



sowing seeds

**Including Men/Father in
Service Delivery & Design.**

**Positive Practice for
Professionals & Managers.**

Introduction:

Context of work with Men/Fathers

Historical: -

- Family Support services have developed out of a need to meet the economic and patriarchal needs of a developing industrial country and this culminated in a division of labour between men/women. Therefore in a changing modern society services have found it difficult to respond to the changing roles of men/women.

Present:-

- Government has seen the need to include men in policy agendas as a result in the growing realisation that women are actively in the Employment market and more men are wanting to adapt lifestyles to their changing needs within the family.

Why work with Men and fathers

The value of early intervention programmes has been well established now for a number of years. It is particularly true when working with fathers. The peri-natal period provides a golden opportunity moment for interventions with men/fathers.

Although traditionally men are reluctant to engage with services generally, around the time of the birth of their children around 65% attend ante-natal classes.

Positive father involvement contributes to, and provides for, a whole range of better outcomes for children, young people and these include: -

- Higher educational achievement
- Fewer behavioural problems.
- Better peer relations.
- Less likelihood of engaging in offending behaviour
- Reduced levels of substance misuse
- Higher self esteem
- Increased occupational mobility.

The father/child relationship has wide ranging implications and these are even more marked in the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families. There are strong policy drivers for engaging with men/fathers.

The Legislative and Policy Framework within the last 3 years is as such: -

- The National Service Framework for Children, Young People & Maternity Services (2004)
- The Childcare Act (2006)
- The Gender Equality Act (2006)

- The Children’s Centre Practice Guidance & Planning and Performance Management Guidance (2006)
- Parenting Support Guidance & Strategic Grant Guidance (2006)
- Every Parent Matters (2007)
- Aiming High for Children (2007)
- Teenage Parents Next Steps (2007)
- Think Family (2008)
- Child Health Promotion Plan (2008).

Incorporating this legislative framework along with the convention on the rights of the child gives the inclusion of men/fathers a strong basis for action by services and individuals to recognise the importance of men/fathers in children’s lives.

Government needs to be able to communicate new policies to the public in a way that appeals to the large majority of parents. This narrative should make clear that “parents” means both mothers and fathers. It should focus on the needs of children and avoid four pitfalls: appearing to undermine single mothers, appearing to harm men’s economic contribution to work, appearing to devalue professional childcare, and appearing to be over-interventionist and prescriptive within the private realm of family life (the ‘nanny state’).

To this end, the following narrative is proposed: -

Government recognises that children need Government to support mothers and fathers¹. As every parent knows², raising children in a modern global economy brings new and particular challenges. Government will support mothers and fathers³, whether together or separated⁴, in their aspirations to do the best for their children⁵ and as they carry out their caring and earning responsibilities⁶.

Most⁷ mothers and fathers want to, or need to, share their earning and caring responsibilities. Government will enhance the support that public services give so that parents⁸ can choose for themselves how to share responsibilities⁹ and increase their sharing if they need to.

¹ Child-focused.

² And this includes many senior politicians.

³ Not “parents” because that is understood to mean “mothers”.

⁴ Equally inclusive of separated and intact families.

⁵ This is universally what parents want.

⁶ Reference to “responsibility” but in a way that is owned by parents rather than lectured about by Government.

⁷ But not all – sharing is a choice made by parents.

⁸ The use of the word “parent” now clearly refers to both mothers and fathers.

⁹ Not the nanny state – parents are driving the change, not Government.

Government will develop a legal and cultural expectation of substantial involvement of all fathers with their children from the earliest stages. We will take steps to make it easier for fathers to participate in the care and education of their children and maintain their support for their children throughout their children's lives: firstly, by tackling barriers in the workplace; and secondly by requiring child and family services to hold clearer and higher expectations of the father-child relationship, and to support it more firmly and proactively.

The contribution of cash and care to children from both parents in low income families and after separation is an important element in tackling child poverty.

Government, while supporting both parents¹⁰, has a duty to protect the rights and needs of children if parental care breaks down.¹¹ Ensuring a child's access to care and finance from both parents, where this is obstructed, is a responsibility of Government.

