

A photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a grey sweater, holding a baby. The man is looking down at the baby with a gentle expression. The baby is wearing a striped long-sleeved shirt and a brown hat. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting.

fatherhood
INSTITUTE

Research – Policy – Practice

Father Time

Dads communicating,
and communicating with dads

Jeszemma Howl

Head of Training and National Development

www.fatherhoodinstitute.org



Why focus on fathers?



What fathers do, matters to children...



Men are not less suited to caring for children than women:

- When similarly supported, men and women develop childcare skills at the same rate; and
- no biologically-based differences in sensitivity to infants (for review, see Lamb et al, 1987) **or**
- capacity to provide intimate care (Parke, 2008).
- The act of caretaking causes hormonal changes in men (as in women) that facilitate nurturing and bonding

Children with highly involved fathers tend to have:

- Higher educational achievement
- Increased emotional security
- Greater capacity for empathy
- Non-traditional attitudes to earning and childcare
- Greater social mobility/earnings relative to parents'
- More satisfying adult sexual partnerships
- Higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction
- Lower adolescent risk behaviour and criminality

(Sarkardi et al, 2008; Bronte-Tinkew et al, 2006; Menning, 2006; Flouri, 2005; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004)

copyright FatherhoodInstitute 2020



Low interest by fathers in children's education has a stronger negative impact on their achievement than does:

- Poverty
- Family type
- Social class
- Housing tenure and
- Child's personality

(Blanden, 2006).



Fathers are there

Who and where are the fathers?

What percentage of parents are in a couple-relationship at the time of the birth?

- **A: 66%**
- **B: 79%**
- **C: 95%**



Who and where are the fathers?

What percentage of parents jointly register their baby's birth?

A: 66%

B: 79%

C: 95%





95% of mothers say they are in a relationship with their child's father at the time of birth

among the **5%** who are 'not (or no longer) in a relationship'

- 10% of the fathers attend the birth
- 25% are still in touch with infant and mother nine months later (Kiernan, 2006)



• 95% of birth parents jointly register their baby's birth



Fatherhood has changed

1950:

8% attend the birth

1959:

51% never get up to baby at night

43% never change a nappy

30% help at home after the birth

1979

22% never get up to baby at night

11% never change a nappy

95% help at home after the birth

1980

91% attend the birth

1990

39% feed infant 'often'

32% bathe infant 'often'

