

NEW PATHWAYS FOR YOUNG FATHERS: YOUNG FATHERS' VOICES



2021

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INTRODUCTION

‘New Pathways for Young Fathers’ was funded by Research England and was a collaboration between Leeds Trinity University and DaddiLife to address an important and under researched topic - young fathers’ future aspirations and what barriers and enablers exist regarding the improvement of their life chances, and potentially, the life chances of their children. By working in partnership with Leeds City Council, national partners, and key stakeholders, this study aimed to address the current gaps in knowledge, policy, and practice.

This illustrated booklet is aimed at professionals and policy makers who work with and support young fathers (defined in this research as under the age of 25 at the time of the first birth or pregnancy) within different settings. We hope that young fathers’ insights and voices into their employment, education, and training journeys, and the impact it can have upon their health and well-being, will help provide a better understanding of young fathers’ aspirations and some of the barriers and challenges faced along the way. The young fathers who participated in this research also wanted to help ‘make a difference’ to other young men by openly sharing their experiences.

At the end of the booklet, we offer policy and practice recommendations based on the young fathers’ accounts.

“It’s to make a difference. I’m hoping to make a difference.”
(Adam, aged 26)

BEiNG A DAD

This section highlights the young men's views on being a father, what is a 'good father', and the changes and sacrifices they have made since becoming a parent.

"Not everything revolves around money and stuff like that. Just making sure that your child knows that you're going to be there, that they're healthy and happy. As long as I'm providing that for my son and I can see that every single time we're together he does have a smile on his face, and he's enjoying the stuff that he's doing, then that makes me happy."
(Johnny, aged 25)

"Just be there when they need it and provide for the mother and child."
(Karter, aged 17)

"I try to be a good father. It's hard, innit, when you're new to it, you don't know if you're doing things right."
(Steve, aged 24)

"You can't stay at home all the time, cause otherwise you're a dosser."
(Webster, aged 23)

"As a dad, I need to make sure that they're happy and confident with life."
(Aiden, aged 19)

