



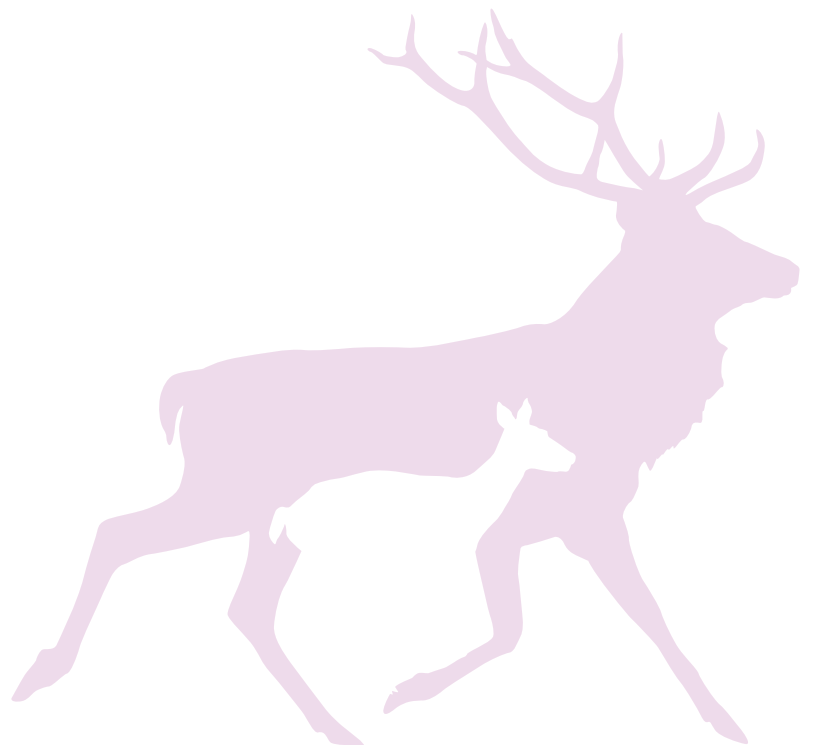
**FATHERS
NETWORK
SCOTLAND**

WHERE'S DAD TOO?

Father-Proofing Your Work

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THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

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Introduction

This is the second and revised edition of *Where's Dad?* For more than two years *Where's Dad?* has been used to campaign for practices which are more father-inclusive, focussing particularly on publicity, policy, education and practice in Scottish children and family services including the Scottish government, local councils, the health services and the third sector. Some examples of success are included in this new edition and there are many more accounts of the reach and impact of *Where's Dad?* - for instance a number of the agencies whose work was referred to have altered their publicity to make it more father-inclusive. However, getting dad in the picture continues to be a challenge, which is why we have published *Where's Dad Too?*



Father-proofing

The value of positively involved fathering is incontestable and proven (Burgess, 2008). Involved fathers ensure that children, women and families as a whole benefit. A consensus is emerging that we now need to move from having to prove the value of fathers to designing services that include rather than marginalise them. That's why we've adopted the term 'father-proofing' – a conscious strategy of future-proofing our society to be the best place for our children to grow up.

Ensuring that services are doing the best they can to involve fathers obviously means encouraging positive attitudes among staff (men and women) and a dedication to father-friendly provision.

However, the importance of image projected by services cannot be underestimated. Image – conveyed either visually or in how fathers are written about – creates a first impression, for example the look and 'feel' of a waiting room or reception area. All of this gives off messages which can say that this service is really just for women and mothers – and this in turn compounds the burden on women and restricts the opportunity for men to get more involved in the lives of their children and families.

Such messages are often particularly strong in publicity and training materials. What follows are some examples of these and suggestions about how to make changes to ensure that family services welcome both mothers and fathers.



