

7

Safeguarding in SEVEN

Working with Men

1. Background

- Men (fathers, stepfathers, extended family members, partners or ex-partners) whether they live with the child or not, can play an important role in children's lives. Despite this, they can often be ignored by professionals who sometimes focus exclusively on the care that children receive from mothers and female carers. These males are known as 'hidden men / males'.

2. Why it Matters?

- A lack of engagement with men can mean that potential risks are not assessed or mitigated effectively. On the other hand, the nurturing and protective capacities, for example of estranged fathers, can also be overlooked. Men may represent a resource for children, and this may still be the case with many difficult or dangerous men. They frequently become labelled as either a 'risk' or a 'resource' when they may represent a complex mix of both.
- Without professionals seeking basic information about the significant males in a child's life, it is unlikely that these males will be contacted or engaged, and this can impact on the information available to professionals or the future thinking around these men.

3. Local Learning

Local learning has been highlighted in [Multi-Agency Case Audits](#) and [Reviews](#), including:

- Child B - an over-reliance on mother and not enough consideration of the family dynamics or the role of Child B's father.
- Child H - professionals did not make the connection between the health needs of grandfather impacting on the grandparents' ability to support Child H's parents, and the subsequent care of Child H.
- Child M - information known by probation about a dangerous offender being in a casual relationship (resulting in pregnancy) was not shared with CSC.
- Child R - mother's partners had a history of criminality and domestic violence. They featured little in the thinking of involved professionals.

4. Common Barriers to Engaging Significant Men

- A lack of information sharing between adults' and children's services.
- Knowing what to share and with whom in a sibling group with multiple fathers.
- Professionals working with fathers (such as substance misuse workers and probation officers) not sharing information as they are unaware that they have contact with their children.
- An over-reliance on information from mothers; some might be coercively controlled, living in fear and hesitant to tell professionals about their lived experiences in full - some might not recognise the risk that significant men pose to their children - some might not be honest. Mothers' might fear involving fathers or fail to see them as the source of problems.
- Not always talking enough to other people involved in a child's life, such as the mother's estranged partner(s), siblings, extended family and friends.
- Reluctance to ask questions or fear of being seen to make judgements on the decisions that parents make about their personal and sexual relationships.



7

Safeguarding in SEVEN

Working with Men

5. Good Practice in Identifying and Working with Men

- During pregnancy and after birth, make active enquiries about the child's father, the mother's relationships and any adults in contact with the child. Record these details and share them with other professionals when required.
- Use different sources to gather information – the main carer of the child may be in a coercive / controlling situation.
- Identify and carry out checks on any new adults who have significant contact with vulnerable children.
- Clarify who the members of a household are, including their relationship to each other and the role they play.
- Be aware that some individuals will have a number of aliases. You might also receive names which are incorrectly spelt. Make sure you carry out checks which allow for different spellings of a surname.
- It can be difficult to get mothers to open up and discuss their partners' involvement in their children's lives. Supervisors should support practitioners to find ways to engage with mothers and build trust.
- Make sure fathers and those with parental responsibility (including those who are not directly involved in mothers' and children's lives) know about concerns about their child.
- Consult the 'significant other' about plans and invite them to multi-agency meetings where appropriate to do so.
- Explore the potential of 'significant' others to support the family and serve as a protective factor for the child.
- Think broadly around which agencies may hold relevant information that could help develop an in-depth understanding of the role of the father in the family? Non-resident, black, ethnic minority & white working-class fathers all have particular circumstances / pressures that need to be understood & assessed.
- Take the time to speak to and work with a child's father on his own. Does father attend appointments/meetings? If not, ask why?
- During joint appointments, consider who you direct questions to; engage fathers in the conversation.
- Ensure that the father or significant male is visible in your records. Does your record detail his strengths, vulnerabilities and risk factors?
- Ask a colleague to join you and arrange to meet in a public place (where you can leave or obtain assistance easily) if you have any safety concerns about meeting a father.

6. Reflections

- Do we hold mother and father equally responsible for their child's wellbeing?
- Do we solely rely on information provided by mothers in relation to significant males in the family?
- Do we use persistence, creativity, curiosity & time to investigate multiple fathers or partners, any of whom might be a risk and/or resource?
- Do we explain to fathers why it is so important to engage them in any work we do with his child and that his input really matters?
- Do we ask fathers about their personal experiences of being fathered when growing up and any previous experiences of working with our service?
- How do we develop trust and respect & show reliability & consistency?
- Do we include men as early as possible, ideally during pregnancy and in the first few months of a child's life?
- Do we consider whether children want to have contact with their fathers / significant others?
- Do we continue to show professional curiosity when information on family members is not forthcoming?
- Where the information is not forthcoming, do we think about who else may hold this information in the network, e.g. birth information held by GPs?



7

Safeguarding in SEVEN

Working with Men

7. Further Learning

- CHSCP [Training](#)
- NSPCC Learning - [Unseen Men](#)
- National Panels Third Report: [The Myth of Invisible Men: Safeguarding children under 1 from non-accidental injury caused by male carers](#)
- Research in Practice Briefing - [Working effectively with men in families](#)
- Fatherhood Institute - [Engaging with Men in Social Care: A good Practice Guide](#)
- Community Care - [Engaging Fathers](#)

