



Working Effectively with Families in Sure Start Children's Centres

What the product is:

Checklists to assist the review of the services provided by Sure Start Children's Centres for families.

How the product can be used:

By individuals or groups who wish to review the nature and range of services and activities offered to families.

Who the product is for:

Sure Start Children's Centre leaders and others in Sure Start Children's Centres and local authorities who are responsible for the provision of services to families.

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Introduction to the TfC Product Suite

This is one of a range of products Together for Children (TfC) has launched to support Sure Start Children's Centres and local authority children's centre teams to deliver Phase 3 of the children's centres programme.

The suite builds on TfC's range of existing support products, which can be found at <http://www.childrens-centres.org/Topics/AllTfCSupportProducts.aspx> and includes toolkits focusing on child poverty, business planning, and supporting priority and excluded families, in addition to materials supporting improved engagement with Jobcentre Plus, health colleagues and the private, voluntary and independent sectors.

The aims of the product suite are to:

- Provide practical ('how to') help and resources for children's centres and local authority children's centres teams to support children's centres journeys to Full Core Offer and beyond
- Ensure that children's centres have the support they need to develop sustainable and successful services.

The product suite focuses on six areas - performance management, finance and sustainability, workforce development, commissioning, facilitating effective working between children's centres and extended services, and working effectively with families through children's centres.

We greatly appreciate the assistance provided by all those who have contributed towards the development of the product suite. A full list of those who contributed towards this particular product is given below, together with an overview of this product's contents.

We hope that you find these products useful. If you have any feedback you would like to offer, please contact us at mail@togetherforchildren.co.uk



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Introduction

The Children's Plan 'One Year On' makes it clear that "Children's centres have a key role to play in the delivery of the Children's Plan so that by 2010 all families with children under 5, will have access to a range of health, family support, childcare and information on training and support ensuring that every child gets the best start to life."

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/oneyearon/>

The Guidance on the Planning and Delivery of Phase 3 Sure Start Children's Centres re-emphasises earlier guidance, setting as priorities for all centres: outreach and home visiting, supporting parents, working with fathers, working with teenage parents and working with children and families from minority ethnic groups. The guidance suggests that in the most disadvantaged areas a children's centre team should include at least three outreach workers, although a range of alternative approaches might be followed in less disadvantaged areas.

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/publications/?Document=1854>

Why was the resource developed?

In December 2006, the National Audit Office report on children's centres identified a number of areas for development, such as:

- the need to do more to identify families with the highest needs, make them aware of the services on offer and help them to access these services
- the use of effective strategies to bring services to these families
- more to be done to improve services for fathers, parents of children with disabilities, and for ethnic minorities in areas with smaller minority populations
- more to be done in raising the quality of services and making them more relevant to the needs of lone parents, teenage parents and ethnic minorities in areas with large minority populations

http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0607/sure_start_childrens_centres.aspx

The many contacts TfC has with local authorities and children's centres have highlighted a number of challenges for children's centres in working with families.

Issues raised by children's centres and local authorities included:

- working with those who are difficult to engage, including some of the priority target groups
- the complications of working with other agencies
- producing appropriate support or action plans for work with individual families
- supporting staff through training and supervision

How was the resource developed?

The product has been produced using the experience and expertise of local authorities and children's centres, as well as the wide experience of the TfC team itself. Local authority and children's centre contributions have been obtained both through direct contacts and through two workshops.

In producing the product it was recognised that a number of other agencies had already produced extensive materials relevant to some of the strands. Rather than duplicate such work, this has been covered through links to sites such as those of NAPP, the Fatherhood Institute and the TDA.

This product also takes account of and refers to the following TfC products:

- Performance Management Toolkit
<http://www.childrens-centres.org/Topics/AllTfCSupportProducts.aspx#perfmgmt>
- Toolkit for Priority and Excluded Families
<http://www.childrens-centres.org/Topics/AllTfCSupportProducts.aspx#tool>
- Child Poverty Toolkit
<http://www.childrens-centres.org/Topics/AllTfCSupportProducts.aspx#child>

What does the product aim to do?

Most of the children's centres which are already designated have at least some aspects of working with families in place. Many have a wide range of provision in operation. This product has therefore been produced as a resource to support the review and development of work with families. The intention is that those responsible for working with families can scan a list of questions and follow up resources and other links to areas where they feel there are gaps or a need for further development.

It is hoped that this will help in the development of services relevant to the needs of the communities each children's centre serves, both in terms of the nature of the services and the quality of that provision.

How to use this toolkit

Following an initial section listing a number of key tips formulated by children's centres leaders, the main part of the toolkit has been written in a checklist format, covering a range of headings. The headings have been agreed based on priorities identified nationally as well as feedback from children's centres and local authorities consulted by TfC.

Any section can be used on its own. Each starts with a brief summary and a number of broad questions, to highlight the sorts of information which should be considered in approaching the section. There is then a table of checklist questions, accompanied by a range of suggestions and links to other resources, to assist in looking further at a particular aspect of working with families.

Top Tips on Working Effectively with Families in Children's Centres

1 Child Centred Services

- retain a focus on the needs of the child amid your work with parents, carers and other adults
- research and understand the needs of the community
- use parents' knowledge of the community to network and build acceptability
- identify and engage with agencies working in your area; really understand what they offer and how they work
- publicise your centre within the community; develop your identity/ brand through activities such as open days etc
- identify when a child has unmet additional needs and respond to these early, drawing in people with more targeted or specialist skills where appropriate

2 Effective Interagency Teamwork

- establish links with existing groups and organisations at ground and organisational levels
- work with partners using processes already in place e.g. CAF and Team Around the Child/ Team Around the School to identify the needs of families and plan and provide services
- ensure effective communication with partners and a clear focus on which families you are working with and why
- work together on clear and agreed systems and processes for accountability, including boundaries and guidance for working together and with families
- place the safeguarding of children at the centre of all work with families, reflected in policy and practice
- ensure that engagement with partners and families is based on consistent, transparent and honest practice, and challenge of assumptions

3 Parents and Carers

- respect parents as partners and offer different ways to support their engagement in service planning, delivery and evaluation
- invest time to understand the individual needs of families and to build their trust
- build on the strengths and resources of parents and carers

4 Service Design

- review and evaluate existing services alongside developing additional or new services

- ensure that parents and carers participate in service design and that services reflect their preferences
- plan services with partners to ensure that they avoid duplication and are easily accessible to families

5 Service Delivery

- establish a systematic approach to explain to families when the service is first accessed, how and why information may be shared and the standards that will be adopted
- record work with families and partners, and share it appropriately
- develop creative and flexible approaches and services
- be honest and realistic about the support to be offered; don't promise what you can't deliver
- set achievable and realistic goals and targets for yourself and others

6 Staff and Resources

- employ a high quality workforce with relevant training, clear roles and responsibilities; with staff supported and working effectively as empowered teams
- invest in front line staff such as receptionists including training and support
- understand the strengths and gaps in staff skills, knowledge and experience, and develop plans to address these including individual supervision and peer group supervision
- recognise the relationship between line/performance management and professional supervision e.g. health visitor managed by a health professional as well as children's centre manager
- recognise the value of reflective practice and 'thinking time' in the development of staff and services

7 Review and Evaluate the Effectiveness of Services

- ensure that the groups which should be targeted are being reached
- don't assume that, just because a service is well supported and used, it is effective – try to assess the outcomes of all the services offered to families

What Sorts of Activity Might Work with Families Include?

