In Practice

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Fathers and families

A guide to assist parenting practitioners with including and working with fathers

Preface

This is a guide for parenting practitioners to offer tips and support in engaging and working with fathers.

The document originated as a research paper for Parenting UK, written by Adrienne Burgess of the Fatherhood Institute and funded by what was then the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

This 2014 update has been produced as a learning document for Improving Futures, a UK-wide programme funded by The Big Lottery that aims to improve the lives of children growing up in families with multiple and complex needs.

The updated paper includes new material that reflects recent research and aims to support the 26 projects involved in Improving Futures and their work with fathers. We hope that other service providers outside of the project will also find value in the information and tips presented within. The paper will be disseminated to the Improving Futures projects, and members of Parenting UK.

Key recommendations:

1. Ensure staff are fully trained in the nuances of working with fathers. Many practitioners are required by policy and legislation to work with 'parents'. However, parenting education 'sticks' and serves the child better when fathers are engaged as well as mothers.
2. Take 'The Dad Test' to assess how father-friendly your practice is.
3. Encourage father-friendly premises and branding which appeals to both genders. Address literature to 'mum and dad', rather than 'parent', and offer services that can benefit all parents.
4. Incorporate fathers work into mainstream services. While it can be important to have a specific member of staff dedicated to engaging fathers, the work itself should not be marginalised.
5. Set aside assumptions and stereotypes. Men are no less predisposed to parenting skills than women but these skills can be better accessed when projects are tailored towards the specific skills and interests of men.
6. Make a dedicated effort to find and engage fathers. Fathers can often be accessed through mothers, or by going out into the community and targeting other services that fathers use.
7. Respect the fathers who do turn up to your services. Showering them with too much special attention can be as detrimental as ignoring and isolating them.
8. Have an up-to-date understanding of shared parenting and the role of the non-resident father. Levels of involvement may vary, so seek to understand the nature of the existing parental relationship and work from this starting point.

A note on terminology:
Throughout this paper, the term 'father' is used to mean birth fathers (whether resident with their child or not) and other men who play an important fatherly role in children's lives.

Introduction

Initiatives for working with fathers are often modelled on projects designed for mothers, advertised in places where fathers don't go, and held on 'social work' premises where men stand out like aliens.

When the Pen Green Family Centre in Corby realised what a turn-off to men their premises were, they set out to make them father-friendly – among other things, putting up pictures of men with children. Most importantly, they started out not with the purpose of 'fixing fathers' but

of 'reflecting fathers' importance' and involving them in the centre, and though this did lead to a successful fathers' group, it led also to other initiatives including specific staff training.

Though fathers' groups are enabling for some, research shows that most fathers are not keen to attend men-only activities (although they may enjoy them if they get there). Trying to set up a fathers' group may absorb a lot of staff time for very little reward, and can ghetto-ise fathers, so that the mainstream service doesn't need to change and become father-inclusive.

Devising strategies to engage fathers actually comes quite far down the line. There's a lot to get clear first, particularly in settings (such as some schools) where the value of engaging with parents of either sex isn't accepted by everyone.

But even when engagement with mothers is high on the agenda and practitioners say they believe it's important to work with fathers too, research has found that they often fail to do so. This isn't surprising: a close father/child relationship is rarely regarded as central to children's well-being.

Case study 1

'The Steering Committee wanted me to work with fathers, and a local father threatened me. He said he'd sue me for only working with mums. The problem is that this project is based on a US model where mothers meet in one group, and their teenagers in another. But I was willing to give dads a go, so I redrafted the flyer. I changed 'lone mother' to 'lone parent.' Not a single man called up! A Committee Member asked about the fathers of the teenagers we're already working with, but that wouldn't be possible. This project's for lone parents.'

Based on an interview with an Australian worker, December 2001

Why work with fathers?

