

Engaging with fathers - the known and unknown

Presentation to
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Conference**

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Richard Fletcher
Family Action Centre
Faculty of Health
The University of Newcastle



Fathers' needs - What are they?

Fathers' needs

Father-inclusive practice occurs when the needs of fathers (biological and social) are responded to through the planning, development and delivery of services.

***Are the needs of
fathers known or
unknown?***

Surveying fathers to identify needs

- Russell and colleagues (1999) asked 1000 fathers in their telephone survey ***'What support and information do you feel you or other fathers need'?***

Surveying fathers to identify needs

- The most common answers were:

"don't know" and ***"nothing"***.

Two mistakes

- Using surveys on fathers
- Concluding that they don't have needs

Interviewing fathers...

- ...he just lets me get it out. He doesn't say anything, he just lets me ramble on and say what I've got to say; shakes his head, says 'Yeah'.

Needs of separated fathers...

- My Mum was always there for me especially when I was struggling at times for money and I couldn't afford food, so Mum always looked after me even though I wasn't living here at home.

Needs of separated fathers...

- I thank the Lord that I rang him that night ... because he sort of come to my place and stopped me because I was on my way over. I'd be in jail today.

Identifying father's needs by group

- CALD father
- Indigenous father
- Step father
- Separated father
- Stay at home father
- Young father
- Father of a disabled child

Fathers' role needs

- Recognise families as a system
- Acknowledge a balance between the needs of fathers and the family as a whole.

Father's role needs



Father's role needs



*I tried to write you
but the words wouldn't come
I felt your rejection
I heard you mock my attempt
at motherhood*

*I cried
because I knew you were right*

© CD Maire

Needs of new fathers?



Average age of first time fathers

33

So most were born around **1976**

What do the dads say?

I ask them

Where was your father when you were born and what did he do with you in the first six weeks?

They say

- *Outside or at work*
- *Not much involvement*
- *No idea*

The world of their fathers

1976

- Malcolm Frazer prime minister
- Equal pay (Almost)
- Mark Philippoussis

Brett Lee born



Fathering is different now



Involvement is expected



What do the dads say?

I ask them

Why do it different to your own dad?

They say

- *Community expectation*
- *“She’ll kill me”*
- *Because I want the connection*

“Because I want the connection”

- **Their dads didn't do it**
- **They want to do it**

BUT

- **No men to observe**
- **No understanding of exactly how or why**

Knowledge Gap



Fathers don't know about...

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



**Father's need practitioners who
can...**

**enable fathers to understand
their *roles and impact as*
fathers and partners in their
children/s lives**

SELF RATING SCALE FOR FATHER ENGAGEMENT SKILLS

1= Very true

2= Somewhat true

3= Neither true nor false

4= Somewhat untrue

5= False

There are 7 questions.

On your page put numbers 1 to 7.

1= Very true 2 = Somewhat true 3= Neither true nor false 4= Somewhat untrue
5= False

1. I can strike up a conversation with men who come from different backgrounds to mine
2. I can often tell what fathers need to connect to their children
3. I recognize that I bring with me my own history of being fathered
4. I have a good grasp of how fathering is similar and different to mothering

1= Very true 2 = Somewhat true 3= Neither true nor false 4= Somewhat untrue
5= False

5. I often discuss how I dealt with a father and then come to a better understanding of what to do
6. I am competent at dealing with angry fathers, fathers with mental health or drug& alcohol issues
7. I can show a father that I respect him

How do you...

enable fathers to understand their *roles and impact as fathers* and partners in their children/s lives?

- **There are several skills involved**
- **Knowledge of the evidence base will help**

The evidence that underpins father inclusion?

- Men are different to women
- Fathering \neq Mothering
- Fathers influence children



