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# MEN'S HEALTH RESOURCE KIT

Kit 3: Practitioners' Guide to Men  
and their roles as Fathers

Title	Kit 3: Practitioners' Guide to Men and their roles as Fathers
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# FOREWORD:

Professor John Macdonald  
and Dr. Anthony Brown

The Men's Health Information and Resource Centre (MHIRC) at Western Sydney University began in 1999 and has been mostly funded by the NSW Ministry of Health. Our mission, since then, has had as its mission to supportive people working men and boys what we called the "non-deficit view of men", especially disadvantaged men. At the time, and to some extent this is still true, "men's health" was generally viewed in terms of pathologies, either the physical ones, like prostate issues or social ones such as men's diffidence in using health services, their reluctance "to talk" and their propensity to violence. While not shying away from what truth there might be in such positions, we realised that to improve men's health across NSW and beyond we need a broader view. The social determinants of men's health<sup>1</sup> became our way of promoting a more rational and compassionate view of men. We can take some pride in having been part of moving the national culture, both professional and popular, towards an acceptance of a social determinants approach, as being a useful way of working with boys and men. In this way we have been privileged to have played a role in promoting men's health policies at State and national level and even internationally<sup>2</sup>. "Learning with and from Aboriginal men" has been one of our themes and running the Shed at Mount Druitt, a one stop shop for Aboriginal men and indeed there we have learned something about working respectfully together on "men's business".

These Resource Kits draw on our experience and contacts to make available to people working with men some useful frameworks for their work. The four parts of the Resource Kit presented here in no way claim to cover all the important issues on the topic of male health but we think they make a good start and we thanks the authors for working with us on them. The papers are:

*Kit 1: Practitioners' Guide to Accessible Health Care for Men*, by Micheal Woods.

*Kit 2: Practitioners' Guide to Effective Men's Health Messaging* by Associate Professor Gary Misan, Chloe Oosterbroek.

*Kit 3: Practitioners' Guide to Men and Their Roles as Fathers* by Andrew King, Dr. Joe Fleming, Dave Hughes, Mohamed Dukuly, Marc Daley, Rick Welsh.

*Kit 4: Practitioners' Guide to Men and Mental Health* by Dr. Suzanne Brownhill.

There are, of course, other issues we would like to cover and in one way or another we will, such as working with particular male populations, especially boys, Indigenous men, gay men, and older men; as well as other issues such as men and cancer, and making health services more "male friendly". But the four presented here represent in some way a marker of where we see men's health in Australia in the 21st century.

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Macdonald, J. *Environments for Health*. 2005, London: Earthscan; Macdonald, J. J. (2006). Shifting paradigms: A social determinants approach to solving problems in men's health policy and practice. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 2008. 185(8): p.456-458.

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Brown, A., & Macdonald, J. Men's Health in Australia in *Men's Health Around the World: A review of policy and progress across 11 countries*. 2009. Brussels: European Men's Health Forum: p.13-17.

# ABSTRACT:

Most men, regardless of the breadth of differences in life experience, recognise that fathering today is different to how they were fathered. While society has changed, few men discuss these changes with other men or have the opportunity to talk about them with health professionals. This guide is primarily focused on engaging fathers in community services, health contexts and programs who otherwise are often less involved for a wide variety of reasons. It has been written to support health professionals to engage with the fathers in the families that they work with, encourage them to discuss the significance of the role they play and the impact that this has on other family members.

The term 'father' in this guide reflects the different ideas, responsibilities, duties, and activities that men play today in family life. In contemporary society, a father can be both biological and social and described as the significant male role model in a child's life. Men who are the significant role model in a child's life can be in intact relationships, separated, or single and while many are the child's biological father they can also be a grandfather, step-father, uncle or another member of the family or unrelated man.

The benefits of having a father involved in raising his children have become more evident over the last few decades. Leading researchers and studies, both internationally and here in Australia, have identified that being an involved father brings with it many health and social benefits to fathers, children, mothers and the extended family.

Fathers' play with their children seems to promote an active, competitive, autonomous and curious attitude in children that is beneficial to the child's cognitive and social development. It also buffers early separation, stranger, and social anxiety. While the involvement of fathers has been associated with the rearing of boys, it is equally important for girls. However, while dads may be seen to have a natural tendency to play with their children, they need to be more conscious of the important

opportunity they have and actively develop more quality play experiences with their children. This is a key role that health professionals have in working with the family. An important measure is the amount of sole-time play the fathers have with their children, where they can develop their own confidence without the mother being present.

The involvement of fathers is a support to the mother's essential and vital role. As more men are involved with parenting of their babies, the stress and pressure on mothers will decrease. This will result in women feeling more satisfied as parents, increased breast feeding [8] and even greater benefits to the child's development. There are a variety of pressures that can challenge this including insecure housing, unemployment, family breakdown and domestic violence. However, as programs and organisations improve their engagement with fathers, professionals need to use their wisdom and skills to ensure that both mothers and fathers are engaged in parenting.

Dads' roles have changed dramatically in recent decades. Not only are more fathers present at the birth of their children than in previous generations, many men are trying to be more active and engaged fathers in a variety of ways. Many families have navigated this change at a pragmatic level without a lot of discussion and role reflection. Many women may now have a dual role of provider and nurturer, a role which many men have embraced while others maintain a role of primary provider. These changes reflect the flexibility of many men in adapting to changing roles and expectations and challenge many of the negative stereotypes about men's supposed inflexibility and unwillingness to change.

Engaged, active fathering may also improve men's health. Men tend to fare worse than women in most disease groups and die approximately five-seven years earlier than women. Supporting men's fathering role may well be a significant catalyst that supports men to achieve better health outcomes.

# SUMMARY:

This guide has been written to support health professionals to engage with the fathers in the families that they work with. The guide gives an overview of the evidence around the significance of fathers' roles in their children's lives and the impact of this on other family members. Healthy child development requires children to have as many healthy adults around them as possible, with those people playing a significant role at different times. This guide is primarily focused on engaging fathers in community services, health contexts and programs who otherwise are often less involved for a wide variety of reasons.

Engaged, active fathering also improves men's health. Men tend to fare worse than women in most disease groups and die approximately five to seven years earlier than women. Supporting men's fathering role may well be a significant catalyst for men to achieve better health outcomes.

The way society views dads and the way that they view themselves is changing so rapidly that many families simply struggle to keep up. The guide reviews some of these changes, where they have come from, and gives advice on what is needed to make sure that children have involved fathers who are enhancing the experience of fatherhood in a way that both children and fathers deserve.

Dad's roles have changed dramatically in recent decades. Not only are more fathers present at the birth of their children than in previous generations, many men are trying to be more active and engaged fathers in a variety of ways. Many families have navigated this change at a pragmatic level without a lot of discussion or reflection on these changing roles. Many women now have a dual role of provider and nurturer, a role which many men have embraced while others maintain a role of primary provider. These changes reflect the flexibility of many men in adapting to changing roles and expectations and challenge many of the negative stereotypes about men's supposed inflexibility and unwillingness to change.

Parents today may live in heterosexual, gay or lesbian relationships, in an extended family or parent by themselves. While we acknowledge the importance of same sex parents, this document has brought together research and practice evidence around heterosexual parents. Some of the ideas presented in this guide are relevant to engaging gay, bisexual or transgender fathers. The evidence base for the best ways to support these men and their families is sparse but growing and support for these men and their families requires adherence to principles of access and equity.

# CHAPTER 1:

## WHY CONSIDER FATHERS?

### SOCIAL CHANGES AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF FATHERS

The traditional role of men in the past has created a challenge for all fathers, not least of all those who become divorced or separated. In the past, men have usually increased their involvement in parenting as their children get older and develop more cognitive and gross motor skill ability i.e. play sport. However, today fathers are more involved in the immediate care of their children as babies and throughout their development [4]. This change is likely to be due to the significant increase in men attending their child's birth. After World War II, 5% of men attended the birth of their children [5]. In the 1980's, it is estimated that 80% of men were attending the birth of their children. Today, male partners attend 98% of births in industrialised countries [6, 7]. This change has forged many other changes that mean men today father very differently to how they were fathered.

The involvement of fathers is a support to the mother's essential and vital role. As more men are involved with parenting of their babies, the stress and pressure on mothers will decrease. This will result in women feeling more satisfied as parents, increased breast feeding [8] and even greater benefits to the child's development. There are a variety of pressures that can challenge this including insecure housing, unemployment, family breakdown and domestic violence. However, as programs and organisations improve their engagement with fathers, professionals need to use their wisdom and skills to ensure that both mothers and fathers are engaged in parenting [9].

In 1999, the Commonwealth Government conducted significant research into the role fathers were playing in family relationships [4]. It identified that for many men their relationship with their children is a very significant connection in their life. It is a personal space that men rarely have had the occasion to share and which few services deliberately enquire into.

Australian men are becoming more vocal about this quiet place, i.e. the importance of their connection with their family, particularly their children. What is occurring is a quiet men's revolution. This men's revolution is not as vocal as the women's movement, but it is noticed as men talk about achieving a better balance between work and family demands. The change is seen by how men behave differently as they walk hand-in-hand with their children and proudly push the pram. Some men identify that the reason for attending a fathering program is because they want to father their children differently to how they were fathered. The birth of a child is now a 'wake-up call' for many men and an opportunity for them to review the choices they make in life and provides the motivation to develop stronger relationships.

### BENEFITS OF HAVING FATHERS MORE INVOLVED WITH THEIR CHILDREN

The benefits of having a father involved in raising his children have become more evident over the last few decades. Leading researchers and studies, both internationally and here in Australia, have identified that being an involved father brings with it many health and social benefits to fathers and children [10].

The benefits are:

- **Experienced by the father** – When fathers build strong relationships with their children and others in the family, they are more likely to receive support and caring in return. Healthy family relationships provide the strongest and most important support network a person can have, whether that person is a child or an adult. The World Health Organization sees such relationships as important social determinants of health [11].
- **Experienced by the mother** – The mother will experience higher levels of support and less stress.
- **Experienced by the children** – Research shows that where fathers have early involvement in a child's life children are more likely to have early educational achievement. If there are good parent-child relationships in adolescence, children will be protected from mental health problems, even after family separation [12].

Other benefits for children include improved cognitive competence in infants, better academic achievement in school aged children and more positive peer relations in adolescence [13].

Being involved in their family members' lives can help fathers to:

- enjoy a secure relationship with their children,
- cope well with stressful situations and everyday hassles,
- feel as if they can depend on others more,
- feel more comfortable in their occupation and feel that they can do their job well, and
- feel confident they have a lot to offer others in terms of their job skills, parenting skills, and social relationships [14].