Images

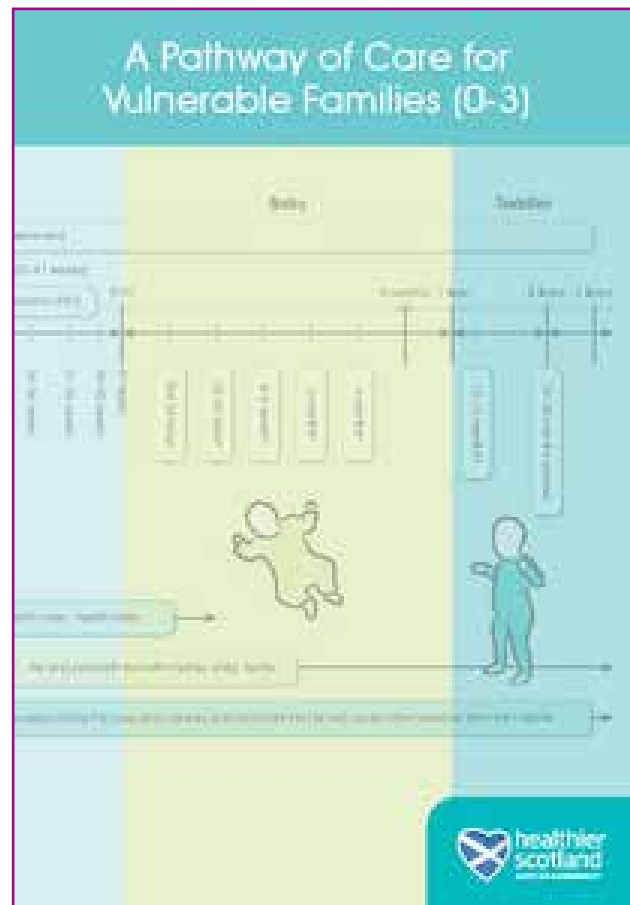
Leaflets, posters, websites and other publicity materials convey powerful messages about what constitutes a family and who a service is designed for. The following are contemporary images from major Scottish services.

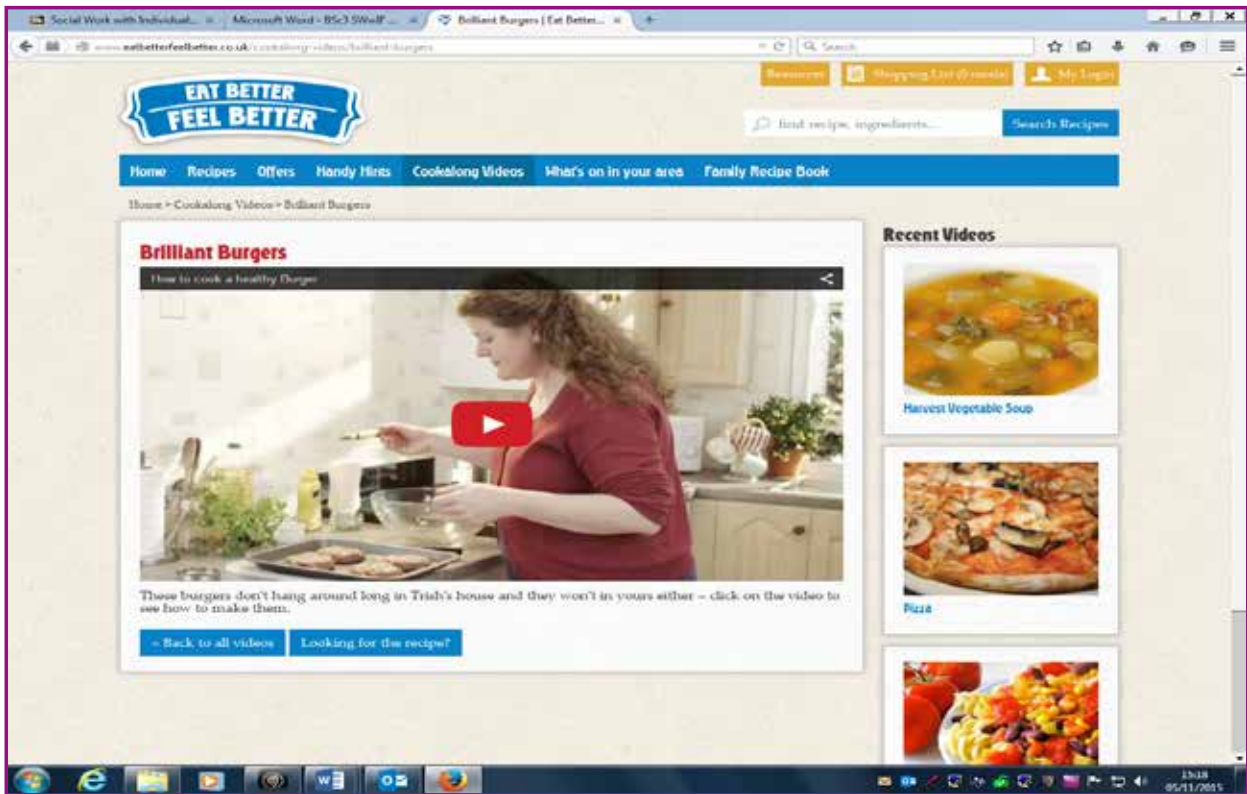
The only parental image in *The Early Years Framework*



