

*Supporting fathers after separation  
or divorce:  
evidence and insights*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Introduction

Since the 1990s, in the UK and many other Western societies, there has been anxiety and extensive debate about the absence of separated fathers from children's lives and the material and emotional costs of this to children, fathers, mothers, and governments. Yet despite the growing literature on divorce-related parenting interventions, claims about their effectiveness continue to be modest and little is known about if and how such programmes may offer support to men as fathers.

The aim of this report is to focus specifically on the issue of fathering after separation or divorce and to review divorce-related interventions potentially available to fathers in this context. It presents findings from an international review of interventions supporting separated parents and/or fathers, undertaken between 2005 and 2012. The time frame was selected in order to identify the most recent interventions and evaluative research and expand the scope of more generic reviews of divorce related interventions.

The review assesses whether and how divorce-related programmes operate to support men's parenting, father-child and co-parental relationships - the process dimension (intervention goals and implementation); and secondly, it seeks to examine the evidence on whether the selected programmes benefit fathers, mothers and children's family relationships after separation or divorce- the outcome dimension (intervention impact and effectiveness).

### Review of Interventions

A comprehensive search of the appropriate social science databases, the Cochrane and Campbell Libraries was carried out initially using the key words 'fathers and divorce' and subsequently alternative combinations of keywords in order to refine the search and identify studies involving programmatic interventions. The most effective were 'fathers and dispute resolution' and 'fathers and co-parenting' and each database was searched using both of these combinations. An electronic search of relevant family support organisations and charities was also conducted, to identify relevant grey literature. In addition, some hand searching, and author's name searching from identified articles, was also undertaken to identify and cross reference any further publications on divorce education programmes aimed at or including fathers.

The criteria used for selection were:

- Evaluations or reports of findings from divorce-related parenting programmes aimed exclusively at, or including separating/separated fathers, and which focus on improving parent-child and coparenting relationships.
- Peer reviewed or commissioned research studies published between 2005-July 2012
- Experimental (e.g. control or comparison groups; pre and post-tests) and exploratory (e.g. qualitative, descriptive or feasibility studies) designs
- Not restricted to the UK, but published in English

### The Interventions

The table below lists each of the 14 interventions and goals. Ten are American, and one each from the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Israel. The set consists of programmes with a parent education focus, some which are more therapeutic or psycho-educational, others which focus on mediation processes and some which combine elements of all of these. The programmes vary in terms of context for delivery, target group and duration, certain common aims can be identified: to increase parental awareness of the impact of separation and divorce on children; to reduce

interparental conflict through the learning or improvement of co-parenting and conflict management skills; to improve outcomes for children; particularly in relation to psychological and emotional adjustment.

In terms of formally stated programme goals, only four programmes: ***Dads For Life, Kids' Turn, The Separated Parents Information Programme, and Supporting Father Involvement***, expressed goals which explicitly related to fathers:

Intervention (n=14)	Country	Brief description
<b>Dads For Life</b> (Braver, Griffin & Cookston 2005, Cookston, Braver, Griffin, Deluse & Miles 2006)	US	Intervention for non-custodial fathers, to improve father-child relationships and reduce interparental conflict
<b>The Collaborative Divorce Project</b> (Kline Pruett, Insabella & Gustafason 2005, Kline Pruett, Ebling & Cowan 2011)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing couples who are parents of young children, to provide wraparound services to support parents and generate a 'culture of collaboration' between them
<b>Kids' Turn</b> (Cookston & Fung 2011)	US	Intervention for all members of a separating or divorcing family, to improve parent-child relations, increase awareness of the impact of separation on children and reduce interparental conflict
<b>Parents Forever</b> (Dworkin & Karahan 2005, Brotherson, White Masich 2010, Brotherson, Rittenbach & White 2012)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing parents, to increase awareness of the impact of separation on children and improve co-parenting skills
<b>Supporting Father Involvement</b> (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett & Kline Pruett, 2006, Cowan, Cowan, Kline Pruett, Pruett & Wong, 2009, Kline Pruett, Cowan, Cowan & Pruett, 2009)	US	Intervention, involving two treatment groups (couples and fathers-only) for low-income families with young children, to support father involvement, prevent coparenting conflict and support coparenting
<b>Focus on Kids</b> (Schramm & Calix 2011)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing parents, to increase awareness of the impact of separation on children and improve coparenting skills
<b>The Parenting Education Programme</b> (Laufer & Berman 2006)	ISRAEL	Intervention for separated or divorced parents to increase awareness of the impact of separation on children and encourage parental cooperation
<b>Separated Parents Information Programme</b> (Trinder et al 2011)	UK	Intervention for separating or divorcing parents, to encourage parents to focus on children's needs and reduce interparental conflict
<b>PACT (Parents Achieving in Collaborative Teams)</b> (Brown et al 2009)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing families experiencing high levels of conflict, to facilitate dispute resolution and reduce interparental conflict
<b>The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme</b> (Whitehurst, O'Keefe & Wilson 2008)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing couples, to increase awareness of children's needs for adjustment after separation and reduce interparental conflict
<b>Parenting Apart</b> (Brandon, 2006)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing parents, to increase awareness of the impact of separation and interparental conflict on children and improve parenting skills to help children's adjustment
<b>Parenting Through Separation</b> (Robertson & Pryor 2011)	NZ	Intervention for separating or divorcing parents, to increase awareness of the impact of separation on children, minimise interparental conflict and increase parental cooperation
<b>Working Together</b> (Owen & Rhoades 2010)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing couples experiencing conflict, to reduce interparental conflict and increase cooperative coparenting
<b>Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution</b> (McIntosh, Wells & Long 2007)	AUS	Intervention for separating or divorcing families experiencing high levels of conflict (including domestic violence), involving two treatment programmes, both aimed at reducing interparental conflict and children's distress

## Summary of Key findings

### General impact of Interventions:

Although the number of intervention studies is limited and the quality of evaluation uneven, there is evidence that programme participation is associated with:

- **Reductions in parental conflict**, even in high conflict cases. This result includes more specific findings such as reduction of conflict in the presence of children, or reduction of breadth and depth of conflict issues. This effect was strong, reported for 11 of the 14 interventions, and cited as a key benefit for children, fathers and mothers.
- **Improvements to the coparental relationship**. The evidence is more modest, not least because the conceptualisation and measurement of this outcome is varied. Reported findings include: increased positive coparenting behaviours, reduced negative coparenting behaviours, improvements in perception of the other parent's coparenting skills and improved relationship adjustment. Seven of the 14 interventions had some impact on coparenting and so it seems fair to say that these programmes may offer support for improving coparenting after separation or divorce.
- **Reduction in children's internalising problems** (children's sadness and low affect) over time, with the effect being strongest for those children experiencing the greatest problems at baseline. Seven of the 14 interventions had some positive effect on child outcomes.
- There is also consistent reporting of **high levels of parental satisfaction and valuing** of divorce-related parenting programmes, particularly immediately after the programme had been completed. This positive response was not affected by whether attendance was voluntary or compulsory.
- Increased parental report of 'intention' to become more **aware of the impact of separation on children**.

### Intervention impact and fathers:

There was no consistent analysis of gender in studies evaluating the potential effects of divorce related parenting programmes. In a significant minority no actual distinction is made between fathers or mothers, with mother and father measures routinely not analysed separately and the term 'parents' being used to present and discuss all findings. Similarly there is no routine disaggregation of parental status (mother or father) and parental residential status (resident or non-resident).

Three studies did disaggregate men's experiences and identities as fathers, either through the design of the intervention or the evaluation, (*Dads For Life, Supporting Father Involvement, The Collaborative Divorce Project*). Seven evaluations present some differentiation between fathers and mothers on co-parenting. The evidence base of these studies is still small, and there is little clear or comprehensive information, particularly on men's parenting or father-child relationships. Even where programmes and evaluations involved goals related explicitly to father involvement, these were sometimes not captured or measured in the evaluation.

### Benefits for children:

Three of the 11 evaluations which offer any discussion of gender report findings which suggest that intervention with fathers brings certain benefits for children. *Dads For Life* reported the

reduction of internalising problems for children (according to both fathers and mothers); and ***Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution*** reported that children experienced improved emotional availability of their fathers. Two further indirect benefits to children arising from father's participation were also reported from ***The Collaborative Divorce Project***: firstly, that father involvement remained constant with a small increase over time, and secondly, that there was an increase in the payment of child maintenance by non-resident parents in intervention families.

### **Improving coparenting:**

Seven of the evaluations which differentiate between fathers and mothers on this dimension reported positive effects of programmes on coparenting behaviours and/or relationship adjustment. In general, these findings relate to the reduction of interparental conflict and the increase in positive coparenting behaviours. In addition to the overall finding that fathers perceive a reduction in conflict, the ***Working Together*** evaluation noted a decrease in conflict in the presence of children, with this effect being slightly stronger for men over time.

Evidence also suggests differences in fathers and mothers perceptions of, and satisfaction with, the coparenting relationship. For example, the ***Working Together*** study showed that whilst both fathers and mothers reported improved coparental relationship adjustment, this effect appeared to decrease for fathers over time. Similarly, in ***Dads For Life***, although the reduction of conflict remained for fathers over time, the positive affect on perceptions of coparenting did not.

With reference to negotiating overnight stays, in the ***Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution*** evaluation, fathers in the CI group reported greater satisfaction with caring arrangements which did not necessarily involve a substantial increase, or 'equal share' in overnight stays, and were more likely to report that the mediation process was 'fair'.

### **Father-child relationships and men's parenting:**

The evidence on ways in which divorce related parenting programmes may improve father-child relationships is very small, predominantly because the majority of studies either did not seek to measure this, or did not report any findings related to it. Indeed where reporting on this question is included, potential effects are often inferred or raised as a discussion point rather than an empirically validated finding.

Very few standardised measures of parent-child relationships were used or adapted across the set of studies, and only two evaluations used a standardised measure of father-child relationships and/or parent-child relationship quality, and did include some reporting of findings related to this.

Findings from both the ***Dads For Life*** and ***The Collaborative Divorce Project*** evaluation infer improvement in father-child relationships by their reporting of improvements in child behavioural outcomes, and slightly increased father involvement over time, respectively, but this potential effect is not reported on directly. The ***Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution*** study reports that children experience increased emotional availability of fathers and greater feelings of closeness to him. Because the child-father measure was used with children only, there are no reported findings on relationship quality from fathers' perspectives, but again, it may be inferred that greater emotional availability and closeness is experienced as a benefit to fathers also.

**Supporting Father Involvement** is the only evaluation to use a direct measure of the father-child relationship, with fathers, and to report the findings. It shows that, in comparison to the control group, both treatment groups (delivered in either couple or fathers-only format) positively affected men's psychological involvement with children, over time. The stronger impact was found for the couple rather than father-only mode of intervention. Only a minority of participants of the **Supporting Father Involvement** programme were separated.

### **Men's psychological responses to separation and divorce:**

There are very few, predominantly inferred, findings which can be linked to men's psychological responses or adjustment (e.g. fathers' perceptions of, 'fairness, or of feeling 'safe' or supported by the programme). One study **Supporting Father Involvement**, reported a decrease in parental stress for both fathers and mothers.

### **Recommendations**

A series of recommendations for developing father-inclusive and gender-sensitive divorce-related parenting programmes relevant to academics, practitioners and policy-makers are offered:

#### **Improving demographic data about fathers**

Basic demographic information on the parental status of men, male fertility and family formation is not routinely collected in many countries. More systematic collection of demographic data on men's lives as fathers would be valuable to researchers, practitioners and policymakers alike.

#### **Incorporation of analysis by gender of parent into evaluation design**

There is no consistent consideration and analysis of gender as part of evaluating the potential effects of divorce related parenting programmes. Developing both more systematic and nuanced ways of including gender as part of programme and evaluation design, would improve understanding of the complex process of family restructuring after separation or divorce.

#### **Further development and application of father-related indicators**

Few father-related measures are used in the evaluation of divorce-related parenting programmes, and where they are present, they are not necessarily reported on. We recommend that existing father-related indicators be more routinely used, and that collaborative work between researchers and practitioners in this field could contribute to the development of further measures of fathering activities and relationships.

#### **Further conceptual work on family restructuring and coparental relationship adjustment after separation and divorce**

Alongside the development of reliable research indicators, there is also a need for appropriate theoretical frameworks to inform programme design and shed light on evaluation data. We recommend further conceptual work on men's parenting, the gendered dynamics of the coparental relationship and changing fathering roles and identities. This work would provide valuable insights for this field of intervention. The importance of applying a critical gender perspective in order to attend to issues of gender difference and of gender equity is recommended.

#### **Undertaking of more formative evaluation and feasibility studies**

The review shows that evidence on the impact of divorce-related parenting programmes on fathers, or on issues relevant to father-inclusive design and implementation for this group of men is surprisingly rare. There is much scope for developing formative evaluation of settings,

practices and processes involved in the provision of such interventions, in addition to summative evaluation of programme effects. Given the current governmental ambition to extend services to separated families, there may also be scope for innovation in developing gender-sensitive and father-inclusive support programmes.

**Increased collaboration between research institutions and practitioners in both statutory and voluntary sectors**

A good deal of support for separated fathers is delivered at a regional and local level, often via various partnerships or commissioning arrangements between statutory and voluntary organisations. In this network of diverse and often imaginative regional provision there is much valuable knowledge and insight. We recommend that increased collaboration between academic researchers and practitioners could be highly productive for improving programme design, implementation and understanding of the complex family processes and relationships involved.

## Introduction

Despite the growing literature on divorce-related parenting interventions, claims about their effectiveness continue to be modest and little is known about how such programmes may offer support to men as fathers. Yet since the 1990s, in the UK and many other Western societies, there has been anxiety and extensive debate about the absence of separated fathers from children's lives and the material and emotional costs of this to children, fathers, mothers, and governments (Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner & Williams, 1999; Collier & Sheldon, 2008, Featherstone, 2009). At the same time there has been increasing awareness of the significance of what men do in and around their family for both children's well-being (Lamb, 2010) and gender equality (Haas and Hwang, 2008) initiating a drive to explore father-inclusive policies and programmes (Lero, 2006). Coltrane (2004) has characterized the simultaneous trends of greater father involvement and increased paternal marginality, especially through relationship breakdown, as constituting the "paradox of fatherhood" in modern times. Historically, a rather narrow economics-oriented view of men's contribution to family life has been adopted by policymakers, resulting in men being viewed primarily through the lens of economic provisioning.

The main target of father-inclusive policy and practice development has been in the area of work-family reconciliation but programmes focused on supporting men's parenting, particularly in challenging and vulnerable family settings, are less well developed (Wall, Leitão and Ramos, 2010). A key issue for father inclusive programmes is achieving a balance between child-wellbeing, paternal involvement and gender equality. Managing the emotional and economic investments of both parents in post-divorce family life is particularly challenging against the consensus of concern over certain key risk factors for children experiencing the separation or divorce of their parents. In summary, these are: the quality of parent-child relationships, parental capacity to be attentive and responsive to children's needs, and interparental conflict (Braver, Griffin & Cookston, 2005; Cookston & Fung, 2011; Kline Pruett, Insabella & Gustafson, 2005; McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007; Trinder, 2010).

The aim of this report is to focus specifically on the issue of fathering after separation or divorce and to review divorce-related interventions potentially available to fathers in this context. There has been little attempt to critically analyse the impact of divorce-related parenting programmes on fathers and their family relationships, or to discuss the challenges of father-inclusive design and implementation in divorce and separation contexts. There is a need to synthesise the most recent research findings and to examine the impact of interventions on fathering but also not to examine post-separation fathering is isolation from the quality of co-parental relationships and child wellbeing, given the risk factors for children outlined above. Also an appreciation of the differences and interconnections between fathers and mothers experiences of caring for children is important (Doucet 2006; Philip, 2012; Smart & May 2004; Smart & Neale 1999).

In the UK, over the past two decades, there has been increasing interest in divorce-related parenting interventions (Hunt & Roberts 2005; Trinder & Kellett, 2007; Trinder et al, 2011) from governments, legal and family welfare professionals in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. This interest is matched internationally, with a particular growth of programmes for separating or divorced parents in the US where the majority of states now have some kind of court-mandated intervention (Schramm & Calix, 2011). However, despite the apparent growth in the provision and credibility of divorce-related parenting interventions, there is less empirical support for their effectiveness, particularly on improving coparental relationships (Owen & Rhoades, 2010; Sigal, Sandler, Wolchik & Braver, 2011). Overall, the evidence demonstrating the effects and impact of such interventions remains mixed (Hunt & Roberts, 2005; Sigal et al, 2011). This field of research is further complicated by the fact that such interventions, and evaluation studies, are both highly variable in terms of design, methods, theoretical underpinning, target group and context for delivery (Amato, 2010; Fackrell, Hawkins & Kay, 2011).

Before moving on to discuss the selected programmatic interventions and present key findings, we now set out the wider demographic patterns and socio-legal context which provide the backdrop for understanding and supporting fathering after separation and divorce.

