

MINDFUL FATHERING®

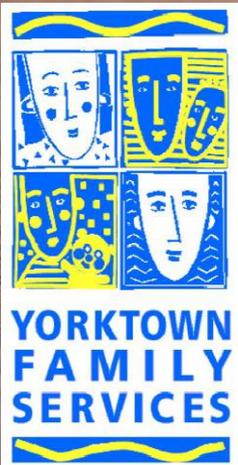
Can men who expose their children to domestic abuse become better fathers?

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www.yorktownfamilyservices.com

MINDFUL FATHERING



Danielle MacInnes, Photographer, Canada

TODAY

What is Mindful Fathering?

- What It Is...and Isn't
- Development Timeline
- Goals for Fathers
- Key Features, Approach

How does it work?

- Referral, Intake, Weekly Format, Topics
- Examples of Exercises and Tools

Does it work?

- What the Evaluation Says

Mindful Fathering is...

- An early intervention/prevention 12 week program
- For fathers identified by child protection/child welfare as exposing their children to domestic abuse
- Designed to reduce child maltreatment and strengthen families through intervention with at-risk fathers

Mindful Fathering[®] is...

- A manualized, structured, curriculum-based group program
- Based on a psycho-educational model using a transformative narrative approach
- Integrates a mindful meditation component for affect regulation
- Now trademarked and registered

Mindful Fathering® is NOT...

- For men facing charges or with charges pending; other programs do this work
- A means to influence a court case or child welfare involvement
- An “anger management” program; although anger is addressed

