

MELLOW DADS IN SCOTTISH PRISONS

Can a community-based intervention be used with incarcerated fathers?

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Introduction

- Daily there are around 7,600 children in Scotland affected by the imprisonment of a parent.
- Opportunities for positive interactions are reduced for these parents and children.
- Positive parent-child interactions are important for behavioural and emotional outcomes for children, parents and is a protective factor against adversity (Lösel and Bender, 2003).
- Fathers in prison miss out on opportunities to develop parenting techniques and learn from their children (Loucks et al, 2012).
- Mellow Dads programme delivered in the community has been shown to improve paternal mental wellbeing, perceived child behaviour and promote parent-child interaction (Patterson et al., 2015).
- A pilot group was delivered in a Scottish prison for the first time with fathers in 2014. Differences between community and prison delivery are considered.

The Mellow Dads programme

The day is split into 3 sessions:

1. Personal group: Fathers share their experiences of parenting; both having been parented and being a parent, and how these are linked.
2. Lunchtime activity: Facilitators, fathers and children have lunch together followed by a fun activity to promote positive interaction.
3. Parenting workshop: This session focuses on practical aspects of parenting, with activities related to the developmental stage of the children. Strengths based video feedback is central to these sessions.

Comparing prison and community delivery

| Theme | In the community | In prison |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Duration | 14 sessions, typically delivered one day per week. | Short term sentences served by group participants - group had to be delivered across 7 weeks (i.e. 2 sessions per week) |
| Timetable | Typically participants not employed or in full time education - can attend the group one day per week. Evening/weekend groups also possible. | Prisoners have jobs within the prison. Strict prison timetable and routine. Facilitators had to negotiate timetable with prison staff. |
| Referral criteria | Participants must be men who are fathers or caregivers to children aged under 5 years old. | Small number of prisoners who were fathers - not enough men with children under 5. Child age criteria was changed to include children over 5. |
| Child attendance | Children attend the group with their fathers, participate in lunchtime activities and are cared for in a children's group during morning and afternoon sessions. When children aren't living with fathers, carers bring the child to the group to participate in the lunchtime activity. | Difficult to have children come to the prison for reasons including geographical distance between their homes and the prison, reluctance of caregivers to tell children about their father's incarceration and restricted contact. Extra contact sessions added to allow as many opportunities for interaction as possible. |
| Video feedback | Before the group begins, facilitators make videos of fathers and children interacting one-to-one. In the group this video is used for strengths based video feedback work. | Due to the difficulties experienced in trying to get the children to the prison, it was impossible to make videos of fathers and children. Therefore video feedback work used sample videos of other fathers and children. |
| Delivery method | Facilitators act as members of the group, directing conversation but not considered "experts" or "teachers". Participate in conversation and share own experience. | Prison style of group delivery described as "death by flipchart" in classroom teaching sessions. Mellow Parenting training encouraged facilitators to change their style, to be more inclusive and nurturing. |
| Support | Fathers self-disclose and discuss some difficult topics. Return to life at home, facilitators sign post to further services where considered appropriate. | Prisoners described sitting in cells dwelling on certain topics covered in the group. Further support identified and participants encouraged to seek further support. |

Moving forward

It is clear that a number of changes have been made to the typical Mellow Dads programme in order to make delivery possible in the prison setting. Further evaluation will explore if these changes have a significant impact on the outcomes of the programme in comparison to the community groups. We aim to establish "non-negotiable" elements of the programme which are absolutely necessary to ensure good outcomes for participants and their children.

- Further pilots in another 4 prisons.
- Feedback from participants, facilitators and prison staff.
- University of Edinburgh external evaluation to obtain feedback from child's primary carer.

References
 Lösel, F., & Bender, D. (2003). Protective factors and resilience. In D. P. Farrington, and J.W. Coid (Eds.), Early prevention of adult antisocial behaviour (pp.130-204). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
 Loucks, N. (2012). Prison and Parenting. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/publications/essays-about-parenting/parenting-under-pressure/prison-and-parenting.aspx>. [Last Accessed 1 January 2015].
 Patterson, K., Ibrahim, R., & McMaster, A. (2015). Mellow Dads: Outcomes of a relationship-focused group intervention for fathers and their children. Poster presented at the British Psychological Society conference, Birmingham (UK), 6-7 October 2015.