- policy and legislation requires many practitioners to work with 'parents' which includes both mothers and fathers (learn more at www.fatherhoodinstitute.org)
- parent education is more likely to 'stick' when delivered first-hand to both parents, rather than expecting one to pass learning onto the other programmes that only address mothers may upset the domestic balance, even sometimes putting women or children at risk
- if the relationship with a father is problematic, then working only with the mother or child fails the child because it does not address the real issue
- if a father is not problematic, then failing to work with him fails the child, by not drawing on a potential resource for that child

Step 1 – Get clear on why fathers matter and what they already do

Fathers are creators, care-givers, comforters, companions, providers, partners, protectors, models, guides, teachers and playmates. They contribute positively to their children's development through:

- their tendency to love them passionately, and remain loyal to them for life
- shared activities and communication with them
- the time, money and skills they contribute to the household
- the networks – family, friends, workmates – attached to them
- the support they provide to mothers representing, to their child, that powerful archetype 'my father'
- modelling masculinity within the household.

Fathers can also have a negative impact on children and mothers – and this is a really important reason for engaging with them. And fathers who do not see their children or provide support to mothers are also having an impact, which can often be challenged.

Do ...

- set up systems to routinely gather the names and contact details of fathers, including non-resident fathers, when children are registered
- actively seek to meet both parents in home visits and other parent engagement
- make co-ordination of father-involvement a specific duty of one (well trained) member of staff – preferably a manager
- require all staff to be willing/able to engage with fathers: identify this in recruitment and supervision
- ensure all staff are trained to work with fathers and understand why this is important
- routinely explain to all fathers and mothers how the father's involvement (including non-resident fathers) with the service (and at home) will improve outcomes for his child
- assess fathers' needs and strengths (as you would mothers') particularly where there are indicators that father-involvement might present a risk.
- seek support for such men to challenge negative behaviour and encourage behaviour change
- in developing policy and practice, put the child 'at the centre' recognising that mothers' and children's needs and perspectives may not always be the same.

What fathers do

Some practitioners may hold the view that fathers spend less time with their children than mothers do and are less involved in their children's lives, both emotionally and practically. While there is some truth in this, recent research has allowed us to dig deeper and find out some of the underlying reasons.

According to a research paper by Modern Fatherhood (Poole et al, 2013a) which looks at the time parents spend with their children on routine activities – from leisure activities such as picnics in the park and trips to the cinema, to simple everyday occurrences like sitting down to a meal together – there is an important link between working hours and the availability of time. Put simply, parents who work full time have fewer hours available to dedicate to their children and, according to current statistics, fathers are more likely to work full time.

The research shows that partner support is also a key factor. Mothers who live with a partner are the most likely parents to share in regular leisure activities with their children but fathers in similar situations are only slightly behind them. It cannot be automatically assumed that fathers have chosen to be less involved. If there seems to be an imbalance of care between a mother and a father, a review of their working hours and the impact this may help to uncover strategies for enhancing parental relationships.

In the same study, parents were asked how often they talk with their children about important subjects and also how often they argue with their children. On the surface, mothers appear to talk more often with their children about things that matter to them, but fathers report fewer arguments. One interpretation of this may be that the father avoids arguments by staying out of meaningful conversations. Consider, however, the significance of the peacemaker role that fathers may be playing. Rather than addressing an apparent lack of communication skills, seek out the positive intentions of existing behaviour and use this as a starting point for improvements.

Consider again the link between working hours and time at home. Some fathers simply have fewer opportunities to talk openly with their children, being less available when an issue arises. Picture the familiar scene of a father arriving home from work and smoothing over a quarrel that has developed between mother and child during the day. Helping parents to understand how and why this scene plays out may help to address difficulties in the relationship between mother and father who have previously only witnessed the scenario from their own point of view.

An important thing to take from all of this is to look beyond assumptions and deeper than statistics. Consider the reaction to the bare fact that the least likely parental demographic to cuddle their children regularly is lone fathers with resident children. One might be forgiven for drawing the conclusion that fathers are less affectionate, less tactile than their female counterparts. Looking deeper at the research carried out by Poole et al, however, shows that cuddling becomes less frequent as children get older and that lone resident fathers are more likely to have older children. Circumstance, rather than gender, therefore plays a key role in the shaping of this stereotype, and gives yet another alternative starting point for any support work.

