Family & Parenting Institute

Where now for parenting?

Perspectives on parenting, policy and practice

October 2011

Building a family friendly society

Introduction

> *'There may be some doubt as to who are the best people to have charge of children, but there can be no doubt that parents are the worst.'*[1]

In the midst of the national soul-searching that followed the disturbances of August 2011, one explanation soon came to dominate: the idea that poor parenting had somehow paved the way for civil unrest. Going even further, some commentators lamented the decline of traditional family values as one of a driver of the social disintegration. Initial polls suggested that the general public concurred with this diagnosis, blaming poor parenting as the driver of the behaviour of looters.[2]

This divisive debate about the 'causes' of the riots is unlikely to be definitively resolved. Although work is now underway to analyse the triggers that prompted the unrest of the summer, it is unlikely the specific role of parenting and family life will ever be fully disentangled from the other complex factors at work.[3] But the public conversation it has generated - while confused in some respects - has served to bring several issues into focus and to pose number of challenges to those of us who work on behalf of families.

In the run up to Parents' Week 2011, The Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) invited a range of commentators and organisations to consider the pressures on modern parenting, what can be learnt from the reaction to riots and what these developments might mean for parenting policy. Despite providing people with only a few weeks to contribute, we were delighted to receive an impressive selection of over 30 articles. The collection presented here highlight a number of challenges that we – as policymakers, charities, and families – need to consider as we attempt to build more nuanced policy solutions to supporting families. Four broad themes have emerged from the collection:

Parenting in the Spotlight

There is nothing new in our collective obsession with parenting, and several of our contributors take a historical perspective on this phenomenon. However, in recent years parenting has become a particularly charged political subject and the idea that the state has an active role to play in the domestic sphere has become increasingly accepted. Authors in this section consider the way in which parenting has become professionalised and the extent to which a deficit view of 'problem parents' is now in the ascendance.

Parenting Pressures

While in many respects family life in the 21st Century is easier than ever before, modern society also presents parents with a very unique set of pressures. These include the rise of commercialisation and materialism to the difficulty of enforcing discipline in homes and communities. Contributors also take an in-depth look at the challenges faced by working parents

[1] George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950) is widely reputed to have been in agreement with this view, as expressed by the Victorian poet William Morris, see p92 Henderson, A. *George Bernard Shaw: His Life and Works, a Critical Biography* (1911)

[2] 'A survey by YouGov for Channel 4/ITN reveals British people think poor parenting, criminal behaviour and gang culture is causing the unrest in cities across the UK.' (August 2011) http://www.channel4.com/news/poor-parenting-to-blame-for-uk-riots-says-exclusive-poll

[3] The causes and consequences of the English riots will be examined in a study by LSE and the Guardian newspaper, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Open Society Foundation http://www2.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/news/archives/2011/09/riots.aspx

in finding affordable and accessible childcare, and the tensions all of these modern pressures give rise to within our domestic relationships.

Understanding the Family

Our shared understanding of the 'family' needs to avoid assumptions and consider the reality of family life as it is lived today. Subjects tackled in these articles include the 'mythology of absent fathers', the 'lazy stereotyping' of single parents, the 'overlooked' role of grandparents, and the 'unheard' voice of children. Authors consider the needs of the most marginalised groups and make the case for a more nuanced understanding of the role of the wider family.

Parenting Policy and Practice

The need for a coherent strategy for parenting support is also explored in several articles, along with the vital role played by professionals. While recent months have seen a group of 'problem families' being placed at the centre of the political debate we need to ensure that we provide a variety of interventions which are appropriate to the different needs within this group as well as a universal offer for all parents. We are also provided with a perspective on how to tackle these challenges at the local level. Finally, contributors point to the wealth of existing evidence on 'what works' in supporting families, and suggest that we should think creatively about ways to engage with parents.

In a section on policy implications we provide an FPI perspective on what this all of this might mean for the future direction of parenting policy. FPI has coordinated this collection but the views contained in the articles remain those of the authors. We hope that this is stimulating contribution to the debate and please do contact us if you wish to contribute your own views.

Peter Grigg
Celia Hannon

October 2011

Figures at a glance:

The riots and convictions

4 The number of days over which the riots took place. The public disorder began on 6th August 2011 in Tottenham, North London. On 7th and 8th August there were further outbreaks of disorder mainly in and around London. On 9th August the incidents were mainly outside of London including in Manchester and Birmingham.

14% Increase in web traffic to news and social media sites in the UK

3.4m Visits to Twitter.com on the Tuesday of the riots

70% The number of those accused of riot-related crimes who had travelled from outside their area to participate – or "riot tourism" as Communities secretary Eric Pickles described it

1,715 The number of suspects who, by 16th September 2011 had an initial hearing at magistrates' courts.

21% The proportion of these aged 10-17 (364 young people)

2% Number of the 10-17 year old male population who have at least one previous conviction

40% Number of males aged 10-17 brought before the courts for the disorder had at least one previous conviction.

11 The age of the youngest known person to be punished for taking part in the riots

Figures at a glance:

Families in Britain

13.8m	Families in England
6.01m	Families in England with dependent children
117,000	Estimated number of families with multiple problems
5.89m	Approximate number of families with dependent children not considered to have multiple problems
£220,000	Estimated minimum cost to state of families with multiple problems
£14,000	Estimated cost of family intervention project per family
£50,000	Estimated saving per family per year of family intervention projects
8,841	Total number of families who worked with a family intervention service between January 2006 to March 2011

Contents of collection

Policy Directions

Drawing on 32 articles from a range of experts, there are so many challenges that we – as policymakers, charities, and families – could consider in an attempt to build more nuanced policy solutions to supporting families. In an attempt to highlight these, FPI has drawn on the perspectives within this collection to summarise five areas for particular attention. We are collating these issues so that they might serve to stimulate a useful discussion about future policy development.

Parenting policy has reached a crossroads and there are set of choices ahead for policymakers. There is a risk that the current debate on 'problem families' unhelpfully adds another stereotype to a modern mythology of parenting. Alongside the 'pushy parent' who helicopters around their child and respects no boundaries in sharp elbowing others out of the way in their child's interest, we have the deficit model of a feckless parent, who is in need of corrective intervention. The reality of modern parenting is, of course, more complex and more interesting than these stereotypes suggest but what is clear is that to move forward requires a more positive, sustainable framework for parenting that both offers appropriate support to parents and the conditions in which families can thrive.

1. The government needs to review the impact of austerity measures on families

Income is a critical factor in enabling good parenting. Conversely financial pressures layer pressure on relationships - both between couples and between parent and child. The Coalition Government is passionately committed to a family friendly society and also to a deficit reduction plan - inevitably these two agendas will conflict in places. The nature of changes to taxes and benefits over the past year has meant that families with children have faced a disproportionate impact on their income. We would urge that, when implementing policies, the Government should closely consider the financial impact on families, for example, the freeze of child benefit rates and the design of a Universal Credit system. Similarly, we need to promote efforts to place affordable, high quality childcare as central to helping parents balance work and care. It is true that supporting families in this way requires public spending, but it should be seen as an investment in future economic growth through enhanced consumer confidence, better outcomes for children and a stronger and more stable society. Austerity measures need to be 'family proofed' and should reflect the long-term importance of family friendly working practices, a fair economy for families, the provision of essential services for families, and good quality housing and transport.

2. New approaches need to be designed with families at the heart; if we start with families, then efficiencies will follow

According to the Department for Education it is not uncommon, in the case of families with multiple problems, for up to 20 local agencies to be involved with the same family, including health services, schools, Children's Centres, the police, social care, and Job Centre Plus. This has been shown to be expensive and ineffective as agencies involvement can overlap and even

pull in opposite directions. Putting the family at the centre of service design creates real opportunities for efficiencies. We welcome a focus on early intervention and on community budgets as mechanisms that could help to ensure a joined-up approach to families' needs across local services. We also hope that new initiatives will explore ways to utilise the entire existing public sector infrastructure available. For example, we believe that improved support and engagement of parents could be rolled out through the schools network and the best practice embodied in many children's centres needs to be preserved - even during a period of cuts. A similar joining-up needs to happen at a national level. The Family Test should be used as an opportunity to arrive at an overview of how policies work for families across Departments – from the Departments for Education, Communities and Local Government, Health, the Home Office, Work and Pensions, and Innovation and Skills – to name some of the main actors. It is only with this approach that the Government will be able to achieve the best for families in these tough economic times.

3. A local family entitlement should be introduced to enhance parental choice and drive improvement in services

While the localisation agenda could bring real benefits to families, it could also drive a further unevenness in service provision and quality. Developing a consistent entitlement for *all* parents will help us to avoid a postcode lottery of services at local level, and begin not just to tackle the difficult cases, but avoid a family facing a problem becoming a family in crisis. The range of parenting and family interventions available should be coordinated locally with a clear statement of the universal entitlement available to all parents, as well as signposting to support and advice in relation to the intensive options of provision for the most vulnerable groups. We regard the current moment as a real opportunity to place families and parents at the heart of spending decisions at the local level. However, in order for this to provide genuine opportunities for consultation, our current mechanisms need to be recognised as insufficient to engage families. We believe that work is needed to enhance the ability of decision-makers to engage with families at the local and central levels. Too often discussions are led from a top-down perspective (with the starting point the questions that matter to politicians and policy-makers, not families) and too often consultation takes place after decisions have been taken. We should not assume we know what different families need; developing an entitlement would require engaging with parents in a far more robust way in the years ahead.

4. Policy solutions will only work if there is clarity about the problems they are addressing

The desire to speed up delivery for the most vulnerable families requires further refinement if it is to work effectively, and the newly announced 'Unit for Troubled Families' will need to set clear parameters for what success looks like. There are three possible targets here – 1) a drive for volume; 2) a drive to limit anti-social behaviour and 3) a drive to ensure that services intervene in a way that prevent family problems becoming a family crisis. Each would require a different strategy and suggest starkly different measures of success. At first sight, the drive for volume is unlikely to be deliverable – cost and the requirement to develop differentiated interventions that would be appropriate across this population and the simple organisational challenges in scaling up would all stand in the way. The second would suggest an extension of FIPs to a tightly defined subset of subset of families who are engaged or at risk of being involved in criminal activity and an implementation plan for roll out to the right scale. The third approach is the one

that not only holds more long term promise, but adds together with government's thinking in this area with the early intervention agenda. This approach would bring into sharp focus the further work that needs to be done at a local level to make services work together more effectively for families and highlight the gaps that are undermining parents' ability to parent effectively, with particular strain already identified in the areas of mental health, domestic violence or support for families with children with special educational needs. Such an approach might then, in turn, enable a new look at effective spending at a local level, enabling greater investment in preventative services even in a time of economic constraint.

5. We need to know more about family trends, behaviour and motivations to make a success of initiatives

Families are not homogenous, and we risk stigmatisation of certain groups if we rely too heavily on blunt demographic indicators of potential risk factors. Snap-shot surveys are not sufficient in this respect, segmentation of families' needs to be based on evidence about real parenting behaviour and should inform the targeting of advice, guidance and support. While a group of 'problem families' have been placed at the centre of the political response, the Government needs to specify how a scaled-up intervention will reach across this group and then ensure that a variety of interventions are in place appropriate to the different needs they have. Improved clarity about what is likely to drive changes in parental behaviour will also enhance the impact and reach of proposed policy solutions, including the planned pilot of a system of parenting vouchers.

While parents look set to remain 'under the microscope' for some time to come, we must move forward in a way which supports the confidence of parents rather than undermining them. Ultimately, progress will only be observed if we recognise not only the importance of parenting skills, but the fact that parenting is a 'social good' and for us to parent well, we will require a family friendly society and economy.

Part one: Parenting in the Spotlight

Parenting Under the Microscope
Katherine Rake, Peter Grigg and Celia Hannon (FPI)

Survival or development? The infant policymaker
Dr Sebastian Kraemer (Tavistock Clinic)

Strong but solitary parenting
Ryan Shorthouse (Social Market Foundation)

It's time to expel the 'experts' from family life
Professor Frank Furedi (University of Kent)

Parenting support – a political quick fix?
Yvonne Roberts (The Observer)

Targeting Troubled Families
Rhian Benyon (Family Action)

1. Parenting Under the Microscope

Katherine Rake: Chief Executive, FPI
Peter Grigg: Director of Research and Policy, FPI
Celia Hannon: Head of Research and Policy Programmes, FPI

Katherine Rake, Peter Grigg and Celia Hannon examine the increased scrutiny of parents, the pressures on the modern parent, and the emergence of a focus on problem parents.

While the focus on 'problem parents' has received renewed intensity in the wake of the riots, it is also an expression of a steady trend towards ever-greater scrutiny of parenting. Parenting has become one of the most charged political and cultural subjects of our age. As the evidence about the decisive impact that the quality of parenting has on children's outcomes continues to grow, parents have come to be seen not just as the cause of many society's ills but also the key to unlocking positive change such as improved social mobility.[4]

This scrutiny of parenting has led to the idea of a parenting 'deficit' and the view that there are a growing number of parents who are incapable. Yet, this focus on parenting skills is not matched by conclusive evidence about a decline in our standards of parenting. It also acts as a distraction it risks diverting our attention away from the mounting pressures which modern society creates for parents. The challenge for policy now is to find the right balance between supporting parents in developing their skills and capabilities and working to lessen the pressures parents face. To do this successfully, a positive framework for supporting parents needs to be created and concrete steps taken towards creating a more family friendly society.

The rise of the professional parent

'Parenting' has entered the mainstream as a verb. The verb parenting implies an act, with a concomitant set of skills and capabilities to be acquired, rather than the noun parent which simply implies a status we acquire when we have children. We are more aware than ever of the impact of parenting styles on the development of the brain and a child's core capabilities such as application, agency and empathy.[5]

In response, we have observed the rise of 'parenting practitioners' and the emergence of a plethora of products offering parents advice and information. This has had the positive effect of making parents more aware of effective parenting strategies, but it also has the unintended consequence of professionalising parenting, which potentially deskills parents as well as raising anxiety rates and guilt. Self-help books and websites are awash with articles cataloguing the phenomenon of over-anxious parents, while attitudinal surveys indicate that parents worry about the quality of their parenting.[6]

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[4] See, for example p.6 of HM Government '*Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility* (2011) which argues that: 'Parents and families have to be centre stage. This strategy sets out plans to support a culture where the key aspects of good parenting are widely understood and where all parents can benefit from advice and support.'
http://www.dpm.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/opening-doors-breaking-barriers-strategy-social-mobility-0

[5] Margo, J et al, *Freedom's Orphans*, London: Institute for Public Policy Research 2008
Lexmond, J and Reeves, R, *Building Character,* London: Demos, 2010

[6] See Netmums survey findings on the pressure to be a perfect parent, and their 'real parenting revolution' launched in response to rising anxiety:
http://www.netmums.com/home/netmums-campaigns/the-real-parenting-revolution

Consequently, parenting has been subject to the forces of professionalisation and marketisation, which has in turn led to increased scrutiny of our private, domestic lives. While the debate on parenting has been genuinely important in improving the quality of parenting that some children receive, it also inevitably leaves others feeling judged and under pressure to deliver to a set of fixed, and inevitably elusive, standards.

It is the context of increased scrutiny and rising standards for parenting that the question of whether parents are 'failing' has emerged. However, much of the evidence available suggests that far from becoming a nation of apathetic, laissez-faire parents, many of us are spending more time with our children and have higher expectations of them.

- Between 1986 and 2006, seven out of eight measures of parental expectations showed an increase, the proportion of parents expecting their children to be polite increased from 75 per cent to 87 per cent and 95 per cent of parents expect their children to do their homework, up from 90 per cent in 1986.[7]
- Analysis of ONS data shows that parents report spending three times longer with their children per day in 2002 than they did in 1972.[8]
- The time spent by working mothers with their children has grown over the last two decades, from fewer than 40 minutes per day in 1974 – 75 to more than 90 minutes in 1999. Working mothers now spend more time with their children than non-working mothers did in 1981.[9]
- Analysing UK-specific data, Fisher[10] found significant increases since the 1960s in father's involvement with their children, although these increases still do not amount to father/mother parity in terms of time spent on childcare.[11]

One of the explanations for the criminal behaviour of some young looters over the course of the riots was the poor parenting that they had received. While it would be impossible to ascertain conclusively whether the 'quality' of parenting has improved or declined over time, or indeed whether there is now more variance in the quality of parenting, one recent study did set out to review the evidence on whether poor parenting was responsible for deterioration in adolescent behaviour. The author summarises the findings thus: '*we found no evidence for declining standards of parenting overall and this leads us to believe this factor does not generally explain the rise in problem behaviour.'*[12] Research such as this suggests we should exercise caution when it comes to generalisations about the quality of modern parenting.

The modern pressures on parents

It is notable that these trends in time spent with children have been observed *despite* the pressures modern life presents to parents. In many key respects British society is far from friendly to families, for example in one recent FPI poll 76% of parents said that stress, including financial pressures (67%) and long working hours (37%), are undermining family life.[13] This brings home that the reality that combining work and caring responsibilities is a very real challenge for families.

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byzone.com/mom_dad/womens_health/stress/article/tame-parental-anxiety/

[7] See Nuffield Foundation, '*Time trends in parenting and outcomes for young people'*, 2009, London www.nuffieldfoundation. org/sites/default/files/Nuffield_CAP_web_final.pdf

[8] Williams, F. (2005) Rethinking Families. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

[9] Gershuny, J. (2000) Changing times: work and leisure in postindustrial society. Oxford: Oxford University Press

[10] Fisher, K. et al (1999) British Fathers and their Children. Report for Channel 4 Dispatches. Colchester: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Essex

[11] For more discussion of this subject, please see 'Father's Involvement in Family life in Hunt (ed) *Family Trends: British families since the 1950s*, Family and Parenting Institute, 2009

[12] Nuffield Foundation *Parents of teenagers are doing a good job* http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/parents-teenagers-are-doing-good-job

[13] FPI polling was conducted among 2016 parents with children under 18 during June 2011.

While the increasing numbers of women in the workplace (maternal employment has tripled since 1951)[14] has led to positive progress on gender equality and seen fathers take a more active role in childcare than was previously the case, the challenge of making the 'dual earner' model work in practice creates specific pressures on family life. The fact that families struggle to meet the additional time pressure created by working parenthood is well documented. And as the expectation of fully shared co-parenting is still yet to be realised, it often continues to be a particular pressure for women. In one large-scale survey, more than three-quarters of mothers stated that, in day-to-day life, they still have the primary responsibility for childcare in the home.[15] Research suggests that many women are still undertaking a 'double-shift' in the workplace and at home.[16]

For both women and men, UK employment practices remain unfriendly to family life: in 2010, 11.1 per cent of the UK population in employment worked at night; 25.3 per cent worked in the evening; 22.2 per cent worked on Saturday.[17] Cultural factors in the workplace can also work against families; even those employees who are entitled to parental leave may still not necessarily feel able to take up their full entitlement. [18,19]

For those families who do succeed in combining work with bringing up young children, the on-going difficulty of finding affordable, accessible childcare has only been intensified by the recent cost rises. The cost of a nursery place of a child aged two or over in England has increased by 4.8 per cent since 2009/10[20] and 63% of parents, regardless of income, say they cannot afford not to work but struggle to pay for childcare.[21] This comes at a time when parents can least afford it, with rises in VAT, food and fuel prices and high unemployment.[22] It is unsurprising that consumer confidence and household spending remains low when families are feeing such financial pressure.

The isolation of modern parenting

With higher expectations of themselves, and living in a society which asks them to seamlessly combine employment and childcare, the networks of support parents rely on come to assume greater significance. However, trends around migration, atomisation and couple separation mean that the social bonds which used to be central to family life have been weakened in some key respects. The act of parenting has become individualised, without the pre-established networks of kinship which once underpinned family life. For example:

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[14] Hunt, S. (ed) (2009) Family Trends: British families since the 1950s, Family and Parenting Institute,

[15] Ellison, G. et al (2009) Work and Care: a study of modern parents. Equality and Human Rights Commission, research report 15.
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/15._work_and_care_modern_parents_15_report.pdf

[16] Green, H. and Parker, S. (2006) The Other Glass Ceiling: the domestic politics of parenting. Demos London
http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/theotherglassceiling

[17] Eurostat *Population in employment working during asocial hours - LFS series*
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/employment_unemployment_lfs/data/database

[18] In a survey for the Equality and Human Rights Commission whilst 55% of fathers had taken paternity leave, of those who did not 49% said that they could not afford it and 19% were too busy at work or thought their employer would not approve of them taking such leave
EHRC (2009) response to BIS consultation *'Choice for families: additional paternity leave and pay'*
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/consultation-responses/response-to-consultation-on-choice-for-families-additional-paternity-leave-and-pay/

[19] A survey for DWP found that 16 per cent of mothers took less than the statutory minimum entitlement (i.e. 26 weeks) and 35 per cent took exactly 26 weeks maternity leave; 46 per cent of mothers took between 27 and 52 weeks and only three per cent were off for more than 52 weeks
http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2007-2008/rrep496.pdf

[20] Daycare Trust *Rapid rise in childcare costs adds to family finance woes* (9 February 2011)
http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/rapid-rise-in-childcare-costs-adds-to-family-finance-woes.html

[21] Daycare Trust and Save the Children survey *New survey shows soaring cost of childcare is pushing the poorest out of work and children into poverty* (7 September 2011) http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/news.php?id=54

[22] See the Family and Parenting Institute's 2011 '*Family Friendly Report Card*' for more data on these trends.
http://www.familyandparenting.org/our_work/Families-in-the-Age-of-Austerity/Family+Friendly+Report+Card+2011

- One in three working mothers now rely upon grandparents for childcare[23] but grandparents are less likely to live in the same household as their children and grandchildren. The number of three generation households declined from about 25 per cent in the 1960s to fewer than 10 per cent in 1998.[24]
- Many parents do not have the day-to-day support of a partner, the percentage of UK households that are categorised as 'single parents with dependent children' doubled from between 1971 and 2008.[25]
- Between 1984 and 1996, Britons became much more likely to say that most people in their local area tend to 'go their own way' rather than 'help each other' (although in the last decade this trend has begun to reverse somewhat).[26]

But perhaps the most worrying by-product of individualising the act of parenting is that the role played in family life by the wider family and the community has been side-lined. Research has also shown that many of our public spaces, towns and neighbourhoods are distinctly unfriendly towards children and young people, with parental anxieties potentially leading to a withdrawal of children and families from many shared spaces.[27] In contrast to our European neighbours, evidence is increasingly pointing towards a culture which is not supportive of child wellbeing and a flourishing environment for families.[28] We may be quick to hold parents responsible for the failings of their children but we are much less willing to acknowledge the critical role played by society and our communities.

The problem of 'problem' families

Alongside the professionalisation of parenting, we have also seen greater political legitimacy behind the idea that government should intervene in cases of 'market failure' – to pick up the pieces where parents are deemed to be failing.

> *'We've got to get out there and make a positive difference to the way families work, the way people bring up their children and we've got to be less sensitive to the charge that this is about interfering or nannying….. And we need more urgent action, too, on the families that some people call 'problem', others call 'troubled'. The ones that everyone in their neighbourhood knows and often avoids.*
> Prime Minister David Cameron, August 2011[29]

In response to the riots of the summer, politicians have re-stated promises to 'turn around the lives of the 120,000 most troubled families in the country'.[30] This figure of 120,000[31] has been quoted widely in the media and policy circles – but it is troubling how easily families 'with multiple problems'[32] have morphed

[23] Speight, S et al, Childcare and Early Years, Survey of Parents 2008 Research Report no DCSF-RR136, DCSF, 2009
[24] Dench, G. and Ogg, J. (2002) *Grandparenting in Britain*. London: Institute of Community Studies
[25] Office for National Statistics, *Social Trends* 39 (2009) www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_social/Social_Trends39/Social_Trends_39.pdf
[26] Margo, J et al, *Freedom's Orphans*, London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2006
[27] Beundermann, J, Hannon, C and Bradwell, P, *Seen and Heard*, London: Demos, 2007.
[28] In a landmark 2007 report, Unicef found that UK children have the lowest levels of well-being in the developed world, see UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. (2007). *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries.* Florence: Innocenti Report Card.
[29] David Cameron, The Fight-back After The Riots, Speech in Witney, (15 August 2011) http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2011/08/society-fight-work-rights
[30] David Cameron speech, reported in the Guardian: http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/blog/2011/aug/15/england-riots-cameron-miliband-speeches
[31] Figure comes originally from research done by the Cabinet Office based Social Exclusion Task Force (SETF), using data from the Families and Children Study
[32] The Department for Education definition is that '*Families with multiple problems/complex needs/troubled families are defined as those who have five or more of the following disadvantages (FACS, 2004): No parent in the family*

into 'problem families'. It is important to retain the distinction as, while there is likely to be some overlap, the population of families who drive criminal activity is not the same as the population of families who experience multiple problems. Unless we retain this distinction, the proposed policy solutions are likely to be, at best, inappropriate and at worse actively harmful to the families in question.

Of course, the term 'families with multiple problems' is just the most current way of describing this group. A whole host of terms have been used to grapple with the same challenge over the past decade: 'vulnerable families', 'chaotic families', 'dysfunctional families' and 'families at risk'.[33] Even before the most recent raft of announcements, this group has been of central concern to previous governments.[34] That this agenda continues to dominate across the political spectrum only serves to illustrate the complexity and long-term nature of the problem.

Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) have been hailed as a key part of the strategy for tackling this multifaceted challenge. These services tend to use a similar model of intervention, providing intensive and persistent support for the whole family, coordinated by a single key worker. There is reliable evidence to suggest that such programmes can produce good outcomes for families.[35] And, given the spiralling costs such families can generate for Local Authorities, FIPs have also been shown to be relatively cost effective.[36]

But, before hailing FIPs as a public policy panacea, we should recognise the challenge of scaling up such an intensive and targeted intervention. The most up to date figures from the Department for Education show that the total number of families who worked with a family intervention service between January 2006 to March 2011 was 8,841.[37] There is a considerable challenge in both reaching this number of vulnerable families and persuading them to engage in any form of intervention programme in a sustained way. FIPs are also an intervention at crisis point and to this extent potentially run counter to the escalating policy focus on early intervention. What is more, in the current tight fiscal environment, their cost is likely to be a stumbling block – estimates suggest that to scale up FIPs on the current model would require an investment of between £1.5 and £2 billion.

Given these factors, FIPs (at least in the shape and form we currently observe), are likely only to be part of the Government's solution. Other proposed policy solutions include mentoring schemes with a large element of volunteer labour. Although there are ways that volunteers may be in a position help to reach more families, it is important that in considering ways to meet the cost of programmes for families, the need for skilled, expert and long-term commitment is not overlooked.

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is in work; family lives in poor quality or overcrowded housing; no parent has any qualifications; mother has mental health problems; at least one parent has a longstanding limiting illness, disability or infirmity; family has low income (below 60% of the median); family cannot afford a number of food and clothing items.' Department for Education (2011) *Estimated distribution of families with multiple problems as at March 11*

[33] See Barrett, H., Parenting Programmes for Families at Risk: A Source Book, National Family and Parenting Institute, 2003

[34] For example, in his 2009 speech to Labour party conference Gordon Brown promised that: '*Starting now and right across the next Parliament every one of the 50,000 most chaotic families will be part of a family intervention project – with clear rules, and clear punishments if they don't stick to them'* http://www.labour.org.uk/gordon-brown-speech-conference

[35] Monitoring and Evaluation of Family Intervention Projects and Services to March 2011 (England) Department for Education Statistical Release http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d001021/osr14-2011.pdf

[36] '*Estimated annual savings resulting from a family successfully completing a family intervention ranged between £62,000 and £75,000. Because these costs accumulate year on year the potential for long-term savings for both authorities and wider society are considerable'* Department for Education website: http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/multipleproblems/a0078053/evaluation-and-assessing- cost-effectiveness

[37] Monitoring and Evaluation of Family Intervention Projects and Services to March 2011 (England) Department for Education Statistical Release September 2011 http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d001021/OSR14_2011.pdf

Where next for parenting?

