



Great idea.
Bite size chunks
of info like this
is v. useful.



DAD
FACTS
ING
READY

ALL BABIES COUNT

THE

DAD

PROJECT



Sally Hogg



Introduction

Pregnancy and the first months of life are a critical period in a child's development, a time when they are developing rapidly and when the foundations for their future are laid. During this period, parents are incredibly important. Their actions, the home environment they create, and the way in which they interact with their child, influence how the baby's body, brain and mind develop. As experts from Harvard have written, "children develop in the context of relationships."ⁱ

Through the Dad Project we looked at how we could strengthen the relationships between dads, their child and his or her mother, and the services that work with them during pregnancy and the year after a baby is born. The project was run by the NSPCC, with support from the Design Council and funding from the Guy's and St Thomas' Charity. Our goal was to explore how we could improve information, advice and support for dads in order to promote their emotional wellbeing and help them to achieve better outcomes for their families.

The NSPCC are by no means the first people to look at how best to support dads during this important phase in their - and their families' - lives. It is 25 years since Professor Michael Lamb described dads as the "forgotten contributors to child development"ⁱⁱ and in this time organisations like the Fatherhood Institute, the Royal College of Midwives, the Departments for Health and Education, Barnardo's and many others have provided valuable research, guidance and best practice examples to encourage services to work better for dads - the "forgotten fifty per cent" of parents.

Despite all this excellent work, there is still a long way to go. As this report shows, many dads still don't get the support they need. Gender inequality still exists in early parenthood and health and children's services often still forget to 'think family'. New solutions are needed to these old problems. We hope that this report brings some fresh ideas, insights and inspiration to those people who can make a difference.



Top tips

Our top ten tips for anyone working with parents in the perinatal period:

- 1** Think of dads as service users in their own right, not only as mums' supporters. Know, record and use dads' names.
- 2** Learn about the research around the psychological and social elements of both mums' and dads' experiences of pregnancy and new parenthood. Educate yourself about the challenges they can face.
- 3** Ensure your communications, workspaces and materials communicate that dads are equally valuable and welcome.
- 4** Reflect on and challenge your own assumptions and stereotypes about fathers, and seek feedback from dads about their experience of your service.
- 5** Help mums and dads to understand each other's experiences of pregnancy and new parenthood and show them concrete ways in which they can help each other.
- 6** Talk to mums and dads about the challenges of new parenthood so they know what to expect. In every contact, ask both parents how they are doing, and listen and respond respectfully to their answers.
- 7** Teach mums and dads how to care for a baby (for example bathing and nappy changing) and specifically encourage and acknowledge dads' involvement in caring for their baby when speaking to the family.
- 8** Utilise scans as an opportunity to help both parents to engage in the pregnancy and get to know their baby. Ensure dads are explicitly invited to the scan and acknowledged when they are there.
- 9** Teach mums and dads about babies' early cues and encourage them to watch and interact with their baby.
- 10** Consider how you can facilitate conversations between mums and dads, dads and dads, and wider families and communities to help create supportive networks around new parents.

Background: the challenge

In summer 2013, the Design Council and Guy's and St Thomas' Charity launched the Knee High Design Challenge, an open innovation competition to find practical solutions to improve the lives of children under five in the London Boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark.

At the NSPCC we had been looking at how to better engage dads in the support we provide during pregnancy and the first year of their child's life. We decided to enter the Knee High Challenge to learn about how design thinking could help us to find new and better solutions.

Our project for the Knee High Challenge aimed to answer four questions:

- How could dads and their families benefit from information, advice and support in the perinatal period?
- What are dads' motivations, values and preferences during this time?
- What is the best way to provide information, advice and support to new and expectant dads?
- What sort of information, advice and support do these dads want and need?



In our work, we found striking similarities between the needs and wants of dads in more disadvantaged communities, and dads from more affluent and advantaged backgrounds. It became clear that improving how universal services work with dads will help all families, although some dads may need an additional helping hand at times too.

The development of our ideas was a process of iteration: we sought input from parents and professionals, used this to develop prototype solutions and then asked for input again in order to develop and refine our ideas.

Our work took us out of the office to design studios, universities, hospital wards and waiting rooms, supermarkets, children's centres, market places, pubs and into the virtual world too. Wherever the experts were – whether it was parents, practitioners, commissioners or academics – that's where we went. We got people involved in a range of different ways, using conversations, vox pops, surveys, focus groups, journey maps, prototypes and plenty of post-its!



We sought to collate information from a range of different sources in a number of different ways, so we could triangulate our findings and be more confident about our conclusions. We were pleasantly surprised by the amount and consistency of the insights and feedback we received.

Although we didn't get through to the final round of Knee High Challenge, we had generated so much learning, and developed such promising ideas that we could not just stop and let it go to waste. Many of our ideas weren't always about radical change – often

they were really simple – but we believe that was what made them so valuable, because it wouldn't be difficult for people to pick them up and make them work in everyday situations.

Our aim in publishing this report is to share the learning we gained on our journey. We want people to pick up our insights, draw inspirations from our ideas and turn them into a reality for families. We hope that the report will be useful to many others who share our passion for delivering the best possible services to new mums and dads, and ensuring every baby is safe, nurtured and able to thrive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to say a huge thank you to everyone who supported the Dad Project, particularly to all the local parents and practitioners who participated in our activities and shared their views.

A particularly huge thank you goes to Geraldine Joyce, Amy George and their colleagues at Guy's and St Thomas' hospital who supported our development work and tested new ideas in their maternity services.

Both the maternity hospitals in Lambeth and Southwark – Guy's and St Thomas' and King's College Hospital – were supportive of this project. We want to recognise the great work that midwives in these hospitals already do, and the improvements they continue to make for dads.

Enormous thanks also go to Seany O'Kane who passionately supports many young dads in South London and who brought his boundless enthusiasm to this project and helped us to involve dads in our work.

We are also grateful to two of our midwives, Karen Corbishley and Anita Jones, and to Kate Billingham, for peer reviewing this publication.

Thanks go to all the colleagues from across the NSPCC who were involved in this work. Jess Law, Chris Cuthbert, Alice Haynes, Melissa Cathro, Laura Copsey, Ed Berry and Dylan Davies in particular were all critical to the success of this project. Our practitioners gave us brilliant insights and helped to reach out to dads around the country, and we had great input from colleagues across the organisation who spoke about their personal experiences as dads and dads-to-be.

Finally, thanks to the Design Council team – Ella Britton, Catherine Pratt and Mollie Courtney – for all their encouragement and guidance.



