Father inclusive Principles of Practice

Creating an inclusive culture

- **Embrace a "whole family" perspective.** All practitioners must proactively expect and encourage the involvement of both parents, including fathers, in a child's life. This recognizes their shared parenting responsibilities, within parameters of safety, and their profound impact on a child's health, wellbeing, and future.
- **Use inclusive language.** Always address both parents using their names in correspondence and in all communications. Avoid generic terms like "dad" which can make fathers feel excluded or invisible.
- **Establish a positive tone from the start.** From initial contact and registration, ensure dads feel valued, respected, and welcomed. Record and use the father's name and contact information consistently in all communications.

Effective and accessible appointments

- **Offer flexible and hybrid appointments.** Recognize that fathers may have different work schedules or availability. Provide options for meetings and consultations that work for them, including early mornings, evenings, weekends, or online meetings.
- **Communicate directly.** Send key information, such as reports and updates, directly to the father via their preferred contact method. Do not assume all communications will be filtered through the mother.
- **Be inclusive of fathers' voices.** Actively listen to and seek the father's perspective on their child's development, needs, and interests. Their insights provide a more complete understanding of the child's lived experience.

Proactive and respectful engagement

- **Adopt the "Who, What, Where, Why, When, and How" framework** when conducting assessments or support plans, particularly in line with **UNCRC and GIRFEC principles**.
  - **Who** is the father or male carer?
  - **What** are his needs and concerns?
  - **Where** does he live and work, and how does this affect his involvement?
  - **When** is the best time for him to connect?
  - **Why** is his involvement important (drawing on UNCRC/GIRFEC principles)?
  - **How** can appointments and engagement opportunities be made accessible to include dad?
- **Be mindful of cultural lenses.** Recognize that cultural ideas about masculinity and fatherhood can be deep-rooted and may affect a father's engagement. Take a sensitive, trauma-informed approach that builds trust.

Addressing fathers' needs and promoting wellbeing

- **Create a safe space to ask for help.** Acknowledge that fathers may feel pressure or embarrassment about seeking help. Build rapport and trust so they feel safe asking for support for themselves and their family.
- **Ask about mental health sensitively.** Engage in caring, non-judgmental conversations about the father's mental health and wellbeing. Be aware of common signs of paternal mental health challenges and provide information on local resources and support.
- **Include fathers in parenting programmes.** Actively invite and accommodate fathers in parenting programmes by offering flexible times and clear explanations of the value of their role.

Embedding practice in policies

- **Update agency employment policies to reflect a father-inclusive approach.** Ensure policies and procedures regarding parental involvement and equal opportunities explicitly include and value fathers and male carers.
- **Provide training for all staff.** Ensure all practitioners understand the importance of including fathers and are equipped with the skills and confidence to engage with them effectively. This helps to challenge any unconscious bias and normalize father-inclusive practice.

Universal Caregiver Access & Equity

Services must ensure that essential caregiving facilities are accessible to all parents, regardless of gender, to promote equality and safety for children.

- **Non-Discriminatory Access**: Baby changing facilities must be located in **unisex areas** or provided equally in both male and female washrooms to avoid excluding fathers.
- **Visible Signage**: Clear, gender-neutral signage should be used to direct all caregivers to facilities, signalling that the service welcomes and expects **active paternal involvement**.

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