research
in practice

Frontline
Briefing

# Working effectively with men in families

## - including fathers in children's social care

Dartington

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## Introduction

This briefing is for child and family social workers and their frontline managers. It is intended to help them think about the role of fathers and how to engage and work with them more effectively.

The briefing offers an overview of research from English-speaking countries. Its focus is on including and working with fathers where children's welfare or safety is a concern, and the practice issues raised by domestic abuse.

In particular, the briefing reflects on practice messages from research in relation to three inter-related areas:

- Early intervention
- Family support
- Child protection

The briefing includes some implications and pointers for practice. However, it should be read alongside the accompanying Frontline Tool – *Working effectively with men in families – Practice pointers for including fathers in children's social care* – where suggestions for practice are set out more extensively.

### Scope of the briefing: Which men, which families?

Men as fathers have been the focus of much research attention in recent decades. They have also increasingly been a focus for policy and practice, including a concern that social care, health and education services should all improve their engagement with fathers, particularly those who aren't living with their children. Policy and practice aims have centred primarily on developing more effective safeguarding strategies and improving outcomes for disadvantaged children (see, for example, Maxwell et al, 2012a).

There is now consistent research evidence that fathers can play an important and positive role in children's development (see, for example, Lamb, 2010). Yet social work and family support services have not always engaged fathers effectively to ensure that they (and their extended families) are recognised as assets for children and young people. A lack of engagement can also mean the risks posed by men are not assessed and dealt with effectively (see, for example, Maxwell et al, 2012a).

- *Fragmented families*: Fatherhood has become fragmented (Collier and Sheldon, 2008). Increases in rates of co-habitation and divorce mean many men are not living with their biological children and/or may be living with or parenting children from a partner's previous relationship. Children may be parented day-to-day by a stepfather or father figure, while also having extended periods of contact with their birth father.

  Research on fathers in families involved with social care highlights the complexity of such families, including high numbers of non-resident fathers, the numbers of families containing children with different fathers, and the involvement of father figures of varying duration and intensity (see, for example, Roskill et al, 2008). It is an area that requires more research attention in order to develop pointers towards effective practice. Swann (2015) notes practitioner concerns (across a range of countries) about how to engage multiple fathers and the breakdown of male-female relationships and suggests greater use of Family Group Conferences to explore these issues (see also, Ashley, 2011).

- *Poverty*: There is a relationship between this fragmentation and family poverty. The stresses of poverty put pressure on relationships and increase the risk of breakdown - and relationship breakdown can give rise to, or increase, poverty for both parents (Tavistock Institute and JRF, 2015). Poverty has multiple implications for fathers' abilities to engage in family life. For example, non-resident fathers who are in a more disadvantaged economic position have less involvement with their children. This is linked to the fact that maintaining and facilitating contact is expensive, including the need to provide a child-appropriate environment in their own home (Poole et al, 2016).

  This evidence is key for those working in children's services in light of the strong association between deprivation and families' chances of becoming subject to child protection and looked after processes (Bywaters, 2017). To take one example, Gupta and Featherstone (2016) highlight the problems faced by economically disadvantaged black and migrant fathers in accessing appropriate housing and the implications this can have for whether they are assessed as suitable long-term carers for their children.

- *Childhood adversity*: Zanoni et al's (2014) Australian study investigated fathers' childhood histories and found that, like mothers in child protection families, some fathers within child protection populations have their own histories of childhood abuse and victimisation. In the UK, we need further research to update Ryan's analysis of studies (2000) which showed the high rates of childhood abuse, physical and mental health issues and substance misuse among fathers involved with services where there were child protection and welfare concerns.

## The role of the father in child development

Michael Lamb (2010), one of the foremost researchers in this area, has noted a shift since the 1970s in the perceived importance of the role of fathers. Before then, fathers were seen primarily as breadwinners and 'playmates'. They were seen as psychologically peripheral to their children while mothers were considered the primary attachment figures. When parents divorced, the idea of a 'clean break' from the birth father was influential and it was thought a stepfather could take the place of a birth father without problems.