2000

53% feed baby at least once a day

57% change baby at least once a day

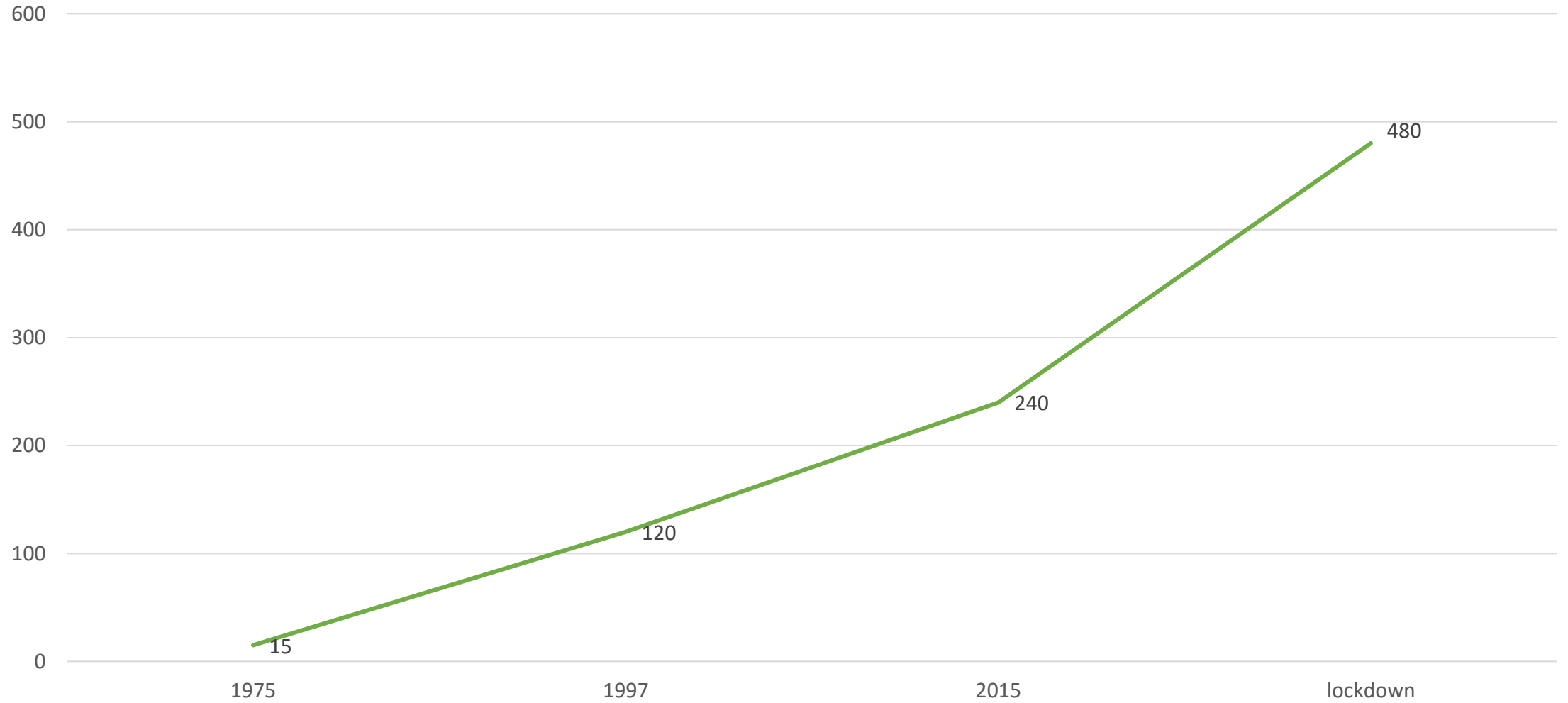
2010

65% change nappies 'a great deal'

72% respond 'a great deal' to their crying babies

By the time their baby reaches 9 months old, a third of mothers say their partner does as much, or more, childcare as they do themselves.

Father's direct engagement with infants and young children



...but we're looking the other way

We still give fathers very little access to time off work when their babies are born:

- Dads get 2 weeks' paternity leave, paid at less than minimum wage
- Fathers are almost twice as likely as mothers to have requests for flexible working turned down (Olchawski, 2016)

The media still talks about the huge gender gaps in caregiving and earning as if women are the only ones who are impacted negatively

Fathers are much less likely to receive targeted support, or to be actively recruited or addressed by family-focused support and interventions

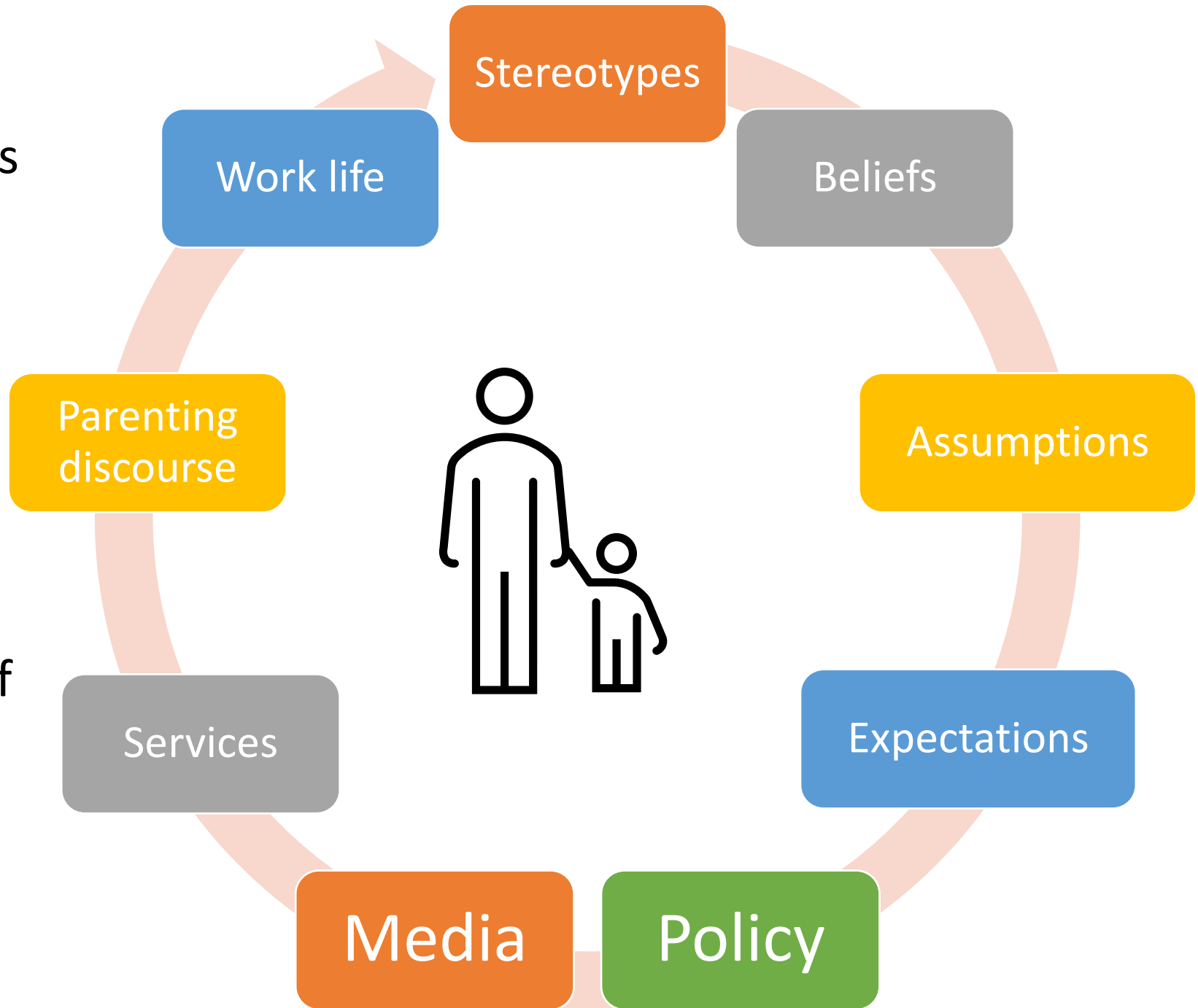
(see Burgess & Goldman, 2018; Panter-Brick et al, 2014; Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2021).

