

FATHERHOOD BULLETIN

SPRING 2020



Australian Fatherhood
Research Consortium

SUCCESSFUL DADDING IN 2020



Australian Fatherhood
Research Consortium



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In this issue

STORIES FOM REAL DADS

- 2 - How to successfully dad
- 3 - Taking the initiative
- 7 - A not-so clean sweep
- 8 - Winning as a parent
- 10 - Take it easy on yourself, Dad

PROGRAMS & FATHER INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

- 5 - Support for Fathers Project
- 11 - New dads to be screened for depression
- 4 - FATHERHOOD NEWS
- 9 - DADS IN THE MEDIA
- 12 - RESEARCH

The Fatherhood Bulletin is brought to you by the Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium; a voluntary group of citizens, clinicians and academics who share a strong interest in fathering.

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4 - Fatherhood News



5 - Support for Fathers project



10 - Take it easy on yourself, Dad



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HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY 'DAD'

WHEN HUDSON WAS BORN WITH A CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITION, IT WAS TIME TO LEARN SOME NEW FATHERING STRATEGIES.

I feel like I have no idea, I have 3 children aged between 17 years and 1 year. I thought my two teenage daughters, have been the whole set of challenges. However, after a 14 year gap, my 1 year old son Hudson (Huddy) has blown that away.

Huddy was born with an autoimmune condition where his body has reactions to most foods. His reactions to something he can't eat includes 3 days of sleepless nights while his tummy and throat heal, continual pain crying (non-stop for 14 hours), inability to sleep without constant settling, and constant re-flux and vomiting.

Learning to help him has been the most exhausting time I can remember – lots of trial and error. Sleep changed to the co-sleeping I swore would never happen; as it's the only way Huddy can settle to sleep. Food (usually a time of fun with your children) is a constant anxiety raiser; as each new food introduced is a possible source of major pain for him; and stress for us.

That's where I think I've done the best as Huddy's

dad. As each new challenge has arisen; win or lose, I've seen it as a learning experience. I've never stopped trying to help Huddy. Trying to understand his problems; or my wife's concerns; dealing with his condition; seeing various specialists to get help for him; and trying to make things better for him through research, comfort and loving him. Learning, persistence and patience are my strengths as a dad.

Those are also where I've failed, and thankfully now grown. I was arrogant in thinking I already knew it all. When things started going wrong, and I didn't know anymore; I got frustrated. Especially with the lack of sleep, sheer exhaustion took over and I became more frustrated, at Huddy, my wife, but mostly myself because I didn't know how to make it better. That's when I got help from Community Health.

Doing the Circle of Security helped me to learn to be more flexible, I understood a lot more of what he was going through and how he was developing.

That in turn opened my eyes to how to help with his condition. Looking back at it all, if I had my time again, I would tell myself to go to QLD Health sooner, learn the Circle. I wish I knew that with my first 2 kids, to step back and be patient with myself, and never stop trying to be there.

I've learnt, I am a good dad because I won't quit, I'm part of a team, I draw strength from my wife's example, from my father, who I always thought as indestructible, who one day recently told me while looking at Huddy "I don't think I'd have the strength to keep doing it like you do". That's when I discovered what makes me a good dad, husband, friend, person. I won't stop trying, win or lose, I often think now when I'm struggling to get through another sleepless night, of Captain America's catchline, "I can do this all day" and that usually gets me through.



TAKING THE INITIATIVE

FROM BYSTANDER TO PROVIDER; HOW COOKING HELPED ONE DAD FEEL LIKE HE WAS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN HIS NEW FAMILY.

I do a lot of the cooking. So I come home from work and my partner, who is 8 weeks pregnant, is feeling worn out. We started getting takeaway more often in the early months of the pregnancy but this was unhealthy for all of us, so I started cooking up a stack of meals in advance. Every other night I am getting home and cooking a healthy fresh meal but on the others we eat the prepared ones.

This was taking the stress off her but I really felt like I was also looking after her and the baby. She did tell me how much she appreciated it but she also told her sister and mother – they live interstate – It was good to hear that it wasn't going unnoticed. It was also nice to know that she was telling other people about it.