The first assembly of the Government's seven core aims for children and young people, based on the UN convention on the rights of the child, is a commitment to ensure that all children have a flying start in life. International research demonstrates the potential short and long term economic paybacks for investment in men/fathers in the early years of children's lives.

The equality act 2007 includes a duty to gender equality and with the impact assessment of services funded by the public sector it requires them to ensure that their services and service users are not disadvantaged on the grounds of gender and that services meet the needs of both sexes. Evidence from the DCSF, via a questionnaire (Oct 2007) sets out the legislative and policy framework that will ensure men/fathers are included in service planning and delivery. Through various pieces of work within Local Authorities, it has now become a fundamental aim to include men/fathers.

Definition of a Father: -

A wide range of individuals may act as a father figure to a child, not just those who are deemed to be the biological parent. They include: stepfathers, grandfathers, elder brothers, uncles, cousins, a mother's new partners etc. The key factor is that they are acting as a positive role model to a child.

Men & Fathers today: -

- 5.4 Million fathers living with dependent children.
- 178,000 lone parent fathers (up from 60,000 in 1970).

¹⁰ There is a deal – Government provides support, but enforces if that support is not used.

- Around 2 million non-resident fathers.
- 33% of childcare taken care of by men/fathers.
- 93% of men take time off during the birth of their children.
- 2005, 31% of father work flexi time compared to 11% in 2002.
- Only 44% of women with babies believe women are naturally better carers than men.
- 80% of men/fathers in BME communities compared to 68% of white fathers, want greater involvement with their babies.

Information from E.O.C 2005. Men and Fathers Today.

Men/fathers and Modern family life.

- Fathers well being and behaviour affects their children's development, such as low educational qualifications, no shared caring responsibilities, increases likelihood of 3 year olds having developmental challenges.
- Most Fathers have a warm and loving relationship with their children and are regularly involved in activities such as reading and playing with their child.
- Significant differences between father's access to and use of different types of leave and flexible working arrangements.
- Of the 15% of fathers who are Non-resident at the time of the child's birth two thirds were still in contact when child was 9-10 months old.

Family Life:-

As we have seen fathers matter to children. However their role is also important in respect of their relationship with their partner or ex-partner. Involving men/fathers in their role as parents will benefit the whole family. Grandparents, uncles, cousins, and other potential role models are also important. Supporting families to reach their full potential becomes much easier when we utilise all the resources within that family and community, rather than simply overburden the mother.

Research from maternity unit's states that when a man/father supports his partner the mother experiences labour much more relaxed and the birth is usually shorter. (Fatherhood Institute 2006).

Parents: -

"Our children are our future; their mothers and fathers its custodians. Nothing can therefore be more important than cherishing and providing the best possible care for all our pregnant

mothers, expectant fathers and babies, and equipping new parents with the skills and support they may need to enable every child to have a equal, confident and healthy start to family life.” *Patricia Hewitt*.

Very often the language we use when talking about services can itself impact on their outcome. Just as the traditional role primary care giver seen as belonging to the mother, so has the word ‘parent’ become similarly attributed.

The UK Government report, *Aiming High for Children: supporting families* (2007) says,

The very word “Parent” in relation to services can have the effect of excluding fathers – both because fathers often perceive the term to mean “mothers”, and because this can be reinforced by the approach of practitioners whose habits of working mainly with mothers are deeply ingrained. This impacts on the ability of both parents to fulfill their rights and responsibilities towards their children and, particularly after separation, can lead to fathers drifting out of the lives of their children. This can have a wider negative emotional, financial and educational consequences for the child.

Impact of father involvement on outcomes for children.

- Early involvement in children’s lives is associated with continued involvement:
- Associated with good Parent-Child relationships in Adolescence
- Reduced risk factors for involvement in anti-social behaviour and crime.
- Protection against mental health difficulties in later life.
- Children’s later educational attainment
- Protection against adult experiences of Homelessness:

Early father involvement does not protect against unemployment in adult children when other factors are taken into account. However, men with involved mothers when they were growing up were less likely to be unemployed than men with uninvolved mothers.

