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# JUST FOR DADS

## A groupwork programme for fathers

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Foreword by Brid Featherstone

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# Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to write the foreword to *Just for Dads: a group work programme for fathers*. This programme arises out of a collaboration between the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork and Tusla/Springboard Family Support Project, Knockaheeny/Farranree in Cork.

There is a greater recognition than ever before that the term family support is actually a misnomer if key members of families such as fathers are not part of the practice and policy picture. It is hard to justify exclusion when one takes on board ethical consideration and the evidence of what we all need as human beings to flourish. Ethically, family support is often concerned with those seeking to overcome a range of economic, social and emotional barriers to achieving their hopes and dreams. Men, in such circumstances, may be struggling to be the kinds of fathers they wish to be and, as a result, having to cope with painful emotions such as anger, shame and hurt. Such emotions may deter help- seeking especially as in our society it can still be hard for men to admit to needing help, to the detriment not only of themselves but also their children, partners, wider family and friends.

It is an ethical imperative, in my view, to ensure we develop services that are able to respond to, and open doors for, those who may hitherto have seen only 'no entry' signs or who have not been able to appreciate that help and hope were not impossible dreams.

There is of course also a strong evidence base on the centrality of relationships to our capacities as human beings, whatever our gender, age, ethnicity or creed, to flourish and, indeed, a growing understanding that that loneliness and social isolation are bad for us in all sorts of ways. Fathers benefit in a multitude of ways from developing strong and emotionally fulfilling relationships with their children and, in turn, their children blossom not just in the here-and-now but for years to come. Good fathers are good parenting partners by definition. A good father respects and supports his children's mother and other female partners. Thus for mothers and women, the supports offered by services to men as fathers can be invaluable.

This publication showcases the achievements of an impressive collaborative endeavour. Bringing researchers and practitioners together to pool their collective knowledge has resulted in a set of practice tools and a programme of work that has already shown its worth and will, I am convinced, be of great value in the years to come.

*Brid Featherstone*

Professor of Social Work, Huddersfield University, and author of *Contemporary Fathering: Theory, Policy and Practice.*

## Welcome to *Just for Dads*

Welcome to *Just for Dads.* This resource is designed to provide the information and materials you will need to run a *Just for Dads* programme. We hope that you find this resource a useful addition to your practice toolkit and that it will provide the opportunity to engage and work effectively with fathers. Best of luck!

## Introducing *Just for Dads*

*Just for Dads* is a groupwork programme which was initiated and developed in Cork, Ireland arising out of a collaboration between Tusla/Springboard Family Support Project, Knocknaheeny/Farranree, in Cork and the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork. It is aimed at engaging with fathers around developing relationships with their children and was conceived out of an awareness gained through practice, research and experience of the limitations and challenges of effectively engaging men in family services. It consists of a ten week groupwork programme which highlights how important dads are to their children's development and provides opportunities for men to explore and develop their fathering role in a supportive, non-judgemental environment. *Just for Dads* is designed for use with all men in fathering roles, including biological, step, foster, grandparents, and social fathers. Since its inception in 2014, the initiative has been developed, cyclically implemented, and independently evaluated (see Swirak, 2015).

## Why produce *Just for Dads?*

When we decided to run a groupwork programme specifically for fathers it quickly became apparent to us that there was very little available in terms of 'off the shelf' resources available to practitioners interested in this area of practice. In their review of research into engaging fathers in child welfare services Maxwell et al (2012) conclude that men are more likely to engage in services that are specifically tailored for them. In their critical review of best practice regarding parenting programmes and fathers, McAllister et al. (2012) highlight the importance of groupwork for fathers being purposely designed for men rather than using a generic parenting programme as their needs are going to be different from women in relation to their parenting. They assert it is unhelpful to be gender blind in this regard if one is to effectively meet the needs of men seeking to enhance their relationships with their children and develop in their role as fathers. *Just for Dads* was designed as a programme for fathers rather than parents in general. All materials refer to fathers, men, dads, and the programme covers general parenting issues (eg Listening to our children, Stages of child development) but also highlighted issues of particular relevance to men (eg Exploring fatherhood, Self-care for Dads; Exploring family relationships with a focus on how adult relationships affect children).

In addition to devising, running, and evaluating the *Just for Dads* programme we decided an important aspect of the initiative was to develop and publish the programme in order to make it readily available to others interested in running a groupwork programme for fathers. The *Just for Dads* programme provides comprehensive session plans, including exercises and handouts (with permission to photocopy), thorough guidance notes for facilitators, promotional materials, and also signposts issues to look out for which may arise along the way. It is our hope that the groundwork we have put in and the lessons learnt along the way will be of benefit to others engaging fathers in family work.

## Why work with dads?

Dads are hugely important to their children and a father's involvement or non-involvement in their children's lives has a very significant influence in terms of self-esteem, academic achievement, interpersonal competence, behaviour, and their mental health and psychological well-being (Bayley

et al., 2009). However, interventions with fathers within social work, community, and family support contexts in an intentional and purposeful manner is a relatively neglected and under developed area of practice, with research highlighting low levels of engagement of and with fathers in child welfare services (Maxwell et al. 2012; Featherstone 2009; Baum, 2015). The Fatherhood Institute highlights the tendency within family services for 'parent' to mean mother and consequently fathers remaining marginal and overlooked in interventions, and emphasises the need for services to focus on engaging fathers directly (McAllister et al, 2012). Likewise, groupwork interventions particularly targeting fathers is not a common occurrence, and groupwork programmes specifically designed for fathers are rare. Panter-Brick et al. provide a good summary when they say 'Fathers have a substantial impact on child development, wellbeing, and family functioning, yet parenting interventions rarely target men, or make a dedicated effort to include them' (2014: 1209).

*Just for Dads* aims to make some contribution towards addressing this deficit by providing a readily accessible programme for practitioners who want to effectively engage fathers in exploring and developing their roles as dads and reflecting on their importance in their kids' lives.

## Running *Just for Dads* – a must-read before you start!

**It ain't what you do it's the way that you do it…**

*Just for Dads* has been devised and developed using a strengths-based approach which views group participants as partners valuing their experiences and expertise and acknowledging and working with the resources they bring to the process. It starts from the premise that most fathers want the best for their children and want to be a good father to them. This is not to naively ignore the potential for difficulties or risk, but rather harness each father's strengths as a basis for engagement in the groupwork process. It is very important when running *Just for Dads* that this positive, constructive and non-judgemental ethos pervades the programme, as in our experience and feedback from participants, this is one of the key factors in the success of *Just for Dads*.

In view of this *Just for Dads* aims to provide an opportunity for men to explore and develop their relationships with their children and is underpinned by the following principles:

- Dads are their child's first and foremost male role model and are very important in their child's life.
- A recognition that while fatherhood is important it can sometimes be difficult and challenging.
- Using a strengths-based approach, *Just for Dads* is centred on dads, to help strengthen their resilience and build self-esteem.
- *Just for Dads* offers a safe space for fathers to come together to support and learn from each other.

**Facilitators involved**

Another important aspect of running *Just for Dads* is the involvement and participation of facilitators. The strengths-based ethos views all group members as having expertise with valuable contributions to make. Therefore all exercises and discussions are undertaken by participants and facilitators in a spirit of sharing and collaboration. This contributes significantly to a strong sense of group identity and trust and an experience of growing and learning on the part of everyone – participants and facilitators alike. Obviously, facilitators need to be judicious about what information they share in the group and decide for themselves their level of contribution. As a general rule, in our experience of

facilitating of *Just for Dads*, we are happy to share our struggles and celebrations as parents, but would be careful about giving identifying information about our children.