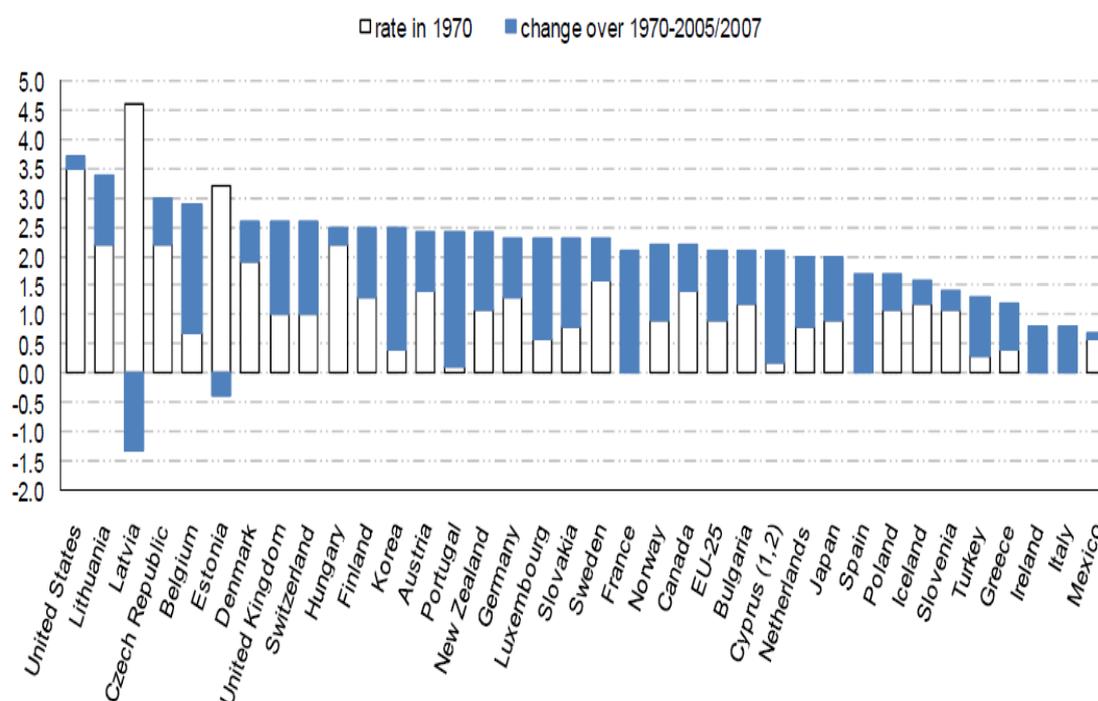
## SECTION 1: Context and background

### 1.1. Demographic patterns

The increase in divorce and re-partnering towards the end of the last century is a key demographic change shaping contemporary fatherhood. The increasing availability and use of divorce across many countries of the world has been a significant antecedent to the growth in fathers living in different households to their children. Since the 1970s crude divorce rates have markedly risen across many developed countries (OECD, 2010, see Figure 1) as part of the second demographic transition. Although divorce rates have stabilized, even declined, in several countries, linked to the decline in marriage rates, divorce, separation of consensual unions and re-partnering have changed the nature of fathers' families. Throughout their life-course, fathers are now more likely than in previous generations to experience more than one family type and in the process fathers typically cease to reside with the children of their first relationship increasing the potential for marginalisation in family life.

Figure 1:

**Increasing crude divorce rates in all OECD countries from 1970 to 2006-2007**  
(Number of divorces per 1000 population)



Sources: OECD Family Database [www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database). OECD, Social Policy Division, Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Eurostat and United Nations Statistics Division.

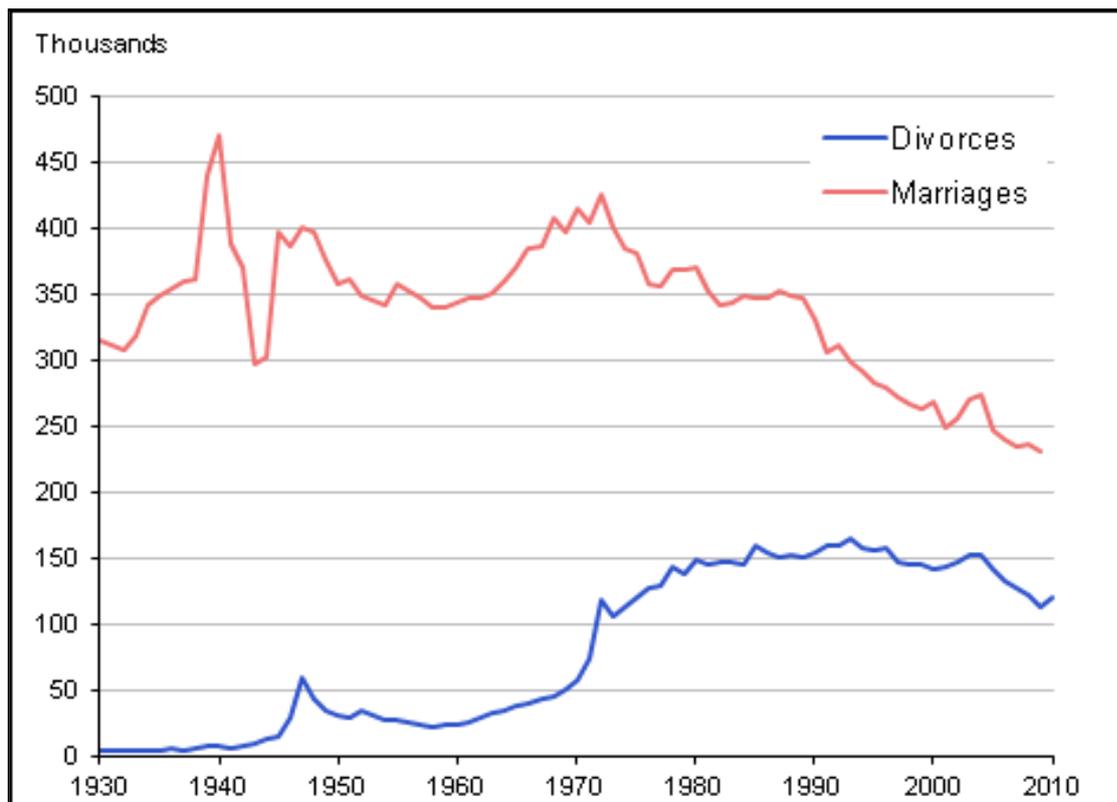
Note: Data refer to 2005 for European Union countries except Germany and France; and to 2006 for Germany, France, Iceland, New Zealand, Turkey and the United States of America.

National rates of lone mother households have been used as a demographic proxy for father absence through divorce and separation. Within Europe 14 percent of households with children are lone mother headed, a doubling over thirty years (EC, 2008). However, actual father involvement with children in this family type can vary considerably and lone mother households

include a wider range of family types than only divorced mothers, most importantly never-married mothers. Notwithstanding these methodological problems, the global growth of lone mother households (OECD, 2010) increases the likelihood of lower levels of spousal/paternal assistance from men to women and children.

The UK reflects a number of these wider patterns, in that divorce rates remain high, though relatively stable (see Figure 2), and there are increased numbers of cohabiting couples and stepfamilies.

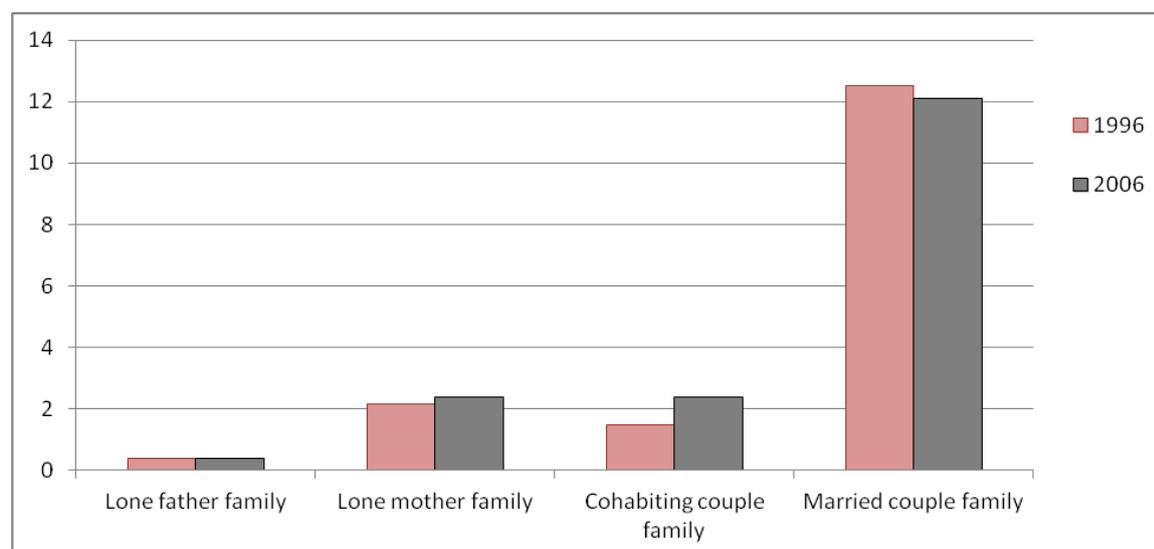
Figure 2:  
**Number of marriages and divorces, 1930–2010**  
England and Wales



(Taken from: ONS (2011) 'Divorces in England and Wales 2010', Statistical Bulletin)

Fathers in the UK are also likely to experience a number of family types, and to be both biological and social fathers to children, across households and geographical distance. There continues to be little systematic demographic data on men in families and households, although as the table below shows, there is some recognition of lone father households as a demographic category.

Figure 3:  
**All families: by family type, 1996 and 2006:**  
 United Kingdom



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics  
 (Taken from: ONS (2007) *Focus on Families*)

## 1.2. Assessing levels of contact between separated non-residential fathers and their children

When fathers leave the family household contact with children is less than when family members co-reside. Early research, often cross-sectional with small samples, suggested that for most divorced and separated fathers, contact with children declines over time (Pasley & Braver, 2004).

Recent longitudinal research from the US shows a more complex picture (Amato, 2010; Cheadle, Amato & King, 2010). In a nationally representative sample tracked over 12 years, only one group, of approximately 23% of fathers, displayed a clear pattern of declining contact (initially highly involved, becoming less so). The largest group of non-resident fathers (38%) maintained a high level of contact (at least weekly) over the 12 years. A further group (32%) remained relatively uninvolved throughout and a minority (8%) gradually increased involvement over the time period. It is likely that these diverse patterns will be found when further cross-national studies are conducted. A variety of variables differentiated between these groups, including the child's age at father-child separation - more contact was maintained when children were older at the point of separation. Also generally father-child contact was at higher levels when mothers were more educated and older at the birth of the child.

Where records are available, which is mostly in Australia and the US, there has been a notable decline in the proportion of 'no contact' non-residential fathers, signalling a diminution in clean break post-separation parenting by fathers. For example, in US 'no contact' rates dropped from 37% of non-residential fathers in 1976 to 29% in 2002 (Amato et. al 2009).

One problem with the contact evidence is that there is a possibility that resident parents (usually mothers) may underestimate non-resident parental contact (usually fathers) and non-resident parents over-estimate their contact levels. For instance, in a UK nationally representative survey 38% of non-resident parents reported direct contact with their children at least once a week and a further 12% reported daily contact (Lader, 2008). By contrast the resident parent sample

reported lower rates of 30% and 6% respectively. These samples were independent, not from the same family group, but nationally representative of resident and non-residential parental households in the UK.

However, taken together, contact research (mainly from developed countries), also suggest more week-day over night caring of children by non-residential fathers, as well as the traditional patterns of alternate weekends and holiday visitation (e.g. Fabricus et al, 2010). For example, in a nationally representative sample of Australian children whose parents had separated within the last 28 months, 16% experienced shared care parenting (defined as 35-65% of nights in the care of each parent) (Kaspiew et al, 2009). Equal care time (48-52% time with each parent) was found for 7% of children. The researchers reported that shared care time was increasing in Australia generally for separated families but also in families where contact arrangements were disputed between parents and finally determined through judicial review. However, the traditional care-time arrangement, of more nights with mother than father, was generally more durable.

### 1.3. Joint legal custody, residence and shared care: the debate

Across the world there is a movement towards awarding joint legal custody to parents after divorce with its emphasis on mutual responsibility for the welfare of the child. The term 'shared care' is frequently used to describe such a movement, but this term can have different meanings in varying contexts and jurisdictions. For example, in some European countries, such as Belgium, joint legal custody does refer to the physical sharing of care, yet in the USA and UK physical and residential custody orders are rarely joint and mothers assume physical and residential custody in a majority (68-88%) of cases (Fabricus et al, 2010).

There is international debate about whether the introduction of 'shared care-time arrangement' presumption would contravene the best interests of the child principle. Under Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC1989) the best interests of the child are deemed paramount in contact decisions over any concept of parental or gender rights to a child. However, the UNCRC also enshrines contact with parents as a basic human right for children (Article 9) and advocates sharing of parental responsibilities (Article 18) as well as listening and respecting the views of children (Article 12).

Box 1

#### **UNICEF FACT SHEET: A summary of the rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

**Article 3 (Best interests of the child):** The best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. All adults should do what is best for children. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. This particularly applies to budget, policy and law makers.

**Article 9 (Separation from parents):** Children have the right to live with their parent(s), unless it is bad for them. Children whose parents do not live together have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this might hurt the child.

**Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child):** When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account. This does not mean that children can now tell their parents what to do. This Convention encourages adults to listen to the opinions of children and involve them in decision-making -- not give children authority over adults. Article 12 does not interfere with parents' right and responsibility to express their views on matters affecting their children. Moreover, the Convention recognizes that the level of a child's participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child's level of maturity. Children's ability to form and express their opinions develops with age and most adults will naturally give the views of teenagers greater weight than those of a preschooler, whether in family, legal or administrative decisions.

**Article 18 (Parental responsibilities; state assistance):** Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children, and should always consider what is best for each child. Governments must respect the responsibility of parents for providing appropriate guidance to their children – the Convention does not take responsibility for children away from their parents and give more authority to governments. It places a responsibility on governments to provide support services to parents, especially if both parents work outside the home.

Box 2

**CHILDREN ACT 1989 England and Wales**

**Under the Children Act 1989, s 1 (1) 'the child's welfare is the court's paramount consideration'**

- (1) When a court determines any question with respect to—
- (a) the upbringing of a child; or
  - (b) the administration of a child's property or the application of any income arising from it, the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount consideration.
- (2) In any proceedings in which any question with respect to the upbringing of a child arises, the court shall have regard to the general principle that any delay in determining the question is likely to prejudice the welfare of the child.
- (3) In the circumstances mentioned in subsection (4), a court shall have regard in particular to—
- (a) the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned (considered in the light of his age and understanding);
  - (b) his physical, emotional and educational needs;
  - (c) the likely effect on him of any change in his circumstances;
  - (d) his age, sex, background and any characteristics of his which the court considers relevant;
  - (e) any harm which he has suffered or is at risk of suffering;
  - (f) how capable each of his parents, and any other person in relation to whom the court considers the question to be relevant, is of meeting his needs;
  - (g) the range of powers available to the court under this Act in the proceedings in question.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/1>

Box 3

**UK Government Advice on Parental Responsibility**

Unlike mothers, fathers do not always have 'parental responsibility' for their children.

**Who has parental responsibility?**

A mother automatically has parental responsibility for her child from birth. However, the conditions for fathers gaining parental responsibility varies throughout the UK.

**For births registered in England and Wales**

In England and Wales, if the parents of a child are married to each other at the time of the birth, or if they have jointly adopted a child, then they both have parental responsibility. Parents do not lose parental responsibility if they divorce, and this applies to both the resident and the non-resident parent. This is not automatically the case for unmarried parents. According to current law, a mother always has parental responsibility for her child. A father, however, has this responsibility only if he is married to the mother when the child is born or has acquired legal responsibility for his child through one of these routes:

- (from 1 December 2003) by jointly registering the birth of the child with the mother
- by a parental responsibility agreement with the mother
- by a parental responsibility order, made by a court
- by marrying the mother of the child

Living with the mother, even for a long time, does not give a father parental responsibility. If the parents are not married, parental responsibility does not automatically pass to the natural father if the mother dies - unless he already has parental responsibility.

Source [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/ParentsRights/DG\\_4002954](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/ParentsRights/DG_4002954) Accessed 28th 2012

These principles are difficult to implement when there are conflicts about contact between a residential parent (usually the mother) and non-residential parent (typically the father). Fathers' lobbyists often complain that courts tend to underplay their child caring competencies whereas mothers' lobbyists declaim fathers' desires for contact without responsibility.

In the UK a central context for the debate over formalising shared care has been the family Justice Review (Norgrove, 2011) and the Coalition Government's subsequent response, consultations and legislation in the form of the draft Children and Families Bill (May, 2012). The stated ambition of the Bill is to reduce barriers stopping parents and carers getting the support they need and to make it easier for parents to share caring responsibilities. In addition, the new legislation aims to give families more choice and support the most vulnerable children, including those in care or whose parents have separated.

Despite existing legislation to facilitate the sharing of care of children after separation or divorce (The Children's Act, 1989) the review set out to consider whether a more collaborative environment for separating parents might be supported through legal reform. Whilst the majority of parents are able to reach agreement without recourse to the law, for a minority of cases experiencing intense or chronic conflict, problems with negotiating caring and financial arrangements for children remain.

In the UK, as in many other Western countries, father's lobbyists tend to favour a formalising of shared parental responsibility, whilst those who oppose legislative change argue that the Children's Act already promotes the continuation of parental relationships after divorce and that any reform risks undermining the core principle of protecting the welfare of the child (Newnham 2011; Trinder 2010).

