In this month's Take Care of Your Health Today column, we focus on the critical parenting role that Black fathers play and the importance of including the support they offer to their children and their families. Despite facing significant challenges, including the support they provide to their children, Black fathers are making strides. This month, we explore resources for Black families and their caregivers and the importance of Black fatherhood.

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Engaged Black fathers strengthen health of their kids, communities — and themselves.

According to statistics from the Pittsburgh Bureau of the Census, there are more involved and engaged Black fathers from other racial groups. About 36% of Black dads who live with their kids, compared to 48% of White dads, report that they have an absence and are unengaged in their kids' lives. This is a significant difference from the 30% of White dads who report an absence and are unengaged in their kids' lives. These findings emphasize the importance of supporting Black fathers and empowering them to be partners and mentors, we must address some of the barriers that prevent them from fully engaging in their kids' lives.

While Black fathers are less likely to marry their children’s mothers than White and Hispanic fathers — fact that often the relationship with their female partner can begin to include more than one child, and often the relationship is more stable and supportive than relationships between Black fathers and their children. This is a strong indicator that Black fathers are more likely to be involved in their kids’ lives, which is a great sign for Black children.

While we also interviewed clients in our program who have been struggling with the loss of a partner or a family member, we found that these clients were also interested in providing a warm welcome to Black men who’ve been disconnected from their families or who’ve lost their partners. We support Black men via our Black Male Institute (BMLDI), which is focused on creating a safe and supportive environment for Black men to connect with others who are facing similar challenges. Through this program, we work with clients on identifying their strengths and focusing on strategies to improve their relationships with their children.

There’s no doubt Black parents and caregivers face unique challenges and pressures in raising their children. These challenges include financial stress, lack of access to resources, and limited social support systems. In the Pittsburgh region, these challenges are compounded by systemic racism and bias, which can create additional barriers to Black parents’ ability to provide the best possible care for their children.

The challenges show that many of our families are less likely to receive support and resources that are available to them. This highlights the importance of engaging with families and helping them navigate the system to access the support they need.

A Pew Research Study on Fatherhood found that 54% of men who are Black, Hispanic, or Asian are more involved in their children’s lives than White men. This finding is significant because it indicates that even though Black fathers may be less likely than White fathers to marry their children’s mothers, they are still more likely to be engaged in their kids’ lives compared to Hispanic fathers. This finding underscores the importance of supporting Black fathers and encouraging them to be involved in their children’s lives.

For more than 20 years, the Family Foundations Early Head Start created equal opportunity for school readiness and success

For more than 20 years, the Family Foundations Early Head Start program has been helping low-income families, including those who are Black, prepare their children for school success.

The program’s goal is to help parents/caregivers increase their knowledge and preparedness for success. Our teams help families meet the needs of their young children, from birth to five years old.

Family Foundations Early Head Start is a high-quality early childhood education and care program that focuses on preparing children for school readiness and success.

Family Foundations Early Head Start creates a more equitable opportunity for all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. The program helps ensure that all children have access to high-quality early childhood education and care, which is essential for school readiness and success. This is a critical step in addressing the racial and economic disparities that exist in our society.

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For more information, visit www.pitt.edu/family-foundations/early-head-start.