



DOING THE BEST I CAN: FATHERHOOD IN THE INNER CITY

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**THE PROBLEM OF FATHER
ABSENCE AMONG UNMARRIED
MEN**

“[Unwed fathers] never signed on to anything.... They never agreed to abide by any fatherhood code. They do not have--they have never had—any explicit obligation to either their children or to the mothers of their children.”

David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 1995

“It is unmarried fathers who are missing in record numbers, who impregnate women and selfishly flee. And it is these absent men, above all, who deserve our censure and disesteem.”

William Bennett, *The Broken Hearth*, 2001

“No longer is a boy considered an embarrassment if he tries to run away from being the father of the unmarried child”

Bill Cosby, Speech to NAACP, 2004

“[T]oo many fathers...are missing - missing from too many lives and too many homes. They have abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men.... We need fathers to realize that responsibility does not end at conception. We need them to realize that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child - it's the courage to raise one.”

Barack Obama, Father's Day Sermon at the Apostolic Church of God in Chicago, June 15, 2008



**WHAT IS THE RIGHT DIAGNOSIS?
LACK OF CARING OR
SOMETHING ELSE?**



STRONG FATHER THIRST

A DESIRE TO BE DIFFERENT FATHERS THAN
THEIR OWN DADS

One

WHAT DEMOGRAPHY TELLS US: NOT JUST SELFISHLY FLEEING

1. Most participate in the birth of their child
2. Most voluntarily claim paternity
3. ~80 percent of fathers (and mothers) say they are together in a romantic relationship by the time the child is born
4. 75-90% say there is at least a 50-50 chance they'll marry the child's other parent, with most putting the chances at good or certain.
5. Almost all, 98 percent, say they want to be involved in their child's life

▪ Results from the 1998-2000 baseline wave of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Survey



THE STORY OF ANDRE GREEN

“THINK BACK TO WHEN YOU FIRST LEARNED SHE WAS PREGNANT. WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST REACTION TO THE NEWS?”

Basic responses ranging from negative to positive:

- Rejecting
- Shaken or scared
- Ambivalent
- Accepting
- Happy

Name	Race	Response
Robert	Black	I was excited, but then I thought "I gotta get out of here and support her."
Ozzy	White	I always wanted one.
James	White	When I found out she was pregnant, everything changed. I was like, "I don't care if she is cheating." And at first I was so happy.
Tim	White	I didn't mind at all! I was happy. Well at the time, I thought I cared about her. I thought I really loved her.
Monte	White	I was ready to have a kid.
Wilbert	Black	I was so happy, even though in the back of my mind I wondered, "Is it mine?"
Steven	Black	I was glad! It was no major obstacle.
Lacey	Black	I was going to have a baby! I was happy!
Omar	Black	I was happy! All the other girls killed my babies. I said, "She's my first, I'm gonna give her everything."

Name	Race	Response
Seven	Black	My first son, I really looked forward to having him.
David	Black	I was happy. She was having a boy.
George	White	I said, "I love you," you know, "I'd love to have a child with you."
Kevin	White	I loved it. I love kids.
James	White	I [planned] it. I said I want to have a kid. I wanted to get my girlfriend pregnant and have a baby.
Stan	Black	I wanted a kid real bad
Darrell	Black	I was happy. Then I thought, "Damn, I got to get a job!"
Bernie	Black	I had wanted a child for years.
Amin	Black	Even though I was not in love, I wanted a son.



