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**FATHERS DAY 2019**

**Man with a Pram**

THIS Father’s Day 19 Australian cities and towns will take part in Australia’s first Father’s Day fundraiser - *Man with a Pram*. The family event co-hosted by Dads Group Inc. and local community partners will see a focus on new dads with babies and toddlers who will walk together to address the growing issue of isolation for new fathers.

Thomas Docking, the founder of not-for-profit Dads Group Inc (DGI), the group organising the *Man with a Pram* events was recently awarded Father of the Year (Sunshine Coast). He created *Man With a Pram* as an awareness vehicle to support new fathers and families. The DGI team of volunteers and staff work to connect thousands of new fathers in over 100 Dads group events right around Australia.

Mr Docking, said dad groups were similar to mum groups but were a space where new fathers could connect and build friendships that would help them on their parenting journey. He set up the first DGI dads group five years ago during his wife Kate’s first pregnancy. “I went looking for support programs for expectant and new dads and there was just nothing,” he said. “And I just thought how can there be all this support geared towards new mums but nothing for new dads?”

“Dads groups encourage fathers to connect with their baby or children and importantly with other dads. The regular social contact helps dads who are feeling lonely, anxious, or overwhelmed. It helps them to bond better with their children and improves their relationships with their partners. It also gives Mums a much-deserved break.

The money raised from the *Man With a Pram* fundraising walk will stay in the local communities to enable more dads group programs to be created for new and expecting fathers.”

Man With The Pram Brisbane event leader Nic Bonastre said the Man with a Pram event at Brisbane was an opportunity for all dads in the area to connect. “This is the biggest national Father’s Day fundraiser Australia has ever seen,” Mr Bonastre said. “If we can help more new dads feel better supported in the most important role they will ever had then that’s an amazing outcome.”

**ON THE WEB**

**Read Along Dads**

To celebrate the International Year of Reading in 2012, Friends of Castlemaine Library (FOCAL) set up the Read-Along Dads (RAD) project at Loddon prison near Castlemaine, Victoria. This project has developed and continues to grow and build participants’ literacy skills, as well as family connections.
So far they have recorded 1,322 books for 688 prisoners.

From the website: We provide the children with a recording of their dad reading them a book. Both the recording and a copy of the book itself are sent to the child who can listen to their parent's voice whilst reading or looking at their book. As one dad said to us about the program: 'It's hard to explain the feeling I get out of it when I know that at night, I'm the last voice he hears before he goes to bed'.

See their webpage https://www.readalongdads.org.au/ and an article describing the project.

UK guidelines on antenatal education specify how fathers should be engaged

The UK document has been summarised by Family Included https://familyincluded.com/antenatal-education-uk/
The UK Department of Health’s Preparation for Birth and Beyond (2011) sets out in some detail (220 pages) how antenatal education should be configured. It refers to “mother and father” throughout. Research shows that when content and activities are tailored to include and meet their needs, fathers engage well, and this benefits them, their partners and their babies.

A key recommendation is that maternity services actively find out what local mothers and fathers want, to ensure they cater for diversity of population, such as ethnic/language groups and parents of different ages.

The target outcomes for antenatal education are specified as:

- Mothers and fathers are able to give their baby the best start in life.
- Mothers and fathers have a positive birth experience.

In terms of delivery of education, the priorities for fathers are:

1. Address the father as a parent of the baby, as well as a support person for the mother.
2. Engage the father specifically and actively, offering information and resources that directly address men. Use the word “father” because “parent” is often perceived to mean “mother”. This will overcome the perception that antenatal education is only for women.
3. Provide some men-only sessions later on in the antenatal course.
4. Help mothers and fathers understand that becoming a skilled parent is a matter of practice for both parents.
5. Ensure fathers are particularly well-informed about health issues over which they have influence: breastfeeding, diet, alcohol use, smoking, mental health.
PROGRAMS AND FATHERS INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Support for Fathers
Support for Fathers is a national project which aims to support fathers as parents and partners.
The project has developed:
• Resources for dads and families across Australia.
• A Professionals’ Toolkit for support services working with dads and families.

Support for Fathers is funded by the Department of Social Services as part of the National Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022.