## CHALLENGES TO GET FATHERS INVOLVED

There are multiple reasons why fathers may be less involved in health and child welfare services [15] including:

- competing use of resources may mean services cannot be delivered outside of normal working hours when more fathers could attend,
- assumptions made by the health and child welfare systems that do not include or can actively exclude the involvement of fathers,
- conflict in past or present relationships,
- mothers fail to identify the father or are unwilling to include them,
- workers traditionally focus child welfare interventions upon the mother often due to assumptions about gender roles, and
- fathers may avoid contact with workers as they view parenting as the mother's role or find that interventions are not focused upon their perceived needs or preferred activities.

These barriers are best overcome by the early engagement with and involvement of fathers. This is achieved by ensuring that fathers are contacted and understand what health/child welfare workers to be involved with and what rights they have as fathers with regard to the health and welfare services.

Parent education groups often have more mothers accessing the programs than fathers. Some programs combine group, couple or individual learning opportunities. Not all parents (mothers and fathers) will attend parenting education programs due to a variety of circumstances. Labelling fathers who do not attend these programs as 'hard-to-reach' should be avoided. Labelling without understanding the context of fathers and families will not increase the likelihood of their engagement with services and restricts services from responding creatively to barriers certain fathers and families encounter in terms of access.

Some of the ways in which services and practitioners can overcome this issue will be discussed in Chapter 3, under the section *Effective models of service delivery*.

### Summary of Effective Strategies for Involving Fathers

A small American study [15a] identified that most fathers had attended at least one of the Well-Child Visits (WCV) with their child's paediatrician in the past year. The majority of fathers were satisfied with health care professionals they dealt with (doctors, nurses and office staff). Three main factors contributed to their expression of satisfaction:

- Inclusive interactions with the physician and health care staff.
- The perception of receiving quality care.
- Receiving clear explanations.
- That they provide child care.

Many of the fathers enjoyed being complimented by health care staff and perceived that they were receiving equal quality service as mothers. Some fathers expressed negative experiences including the difficulty in attending appointments due to work schedules, lack of confidence in their parental role, and health care system barriers [16].

When services insisted that referrals to their program made reference to the role of the father in the family, the result was higher levels of father engagement. It was also found that the ways in which fathers were approached about engagement had a direct effect on their involvement. Cullen offers the following useful strategies for engaging fathers – [17]:

- Visiting them at home.
- Being persistent in having clear expectations.
- Consulting fathers as to what services they required is an effective strategy in increasing their engagement.
- Employing male staff.
- Promoting programs in alternate locations such as sports clubs, employment training programs or workplaces.
- Displaying positive images of fathers and their children.
- Using gender specific language – referring to 'fathers' and 'dads' as opposed to 'parents' should be adopted. It was, however, recognised that some men would be less self-conscious about attending a program for all parents than one specifically for fathers, so caution is needed in the gendering programs.
- Offering flexible hours of services for working fathers
- Highlighting the positive gains to children of father involvement.
- Use activity-based interventions where fathers can spend time with their children and where their strengths are built upon to positively enhance their fathering skills.

'Teamwork parenting' is a very important concept. In 2009, Cowan [18] conducted a randomized control evaluation of an intervention to increase fathers' engagement. Participants were randomly assigned to either a 16-week group for fathers, a 16-week group for couples, or a 1-time informational meeting. Results from an 18-month follow-up demonstrated that both the longer interventions produced superior effects for fathers' engagement with their children, couple relationship quality, and children's behaviour. However, only the parents from the couples groups showed significant declines in parenting stress. The inclusion of both parents in any parenting interventions is very important. Including both parents in any intervention or service may also require providing childcare arrangements. Time-poor parents, without many local connections, may have difficulty organising childcare arrangements, which necessitates one parent remaining with the children while the other attends the intervention or service.

Best practice wisdom indicates that it is essential to provide a range of choices for engaging fathers that include working individually with both parents, providing groups that target the parents as a couple and also the provision of fathers' groups.

# CHAPTER 2:

## FATHER'S ATTACHMENT TO THEIR CHILDREN

According to attachment theory, a secure relationship is essential for a child's healthy development into adulthood [19]. In the past, studies surrounding the development of children have focused almost exclusively on a child's relationships with their mother. Today we understand more fully that fathers play a unique and crucial role in nurturing and guiding the child's development. Many researchers now believe that fathers in their own way are just as nurturing and sensitive with their babies as mothers [20] even though this may be expressed differently. Healthy child development relies on the roles played by both the mother and father respectively, whether they live together or apart. The early years of bonding and attachment are crucial to the developing child's brain which sets the blueprint for the rest of their lives.

One can detect a shift in professional understanding away from quantity of time spent with a child towards emphasising the importance of the quality of time spent with a child. As children grow, and develop, fathers take on added roles of guiding their child's intellectual and social development. Traditionally, parenting approaches have focused on the primacy of the mother's role. However, it is now being recognised [21] that the best outcomes for children are not as much linked to the amount of parental involvement but the quality of that relationship. While a father may be at work or travelling for many hours each day, they can still provide their child with a positive view of the world, reassuring their child that the external world can be a safe place to live.

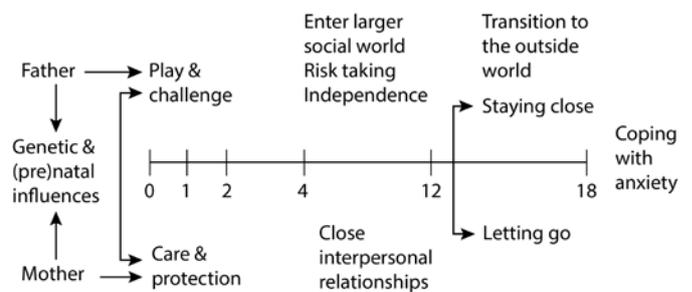
When a father is 'just playing' with his children, he is nurturing their development. Mothers and fathers interact with their children in different ways, fathers tend to play more physically and induce more excitement from their children than do mothers [22]. Fathers instil a sense of confidence to explore within relationships.

Studies on attachment have shown that there are no differences between fathers' and mothers' potential abilities to develop an attachment to their children. It has been shown that fathers and mothers in a representative population are equally able to form a secure base for their children [23]. In the first years of a child's life, the mother often holds a child for the purposes of caretaking and nurturing, whereas a father holds the child for the purposes of playing [24]. The fathers' interaction is often more active, stimulating, exciting, teasing, challenging and may even at times scare or arouse anxiety in the infant. These experiences serve as an important purpose in children's lives, not just for their immediate care but also for their longer term development.

Traditionally attachment theory has emphasised the significance of safety, comfort and security as key factors in a child's development. It is now recognised that 'risk and exploration' are equally important factors and are often

undervalued. Figure 1 highlights that a child's experience of play and challenge experiences with their father supports the development of independence, risk taking and the skills required for development throughout childhood into the larger social world [25]. A key focus in understanding this today is the experience of 'rough and tumble play'.

Figure 1: Different roles of fathers and mothers in their child's development [21]



### ROUGH AND TUMBLE PLAY

Rough and tumble play is not equivalent to fighting between children. All mammals on the planet, especially the juveniles, have some form of rough and tumble play. In experiments, when rats are deprived from experiencing rough and tumble play they are much more anxious and likely to socially isolate [22].

Rough and tumble play may involve:

- Wrestling, grappling, kicking and tumbling
- Has few rules
- Can be clearly distinguished as different to fighting
- Key emotion is enjoyment, not anger
- Involves dominance swapping (child and father take turns in 'winning')
- Can involve the fathers teaching the skill of winning/ losing with effort
- Is connected with the development of emotional self-regulation in children.

*One father said "I know he wants to wrestle when he gets that gleam in his eye. I chase him into the bedroom and he throws himself on our bed. I play the bulldozer. I put my head down and push and push until he falls off the bed onto the carpet. Other times we do world wrestling. I push him down on the bed, where I am going to slam him, but I do it really slowly, so that he has time to roll away before I crash down on the bed. There's lots of tickling too" [1]*

In summary, fathers' play with their children seems to promote an active, competitive, autonomous and curious attitude in children that is beneficial to the child's cognitive and social development. It also buffers early separation, stranger, and social anxiety [21]. While the involvement of fathers has been associated with the rearing of boys, it is equally important for girls. However, while dads may be seen to have a natural tendency to play with their children, they need to be more conscious of the important opportunity they have and actively develop more quality play experiences with their children. This is a key role that health professionals have in working with the family. An important measure is the amount of sole-time play the fathers have with their children, where they can develop their own confidence without the mother being present.

## RESEARCH ABOUT THE VALUE OF INVOLVING FATHERS

It is now recognised that when men spend time providing intimate care (hands-on responsibility) to a new born child, their level of oxytocin (also known as the love or trust hormone) is increased and their level of testosterone decreased. Mother's levels of oxytocin also increase during birth and breastfeeding. However, Gannon found that oxytocin levels in mothers and fathers are triggered differently. High oxytocin levels in fathers are more often triggered by stimulatory parenting, such as tossing their baby in the air, while levels of oxytocin in mothers tended to correspond with affectionate actions such as soft hugs, caresses and baby talk [26].

In summary, the evidence from cross-sectional and longitudinal research in infancy, childhood, and adolescence suggests that the father has an equally important role in child development but a role that is different from that of the mother. In general terms the father's role can be described as one which is undertaken through play, challenge, risk taking, encouraging independence, and, later in development, by helping the child to make the transition to the outside world [25].

A British study [27] followed a group of women since their birth in 1946. This study collected considerable information about these women from infancy, including their memories of how their parents behaved towards them up to the age of 16. The study found that a father who was very controlling, authoritarian, or didn't trust the child, was related to lower scores of psychological wellbeing when the women were assessed in adulthood. However, the participants had very high levels of wellbeing when they had a relationship with a father who was trusting, respectful and appreciative while providing good guidance. This finding was irrespective of the quality of the relationship they had with their mother.

It is also clear that fathers play a key role in the development of their children through the support they give the mother and the family. This support may be emotional, behavioural

or financial. Even in post-separation contexts, it is critical for fathers to realise the on-going significance of this support and the role they continue to play in their children's lives, which is something that needs to be more fully recognised by all the professionals involved.

Researchers and other professionals must recognize that men and women can be engaged in caring for and have healthy relationships with children. This usually is referred to as 'non-deficit perspectives' to fathering, where men take an active role in family life and the care of children [28]. Practitioners can be very important in helping fathers develop attachments to their children. This is facilitated by:

- Including information on fathers' roles in child development and child development in general.
- Helping fathers create a baseline checklist of their involvement activities with their children, so that they can see how they are progressing.
- Identifying and providing 'emotional space' to address loss of children through death, miscarriage or separation.
- Including one-to-one sessions or 'turning-point moments' at any time with fathers when facilitating parent education groups [29].

In summary, it is important to encourage fathers to develop strong attachments with their children and to facilitate this attachment it will benefit not only the child but also the mother, the father and their relationship and connection to society in general.