Fathers role in Child Development: what research tells us

Good Enough Dads

- Children with highly involved fathers tend to have:
- better friendships with better-adjusted children
- greater capacity for empathy
- higher educational outcomes
- fewer behaviour problems
- lower criminality and substance abuse
- non-traditional attitudes to earning and childcare
- higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction

(for reviews see Flouri 2005; Pleck and Masciadrelli 200)

A good-enough Father can 'BUFFER' a child against disadvantage

- Where mothers of very young children are employed full-time, substantial care by fathers moderates any negative effects
- Secure attachment with the father is an important protective factor against disturbance in children whose mother suffers from a mental illness, including Post Natal Depression
- Children at risk of psychosocial failure to thrive, maternal drug abuse, and poverty, talk and learn better when their fathers or father-figures are satisfied with parenting, provide financial support and engage in nurturant play

'Bad' Dads

- Children tend to do badly when their father's parenting is poor:
- Conflict with father, and fathers' harsh or neglectful parenting strongly associated with behaviour problems in children
- Fathers' harsh parenting has stronger effect than mothers' on children's aggression
- Getting on badly with EVEN ONE PARENT more than doubles likelihood of a young person engaging in anti-social behaviour

No dads

When children rarely or never see their fathers, they tend to:

- demonise or idealise them
- blame themselves for their absence
- suffer substantial distress, anger and self-doubt

Impact of Children's services working with Fathers

- Intellectual gains in six month old infants greater when BOTH mothers and fathers trained in infant communication
- Parent education can be delivered equally effectively to mother or father (i.e. fathers can be as effective change agents within families as mothers)
- Delivering parent education programmes to both parents is “significantly more effective” than delivering it to just one
- Each individual parent's sensitivity towards their child (and their child's attachment to them) enhanced when both parents are included in the intervention

Participation by fathers in interventions

leads to:

- increased knowledge and understanding of child development
- increased confidence in their parenting skills
- more sensitive and positive parenting
- greater involvement in infant and child care
- greater interaction with children
- In one study of 24 highly vulnerable families, only one father was unable to reflect usefully on his identity as a man, father and partner
- Paternal care of infants and young children by males from unpromising backgrounds can facilitate productive engagement with family and society

Fathers affect mothers' behaviour and relationships with their children

- **Child-mother attachment** more secure when child-father attachment is secure
- **Maternal depression** linked with poor relationship with baby's father, his non-presence at birth, lack of support & involvement from father, his rigid sex role expectations, his being critical/coercive/ violent, his own poor mental health
- Fathers' behaviour and beliefs impact on mothers' behaviour:
- **father's smoking** by far the biggest predictor of mother's smoking
- **father's understanding of benefits of breastfeeding** strongly connected with mother's likelihood of commencing and maintaining breastfeeding

Fathers and Child Protection: Current Research.

A number of reasons emerge as to why fathers are generally not currently engaged with child protection work and subsequent family court work.

- Men tend to play a smaller role in the lives of their children, leading professionals to conclude that they are less significant in the process of protecting children.
- Among fathers who are not particularly involved in the lives of their children, the presence of social work professionals tends to exacerbate these distant relationships rather than address them.
- Fathers generally can perceive the involvement of social workers negatively
- Non-offending fathers of sexual abuse victims can believe they should avoid physical and other forms of contact with their children, or don't know how they should respond, i.e. they do nothing to avoid doing any harm'
- Fathers, both abusive and non-abusive, may leave the home for a variety of reasons.
- Where parents have separated, mothers are often resistant to their former partners' involvement
- Professionals can perceive men, particularly those implicated in abuse, as a threat both to their clients and to themselves. This reduces the potential for working constructively with all those significant in the lives of the children, and relevant to their abuse.
- **Scourfield, Constructing men in child protection work, Men and Masculinities)** found that despite the mutually negative perceptions of professionals and fathers, their lack of involvement in the process was usually considered to be a bad thing.

There is a need to find ways to address the needs of families constructively without aggravating tensions.

