# Poverty, parenting and social exclusion: educator's guide

# Contents

# 1. Introduction

Poverty is one of the most common features of families whose children come to the attention of social workers, yet many of the issues associated with poverty may fail to be properly recognised by professionals dealing with these families.

Poverty can make peoples' lives much harder and excludes some people from life chances that others take for granted. Poverty makes parenting a greater challenge and can impair the health and development of children. It is accepted that families living in poverty are over represented as users of some children's and families' services, including those of an involuntary rather than voluntary nature.

It is therefore essential for all child welfare workers to have an understanding of the nature and impact that poverty and social exclusion have on parenting, in order to facilitate access to the 'right services at the right time'.

To this end, SCIE in partnership with three leading experts in the field, Jane Tunstill, Anna Gupta and James Blewett have developed nine interactive e-learning resources on poverty, parenting and social exclusion that aim to highlight and challenge the attitudes and prejudices that people may have when dealing with families who live in poverty.

SCIE's interactive e-learning resources are freely available to all teaching staff and students of the social work degree. These are designed to engage groups and individuals through simulations, quizzes, short commentaries, interactive case studies and audio and video clips of families sharing their experiences of living with poverty and discrimination, helping to bring the topics alive. Moreover, they are supported by evidence-based research bringing out key issues and provide full referencing of key research. They can be accessed from any internet-enabled PC and are fully accessible to users with disabilities.

The e-learning resources can be used in a whole-class setting, or students can be asked to work through them privately (they are very useful tools for both introducing key concepts and revising).

These resources have been developed with the support of ATD Fourth World, an anti-poverty organisation that engages with individuals and institutions to find solutions to eradicate extreme poverty. This has allowed SCIE to enrich the resources with the voices of family members who have direct experience of poverty.

The purpose of this guide is to provide an overview of each of the nine learning resources and to highlight key learning outcomes for users.

# 2. Overview of the nine e-learning resources

## 2.1 Poverty is…

This resource introduces the idea of social exclusion as well as formal definitions of poverty and service user definitions of poverty.



## Teaching/learning aims

*Poverty is…* will enable users to:

- describe some of the practical ways in which poverty and social exclusion affect the lives of families with children in the UK
- describe some of the emotional and psychological impacts of poverty and social exclusion on the lives of families with children.

# Full description

Understanding the various definitions of poverty is a very complicated task, but this e-learning resource is designed to help you see beyond technical definitions and to understand how poverty changes people's lives.

After looking at formal definitions in the introduction, you will then be asked to complete the phrase: 'Poverty is...' in a number of ways. You will then watch a group of family members who have experienced or are experiencing poverty complete the phrase.

You will be asked to compare your answers and reflect upon: a) the different aspects and implications of poverty and social exclusion on the day-to-day lives of families and b) how social workers may make judgements about people's circumstances and behaviour.

# Time required for self-study
20 – 30 mins

# Media
This resource contains video

## 2.2 Choices... What choices?

This resource follows a case study of a family and explores some of the difficult choices faced by parents in poverty, as well as the support services that are available parents.



## Teaching/learning aims

*Choices... What choices?* will help users to:

- develop an understanding of the ways poverty and social exclusion impact on the lives of children and families in the UK
- describe some of the support services and networks that can help families living in poverty.

## Full description

Parents living in poverty face a complex set of issues at individual, family and community levels that make parenting more difficult.

This e-learning resource explores a case study of a family to try to gain an understanding of some of the difficult choices faced by parents in poverty, as well as support services that could help parents cope.

## Time required for self-study
20 – 30 mins

## Media
This resource contains audio.

# 2.3 What is 'povertyism'?

This resource introduces the concept of 'povertyism' and includes video accounts from service users giving examples of how they feel 'povertyism' can be perpetuated by professionals and agencies.



## Teaching/learning aims

*What is 'povertyism'?* will help users to:

- explore 'povertyism' and some ways in which people living in poverty in the UK experience discrimination and oppression
- develop an understanding of ways in which social work practitioners and agencies can compound 'povertyism'.

## Full description

Poverty affects children from very different backgrounds. Discrimination on the bases of disability, race or immigration status means that some sections of the population are significantly over represented amongst poor families. However, many families living in poverty also report facing discrimination on the basis of being poor. This is compounded when involved with child welfare services.

