

ENGAGING MEN

A Father Friendly Agency Audit

BY ROB KOCH

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TEN REASONS TO FOCUS ON FATHERS

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"When you look at most family support and intervention services across Australia, three features stand out: they are attempting to do an enormous job with modest resources; frontline workers are usually women; and it is mothers who access the services... but most services would like to involve fathers."

Richard Fletcher ('Bringing Fathers In' Handbook, University of Newcastle, 2004 p.3)

1. **Children need Dads who are confident, capable and caring.** Research shows these children will more likely have greater resilience, healthier relationships, better grades and social skills. They will be less prone to mental illness and anti-social behaviour. These outcomes should be a primary motivation to focus on fathers and be communicated to all stakeholders.
2. **Prevention is better than cure.** While we need services that help rebuild the lives of women and children, effort should also be spent on helping men foresee the consequences of passive parenting, abuse, neglect, and marital breakdown before the damage is done. Helping dads become better men who invest in their children, will in turn help their boys become better men.
3. **Men can produce positive change in their families.** Mothers without a supportive partner often struggle to implement new initiatives, direction and healing. If Fathers are included in the intervention they will more likely embrace their role and take on more of the parenting responsibility in constructive ways. Mothers and children benefit, and practitioners may exceed targets.
4. **Today's Dads need parenting support.** There is an emerging cultural norm among younger Australian men to be 'hands on' with their children, and to engage available services and supports. Men are realizing they have lost their way in the wake of the women's movement, multiculturalism and the taboo on corporal punishment. Many men are ready to redefine fatherhood.
5. **Men are more open to learning about fatherhood from fathers.** Masculinity is bestowed by masculinity, but it is often women telling Dads how to be a man and father. Perceived criticism often produces internal resistance to learning, so a female-free environment removes this pressure to perform to expectations and to conform to feminine ideas of fatherhood.
6. **Men traditionally lack positive role models.** They are less likely to have respect for or seek advice from their own fathers on parenting. They are less likely than women to read or to develop support networks. Mates tend to be too task-oriented to care or too cynical to be constructive. The new generation of fathers are more ready to enlist mentors if they are available.
7. **Men benefit from a male-only learning environment.** In mixed parenting classes the tendency is that a male will leave all the talking, engaging and note taking to his partner. But if he alone represents his family in the training there is no one else to take responsibility for the learning. Also, there are less sexual tensions to distract him.
8. **First Time Fathers of infants are most open to input.** Programs need to target the ante-natal and early years, without ignoring fathers at other stages. To neglect this window of opportunity sends a message at this crucial introduction to parenting that his role is not important. Research shows that fathers who engage their children and supports early will more likely maintain them.
9. **Parenting courses exclusively for men are rare.** Where courses have been developed in other places many participants have been willing to travel to attend. But this may not be possible for many men so there is clearly a need for other areas to cater for Dads. The more courses and options available to men the more perceptions and expectations will change over time.
10. **Governments realise the need for more father-targeted programs.** These are beginning to be in vogue, attracting new funding – but not all organisations will qualify. Institutional barriers to involvement need removing; after hours programs, male workers, flexible options, and strength-based activities, overturning the perception that services are run by women for women.

UNDERSTANDING MEN – Developing a profile of your client base



Team/service: _____ Location: _____

Parental involvement ratio (current): Male____% Female____%

Parental involvement ratio (potential): Male____% Female____%

Characteristics age range, culture, relationship status & phase, service savvy, etc

Presenting Issue What are the reasons for involvement?

Attitudes How would you describe the process of attitude shift?

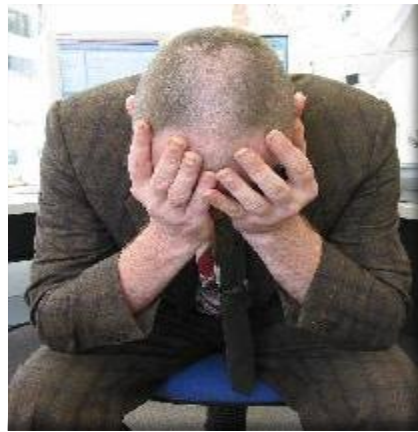
Stage of change Pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance

Values/Concerns What does he value most? What concerns him?

