



# Paternity

## AT WORK

Taking a safety perspective on  
fathers in the workplace



# Introduction



When does stress in parenthood become distress? For many parents, it can be difficult to distinguish everyday concerns and a lack of sleep with unhealthy levels of anxiety or even depression.

Often parents who are experiencing distress view what they're going through in the context of having a baby rather than the context that something may be wrong – like early signs of mental health problems. As such, many parents only seek help when they are at absolute breaking point and finding themselves no longer able to cope. For fathers, in particular, this is becoming an all too common problem.



# Distinguishing stress from distress

Founder and Executive Director at the Centre of Perinatal Excellence (COPE) Dr Nicole Highet explains that many fathers experience high levels of stress and even anxiety and depression during the early stages of parenthood. However, it can be difficult to recognise the symptoms.

Furthermore, when a partner is struggling with these issues, many fathers describe themselves as feeling useless and at a loss as to how they can help. When a partner is experiencing distress it can elicit a reaction of anger and resentment as to why.

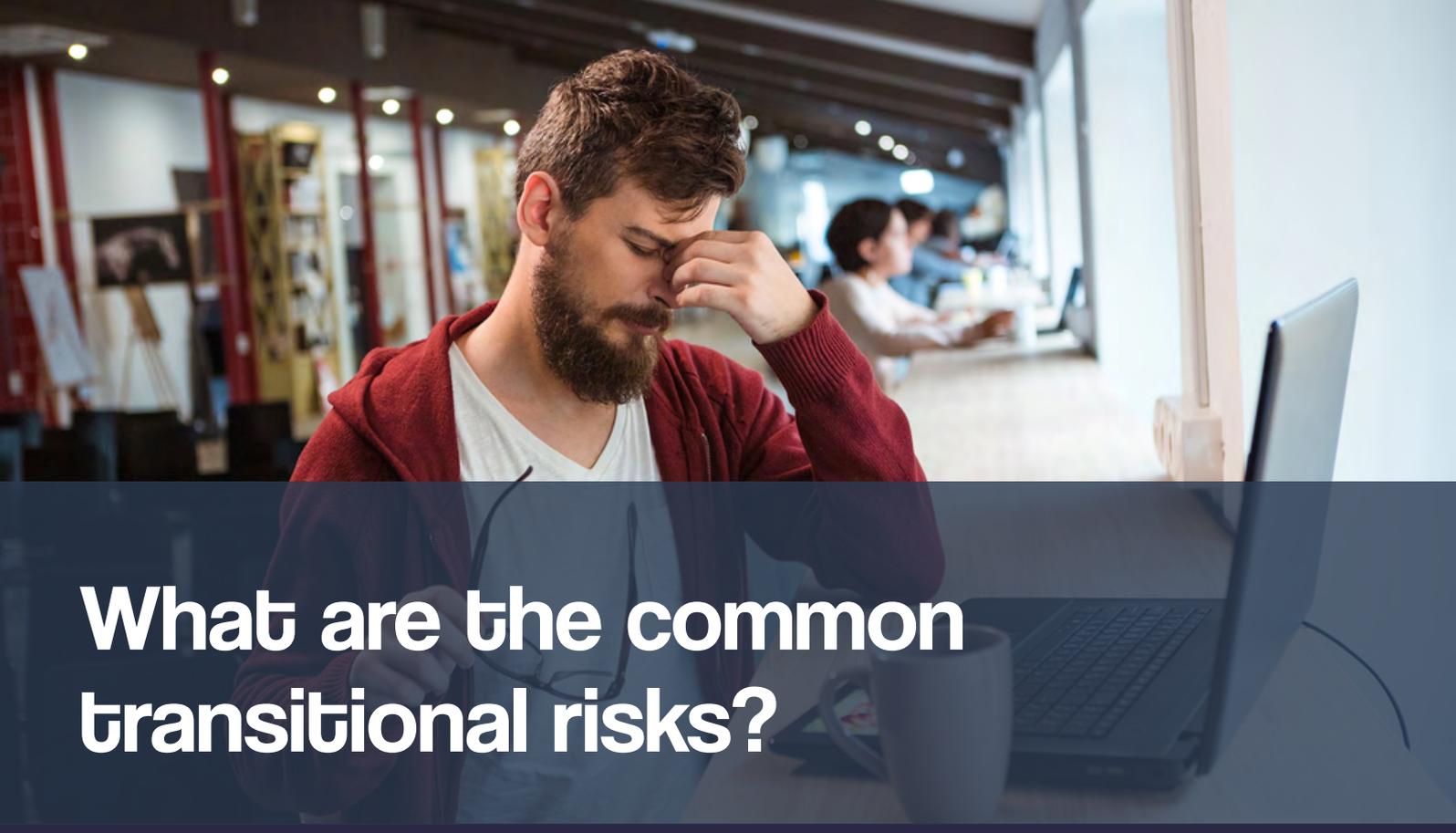
As such, COPE is committed to helping parents manage the many highs and lows that come with having a baby. As with any change,

