



Norfolk County Council

# Fathers & Cultural Competence

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# Why Fathers Matter

- Research shows fathers significantly improve children's emotional regulation, cognitive outcomes and long-term wellbeing.
- Consistent, meaningful father involvement strengthens attachment and family stability.
- Engaged fathers reduce risks linked to behavioural issues, school exclusion and relationship breakdown.
- Services that include fathers early improve multi-agency planning and safeguarding.



## National Challenges

- Services remain mother-centric, often unintentionally excluding fathers.
- Professional assumptions and unconscious bias lead to fathers being seen as 'risky' or 'disengaged'.
- Fathers face structural barriers such as work hours, transport, fear of services or previous negative experiences.
- Young, migrant and minority ethnic fathers face compounded disadvantages.





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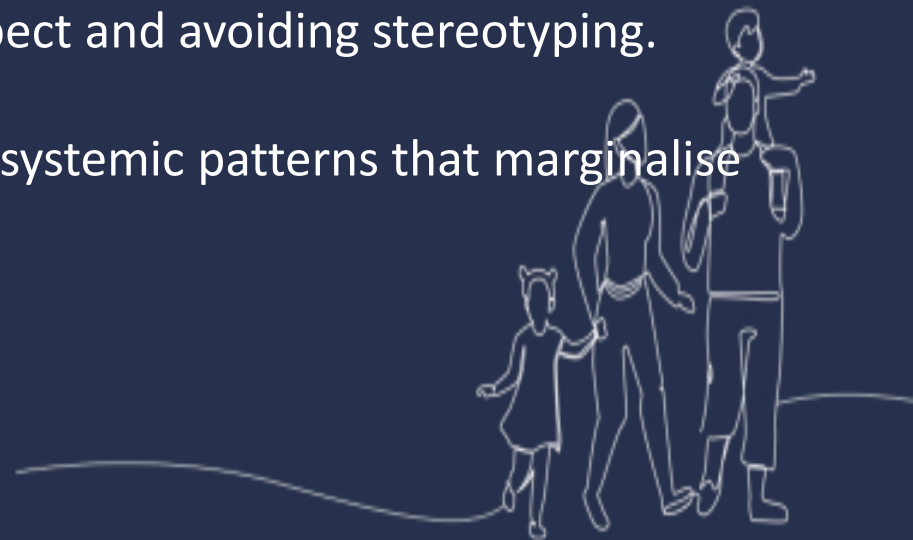
# Norfolk Context

- Norfolk's rural geography and transport limitations shape father engagement opportunities.
- Although predominantly White British, Norfolk includes growing migrant communities, GRT populations and diverse cultural parenting norms.
- Non-resident fathers often live far from partners or lack stable housing.
- Limited local networks, language difficulties and digital exclusion affect father participation.



## Cultural Competence

- Understanding how culture shapes fatherhood expectations is essential (e.g., work roles, communication styles).
- Practitioners must recognise cultural strengths, not only 'risks'.
- Cultural humility involves curiosity, respect and avoiding stereotyping.
- Anti-racist practice requires identifying systemic patterns that marginalise fathers of colour.





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# Intersectionality

- Fathers experience multiple, interconnected pressures: class, migration status, age, language, disability and racialisation.
- ‘Hard to reach’ often means ‘hard to trust’ due to past service experiences.
- Intersectionality helps practitioners understand behaviour in context, not as resistance.





## Barriers for Fathers

- Professionals often communicate primarily with mothers, sidelining fathers.
- Forms, meetings and systems assume a single main parent (often coded as mother).
- Fathers with insecure employment struggle with daytime appointments.
- Stereotyping (e.g., ‘aggressive’, ‘disinterested’) limits engagement opportunities.





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## What We Must Do

- Proactively invite and welcome fathers into every stage of assessment and planning.
- Offer flexible meeting times and provide interpreters early.
- Take a strength-based approach, identifying skills, protective behaviours and family role.
- Challenge bias within teams and modelling inclusive practice across agencies.





# Father-Friendly Practice

- Adapt all communication: letters, texts, forms and invites must be father-inclusive.
- Ensure visual materials reflect diverse fathers and family structures.
- Provide practical adjustments: remote meetings, flexible hours, interpreters, advocacy.
- Build trust through relational practice and transparency.



## Multi-Agency Roles

- Schools, midwives, GPs, police and early help must consistently include fathers in information-sharing.
- Each agency plays a role in reducing stigma and improving access for marginalised fathers.
- Joint training strengthens consistent father-inclusive messaging.
- Cross-agency collaboration reduces fragmentation for families.





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## Table Activity: Barriers & Solutions

1. Identify **THREE** barriers fathers face engaging with your organisation.
2. Discuss how cultural norms, racism, language or system design contribute.
3. Consider father strengths that are overlooked.
4. Agree at least **ONE** actionable improvement per barrier.
5. Be ready to share your table's findings.