Political and legal debate in the UK has drawn particularly on research evidence from Australia (Daniel 2009; McIntosh 2009; Smyth 2009) and the US (Kruk 2005, 2012) and has considered the extent to which establishing a legal precedent for 'shared parenting' upholds the existing principle of protecting children's best interests, or supplants this with the promotion of parent's rights (Trinder, 2010). A key concern for many opposed to legislative change is that the existing evidence suggests that legislating for shared care is not inevitably or necessarily in children's best interests and that robust safeguards are needed in cases of continued high conflict or domestic violence. In the UK, the position taken by government is that the promotion of 'shared parenting' can and should be supported through legislative change, but that this is "categorically not about equality in the time that a child spends with each parent after separation" (Department for Education & Ministry of Justice, 2012). The rationale for the proposed amendment to the Children's Act 1989 is presented in terms of the need to strengthen the expectation that both parents are responsible for their children's upbringing. Therefore the intention of the current UK government is to "reinforce the principle that both parents should continue to play a role in their child's care post-separation, providing that this is safe and appropriate" (Department for Education & Ministry of Justice, 2012).

#### **1.4. High conflict contact cases**

Although lawyers may be involved, a majority of separating families organise post separation custody and care arrangements without recourse to formal judicial decision-making. After separation father involvement is higher when parents are child-centred, co-operate, and are flexible and children's well-being is supported in these post-separation environments (Kaspiew, et al 2009). However, estimates show between 2-10% of separating parents have contact arrangements decided by judges in contested cases (Fabricus et al, 2010) and about 14% of separating couples report a highly conflicted relationship (Kaspiew, et al 2009). Although such

conflicts about preferred post-separation care arrangements are a minority pattern they take up large amounts of legal time and parental resources.

Evidence is mixed about the quantity and type of parental conflict which children can tolerate in separated families (Lamb & Kelly, 2010). In many jurisdictions there is a presumption of contact as being in the best interests of children, fathers and mothers, unless there are compelling reasons to prevent it, and indeed this often provides the context for implementing divorce-related parenting education programmes. There is also the broader interest in increasing the amount of contact between children and their non-resident fathers, as part of strengthening father involvement in children's lives. However, in a minority of highly complex and vulnerable cases where there are serious concerns about domestic violence or child abuse from non-residential fathers there is consensus that supervised, limited or no father-child contact is in the best interests of the child (Kaspiew, et al 2009). Such high conflict divorces, where there is violence, have led to investment in supervised family contact centres which have developed in several countries.

### **1.5. Financial support of children after separation and divorce**

Internationally, research suggests that lone mother households are at greater risk of poverty although variation in income levels exists across the world. Countries operate a range of mechanisms to ensure Child Support is paid or enforced. In general formal child support payments can operate to decrease child poverty in mother headed households (Bradshaw, 2006) and are associated with better outcomes for children (Amato & Dorius 2010). For developing countries the lack of an adult male 'breadwinner' after separation can cause considerable adversity for lone mother families and despite the existence of Family Codes, research suggests weak enforcement of maintenance payments by non-residential fathers, especially among the poor (Chant, 2008).

A body of evidence shows that child support is strongly associated with higher levels of non-residential father contact with children although the direction of causation is unclear (Amato & Dorius 2010). Most child support programmes operate under the principle of continuity of parental financial responsibility post separation but disagreement occurs over the amounts non-residential parents, typically fathers, should pay. In order for child support enforcement approaches to be effective they need to mesh with local cultural norms and aspirations about family life and gender roles as well as operate within national tax and welfare models.

Australia has also demonstrated innovation in a new Child Support programme (operational from July 2008) in an attempt to modernise its approach and adapt to new post separation parenting roles. In an 'income shares' and care share approach the amount of care given (and its cost) by non-residential fathers (and mothers) is included in the model calculating financial support transfers (Parkinson, 2010). The essential feature of the proposed new scheme, based on the income shares approach, is that the costs of children are first worked out as a percentage of the parents' combined income, with those costs then distributed between the mother and the father in accordance with their respective shares of that combined income and levels of care (Parkinson, 2010, p 607). Levels of care are carefully defined: 'regular care' is when children are cared for 14 to 34% of nights per year and 'shared care' is for cases where each parent has at least 35% of nights caring for the child. The new formula has helped more fathers accommodate their children over-night, although in the early stages only taken up by about 10% of non-residential Australians (Kaspiew, et al 2009).

In the UK there have also been recent changes to both the system for paying child support and the way in which this is regulated or enforced (DWP 2012). Again, the focus is on facilitating parents to be able to make their own arrangements. To this end, the Department for Work and

Pensions funds the Child Maintenance Options Service to provide support and information to parents and to signpost them to other organisations should they require specialist help or advice. There remains a statutory scheme, to be managed by the Child Support Agency (CSA) which can again advise parents but also calculate and facilitate payments, or implement collection where necessary (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/childrens-futures-consultation.pdf>)

## **1.6. Family separation: health and wellbeing of non-residential fathers**

There is a growing body of evidence showing strong associations between couple relationship breakdown and adult ill-health, both physical and mental (Coleman and Glenn, 2010). The focus tends to be on women and mothers. Historically, the health of fathers generally and separated fathers specifically has rarely been discussed explicitly or tracked in the clinical and medical literature (Garfield et al, 2009). However, since the late 1990s, there has been more interest in fathers' health status and epidemiological evidence indicates that health disparities between the married and divorced are often more severe for men than women (DeGarmo et al, 2010). Studies show that non-residential fathers have poorer physical and emotional wellbeing (higher levels of depression and alcohol use) than divorced men without children and fathers in intact families (Eggebeen and Knoster 2001). A fatherhood status generally accrues wellbeing but "once men step away from co-residence, the transforming power of fatherhood dissipates" (ibid p.391). It is not known whether the stressful experiences of non-residential fatherhood, as well as divorce, create these problems or that the non-residential fathers had pre-existing and enduring difficulties. For example, in a nationally representative Australian study of separated parents half of mothers and one-third of fathers indicated that mental health problems, the misuse of alcohol or drugs, or gambling or other addictions were apparent in the other partner before the separation (Kaspiew, et al 2009). Other research suggests that strengthening divorced men's commitment to children can help buffer against the stresses associated with managing post-separation parenting, but are less successful for fathers reporting antisocial (aggressive) characteristics (DeGarmo et al, 2010).

## **1.7. Funding and development of services to separating families in the UK**

The UK's political landscape in which interventions involving separating fathers are implemented is changing. Central to this has been the Family Justice Review (Norgrove 2011) and the Coalition Government's subsequent response, consultations and legislation in the form of the draft Children and Families Bill (May, 2012). The stated ambition of the Bill is to reduce barriers stopping parents and carers getting the support they need and to make it easier for parents to share caring responsibilities. In addition, the new legislation aims to give families more choice and support the most vulnerable children, including those in care or whose parents have separated.

The current Coalition government have also made a number of financial commitments to 'relationship support' for couples, parents-to-be, new parents, intact families, families experiencing separation, divorce, and step-families. The Prime Minister has pledged £30 million over five years for supporting couple and family relationships, with the establishment of the NHS Information Service for Parents and the CAN Parent pilot of free parenting classes as central to this project. In addition the government intends to fund the expansion of mediation services, establish the Innovation Fund to commission new services for separating parents, and reform the child maintenance system (Department of Work & Pensions, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. However, alongside these spending commitments and arguable recognition of divorce as a common transition in the lives of fathers, mothers and children, the newly passed Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/newsroom/press-releases/2012/jun-2012/dwp067-12.shtml>

Offenders Act 2012 has added to critical debate over the fate of families experiencing this transition. The LASPO Act includes the removal of legal aid from all but a small minority of private law cases, which, added to the concerns over the proposed changes to the Children's Act 1989, mean that many academics, legal and family or children's service professionals fear that the best interests of children will not be served by these policy changes (Ministry of Justice, 2012).

### 1.8. UK support services for fathers experiencing separation or divorce

In the UK most support for families experiencing separation or divorce comes from voluntary sector organisations (see Table 2); the key statutory service comes from The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) although parents may also receive support with issues related to separation via the National network of Sure Start Children's Centres<sup>2</sup>. In general, the most common form of support available to both fathers and to mothers is via the Internet. Organisations including the Centre for Separated Families, Gingerbread and Relate provide online advice and downloadable information, and organisations such as One Plus One, Family Lives and Netmums offer discussion and peer support through online forums; some also providing individual advice and support via a free telephone helpline. The Fatherhood Institute, Families Need Fathers and The Real Fathers for Justice provide targeted support to fathers, again through a combination of online information, publications to download or buy and telephone helpline or counselling services. As part of its overall goal to promoting approaches to engaging with fathers by public services and employers the Fatherhood Institute also offer advice and training to practitioners and organisations.

*Table 1:*  
**UK National organisations offering services to fathers experiencing separation or divorce**

Organisation	Service offered
Action For Children	Mediation services, family group conferencing and supervised contact
CAFCASS	Online information, family court advisors, Separating Parents Information Programme'
Centre for Separated Families	Online information and guidance, email advice, publications available to buy
Families Need Fathers	Membership, online information and guidance, helpline, local branch meetings, factsheets, booklets and other publications available to buy
Family Lives	Online advice and information (leaflets and video clips), support via online forums and telephone advice line
Gingerbread	Online information packs and factsheets, email advice service and helpline
National Family Mediation	Mediation service, online information and delivery of 'Separating parents Information Programme' (SPIP)
Netmums	Online advice and information, links to other organisations and online discussion/peer support forums. From 2012 delivery of 'Raising Happy Children in Separated Families' in partnership with The Fatherhood Institute

<sup>2</sup> All Children's centres now have a remit to actively engage with fathers and male carers. Service provision is usually in the form of Dad's groups or events for fathers and their children, and tends not to be focused specifically on divorce, but the peer support generated by such provision should not be underestimated.

One Plus One	Online information and guidance, online support forum and “do-it-yourself relationship support service”: ‘The Parent Connection’
Real Fathers for Justice	Online information, email advice and helpline, telephone counselling
Relate	Relationship counselling, publications available to buy, delivery of workshops for parents: ‘Parents Apart’, ‘Moving Forward’, and SPIP in several UK locations (sometimes a fee payable) and currently trialling the US programme ‘Kids’ Turn’ (for fathers, mothers and their children)
Resolution	Facilitates mediation, online information/guidance and workshops for parents: ‘Parenting Apart’, in several UK locations (fee payable)
The Fatherhood Institute	Online advice and information, delivery of ‘Staying Connected’ either direct to fathers or to practitioners, and from 2012 ‘Raising Happy Children in Separated Families’ in partnership with Netmums

In terms of programmes delivered directly to parents, in the UK currently there are very few. Whilst The National Mediation Service, CAFCASS and Resolution offer direct access to mediation and dispute resolution services, the only nationally available divorce education intervention delivered to both fathers and to mothers is the **Separated Parents Information Programme** (SPIP). This programme is managed by CAFCASS and delivered via a number of providers, including The National Family Mediation Service and Relate, who operate via regional or local branches. In addition to SPIP, The Fatherhood Institute in partnership with Netmums are now offering a new programme: **Raising Happy Children in Separated Families** in three locations across the UK as part of the Coalition government’s CAN Parent pilot project (<http://www.canparent.org.uk>). This is an extension and development of the FI’s original **Staying Connected** programme, offered to fathers only and delivered in workplace settings. Relate are the only other national organisation to work directly with fathers experiencing separation and divorce: as a provider of SPIP, through their internally developed parent workshops **Parents Apart** and **Moving Forward**, but also, and most pertinent to this report, Relate have been involved in a DfE-funded trial of the American intervention **Kids’ Turn**, in three locations across the UK ([www.kidsturn.org](http://www.kidsturn.org)).

This means that whilst fathers may access support and advice via larger National family support charities, or through provision in their own particular area via local voluntary organisations or Children’s Centres, such provision is very varied. Also, the evidence base in the UK for both the design and evaluation of interventions involving, or aimed specifically at, fathers experiencing separation or divorce, remains comparatively small and there is considerable scope for research and collaboration between academics and practitioners in this field. Our report therefore details what current research evidence there is in the UK but adds to this by reviewing important findings from a number of research-based international interventions, in order to contribute to such a project.

## SECTION 2: Methods

The aim of this review of research literature was to identify and examine programmatic interventions which may support men's parenting, father-child and co-parental relationships after separation or divorce.

In the past five years a number of reviews or meta-analyses have been conducted in related areas including court affiliated divorce education (Fackrell, Hawkins & Kay 2011), generic fatherhood programmes (Bronte-Tinkew, Burkhauser & Metz 2012), mediation orientation (Kitzmann, Parra & Jobe-Shields 2012) and online divorce education (Bowers, Thomann-Mitchell, Hardesty & Hughes 2011). However, none of these focus specifically on the issue of fathering after separation or divorce or seek to collate the range of interventions potentially available to fathers in this context. There has been little attempt to analyse the impact of divorce-related parenting programmes on fathers and their family relationships, or to assess issues relevant to father-inclusive design and implementation.

This review aims firstly, to assess whether and how divorce-related programmes operate to support men's parenting, father-child and co-parental relationships - the process dimension (intervention goals and implementation); and secondly, it seeks to examine the evidence on whether the selected programmes benefit fathers, mothers and children's family relationships after separation or divorce - the outcome dimension (intervention impact and effectiveness).

The review was conducted during December 2011 - February 2012, with further updating during July 2012. The time frame was selected in order to identify the most recent interventions and evaluative research and expand the scope of more generic reviews of divorce-related interventions (Hunt & Roberts, 2005; McBroom 2011; Sigal, Sandler, Wolchik & Braver 2011).

The criteria used for selection were:

- Evaluations or reports of findings from divorce-related parenting programmes aimed exclusively at, or including separating/separated fathers, and which focus on improving parent-child and coparenting relationships.
- Peer reviewed or commissioned research studies published between 2005 - July 2012
- Experimental (e.g. control or comparison groups; pre and post-tests) and exploratory (e.g. qualitative, descriptive or feasibility studies) designs
- Not restricted to the UK, but published in English

The review involved a comprehensive search of the appropriate social science databases initially using the key words 'fathers AND divorce':

The Cochrane Library: *an online collection of databases providing evidence based research and systematic reviews relating to health care interventions, diagnostics and methodology* (<http://www.cochrane.org/cochrane-reviews/access-cochrane-library>)

Using key words 'fathers AND divorce' (all text) produced one clinical trial which fulfilled all the criteria for selection and no systematic reviews:

*An approach to preventing coparenting conflict and divorce in low-income families: strengthening couple relationships and fostering fathers' involvement* (Cowan, Cowan, Kline Pruett & Pruett, 2006)

The Campbell Library: *an online collection of systematic reviews relating to education, crime and justice and social welfare* (<http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library.php>)

Using the same key words produced one submitted title for a systematic review:

*Shared living arrangements after divorce and the wellbeing of children*, (Deding, M, Hansen Stage, S, Ottesen, M & Jorgensen A.M, 2010) and one submitted protocol: *Systematic Review of Marriage and Relationship Programmes* (Stagner, M, Ehrle, J, Kortenkamp, K & Reardon-Anderson, J, 2009) To date, these reviews have not been published.

All other databases that were searched and the number of publications initially identified are presented in Table 3 below:

*Table 2:*  
**Results of initial electronic database search**

Social Science Database	Number of publications identified
Academic Search Elite	9068
Assia	255
Cambridge Journals Online	105
EBSCO	341
JSTOR	7360
Medline	260
Psych Info	973
Scopus	5612
Springer Link Collection	5312
Taylor & Francis Online	66208
Wiley Online Library	24684
Zetoc (Brit Lib)	127

Further searches of these databases were then conducted using alternative combinations of keywords in order to refine the search and identify studies involving programmatic interventions. The most effective were ‘fathers and dispute resolution’ (all text) and ‘fathers and coparenting’ (all text) and each database was searched using both of these combinations.

An electronic search of relevant family support organisations and charities was also conducted, to identify relevant grey literature. In addition, some hand searching, and author’s name searching from identified articles, was also undertaken to identify and cross reference any further publications on divorce education programmes aimed at or including fathers.

From this refined and extended search 30 publications were initially identified. From this, 20 peer reviewed articles and one commissioned report met all the criteria for inclusion, and 14 specific interventions were identified and discussed by two reviewers.

Seven articles were eventually excluded because they did not directly seek to evaluate or report on an intervention, but were more general research studies or theoretical papers on families after divorce and separation (e.g. on parental adjustment, personal stress, or wellbeing), and two because they reported on interventions supporting fatherhood more generally. One commissioned report also had to be rejected as we subsequently found out that it had been published before 2005.

## SECTION 3: Programme Interventions

### 3.1. The interventions

Divorce related parenting programmes have increased in many Western jurisdictions, particularly the US, over the past two decades (Sigal et al, 2011). In the UK, there is increasing ambition to develop interventions of this kind as part of extending services to families experiencing separation or divorce (DWP, 2012). Older reviews of this field of research present such interventions as having: parent-focused, court-focused or child-focused goals, but more recently a paradigm shift is noted whereby interventions and the family law frameworks which surround these have become increasingly child-focused and attentive to “the psychology of family restructure” (McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007; 9; Robertson & Pryor, 2011).

From the literature search we identified 14 programmatic interventions which included fathers and focused on improving outcomes for children by improving parental and coparental relationships. Ten of these are American, and one from the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Israel. The set consists of some programmes with a parent education focus, some which are more therapeutic or psycho-educational, others which focus on mediation processes and some which combine elements of all of these. While these programmes vary in terms of context for delivery, target group and duration, they also share certain common features. Table 4 below gives a brief description of each intervention along with its country of origin.

