

01 Background: Men, including fathers, stepfathers and mothers' boyfriends or partners - whether they live with the child or not, generally play a very important role in children's lives. They often have significant decision making power within families and exert great influence on the children they care for.

Despite this, fathers and male figures are often absent in recording, assessments and care plans. Research and finding from Serious Case Reviews tell us that professionals tend to focus almost exclusively on the quality of care children receive from their mothers and female carers.

Key issues emerging from reviews in relation to men:

- the lack of information about men in most SCRs
 - the failure to take men into account in an assessment
 - rigid or fixed thinking about men as 'all good' or 'all bad'
 - the threat posed by men to workers

Why it matters:

At the time of the birth, 90% of parents in the UK are in a couple relationship (with half of the rest describing themselves as 'friends'). Even among parents who claim to be 'uninvolved', one third of fathers are still in touch with mother and infant nine months later. (Source: [Fatherhood Institute](#))

"Serious case reviews repeatedly find that although men around a child who died had posed a risk, this had not been identified or acted upon; and that men who could have been a resource often had information which agencies would have found helpful in understanding the child's situation, if only they had been in touch or had been listened to."

(Source: [OFSTED, 2011](#); [Brandon et al., 2011](#)).

"Better engagement with fathers in families where children are at risk is central to saving lives".

07 What to do?

- Involve fathers from the very beginning
- Emphasise to parents how crucial the father's role is to the child's wellbeing.
- Encourage fathers to attend meetings & include them in assessments.
- Ask them directly about risk factors/ risky behaviours such as drug and alcohol use
- make sure fathers and male carers know about concerns relating to their child, and consult them about the plans

Questions:

Where can I find further information?

- [NSPCC: Hidden men](#)
- [Fatherhood Institute](#)
- [Community care: Engaging fathers](#)
- [Working with fathers to Improve Children's Wellbeing](#)
- [Research in practice: Working effectively with men in families](#)

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Information:

Intervening early with fathers, before there is a crisis, makes it easier to support them to develop appropriate parenting styles. It may also avert crises.

Men may represent a resource for children, and this may even be the case with many difficult or dangerous men. Men frequently become labelled as either a 'risk' or 'resource' when they may represent a complex mix of both.

Failure to engage with men is normally explained by their unwillingness but research shows that the men's attitudes and behaviour are only part of the picture. Just as important is how practitioners approach the men.

Men in particular may be wary of authority or feel 'family work' is women's business or think they have nothing to contribute or feel awkward talking with practitioners, especially women.

When men's behaviours are violent & oppressive, risk to family members' safety is of course direct & immediate. Managing and addressing these risks is crucial – not only for immediate family safety, but also for other women and children with whom such men are interacting, or will, interact.



Information:

All agencies working with children and their families should consider the role of fathers and men in the households, both in assessments and when providing services.

The status and the role of males and new partners in the same household should be understood in terms of their potential for protection and nurturing - as well as any adverse effect they may have on the safety of the child and the mother.

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