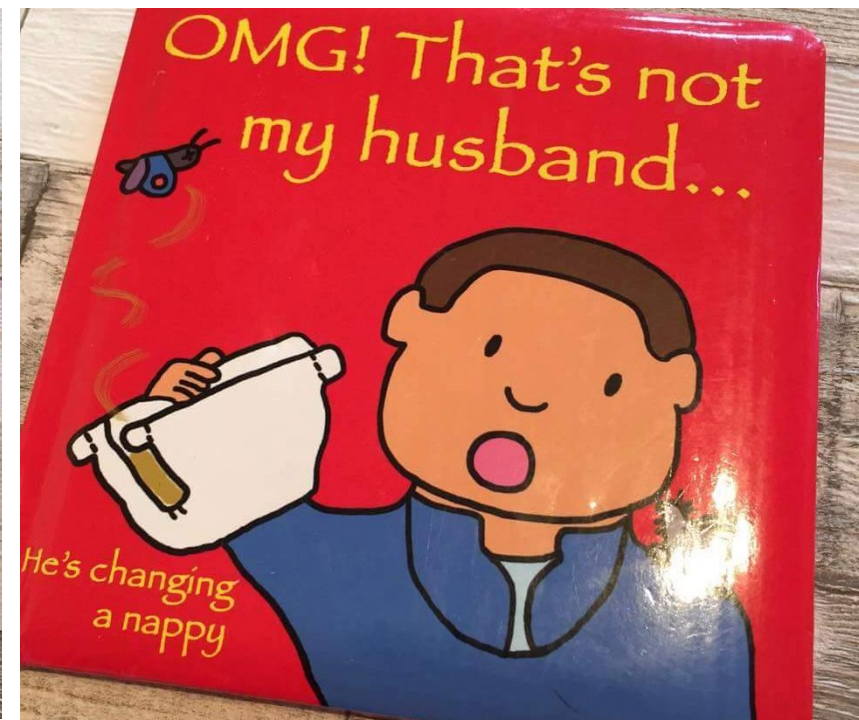
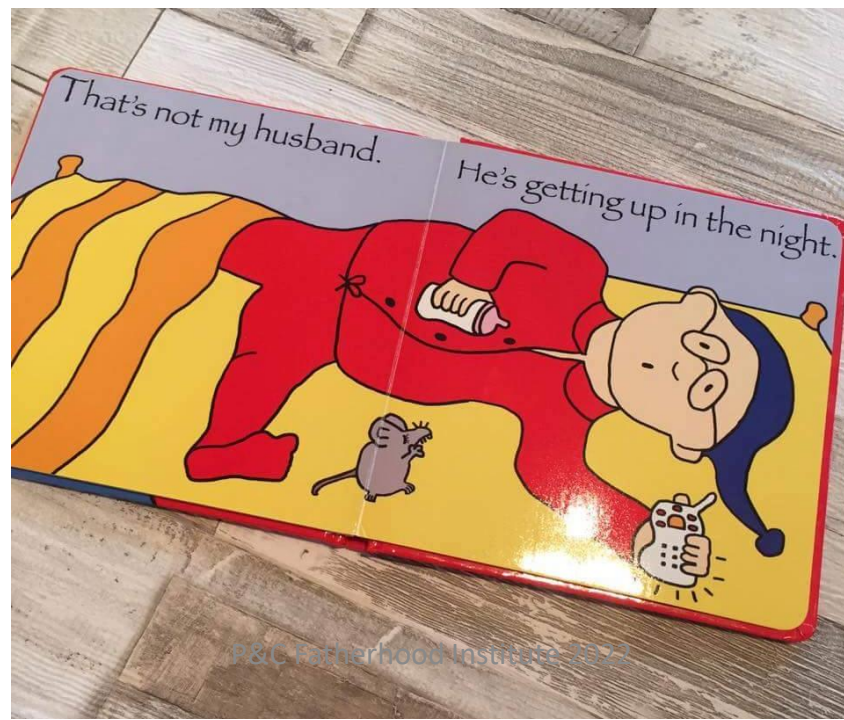
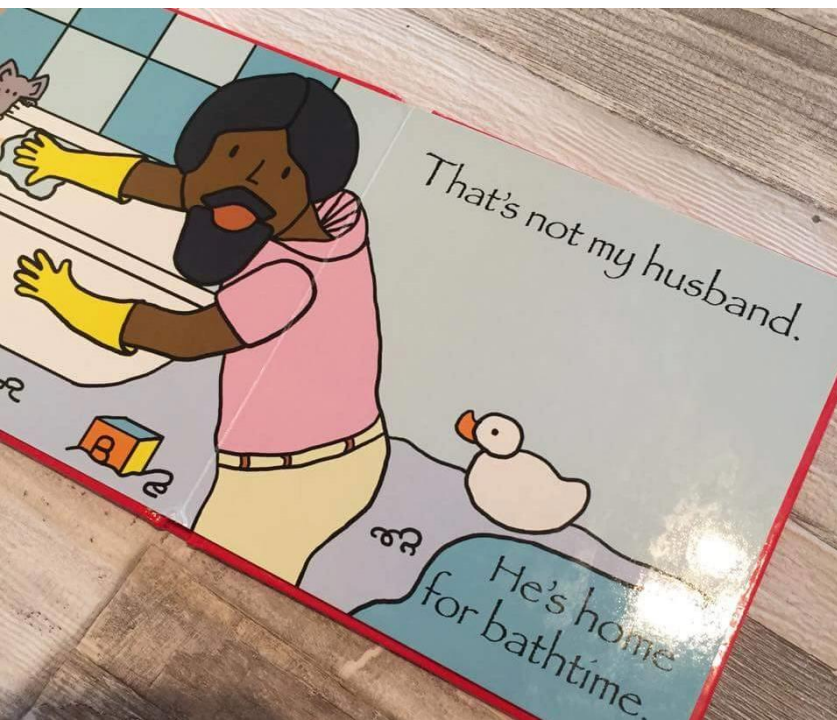
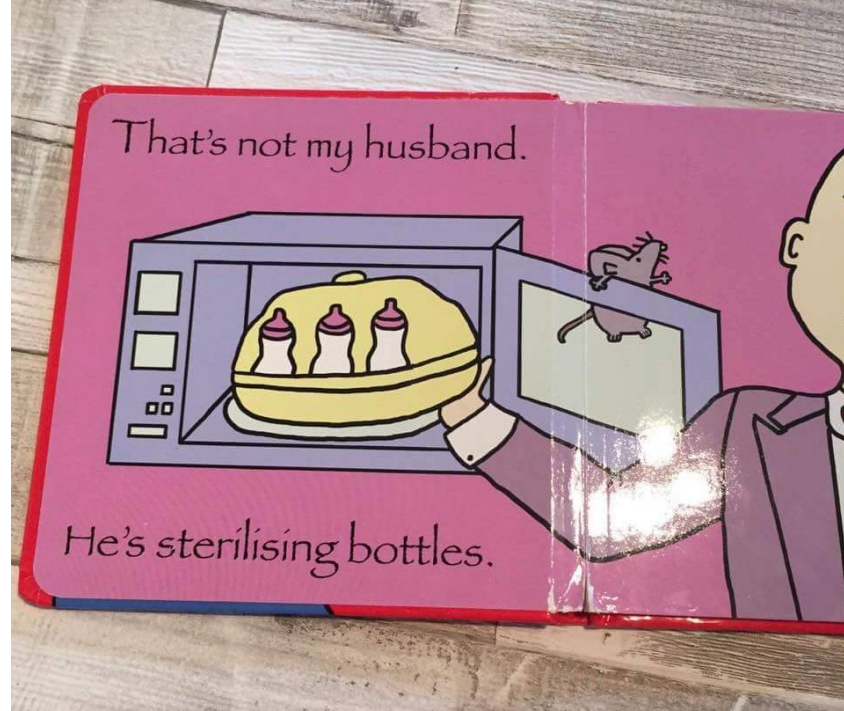
"My wife had nine months building a gradually-increasing connection to the baby — carrying, little kicks, hiccups, and burps. But for me, all that happened in one exact moment when I heard my daughter cry for the first time. All emotions wrapped into one exact moment in time. For the mother, it's a nurturing build of love and connection. For the father, it's a bomb. I froze, I didn't respond when spoken to — and I cried. It was a big moment for me and all I have to do is close my eyes and I can recreate the sound of the first time I heard her voice, etched in my memory like a laser-engraved vinyl record."