I started doing it because about 1 month into the pregnancy she said that she was already feeling tired and that she was going to need help. She didn't tell me what she wanted me to do. I had to come up with that idea myself.

This has been an important experience for me. She has never needed my support before, not like this, and I was a bit lost about what I could do and if I was going to get it right - or come close. Because she has responded to it and been aware of it, I am pretty confident that I got it right and, yeah, this has made me feel more confident that I am going to get it right at other times. It has also helped me to feel like I was part of what was going on instead of being a bit of a bystander, yeh that was important too.

FATHERHOOD NEWS

The latest need-to-know news on dads in one place

12 MONTHS PARENTAL LEAVE

Sydney Morning Herald

Parents dealing with a stillbirth or infant death will be guaranteed 12 months of unpaid parental leave. Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter announced the increase provisions for families dealing with traumatic situations, saying the current guaranteed entitlement of six weeks of unpaid leave for a stillbirth or infant death was "insufficient for many parents who need more time before they return to work".

AUSTRALIAN FATHER OF THE YEAR 2020

The Shepherd Centre - media release

The Australian Father's Day Council and The Shepherd Centre announced Former Commissioner of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service Shane Fitzsimmons as the 2020 Australian Father of the Year. "Shane has certainly excelled as a father, and has played a critical role in our nation's fire service and recovery from the 2020 bushfires".

'FIT DAD' ONLINE SUPPORT GROUP FOR FATHERS

ABC News

Former Australian soldier, Leroy Faure from the Sunshine Coast, is providing thousands of fathers with a safe space to connect and speak openly about their mental well-being through an online fitness community. The "Fit Dad Lifestyle" social media group has over 22,000 members, sharing fitness insights and parenting support in a negativity-free safe space.



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SUPPORT FOR FATHERS PROJECT

DURING A 'SUPPORT FOR FATHERS' SESSION, ANDY SHARED HIS STORY ABOUT BEING A SEPARATED DAD.

In a dad's group, Andy (not his real name) shared the difficulties he faced with shared custody and the emotional rollercoaster of handover time – when his time with his twins had finished, he passes them to mum (ex-partner) and says goodbye.

The group talked about what happens when dad is feeling positive and having a good day. They brainstormed the positive effects this can have on mum, the kids and on themselves. Andy talked about the effects that his positive behaviour has on his kids and himself. But he could not talk about his ex-partner and he could not associate anything positive with her – such was his negative feelings towards her and the separation.

Later on, Andy reflected on how he is a thoughtful dad and mindful of keeping his children in a calm state during the handover so that mum does not have to deal with their emotional meltdowns after he leaves. Andy used to say things like, “I’m gonna miss you” and “I can’t wait till I see you next time” and he and the kids would be in tears,

feeling full of grief. Mum would be left to pick up the pieces as she took the twins back home.

Andy figured out that by staying calm and still being honest with his feelings, things worked out for the better. Now, he gives his children a big hug and tells them, “I love you” and “it’s time to go with mum”. They might still be upset but they are more likely to be calm as they leaves with mum, which means fewer meltdowns.

In the space of just one hour, with the help of talking to other dads, Andy had gone from not wanting to acknowledge his ex-partner to expressing how well he managed his own emotions and his kids', so that he, his ex and his kids can all have a more positive parenting experience.

FIND OUT HOW FATHERS' GROUPS ARE HELPING MEN IN THEIR NEWFOUND FATHERHOOD. CHECK OUT THE NEW RESEARCH ON PAGE 12.



SUPPORT FOR FATHERS

FATHERHOOD AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIP SUPPORT



SUPPORT FOR FATHERS UPDATE

DOM ALFORD

The Support for Fathers project has resources for dads focused on fatherhood, family relationships and connecting with other dads. We also have a professionals' toolkit to guide support services in how they engage dads.

Until March 2020, we were delivering our sessions face-to-face and travelling around Australia. When COVID-19 hit, we moved online and since May 2020, we have been delivering webinars with great success.

Currently, we run:

DadStuff – online sessions for Dads and father figures.

Working with Dads – online training for support services.

