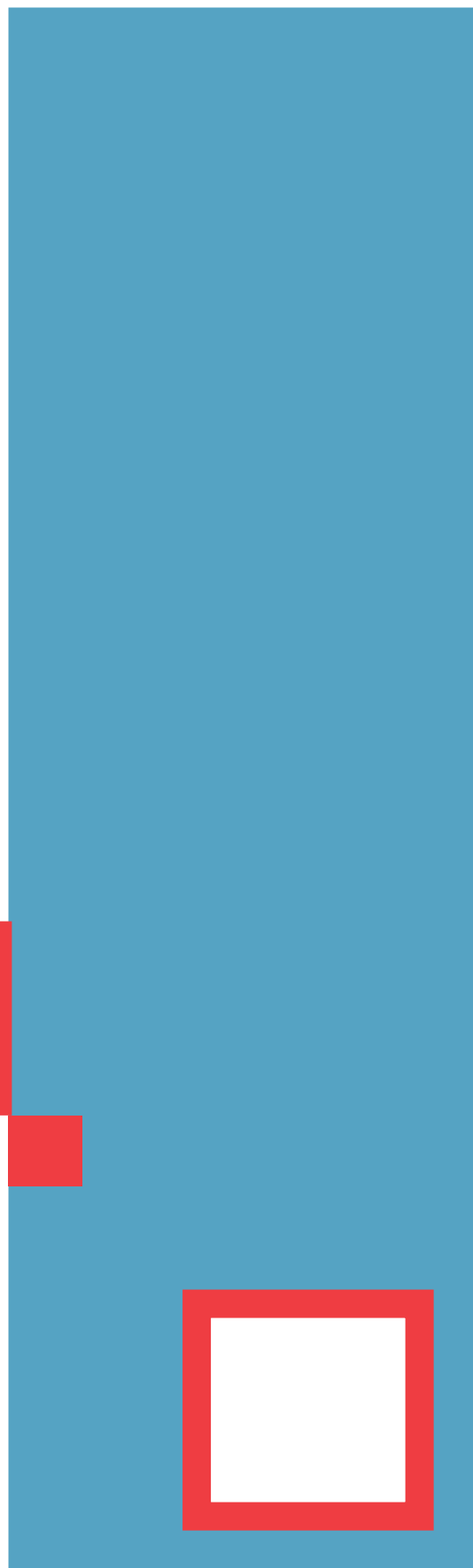
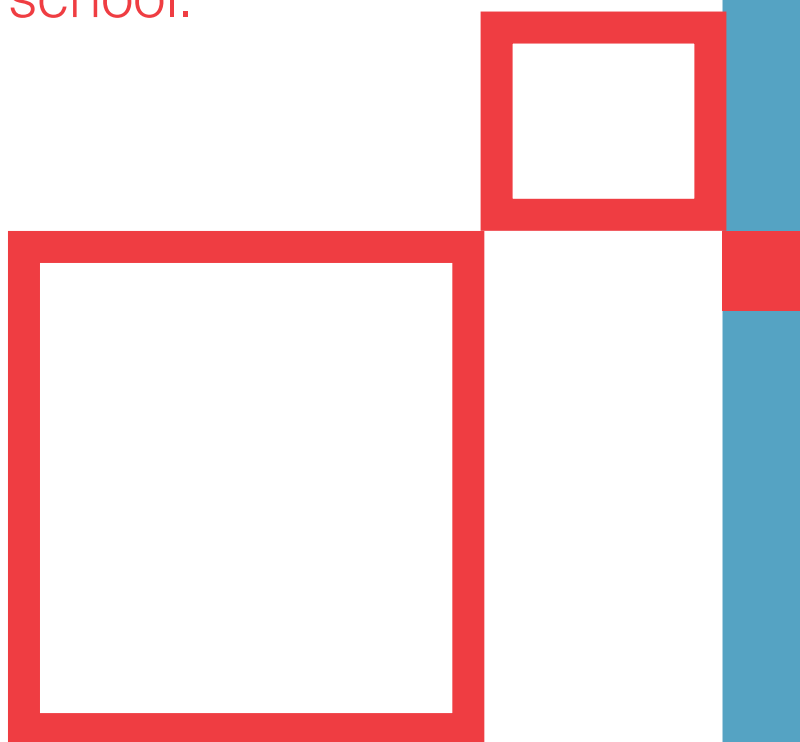


How to source Parenting Provision

A guide to sourcing suitable parenting provision aimed in particular at local authority and school staff wishing to support parents in order to improve their children's behaviour or attendance at school.



