

National Parenting Strategy – Parent discussion groups

Brief for Facilitators

The Scottish Government wants Scotland to be the best place for children to grow up. We know that parents are the strongest influence on a child's life and by building the capacity, confidence and skills of parents, carers and families, we can help ensure that every child has the best start in life and is supported throughout their childhood and into adulthood. This is why the Government is developing a national parenting strategy. We want to raise the value and importance of parenting, while also recognising that it can be difficult at times. We want to work alongside parents and families to look at ways of improving support that will make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people.

We want you to help us by having a discussion with a group of parents and carers that you work with (not just mums, but dads, grandparents, adoptive or foster parents – anyone who is bringing up children) to ask for their views to help shape the strategy and the way forward.

What we want to know?

The Scottish Government wants to know what parents and carers need to help support them in their parenting role. We want to know about support they receive from friends, family, neighbours and the wider community as well as from services (health, education, social work, voluntary sector etc). What are their experiences – good and bad? Why did they seek help from one source rather than another? When they asked for support, were they able to get it? How can we change attitudes which can get in the way of asking for help? In short, what would help parents that you work with to be the best parent they can be for their children? What would make a real difference to them?

How to take this forward

We have developed a short brief and a few questions to stimulate discussion in your group. Please feel free to use your own words. There is also some Q&A on the national parenting strategy for background information, plus some additional topics you can choose to discuss, depending on the interests of your participants and time available. We have included a form at the end of this paper which asks you to tell us a bit about the group of parents involved in the discussion. We also want you to summarise the main points from the discussion and send this back to us in any format that is convenient to you. We will look carefully at all the responses and use them to help us develop the national parenting strategy. Once we have collated all the feedback received, we will tell you what we have found out, and how we are using the information they gave us, so that parents across Scotland can see that their views are making a difference. We hope parents will stay in touch as we may wish to seek their views again!

If you have any questions, please contact Clare Collin 0131 244 7608 or Clare.Collin@scotland.gsi.gov.uk. **Thank you!**

National Parenting Strategy for Scotland – Have your say

We all want the best for our children and young people. There is a robust and comprehensive range of evidence which shows that the early years are crucial to a child's health, development and life opportunities. Parents and families are a child's first educators and are the most important influence on a child's life, especially in the early years.

The Scottish Government recognises that supporting parents* is key to improving the life chances of our children and young people. All families need support at times, whether from family and friends or from specific services, and we want to make sure that parents and families can access the right support at the right time to enable them to do their best for their children. This is why we are developing a national parenting strategy to look at how the support for parents and families can be improved. The Scottish Government wants to hear from parents, carers and others with a parenting role - This is for all parents, not just specific target groups. This is about how you feel as a parent, your experiences and your needs.

Main Questions for Discussion

1. We know there are challenges to parenting, however we also know the fun and joyful experiences we can have with children....what are the best things about being a parent?
2. Thinking back over your child's life, what kind of informal advice or help have you needed? Did you get the advice/help you needed? Please give examples e.g. who did you go to, what advice/help did you need?
3. If you ever asked for help from services (health, education, social work, voluntary/third sector), did you get the help you needed and feel supported? What more could they have done to make a difference?
4. Have you ever needed help but felt unable to ask or not know where to go or maybe you felt there was no help available? Can you give examples e.g. what help did you need, what stopped you from asking for help or getting the help you needed?
5. Do you think there is information overload or not enough for parents? Can you give examples e.g. too much/too little of what, none for specific issues, yes there is and its useful/not useful etc?
6. What makes you feel confident as a parent? What practical things would make a difference to you in your parenting role?

* references to 'parents' and 'parenting' refers to those who provide significant care for children, including grandparents, other relatives or adults not biologically related to the child.

Facilitator Q&A

Q: Why do we need a National Parenting Strategy?

A: To give Scotland's children the very best start in life, because we know that parents are the most important influence on their children's lives, and that all parents need help at times. The strategy will aim to raise the profile of parenting across Scotland, and recognise its value and worth as well as its challenges.

A: To encourage all the agencies (this includes national and local services, voluntary sector and communities themselves) working with children and young people and their families to work together, so that they can provide better services and support to all parents and carers.

A: To help ensure that parents across Scotland get the support they need, when they need it, and to make it easier for parents to understand what kind of help they can expect, from before conception, during pregnancy, and through all the different stages of their children's lives.

Q: Why are we having this discussion?

A: We want to hear what you think? We want to hear about your experiences. What would help you be the best parent you could be?

A: This discussion will help us (parents, citizens of Scotland, central/local Government, agencies/organisations) to think about what we can all do to support everyone involved in the rewarding and sometimes challenging role of bringing up children.

A: We want to consider how we can further support parents who are coping with issues that may make parenting harder – such as disability, substance misuse, domestic abuse, offending/imprisonment, isolation, mental health issues.

Q: What will the National Parenting Strategy do?

A: It will encourage us to look at how we can help improve support to build parents' capacity, confidence and skills so they can be the best parent they can be.

A: We don't think the Strategy should say what good and bad parenting is, but it should say something about what we think are the most important things about being a parent, and what kind of things can make the biggest difference to parents/families and children's lives.

A: Alongside the Government's planned legislation on children's rights and children's services, it will help to improve the life chances for children and young people by making it clear that supporting parents is a very important

part of the focus and investment in early years and prevention and early intervention.

A: It will set out at a national level what support is available to parents, identify where more could be done, and say what else we plan to do.

