

Father Inclusive Guidance

September 2023

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Summary of Purpose	This guidance has been developed to support the inclusion of fathers in a holistic approach to service design and delivery. This guidance is a suggested approach including top tips for practice and resources to help families and our professional community, to work together to ensure we each play our part in understanding the importance of better including fathers in our work.
Accessibility	This document can be made available in large print, or in electronic format. There are no copies currently available in other languages.
Equalities Impact Assessment	During the preparation of this policy and when considering the roles and responsibilities of all agencies, organisations and staff involved, care has been taken to promote fairness, equality, and diversity, in the services delivered regardless of disability, ethnic origin, race, gender, age, religious beliefs or sexual orientation.
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Policy Review Date	This document will be reviewed in September 2026.
Acknowledgement	We would like to thank and acknowledge the services which formed the working group to develop this practice guidance: Dads Unlimited Kent Community Health Foundation Trust Kent County Council Integrated Children's Services Kent Police Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-agency Partnership Business Team Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust. We would also like to thank and acknowledge the two KCC staff groups who provided consultation and feedback on the draft guidance: Rainbow Single Parent Staff Group.

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1. Introduction

1.1 About this Guidance

All children have the right to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment which positively helps them to reach their potential. This guidance is a suggested approach, including top tips for practice and resources to help families and our professional community, to work together to ensure we each play our part in understanding the importance of better inclusion of fathers in our work.

What do we mean by Fathers?

The scope of this guidance is to be truly inclusive and reflect the diversity of fathers within the world we live in. No two fathers are the same and will have diverse and personal social contextual factors. It is therefore important to understand how these influences may impact on their experience and understanding of fatherhood. This guidance does not seek to reinforce gender stereotyping or be heteronormative and is written in line with the Equality Act 2010 which sets out a wide range of protections from discrimination and harassment for people who hold certain protected characteristics. This guidance does refer to men and fathers throughout. Whilst this may not be how all individuals identify themselves, it is informed by practice reviews and research findings that father inclusivity specifically is necessary to safeguard children.

Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 defines 'parent' as:

- all natural parents, whether they are married or not
- any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person
- any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person (having care of a child or young person means that a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child, is considered to be a parent in education law).

1.2 Introduction

The National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report [‘The Myth of Invisible Men’](#) sets out the need for all partner organisations to work with fathers. The evidence from this national review coupled with a sound body of extensive research is irrefutable and informs this father inclusive guidance. Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-agency Partnership (KSCMP) expects the values and cultures of organisations working with children and families in Kent to improve their engagement of fathers and to develop practice in the crucial area of safeguarding.

Further research by the Fatherhood Institute has identified that the role of fathers in families is changing. Fathers, whether they are the primary caregiver, living separately from the family, stepfathers, or grandfathers, are increasingly playing a greater role and

becoming more active in their children's lives. We know that where fathers are involved children often have an increased sense of wellbeing, a clear sense of their identity and greater resilience to adversity. *"Where fathers are positively involved with their children, even when parents are separated, children benefit socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively."* (Allen & Daley 2007)

Practitioner's experience with, and assumptions about, men and fathers will impact on their capacity to work with them from a strengths-based perspective. Having a healthy view of the capabilities of men to build relationships is fundamental to safeguarding practice being child focussed. Understanding the significant relationships to the child is to truly comprehend their authentic lived experience, this includes having awareness of the impact a father has on a child. Both fathers and mothers have needs which can be a risk or resource to the child. It is imperative to understand this dynamic and the extended network, including the paternal family.

When it comes to safeguarding children, traditionally services have been mother centred regarding engaging and being responsible for the wellbeing and safety of children. This can lead to hearing a single story which impacts the effectiveness of safeguarding. Father inclusive practice should never mean creating more risk, but to better manage risk by engaging fathers to gain insight into the family situation from their perspective, thereby enabling assessment, management of risk accountability and providing appropriate support at the right time. Father inclusive practice does not mean that all fathers must be involved in everything, it does mean we must hear the father's voice.

