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Foreword

Of the millions of people across the world, approximately 49 per cent are men. It's been this way since the beginnings of human-kind. So why then are we so perplexed and confused about how to engage and work effectively with men in our communities? Ironically, most of us asking these questions about how to best work with men, are men ourselves. What is it that confuses us about effectively engaging the masculine half of our society? Is it that we have just taken for granted the way men think, feel, engage and respond?

The reality is that men are different to women. We have different needs, motivations, ways of expressing ourselves, and different ways of computing and reacting to information. For decades now, health professionals, academics, leaders in education and social justice have tailored support programs, teaching and health services to specifically meet the unique needs of women, and rightfully so. Thankfully, we have finally come to realise that these same initiatives need to take place in order to improve outcomes for men, in terms of health, wellbeing, education and family relationships. Now we just need to understand what men are all about, and how we need to work in order to effectively engage with them.

All too often services are designed on false stereotypes. And when it comes to providing family and relationship services to Australian men, the picture most often painted is of the sad Aussie bloke struggling to overcome heart-breaking and complex addiction problems, family violence, or criminal behaviour. Libraries are filled with stories of suffering and despair that is seen to be caused by men.

This guide breaks through these assumptions and takes a positive, strengths-based approach to explaining what men want and need, and how we can best support Australian men to engage with the services designed to support them and their families.

As a patron of Mensline Australia – Australia's only national, professional, telephone support service specifically for men with family and relationship issues – I'm passionate about improving access to quality services, tailored to the needs of Australian men and their families. Each year more than 60,000 Australian men (mostly fathers) call Mensline Australia for confidential support about managing family and relationship issues.

It is now starting to be recognised that men play a vital role in the lives of children. This guide has been designed as a starting point for those responsible for working with men. It offers a user-friendly approach to working with men, enabling them to talk about their needs and better support their partners and children. I trust you will find it helpful in your vitally important work.



William McInnes
Patron
Mensline Australia
11 March 2009

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Preface

This introductory guide is one of the designated outcomes from the *2007 National Men and Family Relationships (MFR) Forum* and articulates the core issues discussed at that event. The guide provides an interactive and user-friendly tool for practitioners who are new to working specifically with male clients and their family relationships. This guide is designed to compliment face-to-face training workshops on working with men. It provides information for engaging with men across a variety of disciplines, and some insight into the skills, challenges and best practice models currently being utilised both nationally and internationally in working with men.

The guide will support a wide range of practitioners working with men across the community sector. In particular, this document might be popular within Family Relationship Centres where a significant new workforce is engaging with men through early intervention and post-separation services. Everyone is encouraged to read through all six sections of the guide, rather than pick out different bits. This is because certain theoretical ideas (like generativity) are weaved throughout the whole six topics.

The six topics include:

- Introduction to working with men.
- Working with men as fathers.
- Skills used when working with men.
- Working with men and culture.
- ‘Once were hunters and gatherers’ – working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.
- Working with men in different contexts.
 - A. Working with men and emotions (affect regulation).
 - B. Working with men and family violence.
 - C. Working with separated fathers.
 - D. Women working with men.

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) has funded the development of this guide. By investing in such resources FaHCSIA is helping services providers to work with families in a way that is more inclusive of fathers. These resources support a broad range of services that FaHCSIA funds for men and their families including Men and Family Relationship Services which provide relationship counselling, education and skills training, support, conflict resolution and case management services and Mensline Australia.

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Icon used in the guide

This icon is used to highlight the principles and activities that can be adopted when working with men and/or how practitioners can apply what has been discussed.

You will find one of these at the conclusion of each topic.

Topic 1: Introduction to working with men

Outline

This topic discusses:

- ▶ the historical development of Men and Family Relationship (MFR) programs
- ▶ the significance of the non-deficit perspective
- ▶ current challenges
- ▶ principles for effective practice
- ▶ valuable tools

Read the following section and:

- ▶ reflect on what are the programs in your area that are relevant to men and their family relationships?
- ▶ develop a list of key services, along with key people that you can refer men to.
- ▶ reflect on the services/support your program provides that will be of interest to men. Why are these programs provided?

The historical development of Men and Family Relationship (MFR) programs

The context of working with men in Australia only formally commenced 10 years ago. Prior to this time, few people were employed to work specifically with men (except for domestic violence programs). Since then, new funding has emerged from either Commonwealth/State/Territory Governments or private trusts/foundations. The Bernard van Leer Foundation (www.bernardvanleer.org/) provided the initial funding to the Engaging Fathers Project (www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/efp/index.html) in NSW for developing their men and boys programs.

Since 1998, the most significant funding for working with men has been through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and its funding of Men and Family Relationship (MFR) services (www.fahcsia.gov.au)

This initiative was first announced in November 1997, with funding of six million dollars over four years through the Partnerships against Domestic Violence Strategy Programs. It initially delivered MFR services through 18 locations with a further 20 locations being established in July 2008. The funding of a national telephone line to provide support for men and family relationships was a strong cornerstone from 1997. In 2002, Mensline Australia formally commenced as the provider of this service.

An independent evaluation of MFR programs indicated a high level of acceptance and support by men. Sixty seven organisations are now delivering a suite of early intervention and prevention family relationship services to men in over 121 locations throughout Australia (FaHCSIA, 2008).

In order to understand the value of MFR services, an evaluation of the initiative was undertaken from November 2000 to August 2002. This evaluation focussed on two key issues:

- The operation of MFR services; and
- The experiences and outcomes of the program's clients.

The evaluation found that MFR services were very successful in providing support in rural and regional areas of Australia, where men's services had been practically non-existent to a very diverse range of men (e.g. from culturally, linguistically and socially-disadvantaged backgrounds and Indigenous men), and at key life transition stages such as the birth of a first child, separation and retirement.

The evaluation also helped to debunk the popular assertions that men:

- do not want to talk about themselves and their relationships; and
- will not seek help in relationship matters.

In fact, it found that MFR clients responded very strongly to the existence of the men's service. Men were quoted as making statements such as:

- 'It is about time there was something for us'
- 'Until I heard about the men's service I didn't have a clue where to go to get help'.

The experiences of the services clearly demonstrated that men are open to relationship support, provided that the approach is male-friendly and non-judgmental.

The major keys to success identified in the evaluation, still apply today:

- find a positive connection to bring the men into the service
- build on the men's self esteem and existing skills, rather than emphasising the challenges they experience.

Since MFR programs were developed, a strong series of MFR practitioner based networks have emerged to represent either states or regional areas in Australia. These informal networks have focussed on developing the practice of working with men, sharing resources and building a wider range of effective frameworks to support men and their families. The website www.mfrn.net.au is used to share information about practice-based issues for working with men, to distribute useful resources, and increase awareness about regular national and regionally based MFR Forums. Membership is free and practitioners who have an interest in working with men and family relationships are encouraged to join.

The days of deficit-based models are numbered, with a growing body of knowledge and expertise in developing strategies for engaging with men. Despite these encouraging findings, the evaluation also noted a high level of unmet need for services specifically targeted to men. The overwhelming response from men was to ask for more services specifically designed for them, and for better publicity to increase awareness of these services.

The evaluation also showed, contrary to popular belief, that men have a high degree of commitment to their families and are motivated towards the development and maintenance of successful relationships. Men were found to be generally willing to talk about their relationships and learnt new skills when the context was welcoming and the adopted approach was appropriate. This feedback also fits with the research documented by Don Edgar in *Men, Mateship, Marriage* (Edgar, 1997) who identified that most men insist that their ‘best mate’ (usually seen as a male bonding term) is ‘me missus’. In his research as the foundation director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Edgar found that across all socio-economic groups, the one person men could disclose their real feelings to was their partner.

Through the evaluation, barriers to men accessing services were identified as follows:

- Not being well informed about what counselling involved.
- Believing that counselling does not ‘work’.
- Feeling that existing services are really for women.
- Perceiving counselling to be a last resort to save a relationship, or that needing counselling is a sign that a relationship is over.
- Believing counsellors will take sides against them.
- Feeling uncomfortable with the language and modes of communication traditionally used in counselling.

Other examples of the significant change in men accessing community services is Mensline Australia (www.menslineaus.org.au) providing a professional 24 hours a day, seven days a week national telephone support service (1300 789 978) for men and their families. Mensline Australia receives between 50,000 to 70,000 calls each year. Also, over 200 Men’s Sheds now operate across Australia. Two key websites that document the significant breadth of this new phenomenon are the Australian Men’s Sheds Association (www.mensshed.org) and Mensheds Australia (www.mensheds.com.au).

During 2006, national research into men’s sheds was conducted in South Australia (www.avetra.org.au/publications/Confo6Papers.shtml). It indicated that men are accessing these sheds in very large numbers (Golding, 2006). Men’s sheds have allowed men to come together with shared interests and find new ways to feel useful and contribute again to their communities through learning or sharing their skills, making friends, networking and accessing health information programs and opportunities.

The Mensline Australia Call Back Service (CBS) which is an extension of the Mensline Australia telephone support service, originated from growing concerns about male callers who were lacking support as a result of being geographically or socially isolated. The service was developed to respond to a number of barriers experienced



by men including, long waiting lists, a lack of services in rural or remote areas, and the cost of ongoing support.

The CBS model deviates from traditional telephone counselling services which tend to respond as passive recipients of crisis calls, permitting only the most pressing issues to be addressed. Instead, CBS counsellors work with men over time, encouraging them to tell their stories, providing relationship education, assisting them to take practical steps towards their goals, and creating linkages to ongoing support, where necessary.

During 2007, CBS provided ongoing support to more than 200 men each month and continues to receive over 60 referrals a month. The service provides exemplary evidence, highlighting men's ability and interest in seeking out help and utilising services that are specifically tailored to respond to their needs and help-seeking preferences.

The significance of the non-deficit perspective

Traditionally, outside of politics or the workplace, a comical, yet negative view of men has been portrayed socially or in the media. Amongst the many and varied descriptions of masculinity, the non-deficit perspective (King, 2000; King, 2001; King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) identifies that for many men, the key relationships in their lives, are more significant than previously acknowledged. In a family context, the man's relationship with his children (biological, step or close relationship) is often the pinnacle expression of this importance. In health, a similar position exists and is called the salutogenic approach (menshealth.uws.edu.au). This approach calls for a truly health promoting approach rather than a pathology-focussed one. This involves questioning some of the stereotypes around men's health issues.

This positive connection for men and family relationships can be viewed as 'the quiet place within' that many Australian men talk about least. It is a personal space that men rarely share. Until recently, it was not until men approached the end of their life, that they often expressed regret for spending too much time at work and not enough time with their family. This reflection is still experienced today, as many men only start talking about the importance of their family relationships after a crisis such as family separation has occurred.

Australian men are becoming more vocal about this quiet place, i.e. the importance of their connection with their family, particularly their children. Andrew King refers to a 'quiet men's revolution' occurring throughout Australia. This men's revolution is not as vocal as the women's movement, but it is expressed as men talk about achieving a better balance between work and family demands. The change is seen by how men behave differently as they walk hand-in-hand with their children and proudly push the pram. Some men identify the reason for attending a fathering program as wanting to raise their children differently to how they were raised. The birth of a child is now a 'wake-up call' for many young men and an opportunity for them to review the choices they make in life, and provides the motivation to take greater responsibility and develop stronger relationships. Many men, who are now grandfathers, talk about the significant value of developing a closer relationship with their grandchild than what they had, or were allowed to have, when their children were young.

The challenging side of men's behaviour, however, still exists. It is in this context that many men and community services operate. The challenge for programs is to engage men in working with this 'quiet space'. The non-deficit perspective does not condone inappropriate male behaviours but harnesses the positive motivations that make change a reality. Once this 'quiet space' is entered and men are engaged into accessing services, the skills used by professional workers in working with women can be applied to working with men.

Current challenges

While significant achievements have occurred in working with men (O'Brien & Rich, 2002), the challenge is still enormous. The Western Australian Government Report that reviewed Family and Parent Support Services for Men (Nixon, 1999) identified that men have major health problems. They have high rates of depression, suicide, violence, drug and alcohol use and fatal motor vehicle accidents.

The report recognises that there is still a strong belief that men do not ask for help but fix themselves. Promotion of men and family relationship services still needs improvement as many men view the word 'counselling' as a punitive response for workplace misdemeanours (Nixon, 1999). It is still common for men to remark 'I never thought such services for men existed' when they first come into contact with MFR programs.

The inflexibility of the Australian workplace (including challenges in balancing work and family needs) and the widespread existence of family violence are still significant issues that confront programs because men usually access programs only when a crisis occurs. Men's health programs recognise that men visit their doctor less than women and seek help only after a crisis has occurred (Nixon, 1999). A variety of public awareness campaigns have been useful in promoting a responsive environment that encourages the proactive view that it is okay for men to seek help before the crisis occurs.

Principles for effective practice

Eight principles have been identified for working effectively with men:

1. The importance of perceived equality.
2. The existence of ‘window periods’ where men access support.
3. The need for men’s services to be distinguished from general services.
4. The value of personal recommendation about services.
5. The importance of flexible service delivery.
6. Client involvement in program development.
7. The solution focussed approach.
8. Local area coordination.

(www.groupworksolutions.com.au/_literature_20892/the_quiet_revolution)

1. The importance of perceived equality

When a man makes an initial contact with a program, the immediate environment and openness of staff towards him, will influence his level of trust. Most men enter new situations with suspicion about what will be expected of them and they rely on visual cues that suggest they can relax (King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004).

When there is a significant power difference between men and the service providers, men will be more cautious and wary of engagement. This is why programs with a higher level of service user participation are more effective in engaging men. This emphasis on equality is reflected in the notion of ‘mateship’ and has been a defining feature of Australian culture since settlement (Colling, 1992) and pre-existed in Indigenous Australia.

Groups are best supported by men when they are attended by a diverse and mixed range of participants who can both teach and learn with and from, other participants. The most successful groups occur when men can hear from each other about a variety of backgrounds and experiences concerning fatherhood, family, work etc. Conversely, the men’s groups that struggle for attendance numbers are often focussed too narrowly on attracting only participants that are disadvantaged or receive welfare.

The organisation’s environment is a key issue that men assess quietly when they experience a new situation. They decide if the environment is a threat or one in which they can relax. This is a similar process to how women respond. However, a key difference is that most men do not talk through their decision making and how they responded (at that time, or retrospectively). Many women will talk through this experience with a friend or other person and use this reflection to reconsider what they need to do.

Many organisations have found it useful to display positive posters. These posters are rich in Australian images of ‘perceived equality’ or close connection with important relationships, like children.

For posters and booklets, visit:

- ▶ SNAICC Publications and Resources Online (Free)
<https://www.melmailing.com.au/snaicc/modules/orders/new.jsp>
- ▶ Family Action Centre Publications and Resources
www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/publications-resources/index.html
- ▶ Institute of Family Practice–Working with Men Kit (programs, posters and booklets)
info@ifp.nsw.edu.au
- ▶ NAPCAN has a wide range of resources in different languages
www.napcan.org.au/order.htm
- ▶ Mensline Australia
www.menslineaus.org.au/OrderMaterials.aspx

2. The existence of ‘window periods’ where men access support

For some men experiencing problems in their lives, there is the potential for a ‘window period’ during which they are more likely to access services for assistance. If men experience high levels of frustration and are unable to access services because of long waiting lists or complicated referral procedures, they are likely to give up trying and find other solutions to deal with their problems. These solutions frequently include ignoring the problem, or reacting in more aggressive ways because of their pent up feelings.

Some organisations have attempted to make intake procedures and personal information forms more user-friendly as men have a higher level of frustration when they do not understand these processes. Due to the existence of illiteracy in the adult community, intake procedures need to allow for supporting men who may not feel confident reading or writing in English.

3. The need for men’s services to be distinguished from general services

Programs for men need to have a strong branding about being male focussed or for fathers. Unless the words men, dad, uncles, pops or fathers are used in the program title, they assume that the program is not relevant to them. There was a significant increase in men accessing early childhood centres when they used specific fliers that used the word ‘dads’ and indicated the relevance of the program to fathers (Fletcher, Hahn & Gifford, 2002). When invited by their children, men attended special events in such large numbers, that the early childhood centres or schools struggled to cope with the demand.

4. The value of personal recommendation about services

In the initial stages of operation, many men’s programs experience low numbers of referrals and participants. In this start-up period, professionals need to persevere when the initial response by men to a program is not as high as anticipated. This is an experience that occurs in all community programs, however, when low client numbers occur in male focussed programs it is easily interpreted as an indicator of male disinterest.

It is only after a period of time that programs develop a routine and consistency in service provision. This may include ongoing support groups, regular educational groups or even one-day workshops that are run every six months. It is the consistency over a long period, which builds a program's reputation as being effective and worthwhile. Many men will attend programs because of the recommendation of friends, mates or family members.

One of the strongest forms of marketing occurs when someone who a man trusts, recommends they should access a particular program. This referral is more effective when the client is given a direct telephone number and a specific name of a contact person at the service. Men may stop seeking help when they feel frustrated by their difficulties in contacting someone or accessing support.

5. The importance of flexible service delivery

Men's services need to provide a range of group programs that offer choice. Men have a higher level of commitment when they can choose their level of involvement.

Some of these choices for men include:

- ▶ intensive father's groups and emotional support groups where participants attend for six to 15 months (mid-week evening)
- ▶ educational groups that have a duration of four to eight sessions (mid-week evening)
- ▶ information based, one-day workshops delivered on the weekend
- ▶ men's sheds or use of an informal space for men to meet and talk about relevant issues
- ▶ weekends away for men as a group or with their children
- ▶ father/child playgroups provided mid-week or on the weekend
- ▶ counselling
- ▶ telephone support.

Best practice has ensured the development of a diverse range of local initiatives that respond to men's needs (O'Brien & Rich, 2002), and avoid the 'one-size fits all' approach to service delivery.

The following are a range of programs for men that have emerged in Australia from 1998 to 2008:

- ▶ Afternoon/evening programs for fathers and their children held in primary schools that involve activities and a shared meal.
- ▶ Support groups for separated fathers on Sunday evenings after contact with their children finishes, such as those offered by *Dads in Distress* in various locations across New South Wales.
- ▶ Psychoeducational groups such as the *Hey, Dad!* series of programs, *Fathering after Separation*, and domestic violence programs.
- ▶ Specialised programs for indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse men.

- ▶ One-off workshops/psychoeducational groups and information booklets that have been developed by the Australian Government's Child Support Agency.
- ▶ Counselling and emotional support groups – where men explore a range of experiences.
- ▶ Individual counselling services provided outside working hours.
- ▶ Programs accessed through the workplace.
- ▶ Programs accessed by new fathers before they leave the hospital with their first baby.
- ▶ Task groups and the development of men's sheds where a range of activities are provided.
- ▶ Camp/adventure programs for fathers or for men and their children.
- ▶ Music festivals that promote messages of fathering and masculinity.
- ▶ 'Pitstop' men's health check-up evenings provided in club facilities throughout regional areas of Australia (initially developed in Western Australia).
- ▶ Family farm gatherings in rural communities where six to seven families meet to discuss issues relevant to drought affected communities.
- ▶ Telephone group counselling sessions.
- ▶ Internet blogs that deal with difficult issues in family law or being a father of a child with a disability.
- ▶ Pathways to Manhood, Uncle and other mentoring programs.
- ▶ Telephone counselling and support programs for individuals.
- ▶ National 24/7 male friendly telephone counselling service – Mensline Australia.

Men approach community organisations to meet their specific and immediate needs. When agencies provide a number of the above programs, they are more likely to cater for the diverse range of men's needs. Men often decide if a community program is relevant to their needs in the first few minutes of initial contact, when they are either talking on the telephone or walking in the front entrance of an organisation.

6. Client involvement in program development

It is important for service providers to involve their male clients in shaping and determining the most effective strategies to achieve program outcomes. When services are developing new programs or groups for men, it is vital to establish local reference groups that involve the target group of men. These reference groups can provide important feedback about program direction, marketing, and ambassadors who can personally recommend the program to other men.

Some men, who receive valuable support from a community program, have a strong interest in volunteering and supporting the program's further development. This energy is a tremendous resource, and added to this, adequate training and mentoring can result in positive outcomes for both the men and the service. New generations of men are emerging who have the experience to engage and support men who are not presently accessing men and family relationship programs.

7. The solution focussed approach

Men prefer solution focussed activities rather than counselling sessions (Nixon, 1999). The focus is not on feelings but improved relationships with significant people in the men's lives. A key factor when using a solution focussed framework is the adoption of a non-deficit approach to working with men (King, 2000). The non-deficit approach (King, 2000; King, 2001; King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) is an invaluable model that does not condone inappropriate behaviour but emphasises the importance of the relationship between men and their children.

The solution focussed approach also works well because it uses active solutions to current problems and concerns and involves practical solutions and tools.

8. Local area coordination

A defining feature of the past six years for men's programs has been the development of state based support networks. Due to the low number of men employed in community welfare/health programs, worker isolation was a key issue discussed at the *2004 National Men and Family Relationships Forum*. The state and regional based networks have been an essential support for these workers. The network meetings have provided opportunities for sharing information and allowed for the exploration of issues in greater depth. The MFR Network website www.mfrn.net.au encourages sharing of this information and mutual learning.



These networks allow for the development of useful partnerships that improve practice. When men and family relationships providers run programs in partnership with universal community services such as maternal and child health, community health centres, maternity hospitals, playgroups, or kindergartens, the involvement of men is normalised and the programs are more likely to succeed. Many men's programs begin in conjunction with women's programs. Two fathers' centres in Western Sydney used the same premises as women's programs, but operated outside of normal working hours. During the day the program focussed on working with women and in the evening the program focussed on working with men.

Additional initiatives and networks that have been developed include the following:

The Blokes Card

A new wallet-sized card listing nationally based emergency contacts is proving very popular with men. The program produced the Blokes Card as part of their efforts to improve men's access to information and services in their local area.

Go to www.bensoc.org.au/uploads/documents/blokescard-nov2007.pdf to view a PDF version of the card.

Engaging Fathers Program — Newcastle University

The Engaging Fathers Program at Newcastle University has developed and documented a large range of resources that promote father-inclusive practice.

The primary reasons for father-inclusive practice are based on the following evidence:

- ▶ Equal opportunity for women.
- ▶ Benefits to children and family.
- ▶ National goals for Australia.

(www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/efp/whyfatherinclusivepractice.html)

The website also contains information about capacity building and the competencies needed by professionals to work with men (www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/efathers/includingfathers/Assets/docs/framework/capacity-building-fip.pdf).

The competencies identified at the Newcastle Father-Inclusive Practice Forum are as follows:

- ▶ Group work with fathers.
- ▶ Recruiting fathers to early Childhood Health Centres.
- ▶ Talking to males about violence.
- ▶ Engagement skills for working with antenatal dads.
- ▶ Working with Indigenous fathers, uncles, pops, brothers.
- ▶ Using play with fathers in a multicultural setting.
- ▶ Raising staff awareness and acceptance of fathers.

Access to other networks

The Australian Camp Connect Association (www.campconnect.org.au/resources_kids.shtml) website has a tremendous range of networking links. The Australian Camp Connect Association is committed to helping ensure that the relationship fathers (or significant males) have with their children is one based on 'engagement', active participation, fulfilment, trust, respect, love and of course ... some serious fun!

The connections on their site are divided into:

- Resources for dads (www.campconnect.org.au/resources.shtml)
- Resources for kids (www.campconnect.org.au/resources_kids.shtml)
- International resources (www.campconnect.org.au/resources_intl.shtml)

Throughout this time, a few key networks have developed. The Australasian Men's Health Forum (www.menshealthaustralia.net) is a national organisation, made up of a diverse community of men working in men's organisations, who are committed to encouraging, supporting and promoting the health and wellbeing of men and boys.

The Australasian Men's Health Forum believes that:

- men and women are equal partners in society
- healthy masculinity and healthy sexuality is essential to society
- the wellbeing of men and boys is vital to society.

The Australasian Men's Health Forum has a range of good network resources and Mensline Australia (www.menslineaus.org.au/ServiceDirectory.aspx) has a comprehensive range of local resources.

The Fatherhood Institute has an excellent website at www.fatherhoodinstitute.org and provides international leadership in fatherhood and social policy issues. The Institute:

- collates and publishes international research on fathers, fatherhood and different approaches to engaging with fathers by public services and employers
- helps shape national and local policies to ensure a father-inclusive approach to family policy
- injects research evidence on fathers and fatherhood into national debates about parenting and parental roles
- lobbies for changes in law, policy and practice to dismantle barriers to fathers' care of infants and children
- is the UK's leading provider of training, consultancy and publications on father-inclusive practice for public and third sector agencies and employers.

Other international resources include the Father Involvement Initiative Ontario Network (FII-ON) whose web address is www.cfii.ca/fion/. FII-ON has a long-term vision and strong commitment which have led to some significant collective achievements involving over 25 communities and several provincial and national partnerships. An excellent resource they were involved in developing, in Canada, is the 24-Hour Cribside Assistance: The New Baby Manual for Dads

(www.bcbabyfriendly.ca/BabyManualforDads.pdf). This maintenance-themed manual explores the important skills fathers bring to parenting newborn babies.

