

SOUTHWARK FATHERS GROUP INTERVENTION PROTOCOL

Summary

For whom?	Male caregivers of children aged 4-12 in Southwark, including fathers, grandfathers, stepfathers, and those with parental responsibilities. Participants must reside in Southwark or have children attending school there, with an assigned social worker.
Why?	Feedback indicated that universal support available to all parents/carers in Southwark was not meeting the needs of all fathers, leading to feelings of isolation for some fathers. There is research evidence which shows support targeted at fathers and male carers is beneficial for child outcomes (e.g. Rosenberg and Wilcox, 2006).
What (programme)?	The intervention comprises of ten two and a half hour in person group sessions delivered by a trained facilitator. The 10-week programme focuses on positive parenting, improving relationships, working with professionals and child development stages.
By whom?	The founder and main facilitator is Parenting Practitioner: Ben Campbell. Two previous members of the group are now also trained and employed as facilitators.
Where (settings)?	1 st Place Children and Family Centre.
Where (sites)?	London Borough of Southwark.
How?	In person sessions delivered weekly over 10 weeks in two and a half hour sessions, totalling 25 hours of contact time. The groups are led by a trained facilitator.



When?	The 10-week programme runs during each of the three school terms every academic year. Each session comprises of two and a half hours and runs on a Friday morning from 10am until 12.30pm. The period of observation for this intervention will run across three cohorts beginning in September 2023 and ending in July 2024.
Evaluation Partner	The Anna Freud Centre

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Preferred citation:

(Campbell, Ben) (2023): (The Fathers Group in Southwark): Intervention Protocol. Intervention delivered by The London Borough of Southwark’s Family Early Help Service and funded by Foundations. DOI.



Need

What does Business As Usual look like?

There are limited forms of support for fathers in Southwark outside of the Fathers Group. Existing support aimed specifically at fathers includes:

1. A fortnightly 'Stay and Play' for fathers only at the 1st Place Children and Family Centre. This takes place on Saturdays from 10am-12.30pm
2. Support from 'Future Men', a UK charity which offers guidance, specifically for men aged under 25
3. Universally accessed online forums.

Historically in the London Borough of Southwark, fathers and other males with a caring responsibility for children who were identified as requiring parenting support were often placed on universal parenting programmes that tried to meet the needs of all parents. The universal support can be accessed by referral from a professional agency working with children in Southwark, or through self-referral. It can be accessed by anyone with a connection to Southwark, namely, those living within the borough, those whose child resides in Southwark or whose child attends a school in Southwark. It is worth noting that take up with fathers for the universal support is reported by the service to be low.

Why is the programme or intervention needed?

Lack of appropriate support

Informal and anecdotal feedback indicated that some fathers attending universal parenting programmes felt they were not having all their needs met. Similar reports were also heard from some men attending other groups such as the Barnardo's group. Specifically, fathers whose children were currently involved with children's social care felt their needs and wants were not being considered by the professionals working with their children and they were very rarely consulted. The fathers of those children who were in the court process to decide whether the care they were receiving was suitable were more likely to feel that they were isolated from this process and less likely to be consulted regarding plans for the future of their children.

Response to local need

Evaluations from previous fathers groups as well as general consultations with men in Southwark indicated that they wanted a service that helped them to connect with other males who are using a parenting group in the area to help reduce isolation, improve connections with like-minded individuals and most importantly, have an opportunity to have a positive impact on the future outcomes for their children. This included taking full custody of their children, if need be, rather than having their children go into the care system.



Support targeted at fathers and male carers is beneficial for child outcomes

In addition to these reasons, there is a need for this intervention based on research literature into positive outcomes for children and young people. Research indicates that a child's chances of success are greatly improved if the young person has a positive bond with their father based on a good relationship and positive parenting overall. Rosenberg and Wilcox (2006) created a comprehensive user manual, reviewing the literature and research on fathers and healthy development. It concluded that "from birth, children who have an involved father are more likely to be emotionally secure, be confident to explore their surroundings, and, as they grow older, have better social connections with peers. These children also are less likely to get in trouble at home, school, or in the neighbourhood". For a full review of the literature please see the Southwark Fathers Group TIDieR checklist [here](#).

How scalable is the programme?

Currently, this intervention targets fathers, grandfathers, stepfathers and men who have caring/parental responsibilities for children aged between 4 – 12 years old with an allocated social worker. If expanded nationally, the target population would be all fathers and male carers involved with children's social care in England.

The intervention is open to fathers from all backgrounds and cultures. Fathers from minoritised ethnic backgrounds are encouraged to participate by the facilitator and by including topics that encompass a wide range of perspectives. For example, 'discipline' is discussed in one of the sessions and encourages reflection on a father's own background, societal norms and upbringing. Topics that are included in the sessions are discussed further on in the protocol.

