

# Engaging with Fathers

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What we have learnt from 15 years  
of work in Men's Health, Boy's  
Health and Education and  
through

The Engaging Fathers Project

# **THE ENGAGING FATHERS PROJECT APPROACH**

**The goal: Fathers involved with children**

**The strategy: Services involve fathers**

**The bottom line: Children's well being**

# Can services engage with dads?

- Schools
- Early Childhood
- Indigenous
- Antenatal and postnatal
- Community

# Yes it is possible



Sometimes it is... “Wow”



# It involves risk



# Real Life Evidence





# the payoff...



# FOUR BIG ONES

- Environment
- Communication
- Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes
- Policy and Protocols

**Check your environment:  
PHARMACIES AS A  
CASE STUDY**

# HOW CAN A PUBLIC VENUE NOT BE MALE-FRIENDLY?

- **Male - Female Differences in Pharmacy Use**
- **Ten pharmacies randomly selected**
- **Sixty Hours of observation**

<b>BEHAVIOUR</b>	<b>Females per 100 males</b>
Enters Premises	170
Asks Pharmacist Question	120
Ask Assistant Question	200
Buys Item	260
Picks up Item	300

# DISPLAYS

- **Measured square metres**
- **Coded into Baby, Neutral, Female and Male**







# RESULTS

- **Male items 30 square metres**
- **Female items 339 square metres**
- **A ratio of 1 to 11.3**

# FOUR BIG ONES

- Environment
- Communication
- Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes
- Policy and Protocols

# KNOWLEDGE FOR STAFF

- About father-infant attachment
- Purpose – why involve the men?

We think dads should connect



BUT HOW EARLY?



# ATTACHMENT?



# Ongoing work with new fathers

- Antenatal classes
- Home visiting
- Postnatal Depression Group
- WEB and Email support research project

# What do new fathers need?

- From the research
  - sleep & settling
  - Breastfeeding
  - PND
- From an attachment perspective



# Knowledge Gap



Fathers don't know about...

- brain growth
- self regulation
- attachment
- The father's influence on development

# Attachment Gap



## Fathers don't experience

- Holding relationship
  - (midwife)
- attachment mentoring
  - (Home visiting)

# Knowledge for staff to use Father-infant Attachment



# From the research...

**Q1.** Is mother-infant attachment the template for father-infant attachment?

**Ans:** No

van IJzendoorn and de Wolff (1997)

## Q2. Does father-infant attachment influence development?

On measures of:

social competence, emotional regulation, empathy, school readiness, sibling conflict, behaviour problems...

A2. For Strange Situation Procedure: **No**

A2. For Adult Attachment Interview: **No**

# Three responses

1. More time with infants
2. Buffering effect
3. Look more deeply

# Three responses

1. More time with infants

No evidence

2. Buffering effect

Lots of evidence

3. Look more deeply

New paradigms

# Father-infant attachment buffering

## **Best outcome:**

Mother-infant secure

Father-infant secure

## **Next best:**

Mother-infant secure

Father-infant insecure

## **Next best:**

Mother-infant insecure

Father-infant secure

**Worst:** both insecure



# Q3. How does father-infant attachment form?

- Sensitivity is not the only predictor (not even for mothers)
- Fathers play behaviour
- Feldman (2003) fathers role in coregulation of positive arousal

# LOOKING MORE DEEPLY

- Dads distinctive interaction
- Dads role in social development
- Dads role in via
  - 1. unconscious (oedipal)
  - 2. emotional and cognitive regulation (neurology)
  - 3. spiritual (Indigenous)

# Dads distinctive interaction



# Dads role in social development



Dads role constructed by mother



# Dads role constructed by mother



# New Father's Role for the well being of infant

- Connection to the infant
- Support the mother
- Deal with the outside world
- Find their place in the primary triangle