

SUMMARY FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

Part of the Parenting through Adversity (11–18) Practice Guide

| Produced by Foundations, and commissioned by the Department for Education

This document summarises the [Parenting Through Adversity for Parents of Children & Young People aged 11 to 18 Practice Guide](#) and supports Elected and Lead members with key questions to support delivery.

[The key questions](#) in this document are designed to help Elected and Lead Members work with senior leaders of Children's Services to strengthen their local parenting support offer for families experiencing adversities with children and young people 11 to 18 years old.

This Practice Guide relates to all outcomes of the [Children's Social Care National Framework](#). The enablers of the Framework – leadership, workforce, multi-agency working – have a role in supporting delivery of this Guide's key principles and recommendations.

[Practice Guides](#) set out the best available evidence for leaders in the children's social care sector to support effective practice and improve how services are commissioned, developed and delivered.

They contain actionable key principles and recommendations for senior leaders. These are based on findings from [a robust review of existing evidence](#), which explored what works, for whom, and in what context.

INTRODUCTION

All children and young people need responsive and nurturing parenting, and the parent-child relationship is foundational to a children's emotional, social, and cognitive development. However, for some parenting can be a challenge. This is especially the case where there are additional adversities that undermine the skills, abilities and/or resources parents can offer to support to their children.

Effective parenting programmes can help strengthen a families' response and resilience when experiencing adversities, and improve a range of both parent and child outcomes, including:

- Improving parents' skills and confidence
- Improving overall family functioning and parent-child relationships
- Improving behaviours that challenge for those already at risk of challenging behaviour
- Improving behaviours that challenge where children and young people are already involved in anti-social behaviour
- Reducing internalising behaviours such as withdrawal, anxiety and low mood in children and young people
- Improving parental mental health and reducing parenting stress.

What do we mean by 'experiencing adversities'?

This Practice Guide focusses on parenting support for families experiencing adversities, who have at least one child or young person aged 11 to 18 years old.

Our review defined a range of adversities – synonymous with multiple and complex needs – based on a range of established risk factors for child maltreatment. Some adversities were more common in the evidence, such as child conduct problems, while others were less common, including low socioeconomic status and poor parental mental health. The review included families where the presence of abuse was known to Children's Social Care, but this group was in the minority in the identified evidence.

It is important to note that, while parenting interventions can play a vital role in reducing behaviours that challenge in children and young people, there are limits. For some children and young people, difficulties such as withdrawal, aggression, or changes in behaviour may also signal experiences of exploitation or harm outside the home.

It is therefore important for these families that parenting interventions are embedded within a coordinated safeguarding response that brings together schools, youth services, health services, and specialist agencies such as youth justice if appropriate, to ensure that these harms are identified and appropriately addressed.

What do we mean by parenting support?

In all the parenting Practice Guides, we use the term "parenting support" to broadly refer to parenting interventions, programmes, and services that support parents of children and young people with their parenting, including parenting practices and the parent-child relationship.

Read the [extended definitions](#) for more detail.

The best evidence parenting interventions for parents facing adversities, with children & young people 11–18 years old

The Parenting Through Adversity (11–18) Practice Guide contains actionable key principles and recommendations for senior local leaders. These are based on findings from a robust review of existing evidence, which explored what works, for whom, and in what context.

Key principles: draw out evidence on the circumstances, experiences, and preferences of children and young people in the UK, and internationally, on how to engage and work with them. They also cover evidence on the effective implementation and design of mentoring and befriending interventions. This evidence helps to ensure that accessible, acceptable interventions can be effectively implemented.

Recommendations: draw out the best-evidenced interventions for improving children and young people's outcomes. We only make recommendations where at least one rigorous impact evaluation has evidenced that the intervention achieves positive outcomes for children and young people or parents in the UK, or in countries with similar child welfare systems to the UK.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Key principles are grouped into three themes and apply to all levels of the local system, workforce development, and local offer design and development.

Working with families

Key principle 1: Increase engagement in parenting support by creating trusting, respectful, and anti-discriminatory environments for parents and families.

Key principle 2: Approach family dynamics with curiosity, aiming to understand behaviours and build on family strengths.

