

**Developing a curriculum pack
on the subject of
*fatherhood***

**A research report for
EduAction Waltham Forest
by the
Men's Health Forum**

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Objective

The ultimate objective of the research project is to produce a curriculum pack for use with Years 6 and 9 in schools in Waltham Forest. The curriculum pack will enable teachers and other professionals working with pupils in these age groups to:

- explore differing perceptions of fatherhood
- consider the roles and responsibilities of fathers in differing contexts
- allow discussion of fatherhood within the context of a wider examination of families and family relationships
- encourage pupils to think about their own attitudes, hopes and aspirations in relation to fatherhood and family relationships
- encourage both boys and girls to reflect on the meaning of “masculinity”
- promote a positive vision of fatherhood

The curriculum pack will comprise six lesson plans, together with information about resources and links to further sources of information. It will also include a “context-setting” introduction that will explain the rationale underlying the development of the pack. The lesson plans will be for use with mixed groups of boys and girls, and will, as far as possible, be adaptable for use in settings outside of formal education.

Process

EduAction engaged the Men's Health Forum to lead the planning and development process for the curriculum pack. The Men's Health Forum (MHF) is the only national organisation campaigning for the improved health of men and boys. Information about the MHF and its interest in this field is given at **Appendix 1**.

The MHF designed a research process for the development of the curriculum pack which comprises the following stages. Stages 1 – 3 are complete. The publication of this report concludes stage 4:

Stage 1

A seminar for teachers, youth workers, Connexions staff and other relevant professionals working with children and young people in Waltham Forest.

This seminar was held on the afternoon of January 16th 2007 at Waltham Forest College. It attracted 22 attendees. The seminar began with a presentation about the process for the development of the curriculum pack. It also heard a presentation by Trefor Lloyd from the specialist organisation Working With Men* about work on fatherhood in the school curriculum in other parts of the country. It was noted that this is currently an area of interest that has been little explored and that the proposed work in Waltham Forest may be unique in aiming to develop work with mixed sex groups of younger children.

The second half of the seminar was devoted to an open discussion which drew on participants' experience for ideas and advice about the structure and content of stages 2 and 3 of the project. Participants brought a range of viewpoints and motivations to the discussion which was consequently lively and wide-ranging. It was acknowledged that there is currently an absence of suitable teaching materials with which to tackle this subject and there was strong support for the idea of the proposed curriculum pack. Work on fatherhood was thought particularly to have potential importance for boys, and it was agreed that there is less expertise, by and large, in engaging boys and young men in existing PHSE programmes.

It should be noted at this stage incidentally, it was agreed at the seminar that the original list of subsidiary objectives (see bullet points on opening page above) was too ambitious for the proposed six lesson curriculum pack. It was felt however, that the pack should be seen as the first step in a longer term programme that would ultimately aim to address the subject of fatherhood more comprehensively. The subsidiary objectives were thought to be entirely appropriate to this longer term ambition. The programme for the seminar is at **Appendix 2**.

* www.workingwithmen.org

Stage 2

The development of detailed advice and guidance for those teachers and other professionals willing to run discussion groups or to seek the views of individual pupils to inform the development of the curriculum pack.

The advice arising from the seminar was used to develop a model discussion schedule that would allow local children and young people to explore the idea of fatherhood and to express their views about what should and should not be included in work in school on the subject. The model discussion schedule used an established structure, in which the subject to be discussed is broken down into a small number of key themes, each of which is further broken down into a series of “question prompts”. The resulting schedule is then used as a framework to facilitate a discussion that is as informal, free, open and inclusive as possible within the parameters allowed by the key themes.

By conducting discussions in a variety of settings, with mixed and single sex groups of children and young people, a diverse range of views can be obtained. At the same time, because the discussion schedule and the guidance to discussion facilitators is the same in all cases, the written records of the discussions can be amalgamated to provide a broad and reliable base for decision-making and planning. The discussion schedule is at **Appendix 3**.

Stage 3

A discussion and consultation process in schools, youth centres and other settings across Waltham Forest.

