

# Developing Father-Inclusive Practice Strategy

Stronger Together,  
Supporting Dads,  
Strengthening Halton



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# Introduction

Fathers play a vital role in the well-being and development of children, contributing to emotional stability, social skills, and academic success. Recognising and supporting this role is essential for delivering effective, inclusive services across Halton. Embedding father-inclusive practice ensures that fathers feel valued and supported to engage fully in their children's lives. It challenges traditional stereotypes, breaks down barriers to participation, and creates a welcoming environment where fathers feel seen and heard. This approach is especially critical in Halton, where addressing the needs of diverse families requires tailored and inclusive support. Research consistently shows that when fathers are actively involved, outcomes for children improve significantly. Father-inclusive practices also strengthen families as a whole, fostering healthier relationships and enhancing resilience. By embedding these practices, Halton can promote equality, ensure access for all caregivers, and set a benchmark for family-centred services that truly reflect the needs of the community. Ultimately, a father-inclusive approach is not just a commitment to better practice—it is a commitment to better outcomes for children, families, and the wider Halton community.

This strategy aims to create an inclusive environment that values fathers' roles and ensures they have the necessary resources to contribute positively to their children's lives.



*\*In Halton, we define the term father or dad not only by gene but by who the person is taking on the 'role'. Therefore, this could mean step dad, adopted dad, biological dad (living with child(ren) or not, uncle, grand-father, friend and so on...*

# Objectives

## **Promote the recognition of fathers as essential caregivers.**

Promoting the recognition of fathers as essential caregivers is crucial because it challenges traditional gender roles and acknowledges the significant impact fathers have on their children's emotional, social, and cognitive development. When fathers are actively engaged, children often experience better educational outcomes, improved mental health, and stronger social skills. To achieve this, it is important to ensure that policies, programmes, and services actively include and support fathers. This can be done by training staff to engage fathers effectively, ensuring that service environments are welcoming to men, and advocating for policies such as paternity leave and flexible work arrangements. Raising awareness about fathers' roles also helps combat stereotypes and ensures that fathers receive the same encouragement and support as mothers in their caregiving responsibilities.

## **Enhance service accessibility and engagement for fathers.**

Enhancing service accessibility and engagement allows fathers to access high quality services, designed to support their parenting and fostering father-child relationships, which contribute to children's emotional well-being, cognitive growth, and social skills.

**Provide training for staff on father-inclusive practices.** Providing training for staff on father-inclusive practices is crucial for creating truly supportive and effective services for families. It ensures that staff understand the unique needs and contributions of fathers, challenging traditional assumptions about parenting roles. Training equips

staff with the skills and knowledge to engage fathers effectively, using inclusive language, offering tailored resources, and creating welcoming environments where fathers feel comfortable and valued. This, in turn, leads to increased father engagement, stronger father-child relationships, and ultimately, better outcomes for children and families. By investing in staff training, organisations demonstrate a commitment to supporting all parents and fostering a culture of shared parenting responsibilities.

## **Ensure staff and volunteers understand the importance of engaging fathers in child development.**

Ensuring staff and volunteers understand the importance of engaging fathers in child development is fundamental to creating a truly supportive and effective environment for families. When staff and volunteers grasp the significant impact fathers have on children's emotional, cognitive, and social well-being, they are better equipped to engage fathers meaningfully. This understanding should encompass the diverse ways fathers contribute, recognising that fathering styles and family structures vary. Training and ongoing professional development can play a key role in building this knowledge base, covering topics such as the benefits of father involvement, strategies for engaging fathers effectively, and addressing potential barriers to their participation. By fostering a shared understanding of the crucial role fathers play, organisations can empower staff and volunteers to create welcoming and inclusive spaces where fathers feel valued and supported in their parenting journey, ultimately leading to better outcomes for children.

**Develop policies to support father-inclusive practice.** Developing policies support father inclusive practice and can provide a framework to create systemic change that ensures fathers can be supported to be more actively engaged in their children's lives. Such policies demonstrate an organisational commitment to fatherhood and provide a framework for consistent, equitable practices. These policies might include provisions for paternity leave, flexible work arrangements to accommodate childcare responsibilities, and clear guidelines on how services should engage with fathers. Furthermore, they can address issues like access to information about their children's education and healthcare, regardless of relationship status with the mother. By implementing supportive policies, organisations can remove barriers to father involvement, promote shared parenting, and ultimately contribute to improved outcomes for children and families. These policies signal that fathers are valued and essential members of the family unit.

**Foster community partnerships to encourage father-friendly environments.** Fostering community partnerships is vital for creating a widespread, supportive network that encourages father-friendly environments. By collaborating with organisations like schools, healthcare providers, community centres, and even businesses, we can amplify the message that fathers' involvement is valued and essential. These partnerships can lead to the development of joint programs, shared resources, and coordinated outreach efforts that reach a wider audience of fathers. For example, a partnership with a local library could result in father-child reading programs, while collaboration with a sports league could offer opportunities for dads to coach their children's teams. These collaborative efforts not only

provide practical support and resources for fathers but also contribute to shifting community norms and expectations around fatherhood, ultimately creating a more supportive environment for fathers and families.