From late 2019 free community information sessions and workplace training opportunities will be offered around Australia. To join the mailing list, arrange a community session or for more information, contact Dom Alford, Project Coordinator, via supportforfathers@rav.org.au or on 0437 305 881.
The resources are available at https://supportforfathers.com.au/

Student feedback on university-level courses that helped to engage with fathers

FRB Comment: Practitioners in all human services need the skills and knowledge to effectively engage with fathers. However, education and training are usually offered through brief workshops or webinars. Within the Family Studies program at the University of Newcastle, specific courses focus on engaging fathers in family services as part of a broad research and practice approach. The course attracts students from across the health and welfare sector. Recently two students provided feedback on the effect of their increased understanding of fathers.

Tameeka Mulquiney – midwife
As a midwife who predominately works in the area of education in the antenatal and postnatal period, I identified there was a gap in education, support and inclusion of fathers. I then wanted to gain a further understanding of the impact of engaging fathers in this antenatal experience and beyond for both the father but also the child. I therefore decided to study father engagement as part of my Master of Midwifery program so I could use the skills obtained from this subject in my clinical practice.

What this subject provided me with was an insight into how I could improve my practice throughout the whole pregnancy experience. Firstly, I was able to improve the antenatal care I provided since studying father engagement. I learnt how to provide a holistic approach to engaging with fathers and incorporating them into the family environment prior to birth. This was in the form of adapting my antenatal education sessions to incorporate fathers more and ensure they knew how important their role was in pregnancy, but also for their future as a father.

Also reviewed was the visual representation of fathers in my teaching sessions. I was able to identify there was a lack of proactive male figures bonding with their newborns in pictures I was showing in classes. This was amended by updating photos to show fathers caring for newborns and being part of the skin to skin process. Commencement of skin to skin assists in bonding for both the father and newborn, just as it does with mothers. This representation needed to be displayed so fathers knew skin to skin is encouraged to be completed by fathers, especially when previous fathers explain how it is such an amazing experience that cannot be described in words (Lubbe, 2015). This ensured the image of how fathers form social relationships and positive experiences with the child starts at birth.

Furthermore, studying this subject supported my clinical practice for fathers in the postnatal period. The skills of communication discussed in the course have been adapted into my clinical practice as I now feel comfortable addressing topics with fathers in both an informal and formal setting, especially in relation to the influences of fathering.

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Intergenerational and cultural influences on fathering have been the main components of the communication, and from this subject I have been able to comfortably work together to identify and rectify gaps with fathers.

Overall the changes I have made to my practice since studying have ensured fathers are aware they are worthy, valued and hold a vital role within their family. I also gained further insight on the positive impacts of commencing this so early in the fatherhood experience, therefore complementing my role as a Midwife.

Contact: Tameeka Mulquiney tmulquiney@csu.edu.au

Vanessa Linden – Midwife and lactation consultant

I was invited a couple of weeks ago to teach Lactation classes for 3 days at the main maternity hospital while the Lactation Consultant was away. Normally you stand at the front of the class and talk about the anatomy and physiology of the breast and how the milk is made etc. I started the class standing at the front and soon found that these new mums were yawning, dads were waiting outside, babies were crying... I stopped the class and grabbed a chair and asked the mums to sit around in a circle and also asked if the dads could come in. They all agreed so I invited the dads in. They picked up their babies and when it was calm, I asked each person 'how are you feeling?' The first mum burst into tears, the second mum said she was tired, then the next dad said he was so overwhelmed etc. I gave them tissues, water to drink and many couldn’t stop crying! We talked about the baby blues, having time out for themselves when they go home, and this tiredness and overwhelming feeling is normal the first few days after the birth of a baby. I hugged them, they hugged each other and I think it was the best breastfeeding class that I’d ever taught even though we only talked about breast feeding for 10 minutes out of 30 minutes. I felt happy that every body was so grateful when they left the class, but I also thought that I’d probably never be invited back again! I returned two days later and was called into the bosses office... she told me that everybody was talking about my class and how the feedback forms were rated 5 stars, and they had all mentioned that the breast feeding class was the highlight! I can only say that participating in 'Engaging Families and Communities' has changed the way that I teach new mums and dads...for the better!