It was initially hoped that discussion groups would be held in a number of different types of settings in Waltham Forest, including primary and junior schools, senior schools, non-mainstream educational settings (e.g. pupil referral units), youth centres, and youth advisory centres. It was also hoped that people would be able to speak to individual young people, as well as groups. In the event, time constraints meant discussion groups were mostly held in school settings, and all were in groups. Parental consent was obtained in all cases for younger children’s participation in the discussion groups. The guidance to discussion group facilitators is at **Appendix 4**.

Stage 4

Group facilitators and interviewers feed back notes of their discussion and consultation groups and interviews in a standardised format.

Discussion group facilitators were supplied with a pro forma to ensure that notes were fed back, as far as possible in a standard format. The pro forma also collected information about numbers and ages of children and young people taking part in the discussions. Group facilitators were also asked to report back verbatim quotes from the discussions where those seemed particularly to illustrate a point that was made by the group, or to offer insight into a particular experience or attitude. Despite the slight disappointment that results were mostly obtained from schools rather than from a wider range of settings, some

extremely interesting findings emerged which have allowed us to undertake a confident analysis and to make solidly grounded recommendations.

Stage 5

The findings and recommendations of the outcome report are converted into the content of the curriculum pack.

Following the publication of this report and a period of local discussion its findings, the curriculum pack will be published; initially it will be in draft form for consultation and piloting, and subsequently in its final form for use in local schools and other relevant educational settings.

Analysis of the findings from the discussion groups

Introduction

Seven discussion groups were held in five schools. The details of participants are as follows:

Group	No. girls	No. boys	Total no.	Age range
1	3	0	3	11 - 15
2	8	8	16	10 - 11
3	6	6	12	10 - 11
4	5	2	7	13 - 14
5	4	0	4	10 - 11
6	0	5	5	10 - 11
7	2	2	4	10 - 11
8	0	10	10	15 - 16
Total	28	33	61	

The analysis which follows is structured according to the four key themes identified at the seminar and which formed the basis of the discussion framework (Appendix 3). Throughout this section, sentences and phrases in italics are verbatim quotes from participants. Sentences and phrases in inverted commas are quotations from the facilitator's notes and are sometimes reported speech from participants. The report of each theme begins on a new page.

Theme 1:

Family

At the planning seminar, there was consensus that before discussing fathers and fatherhood with the children and young people, it was important to establish the range of perceptions they held of the idea of “family”. The point was made that families have changed significantly in recent decades as a result of the higher divorce rate, the greater number of lone parents and the shifting patterns of adult relationships. It was also observed that Waltham Forest has a high population of people from minority ethnic backgrounds who make up numerous different communities in the Borough. Perceptions of family may well vary from one group to another.

In the event, the groups were virtually unanimous in describing their families first and foremost as groups of people united by love, affection, commitment and constancy, rather than by their blood relationship with each other.

You can always go to them. They won't let you down.

Only Group 1, the smallest of the groups, defined a family at this stage simply as a mum, dad and children. As might be expected in the groups of younger children, the participants also saw families very clearly as groups which were protective and nurturing, in the sense of providing food, shelter, physical care and emotional support. The sense was of a group of people who share a strong “connection” (this word was used commonly) and who can be relied upon to look after you. The word favoured in the older boys group (Group 8) to describe the most important factor in a family unit was “togetherness”. This group cited members of the extended family as important and even, in one case, family friends within the local community who spoke a particular African language.

When asked however, about “family” as a concept (i.e. rather than in their own direct experience), the younger participants in particular were much more likely to describe a more traditional picture. Where this was described in specific terms – as it was in several cases - this invariably comprised mum, dad, one son and one daughter.

A cartoon picture of a family in my head. A mum, a dad and two children

Most participants identified TV as the source for this idea. In a couple of the groups, the participants went on to discuss the differences between their own circumstances and this rather idealised model. Some children said they did not actually know a single family that conformed to this description. One facilitator noted that one of the girls in her group who expressed very negative views about her own family circumstances, was nevertheless clear that her personal experience did not undermine her belief in the idea of the “perfect” family.