This section illustrates the wide range of activities and services which children's centres provide as a group. You can use this section to review the activities and services you offer and consider their value in terms of the community and the priority groups you serve. There may be some gaps in provision which you want to look at covering and there may be some ideas which you could copy.

Children's centres should give special attention to those families that need extra help with their children. Practitioners should consider the balance between group-based activities in the community, home visiting or both. Some parents find it challenging to attend group based activities, for example those facing severe difficulties, those that are ill, or those who are disabled or have disabled children. These parents may need to be supported to attend group-based activities or may prefer to be supported in the home. Gradually, it may be possible to encourage isolated parents to attend a children's centre, or perhaps use a 'stay and play' group. This can take a long time and requires persistence, working with the parent and child at home initially.

(Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance, 2006)

In Phase 3, the intensity of family support offered by Sure Start Children's Centres serving more affluent areas will vary according to the level of need but priority must be given to reaching out to vulnerable and disadvantaged families. This can be achieved by reshaping existing statutory provision to deliver services through the centre, or by contracting with local private, voluntary or independent sector organisations to deliver services. For the majority of Phase 3 centres in more affluent areas that will not offer intensive family support services on site, links with other organisations and services must be established so that parents can access evidence based parenting programmes where particular needs are identified. In particular centres should link with local health visitors providing the Child Health Promotion Programme and support to parents.

(Sure Start Guidance for Planning and Delivery of Phase 3 Sure Start Children's Centres, 2007) Available from Every Child Matters website: <http://tinyurl.com/ny76t4>

C4EO research on improving children's attainment through a better quality of family-based support for early learning has identified the following key research messages: There is a clear link between improved achievement for children and the quality of the home learning environment. Young children are directly helped to achieve their potential by:

- minimising their exposure to foetal and post-natal injury, disease and infection
- confronting neglect and abuse
- supporting parents' bonding and attachment to their young children

- helping to stimulate the home learning environment by encouraging parents to engage in simple educational activities.

The evidence from this review highlights strategies that work:

- improve parents' education and/or qualifications
- help support parents and lessen mothers' depression and anxiety
- improve employment opportunities, thereby reducing family poverty
- enhance the mixing of children from different social backgrounds in early years settings
- work with parents to stimulate their involvement in and access to early years education and to home visiting.

- what activities and services does your centre provide at present?
- are there any other services which might be considered?
- do you have a full picture of what services are already available in your area and if there are any gaps?
- how effective are the activities and services – in terms of impact and value for money?
- how well used are the activities and services?
- do the services offered take account of the views of service users?

Checklist for Children's Centres – Activities and Services for Working with Families	
Prompts	Ideas
There is a large range of examples of different ways of working with families, and many lists! Lists like this can be useful for centre leaders and their staff, as they may prompt ideas about additional activities to meet particular needs and target groups. Are there activities or services which you don't provide at present and which be appropriate for the community you serve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CWDC has produced a cross sector scoping study of family support workers in the children's workforce, which includes detailed lists of activities and services provided by family support workers. http://tinyurl.com/lnzt5 (pdf) • Kensington and Chelsea's parenting strategy contains a helpful list of services delivered in children's centres and other settings. http://tinyurl.com/mupr8u (pdf) • Barking and Dagenham have a clear description of their Family Support services on their website. http://tinyurl.com/ndhzzl • At an individual children's centre level, Cowgate and Blakelaw Children's Centre in Newcastle upon Tyne also has a clear description of their Family Support service for parents. http://tinyurl.com/msmwfj
Any activity represents an investment in resources and needs to be justified in terms of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birmingham has listed activities against the outcomes for the children's centre, ECM outcomes and the children's centre core offer, encouraging evaluation of

Checklist for Children's Centres – Activities and Services for Working with Families	
Prompts	Ideas
outcomes and targets. Whilst one useful measure is the level of take up of an activity that in itself may not justify resources being allocated to it. How do you assess the impact of an activity or service?	<p>the reasons for offering an activity as part of the full service offer. Birmingham Family Support Toolkit: http://tinyurl.com/nt4yrg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The national evaluation report on Sure Start Local Programmes (March 2008) looks at the positive impact of their work on families and parenting. http://www.surestart.gov.uk/doc/P0002536.pdf A survey of Family Support in Children's Centres, published by the Family and Parenting Institute, looks at approaches to evaluation used in a sample of children's centres. http://tinyurl.com/mdaas (pdf) www.familyandparenting.org
There is a range of approaches to organising services for working with families, including various approaches to commissioning. Could your services be provided in a different way?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A report on the Market for Parental and Family Support Services, commissioned with Price Waterhouse Coopers by the DCSF, list a variety of approaches found in a number of authorities. http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RW72.pdf The FPI report on Family Support in Children's Centres describes the variety of approaches used in a sample of 18 centres, including different team structures. http://tinyurl.com/mdaas (pdf) In Kensington and Chelsea early years services have been re-organised to ensure that there are universal services delivered via children's centres that promote early intervention and prevention work with families and children. http://tinyurl.com/nj8sww (doc) There are further case studies in the supplement to the Winter 2008/09 edition of the Sure Start magazine, Early Years. http://viewer.zmags.com/showmag.php?mid=wrphhh
The children's centre performance management process should take account of feedback from service users, and those who are not using the services, in guiding future plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FPI report on Family Support in Children's Centres looks at techniques used to consult parents and the community. http://tinyurl.com/mdaas (pdf) TfC has produced a toolkit to assist local authorities

Checklist for Children's Centres – Activities and Services for Working with Families	
Prompts	Ideas
How do you get feedback from parents and other service users – and what about those who don't use any services?	<p>and children's centres with review and monitoring. This includes sections on family support and working with parents. Performance management product: http://tinyurl.com/leemhm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A CWDC study on effective children's centres explores how effectiveness is viewed from the perspectives of parents, practitioners and managers, who use, work in or manage children's centres. http://tinyurl.com/lnezt5 (pdf)
Do any parents have financial problems?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Parents' Guide to Money has been produced by the FSA for this purpose, aimed particularly at new parents. http://tinyurl.com/6gb6ey (html) • Support and advice can also be obtained from your local CAB. http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index.htm • The FPI has also published some guidance for parents. Parent's Money Saving Tips: http://tinyurl.com/lfm8hr (pdf)

Working with Other Agencies

A fully integrated approach means there will be clear and effective links between the children’s centre and other agencies. This section looks at aspects of the approach to this. The aim is to avoid duplication of services whilst ensuring there are no gaps.

Experience tells us that one of the best ways of establishing a strong multi-agency team is to give workers and professionals time together. Co-location of services with, for example, health visitors, midwives, family support workers, outreach workers, managers and volunteers sharing office space or a staff room, fosters a better understanding of the aims and priorities for each agency and helps to identify common ground. Issues of confidentiality need to be addressed specifically with information sharing protocols and particular care must be taken if there is any possibility of volunteer workers having access to information about local families. (Sure Start Children’s Centres Practice Guidance, 2006)

- is there an integrated approach to working with families?
- are all workers clear about how to engage other services?
- are there any gaps in service provision?
- is there a shared referral form and process?
- who are the key agencies covering your centre’s reach area?
- how is information shared between workers from all agencies?
- do parents see an integrated and well co-ordinated approach?
- is there a locality or authority wide strategy covering working with families?

