

# THE SUCCESS SEQUENCE

What it Is and  
**Why You Should**  
**Share it** With  
the Families  
You Serve



**National  
Fatherhood  
Initiative®**

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# About National Fatherhood Initiative®

## Every child deserves a 24:7 Dad.<sup>SM</sup>

National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) is the nation's leading non-profit organization working to end father absence. Underlying many of society's most pressing challenges is a lack of father involvement in their children's lives.

### Our Mission

NFI works to increase father involvement by equipping communities and human service organizations with the father-engagement training, programs, and resources they need to be father-inclusive.

### Our Vision

NFI's vision is that all communities and human service organizations are proactively father-inclusive so that every child has an involved, responsible, and committed father in their life.

To see more about our mission, our partners, our impact, and how we can help you engage fathers, please visit [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org).

For fatherhood and family resources, including programs, resources, and other helpful materials, please visit [www.fathersource.org](http://www.fathersource.org).

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## Introduction

What if you knew something that could help a child succeed in life? Would you share it with them?

Would you also share it with parents so they could share it with their children? We hope so!

In this ebook, you'll learn about the "Success Sequence," a formula that helps young adults succeed and achieve economic self-sufficiency in America. It has been proven to reduce the likelihood of poverty and set up future parents for success.

In the coming sections, you'll learn more about the Success Sequence, the benefits it offers families, the research that supports it, and why and how you can share it with the dads and moms you serve.

## What is the Success Sequence?

The Success Sequence involves three steps taken by individuals **before having children**:

1. Get at least a high school education
2. Work full time
3. Marry before having children

The great news is that among Millennials who follow this sequence, 97% are not poor when they reach adulthood. The link remains strong even when this cohort of young Americans reaches their mid-30s (ages 32 to 38).<sup>1</sup>

Did you notice something? Although having a college degree is often associated with many benefits in life, Millennials who complete the Success Sequence but only have a high school education still have a much lower risk of poverty as adults.

Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of the Success Sequence is how it applies to everyone, including individuals who face structural or systemic disadvantages. **That's why it matters so**

**much: Young adults who follow the sequence—even in the face of disadvantages—are much more likely to forge a path to a better life.**

No matter their current situation, the most important thing is exposing them to it.

The fact is that people from disadvantaged circumstances who follow the sequence are much more likely to overcome challenges and achieve economic success! Consider this: the vast majority of Black (96%) and Hispanic (97%) Millennials who followed this sequence are not poor in their mid-30s, as is also the case for 94% of Millennials who grew up in lower-income families and 95% of those who grew up in non-intact families. Also, of those who do not have a college degree but only finished high school and who work and marry before having children, 95% are not poor by their mid-30s.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1,2</sup> <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/successsequencedisadvantagedya-final.pdf>

**Even better, not only does following the sequence help young adults in adverse circumstances avoid poverty, but those who manage to stay on the sequence forge a path to the middle class and realize the American Dream.** By their mid-30s, 80% of Black and 86% of Hispanic young adults following all three steps are in the middle-income or higher-income bracket, compared with 91% of White young adults. The shares are similar among young adults who grew up in lower-income families (82%) and those who did not grow up with both parents (84%).

Even though racial gaps in achieving middle-class status still exist after following the Success Sequence, most young Black and Hispanic adults are in the middle class or higher today after completing the three steps.

**Pro Tip:** Want to learn even more about the Success Sequence? Download the full report, “The Power of the Success Sequence,” [here](#).

## Why Share It with Dads and Moms?

The Success Sequence has been linked to better economic outcomes for children and young adults, and it’s crucial to educate them about it before they become parents. It’s equally important to share this information with parents who already have children and young adults, even if they didn’t follow the Success Sequence themselves.

However, it’s worth noting that a recent study, not every person who follows the Success Sequence will achieve economic self-sufficiency. Further, some people who complete the milestones in the sequence, but in a different order, will achieve economic self-sufficiency.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, it’s never too late to share the Success Sequence with parents to help them change direction and encourage their children to follow it for a better future.

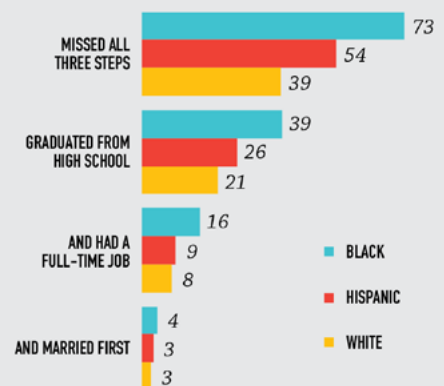
## Broad-Based Support for Sharing the Success Sequence

By now, you might be wondering how dads and moms might react to the Success Sequence, especially if they didn’t follow it themselves. Wonder no more.