Despite the availability of these national networks, there is still the need to further support the sharing of knowledge through the writing of journal articles and the provision of local groups that involve a small group of local workers meeting on a regular basis, to develop stronger partnerships between services, reflect on and learn from, working with men.



Complete this organisational checklist for working with men. It identifies your program's strengths and challenges when working with men.

Referrals work more easily with men being more likely to contact a new program when they are given a specific name of a person to ring, the phone number and a strong recommendation. Avoid just giving the program name and number.

Make sure you update any websites with your own local program details.

An initial project for many networks is to create a booklet that highlights relevant local services for men. Many men, when faced with a crisis, have little understanding of support services or organisations and who they need to contact. An example of this is the Bloke's Book (www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/our-city/community-directory/the-blokes-book.cfm). This book can be used as a template to replicate in many other communities as it provides topics of interest and contains generic national services.

Remember to focus on the principles for effective practice when working with men:

1. Importance of perceived equality.
2. Existence of 'window periods' where men access support.
3. The need for men's services to be distinguished from general services.
4. The value of personal recommendation about services.
5. The importance of flexible service delivery.
6. Client involvement in program development.
7. Solution focussed approach.
8. Local area coordination.

Remember what influences men the most when they first access a program:

- The immediate program/centre environment.
- Having easy telephone contact.
- A range of programs are provided and choices allowed.
- Advertising and increased community awareness as it makes the men's current issues topical.
- Recommendation from other significant people.

Topic 2: Working with men as fathers

Outline

This topic discusses the following subjects:

- Useful websites about fathering.
- Father-inclusive practice – what is it?
- Why engage fathers?
- Programs for fathers can help to...
- Barriers to father-inclusive programs.
- Dad myths.
- The changing role of fathers.
- An overview of the generative perspective.
- Erikson's life stages of development.
- The generative framework and men.
- How the deficit perspective of men is expressed.
- An alternative perspective of fathering.
- Men and adult relationships.

Read the following section and:

- think about what key activities in your area men invest their time in?
- review what services you refer men to regularly. Make sure you know the first name of some of the key people they will speak to.
- visit the FaHCSIA website and download a copy of the *Father-inclusive practice guide*. Using this guide this will help your organisation to more successfully engage with fathers.

The first section of this topic focuses on working with men as fathers and builds on the existence of a range of ideas and available resources. The content of this section is extracted from the *Father-inclusive practice guide*. It provides an excellent resource and workplace project to support the development of a father-friendly program or organisation.

This guide was developed as a resource to support the *Father-inclusive practice pilot project* being undertaken by the Australian Government through FaHCSIA. It was done in partnership with a group of experienced practitioners and 16 service providers from the Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP) and Early Childhood Program (ECP) sectors.

Working with men is all about the relationship. When you explore good practice with men, like working with women, it is rich in relationship connections. That relationship may be between the men's/community health worker and the male clients, or between the men and key relationships in their life. The commonality is that it has a strong connection with people, important objects or locations like the bush, the shed or cars.

When asked how it would be different if fathers were fully engaged in every aspect of family-related services and activities, a woman with many years experience in welfare and family support services beamed a huge smile as she said 'It would be just perfect.'

Useful resources about fathering

Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse – Briefing Papers
(www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/pubs.html#brief)

Hey Dad Program and resources Parenting education programs, DVD and
Photolanguage (hey.dad@brokenbay.catholic.org.au)

Fathering after separation parenting program (www.fahcsia.gov.au)

Family Relationships Online (www.familyrelationships.gov.au)

Men's Group – The movie (www.mensgroupthemovie.com)

Mensline Australia (www.menslineaus.org.au)

Parenting and Indigenous Men Posters
(www.snaicc.asn.au/srs/projects/parentingandmen/posters.html)

Sons of the Fathers DVD (inside a men's group) (www.fathersandsons.com.au)

Working with Men Kit (programs, posters and booklets) (info@ifp.nsw.edu.au)

Networks

Mensline Australia (www.menslineaus.org.au)

Australian Camp Connect Association (www.campconnect.org.au/resources_intl.shtml)

Men's Health and Well Being Association (www.mhwaq.org.au)

Men's Health Information and Resource Centre contains online articles
(www.menshealthaustralia.net)

National Father-Inclusive Practice Framework Website
(www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/efathers/includingfathers)

Men and Family Relationship Practitioners Network (www.mfrn.net.au)

International networks

Father Involvement Initiative – Ontario Network (www.cfii.ca/fion/index.htm)

Fatherhood Institute – UK’s fatherhood think-tank (www.fatherhoodinstitute.org)

Fatherwork – USA overview of the generative perspective
(fatherwork.byu.edu/ideas.htm)

Father-inclusive practice – what is it?

Father-inclusive practice occurs when the needs of fathers (biological and social) are responded to through the planning, development and delivery of services. For services aiming to support families, bringing fathers into everyday activities is a crucial part of inclusive practice. This recognises families as a system, and acknowledges a balance between the needs of fathers and the family as a group.

Because many family-based services have evolved to respond primarily to the needs of mothers and children, father-inclusive practice may require a process of planned change and managed learning that involves building sustainable relationships between staff, family members and the community.

Father-inclusive practice:

- recognises the diverse circumstances, strengths and interests of fathers
- takes a positive approach to the diversity of men, their needs and expectations
- encourages men and service providers to openly celebrate and value fathering.

By aiming to involve fathers and harness their full potential, services aim to promote and contribute to the wellbeing of children and families. The benefits of this approach include:

- the reduction of difficult behaviours and crime in the lives of young people
- raising educational achievements
- improving health
- preventing child abuse.

Further information can be found at www.newcastle.edu.au/includingfathers

By including fathers, services also have the opportunity to promote and facilitate a ‘team’ approach to parenting that research clearly indicates will benefit family life and improve outcomes for children.

Why engage fathers?

- Dads are committed to their children and are looking for ways to be involved in their lives.
- The relationship between fathers and mothers has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of children.
- When dads are engaged and involved in their families, both children and mothers benefit.

- ▶ Many fathers want to parent differently to the way in which they were parented.
- ▶ Dads think differently to mums.
- ▶ To increase the number of men engaging in services.
- ▶ More men are becoming primary caregivers and are expressing their needs as fathers.
- ▶ To reduce the parenting skill gap between mothers and fathers.
- ▶ Structures that benefit the community.
- ▶ Opportunities to promote team parenting through father-inclusive practice.
- ▶ Parenting is a team sport.

IT'S HARD TO WIN WHEN HALF THE TEAM IS ON THE SIDELINE!

Programs for fathers can help to...

- ▶ enhance existing parenting skills
- ▶ develop a peer network with other fathers who share similar like experiences
- ▶ encourage positive father-child interaction
- ▶ increase parenting information and confidence
- ▶ promote father involvement within the family unit
- ▶ decrease isolation by networking with other fathers and professional support staff
- ▶ increase the amount of time spent between father and child
- ▶ increase the number of positive interactions between the father and child.

Barriers to father-inclusive programs

- ▶ Fathers have a different parenting experience to that of mothers.
- ▶ There is less social pressure to be involved.
- ▶ Fathers tend to be more socially isolated as parents.
- ▶ Men may find it difficult to participate in services that are held in the day during work hours.
- ▶ Men may not be able to get time off work.
- ▶ Some men lack flexibility of work schedule to attend parenting programs.
- ▶ Fathers are often viewed as less competent than mothers.
- ▶ Family arrangements and socio-economic realities.
- ▶ Fathers are often open to support, however, there is little available to them in the community.
- ▶ Fathers may not be aware of services already in place, or assume that those they know about are for women.

Dad myths

Some common false beliefs about men looking after children (adapted from ‘Dad myths’ card, www.fathersdirect.com and ABS data) include:

Myth – Only mums can bond with babies

Men can be super-sensitive to babies – their heart rates race as fast as a woman’s when they hear a baby cry. Fathers can recognise their infants by the feel of their hands after only 60 minutes touch, even when blindfolded. When a man feeds a baby, he responds as carefully as a woman when the baby needs to pause.

Myth – Dads don’t make much difference

Young children with involved dads fit in better at daycare and school, learn better and have fewer behavioural problems. They make friends more easily and are better able to understand how other people feel. Later, they have more contented love lives, better mental health and are less likely to get into trouble with the police. All this is true for girls as much as for boys, whether or not they live with their dads.

Myth – A dad’s main job is making the money

Child care statistics show that fathers are increasingly prioritising their child care responsibilities. According to the 2002 ABS Child Care Survey, 30 per cent of employed fathers of children aged under 12 years made use of family friendly work arrangements to care for their children. This increased from 24 per cent in 1993.

Myth – Only mums really look after children

Australian fathers are increasingly spending more time with their children. The 1997 *ABS Time Use Survey* found that men are spending 20 minutes more a day playing with their children and 18 minutes more during the weekend teaching and helping their children, than they were in 1992.

The changing role of fathers

Over the years, the role of the father has significantly changed from the provider and protector role, to one where they must also address the other needs of their children. Today, the role of the father can be broken up into six different categories:

- ▶ A *responsible father* means doing things like organising your child/ren’s doctor appointments, arranging for a babysitter, buying their back to school supplies, and making sure they clean their teeth.
- ▶ A *remembering father* will regularly be thinking about their child.
- ▶ A *nurturing father* will feed their child/ren, give them a bath, buy clothes for them, and take them to the doctor.

- ▶ An *affectionate father* will regularly give their child hugs and kisses and let them know they are loved.
- ▶ An *Interactive father* plays with their child/ren, communicates with them and expresses ideas, positive emotions and free thought.
- ▶ The *provider/protector father* makes sure they are providing for their family and ensuring their child is safe.

An overview of the generative perspective

'It is human to have a long childhood; it is civilized to have an even longer childhood. Long childhood makes a technical and mental virtuoso out of man, but it also leaves a life-long residue of emotional immaturity in him.' Erik Homburger Erikson (1902-1994).

There are many theoretical approaches to understanding and working with relationships. The generative approach to life stages is a model used in understanding ageing and also in understanding fathering. The model was developed by Erik Erikson in the 20th century.

Erikson builds his stages of human development on a series of dyads or opposite personality traits. People think of themselves as optimistic or pessimistic, independent or dependent, emotional or unemotional, adventurous or cautious, leader or follower, aggressive or passive.

Based in part on his study of Sioux Indians on a reservation, Erikson became aware of the massive influence of culture on behaviour and placed more emphasis on the external world, such as depression and wars. He felt the course of development is determined by the interaction of the body (genetic biological programming), mind (psychological), and cultural (ethos) influences (Harder, 2008).

He organised life into eight stages that extend from birth to death (many developmental theories only cover childhood). Since adulthood covers a span of many years, Erikson divided the stages of adulthood into the experiences of young adults, middle-aged adults and older adults. Erikson was the first developmental theorist who saw 'old age' as being positive and expected that older people continue to make a significant contribution and experience new learning.

Central to Erikson's ideas is the belief that somewhere along the way the strength of the human spirit can be ignited and deficits overcome. Erikson divided the lifecycle up into eight life stages that are still relevant today and especially relevant when working with men.

Erikson's life stages of development

1. Infancy: Birth to 18 months

Trust vs. Mistrust

Basic strength: Drive and hope

Erikson also referred to infancy as the Oral Sensory Stage (as anyone might know who watches a baby putting everything in his/her mouth) where the major emphasis is on the parent's positive and loving care for the child, with a big emphasis on visual contact and touch. If we pass successfully through this period of life, we will learn to trust that life is basically okay and have basic confidence in the future. If we fail to experience trust and are constantly frustrated because our needs are not met, we may end up with a deep-seated feeling of worthlessness and a mistrust of the world in general (Harder, 2008).

2. Early childhood: 18 months to 3 years

Autonomy vs. Shame

Basic strengths: Self-control, courage and will

During this stage we learn to master skills for ourselves. Not only do we learn to walk, talk and feed ourselves, we are learning fine motor development as well as the much appreciated toilet training. Here we have the opportunity to build self-esteem and autonomy as we gain more control over our bodies and acquire new skills, learning right from wrong. And one of our skills during the 'Terrible Twos' is our ability to use the powerful word 'NO!' It may be painful for parents, but it develops important skills of the will (Harder, 2008).

3. Play age: 3 to 5 years

Initiative vs. Guilt

Basic strength: Purpose

During this period we experience a desire to copy the adults around us and take initiative in creating play situations. We make up stories, use toy phones and miniature cars, playing out roles in a trial universe, experimenting with the blueprint for what we believe it means to be an adult. We also begin to use that wonderful word for exploring the world- 'WHY?' (Harder, 2008).

4. School age: 6 to 12 years

Industry vs. Inferiority

Basic strengths: Method and competence

During this stage, we are capable of learning, creating and accomplishing numerous new skills and knowledge. This is also a very social stage of development and if we experience unresolved feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among our peers, we can have serious problems in terms of competence and self-esteem (Harder, 2008).

5. Adolescence: 12 to 18 years

Identity vs. Role confusion

Basic strengths: Devotion and fidelity

Up to this stage, according to Erikson, development mostly depends upon what is done to us. From here on, development depends primarily upon what we do. Adolescence is a stage at which we are neither a child nor an adult. Life is definitely getting more complex as we attempt to find our own identity, struggle with social interactions, and grapple with moral issues. Our task is to discover who we are as individuals separate from our family of origin and as members of a wider society. It is no surprise that our most significant relationships are with peer groups (Harder, 2008).

6. Young adulthood: 18 to 35 years

Intimacy and solidarity vs. Isolation

Basic strengths: Affiliation and love

In the initial stage of being an adult we seek one or more companions and love as we try to find mutually satisfying connections, primarily through relationships and friends. If negotiating this stage is successful, we can experience intimacy on a deep level (Harder, 2008).

7. Middle adulthood: 35 to 55

Generativity vs. Self absorption or stagnation

Basic strengths: Production and care

Now work is most crucial. Erikson observed that middle-age is when we tend to be occupied with creative and meaningful work and with issues surrounding our family. Also, middle adulthood is when we can expect to 'be in charge'.

The significant task is to perpetuate culture and transmit values of the culture through the family (taming the kids) and working to establish a stable environment. Strength comes through care of others and production of something that contributes to the betterment of society, which Erikson calls generativity, and people often fear inactivity and meaninglessness. Significant relationships are found within the workplace, the community and the family (Harder, 2008).

8. Late adulthood: 65 years to death

Integrity vs. Despair

Basic strengths: Wisdom

Erikson felt that much of life is preparing for the middle adulthood stage and the last stage is recovering from it. Perhaps that is because as older adults we can often look back on our lives with happiness and contentment, feeling fulfilled with a deep sense that life has meaning and we've made a contribution. Erikson calls this integrity. Our strength comes from a wisdom that the world is very large and we now have a detached concern for the whole of life, accepting death as the completion of life (Harder, 2008).

The generative framework and men

Generativity involves the capacity to care for the next generation and demands the ability to give something of yourself to another person. It includes community building and is historically reflected in the strong support that people give to service clubs, Lifeline, the SES and the Rural Fire Services etc. Generativity can mean serving as a guide, mentor or coach to kids, young people or adults. Research indicates that between 30 to 45 years, our need for achievement decreases and our need for influence or community increases (Vaillant, 2002). Vaillant (2002) writes along with Martin Seligman in advocating a positive psychology approach to practice and understanding people's behaviour.

Besides being applied to human development for men, women and fathering, generativity has had a significant contribution to ageing. The Harvard Study of Adult Development reviewed societal trends in the last 50 years and concluded that generativity is the best indicator for healthy ageing. The study concluded that 'the old were put on the earth to nurture the young' (Vaillant, 2002). However, this learning is not about just giving to others but is found also in the receiving. A key question they used was 'what have you learnt from your children?' even though some people found it hard to answer or even ridiculous to consider.

Generativity is powered by the motivation to 'invest one's substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self' (Vaillant, 2002). The following story outlines how one father put generativity into practice.

David is a father who has not had much meaningful contact with his two sons throughout their 12 years of life. Having experienced a great deal of trauma in his younger years, he has a limited ability to socialise or play with his children. His great desire is to be a better father than his father was to him. He finds this difficult as he has survived intense violence all his life and has resorted to violence many times to deal with any conflict in his adult years. During his participation in the group, David was enduring an ongoing court drama with the Department of Community Services, in order to have a meaningful role in the life of his children. The children were being removed from their mother and he was struggling to put a case forward to become their full-time carer. David desperately wanted their life to be better than his own. One of the New Parenting Infant Network (NEWPIN) educational sessions covered a concept outlining the limitations of what we can control, as compared to what we can influence, and letting go of what is outside our control and influence.

David left the group that night enthusiastic about how he could use this idea at his next court date. The following week, he returned to the group a very different man wearing cleaner clothes, holding his body more erect, taking more pride in his appearance and being much happier. He told the group the following story of the situation preceding his attendance at court:

The mother of his children had attempted to engage him in a conflict in the Court grounds by being verbally abusive and aggressive and he had refused to engage with her. He had acknowledged to himself that he could not control her, or what she was saying, so he had walked away. This was an achievement.

When court was sitting, the mother again attempted to engage him in conflict by staring and mouthing swear words at him. He continued to ignore her. When the court proceedings were not going his way and inaccurate information about him was being put forward, he did not react as he had in the past, trying to use threats and loud language to control the court. Rather, he decided to let it go (as best he could) as he could not control it and instead attempted to influence the court by his 'good' behaviour. Although quite proud of himself for the change in his behaviour in a very stressful situation, the best for David was yet to come.

The case was adjourned. Before he left the court, David approached the solicitor acting for his children and said, 'I know you do not like me and that is OK'. He then added, 'I've been watching and listening to you and you seem like a good person who has the best interests of my sons at heart. I just want to let you know I appreciate what you are trying to do for my boys'. The solicitor, in a spontaneous gesture, offered David the opportunity to spend a short time with his eldest son. Not having seen his son in over four weekends, David accepted enthusiastically. He spent 20 minutes with his boy which he otherwise would not have had. David was ecstatic at this good fortune. This generous gesture by the solicitor continues to have a positive impact on David's life as he has experienced the rewards of learning new ways of dealing with conflict.

There are many reasons that men are not often seen in health/community welfare centres. Most significantly, appointment times are during the day when it is difficult for men or women to have time off from work. Also many men question and are wary of involvement with external community welfare agencies. King (2005) recognises that many men have a strong suspicion about people who influence their family life. Besides trusting family members, many men have little trust and question the relevance of new ideas about relationships until some change is required.

From boyhood, competitiveness is nurtured as young men are taught not to 'be walked over by other people'. This process continues as the child grows into manhood with entrenched values of independence and autonomy. For many men, a suggestion that they need to change what they are thinking or doing is met by a high degree of resistance. Especially when a suggestion contains a deficit assumption like 'men should show more of their feelings'. This assumption is that something needs to be fixed; the father has to learn to act differently. Due to this, professionals need to work harder at the pre-engagement stage (discussed further in this guide) when working with men to find an alternative way to deal with any suspicion and defensiveness.

The generative approach is relevant for men, women and young people. However, it is valuable for understanding male behaviour as they tend to define themselves by a narrower set of roles. These roles often involve having an impact on the world around them through work, sport, their family or friends. The framework is easily applied to fathering (Fleming 2002; King 2000, 2001, 2005; King, Sweeney & Fletcher 2004).

Erikson considered parenthood to be the primary developmental task of adulthood that includes both the moral obligation to attend to the needs of the next generation and the recognition that caring for children is central to personal and societal well being (Erikson, 1975). The non-deficit perspective, an approach to understanding and working with fathers (King 2000, 2001, 2005; King, Sweeney & Fletcher 2004),

suggests that most fathers are interested in family life and that their engagement with support services is influenced by a variety of relationship challenges. These challenges can impact in a phenomenon called '*generative chill*' that is discussed later in the next topic on skills used when working with men (King 2001).

The main concepts in the generative framework are based on two core ideas. The first is that the human context creates needs in the next generation that fathers have an ethical responsibility to meet, and the second is that fathers and their children both benefit and develop from this process of interaction' (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997 as cited in Fleming, 2007). Generative fathering involves the next generation and also recognises that it is beneficial both to the child and the father.



The non-deficit assumptions recognise that fathers have the desire and ability to (Hawkins & Dollahite 1997; King 2000):

- commit – to provide physical and ongoing support and involvement with the child throughout his/her lifetime
- choose – to make day-to-day decisions for their children that meet each child's needs
- care – to attend to the important transitions in a child's life and to work to provide the optimal conditions that maximise their growth
- change – to adapt as children grow older and the father matures in his relationship with his children
- create – to provide resources for material wellbeing and the resolution of problems that allow opportunities for the development of emotional wellbeing
- connect – to form lasting and healthy attachments with their children and other significant people. These attachments will change over time to meet their child's evolving needs
- communicate – to relate with children by sharing meaningfully with them, both verbally and non-verbally.

The generative framework involves caring for or influencing someone external to you or supporting the development of the next generation. Hawkins and Dollahite believe that practicing generativity is central to men's own sense of self esteem and growth (Fleming, 2007).

How the deficit perspective assumption is expressed

Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) emphasise that deficit assumptions are expressed in the following contexts:

The ‘abusing’ father

Russell et al (1999) identified that 48 per cent of community welfare professionals believe that up to 24 per cent of fathers physically abuse their children and 31 per cent of professionals believed that 24 per cent of fathers sexually abused their children. These figures are higher than the national statistics on child abuse and neglect and could influence how professionals develop a trusting relationship with most fathers.

The ‘emotionally challenged’ father

Many labels used formally and informally to describe fathers include: incompetent, unaware, fear of intimacy, emotionally constricted, emotionally constipated etc.

‘Clinicians are divided on whether these emotionally challenged fathers are in need of a strong, adult male mentor or a skilled and patient therapist who can guide them through their dangerous inner journeys to healthy and responsible manhood. Then this assumption is embraced, men are seen as being emotionally and relationship deficient and in need of therapy’ (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997).

Fathers with under-involvement in household activities

Russell, Barclay, Edgecombe, Donovan, Habib, Callaghan & Pawson (1999) found that men are spending a similar proportion of time on household activities as they did 10 years ago. While this statistic is regrettable, it suggests that men are uninvolved, selfishly resisting change and greater involvement (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997). This tension is better understood by recognising that a gender-based difference in perception can exist concerning the timing and standards surrounding household duties. It needs to be recognised that men and women often have different perceptions of the timing and standards that surround household tasks. This is also accompanied with long travelling times to and from work.

Fathers have little interest in professional feedback about their children

When health/community welfare professionals provide feedback to families regarding issues that affect their children, they often favour delivering this information to the mother. This assumption reinforces other assumptions that fathers are deficient in their interest and knowledge about the basic health needs of their children.

Example

One articulate father, in a community workshop stated that in 13 years of having a child with a disability, he has never been approached or had the opportunity to discuss this issue with a professional.

All these assumptions highlight the deficiencies of men at the expense of acknowledging that the basic motivational force for many men is a deep love for their family and the desire to be a good father. While the deficit assumption may adequately describe the behaviour of some men, it lacks the potential for engaging them and creating life change.

According to Hawkins and Dollahite (1997), deficit assumptions create little change in fathers because they:

- have little recognition of growth and development
- misconstrue the motives, feelings, attitudes and hopes of most fathers
- create barriers to change rather than its promotion
- have a narrow standard of good parenting.

Example

Tim is 32 years old. He had a horrific childhood during which he was kicked, beaten, ridiculed, teased, and everything he valued was removed and given away. When growing up, Tim's only comfort was conversing with a teddy bear that he imagined responded back to him, until that too was removed. Tim's anger is immense, but significant new strength is found through being able to talk about his life, knowing that others are finally listening. It is important for him that the other group members do not pity him or feel sorry. The value is being heard, for this is what he failed to experience during his childhood. Throughout the group his attention is drawn to how he feels now, when a group of people listen and accept him. He also identifies that he is a survivor and can share something of his life story with a quiet confidence.

An alternative perspective of fathering

If alternative assumptions were adopted, fathering would be seen in a different light. The new picture recognises that men often want to father differently from how they were fathered, and that good fathering is something that is necessary to their own wellbeing (fundamental motivation). It also suggests that a father's care for his children is a 'central feature of his life's work and you would expect him to strive for competence in this arena' (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997).

The adoption of a non-deficit perspective influences program development. Instead of instructing fathers about their shortcomings and the things they are not doing, the fathering program validates different aspects of what fathers already do well. It is at this point, that greater freedom is generated in the group to explore the barriers that prevent men from achieving what they desire.

King (2005) states that many men identify fathering as something which is active, challenging, creative, irreplaceable, hard work and a central part of their life, regardless of their family relationships. This is the cornerstone of understanding fathering as a generative experience, where men often re-evaluate their life and work towards the care and protection of their children throughout their whole lifetime.