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This guide has been prepared by Relate on behalf of
the Department for Education and Skills.

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Supporting Parents Whose Children Are Experiencing Behaviour or Attendance Problems at School

“Parental involvement in the form of at-home good parenting has a significant positive effect on children’s achievement.”¹

This guide is intended to support local authority (LA) and school staff who are looking for suitable parenting provision to support parents in order to improve their children’s behaviour or attendance at school. Parenting provision forms a mandatory part of a Parenting Order, but may also be used to good effect at an earlier stage, for example, as part of a parenting contract.

This guide is designed to signpost you towards good practice in commissioning and developing suitable provision to support these families in your local area.

Benefits to parents and their children of improved parenting skills are well evidenced.² Parenting Orders for irregular attendance have been available nationally since June 2000 and with the introduction of parenting contracts (for attendance and behaviour) and Parenting Orders for behaviour in February 2004, demand for parenting support and programmes increased. It is essential that the parenting provision made in response to these demands is of good quality and appropriate to the needs of the families receiving it.

A wide range of providers deliver parenting programmes some of which address the needs of parents with older children with behavioural difficulties. In order to implement effective programmes, local authorities will need to work alongside a range of agencies and partners to develop specialist services focussing on behaviour and attendance at school. These need to be of high quality and appropriate to the client group.

Options Available in Providing Support for Parents on Parenting Orders and Parenting Contracts

Option 1

Buying in parenting provision

Models for buying in provision

- Buy in per course/series of sessions.
- Fixed term programmes or rolling programmes.
- Secondment from an LA or external parenting provider (e.g. voluntary sector).
- Buy a number of places on an existing course.
- A service level agreement with a voluntary sector or commercial provider, another LA or Youth Offending Team.

¹ Research No 20022146: The Impact of Parental Involvement , Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment, Charles Desforges and Alberto Abouchaar DfES June 2003

² What works in Parenting Support? A Review of International Evidence, Patricia Moran, Deborah Ghate and Amelia van der Merwe 2004

What to look for in a parenting programme provider

They should:

- offer targeted learning outcomes and materials;
- meet or be working towards the National Occupational Standards for working with parents. See Parenting Education and Support Forum Website <http://www.parenting-forum.org.uk/>;
- offer clear strategies to retain and engage parents;
- have a robust quality assurance/supervision system;
- have experience of working with socially disadvantaged parents;
- have a record of success with parents who have been mandated to attend a programme; and
- offer a range and flexibility of services.

| Pros | Cons |
|---|---|
| <p>Potential for a menu of providers to offer a more flexible approach to families.</p> <p>Cross agency working can be stimulating and generate new innovative approaches.</p> <p>External providers are often well linked in with other agencies and can make appropriate referrals.</p> <p>Specialist, experienced and qualified practitioners with parent expertise.</p> <p>It may be possible to team up with other users of parenting programmes such as a youth offending team with a similar client group.</p> | <p>Not all parenting programme providers offer engagement and retention activities.</p> <p>May need to arrange transport for parents, crèche and venue.</p> <p>Many programmes have general aims and are not focussed on educational aims.</p> <p>Programmes may vary in quality.</p> |

Cost of bought in provision compared to developing own service

It is very important to consider the overall cost of service provision compared to the number of parents seen each year.

Contracting

When contracting with a parenting provider you will need to agree:

- what will be reported back to the local authority on each client's progress. You will need to balance the parents' need for confidentiality with the need to evaluate;
- who is responsible for engagement and retention activities; and
- the procedure for referrals.

Option 2

Commissioning a Bespoke Programme

If there is inadequate suitable local parenting programme provision available it may be more cost effective to commission an organisation to design a programme or develop a tailor-made service for your needs. Many organisations already run programmes appropriate for a universal parent audience. They may be able to adapt existing programmes for your client group.

When choosing a programme designer:

- consider their knowledge of research of parenting;
- consider their experience of designing and delivering programmes for your client group; and
- ask to see examples of other programmes they have designed and delivered if commissioning a course.