Other children, particularly the older boys, saw the idea of “family” in the abstract rather more flexibly, and visualised something nearer to their own life experience – a group of people united by emotional bonds and shared concerns. Few participants referred in detail

to the day-to-day experience of living in this kind of more complex family situation but where they did it was not often in a positive sense. One girl described herself as living in “a bubble” between her natural mother and father and their new partners. In the discussion in Group 8, it emerged that although the boys knew each other well, some had never told their friends what their family circumstances were.

Grandparents were highlighted by some participants as an important part of the idea of family in the abstract, regardless of whether they (the participants) inclined to the idealised or “real world” view.

The “question prompt” about why the participants thought people have children produced a range of responses with no single idea coming through stronger than others. Very broadly however, three categories emerged. These are that people have children: to express their love for each other and make themselves happier; to keep the family name going; and/or to alleviate loneliness and keep them company. When asked to think about how people learn to be parents, much the most common response was that people learn from their experience of having been brought up by their own parents.

Theme 2: Families and fathers

The planning seminar took the view that the easiest way to enable a discussion of “fathers” was to place the discussion within the context of the individual family experience of the participants. At the same time it was agreed that there was value in asking participants also to think about the ideas of “father” and “fatherhood” in the abstract. There was a common agreement that in eventually designing the curriculum pack it was important to establish from participants what they perceived as the qualities of a “good father”.

The discussion about fathers and their role within the family produced wide variations in attitude, opinion and experience – indeed, the very definition of a father was broad in some cases - being, in one group, “someone who is male and who has brought you up at any time during your childhood”

The positive aspects of “a father” were perhaps most commonly articulated as being to do with his being the provider (“pays the bills so you can carry on living in the house”). Other positive aspects of a father included being supportive of the mother; being someone who plays with you (in one case, because mum may be too busy with the housework to do so); and someone who is kind and puts you first. In one group, the majority opinion saw the father as “the man of the house” and “the boss”. Another group saw him in a broadly similar way as a “big strong man”. Despite this, it was more common to see the father as being more liberal than the mother over matters of discipline than the reverse.

A number of negative descriptions of a father were advanced by participants. These included in several cases, his being “too busy” (working long hours) to spend time with his children, and, also in more than one case, being someone who doesn’t contribute to the housework and expects to have things done for him. A daughter of separated parents said:

I have a picture of a father; one is really mean and abuses their kids and the other one spends time with their kids and is caring.

There was a common agreement that mothers and fathers have separate roles, and that their having these roles is because of gender differences. At its most basic level, this was to do with division of labour – fathers being the providers, as described in the second paragraph above – and mothers having responsibility for domestic tasks. Within this, there were a number of references to fathers doing things around the house though perhaps without housework, cooking and so on being actually a shared responsibility (i.e. when fathers do this, they are “helping”). Participants also observed sex differences in relationships:

Mum supplies the love – Dad not as much.

Mum talks about girlie things, Dad about boy things.

Mums expect perfection, Dads aren’t so bothered.

These differences are not seen as a bad thing:

Two different minds will bring two different things.

There was absolute unanimity about the two groups of qualities that make for a “good father”. The first is that he should be accessible to his children whether he lives with them or not (“be there for you”, “spend time”, “stick around”, “work less”). The second is that he should be loving, caring, loyal and supportive. As one participant said:

Nothing extravagant.

The older boys demonstrated something of a conflict when thinking about a “good father”. Their consensus was that even though a father may be respected and valued, he is not necessarily the person to whom they would turn for emotional support – that is more likely to be your mother. The boys’ vision of a “good father” was someone who somehow also managed to incorporate some aspects of their idea of a mother, in the sense of being warmer and more approachable.

Theme 3:

Growing up and perceptions of men

Perhaps the most complex question to arise from the planning seminar was how to enable participants to come to grips with thinking about men and masculinity. This issue was seen as important in eventually helping design the curriculum pack - not only in terms of understanding how to talk about fatherhood but also in trying to ensure that the curriculum pack is able to address matters that are important specifically to growing boys. It was acknowledged within the planning seminar that there may be a range of vague, difficult-to-define set of negative characteristics associated with adult men from a child's point of view (e.g. men as potential abusers, men as more likely not to be a permanent presence in the family home). It was felt important not to shirk this matter, since if not addressed, the work eventually arising could potentially be undermined.