Example

Peter is a father in an intact relationship, where he has two children. His first child died as a toddler from a respiratory problem before Peter commenced attending the father's group. He had loved the little girl so much he was heart broken. He and his partner attended only one session of grief counselling. Throughout the following years, the stress of fathering other children through the toddler years and his fear for their safety took its toll on his relationship with his wife. This was also exacerbated by his imminent retrenchment from work. By being in a father's group, Peter was able to talk for the first time about his grief about his first child. He was also able to remove much of the pressure that had been building inside of him. Over six months, Peter successfully moved back home and continued to play the vital role in the family that he had played previously.

Men and adult relationships

Building on Erikson's stages of human development, Vaillant suggests that adult development for men and women progresses through a series of stages (as detailed in the table below). No theoretical approach to ageing is entirely accurate, but they can provide predictability for motivation and behaviour. Vaillant's research indicates that successful ageing means giving to and receiving from others joyously whenever one is able.

Identity	Discover who we are as individuals separate from our family of origin and as members of a wider society. It is no surprise that our most significant relationships are with peer groups
Intimacy	Find mutually satisfying connections, primarily through relationships and friends. If negotiating this stage is successful, we can experience intimacy on a deep level
Career consolidation	Experience success in how we survive within the world
Generativity	Influence others and learn from them important messages
Keeper of the meaning	Capturing and passing on for the longer future these key messages and learning
Integrity	Acceptance of our one and only life cycle as something that is to be, and that permits no substitution.

Source: Vaillant, 2002

Vaillant identifies three concepts of normal ageing:

1. In positive ageing, healthy individuals demonstrate characteristics of maturity (e.g. forgiveness, gratitude, and joy).
2. Healthy ageing requires sufficient quantity as well as quality of learning from or influencing other people
3. Graceful ageing is demonstrated by a simple acceptance of one's fate in a genuine and socially connected way.

Again, building on Erikson's stages of human development, the last major theme of Vaillant's book is that people can change. This is based on the belief that adult character development is not set in concrete. Poor development is associated with either alcoholism or major depression. Studies of inner city men showed that coping well in adolescence predicted successful old age (Vaillant, 2002). Vaillant wisely points out that life is a paradox of change and conformity. By age 70, early life factors are no longer relevant. Rather, character-based choices (e.g. spouse, drinking alcohol and lifestyle) influence the ultimate outcome. Vaillant destroys the myth that early childhood conflict haunts us forever and says that ultimately what went right is more important than what went wrong.



The non-deficit assumptions are active words that provide men a direction for how they can respond to issues. They are powerful verbs and can be used by practitioners as they talk with male clients:

- **Commit** – How do you show your commitment to your children?
- **Choose** – What is an important choice you have made this week that has a significant impact on other people?
- **Care** – Can you tell me about an experience when you cared for and nurtured your child? What did you learn about nurturing children from that experience?
- **Change** – Can you tell me about any important sacrifices you have made in your life that demonstrate how much you care about (child's name)?
- **Create** – Are there any particular things that help you to be the kind of father to (child's name) that he/she needs you to be?
- **Connect** – Can you tell me about an experience when you felt especially close emotionally to (child's name)? What meaning does that experience have for you now?
- **Communicate** – Can you tell me about the most enjoyable experience you've ever had with (child's name)? What meaning does that experience have for you now?

Topic 3: Skills used when working with men

Outline

This topic discusses the following subjects:

- ▶ Help seeking behaviour in men.
- ▶ Child-focussed practice.
- ▶ Using transition periods.
- ▶ Generative chill.
- ▶ The engagement triangle.
- ▶ Appropriate responses to men crying.
- ▶ How to plan a successful father's group.
- ▶ Tips for attracting group members.
- ▶ Tips for keeping group members.

Read the following section and think about:

- ▶ the key skills you use when working with men. Are they different to the skills you use for working with women?
- ▶ what you have observed about men's help seeking behaviour when they access your service.
- ▶ how you react to male clients who show emotion.

Many practitioners reflect that the skills used in the engagement stage when working with men are where the differences are found compared to those skills used in working with women. Otherwise, the skills for working with men or women are very complimentary. The engagement stage is the common period where men 'go invisible' and display avoidance/disinterested behaviour or revert to a 'fight mentality' where they may argue their point of view or be intimidating in their physique.

Help seeking behaviour in men

In terms of accessing medical care, support services and behaviour change programs, men are well known for waiting until the situation is desperate before reaching out for help. This approach to problem solving is often driven by socialised messages that they alone will be able to survive and manage the situation. Also they may fear that when other people are involved in the situation, it may 'bring it to a head' or make the situation worse.

When men are confronted by a crisis they feel inadequate to resolve themselves, they are more likely to reach out for support. Separated fathers are the single largest group of men who are known for their help seeking behaviour and will actively look for support from services. During these crises, a short 'window period' occurs where men are likely to accept help and support. If the crisis passes without obtaining support they may not engage again until the next crisis occurs, if at all.

Help-seeking behaviour for men can appear as:

- ▶ urgent
- ▶ rushed
- ▶ immediate
- ▶ active
- ▶ mobile
- ▶ doing
- ▶ erratic
- ▶ pushy
- ▶ demanding
- ▶ power-seeking

These behaviours are often driven by a variety of feelings that are not explicitly expressed to other people. Some of the feelings separated fathers use to describe their experience are:

- ▶ frightened
- ▶ hurt
- ▶ confused
- ▶ numb
- ▶ sacked
- ▶ dismissed
- ▶ gutted
- ▶ tricked
- ▶ screwed
- ▶ shamed
- ▶ unappreciated
- ▶ betrayed

The urgency in their attempt to find help may need to be refined or focussed to ensure they effectively access a service. In accessing help, men can tell a long story of all the events that occurred and justify why they need support. This may not be helpful if the intake worker or telephone receptionist does not have enough time to listen and starts to cut the man off. Help seeking behaviour can be channelled by highlighting the key questions men need to answer to obtain the required help.

These questions allow the worker to understand what the service user needs and how the worker can respond. If the worker suggests solutions that have already been unsuccessful, men can easily become frustrated. Using a solution focussed approach to counselling, the worker may propose a range of options that include the service user obtaining legal advice, accessing a support group or seeing a doctor etc. Self care options may include visiting a general practitioner, the local community health centre or phoning Mensline Australia, when required.

Child focussed practice

It is now broadly recognised that child-focussed practice is useful to use when working with men. It enables the creation of relevant discussions with men regarding their family, their insights, concerns and the possible changes that are required. While it is a concept primarily used in mediation and family separation dispute resolution, it is a valuable concept that can be utilised in many other family contexts.

Child-inclusive practices (www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/family/frsp-through_childs_eyes.htm) have been systematically introduced into the community mediation field in Australia over the last 10 years and have been substantially developed and researched in that time. Child-focussed practice occurs when professionals actively give the child a voice by helping the parent(s) to develop their understanding and awareness of their child's needs to encourage the parent(s) to keep this as a focus. Child inclusive practice involves either directly bringing the child into sessions with the parent(s) or giving the child a voice through a third party practitioner such as in a mediation process. McIntosh (2007) outlines a model of child-focussed practice to:

- ▶ create an environment that supports disputing parents in actively considering the unique needs of each of their children
- ▶ facilitate a parenting agreement that preserves significant relationships and supports children's psychological adjustment to the separation, including recovery from parental acrimony and protection from further conflict
- ▶ support parents to leave the dispute resolution forum on higher rather than diminished ground with respect to their post-separation parenting
- ▶ ensure that the ongoing mediation/litigation process and the agreements or decisions reached reflect the basic psychodevelopmental needs of each child, to the extent that they can be known without the involvement of the children.

Using transition periods

Men may resist accessing support services due to their lack of knowledge about the possible benefits they could receive. However, they are more likely to overcome this resistance when they face a crisis that differs from the predicted path in their life. It is during these transitional periods (crises) that men are more likely to overcome the suspicion of being judged and access support services. These transition periods include situations where they:

- experience relationship difficulties
- experience family separation
- have expectations of how life should unfold that are very different to what occurs
- wish to live life differently to how they grew up.

It is the authors' experience that men have increased motivation and interest in family counselling programs when service provision is linked with the father's underlying desire to have a closer relationship with his children.

During these transitional periods many other factors will ultimately determine if fathers engage with support services. Table 1 identifies four stages of male involvement in community/family services, the key processes and difficulties that men face and the supportive steps used by community welfare/health professionals.

Table 1: Processes in engaging men

Stages	Key behaviours and issues	Supportive steps for men's workers
Pre-involvement	Barriers/pressures are likely to exist Men access services when inner conflict/turmoil is very high	Regular accessible advertising to inform men and other key family members or supports about the existence of relevant services
Initial contact	Can be either in person or over the phone. Men are likely to have many questions and be suspicious of being judged	Key processes are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce suspicion • create initial engagement • provide some basic information and problem solving as required • ensure easy access to program or service • make a welcoming environment at your centre • inform men of available choices and options • provide clear information and description of the support program

Stages	Key behaviours and issues	Supportive steps for men's workers
Decision making about further involvement	<p>Factors that can prohibit further involvement are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Generative Chill (discussed on p.48) ▶ Other life crises (e.g. addictions) ▶ Juggling multiple demands 	<p>Key processes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ meet the men face-to-face ▶ use follow-up phone calls ▶ encourage other workers or family members to be available to talk through choices with the men
Ongoing involvement –attending counselling/ groups	<p>Initial problem may be alleviated and a new purpose or direction discussed before the men cease accessing the program</p>	<p>Key processes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ clarify a clear purpose ▶ reflect on situation and life-long learning ▶ explore the on-going challenges ▶ mean what you say ▶ follow through with commitments made by the worker ▶ connect situation with key values–respect, support, empathy and equity to their relationship and work life

Source: King & Fletcher (2001)

Stage 1: Pre-involvement

Many agencies find early intervention working with men difficult as they usually seek help during a crisis, rather than beforehand. Some of the effective strategies to promote early intervention are:

- ▶ Using regular advertising and promotional articles in local newspapers. Other gatekeepers in men's lives such as family members and friends often read them and encourage men to access those services as issues arise
- ▶ Ensuring your program/service is well known among other organisations that have contact with men. Many services have little knowledge of where they can access appropriate support services for men. Encourage referrals that use a person's name and direct-line phone number
- ▶ Developing great practice in your program or group work. Word-of-mouth promotion between men who are participants and their friends or work mates, is one of the best forms of validation and promotion. This can account for 30-70 per cent of new referrals

- ▶ Ensuring that informal or formal men's or father's groups are run regularly in your program. It may take six months to develop the necessary awareness to make the first group happen, but subsequent groups are more viable when people know they can be easily accessed. Working in partnership with other agencies can provide a stronger infrastructure to maintain father's groups in the area.

Stage 2: Initial contact

When men contact a service, they may look for immediate answers to their problems. Many men will have a degree of suspicion and concern about the organisation that they have contacted. They will ask themselves questions such as 'Will I be lectured to?' 'Will I be made to feel inadequate?' etc. These concerns need to be appropriately addressed for successful engagement. If they are interested in participating in a men's group, they need to know when and where it will be. If the wait for a group is too long, they will disengage and the window of opportunity to engage will pass.

A man's decision to access a service will be initially affected by age, socio-economic, cultural and language differences between themselves and the service.

Professionals need to focus on these following points:

- ▶ As a majority of first contact occasions will be over the telephone, ensure that calls are returned promptly.
- ▶ Tackle these initial concerns or questions with a simple explanation about what your organisation provides, and what is involved when men access the service.
- ▶ Provide men with a variety of options. Making choices regarding the type of services available is likely to enhance a man's motivation as he will have more control.
- ▶ Ensure that you mean what you say, as it will reduce suspicion.
- ▶ Recognise possible strengths or attempted solutions that the man has already used.

Stage 3: Decision making about further involvement

During this stage, the person will process the information and ideas he has received and make a decision about further involvement. Life experiences can create difficulties for his on-going involvement in programs such as including 'generative chill', life crises, and the need to juggle multiple demands.

Generative Chill

Extreme threats to an adult's parental generativity will result in 'generative chill', a type of anxiety resulting from a perceived or real danger of losing the child or children one has helped to create (Snarey, 1993). 'It seems likely that brief or extended threats to generativity will have a significant impact on a father's selfhood...' (Snarey, 1993). Family breakdown presents separated fathers with a threat that often results in depression. Generative chill is further discussed later in topic 6 — working with separated fathers.

Case Study—Mike

Mike is a separated father in his early 40s who came very close to throwing himself in front of a train due to his depression. He recognised that the relationship problems in his life and the lack of contact with his children were a continual struggle for him. He battled between giving in to the depression and his inability to change the situation. He ended up attending the father's group for 34 sessions out of 38. He spoke about the group being a vital place where he could be himself regardless of how the week had gone.

He stated 'It has been a good 12 months. I have received good support over the past year as it has helped me to keep sane while I battle to see my son. Attending the group has turned around my whole relationship with my older son. I still play the memory game with my boy, he loves it. I feel a lot closer emotionally to him. I now understand why he reacts that way'. He also added, 'The kids are my main priority. I now accept that Sue and I have finished our relationship. I am sleeping a lot better now.' He changed his employment and moved to a new area where he values all the child contact opportunities that are possible.

Other life crises (e.g. addiction issues)

Mental health and/or addiction problems have a significant affect on men's motivation to be involved in support services. Some fathers will drop out of a group due to these issues, while others use the group experience as part of their recovery program.

In order to meet the challenge of supporting a participant's recovery program, father's groups need to be flexible enough to allow longer term involvement. Instead of running psychoeducational groups that are limited to eight weeks, therapeutic/ educational groups can be provided that allow some fathers to engage for 12 to 18 months. Some of the participants will be at different stages of recovery from their addiction. Three major tools for dealing with addiction issues in these groups are:

- ▶ the development of a group culture that allows participants to challenge each other regarding lifestyle and drug and alcohol issues
- ▶ the reinforcement of relapse prevention strategies in the group
- ▶ the adoption of basic core values such as respect, empathy, support and equality, for the participant's family and work life.

Case Study—Peter

Peter is a young stepfather with a dependence on marijuana. Peter stated one week, 'I gave up pot for three days, but I have had a challenging week. I'm trying to do the right things but no one gives me any credit.' He talked about the challenge of the family and social context in which he lives, 'I want to say 'f... it' and leave. But the love you have stops you. The kids really love me.'

'It's been my life, smoke a few cones, drink beer and watch TV. I cannot get a job as I need to learn to cope first with hassles at home. Dad overdosed last year – since then things have gone down hill.' He went on to talk about the daily battle he has regarding his choices. 'I don't want to walk out of the front door as the neighbours

will say, 'come and have a smoke (dope)'. After four months, Peter still resisted seeing a drug and alcohol counsellor and he recently left his relationship. This is the tragedy that often impacts on families where there are addiction issues. It is important for groups to be able to work simultaneously with recovery issues, relationship and child protection issues.

Juggling multiple demands

Men, like women, often juggle a variety of roles and pressures in the normal course of the day. Men may choose not to access support services due to time constraints. The only real solution is to provide choices in the range of groups/services that are available. Some groups may be intensive, some may be psychoeducational groups and some may be one-day workshops. Professionals may then discuss with men these choices and the possible outcomes for them.



Stage 4: Ongoing involvement by accessing programs

The involvement that most men have in programs varies over time. It is valuable to allow men the choice to either receive information, attend a short one-day workshop, or access medium or longer term weekly programs. When longer term group work programs are provided, new membership and the revitalisation of commitment to the program is maintained. Some participants will leave the group at the end of the school term while other participants will commence their attendance.

The ongoing nature of a longer term group format ensures that there is usually capacity for new referrals to join the group instead of waiting for long periods. It is also valuable for ensuring that men have enough time to make significant changes. This type of group is valuable for men who are interested in becoming the primary carer of their child but are not currently living with their child.

When child protection issues occur with the mother of the children and her current partner, it is worthwhile considering the biological father as a possible placement option. These fathers may have left the relationship years earlier and will need additional support to deal with their own feelings and ‘generative chill’ issues to present themselves as an appropriate primary carer.

Case Study—Tim

Tim is one such father who is 38 years old. He had to battle with a Child Protection Agency to become the primary carer of his child. Over a 12 month period, Tim attended a number of community-based fathering workshops and programs.

The Child Protection Agency psychologist completed two psychological reports over a 12-month period, and stated that ‘in 20 years of clinical experience he had never seen anyone change as much as Tim had’. Tim’s determination and dedication in using these ideas and new learning was apparent to many people.

Tim reflected, just prior to becoming the full time carer of his child, ‘Taking my daughter home will be the best experience in my whole life. It’s like winning the World Cup. Everything else in life has always been taken away from me – that’s why I’m paranoid. I have had to learn patience.’

Tim also commented about his involvement in the fathers’ group, ‘Thanks for your help. I don’t think I would have made it without the group. This group has impacted on me; it speaks about life the way it is. It wasn’t pen or paper stuff. My dream has come true. It is achievable if you are determined. At lots of times you can’t see the end of the road, but you just have to keep going’.

Men’s groups that combine psychoeducational and open discussion sessions in the group format allow for the development of new ideas as well as ensure that the individual explores his own life challenges. It is in this combination of sessions that learning with men is maximised. This blend of group work format allows for:

- the better integration of psychoeducational material to the real life situation of the participants. Greater opportunities exist for the discussion of difficulties and achievements especially when multiple problems exist in the participant’s life
- a non-competitive environment in the group that allows men to relax and engage in the group and with new areas of learning
- time to use storytelling to validate new ways of talking about life experiences and discussing other options for managing real situations. Storytelling is used significantly by men in a wide range of environments; in the workplace, at pubs and clubs. It allows a culture of equality and open communication that is important because of the difficulties that are created by the competitiveness men experience as they grow up
- the modelling of cooperative responses in family communication and the development of confidence in using different solutions to problems
- the participants to develop a culture that validates appropriate actions and responses in their wider life.

The engagement triangle

Language has a significant influence on the successful engagement of men. If the language used by the professional worker is deficit based, it will increase the male service user's level of suspicion and they are less likely to access the program. Some of the deficit based assumptions (King, 2000) view most men as:

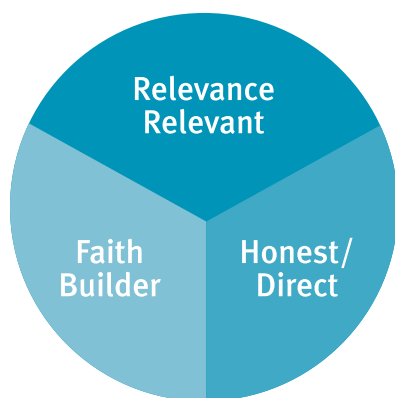
- abusive
- emotionally challenged
- under involved in household activities
- having little interest in professional feedback about their children.

When working with men, effective language involves three key components as illustrated in Figure 1. These three key components are contained in the organisational context and Occupational, Health and Safety policies and the specific context for service delivery. For example each organisation has policies about safe work practices when providing after hours counselling services.

The three key components for developing father-friendly language are:

- **relevance** – the discussion needs to be relevant to the service user's needs
- **faith builder** – the worker needs to convey the belief that the male service user has the ability to commit, choose, care, change, create, connect and communicate
- **honest/direct** – male service users respect people who honestly and respectfully discuss with them the important issues in their life.

Figure 1.1 OH&S Policies



Example

At a father's support service in Western Sydney, a large number of separated fathers regularly access the program. The use of direct and relevant language is important in creating a positive direction for managing family separation. The staff encourage men to refer to their 'ex-partners' as the 'mother of their children', rather than their 'ex'. The word 'ex' conjures up images of someone who is 'no longer important' or is a 'has-been'. This simple change of language is well received by the men as it reinforces a new and positive attitude towards family separation, their child/ren, their previous relationship and themselves.

Some strategies that increase engagement with men include:

- remembering that body language is powerful. Develop strong and comfortable body language around male service users regardless of any height or size differences. Men quickly tune into how comfortable other people are around them and this will influence their level of respect. The simple act of shaking hands, for many men, can symbolise a higher level of respect and mutual connection. In different cultural groups and age brackets, a ‘high five’ will achieve the same effect
- using non-deficit language to demonstrate a respect for the importance of family relationships in men’s lives
- allowing time for male service users to reflect on a discussion after you have been honest and direct with them. Men can become frustrated and will need an opportunity to vent their feelings and time to consider the importance of what has been said. However, no form of intimidation or threat of violence or aggression is acceptable
- being comfortable with the male approach. This is very different from the average female interaction. Men can be, for a variety of reasons, naturally more boisterous, louder, and have a stronger presence in social situations. Generally this is not intended as threatening, yet can be perceived as such
- being child-focussed with men who are fathers. The child-focussed approach cuts through all other situations affecting the men’s lives and helps them to redirect their focus to the child/ren, e.g. ‘How do you think that will affect your child?’

Creating **relevance** with service users is clearly illustrated with a man named Terry who has been attending an intensive father’s group. In a recent group session, he gave feedback to the group on the positive effect the group has had on his life since he was released from a correctional centre. During his last time in gaol, someone recommended he join a father’s group to make a smooth transition back into his large family. Terry reflected on what the group meant to him and concluded that it ‘focussed on my kids, and me’ and this was vital in establishing relevance.

It is quite a challenge for any parent to move from such a highly controlled environment as a prison, to the chaos of living in a family with many children. The children had not seen their father for a significant part of their lives. Terry began his involvement with the father’s group four months prior to release and continued for over a year thereafter. He now credits the support from the group as the major factor in him staying with the family and not re-offending.

Being a **faith builder** demands perseverance and the belief that a father has the capacity to make appropriate choices. For example, Adrian has been a member of an intensive father’s group for over 18 months. When he commenced attending, Adrian was experiencing regular conflict at home with parent/teenager power issues. Adrian struggled to express himself in the group and would resist any encouragement to speak. After some weeks he began to be vocal about his own experience and supported men in dealing with their own issues. He was less reactive with his own teenage children and developed a stronger and more supportive relationship with his partner.

While being **honest and direct** with men is challenging, it creates a greater respect and a focus for change. For example, Graham is a father with two children and a partner. The Department of Community Services has informed him he has a limited time to make significant changes in his approach to parenting or run the risk of having the children taken into out-of-home care. The following is an example of how the group worker approaches this scenario:

Worker: ‘Graham, it is time to deal with these issues or your children will be removed. You cannot afford to continue down the path you have used over the last few months. We want to support you and we have to keep the welfare of the children as the priority. We need to work together on this. Does this make sense?’

The worker has focussed the discussion on change and this provides Graham with choices:

- ▶ He can sit with his anger and resentment and continue not to change, with the risk that his children will be taken into care.
- ▶ He can engage fully with the worker and/or program, and accept feedback about his behaviour, even though it is difficult. This demands a willingness to trust the worker and recognise that at the heart of this lies the best interests for him and his children.

Appropriate responses to men crying

The display of emotion by men is influenced by a wide range of cultural based messages. For some cultures, tears are an ordinary expression of strength and life. In Anglo-Saxon culture, crying may be tempered with feelings of inadequacy or failure. In times of distress men will apologise for crying and say something like:

- ▶ ‘I’m sorry I don’t know what’s wrong with me’
- ▶ ‘I feel like an idiot’
- ▶ ‘I’m not usually like this’
- ▶ ‘I’m just being stupid.’

When working with men it is best to value crying as normal and a strength. Workers may respond by saying;

- ▶ ‘There’s nothing to be sorry for’
- ▶ ‘This is the hardest thing men face in their life’
- ▶ ‘I’m OK with this’
- ▶ ‘I don’t see an idiot’
- ▶ ‘A lot of men rob themselves of this opportunity to release the pain’
- ▶ ‘It takes courage to come to this moment of realism’
- ▶ ‘There’s nothing stupid about being honest with our emotions’
- ▶ ‘When these emotions build up it affects our whole wellbeing and behaviour’
- ▶ ‘It is okay. Some men deal with the feeling by behaving in violent ways hurting

themselves and those around them’

- ‘This pain you are feeling is shared by all involved in the separation – mothers, fathers, extended family and especially children’
- ‘In order to support the children we must first be honest with our own emotions.’

Unhelpful things to say or do when men are crying are:

- Handing them tissues. This may be a sign that the worker is not comfortable with the tears and wishes for it to stop. Often tears will stop after someone is handed a tissue.
- Making a note as it will appear that you are judging them as depressed and recording it
- Taking a few deep breaths as it may be interpreted as a sign that the worker is not comfortable with the emotional expression and wishes for it to stop
- Leaving the room as it may be a sign that the worker is not comfortable with it and wishes for the emotional expression to stop
- Saying ‘when you are right we will continue’ as it implies that the crying is inappropriate to your context of working together
- Saying ‘are you always this emotional’ as it may be a sign that the worker is not comfortable with it and wishes for it to stop
- Saying ‘I’m concerned about you’ as it will appear that you are judging them as depressed or suicidal.