**Ensure strong leadership commitment to father-inclusive practice.**

Ensuring strong leadership commitment to father-inclusive practice is paramount for creating lasting and meaningful change. Leadership buy-in sets the tone for the entire organization, signalling that engaging fathers is not just a program or initiative, but a core value.

When leaders champion father-inclusive practices, they allocate resources, prioritize staff training, and hold the organization accountable for achieving its goals. This commitment can manifest in various ways, such as publicly advocating for father involvement, integrating father-inclusive language into mission statements and strategic plans, and actively participating in father-focused initiatives. Strong leadership also empowers staff to implement father-inclusive practices confidently, knowing they have the support and resources necessary to succeed. Ultimately, genuine leadership commitment is the foundation upon which successful father-inclusive programs and services are built.

**Develop explicit objectives for systematic and effective engagement with fathers.**

Developing explicit objectives for systematic and effective engagement with fathers is crucial for ensuring that efforts are focused, measurable, and impactful. Clearly defined objectives provide a roadmap for action, outlining what the organization aims to achieve in its work with fathers. These objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound

(SMART), addressing areas such as increasing father participation in programs, improving father-child interaction, or enhancing fathers' access to resources. For example, an objective might be to "increase father attendance at parent-teacher conferences by 20% within the next year." By establishing clear objectives, organisations can track progress, evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies, and make adjustments as needed. This systematic approach ensures that efforts to engage fathers are not ad-hoc or reactive, but rather a deliberate and integrated part of the organisation's work.

Create welcoming physical environments that support and include fathers. Creating welcoming physical environments that support and include fathers is essential for signalling that their presence and participation are valued. The environment should move beyond simply tolerating fathers and actively encourage their involvement. This can be achieved through several practical measures. Designated spaces for fathers and children, such as changing tables in men's restrooms, comfortable seating areas for families, and play areas that appeal to a range of ages and interests, demonstrate consideration for fathers' needs. Visual cues, like artwork depicting diverse families and signage that uses inclusive language, further reinforce a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, ensuring that materials and resources are easily accessible and relevant to fathers can encourage their engagement. By thoughtfully designing physical spaces, organisations can create an atmosphere where fathers feel comfortable, respected, and motivated to participate fully in their children's lives.

# Key Implementation Strategies

## 1. Organisational Commitment

### Mission Statement

Our mission is to create a supportive and inclusive environment that values the contributions of all parents, including fathers. We strive to empower fathers, especially new and expectant ones, to actively participate in their children's lives, fostering strong family bonds and promoting work-life balance. By providing resources, guidance, and a community of support, we aim to address the unique challenges faced by new and expectant fathers, ensuring they feel confident and valued in their parenting journey. Together, we build a community where every parent can thrive.

Fathers can be included or excluded through

- The design / delivery of services you're communicating about
- The audiences you address and strategies you use to reach them
- Your messaging, language and visuals
- How you evaluate



## Father-inclusive language

Integrating father-inclusive language in policies, programmes, and promotional materials is crucial for several reasons;

- **Encourages Active Participation:** Using father-inclusive language helps fathers feel acknowledged and valued, and changes how fathers feel about a service.
- **Breaks Down Stereotypes:** It challenges traditional gender roles that often depict mothers as primary caregivers and fathers as secondary. This shift promotes a more balanced view of parenting responsibilities
- **Improves Child Outcomes:** If father inclusive language is adopted and therefore increases engagement across services for dads, then research shows that children benefit significantly when fathers are actively involved. They tend to perform better academically, socially, and emotionally
- **Enhances Program Effectiveness:** Programs and services that explicitly include fathers are more likely to engage them, leading to better outcomes for families as a whole
- **Promotes Inclusivity:** Father-inclusive language fosters an inclusive environment where all parents feel supported, regardless of gender. This inclusivity can lead to stronger community bonds and support networks

Halton aims to ensure that father inclusive language is integrated into its promotional materials such as brochures, leaflets, social media posts and websites, by including language and images that represent fathers.

Dads are relying on digital resources in their 'new' parenting reality to sought out parenting information or support with 6 out of 10 dads accessing parenting information in the following ways;

- Expert advice on parenting websites
- Other parents on parenting social media
- Parenting / baby apps
- Other parents on mainstream social media
- Online videos
- Parenting blogs
- News sites
- Manufacturers websites

Research shows that gender neutrality marketing might not work. Addressing 'parents' or 'families' is unlikely to be effective in getting messages through to dads so it is vital to use terms like "fathers" or "dads" instead of "mothers" and "parents" and always include photos of fathers. Halton has and is continuing to develop a resource bank of father inclusive images, such as the ones below. As part of the Halton Family Hubs Communication and Marketing Strategy, leaflet and social media templates will be developed and these will be made available for the partnership to use as and when appropriate.