This was an enlightening exercise and it brought about the most challenging revelations of the consultation process. It transpired that a significant number of negative characteristics were associated with men. The majority of the characteristics could perhaps be grouped together under the single heading, "threatening behaviours". Some of the specific examples that fell into this category included; men were said to be violent, to be aggressive, to get drunk and push you around, to "get angry and smash things up", to take drugs, to be in gangs, to be "big and scary", and very specifically, to "reverse with speed". The other negative characteristics were rather more prosaic and included being lazy, "hogging the TV", moaning, and showing off. Interestingly, in light of the earlier discussion of fathers, "always working" and being "too busy" were also identified as negative characteristics of men.

This negative view of men was a particular talking point in the older boys' group. It emerged that the boys even had a negative perception of their peers. This took the form of sometimes feeling fearful of young men just like themselves and being unsure of whether a threat of some kind might be present. The boys also anticipated a negative view of themselves in the wider community because of their being young, male and black. Consequently, not only did they hold some negative perceptions of men, they simultaneously found themselves - unavoidably - embodying other people's negative perceptions of men.

In one of the younger groups, the discussion about negative aspects of maleness led to a discussion about whether boys and men were "allowed" to show affection openly. While there was agreement within the group that boys should be able to show affection, and boys in the group said they would not pass judgement if they saw boys who did so, there was consensus that many of their peers would view this as "gay".

The discussion about men who might be positive role models was much more encouraging. In all of the younger groups at least some children identified their own father. Some also

identified their grandfather (in one case, because he is “always there”). One child named an uncle, and another his friend’s father. Participants in one group suggested men in “brave professions” such as fire officers, lifeguards and police officers. The older boys group was alone in not naming any “ordinary” men as role models. Their concentration was on aspiring to wealth and social status, with a number of celebrities named as being role models for these reasons.

The range of specific individual men selected as potential role models by the younger children was extremely eclectic. It included Thierry Henry, Steven Gerrard, Wayne Rooney, Lee Evans (“because he is funny”), Jamie Oliver (“because he would keep you healthy”), Tony Blair, Eminem (specifically because he is known to have a good relationship with his daughter) and most unexpectedly of all, Jimi Hendrix.

The discussion about the kind of father they would like to be when they grow up (boys) and the kind of father they would like their children to have (girls) overlapped to some extent with the earlier discussion about what makes a good father (in retrospect these two question prompts could perhaps have been combined in some way). Nevertheless it is worth looking at some of the ideas that emerged – not least because in this case they are essentially being expressed as aspirations. Constancy, spending time, being supportive, being caring, being a good advisor and being funny were again the key ideas. Being responsible, hard working and deserving of respect were also identified. There were some slight differences here between boys and girls with girls more likely perhaps to specify “loving and kind” and boys more likely to mention someone who is fit, active and in one case, “an achiever” - on the other hand, “not a workaholic” was specified by one participant. Girls were more likely to say that they would like the father of their children to be “one that stays” or “someone who won’t walk away”. Exploring these gender differences in more detail might be an interesting piece of work for the future.

Theme 4:

Fatherhood on the curriculum

The fourth theme was less concerned with participants' attitudes and perceptions than the preceding three. The purpose of this element of the discussion was directly to consult the children and young people about how the subject of fatherhood should be addressed in school and other settings – indeed, to ask them whether they thought it was an appropriate subject at all.

This part of the discussion raised a very challenging and fundamental issue for the development of the curriculum pack; while clear support was expressed in all the groups for discussing family issues in school, there was also – in every group – the strong expression by some participants of reservations about the idea. This was for the same reasons in every case - that it could be “painful” for individuals and that giving away your feelings about your own family may make you vulnerable:

. . . . you may have problems that you do not wish to share

People will take the mickey out of your family

Similarly, participants were split about whether boys and girls should be in separate groups for this kind of work in school, with perhaps a slight majority in favour of mixed groups. Those who expressed this latter view thought that boys and girls had the same expectations of fathers and families and that it was therefore not necessary to keep them apart (indeed it would be more “equal” to stay together).

