

POSITIVE PARENTING IN WESTMINSTER: a strategic approach to supporting parents

Parents have the biggest influence on their children's lives and are their child's main teachers. Most want to be good parents, want the very best for their children, want to give them a good start in life and see them succeed. Good parenting has a positive impact on children, families, communities and society as a whole.

Children enrich our lives, but raising them can be hard work, as any parent will agree, and it's not always easy to know what to do for the best. Some of today's challenges are very different from those faced by earlier generations. All parents have the right to expect help in the form of high quality information, advice and support from services so they can be the positive, confident, responsible parents they want to be.

The importance of good parenting and parenting support services in improving outcomes for children is emphasized in national policies and initiatives, many backed by new legislation. This short version of Westminster's parenting strategy sets out what Westminster is developing in terms of support for positive, confident and responsible parenting.

Definitions

'Parents' includes fathers as well as mothers, non-resident parents, foster carers, and all others with responsibility for caring for a child, such as grandparents.

'Parenting' refers to all the activities and responsibilities involved in raising children.

'Positive parenting' styles promote child development and good behaviour in constructive, non-hurtful ways. Children growing up with positive parenting are more likely to develop good life skills and self confidence, are less likely to develop behaviour problems, and their parents tend to be more relaxed and confident.

'Parenting support services' offer help, advice, support and information on all aspects of parenting. They include helplines, one-to-one support, home/school support, parenting courses/programmes, drop-in advice, book and DVD loans. Parenting support services do not provide financial support or monetary benefits to parents.

'Parenting programme' refers to any structured course which aims to enhance parenting skills and parent/child relationships. Parents take part in group or individual sessions of parenting education and training. Our baseline parenting programme is the excellent Triple P (Positive Parenting ProgramTM) which parents find beneficial.

Westminster's vision

Our vision for Westminster is one where all parents from all communities within the City are positive and responsible parents and have realistically high expectations for their children and for themselves. They have the commitment, know-how and resources to raise children who are healthy and safe, doing well, enjoying their lives, and thriving in our City. When parents need information, advice or support with parenting, they know where to find it, and they receive an appropriate, timely and helpful response that is respectful and understanding of their needs as parents.

Westminster's aims

- To support parents to promote healthy choices for their children.
- To involve parents by reinforcing positive parenting styles, particularly at key transition points, and intervene earlier to prevent problems later on.
- To support parents to provide a stable and secure family environment.
- To support parents to help their children achieve.
- To support parents to promote positive behaviour and to address challenging behaviour in their children, using positive parenting styles.
- To improve access to services and provision of information, advice and guidance.
- To increase early intervention and improve the targeting of services.
- Support parents to return to work.

Benefits of support with positive parenting

- Stronger, happier, parent-child relationships
- Improved achievement at school
- Better mental and physical health within the family
- More enthusiasm for learning
- Stronger networks of support
- More confidence, resilience and independence within families
- Stronger, safer communities
- Less truancy, school exclusion, anti-social behaviour and offending

Westminster's offer to parents

All parents in Westminster are entitled to parenting support services from pre-birth until their child's 20th birthday (25th for care leavers) to help them to be positive, confident and responsible parents. We are developing a citywide approach to parenting support so that parents receive consistent messages from well-trained professionals and the right help at the right time, locally wherever possible. Non-resident parents of Westminster school pupils are permitted to access parenting support through extended school services.

Our parenting offer comprises universal, targeted and specialist services across four levels of parental need.

Level 1. Information, involvement and opportunities for all parents

- **Information about positive parenting methods**, available in various media and formats, online and in libraries, children's centres, surgeries and schools.
- **Information about parenting support services** and how to access them, online at www.westminster.gov.uk/wish and locally in written formats.

- Practitioners establish and maintain **good relationships with parents from first contact**, promote positive parenting, healthy choices, and parental involvement in play, learning and development, and identify any additional needs for support with parenting.
- Families are given timely **information and support through key transitions**: pregnancy, new baby, starting school, moving to secondary school, changing school at non-standard times, adolescence, career decision-making, leaving school, etc, so that children can feel more secure during these crucial times.
- A range of **learning opportunities are targeted towards parents**, including parenting know-how, family learning sessions, and routes into training and employment, delivered locally in libraries, extended schools, children's centres and other community settings.
- **Parents are encouraged to be involved** in the life of schools, local services, and communities, and are given opportunities to influence developments.
- **Services are accessible to fathers** as well as mothers. Schools and local services raise awareness of the importance of the active, positive involvement of fathers in their children's lives, and engage fathers in activities designed to increase their involvement and their confidence in their parenting skills.

Level 2. Targeted support to meet parents' additional needs

There are particular circumstances and times in parents' and children's lives when targeted information, advice and support with parenting can be vital to parents.