# CHAPTER 3:

## INVOLVING FATHERS - SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Research indicates that fathers play a key role in raising active, vigorous, robust and thriving infants [30]. Fitting with the research regarding risk and exploration attachment, infants seemed especially comfortable with, and attracted to, stimulation from the external environment.

Eight-week-old infants can discriminate between their fathers and their mothers, and respond in a differential way to their approach. Research in the United States of America that compared videotapes of comfortably seated infants' response to their mothers' approach and their fathers' found that in anticipation of their mothers' picking them up, babies settled in, slowed their heart and respiratory rates, and partially closed their eyes. When they expected their father to hold them, babies hunched up their shoulders, widened their eyes, and accelerated their heart and respiratory rates [31]. In addition, the more fathers participated in bathing, feeding, diapering, and other routines of physical care, the more socially responsive the babies were [32]. Statistics also show that one of the most significant indicators of breast feeding rates at one and six months is the *fathers' attitude towards breast feeding*. For this reason, and many more, it is vital that dads are encouraged to be involved in an increased capacity.

### INVOLVING FATHERS IMPROVES SUPPORT FOR THE MOTHERS?

Benefits for mothers when involving fathers in childbirth are summarised [6] as being:

- Women whose husbands were present and supportive during labour were less distressed [33, 34].
- Labouring women benefit when they feel 'in control' of the birth process [35]. A key component of feeling in control is experiencing support from their partner during the birth.
- Support during delivery provided by a 'close support person' (who can be, and often is, the baby's father) creates a more positive childbirth experience for the mother, with a shorter duration of delivery and less pain experienced [36].
- When the support person (including fathers) knows a lot about pain management, women have shorter labours and are less likely to have epidurals [37].
- When women are more supported during childbirth, they develop more positive attitudes to motherhood [38].

Men need education about labour and childbirth processes so that they are aware of what to expect when they accompany their partners for childbirth. This understanding will enable them to

better support their partners emotionally throughout the birthing process [5].

Ways to improve the support of fathers [6] are:

- In childbirth classes, have a short time where the mothers and support people can have separate small group discussions about how they can respond to the challenges of childbirth and the theme or issue currently being discussed.
- Provide expectant father classes that cater for their information needs with easy-to-read handout and materials.
- Use practical examples in how men can be supportive. It is important to provide active examples for how they can support their partner through the birth process.
- Encourage the reflection and involvement of fathers in childbirth classes. Fathers who have been prepared well to participate productively in the labour process tend to be more active participants, and their partners' birth-experiences tend to be better.
- Use the personal testimony of a mother and father who recently had a child, to talk to the next class about their reflections and experiences.
- Recognise the psychological boost the fathers can provide as a support person. Medical professionals greatly underestimate the psychological boost fathers give to their partners during delivery, and the practical support men provide during labour and afterwards.

### INVOLVING FATHERS TO SUPPORT MOTHERS WITH POST-NATAL DEPRESSION

When mothers have post-natal depression the father's functioning as a support person is critical as the women often receive more support from their partner than from any other individual, including medical staff [39].

A Canadian randomised control study that involved partners in support programs for mothers with postnatal depression found that when the women's partner participated in 4 out of 7 psycho-educational visits, the women displayed a significant decrease in depressive symptoms and other psychiatric conditions [40]. When only the women received the intervention the general health of the depressed women's partners deteriorated. This effect was not found where the men were included in the intervention [41].

- A shorter length of hospital stay among women with pre/post-partum psychiatric disorders is strongly and positively correlated with supportiveness by their (male) partners [42].
- A brief and inexpensive US intervention (one prenatal session, in separate gender groups focusing on psychosocial issues related to becoming first-time parents) was associated with reduced distress in mothers at six-weeks postpartum [43].

Fathers, as well as the mothers, can experience physical and/or emotional disturbances following the birth of a child. These may include:

- feelings of sadness
- anxiety
- irritability
- poor concentration
- changes to appetite
- sleeping difficulties
- increased intake of alcohol or drugs.

These feelings may be related to life changes, personal or relationship issues, fears or concerns either parent may have.

In these situations it is useful to encourage both the mother and father to:

- Work as a team to tackle this challenge in their life.
- Allow family and friends to support and help.
- Learn about post-partum depression and ways they can support each other.
- Share their thoughts and feelings with each other.
- Focus on their shared dreams for their child and family.
- Spend time engaging in pleasant activities as a family.
- Create an environment that allows each of them to engage in positive interaction with their baby.
- Create an environment that allows each of them to have some time for themselves.
- Maintain regular contact with family and friends.
- Nurture each other.
- Go for a walk and eat nutritious meals.
- Take time out to rest.
- Join a group where they can have contact with other parents.
- Consult their local doctor, therapist/counsellor or nurse and develop supportive networks.

## MAKING THE MOST OF PARENT LEAVE OPPORTUNITIES

Even though the Commonwealth Government has provided legislation that supports men having parental leave (two weeks of paid leave at the minimum wage), many men still cannot utilise this opportunity as they are casual workers, self-employed or work in a context where employers are less supportive. This is while

other countries have introduced longer paid parental leave.

Parental leave should be encouraged by health professionals and within health services as it can have significant benefits for the whole family. The positive effects of parental leave for fathers and families include [44]:

- The development of more stable couple relationships.
- Maintaining higher levels of contact with children, if mothers and fathers subsequently separate.
- The adoption of a healthier lifestyle by fathers and subsequent reduced mortality risk. There is a decreased risk of 'all-cause mortality' indicators amongst men who take between 30 and 135 days of parental leave.
- An increase in the father's role in caretaking throughout the child's life.
- A reduction in the likelihood of mothers likely to smoke or becoming depressed.
- An increase in women being more likely to breastfeed.

## BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

Due to the ethical challenges of conducting a study that measures children's outcomes, most studies have looked at improvements in fathers' skills or father-and-child interactions as 'proxies' for benefits to children [45].

Programs that involve fathers have observed the following benefits to children, namely [2]:

- Improved social competence
- Reduced anxiety
- Higher self-esteem
- Better health outcomes and reduction in obesity
- Increased cognitive benefits
- Healthier relationships with peers.

"Supportive, positive play interactions between fathers and their young children have also been associated with enhanced cognitive development and reduced delay among disadvantaged children. Research also suggests positive effects are ongoing throughout childhood and adolescence" [2].

Similar benefits to children from fathers' engagement and support have been noted by other authors in the area of emotional development [46]. Whereas other researchers have noted a link between a father's obesity and that of their children [48].

## IMPORTANCE OF INVOLVING SEPARATED FATHERS

A 2009 longitudinal study of a group American adolescents explored what impact closeness to their father had on their life [47]. The study was well designed and controlled for differences in age and how adolescents may respond differently to either the mother or father. It found that:

- Adolescents who are close to their non-resident fathers report higher self-esteem, less delinquency, and fewer depressive symptoms than adolescents who live with a father with whom they are not close.

- There was no difference between the two groups with respect to school grades, being involved in violent activities or substance use.
- Adolescents living with a father with whom they are not close have better grades and engage in less substance use and, paradoxically, have lower self-esteem than those who have a non-resident father who is not close.
- Adolescents do best of all when they have close ties to resident fathers. A central conclusion of this study is that it is important to consider the quality of father-child relations among those who have a resident father when assessing the impact of non-resident fathers on their children.
- Closeness to fathers reduces violence similarly in resident-father families and non-resident-father families.

### A HOME VISIT REFLECTION

*A reflection by a father who felt he had a role to play:  
"Our early childhood nurse was very supportive. When she did the first visit after the birth of our child, she engaged with both my wife and myself in how we can care for our son. After she discussed breast feeding with the mum, she turned to me and asked me to stand up and move to the other side of the room. She asked me to look at the angle of how my son was positioned on my wife's lap. She encouraged me to remember this, as it will be useful feedback if my son was not connecting with the breast and getting distressed. That weekend, that is what happened. My son was distressed; my wife was exhausted and was getting upset. I was able to stand back and encourage her to lift the head a bit more. It worked, and my son attached".  
In difficult situations, it is crucial to remind fathers to encourage the mothers to maintain breastfeeding and seek professional support.*

# CHAPTER 4:

## STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT OF FATHERS IN FAMILY BASED PROGRAMS

### HOW TO SUPPORT INVOLVED FATHERING

Having an involved father has obvious benefits to children. Recent media coverage on fathers identify the clear benefits of fathers being involved in a child's life, particularly in the early stages of development, by providing love, support, and comfort [1]. It has also been suggested that fathers are important because they help to teach children values and lessons in solving life's challenges and problems. Fathers also serve as role models in their child's life, which can affect how well their children relate to peers and adults outside the home [49].

Research has demonstrated that fathers have assumed more child care responsibilities and there is an increase in the hours spent in the direct care of their children [16]. Despite this reality, professionals can still find it difficult to involve fathers. This is primarily because of the often false assumption by some practitioners that 'they know how to include fathers'. Some of the personal factors that may prevent the inclusion of fathers may include:

The practitioners' own family of origin can subtly frame personal attitudes and beliefs about fathers:

- Traditional professional education has tended to omit content about the significance of fathers and how to work with them in practice.
- Identification with fathers is potentially more difficult because frontline health and human service occupations are female dominated professions [50].
- Despite these factors, many services are taking a proactive stance and providing staff training in how to include fathers in their work.

### NURSES DECIDE TO INCLUDE DADS

*The Maternal and Child Health Nurses from Moonee Valley City Council decided to purposefully include dads in all their activities. The conversations about addressing the role of dads came from a stay at home dad approaching them to start a dad's service and a desire to provide family centred practice. The nurses agreed to the following strategies to be incorporated into their clinical practice:*

1. Encouraging dads to talk with the nurses on the phone when they ring to organise the initial home visit and not immediately passing to the mother.
2. Asking and inviting the dads to be present for the home visit and subsequent centre visits.
3. Involving the dads in conversation and giving handouts specifically relating to dad's roles with supporting breast feeding and parenting.
4. Giving the dads playgroup flyer to them and also inviting them to join the new parents group.
5. Utilising all opportunities to discuss with the mother the important role that dad plays. Asking important questions like "how does the baby respond when he hears his dad's voice, when dad changes her nappy, when he plays with the child?"
6. Having copies of the positive fathering booklets in the office to show parents.
7. Including questions specifically related to dads in the annual survey to gain their feedback on the Maternal and Child Health Service.

*Family Action Centre (2013), Fatherhood Research Bulletin, 16, University of Newcastle.[3: p. 5]*

In order to support involved fathering, it must first be acknowledged that there are some key assumptions on father inclusion. These are:

- That most fathers want to be effective parents.
- Parenting experience for either mother or father is a highly complex and challenging role.
- By including fathers it conveys a message that we have positive expectations of them and they in turn respond by being involved and aspire to being the best fathers they can be.
- Fathers will require support from the wider environment, external to the family [51].

