



Bexley Local Safeguarding Children Board

Guidance on the Inclusion of Fathers, Partners and Members of Extended Family in Common Assessments, Child in Need & Child Protection Cases

To be used in conjunction with Agency Guidelines, LSCB Child in Need Guide,
Assessment Framework & London Child Protection Procedures

Introduction

Learning from the Serious Case Reviews undertaken in Bexley in 2009 has highlighted the need to consider the child's family in a holistic way and to ensure that fathers, new partners and extended family members are assessed when considering the needs of a child at all stages of assessment. This is also reflected in the national Biennial Review of Serious Case Reviews. This guide is primarily directed at early intervention however the principles of inclusion of the whole family in higher level assessments applies equally.

Fathers and grandparents are often a resource to support and protect a child that are missed. Sometimes they may pose a threat to the well being of the child.

The arrival of a new partner, male or female, into a family does not in its self present a threat to the well being of the child however if they are not included in any assessment this is not known. The arrival of that person may change the dynamics of a family in such a way that the related pressures change the environment from one where the child's needs were being met into a potentially abusive one.

Families and relationships come in many forms and this guidance applies equally to same sex relationships.

The impact of cultural norms can also affect how families 'work' together and the role taken by adults involved with a child. This must be taken into account when working with families from different backgrounds.

Understanding who is in the family

Whenever we come into contact with a child and their family as professionals it is very important that we gain an understanding of who the adults are that have a caring role for the child or who come into contact with the child through their relationship with the main carer usually the mother.

We need to be confident to ask the question when we first come into contact with the family including at the ante-natal stage and that we check regularly with the parent whether this has changed. These questions need to be asked by all universal services as well as those in targeted services, this may be through the completion of a Family Health Needs Assessment by the midwife or health visitor or a school admission form as examples. This should include the father's details, extended family who play an active role with the child and any partner who either lives with the parent or is a frequent visitor to the family home. It must be remembered that family relationships do not remain static and it is important to be aware of changes in those adult relationships.

If it is identified that a child may have additional needs requiring a Common Assessment and Team Around the Child approach the father or partner should be included in the assessment wherever possible, if this is not possible it should be recorded why not.

For situations that meet the criteria for high level services through Children Social Care or CAMHS the requirements remain the same

although more detailed information may be sought.

What to ask when undertaking a Common Assessment or Initial Assessment

Clear questions about the make up of the family should be asked of the parent, usually the mother, and the child if they are of sufficient age and understanding to participate in the assessment. We should not assume that a person presenting with the mother and child is the father.

Fathers, partners and grandparents should be invited to any assessment if they have parental responsibility or play an active role in the child's life unless there is a safeguarding reason why this is not appropriate or the mother refuses consent for them to be involved. If consent is withheld it is important to understand why.

Here are some suggestions of what to ask:

- Details of the child's father (or mother if child lives with their father) - name, address, date of birth, GP - do they have parental responsibility?
- Contact arrangements if the parents are separated including staying arrangements
- Any concerns the parent or child have about their relationship with the father/mother
- Does the father/partner help with the care of the child?
- Does the parent have a current partner, who are they, do they live with the child or play a role in the care of a child?
- Has the relationship started recently?
- Who else in the family has the care of the child or supports the parent with looking after the child?
- What are their details?
- Does anyone involved with the child have a specific problems or access services that may impact on the wellbeing of the child?

What may indicate a risk factor for the child?

Because an adult is identified as having their own problems or as being vulnerable does not mean they are a threat to the wellbeing of the child however it is important that the impact of that adult is understood when assessing a child's needs.

The following issues may indicate a risk or the need to assess further:

- Does the father or partner have a history of violence?
- Is there any history of domestic violence in this relationship or in previous relationships that is known about?
- Do they have a mental health problem or a learning disability that may impact on their ability to care for a child?
- Is there a history of alcohol or substance misuse?
- Is there a dispute over contact arrangements?
- Are there any private law Court Orders in relation to contact?
- Is the parent putting a new relationship before the needs of the child?
- Are there financial or housing issues that may be adding to strained adult relationships?

What may indicate a protective factor for the child?

Most fathers, new partners and grandparents are able to offer support to a parent and to be a positive influence on a child. Again this resource needs to be understood so that the child can benefit fully from this support.

These supports may be available to the child:

- Even if separated does the father play an active role with the child, should they be encouraged to attend meetings and parents evenings to ensure that this is valued and developed in the best interests of the child?
- Does the new partner show an interest in the well being of the child?
- Does the parent involve the father, partner, grandparents in plans for the child in a positive way?
- Are grandparents (and other extended family) able to offer support, respite or care for the child?

Understanding the impact of fathers and partners on the wellbeing of a child

It is not easy to assess the impact especially if the parent refuses consent for them to be involved or you are given incomplete information from the parent however by having the confidence to ask the questions you will get a better understanding of who is involved in the life of a child and it gives you the opportunity to explore both with the adults and the child if there is any risks associated. Equally important is that you also know what resources may be available to support the child in addressing their additional needs.

What to do if you are concerned

If during the course of the information gathering or assessment of the needs of the child you are concerned about the wellbeing of the child or safeguarding issues are identified this must be discussed with your agency's safeguarding advisor or through a consultation with the Safeguarding Children Service.

The concerns may indicate that you need to gather more information from other agencies with the consent of the parent and child or that you need to move from information gathering to a Common Assessment or a referral to Children Social Care.