## Recruiting your group

Significant effort and focus needs to be given during the planning stage of *Just for Dads* to the recruitment and retention of fathers. Recruiting men can take extra effort as many see family services as the domain of their partners rather than themselves. Putting the groundwork in at this stage will pay dividends in terms of having a viable group for the duration of the ten weeks. In our experience of running *Just for Dads*, this is very important as we find that recruitment, attendance and retention is highest when a great deal of effort is made at this stage. We hold information meetings for local service providers and community groups in order to gain referrals, followed up by phone and email regarding potential referrals. We also hold information meetings for interested fathers, and also meet men in advance of the group who are considering taking part in *Just for Dads*. In addition to this, during the weeks the group is running, each father is phoned/texted the night before the morning the group is scheduled to remind them it is on (they are asked if this would be helpful and to date they have said that it would).

Regarding referrals, we run the group on a referral only basis. That is appropriate in our context as a family support project – it is helpful and important for us to be aware of the men's needs, family make-up, any child welfare concerns, etc. It is also important for us to know that the referring agency will continue to support the father while he attends the group (as requested on the referral form). However, a referral system may not be appropriate for your context and you will know best how to approach this issue. We have included our referral documentation in the appendices in case this would be of use.

## Using this resource

This resource provides comprehensive session plans and supporting materials which are designed to make it as feasible as possible for you to run a *Just for Dads* group. All exercises have been tried and tested and are effective in terms of the goals of the programme and each session. Feel free to use the programme as is and also to adapt it to your needs and context. Whilst, permission is given to download, print and photocopy all materials, it is important that *Just for Dads* and its authors are acknowledged as the source for all materials.

## Outline of programme sessions

Whilst the *Just for Dads* programme itself is ten sessions, the overall programme also includes a number of information sessions at the recruitment stage. These consist of an information session for service providers and community groups in your area, and also an information session for interested fathers. We recommend that the information session for service providers and community groups occurs 4-6 weeks before the group starts in order to allow time for referrals, queries, meeting potential participants etc.

**Information meeting for services and community groups**
This meeting aims to provide an overview of the *Just for Dads* programme, outlining the topics covered, the ethos of the programme, and the referral procedure. Brochures and promotional material should be made available to attendees, including referral forms (if relevant).

**Information meeting for fathers interested in the programme**
This meeting takes place one or two weeks before the programme starts. Its aim is to give the men a taster of what the programme will be like and gives them a chance to ask questions and input their ideas as to how the group could best meet their needs. It is also an opportunity for facilitators to set a welcoming and supportive tone for the group. A suggested agenda for this meeting would be:

- Welcome
- Who we are – facilitators introduce themselves
- Who we are – a bit about the agency running the programme
- Why *Just for Dads* – a bit about why we are running the group and why dads are important
- Brief outline of the programme
- Fathers introduce themselves – first name, how many children, what they would like to get from a group like this
- Housekeeping: Toilets, exits, breaks, what food they'd like, would they like to be texted/called evening before group as a reminder.
- Questions

## Programme sessions:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Session 1:** | **Introduction and exploring fatherhood** |
| **Session 2:** | **What our children need from us** |
| **Session 3:** | **Ingredients for good relationships with our children** |
| **Session 4:** | **Listening to our children** |
| **Session 5:** | **Stages of child development** |
| **Session 6:** | **Self-care for dads** |
| **Session 7:** | **Exploring family relationships** |
| **Session 8:** | **How about discipline?** |
| **Session 9:** | **Where to now?** |
| **Session 10:** | **Celebrating Dads (Award Day)** |

# Just for Dads session 1: Introduction and exploring fatherhood

**Goal:** To help the group get to know each other and begin to explore what fatherhood means to them.

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| **0-10 mins Introduction and icebreaker (10m)** | **Introduction:**<br>Welcome all dads to the programme.<br>Quick outline of timings for the session (start, finish, break).<br><br>**Icebreaker**: Ask each person to introduce themselves and tell the group:<br>*Your first name*<br>*How many children do you have?*<br>*Something that you like to do with your children?*<br>*Have you any interests or hobbies yourself?*<br><br>(It would be useful to have these questions written on a flipchart so the group can see them) |
| | |
| **10-30 mins Group rules (20m)** | **Developing group rules:**<br>Group members get into pairs - each pair come up with **two rule**s. Ask each pair to share one rule (if possible something different to what has already been said).<br><br>Facilitator writes rules on flipchart.<br><br>*Facilitators highlight - that times are adhered too, respect for others' opinion, and encourage each other (if it does not come up in pairs).*<br><br>*Facilitator also outlines extent and limits of confidentiality and child protection policy*<br><br>Rules are drawn up by facilitator before next session and a copy given to members at session 2. A copy is also displayed during each session of JFDs |
| | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **30-45 mins Activity (15m)**<br><br>**What is a good dad?** | **What is a good Dad?**<br>Divide the group into small group of 3 or 4 (with a facilitator in each group if possible).<br>Discuss:<br>• What I (dad) think a good dad is<br>• What my child would consider is a good dad<br>Facilitator makes a note of main points |
| | |
| **45-60 mins Break (15m)** | **Tea, coffee and snack** |
| | |
| **60-80 mins Activity Feedback (20m)** | **What is a good Dad – Feedback and discussion:**<br>Each small group give their feedback on each question (noted by facilitator on flipchart) and this is discussed by the full group.<br>- Are there common themes in the groups?<br>- What are the similarities/differences between what we think a good dad is and what our children might think?<br>- Is there anything that has surprised us in what has come up?<br>- Sum up and if appropriate use 3 Cs: Caring, Consistency, Communication (this is relevant for next week).<br>- The theme of praise also is part of next week's session so highlight this theme if it arises in the discussions |
| | |
| **80-90 mins Check in / wrap up (10m)** | **Finishing round:**<br>Check in with group members how they found the session and thank them for coming. Ask each person to say one thing they got from the group and if there is any changes they would like to see in the format of the session for next week.<br>Remind them of next week's topic: *What our children need from us.* |

**Needed for this session:** Flipchart, flipchart pen, beverages and food for break

**Note to facilitators:** This is a key session as it will influence whether dads choose to continue with the programme. It is important that participants develop a sense of connection with group members and facilitators. Try and make it as easy as possible for men to be there, remember their names, make time before, after or during the break to have a chat and find about a little about them. It is

natural that everyone will feel a bit nervous (including facilitators!) as the group is very new to everyone.

# Just for Dads session 2: What our children need from us

**Goal:** To explore what children need from their dads and ways of meeting those needs.

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| **0-10 mins Icebreaker (10m)** | **Link with last week and memory exercise:**<br>Facilitator welcomes group, briefly reminds participants of last week's session. Each person is asked to say:<br>- One thing they learned from last week<br>- One nice memory they have of their children<br>Give out 3Cs sheet as a summary of last week (if appropriate) |
| | |
| **10-30 mins Activity (20m)**<br><br>**Exploring praise** | **Exploring praise**<br>Facilitator gives introduction to session and the importance knowing what our children need to be healthy and happy. Following on from last week's discussion we will be focusing on the importance of praise:<br><br>Divide group into small groups of 3 or 4<br>Discuss:<br>- What is praise?<br>- What is not praise?<br>- What is your memory of praise and how did it make you feel as a child? |
| | |
| **30-45 mins Activity feedback (15m)** | **Exploring praise - Feedback and discussion:**<br>Each small group give their feedback on each question (noted by facilitator on flipchart) and this is discussed by the full group. |
| | |
| **45-60 mins Break (15m)** | **Tea, coffee and snack** |
| | |
| **60-70 mins Activity (10m)**<br><br>**Knowing my child** | **Knowing my child questionnaire**<br>Each participant get a copy of questionnaire and is asked to fill it in by themselves (with a view to discussing it afterwards) |