The issues raised in this article are inter-related; we cannot address the capabilities of a particular group of parents without considering the wider context in which we all parent. Social and economic pressures can undermine the capacity of parents to parent well.

Parenting policy has reached a crossroads and there are set of important choices ahead for policymakers. There is a risk that the current debate on ‘problem families’ unhelpfully adds another stereotype to a modern mythology of parenting. Alongside the ‘pushy parent’ who helicopters around their child and elbows others out of the way in pursuit of their child’s interests, we have the deficit model of a feckless parent, who is in need of corrective state intervention. The reality of modern parenting is, of course, more complex than these stereotypes suggest, and it is clear that to move forward we will need a more positive, sustainable framework for parenting that both offers appropriate support to parents and creates the conditions in which all families can thrive.

While parents look set to remain ‘under the microscope’ for some time to come, we must move forward in a way which supports the confidence of parents rather than undermining them. Ultimately, progress will only be observed if we recognise not only the importance of parenting skills, but the fact that parenting is a ‘social good’ and for us to parent well, we will require a family friendly society and economy.

2. Survival or development? The infant policymaker

Dr Sebastian Kraemer: Honorary Consultant, Tavistock Clinic

Sebastian Kraemer looks at the evidence from developmental psychology to show the vital importance of a society which supports the infant to develop secure attachments.

Babies haven't changed much for millennia. Give or take a few enzymes this perfectly designed little bundle of desires and interests has not needed to evolve. He'll be fine provided there are some people there to care for him[38]. If not, evolution has taken care of that too. You live in a cruel world and treat him roughly: he will develop into a compulsively self-reliant and ruthless individual with little concern for others. Mean societies produce mean people.

So we know what he needs but the world is not designed to provide it. Through attentive care in the early years we hope to produce thoughtful, curious and confident young people but our social arrangements are essentially hostile and competitive. Having a baby is regarded as an expensive undertaking rather than as a contribution to the future of society. One of the most impressive achievements of twentieth century Sweden was to see this clearly, and to provide for its future citizens accordingly – with excellent perinatal health services, paid leave for both parents, nursery care from graduate-trained staff, and a later start to formal education.

Comparisons with Sweden's golden age are scorned these days because 'we can't afford it'. Why not? Children's charities and institutes may be anxious not to sound too political yet this is an entirely political matter. The science is clear. Thousands of studies show how attachments – secure, insecure, disorganised – are formed[39], and how dependent these are on the care parents themselves received as children. In spite of deficits in the previous generation you can make a difference to a child's life; it just gets harder the longer you leave it. Developmental psychology and children's rights have had an impact on policy. Hospitals – after decades of resistance[40] – do now encourage parents to visit their children at almost any time. Children are better protected, and physical punishment in schools is not allowed, even though many people would like it back. But it's an uphill struggle – like walking up a down escalator.

Encouraged by successive governments our world is geared to markets. "It's the economy, stupid" means you can't do anything without money, but the more this idea takes hold the stupider we become. We have instead to ask where the money comes from, and how it is spent. As new Labour learned to their cost, economic ends do not justify the means. The current government's dedication to £18bn welfare cuts to appease global markets will hit children disproportionately: "…cutting the state means minimising the arena in which women can find a voice, allies, social as well as material support; and in which their concerns can be recognised. It means reducing the resources society collectively allocates to children, to making children a shared responsibility, and to the general "labour" of care and love."[41] Neoliberalism is the enemy of children.

[38] 'him' is less clumsy than 'him or her'.
[39] see Graham Music's authoritative and readable text *Nurturing Natures: Attachment and Children's Emotional, Social and Brain Development* (Psychology Press 2010)
[40] Brandon S, Lindsey M, Lovell-Davis J, Kraemer S. (2009) "What is wrong with emotional upset?" – 50 years on from the Platt Report. *Archives of Disease in Childhood* **94**: 173-177. adc.bmj.com/content/**94**/3/173
[41] Stuart Hall, *Guardian*, 12 September 2011 www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/sep/12/march-of-the-neoliberals

This is not the environment in which humans evolved. An infant in a hunter-gatherer band – the way we all lived for 99% of our time on the planet – would have spent many hours being held, since his people were on the move. When they stopped for a break he might be passed around the group, as is still done by the Efé people of the Congo rainforest, recorded by the developmental psychologist Ed Tronick. Babies may be breast fed by other women and become attached to many adults, but when inconsolable still need their mothers. Systematic comparisons by anthropologist Barry Hewlett and colleagues[42] between sedentary foraging and farming people in neighbouring parts of the Congo basin show how much more egalitarian the former are. Both men and women, who see themselves as equal, hold and converse with their tiny children more intensively, let the baby decide when to wean and teach them to share from an early age. Violence is rare, though teasing is common. Such children are more socialised than in the West and at the same time protected from catastrophe in the event of the mother's death. Tronick makes the important point that "child abuse is more likely to occur in societies where mothers are seldom relieved of their child care responsibilities".[43]

The reverse escalator effect is everywhere. Most people involved in child and family services are keen to promote secure attachments for babies and toddlers. They are committed to the idea of stable and familiar settings in which children can develop, both at home and in day centres and nurseries. But outside there is a freezing gale blowing. Little money is available for perinatal services[44, 45], parental leave (in spite of the fact that it saves lives[46]), quality child care[47], good schools for all, affordable homes, healthy food, family and educational benefits, subsidised transport and energy, sports fields, swimming pools, libraries, parks and playgrounds that make rearing children and adolescents more manageable and more successful. Like children, tax is seen as a 'burden'. So governments of all parties sign up to reducing it, yet still find money for bank bailouts and unsustainable wars. Whether local or national, tax should be a contribution to the common good, an instrument of social justice. It is collected from citizens, for citizens. In the current climate this equation is neither acknowledged nor understood.

Elegant research shows how sensitive babies as young as three months are to tensions in the interactions of adults around them.[48] Children will more likely thrive if caregivers – parents and grandparents, childminders, daycare staff, nursery teachers – get on with one another, like a good team. Our social environment does little to support that, the most poisonous threat being from rising inequality, which in Britain has reached levels not seen since the 1920s. The much maligned 1970s, remembered for inflation, strikes and hairy rock bands was actually the most egalitarian in our history. One index of social health is the number of boys born in comparison to girls. Because the male fetus is more vulnerable to maternal stress, women produce fewer boys when times are hard.[49] (For example there is often a fall in the ratio of boys to girls a few months after disasters such as earthquakes and the terrorist attack on 9/11[50]). In England and Wales the highest ratio of boys to girls occurred in 1973.[51] In terms of contented mothers it was the best of times.

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[42] Hewlett BS, Fouts HN, Boyette AH, Hewlett BL. (2011) Social learning among Congo Basin hunter-gatherers. *Philosophical Transactions of The Royal Society B* 366: 1168-1178.
doi: 10.1098/rstb.2010.0373

[43] Tronick E (2007) *The Neurobehavioral and Socio-Emotional Development of Infants and Children.* New York: Norton, p.116.

[44] The pioneering parent infant service in Redbridge and Waltham Forest could be replicated in all areas with dramatic effect. The current marketised view of health means no preventive services are safe. www.nelft.nhs.uk/camhs/camhs_services/wf_parent_infant

[45] A comprehensive perinatal intervention from Heidelberg 'Keiner fällt durch's Netz' [translated as *Nobody Slips through the Cracks*] is now implemented and researched in three German states. www.cierpka.de/English/KFDN.html

[46] Few people, even amongst academics, seem to be aware of the correlation between paid parental leave and infant mortality. This remarkable finding represents just the tip of an iceberg of developmental damage and pathology, which could be modified by intensive early support for families. "A ten week extension in paid leave is predicted to decrease post neonatal mortality rates by 4.1%" Tanaka S. (2005) Parental Leave and child health across OECD countries *The Economic Journal* 115 (501) F7-F28 doi: 10.1111/j.0013-0133.2005.00970.x

[47] On 7 October Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. announced £300m for childcare. James Plunkett writes in *The Spectator* "Half a million people, the vast majority women, have lost an average £436 a year, with some losing as much as £1,300. Today's move does nothing to reverse these earlier cuts but it does mean the government has refrained from punching the bruise by making things worse."

[48] McHale J, Fivaz-Depeursinge E, Dickstein S, Robertson J, Daley M (2008) New evidence for the social embeddedness of infants' early triangular capacities. *Family Process* 47:445-63.

[49] See Kraemer S. (2000) The fragile male *British Medical Journal* 321:1609-12. www.bmj.com/content/321/7276/1609.full

[50] Catalano R, Bruckner T, Marks AR, Eskenazi B. (2006) Exogenous shocks to the human sex ratio: the case of September 11, 2001 in New York City, *Human Reproduction* 21:3127-3131

[51] General Register Office, OPCS and ONS Birth statistics, Series FM1

Inequality creates stress in parents who can't keep up, and anxiety in the better off who fear sliding down. No one is comfortable on a steep slope. It makes all of us less trusting and more averse to communal commitments, such as respecting our neighbours and paying tax. Infant mortality, mental illness, drug abuse, dropping out of education, rates of imprisonment, obesity, teenage births and violence are all higher in unequal countries like ours.[52] Michael Marmot, Richard Wilkinson, Kate Pickett and Danny Dorling[53] have repeatedly published data of this kind with little effect on policy. New Labour, especially Gordon Brown as chancellor, did more for children than the Tory and coalition governments but did not see the inequality elephant trampling all over its plans for poverty reduction, minimum wage, sure start, education (education, education) and health. Neither did they do nearly enough to provide decent housing for a new generation, the bubble went on inflating because property prices were an untouchable fetish for the voting middle class, and unrestrained borrowing a significant source of the nation's wealth.

Yet something has been understood that was not clear before. There is a greater recognition that early intervention is a good idea. Michael Marmot says "to have an impact on health inequalities we need to address the social gradient in children's access to positive early experiences. Later interventions, although important, are considerably less effective where good early foundations are lacking."[54] The coalition government does want to increase health visitor numbers (but these have fallen since the start of their recruitment strategy[55]) and give greater access to the family-nurse partnership and to nursery education for two year olds. There is a steady stream of scholarly reviews on early intervention.[56] Labour MPs Graham Allen[57] and Frank Field have each produced reports for the coalition government suggesting how to deliver it. Field's promising idea is to create a new educational stage 'the Foundation Years' integrating services 'covering the period from the womb to five'[58]. Significantly neither expect government funding for this. Allen proposes a social bond to encourage the wealthy to invest in the early years. The Prime Minister's response is revealing. In a letter to Mr Allen, Mr Cameron says he is "supportive of the idea of setting up an independent foundation" which he said could "guide the development of the early intervention market".[59]

It may seem churlish to dismiss such encouragement but – because they divide workers when they need to be working together – markets do not provide integrated services, neither in health nor in education and early years. The questions remain: who pays? who profits? Without public affirmation of a shared social good we are left with a mean and rootless materialism that corrupts those at both ends of the wealth spectrum, whether bankers and traders with no shame or the 'feral criminal underclass' who helped themselves to trainers and computers in the 2011 summer riots.

[52] see the evidence at www.equality.org.uk

[53] *Fair Play: Selected Readings on Social Justice* by Daniel Dorling, Policy Press, October 2011

[54] Marmot M (2010) *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: A Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post-2010 (The Marmot Review)* www.marmotreview.org

[55] http://www.cypnow.co.uk/Health/article/1096549/health-visitor-national-growth-plan-stalls/

[56] The latest is Barlow J, McMillan AS, Kirkpatrick S, Gate D, Barnes J, Smith M. (2010) Health-led interventions in the early years to enhance infant and maternal mental health: A review of reviews. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 15:178-185. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-3588.2010.00570.x

[57] *Early Intervention: The Next Steps An Independent Report to Her Majesty's Government*. Graham Allen MP, January 2011 www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/early-intervention-next-steps.pdf

[58] *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults: The report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances*, Frank Field, December 2010 www.frankfield.com/about-frank/publications.aspx

[59] www.cypnow.co.uk/Social_Care/article/1092328/cameron-backs-early-intervention-foundation/?DCMP=EMC-CONCYPNow%20Daily

Though often disappointed, babies are born to expect some kind of socialism. What will today's infants be talking about in 2050? If they know any history they will regret lost opportunities; our collective loss of vision that led to wasted generations. The success of the post war consensus[60] was due in part to the fact that it lasted longer than one or two parliamentary terms, so that children could grow up, get educated and housed, find partners, work and free healthcare without overwhelming instability or despair. The needs of a baby born today are precisely what they were for one born in the 1940s, or 50,000 years ago. Though over the millennia many, especially mothers, will have worked these out for themselves, it took an extraordinary effort of science and scholarship to convert that wisdom into unassailable knowledge. Armed with that, we continue to put more obstacles in the way of secure attachments.

> *"This neglect of the young makes the financial deficit pale beside the cost the future social deficit. In unemployment, crime, mental health and social breakdown, the damage done will cascade on, down future generations. I doubt many voters know or would approve the price that children are paying as cuts are camouflaged by empty Cameron words of concern. What's needed is a campaign by children's charities to shame the government and to make these facts known. Quiet despair grips those who see it happening, but where is the voice of real outrage?"* [61]

[60] The consensus was of course forged in war time, when social cohesion was at its strongest. Even the King had a ration book. Yet in the earlier parts of this supposed golden age it was not a good time to be homosexual, suicidal, or in need of an abortion (all illegal if acted on), a single mother, black or other ethnic minority, in a hopeless marriage, mentally ill, disabled, or a female employee. People in all these categories have better rights now but even in 2011 some, such as women seeking abortion and Gypsy Roma Travellers, are newly threatened.

[61] Polly Toynbee, Children face one hammer blow after another, *Guardian*, 13 September 2011 www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/sep/12/children-one-hammer-blow-bankers

3. Strong but solitary parenting

Ryan Shorthouse: Social Market Foundation

Ryan Shorthouse disputes the view that family life and parenting is on the decline and argues that politicians should stop lecturing parents, making them feel more anxious and guilty and start generating policies to improve income, jobs and to prevent feelings of isolation.

According to our political leaders, it is bad parenting which is the leading reason for the 2011 summer riots, which saw predominantly young men cause mayhem in our major cities. A chorus of modern voices have joined them to lament the state of parenting in 21st century Britain. UNICEF, for example, recently published a report comparing family life in the UK with Sweden and Spain, observing that parents here are more likely to complain that they don't spend enough time with their 8-13 year old children.

What we are seeing are leading opinion formers reinforce common misconceptions about modern-day parents. Namely, that women are neglecting their children, spending less time with them, believing they "can have it all" by working and looking after young children. And there are too many absent fathers breeding feral youth.

We should listen to the eminent historian Professor Pat Thane: "Historical examples of moral panic about the family can be multiplied. They might suggest scepticism whenever they recur". Far from declining, family life is important as ever to people. The British Household Panel Survey shows that by far one of the biggest concerns for people, whatever their age – above finances and employment – is their family.

Yes, there are problem families. As there always has been throughout history. And policymakers must work harder to find ways of helping to improve life for children in these families. But, for the overwhelming majority of children, we should not forget that they report being happy with their lives. Indeed, the Children's Society and York University have surveyed 2,000 8-15 year olds on a quarterly basis since 2008, finding that over 90% of children are happy and have high subjective well-being. Their parents are clearly doing a good job.

Arguments should be based on facts. And the facts tell us that parents are investing more time today in parenting than ever before. For the past forty years, 66,000 people have recorded how they spend their time. These time-use surveys indicate that working mothers in particular are spending much more time with young children, triple the amount of time per day in 2004 compared to 1974, despite working longer hours. Fathers too have increased their time caring for children. This is because technology has helped with reducing time on household chores, but also because leisure time has been sacrificed. Parenting, across all social groups, is being prioritised.

The fretting of the handful of British parents studied in the UNICEF report should be interpreted as positive – not evidence of failure, but deep concern about doing a good job of raising their children. But the prioritisation of parenting does have problems.

What seems to have happened is that the time spent working and parenting has squeezed the time for leisure and community. Add to this that families are much more mobile, staying on average only seven and half years in one neighbourhood, it means that ties with others in the local community are much weaker. A recent representative poll by the Family and Parenting Institute of 2,105 parents found that two thirds of parents were not engaged in any community activity.

Trust in other adults has plunged over recent decades as a result. The World Values Survey demonstrates that adults in Britain are less trusting of others than adults in other developed countries. Parenting seems more solitary and stressful. This puts the pressure on parents, especially if you consider that old African proverb: “It takes a village to raise a child”.

Still, unbelievably, there are those who say that parents today are behaving more selfishly, either refusing to marry or divorcing thoughtlessly.

Let’s tackle these accusations head on. Lower levels of marriage do not mean people care less about families and parenting. Marriage actually remains popular. According to a poll by Civitas, the vast number of under-35s eventually want to get married. The reason why fewer do is because it’s held in such high esteem. They want to find the right person and marry at the right time in their lives. That’s more difficult to achieve for young people with employment more unstable and the cost of living so high. As the researchers Jenny Reynolds and Penny Mansfield explain, marriage is now normally entered into – especially for women - because of love, not necessity. Not everyone seeks or finds this; but, thankfully, the stigma and poverty associated with non-marriage has declined, hence the lower rate.

Anyway, it is absurd to say that people are better parents because they are married. Yes, children with married parents tend to have better educational and social outcomes. But the best available evidence suggests that marriage itself doesn’t cause these better results. Rather, it’s the other way around. Those with higher incomes and educational attainment are more likely to marry. These characteristics could be the real reason for their children, on average, doing better. A recent paper by the Institute of Fiscal Studies supports this. If you compare a married and cohabiting couple with the same education levels, socio-economic status and own childhood family structure, there is no significant difference between how their children develop.

Think about it: God doesn’t come and sprinkle special dust over married people which suddenly makes them better parents overnight. What really makes married couples effective parents is that they have a more stable relationship – that’s probably why they’re getting married in the first place – are better educated, and tend to have higher incomes.

Remember that the overwhelming majority of children say they are happy, even against a backdrop of increased non-marriage and divorce. It does not seem to have made life more miserable. If anything, life is better than ever for children, even against this backdrop of the erosion of the nuclear family. That is because, as a literature review by the Department of Children, School and Families showed, what makes the difference to children’s happiness is not family structure, but parental warmth; and this happens if parents are married or not, even if they are divorced.

The classic nuclear family may have declined – with fewer marriages - but this has not made parents less committed. If anything, they are trying to do too much for their children. Perhaps because they feel guilty, they are unfairly punishing themselves for working long hours away.

However, it is important for children to have time for independent play, especially when they are young – it’s good for children’s well-being and the development of key cognitive and social skills. But only 17% of under-11’s say they have been allowed out independently, compared to 39% of today’s parents who report being allowed out independently when they we under 11. And UK children report spending less time engaging in outdoor activities than their Swedish and Spanish peers. With weaker social ties, parents here in Britain have become acutely aware of “stranger danger”, and are thus less willing to let their children out of their sight.

Especially for the poorest children, it is crucial that parents allow their children time to interact with children from different backgrounds. Since a child’s brain is 80% developed by the age of three, it is in the earlier years of a child’s life where exposure to richer and more diverse stimuli is paramount. In addition, the academic literature on social capital suggests that children who have access to a variety of social networks tend to have better outcomes.

This is why enabling and encouraging everyone to access community institutions such as Sure Start Children's Centres, formal childcare settings and schools – where children from different backgrounds mix – is so important. Facilitating these experiences – especially when children are young – perhaps provides the key to tackling long-term disadvantage and disillusionment, the key causes of criminal behaviour by young people.

Worryingly, the evidence suggests that children from the most deprived backgrounds are not getting these opportunities: only 43% of 2 year olds with poorer parents are accessing formal childcare compared to 72% of 2 year olds with more affluent parents. Government reforms could worsen the situation. There is a danger that many Children's Centres will close now local authorities do not have a ring-fenced grant which they are obliged to spend on Sure Start. On top of this, the amount of government investment in Sure Start is declining in real terms.

Free schools have enormous potential, so long as they do not cream students from more affluent homes, leading to greater social homogeneity in existing schools. And the Government has made formal childcare less accessible by cutting the amount of support for childcare costs from tax credits in the April 2010 Budget. Already, as Save the Children and Daycare Trust found in a survey this summer, a quarter of parents living in severe poverty have left the labour market because they cannot afford the childcare costs.

Politicians should not be lecturing parents, making them feel more anxious and guilty about not spending enough time with them. They should be generating policies that support them in what is becoming a more isolated and stressful task.

So, that means finding ways of fostering stronger social capital in communities. Call it the Big Society if you like. But it also means defending those strong local institutions that bring families, especially those from different backgrounds, together: nurseries and playgrounds. And if you really want to support parents and improve children's outcomes, you would make formal childcare – where children from different backgrounds mix – affordable and high-quality for all.

4. It's time to expel the 'experts' from family life

Professor Frank Furedi: University of Kent

Frank Furedi describes what he sees as a demotion of parental authority and the ascendancy of parenting expertise, arguing that we should stop focusing on parental incompetence

This article has been adapted from an article first published online at spiked-online.com[1]

The riots in August have once again foregrounded the long-running debate on the ability of adults to be 'good' parents. However, a lack of confidence in the ability of ordinary adults to socialise younger generation has been evident even since early modern times. By the late nineteenth century, we continue to find scathing remarks about parental competence, along with proposals to limit the authority of parents.

The philosopher John Stuart Mill, author of *On Liberty*, linked his call for the compulsory schooling of children to his distrust of parental competence. This lack of confidence in parents' capacity to develop their children led many nineteenth-century reformers to view formal education as the principal institution of socialisation. In the early twentieth century, educators and child experts sought to bypass parental authority through assuming more and more responsibility for the socialisation of young people.

As a result, there has been a shift in the way that the uneasy partnership between family and school is portrayed by experts. Policymakers often assume that poor parenting and the fragmentation of the family are everyday facts of life that make it necessary for public institutions to take responsibility for forms of socialisation that were hitherto carried out in the home.

In the nineteenth century, criticisms of parental incompetence tended to focus on parents' alleged inability to educate their children. More recently, however, the alleged absence of parental competence has been detected in relation to a growing number of issues: how to nurture, how to stimulate, how to touch, how to discipline, how to discuss questions about sex, death, and so on.

The cumulative consequence of this questioning of parental competence has been the deepening and widening of the idea of a *parental deficit*. The claim that parents are inept at educating their children, or even nurturing and emotionally stimulating them, suggests that parents are not up to the job of socialising their offspring. In effect, these claims call into question parental authority.

The problem of parental authority

In much of the modern literature on parenting, the erosion of parental authority is often confused with the idea that there has been a decline in old-fashioned, authoritarian families. Too often, authority is confused with authoritarianism, and what is overlooked is that the targeting of parental competence is not about limiting authoritarianism in the home but is about calling into question the ability of mothers and fathers to socialise their children.

Today, the fact that the contestation of authority dominates the 'pre-political' spheres of everyday life is clear from the constant, acrimonious debates over issues such as child-rearing, health, lifestyles and the conduct of personal relationships. The erosion of the legitimacy of pre-political authority has deprived many parents, and adults in general, of the self-confidence to engage in a meaningful way with the younger generation.

Parents are told time and again that their authority rests on outdated assumptions and that they lack the real expertise that one needs to socialise young people. And conscious of the fact that it is difficult to act authoritatively today, parents feel very insecure about rejecting expert advice. The explosion of various child-rearing and pedagogic fads is symptomatic of society's loss of faith in parental authority; it represents a futile attempt to bypass the question of finding some convincing alternative to old forms of pre-political authority.

The demotion of parental authority – and its corollary: the ascendancy of parenting expertise – is underwritten by the idea that we have only recently discovered how complex child-rearing is. In the past, so-called 'discoveries' in the arena of psychological research were used to depict traditional areas of life as far more complex than we first thought. Today, the construction of complexity, not only in relation to parenting but in many areas of everyday existence, is fuelled most notoriously by neuroscience.

Colonising the private sphere

Through the extension of the idea of complexity into the world of personal and informal relationships, experts are seeking to colonise the private sphere. One of the key features of modern times has been the decline of 'taken for granted' ways of doing things – and this has encouraged the perception that individuals are not able to manage important aspects of their lives without professional guidance.

Increasingly, routine forms of social interaction are depicted as being difficult and complicated. That is why child-rearing can today be discussed as a *science*. Also, we often hear talk about parenting skills, social skills, communication skills and relationship skills. The idea that everyday encounters require special skills has created an opportunity for the 'expert' to colonise the realm of personal relations.[62]

Experts now claim that their 'scientific knowledge' entitles them to be authoritative voices on issues that were previously seen as being strictly the preserve of personal and family life. As one study of the rise of 'experts' puts it: 'The authoritative voice of "scientific experts" on child development advised repeatedly that the correct training of children required an expertise that few modern parents possessed.'[63] From the perspective of these 'experts', child-rearing, education and interpersonal relationships all need to be reorganised in accordance with the latest findings of scientific research.

The new cohort of experts, who have been on the rise since the late twentieth century, have a powerful crusading ethos. They do not confine themselves to carrying out research and making observations. As the American child psychologist William Kessen wrote in 1979: 'Critical examination and study of parental practices and child behaviour almost inevitably slipped subtly over to advice about parental practices and child behaviour. The scientific statement became an ethical imperative, the descriptive account became normative. And along the way, there have been unsettling occasions in which scraps of knowledge, gathered by whatever procedures were held to be proper science at the time, were given inordinate weight against poor old defenceless folk knowledge.'[64]

But these experts did not merely provide advice. Often with the backing of official institutions, they imposed their proposals on schools and directly influenced the conduct of family life. Measured against

[62] As James Chriss remarked, 'this perception of a lack of guidance and insight among the average citizen sets the stage for the encroachment of "experts" into virtually all walk of life'. Chriss, J. (1999) (ed.) Counselling and the Therapeutic State , Aldine de Gruyter : New York. p.5.
63 Loseke, D, & Cahill, S. (1994) 'Normalizing the Child Daycare Discourse in Popular Magazines, 1900-1990' in Best, J. (1994) (ed) Troubling Children: Studies of Children and Social Problems, Aldine de Gruyter : New York, p.174.

[64] Kessen, W (1979) 'The American Child and Other Cultural Inventions', *American Psychologist*, vol.34, no.10, p.818.

the authority of science, the insights and values of ordinary people enjoy lower and lower cultural valuation.

It is worth noting that the record of the 'science' in areas such as child-rearing, education and relationships is a dubious one. It has consisted largely of ever-recurring fads that rarely achieve any positive durable results.[65] Nevertheless, at a time when adult authority is on the defensive, the scientific expert has gained an ever-increasing influence over intergenerational relations. Typically, educational experts claim that since their proposals are based on purely objective science, only the prejudiced could possibly disagree with them.

Responsible parenting

Contemporary parenting culture exhorts parents to bring up their children according to 'best practice'. In virtually every area of social life today, experts advocate the importance of seeking help. Getting advice – and, more importantly, following the script that has been authored by experts – is seen as proof of 'responsible parenting'.

Paradoxically, the most important doctrine that fuels this subordination of the parent to the expert is the idea of parental omnipotence. Outwardly, parents have never been assigned with so much power and influence over the long-term prospects of their children as they are today. Through a process that I have referred to previously as 'parental determinism', where everything from one's job prospects to future happiness is said to be moulded by early-years parenting, parents are represented as demi-gods whose every act has a far-reaching impact on their children's wellbeing.

However, at the same time as parents are assigned these divine powers, their capacity to use the powers in an effective manner and for the good of their children is always being questioned. In order for it to work properly, parental omnipotence must apparently be mediated through the input of experts. That is why responsible parenting is said to require the authorisation of expertise. Without expert support, parental omnipotence – at least in the sense of doing good – is said to vanish. It is time we challenged this denigration of parental authority and this trashing of parental competence

[65] See Chapter 10 in Furedi, F (2008) *Paranoid Parenting: Why Ignoring Experts May Be Best For Your Child*, Continuum Press : London.

