



Fathers in the first 1001 days

[Health and social care professionals should specifically and directly engage with fathers, rather than assuming they will reach them via mothers, during this vital period, because:](#)

This is the 'golden opportunity moment' for engagement

During pregnancy, birth and the first two years of babies' lives, most fathers are THERE:

- Two thirds attend routine antenatal appointments, and more than 9 in 10 are at the scans and the birth (Redshaw & Henderson, 2013).
- 85% are living with their baby's mother at that time; of the 15% living apart, two-thirds say they are a couple or 'friends'. Only 5% say they 'aren't in a relationship', but 25% of those dads are still around nine months later (Kiernan & Smith, 2003).
- Only 19% of families accessing Children's Centres in the most deprived areas are single parent families. And among those, 77% of the dads are in contact with their child (Maisey et al, 2013).

Despite fathers' ubiquity, health services' engagement with them is non-mandatory and patchy; inclusion depends on the motivation and skill of individuals (Sherriff & Hall, 2014).

Fathers' attitudes and behaviours impact hugely on mothers...

- Pregnancy is a key time when both expectant parents review their health behaviours: diet, smoking, drug/alcohol use (Pryor et al, 2014). The greatest influence on a mother's smoking is her partner's smoking: she is most likely to give up if he gives up and/or helps her stop (for review, see McBride et al, 2004).
- Expectant and new mothers rely on their partner above anyone else. For example, when depressed they turn to him first, and are more likely to receive support from him than from any other person, including medical staff (Holopainen, 2002).
- Mothers feel more capable and confident about breastfeeding when their partner is supportive (Mannion et al, 2013). Including fathers in breastfeeding education and support improves breastfeeding rates (Maycock et al, 2013).

...and on babies

- Fathers' impact on breastfeeding is additionally important because breastfed babies are less likely to be obese later (Armstrong et al, 2002). Toddlers' activity levels are also linked with their father's (but not their mother's) BMI (Sallis et al, 1988).
- High quality (sensitive/supportive) and substantial father involvement from the month following birth are connected with a range of positive outcomes in babies and toddlers, including higher IQs at 12 months and 3 years (Yarrow et al, 1984; Wachs et al, 1971; Yogman et al, 1995; Magill-Evans and Harrison, 1999).
- Disengaged and remote father-child interactions as early as the third month of life have been found to predict behaviour problems in children when they are older (Ramchandani et al., 2013).
- The 'magnitude' of fathers' influences on infant language development is equal to and sometimes larger than those of mothers (Tamis-LeMonda et al, 2013). Later, 'school readiness' in young children is associated with high levels of paternal sensitivity, over and above mothers' (Campbell & von Stauffenberg, 2008).

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Further information

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