*Table 3:  
Brief description of all divorce-related parenting programmes examined*

Intervention (n=14)	Country	Brief description
<b>Dads For Life</b> (Braver, Griffin & Cookston 2005, Cookston, Braver, Griffin, Deluse & Miles 2006)	US	Intervention for non-custodial fathers, to improve father-child relationships and reduce interparental conflict
<b>The Collaborative Divorce Project</b> (Kline Pruett, Insabella & Gustafson 2005, Kline Pruett, Ebling & Cowan 2011)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing couples who are parents of young children, to provide wraparound services to support parents and generate a ‘culture of collaboration’ between them
<b>Kids’ Turn</b> (Cookston & Fung 2011)	US	Intervention for all members of a separating or divorcing family, to improve parent-child relations, increase awareness of the impact of separation on children and reduce interparental conflict
<b>Parents Forever</b> (Dworkin & Karahan 2005, Brotherson, White Masich 2010, Brotherson, Rittenbach & White 2012)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing parents, to increase awareness of the impact of separation on children and improve co-parenting skills
<b>Supporting Father Involvement</b> (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett & Kline Pruett, 2006, Cowan, Cowan, Kline Pruett, Pruett & Wong, 2009, Kline Pruett, Cowan, Cowan & Pruett, 2009)	US	Intervention, involving two treatment groups (couples and fathers-only) for low-income families with young children, to support father involvement, prevent coparenting conflict and support coparenting
<b>Focus on Kids</b> (Schramm & Calix 2011)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing parents, to increase awareness of the impact of separation on children and improve coparenting skills
<b>The Parenting Education Programme</b> (Laufer & Berman 2006)	ISRAEL	Intervention for separated or divorced parents to increase awareness of the impact of separation on children and encourage parental cooperation

<b>Separated Parents Information Programme</b> (Trinder et al 2011)	UK	Intervention for separating or divorcing parents, to encourage parents to focus on children's needs and reduce interparental conflict
<b>PACT (Parents Achieving in Collaborative Teams)</b> (Brown et al 2009)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing families experiencing high levels of conflict, to facilitate dispute resolution and reduce interparental conflict
<b>The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme</b> (Whitehurst, O'Keefe & Wilson 2008)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing couples, to increase awareness of children's needs for adjustment after separation and reduce interparental conflict
<b>Parenting Apart</b> (Brandon, 2006)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing parents, to increase awareness of the impact of separation and interparental conflict on children and improve parenting skills to help children's adjustment
<b>Parenting Through Separation</b> (Robertson & Pryor 2011)	NZ	Intervention for separating or divorcing parents, to increase awareness of the impact of separation on children, minimise interparental conflict and increase parental cooperation
<b>Working Together</b> (Owen & Rhoades 2010)	US	Intervention for separating or divorcing couples experiencing conflict, to reduce interparental conflict and increase cooperative coparenting
<b>Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution</b> (McIntosh, Wells & Long 2007)	AUS	Intervention for separating or divorcing families experiencing high levels of conflict (including domestic violence), involving two treatment programmes, both aimed at reducing interparental conflict and children's distress

### 3.2. Shared aims of divorce-related parenting programmes

Theoretical understanding and research evidence about protective and risk factors to children's adjustment to separation and divorce informed the rationale and design of all of the programmes investigated. All of the interventions selected for investigation aimed to address inter-parental conflict, and to improve coparenting. Therefore this set of interventions can be said to have three central and common aims:

- To increase parental awareness of the impact of separation and divorce on children
- To reduce inter-parental conflict through the learning or improvement of coparenting and conflict management skills
- To improve outcomes for children; particularly in relation psychological and emotional adjustment

### 3.3. Programme goals

Alongside the common aims, each programme also involved a number of more specific programme goals. **Increasing parental awareness of the impact of separation and divorce on children** was operationalised into a programme goal for all of the programmes, but took different forms, including: increasing knowledge of children's developmental and adjustment needs; increasing capacity to focus on the needs and interests of children after separation, or increasing knowledge and appreciation of children's emotional or psychological responses to separation or divorce. **Providing opportunities for parents to learn or improve co-parenting and conflict management skills** was also a stated programme goal across all of the 14 programmes, expressed in a variety of ways, including: increasing authoritative parenting;

improving communication and conflict resolution skills; reducing conflict in the presence of children, or reducing negative attitudes or co-parenting behaviours towards the other parent. Other recurring programme goals include:

- Increased positive coparenting behaviours, such as support for relationship with the other parent, supporting contact and relationship with a non-resident parent
- Improved co-parental relationship adjustment or 'parental alliance'
- Improved child wellbeing and adjustment
- Facilitation group support of members
- Increased stability or compliance with parenting plans or court orders
- Reduction in use of legal system or re-litigation

Four programmes: *Dads For Life*, *Kids' Turn*, *The Separated Parents Information Programme*, and *Supporting Father Involvement*, expressed programme goals which explicitly related to fathers:

- Increased father involvement – in terms of amount or type of contact, and quality of relationship
- Increased support of fathers by mothers

In addition, *Dads For Life* identified two goals related to strengthening father involvement and father adjustment:

- Increased commitment to parenting role
- Increased perceived control over divorce-related events

### 3.4. Target group, setting and duration

**Target Group:** Despite sharing certain aims and programme goals the programmes varied in terms of who was included in the intervention, the context and setting in which the interventions was delivered, and the duration and timing of delivery (see table 5 below).

Two programmes (*Dads For Life* and *Supporting Father Involvement*) were aimed specifically at fathers, with *Dads For Life* focusing exclusively on non-resident fathers (see Box 4).

*Supporting Father Involvement* included divorced or separated fathers as part of a larger group of fathers in low-income families (including fathers who had never lived with their children). Six programmes involved individual fathers and mothers (*Parents Forever*, *Focus on Kids*, *The Separated Parents Information Programme*, *Parenting Apart*, *The Parenting Education Programme*, and *Parenting Through Separation*), three involved couples (*The Collaborative Divorce Project*, *The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Project*, and *Working Together*), and three involved families (*Kids' Turn*, *PACT* and *the Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution Project*).

#### Box 4

**Dads For Life** is a preventive programme aimed to improve child wellbeing and adjustment to divorce by promoting stronger fathering involvement and reducing interparental conflict.

It was designed to complement an earlier programme 'New Beginnings' aimed at resident/custodial mothers (Wolchik et al 2002).

Programme targeted non-resident fathers with at least one child aged 4-12, but gathered also evaluation data from mothers, a 'focus child' and, where possible, that child's teacher.

The programme is intensive: a total of 15.5 hours, delivered through 8 weekly group sessions and 2 individual sessions, by pairs of trained and supervised counsellors. The content is delivered through brief presentations followed by group discussion, role play and homework activities. Each session centres on video presentations, modelling appropriate and inappropriate parenting behaviours or skills.

The programme has four specific 'intervention goals for fathers':

- **Increase commitment to parenting role**
- **Improve parenting skills**
- **Increase motivation & skills for conflict management**
- **Increase perceived control over divorce events**

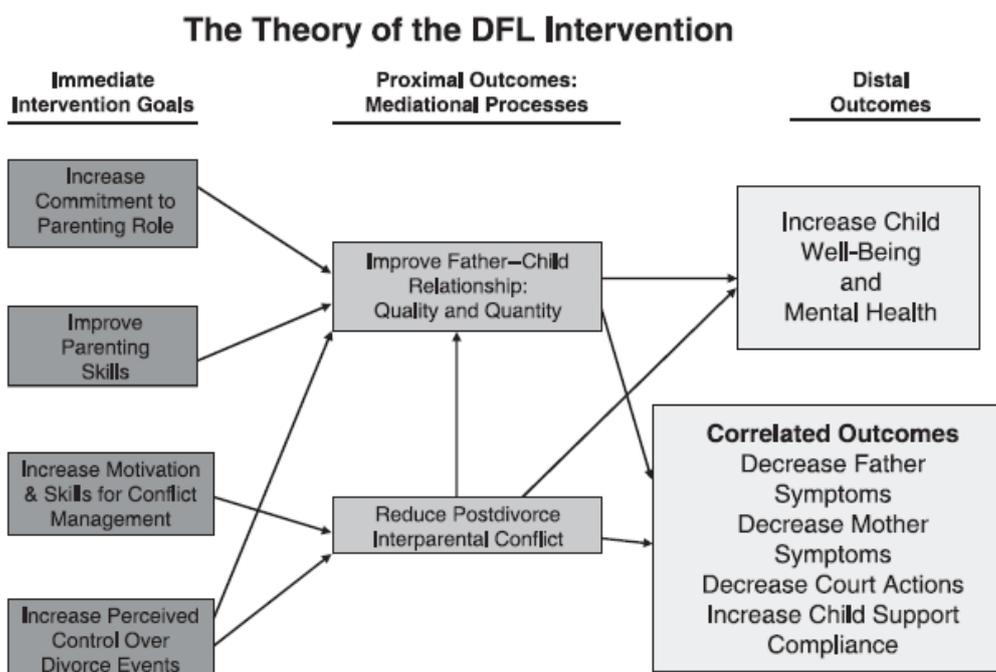


Figure 1. *The theory of the Dads For Life intervention.*

Taken from: Braver, Griffin & Cookston, 2005, 'Prevention Programs for Divorced Non-resident Fathers', *Family Court review*, Vol.43, No.1

Other selection criteria used to target eligible parents for intervention were varied. Notable variations were in the age of children within the family, length of time since separation or divorce and level of conflict between parents. Screening mechanisms were used in all of the programmes, with a consistent focus on excluding cases where either parent had a drug or alcohol problem, and where there was a current or on-going situation of domestic violence. Out of the four programmes designed for families experiencing high and/or prolonged levels of

conflict, only one ***The Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution Programme***, did not exclude family violence cases, as it was “deemed appropriate to explore comparative outcomes around this issue” (McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007:11).

Two programmes (***Supporting Father Involvement*** and ***The Collaborative Divorce Project***) were aimed specifically at families with young children (aged 0-7). Some programmes, for example ***Dads For Life***, or ***PACT*** required families to have at least one child of school age, and others, for instance ***Focus on Kids***, or ***Kids’ Turn***, the age limit was 18 years.

A minority of the programmes are intended to be used more preventively, or specifically for parents in the early stages of separation; the strongest example being ***The Collaborative Divorce Project***. ***Supporting Father Involvement*** is also a preventive programme in that whilst it includes couples who are separated or divorced, it focuses on families at risk of relationship (both couple and coparental) breakdown, who may be married, co-habiting or who have never lived together. The majority of the programmes are available to parents at any stage of the separation or divorce process, but the few that are designed for parents experiencing high levels of conflict often also include families where there has been prolonged dispute over time. Four of the programmes are aimed at families experiencing moderate to high levels of inter-parental conflict: ***The Separated Parents Information Programme***, ***PACT***, ***Working Together***, and ***Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution***.

**Context and setting for delivery:** To some extent, the variation in how or where these divorce related parenting programmes are delivered reflects the wider organisation of welfare services and family law in the different countries of origin. The funding and resourcing of such interventions, particularly in the US tends to come from collaborations between academic and public health research institutions, State or County legal services and community-based family support organisations. In other jurisdictions where there is some kind of Public Health Care system, there may be centrally funded or statutory services, alongside collaboration with the voluntary sector and Universities. In addition, the majority of divorce related services are connected to the private or family law system in some way. Five of our selected programmes are court-affiliated, whereby parents may be referred or recommended to participate (***The Collaborative Divorce Project***, ***Parents Forever***, ***The Parenting Education Programme***, ***PACT***, and ***Parenting Through Separation***); four are court-mandated, where parents (or at least one parent) can be ordered to attend (***The Separated Parents Information Programme***, ***The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme***, ***Parenting Apart***, and ***Working Together***), and five are, or were, available within the community, for parents to be referred or signposted to, or to voluntarily approach (***Dads For Life***, ***Kids’ Turn***, ***Supporting Father Involvement***, ***Focus on Kids***, and ***The Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution Project***).

**Duration:** In terms of duration and ‘dosage’, again these selected programmes are varied. Five fall into the category of ‘brief divorce education programmes’ (***Parents Forever***, ***Focus on Kids***, ***The Separated Parents Information Programme***, ***Parenting Apart***, and ***Parenting Through Separation***) in that they provide 1-6 hours of instruction and learning; emphasise knowledge of the divorce process and the impact of divorce, and inter-parental conflict on children; and are designed to meet court system requirements whilst still encouraging participant adjustment and wellbeing (Brandon, 2006; Brotherson, White & Masich, 2010). The remaining nine are longer programmes, in terms of both total number of contact hours, and number of weeks (see table 5 below).

Table 4:

**Programme target group, setting, duration and timing of delivery**

Intervention (n=14)	Target group	Delivery setting	Total duration	Delivery
<b>Dads For Life</b>	Fathers	Community	15.5 hours	1 hour 45 minutes sessions plus two individual 45minute sessions over 8 weeks
<b>The Collaborative Divorce Project</b>	Couples	Court-affiliated	Flexible but minimum of 12 hours	1-2 hour sessions (plus one follow up meeting) over 10 weeks
<b>Kids' Turn</b>	Families	Community	9 hours	1.5 hour sessions over 6 weeks
<b>Parents Forever</b>	Parents	Court-affiliated	4 hours	Single session
<b>Supporting Father Involvement</b>	Fathers in low-income families	Community	32 hours	2 hour sessions over 16 weeks
<b>Focus on Kids</b>	Parents	Community	2.5 hours	Single session
<b>The Parenting Education Programme</b>	Parents	Court-affiliated	12 hours	3 hour sessions over 4 weeks
<b>Separated Parents Information Programme</b>	Parents (moderate-high conflict)	Court-ordered	4 hours	Either single session or two 2 hour sessions
<b>PACT (Parents Achieving in Collaborative Teams)</b>	Families (high conflict)	Court affiliated	16 hours	6 sessions over approx 8 weeks
<b>The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme</b>	Couples	Court-ordered	12 hours	2 hour sessions over 6 weeks
<b>Parenting Apart</b>	Parents	Court-ordered	4 hours	Single session
<b>Parenting Through Separation</b>	Parents	Court-affiliated	4 hours	2 hour sessions over 2 weeks
<b>Working Together</b>	Couples (high conflict)	Court-ordered	12 hours	Four 1 hour sessions over 3 days
<b>Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution</b>	Families (high conflict, including DV)	Community	CF: 5 hours CI: 6 hours plus 1 separate hour per child	CF: up to 7 sessions CI: up to 7 sessions

### 3.5. Programme format, teaching and learning activities

In general the programmes share a number of common features in terms of teaching, learning and support techniques. Despite the variation in programme goals and duration, almost all of the programmes used a mixed format approach to delivering content, including brief formal or didactic presentations, group discussion, interactive or practical exercises and open-ended discussion time where parents can share experiences or issues from their own lives. Four programmes (***Dads For Life, Supporting Father Involvement, Kids' Turn, and The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme***) all delivered over a number of weeks, also

involved homework tasks as a way of practising new skills. The two exceptions to this pattern are **The Collaborative Divorce Programme** and **PACT**. Both of these programmes provide a form of 'wraparound services' for separating families, involving close case management by programme leaders, the galvanising of community and wider family support networks, mediation services, clinical or psycho-educational intervention and collaboration with legal and mental health professionals (Brown, Bledsoe, Yankeelov, Christensen, Rowan & Cambron, 2009; Kline Pruett, Insabella & Gustafson, 2005).

There are also certain key teaching tools which appear to be common across the majority of programmes: one is some kind of manual or handbook. In some cases, this is to formalise the curriculum, not least for training purposes and programme fidelity. However, in many cases, a version of the programme manual is produced for parents, as a course handbook, and/or workbook, to use during the programme and for future reference.

The second common teaching tool which many of these programmes share is the use of short films and/or vignettes depicting situations or issues that children may face when their parents separate. These films are either scripted and played by actors, or involve 'real' children and their families, but are frequently cited by programme leaders and participants as being a powerful means of generating reflection and potential change in family relationships. In two programmes, **Kids' Turn** (Box 5) and **Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution**, children and young people are directly involved in the programme, via specially designed group and/or counselling work. In both cases children's views and feelings are shared with parents, through programme leaders or in the form of a newsletter, and again, the input is used to provoke reflection, insight and knowledge gain for parents.

Box 5:

**'Kids' Turn'** is a community-based, divorce-related parenting education programme, which originated in the US (California) in 1988. It was developed as an early intervention and prevention model but is now used for families who have been separated for some time.

