



# Consultation with Fathers


a summary



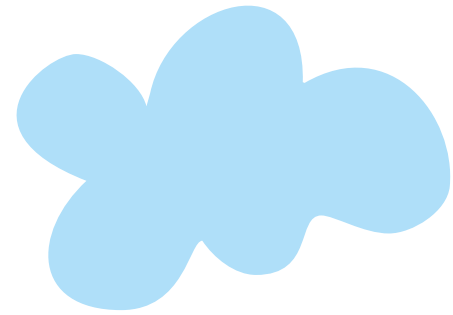


# Contents

Why did SSBC commission the Consultation with Fathers?	3
1. Consultation Process	4
2. Key Findings	5
3. What support and information do fathers want and need?	6
4. Fathers' experience of services	7
5. Were fathers' mental health needs met?	8
6. How do we reach fathers effectively?	9
7. Responding to the Consultation with Fathers	10
8. Acknowledgements	11



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## Why did SSBC commission the Consultation with Fathers?

***The impact of positive male role-modelling on child developmental outcomes is well evidenced, most notably in relation to the father-child relationship*** (Amodia-Bidakowska & Ramchandani, 2020<sup>1</sup>; Sethna et al, 2017<sup>2</sup>).

Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) is committed to improving short and long-term developmental outcomes for children aged below 4 years in four of Nottingham City's wards. Since its establishment in 2014, SSBC has acknowledged and celebrated the important role fathers and male caregivers play in the lives of their respective children with father-inclusive practice embedded as a strategic outcome (SSBC, 2014<sup>3</sup>).

To inform the SSBC Father-Inclusivity Strategy and within the interests of our core principle of co-production with parents, the consultation was commissioned. The aim was to obtain insight into the lived experience of Nottingham's fathers and to better understand their expectations of services.



1. Amodia-Bidakowska A, Lavery C, Ramchandani P (2020). Father-child play: A systematic review of it's frequency, characteristics and potential impact on children's development. Developmental Review. 57.
2. Sethna V, Perry E, Domoney J, Iles J, Psychogiou L, Rowbotham NEL, Stein A, Murray L, Ramchandani PG. (2017). Father-child interactions at 3 months and 24 months: contributions to children's cognitive development at 24 months. Infant Ment Health J. 38.
3. Small Steps Big Changes (2014). A Better Start Nottingham Strategy. Available: [http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk/file-manager/2014-10-ssbc-nott\\_strat-final.pdf](http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk/file-manager/2014-10-ssbc-nott_strat-final.pdf)

# 1

## Consultation process

The consultation consisted of three components:

- 1 Semi-structured telephone interviews (approx. 20 minutes)
- 2 Online survey (approx. 10 minutes)
- 3 Focus groups via video-conferencing software (approx. 60 minutes)



- All stages of the consultation were completed between June and November 2020.
- The vast majority of the telephone interviews and focus group sessions were facilitated by a male researcher.
- All fathers / male caregivers living within Nottingham City boundaries with a child aged below 4 years were eligible to participate.
- Participation was incentivised.

In total  
**93 individuals**  
took part

# 2

## Key findings

Fathers spoke openly of their experiences and preferences. Whilst individual preferences varied significantly, several key themes emerged throughout the consultation:

**The majority of fathers were very satisfied with local services**

*"Can't speak highly enough of the staff"*

**The timings that services typically run was a frequently cited reason for poor engagement**

*"Working families can find it more difficult to use services"*

**Fathers wanted to be recognised as an active (if not equal) parent when engaging with services**

*"From my own experience, fathers are viewed as people who will not play that important a role in a child's life"*

**Several fathers felt services were primarily intended for mothers and that their own needs were frequently overlooked**

*"Men don't get the support they need"*

*"Marketing is often targeted at mums"*

**Fathers were most proactively seeking support and information in the weeks and months immediately before and after the birth of their child**

*"You feel very insecure at the start and it's a time where you need the most support"*

**Many fathers expressed that they did not know where to find information about local services and resources to support their parenting role**

*"I was having to find extra support but it all seemed to be geared around mum and baby"*

**The vast majority of fathers expressed that their own mental health was left unaddressed by services**

*"Guys can be quite isolated sometimes"*

# 3

## What support and information do fathers want and need?

Fathers were interested in what services were available but most were unaware of where to find relevant information. Fathers shared feeling both pressured and somewhat lost when speaking about support and information.