Going online, we have seen a bigger uptake which has been fantastic. It seems being online makes it more accessible for people to attend given they do not have to travel to a venue, can login from their home or workplace and pick a date that suits them. The biggest upshot is that we have people from all over Australia coming together and talking about fatherhood. The negative is that we lose out on quality face-to-face discussion. However, with lots of Australian families in isolation, lockdown and struggling with the impacts of COVID-19, providing opportunities for support is the best thing we can be doing.

More Information

The Support for Fathers project has been running since 2018 and is funded by the Department of Social Services as part of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022.

Relationships Australia Victoria is delivering Support for Fathers.

Find out more at our website:

www.supportforfathers.com.au



Jasmine's Room by Erin Murphy licensed under CC BY 2.0

A NOT-SO CLEAN SWEEP

A MESSY ROOM CAN CAUSE FAMILY FIGHTS BUT A CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE MIGHT BE THE ANSWER.

When we were younger, and mostly before kids, my partner and I used to argue more than we do now. Over time we learnt to understand each other's triggers and be more careful around them. We still find opportunity to disagree about stuff but it rarely escalates to full blown conflict.

The importance of this was brought home to us after a pretty charged argument about something, can't even remember what it was now, when one of our kids (about 6 and 8 at the time) asked if we were going to get divorced. I remember thinking how fragile their sense of safety and security must be, as they had only witnessed a couple of arguments in all that time. However, it became apparent in the teenage years that our daughter could easily have reduced family tensions by cleaning her room. It was bad in there at times. There was food waste, dirty clothes, clean clothes and other rubbish mixed together in piles on the floor. I remember wondering why I had bothered to build cupboards or paint the room.

Her bedroom mess was readily available fuel for agitation and conflict.

It was getting right under my partner's (their mum's) skin and provoking tensions across the family. We made rules, negotiated, begged and disciplined but nothing had any kind of long term influence.

I heard a podcast one day talking about how teenagers didn't even see the mess in their rooms and how the mess was a way of making the space their own. Apparently it is a good thing to be able to see most of what you own, or have partially eaten, in piles all around you. It made me think that we were not going to fix her and that we had to find a way to reduce the influence that her mess was having on us.

We developed a plan, in consultation with her, whereby we would only be allowed to ask her to tidy her room on Wednesdays and Saturdays. If we forgot then we had to wait. If we remembered,



Photo by Joshua Rawson-Harris on Unsplash

then she had to do it. We needed a way to help us look away and this could be it.

Sometimes she did clean her room when we asked and sometimes we still got ignored. The best, and most amusing, thing was that we often forgot to ask when the opportunity days came about. Perhaps her room was a bit tidier after that but this simple plan had an immediate influence on tensions in our home. Once again, it was all about the triggers.

When it came to tidy bedrooms, good 'dadding' was about finding ways to reduce the opportunity for conflict. She is almost 20 now and living away most of the time. She is a wonderful daughter and we get on well. How she keeps her room is not important.

WINNING AS A PARENT

DOES YOUR CHILD BATTLE BEDTIME? PERHAPS A LITTLE IMAGINATION COULD HELP YOU OUT.

Our three (nearly four) year old daughter, Georgie has always been a night owl. At bedtime, we sit with Georgie until she goes to sleep. Sometimes it takes up to a couple of hours to get her to settle and go to sleep once she is in bed. I recently stumbled on a way to help get her to settle and go to sleep quicker by incorporating one of her favourite games into our bedtime routine.

To the bemusement of Georgie's day care teachers, she loves to give pretend presents. She gets excited when they are pretend opened, and she gets to tell the recipient what the imaginary present is. Georgie will often start this game to avoid settling when we are trying to get her to sleep. The bedtime present giving routine starts as an exchange of imaginary gifts which consistently turn out to be a pink and purple (Georgie's favourite colours) bike and helmet.

This game can go back and forth for quite a while if Georgie is in a mood to resist settling despite my wife and I protesting that its time to go to sleep etc.

In a flash of inspiration, I recently tried a different tack and gifted Georgie an imaginary sleeping mask. I explained that when you put the imaginary sleeping mask on, you have to close your eyes. We discussed the rules around sleeping masks and to my surprise, Georgie accepted these as the rules of the game, closed her eyes, quickly turned away from me and went to sleep. At the moment, this is my favourite way to get Georgie sleep; it doesn't always work but seems to mean less instances of us getting frustrated at each other. At this point in time, this is my favourite parenting hack.