**“WHAT WOULD YOUR LIFE BE
LIKE WITHOUT YOUR CHILD?”**

TWO

AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS

Name	Age	Response
Kevin	21	I'd probably be in jail.
Q	24	[I'd be] dead, because of the simple fact that it wasn't until Brianna was born that I actually started to chill out.
Mike	27	I'd probably be dead somewhere, or back in hail, in and out of rehabs. It's given me something to fight for, something like a destination. I got to GO somewhere.
Apple	27	I guess after I got caught up in the bad life, as far as jail, the kids helped me keep my head up, look forward. I got something to live for. Kids give you something to live for.
John A.	34	I don't think I would be as happy as I am now. Cause my kids make me feel totally different.... I feel more like a man.
Seven	37	I couldn't imagine being without them because when I am spending time with my kids it is like, now that is love. That is unconditional love.... It is like a drug that you got to have. No I would never want to be without them
Lee	42	Without the kids I'd probably be a dog. I hope not with AIDS

WHITE FATHERS

Name	Age	Response
Michael	21	Basically like drugs, and robbing cars. I didn't want my son to look at me and think that's okay.
Alex	22	I would be out getting high because I would not have [anything]. I would have my girlfriend but my baby is the most important thing in my life right now.
Will	24	I think I'd probably be in jail. My little brother is in jail and I figure without kids, whatever he was doing I'm sure I would have been doing it with him.
Tony	26	I'd either be dead [or] I probably would have went to college . . . I'm saying dead because I think she's the only thing that make me stop [using.]
Walt	37	I would be dead. I would have killed myself a long time ago . . . I already tried suicide twice.
Bill	38	I'd still be out there.... I'd still be on drugs and sick. I think about my kids and there's just this HOPE [I have now] of getting a good relationship with them."

LATINO FATHERS

Name	Age	Response
Rafael	18	If he wasn't born I would probably be out in the streets.
Daniel	23	I think the world would be finished for me...nothing would matter at all, life wouldn't matter to me because my child is everything to me!
Oscar	24	I would be in the street, you understand? They keep me in order, because the baby is the light of my life.
Misel	28	It would be like the life I had before, a crazy one.... I wouldn't have to worry about anyone but myself and I wouldn't care what happened to me.
Raymond	44	I think that I would still probably be on drugs or doing something [criminal]. It was really my daughter [who] changed me a lot. That is why she is so special because she waked me up. Every time I see her, I be happy."
Carlos	47	I probably would have been dead. I probably would have been dead a long time ago. I have friends that have died from overdoses of drugs, AIDS, alcoholic seizures and all kinds of stuff and most of those guys were those who didn't have children. I would have ended up like one of them.



ELVIS

What did you think your future was going to be before you had him?

I wasn't going to live past the age of 30.

And then once you had him?

I can't even picture my life without Elvis in it.... I had already make a promise to myself. I had told my friends, "I don't want to live past the age of 30. If I make it to 30, I'm going to take myself out.... He came into the picture when I was like 27, and that all changed. Everything changed. My whole life changed.



LACEY |

What would your life be like if you hadn't had your children?

I can't image that one. I really can't.... Because my life without them, it would be empty. It would be empty. Because that's what kept me going, knowing that I had to come out [of jail] and be there for them.

How did you see your future before you became a father?

I didn't have no future.... I didn't care. I lived for the moment.

Did you think you would live to see 42?

Nope. Nobody expected me to be there to see 17 . . .

Did you imagine that you'd be doing something career wise?

No career. I'd be a big gangster.



**“IT’S LIKE A DRUG
YOU’VE GOT TO
HAVE.”**

Nelson Rios



THE GOOD NEWS

Children have a tremendous power to transform young disadvantaged men's lives!



THE BAD NEWS

The process of relationship formation makes the odds long that a father will remain closely connected to his child throughout the life course.

Men end up slaking their father thirst through serial, selective fathering, a highly uneven pattern of fathering that involves intensive investments in some children, with little or no investments in others.



PROCESS OF RELATIONSHIP FORMATION

THREE



AMIN JENKINS

Well my [youngest] son's...mother, I met her at the University of Pennsylvania hospital. She was attracted to me when I first saw her and I made my approach. We begin to socialize and communicate and then from there we began to affiliate and at some point in time we became intimate and my son was born.

JOHN CARR

Actually she was dating a friend of mine and somehow... she wanted me. But it was my friend's girl, so I didn't want to have nothing to do with it. But then [my friend] heard some shit [and] started talking shit saying he would kick my ass. So I was like "whatever. Then I will be with your girl." Eventually, I just got stuck with her for a little while.