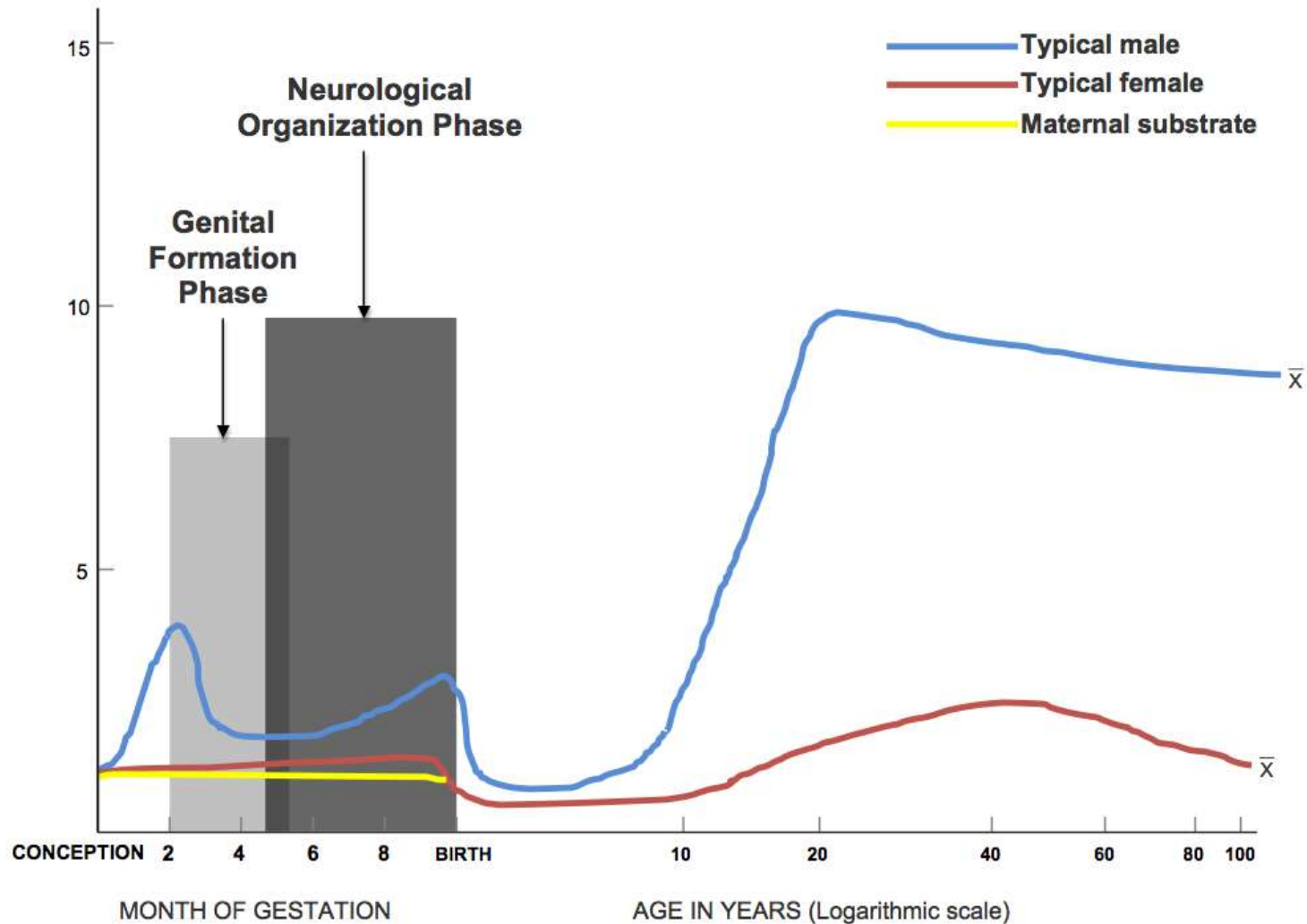
Men are different to women

Recent research

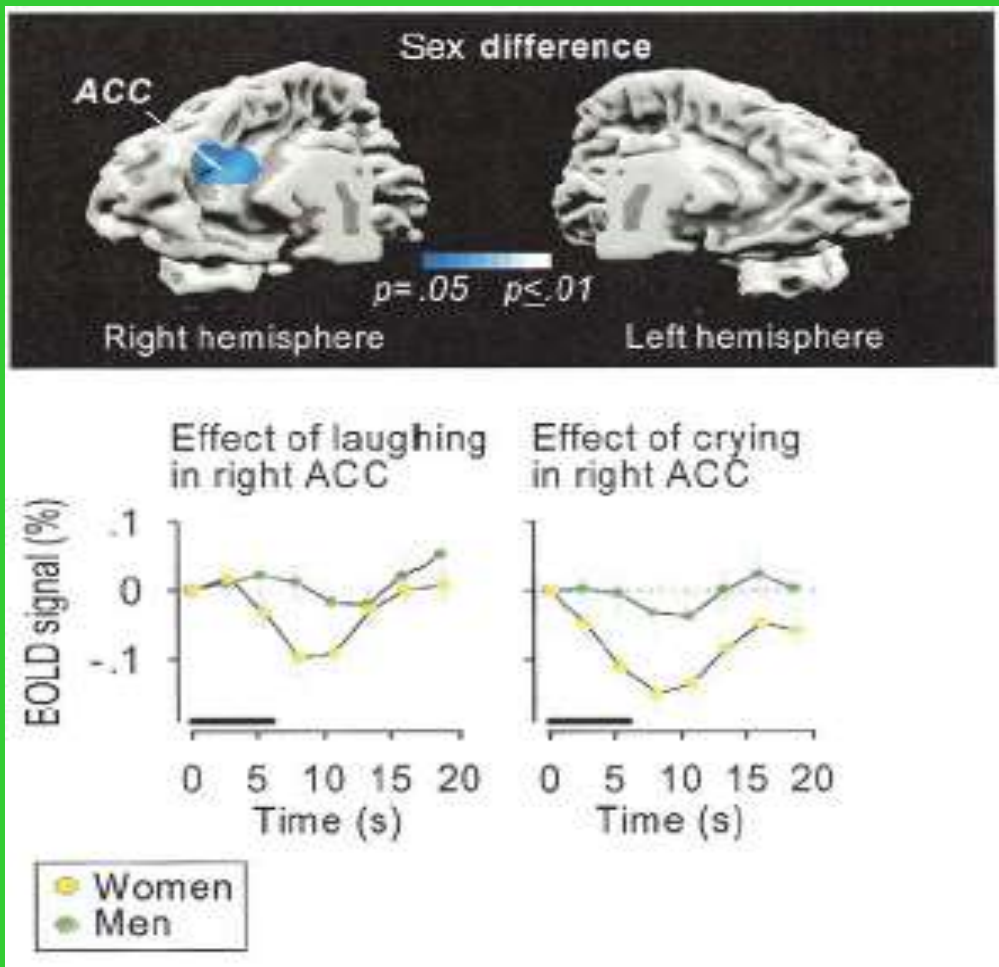
Startling discovery - fathers are men!