Furthermore, some researchers have even argued that fathering and fatherhood is greatly influenced by family and community factors more than the mother [52]. Awareness of your own interactions with fathers is the first step towards supporting involved fathering. The following questions are meant to be a guide and a help to your own self-assessment as a practitioner on interactions with fathers:

- How do you acknowledge the presence of a father on your first interaction?
- Do you include fathers in the conversation when both caregivers are present?
- What is your body language saying that indicates inclusion?
- Do you have eye contact with the father or is it directed at the mother/other caregiver?
- Do you include fathers in discussions about their children or respond to father's questions about their children?
- What are your own beliefs about fathers and their ability to take on child care tasks?

In summary, there has been a dramatic shift in expectations for fathers over the past 20 years, which has resulted in services being in 'catch up mode' to include fathers. Whilst most agencies and services will have father inclusiveness somewhere in their policy and procedures or strategic planning, the most effective method of supporting fathers begins with the practitioner. For some practitioners they may already be achieving the goal of involving fathers, for others, more reflection is required.

It does not matter where practitioners are on this continuum, what matters is that they have taken the time to do some reflection and taken steps to improve or fine tune their practice with fathers.

The Men and Family Relationship Initiative was a sub-program of the Commonwealth Government Family Relationship Services Program from 2000-2010. The experiences of these Australian programs were similar to the conclusions of a review of child and youth programs across Scotland [53]:

- "Dads are important in their children's upbringing.
- Most men have a strong desire to be fathers and generally are motivated to be good ones.
- For a variety of reasons, men do not always effectively fulfil the role in their children's lives as they would like to have.
- Professional beliefs, assumptions and ways of working can label men as problems in family situations.

- Existing services are rarely geared towards supporting dads and may in fact institutionally discriminate against them.
- Many men would welcome support that they perceive to be credible and non-stigmatising" [53].

## **BARRIERS TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF FATHERS**

Fathers can not only influence their children through the quantity, type and quality of the father-child interactions, but also what emotional and physical support they can provide to the mother or partner - including economic support and domestic labour (i.e. childcare) [54]. For fathers to achieve a 'hands on' responsibility for their child's development, requires effective engagement strategies to not only invite fathers in to services but also keep them there in the long-term.

Relationships between parents and professionals of all kinds play a more prominent role during the period of early childhood development than any other time in a child's life [55]. The availability of services both within and external to the home allows opportunities to engage with and develop relationships with both parents. Creating a culture of father involvement in service delivery can be a long-term process but also one which is beneficial. In recent Australian research, barriers to fathers' involvement in services and programs include:

- Operating times of the agency or service (usually 9am to 5pm).
- Practitioners' lack of knowledge or skills of how to involve fathers, especially with vulnerable families.
- Fathers who did not show up for appointments perceived by practitioners as disinterested.
- Seeing work with the mothers and the children as 'core business', while work with fathers is seen as an adjunct [13].

It also identified that whilst practitioners were grappling with practice issues on how to involve fathers, they were also very keen to work with fathers in their service. These findings supported what had already been researched in the past in Australia and also internationally.

Researchers suggest that fathering is influenced by a variety of factors, including individual mother, father, and child characteristics and relationship factors between the mother/ father, and contextual factors [56]. If practitioners are aware of these factors, they are in a better position to identify some of the barriers or likely problems that fathers may encounter with a particular service or services. Transition to parenthood is a major life event that affects all aspects of psychosocial functioning [57]. It has only recently been acknowledged that this transition for men has its own challenges as well as rewards. For example, researchers have identified that pregnancy is the most stressful time for men undergoing the transition to parenting [58].

Practitioners are crucial to meeting the needs of fathers during this transition and also the parenting journey. There are many ways in which this can be achieved and some strategies and ideas will be discussed further in the following chapters in this section.

Some of the barriers for engaging are located in the men themselves. Many men under value the significance and impact they have on their children. One of the basic opportunities that professionals can optimise is to provide fathers with clear and simple information about the research and

significance of their role in the family. This information will address some of the things that fathers don't know about their children [22], such as:

- Brain growth in their children.
- The fathers' influence on their child's development.
- The importance of literacy.
- How self-regulation develops in children.

### EXPERIENCE AT A CHILDCARE CENTRE

*Staff focused their attention on strengthening relationships with the 'drop and run' fathers. "I intentionally maximized every opportunity to engage the dads in meaningful conversation that centred on their child's positive experiences at the centre. I noticed that interactions with one particular 'drop and run' dad were at a superficial level, often revolving around sport and weather. I attributed this to the pressing demands on my own time and the fathers' limited time at the centre. With an increased effort to 'catch up with' the dad before he left the centre, and by refocusing conversations around the child's experiences, I noticed that the relationship between us improved. This also translated to improved relationships between the dad and other staff at the centre. The dad began staying longer at the centre, became more attuned to his child's interests, appeared more confident as a father and staff noticed the relationship between the father and child improved. I reconnected with this father following his child's commencement at school. The father recounted attending a school camp with his child and reporting this was a very positive experience for them both".*

*Engaging Fathers Report, South Australian Government [2: p.23]*

## EFFECTIVE MODELS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

Services can be responsive to the changing needs of fathers [59] and the first place to start is to ask fathers what they already do with their children and what kinds of assistance they may want from the service. It is important to begin with those fathers that services already have contact with as some of these fathers may be able to assist in recruiting other fathers to services. It is also possible to engage fathers by (where possible) working in partnership with other services or practitioners that may be already engaged with fathers specifically. There often will be a list of these services in a local directory (see links in this guide). There are five key things that services and health care practitioners can do to involve fathers:

1. Where possible, go to where fathers are located on their 'turf'. These could be sporting clubs, gyms, workplaces and other venues (see <http://www.beerandbubs.com.au/>)
2. Organise an event to attract fathers using fliers or other media. Events could be barbecues, family fun days, trips, sporting events. You could use local celebrities with male-friendly themes to attract them to your event.
3. Encourage and support the fathers you are already working with and seek their feedback on the services you are providing.
4. Invite and encourage the mothers or the children to take part in engaging the fathers.
5. Involve the fathers in your services as partners in your organisation's overall strategic planning.

In the last decade, many health and welfare services have realised that they can make a big difference to families when they systematically welcome and support fathers. The Dads WA Ngala is one example of such a service which aims to engage men in early parenting by providing a male friendly environment across all their services (for more details visit <http://www.ngala.com.au>).

Services and practitioners can involve fathers effectively and this has been achieved by a number of agencies in Australia as well as internationally. A simple change in a service can result in significant numbers of fathers being involved in programs. One such example in Australia is the *Fathers And Schools Together (FAST)* which is a literacy program that focuses on helping schools to bring fathers more into their children's literacy learning [60].

There are significant differences among fathers in their willingness to engage with services and also health practitioners. Remember that fathers are a diverse group and that one size does not fit all fathers and that a local approach needs to be part of an effective model of service delivery. Effective service delivery with fathers will only work if the fathers are genuinely involved and report that they feel connected to the service.

Interventions which involve both parents have the greatest effect [18]. Providing childcare or assistance with childcare is therefore necessary for both parents to be able to attend. Interventions run in the evenings or on weekends, with the aim of getting more fathers involved, may not be successful if childcare is not available. Some families will not be able to arrange for someone else to look after the children and so only one parent will be able to attend.

## DADS READING TO THEIR BUBS

*The Parkes (Western NSW) library has been striving to include dads in literacy-related activities with young children. During their READTEMBER 2012 literacy celebrations they organised a new literacy program called PyjamaRama where everyone was invited to come to the library for stories in the evening. This turned into something a little more party-ish than expected with mums, dads, grandpas, and grandmas all wearing their pj's, happy to participate in the hokey-pokey before bed! Everyone had such a good time together that one mother has started a petition to make PyjamaRama a regular occurrence.*

*Family Action Centre (2013), Fatherhood Research Bulletin, 16, University of Newcastle.[3: p. 8]*

## CHILDCARE OR FAMILY CENTRE EXPERIENCES

Many early childcare centres report that many fathers seem ill-at-ease and want to escape (drop and run) when they come into the centre with their child [61]. They noticed that dads tend to drop their children off and go and only talk to staff when approached. The main barrier was identified as the fathers being unfamiliar with the centre, what is expected and importance of the information exchange.

Ways to increase familiarity are:

- Use the first names of the fathers, as well as mothers, on invitations for special events.
- Hold information sessions in the evening, at the weekend or at other times when fathers are more likely to be around (we recognise that this will vary from one locality to another).
- Have a dad's and a mum's display board that has information that directly targets either parent.
- Distribute personally addressed booklets to all fathers and mothers, especially those who are not able to attend such a session.
- Greet fathers at the door of the setting every time they come, also trying to 'engage' with them. Keep the focus of the discussion on their child's experiences of the day. This will build a greater connection and help them to feel more welcomed and less unfamiliar with the setting.
- Encourage the men to participate in routines with which they may not be familiar with when the father enters the setting (i.e. settling their children when they drop them off at the start of a session).

The following ways are useful for encouraging father involvement at a family or children's centre [8]:

- Actively engage the father by discussing their child's day.
- Create an environment that is friendly, inviting and comfortable for men.
- Hold 'men at work' days at your centre where some of the men talk about their employment or volunteer work.
- Ask the children to write or colour-in an invitation for their father to attend a special event at the centre. Then ask them to give it to their dad. If the child does not have a father,

encourage them to give to another important male in their life e.g. uncle, pop.

- Involve men in the design and decoration of areas of the centre, including displaying photos of father involvement activities. Make men visible by attending the centre, or viewing posters, photos of past events at the centre.
- Encourage mothers to bring along their partners, boyfriends or brothers along to events and programs.
- Offer parent education programs for men on various topics including keeping children safe around the house, child development and communication. Mobilise the protective spirit within many men by holding a first aid workshop for fathers that focuses on infant CPR, handling your baby and home safety focus.
- Establish a fathers' group. Create opportunities for fathers to speak about their inner worlds and reflect on fatherhood.
- Create a male mentoring program or a volunteer program. These programs support informal involvement, practical approaches and the promotion of teamwork that allows them to interact with other fathers.
- Establish routines and rituals at your centre that involve and recognise fathers. Use strengths questions (what would you like to know about the father of these children). Involve women too (the men are often more interested in support for the whole family rather than support alone for themselves).
- Invite fathers to participate in groups, panels or Management Committees.

Also try to [62]:

- Have practical activities for children and dads such as kite-making, billy-cart making and rough and tumble play opportunities.
- Use gendered language by referring to 'mothers and fathers and other important carers in the children's lives' instead of referring to 'parents'.
- Make your message relevant to their key relationships - 'kids and dads' preparing for mothers' day. Be clear and specific and communicate early on in the relationship about your purpose for why you are involving dads (build trust and expectation).
- Create opportunities for staff to reflect on their own fathering and how they can bring fathers into the work.