5. Parenting support – a political quick fix?

Yvonne Roberts: The Observer

Yvonne Roberts examines the recent political history of family interventions. She argues that parenting support is too often muddled in its intentions and confused about its outcomes. In the design and implementation of these initiatives too little attention has been paid to the role of place and to the potential of an asset based approach to parenting. The piece concludes that the country's parenting strategy needs a radical overhaul.

In South Tyneside, three years ago, "Mary" a single mother of five talked passionately about her positive experience of parenting classes: the key to a different life. Initially, she had been resistant. A victim of domestic violence in the past, she said she'd had particular difficulties with her oldest son, throughout his teens. Finally, he had received an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) and she had been given a compulsory parenting order. Six out of ten residents in South Tyneside live in neighbourhoods ranked in the 25 most deprived in England. Mary had survived on a very low income with poor literacy skills and mental health issues not helped by several ex-partners whom had been violent towards her in front of the children.

At that time, under a Labour Government, improving the quality of parenting via a spectrum of support from a light-touch approach (access to a website or a telephone conversation) through to intensive help (provided for instance, by parenting courses imported from the US and Australia such as Webster Stratton and Triple P) had become a key priority expressed in a range of policy documents. For example, Every Child Matters (2004) and the Children's Plan (2007) and Sure Start (launched in 1998). The Respect agenda (2006), alarmingly, helped to turn parenting support into a corrective "treatment" with compulsory parenting orders and terminology such as "worst families first". [66]

In 2007, Ed Balls then Minister for Children, described "progressive universalism" as "support for all with more support for those who need it most". This dual approach – asset-based and positive for those parents in search of 'light touch' guidance and deficit-based, corrective and coercive for those deemed "bad" parents as if their financial, educational and mental and physical health problems were incidental to the child-parent dynamic – has meant that parenting support retains a stigma and arguably fails to help either group on a large enough scale. This is not least because for both, with admirable exceptions, parenting support is too often muddled in its intentions and confused about its outcomes. And its definitions are far from clear: how do you define 'what works' or, for that matter, 'good enough' parenting?

Authoritative parenting characterised as attentive, caring, responsive, consistent, co-operative and warm with age appropriate and fair methods of discipline is deemed most beneficial. According to Churchill and Clarke this balance of care and control, promotes "children's self esteem, social skills and competence"[67] However, if a child lives in a dangerous deprived neighbourhood, it has been argued that authoritarian parenting may keep him or her safe and in one piece. Place matters.

[66] Home Office website no longer active
[67] Churchill, H and Clarke, K (2007) Parenting interventions with the parents of adolescents: a review of approaches, programmes and outcomes The University of Manchester

As Gorman-Smith and Tolan point out, guided by a developmental-ecological model of risk and development, it may be that how families function or how their parenting differs, may depend on the neighbourhood in which they live. The greater the sense of belonging and security in the neighbourhood, the less harm accrued by 'bad' parenting. They conclude, "It may be as useful to help youth connect to neighbourhood support as it is to try and improve family functioning." [68]

In 2004, "What works in parenting support" [69] was published followed in 2011, by a a review[70] of parenting support in five countries, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Netherlands, as well as England conducted by Boddy et al. The review raised a fundamental conceptual question about the understanding of "what works" and therefore, the way in which existing provision is evaluated.

In England, Boddy et al, say the often standardised approach (fidelity to the parenting course for instance) is very different from the customised support for the whole family and peer to peer help in the other countries in the review. The ethos also differs for professionals. For instance, in France, the aim is "accompagnement", "going alongside" [71] the parent on their journey rather than directing them to "predetermined standardised objectives". "In understanding what works – in assessing efficacy – there is a crucial distinction…between evaluation as an assessment of progress within an individual case intervention (does it work for this family?) and service level evaluation of the programmatic efficiency of a standardised model of intervention (does it work for most families?)" Boddy et al write.

So, why did parenting support work for Mary? In the last few years of the Labour government, a national parenting support network was launched. Local authorities were asked to assess the level of need in their area and draw up a strategy. A report by PriceWaterhouseCooper (2006)[72] uncovered "a significant amount of unmet need and latent demand". The focus of the report was the value of early intervention in families where there is a lower tier of need. The concern of this paper is that ever since while there has been lip service paid to a universal offer in parenting support - Sarah Teather at the Liberal Democratic Party Conference this year (2011) announced yet another trial in two or three areas, issuing parenting vouchers for all parents of children aged under five – in practise, a reductionist and highly confused approach to parenting support is taking place.

On the one hand, the universal parenting offer is neither universal nor – as has been argued - very clear in its aims and outcomes. An IPPR report[73] also points out that, "…. in the UK, it is children from disadvantaged backgrounds – arguably with the most to gain – who use these services least." On the other hand, corrective parenting support begins with a deficit model – what's wrong? - when arguably an asset-based approach beginning with the areas in which the family have coped, often against horrendous odds, might prove more productive. The Coalition is focussing on families who are deemed chaotic and have complex needs, numbering 120,000 families (according to the Coalition) or 140,000 (under Labour). They are seen as "bad" parents. Although the impact of negative circumstances on parenting - unemployment, illness, addiction etc - is acknowledged in programmes such as the Family Intervention Programmes (FIPs), they are too rarely effectively addressed.

In 2010, for example, David Gregg, re-analysed the results of a number of FIPs. FIPs families allegedly bring misery to their community."Fips supposedly cure the presumed cause, poor parenting, with a mixture of threats, parenting classes and 'intensive support'" Gregg writes, "In reality, the Fips target socially inadequate families around 80% of whom have significant mental and physical health problems and learning disabilities. …with such high levels of mental health problems we would expect to see matching levels of medical support in the projects. In reality, only 11% received professional psychiatric

[68] Gorman-smith D and Toal Patrick H Positive adaptation among youth exposed to community violence chapter in Resilience and Vulnerability Adaptation in the context of childhood adversities (2003) edited by Suniya S Luthar Cambridge University Press
[69] Moran, Ghate and van der Merwe What works in parenting support (2004)
[70] Boddy J, Smith M, Statham J Understanding of efficacy: cross national perspectives on 'what works' in supporting parents and families article for Ethics and Education (2011) 4:1
[71] This is also the approach in New Zealand in SKIP Strategises for Kids Information for Parents, that encourages peer to peer help and has had success with the so called 'hard to reach' parents/
[72] PrcieWaterhouseCooper (2006) The market for parental and family support services Department for Education and Skills
[73] Ben-Galim D Parents at the centre (2011) IPPR

treatment or counselling. With around 80% of families exhibiting 'poor parenting' only 35% attended parenting classes and only half of these were delivered by professional agencies."

Gregg began with the flagship Dundee Family Project established in 1996, it has become the prototype for all subsequent efforts. It claimed an 84% success rate with "the most difficult families". Mostly they were very, poor, single parents. 50% were on anti-depressants; 75% had alcohol or drug abuse problems. Gregg writes, "We will see again and again over the years, most families were referred [to FIPs] for mental health problems and social inadequacy rather than offending the public. In most cases, these health problems were not addressed in the projects."
Gregg says the 84% success rate comes down to 39% based on family behaviour, risk factors and ongoing problems. In an evaluation[74] of the highly successful holistic H.O.P.E family centre in a deprived rural area Herefordshire, Margaret Lochrie of not for profit organisation 'Capacity' points out the importance of addressing issues such as mental health and the lack of literacy and life skills in parents. "A national survey by the National Literacy Trust of 500 local providers working with families found that nearly half rarely or never signpost parents to support for themselves," she writes H.O.P.E. works laterally – it provides literacy and numeracy courses, it offers cookery classes, computers, employment preparation, self esteem and confidence building, childcare and rungs to employment, as well offering non-stigmatising support in parenting. That is precisely the kind of incremental help that made a difference for Mary. South Tyneside's Families First Parenting Strategy 2008-2011 saw parenting support as the door to a better life for the whole family. In Mary's case, the parenting course leader was also a buddy, encouraging her to attend, removing barriers in the way, encouraging Mary to commit to other courses, to build up her confidence and her basic skills and discover ways of controlling her anger, and improving her own sense of wellbeing (too often neglected in parenting support).

> *"If you are a parent with a 14 year old who smashes the house up on a regular basis what happens to you when your six week course comes to an end?" Margaret Welch, parenting commissioner at the time, said, "We continue to offer support long after a course ends. We aim for more than just making things a little better. This is about the wellbeing of the whole family."*[75]

Early intervention matters. The findings of neuroscience tell us that volatile and erratic parenting and poor childcare impacts negatively. However, what passes for a parenting strategy in this country needs a radical overhaul. If parenting is so central to flourishing and civil communities (and therefore less costly to the public purse) it has to be genuinely universal; it has to invest significantly, even in an era of austerity, in non-parenting support that is crucial especially to families with complex needs. It has to be customised to the family and that includes income; job prospects; their ability to read and write and addressing unmet adult needs such as unresolved loss and trauma in childhood. And we need to move away from the irrelevant notion of "bad" and 'good enough" parenting.

Parenting may be (very temporarily) challenging or constantly profoundly difficult – and that can vary from child to child within the same family. Parenting is not a static set of tools nor is it a science or even a skill; it occupies the most anarchic part of life – love and the lack of it. It is time for a holistic 21st century flexible and organic system of support that makes life better for us all, not, in some cases, infinitely worse.

[74] Lochrie M H.O.P.E (holistic opportunities for health and education) and change for families (2011) not for profit organisation 'Capacity'
[75] Roberts Y, Brophy M and Bacon N (2010) Parenting and wellibeing: knitting families together The Young Foundation

6. Targeting Troubled Families

Rhian Benyon: Family Action

Rhian Beynon assesses the effectiveness of targeting "troubled "families and asks how support might be extended to other struggling families through universal and specialist services.

The summer disturbances in the UK's cities generated intense reflection on the state of family life with the Prime Minister identifying broken and "troubled" families as principal causes of the unrest. He made two commitments to families; a new 'family test' which would be applied to all domestic Government policy in future and a pledge "to turn around the lives of the 120,000 most troubled families in the country" because the Government considered the breakdown of family life as a major contributor to the disturbances.

In asserting that a minority of chaotic families were linked to far-reaching social disorder, the Prime Minister underlined continuity rather than change in public policy. For the scenario of the "families from hell" who have disproportionate impact on their communities was conjured by the Labour Government, although Prime Minister Gordon Brown put smaller numbers on the problem.

Speaking at the 2009 Labour Party Conference, Brown announced that 'Starting now and right across the next Parliament every one of the 50,000 most chaotic families will be part of a family intervention project – with clear rules, and clear punishments if they don't stick to them.'

The Family Intervention Project is a home-based intensive family support service aimed at families with multiple complex needs who also present challenging and offending behaviour to their communities. It is delivered by a key worker for periods of around a year and can be accompanied by sanctions for non-compliance such as eviction and the loss of social housing. Initiated by Labour the programme was already scheduled for roll-out by the Coalition before the summer unrest.

The present Government, also like its predecessor, asserts that a relatively small number of families can generate disproportionately high costs to the tax-payer. The Department of Communities and Local Government recently estimated that around £8 billion a year is spent on the 120,000 families that have multiple complex problems such as poor parenting, anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, and substance misuse.

Both Labour and the Coalition Governments have developed mechanics aimed at cutting the duplication in the spending on local services for families with multiple complex needs. For Labour this was the Total Place programme. And under the Coalition from April this year 28 councils and their partners in 16 areas were put in charge of 'Community Budgets' that pool various strands of Whitehall funding into a single 'local bank account' for tackling social problems around this group of families.
A third response by the Coalition is employment-focussed provision for families with multiple problems which is supported through the DWP's European Social Fund (ESF) Co-financing arrangements. Around £270m for the period 2011-13 will be spent on Work Programme places and helping families with multiple problems.

This seems like generous resource but is it sufficient and can these responses to "troubled" families succeed? And even if they can, is it really so desirable to focus on "troubled" families in this way?

The Community Budgets initiative to pool resources and cuts duplication makes very good sense; and the Family Intervention Project is an evidence-based programme with a reputation for delivery under both Labour and the Coalition. The latest statistics show that that FIPs have more than halved truancy

and school exclusion and domestic violence in the families they have been supporting and reduced child protection issues by around a third.

But interestingly the FIP programme is a small scale intervention relative to the scale of the problem that has been identified. Since the inception of FIP as a programme in 2007 it has worked with just over 9,000 families relative to the 120,000 families that have now been identified. This is not unconnected to its costs: the cost of a FIP working with one of the highest need families, including on drug and alcohol and offending issues, is up to £20,000 a year; and at its cheapest it costs £8, 000 a family.

This investment is excellent value for money for the tax payer relative to the costs of the family's behaviour to social services and police, and priceless for the vulnerable families and children concerned and their communities; but it is unclear whether this level of FIP will be rolled out to all 120,000 families.

If so, the Government could have to find up to £2.4 billion in investment. While £2.222 billion (2011-12) and £2.307 billion (2012-13) of early intervention grant is being allocated to local authorities in England this must also fund universal programmes and activities available to all children, young people and families, including children's centres to which the Government is also strongly committed. It is as yet not clear yet what the impact of the pooled Community Budget monies will be. Private equity investment is a potential option in the future but is currently only in the pilot phase for home-based family support.

And while the ESF monies are welcome these are work-focussed. However, for many of us working with families with multiple complex needs there is a big question mark over whether employment is a realistic goal for them in the short-to-medium term when many of them have mental health, disability and child protection issues, they have skills and literacy issues and unemployment is high.

Since the PM's announcement in the summer the Government admitted that work will not be an option for all 120,000 families with multiple complex needs. So targeting the Work programme and ESF monies at all these families will not be a good use of public resources.
But setting aside the work focussed monies, even if we were to assume that all the funding streams such as the Early Intervention Grants were adequate is it really desirable that the main focus of resources should be the targeting of a FIPs-style intervention at 120,000 families with multiple complex needs?
The FIPs programme is often mistakenly viewed as an early intervention when it is more properly seen as a crisis intervention: that is intervening at a relatively stage when communities cannot ignore families. This is why it is costly; and by itself it will not prevent the creation of further generation of families with multiple complex needs.

But an issue is that the Government's definition of families with multiple complex needs is hazy. Its rhetoric has defined the "troubled" in troubled families as worklessness or criminal behaviour. The reality is that many families with multiple complex needs are neither fecklessly avoiding work nor presenting any anti-social behaviour to their neighbourhoods. They are simply highly disadvantaged and vulnerable adults and children who are not getting the local social and educational services they desperately need.

Some do need intensive home-based family support along FIPs lines but they need it earlier and without the heavy handed sanctions of FIPs. Parents with mental health issues or learning disabilities want support to better self manage their conditions and disabilities and learn techniques so as to manage their households and children's behaviour and reduce family stress.

The good news is that if such help is given early enough it can be cheaper than FIPs. For example independent evaluation has shown that Building Bridges, Family Action's home support services, can be delivered for a cost of around £4000 per family per year while reducing the need for, and costs of the Care Programme Approach for adults and local authority care for children.

But arguably intervening even earlier before multiple complex needs develop is crucial because the new neuroscience is telling us that children's life development is hugely impacted by the first years of life.

For example some parental mental health conditions begin, or get worse, in pregnancy. Up to one in six mothers will become depressed before or after the birth of their child with a likely negative impact on the mother-child bonding relationship and their child's development. Therefore, services which spot and support very isolated mothers-to-be at higher risk of perinatal depression so as to mitigate these risks can potentially do a lot more to avert damage to children than interventions in later life.

Also because they intervene earlier before more costly problems like truancy and children's conduct disorders develop they are also much cheaper than FIPs – Family Action's perinatal service costs just £4,000 a year a family - but currently they are not as well-funded.
The focus on FIPs and the most troubled families also neglect the role that well-funded universally accessed children's centres run along a community hub model can play in identifying disadvantaged children and parents and helping them to prevent problems spiralling by lower levels of multi-faceted support.

Children's centres are a cost-effective way of delivering the mix of support such families need, from help with parenting and child care and play activities to help with benefits, and job searches. Most importantly they give parents chances to participate in the running of services, form informal support networks with their peers, and build forms of social capital which are likely to make their families active community participants, rather than antagonists.

The Government commitments to intervention in families with multiple complex needs and the achievement of FIPs are to be welcomed. However such rhetoric needs to be less punitive and the needs of the families better defined. We also need to see investment in services for a wider range of struggling families which are genuinely early intervention in approach. Worryingly many of these services, including children's centres, are being lost or cut as commissioners are forced to concentrate on their resources on families who present the greatest risks.

There also needs to be more joined-up thinking across Government. The impact of welfare reform which is presently proceeding in Parliament threatens the success of intervention in the most at-risk families. For example if the PM's "troubled" families are kept on the move by decreasing levels of housing benefit and the welfare benefit cap, Community Budgets will find it difficult to deliver and there will be a limit to how far any investment in a FIP or other intervention can strengthen their resilience and promote the stability of communities. Overall linking benefits to the CPI rather than the RPI is likely to hurt the spending of all families who depend on welfare as an element of income amidst the present economic crisis.

As the Prime Minister said "If it hurts families, if it undermines commitment, if it tramples over the values that keeps people together, or stops families from being together, then we shouldn't do it." If his family-friendly approach is to work it must be inclusive of the most troubled families and those who are just struggling, and universal as well as specialist services to families. And it cannot ignore welfare

Part two: Parenting Pressures

Couples, Families and Angry Young People - An Unwelcome Truth?
Susanna Abse (Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships)

Good Parenting; it's not rocket science
Elizabeth Duff (NCT)

Discipline and Parenting
Shaun Bailey (MyGeneration)

The discipline challenge of our age
Anne Marie Carrie (Barnardo's)

Will we ever have family-friendly workplaces?
Liz Gardiner and Jonathan Swan (Working Families)

Settling the debate on childcare
Anand Shukla (Daycare Trust)

Making Work Pay – The Childcare Trap
Chris Wellings (Save the Children)

Childcare, jobs and a minimum standard of living
Chris Goulden (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

Commercialisation and Sexualisation – The pressures on parents
Jeremy Todd, (Family Lives)

What are we worth?
Fleur Dorrell (Mothers' Union)

7. Couples, Families and Angry Young People – An Unwelcome Trust?

Susanna Abse: Chief Executive, Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships

Susanna Abse examines the riots in the context of everyday pressures on family lives and argues that it is by reducing inter-parental conflict and building up resilience that we can have the biggest impact on children.

The disturbances in August 2011 give us all pause for thought but how we make sense of the outbreak of violence and lawlessness depends on our perspective and where we locate ourselves in a society that now has, as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported in 2007, record levels of inequality. The report found that households in already-wealthy areas have tended to become disproportionately wealthier and that many rich people live in areas segregated from the rest of society. What impact does that have for those struggling with limited means and limited opportunities? Have we created a society that displays wealth but doesn't share it? And does this display provoke enormous envy in those who have no access to wealth? In good times jealousy can be a creative spur to compete; in bad times could it be the spur to envious rage and the wholesale violence and robbery we saw in August of this year?

Whilst it is now clear is that the majority of rioters were not making a coherent political protest against issues such as the loss of the educational maintenance allowance, growing youth unemployment or even the alleged brutality of the police, it is also clear that some form of protest *was* being made. Rebelliousness in the form of gang culture and other forms of deviancy is a protest: a protest against the authority of the establishment and of parental figures. And protest can be a healthy response to unfairness and disadvantage but it can also come in a form which is highly self- destructive and harmful to others. This damaging kind of protest is what took place this summer.

A relevant question therefore, is not only why these young people are so angry and aggressive but also why have they so little capacity to channel this anger productively? As a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and Chief Executive of The Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships, I am liable to have a particular point of view and I make no apology for this. No single analysis can provide a satisfactory explanation for the riots and so in this article, I will simply try and shine a light onto a particular area - an area which often remains dark and unexplored.

> "*A commonly held belief, supported by therapists' experience, theories of psychopathology, and systematic research, is that without intervention, troubling or negative intergenerational patterns will be repeated in the next generation. Couple relationships play a central role in maintaining or breaking intergenerational cycles. Furthermore, preventive interventions focused on strengthening the couple relationships of parents of young children have the potential to affect the parents' relationship quality and their children's social, emotional, and academic development."*
> Carolyn Pape Cowan and Philip Cowan, University of California, Berkeley (2005)

Whilst journalists and some politicians talk about "feral children" and lawless families, little light in these tirades is shone into the private world of the family. Notions of neglect, immorality and fecklessness pervade the debate about the riots, vilifying these young people and their parents, leaving little room for compassion or understanding. As a clinician working with families, I am very fortunate to be allowed into this private world.

Bob and Paulina have 3 children. They first separated when their youngest was 3, following a period where Bob had been unemployed and was heavily using drugs and alcohol. Despite their "separation" the couple found it very difficult to stay apart and continued to have a relationship which was fractious, uncertain and often highly conflicted. For many years, Bob would stay with Paulina and the children at the weekends, leaving on Monday mornings for his job as a residential social worker. Sometimes Bob would sleep on the living room sofa, sometimes he would sleep in Paulina's bed; things were up and down and never settled.

Bob and Paulina came to TCCR's Parenting Together service for help with their eldest two children, who were then in their teens. Kristin, 14 and Jacob, 16 were presenting their parents with considerable challenges who were finding it impossible to agree on a strategy and a plan of action for responding to these difficulties. The couple were currently living apart and seemed to have very different attitudes and ideas about what was best for their children.

In their sessions, Bob would complain that Paulina was over controlling and that both Kristin and Jacob wanted to live with him because they hated the way Paulina tried to run their lives. Paulina treated Bob with utter contempt in the consulting room, asserting that he was a useless "waste of space father." She maintained that the children agreed with her on this and that even their youngest Tommy wanted nothing more to do with him.

The therapists worked hard to help the couple focus on their children's needs, paying particular attention to Kristin who had developed an eating disorder and to Jacob who was using cannabis and had dropped out of school following devastating GCSE results.

The links between the wellbeing of children and their environment have been long established but what family factors really affect children? Whilst recognition that economic strain, parental mental ill–health and critical and neglectful parenting have all been cited as primary causes of poor outcomes, less has been said about inter-parental conflict and its crucial impact on the lives of children.

Over the last two decades, convincing evidence has been gathered that shows that inter-parental conflict adversely influences children's psychological development, social competence and academic achievement (Cummings et al, 2000; Harold et al, 2004). Indeed, it is also clear that sustained inter-parental conflict increases risk of anxiety and depression, aggression, hostility and anti-social behaviour in children (Cummings and Davies, 2002; Harold, Shelton, Goeke-Morey and Cummings, 2004). And it is not rocket science to understand that this type of unhappiness is likely to spill over into a couple's capacity to parent, with hostile couples being typically more hostile and aggressive towards their children. (Erel and Berman, 1995; Harold, Fincham, Osborne & Conger, 1997).

Whilst family breakdown is often cited as a key driver of societal problems, the quality of the parental relationship is less to the fore. Children clearly find the dissolution of their parents' relationship painful, but it seems that it is often the many consequences that flow from this life event that are most problematic.

Parents often find their post-separation relationship difficult and whilst adults may have ways to tolerate this, children find it extremely challenging. Evidence suggests that conflict that occurs before, during and after divorce may explain more about children's adaptation to their new circumstances, than the actual event of divorce per se (Kelly, 2000).

Professor Gordon Harold, now at the University of Leicester and a Senior Fellow at TCCR has shown how inter-parental conflict serves as a primer for children's perceptions of other relationships. Similarly TCCR's psychoanalytic methodology also places the parental couple as a prime influence of future relating. If couples are hostile to each other, children may take this way of relating as a template, making conflict resolution difficult in other parts of their life. Feeling threatened by heightened conflict at home, one could say that children learn to fight fire with fire.

Anger and conflict in itself is an inevitable part of human relationships but it is how anger and conflict is managed that is crucial. The creative use of anger and the resolution of conflict allows family life and relationships to thrive and grow, and gives children a model that they can use in their future life at work, study or in their personal relationships. Where conflict is poorly resolved and anger flourishes, children do not learn to manage their dissatisfactions, resentments and disappointments and are more likely to channel these feelings into destructive anti-social behaviour. Our experience of working with families shows us this kind of inter-generational transmission is central to the difficulties couple's face and to the difficulties their children often then display.

> *In their 5th session of therapy, Bob talked about his own experience as a child. Reflecting his and Paulina's experience, his own parents had separated when he was 3. He did not see his father again and his mother re-partnered soon after. He said he had hated his step-father who had beaten and abused him and his mother through his childhood. He said he also understood how Jacob was feeling because he had felt the same way himself at 16, hating authority and school. Paulina said she couldn't really remember anything about her childhood, since she was sent to Birmingham from St Lucia to live with her aunt at the age of 9. She did not feel her aunt wanted her and meeting Bob at 19 had been the first time she had felt "at home" since she had left the Caribbean as a child.*
>
> *The therapist wondered whether these experiences of catastrophic loss on the one hand and conflict and abuse on the other, were central to the difficulties that they and their children were now struggling with.*

Given all this evidence, one might expect that support for couples would be central to those policies aimed at children's welfare and to the practice of those working with parents and children - yet this is not the case. Whilst there has been considerable provision in the form of parenting programmes to train parents to be better carers of their children, provision to strengthen the couple relationship and recognise its impact on children's lives has lagged a long way behind. Some might say that interventions aimed at supporting and strengthening parenting may have little real impact, if the fundamental context in which this parenting takes place is one of conflict or hostility, yet we continue to largely ignore this issue.

Evidence of this blind spot was found in the survey undertaken by the Children's Society in 2009, which asked 30,000 respondents to agree or disagree with the statement – "Parents getting on well is one of the most important factors in raising happy children". Of the 20,000 children asked, 70% of them agreed. Of the 10,000 adults surveyed only 30% of them felt this to be crucial to children's happiness.

Parents, governments, social workers, teachers and therapists frequently share this blind spot, avoiding the painful truth that the adult relationship is central to most children's wellbeing. Painful because the issue often feels so personal and focussing on it can engender great shame and powerlessness in us, as we all struggle with our messy complex personal lives.

There is no doubt in my admittedly partial mind, that the high levels of relationship distress and post-separation conflict that are common in the UK, are part the reason why our children are unhappy and angry. And I believe that the conversion of this unhappiness and anger, fuelled by poverty and lack of opportunity into violent destructiveness is a sign that we are not helping our young people to develop creative ways of protesting and managing their anger and disappointment. Indeed we are teaching them the very opposite.

At TCCR we believe that supporting the adult relationship has the potential to make a real difference to children's' life chances, to social justice and to the emotional and economic wellbeing of the UK. If children's beliefs about relationships are largely derived from their parents' relationship then supporting "parenting" won't be enough to change children's lives. We need to support couples to develop a positive "model" of relating for themselves and crucially for their children. Resolving conflict creatively not only ensures family stability, it also gives children a confidence and belief in a world and a society that is just and fair. And when the world isn't fair it importantly gives children the capacity to protest in ways that can be heard and understood by us all.

8. Good Parenting; it's not rocket science

Elizabeth Duff: Senior Policy Adviser, NCT

Elizabeth Duff explodes the notion that parenting is inherently difficult and highlights the benefits of accessible support and social networks.

Sociologist Frank Furedi has famously said that "Parenting is not difficult. Nuclear physics is difficult".[76] Others would disagree with Furedi. Until recently, one of these would have been Richard Handl, a 31-year-old man from Angelholm, Sweden, who did not think that nuclear physics was difficult at all. He attempted to build a device to split atoms in the kitchen of his own apartment.[77]

Handl easily bought, by mail order, the radioactive isotope tritium and procured some of the synthetic radioactive element americium by dismantling home smoke detectors. In an interview following his efforts becoming public, Handl said: 'The whole thing exploded up in the air … It's probably pretty hard to get it to work'. Asked about the future of his investigations after his equipment was confiscated by police, he promised 'Now I'll keep it at the theoretical level." Because he found it very easy to acquire the components needed for a small nuclear reactor, it seems Richard Handl was led to believe the process would be simple. It could be argued that, because many people find it easy to conceive a child, they assume the activities required to be an effective parent are also easy.

