



About Families

About Families is a partnership between the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Parenting across Scotland and Capability Scotland. The project aims to support voluntary and statutory sector organisations to develop their services to meet the changing needs of parents and families, including those with disabilities.

Together and Apart: Your ideas for action

About Families supports organisations by reviewing evidence and presenting key findings in accessible ways. Evidence is shared with practitioners, policy makers and organisations interested in issues relating to parenting and disability. Through this sharing of evidence and ideas, we can inform how services are delivered for parents and families, including those with disabilities.

This report shares ideas for action which were generated at an event that explored the topic report, 'Together and Apart: Supporting families through change'.

These actions are ways of addressing the needs of parents and families and achieving positive outcomes for families. About Families can **support you** to implement actions with your organisation. Please contact Katrina Reid at 0131 651 1941 or Katrina.reid@ed.ac.uk to find out more.

Please note, all the reflections in this report are from the participants who attended the 'Together and Apart: How do we support families through change?' event.



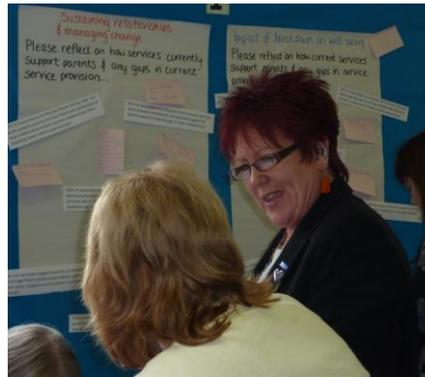
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Together and Apart: How do we support families through change?

Participants came from across Scotland and different sectors including academia, local authorities, private organisations, the Scottish Government and the Third sector.

The event was participative, with a range of opportunities to get involved and share thoughts and ideas about how to use evidence in planning service developments. Group discussions encouraged reflection on the research, considering the findings in the context of current service provision and identifying how services could be developed to meet the changing needs of parents and families, including those with disabilities.



What does the evidence tell us?

Findings that surprised participants

'How much support is available but how little is known about this by the general public'

'Findings weren't surprising and all seemed quite 'obvious' but there was a sense that this was reassuring that it was helpful to have findings pulled together in a report'

Findings which participants didn't agree with

Participants wanted to know the views of children and how relationship changes have affected them – even though this was beyond the scope of the report

'feel that 'mediation' 'counselling' etc to manage or improve relationships is crisis intervention when real early intervention is actually educating young people on emotional literacy and how to sustain and form successful adult relationships'

Findings that participants wanted to know more about

'Mental health of parents leading to conflict between parents and impact on mental health of child'

'How to support people to have developmental approach to relationships'

'What evidence is there that supporting parent's relationship leads to an improvement in outcomes for children?'

How do we currently support families?

Counselling and mediation services provide valuable support for parents and families and there was an overall sense that these services should be more widely available to families and children, as well as couples/parents. In addition organisations need to work in partnership to ensure that those most in need of relationship support can access the most appropriate services to meet their needs.

Below are gaps in services and areas for development which were felt to be important in ensuring that parents and families, including those with disabilities, can access the most effective support.

The need for information

Parents and families need more information to increase their knowledge and awareness about changing parental relationships, as well as information about services which provide support.

Support for fathers

Gaps in support for fathers were reflected in terms of tailored support for fathers but also that current services are predominantly delivered by woman and this can be a barrier for men.

Accessibility of services

Some families, including families with disabilities; ethnic minority families; parents with literacy issues and communication support needs, were felt to be at risk of being excluded from services. Services must be physically accessible, approachable and appropriate to meet the needs of all families.

Practical barriers to accessing support

Support services must address the practical barriers which some families experience. This includes services being physically accessible; open at evenings and weekends; providing childcare alongside support services and ensuring rural communities have access to services.

Financial support

Financial support should be available alongside relationship support, to help families make decisions and understand the implications of their changing relationships. It was also felt that financial advice should be available from trusted support services rather than separate agencies.

Consistency of service provision for families with disabilities

Questions were raised around support which is provided for families with disabilities and whether this should be specialised or if all families need tailored support. However, one key issue is that support for families with disabilities should be available at the point of diagnosis.

The role of schools

Schools need to acknowledge children's differing life circumstances and children should learn more about good



quality relationships, emotional literacy and how to sustain and form successful adult relationships. Counselling for children/young people should be available in all schools.

Supporting during periods of transition

More support is needed to help parents and families make sense of their lives during periods of transition (e.g. through case studies). It was also felt more support for parents through 'parenting apart groups' is needed.