Q: Who is the National Parenting Strategy for?

A: It's for children! By supporting parents, we will help improve the life chances for our children and young people – the parents of the future.

A: It's for the Scottish Government, Health Boards, local authorities, the third sector and informal support networks to make sure that we think about parenting in everything we do, and think about ways we can improve our support to parents.

A: It's for everyone who is involved in parenting – for parents themselves but also grandparents, and other family members, as well as carers, foster parents and adoptive parents. In fact its for everyone, whether we have children or not, because the responsibility of raising children should be shared and supported by our wider community.

A: It's for all parents of children of all ages, starting from before conception and going right up to 18 - 21 for children who have been 'looked after' (in care).

Q: When will the National Parenting Strategy be available?

A: We think the strategy needs to be developed in different stages:

Phase I: The first step is to develop a national overarching strategy which says what we are trying to achieve. We want to do this by summer 2012.

Phase II: Working across Scotland to help local services/communities (health, education, social work, third sector and communities themselves) think about the best way that they can support parents.

Phase III: Depending on the feedback received throughout the engagement period, we will consider what kind of support would be useful to parents/families that would make a practical difference to supporting them in their parenting role.

Supplementary discussion topics depending on audience and time available.

Influences on Parents: Parents learn about parenting primarily through their own parents. There is a clear transmission of parenting attitudes and capabilities between parent and child that starts at a very early age. Parents also use secondary sources such as friends, broadcast information and professional advice for information and advice about parenting.

Question: *How can we encourage parents to learn more about parenting? Do we need to provide more information and advice? If yes, would more general advice and guidance (covering the age stages described overleaf) be helpful? Or should we set out what local services are available for parents of each age group in their area?*

Childcare: There are various estimations of the total costs associated with raising a child with the highest costs associated with childcare and education. These costs are of particular relevance to lone parents, lower income working parents and those with a higher than average number of children. Research tells us that most parents feel that the costs of formal childcare is too high and that a combination of formal and informal childcare arrangements (e.g. grandparents) are widely used.

Question: *How does the cost of formal childcare affect parents?*

Question: *How important is the role of grandparents/other family members providing informal childcare?*

Health and Wellbeing of Parents: We need to remember that parents are adults with their own particular needs, and that an adult's own health and happiness can greatly affect their capacity to parent. These needs can range from simply having access to sports or leisure facilities in their local area to more acute support needs such as substance misuse and mental health problems.

Question: *How can we best support parents to look after their health and wellbeing (not just physical health but emotional, social, spiritual etc) to be the best parent they can be?*

Parenting Teenagers: For both teenagers and their parents, adolescence can be a time of excitement and significant challenges with issues such as puberty, peer influence and risky behaviours to deal with. However, parents can sometimes lack confidence with how to manage their teenagers' behaviour while at the same time maintaining a good relationship with them.

Question: *How can we best support parents of teenagers?*

The Home Learning Environment: We know that the home learning environment is very important to a child's cognitive and social-emotional development, more than parental occupation, education or income. Activities such as being read to, outdoor and indoor physical and creative play, visiting a range of places and events, can all have a significant influence on cognitive development. Research tells us that being read to every day in the child's early years can continue to positively influence a child's performance at school at the age of 15, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Question: How can we better support and encourage parents to engage more with their child in the early years?

Achieving a Good Work-Life Balance: The stay-at-home mum is now less common in Scotland than it was before and dual-earning households have become more of a norm and an economic necessity for some people. However lack of time and financial resources in families can add to the pressures as parents try to adapt their parenting to the realities of their work life. Particular difficulties are known to include childcare costs and the level and availability of formal and good quality childcare arrangements, patterns of work schedules and the number of paid working hours.

Question: How can we ensure that parents achieve the best balance between work and home life? What are the barriers to achieving a good work/life balance?

Support for Parents Dealing with Challenging Behaviour: Many studies have shown that challenging behaviour often starts at an early age with a combination of temperamentally difficult toddlers and inexperienced or vulnerable parents, which (if left unsupported) can lead to a downwards spiral of difficult behaviour e.g. exclusion from school, poor attainment levels, substance misuse, sexual health, offending and reoffending behaviour.

Question: How can we best support parents dealing with children/young people's challenging behaviour?

Future of Families in Scotland: The structure and size of Scotland's households are changing with an steady increase in one person households. This is due to an increasing number of late marriages, a decrease in the marriage rate overall, absent fathers, an increase in the co-habitation rate and an increase in divorce rates. This means more lone parents (90% headed by women) and also an increase in step-families.

Question: What are the difficulties associated with being a lone parent or step-parent?

Question: Do fathers/grandfathers face different parenting issues?

Low Income Families: We know a lot about the negative impact of poverty on children and families and that economic pressures, low income and poor housing has all been associated with higher levels of family stress, low self-esteem and a higher risk of separation and divorce.

Question: How can we best support parents/families facing difficult times?

Parents/children with impairments: Parents with or who have children with sensory or physical impairments often face the same issues as any other parents and are equally affected by factors such as poverty, family structure and social exclusion. However, there may also be the need for additional support in looking after their children, transportation and domestic tasks.

Question: How can we best support parents with or who have children with sensory or physical impairments?

There may also be particular additional issues for parents e.g. BME, travellers, LGBT, Looked after Children/Corporate Parenting, young/older parents, parents living in rural communities, other parents.

Question: What are these additional parenting issues and how can we improve the support available to help parents be the best they can be?

Question: Any other comments?