## GENERATIVITY - A FORCE FOR CHANGE

The generative stage, developed by Erik Erikson as part of his eight life stages of development, is when people focus on the greater impact they have on their immediate world (family, work, community) and their key relationships [63, 64]. The generative approach is still relevant today and especially relevant when working with men. Generativity involves the biological and parental capacity to care for the next generation and demands the ability to give something of you to another person. It also includes a societal expression that is historically reflected in the support that people give to Service Clubs, Lifeline, SES and the Rural Fire Service. Other societal expressions include where people may instruct apprentices, act as a guide, mentor or coaching children, young people or adults.

Research indicates that between 30 to 45 years, our need for achievement decreases and our need for influence or impact on some community increases [65]. Besides being applied to human development for men, women and fathering, generativity has had a significant contribution to understanding aging. The Harvard Study of Adult Development reviewed societal trends in the last 50 years and concluded that generativity is the best indicator for healthy aging. The study concluded that “the old were put on the earth to nurture the young” [65]. However this learning is not about just giving to others but is found also in the receiving. A matched study [66] identified that similar generative impacts existed in research about recovery from alcohol addiction using the Alcoholics Anonymous approach. Their research indicated that people thrived most when they invested something of themselves into helping someone else (being a sponsor) independent of how many AA meetings they attended.

Generativity is powered by the motivation to “invest one’s substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self” [65]. Generativity uses the concept of forces where ego strengths are developed through life in response to challenges experienced. The development of strengths (hopes and dreams) and tensions (fears and anxieties) complement other strength based and resilience approaches that are used today in community services/health practice. When working with men, motivation to change is best mobilised when the focus is **not primarily** on inner self reflections but on generative reflections.

Generativity is ‘caring for something outside of yourself’ or involves taking care of the next generation. Generativity is best understood as a response to perceived vulnerability. While children are often the strongest expression of generativity in people’s lives, it has other expressions throughout a lifetime. Some of these connections are:

- Children (one of the strongest expressions of generativity)
- Partner (however this is often minimised when partners are viewed as being more powerful)
- Service clubs - Service Clubs, Lifeline, SES and the Rural Fire Service.
- Sport - if your involvement provides rewards beyond the immediate reward of competition and exercise
- Employment context (if you identify the importance of making a difference in your job)
- Gardening
- Mates (other people they identify with in a similar situation)
- Other key relationships (particularly where vulnerability may exist) i.e. a sibling with a disability
- Wider community interests
- Dogs/animals/pets.

Understanding the generative perspective is useful when working with fathers as it:

- Provides a strength based framework to understand many men’s focus on the external world rather than the internal world of their feelings.
- Emphasises the significance of their relationship with the child without necessarily having the skills or spending time alone with the child.

→ Values the importance of men seeing the parenting experience that may require greater responsibility.

→ Provides a framework for tools to use when working with fathers.

Some generative interventions you could use are:

→ Focus on active and practical ways of being in the world and having an influence and impact on others. Use questions that ask about ‘impact’, ‘difference’ or ‘influence’ i.e. “how does your response impact on your son”? Discuss how they have an impact on, who they influence and who they respect? Also who are the people who impact, influence and respect them.

→ Build on a future focus, how their impact, influence and level of respect with their key relationships will be in the future. Ask ‘what do you want to do more of...?’

→ Ask the father to tell the birth story of one of their children. This is a very special opportunity as men usually allow the mother to tell the birth story (as they should). However it is by telling your version of the birth story that you own the experience and the likely changes you face. The birth of a baby is so rich in vulnerability and the need for care of the baby that it increases the fathers’ ability to connect and attach to their child.

→ Challenge perceptions of hopelessness and the importance of making choices to shift the victim mentality and emphasise the importance of responses – ask ‘how do you want to be seen?’ Acknowledge the challenge of being a reasonable man in an unreasonable situation.

→ Discuss clear expectations in how you will work together, what is required and reduce the fear of the unknown.

→ Identify relationship changes: ‘what has changed?’

→ ‘what has not changed?’

→ ‘what do you want to achieve?’

→ Build on discussions that highlight key relationships and the person’s significant hopes and fears/anxiety (yearning vs challenges).

→ Identify and name key values that are conscious, purposeful and can help to widen the range of choices they can use in response. This identifies and builds on primary motivations.

## THE POWER OF THE BIRTH STORY IN MEDIATION

*An experienced Family Law Mediator experimented in mediation sessions with the idea of asking both parents to talk about the birth of one of their children and to tell each other of their memory. Originally she thought clients would say ‘are you kidding?’*

*Well, exactly the opposite happens – each parent launches into their story and the other parent starts listening. This start to the mediation puts the whole process into a positive framework to begin with and this assists the clients to be child focused/future focused. It has made a significant change to a high conflict process.*

# CHAPTER 5:

## WORKING WITH MEN IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

### WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FATHERS

Fathering to many Aboriginal men is the most important and challenging commitment in their lives.

Prior to colonisation Aboriginal people were hunters and gatherers who lived by strict customary lore in which there is men's and women's business and Aboriginal culture continues to recognize that both men and women play equal but different roles in parenting. After colonisation Aboriginal cultural identity was purposely targeted by colonizers as they brought a different set of family values, and there was active movement to progressively destroy Aboriginal culture including the removal of Aboriginal children from their family, community and culture. The resulting impact has in some part left Aboriginal people traumatised by the physical, mental and sexual abuse that occurred in institutions. The resilience in Aboriginal people continues to be an asset that is built on strong cultural foundations and the love of and diversity of family.

When working with Aboriginal men, the main thing to do is recognise that there are a different set of cultural and family values. Aboriginal males in general are more active as fathers when there are no other barriers or disharmony. If there is generational connection between elders who play a strong and positive male mentoring role and young males who seek their support, there is an increased level of confidence and capacity as a father figure.

Aboriginal men's groups in general involve Aboriginal males of all ages, including grandfathers, sons and grandsons. Aboriginal males in these groups often mentor and support each other and with the involvement of elders, who share their lived experience, assist in increasing self-esteem and parenting capacity.

In many Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal men's groups are being established and gaining ground. The strength of groups is the social capital that is invested in them by local Aboriginal males. In NSW there are some 72 Aboriginal men's groups throughout communities and reach all corners of the state. Non-Aboriginal services and workers need to realize their own limitations in understanding the complexity of Aboriginal communities. Many services and their staff may underestimate the need to engage properly and the required level of communication to remain engaged.

Sometimes non-Aboriginal workers are inclined to engage with Aboriginal men by interacting with Aboriginal women. The perspective of Aboriginal women and mothers is important but consultation directly with Aboriginal men and fathers is essential. One of the key issues Aboriginal fathers and men's groups face is the lack of culturally respectful, male specific programs and

funding available in comparison to programs for women, mums and children. The messages for Aboriginal fathers are no different to the messages that all fathers need to remember. However, they are more critical and essential for the Aboriginal communities due to the social history they have experienced. It is good for non-Aboriginal workers to realize their own limitations in understanding fully Aboriginal culture and as much as possible programs should be informed by input from Aboriginal elders.

#### REFLECTION FROM A LOCAL HEALTH PROJECT

*My name is Marc Daley and I am a proud Bundjalung man from South Grafton – Clarence River Country. I am lucky to have four children of my own and I am also happy to be the Project Manager/Group Facilitator of the "Strong Father's – Strong Families Project" in South West Sydney.*

*Groups are run on a weekly basis in the Local Health District of Liverpool, Bankstown, and Fairfield but the home base for this project is Hoxton Park Community Health, so you can see fathering is something I take very serious both personally and professionally.*

*Working with Aboriginal dads is my passion because after all I am one, the last time I looked in the mirror I very much resembled an Aboriginal man trying to be the best husband and also the best Dad I can be. These days a lot of Aboriginal men are accessing groups and becoming a powerful force in the community and several of us are on the path to claiming our leadership role back and also putting ourselves back in the picture in the raising of our Jarjums and let me share that the sleeves have been rolled up as we all know there is much work to do here.*

*In my opinion it has been our Aboriginal grandmothers and aunts that have held up our communities and provided the basic foundation of our children to grow from. Now is the time for us Aboriginal men to take a firm stance to be a great role model to our young ones and the community.*

*I have thought of my life before my children and to be honest really cannot imagine life without the four kids that call me Dad as they have brought so much more into my life, and let me be honest they have also brought many challenges into my life, and trust me I have also learnt so much about myself in this time of emotional struggle.*

*I will continue to support my brothers in the community and I will keep the fire in the belly for change in the Aboriginal community in general. I know that being the best dad you can be is not easy and in-fact it is the hardest job any man can sign up for...but it is do-able. Stay Strong.*

The following messages need to be reinforced in fliers, resources, programs and discussion had with Aboriginal dads [67]:

- Be there – Make time with your kids, enjoy just being with them, laughing with them, playing with them and showing them your feelings and love.
- Be proud – Respect, be proud of your culture and teach the kids their culture as well.
- Protect – Be child centred, make good decisions for the best interests of your children. Think about how you talk, act and care for them so that they grow up safe, happy and proud.
- Connect – be involved with their children at the start and all through their life. Mistakes and challenges will occur but keep the connection going by letting them know you are there for them.
- Talk – Talk and listen to your children – talk with your kids and to other dads about what it is like being a dad.
- Feel good – Mistakes and challenges will occur but enjoy your kids and enjoy being a dad.
- The journey – Think about the lessons you have learnt about life and tell your children and grandchildren.

An excellent booklet 'You're a dad: Seven storylines about being a dad' is distributed by Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) and is available from their website [67].

## WORKING WITH CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE FATHERS

People with English as a second language may have migrated to Australia for a change in life, work or to be closer to the rest of their family or they may be a refugee. An effective position for community service/health workers when working cross-culturally and especially with fathers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is to adopt a 'safe uncertainty' approach. This is an approach that attributes equal value to professional expertise, as well as the knowledge and expertise of the service user with regards to their unique situation. This has been described as being the state of 'informed not-knowing' [68]. This means that workers refrain from being the 'expert', 'right' or in full possession of 'the truth'. A key focus of this approach is to seek understanding rather simply acquire knowledge of the service user's situation. When professionals are more informed about the life experiences of people from multicultural communities, they can become aware of their own cultural biases and then recognise and harness the cultural narratives of the 'other' in a truly strengths-based practice.

A significant component of the engagement process with culturally and linguistically diverse background fathers is for the worker to consider:

- the key issues experienced by the service user;
- the underlying impacts of that experience; and
- the associated challenges experienced when addressing these issues.