bringing a baby into the world comes with many adjustments, but often these issues are not openly spoken about between parents. As a result, many parents are left feeling like they are the only ones who may be struggling to cope.

The workplace, therefore, provides a prime opportunity to reach fathers during this transitional period, and supply information as to what the common issues are, provide insight into how to recognise what is going on within themselves and their partners, and know when and where they can access help early – rather than waiting until things have reached ‘crisis point’.

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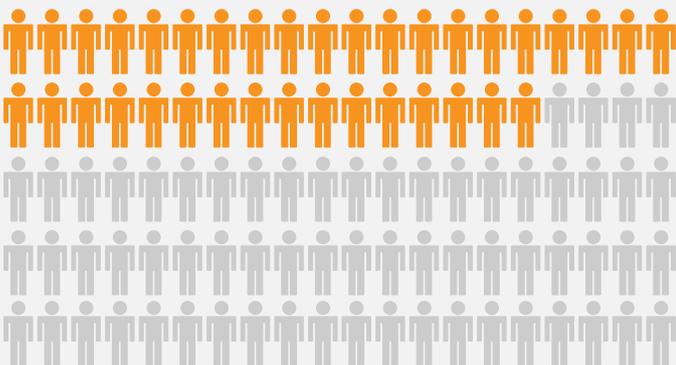
# What are the common transitional risks?

Dr Sarah Cotton from Transitioning Well explains that many fathers tend to internalise their struggle, and are hesitant to share this with their partner or see what they are experiencing is common in their situation. For example, father fatigue is a key issue associated with this transitional phase and can become a serious safety risk in the workplace.

Recent Australian research by Southern Cross and Griffith Universities found that 36% of new fathers were more likely to have an accident

at work, and 26% were more likely to have an accident on the road, on the way to or from work due to fatigue.

The role of a father has high expectations and responsibilities and the overwhelming pressures and need to be the 'rock' for their family are often at the root of unhealthy stress levels.



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# What is Dad Stress??

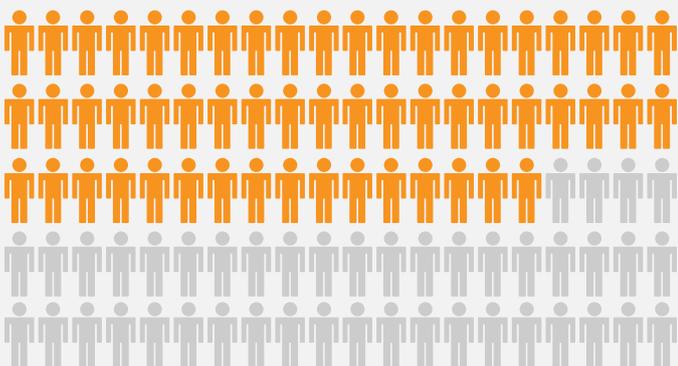
Dad Stress involves more than simply trying to adjust to a new work/life balance with added responsibilities and feelings of pressure as the provider. It is also a result of integrating fatherhood with marriage, friendships, and other commitments.

These feelings are common, with Beyond Blue research stating that more than half (57 per cent) of first-time fathers experience moderate or severe levels of stress. Furthermore, men are reactive in the way they receive information, with the same research suggesting that 56 per cent of fathers do not seek information early on – rather

they are more likely to wait until a problem has arisen.

This can create identity confusion and work/life conflict as Dads struggle to integrate their new role into the other components of their lives.

Adam Baldock of the Fired Up Dads podcast explains that it was only recently that Dads took a more active role in parenting rather than simply filling the role of the provider. While many men are happy to be more involved, it still comes with significant adjustments.



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# Why should organisations want to help in this area?