Is parenting difficult? Do parents need more formal education to learn it? Or better networks of support which help them fill the gaps of knowledge and skills? Or is it all just common sense? In the present social and economic circumstances for families in the UK, most parents do *not* see this job as easy. They may well find large parts of it enjoyable, stimulating and fulfilling, but also tiring, bewildering and expensive in either time or money or both. A 2010 survey asking 'what mums need?' found that '*All parents want early support, that is easy to access and near to home as problems develop. Getting help early can mean the difference between resolving a problem such as a child sleeping and eating which if left unresolved can lead to a crisis in confidence and even longer term depression.*[78] Immediately after the birth of a baby, gifts and congratulations pour in and, briefly, the family receives attention from health professionals and others. The clouds of glory can turn quickly to a chilly climate of fatigue, anxiety and isolation.[79]

Above all, the vigorous promotion of 'choice' by recent governments of various political shades has added weight to the traditional burden of parental responsibility by a continuing series of decisions needing to be made about healthcare during pregnancy and birth, infant feeding, childcare, early years education and so on. Friends, neighbours and the ever-present media may offer information and advice but are also often ready to criticise the decisions made and pile feelings of guilt on top of the emotional peaks and troughs already charted during early parenting.

NCT, the UK's largest charity for parents, aims to offer support and information to parents – but not direct advice. We want to make sure parents (and those intending to be parents) have access to a range of high-quality information, are given the opportunity to discuss issues with both peers and trained supporters, and are encouraged to take the time to make their own decisions. Our vision is of parents who are not just informed and supported but confident to go forward after the early days, find their own reliable sources of help and make decisions they feel sure about.

[76] Why parents shouldn't feel guilty if they can't devote time to their toddlers. Viv Groskop, The Observer, Sunday 11 September 2011 http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2011/sep/11/childcare-parenting-neuroscience-nurture
[77] Swedish man arrested after trying to split atoms in his kitchen. The Telegraph Wednesday 03 Aug 2011 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/8679630/Swedish-man-arrested-after-trying-to-split-atoms-in-his-kitchen.html
[78] Local Services for Parents: What Mums Need. Report from Netmums, 4Children and Unite/CPHVA, 2011.
[79] Bhavnani & Newburn . Left to their own devices: The postnatal experiences of 1260 first-time mothers. NCT, 2010.

The principles of good practice in preparing for the birth and in the bringing up of a child have not greatly changed over recent years. What has changed is the *perceived* amount of choice, the extended discussions of what are the best choices - carried out in a blaze of media limelight – and the immense commercial pressures to spend money on goods and services for young children.[80] The range of options available for those who can afford them is indeed dazzling, but there is no evidence that such material wealth promotes wellbeing.[81] At the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, parents on a low income are left even more disappointed and frustrated by not being able to buy advertised goods for their children, and may be prevented by their circumstances from accessing the knowledge that tells them the purchases are neither necessary nor helpful. From manufactured baby foods to complex electronic toys, it's an extra battle that parents don't need - to resist the promotion and the pressure.

NCT, through its huge community of contacts among new parents across the UK, is overwhelmingly aware of the stresses put on parents from pregnancy onward. Our aims are to help parents become the experts in parenting – at least for their own family - and to believe in their own value and their own power. Our antenatal preparation for parents-to-be includes not only teaching about the processes of pregnancy and birth, but a strong focus on relationships, information-gathering, decision-making, negotiation and other areas and skills that are all part of *life*, not just *birth*. The 'transition to parenthood' is a stage of life that the majority of adults go through, as they go through childhood, the teenage years, middle-age and retirement. All of these require learning and adjustment, as social and economic circumstances change. Those who accept they may need to learn, both formally and from others' experience, are usually better placed to benefit from the new phase of life and use their new skills positively.

When parents connect with NCT classes or courses, or get involved with one of our branches of volunteers, it is no surprise to us that they often go on from there to take up other opportunities for contributing to community or society. For many NCT members, it is the first voluntary work they have ever done when they help host a tea-party or run a nearly-new sale. The understanding that they have 'qualified' to do this work simply by becoming a parent helps to add to their self-esteem and brings home the fact that their experiences are of interest and of help to others.

This charity is currently preparing a major drive to raise the profile of parenthood as a positive stage of life and one where investment – of money, time and effort – pays back dividends not only through the increased well-being of the children who are raised by confident parents, but through the later life of the parents themselves who have found the experience of creating a family stimulating and fulfilling. We urge policy-makers to listen to these voices and learn how a higher value placed on parenthood in all its aspects will benefit not only families but the whole of society. NCT will welcome partners in this work and a collaborative initiative, with a joint strategy, to strengthen and widen the dissemination.

We are only too aware of the current debate over the strength of the evidence underpinning the importance of the parent-child bond in the early years. As a charity, we have also contributed to the several independent reviews on early-years action carried out on behalf of the government, such as that by Graham Allen MP. We don't particularly want to join in a skirmish that is making use of the bluntest of weapons and apparently fought between the 'parent-bashers' and the 'neuro-nonsensers'. In our long experience of supporting parents, it has been reinforced over and again that families work out their approaches in different ways according to their inclinations and their circumstances. Almost invariably the children who flourish best are those whose parents have been helped to find the information they want and given support for their own plans, neither left to fend for themselves nor put on the naughty step by the nanny state.

[80] DfE. Letting Children be Children Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood by Reg Bailey. Department for Education, 2011.
[81] UNICEF. Child well-being in the UK, Spain and Sweden: The role of inequality and materialism. UNICEF UK, 2011.

NCT acknowledges the adventurous spirit of Richard Handl, the Swedish home-nuclear-physicist, and we do know that parenting is not rocket science. But we do believe that both these activities are safer and more effective with a bit of learning and a lot of support from social networks who help you to know you are going down the right path for you and the voluntary sector can help do this for parents.

9. Discipline and Parenting

Shaun Bailey: Managing Director and co-founder, MyGeneration

Shaun Bailey argues that, as discipline has been labelled as old-fashioned, authority has shifted from parents towards education and the state. The response now should be a re-emphasis on parental responsibility.

What is the greatest thing a parent can give to a child? A sense of love and security? Yes, certainly. But, just as important (and markedly less popular in today's world) is discipline. The D-word has become a bad word; it has been misunderstood, misaligned and marginalised. People no longer like to talk about discipline. The focus in parenting today is on freedom and discovery instead. This has led to a crisis – a crisis for parents and a crisis for young people. The recent riots illustrate that the crisis is no longer contained. Something must be done. This is the discipline challenge of our age.

What does it mean to discipline your child in today's world? Well, it doesn't mean beating the life out of them, or using fear and control to get your own way. To discipline means to come alongside, to correct someone's behaviour; it means, in effect, to disciple them. To be disciplined means that you are no longer the centre of the universe. You have to let go of what you want and cede your own desires, so that you can learn to prioritise somebody else's needs. This should happen in any well-functioning family. Discipline and altruism are the basis of any civilised society; yet our public discourse today shuns discipline as old-fashioned and anti-personal freedom.

The greatest barrier to discipline in contemporary society is Western culture – which is all about me, me, me, me, me. Young people do not learn to cede their desires, they learn instead to look after number one: "I [the child] am the centre of the universe" and "I am always right". This is closely followed by "You can't tell me anything". Is there anything more terrifying thing for a parent to hear than this? Our culture idolises children and this has not benefitted either children or the rest of society. Parents have been side-lined and, in many ways, have lost the ability to freely discipline their children.

It increasingly feels as though, on our little island, we have allowed discipline structures to be set outside the home. Many parents – especially those from working class and non-liberal backgrounds – feel that successive governments has robbed them of the right to discipline their children in ways they see fit. This is not right. Minor incidences of anti-social behaviour are today more likely to be addressed by the police and courts, rather than parents. The previous government took this responsibility away from parents and gave it to institutions. Yet an institution can never replace a human being; an institution cannot replace a parent.

The government cannot create quasi-parental institutions; this approach simply does not work. But the government can and should set the tone and direction of public discourse surrounding parenting and discipline. It must place legal buffers around the family unit that will protect children from the extremes of neglect and indulgence. And there is a role for relevant institutions too, not as quasi-parents but as a back-up, where needed. They must be given the legal framework to administer authority where needed; they must be allowed to be pro-parents and to work in partnership with parents. Schools should be able to legally request parents' attendance at parents' evenings. Young offenders should be required to pursue their education whilst in prison. And parents should be held responsible for any criminal behaviour committed by their children – involvement at every stage of the journey through the criminal justice system by parents should become mandatory. Each of these measures will reinforce adult authority in contexts where this has been systematically eroded. They will allow parents, where necessary, to work with institutions to enable the effective discipline of children.

The previous government created a context in which many, many people think it is someone else's job to discipline their child. It is the job of the school or the police or the youth club. Parents cannot be allowed to abdicate responsibility for disciplining their children, nor should they be prevented from doing so. We need to stop making excuses for the bad behaviour of young people and start creating a context where discipline is once again both acceptable and essential. We must no longer allow moral relativity, lack of responsibility and lack of solid family structures to dictate the discipline agenda. This government needs to change the direction of this debate, moving towards conversations that emphasise discipline and parental responsibility. Only after parents and communities are allowed once again to discipline children, will we begin to see a real change – a change that is good for parents, for children, and for wider society.

10. The discipline challenge of our age

Anne Marie Carrie: Chief Executive, Barnardo's

Anne Marie Carrie argues that we need to address the root causes of bad behaviour, not just the symptoms, and that this requires intensive support for families alongside addressing inequality

Few would dispute that discipline is an important element in raising children to become well-adjusted adults. However, after the riots of this summer, the debate rages about what sort of discipline children need, and whose responsibility it is to administer it.

The common view is that poor parenting at home and a lack of discipline at school is the culprit, and that cracking down on bad behaviour is the best way to nip things in the bud. But if the solution were so simple, then surely all children would already be perfectly mannered, and the multi-million pound industry peddling books and TV programmes with advice on child rearing to worried parents would go out of business overnight?

As the UK's largest provider of parenting, family and support services in the UK, Barnardo's knows a thing or two about what works with children. What we have learnt is that the best way to nurture good behaviour is to intervene early and support vulnerable families to help encourage confident, positive parenting.

In order to do this, Barnardo's staff work in partnership with education, health and therapeutic services, the police, youth offending teams and local authorities. We provide a range of support services including: one-to-one support to children and young people in school; drop in sessions for parents, and; home visits to support families.

We know from our experience that what works best in tackling the most difficult cases of discipline are whole family approaches to parenting and discipline, such as our schools parents support workers, Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) and intensive fostering schemes. Indeed, the evidence bears this out – recent government evaluation of FIPs shows that anti-social behaviour and truanting stopped in around half of the families where specialist intervention took place.

Which is why we have raised concerns that the government's approach toward discipline in schools is far too narrow. Moreover, the proposals to use force to search a child or erasing data from mobile phones may be counterproductive and disproportionate. For this reason, Barnardo's is calling on the Government to remove some of the more extreme new discipline powers from the Education Bill.

Our recent report *'Tough love, not get tough: responsive approaches to improving behaviour in schools'* argues that the new discipline guidelines are too simplistic and may even risk making discipline problems worse. A crack down only on the symptoms of children's bad behaviour fails to address the root causes, which all too often lie in a challenging home life.

Our research shows that intervening with families to tackle bad behaviour is more effective than authoritarian punishments alone. After all, the whole purpose of disciplining a child at school should be to get them to a point where they are able to turn up on time, be in a classroom and learn.

One child who benefited from a Barnardo's family support service was Freddie, aged seven, who was often late or absent from school and struggled to complete homework. Project staff undertook home visits to discuss the importance of regular attendance with both Freddie and his family. They also contributed to school meetings monitoring Freddie's attendance and academic progress. Freddie's

attendance levels, attitude and learning all improved significantly as a result of the holistic support he received.

The best approaches to discipline help children and young people learn to manage their own behaviour. Tough love might include referring parents for parenting classes, or helping them to restore family routines and set clear boundaries for behaviour when these have been disrupted.

One way to do this is through intensive family support, and Barnardo's has been piloting a new initiative to help young families to develop their parental skills. This new service offers a flexible package of support to young parents with multiple and complex needs, for example drug and alcohol problems. Many of these young parents will have themselves experienced poor parenting, abuse or neglect and will be limited in their understanding of their child's needs.

This tailored programme includes support at evenings and weekends when young parents can be most isolated and their children are most vulnerable. Additionally a small number of families who are most at risk can access short-term foster care which will focus on whole-family approaches and will provide a safe, protective environment for parents to learn about the emotional and practical skills needed to care for a young baby.

We will always argue that focusing on extremes of bad behaviour and using harsh punishments is tackling the problem far too late. Instead we must ensure that we focus on supporting families at an early stage to prevent their children from developing discipline problems.
If the government is serious about tackling discipline problems then it must also be serious about tackling inequality in childhood. We need to help parents be the best parents they can and that means supporting families, not just disciplining children.

The voluntary and statutory sector must continue to work together to establish intensive multi-agency support for families to help them deal with issues early on. Every parent knows there is no quick fix, no magic spell to transform children who throw temper tantrums or refuse to do as they are told. Good parenting and good discipline requires time, patience, love – and boundaries.

11. Will we ever have family-friendly workplaces?

Liz Gardiner: Working Families
Jonathan Swan: Working Families

Liz and Johathan analyse the pressures facing those juggling employment and parenting. They argue that children will continue to be seen as an impediment to labour force participation until we reconsider our definition of a family friendly economy

> *"The unsolved conundrum of child care – the elephant in the living room that we are so accustomed to that we walk around it unseeing – is that the needs of children have not changed but their societies have."* [82]

The difficulties of combining paid employment and childcare are not new, but they may be entering a new phase. While many families - particularly those on low incomes - have always had two parents in work, the male-breadwinner, female-carer model appears to be in transition. Assumptions that the mother must be the carer have been challenged over recent years as young women's educational achievement and earning potential matches young men's. More men are becoming involved in hands-on childcare. The Government is consulting on a very flexible approach to parents taking leave - in theory enabling real choice between families as to who works and who cares. But is the rhetoric of new-model parenting matched by a real change in the workplace?

On the positive side, there are many opportunities to work flexibly, and statutory rights make part time working easier to achieve. Many employers have allowed flexible working to spread across their organisations, with the most enlightened allowing alternative models of work right up to the top levels. A recent report estimates that 91 per cent of organisations offer some kind of flexible working.[83]

On the negative side, the most common arrangement for a working family remains one full time worker (most commonly the father) with the second parent working part-time, combining paid work and childcare. Instead of flexible working rights freeing up time for both parents to work and care, flexible working - to date - has been seen as a means of keeping women in the labour market. There remains an underlying assumption that it is the mother who needs to find a balance.

There are clear barriers to change. Fathers of young children work some of the longest hours in the EU; parents spend more on childcare in the UK than in any other OECD country[84]; many women have to take jobs lower than their skill set allows simply to find a job that will allow them to combine caring and paid work; and the recession has made employers and employees wary of working differently.

The opening quote, therefore, in the light of the barriers and attempts to overcome them, implies that there is a deeper underlying issue with the place that work has in our lives, and the way that it is arranged. These deep-seated routines and assumptions are significant obstacles through which parents must find a way if they are to successfully combine paid work and family life. For fathers, in particular, this balance is elusive.

[82] Penelope Leach in Tomorrow's World, *Working Families (2009)*
[83] Reinventing the Workplace, *Demos* (2011)
[84] Annual Childcare Costs Survet, *Daycare Trust* (2011)

A particular challenge is the way that work is organised. Although flexible working is available, and is relatively well-supported by many employers, the basis of flexible working is still one of exception, where an employee works in a way that is 'non-standard', an anomaly. The ideal of the always-available employee, unencumbered by caring responsibilities, has deep roots.

The view of parenting, that it is a normal part of the lifecourse or even a social good, is not something that sits easily with the way work is organised. In fact, any type of caring which necessitates a different way of working is seen as disruptive. Therefore, as welcome as policy developments are within organisations, and however well they are driven and supported by legislation, the problem of parents fully engaging with their work and fulfilling their caring responsibilities at the same time will persist.

At the same time, parenting skills are increasingly under the spotlight. As politicians move from lone mothers to absent fathers as contributors to - or even the causes of - societal ills, it is time to pause and recognise that families need both time and money to thrive. With 33 per cent of parents saying that the demands of work mean that they do not have time to sit down and eat a meal as a family more than once or twice a week, we should take a good look at our expectations of parents.[85]

For a start we need to challenge the unrealistic expectations about how people can work. For many families in low paid work, both parents need to hold down several jobs equating to many hours at work simply to meet the bills. The resulting exhaustion and shift-parenting leaves little time for families to spend together: financial poverty is replaced with time poverty. But at all levels of paid work, problems persist.

Often inefficient and time-wasting ways of working are overvalued and rewarded, obscuring the effectiveness of alternative working practices. Long hours and presenteeism don't occur by chance; these are ways of working which obtain the best rewards (if not results), win the approval of managers and ensure career progression. As Lewis and Rapoport have observed:

> *"The notion of the ideal worker who can "give" more and more time to work implies that working time tends to be valued more than time for families and communities, by employers and perhaps more widely. There is also visible and invisible time in the workplace. For example, time at work in the early morning is often valued less than time spent at work late into the evening. Those who use flexitime or informal flexibility to come in to work very early and leave early, often to collect children from school, report that they are often undervalued or regarded as part-timers, while those who come in later but work late and call late meetings, are considered to be highly committed."* [86]

This phenomenon of reward and penalty for full time versus flexible workers appears to be deeply ingrained within organisational DNA. New research[87] shows that even when monitoring for bias, many employers still give a larger proportion of the top performance grades to full time rather than flexible workers, despite line manager assertions that they fully value their team members who work flexibly.

The question of who does the parenting is one which is largely shaped by the demands and requirements of work. Men do less childcare, less hands-on parenting, than women. Men look across at the compromises that women make with part time jobs and careers, and don't want, or can't afford, to make similar changes.
In many discussions about work-life balance, men's full time work is accepted as part of an immutable background for the difficult work-life compromises that women must make as they shoulder the bulk of the responsibility of caring for children. The working patterns of men are largely ignored. Instead we try to regulate business and create new entitlements for women, to make their lives easier with the effect that every time we do this, without looking at men at the same time, women become more expensive in the workplace relative to men, and things worsen for them.

[85] Work and Relationships, *Working Families* (forthcoming 2011)
[86] Tomorrow's World, *ibid*
[87] Top Employers for Working Families Benchmark and Awards, *Working Families* (forthcoming, 2011)

For parenting to become easier in relation to work, a more equitable sharing of the childcare needs to become a realistic option. Children still need parental time, but families struggle with both financial and time pressures of work. While childcare costs remain high and women weigh their part-time incomes against those costs, joint parenting remains uneconomic. Engaging fathers in delivering parenting may need more than exhortation from politicians: it needs a new look at the way work is organised. The value of children now for a properly functioning future society also needs to be re-stated: our future workforce is educated and shaped by today's
parents. Trying to fit families into economy-friendly shaped jobs carries with it a danger that children continue to be seen as an impediment to labour force participation. There needs to be a rebalancing of goals to recognise the benefits to families - and to the wider community - of providing time for good parenting.

12. Settling the debate on childcare

Anand Shukla: Chief Executive, Daycare Trust

Anand Shukla welcomes the glare on parenthood if it stops blaming and bewildering parents and helps to improve the quality and take up of child care and build a more family-friendly society

The current media and political glare on parents is helpful in that it brings some much needed attention on relieving the pressures faced by families and the barriers to a more family-friendly society. However, as ever, it is dominated by headlines blaming parents and this is something we observe too often. For example, despite a rapid increase in the use of formal childcare over the last few decades, driven by higher rates of female employment and a cross-party political consensus on the importance of early years services, the debate about the impact of the early use of daycare on young children continues to rear its head on a regular basis. When this happens, it is all too often shrouded in scare-mongering media headlines, which proclaim that the latest piece of research shows definitively that working mothers (for it is almost always focused on mothers) cause long-term damage to their babies and toddlers by using a nursery. Such headlines can leave working mothers feeling tormented and guilty.

For parents, deciding what is in the best interests of their child and the rest of the family can be bewildering. This is a stressful period as parents work out how they will juggle family life and work, and how to share care between them. Many parents find it very difficult to calculate what is in the best interests of the whole family – emotionally, educationally, socially and financially. Few feel that they have made the perfect choice; rather they make decisions based on their circumstances and the resources available to them.

From our experience of working with parents for 25 years, we know that no parent makes a decision about childcare lightly. Choosing childcare is one of the most important decisions that parents make in the early years of their child's life. They make this decision with the safety, comfort and development needs of their child taking priority. But the reality of family life in 21st century Britain is often one where both parents are in employment, and our modern childcare system must support this.

Finding and paying for childcare is not easy. Despite local authorities having a legal duty to ensure sufficient childcare is available in their local area, many families still struggle to find provision that is local, affordable and of high quality. For too many on low and middle incomes, work simply does not pay, because childcare costs are so high. This fact was underlined clearly in a recent Save the Children and Daycare Trust survey of 4,000 parents across Britain. Parents told us that they had got into debt and had to cut back on food and household bills in order to pay for childcare. Yet still they told us that they wanted to work, even though for many it wasn't economically viable once the cost of childcare was taken into account. The Government's well publicised welfare reform plans are intended to ensure that work always pays, but to date we are not convinced that this will be the case for those with even moderate childcare costs.

Yet work is a crucial part of most parents' ambitions and identity. There is also ample evidence that parental employment is good for children. It is the most successful route by which to raise children out of poverty, and has benefits for parents' health and self-esteem. This will benefit children not only in their early years but in their later life, lifting them from the poverty trap.

Nursery education also benefits children, particularly if it is high quality. There is a substantial body of research on the long-term positive impacts on early childhood education. These benefits range from improved language skills and increasing educational achievement in children's later school careers. Research shows that children who attend a nursery are better prepared for school and usually have

better social skills such as such as cooperation with peers – skills which are essential to a child's future happiness and good mental health. Furthermore, there are health benefits that can be directly gleaned from attending a nursery: from early establishment of healthy behaviours such as the consumption of fruit and vegetables to increased uptake of immunisation and increased penetration of child safety messages. [88]

The Government clearly agrees that children benefit from high quality nursery provision. Even in this austere time of spending cuts and savings, the Department for Education is investing significantly in formal childcare for young children as part of their drive to support families in the foundation years. Shortly after taking office in 2010, the Government went ahead with Labour's planned increase to 15 hours per week of the free early education entitlement for three and four year olds, and announced an extension of the entitlement to the 20 per cent most disadvantaged two year olds from 2013.

Some academics have expressed concerns about the use of group care for such young children, arguing that there may be negative impacts on children of long hours spent in daycare. These critiques of daycare fall into two camps: medical and developmental. There has been a spate of recent media articles[89] arguing that daycare increases levels of the stress hormone cortisol in young children, although these assertions have been refuted by a growing number of scientists[90].

A more substantial body of criticism has come from a number of developmental psychologists who argue that long hours in daycare are associated with increased behavioural problems when children reach primary schools. These behavioural problems appear to be greater where daycare is of low quality and where staff turnover in nurseries is high.[91]

[88] For example Melhuish, E. (2004), 'A literature review of the impact of early years provision upon young children, with emphasis given to children from disadvantaged backgrounds', *Report to the Comptroller and Auditor General*, London: National Audit Office (available online on www.nao.gov.uk) and Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B. and Elliot, K. (2002) 'The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project technical paper 8b – Measuring the Impact of Pre-School on Children's Social/Behavioural Development over the Pre-School Period', DfES/Institute of Education, University of London, London

[89] See for example http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2036266/Putting-baby-nursery-raise-heart-disease-risk-sends-stress-levels-soaring.html

[90] http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/sep/23/bad-science-ben-goldacre

[91] Belsky, J., Burchinal, M., McCarthy, K., Vandell, D., Clarke-Stewart, K. and Owen, M. (2007) 'Are there long-term effects of early childcare?' *Child Development*, 78: 681–701

13 Making Work Pay – The Childcare Trap

Chris Wellings: UK Head of Policy, Save the Children

Save the Children argue that affordable childcare is a key strand of family and parenting policy essential for meeting the goals of maximising family incomes, making work pay and in turn tackling child poverty.

The next stage of parenting policy must recognise the impact of childcare costs on families. We want to see high-quality and affordable childcare more widely-available. Parents in the UK face some of the highest childcare costs in the world. This affects their ability to work, train and study, as well as forcing families to make difficult financial choices. In spring 2011 Save the Children and Daycare Trust surveyed more than 4,000 parents to explore their views on access to childcare and the impact of childcare costs on family incomes and work incentives.

The impact of childcare costs on family finances and employment

The survey results showed that high childcare costs place considerable strain on most families and that 41% of respondents believed they were on a par with their mortgage or rent. The impact on family finances appeared to be greatest for those on low incomes. Eight out of ten parents living in severe poverty reported that cost was a barrier to accessing childcare; 61% had struggled meeting childcare costs compared with around a third of parents on higher incomes (37%). Parents in severe poverty were more likely to have cut back on food and household bills to pay for childcare costs than families on higher incomes and the cost of childcare had caused a third of parents in severe poverty to get into debt (compared to less than a quarter of parents living on higher incomes).

The survey also showed that high childcare costs were undermining the government's laudable aim to make work pay by reducing the financial gains from employment for many families. The majority of respondents in severe poverty (58%) said they were no better-off working and paying for childcare, compared to just 19% of those with family incomes over £30,000. Due to difficulties accessing childcare a quarter of parents in severe poverty (who responded to the survey) had given up work, a third had turned down a job, and a quarter had not been able to take up education or training.

Finally the survey showed the challenges with high childcare costs faced by larger families. 59% of families with three or more children who took part in our survey said they had experienced difficulties with childcare costs; this drops to 42% of families with just one child. Families with three or more children were more than twice as likely to have cut back on after-school activities in order to meet childcare costs as those with one child.

Childcare costs, Working Tax Credit and the Universal Credit

In April 2011, the Coalition government reduced the amount of childcare costs that could be claimed through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, so parents could only claim 70% (as opposed to 80%) of childcare costs. This will mean an average loss of over £500 per year for the half million families who receive this support, and up to £1,500 for families receiving the maximum help.

Under Universal Credit, which replaces many benefits and tax credits from 2013, funding for childcare will be maintained (at a fixed budget of £2 billion per annum by 2014 / 15) but eligibility will be extended to include parents working fewer than 16 hours per week. The inclusion of those engaged in mini-jobs is welcome, but it means that less help will be available to support parents working longer hours. The government's decision on how to structure and fund childcare support under Universal Credit is therefore vital. Two options have been put forward - firstly continuing to cover 70% of childcare costs with maximum weekly limits of £125 for one child and £210 for two or more children; secondly covering 80% of costs with limits of £100 for one child and £150 for two or more children.

The poorest families would be affected most severely by both these options. Modelling from the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (August 2011), commissioned by Save the Children, shows that a single parent with two children working full-time on £15,000 per year and with childcare costs of £232.40 per week would be £59.49 worse off each week under Universal Credit (largely because of reductions in childcare support). Department for Work and Pensions modelling (2011) shows that more than a quarter of a million families will see their entitlement reduced under these options including many families who can currently receive up to 95.5% of childcare costs through housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Policy recommendations

The views of parents who responded to our survey suggest that in order to meet the goals of maximising family incomes, making work pay and in turn tackling child poverty, childcare must become more affordable to parents on the lowest incomes. We welcome the government's recent announcement of £300 million to extend support for childcare costs to those working under 16 hours. They now need to ensure a minimum of 80% of childcare costs are covered under Universal Credit up to current weekly limits. Covering this level of support for those working more than 16 hours per week would cost an extra £405 million per annum. This would be an important step forward for parents and should be a key strand of family and parenting policy.

