

MITEY

**MEN IN THE
EARLY YEARS**

**10 myths about men and
early years education**

...and how to bust them

Introduction

The fact that men make up only 3% of the early years workforce in England¹ (and 4% in Scotland²) is the starkest of reminders that despite decades of progress, we still have a long way to go before we achieve anything approaching full gender equality in the UK.

It's 2019 and women caring for young children still represents so 'normal' a combination that it has become almost 'the only' combination in early years education. It's like the childhood equivalent of fish and chips, cheese and pickle, or gin and tonic – traditional, reassuring and seldom questioned.

So where does this leave men? Should we view the extreme gender-imbalance of the early years workforce as just an anomaly? Or must we address it as symptomatic of a deep discomfort about men looking after children?

The British Social Attitudes survey in 1984 found almost half of us (49%) believing it was "a man's role to earn and a woman's role to care". By 2012 only 13% of us believed this - and only 4% of people aged 18-25. But the 2012 survey also found 38% of us believing that when a woman marries or cohabits, she shouldn't be obliged to contribute to the household income – and amazingly, 95% of us believed that pre-school children will be damaged if a mother works full-time. More than a third of us (37%) thought this of children whose mothers do any paid work at all³.

It's as if we want women to have the freedom to earn money outside the home (and men to have the freedom to care within it, perhaps), but only within limits. And our beliefs about the special nature of the mother-child relationship clearly run deep.

So here is the challenge: to get clear in our heads WHY we want more men in the workforce – and to do battle against the profoundly held cultural beliefs that underpin our failure to attract and hold onto them.

Some in the sector are already well on their way with this agenda. We'll be featuring their stories on the MITEY website, and at our national conference on 4 September, over the coming months. This document is intended to stimulate discussion and get us moving in the right direction. I hope you find it useful.

Dr Jeremy Davies, Project lead, The MITEY Campaign, April 2019.

www.miteyuk.org

[www.twitter.com/miteyuk](https://twitter.com/miteyuk) #MITEY

¹ Figure from DFE Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2018 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/795332/Frontier - SCEYP 2018 Finance Report v2.pdf. See footnote on p29

² <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/news/blogs/Blog-71581.aspx>

³ Scott, J., & Clery, E. (2013). Gender Roles: an incomplete revolution? London: National Centre for Social Research. <http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-socialattitudes-30/gender-roles/introduction.aspx>.

1: “Men don’t want to work in early years education.”

Only 3% of the English early years workforce are men⁴, as compared to much higher percentages of men in other traditionally female-dominated workforces, like primary school teaching (15% male⁵) and nursing (11%⁶).

Perhaps the numbers speak for themselves: lots of men don’t want to work in early years education? But look a bit deeper: some of the reasons for not wanting to work in early years are probably entirely justifiable – for anyone, regardless of gender. This is a career that is not without its problems; low pay and status being significant ones, and these need attention⁷.

And yes, for some men, the fact that early years is so strongly identified as a ‘female’ profession may make it particularly unappealing⁸. But for others that may not be the main issue.

And the truth is: most men will have never even *considered* early years education as a possible career.

That’s hardly surprising. How often are boys or men invited to think about this as a possible job? Did their careers advisors ever suggest it?⁹ Do local FE and other courses actively seek to recruit them¹⁰? Do early years employers make it clear that

⁴ DFE Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2018 (see footnote 1)

⁵ Figure from 2015

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/533618/SFR2_1_2016_MainText.pdf

⁶ Figure from 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/2017/mar/01/why-so-few-male-nurses>

⁷ See for example <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/news/1163707/early-years-recruitment-crisis-putting-governments-30-hours-policy-at-risk> and <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/news/1166602/early-years-staff-face-financial-pressure-as-wages-drop>

⁸ Research for the Equal Opportunities Commission found that while 80% of girls would be willing to learn to do a non-traditional job, for boys the percentage was only 55%. Fuller, A., Beck, V., & Unwin, L. (2005). Employers, young people and gender segregation (England). Working Paper Series No.28. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.

