

## One Minute Guide Engaging with fathers - 'Hidden Men'

Men play a vital role in children's health and development and can have a major influence on the children they care for. However as highlighted in a national review<sup>i</sup> and in analysis of serious case reviews, male carers and male partners sometimes go 'unseen' by services involved with children. Reasons for this oversight include lack of professional engagement and curiosity; an over-focus on the quality of care children receive from their mothers; or inadequate information sharing between services.

### Identifying the men in a child's life

When birth fathers are cohabiting with the mother and child, it is easier to identify carers and encourage inclusion. Identifying fathers when they are not living with the child, as well as identifying new male partners in the household can be more challenging. There are many reasons why mothers may be reluctant to discuss fathers and male partners role in their children's lives including abusive relationships or when the relationship between the adults has broken down.

### How can professionals improve engagement with fathers and men in practice

- Active enquires should be made during pregnancy and after birth about the child's father, or significant males.
- Conversations around mother's support networks, should explore the role of other men as carers or providers for the child.
- Where possible use different sources to gather information – consider the risk of a coercive / controlling situation.
- Document who are the members of the household, their role and relationship to each other.
- Take into account some people may be using aliases or nicknames and when making checks, allow for different spellings of names.
- Be curious, challenge and explore information provided, especially if it seems to be contradictory.
- Be explicit with mothers about the importance of speaking to the father and including him in the process, while also ensuring that she would not be put at risk.
- Where appropriate speak separately to the father rather than gaining information solely through the mother.
- Ensure that when present fathers and significant males are included in the conversation.
- Ensure that the father or significant male is clearly identified in records. Does your record detail his strengths, vulnerabilities and risk factors?
- Explore ways of encouraging fathers to engage in conversations about their child, for example:
  - *Where possible emphasis the important of the role they play to their child wellbeing and develop a working relationship.*
  - *Encourage them to attend ante-natal appointments and classes*
  - *Where possible make appointments that accommodate their working routine.*
  - *Be mindful of gender bias and-'barriers' that may be present in the work you are undertaking and consider if any are possible*
  - *Offer advice and signpost to support when additional needs are identified*

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### Further reading

- [Unseen men: learning from case reviews](#)
- <sup>i</sup> ["The Myth of Invisible Men" Safeguarding children under 1 from non-accidental injury caused by male carers](#)