14. Childcare, jobs and a minimum standard of living

Chris Goulden: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Chris Goulden argues that the design of support for childcare costs could make or break the Government's welfare reforms for families and for their goals on child poverty over the next few years.

As the focus on a minority of troubled families intensifies, the economic pressures bearing down on the majority of families are in danger of being forgotten. This will not last because as cuts to Tax Credits start to be felt and the cost of paying someone to care for your children continues to increase, childcare will rise up the agenda as the hottest parenting issue. Indeed, Save the Children and the Daycare Trust published a new survey[92] recently suggesting that working parents in Britain are spending nearly *one-third* of their income on childcare.

The costs of childcare are also a key feature of the Minimum Income Standard for the UK[93] that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) publishes each year. This standard is based on what ordinary members of the public, gathered together in a series of focus groups, say we all need for a minimum acceptable standard of living. The standard covers food, clothing, household and personal goods and services, bills, rent and so on. A large component of the budget is childcare for working lone parents or for couples who both have jobs.

The minimum budgets are developed for all the major family types, ranging from a single, childless adult to families with up to four children and also for single and couple pensioners. Each of the budgets is determined by people with those same demographic characteristics; so, for example, the items and activities for families are set and checked by parents. The budgets are also validated by experts so that they meet minimum standards for nutrition from food and warmth in the home, for example.

Childcare costs in the minimum income standard are based on the assumption that parents are in full-time employment. The rationale for this decision among the focus groups was that it allowed parents the resources to make the choice whether to use formal childcare or not. The amount of childcare needed varied by the age of the children. For infants and pre-school aged children, groups agreed 50 hours per week (including time needed for commuting, picking up and dropping off), excluding annual leave. For younger school-aged children, the standard provides for after-school plus full-time childcare in the school holidays. For older secondary school children, there is only provision for structured activities during summer holidays.

On the back of these assumptions, the latest data from the Minimum Income Standard research confirms how much of a squeeze there is on low income working families:

- From April 2011, families need to typically earn over 20% more than they did just one year ago to achieve the same minimum standard of living. This is not just a result of cutting Childcare Tax Credits from 80 to 70% of the cost of childcare. The combined effect of other cuts or freezes to family benefits and continuing high rates of inflation have all contributed.
- A family of four with two earners and using childcare needs £36,800 a year to reach the minimum standard.
- A lone parent needs £18,200 a year to reach the minimum standard of living.

[92] http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/Childcare-costs-pushing-kids-into-poverty.htm
[93] http://www.jrf.org.uk/focus-issue/minimum-income-standards

- Last year, figures for families and lone parents were £29,700 and £12,500, respectively – lone parents are hit particularly badly because they lose housing benefit as their earnings requirements rise as well as tax credits.

The hourly wages that these figures imply are much higher than current levels of the minimum wage or even many low wage jobs. So, in order for working poverty in general, as well as child poverty, to reduce in the future, we need a much stronger focus on job quality in addition to job creation. This entails a parallel concentration on retention and progression in work as well as on welfare to work policy. This would involve stimulating better quality part-time jobs and work that is more contractually secure and better paid.

Policies and incentives are needed that allow businesses to develop their staff, create progression routes and use the skills that their staff gain. The benefits system needs to support employers in these goals for working parents. At the time of writing, we are still waiting for the final design of help with childcare costs in Universal Credit, due to begin from October 2013. The way this is implemented could make or break the Government's welfare reforms for families and their goals on child poverty and social mobility. The lesson is that what seem like small changes to the benefits system can have a massive impact on the living standards and decisions of families in combination.

15. Commercialisation and Sexualisation – pressures on parents

Jeremy Todd: Family Lives

Jeremy Todd examines the pressures on modern parents including technological advances and an increasingly commercialised world. He argues that increased efforts are required to build the resilience of young people and the confidence of parents to talk to their children.

The commercialisation of childhood is a topic that has gained traction with policy makers over recent years, and is one of the major pillars of work that the cross Government taskforce on childhood announced by the Deputy Prime Minister last year is focusing on. A review commissioned by the Prime Minister and led by Reg Bailey published its findings in June this year, making a series of recommendations under the banner "letting children be children". The Bailey review built on previous reviews including Professor Tanya Byron's review "Safer Children in a Digital World", Dr Linda Papadopoulos' review on the Sexualisation of Young People and Professor David Buckingham's work on sexualised goods aimed at children. The recommendations include measures which aim to make business more accountable giving Government responsibility for checking on progress regularly.

The Bailey Review's recommendations include important steps that must be taken by businesses' and others to reform practice, but there is more that can be done to support parents to take an active role in mediating their child's access to inappropriate media and influences.

Pressures of Modern Parenting

Family Lives recognises the challenges many parents face in balancing their children's access and exposure to commercial pressures and the fast pace of modern society and technology. In a 2010 survey on Family Life completed by visitors to Family Lives' website 70% of respondents felt that parenting today is harder than when they were children, and 76% found parenting either harder, or much harder than they expected. This finding was backed up by a nationwide survey in June 2011, conducted by Vision Critical on behalf of Family Lives and Drinkaware, which found that three quarters (74%) of parents think the issues their children face today are more serious than the issues they faced at the same age. Developments in technology and a society in which over the years sexual permissiveness has increased contribute to giving parents a complex job in keeping their children safe. Technology plays a major role in exposing children to influences outside of their parent's control. In a June 2011 survey of young people by Family Lives and Drinkaware, 12% of 10-12 year olds and 25% of 13-15 year olds reported that they had seen sexually explicit images on the internet. Family Lives has worked to support many families where early sexualisation has caused difficulties.

Elena's story

Elena, a mother of two, came to Family Lives for Intensive Telephone Support after a very traumatic few months. Her youngest daughter, 14 year old Charlie, was a shy girl who struggled to fit in socially at school and felt very much on the sidelines of her friendship group. Elena was shocked to discover that Charlie had been regularly accessing an internet chat site where she had been groomed for online sex. It was in the aftermath of this discovery that she rang Family Lives. She was struggling to deal with Charlie's behaviour at home- she was very argumentative and was increasingly closed off from her parents. Moreover, Elena was particularly concerned that her daughter, at such a vulnerable age, had been exposed to an extreme and debasing representation of sexuality, and feared that her daughter felt this type of interaction was 'normal'.

Elena wanted to develop more awareness of her daughter's needs, and be able to support her through what was a difficult time for the whole family. Through individual telephone sessions Elena explored strategies to develop assertive communication between herself and her daughter. She learnt strategies to deal with conflict, and noted by the end of the sessions that she often reflected on a given situation before reacting, preventing things from escalating out of control. At the same time, Elena used new parenting techniques to ensure that she maintained clear boundaries within her home. By dealing with conflict effectively, Elena had more time to build her daughter's self-esteem, and to reassure her that she was not there to judge, but to understand. Our parent support advisor worked with Elena to deal not only with the significance of her daughter's trauma, but with Elena's own feelings of guilt, her partner's reluctance to engage, and the effect these challenging issues were having on her siblings.

Technology – Keeping Children Safe online

In a survey by Family Lives and Drinkaware in June 2011, 86% of parents feel increased technological exposure is influencing their children growing up too quickly. The survey exposed real gaps in parents' confidence around technology and the way their children interact with the cyber world. 54% of parents have never heard of the term 'sexting', despite its increasing prevalence in schools and amongst young people. Alarmingly, despite several years of messages to parents about the importance of not allowing unsupervised access to technology in a child's bedroom, half of 10-12 year olds we surveyed have unsupervised access to a computer in their bedroom. This indicates that the messages about how to keep children safe online are not filtering through to parents. It is clear that there is more work to do, both to ensure that all parents hear the advice about the simple ways to help keep their children safe online, but also to offer more advanced training for parents to increase their confidence around interventions such as parental controls.

Policy Interventions

The commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood is not a policy area with simple quick win solutions. It is neither possible, nor desirable to turn back time and it is too simplistic to view the past as an age of innocence. Instead, policy solutions must focus on supporting parents to have open and frank conversations with their children about what they are seeing and hearing, and empowering parents to mediate their children's access to media and items in the commercial world that they feel are inappropriate. There is also a significant role for policy makers to think about how to up-skill those parents who feel out of their depth with the technology their children are using.

Another important policy approach that remains largely unexplored is building resilience in children by educating them about the way that the commercial world works, the psychology of advertising and raising their awareness about sexualised gender roles and bullying that may seem to be part of the wallpaper of their lives. Teen Boundaries UK, part of Family Lives is a charity that delivers workshops to school children to combat sexual bullying. The programme consists of five lessons covering the causes and effects of early sexualisation (media influences, popularity mechanisms and how they affect behaviour within peer groups); the use of sexualised language and bullying; the effect of the cyber world; Sexting/Internet (porn-fantasy and reality) and how it adds to the issues of sexualised bullying; the use of FormSpring and FaceBook in Cyber Bullying; positive gender relationships (including domestic violence) abuse in relationships; sexual violence, safety tips and awareness, reporting and further help, individual responsibility in stopping sexual violence.

Conclusion

There are many new issues that face parents when trying to keep their children safe from harm largely made more challenging by the advent of new technologies which despite their many advantages also bring risks for young people and families. This topic is attracting interest from Policy makers, with a specific commitment to address the issue in the Coalition agreement published after the new Government took power last year. It is clear that despite the implementation of many of the recommendations from the 2008 Byron review, many messages have not filtered through to parents to help them keep their children safe online. More must be done in this area – Elena's story points to the damage that can be caused if families don't manage this risk adequately, and the many posts on Family Lives' message boards about concerns over their child's internet usage reinforce this.

Empowering parents to help their children manage the influence of new technology and the commercial world is one important policy avenue to explore, and another is building resilience amongst children and young people by helping raise their awareness and understanding of how to keep themselves safe and manage the risks they may face. Whilst Government and companies must take their share of responsibility for allowing children to be children, parents and young people themselves are the key to mediating against the potentially harmful impacts of commercialisation and sexualisation in modern society.

16. What are we worth?

Fleur Dorrell: Head of Faith & Policy, Mothers' Union

Fleur Dorrell argues that greater materialism inevitably leads to dissatisfaction and sets out the need to restore the self-worth of families by tackling the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood.

The commercialism of childhood was illustrated so dramatically by the rampant looting of high street shops observed in the riots, but evidence that something was going wrong was available well before the disturbing events of the summer. In August 2010 Mothers' Union launched its *Bye Buy Childhood* Campaign[94] attempting to tackle what we have seen as a steady upsurge in the pressures of commercialisation and sexualisation driving the behaviours of young people and their families. The campaign had three aims: to encourage parents and the wider family to think about the influence of commercialisation within the home; to engage with the commercial world and take positive action to challenge instances of inappropriate marketing or selling; to hold the UK Government accountable on the pledges made to address the commercialisation and sexualisation of children. Since then, the Government has commissioned an independent Review on the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood, chaired by Mothers' Union's Chief Executive Reg Bailey. It was published in June and made fourteen recommendations.[95]

So why are we worried? Childhood is a marketing opportunity now worth £99 billion in the UK.[96] With the constant and rapid development of new media marketers can reach children wherever they are to persuade them to consume – whether through celebrity endorsement on TV, internet cookies or peer to peer marketing. This 'commercialisation of childhood' has attracted widespread concern, from those who perceive a loss of childhood innocence to those who object to children being groomed for a lifetime of consumer obsession. Three fifths of parents we surveyed believe that advertising can be harmful to them.[97] Yet this is not just a problem for our children, as adults we are equally seduced and commercialised in many aspects of our lives and therefore, do not always provide a consistent role model to those around us. When we lose our ability to discern wisely what we do, or do not, want or need, it becomes easy to replace 'being' with 'having'. Or as the Graphic Designer, Jonathan Barnbrook says: *once we branded our slaves, now we are slaves to our brands.*

The commercial world can play a very positive and exciting part in children's lives when it is educative and fun, when it enables participation and belonging, but higher media consumption is linked with greater materialism and inevitable dissatisfaction, particularly when children can't have the same things as their friends or lose self-confidence through a perceived negative body image. Parents regularly encounter pester power and can feel overwhelmed in making the right decisions for their children's wellbeing and happiness. Saying 'no' to your children ought to be straightforward yet parents can also experience competitiveness from fellow parents or are undermined if other parents and relatives relax all the rules they have carefully established with their own family. It is a delicate balance.

The media's preoccupation with physical appearance and sexualized imagery are also troubling young people. Girls in the UK find it the hardest to feel attractive when bombarded with superficial media and marketing 'ideals of beauty'. The sex sells approach appeals to the most basic instincts and the most hidden desires but can distort our understanding of lasting, respectful relationships and of our self-worth, at an early age.

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[94] For further information about the Campaign, Report and resources go to www.byebuychildhood.org
[95] https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM%208078
[96] Mayo and Nairn, Consumer Kids: How Big Business is Grooming Our Children for Profit, Constable, 2009.
[97] Mothers' Union, Bye Buy Childhood: A Report into the Commercialisation of Childhood, 2010.

So is life in the UK really characterised by a preoccupation with the consumption of material goods? Do we find ourselves facing a crisis of meaning both individually and collectively? This isn't just about how children behave or what they crave, adults are equally seduced and commercialised yet remain mystified by their children's pestering for the latest products. Peer pressure affects all age-groups therefore, resilience and confidence to tackle it should be a priority in the home and in the school. When a child sees it's Mum or Dad spending hours on their mobiles, laptops or in buying the latest household gadgets, it isn't surprising why children grow up believing that buying is central to their wellbeing and identity?

The immediacy of this materialism not only leads to dissatisfaction and competitiveness amongst children who are pressured into being consumers from early on but stifles other development at a critical age. The more time children spend in isolation online or on their gadgets, the less time they spend in learning face to face social skills with their peers and with other generations; they spend less time being physically active and healthy resulting in low self-esteem, body image issues and lack of confidence. Children are hiding behind consumption because too often their parents simply aren't there to support them when they need them most.

Mothers' Union is challenging our culture through parental awareness, parliamentary lobbying and calling for tighter regulations in the music, retail, marketing and advertising industries. We believe that our children's self-image and sexuality should be nurtured from within and not imposed from outside, they are to be cherished not exploited.

So what can you do? First, we can all reflect on our consumer habits, and try to make changes where commercialisation or sexualisation is affecting both our wellbeing and that of those who create the products we buy. Mothers' Union has produced a simple *Bye Buy Test* to help children and adults think about the choices they make when shopping.[98] Second, challenge the manufacturing, marketing and retail industries to take an ethical approach to selling to children; especially in relation to sexualised clothing and products inappropriate for that age, or in promoting products sexually even when they themselves are not sexual in nature. Third, demand that the Coalition Government prohibits the 'sex sells' approach being aimed at children under 16 and will prevent children from being exposed to sexualised media particularly through on-street advertising, accessibility to inappropriate content on the internet and internet enabled devices, and in the music industry where currently, music DVDs (unlike films) are not age restricted.[99]

We sell ourselves short when we do not think for ourselves, about what is legitimate, manipulative or exploitative. When we behave as if we had no choice, as if the way in which we live is out of our control. When we see the risks to human flourishing in a deeply 'commercialised' and 'sexualised' world, we have a social, political and spiritual responsibility to speak out and restore our self-worth.

Unicef's latest Report[100] shows clearly that children thrive when they spend core and structured time with their parents. Materialism is far less important to those children than key relationships. When children actively contribute to family life by doing chores and understanding basic ground rules, they feel more connected and less lonely. They learn to value the importance of belonging, sharing, waiting and saving up for things rather than receiving them on demand.

[98] Available from Mothers' Union, 24 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3RB or www.byebuychildhood.org
[99] 80% of parents believe the media make children sexually aware at too young an age, taken from Mothers' Union, Bye Buy Childhood: A Report into the Commercialisation of Childhood, 2010.
[100] http://www.unicef.org.uk/UNICEFs-Work/What-we-do/Issues-we-work-on/Child-well-being/

Yet so many UK parents have replaced ‘being’ with ‘having’ because their time is limited and a long working hours culture prohibits them from regular and quality family time. Time is bought at a premium and translates into the cost and loss of being a family. Mothers’ Union has campaigned for years on flexible working and increasing parental leave to enable families to spend more time together yet there is a long way to go.

Family life is under great threat. We must work together: parents, schools, the media, the government and wider society to ensure that the next generation will not be sold a life that they cannot afford nor a life defined by what they have rather than who they are. It is unethical to sell children the lie that buying equals happiness at the expense of relationships they long for most.”

Part three: Understanding the family

Who is listening to the child?
Enver Solomon (Children's Society)

Parenting Pollution
Camila Batmanghelidjh (Kids Company)

If we want fathers to change their ways, we need first to change our
Rob Williams (The Fatherhood Institute)

Strengthening the Family and Tackling Family Breakdown
Samantha Callan (Centre for Social Justice)

The cold light of day: what have we learnt in the wake of the riots?
Caroline Davey (Gingerbread)

Don't forget the Grandparents
Sarah Wellard (Grandparents Plus)

Beyond 'ordinary' parenting; supporting parents of disabled children
Srabani Sen (Contact a Family)

Families affected by substance misuse: specialised or mainstream policy?
Vivienne Evans (Adfam)

How to deliver family friendly Britain? Put families in charge
Anne Longfield (4 Children)

17. Who is listening to the child?

Enver Solomon: Director of Policy, Children's Society

Enver Solomon is struck by the absence of the child's perspective in debates about the riots and argues that only by listening can we begin to see children as more than just recipients of parenting and begin to improve wellbeing[1]

In all the debates and discussions of family and parenting since the August riots it has been striking how there has been barely any mention of how children view their families. The perspectives of children seem to have been largely absent yet what they have to say and how they experience family life has important implications for policy. Indeed, if government ignores the voice of the child then policy making will be less well informed and less effective.

Research conducted by the Children's Society asking children what determines their well-being has established that family is critical in shaping their happiness. This is not surprising. What matters, however, is how family determines children's subjective well-being and also how children experience family life. There are a number of key findings from our research which must be not be ignored if we are to seek solutions that can support parents to strengthen family life and ensure our children are happy and so more likely to achieve and do well.

Families are often defined by government and in official data as living in single households with either one or two parents. But our research, based on surveys with over 5,000 children aged eight to 15 years old shows that this does not reflect how children say they experience family life. They live in a wide variety of structures that actually elude simple categorisation. We found that a fifth said they live in two homes. This inevitably complicates family accounting. For example, seven out of ten live with their fathers in their first home but more than eight out of ten live with their father in either their second or first home. It also suggests that children whose parents are not together have more contact with their fathers than is perhaps generally thought to be the case.

It is equally important to note that for many children family structures are not static. They change over time and more often than is recognised by policy makers. We found that ten per cent had experienced a change in the last year. The notion of the stable nuclear family is clearly outdated.

Children's experiences show that families are diverse and complex. They are also fluid with both immediate and extended members changing over time. This means that children live in a wide variety of family structures that cannot be simply categorised. In defining and seeking to understand how family life impacts on children, ministers and officials must recognise this.

But how important is structure in determining children's sense of life satisfaction? The implicit assumption behind the Prime Minister's desire to promote family life by ensuring that government 'family proofs' all policies is that two parents in wedlock provide the best start in life for the nation's children. Yet the message from research is that the quality of family relationships, not the structure of the family unit, matters most. Our own child-centred research bears this out. A simple measure of family harmony – 'my family gets along well together' – was ten times more important in predicting overall well-being than family structure. It explained 20 per cent of the variation in overall well-being whereas family structure explains less than two per cent.

If individual and family characteristics explain very little of the variation in overall well-being compared to family harmony then we need to think seriously about policies which reduce pressure on parents rather than seeking to bolster one form of family structure over another. Parents need to be supported to manage conflict and know where to turn to find support. Family therapy needs to be more universally accessible to all parents regardless of their background. Arguably child and adolescent mental health services need to be developed as child and family services that support children in the context of their family environment.

Clearly no family is an island. Context is important. Wider economic factors impact on the stresses and strains parents experience and ultimately the level of conflict in the home. Household income does, therefore, make a difference in determining whether or not pressures are reduced or parenting capabilities are enhanced. And there are associated consequences for how happy children feel about their lives. We have found a statistically significant relationship between household income and children's well-being.

Children in the lowest income groups are less happy than children who are better off. In fact, low well-being was reported by more than twice as many children in the bottom income quintile as the top income quintile. We also found that changes in household income make a significant difference. Children in households that had experienced a fall in income were more than twice as likely to report low well-being as children in households that had experienced a rise in income. In addition, children whose parents were 'very concerned' about the impact of the economic situation reported lower well being than those whose parents were 'not very' or 'not at all' concerned.

Given the importance of household income to reducing family pressures and determining children's happiness, primarily for those on the lowest incomes, the government's welfare reforms have an even greater significance. Reducing the nation's social security bill by £6billion is going to directly impact on the amount of money available in the pockets of the poorest families. One of the most significant reforms is the introduction of a cap on household benefits for those who are not in work. It is expected to be set at around £500 per week for couples and lone parents, which means they will £93 worse off each week.

The government says the cap is intended to promote income fairness between those in work and those receiving benefits and provide incentives to move into work. However, our analysis reveals that children are being disproportionately punished for decisions they have no control over. Around 210, 000 children will be affected by the cap, compared to 70,000 adults. This means that three-quarters of those affected are children, making them nine times more likely than adults to be affected. To minimise the impact on children the government needs to consider alternative options, such as using average income for working families with children to calculate the level of the cap rather than using the average household wage. This would mean setting the cap closer to £600 and so affect far fewer families.

In addition to family harmony and conflict there is a further factor - children's participation in family life - which is pivotal if government is to develop family friendly policies that genuinely support parents and their children. Feeling listened to and involved in family decisions really matters to children. Our research shows that it makes a difference to their well being in the same way as family harmony. Children who feel they help make family decisions or who feel their parents listen to their views and take them seriously certainly appear to be more satisfied with their lives.

This sends a clear message to policy makers that children must be seen as active participants in family life rather than mere passive recipients of parenting. They are able to make choices and contribute to the family as a whole and through specific relationships. They should be encouraged to negotiate and play a central part in family decision-making. Overall, children must be supported to play an active role in their families.

This might seem like an impossible policy goal. But parenting information and support programmes need to clearly send out the message that how a child participates in family life really does matter. Politicians can also set the tone for how parents and communities engage with children. By being prepared to acknowledge the importance of listening to children and respecting their realities and point of view the value of children's participation can indirectly become more widely embedded in family life.

Families are critically important to child development so the renewed focus on parenting and family is, of course, to be welcome. But politicians from all parties appear to be falling into the familiar trap of seeing families solely through the eyes of parents. This one dimensional view of family life does not reflect children's experiences or capture their concerns. In the long run it risks producing policies that undermine rather than promote children's wellbeing.

18. Parenting Pollution

Camila Batmanghelidjh: Founder, Kids Company

Camila Batmanghelidjh asserts enhancing parenting skills will never be a substitute for a child who has not been well cared for. She argues that child abuse is the cause of long-term dysfunction and our unwillingness to consider how to provide consistent attachment and love has led to a preoccupation with procedures and systems.

Pretender
I am the great pretender.
I can sway like the trees,
I can move like a cat,
And I can speak like a person who is acting in a play.
I can roll like a ball,
And be wide like a hole.
I am the great pretender,
And sometimes I can act like you.
But me,
I do not know who or what I am.
What I seem to be, is someone else.
But inside I do not know who I am.
Pretender is my name.

This poem, written by a child who is negotiating significant trauma on a daily basis, illustrates piercingly the fundamental importance of a parent in a child's life. A child's sense of identity and integration is acquired through the mindful reflections provided by a loving parent. In the *reverie* of the mother, as she gazes lovingly at her child and responds to the child's needs, is the genesis of personal identity. Children will only know that they exist if the parent sees them.

Some parental figures, whilst negotiating their own childhood traumas, experience their children as toxic. The child's needs and attachment-seeking behaviours might feel draining or repellent. At times, the parent may infuse the child with shame by transmitting discontentment, wishing the child had greater qualities. Despite physical, sexual and emotional assaults, the parent-child bond seeks cohesion, leaving children time and time again hoping for better days and repeatedly forgiving their parents.

Across the world, it is recognized that 87% of children who are being abused experience maltreatment at the hands of their immediate carers. This is in the context of Britain annually sustaining childhood maltreatment involving 1.5million children, of whom only approximately 40,000 receive a child protection plan providing social work input. Clearly, child abuse is an epidemic, the victims of which are too silent and powerless to hold the state accountable for their safety.

There is a price to pay for child abuse: the rage either turns in on the self or, in revenge, is hurled at others.

There is remarkable consistency between child abuse, criminality and long-term dysfunction. Whilst we stare into the eye of a catastrophe, our politicians cling to a kind of quaint tea party, providing paper-doily solutions rearranged in the same old useless, mindless way. The subject of their intention is 'parenting'. They believe they can solve social care issues by marching dysfunctional parents into parenting classes, where the use of the 'Naughty Chair' seems to be the panacea. Everyone is preoccupied with morality. If only high moral values could be hammered into the heads of the amoral, we would have a perfect society.

In the service of parent training solutions, a plethora of institutes has emerged, each with its own manual of parent modification. The truth is, those parents who would benefit from parenting classes are not the real source of the challenges we face. Of course, having one's skills enhanced is confidence-boosting and stress-reducing, but it is arguable whether the intervention is being delivered at the real problem.

The dark truth hides somewhere more sinister and uncomfortable. The shiny faces of the politicians have rarely been there or lived it, so it is hardly surprising that they lack the vision to describe the real object of our despair.

Imagine being a nine-year-old, your house too horrific to live in. Sometimes you hear your mother scream, and you're frozen in terror despite wanting to go to her rescue. Post-assault, your mother looks at you as if the pity in your glance devastates her. This is the child who wrote the poem. Childhood has not been about good or bad parenting. It's been about survival; surviving the blows but also attempting to survive the emptiness, the crushed identity.

This child is one of the lucky ones, having found Kids Company. Our staff function as an additional parent, allowing enough safety to flourish and metamorphosise pain into poetry. However, those children who haven't been reached with help will eventually sink into despair, which vacillates between passive suicidality and vengeful hatred.

The real challenge for our politicians is to understand that, once the biological carer has failed in caring for the child, the state needs to step in as a substitute parent. The devil is in the details: it's not just about the provision of underwear, socks and bed-sheets. It's about restoring the loving *reverie* that would otherwise have been provided by an adoring parent. We have been blinded by the fear of interfering with the parent-child bond, and consequently we have failed to conceptualise systems which can provide loving care for children who have been denied it. Our social care agencies are preoccupied with procedures and fear of being sued, when they should be thinking about how to provide consistent attachment and love for a child who needs to be nurtured.

I hear your shame bellowed back at me in protest. You don't want to talk of love in the public space. But neuroscience is now unequivocally confirming that human relationships are the primary drivers of neuronal structuring. Brain scans reflect it back at us: where there is lack of love, there is a gaping hole. It's that catastrophic emptiness that deprived children want filled with care.

Who dares look into the chasm wins.

19. If we want fathers to change their ways, we need to first change ours

Rob Williams: Chief Executive, The Fatherhood Institute

Rob Williams challenges the 'mythology of absent fatherhood' and argues that if services principles and delivery were better designed, fathers could play a more central role in parenting responses.

Absent fathers were at the top of the list of those blamed for the moral collapse behind the riots in August. The evidence does indeed show that growing up without a father or positive father figure makes it harder to navigate the transition to adulthood. Involved fatherhood provides real protection from the dangers of educational failure and adolescent disaffection. Children who do not enjoy a supportive relationship with their fathers are much more likely to get into trouble with the law in their teenage years and to misuse drugs and alcohol[101]

Although the research base is solid it is obscured by the mythology of absent fatherhood, which assumes that in the UK thousands of young women give birth each year to babies who will never know their father, even if their mother can remember his name. In fact, analysis of the millennium cohort study shows that 85% of live births are to fathers and mothers who live together (married or co-habiting). Most of the remaining couples who are not living together are in a relationship and many of these will move in together within 9 months of the birth. In fact, only 4% of mothers said that they were 'not involved' with the father of the child but even in this small group 10% of the births were attended by the fathers.