2. Father Inclusive Practice

2.1 Key Elements of Father Inclusive Practice

Father inclusive practice occurs when the needs of fathers and father figures are responded to through the planning, development, and delivery of services. It recognises families as a system and acknowledges a balance between the needs of fathers and the family as a whole. Many family-based services have evolved to respond primarily to the needs of mothers and children, and therefore father-inclusive practice may require a process of planned change and managed learning. This involves building sustainable relationships between practitioners, family members and the community.

Father inclusive relationship-based practice:

- Recognises the diverse circumstances, strengths, and interests of fathers.
- Takes a positive approach to the diversity of men, their needs, and expectations.
- Encourage men and service providers to openly celebrate and value fathering.

2.2 Organisational Principles of Good Practice for Engaging Fathers

Recognise the value of paternal involvement to children, research demonstrates children still place value on fathers when they are not visible in their day to day lives.

Understanding the different experiences of motherhood and fatherhood and design or adapt services that respond supportively to this.

The values and cultures of services should promote greater father engagement by offering flexibility and responsiveness. This includes the timing of meetings to account for both parents' availability and adapting resources and communication.

The inclusion of fathers needs to be an organisational and cultural expectation from the outset. Persistence is needed at practitioner level and time should be allowed and invested at policy and organisational levels to facilitate this.

Early and explicit contact with fathers is key to engagement, including communication and relationship building outside of formal meetings with fathers and all men with a significant relationship to the child. This early engagement needs to be an expectation from managers and practitioners with access to support and training to enable skills in professional curiosity, tenacity and creativity when engaging men from the outset.

Fathers' attendance and involvement in meetings and conferences should be clearly recorded specifically, capturing which parent/s, or which man, attended. Recording reasons for fathers' non-attendance is essential to reduce their invisibility and to be able to review practice efforts to include them.

Where there is a plan to support children, set clear expectations for fathers to contribute and share responsibility and accountability. Such expectations should include explicit

recognition of the value of each specific father to his child, based on the resources he offers, or could be supported to offer. Men's needs and capacities as parents must also be explicitly considered.

Working with fathers who are violent or abusive is challenging and organisations must ensure that staff feel safe (physically and emotionally) and supported with the necessary skills and practical support to include fathers.

Managers and practitioners should critically examine their organisation's structures and processes to identify areas where a more father-inclusive approach can be adopted.

Agencies within KSCMP need to quality assure how men are being assessed and engaged, and outcomes should be reported to partners. When examples of best and successful practice are identified, these should be highlighted and shared. Feedback from fathers should be routinely sought so agencies can learn from them what works best and what might be avoided in future.

To accompany this guidance, a one minute 'Think Father' guide has been produced which can be found at appendix one.

2.3 Parental Responsibility

The role of parental responsibility (PR) and father inclusion has at times been a source of uncertainty in safeguarding practice. Father engagement should be presented from the outset as expected and important to understanding the child's significant relationships and lived experiences. This may help to avoid a build-up of frustration, fear and anxiety, or a sense of the father being irrelevant. The absence of PR will also in some circumstances have an impact on some of the information that you are able to share with fathers, so always check with your line manager or legal team if you need clarity around this.

Reasons for not involving a father may include if involving them places the child at greater risk of harm. Limiting risk management only to keeping fathers away from their children does not however effectively address the risk that they pose, as absence may harm their children, increase risk to their partners (or ex-partners) and may create a level of risk for other, new potential victims. These situations should be discussed with your line manager, safety planning considered, and if the decision is made not to engage the father, this decision along with rationale for the decision must be clearly recorded on data recording systems.

2.4 Collecting Fathers Contact Details

Early and direct contact with fathers needs to be an expectation from all managers, and staff need to be supported in their practice from the earliest opportunity.

Services in agencies that form part of KSCMP which require a referral to them will systematically seek the details of the father at the point of contact. The full name and up-to-

date address/contact details of the father and any other significant father figures should be accurately recorded and where possible linked on the relevant data recording system with the child/ren¹. If this information cannot be obtained, then it should be clearly recorded why it has not been possible and what attempts were made to get father's contact details.

It is expected that all professionals will be tenacious in finding out a father's contact details and communicating with them. Whilst a mother is not required to provide contact details for the father, it is important that practitioners build rapport with the mother and develop trust, continuing to ask for their details and explain the need to do this for the benefit of the child, as well as continuing to seek details with other organisations who work with the family. As with mothers, it is important to ensure that records of contact details for fathers are regularly reviewed and kept up to date.