Within psychology, the father is now seen as important in his own right and there has been a considerable growth in research in this area, which reflects and supports wider social and cultural developments. While the 'father as breadwinner' model remains strong, there has been a shift toward men and women sharing childcare, particularly in the context of women's increased involvement in the labour force. Moreover, men across all cultures and classes appear to be expressing a desire to have relationships with their children that are more emotionally fulfilling than those of previous generations are perceived to have been (Dermott, 2008).

These positive cultural shifts are neither linear nor straightforward. Lamb has also noted that men are often perceived as less competent parents in need of female supervision, a view that appears to be 'pervasive' in British society and has been internalised by men themselves (Lamb, 2004, cited in Bateson, 2017). Moreover, Bateson (2017) also cites Lloyd (2001) who notes a 'common assertion' among social care professionals that 'men are dangerous'.

### Key messages on fathers and child development

Some of the key messages that have emerged from research on the role of the father in child development are:

- **Gender and parent-child relationships**: Any differences between fathers and mothers appear to be much less important than the similarities. Parental warmth, nurturing and closeness are all associated with positive child outcomes, regardless of whether the parent involved is a mother or father. The quality of the relationship is what matters. Children who have secure, supportive and reciprocal relationships with their parents are more likely to be well-adjusted psychologically than those whose relationships are less satisfying (Lamb, 2010; Lamb and Lewis, 2010).
- **Culture and family context**: Fathers play many roles in their children's lives and influence their children in ways that vary from family to family, depending on the expectations and aspirations of individual parents, their culture and communities.
- Family context is often at least as important as individual relationships within the family. Positive paternal influences are more likely to occur not only when there are supportive father-child relationships, but when the fathers' relationships with partners, ex-partners and other children are also positive (Lamb and Lewis, 2010). The Early Intervention Foundation (2016) emphasises the importance of the couple relationship to children's welfare, irrespective of whether the parents are together or separated.
- Fathers and children must be viewed as part of complex social systems in which each person affects each other reciprocally, directly and indirectly (Lamb, 2010; Lamb and Lewis, 2010).

## Early intervention and family support

### Implications for practice

- The role of the father is important in its own right.
- However, the father's role and impact needs to be considered within the context of the family as a whole.
- In order to ensure the child's welfare is promoted, it is important to understand and engage with a couple's relationship, irrespective of whether they are together or separated.
- Fathers involved in child protection families are likely to face particular challenges linked to poverty and childhood experiences of abuse, which have implications for their health and wellbeing.

Lloyd et al's (2001) study of fathers in Sure Start (a neighbourhood-based UK government initiative developed from 1998 which delivered early intervention programmes with children under four, including home visiting, group work and community development programmes) highlighted a number of lessons for effective engagement of fathers:

- Assertive and tailored outreach.
- Employment of male workers.
- Increasing the range of activities, including activities that are not 'talk' based and more focused on skills development.

A later study of the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP – a home visitation service usually offered to vulnerable teenage mothers) explored early intervention and safeguarding work with young fathers (Ferguson, 2016; Ferguson and Gates, 2015). While overall evaluation of FNP raises questions about its effectiveness (Robling et al, 2016), this particular study looked at whether (and how) FNP engaged the babies' fathers.

Ferguson highlights the vulnerability and structural disadvantage of the young fathers. He identifies resistance as being linked to feelings of powerlessness, with the young men who most needed help the least able to take the help offered. Three broad but distinct patterns of engagement emerged from the research:

1. Fathers fully engaged with the service straightaway and the relationship with the family nurse deepened over time.
2. Fathers partially engaged with the service.
3. Fathers were resentful at the outset and never stopped being resistant (and sometimes hostile) towards intervention.