This research aims to review some of the challenges and opportunities relating to the scaling up of the Fathers Group currently facilitated in Southwark. In order to scale up this programme and provide it in other areas of the country, significant time and resources would be required to train facilitators that have the knowledge and enthusiasm to deliver this programme to ensure the best outcomes possible for participants. Experience in delivering this group within Southwark has indicated that those who are referred to the Fathers Group tend to wish to engage more with male facilitators and this needs to be considered when thinking about the idea of scaling up this intervention. As well as this, the engaging of fathers in a meaningful way has often been a difficult process and one that requires a dedicated and enthusiastic team of people. This Fathers Group has been running in some form since 2015. Since its inception, significant time and energy has been invested in promoting this group, ensuring that partner agencies and Children's Services are aware of the programme and see value in making referrals. In order to ensure that any scale up of the Fathers Group is possible, significant time and resources need to be provided to not only engage the fathers that would benefit from the intervention, but also to engage partner agencies to understand the importance of the Fathers Group to any current or future family planning.



Steps are being taken as part of the evaluation to gauge interest in other local authorities (LAs). This is being conducted in the form of a scoping survey whereby LAs list their current provisions and interest in the intervention.

Intervention

What does the programme or intervention aim to achieve?

The aims of the Fathers Group are set out according to the group's [website](#) and are underpinned by the intention to support fathers. As outlined in the logic model¹ developed as part of a previous self-evaluation, the intervention is expected to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Improved relationship with partner and ability to co-parent
2. Decrease in the number of domestic abuse incidents
3. Improved parental skills
4. Childs development needs are met
5. Improved relationship with child
6. Increase in number of fathers with duty of care in the borough
7. Increase in number of positive male role models in the borough
8. Decrease in number of looked after children.

Based on previous interviews with fathers from the PINE evaluation, other outcomes that may be influenced by the intervention are:

1. Improvement in parenting confidence
2. Improvement in the working relationship between fathers and the social workers and other professionals involved in the lives of their children
3. Reduction in isolation and improved awareness of services available in the local area
4. Increasing willingness to access support as soon as possible.

Who is expected to benefit from this programme?

The participants of this intervention are fathers, grandfathers, stepfathers and men who have caring/parental responsibilities for children aged between 4 – 12 years old. Participants must live in Southwark and/or their children live or attend school in Southwark. There should also be an allocated social worker to the family. Fathers will be referred to the group via existing pathways in Southwark Children's Social Care, other professionals, the courts, or self-referral. All those who accept taking part in the Fathers Group intervention during one of the three cohorts starting Autumn 2023, January 2024, and Spring 2024, are eligible to take part in the study. Group participants that are referred to the Fathers Group, but do not engage or drop out for any reason

¹ <https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Southwark-Parenting-Group-PINE.pdf>



are automatically placed on the waiting list for the subsequent groups in the future. Aside from not meeting the inclusion criteria, there are no specific exclusion criteria.

Other indirect beneficiaries include the children, partners, co-parents of the men as well as the social care professionals that work with them.

For a list of mitigations designed to improve accessibility to the intervention, please see 'Risks to Inclusivity' table [here](#).

What is the programme or intervention?

Each Fathers Group comprises of ten two and a half hour in-person sessions delivered at the 1st Place Children and Family Centre in the London Borough of Southwark. Fathers attend one session per week at the same time and venue. Each Fathers Group is run and completed during the three school terms.

Weekly themed sessions

The intervention involves a weekly session which is focused on a particular theme relevant to parenting. For a detailed list of what is covered in each session, please see [Appendix A](#).

The session begins with a 'Check In' that is designed to allow each man to share something about themselves, such as one thing that went well that week and one struggle or worry they have regarding their parenting. This allows the men to get some solutions to their own issues, but also allows them to problem solve with the other group members. By helping participants to realise that a lot of the issues they face are similar to other men, the 'Check In' aims to reduce feelings of isolation and improve the bonding between the group.

After the 'Check In', there is a half-hour break where participants are provided with light refreshments. This gives participants the opportunity to continue to bond over food and to either talk about other subjects or continue previous discussions. Often, continuing discussions of topics just raised is an excellent way to expand ideas more, and allows each of the men to share their views or thoughts in an even more informal manner

The final part of each group session focuses on providing participants with some information about parenting and improving their relationship with their children. Each session has a plan of work to be presented and includes themes on:

- Discipline
- A day in the life of a social worker
- Child development
- Conflict with children, mothers of children and other loved ones
- Mental health for children and fathers
- Internet safety
- Fathers and the importance of being assertive not aggressive.