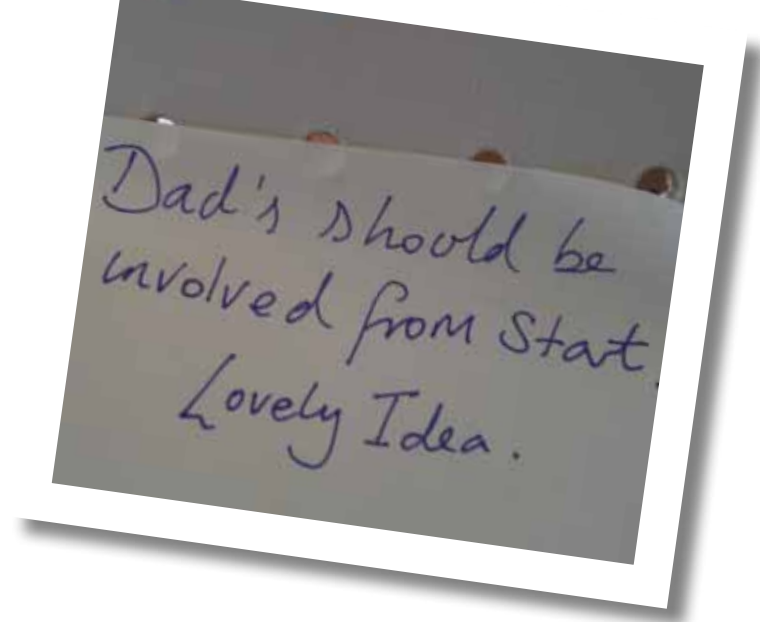
Why do dads matter?

No one ever starts a document with a section on 'why mums matter' do they? We assume that children need their mums. Yet dads are somehow different and reports about dads, like this one, generally begin with the evidence for why dads matter. Reaching out to dads somehow requires justification. This reflects the gender inequality that exists around parenting.

“Fathers make unique and irreplaceable contributions to the lives of their kids. Unique means they provide something different from mothers; they are not just part time mother substitutes. Irreplaceable means that when they are absent, children suffer...”ⁱⁱⁱ

There is a wealth of strong research evidence to confirm what we all intuitively know: When fathers are sensitive, supportive and engaged, it has a hugely positive impact on their baby's life and is linked to a range of social, academic and economic benefits in the future.^{iv} The reverse of this is also true, when dads have poor emotional wellbeing, are hostile or detached, this can have a negative impact on their family.

During pregnancy and after birth dads also play an important role in influencing the wellbeing of their partner, and in supporting her to maintain healthy behaviours that benefit their baby. Women whose partners remain involved during pregnancy are more likely to



attend antenatal care, take better care of their health and deliver healthier babies.^v Research shows that fathers' attitudes and behaviour play a significant role in, for example, whether mothers give up smoking or breastfeed their baby.^{vi} The speed at which a woman recovers from postnatal depression is also linked to the quality of her relationships with her partner.^{vii}

Fathers can play a particularly important role in babies' lives if mothers are not able to provide the sensitive and responsive care that their babies need, for example if they have serious physical or mental health problems which temporarily or permanently impair their parenting abilities. In these cases, dads can be 'buffers' who ensure that problems do not have a significant or lasting impact on their baby.

“When father is interacting positively with his children, the mother feels in turn more positive and emotionally stable. Combined, they work together to deliver better positive child outcomes”^{viii}

Laying strong foundations

Pregnancy and the first year of life are a prime time to support dads and dads-to-be. Pregnancy is not just an important time for mums. It's a critical life transition for dads too, a time of huge psychological and social change.

Men who live with their partner may even undergo physical changes in preparation for their birth of their baby: fathers-to-be have been found to show lower levels of testosterone and cortisol during their partner's pregnancy, and higher levels of prolactin when in contact with infants. These hormones are thought to facilitate paternal behaviour and help dads to be more responsive to their babies.^{ix} Professionals can build on these innate propensities as they support men to become active and effective dads.

The perinatal period is a time when many dads are actively engaged and keen to be part of their families' lives. In our work in Lambeth and Southwark, many dads and dads-to-be told us that they want to be involved during pregnancy. National statistics show that the vast majority of dads are present during the perinatal period:

85% of parents are married or living together when their baby is born.

96% of parents are in a romantic relationship at the time of a baby's birth.

86% of all fathers are present at their baby's birth.

93% of fathers currently sign their baby's birth certificate.^x



Sadly, the statistics also show that over time many dads become less involved in their children's lives. Research suggests that as many as four in ten children are being brought up by their mothers, with no regular contact with their fathers.^{xi} To prevent this drifting of fathers out of their children's lives, we must do all we can to capture and maintain their early enthusiasm right from the start – to help dads to be active parents through pregnancy, birth and beyond.

“Dads should be encouraged to be a part of their child's life from as early as possible. You feel like a spare part initially otherwise”

(dad at focus group)

- **Dads' involvement in pregnancy is linked to babies' health at birth and in the first year of life, which is predictive of their later wellbeing.** ^{xii}
- **Dads' involvement in pregnancy is also predictive of his involvement in the child's later life.** ^{xiii}
- **Prevention is better than cure. It is easier to engage dads from the start than to try and reach them after they have disengaged from their child's life.**

As part of the Dad Project, we conducted original research with YouGov to survey over 1000 men, including 660 dads. They told us about the importance of supporting new dads and dads-to-be:

- 95% of dads agreed that it is important for dads to be involved in looking after their babies.
- 90% of dads agreed it was rewarding for them to be involved in looking after their baby.
- 76% of dads agreed that it is important that midwives support dads as well as mums.
- 43% of dads agreed that midwives are not very good at including new dads in maternity care.
- 58% of dads agreed it is common for dads to feel left out after their baby is born.
- 68% of dads agreed that if dads were more involved during pregnancy, they would be more involved during the rest of their child's life.
- 81% of dads agreed that dads need to know more about what to expect when their first baby is born.
- 83% of dads agreed that being more prepared would make it easier for new parents.¹

¹Survey from YouGov Plc: Total sample size was 1,187 adults, of which, 660 were dads. Fieldwork was undertaken between 24th - 25th March 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB men (aged 18+).

Men of steel?

Whatever your gender, new parenthood is a time of stress and sleeplessness, and dads, like mums, are also more susceptible to anxiety and a decline in emotional wellbeing during this time. Many fathers report that they feel isolated during the perinatal period as attention is focused on their partner and new baby. Couples can also experience a decline in the quality of their relationships after the birth of a baby, which can have a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing.

Whilst postnatal depression is generally associated with women, many men can be affected too. Evidence shows that between a quarter and a half of new dads with a depressed partner are also depressed themselves.^{xiv}

The general narrative about dads in the perinatal period often frames them as important supporters to their partner and baby. This is true, but dads need to be seen not just as supporters, but also as people in need of support. The portrayal of dads as strong men who support their families can make it harder for men to raise questions and concerns, and to ask for help. It is important to talk about how most dads find new parenthood tough too, so that men are prepared for this and feel able to talk about their experiences.

Professionals working with new families should also be aware that dads can have important relationships with their babies, and can be in need of support, even if they are not in a relationship with the mother and presenting as her supporter.



“Men experienced extensive changes in their life, which they found trying and difficult to handle... Trying to understand the new situation, fathers became confused because of a lack of guidelines and role models and lack of support from relatives and friends... Fathers had not expected the infant to be as demanding as it proved to be... In several studies, men expressed a feeling of marital conflict and dissatisfaction... they felt hurt by being alienated and excluded from the close mother-infant bond.”^{xv}

In this report we frequently use the term ‘emotional wellbeing’, this refers to a person’s capacity to:

- manage their emotions,
- be resilient to stress and life events,
- be autonomous and meet the demands of everyday life,
- develop and sustain good relationships with others,
- enjoy life and be happy.