Family is the issue – and everyone has experience of it – whatever that may be.

Those who saw advantages to boys and girls learning separately broadly expressed their views in terms of their belief in basic gender differences. These participants felt that separate groups were useful because boys and girls have different experiences – “girls know about girls’ stuff and boys know about boys’ stuff”. Interestingly one girl said:

Boys may feel more comfortable with just boys listening

Some girls expressed themselves strongly in favour of boys in particular learning about fatherhood in school because in their view, boys had a pressing need to learn – “cos they think women do everything”. No group reported boys expressly acknowledging that learning about fatherhood would be useful to them.

Discussion about mechanisms for dealing with the subject in school were inconclusive. This may be because it is unrealistic to ask children to think about teaching methods, or it may simply be that this topic came up at the end of most of the discussion groups, perhaps

when time was running out. Where views were expressed, breaking into smaller groups for “wider discussion” was thought to be a good idea, although the idea of children talking to each other prompted one child to express a view that echoed the reservations highlighted earlier:

. . . . but that might be a bit personal.

One group said that talking about family issues needed a “strong teacher”. Bringing dads into school to talk about “what it’s like to have the responsibility” was suggested in a couple of the groups.

Finally, it is perhaps worth noting that several facilitators observed that participation in this piece of research, in itself, encouraged some children to talk openly about their own family circumstances and, in some cases, to discuss their personal unhappiness. Where this did happen, facilitators noted the empathy and support of other children. This is not advanced here as an argument for encouraging children to do this more frequently but it is perhaps, evidence that there is a desire among some children to explore the idea of fathers and families.

Conclusions and recommendations

Proviso

It should be noted that I am not a teacher or a youth worker. I am an experienced trainer who has worked with a wide range of adult groups on a variety of subjects but I have never worked with children in the target age groups for the curriculum pack. In framing the recommendations that follow I have drawn on my knowledge of academic research and best practice in relation to men's and boys' physical and emotional health. In analysing the discussions I have relied also on my experience of running similar consultation exercises in the past. I have additionally taken into account what I have learned from speaking to people working directly with children and young people in Waltham Forest – particularly the views expressed by local professionals at the planning seminar held in January of this year. I am confident of my interpretation of the findings from the discussion groups but I think it is probable that people with greater experience than I of working with children and young people will see more clearly how these findings relate to curriculum planning in schools and other educational settings. I therefore encourage readers to pass on their own thoughts and suggestions to EduAction.

The recommendations below are not in priority order nor do they relate to the order of the themes in the discussion. I have tried to arrange them logically starting with the general and moving to the particular.

1. Some children expressed concern about the subject of fatherhood (or family issues in general) being addressed in school at all. This is because, for some children, this subject seems to sail perilously close to personal experiences that may be painful. Some also had reservations about their peers knowing too much about their family circumstances. At the same time, many participants in the discussion groups were enthusiastic about the idea and advanced strong arguments for incorporating this kind of work into the curriculum. It was also noticeable that some children used the discussion groups themselves to reflect on their own – sometimes difficult - personal circumstances, suggesting that they found a benefit in doing so. The safest approach would seem to be to ensure that the subject is approached neutrally and objectively, and does not rely expressly on asking children or young people to talk about their own circumstances. It might be wise also to establish a policy to facilitate access to pastoral support for children who demonstrate anxiety or concern.
2. There was consensus that a “family” is (or should be) a close, loving group of people that offers security, stability and care to a child. Blood relationships are not central to this concept of family, nor is “traditional” family structure. At the same time, there was a commonly held view that the “ideal” family probably does conform to a particular well-established model (mum, dad, son, daughter). This ideal is somehow neater than the “real world” equivalent and it persists even in the minds of children whose personal experience is of something more fluid. Exploration of this interesting dichotomy may offer a route into talking about families that is both neutral and, in

general terms, supportive of the differing range of home circumstances that may exist among the children in the class.

