

Working with fathers and male care givers

This learning summary takes evidence from Oxfordshire serious case reviews and national findings. The Oxfordshire learning from it is consistent with national learning.

This summary focusses on the importance of fathers and male carers involvement during child protection work and where improvements could be made locally.

It is widely recognised that a number of factors, including early positive involvement for fathers and male carers from ante natal, midwifery and health services, and male friendly approaches can help to improve their engagement in Child Protection processes. However it is also true that existing organisational culture and systems can hinder appropriate involvement of fathers and male carers to the detriment of the needs of the child.

Themes in Common with other Oxfordshire Case Reviews

Fathers/male carers – communication with and involvement of fathers and male carers

Parental Neglect

Key Learning Points for Managers

- Assess the way that **work is organised** - Review policy, procedures and work environment to ensure they are 'father friendly' and not implicitly excluding fathers from being involved.
- **Model expectations** that fathers and male care givers will be involved and the importance of that involvement. Challenge teams to reconsider if the level of engagement of fathers/male care givers is acceptable for that case—provide support if needed.

Key Learning Points for Practitioners and Managers

- Ensure fathers/male care givers are identified at the outset, details recorded and **assessed in terms of strengths** -as a potential provider of care, as well as in terms of risk.
- Use **direct conversations with fathers/male care giver** for assessments. Seek examples to evidence statements and avoid assumptions.
- Keep clear **records of all communication with the father/male care giver**. Ensure that the communication with the father/male care giver is right for their child.
- Apparent co-operation from one parent can risk prioritising their input above the input of the other parent or care giver (often the father). Professional engagement with both parents is important (Working Together 2013). Regularly **review the involvement of father/male care giver** and challenge yourself whether you have the right balance of input from the mother and father or male care giver.

- If possible make **meeting times accessible** to both parents, e.g. beginning or end of the day, to ensure that working parents can attend.
- Fathers/male care givers should be **invited to child protection conferences** as per OSCB procedures, unless there are exceptional circumstances. They should always **receive minutes** of Child Protection meetings whether they were present or not.
- **Where a decision has been made to exclude the father/male care giver from a case conference**, ensure there is a clear record of the reasons for that decision and how the decision was made. Provide this information in the Social Worker record for the Chair of the conference.
- If there are policies, procedures or practice that you believe could be acting as **barriers to fathers/male care givers** involvement, raise these with your line manager and suggest how they could be improved.

If you do one thing, take time to...

Check and re check regularly that communication and input from the child's father/male care giver is being proactively sought, obstacles being overcome and the input is being considered on an equal footing to the child's mother.

Learning Tools and Resources

- Fatherhood institute – www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2014/working-with-fathers-to-safeguard-children-fi-journal-article, and other useful tips and topics
- 'Future-Proofing Fathers Work', a report by Martin Andrews, commissioned by Oxfordshire Parenting Forum, <http://oxfordshireparentingforum.blogspot.co.uk/>
- NSPCC library, www.nspcc.org.uk – a range of publications about working with fathers in safeguarding
- 'Why is it a Mums world?' <http://www.oscb.org.uk/themes-tools/working-with-fathers-male-care-givers/>
- Access 'Working with men and boys' Training from www.oscb.org.uk/training
- Oxon Dads – a site by Dads for Dads in Oxfordshire, <http://www.oxondads.co.uk/>