⁹ There is evidence that children’s career aspirations are highly gendered at a very young age (Chambers et al, 2018). One in four 14-15 year old boys surveyed agreed that a career in caring ‘sounds interesting’ (Fuller et al, 2005); One in eight would be interested in working with children (Cook, 2005). Men’s enthusiasm for careers in these areas increases with age, and is particularly noticeable among males who retrain (Rolfe, 2005). Careers advice rarely supports boys into caring professions while boys are often sent to ‘masculine’ work experience, and are never supported to think about ‘non-traditional’ careers like EYE. Males can face discrimination and marginalisation in these areas, which is rarely addressed (Kouta & Kaite, 2011; Cameron, 2006; Cameron et al, 1999). The Gatsby Standards initiative, aimed at improving school-based careers advice, mentions gender equality as an area of focus, but only in terms of encouraging girls into traditionally ‘male’ careers. See Gatsby Foundation (2018). Good Career Guidance: a Handbook for Secondary Schools. Available online: www.goodcareerguidance.org.uk.

¹⁰ There is also an urgent need to review childcare training curricula and delivery of training to support men into childcare, particularly a fast track system for those entering as career changers (see Vandebroek, M., &

applications from males are welcome? And as dads dropping off or picking up at nursery, how have workers engaged them in conversations about parenting or child development, as they would routinely engage mums? Have staff made a point of inviting dads to events, or asked them to help out as volunteers?

Chances are that there are lots of ways men in your area could be helped into a position where considering a career in early years education starts to seem 'normal'. Maybe only once that's happened, will we really get a sense of whether early years education is a career that can appeal to men.

Peeters, J. (2008). Gender and professionalism: a critical analysis of overt and covert curricula. *Early Child Development and Care*, 178(7), 703 — 71).

2: “Women are naturally more ‘gifted’ at caring for children.”

Women in the UK still do the lion’s share of looking after children¹¹. But men’s participation in hands-on caregiving for children has increased hugely over recent decades. Dads’ average childcare time per day was just 15 mins in 1975; by 2007 it had risen to 2 hours 30 minutes. Today’s fathers do roughly half the caring for preschoolers that mothers do – whereas 50 years ago they did less than 15%¹².

So there are plenty of men out there with experience of looking after and nurturing the future generation. And research suggests that they can be just as good at it as women!

Dads tend to have fewer opportunities to learn about caring for their new baby; healthcare systems still focus on turning mothers into competent caregivers, and position fathers as optional extras. If they think about dads at all, they generally expect mothers to act as the conduit of information. But even despite this, scientists have found no biologically-based differences between the sexes in terms of capacity to interact sensitively with, or provide intimate care to, infants¹³.

Research suggests that, just like mothers’, fathers’ responsiveness (understanding and meeting their infants’ needs) varies depending on the degree to which they assume responsibility for their care¹⁴. When similarly supported, both mothers and fathers develop childcare skills at the same rate¹⁵. So for all of us, the more we do, the better we get.

We know that similar brain changes take place among ‘primary caretaker’ mothers and fathers, and that, despite no pregnancy or breastfeeding, hormonal changes take place in men who look after children (just as they do in adoptive mothers). In short, the male body can become ‘primed’ for and by caretaking – and this effect endures: for example, hormonal responses are more rapid in experienced fathers¹⁶.

¹¹ The Fatherhood Institute Fairness in Families Index found that in 2016, British men were doing an average of 24 minutes caring for children for every hour done by women (the lowest in the developed world).

<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2016/how-can-we-help-uk-families-become-more-gender-equal/>

¹² Burgess, A. & Davies, J., (2017). Cash or Carry? Fathers combining work and care in the UK (Full Report). Contemporary Fathers in the UK series. Marlborough: Fatherhood Institute.

<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Cash-and-carry-Full-Report-PDF.pdf> (see especially pp36-7)

¹³ Parke, R.D. (2008). Fathers in families. In Marc H. Bornstein (Ed), Handbook of parenting, Vol 3: Being and becoming a parent. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum & Assoc.

¹⁴ Lamb, M.E. and Lewis, C., 2010. The development and significance of father-child relationships in two-parent families. In Michael E. Lamb (ed), The Role of the Father in Child Development. 5th ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley (pp. 94-153).

