

Chapter Six

As we have shown in this report, it is now widely accepted that the exclusion of fathers from child and family work is problematic and needs to change. Yet, a major deficit in knowledge existed in relation to how fathers can be included in intervention work, in terms of actual strategies, policies and practices. Against this background, the core research question addressed in this study was how can more (vulnerable) fathers be effectively engaged with by social care services, more of the time? The aims of this study were fourfold:

- To document the needs and perspectives on fatherhood and family life of vulnerable fathers and their partners and children.
- To examine the factors and processes which lead to the exclusion of fathers from child and family services.
- To examine the factors and processes which lead to the inclusion of fathers in child and family services and to identify good professional practice with fathers and their partners and children.
- To identify best practice and develop a framework for policy and professional intervention with vulnerable fathers and their families.

6



A father-inclusive
framework for
family policy and
practice

Leaving Fathers Out

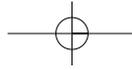
The preceding chapters have provided detailed analysis of case-study material which we hope enabled us to meet these aims. Our aim in this, the final chapter, is to draw together the various strands of the evidence we have accumulated through the study, and in particular with reference to identifying best practice with fathers. The aim of this chapter, then, is to provide a summary analysis of 'what works' with fathers and families and to develop a framework for policy and professional intervention with vulnerable fathers and their families, what we call a 'father-inclusive framework'.

A very important finding of this research is that promoting active fatherhood, especially in the context of disadvantage, is in itself a form of social inclusion . . .

We are aware that while extensive in scope, it was not possible for this study to examine all the kinds of child and family problems that involve fathers. It is important to emphasise that our intention was not to be specifically problem-centred in the development of this framework. We recognise that some types of problems - such as domestic violence - require particular responses which are tailored to promoting safety and welfare. It is not possible to cater for all of that detail in constructing a father-inclusive framework for policy and practice that can apply to the broad range of situations that professionals deal with - although we hope that the detailed case-studies presented in this report can satisfy at least some of the desire for such detail in at least some kinds of cases. Our aim was to include enough types of cases and intervention work to be able to develop a father-inclusive framework that is robust enough to withstand generalisation about how work with fathers and families needs to be accomplished and developed.

6.1 Outcomes: the consequences of including fathers

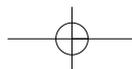
Unpinning any framework for including fathers has to be some conception of the consequences of doing so. This report has shown that 'vulnerable' fathers represent risks, and resources, to families. The best overall outcomes are those which maximise the resourcefulness of fathers. Our findings show how this makes for safer and happier father-child and couple relationships, that is families where the healthy development of children is promoted. It also has tangible benefits for men themselves and as fathers, promoting



their capacities to care and experience the joys of relationships with children and partners. There is in turn a clear social gain from father-inclusive practice as our findings show, more involved fatherhood turns men away from lives of crime and self-abuse, which have economic costs in terms of health care, criminal justice systems and so on. Involved fatherhood generally connects men in a purposeful way to civil society and activates their desires to contribute to producing the kind of (good) society they want their children to grow up in.

A very important finding of this research is that promoting active fatherhood, especially in the context of disadvantage, is in itself a form of social inclusion. This is especially the case with the most marginalised young men, for whom we found fatherhood is seen as an opportunity to achieve something meaningful in their lives, in a context of loss and underachievement, in education, work, family relationships, crime and so on. The positive way these young men's partners portrayed them as loving, good fathers and the manner in which they portrayed themselves to us in interviews belied their public image as 'hard' unreachable men. Intensive residential work with such vulnerable mothers, as well as fathers, proved the most effective in producing outcomes which developed the fathers as responsible, fully available carers in the context of similar kinds of negotiated work with partners, and kept the family together. A core recommendation from this research concerns the need to develop residential and intensive day care services which can contain these young men, in their families and maintain the integrity of the family unit.

Our findings suggest that given the trauma arising from domestic violence and child abuse, the most urgent and significant outcome of social intervention into fatherhood is, that it can develop men, from being a risk, to being an asset to their children, partners and significant others. The kind of detailed intervention work we have presented in this report shows that dangerous men, who have been violent to their partners and children are not only rendered 'safe', but can be developed as nurturers, and helped to become good enough parents. Effective father-inclusive practice promotes effective child protection. Significant positive effects are evident where fathers are not abusive as such, but unreliable and placing the integrity of the family at risk through the lack of consistent support and care for the children and partner. Similarly, significant positive outcomes were apparent for men



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who had lost touch with the emotional basis of the fatherhood role and who, while they were good providers, struggled with intimacy, and to make relationships with children and their partners 'work'. Intervention played a vital role in preventing serious relationship breakdown in situations where young people were misusing drugs and alcohol, for instance, by equipping the fathers with actual techniques to deal with such situations. But it went further in enabling these men to re-evaluate their lives and choose to be more

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actively involved as fathers, spending more ('quality') time with their children and partners. This illustrates a key outcome emerging across all types of fathers and families, and problem situations, in how intervention developed both fathers' practical skills and competencies at parenting - changing nappies, managing challenging adolescents, and so on - and the men's emotional capacities, promoting the kinds of critical self-reflection which led the men to redefine key aspects of their masculinity in the creation of a more nurturing self.

The research has demonstrated the crucial role of intervention work in helping men to heal, especially when the men are survivors of trauma such as childhood sexual abuse. This has concrete benefits in developing their capacities to parent in the most intimate ways, freeing them for instance, to feel comfortable enough, as abuse survivors, to touch and hug their children. They were also helped to free up the emotional blocks and pain that led them into addictive and destructive behaviour, with the self and others, developing their capacities to be in equal, expressive relationships with their partners and children, to be in 'democratic families'. This reflects a key overall outcome of social intervention with vulnerable fathers, in how

it connects with the healing power of love in (fractured) families. What we have called 'the restorative power of love' refers to how men and women can heal each other and themselves in loving relationships; where fathers (and mothers) can and do fall in love with children who are not blood related and how living in the love of children can heal some of the trauma that adults once suffered as children themselves.

Involved fatherhood benefits mothers as well as children. In general, the mothers we

interviewed wanted the men to be actively involved fathers and felt that intervention work had developed the men's capacities to nurture and take domestic responsibility. Mothers felt that intervention brought considerable benefits to themselves, by helping to produce men who shared parenting, and were physically and emotionally available to them. It also brought benefits to mothers in helping them to develop parenting skills and (re)negotiate roles and relationships with the men. Our findings demonstrate a significant outcome in terms of how intervention requires (vulnerable) mothers, as well as fathers to change. Women were challenged and supported by professionals to see the role they had been given, and taken on, as domestic gatekeepers, and to create a space in relationships and domestic routines to let the men be more active fathers. Women had to let go their over-developed sense of responsibility for all things domestic, and accept fathers ways of doing things in how they directly cared for children, cooked, used the kitchen and so on, as good enough. This went hand-in-hand of course with calling the fathers into taking such domestic responsibility.