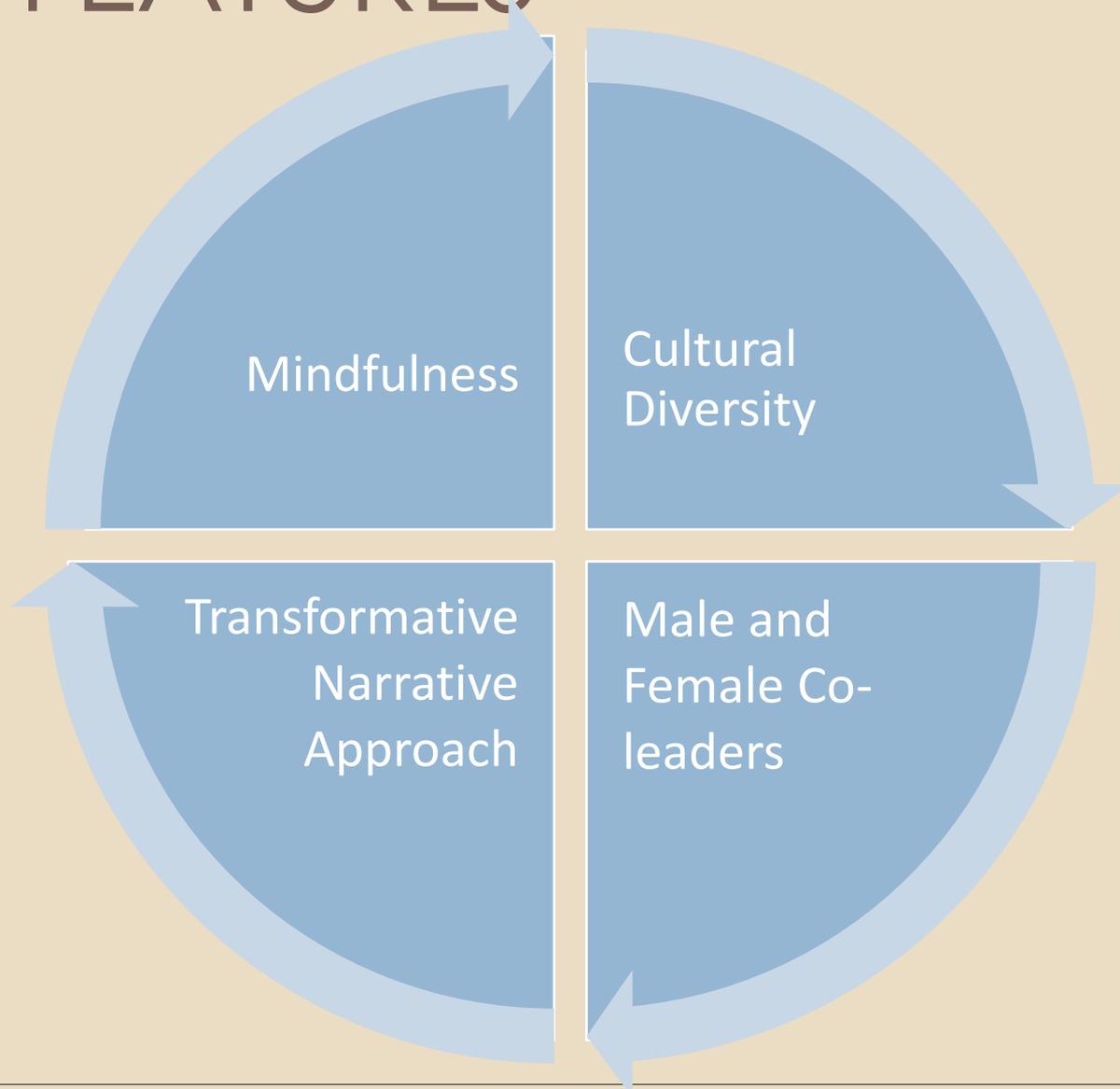
TIMELINE

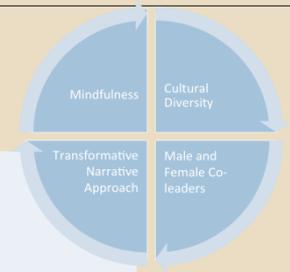
- 2007** Yorktown Child and Family Centre receives funding from Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services Transformation Fund for Community Capacity Building to launch fathering group for men who have exposed their children to domestic violence
- 2008** Ongoing evaluation begins, led by Dr. Ramona Alaggia
- 2011** Manual created
- 2014** Trademark registered
- 2015** Over 200 fathers have completed the program
Ongoing, core funding from Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services

GOALS FOR FATHERS

1. Increase understanding of the impact of abuse on children and partners
2. Increase awareness of attitudes and perceptions regarding masculinity that contribute to partner abuse and child maltreatment
3. Increase awareness of child development, age-appropriate expectations, child-centred parenting
4. Learn new parenting skills
5. Increase awareness of, and responsibility for, abusive behaviours
6. Learn more effective ways of dealing with anger and aggression
7. Improve parent/child relationship and co-operation in co-parenting (thus improving outcomes for children)

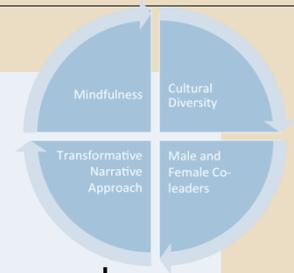
KEY FEATURES





Cultural Diversity

- Cultural make-up of group reflects community in which it's based
- Pro-active recruiting of diverse clients
- Facilitators attend to:
 - Language accessibility
 - Traditional cultural roles
 - Sharing/Privacy issues



Male and Female Co-Facilitator Model

- Positive role-modelling and mentoring of co-gendered partnership
- Mutual understanding of collaboration
- Balancing power and decision-making, co-leadership
- Determining when best to address issues from male or female perspective
- Checking in with each other about timing, process, approaches, in front of group
- Processing challenges and addressing conflicts, in front of group
- Practicing basic program concepts with participants (exploring, unpacking, deconstructing, reconstructing)