¹⁵ Myers, B.J. (1982). Early Intervention Using Brazelton Training with Middle-Class Mothers and Fathers of Newborns. Child Development, 53(2): 462-471

¹⁶ See Pilyoung Kim, PhD, Paola Rigo, Linda C. Mayes, Ruth Feldman, James F. Leckman, and James E Swain (2014) Neural Plasticity in Fathers of Human Infants, Soc Neurosci. 2014 Oct; 9(5): 522–535.

What this shows us is that, whilst many men may present as less *confident* at looking after children, and especially at the more intimate aspects of caregiving, this does not mean that they are less *competent or capable*.

This insight has great significance for the early years sector, for several reasons:

- Beliefs (often unspoken, and unchallenged in professional training and development) about men's relative lack of ability in hands-on caregiving may underpin and seem to legitimize services' failure to tackle the lack of gender diversity in the early years workforce.
- Such beliefs may also shape how men who do work in the sector, are treated by female colleagues. They may be pushed away from more intimate caregiving roles and towards more traditionally 'male' activities like outdoors play, for example; or feel patronized by female colleagues offering unwanted advice on nappy-changing techniques. In severe cases managers may even fail to defend men against requests from parents for them not be involved in toileting or changing their children's nappies (see also myth 8).
- *Some* male staff – especially those who have not had much experience of intimate caregiving in their personal lives - may need additional support to increase their confidence. The same is likely be true of inexperienced female staff too. For employers, the important thing is to see this as a legitimate area for training and development for all staff, rather than a gender issue which disqualifies males.

Available online: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4144350/>; Atzil, S., Hendler, T., Zagoory—Sharon, O., Winetraub, Y. and Feldman, R., 2012. Synchrony and specificity in the maternal and the paternal brain: relations to oxytocin and vasopressin. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 51, pp.798--811; and Gray, P.B., and Anderson, K.G., 2010. *Fatherhood: Evolution and Human Paternal Behavior*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

3: “Men are put off early years education because of low pay and poor career progression.”

Low pay is a source of dissatisfaction for many early years professionals and there is considerable disquiet about low remuneration and the status of the sector. Some evidence points to this acting as a barrier to attracting men into the early years¹⁷. A perceived lack of clear career progression routes is another concern.

But should these potential recruitment barriers be viewed or presented as any more serious for men than they are for women? Surely a job well done should be paid accordingly, regardless of the gender of the person doing it? Don't women entering the early years sector also want to see that they could progress into senior, better paid roles as they gain in work experience? Are we seeing better qualified female staff rejecting the sector for the very same reasons?

The reason we tend to view such problems as disproportionately significant for men may be that we assume that all men need 'main breadwinner' salaries (and that women don't), just as we assume that all women will happily accept lower paid roles because the most important factor for them (and only them) is the ability to work hours that fit around their own childcare commitments.

It is true that men are still more likely to be the sole or main breadwinner in families, so there is certainly a proportion of men for whom the starting salaries on offer in early years education might feel impossibly low.

But what about men who are not in that situation? They might be too young to have such financial responsibilities; their partner might be the higher (or an equal) earner; the men might be older and less financially stretched, with more freedom to choose work that doesn't come with a fat pay cheque.

Men work in lower paid jobs in a huge variety of sectors, from catering to retail to construction to hairdressing, for a complex range of reasons. If invited or encouraged, some may actually prefer to work in early years than in other, similarly remunerated roles. Some may even be prepared to take a pay cut, because the work appeals to them sufficiently. And for men (often fathers or grandfathers) scaling

¹⁷ “There is evidence that it is not purely advertising and support which attracts and keeps men in childcare in other European countries, but the *nature* of the work, which is more knowledge-based and educational than childcare within a British context. In Norway and Denmark trained ‘pedagogues’ are able to work across a range of settings with children and young people aged up to 18 (see Cameron, C. , Owen, C. & Moss P. (2001), ‘Entry, retention and loss: a study of childcare students and workers’, DfES research report no. 275.). This may raise the status of both the training and the occupation, and therefore increase their attraction to men (see Rolfe, H. (2005). Men in Childcare. Working Paper no. 35. London: Equal Opportunities Commission).

down towards retirement, or no longer able to undertake heavy physical work, early years sector employment and the flexibility it can offer, may be just what they need.