DADS IN THE MEDIA

Catch up on the latest podcasts, TV, movies and websites about fathers



THE FATHERING PROJECT

ABC iview

Compass presents: In one of Perth's most disadvantaged suburbs, Australia's first preventative program 'The Fathering Project' combats entrenched, intergenerational problems, one father at a time. This raw, heartfelt, observational documentary follows the triumphs & tragedies of the men and boys of Armadale, providing insight into a modern crisis of masculinity.

Available on ABC iview until 06 October 2020 or the 'Watch' section of ABC Religion & Ethics website.



WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A MODERN DAD?

ABC Podcast

Maggie Dent talks to TV presenter Osher Gunsberg, comedian Peter Helliar, musician Tim Rogers and parenting educator Clark Wight, about finding their feet, how they show their love, and what it's like being a dad in the 21st Century.

Available on the Parental As Anything podcast: Episode #23.



SUPPORT FOR FATHERS

New website

Men, particularly fathers, often don't have access to resources that are designed specifically to meet their circumstances and needs. The new website, Support For Fathers, provides free information, advice and resources specifically for dads, and a toolkit for professionals who work with fathers and families.

Check it out at <https://www.supportforfathers.com.au/>.

TAKE IT EASY ON YOURSELF, DAD

DO YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF EXHAUSTED TRYING TO JUGGLE A BABY AND BEING THE PERFECT PROVIDER?

As I write this my little nine-month-old boy Jack is sound asleep, something that has been a rare occurrence in our household up until recently. I had been told by everyone to be prepared for the lack of sleep a baby brings to your life, however being a shift worker gave me a sense of false confidence and I thought I would cruise through these sleepless nights with ease. I was wrong! I was working 12hr days, studying, trying to be a good husband and father and it was slowly wearing me down. I found myself feeling really low and disappointed as I had a feeling I wasn't being the father I had imagined myself to be.

Even though our wives and partners often bear most of the workload with raising children I felt a lot of pressure as a dad to be this super hero type figure that doesn't waiver under pressure and will always be a solid rock that the family can rely on.

My wife is amazing and seems to have an endless abundance of energy. She has handled the sleepless nights much better than I.

It took some honest conversations with her and a hard look at myself to realise I was running myself into the ground. This was counterproductive to being a good father.

It was then that I made the decision to take a step back from some of the areas of my life that were adding pressure and direct more of my focus to being present with my son. That small change



had a huge positive effect for myself and my family. I have realised through having our son that I can't do everything all at once and it is ok to ask for help, take a step back and sometimes less is more.

I have found success in parenting my son through not being so hard on myself and trying every day to just enjoy the little moments I get with him. I can be the rock my wife and son needs but I'm only capable of being that if I don't take on too much work and added pressure.

After all my first and most important job is being a father.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT DADS AND SLEEP CHECK OUT THE NEW RESEARCH ON PAGE 13.

NEW DADS TO BE SCREENED FOR DEPRESSION

For the first time in Australia, new fathers will be screened for depression through a state health service. With a \$2.4 million grant from the Health Innovation Fund, NSW Health has launched a Focus on New Fathers (FONF) pilot program targeting 30,000 fathers in four Local Health Districts. The FONF pilot will use SMS4dads, an innovative digital platform to reach men expecting a baby/with a newborn to provide information and a screening tool throughout the transition to fatherhood.

SMS4dads, developed by researchers from the University of Newcastle and HMRI, sends three texts per week with tips and information about infant development to fathers' phones from 16 weeks into the pregnancy until the baby is 12 months of age. The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), which is used in state and national surveys to monitor mental illness, will be embedded in the SMS4dads text messages at five points. Distressed fathers will be contacted by the Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia helpline. As well as testing the identification and referral of those with distress the pilot will also attempt to increase clinician awareness and confidence in providing support to new fathers.

"We know that a father's mental health is vital to a well-functioning family" says SMS4dads program lead Associate Professor Richard Fletcher "and health services recognise that dads can be depressed too, but this is the first State health service to pilot screening for fathers as part of health service provision on this scale".