Once you have chosen a provider the process needs good project management. You should expect 4 phases:

1. Needs Analysis

Set out for the provider a clear brief containing the following:

- client group (e.g. background, ethnicity, attending on a compulsory or voluntary basis);
- practitioner background;
- special needs of the group (e.g. childcare, access, literacy needs);
- who will be delivering the programme and their existing knowledge and expertise;
- structure (length, timing, size of group, accreditation, therapeutic level required);
- level of detail required in the trainer's manual; and
- time frame.

The training provider will need to have access to a range of stakeholders including LA staff, parents and programme facilitators.

Needs analysis is a complex process - consider whether the person you have identified to do the work has the necessary skills. There are books available which provide a useful introduction to the subject.³ Remember that this type of work can be outsourced.

2. Design

The Needs Analysis will result in recommendations for programme content, style and structure. The provider should draw up clear learning objectives based on your aims for the programme and the client's needs. It may contain various types of intervention including educational parenting groups, counselling, family counselling and mentoring.

³ For example, see *Learning Needs Analysis & Evaluation* - Bee, F. & Bee, R (2001)
ISBN: 0852929676

Agree with your provider on objectives and structure, including the strategy for engagement and retention before they develop detailed exercises and activities.

3. Pilot Delivery

- Identify a client group for road testing your programme.
- Don't forget to include engagement, retention and exit strategies.
- Be prepared to change the model as you go along - be responsive to parents' needs - if they don't turn up, find out why.
- It is helpful to observe these sessions and get lots of verbal feedback from clients during the process.

4. Evaluation of programmes (including pilots)

Evaluation is an essential part of any programme. If you want to find out what works for you and the families and schools you are working with you need to build this in. You will need to ensure the thorough evaluation of any pilot along with ongoing evaluation to ensure the quality of the programme over time and for different families. You may decide to have an independent evaluation conducted on your programme at a pilot stage; however this can be very costly for a small programme. If you decide to conduct your own, The Parenting Education and Support Forum have developed a useful guidance pack for developing evaluation tools for parenting programmes.

Evaluation can be done in a number of ways:

- conversations with parents, trainers, LA staff, young people and teachers;
- questionnaires;
- structured telephone interviews;
- group feedback on their learning/changes in the family at the end of a course;
- feedback from school/parents on changes in the child's behaviour;
- achievement of agreed learning outcomes; and
- follow up sessions offered at a later date.

You will need to consider the parents' confidentiality at all times in collecting and sharing data as part of evaluation. Bear in mind that parents may find the completion of long questionnaires very difficult and you need to allow adequate time in the programme for parents to complete.

| Pros | Cons |
|--|--|
| A bespoke programme that addresses the unique needs of parents in your area. | Long lead-in time - may be up to a year. Initial, indirect expenses are high. You will need to programme manage the development. |

Option 3

Developing in-house provision

You may find it more cost effective and sustainable to develop an in-house parenting programme. Working with parents requires a range of professional competencies which are specific to working with adults on relationship and behavioural issues. This requires a sound theoretical knowledge base about family relationships as well as skills for working in an adult education setting.

The decision about whether to develop in-house capacity will depend on the:

- likely demand for courses;
- local priorities;
- existing expertise in working with parents;
- availability of suitably trained people; and
- capacity to fulfil all functions of service provision such as event management, venue, transport arrangements and childcare.

First you must decide what sort of service you would like to provide to parents. The best programmes offer a range of options that parents can move between as required. You will need to consider the support and supervision requirements of any staff member who is directly providing parenting intervention. In addition to desk space, telephone, computer and access to resources, accommodation needs will include confidential meeting space for parent interviews and group meetings.

Training for working with parents

The key organisations to advise on the training of professionals to deliver these services are: Parenting Education and Support Forum (PESF), British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapists (BACP) and the Association of Family Therapists (AFT).

- Parents Courses: PESF <http://www.parenting-forum.org.uk/>
- Individual Counselling: BACP <http://www.bacp.co.uk/>
- Couple Counselling: BACP
- Family Therapy: AFT <http://www.aft.org.uk/>
- Parent Coaching 1-1 Educational approach: PESF
- Parent Mentoring: National Mentoring Network <http://nmn.org.uk>

| Pros | Cons |
|--|---|
| You may be able to more readily customise your service to parents. | If there is only one parenting specialist on your team, s/he may lack peer support and feel isolated. |
| You may get better staff buy-in from 'one of their own'. | The programme may be too narrowly focussed on education-related issues. |
| You will have full control over the programme. | There may be too few parents to conduct group courses or activities. |
| | Quality control may be difficult. |

Whichever method you choose to develop parent support services, it is vital to include your key team members in all phases of programme development and implementation. Team training and good internal communication will help team members to understand the value of the programme and their role in supporting parents. If you decide to use an external provider, they will probably be happy to conduct training and awareness activities for your team.

