

The newsletter concerning parenting support for black and minority ethnic fathers

Raising boys

the single parenting dilemma

Many boys are a worry. Media descriptions are of the 'feral', violent and anti social nature in schools, the street and even within the home.




The simplistic view goes, too many are out of control, lack discipline and boundaries and many of the fingers are pointed at parents, but particularly lone mothers and of course absent fathers. No father, no discipline is the cry. However, there is strong evidence that it is the absence of discipline and boundaries and not a father that is the real problem.

Within single parent (lone mothers) households, if discipline and boundaries are maintained well, then boys manage to avoid the Youth Offending Institution and gang. So as long as the absence of fathers is replaced by strong boundaries and discipline, problems are significantly reduced.

This will be a hard argument to take for some, however, most of us know individual single mothers who hold a high line for their sons who do not step out of line, and in spite of the absence of a man we cannot ignore this reality. We also can't ignore that role modelling is complex, certainly more than the 'boys spends time with a man, happy ending'. Boys are as likely to model the opposite of their fathers as they are the same.

communicating are critical aspects of parenting, but many parents find these middle class and white notions of family relations. For parents more used to 'children show respect' cultures or who find verbal communication difficult at the best of times, then 'talk to your children' notions of discipline and boundaries is just not enough! Interestingly, many websites providing parents with information too often concentrate more on the reasons

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Here at Working With Men we deliver school-based preparation for fatherhood courses to Year 10 boys who will often say they want to be a different dad to their own, not the same. So their fathers have modelled the opposite way of parenting that some boys decide they do not want to reflect. This is not to say that fathers are surplus to requirements, but that is another story.

A quick review of websites for parents on discipline encourages us to talk and verbally communicate with our children, often in a 'child-friendly' manner. Now, there is of course nothing wrong with this, talking and

not to smack, than what to replace it with, as though the argument still needs to be made to the majority of parents!

In some respects that might still be the case. After so many years of 'broken families' and 'errand fathers' single mother and absent fathers being seen as the problem it shouldn't be a surprise that many single mothers are on the defensive, reluctant to attend mainstream parenting courses, where the nature of their family and the number of adults in it, are seen as fundamentally the problem (this is before race and culture are added). Reluctance is understandable.

At Working With Men we have been developing a four session programme aimed at single mothers with sons under five, where two of the sessions concentrate on discipline and boundaries (the others on differences between boys and girls, motivation and preparation for school). These sessions often focus more on voice tone and volume, what makes boys tick and very manageable steps for mothers to practice and see the results as well as the more predictable talk praise, be positive and praise some more. Very often these variations have to be demonstrated and experimented with, before mothers can grasp them.



Interestingly, these courses have booked up quickly with mothers wanting places and often saying 'I need this course'. We promote them as opportunities for mothers to learn about their sons and not as parenting courses, the mothers themselves come and want to tell us about their parenting. They don't appear to feel judged in their parenting, because they and we are focussed on getting the best from their boys. We hear about their sons being 'little terrier', 'Damian' and 'wild'. They tell us 'the naughty step' doesn't work for them and they don't know what to do. We offer them different practical ideas to try at home and during the evaluation they always tell us we could have given them more. Most of the mothers recognise that boundaries and discipline are their biggest problem and as

they understand their sons and experiment, they find ways of handling their sons which works for all concerned.

It is the practical skills that seem to have the impact and not the leaflets and wise words.

It might also be that to target some parents a more targeted 'parent friendly' set of approaches are required, that enable working class parents to 'want' parenting courses and not arrive with the pressure of compulsion behind them.

For further information about Raising Boys courses, go to www.workingwithmen.org.

Trefor Lloyd *Working With Men*

Father work across the UK

Health issues with teenage fathers

Engaging with black and minority ethnic fathers or male carers has always been a challenge, but Syed and Mohammed from The Children's Society Bradford have taken an innovative step in engaging teenage dads. In partnership with Ali from Sure Start West Bowling they organized a men's health session and a parenting skills programme. They have found that men are less likely to go to the doctors due to their macho image and thus may have underlying problems affecting their health, which they are unaware of. They have introduced sessions on health through

the parenting programme. This has been a long concern amongst men but now through the parenting session they can receive support and advice on issues relating to their health and well-being.

"I really enjoyed the men's health course, we learnt about diet and what to eat, about sexually transmitted diseases and testicular cancer."



Fathers can learn how to check their own blood pressure and blood glucose levels using special monitoring devices, under the supervision of qualified health professionals. Syed and Mohammed believe that by getting the fathers to do it themselves, is the first step towards motivating fathers to do something to about their health. The session is always a fun atmosphere with fathers always making jokes and laughter. On a more serious note the message is getting across.

“There were all blokes in the room which made it easy to ask questions”

Fathers through the workshops can receive information and help on the following:

- Diet - Healthy eating
- Blood Pressure & Blood glucose testing
- Contraception and Sexual Health
- Men’s health issues including male specific illnesses such as testicular and prostate health
- Helping towards reducing or stopping smoking.
- Anger and stress management.

A recent evaluation of the programme indicated that the men valued the session, that they were informative and made them more health conscious. More than half of the respondents indicated that they would consider reducing the amount of alcohol and cigarettes they smoked. All agreed that the course contributed towards the quality of their lives, mental health and well-being.

“The course has given me many ideas; I definitely would recommend my friend to attend.”



“The carbon monoxide monitor was interesting, at first I felt a bit scared but watching others blow in it, I did the same. You never think when smoking about carbon monoxide. We always talk about tar and tobacco”.

Information exchange

Proposals for joint birth registration

As part of the work to redesign the child maintenance system, the Department for Works and Pensions has been consulting on *joint birth registrations: promoting parental responsibility proposals*. In September 2007, this consultation came to an end. The proposal is to make it a legal requirement for mothers and fathers to register the birth of their child together. In doing so, fathers are given equal parental access. This move is also linked to promoting early and consistent engagement in children's lives by ensuring fathers (especially non resident fathers) are encouraged in their parental responsibility from the start.

In addition to ensuring equal parental status, the proposed legal requirement for the father to be named on the birth certificate as well as the mother (with some exemptions for vulnerable cases) will arguably lead to:

- increased parental responsibility though improving father involvement
- the paying and receiving of maintenance;
- embed an expectation that fathers have clear responsibility to their child;

- identify vulnerable cases that may need interventions to support parenting; and
- lead to a culture where 'fatherhood as well as motherhood, always comes with both rights and responsibilities'

Further information on the proposals is available on the Department for Works and Pensions website
www.dwp.gov.uk/childmaintenance/

At time of writing there is no set date for the response to the consultation.



New name for Fathers Direct!

The Fatherhood Institute (registered charity 1075104) came into being on 7 January 2008, a successor organisation to Fathers Direct - which was established in 1999. The gravitas of the new name reflects the organisation's core business which is to collate and disseminate research on fathers' impact in families, help shape government policy in this area, influence the public debate and provide training and publications to family service providers, to help them develop more father-inclusive practice. The old name had become a bit of a liability: a major problem was that it implied direct action, so staff found themselves prefacing

presentations and conversations with the explanation that we weren't a fathers' rights organisation. However, the real nail in the coffin of the old name was a letter we received from a child who thought we were a direct-mail company and wanted to order herself a father. The Fatherhood Institute can be found at www.fatherhoodinstitute.org.



About the Race Equality Foundation

The Race Equality Foundation is a registered charity working towards better social support and social care for Britain's black and minority ethnic communities. For further information or a copy of our annual review, contact Yangna Li.

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