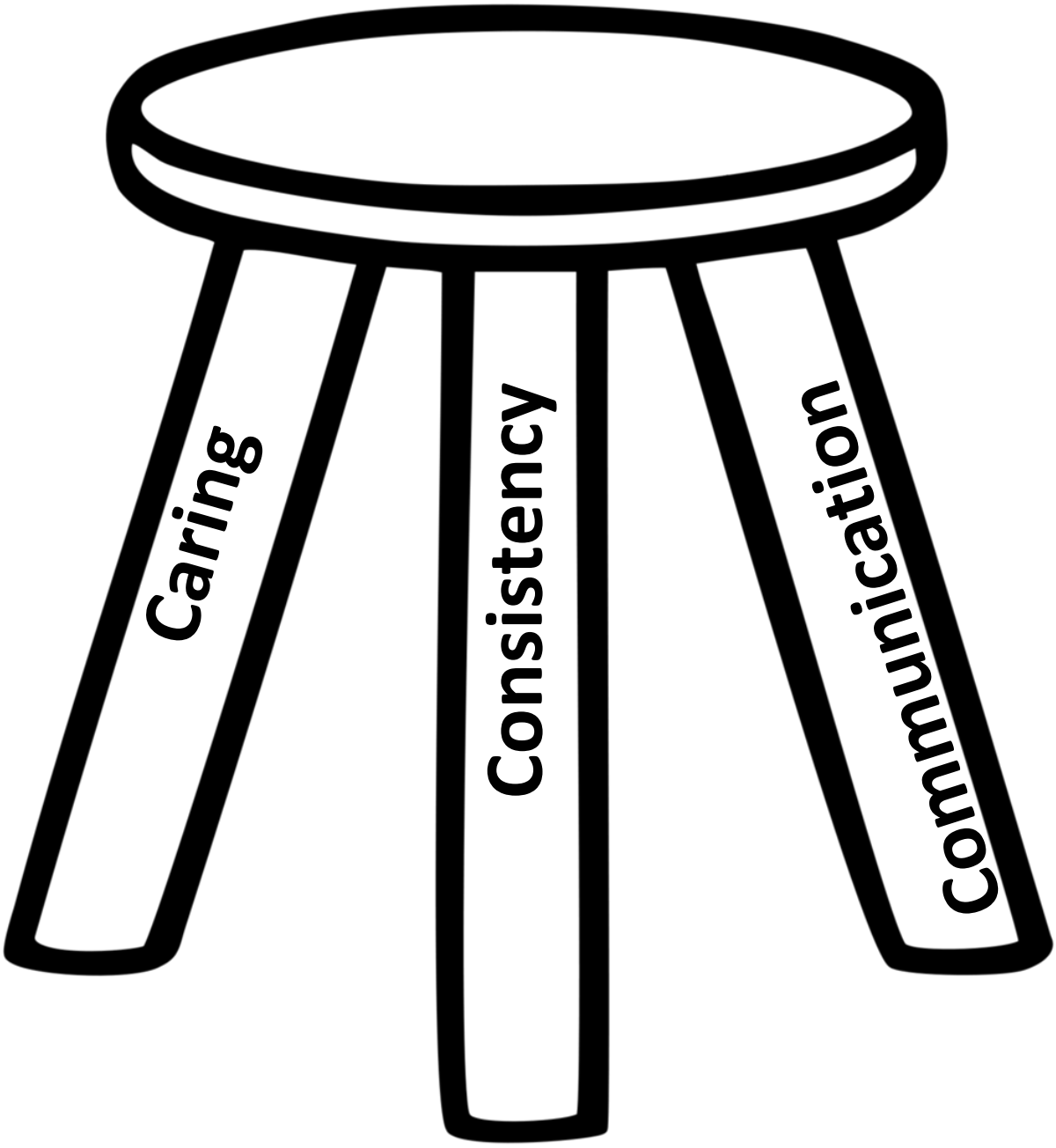
| | |
|---|---|
| **70-85 mins Activity feedback (15m)** | **Knowing my child – Feedback and discussion:**<br>Discuss results of questionnaire in small groups first, then full group.<br>- Were you surprised by your answers?<br>- What surprised you?<br>- How can we get to know our kids better? |
| | |
| **85-90 mins Wrap up (5m)** | **Summary and encouragement to practice what we've learnt**<br>Facilitator emphasises that to meet our children's needs we need to know/understand our children and their experiences.<br>Summarise main points of discussion and encourage group to look for ways to praise their children and get to know them better this week.<br><br>Remind group of next week's topic*: Ingredients for good relationships with our children* |

**Needed for this session:** Flipchart and pen, 3 Cs hand-out, beverages and food for break, copies of 'Knowing my child' questionnaire, pens for participants.

# QUESTIONNAIRE
## Knowing my child…

| | Do you know?..... | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The name of your child's best friend? | | |
| 2 | What achievement is your child most proud of? | | |
| 3 | What really makes your child angry? | | |
| 4 | What food does your child like or dislike most? | | |
| 5 | What embarrasses your child most? | | |
| 6 | Can you name your child's teacher? | | |
| 7 | What is the most challenging thing about school for your child? | | |
| 8 | If your child belongs to any Social Networking Sites e.g. Facebook, Snapchat? | | |
| 9 | What causes your child greatest worry? | | |
| 10 | What your child likes to do with you? | | |
| 11 | What is something that really upsets your child? | | |
| 12 | What your child loves most about you? | | |

# Being a good dad…3 Cs



# Just for Dads session 3: Ingredients for good relationships with our children

**Goal:** To explore the factors which impact on our relationships with our children.

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| **0-10 mins Introduction (10m)** | **Link with last week:**<br>Facilitator welcomes group, briefly reminds participants of last week's session. Group is asked if anyone has an example of anything from last week they put into practice:<br>- Examples of praise<br>- Examples of getting to know their child better or becoming more aware of something relating to their child |
| | |
| **10-40 mins Activity (30m)**<br><br>**Agree/Disagree exercise** | **Relationships Agree/Disagree exercise:**<br><br>Facilitator places two sheets of paper on the floor at either side of the room. One sheet says 'AGREE', the other says 'DISAGREE'. The exercise is explained to the group, highlighting that it works best when people have different ideas. It is also emphasised that there are no right or wrong answers.<br>Then s/he reads out the first statement (eg. 'Children should follow their parents' orders without asking questions') and gives it to someone in the group and asks them to place it along the agree/disagree continuum according to what they think about it and say something about why they are placing it there (eg if they agree strongly, put it right near the 'Agree' sheet, if they both agree and disagree with aspects of the statement place in the middle somewhere etc). When they have done that, invite other members of the group to move the statement either way (more towards agree or disagree) and say why they are moving it.<br>Continue the exercise taking each statement in turn, allowing it to be moved 3-4 times as time allows.<br>(Six statements are provided – choose those most relevant to your group). |
| | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **40-45 mins Activity feedback (5m)** | **Exploring relationships - discussion:**<br><br>Wrap up the exercise thanking everyone for sharing their opinions and highlight main points of discussion. |
| | |
| **45-60 mins Break (15m)** | **Tea, coffee and snack** |
| | |
| **60-70 mins Activity (10m)**<br><br>**Ingredients for a good relationship** | **Ingredients for a good dad-child relationship:**<br><br>Divide group into small groups of 3 or 4<br>Discuss:<br>- What are the ingredients for a good dad – child relationship?<br>- Are there ingredients we should avoid (eg that would hinder the relationship)? |
| | |
| **70-85 mins Activity feedback (15m)** | **Ingredients for a good dad-child relationship – Feedback and discussion:**<br><br>Each small group give their feedback on each question.<br>Facilitator notes feedback on flipchart – draw a cake shape and note ingredients in it (and the ingredients to avoid outside it). This is discussed by the full group. |
| | |
| **85-90 mins Wrap up (5m)** | **Summary and finish**<br><br>Summarise main points of discussion and encourage group to look for ways this week to build in some of the ingredients we have identified.<br><br>Remind group of next week's topic: *Listening to our children* |

**Needed for this session:**

Flipchart and pen, beverages and food for break, statements and AGREE/DISAGREE sheets for relationships agree/disagree exercise.