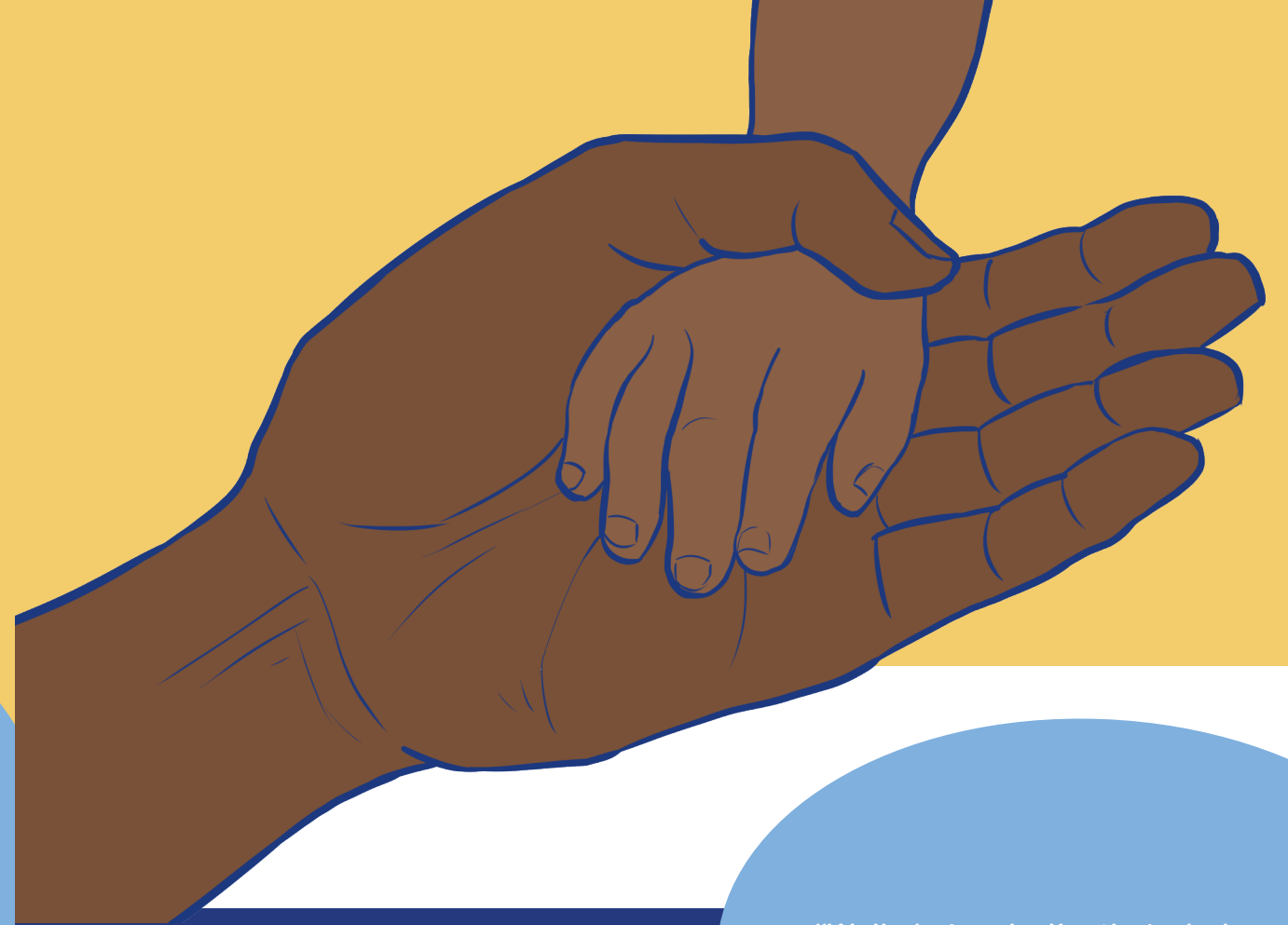


"My idea of a good father is me being there for my kids and letting them know that at the end of the day, no matter what, I love them to bits. That's my idea of being a perfect father."
(Wesley, aged 21)

"We just play all the time, go out, do activities. In all honesty it stops me from doing the sort of stuff that I used to do like going out all the time."
(Johnny, aged 25)

"Well obviously, I'm their dad, aren't I, so whatever they need or whatever they ask for, I try my best."
(Tarrell, aged 30)

"People go out on a night, I mean, a couple of my friends they'll go out. They'll go gamble, they'll do drugs, everything else like that. For me, it's a case of, I don't do gambling, I don't do drugs, I'll have alcohol now and again, but I won't be really excessive like they are. I'd say the reason I am not excessive like they are, is because I need to be a role model."
(Robert, aged 19)



EMPLOYMENT INSiGHTS

Young fathers shared their views on the importance of finding and securing employment, and the multiple challenges that can be involved.

"I feel like there's mostly pressure on men. Like there's a massive stereotype, you now, the man's the breadwinner."
(Robert, aged 19)

"Working sets a big example for the kids."
(Darren, aged 30)

"I think the younger you are, the harder it definitely is. Cause there's less opportunity for younger people and I think in certain aspects of society they're not taken as seriously, especially in a professional environment. And if you come into a place and go, 'oh I was a dad from a certain age', they build that stereotypical picture of what kind of person you're going to be. And it makes it difficult to provide."
(Trevor, aged 22)

"Finding work gives me a sense of pride."
(Karter, aged 17)

"Any employment that I could get my hands on, I was going for it."
(Tarrell, aged 30)

"You work full-time, you lose out on your family. You work part-time, you don't get enough to support your family, but you do get to see your family more. It's just finding a balance where you're able to live life happily."
(Adam, aged 26)

