

Supporting the families of teenagers

CHILDREN 1ST is concerned that parents remain unaware of how to access support or information to assist them with their teenage children. We welcome the current focus on early intervention and believe strongly that prevention is far better than cure. However, through our work with parents and families across Scotland, we have become increasingly aware that there is a clear support gap when it comes to parenting teenagers.

This briefing gives an overview of recent research highlighting parents' own perceptions of the challenges in bringing up teenagers, and outlines CHILDREN 1ST's recommendations to the Scottish Government regarding this particular group of families and young people in Scotland.

For further information on anything contained in the briefing please contact Mhairi Snowden on Tel:0131 446 2393 or at mhairi.snowden@children1st.org.uk

Current policy context

A range of initiatives and legislation affecting families has been developed by the Scottish Government over the last few years. Focus has been on parenting from the perspective of supporting families at the early stages of a child's life through Sure Start and other early interventions, and holding parents responsible when children or young people commit offences or are involved in anti-social behaviour. We remain concerned at the punitive approach adopted in anti-social behaviour legislation.

CHILDREN 1ST has welcomed the new administration's plans to invest in early years through an early years strategy, and also to promote positive policies for children, young people and their families. We look forward to further detail on these policies over the coming months.

What support is available to parents of teenagers?

While support is currently available for the parents of teenagers when things have reached crisis point (such as through children's hearings), there is less universal support available for parents beyond helplines such as ParentLine. Parents often do not know how to access information or advice beyond their informal networks (such as friends and family). We are concerned that these informal networks are unavailable to many parents.

What do parents say?

Two recent surveys carried out in Scotland, and further research carried out in the rest of the UK have highlighted the challenges that parents face when bringing up their teenage children.

Family Life in Scotland, Parenting Across Scotland: 2004

In 2004 Parenting Across Scotland, a multi-agency project financed by the Scottish Government and led by CHILDREN 1ST to research the concerns and issues affecting

parents in Scotland, commissioned MORI Scotland to undertake a survey of 1000 parents about family life in Scotland. Amongst many other things, the survey found that:

- One in five parents of teenagers said they had experienced problems with their children and they thought they needed help.
- Over two-thirds of adults were not aware of any organisations that provide advice and support to parents.

The Best and the Worst Job in the World: Why Being a Parent Isn't Easy, ParentLine Scotland and CHILDREN 1ST: 2007

In 2007 ParentLine Scotland, the free confidential helpline for parents and carers provided by CHILDREN 1ST, undertook a short survey over a three month period asking callers to the helpline what they found most difficult about being a parent.

One in five parents highlighted behaviour as a particular concern, with the vast majority of these highlighting teenage behaviour as the most challenging thing about parenting. Many parents revealed that they were lacking in support for bringing up their teenage children:

“As a parent of teenage children with very challenging behaviour, I don't feel that there are enough people to talk to. We need a health visitor type facility for older kids and more support for dealing with challenging behaviour.”

Supporting Parents of Teenagers, Policy Research Bureau: 2007

In England, a study conducted on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (now known as the Department for Children, Schools and Families) in 2007 found that much more was needed in the way of support for the parents of teenagers. The study, which combined a literature review and interviews with parents and professionals, highlighted a lack of awareness of support, and a real desire for information about children's adolescent development amongst parents.

Conclusions: strengthening families

Through our work with parents, we know that the vast majority of parents want the best for their children. We also know that they often do not know how to access the right sort of information and advice at the right time, and that parents benefit from a mixture of support (from universally available information and advice to targeted services). Support for parents has to be non-judgemental and available when parents need it. We call for:

1. **A greater understanding** of the difficulties and challenges of parenting teenagers
2. **Improved access** to family support services
3. **A National Family and Parenting Strategy** that takes a strategic approach to the provision of services such as parenting skills programmes
4. **The right balance** of universal support (information and advice) for parents of teenagers, and targeted support (for example for parents of children with ADHD)



Giving Scotland's vulnerable and disadvantaged children a brighter future