Supporting Parents

Why it matters

Parents are responsible for teaching their children positive values and instilling good behaviour. Conversely, poor parenting increases the risks of involvement in anti-social and offending behaviour.

By improving parenting skills, we can tackle anti-social behaviour. Parenting programmes are highly effective in helping parents manage their children’s behaviour better, leading both to reduced nuisance and improved family functioning.

That is why anti-social behaviour practitioners should be thinking about parenting. Parenting programmes in your area can help you deal with children’s anti-social behaviour in your community.

You do not necessarily need to use parenting contracts and orders, as YJB evidence shows that many parents will attend provision voluntarily. However, there is increasing recognition that the early use of a contract can be very powerful in motivating parents. The strength in contracts is that the roles and responsibilities of both parent and professional are set out clearly and agreed to from the start. So if parents are reluctant to get help or deny they and their children have problems, a parenting contract and if that doesn’t work, a parenting order should be used to get parents to accept their parental responsibility.

Parenting contracts and orders can be obtained alongside other anti-social behaviour interventions such as acceptable behaviour contracts, ASBOs or alongside a conviction for any offence by a child or young person. (ref pocket guide to tools and powers)

Parenting and anti-social behaviour

Parenting has the most critical influence on a child’s behaviour and his or her life chances. Ineffective parenting has repeatedly been shown to be strongly associated with anti-social and offending behaviour.

Evidence shows that parenting programmes can improve parenting skills and improve children’s behaviour. Training parents in negotiation skills, setting clear boundaries and rewarding good behaviour can reduce and anti-social behaviour and have wider beneficial effects for children, adolescents and families. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommends the use of certain parenting programmes for children with more
sever behavioural difficulties such as conduct disorder or oppositional defiant disorder.

**What is a parenting programme?**

A parenting programme teaches parents techniques to improve their child’s behaviour. Good programmes follow a standardised sequence using a well researched manual, have well documented stages and are delivered by workers who have been professionally trained by an accredited trainer. These programmes focus on:

- teaching parents positive parenting skills which can change or remove the causes of problem behaviour
- building a positive relationship with the child
- use of praise and incentives
- a developing parental understanding of commands and consequences
- establishing consistent boundaries with ‘time out’ for infringements.

There are other types of programmes which help parents understand their and their child’s emotions and behaviour and to improve communications.

Parenting programmes tend to last one to two hours a week for between eight and 22 weeks. They are usually held in groups of between six and ten participants. Parenting training can also be delivered on a one to one basis where a parent’s needs are too complex for group work (for example, where a parent has significant mental health problems, learning difficulties or has a physical disability that precludes groupwork).

These types of parenting programmes should be a part of every Local Authority’s package of support for parents, but it is important to note that effective parenting programmes are not the same thing as general parenting or family support. The Local Authority may also offer parenting support such as groups which give general advice and guidance, rather than theory based, manualised, intensive parenting programmes. These could be, for example, children’s centres, Youth Offending teams and Child and Adult Mental Health Services. The voluntary sector also offers both the intensive parenting programmes and generalised support, for example, charities such as Home Start use volunteers to befriend and support parents, offering practical help; but although this support may have a positive effect, they do not cite improving parenting skills as one of their central aims.

**Which programmes work and for whom?**

There are many different types of parenting programmes, but not all are evidence based as yet and proven to reduce anti-social behaviour. Those in the table below have the strongest evidence of effectiveness and have been found to produce excellent results when reproduced in the UK.
As part of the Respect programme, the Government is taking steps to improve the quality of parenting provision and ensure that the staff who are delivering programmes are well trained and supervised.

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<th>Programme</th>
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| Webster Stratton ‘Incredible Years’ | Parents of 3-8 yr olds (plus DfES pilot for 8-12 year olds) | Treats aggression and conduct problems, helps parents support their child’s education and deal with bad behaviour | • 1 US research found that the benefit of every $1 spent is $4.25 from reductions in the cost of crime alone  
• 2 UK Control trail found that Children showed a large reduction in antisocial behaviour; whilst those in the waiting list (control) group did not change |
| Triple P                         | Middle childhood and Teenagers | Uses a tiered system of increasing intervention according to parental need | 66% of children diagnosed with ODD/conduct disorder whose parents received the parenting programme were in the normal range of behaviours (at both 1 year and 3 year follow up assessments). |
| Mellow Parenting                 | Family must include a child under 5 | Focus on the mother-child relationship | • Successful in engaging hard to reach families often with severe, multi-generational parenting problems  
• Change has been demonstrated in maternal well being, child behaviour, child development and maternal-child interaction  
• Pilot study in US found reduction in risk of abuse. |
**Strengthening Families Programme (SFP)**

Programme for parents and their child in high risk families. Programmes available for age ranges 3-5, 6-11, 10-14, 12-16.

Number of sessions vary depending on the programme, with a maximum of 14 sessions. Focus is family skills programme designed to reduce risk factors for substance abuse, depression, aggression, and delinquency.

- Improves parenting behaviours and child outcomes:
  - substance use
  - problem conduct
  - school-related problem behaviours
  - affiliation with antisocial peers
  - peer resistance

**Multi systemic therapy**

Families with children and adolescent(s) displaying clinically significant anti-social behaviour (psychiatric diagnosis of conduct disorder/delinquency).

Intensive parenting intervention involving therapists (available to family 24 hours a day) who help parents to set rules aimed to improve different aspects of the young person’s behaviour.

- Decreasing behaviour problems, improving family relations, reducing recidivism.
- Reducing re-arrest rates, reducing time spent by juvenile offenders in institutions.

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*For more information on evidence based interventions see the Toolkit for Commissioners [www.toolkitparenting.uk](http://www.toolkitparenting.uk)*

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**Who delivers parenting programmes?**

Parenting programmes are delivered by a range of organisations. The local child and adult mental health service provides courses run by psychologists and other staff. Parenting programmes are increasingly attached to extended schools and children’s centres. Children’s services and some of the larger Registered Social Landlords provide also contract voluntary or private organisations to deliver courses for them. Youth offending teams provide parenting programmes or make them available through voluntary organisations where children are involved or at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system.

Different arrangements exist from area to area and as this takes on a greater priority locally, with increased resources, we expect expanded provision of people able to run the programmes effectively.

June 2007

(Updated October 2007)