

What you need to
know about Newcastle's
**Parenting
Support
Strategy**



What do we mean by 'parenting support'?

In its Guidance document the Government describes parenting support services as 'any activity or facility aimed at providing information, advice and support to parents and carers to help them in bringing up their children'.

So, 'parenting support' means activities that allow anyone carrying out the role of a parent (either on their own or with other people) to develop the knowledge, skills and experience they need to do this to the best of their ability. The sorts of activities parenting support could include are:

- ✓ **assisting you to support your child's learning**
- ✓ **helping you develop routines with your children;**
- ✓ **developing better approaches to understanding children's behaviour and communicating with them in a positive way; and**
- ✓ **any activities that help mothers and fathers to bond more closely with their children.**

This parenting support can be developed in a number of ways – through parenting programmes, face-to-face discussions and home visits. Traditional family support services very often provide this kind of support as part of a wider package of family support.

The strategy covers parenting support from before a baby is born, and provides links to any support you might need as a parent, whatever your situation.

There are many worthwhile activities, known as 'family support', which can help parents carry out their responsibilities as parents (for example, respite care for one child so that you can spend time with your other children, services that provide toys, or advice to help you budget). However, these activities are not included in the Parenting Support Strategy.

Throughout the Strategy, the word 'parent' includes mothers, fathers and carers (including grandparents and other people who care for children, such as foster parents).

Why do we need a Parenting Support Strategy in Newcastle?

Everyone knows that mothers, fathers and carers are really important people in children's and young people's lives.

Most of the time, bringing up children is really enjoyable. But we all know that from time to time parents have problems, just like everyone else. And when that happens, parents say that what makes a difference to their confidence is having someone to turn to:

- ✓ **who they can trust;**
- ✓ **who can support them in practical ways; and**
- ✓ **who can give them reassurance, information and advice.**

Having somebody like this really helps the relationship that parents have with their children, especially if they can get the advice and support quickly and close to where they live. It also makes a difference if the support is well co-ordinated and consistent.

Not everyone is lucky enough to have family and friends to turn to, so it's really important that the parenting support we provide is accessible, well co-ordinated and meets people's needs.

Why are we producing a Parenting Support Strategy now?

In October 2007, the Government decided that every local authority should improve how they tell people what support is available for parents and carers, and what support is still needed.

Who is in charge of putting the Strategy together?

The Government said that each local authority had to put one person in charge of making sure a Parenting Support Strategy is developed. They call this person the 'commissioner for parenting'.

The commissioner for parenting has to gather all the information we need by talking to lots of people who have an interest in bringing up children in the area. These include:

- ✓ **people who provide services for parents, children and young people; and**
- ✓ **anyone who carries out the role of a parent.**

After talking to all these people, the commissioner has to make sure that we have a Strategy – an agreed way of setting out what people think are the main priorities for parents and a plan for making sure these things happen.

The commissioner for parenting in Newcastle is Sue Miller. Her contact details are at the end of this document.

How are we going to produce the Strategy?

Producing the Strategy is a big job and something we've never done before with so many other agencies. Different individuals need to be involved because there are lots of people and organisations who support parents.

We will develop our Parenting Support Strategy in the following ways.

- ✓ **Find out what parents need.**
- ✓ **Find out what support is already available.**
- ✓ **Set up a group that can make sure resources are organized in the best ways.**
- ✓ **Consult parents – fathers as well as mothers.**
- ✓ **Find a way of involving everyone in making decisions about what to do next.**
- ✓ **Produce a document that tells everyone what's going on.**

How have we done this?

We've included support for parents as a main theme in our yearly review of our Children and Young People's Plan, which took place in May 2007.

In June 2007, we held an event at St James's Park called 'The Hundred Voices of Mothers, Fathers and Carers' for parents to tell us their views.

We asked the people who parents wanted to come to the event (planners and strategic managers, heads of services, and politicians) to make promises about what they would do after hearing the parents' comments. We have included these promises in the Parenting Support Strategy and action plan.

We've produced a DVD of the event, which we will use to:

- ✓ **share with services the important things parents have told us; and**
- ✓ **influence how support for parents is provided in future.**

We held a number of focus groups in June and July 2007 asking people who work with parents about their views on what support parents need.

We've checked what these people said against information that the Parent Education and Support Co-ordination Team collected from parents and people who provide support for parents, and we have reflected the information the team has collected in this document and our action plan.

In autumn 2007, we held an event for parents, and people who support parents, from across Children's Services and other services that relate to families (such as Regeneration and Safe Newcastle) to share and review the draft Strategy and action plan.

The Strategy will be passed to the Children and Young People's Strategic Executive to approve in December 2007. The Government wants all local authorities to have these strategies in place by March 2008

We will regularly review the progress of the Strategy.

What does the Strategy say parenting support should be like in Newcastle?

The Strategy sets out a vision that says:

All mothers, fathers and carers will be able to choose the right types of support at the right times so they feel confident as parents and can care for their children in a positive way.

What does the Strategy say are our beliefs about parenting support?

- ✓ **Supporting parents is everyone's business, not just people who carry out the role of parents.**
- ✓ **All parents, no matter what their circumstances, need support at some point. Needing support should be recognised as normal and not as a failure.**

- ✓ **Support should be provided in local communities and be close enough and well-known enough for parents to be able to find it easily.**
- ✓ **We must recognise that parenting support comes as much from within communities and families as it does from professionals who support communities, and give communities the skills they need to support themselves.**
- ✓ **Although we know that there is unacceptable behaviour that can harm children, we also understand that there is no one right way to bring up a child. Parenting support needs to respect cultural differences and beliefs about how children should be brought up.**
- ✓ **We should provide a range of activities and resources to build trusting relationships with parents so they feel confident about using a support service.**
- ✓ **Providing good-quality parenting support as early as possible prevents problems from getting worse. This is the main focus of this Strategy.**
- ✓ **To prevent problems from happening, we want to support fathers as well as mothers who are expecting to become parents, particularly people that could find it challenging to be a parent.**

How are we going to put these beliefs into practice?

Our action plan covers a number of important areas that we need to work on.

- ✓ **Providing better training for staff involved in supporting parents.**
- ✓ **Making sure that the Children and Young People's Directory has up-to-date, accurate information about support for parents.**
- ✓ **Finding ways of bringing information together about the support parents need in different areas in the city.**
- ✓ **Developing and applying an open and fair way of buying and arranging support for parents.**
- ✓ **Making sure budgets for support for parents are targeted on the agreed priorities.**
- ✓ **Putting in place the part of the Parents' and Carers' Participation Strategy which relates to support for parents.**
- ✓ **Making childcare an important part of support for parents.**

- ✓ **Promoting better ways of sorting out (or preventing) problems as early as possible.**
- ✓ **Publishing a range of parenting courses across the city.**
- ✓ **Promoting support for fathers as well as mothers.**
- ✓ **Promoting positive images of parents in the media.**

Where can I find out more about how to contribute to the Strategy?

The Strategy, action plan and form for feedback are all on the Children's Services website at:

www.newcastlechildrenservices.org.uk/core.nsf/a/mcs_parent_strat.

There are links on the website to lots of other information about parenting support in Newcastle.

For more information, contact:

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The consultation period for the Strategy runs until November 12/2007.