

Safeguarding Children by Working Effectively with Fathers

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Welcome!



Please be aware that some of the sessions are being recorded for sharing later.

We want people to participate but please use the 'raise hand' facility to ask questions and contribute when others are talking.

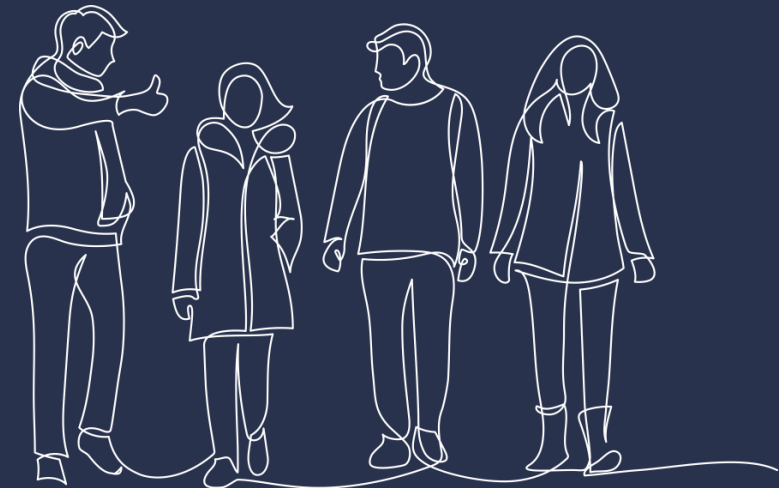
Please be considerate to others - together we want to create a safe, open and reflective space to learn.

You can turn on live captions on by clicking on the 3 dots at the top of your screen if you need this.

The link to the feedback form will be put in the chat.

Please do take the time to complete it after the session.

Thank you!