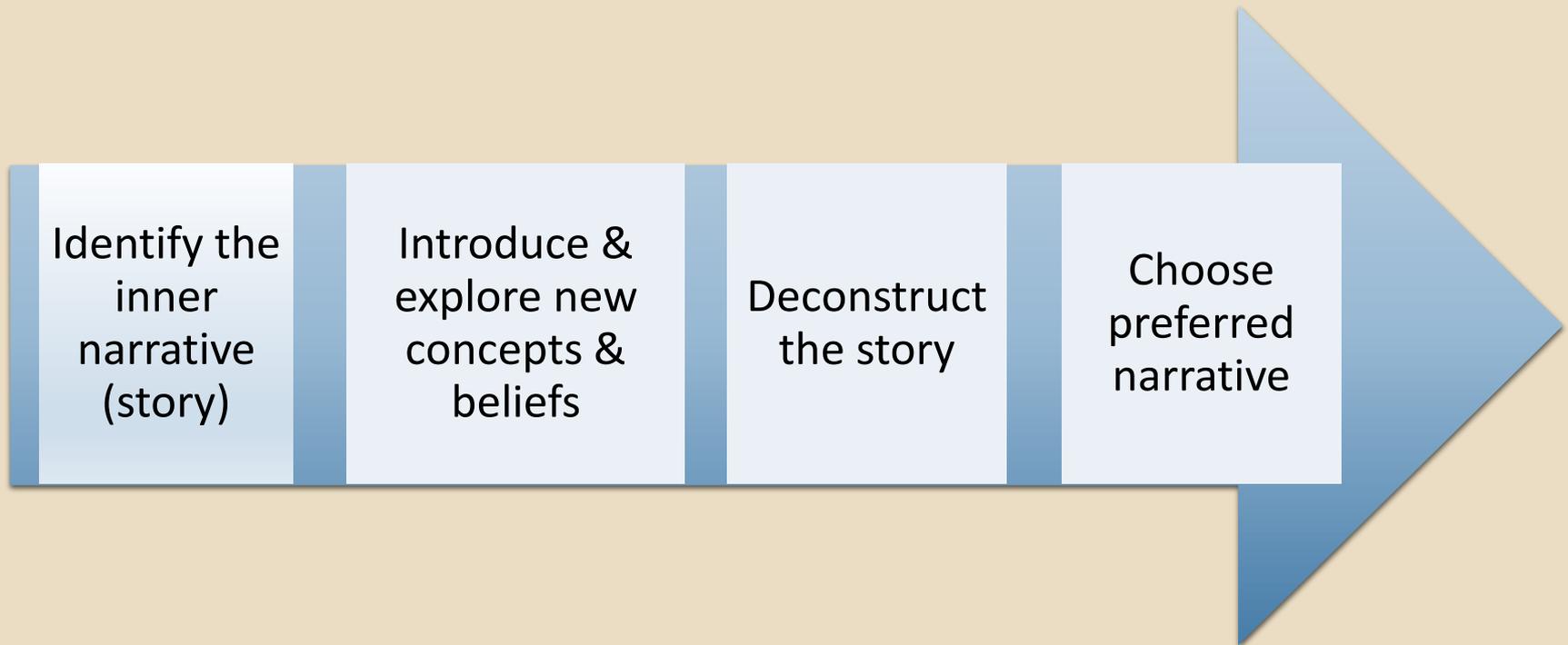
Transformative Narrative Approach*



- Encouraging collaboration through the use of a non-threatening model encouraging relating to others respectfully
- Using the transformative power of sharing concerns and challenges with peers; receiving feedback from peers
- Identifying how remorse and taking responsibility may be used as catalysts for change, rather than shame
- Facilitating the preferred narrative—a personal vision for change based on intentions, hopes for the future, and commitment to values

*Based on the work of Michael White, 1988, 1992, 1995

Transformative Narrative Approach*



*Based on the work of Michael White, 1988, 1992, 1995

Mindfulness



- A mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations
- Why Mindfulness?
 - To help fathers begin to connect these thoughts and feelings, moving from a state of helplessness, hopelessness, shame, blame ... to a state of acceptance, responsibility taking, hope
 - Breathing and visualizing, practicing staying in the moment to calm oneself
 - Relaxation techniques are practiced every week
- Introduced at the very first group...starting simple and advancing to deeper exercises

REFERRAL AND INTAKE

FATHER calls the
VAW Intake
Coordinator

- Program criteria, objectives, expectations, timeline explained
- Screening begins
- Must acknowledge abuse in order to help decide if he is a good fit and if father thinks program is right for him
- Must show interest in learning alternative and non-violent ways to partner, parent