Top Tips

- Does the father have parental responsibility (PR)?
- Is the father living in the family home or not?
- Does father have time with the child/ren? And/or do the child/ren live with father?
- Are the parents married/divorced, or are they now in new relationships?
- Is there another significant male/father figure to the child/ren living in the home?
- Do the children have different fathers and if so, are their details clearly recorded on the system in a way that this is made obvious?

2.5 Initial Contact with Fathers

Fathers may assume services place greater importance on the mother's voice and engagement, not appreciating the importance of their voices being heard by professionals. Hence why some fathers may ignore initial contact, exhibit behaviours that imply disinterest or resistance from services. It is essential that trauma informed approaches are employed to understand father's barriers and behaviours. Practitioners should avoid mirroring these behaviours. Conversely practitioners should employ creativity and persistence to draw fathers in, communicating clearly why we want to meet with them and the importance this has to their children. Fathers and father figures that decline contact ought to be viewed within the context of a trauma informed practice and/or a lack of interest in working with professionals and services, not a lack of investment and interest in their child. Therefore, it is paramount the onus is on services to ensure that the father sees the benefit of engaging with services and that we continue to contact them throughout the time that we work with their child/ren.

Kent is culturally diverse, and practitioners should be mindful in some cultures the pathway to successful family engagement is through building a respectful relationship with father

¹ There are some organisational recording systems in which it is not possible to link a fathers record to the child/rens.

initially. Resources such as the [Cultural Atlas](#) or the Checklist for Engaging Fathers in appendix two may be useful to consider.

Top Tips

- Take a child's rights approach, contacting significant adults maternal and paternal that the child/ren have relationships with.
- Be open minded. Gain and consider all parents perspectives, giving due weight equally.
- Familiarise yourself with the separated parent's arrangements regarding shared care, so you know which parent to contact at the right time. Resources such as [KSCMP's family law legal orders factsheet](#) may assist.

3. Assessing and Understanding Fathers

3.1 Assessing Fathers

“Approaches to engagement, to interviewing and to listening should be the same for both women and men. Exploring their histories, where they draw their support from, how they see their futures.” The Myth of Invisible Men (2021)

Firstly, when assessing families, practitioners are encouraged to be professionally curious about the child’s life and significant relationships. Practitioners are to value the experience, skills and knowledge fathers bring to fathering and the positive impact child centred fathering can have on the child’s outcomes.

To be successful in including fathers in assessments, practitioners need to begin with building a relationship based on trust and mutual respect. Building an authentic relationship will enable professionals to use professional curiosity to gain a full picture of a father’s life, understanding his current strengths, needs and lived experiences, in the past, their childhood experiences, their experience of being parented, their sense of what being a father is and should be, and their hopes for the future.

Be prepared to understand the issues that uniquely affect fathers. For example: non-resident, black, minority ethnic and white working-class fathers all have unique circumstances and pressures that need to be understood and assessed. Consideration needs to be given by professionals to understand a father’s vulnerabilities particularly in the context of how they maintain patience, manage stress, anger, and frustration. Time needs to be given by professionals to gather information and understand the impact on the child of a fathers’ needs around substance misuse issues, emotional wellbeing, work, and housing situations.

Top Tips

- Include fathers from the outset, at assessment stage.
- Critically reflect on your own practice.
- Consider how unconscious bias may be influencing your own and your organisation’s engagement with fathers.
- Persist with recording as full a picture as possible of father’s lives and circumstances, including family history, past and current involvement in the child’s life, physical and mental health, and current housing/work situation.
- Understand the paternal network through using genograms.
- Recognise the value of fathers to children (children still place value on fathers when they are not visible in their day-to-day lives) and the need to involve them (where safe) in every aspect of direct work.
- Take a trauma informed approach by recognising that many fathers are vulnerable and may withdraw or become resistant as a form of defence.
- Recognise the responsibility of both mothers and fathers to adopt child focussed viewpoints.
- Value the experience, skills and knowledge fathers bring to fathering.

- Ensure you assess mothers and fathers in terms of risk and resource, while acknowledging children can never be assessed as protective factors for mothers or father's needs.
- Engaging with all different types of fathers and father figures should be prioritised and business as usual. If practitioners find they are questioning whether to involve fathers, this should be explored with line managers and reasons for not engaging fathers recorded.