Brain architecture



Men are different to women





Fathers ≠ Mothers



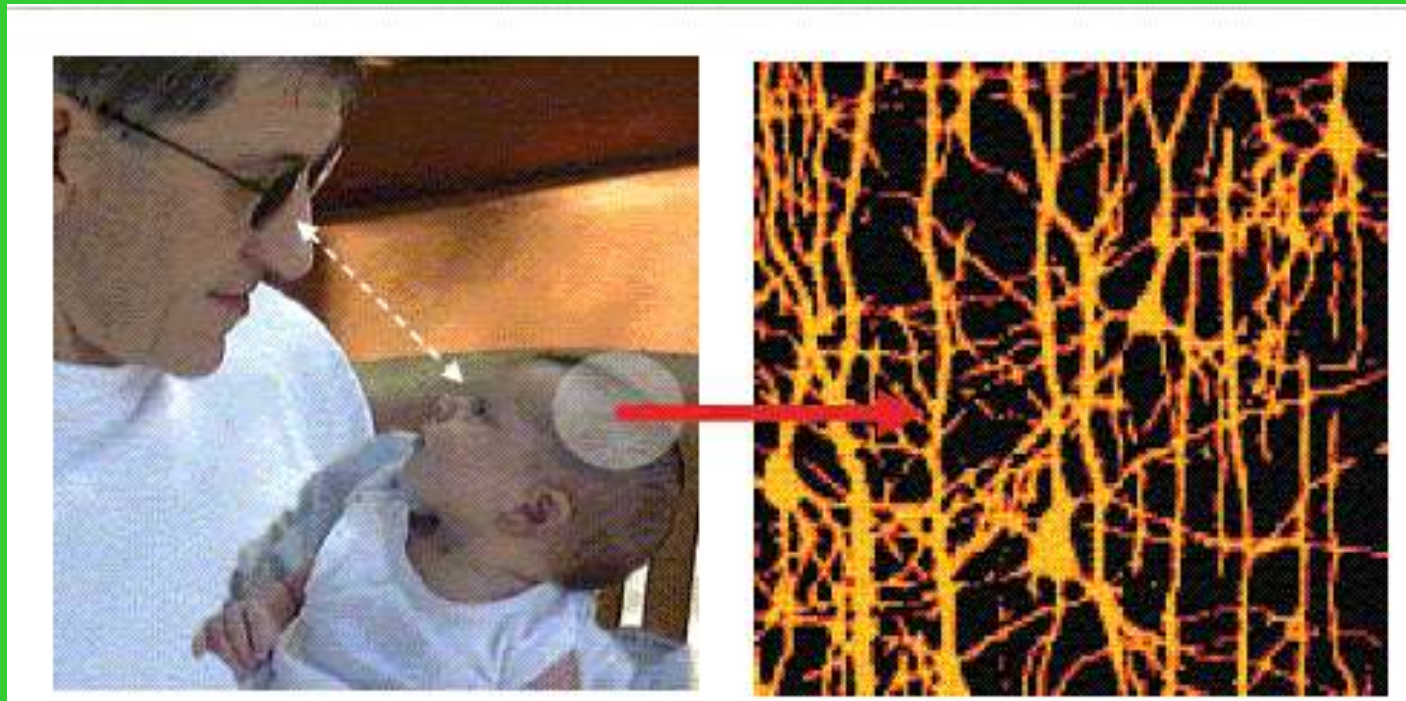
For older children
we think dads = mums



But for younger?



