



Norfolk Safeguarding  
Children Partnership

TOOLKIT

# Working with mothers to include fathers

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

**2023 Edition**





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



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

**Norfolk Child Safeguarding Practice Review  
AK 2023**



Children’s outcomes and life opportunities improve when their fathers are positively involved in their lives. The quality and level of involvement that fathers have has a significant impact on the quality of life for the child as they develop through their childhood and into adulthood. This is not limited to the impact of birth fathers living with their children, but includes non-resident fathers, stepfathers, and partners providing a nurturing role for children.

When families appear at an organisation’s front door, there is an expectation that father’s details will be collected and recorded. It is not enough to have a family contact telephone number and address; it must be clear that there are contact details for both the mother and the father. If a referral comes from another organisation without father’s contact details, then the referrer should be asked to provide these.

Statistically it is uncommon for fathers not to be involved in their children’s’ lives particularly when they are very young: over 96% are having regular contact at this time<sup>1</sup>. It is essential to make contact with all parents if we are to understand the lived experience of children.

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<sup>1</sup> Where’s the Daddy: Fathers and father-figures in UK datasets Goldman and Burgess (2018)  
<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Wheres-the-daddy-Full-Report.pdf>



One of the sources of contact details for the father is the child's mother. The mother is most frequently the first parental contact for practitioners, and they should work with her to try to engage the father or other parents. Not all mothers will be enthusiastic about sharing these details and this could be for any number of reasons. A mother is not obliged to share the father's contact details under normal circumstances, and if she is unwilling, then it is important that the practitioner is in a position to explain the benefits of her doing so and why we want this information.

1. Positive father involvement improves outcomes for children and quality of the father-child relationship matters more than the specific amount of hours spent together<sup>2</sup>.
2. We are asking because it is an expectation of our organisation not just a passing interest.
3. We work to help them to achieve the best outcomes for their child, and this will always be our focus.
4. Having the father's contact details does not necessarily mean that he has to have more contact with the child, but it is important for robust safeguarding practice.
5. When fathers are viewed by the mother as a negative influence, services have a role to play in improving his parenting capacity and ability.
6. We will always seek to reduce levels of risk for a mother and her children and providing his contact details allows us to support her more effectively.

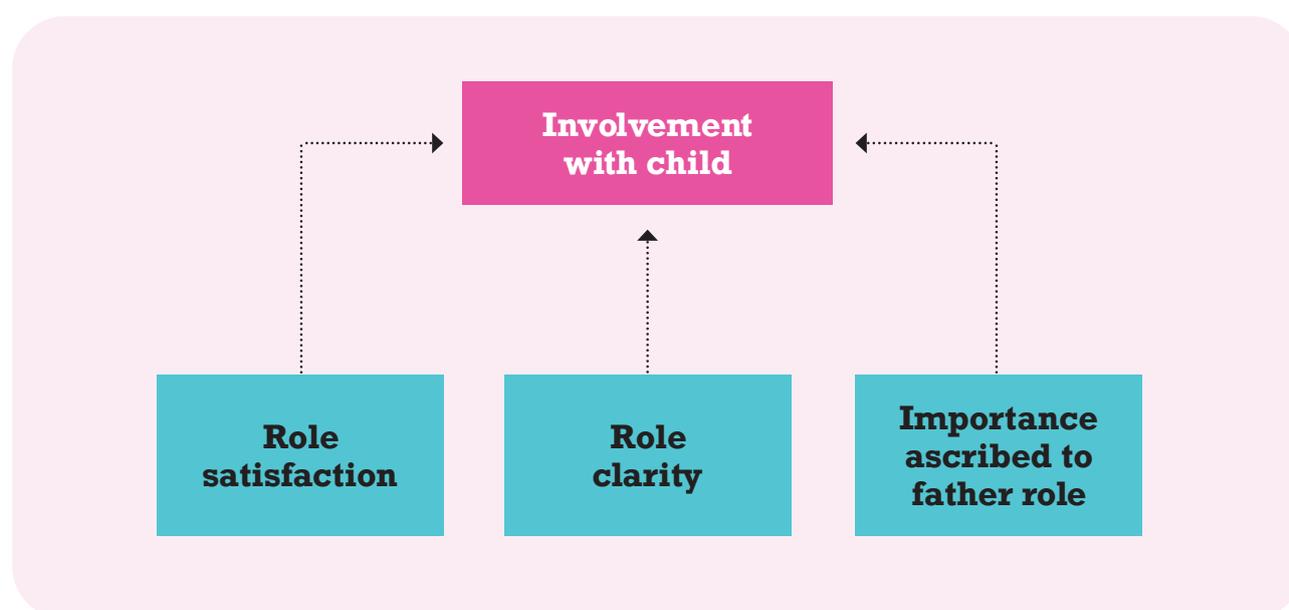
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<sup>2</sup> See toolkit guide: *Fathers and outcomes for children*

When asking for contact details it is important to consider the language that you use and asking, “Would you mind giving me his contacts details?” is very different from “We will need to have his contact details for our records”. In both cases the mother does not have to agree, but the latter includes the expectation that the organisation should have this information.

If the mother does not agree at the first attempt, then it is important that this is revisited once you have built a better relationship and there is a greater degree of trust and rapport.

Fathers usually have as much impact on the child’s development and wellbeing as mothers. Fathers and mothers, as well as professionals, don’t always understand the benefits of the father being actively involved in his child’s life, so it is important that we help parents to understand this. A father’s involvement with his child is predominantly influenced by how he, and those around him, understand and value his input.



It is essential that fathers are not seen as an additional parent to the mother but that they are equally important in their child’s life, especially when their contact time with their child is limited. The quality of the father-child relationship matters more than the specific amount of hours spent together.

When services work with just one parent, they fail to fully understand the child’s lived experience and are not employing Norfolk’s family networking approach. Not only does this fail to understand the child’s lived experience, but it can also place an unfair burden on one parent and excludes the other.

**Working together to safeguard children states that:**

***“A child centred approach means keeping the child in focus when making decisions about their lives and working in partnership with them and their families. All practitioners should follow the principles of the Children Acts 1989 and 2004 – that state that the welfare of children is paramount and that they are best looked after within their families, with their parents playing a full part in their lives, unless compulsory intervention in family life is necessary.”***

When fathers are not visible to practitioners, those professionals should be persistent in trying to trace them and should keep a record of their attempts so that the myth of invisible men does not continue. The inclusion of fathers needs to be a routine organisational and cultural expectation from the outset.







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