As for career progression, there are in fact a variety of higher paid roles that women and men can take on within early years education, beyond the 'classroom' – including running and/or managing nurseries or nursery chains, or moving into teaching or academia.

So, perhaps it is unhelpful to focus solely or mainly on low pay and poor career progression as a barrier to male recruitment, because these problems affect everyone and without a magic wand to solve them, where does that leave us...in a sector that will never change! Our approach needs to be more creative: there are men out there who would love work in early years, if we identified them and actively sought to recruit them.

4: “Men are better at ‘rough and tumble’ play.”

Research suggests that ‘rough and tumble’ play is one of the few areas of adult-child interaction where men, in general, feel more confident. Fathers do more of it with their children than mothers do, for example¹⁸.

It may seem tempting to alight on this as proof that men and women are fundamentally different, and even to jump to develop a recruitment strategy that focuses on hiring men to specialize in lively and/or risky play.

But such an approach should be viewed with caution.

First, feeding into gender stereotypes of having male staff perform ‘masculine’ roles and women ‘feminine’ roles, teaches children the wrong message from day one. To model gender equality we should be showing them women and men, side by side, doing the same job and specialising in the things that make them passionate.

Second, research suggests that this is not what children themselves want. They don’t care about a practitioner’s gender - they care about whether the person taking care of them is engaging and ‘fun’¹⁹.

Third, the biggest difference between women and men in respect of ‘rough and tumble’ play is probably a physical one: on average, men tend to have greater upper body strength than women, for example, and so can continue doing ‘rough and tumble’ play that involves lifting for longer, as children get larger and heavier. Given that most ‘rough and tumble’ play involves wrestling rather than lifting, women (whether we are talking about mothers, or female nursery staff) should have no problem with it, in fact – and, in nurseries which support ‘rough and tumble’, perhaps we should view this as an aspect of practice where female staff may need additional training or support, rather than one in which male staff should specialize!

We should also remember that some men – and some women, of course - are more ‘physical’ than others; even the most apparently binary of traits tend to exist on a spectrum.

In fact since ‘rough and tumble’ is great for children’s brain development and developing confidence²⁰, all early years professionals should be engaging children in such play, where appropriate. But many other types of play and learning activity matter too, as do the more mundane tasks like nappy-changing, so it is important that staff of both genders are supported to feel confident in delivering on all aspects of early years practice. Not only does this enable all staff to develop essential skills

¹⁸ Craig, L. (2006). Does father care mean fathers share? A comparison of how mothers and fathers in intact families spend time with children. *Gender & Society*, 20(2), 259–281

¹⁹ Perkins, H., Edwards, T., and O’Sullivan, J. (2018) Men in Childcare: Does it matter to children, what do they say? (Stage 2). University of Wolverhampton & London Early Years Foundation. Available online: <https://www.leyf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Men-in-Childcare-stage-2-Final-v7-JO-HP-TE-compressed.pdf>.

²⁰ St. George, J. and Freeman, E. (2017), Measurement of father-child rough-and-tumble play and its relations to child behaviour. *Infant Mental Health Journal* 38(2): 709–725 DOI: 10.1002/imhj.21676

but it allows children and parents to see gender-flexible behaviour, as male and female staff collaborate in all aspects of children's care and development.

That way, staff become more versatile and interchangeable; we might value them not so much for their gender, but for their 'gender-flexibility'.

5: “We should treat everyone the same, so gender becomes irrelevant.”

Scan the jobs section of any early years publication, or search for early years vacancies through any jobs website, and you will not find any adverts explicitly seeking female staff. All refer to ‘practitioners’ and ‘individuals’ whose gender is not specified. And yet 97% of the workforce is female.

Treating everyone the same is clearly not working, therefore, if our goal is to achieve a gender-diverse early years education workforce. The truth is that taking a gender-neutral approach in a gendered situation only reinforces the status quo: we know, for example, that to get girls to study STEM subjects, we cannot remain gender-neutral: what’s needed are specific strategies to encourage them.