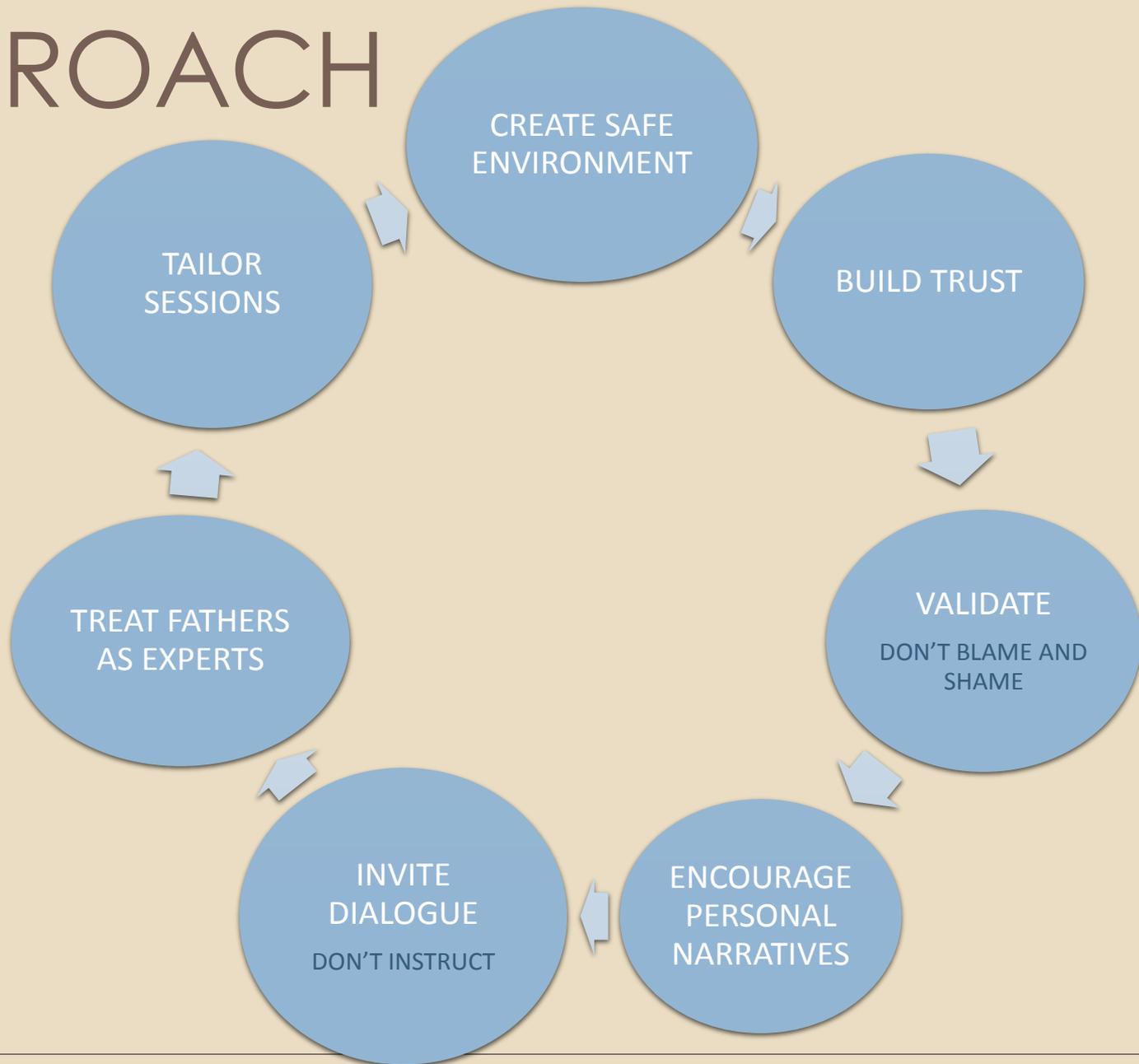
YES

- Formal intake is completed

NO

- Not ready
- Won't acknowledge abuse
- May be referred elsewhere

APPROACH



EACH WEEK

- ✓ **Share a meal together**
- ✓ **Check-in**
 - Reflections since last session
 - Follow-up on specific events, activities
- ✓ **Introduce Topic**
- ✓ **Mindfulness Exercises**
- ✓ **Dialogue**
- ✓ **Check-out**
 - Reflections on how they're feeling now