This e-learning resource explores the way this discrimination works and seeks to help make practitioners aware of some of the implications. Users will examine ways socially excluded individuals may be discriminated against for being poor (or 'povertyism').

Users will then watch some family members present some ways in which they feel povertyism is being perpetuated by professionals and agencies. This is followed by a conclusion and a final video message.

## Time required for self-study
20 – 30 mins

## Media
This resource contains video.

## 2.4 Service user perspectives on good practice

The main focus of this resource is on the qualities that families value in professionals which help to promote positive relationships



## Teaching/learning aims

*Service user perspectives on good practice* will enable users to:

- understand how good practice with families living in poverty is built on positive professional attitudes
- understand how fundamental attitudes, such as respect and trust are valued by parents
- explore some of the steps practitioners can take to promote positive relationships with parents.

## Full description

When using services, parents have reported that they encounter discriminatory attitudes from some professionals on the basis that they are poor. This e-learning resource seeks to help you understand the positive steps that can be taken to build good relationships with parents in poverty.

Having first thought about what families value in professional relationships, users will then watch different family members, who have experienced or are experiencing poverty, discuss issues which they value as good practice from the point of view of people who use services.

Users are then asked to look at some of the steps that families feel practitioners can take to make a positive difference in their work with a family that is living in poverty. This is followed by a conclusion and a final video message.

## Time required for self-study
20 – 30 mins

## Media
This resource contains video.

# 2.5 Values, parenting and professional roles

This resource focuses on the personal values that practioners can bring to their daily role and seeks to help make them aware of the impact and implications that these can have.



## Teaching/learning aims

*Values, parenting and professional roles* will enable users to:

- develop an understanding of the values that individuals bring to working with families in poverty
- reflect on how these values might impact unhelpfully on understanding parental behaviour
- become aware of the responsibilities for ethical practice as supported by their professional codes of conduct.

## Full description

All of us who work with families carry into our work a whole set of beliefs and values about family life and how children should be cared for. This e-learning resource is designed to make users aware of these personal values and how they might impact on their practice.

This e-learning resource explores the way that personal values can effect the way that families are dealt with and seeks to help make practitioners aware of the impact and implications that this can have.

The user is asked to capture their initial thoughts relating to three case study images depicting different aspects of family life. Afterwards, three child care professionals discuss their thoughts on each case study and the care that they would provide.

After listening to these extracts the user is asked to reflect upon whether these individuals allowed their personal values and beliefs to affect the way that they responded to each case study.  This is followed by a conclusion highlighting the codes of practice for child care professionals.

## Time required for self-study
20 – 30 mins

## Media
This resource contains audio and video.

## 2.6 Incorporating an understanding of poverty into assessments of children and their families

This resource focusses on highlighting some of the complex issues of poverty and social exclusion that can arise during assessments of children and their families.



## Teaching/learning aims

*Incorporating an understanding of poverty into assessments of children and their families* will enable users to:

- have an understanding of the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families
- understand how this government – issued guidance provides a model of how parenting capacity and family and environmental factors impact on child development
- use the Framework in their own work in order to specifically understand how poverty can impact on both parents and children's' development.

# Full description

Practitioners often have to undertake assessments of children and their families who are living in poverty. To help improve the consistency and quality of these assessments the Government introduced the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families.

This e-learning resource lets you explore the framework and its many dimensions. With the help of Barbara, a social worker, users will use the framework to assess a family, to help you to understand the needs of children and families in your daily role.

# Time required for self-study
40 – 50 mins

# Media
This resource contains audio.

# 2.7 What resources can you access to help your support families?

This resource uses a case study to look at an assessment of possible neglect and the support services that could be of assistance.



## Teaching/learning aims

*What resources can you access to help your support families?* will enable users to:

- reflect on the impact of poverty on parental capacity and child development in the context of safeguarding children
- develop their understanding of resources to support families living in poverty
- increase knowledge of access to and availability of resources to support families.

## Full description

Research on families involved with child protection services in the UK reveals that many share the common experiences of living on a low income, suffering housing difficulties, and social isolation.