Statements for Agree/Disagree exercise

**Children should follow their parents' orders without asking questions**

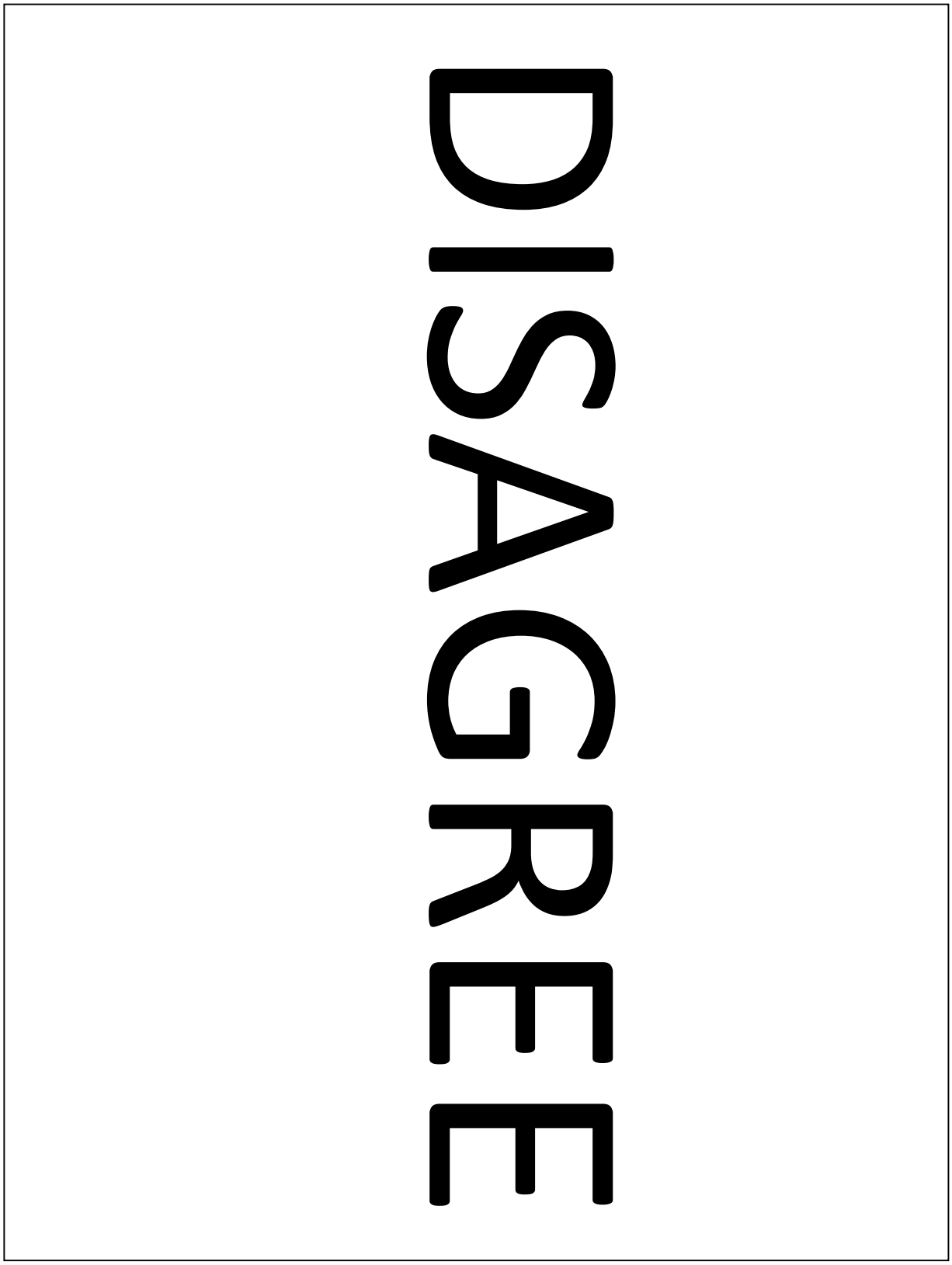
**Your relationship with your children has an impact on their relationships when they become adults**

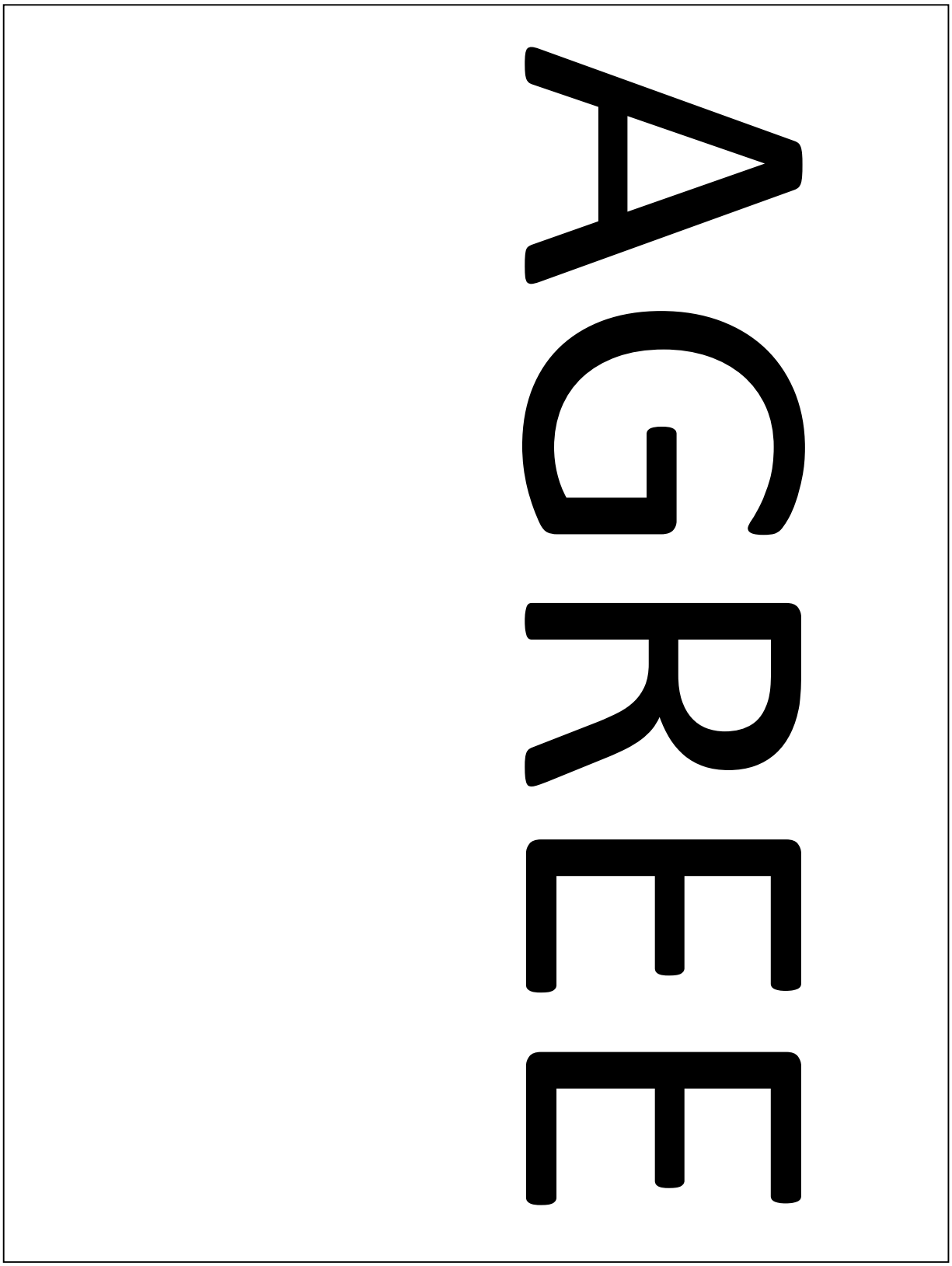
**A good father provides what their children want**