# Fatherhood champions

Halton has invested significant resource in recruiting 18 Fatherhood Champions from different services and organisations. These include;



Fatherhood Champions are equipped with the knowledge and skills to cascade their learning to colleagues and lead on key issues in their locality. They underwent training that offered an in-depth learning experience, supplementing the two-day course with a self-study portfolio and a third training day. Following the successful completion of the training, they became 'Fatherhood Champions' within their service, and have developed a comprehensive strategy for building, sustaining and promoting and advocating for a father inclusive service. Fatherhood Champions are expected to identify methods to cascade learning and support practice within their own service and beyond. They will use their local and professional experience, and the knowledge gained through the training, to influence the design and delivery of services to families under Family Hubs, and beyond into targeted and universal services.

Our Fatherhood Champions in Halton are;

Name	Service / Organisation	Email address
Aileen Donaghy	Health Improvement Specialist, Calm your Mind	<a href="mailto:aileen.donaghy@halton.gov.uk">aileen.donaghy@halton.gov.uk</a>
Catherine Kelly	Health Visitor, Halton 0-19 Service. Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust	<a href="mailto:catherine.kelly@nhs.net">catherine.kelly@nhs.net</a>
Laura Gouldson	Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust	<a href="mailto:laura.gouldson@nhs.net">laura.gouldson@nhs.net</a>
Hannah Jones	Early help family worker, Short Breaks Service for Children with Disabilities	<a href="mailto:hannah.jones2@halton.gov.uk">hannah.jones2@halton.gov.uk</a>
Helen Williams	Infant Feeding Support Worker, Health Improvement Team	<a href="mailto:helen.williams@halton.gov.uk">helen.williams@halton.gov.uk</a>
Emily Mather	Parenting and Healthy Relationship Officer	<a href="mailto:Emily.mather@halton.gov.uk">Emily.mather@halton.gov.uk</a>
Sophie Talbot	Infant Feeding and Early Years Support Worker	<a href="mailto:Sophie.talbot@halton.gov.uk">Sophie.talbot@halton.gov.uk</a>
Dean Lawrenson	Early Help Officer, Locality	<a href="mailto:Dean.lawrenson@halton.gov.uk">Dean.lawrenson@halton.gov.uk</a>
Ellie Welding	Continuity Team Leader, Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals	<a href="mailto:e.welding@nhs.net">e.welding@nhs.net</a>
Elle Gregson	Health Improvement Specialist	<a href="mailto:Elle.gregson@halton.gov.uk">Elle.gregson@halton.gov.uk</a>
Natalie Starkey	Infant Feeding Specialist Midwife	<a href="mailto:Natalie.starkey1@nhs.net">Natalie.starkey1@nhs.net</a>
Emma Boone	Children and Families Development Officer, Halton Libraries	<a href="mailto:Emma.boone@halton.gov.uk">Emma.boone@halton.gov.uk</a>
Victoria Hughes	Early Intervention Officer, Icart	<a href="mailto:Victoria.hughes@halton.gov.uk">Victoria.hughes@halton.gov.uk</a>
Alisha Jones	Social Worker	<a href="mailto:Alisha.jones@halton.gov.uk">Alisha.jones@halton.gov.uk</a>
Sarah Thomas	Early help family worker, Short Breaks Service for Children with Disabilities	<a href="mailto:Sarah.thomas@halton.gov.uk">Sarah.thomas@halton.gov.uk</a>
Clare Palmer	Early Years Worker, Runcorn Family Hub	<a href="mailto:Clare.palmer@halton.gov.uk">Clare.palmer@halton.gov.uk</a>
Lyndsey Holt	Clinical Psychologist, Start for Life Emotional Health and Wellbeing Team	<a href="mailto:Lyndsey.holt@merseycare.nhs.net">Lyndsey.holt@merseycare.nhs.net</a>

Halton Fatherhood Champions are now part of a network of Fatherhood Champions across the country, facilitated by the Fatherhood Institute. Our Fatherhood Champions will be the first to hear about any new research and be invited to attend free webinars. They will also have the opportunity to attend an annual conference, where they can meet with other Champions and share best practice. Champions also have access to a National Champions website. If you are interested in understanding more about how you can become more father inclusive, please reach out to one of the champions who will be happy to help.

Fatherhood Champions will now form a collective strategic planning group across Halton, with specific responsibility for father inclusiveness, and feed into the family hub steering group.

