



## DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-2017-0058, 28 February 2017

# Role of fathers in the family unit

## Summary

This pack has been prepared ahead of the debate to be held on Wednesday 1 March on the role of fathers in the family unit.

The subject for debate has been chosen by Neil Gray MP.

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

# 1. Introduction

During 2016, the Fathers Network Scotland (FNS) ran the "[Year of the Dad](#)" campaign, "issuing a rallying call to services and employers to support dads, embrace family-friendly, inclusive practice and reflect the importance of fathers in child development".<sup>1</sup>

FNS explained that

Because society hasn't yet caught up with the striking cultural changes that have taken place in the home and workplace over the past fifty years. The old stereotype of married breadwinner and disciplinarian no longer serves us in an age of increasing diversity and gender equality. It's time to celebrate and support the key contribution fathers make to child development, family and community life.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of recent developments, the website noted that:

Dads now play a more active role in a child care and domestic life in general.

1. Their involvement in parenting has increased from less than 15 minutes a day in the mid-1970s to three hours a day during the week, with more at the weekend (Fisher et al, 1999)
2. Once seen by services as an after-thought or even a distraction from the real work of supporting mum, dads are now making their presence felt in health centres, schools and what used to be called "mother and toddler groups".
3. Typically excluded from the birth of their children until the late 1950s, today men rightly expect to be present to support partners from the start of pregnancy, and to welcome their children into the world.
4. Recent legislation – including changes to birth registration, the right to request flexible working and shared parental leave – means forward-thinking organisations no longer assume it will only be mum who takes time off.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of 2016, a review of "Year of the Dad" was published by FNS and the Scottish Government which noted that during the year:

- launch events, workshops and conferences were among 95 events created by 56 organisations "which reached 14,800 people across Scotland during 2016";
- publicity included 40 downloadable resources, Youtube clips, website and social media;
- "of the 38 organisations which helped us review YOTD via telephone interviews and a survey, all aspired to improve on existing dad-friendly policies, and welcomed the campaign as a

place for organisations to come together under one banner to highlight dads' needs".<sup>4</sup>

The report concluded that:

The full impact of these activities and assets is hard to measure in terms of outcomes for children and families. What is evident is that this small-scale campaign – designed and run by the equivalent of 1.5 full time staff and 1 full time consultant – has rippled outwards across Scotland thanks to our partners and stakeholders.

Many have taken the concept and assets and run with their own initiatives, taking responsibility for their own outcomes.

For example, Fife Council raised a motion to support YOTD; the charity Home-Start called a debate in Scottish Parliament, and the Cattanach Trust diverted over £200k specifically to under-privileged dads' initiatives. Meanwhile Bookbug and Circle Scotland each launched a whole programme of events and initiatives.

Such actions have had the most powerful impact because they have been owned and organised by those closest to the communities they are serving. Along with our 289 champions, they are the changemakers in the longer term.

Good, father-friendly work has always existed but until now we didn't know who was doing it, where it was and what the impact was. Now we are all linked as part of a network – one of the most highly-valued outcomes of the Year of the Dad.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of policies relating to fathers, highlights include:

- unmarried fathers assume parental responsibility if they are named on the birth certificate – this has applied since May 2006 in Scotland, since December 2003 in England and Wales, and since April 2002 in Northern Ireland;<sup>6</sup>
- under recent changes to employment law (which is not devolved), Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Shared Parental Pay (SPP) is available for families having a baby or adopting a child. It allows the 52 weeks' leave and 39 weeks' pay that is unused by a mother or primary adopter to be shared in blocks between the parents;<sup>7</sup>
- fathers can have up to two-weeks of paternity leave, and either parent can take unpaid parental leave of up to four weeks per year (taken in one week blocks);

More information on employment law and family-related leave can be found in section 10 of the Library briefing paper [Key Employment Rights](#).