"I don't work while the kids are awake. If I do bring work home, I never do it while they're awake. I don't work at weekends, unless I really have to."
(Martin, aged 31)

"We had a bit of a time with my son, where he wasn't well and I was having to leave work early cause we he was having hospital appointments and stuff like that. My work were like 'don't worry about it, we'll work everything out'.
(Johnny, aged 25)

"I'll do any work, if it's good money."
(Richard, aged 24)

"I'm naturally quite ambitious anyway, so my plan for this year is moving up the ladder really."
(Dominic, aged 27)

"So there was no leeway in terms of like having regular time off if you needed it, in terms of childcare responsibilities or if something has happened."
(Trevor, aged 22)



APPRENTICESHIPS

A number of young fathers shared their views on apprenticeship schemes and how helpful they were for building up work experience and finding employment afterwards.

“They tell you about apprenticeships whilst you’re at school, but, I don’t think they’re appealing, when you see the wages that you get on them. It’s working 40 hours a week for £130 and stuff like that. Yeah, teachers used to tell you about them, but the wages just put you off.”

(Steve, aged 24)

“As soon as I left school, I thought, ‘the first thing I need is money’, but I wanted a qualification at the same time. So, an apprenticeship just ticked both boxes.”

(Trevor, aged 22)

“They’re more like trades, aren’t they? I always link apprenticeships to like joinery, building or plumbing. Never felt like I wanted or needed one.”

(Max, aged 32)

“They’re fantastic, apart from if you have a family and you’re above the age of 17, cause your apprenticeship wage, you could be doing 50/60 hour weeks on your apprenticeship and still be getting paid £4 an hour and still have to provide for your house, your kids, everything, all your bills, water, gas, electric, TV, phone, all that sort of things, but you have to do 60 hour weeks just to be able to afford it.

If you do any less than that then you can’t afford it.

Apprenticeships are all good and well in getting you somewhere, but as soon as you finish your apprenticeship you’ve been cheap labour for the past two years for them. See you later, bye, go find your own thing.

And during your apprenticeship, you don’t get taught much. They need to rejig the system a little bit, make it fairer to younger people.”

(Adam, aged 26)

“The man on the job [employer], he’s pulling over just short of four grand or whatever for a couple of weeks. And you’re coming home with a bag of sand.”

(Richard, aged 24)



EDUCATION

Young fathers shared their mixed views on the importance and value of education during their younger years and after compulsory schooling (including further and higher education).

“Obviously just being young and stupid. If I knew what it was going to be like now then I would have done it [school] all differently.”
(Justin, aged 17)