***Key elements that promoted engagement were:***

- The amount of **quality time** that was invested in developing relationships with fathers (as well as mothers).
- A **focus on strengths** as well as areas for improvement.
- A skilled, therapeutically oriented and holistic approach to service delivery.
- **'Early' help** was crucial, tapping into the men's redefining of themselves as caring fathers during pregnancy and following the birth. This is an important point echoed through the literature – whether or not men are included during pregnancy can set the tone, not only for their engagement with their baby, but also for their engagement with services. On this point, Hogg (2014) notes many fathers report feeling isolated during the perinatal period and say they feel neither fully engaged nor supported.

Research investigating young men's (including young fathers') relationships with social care workers in a range of support services provided by the charities Action for Children and Working with Men (Featherstone et al, 2016; Robb et al, 2015) echo these concerns about structural disadvantage and vulnerability.

Workers in the projects were attuned to the difficulties faced by many of the young men living in deprived areas and the implications for their futures of poor educational experiences, being in care and/or in prison. Some of the workers had themselves had similar experiences and the projects had been developed on the basis of understanding the need to compensate for, and repair, structural disadvantage and psychological distress.

***Key factors identified by young men in terms of developing effective relationships:***

- **Trust**: They felt able to trust the worker. When expanding on what that might mean, it was described as sometimes just a 'feeling', but was fostered by experiencing workers as reliable and consistent.
- **Reliability and commitment**: Young men felt the worker needed to care about them. They thought effective relationships were jeopardised if workers seemed to be just 'doing their job' or 'in it for the money'. This was also linked to how reliable and consistent workers were.
- **Respect**: Effective relationships were fostered when young men felt respected by workers. They especially appreciated the focus on their strengths and capabilities, rather than the deficit-based approaches they had experienced elsewhere from other professionals.

Young men in these studies rejected any assumption that workers needed to be male or of a matching ethnicity to work with them effectively. However, they did appreciate workers who had been through similar experiences to themselves, or who came from the same kinds of backgrounds as they did.

The services offered practical help, such as food and shelter, and so could compensate for the harshness and loneliness of many of the young men's lives. They also offered young men hope by demonstrating the possibility of change, as represented by workers who had turned their own lives around. The young men were supported to care for each other and to develop more caring relationships within their families.

## Implications for practice

- The personal qualities of a practitioner matter (rather than their gender or their ethnicity).
- Men need to feel able to trust practitioners and expect them to be reliable and consistent.
- The design and composition of services need to reflect an understanding of the issues that can be faced by marginalised men.
- A strengths-based approach is essential to counter the deficit-laden messages that men have often received.
- Services need to include men as early as possible, ideally during pregnancy and in the first few months of their child's life.

## Involving fathers in parenting programmes and skills training

Like other other areas of service provision, parenting programmes have been criticised for not involving fathers and a concern that too often the term 'parent' in practice means 'mother'. Failure to involve fathers has been criticised as ineffective as well as unfair, in that focusing on women may mean parenting strategies won't be implemented if men are not on board.

In an overview of the literature on fathers' participation in parenting interventions, Burgess (2016) found sample sizes of fathers were usually small, the impact of engaging with both parents was almost never measured and evaluation design was weak (Panter-Brick et al, 2014). Burgess argues that engaging both parents is usually more effective than engaging just one and that marginalising fathers amounts to poor professional practice, which may compromise the safety of mothers and children.

One study sought to understand whether changes to parenting practices can occur from one parent's attendance at a programme – and if so, what factors promote modifications in the non-attending parent's parenting (Huntington and Vetere, 2015). In this mixed-methods study, both parents attributed changes in their parenting practice to programme participation. This was facilitated by mothers giving programme information to fathers and by positive co-parent relationships. While ideally both parents would attend every session, the suggestion is that this may not always be necessary to promote positive parenting.