TIM O'BRIEN

I was hanging at a friend of mine's house, and her and a couple of her friends were there, and she used to go out with my friend. My friend was trying to get back with her, and I ended up getting with her.... We were only together for about two months, and she was getting pregnant.... I didn't mind at all.

WILL DONNELLY

I had just come out of a juvenile institution. I think I just turned 17...and I started going with her friend. And then one day she came around and we started talking, then I went with her and left her friend, and me and her got together and started having kids together and then we got closer and closer. Then we started living together.

DAVID WILLIAMS BEFORE.....

[When I was first with Deborah] I had a girlfriend on the side too, Kathy. She's somebody that I met at a [Narcotics Anonymous] meeting. We got close and we were helping each other [with our addictions]. One thing led to another and we got intimate.... Me and Deborah would get into an argument, she'd tell me to leave, I'd go stay with Kathy. (So how did you end it with Kathy?) Deborah got pregnant, and I had to do what was right.

DAVID WILLIAMS AFTER....

Each month [of the pregnancy], you know, we got closer and closer. I wanted to be with her more.... And then like 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, she had me running to a Pathmark [grocery store] buying different foods. So that brought us a lot closer too. And then, watching [him] born [brought us even closer]. On her last push he came spinning out like a bullet! Nothing was more beautiful than Julian. The way he came out of his mother..., that was amazing. And I held him, I didn't want to let him go.

PROCESS OF RELATIONSHIP FORMATION IN *DOING THE BEST I CAN*

Most conceptions leading to a live birth....

- “I just wasn’t thinking at the time” 50%
- Only a line portion (less than 1 in 5) planned

Childbearing occurs when men are in highly tenuous relationships

- Short “courtship”, little selectivity
- Conception: “Just not thinking at the time”/”One thing led to another”
- Pregnancy prompts the “real relationship”
- It’s “all about the baby”

Childbearing occurs when men are in highly tenuous circumstances

- Unstable employment
- Still in a pattern of “rippin’ and running the streets” so in and out of prison and jail
- Substance abuse problems
- Unstable housing

CONSEQUENCES

Frequent breakup

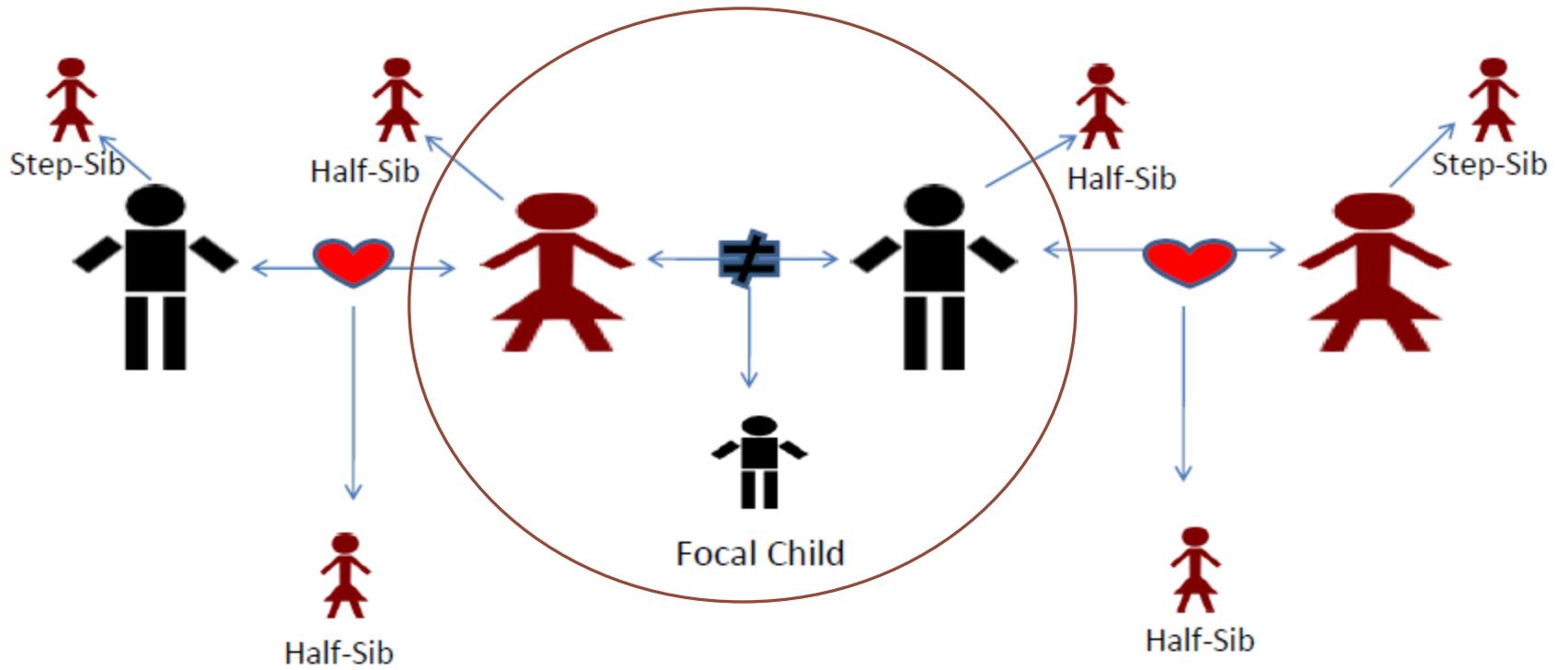
- 1/2 in the first year
- More than two thirds by the child's fifth birthday