Strategies How does HE typically engage the service?

Response How do YOU deal with Dads? Is it working for you? For him?

Average men today in Australia are under pressure



- ☐ Staying competitive (or even employed) in the fragile employment and business market
- ☐ Providing for the family while balancing work and family and having time for their own needs
- ☐ Understanding the changing role and complexities of parenting in a society marked by change
- ☐ Supporting their partner in an age of increasing stress, anxiety and depression
- ☐ Connecting with their children and partner in the busyness of modern life
- ☐ Managing stress and problem behaviour in healthy ways
- ☐ Accessing the complex welfare and legal system in times of stress or separation
- ☐ Breaking out of the isolation to find real mates and mentors who can help each other really live
- ☐

Besides the intense grief, shame and humiliation of having his family torn apart the separated man is often overwhelmed with:

- Finding accommodation
- Establishing a new household
- Maintaining employment
- Managing pre-existing family financial responsibilities
- Negotiating child support payments
- Loss of friends, family and wider support network
- Accessing technology, communications and services
- Accessing his own possessions
- Negotiating child access arrangements with a hostile ex-partner
- Securing & providing a positive contact experience for his kids

Why do men struggle to access the service system?

A whole range of services are required to assist families through separation:

- Child Support Agency
- Mediation services
- General practitioners
- Mental Health services
- Family lawyers and court
- Counselling
- Material Aid
- Parenting and other supports
- Peer support services
-
-



List the barriers and difficulties a separated man may experience or perceive before he even attempts to engage a service.

Identifying what is NOT helpful before men attempt to engage



- ☐ lack of male staff or male-friendly staff
- ☐ not invited or made to feel welcome
- ☐ absence of visual pointers that men belong
- ☐ inflexibility of hours of operation or event
- ☐ clinical or intimidating environment
- ☐ suspicious, judgemental or deficit approach
- ☐ bias against men in favour of women
- ☐ lack of validation of importance of father role
- ☐ patronizing manner
- ☐ 'pushy women'
- ☐ jargon that marginalizes and dis-empowers
- ☐ boring monologues & programs
- ☐ lack of assistance while 'on hold'
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐



What tips and engagement strategies ARE helpful?



THE FATHER-FRIENDLY SUPPORT AGENCY

By ROB KOCH

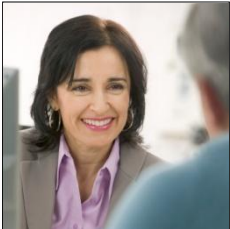
This tool is simply a discussion starter. The following 30 performance indicators compiled from a variety of sources can lead to improving the way an organisation engages men. Some indicators may not apply to every situation.

Circle a number: 1 (poor) to 5 (great) and tally up your score. If unsure or where the indicator is not applicable select a 3.

All our staff...

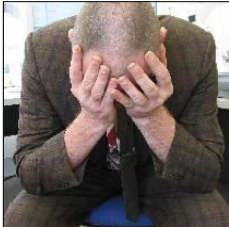


Definite Work Area



Definite Strength

1. ...are convinced that fathers have an important role in the well-being development of children	1	2	3	4	5
2. ...could summarize the positive outcomes for children who have a caring and involved father or father-figure	1	2	3	4	5
3. ...are friendly towards fathers who engage the agency and provide an impartial service	1	2	3	4	5
4. ...use clear and simple language when relating to men rather than using jargon - verbally or written	1	2	3	4	5
5. ...avoid stereotypes and generalizations about men and their motives	1	2	3	4	5
6. ...shake hands with men when meeting them for the first time or greet men from other cultures appropriately	1	2	3	4	5
7. ...make an effort to learn and use the man's first name when addressing them	1	2	3	4	5
8. ...use respectful language and gestures to fathers, particularly from paternalistic cultures	1	2	3	4	5
9. ...affirm the interaction fathers have with their children without being patronizing	1	2	3	4	5
10. ...affirm the devotion children express in their activity toward their fathers	1	2	3	4	5



Definite Work Area



Definite Strength

Our agency...

