

01 Purpose of this Briefing

An understanding of all the significant relationships in a child's life is beneficial. Where parents have separated, the focus should not solely be on the main carer / with who the child resides. When considering the child's needs in the context of parental separation where there has been domestic abuse (including alleged), practitioners need to be aware that there may be ongoing risk and that this may elevate around separation. This briefing contains national and local learning.

02 Engagement with parents post separation

Post separation, unless not appropriate due to domestic abuse / safety concerns, agencies should try to engage with both parents:

- To establish a coherent picture of what the child's life is like
- To triangulate information – e.g., to understand the details of the parents' backgrounds and to explore the impact that the histories of those involved in a child's life may have on the child's experiences
- To ensure there is not an overreliance on parental self-report
- To ensure parents receive consistent messages
- To offer support following custody decisions / significant life changes for the child and parents.

03 Hidden Men

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published their national review entitled [“The Myth of Invisible Men”](#) in September 2021. It is important that fathers/male carers are visible to professionals, otherwise there will be limited opportunities to understand their parental role. They need to be ‘visible’ in records too; practitioners should document more than their attendance. The same level of curiosity and enquiry should be applied to understanding men's lives / experiences as it is to that of women.

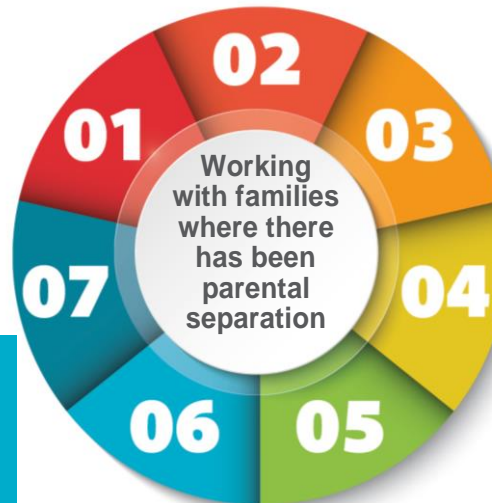
Practitioners should consider any potential risk to children from fathers, any new partners of parents, or other adults with close and regular contact with the family, regardless of sex, gender, or sexuality.

07 Resources to support practice

- [Domestic abuse procedure: understanding escalation of risk and risk post parental separation](#)
- [Practice Principles – Engaging Fathers and Male Carers in Effective Practice](#)
- [Resource Pack: “Invisible”/“Hidden”/“Unseen” Men: Engaging fathers and male carers in effective practice](#)

06 Reviewing Practice

- Have you taken a child-centred and trauma-informed approach, with a focus on the lived experience of the child?
- Have you considered changing relationships and dynamics in a household, for example, with the introduction of new partners, and understood what this might mean for the child?
- Have the child's views informed analysis and assessment so that intervention is appropriate to address key concerns and needs? If concerns are escalating, ensure safeguarding action is taken.
- Where domestic abuse has been a factor, have you considered the child's experiences and the impact of domestic abuse on their safety, wellbeing and development?
- Has information been recorded, triangulated and shared appropriately? Have invitations to strategy discussions/meetings / child protection conferences / core groups been sent to all relevant agencies, including, where relevant, with domestic abuse services, CAFCASS?



04 Domestic abuse and understanding escalation of risk post parental separation

[Women's Aid](#) highlights parental separation is often mistaken as equating to an end of the abuse and a reduction in risk. In fact, risk can continue or increase after separation and it should not automatically be interpreted as a protective factor. The dynamics of domestic abuse are often based on the perpetrator maintaining power and control over their partner. Challenges to that power and control, for example, separation may increase the likelihood of escalating abuse or homicide.

It is not just about the risk of physical abuse. Practitioners need to respond to possible harassment and stalking type behaviours post parental separation.

05 Child contact in the context of domestic abuse and parental separation

When looking at child contact in the context of domestic abuse (including alleged abuse) and parental separation, professionals should consider:

- The motivation of the parent in seeking / maintaining contact with the child – is it a desire to promote the child's best interests or as a means of continuing intimidation, harassment or violence / abuse to the other parent?
- The child's views about contact and whether they have any worries about contact taking place
- In any assessment, the contribution of the wider family network connected to both parents
- The role of each parent in the care and welfare of the child. Remain curious and alert to the risks they may pose, but also any protective factors they may contribute that would be revealed through undertaking a further assessment to establish whether children are safe once adults have separated.