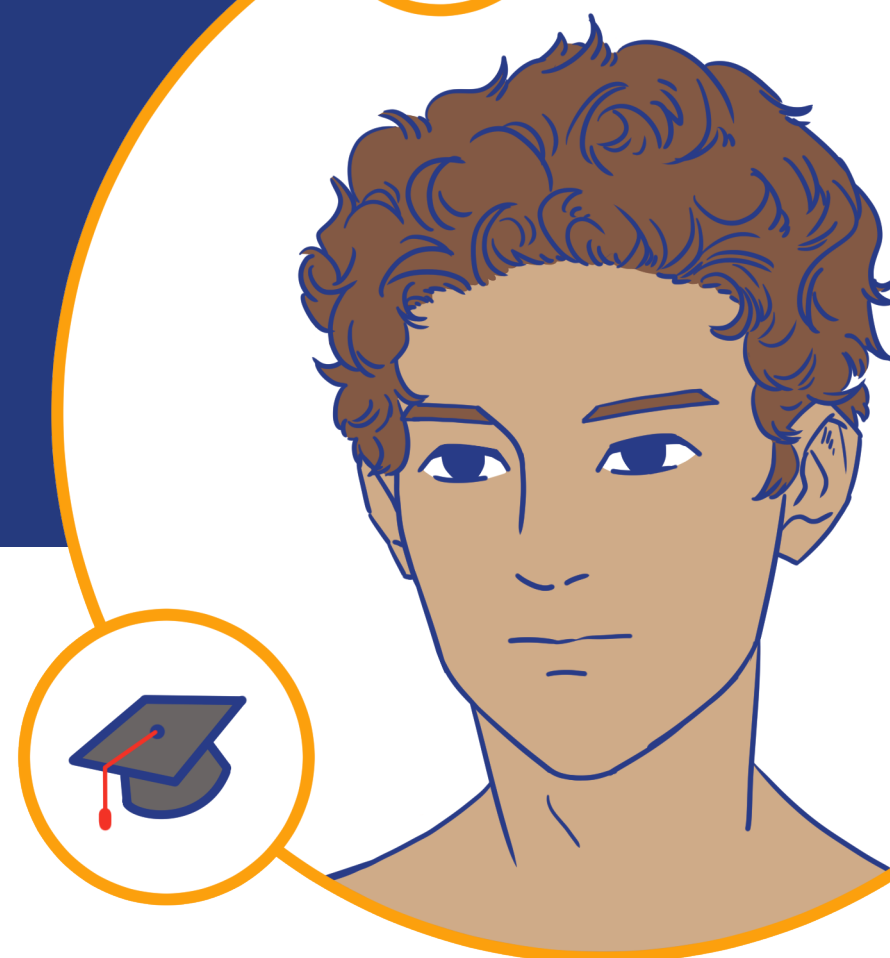
“Like, some of my friends, like 22-year olds, they’ve got a house and cars, it’s because they left school at 16 instead of studying. They went and got a job. It might pay off in ten years for someone who’s been studying, but you’ve got ten years to make up on.”
(Steve, aged 24)

“If there was no financial support then I wouldn’t have been able to do it. Yeah, there would’ve been no way. University has definitely been life-changing. It has definitely opened doors.”
(Max, aged 32)

“A few teachers that I had good relationships with, did offer me a bit of advice and said, even if you do go to college now, the child’s still young, you can actually get it out the way. You do have an opportunity to expand your learning here. I was just like, I can do that with an income. So, I was already kind of set in my ways.”
(Trevor, aged 22)

“The people in school didn’t help me, all they did was just sort of pass me on, fob me off, stick me in isolation, not give me any advice or anything, so it was like a case of neglect.”
(Adam, aged 26)

“Yeah I got a 2:1, my degree was solid. My postgraduate modules that I completed were really good, I was on course for a merit/distinction on that. And then on my Master’s degree modules, I’d got two distinctions and high 2:1s. I know I’m capable of doing it.”
(Tommy, aged 31)



“I think for me, if I was to go back to education, it’d be at a point where my kids are all grown up, probably got kids of their own and I’ve got spare time on my hands and I want to actually learn something new. But right now, trying to juggle education, a job, kids and everything else, it just feels a bit overwhelming, so that’s definitely why I’d give it a miss.”
(Trevor, aged 22)

“I don’t wanna go to uni, but I’ll pay for my son to go if he wants to go.”
(Keane, aged 25)

“Year seven and eight I was a troublemaker. Constantly in trouble. But in year nine I just turned it round. Just cause I knew it was my GCSE year, starting in year nine. I don’t think I would have got on this course if I didn’t change my attitude.”
(Karter, aged 17)

“I feel like from the ages of fifteen to seventeen, often courses like English and maths, they’ve just wasted my time and effort. I never learnt anything. I’m starting to learn in life on my own now, as I get older in life.”
(Andrew, aged 25)

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Young fathers' health and well-being were often impacted by employment, education, and training experiences, particularly, the lack of opportunities and support available.

