



Strategies for working with fathers

This good practice paper is based on research evidence and the experience of practitioners across Wales. Thank you to Swansea's Dads Groups for sharing their experience and expertise to inform this paper.

1. Consider the diversity of fathers

As well as biological fathers, stepfathers, adoptive or foster fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers or a new partner may act as a father figure to a child. Fathers come from a diversity of situations including those who are single, young, gay or from Black and Minority Ethnic communities. The key factor is they are acting as a positive male role model to a child.



2. Understand the impact fathers have

One strategy to motivate men to be more involved is to tell them about the huge impact they have on their child's development. Research shows children with involved fathers are more likely to:

- have better language development and higher educational attainment;
- have fewer behaviour problems; and
- be more resilient, handle stress better and have higher self-esteem.

3. Be aware of father's barriers to involvement in services

- Men may see parenting support services as primarily for mothers.
- Some fathers may believe they are not expected to attend appointments and home visits.
- Some fathers may be wary of joining in and being the only male in the group.

- A significant barrier to engagement is the feeling that fathers may be judged or seen as weak or a bad father for needing help and support. They may have concerns that Social Services would become involved if they needed support.
- Some fathers may perceive needing help as a detriment to their male pride.
- Fathers experience similar barriers to engaging with services as mothers including social isolation, fear of the unknown, concerns about being watched and judged, feeling that they wouldn't be accepted because of their age or ethnic background, as well as practical barriers such as transport and childcare.



4. Assess your father-friendliness

- Is it assumed fathers will be involved in all aspects of parenting or are they seen as optional extras?
- Do practitioners actively seek fathers out? – taking into account risk assessment (as with mothers)
- Is the physical environment welcoming to fathers?
- Do promotional materials reflect fathers in the words and images used?
- Do referral forms capture father's details, even if absent?
- Are the range and type of activities on offer appealing to men as well as women?

5. Consider strategies for engaging fathers

- A good time to engage with fathers is around the birth, when they are most open to information and support.
- Take a flexible approach – offer sessions and activities in the evening and weekends as well as during the day (Terms and conditions of staff may need to be considered).
- Invite 'mothers and fathers' not just 'parents'. You could get the child to specifically invite their Dad or significant male, directly to events. They could draw and/or write the invitation to their Dad or Granddad. Many men would find it hard to ignore their child's direct invitation. In using this approach, be careful not to stigmatise children, for example if the father is not present, or with LGBT families.
- Consider how you market your group or session. Fathers may be more likely to attend a group that seems practical with a clear purpose of value to them and their family. It may help to keep titles and descriptions short, keeping the focus on the children or the family. Examples such as, Making the Most of Fatherhood; Dad's Matter; Men Behaving Dadly, Builder's breakfast may work better than inviting fathers to a coffee morning or support group.

- Build rapport with fathers before they attend a group (for example, using home visits or taster sessions).
- The qualities that fathers believe to be important in a good facilitator are having a sense of humour, being approachable and non-judgemental, acting as a good role model, being able to relate to fathers and adopting an interactive and 'fun' style of working.
- There is nothing wrong with having female facilitators but women may often be viewed as experts on parenting. Having a male role model can break down barriers. The individual preferences of parents, the skills of the facilitator and personalities are what count.
- Offer fathers practical support, referrals and resources for issues outside of parenting (in partnership with other agencies). This helps build trust.
- Show fathers how other men are getting involved.
- Initial socialising and fun activities can break down barriers and put fathers at ease. Providing a snack or other refreshments can also be a good hook.
- Encourage mothers to bring their partner along – Men are more likely to engage if their partner encourages them to do so. End of term parties, fun days and other unstructured events are often a good way of enabling this.
- Support staff to feel more confident and competent about engaging fathers.



Resources:

Parenting in Wales: Guidance on engagement and support has more information about engaging fathers and approaches to supporting and engaging parents <http://bit.ly/1N7xxgQ>

The Fatherhood Institute has useful information including a 'Young Dads Resource Pack' <http://bit.ly/2eihtnv> a checklist for engaging fathers in parenting programmes <http://bit.ly/2dkgSxi> and a free on-line course "Dads Included" <http://bit.ly/2d1Jpsi>

Contact:

Welsh Government Parenting Team by e-mailing parenting@wales.gsi.gov.uk

gov.wales/giveittime



Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