Workers need to be genuinely interested to find out about the background and experiences of the fathers, as well as the meaning they attached to those experiences. The most important message is that workers should adopt an inquiring mindset that is guided by genuine interest in knowing about the service user's

situation from the service user's point of view. This becomes the medium for drawing out the narrative, providing invaluable validation and normalising of the service user's experiences.

When fathers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds come to see workers, they believe that the worker has some expertise, which will help alleviate their problem. Workers are more effective when they have already developed some knowledge about their service users' culture and gender by engaging in dialogue with colleagues, service users and friends; attending cultural awareness/ competence training; watching documentaries; reading books and so on. It is very useful for workers to be comfortable with using interpreters.

Workers are more effective if they have explored (through professional supervision or training) their own socialisation experience and attitudes to achieving culturally sensitive practice. Workers hear the service user's story with some knowledge about their background, but not with full possession of 'truth'. If workers become as informed as possible about themselves and those whom they perceive as different, they will be able to listen in a way that takes into account cultural biases.

In the case of refugee fathers, it is important to consider the overlap and complex interaction between issues associated with the aftermath of traumatic experiences in the context of organised violence, the problems related to the exile, migration and resettlement processes, and the trials and difficulties that are part and parcel of the normal life cycle [69].

When many refugee fathers come to Australia, they experience a significant role change. Through these changes, like many others, refugee fathers have few opportunities to talk through their concerns with someone else. They put attention to responding to issues in the best way they can. Their aspiration to protect their family has to be redefined in Australia as it may have a very different expression than what was culturally appropriate in their country of origin. The new context can involve coming to terms with changing roles in Australia compared to their country of origin. This could include men's roles in society, their family, the wider community, and employment and income.

It is important to talk through the previous roles and expectations they held before coming to Australia and how these have changed. It is also important to encourage them to remain up to date with changes in their own country of origin, as the socio-cultural environment that existed when they left the country is often concretised as the normal and ideal set of community values for many years into the future. An example of this is that the attitudes towards women and their freedom in the community may have recently changed in their country of origin. However, they idealise the values that existed at the time they left as a refugee.

Five important considerations when engaging refugee fathers:

- 1. Consider the impact of the past experience of their migration to Australia.** Some culturally and linguistically diverse fathers, whether they are refugees or from refugee-like backgrounds, have experienced forms of difficulties in their country of origin and migration/ process. Coming to Australia creates great sense of hope and expectation for a better life for themselves and their families. These expectations are not always achieved due to challenges of resettlement in a new country. Impact of unmet expectations on many culturally and linguistically diverse fathers may lead to unexplained frustrations, anger and sense of hopelessness.

**2. Work towards building service user's sense of control and safety; meaning and purpose in life.** Help to

re-establish their dignity and value; as well as reconnect them to wider society <sup>[70]</sup>. Adopt a curious openness that helps you to understand the service user's situation, being person centred and not probing too much. Let the service user lead. Show interest and positive regard for them and their background. Be mindful of triggers and some of the impact of the past trauma issues with regards to setting, communication, your role and service. Be transparent and honest, familiarising the service user with aspects of confidentiality and privacy and being upfront about your role.

**3. Be aware of how easily the service user can be overwhelmed.** Many newly arrived immigrant families

easily become overwhelmed by the processes and stresses involved when settling into a new country. At times, the father is quite likely to have a smaller set of relationships or networks to talk through these changes, so they may appear more isolated or frustrated. Sometimes it may be difficult for the parents to provide for the basic parenting responsibilities due to the pressures or stress involved. Many of these pressures and stresses on the father centre on obtaining new employment, the change of his potential job role due to the lack of recognition of his original qualification, the future, child/family needs and worries about overseas issues and responsibilities in his country of origin.

**4. Create opportunities to talk about the role changes that have occurred.** The fathers have experienced significant

cultural change around ideas and expectations of how their family operates. This includes the gender relations, individualism versus collectivism and extended family contexts versus nuclear families. They may need to learn new skills like cooking for the family as the mother is likely to obtain employment in some situations. This is a new role that may be trivialised by other fathers from their community as it challenges traditional expectations and masculinities and is seen as a woman's responsibility.

**5. Value that the father loves and care for their children.** It is often due to the hope of improving their children's future that the flight/migration experience as a newly arrived family originally occurred. Discuss the care of their children:

- a) How this is achieved in Australia?
- b) How do they keep their family safe?
- c) What is the difference between keeping someone safe, controlling them or when does it become abusive?
- d) How do they balance and provide for what their children need?

Working with culturally and linguistically diverse fathers is like working with any other fathers. Do not feel that your skills are insufficient or that you are facing an exotic situation beyond your knowledge. The biggest difference is that you have to learn more about their specific past experiences, their cultural norms and practices and the impact these may have on their personal situations. The situation also calls for a greater self-awareness and self-knowledge amongst the workers with particular focus on understanding their own cultural biases.

# CHAPTER 6:

## CONSIDERATIONS WHEN WORKING WITH FAMILIES AND DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

*“Domestic and family violence is a violation of human rights and a crime. It includes any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear. It is usually manifested as part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.” [80: p.28].*

This resource aims to provide health professionals with practical suggestions to increase fathers’ interactions with their services and through this positively enhance men in their roles as fathers. Including a section on violence in such a publication may seem contentious to some, as it could imply that working with fathers inevitably means discovering violence and abuse. This is not the intention. Effective parenting is obviously impeded in families which experience violence, so the identification and elimination of domestic and family violence (DFV) is essential to enhancing men’s roles as dads.

DFV is a complex issue that practitioners will encounter when working with families. In fact, for a significant number of families who experience DFV, it may escalate or occur for the first time during pregnancy. Men accessing programs may also talk about their own use of or potential for violence, as well as their own experiences of being victims of violence from other family members, either as a child or as an adult.

### IDENTIFYING AND EVALUATING DFV

Practitioners working with families where violence is known or suspected need to remember that:

- The safety of all involved in any intervention is the first and primary consideration,
- No information obtained from the victim is passed on to the person who uses violence,
- This work requires a careful balance of engaging the perpetrator around their use of violence, whilst avoiding collusion,
- All violence in relationships is unacceptable,
- DFV traumatically affects children,
- Accountability practices involve having the victim’s stories in mind while working with the partner who uses violence.

The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) in the UK have developed an evidenced based and evaluated risk assessment tool for DFV. This tool can be downloaded from the MARACs’ website: <http://caada.org.uk/node/546>

The NSW Government is developing a risk assessment tool for DFV. Practitioners working with families should familiarise themselves with this tool and its use: [http://domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/file/0003/301179/DVSAT\\_guide.pdf](http://domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/file/0003/301179/DVSAT_guide.pdf)

For more information on policies and procedures with DFV:

- For NSW Ministry of Health services, consult your Child Wellbeing Unit,
- Keep Them Safe: [www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au](http://www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au)
- HSNet ServiceLink: [www.hsnet.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hsnet.nsw.gov.au)
- Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies: <http://www.acwa.asn.au/>

### WHEN A FATHER USES VIOLENCE

Fathers, even those that use violence, often want to be a ‘good father’. There is often an unspoken tension within many men between the yearning to be a good dad and the impact they know that using violence has on their children and how their children perceive them [77]. Fathers who use violence often experience a tension between being the best dad they can be (or want to be) and the knowledge that they are hurting their children (either directly or through the children witnessing violence).

Many practitioners find it difficult and uncomfortable to discuss a person’s use of violence, acknowledging that men experience tension between wanting to be a ‘good father’ and their use of violence can be a way to engage dads in discussion around their use of violence. Once broached this can be a first step in referring the man to a service that can provide the appropriate help and support. Of course such discussions should only take place when workers feel safe to do so. Practitioners inexperienced in working with violence are encouraged to get more information from the links and agencies listed throughout this chapter and should seek advice from their supervisors and more experienced colleagues.

Health services in NSW do not provide specific services to address DFV perpetrating behaviours. Parents who are open to seeking help to reduce controlling or otherwise damaging behaviour and build a better parenting relationship should be referred to services outside of the health system. NSW has minimum standards for programs for men’s domestic violence behaviour change programs. Contact details of programs that meet these standards can be found at:

[http://www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au/domesticviolence/Pages/MiniStandardsforMen’sBehaviour/Minimum\\_Standards\\_for\\_Men’s\\_Behaviour.aspx](http://www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au/domesticviolence/Pages/MiniStandardsforMen’sBehaviour/Minimum_Standards_for_Men’s_Behaviour.aspx)

## **WHEN A FATHER IS A VICTIM OF VIOLENCE**

It is clear that the majority of victims of DFV are women and that this violence often stems from the physical and economic power imbalance that exists between men and women. Yet there are a minority of men who experience violence from partners or family members. These men report feelings of shame and worthlessness similar to that of female victims. These men also experience significant barriers to accessing services, including feeling that they are not taken seriously when they disclose their experience of violence. Recent Australian research of male victims recommends that such barriers could be overcome through policies, services and awareness campaigns for male victims of violence in ways that complement existing responses to “family violence against women and children and not to damage the effectiveness of those campaigns” [75:p.3].

# CHAPTER 7:

## A TOOLBOX FOR WORKING WITH FATHERS

The Working with Fathers Toolbox captures the key issues discussed in this guide and contains four key areas that allow programs to assess and improve the programs they offer to fathers. These areas are:

1. Environment
2. Language
3. Initial contact and marketing
4. Service provision

### THE ENVIRONMENT

When a father makes initial contact with a program, the immediate environment and openness of staff towards him will influence his level of trust. Many men enter new situations with suspicion about what will be expected of them and rely on visual cues to relax. They notice if other men are visible, either entering or leaving the centre or shown in positive images on posters. Some environmental factors that will increase engagement with men include:

- Use positive images of men in posters and having suitable reading material in the waiting rooms that may interest men that provide an easy read and positive reflection on fathering. Display photographs of events that especially feature images of men and children.
- When possible, employ male staff to work directly with male service users.
- Use premises that are easily accessible, with car parking space or access to public transport.
- Focus on engaging the male service users at the initial telephone contact. Men often use the telephone as the first point of contact to reach out for support. They may ring a large number of agencies to locate an organisation that will be helpful to them. This can result in confusion when professional staff return phone calls, as the male service user may not immediately remember the organisation that they had called.
- When referring fathers to another service, provide him with the name of someone to contact and what makes them relevant to their situation rather than only providing a generic number and program name. When the referral is more relationship rich, many men are more likely to follow through with the connection.

→ Provide services outside normal working hours. Many men find it difficult to access community programs while working part time or full time. It is easier for male service users to access programs when they are offered on weekends or in the evenings.

→ Ensure that large power differences do not exist between professional workers and the service users. When culturally appropriate, encourage staff to use the first name of the father rather than more formal greetings like 'Mr Jones...'