The benefits for mothers are perhaps most obvious where vulnerable mother's in-capacities to care for their children place the children at risk of entering Care or result in such action. At their most resourceful involved fathers can contribute the kinds of support and nurture that is necessary to keep children in their families. This emerged in our data in a variety of ways, and especially in terms of the positive presence of step-fathers in families. Yet fathers as a safe, developmental 'resource' for their children, was far from a clear-cut matter in many situations, irrespective of family form. As we have shown, some fathers of children who were initially labelled as a 'risk', as dangerous and/or useless, were re-framed through social intervention as good-enough fathers and the primary, reliable parent. Thus the status of fathers as risks or resources does not remain static, but is apt to change as the intervention work interfaces with and ebbs and flows of the life experiences of families. Again, alongside the crucial emotional benefits of this for children, there is a significant social and economic gain in involving fathers as the State does not have to pay for alternative care for children.

Child and family work, by its very nature, involves relationship problems, trauma, pain and loss. The report has documented the crucial family support work that is being done with

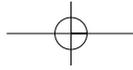
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separated fathers, their children and (sometimes) mothers. Significant positive outcomes have been shown to occur for fathers in acrimonious marital breakdown situations, where custody of, and access to, children is being viciously fought over by warring parents. The fathers have been helped to deal with their anger at being excluded from anything other than minimal contact with their children by the family law system, and to find ways of having open communication with their children about their feelings and wishes.

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Our findings suggest that, overall, father-inclusive practice has tangible positive outcomes for children. All of the children we interviewed expressed a desire to have close loving relationships with their fathers, and felt that in general this had been enhanced through intervention work. Children were critical of professional responses which they perceived to take one parent's side, usually the mothers, as this unfairly excluded their fathers and did not give them a chance. What children valued most - even if they often found it awkward and hard-work - was individual direct work as well as whole family sessions which included their fathers, and created opportunities for honest communication about feelings, and open democratic discussion which took account of their wishes in deciding and

planning the future. Through such work, vulnerable families were helped to heal and 'move on'. Crucially, children as well as fathers were helped to gain emotional literacy and a more congruent relationship with themselves. Given the primary focus of this study, without in any way denigrating the importance of this for girls, we do want to emphasize the positive outcomes of this kind of 'expressive family support work' for boys. Our findings show conclusively that the more vulnerable boys are left to deal with their trauma on their own, as was the childhood experiences of all of the fathers we interviewed. The more they develop a self-concept based around values of 'inscrutable masculinity', and a closure around acknowledging vulnerability and seeking help - all of which contributes to them becoming vulnerable fathers. This report has shown the significance that intervention work has for boys and young men in enabling them to go beyond the construction of an inscrutable masculinity, to be the kinds of men that intervention has helped their fathers to become.



6.2 Key features of a father-inclusive framework

As we have shown in this report, while good practice is certainly going on, it is the norm for fathers to be excluded from work with welfare practitioners. An important finding of the research is that inclusion and exclusion are often not mutually exclusive experiences. Even those men who have been included by (some) services or professional(s) usually have experience of being excluded by (some) services or professional(s) in the past or present. The key point is that the exclusion of fathers is so common an experience, that rarely is their inclusion a straightforward matter. Father-inclusive practice, therefore, because it is being developed in the context of such a powerful exclusionary impulse, requires concerted, focused action to include the man. The exception, as we have acknowledged, are those instances where the exclusion of men seems clearly justified because they constitute a real, known threat to the safety of children, women and/or professionals. Our findings however, suggest that even these situations can be less straightforward than they look, given that we found instances where men who were labeled as dangerous and excluded from the family and intervention on those grounds, turned out on closer examination not to be so. The tension that practitioners must constantly wrestle within their work with suspected dangerous men, is to take that danger seriously, while questioning the basis for that judgement and its implications. By the 'inclusion' of men we are referring to a continuum of engagement which at a minimum involves talking directly to the man about fatherhood, the family and the problems at hand, and, at the other extreme involves in-depth work to develop him as a father. The most troubling examples of exclusion we came across involved the systematic discarding of men as fathers without even the minimum of engagement, such as a conversation with him. The father's official identity was based on his appearance, what professionals and other family members said about him, coupled with powerful tacit assumptions about (dangerous) masculinity and how men are thought to be. This is unacceptable. The risks that a man represents have to be very great indeed to justify his exclusion from intervention work and sometimes the family, without at the very least directly engaging with him.

In general, the inclusion of men needs to be done in a manner that engages him in the most open, honest, serious way possible, avoiding, for instance, trying to coyly entice him in



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through a focus on talking about what one social worker called “the nice things”. As the fathers we interviewed all testified to, they are acutely aware of the serious issues in their own and the children’s lives, and they need and deserve to be engaged with about them. To them, for professionals not to do so seems strange and irresponsible, an abuse of the power professionals have to determine legitimate agendas in child and family work. Yet, we also found that in some instances fathers avoid professionals. The kinds of fears men typically have of professional involvement include:

- Going against a definition of masculinity which values strength, coping and repudiates vulnerability and needs for support.
- being seen at all with the children due to a past history of violence and so keeping a low profile, trying to be there but not be there.
- being discovered defrauding social security.

Professionals need to be acutely aware of, and openly name and address the anxieties that can lead to father’s excluding themselves.

This report has shown that agency context, especially the pressure of ‘crisis work’ and the time organisations spend reflecting on their assumptions, and work with fathers and families, all play a part in how they do or do not work to include men. We have identified a number of key features of organisations, professional approaches and practical steps which positively influence both the process of engaging with men as fathers, and also the level of ‘success’ in strengthening families through working with fathers. Our findings suggest that a father-inclusive framework requires an integration of at least 10 things:

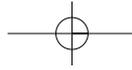
- Clear father-inclusive policies in organisations.
- Critically reflective self and organisational cultures which constantly monitor and challenge assumptions about gender roles, men and masculinities.
- Practical skills and techniques to engage men and ‘hold’ them in the work.

- Practical skills and techniques to work with women and children in their own right, and in integrating the impact on family relations of the work done with the father.
- A belief that men can nurture and develop as carers.
- An ethical concern with involving men in the lives of children and families.
- A commitment to promoting 'democratic families' where women, children and men feel safe, and equality is practiced in day-to-day life in everything, from the management of money and time to the communication of needs and feelings.
- An approach which ensures men are challenged to take responsibility for any problems, such as violence, they cause.
- An approach which ensures that men are supported to work through any problems they have.
- A belief that fathers matter to children and families and must be included, not just as good supportive or secondary parents to mothers, but as men who are important in, and of themselves.

These features constitute a set of core beliefs, principles and orientations to father-inclusive work with men and families. We shall now elaborate on these by drawing out in more detail the kinds of practices that need to go on within this father-inclusive framework.

6.3 Developing father inclusive practice

From the professionals we interviewed, and from the narratives of the fathers, mothers and children themselves, we have uncovered six key dimensions to father-inclusive practice. In presenting these key steps we do not believe that each case will necessarily involve all of them, or that they have to be followed in a linear manner. Nevertheless, these steps do have a sequential logic as part of a father-inclusive framework, and we have laid them out along a developmental continuum, one which we feel speaks to what is broadly required on a case-by-cases basis, and in developing entire services and systems towards father-inclusive practice.