"I'd just rather deal with everything on my own... it's the best way."
(James, aged 24)

"I have had previous episodes where I was off work with depression. So, I have experienced it, I have experienced those low points. And I'm nowhere near where I used to be. I think it's just knowing yourself and accepting when you need help and talking to people about it. Yeah, it's something that you constantly always think about, you know, like being reflective. Cause you could easily end up going back down that route if you're not careful."
(Max, aged 32)

"I think it's because I don't rely on anybody, I don't really open up to people, I don't really trust a lot of people. I can be quite reserved."
(Robert, aged 19)

"Oh yeah, at that time there was pressure at home all the time, and I was getting two/ three hours sleep a night because the feeling you have, especially as a man, like, you're not supposed to show your emotions, and as a child you always get told, 'Man up', you know, that sort of thing. As myself, as a person, I felt quite isolated because I wasn't able to talk about this stuff and I had to provide for my family as the man. I look at it now as a load of rubbish, you're a team, you both support each other, you all support each other, and that's how you make it through life, but at that time of my life I didn't realise it like that, I was like, I'm the provider, I'm the one that has to be strong, and then I broke."
(Adam, aged 26)

"I've noticed with young dads and not even just young dads to be fair, but young men in general these days, that mental health issues are a very common problem."
(Trevor, aged 22)

"I miss my daughter. I have been going through depression mode ever since I didn't get to see her. I've been in her life ever since she was born and then when me and her mum split up, her mum took her away from me unlawfully,"
(Tarrell, aged 30)

"I think I just kind of just drifted into a place where I was not aware of what was going on around me a lot of the time. I just felt very distant. And it was difficult focusing on somewhere to work. It was just too much at that point. And I did feel a little bit of burn out from being permanently in education for so long. But I just spent a lot of time on my own self-confidence and like realising that. I think like with the job rejections as well you think about your own self-worth."

(Tommy, aged 31)

"Just everything building up. I wouldn't realise it, like, it's just loads of little things. It'll just start building up and then my head will go."
(Justin, aged 17)



PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Young fathers shared their views on professional support, and what helped and what hindered.

“Like I’ve had a lot of support from social services employment-wise, and what I can do CV and education-wise, and things like that.”
(Robert, aged 19)

“I mean personally if it wasn’t for the young dads’ group, I think a lot of us would have probably ended up on the wrong end of the stick, either in a sticky situation or in a ditch. And obviously if it wasn’t for this group, then I wouldn’t know where I’d be to be honest.”
(Wesley, aged 21)

“I think for anyone who’s a young father, whether they’ve come out of education, looking for work, or looking into further education, I think that support is needed. There’s a lot of career support needed and the financial element. There’s definitely that kind of team needed. There should be something there.”
(Tommy, aged 31)

“Embarrassment, a sense of pride could be another factor stopping anyone reaching out for support. A male’s pride is dearly important, I know through my experiences that I was very reluctant to find any suitable help for myself, until someone actually reached out to me.”
(Robert, aged 19)

“Don’t be scared to ask for help, because a lot of dads do, because with being men, they think, oh, I don’t need to ask people for help, I should be able to do it. No, you don’t. Ask for help, because I certainly didn’t at one point, but now I do, and it’s helped me a lot and as a parent.”
(Aiden, aged 19)

“If there was someone who I can speak to, I can just let it all out.”
(Karter, aged 17)

“There would be too many things to list that could potential stop a young father from reaching out for support, but the main thing I believe is fear of the unknown and not being correctly informed of the potential support that is available.”
(Adam, aged 26)

“I think being a young dad brings a lot more struggles on the person in question. Having kids young, you don’t know what support you need to give and put in.”
(Tarrell, aged 30)

“Not everyone’s out there to laugh at you, some people are out there to actually help you.”
Darren, aged 30)



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need to identify and include young fathers when working with young parents, so that they are not ignored or forgotten about.
2. Acknowledging the role of young fathers better and recognising the ways in which they can positively contribute to family life needs to be reflected in the language of policy and practice documents and other relevant debates.
3. We also need to recognise the diversity that exists amongst young fathers and their circumstances.
4. Counter to the 'feckless father' notion, which is often attributed to younger fathers, the young men we spoke to were aspirational and wanted to do their best for their children and 'be there'. It is therefore important to challenge and change the negative perceptions of