The front cover of *A Pathway of Care for Vulnerable Families (0-3)* (on the right) describes the booklet as for 'pre and post birth for both mother, child, family'. In it there are 29 references to 'mother'. As for 'father'? 'Phrase not found'.

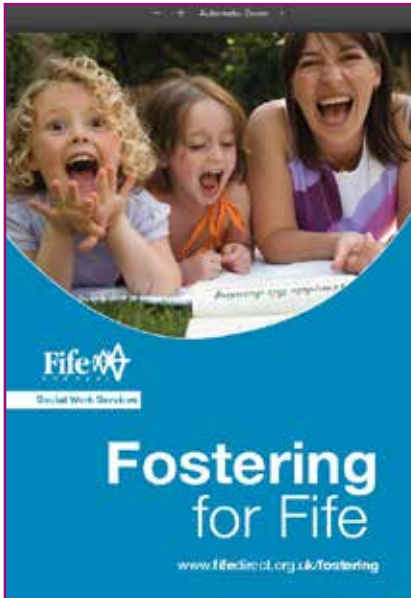
In 2015's *Eat Better Feel Better* campaign materials (see next page for visual reference) we 'are all getting behind the mums of Scotland to support them to make sure they can buy and cook healthier food for their families'. Here images of men are those of them enjoying food whereas those of women are them cooking for their families – none of the eight 'Cookalong Videos' feature men doing the cooking:





Images like these tell us two things. Firstly that children and housework are women's business and secondly that men, by being invisible, are dispensable in the lives of families. These images and the messages they give out are perpetuated throughout a swathe of other child and family publicity materials. For instance in Education services and schools, both the following images head up a *Curriculum for Excellence* factfile – 'Parents as partners':





Elsewhere in the Curriculum for Excellence materials there are 11 images of women and none of men (in *Curriculum for excellence: pre-school into primary transitions*). Social services are particularly notable for publicity that features children's services for women only:

('Paisley mum, Susan Morris, 24, had reached the end of her rope with Matthew, her four-year-old son. When Susan spotted scratches on his little sister's face, she decided it was time to call Renfrewshire Council's Triple P Team')

