



# Caring Dads: Helping Fathers Value Their Children

**Tim Kelly**, Executive Director,  
Changing Ways, London, Canada

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# Why work with maltreating fathers

- Mothers constitute over half of reported child abuse and neglect investigations
- Likely a misrepresentation due to the high number of single parent mother lead families

**Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, Trocme et al., 2001**

# Why work with maltreating fathers

- Two parent mother/father families fathers are investigated in 71% of physical abuse and 69% of emotional maltreatment cases
- Sexual abuse father/stepfathers are over three times as likely to be investigated as mothers/stepmothers (24% vs 7%)

**Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, Trocme et al., 2001**

# Why work with maltreating father

- Much of the treatment and intervention focus has been on mothers with little attention given to appropriate interventions with fathers.
- Mothers are often placed in untenable positions to be child protective from men whom they may not be able to protect themselves
- They are often required to monitor, or prevent the children's father's access
- Mothers may be viewed by the children as the person preventing their father's access or visitation

# Why work with maltreating fathers

- There may be two reasons for existing strategy for interventions with maltreating fathers
  - A social and systemic bias that views mothers as more amenable to change than fathers
  - Maltreating fathers often have hostile attitudes and there may be a reluctance on the part of service providers/child protection workers to engage them in a meaningful productive manner

# Working with maltreating fathers

- **Practical Experience and Availability of Programs**

- **intervention focus on high risk mothers**
- **Most maltreating fathers are referred to traditional parenting support and educations program**

# Why not traditional parenting programs?

- Most parenting support and education programs assume a skill deficit and tend to focus on child behavioral management techniques which include reinforcement strategies, punishment/discipline and anger management

# Why not traditional parenting programs?

- Many maltreating and abusive fathers present overly controlling behavior, a sense of entitlement, and self-centered attitudes
  - thus, the development of child management skills should not be an initial focus of intervention

# Why not traditional parenting programs?

- “What do you mean? I can’t spank him, touch him or anything. How’m I supposed to control him?”

# Why not traditional parenting programs?

- Many abusive and maltreating fathers present a paradoxical relationship between perceived power and use of power-assertive strategies.
  - are highly reactive to the possibility of lost control
  - more likely to attribute negative intent
  - engage in more control-oriented appraisal
  - are more likely to derogate children
  - are more likely to be abusive and coercive

*Bugental et al.*

# Why not traditional parenting programs?

- Accountability is not a focus of most parenting education programs
  - Intervention for maltreating fathers need to collaborate with child protection services and the criminal justice system
  - Intervention for maltreating fathers need to be child protection focused not father focused
- Most traditional parenting programs presume a basic level of cooperation and consistency between parents

# Therapeutic Goals and Strategies for Intervening with Maltreating Fathers

# Caring Dads Program

- 17 week program – 2 hour sessions
- Groups of 8-12 fathers
- Two-three facilitators ( male/female)
- Facilitator backgrounds, abusive men's counselor, child protection and women's advocate
- Referred by child protective services and / or probation and parole

# Caring Dads Program

- Focus to increase fathers awareness the impact of abuse and neglect on their children
- Enhance motivation to change
- Challenge and reduce attitudes and perceptions that contribute and support child maltreatment
- Support improvements in child/parent relationship
- Support reduction in father involved parental conflict and increase father cooperation in parenting

# Caring Dads Program

- Goal #1 “Engaging fathers in the process of change”
  - As most are fathers referred and mandated by child protection or court order it is important to establish a therapeutic relationship as quickly as possible
    - Strategies include motivational interviewing techniques, acknowledging clients’ experience as child and adult, and enforcing group norms strategies and supports

# Caring Dads Program

- Goal #2 “Child centered parenting strategies”
  - Discussion of child developmental stages including realistic expectations for children
  - Support for better familiarity of their children
  - Discussion and challenges towards greater understanding of a balance of children’s and parental needs with a focus on prioritization of children’s needs
  - Focus on a continuum of abusive strategies (adult centered to child centered) employed to achieve parental needs versus children’s needs

# Caring Dads Program

Adult Centered ----- Child Centered

Denial ----- Responsibility

# Caring Dads Program

- Goal #3 “Increase father’s awareness of and responsibility for their abusive and neglectful behavior which includes actions towards the children’s mothers”
  - Achieved through cognitive-behavioral strategies and direct confrontation directed at rationalizations for the abuse and neglect they have used against their children and their children’s mother

# Caring Dads Program

- Goal #4 “Rebuilding trust and planning for the future”
  - Support for recognition of the long term impact of child maltreatment and neglect and the development of realistic expectations for child/parent relationship
  - Addressing the emotional impact of abuse on the children as well as the perpetrator
  - Encourage help seeking behavior

# Caring Dads Program

- Conclusions:

- Father perpetrated child maltreatment is more than the development of a new set of child controlling skills
- Child maltreatment has damaged the relationship between the father and his children and their mother and must be accounted for by the fathers

# Caring Dads Program

- Conclusions:

- Abusive and maltreating father's require a specialized intervention that addresses the nature of abuse and neglect and the impact on children and requires a specialized understanding of the dynamic intersection of woman abuse and child abuse
- Interventions for maltreating fathers must work in collaboration with community including woman's advocates, child protection agencies and criminal justice system

“I used to think that kids just needed a good whack. Now I think they just need an adult to make an effort.”

# Caring Dad's: Helping Fathers Value Their Children

Co-creators:

Dr. Katreena Scott

Dr. Claire Crooks

Karen Francis

Coordinator:

Michele Paddon

[www.caringdadsprogram.ca](http://www.caringdadsprogram.ca)

# How to find us...

- [linda.baker@lfcc.on.ca](mailto:linda.baker@lfcc.on.ca)
- [alison.cunningham@lfcc.on.ca](mailto:alison.cunningham@lfcc.on.ca)
- [timkelly@changingways.on.ca](mailto:timkelly@changingways.on.ca)