If fathers are to be successfully included in programmes, then content, style, methods, goals and facilitator training may all need rethinking. Scourfield et al (2016) conducted qualitative research with fathers who attended Mellow Dads, an intensive 'dads only' group-based intervention underpinned by attachment theory, for fathers of at-risk children.

Fathers appreciated facilitators' efforts to make the group work, valued the advice on play and parenting style as well as the opportunity to meet other fathers in similar circumstances. However, obstacles that impacted on the effectiveness of the programme included:

- The amount of time needed to get men to attend in the first place, and then to keep them coming.
- A lack of opportunity for fathers to practise new parenting skills if they weren't living with their children.
- The difficulties men experienced in sharing personal intimate information.

The authors suggest these challenges raise questions about how much change can be expected from vulnerable fathers and whether programmes designed for mothers can be applied to fathers with little adaptation. (It's worth noting that another study on the use of Mellow Dads with a group of fathers in prison - Langston, 2015 - was more positive about the programmes potential.)

### Working in partnership to develop parenting programmes for men

A preoccupation with pre-designed programmes and 'programme fidelity' has been criticised by those who emphasise the importance of developing responsive and contextually and culturally specific practice approaches (see, for example, Featherstone et al, 2014). There is considerable potential for developing partnerships in this area with third sector organisations, where there is a long history of working with men – see for example **www.workingwithmen.org**

This work highlights issues for those from different cultures and ethnicities and can be carried out with individuals or in groups. There appear to be considerable advantages to centre-based work where space and time can be available to develop relationships at a pace that allows men's stories to unfold over time, often in the context of doing activities.

### Implications for practice

- Parenting programmes have not developed an inclusive approach to fathers generally. Manualised programmes may not be sufficiently flexible to engage with the needs of men.
- It should not be assumed, however, that if only the mother attends a programme, then the father won't work with the mother to effect changes.
- It has been questioned whether programmes that have been developed for mothers have much value when used with little adaptation for fathers. However, there is potential to develop responsive and creative approaches by building on knowledge gained in the third sector and developing partnerships across sectors.

**Principles of good practice for engaging fathers**

- Practitioners need to understand masculinity and contemporary fatherhood in order to assess fathers and wider family dynamics accurately. Cultural ideas about 'manliness' and fatherhood are deep rooted and vary across cultures, ethnicities and class.
- Non-resident, black, ethnic minority and white working class fathers are all likely to face particular circumstances and pressures. These need to be understood and assessed.
- Be prepared to engage with men and support them to develop their parenting skills and address any addictions, mental health problems or violence. Empower marginalised fathers to be a better resource for their children.
- Recognise the value of fathers to children. Involve them (where safe) in every aspect of direct work.
- Involve the father and paternal extended family at the earliest possible opportunity. Family Group Conferences are an excellent vehicle for identifying and engaging wider family networks. FGCs should be used as early as possible within the assessment stage.
- Adopt 'due diligence' in locating absent fathers. Finding absent fathers should become a practice expectation. It requires persistence, curiosity and creativity.
- Think about how power, gender relations and personal experience (for example, of your own father, partner or being a father) may be shaping your perspective and influencing your practice.
- Be respectful. Notions of respect and disrespect can have particular relevance for men. When social workers communicate respect they are more likely to engage the father and keep him involved.
- Be consistent. Practitioners should be consistent in what they say and how they behave towards fathers. Be consistent in what you say *to* fathers and *about* fathers in reports (Brandon et al, 2017).
- Recognise that many fathers are vulnerable and may withdraw or become threatening as a form of defence. Most children want to maintain a relationship with their fathers, even if they are or have been abusive.