Case Study 2

'I've been working with two fathers on parenting orders who indicated extreme resistance to participating, threatening to disrupt any group in which they were placed. However, with one-to-one support, both completed their twelve week courses, and then both indicated they'd be open to further contact'.

Steve Catchpole, Fathers Worker, Suffolk Community Education

Step 2 – Unpack stereotypes and assumptions

On a deep level, many of us feel fathers' love of their children is conditional, and mothers' is unconditional, when of course it's much more complex than that. But because of this belief, professionals who would recognise a mother's negativity towards her child as distress, frustration and guilt, and would work patiently through to the love and concern beneath, will accept a father's expressions of negativity as the 'truth', and stop there.

While motherhood is routinely seen as a motivator for women's attendance in detox programmes, further education and so on, fatherhood as a potential motivator for men's development is usually overlooked. One worker observed that all the men who successfully completed a domestic violence programme were fathers, although this had not been noticed or built on by the organisers.

Studies have shown that fathers can have an impact on their children's lives that is similar in effect, yet different in style, to that made by mothers (Adesso, & Lipson, 1981). Knowing this, it is important for services to reflect the true influence of fathers in their approach. The power of a combined parental influence should not be underestimated, and nor should the positive effect of a second parent with the skills to pick up where the other left off.

What are fathers capable of?

- most men report fatherhood as the most profound emotional experience of their lives
- mothers are not natural experts: left in charge of babies or children, men and women develop skills at the same rate
- men are as sensitive and responsive to infants as women are
- fathers and mothers give their babies the same amount of affection
- fathers often express intimacy through shared activities
- many non-resident fathers offer an alternative home when the need arises.
- modern fathers are responsible for around eight times as much childcare as their own fathers were (O'Brien, 2004)

(From *What good are dads?*, 2001)

Case study 3

The Families Moving Forward project has an ethos that engaging with fathers, step fathers and other male carers. Out of 139 families that are on the project database, 56 fathers or male carers are registered.

Using the "individual family budget model" they can tailor support to meet the needs of male carers. They supported one father by funding a football coaching course, providing a pathway into employment that will benefit the whole family. Another father, who was struggling with mental health and obsessive compulsive disorder, accessed additional support and alleviated his obsessive behaviour, improving family relationships.

Families Moving Forward

Before thinking about men as fathers, it's necessary to think about fathers as men.

Dr Deborah Ghate found that projects that directed their efforts at 'parents' and denied gender issues had the least success in engaging fathers. Projects that focused consciously on the similar potentialities of women and men as intimate parents did better.

But the best results were achieved by projects that recognised men's experiences, interests, attitudes and expectations as often being different, and devised special strategies for them (Ghate, 2000) – although this did not necessarily mean working with the fathers in separate services.

Any organisation that claims to work with fathers because their policies say 'we work with parents' but does not have conscious strategies, backed up by policy, to engage and interact with fathers, is not 'working with fathers'. At the same time, professionals need to be sure that what they perceive as men's 'different' needs or behaviour is not simply their reaction to being treated differently. The Pen Green Centre filmed staff greeting parents, and found they chatted longer and in more depth with mothers, gave a lot more eye contact and stood closer to them.

Changing staff behaviour changed the behaviour of the fathers, 87% of whom went on to be involved in Centre activities (Lloyd, 2001).

Times have changed since old stereotypes were established. Even non-resident fathers are more involved in their children's lives than fathers forty years ago and many even spend a significant amount of time parenting alone (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). When working with families where there seems to be no father present, it is possible that the father lives nearby and has a strong presence in the child's life.

Certainly some fathers distance themselves from family services, but practitioners as often collude with this, perhaps feeling more at ease working with mothers (Burgess, 2009).