The children and families experiencing these factors may often feel that they have few choices available to help them.

This e-learning resource explores the complex issues that often surround these children and families. Through a case study, users will have the chance to reflect on an assessment of possible neglect and support services that could be of assistance to them. Users can then compare their reflections with the findings of the social workers who undertook the assessment and find out more about the possible services available to the family.

## Time required for self-study
20 – 30 mins

## Media
This resource contains audio.

## 2.8 How sensitive to poverty and social exclusion are you in your daily practice?

This resource uses six different scenarios to help assess the users' level of sensitivity to poverty in their daily practice.



## Teaching/learning aims

*How sensitive to poverty and social exclusion are you in your daily practice?*

will enable users to:

- develop an understanding of the values that they bring to working with families living in poverty
- reflect on how their values and behaviours might impact on families living in poverty with whom they work
- explore sensitive ways of working with families that are consistent with anti-oppressive, partnership-based practice.

# Full description

Despite poverty and social exclusion being common characteristics of families involved in the child protection system, there is evidence to suggest that professionals struggle to truly incorporate an understanding of the impact of poverty in their assessments and interventions.

In practice, social workers and other professionals continue to have difficulty in making sense of the complex interplay between poverty, social deprivation, parental capacity and children's development.

This e-learning resource will enable users to explore their own sensitivity to poverty with the help of six separate scenarios, each highlighting a different issue faced by families living in poverty. After they have worked through the six scenarios, they will be able to see their level of sensitivity to poverty and social exclusion. Users will then be able to match their responses to our examples of how to deal with the situations in a sensitive manner, reading our ideas behind each approach.

The e-learning resource concludes with a short video clip of a family member relating the importance of a sensitive attitude towards poverty.

## Time required for self-study
20–30 mins

## Media
This resource contains video.

## 2.9 How can your agency support you in accessing and using knowledge to be poverty aware?

The main focus of this resource is to explore the different types of knowledge that exist to help make practioners 'poverty aware'.



## Teaching/learning aims

*How can your agency support you in accessing and using knowledge to be poverty aware?* will enable users to:

- understand key aspects of the potential role played by the agency as well as an individual member of staff in maximising understanding and addressing the relationship between poverty, social exclusion and parenting
- identify the agency and organisational support on which they should be able to count in their work with parents
- be able to feel confident in exploring, along with colleagues, a number of ways in which their agency can increase its capacity to be 'poverty aware'.

# Full description

It is now increasingly understood that there are different types of knowledge, all of which contribute to the ability of people working in children's services to do their jobs well. Understanding the types of knowledge that are available, and having access to this knowledge is an important aspect for anybody who is working with families that are living in poverty.

The first part of this e-learning resource explores the different types of knowledge that exists to aid users in their day to day work.

Having been introduced to the different types of knowledge, a series of questions will enable users to rate how their agency performs in allowing and encouraging them to access and disseminate the different types of knowledge. Once they have reflected on this they will be able to see our suggestions on how to enhance the performance of their agency in the areas that they felt could be improved.

# Time required for self-study
20 – 30 mins

# Media
This resource doesn't contain any audio or video segments.

# 3. Additional resources

A number of additional resources have also been produced to accompany the nine learning resources. These can be accessed from the website and are designed to supplement the learning of this topic. The additional resources are:

# 3.1 Video interview

A key aspect of the development of these e-learning resources was the opportunity for families living in poverty, or who have experienced poverty, to share their experiences with us through a series of video interviews.

In one such interview, we talked to Moraene (Mo) Roberts, who has worked with the charity ATD Fourth World for many years and who has worked with many families in poverty. While we have included excerpts in the e-learning resources from other family members, we thought her experiences and insights into the issues of poverty and social exclusion warranted the inclusion of her entire interview here. It provides a very useful overview of the issues facing families living in poverty and some key lessons for practitioners who are in contact with these families.

The interview is unedited and lasts approximately 20 minutes, covering many areas, such as:

- the definitions of poverty
- the impact of poverty on individuals
- the negative attitudes received from social care workers as a result of living in poverty
- how to improve practice when dealing with parents living in poverty
- the positive attitudes that social care workers can bring to working with families in poverty
- the difference changing one's approach towards families living in poverty can have.

