



FACTSHEET

Resources for services

What does father-inclusiveness mean?

Positively involved fathers have a significant impact on the health, wellbeing and outcomes of children - so it is essential to actively include dads in the services you offer. This may sound easy, but in fact you'll need to put in a lot of work behind the scenes if you are really to create a 'father-inclusive' service. Setting up a dads' group is not enough!

Father-inclusiveness means redesigning all the services you deliver so as best to support father-child relationships. Specific services for fathers, such as ongoing dads' groups or one-off events for fathers, can help along this journey but don't think of them as being the solution in themselves.

Key characteristics

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' answer to how to develop a father-inclusive service, but there are some key characteristics to help you shape things in ways that make sense locally:

- Father-inclusive services offer fathers, father-figures and expectant fathers the support and opportunities they need to play their parental role effectively - whatever their circumstances and the degree of involvement they currently have in their children's lives.
- Father-inclusive services understand that dads may not appear at first sight to be in need of support; they may not even appear to be 'on the scene'. But it's surprisingly uncommon for a dad to be completely absent, and father-inclusive services operate from the point of view that dads who do not live full-time with their children can have an extremely important, positive and beneficial relationship with them, and that all family members should be encouraged and supported to achieve this.
- Father-inclusive services recognise all mothers and mothers-to-be as strong influences on children's relationships with their fathers, and therefore routinely engage with them around fatherhood.
- Father-inclusive services recognise that the life-histories, behaviour and aspirations of fathers and father-figures impact on children and mothers - and that engaging with these men is vital, if mothers' and children's needs are to be adequately served.

- Father-inclusive services are wide-ranging and flexible enough to respond to individual fathers' complex and changing needs (as these impact on fathers' effectiveness as parents), and are developed with different types of fathers in mind, so as to engage effectively with fathers' diversity. They are accessible, ie are delivered at times and in places accessed by most fathers; and are focused not just on promoting positive parenting by men, but also on reducing men's risk to mothers and children.

Steps towards father-inclusiveness

The Fatherhood Institute assesses services' father-inclusiveness using a model developed by Raikes et al, who identified various steps that organisations must go through as they progress on their journey towards father-inclusiveness.

A fully father-inclusive service:

- has an agency--wide commitment to attracting and involving fathers
- employs and trains a father-involvement co-ordinator (not necessarily a man)
- consistently views fathers as co-parents
- views programmes as being as much for fathers as for mothers
- adjusts service delivery to meet the needs of working fathers/mothers
- helps both mothers and fathers to reflect on how each father contributes to his child's health and development
- discusses fathers regularly (and includes them wherever possible) in case conferences
- self-evaluates its engagement with fathers critically, and on an ongoing basis.

Very few, if any, services in the UK and around the world are fully father-inclusive. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't be striving for father-inclusiveness...

What father-inclusiveness looks like

Here's what father-inclusive services might look like for your service:

Maternity services

- engaging dads from the moment pregnancy is confirmed
- actively inviting dads to attend and take part in every aspect of the antenatal process
- treating dads as equal partners in the transition to parenthood - not a less important, optional extra
- empowering dads to understand and support labour and birth

- helping dads understand their role in breastfeeding
- helping dads know how to identify signs of post-natal depression
- being on the lookout for dads who are struggling to cope and/or are suffering from PND
- capturing the father's data as part of the mother's birth plan.

Health visiting services

- capturing contact details of fathers as well as mothers
- inviting fathers and mothers to take part in appointments and visits by addressing each of them directly and explicitly, starting with the primary visit
- making sure fathers know how important and valuable it is for them to take part in appointments and visits
- empowering dads to understand their role in breastfeeding
- helping dads know how to identify signs of post-natal depression.

Early years services

- valuing dads and making clear how important their role is
- engaging with dads from the moment their children are first registered with the service
- capturing the father's data as part of the registration
- giving dads confidence to access the services
- welcoming dads to the service.

Schools

- capturing dads' contact details and keeping them updated regularly – making particular efforts to ensure that contact details for dads in separated families are recorded, used and updated regularly
- engaging with dads as well as mums, helping them understand how they can support their children's education, for example with regular reading and other home-based activities
- providing dads as well as mums with well-planned, tailored opportunities to participate in the life of the school; collecting and monitoring data on fathers' and mothers' involvement in the governing body, PTA etc, and going out of your way to reach a good gender balance
- celebrating dads' roles and involvement through celebrations of Father's Day, Fathers' Story Week and other family events and festivals.

Prepared by Jeremy Davies of the Fatherhood Institute

More resources for employers, service providers and families are available at: www.yearofthedad.org

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Organised by Fathers Network Scotland with support from the Scottish Government

