

# A Strategy for Parenting and Family Learning in Fife



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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 A coherent approach across Fife**

This strategy is aligned within the National Parenting Strategy and sets out an agreed and coherent approach to supporting families and parents across Fife. It is written for the benefit of parents and families, service providers and service commissioners.

While many agencies in Fife are involved in supporting families and parents in different ways, they have not until now shared an overall approach. This carries risks of duplication of services, inconsistency of service delivery and uneven levels of provision across Fife. By developing a strategy for parenting support and family learning we aim to improve:

- coherence and effectiveness of service delivery
- the potential for synergy between the efforts of partners.

### **1.2 The key importance of parenting**

Effective parenting is the key influence on healthy physical, emotional and psychological development in children. Consequently the greatest effort should be placed on supporting parents in their responsibility to meet these needs while acknowledging all parents have a right to help and advice. Supporting parents as adults in their own right is recognised as an integral element in the strategy – their emotional wellbeing, educational and employment opportunities can all have an impact on their parenting capacity. Family Learning programmes which offer activities for family members to learn together through intergenerational learning can increase confidence and foster positive attitudes to learning that might lead both adults and children to engage in further educational opportunities.

### **1.3 Proportionate support**

Research suggests that the most effective way of meeting the needs of children and families at different ages, stages and levels of need is through a continuum of support founded in universal provision, targeted early intervention, through specialist resources and enhanced support. The focus of this strategy is to ensure comprehensive services at each of these levels. As with the National Strategy, Fife recognises the potential that can be realised by working with families to provide support as early as possible with a focus on prevention. We must also ensure that we look at new ways to tackle inequality by delivering targeted approaches to parenting and family support to ensure families with the greatest needs are supported through preventative and early intervention approaches to minimise the potential for crises to arise.

It is important to recognise how challenging a task parenting can be and create a culture where seeking help and support is non-stigmatising and easily accessible. Parents who face particular additional challenges are highlighted in the National Parenting Strategy and include:

- fathers, particularly those living apart from their families
- lone parents

- parents of teenagers
- mothers with poor mental health
- teen parents
- families affected by disability
- families affected by imprisonment
- families affected by domestic abuse
- families affected by drug and alcohol abuse
- families impacted by attachment difficulties
- all parents and carers of looked after children
- parents offering a kinship role ( formally agreed or informally arranged)

#### **1.4 Early intervention**

The strategy gives particular emphasis to identification and support in the early years. This means ensuring easy access to universal provision and the provision of useful information for all pregnant mothers and parents of young children. It also means ensuring that communities can provide additional support to vulnerable families, families affected by disability and those without extended family networks.

This paper links to the Early Years Strategy which describes a clear pathway of early intervention and more intensive parenting support in the critical phases of early attachment. The substantial evidence of the adverse impact of poor attachment on future development and well being of children and young people underpins the emphasis on Nurturing Approaches to intervention at all stages and levels. Success at the preventative and early stages is expected to lessen the demand on specialist and crisis support to enable an intensive and rapid response where it is required. The model is based on a multi-agency framework that builds on existing strengths of communities, current services, local authority and NHS structures.