The SMS4dads program uses the 'voice' of the baby to deliver messages that are synchronised with the development of the fathers' fetus and baby.

The messages on interacting with a new baby, supporting mothers and staying healthy are brief but have links to further online information. Previous programs using SMS4dads have reported extremely positive reactions from dads to the baby 'voice' and to the program overall. Between 80 and 90% of participants stay with the program until the end even though they can opt out at any time.

In a South Australian pilot study 92% of fathers said the messages helped in their transition to becoming a father. The texts also helped to bond with their baby and coparent with their partner. Comments from participants included "When other people tell me what to do, that doesn't really work for me, but when the message came from my baby asking me to read to her – well, what could I do?" "The texts were a great conversation starter with my wife, I forwarded quite a few through to her." "The way the messages would pop up and sometimes the timing was just right to give you a boost or a smile amidst everything – like a mate tapping you on the shoulder."

The FONF program was launched on Fathers Day 2020 and will run into 2021. Dads from NSW can register at www.sms4dads.com

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“When I got the news”: Aboriginal fathers in the Kimberley region yarning about their experience of the antenatal period



Paternal involvement during the antenatal period is recognised as a positive contributor to a child's health and developmental outcomes. Little is known about Aboriginal Australian men's experiences and perceptions during their partner's antenatal period.

Methods: A qualitative yarning methodology was used to explore the experiences of ten Aboriginal Australian fathers during their partner's antenatal period, in a remote Northern Australian town.

Conclusions: This study demonstrated that these Aboriginal men valued engagement with antenatal care (ANC) services and highlighted strategies to improve Aboriginal paternal involvement with ANC services. Enhancing ANC to be inclusive of fathers, through a local co-design process, could strengthen and support Aboriginal families to achieve improved health and wellbeing outcomes across the family system.

Carlin, E., Cox, Z., Spry, E., Monahan, C., Marley, J. V. & Atkinson, D. (2020). "When I got the news": Aboriginal fathers in the Kimberley region yarning about their experience of the antenatal period. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 00, 1-10.

Impacted family equality, self-confidence and loneliness: a cross-sectional study of first-time and multi-time fathers' satisfaction with prenatal and postnatal father groups in Sweden

Objective: To quantitatively assess fathers' perceptions and satisfaction of father groups in Sweden during the prenatal and postnatal periods.

Method: A cross-sectional quantitative study design was used to report fathers' satisfaction of father groups, including how the groups impacted their personal outcomes, as well as their relationship with their partner and child. Further analyses were completed on if their depressive symptoms, via EPDS, and/or parity affected their satisfaction and personal outcomes.

Findings: Overall, fathers were generally satisfied with both the prenatal and postnatal father groups, although fathers attended prenatal father groups to a lesser extent. Father groups may help encourage fathers to meet policy goals, such as childrearing equality, and can be an important arena for screening fathers for depression.



Wells, M. B., Kerstis, B. & Anderson, E. (2020). Impacted family equality, self-confidence and loneliness: a cross-sectional study of first-time and multi-time fathers' satisfaction with prenatal and postnatal father groups in Sweden. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*; <https://doi.org/10.1111/scs.12900>

Sleep among fathers of infants: What we do know about it and why is it important?



The limited existing research on parental sleep is mostly focused on mothers. However, both parents may be impacted by sleep disturbance and infant care tasks during the night (Insana et al., 2014) as many fathers assist with nappy changing and settling the baby after each feed. Regardless of the arrangements around sharing the infant care workload, both parents are likely to be affected by poor sleep and fatigue.

Wynter, K. (2019). Sleep among fathers of infants: What we do know about it and why is it important? *International Journal of Birth and Parent Education*, 7(1), 15-17.

Sleep, mental health and wellbeing among fathers of infants up to one year postpartum: A scoping review

Background: Sleep disturbance among adults has consequences for their health and functioning. Among mothers of infants, there is evidence that fatigue and sleep disturbance are significantly associated with depression, anxiety and impaired relationships with partners and infants. It is not known whether consistent evidence of such associations exists for fathers.