A theory of change

We believe that by supporting dads through the perinatal period, we can have positive impacts on them, their partners, and their babies. This is shown in the theory of change below.

If we can provide better information, advice and support to new dads...

Dads will understand more about:

- The role they can play in caring for their baby and how to provide appropriate care.
- The impact of the transition to parenthood on them and their relationships with their partner
- Mums' feelings, emotional wellbeing and the risks of perinatal mental illness, and what they can do to support their partner.

Therefore dads will feel...

- More confident as a parent
- More valued, included and involved
- More prepared for the challenges they and their partner² may face as they become parents.

Therefore dads will give..

- More sensitive and appropriate care to their baby, and get more involved in looking after them.
- More empathy and emotional support to their partner.

This will also have positive longer term impact on mother and babies:

- Mums will feel supported, which promotes their emotional wellbeing and makes it easier for them to respond to their babies' need.
- Babies will develop in a nurturing environment where they receive the sensitive care they need to thrive.

This lays strong foundations for better social, emotional and cognitive development, with life long benefits.

²Work with fathers-to-be is beneficial even when they are not in a relationship with their baby's mother, and the co-parenting relationship is still important.

Where is it going wrong?

In our conversations, many fathers told us that they did not feel fully engaged and supported during the perinatal period. Much research on this theme has generated similar findings.

The responsibility for engaging and supporting dads in the perinatal period is often placed on the shoulders of already stretched and busy midwives and health visitors. We identified a number of barriers and problems in the system that make it difficult for these services to give dads all the support they need:

- These services were designed primarily to protect mothers' and infants' physical health. This still lies at the heart of how they are organised and managed, and is reflected in training, priorities and targets.
- Services are incredibly stretched, and professionals themselves can feel stressed, so they can struggle to provide mothers, let alone fathers, with the emotional support that they need.
- There are psychological and practical barriers to dads engaging with maternity services, such as a lack of time off work and unease at being present in a predominantly female environment when 'women's issues' are discussed.
- Dads can feel unclear about the role they should play during pregnancy. This can prevent them from proactively engaging with services.
- There is a tension because the same short appointments have to cover both the mother's physical health and wellbeing, and also the baby's wellbeing and the couple's transition as a family.



- Many midwives and health visitors say that they lack the confidence and time to work with dads, or to discuss mental health or couple relationships. Working with couples requires different skills and a different style and approach to working with a woman on a one-to-one basis.
- Professionals working with families who have more complex lives often have to consider the risks that the father or mum's partner can pose to a family. This can lead to a position where men are only considered as a 'risk to be managed' and services fail to recognise and respond to their strengths and contributions as caregivers.
- Professionals are sensitive to the fact that women may not have a partner, or may be suffering from domestic abuse, but this can lead them to be over-cautious in asking about dads, particularly in more disadvantaged communities.
- Because most services reach new dads via mothers, it is very difficult for them to engage with fathers who are not in a relationship with the mother of their baby.



“I can understand that midwives don't want to assume that dad is on the scene. But my partner came to every appointment and we told the midwife he was keen to be involved, but still no one took a note of his name, invited him to appointments or groups, or talked to him directly... in his own right..”

(mum talking to us on the London South Bank)

Our work raised some interesting questions for service providers and commissioners to think about:

- Who is responsible for supporting dads through the perinatal period?
- If we designed a service from scratch to meet the emotional and physical needs of whole families in the perinatal period, what would it look like?
- How can we involve dads more, whilst maintaining a private space for mums if they need it?
- What's our default position about dads, and what should it be - do we see them as a risk, a resource, a service user, or something else?
- Are we delivering services to individuals, couples or families? What is the implication of this for how we work?

It is important to be clear that it isn't just health services that often fail to treat dads as equally important parents; this bias exists across all of society. Even in childhood, young girls are often given toys which prepare them for motherhood (such as dolls and tea sets) and yet it is often seen as inappropriate for boys to play with these toys.

The Government gives fathers very little time to care for and bond with their new baby, and to support their partner. The law has just changed to enable fathers to take unpaid leave to attend up to two antenatal appointments. As IPPR have recently argued, we believe that dads should have paid time off to attend at least four appointments – this would enable

them to attend the initial midwife appointment, both scans, and an appointment in later pregnancy where – for example, the midwife and woman might discuss her birth plan.^{xvi}

New dads are only entitled to two weeks of statutory paternity leave³. Employers generally do not see it as important to supplement this leave for fathers, as they often do for mothers. As we were completing the Dad Project, it was reported that fewer than nine per cent of new fathers received more than the statutory two weeks full paternity pay, and that employers were far less supportive of fathers taking just two weeks leave, than they were of women taking far longer maternity leave.^{xvii}

³From 2015, mothers will be able to share up to 50 weeks of their leave with their father, but the government expects take up of this entitlement to be very low (between 2 and 8 per cent).^{xvi}

Where's the daddy?

Throughout our work we realised that we could create shiny leaflets and apps, websites and services for new dads, but it would not automatically get to the heart of the issue, which is that dads are not treated as equally valuable parents. No 'add on' is going to change this; instead we need to look across the board at how we change our portrayal of, and interactions with dads. The media, marketing, social norms, public attitudes and public services all have a role to play.

There are many resources available for parents-to-be, and these help to shape couples' attitudes and expectations around their roles. At the moment, these are very mum-focused, reinforcing the subliminal messages that dads don't need to be involved. This selection of materials, given out at a booking appointment illustrates just how absent dads are from our representations of new parenthood.

Where dads are mentioned in resources, they are often portrayed as the “baby entertainer, bumbling assistant or line manager”^{xviii} and not as an equal and valuable parent.

Similarly, many maternity settings and contacts are not designed to include, involve and welcome dads.



We recommend that services should do a 'dad check' of their places and resources to ensure they are father friendly. To start with, just asking a few simple questions might help:

- How are dads addressed in letters and materials, are they made to feel welcome?
- What images are used – are dads represented and shown in a positive way?
- How are consulting rooms set up, are both mums and dads included?
- Does the midwife or health visitor know dad's name and address him?
- Are questions about the baby asked to mum and dad equally?

The Fatherhood Institute offers more detailed help and guidance for organisations who want to self-assess how they work with dads.^{xix}

During our project we looked for ways to help midwives and health visitors to understand more about dads' experiences of the perinatal period, and to reflect on about how to engage dads meaningfully. Suggestions raised during our work included:

- Using film to show professionals a dads'-eye-view of services.
- Ensuring that health visitors and midwives have reflective supervision to support them to reflect on how they work with fathers and partners, and to consider the factors that might make this difficult.
- Creating a working group of staff (such as midwives, health visitors or children's centre workers) in each setting, who can meet regularly to explore how they currently involve dads and partners and how they might improve their service.



What's in a name?

We all feel more valued and respected if someone addresses us by our name. Dads told us that they wanted professionals to ask, record and use their names.

