

“Why is it a Mum’s world?” How can we support Dads better?

1 What did we do?

18 fathers attended the Sounding Board from diverse backgrounds. A further 12 fathers were interviewed who could not attend, but their feedback is included in this report.

2 Key themes

We covered 3 areas:

- a) Early experiences
- b) It’s a Mum’s world
- c) Separation, custody, and access

a) Early experiences (Health Services)

Dads felt left out at medical appointments, with there being only one chair, and all conversation directed at the mother:

“If you don’t feel included at the early stages, you begin to get a bit withdrawn and resentful or you just push your way into it – you feel uncomfortable and it is hard to tell your partner that’s how you feel too - so much is going on for her.”

“When my girlfriend miscarried they didn’t seem to consider my loss and I didn’t know how to explain it.”



Dads want to be involved in the whole process. They find it hard to know what services are out there:

“Once baby was born I was not able to stay at the hospital so then I didn’t learn how to help her with feeding and all sorts.”

“No one asks how you are, which seems to set the standards from then on - Dads as an accessory.”

Dads would like help with the practical things such as bathing and holding, to feel useful. Good information would be helpful regarding antenatal and postnatal support – many Dads thought only NCT was available:

“We need encouragement to go to antenatal classes, help to understand what they’re about and get involved. My missus had already had 2 children so didn’t want to go to the classes – I felt like I couldn’t go on my own but really wanted to learn about it, how I could help and what I needed to have to be ready.”

b) It’s a Mum’s world

“One of the most important things is your confidence as a Dad, you are always learning and trying to get it right.”

Dads felt it was good to have male only sessions so they could share experiences away from women, and one Dad said they might feel more comfortable if there were more men in the workforce. It is important to recognise that Mums and Dads need different things – a different language should be used.

“We need more Dads groups run on different days and be able to attend even if you don’t have your children with you.”

“Society need to recognise that Dads get depressed too and can get post natal depression. When I was depressed I didn’t realise and it came out in mood swings which frightened the family.”

Promotion and information around parenting, and services and support is all targeted to women, lots of advertising has Mums’ faces on it:

“The domestic abuse posters have pictures of women as victims and are aimed at women, all these posters are on the walls in children’s settings and you start to feel as if Dads are bad people.”

“People are sometimes suspicious of Dads doing the child care and wanting to take an interest in their kids’ development, the media doesn’t help because of the high profile cases of male paedophiles. If you think about it too much you would never go anywhere with your kids.”

It was felt that systems within our society weren’t as accommodating to Dads as to Mums:

“As a Dad I often feel ignored, at school

pick up, health visitor appointments. When I went with my girlfriend to PCAMHs [Primary Child and Adolescent Mental Health] for an appointment about our daughter it was all directed to Mum and not me. It makes you lose confidence in yourself.”

“Me and my girlfriend had our youngest voluntarily taken into the care of my Mum. We are now clean and really want her back with us full time, but what really bothers me is that every time our social worker rings they only talk to my girlfriend not me, even when she’s on the toilet they ask me to get her to ring back – and don’t seem to think about communicating with me.”

c) Separation and Custody: How do Dads ask for help?

“My solicitor told me about the Man Enough course, I didn’t know where to go or who to ask for help because I wouldn’t go into a children’s centre unless I had kids with me, I wouldn’t ask my kids’ teachers or the local health visitor because it didn’t seem right. I did talk to my GP because I was feeling really low about it, he suggested I talk to a solicitor.”

Information about processes and procedures for Dads who don’t live with their children and the impact on their children are needed:



“When families separate it all stacks up against the Dad – housing gets lost, nowhere to meet your kids, the cost, all the benefits are in Mum’s name, you feel driven away and powerless. Then you feel scared to ask for help in case they think you aren’t coping.”

Dads said it would be good to have some information on their rights:

“It is difficult to understand the processes when you split up with partners. Some Dads had come to informal agreements between themselves; other Dads had gone to solicitors.”

Solicitors were the main source of advice on access issues for separated Dads, despite it having a huge impact on their children.

“When you split up most letters and reports and communication seems to go to the Mum so you are totally out of the loop, which puts you at a disadvantage.”

“One minute I’m allowed to see [the kids] and the next I’m not, it’s hard not to get really angry. You then forget about the kids and how they must be feeling.”



“Me and my girlfriend had a fight, I got put in the holding cell for 9 hours and then sent home, they didn’t offer me any support around how to manage my feelings. She got victim support offered and phone call support, I got nothing and now its on my record.”

“Some young Dads I know when they split up with their girlfriends just assume they don’t have a family anymore – the grief is really hard to explain.”

“It’s really hard for Dads in minority groups who split up, the cultural issues are complicated and it is even harder to know where to go to for some support and guidance.”

“They sent me on Man Enough as an order so I could get access to my children. It took a few weeks but even though all the Dads were from really different backgrounds I relaxed and enjoyed it. We all had similar problems and it really helped me understand my kids and why they do things they do. Not enough people and services know about Man Enough and because it seems to be the only thing out there to educate Dads specifically about parenting I think it needs to be promoted more and we need more courses for Dads targeted at Dads.”

“I have 2 hours supervised contact a week with my baby son, because I hit him when he was 2 months old. I think it went wrong for me because he didn’t want to be held by me ever, he always wanted his Mum and he was quite colicky and 8 weeks of no sleep, no one to talk to and it seemed no way out of the situation – I felt useless and no help to my son or his Mum. I am so

ashamed of what I did. My girlfriend can't contact me unless it is through the social worker – so I don't know if I will miss that moment when he crawls for the first time, or talks – it is so tough."

"It's all about Education and Awareness within our workforce of these issues for Dads." (Professional)

"More information needs to be shared on the impact on Dads around custody issues." (Professional)

"It's wonderful to see the county make such an effort in pushing Dads' issues and support to the forefront like this." (Dads worker)

Actions

Children's Centres will:

- Aim to include Dads' issues on their team agendas at every meeting.
- Encourage health professionals when using their setting to have inclusive questions about fathers / to fathers in their entire practise.
- Aim to have a variety of Dads' groups on throughout the week to ensure availability.
- Ensure Dads' groups make it clear that fathers can come for support even if they do not have full access to their children and on days they don't have their children.

OFIS will:

- Hold an up to date list of fathers' groups – both those in the week and Saturdads.
- Continue to keep up to date and increase information for Dads through their Oxondads website.

Think Dad will:

- Continue to support and encourage Dads workers to develop their practise to be inclusive to all Dads.
- Train up more Man Enough Trainers.
- Continue to offer Man Enough taster sessions at Children's Centres.

Social Care will:

- Assign a senior manager to be a Dads' Champion.

Dads will:

- Look into an online forum for Dads to encourage more information and discussion for them online.

Early Intervention Service will:

- Make sure each Hub has a Dads' champion.
- Be more explicit in CAF / TAC processes about having the Dad's name on the forms and working to involve and engage them in meetings.
- Include awareness of working with Dads in their workforce induction training

OSCB will:

- Have a page dedicated to Dads on their website and commission training for working with Dads.



This is a Participation & Play Team publication. For a copy of this report please email: toni.bremble@oxfordshire.gov.uk