

**Involving Men in Antenatal Education:  
The dads2b course  
an evaluation of  
Innovative Practice and Partnership Working**

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## Background

In recognising the important role of partners 'A framework for maternity services in Scotland' (Feb 2001) suggests that Health professionals should take all steps to ensure that partners are involved and do not feel marginalised to enable them to take a full and active role in pregnancy and childbirth.

In response to this, in March 2004 an innovative pilot was launched in West Lothian to provide and assess demand and uptake of antenatal courses for expectant fathers. The Dads2b courses aimed to increase confidence in supporting partners through childbirth, caring for their baby and highlight issues of mental health and wellbeing and would supplement existing antenatal services.

It was developed through a unique partnership in Scotland between the Sure Start team within West Lothian Council and Parent Education Services at St. Johns Hospital in West Lothian. The course consisted of a 4-week programme that was set up with funding support from an NHS Mental Health and Wellbeing Grant.

The drivers for this service were

- The 6<sup>th</sup> Report of the Confidential enquiries into Maternal Deaths in the UK which stated that the most common indirect cause of deaths overall was due to psychiatric illness.
- National Suicide Strategy (2002) recognised suicide as the leading cause of death in men under 35, with two-thirds of these being fathers.
- Men who increasingly want to be involved fathers still faced barriers that inhibit their parenting. (Fathers Direct 2000)
- Available support for dads-to-be is regularly tagged on to women's services and often with stereotyped attitudes (Bradley, Mackenzie & Boath 2004).
- Dads in Britain work the longest hours in the European Union, yet there are fewer services to support men in their parenting (Fathers Direct 2000).
- 1:10 single parent is a father, and fathers are the main carers of children of mothers who work. (Fathers Direct 2000)

The course was initially set up in a socially deprived area and was aimed at vulnerable and very young fathers with ongoing support provided after their newborns were 6 weeks old. The need for a more generic course open to all dads soon became very apparent and the course was adapted to accommodate working dads.

The pilot evaluations were excellent and demand was much greater than we had envisaged. 76 dads attended during the pilot, 11 of these accessed other services which ranged from advice on baby care issues, postnatal depression, sure start dads services and baby massage.

The service was mainstreamed in response to the success and increasing demand for the dads2b courses and increasing evidence highlighting the lack of specific services to engage with expectant fathers (National Audit of Parent Antenatal & Postnatal Education in Scotland 2005)

## The Course

The course now consists of a 4 week core structure and optional extra session to meet group needs.

There is an overall facilitator for each group, with input from a midwife, an early years development worker and visiting dads. Although sessions cover labour, birth and healthcare a large part of the course involves practical sessions on baby care and includes coping with a crying baby and baby massage.

With increasing evidence that greater father involvement is correlated with lower parenting stress and depression in mothers (see review, Fisher et al,2006), and that Fathers depression (like mothers') limits their ability to parent effectively (Huang & Warner 2005), an emphasis within the course is placed on raising awareness of post-natal depression amongst both women and men. Information is given on recognising depression, how to seek help and the support services that are available.

Over 400 Dads have now accessed the service and it achieved good practice recognition by Quality Improvement Scotland in 2007. Other areas such as NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Greater Glasgow have observed the course with a view to replicating or facilitating similar services.

Courses have evolved to meet changing needs and have continued to evaluate well. The most important aspect of the evaluations for facilitators was the comments the dads themselves made on the course;

2004

*"Very practical, hands on, better than reading books"*

*"As a new dad it has all been helpful"*

2005

*"Just being able to discuss our feelings openly was helpful"*

*"it has given me more confidence about..well...everything"*

2006

*"I have learnt a lot of things my wife didn't know, good for **my** confidence. Made me feel more of an equal partner and encouraged me to read further and discuss more with my wife"*

*"above all reassurance! Visiting dad was most helpful".*

2007

*"I feel ready to take on the challenge, without the course I would feel very apprehensive"*

*"Reassured that fathers can care for their newborns"*

2008

*"My knowledge of all things 'baby' has improved 100%"*

*"Feel confident... Told me things which I had not thought about, but now seems like common sense"*

*"Don't miss it, every dad should go."*

## The Way Forward

Given that the course has been so successful we would like to share our experiences and develop materials that could be accessed by all. Future plans and developments would include:

### Locally

- Expanding the course to other areas in Lothian as part of Gender Equality Duty
- Extending our partnership to include the NCT (National Childbirth Trust) and rename this partnership DADS 2 B SCOTLAND.
- Creating an electronic database for bookings and contacts of those attending
- Undertaking academic research into achievement of course aims- measuring perception of confidence levels and involvement with their children in the post natal period. This would support growing evidence that fathers who are taught skills of caring for a newborn tend to be closer to their babies at the time and also later (Nickel & Cocker, 1987; McHale and Houston 1984, Scholz and Samuels 1992)

### Nationally

- Sharing evidence of good practice and partnership working
- Development of a national website, **[www.dads2bscotland.com](http://www.dads2bscotland.com)**, which will become the main resource for dads to be and agencies working with or engaging with dads and young dads to be in Scotland
- Developing the teaching tools and dads2b course content into a toolkit that can be accessed by agencies engaging with men and young men in the antenatal period. This toolkit will be designed so that it can be easily downloaded from the website
- Seeking support of Health Scotland and the Scottish Government to promote these services and resources as fundamental to the Equality Act 2006 and the Gender Equality Duty (enforced April 2007)
- To make available on the website information for dads to be on all aspects of parenting, pregnancy, labour, birth and baby care.

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