(Based on Ashley et al 2011, Hahn et al 2011, Asmussen and Weizel 2010, and Fatherhood Institute 2009, as cited in Swann, 2015)

## Child protection

The potential problems that can arise if men are not assessed both in terms of the risk and/or the resource they present for the children in their families have been highlighted in a range of reviews (Ofsted, 2011; Sidebotham et al, 2016). While change across the sector is patchy, a number of research and practice innovations have emerged over the last decade. These include:

- A whole-system change project led by a senior manager in one London borough (Swann, 2015).
- Action research carried out by Family Rights Group in a number of local authorities (see **www.frg.org.uk/fathers-matter-action-research-projects**).
- A project led by the Fatherhood Institute involving six local authorities (Scourfield et al, 2015).
- A training programme with social workers, including raising awareness of gender issues and developing skills in the use of Motivational Interviewing (MI) (Maxwell et al, 2012b; Scourfield et al, 2012).

These have resulted in a small body of knowledge that explores:

- Mothers, fathers and grandparents' perspectives on services and how they engage fathers (Ashley et al, 2006).
- Social workers, family support workers and managers' perspectives on the obstacles and challenges (Swann, 2015; Maxwell et al, 2012b).
- The practice and policy steps needed to promote and embed whole-system change (Scourfield et al, 2015; Swann, 2015; Roskill et al, 2008).

*Key obstacles to effective father engagement identified by these projects were:*

- Fathers, especially non-resident fathers, were often invisible – their names and contact details were absent from case files. As a result, they were often not invited to key meetings.
- Workers felt constrained by time demands and unable to spend time seeking fathers out.
- If mothers said they didn't want fathers involved, workers were unclear about the legal position. They also feared jeopardising their relationship with the mother.
- Domestic abuse within families posed real concerns in terms of how safety for all could best be ensured.
- Fear of violent men emerged as an obstacle to engagement on the part of women workers particularly.
- Workers' own childhood experiences of abuse and violence could be an obstacle.

As a result of these action research projects and training, changes in practice were instigated in some local authorities:

- Case recording improved, and invitations to fathers and attendance at key meetings improved.
- Some fathers' and paternal networks were identified and utilised as safe living situations for children.
- Family Group Conferences were identified as a particularly helpful way of engaging fathers and their family networks.
- Workers' own fears were acknowledged and reflective cultures embedded in practice alongside ongoing attention to risk and safety protocols.
- Exploring gender issues in practice became part of workplace discussions.

## Learning from Motivational Interviewing (MI)

A two-day training course aimed to improve child protection social workers' engagement of fathers, increase awareness of gender issues and develop skills through the use of Motivational Interviewing (MI). Evaluation found a significant increase in social workers' self-efficacy and self-reported engagement of both non-resident fathers and resident men who were not seen to pose a risk to children (Scourfield et al, 2012). (There was no increase in the engagement of resident fathers who were perceived as presenting a risk to children, however.)

Fathers frequently report frustrations with practice approaches that are not based on listening to what they're experiencing and which don't appreciate their perspective or acknowledge their skills and strengths. Most importantly, men express frustration when practice is characterised by double standards – for example, when workers expect men to be on time for meetings yet are often late themselves (see Ashley et al, 2006; Featherstone, 2009; Brandon et al, 2017).

MI is a communication style underpinned by a set of key principles – including the idea that intrinsic motivation is more sustainable than extrinsic motivation and that ambivalence about change is entirely normal. MI prompts thinking about the nature of the relationship between the social worker and parent, alongside a consideration of what other factors might be supporting or inhibiting change.

Wilkins (2017) highlights issues for working with disguised compliance that may be particularly pertinent to work with fathers when resistance occurs and offers the following pointers in relation to practice based on MI:

- Avoid a direct head-on argument about the behaviour you would like to change (whether this relates to pre-existing concerns, such as alcohol misuse, or the issue of disguised compliance itself).
- Show the parent you understand what they are saying and what life is like for them and their child.
- Use reflective listening skills and demonstrate empathy.
- Talk in a non-confrontational way about any discrepancy you notice between what the parent says about the plan and what you understand to be their wider goals or objectives.
- Encourage the parent to come up with possible solutions or alternative behaviours themselves, rather than advising or directing them.

