

# The challenges for social care practitioners and their managers

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***How can we take forward a practice and policy framework to engage fathers in social care?***

***Is this proposed framework right?***

***What are the difficulties in implementing the framework?***

***How will legal, policy and practice contexts influence implementation?***

***What will practitioners need as this framework is implemented?***

## ***Legal and Policy Framework***

**The Equality Act (2006):** requires public bodies including health and children's services to publish an action plan for promoting gender equality, and carry out a gender impact assessment before commissioning services, and monitor how their services impact on men and women respectively

**The Children's Plan (2007):** “need for public services to engage with both father and mother except where there is a clear risk to the child to do so”

**Every Parent Matters (2007):** “Irrespective of the degree of involvement they have in the care of their children, fathers should be offered routinely the support and opportunities they need to play their parental role effectively”

# *Legal and Policy Framework*

**The Children Act (1989):** fathers are parents under the Act irrespective of whether they have Parental Responsibility, so they should generally be involved in case conferences, planning meeting etc

**The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (2000):** requires assessors to gather information about, and from, *all* relevant family members, whether resident or not, and requires them to be clear about the roles played by fathers or father-figures

**Children's Centre Practice Guidance and Planning and Performance Management Guidance (2006):** All Centres must have a strategy to publicise all their services to fathers specifically; have effective systems to gather information about fathers in all families they are in contact with; recruit and train all staff to be sensitive to the needs of fathers as well as mothers. A Performance Indicator requires Centres to assess how well they engage with fathers in the "most excluded groups"

# ***Legal and Policy Framework***

Parental Responsibility (PR) is *"all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property"* (section 3(1) Children Act 1989)

From 1 Dec 2003, unmarried fathers can acquire PR if registered on the birth certificate (not retrospective): at least 93% of new fathers have PR

## **Fathers with PR are entitled to:**

be joined automatically as a party to care proceedings (*Family Proceedings Rules 1991, Appendix 3*) and adoption proceedings (Adoption Rules 1984, rules 4 and 15)

remove a child from accommodation (section 20(8) of Children Act 1989)

be consulted when his child is likely to be accommodated

have his views heard and taken account of in any assessment undertaken

# ***Legal and Policy Framework***

**Fathers without PR** still have rights, for example:

- to apply to the court for certain court orders in respect of his child
- if the child is in local authority care, to have reasonable contact with his child

**The child also has a right to know who his or her father is, and for the State to support that right.**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

Article 7 (1): 'The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to....., as far as possible,.....know and be cared for by his or her parents.'

Article 8 (1): 'States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.'

## ***Why Work with Fathers?***

Positive outcomes for children/adolescents generally

Positive outcomes for vulnerable families and children

- **Attachment issues** - Attachment towards both parents is enhanced when both parents are included in the intervention. (Bakermans-Kranenburg et al 2003)
- **Recovery from trauma and abuse** - Non-offending fathers can have a significant role in the recovery process if they can provide verbal, emotional, and physical reassurance to their child.
- **Can provide a protective and resilient element in child's life**
- **Reduce vulnerabilities in adolescence**

## ***Fathers as a Risk***

Major NSPCC research found that a fifth of the sample were sometimes 'really afraid of their fathers'

Clear evidence of negative outcomes for children when fathering is negative

Fathers' negative impact needs however to be considered within context of a wide variety of variables

### **Ignoring fathers is not an option:**

Fathers negative impact can be altered through interventions

Need for clear assessment and planning