What are the strong messages that fathers receive?

Do different types of dads get labelled in different ways?

What is the impact of this positioning?





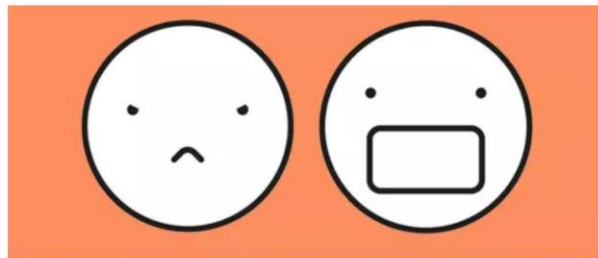
He Said WHAT in the Delivery Room? Tips for Dads on Delivery Day

Dads-to-be are known for making blunders in the delivery room—just take it from these moms. Here's a rundown of game-day etiquette so guys can read and learn.

Save Article



By The Bump Editors
Updated February 28, 2018



Dadsnet

1 d · Public



Genius 😂

It was my husbands turn to feed her





A promotional graphic for 'The Dad'. It features a silhouette of a muscular man standing on a rooftop, looking out over a city skyline at sunset. The text 'Which Superhero Dad Are You?' is prominently displayed in white. In the top left corner, there is a logo for 'THE DAD' and the text 'The Dad'. In the bottom right corner, there is a pink button with a person icon and the text 'LET'S GO'. The text 'via The Dad' is also visible above the button.



📷 The UK Government has scrapped a 'Stay At Home' campaign after criticism

Healthy Child Programme

Pregnancy and the first five years of life



What does
this
positioning
mean?