What Works in Parenting Support?

Whichever option you choose in ensuring parenting provision, considerable thought needs to be given to the way in which a programme is run. A great deal of research has been undertaken in recent years into what works best when supporting parents. This leaflet summarises this research and offers good practice guidelines for effective programmes.

The Challenges

Major challenges exist for parenting programmes and their providers serving socially disadvantaged parents or those who have been mandated to attend. Parents may fail to turn up, drop out, or be non-compliant whilst attending a group or counselling session. Some parents that attend may find it difficult to maintain the progress they have made following the conclusion of their programme.

A number of contextual issues will impact upon the success of any parenting programme. In order to increase the effectiveness of a programme you must pay special attention to engagement and retention issues. Simply offering a programme will not in itself ensure success.

Parents' level of engagement with parenting support can depend on a number of factors including⁴:

- poverty;
- family breakdown, post-separation conflict and lone parenting;
- severity of child's problems; and
- the presence of abuse in the family - parents may be in fear of their children⁵.

Parents often desperately want support and positive change in their family. However, their ability to receive the help they want may be affected by low self esteem, complex and deeply entrenched family problems, and bad experiences of authority and of school.

Parents may have fairly chaotic lives which make it difficult for them to keep appointments and they may find reading and writing difficult, especially if English is not their first language.

In order to provide a service that parents can really benefit from, practitioners and programme managers have found that certain approaches seem to work best for parents.

⁴ Negative Treatment Outcomes for Behavioural Parent Training Programs, Assemany and MacIntosh, Ball State University 2002

⁵ For more information on this issue contact **The Tulip project** Tel: 0151 637 6363

Factors for Success

“The facilitator’s attitude to me and confidence in me has helped me to realise that I am a person in my own right and that I have something to give to my kid and the other parents”

Judy, parent on Parenting Order

Engagement and Retention

It is essential to build trust with parents in order for them to attend and get the most from the parenting programme. There needs to be a clear strategy for engagement and retention of parents and monitoring its effectiveness. This should include:

- personal contact (in person or on the telephone) to discuss programme content and any personal concerns or problems that parents may have with attendance (time of day, childcare, transport);
- outreach work: e.g. drop in service, information meetings, telephone calls, leaflets and posters;
- one to one counselling/mentoring before and after group sessions;
- a retention strategy: nominated personal contact, reminder letters/calls, help-line and follow up calls/emails; and
- an exit strategy: signposting to other support agencies particularly where there are additional special needs such as mental health, drug and alcohol problems and domestic abuse; certificates of attendance/accreditation; feedback against learning plans; and parent mentoring and/or peer support schemes.

Range of Services

Parenting is known to be affected by a range of problems, chiefly: physical and mental health; poverty; family structure; and, the availability of informal support such as family, friends and neighbours. Parenting skills may only be successfully improved in the context of support in other areas of family stress. This might mean support for those suffering mental health problems, counselling for debt or financial problems, or assistance in securing appropriate housing. You should consider:

- a menu of services;
- flexibility of approach catering for those who may need longer term or parallel interventions such as parent training, support groups, individual, couple and family counselling. Many parents benefit from 1-to-1 sessions before or whilst attending a group;
- referral routes for complementary services for parents e.g. couple relationship issues, debt, substance misuse, mental health issues; and
- complementary programmes for the children and young people.

Programme Content

Content should be linked to specific, measurable objectives relevant to general parenting goals as well as specific personal goals regarding management of attendance and behaviour. These objectives should tie into the family’s needs identified in a high quality initial assessment, which is timely, thorough and culturally sensitive. These objectives should be agreed with the parents.

Theoretical Approach

There are indications that behavioural approaches may be the most effective for parents facing more severe parenting problems⁶. Other approaches may also prove to be effective where they adhere to best practice in adult learning theory, regarding skills acquisition as well as attitudinal change and peer support.