Access to individual sessions with a lawyer

Participants traditionally have had access to a pro bono lawyer who offers two or three individual sessions incorporated within each Fathers Group. The time for each session depends on the demand as well as the time that the lawyers are available. These sessions are offered outside of the main group room so that each man can have complete freedom to discuss any issue they have relating to child and family law confidentially. The exact discussions during these legal sessions are not divulged to the facilitators of the group. These sessions are provided free of charge, although if the participant wishes the lawyer to represent them in court, charges are then applied and are dealt with privately between the individual father and lawyer. In recent times, the availability of lawyers has been a challenge due to their own time restraints as well as the cost implications involved. Unfortunately, for the past few terms, these lawyers have been unable to attend the group onsite, although when this is the case, fathers that engage in the group are able to access the same legal services over the telephone. These telephone consultations are free and will provide those that use the service with a good understanding of the presenting issues as well as an idea of the legal options at their disposal. Further work is required to ensure that there is access to consistent and free legal support for the fathers that access the Fathers Group, but it is hoped that this service will be available as soon as possible.

Celebration ceremony

The intervention is concluded with a celebration ceremony for all those that completed the programme (that is, anyone with higher than 70% attendance and engagement). At the celebration ceremony, food and refreshments are provided for the successful participants, and their family members and other loved ones, where the men receive their framed certificate. This ceremony is designed to celebrate the achievements that each man has been able to make by graduating from the Fathers Group and acknowledge the commitment they have shown throughout.

How will the programme be delivered?

Facilitators

The group is led by a trained facilitator. Current facilitators include Ben Campbell, the developer and main facilitator of the Southwark Fathers Group as well as two fathers who have previously completed the programme and have now been trained by Ben. Facilitators deliver the 10 sessions weekly in-person to a group of participants. These facilitators are now being paid for their time to deliver the programme.

The facilitators' role includes ensuring that each participant within the group is able to share some concerns and successes in their own lives, feels confident and comfortable to do so and that ultimately, their parenting style and delivery is improved by accessing the full group.

As well as delivering the group itself, the facilitator aims to contact each participant on the telephone once during each week of the group to ensure that there are not any issues preventing them from attending in the future or to help if they require any further assistance. This is particularly the case for group participants that did not attend a specific session and did not alert



the facilitator to this fact. Regular telephone contact outside of the group itself is a key component of this group to ensure that engagement is on-going throughout the entirety of the Fathers Group.

Information and materials

Facilitators have access to a lesson plan which outlines topics that should be covered in each session. Most of the session is discussion-based with limited use of materials. To aid discussion, facilitators often use flip chart paper and pens to record key points from the discussion. For example, flip chart paper is used to record and display the agreed rules of the group. This ensures that any rules that the participants want for the group are recorded accurately and then displayed on the wall during each session. These rules are displayed in an obvious place to ensure that the participants are aware of them and this will hopefully encourage all members of the group to respect the rules and abide by them. As well as this, group members are always asked to review the group rules to ensure they are still relevant and are also able to change or add a rule should there be reason to do so.

Whilst there is a specific lesson plan for the Fathers Group (see Appendix A), to ensure the integrity of the programme very little written information is provided to the men during the group. This is because feedback from previous participants indicated a preference for discussion based, informal learning as well as the fact there can be no or limited literacy skills among a proportion of participants.

Data

Southwark Fathers Group do not currently collect any additional data as a standard part of the intervention other than information collected via initial referral forms which are then added to the Southwark case management system (Mosaic).

What is the schedule for set-up and delivery of the programme?

Delivery of the Southwark Fathers Group began in 2015. Delivery of the Group follows a cohort model where a new cohort of fathers begin at the start of each academic term.

For this evaluation, delivery will be monitored across one academic year. This will begin in the first school term (September 2023) and will end in the final school term (July 2024), meaning there will be a total of three cohorts. After July 2024, Southwark Council will continue to deliver the Fathers Group. There are currently no plans to roll out the intervention further to other local authorities.

For a full schedule for the delivery of the programme, please see the [Timeline](#) included in this protocol.

Where will the programme be delivered?

The Southwark Fathers Group takes place within the 1st Place Children and Family Centre, located within the borough. The Southwark Fathers Group has been delivered in Southwark since 2015.



Funding for delivery is anticipated to continue after the conclusion of this evaluation and currently there are no plans to discontinue the group in Southwark.

What variations from the core model, if any, are planned?

There will not be any local variations of this model as it is currently only being delivered in one local authority (Southwark).