## 2. Staff Training and Development

Staff training and development is crucial when developing and implementing father-inclusive practices. Halton, working alongside the Fatherhood Institute, made the decision to invest in staff training and development, so that we are able to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for fathers, ultimately benefiting the entire family unit. Halton took a strategic approach in the following way;



Training and development has helped staff understand the unique needs and challenges that fathers face. This understanding is essential for creating an inclusive environment where fathers feel welcomed and supported. The training has helped staff recognise and challenge gender stereotypes that may hinder father involvement. By promoting a more inclusive mindset, staff are better able to support fathers in their parenting roles. The following training has been delivered across Halton to date;

- Developing Father Inclusive Practice Across Halton
- Working with fathers to safeguard children / exploring the myth of the invisible men
- Working with fathers in the perinatal period
- From here to paternity – Presentation for Halton Health Day
- Exploring fathers use of social media; Building effective communications strategies

Fatherhood Champions will endeavour to undergo training on father engagement every three years alongside the networking opportunities afforded to them. This will allow them to continue to provide ongoing support using the very latest research and evidence.

Fatherhood Champions will also support with the induction process of new managers, staff, and volunteers in their service by providing a briefing session on father engagement.

Staff training and development culminated in a whole system **Father Inclusive Conference** in February 2025 where 90 professionals from Halton collectively came together to explore father inclusive practice in more detail. Through thought-provoking sessions, interactive workshops, and collaborative discussions, professionals were inspired and equipped to build stronger relationships with fathers and enhance their contributions to family well-being.



Speakers at the conference included UK and Worldwide industry experts as well as local Fatherhood Champions and featured a wide range of different topics of focus and interest including;

Dr Anna Machin; The Science of Dad

Scott Mair;  
Understanding Autism through a father's eyes

Mark Williams;  
Fatherhood, Mental Health and better outcomes for the whole family

Stacey Cameron & Natalie Starkey; Nurturing the Bond: A Dad's Role in Breastfeeding and Baby Care

Emma Boone; The strengthening of the father – child bond through the power of reading

Dean Lawrenson;  
Building a Family, One Step at a Time: A Single Dad's Adoption Story

Tom Byrne & Holly Flynn;  
Together for Dads in Halton

Tom Byrne ; Supporting Dads: Navigating the Neonatal Journey

All of the above topics of discussion were filmed live at the event and can be found here at [Halton Family Hubs – YouTube](#). It is highly recommended that anybody who was unable to attend the event spends some time watching the presentations and sharing with colleagues.

## Feedback from Professionals

**97.7%** of professionals felt the conference improved their understanding of the importance of father-inclusive practices in supporting families

**90.9%** of professionals felt the conference made them feel at least confident in applying father-inclusive strategies with their professional practice

**100%** of professionals felt they were at least likely to advocate for and implement father-inclusive strategies in the workplace or community

### 3. Service Design and Delivery

To develop programmes tailored to fathers' needs, schedules, and interests, it's important to consider a wide range of different strategies. Gathering input directly from fathers to understand their specific needs, preferences, and challenges can help identify common themes and areas of interest. It is also important to engage with community organisations and stakeholders to gain insights into the local father population's needs. In Halton, we have undertaken research directly with fathers as well as through community organisations, such as Parents in Mind.

Approximately 1 in 10 fathers report symptoms of depression (Cameron, Sedov, & Tomfohr – Madsen, 2016) and as many as 18% report elevated symptoms of anxiety and / or stress (Giallo, Cooklin, Wade, D'Esposito, & Nicholson, 2013). Despite men's vulnerability, there is very little targeted support for improving the mental and physical health of fathers. Of the limited targeted support that does exist for fathers, services often face difficulties recruiting and engaging them (Bayley, Wallace, & Choudhry, 2009). Factors which commonly impact fathers' engagement with services include;

- Attitudes around help seeking and masculinity (prioritise other family members' needs, minimise problems, self – reliance, control)
- Poor health literacy

Structural factors can also influence fathers' uptake and engagement of support. Some of these can include;

- Inflexible workplace practices
- Service culture
- Practitioner knowledge and competency in engaging fathers

- Interventions offered during traditional working hours
- Lack of male practitioners
- Long waitlists

Dads want to meet other new dads in the early parenting period as it is viewed as an opportunity to seek social connections with other men at similar life stages. Research and insight gathered directly from fathers in Halton demonstrated the following;

- The majority of dads were interested in male only stay and play and walk and talk sessions as well as swimming classes to take their babies to.
- Many were happy to meet on a monthly basis
- Most dads felt that the weekends were the most appropriate times with many favouring the mornings

In April 2024, Halton Family Hubs, Ideas Alliance and Parents in Mind collaborated on a co production research project with the aim of illuminating the experiences of local families as they navigate the successes and obstacles in finding appropriate support for mild mental health issues during the perinatal period. The project explored, through the perspectives of local parents and caregivers, a deeper understanding of the accessibility and the impact of low-level mental health support in Halton. 34% of participants identified themselves as fathers, co-parents and partners. A summary of the findings include;

- Working parents found a barrier to accessing services was due to a lack of evening, online or weekend offers
- Dads experienced fewer mental health challenges when they were invited to actively participate in both antenatal and postnatal appointments to understand their role in supporting the mother's wellbeing

- There was a perception that healthcare providers and supportive service staff in Halton are ready and capable of discussing mental health matters with mothers and birthing parents. Nevertheless, there is a shortage of support services for fathers. This limited support for fathers and male caregivers makes it challenging for staff to engage in these discussions equally.
- The most common emotions impacting fathers and partners when expecting or during the first 2 years of parenting were anger and hopelessness.