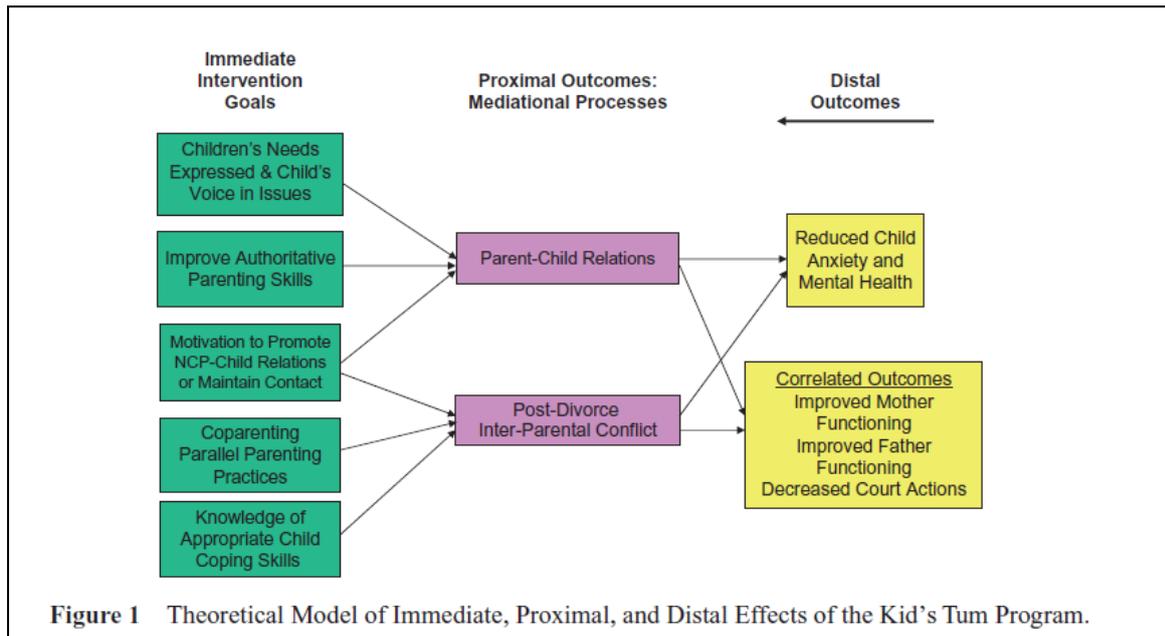
The programme is delivered to all family members: fathers, mothers and children, in mixed sex (but non-couple) groups for adults and age specific groups for children.

It consists of six, weekly sessions of 1.5 hours, held on a weekday evening or a Saturday. The content is delivered in a range of formats, including: formal presentation, group discussion, skills activities, role play and homework. Children also produce their own newsletter to explain their own experiences and feelings about separation and divorce.

*"It can be very powerful to have parents and children learning the same things at the same time"*

*"Kids' Turn is very intense – for families, facilitators and volunteers, and a great deal of collaboration and coordination is needed"*

(Personal communication, Cambridgeshire Kids' Turn coordinator, May 2012)



Taken from: Cookston, J & Fung, W (2011) 'The Kids' Turn Program Evaluation: Probing change within a community-based intervention for separating families', *Family Court Review*, Vol.49 (2) pp348-363

### 3.6. The evaluation studies

Each of the programmes included in this report has been subject to at least one evaluation study, with a small minority of programmes having been evaluated more than once. Just as the programmes themselves vary, so too does the design and methods of these evaluations, making comparison between programmes and assessment of the evidence more challenging. A number of the evaluation studies also reflect on specific issues related to the design and implementation of divorce related parenting programmes, for both researchers and practitioners, and we draw on these insights later in the report. Evaluation is crucial for demonstrating the effects of intervention, identifying or differentiating between 'active ingredients' (Emery, Sbarra & Grover, 2005) or most receptive participants, but also for establishing participant satisfaction and perceptions of an intervention. In this field of research, evaluation has attempted to investigate all of these dimensions, but a small number of the studies presented here have focused on the latter. In what follows, we present and discuss the research design and methods used, sampling processes, and measures used to assess aspects of the programmes.

#### Study design

Four of the evaluation studies are experimentally designed, in the form of a randomised controlled trial. ***Dads For Life, The Collaborative Divorce Project, Supporting Father Involvement*** and ***The Co-operative Parenting and Divorce Project***, all involve random allocation of participants to a treatment or control group. It is also important to note that in the cases of ***Dads For Life, The Collaborative Divorce Project*** and ***Supporting Father Involvement***, the researchers and authors of the evaluation are also the designers of the intervention itself, with the evaluation being built in from the outset. The nature of the control group took different forms, for example, receiving a low dose version of the intervention, such as with ***Dads For Life***, or being a wait-list control group, as with the ***Co-operative Parenting and Divorce Programme***.

Although not using a strict experimental design, also notable is the **Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution** evaluation study, where a two stage lagged design was used in order to create a comparison between the two intervention models. **The Separated Parents Programme** also involved a comparison group of parents who had not attended the programme as part of their journey through the family court. The remainder of the evaluations had no comparison or control group and often relied on retrospective reporting after parents or couples had completed the programme.

Three studies; an early evaluation of **Parents Forever** (2005), the UK evaluation of **The Separated Parents Information Programme** (2011), and **Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution** included a qualitative element, involving interviews with parents, and/or focus groups.

Table 5:  
**Design and data collection methods involved in each of the evaluation studies**

Evaluation study (n=16)	Design	Methods
<b>Dads For Life</b>	Experimental: randomised control trial (low dose control group)	Structured interviews using standardised measures; pre & post-test, 2 follow-ups up to 2 years; evaluation & outcome data also collected from mothers, focus children and teachers
<b>The Collaborative Divorce Project</b>	Experimental randomised control trial (mandatory state programme only)	Self-complete questionnaires using adapted standardised measures; pre & post-test, 1 follow-up to 18 months; evaluation & outcome data also collected from teachers, lawyers and court records
<b>Kids' Turn</b>	Quantitative: longitudinal study (no comparison group)	Self-complete questionnaires; pre & post-intervention
<b>Parents Forever Evaluation 1 (2005)</b>	Qualitative: cross-sectional	Semi-structured telephone interviews; post-intervention
<b>Parents Forever Evaluation 2 (2010)</b>	Quantitative: cross-sectional	Self-complete, retrospective questionnaires; post-intervention
<b>Parents Forever Evaluation 3 (2012)</b>	Quantitative: cross-sectional	Self-complete questionnaires; post-intervention and follow-up
<b>Supporting father Involvement</b>	Experimental, randomised control trial (with two treatment groups (couples and fathers-only); low-dose control group)	Interview-administered questionnaires using standardised measures; pre-test, post-test at 9 months, follow-up 18 months (NB added videotaped interactions between father-child and mother-child at follow-up but to date no published data available)
<b>Focus on Kids</b>	Quantitative longitudinal study (no comparison group)	Self-complete, retrospective questionnaires; pre & post-intervention and follow-up between 4-10 months
<b>The Parenting Education Programme</b>	Quantitative cross-sectional	Self-complete questionnaires; retrospective post-intervention
<b>Separated Parents Information Programme</b>	Mixed methods, cross-sectional with match comparison	Telephone survey, in-depth interviews and focus groups with parents and with professionals; post-intervention
<b>PACT (Parents Achieving in Collaborative Teams)</b>	Quantitative longitudinal study (no comparison group)	Self-complete questionnaires using standardised measures, case file reviews; pre-intervention and 2 follow-up

<b>The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme</b>	Experimental randomised control trial (wait-listed control group)	Self-complete questionnaires using standardised measures, focus group; pre & post-test and follow-up at 12-18 weeks
<b>Parenting Apart</b>	Quantitative longitudinal study (no comparison group)	Self-complete questionnaires; pre & post-intervention and follow-up
<b>Parenting Through Separation</b>	Quantitative longitudinal study (no comparison group)	Self-complete questionnaires using adapted standardised measures; pre & post-intervention and follow-up at 4-6 months
<b>Working Together</b>	Quantitative longitudinal study (no comparison group)	Self-complete questionnaires using adapted standardised measures; pre & post-intervention and follow-up
<b>Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution</b>	Mixed methods; repeated measures, two stage, lagged design	Structured interviews using standardised measures with parents and children; pre-intervention and 2 follow-up; self-complete questionnaires for mediators; post-intervention

### Evaluation samples

The sample sizes for this set of evaluations are generally not large. For the four experimental designs, sample sizes ranged between 32-289 participating couples, fathers or families, with smaller control groups. For the remaining non-experimental designs, six evaluations had samples of more than 100 participants and four had samples of less than 100. There were also two survey evaluations that involved initially large numbers (more than 2000) of participants, but with significantly lower numbers at follow-up.

*Table 6:  
Numbers in sample, control group and follow-up*

Evaluation study (n=16)	Sample size	Control N	Follow up
<b>Dads For Life</b>	214 fathers	Control group received home, individual-based version 87 fathers	3 waves up to 15 months after baseline
<b>The Collaborative Divorce Project</b>	161 couples	Control group received State 6 hour mandatory education only N not given but randomly allocated.	153 (6 months) 142 (15-18 months)
<b>Kids' Turn</b>	61 parents		
<b>Parents Forever Evaluation 1 (2005)</b>	89 parents		
<b>Parents Forever Evaluation 2 (2010)</b>	342 parents		
<b>Parents Forever Evaluation 3 (2012)</b>	238 parents		82 (2 months)
<b>Supporting Father Involvement</b>	289 couples	132 low dosage couples	Post-test at 9 months, follow up at 18 months

<b>Focus on Kids</b>	2274 parents		149 (between 4-10 months)
<b>The Parenting Education Programme</b>	130 parents (54 fathers)		
<b>Separated Parents Information Programme</b>	349 PIP parents	Individually matched comparison group selected from courts not ordering PIP 292 Non-PIP parents	
<b>PACT (Parents Achieving in Collaborative Teams)</b>	14 couples		9 (6 months) 5 (12 months)
<b>The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme</b>	32 parents	29 parents	19 (between 3-4months)
<b>Parenting Apart</b>	9876 parents		345 (between 3-9 months)
<b>Parenting Through Separation</b>	119 parents		83 (4 months)
<b>Working Together</b>	20 parents (8 fathers)		17 (2 months)
<b>Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution</b>	181 families; 111 to CF condition; 70 to CI condition		CF: 67 (1 year) CI: 56 (1 year)

Participants were identified by a range of means, with the most common being recruiting from a larger group of fathers and mothers who had attended the programme, either voluntarily, or by order of the court. Three studies selected or recruited participants from court files (***Dads For Life, The Collaborative Divorce Project, and The Parenting Education Programme***), two used local media and community advertising (***Parents Forever*** and ***Supporting Father Involvement***) and three involved referrals or sponsoring from Family Welfare services or Relationships Centres (***Supporting Father Involvement, Parenting Through Separation and The Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution Project***).

### What do the evaluation studies measure?

In order to assess the impact of the programmes, each evaluation study involved applying, adapting or creating certain measures for programme goals or hypothesised outcomes.

In general, outcomes measured related to parents (sometimes fathers and mothers), children, use of the legal system, and parent satisfaction with the programme. The majority of evaluations measured some combination of these, but three studies (***Focus on Kids, The Parenting Education Programme*** and ***Parents Forever***) focused only on parent satisfaction and perceptions of usefulness, knowledge gain or 'anticipated behaviour change' (Schramm & Calix, 2011).

Table 7:  
**Types of outcomes measured by programme evaluations**

Outcome measured	No. of programmes
Reported behaviour change and adjustment for parents and for children	7
Reported behaviour change and relationship adjustment for parents only	5
Legal outcomes (such as reduced re-litigation)	3
Reported behaviour change and relationship adjustment for fathers	2

### Standardised measures

As shown in Table 9 below, seven out of the 16 evaluation studies examined here made use of existing standardised measures, in order to identify an effect of the intervention. Standardised measures involve structured questionnaires with pre-selected responses and/or rating scales, which have been tested for reliability and validity. Of these, two evaluations; **The Collaborative Divorce Project** and **Supporting Father Involvement** used standardised scales designed specifically to measure father involvement or fathering relationships.

The remaining nine evaluations (all three studies of **Parents Forever, Focus on Kids, The Parenting Education Programme, The Separated Parents Information Programme, The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme, Parenting Apart** and **Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution**) used original measures designed for each particular programme, by the researchers and sometimes in collaboration with programme leaders. These measures also took the form of structured questionnaires and rating scales, and were most often designed in relation to programme aims and goals.

Table 8:  
**Standardised measures used to evaluate programme effects**

Evaluation study (n=8)	Measures used or adapted
<b>Dads For Life</b>	<p><b>Co-parenting:</b> adapted from Dumka, Prost &amp; Barrera, 2002</p> <p><b>Interparental Conflict:</b> adapted from <i>Children's perception of Interparental Conflict Scale</i> (CPICS), Grych, Seid &amp; Fincham, 1992</p> <p><b>Child behavioural Problems:</b> adapted from <i>Child Behaviour Checklist</i> (CBCL), Achenbach, 1991</p>
<b>Collaborative Divorce Project</b>	<p><b>Family socioeconomic status:</b> <i>CDP Questionnaire</i> &amp; Hollingshead, 1975</p> <p><b>Parent Psychological Functioning:</b> <i>Brief Symptom Inventory</i> (BSI) (Derogatis, 1993)</p> <p><b>Co-parental cooperation:</b> <i>Discuss and Share Decision Making Scale</i> (Ahrns, 1981, 1983)</p> <p><b>Co-parental conflict:</b> <i>Acrimony Scale</i> (Emery, 1997) and <i>Content of Conflict Checklist</i> (Johnston rev. 1996)</p> <p><b>Paternal Involvement and Access:</b></p> <p>Participation in Childrearing (Ahrns, 1991, 1993)</p> <p>Regularity and Consistency: <i>Father Role Scale</i> (Seltzer 1991)</p> <p>Satisfaction with Arrangements: <i>Stanford Child Custody Study</i> (Maccoby, Mnookin &amp; Depner, 1993)</p> <p>Residential Schedules: <i>Families in Transition Questionnaire</i> (Wallerstein &amp; Kelly, 1980; Kline, Johnston, Tschamm &amp; Wallerstein, 1989)</p> <p><b>Parent-Child Relationship:</b></p> <p>Negative Changes: <i>Stanford Child Custody Study</i> (Maccoby, Mnookin &amp; Depner, 1993)</p> <p><b>Child Outcomes:</b></p> <p>Behaviour Problems and Social Competence: <i>Child Behaviour Checklist, Parents' and</i></p>

	<p><i>Teachers Versions</i> (Achenbach 1991, 1992)  <i>Vineland Screener for Adaptive Behaviour Skills</i> (Sparrow, Balla &amp; Chicchetti, 1984)</p>
<b>Kids' Turn</b>	<p><b>Co-parenting:</b> Dumka, Prost &amp; Barrera, 2002  <b>Interparental Conflict:</b> adapted from <i>Children's perception of Interparental Conflict Scale</i> (CPICS), Grych, Seid &amp; Fincham, 1992  <b>Parental Alienation:</b> adapted from 'Dads For Life' (Braver, Griffin, Cookston, Sandler &amp; Williams, 2005)  <b>Conflict Breadth:</b> adapted from 'Dads For Life' (Braver, Griffin, Cookston, Sandler &amp; Williams, 2005)  <b>Sharing Problems with Parents:</b> adapted from Wolchik &amp; Sandler 2000  <b>Divorce Communication:</b> original design  <b>Parent-Child Communication:</b> <i>Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale</i> (Barnes &amp; Olson, 1982)  <b>Family Routines Inventory</b> (Jensen, James, Boyce &amp; Hartnett, 1983)  <b>Parenting Identity:</b> adapted from 'Dads For Life' (Braver, Griffin, Cookston, Sandler &amp; Williams, 2005)  <b>Brief Symptom Inventory</b> (BSI) (Derogatis 1975) for Anxiety and Depression  <b>Behaviour Problems Inventory:</b> adapted from <i>Child Behaviour Checklist</i> (Achenbach &amp; Edelbrock, 1983)</p>
<b>Supporting Father Involvement</b>	<p><b>Father-child relationship:</b> Psychological and behavioural engagement. The Pie (Cowan &amp; Cowan 1991)  <b>Parenting Stress:</b> Revised <i>Parenting Stress Index (PSI)</i> (Lloyd &amp; Abidin 1985)  <b>Parenting Style Attitudes:</b> <i>The Ideas about Parenting Questionnaire</i> (Heming, Cowan &amp; Cowan, 1991)  <b>Couple relationship quality and stability:</b> <i>The Quality of Marriage Index (QMI)</i> (Norton, 1983)  <b>Conflict about Discipline:</b> one item from <i>The Couple communication Questionnaire</i> (Cowan &amp; Cowan, 1990)  <b>Children's behaviour problems:</b> <i>The Child Adaptive Behaviour Inventory</i> (Cowan, Cowan &amp; Heming, 1995)</p>
<b>PACT (Parents Achieving with Collaborative Teams)</b>	<p><b>Brief Symptom Inventory</b> (BSI) (Derogatis 1975)  <b>Drug Abuse Screening Test</b> (DAST)  <b>The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test</b> (AUDIT-C) (Bush, Kivlahan, McDonell, Fihn &amp; Bradley, 1998)  <b>The Modified Physical/Verbal Conflict Questionnaire:</b> adapted from Buehler et al 1998, Kerig, 1996 and Strauss, Hamby, Boney-McCoy &amp; Sugarman, 1996)  <b>Co-parenting Questionnaire</b> (CQ), Margolin et al 2001  <b>Child Behaviour Checklist</b> (CBCL), Achenbach 1991</p>
<b>Parenting Through Separation</b>	<p><b>Parent-child relationships and parents perceptions of children in the middle of parental conflict:</b> adapted from McKenzie &amp; Guberman, 1996, Sieppart et al, 1999)  <b>Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire</b> (SDQ), Goodman, Meltzer &amp; Bailey, 1998</p>
<b>Working Together</b>	<p><b>Relationship Adjustment:</b> adapted from <i>Systematic Therapeutic Inventory of Change</i> (Pinsoff et al 2009)  <b>Confidence in Co-parenting:</b> adapted from <i>The Confidence Scale</i> (Stanley et al, 2001)  <b>Overt Hostility:</b> <i>The Overt Hostility Scale</i> (Porter &amp; O'Leary, 1980)  <b>Negative Communication:</b> <i>The Communication Danger Signs Scale</i> (Stanley &amp; Markman, 1997)</p>
<b>Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution</b>	<p><b>Parent measures:</b>  Parental Alliance Measure (Abidin &amp; Brunner, 1995)  Parental Acrimony Scale (Shaw &amp; Emery, 1987)  Parent Conflict Scale (McIntosh &amp; Long, 2004)  Parent-Child Relationship Scale (McIntosh &amp; Long, 2003)</p> <p><b>Children's measures:</b>  Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict (Grych, Seid &amp; Fincham, 1992)  Security in Interparental Subsystem (Davies, Forman, Rasi &amp; Stevens, 2002)  Caught in the Middle Scale (Buchanan, Maccoby &amp; Dornbusch 1991)  Child-mother Relationship Scale (McIntosh 2003)  Child-father Relationship Scale (McIntosh (2003)</p>

In this section we have described the 14 programmatic interventions selected for review, and their respective evaluation studies; setting out their salient features, similarities and differences. In section four, we present key research findings in terms of what the evaluations reveal about whether and how such interventions may support men's parenting, father-child and coparental relationships.