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Working with Other Agencies	
Prompts	Ideas
Many areas have some form of strategic plan which sets out the respective roles of the agencies in the area. Does your local authority have anything like this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TfC toolkit for developing a local authority strategy for working with families will include examples of the types of approach taken.
Within the individual children’s centre, a number of practices can support integrated working with families. Regular team meetings, including workers not necessarily employed within the centre, are common practice. Also increasingly recognised is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warrington Council’s website includes a comprehensive range of materials to support integrated service delivery, including common referral forms. Practitioner’s toolkit: http://tinyurl.com/nlwzsk • The link below gives the form used by Merton local authority. Request for service form: http://tinyurl.com/mw5dhl (pdf)

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Working with Other Agencies	
Prompts	Ideas
<p>the use of the common assessment framework¹, to provide a generic format for agencies to record and share information (with appropriate consent) on children and families in the reach area, and the team around the child (TAC) to bring services and families together to agree how best to meet the needs of the child.</p> <p>Where a CAF is not appropriate (either because the needs are obvious, the first contact agency is an adult service or the family has not consented to a CAF being undertaken) many areas have developed a common referral form.</p> <p>How do you support integrated working?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FPI report on Family Support in Children’s Centres describes multi-agency working in a sample of 18 centres. http://tinyurl.com/mdaasr (pdf) www.familyandparenting.org
<p>Essential to any service engagement process is a clear understanding of the respective roles of those involved. Whether engaging other services is handled by individual staff, or through some form of panel, this allows fully informed decisions regarding which services should be involved. At one extreme a practitioner involve Social Care or health specialist services, at the other extreme they may simply want to ensure a parent knows of and is welcomed at some form of pre-school or parenting group. Opportunities are missed if the workers involved are not aware of all the options.</p>	<p>See section on support and action plans.</p>

¹ Where a practitioner is concerned that a child may have been harmed or may be at risk of harm they should **not** complete a CAF but should immediately follow the procedures established by their local safeguarding children board (LSCB).

Checklist for Children's Centres – Working with Other Agencies	
Prompts	Ideas
<p>All those working with the centre should clearly understand how to engage other services.</p>	<p>Some services offer dedicated phone lines so that children's centre workers can share any concerns and receive early advice on the appropriateness of a referral. Shelter's Children's Service provides specialist housing advice for children's centre professionals who can call their Children's Service Advice Line. This provides easy access to specialist housing advice and a referral route to specialist advisers. Children's Centre advice line: 0845 421 4444 http://tinyurl.com/l39dxx (html)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some PCTs the CAMHS service offers a similar dedicated phone service. • Shelter has also produced a briefing which discusses how bad housing or homelessness affects children, and the ways in which children's centres can engage more effectively with homeless children and their families. 'Children's centres have a responsibility to engage with, and provide for, all children but with particular emphasis on improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged'. http://tinyurl.com/mhgf8w (pdf) <p>Jobcentre Plus advisers have proved effective links in identifying families who could benefit from children's centre contact and, with their agreement, made referrals to a local centre. There is information on and examples of links with JCP on the TfC website: http://www.childrens-centres.org/Topics/LinksWithJCP.aspx</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There should be links in place with local early years settings, to ensure that any family needing additional support is identified and followed up.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key partner agency will be Health. • Have you properly engaged Health Sector colleagues? • Do you have a full understanding of each other's organisations? • Do Children's Health Services have a high profile in your centre? • Can the way in which information is shared be improved? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Healthy Lives, Brighter Futures – The Strategy for Children and Young People's Health' sets out a strengthened role for Sure Start Children's Centres – both through additional health-based programmes, focusing on reducing obesity and smoking, and by ensuring that each centre has access to a named health visitor (see Chapter 3 on Pregnancy and the Early Years). http://tinyurl.com/nacrji (DoH, pdf) • TfC has published a suite of documents designed to be used by colleagues in both Local Authorities and in local Health organisations as they work towards their shared outcomes. http://tinyurl.com/6bhn5j

Checklist for Children's Centres – Working with Other Agencies	
Prompts	Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you developed clear and concise guidance together to ensure ownership at all levels? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Change4Life website contains a useful range of materials and links regarding healthy lifestyles. http://www.nhs.uk/Change4Life/Pages/default.aspx Cheyne Family Centre in Kensington and Chelsea, with the local Primary Care Trust, has set up a 'Best 4 Baby Café'. This provides a range of services including support to mothers on breast-feeding and bottle-feeding. Both trained staff and experienced mums are on hand to give advice. http://tinyurl.com/mm5eno (TfC, doc) Gloucestershire established learning sets with the aim of providing an opportunity for Health Visitors, School Nurses, Community Nursery Nurses and Children's Centre staff to work together to develop local plans to address services for children and their families, based on local need. http://tinyurl.com/lquzon (TfC, doc)
<p>Staff at health centres and GP clinics should know about the services their local children's centres offer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bath and North East Somerset commissioned an 'Early Relationship Project' with CAMHS, focusing on families attending 'stay and play' and 'Bumps and Babes' sessions. This provided easy access, in a drop in format, to a non-medical environment. Instant advice and guidance could be provided where appropriate, with opportunities for more formal assessment on the children's centre site, and a pathway to CAMHS if needed. Ongoing contact was improved and there has been increased take up through families spreading the word. The authority now wants to extend this approach across all of its children's centres and see it fully embedded for the future.
<p>Certain groups present particular challenges, but there can also be the opportunity to work with specific support services, such as those which work with the families of the armed forces.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prudhoe Children's Centre, Newcastle on Tyne has established links with a local army barracks. Families living at Albemarle Barracks are particularly isolated due to the rural location and lack of public transport. Links with both the Unit Welfare Office and the Army Welfare Service have been established and families were supported to access Children's Centre Services at Prudhoe. Services at the site itself have also been developed. http://tinyurl.com/noh3sf (TfC, doc)

Support and Action Plans

This section looks at approaches to drawing up support or action plans for work with individual families. The aim of such plans is, working with the family, to set out an approach which makes clear the ways in which services will work with them, the expectations on them, and a timescale for review and moving on.

Targeted support should be offered to parents where professional staff judge that they and their children face significant, additional risk of poor outcomes; or parents themselves ask for further help. This could take the form of one-to-one support through home visiting, more intensive structured parenting programmes or referral to specialist services such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Targeted support should have a clear structure and defined objectives, taking a holistic approach to working with the whole family.
(Sure Start Children’s Centres Practice Guidance, 2006)

- is it clear when a support plan should be drawn up?
- who is involved in drawing up a support plan?
- how does it link to the CAF system?
- does each plan set out clear and realistic targets, including timescales?

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Support and Action Plans	
Prompts	Ideas
Much of working with families is about offering a universal service, open and appropriate to all. In most areas, for the majority of parents, their needs will be covered through initial contacts and group provision. The main contact with the children’s centre will be through a range of early years groups, drop in sessions and parenting activities. However some will be identified as in need of a higher level of support than this. Many centres operate some form of panel system, to consider families identified by the centre workers or others as in need of additional support. Their needs can be set against the services available and a support plan agreed with them. In most cases this will include	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derbyshire has reviewed its process for drawing up and reviewing action plans, agreeing common practice. This has resulted in clear, transparent action plans for parents and carers, and for staff. http://tinyurl.com/nfca2q (TfC, doc) • Warrington Council’s website includes a comprehensive range of materials to support integrated service delivery, including a framework for family support plans. Practitioner’s toolkit: http://tinyurl.com/nlwzsk