3. It is difficult to know whether the curriculum pack should advocate a particular model of fatherhood but if so, this research has provided a vision that is positive, uncontroversial, does not take a particular cultural or ideological standpoint and is meaningful to children. That is that a good father should aspire to be loving, kind, supportive and constant.
4. Some of the characteristics that were identified as being important in a “good father” (“loving”, “kind”, “caring” etc.) are not those uppermost in making a “real man” (although one or two of the other characteristics mentioned by the children are rather more so e.g. “hard working”, “deserving of respect”). This may be confusing for growing boys whose developing idea of maleness is subject to a range of cultural influences. It is also observable from the discussions that many children see men and women to a large extent as having relatively fixed gender roles. Fathers may be particularly associated with bread-winning - something that brings its own potential problems, with a commitment to work seen as negative by some children because it limits the time that their father has available to spend with them. Again, this tension between “traditional” and/or idealised views, and what children really value may offer a basis for discussions and exercises that enable children to think about the issues creatively.
5. The discussion groups were inconclusive about what kinds of teaching might work best. There was some support for working in smaller groups and one could speculate perhaps that the discussion groups themselves demonstrated the usefulness of that approach. It did not emerge clearly whether working with boys and girls separately was thought to be a good idea. It is recommended that different approaches are tried in different schools in a structured way during the first year that the curriculum pack is in use. These approaches can then be monitored and, following discussions with the teachers concerned, a decision can then be made about the most effective approach for the future.
6. One particularly striking finding of the research was the range of negative views of men held by some of the children. It also emerged from the discussion groups that some girls had already absorbed a rather negative picture of men as future life-partners. As in 4 above, this negative picture of men must be extremely confusing for growing boys. Although the discussion groups did not address this subject, it would be interesting to look at what view of men is promoted across schools as a whole (for example: balance of male to female staff; differing roles of male and female staff; engagement of fathers in school activities; “stranger danger” campaigns; portrayal of men in taught literature and so on). It is recommended that, in the longer term, schools develop an approach to the subject of fatherhood that is not limited to the specific curricular activities under discussion here but which encompasses policies and activities across the school as a whole.
7. Several participants in the discussion groups spoke positively about their grandfathers. Extending the curriculum pack to include materials related to grandfathers would increase the chances of giving children something within their personal experience to relate to, while at the same time, having the advantage of being a little further removed from their immediate family circumstances. Taking

grandfathers as a starting point would also offer scope for discussing the changing role of men and fathers over recent decades. This in turn might help with thinking about fatherhood more generally.

8. There was some feeling that bringing volunteers into school to talk about their experiences as fathers would be useful and interesting. Given the concerns expressed by the children about privacy however, it might not be advisable to invite fathers of current pupils to do this. For similar reasons it might not be appropriate either for male teachers to talk from their own experience. It might however be a workable to recruit volunteers who had no association with children at the school. Careful selection would be necessary but if suitable older men could be found that might also bring the advantage of greater experience, and could link with the idea of grandfathers suggested at 7 above. It might be particularly interesting to have two or three men from different cultural backgrounds to speak to the children in turn (perhaps as part of work in smaller groups).

Appendix 1

About the Men's Health Forum

The Men's Health Forum (MHF) is the only national organisation campaigning for the improved health of men and boys. The MHF's central focus is the development of health policy but we have managed or directly undertaken a number of research projects, including two important studies on behalf of the Department of Health – with a third such (a three year project forming part of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Programme) currently in development. The MHF also offers a training service for health professionals and works to improve the health knowledge of the “man in the street” – especially during National Men's Health Week, which takes place every June and of which the MHF is the lead organiser. The MHF has recently established an “academic wing” in partnership with the Centre for Men's Health at Leeds Metropolitan University.

The MHF has a long-standing interest in the promotion of a positive view of fatherhood. There is strong research evidence linking positive and supportive fathers with a greater likelihood of better physical and mental health in children – particularly boys. It is also because we believe that positive engagement with children and family relationships fosters a version of masculinity that encourages men to take better care of their own health. In our view, support for fathers and the development a positive vision of fatherhood is – in the long run – an important step towards better health for men and boys.