Father-infant attachment is different



Recent research

Startling discovery – fathers influence children!



The Transition to School

- 600 children (USA)
- videotaped fathers and mothers completing a task with children
- teachers rate children on behaviour and social skills
- *Research question:*
What best predicts social skills with peers and with teacher?

The Transition to School

- The tasks:
 - playing with a set of toy African animals
 - drawing a sailboat together using an Etch A Sketch toy (with the parent controlling one knob and the child controlling the other)



The Transition to School

- Code videotapes for:
 - sensitivity to their child's cues and support for their autonomous activity

The Transition to School

- Best predictor of children who had fewer behaviour problems and higher social skills?

Fathers who were sensitive and supportive of autonomy

- This is independent of the mothers' effects
- An emotionally intimate marital relationship added to the positive effect of the fathers' effect

National Institute for Child Health and Development (2004) Fathers' and Mothers' Parenting Behavior and Beliefs as Predictors of Children's Social Adjustment in the Transition to School

Established and emerging research

ESTABLISHED RESEARCH (what we know)

- Fathers are not mothers
- Fathers influence children's development
- Services could include fathers

Emerging (partly known) research

- Rough & Tumble play
- Father's depression
- Father-infant attachment
- Children's learning with fathers
- Complementary roles (Mother/father)
- Valuing fathers (Indigenous)

Emerging research

- Recruiting fathers into school-based activities
- Supporting fathers in families with PND



Using dadpics



- “DadPics” in a Year 2 class

Dadpics



Dadpics: What I would like to do



87 out of 102 fathers attended
Homework with dad 2/26 to 24/26



Supporting the baby and the mother by supporting the father

- **Mother severe PND**
- **Hospital 5 days after birth**
- **Father contacts service**

Pilot service for fathers

Brochure offered

“a free service for new fathers”

who may have

“a wife or partner who is not doing so well”.

At interview offered

Home visits for father + baby

(based on Systematic Training in Effective & Enjoyable Parenting (STEEP))

Involving Fathers in Early Childhood Services

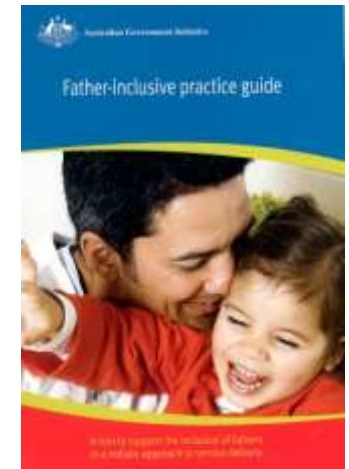
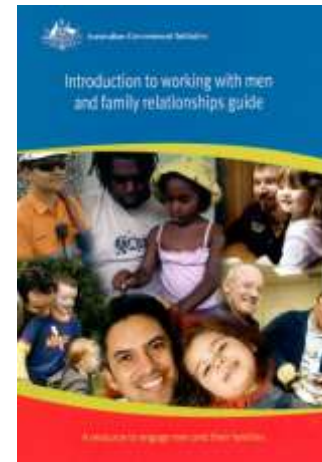
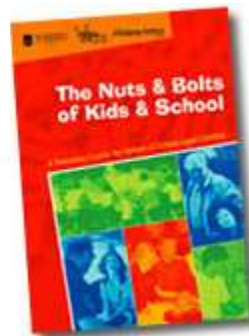
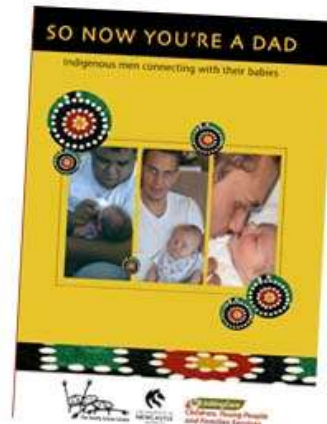
www.newcastle.edu.au/childrens-centres



Involving Fathers* in Early Childhood Services

*includes biological and social fathers

A joint project of the Family Action Centre and Good Beginnings



2nd Digit to 4th Digit Ratio

