



engaging dads

RCM pocket guide designed to support midwives in providing a more inclusive experience for fathers and partners during the antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal period



Royal College
of Midwives

Created in collaboration with the Fatherhood Institute



Background

Midwives have a unique role in engaging with women, their partners and families during the perinatal period.¹ This role includes providing care and support during the pregnancy journey and promoting population health.

Due to this position of influence, midwives not only improve health outcomes for women and their babies, but also for their families. Midwives can support the transition to parenthood and promote positive attachment between the parents and their baby.

This enables partners and family members to better support the women and be ready for caring for their baby. For most women, an important part of this journey is the role their partner plays.

In this pocket guide we will focus on male partners who are becoming fathers. For the purpose of this pocket guide, the term father includes biological and social fathers, such as stepfathers and adoptive fathers. We will explore how we better engage these fathers in the perinatal journey and support them in preparation for fatherhood.

According to research, involving mothers and fathers in a child's care right from the beginning increases the child's chances of developing a secure attachment.²

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM), alongside the Fatherhood Institute (FI), has created this pocket guide and a series of resources to help midwives and support staff offer effective engagement with fathers and other non-birthing parents.

For more detailed information and resources centred on the themes discussed in this pocket guide and much more visit the Fatherhood Institute padlet <https://bit.ly/457taTn>



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Father-inclusive perinatal pathways

We are familiar with the many changes women experience during the perinatal period. However, it has been found that men also experience **emotional** and **psychological** changes in their transition into fatherhood, which are significant and can often be complex.³

Emotional and **psychological** changes experienced in the transition to fatherhood can often be challenging, especially alongside other factors that some men experience.



substance
misuse



unemployment



housing
issues



mental
health

What can maternity staff do to help?

Well-supported fathers can have a positive impact on women's perinatal experiences and outcomes.⁴ Midwives are encouraged to involve a woman's partner and provide information for partners about pregnancy.⁵ This may include:



Involving men in the antenatal booking appointment



Acknowledging him as a part of the pregnancy journey



Including them during the intrapartum and postnatal period.

Some of the problems fathers face are beyond the scope of maternity services. Nonetheless, by making small changes in services and practice, midwives and support staff can help men navigate their journey into fatherhood more successfully and make it a friendly, helpful and meaningful experience.



Supporting diverse fathers

Fathers, like mothers, are a diverse group, whose needs and preferences may vary according to a range of factors. These groups may face particular challenges and require targeted additional support.

What can maternity staff do to help



Young fathers

Young fathers may struggle to make sense of their role and feel acknowledged during their journey to fatherhood. Midwives can support them by helping them reflect on their experiences and engage them by asking questions.



Gay/bisexual/trans fathers

Research suggests that fathers in these categories often experience stigma and report a lack of support in their journey to fatherhood. Midwives can support them by adopting simple changes to the language used. An openness to the variety of LGBTQ+ family structures can help maternity services be more inclusive.



Fathers with disabilities

Acknowledging a father's disabilities helps towards engaging them with their partner's care. Midwives can consider the enablers they can use to engage such fathers. These may include addressing communication barriers (e.g. ALS interpreters and plain language resources), accessible healthcare spaces and openness to discuss disabilities in a positive way, amongst others.



Fathers of colour

Research suggests that fathers from ethnically and/or culturally minoritised groups can find health services hostile and unwelcoming.⁶ Fathers can be supported to access advocacy organisation such as **dopeblack.org** working to raise awareness and counter negative stereotypes about fathers of colour.



Working together

Fathers and partners can have a positive influence in both supporting the women and maternity staff. By engaging with them, midwives can maximise this impact.

It is vital that midwives and fathers make the most of every point of contact during the antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal period. Midwives have a unique position to encourage men's engagement in this journey and provide wider health and well-being information for men and fathers.

We have created some example scenarios and suggestions to help guide the conversations you might have with women in your care and their partners.



Scenarios and suggestions



Scenario

Misha is attending her booking appointment with her partner. He appears nervous and asking several questions



Suggestion

If I connect with him I can help him better look after himself and his pregnant partner. That could make the experience better for them both.



Scenario

Sarah is at an antenatal class with her partner who is a young father



Suggestion

He may feel out of his depth.
Ask him how he is feeling.

Perhaps support him in completing a task eg. counting contractions during labour or showing him how to change a nappy



Scenario

Helen does not speak English and has come to Triage with her husband. He keeps pressing the buzzer to speak to the doctor.



Suggestion

Helen's husband may know her better and understand her needs at this time. Take his concerns seriously.

Explain to them both the need for interpretation and translation for Helen, to address the language barrier.



Scenario

Christina and her partner have just had a baby after being in hospital for several days.



Suggestion

He may feel overwhelmed by this experience. When fathers feel supported, they can better look after their babies. This helps them bond with their baby and takes the pressure off the woman.

For more detailed information and resources centered on the themes discussed in this pocket guide and much more, access the Fatherhood Institute padlet:

[**https://bit.ly/457taTn**](https://bit.ly/457taTn)



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