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6.3.1 Working through 'macho fixations' and images of (dangerous) masculinity

What is needed then . . . are techniques for getting beyond macho fixations to a genuine assessment of the man in himself and as a father

The most powerful reason why men are excluded from social intervention is that they are perceived as dangerous and/or unreachable. Our research interviews with professionals highlighted how often they judge men and fathers negatively on the basis of his presentation, appearance, his tattoos, 'hard man' persona, lifestyle - such as doing hard physical work or aggressive, violence-prone work, like bouncing, or 'security'. This social construction drew on a particular dominant paradigm of theorising gender and identity which emphasises dangerousness and/or fecklessness, and 'fixes' men in their relationship to caring in deficit terms. As researchers we found ourselves reacting to the perceived 'dangerousness' of the men who were sitting opposite us. We began by relating primarily to the 'hard men' in front of us, to the exclusion of all other aspects of them. They scared us. The lesson is our acute awareness of how threatening it felt to be starting a dialogue about vulnerability, with what we were judging to be hard, unreachable men. This is precisely what the professionals in our study tended to do by becoming fixated on images of dangerousness and

machismo.

One consequence of this is that some professionals palpably failed to understand the nature of the men with whom they came into contact. The most shocking disparity we found between professional perceptions and the reality of the men's lives, was in how professionals insisted that working class men are 'slow to change with the times' and be more active fathers, while the fathers themselves presented quite the opposite view. In fact the most marginal men in our sample were the most involved in active child care. There were important exceptions to this finding, and in general family centre workers were much less prone to such a misreading of the men than social workers. There seems to be something in the very nature of statutory social work which 'splits' men (and service users more generally?) and fails to see them in the holistic way that family centres are much more likely to, at least in our sample.





In the main, the community care social work referrals did not make specific mention of the father in the family. These referrals spoke of the mother and the children, except most notably when the father was referred to as being a 'danger' or a risk to the family. This introduction of the father was often by way of a comment such as 'there may be a history of domestic violence in this family,' or where the father was spoken about as having children in another relationship, or was seen as being addicted to alcohol. Social work referrals spoke of men by framing their involvement in terms of the danger and risk that they might be to a family, the deficits, while excluding the men from the actual work which might ultimately be done with these families in the centres. If a father has a questionable past or present in terms of, say, violence, the most powerful pattern is for this aspect to overwhelm all other professional perceptions of him, including his capacity to parent.

What is needed then, as we have shown in this study, are techniques for getting beyond macho fixations to a genuine assessment of the man in himself and as a father. What we believe enabled us to go beyond our own macho fixations with the men was the design of the interview schedule and kinds of questions we asked. We asked the men to tell their story of fatherhood, and in general used strengths based questions, which enabled the man to tell us what he felt he was good at as a father, areas for improvement and what he found useful about social intervention, for instance. We return to this theme below.

Our findings show that working with vulnerable fathers is a challenge, not least because the men themselves so often have internalised their own macho fixations - in essence, a view of themselves as invulnerable. The very effort that their lives take in having to survive, in part creates a way of being male which necessitates strength and resilience. Excluded young men, for instance, tend to enact what Connell refers to as a hard, edgy 'protest masculinity' as a response to their marginalisation - from the labour market, education, the family. The personal resources needed to survive a lifestyle based on protest and self-destructiveness, negate the skills and sensitivities that are needed to overcome and heal what is driving such behaviour. Refusing support and therapeutic help is not merely an ideological preference but a visceral necessity, a requirement which is inscribed in the very bodies of the men. Even admitting to finding intervention helpful causes such men discomfort, because it is tantamount to admitting vulnerability by conceding that there



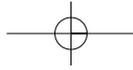
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Finding ways of overcoming the prejudice and classism which results in men's exclusion is essential to including marginalised men . . .

was something with which help was needed in the first place. Our findings show, categorically, that the front that vulnerable fathers present to the outside world (including social workers) constantly belies the active, nurturing side of themselves that they may express in private. Similar things can be said about men who have been separated from their children through the legal/court system and how their (riotous) anger and politicised discourse in relation to father's rights can also distract professional attention from the fact that these fathers are hurting, and what they and their children need. Therefore it is crucial that practitioners develop practice approaches which enable men who struggle in this way to narrate about their children, and avoid questions which demand an acknowledgement of too much vulnerability. In other words, the questions need to be generative strengths based (see below), centered on what he feels he is doing well with his children. Questions which focus on the men's deficits and failures will not engage or encourage such inscrutable men to begin the type of 'expressive work' which we argue is a central approach to father inclusive practice.

Finding ways of overcoming the prejudice and classism which results in men's exclusion is essential to including marginalised men, and often involves challenging other professionals and family members representations of the man. The most effective father-inclusive practitioners are able to accommodate a complex notion of masculinity as multiply layered. They recognize that there are many sides to men and masculinity and that they need to go beyond representations of the dangerous (and feckless) masculinity - what we call 'toxic masculinities' - to give the other (nurturing) parts of him a chance. This does not mean avoiding the dangerous or irresponsible elements of what is understood about the man, but needs to involve directly confronting and, where necessary, working with these 'toxic aspects' in tandem with a focus on the man's capacities to actively care for his children well enough.

Policy makers and practitioners need to develop their confidence and competence to work through any initial experiencing of a man as 'rough', 'invulnerable', 'dangerous' and so on,



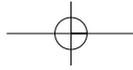
to uncover with men their ways of being men and fathers. The challenge is to take seriously what is known or suspected about the man while adopting a 'not-knowing' stance, which produces the necessary information from the father and others on which to base a thorough assessment of him, in terms of him being a possible risk and resource to his children and partner. Policy makers also need to routinely challenge their assumptions about men so that initiatives and resources to support and develop marginalised men will be made available.

6.3.2 Inviting men in and calling men into responsible fathering

The best, proactive father inclusive practice requires professionals to invite men in from the earliest stage of professional involvement. The key initial task should be to attempt to meet with the father, and begin to establish his view of the situation at hand, calling forth men's stories about themselves and as fathers (Hogan, 2001). We are arguing that the current norms which support father absence need to be turned on their head: compelling grounds need to be available for professionals not to include the father, so much so that professionals need to refuse to go ahead with initial interviews until efforts to get the man involved have been exhausted. We are following here the lead of some of the agencies and workers in our study who adopted such an approach, and the feedback from fathers about how important it was to them that these kinds of efforts were made on their behalf.

The real value of finding ways to involve fathers in family work has been shown through a review of literature on the effectiveness of family therapy (Carr, 1998). Our findings support such research, which consistently shows that a father's involvement in sessions enhances the effectiveness of the therapy (Gurman & Kniskern, 1978; Frielander et al, 1994; Bischoff and Sprinkle, 1993). This report has paid significant attention to uncovering what professionals actually did to successfully engage with men and fathers, and how they kept these fathers engaged. Without exception those professionals, who were most successful in engaging fathers and 'holding' them in the work, were those who invited the father to attend from as close to the start as possible. This communicates the message that fathers are important, while also avoiding the systemic pitfall of becoming (or being felt to be) too aligned with the mother before the father is invited to join in.





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Many vulnerable fathers have no experience of feeling respected or honoured by services as fathers. Being invited to attend a family meeting, or asked their opinion about their children was often the first time they had ever been told they were needed in their children's lives.

I mean they're invited here. You know. The invitation goes out to them. If they want to come, they come. And if they come to that meeting, it means they want to be a part of it because they're making the effort to come up here to face people. And you'd noticed a pattern of men liking to be included. And they tell you. They'll say they'll tell you about 10 times a day, thanks for giving us a chance. Thanks for giving me a chance here. Nobody's asked me before what I wanted, nobody ever asked me about my kids before. Every one of them, they really are thankful, and they say to key workers like, 'God, I never knew, I never knew I could do all this now.