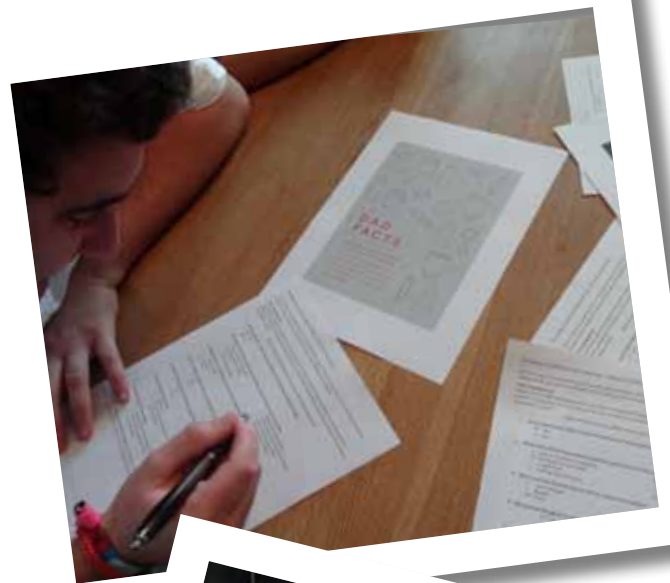
We recommend that primary health services should review the notes and records they use in the perinatal period to ensure that dads' names can be recorded in a place that makes it easy for professionals working with a family to see and use them.

We also explored what collective terms to use to refer to dads. Some dads told us that they wanted to be called a 'dad', others a 'father' (people had different views about which one of these words suggested a more serious involvement in their child's life).

Some dads asked us not to use the word 'partners' because they weren't always in a relationship with their baby's mum. However we also met mums' partners – male and female-- who were keen to be recognised and involved in their partner and child's care, but were not dads.

We are often told not to use the word 'parents' because many dads assume that a service or materials aren't for them unless they are addressed directly.^{xx}

So how should services refer to the important men in a child's life? **We recommend that if you need a catch all, 'dads and partners' or 'fathers and partners' is probably best.**



In some areas, parents register their child's birth in children's centres. Since many dads are present at this registration, this offers children's centres the opportunity to collect dad's contact details so that they can get in touch with him directly about their services in the future.

An idea: A letter from your midwife

During our research and development work on this project, we tested the idea of creating a set of postcards and wallet cards to assist midwives in involving and supporting dads during pregnancy.

The cards would all be designed specifically for dad, with a 'dad fact', tip or quote for them on one side. The other side would be blank for the midwife to write a personal message for dads. The prototypes that we created are shown here.

The messages on the cards are based on what dads told us they wanted to know and evidence tells us can help families during this period in their lives: There is a strong focus on encouraging supportive and sensitive relationships between mum and dad, and dad and baby.

These postcards are a simple way to ensure that midwives think about dads and address them individually:

- If a dad is at an appointment, the midwife could talk to him about whether he wanted a note made of anything, such as the baby's size, an issue discussed or the date of the next appointment.
- If not present, the card could ensure that dads get some feedback from the appointment and know they were in the midwife's mind. The midwife could talk to mum about what dad might be keen to know and write this on the card. Mum could then take this home for dad, which could also help her to talk to him about the appointment.

The cards give dads facts and information, but they also prompt conversations between midwives, mums and dads.

"I found that the teenage couples really do appreciate them, especially the ones to put in the wallet"

(teenage parents' midwife, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust)



DAD FACTS

#1 SOMEBODY'S LISTENING

BABIES CAN HEAR YOU BEFORE THEY'RE EVEN BORN.

When you're talking to the bump (or around your partner) your baby can sense you. This means they'll actually recognise your voice when they're born. So take the time to chat to your little one, maybe even play them some music? Just don't do anything too noisy!

A fellow dad says:

"I thought it was really weird at first, but I soon really liked chatting to the bump. It makes the baby so much more real."

Mike - dad of Miguel, eight months.

Your midwife says:

Your next appointment is:

This is a pilot scheme to involve new dads. Please tell us what you think by emailing infordads@gmail.com

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DAD FACTS

#2 BIG CHANGES, LITTLE SLEEP

NEW BABIES CAN PUT A REAL STRESS ON YOUR HOME LIFE.

Two in three couples say things can get a little strained after the baby comes. So be ready. Work out what you're each going to do to support each other, and most importantly... talk openly about how you're feeling. It'll make things easier for the three of you.

A fellow dad says:
"Honesty was the only way to deal with things when times got tough. Women can't read minds any more than you can, so tell her how you feel. You'll soon see that she feels the same too."

Ed - Dad of Jules, 11 months.

Your midwife says:

Your next appointment is:

This is a pilot scheme to involve new dads. Please tell us what you think by emailing infordads@gmail.com

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DAD FACTS

#3 NAPPY TIME = HAPPY TIME

YOU'LL CHANGE 5,500 NAPPIES BEFORE YOUR BABY'S POTTY TRAINED.

Babies just love to interact with you... no matter what the situation. So nappy time can actually be a fun time to spend together.

Also, there's evidence that the more you do with your baby - the better their childhood development.

A fellow dad says:

"I thought nappies would be a nightmare, but actually it was a great laugh between me and Emilia."

Paul - dad of Emilia, 18 months.

Your midwife says:

Your next appointment is:

This is a pilot scheme to involve new dads. Please tell us what you think by emailing infordads@gmail.com

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Hard to reach?



Dads have sometimes been described as ‘hard to reach’. This label is predominantly applied to dads from more disadvantaged backgrounds and with additional difficulties.

Yet we know that in the perinatal period dads are not hard to reach: for example, most dads come to a scan and 86% are at the birth. It shouldn’t be hard to reach someone who is sitting in the room and keen to be involved!

Certain groups of dads (and their partners and babies) are at greater risk of poor emotional wellbeing and development. This includes those who are:

- young
- have an unwanted pregnancy
- have a history of mental illness and/or being abused as a child
- have poor relationship quality

- have low social support
- and/or have low income.

In Lambeth and Southwark we found dynamic organisations, such as St Michaels Fellowship, Working with Men and Young Dads’ TV, as well as great teenage midwives, who work with dads who experience at least one of these characteristics. These services understand how to support new dads and have a lot to teach us.

Every dad is unique, however, as already described, we found striking similarities between the needs and wants of dads in more disadvantaged communities, and dads from more affluent and advantaged backgrounds. Improving how universal services work with dads will help all families, although some dads may need an additional helping hand at times too.

Thinking Family

In 2007, the Social Exclusion Task Force encouraged all public services to ‘think family’; to make sure that the support provided to all children and adults is coordinated and focused on problems affecting the whole family.^{xxi} These principles are still very relevant today.

Thinking family involves:

- Identifying whether adults who are experiencing problems are parents, and supporting them in their parenting role.
- Coordinating the support provided by different agencies to each family, especially those with the highest level of needs.
- Meeting the full range of needs within each family.
- Considering and responding to the needs and influence of family members who may not live at home or engage with services.
- Strengthening the ability of family members to provide care and support to each other.

How to reach?

Our work found that parents from all backgrounds had different drivers and motivations when it came to parenting. Every parent is different, and obviously professionals should be alert to their unique situation and needs.