How to plan a successful fathers’ group

Strategies to help you plan an effective program include (King & Coleman, 2007):

- using father-friendly timing and hold the program at an appropriate time– depending on whether its with children or not
- identifying other workers and agencies who can assist you to plan, promote, conduct or support the program. For example, some dads may need respite to attend. Or, if your organisation does not provide activities to the children of targeted dads, then it is recommended that you seek assistance with the planning, conducting and equipping the activities session from agencies who have experience with this context
- identifying dads who are willing to help you to plan and promote the session
- meeting with dads, other family members or service providers to try to ascertain which topics are likely to be of greatest interest, and what times and frequencies are likely to suit most men
- checking with other major agencies to avoid picking a time which clashes with other activities for targeted families
- working out what other resources you will need e.g. providing food, using a venue in which fathers are likely to feel comfortable, and making sure you have appropriate activity or training resources.

Tips for attracting group members

In developing the *Hey Dad! For fathers who have a child with a disability program* (King & Coleman, 2007), 70 per cent of the fathers at a focus group, indicated that having phone contact with the leaders was essential for them in deciding to attend the first session. This process enabled them to clarify questions and build a connection with the leader.

Our experience suggests that the following tips will help you to attract men to your group work programs:

- ▶ Have an established relationship with the fathers, or involve an organisation that has direct contact with the father's children. In the pilot, the most successful programs in accessing fathers and encouraging them to attend the sessions involved programs delivered in partnership with disability services
- ▶ Use 'gatekeepers' in men's lives, such as partners or other key family members, to encourage their initial involvement in the program
- ▶ Get dads who have already attended other programs to tell other dads about it and to promote their attendance
- ▶ Request that other agencies supporting targeted families promote your program and encourage fathers' attendance. Use the first name of the person who is taking bookings to increase the likelihood that men will register
- ▶ Use quotes and reflections from other fathers who have attended other sessions in your promotional material
- ▶ In all promotional material, be clear about times, locations, dates, structure, content and the availability of respite, that food will be provided, and that the program is free
- ▶ Ring all the participants and speak to them individually about the program (this is very important as it starts building the relationship before they walk in the door).
- ▶ Explain the overall content and likely process involved and working out ways to remove any barriers to, or anxieties about, their attendance
- ▶ Allow lots of time to plan and develop trust with the fathers. If it is difficult to recruit fathers to attend, organise some social events, like a BBQ to enable the men to slowly get to know other fathers
- ▶ Provide a map to make finding the venue simple
- ▶ Provide details about transport, parking etc.

Tips for keeping group members

It is important to portray a welcoming impression. For example:

- welcome new fathers, find out what they would like from the group, explain what will happen in the meeting and introduce the new members to other members
- arrange seats in a circle
- allow time for talking and listening to each other
- avoid jargon and don't refer to people without explaining who they are
- remember and use people's names.

Groups need members who will share in the workload of the group. For example:

- everyone should help decide on the group's activities
- members' views should be heard
- members should identify roles or activities they are happy to help with
- rotate jobs regularly and involve new members
- share information and make use of existing networks
- give everyone a chance to contribute with the skills they have
- do not let older members dominate (Contact a Family, 2006a).

Successful groups:

- have a positive group climate emphasising the strengths of children
- focus on what can be accomplished, rather than obstacles
- meet the needs of members, whether that be emotional support, information, education and/or advocacy
- have leaders who motivate/organise and provide contacts (King, Stewart, King, & Law, 2000).



When working with men, phone calls need to be answered or returned promptly as they often have a lower threshold for frustration before this 'window period' vanishes.

The best skill for dealing with men's help seeking behaviour is to work from a position of 'being alongside'. Many images of how men relax and be with others display examples of 'perceived equality' or this 'alongside behaviour'.

Nationally, most practitioners working with men have identified child-focussed practice as a primary tool for supporting men and changing their behaviour.

Topic 4: Working with men and culture

Outline

This topic discusses the following subjects:

- ▶ Engagement strategies
- ▶ Language barriers
- ▶ Male socialisation experiences
- ▶ Effective engagement of CALD men
- ▶ Migration
- ▶ Torture and trauma
- ▶ Racism

Read the following section and reflect on:

- ▶ what key relationship do you have with different cultural groups in your community?
- ▶ how can you build respectful relationships with those communities?

The purpose of this topic is to argue that although there is a growing emphasis on men's involvement in family life, there has been little application to the diverse needs of men from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and their families. Little information exists about how professionals can engage men from CALD backgrounds and respond to issues relating to male service users. The topic aims to shed some light on the issue and highlight the need for further research. The names of these clients have also been changed for this topic.

Engagement strategies

Generally, cross-cultural literature offers fewer therapeutic strategies and tools specifically designed for working with men from CALD backgrounds. More importantly this literature lacks research knowledge not only about how to work with men from CALD backgrounds, but also about cross-cultural practice as a whole.

Cross-cultural literature has little focus on how to engage and retain men from CALD backgrounds. However, the authors have found that working with CALD men has many similarities to working with men in general, except that the engagement issues are intensified due to early socialisation and migration experiences.

The most effective position for community service/health workers, when working cross-culturally and especially when working with men from CALD backgrounds, is to adopt a 'safe uncertainty' approach. The worker needs to hold a belief of 'authoritative doubt' that values both professional expertise as well as uncertainty. It is also called 'informed not-knowing'. This approach is consistent with the non-deficit approach (King, 2000; King, 2001; King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004; King, 2005; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) that identifies the relationship connection between men and other family members, or men and the worker as the primary opportunity for engagement and change.

A significant component of the engagement process, regardless of the intervention context, is related to the ability of workers to assess, and then work with, each individual's 'state of readiness' to engage:

- the key issues experienced by the client
- the underlying concepts that impact on these issues
- the associated challenges experienced when responding to these issues.

Language barriers

The issue of language goes beyond the spoken language and needs to incorporate assessments of comprehension and conceptual understanding. Workers need to allocate additional time and actively seek feedback to assess the service user's:

- level of comprehension
- ability to bring meaning to critical concepts.

A group of professionals attending the *2007 Men & Family Relationships Forum* expressed the view that the use of interpreters was a subordinate process and suggested agencies should be proactive in providing employment opportunities for bilingual workers thus providing recognition of the process, training and systemic barriers present in current ways of doing things.

It was seen that the use of interpreters can dilute the richness of cross-cultural experience for men, families and the worker. When used, interpreters should have some basic understanding of cross-cultural gender issues. The worker needs to explain the interpreter's role in the sessions and ensure the interpreter simply translates the spoken word verbatim without engaging the service user. Workers should undertake training in working with interpreters.

Male socialisation experiences

Edgar (1997) argued that male socialisation at a young age develops a high level of survival skills. In early family life and the school playground, boys learn that survival means being stronger, faster and more in control of your feelings. While men have the ability for empathy, there is usually less motivation to be empathetic, than women. Edgar suggests that men are trained to conceal, to be cool, not to 'seem' sensitive, because sensitivity in a macho world is a sign of weakness. Therefore intuition for men is primarily focussed on safety. As men enter new environments, they assess

potential threats and attempt to reduce the impact of those things that could harm them or those close to them. When men do start to talk about their feelings, it is often new territory and is expressed in fewer words than women would use.

Traditionally, this way of being in the world, forged the notion of ‘protector’ as the dominant masculine role by which men, from all cultures, are influenced. As men move from adolescence to young adulthood, they need to learn the difference between what it means to negotiate safety in relationships and when this becomes controlling. The greatest challenge in balancing this protector role is the ability to talk with others and learn through feedback from the other person. This mentoring experience is vital for young men as they explore this balance through their involvement with sport, work and relationships.

Case Study—Mr Shahidi

An Iranian man, Mr Shahidi, who recently migrated to Australia with his family, was referred to a father’s group by a counsellor engaged to work with the father’s anxiety and depression. The father related his inability to speak to his 22-year-old son, Bahrooz, for fear of losing his relationship with his son. The son, a university student, would often bring girls home and refer to them as girl friends. The father had a cultural expectation that this related to girls that his son had intimate relationships with, even though, when describing the circumstances, the father had no evidence of anything other than study-based friendships. The father was unable to fully explore those relationships with his son due to his underlying fear and anxiety, and the overriding cultural expectations. For the father, this was an issue of respect – Iranian culture contains an expectation that children will accept parental authority until they marry and leave home, even if that takes place well into the child’s 20s.

When families grow up in severe adversity such as war, persecution or absolute poverty, young boys and men learn to express the protector role in ways that relate to the specific environment in which that role is learnt and expressed. Those same boys and men may then face a significant challenge to make the required transition to continue to express the role in appropriate ways and in the context of the changed environment e.g. reduced adversity, no war etc. Violence, trauma and survival skills that are learnt in the backdrop of war, or for that matter adversity of any kind, will sensitise them to that set of dangers, creating the potential to be over sensitive to any perceived threat in changed environments.

Group processes were used in the case study above to explore the issue of ‘respect for parents’ in the context of when the parents were growing up in Iran compared with the context of their children growing up in Australia. The group agreed that often father’s expectations around respect were unrealistic in the Australian context because in relation to their own experiences growing up in Iran, respect was often confused for obedience through fear. The following week Mr Shahidi disclosed that he had initiated a conversation with Bahrooz to explore what was actually happening when Bahrooz had his girlfriends come over. He expressed how relieved he was to learn that Bahrooz was involved in assessment-related study projects with these individual girls. Mr Shahidi also disclosed that he wanted his children’s respect, not the obedience through fear he related to his own father when growing up.

Regardless of the harshness of the environment where boys grow up, there are opportunities throughout life where men often re-evaluate their life, and work towards better utilisation of fathering roles. One of those opportunities is through the care and protection of their children. This is the cornerstone of understanding fathering as a generative experience (King, 2000).

It is a myth that men don't communicate with their wives/partners (Edgar, 1997). In this research Edgar talks extensively about how the men involved used different means of communication to express themselves than women. There seems to be an increasing body of research evidence, from all around the world, that supports the notion that men invest heavily in their wives and families. However, that investment is expressed and communicated in ways that are filtered by masculine identity, culture, religious affiliation, educational attainment and socio-economic status or class.

Cultural values and subsequent behaviours may be different for men from the dominant culture as they relate to issues of:

- ▶ competition
- ▶ sexuality
- ▶ attitudes toward women
- ▶ family dynamics
- ▶ fathering roles and identity
- ▶ religious orientation and level of affiliation
- ▶ acknowledgement, identification of feelings thus expression and awareness of emotional context.

Professionals need to talk with their male service users about the impact of their culture and gender on their situation. Cultural and gender sensitive counselling practices with men from CALD communities require professionals to make culture and gender a central metaphor for engagement and change.

Case Study—Carlos

Carlos and his wife Veronica are 40 years old and Argentinean-Australian Spanish. The couple has been married for 16 years and they have two children, a 15-year-old girl and a 5-year-old boy. The local community health centre referred the couple to a program because of Carlos' poor relationship with his wife, poor interpersonal skills and an anger management problem. Carlos is a caring and family loving person and was very keen to work with the service.

The word 'macho' is often used globally in reference to Latin American males. This word may negatively influence the worker to expect sexist behaviour in Latin American men and this assumption is unhelpful when attempting to engage with Hispanic (Latin American) male service users.

Male workers might have an advantage in initially engaging male CALD service users as the men may believe that male workers will understand them. However, this is balanced by female workers who are often perceived to be more caring and supportive, and men will be more open with them. The male worker explored Carlos'

role in the family, how socialisation affected him, and what was expected of him in his family of origin. The question was asked ‘What does it mean to be an Argentinean man?’ Carlos said he wasn’t socialised to be aggressive and competitive. When asked what he expected from the service, Carlos said that he wanted to talk to someone about his pain. He also stated that he wanted to improve his relationship with his wife, because his wife always accused him of being weak and dependent on her.

The worker highlighted Carlos’ strengths by exploring his insight, knowledge and awareness of relationship issues. He was asked ‘What is that like for you, when your wife says that you are weak?’ When his strengths were highlighted, it was easier for Carlos to explore and experience his feelings. Exploring men’s feelings can be threatening, but the experience is valuable when their strengths are acknowledged.

The worker found it helpful to ask questions of Carlos and Veronica about their experience of growing up in Australia. This allowed Carlos to talk about the new ways he cared for and protected himself and those he cared about. Both of them improved their understanding of each other and their relationship. They found it useful to focus for a few minutes in each session, on issues about ‘work’ and ‘soccer’, because both play an important role in Carlos’ life.

It was useful to ask Carlos questions like:

- ‘How different is your understanding of gender from your father/ brother?’
- ‘What does it mean to be an Argentinean man living in Australia?’
- ‘If you lived in Argentina now, what role would you play?’
- ‘Do others in the Argentinean community have the same opinion as you about gender roles in your community?’

Effective engagement of CALD men

‘Informed not-knowing’, as used by Anderson and Goolishian (1992), means that workers are never the ‘expert’, ‘right’ or in full possession of ‘the truth’. On the other hand, when professionals are more informed about the life experiences of people from CALD communities, they can become aware of their own cultural biases and then recognise and harness the cultural narratives of the ‘other’ in truly strengths-based practise.

Many authors take the position that workers do not need to understand a family’s culture in order to be effective when working with CALD service users. Others stress that if the worker is from a different culture than their service user, they will work less effectively with that service user.

However, it is not about being of the same cultural background, but the ‘informed not-knower’ position that is the most helpful for a worker to use when they work cross-culturally with men. Workers need to be genuinely interested to find out, ‘Where exactly have you come from?’, ‘Where is your mother and father?’, ‘Do you have a photo of them?’, and ‘I would love to see it’ etc. These are examples of an inquiring mindset. The accompanied ‘genuinely interested’ message becomes the medium that

draws out the narrative, provides invaluable validation, and normalises the service user's experiences.

When men from CALD backgrounds come to see workers, they believe that the worker has some expertise which will help alleviate their problem. Workers are more effective when they have already developed some knowledge about their service user's culture and gender by engaging in dialogue with colleagues, service users and friends; attending cultural awareness training; watching documentaries; reading books (see Lanier, 2004); reading feminist and men's writing on gender issues, male socialisation, and so on. Workers are also more effective if they have explored (through professional supervision or training) their own socialisation processes and attitudes to achieving culturally sensitive practice. Workers hear the service user's story with some knowledge about their background, but not with full possession of 'truth'. If workers become as informed as possible about themselves and those whom they perceive as different, they will be able to listen in a way that takes into account cultural biases.

This next section discusses a number of CALD issues, such as migration, torture and trauma, racism and male socialisation. A case study is used to illustrate how workers can engage CALD men and how they can make their practices more effective using cross-cultural gender sensitive practices.

Case Study—Izaz and Nasrin

A Sudanese Muslim Arabic speaking family was referred by STARTTS (NSW Torture and Trauma Services) to a Men and Family Relationships Program. The family was referred because they were experiencing lots of arguments and the children were experiencing difficulties at school. Izaz and Nasrin (the parents) also reported that they were experiencing relationship difficulties. Izaz shouted at, and emotionally abused Nasrin, and the couple had frequent intense arguments. Both reported that their relationship difficulties started four years ago, however, they also reported that they had never enjoyed a good relationship.

They stayed five years in Egypt before the family migrated to Australia one year ago. The family had to leave their country of origin, Sudan, due to political persecution. Both parents were political writers back in Sudan. Izaz had been tortured by the governing regime because of his opposing political views. Izaz is unemployed and believes that their relationship difficulties and family problems were due to the lack of adequate financial resources. The parents and children agree that their two children are not happy in Australia, as Karim and Abdul feel disappointed and isolated.

The parents reported that Abdul fights a lot in school. Abdul said that other children pick on him, say he is 'black' and make other derogatory comments which make him extremely angry. Abdul also mentioned that when he sees his parents fighting, he becomes sad and angry. The parents mentioned that Abdul changed from being quiet, to more aggressive. His academic performance has declined. The children report that they support each other, however, they would like to see their parents stop fighting and take more interest in their lives. Izaz was reluctant to attend therapy and Karim was not interested in talking to an outsider about their family issues.

Engagement is a complex process involving the development of the relationship between the worker and the family. This next section focusses on how a worker engages with Izaz (the father) and develops rapport with him. The importance of trust in any therapeutic relationship has long been recognised. In this case, it is paramount because Izaz is a survivor of torture and trauma. Torture occurs within the context of the powerful relationship between torturer and victim. The survivor will continue to find it difficult to trust others (Jaffa, 1993).

To create a positive impact and engage with Izaz, the worker must show empathy, unconditional positive regard and be respectfully curious about the family's cultural practices.

Engagement starts with Izaz and his family when the worker warmly greets them and offers them a cup of tea. The worker asks Izaz 'What do I need to know that will help your family?' For men in many cultures, asking for help makes them feel inadequate. Izaz is unemployed and unable to fulfil the breadwinner role. By validating his authority, a stronger engagement is created by inviting Izaz to work in partnership with the worker. It is useful to ask some questions about his country of origin and his cultural practices. This demonstrates an interest rather than simply stereotyping his culture.

The worker needs to be acutely sensitive to the presenting verbal and non-verbal cues. Anything that is said or done should not imply that the worker undermines, patronises or glorifies the service user's culture.

The father's story needs to be appreciated. It highlights the struggle of an immigrant who is trying hard to make a new life for himself and his family. Some common interests may be shared, and occasionally the worker may use appropriate self-disclosure.



Migration

The migration process has seriously affected this family. The migration experience is divided into the following stages (Sluzki, 1979):

- 1) Preparatory stage (in previous country).
- 2) Act of migration (movement between countries).
- 3) Period of overcompensation (initial adjustment to Australia).
- 4) Period of decompensation (process of full adjustment to Australia).
- 5) Transgenerational experiences (subsequent generations born in Australia).

During the initial engagement stage, this family was in the 'period of decompensation'. However, it is important to identify how the father dealt with the previous three phases. In order to cope with the migration, the family managed the immigration experience in different ways. Izaz (the father) focussed on dealing with the pressing financial and physical relocation issues (house, school etc). Nasrin (the mother) kept her feelings about the migration experience to herself.

This coping pattern is sufficient during the first few months, however, if the family rigidly maintains these roles, it can create a major crisis in family relationships. Izaz and Nasrin, after one year of migration, are still locked into these fixed roles that have contributed to stress on their relationships.

Izaz has developed stronger networks in Australia due to his focus on the outward issues affecting his family. Nasrin is inward-oriented, focusing on writing letters, making phone calls to her family back in Sudan and mourning what has been left behind in Sudan. Nasrin's inward-oriented activities contribute to her isolation. The behaviour of each member of the system affects the behaviour of the other.

Because of his strong networks outside the family, Izaz experiences his wife, and mother of his children, as relatively ignorant of the norms and customs of the new environment. As his wife has fewer acquaintances and friends, this further separates her from community supports and increases the experience of isolation. She may respond either by clinging more to the past or by clinging more to her husband, who in turn, will feel too restricted. She also may respond positively if assistance is offered to her by the family worker, for example, being invited to join a support group. Izaz needs to be encouraged to support his wife in this venture.

The whole process escalates progressively into a major crisis for the relationship. It is important to discuss the cultural practices, parenting norms and role definitions of the Sudanese culture before any interventions are used. The worker must convey, at all times, that things may be different between the two cultures and countries, but these changes are neither intrinsically good or bad.

Torture and trauma

Torture and trauma has significantly impaired this family's functioning, with conflict in Izaz and Nasrin's relationship that in turn is affecting their children. The family has received post traumatic stress therapy by a torture and trauma service.

The worker's approach was to reinforce the authority of the parents and discourage the children from becoming involved in parental conflict. Nasrin's and Izaz's own skills were utilised as they started writing and publishing topics about their immigration experience and the politics of Sudan. They found this interesting, enjoyable, and an opportunity to explore the interface between family and community.

The process of migration and the experience of torture and trauma situations contribute significantly to the development of relationship difficulties.

Racism

Racism is an issue for this family. For example, Abdul is the victim of racial slurs and abuse from other children at school and this is an issue the whole family experiences. Abdul's fighting with other children is a response to racism and is something that the school needs to address. The worker, if skilled in culturally sensitive practice, will be able to assist the family to find strategies in overcoming racism. The worker may also need to provide advocacy, on a systems level, to assist this family to find new ways for this issue to be addressed that include identifying and recruiting appropriate partners e.g. teachers, school principal, school counsellor.

Workers must be able to validate the positive steps that Abdul uses to respond to the racism. The worker supported Abdul to express his anger and sadness in the session by asking the question 'How did that make you feel when other students said you are 'black'?' As an advocate, the worker discussed the issue with the school principal. The worker reinforced messages that black is a proud colour e.g. many celebrities, including top world athletes and leaders are black.

It is recognised that many CALD families enter Australia with a migration expectation of freedom and new opportunity, but this is often tinged with:

- ▶ refugees experiencing mental health issues accompanied by self medication with a variety of substances
- ▶ long-term displacement into detention centres
- ▶ family breakdown – loss of extended family connection
- ▶ accumulative stress
- ▶ mistrust of authorities (due to refugee experience or coming from countries where corruption is happening)
- ▶ lack of support and systemic pathways to gain recognition for pre-migration competencies, skills and qualifications
- ▶ trauma
- ▶ language barriers/comprehension is the not the same as speaking English well

- unclear and sometimes unreal expectations of Australian cultural values, the welfare system, freedom, prevailing democratic processes and the presence of relevant opportunities.

A group of professionals attending the *2007 Men & Family Relationships Forum* expressed a significant difficulty identifying themselves as skilled when responding to CALD communities, as this work was seen as a specialist area. A major challenge identified was the limited access to training in cultural education, awareness and sensitivity both at the practitioner and organisational level.

For those practitioners who had successfully engaged cross-culturally, the most significant skill identified was the capacity to develop strong working partnerships with CALD communities and ethno-specific organisations. This was achieved through regular community consultation and as one delegate noted to ‘personally invest in the cultural life of the client...from the management to the front-line workers in the organisation.’

This overall approach needs to be implemented not only in relation to cultural identity and practise but should include gender identity and masculinities.

Conclusion

This topic has examined the issues of cross-cultural and gender sensitive practices used in services. The non-deficit approach to working with men and the ‘informed-not-knowing’ position is identified as the most helpful approach when workers provide services to CALD men and families.

This topic has demonstrated the need for workers to understand how socialisation affects CALD families. It has also highlighted that workers need a good level of self-awareness of their own socialisation experiences, cultural biases and attitudes to others from CALD backgrounds. Three case studies have been used to provide the framework of cross-cultural gender sensitive family therapy practices with men from CALD backgrounds. It suggests that culture and gender are central metaphors for effective cross-cultural gender sensitive counselling practices with men from CALD communities.

Successful workers will be able to empathically appreciate the service user’s world view and acknowledge and respect differences that may exist between the family and worker. Culturally sensitive workers will maintain an awareness of diversity within family and cultural groups and avoid using stereotypes. Successful workers have an awareness of their own cultural issues and use this to demonstrate cultural sensitivity to service users. It is useful to avoid using generalised male stereotypes and derogatory or stereotypical views about women. However, that challenge needs to be applied using frameworks that respect and acknowledge the evolving intellect of the service user.

The common base in working with men from CALD communities is the demonstration of a genuine appreciation of and respect for the differences that exist between

and among families. It is often useful for workers to build this awareness through accessing training programs for workers about cross-cultural and gender sensitive issues. A core area for development is knowledge about migration experiences, plus torture and trauma issues and what impact these have on family relationships. Workers need to also acknowledge the women's relative economic and socially disadvantaged position in our society and in many CALD communities.



The 'take home' message to attract, engage and retain CALD men in their programs occurs when agencies, programs and staff offering services to these men, and their families, routinely reflect on their:

- mode of practice
- cultural and gender sensitivity
- organisation profile.

At the *2007 National Men and Family Relationships Forum*, the workshop convenors and practitioners identified the following skills to use when working with CALD communities:

- Engage and employ bilingual practitioners
- Deliver culturally appropriate services in consultation with specific communities
- Adopt a whole of life approach to service provision
- Ensure regular community consultation and attendance at inter-agency meetings
- Work in partnership with community leaders and agencies
- Understand the growing needs of the community and how these change the longer community members that have been in Australia
- Utilise the skills of volunteers and leaders in the community
- Use gender specific activities and culturally appropriate food (e.g. Halal food)
- Promote safety within the group by creating space for the group to talk with interpreters, bilingual facilitators and each other, in their own language, prior to the group starting
- When new to working with CALD communities, accept that mistakes will happen
- Walk alongside – learning partnerships are important when building awareness and understanding about another's culture
- Don't assume anything, apply the 'informed not-knowing' approach through thoughtful sensitive inquiry
- Respect the presence of divergence across all cultures
- Be aware of the hierarchical aspect in a community.

Topic 5: Once were hunters and gatherers – working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men

Outline

This topic discusses the following subjects:

- Role changes for Aboriginal men.
- Impact of new leadership in Aboriginal communities.
- How to ask permission to enter the community's land.
- Key approaches for non-Aboriginals working with Aboriginal communities.
- The development of Aboriginal facilitators for the *Hey Dad for Indigenous Dad's, Uncles and Pops program*.
- How to use the significance of Dreamtime stories.

Whilst these headings are not individually featured in the information about this topic, the transcript below from an interview between Ray McMinn and Andrew King covers details relating to the subject matter outlined above.

