

Successfully Engaging Fathers in their Child's Early Years

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21st Century Fatherhood is...

- Diverse and changing
- Socially contested
- Often fragile
- Embedded in complex web of relationships and identities



Changing Fatherhood: Involvement

- 55% take formal paternity leave. Most new fathers who do not take leave could not afford to do so – and 88% of those wanted to (*EHRC 2009*)
- UK fathers carry out 25% of weekday childcare, and one-third at weekends. More where both parents work full-time (*EOC 2003*).
- 50% of mothers of 9-month-olds are in paid employment (*Dex & Ward, 2010*)
- 58% of men and 62% of women reject the male breadwinner role (*Dads and their babies; EOC 2005*) 70% of men & women want fathers to be more involved (*Twenty-first Century Dad; EOC 2006*).

Fatherhood is diverse and fragile

- At the time of the birth, 86% of parents are married or living together (and 93% of these dads attend the birth)
- Young, poor, never-co-resident dads likely to be least involved. They are most marginalised from services and most stigmatised too.
- 1 in 4 UK children under 16 experience their parents' separation. 1 in 10 parents share care of their children almost equally after separation. Among the rest 1 in 3 children see their fathers AT LEAST weekly (*Peacey & Hunt, 2008*)

Positive longterm impact of father-child relationship

- Children with positively involved resident or non-resident biological or step fathers tend to have:

- better friendships with better-adjusted children

- fewer behaviour problems

- lower criminality and substance abuse

- higher educational achievement

- greater capacity for empathy

- higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction

- (Flouri 2005; Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004; Dunn 2004)*

- **Early father involvement** (including taking paternity leave) predicts greater involvement as children grow

- **Strong protective factor** for disadvantaged or vulnerable children (*Black et al 1995; Tunnard 2002, 2004*)

Poor father-child relationships affect child outcomes

- **paternal depression** - children of post-natally clinically depressed fathers show more behaviour problems later in childhood (*Ramchandani et al, 2005/2008*)
- **low paternal interest in his children's education** - (particularly boys') has a very negative impact on their achievement (*Blanden 2006*)
- **fathers' harsh or neglectful parenting** - is strongly associated with behaviour problems in children (*studies cited by Phares 1999; Flouri 2005*)

Other effects of positive father involvement

- **Child-mother attachment** more secure (*for review see Guterman & Lee 2005*)
- **Post-natal depression in mothers** less likely and less damaging for child (*for review, see Fisher et al 2006*).
- **Initiation and continuation of breastfeeding** more likely (*Swanson & Power 2005*)
- **Fathers more satisfied** and adjust more quickly to fatherhood (*Barclay & Lupton, 1999*)
- **Lower parental stress and relationship breakdown** (*Cowan & Cowan, 2003*)

Key Research Summaries on Fatherhood Institute Website

Fathers and Maternal and Infant Health in the Perinatal Period

<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=2&cID=736>

Fathers and Smoking

<http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=2&cID=579>

Fathers and Breastfeeding

<http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=2&cID=581>

Fathers and Postnatal Depression

<http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=2&cID=580>

Young Fathers

<http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=13&cID=575>

Main Research Summary: 'The Costs & Benefits of Active Fatherhood'

<http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=0&cID=586>

Fathers' Information and Support Needs

Largely due to differing socialisation & circumstances, men usually (relative to women):

- are **less experienced & knowledgeable** about infants / children, and about their own children
- are **more isolated** as parents
- believe they have a **relatively marginal** impact on their children's lives

What do fathers think of early years services?

- children's services are 'not for me' – not welcoming, not addressing my needs/experiences
- low sense of 'entitlement' to services
- less aware of what services there are
- do not feel addressed by communications aimed at generic 'parents'
- **BUT 79% (men and women) say new fathers should get more information on pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding and caring for a baby (*Fatherhood Institute 2010*)**

Children's Centre Practice Guidance & Planning and Performance Management Guidance (2006)

All Centres must routinely offer all fathers the support and opportunities they need to play their parental role effectively, particularly groups of fathers previously excluded from services and whose children may be at risk of poor outcomes

Maternity Matters (2007)

High quality maternity care involves access to a wide range of varied services that should work in partnership to help equip mothers and fathers with the skills they require to become confident and caring parents.

Coalition Government Commitments (2010)

Encourage shared parenting from earliest stages of pregnancy

How to Engage Fathers Effectively: Routine Procedures

- *Referral forms* (include all relevant men in family).
 - *Initial visits/letters* eg Lincs health visitors changed welcome letter to include fathers: attendance went up 18% to 65%.
http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/_download/?id=5967
- Visits at times they can make.
- *Assess their information and support needs* – child health, breastfeeding, parenting information, depression/anxiety, support networks, parental relationship.
 - *Enlist mums' support for engaging fathers* (lower drop out from parenting interventions when both fathers and mothers participate; Foote et al, 1998)

How to Engage Fathers Effectively: Marketing, Outreach, Signposting

- *Publicity materials* targetted at dads, and stressing their important role
- *Welcoming settings* – posters, noticeboards
- *Specific Events*, eg Fathers Story Week
- *Signposting* from other local services/groups, eg Connexions, housing, citizens advice, youth offending, CAFCASS

Whole team approach – fathers are everyone's business. Male staff help, but everyone can do this. View fathers as co-parents, and services as being for both fathers and mothers.

Fathers Story Week, 14-20 June 2010

- for schools, nurseries, pre-schools & childminders to get dads more involved with children's learning and development
- free resources, including lesson/session plans for different Key Stages and the Early Years Foundation Stage, and ideas for running 'Bring your dad to school day', from www.fathersstoryweek.org
- dads in a box: "even shy children have been confident and proud to tell us all about their boxes during circle time"
- fathers in school - policeman dad gave talk on stranger danger; grandad showed air raid siren; making aeroplanes session
- taking books home to read with daddy at bedtime

"....just want to say a BIG THANKYOU to Fathers Story Week as our plans this week have helped OFSTED see how absolutely fabulous we are. Boy was she impressed!" (Lutterworth Nursery)

Hit The Ground Crawling: Peer to peer mentoring for dads

Expectant dads say:

“You don’t have to be embarrassed about asking things that your partner may already know”

“Fantastic...I was much more open to learning because it was presented from a male perspective”

“Some thinking outside the box at last - the 1st male perspective discussion during the whole pregnancy”

New dads say:

“It has given me a real sense of achievement knowing I am helping other dads get involved sooner and helping them understand how hard it is for the mother”



Sign up as a Think Fathers Champion

Do the self-assessment Dad Test

- **Leadership**; goals, systems, culture
- **Team**: recruitment, induction, professional development, appraisal
- **Environment**: is it welcoming/accessible for men?
- **Marketing and Communication**: targeted
- **Recruiting Fathers**: accessibility, outreach, assessment
- **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Register at champions@fatherhoodinstitute.org