Whilst the number of babies born in circumstances where involved fatherhood seems unlikely is small it is dwarfed by the enormous caseload of children who lose contact with their fathers as a consequence of their parents' fractured relationships. One third of UK children will see their parents separate before their 16th birthday and a third of these will come to have little or no contact with their fathers[102] That's 1 million children or, in other words, an enormous problem which successive policy makers have done little to address.

The potential embarrassment for politicians comes from the way in which the public services they administer create barriers between separated fathers and their children. As soon as separation occurs we refer to the family as a single parent family, as there is only one parent available to the child. Schools and GPs pass on information to one parent only, benefits to support the cost of caring for a child go to one parent (usually the mother), whether or not the father provides significant care during the week. Housing is starkly apportioned according to which parent is regarded by the system as responsible for the child (as if only one of them is). There is little hope that a father, on leaving the family home, will be housed in accommodation suitable for his children to stay with him overnight. Not many fathers feel able to invite their children to spend a weekend amongst the transient population with whom he shares the collection of bedsits where he has been housed with no regard for the impact this will have on his ability to play a positive role in his children's lives.
At the time of separation most men fully intend to play their part as a parent. This can be a difficult goal to achieve. I doubt there is a single MP who has not received a hefty post bag from men in all kinds of anguish at the difficulties they are facing maintaining contact with their children. And it is worth mentioning here the high levels of depression, ill health and unemployment which we find amongst separated fathers. If a number of these men fall away, exhausted and demoralised, we have to wonder why we don't do more (or even something) to help them stay in touch.

[101] read our research summary on fathers and anti-social behavior http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2007/fatherhood-institute-research-summary-anti-social-behaviour-and-fatherhood/
[102] read our research summary on separated families http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2008/fi-research-summary-separated-families/

With the notable exception of the Child Support Agency, few publicly funded services will ever suggest to separated fathers that they have something to offer their children – in the CSA's case, of course, that something being money. Instead it seems more convenient to the system to allow these men to drift out of the picture.

This sense of convenience, of finding it easier to deal with the mother only, informs many other services used by families. From maternity services through health visitors and even parenting classes, services find it easier to engage with a mother who is present rather than a father who may only be available at certain times. The costs of talking to two parents rather than one are overestimated whilst the benefit of engaging with fathers is undervalued. The stalled progress on the moves to require both parents to be identified on a child's birth register is a case study of this unequal approach to parenting responsibilities. These reforms were quietly shelved by the coalition government on the grounds that it would be too costly to responsibly follow up on cases where the mother was reluctant to name to father. These costs were considered to be more significant than the long term consequences for the child. As a result we still have a system where mothers are required by law to register themselves as parents whereas this remains a matter of personal choice for the father.

The child protection system has been criticised many times in serious case reviews for failing to engage with fathers of children at risk. Some fathers in these situations can of course be the people who put their children at risk – but most fathers can be a vital and positive resource. Despite this potential, services often find it simpler to manage the risks around a child through efforts focused directly on the mother.

In the Baby P case the father of the child was living nearby and was offering to take care of him but, instead of assessing whether he was a suitable parent, the child protection team placed Baby Peter with a friend of his mother. There was very little regard for the option of strengthening the link with a father who was, months later, finally assessed and found to be a very suitable carer for Peter. Too late, as it turned out, for this to change Peter's tragic end.

Low expectations of fathers also inform our approach to young people in the criminal justice system. The law courts seem much more keen to hold mothers to account for bringing up children than in applying this principle to fathers. Currently 80% of parenting orders are handed down to mothers – even though in half of these cases the father is living with her and may even be in the court room at the time. Why is the father's role not recognised even when he is standing right in front of a Magistrate? By not giving parenting orders to these fathers the law courts become part of the problem. Fathers are not given the opportunity to help or, to put it another way, they are absolved of their parenting responsibilities.

Of course the courts get involved towards the end of a process, stretching backwards to the moment of conception, of placing a far greater expectation on mothers than on fathers. The magistrates can't be blamed for continuing in the same vein. However it could be that by taking action at the end of the line, we can have a big impact on what happens further down.

By establishing a principle that fathers should always get parenting orders whenever an order is handed down to a mother we might stimulate an re-orientation of assumptions all along this continuum.

If services were aware that both parents will be held responsible for their children's welfare up to the age of 18, whether or not they share a house together, this would challenge the easy option of helping the child by dealing only with the mother and support efforts to reorient services towards a whole family approach.. If fathers and mothers fully understoood this principle, and were expected to uphold it this would significantly change the dynamics of their discussion at the time of separation and for years afterwards.

If we also introduce an expectation (if not a duty) on schools and GPs to communicate with both parents, rather than just the one they can most easily see, we might begin to see a system that helps to keep fathers engaged with their children throughout their childhood.

There will be objections from those who fear that dangerous and abusive fathers might be pushed back into the lives of people who are better off without them. This is a reason to be careful, but not a reason to do nothing. Of the men who lose touch with their children only one in six present significant problems as fathers. We need to invest in processes to engage the five out of six who can play a positive role for their children.

These are practical steps which will reduce the numbers of children who lose touch with their fathers. Politicians might find it convenient to blame 'no-father' families for social unrest If they do nothing to change the system that makes it harder for fathers to stay connected, it won't be long before Ministers need to start pointing the finger at themselves.

20. Strengthening the Family and Tackling Family Breakdown

Samantha Callan: Centre for Social Justice

Samantha Callan sets out the importance of tackling family breakdown and presents a number of policy ideas to improve the focus on encouraging strong and stable families

This summer's rioting exposed, in less than a week, the brokenness in many parts of our society which the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) has highlighted in all of its policy work since its establishment in 2004. Although poverty is its most visible hallmark, this social breakdown is not simply about a lack of money. It is driven by five pervasive factors: family breakdown, educational failure, intergenerational worklessness and welfare dependency, drug and alcohol addiction, and severe personal debt.

These 'pathways to poverty' are interconnected: children who experience family breakdown are more likely to fail at school. Those failing at school, surrounded by a culture of worklessness, are more likely to end up unemployed and on benefits. Debt as well as drug and alcohol abuse also tend to emerge when an individual's life appears to have no purpose. Destructive and demoralising patterns of life tend to be passed from one generation to another.

The CSJ's policies are geared towards helping people change their lives and giving them opportunities for a more hopeful and productive future. Our research has consistently shown that this must start by preventing family breakdown and the havoc it wreaks among parents and their children. Through speaking with thousands of individuals and organisations tackling poverty at the coalface, we have found that this is often the root of the other pathways.[103] Young people commenting on the riots, who did not themselves take part, emphasised the difference that coming from a supportive family made to their choices. Our polling shows that over 80 per cent of people would agree and think family breakdown is a serious problem. [104]

This is not about moralising or telling people how to live their lives; it is about encouraging strong and stable families. Through early intervention with the most vulnerable, improving support for relationships, and removing the significant barriers to couple formation and marriage which stifle aspiration in the poorest areas we may hope to prevent the social breakdown which is crippling elements of our society.

Healthy families and stable childhoods should be the foundations on which we build a better Britain. And from strong families, other reforms are given room to take root. Yet over the last 40 years our social trends have pushed in the opposition direction. High divorce rates have plateaued but the rise in unmarried parenthood has been accompanied by an escalation in family breakdown. Our research has shown that these trends are most evident among the poorest in our society. .

[103] For more details see Centre for Social Justice, *Green Paper on the Family*, London: Centre for Social Justice, January 2010 [accessed via: http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/CSJ_Green_paper_on_the_family_WEB_2nd.pdf]
CSJ/ YouGov polling of 2084 adults, September 2011
[104] CSJ/ YouGov polling of 2, 084 adults

CSJ/YouGov Polling found that:

- 83 per cent think family breakdown is a serious problem; over a third think it is very serious;
- 75 per cent believe that stabilising Britain's most troubled families would help society as a whole;
- Over 70 per cent of those expressing an opinion support introducing an extra tax allowance for married couples; and
- 75 per cent think fatherlessness is a serious problem, almost a third think it is very serious. [105]

Our work shows that marriage is a social justice issue; aspirations to marry are similarly high across the social classes but further down the ladder it becomes harder to realise those aspirations for economic and cultural reasons.

- In our September 2011 polling at least two-thirds support the recognition of marriage in the taxation system. [106]

Breaking the link between parenthood and marriage has introduced massive instability into society in general, and into the poorest communities in particular, because informal partnering greatly increases the risk of single parenthood. Explicit commitment most effectively draws men into responsible fatherhood, and gives those who are lacking in purpose something to live and work for beyond themselves.

Fewer than one in ten married parents have split by the time a child is five compared with more than one in three who were not married. Where parents were not living together when a child is born, (and the couple penalty in the benefits system has discouraged couple formation) the break up rate (five years later) is a staggering 60 per cent. [107]

- 97 per cent of all couples still intact by the time a child is 15 are married. [108]

- Half of all children born today, at current trends, will see the breakdown of their parents' relationship. [109]

Family breakdown is a key driver of poverty – especially for women – and as a result, the gap between rich and poor has widened. Upon a split their income drops, on average, by more than a tenth; and half of all single parents are in poverty. [110]

Single parenthood is a risk factor for poverty everywhere. Swedish statistics show parental separation is the biggest driver into child poverty by a large margin. Thus even in the most generous welfare regime in the world, the state does not and cannot prevent single parenthood's link with poverty. [111]

[105] Ibid
[106] Ibid
[107] Analysis of Millennium Cohort Study corroborated by Goodman and Greaves, IFS Briefing Note BN107, 2010
[108] Analysis of Census date (on a subsample of 451, 468 families with children, there were 13,676 intact married couples with 15 year olds and only 456 intact cohabiting couples with children)
[109] Projections based on Census, British household Panel Study and Millennium Cohort Study
[110] Jenkins S, *Marital splits and income changes over the longer term*, Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, 2008
[111] Among children in single parent families the incidence of poverty is more than three times as high (24.7 per cent) than those in families with two parents (8.1 per cent). In comparison with households headed by couples, at least four times as many households headed by single parents are in poverty. Source: Save the Children Sweden, *Child Poverty in Sweden 8th Report 2010b*, Stockholm: Save the Children Sweden, 2011

What should we do about family breakdown?

It is not just the policies Government sets, but also the messages it sends that influence people's behaviour. Strong families make for strong societies and ministers have a responsibility to articulate this. The following measures communicate support for a culture of marriage, commitment and two-parent families (without in any way criticising or penalising lone parents).

- Protecting investment in Universal Credit now and in the next spending review for addressing the couple penalty.
- Reinstating marriage on government forms and in government research, thus giving a lead to other sectors like health and insurance.
- Recognising marriage in the tax system (the CSJ's 2010 *Green Paper on the Family* gives 'order of magnitude' costings).
- The *Norgrove Interim Report* recommends that the process for divorce leaves the family courts and is dealt with wholly administratively unless disputed. Yet international experience of administrative divorces, such as in Japan, raises significant concerns. Although much of the present divorce process is entirely administrative, the declaration of the formal and legal ending of the marriage should be made by an institution that still commands respect across much of society.
- Registrars should signpost engaged couples to face-to-face marriage preparation, where good courses are available locally.
- There is an absence of the family agenda in Government communication. For example, the Department for Education is already funding community-based programmes that combine antenatal education with information about relationships. Society needs to know that this is a priority.

As well as these important signalling measures the CSJ recommends that:

- Sure Start Children's Centres should be built upon and absorbed into Family Hubs: facilities in the heart of communities delivering joined-up, family-focused services, with a particular focus on early years provision, health visitors working out of them, and an emphasis on outreach. Family Hubs should have three key objectives achieved either through direct delivery of services or through proactive referral to other local services.
    - Strengthen families: give families who need it help with family relationships and parenting, focusing particularly on the social and emotional side of a child's development and parent-child relationships.
    - Help prevent family breakdown by:
        - Providing preventive relationship support at key points in a couple's relationship; and
        - Supporting families in difficulty by working with them, where possible and appropriate, to resolve conflict and find solutions to challenges.
    - Support separating families in achieving workable parenting arrangements which are in the best interests of the children without the need to resort to the courts.
- Children's Centres and Family Hubs should provide a range of services to help couples: relationship education (pointers that help prevent problems), counselling, mediation and classes to help them keep their children's interests as the top priority when they are separating.

- Restructuring at local government level to mirror the Social Justice Cabinet Committee in central government which facilitates and drives cross-departmental working to tackle interlocking pathways to poverty.

- Intensive help for our most chaotic families that draws on key learning points from family intervention projects such as: the need to involve effective voluntary sector services, the merits of having a small team around the family with whom they form strong relationships (advocating for them and helping them access all other services they might need such as parenting programmes and mental health support), more time and freedom to work with families to build trust, and minimal bureaucracy.

- Include couple relationship support in intensive help for our most chaotic families. Adults in all types of families (including single parents) need tools to help them break intergenerational cycles of family breakdown.

- Family fostering programmes offering residential support to families with children at immediate risk of entering care for preventable reasons and intensive round the clock support must address the issues behind the need to take children into care (such as those run by Save the Family).

- Now that local councils have to develop their own strategies as part of the national Child Poverty Strategy, they should collect data on relationship status so they can demonstrate the effectiveness of their strategy to stabilise other relationships in their area. This would drive the provision of a wide range of relationship support and other measures – in other words the Government should set the right outcomes for local authorities to deliver against.

- Given people's aspiration to marry, the reality that many do not achieve that aspiration and the importance of parents' relationships to giving their children a good start in life, the prospective Early Intervention Foundation proposed in the recent Allen Reviews should research the most effective relationship stabilisation and education programmes.

21. The cold light of day: what have we learnt in the wake of the riots?

Caroline Davey: Gingerbread

Caroline Davey laments the lazy use of stereotypes observed after the riots and calls on a greater focus on supporting all parents in bringing up children and avoiding poverty.

Broken Britain. Moral decline. Feral youths. These and many more weary clichés were trotted out over the summer in an attempt to explain the rioting, looting and vandalism witnessed in cities across the country. And none of them came even close to doing so.

The crushing inevitability of the rush, in some quarters, to blame family breakdown and single parents was as depressing as it is familiar. Of the 3 million children being raised in 1.9 million single parent families in the UK today, only a miniscule fraction will have been involved in the riots, alongside a tiny fraction of those being raised in families with both parents. But certain sections of the press and commentariat were swift to judge single parents, as they often do, as ultimately responsible. One MP even used this reasoning to shoehorn a call for marriage tax allowance – one of the biggest wastes of government funding imaginable – into the subsequent parliamentary debate.

But it's vital that we inject some perspective into the debate that has rumbled on ever since: the vast majority of single parents, alongside the vast majority of parents in general, do a great job of bringing up their children. Many of them do so despite the odds being stacked against them, with single parent families twice as likely to live in poverty as couple families. And let's not forget that being poor doesn't automatically mean being a poor parent; it just means parenting while struggling against the many challenges of living on a desperately low income.

That is why Gingerbread last year launched our "You're Brilliant" campaign, to remind single parents – and society at large – that they are just like other parents; doing a great job in what can often be particularly difficult circumstances. For we know just how important it is to break down the barriers between the 'them' and 'us' stereotyping that can be constructed around single parents and (preferably married) couple parents by the media. In reality, I defy anyone not to know at least one single parent in their family or close circle of friends, and to know full well that they're doing a fantastic job of bringing up their kids. And there are endless examples of adults today who prove that being raised by a single parent was no barrier to them doing well and achieving in their chosen field – look at Bernard Hogan-Howe (the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner), Gary Oldman, Carol Vorderman or Plan B, to name just a few.

It was, therefore, disheartening to see the immediate knee-jerk response to the riots, when it seemed all too easy to resort to lazy stereotypes and sweeping generalisations. But worse, in many ways, has been some of the analysis in the cold light of day, when the legitimate shock, fear and anger generated by those dark nights has hardened, for some, into brutal assessments of how those who took part should be treated. Does anyone really think that evicting people from social housing will do any more than foist their problems onto a different neighbourhood, when the evidence shows that what works is an intensive intervention to treat the root causes of the most dysfunctional families? And by all means use the full force of the law and sentencing options available to punish those who have committed criminal acts, but

where is the sense in taking away benefits from offenders' families and plunging them into abject poverty?

Fundamentally, what is most important is providing support to *all* parents in bringing up their children – and by this we mean everything from supporting them in work which allows them to earn a decent income as well as combine work and parenting (such as the provision of affordable high quality childcare, and ensuring that there are more flexible jobs across all workplaces and levels of seniority and income), tackling child poverty, through to working positively and in partnership with parents when they or their children may have additional support needs.

Over the days, weeks and months ahead there will continue to be much soul-searching about the riots, and – particularly in the current constrained economic climate – the potential for further hardening of hearts and tightening of purse strings is all too strong. But we do all parents a disservice if we don't take this time to understand in full how best to provide them with constructive and effective support, and put in place the framework to make sure this happens.

22. Don't forget the Grandparents

Sarah Wellard: Grandparents Plus

Sarah Wellard argues that grandparents are an under-utilised resource in family strategies and have a huge role in promoting wellbeing, not just of young children but of teenagers and parents themselves.

As we scramble to find new ways to enhance the wellbeing of families and address the capabilities of parents, all too often we ignore or exclude from services and strategies a massive and increasingly essential resource. Grandparents and the wider family are vital for promoting the wellbeing of children and families, yet they are usually overlooked or taken for granted by both policy makers and practitioners. Grandparents play a pivotal role in providing childcare for working parents, supporting parents and children through difficult times and sometimes taking on the fulltime responsibility of bringing up their grandchildren because the parents are unable to do so.

Grandparents providing childcare

Almost two thirds of Britain's 14 million grandparents help out with looking after their grandchildren at some point, with one in five grandmothers providing at least 10 hours a week of childcare[112]. Parents often report that they find grandparent care more reliable, affordable and flexible, because they are willing to take children when they are ill and at times when formal care is not available. Around one in four working families depend on grandparents for childcare, and increasing financial pressures on families and the rising cost of formal childcare is likely to lead to greater numbers of parents turning to grandparents for help.

Recent research on the implications for children's health and development of grandparental involvement in childcare underlines the importance of recognising and supporting grandparents who are informally caring. A study published last year showed that preschool aged children from more advantaged backgrounds were more likely to be overweight if they were looked after by grandparents and other informal carers than if they were cared for only by a parent – but this did not hold for children from less advantaged backgrounds. It may be that grandparents lack information about healthy nutrition and may not encourage physical activity as much as the parents. Another study found children looked after by grandparents tend to be less school ready and have more difficulties getting on with other children than pre-schoolers who have attended formal childcare, but have better vocabularies[113]. This may reflect grandparents spending more time than other carers talking to children, but less taking them to toddler groups and settings where they have the chance to learn to socialise with other children, and where grandparents do not always feel welcome. Research from the Royal Free and Maudsley hospitals in London[114] indicates that children with a grandparent involved in their care are less likely be brought to accident and emergency departments with minor conditions not needing treatment, suggesting that grandparents provide helpful reassurance to families with young children. These studies underline the importance of including grandparents as well as parents in strategies aimed at promoting children's health and wellbeing, including in Sure Start children's centres.

[112] Wellard, S and Bryson, C, forthcoming analysis of British Social Attitude Survey data on grandparents
[113] Hansen K and Hawkes, D, Journal of Social Policy Vol 38 Issue 2, April 2009, pp 211-239
[114] Fergusson E, Li, J and Taylor, B, Grandmothers' role in preventing unnecessary accident and emergency attendances: cohort study, British Medical Journal, Vol 317 19-26 December 1998

Grandparents' role in the lives of teenagers

Generally grandparents' involvement in family life is highly positive for children and young people. A study by Ann Buchanan and Julia Griggs from the University of Oxford[115] highlights the continuing and important relationship between teenagers and their grandparents. They found a particularly close relationship between teenagers and maternal grandmothers, with 94% of teenagers whose maternal grandmothers have at least occasional involvement reporting that their grandmother respects what they say, and 84% saying she gives them advice with dealing with problems. More than a third felt able to share issues which they couldn't talk to parents about. The study showed a positive relationship between having a close relationship with a grandparent and prosocial behaviour, and also strong association between grandparental involvement and fewer adjustment problems in teenagers.

Young people were also significantly more likely to talk about problems to their closest grandparent when they were under pressure from difficulties at home and closeness to a grandparent seemed to protect them from adjustment problems. Again, this study underlines the need to recognise the role grandparents play in young people's lives in seeking to promote teenagers' wellbeing, and the potential for grandparents to be a positive influence in their lives.

Grandparents raising their grandchildren

Around 200,000 grandparents and other family members in the UK have become fulltime carers of their grandchildren. Initially, this may be just on a short-term basis, for example because a parent is ill, in rehab or in prison. But often, this becomes a permanent arrangement. As well parental illness, drug or alcohol misuse or imprisonment, common reasons leading to a grandparent becoming the full-time (kinship) carer of a child are the death or disability of a parent, domestic violence and child abuse or neglect.

Research[116][117]into children looked after by grandparents and other kinship carers indicates that many of these children have experienced similar multiple adverse experiences to children who are in care. Yet only a small minority of the estimated 300,000 children living with kinship carers are legally classed as "looked after" children, and few received the same, if any, support from children's services. Grandparents Plus' own research reveals the huge challenges which many kinship carers face, with many experiencing poverty, isolation and lack of support. A survey[118] of 255 of the members of our Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network found that that most carers are struggling on very low incomes at or below the poverty line with only around one in three receiving an allowance from the local authority. Almost thee in 10 say they had to give up work when they took on full-time care while another 29% reduced their paid hours. Nearly half of the carers surveyed are bringing up a child with a disability or special needs, and six in 10 longer term health condition of their own. The low visibility of these families at national and local government level means they are not recognised as a group at risk of poverty and disadvantage, and excluded from local authority child poverty strategies.

A study of older grandparent carers aged 65 and over – estimated to be around 25,000 in total, revealed the extreme reluctance of many carers to engage with children's services for fear of the children being taken away because they will be judged "too old to care", and the importance of trusted sources for obtaining support – the wider family, schools, churches and voluntary organisations. Yet voluntary organisations and children's centres often overlook the needs of this group, and parenting support rarely targets them, despite the additional challenges they may face in parenting second time around when the children have experienced trauma with their birth families and may suffer from emotional problems or foetal alcohol syndrome.[119]

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[115] Buchanan A and Griggs G 2009, My second mum and dad, The involvement of grandparent in the lives of teenage children, Grandparents Plus

[117] Farmer, ERG & Moyers, S. (2008) *Kinship Care: Fostering Effective Family and Friends Placements*, Jessica Kingsley.

[118] Grandparents Plus (2010) What if we said no? Wellard S. and Wheatley B.

[119] Grandparents Plus champions the role of the wider family in children's lives, through policy, research, campaigning and an advice and information service for kinship carers. Go to www.grandparentsplus.org.uk for more information.

Supporting kinship carers helps keep children out of care, and reduces the risk of poor outcomes for children, yet cuts to both local services and welfare benefits focussed on short-term savings are likely to increase the likelihood of placements breaking, and act as a disincentive to potential carers stepping forward.

The impact of current policy changes

Many of the cuts in public spending currently being implemented will have a big impact on the wider family – for example cuts to the childcare element of Working Tax Credit - and are likely to put much greater pressure on grandparents to help out with childcare, as increasing numbers of working parents are unable to affordable formal care. Housing changes which force people to downsize when their adult children move out will make it harder for low income grandparents to provide respite for parents who are struggling to cope. And kinship carers who have stepped in to bring up vulnerable children are likely to be particularly hard hit by the swathe of welfare reforms which will significantly increase child poverty. The proposed benefit cap for example will hit larger families including kinship carers who have taken in sibling groups or have their own children still at home, and cuts to increased conditionality requirements under Universal Credit making it increasingly difficult for those who are forced to give up work when a child moves in.

We would also like to see the role of the wider families in employment policy, with grandparents able to request flexible working which would support those who are combining work with childcare. We would also like a much more creative approach to parental leave, with parents able to transfer entitlement to grandparents as already happens in Germany, for example if the parent is ill or still in fulltime education.

Conclusion

Despite the vital role which grandparents and the wider family play in underpinning the caring role of parents, or indeed taking on that role themselves, they are largely absent from the policy debate and as a result vulnerable to unintended consequences. It's time to put the wider family to be put at the heart of policy making, not only in family and children's policy, but also in areas like housing and employment.

23. Beyond 'ordinary' parenting; supporting parents of disabled children

Srabani Sen: Contact a Family

Srabani Sen highlights the particular pressures on parents of disabled children and the challenge of finding time for good quality parenting and the need for a targeted and co-ordinated policy approach to support this group

A key group of parents and families that often get over looked are those with disabled children. Parents with disabled children face a unique combination of emotional, social, physical and financial pressures that can impact on the stability of family life. For many this can mean they find it difficult to take part in daily activities and can become very isolated and feel unable to cope.

People providing high levels of care are twice as likely to be affected by poor health as those without caring responsibilities.[120] Families face discrimination associated with caring for a disabled child, almost 70% of respondents to our survey *What makes my family stronger* (May 2009) said their experience of understanding and acceptance of disability from their community was poor or unsatisfactory.

Quite apart from the emotional and physical pressures involved in caring for a disabled child, families face two specific financial challenges that are additional to those faced by all families. Firstly they incur considerable extra and ongoing costs in caring for their child - it costs three times more to raise a disabled child[121]. Families with disabled children also face specific difficulties in sustaining employment due to the demands of juggling work and caring - just 16 per cent of mothers with disabled children work, compared with 61 percent of mothers with non-disabled children[122]. Consequently, families with disabled children are at greater risk of living in poverty[123]. Our report *Counting the Costs 2010* revealed that families with disabled children are going without essentials - almost a quarter are going without heating and one in seven are going without food.

Parent carers have also identified the following as causing strain their ability to parent effectively:

- struggling to come to terms with the news of a child's disability; or practitioners not acting on their concerns about their childs development.
- a lack of time for themselves, each other and other children.
- little opportunity to enjoy play and leisure as a family.
- a lack of support and understanding from professionals such as GPs.
- access to suitable services; and having to fight for those that are available.

It is clear is that parenting a disabled child goes beyond 'ordinary' parenting. Too often parents spend too much time doing caring tasks and dealing with a web of interdependent and often uncoordinated services leaving them with a lack of quality time for parenting and doing the things other families take for granted - almost three quarters (73%) are going without days out and leisure time[124].
UK research has shown unequivocally that parental involvement in education contributes significantly to children's achievement. Therefore, due to the unique combination of pressures on parent carers we

[120] Carers UK, 2004
[121] Paying to Care: the costs of childhood disability by Barbara Dobson and Sue Middleton
[122] Langerman, C. & Worrall, E. (2005), *Ordinary Lives –Disabled children and their families*, London: New Philanthropy Capital
[123] Department of Work and Pensions 2006/07 Households Below Average Income showed the risk of relative poverty for families with a disabled child but no disabled adult family member has increased from 20% to 25%, meaning disabled children are now at greater risk of living in relative poverty than non-disabled children.
[124] Contact a Family (2010) Counting the Costs: The financial reality for families with disabled children

must also consider the negative impact on the home learning environment for disabled children and the risk of them therefore reaching their full potential. The Government will shortly begin piloting in some areas an offer of voluntary parenting classes for every parent of a child under 5, which is in direct response to the evidence that the home learning environment is the biggest single determinant of a child's future success.

However what do we know about the impact of parenting classes on families with disabled children?

