

## **Practice Principles – engaging Fathers, and male carers in effective practice**

### **Why is engagement with Fathers and Male carers important to identifying and managing risk to children?**

Most perpetrators causing harm to children, particularly children under 1 are men, they are the greatest source of risk, but we often know least about them.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel National [Review into Non-Accidental Injury in children under the age of 1](#). “The Myth of Invisible Men” Safeguarding children under 1 from non-accidental injury caused by male carers was published in September 2021. The research demonstrates the significant role that men play when children are harmed AND how they are often missing from routine engagement with professionals. The research tells us:-

- Men wanted to be involved sharing difficulties about being included. They tell us that they feel that they were not seen or heard.
- There was limited evidence that services actively attempted to engage with those men that might be harder to reach – this will assist them remaining disengaged from work required.
- Our knowledge of men, their personal and parenting history can be poor, and this makes understanding their role in family life, parenting and any support needs unclear
- Gaps in understanding male carers can make our judgements and plans one sided with too much emphasis on the mother’s role – this can weaken plans including missing support needed by fathers and male carers
- Men can therefore miss important opportunities to understand the challenges of parenting and how to respond safely – this includes how to deal with crying, sleeplessness and may increase their anxiety about fatherhood ('Silently Panicking'). This means they are not equipped to deal with these issues as they emerge routinely.

### **What can you do to engage effectively with fathers and male carers?**

Some men may have had poor experiences of parenting and had limited engagement with universal service prior to becoming fathers.

- Be curious about the man’s role and how he can be supported to become a great dad
- Involving fathers; services to promote early engagement with men due to become fathers and avoid delaying to when they become parents
- Don’t assume that all fathers understand the challenges of fatherhood/parenting and what it means to care for a child – and don’t rely on key messages being passed on by mothers or female partners, for example ICON and safe sleeping advice.
- Aim to share information to help men explore and understand fatherhood/parenthood/caring responsibilities including the challenges.
- Help men to understand child development and the first 1001 critical days for all children by sharing information to help learning don’t assume that they have this information
- Identify local support for men including any online resources, for example Dad Pad, [www.iconcope.org](http://www.iconcope.org), healthy together resources, Chat health, home start, Early Help, Centre for Fun and Families, Turning Point, [www.lullabytrust.org.uk](http://www.lullabytrust.org.uk)

## How to Assess Men – some helpful tips for practitioners

- Record the names and dates of birth of fathers or male carers in the household or who visit the household or are in a relationship with the birth parent – is he birth father, stepfather?
- Ask about the male's relationship to the child/children.
- What role will the man play in the life of that child/children – will they share practical tasks, be absent but have contact?
- What experience of caring for children does the man have – don't assume that if they have other children that they also have hands on parenting experience.
- What sources of support has the man got within his friends and family network e.g., grandparents, sister, brother, friends. Are these positive role models?
- Understand the father's own history – consider childhood and young adult experiences, Adverse Childhood experiences including trauma, being in care or a victim of abuse in childhood, age, experience of or perpetrator of domestic abuse, offending history – how might this affect his parenting now and in the future?
- Understand his health and well-being – has he used drugs and alcohol now or in the past – is this problematic, physical health problems, mental health – anxiety and depression, ADHD, anger management issues, learning disability or learning difficulty?
- What is the context for the father? – living jointly or separately with mother, suitable housing, deprivation, employment, financial difficulties, identity, and cultural issues including racism.
- As about links to other agencies now and in the past
- Find out the different parenting experiences of both parents – particularly if this is a first-time dad with a mother who has had other children.

Consider where you can gather and share information emerging from your questions – Adult services, GP information, Children's social care, Police, Midwifery, health visiting, 3<sup>rd</sup> sector e.g., Turning Point, Domestic abuse services.

## Involving fathers in Planning

- It is important to plan with Fathers to make them part of any support being developed
- Make plans in writing with clear roles, expectations, and timescales for both you, colleagues and family members including father.
- Routinely involve fathers, male carers and non-birth parents in services delivered to the family – they may be an important source of support but may also become a barrier to support being effective
- If your agency is supporting a man who is becoming a father or male carer, make sure this is acknowledged in your work and any plans for intervention are updated. This includes services in response to Offending, Domestic abuse, substance misuse and adult mental health
- When delivering Health services include the role of the man in your plan for intervention to clarify how he will be involved and how he will contribute to family life.

- Include how and when you will have discussions on parenting and if an assessment of specific support needs is required – give timescales for this being completed and how the father will be involved.
- Share any plans with other agencies that might also need to be involved – make sure these are handed over to agencies if responsibilities change so there is continuity of support.
- Make suitable referrals if the information that you gather means a multiagency plan of support is needed – and talk to the man about why this is necessary to help parenting

### **Getting support and guidance as a practitioner**

- Practitioners should seek supervision from their first line managers to help explore emerging concerns and anxiety around working with working with men/carers
- Reflect with your manager the information that is emerging from your work with father's are you remaining objective and realistic – could you be overly sympathetic to sole male carers?
- If information indicates that the man has a violent history, think about how this will be managed including considering joint working with a colleague or other agency
- Consider advice from a safeguarding lead in your agency
- Share information using the LLR referral procedure if your information suggests that a child needs additional support and protection.