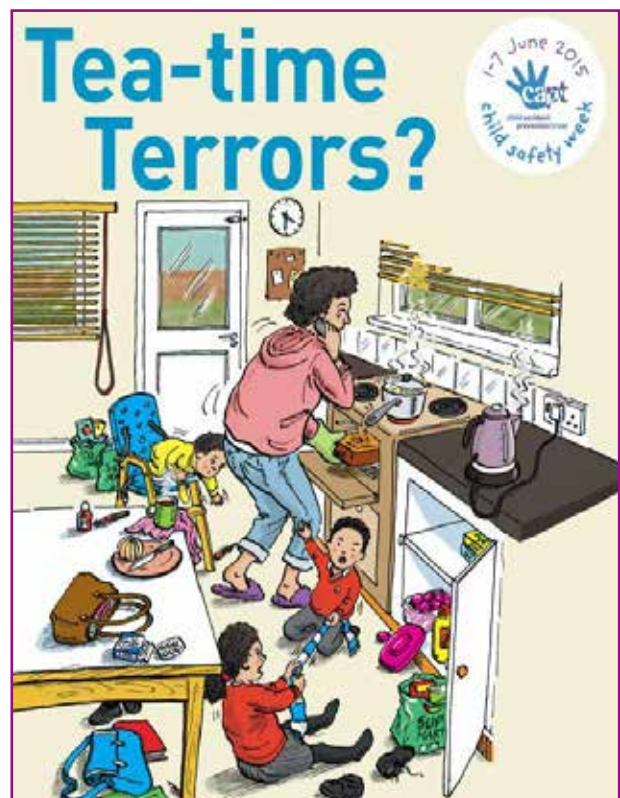
Child Safety Week



"Where can I get a list of child minders?"
(Shetland Council)

Such careless use of stock images goes beyond official sources:

Many images, whilst referring to the whole family, depict a woman-only, fatherless family:





Engaging with Families (Education Scotland)

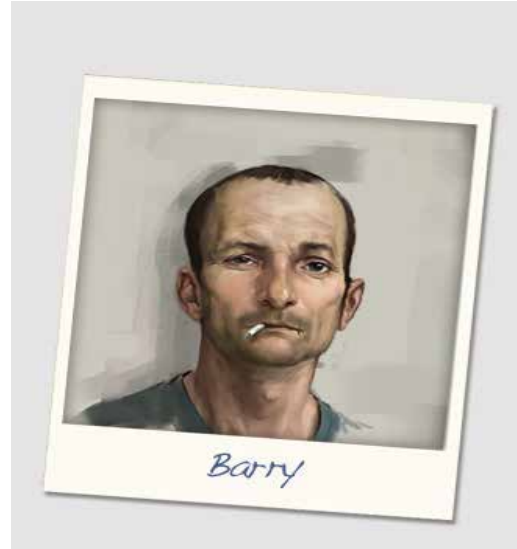
Below we see dads in the picture at last - but only as the bad guys! When images of fathers are presented, these are generally not positive, particularly in social work materials:



Both images from Children's Hearings publicity

The next two images of social services clients from the Centre for Child Protection at the University of Kent's *Rosie* – a child protection simulation, are especially clumsy:

And here's Grandad:



'Danny, father, is a hostile and intimidating character...'

If every picture tells a story, or in the above cases, sends a message that fathers are either non-existent or to be treated with suspicion, then the words and phrases used in these leaflets, booklets, on-line materials and other such documents also give a subtle (and sometime not so subtle) communication.

Language

In the most studiously neutral examples aimed at mothers and fathers, in an effort not to identify only mothers with child-care, the words 'parent' or 'parents' are used as in 'parent and toddler group'. However very few people read or hear 'mother' or 'father' in this or other examples because of the societal default understanding that parent equals mother.

Elsewhere, mothers are often 'mums' and fathers are often, well, fathers, or 'the father':

Public health and education worked together with Claire's mum and the children to support understanding of the father's illness and help mum to prepare the children for changed circumstances (Getting It Right For Every Child in Lanarkshire, Practice Examples).

Here the familiar 'mum' renders 'father' unfamiliar. How about 'mum' and 'dad' instead?

Case Studies, practice scenarios and training examples

Training and staff development activities, often either by omission (rendering fathers invisible) or commission (depicting fathers as pervasively abusive or useless) repeat the message that fathers are dispensable and mothers are the sole carers. These impressions of fathers and fathering can be grouped into three main categories.