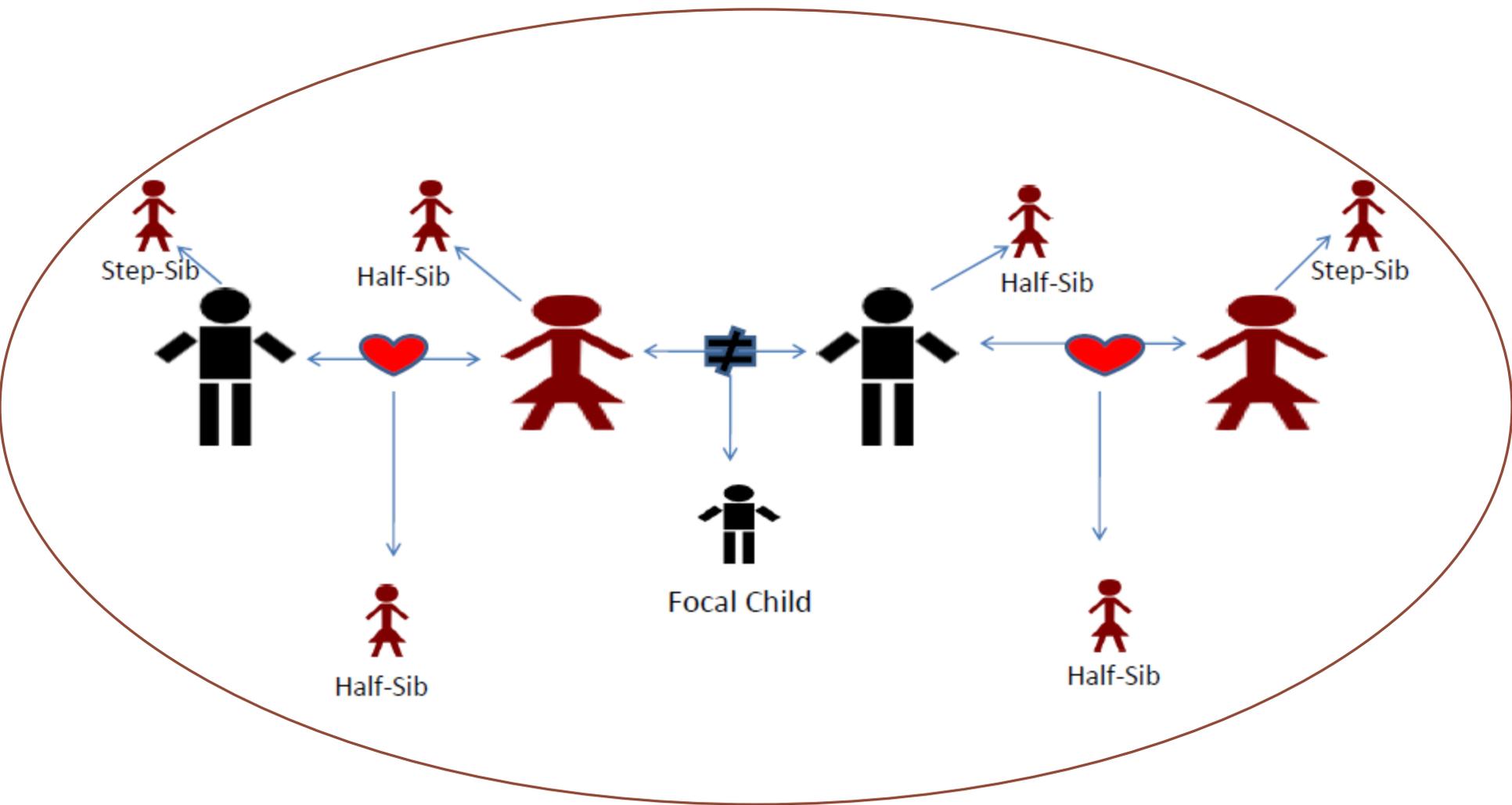
Highly contentious co-parenting relationships