There may occasionally be variation of delivery of the intervention across different cohorts. There is a lesson plan which sets out the content and order of sessions to be delivered over the 10-week course (see Appendix A). The overall lesson plan is very unlikely to be changed within the first three sessions, as these sessions are designed to help the participants engage with the group itself and understand what sort of father they are and what sort of father they wish to become. If these initial lessons plans are changed too much, the integrity of the programme and engagement of the participants may be compromised. However, there is certainly a degree of flexibility in the order in which the remaining sessions are delivered based on the needs of the participants. For example, if during a “Check In”, a participant has a series of questions pertaining to an aspect of the programme that is not due to be discussed that day, there is an option to change the planned section of the programme and replace it with the part of the programme that relates to their questions if the facilitator and a majority of group members agree it would be suitable. Any lesson plans that were replaced will then be fitted into the group sessions at a later date. As a result, Fathers Groups may vary from cohort to cohort in terms of the order that lessons are delivered, but overall will still cover the same material.

The ‘Check In’ is likely to be slightly different each week and within each group. This is because, whilst the questions remain the same throughout, the answers provided can change depending on the fathers present and what they decide to share. Occasionally, some sessions may deviate from the lesson plan and take the shape of topics raised at the ‘Check In’ if the group decides this would be more helpful. For example, some fathers may want to discuss if they have experienced a similar issue and what methods they used to manage the situation. This flexibility can increase bonding and reduce feelings of isolation for fathers, as well as benefitting the session facilitator where moving onto something completely different could be challenging.

What quality assurance systems are in place?

Given that the facilitator of this intervention is also the developer of the intervention, there is slightly less need for formal quality assurance systems to be in place given the fact that the facilitators are present for the entirety of each session. Risks and mitigations can be found further down in the section on Development Processes.



Theory of Change & evaluation questions

Does the intervention work?

There have not been any impact evaluations of the Southwark Fathers Programme. A previous self-evaluation completed by Southwark with the support of the What Works for Children's Social Care PINE (Practice In Need of Evidence) team concluded that the majority of those that completed the Fathers Group felt that this intervention worked for them. Fathers reported feeling more positive and confident about their role as a father and had better communication with others as a result of being part of the intervention. Fathers enjoyed the format of the group and the opportunity to engage in a process that focused solely on the experiences of being a father in a male only environment.

Emerging evidence in the form of short questionnaires and verbal feedback during graduation ceremonies supports the findings from the self-evaluation mentioned above. Feedback has indicated that when a father completes the Fathers Group in Southwark, he feels more aware about his role as a father, more able to work in collaboration with the professionals involved with the lives of their children and feels that the functioning of family life has improved. Also, fathers that have completed the Fathers Group report feeling less isolated within their community and feel more confident to actively participate in the lives of their children.

Other research on similar fatherhood interventions provides some evidence of promise. An integrative review on fatherhood intervention research found some of the most effective interventions were those that contained components such as focusing on interpersonal interaction either between the father and the child or the father and mother as well as child development, and parenting skills (Henry et al., 2020). All of these are components of the Southwark Fathers Group. The review also found that the most effective fatherhood interventions were those delivered in the community - as with the Southwark Fathers group.

As discussed in the evaluation protocol, the wider research literature supports the use of such an intervention for fathers.

Does the intervention work as intended?

Considering whether this intervention works as intended pertains to the mechanisms it employs. By mechanisms, this refers to how a participant may think or feel during an intervention, as well as what they do.

The delivery of the group encourages a focus on peer-to-peer support which is important for fathers to encourage them to talk openly and honestly about their concerns and fears. Support provided by the facilitator and their peers is designed to reduce feelings of isolation and increase feelings of support and safety for participants.



An example mechanism for this intervention involves the ‘Check-In’ which happens at the start of every session. Engaging in this check-in activity enables participants to feel less isolated with their difficulties as a father and to feel confident and comfortable to discuss these issues in an open and strengths-based environment.

The second part of each session focuses on subject specific psychoeducation. For example, parenting techniques designed to improve the lives of their children as well as their skills as a father. There is a particular focus on the importance of clear communication, discipline strategies that encourage improvements in the child/father relationship and focus on positive strategies such as praise, rather than more punitive methods of discipline. The materials and sessions also ensure that participants have a good and practical knowledge of child development which enables an increase understanding of the impact of domestic abuse, and can have a significant impact on how fathers should behave around their children. These sessions should give fathers an improved understanding of their own behaviours and motivations, which allows them to be more open to change.

A key session in the Fathers Group is called “A Day in the Life of a Social Worker” which has been designed specifically to bridge the gap between the fathers themselves and the professionals that work with their children. Poor working relationships between fathers and professionals (especially social workers) has been a long-standing issue within Southwark and this often leads to poorer outcomes for families. This particular session encourages participants to understand the behaviour and decision making of professionals and how they themselves can appropriately engage and contribute to these interactions.

As a result of these activities, other mechanisms will include participants reflecting on how they currently parent, how they interact and communicate with partners, children and practitioners, how they consider elements of parenting such as discipline and gaining confidence in their parenting skills.