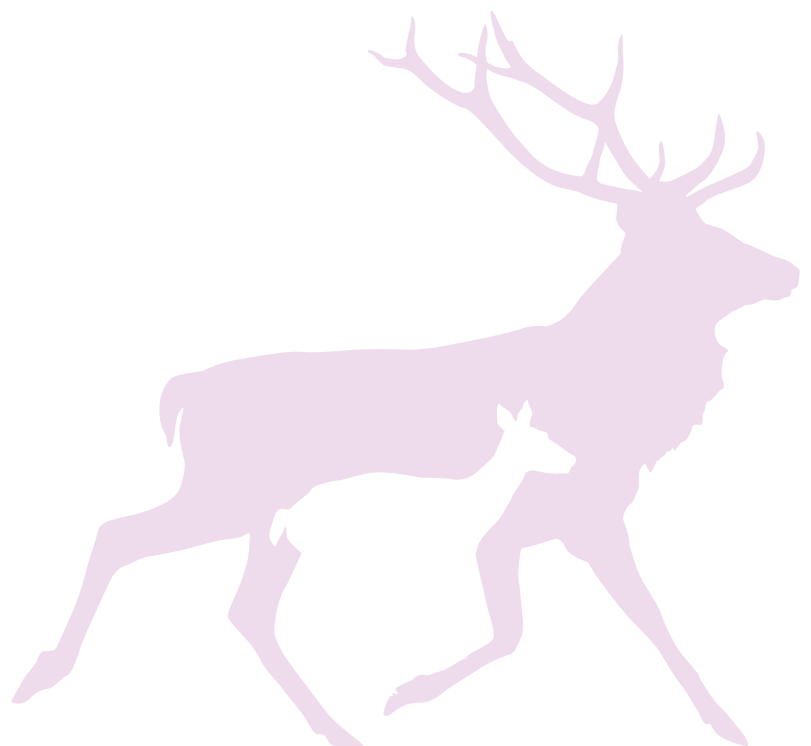
The missing father

David was born in one of the most deprived areas of Scotland to a mother who used drugs, drank and smoked throughout the pregnancy. He was brought up in an extended family none of whom have ever worked; 3 "uncles" have convictions for serious violence... (The only case study in The Early Years Framework - Personalising the Vision)

and

Erin is 15. She has a history of mental health problems including depression, self-harm and bulimia. Her relationship with her mother is a difficult one, her father is unknown (Scottish Child Law Centre training scenario)

The four case studies in *Building the Ambition: National Practice Guidance on Early Learning and Childcare, Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014* (Scottish Government, 2014) have no father present or available.



The problematic father

The e-learning resource, *Recognising and reporting situations where there might be a need for protection* is an on-line child protection module of NHS Education for Scotland. At Slide 8/28, concerned with babies' needs ('recognising maternal self-confidence'), all people other than the mother in a baby's life come under 'caretaker'. At Slide 12/28 a mother is admitted to hospital in example of when a child may become distressed and at Slide 25/28 fathers get a part, unfortunately as a problem: 'routinely involve fathers when assessing risk'.

The threatening father

It is difficult to find examples in the many books, papers and training materials where fathers are an asset. Instead fathers are regularly portrayed as alcoholic, drug-taking, wife-beating, child-harming brutes.

See for example the *Craig's Story* video made by the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children which begins "My dad was always in a bad mood, always fighting, especially when he went doon the pub' and:

Alison phoned the police when her niece broke down in tears and told her that her dad touched her privates and told her it was their secret. The police and social work are now investigating and the dad has moved into a friend's house for now.

Bob spoke to the duty social worker after his son's friend told him he was scared to go home because his dad would be drunk and might hit his mum. It turned out his family had a social worker who was able to speak to the friend, and checked that everything was ok at home.

(The above two scenarios are from the *Speak Out* campaign of Inverclyde Child Protection Committee)

Examples of such routine and lazy depictions stretch to disabled (and thus unable to help) grandfathers and routinely risky stepfathers and boyfriends. The counter that these scenarios are the experience of child protection practitioners doesn't hold up when it is understood that a third of fathers may not have been involved from the start (Roskill, 2011) thus lessening the chances of there being social work experience of a balance between good dads and not so good ones. The Lanarkshire 'Getting It Right' practice scenarios, leaving aside the mum/father awkwardness previously mentioned, does a good job in offering a range of case studies that include fathers in caring capacities.

Physical surroundings

But what if none of the prevailing messages about fathers were received by the kind of fathers who, it may be thought, need encouragement to involve themselves with services? And what if they come looking for help? How might they be greeted **before** they talk to anyone?

