

Making the *most* of fathers: Five 'best practice' tips

TOP TIP

1

Review policies

> Policies need to specify that 'fathers' (not just 'parents') must be engaged with, and should state why their participation is important. HR policies and staff contracts may need review, to provide flexible working hours (this will help working mothers, too). Recruitment, supervision and appraisal frameworks will need to address engagement with fathers.

TOP TIP

2

Commit resources

> Although engaging with the whole family ultimately saves money, an initial investment is necessary. Resources must be found early on to review policies and program design, ensure premises are 'father-friendly,' re-formulate data collection methods and evaluation frameworks, train staff and allow them more time per case to track down and include fathers and other key family members.

TOP TIP

3

Be systematic

> The only way to ensure engagement with substantial numbers of fathers is for this to be everyone's business. Whenever a child is registered, the names and contact details of their father (whether co-resident or not) and other significant male (as well as female) carers must be sought and recorded. Then the fathers' engagement with the service, and any referrals from it, should be recorded and monitored. Whenever a father is not engaged with or he is not included in a referral, reasons should be requested and recorded.

TOP TIP

4

Understand why it's important

> Researchers, policy makers, practitioners, mothers, father and the wider family need to understand the benefits to the child, of the father accessing a service and/or playing a greater role at home; and the risks to children when fathers and father-figures do not engage or are not engaged with.

TOP TIP

5

Reflect on your own attitudes to, and experiences with, fathers and men – and wider cultural expectations

> We each have our own 'fatherhood stories', and cultural messaging relating to men and fathers is powerful. Research, policy and practice can all be coloured by our personal experiences and assumptions. 'Unpacking' these is crucial so we can be in control of our own responses.

THEY SAID IT:

We take time preparing expectant fathers so they can adopt an active role during the birth. Prenatal classes are available in the evening and on Sunday afternoons (working mothers come then, too – and parking is easier) and we avoid holding classes during prime time sporting fixtures. This systematic engagement with the dads has led to a reduction in the number of women being admitted to hospital in early labour, as they cope confidently at home with their partner's support. This has meant cost savings for the hospital and a lot less work for busy midwives. After the birth, visiting times are now 9am till 9pm and we provide refreshments and an allocated toilet for men.

To download other 'Bringing fathers in' resources and access relevant links and references, go to:
www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2014/bringing-fathers-in-resources-for-advocates-practitioners-and-researchers/