3.2 Understanding Identity, Culture and Contextual Vulnerabilities

When working with fathers and father figures it is important to see them as individuals with diverse background and experiences, not one homogenous group. They need to be understood and assessed as they apply for that individual and not to be based on assumption or stereotype.

3.3 Masculinity

Research evidences the importance of understanding dominant, multiple, and marginalised masculinity when working with fathers. Ideas about masculinity and fatherhood can vary across cultures, ethnicities, and class. These need to be understood in the context of that individual to avoid assumptions or stereotypes. In addition, consideration, and application of John Burnham's SOCIAL GRRRAACCEESS model and the concept of intersectionality is vital to understand their unique experiences and how these impact on their lives and therefore their fathering for children of all ages.

One narrow, dominant view of masculinity is that a man should suffer physical and emotional pain in silence, not show weakness, doesn't need warmth, comfort, or tenderness. Acceptable emotions for men to display are bravery and anger, a man shouldn't ask for help, asking for help is weak and a man should always win. Receiving these messages means some fathers we work with will struggle to show vulnerability or accept help, the impact being that these fathers struggle to engage with services, even though they care very deeply for their child's outcomes. Practitioners need to understand masculinity and contemporary fatherhood to engage and assess fathers and wider family dynamics accurately.

3.4 Fathers Experiencing Domestic Abuse

Abuse of men happens far more often that you might expect, in both heterosexual and same sex relationships. It happens to men from all cultures and all walks of life, regardless of age or occupation. The Office for National Statistics figures show every year that one in three victims of domestic abuse are male, equating to 699,000 men in 2021/22.

Domestic abuse can be physical, psychological, sexual, or financial. Healthy relationships can have disagreements, but when a father is afraid of their partner, the relationship is abusive,

even if there is no physical violence. Men are often reluctant to report abuse because they feel embarrassed, as society puts pressure on men to act strong and sort problems out themselves. They may fear they won't be believed or scared of reprisals like not seeing their children, becoming homeless, or if they are in a same sex relationship they may face the additional challenge of having to explain how a man can abuse another man. For these reasons asking for help can be hard for some fathers.

Top Tips

- Do allocate some private time and space to listen.
- Give fathers voice due weight.
- Do be sensitive, non-judgemental, practical, supportive, and discreet.
- Do prioritise safety.
- Familiarise yourself with resources and specialist male support and for Domestic Abuse:
 - [Dads Unlimited – Supporting the emotional safety of men and those they care about](#)
 - [Men's Advice Line UK – Domestic abuse helpline for men](#)
 - [Domestic Abuse Support in Kent and Medway](#)
 - [KSCMP elearning – Supporting males experiencing domestic abuse](#)

3.5 Fathers Experiencing Mental Health Issues

According to the Campaign Against Living Miserably, 125 lives are lost every week to suicide, and 75% of all UK suicides are male. Higher rates of suicide are also found in minority communities, including gay men, war veterans, men from BAME backgrounds, and those with low incomes.

Society's expectations and traditional gender roles play a role in why men are less likely to discuss or seek help for their mental health problems. This may be based on a narrow view of stereotypical masculinity; however, practitioners need to acknowledge the additional vulnerabilities and barriers fathers may have to opening up about their worries.

Top Tips

- Let them know you are there to listen to them without judgement.
- Fathers experiencing mental health problems may find it hard to reach out, so try to keep in touch. A text message or a phone call could make a big difference.
- Find out about local services such as talking therapy or support groups.
- Help them to get help. Reassure them that it is okay to ask for help and that support is available. You could help them contact their GP or accompany them to their appointment if they want you to.
- Practitioners need to demonstrate an understanding of the impact on fathers if they are feeling excluded from their children's lives.
- Children must never be considered a protective factor for fathers who feel suicidal

or have mental health issues.

- Familiarise yourself with relevant resources:
 - [Campaign Against Living Miserably](#)
 - [KSCMP factsheet – Impact of Parental Mental Health on Children](#)

3.6 Multiple Fathers

Relationships are dynamic and therefore can change or end. Consequently, it is not uncommon for there to be multiple fathers or father figures to child/ren in some families.