→ When holding occasional workshops, use venues where men normally gather (e.g., sporting venues and events, specific workplaces). These spaces provide opportunities for promoting programs and recruiting fathers. Men from specific cultural groups may be more likely to attend a local religious institution than a sporting event [9].

→ In schools, early childhood centres or childcare centres, ask the children to write or colour-in an invitation for their father to attend a special event at the centre. Then ask them to give it to their dad. If the child does not have a father, encourage them to give to another important male in their life e.g. uncle, grandfather.

→ Sometimes men are more likely to attend a child and family service if they are encouraged to do so by their partners. Similarly, a partner who discourages his involvement may reduce a man's willingness to engage with a service.

### LANGUAGE

In addition to the obvious need for interpreters in some instances, it should be acknowledged that language has a significant influence on the successful engagement of many fathers. If the language used by the professional worker is deficit based, it will increase the man's level of suspicion and they are less likely to access the program. Some of the deficit based assumptions [78] view most men as:

- abusing fathers
- emotionally challenged fathers
- under involved in household activities
- having little interest in professional feedback about their children.

The three key skills [79] for developing father-friendly language: are

- relevance – the discussion needs to be relevant to the service user's immediate needs and situation.
- faith building – the worker needs to convey the belief that the male service user has the ability to commit, choose, care, change, create, connect and communicate.
- honest/direct – Most male service users respect people who honestly and respectfully discuss with them the important issues that affect their life.

Some strategies that increase engagement with men include:

- Remember that body language is powerful. Develop strong and comfortable body language around male service users. Men quickly tune into how comfortable other people are around them and this will influence their level of respect. The simple act of shaking hands, for many men, can symbolise a higher level of respect and mutual connection.
- Use non-deficit language to demonstrate a respect for the importance of family relationships in men's lives and those basic human values that are important to them.
- Allow time for male service users to reflect on a discussion after you have been honest and direct with them. Men can become frustrated and will need an opportunity to vent their feelings and time to consider the importance of what has been said. Sometimes offering an idea as a suggestion and allowing them time to reflect is far better than saying this is what they need to do.
- Be comfortable with the male approach that may be more cognitive focused and action orientated. This can be very different from female interaction. Men can be, for a variety of reasons, naturally more boisterous, louder, and have a stronger presence in social situations. Generally this is not intended as threatening, yet can be perceived as such.
- Be child centred with men who are fathers. The child centred approach cuts through all other situations affecting the men's lives and helps them to redirect their attention to the child/ren, e.g. "How do you think that will affect your child?"
- Men may be uncomfortable with programs that emphasise the provision of "support" because it suggests they are not coping. Use active terms like 'explore...', 'hear from other men talk about...'

## INITIAL CONTACT AND MARKETING

The best approach for promoting programs to men is by word of mouth. Due to the high level of initial suspicion, men often ignore fliers and newspaper advertisements unless they are experiencing, and wish to address, a current life crisis. When the crisis has not reached its crescendo, men respond best to the recommendation of a program by someone they trust. Friends, family members, partners, colleagues, human resource workers, doctors, other professionals and 'mates' can be respected 'gatekeepers' who can influence men. At least seventy five per cent of referrals to many fathering programs rely on some form of recommendation by a respected 'gatekeeper'.

When a program for men commences, it is initially important to advertise in newspapers or fliers that create interest amongst the 'gatekeepers'. Written promotions should clearly identify what will be gained by attending the program. Use 'doing' or 'active' words and for group programs, emphasise that there will be an

opportunity to hear other men's ideas.

When referring a father to another program, it is best to refer them to a person who you recommend than an organisation. It will increase significantly the likelihood that they will follow up on the referral.

## SERVICE PROVISION

Men will respond more positively when a range of different programs are offered such as telephone counselling, face-to-face counselling and group work and some choice is involved. Some men will favour informal environments that have little structure, while others will desire a context where their concerns are specifically addressed. It is important for organisations to provide the widest range of contexts for working with men that are possible in their budget.

Men appreciate a basic structure that helps to reduce their concerns about what will be expected from them. Clearly identify what the service user needs and what is expected of them when they use the program. Regularly review what is achieved and obtain feedback about the male service user's opinions and reactions to their learning. Asking at the end of the session, if the time together has been 'great', 'okay' or 'boring', is very useful for obtaining immediate feedback.

Men appreciate a context where they feel valued and can have input into some of the decisions that affect their life. Without this level of regard, men quickly identify how to 'play the game' and may use programs briefly to get what they want while holding themselves back from true involvement and commitment. When male service users need to make critical decisions, outline the available options with the belief that they can make an adequate choice.

When men are confronted by a family crisis, they are more likely to reach out for support. Separated fathers are the single largest group of men who are known for their 'help seeking' behaviour and will actively look for support from services. During a crisis, a 'short window period' occurs where men are likely to accept help and support. If the crisis passes without obtaining support they may not engage again until the next crisis occurs, if at all. This is why when working with men, phone calls need to be answered or returned promptly.

Useful questions to engage separated fathers over the phone include:

- When were they separated?
- What is the age and gender of the children?
- With whom do the children live?
- Where the father and mother live since the separation?
- Current arrangements regarding contact?
- Are there any court orders or Apprehended Violence Orders [79]?

These questions allow the worker to understand what the service user needs and how the worker can respond. If the worker suggests solutions that have already been unsuccessful, the service user can easily become frustrated. Using a solution focused approach to counselling, the worker may propose a range of options that include the service user obtaining legal advice, or mediation etc. Self-care options may include visiting a General Practitioner, the local Community Health Centre or phoning Mensline Australia.

Many fathers respond favourably when involved in a group program with other men who have experienced a similar situation. Their level of motivation and the availability of time will ultimately influence their attendance. It is important during the initial engagement, perhaps by telephone, to support the development of positive motivation. This is achieved by remaining child focused, emphasising that involvement in the program will allow them to learn from the situations that other men experience and enable them to manage their situation in a better way. After having some involvement, most men report that the group involvement has been a unique and rewarding experience. The length of group programs may vary from one day information workshops, to three hours a week for ten weeks. The range of groups includes information based workshops, emotional support groups and educational groups.

Questions to consider in planning and delivering services [9]:

- Where do the men in the local community gather? Can you promote your program at these venues?
- Consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: where do they meet? Have you spoken to the community and traditional Elders, including male Elders? Can you work in partnerships with them? How does the culture sustain their roles as fathers? What challenges do these men face as fathers?
- Consider men from culturally and linguistically diverse communities: Where do they meet? Have you spoken to their community leaders? Can you work in partnership with them? How does the culture sustain their roles as fathers? What challenges will those men face as fathers?
- What type of language is used in your promotional materials? Does it recognise the challenge for men to access help (i.e. courage to change)? Do you use gender language or refer to parents (which many communities view as code for 'mothers')? Does your promotional materials state what the men will get out of the program and use active language to describe what will be occurring (i.e. avoid references to sit and listen)?
- Are there positive images displayed in the space or in your promotional materials? Are their positive stories about fathers used and quotes about what other men have said about your program?
- Does your program provide 'hands-on' learning experiences?
- Is your program available outside of business hours?

## RECRUITING FATHERS

Fathers are more likely to be involved in a program [45] when:

- The father's engagement is requested from the start as expected and important and included in the home visiting.
- Workers talk directly to individual fathers before seeking commitment to a parenting course.
- Sessions are provided at flexible times and in appropriate environments.
- Fathers who do not attend are followed up.
- The benefit to their child is repeatedly emphasised.

- Gay or bisexual fathers are included as standard practice.
- The fathers' needs, including their mental health, are routinely assessed.
- The whole team seeks to (and is trained to) engage with fathers and build relationships with them (as they should do with mothers).
- The team regards the program as being as much for dads as for mums.
- Non-resident fathers are engaged with whenever possible;
- Mothers (and other fathers) are encouraged to think about the fathers' importance and help to recruit them.
- The mothers' ambivalence or resistance is taken seriously.

## RETAINING FATHERS

Fathers are likely to find parenting interventions more rewarding [45] when workers:

- Set out clearly the goals and expectations of the parenting course.
- Consult with fathers about their goals for participation in the program and tailor the program accordingly. Allow fathers and mothers to own the process for change, rather than the focus being on completing the program.
- Adopt a strengths-based approach which supports the father's capabilities rather than treating him as a resource.
- Help fathers create a baseline checklist of their involvement activities with their children, so they can see how they are progressing. Seek out feedback about the difference it makes within their family.
- Remind fathers of upcoming sessions (e.g. using text messaging) and follow up non-attenders.
- Introduce 'active' course elements (e.g. video playback, father-child activities) and ability to discuss things in smaller groups and move around the room.
- Create changes of mood/pace within the program (e.g. formal/informal; structured/unstructured; discussion/ activity).
- Include information on fathers' roles in their child's development.
- Create opportunities for fathers (and mothers) to reflect on their understandings of gender, masculinity and care.
- Address couple-relationship issues and gender roles including the importance of uncles, step-fathers and grandfathers.
- Identify and provide 'space' to address loss (e.g. of children/stepchildren/miscarriage/child protection issues).

## Checklists for the Working with Fathers Toolbox

Consider the following questions to appraise areas for improvement for your program/service. Father inclusive agencies achieve the following:

- Are convinced that fathers have an important role in the development of children.
- Can summarise the positive outcomes for children who have a caring and involved father or father figure.
- Are friendly to fathers who attend the centre.
- Use clear and simple language when relating to fathers rather than using jargon, verbally or written.
- Avoid stereotypes and generalisations about men and their motives.

### Environment

How often does your program/service

- Display posters that depict a wide range of positive male images.
- Have easy accessibility for car parking and public transport.
- Have regular special events or groups that are held outdoors (i.e. parks, BBQ's)
- Have male friendly reading material (sports/ car magazines, financial magazines, brochures promoting positive messages for men).
- Have male staff or other male service users, who would be noticed by other men entering your centre for the first time.
- Display snapshots (photos) of centre activities (with men and children) visible in the centre?
- Provide services and have events/groups outside of normal working hours (After 5.00pm and on weekends).

How often does your organisation...?

- Actively support staff to work with male service users?
- Review policies that specifically identify positive ways of working with and better target male service users.
- Develop formal strategies within the workplace to engage fathers. Highlight these strategies at your management forums.
- Measure statistically the number of fathers/men involved in your programs (occasions of service, age, work status, employment type and relationship to child).
- Include fathers in their strategic plan and not just parents or people (that often means primarily women in practice).
- Review clearly identified policies that identify when men are included and/or excluded from receiving support by your organisation.
- Employ male workers who have time to work directly with male service users.

## Language

Do most staff use the following in their interaction with male service users?

