

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH MEN IN FAMILIES

Background: The extent to which men in families are engaged in the safeguarding process can have a considerable impact upon the understanding of risk for the child and family. Professionals can have fixed-thinking in terms of the role of men in a family and in their role in parenting children. They can sometimes be overlooked as a protective factor, but a lack of engagement can also mean the risks posed by men are not assessed and dealt with effectively.

Why it Matters? Parental warmth, nurturance & closeness are associated with positive child outcomes regardless of which parent is involved. Research highlights the hugely constructive role fathers can play in a range of outcomes. Men across all cultures & classes want to have relationships with their children but men are often perceived as less competent parents in need of female supervision (Lamb, 2010) or even 'dangerous' (Bateson 2017).

Question to consider: Do you always identify whether a man is living/visiting the family home? Do you record accurate contact information? Do you have persistence, creativity, curiosity & time to investigate multiple fathers, any of whom might be a risk and/or resource? How do you develop trust and respect & show reliability & consistency? Do you use a strengths-based approach? Is your service designed to reflect an understanding of the issues that can be faced by marginalised men? Do you include men as early as possible, ideally during pregnancy and in the first few months of a child's life?



Information: Early identification & involvement of fathers promotes continued engagement: actively seek fathers out. Consider which agencies may hold relevant information that could help to develop an in-depth understanding of the role of the father in the family, his lived experience, strengths/ vulnerabilities and how these might potentially impact upon parenting, protection & risk for the child/ren? Non-resident, black, ethnic minority & white working-class fathers all have particular circumstances/pressures that need to be understood & assessed (Swann 2015).

What to do: 'Due diligence' in finding absent fathers needs to become a practice expectation. Emphasise to parents how crucial the father's role is to the child's wellbeing. Ask them directly about risk factors and risky behaviours such as drug and alcohol use. Make sure fathers and male carers know about concerns relating to their child and consult them about plans. and RIP's [Working effectively with men in families](#) and NSPCC's [Unseen Men](#) has more information.

Barriers to engaging fathers: rigid/fixed thinking by professionals; mothers as gatekeepers; children as 'women's work' (some fathers hold this belief too); mothers' fears of involving fathers; fathers as reluctant/elusive clients; complex issues in assessing risks posed by fathers/other males and balancing risks with protective factors; time, opportunity & inclination; parental responsibility; mother's resistance; seen as 'the problem'

Taking the time to speak to and work with a child's father on his own is as important as one to one time with a child's mother. Does father attend appointments/meetings and, if not, ask why. Evaluate the engagement of fathers – what does this tell you? During joint appointments, consider who you direct questions to; engage fathers in the conversation. Is the father visible in your records? Does the record detail his strengths, vulnerabilities and risk factors?