New competing obligations to new romantic partners, social children, new biological children

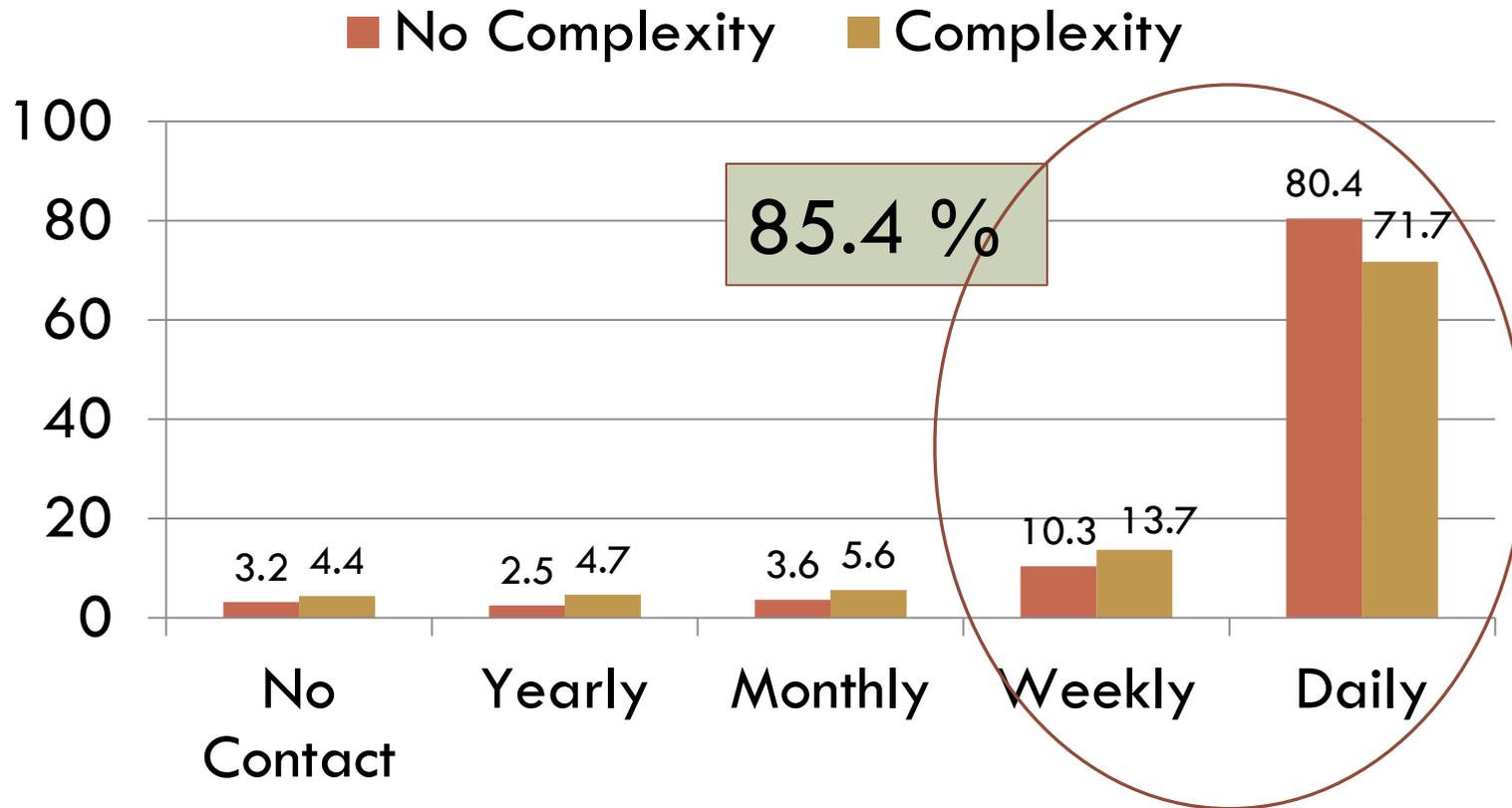
- Obligation overload

