
Supporting Care Leavers who become Fathers

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“For too long...

our culture has treated boys who become fathers . . . as detached misfits who are the architects of many of our nation’s problems, rather than seeing these youth for who they really are: young men trying to navigate a complex array of difficult life circumstances that place them at a tremendous disadvantage”
(Kiselica, 2008)



Fatherhood is diverse and fragile

- At the time of the birth, 86% of parents are married or living together (and 93% of these dads attend the birth)
- UK fathers carry out 25% of weekday childcare, and one-third at weekends. More where both parents work full-time (*EOC 2003*).
- 50% of mothers of 9-month-olds are in work (*Dex & Ward, 2010*)
- 58% of men and 62% of women reject the male breadwinner role (*Dads and their babies; EOC 2005*)
- Young, poor, never co-resident dads likely to be least involved. Most marginalised from services and most stigmatised too.

Positive longterm impact of father-child relationship

- Children with positively involved resident or non-resident biological or step fathers tend to have:

- better friendships with better-adjusted children

- fewer behaviour problems

- lower criminality and substance abuse

- higher educational achievement

- greater capacity for empathy

- higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction

(Flouri 2005; Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004; Dunn 2004)

- **Early father involvement** predicts greater involvement as children grow

- **Strong protective factor** for disadvantaged or vulnerable children *(Black et al 1995; Tunnard 2002, 2004)*

Other effects of positive father involvement

- **Child-mother attachment** more secure (*for review see Guterman & Lee 2005*)
- **Post-natal depression in mothers** less likely and less damaging for child (*for review, see Fisher et al 2006*).
- **Initiation and continuation of breastfeeding** more likely (*Swanson & Power 2005*)
- **Fathers more satisfied** and adjust more quickly to fatherhood (*Barclay & Lupton, 1999*)
- **Lower parental stress and relationship breakdown** (*Cowan & Cowan, 2003*)

Young fatherhood

Predicted by low socio-economic status, having teenage mother or young father (at first birth), separated parents, low academic achievement, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, early marriage/cohabitation (*Pears et al, 2005; Bunting, 2005*)

Young men have roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ probability of becoming a young father (under 23) if:

- son of teenage mother
- father's social class IV or V
- conduct disorder
- in social housing at 10
- poor reading ability at 10

compared to **2%** for those not experiencing any of these factors

Young fathers and offending

- 12% of 15-17 year old male offenders have children
- Among those aged 22 and under, nearly half are (or are about to become) fathers
- Over half of young male offenders have been in care
- Nearly half have literacy/numeracy levels below age 11
- Few had models of good fathering

Young fathers

- vast majority are keen to be connected to their children and support their partner (*e.g. Quinton et al 2002; Bunting & McAuley 2004*), and usually anguished by lack of engagement with their children (*e.g. Osborn 2008*)
- fatherhood has often given their lives meaning and protected them from involvement in negative activities (*Rouch 2005*)
- expressions of no/low interest mainly associated with financial insecurity or confusion about how to take care of babies / young children (*Rhein et al 1997*)
- often face family rejection, barriers to contact with child / mother, struggling to contribute financially, inability to envisage future (*Guterman & Lee 2005*)

Experiences of care leavers who are fathers

- **Detachment and isolation:** from own families, especially own father. Fatherhood seen by some as an opportunity to recreate a “family”. But often a struggle to know how to be a father where they experienced poor fathering. Sense of ‘shock’ when they learn they will be a dad.
- **Relationship with mother of child:** “Girls don’t let you get involved even when you want to – they want to do it all themselves. And then, when you’re not doing anything, they have a go at you!” Ex-partner having new boyfriend, or moving far away taking the child(ren) with her.
- **Difficulty trusting others (including partners).** Experiences before going into care, loneliness and rejection within the care system. Also hard to trust themselves.
- **Competing demands:** “We need the money for the kids, but then you can’t go out to look for a job because you’ve got to look after them”
- **Social exclusion:** unemployment, housing, drug use, prison etc

‘Dealing with it’: experiences of young fathers in and leaving care. (Tyrer, Chase, Warwick & Aggleton; *BJSW Vol 35, No 7, 2006*)

Services for care leavers who are fathers

Complex support needs often not adequately met:

- see services as 'not for me' (female-focussed, bureaucratic, inflexible); low awareness of what services there are; low sense of 'entitlement' to services; do not feel addressed by communications aimed at generic 'parents'.
- Often made to feel unimportant during pregnancy and after birth. Generally little access to mother and baby unit for visits or support
- Little assessment of young fathers' needs: concentrated on what they thought the young men needed, rather than asking them
- Housing services etc failed to acknowledge them as fathers

Tyrer, Chase, Warwick & Aggleton (2006)

How to engage fathers who are care leavers effectively

- **Address their needs as actual and future fathers in care system.** Whole team approach: male staff help, but everyone can do this.
- **Routine engagement and assessment in mainstream services:** *referral forms; initial visits/letters* (eg Lincs health visitors changed welcome letter to include fathers: attendance went up 18% to 65%. Visits at times they can make). Assess about child health, breastfeeding, parenting information, depression/anxiety, support networks, parental relationship.
- **Ongoing relationship** with professional able to act 'like a friend'
- **Enlist mums' support for engaging fathers:** lower drop out from parenting interventions when both participate (*Foote et al, 1998*).

Father-inclusive local services: Hull Teenage Pregnancy Support Service

- **All staff responsible** for working with young dads - recruitment, induction, training, supervision reflect this
- **Systems:** routine, practical registration & assessment of young dads and mums (including CAF); targeted literature
- **Effective partnerships:** eg with Connexions, housing, Relate, domestic violence services
- **Integrated services:** structured 18-week ante-natal programme addresses fathers' role throughout
- **Monitoring:** referral, assessment and support of young dads carefully scrutinised
- **Consultation:** with young dads and mums

Hit The Ground Crawling in Liverpool: Peer to peer mentoring for young dads

Recruited through Connexions and Teenage Pregnancy Service

Midwife says: *“It helps to move young men forward in their thinking and planning for the arrival of their own babies.*

.....This has proved to be successful as the young men are able to talk together without fear of being judged.”

Expectant dad says: *“You don’t have to be embarrassed about asking things that she may already know”.*

New dad says: *“It has given me a real sense of achievement knowing I am helping other dads get involved sooner”.*

<http://www.lwh.me.uk/pdf/Hit-the-ground-crawling.doc>

Key Research Summaries on Fatherhood Institute Website

Fathers and Maternal and Infant Health in the Perinatal Period

<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=2&cID=736>

Fathers and Smoking

<http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=2&cID=579>

Fathers and Breastfeeding

<http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=2&cID=581>

Fathers and Postnatal Depression

<http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=2&cID=580>

Young Fathers

<http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=13&cID=575>

Main Research Summary: 'The Costs & Benefits of Active Fatherhood'

<http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=0&cID=586>



Sign up as a Think Fathers Champion

Do the self-assessment Dad Test

- **Leadership**; goals, systems, culture
- **Team**: recruitment, induction, professional development, appraisal
- **Environment**: is it welcoming/accessible for men?
- **Marketing and Communication**: targeted
- **Recruiting Fathers**: accessibility, outreach, assessment
- **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Register at champions@fatherhoodinstitute.org