3.7 Non-Resident Fathers or Own Household Fathers

These are birth fathers whose main home is a separate household from his child/ren and their mother – even if the parents consider themselves to be a ‘couple’. (Fatherhood Institute)

3.8 Shared Parenting

When children following parental separation or divorce are brought up with the love and guidance of both parents. You may hear this described as: shared parenting, equal parenting, involved parenting, co-operative parenting, parallel parenting, as other terms.

Top Tips

- Recognise the importance of the father in a child’s life, even when there is no father currently involved with the family. This will create an opportunity to talk to children about their understanding of their paternal identity and how the absence of the father has affected the family.
- Engagement may take many forms, depending on the circumstances of the child and family arrangement. The role of a father may differ depending on fathers background, experiences, and self-identity. The father role could also be provided by the child’s uncle and/or grandfather.
- When working with fathers from black and minority ethnic groups, be culturally curious and talk with the father about what it means to be a father from his cultural perspective. What is the father’s role, what are their responsibilities, what additional stressors exist (i.e. racism, poverty, and marginalisation), how would they define fatherhood from their specific perspective?
- Demonstrate an understanding that the heritage of some fathers we work with has been impacted through the history of colonisation resulting in intergenerational trauma and disconnection from their role as men and as a father.
- Support fathers to stay connected to their child and family so opportunities exist for a child to learn paternal culture, language, customs, beliefs, and traditions.
- Young fatherhood comes with complexities, exacerbated by contradicting stereotypical and anecdotal images of younger fathers. Young fathers are often exposed to multiple stress factors such as social isolation, their own health (physical and mental), role restriction and limited support networks. It is essential professionals explore individual young fathers’ lives and the paternal network

strengths and worries.

- When working with LGBTQIA+ fathers or parents when it comes to parenting, the challenges will be much the same, however there may be additional stressors such as bias either on a personal or an institutional level where there is a lack of support, understanding, services and legislation. Practitioners should ask how they experience parenting from their perspective.
- Support fathers to engage by considering accessibility, including means of communication, times of visit, venues, virtual options, and language.
- Consider making 'warm referrals' by taking fathers to introduce them to the service they are being referred to and answer any questions or concerns they may have to help them feel comfortable.
- To successfully implement active efforts, they must be underpinned by practice that is culturally competent, anti-oppressive, child-centred, trauma-informed, and relationship-based.

3.9 Meetings with Fathers

When there is a meeting to discuss a child, both parents should be invited unless there is a clear, recorded reason why this should not happen. As with all communications it should be explicit that the father is expected to attend; generic invitations to "parents" can be read as applying to the mother. It is good practice when addressing communications to use given names. When it is unsafe for both parents to be present at the same time, staggered or separate meetings should be considered. Lack of attendance by a father should not be accepted as normal and the reason for non-attendance recorded. If a father has not attended a meeting, managers and practitioners are obliged to reflect if they have failed to clearly convey the value of the meeting. Furthermore, if a father does not attend a meeting, every effort should be made for him to attend any subsequent meetings. A flexible approach should be taken to enable working parents to be present at meetings, whenever possible. Where face-to-face engagement is not possible, practitioners must make best efforts to engage fathers through electronic communication, telephone conversation and/or use of a culturally competent advocate.

3.10 Safety Planning and Managing Risk

Domestic abuse and intimate partner violence can be instigated by and affect both men and women. This section of the guidance focuses on the risk assessment and safety planning when fathers and father figures present abusive behaviours which are harmful to other people, namely their partner and child/ren.

"Male violence are powerful social influences, negatively affecting the lives of girls and women, primarily, but also, in different ways, those of boys and men". (Ferguson, 2011)

For organisations to better understand situations where domestic abuse is present and who is at risk and what support or plans are needed to manage the risk and increase safety, it is imperative professionals engage with the partner experiencing violence separately. However, fathers need to be engaged with to understand their family history, experiences,

and possible trauma. Unless we understand the father's level of insight and what if the perpetrator accepts responsibility, we are unable to effectively reduce risk.

