

Learning from Practice

Introduction:

Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) champions good multi-agency working and supports practitioner learning with examples of cases where practice demonstrates positive multi agency practice.

In October 2023 the DSCP completed a number of observations of Child Protection Conferences. The example in this learning briefing identifies that the professionals demonstrated good practice by involving both parents throughout the process for the child. There were a number of interventions within this family however this briefing is related specifically to father/male carer inclusive practice.

Background:

Child P lives with his mother and spends time with his father, he is subject to a Child Protection Plan owing to a domestic abuse incident following parents' relationship ending. Child P has been subject to a Child Protection Plan for 6 months, his father has attended all of the meetings, he was included within assessments and offered a voice when discussing his son. During the Initial Child Protection Conference father was offered a separate meeting to mother, the Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer offered father the time to discuss the strengths, concerns and contribute to the Child Protection Plan. During the Child Protection Conference observed both parents consented to a joint meeting, mother was supported to join and leave the meeting separately to father. Father's voice was clear and well represented in the work completed by the multi-agency team, he was offered support and courses to look at his behaviour towards mother.

Family members were an integral part of the Child Protection Plan, they had been offered a family meeting and were supporting the child to safely move between his parents during the week, keeping him safe from seeing further incidents of domestic abuse.

Why do we involve fathers?

It is widely recognised that when professionals had early positive involvement with fathers and male carers, and male friendly approaches this helped to improve their engagement with services. However, organisational cultures and systems can hinder their involvement, and this has been highlighted in a number of serious case reviews.

“Preconceived ideas about fathers as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ influences potentially whether they are involved in assessments regarding their children. This means that important information about risks may be lost” (Department for Education, 2016).

Fathers are important to children, and (like mothers) most present a combination of positive and negative factors. Research highlights the hugely constructive role fathers can play in a range of child and family outcomes. However, when in contact with practitioners, men say they feel overlooked both as a resource for their children and in terms of the difficulties they might be facing.

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.

Child P's Father:

I am happy with how the conference was facilitated; I think it went well. I feel like they have all listened to me, at one point it felt like fingers were pointed at me, but the last few months this has been better, and I have felt included (dad).

Child P:

I want to see my daddy.

Child P's mother:

I want our son to spend time with his father, but I need to be safe. Leanne (social worker) has helped us to put a plan in place so this can happen.

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

What can you do? 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 equally
- Understand the paternal network by 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 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.
- Be prepared to engage with men and support them to develop their parenting skills and address any addictions, mental health problems or abuse, and understand any root causes of these behaviours.
- Safety planning should consider the safety of family and practitioners. Raise any issues with your line manager and complete sector specific risk assessments, for example Safe Lives: Identifying the risk victims face.

Resources

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

Father inclusive family hubs [NCFH A&I conference: father inclusive family hubs - YouTube](#)

The Fatherhood Institute (2022) Mainstreaming Father Support in Family Hubs [Mainstreaming Father Support in Family Hubs](#)

DSCP multi agency procedures: [Domestic Abuse \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

Safe Lives: resources for professionals working with victims of domestic abuse and their families. <https://safelives.org.uk/knowledge-hub>

Podcast made by Dad's for Dad's [DigiDAD](#)