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Support and Action Plans	
Prompts	Ideas
attendance at both children’s and adults’ groups. However in some a need for more intensive support, possibly on a one to one basis, will be proposed. This could include referral to other agencies, or family support from the centre, perhaps including outreach visits to the home.	
Agreeing a clear action or support plan has obvious benefits for all involved. The provision most appropriate to the needs of the family can be identified and risks of duplication (and gaps in support) are minimised. The plan will set clear targets, including an ‘exit’ strategy. Support can carry with it the risk of dependency. One of the benefits of a good support plan is the inclusion of targets and the clear intention that the family will move on from its initial position. For most, ‘exit’ will not mean a severing of links with the workers and services, but a move down the tiers of support towards provision which is universal and available to all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Birmingham toolkit gives a full description of that authority’s approach to planning and reviewing support to individual families, including family plans and family files. “To end intervention is a big stepping-stone for the family, but it does not necessarily mean that it is the end of involvement with the children’s centre. The family may still want to access universal services. It is important though that the family see a clear ending rather than services just drifting off.” The toolkit also includes case studies. http://tinyurl.com/nt4yrg (TfC, doc) • The Family and Parenting Institute, with DCSF support, has produced a guide on ‘How to Help Families in Trouble’. This covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning your visit, including the first meeting, scope, recap agreements, using contracts, rewards and sanctions • When things go wrong and issues beyond control • What to do when you get stuck and sources of further help. http://www.familyandparenting.org/item/publication/40/2
Is the relationship between a centre support plan and a CAF clear?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are numerous national and local guidance notes regarding CAFs – for example ‘The Common Assessment Framework for children & young people: supporting tools’. http://tinyurl.com/luoqav (ECM)

The Right Workers to Work with Families – their Management and Support

This section looks at the range of workers who might provide services and activities for families. The first checklist reviews who this might be, in terms of position, background and experience. The second checklist looks further at the types of support and training this group of workers might need.

All members of the children's centre team should receive training in working with parents as part of the common core for the children's workforce. Practitioners offering parenting groups or delivering support through home visiting need specific training in working with parents and should be working to meet new National Occupational Standards at level 3, or level 2 for staff supporting a group leader. This includes professionals trained in other disciplines that work with parents, for example health visitors and social workers. Where centres are currently unable to meet these standards due to workforce constraints, they should be moving towards them by providing training opportunities for staff. Parents or other volunteers should also be given opportunities to train – it is important to recognise that parents who have themselves successfully raised children should be considered a valuable resource. Ongoing monitoring and supervision will be important for all those who work with parents, as this is key to maintaining quality.

(Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance, 2006)

- what experience and background do those working with families in your centres have?
- is there a range of skills available and are these used effectively?
- is there safe and appropriate use of volunteers?
- is there a clear, agreed and appropriate use of parents?
- what qualifications do those working with families have?
- is there recognition of the role which all staff play in working with families?
- is there the opportunity for progression for parents and volunteers to move into paid employment?
- are the management arrangements for those working with families clear?
- are there appropriate supervision arrangements in place for all staff, volunteers and parents?
- is there access to appropriate training?
- are there sufficient opportunities for all centre staff, volunteers and parents to work together, to strengthen the centre's ethos and practice e.g. workshops
- is there appropriate guidance and support regarding home visits?

Checklist for Children’s Centres – the Right Workers to Work with Families	
Prompts	Ideas
<p>It is likely that staff working with families come from a variety of backgrounds, with a range of qualifications.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CWDC Family Support Review includes a detailed account of the range of backgrounds and qualifications found amongst family support workers. http://tinyurl.com/lnezt5 (pdf) • The FPI report on Family Support in Children’s Centres looks at the training and qualifications of staff in a sample of children’s centres, as well as approaches to use of parents as volunteers. http://tinyurl.com/mdaasr <p>There are some parallels with the role of Parent Support Adviser in extended schools. The PSA offers early intervention, preventative support, guidance and advice to improve outcomes for children, young people and families within a school context, through working in partnership with parents, carers and other agencies. The role will assist in tackling underachievement to enable pupils to have full access to educational opportunities and overcome barriers to learning and participation. PSAs aim to work directly with parents in a non-judgemental way, empowering them and their families to get the most out of the educational opportunities available. PSAs generally focus their work on preventative and early intervention activities. They work in a schools context where presenting needs are below the thresholds that trigger the involvement of specialist services and other agencies. Parenting Support: http://tinyurl.com/ktff5q (TDA)</p>
<p>Using parents as outreach workers can be very effective in some communities. However such workers need to be recruited and trained with care, and also need to be well supported. There is a need to be aware of the boundaries for non-professional outreach workers. They need to be sensitive to the risk of over identification with parents and of missing some of the key issues as a consequence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Bournemouth Children’s Centres recruited and trained parents to become buddies for new parents attending their stay and play activities. In a community where parents’ trust of statutory agencies was variable it was seen as important for parents to be able to relate to someone from the children’s centre. This helped build community belief that the children’s centre services were for them and increased parental access to services. They also found that parents who became engaged with the centre as volunteers and members of the Partnership Board were very proactive in encouraging other parents to become involved with the Centre.
<p>Many of the volunteers working in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAB, Home-Start and Parentline Plus are perhaps

Checklist for Children’s Centres – the Right Workers to Work with Families	
Prompts	Ideas
<p>children’s centres are parents. However some centres work with others from the community. In some cases centres have developed a partnership or a contract with a local or national voluntary organisation to provide and supervise a group of volunteers.</p>	<p>the main national providers of volunteers working with families. There are many smaller local organisations.</p> <p>www.home-start.org.uk http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index.htm http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk/</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Tavistock Institute report on Voluntary and Community Sector Services - Their Role in Supporting Parents and Families explores the role played specifically by the voluntary and community sector in England as a key provider in supporting parents, carers and families. http://tinyurl.com/nacpnh (DCSF)
<p>Domestic violence and its impact on children is of growing concern for many of those working in children’s centres. Are staff fully informed of the various agencies, helplines and resources for parents and children in this situation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NSPCC has a number of publications for those working with families affected by domestic violence. They also offer advice through their helpline, 0808 800 5000. http://tinyurl.com/nddkzn • The 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline provides advice to those who need it - 0808 2000 247. www.womensaid.org.uk • The Men’s Advice Line and Enquiries (MALE) provides support for men in abusive relationships - 0845 064 6800. www.mensadvice.org.uk • Birmingham & Solihull Women’s Aid is an example of the many local voluntary organisations which offer support for those involved in domestic violence. They have developed a Family Support Project which is available to help and support women and children who have been affected by the experience of domestic violence. http://www.bswaid.org/lc/cms/page_view.asp?ID=686 • The Chai Centre in Burnley has found that a combination of integrated working and regular home visits to all families in the area means that they are uncovering a many support needs that might otherwise go unnoticed. A clear need to offer support around domestic abuse has emerged from this. They offer ongoing, home-based family support for a range of issues, but in around 50% of their family support cases, domestic abuse is a factor. http://tinyurl.com/mu2gsc (TfC, doc)

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Managing and Supporting Those Who Work with Families

Prompts	Ideas
<p>Is your team fully integrated, or is its approach fragmented and lacking in impact?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop, regularly review and revise clear focused SMART outcomes for the team’s work. Ensure that the behaviours and values of integrated working are reinforced through team and individual objectives and performance reviews. • Ensure understanding of the lead professional/key worker role in co-ordinating implementation of the agreed family support plan, with particular reference to any action plan/child protection plan. • Develop an understanding of each agency/worker’s role in contributing to supporting families. Agree common aims and objectives recognising difference, skill sets and interests. Develop a common language for work with families. • Aim for an Information sharing strategy developed and agreed at strategic level and understood and worked to locally. • Ensure that all staff who have to make decisions about sharing information on a case by case basis understand when and how information can be shared legally and professionally and where to go for support if required. [See also information sharing guidance www.ecm.gov.uk/informationsharing] • Ensure that managers understand when and how information can be shared and are able to support their staff in making information sharing decisions when required. • Ensure that relevant staff are aware of and can use where appropriate, the IT tools that support integrated working, such as ContactPoint and National eCAF (when available). www.ecm.gov.uk/contactpoint www.ecm.gov.uk/caf/ecaf • Establish a process, developed at strategic level, for resolving disagreements between agencies, and for managing staff performance. • Hold regular meetings of relevant workers, led by a manager, to discuss individual cases. • At strategic level ensure that CC leaders are appropriately supported in order to provide leadership to their team. • Recognise that change and working across skill sets and boundaries is difficult.