Do not ...

- think that by inviting 'parents', you will reach fathers: everyone tends to hear 'parent' as 'mother'. Invitations should be addressed individually to each parent or to 'mum and dad' to specify that fathers are included
- assume that when a father does not attend, he is not interested. Consider whether the course or event is being held at a time when he can get there and by a leader with whom he will feel comfortable. Is he staying home to babysit? Has the family discussed whether he should attend? Does he even know the event is happening?
- expect fathers to feel at home in premises designed to meet the needs of mothers or children; tackle the environment or think about other venues for some services.
- assume that all fathers are the same: older/younger fathers will have different issues, as will fathers/step-fathers, resident/non-resident fathers, lone fathers, employed/unemployed fathers, fathers in families contending with disability, and fathers from different social and cultural groups.

Step 3 – Support the work

Since working with fathers will challenge the culture of most organisations, individual enthusiasm will not be enough. Engaging with fathers must be seen as everyone's business, with support for this work at all levels.

If this is not in place few fathers will engage and 'fathers' workers' will burn out and leave. This will reinforce the notion that trying to engage fathers is a waste of time.

What does a father-supportive organisation look like?

- It has a documented mission inclusive of serving fathers.
- Board and managers are committed to this and engaged in ongoing reflection and self-reflection.
- Serious attempts are made to recruit and support male workers and volunteers.
- Fathers are regularly consulted and participate on parent and other advisory groups.
- Literature and publicity about the organisation reflect the commitment to serving fathers.
- Policies that make it harder for fathers to be involved are identified and changed.
- Fathers' participation is mainstreamed, not limited to separate services such as a fathers' group.

A valuable self-assessment tool, the Dad Test, (see 'Further help') can help you achieve this. Services need to be clearly tied to outcomes thoughtfully planned and implemented for fathers as well as mothers.

One particular project in Australia was designed to help lone mothers with discipline issues, but did not consider that this might also be a primary need of lone fathers, or even whether there were substantial numbers of lone fathers nearby.

If you deliver a mainstream parenting programme allegedly designed for 'parents', you cannot assume this will benefit fathers to the same extent as mothers. You will usually need to rethink content, style and goals – for example a goal of parent education for fathers is likely to include father and child spending more time together, whereas this may not be a goal for most mothers.

Fathers may need legal and child maintenance advice, and housing/benefits issues/solutions for fathers are likely to differ substantially from mothers'. Nor can you assume that services to which you refer mothers will be equipped to meet fathers' needs, or that important services that men may need (for example perpetrator programmes for men who use violence) exist locally at all. Monitoring and evaluation will almost certainly also need to change, such as collection and analysis of parents' attendance/satisfaction etc by gender.

Step 4 – Finding the father(s)

Who is 'the father'? The term tends to be used loosely, covering both birth fathers and father figures, who are often approached from an either/or perspective. While this is useful in discussion, and has been employed in this paper, certain assumptions need to be avoided in practical settings. Workers may not know if a co-resident male is the birth father, or if they do (and he isn't) may believe that contacting the 'real dad' isn't important.

Concerns about the alleged shortage of men in children's lives usually arise from the idea that what is missing is a male influence – a 'male role model' rather than a specific person. In fact, birth fathers are far more than 'role models': they are always important to children even when the two have never met because they are 'the other person who made me'. Step-fathers and other key father-figures are important in addition.

Seeking to engage with non-resident fathers poses special problems. Practitioners may fear alienating the mother. Research shows, however, that approached sensitively, most mothers have no problems talking about their children's fathers, whether they live together or not. Practitioners may also make unfounded negative assumptions about the 'absent' father. One study found teenage pregnancy midwives assessing the parenting capacity of the young fathers as poor – even when they had not met them. Practitioners who do pursue missing dads are often pleasantly surprised. Fathers may also be being hidden from services for benefits and other reasons, and mothers may be happy to reveal them when fears about possible consequences are allayed.