Feedback from fathers gathered through a variety of research projects suggests these pointers may be of particular value in facilitating relationships between them and workers (Roskill et al, 2008).

## Embedding change

Swann (2015) argues that in order to embed change in organisations, the following are essential:

- Provide opportunities for managers and frontline workers to reflect on their own experiences of fatherhood. (This should include exploring gender issues and anxieties – see also Swann, 2011.)
- Develop a vision for the service and a learning culture in which practice skills are fostered and actively improved.
- Audit and map recording practices and invitations to meetings.
- Develop reflective supervision and support.
- Provide ongoing opportunities to reflect on dilemmas, contradictions and naming emotions.

### Implications for practice

- The invisibility of fathers (especially non-resident fathers) is a concern. Their absence from case files both reflects and reinforces their absence from practice. Practice change can be achieved by attention to recording and invitations to (and attendance at) key meetings.
- It's important to develop reflective cultures where workers' fears and anxieties can be expressed. These need to name gender-related issues and complexities.
- Practice skills based on approaches such as MI have the potential to support engagement.
- Managers have an important role to play in providing the vision for, and supporting and promoting, father engagement.

## Men's experiences of the child protection system

Marion Brandon and colleagues have been working on a qualitative longitudinal study of men's experiences of the UK child protection system. It involves 35 men who were fathers (or father figures) to a child with a newly made Child Protection Plan.

***What men said was unhelpful about the child protection system:***

- **Being included late or as 'a last resort'**: Non-resident fathers in particular felt social workers delayed involving them. When social workers were concerned about a mother's care, fathers felt they were not taken seriously or supported to become more involved.
- **Being labelled 'difficult'**: This was an important way in which men felt unfairly treated by social workers. If men get angry or upset, they can quickly find themselves kept at arm's length from the child protection process and their child. If they challenge this, it can make things worse.
- **Not getting a fair hearing**: When there are allegations of domestic abuse or conflict between a father and mother over what's happened, men felt their perspective wasn't always taken seriously. (Fairness is raised as an issue by men who accept responsibility for abusive behaviour, as well as by men who feel wrongly accused.)
- **Lack of flexibility:** Many men felt social workers were not prepared to negotiate over how meetings or visits were arranged, or that there were double standards over things like being on time or being flexible.
- **Social workers are 'hard to reach'**: Men's experience was that social workers were often difficult to contact and this makes it hard to build relationships or trust.

***What men said had helped build trust with social workers***

- **Early involvement**: Most men appreciated being met or phoned before the initial child protection conference. This can be a chance for social workers and fathers to begin building a working relationship.
- **Being listened to**: Fathers found it easier to trust a social worker who took time to understand their situation, took their views as seriously as those of mothers and was not judgemental.
- **Reliability**: Being reliable means social workers doing what they said they will do, replying to messages and keeping fathers updated about what is happening.
- **Balancing criticism and praise**: Men want social workers to be honest about their concerns, but also to look at the whole picture of what a father can offer. It's easier for men to accept criticism if positive factors are recognised. Men who feel only criticised are more likely to reject the social worker or withdraw from the child protection process.
- **Practical support**: Men who had a more positive experience spoke about social workers having helped with housing, advice on welfare benefits or in building good relationships with local children's centres, for example.

(Brandon et al, 2017)

## Working with domestic abuse

While fathers have often been ignored as resources for children, the risks they pose have also been under-explored. A key issue concerns the impact of experiencing domestic abuse on children's safety and women's ability to offer safe care.

Recognition that experiencing domestic abuse is a child protection issue has had mixed impacts. On the one hand, it draws attention to the harm children can suffer and the co-occurrence of abuse to women and abuse to children. On the other, the implications for mothers can be problematic. They can be judged as failing to protect and become invisible in terms of their own needs as women (Featherstone et al, 2014). They may face unrealistic pressure to keep children away from violent men of whom they are themselves afraid.