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE



Jonathan Bean, Photographer, Scotland

TOPICS

Week 1 INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION	Week 7 CHILDREN AND DEVELOPMENT
Week 2 WHAT IS A FATHER?	Week 8 PROBLEM SOLVING WITH CHILDREN
Week 3 HOPES AND DREAMS	Week 9 PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE - 1
Week 4 MASCULINITY AND POWER	Week 10 PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE - 2
Week 5 PATHWAYS TO ABUSE	Week 11 MAKING CONNECTIONS
Week 6 PARENTING	Week 12 WRAP-UP

Week 4

MASCULINITY AND POWER



MAN IN A BOX

WUSS

SISSY

Don't show emotions,
except anger
Don't cry
Don't show weakness or fear
Don't be like a woman
Don't be like a gay man
Don't need help

Be straight
Make decisions
Women are property and
objects

FAG

WIMP

Adapted from "Tough Guise" by Jackson Katz, 2000

DIALOGUE ABOUT ...

- How engaging in abusive behaviour is a choice
- Power and control – especially coercive control tactics
- Similarities in beliefs about masculinity, parenting and women which are sexist and outdated
- Unpacking gender socialization constraints – especially around sexist attitudes and actions, hyper-masculinity
- How being sexist, racist and homophobic are domination tactics
- Own victimization as a means of building empathy for those they have hurt

Week 6

PARENTING



AS THE SESSIONS UNFOLD

Groups leaders observe the fathers ...

- Socially interacting before or after group
- Starting to use the language of the program – “child-centred”
- Actively talking about or trying out new tools and concepts
- Feeling safer and expressing anger, resentment, as well as sadness and loss
- Challenging discussion points or perspectives in constructive ways
- Expressing empathy about their partners, each other, their children
- Starting to identify triggers and shift behaviour (i.e. can perceive being judged and discuss new strategies instead)
- Demonstrating self-reflection

Can men who expose their children to domestic abuse become better fathers?

What does the evaluation tell us?

RESEARCH

Over-arching goal is to provide an evidence-based group program for fathers who have exposed their children to DV that works and can be used by others.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) Is MF achieving its program goals and outcomes?
- 1) What impact does MF on:
 - engaging and motivating fathers
 - increasing parenting skills/effective parenting
 - increasing affect regulation (i.e. anger)
 - increasing awareness and acknowledgement of parenting behaviour and the impact on children
- 2) How satisfied are clients with the services they receive?

EVALUATION STRATEGY

A two-pronged approach has been implemented for a multi-year evaluation:

- 1) A **process evaluation** was conducted from 2008 to 2010 to help further develop the MF model of service delivery
 - Based on this, a curriculum and manual were developed for group leaders to follow
- 2) An **outcome-based** evaluation is being used to measure desired changes with the father participants:
 - Using pre/post single group design
 - Measuring **group engagement, parenting competence and better control of anger**

MEASURES

Your Views About the Program

- a client engagement measure (modified by and used with permission from Caring Dads program)

Parenting Scale

- Arnold, O'Leary, Wolff, & Acker, 1993
- a parenting effectiveness instrument with strong psychometric properties

About You

- anger and aggression measure (adapted from Caring Dads program)

Client Satisfaction Survey

- developed by Yorktown Family Services

SINCE 2008 ...

- Over 12 group cycles have been evaluated
- Almost 100 fathers have participated in the evaluation after being given information about the research and signing agency consent forms

FINDINGS

Demographics of the fathers participating in the research:

- All referred by Catholic Children's Aid Society and Children's Aid Society of Toronto
- Ranged in age from 18 to 69 years; average age 39
- Of all the study participants, just under half identified as Caucasian (42%); remainder as racialized
- 2/3 were Canadian-born
- Of the men identifying as newcomers/immigrants, average number of years living in Canada was 13
- Average number of children was 2
- Just over two-thirds reported being employed