Read the following section and reflect on:

- what key relationship do you have with different Aboriginal groups in your community?
- how can you build respectful relationships with those communities?

Ray McMinn being interviewed by Andrew King

Andrew: Could you introduce yourself?

Ray: My name is Ray McMinn, I am an Elder of the MINGALETTA Aboriginal Community, based on the Woy Woy Peninsula, Central Coast. I am also an Elder of the Potory Minbee Aboriginal Elders and Seniors Association of the Central Coast. I work as the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer for the Department of Education and Training.

Andrew: Which has always been a coastal community?

Ray: A group of us got together and decided to form a corporation as we have a rather large Aboriginal community on the Woy Woy Peninsula. Over three

hundred Aboriginal students in the six cluster schools, a community that is not transient and have made their home the Woy Woy Peninsular. Aboriginal people from different countries i.e. Dharug, Awabakal, Wiradjuri, Wadiwadi and Bundjalung, just to name a few. We have been going for five or six years so far and gaining strength and recognition each year. MINGALETTA is a Guringgai word for coming together or meeting place, and that's what we do. Our main focus is housing, health and education.

Andrew: Wonderful. This section is going to be called 'Once were hunters and gatherers' – working with Indigenous men. What does that title mean to you?

Ray: Prior to colonisation Aboriginal people were hunters and gatherers. After colonisation that identity was gradually eroded over the years. Now it has completely gone with urban Aboriginal people, and yet it is still part of their nature, it is in their blood. There is a sense of hopelessness, lostness and lack of self-esteem. Not as much with remote communities who still live traditionally but even then the Aboriginal people have their own unique problems in those communities. But they still do a certain amount of hunting and gathering, but again it is slowly diminishing.

With this identity being lost, their self-esteem is damaged. When working with men, the main thing you need to do is to build up that self-esteem, get that sense of hunting and gathering back within them, which today means earning a wage, providing for their family and caring for their family. That's what's been lost, and that's why we're in so much trouble today.

And you'll find that in every Aboriginal community that you go into, the leaders are women, they are the outspoken people. The Aboriginal men sit back and do not project themselves very well. It is now slowly starting to change; there is a new excitement and expectation through the work of people within other organisations that are working with men. The men are starting to help get back their self-esteem, sense of belonging and sense of pride. Slowly it's working.

Andrew: What difference does it make for the men as they redefine that identity and revalidate that role of being hunters and gatherers? What difference does it make in the men's lives?

Ray: Well it gives them a sense of pride. You know, even when you have worked in prisons and things like that you see the change in the young fellas. It gives them a sense of pride, a sense of self worth, a sense of self-esteem and they just... you see the change. They want to get out there and do things. And so I think it's essential, or it's paramount to any Aboriginal men's training to instil that hunting and gathering regime back within them. And once you start doing that, you'll find it a lot easier to get them back to where they used to be.

Andrew: You mentioned before that the new leadership in the communities is women focussed and how that's highly valued. As the self-esteem of blokes come back, as they revalue that role of hunting and gathering in their own leadership abilities, how does that coexist, with the female leadership?

Ray: It's like the white society. We had the women's revolution which is a great thing. But the men need to rebuild their own confidence in who they are. This is not only true for Aboriginal men, but also for white society males who are also losing their identity. In Aboriginal society that's how it was. Males and females were on equal footing. Women were respected and revered. Now, what's happened is the females, out of necessity, are taking leadership roles because the males have previously lost their identity. Well, it's not that simple, but that's how I look at it.

Now, you'll find that when you go into Aboriginal communities the males are starting to regain, not control, their self-respect and self-esteem. That's the ones we work with, so you'll find that the women by their own choice, are getting back to be nurturers and carers for their families, and the males are starting to get back to hunting and gathering. Everything should be in equal partnership.

Andrew: To support this change for men, what is the message non-Aboriginal workers need to do when working with Aboriginal men?

Ray: If you're working with Indigenous people it is best to use Aboriginal men as tutors and teachers. Because for far too long, what's happened has been controlled and delivered by white people governments. For too long the message has been from white society to Aboriginal people, is what we are going to do for you. It does not work. It's got to be reversed. School principals come to me and say 'Ray, we're trying to get into a community, how do we do it?' I say, they need to start by approaching the elders.

But don't go in and say 'This is what we're going to do'. Always reverse it and say 'What can we do for you?' That's how it works. And that way you'll get the respect of the community and the respect of the Elders. They will work with you and eventually you'll get them coming back into the schools.

It is the same for men in an Aboriginal community. You go into the community and don't say that 'This is what we're going to do', but if you do it the reverse, and say 'What can we do for you? How can we help you make your decisions for what you want to do for your people, for your family?' With that approach you win hands down every time. The other way, it doesn't work. We know that!

Andrew: When this approach is adopted, what are some of those examples of cross cultural partnerships that have you witnessed in your own work?

Ray: Well, this way of working alongside the community is not unique to Aboriginal communities. There's no reason on earth why the same approach can't be used with all cultures. White, Chinese or Japanese cultures, the same approach will work. Our society falls short all the time, we don't look at it the other way, we always look at it from our point of view, 'we will help you'. We avoid asking the question, 'How can we help you and what do you need from us?' That's the way to approach it.

Dealing with parents, the dreamtime stories or *Hey Dad*, or another parenting program you've put in place. The thing in society today is that the family unit is breaking down, we know that. The reason it is breaking down – this is my opinion – is that we weren't handed down the skills our parents had. They might have been disciplinarians, or whatever, but the skills handed down from generation to generation on how to raise families and how to deal with communities – because parents haven't been handed the skills to use for raising their children, we now have a big problem. But if you go out and give the parents the skills, help them to get the skills then we will improve the community. Otherwise we are in a big mess, until such time as we begin to get this sorted out.

Andrew: Coming back to the skills in a moment. Sometimes people say it is hard for female workers to work with Aboriginal men. What is your perspective on that?

Ray: I've seen some fantastic female workers working with men. I think the *Hey Dad* launch at Tamworth was proof in the pudding. Aboriginal men need to also hear from a female perspective how to recreate this equal partnership. The female leaders will respect the delivery of these courses. The female leaders I have observed work fantastically. I think it will be better in the long run, when Aboriginal men take up the group leader roles but initially it is the women who have taken these roles and they do a fantastic job.

Andrew: What are the most important things that female workers need to do when engaging Aboriginal men?

Ray: Equality and respect. I think they're the two main factors if you're a female worker with an Aboriginal male. Come from a level footing, and value the role the men play in society or what they should play. I have seen some social workers that adopt the attitude of 'what I do for you', not the other way around which I spoke about before. Then they become overbearing and overpowering, and forget that these men have lost their role, they have lost their identity.

That goes for female Aboriginal women as well, there's no two ways about it. Many of them integrated a lot better than the men because they were usually married to white men. They integrated far better. Whereas, the males – for who it was against the law to even go near a white female in the old days, and even now that's still frowned upon to a certain degree – the men need to be reminded of their tenderness and nurturing, as is their nature. That is what women were born for, to be nurturers and carers and you know, with Christ and Mary Magdalene. He knelt below her, and he was probably the first female liberationist if you like, if you want to go down that path, because he was kneeling at the feet before Mary Magdalene which wasn't heard of in those days for a male to be below a female.

Andrew: You were talking about the importance of parents in re-validating that set of skills they use in caring for their family. When working with Aboriginal men,

what good practice skills are used? You mentioned equality, level footing is a key thing, and validating that lost role.

Ray: Well I can tell you one thing is. Be straight as a gun barrel because they will pick it up if you are not. And I – this goes for anyone – you’ve always got to speak from your heart. Use your heart and experience. If you don’t you’re lost. They’ll see through you, and they’ll say ‘There’s another know-it-all trying to tell us what’s good for us’. So you’ve got to be fair dinkum. If you’re not fair dinkum you might as well give the game away, as far as I’m concerned.

As far as the skills go, this goes for all society. Within an Aboriginal community, or any community, it takes a whole village to raise a child. You probably have heard that before. Well it’s true. Because once the child is born, they are virtually handed over to his aunties and uncles, and they have got several of them. They have several mothers and several fathers and the child’s education begins at birth. We are in danger of losing that extended family. Some cultures have still got it, but it is a dying thing. Say I’m in court, and an Aboriginal boy is accompanied by his aunty and uncle. The magistrate will frown upon it. He will say ‘Where’s the kid’s mother and father?’ What they don’t understand is that the mum and dad are usually too close to the situation to speak effectively from their own experience. Whereby the aunty and uncle are often who the boy or girl will listen to, mum and dad are the enemy at the moment. So, the aunt or uncle will accompany the child, as they are removed from the situation to a certain degree. They’re able to see it more clearly than the immediate mother and father. That’s the sort of thing we’ve got to get back to.

Where we’ve got a community like Mingaletta, if you’ve got a child that’s in trouble, at a school, you get the community behind it and they’ll help sort it out. Where I saw a kid the other day, he’s in strife, but there’s no Aboriginal community to assist him, or mum and dad to help them out. So it’s left to mum or dad, but mum or dad are too close to the situation. It becomes very emotional especially in single parent families, and the kid regards them as the enemy. That’s when the extended family comes into play. Usually the boy or girl has more respect for his aunt and uncle and will listen to them more readily than he would for his mother or father because he lives with mum or dad all the time.

Andrew: Working with the social system around the kids is a vital part of those skills. Are there any other important skills for workers to use to work effectively with Aboriginal men?

Ray: Well I believe we’ve got to set goals and aims for any community, we’ve got to raise the bar for Aboriginal males. Don’t say, this is what happened, this is how it has always been. We’ve got to raise the bar to say ‘This is what I want from this and what do you want for yourself’.

Andrew: You used the word community in that. Is that an important thing for workers to be aware of, when to work with the individual man, and when to work with a larger community group?

Ray: You need to start within the community. Say you're in Taree (a small regional town in New South Wales) and you approach the community to get the men to come to the course. I think you'll find the Child Protection Agency dictated that they need to go and attend a parenting course, but the men are only going to be there because they've got to be. The best way obviously is to volunteer to get them there on their own, so they want to be there.

It takes an exceptional trainer, and it can be done, to be able to draw them out, so they actually want to stay there and be there and stay within the course. And again the way to do that is to approach them on their level, and their footing, say 'What do you want and how can I help you achieve what you want in your life?' It's imperative that they approach it on a level footing all the time, and that they are true and fair dinkum not instructed just read a book. The leader has to sit in and be a part of that group, be one of the group.

If you're doing the training yourself, that's how you learn the most, and best relax. That's how I approach it when talking with men. I put myself in their situation – I've been there, I know what it's like, you know – and that's how other workers have to approach this sort of situation, especially with Aboriginal men.

Andrew: If you are new to an area and want to build the relationship with an Aboriginal community, where would you first start? Do you go to see the Elders or start with the local Land Council or the Indigenous Health Service?

Ray: It's all of the above. But before you even go into a community – like if you are going into Dubbo – you find out the country. You do some homework, and find out what country you're in. Say it's Wiradjuri, or if you're going to the Central Coast, it is Darkinjung. So, actually know the land and the country you are going into before you approach anyone. And once you've done that then you approach the Elders, or the Land Council, or the Aboriginal Medical Service. You ask permission to go onto that land, you always say 'Is it ok if I come onto Darkinjung?' or acknowledge that you are in Darkinjung country, or you are in Wiradjuri country. It is just a mark of respect, and they appreciate that, believe me, they really appreciate that.

This outsider has come into your country, he has asked permission to enter, and he acknowledges that he knows this is your country, which is a big thing. Even though the person you might approach – she might be from another country – she's living in that place, the same as Mingalletta, that's Guringgai territory. But these people have met and gathered, given birth to the children so the children realistically, historically they might be Dharug descendant, but they're born in Guringgai territory, so they take on that identity of that country they are in, but historically they are from...wherever. You know,

where their families are from. It is a big, big thing to, to find out who the Elders are in the community, they'll let you know and then approach them and seek permission. They will pass this respect onto others, otherwise you're bashing your head against a brick wall, and you'll never get in unless you do show that mark of respect.

Some people say that there are not many real Aboriginals around these days. Even with urban Aboriginals, they still follow and are trying to get back their own cultural base. And by doing that you show that you are on the same page as they are and you respect their country and the land.

Andrew: In our fast-paced society, will that sign of respect be passed on?

Ray: Yep, without a doubt. I can give you an example. At Christmas time the family and I went away camping to Saltwater Nature Reserve. I was invited to go there as an elder from my community. Before I went to Salt Water, I went to see the local Elders and introduced myself even though they knew me anyway. I introduced myself and said 'Can I seek permission to come up on your land, I'm a Dharug descendent, and I'm an elder of MINGALETTA Aboriginal Community?' Permission was granted and it was like open house. Anything that I wanted on that land, I was able to do because I paid the respect to start with. You know, I didn't have to, just out of respect I did.

My kids do the same thing too. If at university or whatever, they always acknowledge the country and always talk to the Elders and people like that before they go on the land. It's growing, it's tradition, and it's coming back. And I think the *Sorry Day* was one of the biggest things ever, I've had four historical Aboriginal events in my life.

One was being born Aboriginal in Redfern in 1944, and my father was in New Guinea, in the army. My mother was an Aboriginal woman, my father was white. When I was born, they went underground, and in those days aboriginality was never mentioned, even though we knew. In 1960 a kind magistrate put me in the Navy and then in 1967 I was serving in submarines in the UK and word came through about the results of the referendum. I could actually say to everyone, which they already knew anyway, that I was Aboriginal, because prior to that there were no Aboriginals in the services, especially not in the Navy. So '67 was the referendum, that's when I announced, I could come out of the closet, so to speak. The next big event was the *2000 Reconciliation March* across Sydney Harbour Bridge. This in my mind was the day which Australia said sorry to Aboriginal people, the larger society said sorry. The next event was obviously the *Sorry Day Apology* in Canberra which I was present at. So those four days are probably the most significant days in my life as being Aboriginal.

Now, if you can, if you can imagine, the Stolen Generation, these are the people we are talking to. Males, who didn't know who their mothers were, who have lost a great chunk of their life. They don't know where they're from. They don't know who their fathers and mothers were half the time, they are just wandering around aimlessly. And this is why we've got to get to them

and rebuild stability in their lives. The only way to do this is to reach out and talk to them about their culture and their country. Find out where they are and who they are. You need to do your own homework before you go in there and find out where they are from and the country you are in.

Andrew: I have here in front of me a copy of *Hey Dad* for Indigenous Dad's, Uncles and Pops. I know you were part of that program and its development. What does the *Hey Dad* program mean for you?

Ray: Oh, I think it's an excellent tool. A very, very well thought out, well planned tool for reaching out to our men. It probably needs a more cultural aspect to it, but I think any facilitator can incorporate their own stuff. The inclusion of Dreamtime stories which are relevant to raising families, is powerful.

Andrew: I imagine a key part of the next few years is training more Aboriginal men to be facilitators. What skills or support do Aboriginal men need to facilitate this program?

Ray: Well you know what? Organisations have a great opportunity to train young Indigenous facilitators who may at present be in juvenile justice. There are many young men, soon to be released in five or six week's time – they usually have children as well – they can be trained to be facilitators for the *Hey Dad* program, and then they go back to their community with a new way to contribute. That young man can be attached to a local organisation. You have a trained facilitator based in a high Aboriginal population – they are working, so employment – they are able to help his own community with training programs. He has a renewed self respect, self-esteem and even with a prison record, he's able to go into his community as a trained facilitator. You couldn't wish for anything better. As long as you keep the fire burning and not to let the old ways creep back in, by constant monitoring and upgrades.

Andrew: What are the qualities or characteristics you would look for within those young men in making that selection process of who to train?

Ray: Their education is probably not so crash hot – they have usually dropped out of school at 15, or whatever. But they really don't need that, they just need the skills. And most Aboriginal men, once you get them going, they are great talkers, they are great Dreamtime storytellers. And that's what their heritage is, and they are able to communicate especially with their own community. So you know, you're looking at personality.

An example is Uncle Max who is an Elder. I was with him the other day—he was sitting in the room quietly in his European clothes and being very demure and shy. However, when he changes into his traditional Naga and paint, his whole personality changes. He just comes right out. It's extraordinary.

And you'll find that with most Aboriginals. If you take a young bloke, they are shy, quiet and reserved. But if you give them the skills and the training to be a facilitator, you'll find they will come out. Because they've got a goal, an aim, and they have got something they can actually be proud of.

I've seen this happen. Tamworth was a good example. You have got a group of men—they were shy, they really were not going anywhere at the time, however, you get a couple of leaders and train them with the *Hey Dad* program and watch them blossom. They come out of their shells and they're doing a good job. It is satisfying to see that growth.

Andrew: How important are those Dreamtime stories in terms of reclaiming the traditional or new roles, of what it means to be a hunter, gatherer, provider, protector?

Ray: I have presented the *Sharing the Dream* program to my regional bosses and teachers. The program involves listening to Dreamtime stories and the participants then identify the content of the story – respect for self, respect for elders, respect for children and respect for family. All these different moral codes and things that we are supposed to live by are in the story. It's all contained in a Dreamtime story. So I'd defy anyone to take a look at a Dreamtime story – I don't care if it is *Tidalik the Frog*, or whatever – you'll find morals, respect, self-esteem, health and well-being in the story. That relates to how we live our lives in those stories. With Dreamtime stories, it's imperative, especially with Aboriginal people, that they hear those stories and we start handing it down again. Because within those stories is the code of conduct for moral living or living your life.

Andrew: Is there a Dreamtime story that comes to mind as one that speaks to you about the current context which men face, and that challenge which is before them?

Ray: The story of The Nurunderi (hunters) and the Koolyangarra (children).

Seldom were aged animals hunted, unless game was very scarce. Yet when confused old animals wandered into camp, they were often teased by Koolyangarra. These children pretended they were Mundurras, or hunters, tormenting the old animals with blunted toy spears.

One day, an aged Mari, a wallaby, entered the Banya and began to graze. The Koolyangarra quickly gave chase, but the Mari nimbly avoided the blunted spears, in spite of his age, he even jumped over the heads of the Koolyangarra, till the children grew angry.

'Keep still,' they shouted. 'We cannot kill you if you jump about so.'

The Mari stopped and faced them.

'Why do you want to kill me?' said the Koolyangarra.

'To avoid being killed,' said the Mari.

'But you are a Mari, and Mari's don't speak,' said the Koolyangarra.

'Is that so?' said the Mari.

Then, to the children's astonishment, the Mari turned into one of the spirit people. Finally the spirit spoke.

'I am Nurunderi, a spirit teacher, sent by the great spirit, Baimi. I come to teach you respect.

'How often have I seen you tease old animals, and how that displeases me. You should hunt only for food, never for fun. All creatures deserve dignity, because each has a purpose, even if that purpose is beyond the understanding of children. Above all, age should be respected, because with age there is wisdom, which is passed on to the young.'

'We do respect the elders' said Wilyango, (or boy). 'But what can we learn from an old animal?'

'Were you able to catch the Mari?' asked the Nurunderi, 'or kill it?'

The boy shuffled and looked at his feet, feeling very foolish.

'You see.' said the Nurunderi, 'age and experience teaches much.' He paused for some time, then he added. 'Only if you remember these things can each of you become good Mundurras, and if you do then your people will never go hungry.'

The Koolyangarra looked at each other for only a moment, yet when they looked back, the Nurunderi had vanished.

This is one of many Dreamtime stories that can be used and you can see the moral message it contains. The story is not just for children, I have used it for adults to dissect and discuss the content and how it can be related to parenting today.

Andrew: Thanks Ray for sharing a rich story with many insights into working with Aboriginal men.

Reflection on facilitating group work programs with men who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

In the *Hey Dad* program, they recommend the following things for facilitators to do when they have Aboriginal men in the group. Most importantly, always use an Aboriginal co-facilitator.

Other important things are:

Setting up the space

- ▶ Place the chairs in a circle with an adequate space between each chair for men to have free movement.
- ▶ Plan your sessions ahead and assess your particular group's needs, abilities, challenges and strengths.
- ▶ Support rather than confront. Remember that Aboriginal people often suffer from 'fight or flight' when confronted by shame circumstances.
- ▶ In fliers and promotional material, highlight the positive influence of males in their kid's lives.

- ▶ Group facilitators need to model appropriate behaviour such as non-competitiveness.
- ▶ Acknowledge that every person in the group, including the facilitators, is always learning. The Aboriginal fathers, uncles and grandfathers need to know they have a unique expertise in understanding their own kids.
- ▶ Normalise the learning experience. Ensure it emphasises that new learning comes from life experience. It is not like a classroom where answers are right or wrong.
- ▶ Men may need to be coached and helped to work through appropriate words and behaviour when they have to deal with specific professional agencies to meet their needs. It may be relevant to have a guest from these agencies drop in to a group for a five minute chat about who they are and what they do and then allow them to stay and answer questions over morning/afternoon tea or even lunch.

Being upfront

- ▶ The facilitators must inform the group that they are responsible for reporting any instances where a child may be at risk.
- ▶ Most participants will have a high sense of anxiety about what the group involves.
- ▶ Develop clear guidelines or rules with participants.
- ▶ Discuss issues without directly challenging the men.
- ▶ Focus on the relationship between the child and adult.
- ▶ Do not use put-down terms. For example 'the kid's mum' rather than 'ex'.
- ▶ Avoid stereotypes and generalisations.
- ▶ When writing on the whiteboard ALWAYS read out what you write.
Some participants in the group may have low literacy skills.

Being relaxed and open

- ▶ Facilitators need to have an understanding of the program content and be able to facilitate without being directional.
- ▶ It is important that the participants understand what is going to happen, and that facilitators maintain a balance between being directive and clear, as opposed to being over-controlling.
- ▶ It is important for participants to be involved in developing a clear set of group guidelines and values.
- ▶ Affirm the role played by fathers, and other men, including grandfathers and uncles.
- ▶ Use familiar, clear and simple language rather than jargon.
- ▶ Talk about issues when they come up in the group.

Accept the level of anxiety the group members may experience

- ▶ Be aware that for many Aboriginal men this will be their first exposure to this type of program, and until they develop a comfort level, they will be quite apprehensive about questions regarding what concerns them.



- The comfort level may never be reached so the facilitator must be aware of individual needs of group members.
- Be aware that some of the activities, role plays and examples contained in other programs may not be appropriate with Aboriginal men. For instance, some activities will not be suitable for incarcerated or mandated groups, while some activities may not work with fathers who don't live full time with their children. As a facilitator, the suitability and appropriateness of activities and session material is at your discretion.
- It is more appropriate to ask 'Where are you from?' than to ask 'where do you work?' This is generally how Aboriginal people introduce themselves via association of family and country.
- Remember that completing paperwork to access programs and services can be intimidating.
- Use open body language, for example, shake hands (positive body contact, non-threatening and validating).
- Only use intermittent eye contact especially when the person has a high degree of anxiety/emotion.
- Separate behaviour from the person.

Use throw words instead of brainstorming

For some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, the term 'brainstorming' can be intimidating. This may be due to negative experiences with educational institutions in the past or simply a lack of confidence in their own brainpower. To encourage increased participation in the group work exercises the term 'throw words' has been used to replace brainstorming. For example, if the theme was emotions, you could say:

'In this session we are talking about emotions. I just want you all to throw words at me and I'll write them on the board. What are all the emotions that we can name?'

Yarning the issues

Yarning has always been the way that Aboriginal people support each other in times of problems. It is talking and understanding each other.

Fathers might come to a group because they currently have a need to participate more positively in their children's lives or may have particular child-related issues to resolve. Other issues might surface during the program as they try to put ideas into practice. While we anticipate that the group will give them the skills to address these problems, there is rarely a quick solution. However, it is still important to address urgent issues, and to help fathers, uncles and grandfathers to become more skilled in dealing with problems through yarning.

For this reason a segment called 'great spirit, the issues' is used. In this section, the men may present practical problems for open group discussion. It is suggested that the time devoted to this section be set when the segment is introduced, and that this time limit be adhered to, otherwise 'pressing issues' can dominate every session.

Explain the idea of 'yarning the issues' to the group in the first session. You can use a made up issue to practice.

1. At the start of each week ask the group if there are any 'yarning issues' they would like to bring to the group. Alternatively, have a box of paper and pens at the back of the room where group members can write down their pressing issues. This way the person who 'owns' the issue can stay anonymous.
2. Write the issue on the whiteboard (or butcher's paper) reading it out to the group. If it is an issue that will be addressed during the session, ask the group for permission to discuss it in the session rather than in yarning issues.
3. Go around the circle asking members to offer a suggestion to the issue. All suggestions are written briefly on the board, pictographs are acceptable.
4. It is often helpful to copy down the problem and suggested solutions, then photocopy them and distribute them to participants. This can become a useful resource for the group.



If you are interested in being trained as a *Hey Dad* program facilitator or implementing the *Hey Dad* program in their communities, contact Centacare Broken Bay on 02 94882400 or email hey.dad@brokenbay.catholic.org.au

Find out the relevant country for your local area. Then approach the local Elders, Land Council and the Aboriginal Medical Service for permission to go onto that land. This is a mark of respect.

