



Mainstreaming Father Support in Family Hubs



The Fatherhood Institute (UK charity 1075104) works to build a society that values and supports men as hands-on fathers and caregivers.

We help health, education and social care practitioners understand fathers' impact, and engage effectively with them; and we support commissioners to design, deliver and evaluate father-inclusive resources, services and interventions.

We also partner with academics to conduct and support impactful, father-inclusive research – and we work with governments, NGOs and other partner organisations to develop father-inclusive policy thinking, strategies and practice.

<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/>

What our clients say

“With the assistance and guidance of the Fatherhood Institute, we have been able to move forward in terms of our work with fathers. The bespoke nature of the training that we commissioned (in the form of training days and webinars) has been invaluable and has provided our teams with the foundations required to move forward. With each member of the team now all very much focused on work with fathers, we have subsequently created a wider strategy. We hope that this work will continue to go from strength to strength.”

Locality leader, 2022

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The rationale

In its *Family Hubs and Start for Life programme guide*, published in August 2022, the Government has set out its vision for a £300 million programme covering 2022-25. We are delighted to report that within the document's 112 pages, the word 'fathers' appears 26 times – enough to persuade us that at a national level, there is an explicit understanding of the need for fathers to be woven into the design, delivery and evaluation of family services.

But while father-inclusion is spelled out as a clear expectation in the guide and accompanying annexes (something to be welcomed, because so often it is not), we know that turning this into a reality can be a major challenge.

Father-inclusion can seem disarmingly simple, and sometimes small changes can make a big difference. Changing invitation letters to say 'Dear Mum and Dad' rather than 'Dear Parents' has been shown to result in higher attendance by fathers at postnatal home visits by health visitors, for example¹.

But father-focused work often falls flat: we've lost count of the number of well-meaning "dads' groups" we've seen come and go in our 20-plus years researching and advocating for systematic father-inclusive services and approaches. There's often a knee-jerk assumption that men need or want male-only peer support, when in fact evidence suggests that **well designed, implemented and evaluated inclusion of fathers within mainstream services can be more successful**.

Indeed, fathers are MUCH more likely (three times so) to engage with parenting support when services are 'mature' in their father-engagement - and even fathers who DON'T get involved are more likely, when services are 'mature', to be aware of the possible benefits to their children, and therefore more likely to support their children's and or partner's participation².

How does a service become mature in its engagement with dads? Well, there's no single model, but it involves **not only changes in practice but also paradigmatic shifts in thinking by the whole team**. Some key features of a mature service³ are:

- Fathers being consistently viewed as co-parents, with staff helping mothers and fathers to reflect on how each father contributes to his child's health and development
- An agency-wide commitment to attract and involve fathers; programmes being perceived as being as much for fathers as for mothers; and fathers being regularly discussed in case conferencing - and included in conferences

¹ For the full case study see Guide to Developing a Father-Inclusive Workforce at <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/uploads/publications/460.pdf> (page 5)

² For more on this see Raikes, H.H., Summers, J.A., & Roggman, L.A. (2005). Father involvement in Early Head Start programs. *Fathering*, 3(1), 29-58; and McAllister, C.L., Wilson, P.C., & Burton, J. (2004). From sports fans to nurturers: an Early Head Start program's evolution toward father involvement. *Fathering*, 2(1), 31-60

³ See Raikes et al (2005) – referenced in footnote 2.

- Activities often allowing for fathers and children to do things together, and being linked to other programme components, such as home visits
- ‘Special’ father/ male activities no longer being regarded as the vehicle for father-involvement. Instead, a wide array of programme efforts to include fathers exist; and adjustments in service delivery have been made to meet the needs of working fathers and mothers
- The employment and training of a father-involvement co-ordinator, and the programme being seen as a leader in its community, in terms of father-involvement.
- Commitment by programme leadership to engage in ongoing critical and reflective thinking and regular self-evaluations.

One of the great things about the Family Hubs programme is that there’s the potential for local authorities to embed high quality, long-term, strategic approaches to father-inclusion from pre-conception and antenatal services, through to health visiting, early years education, primary schools, social work and beyond.

Investment in workforce development training to skill up the practitioners, managers and leaders who can run this work and keep father-inclusion high on the agenda, will be crucial – as will evidence-based interventions that have been shown to be effective with fathers.

We’re here to help you find the best solutions. In this brochure we’ve set out some ideas about what our support might look like – but we’re also able to put together bespoke packages.