(Family centre manager)

Strategically including fathers in this way at the outset of family work affirms to the man that he is important as a father, and 'calls' him into the responsibilities of active fathering. It can also have a profound systemic effect. When an agency insists on following a father inclusive policy, other family members and professionals can be reminded just how significant a father is.

Right at the initial meeting stage when they come up here to see the place, when we meet them right from the word go now we work to include the dad. If we discover that there's a partner involved we would say that, we would actually disband that meeting, the initial meeting around what we could offer and stuff like that and ask for him to come as well. Um and then start to explain to both people what the place is about what we can offer both parties, what we would see happening here. The hard work that they both have to do. Um and that we would be expecting him to be here most days as much as possible. Depending on work as well. And that we would be expecting him to look at his needs what he needs to be able to live as a family. What difficulties they're having as a couple all that type of thing.

(Family centre manager)





'Calling' fathers into meetings in this way, contains elements of publicly inviting him into his children's lives, challenging him to take on the responsibility of fathering and being accountable in the face of the system. Even where fathers are non resident, our research has found some really interesting and 'post-modern' approaches to making contact with dads. One family centre worker had developed a practice of contacting fathers on their mobile phones during sessions, a sort of 'teleconferencing' that was most successful in giving men a voice and getting them to attend the next session. The idea of phoning men directly to explain to them what was needed of them in terms of the intervention began quite by chance when working with a couple who had separated and were struggling to organise access and shared parenting arrangements. The family worker had initially asked the mother to encourage the father to attend for session. However he was unwilling to attend, if it were simply seen as 'giving in' to his ex-wife, and the telephone call from the worker convinced him that he mattered in himself and that he needed to be involved in the sessions, for the sake of working out proper contact with and responsibility for his children.

Introductory work with the father and family needs to make it clear that the practice approach supports a democratic model where all family members are valued equally. While stopping short of colluding with or supporting abusive behaviour, this holds even if the balance of responsibility for child care and domestic labour is not equally distributed between men and women. A key aim of intervention should be to change that, assuming that the couple have not negotiated and agreed such inequality. Unless the man feels respected and that his contribution to discussions is valued he will not meaningfully engage. A key aim of intervention is to move the father along a developmental pathway which enables him to actively care for his children and in a good-enough manner. Our data demonstrates conclusively that fathers engage much more purposefully when they can see, as well as feel, the active efforts that are being made on their behalf. We are thinking, for instance, of the social worker who agreed to attend the parenting course in the family centre along with the father at 8am, a gesture that was crucial in turning the case around to help produce a father who, by his own account, was now able to believe that the services were on his side (them having previously been actively against him) and develop his parenting competencies significantly.



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Creating father-friendly spaces: Our findings suggest that care and attention need to be given to the context within which the actual practice goes on, in so far as professionals have this under their control. Intervention sites - social work offices, family centres - need

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first of all to be welcoming to all service-users. The provision of tea and food can be a very nurturing gesture, especially for very disadvantaged users for whom the centre may, among other things, be a haven from a heartless world. They must make special efforts to send out father-friendly messages, by such things as having men's interest magazines in waiting rooms, to having male workers available. When publications such as *Men's Health* and *FHM* (For Him Monthly) begin to rub shoulders in waiting rooms with *Cosmopolitan* and *Hello!*, men will know that these are equal spaces for them. We are not arguing here that male workers should be working on all cases involving fathers. Our findings suggest that women can and do work very effectively with fathers. There are some instances where co-working by male and female colleagues is desirable. But at the very least, men need to be visible in offices to help create images of male-friendly spaces.

Quality time with fathers: Social work approaches in particular need to be more purposeful in their approach to men. Social workers often reported to us that they did not have time to work with the father, or had enough to do focusing on the mother. Yet, our findings show that they often *do* spend at least some time with fathers, but most of it, frankly, wasted. They try and humour them, discuss the "nicer things". The real point is that social workers do have time to spend with fathers, and it needs to be *'quality'* time. Men, no less than women and children, can immediately sense if someone is interested in them, or can not wait to get out of the room. There is an important spiritual component to helping relationships and the worker needs to communicate the sense that they are prepared to sit with the user, through thick and more thick. Crucial to this, is the worker feeling comfortable in her or his work with men, skilled and confident enough to know that they can engage and 'hold' the man in a therapeutic space.



6.3.3 Keeping men involved: 'Holding' work with fathers in families

Once men are engaged by services, the challenge is to keep them involved, to 'hold' them in the service and in their families. This takes different forms according to the context of the work. It is a generic skill which involves developing a relationship which contains the man's anxieties and enables him to see and feel what he has to gain from remaining involved. 'Holding' men follows on from the benefits of engaging men in family work by including the father from the start. As one male family worker epitomizes it:

I've found that once, if a referral comes in and fathers are, once fathers are involved from the beginning I tend to hold them, you know. I tend to get them more involved probably than they possibly would have been. And that holds them, you know, so for the length of time that they should be here or they want to be here or whatever, you know. And I suppose that is that I think I don't know, I mean I think I engage with them in a way that, that's that conveys to them that I, that I'm interested in them and interested in what they have to say. You know I certainly, I always, any little, any little sort of progress or any little thing that they do that's actually, that's valuable, I always affirm, you know. Always. Um, because fair dues, to me, to me men are actually very much unseen I think in this kind of work generally. And I think that they're, I think if you see them and lay it on that they'll grab on to that you know.

This quote also illustrates the key role of affirmation and a focus on strengths and 'progress' in holding men in services, to which we return below.

The 'holding' of men required to enable them to settle into working on themselves, and as part of their family can be provided in a number of ways. Agencies need to have a 'holding' policy as it were, an explicit commitment to working with fathers. One unit for homeless mothers and children in our study changed its father-exclusive policy when it realised that this was actually making things worse for the mothers and children they sought to 'rehabilitate'. Although they only worked with the mother and children, men were hovering about in the background and moved in with the family when they returned to the



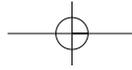
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. . . a key requirement in work with vulnerable young fathers (and mothers) is to find a way of containing and channeling their energy and passion

community. Because no work had been done with the father, this threatened all the work done with the mother. In effect, they decided that their unit was to be a 'container' within which men could be 'held', not simply for themselves, but *in their families*. The importance of men being professionally held like this, is that including fathers creates knock-on effects through the family system. Women have to change, to let go, to let men in. Fathers have to be able to be 'good enough' in mother's eyes if they are to make continued efforts to do domestic work and child care.

Statutory social work services face major challenges in creating this kind of 'holding' environment for men. As our findings show, they too often mirror the movement, messiness and chaos in the men's lives by colluding with the shadowiness of the man's presence, not becoming clear about what he means in the family, or what the professional role should be with him. This leaves the men with nothing to settle into, as it were, nothing solid upon which to ground themselves, with no one to contain their anxieties. It may be that statutory social services need to face the fact that they cannot always 'hold' men in the manner necessary, or as other agencies can, because of their different relationship to the community and engagement. Our data suggests it is possible for statutory social workers to engage and hold men, but it certainly appears to be more of a struggle due to the different contexts within which agencies work, and the particular fears that surround statutory workers in disadvantaged communities. Collaborative work with family support agencies is an important strategy for carrying off the necessary 'holding' work, although as we have shown it is not always necessary.

