

Young Fathers



**FAMILIES NEED
FATHERS**

The term, 'young fathers', generally refers to paternal males under the age of 25. Stereotypically this group are thought to be disinterested, uncaring and irresponsible. However, recent research demonstrates that many young fathers do wish to be involved in their children's lives but through lack of support and social disadvantage, they may have been denied this. Even professionals are "continuing to juggle" with constructions of the father as a "risk" vs. the father as a "resource"¹.

Challenges to the parent:

Young fathers currently represent one of the most vulnerable parent groups. They are more likely to: come from a disadvantaged social background, be less developed, receive lower wages and possess lower academic qualifications. As a result young fathers, like young mothers, tend to be less prepared for the challenges and anxieties of parenthood.

Additionally, young fathers may face underlying discrimination from professional bodies. Family services tend to be primarily mother-oriented and may adhere to the view of young father as a 'risk' factor, placing further obstacles in their paternal path.

In cases of non-residency, young fathers are likely to have a lower economic standing and "be characterised by a lower threshold for the experience of negative emotions such as fear, anxiety and anger; experience more symptoms of anxiety and substance abuse; and engage in more crime, violence and abusive behaviour towards women"².

1 Nigel Sheriff, 'Supporting Young fathers – Examples of Promising practise' (The Trust for the Study of Adolescence Ltd 2007)

2 Jaffee, S.R., Caspi, A., Moffitt, T.E., Taylor, A., & Dickson, N. (2001). Predicting early fatherhood and whether young fathers live with their children: prospective findings

Impact on the family:

A young parent needs support and one of the most powerful sources is potentially that of the other parent. It has been found that 'a decreasing pattern of involvement by the young father is significantly associated with young mothers' increased parenting stress³. Indeed according to research by Quinton et al (2002), 'by ignoring young fathers, services were ignoring mothers' wishes' and that 'young mothers themselves often placed a high value on the involvement of their babies' fathers'⁴. It is also important to note that for a non-resident young father, being less involved with their child's upbringing can have an adverse effect upon his state of mind.

Current failures to understand the role of young fathers has a negative impact upon the wellbeing of the parents, but most importantly of the child. Recent research suggests that 'child-father relationships are particularly important for children from 'high risk' families⁵' and their correct adjustment into society. Also involvement in the prenatal process is shown to reduce the risk of punitive behaviour by the father towards the child in the future.

and policy reconsiderations. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*

3 Kalil, A., Ziol-Guest, K.M., & Coley, R.L. (2005). Perception of father involvement patterns in teenage mother families: predictors and links to mothers' psychological adjustment. *Family Relations*

4 Quinton, D., Pollock, S., & Anderson, P. (2002). *The Transition to Fatherhood in Young Men: Influences on Commitment. Summary of Key Findings*. Bristol: School for Policy Studies, Bristol University.

5 Dunn J, Cheng H, O'Connor TG & Bridges L (2004) 'Children's perspectives on their relationships with their non-resident fathers: influences, outcomes and implications' *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*



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Opportunity:

The most important figures in a young child's life are the caregivers. Children model themselves upon their parents and learn immeasurably from them. Parent-child relationships can be invaluable to the development and emotional wellbeing of the child. For this reason it is important for parents to be involved and not pushed away. Professionals can help by reconsidering their preformed ideas of young parents and to facilitate the relations between the parents and their child. Research has found that where support is made available the quality of engagement and emotional involvement of the parent with the child is improved.

Agency provide some information regarding the status of young fathers and practical advice for parents.

<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=13>

An independent think tank providing recent news, research, policy and practical advice aimed at professionals working to support young fathers.

Links and Support

Charities/Support

<http://www.young-fathers.org.uk/> The Young Fathers Initiative website is full of useful information for young fathers as well as professionals.

<http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk/> Parentline Plus is a national organisation offering advice and support to all parents.

<http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk/> Parent Centre is a link to advice and support on a range of parenting concerns.

Research/Policy

<http://www.youngfathers.net/about/index.htm>
The Trust for Study of Young Adolescents provide a micro site and publications compiling research and advice for organisations and professionals working with young fathers.

<http://www.youthinformation.com/templates/internal.asp?nodeid=90248> The National Youth