Does the intervention work differently in certain conditions?

People

As a result of this eligibility criteria, the participants come from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences, and different referral routes to the group. It has been acknowledged that with different cultural backgrounds, such as fathers from minoritised ethnic families, there may be varying degrees of confidence upon joining the group, as well as varying conceptualisations of fatherhood, such as differing views on physical punishment and different societal norms. To accommodate this, the sessions always contain topics that deal directly with these issues, such as Week 3’s session on discipline or Week 6’s session on overcoming conflict with children. In addition, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to ensure that, despite these differences, all group members work together in unison and are able to learn from each other in a calm and encouraging environment.

The Fathers Group may also work differently depending on a father’s referral route to the group. Some fathers are referred from professionals or the courts where there is an expectation to complete the group whereas others may have self-referred. The facilitator observed that those who



are expected to complete the group often get more out of the experience. They also noted that those who self-refer are often looking for initial reassurance they are doing a good job and then may be influenced to continue improving so as not to become similar to those perceived to be in a more difficult position.

Places

The Fathers Group has been run out of the 1st Place Children and Family Centre in Southwark for the past four years. This is because fathers have previously indicated that this space is perceived as being “non-threatening” and that they feel welcomed when entering this space. The 1st Place Children and Family Centre has a specific ethos shared with the Fathers Group; that fathers need their own space to get support around their role as a parent and that fathers in general need to be supported as much as possible to be an active and engaging presence in the lives of their children. This children’s centre also provides a free of charge crèche space for those that need it, provides space for light refreshments and food and is overall a family friendly environment that encourages men to continue to access the centre on a weekly basis. Previous locations did not suit the group so well.

Does the intervention deliver value for money?

A cost-benefit analysis will not be included as part of this evaluation.

Development process

Direct practice staff

The lead facilitator Ben Campbell was involved in the creation and design of the intervention in 2015. This was based on training Ben received on the delivery of various parenting programmes already in existence. Ben also received lengthy training facilitated by Respect UK, a leading agency in the UK who provide on running groups for men and the best ways of engaging men in a positive and meaningful manner.

Beneficiaries

Over the following few years, the programme was updated according to feedback from participants. Feedback was provided in the form of short questionnaires after successful completion of the project and verbal feedback at graduation ceremonies. An example of such refinement included using less written material and resources as some fathers reported struggling with this due to a lack of literacy skills.



Organisations expected to refer beneficiaries to the programme

Other stakeholders engaged include Children's Social Care in Southwark, who complete referrals for men into the Fathers Group. This is done via a referral form via the database used in the borough called Mosaic.

Project management

Roles and responsibilities

Team member	Roles, responsibilities & experience
Ben Campbell	Parenting Practitioner, Southwark Family Early Help. Group intervention facilitator and support to evaluation
Victoria Agnew	Head of Family Early Help Service, London Borough of Southwark- institutional support to Group and evaluation

Timeline

Dates	Activity	Staff responsible/ leading
September 2023	Recruitment of first cohort	Southwark Fathers
December 2023	Post treatment data collection of first cohort	Anna Freud
January 2024	Recruitment of second cohort	Southwark Fathers
February- March 2024	Design and dissemination of a local authorities survey	Anna Freud
April- July 2024	Recruitment of third cohort	Southwark Fathers
August- October 2024	Conclude data collection Begin data analysis Conduct literature search to inform future cost analysis	Anna Freud



October 2024- February 2025	Finalise data analysis Finalise report and outputs	Anna Freud
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Project risks

Risk	Impact of the risk from 1 (low) to 3 (high)	Mitigation
Possibility of not recruiting enough fathers	1	Southwark Fathers Group have extensive experience recruiting fathers to take part in the Group and in a previous initial evaluation of the intervention. The Group will be delivered over three cohorts, allowing learning from the first to inform the subsequent approach to recruitment for the remaining cohorts.
Heavy reliance on a single practitioner for delivery of the intervention	2	Currently, the intervention is delivered by one practitioner (with support from additional facilitator(s)) and there is heavy reliance on him to recruit and facilitate the Group. This creates a risk for the sustainability of the programme if this practitioner became unavailable to deliver the sessions. This will be mitigated somewhat by the fact that new facilitators who previously completed the Fathers Group are in the pipeline to be trained by the current facilitator.
Potential for attrition	2	Previously, on average around 70% of fathers have completed the Group which suggests low rates of attrition could be expected. To mitigate this further, the facilitator of the group communicates by text with fathers in the days before a session and follows up if a session is missed.
Plans to train two new facilitators who were previous participants of the programme could impact fidelity	2	Adding in new facilitators where there has previously only been one does have some potential to impact fidelity, particularly if they are introduced part way through the programme. This will be mitigated by a thorough training programme for the two facilitators and regular contact with the evaluation partner to update on when and how new facilitators are being used.