Adopting a gendered approach to recruitment and staff support does not undermine gender equality or equality. The principle of ‘gender equity’ involves fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs – in other words, recognizing that one size doesn’t fit all and looking for ways to encourage, support and create space for the under-represented gender (usually women, but in the case of the early years workforce, men).

Legally speaking, employers can use ‘positive action’ in a variety of ways, to help encourage people who share a ‘protected characteristic’ (as defined in the Equality Act 2010...in our context, the ‘protected characteristic’ is gender) and are under-represented in a particular activity (in our context, participating in early years education as a career). This is something we are used to seeing in traditionally male sectors like science, technology, engineering and medicine, via various campaigns and initiatives. An example is the WISE campaign²¹.

Later this year we will be producing more detailed advice about the kinds of things early years employers could be doing in terms of ‘positive action’. For now, here is a list copied directly from the Equality Act 2010 Code of Practice, which is available as a free download on the Equalities and Human Rights Commission website²²:

- targeting advertising at specific disadvantaged groups, for example advertising jobs in media outlets which are likely to be accessed by the target group;
- making a statement in recruitment advertisements that the employer welcomes applications from the target group, for example ‘older people are welcome to apply’;

²¹ <https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/>

²² <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/employment-statutory-code-practice>

- providing opportunities exclusively to the target group to learn more about particular types of work opportunities with the employer, for example internships or open days;
- providing training opportunities in work areas or sectors for the target group, for example work placements.

6: “Children need a balance of ‘mother-figures’ and ‘father-figures’ at nursery.”

Early years professionals often talk about their work using the family as a metaphor, and in this way they communicate ideas about maternal and paternal gender roles: mothers are like *this*, fathers are like *that*.

So would the ideal scenario would be to have a balance of female and male workers, who can personify stereotypical gender differences within our settings?

The problem with this is that it assumes that stereotyped ‘fathering’ and ‘mothering’ are how parents in families operate – and that such stereotypical behaviour is best for children.

Nothing could be further from the truth: in most families there is cross-over between parents in stereotypical parenting behaviours (mothers, for example, are more likely to be strict with children than fathers are). And research tells us, in fact, that children do best when fathers and mothers *share* the everyday parenting tasks, rather than sticking rigidly to gender-defined roles. The vast majority - if not all - of what good dads do is about getting stuck in and doing what’s normally associated with motherhood: hands-on care of young children, and responding sensitively to them²³; little or nothing relates to their being male.

Consider a stay-at-home father for a moment. He is well-practised at all the tasks one might normally associate with mothers (from bathing and nappy changing to soothing and comforting, management of everyday disputes and endless domestic planning) and so probably lacks some of the traits often considered ‘typical’ of fathers (relative absence, due to a focus on paid work; a relative unfamiliarity with the ‘mental load’ of managing the day-to-day parenting workload; a certain emotional distance, and alongside that a focus on discipline).

As an early years employer, would you prefer a male practitioner to embody the more ‘feminine’ skillset held by such a gender-stereotype-defying stay-at-home dad? Or would you prefer to take on the more traditional, less hands-on father-figure?

If the former, mightn’t we do well to rid ourselves of the father/mother metaphor altogether, since we can see that it is the *performance of particular roles*, rather than the *gender of the performer* per se, that really counts?

That way we could view all potential recruits as individuals with their own combination of interests, skills and aptitudes, which might be more or less useful in the education and development of young children. And such recruits’ effectiveness in

²³ See for example: Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Baumwell, L. B. and Cristofaro, T., 2012. Parent-child conversations during play. *First Language*, 32, pp.413-438, and Tamis-LeMonda, C.S., Cabrera, N.J. and Baumwell, L., 2013. Fathers’ role in children’s language development. In Natasha J. Cabrera and Catherine S. Tamis-LeMonda, *Handbook of Father Involvement: multidisciplinary perspectives*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge

the workplace – women's as well as men's - would rely on their ability to engage interchangeably in different roles, rather than their ability to act like a gendered stereotype.