A recent study found that the Success Sequence is quite popular among parents and the American public.<sup>4</sup>

**More than 95% of Black and Hispanic adults who followed the Success Sequence are not poor.**

% of adults ages 32-38 in poverty after completing each step



Notes: Based on adults surveyed in 2017-2018. Education and employed measured in 2010 when the cohort was in their mid 20s.

Source: IFS analysis of National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 cohort (NLSY97).

AEI/Institute for Family Studies

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mathematica.org/publications/what-influences-the-success-sequence-and-economic-self-sufficiency-findings-from-a-mixed-method>

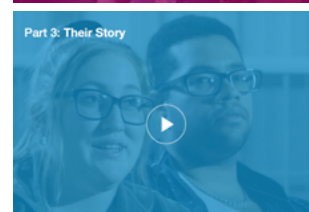
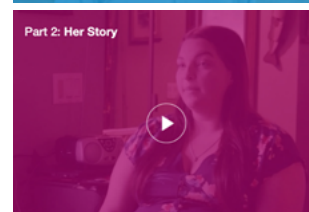
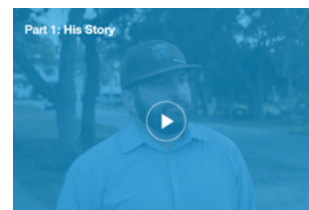
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Uncommonly-Popular.pdf>

- More than three-quarters of American parents (76%) favor teaching it in public schools.
- More than 70% of Democrats and 85% of Republicans favor teaching students the Success Sequence, as do 68% of Blacks, 74% of Hispanics, **and 72% of those adults who did not follow the Success Sequence themselves.**<sup>5</sup>

## How to Share the Success Sequence

Here are some ideas for sharing the Success Sequence with dads and moms. Use one or all three ideas!

1. Use the free resources on the Success Sequence website. Visit <https://ifstudies.org/success-sequence> to access three videos about the sequence you can show parents and other related content to share with them. The videos are diverse and relatable.
2. Introduce it during a fatherhood or related program (e.g., character development).
  - a. Tie it to a related topic in your program, such as work, school, or healthy relationships/marriage.
  - b. Introduce it as a one-off topic in group-based or one-on-one interactions, especially with men who are not yet dads.
  - c. Add the videos and related content from the website above to enhance the program.
3. Create a discussion with and among parents.
  - a. To broach the subject, ask: Have you heard of the Success Sequence? If someone has heard of it, ask them what they know, then proceed to “b” below. If no one has heard of it, ask the following questions: If you knew there was a formula you could follow to have a positive financial future, would you use it? Would you share it with your children? Discuss their responses with them.
  - b. Share (or confirm) the steps in the Success Sequence and why they matter. After sharing them, ask dads and moms to share their thoughts on the steps.
  - c. Ask about barriers to accepting the importance of the sequence (e.g., they didn’t do it that way, so why bother with it now).
  - d. Tell dads and moms how they can share it with their children. Use the motivation that parents don’t want to see their children grow up to face some of the same struggles they faced.



<sup>5</sup> <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-power-of-the-success-sequence-for-disadvantaged-young-adults>

## Regardless of how you share the Success Sequence, follow these five tips.

- 1) Explain that knowledge of the Success Sequence has power: it helps reduce poverty. It's also never too late to take the steps in the Success Sequence! In fact, a recent study found much lower poverty among unmarried mothers who later married, worked full-time, and had at least a high school education.<sup>6</sup> Following the sequence can lead to less poverty even after the birth of a child outside marriage.
- 2) Focus on the sequence of steps, not the (potential) barriers or personal opinions about the steps in it.
- 3) Reiterate that increased knowledge and making specific choices in a specific order can lead to better outcomes/futures.
- 4) Be careful to teach the sequence in a way that doesn't make parents feel badly if they didn't follow it themselves, and won't succeed as a result.
- 5) Frame the Success Sequence as a tool for parents to also share with their children to help them succeed!

In closing, the Success Sequence offers a powerful set of steps to share with parents that reduce the likelihood of them and their children living in poverty. We encourage you to start planning how to incorporate it!

Armed with this guidance and your passion to share this knowledge, we're confident you'll positively impact children and young adults' lives for years to come.

From all of us at [National Fatherhood Initiative](#)<sup>®</sup>, thank you for serving fathers and families.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/dynamics-of-families-after-a-nonmarital-birth/>