We have shown that a key requirement in work with vulnerable young fathers (and mothers) is to find a way of containing and channeling their energy and passion, of 'holding' the man in his family sufficiently, enabling the development of his caring capacities and their triumph over the desire for protest (see chapter 5). When present, marginal young fathers are capable of contributing a great deal to the household. Yet these young men also have serious problems, the most significant of which is an unreliability which makes their consistent support for their children and partner uncertain.



Conventional casework approaches to such men, where they are seen periodically in their homes by social workers have their place, but these men, because of their marginality, need much more. The holding of the men and/in their family that is required, needs an actual physical environment, a place to which they can attach, where the concerted work that needs to go on can be done. Our research has found that including such 'wild' men in a way that develops their capacity to become a responsible father, requires an extra effort on behalf of the State's family support services. Engaging men and keeping them involved in therapeutic and family support work is one of the biggest challenges professionals face in this work. Our findings suggest that it is now necessary to provide residential type facilities, that include fathers in families, so that the holding work with such men is structurally provided. We recommend therefore that residential and intensive day care facilities need to be developed to work with vulnerable fathers and their families as entire units.

When child and family services do include such fathers, the men and their families are more likely to use them to overcome some of the adversity in their lives, to develop into still better, more reliable, fathers when the services combine therapeutic work with a consciousness of the poverty and disadvantage in service user's lives. This is what one family centre described as 'working with families in the middle of the edge', and involved offering therapeutic family supports together with endeavours to challenge social injustice and inequality.

Fitting in with fathers' routines: A key factor in being able to keep fathers attending, was whether or not an agency tried to fit in with the rhythms and responsibilities of the man's life. This involves being aware of setting appointment times or making home visits, so that the man has a realistic chance of being there. Our findings support other research into fathers' ongoing participation in family sessions which has found attendance rates of 67% (Walters et al 2001). The most frequently cited reason men gave for non-attendance was needing to be at work. The context of marginality and poverty is crucial here, as working-class fathers simply do not have the option of missing work, as their wage ensures the family's survival. The desire to be involved in family work and pressure to fit participation around professional's diaries and routines, places working-class men's jobs at risk. One



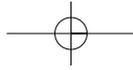
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(step) father in our research who was actively supporting his partner in having her four children returned from foster care, spoke about how he struggled to hold onto his job and make all the meetings with the health board. Yet the social workers involved never thought to ask him what appointment times would suit him, or even to let him know how long the meetings might take. This is despite the fact that this man's presence in the family as a resource to a very vulnerable mother was central in the decision to return the children from care.

We did find examples where family centres were consciously reorganising their working times to actively involve working fathers, and mothers. One family centre ran a parenting course at eight o'clock in the morning to enable fathers' involvement. Another example was where a family centre created two working shifts so that appointments could be offered from eight in the morning till nine in the evening, as well as at lunchtime. The response from very many of the fathers on being offered an appointment during lunchtime, or in the evenings after work was one of heartfelt gratitude, and regular attendance. Similarly the homeless 'mother and child unit' in our sample where fathers were not allowed to 'sleep over' because of the infrastructure, had developed its 'father inclusive policy' in such a way as to go out of their way to include fathers in the all of the activities of hands on parenting right up until they had to leave at 10pm.

The dads that have been involved here have been very interested and involved and very anxious to take part. Um all would say that the health board never asked them what they want. Even though he [the fathers] can't stay here at night he can be here all day he can be involved in all the taking care of the kids and you know get involved in the place, washing, cooking all the bits. Um and I suppose in the recent past it's been quite successful...

You know get dad to put the kids to bed you know read them a story if he's able to read stuff like that you know. Have a routine around bedtime. Dad can do that and mum can go away and watch Coronation Street if she wants to have a break you know. No you couldn't they'd never be safe with him. And that's the way you know. But he's never done it before. The dads that come here I, I mean they play with their kids they're around with their kids but they don't actually, actually they haven't



really any experience of doing the parenting stuff. So the mother is expected to have to do it. And they don't really believe that the men can do it. Haven't even thought about it. Hasn't entered their heads. That's the woman's role that old you know the woman's role in the home and he's supposed to be out there doing whatever you know. But the dads are really willing, delighted to be asked to put their kids to bed or you know take their kids out down town for a couple of hours while mum is having a bad hair day or you know

(Female family centre manager).

This is what working with the most vulnerable fathers in a purposeful, inclusive way has to mean, not just allowing them to exist as 'visitors' in their children's lives.

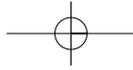
Working in such a flexible, father-friendly manner is to a large degree determined by the ethos and policy of an agency. However, fitting in with fathers is also governed by a professional's ability and willingness to accept the man as he is, and start from where he is at, finding creative ways to connect with him, his interests and use of language.

Yeah, and it's hard work! As you know! Like it is hard work, there's no doubt about it, you know. But I think if you take your time with it and take it slowly it can work, it can work really well. And I think therapeutically it's very much about you know in many ways initially accepting that man for where that man is right now, in himself, d'you know what I mean? And that if he can't talk about anything but football or his pals or whatever it is that, that for the first week is absolutely fine. That you go with that and you allow him that space to talk about all those kind of things and then intermittently then at different points you know really listen out for and you'll always find them if you listen for them, the points where he can actually maybe talk about his relationship with himself or with others or his partner or whatever it is.

(male family centre worker)

This illustrates the importance of holding on to men of pacing the work in a manner which is deeply sensitive to his needs and capacities, and which gently supports and challenges him around his identity as a man and father.





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6.3.4 'Informality' and expressive work with fathers

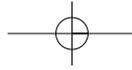
This dimension of father inclusive work necessitates the provision of a range of services to fathers, from parenting classes to in-depth psycho-therapeutic work, delivered as appropriate on a case-by case basis. At its core it requires that workers take the time to sit with men, developing men's own capacity to 'sit with themselves' in order to begin to (re)connect with their sense of who they are and their emotional lives. A key part of this work involves other family members, and enables children as well as partners to give voice to their concerns, challenge/support the man and find healing. Expressive work with fathers is fundamentally oriented to developing their abilities to communicate with children and partners, and with themselves.

Our findings suggest that the constant movement of men, how they travel to work, use their bodies at work, how they are so often 'busy' in their heads, planning paying this bill and that, thinking things through, all of this means that rarely are men still. And stillness is a crucial component of being able to connect with the self and others. One of the most overlooked, yet vital, contributions of therapeutic engagements with men is that it offers them a space to be still. To just sit there and be. We would submit that a reluctance or inability to meet the initial challenge of being still, of sitting for an hour engaging about oneself and relationships, is perhaps the major reason why so many men either never enter therapy, or withdraw from it so quickly when they do.

