Top Tips for Involving Dads and Male Carers

Introduction

Learning from a recent Rapid Review involving a young child who was seriously injured highlighted worries about father inclusive practice before the incident. Although some attempts were made to involve dad, for example in ante-natal appointments, mum was seen to be the main carer and the main point of contact for services.

While these worries were not considered severe in isolation, the review identified missed opportunities to update dad and involve him more. This is a recurring theme locally. The findings reinforce the importance of holding dads in mind and finding ways to overcome any barriers to their involvement.

Top Tips for involving dads and male carers

Identify who the important men are, by considering:

- Biological dads
- Stepdads
- Parters
- Dads who live elsewhere
- Separated dads
- Granddads
- Adult brothers
- Uncles
- Male family friends
- Any other men who are in touch with the child/young person or who help care for them

Contact dads and male carers directly
Communicate directly with dads and male carers where this is safe. Don’t rely on another parent to:

- Pass on appointments
- Explain what is happening
- Share the father’s views
- Tell you whether he wants to be involved or not

Make sure that you gather contact details for dads and male carers so they can receive invites and information themselves

Start the conversation early
Involve dads from pregnancy onwards and as early as possible when children and families receive support.

Explain:

- why you want them involved
- what your role is
- what will happen next
- what you need from them
- how their views will contribute.

Stay curious
Keep an open mind and avoid jumping to conclusions too quickly – preconceived ideas about dads and male carers can influence whether they are involved, potentially leading to important information being missed.

Instead ask open ended questions to understand the situation better, for example:

- How would you describe your relationship with your child?
- What do you like doing together?
- What do you love most about your child?
- What do you think is going well for your child?
- What are you most proud of as a father?
- What are you worried about?
- What are your best hopes?
- What do you think needs to change?
- What would help you as a parent?
- Who else loves or cares about your child?

Be flexible
Work, transport, other responsibilities and previous experience of services can all affect how well dads work with services.

Where your service allows it, consider:

- Different appointment times
- Telephone or online contact
- Alternative meeting locations
- Contacting dads separately
- Meeting parents separately (e.g. where there are risks to the other parent)

Consider barriers
If practitioners find a dad or male carer 'difficult to engage', consider **what is getting in the way?** Think about how barriers can be overcome rather than putting the onus solely on the dad or male carer to engage with services.

Always hold safety in mind
Father inclusive practice does not mean involving a dad or male carer without considering safety. Where there are worries about domestic abuse, violence or other types of harm, practitioners should consider whether and how to work together safely.
Think about the safety of:

- The child/young person
- The other parent/carer
- Family members
- Practitioners
- The dad or male carer himself

Separate conversations or meetings may sometimes be needed. Joint visits may also help increase safety.

Additional Information

Support for Dads and Dads-to-be provides information on courses and groups for dads in Durham, healthy babies, and emotional wellbeing support for parents and parents-to be

Support for young dads: Delivered in partnership with the **North East Young Dads and Lads Project**, this initiative provides free 1-to-1 mentorship, group support, and skills workshops for young fathers and dads-to-be aged 25 and under (contact via text/phone at 07990 164 449 or email info@neydl.uk)

Dad's Stay and Play: Informal, fortnightly drop-in sessions hosted by **Durham County Council Family Hubs** for dads, grandads, uncles, and male carers with children up to reception age, featuring activities and free refreshments

Durham Dads Together provides informal meet-ups for dads and dads-to-be, with opportunities to meet other fathers and discuss areas such as bonding, managing stress, supporting partners and child development.

Dads and Male Carers Coordinator

Craig Williams is the Dads and Male Carers Coordinator for County Durham Family Hubs. The role supports practitioners and services across County Durham to strengthen father-inclusive practice through training, consultation, partnership working and workforce development.

This includes delivering Dads and Male Carers training, coordinating the Dads Champions Network, leading the County Durham Dads and Male Carers Strategic Group and supporting organisations to improve engagement with dads and male carers.

For information, training or support relating to father-inclusive practice, practitioners can contact Craig Williams via County Durham Family Hubs: dad@durham.gov.uk or contact Craig directly: Craig.williams@durham.gov.uk

Practitioners can find more information about involving and supporting dads and male carers via the Dads and Male Carers page on the DSCP website.

Key message

Please share and discuss this briefing in your teams to raise awareness of father inclusive practice. Consider including this information in team meetings, supervision and service briefings to help involve dads in a timely way.