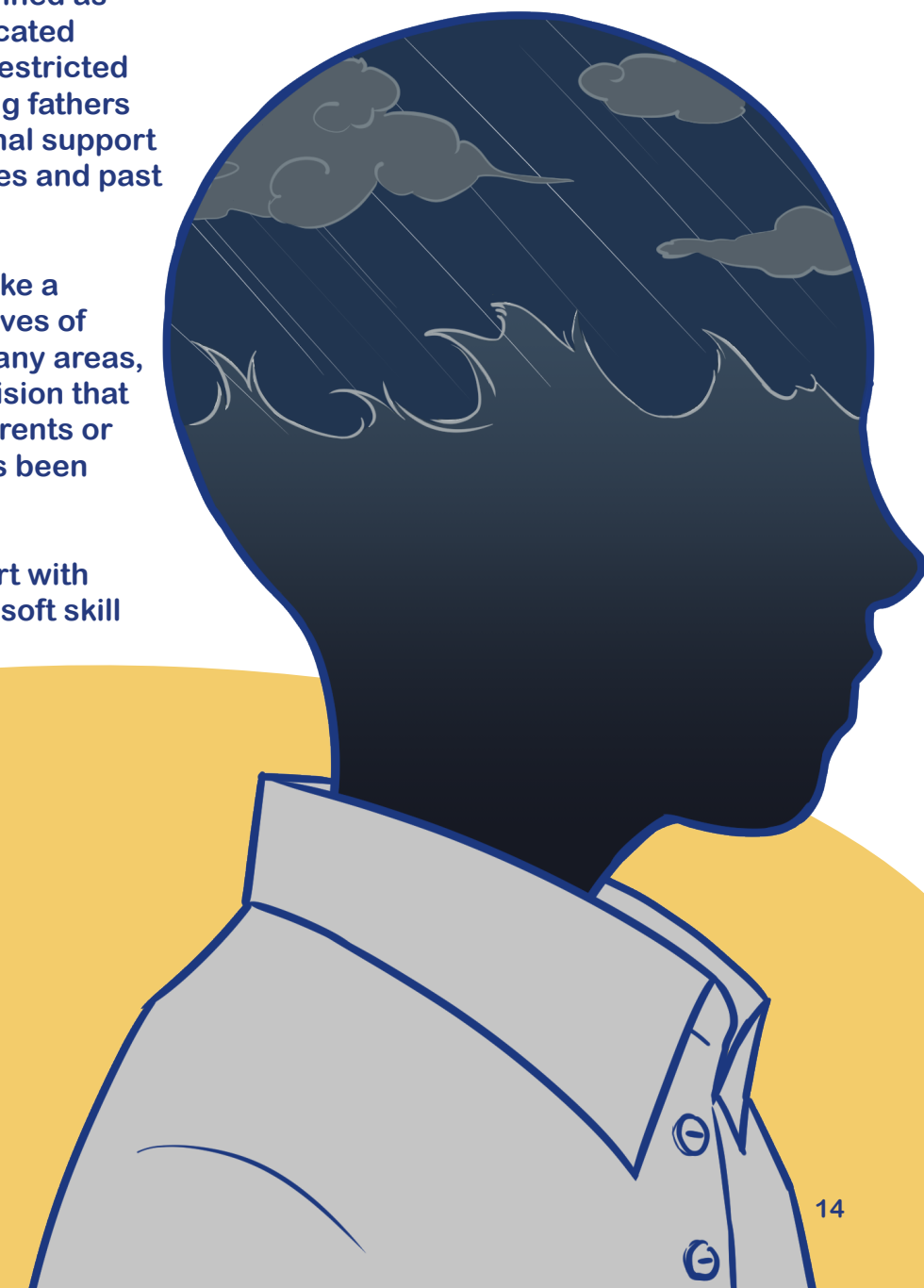
young fathers if we are to reach out to them effectively and provide adequate support.

