

Fathers and fatherhood in young carers' families

Recommendations

For service providers / practitioners

“My parents separated and live on opposite sides of the city. They both need emotional and physical support. Technically I live with my mum, but really I travel between the two of them every week. It’s exhausting, but they don’t have anyone else.” Matt, young carer from Sheffield

Based on the findings of the [‘Fathers and fatherhood in young carers’ families’](#) literature review, and insights drawn from the Fatherhood Institute’s long experience of working with services to maximise father-engagement in a variety of settings over more than a decade, we have identified a range of ways in which services for young carers could be more father inclusive

1. Wherever your service is situated in the complex systems with which young carers’ families might interact – whether you’re an adults’ or children’s service, or are focused on drug and alcohol, for example – it is important to take steps to equip your service to recognise and actively support positive father-child relationships. Helping a young person reflect on and improve their relationship with their father and/or father-figures, or to reconnect with them if the relationship has broken down, could have a huge impact on his or her life as a carer, and beyond.
 - a. **Adult services** should, as mentioned above, identify the parental status of every male client and his connections with children – and seek ways to ensure that these connections remain fruitful. Drug and alcohol services should also consider using fatherhood as a motivating factor to help men change their behaviour.
 - b. **Children’s services** should seek to identify and engage with the father as early as possible, unless to do so is assessed as unsafe (and even then alternative ways of working may be feasible). This is the case whether or not he has Parental Responsibility, and whether or not the mother consents (see below). Children’s records on the integrated children’s system should clearly state the name and the full and up to date contact details of the birth father and any other significant father figures; AND whether they have been assessed and are actively involved in the child’s life.
 - c. **If a child becomes looked after**, the first choice of placement is with the other parent provided it is consistent with their welfare (s.22C Children Act 1989); so the birth father should always be consulted (and where appropriate assessed) when a placement is being considered - whether or not he has Parental Responsibility. If a father or father figure disagrees with the outcome of your assessment, his views should be recorded, placed on the child’s file and responded to accordingly.

2. Count how many fathers your service is engaging with. There is strong evidence that father-child relationships are hugely important to children and mothers, as well as to fathers themselves – and collecting data on father-engagement is a vital first step towards recognising this and offering a father-inclusive service to young carers and their families. Fathers can be a vital resource with whom you could work to improve a young carer's situation – even if at first they may appear to be absent, or inaccessible due to work commitments.
3. Learn to 'see' men as fathers or potential fathers – just as you 'see' women as mothers. Services will often ask women but not men about their family commitments, leading to provision of support and/or information/advice. The failure to recognise men's role in fatherhood may lead to young carers' caring for fathers and father-figures remaining hidden.
4. Make clear that fathers' positive involvement in their children's lives is both desirable and expected. This can help make clear to men themselves, and to those around them, that you value and support young carers' relationships with their dads. Sometimes small changes can make a big difference. Health visitors found that changing their introductory letter so it said 'Dear Mum and Dad' rather than 'Dear Parent', and explaining why dads' presence was important too, dramatically increased dads' attendance at appointments.
5. Fathers, like mothers, may benefit from a range of support, as part of a 'whole family' approach to supporting a young carer. This may range from intensive support (for example where a father has mental health problems or is a substance user) to provision of information and advice to help separated fathers whose children are caring for their mother or other family members, to stay connected with, and support, their children.
6. If you are engaging with a 'lone parent' family you should, as a matter of course, enquire about the 'other' parent (normally the father), and strive to support the children to develop or maintain a positive relationship, including regular contact, with both parents – unless it is unsafe to do so. This may require sustained and sensitive work with the young carer, the other parent (usually the mother) and potentially with other family members.
7. Couple support for mums and dads whose children are young carers may bring huge benefits, helping them work through the problems they may have experienced individually and together – and enabling them to work effectively as a parenting team.