Engaging men in such expressive narrative work requires commitment and confidence. As one male family centre worker (actually a social work student on placement) put it, recalling the initial challenge of slowing a father down enough to allow him begin to piece his life story together again:

I remember when he came in first, him being very devastated and spending a lot of his time just very upset very, very nervous you know he found it very hard to sit still for an hour you know. And I remember me having to put, be very clear with him that, that I would keep him for an hour and we would remain in the session for the agreed time so that he had the security of knowing that the session was





not going to go beyond the hour because if it went beyond the hour for him he had the anxiety then of him not being back in time to pick up the kids from school or to be there when they came home from school. So he had a very tight schedule as a parent as well. So I was able to say to him you know I guarantee you that we will finish an hour from now and you needn't worry about watching the clock this is an hour when you can sit and be and spend the hour as you please and that includes not having to look at your watch or look at the clock you know. And he did trust me that we would finish on time so it was actually one hour in his week when he didn't have to be watching the clock watching the schedule trying to run here and there. Um and then I suppose the therapy began with creating that space. You know that would have been one of the first things that I had to do with Dermot is establish the environment and establish the space and the boundaries and the setting within which the counselling or the therapy could be.

In doing this work, Dermot was offered the chance to tell his story and was amazed 'just how much baggage' he was carrying from childhood. Dermot believes the effect of having the opportunity to use the family support service in such a way quite literally saved his life, and developed him hugely as a father. He felt listened to and supported, the key to which was creating the type of therapeutic container or 'milieu' which held him still long enough to begin to make sense of the crisis of his life.

The men's narratives suggest that at the heart of this work they valued intervention if and when it worked with them, to reconnect them with their bodies, feelings and voice. Men, driven in the world of work, lost in depression, alcoholism or other addictions, or the pain of grief and bereavement, spoke a lot about having become lost and disconnected from their own sense of who they were.

Our findings show that service user fathers universally favour a style of professional working where the emphasis is on 'informality', as opposed to a more explicit model of the expert as all-knowing and dominant. Men need to feel 'talked with' not 'talked to.' As one male family centre worker advised: "Sometimes I'm fearful we get men into therapy to work on them. We work with women we work with mothers but we work on fathers and



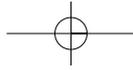
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In every case in our sample where men were developed as fathers, social care services created the space for them to rethink their masculinity and re-conceptualise themselves as men and fathers . . .

we work on men! Which I think is a dangerous notion." 'Informal' engagement represents a therapeutic disposition to working with men which allows these men to feel respected. Rather than entering into a patriarchal struggle for dominance which judges or overtly controls them, the informality enables them to maintain a sense of being in control. The difference they recognise in being 'spoken with' rather than 'talked to' means that they do not need to defer or submit to experts who represent higher authority. This enables them to maintain a 'respectable masculine self', with its high value on coping and control, while at the same time submitting to their need for help. The paradox is that the more informal service user fathers perceive the approach to be, the more likely they are to fully engage in child and family work with the seriousness it deserves. Another way in which we found men resolve the tensions around engaging with helping services and maintaining a respectable masculine self, is by presenting the therapeutic support as being for their children. Any benefits to themselves can be seen as secondary and in extreme cases as an irrelevance. The men in effect reframe their contact with child and family services as another form of providing for their children and families, albeit a much more emotionally engaged version than the traditional absent provider model. The implications of this for practice are again, that workers need to move at the man's pace, be aware of this pattern and support and affirm him in his 'emotional provider' role. Sooner or later he may come to a place where he can accept help for himself, a point that some men in our sample did reach.

6.3.5 Fateful moments and life-planning work with fathers

Developing men as fathers requires developing their parenting skills and capacities. However, this should not be understood simply in a technical sense of 'skills' development, but relates fundamentally to the men's self-identities. In every case in our sample where men were developed as fathers, social care services created the space for them to rethink their masculinity and re-conceptualise themselves as men and fathers. Such therapeutic

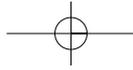


supports allowed men to reclaim their own hurt/traumatised childhood, to revise their relationship with parts of their life such as work, drink, drugs, the legal system and to re-imagine the life and way of being they now desired within their intimate relationships with partners, children and self. This constitutes what we, after Giddens (1991), call life-planning work.

A very significant pattern to emerge in the more effective father-inclusive practice we studied, is for men to be launched into a different developmental pathway by being called into a father-work responsibility which requires active caring for children. This 'calling' can take a number of forms: a marital/relationship breakdown or incapacitation of the mother which requires the father to take primary or even sole responsibility for his children; or professional judgement that the mother is no longer safe enough or able to care for the children. When these turning points arise in men's developmental pathways they constitute what we have called (after, Giddens, 1991) 'fateful moments' in the lives of men, children and families, the response to which has a powerful influence on what kind of father the man is to remain or become. Social work and social care interventions potentially have fateful consequences which extend to even losing one's children. Thus the very act of becoming a subject for intervention itself, is a fateful moment. How men and women are addressed and constructed in their roles as fathers and mothers, from the outset has fateful consequences in terms of positive or negative outcomes, whether men are developed as carers and the kinds of parents people become.

Our findings suggest that in situations where fathers were excluded and not developed as carers, the professionals missed many fateful opportunities to engage with those men about their fates. The entire intervention itself became a missed fateful moment because no attempt was made to channel the man's generative energy into caring and a changed self-definition. To some degree, all of the men in our study faced such fateful moments, decisions about what kinds of fathers and families they wanted to be, about self-identity. Situations that worked best - in that they had clear positive developmental outcomes for fathers and families - were those where professionals (intuitively) recognised and seized the fateful moment in which the man was faced with a choice about what kind of man and father he was now going to be, and supported the men to launch into something new in





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how they parented. This was often as simple a thing as a professional letting a father know of one's belief that he had the capacity to care well for his children. Such confidence building is a basic, but crucial part of handling fateful moments. Similarly, engaging in expressive family support work involves men in dropping their defences. Fateful moments arise where they express embarrassment about crying or needing help at all and it is crucial that these moments are managed in a way which supports the man in moving beyond inscrutable masculinity and developing his expressive, caring capacities.

Fateful moments, our data suggests, can be opportunities for positive change that can actually turn around even high-risk cases. The previously hidden, underdeveloped or untapped resource of fathers in vulnerable families can be uncovered when professionals are willing to 'enter into' the moment with men, as it were. Such expressive work with men operates on a spiritual domain where workers are required to dig deep into what Bert Hellinger (1999) terms 'gravity in their soul' so that they may go through the crisis and process of change with men.

In this manner therapeutic family support needs to promote the possibilities for fathers, mothers and children to actively engage and develop through the creative and courageous use of fateful moments along a developmental path towards enhanced intimacy with self and others. Such life-planning offers vulnerable fathers the opportunity to reconstruct their fractured life stories into a coherent personal narrative that includes and celebrates the life giving and enhancing energy of generative fathering.

In summary, our detailed research findings from interviews with all the stake holders involved in child and family work indicate that an exemplary model of father inclusive practice takes a form where it should:

1. include men and fathers in the sessions, because they were important in and of themselves.
2. honour the 'provider father' and validate his contribution to the family.