Our culture

Our culture stigmatises parents and children from separated families and those who are experiencing relationship difficulties. Separation is a sensitive issue for children and language barriers in accessing support need to be addressed.

Peer support

Peer support was highlighted as being a useful way to support parents who are experiencing relationship difficulties and change. Befriending schemes were seen as one way to provide this support however, it was felt that there is a need to get younger people and more men to volunteer with these services.

Kinship care

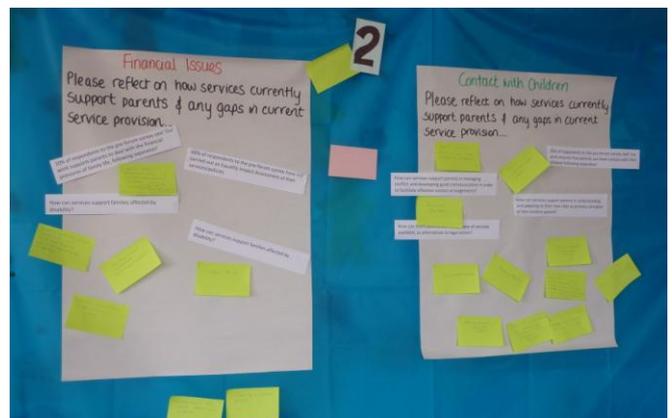
Kinship carers play an important role in caring for children and young people. It was felt that there is a need for more support for kinship carers who are in a parenting role.

Funding issues for providing services

Limited funding for providing support services was recognised as being a challenge. It was also noted that more money is needed to support organisations to work in partnership.

Health care

A gap in providing relationship support and advice through universal services such as midwives and health visitors was highlighted. Ante natal classes should include that a dip in relationship satisfaction after the birth of a child is normal.



How could current gaps in services be addressed?

Below are some of the suggestions which participants highlighted as being areas where services need to focus their attention in order to ensure that parents and families receive the support that they need.

Ideas for engagement

Engagement relates to parents and families being aware of services available and knowing how to access them, as well as addressing the barriers which they may experience when accessing them.

Services need to effectively 'market' parenting support by offering services that have been shown to make a difference and promote positive outcomes which can be achieved in seeking support.

Services need to address the physical and social barriers which some families may experience. Services need to take into account the social and cultural context that they are working within for example, separation can be seen as more 'normal' and acceptable in some communities.

Making services 'accessible' should go beyond providing information and signposting. For some services signposting is not enough and some individuals need additional support to access them. This relates to issues of trust and confidence and the approachability of some services.

Ideas for practice development

Evaluation was seen as providing opportunities for developing services as it should be a participative and inclusive process which focuses on learning about what works and what doesn't work, as well as reporting. Evaluation should also be built into services, for example, if services users were to talk to their peers and share experiences, this would provide an opportunity to capture the impact of services and provide opportunities for peer support.

Parenting classes provide opportunities for engaging with parents about relationship issues and could look increasingly at parental relationships. Child contact services also provide an opportunity to focus on family dynamics as well as contact issues.

Some participants felt that 'imaginative' use of technology such as the use of telephone and internet services, including Skype, would help improve the accessibility of services.

Ideas for partnership working

Partnership working between organisations was recognised as being crucial to addressing the needs of parents and families. It was noted that it is not possible to deal with single issues for families; all needs have to be addressed to achieve multiple outcomes. This holistic approach to working with families requires integrated working across different agencies. Raising awareness and developing the skills of those providing services would help integrate specialist services into mainstream settings.

Ideas for policy

It was noted that there is a gap between the vision of the Scottish Government and that of local authorities. This also extends to different professionals working towards different agendas which are not integrated, for example, health visitors and teachers.

Diversity in local services was recognised as hindering a consistent joined up national approach across Scotland. It was felt that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the local and national support services available, both for support services and parents themselves. It was also reflected that community and voluntary organisations are less stigmatised than statutory organisations and are therefore in a better position to engage with some service users.

The need to continue to invest in services was stressed and making the 'preventative spend' case was seen as a way in which this could be pursued.

Advertisements and campaigns to 'normalise' relationship difficulties and reduce stigma could provide education and address some of the associated cultural issues. The Scottish Government's National Parenting Strategy (currently being developed) was seen as one way of focusing support services and providing a common goal for agencies to work towards.