1.	...has identified the need to support fathers in their strategic plan and communicates this to staff and the community	1	2	3	4	5
2.	...reviews programs and policies regularly to ensure greater father participation in the agency/centre/programs	1	2	3	4	5
3.	...involves some men in the management of the agency/centre	1	2	3	4	5
4.	...has the capability in their databases to document the attendance of men who access services to measure progress	1	2	3	4	5
5.	...has part of their website dedicated to effectively promoting services for men and providing parenting & health information	1	2	3	4	5
6.	...disseminates information and directories of other services for men to smooth the pathways of referral or redirection	1	2	3	4	5
7.	...has at least one 0.6 EFT position dedicated to supporting men in their role as parents or promoting men’s health	1	2	3	4	5
8.	...facilitates or promotes father-targeted programs, support groups and events, including a focus on Father’s Day	1	2	3	4	5
9.	...encourages staff to attend training in father-friendly work practice and programs	1	2	3	4	5
10.	...encourages flexible and innovative work practices and programs to successfully engage men	1	2	3	4	5



Definite Work Area



Definite Strength

Each of our premises & services...

1.	...displays posters depicting positive male images, rather than just negative images	1	2	3	4	5
2.	...has a mix of reading material in waiting areas that would interest a range of fathers and mothers	1	2	3	4	5
3.	...displays photos of activities where fathers and children are interacting positively	1	2	3	4	5
4.	...has family activities that include after-hours and outdoors events to involve working fathers and mothers	1	2	3	4	5
5.	...invites the involvement of men based on their strengths and interests rather than the needs of the agency/centre	1	2	3	4	5
6.	...involves both parents (where possible) in decisions regarding their children, even if separated	1	2	3	4	5
7.	...addresses correspondence to the parent rather than mother to value fathers who are involved or perhaps the primary carer	1	2	3	4	5
8.	...involves at least one male in the facilitation of men’s programs in a team where all can relate to men effectively	1	2	3	4	5
9.	...involves male clients in the promotion of the program or service and in modelling father-child interaction	1	2	3	4	5
10.	...involves facilitators of the men’s programs personally in handling each enquiry or registration to address resistance issues and to create a rapport	1	2	3	4	5

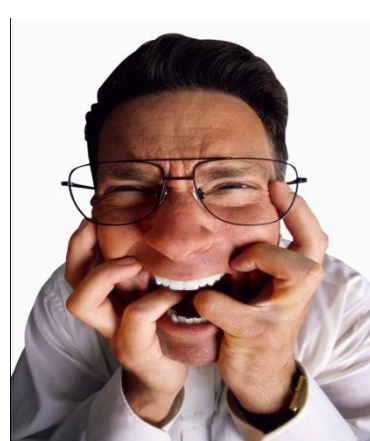
OUR PERFORMANCE...

Date: _____

Tally up your individual scores and average the score across the team

Score:

- 30-60 *No agency could perform this badly, surely!*
- 61-90 *Drop everything and take a serious look at turning this around.*
- 91-120 *Doing well, but focus on two or three issues you agree could improve.*
- 121-150 *Get on the speaking circuit – you are a Father-Friendly Support Agency!*





ENGAGING MEN

DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN

- 1. Name three things that I PERSONALLY could give more attention to in the way I engage men.**

- 2. Name three things our TEAM/CENTRE could give more attention to in the way we engage men.**

- 3. Name three things our AGENCY could give more attention to ensure we are a Father-Friendly service provider.**

- 4. Circle the TOP PRIORITY in each of the above category.**

- 5. What training or resources do we need to achieve the above?**
