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Professional Seminar Series

Approaches to Supporting Parenting:

Strategies and Solutions

Ceri Daniels (University of Huddersfield) 25th April 2008

Aims of Today

- Identify some key ‘drivers’ of Parenting Support Intervention in UK
- Share our ‘parenting support’ experiences & identify main issues and benefits of different approaches
- Discuss findings of current research on ‘what works’
- Consider some strategies for the most effective approaches
- Hopefully, challenge our thinking & have fun!

Parenting: *Private Vs State*

- Family life traditionally a very private sphere in UK
- Post-war emphasis on universal rights to support: health services, education & increasing welfare support
- Tension today between state's role, preservation of parental autonomy & child's well-being (reflected in policy & legislation)

<u>The Children's Plan states:</u>

"*Parents bring up children, not Governments*" (DCSF, 07)

Commentators from different perspectives agree that 'Parenting' has a very high priority on Government's agenda

Current Policy

- The physical and emotional *care* and *control* of children lies at the heart of Government's policies (e.g. ECM, Respect Agenda, Social Exclusion).

- Tension - where responsibility lies and contradictory messages? The Government clearly espouses parents as partners *but* brings in punitive control measures such as Parenting Orders. Parents 'encouraged' to work *and* expected to provide 'family home life'

- Financial Investment & expectation on practitioners to provide 'parenting support' significant:

  - Parenting Fund includes £34m 2007/10 LA's appoint 2 'expert parenting advisers'
  - National Parenting Academy
  - Compulsory Parenting Support Strategies

What do we mean by Parenting Support?

- What does ‘parenting’ mean to you?
- Discuss what type of ‘parenting support’ you are involved in?
- Identify some key characteristics of parenting support interventions you are involved in?

Definitions of Parenting

- The definition of 'parenting capacity' in the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need:

  '*the provision of basic care, safety, emotional warmth, stimulation, guidance, boundaries and stability*'

- Definition provided by Parenting UK:

  '*parenting is both a continuous process starting before parenthood and continuing through birth and school to grandparenthood, and an interactive process concerned with the development of the whole person*'

Parenting Support Programmes

- Parenting programmes defined broadly as:

  '*any formal interventions designed to support the parent/child relationship'.*

  (Parenting UK)

- 147 different programmes on Govt. funded Database

  (but many, many more)!

<u>Examples of Models</u>

- Family Nurse Partnership (focuses first-time young Mums)
- Solution-Focused Parenting

(Webster-Stratton, positive parenting)

<u>Delivery</u>

- Group-based programmes
- Individual
- Specialised
- Neighbourhood programmes

Supporting or Controlling?

- Which aspects of parenting should be the parents responsibility and which should be the ‘state’s’?
- Be prepared to explain …Why?

Realities of Practice

- Policy & Legislation directs your work
- Local work context
  - level of influence
  - Pressures of work
- Professional & personal values and judgement
- ‘Good enough’ parenting?

Major Research Study (2004) : What Works in Parenting Support?

- **What works?**

- Any (quality) intervention better than none but earliest most beneficial
- Interventions with strong, clear model
- Both universal & targeted programmes (more evaluation needed)
- Delivered by appropriate & well-trained staff
- Responsive (ecology of family) & culturally sensitive
- Longer term programmes with 'booster' sessions
- Both cognitive (belief, self-perception etc) & behavioural (skills & practical) models

Research Study Cont…..

- **What is yet to be proven or doesn't work?**
  - How effective (as opposed to promising) programmes really are
  - Translating international parenting programmes for UK use
  - What doesn't work - bias against reporting 'failures' or negative findings
  - Can positive change be sustained?
  - How children themselves see the effectiveness of these programmes
  - Effectiveness when used with fathers, parents from black and Asian families
  - Retaining and engaging families deemed 'high risk' and offering long-lasting positive impact

Informing Your Approach ……. Some Final Thoughts…?

- Research suggests *Parenting Support* does benefit families: needs to be normalised – universal access (most PS policy target 'disadvantaged' individuals or communities)
- Policy developments in one area should not pull against policy in another - Consider this if you develop/input into policy or strategic plans locally
- Families facing multiple issues will struggle to benefit most (consider parallel interventions)
- Do enforcement and control sanctions like Parenting Orders really help by punishing people who 'fail'? What else can we do? **Do *with* or, do *to*?**
- Staff need to be trained and properly supported. Also, remember own values etc.
- No single model proven as more effective - clear approach & consistency communicated across areas

Resources & References

- *What Works in Parenting Support?* Moran et al (2004) Policy Research Bureau
- *Enhancing the Well-being of Children and Families through Effective Interventions : International Evidence for Practice.* McAuley, C. (2005) Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- *Government and Parenting: Is there a case for a policy review and a parents' code?* Henricson, C. (2003) Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- *Family Support as Reflective Practice* Dolan, P. (2005) Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Database of Parenting Support Provision

  http://www.toolkit.parentinguk.org