To enable engagement where domestic abuse is a feature and the father is the alleged perpetrator, a DASH risk assessment should be undertaken (with the female experiencer of DA), and consideration given to MARAC alongside organisations own internal procedures. Practitioners must ensure there is a safety plan for the children and partner. Resources that may assist, include:

- [Safe Lives – Resources for identify the risk victims face](#)
- [Safe Lives – DASH Risk Checklist](#)
- [Safe Lives – Severity of Abuse Grid](#)
- [Domestic Abuse Support Services in Kent and Medway](#)

Practitioner safety needs to be considered just as seriously as family safety, so the practitioner should raise any issues with their line manager in order for measures to be put in place. Managers also have a responsibility for noting any perceived risks to the practitioner at the point of allocation and what their proposed safety plan in. If an assessment is made that it is unsafe for a practitioner to engage with a father, then the implications of this for risk to the safety of the child/ren must also be considered and acted upon. If it is unsafe for a practitioner to meet and engage father, then it may be logical to conclude that it is unsafe for a child to be in proximity or in the care of them.

Reflective supervision is one critical way for agencies to advance their practice and support professionals' safety and wellbeing. Key questions include:

- What do we know about the perpetrator's pattern of abuse and control as it related to responding to outside interveners?
- What safety concerns does this information raise for us? Do we have gaps in our knowledge about their pattern toward outsiders that we need to address to fully assess worker safety in this case?
- Are there any prior experiences you have had that you think are impacting your sense of safety (for yourself and the victim/survivor? If children are involved, how are we partnering with the victim/survivor around how our involvement may impact them and the children's safety?
- Do we have any concerns about the perpetrator targeting you based on your demographics, e.g. gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, etc?
- Do our concerns about practitioner unsafety have implications that should be reflected in our assessment of risk for the child/ren?

4. Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes for Father Inclusivity

4.1 Skills

Critical skills required to make services accessible and responsive to the needs of fathers and their children include the ability to:

- Consider how unconscious bias may be influencing your own and your organisation's engagement with fathers.
- Promote father-inclusive practice within your own and other agencies.
- Promote the benefits of a 'team' approach to parenting within your own and other agencies.
- Model effective, respectful, and inclusive communication when working with fathers including:
 - Verbal and non-verbal communication,
 - Listening, empathetic responding,
 - Summarising and paraphrasing,
 - Questioning,
 - Effective conflict resolution,
 - Assertiveness,
 - Use of humour,
 - Tact and sensitivity.
- Value and work inclusively with the father whilst considering the full range of possible influences in their lives and the impact of how these interrelate.
- Persist with identifying a child's father and other men involved in raising the child. This will often involve building trust with mothers and being creative, empathetic, and persistent with the wider family network.

4.2 Knowledge

There is a robust body of evidence regarding fathers and fatherhood: it is important that all practitioners understand the role of the father and the impact this will have on the outcomes for their child.

All practitioners working with children and families should:

- Understand the impact that all fathers have on their children's lives and their outcomes.
- Recognise the values of fathers to children (children still place value on fathers when they are not visible in their day-to-day lives) and the need to involve them (where safe) in every aspect of direct work.
- Think about how power, gender relations and personal experience (for example, of their own father, partner or being a father) may be shaping their perspective and influencing their practice.

- Most children want to maintain a relationship with their fathers, even if they are or have been abusive.

4.3 Attitudes

At an individual level, a practitioner's experience with, and assumptions about, men and fathers will impact on their capacity to work with them from a strengths-based perspective. Having a healthy view of the capabilities of men to build relationships is fundamental. All practitioners working with children and families should:

- Have a genuine and expressed belief in the value and importance equally of the roles of fathers and mothers in their children's lives.
- Recognise that fathers can make day-to-day decisions that meet the needs of their children and work as an active and effective member of a parenting team.
- Acknowledge fathers can form lasting and healthy attachments with their children and learn to adapt and change as their children grow.
- Value the experience, skills and knowledge fathers bring to fathering.
- Reflect on how language and other communication media can be (more) inclusive of fathers.
- Be prepared to engage with men and support them to develop their parenting skills and address any addictions, mental health problems or violence and understand any root causes of these behaviours.
- Empower marginalised fathers to be a better resource for their children.
- Be consistent in what they say and record, and how they behave towards fathers.
- Research indicated that notions of respect and disrespect can have particular relevance for men. This is evidence through popular culture about respect and disrespect. When practitioners communicate respect (verbally and nonverbally) they are more likely to engage the father and keep him involved.