Safeguarding risks

The facilitator of the Fathers Group as well as the staff at the Children and Family Centre are trained and skilled at recognising safeguarding concerns as well as ensuring that these



safeguarding concerns are treated in the most appropriate manner to ensure that the likelihood of any harm to any child is mitigated. The role of the facilitator of the Fathers Group as well as the staff at the Children and Family Centre will be to ensure any safeguarding concerns are dealt with in the short term and the correct information is disseminated to the right lead professional.

Social workers that refer participants to the Fathers Group will remain as the lead professional in all of those cases. As a result, it will ultimately be their role to ensure that any highlighted safeguarding concerns are adequately dealt with to ensure that the likelihood of harm is reduced. All professionals working with all agencies involved with the Fathers Group will have high levels of training to respond to any safeguarding concerns that may emerge and will have the right skills to inform those that need to know this sort of information.

Risks to inclusivity

The Fathers Group is inclusive by being accessible to any male carer in Southwark with involvement in children’s social care.

Risk	Potential impact	Mitigation
English language ability	Southwark is a diverse borough and many of the men that attend the Fathers Group will not have English as a first language. As a result, some of the men do not feel comfortable speaking English if this is not their first language. Due to the diversity of people living in Southwark, the Fathers Group is experienced in delivering to Fathers with a variety of first languages.	Where appropriate, an interpreter who matches the language and dialect of the participant(s) will be involved in the sessions. Materials for the sessions will be adapted and translated to meet the language ability of participants. Budget adjustments for delivery have been made to accommodate the adjustments for fathers with English as an additional language.
Age	History indicates that those fathers under 25-years old often struggle to engage with the Fathers Group due to fears, such as a lack of confidence, associated with their age. They can at times feel intimidated by the group setting and meeting fathers older than them.	Historically, slightly more effort from the facilitator is required to engage younger participants. Meetings (1:1) in the community prior to the group starting appear to be the best way of gaining engagement. Once young fathers attend the first session, they tend to engage for the whole of the process.
Socio-economic class and income	Southwark is incredibly diverse and as such houses people from a variety of socio-economic classes. The Fathers Group is designed to work with fathers	Southwark are able to assist men who have limited or no funds to travel to the venue with bus passes, etc. to ensure that they can



	<p>across this perceived class system and engagement in this group should not be prevented due to having a lower socio-economic class</p>	<p>still access the group regardless of whether they have the finance to attend.</p>
<p>Disability</p>	<p>Those with significant disability are still able to access the Fathers Group.</p>	<p>The venue for the Fathers Group has complete disability access. Those in wheelchairs or with other walking aids are able to access the training room as there are no stairs or other barriers in the way. Those that have issues with sight or hearing are provided with interpreters where required and no concerns have been noted to date</p>
<p>Ethnicity</p>	<p>Some fathers of differing ethnicities may feel that they do not belong at the group or the fathers group “is not for them”</p>	<p>Ethnicity and how it relates to being a father is a large part of the Fathers Group, especially in the first few sessions. Fathers are encouraged to take pride in their backgrounds and use their backgrounds to encourage their children to be proud of their heritage. Group rules are established in the first session and always discuss the fact that we are all different and that we can learn a great deal from each other’s difference. Respecting all people and their ethnicities is at the forefront of these group rules. Any infringements of these rules will be raised with the individual and continual breaking of these rules could ultimately result in expulsion from the group altogether.</p>
<p>Religion or belief</p>	<p>Variations in views around the idea of fatherhood and how this sits within various religions could be a barrier to inclusion if things discussed in the group are not congruent with the views of a particular participant</p>	<p>People with differing views and beliefs are always welcome within the Fathers Group and the participants are encouraged to discuss these views in relation to being a father in modern day society. Difference is encouraged in the group and respectful debate is at the forefront of any peer-to-peer learning that may occur as long as views are shared with respect and in line with the group agreements.</p>