"As a father I wanted to talk to someone when I felt worried or useless in supporting my wife, I thought I'd be labelled controlling or would have to hand over lots of information when all I wanted was some advice or a 15 min call on how I could be the best dad by helping her feel like a good mum when I couldn't be around. Nappies and bottles were fine but she got frustrated with me when I didn't understand. It put an extra strain on those early days and I never felt I was getting anything right"

"My mental health declined most when I felt useless and questioned my every move.....I wanted to know, and preferably as early as possible as we had had many losses, if my wife does go through a difficult birth or she does get depression, what am I actually looking out for and how can I understand it better so this doesn't build up to us being so far apart from each other in that first year"

"I struggled to find anything at all I could access as a dad, it's even harder when you don't know what support you need too. I went to the GP and just got given medication and told I was depressed. They didn't seem to have any other offers. I noticed the Health Visitor had lots of really useful things for mums, they were great but I didn't feel I could ask 'what about me?' when I knew the priority was for our baby and my partner"

"It was easy to open up to my partner but I think he found it hard to deal with the emotional ups and downs and some other support for him would have been good too. I know he felt like a better father when he could find support, tips or groups for me to use so he didn't feel worried about us when at work"



## Develop programmes tailored to fathers' needs, schedules, and interests.

During the research, fathers told us what they felt would make a difference to their well-being during the perinatal period.

- “When you are able to be there when the Health Visitor comes round if she could just say ‘if you ever want to call me, you are important too in your job’, or give me some tips on how i can give mum a break? This could be on a piece of paper that says ‘ways to give mum a break....read to the baby before last feed so she can shower. It sounds so small but it really helps make you feel like you are both contributing to your family when you miss so much at work all day”
- ‘More than that would be to ask or mention that if you’ve had your own difficult upbringing and feelings crop up then give me a call, come chat to me, it happens more than you think just to acknowledge that its ok if you’re not sure you’re being a good dad, it would be great to talk to people that struggle with similar thoughts’
- ‘The infant feeding team were key to me feeling like a good father during a difficult time with a baby in NICU, I was able to support my wife’s feeding by labelling bottles, showing her videos that made her smile in expressing rooms and working as a team when she was really feeling sad. It brought us closer and i felt important and like I was providing’
- “Informal support that’s wrapped up with doing activities for the first time. I had no idea where to go with my baby on the weekend and I like the idea of a dads space but nothing you have to sign up for just drop in, chat, maybe WhatsApp, so you can meet some more dads doing the same as you and your confidence grows spending more time with your kid”

- Dads dream of joining care sessions with a level playing field in communication, fun activities, and helpful resources that celebrate the magic of fatherhood.
- Establish informal spaces tailored for fathers to increase bonding and connection to enhance paternal relationships, alleviate feelings of isolation, anger and effectively address forthcoming challenges in family breakdowns due to lack of understanding of new feelings.
- Appointments that promote inclusivity and provide resources to fathers on how to support their partners’ well-being effectively not to be overlooked. Informal opportunities to connect with other local fathers.

## Key Points to consider



Based on national research, evidence and feedback gained from local fathers, Halton Family Hubs commissioned two father inclusive services to provide support to dads specifically during the first 1001 critical days.




## Support for Dads, Partners and Non-birthing Parents



Halton Family Hubs bring lots of services together in one place, making it easier to find information and services for you and your family.

Working with Halton Family Hubs, NCT Parents in Mind offers friendly, non-judgmental, free, low level mental health support for dads, partners, and non-birthing parents during the early stages of parenthood, run by local parents who understand the challenges it can bring.

Come and connect with a community of local dads



- One-to-one phone calls with a local dad volunteer who has had similar experiences
- An open WhatsApp chat to connect when challenges through the week arise
  - A weekly relaxed Zoom chat
- A range of digital support including podcasts

All our services are free to access

*“I felt hopeless and angry but having the WhatsApp available gave me the strength I needed to keep going”*

 NCT Parents in Mind Warrington & Halton
  @parentsinmind.nw


 To find out more scan the QR code  
 Call: 07709 841829  
 Email: [parentsinmind.nw@nct.org.uk](mailto:parentsinmind.nw@nct.org.uk)



 To find your nearest Family Hub visit:  
[www.haltonfamilyhubs.co.uk](http://www.haltonfamilyhubs.co.uk)  
 Email: [familyhubs@halton.gov.uk](mailto:familyhubs@halton.gov.uk)





Dad Matters Warrington, Halton & Cheshire is in place to support dads in order to have the best possible relationship with their families. We work closely with other professionals within the North West and nationally to better support dads in the first 1001 days of their parenting journey.