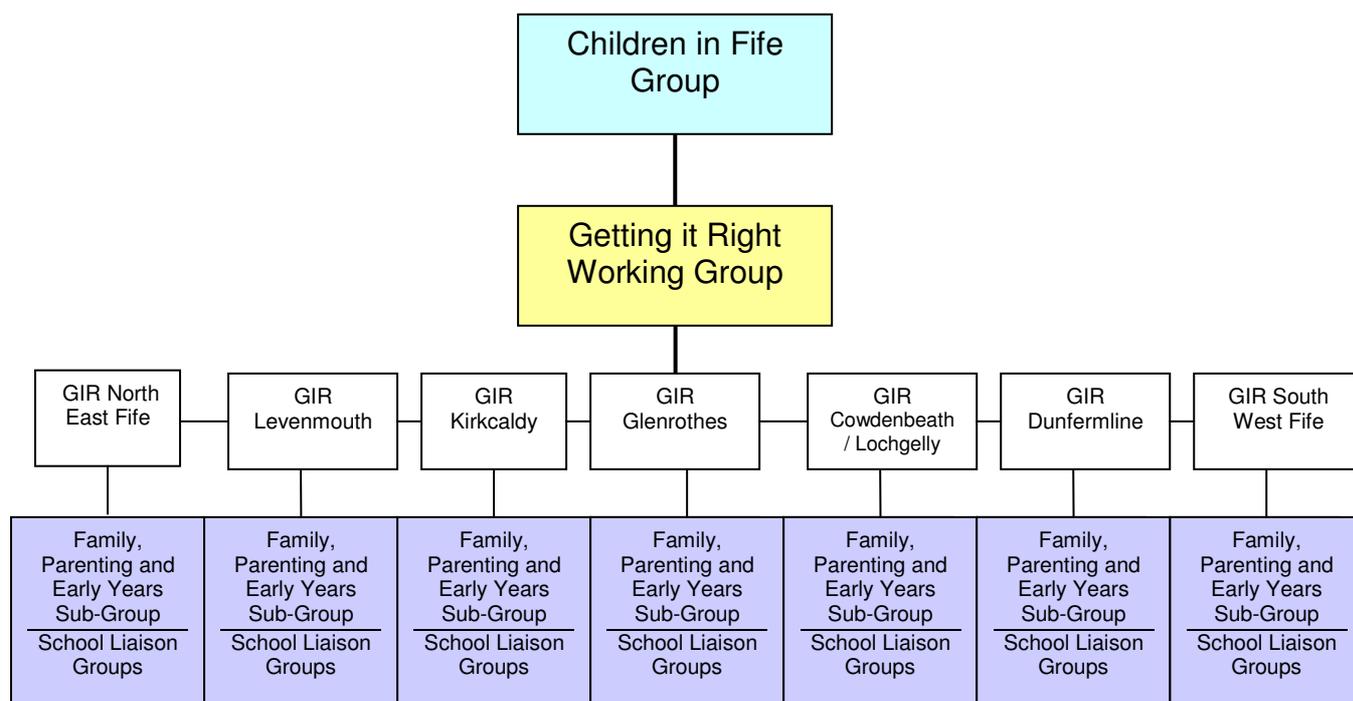
#### **1.5 The wider strategic context**

The framework sits within a wider integrating strategy for supporting children and families. This is planned and delivered through:

- Children in Fife Group
- Getting It Right Working Group
- Child Protection Committee
- Corporate Parenting Group
- Early Years Strategy Group
- Health and Wellbeing Alliance / Co-ordination Group
- Children's Rights Strategy Group
- Young Carer Strategy Group
- Children and Families Disabilities Strategy Group (Social Work)
- GIR (Area) Groups
- Family, Parenting and Early Years Sub-Groups

## 1.6 Mechanisms in communities

It is the responsibility of services to work in partnerships at community and strategic levels to develop, implement and evaluate parenting work in line with the agreed Fife strategy. The diagram below shows the mechanisms for these partnerships and how these will link to the Getting it Right Working Group and Children in Fife Group.



The role of Getting it Right Area Groups is to implement the Fife strategy based on local knowledge of gaps in existing services and of needs in the local community. Appendix 3 sets out these roles. School Liaison Groups and service managers at area/service level will have a role in prioritising and monitoring more enhanced interventions.

The Family Parenting and Early Years subgroups report to the Early Years Strategy Group which provides the framework for development based on the National Early Years Framework and Early Years Collaborative.

## 2.0 AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

### 2.1 Aims

#### This strategy will:

- Embed shared values, culture and principles around family learning and parenting support
- Provide a framework for a community capacity building approach
- Provide a framework for service delivery

- Provide a means of identifying gaps in services, both locally and service-wide to assist in commissioning
- Describe different levels of needs and how the strategy supports staged intervention

## **2.2 Principles**

### **Effective parenting is based on:**

- Secure attachment – in the early years, particularly the first year in life
- Positive beliefs and attitudes
- Confident adults with positive self esteem
- Clear expectations and boundaries within a warm and loving relationship
- Developmentally appropriate parental supervision
- Parental engagement in the child's learning in and out of school

## **2.3 Empowering not usurping**

### **To help them in their role all parents should:**

- Be valued and respected
- Receive recognition that most parents are trying to do the best for their children, sometimes under difficult circumstances.
- Have the right to support in their key role as the primary educators for their own children.
- Have ready access to advice and support that is non-judgmental and promptly offered.
- Be supported, empowered, understood and challenged to meet their responsibilities
- Have access to opportunities to further their own personal and educational development

## **3.0 STAGED INTERVENTION**

### **3.1 Graduated help**

This model is based upon graduated levels of needs and vulnerability for individual young people and families. Young people and their families will move between levels as their circumstances and needs change and this will be reflected in changes in service response.

