



supporting families to support children

Scotland: the best place in the world to bring up children?

A collection of essays about parenting in Scotland

Summary

Introducing the collection

Policy panacea to cure all society's ills or the cause of them? Parents and how they parent have been under scrutiny in recent years. Parents get a negative press; overwhelmingly, that standards in parenting are declining. Is this the case? Or, in fact, is the job of parenting getting harder in an increasingly complex world? Whichever is right, both suggest that parents could do with more help.

The Scottish Government is committed to introducing a national parenting strategy and making Scotland the best place in the world to bring up children. If it announced its intention to intervene in the economics of the country, to improve the nation's health, to prevent crime or to educate its young, people would regard these as natural functions of government. And yet, the very mention of a national parenting strategy is likely to bring with it accusations of 'nanny state'. But supporting families is exactly about all those functions that we accept as the job of government – rebuilding our failing economy, improving health, preventing crime and educating children. We need to recognise the value of good parenting more, and provide more support to parents before they fail, rather than picking up the pieces afterwards. It is critical to the future of our country that we do so; beyond this, it is the right thing to do – Scotland's families deserve no less.

So, to encourage people to discuss, debate and contribute to the national parenting strategy, Parenting across Scotland, invited a wide variety of organisations and individuals to submit an article about any aspect of parenting. When we asked people for contributions, we did not know what to expect. What we got was impressive: passionate essays from people who really care about parenting and who want to see Scotland change how it supports families. They highlight the hot topics and also the many challenges to designing a more coherent approach to supporting families.

Although the subject matter in this collection is wide, it is not the full picture. Some gaps reflect a deficit in current policy thinking and research; for example, there are few articles about parenting teenagers (though a third of all calls to ParentLine are from parents of teenagers) and none at all about parenting in black and minority ethnic families. These are important topics for the parenting strategy.

Neither does the collection consider parenting in its wider context – it would have doubled or trebled in size. Parenting isn't a discrete activity isolated from the environment – where we live, how work is configured, the childcare available, and whether we can get on a bus with a buggy all make a difference. We did not specify topics and the submissions are broad, including personal accounts of parenting; research findings; and practical examples of support for parents. All contribute to developing a strategy. And together they provide a vision for the future.

Although we have presented each article as standalone, they are interconnected, and some information is repeated by different contributors. We have grouped the articles into six themes, more to do with ease of reading than to demarcate articles. Many of them fit all the themes because parenting cuts across so many aspects.

Theme 1: Parenting

Being a parent is not about a set of rules to follow to produce a happy, well-adjusted young person. If it were, in some ways, it would be a lot easier. In others, it would be far less interesting. Whoever the parent is (including the state as corporate parent), families are essentially about relationships and how people relate both within their families and from them to the wider world. At its best, parenting is about love, kindness and caring. For many parents, particularly those in difficult circumstances, this is not easy to achieve and they may need extra help. This section looks at what it means to be a parent; being a father; how differing family backgrounds affect people; and how different countries help families.

Contributors: Clare Simpson; Alan Sinclair; Marion Macleod; Maggie Mellon; Gary Clapton

Theme 2: Towards a national parenting strategy

With the Scottish Government considering a national parenting strategy, contributors discuss what needs to happen to make Scotland the best place in the world to bring up children. Children usually come with families, which is why 'getting it right for every child' generally means getting it right for every family. The critical place of supporting parents in children's early years; the state's role as corporate parent; and the importance of communication are all considered in the light of the proposed parenting strategy and better support for families.

Contributors: SallyAnn Kelly; Phil Wilson; Wendy Mitchell; Jim Wallace; Sarah Burton; Kim Hartley

Theme 3: Parenting - early years to teenage years

The early years have received considerable attention as a critical time in child development and a vital intervention point for improving children's lives. Investing in the early years pays considerable dividends later on. While the early years can be difficult for parents, the teenage years throw up their own problems, and many parents struggle to manage. Writers in this section look at the importance of these times in a child's life; the research findings; and effective approaches to parenting and family support.

Contributors: Tam Baillie; Phil Wilson; Paul Bradshaw; Lesley Kelly; Matt Forde; Louise Marryat; Emma Dore; Karen Mountney

Theme 4: Parenting under pressure

Not all families have equal chances. In particular, children in families struggling with substance misuse, those affected by domestic abuse, and parents with mental health difficulties fare worse than others. More children are affected by a parent's imprisonment than by divorce. Evidence shows that parents on a low income are not worse parents, but they do struggle against greater odds, and with changes to welfare benefits, the pressures on low-income families are set to increase. As well as vital

universal services in the early years, families with specific difficulties may need tailored or intensive help. The articles in this section consider the issues for, and ways of helping, families under pressure.