DATA ANALYSIS

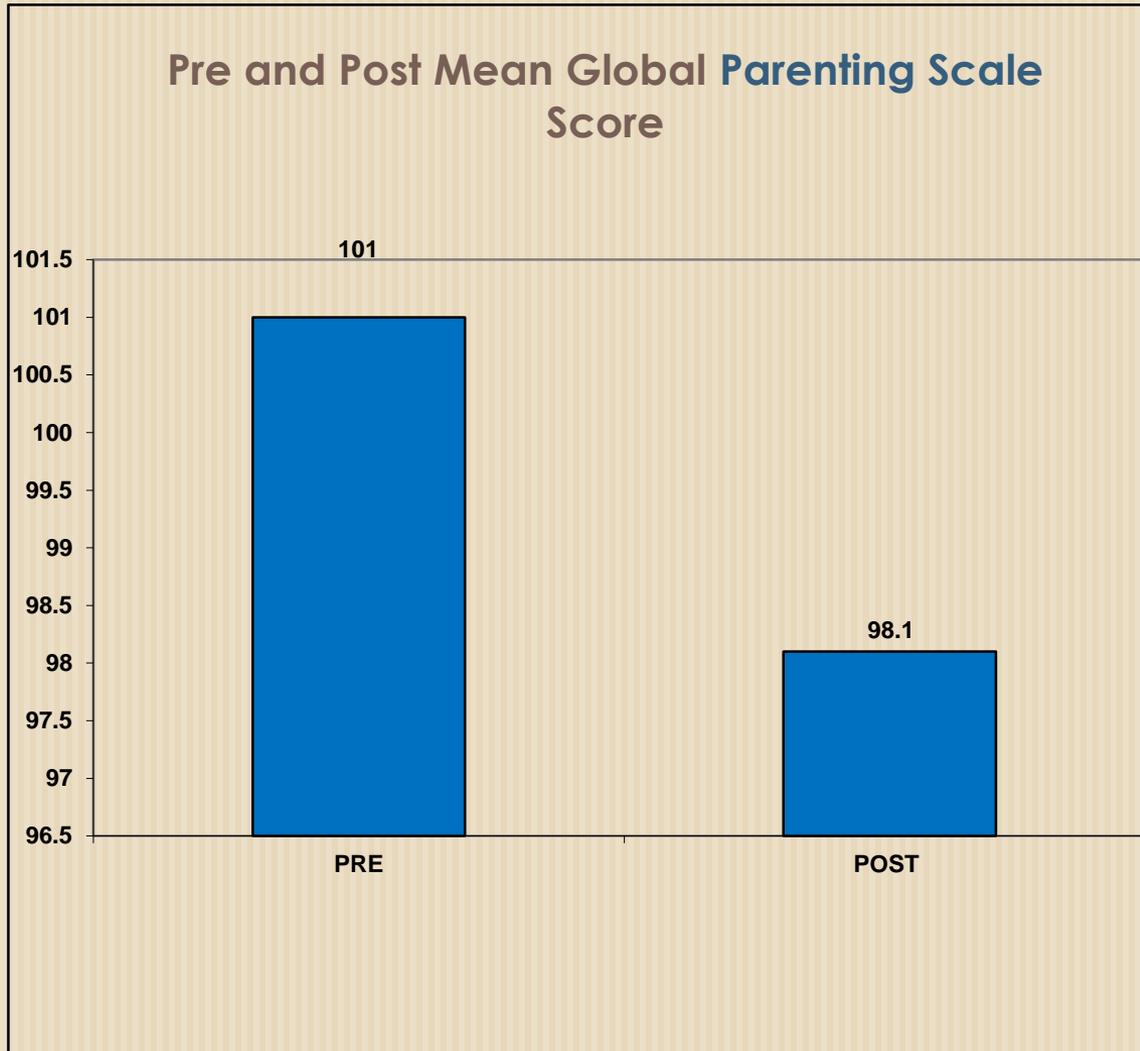
- N=98 – small sample but conducive to sound examination; descriptive and exploratory
- Attrition rate (drop-outs) almost negligible
- Paired t-tests were conducted across groups to determine if participation in MF is associated with statistically significant gains in motivation, reduction in parenting dysfunction, and reduction in emotional reactivity