Children/young people at level 4 will also have needs to be met at levels 1, 2 and 3. In this sense the model represents a continuum of needs and related interventions. Families' needs will change over time. A particular event within a family e.g. the death of a parent or sibling may result in additional needs being identified which require a response.

### **3.2 Least intrusive intervention**

Whenever possible the service response must be directed at reducing risk and vulnerability and meeting needs at the lowest level of intervention. The availability of,

and access to, effective early intervention and prevention is essential in order to achieve this. Early intervention refers both to an emphasis on identifying risks in the early years but also intervening in a timely, proportionate way when difficulties arise at any age. This staged approach provides a clear pathway and co-ordinated response through universal and targeted services and aims to reduce the number of unplanned crisis interventions.

### **3.3 The named person**

Based within universal services a named person will be the first point of contact for parents seeking advice, information and signposting to other services. The named person pre-birth to 10 days after birth is the midwife. From 10 days until entry into P1 the Health Visitor. For primary school aged children, the named person is usually the headteacher but may be a deputy headteacher or support teacher. In secondary school the named person is usually the guidance teacher but may be a support teacher or deputy headteacher. Where the needs of a young person are complex and they receive significant or intensive supports or services from more than one agency than a Lead Professional will be nominated to co-ordinate planning and achieve intended outcomes for the child. The examples given below are for illustrative purposes only. The level of support should always be determined by a careful analysis of the shared assessment information.

### **3.4 Level 1 Universal Support**

Universal Services need to be accessible to all parents and families including vulnerable families and those with children affected by disability. The named person for the child has a responsibility to signpost the family to locally available services and resources and information. Level 1 support includes a wide range of activities such as informal community groups and volunteer networks, childcare provision and adult education and employability opportunities as well as parenting courses and programmes. It is important that all parents have easy access to clear concise information on everything from pregnancy to the teenage years and beyond.

Family Learning as part of community based adult learning is an important strand of this universal support. The aim of Family Learning programmes is defined as encouraging family members to learn together. They aim to provide a positive learning experience that enhances personal and educational development and motivates both adults and children to pursue further learning activities. However the focus is the learning needs and opportunities for participating parents and should offer appropriate adult learning progression routes.

Parental involvement in education would also come within this descriptor and would include both partnership activities in school and supporting home and wider learning opportunities.

No single approach suits all families and therefore there needs to be a variety of community provision on offer developed through partnerships between public, voluntary and independent sector agencies. There should be a close fit between universal approaches and targeted support where needed so that families do not

have to reach crisis before they get help. Ensuring effective communication and appropriate partnership structures will underpin this.

### **3.5 Level 2 Additional Support**

Services at this level are aimed at vulnerable families who need additional support, either self-referred or because a service has identified the need. The named person will signpost the family and, if necessary, liaises with the appropriate key people to ensure that there are no barriers to the family accessing the support. For children under 5 the Health Visitor, as named person will deliver the universal health programme to all families. Within this families will be assessed at key stages and additional support will be provided as required. We need to ensure there is no stigma associated with seeking help and develop a culture where parents feel encouraged to seek support, reassured that by doing so their parenting responsibilities and rights will be respected.

Example of needs and circumstances at level 2:

- a young person involved in anti social behaviour gets help from SACRO
- speech and language therapy for a child struggling to communicate at nursery
- an adult education worker involves the drug and alcohol service following discussion with the parent around their own substance abuse
- head teacher refers a child to an educational psychologist as part of their educational needs assessment
- child with special health needs is referred for assessment
- young people who are carers get support and advice from social worker
- family facing debt/separation advised by a family worker
- a targeted parenting group for young families where there are concerns re the children's emotional and social development
- a family of an infant where effective attachment is not developing is supported by the Health Visitor and Homestart volunteer.

### **3.6 Level 3 Extended Support**

Support at this level is aimed at families of children whose health and development is being impaired by a range of complex or unmet needs and where an integrated response from a number of agencies and support systems is necessary to achieve an improvement in outcomes. Support may include the identification of a lead professional as part of the GIRFEC approach.

