



Conversation Stream Notes

What do Children need from Fathers?

Year of the Dad Conference - 12 February 2016

The conversation stream consisted of three presentations followed by a floor discussion.

This summary has two parts: First, a short summary of each presentation, focusing on the key messages. The second part is a summary of the issues that were discussed among participants after the presentations.

What do children want from dads?

Colin Morrison – Co-founder and Co-Director, Children’s Parliament

Colin opened with the underlying principles of the Children’s Parliament work, which centres on children’s human rights and dignity. One of the works of the Parliament was a project that contributed to the development of the National Parenting Strategy. The project was creating a space for conversations among and with children about their dads. The vignettes from the project showed expressions from children when doing activities together with their dads, and their awareness of how their dads are struggling to make a living and making the time for them.

Making school dad Friendly

Tim Porteus - Midlothian Sure Start

Alison Cameron and Chris Wilson - Prestonpans Infant School

After Tim gave a prologue, Alison and Chris introduced the Prestonpans Infant School, an example where a formal education setting tries to include dads or male carers more in a school’s service. Alison and Chris gave examples of how dads and male carers were included in the school’s activities. Two of the examples were: a) in events for families, the school makes explicit in the invitation that dads, granddads and uncles are welcome; b) the two office bearers in the Parents’ Council are male carers. They also noted that being inclusive also means giving space for dads to share their skills, hence the ‘Dads Work’ initiative.

What do children say they want from dads?

Presentation from Gary Clapton - University of Edinburgh

Gary pointed out that the topic “what children want from fathers?” is actually hard to find in research or studies, and that policy tends to use ‘needs’ rather than ‘wants’. But Gary argued that ‘wants’ could be found embedded in needs and expectations – the two terms that are mostly used in researching children’s views. After giving examples of relevant studies in Edinburgh, Scotland and other countries, Gary added that asking what children wants will get different responses depending on children’s ages and stages of development. It is noted that there is an emphasis on the quality of relationships between children and their dads across the different studies. To improve this quality, Gary reminded us that it is important to address stereotypes about fathers in the society and family services in Scotland.



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Chaired Discussion

Sarah Morton, Co-Director, Centre for Research on Families and Relationships

The following is a summary of the issues that were discussed among participants after the presentations.

- What do children want?
 - Based on the three presentations and the floor discussion, children wants love, dignity, which means being respected and their voices heard, and better quality of relationships. What children do not want is to be shouted at and neglected.
- The discussion was not successful in answering to what extent what children want from dads is different from what they want from parents in general. However, throughout presentations and discussion, it was noted that there are wider issues in society that have implications on father's involvement in family/children's lives. Inequality and stereotypes were again mentioned, as had been raised in the morning talks. Specifically, some participants gave examples of how inequality and stereotypes became barriers for fathers. The examples given were commented by the presenters' and so resulted in a rich discussion with the following key points:
 - Some family services are suggested to look for ways to involve fathers more. However, it is paramount to consider 'transitions' before taking forward this idea. 'Transitions' here points to children's ages and stages of development; making sure that father's involvement is at the stage that is appropriate. One of the stages is the early years, and what the Prestonpans Infant School has done is therefore a good example. Also, it was noted that undertaking inclusive actions should not exclude anyone. One of the comments from the participants was that perhaps there is a reason for mothers (or children) not wanting fathers to get involved.
 - Although society is changing towards promoting equal gender roles, there are still stereotypes for men; such as suspicion towards male nursery workers or dads being belligerent.
 - In order to remove the barriers mentioned above, the discussion noted a couple of influencing factors. For the Prestonpans Infant School to be able to achieve such level of involvement from fathers, teaching staff has been actively approaching dads in order to get them involved (for example, start by talking to them during the School's football practice). Listening to dads and worked with them to realize their ideas were seen as creating opportunities for their involvement. The other factor for success is to challenge traditional 'nurturing' principles and practices in parenting: to look at parenting more as a shared role between mums and dads instead of the bigger role for mums.



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