

Barnardo's Scotland Briefing: Scottish Government Debate on the National Parenting Strategy

Barnardo's Scotland supports the Scottish Government's plans for a National Parenting Strategy. It offers Scotland a unique opportunity to articulate a vision for growing up in Scotland, and is one we should capitalise on.

Barnardo's Scotland calls on the Scottish Government to consider the following as part of its progression of the National Parenting Strategy:

- **Prepare, Advise and Support** – The National Parenting Strategy should be based on three principles: prepare, advise and support. It must focus on all aspects of parenting from pre-conception, pre-birth, birth, early years, school years, 16-18, and transition to adulthood.
- **National Parenting Campaign** – the Scottish Government should launch a National public debate/conversation on parenting and how we view children and families and how we raise our children.
- **Children's and Young People's Bill** – the new strategy must recognise and be an integral part of the promised new legislation on children and young people.
- **Corporate parenting of looked after children** – The strategy must encompass all those in a parenting role, especially the corporate parent. Looked after children have some of the worst outcomes across Scotland. In many ways the parent that needs the most support in Scotland is the corporate parent.
- **Building on existing work** – the National Parenting Strategy must recognise and incorporate what has been developed to-date. It must act as a linking document bringing together all the elements of all the frameworks, policies and strategies across Scotland, such as the Early Years Framework.
- The strategy should be linked in with the other promised initiatives the Government has proposed such as the Early Years Early Action Fund, the change fund and proposed children and family centres.
- **Multi-agency/partnership working** – The strategy must act as a catalyst to bring together all the different agencies involved supporting children and families and implementing existing policy.
- **Fathers** – There should also be a specific focus on fathers to ensure their role is valued, understood and that they get clear messages about the essential contribution they make as well as their responsibilities.
- **Data** – The strategy needs to be supported with relevant, accurate and up-to-date data.
- **Scrutiny** – There must be regular reporting to Parliament and the publication of reports and statistics need to be given in order that progress can be reviewed and priorities adjusted.

Prepare, Advise and Support

The National Parenting Strategy should be based on three principles: prepare, advise and support. It must focus on all aspects of parenting from pre-conception, pre-birth, birth, early years, school years, 16-18, and transition to adulthood.

Under the theme of preparation the strategy must work to ensure that people are ready to start families. This should start as early as possible in schools with family planning education. Prenatal education and the role of GP surgeries and family planning services all need to be considered as part of the strategy and the support they give at the start of and throughout the parenting journey.

Advice is crucial both before and when the baby is born, as well as right throughout parenting. Ensuring the right advice is available and is disseminated at the right time to parents and families will be a crucial aspect of the strategy. This advice must be easily accessible to all families and all families must know how and where to go to get it. In a poll conducted for Parenting Across Scotland (PAS) in 2010 almost three quarters (72 per cent) of the 1,000 parents surveyed said they did not know where to go for advice and support in bringing up their children. This figure rose to 82 per cent among parents in the most deprived areas of the country.

Finally the strategy should make clear when and how support should be given to those parents that need it. It needs to address all those issues which can interfere with parenting, whether it is the challenges the parents themselves face or the particular issues around the additional health and development needs of their children. There should be tiered level of support for parents from basic support such as information, through to group/peer work, mentoring, right through to crisis intervention.

Challenging stigma will be a major area of work. The strategy should imbed in our culture the idea that it is completely natural and expected that parents need advice and support, as part of mainstream parenting. Getting advice before and during parenthood should be seen as the norm and not just for vulnerable parents or parents at risk.

The Corporate Parent

In Scotland, the parent above all others that needs the most support if it is to improve the outcomes for its children is the state in its role as the corporate parent. The Scottish Government and Local Authorities are currently acting as corporate parents to close to 16,000 looked after children and young people in Scotland.

Nearly all of these children come from chaotic backgrounds with complex family issues, such as domestic violence, parental alcohol and substance misuse, physical or sexual abuse, loss, trauma, separation or family break up.

There is a whole range of statistics that show that looked after children and young people experience poorer outcomes across almost every area of life that we measure as a society, from education, health, safety, to employment, poverty, and housing. These poor outcomes follow them right through care and beyond.

Unfortunately many of these statistics and outcomes have got worse over the years, and haven't improved since the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament thirteen years ago.

How can a Parenting Strategy support looked after children

So what can the corporate parent do better and how can a National Parenting Strategy successfully intervene, where other strategies and frameworks have not over the first thirteen years of devolution.

Ideally, intervention must be as early as possible to ensure a child never enters care in the first place and a National Parenting Strategy must prioritise this. There needs to be systems in place to identify those families at risk and structures that can support them.

When a child moves into the care system and there is clearly little hope of them returning to the family home, then the Government needs to ensure that there is a system in place to move that child into a stable, permanent home environment as quickly as possible.

There is also an important question for the National Parenting Strategy to consider: to what extent and how long should the corporate parent remain responsible for the young people in their care.

Today's modern families see parental support for children remaining right through the transition into adulthood and beyond. Parents frequently support children through further and higher education, early employment, accommodation, financial support and much more.

The National Parenting Strategy must consider how the corporate parent should support care leavers into and during adulthood.

About Barnardo's Scotland

Barnardo's Scotland works with more than 10,000 children, young people and their families in 98 specialised projects in communities across Scotland.

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