4.4 Creating Mature Services

The Fatherhood Institute provide valuable evidence for Family Hubs in creating mature father inclusive services, which forms the basis for this guidance for services within the KSCMP.

Guidance suggests well designed, implemented, and evaluated inclusion of fathers with mainstream services can be three times more successful in engaging fathers when services are mature in their father engagement.

Some key features of mature services include:

- Fathers being consistently viewed as co-parents, with time being given to reflect on how fathers contribute to his child's health and development.
- Fathers are seen and assessed similarly to mothers for protective factors as well as risk.

- Meetings, interventions, support and programmes being perceived as being as much for fathers as for mothers.
- ‘Special’ father/male activities no longer being regarded as the only vehicle for father-involvement. Adjustments and flexibility in service delivery have been made to meet the needs of working fathers and mothers.
- The training and employment or identification of a father involvement coordinator or champion to focus on the agenda and practice within each sector.
- Commitment by programme leadership to engage in ongoing critical and reflective thinking and regular self-evaluations.

Investment in workforce development training to skill up practitioners, managers and leaders who can run this work and keep father inclusion high on the agenda will be crucial- as well evidence-based interventions that have been shown to be effective with fathers.

4.5 Sector Specific Guidance

Alongside this Father Inclusive Guidance, professionals should stay up to date with their own agency guidance around working with fathers.

5. References and Resources

- Allen, S. and Daly, K. (2007) The Effects of Father Involvement: An Updated Research Summary of the Evidence
- Australian Government Dept of Social Services (2022) Father-Inclusive Practice Guide
- Australian Capital Territory Child and Youth Protection Services (2020) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Father Inclusive Practice Guide
- [Campaign Against Living Miserably](#)
- Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2021) [The Myth of Invisible Men: Safeguarding Children Under 1 from Non-Accidental Injury Caused by Male Carers](#)
- [Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service](#)
- [Cultural Atlas](#)
- [Dads Unlimited – Supporting the emotional safety of men and those they care about](#)
- [Domestic Abuse Support in Kent and Medway](#)
- [The Education Act 1996](#)
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- HM Government (2021) [The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days.](#)
- [KSCMP elearning – Supporting males experiencing domestic abuse](#)
- KSCMP [Family Context and Professional Curiosity Factsheet](#)
- KSCMP [Family Law Legal Orders Factsheet](#)
- KSCMP (2022) [Harm to Under 2s in Kent](#)
- KSCMP [Impact of Parental Mental Health on Children Factsheet](#)
- [Men’s Advice Line UK – Domestic abuse helpline for men](#)
- Reeves, J. (2008) Inter-professional Approaches to Young Fathers.
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- Safe Lives [Resources for identify the risk victims face](#)
- Safe Lives [DASH Risk Checklist](#)
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6. Appendices

Appendix 1: One Minute Guide

Father Inclusive – One Minute Guide

“Where fathers are positively involved with their children, even when parents are separated, children benefit socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively.”

Allen & Daley 2007

Why the need for Father Inclusive Practice?

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report [“The Myth of Invisible Men”](#) findings:

The opportunity for offering support to men who might need it in their role as fathers, for early identification of both parental and children’s vulnerabilities, and potential risks that these indicate are not maximised.



Safeguarding practice with fathers of young children is something of a paradox. Despite evidence suggesting some men are very dangerous, service design and practice tends to render fathers invisible and generally ‘out of sight’.

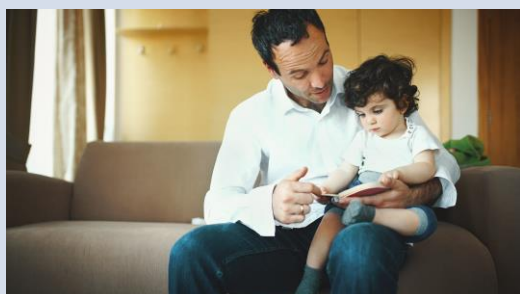


Some of the men want to remain hidden, unassessed, and unengaged.



What does Father Inclusive relationship based practice look like?