Dad Matters Offer: Outreach services & drop-ins at Maternity Centres + 1:1 peer support to dads + Signpost and support dads to access services and information to help make sense of being a dad + Support dads with anxiety, stress and mental health awareness

Across Cheshire and Merseyside, DadPad is also available for Halton dads to access, independently or via a professional. Professionals have access to hard copies of DadPad via Family Hubs or, alternatively, the app can be downloaded either via Google Play, App Store or via Halton Family Hub Online.



The DadPad is a comprehensive guide and app designed to support new fathers in navigating the challenges and joys of parenthood. It provides practical tips, expert advice, and resources on various aspects of baby care, child development, and parental well-being.

To download the DadPad app, you can visit your device's app store (Google Play Store for Android or Apple App Store for iOS) and search for "TheDadPad".



**DadPad is free to download for all Halton residents.**

Within the research base, fathers' mental health and wellbeing during the transition to fatherhood have been described as understudied. Despite the potential positive outcomes of having a child, it can be perceived to be stressful for both mothers and fathers, with effects on the couples' relationship

## Digital Interventions

Digital interventions help address barriers to traditional health care services. Fathers play an important parenting role in their families, and their involvement is beneficial for family well-being. Although digital interventions are a promising avenue to facilitate father involvement during the perinatal period, most are oriented toward maternal needs and do not address the unique needs of fathers. Research has demonstrated that new and expecting fathers use digital technologies, which could be used to help address father-specific barriers to traditional health care services. Technology is widely used by new and expecting fathers as a source of parenting information, with fathers showing a strong interest in using internet-delivered strategies for mental health and parenting supports during the transition to fatherhood (Da Costa et.al, 2010)

Research on the evaluation and effectiveness of digital interventions for dads is limited, however, a Systematic Review of Mixed Methods Studies carried out in 2023 exploring 'Digital Parenting Interventions for Fathers of Infants from Conception to the Age of 12 Months, 50% of the qualitative studies that were part of the review focussed on the SMS4Dads intervention. Mixed method articles also involved interventions targeting knowledge on infant feeding and breastfeeding.

The evidence from the research demonstrates that fathers are generally supportive of eHealth interventions and that they find such interventions to show promise in building parenting confidence and knowledge and promoting support toward partners. Qualitative findings also support the need to adapt digital interventions to accommodate father-specific needs and barriers. Suggestions from qualitative studies include mobile compatibility of web-based programs and making programs available during the prenatal period, when fathers may have more time compared with during the postpartum period.

Halton Family Hubs have commissioned BeebotAI to transform the way in which we interact with families. Using Artificial Intelligence and Intelligent Automation, we have been able to use digital support proactively to provide regular information to support dads through their fatherhood journey. With our automated care pathways, dads are able to receive automated, targeted, timely and relevant information via an app notification guiding them through the different stages of pregnancy to ensure that they feel valued, empowered and informed. Once the baby has successfully been delivered, dads are then able to sign up to receive notifications on breastfeeding and infant feeding.

## 4. Active Engagement Strategies

Despite the potential opportunities and benefits of engaging fathers in early home visiting, fathers' participation in home visiting services has been reported as infrequent and inconsistent (Holmberg & Olds, 2015; Thullen et al., 2014). Although fathers, in general, are not well engaged in early home visiting, evidence indicates that fathers can still shape the effectiveness of these services for mothers and their young children. For example, Eckenrode and colleagues' study (2000) of the Nurse-Family Partnership program (Olds, Henderson, Tatelbaum, & Chamberlin, 1986) showed that domestic violence reduced the impact of the intervention. Similarly, mothers who report lower service involvement by their male partners report dropping out of home visitation services sooner (Navaie-Waliser et al., 2000) and participate in fewer visits overall (Stevens-Simon, Nelligan, & Kelly, 2001).

**Are you a New Dad. Sign up to receive infant feeding updates and support.**

Get regular information to support you through your Fatherhood journey. With our automated care pathway for dads.



Scan to find more



**Are you a Dad to be? Sign up to receive pregnancy updates and support.**

Get regular information to support you through your Fatherhood journey. With our automated care pathway for dads.