- Non-offending fathers can have a significant role in the recovery process if they can provide verbal, emotional, and physical reassurance to their child. Stott found in her sample of abused children, that nearly four fifths of the children had a non-offending father figure. This emphasises the potential value of involving these men in their child's support.

Research taken from Fathers Direct, 2005

Featherstone (2001), Putting fathers on the child welfare agenda, Child and Family Social Work 6.

Bradshaw et al (1999), Absent Fathers?, Routledge, London, Cawson et al (2000), Child Maltreatment in the UK, NSPCC, London

Ryan (2000), Working with Fathers, DoH, Radcliffe, Oxford, Gibbons et al (1995), Operating the child protection system: a study of child protection practices in English local authorities, HMSO, London

Who do these guidelines apply to:-

The guidelines are intended for all those professionals involved in the delivery of all services that are for families, children and young people, these include Health, Education including Extended Schools, Health and Social Care, Sure Start Children's centers, Family Support, Youth Support, Connexions, Youth Offending and the Voluntary, Community & Faith Sector.

With the onset of children's trust arrangements, the development of District commissioning and multi-agency teams and other issues such as Safeguarding and contact point, it is imperative to find ways to creatively incorporate men/fathers into these arrangements.

Multi Agency Working:

Although all services need to be father inclusive, it is not always practical or indeed appropriate for them to bring men together in Men/father groups. However, where service providers are able to work together in an area they will be able to signpost men/fathers to whatever is currently available in that area, FIS officers have a key role in the promotion and implementation of informational needs to all universal and tier 2 services.

Strategies for engaging fathers should be routinely included in and set within the context of local authority Parenting, Family support, Drugs and Alcohol, Crime and Disorder and Housing strategies. As in the forthcoming JAR/LAA agreements these should also meet these regulatory guidelines in inspections.

Challenging the Barriers.

Although an ever increasing number of projects are now employing a Dads worker in one form or another, this in itself is not sufficient. Father inclusion is something that is the responsibility of the organisation and all workers should routinely see this as part of their work practice. It is not an optional extra or a piece of added value! We can only fully support all families when including men/fathers is embedded in each and everyone of our services. Managers need to make this clear to all staff and have the foresight to see this as an investment in the long term for their services and clients, this will mean where necessary staff have the appropriate training to take on this role, and this is included in supervision and appraisals.

As well as the cultural barriers to men/fathers taking on a greater involvement in family life, there are those we create ourselves.

To quote Aim Higher for Children: -

- Services that are insensitive to fathers needs; they do not adequately connect with the context of men/fathers lives or motivations.
- An overtly female focus amongst staff and service users, and lack of confidence to explain to female service users why it is important to engage with men/fathers.
- Staff underestimating the significance of a man/father's involvement if he is not visible to the service, or not living with the child.

Father Involvement:

Although many projects strive to persuade men/fathers to become more involved in the lives of their children, it is important to understand what is meant by involvement. There are a number of academic models of this currently available, the most prominent suggest there are 3 areas for this: -

- **ACCESSIBILITY:** a fathers presence and availability, this means by giving love, sharing physical time and play, emotional availability, giving time for listening and supporting change through reinforcing emotional language. Mental exploration of different ideas and concepts and raising awareness.
- **ENGAGEMENT:** direct contact such as care giving, reading, playing, and family outings etc.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** this is the ability to respond to the changing environment, this may include fully participating in decisions regarding the child's health, schooling, caring,

practical issues such as buying clothes, sleeping arrangements, and also having an insight into where your children are at any given time.

Young Fathers

Young fathers are probably the most invisible group in terms of service provision, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that they themselves tend to believe they are unwelcome and inadequate as parents. Researchers have found young fathers “mostly ignored, marginalized or made to feel uncomfortable by services, despite their desire for information, advice and inclusion.

Many young fathers report limited or no contact with Midwives, health visitors and social workers, identifying these young men should not prove to difficult when health and community services work together. However, health professionals often report they feel they lack the skills to successfully engage with these young men.