## SECTION 4: Findings

### 4.1. What does the evaluation evidence show overall about the effects of divorce-related parenting programmes on family relationships after separation and divorce?

We begin this section by presenting an overview of key findings from across the set of evaluations of our selected divorce-related parenting programmes. We focus on reported findings which are shown to be linked to specified and measured outcomes, as defined by the evaluation and programme goals. We also present these findings with reference to the identified common aims of the programmes:

- To increase parental awareness of the impact of separation and divorce on children
- To reduce interparental conflict through the learning or improvement of co-parenting and conflict management skills
- To improve outcomes for children; particularly in relation psychological and emotional adjustment

#### Overall findings:

The strongest empirical evidence from the evaluations overall is for **reductions in parental conflict**, even in high conflict cases. This result includes more specific findings such as reduction of conflict in the presence of children, or reduction of breadth and depth of conflict issues. This effect is reported for 11 of the 16 evaluations, and is frequently cited as a key benefit for children, fathers and mothers.

In terms of **improvements to the coparental relationship**, the evidence is more modest, not least because the conceptualisation and measurement of this outcome is varied. Reported findings include: increased positive coparenting behaviours, reduced negative coparenting behaviours, improvements in perception of the other parent's coparenting skills and improved relationship adjustment. Seven of the 14 interventions are reported to have some impact on coparenting and so it seems fair to say that these programmes may offer support for improving coparenting after separation or divorce.

There is also modest evidence for the effect of divorce-related parenting programmes on children's wellbeing and adjustment. Overall, there appear to be some benefits in terms of a reported **reduction in children's internalising problems** (children's sadness and low affect) over time, with the effect being strongest for those children experiencing the greatest problems at baseline. Again, seven of the 14 interventions are reported to show some positive effect on child outcomes.

In general there is consistent reporting of **high levels of parental satisfaction and valuing** of divorce-related parenting programmes, particularly immediately after the programme had been completed. This positive response was not affected by whether attendance was voluntary or compulsory.

In addition there the findings from the evaluations provide some evidence that divorce-related parenting programmes can produce **increased parental awareness of the impact of separation on children**. Within this, a distinction needs to be made here between evaluations that measured parental satisfaction and parents' reported 'intention' to focus on the needs of children, and those that measured and reported behavioural change in parents.

Table 10 below provides more detail of the overall findings for each programme in relation to the target group and outcomes measured:

*Table 9:  
Overall findings from evaluation studies by specified outcomes*

<b>Evaluation study (n=16)</b>	<b>Sample inclusion criteria<sup>3</sup> &amp; N</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Dads For Life</b>	Divorced within past 4-10 months  Mother has main custody  Child 4-12 years  Both parents lived within 1 hour of evaluation university  214 fathers	<b>Interparental Conflict</b>   <b>Co-parenting</b>   <b>Child behavioural Problems</b>	<b>Interparental conflict</b> decreased over time for treatment and control groups but greater reduction for mothers and fathers in treatment group.  Mothers' perception of positive <b>co-parenting</b> increased over time when their ex-partners participated in treatment group (unlike control groups). No change in fathers' perceptions  Mother and father report reductions in in child behaviour problems	53% eligible parents declined to participate.  30% attrition by final wave
<b>The Collaborative Divorce Project CDP</b>	Couples currently filing for divorce  Child 0-6 years  161 couples	<b>Co-parental cooperation</b>  <b>Co-parental conflict</b>  <b>Paternal Involvement and Access</b>  <b>Child Outcomes</b>  <b>Legal outcomes</b>	CDP mothers & fathers reported less gate-keeping behaviours than controls.  CDP mothers & fathers reported decreased conflict over time (no comparison made with controls)  CDP fathers reported increased & stable positive father involvement over time: reduced in controls.  Children in CDP group reported fewer cognitive problems (teacher report) than controls  CDP parents more likely than controls to pay child support and less likely to undergo expensive litigation.	40% eligible parents declined to participate  11% attrition by final wave. Stronger engagement by intervention group but no N given for control group  Publication provides annotated summary of findings only, not data
<b>Kids' Turn</b>	Parents where pre and post programme test data available	<b>Interparental Conflict</b>	Reduction in interparental conflict & conflict breadth over time  Reduction in competition over children's affection	Time periods between wave 1 and 2 not clear- 6 weeks?

<sup>3</sup> Sample inclusion criteria is not always given

	Child 4-12 years  61 parents	<b>Parent-Child Communication</b>  <b>Parental Mental health</b>  <b>Child outcomes</b>	No change in parent-child communication  Reduction in anxiety and depression  Reduction in children's internalising problems	
<b>Parents Forever Evaluation 1 (2005)</b>	89 parents			
<b>Parents Forever Evaluation 2 (2010)</b>	342 parents	<b>Programme satisfaction &amp; knowledge</b>	High satisfaction and strong endorsement of sensitivity to divorce effects on children	100% response rate
<b>Parents Forever Evaluation 3 (2012)</b>	238 parents			
<b>Supporting Father Involvement</b>	Both parents agree to participate  Target child 0-7  Parents can be married, cohabiting or separated but must report raising child together  143 Couple 130 Father only	<b>Father-child relationship</b>  <b>Parenting Stress</b>  <b>Parenting Style Attitudes</b>  <b>Couple relationship quality and stability</b>  <b>Conflict about Discipline</b>  <b>Children's behaviour problems</b>	Compared with low dose comparison group, both intervention groups showed positive effects on fathers' engagement with children, couple relationship quality  Stronger impact in couple groups than father-only groups          Reported reduction in children's behaviour problems.	Only 6% of sample were separated fathers.
<b>Focus on Kids</b>	2274 parents	<b>Programme satisfaction &amp; knowledge</b>      <b>Coparental conflict</b>	Decrease in perceived helpfulness of programme at follow-up 4-10 months  Younger, female and low income participants rated programme more highly    Reduction in coparental conflict reports over time	
<b>The Parenting Education Programme</b>	130 parents (54 fathers)	<b>Programme satisfaction</b>  <b>Perception of Programme Goal Achievement</b>	High programme satisfaction  Peer support goal and awareness of children's needs goal most strongly endorsed.	
<b>Separated Parents Information Programme</b>	PIP sample selected from 65 courts orders (N=991 eligible)	<b>Contact</b>  <b>Parental Communication &amp; conflict</b>	Slight increase in contact for PIP in comparison to non-PIP  No differences between the groups in levels of communication & conflict	No information on distribution of parental status across groups.

	cases)  349 PIP parents	<b>Economic cost of case pathway</b>	Similar costs profile PIP £4,726 non-PIP £4,636	
<b>PACT (Parents Achieving in Collaborative Teams)</b>	14 couples	<b>Co-parenting</b>  <b>Parental Conflict</b>  <b>Children's behaviour problems</b>	Increase in cooperation over time  Decrease in verbal conflict  Decrease in internalising over time	38% attrition for mothers by final wave 42% attrition for fathers by final wave
<b>The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme</b>	32 parents	<b>Perception of other parent's co-parenting</b> <b>Self-assessment of Relationship quality with other parent</b>	Intervention group had a more positive effect on perception of other parent's co-parenting skills than control	
<b>Parenting Apart</b>	Random sample from court cases 9876 parents	<b>Parental conflict</b>  <b>Parents perceptions of children in the middle of parental conflict</b> <b>Programme satisfaction</b>	Increase in parental conflict over time (3-9 months)  Reduction in parental conflict in the presence of children over time  High programme satisfaction	75% attrition by follow-up
<b>Parenting Through Separation</b>	119 parents	<b>Parent-child relationships and parents and perceptions of children in the middle of parental conflict</b>  <b>Child outcomes</b>	Decrease in parental conflict over time Decrease in perceptions of children in the middle of parental conflict  Parents reported improvements in children's problem behaviours	17% attrition
<b>Working Together</b>	20 parents (8 fathers)	<b>Conflict</b>  <b>Coparenting</b>	Fathers and mothers reported decrease in conflict in the presence of children, effect was slightly stronger for men at post-test and follow-up  Improved relationship adjustment & increased confidence in ability to coparent, but for fathers this decreased over time	23% attrition
<b>Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution</b>	Separating parents undergoing a parenting dispute  Child between 5-16  Parents report willingness to	<b>Parental conflict &amp; child distress</b>  <b>Parental alliance</b> <b>Acrimony</b> <b>Co-parenting</b>	Reduction in parental conflict & child distress found for both groups  Greater benefits for fathers, mothers and children in CI treatment group	

	change views			
	Child likely to benefit			
	181 families; 111 to CF condition; 70 to CI condition			

#### 4.2. What does the evaluation evidence tell us about whether and how divorce-related parenting programmes may support fathers?

One general finding from this review is that there is no consistent consideration and analysis of gender as part of evaluating the potential effects of divorce related parenting programmes. In a significant minority of programme evaluations there is no distinction made between fathers or mothers, with mother and father measures routinely not analysed separately and the term ‘parents’ being used to present and discuss all findings. Similarly there is no disaggregation of parental status (mother or father) and parental residential status (resident or non-resident).

However, within the evaluations examined here, a small number of studies did, either through the design of the intervention or the evaluation, attempt to disaggregate men’s experiences and identities as fathers (*Dads For Life, Supporting Father Involvement, The Collaborative Divorce Project*). The rationale and value of such disaggregation or recognition of gender difference can be explained and justified in a number of ways:

- To identify “potentially modifiable” elements of fathers’ behaviour (Braver, Griffin, Cookston, Sandler & Williams, 2005: 296) in order to positively affect outcomes for children
- To improve understanding of the complexity of the coparental relationship and of concepts such as ‘gatekeeping’ (Cowan et al 2009; Kline Pruett, Insabella & Gustafson, 2005)
- To improve understanding of father-child relationships and men’s parenting (McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007)
- To improve understanding of men’s psychological responses to separation and divorce (Cowan et al, 2009)

As shown in Table 11 below, in total, 11 of the 16 evaluation studies made some disaggregation of fathers and mothers. Of these, only five offered substantial reporting and discussion of gender differences in terms of the direct or indirect effects of the programme (*Dads For Life, The Collaborative Divorce Project, Working Together, Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution, and Supporting Father Involvement*). Six studies provided some analysis of gender as a demographic variable and reported any differences in fathers and mothers rating of the programme, attendance or reported knowledge gain (*Parents Forever 2 & 3, Focus on Kids, The Parenting Education Programme, PACT, and The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme*). In the remaining five of the evaluation studies, not included in the table, no analysis or discussion of gender difference was provided (*Kids’ Turn, Parents Forever 1, The Separated Parents Information Programme, parenting Apart, and Parenting Through Separation*).

Table 10:

**Evaluation studies providing gender analysis and findings related to fathers**

Evaluation study (n=11)	Reported findings by gender
<b>Dads For Life</b>	<p><b>Outcomes related to reduction of interparental conflict and improvement of coparenting</b></p> <p>Both fathers and mothers reported improvements in child behavioural adjustment and coparenting behaviours, and reductions in interparental conflict</p> <p>Behavioural change in fathers reported as particularly significant due to greater 'independence' of mothers' corroborating reports</p>
<b>The Collaborative Divorce Project</b>	<p><b>Parent satisfaction:</b></p> <p>Fathers appeared harder to retain on the programme and low-income fathers more likely to drop out</p> <p>High rates of father satisfaction with the programme</p> <p>Fathers rated group sessions more helpful than mothers</p> <p>Fathers rated meetings with counsellors less helpful than mothers</p> <p>Fathers rated availability of telephone contact/support as very helpful</p> <p><b>Outcomes related to 'understanding of gatekeeping'</b></p> <p>Fathers acknowledged importance of past and present relationship with mother; and importance of mothers' support for father-child relationship</p> <p>Fathers reported that mothers facilitated contact with children, but less than mothers stated</p> <p>Fathers valued flexibility and practical support from mothers, such as transport, having children ready, and extra time on special days</p> <p><b>Outcomes related to 'family and child'</b></p> <p>Fathers reported reduction in interparental conflict</p> <p>Father involvement remained consistent for intervention fathers, with small increase over time</p> <p><b>Outcomes related to use of legal system</b></p> <p>Increased payment of child maintenance by fathers in intervention families</p> <p>Participant attorneys reported that 83% of intervention fathers displayed changed attitude towards compromise</p> <p>Increased maternal support for father's parenting role is also associated with decreased use of legal system</p> <p>Fathers reported benefits in terms of agreed parenting plans involving consistent schedules and overnight stays</p>
<b>Working Together</b>	<p><b>Outcomes related to interparental conflict</b></p> <p>Fathers reported increase in conflict at post-test but then decrease at follow-up</p> <p>Fathers and mothers reported decrease in conflict in the presence of children, but this effect was slightly stronger for men at post-test and follow-up</p> <p><b>Outcomes related to coparenting and 'relationship adjustment'</b></p> <p>Fathers and mothers reported improved relationship adjustment and increased confidence in ability to coparent, but for fathers this decreased over time</p>
<b>Child-focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution</b>	<p><b>Outcome related to benefits for fathers and children in CI treatment group</b></p> <p>Fathers reported lower acrimony between parent and improved coparenting</p> <p>Children experienced increased emotional availability of fathers and greater emotional closeness</p> <p>Fathers and children reported greater contentment with, and stability of caring arrangements</p> <p><b>Predictors of overall progress for fathers</b></p> <p>Reduction of hostilities over time; increased parental alliance; frequent overnight stays or shared care arrangements</p> <p><b>Reported qualitative findings</b></p> <p>Fathers in CI treatment group reported higher satisfaction with caring arrangements</p> <p>Fathers in CI treatment group tended to feel more supported and that mediation was 'fair'</p>

	Fathers in CI treatment group more likely to agree to 'developmentally appropriate' caring arrangements for children Fathers in CI treatment group described the input by children as powerful and 'transformative'
<b>Parents Forever (evaluations 2 and 3; 2010 and 2012)</b>	<b>Analysis using gender as a demographic variable related to parent satisfaction with programme</b> Fathers rated programme slightly higher than mothers at 2 month follow-up Fathers showed small but significant greater decline in their own negative divorce-related behaviours
<b>Supporting Father Involvement</b>	<b>Analysis using gender as variable relating to participation and retention</b> Generally high levels of retention for both fathers and mothers in treatment groups Slightly higher rate of retention for fathers in couples groups <b>Outcomes related to father engagement</b> Both treatment groups positively affected men's psychological involvement with children, over time Both treatment groups positively affected both parents views about fathers' involvement with daily childcare tasks, over time Both treatment groups positively affected men's confidence and role identity as fathers Significant decline in parenting stress for both fathers and mothers in couples group At follow-up, fathers reported decline in conflict over child discipline; though mothers reported increase
<b>Focus on Kids</b>	<b>Analysis using gender as a demographic variable related to parent satisfaction with programme</b> Fathers rated programme lower than mothers at post-test Fathers scored lower on parenting and coparenting measures at pre and post-test, but no gender difference at follow-up
<b>The Parenting Education Programme</b>	<b>Analysis using gender as a demographic variable related to parent satisfaction with programme</b> No reported gender difference in parents satisfaction with the programme or with their perception that the programme achieved its goals
<b>Parents Achieving in Collaborative Teams (PACT)</b>	<b>Analysis of gender as a demographic variable related to participation and attrition</b> No reported gender difference <b>Outcomes related to programme effectiveness</b> Fathers reported using formally agreed parenting plan more than mothers at 6 month follow-up, and at 12 month follow-up
<b>The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme</b>	<b>Outcomes related to coparenting</b> No difference in fathers and mothers reporting of overall quality of relationship with other parent; perceived coparenting abilities or assessment of other parent's coparenting Fathers increase in positive coparenting behaviours was slightly smaller than mothers

#### 4.3. Supporting 'potentially modifiable' aspects of fathers and fathering

Braver et al (2005) argue the significance and potential of fathers as preventive and positive resources for their children. In the development of *Dads For Life*, these authors rejected any 'deficit model' of fathering and sought instead to focus on improving fathers' capacity to positively affect children's adjustment to separation and divorce, but also to recognise the particular features of non-resident fathers' experience. In this way, the four central programme goals of *Dads For Life*: frequency of father-child contact, the quality of father-child relationship, father's financial support, and quality of postdivorce mother-father relations, can be seen as the elements of post-separation fathering that are 'potentially modifiable'.

The five studies that offered substantial reporting or discussion of outcomes specifically related to men's parenting, father-child and coparental relationships therefore provide some evidence of what divorce related parenting programmes may 'modify' for fathers, and what benefits they may also bring, for fathers, children and for mothers.