<p>Gender</p>	<p>The Fathers Group focuses on supporting those that identify as a male carer.</p>	<p>The Fathers Group was initially set up to ensure that those identifying as male carers get adequate support to ensure that they can meet their full potential.</p>
<p>Sexual orientation</p>	<p>For some, this Fathers Group may appear to focus on fathers who are part of a heterosexual relationship only.</p>	<p>This Fathers Group is for all people that identify themselves as a male carer and sexuality is not a criteria for attending. In the past, the Fathers Group has had participants from a variety of sexual orientations and family arrangements all of whom have indicated that they have been made to feel welcome and included.</p>
<p>Gender reassignment</p>	<p>For some, this Fathers Group may appear to be only for those who are biologically considered to be a male and exclude those that were born biologically female.</p>	<p>As mentioned above, the Fathers Group is for those that identify as being a male carer. This is regardless of their sex at birth. As long as the referred person identifies as a male carer then they will have access to the Fathers Group. Transgender and non-binary parents will be asked about their views on attending the Fathers Group and any reasonable adjustments will be made to make them feel welcome.</p>
<p>Caring responsibilities</p>	<p>Many fathers have additional caring responsibilities for another person in their family. At present, the Fathers Group is run on a Friday morning and this may prevent some referred people from accessing the group if they have additional caring responsibilities.</p>	<p>Many fathers referred to the Fathers Group historically have had additional caring responsibilities for other members of their family. This is one of the main reasons why a free of charge crèche facility is so important. This crèche facility is available to all children, although traditionally only those under 5-years old attend. The Fathers Group runs during the school day as it is hoped that the vast majority of young people and children will be at school whilst it is being run. This is also the reason why there are no sessions during half term school holidays as it is anticipated that this would be a barrier to people being able to attend.</p>



Bibliography

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Appendix

Appendix A: Fathers Group session guide.

Week 1: Introduction

Topics:

1. Introductions – Check in.
2. Rules of engagement/ Expectations of the group whilst it is happening
3. Overview of the course.
4. Exercise – ‘what does the perfect Father look like’.
5. Meet the facilitator and understand the importance of the group.

Aims:

1. To introduce the activity entitled ‘check in’ and get the participants to understand its importance and structure & To give an opportunity for the dad to discuss positive and negative aspects of their week involving their children
2. To define rules for the group
3. To understand the format of each session/ expectations/ topics etc.
4. To encourage dads to share individually what positive, upsetting and difficult situations they have been involved in and how they felt, how their child felt in these example + Sharing ideas on what is required to be a good dad.

Week 2: Communication.

Topics:

1. What is the point of attending the Fathers Group
2. Introductions and some history of the Fathers Group in Southwark Council
3. What the group will cover during the next few weeks
4. Rules of Engagement
5. Check In –who are you and how are you
6. Communication with children
7. Final thoughts of the day

Aims:

1. To introduce the activity entitled ‘check in’ and get the participants to understand its importance and structure & To give an opportunity for the dad to discuss positive and negative aspects of their week involving their children
2. To define rules for the group
3. To understand the format of each session/ expectations/ topics etc.
4. To encourage dads to share individually what positive, upsetting and difficult situations they have been involved in and how they felt, how their child felt in these example + Sharing ideas on what is required to be a good dad.



5. Introduce the importance of effective communication and its role in creating the best father/child relationships. To focus on communication and the fact that it is not just what is said, but how things are said and when. Introduce ideas around the importance of modelling good behaviour at all times. Also, importance of communicating why father has been absent from life of child (if appropriate) and apologising for previous harm or hurt. Effective communication is the starting point for good relationships with children.

Week 3: Discipline

Topics:

1. Welcome and make sure everyone is well.
2. Discuss the rules of engagement.
3. Discipline- do's and don'ts
4. Smacking our children- should we?
5. Check In
6. Any Other Business

Aims:

1. Continue to use the Check In to get fathers talking about their weeks with their children/ mothers of their children. Improve group cohesion, decrease feelings of isolation and encourage all group members to problem solve with each other and support each other as much as possible.
2. Discuss the concept that we often discipline our children using methods that we felt worked when we were young and conversely, don't use methods that we did not like when we were young. We are often products of our upbringing- this is our discipline starting point.
3. Discuss best practice around how to discipline children and ensure that these methods create long lasting change. The importance of getting children involved in rule making and how this is more effective than more punitive approaches.
4. Discuss the use of smacking. Introduce the concept that smacking is more harmful to relationship than other methods and that Praise is most effective form of discipline.
5. Discuss the importance of accountability and consistency when using various discipline methods.

Week 4: A Day in the Life of a Social Worker.

Topics:

1. Understanding the role of a social worker
2. How do referrals to Southwark get treated and how the process works from a Fathers perspective. Introducing the idea of children's assessments, what are social workers looking for, how do they assess and the importance of getting involved in this process.
3. What is Child Protection, what is a Child In Need, how does the Family Court process work.
4. The importance of getting involved in the process and working in collaboration with social workers



5. The importance of how fathers present themselves in professionals meeting.

Aims:

1. To bridge the gap between how fathers see a social worker and the wider professional network and the professional network itself.
2. Get fathers to understand the importance of collaboration when working with all professionals and the importance of presenting well in meetings as well as engaging with the social worker to get the best outcomes for their children.
3. To get fathers to understand why social workers do what they do, why the system focuses on the needs of the mother as the main carer (in almost all situations). To try and get the fathers to empathize with social workers and see them as a valuable professional in the lives of their children in the same way they view teachers or nurses.