Ask them 'What can I do for you?' Use as many empowerment-based strategies as possible.

Spend time in building your relationship with the community by attending local events.

Find as many ways that you can include and work alongside Aboriginal workers and members of the community.

Topic 6: Working with men in different contexts

A. Working with men and emotions (affect regulation)

Outline

This topic discusses the following subjects:

- ▶ Problems with the concept of anger management.
- ▶ Difference between anger management programs and domestic violence programs.
- ▶ Challenges faced in dealing with men and emotion.
- ▶ The importance of valuing the full spectrum of emotion–affect regulation.
- ▶ Useful tools for working with affect regulation.

Read the following section and reflect on:

- ▶ what support do you provide men as they work through their emotions concerning the issues that are important to them?

The *2007 Men and Family Relationships Forum* in Adelaide identified that one of the major challenges in engaging men into groups is due to their reluctance to be involved in (unstructured) discussions of emotional issues that may leave them feeling exposed and vulnerable to shaming. Donald Nathanson advocates the importance of dealing with men in non-shaming, non-stigmatising ways.

Problems with the concept of anger management

Although there are problems with the concept of ‘anger management’, many men relate to it and are motivated to attend such a group program. This is because men are usually not looking for ‘affect regulation’ – they are looking for ‘effect regulation’ – or tighter ‘control’ of their behaviour that follows emotional arousal. Usually this is promoted by feedback from key people in their life or authorities like the police or court system. ‘Affect’ involves the impact of emotions on our behaviour, while ‘effect’ involves the primarily focus being actions and behaviour.

However, current professional understanding is moving in the direction of seeing effective ‘anger management’ as helping men to proactively deal more effectively with all of their emotions, rather than learn how to ‘control’ their anger. Men are often referred by other professionals for ‘anger management’ as if it is a quick-fix, one-size-fits-all magic wand solution (Sutton, 2007a). This is highlighted in the media

reports where public figures, like Sam Newman, have been mandated to undergo counselling for anger management issues, further blurring distinctions between self-regulation and punitive action. It is critical that professionals understand that the solution involves more comprehensive ‘affect regulation’ and that individuals require quite different periods of intervention for behaviour change to be successful (Sutton, 2007a).

Another reason men relate to the idea of ‘anger management’ is because it’s okay to feel and act angry as it does not challenge the male stereotype, whereas showing other emotions is seen as feminine. It is therefore not problematic (threatening) for men to sit in a group and articulate their ‘problems with anger’ and it often takes some time to move the discussion to other emotions. It is also recognised that there is a difficulty for men to access these services in many rural areas.

The term ‘anger management’ is problematic in the eyes of various professionals/ services because it is erroneously often used interchangeably with the concept of a domestic violence perpetrator’s group program (Sutton, 2007a). This is problematic as it blurs the distinction between emotional responses and the socio-cultural and gender issues that support domestic violence (e.g. power and control). While it is generally accepted to have ‘anger management’ or ‘affect regulation’ groups for men who have problematic low levels of ‘anger’, some of the behaviour management strategies used in ‘affect regulation’ programs are similar to those found in domestic violence perpetrator group programs (Sutton, 2007a). However, while some strategies overlap, both contexts use very different underpinning framework and philosophy.

Difference between anger management and domestic violence programs

It is important that practitioners refer men to the most appropriate programs and that ‘anger management’ is not seen as an alternative to being involved in a behaviour change program. The table on page 87 highlights some of the differences between anger management and family violence programs.

Anger Management Programs	Domestic/Family Violence Programs
Behaviour is often reactive and people have trouble regulating emotions in a wide range of situations	Problem regulating emotions at home and often impacted by beliefs regarding power, privilege and entitlement
Focus on triggers and connections between thoughts, feelings and actions	Behaviour is often intentional and involves power/control issues
Involves self esteem, self care, relationship skills, lifestyle, physiological and emotional issues	Involves an educational process that explores the use of privilege/entitlement, power/control and equity in relationships
Can involve mandated clients	Can involve mandated clients
Often courses are delivered in a six to twelve week format	Includes a wide range of violence—physical, emotional, psychological, financial, sexual etc.
	Partners are routinely involved and interviewed to ensure they are safe and that change is being sustained

To ensure a proper assessment is completed, practitioners should:

- determine whether the participant has been violence-free for a specified period of time (as determined by your program) and they intentionally commit to changing their behaviour
- ensure the participant is able to take full responsibility for his actions
- conduct a pre-interview, and if possible, copy court documents or any other referral letters being reviewed
- clarify the context where the anger incidents occurred and who was involved. If the issues are experienced in the context of intimate family relationships, the participant should be assessed for the degree of violent/controlling behaviour and referral to a Domestic Violence (DV) behaviour change program. Be aware that minimising the impact of the behaviour or denial is likely to occur
- consult their supervisor if any concerns arise that the behaviour is more DV related. Ensure other family members are safe, and refer the client to a DV program
- support clients who are to be involved in an anger management program but actually require a DV behaviour change program. It is important to support the participant by holding them in the existing program until such time they move into the DV behaviour change program. A man who is abruptly cut off from a program may feel rejected or humiliated and will be less likely to take up the other referral. All attempts are made to do what is required to ensure safety for the other family members
- ensure access to the anger management program is at the determination of the group facilitators and not automatic or a right of the participant.

Challenges faced in dealing with men and emotion

While men have a level of emotional awareness, they usually experience and perceive emotions as 'real' and 'natural' and find it harder to engage with the ideas of identity and sense of self and the impact of their feelings. There is a growing awareness of the level of stress for men (and women) in an increasingly demanding society and how this impacts on levels of emotional arousal, frustration, irritability, conflict, anger etc. This raises the challenge of gender roles, social conditioning, work-life balance, time allocation etc.

As a result of male social conditioning, many men have learnt to suppress and repress their emotions and are not so in touch with their feelings. Since we rely on our own emotional sensitivity to tune into the emotions of others, these men lack understanding of, and empathy towards, their partner's and children's emotional needs.

Anger can result from men being unable to process and contain emotional arousal and distress (especially in intimate relationships). To support greater emotional awareness by men there is a need to challenge social norms that are reinforced through the media and sport. This issue highlights the importance of role-modelling and education to re-frame masculinity. Men often do not understand the consequences of their expressions of negative emotion, and anger can be a mechanism of power and control within relationships. Many men lack the capacity to reflect and express it verbally, even though it is an important skill.

Men's limitations around emotional awareness are an important issue for effective parenting, and one of the biggest problems around is the often heated and hostile issue of separated men's contact with children. Significant evidence now exists regarding the impact conflict has on children. The safety of children and other people is always a fundamental consideration. Some men complete courses and feel they are in control of their anger, but actually still experience significant emotional regulation issues. Men in these groups need to be encouraged to understand that emotional regulation is a lifelong process that continually improves the quality of their life and relationships.

There is a challenge of working with different cultural groups and beliefs about 'anger management'. Some cultures may exhibit behaviour that may appear intimidating/aggressive/abusive to other cultural groups e.g. cultures that readily use gestures, loud voices and strident tones as part of normal communication.

Critical to understanding effective 'anger management' is the use of a process that works with the whole range of emotions in a proactive ongoing way i.e. 'affect regulation'. Practitioners are required to acknowledge the validity of all emotions right from the start in order to avoid the suppression, repression and disassociation that cause men to 'bottle up' their feelings and later 'blow up' with the use of aggression or possible violence (Sutton, 2007a).

In group work that deals with men and their emotions, practitioners have found it important to use regular group 'check-ins' to identify and enable the men to access their feelings. Some tools are valuable like the illustrated 'feely faces' chart that help

men more comprehensively identify emotions. It is important to acknowledge fear as a regular and normal emotion that serves to select attention towards possible threats in order to maximise survival (physical, emotional and psychological). Neurobiology informs practitioners on how people are hard-wired by evolution for fear ('anger management' is fear management) (Sutton, 2007a).

The initial challenge for group leaders is to develop sufficient trust and initial engagement that allows the men to relax and talk honestly. A variety of useful tools like the anger iceberg/volcano can then be used. The feelings that men might be feeling at the start of the group need acknowledgment before working towards identifying and processing underlying issues. It is important for group facilitators to have strong boundaries, be aware of their own emotional issues, and access good debriefing and supervision.

Both formal (clinical) and informal (emotional) debriefing is important. Guided mediation can help to contain and hold issues left over from the group. It is useful to have two group facilitators so that they can take turns going into details and stepping back to look at bigger group process dynamics. Helping people to understand that anger can be addressed internally and not just directed toward other people. Practitioners need to distinguish between anger as an emotion and violence as acted-out behaviour. Pre-group interviews are necessary to screen men and direct them to the most appropriate group e.g. dealing with domestic violence requires a domestic violence perpetrator group that has policies and strategies to address the safety of partners and children. Also it is crucial to recognise the importance of long-term work, because the work can't be achieved in one course of sessions.



The importance of valuing the full spectrum of emotion – affect regulation

Working with men and emotions needs to remain practically focussed and relevant to the lives of the participants. It focusses on the ‘experience’ of emotion and not just an ideas ‘talkfest’. It is critical for men to understand that clear rational thinking depends on the ability to contain and regulate emotional reactivity – this creates mental space to weigh up options and choose an appropriate response rather than automatic reactive acting-out behaviour. Walking away or fighting, both fail to solve the issue. One needs to teach communication and negotiation skills to actually resolve conflicts and use examples and scenarios that are familiar to their life situation.

In time, it is important for the academic focus to shift from ‘anger management’ towards ‘affect regulation’ as the core paradigm, although ‘anger management’ is still more widely recognised as a label. Maybe ‘emotional regulation’ could be a useful term in the future and allow for the development of a wider range of creative programs.

The idea that anger is the only acceptable emotion for men to express is still widespread. Practitioners need to encourage changing the culture of masculinity. Prevention is better than cure, and building an emotional vocabulary is easiest when commenced from a young age. Emotions underlying and contributing to anger are sadness, fear, depression etc and can relate to an underlying sense of powerlessness and grief. It is important for men to also express joy and happiness in their relationships. This may be a result of male socialisation that requires men to live up to the stereotype of strength, independence and invulnerability. While these are all important and valuable qualities, without balance and the expression of other qualities like empathy, compassion, relationship, the men’s lives will remain fragile.

It is now better understood that aggression is not ‘learnt’ in childhood but that the failure to learn ‘affect regulation’ and empathy for others means that children fail to grow out of immature selfishness and aggression. A sense of powerlessness may be related to cognitive beliefs (expectations) about how things ought to be. These in turn may be related to early childhood experiences, with unresolved and unmet emotional needs driving unrealistic current expectations of other people. Daniel Siegal discusses these issues in his book *Parenting from the Inside Out* (Siegal & Hartznell, 2003). It is suggested that effective intervention with men with ‘anger management’ problems should address all these issues through an integrated approach (Sutton, 2007a).

When working with fathers, it is more important to assume, until proven otherwise, that men have the desire and the ability to (King, 2000):

- **commit** – the physical and ongoing support that men provide, and their awareness and involvement with their children throughout their lifetime
- **choose** – the capacity to make day to day decisions for their children and that meets their needs
- **care** – the ability to attend to the important transitions in children’s lives and provide the optimal conditions that maximise their growth

- ▶ **change** – the ability to adapt, as children grow older and the father matures in his relationship with them
- ▶ **create** – the creation of resources for material comfort and the resolution of problems that allow opportunities for the development of emotional well being
- ▶ **connect** – the ability to form lasting and healthy attachments with their children. These attachments will change over time to meet the children’s evolving needs
- ▶ **communicate** – the capacity to relate with children by sharing meaningfully with them, both verbally and non-verbally.

Useful tools for working with affect regulation

Various organisations or programs use ‘feeling faces charts’ to help clients better identify and process their feelings. Also many versions exist for the ‘anger iceberg/ volcano’ that allows men to identify what primary feelings exist below the surface.

An important discussion for many men is the clarification of issues in their life they can control and influence, or those they have no control or influence over.

The following is an example of a useful tool in addressing this area of control/ influence:

Draw a small circle approx 10cm diameter on a piece of paper. Shade it in. This represents what we can control in our lives. It is in actual fact a very limited area. We can only control what we wear, where we go, who we spend time with, and our own behaviour. People do not have the right to control others!

Draw a larger oval type shape around the smaller ‘area of control’. This is our ‘area of influence’. It is larger than our ‘area of control’ yet it is still limited. Conflict in life is increased when people try to control what they can only influence, or attempt to influence what is outside their control or influence.

When attempting to control a situation or a person who is outside our influence and control, we have no choice but to use power. We then force others to do what we want. This force is violence.

This misguided attempt to control issues in our lives often occurs in family separation when separated fathers are in conflict with the mother of their children. Unless the children are in actual or potential danger, each parent has the right to attempt persuasion and to influence the other parent and has no right to try to force their view of ‘how things should be’ on the other. If it is not going the way you want, learn how to ‘let it go’.

Outside of the larger oval shape write ‘outside our area of influence and control’. There are now three distinct areas:

- ▶ Our area of control.
- ▶ Our area of influence.
- ▶ Outside our control and influence.

It is of paramount importance for the wellbeing of relationships and oneself that people clearly differentiate between these three areas. Conflict results when one party attempts to control what is outside their control or influence.

To attempt to control a situation or person that is outside someone's control and influence, they must use some type of force or power. For example:

- ▶ Physical force – violence or the threat of.
- ▶ Intimidation – creating fear.
- ▶ Humiliation.
- ▶ Threats to do something or withdraw love and attention.
- ▶ Force of will

The more power/force used the greater the conflict and feelings of mistrust. Although difficult, people must learn to let go of what is outside their areas of control and influence – a simple thing to say, yet in reality it is very challenging to do.

B. Working with men and family violence

Outline

This topic discusses the following subjects:

- Definition of domestic violence (DV)
- Development of an integrated framework
- Other research about domestic violence
- Current challenges for working with men and violence
- Historical development of DV programs for men
- Skills used when working with men and violence
- Change (view to the future)
- Suggestions to reduce domestic and family violence

Read the following section and reflect/act on the following:

- What behaviour change programs operate in your local area?
- Contact and meet your local domestic violence workers.

Family violence is a complex issue that professionals will encounter when working with men. Many men accessing Family Relationship Programs will either talk about their own use of, or potential for violence. They may also want to discuss episodes of violence that they have experienced. This topic explores a wide range of view points and experiences encountered by professionals working with men and family relationships. It is intended to supplement other DV readings rather than cover all issues with significant depth and detail. It is an introduction and reflection on the practice issues involved in working with men and family relationships and does not attempt to be an academic article or deal at depth with these issues. This topic supports that feminist, psychological approaches and strengths-based interventions are possible to use together without undermining the traditional feminist approach to understanding DV. The feminist approach to DV has provided a significant platform for greater gender equity throughout society even though this change process is still far from complete.

Men and Family Relationship (MFR) programs hold the position that all violence in family relationships is unacceptable and the most important issue is the effect that this violence has on the victims, particularly the children. When children are routinely exposed to violence, another generation of violence is being incubated.

The issue of safety is the foundation of working with DV. It is critical for workers to maintain this stance. Taking sides will tend to subvert this stand, increase the possibility of collusion, increase the level of risk for those who experience the impact of the violence, and weaken any positive intervention. Professionals working with men need an appreciation of the many and varied understandings of DV (regarding both causes and interventions) and the considerable safety concerns.

Feminist theories now argue that there are a wide range of causes for DV. Men's behaviour can be understood through the impact of a male privilege/entitlement belief system, and through using a psychological emphasis regarding the impact of trauma or negative social learning. Both perspectives are vital and should not compromise the significance of the other approach. In fact, it could be argued that social learning approaches and other psychological approaches are supported by feminist practice (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007).

However, in practice, it is very difficult (some people argue, it is not possible) to distinguish what aspects of someone's violent behaviour are motivated by male privilege versus psychological/trauma/social learning issues. Due to this difficulty, the broader understanding of DV work needs to:

- retain the need to ensure safety for all
- challenge belief systems and focus on privilege/entitlement
- work for wider social change as these beliefs are widespread throughout all levels of society.

However, when working with individuals, an integration of psychological (Heise, 1998; DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007) and strengths-based approaches is required as long as safety issues are not compromised.

Definition of domestic violence

Most definitions of DV are similar to 'behaviour within a domestic relationship, that involves an abuse of power and is usually, though not exclusively, perpetrated by men against women and children. DV encompasses a range of behaviour including intimidation, coercion, emotional abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, isolation and psychological manipulation (Mulrone, 2002, p.3).

These definitions reflect the definition of DV as being patriarchal tactics of power and control which has been dominant for nearly 20 years (Sutton, 2007b). However, there is increasing evidence that the influence of male privilege exists on a continuum, and depends on each man's background (i.e. family history, education, lived experience with work/peers/ relationships).

Some domestic violence behaviour is a premeditated attempt to coerce or control a partner, while other behaviours are influenced by other reactive elements, such as attachment anxiety (Sutton, 2007b; Dutton, 2008). However, control and power tactics are often not 'premeditated' or even conscious, and that much of the work that needs to be done is about making the unconscious conscious.

Flood recently reviewed the Australian Personal Safety Survey that acknowledges that one in 20 women (5.8 per cent) and one in 10 men (10.8 per cent) experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence in a lifetime (Flood, 2006). However, this figure cannot be misused; the survey indicates that the violence experienced by men and women was mostly perpetrated by men. This survey inquires about acts experienced and did not explore the context or meaning of the

violence. 'Interviews with the same men and women documented that men's violence differed systematically from women's in terms of its nature, frequency, intention, intensity, physical injury and emotional impact' (Flood, 2006). This is consistent with international research as well (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007; Dobash & Dobash, 2004). One of the current tensions in practice which occurs, is that as more men access community welfare/health and relationship programs, there is a greater voice for their experience regarding violence. This experience needs to be heard and acknowledged but the hearing of this voice at the individual level, cannot cease to be informed by the wider context of violence as experienced in the community.

DV occurs in marriages, de-facto relationships, between boyfriends and girlfriends, in gay and lesbian relationships and between family members. There are many complex and confounding factors with regard to DV statistics, but there is a current general agreement that the majority of severe DV is researched and documented to be male to female while there is an increasing awareness of some female to male DV (as well as gay and lesbian DV) that requires greater empirical study (Dutton, 2008; DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007). In 2006, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducted a telephone survey of people over the age of 18 called the *Personal Safety Survey, Australia*. They found:

- in the last 12 months, 70 per cent of men were assaulted by a stranger and less than 5 per cent were assaulted by a female partner or ex-partner.
- in the last 12 months, 24 per cent of women were assaulted by a stranger and 30 per cent were assaulted by a male partner or ex-partner.
- since the age of 15, 41 per cent of men have been physically assaulted and 4.8 per cent of men report being sexually assaulted.
- since the age of 15, 29 per cent of women have been physically assaulted and 16.8 per cent of women reported being sexually assaulted.

While this study is a good snap-shot of the experience of violence, it has no information about the level of violence, regularity and impact on the victim. Traditionally, DV is seen within socio-cultural/political theories (feminist and functionalist theories) where DV is a consequence of the structural inequality and patriarchal privilege between men and women. The majority of injuries, deaths and negative outcomes that result from DV occur to women. This is a perspective that men's violence is usually in a context in which men have more power, either physically, or from their privileged opportunities in our society. While there is now documentation of violence that women perpetrate against men, the amount of violence of men against women is also under reported.

There are various ideas as to the range of behaviours that fall under the category of 'violence'. People commonly think of physical acts when they think of violence. The judicial system has legal definitions that include verbal threats and intimidation but stop short of the more subtle forms of control and abuse, except for Victoria where new laws have been brought in to prevent non-physical forms of DV like financial abuse. Most DV agencies, including the ones with programs for people who perpetrate violence, consider behaviours such as the 'silent treatment', put-downs and keeping secrets as important to name as controlling acts.

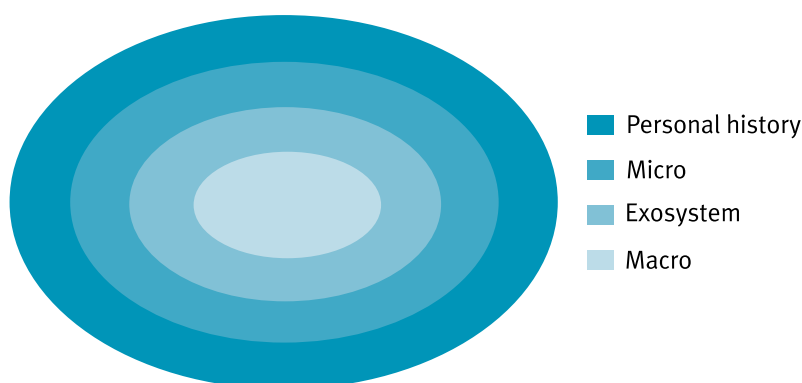
Development of an integrated framework

It is sad when three important frameworks for working with men (feminist, psychological and strengths-based), are polarised against each other. Recognising that these frameworks are used widely, practitioners will experience tensions or challenges when applying them to working with men and violence issues. There are current developments within feminist theory and from other perspectives to create a more unified framework (Heise, 1998).

There appears to be a current paradigm debate regarding DV causes and interventions that may make it difficult for workers to develop a clear coherent and consistent big picture (Sutton, 2007b). This occurs as people use different paradigms to think about their work practice. The socio-cultural/socio-political approach theories have significant value and focus on explaining DV through the cognitive patriarchal beliefs of male entitlement (learnt by men as they grow up and are influenced by the way their society/culture is structured). The psychological and strengths-based tools can provide opportunities for change at the individual level. Both perspectives are vital.

Heise advocates for a joint framework that holds together psychological, sociological, criminological and feminist perspectives. Often the interconnection of these frameworks is avoided due to fear that one framework will dominate the other. This is an ongoing risk and in a practice context it is worked with and minimised daily. Heise states that ‘although theories based on stress, social learning, and personality disorders may suggest why individual men become violent, they do not explain why women are so persistently the target’ (Heise, 1998). To work with the tensions, she advocated for the ecological framework below that recognises the interconnection of the personal experience, microsystems, exosystems (the system between the individual and broader social experience) and macrosystems.

Figure 2—Heise’s Ecological Framework



Macrosystem

- Belief in male entitlement/ownership of women.
- Masculinity linked to aggression and dominance.
- Rigid gender roles.
- Acceptance of interpersonal violence (Heise, 1998).

Personal history

- Experiencing DV as a child.
- Being abused as a child.
- Impact of absent or rejecting role models.

Microsystem

- Male dominance in the family.
- Male control of wealth in the family.
- Use of alcohol.
- Marital/verbal conflict.

Exosystem

- Low socio-economic status/unemployment.
- Isolation of women and family.
- Delinquent peer associations.

Heise's framework holds together the political analysis and the individual focus as used by Dutton, Sonkin and others. The psychological approach adds another layer to working with DV and men.

A new emerging psychological approach is neurobiology where many parts of the brain are involved in processing information and thinking, not just the cerebral cortex. It is now known that the limbic system also does much of our 'thinking', often at an automatic and unconscious level, because it is processing multiple levels of feelings. There are also brain structures whose role is to integrate these two systems so they can function together in an integrated way (Sutton, 2007b).

It is also now known that early socio-emotional attachment determines how well this processing develops, and what developmental deficits will determine 'affect regulation' deficits that will contribute to anger or violence in later life (Sutton, 2007b). Thus, if certain emotions are regularly experienced in early childhood, this will influence a person's cognitive beliefs. To work with this, practitioners examine whether effective interventions respond to 'affect regulation' deficits at the emotional level and not just at the analytical cognitive level (Sutton, 2007b). As the integration of this perspective is applied to DV work with men, the lessons learnt through the feminist approach remains a central foundation, with the primary focus being the safety of the whole family.

The crucial difference between the feminist approach to treating men who use violence, and other current frameworks, is that the major focus is on how men's behaviour is privileged, rather than the psychological causes (Sonkin, 2008). Pease (2008) recently expressed questions about the role men should play in dealing with DV and the impact of privilege; collusion between men; the limitations of existing approaches including strengths-based, and psychological approaches; male positive approaches and whether current primary prevention and perpetrator strategies would be better refocussed on such areas as the silence of non-violent men; addressing violence within specific contexts; and ensuring men's violence prevention work remains accountable to women. Pease argues that men have to play a minor role in the DV debate until greater structural change occurs in gender inequality. He questions the use of strengths-based approaches to working with men and how governments have deliberately shifted the debate from a structural focus to an individualised psychological problem.



Strengths-based practice has been a foundation in many community and relationship programs. Pease's criticism of its application is valid if strengths-based practice is viewed as being soft, nice or friendly towards men. However like the reality of modern feminism, its evolution is much more sophisticated and complex. Strengths-based practice views people as having sufficient resources and strengths to meet their challenges and problems with new solutions, until proven otherwise. Through using these existing resources to respond to change, it allows practitioners to engage with a wider range of people with a greater capacity for change. It also allows the practitioner to challenge the men to an even deeper level about attitudes, beliefs and what change is required, without them becoming defensive or even aggressive. The strengths-based approach provides one of the strongest containers to talk about significant problems, challenges and explore possible solutions. While the practitioner is a

facilitator, this role still allows specific safety issues and behaviours to be named and confronted. The use of a strengths-based framework remains continually informed by the use of feminist frameworks and psychological interventions like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and ‘affect regulation’, with the primary focus remaining on assuring safety.

