

Working with dads and men in families



Blackpool
**Safeguarding
Children**

Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

Working with dads and men in families

Dads (including those who do not live with their children) play an important role in children's development, they 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 the individual parents, their culture and communities.

Men in families include adult siblings, Grandparents, Step-parents, Uncles and other significant extended family members and friends.

Learning from national and local reviews tells us that dads and men in families are sometimes overlooked or 'hidden' in our work to support children and families.

This can limit our opportunities to fully understand support networks around children and families both in recognising the strengths and support that they can provide and the worries or risk that their role in family life might bring.



Why it matters for Blackpool families

In Blackpool, we believe every family has strengths, and that includes dads and men in families.

When we build relationships with dads and include them in support early, children experience better outcomes. Research shows that involving dads can support:

- Stronger learning and school achievement
- Better emotional wellbeing
- Improved behaviour and self-regulation
- Greater confidence and social skills

When dads are included, families often need fewer statutory interventions, and support becomes more sustainable (Bateman, Darwin & Galdas, 2017).

When we don't build relationships with dads, we miss opportunities to recognise and build on the protective role many dads play. This is particularly important in;

- Understanding the whole family story
- Holding men accountable for harmful or unsafe behaviour

Blackpool Families Rock is about working with the whole (and wider) family, and that means dads too.

'Hearing that dads are just as important as mums matters. When professionals show us that we have a valuable role, it boosts our confidence and makes us want to engage more positively.'

Blackpool dad

How we work with dads and men in families

We know that relationships create change. Blackpool Dads tell us they value:

- Being included from the start
- Being valued for their role in their children's lives
- Being given a fair chance
- Feeling respected
- Professionals who understand what might be behind their behaviour
- Honest conversations that balance challenge with encouragement
- Professionals who recognise their unique identity as a dad
- Professionals who are curious and don't make assumptions

Listening with curiosity helps us understand what matters to dads and how they want to be involved in their child's life.

'Understand the barriers we might not always talk about. Some of us have said the upbringing we had makes it hard to talk or that we struggle with reading and writing. Others are dealing with past trauma, mental health, or substance misuse. These things all affect how we communicate and how we take in information. We're trying – but sometimes we need patience and understanding.'

Blackpool dad

Get the basics right

To work relationally, we need to know who is in the child's network.

- Make sure dads' details are recorded (including confirming whether they have parental responsibility) we should always consider dads who live elsewhere.
- Make sure we understand the role that men connected to the family play in family dynamics (consider step- parents, Grandparents, new relationships etc) always having professional curiosity
- Include dads in assessments, meetings, and planning.
- Check assumptions – don't rely on second-hand information about a dad's involvement in family life or their willingness to work with professionals (think about living arrangements/ family time etc)

Every dad deserves the chance to be part of the story.

'Many of us feel like mums get listened to more or get faster responses. It can seem like professionals are "in touch with the mother as and when they want," but we're left waiting or not updated. This makes us feel pushed out and judged.'

Blackpool dad

Understanding the family story

Where there is a more formal plan of support needed using genograms and chronologies can help us to understand the family story.

- Family trees
- Genograms (a visual representation of who is connected to the child) can help us map relationships, strengths, and support networks and to understand any worries or risk
- Chronologies help us understand significant events and patterns over time.
- Impact chronologies can be a very useful tool to understand what these patterns mean for children

These tools support curiosity and better-informed planning.



Planning and decision-making with dads and family men

- Arrange meetings at times that work for the dad whenever possible.
- Consider whether that dad needs any additional support to access.
- Understand their barriers/ wider responsibilities- ensure we fully value their contribution
- If dad can't attend, gather his views beforehand and share outcomes afterwards.
- Write plans that name who is responsible for each action.
- When conflict or complex dynamics exist, consider separate conversations so everyone feels safe and heard.

Co produced plans lead to better outcomes.

'We want people to hear both sides before making assumptions. It's frustrating when it feels like our voice doesn't carry the same weight, and it creates distrust before we've even had the chance to speak.'

Blackpool dad

Be curious about maternal gatekeeping

Sometimes mums may say a dad doesn't want to be involved or shouldn't be contacted. These concerns may be valid, but we must:

- Explore the reasons with curiosity
- Seek evidence rather than relying on assumptions
- Ensure both parents' voices are heard where safe

Our role is to understand the whole picture, not just one part of it.

Reflect on barriers and bias

Blackpool Families Rock encourages us to reflect on our own practice:

- Are we unintentionally overlooking dads?
- Are past experiences shaping our expectations?
- Are we giving dads the same opportunities to build relationships with professionals as mums?

Using supervision and multi-agency planning to challenge assumptions and stay child focused can be helpful to reflect on and address this bias.

'Just having the time to chat, in my case I have no one else to share my thoughts and anxieties with as my partner has Post Natal Depression.'

Blackpool dad

Keep the child at the centre

Everything we do starts with "What does this mean for the child?"

- Will involving the dad strengthen safety, stability, and wellbeing?
- What does the child say about their relationship with their dad or men in their family?
- How can we support safe, positive connections where appropriate?

Children benefit when the adults around them work together.

Managing risk safely and transparently

Some men in families may present risks due to violence, abuse, or harmful behaviour. Working with dads and men who are risky helps us:

- Hold men accountable and offer both hope and opportunity for change
- Understand risk clearly
- Plan for safety
- Improve outcomes for the child

'Think about how things start when you first get involved with us. A lot of us feel like the accusation is instantly believed and that we're judged before anyone knows the full story. This puts us on the back foot straight away and makes us feel like we're not being given a fair chance'

Blackpool dad



Use creative and indirect approaches

Some dads engage better when support is linked to activities. Research (McGale et al., 2011) shows that pairing interventions with things like hobbies, sports or exercise can increase participation.

Be creative – meet dads where they are, build trust, and use their interests as a bridge to deeper conversations.

Meeting face to face; think about how we might see a dad in his role as dad (with his child)

'We appreciate learning techniques that help us communicate better and deal with frustration in healthier ways. Dads describe it as helping them "reflect on behaviour," understand themselves more, and think differently about how they respond'

Blackpool dad

Conclusion

Blackpool Families Rock is about relationships, strengths, and working with the whole family.

When we engage dads with curiosity, respect, and high expectations, we:

- Strengthen children's safety and wellbeing
- Build more resilient family networks
- Support fathers to take responsibility and play a positive role

Working with dads isn't an add on – it's a core part of how we help Blackpool families thrive.

Special thanks go to the Blackpool dads (Dads Matter Blackpool, Blackpool Caring Dads programme, Gateway Academy Blackpool, Boundary Primary School Blackpool) who bravely and honestly supported us to develop this guidance including giving their permission for their direct quotes to be used.