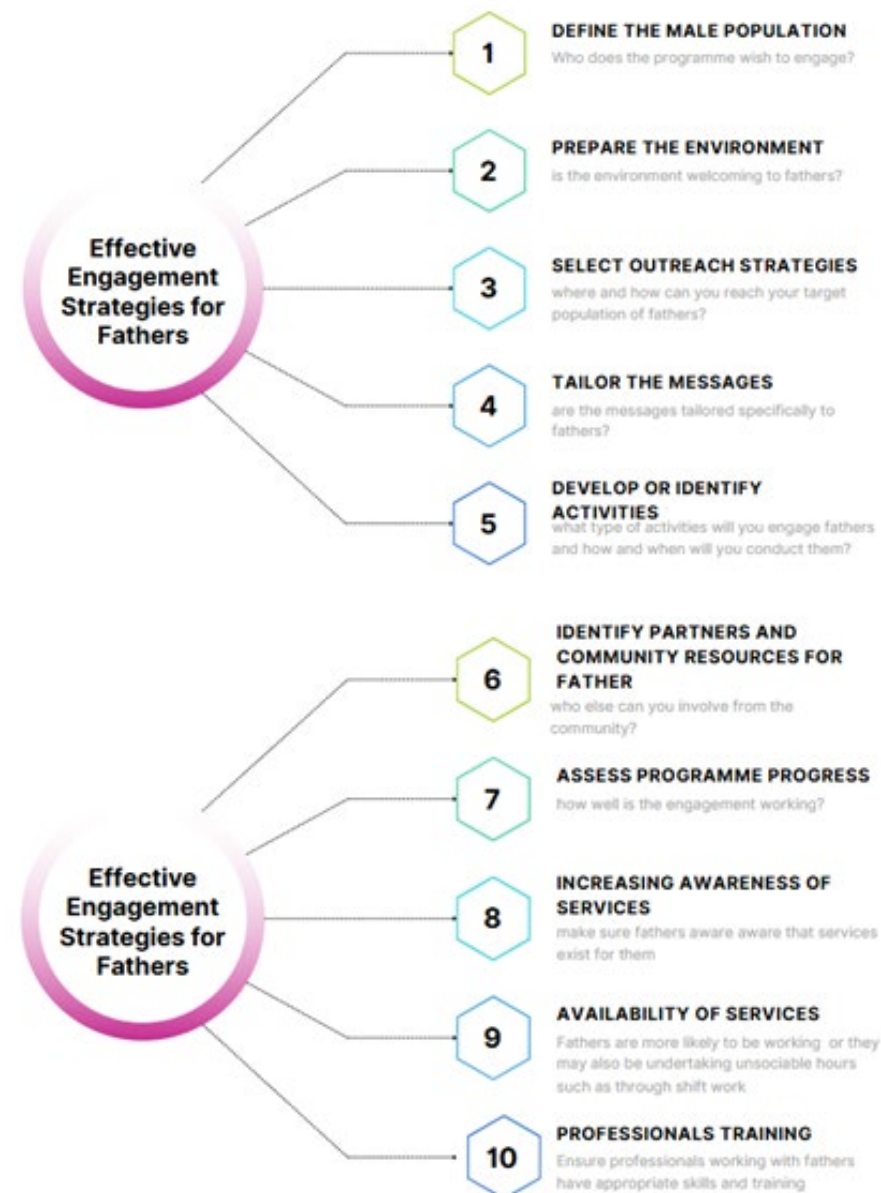
Scan to find more





In order to successfully engage fathers, it is important to know where and who fathers are. The Fatherhood Institute recommends that “Data should be collected by NHS and local authorities to assess whether government policy and official guidance on partner or father-inclusion have been embedded into service design and communications” and that “Fathers’ names, contact details and NHS numbers should be entered onto NHS birth notifications so that fathers can be contacted directly by services. As is the case for mothers, the father’s NHS number would link to his medical record for use by practitioners and for research purposes within a framework of data protection law and ethical guidelines.”

When looking to engage and involve fathers in services and / or interventions, it is important to link back to the research and evidence of what works. Earlier on in the strategy, it was noted from fathers in Halton themselves of what would help them to feel included and involved. Below, are some additional key points for consideration;



## 5. Policy and Advocacy

In collaboration with The Fatherhood Institute, Halton Family Hubs have adopted the 'dads included' self – assessment. The Dads Included self-assessment is designed to help all agencies working directly with children and families to identify how father inclusive their own services are, and what changes they can make to ensure they provide the best possible services to improve children's wellbeing and safety. The self – assessment was launched, shared and distributed with 90 professionals at the Halton Fatherhood Conference in February 2025. An online version of the self-assessment will be developed so that a digital record can be captured across Halton of all agencies who agree to use it.

The self-assessment works best when senior managers are committed to using the tool to improve their father inclusiveness. The following provides an overview of the six units of the Dads Included Self-Assessment

### The Six Units of the Dads Included Self-Assessment

#### Leadership

Strong leadership and a clear strategy are essential in ensuring that everyone in your organisation is committed to engaging with fathers and strengthening father-child relationships. Senior managers must feel confident in their knowledge about why positive father-child relationships are so important to children, and how to support them.