Professionals working with men need to remember the following:

- Safety of all involved in any intervention is the first and primary consideration.
- No information obtained from the victim is passed on to the person who uses violence.
- This work requires a careful balance of engaging the man around his use of violence, whilst avoiding collusion. *No To Violence* (NTV)–the *Male Family Prevention Association Inc.* in Victoria–is currently writing material on this and will be posting it shortly on their website–www.ntv.org.au
- The physical and economic power imbalance that often exists between men and women.
- All violence in relationships is unacceptable.
- Children witnessing DV are traumatised and affected emotionally and psychologically for life.
- Accountability practices involve having the victim’s stories in mind while working with the man or woman.

Other research about domestic violence

Feminist theory has ‘deeply committed to enhancing a rich empirical and theoretical understanding of women’s use of violence’ (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007). Other contexts have endeavoured to better understand the different shades and expressions of family violence. Michael Johnson is the Associate Professor of Sociology, Women’s Studies, and African and African American Studies at Pennsylvania State University, USA. Johnson identifies family violence as four different types and motivations:

1. In intimate terrorism, the individual is violent and controlling, the partner is not. The violence is usually severe and it tends to escalate, and injuries are common. Evidence indicates that men are more likely than women to use this type of violence in family relationships and it is likely to result in far greater injury towards women (Dobash & Dobash, 2004).
2. In situational couple violence, although the individual is violent, the behaviour is reactionary due to emotional overload or extreme stress, rather than deliberately controlling. ‘Here the violence is relatively minor, both partners practice it, is expressive in meaning, it tends not to escalate over time and injuries are rare’ (Flood, 2006).

3. In violent resistance, the partner who regularly experiences violence, reacts with violence (an act of self-preservation, a justifiable response when one's human rights are violated). Some people argue that it is unfair and inappropriate to refer to these behaviours as violence as they are motivated by self-defence or the protection of others.
4. In mutual violent control, both partners are violent and controlling.

Johnson (2007) explores evidence that situational couple violence dominates in general surveys (of large sample size) while intimate terrorism and violent resistance dominate in court-based studies (smaller sample size). An argument is made that if we want to understand partner violence, intervene effectively in individual cases, or make useful policy recommendations, we must make these distinctions in research, as well as practice. While Johnson's categories are criticised, there is value in further researching the different types of DV, although in reality these types probably exist on overlapping continuums rather than as discreet categories. The most significant criticism is that motivation and use of violence is difficult for someone else to judge as it is regularly down played or under-reported and incorrect use of classification may lead to victims of violence being at greater risk.

Current challenges for working with men and violence

The *2007 Men and Family Relationships Forum* in Adelaide identified that practitioners may have anxiety about working with male clients and their potential for violence. They may feel intimidated by the issue and avoid discussing violence. Often when it is dealt with, the men are referred to one of the few community-based men's behaviour change programs. The forum identified that there is a lack of support services to refer men to, even though a significant proportion of men have a strong motivation to address their behaviours.

The NSW Men and Family Centre at Lismore, has surveyed men's DV programs in several cities and found that for every 10,000 head of population, one man per week will make a call requesting a service to help him stop his abusive behaviour. Therefore, in a target population of say 50,000, five men per week could be expected to be actively looking for a men's behaviour change DV service. If these figures apply to most areas of Australia there are a huge number of men waiting for appropriate programs in order to be engaged in behaviour change.

Recent developments in service provision have identified that there can be a hierarchy within the practitioner-client relationship in which the counsellor can assume a position of superiority. This can be seen as perpetuating the model already embraced by those using violence, rather than providing choices through modelling alternative behaviour. A big challenge for a practitioner is to become aware of his/her own 'capacity to abuse their power', that is, the practitioner's desire to force learning on someone else. It is critical for practitioners to access regular supervision and to cultivate an awareness of their own attitudes and habitual ways of being. It is important to avoid totalising views of the men e.g. defining them only as users of violence. Language such as 'perpetrator' or 'predator' encourages this totalising.

Having this one-dimensional, deficiency-based view of a person will restrict the change process. When the violence occurs in a current relationship, a better term to use is ‘person who used violence’ or ‘person concerned about their use of violence’.

In behaviour change programs it is essential to provide ongoing support and contact as well as confidential follow-up with the (ex) partners of the men. This is a safety mechanism and maintains accountability to the victims of violence. With this in mind, the practitioner is working for both the person who has used violence and the victims. The ongoing victim support and evaluation process can be difficult to maintain as it is time intensive and partners may have a hesitation to being involved. It is not appropriate to work with men on DV unless the safety, support and accountability processes are operating and integrated. The NSW Men & Family Centre at Lismore has found that 95 per cent of the women who are given support through this ‘partner contact’ process have not had any contact or support from any DV related organisation. Even if the men leave the program early, the women continue to receive support as long as necessary.

The Adelaide forum recognised that female facilitators are critical to this work, and it is a challenge for male or female workers to create the initial safety for men to speak truthfully and build sufficient trust. Female facilitators are often seen as a valuable source of knowledge by providing a woman’s perspective. Aboriginal men often require groups that are less structured and the use of more conservative group processes (e.g. avoid exercises that use movement or touch). Some practitioners recognised that less structured meetings resulted in better attendance than structured a men’s group.

No to Violence (NTV), the Victorian Male Family Violence Prevention Association Inc, is a peak body of individuals and agencies working for the prevention of male family violence. The specific focus is to work for the safety of women and children by assisting men to change and end their violent behaviour. It has a wide variety of recourses and standards for practitioners to enable them to facilitate behaviour change groups.

Historical development of DV programs for men

Domestic violence perpetrator programs began largely in the US and have been running for around 20 years. Other English speaking western countries such as Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have set up similar programs. The Adelaide Domestic Violence Service began one of the first programs for men who were troubled by their violence in the late 1980s (Sutton, 2007b).

Social learning models

Initially, the first group interventions were based on social learning theory which proposes that social behaviours are learnt in early childhood and that learnt behaviours are maintained by various reinforcing events and social beliefs. These groups therefore focussed on behavioural change in dealing with stressful emotions and situations (especially ‘anger management’). ‘Skill deficit’ models proposed that

anger and violence was a result of skill deficits such as low frustration tolerance, lack/loss of control, learned helplessness, etc. These formed the basis for the well known 'cycle of violence' models (Sutton, 2007b).

Cognitive behavioural therapy interventions (CBT)

Following social learning theory, CBT interventions are designed to change dysfunctional learned behaviour by cognitive restructuring of 'irrational' thinking and emotions, along with skill development.

A major CBT goal is increased self-observation, which is facilitated by self-monitoring via 'anger logs' that record and analyse stressful situations and incidents. This helps users of violence to learn to identify their triggers, self-talk and consequences. The ability to stop and question their impulsive internal dialogues is regularly reported by many men to be the single most effective skill they learn in group programs (Sutton, 2007b).

'Feminist' socio-cultural models

Feminism is not a therapy model as such, but a set of beliefs and structures that give priority to a feminist analysis of gender and power in relationships and society. Feminist analysis focusses on external systems such as patriarchal structures and sexist practices which shape the social construction of gender. Gender role socialisation results in rigid sex roles based on male privilege and entitlement which lead to unreasonable and unfair expectations of women and a lack of empathy and consideration for their needs, feelings, beliefs and values (Sutton, 2007b).

The feminist approach is widely adopted especially with increasing awareness of DV and its impact on children. However, it recognises that multiple perspectives are required to work with family violence as long as the safety issues are not impacted. Feminism is often inaccurately polarised in the debate as being too simplistic or only focusses on structural analysis of society. With the feminist traditions are many view points. Feminist writers have recently embarked on exploring the accumulating evidence of significant violence and abuse in gay and lesbian relationships. 'While the concepts of gender and patriarchy are useful to account for the huge incidence of violence against women, feminist theories should not become a 'regime of truth' that is applied to all individual cases of violence. We need a more complex approach – one that sees power as a relational dynamic and recognises sexuality, culture, class, race, age and ability as well as gender' (McKenzie, 2003; Gondolf, 2007).

As a practitioner, the debate between feminist and psychological approaches to change behaviour has an endless range of perspectives. Some of the tensions that exist are:

- ▶ behaviour change programs fundamentally work to change beliefs about the tactics of power and control in a patriarchal society rather than use psychological methods like CBT to change behaviour
- ▶ Gondolf (2007), a strong pro-feminist researcher, advocates that the Duluth Behaviour Change Model is based on CBT approaches. He strongly advocates for the use of guilt and shame as tools for change because men who use violence are

seen as likely to feel little guilt and more likely to blame others for their behaviour. 'Obviously scolding or condemning individuals is not what Duluth promotes, but confronting men's behaviour in a more systemic way does have some justification' (Gondolf, 2007)

- ▶ all group interventions are viewed as being 'psychoeducational' or about re-education regarding power/control rather than the use of a 'therapeutic' or psychological approach that may individualise the cause of the violence, and may excuse men's behaviour and therefore limit them from taking responsibility for their actions
- ▶ skill based models such as 'anger management' are seen as neglecting to address the violence against women and children as these programs fail to name and expose the tactics of power and control and are often the easier and shorter program for men to access.

The future development of behaviour change programs requires embracing the feminist specific and the best use of psychological and strengths-based approaches to create change. Johnson (2007) has found that not all violence is motivated by patriarchal privilege. According to him, some family violence occurs when men feel powerless and without a voice. However a man may feel powerless because his sense of entitlement is not being acknowledged. Johnston made the simple distinction, outlined on pages 99–100, between violence that involves control over one's partner (intimate terrorism) and violence that arose in the course of specific conflicts that escalated into violence (situational couple violence). Even though the identification of the differences between these motivations is difficult to gauge, our sector's understanding of family violence requires better articulation of these differences that Johnson has proposed.

No matter what the motivation, violence is unacceptable. Alan Jenkins, an Australian Psychologist and DV practitioner developed an approach based on narrative therapy called 'Invitations to responsibility'. Jenkins supports men to make an ethical stand against their abusive behaviours by encouraging them to take responsibility for their abusive behaviour and provide direction on how to act with respect and care (Jenkins, 1995). Using this respectful approach allows a practitioner to work with men to take responsibility while using a strengths-based approach i.e. narrative therapy.

Skills used when working with men and violence

The current approaches being used when working with men and violence are influenced by CBT, narrative counselling, solution focussed counselling and strengths-based practice. Psychoeducational behaviour change programs like the Duluth Model have been very influential and have contributed to the development of significant tools for change with the cycle of abuse and equality wheels. However, according to the Adelaide forum, the program is less effective in inviting men to take responsibility if it has a primary focus on shame and guilt. If the focus is on new skill development, increased understanding of DV and even affirms existing strengths, it is seen as being more effective in changing behaviour. More recent approaches have the purpose to

encourage men to reflect on ‘becoming the man they want to be’. All the approaches discourage viewing the men as having fixed, violent identities.

According to the Adelaide forum some of the core practices for effective interventions are:

- ▶ creating a high degree of emotional safety in the group which allows for honest disclosure and respectful interaction
- ▶ working with respect; engaging the group participant as a person who is struggling with and concerned about their use of violence. Avoid thinking of anyone as ‘a perpetrator’
- ▶ engaging the creative rather than the reactive process within men. Discussing reactivity can be non-productive
- ▶ acknowledging men’s stories without condoning behaviour
- ▶ spending time on what has gone on during the week is often the most useful aspect of the group. This allows the worker to unpack what has happened and the unconscious beliefs that underlie their behaviour. This allows change to occur
- ▶ shifting the focus onto what men want for their children allows the men to open up, since they are no longer feeling blamed
- ▶ developing a set of group guidelines or positive group norms including being able to tell a story without someone ‘jumping out to fix it’
- ▶ being up-front about the limitations of group confidentiality. Child protection and the safety of others take priority over confidentiality
- ▶ validation of the positive efforts a man is making can help him shift from a ‘perpetrator presenting as the victim’ mentality and begin to take responsibility for his actions. This validation should not collude with any excuses or blaming, but should affirm his intentions to create more respect and care in his relationships.

The practitioner establishes a ‘practice of care’ amongst the men that is missing in many other men’s cultures. This care is focussed on the safety of key relationships surrounding them and also involves the care of themselves. This is established through supporting attitudes that keep the focus on healthy relationships and equality. It is assumed that men have a core intention of making the world a better place for them and their family and builds on the motivation of the ‘honourable man within’ and other ‘honourable intentions’ i.e. to make a difference; to create a safer world for their children.

Change (view to the future)

The *2007 Adelaide Men and Family Relationships Forum* recognised that there needs to be an incorporation of new ideas to reduce family violence in the future. The socio-cultural analysis (power and control) is insufficient on its own to explain family violence and therefore interventions based only on this analysis will be too limited. The discussion about women’s violence against men needs to be recognised

in a sensitive and appropriate way to ensure greater safety for all. It is vital that this discussion in no way reduces the gains made in the long history of combating violence against women by making it a public issue.

Media representations are hugely detrimental to perceptions of men. Men are often represented as disposable or as buffoons. It is possible that this climate can make a man feel reasonably threatened and even more isolated. Models of masculinity that include competence in the emotional world are needed. Across society young men need to be empowered to recognise and express emotions.

To create a safer and more caring society, practitioners need to work directly with men. Working with women is essential for safety and for challenging men's sense of entitlement, but all too often men have been looking for support to change only to find no services available. This is an ongoing tragedy for Australian communities, for men, women and children. Male-positive recruitment policies and counselling practices have to be developed for community agencies. Men need to have a strong place within community work while continuing to work sensitively with women, taking into account their perspectives and stories. As men increasingly take up responsibility in the family and community sector, all of society will benefit.

Suggestions to reduce domestic and family violence include:

- work with men around respectful engagement whilst holding a focus of responsibility and with the primary focus being on the safety of women and children
- more trials and evaluation of a broader range of programs that target men's behaviour
- support for strengths-based approaches and early intervention programs, as well as for community education programs such as the White Ribbon Campaign (www.whiteribbonday.org.au)
- displaying Mensline Australia posters at local courts throughout Australia to increase access to telephone support services for men involved with DV issues
- avoid totalising views of men. Language such as 'perpetrator' or 'predator' encourages this one-dimensional, deficiency-based view of men. Respectful language will increase the number of men willing to engage with intervention agencies. Use language such as 'users of violence'
- a focus on the impacts on children when violence occurs in family situations is often the most effective way to engage the parents
- use strengths-based approaches that build inclusion right from the beginning
- educate young people to build awareness of the impact of violence in relationships.

Work with men using violence must always focus on the safety of those experiencing violence. When working with those using violence, the service provider is, in fact, working on behalf of those experiencing violence, and they (the victims) are the primary clients. This work requires a careful balance of engaging the man around his use of violence whilst avoiding collusion. Appropriately and respectfully challenge the use of controlling behaviour and violence-supporting attitudes, and engage the man in a commitment to work to behavioural and attitude change that supports non violence, safe and respectful relationships. An important aspect of this work is engaging the man in an ongoing commitment to keep his partner and children safe and to take steps to maximise their safety. This work also involves assessing and responding to safety concerns for the man himself.

It is vital to initiate and offer ongoing contact with partners (and (ex) partners where children are involved) to assess safety and offer support and referrals. Different understandings of confidentiality are required in this contact with women and children to ensure that no information provided by women or children is passed onto the male partner. Contact with the female partner and the worker should not even be discussed with the man beyond gaining the woman's contact details and discussing why contact is needed as part of providing him a service. Any information given by the man that affects the safety of women and children needs to be acted upon by contacting police and/or women and child protection services.

C. Working with separated fathers

Outline

This topic discusses the following subjects:

- ▶ What motivates fathers to disengage from their children?
- ▶ Stages of involvement
- ▶ The generative fathering framework as a tool to rebuild engagement
- ▶ Valuing differences in roles
- ▶ Ways that men can deal with disengagement
- ▶ Useful steps for fathers rebuilding engagement with their children.

Read the following section and reflect/act on the following:

- ▶ which programs in your area, support separated fathers?
- ▶ locate and visit your local Family Relationship Centre. Discuss with them how your program can support their clients.

This topic explores how separated fathers, who may have limited or no contact with their children, can be understood from a non-deficit perspective (Fleming 2002; Hawkins & Dollahite 1997; King 2000, 2001, 2005; King, Sweeney & Fletcher 2004). It describes how the generative fathering framework is used as a model to assist separated fathers to rebuild their connection with their children. The topic also examines parent/child contact time from a child focussed perspective.

What motivates fathers to disengage from their children?

After separation, some fathers disengage from their children and have little involvement or contact time in their lives. Australian research indicates that 26 per cent of children have contact with their fathers less than once per year (Smyth 2005) and 4 per cent of children rarely or never see their non-resident parent (typically their father) (Smyth, 2004). Reasons for this may include issues or allegations involving child protection, domestic violence, and conflict with the mother of their children or issues about how the father copes with the legal and social issues surrounding the separation (Kruk 1993). In this section, 'limited contact' refers to a significant reduction in the time a father spends with his children. The terms used in the topic for resident and non-resident parents have changed in 2006 to the 'parent that the child lives with' and the 'parent that the child spends time with' (Barry 2007).

This section builds on Kruk's research in 1993 and explores current practice issues in working with separated fathers. It explores the male experience associated with post-separation disengagement and how re-engagement can be fostered. This exploration is based on the experiences of working in a large fathers' centre in NSW

that specialises in working with separated fathers. An outcome of this will be better responses and improved communication (Smyth 2004) to use when talking to and supporting fathers in reconnecting with their children when they have little or no contact time.

After family separation occurs, children benefit from some level of involvement with both parents as long as an unacceptable risk to the child does not exist. Over the past decade, there has been a steady increase in separated fathers being more involved with contact or the care of their children. Parkinson and Smyth (Smyth, 2004) found that 75 per cent of non-resident fathers would like to have more contact with their children. The hope that non-resident fathers might have more contact with their children was also supported by 40 per cent of resident mothers (Smyth 2004). This social change is demonstrated by the number of men obtaining support from Mensline Australia, with 461,177 phone calls received between September 2001 and November 2006, 85 per cent of them being made by men (Mensline Australia 2006), in addition to the high level of involvement in the Men and Family Relationship (MFR) programs throughout Australia (King 2005; van Ryke 2004).

After family separation occurs, non-resident parents' contact with children will vary as the children change and grow (Smyth 2005). It is not uncommon for these parents to feel disengaged from their children. Disengagement can involve an active or unconscious decision by a parent to have minimal involvement, physically or emotionally, with their children. They might disengage due to:

- ▶ increased geographic distance between them and their children
- ▶ increased economic demands
- ▶ new family responsibilities
- ▶ their inability to deal with their own anger or the mother's anger
- ▶ feeling it is in the best interests of the child/ren as they will be exposed to less conflict
- ▶ high to extreme level of father-child alienation.

What is clear from the literature (Hawkins & Dollahite 1997; Kruk 1993) is that the decision to limit contact with one's children is neither straightforward nor easy for men to make. Kruk (1993) interviewed 40 men about the reasons why they disengaged from their child/ren (p.72). Of the men who disengage from having contact with their children, Kruk (1993) found that 90 per cent of these men disconnect due to the pain and frustration that arises when they have contact with their children.

Reasons men disengaged from contact with children	Percentage of men	Number of men
Contact difficulties	90%	(36)
Father's decision to cease contact	33%	(13)
Practical difficulties in making contact happen (distance, finances, shift work schedules)	28%	(11)
Child(ren) not wanting contact	18%	(7)
Legal orders prohibiting contact	16%	(6)
Early pattern of no contact (influencing future contact)	5%	(2)

Kruk (1993) argued that non-residential fathers' disengagement from their children should not be interpreted only as a lack of interest in their children, or the end result of previous difficult father-child relationships. Kruk stated that psychological factors related to fathers' unresolved grief and inability to adapt to child absence, role loss, and the constraints of the 'visiting' relationship, are significant factors in their disengagement. Kruk also posits that fathers' lack of help-seeking behaviour further intensifies the grief and increases the impact of the losses involved with the separation (i.e. loss of child relationship, partner relationship and increased job pressure).

Physical reasons

Relocation: Children in some cases, may immediately be relocated by the mother to outside the city, state or even country where they resided prior to the separation. In Australia, at least one in four non-resident parents (mostly fathers) lives a significant distance (more than 500 kilometres) from their children (Smyth 2004). The amount of contact non-resident parents have with their children is strongly influenced by the distance they live apart (Smyth, 2004). In recent times, many separated fathers have been much more proactive with seeking the assistance of the court in returning the children to their usual place of residence until formal arrangements can be decided by the parents or the court.

Reduced standard of living: Fathers may have to accept less than adequate accommodation that may not be suitable for their children. Some men are forced to live with friends, family of origin, in bed sits, backyard granny flats, etc.

Financial hardship: Some fathers report finding it difficult to cover the costs of contact with their children due to the demands of child support, legal fees and re-establishment costs after separation occurs. While women and children are more likely to experience financial hardship after separation/divorce, according to Smyth's 2004 study, a significant number of men are not in a strong economic position, particularly men living alone (Smyth 2004).

Adversarial nature of legal processes

Legal processes can exacerbate or create conflict, and direct communication between the parents may be minimal when communication is channelled through legal representatives. The non-compliance by either parent with agreements or court orders can lead to exasperation from a parent who may be unaware of the enforcement options available, or unable or unwilling to re-enter the legal process to gain compliance.

Fathers who are finding the separation process difficult benefit from accurate information which is understandable to them. Some fathers may feel a sense of betrayal by the system, and can have feelings expressed through statements such as 'where are my rights?' or 'the system is supporting her'. The key here is to work with the father's instinctive nature for protecting and supporting his children. When he is seen as confrontational or aggressive towards the mother, the safety he desires for his children is compromised. This is an important realisation for the father as he develops a child-focussed solution approach where the safety of the child is essential. However, this may be limited in domestic violence situations where the father's desire is to control the mother's responses and actions.

The recent changes to the Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act and the establishment of 65 Family Relationship Centres (FRC) is part of a broader government strategy for improving outcomes and experiences arising from relationship breakdown in Australia (Altobelli, 2006). They also provide vital opportunities for fathers who have interrupted contact with their children, to review those contact arrangements. At a recent NSW Men and Family Relationship Services Network meeting, it was reported that, in their first 12 months of operation, local Family Relationship Centres found that there has been a high level of interest in their support services from fathers who had been separated for several years and have minimal contact with their children.

Psychological factors

Grieving process: There is a direct connection between the intensity of the pre-separation father-child relationship and the outcome of the grieving process for non-resident fathers. Fathers with strong emotional attachment to their children before separation and divorce are more likely to experience the post-separation period as traumatic and are more likely to withdraw from parenting for a period of time. Often child disengagement relates to the level of pain experienced by the non-resident parent (Kruk 1993). This was also found to be the case in Killeen and Lehmann's 2004 study, during which one father said:

'Just not having daily input, not having the daily physical contact ... is hard'.

Mark filled with emotion, commented: 'It's very important ... he ah ... he's the first thing I think of probably ... of a morning ...' (referring to his five-year-old son) (Killeen & Lehmann 2004).

When separation occurs in families with young children, there is little time for the development of father-child involvement. This may cause an alarming sense of deprivation and exclusion from the child's life. Many fathers in this situation become anxious that the child will not know or remember them (Family Planning Association, 1998).

Child's absence: Child absence produces a significant difference in fathers' perception of their functioning as a parent, post-separation. Feeling de-valued as parents, previously highly involved and attached fathers described themselves as being lost, having no structure in their lives, and generally anxious, helpless, and depressed (Kruk 1993). The fathers may have spoken to few people about their feelings and the importance they attach to their fathering role. The crisis of separation can provide the first opportunity for this to be expressed.

Child's safety: King and Fletcher (2007) have observed (through their work in a large fathers' centre in Western Sydney) that many men have concerns about how they can protect their children and maintain their safety when they are no longer living with them. They become anxious when another man lives with the mother and the children. In some cases when another man is involved, this is seen as a direct threat to their role, bringing feelings of identity displacement and embarrassment.

To deal with this, fathers need to recognise it is in their children's best interests for him to accept the new relationship. The expression, 'the nearby guy' may be useful as it emphasises the relationship with the child, rather than 'the boyfriend' which focusses on the new adult relationship. The healthy development of all children relies on their easy access to connections with positive male role models. While 'the nearby guy' may not replace the biological father, he provides fathering responsibilities (Smyth 2004). From the child's viewpoint, when the father accepts his ex-partner's new relationship he reduces the chance that the child will feel disloyal to him.



Role loss: Child absence is accompanied by role loss unless fathers can value the new and ongoing role they play in the children's lives. After separation, fathers can lose the identity and status they traditionally associated with being a 'dad'.