*"I had to learn on my feet"*

*"(In the perinatal period) Felt left to your own devices"*

Limited paternity leave was regularly cited as a barrier to developing a confident fathering role in the early months, as well as a barrier to engaging with services.

*"I have two jobs, I'm self-employed and I work as well. Things are difficult with limited paternity leave"*

Fathers shared that they lacked the valuable peer support networks that their baby's mother had.

*"When you go back to work after paternity leave you haven't had much of a chance to establish a bond with other parents"*

### 88% of surveyed fathers

stated that they would attend male-only groups however there was a clear preference across all components of the consultation for mixed group sessions that are consciously designed with the needs of both mothers and fathers in mind.

*"If they could be more focused on fathers, what to expect, how to react"*

*"It's difficult for a man to think I'm going to go to an all-woman space"*





# 4

## Fathers' experience of services

The feedback about the importance of staff being friendly and welcoming was strongly felt to be the most important factor in determining a positive experience when using services.

*"(Staff) Don't expect fathers by themselves"*

*"There's a question of where is mum?"*

The overwhelming majority of fathers stated full-time working hours as the major obstacle to attending community sessions and engaging with services. With most activities taking place during the working day, many fathers felt both unwelcome and unable to attend.

*"Because of work [I] never thought of services as being something for me"*

One father voiced that a lack of diversity within local services was a barrier.

*"I find it alienating going to suburban services as they're not very diverse"*



# 5

## Were fathers' mental health needs met?

Fathers were asked about what, if any, mental health support they had received in each component of the consultation.

### 90% of surveyed fathers

stated that they had never been asked nor offered support for their own mental health. Fathers discussed in the focus groups their feelings of exclusion when their baby's mother was actively supported for her mental health.

*"I might as well have not been in the room"*

### 91% of surveyed fathers

stated that they would have valued receiving information and/or support for their own mental health. Several fathers shared details of their emotional journey into fatherhood.

*"Having my son was a daunting experience"*

*"I was personally overwhelmed when my child was born, and it would help for it to be acknowledged that it can happen"*





# 6

## How do we reach fathers effectively?

A common barrier raised by fathers was that they simply did not know where to find information. Several fathers were concerned by the trustworthiness of online information.

*"There is a wealth of information out there but there's also a risk of things being misleading. We need actually verified accounts giving out information that is trustworthy"*

Fathers spoke of wanting to know 'basic' information such as how to handle their baby safely but felt that information was mainly directed towards the baby's mother.

*"All the information was loaded onto my partner"*

Fathers within the focus groups discussed together the various methods of information delivery; whilst there was no clear consensus on the best solution many agreed that a single source would be useful.

*"I just want a one stop shop for information... spending time looking for information means you're not with your kids"*



# 7

## Responding to the consultation with fathers

**SSBC will channel the learning from the Consultation with Fathers into:**

- Developing the Father-Inclusivity Strategy and Operational Plan
- Sharing the learning amongst the partnership
- Continued partnership working with the multi-agency Father Inclusive Practice Group
- Establishing a Fathers' Advisory Group
- Reviewing and further developing SSBC's **'Think Dads!'** training offer
- Producing a physical resource for new and expectant fathers / male caregivers to support their parenting role and the emotional wellbeing of the entire family
- Developing a father specific 'one stop' information zone on the website



# 8

## Acknowledgements

Firstly, SSBC would like to thank all of the fathers who shared their invaluable insights and experiences of services.

SSBC would like to thank Coram Family and Childcare for their work and commitment to the consultation as well as the Father Inclusive Practice Group for providing valuable feedback during the course of the consultation.

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 [www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk](http://www.smallstepsbigchanges.org.uk)

 [ncp.ss.bc@nhs.net](mailto:ncp.ss.bc@nhs.net)

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