#### 4.4. Reported outcomes related to benefits for children

Of the 11 evaluations that undertook some gender analysis, three report findings which suggest that the effect of the intervention on fathers brings certain benefits for children:

As described above, the aim of *Dads For Life*, was to improve psychological and behavioural outcomes for children by improving fathers' parenting and coparenting skills. In the 2005 evaluation, the key reported finding was the reduction in internalising problems for children (according to both fathers and mothers) with the effect being strongest in those children reported to have the greatest problems at the start of the intervention (Braver et al, 2005).

The *Child-focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution* programme reported a small number of unique outcomes for fathers and children in the Child-Inclusive treatment group. Based on structured interviews with children, the evaluation found that children experienced improved emotional availability of their fathers, and greater feelings of closeness to him (McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007). Fathers, mothers and children in this group also expressed greater contentment with caring arrangements.

The *Collaborative Divorce Project* reported two indirect benefits to children arising from father's participation in the programme. Firstly, that father involvement remained constant with a small increase over time, and secondly, that there was an increase in the payment of child maintenance by non-resident fathers (Kline Pruett, Insabella & Gustafson, 2005).

#### 4.5. Reported outcomes related to understanding and improving coparental relationships

Seven of the 11 evaluations which differentiated between fathers and mothers reported positive effects of programmes on coparenting behaviours and/or relationship adjustment. In general, these findings relate to the reduction of interparental conflict and the increase in positive coparenting behaviours.

Fathers in the *Dads For Life* programme reported improvements in coparenting and a reduction in interparental conflict. The authors present these findings as particularly significant as they were corroborated by mothers who had not been involved, and did not necessarily know about fathers' participation, in the intervention. Moreover, this trend was not found in the control group. The authors note: "the change in the one parent (the father) must have been substantial enough and comfortable enough that the entire dynamics of the relationship were revised in a way that was unmistakably apparent to the partner" (Cookston, Braver, Griffin, DeLuse & Miles, 2006: 133).

In addition to the outcome that fathers in the programme reported a reduction in inter-parental conflict, *The Collaborative Divorce Project* evaluation also reports a number of findings that they link to 'understanding of gatekeeping'. In relation to fathers' perception of mothers' coparenting role, fathers' acknowledged the significance of their past and present, or on-going relationship with mothers, and the importance of mothers' support for fathers. Fathers also valued flexibility and practical support from mothers with regard to caring arrangements, and reported that mothers did facilitate contact (Kline Pruett, Insabella & Gustafson, 2005).

Fathers in the **Working Together** programme also reported a reduction in interparental conflict over time, although for fathers there was an initial increase at post-test. Fathers and mothers both reported a decrease in conflict in the presence of children, with this effect being slightly stronger for men over time. Both fathers and mothers also reported improved coparental relationship adjustment and increased confidence in their ability to coparent, but here, this effect appeared to decrease for fathers over time (Owen & Rhoades, 2010). This finding, of a difference in fathers and mothers perceptions of, and satisfaction with the coparental relationship was also present in the **Dads For Life** study, where although the reduction of conflict remained for fathers over time, the positive affect on perceptions of coparenting did not. Cookston et al (2007) suggest that this may be due to fathers' raised expectations of reciprocal positive coparenting immediately after the programme, which, in some cases, are not then met.

The reported findings from the **Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution Project** highlight particular benefits to families (and fathers) in the Child-Inclusive (CI) programme. In this group, fathers reported lower acrimony between parents and improved perceptions of coparenting. In addition, the qualitative findings from this evaluation offer further insights into the impact of the CI programme and the potential benefits to both fathers and children. Fathers in the CI group reported greater satisfaction with caring arrangements, were more likely to report that the mediation process was 'fair', and that they felt supported within this. Fathers in the CI group were also more likely to be content with arrangements which did not necessarily involve a substantial increase, or 'equal share' in overnight stays. The authors suggest that the CI programme enabled fathers and mothers to negotiate developmentally sensitive arrangements, and "made it easier to resist arrangements tailored to any sense of adult entitlement" (McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007: 22).

The **Supporting Father Involvement** evaluation found a positive effect for fathers in relation to coparenting in both the couples and fathers-only treatment groups. In both groups, there was improvement in both parent's views about fathers' involvement with daily childcare tasks. In addition, this evaluation reported a significant decline in parenting stress for both fathers and mothers in the couples group. Fathers also reported a decline in conflict over child discipline over time; although mothers reported an increase (Cowan et al 2009).

The 2010 and 2012 evaluations of **Parents Forever**, and of **The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme**, included brief references to findings related to fathers and coparenting. In **Parents Forever**, the reported decrease in negative divorce related behaviours was slightly, but significantly greater for fathers (Brotherson, White & Masich, 2010, Brotherson, Rittenbach & White, 2012). In **The Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Programme**, both fathers and mothers reported improvements in the overall quality of the coparenting relationship and assessment of their own, and the other parent's coparenting abilities. However, fathers' increase in positive coparenting behaviours (again based on self-assessment and assessment by the other parent) was slightly less than mothers (Whitehurst, O'Keefe & Wilson, 2008).

#### **4.6. Reported outcomes related to understanding and improving father-child relationships and men's parenting**

The evidence regarding ways in which divorce related parenting programmes may improve father-child relationships is very small, predominantly because the majority of studies either did not seek to measure this, or did not report any findings related to it. Indeed where reporting on this question is included, potential effects are often inferred or raised as a discussion point rather than an empirically validated finding. Very few standardised measures of parent-child relationships were used or adapted across the set of studies; three evaluations included some measure of parent-child relationship quality, but did not report directly on this:

- **The Collaborative Divorce Project** - Parent-Child Relationship: Negative Changes: *Stanford Child Custody Study* (Maccoby, Mnookin & Depner, 1993)
- **Kids' Turn** - Parent-Child Communication: *Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale* (Barnes & Olson, 1982)
- **Parenting Through Separation** - Parent-child relationships and parents perceptions of children in the middle of parental conflict: adapted from McKenzie & Guberman, 1996; Sieppart et al, 1999)

Only two evaluations used a standardised measure of father-child relationships and/or parent-child relationship quality, and did include some reporting of findings related to this:

- **Supporting Father Involvement** - Father-child relationship: Psychological and behavioural engagement, *The Pie*, (Cowan & Cowan 1991)
- **Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution** - Child-father Relationship Scale, used with children (McIntosh 2003); Parent-Child Relationship Scale, used with parents (McIntosh & Long, 2003)

**Dads For Life**, which is, in many ways a particularly promising contribution, and is aimed specifically at non-resident fathers, does not report findings which relate to father-child relationships. It may be inferred that because reported child problem behaviours decrease when fathers participate in the programme, that the relationship between father and child improves, but there is no empirical evidence provided to valid this effect directly.

**The Collaborative Divorce Project** evaluation also infers improvement in father-child relationships by its reporting of consistent and slightly increased father involvement over time, but again, this potential effect is not reported on directly.

Based on analysis of structured play-style interviews with children, the study of **Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution** claims that children experience increased emotional availability of fathers and greater feelings of closeness to him. Because the child-father measure was used with children only, there are no reported findings on relationship quality from fathers' perspectives, but again, it may be inferred that greater emotional availability and closeness may be experienced as a benefit to fathers also.

As identified above, **Supporting Father Involvement** is the only evaluation to use a direct measure of the father-child relationship, with fathers, and to report some findings based on this. The study reports that both treatment groups (couples, and fathers-only) positively affected men's psychological involvement with children, over time. It also reports that both treatment groups positively affected men's confidence and role identity as fathers. In relation to men's parenting, this study also reported a significant decline in parenting stress for fathers (and mothers) in the couples group (Cowan et al, 2009).

#### 4.7. Reported outcomes related to understanding men's psychological responses to separation and divorce

There is only a very small set of, predominantly inferred, findings which can be linked to men's psychological responses or adjustment to separation and divorce. Clearly, common significant responses to the ending of a couple relationship are hurt, sadness and anger, and the studies considered here only refer to these in as much as they report evidence on the reduction of

interparental conflict for fathers (and for mothers). Three studies (*The Collaborative Divorce Project, Kids' Turn, and PACT*) used the *Brief Symptom Inventory* (BSI) with participants, to measure either parent functioning or specific symptoms such as anxiety or depression, but *PACT* used this as an initial screening measure, and none of the three reports any gender differentiated findings related to the wellbeing or adjustment.

Another profound challenge for separating parents is to make the emotional and psychological distinction between the ending of the couple relationship and the continuation of the coparental one; this is sometimes referred to as 'relationship adjustment' (Owen & Rhoades, 2010). One study, of the *Working Together* programme, used a standardised measure for this concept, adapted from the *Systematic Therapeutic Inventory of Change* (Pinsoff et al 2009). The authors reported a finding of improved relationship adjustment for both fathers and mothers, but that for fathers this decreased over time (Owen & Rhoades, 2010).

The *Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution* evaluation can be used to infer certain outcomes for fathers' psychological responses and adjustment, based on their presentation of qualitative findings. Fathers in the CI group reported a greater sense of 'being heard, feeling supported, and were more likely to feel that the mediation aspects of the programme were 'fair' (McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007). This study also reported that fathers experienced the direct input of their children's views as powerful and 'transformative', which may also be relevant to understanding a process of reflection and/or change in fathers' responses to, or capacity to resolve interparental conflict (McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007: 22).

As discussed above, in their evaluation of *Supporting Father Involvement*, Cowan et al (2009) report an improvement in men's confidence and role identity as fathers as an effect of both treatment groups. This finding could infer improved psychological wellbeing and adjustment to separation or divorce, but again, there is no direct association demonstrated. In addition, an inference may be drawn from the reported decline in parenting stress, for fathers (and mothers) in the couples' treatment group, in that reduced parenting stress may be linked to parental wellbeing.

#### 4.8. Strengths and limitations of the evaluation evidence

Our review began with current international research evidence about programmatic interventions which focus on family relationships and psychological family restructuring after separation and divorce. Our aim was to examine this evidence for what it revealed about supporting men's parenting, father-child and coparental relationships. The search process, identification and analysis of the programmes and their respective evaluations has been both challenging and valuable and points to some promising findings and areas for further conceptual and empirical development. Overall, the strengths of evaluation studies we reviewed are:

- The studies do provide a picture of the steadily accumulating knowledge about the actual and potential benefits of divorce-related parenting programmes.
- There are some points of similarity or comparison across the programmes and their respective evaluations, including certain common aims, programme goals, and the use of standardised measures, which does make some generalisation of findings possible.
- The discussions presented in the evaluation papers also make possible the identification of promising and creative intervention processes, prevailing concerns and emergent ideas, which we feel are helpful for future research.

- Despite the variation in programme and evaluation design, the synthesis of this research does reveal important evidence and insights about how parents may respond to such intervention; not least that parents who take part appear willing and, to some extent able, to improve their capacity for reflection, attitudinal and behavioural change.

However, there are also a number of limitations of this body of research which are also important to consider:

- There continues to be a lack of reliable evidence about exactly what elements of divorce-related parenting programmes may produce attitudinal or behavioural change in parents and/or children. There is continued interest with what might constitute the ‘active ingredients’ in programmatic intervention and we return to this discussion in Section 5.
- A significant number of evaluation studies involved small sample sizes and high rates of attrition. This is a cause for concern as it may suggest underlying selectivity factors. For instance only 25% of **Parenting Apart** participants were involved in the 3-9 month follow-up assessment and overall scored higher on parental conflict than at baseline, a pattern not shown in other studies.
- Only five evaluations involved a control or appropriate comparison groups with follow-ups, which limits the ability to identify confounding variables and to demonstrate programme effects, in particular whether any benefits were indeed related to the programme, the passing of time or other unobserved factors.
- In general there is very little disaggregation by gender of parent; in some evaluations gender appears as a demographic variable, either to simply identify numbers of fathers and mothers, and in others to analyse in relation to retention or satisfaction. However, there is very little analysis of in terms of whether and how divorce-related parenting programmes impact on fathers and mothers, or of reported similarities or differences in outcomes
- In relation to the aim of our review, and as a consequence of the previous point, there is little clear or comprehensive information on men’s parenting or father-child relationships, or on fathers’ coparenting perceptions or behaviours. Even where programmes and evaluations involved goals related explicitly to father involvement, such as **Dads For Life**, these were sometimes not captured or measured in the evaluation

In this section we have set out key findings from our review of the selected body of research literature. We have firstly identified some generalised claims which can, with some confidence, be made based on the evaluation studies. We then presented the more detailed, ‘drilled down’ analysis of the effects of the programmes on men’s parenting, father-child and coparental relationships, and also men’s psychological responses or adjustment to separation and divorce. In Section 5 we go on to consider the issues and promising ideas which emerge from this analysis.

## **SECTION 5: Issues and insights**

Research on the impact of divorce-related parenting programmes on fathers and their family relationships; or on issues relevant to father-inclusive design and implementation for this group of men are surprisingly rare. In this section, we highlight issues relevant to researchers and practitioners in terms of designing both support programmes and evaluation studies, and make certain recommendations for future development.

### **5.1. Why focus on fathers?**

The aim of this investigation was to identify and examine current research evidence on whether or how divorce related parenting programmes support fathers in negotiating on-going coparental relationships with mothers and sustaining relationships with children after separation or divorce. The focus on fathers has been in part to extend previous work on developing father-inclusive practice and evaluation, in the field of family support services (Ghate et al, 2000; Ryan, 2000; Daniel & Taylor, 2001; Lloyd et 2003; O'Brien 2004; Burgess, 2009; Walters, 2010).

There has been a paucity of evidence-based reviews of parenting intervention effectiveness for fathers both across sector and life-stage, although this gap is gradually being remedied such as in the field of health interventions with young children (Magill-Evans et al, 2006); supporting children with cancer (Jones et al 2010); child-welfare services (Maxwell et al, 2012) supporting teenage fathers, Bronte-Tinkew et al 2008). Our report contributes to these efforts to enhance and improve the knowledge base on which to develop further father-inclusive programmes with the growing number of families which experience parental separation (Parkinson, 2010). As set out in the introduction to this report, recent changes in the UK socio-legal and political context around managing the process of separation, and supporting separating families mean that questions of appropriate design, implementation and evaluation are both timely and hugely important.

A further reason for a focus on fathers is the growing potential for more paternal marginality in children's lives as couple and marriage relationships end and re-partnering occurs (Coltrane, 2004; Kiernan, 2006; Carlson & McLanahan, 2010). The dual trends of non-residential fatherhood growth and the paradoxical pattern of more male involvement in the care of children are part of the heterogeneity of contemporary fathers (Pleck, 2010). Men's roles as fathers are becoming more complex and for some more fluid. Most children may still have their biological father co-residing with them for the whole period of childhood but if their parents' relationship ends, they are likely to experience more than one father figure. Step-families are one of the fastest growing types of family in the UK - 10% of all families with dependent children (Smallwood & Wilson, 2007). Accordingly, an increasing number of family support practitioners are working in family contexts where children have a diverse set of father figures throughout their childhood. A family support approach which concentrates only on mothers or mother-child relationships, to the exclusion of father figures, may miss significant emotional attachments or causes of stress for children and parents.

We also focus on fathers because of a commitment to gender equality; which for us means developing an approach to family support service provision and evaluation which attends to gender difference and thinks critically about where, when, and how gender sensitivity can make a difference to the quality of provision (Doucet, 2006; Perelberg & Miller, 2012; Philip, 2012). Any analysis of the longstanding gendered patterns of caring for children and the opportunities and constraints these bring for mothers, fathers and children, cannot be carried out by focusing only on the lives of women. An equality agenda within family support services needs to be supportive of men's greater involvement in caring for children and attentive to any distinctive features of men's parenting, without disregarding the historical gendering of care, or disenfranchising

women as mothers. This report suggests that utilising research evidence on what men as fathers say they value in divorce-related parenting programmes, what effects these may have on fathering relationships, and at what benefits they bring to fathers, children, and mothers, can provide a valuable tool for developing father-inclusive family support services. However, it also demonstrates that the evidence base in this area is very small, and often difficult to tease out, in terms of both programme effects, and issues relevant to implementation and evaluation. The report therefore also points to a need for both more systematic and more nuanced ways of including gender as part of programme and evaluation design, and of attending to fathers and mothers experiences of the complex and painful process of family restructuring after separation or divorce.

## **5.2. Issues: what factors may affect the development of father-inclusive programme and evaluation designs?**

From our review of the selected literature a number of concerns appear in relation to developing divorce-related parenting programmes that can attend to men's lives as fathers, and designing evaluation studies to examine whether and how fathers and their families may benefit from this.

### **Factors relevant to programme design**

**Expanding the conceptual approach:** The majority of the intervention programmes reviewed drew on psychological and developmental perspectives as a framework for shaping programme goals and content, particularly in relation to children's adjustment to separation and divorce. There is also a tendency to draw on a gender-neutral discourse of 'parents' and 'parenting' as a vocabulary for describing roles and skills, and to present fathers and mothers as socio-economic equals in terms of access to resources. However, if divorce-related parenting programmes are to be inclusive and supportive of both men and women's caring and economic roles and responsibilities after separation, a wider conceptual framework may be productive. Practitioners and evaluators may benefit from the approach of critical and sociological theories in relation to family relationships, which emphasise the gendering of care for children, the connections between fatherhood and masculinity (Collier, 1995), and the interconnections between fathering and mothering (Doucet 2006; Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies, 2003; Smart & Neale 1999). They argue that gendered patterns of caring for children can become fault-lines for the reorganisation of parental roles and responsibilities following separation or divorce. Similarly interdisciplinary advances in conceptualising father absence and involvement (Cabrera. & Tamis-LeMonda, 2012) would contribute toward extending appropriate theoretical frameworks for programmes dealing with fathers and mothers in this highly charged transition (see fatherhood indicators discussion below).