Walk through the door of the clinic, GP waiting area, family centre, social work office. Look around; look around again. These are not places where men and fathers are expected to be. Posters and leaflets on the walls and tables are mostly intended for women e.g. Weightwatchers, Moon Walk:



or have images of women as carers:



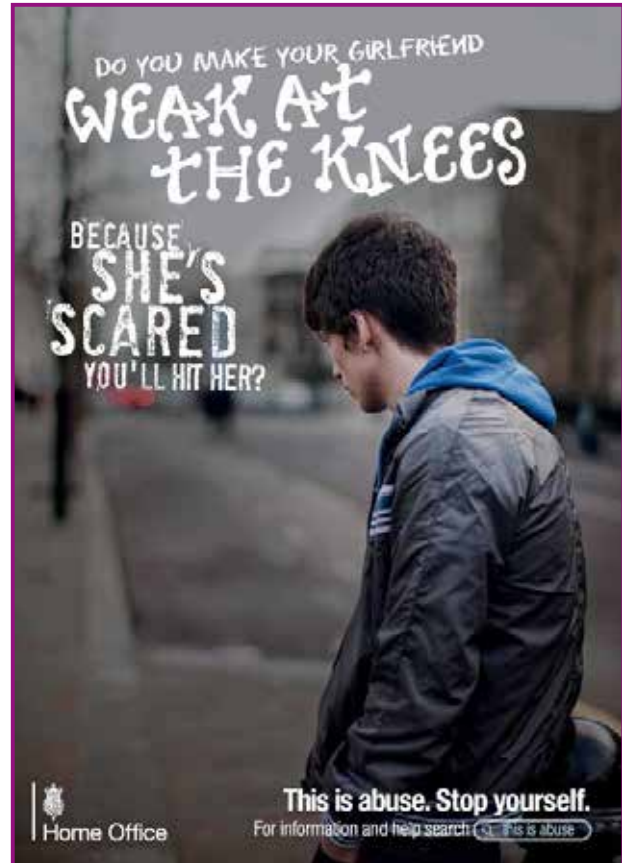
or carry hotlines and warnings to women about dangers from men. When men feature it is generally negatively as in domestic violence or the common Zero Tolerance posters.

Other posters have depictions of men as threats (sometimes just as a pair of knuckles or a shadowy gang of males being warned about knife crime) and it is rare that there will be adverts for services for men/fathers or that men are shown in anything other than a negative (let alone neutral) light.

If our man/father decides to wait and is oblivious to the walls and leaflets on the tables, what can he read? There's always *Bella*, *Take a Break* or an old *Cosmopolitan*.

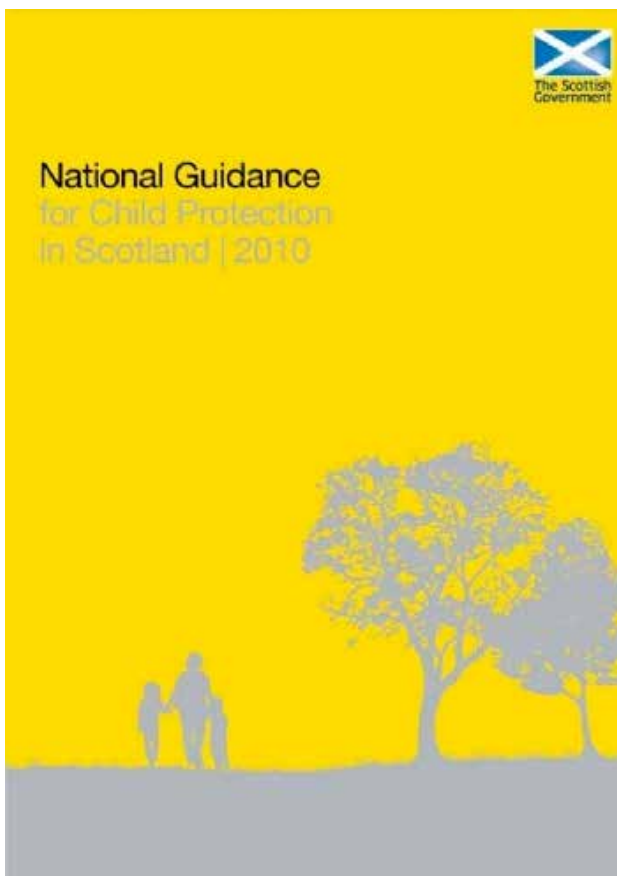
No-one is suggesting *Fast Car Magazine* should suddenly appear in waiting rooms across the land – such gender stereotypes are exactly what we need to challenge – but why not *Mens' Health* at the very least? Let's agree that the overall package that makes up the experience of waiting for help is currently not designed to encourage men or fathers to feel that they've come the right place.