It suggests that fathers are optional

It is detrimental to mothers

It dissuades take-up of services by fathers

It misses A LOT

“...there continues to be a dearth of information about men in SCRs. The primary focus of health professionals and social workers continues to be on the needs, circumstances and perspectives of the mother. This is the case even in established relationships when the mother’s partner has a major role in looking after the children”

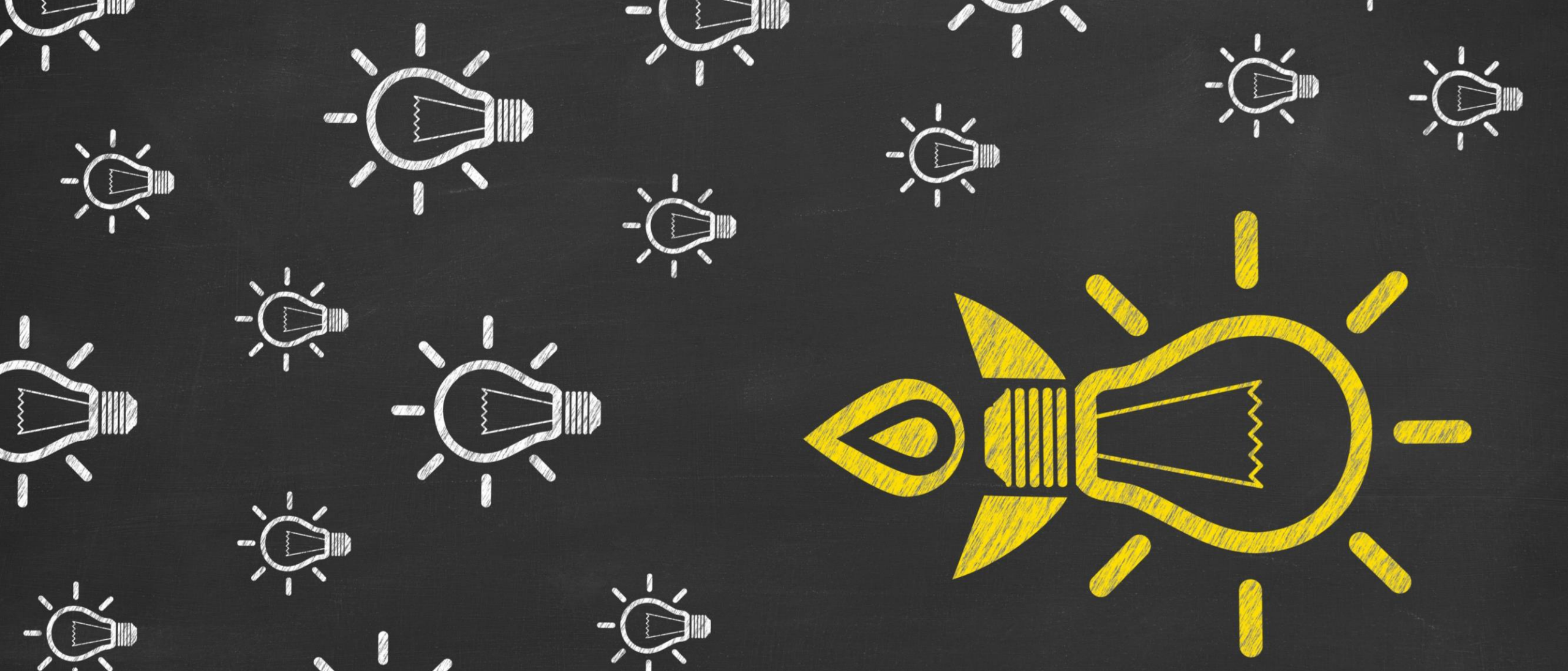
(Complexity and challenge: a triennial analysis of SCRs 2014-2017 Final report March 2020)

Revealing Fatherhood - Beatrix is Three

**At the top of the stairs
I ask for her hand. O.K.
She gives it to me.
How her fist fits my palm,
A bunch of consolation.
We take our time
Down the steep carpet way
As I wish silently
That the stairs were endless.**