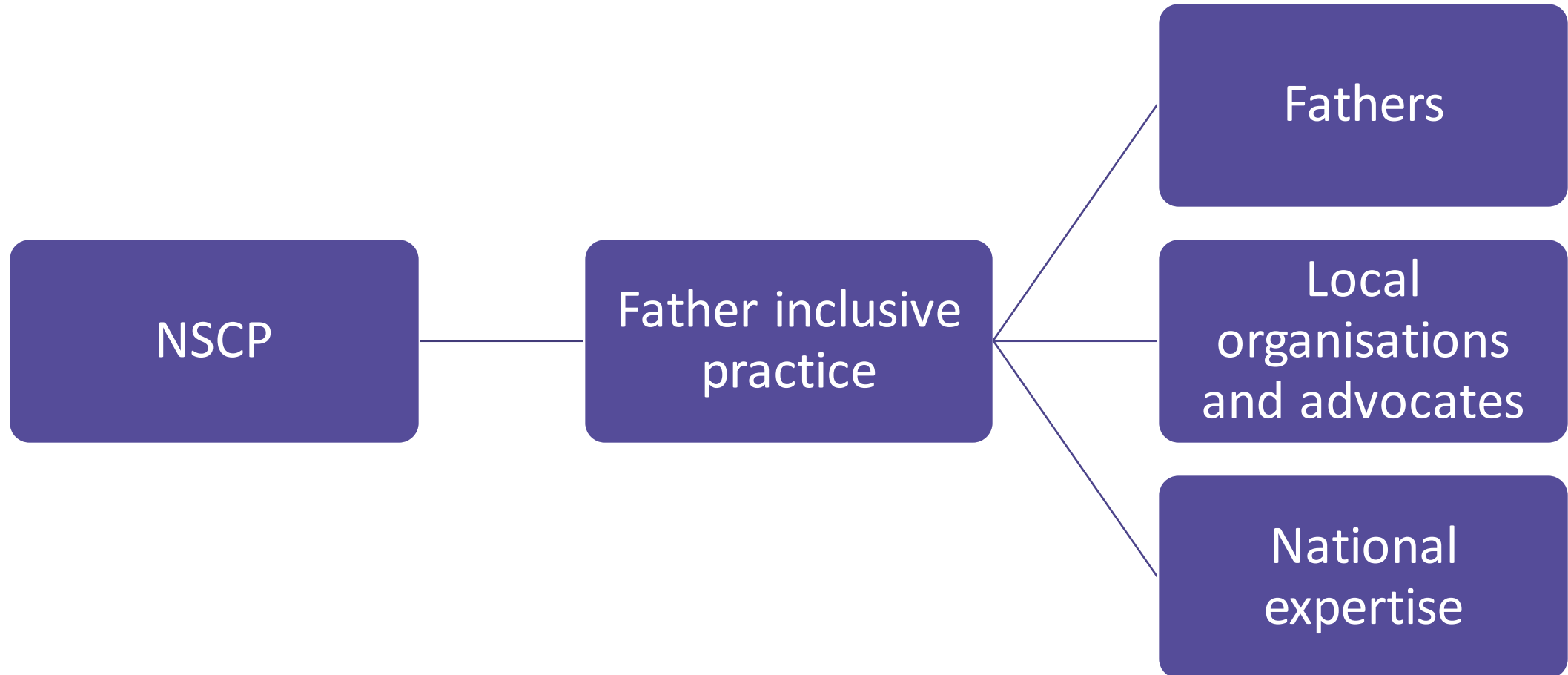
The Myth of Invisible Men

“...those leading and commissioning services and practitioners active in this work should do more, much more, to make the seemingly invisible visible and the hidden known”

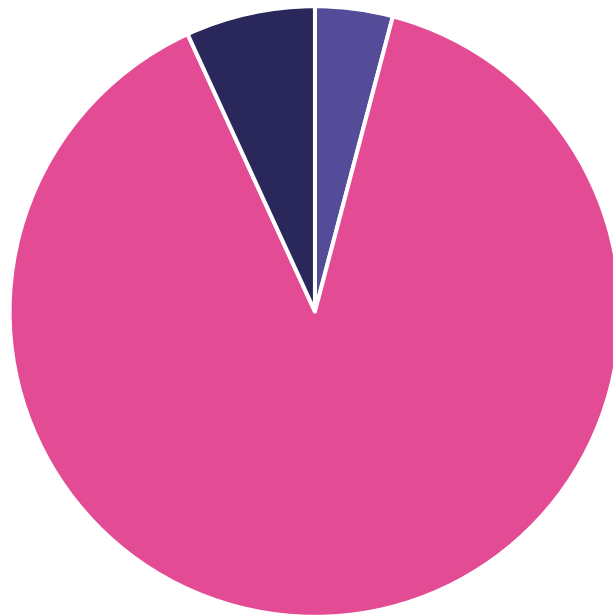
“It is the recommendation of this review that all local safeguarding partnerships respond comprehensively to these challenges and develop local strategies and action plans to support improved practice and effective service responses.”

The National Child Safeguarding Review Panel report [The Myth of Invisible Men](#), published September 2021