## 3.2 Quiz: What do you know about poverty, parenting and social exclusion?

During the production of the learning resources we put together a collection of facts and figures relating to poverty, parenting and social exclusion, which we have turned into a fun and easy to use quiz.

We hope you will use these to support your learning and to increase your background understanding of the topic.

## 4. About the authors

**James Blewett** is a registered social worker who is Research Director and national chair for Making Research Count, the research dissemination network which in London is based at the Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London. After many years working in different children's services posts, James has taught extensively on social work qualifying and post qualifying programmes. As part of this work he helped developed a module with service users on the impact of poverty and parenting. James has written and researched around number of areas in children's social care including family support, child welfare policy and workforce issues.

**Anna Gupta** is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at Royal Holloway, University of London. She is the Director of Post-Qualifying Studies in the Department of Health and Social Care. She was been the director of the successful London Post Qualifying Child Care Award at Royal Holloway for seven years and has developed the new Graduate Diploma in Work with Children and Families under the new GSCC Post Qualifying Framework. She is a qualified social worker with extensive experience of child care social work and management, including work as a children's guardian and expert witness in public law family court proceedings. She has published work on various aspects of child welfare, including on working with families living in poverty, childhood neglect and work with black and minority ethnic families. She is currently involved in an evaluation of family group conferences for black and minority ethnic families, and has recently completed a literature review on child protection systems and international adoption for the Children's High Level Group, a charity working with countries in Eastern Europe to develop their child welfare services.

**Jane Tunstill** is Visiting Professor and Children's Services Consultant at the Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College, London and Emeritus Professor of Social Work, Royal Holloway, London University, where she established the Department of Health and Social Care and was responsible for professional and post qualifying social work education. Much of her research has been in family support and early intervention, and she has undertaken a large number of studies in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. Between 2000 and 2007 she was a Primary Investigator, (Director of the Implementation Module) of the DfES commissioned National Evaluation of Sure Start, responsible for the collection of national data on the roll out, service delivery and workforce issues. Her most recent NESS study is on the Safeguarding Activity of Sure Start Local Programmes and Children's Centres. Her published research studies include three consecutive Department of Health funded national studies, two on the implementation of the 1989 Children Act and one, a national study of the co-ordinating and networking activity of Family Centres, part of the Department of Health Parenting Initiative. She has undertaken a wide variety of commissions for the voluntary child care sector, including a mapping exercise of Family Support Services for FPI (Family and Parenting Institute); and a Cross Sector Scoping Study of the Family Support Workforce for CWDC (Children's Workforce Development Council).

In addition to undertaking research she is very committed to the need for imaginative and proactive dissemination of the knowledge base for children's services. She is a member of the editorial board of Children and Society, and along with colleagues, was a founder member of the national social care dissemination project, Making Research Count, which now operates across England with a membership of approximately 250 health and social care agencies. She is a member of the Management Board of CAFCASS, in which role she has corporate sponsorship for research.

# 5. Acknowledgements

SCIE would like to thank ATD Fourth World, and Matt Davies and Mo Roberts in particular, for helping SCIE to successfully involve the families in this project. We would also like to thank all the families themselves, who peer reviewed the resources, advised on their content and allowed us to film them in a series of video interviews, where they shared their insights into living with poverty.

Please visit the ATD Fourth World website (www.atd-uk.org) to find out more about its work.

# 6. How to access SCIE's e-learning resources

The nine resources on Poverty, parenting and social exclusion can be downloaded directly to the classroom by teaching staff who wish to conduct whole-class work using a data projector or interactive whiteboard. Alternatively, students can be instructed to visit the resources themselves on SCIE's website. Institutions may also download the resources and include them in their own virtual learning environment (VLE).

To access or download SCIE's e-learning resources in one of the three ways above, visit: www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/index.asp

# 7. Forthcoming SCIE e-learning publications

Please note that SCIE will be launching two further series of ten interactive e-learning resources on the topics of Inter-professional and inter-agency collaboration and Communication skills towards the end of 2008.

SCIE will also be launching two smaller series of three e-learning resources on the topics of Residential child care and Children of prisoners later in 2008.