

Briefing on Serious Case Reviews

Assessing & Engaging Fathers and Male Figures

This short briefing pulls together research and learning from case reviews where the failure to know about or take account of men in the household and child's life has been highlighted.

A worrying factor of case reviews and audit work nationally is the repeated finding that fathers and male figures are often absent in recording, assessments and care plans. The issue of the role of men in children's lives is a familiar feature of Serious Case Reviews¹. All agencies working with children and their families should consider the role of fathers and men in the households, both in assessments and when providing services. The status and the role of males and new partners in the same household should be understood in terms of their potential for protection and nurturing - as well as any adverse effect they may have on the safety of the child and the mother.

The potential of increased risk of abuse for children living in households where one parent, usually the father figure, is unrelated to the children has also been researched, and whilst being part of a reconstituted family is not a risk indicator of itself, it should be considered as part of a comprehensive assessment.²

The Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE) addresses 'Men and male caregivers' in their Working Together with Parents e-learning [module](#)³. They highlight a number of different but connected issues emerging from reviews in relation to men in families:

- the dearth of information about men in most serious case reviews
- the failure to take men into account in an assessment
- rigid or fixed thinking about men as 'all good' or 'all bad'
- the threat posed by men to workers

Learning from Serious Case Reviews

Peter Connelly (Haringey, February 2009)

Peter Connelly was a 17-month old boy who died in London after suffering more than 50 injuries over an 8 month period. The serious case review drew attention to the risk implicit in not considering fully the impact of an unrelated man joining the household. It set out this out starkly: **"One of the potentially dangerous scenarios in child protection is an unrelated man joining a vulnerable single parent family."**

CN10 (Devon, April 2014)

A Step Father was convicted and imprisoned for sexual offences against his two stepdaughters. The serious case review highlighted the importance of considering **all** caregivers within the family. The review indicated that assessments and support plans tended to focus on the mother's problems in providing care.

¹ Brandon et al., 2008, 2009

² Lawrence M. Berger, Christina Paxson, and Jane Waldfogel, ["Mothers, Men, and Child Protective Services Involvement"](#), Child Maltreat, 2009

³ Parental Mental Health and Families; Men and Male Caregivers.



Child J (Bolton January 2014)

Child J died as a consequence of non-accidental injuries. The serious case review considered the significance of men in Child J's life, one of the concerns highlighted was 'Shadowy' unknown males in the background, one of whom was known to have committed serious offences of domestic abuse against another woman.

This case highlighted the complex issues about the role of safeguarding agencies in making judgements about the significance, or otherwise, of decisions made by parents about their personal and sexual relationships. The issue should be explored for two reasons:

1. the potential risks involved when men in relationships which offer little commitment are involved in the children's lives
2. the particular impact for the children's emotional development on their understanding about who are the significant parental figures in their lives

In this case there was minimal information about what involvement any of Mother's partners had in relation to her children, and this was crucial in considering what approach could have been taken by the agencies concerned, including who might be part of any assessment

Understanding the roles of men in the family

- Consider the role of individuals as seen from a child's perspective
- Any assessment should include information about all members of the household, including biological fathers, new partners or ex-partners who are back in the picture, and others such as lodgers within the family environment.
- Information about who lives in the home and who has contact with the children should be verified and kept up-to-date. It will be important to have an understanding about past history.
- Investigate the identity of any unknown males in the home.
- Agencies should share information about the appearance of new men in a household so as to make them visible to practitioners working with the family or child.
- There should be a comprehensive assessment of the family dynamics.
- The role of every member in the household play in caring for the child should be considered, alongside what risks they pose or what protection they may provide.
- Perceiving men in a polarised way as primarily 'good' men (good dads) or 'bad' men (bad dads) and applying a restricted way of thinking could be detrimental to any assessment and for example discount a 'bad' dad's concern about the welfare of the children in his ex-wife's care.