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Managing and Supporting Those Who Work with Families

Prompts	Ideas
<p>Whilst the significance of supervision may be clear to those with a Social Care or similar background, many of those working in children’s centres have come through very different routes. Those working with families need strong and clear support from colleagues with an appropriate background and training. In some cases this may be someone other than the line manager.</p> <p>In ‘Providing Effective Supervision’ Skills for Care and the CWDC suggest that there are three interrelated aspects to supervision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line management • Professional • Continuing professional development of workers <p>Key to building this workforce is providing up to date, accessible and relevant support, guidance and opportunities for workers. High quality supervision is one of the most important drivers in ensuring positive outcomes for children and families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills for Care and the Children’s Workforce Development Council have teamed up to produce a step-by-step workforce development tool on providing effective supervision tailor made for the job. It has been developed in association with a wide range of employers, practitioners and partners, including the Department of Health and the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The guidance and other resources have been designed to assist organisations, supervisors and those receiving supervision to make the most of the opportunities that supervision offers. The tool includes a number of case studies and sample forms. http://tinyurl.com/mzhr9h (pdf) • The Birmingham document “Safeguarding Requirements in Children’s Centres” states that each children’s centre must produce a statement and structure of how supervision will be implemented for all staff and that this must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The regularity of supervision (a minimum of 6 weekly) • The degree of performance management in supervision alongside casework reflection and discussion • The supervisor and supervisee ensuring recording and signing off of each supervision session The Birmingham toolkit gives a detailed description of supervision arrangements for family support workers in children’s centres. http://tinyurl.com/nt4yrq (TfC, doc) • The FPI has produced guidance on supervising family and parenting workers as well as a related guide on ‘How to help families in trouble’ with a set of downloadable factsheets covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment and tools to use: family trees and ecomaps • Helping parents help their children to behave well: behaviours, star charts, rewards and discipline • The art of making good referrals. Supervising Family and Parenting Workers: http://tinyurl.com/kj93o3 (pdf) www.familyandparenting.org/publications

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Managing and Supporting Those Who Work with Families	
Prompts	Ideas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Tyneside Sure Start Strategic Partnership, with Riverside Children’s Centre has developed Developing Supervision Skills for Childcare Providers as one of its courses. http://tinyurl.com/nzhj4t (pdf)
Some newly established teams may lack skills in, and knowledge of, family support work.	<p>Ensure that induction, supervision and appraisal are embedded within the children’s centre team to support a continuing focus on task and reflective practice.</p> <p>Ensure additional clinical supervision as appropriate.</p> <p>Develop a team understanding of the range of family support – from universal to complex.</p> <p>Arrange specific training on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> professional boundaries lone working importance of keeping the child at the centre of the work safeguarding process and procedures recognition of signs and symptoms of abuse information sharing CAF and the role of the lead professional – the team around the child IT skills <p>‘Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who Work with Children and Young People’, produced by the Allegation Management Advisors Network and commissioned by the DCSF, provides clear advice on appropriate and safe behaviours for all adults working with children in paid or unpaid capacities, in all settings and in all contexts. http://tinyurl.com/npt42r (ECM)</p> <p>The Birmingham ‘Safeguarding Requirements in Children’s Centres’ requires the following training for all staff as mandatory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induction training for all staff on safeguarding and child protection Basic child protection training, including recognition and referral CAF training – both awareness and core Recording/record keeping, including access to records legislation Early Support

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Managing and Supporting Those Who Work with Families	
Prompts	Ideas
	<p>http://tinyurl.com/nt4yrg (TfC, doc)</p> <p>A further list of training suggestions for those working with families is available: http://tinyurl.com/knczql (TfC, doc)</p>
Does your team include an appropriate skill mix?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use regular sessions with the team to develop a good understanding of each others’ skills, ethos, values, experience and ‘language’. • Develop a team understanding and knowledge base of specialist resources available, their appropriate use and commissioning, according to the assessed need of service users. • Use regular team discussion and available management information data to develop knowledge of the overall needs of the area. • Use faith and community leaders to gain better understanding of culture and specific needs of particular groups. • Provide staff training appropriate to need on assessment skills, recording and report writing.
Have you been able to recruit or bring in appropriate staff?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try recruitment incentives, terms and conditions; reflective supervision. • Discuss with relevant partners and others regarding secondments, attachments, joint funded posts or cross boundary working (professional or geographic).
Are the job descriptions and person specifications correct for the roles required?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The TfC toolkit on Workforce Development includes a range of examples of job descriptions for family support and family worker. http://tinyurl.com/mtmqxb
Home visits carry particular risks and challenges. Staff undertaking home visits must be adequately briefed and trained.	<p>See the TfC product ‘How to Create a Lone Worker Home Visiting Policy’ for detailed guidance on this issue. http://tinyurl.com/komdo7 (doc)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Social Care colleagues should be able to provide relevant guidance and policies. Below is a link to a sample policy from Doncaster Council. http://tinyurl.com/l7v874 • The DCSF ‘Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who Work with Children and Young People’ includes advice on home visits. This recommends that workers should agree the purpose for any home visit with senior management, unless this is an acknowledged and integral part of their role e.g. social workers, and that employers should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that they have home visit and lone-working policies of which all adults are made aware • These should include arrangements for risk assessment and management • ensure that all visits are justified with make

Checklist for Children's Centres – Managing and Supporting Those Who Work with Families	
Prompts	Ideas
	<p>detailed records including times of arrival and departure and work undertaken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure any behaviour or situation which gives rise to concern is discussed with their manager and, where appropriate action is taken and recorded • ensure that adults are not exposed to unacceptable risk • ensure that adults have access to a mobile telephone and an emergency contact person http://tinyurl.com/dlbee8 (ECM, doc)
Are the training needs for those working with families clear – and can they be met?	<p>Some areas have developed their own training programmes, or bought this in from other providers.</p> <p>Some higher education institutions offer appropriate courses. Examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Links http://tinyurl.com/lfzah (pdf) • University College, Birmingham http://tinyurl.com/lg4jtl • University of the West of England http://courses.uwe.ac.uk/l590/2009

Parenting Support and Programmes

This section looks at a particular and key aspect of working with families – parenting support. In particular it gives links to sites for parenting programmes and family learning. See also the separate sections on priority groups for links to information about working with specific communities.

Children’s centres should provide access to structured, validated, evidence-based parenting programmes for parents of children aged 0-5 who need support. Parents for whom additional support may be necessary include at risk groups such as teenage parents and isolated families who may face greater challenges in their role as parents. Programmes can also be run in response to difficulties identified by parents or practitioners such as children’s behavioural difficulties or sleep problems, and should be run by practitioners trained to do so.

(Sure Start Children’s Centres Practice Guidance, 2006)

- are structured, evidenced-based parenting programmes delivered through your centre?
- which courses do you use and why?
- how do you try to make these accessible and used by the full range of parents in your reach area?
- are there any gaps in the types of course and support offered?
- do you have access to enough parenting practitioners trained in delivering evidence-based parenting programmes?