Parenting Scale Global Score

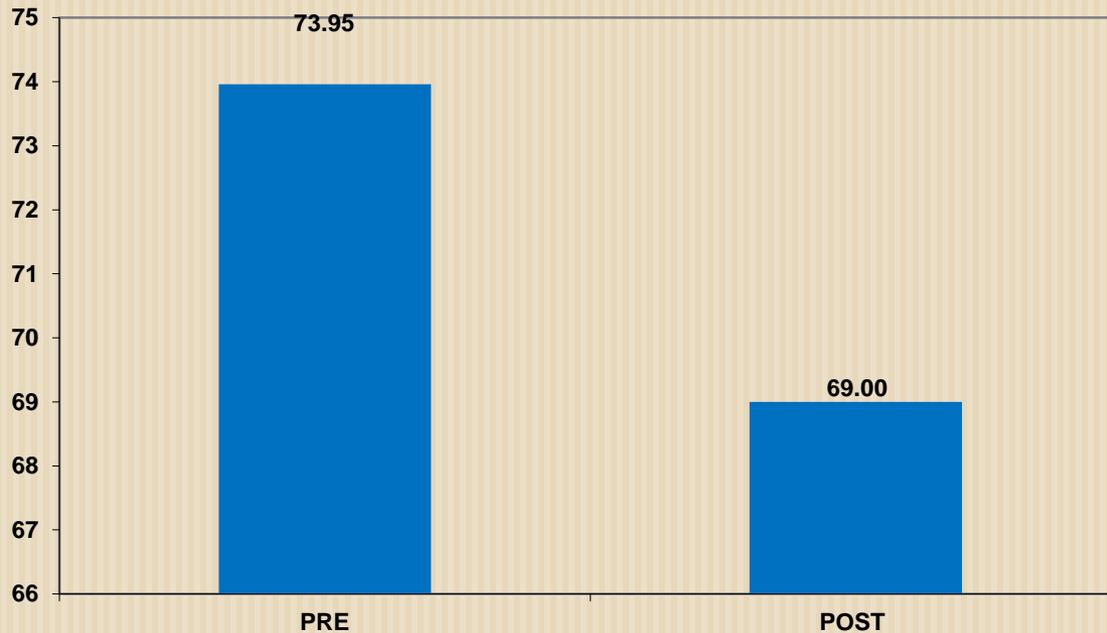
Prior to intervention, men's average scores (M=101, SD=16.49) indicated moderate parenting dysfunction.

Following intervention, men's average scores (M=98.1, SD=18.25) decreased, indicating improvement.

Most of this improvement was accounted for in the Over-reactivity sub-scale.



Pre and Post Mean About You Score



About You Score

Men's average emotional reactivity (anger) decreased over the course of the program showing statistical significance.

(M=73.95, SD=20.1)
to (M=69.00,
SD=19.1)

DADS SAY

engaging and motivating
fathers

“Men are under a lot of pressure to be strong and tough – I’ve SO let that go. Now my wife, kids and I work as a team and we are all way more happy.”

“I’ve never talked with other guys about stuff like feelings, my relationship, my problems, and especially about the fears I have for my family. It really helped me to open up and it felt really good. I didn’t think other guys felt the same way about their stuff.”

DADS SAY

increasing awareness and acknowledgement of parenting behaviour and the impact on children

“My child was hurting others and I realized that I was role modeling the same behaviour.”

“I wouldn’t want my daughters to marry men like me.”

*“My entire family has changed!
And I realize it’s because I’ve changed.”*

DADS SAY

increasing parenting
skills/effective parenting

*“Now I try to
treat my family
as if they were
guests in my
house.”*

*“I have learned that taking
responsibility for my own
actions and being a positive
role model is the most
important part about being
a dad.”*

DADS SAY

increasing affect regulation
(i.e. anger)

"I learned in group you choose how you think, feel and behave."

"I have learned that I have control over my reactions and emotions."

DADS SAY



PROGRAM ADHERENCE, GROWTH & CHALLENGES

- Fidelity checks for adherence to the MF Manual have been conducted on 6 cycles (mid-cycle) with very high adherence on 12 criteria
- Recent addition of a meditation component
- Great potential for reduced child welfare involvement – need to find means to measure this aspect
- Need for control group to strengthen findings
- We do not have corroborating data from partners/ex-partners

EVALUATION SUMMARY

- Very high retention rates speak to high engagement
- Steady positive outcomes for participating fathers
- Standardized measures indicate change in a positive direction for each of the key targetted areas of motivation, parenting and control of anger

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Let's discuss!

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THANK YOU



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Jared Erondu, Photographer, United States