Participation:

The ultimate aim of involving parents in general, and men/fathers, in particular is to improve the quality of life for children and their families. Services which are developed in this way have the potential to be more relevant, better used and more responsive to the changing needs.

The DCfS guidelines on developing Father inclusive Parenting strategies states that “to support their child’s wellbeing and health, both Mothers and fathers need to be accessible and useful information, and services which are easy to navigate and treat them as partners. This means systematic engagement with fathers by all staff in all services including Maternity and Children’s services”.

Where services have been successful in engaging with men/fathers it is generally because they have taken the time to find out what exactly those men/fathers want or need from the service.

Communication:

Good communication is essential to all relationships. This applies as much to the father-child relationship as it does to that between the father and the mother of his children. It is particularly important in separated families, as professionals we also have a responsibility in how we speak and listen to services users in our professional relationships.

Promotion and Publicity:

Traditionally services have engaged with women and mothers, and publicity/promotion and other means of communicating information have been designed with them in mind. There is

clear evidence that men respond more positively when it is made clear that the information is meant for them. This may be as simple as including images of men with children in the literature. Again the choice of language can make a big difference between success and failure.

Assessment and Data Collection:

All services need to ensure that their systems for recording information about families include dedicated space to information about men/fathers and their role in the lives of children, especially with the growing number of reconstituted families and single headed households. This applies equally to initial contact as well as on-going work, it is exceptionally important in issues of safeguarding.

Fathers should be specifically invited to attend meetings, as we have seen earlier it is not enough to assume that inviting parents will mean that fathers think this means them. Not only must we ensure that fathers or male carers have an opportunity to be present but that they are offered every encouragement to fully engage in all and any discussions. Even when men/fathers are non-resident they are still important to their children. One of the best predictors of a father making regular payments to the CSA is when he is able to maintain regular contact and remain part of his children's lives.

Self Assessment Tool:

- Does your service meet its duty to Gender Equality as laid out in the Equality Act 2007?
- Do you stress to Men/Fathers/Male Carers the importance of their role, in relation to better outcomes for their children?
- Do you always engage with the "father figure" within a given family, as well as the child's biological parent (Father)?
- Do you make it explicit to all service users that the word Parent does not simply mean Women/Mothers?
- Have all staff have the opportunity to access appropriate training to work with men/fathers?
- Are you aware of what services for men/fathers are currently available in your area?
- Are you clear about what is meant by an involved man/father, and is this reflected in measured outcomes for the family?
- Young Men/fathers are often particularly hard to reach, do you have a specific strategy for achieving your targets within this area?

- Are men/fathers routinely included in consultations and the design of service provision?
- Do you always explore the options of communicating with separated men/fathers?
- Do you produce leaflets and posters specifically designed with men/fathers in mind rather than the traditional generic leaflet?
- Does your assessment and data collection routinely ensure that details of the man/fathers are included?

Conclusion:

Father-child relationships, whether they are positive or not, have an enormous impact on the outcomes for children, young people and families. Despite the fact that men/fathers are often invisible to services, they play a vital role, with the benefits extending across the whole family. Work with men/fathers therefore not simply about added value, but needs to be seen as a core component in providing a sure start for the children and young people in their lives.

Case Studies:

Case Study 1: Sowing Seeds Including Men Network events.

These meetings act as a conduit for managers and practitioners and men/fathers to raise awareness of issues impacting on men/fathers and for practitioners to share good practice whilst gaining insights into new research about men/fathers.

Case Study 2: Manchester PCT Service Providers: LGBT Parents group:

This group runs monthly for LGBT families to share and discuss issues that are relevant to them as parents and support is offered through share mentorship and social networking.

Case Study 3: Big Life Parenting group, Zion Resource center.

This parenting group has been successful in recruiting and retaining $\frac{3}{4}$ men on parenting courses, the impact of the men has been helpful in shaping the views of other parents who have attended.

Case Study 4: Sure Start Play and Stay, Manchester PCT Service providers, Zion Arts Centre.

This group is introducing parents to interact with their children through play, it has had in attendance 5 men, who have greatly benefited from the activity and state they will carry on.

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