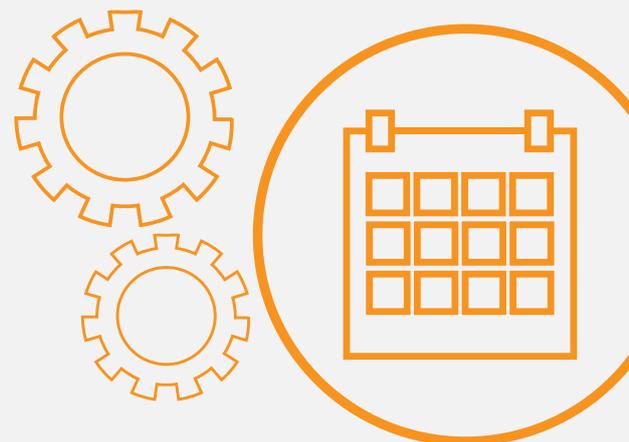
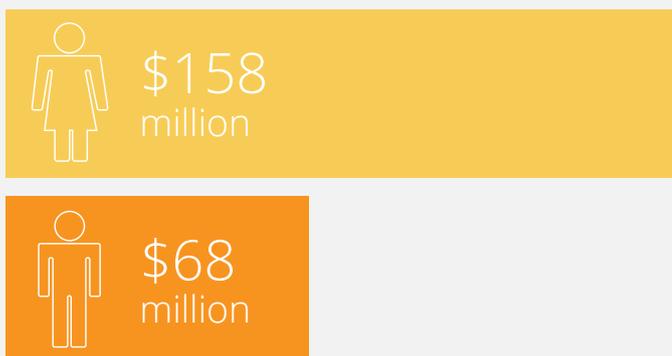
Recent research from The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) states that one in four men experience discrimination during pregnancy, parental leave and the return to work period in the workplace. This highlights the lack of knowledge of many companies on how to support workers during this transition period. Furthermore, it can lead to high turnover with many men citing lack of flexibility as a key factor in their decision to leave an organisation. Heightened stress can also result in a reduced sense of engagement and productivity.

This issue is more than simply a health and safety concern. Failing to address these

problems can result in serious financial implications for a business.

PricewaterhouseCoopers analysed the cost of antenatal and postnatal depression and anxiety to companies if it is not properly addressed. Its research report stated that the cost of this productivity loss over one year is \$158 million for mothers and \$68 million for fathers and extended to 20 years, sits at \$233 million for mothers and \$80 million for fathers.

Mothers vs. Fathers Productivity loss over one year





# Why is there a need for a package tailored to Dads?

Many fathers lack the information to why they are experiencing heightened levels of stress. This is due to few men attending perinatal (pre and postnatal) appointments and missing out on valuable advice around this transitional period. Even so, much of these appointments are currently focussed on basic physical needs of the mother and baby, with little time or opportunity to focus on the personal transition and the potential impacts upon emotional and mental health.

Furthermore, the roles, expectations and experience for fathers is overall very different. Information for fathers, therefore, needs to be

tailored for the gender as opposed to a generic parent.

Incorporating this as a workplace safety initiative acts to normalise the issue. There is a critical time for men when they become fathers when they are more receptive to information. Reaching Dads at this point and providing them with strategies to help navigate stress before they reach breaking point can help to mitigate the risk.

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# What does the training package incorporate?

Paternity at Work has developed an online package that allows organisations to address the safety implications of these issues. As men are less likely to seek help themselves, the workplace is able to act as a key instigator to help mitigate the risk.

To compliment this, COPE has developed a digital screening platform, iCOPE, which enables the emotional and mental health of fathers to be assessed and importantly provides Dads with instant personalised reports (via email or SMS) based on the questions and screening tools used. These reports are often the only time that a father's emotional and mental health status is ever reflected upon or enquired about.

By empowering Dads with tailored information about their own personal status, this serves to provide them with a context of how they are travelling, direct them to clinical information and support strategies, and importantly effective treatments in the community or organisation if needed.

The online training package will take approximately 20 minutes to complete and will incorporate stories from Dads sharing their experiences, as well as insights from experts explaining the clinical context. It will also provide fathers with strategies to deal with common issues that arise during this transitional period.

Rather than wait until 'crisis point', this program ensures there is a confidential and discrete way for Dads to receive timely, appropriate insights, understanding and resources through a practical intervention.

Many fathers express feeling valued as employees, but ignored as fathers in their role at work. Through this training package, we hope to address this issue and ensure that work-paternity support becomes an essential and visible workplace service.



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