

7 MINUTE BRIEFING

Working Effectively with Men in Families

For more information about how we can improve practice and engage more effectively with fathers click on the following links:

https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventin g-abuse/child-protectionsystem/case-

reviews/learning/hidden-men/ http://www.communitycare.co.uk/e

ngaging-fathers/ http://workingwithfathers.weebly.co

http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/ wp-content/uploads/2013/03/FAT-91768-FI-SafeGUarding-A4-16ppaw1.pdf Engaging with men more effectively could improve how we keep children safe. Men play a very important role in children's lives and have a great influence on the children they care for. They can sometimes be overlooked as a protective factor. Often, the focus is almost exclusively on the quality of care children receive from their mothers/female carers.

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 any meetings and include them in assessments. Ask them directly about risk factors and 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 plans.

NSPCC Hidden Men: learning from serious case reviews 2015 identified two categories of 'hidden men' those who posed a risk and men as protective factors. For example, risk factors include relying too much on solely mothers for essential information; if mothers are putting their own needs first they may not be honest. Also, practitioners may not talk to others involved in the child's life. Highlighting the importance of hearing the voice of the whole family!

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The quality of the relationship is what matters; children who have secure, supportive, reciprocal and sensitive relationships with their parents are more likely to be well adjusted psychologically. Fathers play multi-faceted roles; positive paternal influences are more likely to occur not only when there are supportive father-child relationships, but when the fathers' relationships with partners, ex-partners and other children are also positive.

Many barriers to engaging with fathers have been identified - Rigid or fixed thinking by professionals - Mothers as gatekeepers - Children as 'women's work' (some fathers hold this belief too) - Mothers' fears of involving fathers - Fathers as reluctant/elusive clients - Complex issues in assessing risks posed by fathers and balancing risks with protective factors - Time, opportunity and inclination - Parental responsibility? - Mothers resistance? - Seen as 'the problem'.

Michael Lamb (2010 - one of the foremost researchers in this area) highlights that research increasingly sees the father as important in his own right - not just a breadwinner or playmate. In summary, Lamb identified that parental warmth; nurturance and closeness are associated with positive child outcomes regardless of whether the parent involved is a mother or father.

For more information regarding 7 minute briefings, please email sarah.herron@knowsley.gov.uk Knowsley Safeguarding Children Board, 2nd Floor, Nutgrove Villa, Westmorland Road, Huyton L36 6GA Tel: 0151 443 3859 www.knowsleyscb.org.uk