> *"I'm struggling with my local social services and my GP. They say my daughter doesn't have a disability it's bad parenting and are forcing us to do a triple p parenting course, this makes me feel really angry that my concerns aren't being taken seriously by people that are meant to be the professionals."*

> *"When my child was diagnosed with autism and ADHD I attended a parenting course, the strategies that were highlighted did not work with my child as it did not take account of my child's particular needs. I found attendance on the course frustrating, the course trainer and other parents on the course made me feel like I was a failure".*

These quotes illustrate the potential negative impact on parents with disabled children. We regularly hear from parents that they felt that their parenting skills were being judged negatively especially for those parents that have tried many of the strategies prior to attendance but were not believed to be 'doing it' right. This leaves many parents who are already struggle to come to terms with their childs disability distrustful of professionals and further adds to feelings of isolation and low self esteem.

Our feedback reveals that parents that benefit most from parenting classes are those that have received support targeted at families with disabled children, which is led by parents in similar situations and is individualised to support and understand the disability and associated behaviours.

> *"I like parenting support that is focused on families with disabled children based on particular themes such as sleep, feeding, toileting".*

> *"The parenting class looked at what my child could achieve and set goals to reflect her learning needs. It also worked with my daughter to help her own understanding of her condition".*

> *"After receiving a diagnosis I was really anxious, I felt like I was no longer sure how to interact with my baby, speaking to other parents in similar situations really helped".*

In summary, parent programmes should offer support and information that helps families with disabled children to:

- Come to terms with understanding how the condition will affect their child
- Understand why it has happened and perhaps stop blaming them self
- Adjust expectations, for themselves as well as their child whilst celebrating their individual achievements.
- Looks at alternative responses and strategies that can help.
- Take control and plan their future

What is clear from the feedback Contact a Family has received from families with disabled children is that delivering parenting support using the social model of disability is key in building family resilience and helping parents plan long-term for their children so they can reach their full potential. Unfortunately, this is something that is not routinely considered in parenting programmes and can indeed add to parental stress and isolation when advice is given by people that don't understand specific conditions or behaviours and the unique challenged faced by families with disabled children.

A targeted and co-ordinated policy approach across government departments is required that considers the unique combination of interdependent pressures placed on families with disabled children.

24. Families affected by substance misuse: should policy be specialised or mainstream?

Vivienne Evans: Chief Executive, Adfam

Vivienne Evans argues that family policies can struggle to capture nuance when dealing with complex issues and highlights a central role for specialist drug and alcohol professionals at the heart of family interventions.

> "All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"
> - Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

Over the last decade there has been a growing recognition of substance misuse and its impact on the family, rather than as a problem limited to an individual's own life – for example the *Hidden Harm* report in 2003, which shone a light for the first time on children affected by parental drug use; the National Treatment Agency's *Supporting and Involving Carers* in 2008, which looked at the provision of services for families independently of their relatives; and the 2008 and 2010 Drug Strategies, which both explicitly recognise the effects of substances beyond the individual using them. In particular, two key ideas are now generally accepted where they were unrecognised previously: that the involvement of family members in the treatment of their relatives with addiction problems can enhance positive outcomes; and that family members in these circumstances show symptoms of stress that merit support in their own right.

Just as there is a risk that families escape attention in drug and alcohol policy, there is a corresponding risk that drug and alcohol issues don't receive enough attention in family policy. Initiatives such as Family Intervention Projects and *Think Family* have helped to put substance misuse on the radar of family support and social care practitioners, and the language of 'multiple needs' has attracted the attention of the higher echelons of Government. It is vital that in the multiplicity of needs – for example antisocial behaviour, domestic violence and low educational attainment - we don't forget about the impact that drugs and alcohol can have in a family environment.

Whether it be the links between alcohol use and domestic violence, or substance use and mental health issues, for example, social care practitioners have found themselves juggling an increasingly complex mix of factors in pulling together a picture of a family and working effectively with them. Family policy may embrace drugs and alcohol in a general way, but unless this is accompanied by specific responses and practitioner expertise relating to substance use – and we have seen a marked increase in demand for this kind of training from children and family services – it will be difficult for local responses to improve.

The challenges for policy, and for progress, are of definition and location. What exactly does a drug or alcohol misusing family look like and hence, where do we find a 'home' for these families in policy and practice? These families have substance misuse problems and hence need to be included in drugs and alcohol policy; however, substance use rarely exists in isolation and these families often come to the attention of wider policy initiatives: they may also be out of work, committing crime, in prison, living in poverty, and subject to physical and mental health problems and domestic violence.

Adfam supports any practitioner working with families affected by substance misuse. Many of the services for these families are set up and run – often on a voluntary basis – by individuals with personal experience of addiction in their own families. These services, among other things, offer peer support and self-help advice, saving the NHS and local authorities £750m, according to the UK Drug Policy Commission - this is the Big Society in practice. However, financial support for these groups, along with many other in the local community sector, is either being withdrawn or shifted into drug and alcohol specialist services, moving the emphasis of care onto the role the family member can play to encourage someone's recovery rather than focus on the needs of the family in their own right.

So where is the policy compass for these families? The number of health, education, housing, employment, crime and its prevention, plus child protection and safeguarding policy areas searching for the answers to how to deal with these families thus embraces the DfE, the Home Office, The Ministry of Justice, the DWP and the Department of Health. In addition, a major barrier to the effective coordination of work with families affected by substance use is that the term 'family' itself is interpreted in so many different ways. For example, from an educational standpoint, the priority may be to support parents in transmitting prevention messages to their children; from a drug policy perspective, it may mean looking at how best to use the family's expertise to produce better treatment outcomes; or from the point of view of children's services, the key consideration may be safeguarding the children of substance users from neglect, risk and harm. Adfam was originally set up by the mother of a heroin user who could not find the support she needed in her local area, and it is important that this group – adult family members – are not lost in the concentration on parental substance use.

Despite the best efforts of support services, the family picture is often so complex that it is very difficult for one agency to identify – let alone meet – all their needs. Even if individuals with drug and alcohol problems come into contact with services regularly, the needs of their families and children can remain hidden. For example, drug treatment clients are often reluctant to divulge their parental status for fear that their children will be removed; a family may experience domestic violence and 'low level' problem drinking on a daily basis without catching the attention of the authorities; and even in the most severe cases of Serious Case Reviews, 30-40% of the families are not previously known to social care services.

The answer to all this is the joined-up approach. National government and local areas have long been developing protocols and good practice guidance to encourage partnerships between specialist drugs/alcohol commissioning and provision, and children and family – and criminal justice and housing – services. At Adfam we are currently working on some research to see how far this is translated into the everyday practice of those professionals who come into contact with these families. And, to judge from the responses to our training courses focusing on the practice issues for families and children affected by substance use, there is an almost overwhelming need for training from a large and diverse workforce.

What all this means in practice is that policymakers may regard drug and alcohol issues as ‘specialist’ or niche’ as one response, and integral to a myriad of policy areas as another. Nuance is difficult to capture in policymaking, therefore practice suffers a similar fate.

The development of a family-friendly service for families where drug and alcohol misuse may be intergenerational, where parenting capacity is compromised and the life chances of children are negatively affected, should be integral to mainstream practice; nonetheless, it requires a specific skill set and a confident, well-trained workforce to implement effectively.

Investment in providing services and support for families with multiple needs is to be greatly welcomed, and the expansion and positive evaluations of Family Intervention Projects show that this work can be rewarded with positive outcomes which save money in the long-run. Adfam urges consideration to be given to the challenges of engaging and working with these families in the development of the Family Test: service provision for families and children affected by drugs and alcohol is essential.

25. How to deliver family friendly Britain? Put families in charge

Anne Longfield: Chief Executive, 4 Children

Anne Longfield argues that families should be seen as assets not burdens, and placed at the heart of efforts to design family friendly services and policies.

The 2010 general election was a landmark event which saw all three main parties highlighting families in their political manifestos. For the first time across the political spectrum, the family was being placed at the heart of a vision for society with commitments to make Britain a country that supports and nurtures families - a truly family friendly country.

Yet, eighteen months on, all parties are still having some difficulty in defining just what this means and how it can be delivered. Yes of course it means good buggy access to public buildings and transport, decent family orientated services and employment opportunities that allow families to balance home and work. There is still much to do in most of these areas but the pathway for the future is increasingly clear. But would-be voters instinctively know that a family friendly country means more than this. The question is: If it's about more than employment law and service delivery, is it something that government - national or local - could or should do something about? The families who talk with 4Children answer with a resounding yes.

A year ago, 4Children reported on one of the most extensive consultations and dialogues with families this country has ever seen. The Family Commission, chaired by Esther Rantzen had travelled the country consulting with 10,000 families about their lives, their aspirations, what held them back and what could take them forward. The Commission found optimism - families positive about their future and determined to do everything within their powers to help their family 'get ahead'; it found resilience - with families constantly evolving to face the new challenges and it found frustration with government and services that did not only fail to understand what families need but actively seemed to be working against them.

Take a look at these findings. When asked how 'family friendly' job centres and employment support were (there to support family members to find jobs to become and remain financially independent) only 3% of people thought they were. Local councils (there to create and support positive and flourishing communities) did little better with only 8% believing that they were. Even family services fell short of the family friendly mark for many with just 27% of people thinking childcare could be described as putting families first and 45% of schools. Let's be clear, families wanted and valued these services but there was something about the way they were being run that prevented them from gaining the full potential of support they needed from them.

For all those seeking a more outcome focus to services there is a strong lesson here: you won't get the most from the money you spend on services and you won't make the differences for families that you need to do UNLESS you change the way the service is delivered to make it 'family friendly'. Even relatively new and highly regarded services such as Sure Start Children's Centres need to reflect. The advice and support on offer to families is literally changing lives but think how much more could be achieved if you put families in the driving seat. These valuable services now need to be remodelled, improved and added to in innovative ways that work for families and that offer more to the community as a whole.

But it was those families with the most complex needs that felt most let down by a system that was felt to work against them rather than for them. Time and time again with worrying consistency, families told us of services and professionals who did not understand their lives and aspirations; when they asked for help when problems occurred none was available and when problems escalated into crisis, they were overwhelmed by a system that treated them as a failure with the scrutiny and disempowerment that this affords. “The state ignores us when we need help” we were told, “and then when we hit a crisis they are on our backs”. This is not a system designed to think ahead, maximise potential and prevent crisis. All of the things families want and need it to be.

Little surprise we called the report ‘Starting a Family Revolution’ with a call to put families in charge. This is the scale of the challenge and the scale of culture change we need to see to begin to make a difference. So what are the fundamentals that need to change? What would families make different if they were in charge? Let's start with the basics:

1. Families are assets not problems – until we realise this we won’t get anywhere.
2. Families are problem solvers – families want to shape and deliver their own solutions and want the help and support to do so.
3. Families want to help each other – 91% of people in a recent poll we commissioned told us that they would be prepared to help struggling families in their neighbourhood – let’s release that potential.

BUT that doesn’t mean that there is no role for the state – far from it. Families want help and services but they want the right kind of help – help that is available early and locally as difficulties arise; help that is practical and helps them resolve their difficulties – not just endless assessments of risk; and help that empowers and strengthens them to develop as a family unit.

Family friendly means a state that understands these things and works ALONGSIDE families to help them flourish.

So is any of this possible? Certainly it is a challenge at every level - from Government systems to professionals delivering the services and support. This means a major mind-shift and in some cases a totally different starting point.

But 4Children remains confident that it is very possible. The recent commitment from the Prime Minister’s to a Family Test across Government is a start. First proposed by 4Children as a recommendation in its Family Commission last year it has the potential to provide a powerful catalyst for change across Government by considering whether policies strengthen rather than weaken families.

Now putting families in charge of conducting the test would make it even more radical.

Part four: Parenting Policy and Practice

Towards a long-term strategy for parenting
Pamela Park (Parenting UK)

Never too early, never too late
Naomi Eisenstadt

Picking up the pieces in Westminster
Nickie Aiken (Westminster Council)

Four steps to supporting parents
Denise Burke and Stephen Burke (United for All Ages)

The softer side of early intervention
Jo Graham (Learning Unlimited)

Supporting Working Families Everywhere
Emma Harrison (A4E)

Building on what we know to break the cycle
Dame Clare Tickell (Action for Children)

Parenting after the Riots
Annette Mountford (Family Links)

26. Towards a long-term strategy for parenting

Pamela Park: Chief Executive, Parenting UK

Pamela Park sets out why parenting is so essential, outlines a framework within which it can be supported at key transition points and highlights the importance of a measured approach to parenting after the summer disturbances.

While factors which led to the unrest in August 2011 are many and complex, the quality of parenting is undeniably a part of the jigsaw. In response to the events, the Prime Minister said "if we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we've got to start". Although further analysis has now revealed that only 20% on average of those arrested were under 18, we know that the quality of parenting is a key determinant in predicting a child's future involvement in anti-social activity or criminal behaviour, whether as a child or later in life. We also know that one of the key risk factors for future criminal activity is having a family member who has a criminal conviction. The children, present and future, of those convicted following the riots are at higher risk of criminal behaviour themselves.

Why focus on parenting?

Parents are the biggest single influence on their child's development. "Authoritative" parents, who show warmth, consistency and positive regard towards their children and set firm boundaries, are best for most children, rather than parents who are characterised as "authoritarian" or "indifferent". Authoritative parenting builds the foundation for a child to grow up feeling loved and valued, and in turn children develop the capacity to trust and empathise, to respect other people, and to understand the consequences of their actions.

Not only do we know that parenting is crucial in determining a child's future but we know also that parenting skills can be learned and enhanced, resulting in improved family wellbeing and better outcomes for children. There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of parenting programmes: over 100 randomised trials show the effectiveness of structured, cognitive behavioural-based interventions with a wide range of families in reducing child problematic behaviour, improving parent confidence and skill, and reducing child maltreatment.[125]

Unicef's 2007 report card placed the UK at the bottom of the child wellbeing league table.[126] Recent follow-up research by Unicef showed that wellbeing 'centres on time with a happy, stable family, having good friends and plenty of things to do.'[127] It is important that parenting policy is set in the context of improving overall family wellbeing. The quality of parenting is one of the key determinants in family wellbeing – recent reports and league tables show that Britain needs to improve in this area. Around three-quarters of parents say they want more information and support to help their parenting[128] - policy-makers must recognise this opportunity to significantly improve family wellbeing across the country.

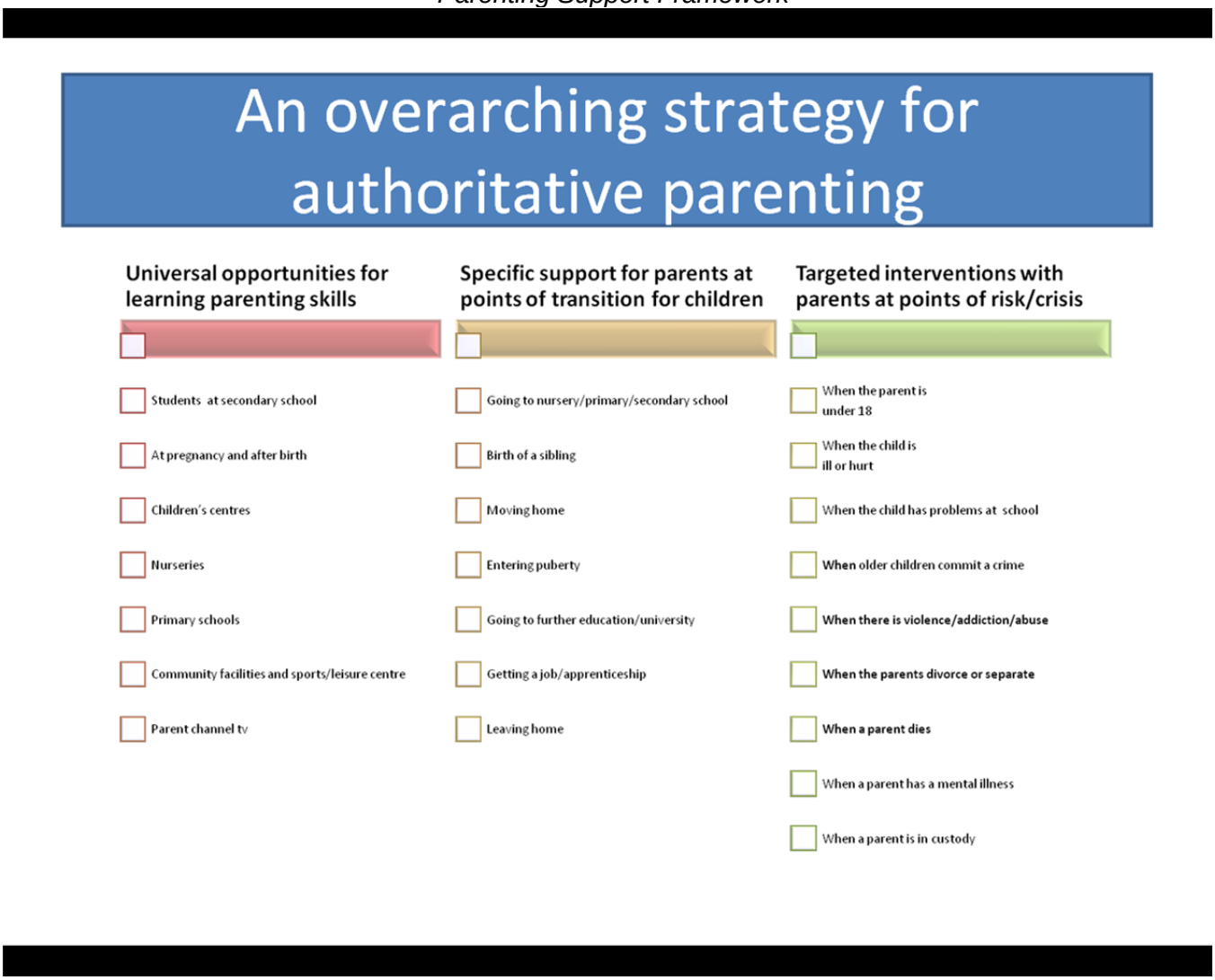
[125] ACAMH Emanual Miller Lecture and Day Conference presentation, Professor Frances Gardner, March 2011.
[126] *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries,* Unicef, 2007, p. 2.
[127] *Children's Wellbeing in UK, Sweden and Spain: The Role of Inequality and Materialism,* Ipsos MORI and Dr Agnes Nairn, 2011, p. 1.
[128] Department for Education website: http://www.education.gov.uk/a00198258/government-trials-parenting-classes-for-all-parents-of-children-under-five.

How to transform parenting in the UK

In order to produce any long-term improvements in family wellbeing, we must change the social norms surrounding parenting support – moving towards a society where seeking advice and support about parenting is as accepted as attending an antenatal class to get information about pregnancy and birth. The birth process, after all, lasts no more than 24 hours while parenting is a life long role. Parenting must be recognised as a skill that can be learned and enhanced.

In order to ensure social norms can be changed, parenting education and support must be offered within a framework which builds on a platform of universal support. The stigma associated with asking for help is thus diminished, and more effective, targeted support to those in greater need can be promoted. Parenting support models such as those in Leksand in Sweden and the SKIP programme in New Zealand, which are universal and preventative in nature, offer proof that this approach is effective.[129]

Parenting Support Framework



[129] *International experience of early intervention for children, young people and their families',* WAVE Trust/C4EO 2010.

Universal provision
Integral to this parenting support framework is a universal platform that will ensure a shift in social norms, beginning with the inclusion of concepts of positive parenting and understanding child development in schools. This will not only help to ensure that the next generation of parents have the necessary understanding of what children need, but it also shifts the social norms around seeking advice as students will already have a lived experience of learning about parenting.

Providing parenting support for expectant mothers and fathers is another key area which needs greater recognition and development. All parents can benefit from learning about parenting and relationships during the antenatal period, rather than just the mechanics of birth and breastfeeding - and they are particularly open to learning before the birth of their first child.

Evidence shows that the first years of a child's life are vitally important in laying the foundations for later outcomes, therefore we endorse the current focus on children's centres and the introduction of an offer of universal parenting classes to parents of children under five. Given the evidence of the importance of the foundation years in shaping a child's future, it is essential that all parents have access to advice and support during these vital years. This universal offer, if properly accessed following the shift in social norms, would greatly contribute to improving the overall wellbeing of families in the UK.

Early intervention at points of transition

We know that points of transition and change can be challenging and provoke anxiety, yet at these times parents are often more open to support and help. The key transition points which could be built upon include starting primary school and moving to secondary school, the birth of a new sibling and moving home. We believe that targeting these key times of transition will allow universal engagement with parents, leading to wider uptake of cost-effective early intervention and preventative work with families who may be experiencing challenges but have not yet reached thresholds which would bring them to the attention of more costly targeted interventions, especially if the interventions are delivered by a plurality of providers in universal settings.

Targeted interventions

To complete this framework there needs to be targeted interventions for families where there are established difficulties, such as mental health problems, parental substance misuse, or a family member in prison. To break the cycles of disadvantage that have become entrenched in some communities, targeted support towards these groups where we know there are additional needs is essential. In addition, there is a growing body of evidence which shows that multi-agency, whole family approaches are effective in supporting those families with multiple, complex needs. The Westminster Family Recovery Programme has seen a 69% reduction in accused offences and 48% reduction in reported anti-social behaviour, whilst saving an estimated £2 million in costs that would have been incurred had the 50 families involved not received intensive support.[130]

Of course, throughout the parenting support framework, from universal to targeted services, the quality and training of the workforce - both in terms of what they do and the way in which they communicate with parents - is an essential ingredient to ensure high quality outcomes for parents and families.

[130] *Repairing broken families and rescuing fractured communities: Lessons from the frontline.* Local Government Leadership/Westminster City Council, 2010, p. 20.

Conclusion – challenging assumptions and avoiding pitfalls

The events of the summer raised two areas of potential pitfalls in relation to parenting policy. First, some parents were quoted in the media as blaming government for no longer letting them discipline their children. The unrest must not be used as an excuse to condone authoritarian parenting – characterised by harsh discipline and inconsistency. Authoritative parenting consistently sets firm boundaries but does not resort to harsh discipline that simply makes matters worse; it is more effective to use positive methods of discipline. Secondly, the unrest led to a strong response by the judiciary and local authorities, with custodial sentences and threats of eviction and loss of housing benefit. We must avoid responses that will inadvertently make problems worse in the future. Although the use of parenting orders has been questioned by some quarters of the sector, a Youth Justice Board evaluation of parenting orders showed that reconviction rates had dropped by nearly one third, and there was a 50% drop in number of recorded offences committed.[131] We would challenge local areas to utilise parenting orders in place of evictions or loss of benefits.

Policy which focuses just on blaming parents and exclusively targeting "broken" families will only present short-term solutions and reinforce stigma associated with seeking parenting support, and will not improve wider family wellbeing across the UK. The Allen and Field reviews, together with the Coalition's commitments to improve social mobility, provide an opportunity to make sound policy decisions focusing on sustained change rather than crisis management. For there to be longer-term change, the wider spectrum of family support – from universal through to targeted support – must be developed.

[131] *Positive Parenting,* Youth Justice Board, 2002, p. iii.

27. Never too early, never too late

Naomi Eisenstadt: Senior Research Fellow at the University of Oxford, former Director of the Social Exclusion Task Force

Naomi's contribution reflects on the current interest in parenting and goes on to explain why the discourse on reaching the 'most disadvantaged' is unlikely to result in progress until more sophisticated analysis and approaches are developed.

A series of consistent themes dominated the Blair Brown years. While Blair himself was deeply committed to improving education for all children, there was also a strong push from both politicians about child poverty, and particularly about reducing the gap in outcomes between the poorest children and the wider child population. While the main strategy for reducing the gap in outcomes was through statutory schooling, there also emerged a keen interest in family policy, both in policies to reduce pressures on families and policies to enhance the capabilities of parents.

Supporting parents and supporting parent*ing*

The social class gradient in outcomes for children is well established. Children from better off backgrounds do better than those from poorer backgrounds. Reducing pressures on poorer families, that is, supporting parents, is one way that Government can intervene to ameliorate the impact of poverty, or indeed reduce the numbers of children living in poverty. Such policies include targeted benefits, improved parental leave arrangements, flexible working arrangements, and flexible and affordable childcare. Government can also intervene to support parent*ing*, improving the behaviours of parents in the ways they interact with their children, from informal support, advice and information to highly structured parenting programmes.

The decisions on which of these twin tracks to take has become highly politicised. The left will argue that the real problem is poverty, and with a more generous benefits systems and better employment prospects, child poverty and the poor outcomes associated with poverty will significantly decrease. The right argue that poverty is no excuse, any parent, given the right capabilities, can improve their child's life chances. The either /or nature makes this a sterile debate. It is clearly easier to adopt the behaviours associated with 'good' parenting if the pressure to provide the basics are reduced. Not all well off people make good parents, and not all poor people are bad parents; it is just significantly more difficult to be good parent with a minimum level of resources. Finding the right balance between reducing pressures and increasing capabilities is challenging, and critically important.

Supporting parenting is intervening early

The evidence is now substantial on the impact of severe stress on infant and pre-natal brain development. However, there is also evidence of on-going brain plasticity into adolescence and beyond. High quality home learning environments and early education improve the chances of success in later life, but they do not provide inoculation against all risks as children mature. Children experience risks well into their teens and support to mitigate such risk also needs to be available. The arguments about the need to increase resource allocation for the early years were made on the basis of decades of significant under investment. The second strong argument for increased investment in early years and parenting support is that there are significantly more interventions and programmes with a stronger success record with very young children and their parents, than there are programmes for older children. Intervening early is likely to cost less, and achieve more.

Shifting the curve or addressing the tail

Most of the major social policy systems changes in the last hundred years have shifted the curve, leaving the general population wealthier, healthier, and wiser. The Victorians provided clean water for everyone, not just those likely to contract cholera. State provision of education and a National Health Service have also shifted the curve. Universal provision of early education is already ensuring more children experience success at school, and therefore, have better chances of employability in adult life. Good early-years provision is also associated with better physical and mental health in adulthood. Unfortunately, no policy works for everyone; as the curve is shifted, the few in number for whom successive policies have not worked are left further and further behind. The tail becomes longer, thinner, and those at the very bottom have a complex set of problems that no single policy or initiative can address. A set of key features are likely to coalesce around families in this group: inter generational worklessness, poor housing, mental ill health. An additional high risk factor for poor child outcomes is having a parent in prison. None of these issues individually predict disaster, but collectively, within the same family, they create almost intractable problems that cannot be dealt with by children's services or indeed, by the best evidence based parenting programmes. Nor can they be dealt with by traditional community development or Big Society approaches. These are the families that neighbours don't like, and for good reason, don't want to associate with.

Addressing the curve requires a niche market approach. It requires sophisticated market research to establish from the families themselves as well as from data analysis, what would work. Carefully targeted programmes like Family Intervention Projects have had some success, as has the Family Nurse Partnership programme. However, we have failed to develop a systematic approach to targeting based on both adult and child risk factors.

The Government is conducting a number of reviews on the riots. Firstly, any review should re-examine the data analysis done by the Social Exclusion Task Force on the nature of deep exclusion. They should also do a much clearer analysis of who was involved in the riots. How much was about deeply rooted long term disconnection and how much was going along with the crowd for free stuff. Finally, any new proposals need to consider the impact on the wider family, not just the individuals caught up in the affray. Putting more parents in prison, particularly if they have not had contact with the criminal justice system before, is likely to increase rather than decrease risk of intergenerational disaffection.

28. Picking up the pieces in Westminster

Nickie Aiken: Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Community Protection, Westminster Council and a Trustee of FPI

Councillor Nickie Aiken provides a Local Authority perspective on dealing with the most vulnerable families and highlights the gains Westminster has achieved through better cross-agency working and coordinated approaches

The unrest seen in our major cities over the summer has rightly focused attention on how to assess, intervene and persist to help some of the most vulnerable families in our communities. With the Prime Minister pledging to tackle 120,000 problem families before the next election, local authorities should be at the forefront of local solutions to meet this challenge.

Following extensive investment, these families continue to cost the taxpayer almost £100,000 per year. The answer is not more investment; rather it is a smarter, more coordinated approach to public services.