- Provide up front and direct discussion of important issues.
- Use clear and simple language rather than jargon.
- Talk about issues honestly even when the service user is emotional.
- Link family issues with a child focused approach.
- Challenge inappropriate language and reactions without immediately withdrawing your service.
- Use non-putdown terms such as 'mother of the child' rather than 'ex' when describing the mother.
- Avoid stereotypes and generalisations that all men are violent or perpetrators of domestic violence/child abuse.
- Discuss the importance of involving fathers with the mothers.
- Affirm the role fathers play with their children and families.
- Use open body language ...i.e. shake hands (positive body contact, non-threatening and validating).
- Use intermittent eye contact especially when the service user has high degree of anxiety/ emotion.
- Aware of male 'personal space' which may be different depending on the gender of the worker.
- Use non-deficit language and gendered language (i.e. refer to mothers, fathers and other important care-givers in children's lives aged 0-8 years) in fliers/ promotional material.
- Reinforce non-deficit language that men can commit, choose, capacity to relate with children, capacity to make day to day decisions, care, change, create, connect, communicate, and have the ability to form lasting and healthy attachments with the children/ partner.
- Ensure multicultural-friendly environments, including addressing language barriers and respect for cultures.

### Initial Contact/Marketing

How often does your program...?

- Identify clear purposes for having barbeques, meetings, counselling sessions, gatherings and groups in your advertising.
- Use 'doing' language and 'active' words in your promotion/fliers and marketing.
- Ask mum "when can I see you and your partner for our next appointment?"
- Have service users recommend your program to other men.
- Use the local media to promote your program/service.
- Give service users' choices about services available with clear explanations of their options at point of intake.
- Use appropriate informality at the beginning of meetings/ groups/gatherings especially at initial contact.

## Service Provision

How often does your program...?

- Have a clear context, guidelines, focus, and aim for your program.
- Encourage interaction and connections between service users in group settings.
- Send the father a summary of the family consultations.
- Try teleconferencing with the father at work whilst explaining relevant information to the mother.
- Separate behaviour and the person when you are dealing with challenging issues.
- Allow service users to influence the program content and have some choice about their involvement.
- Have review points and clear ending points for service users involved in your service.
- Present a variety of options/choices when working with men.
- Model non-competitiveness and celebrate small successes, fairness, cooperation and equity.
- Have clear rules/expectations that are relevant to service user's needs.
- Talk through with service users challenging tasks they need to do and provide men with coaching about how it can be completed.
- Recognise that male service users have something valuable to contribute.
- Use appropriate techniques to reduce the suspicion/ concerns that male service users sometimes have when they attend a program.
- Actively request feedback from male service users and members of the community as to how approachable your service is.

# CHAPTER 8:

## MESSAGES FOR MOTHERS AND FATHERS

### KEY MESSAGES REGARDING WHAT MOTHERS CAN DO...

- Discuss expectations of your roles as parents with your partner.
- 'Invite dads in' – men have only a short history of being day-to-day nurturers of children. It is possible that their dads were busy working and had little time to share some of the childrearing responsibilities that come with having a baby. Talk to him about the tasks, issues, needs and your perspective on how to best raise your children.
- Allow him to get involved. Sometimes mothers need to hand over control of the baby to him – 'the buck stops with me phenomena' e.g. trust the father to do the nappy changing or baby bathing. Encourage the father to spend time alone with his child. This will really help him to develop his own skills, confidence and ability to nurture your children. This aspect is critical as research shows that many fathers have not been given the opportunity to spend more than 30 minutes a week alone with their child in his/her first year of life.
- Discuss parenting; negotiate the childrearing tasks and household duties, to ensure that both your emotional and practical needs are met. Men tend to be more task oriented than women and more capable of providing support when they know exactly what is expected of them.
- Encourage health professionals to engage with the father. If fathers get the message from both the mother and the health practitioner, then they are more likely to understand the importance of their role in their child's development.

### KEY MESSAGES REGARDING WHAT FATHERS WITH BABIES CAN DO...

- Babies enjoy being held, cuddled and gently massaged.
- Babies like it when you talk, sing and play with them.
- Babies like to be comforted, to feel safe and loved.
- Have special time with your baby – organise a regular special time for you and your baby to get to know each other, to strengthen your bond and relationship e.g. go for a walk, go shopping, have a nap together, play.
- The added advantage is that it can free your partner to have some time for themselves.
- Learn to fold and change nappies.
- Record your baby's development.
- Learn to bath your baby.
- Hold your baby in a way that is comfortable for you. Remember to support your baby's head as you pick him/her up.
- Find some way to be involved in feeding your baby.
- Crying is your baby's way of communicating to you – letting you know their needs and feelings. They may be hungry, have a dirty nappy or wind, feeling cold/ hot, tired or may simply want to be held. Comfort your baby. You cannot spoil your baby by giving him/her too much love.
- Babies and young children need you to protect them from harm. Start by making sure your baby's environment is safe – house, car, bassinet, cot, stroller and toys.
- Find some time alone without the baby. You will need time to reflect on your changed life and new perspectives. It is important to give yourself that time.
- Find some time alone with your partner.
- Do things as a family.
- Be the father you would like to be.

## KEY MESSAGES REGARDING WHAT FATHERS CAN DO...

- Make time to be a dad: Do not simply assume that you will have time to be involved with your child. Plan and schedule time to play and talk with your son/daughter
- Be a good role model: Your child watches everything you do and learns how to act and react from your actions. Show him/her the best way to eventually parent their children, by being a great parent yourself.
- Playtime: Playing games with your child is good for both of you and creates a bond between you.
- Teach respect.
- Share ideas about parenting with your partner, family, friends and health professionals. This helps create a support network.
- Be a mentor: help other dads become the great dads that they want to become. Share your experiences and expertise with the men around you. This includes your own father. It's never too late to learn.
- Change or improve your household behaviour: Having a baby increases the extent of the household chores unbelievably. Do not expect your partner to do all the extra work. Discuss housework with your partner and make sure that you do your share. It is well researched and agreed that the fastest way to a woman's heart is via the vacuum cleaner and kitchen sink.
- Work together as a team and share all the tasks including housework. Support and respect the mother of your child.
- Spend time ALONE with your child/ren.
- Love your children and show them your affection and encouragement.
- Communicate with your partner, kids and health professionals. Be open with your feelings.
- Spend as much time together as a family as possible having fun and relaxing. It might be a good time to get closer to your father too!
- Share your own life story with your children. They need to know and understand who you are.

## KEY MESSAGES FOR A FATHER TO CONSIDER...

- What kind of dad would I like to be?
- What sort of relationship would I like with my children? Share your thoughts with your partner about this.
- What kind of memories do I want my child to have about his/her childhood?
- How do I want my child to feel while growing up?
- Have a look at the other priorities in your life and consider whether they are compatible with your new life and your partner's expectations of fatherhood?
- Make time to share fun, enjoyable or pleasant activities with your partner.
- Make time to discuss important issues.
- Share your thoughts and feelings (i.e. hopes and dreams, concerns, desires, problems...) with your partner.
- Discovering the things that communicate caring. Ask your partner to make a list of ten things that they feel would be an expression of caring from you to them. Spend some time yourself making a similar list. Swap lists and discuss their contents.
- Do at least one thing each day that is an expression of caring for each other.
- Find a way to show your partner how you love them. This could be romantic and affectionate or even cleaning up the kitchen.
- Focus on your shared dreams for your child and family.
- Spend time engaging in pleasant activities as a family.

## SUGGESTED LINKS

Australian Camp Connect Association	<a href="http://www.campconnect.org.au/resources_intl.shtml">www.campconnect.org.au/resources_intl.shtml</a>
Mensline Australia.	<a href="http://www.mensline.org.au">www.mensline.org.au</a>
Men's Health Information and Resource Centre (contains online articles)	<a href="http://www.menshealth.westernsydney.edu.au">www.menshealth.westernsydney.edu.au</a>
Involving fathers in early childhood services (info, interviews, resources).	<a href="http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/efp/niftey/index.html">www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/efp/niftey/index.html</a>
Dads Included, developed by the Fatherhood Institute, shares knowledge, stories and ideas about new ways of reaching out to fathers.	<a href="http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/">http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/</a>
Strong Men, Deadly Groups. (Aboriginal Men's Groups)	<a href="http://www.menshealthaustralia.net/">www.menshealthaustralia.net/</a>
Dads make a difference - an exploratory study of paternal support for breastfeeding in Perth, Western Australia.	<a href="http://www.internationalbreastfeedingjournal.com/content/4/1/15">www.internationalbreastfeedingjournal.com/content/4/1/15</a>
Including fathers in work with vulnerable families - NSW Brighter Futures Program.	<a href="http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/321161/brighterfutures_including_dads.pdf">http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/321161/brighterfutures_including_dads.pdf</a>
Being Dad, Being Proud. Aboriginal specific information sheets designed to promote father involvement with children - NSW Brighter Futures Program.	0-6 months, 6-12 months, 1-3 years, 3-5 years, 5-8 years
Dads make a difference - NSW Brighter Futures Program.	Information sheets 0-6 months, 6-12 months, 1-3 years, 3-5 years, 5-8 years These are designed to promote father involvement with children
Introduction to working with men and family relationships guide.	Introduction to working with men and family relationships guide
Father inclusive practice guide.	Father-inclusive practice guide
The Fatherhood Project - programs for expectant fathers and organisation of fathering festivals.	<a href="http://www.fatherhood.com.au/">http://www.fatherhood.com.au/</a>
DESA - Men in families and family policy in a changing world report.	<a href="https://www.unngls.org/index.php/un-ngls_news_archives/2011/1871-desa-men-in-families-and-family-policy-in-a-changing-world">https://www.unngls.org/index.php/un-ngls_news_archives/2011/1871-desa-men-in-families-and-family-policy-in-a-changing-world</a>
Part 1: Dr. Christopher Walmsley presents the findings of recent research on father's participation in social services, along with innovative practical strategies for promoting fathers' inclusion fathers in social services.	<a href="https://youtu.be/8yPcB1Q0HCY">https://youtu.be/8yPcB1Q0HCY</a>
Part 2: Dr. Christopher Walmsley presents the findings of recent research on father's participation in social services, along with innovative practical strategies for promoting fathers' inclusion fathers in social services.	<a href="https://youtu.be/bM3Bnr_Q6IA">https://youtu.be/bM3Bnr_Q6IA</a>
Fatherhood Institute – Excellent summaries of current research.	<a href="http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org">http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org</a>
The absence of fathers in child and family welfare practice Report. Fleming, J. (2010). 'The absence of fathers in child and family welfare practice', PhD Thesis, Monash University. Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences. Dept. of Social Work.	<a href="http://arrow.monash.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository/monash:80105">http://arrow.monash.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository/monash:80105</a>
Family Relationships Online – information about Family Relationship Centres as well as resources for families	<a href="http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au">http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au</a>

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