5. Many young fathers were unsure of their parenting rights and what this meant in practice. Young fathers would welcome clearer advice here especially if there are problematic relationships with the mother of the child or maternal family.
6. Regardless of the relationship status and the differences seen, young fathers wanted to work together with the child's mother when parenting.
7. Many young fathers did not know who they could turn to in times of need in relation to professional advice or if they were eligible for support. Increasing awareness of what support is available at a national and local level would benefit many young fathers.

8. Despite a number of policy measures being in place for health support services and education and employment pathways, these were not well understood by fathers or well utilised as a result.
9. Young fatherhood is often defined as under the age of 25 and dedicated support for young fathers is restricted by age as a result. Many young fathers would benefit from professional support at different stages of their lives and past their mid-twenties.
10. Professional support can make a significant difference to the lives of young fathers. However, in many areas, generic and specialised provision that is targeted towards young parents or young fathers specifically has been reduced or stopped.
11. Young fathers wanted support with the development of core and soft skill

sets (e.g., EET pathways, budgeting, personal relationships, health, and well-being).

12. The opportunity for young fathers to come together to connect and support each other, was said to be extremely helpful and beneficial.



PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consider offering young fathers their own opportunities to gain consultation, advice, and support, independently from the mothers.
2. Ask young fathers if they are aware of their rights as a father whilst at work/ education. Signpost them to support organisations.
3. Establish with young fathers, what role they would like to play as a father. Discuss with them how they will achieve that and if there any difficulties here, and what help is available.
4. Fathers may have different expectations of what their role should be and there may be cultural differences. Be prepared for this and share with them best practice recommendations without judgement.
5. Signpost young fathers towards support which will help to encourage and maintain positive relationship with the child's mother regardless of the young parents' relationship status.
6. Allow young parents more consultation time in order to clarify new and possibly confusing or challenging information.
7. Some young fathers may have limited or no contact with their children for varied reasons. Sensitivity of such issues are therefore required.
8. Utilise existing training aids to encourage young fathers to ask questions and provide support, such as 'Following Young Fathers' Practitioner Training Workbooks (books 1, 2, 3) (2015).
9. Distribute best practice material with all front-line workers who may come in contact with young fathers. The top ten tips provided are particularly useful.
10. Support groups specifically focused on young fathers can be very helpful. Young fathers can be excellent peer mentors to other young fathers. Consider inviting young men to join a peer-to-peer mentoring scheme.



SUPPORT

FiNAL THOUGHTS

“I think there needs to be a political voice. But I don’t think that there’s current momentum, for any meaningful change unfortunately.”

(Dominic , aged 27)

“I think it’s getting rid of that stereotype mainly. I think that’d be the first step, then people can look at you with an open mind and as a human, instead of just a young dad.”

(Trevor, aged 22)

“Young fathers are stigmatised. They’ve got a bad label, like they’re not career orientated people. Maybe the media can do something about it”.

(Max, aged 32)

“Men don’t get as much support. So I feel like for young fathers, there needs to be more groups to support more people out there. It can maybe change another person’s life. There’s a lot more that needs to be done there.”

(Wesley, aged 21)

“If I can just look after my children, and my partner, and be able to spend as much time as I can with them, but at the same time financially support them as well, that’s all that I really care about.”

(Johnny, aged 25)

“I’d say that there needs to be a shift of focus, cause as usual it’s always about the women and stuff like that. What about the dads? There needs to be some sort of support there.”

(Robert, aged 19)

“All young fathers, even young parents themselves, not just fathers, young parents need support if you know what I mean. They all need that little bit of help instead of just being judged.”

(Darren, aged 30)

“It’s all the mothers that get the recognition. Fathers can wash the dishes, change the nappies, make the bottles, do the night feeds. We’re just as important as the mother.”