In addition, in England and Wales the law was recently amended so that a court is to presume that the involvement of each parent in the life of

<sup>4</sup> Fathers Network Scotland and Scottish Government, [Year of the Dad Review 2016](#), December 2016

<sup>5</sup> As above, p7

<sup>6</sup> GOV.UK, [Parental rights and responsibilities – 2. Who has parental responsibility](#), website

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay/overview>

the child concerned will further the child's welfare when it is considering a child arrangements order (for contact or residence).<sup>8</sup>

In its manifesto for the 2016 Scottish election, the SNP said:

while we are rightly proud of the ground-breaking approach taken to parental rights and responsibilities in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, we recognise that this legislation is now over 20 years old and the shape of families has changed considerably in that time. We will review the legislation to ensure the interests of children and their need to form and maintain relationships with key adults in their lives – parents, step-parents, grandparents and other family members – are at the heart of any new statutory measures.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, the Justice Committee of the Scottish Parliament concluded in its March 2016 report that:

the way in which the Scottish legal system handles family law cases involving children raises strong and conflicting views. With the main legislation over 20 years old, we note views that it may be time for a wholesale review, focussed as much on how the law is applied, and the mechanism used to resolve disputes, as on what the law says. We consider that cases would benefit from increased use of mediation and, if necessary, from being heard by specialist family law sheriffs.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For more information, see pages 8–9 of the Library briefing paper, [Child arrangements orders: residence and contact related matters for parents, grandparents and others after separation](#).

<sup>9</sup> Scottish National Party, [Manifesto](#), webpage

<sup>10</sup> Justice Committee, [Post-Legislative Scrutiny of the Family Law \(Scotland\) Act 2006, 6th Report, 2016 \(Session 4\)](#), 17 March 2016, pp21–22, para 87

## 2. Parliamentary material

### 2.1 Written parliamentary questions

#### [Families](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Northbourne | **Party:** Crossbench

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to address issues arising from family breakdowns, and the impact on male children of growing up in a household without a resident father.

**Answering member:** Lord Henley | **Party:** Conservative Party |

**Department:** Department for Work and Pensions

The Government recognises the damaging impact of conflict between parents on children's outcomes. New evidence was published last year highlighting this link, and making clear that the presence or absence of parental conflict has a much greater impact on a child's outcomes than the structure of the child's family. Our child maintenance system encourages separated parents to collaborate and make family based arrangements where they can, working together in the interests of their child once they separate. Evidence shows that after separation where parents are able to take a collaborative, low conflict approach it is better for children's outcomes, including over the involvement of the non-resident parent where this is appropriate, whether this is the child's mother or father.

22 Feb 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL5362

#### [Paternity Leave](#)

**Asked by:** Phillips, Jess | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what research his Department has recently undertaken into the potential benefits of increasing paternity leave for men.

**Answering member:** Margot James | **Party:** Conservative Party |

**Department:** Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

In 2011, the Coalition Government consulted on a number of options to modernise employment entitlements relating to families. This led to the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and Pay for working parents; and the provisions in the Children and Families Act 2014 which enable Ministers to make Regulations to extend paternity leave and increase the rate of pay.

18 Oct 2016 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 48132

#### [Children: Custody](#)

**Asked by:** Robertson, Mr Laurence | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment she has made of the equality between mothers and fathers of court judgments

on child custody and access to children; and if she will make a statement.

**Answering member:** Dr Phillip Lee | **Party:** Conservative Party |  
**Department:** Ministry of Justice

The law requires the welfare of the child to be the court's paramount concern when making any decision about a child's upbringing, including with whom the child is to live or spend time. The courts must consider the individual facts of each case when making a decision.

Decisions in these cases are a matter for the independent judiciary.

10 Oct 2016 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 46151

#### [Paternity Leave](#)

**Asked by:** Lucas, Caroline | **Party:** Green Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will make it his policy that all employees are entitled to paternity leave from the first day of employment; and if he will make a statement.

**Answering member:** Margot James | **Party:** Conservative Party |  
**Department:** Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

The Government is taking a range of steps to improve provision for working parents. The eligibility rules for statutory paternity entitlements balance the needs of parents and the cost both to employers and to the taxpayer.

09 Sep 2016 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 44641

#### [Fathers](#)

**Asked by:** Lammy, Mr David | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what policies his Department is implementing to promote active fatherhood; and if he will make it his policy that fathers be required to sign birth certificates.