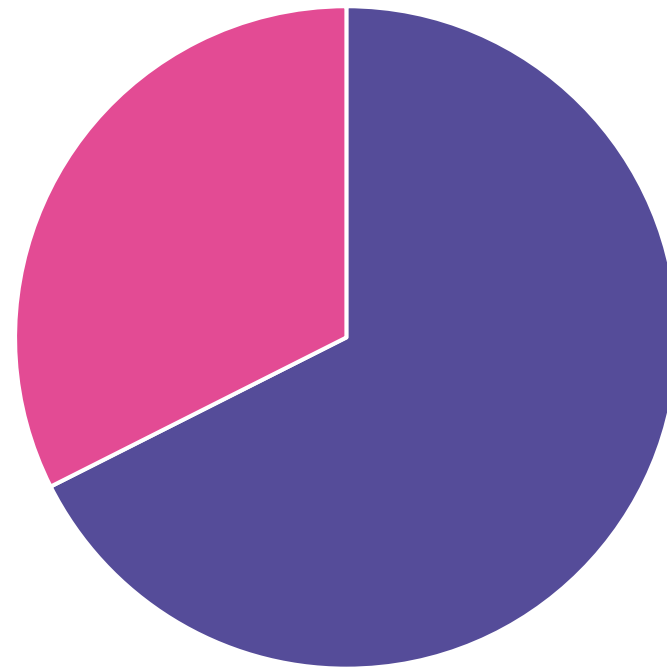
Governance and support structure



Survey with fathers in Norfolk 2022



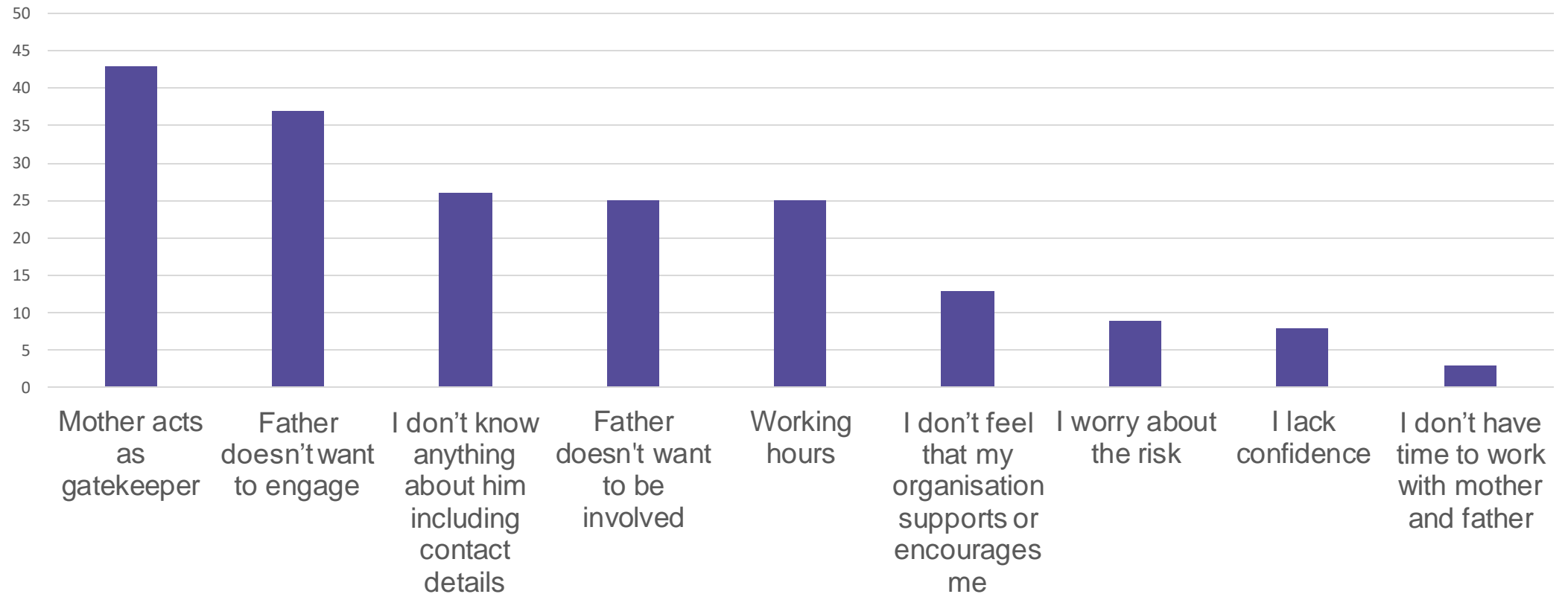
- Well supported by all services
- Mixed experience
- Felt excluded by all services



- Felt excluded or ignored by at least one service

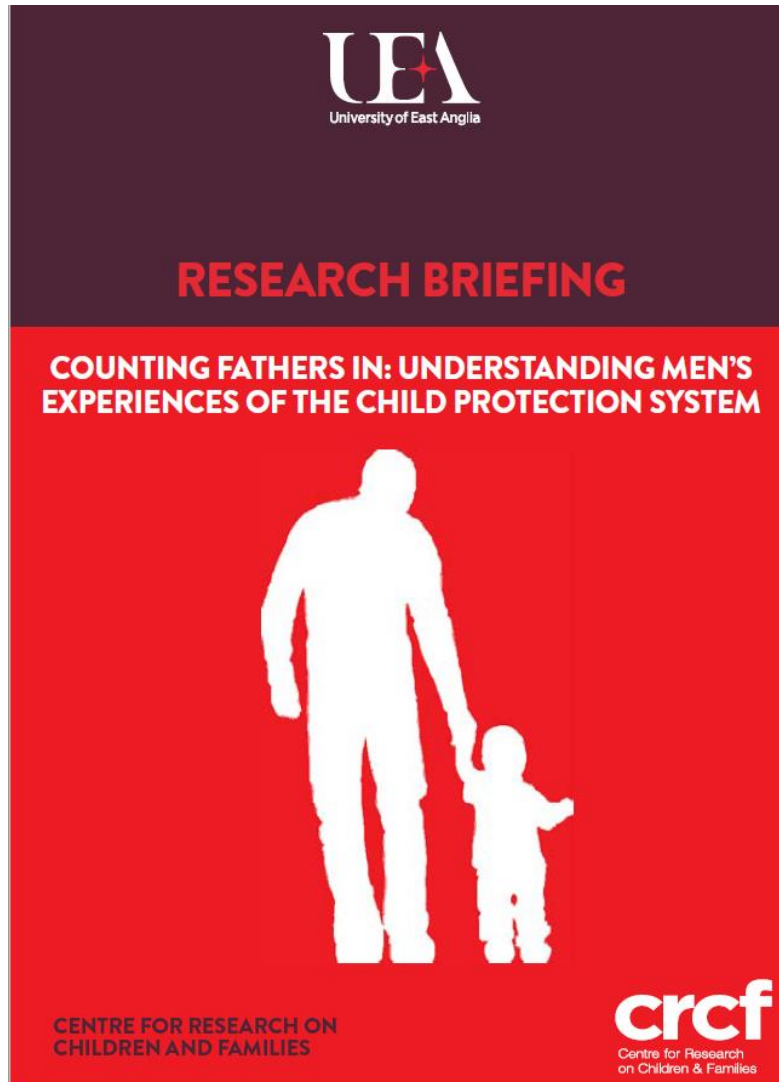
Learning from the multi-agency workforce