3. re-frame and expand the available narrative in relation to what these men do to contribute to the lives of their children and families, thus allowing the fathers to see their contribution as being more than (only) a traditional provider.
4. speak with and about these men in terms of their resilience rather than (only) in terms of deficits.
5. take seriously any evidence of destructive, violent behaviour while understanding the expression of anger as being an exterior expression of some deeper, interior malaise such as pain, sadness, loneliness or other such emotion that men have been socially conditioned to repress.
6. 'join with' men and invite them to become more than they were ever told they could be, realising that any such change in fathers will also necessitate a change in the family and social system too and supporting that developmental process.
7. see people's lives and behaviours as being both influenced by the context of their lived reality, such as poverty and violence, while also believing that men, women and children have the resources within themselves to develop authentic selves and capacities.
8. see the role of the professional as not about changing or controlling people's lives but of 'bearing witness' and at times assisting to un-block the barriers that keep people from developing their capacities.
9. as fellow human beings sharing time and space on this planet, professionals should allow themselves to feed their client's when they are hungry, report child abuse when children are in danger, cry when they are upset and develop open collaborative relationships with service users wherever possible.
10. be ethically committed to ongoing training, regular supervision, self reflective practice, personal therapy and the development of father-inclusive agency cultures.

6.3.6 A generative strengths based approach to working with fathers

Our findings show that men like a style of questioning which is strengths-based and solution focused. These are questions which contain an opportunity for the man to tell his story and to provide narrative on strengths, as well as a challenge to account for what they do, or do not do, their competencies and commitment as fathers. Professionals also find

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that these kinds of questions work best. We include here examples of the types of generative strengths based questions which our findings suggest are useful for practitioners in developing competency at father inclusive practice. First, we feel that it is important to say something further about the theoretical perspectives which, our findings suggest, should underpin the generative-strengths based approach to father-inclusive practice.

Not only do fathers impact on children, but children impact on fathers and their development

A key focus of this research has been on exploring the prospects of a method of working with men as fathers that draws from the developing field of strengths-based and generative work with men. The aim of a developmental perspective on fatherhood is to shift professional discourses from 'deficit' approaches which focus on what fathers do not do, to 'generative' approaches which seek to identify and build on the positives that men bring to their father role (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997; McKeown, Ferguson and Rooney, 1998, chapter 4). In building on men's strengths as fathers, the 'generative' perspective sees the capacity to care for the next generation as being a core developmental opportunity for both fathers and mothers. This approach to hosting 'generative' conversations with men is seen as a purposeful shift out of 'deficits' towards 'strengths'.

Such conversations require an attitudinal disposition on the part of professionals, as well as a tactical decision to begin the conversation with this man about his life as a father, that is born out of a positive affirmation of his abilities and contribution. Thus the generative approach to working with men seeks to co-construct ways which advance (vulnerable) men's abilities to practice responsible fathering. The notion of a 'generative' approach to fatherhood is drawn from Erik Erickson's (1963) theory of human development where he argues that generativity, or care, is the most important developmental need in adults. Therefore, full human development involves investing in, committing responsibility to and caring for the next generation, through children, stepchildren, foster children or the wider community. Fatherhood then is no longer seen simply in terms of roles, such as moral teacher, breadwinner, sex role model, but rather as a key developmental stage in life-long learning for men. Not only do fathers impact on children, but children impact on fathers and their development. Caring is seen as being

good for men as well as women. Our findings bear this out in how men in our sample responded to being called into responsibility for their children, discovering new depths of capacities to care and be responsible for child care.

Our findings suggest that the process of pursuing a generative strengths based conversation with men offers a very positive means of engaging them as fathers. Such a generative interview opens men up and brings them more deeply into an articulation of their experiences of living with families and themselves.

Engagement questions: Engagement questions need to begin with clarification/recognition of how the father and family came to be in contact with professional services: "Why are you here? Whose idea was it to arrange this meeting today? Who else agrees this might be an important/helpful/difficult meeting?" If the man is an involuntary service user and they are under some duress, it is crucial to clear the air by providing opportunities for as honest a discussion as possible about how he feels about being there. Questions which contain a signal of empathy towards his position help to give him the message that you are aware of how he might be feeling: "It must be hard for you to have to talk/work with under these circumstances?"

Following these initial context setting questions, men are invited to speak from their heart, about what it means to them to be a father. By beginning in such a manner all men are given the initial space and opportunity to find their voice and stand, as it were, on some solid ground in the (often frightening) intimacy of having to account for oneself with a professional. Even in cases where men need to be confronted about their dangerous, abusive or suspect behavior in families, we recommend this generative framework as a positive technique. Beginning social work conversations out of a strengths base offers an initial engagement technique that connects the man and worker in a conversation that is quite different from one based entirely on professional suspicion and accusation, which is most often responded to by denial or personal retreat (Carr, 1994). The trick is to confront the man about any relevant concerns and render him accountable in the context of building up a broad picture of how he sees his life and himself as a father.

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The man needs to get the message very quickly that the professional is not there simply to talk with and about him as a problem, but has a much broader interest in him as a man and father. Central to this is the requirement to give early opportunities for the man to say positive things about how he views himself as a father. This gives him the message that you are interested in all sides of him, and in helping him to develop what he feels he does well so that he can do it as often as possible. This can apply even if the man has had little or no contact with his children, such as ex-prisoners, by promoting a narrative about "how did you miss your children?, for instance. Questions such as "what do you feel your children missed by you not being here?" also give the man a chance to articulate what he feels he can offer as a father and a sense that you believe that he is - or can be - an asset to the family. This also opens the way to an honest discussion about his capacities to actually provide what he wants to offer and the role of services in helping him to achieve it.

The man needs to get the message very quickly that the professional is not there simply to talk with and about him as a problem, but has a much broader interest in him as a man and father . . .

Early work should include clarifying with the father his view of the stories that have been floating around the system about him. This needs to form part of an overall father-inclusive assessment framework, which is focused on determining the man's capacities to care for children, as well as his incapacities, and which needs to be open to acknowledging the man's strengths as well as identifying the areas he needs to work on.

Uncovering Stories of Fatherhood: Here the man should be asked about his history as a father, how he felt on first becoming a father, his level of involvement in the pregnancy, birth, and child's early and developing life. In-depth exploration should occur of what he currently does with his children: 'I'd like to hear about some of the variety of experiences you have with your children?' 'What is it like for you when doing these things, how does it make you feel?' 'I'd like to hear about times you most enjoy being with your children? What is it about those times that you enjoy most? What do you feel you are most good at as a father? How do you actually show your love/care for your children? '... for your wife/partner?'

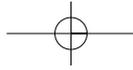
Our experience of probing men in this manner in the research interviews shows that each man became more relaxed in their style of talking when they were asked to discuss becoming a father. Men, like women, respond well to finding themselves being spoken with as an important parent.

Uncovering problem areas and coping strategies: Crucially, the interview is effectively charting the man's account of how he has developed as a father, what we have called in this study, his developmental pathway. Having co-constructed this type of (initial) solid ground, the professional conversation may then more purposefully move into the more challenging and direct questioning about any difficulties he has experienced and the history of any social intervention in his life: 'What as a father would you like to improve on or needs to change?' 'What do you need help in changing?' 'I'm wondering about times when you may have found it difficult as a father, when you felt challenged in having to care for your children. Can you give me examples of such times?' 'How often do they happen?' 'How is it that these situations prove so difficult for you?' 'Even in that situation what do you feel you were able to do that made you feel good about being a father?'

