

Parenting Strategy – DRAFT August 2011 v8.3

What do we mean by parenting support?

Parenting support can be defined as "any activity or facility aimed at providing information, advice and support to parents to help them in bringing up their children."

What do we mean by parents?

The parenting population includes mothers, fathers, carers or other adults who have a caring responsibility for children, including those who are fostered or adopted.

Why do we need a Parenting Support Strategy?

We know that parents are the single most significant influence on children's emotional and physical well being, educational attainment and behaviour. We also know that there are many benefits to supporting parents, not only for children, young people and families, but in the savings that can potentially be made on costly specialist services.

Our vision is to support parents before difficulties occur and to build a range of services that give them access to the kind of support they need, as soon as they need it.

What do we know already?

National research

We know from national research, that it is cost effective to support vulnerable parents in the first five years of their child's life in order to prevent the need for intensive services later. However, early intervention needs to be sustained over time; although it can reduce the risk of later problems, it does not necessarily 'inoculate' against them.

We know that ongoing lower level support such as parent networks can be highly effective, and that this is valued by parents. There is often stigma attached to statutory or 'professional' services and parents can be reluctant to ask for help for fear of being judged as a 'poor' parent.

In terms of the kind of support that is offered, we know that evidence based parenting programmes can be effective and that support must be offered by a well-trained workforce, which recognises the importance of the role parents play and can engage with them positively.

We also know that there are times when parents require more support, such as at times of transition, including stages of development and difficult times such as marital breakdown. We must see parenting in relation to wider issues, for example poverty or domestic abuse, as these things can affect parenting capacity or the ability to benefit from parenting support.

What are local people telling us?

Parents want;

- more support for parents of children with a disability and teenagers;
- easier access to quality information;
- more opportunities to be supported by other parents;
- Parenting courses and groups and an expert to talk to when they need advice;
- a positive relationship with professionals, that empowers parents to ask questions and request support when they need it;
- a positive relationship with their child's school and to feel involved in their child's learning (especially at secondary);
- to be more involved in decision making about services that affect them and their children.

(Solihull Ask Parents 2010 and 2011)

The workforce noted similar gaps in support for parents, particularly around support for parents of children with a disability and teenagers. In terms of support for the workforce, they requested;

- more information about the services available to support parents;
- training in how to how to effectively challenge parents when there are issues.

(Solihull workforce survey, January 2011)

What are we going to do and why?

We know that parents in Solihull need a range of support and that this varies from parent to parent and throughout the stages of their child's development. Whilst some parents may simply need more information, others may need intensive one to one support. In Solihull we want to develop and deliver a menu of integrated parenting support that reaches those parents who need it, as soon as they need it.

In order to achieve our vision, we have identified 5 key priorities, each with a number of related action points.

Priority 1 - Strengthen information provision to parents

Why is this a priority?

Both parents and practitioners have told us that they would welcome improved access to information, particularly at times of change. In order to help parents as early as possible, it is vital that they, and the people working with them, know what support is available and how to access it. In addition, the Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on the Local Authority to provide information to parents.

We will;

- Provide support to key staff in information delivery;
- Produce a directory of parenting and family support;
- Improve information for parents available on the web (and in other formats where needed);
- Continue to expand our Parents Network and ensure that as many parents as possible receive information directly and regularly;

- Develop new information sessions at key transition points (like Welcome to Nursery).

Priority 2 – Secure a menu of Parenting Programmes

Why is this a priority?

National evaluation has shown that evidence-based parenting programmes have a positive impact on children's outcomes. Solihull offers a universal and a targeted parenting programme, both evidence-based. However, we need to ensure that our programmes are meeting needs and that we are prioritising resources appropriately.

We will;

- Review our current arrangements and make recommendations for improvements, including cost savings and quality;
- Work in partnership to agree a menu of parenting programmes;
- Develop programmes for specific groups of parents, eg. Parents of children with a disability, parents of teenagers;
- Involve parents in facilitating the programmes and offering peer support once a programme is finished.

Priority 3 - Agree a sustainable, integrated menu of family support

Rationale:

For some parents, information or a parenting programme will support them adequately with their parenting needs. However there are other parents who may need one to one family support to help them with the difficult circumstances their families face. Family support services are not consistently available across the borough and there are gaps in services geographically, and at levels of need.

We will:

- Clarify the current offer of family support services along the whole continuum from universal through to specialist and address any gaps, ensuring services are integrated;
- Develop a scheme to offer support through parent volunteers;

Priority 4 - Ensure there is a consistent approach to parenting support throughout the workforce

Why is this a priority?

A well-trained workforce that knows how to support parents is vital. Parents have told us that the attitude of professionals is key and can make them feel judged or empowered. It is vital that our workforce has the skills and knowledge they need not only to identify issues early but also to offer the right intervention at the right time.

We will;

- Provide information, guidance and resources to help practitioners identify parents' needs early and support or signpost them appropriately;
- Offer training for practitioners and managers, to include building positive relationships, evidence- based practice and models of supervision.

Priority 5 - Provide parents with opportunities to be involved in developing and delivering services, and to be involved in their children's learning

Why is this a priority?

Engaging parents in the development and delivery of services leads to more effective services. Parents have told us that they want to be more involved, particularly in relation to schools and their child's learning. Parents have also told us that they value support from other parents and that they often turn to friends and family before professional services. It is therefore important that we enable parents to become more involved in making decisions, that they are involved in their child's learning and development, and that we develop new ways for parents to give or receive peer support.

We will;

- Develop new volunteering opportunities for parents;
- Provide good practice guidance for schools and early years providers in engaging parents in decision-making and children's learning;
- Strengthen the Parents Forum and Solihull CAN and support their involvement in strategic decision-making;
- Promote engagement opportunities using the Parents Network;
- Sustain and develop the annual Ask Parents survey;
- Make links with community-based parents' groups;

How will we know if it's working?

If our strategy is working, we would expect to see the following:

Positive feedback from parents to evidence that more parents

- feel supported in their parenting role (baseline Ask Parents 2011);
- feel better informed about services (baseline Ask Parents 2010);
- feel able to influence decisions (baseline Ask Parents 2010);
- feel able to support their child's learning (baseline Ask Parents 2011).

Improved outcomes for children and young people including

- Improved attendance and attainment at school;
- Improved health and well being;
- Reduced exclusions for poor behaviour;
- Reduced referrals to children's social care.

Our action plan includes measures of success that will allow us to monitor progress and impact within each priority area.

Appendices

- Draft Action Plan 2011-2012
- Final report - Ask Parents 2011
- Consultation with the children and young people's workforce