



# What Scottish parents tell us

SUMMARY OF IPSOS MORI POLL

UNDERTAKEN FOR PAS 2008



## Background

Parents are at the heart of ensuring that children have the best possible start in life and grow up to be healthy, confident citizens who make an effective contribution to society. Being a parent is probably the most important but also the most difficult job any of us will ever do, but also one that we all struggle with from time to time.

Parenting is the most important factor in determining the future health, well-being and achievements of Scotland's children – which is why all families should be entitled to the best possible support to help them in their vital role of bringing up children.

However, indices of child well-being compiled by UNICEF and by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development place the UK near the bottom of the league table of developed countries. In order to improve life chances for all Scotland's children it is important to look at the difficulties and challenges faced by parents, and to examine what advice and support works for parents and what help parents would like to bring up their children.

Parenting Across Scotland (PAS) commissioned a MORI poll to seek parents' views on a range of key parenting issues. The poll looked at:

- support in bringing up children
- attitudes to health visitors
- relationship and financial support
- behaviour
- the media's portrayal of parents, and
- parents' future support needs

PAS is a partnership of children's charities and adult relationship organisations working together to provide a focus for issues and concerns affecting parents in Scotland. Together the PAS partners work with thousands of parents throughout Scotland. PAS focuses on:

- Providing information and support to families to help parents bring up their children
- Researching subjects of concern to parents
- Sharing good practice on supporting parents
- Representing the views of parents to policy-makers

PAS believes that we should value parents and celebrate the invaluable contribution that they make to future generations.



## Key findings

### Support in bringing up children

Depending on the specific issue they are facing, parents mostly rely on health visitors, GPs and their own parents or relatives for advice on parenting issues. Those with older children rely to some extent on their child's school.

In the early years of children's lives, health visitors are a primary source of support for parents on subjects including day to day issues such as feeding, sleeping and eating, and concerns about their child's development and health.

Just over two-thirds (69%) of parents are unable to name any organisation that provides support and advice on parenting issues.

### Health visitors

Health visitors are seen as an important part of parents' support networks and are well regarded by parents. Parents feel that health visiting services should be available to all parents rather than being targeted only at those experiencing problems.

- Nine out of 10 parents agree that they "found the health visitor's advice reassuring"
- 76% agree they "would have missed the help provided by the health visitor if [they] had not had it"
- 85% of parents disagree that "health visitors interfere too much"
- A large majority of parents (91%) disagree that "health visitors should only visit parents who are having problems with their child"
- 89% disagree that "health visitors should only visit parents who have asked for their help"

### Relationship and financial support

Around a quarter (26%) of respondents would rely on their parents or relatives for help if they were experiencing relationship difficulties with their partner with a similar proportion relying on friends (21%). Much smaller proportions would rely on other sources of support, with around one in 10 mentioning professional counsellors (9%) and Relate Scotland (7%). 12% would not go anywhere for help with relationship difficulties. Only a third of respondents can name any organisations that provide support to parents having difficulty agreeing arrangements for their children following a separation. Around one in 10 mention Family Mediation Scotland (9%) and Relate Scotland (7%).



Nearly three-quarters (72%) of parents are finding it more difficult to afford their household bills than they were a year ago, with 31% saying they are finding it a lot more difficult. Asked where they would go for help if they could not pay bills, around a quarter (23%) say the Citizens Advice Bureau and a similar proportion say their parents or other relatives (22%) and their bank manager (22%).

### **Behaviour**

The majority of parents appear to experience no major problems managing their child's behaviour. Almost all (97%) say they find it easy to praise good behaviour, while 71% say they find it easy to discipline their child appropriately and 64% are confident in their ability to deal with difficult behaviour.

The methods of discipline that parents most commonly use are praise for good behaviour (99% have used this at least sometimes in the last year), discussing issues calmly (92%) and giving rewards or treats for good behaviour (91%). A majority have also sought to discipline their child by shouting or yelling (71%), by taking away something their child values (55%) or by not paying their child any attention when he/she is throwing a tantrum (52%), but these approaches are used comparatively less frequently. These results are consistent with findings from the 2007 survey in which the same question was asked.

Around half of parents with children aged two to four years have used a 'naughty step' at least sometimes in the last year and 65% have done so at least once or twice. This finding points to the influence of television programmes such as "Supernanny" on parental behaviour.

The methods of discipline that parents regard as most effective are discussing issues calmly (55%) and stopping children from going out or taking away something they value (47%). The methods that are least commonly thought of as effective are smacking (1%), threatening to smack (3%), shouting or yelling (7%) and using a 'naughty step' (8%).

### **Media portrayal of parents**

Half of respondents say that the media is generally negative towards parents while only 10% feel it is positive, and 37% say it is neither positive nor negative.

Views are more divided on the question of how fair the media is towards parents. Around a third of parents (36%) consider the media to be unfair while 21% consider it to be fair. Again, a significant proportion (41%) have a neutral opinion, saying that the media is neither fair nor unfair towards parents.



Those who say that the media is unfair towards parents were asked how this makes them feel. Around a third say they are “frustrated and angered by it”, while 23% say that they feel “worried about whether they are doing the right thing as a parent” and the same proportion say they “aren’t bothered by it”.

### **Future support for parents**

Parents were asked what additional support they would most like to receive as parents. The most common responses are:

- more financial support (19%),
- more or cheaper childcare (11%) and
- more leisure and recreational facilities for young people (6%)

Around half of respondents (47%) say that the Scottish Government has a poor understanding of the challenges and problems faced by parents while slightly fewer (44%) say that it understands these challenges well.

Parents who say that the Scottish Government has a poor understanding of parenting issues were asked why. The most common responses are that the Government does not provide enough financial help or support to parents (24%), is out of touch and doesn’t listen to parents (18%) and does not provide enough support in general for parents (13%).

**1,011 parents of children aged 0 – 16 were interviewed by Ipsos-MORI on behalf of PAS. The interviews were conducted by telephone between 31st July and 17th August 2008.**

*The full report is available from the PAS website at [www.parentingacrossscotland.org.uk](http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org.uk)*

### **PAS has carried out two previous Ipsos MORI polls**

- The 2004 PAS MORI poll surveyed a general sample of the population and found that almost 40% of parents worried about how good a parent they are and that both parents and non-parents thought it was harder to bring up children now than it was when they were young.
- The 2007 PAS MORI poll surveyed 1,250 parents in Scotland and looked at support available to parents and at what they found most rewarding and most challenging about being a parent.

*Reports are available from the PAS website at [www.parentingacrossscotland.org.uk](http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org.uk)*



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**PAS partners are:**

- Aberlour Childcare Trust
- Capability Scotland
- CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>
- One Parent Families Scotland
- Relationships Scotland
- Scottish Adoption Association
- Scottish Marriage Care
- Stepfamily Scotland

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