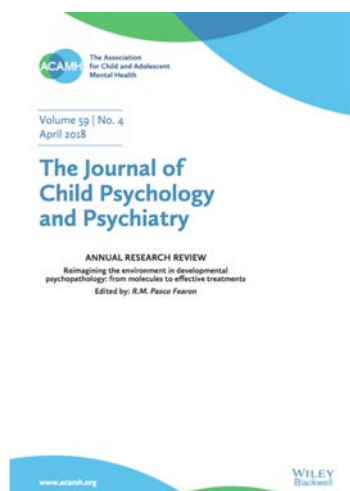
Purpose: The aim of this review was to describe what is known about fathers' sleep and its associations with mental health and wellbeing, in the first 12 months postpartum.

Key conclusions: Health professionals should consider a brief assessment of fathers' sleep when they consult families with young infants. Psycho-education regarding management of poor infant sleep could help to prevent long-term fatigue and its consequences among fathers.



Wynter, K., Francis, L. M., Fletcher, R., McBride, N., Dowse, E., Wilson, N., ... The Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium (2020). Sleep, mental health and wellbeing among fathers of infants up to one year postpartum: A scoping review. *Midwifery*, 88, 1-23.
doi: 10.1016/j.midw.2020.102738.

Annual research review: Interparental conflict and youth psychopathology: an evidence review and practice focused update.



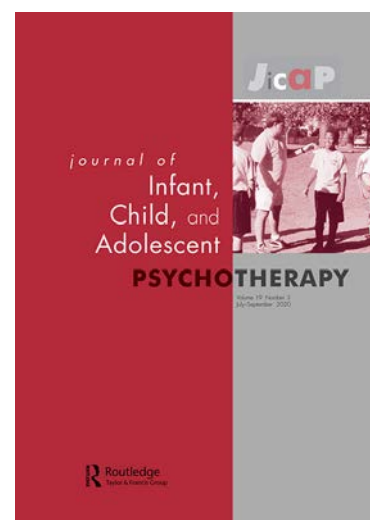
The quality of the interparental relationship is recognized as an important influence on child and adolescent psychopathology. Historically, clinically oriented research on this topic has focused on the impacts of parental divorce and domestic violence as primary interparental relationship influences on child outcomes, to the relative neglect of dimensional or qualitative features of the couple/interparental relationship for youth (child and adolescent) psychopathology. We review evidence and present an integrated theoretical model, highlighting how children are affected by interparental conflict and what this evidence base means for effective intervention and prevention program development, as well as the development of possible cost-benefit models.

Harold, G. T. & Sellers, R. (2018). Annual research review: Interparental conflict and youth psychopathology: an evidence review and practice focused update. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 59(4), 374-402.

[dhttps://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.swin.edu.au/10.1111/jcpp.12893](https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.swin.edu.au/10.1111/jcpp.12893)

Efficacy of the Circle of Security intervention: A meta-analysis.

The Circle of Security (COS) intervention aims to teach caregivers to become more responsive to their children's needs. The present study is a metaanalysis that examined the efficacy of the COS intervention in relation to child attachment patterns, quality of caregiving, caregiver self-efficacy, and caregiver depression. A total of 10 studies were determined eligible for this meta-analysis. A random effects model was used and Hedge's g was calculated for the overall effect sizes. Results indicated a medium effect size for the efficacy of the intervention for child attachment security ($g = 0.65$, $p = .003$, $k = 4$), quality of caregiving ($g = 0.60$, $p = .012$, $k = 4$) and reduction of caregiver depression ($g = 0.53$, $p < .001$, $k = 3$). There was a significant large effect for improved caregiver self-efficacy ($g = 0.98$, $p < .001$, $k = 2$). Results suggest that while the efficacy of the COS intervention demonstrates promising results, more research is needed.



Yaholkoski, A., Hurl, K. & Theule, J. (2016). Efficacy of the Circle of Security intervention: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Infant, Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy*, 15(2), 95-103.

doi: 10.1080/15289168.2016.1163161

AFRC Note - This is important research but of the 10 studies included only 5 had male caregivers and the average percentage of males in these cohorts was <15%. More work needs to be done to understand the influence of COS on dads and parenting dyads.



The Fatherhood Bulletin is brought to you by the Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium; a voluntary group of citizens, clinicians and academics who share a strong interest in fathering.

If you wish to join the mailing list, please email chris.may@newcastle.edu.au