Issues identified by professionals as barriers

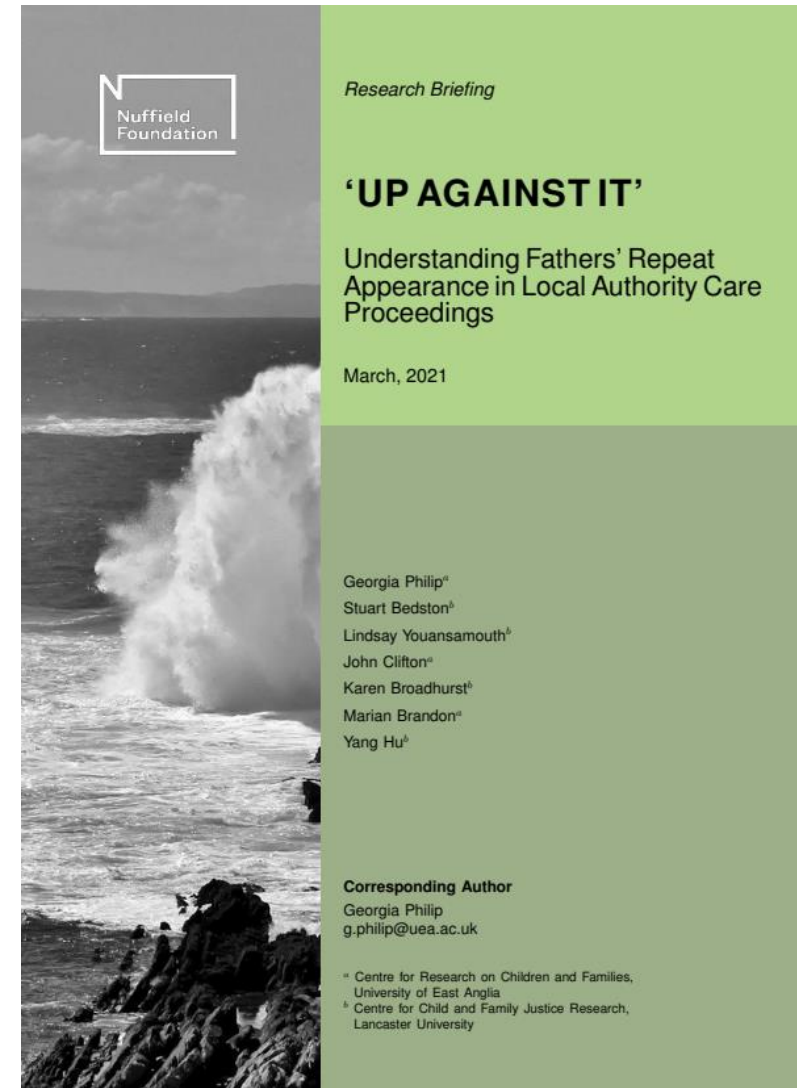


Learning from Research...

- UEA School of Social Work has contributed to the evidence base and the practice/policy landscape around father inclusion.
- Two major innovative research studies and a lot of engagement, dissemination, and training work.
- We are cited in the Myth of Invisible Men report, in new practice guidance for working with recurrent parents, and for infant removal. Actively involved in developing support for birth fathers.
- In Norfolk, we have actively worked to support the NSCP father inclusion project and the good practice guide.