In this context, research suggests mothers can experience child protection services as blaming and punitive (Featherstone et al, 2014). Mothers can come under pressure to separate in order to protect their children when there is no social or material support in place post-separation. Women talk of their loneliness as well as the huge pressures placed on them to be good mothers in situations where they have few resources. Separation, moreover, can intensify the dangers for both women and children. Post-separation contact ordered by the family courts, for example, can provide a context in which abuse is continued and women are held back from building abuse-free lives.

### Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes (DVPPs)

DVPPs are group-work programmes based on cognitive behavioural approaches, underpinned by an understanding of the role of power and issues of control in men's motivation to abuse. Group work for men is accompanied by support services for women and children. While initially concerned with men as partners, DVPPs have evolved to encompass men's roles as fathers.

Project Mirabal is a multi-site longitudinal research project that explored the views of men, women and children about the impact of community-based DVPPs in England (Kelly and Westmarland, 2015). In-depth interviews were conducted with men on programmes and their partners (or ex-partners) at the start and end of attendance. A small number of children were also interviewed.

Aware that it was quite possible for physical violence to stop, yet for women and children to continue living in an atmosphere of tension, threat and coercive control, the researchers devised six measures that took account of this possibility.

The results were an improvement in all indicators measuring respectful communication, dramatic and significant improvements in relation to safety and freedom from violence and abuse, and improvements in restoring women's voice and ability to make choices. Quantitative indicators showed improvement in relation to enhanced awareness of self and others for men on DVPPs and children feeling safer, heard and cared about.

## Caring Dads: Safer Children

Caring Dads: Safer Children is a programme developed in Canada by Scott and Crooks (2004) and rolled out in the UK by the NSPCC. It is designed to address the parenting behaviour of violent fathers who have exposed their children to domestic abuse. An evaluation found evidence of sustained improvements among some fathers who completed the programme, with fathers and partners both reporting fewer incidents of domestic abuse after completion.

Risks to children reduced because fathers generally found being a parent less stressful and they interacted better with their children. Improvements in fathers' behaviour also helped to increase feelings of safety and wellbeing within their families. However, case notes and comments from the children and partners' survey highlighted that some fathers who complete the programme do not change sufficiently and their contact with their families should continue to be monitored (McConnell et al, 2016).

## Learning from restorative approaches

- **Strong Fathers** is a project that emerged from restorative approaches to violence and conflicts more generally (Pennell et al, 2013). Restorative approaches seek to do justice to suffering caused without perpetuating the hatred aroused. In situations of family violence, the restorative process requires that the suffering men cause be identified, but acknowledges that simply condemning them perpetuates hatred and fails to rebuild their sense of 'personhood'.

  It is argued that reconstructing the personhood of the fathers, mothers and children is crucial if families are to heal from trauma, re-forge their bonds, and forestall the intergenerational transmission of violence. Pennell et al argue that the approach is particularly attuned to the needs of men from BME backgrounds. The role of faith as a motivator in stopping abusive behaviours is recognised and fostered, and it shows some encouraging evidence of reduced drop-out rates.

- **Family Group Decision Making** is used in some local authorities in England to address domestic abuse. An evaluation in Canada using a comparison group found positive evidence of reduced maltreatment and abuse for mothers and children (Pennell and Burford, 2000).

Restorative approaches look likely to develop further in England as renewed interest in restorative practice gathers pace across many local authorities. It is not without controversy, however. There are concerns as to whether it may obstruct the administration of justice for criminal behaviour and increase risks to women and children.

The Domestic Abuse Restorative Family Approaches (DARFA) Partnership, a consortium of organisations in Wales dedicated to providing a service that enables families to live safer lives, addresses these concerns directly and offers valuable pointers towards how restorative approaches can be used to ensure safety and justice. Go to: **www.darfa.uk/who-are-darfa-and-how-do-they-work**

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