(Aiden, aged 22)

“Men don’t help themselves, cause they feel like they have to hold it in. But there’s barely any help out there.”

(Keane, aged 25)

“Yeah I think as a man and as a male, as a guy, as a dad, if we had some more understanding that would be helpful.”

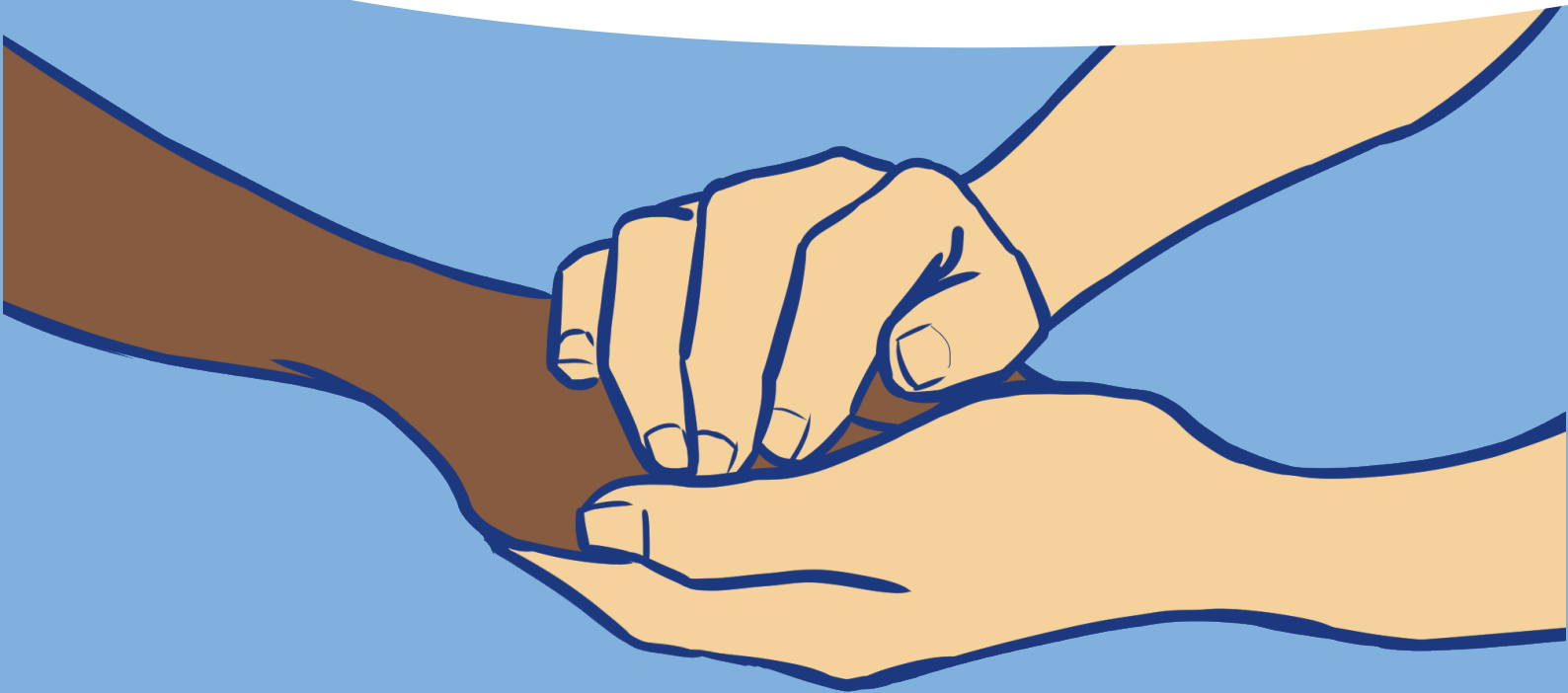
(Adam, aged 26)

“A lot of young dads don’t know their rights. I feel like there should be something out there that should help young dads.”

(Tarrell, aged 30)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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