‘Counting Fathers In’
Understanding men’s experiences of child protection (2014-2017)



‘Up Against It’
Fathers’ experiences of recurrent care proceedings (2017-2020)

Work still to do...

- 'Fathers not the 'core business'; fathers perceived as 'hard to reach', services as unwelcoming or overlooking men as parents, or allowing/making assumptions.
- Danger of the 'zero sum game' approach – that including fathers means excluding mothers. Risk of polarising or opposing the needs of fathers against those of mothers.
- Social/political/policy marginalisation – the 'gaze' and response of professionals is not evenly distributed; some families and fathers are much more likely to be under scrutiny.
- Fathers more likely to be seen as optional and/or their problems interpreted more in terms of risk rather than vulnerability.

Some change points to focus on...

- **Both-And approach.** Most fathers, like most mothers, need both challenge and support for their parenting. Fathers need to be held equally accountable *and* need validation as parents in their own right.
- **Inclusion as standard, not optional.** And from the start, rather than postponing/delaying father engagement, and including routine recording of information about men's lives/circumstances.
- **Clarity/transparency/differentiation** in reporting on which parents access services, attend meetings and so on (this is an issue for research too!)
- **Challenge assumptions of father 'absence' or 'non-involvement'.** Think about how and when such terms are used and question them!
- **Attend to how powerful emotions are expressed (or not) by fathers, and then interpreted, and responded to, by professionals.**
- **See fatherhood as generative and as a mechanism for change** (including seeing change as possible).

Case AK and AL

“The view of the CSPR Panel is that... ..fathers are equally important [as mothers] and that including fathers should be a *mantra of safeguarding practice* - this is the cultural shift Norfolk is aiming for.” (SPR AK Norfolk 2022)

Recommendation

The NSCP should produce and promote sector specific good practice guides on working with fathers and father figures and good practice in working with them, highlighting the expectations of all partner organisations around professional curiosity, engaging, assessing, recording and information sharing when working with all families.

Input to the good practice guidance

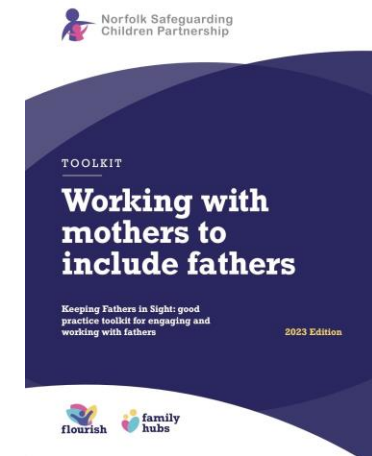
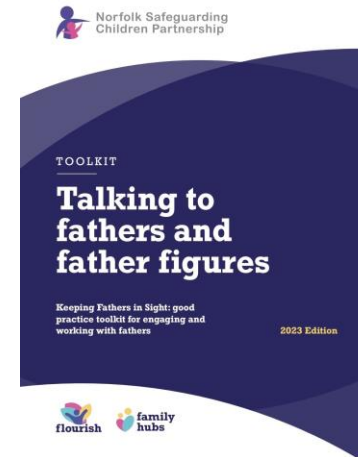
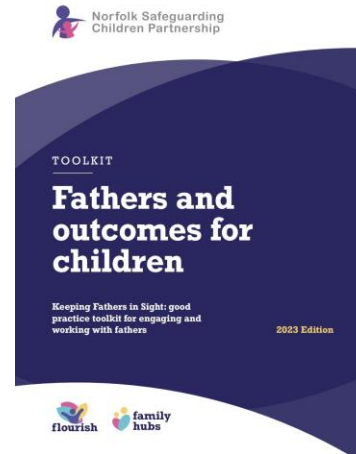
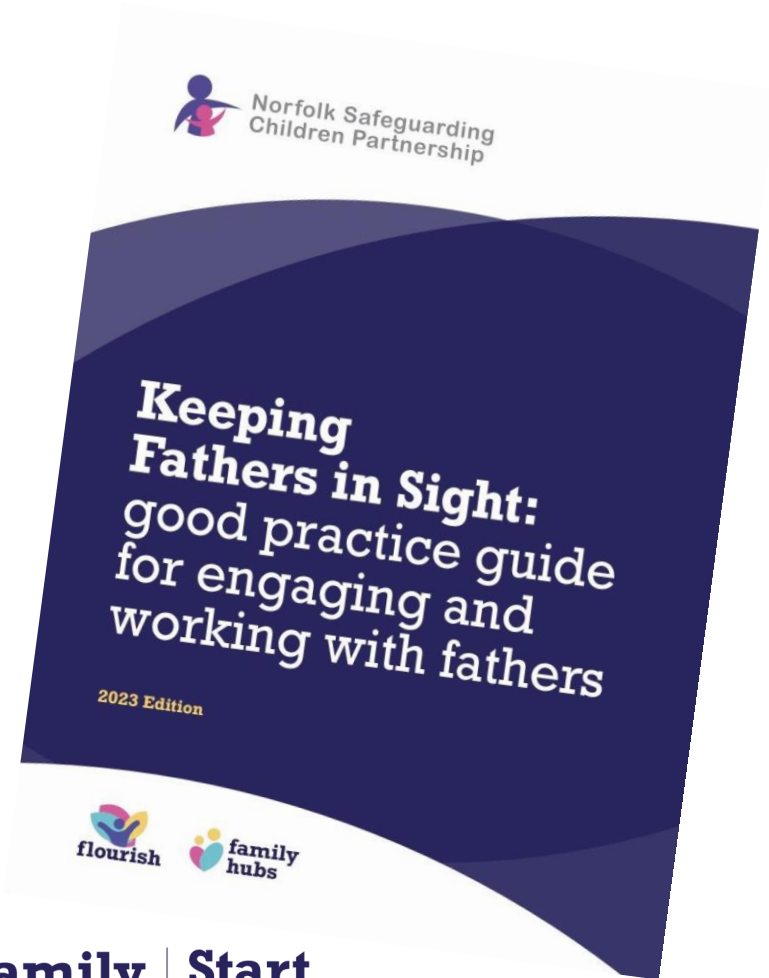
- SPR roadshows
- International examples of guidance
- Fathers
- Expert Advisory Group
- Community of Practice colleagues