Key principle 3: Build parental confidence through parenting support to respond effectively to behaviours that challenge.

Meeting families' needs

Key principle 4: Implement a flexible local offer that responds to families' needs and preferences through a mix of support types, including options for intensive support when needed.

Key principle 5: Group-based support encourages peer connection, providing parents with the opportunity to build reciprocal relationships.

Key Principle 6: Implement a local parenting offer which is culturally responsive and addresses the cultural values, beliefs, and experiences of the local population.

Local system culture

Key principle 7: Promote an evidence-informed, integrated, and innovative culture to enable effective implementation and fidelity of parenting support.

Key principle 8: Ensure effective multi-agency collaboration through defined organisational responsibilities, and strong place-based systems to enable seamless, family-centred coordination to improve referral pathways and family experience.

Key principle 9: A consistent, supported and skilled workforce is essential to the delivery of effective parenting support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION	STRONG EVIDENCE	GOOD EVIDENCE	PROMISING EVIDENCE
1. Make evidence-based interventions available to families where behaviours that challenge are present to improve and empower effective parenting practices.		✓	
2. Make evidence-based parenting interventions available to families experiencing poor family functioning and child behavioural issues to reduce parenting stress.		✓	
3. Make evidence-based parenting interventions available to reduce negative emotional behaviours.		✓	
4. Make evidence-based family therapy interventions available to reduce behaviours that challenge in children and young people.		✓	
5. Make evidence-based systemic family therapy models available to support improved family functioning where there are behaviours that challenge.		✓	
6. Make evidence-based parenting interventions available to families whose children have been identified as needing support from Children's Social Care, to support parental mental health.		✓	

STRONG EVIDENCE

- Meta-analysis of at least two randomised controlled trials or quasi-experimental studies
- Low on risk of bias assessment
- Demonstrates effectiveness of the intervention(s).

GOOD EVIDENCE

- Meta-analysis or narrative synthesis of at least two randomised controlled trials and/or quasi-experimental studies
- Moderate on risk of bias assessment
- Demonstrates efficacy of the intervention(s).

PROMISING EVIDENCE

- One randomised controlled trial or quasi-experimental study
- Low or moderate on risk of bias assessment
- Demonstrates efficacy of the intervention(s).

Read the evidence ratings in full: <https://foundations.org.uk/how-to-use-the-practice-guides/>

KEY QUESTIONS FOR ENGAGING SENIOR LEADERS

These questions are designed to help Elected and Lead Members work with local leaders of Children's Social Care to strengthen their local parenting support offer for families experiencing adversities with children and young people aged 11 to 18 years old. They should act as prompts to aid conversations with local leaders on implementing this Practice Guide's recommendations and key principles.

How evidence-based and informed is our current local support offer for supporting parents who are experiencing adversities with children and young people aged 11 to 18 years old?

To ensure that families experiencing adversities are able to access parenting support that we know improves outcomes, there should be an integration of research-backed interventions known to be effective in improving outcomes for families. Local leaders should detail how the local support offer is built alongside the inclusion of evidence-based programmes to address challenges such as mental illness, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, poor housing conditions, and racism.

Strong leadership is essential throughout the implementation process of any parenting programme – from assessing population needs and adopting interventions to embedding them and maintaining quality. Interventions should align with local workforce skills, such as therapeutic expertise, or the ability to facilitate groups and coach parenting practices. Additionally, continuous review processes, including data collection and analysis, should be in place to monitor service effectiveness and adapt the offer based on emerging evidence to better meet families' needs.

Local leaders should ensure the necessary professional development for practitioners to keep skills and knowledge current. Reflective practice, supervision and feedback mechanisms should be in place to allow practitioners to learn from experiences and enhance service delivery. These efforts should connect to broader strategic goals, demonstrating how an evidence-informed approach supports the mission of improving outcomes for children and families locally.

Delivering well-evidenced support locally will improve outcomes and ensure that resources are directed to the most effective services. The Practice Guide summarises the best-evidenced support for parents experiencing adversity with children and young people 11 to 18 years old and can serve as a starting point for local leaders to assess how well their current offer meets the needs of this group. Understanding the specific demographics and support needs of local families is also crucial when prioritising support.

