

Engaging Fathers in Social Work Practice Guidance



Purpose of this Practice Guidance

Dudley's Centre for Professional Practice have created this Practice Guidance for all practitioners to utilise whilst working with children and families.

Audit activity and research tells us that assessment, planning and intervention for children often has an absence of the father's views, involvement, engagement. If fathers are not contacted, or are included minimally within intervention, this could ultimately result in potential safeguards or support for children being missed.

This guidance aims to achieve the following;

- Practitioners to understand the importance a father's role can have in the life of a child.



- To highlight the ways practitioners can positively engage fathers in Social Work practice, from the point of initial contact to the point Children’s Services end their involvement with families.
- To provide resources that practitioners can share with the fathers they work with to empower and educate them on their parental rights.
- To provide additional reading for practitioners to access to further their own knowledge in this subject area.

Including All Types of Fathers

This guidance for practitioners includes Social Work practice with fathers, stepfathers, males that have adopted a ‘fathering role’ in a child’s life, and situations whereby there is more than one



father involved. It does not seek to minimise the role of the mother or other important family members or carers. Its purpose is to acknowledge fathers can also play a significant role in their child’s life, and to encourage practitioners to be inclusive of them in their practice. This is of course dependent on risks and concerns that are potentially posed by the father to the child/ren.





Learning from Serious Case Reviews and Research

There is lots of learning about the importance of involving fathers within research. Studies have found that fathers' details are often missing on children's case files, and that they are often not invited to key meetings, including Child Protection Case Conferences about their children (Strega et al, 2008, Bayne & Holland 2010, Roskill 2011, [NSPCC 2015](#)). A consistent theme amongst Serious Case Reviews is that fathers are not consistently engaged in Social Care processes, and this can often result in paternal family support and resources being missed.

In September 2021, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published findings from their third national review, 'The Myth of Invisible Men'. This review examined the safeguarding of children under the age of one, who sustained non-accidental injuries from their father or other male carer that caused harm or ended their lives. The review concluded that fathers are not consistently and meaningfully engaged by Social Care, and this can make fathers invisible when taking into account their roles in the lives of their children. The review suggested that not enough is known about fathers' backgrounds, characteristics and trigger factors for the abuse the children sustained. One example was the lack of regular and significant involvement of fathers during the periods before and immediately after the birth of children from Midwifery services, during the periods before and immediately after birth. Additionally, it was found a lack of professional curiosity used in

discussions with fathers could contribute to an absence of information being ascertained, and ultimately the visibility of fathers being heavily reduced on children's Social Care records.

The review recommended there needs to be a wider change in government policies and programmes in order to reflect the importance of working with fathers and male carers. Local Authorities need to increase the availability and effectiveness of training for frontline practitioners to improve their awareness and understanding of engaging meaningfully with fathers.

Guidance When Making Initial Contact with Fathers

- Attempt to ascertain correct contact information for fathers utilising information from partner agencies, such as Health or Education. This prevents an over-reliance for this information from the mother, who may not be in a relationship with or on positive talking terms with the child/rens father.
- After obtaining these details, they can then be shared with agencies who may not have up to date or correct contact information, to ensure the father remains involved with other services involved with the family, such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).



- Practitioners should contact the child/ren's father in the first instance, if appropriate, rather than relying upon the mother to gather information from them regarding the referral being made about their child. This ensures that the father's views are obtained from the point of the family's initial contact with Children's Services.

- If the child's mother and father reside at the same address, practitioners should ensure all correspondence includes the names of **both** parents, or are addressed to 'The mother and father of ...'. This reduces the assumption that the letter is addressed solely to the mother and actively includes and engages both parents.



- Ensuring that several avenues are taken to contact the father, including phone calls, voicemail messages, text messages, letters and visits to the home address.
- Arranging meetings taking into consideration the working patterns of fathers, where possible, so that they can and are encouraged to attend meetings about their child.



Maintaining Positive Engagement with Fathers



- Where fathers cannot attend meetings about their child, practitioner' should always ensure that their views are ascertained and shared at the meeting, so that there is input from the father in his absence and he has a voice.
- Similarly, other professionals should be encouraged to contact the father prior to the meeting taking place, so they can discuss their involvement with the child and gain his views.
- Minutes of initial meetings and reviews, or conversations between the practitioner and father, should take place directly after meetings so he is apprised of what is happening in his child's life.
- The views, wishes and feelings of fathers should be obtained and included within *all* assessments and plans for children, where possible and appropriate. Not including fathers can result in additional support or safeguarding opportunities for children being missed, i.e. the father and paternal relatives not being considered within Genograms, Viability Assessments, and other Court processes.
- Finally, practitioners should ensure that the details of a fathers are on referral forms for support to partner agencies. This is particularly



important for fathers who may not engage with Children's Services, as they may engage more positively with non statutory agencies.

Empowering Fathers to Understand Their Rights

In some instances, fathers may not be aware of their rights as a parent to their child/ren. Practitioners working with families can offer clear, concise explanations as to what a father's rights are, i.e. explaining Parental Responsibility and what this means in the life of a child.



In addition to this, fathers can access information services that clearly explain their rights to them. As an example, the **Family Rights Group Website** aims to simplify and provide an understanding of Parental Responsibility, Family Time (Contact), Child Protection, Care Proceedings, the Care System and Adoption.
<https://frg.org.uk/get-help-and-advice/who/father's/>



Additional Reading for Practitioners

- **Community Care Article, 'Working with Fathers: Key Advice from Research'.**

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2018/02/19/working-father's-key-advice-research/>

- **NSPCC Hidden Men: Learning from Case Reviews.**

https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1341/learning-from-case-reviews_hidden-men.pdf

- **Research in Practice Publication, 'Working effectively with men in families – practice pointers for including fathers in children's social care: Frontline Tool'.**

<https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/publications/2017/july/working-effectively-with-men-in-families-practice-pointers-for-including-father's-in-childrens-social-care-frontline-tool-2017/>

- **The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel. 'The Myth of Invisible Men: Safeguarding children under 1 from non-accidental injury caused by male carers'.**

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1017944/The_myth_of_invisible_men_safeguarding_children_under_1_from_non-accidental_injury_caused_by_male_carers.pdf



Additional Resources for Fathers



- **Family Mediation Council**
<https://www.familymediationcouncil.org.uk/family-mediation/>
- **The Fatherhood Institute** <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/>
- **Families Need Fathers** <https://fnf.org.uk/>