Norfolk Safeguarding
Children Partnership



Keeping Fathers in Sight: good practice guide for engaging and working with fathers



Contents of the good practice guide

1. Introduction
2. Organisational principles of good practice for engaging fathers
3. Parental Responsibility
4. Assessing and managing risk
5. Collecting information and fathers' contact details
6. First contact with fathers
7. Fathers and meetings
8. Maintaining engagement with fathers
9. Family networking
10. Skills, knowledge and attitudes for practitioners

Principles

6. Early and direct contact with men is a key aspect of engagement. This includes the importance of communication and relationship building outside of formal meetings, and relates not only to birth fathers, but also to all and any men connected to the child. This early engagement needs to be an expectation from managers and practitioners, and staff need to be supported in being persistent and creative in their practice from the earliest opportunity.

Hey Mark

Here is a lovely example of how the training has impacted on our engagement with fathers.

The case has been with us multiple times with similar concerns however Joe has previously not engaged at all, or showed limited engagement.

At the beginning of this particular case Joe had shut down initial contact with Family Support saying he had “no interest in Early Help involvement” and hanging up the phone on several occasions. Despite this, we persevered and continued to message him (his chosen form of contact) to encourage that we wanted to hear his voice and understand his current experiences. After a few messages and encouragement Joe agreed to a face-to-face meet with myself, and asked if his Mum could attend as support. This was heavily encouraged, and Joe was given choice of meeting place to ensure he was comfortable. Joe chose to come to Havenbridge House and following explanation around what Family Support looks like for him and what support we would like to give him; he became very emotional saying he hadn't felt listened to before and acknowledges he's always just felt like a “bum Dad” and not felt comfortable or confident to have his voice heard or been given the encouragement to have support for himself as a person and as a Dad. Joe has felt judged by his children's schools and always feels their Mum “gets there first” with her side of the story and this had left Joe feeling attacked and judged at previous EHAP meetings. Joe tells us having the opportunity to speak one to one and have his voice heard before any meetings or joint work, has meant he has more trust in the system and actually feels like someone is listening to him rather than making presumptions and judgements.

He is telling us he wants to be more involved in his children's lives but just doesn't know how at the moment with his own struggles he is facing. Joe is now agreeing to engagement with Family Support, FSP meetings and engaging with AMHT and CGL.

Moving forward

- Further resources

<https://norfolklscp.org.uk/people-working-with-children/nscp-priorities>

- Training

<https://norfolklscp.org.uk/nscp-training-booking>

- Community of practice: working with fathers

- Just One Norfolk: landing page for fathers

<https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/support-for-dads/>

Please let us know what you think



<https://forms.office.com/e/nFDzqZWk4i>



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