To support our work, and drawing on parent segmentation work done by other organisations,^{xxii} we identified three key types of motivations for new dads:

- **‘Committed’** parents are driven by aspirations for their children and a motivation to ensure their children succeed in the future.
- **‘Struggling’** parents are driven by practical, direct and visible benefits which will make parenting and family life easier now.
- **‘Independent’** parents have stronger interests outside of being a parent, and are driven by their own individual interests. They might, for example, be concerned about personal interests, couple relationships or friendship groups.

To resonate with all three sets of motivations, we ensured that all materials that we created talked to dads as individuals; gave them

practical tips for making life easier now, and talked to them about how to improve their baby’s development.

We encourage all organisations to think hard about parents’ motivations, pressures and lifestyles when developing new services and resources.



What I really want to know is...

We asked nearly 200 dads, mums and dads-to-be about what would be useful for new dads to know. We also looked online at what dad bloggers advised other dads, and we considered the evidence about what dads can do to improve their family's wellbeing. The results were all very similar. These are the top ten topics that came up, in order of popularity.

1. By far and away the biggest theme was the need **to help men to support their partners**, and to help them to understand how a woman feels in pregnancy and in the early days after their child is born (exhausted and emotional!). Men and women both talked about how new dads often did not understand how their partner was feeling and this made it harder to support them.

Linked to this, another common theme was the need to warn dads about how hard breastfeeding could be, and to give them some advice on how they could support their partner to breastfeed.

“Being pregnant is a bit like being French. We can understand it, but we'll never know what it's really like, so we need to be told what pregnant women need.”

(man, age 30, without children, at focus group)

2. Another key theme that emerged was a desire to **encourage new dads to spend time with their children** and help them to see how rewarding and engaging with a baby can be. Dads talked about positive experiences of making time for their children, or how they wished with hindsight that they had spent more time with them. They told us how spending time and bonding with their baby in the early days had benefits for their relationship with their children in the longer term.
3. A strong theme in our conversations, particularly with more disadvantaged families, was **the importance of financial security**. Parents talked about the financial pressures of having a baby, dad's desire to provide for the family, and the difficulties of new parenthood if the family had financial worries. They felt that help understanding the costs of a new baby and budgeting for this would be welcome. They also suggested that a checklist of things they needed to buy (and not to buy!) before their baby arrived would be useful.
4. Another very common theme was the need to warn dads about the stresses and strains of parenthood, and to reassure new dads that **everyone finds the first weeks and months with a new baby hard, but it will get better with time**. Dads talked about the need for reassurance that it was normal to struggle, and that it was ok to ask for help. They also told us about the need to warn dads about how much life would change and how scary it could be when they first got home with their baby.

“If you don't know how difficult babies are. You beat yourself up for being a bad parent.”

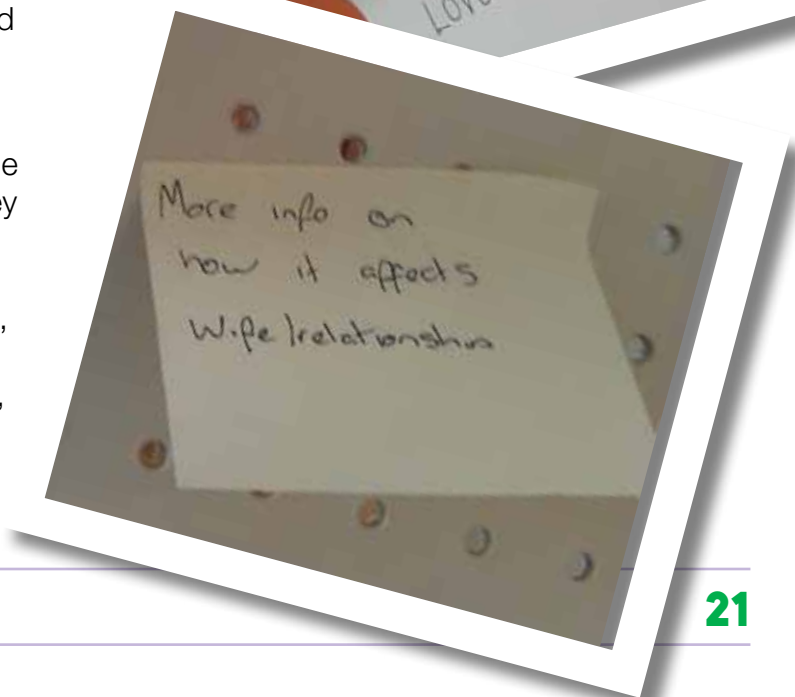
(dad at focus group)

Linked to this, dads told us that they wanted practical advice on how to soothe a crying baby, and also that it was important to reassure dads that all men could feel stressed or angry when their baby cried, and that it was ok and normal to feel this way.

5. Parents told us of the need to advise parents **to trust their instincts and develop an approach that works for them and their baby.** They said new parents needed to be told not to be worried if they were given a lot of different advice, or if a particular approach didn't work for their baby, but instead to realise that their baby was unique and might not be the same as other babies or those in the books.
6. Dads told us how they lacked confidence in doing **basic practical things like changing a nappy and holding their baby.** They told us about how important it was for dads to do these things so that they could be involved in parenting. Dads told us that they were not sure what role they could play, particularly if their baby was breastfeeding and that it was important for them to know how they could help so that they could feel involved and take the pressure off mums.
7. Dads talked about their concerns about the **health and wellbeing of their baby.** They said that it would be useful to have some clear advice about what to worry about, and what not to worry about. For example, dads talked about being particularly concerned about young babies' breathing, and if their baby had an accident. A few

dads told us how they had unnecessarily taken their child to the doctor or hospital, and said they wished they'd known not to panic.

8. Dads told us how they liked to know about **babies' development**, how their baby was growing, and how they could help their child to develop.
9. New dads who had accessed good groups and play spaces in their local areas said that all dads should be told more about **the services and opportunities for them in their local areas**, and places that they could take their baby.
10. Dads mentioned that it would be useful to have some **guidance on legal issues**, such as paternity leave rights and the implications of having your name on the babies' birth certificate.



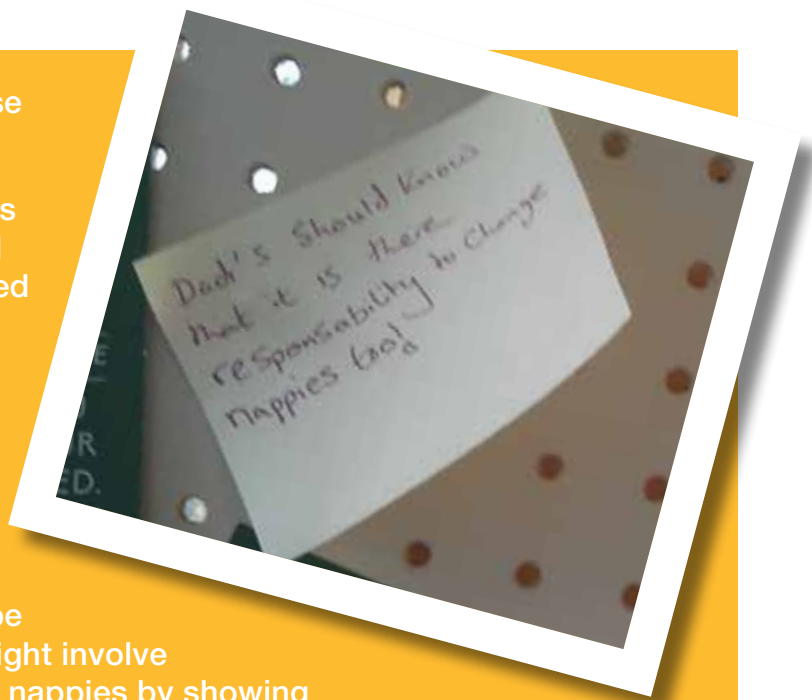
Confidence leads to involvement

Time and time again dads told us that they wanted to be more involved with their baby and to support their partner, but sometimes they didn't know what to do. They felt that knowing more about how to care for a baby, and specific things that they, as dads, could do, would give them more confidence to get involved.