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Parenting Support and Programmes	
Prompts	Ideas
There is a wide range of parenting programmes available, many tailored to the needs of particular groups and communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Academy for Parenting Practitioners (NAPP) is a major source of information on parenting programmes. Their Commissioning Toolkit provides comprehensive information about more than 100 parenting programmes available in England. The programmes range from those aimed at helping parents to raise the self-esteem of their children, to more targeted interventions, such as those for parents whose children have problems with behaviour, mental health or substance misuse. The searchable online database outlines who the programmes are for, their content, training requirements, what they aim to achieve – and, importantly, their quality and effectiveness. www.commissioningtoolkit.org <p>The NSPCC has published a number of leaflets giving</p>

Checklist for Children's Centres – Parenting Support and Programmes	
Prompts	Ideas
	advice to parents and others, covering issues such as preparing for a new birth, dealing with stress, comforting a crying baby and managing difficult behaviour without smacking. http://tinyurl.com/mjeo4r
Some parenting courses may be more suited to children's centre needs than others, with a focus on parents with younger children and certain target groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A survey of Family Support in Children's Centres, published by the Family and Parenting Institute, lists the courses used in 18 centres. http://tinyurl.com/mdaasr (pdf) • PEAL invited practitioners from children's centres, who attended PEAL training 2006-07, to apply for funding to develop parent partnership projects. Some of the projects have been selected and produced as PEAL practice examples. These can be downloaded from: http://tinyurl.com/mja5mw
Is there a need for family learning provision as part of your centre's parenting support? Can staff recognise the differences and synergy between family learning and parenting skills programmes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIACE has undertaken an assessment of the links between family learning and parenting programmes, and produced a discussion document for local authorities. Links document: http://tinyurl.com/lsp1a5 (pdf) Discussion document: http://tinyurl.com/kugxcw (pdf) www.niace.org.uk • The National Literacy Trust, as part of the Talk to Your Baby initiative, has some fifty case studies showing the ways in which children's centres are working on early language development with mums, dads, brothers and sisters. http://tinyurl.com/nvxchr

Working with Target Groups and Those Who Are Difficult to Engage

This section considers the major concern of those families a centre may not be able to engage. First these families need to be identified and then a range of approaches considered, depending on the nature of the group. Remember that these are often families who are resistant to services, maybe because they have had a poor experience of services and find them neither acceptable nor beneficial.

The first checklist is general to all those who are difficult to engage. There are then a number of separate checklists for specific groups, reflecting national concerns and priorities:

1. [Fathers](#)
2. [The Families of Prisoners](#)
3. [Families from Minority Ethnic Communities](#)
4. [Families with Disabled Children](#)
5. [Families with Disabled Parents](#)

High quality parenting and family support services with appropriate outreach can help to overcome these barriers, and ensure that all parents have access to the support they need to get involved in their children's learning and development and give them the best possible start in life. Such services are central to helping children's progress and to narrowing the gap in children's outcomes associated with disadvantage.

Sure Start Children's Centres should provide teenage parents with access to specialist, tailored support. In areas where there is a high incidence of teenage pregnancy, children's centres should provide parents with personal advisors, or at least a lead worker in the children's centre to support all young parents. Past experience has shown that childminders can play an important role in supporting teenage parents. Where teenage pregnancy is less prevalent – which may be the case in some Phase 3 areas – children's centres should consider a cluster arrangement where specialist resources are shared, or one centre takes the lead and receives referrals. Centres unable to provide a lead worker should identify one from within the Targeted Youth Service or Teenage Pregnancy Partnership to work with each teenage parent.

(Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance, 2006)

- what are the priority groups in your centre's reach area?
- how effective are your services in reaching those groups?

- how representative is the involvement of these groups in centre activities and services – with reference to the numbers of under fives in such groups locally?
- are there groups you need to do more to reach and involve?

For any specific group:

- do you have data on contact with that group?
- how does the level of involvement of that group reflect numbers in your reach area?
- is there a plan or strategy for working with the group?
- is there someone with specific responsibility for the group?
- are there specialist support groups or advocates in the area already working with the group that you need to link up with?

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Working with Target Groups and Those Who Are Difficult to Engage	
Prompts	Ideas
Does your centre have a clear Equalities and Inclusion Policy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See the TfC product ‘How to Create an Equalities and Inclusion Policy’. This includes a brief guide to the relevant legislation, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sex Discrimination Act • The Race Relations Act • The Children’s Act • The Disability Discrimination Act http://tinyurl.com/lvpbz4 (TfC, doc)
It can be relatively easy to establish activities for families and see them well used. There is always a demand for outreach and intensive family support. But one of the main challenges for those working with families in children’s centres is to identify those families who are not using services. This may well include some from groups identified as a priority by the centre and the Children’s Trust.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TfC’s toolkit for reaching ‘Priority and Excluded Families’ identifies the following groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teenage parents • lone parents • families living in poverty • workless households • families living in temporary accommodation • parents with mental health issues or drug or alcohol problems • families with a parent in prison or known to be engaged in criminal activity • families from minority ethnic communities • families of asylum seekers • parents with disabled children • disabled parents with children http://tinyurl.com/nkppnq (TfC) • A study into delivering services to priority and excluded families carried out by National Foundation for Educational Research found three broad definitions in use by service planners and providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • minority groups

Checklist for Children's Centres – Working with Target Groups and Those Who Are Difficult to Engage	
Prompts	Ideas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those slipping through the net • service resistant <p>Delivering services to hard to reach families in On Track areas: definition, consultation, and needs assessment, a Home Office Development and Practice Report (2004): available at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/dpr15.pdf</p>
Having identified the groups it wishes to actively reach out to, the centre needs to consider and debate the issue, working out what needs to be done, making appropriate plans and, evidencing plans and outcomes in a circle of learning and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TfC's toolkit for reaching 'Priority and Excluded Families' provides tools to help organisations offering services to children and families identify the barriers facing certain groups within the community, and to help collect information and develop action plans to address them. http://tinyurl.com/nkppng (TfC) • Marsh Farm Children's Centre, Luton have a stall at the local market each month, staffed by various members of the children's centre team, such as health visitors, a midwife, community development workers and a community food worker. They provide general information about activities and specific advice for families with young children who use the centre. Running the stall on a regular basis means people look out for it and it attracts people who are wary of coming to an 'official building'. Ideally they would like to run the stall on a weekly basis. • Outreach and Home Visiting Services in Sure Start Local Programmes is a study which looked at Outreach and Home Visiting services in Sure Start Local Programmes. Outreach and home visiting staff found that, with sensitivity and persistence, families did get involved, but they often needed to be accompanied to services and to have continued individual support. http://tinyurl.com/kouvra (DCSF, pdf) • Kensington & Chelsea established groups for teenage dads and mums, run by Connexions and called respectively 'Break 4 U Bro' and 'Break 4 U'. http://tinyurl.com/nsnxgk
Even for the universal group sessions, if provision is oversubscribed it may be	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One approach is to reserve a proportion of the places for those who are from such groups, maybe for referral by the centre workers and others. Another