Contact: Vanessa Linden Vanessa.Linden@uon.edu.au

Supporting young men and fathers from migrant and refugee backgrounds

By Migrant Council of Australia

Fatherhood can have a transformative impact on men, particularly in regard to gender equality. It is also an opportunity for preventative engagement with fathers to be. Strategies aimed at young men and fathers from migrant and refugee backgrounds have the potential to foster positive and respectful attitudes and behaviours in current or future relationships.

Migration Council Australia (MCA) has undertaken consultation on current service and information provision gaps for men from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
The consultation found that men and fathers from migrant and refugee backgrounds are a highly diverse group and among the most difficult cohorts for service providers to engage with on family and relationship issues. Moreover, despite the abundance of information on family safety, there are limited resources on positive parenting tailored to men and fathers from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

In response to these gaps MCA, in collaboration with the Australian Government, developed a national strategy to engage men and fathers from migrant and refugee backgrounds and created two resources. The first is a website (https://fatheringacrosscultures.org.au) for service providers and initiatives working with fathers from migrant and refugee backgrounds, to guide them through some of the considerations to be had when engaging with this cohort. The second is an app for fathers from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The app will provide basic information on the transition to fatherhood, healthy relationships and where to find information and support. Both resources are expected to be launched later this year.

The next stage of the project will be the development of a Supporting CaLD Fathers Hub. The Hub will bring together service provider-, and, community-led initiatives across Australia currently working with men from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The Hub will provide a platform for services to share lessons learnt, good practice cases, and to discuss common and emerging challenges when engaging with CaLD fathers. It will also identify programs and initiatives that support CaLD fathers through a directory. This work is planned to take course over the next year.

Contact: info@fatheringacrosscultures.org.au

Males in Early Childhood

In 2005 Craig D’Arcy presented on the Engaging Fathers Forum held at the University of Newcastle on the role of male staff in making early childhood settings more father-friendly. For this 2019 issue of the Bulletin, Craig reflected on what has changed in the 14 years since that Forum for men working in early childhood services.

Craig d’Arcy

Craig d’Arcy is currently the coordinator of a small community preschool in Northern NSW, Australia. Since 1991, Craig has gained a wide range of experience in the early childhood field, working in a diverse variety of positions with children and families. In addition, he is also the Australian member of the leadership team for the World Forum on Care and Education project – Men in Early Childhood Education. He is the facilitator of the National Males in Early Childhood Network, which he established in 2002.

What has changed in the last 14 years?

* There is a situation where demand generally outstrips the number of child care places available (i.e. waiting lists), coupled with a turnover rate of educators of approx 15% / year. This is further impacted by increased adult to child ratios and mandated changes to all staff having to obtain a formal qualification. Workforce shortages are a major threat to the industry.

* With the above context, various government initiatives and policies have been developed to attempt to address workforce shortages - but men as potential educators have not been mentioned or targeted in any of these initiatives.

* In Australia, the numbers of men in the early years have not changed much at all over time, remaining close to the current 2.7%.

* The challenges ahead include; men needing to be actively recruited, men working/studying in isolation, negative community attitudes, fear of being branded a child abuser and relatively low pay/working conditions compared to other industries.

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* To address these issues, we could look to overseas examples of successful ways to increase male involvement. For example, male only early childhood courses, men to be actively targeted and invited to apply for positions, government policy that sets clear targets for male staff / students and male early childhood support networks to be established.

Contact: Craig d’Arcy craig.darcy1@gmail.com

CONFERENCES

**CHANGING THE STORY**
Young Aboriginal Men’s Mental Health, Wellbeing and Fatherhood

**FRIDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2019**
9am–3pm University of Newcastle, NSW

**SPEAKERS**
Dr Mark Wenintong // Dr Mick Adams
Craig Hammond // Charlie Faulkner

**INVITATION TO**
Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff from Community, Health, Nursing, Hospital, School, Early Childhood, Welfare services

**LEARN**
How young Aboriginal fathers see their role

**HEAR**
From Indigenous leaders in men’s health

**CONTRIBUTE**
Your work with young Aboriginal men

**EXPLORE**
How your service can support Aboriginal fathers to benefit the whole community

**REGISTRATION**
* Registration essential // Lunch provided

**Email** family@newcastle.edu.au
**Phone** Richard Fletcher 0429 152 405
How can fathers be involved in the prevention of obesity within their family?