- Recognises the diverse circumstances, strengths, and interests of fathers.
- Takes a positive approach to the diversity of men, their needs, and expectations.
- Encourages men and service providers to openly celebrate and value fathering.



Barriers to Father Inclusive Practice



- Negative socially constructed images of men
- Practitioners’ own childhood experiences of abuse and violence
- Practitioner’s experiences of fathering
- Safety fears
- Practitioners feel constrained by time demands
- Missing contact details for fathers
- Mothers will often ‘gate-keep’ the father’s identity

Father Inclusive Practice Tips

- Include fathers from the outset.
- Recognise the value of fathers to children.
- Be open minded. Gain and consider all parents perspectives, giving due weight equally.
- Understand the paternal network through using genograms.
- Ensure you assess mothers and fathers in terms of risk and resource, while acknowledging children can never be assessed as protective factors for mothers or fathers.
- When working with fathers from black and minority ethnic groups, be culturally curious and talk with the father about what it means to be a father from their cultural perspective.
- Consider how unconscious bias may be influencing your own and your organisation's engagement with fathers.
- Recognise the importance of the father in a child's life, even when there is no father current involved with the family. This will create an opportunity to talk to children about their understanding of their paternal identity and how the absence of the father has affected the family.
- Be prepared to engage with men and support them to develop their parenting skills and address any addictions, mental health problems or violence, and understand any root causes of these behaviours.
- Safety planning should consider the family safety and the practitioners. Raise any issues with your line manager and complete sector specific risk assessments, for example [Safe Lives: Identifying the risk victims face](#).

Supporting Fathers with Child Centred Fathering

Child Development – Indicate to fathers that children go through a number of stages as they grow up. Help fathers appreciate the developmental context of their children's behaviour and reactions.

Positive engagement such as care and play – Support fathers to understand the value of play for children. Play is a way children work through problems, have fun, and engage adults around them. Play also provides a fantastic opportunity for fathers to connect with their children and have their children feel listened to and understood. Encourage fathers to set aside some time where they are committed to playing with their child.

Warmth and responsiveness, including emotional support – Encourage fathers to understand the importance of praise. Praise is effective in encouraging children (especially older children) to relate to how they feel about who they are and to their achievements. Praise also encourages positive self-esteem and self-worth.

Discipline with love and positive parenting – All children need positive guidance and discipline, not as punishment, but to set reasonable limits. Fathers should remind children of the consequences of their actions and positively acknowledge desirable behaviour. Fathers who discipline in a calm and fair manner show love for their children.

Respect the other parent of your child – Parents who respect each other and demonstrate mutual respect to their children, provide a secure environment for them.

Appendix 2: Father Inclusive Engagement Checklist

Father Inclusive Practice: Engaging with Fathers Checklist



Get to know the father

- ✓ Introduce yourself and welcome the father to the service.
- ✓ Ask father about his background, family and experiences.
- ✓ Ask father about his worries and what is going well for him.

Establish role clarity

- ✓ Explain and ensure a mutual understanding of your role as the professional.
- ✓ Explain and ensure a mutual understanding of your role of the father's role in accessing the service.

Consider how you communicate

- ✓ Contact the father and paternal extended family at the earliest possible opportunity.
- ✓ Ask the father how he likes to communicate, he may prefer text or email.

Build a respectful relationship

- ✓ Be reliable and on time.
- ✓ Be respectful and consistent.
- ✓ Balance criticism and praise.
- ✓ Listen to father and give his voice due weight.

Practitioner considerations

- ✓ Accept fathers can have a positive role in the lives of child/ren.
- ✓ Work is crucial to masculine identity and so this commitment needs to be respected.
- ✓ If biological father is non-resident, is there another man living in the home that has a significant relationship with the child?

Working with fathers as individuals

- ✓ Working with fathers from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, practitioners must be culturally curious and talk with the father about what it means to be a father from his cultural perspective.
- ✓ Practitioners need to consider how they will adapt their practice, as they need a variety of engagement formats so they can engage with a range of fathers, such as: married fathers, co-habiting fathers, non-residential or own household fathers, LGBTQIA+ fathers, fathers with disabilities, imprisoned fathers, fathers with no recourse to public funds, fathers with no immigration status, multiple fathers, boyfriends and stepfathers.