Questions can then move the conversation with men further into an exploration of the meaning of, and emotional experience of, being a father. 'Before you became a father what did you expect fatherhood to be like? Tell me about your hopes and dreams of being the type of father you wanted to be? Overall how has it turned out for you (has it been like what you expected)?' A key generative type question is: 'What aspects of those hopes and dreams might you want to reintroduce into your life as a father now that you know more about the daily reality of having a growing child in your responsibility?'

Reconnecting men with their own childhood: 'Where did you get the ideas about the type of father you know you want to be?' 'Who taught you most about being a father?' 'Where do you find your supports for being the type of father you are?'

'What type of man was your own father?' 'What type of things did he do in the family?' 'How would you describe your relationship together?' 'Are there things he did that you would want to make sure to do as a father now?' 'Are there things he did that you really do not



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want to carry on doing?' 'What have you learned about being a father from your mother?' 'Who else do you believe has taught you about being a dad?' 'What have your children taught you?' 'What advice or expertise would you pass on to a new father?'

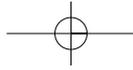
Helping men to reflect on the balance of their lives: This narrative exploration should extend into every area of the man's life, including the balance of home and work. 'What do you do with your day or week, how do you spend your time?' 'How much time do you give to your job, your children, your partner and to yourself?' 'What does work/unemployment mean to you?'

Who does what at home and with the children: 'How do you work out the division of work and child care responsibilities at home?' 'Do you believe that you take on an equal share of the house chores?' 'Do you think the workload is fair?' 'What do you think your wife would say about this?' 'Are their jobs in at home that you would just not do?' 'Are their jobs that your wife always leaves to you?' 'Have you spoken about these different jobs or how did the decision come about?'

Fitting in with the father and establishing his availability: 'What is the most convenient time for you to be available for these sessions?'

Helping men to consider the effects of change: 'What do you feel is the most important contribution you make as a father? Where do you notice that you get or find your best energy, what part of your life energizes or sustains you? How do you recharge your batteries? What would you change about the order in which you give time to these parts of your life? What way would you like to re-balance your life? What would you like to do more of? Less of? What needs to happen to help you achieve these changes? What could you do to begin to achieve these changes? Who could help you most with these changes? When you make these changes that you are planning now, how do you believe they will change your relationship with your wife/partner? With your children? How would somebody notice the first step in this change for you? Who knows you that would predict your ability to succeed in this endeavor to change? What do they know about you as a man that would convince them that you will succeed in this endeavor?'





Assessing men's emotional resources and supports: 'At difficult times in your life who have you spoken to about these difficulties?' 'Is there anyone you can talk with today?' 'Where do you get your emotional support?' 'What contact, if any, have you had with professional services in the past?/in the present?'

These questions are not only important as a means to workers gathering information on which to base assessments, but are significant in creating a therapeutic experience in itself. Exploration of the deepening experience of being a father brings the man into a generative conversation around his identity and self-concept as a man and father. This gives the men greater command over the story of their life as a father and allows them to become the expert authors of their own life narrative, in ways which both increases their understanding of it and provides a means to them rewriting/changing it.

6.4 Conclusion

We have sought in this report to draw together an analysis of the best work that is going on with fathers and families to produce here a framework for father-inclusive practice. Our hope is that this framework can inform professional training and be adopted in policy and practice in ways which can lead to the development of generative work with men/fathers and ultimately help to strengthen families through fathers. This framework for father inclusive practice is grounded in respecting fathers, looking to their strengths and allowing them to move through the 'fateful moments' in their lives along a developmental path towards the kinds of active 'generative fathering' which can benefit children, women and ultimately men themselves.

6.5 A summary of recommendations from the research

In an important sense the father-inclusive framework for policy and practice we have elucidated in this chapter constitutes the core recommendation from the research. This means that many of the main implications of the study are process oriented, that is to say they concern ways of actually going about working with vulnerable fathers and their families, strategies for engagement, building trust and relationships and so on. Such



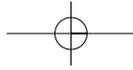
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implications defy easy categorization in a list of recommendations. That said, we have made some key proposals about very concrete measures that need to be taken on the basis of the findings from this research and which are summarized below:

- We recommend that all agencies who work with children and families develop explicit father-inclusive policies and practices. These need to establish a minimum requirement that compelling reasons need to be given for services not to work with fathers.
- Promoting active fatherhood needs to be seen by policy makers and practitioners as a form of social inclusion. Fathers should be included from the moment of pregnancy awareness, at the birth and in the early months and years of the child's life.
- The needs of younger marginalised men who become fathers require particular attention. Residential family centres that are purpose built to work with entire family groups and to include fathers need to be established and state funded.
- The structural conditions which contribute so significantly to the exclusion of working class fathers urgently need to be addressed. In particular we recommend that the father's status as a recipient of state benefits should at all times be kept separate from his identity as an (active) father. The same goes for mothers, who also have an economic incentive to claim the lone-parent allowance, omit the father's name from the birth certificate and effectively write the father officially out of family life. Mothers and fathers need to get the message from professionals that how they choose to survive economically in a milieu of poverty and daily struggle is their business, but excluding fathers and denying children an opportunity to have an active father is morally unacceptable.
- We recommend that statutory and voluntary agencies working with children and families ensure that staff are trained in the skills of 'father-advocacy' and that specialist posts of 'father-advocates' are created in all health board regions as a way of strategically moving practice with fathers forward. It is crucial that these initiatives are supported financially and morally by the relevant government departments. A

further strand to this father-inclusive strategy should be the funding of a pilot project which uses trained father-advocates to work with agencies and evaluates the outcomes of these efforts. The involvement of service user men in the design and delivery of such father-inclusive initiatives is essential to their organisation and success. Including marginalised men in the delivery of services to men in their communities is an important aspect of an overall developmental strategy for father-inclusive practice.

- Not only routine agency supervision but systematic forms of therapeutic support need to be provided for professionals by agencies. Such systematic self reflection needs to be part of on-going professional practice and development. Again, the biggest challenge in this regard is to social work which needs to reverse the profession's move away from a self-reflective reflective culture to promote personal as well as professional development for social work staff, including systematic critical reflection on the impact of their values, experiences and biographies on work with vulnerable fathers and families.
- Dedicated father inclusive work needs to be systematically done with men in prison, both to assist them in maintaining contact with their children while inside, and to prepare them for (re-)entering an active fathering role on their release.
- A range of support and therapeutic services need to be funded and made available to fathers, from parenting classes to deeper psycho-therapeutic work which enables men to explore the legacy of the past, connect to their emotional lives, and develop better capacities for communication with their children and intimate partners.
- Given that inequality is an important contributory factor to child and family problems, services that work with very disadvantaged families need to combine supportive personal development work with a concern for social justice.
- We recommend the development of family mediation and family support services that recognise and respond to the importance of non-resident father's involvement in their children's lives. The family law system needs to become much more father-friendly.
- Legal reforms which give due recognition to the rights of un-married fathers are



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- required. The constructive role that step-fathers can play in the lives of children need to be fully recognised.
- The choices working fathers have around spending time with their children are severely limited. The poorer families are the less options they have to be flexible in relation to a more active fatherhood role during the working week as this equates to a loss of desperately needed earnings. The introduction of paid paternity and parental leave is essential to giving men and their partners the choice for the man to go beyond the provider role and be as fully active as fathers as possible. Again, the needs of poor, working-class men deserve particular attention in this regard.