It was noted that shifting the focus towards children would be beneficial. By supporting and educating children, potentially in schools, this could help improve the relationships of future parents. It was felt that this would 'make the case' for investing in adult relationships.

In addition to this, the participants identified examples of good practice which could be shared with others. About Families will have more information about these examples of good practice on its website soon.



What actions can we take forward to further support parents and families?

Below are the actions that participants identified as being important for organisations to develop their services and continue to meet the changing needs of parents and families, including those with disabilities. These actions were identified as being appropriate to all organisations working with parents and families.

Providing information

Provide information to parents and families about relationship change, how to manage changes and cope with difficulties. This will raise awareness about relationship changes and help parents recognise when they need support.

Educate children and young people about relationship issues, including peer and friendship relations. Education was recognised as having the biggest impact for prevention of future adult relationship difficulties.

Raising awareness of support available

Gather and share information about services which support parents and families experiencing changing relationships. This would help parents know where to go for help and would enable effective signposting between organisations. One website with all national and local information relevant to relationships was seen as a way forward.

In addition, a comprehensive mapping of services would help identify gaps in services.

Promoting positive outcomes

Capture and promote positive outcomes which parents and families can achieve through relationship support services. Case studies and life stories are a powerful way of sharing this information and encouraging others to engage with support services. Information should be presented in a way which does not stigmatise relationships, separation and child contact.

Pre-mediation services

Provide pre-mediation to support parents who are not ready for mediation and encourage them to access these services.

Partnership working

Increase communication between organisations and agencies to provide more joined up services for parents and families and to address the 'territoriality' service provision. This would help ensure that parents receive holistic support as well as being able to access the support which is most relevant for their needs.

Equality Impact Assessments

Routinely conduct Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) of services to ensure that the needs of all service users are met and to identify any potential risk of discrimination.

Developing alternative ways of delivering services

Use telephone and video conferencing facilities to provide services. Support for parents also needs to be parent-friendly: childcare provision, timing (evenings, weekends), offered in more languages and also accessible for people with literacy problems.

Provide support in various ways to ensure that parents can access the information and support they need in the way they need it. This could be support for parenting apart, peer support, and ensuring that parents can access information at an early stage. A community development approach would facilitate parents supporting each other.

The role of local authorities

Improve partnership working within local authorities to address issues of professional boundaries and funding.

Hearing children's voices

Capture the views of children about the impact of parental relationship difficulties as the child's perspective would help ensure that the needs of the whole family are considered. This would also help address the gap in availability of child/young people counselling.

How About Families can support you to develop your services

Through the sharing of evidence and ideas for action, About Families aims to support voluntary and statutory organisations develop their services to meet the needs of parents and families, including those with disabilities.

Some of the actions in this report will be relevant to your organisation and there will also be other actions, specific to your organisation, which would develop your services to meet the needs of parents and families. About Families can support you to plan actions, involve your service users and evaluate the difference your services are making. Below are two examples of support About Families has provided as a result of the 'Parenting Teenagers' report and forum.

Supporting Parents and Carers in Edinburgh

In partnership with NHS Lothian and voluntary organisations, Edinburgh City Council is working to build capacity within all sectors to provide co-ordinated universal support for parents and carers. This work is based on an early intervention approach which aims to ensure that parents can access the support they need, when they need it.

In 2010 SPACE undertook a consultation exercise with parents to explore the challenges they face and the support they need. About Families **worked with SPACE to analyse and report on these local findings**. About Families supported the SPACE development workers to **develop tools to self-evaluate the Parent Information Points** which provide information for parents.

Amber Mediation Project, Edinburgh Cyrenians

The Amber Mediation Project work to prevent homelessness amongst 14-24 year olds by mediating between young people and their parents. Amber has recognised that the challenges of parenting a teenager can contribute to relationship breakdown. As a result, Amber is seeking funding to run parenting courses, specifically targeted at families where there is risk of homelessness.

About Families is going to **support Amber to consult with parents and families**. This will establish if there is a need for parenting programmes and how they should be delivered. This will provide further evidence to support applications for funding to take this work forward.

Supporting you

If you have an idea for how your services could be developed to further support parents and families sustain healthy relationships and manage relationship changes, please contact Katrina Reid, Development Officer for About Families, and request an 'Ideas for Action' form (contact details below). This short form asks you about your initial ideas for developing your services.

Once you have completed an 'Ideas for Action' form, About Families will explore with you how you could be supported to take your actions forward.

Katrina Reid can be contact at Katrina.reid@ed.ac.uk or 0131 651 1941.

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