**Answering member:** Priti Patel | **Party:** Conservative Party |  
**Department:** Department for Work and Pensions

Our objective is to support families to create and maintain good quality relationships to sustain a safe, stable and nurturing environment for their children. We believe that fathers play an integral role in family life and that is why the government has worked hard to ensure that families have the support they need. In particular, we have invested approximately £8m for 2015-16 providing services for couples – mothers and fathers - during key transitions and in difficulty. We have ensured that all specifications for new contracts specifically include a requirement for providers to engage fathers and ensure their services are father friendly.

We have also introduced the Family Test which ensures that potential impacts on family functioning are carefully considered as part of the

polycymaking process, including impacts on all members' ability to play a full role in family life.

The legislative provisions to introduce mandatory joint registration remain on the statute and we will continue to consider how joint registration can support fathers' involvement as part of a wider package of support.

08 Dec 2015 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 18276

### [Paternity Leave](#)

**Asked by:** Green, Kate | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, what steps he is taking to raise awareness of the right to statutory paternity leave.

**Answering member:** Nick Boles | **Party:** Conservative Party |  
**Department:** Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

The Government provides comprehensive guidance on statutory paternity leave and pay on the GOV.UK website.

The right to take paternity leave is now well established. The latest information from the Maternity and Paternity Rights Survey undertaken in 2009-10 suggests that 91% of fathers take some time off after their babies' birth.

The Coalition Government undertook a campaign to raise awareness of the introduction of Shared Parental Leave, which came into force on 1 December 2014 for parents of children due (or placed for adoption) on or after 5 April 2015. Shared Parental Leave enables fathers to play a greater role in raising their child and enables mothers to return to work at a time that is right for them.

19 Nov 2015 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 16113

## 2.2 Oral parliamentary questions

[Topical questions](#) (HC Deb 2 February 2017 c1172)

**Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)**

T4. What are the Government doing to support men to take a more active role in looking after their children? [908551]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinéage)**

We know that when fathers take an active role in childcare, it is not only great for their relationships with their children; it is also important in eliminating the gender pay gap. That is why we have introduced shared parental leave and extended the right to request flexible working, helping both mums and dads to balance their work life with their family commitments.

## 2.3 Debates

[International Men's Day](#) (HC Deb 17 November 2016 cc468-91)

[Male Suicide and International Men's Day](#) (HC Deb 19 November 2015 cc241-81WH)



### 3. Press articles

[Fathers face negative bias when applying for part-time work](#)

**Independent, 21 February 2017**

[Fathers help create happy families, but the state neglects their role](#)

**Observer, 12 February 2017**

[Iain Duncan Smith thinktank in 'fatherless society' warning](#)

**Observer, 12 February 2017**

[How working dads juggle their roles](#)

**BBC News, 16 January 2017**

['Fatherhood penalty' now a risk for men, warns charity](#)

**Guardian, 14 January 2017**

[Fathers should be celebrated, not ignored](#)

**Times, 30 December 2016**

[Absent fathers no longer: men confront stereotypes to become involved parents](#)

**Guardian 6 December 2016**

[Why are only 1 in 100 men taking up shared parental leave?](#)

**Telegraph, 5 April 2016**

[Myth of the new-age father as traditional parenting roles re-emerge](#)

**Telegraph, 19 May 2015**

## 4. Press releases

[The 2017 Modern Families Index – a snapshot into the lives of UK working families](#)

**Working Families, 16 January 2017**

## 5. Further reading

[Modern Families Index 2017](#)

**Working Families and Bright Horizons, 16 January 2017**

[Employee Workshops Increasing well-being and engagement for new dads](#)

**Family friendly Working Scotland and Fathers Network Scotland, September 2016**

[Annual Fatherhood Survey 2016](#)

**Centre for Social Justice, August 2016**

[Dads play key role in child development](#)

**Michigan State University, 14 July 2016**

[Dad Matters: Why fathers should figure in your work](#)

**Fathers Network Scotland, February 2014**

[Scottish Fathers and the Labour Market](#)

**Working Families and Fathers Network Scotland, April 2013**

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