FrB Comment by Elaine Bennett, Director Research Ngala. Three studies (Two American and one Australian) with different perspectives were reviewed: All studies stressed the importance of fathers being engaged and involved in the change for obesity prevention highlighting the importance of the first 1000 days.

Firstly, Davison et al. (2019) looked at five key programs in the USA which target families in the first 1000 days and who integrate obesity prevention services. Overall they found that father involvement was low. The article notes the barriers to father engagement and recommends policy, systems and environmental strategies to overcome or promote engagement so that fathers can play an important role in the health of their children. The second article by Tan et al. (2019) was a qualitative study which set out to understand how fathers and mothers jointly navigate child feeding; and to identify areas of child feeding where both parents agree and/or disagree. The couples noted that they were influenced by their family of origin when it came to child feeding and they attempted healthier family eating habits with their children. The study revealed areas of agreement as well as disagreement between the couples, as well as noting increased maternal involvement in feeding tasks being aligned with stereotypical gender roles. The authors stressed the importance of discussion with parents to understand each partners expectations of managing family mealtimes and child eating behaviours. The final article by Morgan et al. (2019) was a study conducted in the Hunter region of NSW. The outcomes of a father-child lifestyle intervention following 12 months demonstrated positive intervention effects. The program called ‘Healthy Dads Health Kids’ used trained facilitators to engage and assist families from low socio-economic and regional areas to improve their health and wellbeing which was sustained over a year.

Engaging fathers in early obesity prevention during the first 1,000 days: Policy, systems and environmental change strategies

Objective: Fathers are critical stakeholders in childhood obesity prevention but are difficult to engage. This review presents a new approach to engaging fathers in obesity prevention during the first 1,000 days.

Methods: The review focuses on five existing health and social service programs, including prenatal care, pediatric care, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, home visiting, and Early Head Start. For each program, the obesity prevention services provided, evidence of father engagement, and barriers thereto are outlined. Subsequently, policy, systems, and environmental strategies are outlined to address the noted barriers and promote father engagement.

Results: Although the programs hold great promise in bringing obesity prevention services to fathers, barriers to their engagement are present in the inner (e.g., limited hours of operation, lack of father-specific materials and programming) and outer (e.g., lack of model programs, best practice models, and consistent funding) settings of programs. Policy, systems, and environmental strategies to increase father engagement focus on earmarked funding, changes to national practice guidelines and practitioner training requirements, and the establishment of father-engagement performance metrics.

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CONCLUSIONS: Increasing father involvement in the specified programs will likely increase their engagement in early obesity prevention in an efficient and sustainable manner.


**Coparenting in the feeding context: perspectives of fathers and mothers of pre-schoolers**

**Purpose:** This study examined how fathers and mothers coparent around child feeding.

**Methods:** Father–mother pairs (N = 30) of preschool-aged children (M child age = 4.1 years old) participated in joint or group interview sessions.

**Results:** Three themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: (1) couples’ division of labor regarding feeding tasks seemed to align with stereotypical gender roles; (2) couples noted that they attempted healthier family eating habits in comparison to families of origin and recognized the influence of extended family on their attempts at healthier feeding; (3) couples agreed on the importance of family mealtime, routines, and healthy meals, yet disagreed on strategies to limit unhealthy foods and achieve harmonious family meals.

**Conclusions:** This study identified processes of coparenting and child feeding areas that were particularly challenging to manage among parents, which could be important targets for childhood obesity interventions.