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Working with Target Groups and Those Who Are Difficult to Engage	
Prompts	Ideas
necessary to prioritise resources in some way. Sometimes those who are most in need of such provision are least able or most reluctant to access it. Centres have adopted a variety of approaches to try to ensure the availability of places in groups for priority families. The ideal would clearly be to create more provision, but in some cases this is not practical or financially viable.	<p>approach adopted is to ‘rotate’ the places. For example a popular stay and play might offer places to children for a limited number of weeks. At the end of that period the place would be passed on to another child. Alternatively the hours offered might be reduced to allow more children to be given a place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents could be trained and supported to organise drop ins for themselves in other community settings
Consider the use of parents as a way to get in touch with and gain the confidence of some families. However in deploying parents in this way, there is a need to be aware of the boundaries for non-professional outreach workers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Bournemouth Children’s Centres recruited and trained parents to become buddies for new parents attending their stay and play activities. They also found that parents who became engaged with the centre as volunteers and members of the Partnership Board were very proactive in encouraging other parents to become involved with the Centre.
There is no one approach which works for all. However most successful approaches seem to centre on some form of personal contact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The FPI found that access to ‘hard-to-reach families’ often depended upon presenting services as an entitlement and as aligned to familiar health services. Regular contact helped and so did an offer of appropriate childcare. Regular, informal contact, for example through drop-ins and baby cafes, helped build trust and some centres benefited from dedicated staff and special programmes to attract BME families, fathers, teenagers and other groups of potentially excluded parents. <p>Newsletters, flyers, local press and space in local publications all had their place in promoting services, but word of mouth was the most effective.</p> <p>http://tinyurl.com/mdaasr (pdf)</p>
Parents can sometimes be difficult or reluctant to engage with the centre and its workers, for a range of reasons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try teasing out what some of the barriers to engagement might be. • Use other parents as volunteers to engage with parents (need to be appropriately recruited, trained supervised and supported). • Find creative ways of engaging parents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • buddying • accompanying parents on visit to children’s centre

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Working with Target Groups and Those Who Are Difficult to Engage

Prompts	Ideas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • texting parents as reminder/thank you re visits/appointments • using the support of prominent community/faith leaders to engage with those unaware of the services on offer • ESOL classes where appropriate, with crèche • Registrar uses children’s centre for regular sessions to register births • Ensure, through a variety of methods outlined above, that the services are truly community based • Aim for a staff work ethos of working alongside parents. • Provide a welcoming environment both in the centre and from all staff (training need).

Working with Fathers

Father-child relationships can have a profound and wide-ranging impact on the child that lasts a lifetime. Sure Start Children’s Centre services should be responsive to supporting fathers and father figures in their role as parent. A parent link or outreach worker with a specific remit to engage with fathers will be most effective. In smaller Phase 3 centres or clusters, a specialist fathers’ worker may need to be shared between centres. All other staff should also have the skills and confidence to engage with fathers, particularly on initial contact.

(Sure Start Guidance for Planning and Delivery of Phase 3 Sure Start Children’s Centres, 2007)

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Working with Fathers	
Prompts	Ideas
Why is it important to involve fathers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Where’s Dad: Exploring the views of children, parents and staff on involving fathers in early years settings’ is a research study published by the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA). This study concludes that ‘settings should routinely ask fathers to come into the setting so that children — especially those who do not have contact with their own fathers — can benefit from their presence.’ http://tinyurl.com/kult37
Are the reasons for the lack of involvement of fathers in your children’s centre clear and understood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A report on the Market for Parental and Family Support Services, commissioned with Price Waterhouse Coopers by the DCSF, summarises research into the lack of involvement of fathers. http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RW72.pdf • The TfC toolkit on Reaching Priority and Excluded Families contains a useful prompt and planning checklist on working with fathers. http://tinyurl.com/nkppng (TfC) • IncludingMen.com holds a range of useful resources, case studies and training information for a network of policy makers, managers, researchers and practitioners on the subject of including men in services. www.includingmen.com
Who are key partners who might be able to help with encouraging fathers to take part in centre activities? What are the best times to run such activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Fatherhood Institute has produced a toolkit for Father-Inclusive Practice. This is a set of 15 colour-coded cards, which chart 8 logical and easy-to-follow steps for developing father-inclusive practice (i.e. for ensuring that issues relating to fathers and fatherhood are addressed in all services delivered by an agency). Also included is a Research Summary of

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Working with Fathers	
Prompts	Ideas
	<p>the benefits of father-inclusive practice to children and mothers; a Legal Briefing (which explores issues of confidentiality, data collection and parental responsibility); and Resources sections.</p> <p>http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?prodDetailID=58</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Derbyshire County Council was concerned about the limited involvement of fathers in its children’s centres. They held team meetings in their centres to discuss this and established ‘Dads’ links’ at each of them. They discussed various activities and ways to engage fathers, and held wider meetings with other professionals. <p>This led to the development of courses ‘Daddies do Care’ and ‘Men Behaving Dadly’. Good working relationships were established with key partners, particularly with health and also with the local football club. There has been positive feedback from the dads who have attended.</p> <p>For the future, they would like to be more flexible about timing, and try to ensure inclusion of the father when a family first registers with a children’s centre.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sure Start North Moor Children’s Centre in Newcastle upon Tyne has produced a helpful summary of work with fathers. http://tinyurl.com/m4x686 (TfC website) More ideas in this Sure Start leaflet. http://www.surestart.gov.uk/doc/P0002238.pdf
<p>Many centres have developed successful ways of working with fathers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of work with fathers can be found on the following websites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TfC Fathers Case Studies http://tinyurl.com/kqmhvq Fatherhood Institute http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=0&fID=2 Coventry Children’s Centre invited the whole family to a ‘dad’s group’. They found this resulted in good attendance and strong diversity. There was also good interaction with staff and between those present, with the parents getting to know each other and the wider team children’s centre team. Sure Start Bedlington Children’s Centre,

Checklist for Children's Centres – Working with Fathers	
Prompts	Ideas
	<p>Northumberland, has established a voluntary organisation of local fathers. The group, called "4Dad's, It's a Dad's Thing" was set up with the aim of supporting other local fathers / male carers in two main ways - monthly Saturday drop in and holiday activities.</p> <p>http://tinyurl.com/lxtq4u (TfC, doc)</p>

Working with the Families of Prisoners

Losing a parent to imprisonment can be an extremely life damaging event for a child. Children's lives may change dramatically and suddenly, particularly if the imprisonment leads to a change in care arrangements. The trauma experienced by children increases the likelihood of them having mental health problems, financial difficulties, or going on to offend in later life.

(Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance, 2006)

Checklist for Children's Centres – Working with the Families of Prisoners	
Prompts	Ideas
<p>The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has published a guide on the children of prisoners which suggests that there is a strong association between parental imprisonment and adverse outcomes for children. Compared to their peers, children of prisoners have about three times the risk of antisocial or delinquent behaviour, mental health problems, and other adverse outcomes.</p> <p>Evidence to date is consistent with the idea that separation because of parental imprisonment is harmful for children. However, it is difficult to separate out the effects of separation from the effects of other adversities that often follow parental imprisonment (such as loss of family income and stigma).</p> <p>Although there are only a few large-scale studies of parental imprisonment, it is clear that children of prisoners are a highly vulnerable group, and are likely to need extensive support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SCIE guide 'Children of prisoners - maintaining family ties' is a useful source of background information and literature on this issue. http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide22/index.asp The SCIE has also published e-learning resources using audio, video and interactive technology, to provide the user with an introduction to the significant, but unknown, number of children who are affected by the loss of a parent or carer to prison. http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/cop/index.asp The Ormiston Trust works with ten prisons in the East of England and has established community support for children and young people in four counties. It aims to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> good quality visiting and contact opportunities for children to spend time with their imprisoned parent/carer or family member support and information for children and families accredited courses for parents in prisons to explore how they can best maintain a role in their child's life resource material to support families and those who work with them http://www.ormiston.org/timeforfamilies http://www.ormiston.org/catalogue.html#10 Action for Prisoners' Families aims to increase the support available to families affected by imprisonment both through properly funded specialist services and via mainstream children and families service providers, and prisons, across the statutory, private and voluntary sector. http://tinyurl.com/mzevpw