Example of needs and circumstances:

- a family where the children have complex needs, there is no extended family and one of the parents becomes terminally ill. This results in the need for support from a range of agencies to maintain the family unit
- a young person who is displaying a range of anti social behaviours and non school attendance. Parents' ability to manage this is compromised by their own drug and alcohol abuse

- a parent with ongoing mental health difficulties who has fled domestic violence and the children are exhibiting a range of challenging behaviours at school
- a single unsupported parent who continues to miss child hospital appointments for investigation of failure to thrive
- child who has complex disabilities, health or specialist needs requiring a coordinated intervention from a number of agencies
- a pregnant woman with a history of drug or alcohol misuse requiring intensive anti-natal and post-natal support from a range of services.
- A family who requires access to a range of resources to reduce the impact on the education and social development of the young person taking on a caring role.
- a family who would benefit from the provision of short breaks ( respite care) to sustain the fulltime care arrangement.

### **3.7 Level 4 Enhanced Support**

Children/young people and their families at level 4 have a high level of need/vulnerability. Services at this level are aimed at families in crisis and who need urgent, intensive intervention. Level 4 services are accompanied by a robust multidisciplinary case planning approach with an identified lead professional. Whilst every effort is made to support parents and work towards achievable changes to enhance and develop parenting skills the primary focus of support would be in reducing immediate risk to children.

Examples at level 4:

- children and young people who need protection from harm e.g.:
  - children and young people abused by parents
  - a child/ young person is being sexually exploited
  - children/young people suffering from neglect
  - children suffering significant harm whose parents are unable to offer consistent and good enough parenting
- child/young person in care who has severe emotional/behavioural problems, attachment problems & offending difficulties
- families caring for a child/young person with severe disabilities and/or complex health needs who presents significant challenge to his parents/carers or risk of harm to himself
- child with a mental illness who is at risk of significant harm.

## Common values of practitioners working with families

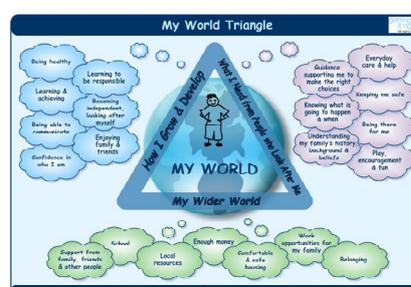
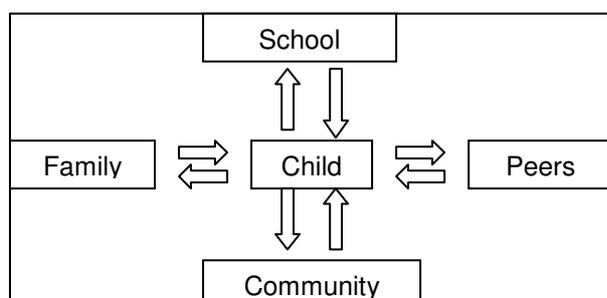
**Common values and principles** are at the heart of the Common Core and the *Getting It Right For Every Child* approach. These values and principles build from the *Children's Charter* and reflect legislation, standards, procedures and professional expertise. They bring meaning and relevance at a practice level to single agency, multi agency and inter agency working across the whole of children's services.

- **Promoting the same values across all working relationships:** recognising respect, patience, honesty, reliability, resilience and integrity are qualities valued by children, young people, families and colleagues
- **Making the most of bringing together each worker's expertise:** respecting the contribution of others and co-operating with them, recognising that sharing responsibility does not mean acting beyond a worker's competence or responsibilities
- **Promoting the well-being** of individual children and young people: this is based on understanding how children and young people develop in their families and communities and addressing their needs at the earliest possible time
- **Keeping children and young people safe:** emotional and physical safety is fundamental and is wider than child protection
- **Putting the child at the centre:** children and young people should have their views listened to and they should be involved in decisions
- **Taking a whole child approach:** recognising that what is going on in one part of a child or young person's life can affect many other areas of his or her life
- **Building on strengths and promoting resilience:** using a child or young person's existing networks and support where possible
- **Promoting opportunities and valuing diversity:** children and young people should feel valued in all circumstances and practitioners should create opportunities to celebrate diversity
- **Additional help should be appropriate, proportionate and timely:** providing help as early as possible and considering short and long-term needs
- **Supporting informed choice:** supporting children, young people and families in understanding what help is possible and what their choices may be
- **Working in partnership with families:** supporting wherever possible those who know the child or young person well, know what they need, what works well for them in their family and what may not be helpful
- **Respecting confidentiality and sharing information:** seeking agreement to share information that is relevant and proportionate while safeguarding children and young people's right to confidentiality
- **Co-ordinating help:** recognising that children, young people and families need practitioners to work together, when appropriate, to provide the best possible help
- **Building a competent workforce to promote children and young people's well-being:** committed to continuing individual learning and development and improvement of inter-professional practice.