Beatrix is three, by Adrian Mitchell

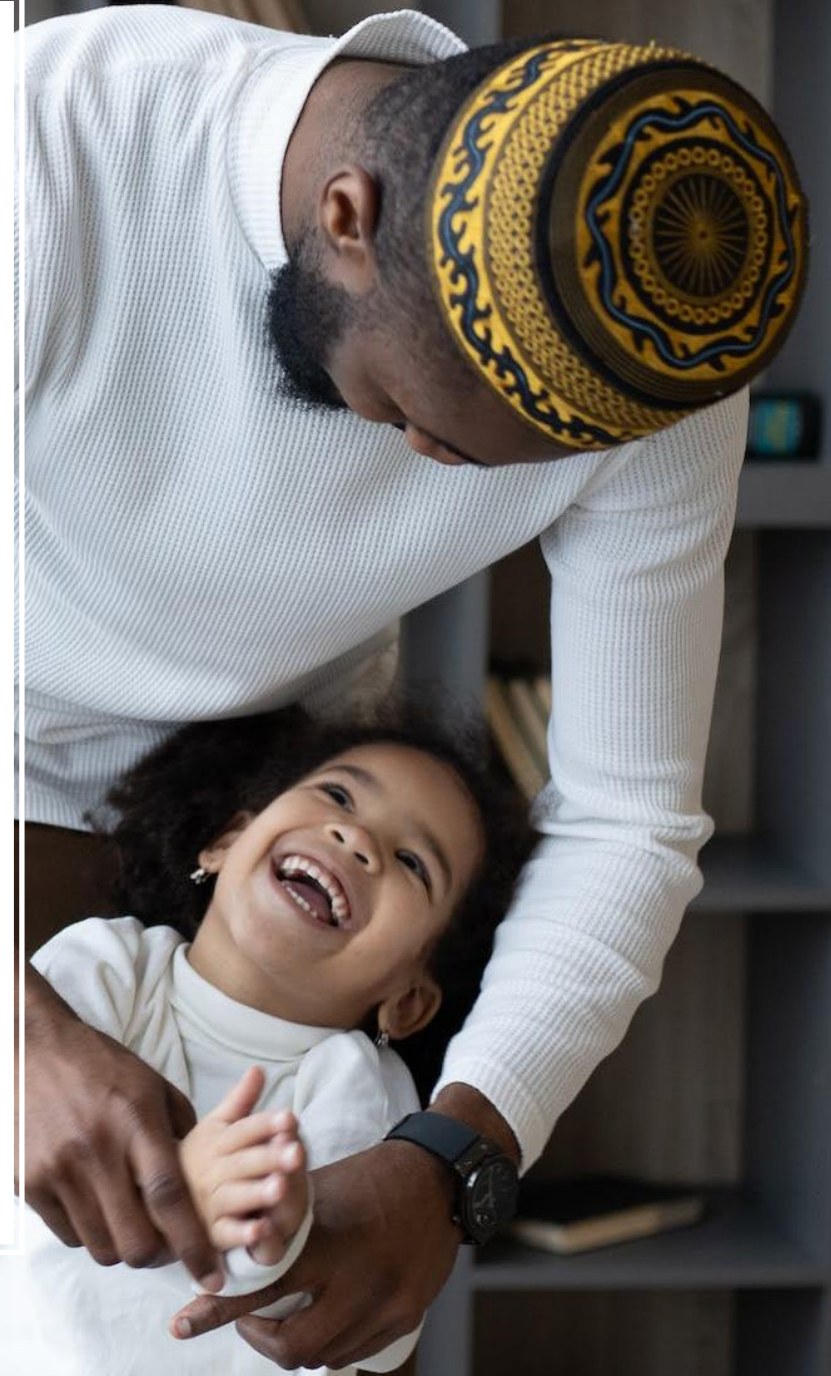




What the research tells us

What evidence there is suggests that:

- While mothers often ‘take the lead’ on early parenting and educational support
- many fathers, including those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, play a significant role
- fathers’ relative absence from the home learning environment due to working commitments is a key factor in their lower involvement
- (see for example Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Flouri, 2006), (see for example Keown and Palmer, 2014; Nutbrown and Hannon, 2003) (see for example Duursma, 2014; Kim and Hill, 2015; Baker, 2018), (see for example Norman, 2017).