More information about the MHF can be found at our website, including downloads of most of our research reports and policy papers can be found at:
www.menshealthforum.org.uk

The MHF also runs the world's most visited men's health advice website:
www.malehealth.co.uk

Appendix 2

Seminar Programme

Half-day seminar, January 16th 2007 Mallinson Suite, Waltham Forest College Programme

1:15 **Lunch**

1:50 **Introduction and welcome. Local background to the project.**
Mary Neilson
SRE/Drugs Adviser, EduAction Waltham Forest

2:00 **Project objectives and structure. Purpose of the seminar.**
David Wilkins
Policy Officer, Men's Health Forum

2:30 **Fatherhood on the curriculum: What is known? What is happening elsewhere?**
Trefor Lloyd
Director, Working With Men

3:00 **Break**

3:15 **Discussion**

4:15 **Summary and next steps**
David Wilkins
Policy Officer, Men's Health Forum

4:30 **End**

Appendix 3: Discussion Schedule

Key themes	Question prompts
<p>Families</p>	<p>What is a “family”? – (ie how do the young people “picture” a family?)</p> <p>Where does their picture of a family come from?</p> <p>Is their own family – or families that they know - like their picture of a family? [Alternative form: Are real families like their picture of a family?]</p> <p>Why do they think people have children?</p> <p>How do they think people learn to become parents?</p>
<p>Fathers and families</p>	<p>How do the young people picture a “father”?</p> <p>Are there differences between what fathers and mothers bring to a family?</p> <p>If there are differences, what are the reasons for that?</p> <p>What makes a good father? [Alternative form: What do they think children want from a father?]</p>
<p>Growing up and perceptions of men</p>	<p>Are there particular men whom the young people regard as good role models?</p> <p>Are these family or friends; famous men; fictional men?</p> <p>What makes are the characteristics of these men that make them a good role model?</p> <p>Are there negative characteristics that they especially associate with men?</p> <p>When they grow up: What kind of father would they like to be (boys)? What kind of father would they like their children to have (girls)?</p>
<p>Fatherhood on the curriculum</p>	<p>Do the young people think talking about family at school is a good idea?</p> <p>Do they think boys and girls are interested in different aspects of the family? If so, what are the differences?</p> <p>Do they think boys and girls should learn separately sometimes on this subject?</p> <p>Do they have any other thoughts about how they might look at this subject in school?</p>

Appendix 4

Discussion Guidance notes

Please read these notes before undertaking your local discussion groups (or your “interviews” with individual students).

Introduction

You are already familiar with the idea behind this small study, which is to inform the development of the planned curriculum pack on fatherhood. Specifically, the study will allow us to take into account the views, attitudes and experiences of local children and young people. This study is perhaps the most important part of a longer process intended to ensure that the eventual pack is as effective as possible.

It is important that the subject areas dealt with in the study are consistent across the Borough, regardless of the various settings in which the consultations take place. The settings may differ significantly of course and the children and young people will bring a wide variety of life experiences. Consistency is necessary however, for the obvious reason that it will not be possible to draw reliable conclusions unless all those who have participated have talked about the same things.

Having said this, it is important to realise that the discussion schedule is intended to be as flexible as possible, so that it can be adapted to local circumstances and opportunities – and to the skills and experience of the person leading the discussion.

About the discussion

The most important thing to remember is that – whether we are working with groups or individuals – we are *not* aiming to conduct “interviews”. The intention is that the discussion should be as near as possible to a natural conversation or regular classroom discussion. The mood and style should be relaxed, and the children and young people should be allowed to discuss the subjects as freely as possible. The role of the discussion leader is to exert a light touch occasionally to keep the discussion on track (see below). It is also the role of the discussion leader to encourage as wide a participation as possible. This may involve inviting the quieter participants to contribute and if necessary, preventing a small number of participants from dominating. If some individuals seem very reluctant however, it may be best not to press them if that means unduly disrupting the flow.

Icebreakers and alternative approaches

The nearer the discussions are to being fun, the better the results will be. I am not a teacher and you know far better than I how to work with your own students. Feel free to begin the discussion with an “icebreaker” if you think that will help and if you want to use an alternative approach to the whole thing, please do so. Likewise, if you want to work with participants in different numbers than the two basic choices of groups or individuals (pairs for instance?), then do give it a try. Whatever approach you take, the only rule is that you should achieve reliable outcomes in terms of investigating the four key themes and that you do so by addressing some of the ideas underlying the question prompts.