#### Team

How well you and your colleagues interact with fathers is a crucial factor in how they engage with your services. Take a step back and think about whether dads would feel comfortable dealing with your team. Remember, mothers and fathers have distinct needs and can require different approaches. Many practitioners feel they can relate easily to most mothers, but don't always consider how well they engage with fathers, and whether or not their actions may unwittingly exclude men.

#### Environment

First impressions count, and your services' physical environment can be a major factor in how comfortable a father will feel getting involved. Think about your décor, displays and promotional material and whether they create the kind of environment that would make fathers feel welcome.

#### Marketing and communication

Communicating proactively with fathers will help show them that mainstream services are for them, as well as for mums. They will be made to feel they are important to your service and will want to become involved. Remember, this is not just about marketing campaigns; all communications, including letters, can unintentionally exclude fathers if not planned carefully.

#### Recruiting fathers

Making your services readily available and accessible to local fathers can be easier than you think. To help as many families as possible, it is best to recruit fathers proactively and routinely rather than as an exception, such as when dads get into difficulty.

#### Monitoring and evaluation

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of your work with fathers is vital to assess what works and what doesn't.



We know through the feedback gained from local fathers, and the national evidence base, one of the most fundamental ways in which to successfully engage with fathers is to implement flexible service hours to accommodate their working hours. We know that maternity and paternity leaves are not comparable with the vast majority of fathers returning to work 2 weeks after the birth of their child. Engaging fathers effectively in services requires a tailored approach that acknowledges their work schedules, preferences, and needs. Here are key strategies to implement flexible service hours successfully

## 1. Understand Fathers' Needs and Availability

- Conduct surveys or informal discussions to understand when fathers are most available.
- Get to know the fathers who you are working with to understand their working patterns (e.g., shift work, evening jobs).

## 2. Offer Flexible Service Hours

- Where possible, try and offer a variety of different sessions including early morning, evening, and weekends.
- Introduce virtual and on-demand resources, like online workshops or recorded sessions.
- Rotate service hours periodically to test what works best.

And remember, what works for fathers may also work for working mothers too ensuring the whole service is inclusive to all

# 6. Community Collaboration

Community collaboration is essential when developing father-inclusive practice, as it ensures that fathers are effectively engaged, supported, and valued in parenting and family life. Collaboration between local organisations, schools, healthcare providers, and family hubs creates a strong support network for fathers.

Fathers can access peer support groups, parenting workshops, and a range of different services tailored to their needs. Collaboration allows services to be more visible and accessible, meeting fathers where they are (e.g., workplaces, sports clubs, or community centres). Digital platforms and social media can further extend outreach.

There are a number of organisations and services across Halton that provide opportunities for fathers to come together. These include;

- **Andy's Man Club** – This currently includes Westfield Primary School, Clayton Crescent, Runcorn, WA7 4TR. More information can be found by visiting <https://andysmanclub.co.uk/groups/>
- Parents in Mind
- Dad Matters
- **Calm Your Mind** – Support in Halton for men's mental health. <https://calmyourmind.co.uk/>

## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Across Halton, we want everybody to be committed to fostering a father-inclusive approach to services, ensuring that fathers are actively engaged, supported, and valued in their parenting roles. To achieve this, we would like everybody to adopt the following key measures:

### Commitment to Continuous Improvement

1. **Regular Feedback:** All services aim to seek regular feedback from fathers using their services to understand their experiences, needs, and barriers to engagement. This can be gathered in a range of different ways including through surveys, focus groups, and direct conversations.
2. **Performance Indicators:** Our aim is for services and organisations to track fathers' participation rates and engagement levels to help assess the effectiveness of programmes and guide future improvements.
3. **Ongoing Programme Evaluation:** Our programmes will be subject to continuous review and adaptation based on evaluation outcomes. This process will ensure that services remain relevant, responsive, and beneficial for fathers and their families.

### Leadership and Staff Development

4. **Leadership Audits:** Our aim is for Senior leaders to adopt the 'Dads Inclusive Assessment' and use it regularly to assess adherence to father-inclusive objectives, ensuring that leadership actively promotes and integrates father-friendly practices across all services.
5. **Team Audits:** Staff will be invited to participate in completing the 'Dads Inclusive Assessment' periodically to evaluate their understanding, confidence, and effectiveness in engaging fathers. Training and professional development opportunities will be provided to enhance staff skills in father-inclusive practices.

### Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive Environment

6. **Environment Audits:** Services are encouraged to ensure they remain welcoming and inclusive for fathers. This includes reviewing promotional materials, signage, and service accessibility to foster a father-friendly atmosphere.



[www.haltonfamilyhubs.co.uk](http://www.haltonfamilyhubs.co.uk)