Because of social norms and physical realities, dads can often make more of a choice about whether they get involved with their baby than mums can, but can also miss out on valuable opportunities to learn how to care for a baby. Dads told us that they would be less likely to care for their baby if they were not sure how to. Many dads also told us that they had been scared by simpler tasks, for example, not knowing how to bathe a baby and fearing that they could do some harm (many mums have told us the same thing). There is clearly value in dads being explicitly shown how to do these basic tasks.

The men that we spoke to generated these ideas to get dads involved in baby care:

- A dads channel on YouTube with videos of how to do basic things like bath and change a baby (preferably demonstrated by other dads).
- Ensuring that maternity support workers take time in hospital to show dads how to bathe babies and change nappies.
- Creating an expectation that some tasks, such as changing a nappy, will be things that dads might lead on. This might involve midwives encouraging dads to change nappies by showing them how to do it, and emphasising how this can be a time to interact with their baby. Midwives or health visitors could also challenge stereotypes by addressing any questions about babies' nappies to dads first rather than mums. The people we talked to during the project came up with ideas to support dads in these tasks, such as an app or wall chart to count the number of nappies changed and record babies' cues that they might observe while changing a nappy.



Scanning for opportunities

We know that ultrasound scans are important moments for many dads. In our work, many dads talked about the scan as an exciting time when the pregnancy really became real for them. Academic research too shows that the scan helps men to connect to the fetus – helping the baby to feel real, and for them to see his or her personality.^{xxiii} Parents' interactions and dialogues during ultrasound, and shared thoughts about the baby can help to shape co-parenting relationships.^{xxiv}



Evidence shows us that if parents have rich representations of their baby during pregnancy – seeing him or her as a small person with their own character and experiences - this can lead to better parent-infant relationships after the baby is born.^{xxv} We believe more can be done to harness the potential of scans to help dads build these representations. As the box shows, there are interesting projects around the world using scans to help parents get to know their babies.

Researchers at the University of Turku in Finland are running a project using 3D ultrasounds scans to help mums with substance misuse problems to get to know their baby and develop reflective function (the ability to think of their baby as an individual with his own feelings and needs). In this project, mums are given three additional scans, where the sonographer helps them to observe their baby and think about their experiences, reactions and behaviours. This programme is currently being evaluated, but early feedback is that mums' attendance is excellent and the project is helping them to imagine their babies. This sort of intervention could be incredibly valuable to help dads to build a representation of their baby.

At the moment, we often miss the opportunity to use routine scans to support dads to engage with pregnancy and forthcoming fatherhood. In the box below is a copy of a letter that one of our team received about a pregnancy scan. It does not have a friendly style, and – far from welcoming dad to the appointment - it tells mum that she can bring a ‘chaperone.’ In the second box is another example that we created to show what the letter could have said. **We suggest that scans should always be presented to expectant parents as a chance for both mum and dad to get to know their babies.**

Even simple things can help to engage dad in the scan – for example, we found that the scan pictures can be given in large and feminine cardboard frames. This means that mum is more likely to keep them with her notes. Maybe a small pocket sized frame would enable dad to keep a photo of his baby too?



The actual letter

APPOINTMENT AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREGNANCY SCAN

Name.....[Mother's name only].....

Your appointment is on at

THIS APPOINTMENT MUST BE CONFIRMED PREFERABLY BY EMAIL:

[Email address].....

If you are unable to use email please contact [phone number] or Ultrasound Mobile [number].

You must bring your pregnancy records with you and any consent forms.

A full bladder is not required for any stage of pregnancy scans.

If you feel that you need a chaperone for this procedure you may bring someone with you or if you would like us to provide one please try and let us know in advance either by email or telephone.

A suggested letter

Dear [Mum and Dad's Name]

Your next scan has been booked for at We hope that this is a time that you can both make. Please confirm whether or not you can attend by emailing us on [email address] or calling [phone number].

The scan is a great opportunity for mums and dads to see their new baby and to hear about how he or she is developing. Therefore it would be fantastic if you could both attend. If mum is attending alone and would like a chaperone, please let us know and we can arrange this.

Please bring your maternity notes with you to the appointment.

You may have heard that you need a full bladder for the scan. Don't worry – we can see your baby fine without this.

We look forward to seeing you.

Baby led

Babies are amazing, and showing dads just how fantastic their babies are, and how they can communicate from birth, is a great way to help them to feel confident about early parenting. It's also incredibly important for babies, who need their caregivers to be sensitive to their feelings, needs and experiences, to recognise their mental states and behaviours, and to respond appropriately. ^{xxvi}

Research for the Design Council as part of the Kneehigh project showed that, whilst pregnancy and the first years are vital in laying the foundations for child's development, much of this early development is invisible to parents, and they are not aware of how their children are learning and how they can support this.

In our work, we found that helping dads to recognise that babies are communicating from birth was very powerful. A group of young dads that we spoke to had been taught about babies cues in a dads' group, and reported that it made parenting much more pleasurable for them. There is also evidence from other interventions which backs this up, as shown in the box below.



The Newborn Behavioural Observation (NBO) system is a tool used to help clinicians and parents to observe infants' early capabilities together. It is currently used with new parents at King's College Hospital in South London.

The NBO is designed to build and strengthen the parent-infant relationship. The tool enables parents to observe what their baby can do so that they can appreciate their baby's unique abilities and also see her vulnerabilities and needs.

The NBO helps parents to get to know their baby better, understand babies' cues and develop confidence in their role. Studies have shown that using tools like this with dads encourages them to be more involved in taking care of their baby. ^{xxvii}

One of the fact cards that we created as a prototype idea in the project told dads that babies can't see very far and so need to be held close. This message was very popular with dads: many of them didn't know this fact, and said it would change how they held and interacted with their babies. Many dads also reported knowing that their baby can hear their voice in the womb and liking this.

We know from our services for expectant and new parents that films can also be a powerful way to help parents to recognise and reflect on babies' cues. One of the ideas we generated in this project was to create more films to help parents recognise their babies' early abilities and to tune into their cues and communications.

Some of the men we talked to, whilst in a minority, revealed attitudes or beliefs that suggested that they didn't feel that dads had a role in caring for babies. This demonstrates the need for action to challenge unhelpful perceptions of fatherhood.