Alternatively, fathers need to acknowledge that, post-separation, fathering is not about reclaiming the role, which still exists. However, the circumstances have changed, so the role would benefit from being restructured to suit the current needs of the children. There is no denying, however, the fact that he is still the children's father, and this must be affirmed by significant people in his life.

The 'visiting' relationship: Disengaged fathers often view themselves as 'visiting' fathers, for the time they spend with their children, rather than full-time carers. The constraint of the 'visiting' relationship is a significant component in the disengagement of those fathers who had an active role to play in their children's lives during the couple's relationship (Kruk 1993). This is demonstrated by one father in the Killeen and Lehmann study (2004):

He lived in a caravan and felt this had an unfavourable effect on his contact, commenting: 'I feel inadequate because I'm not providing her with a room and that sort of stuff'.

Being child-focussed is an important skill for all fathers to develop. The man who says, 'just give me my kids and I will be okay' is not on a child-focussed path. Post-separation, a father benefits from being a much more competent parent, able to respond to the child's immediate needs. This is a challenge to which most men can rise, especially when they receive support from peers and workers. These fathers become valuable parents who are supportive and responsive to the child, providing a positive, non-pressured environment in which the children can relax and grow as themselves, rather than be exposed to high levels of conflict between parents.

Perceived effects of divorce on children: A primary factor associated with the disengagement of previously highly involved and attached fathers is their perception that their children are 'caught in the middle' of an ongoing conflict between the parents. They may, therefore, choose to wait until the child is older before they attempt to re-establish contact.

The issue of conflict is reduced when both parents actively use strategies to avoid or deal with conflict in a child-supportive way. It is important for the fathers to acknowledge that separation impacts on all members of the family, but that ongoing conflict can have longer lasting ramifications for the children.

Parental alienation: There are many degrees of parental alienation imposed upon many children when separation occurs. It can be shown by a lack of acknowledgment or respect by one parent for the other, their family and/or other people having direct influence on the child. An example of this might be stating a negative view of the other parent with regard to their feelings for the child, such as when a mother says, 'Your father doesn't love you, he doesn't even like you, and he didn't even want you'.

Alienation may also occur when one parent seeks to convince the child that the other parent is a threat to the child or the family. While these statements may contain some truth, some positive regard for the other parent relates directly to the child's own

view of themselves. It is recognised by King and Fletcher (2007) that it is important for fathers to acknowledge that mutual respect between the parents would enhance relationships with their children.

Stages of involvement

Ross Fletcher, who is an experienced Men and Family Relationship (MFR) worker that specialises in working with separated fathers, reflects on how men respond to family crisis issues and the interaction between thoughts and feelings, and how practitioners can best respond to them.

Stage 1: When men say: ‘I don’t know...’, they may be feeling: ‘I’m scared’

They may be thinking:

- ▶ what to do
- ▶ what to believe
- ▶ who to trust
- ▶ what’s going to happen?

This is the window period when men will make some movement and it will usually be rushed with an urgency to allay the fear (usually by telephone). They will be seeking an instant solution or at least some justification of their powerlessness within the injustice they feel. The key to purposeful engagement here is to be able to slow them down without stopping them. Provide options available to them to continue this movement, yet challenge the beliefs held such as, ‘I don’t have any say’ and ‘well, who has told you that?’

It is important to not provide multiple referral options as this will only add to the confusion overload and further frustrate them. It is best to give them the name of a person to contact next so the movement has a clear purpose and continuity. Validation of the unspoken feeling of fear will help if done in a normalising manner such as ‘this is really scary stuff for most men’.

Stage 2: When men say: ‘I’m not sure...’, they may be feeling: ‘I’m confused’

They may be thinking:

- ▶ why do I have to do this?
- ▶ do I want to know this?
- ▶ how did I get here?
- ▶ what have I done wrong?

This is where the man has taken the next step in help seeking behaviour and physically accesses a service or makes a follow-up phone call. At this point the fear has changed to suspicion, which evokes the self-protection mechanism of ‘It’s not about me, it is somebody else’s fault or some other external factor at play’.

Also they report the reason for being there is because of a responsibility to someone else i.e. 'The person on the phone wanted me to come here'. It is important at this point to have the man take ownership of his presence and be realistic about his current position by saying 'What do you want to get from this process?'

Stage 3: When men say: 'It's strange...', they may be feeling: 'What am I doing?'

They may be thinking:

- ▶ what am I doing here?
- ▶ why am I talking to these people?
- ▶ I don't belong here
- ▶ I don't deserve this
- ▶ I've done nothing wrong.

Now the man feels investment in the process, and reacts as if he has given up something, even if only his time. The feeling may be that he deserves better, a bit like starting a new job and questioning your choice. It is important at this point to promote a sense of meaning and purpose for being involved. Timeframes are confirmed and goals are set to achieve in the short term. The worker's roles are to be a faith builder of achievable outcomes, yet support the service user to achieve them.

Stage 4: When men say: 'It's too hard...', they may be feeling: 'I'm tired'

They may be thinking:

- ▶ it's easier to give up
- ▶ it's not worth the effort
- ▶ someone help me
- ▶ I can't cope.

Now attempts are being made to implement and test the new beliefs and perceptions in the reality of his family situation. Some efforts will take planning and practice and responses will be varied and not usually produce spontaneous results. The focus must be on the original intention. The man needs to draw on the patience instilled by the honesty and realism of the worker and work towards the set goals and timeframe.

This can be the point of breakdown, so trust and encouragement are high priorities at this point. Pity or sympathy from the worker will only reaffirm the belief of powerlessness. He must acknowledge he can only play his part in the process or he will return to trying to change the behaviour of others. Maintaining your integrity above all else, is helpful as a response to doubt.

Stage 5: When men say: ‘I can do this...’, they may be feeling: ‘It helps’

They may be thinking:

- ▶ I have to do something
- ▶ I can’t give up
- ▶ I am capable
- ▶ no one will do it for me.

This is where the man’s survival instinct kicks in. If he has reached this point he has accepted the need to adjust to the changed circumstances. Energy will be high so it is important to keep him grounded so he does not get ahead of himself with his aspirations.

Remind him of the early lessons learnt if he allows any situation to get out of hand, it can undermine all their previous effort. Task and maintenance processes need to be applied.

Stage 6: When men say: ‘I am working...’, they may be feeling: ‘It works for me’

They may be thinking:

- ▶ I feel worthwhile
- ▶ I have purpose
- ▶ I have responsibilities
- ▶ I see the rewards
- ▶ I feel productive.

The man is functioning when he appreciates his self worth and the value of those within his family (including the mother of his children) and the community as a whole. It is now time to reflect on the courage it took to take the risks of asking for help and advice. This is also a time to set new goals so further growth is achieved.

Useful questions to ask separated fathers during the engagement stage

The following is a list of some useful questions to ask when you first talk with separated fathers:

- ▶ When were you separated?
- ▶ What is/are the age/s and gender/s of your children?
- ▶ With whom do the children live?
- ▶ Where are you and your child’s mother living since separating?
- ▶ What are the current arrangements regarding contact?
- ▶ Are there any court orders or Apprehended Violence Orders?

Once initial engagement has been achieved, ask ‘how are you travelling?’ and complete a risk assessment if necessary.

The generative fathering framework as a tool to rebuild engagement

The generative fathering framework (Fleming 2002) is a model for understanding the non-deficit approach to fathering.

Generative fathering has been described as fathering that meets the needs of children by working to create and maintain a developing valuable relationship with them (Hawkins & Dollahite 1997). Generative fathering is caring for someone external to you or supporting the development of the next generation. For more information, see pages 35–38.

Generative chill (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) is a useful concept for understanding how fathers disengage from their children. The challenge is how men can rebuild this generative connection. Professionals and close family members may desire to help men deal with the pain of their family separation, but it is the father's timing alone that will ultimately dictate when he is open to rebuilding connection, engagement or reunion with his child.

Generative chill (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) is described as the anxious awareness people experience arising from the threatened loss of the relationship with one's child. The reaction men have to family separation will be influenced by how they deal with this experience. When separation is managed well, generative chill is a motivation that creates a stronger father/child relationship. When separation is managed poorly, generative chill becomes depression, despair and disengagement.

The authors argue that the dominant social view of separated fathers contains images that reflect their absence, disinterest, abandonment, disengagement, non-involvement, and sometimes labelled 'Disneyland Dads'. As the contact parent, they are often viewed as playing a secondary and less important role.

Current research provides a different image which indicates that:

- ▶ fathers are generally important to their children's lives
- ▶ continued contact with their father after separation enhances children's adjustment
- ▶ fathers benefit from involvement with their children after separation
- ▶ fathers want to be involved with their children and to fulfil their responsibilities as a father (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Smyth 2004).

Men's behaviour often reflects the attitude that 'good fathering means good providing'. The responsibility of providing for the family's needs influences men's level of self esteem and the value they place on their family role. Hawkins and Dollahite's 1997 research shows that unemployment can prompt working-class men to question their value to the family. Programs such as Being Connected, initially trialled by the Child Support Agency (2005), researched whether or not closer connections between fathers and their children positively impact on fathers' abilities to access employment. The research suggested that separated fathers are more involved and are more active contributors of child support when they have a firm identity that is supported by other people around them.

In the USA, Bryan (1997) recognised that a father's unemployment and absence can result in problems of poverty, depression, violence and neglect for the mother and children left behind. Fathers, as represented in the wider community, generally undervalue how important their presence is to their children's schooling, gender identity, emotional stability, security and self confidence (Bryan 1997).

Valuing differences in roles

Women are less likely to evaluate good mothering according to how well they provide for their children financially, or what they do in maintaining their relationship with their partner (Hawkins & Dollahite 1997). Men, however, are more likely to evaluate their role in the family by using a limited range of criteria, for example, being the financial provider.

After separation occurs, fathers need to be able to define the new role they play in their children's lives. The use of educative groups for separated fathers aids the development of, and expression of new parenting roles. The new parenting role emphasises:

- ▶ that men can redefine their parenting relationship to highlight the unique opportunities that separated fathers experience
- ▶ the unique and valuable qualities men play in their children's lives with ongoing involvement
- ▶ that the father is also the vital link to the paternal family of the child.

This new role can be poorly developed when fathers enter into a new relationship too quickly. Re-definition and co-parenting issues may not be adequately addressed, so confusion and disengagement are more likely (Hawkins & Dollahite 1997). The new relationship may present a fresh start, even though it might conflict with a child-focussed and child-supportive position. Acting as a block or defence for the father, it might interfere with the grieving process and reduce his ability to identify what impact the separation has had on himself and the child. This can result in a reduction of support for himself and towards his child, while relying on his new partner for relationship satisfaction.

Ways that men can deal with disengagement

The key for men to re-engage with their children is to recognise the significant pain involved in the disengagement process and re-develop the experience of being-in-the-moment (Smyth 2005) with their children. Bryan (1997) refers to this disengagement pain as a 'haunting' that occurs when men themselves cut off from their children. While a strong emphasis is placed on the responsibilities men have after family separation has occurred, the word 'responsibility' has a wider meaning. Responsibility means 'response-ability'. Until proven otherwise, men and women have the ability to respond from a deeper place in their heart that focusses on their relationship with the child (Bryan 1997). The recognition of the significance of the father-child relationship is the first step in nurturing positive responses.

King and Fletcher (2007) have found that most disengaged fathers hope that they will be able to regain the relationship connection with their children. Bryan (1997) states, 'Until he is able to do that, no matter how a man may try to deny it, he is divided'. Often after a period of disengagement, the possibility of reconnecting with their child/ren arises. Sometimes this emerges as a result of the men being around other people's children and they develop a deeper urge to reconnect with their own children.

To counter the men's belief that their children are better off if they have less involvement in their life, it is important for disengaged fathers to realise that their children may share many of the same feelings. When the initial attempt to reconnect occurs, both the father and the children can share similar feelings. They both have a fantasy about the reunion after not seeing each other for a significant period of time as well as a sense of loss and bewilderment about the separation and a possible wish for a workable route back into each other's life (Bryan 1997).

The re-connection of fathers with their children should always focus on the safety and well-being of the child. Neither the mother nor the father should be with their children if their behaviour is in any way detrimental to the child.

Through the operation of the Fathers' Support Service in Western Sydney, King and Fletcher (2007) have observed that fathers experience this 'haunting' (Bryan 1997) when reminded of their children. When men are asked if they have children, they may respond in a less than positive manner, such as, 'Well you might say that, I don't get to see them'. This will be the end of a dialogue started with positive intention, and will most likely not be revisited. Fathers would benefit if guided to a more positive response, such as 'Yes, I have two great kids and they live with their mum'. Similarly, 'haunting' (Bryan 1997) can occur when fathers report being around other children—hearing them call to their fathers can be an upsetting reminder of their loss. The father can maintain the love he feels for his own children through contact he has with other children, thus developing an appreciation that fathers, and other significant men, are important in children's lives.

Useful steps for fathers rebuilding engagement with their children

Fathers who have re-built engagement with their children have identified a number of useful steps.

1. Maintain a journal over several months that enables the men to prepare themselves emotionally for reunion with their children. It is useful to develop an emotional map that recounts key memories of the child/ren and then over time focusses on the development of a clear picture of where their child is today and what their life is like. It is also useful for the father to create a narrative timeline of their life, a life history in their own words, as this will help when communication starts with his children.
2. It is important for the men to obtain current information about their child/ren, if they have not already done so. School reports and current photographs and

contact with the school will be useful. This will focus the father on the present context and replace images of the past. The unique and valuable qualities the children possess must be acknowledged by the father as this will be important in dialogue with the children to build their self-esteem.

3. Negative ways of responding to issues can be addressed by writing a list of positive strengths about themselves. It may also be useful to create a gratitude list of 50 things they are grateful about in their life (present and past). The fact that their children are healthy, cared for and safe should be high on the list as this will support the appreciation for the mother's role.
4. Identify a professional support person or mentor. Often professionals can coach and support men in this process as they share their new learning. It is important for the men to develop useful strategies for dealing with their emotions, such as talking to someone, exercising, cleaning, walking, etc. They need to manage their health and take care of themselves.
5. Access to a mediation service may be useful in contacting the mother if communication is difficult. A skilled mediator can be a vital resource in these situations. A mediator or legal representative will be important if there is any order restricting direct contact. In any case, the father should seek legal advice from a family law specialist, solicitor or lawyer, about their intended actions.
6. Humility, the desire to nurture, and responsibility, are core values that will support the re-connection process. Writing a list of the key lessons they have learnt through their life is one of the exercises that can assist fathers to develop the necessary emotional flexibility to deal with the experience of reuniting with their child. It is useful for fathers to join a support group for separated fathers to reinforce the use of a new business-like relationship with the mother (Killeen & Lehmann 2004). This business-like relationship with the mother of their children has been reported to be vital by fathers who have shared care responsibilities because it assists in disentangling the adult relationship from the parenting relationship (Smyth 2004).
7. It is important for the fathers to prepare for the reunion with their children slowly, without having firm expectations of what will occur. It is useful for them to lighten up and value the good things currently happening in their life. Fathers need to be careful about making promises to their child/ren or the mother that they may not be able to keep.
8. It is important for men to be able to show positive regard for the child's mother, as re-establishing the relationship with the child does not take place in isolation, and requires them to avoid or manage any negative communication and conflict that may arise.

Discussion

This topic has explored the reasons why contact between separated fathers and their children can break down and lead to disengagement.

In summary, there are many factors that result in fathers disengaging from their children, such as increased geographic distance between a father and child/ren; increased economic demands; father-child alienation; new family responsibilities; conflict with the mother of their children and their inability to deal with either their own anger or the mother's anger.

The generative fathering framework is a model for understanding the non-deficit approach to fathering and supports a process for rebuilding engagement. Generative chill is a useful notion for understanding how men disengage from their children. It is vital that separated fathers value the new roles that they play in the lives of their children. The primary roles that fathers have played in the family before the family separation occurred may need to be re-adjusted e.g. providing financial security or being the protector (while this role may not exist in reality, it still provides a high level of motivation for men). Secondary roles that traditionally may have had less prominence, such as cooking for the children, reading stories and talking about ordinary life experiences, will become more important and rewarding in the new post-separation relationship. While the re-assessment of these roles will be difficult, the new roles used, post-separation, are often more rewarding and relationship enriching.

Solutions

A number of steps and strategies have been identified in this topic that may assist in restoring positive contact between separated fathers and their children. These are:

- to maintain a journal over several months, enabling the men to prepare themselves emotionally for reunion with their child/ren
- to obtain current information about their child/ren, such as school reports or current photographs
- to identify positives about their current situation to enable them to respond in a child focussed way rather than out of bitterness
- to access a professional support person or mentor
- to access a mediation service such as the Family Relationship Centres that are available throughout Australia, which may be a useful step in contacting the mother
- to remain humble, rather than self-righteous, and to take responsibility for their own feelings and actions
- to move slowly through the process, rather than rushing.

Conclusion

While many fathers may find it difficult to express their feelings in words, the primary motivator in their lives is relationships, especially the relationship with their child/ren. From the child's perspective, every child has a biological father whether he is present, absent or even deceased. They have a natural curiosity about their father because it leads to answers about who they are themselves and why they look, feel, think and behave as they do. Children need many different sources of familial input to understand and value their own existence. Positive support for the father-child relationship is as healthy and vital for children as it is for the father.

However, this is only true for the father who is willing to be open to the changes that separation creates and who is willing to seek new knowledge and the support required to meet the new challenges. The post-separation experience is not about 'getting even' or seeking revenge on the mother, but involves the subtle nurturing of a stronger relationship with their child/ren. When this focus is achieved, many fathers report that after separation they achieve a new, deeper and more meaningful relationship with their children. Often the relationship is both richer and stronger than before the separation occurred in spite of the confusion in role experienced by many fathers today.

After contact has broken down, separated fathers are likely to re-involve themselves with their children when they receive respectful support that nurtures the significance of the father-child relationship. Professional support needs to be accessible, easy to understand, relevant to their immediate situation, of high quality, and yet still affordable.

D. Women working with men

Outline

This topic discusses:

- ▶ strengths women have in working with men
- ▶ challenges women face in working with men
- ▶ practical points for women working with men
- ▶ change in the future.

Read the following section and reflect on:

- ▶ who are the key female workers in your organisation that work with men?
- ▶ how do they effectively work with men?

This section has been written by a male practitioner reflecting on what works for men when working with female practitioners. This is a valid reflection as it represents how the helping relationship is best nurtured for men. This reflection also incorporates feedback from a Women Working with Men Workshop held in October 2007 at the *National Men and Family Relationship Forum* in Adelaide. It has also been reviewed by several female practitioners with their feedback incorporated.

Strengths women have in working with men

Female practitioners often have a significant strength and an initial challenge when working with men. The strength occurs as most men assume that women are more nurturing and better listeners than most men. Men often comment that it is easier to open up and discuss their feelings with women as trust is often greater.

As one female counsellor from Mensline Australia reflected ‘I regularly have men remark that they enjoyed talking to a female because they felt that I, being a female, would have a greater understanding of what was happening for their partner, and would therefore be better able to assist them in managing their relationship with their partner’.

The challenge occurs when men feel judged or belittled by women. Until enough trust is established some men may be concerned about how women view them (see them as inadequate or as abusive). Some men may also try to protect the female worker by not revealing what is really happening within them.

As mentioned previously in this guide, young boys often are exposed to high levels of competition, and learn survival skills by fighting or running away from their problems. Since they have few opportunities when young to practice talking through their feelings, it is only in adulthood that this skill is better practiced, usually with their partner. If their partner is female and the relationship breaks down, the sense

of betrayal they experience may make it harder for them to develop that initial trust with a female caseworker. Socialisation is a powerful force in adolescence, and even though boys may be exposed to caring mothers, grandmothers and even sensitive fathers, uncles and grandfathers, these roles may be minimised in preference to the experiences gained from their peers.

Other strengths female workers may have include better acknowledgment of body language and an ability to work subtly with this expression. Female workers have strong boundaries, knowing when to leave or not to go in. One example of this is in the police service. Female police officers often have a stronger ability to read a situation and appraise what could be occurring. Male officers usually decide much faster, who is the problem and are more likely to rely on force to subdue that person. Women are more likely to work with the whole story not just the ‘facts’. The whole story involves listening to what makes a person a person – stories, emotions, trust, connections, lies, what they want from you, themes that emphasise they are human, their history, and their sense of self. They also have the ability to re-frame a story and provide an insight into what is happening for the women in a man’s story. This can be very insightful for men and is a primary reason men approach the service.

Unless religious or cultural reasons have an impact, for many men, the gender of the worker is not a significant issue. When developing a fathers’ program recently, King & Coleman (2007) conducted a series of focus groups with men who had a child with a disability. The study indicated female leadership of the group was not a problem. In fact, some fathers commented they are more likely to open up to a female leader. However, some people thought that having at least one male facilitator was helpful for at least the first session. The men did state that it was more important for them to see that the leaders were committed to their child’s and family’s situation. More important factors are the skill level, depth of training and experience of the practitioner and that the men believe they are heard and understood. This involves the establishment of rapport and warmth and the ability to identify and address the relevant issues – similar skills as used in all counselling relationships.

Challenges women face in working with men

The primary challenge in building initial trust in the relationship is moving beyond suspicion. Many men respond by initially expecting women to judge them for being:

- abusive
- emotionally challenged
- under involved in household activities
- uninterested in professional feedback about their children

Many challenges exist in tensions that may not have an easy solution. Services that work with women in crisis are unable to support the men who experience the same problems. This is a significant issue in the context of violence and homelessness (especially when the man is the primary carer of the children and requires emergency housing). The most effective response is the funding of more services that cater for different target groups (men who experience violence).

Some of the challenges occur when women work in isolation with higher needs men. They can experience higher levels of risks or require that OH&S policies increase their sense of protection (like maintaining locked doors or having at least two staff on duty at all times).

Not necessarily a gender issue, the culture of counselling often focusses on ambience, feelings and reflection. These skill sets are not necessarily a priority for many men. For some men, engagement is active or even physical when kicking a football at the park.

Gender, when mixed with the age of the worker can be a challenge as young female workers can be minimised as having little life experience. This can be experienced by young male workers, but often a playful banter occurs between men that reduces this minimisation. Some women have mastered this banter through their own life experiences. An example of this is a young female worker who used playful banter when running a group. An older male participant said to her 'I have a grand-daughter just like you', and she responded 'I have a grandfather just like you'. He smiled and the session continued without any impact.

Negative attitudes may exist in services that predominantly employ female workers regarding how they can best work with men. Men avoid organisations that display strong negative images of men. A tension exists between workers wanting to support men and also support their female clients. While men may not be seen as the best communicators they have an excellent antenna for attack or awkwardness and will often walk away or disconnect whenever it is significantly activated.

As one male client reflected on accessing services in a small remote mining town, he recognised that men and women are very different. Men often access services seeking a solution because they have reached the end of their tether whereas women access the same service for support with coffee and a chat.

Practical points for women working with men

Being comfortable with yourself

- ▶ Focus on being yourself – don't try to pretend to be anyone else.

Boundary setting

- ▶ Maintain awareness of your own triggers and issues i.e. challenges around anger being displayed. Learn to feel okay with a range of emotions and set healthy boundaries around acceptable behaviour.

- Maintain honesty about your and the program's limitations.
- Set appropriate and clear boundaries.
- Avoid colluding with both male and female clients.

Supervision and support

- Find positive and informative supervision – preferably a supervisor that understands the issues around gender in an unbiased manner.
- Access mentoring and debriefing support from experienced male and female workers.
- Recognise the lack of resources, training and support that exist when working with men and other target groups.

Awareness of broader issues

- Develop strategies to overcome feminisation of services.
- Recognise gender issues and the stereotypes that come with it.
- Recognise cultural and social views of working with men.
- Recognise barriers that men may feel in relation to counselling, group work with female/male counsellors and focus on positive engagement and relationship building.
- Recognise stereotypes that men encounter: men not allowed to show feelings, limitations around being a man (which box are they being pushed into), barriers to being allowed to be a man, taboos for men, sexuality, parenting, violence etc.
- Recognise issues around mandated versus engaged consumers.
- It is useful to use male appropriate language that emphasises an active understanding of life and how challenges are dealt, with rather than passive or feeling orientated approaches.

Maintaining a focus when working with men

- Use confidence and non-judgemental confrontation.
- Work with strengths – of men and masculinity – acknowledge the importance of being male and whatever that means to the individual. Avoid stereotypes or use them as a tool to assist the man you are working with.
- Work with men's experience, identity, beliefs, thoughts and feelings – a person- centred approach/relational approach.
- Focus on the person not the gender – you are working with trauma and human issues.

Change in the future

It is often not helpful to focus on gender as a way of analysing programs. Instead focus on individual issues, strengths and challenges. Engage with the client's strengths, values and their style of communication. Listen carefully to the unique stories that men bring to relationships and life. Focus on working with the client's story not just their gender. It is likely to be valuable for female staff to access a working with men course and encourage workers to network with each other. Finally respect the issues that women have fought hard to change.

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