Once in contact with staff and practitioners, the range and quality of attitudes and services for fathers is another matter and has been discussed elsewhere (see for instance, Clapton, 2013).

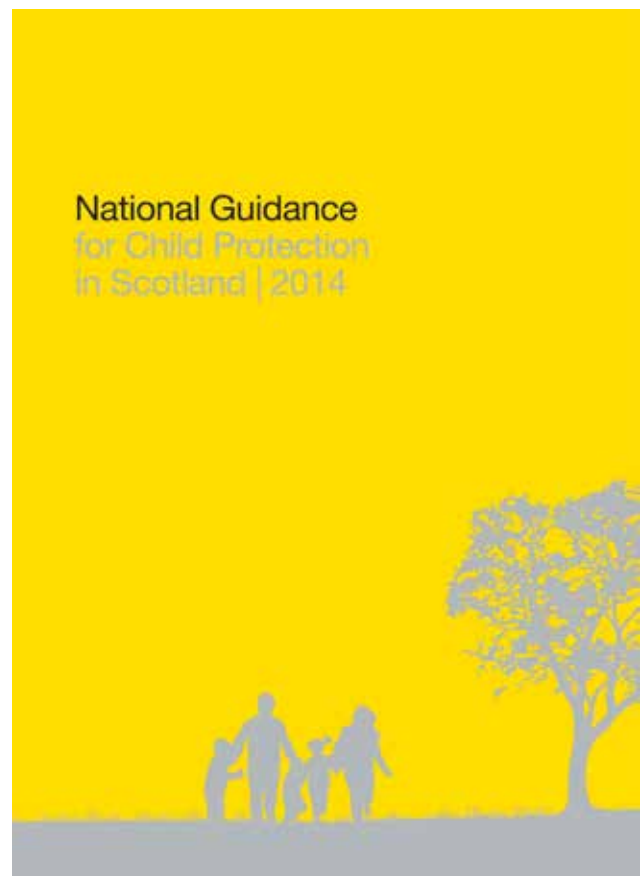


Father proofing in action

In the vast majority of examples provided, the absence of fathers or their negative depiction is unthinking rather than deliberate. It follows that change (and with it the encouragement of greater father involvement in families) requires neither undue effort nor heavy resources. Children, women, families, communities and fathers stand to benefit. Father-proofing is not only about the importance of **depicting** men as involved or capable of being involved in the lives of their children and families, it is also a tool for drawing men into the services we offer in family welfare, child care and public health. And it is just as important that we **stop depicting** women as sole carers with the sole responsibility for the health, welfare and safety of children and families. In this sense, when you flip it, father-proofing is mother-proofing. And it's as easy as this:



Before



After



Before



'Children and families

Information on child protection, Children's Hearings, fostering and adoption, and more'
(North Ayrshire, October 2014)

After



'Children and families

Information on child protection, Children's Hearings, fostering and adoption, and more'
(North Ayrshire, 2015)

Altering images, revising training materials, changing décor and balancing reading materials is one thing. However, father-proofing on its own will have limited effect if it is not part of a strategy to change cultures, attitudes and practices about children, families and mothers and fathers.

But it can be a place to start.

April 2016

References

Burgess, A. (2008) *The Costs and Benefits of Active Fatherhood*, London: Fatherhood Institute

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Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press Roskill, C. (2011) *Research in three children's services authorities*.

In Ashley, C. (ed.) *Working with risky fathers: Fathers Matter Volume 3: Research Findings on working with domestically abusive fathers and their involvement with children's social care services*, London: Family Rights Group

For more information and resources on father-proofing and other dad-friendly initiatives, consult www.fathersnetwork.org.uk



Find out more at www.fathersnetwork.org.uk

 [@FathersNetScot](https://twitter.com/FathersNetScot)

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 www.youtube.com/fathernetscot