Please contact our Head of Training, Jeszemma Howl if you’d like to discuss things further. You can email her at mail@fatherhoodinstitute.org or give her a call/text on 0791 786 413.

Our offer

Workforce development training

Authentic father participation in Parent Carer Panels and beyond

One day online: for up to 16 people.

A well-balanced and diverse Parent Carer Panel of 'experts by experience' can be of huge value to services, but too often we fail to hear the voices of fathers and other male carers. How can we know what they want, what they think and how they feel about our offer to their them and their family? Authentic participation in management and decision-making processes, including parent-panels, requires us to rethink how we reach out, how we engage and how we learn from fathers in consultation, evaluation, and delivery design. This course will help you be father-inclusive in your reach and communications; plan participation and consultations with fathers in mind; identify areas and actions for co-production; and discover some quick and easy 'hooks' and appraisal methods.

Fatherhood Champions

Three days online: for up to 16 people.

Fatherhood Champions are equipped with the knowledge and skills to cascade their learning to colleagues and lead on key issues in their service and locality. The training offers an in-depth learning experience, and includes audits, self-study portfolio, action planning and all resources needed to embed knowledge and expertise within the team. Participants who successfully complete the course and portfolio will become 'Fatherhood Champions' within their service, having developed a comprehensive strategy for building, sustaining, and advocating for a father inclusive service, ready to cascade learning and support others. Champions come from a range of sectors, including health, early years, social care and education.

Engaging fathers in health visiting and family services

One day online: for up to 16 people.

Health visitors and other family services are an important service for families, and this course will help those services to gain the confidence, knowledge and skills to work effectively with fathers. Participants will explore latest research and evidence base and develop strategies to engage with fathers in their day-to-day work, including appointments, groups and home-visiting. Follow-on resources included.

Involving fathers to support breastfeeding

One day online: for up to 16 people.

Improving breastfeeding rates is an important policy goal and thirty years of research have found benefits from the father's verbal encouragement; responsiveness towards his partner; assistance in preventing and managing breastfeeding difficulties; and help with household duties and infant care. Fathers' supportiveness is associated with detailed understanding of breastfeeding benefits and common challenges and how to address them; and with perceiving himself as having a useful role to play. Fathers may need support themselves if they are to support their partner: this course will empower you to identify what such support might look like,

when and how to deliver it, and what fathers (and mothers) find most useful. Follow-on resources included.

Working with fathers in safeguarding

One day online: for up to 16 people.

Over several decades one of the key issues that is consistently highlighted in serious case reviews and academic research is the failure to engage with and assess fathers and other men as a potential risk or resource for children effectively and systematically. This means that children are frequently put at greater risk of harm because the behaviour of risky men (including those who perpetrate domestic abuse) is not sufficiently understood and engaged with, and because men who could offer positive care for at-risk children are not effectively identified, assessed and supported. This evidence-based course will support managers and practitioners to identify the barriers and opportunities to identify and engage with fathers, including those who use violence or are resistant, and who may require other services. Suitable for anyone working with families.

Supporting fathers' perinatal mental health

One day online: for up to 16 people.

This course draws on the best, up-to-the-minute, international evidence about what happens to men during the transition to fatherhood, including the prevalence of, and risk factors for, paternal mental health problems and how best to support them. We will consider fathers' roles in supporting maternal mental health; the impact of fathers' mental health and adverse childhood experiences in their own and their children's lives; gendered beliefs and attitudes; and fathers' help-seeking behaviours. The course includes real-life testimonies from fathers and provides guidance and strategies on how to support paternal mental health (including engagement, assessment, signposting and referral). We also provide participants with *Becoming Dad*, a joint Fatherhood Institute/ Mental Health Foundation publication, to promote to expectant and new fathers as part of their universal offer.

Working with fathers in the early years to support children's development

One day online: for up to 16 people.

What fathers do (or don't do), matters to children. Fathers have a huge impact on their child's development, attainment and education, whether or not they know it. This course will explore the evidence base regarding the role fathers play in their child's development, how to help them to explore involved fatherhood and why this is sometimes overlooked in family services. We will offer opportunities to explore the evidence and case studies, useful tools and best-practice to support action planning to embed father-inclusive practice.

Find out more: email our Head of Training, Jeszemma Howl at mail@fatherhoodinstitute.org or give her a call/text on 0791 786 413.