The “key themes”

The themes appear in the left hand column on the grid – they are the most important bit of the whole thing. The idea is that all four themes should be covered in the discussion whether the discussion takes place with individuals or in groups. Ideally, the themes will be covered in the order in which they are listed although that is not vital.

The “question prompts”

The question prompts are based on the discussion at our meeting on January 16th. As I said earlier, these are not “interview” questions – their purpose is to help you keep the discussion on track and to map out what we agreed were the most important areas for discussion. Provided you address the four themes, it doesn’t matter at all if you come to the questions in a different order from the way they are laid out. Likewise, I think it is very unlikely that you will have time to address all the questions under all the themes. At risk of repeating myself, the important bit is to aim to cover – if at all possible – the four themes.

Language

I haven’t made any attempt to frame the questions in language suitable for children and young people. I hope the underlying concepts are appropriate for the target group (I am fairly confident they reflect our discussion on January 16th) but I am leaving it to you to “translate” the ideas into a form that children and young people will feel comfortable with.

Age groups

The curriculum pack will be aimed at Years 6 and 9, and I hope that the majority of those involved in the discussions will be in those age groups. I recognise however that it will not necessarily be possible, especially for those outside mainstream settings, to guarantee that they will be able to work only with students in these age groups. Results from children and young people of all ages will be welcome and useful. The pro forma for you to send in your results will include a space for reporting the age(s) of the participants.

Cultural differences

I realised in writing the schedule that it is really not feasible to have specific questions that relate to cultural differences (for example differences that relate to social class or ethnic origin). As I said earlier however, the aim of the schedule is to allow discussion leaders as much flexibility as possible. You are familiar with your own settings and students, and you I hope you will be able to lead the discussions in such a way that they are sensitive to your local circumstances. If any important cultural factors do emerge in your observation, then it would be most helpful if you could feed them back. There will be a space on the pro forma to allow you to do this.

Group discussions

Generally, when using this kind of process with adults, a group of 6 – 10 is considered appropriate. I'm quite happy however, to leave it with you to decide what you think is a workable number for your own purposes. Similarly, I will leave it with you to decide how long you think the discussion should go on – I realise this might be dictated by circumstances in any event.

Discussions with individuals

The purpose of including discussions with individual students is to get round a problem that is well recognised in research – that peer pressure may exert undue influence in discussion groups with young people. This is known particularly to be a problem in working with boys, who may be wholly reluctant to participate in a group discussion but quite relaxed about speaking individually.

Keeping a record

Obviously, it is important to capture the flavour and some of the detail of what is said. It will be much easier to do this if you can arrange for a colleague to take contemporaneous notes. Otherwise, you will need to jot down brief notes yourself whilst the discussion is ongoing. If you do the latter, the sooner you can expand the notes a little, the less likely you are to forget something important. I know you are all busy, so I will aim to make the pro forma in which you report back your findings to me as easy to use as possible. I'm afraid that the reporting back element will probably be a bit more time-consuming if you are doing interviews with individuals.

Verbatim quotes

This might be too much to ask, but occasionally in this sort of process, someone says something that sums up a whole idea in just one phrase or sentence. If any of the children or young people does say something particularly telling and you have a moment to jot it down, or find you can remember it later, then that might be especially helpful to me in writing the report.

Confidentiality

I think it would be useful to ask the participants in groups to respect each others' confidentiality, although I guess dwelling on this point runs the risk of making the discussion sound threatening in some way. You will need to say of course, that the discussion group will form part of this planning process. People conducting discussions with individuals should give an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity at the outset.

..... Finally

Thanks very much indeed for your willingness to help with this process. I know you are all busy. Your contribution is much appreciated. I am confident that this process will make for a more effective end product, and that it can form the basis for some important learning locally – and maybe even more widely. I will make sure everyone receives a copy of the report analysing the findings from the discussions; indeed - time permitting - I will aim to consult you on a draft version before the final report is written.



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