- **Targeted support for parents who are likely to have additional needs** eg. new parents, lone parents, parents of teens, to enhance their parenting capacity.
- **Specialised interventions** are available for young parents, and parents of children with disabilities or physical illnesses, according to their needs.
- **Adult services identify vulnerable adults who have children** and, if there are additional needs for support with parenting, these are taken into account in care planning. Vulnerable adults include those with learning or physical disabilities, sensory impairments, long term illnesses, mental health, drug, alcohol or domestic violence issues, and those who are homeless or overcrowded.
- Practitioners provide **advice and support with early parenting issues**, eg. breastfeeding, post-natal depression, relationship difficulties in early parenthood.
- **Professionals signpost, refer or facilitate self referral** to parenting support services, including Triple P parenting interventions.
- Parenting support is available through **brief consultation, topic sessions and structured parenting programmes** in children's centres, extended schools and other community settings.
- **Where a pupil is at risk of exclusion**, school and parents sign up to a parenting contract and the parents are offered a place on a parenting course.

- Where there are **multiple additional needs**, a plan is agreed through a multi-agency panel and coordinated by a lead professional.
- Support is available to help parents respond to problematic and risky **teenage behaviour** associated with drugs, alcohol, sex, crime, bullying and truanting.

Level 3. Coordinated family interventions

About 3% of families have multiple, complex problems such that a fully coordinated response is needed to achieve change. These families will be engaged and empowered through a formal 'contracting and consequences' approach.

- **Participation in a structured parenting programme** will be specified in robust multi-agency contracts for the whole family, coordinated by a lead professional.
- **There are clear processes for accessing parenting programmes.**
- **Group parenting programmes run all year round** in local areas and settings across Westminster, and at varying times of day.
- **Enhanced, individualised parenting interventions** eg. on coping with stress, managing anger, and partner support are available, especially where a child has severe social, emotional or behavioural difficulties, where there is a history of crime, anti-social behaviour or domestic violence, or risk of child maltreatment, neglect or breakdown.
- The parents of **children looked after by the City Council** are offered a place on a parenting programme where the plan is for their children to return home. Similar training is offered to foster, respite and residential carers.

Level 4. Intensive support and statutory intervention

Intensive, sustained parenting support backed by statutory powers is necessary for a handful of families with problems which parents have so far been unwilling or unable to address e.g. school non-attendance, permanent exclusion, drugs, criminal activity or anti-social behaviour. Intensive keyworking and facilitated access to services can empower even the most challenging families to get their lives on track.

- There is a **robust and assertive keyworking approach** with families who have multiple problems and are facing legal action.
- Where a child has an acceptable behaviour contract (ABC) or an anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) or the parents are subject to a parenting order, they are engaged in an **individualised parenting programme**, as part of a holistic package of support for the whole family until it is no longer needed.
- Legal powers including **parenting orders are utilised appropriately** to promote parental engagement and cooperation in the interests of the child, with effective multi-agency coordination of their statutory powers.
- The parenting support needs of parents in **prison** and of parents of imprisoned young people are considered as part of preparations for release.

We will develop, strengthen and fully integrate our parenting offer over time. Our priorities over the next two years are:

1. An integrated approach to commissioning parenting services.
2. A citywide strategy for engaging with and consulting parents.
3. Support for the 3% of families at greatest risk of social exclusion.
4. Training, accreditation and support for the children's workforce.
5. Information and publicity about positive parenting methods and parenting support services.
6. A coherent and needs-led approach to the delivery of parenting programmes.
7. Working with and engaging fathers.
8. Transitions into primary and secondary school.
9. A review of outreach to parents.
10. Linking parenting programmes and family learning sessions.
11. Improving communication, systems and services for supporting vulnerable adults who are parents.
12. Delivery of services on a locality basis.

Positive partnership with parents

Every parent in Westminster is entitled to expect a range of high quality parenting support services delivered by skilled and trained practitioners. In addition, children, young people and parents can expect Westminster City Council, its partners and service providers to:

- consult them about their needs through formal and informal mechanisms
- involve them in the planning, development and delivery of services
- ask for feedback on services and strategy and take their views into account in future developments

As with any effective partnership, expectations need to be explicit on both sides. Our expectations of parents as positive partners are that they will:

1. Support their children by promoting healthy choices; providing safe homes and stability; supporting learning and enjoyment; promoting positive and responsible behaviour; and striving to achieve economic wellbeing
2. Encourage their children to reach their potential
3. Work in partnership with schools and other agencies to achieve the best outcomes for children
4. Comply with the law in undertaking their parenting responsibilities

This is, of course, no more than most parents expect of themselves. The City Council makes a similar commitment to the children we look after as corporate parents.

For a copy of the detailed strategy and action plan please contact the Director of Children's Services, Westminster City Council, 64 Victoria Street, SW1E 6QP.