How do we ensure that parents who are experiencing adversity with children and young people aged 11–18 are able to access the support they are entitled to?

Implementing parenting programmes requires good multi-agency collaboration. Local areas should ensure effective multi-agency collaboration through defined organisational responsibilities, and strong place-based systems to enable seamless, family-centred coordination to improve referral pathways and family experience.

Effective multi-agency collaboration – between health, education, and youth justice where appropriate – requires shared values, common language, and joint commitment to seamless support for families. These strong multi-agency relationships can ensure effective referral of eligible families into parenting programmes, while avoiding families having to constantly reshare their experience, or face conflicting messages. By working closely with partner agencies, local authorities can ensure consistent messaging and build trust with families who may be reluctant to engage with formal services due to stigma or past negative experiences.

A local parenting offer should also be culturally responsive, addressing the cultural values, beliefs, and experiences of the local population in order to improve access and engagement. Cultural responsiveness requires authentic partnership with communities, recognition of how structural inequalities affect different populations, and an understanding of families' cultural contexts. See key principle 6 for further information.

Simplifying access to support is critical. Local authorities should ensure that services are easy to navigate reducing the administrative burden on families, and any structural barriers – such as location of services, accessibility, and cultural responsiveness – that may prevent families from engaging with support should be addressed and managed. Training should be provided for practitioners in recognising the signs of unmet needs and understanding the available support pathways will enhance the ability to connect families with appropriate resources. Regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms can help local authorities refine their strategies, ensuring that support is not only available but also effectively reaches those who need it most.

How can we ensure that the workforce has the right skills and knowledge to support parents experiencing adversity with children and young people aged 11–18?

High caseloads, understaffing and staff turnover were regularly identified in the review underpinning this guide as barriers to delivery of parenting support. Training, reflective supervision, manageable workloads were enablers of staff confidence and intervention effectiveness.

It is important that practitioners are seen as knowledgeable, confident and approachable to families. Training and supervision enable successful parenting support and improve staff confidence.

Investing in joint training and capacity-building initiatives ensures all partners who work with families have a shared understanding of family needs and the best approaches to supporting them. To facilitate this, local leaders should provide the workforce with suitable opportunities to deepen their knowledge, develop new skills, put learning into practice and aim to protect staff time to attend training away from immediate workplace demands.

Staff capacity is also key to effectiveness of evidence based parenting interventions and improving outcomes for this cohort of children and families. Leaders should support practitioners to have manageable caseloads.

How can we use this Practice Guide to deliver wider Children's Social Care reforms?

This Practice Guide offers local leaders clear, evidence-based recommendations and key principles for delivering parenting support to effectively support families with children aged 11–18 years old facing adversity.

In using this, and other Practice Guides produced by Foundations local leaders can fulfil many areas of the Children's Social Care National Framework, ensuring they meet their statutory responsibilities while delivering high quality, impactful support. The Practice Guide emphasises multi-agency collaboration, cultural responsiveness, and family-focused and tailored services, all of which are proven to improve outcomes for children and families.

Implementing the strategies in this Practice Guide comes at an ideal time, aligning with the expectations set out in the Family First Partnership Programme Guidance. By adopting this approach, local authorities can create a cohesive, efficient service offer that addresses the needs of families, reduces demand on more intensive services, and fosters better outcomes. This Practice Guide provides the tools and evidence needed to drive meaningful change, making it an essential resource for Directors of Children's Services as they work to transform and enhance local systems to improve outcomes for children and families.

As an Elected Member, you may want to engage your colleagues across the Cabinet and other relevant committees such as Partnership Boards, Integrated Care Boards, and Health and Wellbeing Boards to coordinate the development of the local offer for parent carers of disabled children and young people.

This resource is part of a set of publications linked to Parenting Through Adversity (11–18) Practice Guide:

- Full Practice Guide: <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/full-guide-parenting-through-adversity-11-18.pdf>
- Online summary Practice Guide: <https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/parenting-through-adversity-11-18>

Find out more about the series of Practice Guides:
foundations.org.uk/practice-guides

We want to hear from local leaders who are engaging with the Practice Guides.
Get in touch at practice_guides@foundations.org.uk