Following the riots, Westminster conducted a consultation event with young people and it was found that they felt the root cause of the problem was family breakdown but also poor parenting, particularly the lack of clear discipline in the home. A family environment was seen to provide a stable, secure and safe haven for young people at risk of entering a gang and engaging in the associated criminal activity. It was also felt by the young people that the initial breakout of violence was caused by a hardcore minority of young people with connections to local gangs.

It is against this backdrop that Westminster's 'Your Choice' programme was born. The council is taking a clear leadership and co-ordinating role in tackling serious youth violence. Building on the principles of early intervention, information sharing and personal responsibility, this programme allows our young people and their families to make a real choice – to take the services on offer and become upstanding members of our community, or to face a range of enforcement options.

The programme will provide targeted prevention programmes to stop young people from becoming involved in gangs, for example, through early intervention work in schools with year 6 and 7 pupils. It will also provide interventions to divert young people from gangs, through cross-border gang mediation, gang exit support up to the age of 24 and supporting parents in dealing with their children's involvement in gang activity. By engaging with our young people early, involving the wider family network and offering a clear life choice, this programme will see the lives of some of the most vulnerable families in society turned around.

The programme will build on the excellent work already ongoing across the city, including the Tell it Parents Action Group which has taken root in the north of the city. The group, started by local parents for local parents, aims to unpick some of the problems facing local communities today. It's strength as a community network lies in a grassroots, on-the-ground, joined-up approach to ensuring parents are part of any solution in maintaining strong and safe communities. With weekly drop-in sessions taking place, the credentials of this project are ones we hope to replicate throughout the Your Choice programme.

The motto of the group is ‘it takes a whole community to raise a child’; a motto which the Your Choice programme seeks to echo.

The Your Choice Programme also builds on the proven foundations of Westminster’s Family Recovery Programme (FRP). Established in 2008, the FRP’s success lies in its simplicity. Instead of families being passed from agency to agency or sharing information with practitioner after practitioner, the programme wraps services around those families most in need. The project provides a team around each family for six to 12 months and uses the expertise and intelligence of a range of professionals to assess, intervene and persist to help some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

A family takes many shapes and sizes; yet at its core, children and adults are bound by a domestic relationship, whose actions and inactions impact upon each others’ lives. In most families, these are positive relationships, morally beneficial with strong values instilled by good parenting without intervention. The families at the heart of the Family Recovery Programme are often chaotic. The absence of control and discipline, often coupled with a ‘don’t care’ attitude, blights their own lives as well as their neighbours’, inhibits social mobility and ultimately damages the community.

A key part of the programme is the family’s consent to share information. The Family Information Desk forms a key component of the programme; with different agencies sharing information on particular families so as a clear picture of the family, can their interactions with public services, can be mapped. This in turn means services are delivered in a smarter, more efficient way to meet the needs of the whole family.

With the first cohort of 50 families through the programme, the results speak for themselves. In the first year alone the net costs avoided for these families amount to over £1m, with the cost avoidance per family coming to over £21,000. Through the intervention of the programme the average number of arrests for crime households dropped from 9 to 1.5 a month and anti-social behaviour was reduced by nearly half. This means our streets and communities are safer and our problem families are turning their lives around.

The support of the Family Recovery Programme is not unlimited. Before participating in the programme, families must sign a contract with the council. The agreement sets out the possible sanctions – eviction, parenting orders, care proceedings and other forms of court action – in the event of a repeated failure to engage with the programme. In addition, those who join the ‘Your Choice’ programme will be subjected to possible sanctions if they repeatedly refuse to co-operate in the programme. With real choice comes real consequences and young people who choose to continue to associate with gangs and related offending will be subject to a range of enforcement methods against them, led by the Police and Council working in partnership.

This summer’s unrest has provided ‘rocket fuel’ to the parenting agenda; focusing practitioners and politicians’ minds alike on the importance of the issue. An appropriate, measured and reasoned policy response is needed. By building on the principles of the Family Recovery Programme, Westminster’s Your Choice programme, will offer young people in our communities a way out of crime and into a civil and more responsible society.

29. Four steps to supporting parents

Denise Burke and Stephen Burke: Directors, United for All Ages

Denise and Stephen Burke set out four critical factors in supporting better parenting and relieving the pressures on families.

Are parents failing? Of course not; the overwhelming majority do a fantastic job under extreme pressure. But parents don't operate in a vacuum, so we need to look at all the factors that contribute to good parenting and help give children a good start in life, ensuring their well-being on the way to becoming well-rounded adults. We would identify the following support as being crucial:

- An early offer of help for families facing difficulties. Too often it's too little, too late, which is a waste of resources and fails to tackle the real issues. When interventions are offered early, problems don't escalate and become more costly to solve later on. Schools and health play a key role in identifying where help is needed. This offer of help should address the whole family and their needs rather than individuals within the family.

- Access to universal information and advice so families and parents in particular can get answers to the questions they face throughout the life of a child and young person, from 0-19. There should be a blanket range of services that families can access; referrals for more acute interventions should be made when the core offer cannot provide the support needed.

- Encouraging support from the wider family. Family policy and practice often fails to recognise that families are multi-generational and extended. Grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins and step-families all play a big part in helping to raise children. They must be seen as a real resource and encouraged.

- Families must be supported to balance work and care. Employers must provide flexible working and a decent wage; childcare and eldercare need to be affordable and easily available.

Life within our multi-generational society is changing rapidly. More and more parents will live in households of three generations or more. More parents will rely on grandparents and other relatives for help and support. More will be squeezed by time and financial pressures. But if we change and respond to these realities and invest in the future of our children, then parents will continue to do a grand job.

Denise Burke and Stephen Burke are directors of United for All Ages www.unitedforallages.com

30. The Softer Side of Early intervention

Jo Graham: Consultant, Learning Unlimited

Jo Graham welcomes a focus on early intervention but urges that we do not overlook the role of museums and heritage sector as safe spaces to support family learning

The policy wind is blowing in the direction of early intervention. Whilst there may be discussions around how to afford it at a time of deficit reduction, when Local Authorities are closing Children's Centres and removing funding from parenting services, all the rhetoric is firmly pointing towards early intervention driving policy decisions.

Whether it is Iain Duncan Smith's principled endorsement:

> *"Getting Early Intervention right is crucial to breaking the inter-generational cycle of many of the social problems Britain is facing. By improving outcomes for children who have had a difficult start in life we can help them to meet their hopes and ambitions."*

or the logical pragmatism of long-term savings expounded by ministers such as Oliver Letwin:

> *"The great power of Graham (Allen)'s work is that it vividly illustrates the need to put more of our effort into solving problems early and cheaply, instead of spending vast sums trying (often vainly) to cure them later. Whether you measure this in terms of human happiness or in terms of taxpayer value, earlier is better."*

It is clear that senior government figures are being won over by the findings of the Allen Report. But what shape will this new-look early intervention take? With money tight and services more targeted will early intervention necessarily become more focused, more formalised, more measured? In targeting, will we adopt a deficit model of parenting where families take part in programmes that look alarmingly like lessons or counselling sessions, where genuine intergenerational communication is difficult to achieve and family agency suffers even if other positive outcomes are achieved?

'Grasping the Nettle', C4EO's practice based report on early intervention, highlights the characteristics of effective provision, calling them the five golden threads. Although they stress all five need to form the foundation of policy, they state:

> *"Of all the potential areas for intervention, it is in the combination of early years development, including language and communication skills, and parenting support that the most significant impact could be made."*

This is the arena in which museums and heritage have the potential to make a huge contribution. Museums have not been at the forefront of strategic thinking when it comes to envisioning family support services. They rarely offer formal programmes for under 5s, tend to have hard-edged, quite adult environments and, with the exception of the Science and Natural History Museums, still aren't always seen as "family destinations".

But museums can support the three golden threads that sit firmly within the key area of intervention identified by C4EO: the best start in life, language for life and engaging parents. What's more they do it in a "soft" way, providing genuine reasons to communicate, shared intergenerational experiences that underwrite family narratives and independent activities that give families agency to follow their own

interest, spend as much or little time as they want, bring their own experiences to bear and leave and come back when they want to.

Interesting work to engage parents with their young children has taken place in a number of museums across the UK. In Stoke, the Potteries Museum worked with Stoke Speaks Out and Sure Start to develop their wildlife gallery into a communication-friendly space for families with young children. Whilst the museum does run staff-led events from time to time, most of the Museum experience is self-managed. Comfortable seating close to activities prolongs adult-child interaction. Games and toys that link directly to artefacts in the cases prompt playful communication and knowledge sharing.

The relatively simple but thoughtful set of changes made by the Museum has seen the number of families using the space increase by 51% in the first year. The length of time they spend there increased significantly as did the number and length of conversations. What's more the social profile of families using the Museum (as evidence by postcodes) has shifted with a much higher proportion of local families from areas facing deprivation visiting.

In the South West an exploratory research project following families in six museums across the region concluded that with the right playful equipment to hand and an organisational environment in which families feel they have permission to explore and play, almost all family adults could engage with their under 5s to explore the museums' displays. What's more, arming children with torches, magnifying glasses or binoculars empowered them to initiate activity and prompted family adults to fall in line, following children's lead and providing a narrative for the exploration.

Of course each family did this at their own level and in their own way. The research found that families who would not usually use museums did not always feel comfortable and confident to explore the space or use resources on their first visit. Because this was a funded programme however subsequent visits were able to familiarity and as confidence grew so did communication. At the end of the project, all families were using the same resources. All that parents from disadvantaged areas needed was the time and support to access what can be a universal service.

Work in Manchester reflects similar findings. There they are extending their innovative work with 3-5 year olds to children 0-2, resulting in the "Culturebaby" conference in November to explore museums, policy and practice in the context of early intervention.

Just as the logic of early intervention versus late seems irrefutable, so it seems logical that encouraging families to explore intriguing places together in a carefully supported but totally informal way should offer a growth in confidence, in relationships, in communication , in curiosity and in understanding. After all this is what many families who already feel comfortable using museums take away from their visits.

What's more, exploring the past as a family enables parents to be experts, gives children insights into their family's history and enables them to see their parents as individuals with lives of their own.

Unfortunately not all museums offer the best environment to support this kind of exploration and the museum sector has not been the focus of much research into family interactions with young children. The potential hinted at in the South West study therefore is not well evidenced. But the project did show that parents have the capability to engage with their children and develop meaningful conversations, even sustained shared thinking on occasion.

Rather than reducing cultural services therefore, perhaps there is a case for Local Authorities in particular to take a fresh look at their museums. Can they be better utilised as part of Family Learning? Can they offer supported exploration as part of parenting support? Could they provide communication-friendly spaces, promoted as social, free-choice weekend destinations through schools and health services? Could their museum services work more closely with other agencies to encourage families to explore their own stories? Can we harness the power of heritage to help families build a sense of who they are and how they belong? If heritage becomes part of early intervention could we help children and families feel more “rooted” as they face the difficulties of adolescence?

31. Supporting Working Families Everywhere

Emma Harrison: Chief Executive A4E and lead champion, Working Families Everywhere campaign

Emma Harrison sets out the ambitions of the Working Families Everywhere campaign and how it aims to help families aspire for better futures

The riots of on the streets of England in August 2011 shocked the public and showed a level of dysfunction and dissatisfaction in some communities that manifested itself in violent protest. As a result, Prime Minister David Cameron redoubled his efforts to address the growing number of workless families, reiterating his announcement of December 2010 that he had asked Emma Harrison to lead a drive to get 120,000 troubled families working again. Harrison's Working Families Everywhere campaign believes that every family can aspire to be a working family and seeks to enable this aspiration through intensive intervention by a team of Family Champions.

The 120,000 families mentioned by the Prime Minister have complex needs that are presently served by a range of government agencies charged with dealing with one, or in some cases a couple, of these needs. The difference in the Working Families Everywhere approach is on setting a single goal, in this case employment for at least one family member, and dealing with the other needs on the path to, or subsequent to, that goal.

At the time of the initial announcement Harrison said: "I have spent more than 20 years helping individuals and families in the most disadvantaged communities get work, regain ambition and improve both their lives and the lives of those around them. I am excited and honoured to be asked to help make real the vision to turn 120,000 'never worked' families into families that are working, paying their own way, living great lives and, what's more, helping others do the same.

"For those families that are part of the Working Families Everywhere Campaign they will have a new source of support, they will have their own Family Champion, someone who side by side with the family will use every existing resource available to help them get going, face up to and sort out their problems, whether they be parenting challenges, poor health, debt, addiction, dependency or lack of motivation. Most importantly, however, it will involve helping people into meaningful employment to help create happy, working families with a new sense of purpose and an active role in society.

"My role will be to inspire, to change attitudes, to make sure that every bit of the existing government, voluntary and private effort adds up to this single goal of creating happy, working families" she said.

The timing of Parenting Week, with its theme of 'Family Friendly: what's the story?', fits well with the Working Families Everywhere campaign and its efforts to stimulate the debate what 'family friendly' is and how it impacts on employment.

Figures cited by the charity Family and Parenting Institute show that only six percent of people think that the UK is a very family friendly society. Harrison wonders whether that figure would be even worse if studies were to look into workplaces: "How family friendly are our workplaces? How much of a barrier to work is a lack or perceived lack of empathy to families by employers?

“As I travel around the country with the campaign I see that the vast majority of the families I meet want to change their own futures by moving into employment because it is through employment that they will be able to make the greatest changes to their economic circumstances. However, many of the 120,000 families we want to help will see themselves join employment at entry level therefore flexible working hours that fit with school and nursery provision is vital" she said.

Each of the Working Families Everywhere ‘Family Champions’ seek out employment opportunities for the families they support, a process that would be greatly simplified by employers being more open and transparent about their family friendly policies, publishing details of maternity and paternity leave, flexible working or carers leave on their websites.

Harrison is convinced that the family friendly employers are out there: “I have seen for myself that there are companies who really believe in families and provide great support to ensure that their employees aren’t put in a position where they have to choose between work and family. These employers should make sure they are open about and urge other businesses to be the same. This campaign is happening because people have seen that troubled families that become working families are able to play a more active role in contributing to their community - the Prime Minister has seen it, I have seen it and the Family Champions have seen it.”

One of the key aims of the Working Families Everywhere campaign is to highlight the issues and barriers that exist to getting families into employment. The media is playing a role, helping the wider public to understand the situations faced by these families and how they can help themselves and each other.

The campaign sees Emma Harrison taking the lead on inspiring, recruiting, training and developing an army of “Volunteer Family Champions” who will be from communities up and down the country- people who are passionate about and capable of helping others. She urges others to join her: “With the support of their own Family Champion, we can help transform these workless families into working families, building their independence and aspirations for the future. As a society we should celebrate families and all play our part in helping them to thrive. That is just what this campaign is about: helping troubled families to become working families so they can, in turn, help others”.

32. Building on what we know to break the cycle

Dame Clare Tickell: Chief Executive, Action for Children

Dame Clare Tickell urges policymakers to build on voluntary sector experience in supporting families and to create a long term, cross-party and sustainable approach.

The way that we parent has the most critical and lasting influence on a child's life. Every generation of parents has challenging issues to grapple with but currently, for a growing number of parents, the twin pressures of reduced family income and a cut back in support from the state is undermining their ability to provide a stable and loving home for their children. Where families are struggling to cope the impact is borne out in the disintegration of a critical part of what binds our communities together. Within the family there is an increased risk of breakdown, of child behavioural problems and of neglect, and in the wider world there is a massive drain on the public services that are left to pick up the pieces.

What we face is not an insurmountable mountain of entrenched and unsolvable problems. We know the scale of the challenge, we know what action is required of government, both local and national, and we know how to turn lives around on the ground. For many years organisations such as Action for Children have delivered services that have proven success in transforming the lives of families with significant social, health, economic and behavioural problems. Through appropriate investment and strong leadership from government we want to see that success built upon and taken even further.

Official Government figures estimate that just over 120,000 families in England are experiencing multiple problems. These problems include mental ill health, violence, money pressures and problems with drugs or alcohol. Many of the parents in these families will have been brought up in similar homes themselves. These parents are 34 times more likely to need drug treatment and eight times more likely to need treatment for alcohol abuse. Most worryingly there are child protection concerns in a third of the families.

These facts have not gone unnoticed by political leaders at the very highest level. Indeed in December 2010 the Prime Minister David Cameron made a personal commitment to turn around the lives of those troubled families by the end of this Parliament. The riots of July 2011 hit home to him the level of urgency that is required in the application of his ambition and prompted his demand for "rocket boosters" for those very efforts.

While achievable; effective and sustainable change for these 120,000 plus families will not come easy. Solutions do exist, but they require a long term vision, strong political leadership and a clear targeting of resources.

The key to success is sustained trust and support through the development of high quality professional relationships with vulnerable parents who may well have suffered in childhood themselves and often have limited or no parenting models to draw on. To break long-term cycles of suffering, families need targeted support that helps them find their own solutions without putting a label on them.

The evidence shows that intensive family support services prevent anti-social behaviour, keep children out of care and provide a cost-effective solution to service provision. They have achieved remarkable results. For example an analysis of services for families at risk of eviction due to anti-social behaviour found that 85% of complaints about antisocial behaviour either ceased or reduced to a level where the tenancy was no longer deemed to be at risk[132]. The families who were involved in anti-social behaviour

[132] *Anti-social Behaviour Intensive Family Support Projects: an evaluation of six pioneering projects*, Sheffield Hallam University (2006)

had decreased from 89% to 32% and the number of families with four or more anti-social behaviour problems declined from 45% to 5%[133]. Furthermore an analysis of social return on investment made found that for every £1 invested annually in intensive family support projects, society benefits by between £7.60 and £9.20[134]. One family support service run by Action for Children that works with over 40 vulnerable families with children at risk of offending reduces the number of children going into care by more than half, saving the local authority more than £37,000 per year for every child. If life changing services such as these are cut across the UK, we calculate it will cost the UK economy £1.3 billion per year[135].

The core element to an effective family support service is the quality of the human relationships developed. Previous research and evaluations have all shown that establishing an effective professional relationship with vulnerable parents is what makes a real difference in improving outcomes for children. Yet too often this is overlooked.

We have recently undertaken research in order to better articulate what this relationship looks like, and to understand the core elements of our family support services that are critical to this success. Our research, published in September 2011, identified the core practitioner qualities, skills and knowledge required:

- A child-focused approach: practitioners must have a clear focus on the outcomes intended for children and young people. This is particularly important for practitioners who have limited or no contact with children.
- Integral to the development of good relationships, is the achievement of an effective balance of support and challenge that takes account of children, young people and family needs, service context and engagement.
- Being open, clear and direct with parents from the outset
- Demonstrating credibility and genuineness to build trust with parents: being down-to-earth and demonstrating warmth
- Empowering and enabling families to address issues themselves. A solution-focused approach helps build parents' independence by working with them to identify issues, set goals and develop their own skills to resolve issues.
- Action-focused practice: working with parents to prioritise and resolve issues
- Practitioners' ability to interact positively with children and young people break down barriers, putting parents at ease
- Facilitating parents' understanding: help parents to understand terminology, jargon or actions needed in a way that is not patronising

[133] ASB Family Intervention Projects – Monitoring and Evaluation, National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) 2010

[134] *Backing the Future: why investing in children is good for us all*, New Economics Foundation (nef), Action for Children (2009)

[135] New Philanthropy Capital used the SROI models developed by the New Economics Foundation (nef) to provide figures on Action for Children's East Dunbartonshire Family Service on the success of the programme in preventing children from going into care. This figure takes into account the savings of £0.8bn the government would make from not providing family support services to all children in the UK at risk of going into care. However, cutting these services would be a false economy, as many more children would be taken into care, at a cost of £2.1bn. This gives a net cost of £1.3bn (£2.1bn - £0.8bn)

Practitioners' ability to develop effective relationships with vulnerable parents is directly influenced by the organisation in which they operate. Key organisational qualities such as a strong management commitment, the effective use of supervision and the ability to provide flexible, needs-led delivery are all essential.

The voluntary sector is in a unique position, we have the skills to engage service users in support, the autonomy to trial new ways of working, and the ability to innovate and provide flexible support. By having a clear organisational focus on supporting staff to develop, enhance and deliver these core relationship skills, there is the opportunity to build further on the expertise of the workforce and maximise the outcomes that are being achieved for service users. The research has developed resources (the skills and organisational frameworks) that provide organisations and professionals with tools to support the development and delivery of an effective professional relationship, and to help demonstrate how these are being achieved in everyday practice.

In conclusion, we welcome the current high profile given to family policy, but want to ensure progress is maintained once the political focus has shifted. Policy makers have failed so far. During the lifetime of a 21 year-old, there have been over 400 different policy initiatives, with each one lasting a little over two years[136].

The challenge now is to embed sustainability and investment for the long-term. This is not about reinventing the wheel, or an everlasting quest for new solutions. It is about securing investment in staff and organisations which are equipped to work in the most complex of circumstances and able to address entrenched problems. Policy needs to start valuing the things that matter.

We would urge that the developing the confidence of adults to undertake good quality parenting is a key block in the building of community capacity. In a time of financial cuts, it is short-sighted and a financial own goal not to recognise that by intervening to support parents at an early stage, we can help prevent young people from getting trapped in the same cycle of deprivation that have trapped their parents and grandparents.

Solving the complex problems facing the most deprived children requires a level of long-term commitment that can only be achieved by cross-party consensus and a willingness to take an agenda forward over a generation.

[136] *As Long As It Take: a new politics for children*, Action for Children (2009)

33. Parenting after the Riots

Annette Mountford: Chief Executive, Family Links

Annette Mountford offers a calm, historic sense of perspective about the Autumn disturbances and highlights the importance of well trained professionals in supporting, not threatening, parents lacking in confidence.

"Do you know when I first started this course and saw all the stuff you were bringing in, I thought what a load of crap! But now I think everyone should do this Programme, they should have no choice and all parents should do it before their children are born. I know many of my friends and family who should do it. It really makes you think" - father in Holme House Prison 2010 after attending a Nurturing Programme parent group in the prison

The riots already seem a long time ago – part of a summer of global financial crises, phone hacking scandals and weather to match. So many words spoken and yet so little understood. Can anything more usefully be said? The London School of Economics and the Guardian, together with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have launched a project "Reading the Riots" which aims to untangle the causes and measure the effects of the riots. We might be wise to wait until they report.

Some facts are emerging which might start to clear the very muddy waters, and to support a cautious stance. According to the Ministry of Justice, a quarter of those convicted of offences had over 10 previous offences. Three quarters had at least one caution or conviction and those with a criminal record had an average of 15 offences. Half of those appearing before the courts up to 15 September were under 20 years of age; over half of those under 18, of whom there were 364, had previous convictions. These figures tell us that the riots were a chance for those who regularly offend to offend again. They also show a very small cohort on which to base a huge number of generalisations.

One major focus of public concern was the role of the parents in the lives of the young people in question. This concern ranged from a measured reflection on how parents, particularly those working long hours and on a low income, might struggle in the long summer holidays to keep their teenagers entertained, to blunt condemnation and even vilification. This anxiety about parenting is not new – the Jamie Bulger case nearly 20 years ago prompted similar responses. While it is not reasonable at all to draw conclusions on the basis of scant evidence in particular cases, the reason parenting is raised in these circumstances is because we know that the quality of parenting impacts on a child's emotional, physical, mental and social development.

We know, and brain science now backs it up with more and more evidence, that a baby needs a secure attachment to a primary care giver from birth (a baby needs his or her mum!) We know that babies, toddlers, children and teenagers need boundaries and support and discipline and love. We know that they need consistency, they need attention, and they need empathy in order to develop empathy for others. In other words adults and children need to be good at relationship skills.

As a health visitor for many years, visiting families in poverty on the council estates of Oxford, I know that many babies, toddlers, children and teenagers don't get these basics of parental support. Every day, babies are neglected, toddlers are beaten, children are shouted at, teenagers are abandoned. Not all these children go on to lead criminal lives. Not all are frightening, or hooded, or violent. But many are unhappy, or unstable, or develop addictions, or have a baby themselves at a very young age.
I don't suppose that these unhappy families are a new phenomenon, just as the riots are not a new phenomenon. After all, the London Mob, like its Paris equivalent, has played a role throughout history. Similarly, the cries of condemnation or of despair with family failings echo down the ages.

What I do know, from my experience of talking to families, are two key facts which together offer a source of great hope for the future - most parents want the best for their child and most parents can be helped to do better for their child.

The saddest aspect of my time as a health visitor was seeing how the good intentions of the new parent can often end up in frustration, despair and even harm to the child. This was the case with families of many different backgrounds - parenting problems are no respecters of social class or income levels. The key is to harness the initial good intentions through appropriate support and encouragement, so that the intentions are in fact realised. This is not about instruction or condemnation, as I quickly learned. Telling parents what to do rarely resulted in more successful parenting. Instead long term change is achieved by addressing what causes the feelings of distress, anger, frustration and pain that lead to anti-social behaviour.

The key was to build the confidence of the parent to believe that they could become a good parent. This is often hard for a parent who was unloved or harshly treated as a child themselves, or who was abused or neglected by their own parents. It is also about the parent reflecting upon how their own behaviour impacts upon their child. I vividly remember one parent who arrived in a rage at the Week 3 session of a 10 week Nurturing Programme parenting group. Her son had smashed the microwave plate. After giving her a cup of tea, some sympathy and calming her down, the group leader enquired *"How do you think your son was feeling when he smashed the plate?" "Well he was angry with me, wasn't he?" "Ah yes – and what had happened to make him feel angry?"* Pause and then she replied *"He'd just found out I'd eaten his chocolate*". She had a light bulb moment and went on to make huge changes for the better in her family.

The challenge is that it takes huge skill on the part of the professional working with families to enable parents to have these light bulb moments. Parents with fragile confidence, and unnurtured childhoods, who know deep down that they are struggling with their child, and fear either that things will get worse, or that their child will be taken away, will not seek help from anyone whom they perceive as threatening. And once trust is built, and the parent comes through the door for the first time, the ongoing relationship has to be based on working with the parent, not doing things to the parent.

Professionals themselves can feel vulnerable working with these difficult families, who might be initially hostile and defensive. They may hide behind process to create a safe space. Or they may become cynical as the families prove resistant to what seems to be sensible advice. It takes skilful training to give the professionals the confidence to work with the parents in an authoritative, supportive way. Family Links has been training parent group leaders for 15 years. A recent independent evaluation of our training showed that 80% of those trained gave us 10 out of 10 for the quality of our training (the average was 9.7), and 100% of the 247 trainees found the training made them more confident working with parents.

Similarly teachers working with these angry teenagers need training to become confident in helping them manage their feelings and behaviour. These young people need to learn to build relationships that equip them to become good enough parents in due course, even in their own parents have been unable to provide a suitable model of good parenting.

The evidence –base for impact of parenting programmes is now well established. High quality clinical trials of manualised programmes have achieved significant improvements for the families in the trial. The difficulty is ensuring that when these programmes are rolled out across the population, they achieve the same or similar impact as in clinical conditions. The next big area for research must be around finding out how this can happen – what combination of training, supervision, and programme materials makes widescale replication successful.

It is hard enough to get parents to walk through the door – it takes skill to keep them coming back each week. As one parent told researchers[137] about the Family Links-professionals working with her:

> *"They were so supportive…they didn't criticise; supported me instead of saying "no this is how you've got to be a parent" she really listened"*

At every point at which professionals come into contact with parents or children, they need to be confident enough to model trusting and respectful relationships which are the bedrock of a healthy society. This requires high quality sustained training and support.

[137] From "Understanding parenting programmes: parents' views" Dr J Barlow, Health Services research Unit, University of Oxford.

There is no such thing as an average family. The Family and Parenting Institute champions families. We are an independent charity working for a family friendly society which recognises the whole family, values families in all their diversity, and promotes conditions which enable families to thrive. We draw on research and evidence to influence policy and offer practical solutions to make society more family friendly.

Family and Parenting Institute
430 Highgate Studios
53-79 Highgate Road
London NW5 1TL

Tel 020 7424 3460
Fax 020 7485 3590
Email info@familyandparenting.org
Web www.familyandparenting.org

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