Parenting programmes

Father-inclusive perinatal support

Becoming Dad

Train to deliver the Becoming Dad programme, a three-hour peer group intervention for expectant and new fathers, designed to provide them with tailored information and support as they make the transition to first-time fatherhood. The dads progress through a wide-ranging curriculum designed to build their confidence around hands-on baby care (e.g., nappy-changing, bathing and baby handling); health and safety (e.g. danger signs to look out for, safe sleeping and shaken baby syndrome); bonding and attachment; healthy relationships, supporting breastfeeding and mental health (their own and their partner's). This updated intervention draws on our work with mental health organisations and our [Contemporary Fathers in the UK](#) evidence reviews. It works because it is a 'one-stop shop' where the men can get crucial and timely information and support, without signing up to a long commitment.

Family Foundations

Family Foundations is one of the world's most father inclusive and evidenced based parenting programmes. The approach to prevention around the transition to parenthood has differed from others' by strategically focusing on enhancing the coparenting relationship, based on both theoretical and strategic practical considerations. FF has been rigorously evaluated and shown to produce positive outcomes in family relationships and parenting quality, and to reduce parents' physical aggression towards children. FF has also been found to have positive impacts on child and parent emotional and behaviour issues. For certain outcomes, FF had the greatest benefits for families at higher levels of risk based on baseline levels of mother education, father emotional security, mother depression, or couple relationship conflict. Family Foundations is featured in the Early Intervention Foundation Guidebook, with a strength of evidence rating of 3 (out of 4); and was an 'exemplar' in a Yale University systematic review of parenting interventions. If you are a commissioner thinking about how FF stacks up against other approaches, check out the [EIF's commissioner guide](#).

Supporting the home learning environment

Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED)

Fathers Reading Every Day is a reading-for-pleasure intervention for fathers and their child of any age. It works by encouraging men to read to their child, understand the importance of listening to their child's reading, and share in literacy-benefiting activities for a fixed number of minutes per day for four weeks. FRED can be transformative for parents with many fathers saying FRED has brought them closer to their children and encouraged them to be more involved with their development at home. Children benefit from their fathers' focused attention on their reading and language development, and a month's worth of warm interactions, which may lead to an improved relationship throughout their lifetime. Check out [more FRED outcomes](#).

Support for Trailblazers

Our team members have worked across the UK and internationally, within complex health, social care, education and early years systems – transforming established services and setting up new ones. This has included supporting the development of Better Start programmes; building robust father-inclusive approaches to safeguarding in local authorities; working in social care to self-audit practice; and supporting the redesign of policies, materials (for practitioners and parents) and strategies in early years systems.

The FI team has expertise in research, strategic and policy development, auditing of services, press/PR & communications, programme development, training, delivery and evaluation.

We can work with you to design a consultancy package for your **Trailblazing Father-Inclusive Family Hub** which is responsive to local policy and informed by the latest evidence on fathers and national policy guidance.

We can help you by:

- Contributing to strategic planning processes to embed father-inclusive approaches in your *joined-up* Family Hub teams from health, early years and social care pathways
- Delivering high-level seminars to senior commissioners and stakeholders and cabinet members to get their buy-in to your new approach
- Auditing and ‘father-proofing’ policy and practice documents to ensure they are father-inclusive
- Father-proofing parenting interventions/programmes and processes
- Developing and disseminating publicity materials and resources for new fathers, and establishing meaningful engagement on Parent Carer Panels
- Working with evaluation teams to help you measure your father-engagement, and the impact of this, by developing protocols for evaluation and monitoring.

Find out more: email our Head of Training, Jeszemma Howl at mail@fatherhoodinstitute.org or give her a call/text on 0791 786 413.

Get in touch

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Email: mail@fatherhoodinstitute.org

Tel: 0791 786 413.

Register for Fatherhood Institute e-newsletters, which bring you the latest news and insights about father-inclusive research, policy and practice direct to your inbox. Sign up here:

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What our clients say

“A great organisation to be working with, the training was relevant and informative and delivered in a clear and concise way.”

Project Officer, South West

“Warm, friendly, knowledgeable and focused on outcomes.”

Locality Manager, London

“Fabulous bespoke training that has long been overdue within the NHS. New research, knowledge and framework for service development was evident throughout the training. Very knowledgeable trainer with great passion and patience. Will help service embed recommendations from the *Myth of Invisible Men* document. I have already recommended the training to the local authority.”

Team leader, North East