



# ***Using motivational interviewing to improve social workers' engagement of fathers in child protection***

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## ***Practice realities***

- **Increased rhetoric about father involvement in various sectors - and some progress**
- **Little impact in the child protection field**
- **The barriers are various:**
  - **Fathers themselves**
  - **Mothers as gatekeepers**
  - **Practitioners**



## ***You work in child protection – why engage fathers?***

- **Fathers and paternal relatives are a potential resource for the care and support of children**
- **For most children their relationship to their father is important**
- **Better management of risk**
- **Men who are present in households are crucial to child welfare, whether biological fathers or not**
- **Avoids putting pressure on mothers to do all the work**
- **Caution needed with regard to risk to women and children – not always appropriate to have a man in every meeting**

## ***The (limited) evidence base***

- **Several studies in the last decade or so which catalogue the nature of the problem.**
- **Little evidence on what might improve practice**
- **Little evidence that more engagement of fathers would improve outcomes for children**

# ***Our intervention***

- **A two-day evidence-based training course in South Wales, designed to improve practitioners' engagement with fathers**
- **One day of awareness-raising followed by a day on motivational interviewing**
- **A limited intervention – only with social workers and only a short course**
- **Feasible in the pressurised real world of practice?**

# ***Intervention development***

- **Review of empirical studies on barriers to and facilitators of father involvement**
- **Review of what works in training busy professionals**
- **Consultation and qualitative research in two local authorities**
- **Training materials commissioned from key organisations with a track record on this issue**
- **Further development work by experienced trainers with practitioner credibility**

# ***Mixed method evaluation***

- **Observation of training days**
- **Follow-up semi-structured telephone interviews**
- **Measures of social workers' readiness to work with fathers at the start of the course and two months later (n=50)**
  - **Self-efficacy**
  - **Team culture**
  - **Self-reported caseload**



# ***Day One – awareness raising***

## **1. Laying the foundations**

- ▶ Acknowledge difficulty of role and complexity of issues
- ▶ Establish practitioner credibility of trainers
- ▶ Work with (half) social work teams

## **2. Enhance under-pinning knowledge:**

- ▶ Research evidence
- ▶ Social context (inc. gender relations)
- ▶ Legal framework

## **3. Raise awareness of the importance of the issue (values) and encourage critical reflection on current service responses**

## **4. Begin to examine interviewing skills in relation to case scenarios**

# ***Day Two – skills training***

- **A brief introduction to motivational interviewing**
- **Focusing on...**
  - Principles
  - Client-centred listening skills
  - Readiness to change rulers
  - Change talk
  - Working with resistance
- **Role play**

## ***Results: Self-efficacy***

- **How confident are you that you can.....?**
- **17 statements about self-efficacy in relation to work with fathers**
- **Data from participants at the start of the course and 2 months later**
- **A Wilcoxon signed rank test showed a significant increase ( $p < 0.01$ ) in confidence for all 17 statements**

## ***Results: Team culture***

- **Why teams are important**
- **8 statement about readiness to work with fathers in social work teams. 6-point scale of agreement**
- **A metric of all responses totalled shows a significant increase two months after the course**
- **When each question is considered separately, change over time was only significant for the statement 'In my team, staff are comfortable working with fathers' ( $p < 0.05$ ) the statement 'I myself would feel able to offer advice and consultation to others on work with fathers' ( $p < 0.01$ ).**

## ***Results: Caseloads***

**Questions about categories of fathers on caseload and how many have been worked with:**

- Men whose behaviour puts children at risk of harm (no change)**
- Men living with children who are not putting them at risk of harm (significant increase [ $p < 0.05$ ])**
- Fathers whose whereabouts are known but who are not living with their children (significant increase [ $p < 0.01$ ])**

## ***The challenges of improving father engagement***

- **Too much risk or too much resource**
- **How to get social workers away from the office to attend training**
- **The need for ongoing advice or at least refreshment**

# ***The challenges of motivational interviewing in child protection***

- **Confrontational style is a systemic problem**
- **If telling people what to do does not work, ‘what’s the point of social workers then?’**
- **One day’s training not enough**