Contributors: John Dickie; Susie Fitton; Nancy Loucks; Heather Coady; Dave Liddell

Theme 5: Supporting families through transition

Over the past few decades, there have been fundamental changes to the family. Societal changes, such as the role of women, acceptance of difference in sexual orientation, and policy changes, such as to divorce and employment, mean that families are probably more heterogeneous than ever before. This makes it difficult to design policies responsive to families which are increasingly different, disjointed and yet intimately and complexly connected to other families. In this section, contributors cover the changing shape of the family (for example, lone parents and adoptive parents) and consider what happens when families separate.

Contributors: Satwat Rehman; Roseanne Cubbitt; Ian Maxwell; Marion Laird; an adoptive parent

Theme 6: Some practice examples

There is much good practice already in Scotland which indicates how families can be supported. This section highlights examples from around Scotland including educational projects, psychology, parenting programmes, helpline practice and work with young offender fathers. Children's educational outcomes vary widely and are closely linked to their backgrounds. Parental involvement in their children's education can make a considerable difference. In this section, contributors consider how this might be achieved and describe various interventions designed to help with children's behavioural problems.

Contributors: Brenda Renz; Euan Lloyd; Eileen Prior; Katie Buston; Daniel Wight; Liz McMahon; Aileen Kenny; Christine Gordon; Edwina Grant

Looking ahead

A parenting strategy has to consider parenting as an activity which takes place within and among families, but must also deal with the wider context within which families operate. It must create a society which is considerate of families and creates conditions in which they can thrive, rather than constantly struggle.

We hope that the collection contributes to the debate on Scotland's national parenting strategy; what it means to be a parent in Scotland today; and how we best support families.

We also hope it goes some way towards answering the question: 'Scotland: the best place in the world to bring up children?'

To read the full collection see www.parentingacrossscotland.org

Facts about families in Scotland

- 5.2 million people live in Scotland.
- Around 1,037,839 are under 18.
- 24% of households contain children (approx. 604,000 households).
- The number of households containing two or more adults with children is projected to decline from 19% to 11% of all households by 2031.
- In 2011, there were 29,135 marriages, the highest for four years, although low compared to a generation ago.
- In the same year, there were 9,814 divorces, the fewest in 30 years.
- More people are cohabiting than before.
- In 2011, more children were born to unmarried than to married parents for the first time.
- There are over 163,000 lone parents with 295,000 children (almost one in four families).
- Over half of lone parents were previously married.
- At July 2011, there were 16,171 children looked after by local authorities. This number has increased every year since 2001, and is at its highest since 1981.
- During 2009, there were 455 adoptions. This is 37 more than in 2008, but half that of the late 1980s, and around a quarter of the early 1970s.
- In 2006, it was predicted that by 2010, stepfamilies would be the dominant family form.
- One in four children (250,000) is growing up in a family whose income is below the poverty line.
- 27% of lone parents have a long-standing health problem or disability as do 19% of children living with a lone parent.
- Around 16,500 children a year experience a parent's imprisonment.
- The teenage pregnancy rate has been fairly steady for the past decade but Scotland has a higher rate of teenage pregnancy than most other western European countries.
- Teenage pregnancy is linked to deprivation with the rates of teenage pregnancy in deprived areas more than treble those of the least deprived areas.
- The average age of becoming a mother increased from 27.4 in 1991 to 29.6 in 2010 and becoming a father from 30 to 32.4.

See www.parentingacrossscotland.org for references for this section.

PAS believes a national parenting strategy needs to:

- Value the importance of parenting and the important work parents do
- Ensure that parents get the help they need when they need it through the principle of 'progressive universalism'
- Invest in the early years, and in particular, reinvigorate the crucial profession of health visiting
- Support families out of poverty, and protect them from the adverse effects of the recession and welfare reform
- Improve work-life balance by making workplaces more family-friendly and childcare more affordable and accessible
- Support parents to build their own support through family centres and by investing in communities

Parenting across Scotland (PAS) pools the efforts of seven major charities which support children and families to ensure that children have the best possible start in life.

Aberlour Childcare Trust www.aberlour.org.uk

Capability Scotland www.capability-scotland.org.uk

Children 1ST www.children1st.org.uk

One Parent Families Scotland www.opfs.org.uk

Relationships Scotland www.relationships-scotland.org.uk

SMC www.scottishmarriagecare.org

Scottish Adoption www.scottishadoption.org

This is a summary version of the full document available at:
www.parentingacrossscotland.org

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