Research carried out by The Trust for The Study of Adolescence⁷ identified four principal features of parenting that most impact on children's behaviour - any programmes should include attention to these areas:

- the improvement of communication and relationship skills is foundational;
- supervision and monitoring of (a) where children are, what they do and who they are with and (b) emotional monitoring, i.e. how they are feeling and thinking, especially during key life changes;
- conflict between parent and young person, and the need for consistent boundaries; and
- family disruption - e.g. how to handle adult relationship breakdown in a way that prioritises the children's needs.

A good curriculum may also include such topics as adolescent development, life stages and transitions, crisis management and substance abuse information.

Other essential programme features are:

- policies and procedures for child protection and domestic abuse; and
- comprehensive evaluation.

Structure

- At least 14-20 hours per parent, in any combination of groups, counselling and/or family counselling as required.
- Counsellors working within a supervision structure and to ethical standards.
- A full facilitator's manual to ensure consistent delivery of an approved programme.
- Skilled practitioner with excellent interpersonal skills.
- A learning programme using a variety of learning styles, clear and simple handouts and a methodical approach to meeting the learning objectives.
- Learning materials must take account of literacy levels and cultural diversity of parents.
- A holistic service embracing school and family.

Learning Approach

- Interactive learning approaches - parents enjoy discussions rather than lectures, they like practicing skills rather than hearing about them, they need to be facilitated in developing their own strategies rather than being "told what to do".
- Highly practical support and application to daily life - Parents appreciate take home tips and simple strategies for immediate use at home.

⁶ Parenting in Poor Environments: Stress, support and coping, Ghate and Hazel, London: Jessica Kingsley Publications

⁷ Monitoring and Supervision in "Ordinary" Families: The views and experiences of young people aged 11 to 16 and their parents, Stephanie Stace and Debi Roker

- Acknowledgement of the existing skills and resourcefulness of parents and linking them into further community resources that they may find helpful.
- Skills practice - many parents engage in role play in order to practice skills such as communication and negotiation if you use real relevant scenarios and provide a supportive environment for “trying it out”. Other skills techniques could be listening skills practice in pairs, case studies that need solving, games, and parent/child conversation “rehearsal”.
- Focus on specific and general learning outcomes.

Environment

- Service at times to suit parents (to fit round work and other responsibilities).
- Non-stigmatising community venue.
- Safe access - well lit streets, in client's own home or via telephone.
- Easy access - accessible public transport.
- Short distances to travel.
- Childcare.
- Financial and practical help with travel costs.

Facilitators/Practitioners

- Appropriately trained and supervised professionals.
- Adherence to relevant ethical standards.
- Meeting or working towards National Occupational Standards⁸ for professionals working with parents.
- Clinical and Management Supervision.
- Opportunities to network with other parenting education practitioners.

What to Evaluate

The commissioner or its subcontractors need to evaluate their programmes in terms of:

- general impact on parenting;
- impact with reference to the specific aims of the programme; and
- impact on personal goals discussed with the family at assessment stage.

| Quantitative Outcomes | Qualitative Outcomes |
|--|--|
| Return to school Increased parental engagement Improved achievement at school Improved attendance Fewer incidents of poor behaviour Numbers retained in programme | Improved behaviour Parent satisfaction Attention at school Mental health Sibling behaviour |

⁸ The Parenting Education and Support Forum have worked with Lifelong Learning UK (the Sector Skills Council for further, higher, adult, community and work-based education) to develop National Occupational Standards for professionals working with parents. These were approved April 2005.

Resources

There are a number of excellent resources for supporting parents of children who are truanting or excluded from school, including:

- off the shelf Parenting Programmes - many of which include training for facilitators;
- videos;
- CD Roms; and
- books.

A useful database of programmes may also be found on the Policy Research Bureau's website www.prb.org.uk, which compiles details of evaluated programmes reviewed in recent research⁹

Useful websites

The following is not an exhaustive list, but can provide a good starting point for research in this area.

Relate - www.relate.org.uk

TSA - www.tsa.uk.com/

PESF - www.parenting-forum.org.uk/

NFPI - www.nfpi.org

Parent Line Plus - www.parentlineplus.org.uk

⁹ What works in Parenting Support? A Review of International Evidence, Patricia Moran, Deborah Gbate and Amelia van der Merwe 2004

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