7: “Making a special effort to recruit men is ‘social engineering’.”

Ask yourself this question: If you were designing the UK’s early years education sector from scratch, would you:

- a) Populate your workforce with 97% women, demonstrating in the clearest possible way to young boys and girls that society entrusts caregiving and education almost entirely to women?

Or

- b) Create a profession that by-and-large reflected the diversity of the population; gave children as broad an experience of caring adults as possible in the early years; and sought out the best educators and caregivers from all genders, ethnicities, sexualities and cultural backgrounds...giving everyone the chance to contribute to the vital work of supporting the next generation’s education and development?

Now ask yourself: does a) or b) sound most like social engineering?

8: “Paedophiles are attracted to early years education, and are mostly men.”

The fear of men being around children is a serious threat to our attempts to create a more gender-diverse workforce – and it is everywhere. Let us not forget that only three years ago Andrea Leadsom, then-candidate for Prime Minister (the highest public office in the land) went on the record advising against the recruitment of male childminders²⁴.

It is undoubtedly true that the very small minority of men or women who are strongly motivated to abuse children sexually, will seek out opportunities to do so; and that individuals (again, men or women) with troubled histories may be physically or emotionally abusive towards vulnerable people in their care. The threat of child abuse must always be acknowledged and addressed powerfully and constructively.

But this does not justify excluding men from early years education, any more than it would justify removing all children from their fathers' care. Suspicion of men-in-general must not become a reason to exclude them from the workforce. And we must remember that women can and do abuse children too. *Child protection should always be our first priority, regardless of staff members' gender.*

So...we need to put in place comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures, place them at the very heart of our practice, and enforce them universally.

Do we need special safeguarding procedures for male employees? No – because doing so would undermine men's capacity to care effectively for children and 'miss' women who have the propensity to abuse. We need high quality safeguarding policies and practices for all staff at the very heart of our practice, and universally enforced.

²⁴ <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/news/1158237/outrage-over-leadsoms-comments-that-male-childcarers-might-be-paedophiles>

9: “Boys need more adult male role models.”

Discussions about men in the early years often head down a road signposted ‘role model’, in a way that tends not to be the case when we talk about women in the sector. It seems that men joining the workforce are held up as needing to embody a set of particularly male values or virtues, and that these are felt to hold special power for the boys in our care.

There are several reasons why this argument is problematic.

First, it betrays an implicit negative belief about the level of fathers’ and father-figures’ active participation in their children’s upbringing – the idea being that children (especially boys) need other men to act as replacements for the men who should be ‘there’ for them at home but are not. The reality is rather less dramatic:

- When their children are born, 95% of parents register the child together; 85% of mothers describe themselves as married or cohabiting with the child’s father, Among the 15% living separately, two-thirds are ‘romantically involved’ or ‘friends’; and the remaining 5% say they are ‘not (or no longer) in a relationship’²⁵.
- Among women presenting as lone mothers (around 20% of the total) at children’s centres in the most disadvantaged areas, 77% said their children were in ‘regular’ contact with the father²⁶.
- In the early years, few fathers live apart from their child and their child’s mother. Among those who do, only a very small percentage are not in regular contact²⁷. And even by age 11, only one-in-ten (11%) of children have little or no contact with their father (this is based on mothers’ reports – the real figure is likely to be even lower)²⁸.

Secondly, notwithstanding the danger of under-estimating fathers’ actual contribution, even if one were to be faced with an epidemic of fatherlessness, how would filling our early years settings with male workers help that situation anyway?

²⁵ For more details see ONS. (2016a). Births by parents' characteristics in England and Wales: 2015. London: Office for National Statistics
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsbyparentscharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2015>; and Kiernan, K., & Smith, K. (2003). Unmarried parenthood: new insights from the Millennium Cohort Study. *Population Trends*(114), 26-33. doi.
<http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1495220>.