## Key principles of extended and enhanced interventions

Theoretical assumptions of effective interventions:

- Children live in the real world which consists of multiple systems that have direct and indirect influences on their development and well-being.
- Effective interventions influence all of the systems that impinge on the child.



**All agencies working with parents should:**

- Aim to be strength focused in their attitudes and foster feelings of hope and positive expectations and
- Aim to provide the right level of support at the earliest opportunity to prevent families reaching crisis point.
- Offer a range of appropriate and proportionate interventions in response to family circumstances and need. Interventions should be appropriate for the child's age and stage of development.
- Deliver services that show evidence of good outcomes and build in appropriate quality assurance systems to ensure they continue to be delivered in practice as they were originally shown to be effective.
- Focus on cost-effectiveness, in order that the greatest number of high quality services, delivering the best outcomes, can be targeted at the right families.
- Evaluate their own practice (in terms of child outcomes as well as parent satisfaction) and show a willingness to modify practice in light of those evaluations.
- Plan and work together. Communicate well in order to ensure a continuum of care for families which avoids duplication and works to fill identified gaps in services.
- Be competent at assessing a child & family's strengths and difficulties, taking account of the other systems within which they function (e.g. school, peer, and community). Through analysis of the strengths and pressures in these circles of support, the child or young person's needs can be identified and summarised using the 7 well-being indicators: SAFE, HEALTHY, ACHIEVING, NURTURED, ACTIVE, RESPECTED AND RESPONSIBLE & INCLUDED.

## Responsibilities of Getting It Right Area Groups

1. To develop universal and additional provision in the local area in line with the strategy ensuring the needs of families affected by disability are taken into account
2. Ensure consistent delivery of targeted, extended and enhanced family support and parenting services.
3. Using existing structures to ensure clear multi agency assessment and intervention pathways are in place to prioritise referrals for more enhanced interventions.
4. Establish monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance processes for the delivery of family support and parenting services.
5. Ensure that all relevant agencies and the voluntary sector have nominated a champion of family support to participate in the Family, Parenting and Early Years sub group
6. Establish protocols for communication and collaborative working with Adult Learning Local Planning Groups.

### Early Years Parenting and Family Learning: A Key Priority

Parenting in the early years continues to be a priority; this will be taken forward through the Family, Parenting and Early Years subgroups, set up in each of the 7 GIR Areas to have a focus on the priorities of the Early Years Strategy. These groups have a critical continuing role in building capacity and co-ordinating developments such as the Family Nurture Approach and parenting programmes across the Community Planning Partnerships. This work will be co-ordinated through the Early Years Strategy Group.

Getting it Right Area Groups were, in 2013, also asked to review the provision for family learning and parent support for primary aged children which includes the transition into secondary school. The GIR groups may create a short-life working group or alternatively invite additional representatives to specific GIR meeting(s) to take this forward on the basis of this priority task and valued outcomes:

From a working knowledge of what is already available in the area, identify the provision for family support in the primary years and transition into secondary school which meets the standards set out in the strategy and identify any gaps.

### Short Term and Intermediate Outcomes

1. Families and practitioners have clear information on what is available locally and how to access services
2. There are increased activities and opportunities for all families with primary aged children with particular evidence of participation by potentially vulnerable groups.
3. There are increased opportunities for collaborative training and working involving community based adult learning, schools, family and community support teams, health and the voluntary sector.
4. Parents, families and practitioners have increased awareness of:
  - the immediate and long term impact of supporting effective choices of a healthy lifestyle e.g. sleep, nutrition and physical activity
  - the importance of nurturing positive family and peer group relationships for children's emotional health and well being.
  - the significant role that parents play in supporting their children's learning, literacy and wider educational progress.