

Engaging with Parents

What have we learned and where are we now?

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Summary

- Brief history of parenting support, policy developments and current services
- What we know about effective practice in engaging with parents
- Implications for local policy and practice

“We have found no better way to raise a child than to reinforce the ability of his parents to do SO” Committee on Child Health Services 1976 (Court Report)

“Government does not bring up children - parents do, so government needs to do more to back parents and families” *Children’s Plan: Building Brighter Futures*, DCSF 2007

Parenting education and support – a historical perspective

1970s – first review by Departments of Health and Education into how to raise standards of parenting. Seminar report and overview – *Preparation for parenthood: some current initiatives and thinking*, Pugh 1980

1984 Report of three year national study – *The Needs of Parents: practice and policy in parent education*, Pugh and De'Ath, Macmillan.

A Job for Life (Pugh et al 1982), promoted a life cycle approach to support for today's and tomorrow's parents.

1994 – *Confident Parents, Confident Children*, Pugh, De'Ath and Smith, NCB.

1995 – Parenting Education and Support Forum established (now Parenting UK)

Supporting Families Green Paper

1998

- Greater role for the state in supporting parents in bringing up children
- Establishment of Sure Start schemes (community based family support programme in 500 most deprived areas for families with children under four)
- Establishment of National Family and Parenting Institute in 1999
- Better financial support for families
- Strengthening marriage
- Better support for more serious problems

Every Child Matters (2003) and The Children's Plan (2007)

- Overall aim - to improve outcomes for all children 0 – 19 and narrow the gap between those who do well and those who do not.
- By improving and integrating universal services – for example children's centres and extended schools
- Providing more specialist help to promote opportunity and prevent problems - targeted services within universal context
- Reconfiguring services around the child and family
- With an increasing emphasis on supporting parents to support their children

Some key research findings that have influenced UK policy

- The support that parents give to their children's learning, and the educational environment of the home, are critical
- Relationships within families and the quality of parenting are more important to children's development than family structures
- Parenting styles impact on outcomes for children – authoritative, rather than authoritarian or permissive
- Children thrive on recognition, praise and feeling valued
- Impact of early attachments and environmental circumstances on early brain development
- Long term impact of high quality early education
- Understanding of risk and protective factors in relation to the child, the family and the community
- Importance of prevention and early intervention

Some recent and current government initiatives

- Parenting Fund 2004
- Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL)
- Early Learning Partnership Programme (ELPP)
- Parents as Partners in Early Learning
- Parent Support Advisors
- Families Information Services
- Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinders
- Parenting Implementation Project
- Parent Know How
- Family Pathfinders
- Family Intervention Projects
- Family Nurse Partnerships
- National Academy for Parenting Practitioners (NAPP)

Early Learning Partnership Programme

Agencies

- Homestart
- NCH
- Family Welfare Association
- Coram
- Barnardo's
- Preschool Learning Alliance
- ContinYou
- Pen Green
- Thurrock Community Mothers

Approaches

- Bookstart
- Brief Encounters
- Parents as First Teachers
- Newpin
- Campaign for Learning
- PEAL
- PEEP
- ICAN
- PICL/Engaging parents
- Share

Different labels

- Parent involvement and participation
- Parenting education and support
- Parents as partners
- Parents as educators
- Parenting skills training
- Family learning
- Family support

Different theoretical approaches and models

Main objectives

- Meeting family's needs
- Adult learning
- Children's development and learning
- Learning delay
- Changing children's behaviour, tackling behaviour disorders
- Improving relationships
- Community development and capacity building

Models or approaches

- Behaviourist
- Social skills training
- Humanistic
- Psychodynamic
- Sharing knowledge
- Modelling new activities
- Improving relationships
- Advocating, supporting and empowering parents

Research on what works in parenting support

- Processes (relationships, attitudes and how programmes are delivered) are more important than the content
- Universal open access services, and targeted services
- So having appropriately trained staff is key
- Working with parents and children together, particularly when children are young
- A continuing focus on reaching out to, keeping and engaging parents
- Interventions with a strong theoretical base and with measurable objectives
- Having multiple referral routes
- And more than one method of delivery
- Group work (learning from sharing with other parents)
- But individual work when problems are entrenched

But ...

- Most rigorous studies are American and may not translate
- We still don't understand what works for whom and in what circumstances
- Or whether change can be sustained
- There are few studies which combine quantitative and qualitative approaches
- Some things are easier to measure than others (and these are not always the most important)
- There is still little involvement with fathers and with black families
- For many parents the level of stress or economic factors are the highest priority and must be addressed first
- But most parents want support and benefit from the support that they are getting

And what do parents want?

A service that

- is timely and accessible and is there when needed
- meets parents own self-defined needs
- is informative
- respects their expertise in their own lives, and treats them like responsible adults
- Does not undermine their own sense of autonomy

Parenting in Poor Environments Ghate and Hazel 2002

Implications for local policy and practice

- Parents and carers are recognised and supported as the most important people in their children's lives, by everyone working with children and families
- Quality of parent-child relationships and early attachments are seen as key
- Practitioners are skilled in working effectively with parents, recognising parents expertise and commitment to their children and building on their strengths
- Parents are consulted and involved
- Think Family

This requires

- Strong leadership at senior level, with a clear vision and strategy for engaging with and supporting parents
- A local parenting education and support commissioning strategy central to the CYP Plan, taking account of the view of parents and carers
- Staff in all services who have core skills and competences to work with parents, and specialist skills for working with families with complex needs
- Community based open access services, as well as outreach services, family support and parenting programmes
- A focus on prevention and early intervention

Some challenges in engaging with parents

- Government appears to have an ambivalent view of parents – they are seen as part of the solution and part of the problem.
- There are no single or simple golden bullets – one approach or programme will not suit all parents.
- Intelligent and informed commissioning – too many initiatives and what counts as evidence of what works?
- Existing programmes are often not reaching those in the greatest need. Is it families who are hard to reach, or services that are hard to use? How families are treated is key to improving outcomes for children.
- Can funding be found to ensure that all those who work with families are appropriately trained?