Suggested commitments to fathers (from those who work with families)

- We will ask the question 'where are the fathers?' when we see a room full of female parents.
- We will neither ignore you nor pounce on you and cry 'how wonderful – a father!' when you enter the room.
- We will learn your name, and use it.
- We will build a relationship with you as we would with your child's mother, developing a gradual idea of your strengths, and the challenges you face.
- We will direct written and verbal communications to you, as well as to your child's mother.
- We will look for your strengths as a father and as a partner and then identify how we can offer support.
- We will let you know that we feel positively about men and the contributions they make to their families and society.

Do ...

- routinely collect information about father and/or father figures whether co-resident with the child or not
- 'ask don't assume' about the roles the fathers and father-figures play in children's lives
- establish the contact patterns and emotional, legal and financial involvement of non-resident fathers and father-figures in the child's life
- involve these men in discussions about the child's welfare, and in any therapeutic work (whilst ensuring the child's and the mother's safety)
- if direct work with fathers is planned, discuss the purpose of this work with family members.

What we know about non-resident fathers

Research by Modern Fatherhood (Poole, et al 2013b) shows growing numbers of fathers who don't live with their children. According to their figures, single parent households have been on the increase for 30 years and the vast majority (97%) are headed by mothers, meaning more and more fathers living away from their children. To understand how to work with non-resident fathers, it is useful to know a little bit more about them.

They estimate that as many as 17% of fathers have non-resident children – a statistic based on fathers whose children are under 16 and equating to nearly one million fathers in the UK living away from their dependent children. The majority of these fathers are likely to be single and less than a third of them have other resident children.

According to Poole et al, these non-resident fathers tend to be younger - fathers in the 16-24 age bracket are more than twice as likely to live away from their children as fathers aged 45 or older. They are more likely to have lived away from their own fathers as children.

Aside from age and family history, the study also highlights links between a father's residential status and his ethnic background and economic situation. Black Caribbean and Black African fathers include higher proportions of non-residency while southern Asian fathers are the most likely to be living with their children. Non-religious fathers are also more likely to be non-resident.

The research finds that non-resident fathers are more likely than resident fathers to have fewer qualifications, and fewer job prospects and are less likely to be home owners. These factors are linked to lower self-esteem with reduced physical and emotional wellbeing. When the sense of purpose that men can gain from fatherhood is lost through leaving the family home, the disempowerment can further compound things.

The level of contact that fathers have with their children varies depending on the individual circumstances and may be perceived differently depending on who is asked. According to the statistics, non-resident fathers may claim to have higher levels of contact than that reported by the resident mothers of their child. Poole et al reveal that nearly 60% of non-resident fathers say they see their children at least once a week, and only 13% say they have no contact at all, though this last figure appears to be declining.

Looking deeper, the research shows a link between financial stability and the possibility of contact. Larger homes with spare rooms can present greater opportunities for children to stay with non-resident fathers, so financial and housing-related security can factor into contact levels.

The study also draws an interesting link between contact and financial contribution. To a degree, the more often a father sees his non-resident children, the more he tends to offer in the form of financial support. At some point, however, the two behaviours diverge, as if financial contributions are replaced by shared activities and caring duties.

Perhaps the most important lesson from this study is that the fathers who have the greatest levels of contact with their non-resident children also feel the closest to them. Fathers who see their children at least once a week are the most likely to describe the relationship as 'very close' (Poole et al 2013b).

Case study 4

Protective Behaviours encourages children and vulnerable adults to build a network of support and develop an understanding of their rights and how to stay safe.

One dad had care of three children under ten following the breakdown of his relationship with their mother, whose alcohol use had led to violence. The children engaged in three Protective Behaviours sessions and the father engaged in parenting support work to improve his parenting skills and emotional availability.

As he is exceptionally shy he did not attend a parenting group but went through the sessions on an individual basis with his Family Navigator and looked at all the issues. Contact has now resumed and the family are working on issues such as finance, getting the children to and from school and furnishing the family home. The school echoes all the positives and the children are doing well and adjusted to their new life with dad.