“Dads don't have a role to play til they are a bit older, do they? Only a mother can do anything when they are a baby”

(dad in South London)



It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it...

During the project, we talked to men about how they wanted to receive parenting information and advice. Here are the top ten things they told us:

1. The men we spoke to wanted **short, 'bitesize' content**, nothing too overwhelming, just a little piece of information to remember and think about.

“Bitesize facts are best.. snippets are easy to digest and retain”

(dad at focus group)

-
2. Information should be **timely**. Dads wanted ‘nuggets’ of information that were relevant to them at a particular moment. Some suggested having a fridge or desk calendar, app or text messages to tell dads what they needed to know at a particular time.
 3. Dads said that they wanted to be told **specific things that they could do to be helpful**, or things to avoid doing. They wanted clear, step-by-step advice on how to care for their baby and support their partner. The idea of ‘top tips’, a ‘blow by blow guide’ and/or a checklist appealed to many of the dads.

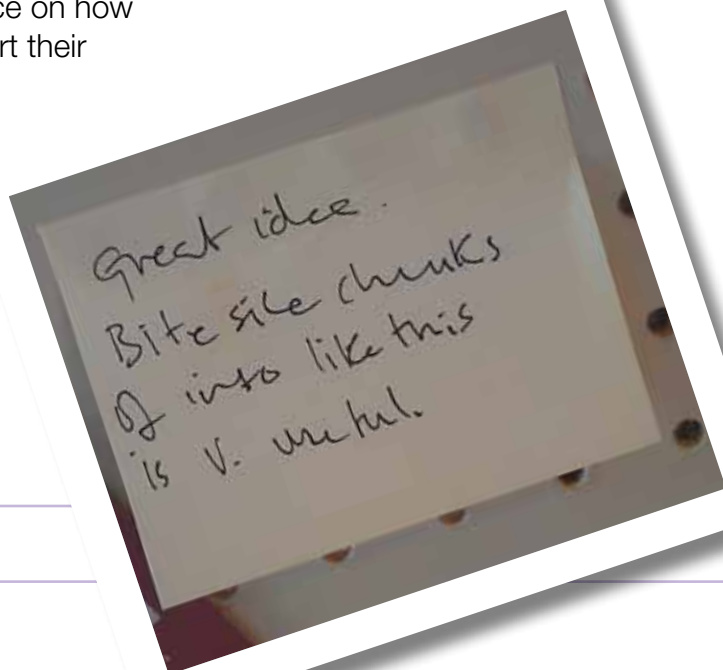
“We want useful information, not preachy advice.”

“What we need is like a Haynes manual for babies. A blow-by-blow guide, with pictures.”

“I'm a problem solver. I just want to know what I need to do.”

(dads at focus group)

-
4. Dads told us that they would welcome **real, peer-to-peer, advice** with anecdotes and reflections from real dads. They said this would resonate and be more trustworthy. They would prefer hearing stories from existing dads about what they had done, rather than being told what to do. We also believe that reading about real dads’ experiences might encourage dads to talk more, and feel more comfortable about their own feelings and concerns as they realise that other dads feel the same.



5. Dads told us that they wanted to be addressed directly as dads and wanted information specifically about their role as well as general parenting advice.
6. Men liked facts. Our prototype flyers included facts about babies which we believed would prompt dads to think about how they interact with their babies. 95% of men who commented on our prototypes said they found the facts ‘useful and interesting.’

Men told us that they could feel more knowledgeable and confident as a result of knowing facts, and that they would share these with family and friends. They also told us that they wanted to be equipped with facts and information, rather than hearing judgement, opinion or instruction. Facts can avoid being ‘preachy’ whilst still being clear about what babies need.



“The advice given on the flyers is great... I like the way the facts are numbered, this would entice me to check out the other facts,”

(feedback from dad by email)

-
7. Dads liked an **informal and relaxed tone**. They enjoyed amusing anecdotes that could ‘break the tension’ during a stressful time.

8. It was important that advice was **‘common sense’**. A strong theme that emerged repeatedly in our work was the desire for realistic advice that recognised that all men and all babies were different and there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution to parenting problems.
9. Dads told us about the huge amount of inconsistent and confusing written and online materials and advice for new parents. They talked about the overwhelming amount of information they found if they tried to get information about their baby, and how much of it conflicted. They struggled to know which advice was accurate, particularly online. They told us about the value of **trusted brands** and of how it would be useful to have help to navigate what is out there. They also told us that it is important for dads to receive information that is **consistent** with what mums receive.
10. Dads wanted resources to be designed in a style that was obviously for them – **a clean and simple style** that wasn’t too babyish or feminine.

A little more conversation

Almost unanimously, men told us that the most useful thing for new dads was to talk to friends with children. Men who were not dads told us that if they found out their partner was pregnant, the first thing they would do would be to turn to male friends with children for advice. A few existing dads talked about meeting other new dads through groups like NCT, and how these had been an important support group. Dads also told us about the importance of their partner, parents and wider family when their baby was born. It was clear that dads preferred to get advice from real people who knew them, and this would be more salient than any resources. A key theme in these conversations was the value for fathers of getting personal information from someone who understood their personality, preferences and context.

We know that men often do not talk about babies or fatherhood. Men without children who came to our focus groups stayed around in the bar afterwards to chat. They said that they hadn't spoken about being a dad before and quite enjoyed it! We believe that conversations about children and parenthood should start in school. Programmes like 'Roots of Empathy' have shown the value of helping children – both male and female – to learn about babies and parenthood.

During our work, we also heard that it can be hard for men to talk about fatherhood. We know from our experience delivering services to parents, that men can find it more difficult to talk about feelings and worries. This is particularly true for dads from more vulnerable families who may have less supportive social networks, but are likely to need help most.

Reflecting on all of this, we felt that services and resources should help dads-to-be and new dads to have conversations with people who could support them.

One idea that emerged during the project was a week-by-week pregnancy and baby wall calendar which could be visible in parents' houses. We hoped that this may be more likely to prompt conversations and could also encourage other family members and friends to think about what the parents and baby need, and help them to understand the latest advice and evidence about babies. We also felt that by including quotes from real dads talking about their concerns and experiences in our materials, we might help dads to realise that their feelings are normal and find them easier to talk about.

Other more radical ideas generated in our workshops included baby themed beer mats to prompt conversations in the pub, and even dad arm bands, which, like a 'Baby on board' badge for women, could let people know that a man was a new dad and perhaps talk to him about it.

Digital solution?

We spoke to men about where they went for information on a range of issues, including about being a dad. The two most common answers were friends and the internet. Men told us that they used both of these approaches in different ways, and both had value at different times. For example, dads told us about how friends could give them more personalised advice, but the internet provided more expert or objective advice. We also heard how men sometimes looked online before talking to friends so that they knew enough about an issue to ‘not ask any embarrassing questions.’

In our focus groups and conversations, dads talked about how the internet is easy and convenient, and allows you to explore any issue without anyone ‘judging you’. Many men liked blogs and forums which enabled them to see real people’s honest reflections on an issue, and how different people had solved a problem. Another team involved in the Knee High Design Challenge, Best Beginnings, worked on the development of a new app, which many dads were excited about.