²⁶ Maisey, R., Speight, S., Haywood, S., Hall, J., Sammons, P., Hussey, D., Goff, M. and Sylva, K. (2013) Evaluation of Children’s Centres in England Strand 2: Baseline Survey of Families Using Children’s Centres in the Most Disadvantaged Areas Research Report. Department of Education: London

²⁷ Haux, T., Platt, L. and Rosenberg, R. (2015) Parenting and post-separation contact: what are the links? Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion.

²⁸ Haux, T. and Platt, L. (2015) Parenting and contact before and after separation. London School of Economics/University of Kent.

There is no evidence that a father's love and care can be straightforwardly replaced by regular contact with a male early years worker, any more than a female worker could replace the love and care of a child's mother.

Thirdly and more specifically, why focus only on the potential damage to boys of absent fathers? What about the girls? There is a huge body of evidence showing that fathers matter to daughters too²⁹.

So while we want children to be surrounded by responsible, caring men as well as women, it's important not to diminish this to a kind of male-only masculinity training camp. Apart from the vexed question of "which *form* of masculinity?" this, surely, would feel like an attempt to 're-gender' society!

It's worth remembering that all staff in early years education are, in fact, expected to provide positive role models as part of their pedagogy of care and education, as identified in the Teachers' Standards for Early Years³⁰.

And this chimes with evidence that girls and boys look to all adults - regardless of gender - as exemplars, as they construct their own, individualized understandings of the world, and of the constraints and possibilities of their own gendered selves³¹.

As such, a male worker's presence in a nursery is, in and of itself, unlikely to achieve much for any child, any more than a female worker's mere presence would: in both cases, what matters is the quality of each individual worker's personality and practice.

So surely the ideal scenario is a mixed gender workforce in which staff identifying as male, female or non-binary are fully competent and confident at the full range of activities and support from which children might benefit? Within that context, men modelling caring masculinities can be seen as important – but for all the children, not just the boys.

²⁹ See for example Nielsen, L. (2013) *Father-Daughter Relationships: Contemporary Research and Issues* (Textbooks in Family Studies) 1st Edition. Routledge.

³⁰ National College of Teaching and Leadership, (2013) *Teachers' Standards (Early Years)*. Available online <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-teachers-standards>.

³¹ Robb, M. and Ruxton, S. (2016) *Do boys need male role models?* Available online <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/childhood-youth/working-young-people/do-boys-need-male-role-models>.

10: “Parents don’t want men looking after their children.”

Surveys suggest that most parents would be happy to place their children in a nursery or other early years setting that employed male workers³².

A few parents may express doubts: British culture remains strongly ‘maternalist’ and there are prevalent beliefs about women being more ‘natural’ as caregivers, especially with babies and young children – and about male paedophilia in nurseries - so it would be surprising if you didn’t encounter negativity towards men in your workforce.

But given that your over-arching duty to the children of these parents is to provide them with the best education and care possible, why would you limit their experience of diverse, competent and well-qualified caregivers, based purely on their gender?

If a parent were to say they didn’t want their child looked after by someone of a particular ethnicity, sexuality, religious or cultural background, how would you respond? Why should discriminating against them because of their gender be any different?

In fact, far from the inclusion of male staff being a barrier, some early years providers have found that having male staff can be a ‘selling point’ with parents. And remember, it may also be the case that mixed gender teams feel better-equipped to engage with dads, some of whom may feel alienated in female-only settings.

So how should you approach parents in relation to gender and other diversity in your workforce? From the outset, your policy needs to be made explicit and the benefits to children promoted. Signing up to the MITEY charter³³ and displaying it prominently in your setting can be a great start, helping you present your position clearly as ‘business as usual’.

³² See Gaunt, C (2009) Parents want to see men in the nursery, says CWDC. Nursery World, 20 January 2009. Available online: <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/news/1104922/parents-nursery-cwdc>; Rolfe, H. (2005). Men in Childcare. Working Paper no. 35. London: Equal Opportunities Commission; and Cremers, M., Krabel, J., and Calmbach, M. (2010) Male Educators in Kitas. A study on the situation of men in early childhood education. Catholic University of applied social sciences Berlin and Sinus Sociovision GmbH, Heidelberg/Berlin.

³³ <https://mityuk.org/sign-up-to-the-mitey-charter/>