Maternal gatekeeping sparked by her desire to keep a new relationship intact

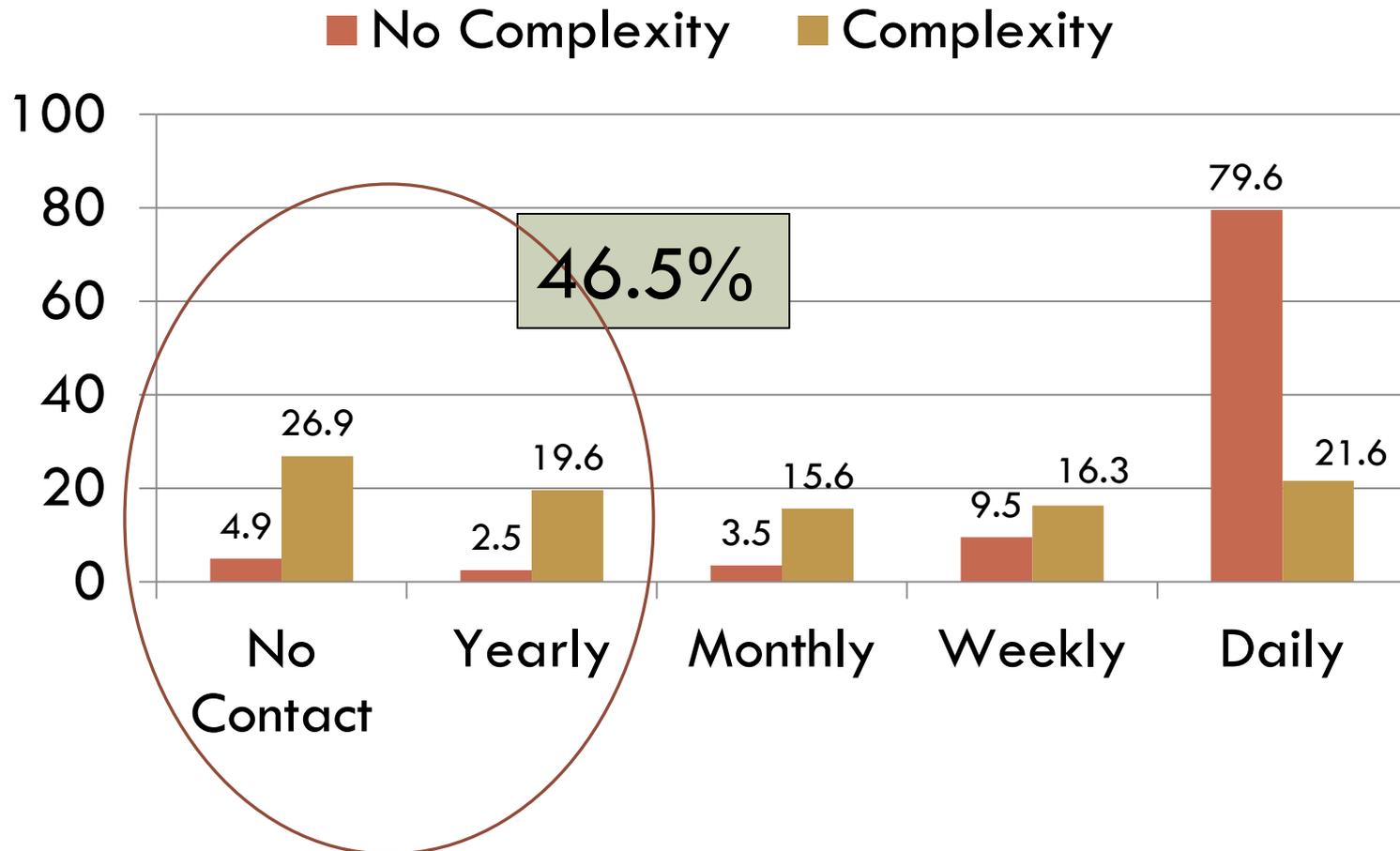




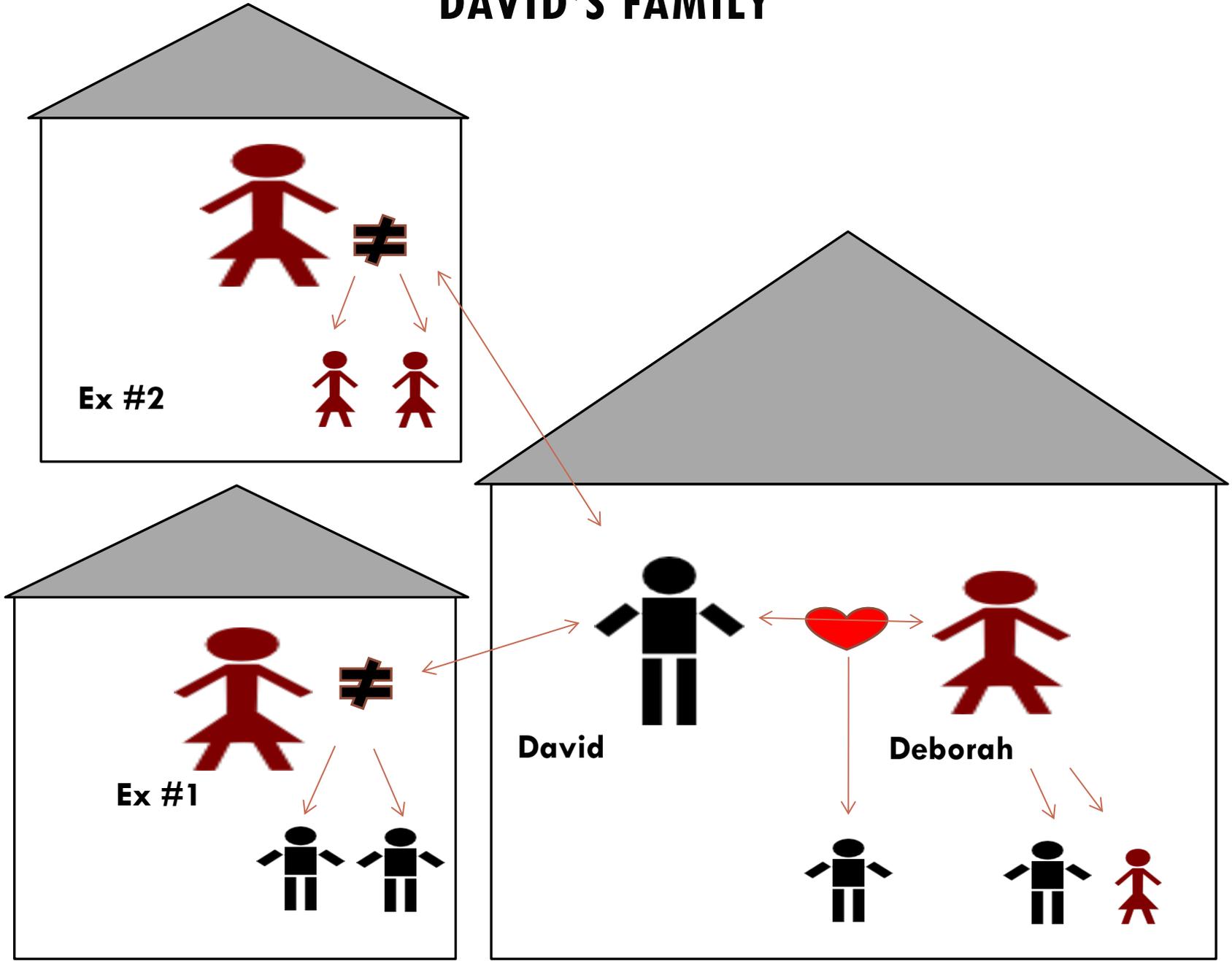
CHILD INVOLVEMENT FROM A FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE: MAXIMUM CHILD INVOLVEMENT (AMONG MEN WITH NONMARITAL BIRTHS)