**We should always avoid arguing with our children**

**We should always avoid arguing in front of our children**

**Children need to learn early who the boss is in the family**


DISAGREE


AGREE

# Just for Dads session 4: Listening to our children

**Goal:** To explore the powerful effects on children of being listened to and not being listened to.

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| **0-10 mins Introduction and icebreaker (10m)** | **Highlights and lowlights:**<br>Facilitator welcomes group, briefly reminds participants of last week's session (Ingredients for good relationships with our children), and flags this session is focused on listening.<br>Going around the group, each person is asked to share one highlight and one lowlight of the past week. |
| | |
| **10-25 mins Activity (15m)**<br><br>**Complete the statements exercise** | **Being listened to – complete the statements exercise:**<br><br>Facilitator passes around statement sheet (and pens) to participants and reads through them. Each person completes sheet for themselves and then discuss as a large group<br>"I know someone has heard me when….."<br>"Being listened to makes me feel…."<br>"I know someone is not listening to me when…"<br>When I'm not listened to I feel…"<br><br>In large group take feedback regarding these statements and discuss |
| | |
| **25-45 mins Activity (20m)**<br><br>**Roleplay part 1** | **Father / child roleplay (acted out by facilitators):**<br><br>Child comes home from school/meets the dad and is full of what went on at school today. She/he is trying to tell the dad all about what they did in the playground, who s/he played with, who was calling names…..etc<br>The dad is not listening well, is distracted with other stuff (watching a match on tv), not facing the child, not on her level, interrupting her about other stuff ('did you see the tv remote – it's lost…). Gets a message on his phone and checks it… etc. Absentmindedly says something |

| | |
|---|---|
| | about what she is saying, but gets the name of her friend wrong…<br>The group is asked what they observed about the dad's listening – he's not listening well? What shows he is not listening well? |
| | |
| **45-60 mins Break (15m)** | **Tea, coffee and snack** |
| | |
| **60-75 mins Activity (15m)**<br><br>**Roleplay part 2** | **Father / child roleplay part 2:**<br><br>The group is asked how the dad could listen better. The group gives the dad advice on how he could listen better and they do the role play again. This time, the child is heard and gets to tell her story…. It turns out someone was calling her names in the playground and threatening to take her lunch and she's very upset about it. |
| | |
| **75-90 mins Activity (15m)**<br><br>**Summary sheet** | **Summary sheet: 'Listening well to our children'**<br><br>Hand out summary sheet to participants. Facilitator goes through each principle inviting groups' input/questions along the way<br><br>• Get down to their level when they are talking to us/we are talking to them<br>• Make eye contact with them<br>• Give them our full attention<br>• Don't interrupt<br>• Asking them questions about what they are saying<br>• Summarise/ play back what they've said to us shows we've heard them<br>• Create spaces where conversations can happen (eg doing an activity together, going for a walk/drive, having one to one time)<br><br>Next week: *Stages of child development* |

**Needed for this session:**

Beverages and food for break, copies of statement sheet, pens, copies of 'Listening well to our children' handout.

**Complete the following statements…**

“I know someone has heard me when…..”

“Being listened to makes me feel….”

“I know someone is not listening to me when…”

“When I’m not listened to I feel…”

# Listening well to our children…

- Get down to their level when they are talking to us/we are talking to them
- Make eye contact with them

- Give them our full attention
- Don't interrupt

- Asking them questions about what they are saying
- Summarise/ play back what they've said to us shows we've heard them
- Create spaces where conversations can happen (eg doing an activity together, going for a walk/drive, having one to one time)

## Just for Dads session 5: Stages of child development

**Goal:** To gain a better understanding of our children and how best to meet their needs at different stages of development.

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| **0-15 mins Introduction and icebreaker (15m)** | **Review of last week and learning gained:**<br>Facilitator welcomes group, briefly reminds participants of last week's session (Listening to our children).<br>Each person is asked to say one thing they learned from last week. Then the group as a whole is asked 'How do we think the things that we learned will help our relationship with our child going forward?' |
| | |
| **15-30 mins Activity (15m)**<br><br>**Brainstorming exercise** | **Communication at different stages – brainstorming exercise:**<br><br>Facilitator hands out sheets (and pens) for exercise and asks participant to reflect on questions individually first and then in small groups of 3 or 4.<br>The sheet asks: 'How does the child communicate with their dad? And 'What is the best way for the dad to communicate with their child?' at three stages: 0-5, 6-12, 13-18. |
| | |
| **30-45 mins Activity Feedback and discussion (15m)** | **Communication at different stages – feedback and discussion:**<br><br>Each group is asked for their feedback in relation to the exercise. Facilitator notes feedback on flipchart, and main points are discussed by the group as a whole. |
| | |
| **45-60 mins Break (15m)** | **Tea, coffee and snack** |
| | |
| **60-75 mins Activity (15m)**<br><br>**Discussion exercise** | **The challenges of each stage – discussion exercise:**<br><br>The group is divided into small groups of 3 or 4 and asked to discuss: |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • What are the main challenges of parenting each age group?<br>• What works and what does not work with the three age groups?<br>(It would be helpful to have these written on the flipchart) |
| | |
| **75-85 mins Discussion feedback (10m)** | **The challenges of each stage – discussion feedback:**<br><br>Each small group gives feedback on the main points of their discussion. Facilitator makes a note of this on the flipchart – particularly highlighting *what works* at each stage. Facilitator agrees to draw up handout for next week of the things the group has identified that work with each stage. |
| | |
| **85-90 mins Wrap up and request (5m)** | **Wrap up and request to bring item next week:**<br><br>Facilitator thanks the group for coming and flags next week's session is on self-care. The importance of self-care is briefly introduced.<br><br>Each person is asked to bring something with them to the group next week that symbolises how they look after themselves. (Facilitator to remind them of this via text/phone call day before) |

**Needed for this session:** Flipchart and pen, 'Stages of child development' brainstorm sheet, pens, beverages and food for break.

**Note to facilitators:** It is important to remind group nearer the time to bring their object to next week's session. Arrange who will do this (by text/phone). Also next week's session incorporates a nice breakfast/meal – this will need some advance planning!

# Stages of child development brainstorm…

| | |
|---|---|
| **How does the child communicate with their dad?** | 0-5yrs |
| | 6-12yrs |
| | 13-18yrs |
| **What is the best way for a dad to communicate with their child?** | 0-5yrs |
| | 6-12yrs |
| | 13-18yrs |

# Just for Dads session 6: Self-care for Dads

**Goal:** To gain a deeper appreciation for the need for self-care and a better understanding of what we need to do about it.

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| **0-15 mins Introduction and icebreaker (15m)** | **Review of last week and brief intro:**<br>Facilitator welcomes group, briefly reminds participants of last week's session (Stages of child development).<br>Each person is asked to say something nice they did with their child/or a nice moment they had with them this week.<br><br>Facilitator introduces concept of self-care. As parents our focus is often on our children and meeting their needs. It's important to look after ourselves also.<br>Example of airplane oxygen mask is useful here – airline safety instructions always tell us to put on our own mask first before attending to our child. Same applies in life – we need to be attending to our own well-being and meeting our own needs if we are to be in a position to meet the needs of our children. Our instinct is often the reverse and it is easy to get worn out. |
| | |
| **15-35 mins Activity (20m)**<br><br>**Self-care object exercise** | **Self-care object exercise:**<br><br>Hopefully each person will have brought an object which represents something about how they look after themselves/ things they do to look after their own well-being/ things they enjoy. Each person (including facilitators) shows their object to the group and explains the significance of it in terms of self-care. (If someone has forgotten they could be asked to share what they would have brought, and why).<br><br>When each person has shared, invite group to discuss the value and challenges of making time for self-care. |
| | |
| **35-60 mins Break (25m)** | This self-care session provides the opportunity to have a nice breakfast/meal together (depending on the time of day your group |