**Twelve-month outcomes of a father-child lifestyle intervention delivered by trained local facilitators in underserved communities: The Healthy Dads Healthy Kids dissemination trial**

Healthy Dads Healthy Kids (HDHK) was the first program internationally to specifically target overweight and obese fathers to improve their children’s health. In previous randomized controlled trials, HDHK generated meaningful short-term improvements in the adiposity, physical activity, and eating behaviors of both fathers and children. The aim of this dissemination trial was to evaluate the 12-month impact of HDHK when delivered by trained facilitators across four low socioeconomic and regional communities in the Hunter Region, Australia. The study was a nonrandomized, prospective trial with minimal eligibility criteria (i.e., father body mass index [BMI] ≥ 25 kg/m² and children aged 4–12 years). HDHK included eight weekly practical and theoretical sessions. Assessments were baseline, 3 months (post-intervention), 6-months, and 12-months. The primary outcome was fathers’ weight. Secondary outcomes included child BMI z-score and validated lifestyle behavior measures (e.g., physical activity, diet). Overall, 189 fathers (mean age: 40.2 years, BMI: 32.6 kg/m²) and 306 children (mean age: 8.1 years) participated in one of 10 HDHK programs in four areas. Intention-to-treat linear mixed models revealed a significant mean reduction in fathers’ weight at post-intervention (~3.6 kg, 95% confidence interval: ~4.3, ~2.9), which was maintained at 12 months (71% retention). Corresponding improvements were also detected in children’s BMI z-score and a range of lifestyle behaviors for both fathers and children.

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Attendance and satisfaction levels were high. Positive intervention effects observed in previous randomized controlled trials were largely replicated and sustained for 12 months when HDHK was delivered by trained local facilitators in underserved communities. Further investigation into the key systems, processes, and contextual factors required to deliver HDHK at scale appears warranted.


**Male Partners of Women with Postnatal Mental Health Problems**

*FRB Comment by Dr Dawson Cooke, Curtin University.* A recent study by Ruffell, Smith and Wittkowski (2019) reviewed and synthesised the results from 20 published papers on men’s experience when their partner has postnatal mental health problems. The themes they identified are a reminder of the complex and diverse influences a family member has on each other member and the family system – impacts that can be both positive and negative, direct and indirect. These findings also remind me of how critical it is to consciously maintain an open and curious mindset when considering people’s subjective experience, either as a researcher or a practitioner. Reflecting on research such as this helps us to keep our perspective broad and informed of the wide variety of impacts and responses that are possible. Yet in contrast to this broad view that we aim to hold, each man in this particular situation develops a uniquely personal view. One of the Bulletin’s editors, Elaine Bennett (Bennett & Cooke, 2012), developed the analogy of ‘looking into a periscope’ to describe men’s experience of surviving PND. Their experience is often a very private and is a view that is focussed and affected by many conditions – a view that is also interpreted differently over time and as conditions change. The diagram illustrating themes, subthemes and the relationship between them, from Ruffell, Smith and Wittkowski (2019)
The experiences of male partners of women with postnatal mental health problems: A systematic review and thematic synthesis

**Objectives:** This systematic review thematically synthesised qualitative research exploring men’s experiences of their partner’s postnatal mental health problems and their impact on men’s emotional wellbeing, relationships and support needs. Maternal postnatal mental health problems impact women and their infants. Recognition of the role that men play in supporting women’s’ recovery and infants’ development is growing. However, less is known about how maternal postnatal mental health problems affect men and how they wish to be supported.

**Methods:** A systematic review of the literature was conducted in January 2018 by searching five electronic databases (PsycINFO, EMBASE, MEDLINE, PubMed and Web of Science). Qualitative research studies published in English exploring men’s experiences of having a partner with postnatal mental health problems were included. Twenty papers met the inclusion criteria and were appraised for methodological quality. Data were thematically synthesised.

**Results:** In addition to nineteen subthemes, 5 main themes were identified: (1) Being a father, (2) Being a partner, (3) Experiencing negative emotions, (4) The ways in which men cope and (5) Where support is needed.

**Conclusions:** Maternal postnatal mental health problems impacted men’s roles of being a father and a partner and gave rise to negative emotions. Men coped with these experiences in a number of ways, which were both helped and hindered by personal, social and professional factors. Participants’ coping methods were understood in relation to Coping Theory. Recommendations for perinatal mental health professionals included the need for increased public awareness of postnatal mental health.


Surviving postnatal depression: The male perspective

**Aim:** The study aim was to hear the male voice describing the experience of postnatal depression (PND) and to develop a conceptual framework, which would explain this experience.

**Background:** Given the relatively large body of research on the nature of PND from the woman’s perspective and the general movement towards family-centred practice, it seemed timely to undertake a study that concentrated on the male experience of having a partner with PND.