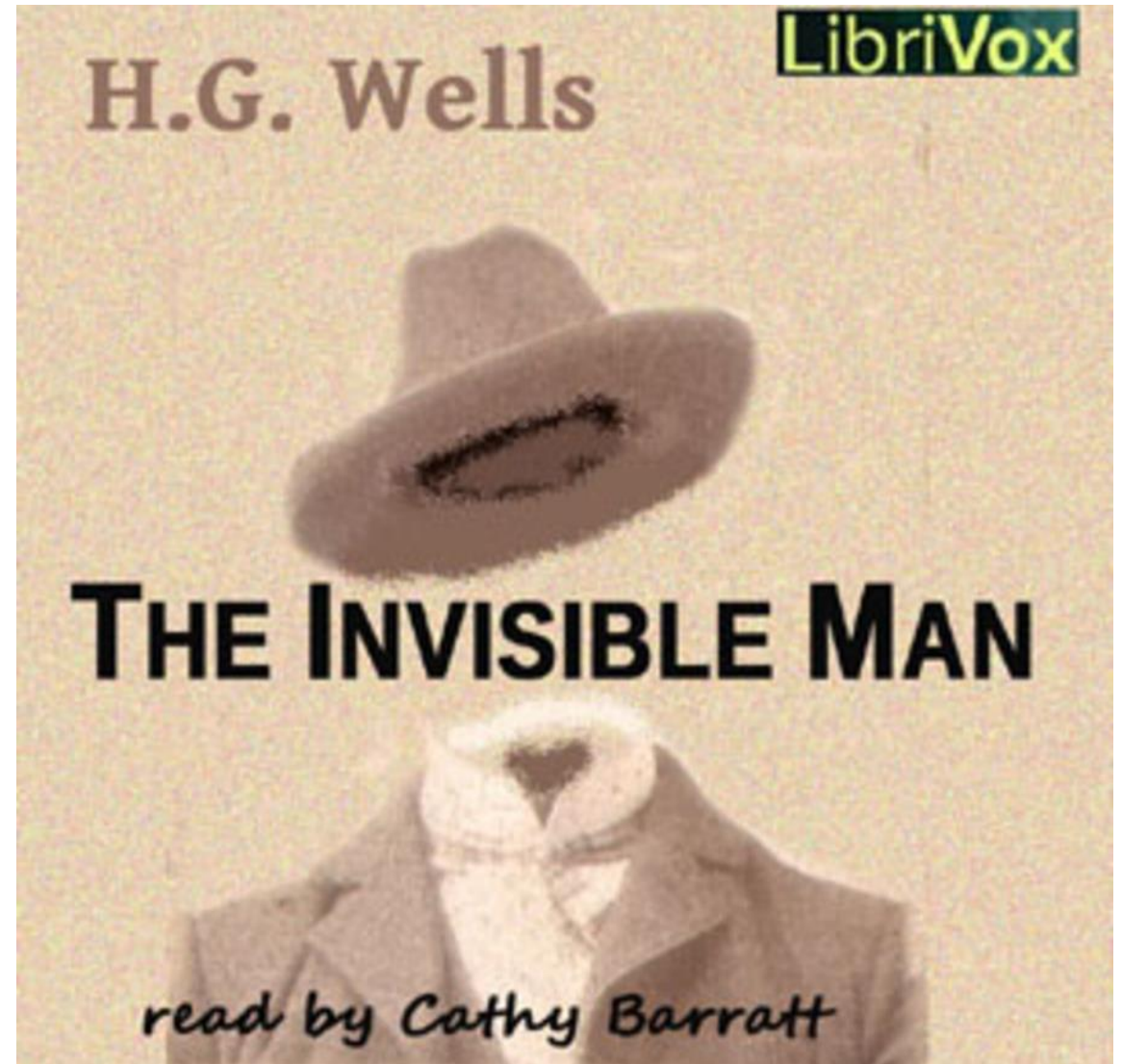


Missing in action...

Shift in family lives

Fathers role in
language development

Full range of 'inputs'



Fathers' early *behaviour*: impact on toddlers

When father's early caregiving or play (3-6 months) was **frequent, regular, positive in tone or engaged and active**, two-year-olds

- show better **cognitive development** display **fewer behaviour problems**

Conversely, **toddler problems are greater** when their father was **disengaged, remote or critical** in face-to-face interaction with them early on

(Butler, 2012; Malmberg et al., 2007; Flouri & Malmberg, 2012) (Malmberg et al., 2016)

(Butler, 2012; Ramchandani et al., 2013).



Language Development

Fathers:

- More often using causal explanatory language, which predict their children's theory of mind
- May use different and longer words with their children
- Use more abstract words

More similarities than differences in mothers' and fathers' speech with young children, possibly as fathers spend more time with them

(Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). (LaBounty et al, 2008). (Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2006); Tamis-LeMonda et al, 2013).

A recent study found that fathers had a **greater impact than mothers on their children's language development.**

Children whose fathers used more diverse vocabularies had greater language development when they were tested one year later; the **mother's vocabulary did not have a significant effect.** University of North Carolina at Chapel

Hill's Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute and UNC's School of Education



- Disabled children were more likely to display interest in literacy materials when their fathers were involved in *child care* and *household* routines,
- As early as 6 months of age, shared reading with dads who used a diverse vocabulary had a significant impact on the child's language at 15 months and 36 months of age.
- 7-year-olds whose dads never read to them are more than a year behind those where dads read daily when they reach 11 years. (Read On Get On, 2014) (Barnes, 2009). 2010 study from the College of New Jersey

1 – 2 years

When fathers of 1-2 year olds read lots of books to them, their children tend to be more interested in books later
(Lyytinen et al, 1998).

3 – 5 years

Pre-schoolers whose dads read and talk to them a lot behave and concentrate better at nursery, and do better in maths as well
(Baker, 2013).

5 years

Their children know and use more words, can pick out letters more accurately, and are better at problem solving

7 & 11 years

Fathers' involvement with their 7 and 11 year old children is linked with their better national examination performance at age 16 and their educational attainment at age 20.



What do fathers need from us?

The practice vacuum...

Services still don't talk to dads, even if there's a growing awareness that they should

- 65% of dads said healthcare professionals had rarely/never discussed fathers' roles.
- 56% said they weren't addressed by name.
- 29% don't remember being directly addressed at all

Dad's experience depended on the practice of each individual

- Some fathers describe positive encounters
- Most report feeling ignored patronized and considered unimportant

Father surveys

- 37% searched for information/ resources about their child's speech, language and communication in the past year
- 50% said they had used resources to support their child's speech, language and communication; 74% said the resources did not mention fathers

Fathers described themselves as participating in a range of activities:

- reading singing
- talking/listening and
- playing/other shared activities

What support they want...

- Break information down in more simple terms.
- How to communicate when the child has a learning barrier. Like ADHD. Hard to get focus communicating, when he is not engaged/agitated
- I dyslexia so it's normally mum who's the talking and teaching
- I just think there needs to be more focus on dads in general
- just maybe when i can find the time. its not that i dont want to i just dont know when i can.
- Milestones and knowing what to teach and when
- Some more activities for other languages would be great.

