of the program really helps us make sure that every child has what she or he needs to thrive and that goes without saying that part of that is an engaged and a committed father.

James Murray ([09:44](#)):

I'll ask one thing of us all collectively, as we continue to talk about The Blueprint and the significance of where we move now as a society towards engaging dads, let's continue to identify ways to actually develop a culture that values the essential role of fathers. Let's make that the new norm. Together as partners, we can really refine and help fathers grow on all levels and we'll help fathers understand how much we value them and how much their leadership means to us now, more than ever.

James Murray ([10:17](#)):

I can't say thank you enough again to Kenny Braswell and Fathers Inc, for taking leadership in this way and I really look forward to our continuing this discussion over time and rolling up our sleeves to help improve the plight of fathers and families. Thank you.

