



Safer Seven

On: Hidden Males



1. Background

Fathers and other significant male family members can play important roles in children's lives and have a considerable influence on the children they care for.

Despite this, evidence shows that they are often ignored by professionals who sometimes focus almost exclusively on the care children receive from mothers and female carers.

3. What is behind it?

Without basic information about significant people, it is unlikely that they will be contacted, and this perpetuates the lack of information.

Reasons include:

- lack of engagement.
- unavailability due to work patterns or other commitments.
- separation/not living in household.
- mother requests no involvement.
- intimidation by the 'significant other'.
- assumption that they will not want to participate.

2. Why does it matter?

An analysis of SCRs and CSPRs by the NSPCC using cases which highlighted the issue of professionals not identifying and/or assessing key men, such as fathers or mothers' male partners, involved in the care of children who died or suffered harm identified two categories of 'hidden' partners who:

- Posed a risk to the child which resulted in them suffering harm; and
- Those who were capable of nurturing and protecting the child, for example, estranged fathers who were overlooked by professionals.

4. So why don't we include "Hidden Partners"

- Evidence shows a lack of information sharing between services. Often practitioners involved with men who are fathers do not share information about potential risks.
- Practitioners rely too much on mothers to tell them about men and other people involved in their children's lives.
- It also found that practitioners do not always talk enough to other people involved in a child's life, such as the mother's estranged partner(s), other siblings, extended family, and friends.

5. So why don't we include "Hidden Partners"

- Practitioners can often be reluctant to judge the decisions parents make about their personal and sexual relationships.
- Overlooking the ability of estranged fathers to potentially provide safe care for their children.
- Failing to identify and/or engage with fathers ignores their fundamental importance in a child's emotional and psychological development.

6. How can you change it?

- During pregnancy and after birth, make active enquiries about the child's father or anyone who may have parental responsibility. From the outset identify the 'significant' people in the child's life e.g., partners.
- Consider the use of GCP2 Antenatal as it could support the engagement with father.
- Consider some people may be using nicknames, aliases, be given false status, for example, 'uncle'.
- When making checks, allow for different spellings of names.
- Use different sources to gather information.
- Use professional curiosity.

7. Further information: [NSPCC: Hidden Men, Learning from Case reviews](#)

More information about Professional Curiosity can be found in our Safer7 on the subject available via the [Learning Zone](#).