| | |
|---|---|
| | runs). It is worth putting some effort into this and making the break-time a nice treat for everyone! Consequently the break will be 25 mins today instead of 15. |
| | |
| **60-75 mins Activity (15m)**<br><br>**Meditation/mindfulness exercise** | **Meditation/mindfulness exercise:**<br><br>The group is facilitated in a simple meditation exercise aimed at helping participants relax and be aware of their breathing and what is going on in their minds:<br><br>*The Buddha described the human mind as being filled with drunken monkeys, jumping around, screeching, chattering, and carrying on endlessly. We all have monkey minds, with dozens of monkeys all clamouring for attention. Fear is an especially loud monkey, sounding the alarm incessantly, pointing out all the things we should be wary of and everything that could go wrong.*<br>*The following exercise will increase our awareness of our own 'monkey mind' and, hopefully, inspire us to strive toward quietening our busy minds.*<br><br>*This exercise works best if a longer period of time can be committed to - 15 minutes or more, as the true nature of our ceaselessly thinking minds will be revealed. 5 minutes in a group setting will suffice.*<br><br>*The object of the exercise is to count our exhalations up to a count of four and no more, then start counting again up to the fourth exhalation. When you notice that you are counting beyond four, just begin again. The more you notice that you are counting your sixth or seventh exhalation, then the more you are becoming aware of how much of your attention is drawn by 'the mad monkeys' in your mind.*<br>*Repeatedly counting beyond four and noting it should be seen as success, for you are now noticing the nature of 'Monkey mind', and when you do notice your counting beyond four, gently return to the count up to four. Sounds easy? Let's try it…* |

| | |
|---|---|
| **75-85 mins Discussion (10m)** | **What do I need to do to in relation to self-care? – discussion:**<br><br>The group are asked to reflect on what they need to do regarding self-care. Have they got any new ideas from today? Is there anything they are taking away from today?<br><br>This is discussed in the large group (or in small groups/pairs first if you feel that would be more productive for your group). |
| | |
| **85-90 mins Wrap up (5m)** | **Wrap up:**<br><br>Facilitator thanks the group for coming and flags next week's session is on *Exploring family relationships.* |

**Needed for this session:** Food and beverages for having a group meal together, facilitators need to bring self-care objects.

**Note to facilitators:** Next week's session has an exercise using photographs (see session for details). If you don't have a pack already you will need to allow yourselves time to order one or make one yourselves (or think up an alternative exercise!).

# Just for Dads session 7: Exploring family relationships

**Goal:** To become more aware of our family relationships and the effect these have on our children.

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| **0-15 mins Introduction and recap (15m)** | **Review of last week and learning gained:**<br>Facilitator welcomes group, briefly reminds participants of last week's session (The importance of self-care).<br><br>Group is asked if there was anything from last week that they managed to put into practice during the week.<br><br>Facilitator introduces this week's topic – the dynamic of family relationships and acknowledges that people are in different situations – some are parenting on their own, some living with their partners and children, some living apart from their children. Whatever the circumstances – the dynamics of family relationships has an impact on kids – as it probably did for us when we were growing up. |
| | |
| **15-45 mins Activity (30m)**<br><br>**Photograph exercise** | **Family relationships exercise using photographs:**<br><br>This exercise is carried out using a pack of photographs (The pack we use is called Photospeak and is available from http://www.partnersinfaith.ie/new/index.php/publications/66-photospeak )<br>You could also make your own pack using images from magazines or newspapers stuck onto cardboard for durability. You'll need around 50 images.<br><br>The photographs are placed on the floor and the group is asked to spend some time looking at them and choose one or two that represents something to them about their family situation or the dynamics/relationships in their family. Explain that they will be asked to say something about their photo to the rest of the group.<br><br>When each person has chosen their photo/s, they are asked to return to their seats and each person in turn, shows the group their photo, says why they chose it and what it represents to them.<br><br>When everyone has said something about their photo – the group is asked if there was anything that particularly struck about anyone else's photo, or what they shared. This facilitates the group to follow up issues that have arisen that are significant to them. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **45-60 mins Break (15m)** | **Tea, coffee and snack** |
| | |
| **60-75 mins Activity (15m)**<br><br>**Myths exercise** | **Myths about conflict exercise:**<br><br>The group is divided into small groups of 3 or 4 and asked to discuss statements written on a flipchart.<br>• My child doesn't even know what's going on when we're fighting<br>• Parental conflict has no real effects on children<br>• My child might be upset for a little while but they'll get over it quickly<br>• My children know that our fights/conflict is not their fault<br>(Source: Adapted from Scott et al, 2006) |
| | |
| **75-85 mins Discussion feedback (10m)** | **Myths about conflict – discussion feedback:**<br><br>Each small group gives feedback on the main points of their discussion. Facilitator then gives out fact sheet relating to the statements and group spends some time going through this and discussing it. |
| | |
| **85-90 mins Wrap up (5m)** | **Wrap up and opportunity to debrief:**<br><br>Facilitator thanks the group for coming and acknowledges that this week's session can be a difficult one. S/he lets the group know that the facilitators will be available after the group if anyone want to discuss further any issues that have been raised for them.<br><br>Flag next week's session is on discipline. |

**Needed for this week:** Beverages and snacks for break, photographs for exercise, myth/fact sheets, flipchart and pen, time afterwards for debriefing.

**Note to facilitators:** Next week's session involves showing video clips (YouTube) so you may need to put some time into planning equipment and facilities to do this.

# Myths about conflict….

**Myth**

My child doesn't even know what's going on when we're fighting.

**Fact**

Children do know when their parents are in conflict. They hear threats and they sense conflict and tense atmospheres. Children don't have to see or hear things to know when you're fighting or in conflict even when they don't see it.

---

**Myth**

Parental conflict has no real effect on children.

**Fact**

Parental conflict is one of the strongest predictors of childhood problems, particularly when in relation to father's abuse of the mother. Children experience a range of emotions of anxiety around this. They may experience learning disruptions, speech and language problems, attention and behaviour problems, and stress related physical ailments (sleep problems, headaches etc.) They may experience social anxieties and feel different or maybe aggressive or hostile in interactions with peers. If you hurt your child's mother, you hurt your child.

---

**Myth**

My child may be upset for a little while but he/she will get over it soon.

**Fact**

Witnessing conflict (especially physical conflict) can have long term effects on children, can lead to anxiety, alcohol and drug misuse, and juvenile delinquency, bullying and violence in later relationships.

---

**Myth**

My children know that our fights/conflict is not their fault.

**Fact**

Children often feel guilty in response for their parent's conflict and sometimes feel responsible.

---

(Source: Adapted from Scott et al., 2006)

# Just for Dads session 8: How about discipline

**Goal:** To reflect on the value and challenges of discipline with a view to gaining some helpful perspectives and new ideas.