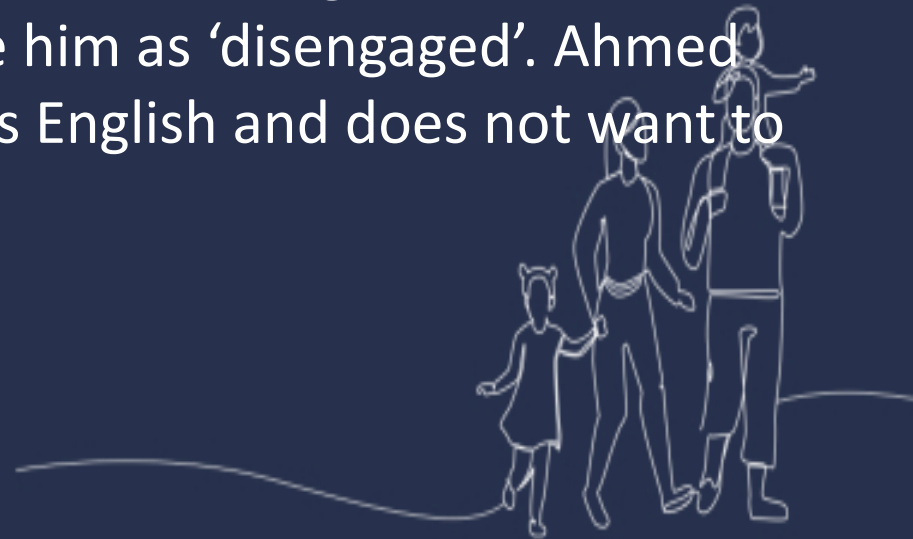




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## Case Study 1: Ahmed

Ahmed is a 32-year-old Sudanese father working long agricultural hours. He speaks limited English. His three-year-old child is on a child-in-need plan. All meetings have been scheduled during Ahmed's work hours, making attendance impossible. Practitioners describe him as 'disengaged'. Ahmed reports feeling ashamed about his English and does not want to appear disrespectful.



# Discussion Questions

1. What cultural, structural or linguistic barriers affect Ahmed?
2. How have service decisions (e.g., timing) shaped perceptions of 'disengagement'?
3. What biases might influence professional judgement?
4. What practical steps would improve engagement?





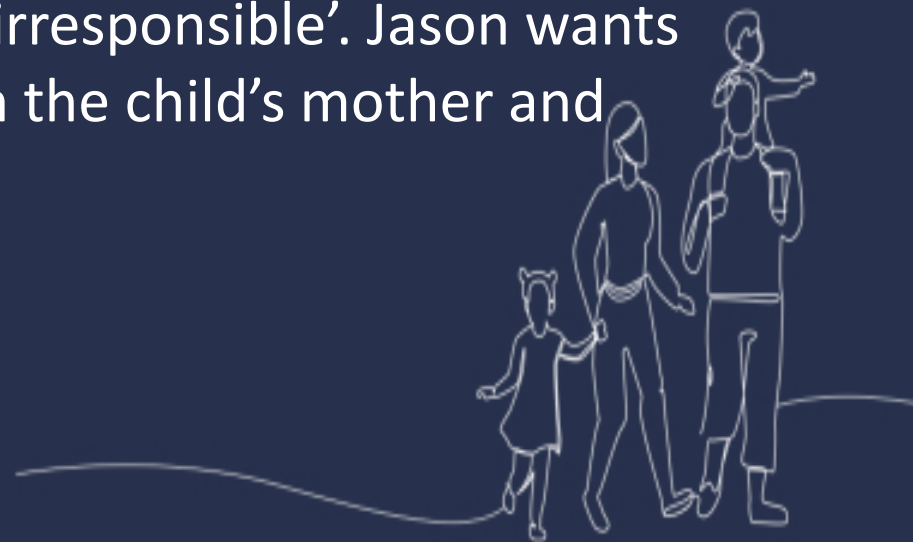
## Discussion Points

- Structural conditions shape engagement more than motivation.
- Interpreter support and visual communication tools increase accessibility.
- Scheduling flexibility demonstrates respect for cultural and employment realities.
- Judgements must be evidence-based, not assumption-driven.



## Case Study 2: Jason

Jason is a 19-year-old mixed-heritage father. He is non-resident. Jason has a history of exclusion from school, homelessness, and inconsistent contact with services. He expresses distrust toward professionals and feels judged as ‘irresponsible’. Jason wants involvement but fears conflict with the child’s mother and agencies.





## Discussion Questions

1. How do Jason's age, race, class and past trauma shape his service engagement?
2. How might stereotypes influence professional responses?
3. What does anti-racist, trauma-aware practice look like here?
4. What approaches would help build trust with young fathers?



## Discussion Points

- Young fathers require affirmation and relational consistency.
- Racialised assumptions can undermine father identity.
- Trauma-informed practice prioritises safety and trust.
- Clear communication reduces anxiety about involvement.





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## What are we saying

- Fathers matter for outcomes.
- Cultural competence improves engagement.
- Anti-racism must be active, reflective and embedded.
- Multi-agency alignment strengthens support.





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# Thank You