One Herts One Family, Westminster Drugs Project

What about shared parenting?

In 'What is Shared Parenting?' the charity Families Need Fathers describes shared parenting as a long term arrangement that is reviewed and adapted throughout childhood to fit the child's needs. According to their objectives, children should feel that both parents are properly involved with neither one having a greater degree of moral authority. Time spent with each parent is balanced so that both can share in day-to-day routine as well as leisure time. When neither parent is excluded from any one area of the child's life or, conversely, given sole responsibility for any one aspect, the child is more likely to see both parents as equals without developing stereotyped ideas of, for example, mothers as carers and fathers as financial benefactors.

The early years window of opportunity

As seen in the Fatherhood Institute's piece Engaging Fathers in their Children's Learning (Burgess, 2005), there is a window of opportunity for engaging separated fathers in the early years. This is the period when parents are most heavily involved in their children's lives. Day-to-day care and close interaction are at a level in the early years that is unlikely to be matched again. Early years settings can therefore see particularly good

results from making services and publicity as father-friendly as possible.

Another reason given by Burgess (2005) that separated fathers are easier to engage in the early years is the natural drive to build strong relationships with their children. They are at a turning point that can determine the future of their parenting role and establish the nature and level of their involvement.

According to Burgess, fathers at this point are likely to be keen to engage with their children's social and educational development, even if their own experiences of education were not positive. As seen already, fathers' love for their children is no less a motivating factor than mothers'. If they have educational gaps such as in literacy or numeracy, these can be addressed by linking activities to the possible benefits for their children. Fathers want their children to learn and to succeed, and they want them to have better experiences than their own.

Step 5 – Sustaining engagement

To attract fathers consistently, the service will need to have a strong public image and be recognised by community partners, by local media and by local fathers as a good resource for dads. Once this happens 'everything snowballs' says one worker 'and the phone never stops ringing'.

As an organisation, do ...

- have regular advertising/promotional articles in local media: fatherhood makes a 'good story' and they'll be glad to hear from you
- ensure the father-inclusiveness of your organisation and its services are well known to local services which engage with men (for example, youth services, substance misuse, mental health, homelessness projects, employment and training) and encourage these organisations to identify the fathers among their clients
- ensure the father-inclusiveness of your organisation and its services are well known to organisations that work with women (including teenage pregnancy), mothers and children
- work in partnership with other local agencies to help them develop father-inclusive approaches
- recognise that some men will contact you when they are in crisis (so have appropriate support in place) and some feel more confident if they can 'bring a friend along'
- monitor and evaluate your work so success in engaging fathers can be demonstrated – and then publicised

When in contact with a father, do ...

- ensure phone calls are returned promptly
- tackle initial concerns or questions with a simple explanation of what your service provides, and what fathers can expect
- provide a variety of options
- mean what you say: it will reduce suspicion
- follow up when engagement falters (text, phone, email – whatever works)
- gather contact details of someone who will always know where he is – in case he moves, or his phone number changes.
- take the Dad Test (see 'Further help')

The golden rule in recruiting fathers is to **go to where the fathers are**, whether this means sending engagement workers out, or advertising with leaflets. Fathers are at ante-natal classes and on labour wards, dropping their children off at nursery or school and collecting them from the childminder. They are in local workplaces or attending employment, training and FE services. They attend contact centres and probation services, engage with solicitors, citizens advice, child support and benefits services, access local sports, and live in hostels and local prisons.

Parenting initiatives that have collaborated with external organisations have been successful in generating father referrals by stationing engagement workers in key locations like GPs surgeries and schools at peak times, displaying leaflets and posters and raising awareness of the services on offer. An even more active approach involves "community development workers" going out into dad-friendly locations and approaching fathers directly.