**Method:** Seven men whose partners were currently experiencing, or who had recently experienced moderate to severe PND, participated in unstructured interviews. Grounded theory methodology was used to explore the male experience of living with a partner suffering from PND.

**Results:** Data analysis revealed four categories in the process of living through the experience of a partner’s PND: "out of control", "coming to the realisation", "making sense of it", and "the road to recovery". The core variable, "surviving PND" integrates the categories and encapsulates the process of transition experienced by the men.

**Conclusions:** The consequences of "surviving PND" are explained by the men as both losses and gains. For some men there was a sense of vulnerability and emotional drain because they had poured so much energy and self into the women and their needs for recovery. "Surviving PND" also had significant impact on the relationship, both in a positive and negative way.

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In addition, all men developed an increased understanding and gained personal insight into themselves, their partner and people in general. Implications for clinical practice: This research increases our understanding of the male experience of PND and may be drawn on to inform the practice of nurses and other health care or early parenting professionals.


**RESEARCHER PROFILES**

Fathers, masculinities and imprisonment

**Tess Bartlett, MA, PhD (Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, Monash University, Melbourne)**

My interest in researching fathers can be traced back to the very beginning of my honour’s degree in criminology (2006) when I became increasingly interested in gender and crime and the lived experiences of those in prison. The research I have been involved in since completing my master’s thesis (2009), both as a student and as a researcher, has been about families and how they are impacted by imprisonment. From 2012 to 2015, I worked on an Australian Research Council (ARC) project examining care planning practices for children when their primary carer parent was arrested and, consequently, imprisoned. When interviewing primary carer fathers in Victoria I became particularly interested in the construction of masculinity in the “hyper-masculine” prison environment as well as fathering identity and how men experienced being a primary carer father in prison. I started noticing themes arising from the interviews: there was very little support for these men in their role as fathers at any stage of the criminal justice system; primary carer fathers tended to be largely overlooked by authorities (such as the police and prison staff) and were not questioned about their children; yet primary carer fathers themselves did want to be involved in their children’s lives, despite being incarcerated.

These observations brought to mind several initial questions about incarcerated primary carer fathers. Were primary carer fathers not given supports in prison because they were fathers and the gendered assumptions that exist with regard to fathering and primary care? Were primary carer fathers in prison more open to fathering from prison than they were being given the opportunity to be? If there were opportunities to learn about fathering and be connected with their children from prison – would they take these? These questions were at the forefront of my mind as I gathered the data for the ARC project and with this came a sense of urgency to be a voice for primary carer fathers: to tell their stories, get their stories heard, and reflect their experiences in a way that was true to them.

Supporting incarcerated fathers: An exploration of research and practice in Victoria, Australia

In recent decades the number of incarcerated parents has increased on a global scale. The majority of these prisoners are men, yet there has been very little formal attention concerning the parenting status of these men, despite knowledge about the impact of parental incarceration on children being well established. In Victoria, Australia, some 93 per cent of prisoners are men, and more than half of these are fathers, yet they have also attracted limited scholarly and practitioner attention. This article explores research and practice accounts regarding support for incarcerated fathers and their children, particularly emphasising visiting, supported/visiting and fathering units, to build knowledge in Victoria.
To do so it examines 36 publications from 2000 to 2018, addressing a gap in knowledge relating to supporting father-child relationships from prison. It concludes by offering pragmatic solutions for the development of supports that will contribute to the maintenance of these relationships.


**Did we forget something? Fathering supports and programs in prisons in Victoria, Australia**

This article draws from data gathered for an Australian Research Council–funded study conducted in Victoria and New South Wales between 2011 and 2015, which examined how dependent children are responded to when their primary carer is imprisoned. In particular, this article specifically addresses a gap in knowledge by examining the current state of fathering programs in prison in Victoria. To do so, the views of 39 primary carer fathers incarcerated in Victoria are analysed. We argue that there is a distinct lack of support for fathers in prison, acting as a barrier towards maintaining father–child relationships. Findings indicate that 79% of the fathers in this study were never offered any parenting support services or programs. By clearly highlighting the state of fathering programs in prisons in Victoria, this article offers suggestions as to how best to facilitate the connection between incarcerated fathers and their children.