

FATHERS MATTER



CONNECT GROUP

Facilitator's Toolkit

HEARTLINES

**Are you a father, father-to-be,
father figure, someone who
works with fathers or interested
in becoming a father?**

The Fathers Matter initiative celebrates and supports
active, present and positive fatherhood.

www.fathersmatter.org.za

**FATHERS
MATTER**

is an initiative of

HEARTLINES

THE CENTRE FOR VALUES PROMOTION

www.heartlines.org.za

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Introduction



Globally, and in South Africa, not many people understand the importance of fathers being positively present and involved in their children's lives. Everyone knows how valuable mothers are, but fathers aren't always seen in the same way.

A father plays such an important role in a child's development, emotional well-being, educational achievements and future productivity – and we see this in research and through people's personal experiences.

How many of our problems as a society would be reduced if children grew up with fathers who supported them, spent time with them, taught them and encouraged them? How many of our children would be more balanced, secure and well-adjusted?

But many children grow up without a loving and supportive father or positive male figure in their lives.

Heartlines is working to help change this through its **Fathers Matter** programme, part of which includes the **Connect Groups** described in this resource. This Facilitator's Toolkit was developed for anyone wanting to run a Connect Group, be it in a Christian context, or a mixed group.

What is the Fathers Matter project?



Fathers Matter is an initiative to support the positive and active role of fathers and men in the lives of children, in order to lessen the risks linked to the absence of fathers or positive male role models. Fathers Matter is a project by Heartlines, the Centre for Values Promotion, a social change NPO that promotes positive behaviour change using stories and values-based resources.

Why fathers are important

Research shows us that children who grow up without the active, positive presence of one or more men in their lives (not necessarily their biological fathers) puts them at high risk of mental illness, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, poor educational and economic outcomes, and becoming victims or perpetrators of violence, including gender-based violence. In South Africa, an overwhelming majority of children have absent fathers.

Although these risks are not a guarantee that a child won't grow up to be healthy, successful and capable, and many children of single mothers do flourish, the benefits children get from having a positive, active father or father figure are huge.

But fathers need support

Many fathers and father figures need support to be positively present and engaged. **It can be difficult to know what to do**, how to be a role model, or how to build into their child's mental, physical, social, spiritual and emotional development. **Men need to be able to talk, share and be supported in the roles that they play.**

The **Fathers Matter Connect Groups** have been created to help do just that.

What is a Fathers Matter Connect Group?



The aim of the Fathers Matter Connect Groups is to get groups of men in a workplace, social club, local church, or from any other context, to support one another as fathers, or father figures, and to provide them with useful information, resources and discussion materials.

The Connect Group initiative is a peer-to-peer mentoring and accountability project – not a complete course on how to be a better father. It has been created to:

- Cultivate the belief that fathers matter, in the same way that we believe that mothers matter.
- Help men feel motivated to be better fathers.
- Encourage more men to mentor other men to be better fathers.
- Motivate the members to support and encourage each other as fathers outside of the group sessions.

What does a Fathers Matter Connect Group look like?

A Fathers Matter Connect Group is a group of men who meet on a regular basis to talk, share and support each other.

Heartlines will provide resources that can be used to guide and inform your group.

We suggest that groups have around six to eight people in them. Smaller groups can also work, but for larger gatherings where there are more than eight men, we recommend you divide into smaller groups. WhatsApp can be a useful platform for Connect Groups to meet virtually if it's not possible to meet in person.

Groups can include people with existing relationships, but **there is great value in a group that is made up of men of different ages and backgrounds**. That way, younger fathers can learn from the wisdom of more experienced fathers. A group can also include yet-to-be fathers, single fathers, etc.

What to expect from the Fathers Matter modules

There will be a number of modules available for Connect Groups to work through together. Each module will have between four and five sessions. You should set aside about 1 to 1.5 hours for each session.

Module 1, the Core Module, is where you should start.

After that, you and your group can choose which module to do next, depending on the specific needs of your members. The first module explores the idea: “Yes, fathers matter – here’s why.”