- Children were 4 times more likely than their peers to make greater-than-expected progress (rising two sub-levels): Reading (42% vs 11%) Numeracy (22 vs 9%) Writing (20% vs 15%)
- Children entitled to free school meals made the greatest progress
- 97% of fathers say taking part has helped them read to their child every day
- 96% say they have noticed their child having longer conversations AND using new words or phrases
- 91% say they feel more 'connected' (knowing when they need quiet time, a cuddle, eye contact, understanding their 'mood' etc) with their child



Conclusion

- Fathers are there, and what they do (or don't do) matters to children
- Fathers make an indelible contribution to the lives of their children, and services are well placed to ensure that this is a positive legacy
- 'Framing' of fatherhood gets in the way of revealing their roles, impact, experience and support needs
- We need to 'catch up' with the change within families, widen the focus and be systematic about that



What helps...

Know who
they are

Take them,
and their role,
seriously

Give
information

Reflect

Avoid the
pitfalls and
assumptions

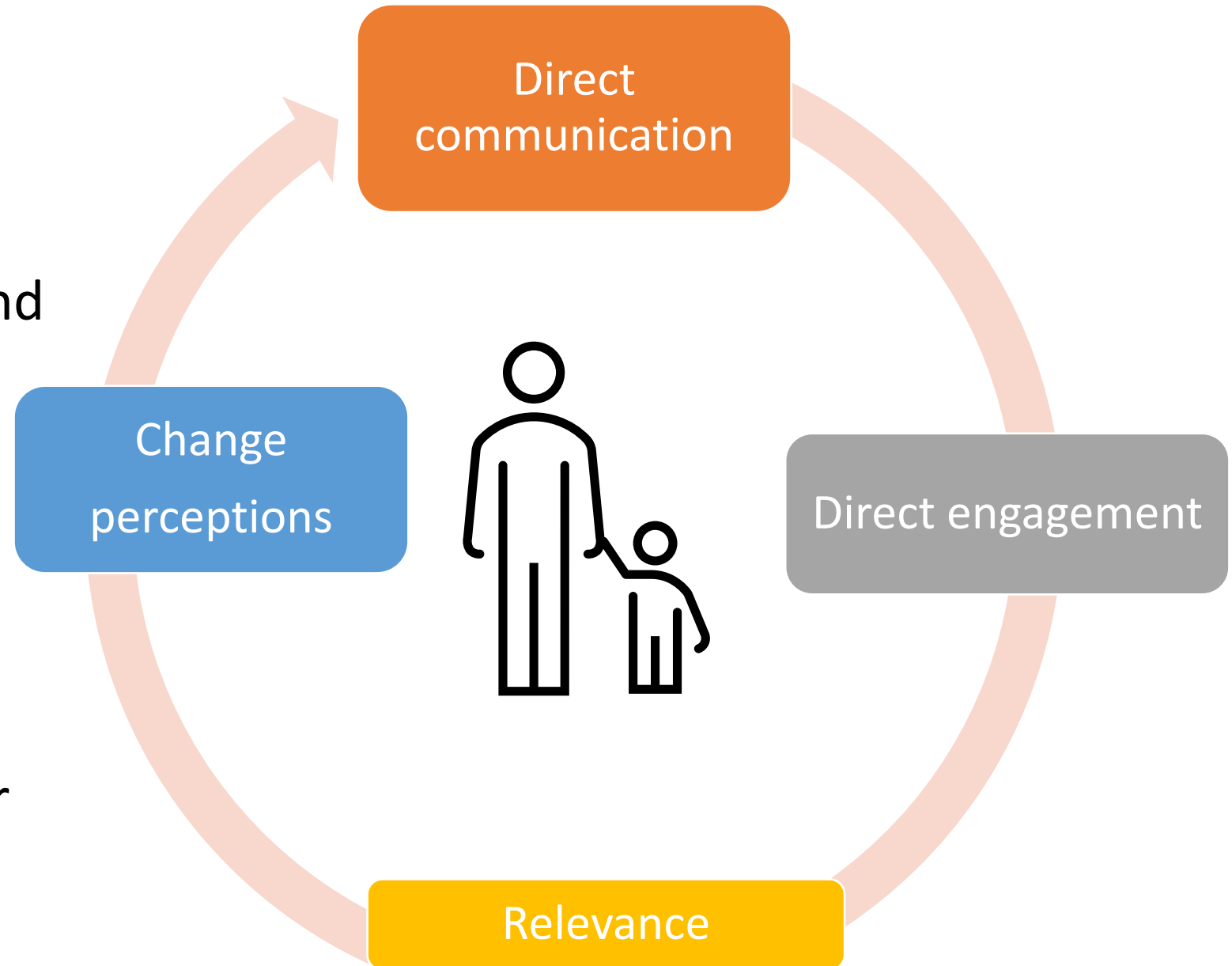
What messages can you send that:

Interrupt the 'cultural noise' around fathers and families

Reflect their realities

Avoid assumptions

Support them, and their families



More research and reviews

Contemporary Fathers in the UK:

How was it for you?: Fathers experiences of maternity services.

Where's the Daddy? (2018): Fathers in UK research.

Bringing Baby Home (2022).

Cash or Carry (2017): Fathers combining work and care in the UK.

Who's the Bloke in the Room? (2018): Fathers during pregnancy and at the birth in the UK.

Lockdown Fathers – the untold story (2021): Fatherhood during the first Covid-19 lockdown in the UK

Myth of Invisible Men

www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

