

Reaching parents: implementing parenting programmes

Key messages

- Parent education programmes make a real difference to families.
- Parenting programmes are still not reaching all the families who could most benefit.
- Programmes need to be publicised and 'marketed' to encourage parents to sign-up. 'Word of mouth' is the most cost-effective method.
- Pre-group preparation increases attendance levels and prevents dropout. It helps to engage the seldom heard families who might otherwise not attend.
- Facilitators need to adopt a collaborative approach with parents. This is fundamental to making programmes acceptable to a wide range of parents.
- The delivery needs to be tailored to the group to help all parents engage with the material.
- Providing additional support during a course keeps parents engaged and ensures successful completion.
- Working in partnership with other organisations extends the reach.
- Training and supporting facilitators and recruiting volunteers to help run courses both ensure a more successful outcome.

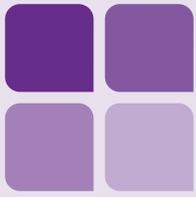
Parent education programmes make a real difference to families. They promote parents' confidence and improve their parenting skills. However, programmes may still not be reaching everyone who could benefit. Often the parents in most need of support have the greatest difficulty in accessing them.

There are a range of problems associated with access, causing low levels of uptake and high rates of drop-out. These problems are most acute for socially disadvantaged families and parents of children with complex needs.

Some of the main barriers to access and a successful completion of parenting programmes include:

- lack of information about programmes
- fear of stigma or being labeled a 'bad parent'
- a mismatch between the programme and the parent
- practical problems such as transport and childcare
- competing demands of daily life

Two recent SCIE publications Report 21a: *Follow up work to support implementation of the NICE/SCIE guidance on parenting programmes* and Report 21b: *Reaching parents: improving uptake of parenting programmes* explore these issues in more depth. They have identified how parenting programmes could be made more accessible and acceptable to a wide range of parents. Drawing on examples of good practice, they also describe some solutions to overcoming these barriers.



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Strategies for making parenting programmes accessible

The strategies for making parenting programmes more accessible and acceptable to socially disadvantaged families benefits all parents. These include (a) making changes to the delivery of programmes and (b) making changes at a more strategic level.

(a) Changes to delivery include:

Marketing programmes

The most successful approaches include:

- outreach – talking to parents in the community
- holding taster sessions
- 'word of mouth' – the cheapest and often most effective method.

Meeting parents before the first session

Intensive, preparatory outreach work is essential to:

- recruit the right people to the right courses
- engage seldom heard families
- reassure parents that they won't be stigmatized or labeled 'a bad parent'
- assess parents' readiness to engage with a programme
- identify whether parents have any special needs to facilitate attendance
- ensure parents will receive the appropriate support to attend a course and fully-participate
- start developing a relationship of trust and respect.

This makes a big difference to getting people through the door and paves the way for successful engagement.

‘It is important to do careful preparatory work prior to starting a course... You may need to do different preparation, depending on the needs of the individual parent.’

Creating a safe space

This requires:

- choosing the right venue
- setting up and maintaining the right group dynamic
- welcoming parents
- establishing ground rules right from the start and maintaining them (respect, non-judgement and confidentiality).

Overcoming practical barriers

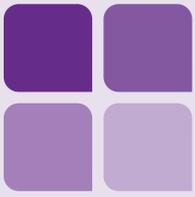
By:

- experimenting in running 'satellite' programmes in rural areas or offering telephone-based courses to parents who would not otherwise attend
- offering free transport
- providing free, high-quality childcare.

Adopting a collaborative approach

- empowering parents and enabling them to set their own goals
- working in partnership with parents and recognising their strengths and expertise
- viewing parents as capable of working at finding the best solutions to their own problems
- working from 'where parents are at' and, as far as possible, at their pace.

This approach is fundamental to programmes being acceptable to a wide range of parents.



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‘It’s not a model where the facilitator teaches or advises. It’s around the parent pulling out the principles, and being the expert, and coming up with the ideas.’

Tailoring the programme to different parent groups

This involves adapting the style of delivery to make it more suitable for the individual parents in the room. This seems to be particularly important for parents who :

- are young
- whose first language is not English
- are from BME communities
- have special needs.

Ensuring parents do not have to read large amounts of text benefits a wide range of parents. Using parents’ own experiences as material for group discussion helps parents closely identify with the programme content.

Supporting parents during the course

This helps parents to complete a programme. This support may simply consist of a between-group telephone call. However, this is vital to help parents who miss a session to catch up. Parents with more complex problems might need additional one-to-one support in parallel with the sessions.

Helping parents to embed the learning into their daily lives

By:

- enabling parents to repeat a course if necessary
- providing follow-up so parents can continue meeting and learning from each other-parents can be encouraged to facilitate this themselves
- offering refresher courses.

(b) Changes at a strategic level include:

Working in close partnership with other organisations

This has several benefits including:

- improving access to groups of parents who are seldom heard
- earlier intervention for families in trouble, which helps avoid crisis situations
- making it easier for parents to find out about the courses available and to gain access to additional support
- increasing awareness of the courses available and therefore increasing the likelihood of staff making appropriate referrals
- increasing local capacity to deliver parenting programmes
- extending the reach of programmes and ensuring more parents receive some basic level of support.

Ensuring facilitators are highly skilled

This is essential to guarantee a good outcome from parenting courses and requires:

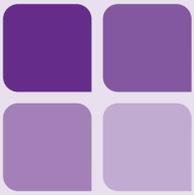
- adequate training
- continuing professional development
- high-quality supervision
- both emotional and practical support.

Co-facilitation is a particularly successful model of delivery and support, as two facilitators are better able to share the load, manage the dynamics of the group and support each other between sessions.

Recruiting volunteers to help run and support programmes

Either to provide additional support or to help co-deliver programmes:

- parents who provide additional support enable other parents to engage and complete a course and also boost recruitment
- parents who have been through the programme are very influential and effective co-facilitators.



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‘To actually have a parent sitting there and saying do you know, last year I was exactly like you... but you can put the effort in and turn this around... the power of actually hearing another parent say that, outweighs anything we can say.’

This At a glance summary is drawn from SCIE Report 21a: *Follow up work to support implementation of the NICE/SCIE guidance on parenting programmes* and b: *Reaching parents: improving take-up of parenting programmes*. Part a describes the findings of a follow-up study to support the implementation of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)/Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) guidance on parenting programmes (NICE/SCIE, 2006). The original guidance made recommendations for good practice in the delivery of programmes for parents of children aged 12 or younger with a conduct disorder.

The follow-up study involved carrying out a practice survey, talking to a wide range of frontline practitioners about their experience of providing a variety of parenting programmes. Part b provides specific guidance on improving take up of parenting programmes. The full report can be accessed from the SCIE website at www.scie.org.uk

SCIE's At a glance summaries have been developed to help you understand as quickly and easily as possible the important messages and practice advice in SCIE's guides. These summaries will give you an overview of the messages or help direct you to parts of the guide that you may find most useful. You can also use them as training resources in teams or with individuals.

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