



# The Fatherhood Institute: Policy think tank.

We want to see society that gives all children a strong and positive relationship with their father and any father-figures; supports both mothers and fathers as earners and carers; and prepares boys and girls for a future shared role in caring for children.

- To demonstrate and communicate the value of active fathering and co-parenting, particularly in the early years
- To embed father-inclusive practice within organisations that deliver services to families
- To lobby for a parental leave system that enables more new fathers and mothers to share caring and earning

# How we began

- FI was established 15 years ago by three men who all became fathers (of daughters) at the same time.
- The purpose of FI was to create a cultural space where the role of fathers in the lives of children could be considered and addressed.
- The development of a **robust research and evidence base** was crucial to help us to influence policy and to change practice in family services/education/social work.

# The impacts of “high paternal involvement”

- better friendships with better-adjusted children
  - fewer behaviour problems
  - lower criminality and substance abuse
  - higher educational achievement
  - greater capacity for empathy
  - non-traditional attitudes to earning and childcare
  - more satisfying adult relationships
  - higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction
  - (for reviews see Flouri 2005; Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004)

# Children tend to do badly when their father's parenting is poor

- Behaviour problems in children are strongly associated with father-child conflict, or with the father being harsh or neglectful  
*(Flouri, 2005; Phares, 1999)*
- Harsh parenting by fathers is linked with more aggression in children and adolescents than is harsh parenting by mothers  
*(Flouri, 2005; Phares, 1999)*
- When fathers have been clinically depressed in the post-natal period their children (particularly boys) still tend to exhibit behaviour problems and other difficulties many years later  
*(Ramchandani et al, 2005/2008)*

# The impact of a life without dad

When children rarely or never see their fathers, they tend to

- demonise or idealise them

*(Kraemer, 2005; Gorrell Barnes et al, 1998)*

- blame themselves for their absence

*(Pryor & Rodgers, 2001)*

- suffer substantial distress, anger and self-doubt (this is still found in young adults who ‘lost’ their fathers years before)

*(Fortin et al, 2006; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 1998)*

# The impact of father engagement on disadvantage

- Children who live in poverty are very significantly affected by their fathers' interest in their learning and this is particularly true for boys
- In 1992, British sociologists Dennis & Erdos found unemployed fathers' support for their children's education strongly connected with those children's escape from disadvantage
- Blanden (2006) found low fatherly interest similarly predictive – in the other direction: a father's low interest in his son's education, for instance, reduces his boy's chances of escaping poverty by 25%

# The birth of their new baby is a “golden opportunity” to engage dads:

- Expectant and new fathers tend to re-evaluate their own health risk behaviours and make healthier choices (Blackburn et al, 2006; Westmaas et al, 2002; Lupton & Barclay, (97)
- Handling infants generates hormonal changes in men which promote attachment and reduce aggression (Feldman et al, 2010)
- Most mothers are happy with their partner’s presence and support during birth and disappointed with their experiences with midwives, (Diemer, 1997)
- When a father is an active participant in the decision to breastfeed, has a positive attitude and understands the benefits, mothers are more likely to breastfeed and for longer (Swanson & Power, 2005)

# What do we do?

Funded by government, trusts and foundations and donations.

We gather and disseminate research into the impacts that fathers have on mothers/babies/children and on the couple relationship

We influence national and local policy and practice – particularly early education/maternity and schools, and our peer organisations in the sector.

We influence through lobbying, consultancy and training

We deliver courses and resources to practitioners and to couples/fathers.

We take a systemic approach to embedding change.

# How we influence policy in the UK.

- We focus on the key national or local policy we want to change in the UK
- We consider which policy change would make the biggest difference for families/fathers.
- We collaborate with influential people /organisations to help make change happen.
- We build the resources we need to develop to help make change happen – including communications capacity.
- We raise the funds/sponsorship/capacity to make these things happen
- We measure our impact and evaluate outcomes

# What have we achieved?

- Established a political dialogue about leave arrangements for mothers and fathers.
- Influenced policy making and practice guidance for early years services.
- Created and disseminated resources for every new father
- Trained health visitors, teachers, social workers to engage fathers effectively in UK and Europe
- Delivered programmes to dads in schools across the UK to get fathers reading with children
- Developed a programme to train men to work with young children.

# Influencing Policy

- Manage your own expectations of what it is possible to change.
- Create a timescale
- Break things into steps – don't expect to change everything all at once.
- Build alliances/collaborations nationally and locally.
- Simplify your policy goals so that the media/the public understand them.
- Build an evidence base to support your case – including the economic argument.
- Talk to the influencers – politicians, relevant organisations, the press, the public.
- Work from the top and the bottom.
- Measure impact.