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| **0-20 mins Introduction and icebreaker (20m)** | **Review of last week:**<br>Facilitator welcomes group, briefly reminds participants of last week's session (Family relationships).<br><br>**Icebreaker:** Each person is asked to say one thing that has been good about being part of *Just for Dads* so far.<br><br>**Introduction to discipline:** This week's topic of discipline is introduced. Facilitator acknowledges discipline is hard, highlighting the challenge for all of us of getting the balance between being too hard on kids, or too soft (with our own moods and stresses thrown into the mix as well!). |
| | |
| **20-40 mins Discussion exercise (20m)** | **Discussion exercise – Discipline: what's hard and what works?**<br><br>In small groups of 3 or 4 ask groups to discuss:<br>• The hardest things about discipline are…<br>• Discipline works well when….<br>(It would be helpful for these two discussion points to be written on flipchart)<br>(10 mins)<br><br>Feedback from small groups taken and main points noted on flipchart. Common themes discussed<br>(10 mins) |
| | |
| **40-45 mins Video clip (5m)**<br><br>**Encouraging good behaviour** | **Encouraging good behaviour video clip:**<br><br>Watch video clip on encouraging good behaviour<br>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-bLKdL1yGo&list=PL4641E0B7C9C9C7B6&index=3 |
| | |
| **45-60 mins Break (15m)** | Tea, coffee, and snack |
| | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **60-70 mins Video clip (10m)**<br><br>**Handling difficult behaviour** | **Tips for handling difficult behaviour video clip:**<br><br>Watch clip on tips for handling difficult behaviour https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xv1Q6DTXoL8<br><br>Discuss useful aspects of both clips |
| | |
| **70-80 mins Discipline hand-out (10m)** | **Discuss *Discipline: some helpful tips* handout:**<br><br>Give each participant a copy of *Discipline: some helpful tips* handout. Facilitator goes through it inviting discussion/questions and feedback along the way. |
| | |
| **80-90 mins Finishing exercise and wrap up (10m)** | **Finishing exercise:**<br>Each person says one thing they've learnt about discipline<br><br>**Wrap up:**<br>Facilitator thanks the group for coming and flags next week's session is our second last one and is called *Just for Dads – where to now?* In this session we will be reflecting on our JFDs journey so far and setting future goals for ourselves as fathers/parents. We will also be thinking about what has been good about JFDs and what could be improved.<br><br>It may also be useful to discuss plans for the final session (Week 10: *Celebrating Dads*) in terms of the group's preferences for venue, food, format etc. |

**Needed for this session:** Beverages and food for break, flipchart and pen, *Discipline: some helpful tips* handouts, equipment for showing video clips (computer, projector, screen, and Wi-Fi).

# Discipline – some helpful tips…

- Try and stay calm – it's so easy to get cross and loose the cool, but it only turns the heat up in the situation. Discipline will be more effective if you speak and act calmly.

- Have clear boundaries around what is acceptable and what behaviour isn't acceptable.

- Be clear about the consequences of bad behaviour and give a warning: 'if you draw on the wall again, the crayons will be put away' (Counting to 3 can help!)

- Focus on the behaviour rather than criticising the child - 'Stop hitting your brother, it's not a nice thing to do' rather than 'why are you being such a horrible boy?…'

- Praise them when they do what you ask and notice them when they're being good.

- Always follow through and be consistent – stick to your word!

## Consequences - some practical ideas…

**Time out** – on a stair or a chair

(1 minute for each year)

**Take away privileges** for a while eg TV, Computer or phone

**Reward rather than punish** – 'when you get your room tidy/homework finished you can watch TV/we'll read a book together'

**Let the consequence fit the 'crime'** – don't come down too heavy eg take away a toy rather than no TV for a month!

**Distract** – eg ask them to do something for you, or show them something interesting

## Just for Dads session 9: Where to now?

**Goal:** To reflect on what we've gained from *Just for Dads* and set goals for ourselves as fathers.

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| **0-10 mins Introduction and recap (10m)** | **Review of last week and learning gained:**<br>Facilitator welcomes group, briefly reminds participants of last week's session (Discipline).<br><br>Did anyone try any of the ideas we learnt about/discussed last week? How did you get on? (eg using rewards, being consistent and following through, time out chair/stair, warning + count to 3, taking away privileges etc.)<br><br>Facilitator introduces this week's topic – Where to now? This week we will be reviewing what we've gained from JFDs and thinking about what we want for ourselves as fathers in the weeks/months ahead. |
| | |
| **10-30 mins Activity (20m)**<br><br>**Blob figures exercise** | **Where am I now exercise:**<br>Using blob figures hand-out, each person identify where they are on the tree in relation to being a dad. Go around the group so each person can share where they are at. |
| | |
| **30-60 mins Activity (30m)**<br><br>**Goal setting exercise** | **Where would I like to be? Discussion/ setting goals exercise:**<br>In light of where you are, what you have learnt over the past few months at 'Just for Dads', and now the course is coming to an end, what goals would you set yourself in relation to your fathering from this point?<br>Each person reflect and write down their thoughts using goal setting hand-out as a guide.<br><br>In small groups of 3 or 4 discuss goals.<br><br>Participants are encouraged to put their goals sheet somewhere they will see it over next few weeks so they can be reminded of their goals. |
| | |
| **60-75 mins Break (15m)** | Tea, coffee, and snack<br>(note break is a little later this week) |
| | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **75-85 mins Evaluation (10m)** | **Evaluation of Just for Dads:**<br><br>Facilitator gives out evaluation sheet and reads down through it. Ask group members to fill out evaluation sheet so we can have their input for when we run the programme again.<br><br>Then review each question verbally in order that participants can discuss their feedback together. A facilitator should take notes of the points made in this discussion.<br><br>(It is important to facilitate evaluation both in written form and verbally. This allows participants to give feedback confidentially and also caters for varying degrees of literacy) |
| | |
| **85-90 mins Wrap up** | **Wrap up:**<br><br>Facilitator thanks the group for coming and for their valuable contributions over the weeks of the programme.<br><br>Next week's arrangements are flagged for the 'Celebrating Dads' session. |

**Needed for this session:** Beverages and food for break, copies of figures on a tree exercise, copies of reflection and goal setting exercise.

**Note to facilitators:** In advance of next week's session it would be useful to discuss what are the possibilities for the group to meet up after the programme has finished if that is something they decide they would like to do. Options may include a family outing (including children), or a drop in coffee morning. We have done both with a particularly successful trip to a local kids Playzone where fathers brought their children along. Plans will depend on what the group would like and what resources will allow.

It would also be important to review that all plans for next week are in hand – eg: booking venue, catering, certificates, vouchers (if applicable), guest speaker (if applicable).

# Just for Dads Session 9 – 'Where to from here?'

**In light of where I am now, and what I've learnt at Just for Dads, what goals can I set for myself over the next few weeks and months?**

**Eg: are there things I can do that will help me be a good dad to my kids? Are there things I've learnt here that I can put into practice? Is there anything I've gained here that I can continue?**