Most importantly, fathers are almost always known to the children registered in your services – the simplest way of finding these fathers is to invite them in with a personal invitation. One health visiting team quadrupled the number of fathers attending the home visit by simply addressing the letter 'Dear Mum and Dad' instead of 'Dear Parent' and making the point that the service hoped to see both of them.

Most mothers will happily give you fathers' details so you can contact them – even when dad is living elsewhere.

When preparing materials to hand out to fathers, consider that appropriate branding goes beyond father-friendly imagery. Avoid bureaucratic phrasing such as "referrals for support" and opt for something warmer like "an offer of help". Link your offer to the potential benefit for the children, not the fathers themselves. Include contact details for your service so that fathers can sign up directly.

The possibilities for recruiting dads are endless. Using the 'detached social work' model, some projects targeting young fathers have put key workers into housing in the community. Others work with health services to target expectant fathers, with 'I'm a Dad' gift bags or ante-natal courses such as Hit the Ground Crawling (see http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/hit-the-ground-crawling). A UK project identified men in a GP practice who made, and then failed to keep, appointments: many turned out to be separated dads, for whom separation from their children was a key issue.

Do ...

- use fathers who've completed your programme as recruiters
- ensure outreach workers make clear their wish to engage with both parents, and schedule visits to suit both
- distribute and carry great leaflets as back up, but don't expect them to do the job for you
- 'lean on' partners and children to get dads involved (invitations from children to their fathers can be really successful)
- be patient – persevere
- consciously imagine a positive future for each father

Further help

The 'Think Fathers' Network
http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2009/we-need-you-as-think-fathers-champions/
This is a free network of agencies and individuals committed to bringing in cultural change to support father–child relationships. Fatherhood Champions can take the free Dad Test, a self-assessment tool developed by DCSF with the Fatherhood Institute, to help them consider how effective their engagement is; and to identify changes they can make to ensure it is systematic and effective. The key elements the Dad Test helps review are: leadership, team, environment, communication, recruiting fathers, father-child relationships. The Fatherhood Institute offers a range of services and publications to help agencies and individuals fulfil Dad Test requirements:
www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

Training and consultancy

The Fatherhood Institute
www.fatherhoodinstitute.org
Tel: 0845 6341328 (free service-providers advice line)
mail@fatherhoodinstitute.org

Working with Men
www.workingwithmen.org
Tel: 020 7237 5353
info@workingwithmen.org

Fathers Plus
http://www.fathersplus.org
Tel 0191 2727824

Case study 5
The importance of pre parenting group engagement for fathers

" Recently we have seen an increase in the number of fathers who have been 'referred' or 'recommended' to attend a parenting group. In our local experience it has proven invaluable to take the time to ensure each father receives an individual telephone contact. This contact offers an opportunity to openly discuss any concerns they may hold and provides clarity around the commitment in order to attend a parenting group. When ever possible fathers are also offered a choice, to attend alongside their partner or alternatively a fathers-only group. I feel that the value of this pre group engagement work was proven when in our last fathers-only parenting group, 8 fathers (100%) completed the full 10 weeks."

Tracy Mansbridge
Parenting Co-ordinator
Solihull Parenting Team

Additional references

Download the 'Dad Test'
http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/Dad-Test-Guide.pdf

Toolkit for Father-Inclusive Practice
http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/toolkit-for-father-inclusive-practice/
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http://www.fnf.org.uk/law-and-information/what-is-shared-parenting?qa=132#qa132

Fathers and Parenting Interventions: what works?
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Abingdon: Radcliffe Medical Press

About this paper

Based on a paper originally written and revised by Adrienne Burgess, Director of Research at the Fatherhood Institute. Adrienne has written widely on fatherhood and couple relationships. One of the founders of the Fatherhood Institute, she has a thorough understanding of both research and practice. Her book Fatherhood Reclaimed: the making of the modern father (Vermilion, 1997) helped set a new agenda on fatherhood in the UK, and has been published throughout the world.

This paper was initially funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and updated for the Improving Futures project, funded by the Big Lottery.