“We don't want to be a perfect dad. We just need someone to tell us what to look out for to make sure we don't screw up”

(man without children at focus group)

However, dads and dads-to-be also raised some reservations about online information, advice and guidance:

- Many dads talked about ‘information overload’, the amount of conflicting information online, and not knowing which sources of information could be trusted.
- Whilst some men saw the value in online forums, many disliked the idea of seeking or taking advice from strangers and recognised that people who go on forums can be unrepresentative.
- Men told us that they avoided a lot of online advice for dads because they felt that it would be too ‘PC’, ‘preachy’ and ‘unrealistic’. One group described how online content seemed to prescribe to a “DIY dad ideal”, which did not resonate with them.



When we started this work, we anticipated that we might end up creating a modern electronic solution, such as an app, website, or text messaging service. In the early stages we didn't even ask dads about hard copy materials. However, throughout the project, we became increasingly convinced about the value of visible, tangible materials. There were a number of reasons for this:

- We realised the value of conversations between dads and their partner, friends and family. Text messages, emails and websites are generally viewed by one person on their own, whereas materials such as a calendar can be shared and help to prompt conversations and a shared understanding of the situation.
- Men talked about how being given a recommended book about being a dad was a 'right of passage' and a welcome recognition of their dad-to-be status. It had a different symbolism to signing up to an online message system.

- Dads in our focus groups, and those writing online book reviews, talked about how they read books as a way of demonstrating to their partner and family that they are taking pregnancy seriously and want to be supportive, so the visibility of materials is important.
- Men told us how they found books or leaflets easier to read, less authoritarian, and more trustworthy than online articles.
- We picked up some concern amongst professionals about the increasing amount of time new parents are spending a lot of time on their phone, rather than being mindful of, and attuned to, their babies' needs.

It is clearly important that, whilst we recognise the potential of new technologies, we do not forget the value in traditional print media.



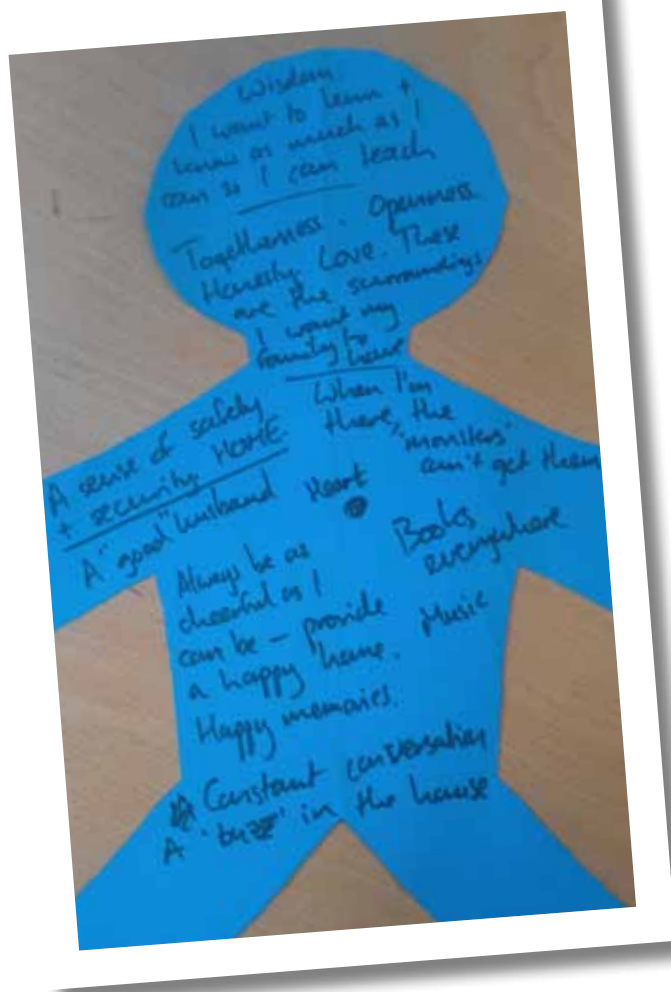
Using mum as a gateway

We initially presumed that to reach dads we needed to create resources just for dads and target them directly. This was partly true: dads definitely liked the idea of advice tailored just for them. However, through our work we realised that many dads access a lot of information and advice about being a dad through their partner. We also heard that they may be more likely to read something that their partner gives them, because they want to be seen to be trying to help. Many online book reviews talked of how mums bought books for dads, and the dads we met at children's centres said they had found out about the service through their partner. We know from our direct services for parents that mums can often facilitate and support dads' involvement in group programmes. This is why we considered how it could be useful for resources for dads to be given by midwives to mums who then encourage their partners to take a look.

Rather than just focus on dads, we started to think more about mum and dad as a team and the value of supporting them in a 'joined-up' way. We knew from the start that it was important to make sure that advice for dads was consistent with what mums might be told by their midwife, but we started to think about providing shared information to mums and dads. Some dads were very keen on this idea – they talked about the importance of focusing

on what their baby needs, rather than making assumptions about the different roles of mums and dads. However others dads emphasised that dads still need to be addressed directly, and the value of 'dad only' spaces where dads can ask questions and discuss their own concerns (which they may feel inhibited to do in front of their partner). Of course, we must also consider the needs of fathers who are not in a relationship with the mother of their baby.

In summary, there is clearly a role for both joint parenting advice and information specifically for dads.



One dad's description of the kind of dad he wants to be.

Conclusion

The Dad Project has enabled us to understand more about how, and why, dads can feel excluded in the perinatal period, and what the consequences of this might be for them and their families. It has also generated many useful ideas and insights about what can be done to ensure that more fathers feel valued, included and involved, and to enable them to give their baby the best start in life.

Drawing all this together, we developed our ten top tips for anyone working with families in the perinatal period (highlighted on page 3).

These are:

1. Think of dads as service users in their own right, not only as mums' supporters. Know, record and use dads' names.
2. Learn about the research around the psychological and social elements of both mums' and dads' experiences of pregnancy and new parenthood. Educate yourself about the challenges they can face.
3. Ensure your communications, workspaces and materials communicate that dads are equally valuable and welcome.
4. Reflect on and challenge your own assumptions and stereotypes about fathers, and seek feedback from dads about their experience of your service.
5. Help mums and dads to understand each other's experiences of pregnancy and new parenthood and show them concrete ways in which they can help each other.
6. Talk to mums and dads about the challenges of new parenthood so they know what to expect. In every contact, ask both parents how they are doing, and listen and respond respectfully to their answers.
7. Teach mums and dads how to care for a baby (for example bathing and nappy changing) and specifically encourage and acknowledge dads' involvement in caring for their baby when speaking to the family.
8. Utilise scans as an opportunity to help both parents to engage in the pregnancy and get to know their baby. Ensure dads are explicitly invited to the scan and acknowledged when they are there.
9. Teach mums and dads about babies' early cues and encourage them to watch and interact with their baby.
10. Consider how you can facilitate conversations between mums and dads, dads and dads, and wider families and communities to help create supportive networks around new parents.

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