Week 5: Child Development

Topics:

1. Check In- how was your week
2. Child Development and its importance as a Father
3. Encouraging fathers to understand some of the developmental milestones that our children reach
4. Discuss how as our children develop, so our methods of parenting change. The importance of continuing to develop ourselves as a father alongside our children.
5. The importance of father's involvement in the lives of their children and how this promotes development.
6. How development can stop when children are under stress and what fathers can do in these situations.

Aims:

1. To introduce the idea that children develop through stages and the importance of changing parenting styles to match changes in child development.
 - To understand how good parenting abilities and a good child/father relationship positively impacts of child development.
 - For fathers to understand that if children are exposed to harmful or stressful environments, those experiences might have a negative impact on development, which in some cases may lead to long-lasting problems.

Week 6: Conflict- understanding the impact of this on children, managing conflict with our children.

Topics:

1. Check in- how are you?
2. Conflict- what is it
3. Is conflict a normal part of life?



4. The impact of conflict on children and how to prevent this having a damaging effect on our children
5. What to do if conflict has been part of a child's life.
6. How do fathers need to behave with their children and revisiting the importance of effective communication.

Aims:

1. To normalise the idea of conflict- that conflict is used to create shared understanding. To get fathers to understand that conflict occurs in every family and that it is how it is managed that is the most important.
2. Understanding the impact of longstanding conflict and what to do to repair the damage done historically.
3. To get fathers to think about the idea of apologizing for past behaviour and repairing relationships with children that have been damaged through historic conflict. The importance of communicating "sorry" and talking with children around how to minimise conflict in the future.

Week 7: Conflict with the mothers of our children and other loved ones.

Topics:

1. Check In- how was your week?
2. Conflict with mothers of our children
3. Effective communication and conflict resolution with mother
4. The impact of parental conflict on children
5. Child centred parenting vs Parent centred parenting
6. How to we communicate with a partner when conflict has been an issue historically.

Aims:

1. To discuss and understand why some fathers are blocked from seeing their children by the child's mother
2. To discuss how to manage conflict in an intimate relationship and how to continue to co-parent when this has been an issue.
3. To try and focus on the needs of our children rather than the need to continue to argue/fight with the mother of our children.
4. Effective communication with children after periods of conflict in the family home.
5. Effective communication with mothers that do not want fathers to be involved with the children

Week 8: Mental Health for children and fathers

Topics:

1. What is mental health in men



2. Why should men care about their mental health
3. Understanding the importance of mental health for all people and the links to physical health and overall wellbeing.
4. To discuss what services are available for support, but also that these services are stretched and that fathers need to step up to support their children and themselves more.
5. Mental health and children- what is anxiety and depression. The impact that Covid 19 had on mental health for young people
6. How can we help our children if they feel unwell.

Aims:

1. To demystify mental health in men
2. To encourage men to care for their mental health in the same way they care for their physical health.
3. To come away from stereotypical ideals that men should be strong at all times and should “just get on with it”.
4. To get men to model to their children that mental health is just as important as physical health
5. To get fathers to understand how to manage difficulties with their children’s mental health and to continually be curious in this regard.

Week 9: Internet Safety and how to manage our child’s time on the internet, playing games online and the use of social media. Fathers and the importance of being assertive not aggressive.

Topics:

1. What is internet safety and how to we supervise our children on the internet.
2. What does the research say around time spent online.
3. What are the dangers and benefits of being online
4. Effective parenting techniques around reducing time online. How do we strike the right balance between online activities and encouraging other activities in our children
5. Fathers, how we are perceived, how we can continue to be assertive without being seen as aggressive.

Aims:

1. Encourage debates around internet safety and suitable parenting strategies in this area.
2. Trying to understand how a child interacts with the internet seeing as most fathers are too old to have experienced this as a child themselves. Eg. Most fathers would not understand what it is like to be cyber bullied.
3. Encourage shared understanding of the need of the child to access the internet vs the dangers and damage associated with this.
4. Encourage fathers to think about how their behaviour is viewed by others. Ensuring that fathers are behaving in an assertive manner and not an aggressive one.



Week 10: Graduation week.

Topics:

1. Consolidation week.
2. Check In
3. Overview of the Fathers Group.
4. Graduation ceremony

Aims:

1. To ensure that there are no 'gaps' in the father's understanding of the various elements we have covered over the programme.
2. To cement as much of the learning/techniques/theories from the programme as possible.
3. To acknowledge and celebrate the work, learning and journey that the fathers have been on both collectively and individually.
4. Discuss what services are available to help the participants in the future and ensure they are able and willing to ask for help if necessary.
5. Celebrate the success and commitment of each participant. Give out certificates and fathers manual. Gain feedback and often get an important member of Southwark to provide a speech