**Participant selectivity and recruitment of "hard to reach" fathers:** The question of whether only parents who are highly motivated or committed to change attend divorce-related parenting programmes is consistently asked of this type of family support intervention. It is relevant to issues of who programmes are aimed at, whether they reach their intended target, or fail to engage those fathers and families who may need support most. This is not to dismiss any benefits to fathers who do attend, but to raise the fact that those who either do not volunteer, or do not comply with referrals or court orders, might be in equal or greater need of support. The evaluations of court-mandated programmes showed evidence of high rates of parent satisfaction and perceived value of the programme, and in some, a reduction in levels of resentment at being required to attend (Brandon 2006). This finding suggests that programmatic interventions might be valuable to reluctant or resistant fathers, or to a wider group than currently choose to attend. Programme leaders may need to further consider issues of advertising, referrals or signposting from other agencies, recruitment, and the context for delivery, in terms of whether and how they reach and resonate with men. The broader issue of men's invisibility within family support

services may also mean they are less willing to attend, or may be less actively encouraged and informed about attending (Jones, Burgess & Hale, 2012, Walters 2010).

**Screening and domestic violence:** As discussed in Section 3, screening potential participants for their suitability is a standard feature of the programmes we reviewed. Common exclusionary criteria are serious drug, mental health or alcohol problems, all of which can be linked to men's psychological adjustment to divorce (Fals-Stewart et al, 2004; Bokker et al, 2006), but perhaps the key issue here is that of domestic violence. The literature and debate about fathers as risks as well as resources to their families is highly pertinent to divorce and separation, and has been prominent in discussions over contact, mediation and most recently the conceptual and legal implications of shared care (Featherstone, 2010; Norgrove, 2011, Hunt & et al (2009). For parenting programmes aiming to reduce interparental conflict and encourage agreement over caring arrangements, issues of highly imbalanced power relationships and the safeguarding of children and women are clearly crucial. Excluding families from such programmes when there is domestic violence is appropriate and important but this still raises the question of where such families, and fathers, access support, and identifies a particular target group with particular needs.

Providing interventions for fathers who have been violent to their partners or exposed their children to violence arguably requires an even more gender-sensitive and father-inclusive approach, in that there is a need to attend and be responsive to issues of anger and aggression in relation to men and masculinity. Originating in Canada and recently trialled in a number of locations across the UK, one programme, **Caring Dads**, is a rare and notable example of a programme for fathers and their families, which adopts such an approach (Scott & Crooks, 2007; <http://caringdads.org>).

**Mainstream family services and diversity:** A broader issue relating to programme design is that of what kind of service should be offered, to be delivered at what level. In some jurisdictions a model exists for a nationally available parenting programme for separating parents, such as the **Separated Parents Information Programme** in the UK, the **Parenting Education Programme** in Israel or **Parenting Through Separation**, in New Zealand. Part of the debate arising from the evaluation research literature is whether and how, an evidence-based parenting programme might be developed, as a mainstream service.

Yet, another important issue, raised by many of the research papers reviewed here, is that divorce related parenting programmes need to be appropriately designed for families in diverse circumstances and with different cultural, educational and social backgrounds (Brown et al, 2009; Cowan et al 2009). The issue of developing father-inclusive support services for separating families can be seen as part of the wider debate over strategies of integrating fathers within universal or statutory services, or identifying them as a particular group requiring targeted support.

### **Factors relevant to evaluation design**

**Lack of consistent analysis by gender:** Men's personal family life experiences and the extent of their caring responsibilities and emotional obligations have not been a routine consideration in international mainstream policy developments or assessments (O'Brien, 2011). In this review, despite selecting programmes which involved, or were aimed at men as fathers; some of which had programme goals related to supporting father involvement, it was difficult to identify and extract information about programme effects on, and benefits to, fathers. Whilst it can be assumed that general findings, such as the reduction of interparental conflict, or improvements in coparenting, apply to fathers, there are few attempts to disaggregate fathers and mothers scores or to consider how programmes may specifically affect aspects of men's parenting, father-child relationships or fathers' perceptions of coparenting. Some evaluations do make explicit the

numbers of participating fathers and mothers, and some use gender to analyse motivation or retention. However, we suggest a more consistent approach to incorporating disaggregation by gender into the rationale and design of evaluation studies, in order to be more attentive to the gendered experience of parenthood and to the complex interconnections between fathers and mothers as coparents after separation or divorce.

**Need for more father-related indicators:** Attempting to analyse the impact of intervention on outcomes is a complex endeavour, and relies heavily on the operationalisation of concepts and development of reliable and valid indicators. Historically, much of the conceptual and methodological development in family service evaluation has focused, either explicitly or implicitly, on the maternal dimension of family relationships (Marsiglio, et al 2000). In light of this, it is not surprising that the fatherhood research field has become concerned with the issue of concept scrutiny and the development of indicators to capture multiple and complex aspects of fathering identities, roles and activities. In this review, we found very few father-related indicators. *The Collaborative Divorce Project, Supporting Father Involvement* and *Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution* were the only three evaluation studies to use any, but even where indicators were used, findings related to fathers, and particularly to father-child relationships were not always reported in research papers. Similarly, where programmes, such as *Dads For Life* expressed father-related goals, the evaluation study did not always directly measure, or again, report on these. In order to evaluate divorce-related parenting programmes from a fathering perspective, a set of fatherhood indicators need to be adopted and systematically measured before and after the intervention. A central part of such evaluation is identifying particular dimensions of fathering relevant for the project at hand and then choosing the best available measure. Evaluators, researchers and practitioners alike will need to ask 'What counts for positive change in relation to fathering? How do we measure and understand the effects of that change for children, families, and communities?'

**Sample selectivity:** The review of evaluation studies revealed issues with both small sample sizes and high attrition rates. In addition, only four studies involved random selection of participants as part of an experimental design, with the majority generating a sample from parents who had were either about to begin the programme, or who had just completed it. This means that, in terms of knowledge about fathers and divorce-related parenting programmes, there are further questions to be asked about which fathers take part, and whether, and how, participating fathers may be representative or atypical of separated fathers more generally. *Dads For Life* and *Supporting Father Involvement* (both randomised controlled trials) both sought to focus on fathers specifically; generating samples of non-resident fathers and 'vulnerable', low-income fathers respectively. In developing the knowledge base on how fathers both adjust to, and impact on, the process of family restructuring after separation and divorce, there is scope for evaluations of programmes aimed at different groups of fathers, as well as those which compare fathers and mothers within the same programme.

**Reliance on self-reporting:** One further characteristic of the evaluation studies reviewed was the tendency to use self-complete, structured questionnaires as the key data collection method. This means that in most studies there is a reliance on parental self-reporting, of their own, and their children's behaviour, attitudes or perceptions. In addition, a number of the programme evaluations involved relied on retrospective reporting after parents or couples had completed the programme. In programmes involving couples, then comparison can be made, but in many, individual fathers or mothers were the sole reporter on measures relating to coparenting and children's problem behaviour. To address this, some studies involved more than one reporter, particularly for measuring outcomes for children, or sometimes for assessing the value of, or knowledge gained from, participation. Cookston et al (2006) claim that the approach taken in *Dads For Life*, of involving mothers in reporting on the coparental relationship, when they often did not know whether the father had participated, gave mothers' reports particular independence and therefore reduced the plausibility of 'rival explanations' (Cookston, et al, 2006: 133).

However, there is some acknowledgement that reliance on self-reporting limits what can be claimed about the effects of divorce-related programmes, and that alternative or additional research instruments may be desirable. In the **Supporting Father Involvement** evaluation the authors report that video-taped interactions between fathers and children are now included, but to date there are no published findings relating to this (Cowan et al, 2009).

**Expanding the range of evaluation techniques:** This final issue is a broader comment about future directions for evaluation design, particularly in father-related research, where there is an arguable need for both conceptual scrutiny and the development of indicators. In terms of summative evaluation, the randomised control trial (RCT) has been adopted as the key benchmark of intervention effectiveness, and has considerable standing in the context of evidence-based treatment. RCT evaluation design allows investigators to compare the efficacy of treatment versus no treatment or to compare the relative efficacy of more than one form of intervention. However, whilst being a powerful source of evidence, the RCT approach still can not necessarily provide insight in the processes by which the intervention works. That is, after a positive trial result, we may be confident that the treatment works but remain none-the-wiser as to *why* or *how* it works. In the context of divorce-related parenting programmes, this point seems particularly relevant, as there is a growing sense that these interventions can and do help separating families, but still a lack of robust evidence as to exactly what elements constitute the ‘active ingredients’ (Sigal et al, 2011). Other debates around the strengths and limitations of the RCT include: the ethics of randomisation, the tendency to focus on group differences rather than individual variation, and again, the importance of carefully thought-out and reliable indicators. In the case of evaluating ways in which divorce-related programmes can support fathers, there is still a need for increased understanding of the processes, aims and practices involved in such interventions, and for describing organisational settings and tracking of uptake of fathers. This means that formative evaluation, as well as summative assessment of efficacy, is important. Therefore there is scope for boosting RCT evaluation designs with mixed methods (for example qualitative approaches including ethnography or organisational case studies) in order to deepen understanding about supporting fathers after separation and divorce, and to design more effective programmes.

### 5.3. Insights: in search of the ‘active ingredient’

Having highlighted certain issues for consideration, we now identify a number of features or insights which appear relevant or promising for developing father-inclusive and gender-sensitive divorce-related parenting programmes. In the UK and beyond, these programmes are already frequently used for the minority of cases where parents are in legal dispute over caring arrangements for children, and are likely to be extended, in some form, to all separating parents. We suggest, therefore, that greater acknowledgement of the particular challenges and emotional or psychological responses experienced by fathers and mothers, as part of programme design, is a productive direction to take.

We begin by considering a prevailing and important question in the field of evidence-based intervention: ‘what are the active ingredients?’

**Involving both fathers and mothers in the intervention:** As the report has shown, divorce related parenting programmes are varied in terms of whether they included couples, parents, fathers-only, or families. Two of the interventions (*Dads For Life*, and *Supporting Father Involvement*) specifically directed support at fathers and demonstrated that improvements in child and coparental outcomes could be produced as a result of the programme. Commentaries from other interventions such as *The Collaborative Divorce Project* and *Kids’ Turn* point to the impact of involving both parents in a support programme, in terms of knowledge gain, and also in relation to improving the parental alliance (Cookston & Fung, 2011; Pruett et al, 2005). Yet, the

findings from the **Supporting Father Involvement** and **Dads For Life** studies showed that involving both parents could be beneficial in a range of ways, including in relation to attendance and retention. For example, Cowan et al (2009) reported that engaging fathers in a fathers' group was facilitated when mothers came to the first meeting. Braver et al (2005) involved mothers more indirectly, as additional reporters of any programme effects, and from this found that mothers were both aware of, and responsive to, changes in fathers' coparenting. Cowan et al conclude that the question is not "whether to intervene with fathers or with couples, but, in either approach, how to involve both parents in the intervention programme" (2009: 677). This observation could point to more innovative ways to engage fathers and mothers in divorce related parenting programmes, and create supportive contexts for facilitating coparenting strategies.

**Perspective taking:** This point is related to the significance of involving both fathers and mothers in interventions, and suggests a productive way in which behavioural or attitudinal change might be generated. Whilst not an empirically validated finding, a recurring idea raised in discussion, and also by the few studies that included qualitative findings, was that of 'perspective taking' (McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007). The opportunity to see a situation from the perspective of another was seen by some programme leaders, and/or researchers as a valuable tool in facilitating conflict reduction between parents and increasing their capacity to focus on the needs of children. Perspective taking was also commented on by some fathers as a benefit of being in a mixed sex group, and as something which could generate reflection or a shift in perception. **The Collaborative Divorce Project** reported outcomes related to improving understanding of gatekeeping, and identifying fathers' acknowledgement of their on-going relationship with mothers, and the valuing of mothers' support for fathers among the findings. Clearly, this idea needs development; it is not a strong evidence-based technique. However, we feel it is worth considering in terms of an emergent theme which could be incorporated more formally into programme content or activities.

**Impact of direct input from children:** In some respects this point is related to the previous one, in that it links to aspects of programme content which may actively engage or induce change in participants. As discussed in Section 3, almost all of the interventions involved the use of video films or vignettes presenting common problems faced by children when their parents separate. Whilst the effect of this technique tended to be measured in relation to parent satisfaction and has not been empirically linked to outcomes, there is repeated discussion of the value and impact of presenting (or confronting) parents with children's views and feelings. The suggestion is that this technique can be a powerful '*wake-up call*', or a way of making difficult issues around managing and reducing parental conflict more 'palatable' (Braver, Griffin & Cookston, 2005; McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007). In a number of evaluations including **Parents Forever**, **Parenting Apart**, and **The Separated Parents Information Programme**, comments from both fathers and mothers refer to the children's material as '*a light bulb moment*' in terms of realising the impact of interparental conflict on children (Trinder et al, 2011). In **Kids' Turn** and the **Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution** programme, children are directly involved, through age-appropriate counselling groups and their views fed back to fathers and mothers. Fathers in the Child-Inclusive treatment group described this feedback session as 'valued and transformative', and the authors suggest that this may be linked to fathers improved capacity to reach agreement on developmentally sensitive caring arrangements, and their sense of 'fairness' around such negotiations (McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007). However, an evaluation of the effects of **Kids' Turn** on 7-9 year olds also offers a cautionary note about the impact of direct involvement for children themselves. The authors suggest that children "may need continued support in addressing the strong feelings the programme aroused in participants" (Gilman, Schneider & Shulak, 2005).

**Palatability and 'feeling safe':** All of the programmes reviewed were aiming to reduce interparental conflict and improve the coparental relationship. These aims mean that, in the

design of content and delivery, material on conflict management and relationship skills has to be included, and handled constructively. Braver et al (2005) refer to the importance of making divorce-related parenting programmes 'palatable', in order to engage and retain fathers, and indeed to create an opportunity for the intervention to 'work'. ***In Dads For Life***, the conflict and relationship content was felt to be the most challenging and least appealing to fathers, and was deliberately delayed until group rapport and trust had been established. The authors also believe that their underpinning generative, strengths-based model of fathering was important in shaping the design and content of the programme, making it both more palatable and supportive to non-resident fathers: "Fathers came because they felt they would be understood and safe in DFL" (Braver et al, 2005: 92). This idea of palatability could also be applied to issues of programme setting, timing, group composition and also the approach and attitude and professional skills of programme facilitators; in a sense it offers another way to think about father-inclusiveness and gender-sensitivity. ***The Collaborative Divorce Project*** and ***Supporting Father Involvement*** also seek to address the issue of presenting fathers with challenging or delicate material, whilst offering a supportive and respectful environment in which to encounter this (Kline Pruett et al, 2009). In the evaluation of the ***Child-Focused and Child-Inclusive Dispute Resolution Programme***, the authors also report that fathers in the Child-Inclusive treatment group, experienced a '*levelling of the playing field*' where they felt more empowered in negotiations over caring arrangements but also more able to listen to views that differed from their own (McIntosh, Wells & Long, 2007:22).

## **SECTION 6: Recommendations**

A series of recommendations for developing father-inclusive and gender-sensitive divorce-related parenting programmes relevant to academics, practitioners and policy-makers are offered:

### **Improving demographic data about fathers**

Basic demographic information on the parental status of men, male fertility and family formation is not routinely collected in many countries. More systematic collection of demographic data on men's lives as fathers would be valuable to researchers, practitioners and policymakers alike.

### **Incorporation of analysis by gender of parent into evaluation design**

Currently, there is no consistent consideration and analysis of gender as part of evaluating the potential effects of divorce related parenting programmes. Developing both more systematic and nuanced ways of including gender as part of programme and evaluation design, would improve understanding of the complex process of family restructuring after separation or divorce.

### **Further development and application of father-related indicators**

Few father-related measures are used in the evaluation of divorce-related parenting programmes, and where they are present, they are not necessarily reported on. We recommend that existing father-related indicators be more routinely used, and that collaborative work between researchers and practitioners in this field could contribute to the development of further measures of fathering activities and relationships.

### **Further conceptual work on family restructuring and coparental relationship adjustment after separation and divorce**

Alongside the development of reliable research indicators, there is also a need for appropriate theoretical frameworks to inform programme design and shed light on evaluation data. We recommend further conceptual work on men's parenting, the gendered dynamics of the coparental relationship and changing fathering roles and identities. This work would provide valuable insights for this field of intervention. The importance of applying a critical gender perspective in order to attend to issues of gender difference and of gender equity is recommended.

### **Undertaking of more formative evaluation and feasibility studies**

The review shows that evidence on the impact of divorce-related parenting programmes on fathers, or on issues relevant to father-inclusive design and implementation for this group of men are surprisingly rare. There is much scope for developing formative evaluation of settings, practices and processes involved in the provision of such interventions, in addition to summative evaluation of programme effects. Given the current governmental ambition to extend services to separated families, there may also be scope for innovation in developing gender-sensitive and father-inclusive support programmes.

### **Increased collaboration between research institutions and practitioners in both statutory and voluntary sectors**

A good deal of support for separated fathers is delivered at a regional and local level, often via various partnerships or commissioning arrangements between statutory and voluntary organisations. In this network of diverse and often imaginative regional provision there is much valuable knowledge and insight. We recommend that increased collaboration between academic researchers and practitioners could be highly productive for improving programme design, implementation and understanding of the complex family processes and relationships involved.

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