CHILD INVOLVEMENT FROM A FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE: LEAST CHILD INVOLVEMENT (AMONG MEN WITH NONMARITAL BIRTH)



DAVID'S FAMILY



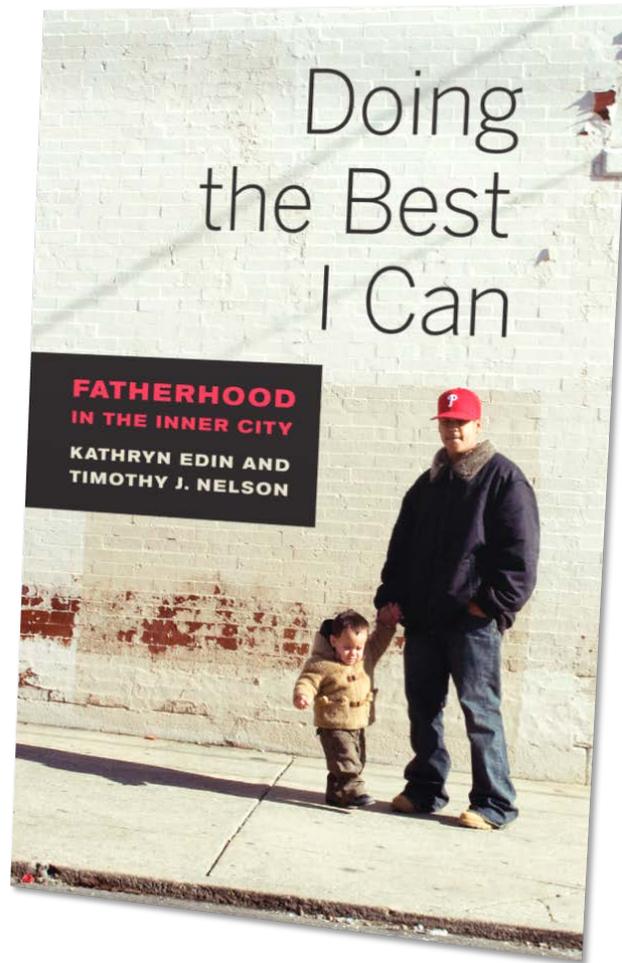
BOTTOM LINE

This process puts fathers on a *family-go-round*

And puts children on a *father-go-round*, often with no adult male that invests in them throughout the early life course, to see them through middle school and high school, much less college

SOLUTIONS

1. All pregnancies should be intended
2. Capitalize on father thirst



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