Each session in the first module includes:

- An icebreaker (Typically light and fun, a simple way to get to know each other.)
- Setting the scene (A short summary or story to set the context for the session. The facilitator can read directly from the resource or adapt the story to suit the group.)
- Video/s
- Questions to guide a conversation/story-sharing
- Reflection, affirmation and scripture/prayer time – for Christian groups
- Action point or tip

These are the topics covered in the Connect Group modules:

Module 1: Fathers Matter Core Module

Session 1: Why fathers matter

Session 2: Understanding our own father stories (Part 1)

Session 3: Understanding our own father stories (Part 2)

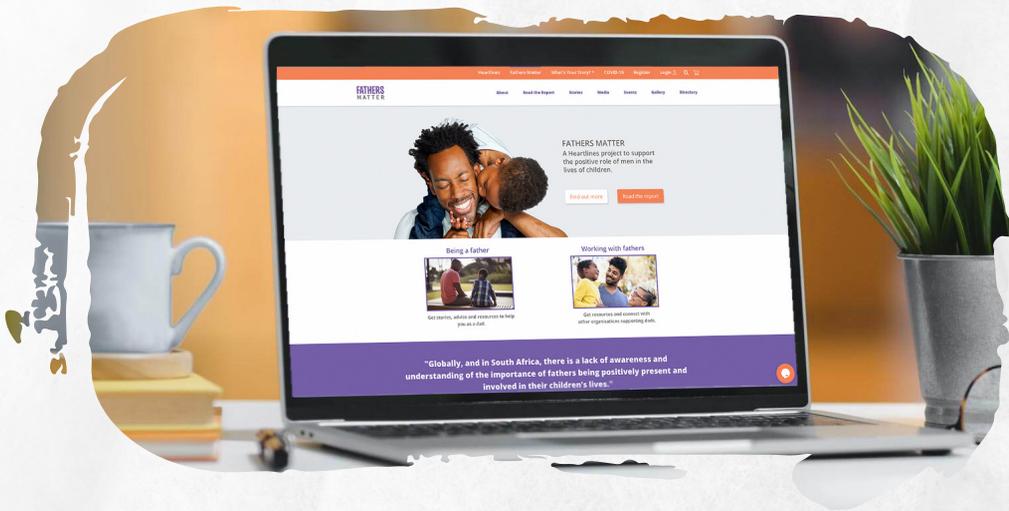
Session 4: What is a father?

Session 5: The father I want to be

Upcoming modules include:

- **Bridging relational difficulties (in your fathering)**
- **Fathering in the first 1000 days**
- **How culture and context impact your fathering**
- **Fathering a child of 3-6 years**
- **Fathering a child of 7-11 years**
- **Fathering teenagers**
- **Fathering young adults**

How to start and run your Fathers Matter Connect Group



To start a Fathers Matter Connect Group, we recommend working through the following list:

1. Find the right champion. This should be someone who has the vision and time to get things going. You (the person reading this) might well be that champion. If not, think of people in your church or community who might be suitable.
2. Decide who you would like to invite to your Connect Group. Think of people you know who would benefit from being part of this group. Try to bring people together from different age groups and backgrounds.
3. Aim to include six to eight people. Having more than this makes it difficult to share and connect deeply.
4. Invite people to participate. This can be done by email, WhatsApp, or phone, but speaking face-to-face is often best.
5. Ask them to commit to attending. Initially invite people to join for the first module. They can then decide whether they want to continue after that.
6. Set a date and time for the first meeting. Let everyone know that each session will be between one and one and a half hours long.
7. **NB: While COVID-19 is affecting social gatherings, your group might decide to meet online using Zoom, WhatsApp or Google Meet (or have some members meeting remotely and others meeting in person).**



FATHERS MATTER

A Heartlines project to support the positive role of men in the lives of children.

[Sign up and get free resources](#)

Are you a father?



Get tips, resources and inspiring stories to help you as a dad.

Do you work with fathers?



In order to access the content to run a Connect Group, you'll first need to sign up and create a profile on our online resource centre at www.fathersmatter.org.za

Signing up on the Fathers Matter resource centre

1. Go to www.fathersmatter.org.za on your mobile phone or computer.
2. Click **Sign Up** on the orange navigation bar at the top of the page.
3. Fill in your name and contact information, then press **Next**.
4. Click on the arrow next to **Organisation** and then choose 'Personal' or any other relevant option.
5. Fill in the other applicable or required information. Create a password. Then hit **Sign Up**.
6. Check your email inbox for a confirmation email and click on the link in the email to activate your profile.
7. Go back to www.fathersmatter.org.za and log in.

You're all set and will now be able to view and download all the free resources available across our Heartlines projects, including the Fathers Matter Connect Group content.

What you need to run your Connect Group

Once you've signed up, you can access and download all the Connect Group resources to run your sessions.

Here is a list of things you'll need for each session:

- A digital or hardcopy version of the outline for the session for each group member.
- A laptop or USB-compatible screen if you're meeting in person.
- A copy of the videos for that session downloaded onto a computer or USB flash drive. Or a download/link of the video material for that week to share with your group online or on WhatsApp.
- A notebook and Bible – for Christian groups.

If you don't have a way to show the videos, you can leave that section out. But we strongly recommend that you do show them, even if it's on someone's tablet.