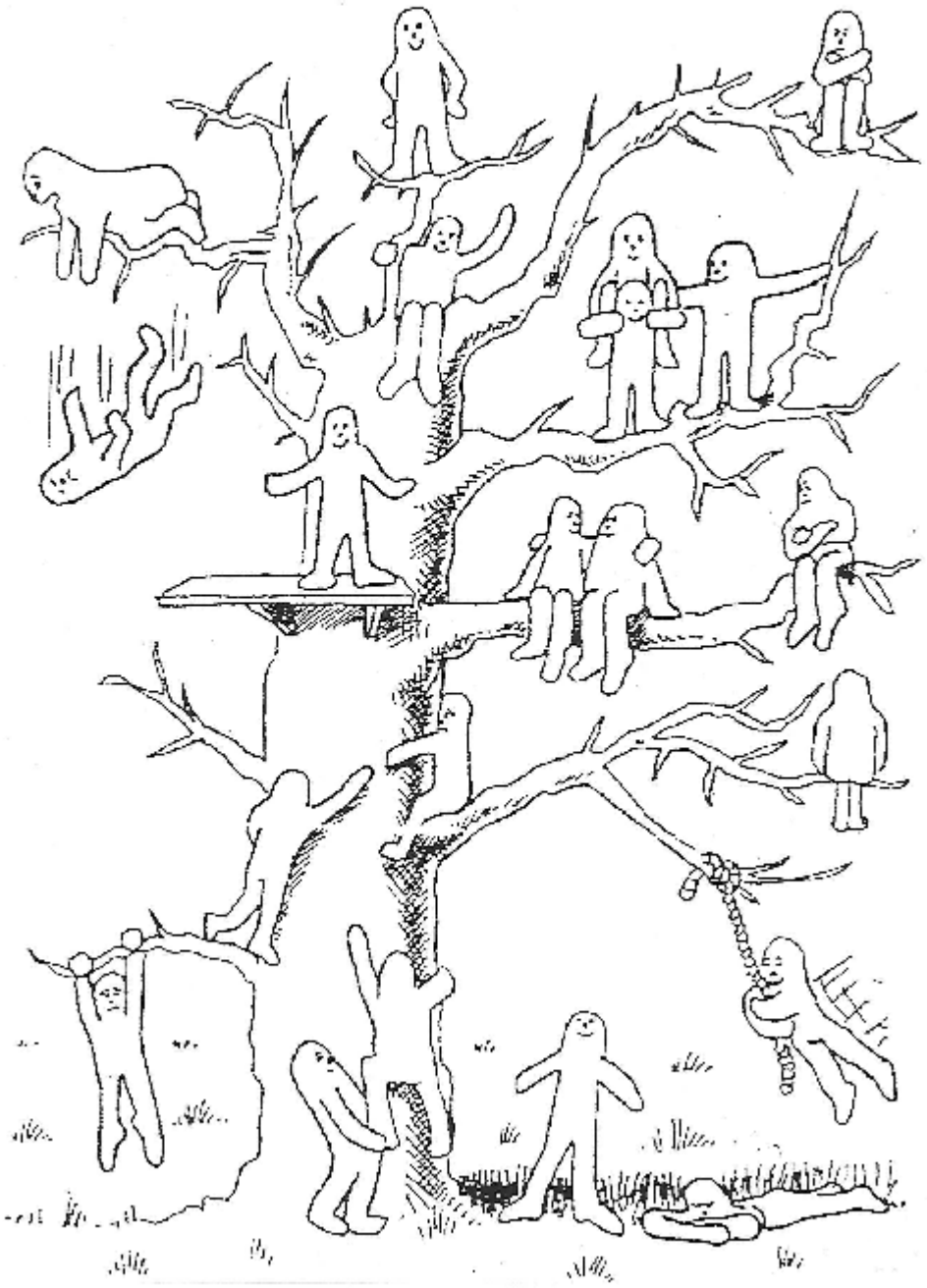
**1.**

**2.**

**3.**

## YOUTHNET RESOURCES

**Which of these figures best represents you right now?**



# Just for Dads – Tell us what you think…

Why did you come to Just for Dads?

What was it that **kept** you coming to Just for Dads?

The best parts of Just for Dads were……

How could Just for Dads be improved?

Has anything changed for you as a result of coming to Just for Dads?

How would you rate Just for Dads?

| 1 (very poor) | 2 (poor) | 3 (fair) | 2 (very good) | 5 (excellent) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Any other comments?

# Just for Dads session 10: Celebrating Dads! (Award Day)

**Goal:** To celebrate the completion of the programme and provide a relaxed/enjoyable space for the group.

This session is different to all the others as it entails meeting for a meal, and acknowledging the men's achievements by presenting them with Certificates of Achievement. It may also involve a speech or two and even a guest speaker to add significance to the occasion! Planning how this will best work for your group is up to you.

**Things that have worked for us:**

- *Having a meal together*
  - We have met up for breakfast in a local pub, and also gone out for lunch in a local café. Having food together lends a sense of celebration and reward and also provides a relaxed environment for people to interact informally. Each venue was able to provide us with a room off the main dining area for privacy. Of course this will be subject to available resources - if things are tight perhaps a bring and share meal may be an option.
- *Presentation of certificates*
  - We have drawn up certificates for each of the men which acknowledge their participation in *Just for Dads.* We have included a sample here.
- *Guest speaker*
  - Having a guest speaker can underscore the significance of the men's participation and is a nice outside validation of the programme. Speakers we have invited include a professor from the local university and the manager of the family support service from which the programme is run.
- *Vouchers*
  - On a number of occasions it has been possible for us to include vouchers (€40) in our presentation to the men. This has been a nice acknowledgement of their participation and a gesture of appreciation rather than any kind of payment for participation.
- *Photographs*
  - We have taken photographs of the men receiving their certificates and then sent them a printed copy. It is important to reassure the participants that the photos won't be used for any other purpose.
- *Planning a post JFDs get together*
  - As stated previously, a number of our groups have been keen to meet up again after the programme has finished. A drop-in coffee morning or trip to a local kids' Playzone are good options.

Have you any learning to share from your experiences of running *Just for Dads*? We'd love to hear from you at justfordadsprogramme@gmail.com

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# Appendices - *Just for Dads* promotional material

On the following pages you will find a *Just for Dads* promotional flyer, poster, referral form and completion certificate. Feel free to use them and adapt them to your own context.

# Children learn more from who you are than what you teach

W.E.B. Du Bois

This programme will run for a 10 week period, 1.5 hours each week.

## Location

## Time

## Dates

For further information
about this programme, contact:

# Just for Dads

**An opportunity for dads to explore their relationships with their children**

# Philosophy of this Programme

Dads are their child's first and foremost male role model and we recognise that while fatherhood is important it can sometimes be difficult and challenging.

We would like to offer a safe space for fathers to come together to support and learn from each other.

This 10 week programme will be confidential, non-judgemental and hopefully an enjoyable and informative experience for all involved.

# Objectives / Goals

This programme will aim to:

- highlight how important dads are to their children's development
- be centred around dads; to help strengthen their resilience and build self-esteem
- support dads to explore and develop their relationships with their children
- increase awareness around the benefits of having a positive relationship with the children's mother
- create a supportive environment that will promote shared learning among dads
- give dads the opportunity to learn practical tools to manage difficult situations relating to their children
- create a learning experience for all those involved which can inform future programmes and practice

# Outline

**Session 1:**
Introduction and exploring fatherhood
**Session 2:**
What our children need from us
**Session 3:**
Ingredients for good relationships with our children
**Session 4:**
Listening to our children
**Session 5:**
Stages of child development
**Session 6:**
Self-care for dads
**Session 7:**
Exploring family relationships
**Session 8:**
How about discipline?
**Session 9:**
Where to now?
**Session 10:**
Celebrating Dads (Award Day)

# Just for Dads

## An opportunity for dads to explore their relationships with their children

This programme will run for a 10 week period, 1.5 hours each week.

LOCATION

TIME

DATES

For Further information about this programme, contact:

# Just for Dads

## Referral Form

**Referrer's Name** | **Referring Agency**

**Tel No**

**Will you the referrer continue to support this father during duration of program?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

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**Person Being Referred:** **Name**

**Address** | **Tel No** | **Age** | **Ethnicity**

---

**Relationship Status**

Single ☐ Co-habiting ☐ Married ☐ Widowed ☐

Civil Partnership ☐ Separated ☐ Divorced ☐

**Comments on (Father's ) Family Status**

## Father's Family Makeup Data

| Child | Name of Child | Age of Child | M/F | Living with Father Y / N | Access to Children Y / N | Type of Father See Note Below | Child Mother's Name | Fathers Relationship with Mother |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | |

**Note:** Biological Father (F) Step Father (SF) Grandfather (GF) Other (O)

**Suitability for this Programme.**

**Is this father currently being assessed by Social Services? in relation to child protection concerns.** Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure ☐

*(If Yes, please provide detail)*

_____

_____

**Has this father current access to his children?** Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure ☐

*If No, please provide detail)*

_____

_____

| | Yes | No | Not sure |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Can this father travel independently in order to attend this group?** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **Is he available on to attend group?** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **Is this father suitably motivated to complete this program?** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **Is he aware of this referral? *(Can you please confirm)*** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

**Do any of the following apply to this father, in a way that could impact on their capacity to engage with group.**

| | Yes | No | Not sure | If Yes (Please detail) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Active addiction | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | _____ |
| • Mental Health Issue | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | _____ |
| • Literacy Issues | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | _____ |
| • Intellectual Disability | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | _____ |
| • Perpetrator of Domestic violence either historically or current | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | _____ |

**What do you consider are the three main strengths of this father:**

**1.** _____

**2.** _____

**3.** _____

**Referrer Signature** _____ **Date** _____

# Just for Dads

This Certificate of Completiton
is Hereby granted to

_____

having successfully completed
The Just for Dad's Programume

*Signature* _____ *Date* _____