How to prepare for each session

How you prepare for every session, how you make people feel comfortable, and how honest you are when you share will set the tone for your Connect Group.

- Before each session, read through the material.
- Spend some time reflecting on your own relationship with your father. This course may bring up some strong emotions or unresolved matters regarding your own father story. If necessary, discuss this with someone you trust beforehand, to better equip you as you facilitate this course. You may also want to read some additional material, which we recommend on our site.
- If you have time, watch the video clips before each session.
- Remind all members about details for the upcoming session, and any pre-work needed.
- Maintain a positive, respectful attitude!

If you're running a Christian connect group:

- Spend some time in prayer for the group.
- Encourage people to bring their Bibles.
- Expect God to work in people's lives during and after the discussions.

How do I facilitate a Connect Group?

Well done for putting up your hand to facilitate a Connect Group! It's not an easy thing to do, but it's very rewarding. As the facilitator, you set the tone for how safe and empowered people feel to share their stories.

Your role as a facilitator or small group leader is to:

- Welcome all members equally.
- Create a safe space for exchanging ideas, opinions and stories.
- Help the group take a journey of discovery together.
- Model respect, trust, understanding, empathy and safety.
- Prepare well, including praying for your group if applicable.
- Stick to the timing guidelines as much as possible to ensure that group members get the most out of each session.
- Create an environment where people feel free to express their thoughts. Watch for body language and encourage those who are quiet to share their opinions.
- Gently remind everyone to not be “that person” in the group: the one who talks so much they don't give anyone else a chance to! As the facilitator, don't be “that person” either.
- Allow people to share examples from their lives that could enhance the learning experience.
- Once you've run a Fathers Matter Connect Group, we'd love to hear your feedback on how it went! Please feel free to share testimonies, photos or videos with us on any of these channels:

Email: fathersmatter@heartlines.org.za

Website: fathersmatter.org.za

Facebook: Fathers Matter ZA

Twitter: @HeartlinesZA #FathersMatterZA

Ways of sharing your father story



During the Core Module there is an opportunity for each person in the group to share a bit about their own father story.

The idea is that each man in the group (three or four people a week) takes a turn to tell their story. About 10 to 12 minutes are allocated for each person to share.

If you have a group of more than eight people, we suggest breaking into smaller groups or making time for another session for sharing these stories.

The questions are only a guide and those sharing are free to tell their story in any way they would like to.

The questions used in this session are:

- What type of relationship did you have with your father growing up? Was he involved, present, absent, a positive influence?
- How has that relationship with your father shaped your own story? And in what ways has it impacted your relationships?
- What's one personal commitment you want to make in the area of your fatherhood?

You can add other questions that you feel are relevant. As the leader, be prepared for some emotions to come out during the sharing. If it seems appropriate, get one or two people to affirm or pray for the person who has shared.

Tips for listening and sharing



We know that some men aren't used to talking and sharing openly about sensitive matters. While we don't want men in the Connect Groups to feel exposed, there are ways to encourage and help everyone share more openly and honestly. The material has been designed to make it easier for men to share in ways that they may not be used to.

Sharing is a deeply personal process. Ideally, we should be left feeling empowered, connected and affirmed after sharing, not misunderstood or hurt.

In order for that to happen, a safe space needs to be created. Three values are crucial for creating a safe space for sharing stories: **respect**, **understanding** and **trust**.

Respect: Having due regard or concern for the feelings, wishes, or rights of others.

Understanding: Being sympathetically aware of other people's feelings; tolerant and forgiving and compassionate.

Trust: A firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something.

Responding to uncomfortable stories



Sometimes people share in ways that leave us feeling uncomfortable, or they share things that are painful.

Here are some guidelines for how to respond to those situations:

- Try to identify what it was that upset you.
- Ask yourself how their sharing touched on (or differs from) your own experiences, beliefs or assumptions.
- Think about that person's background and life; how might their experience of life have shaped the way they see things?
- Think how your own experiences have shaped the way you see things.
- Ask yourself if there is something you could learn from their perspective?
- It is very important not to judge or correct the sharer, or interrogate them about their choices or actions.

There may be a time where someone shares about a problem they have and you, as the leader, don't feel able to help them. With their permission, refer them to a more mature person or a counsellor if needed.



We hope this toolkit has helped you as you prepare to run a Fathers Matter Connect Group. If you have any questions, please contact us at Heartlines. Our hope is that everyone in your Connect Group will find the experience enriching and transforming.

And don't forget to let us know how it goes. Contact us on any of these channels with questions or feedback:

Email: fathersmatter@heartlines.org.za

Website: fathersmatter.org.za

Facebook: Fathers Matter ZA

Twitter: @HeartlinesZA #FathersMatterZA

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