Checklist for Children's Centres – Working with the Families of Prisoners	
Prompts	Ideas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The TfC toolkit on Reaching Priority and Excluded Families contains a useful prompt and planning checklist on working with the partners and families of prisoners. http://tinyurl.com/nkppng (TfC)
NAPP states that the children of parents who have been sent to prison – 150,000 each year – suffer a wide range of social problems, from poverty, family breakdown, poor mental health and a greater likelihood of ending up as prisoners themselves.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAPP has produced a webpage 'Focus on Parents in Prison' which looks at the latest research and examines what the Government has been doing to address the needs of prisoners and their families. It also provides practitioners working with such families with a range of resources, including training and events, publications and contacts. http://www.parentingacademy.org/parentserv_prison.aspx
Some families may not want to share information with their local children's centre, but may welcome a confidential helpline service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Prisoners' Families Helpline is a free and confidential service for anyone who is affected by the imprisonment of a close family member or friend. The Helpline is a consortium of three organisations and is co-ordinated by Action for Prisoners' Families. Freephone 0808 808 2003. http://www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk
<p>Data indicates that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 59% of men and 66% of women in prison have dependent children under 18. During their sentence, 45% of prisoners lose contact with their families and many will separate from their partners. As many as 25% of male young offenders and 40% of female young offenders are parents themselves. An estimated 70,000 school age children enter the youth justice system annually. <p>What do these figures mean in terms of your reach area?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families Do Matter is a project particularly focussed on offenders in custody in the West Midlands region and their families, but also seeks to work with organisations who have contact with offenders serving sentences outside of prison. Its aim is to promote better family ties between families and prisoners and improve services received by the families and by doing so to improve the outcomes obtained and contribute to reductions in reoffending. http://www.familiesdomatter.co.uk Families Do Matter has helped to establish close links between some prisons and their local children's centres. In Wolverhampton the Berryfields CC and the Wolverhampton Family Information Service work closely with Featherstone Prison, supporting work with children and families during visiting sessions and looking to encourage links between these families and their local children's centres. A detailed account of the project can be found in their Summer 08 newsletter. http://tinyurl.com/lspn67 (pdf)
Is there a prison within the reach area of your children's centre?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The link below is to a map of prisons across the country. If there is one nearby, one of the

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Working with the Families of Prisoners	
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	<p>organisations listed above may be able to help establish contact with the prison authorities.</p> <p>http://tinyurl.com/mhwqhs (HMPS, pdf)</p>
<p>Are there ways in which parents in prison can be involved in the education and development of their children?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Literacy Trust website gives a number of examples of projects involving prisoners in the development and learning of their children. <p>http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/campaign/prisons.html#famread</p>

Working with Families from Minority Ethnic Communities

Evidence shows that some minority ethnic groups suffer disproportionately high levels of disadvantage: increased likelihood of poverty; unemployment; low wages; poor health; and lower attainment; all of which may be compounded by experience of racial discrimination and separation from mainstream services.
 (Sure Start Children’s Centres Practice Guidance, 2006)

Activities in children’s centres should enable all parents and children in the centre to get to know each other and to appreciate the diversity of their community. ‘Inter-centre’ activities can promote better understanding of different ethnic backgrounds, faiths and cultures. Building mutual trust and respect within and across communities is an important role for children’s centres but will take time and perseverance.
 (DCSF Guidance for Planning and Delivery of Phase 3 Sure Start Children’s Centres)

Checklist for children’s centres – working with families from minority ethnic communities	
Prompts	Ideas
Are the reasons for any the lack of involvement of those from minority ethnic communities in your children’s centre clear and understood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A report on the Market for Parental and Family Support Services, commissioned with Price Waterhouse Coopers by the DCSF, summarises some reasons for the lack of involvement of those from minority ethnic communities. http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RW72.pdf
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following identification of poor engagement - informal and formal – by Somali families, the Coram Parents’ Centre team together with other agencies agreed an action plan and resources. http://tinyurl.com/mdc2fe (TfC, doc) http://www.coram.org.uk/ • The TfC toolkit on Reaching Priority and Excluded Families contains a useful prompt and planning checklist on working with minority ethnic families. http://tinyurl.com/nkppng (TfC)
Outreach with ethnic minority communities has been shown to have a major impact in increasing awareness of employment and training opportunities, especially among Indian and Pakistani women. The language and outreach skills of the outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic Minority Outreach: An Evaluation, a report by the Department for Work and Pension’s, looks at the evaluation of the first two years of an Ethnic Minority Outreach initiative. http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep229.pdf

Checklist for children's centres – working with families from minority ethnic communities	
Prompts	Ideas
workers were crucial in reaching these groups.	
Many children's centres have families from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds in their areas. Interagency and integrated working has been shown to be a key element of successful work with these groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The TfC toolkit on Reaching Priority and Excluded Families includes case studies on working with traveller families. http://tinyurl.com/nkppng (TfC) • Whilst principally about issues for school aged children and their families, a literature review commissioned by the DCSF gives a comprehensive insight into many of the issues for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and their families. http://tinyurl.com/natktv

Working with Families with Disabled Children

Disabled children should be fully included in all services provided by Sure Start Children's Centres. All disabled children, along with their families, should be able to participate in activities and take part equally alongside their peers. Families where there is a disabled child will often be under pressure in many ways. Research has shown that they can be among the most disadvantaged families in this country, and are often excluded from mainstream services.

(Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance, 2006)

Checklist for Children's centres – Working with Families with Disabled Children	
Prompts	Ideas
<p>Concerns for families with disabled children include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better co-ordination of services provided by different agencies and people • Continuity of support • Initial assessment of need • Better information and access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Support is a Government programme to improve the help and support that is provided for families with young children with disabilities. It developed in response to the experience of families. It provides a standard framework and set of materials that can be used in many different circumstances, and a set of expectations about how services should work with families. http://www.earllysupport.org.uk/ • Parent partnership services are statutory services that offer information, advice and support for parents of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) they will also be able to put parents in touch with other local organisations. PPSs also have a role in making sure that parents' views are heard and understood and that these views inform local policy and practice. Some parent partnerships are based in the voluntary sector although the majority remain based in their local authority or Children's Trust. All parent partnerships, wherever they are based, are at 'arm's length' from the authority - that is, they are able to provide impartial advice and support to parents. The National Parent Partnership Network provides information and lists local contacts. www.parentpartnership.org.uk • The TfC toolkit on Reaching Priority and Excluded Families contains a useful prompt and planning checklist on Working with disabled children. http://tinyurl.com/nkppng (TfC)

Checklist for Children's centres – Working with Families with Disabled Children	
Prompts	Ideas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Together From The Start – Practical guidance for professionals working with disabled children and their families' has been issued jointly by the DCSF and the DoH. It is concerned with the delivery of services to disabled children in the age range birth to third birthday and their families. http://tinyurl.com/3byj46 (DoH)
<p>There is a range of specialist agencies and literature on families with disabled children. This can help with understanding of the issues which such families can face.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Aiming High for Disabled Children: better support for families' sets out some of these issues. http://tinyurl.com/lr6qhn • Aiming High for Disabled Children - short breaks implementation guidance – contains some helpful lists of references and resources. This also gives some examples of models of service delivery. http://tinyurl.com/mpoqa3 (ECM, doc) • The Together for Disabled Children website has some useful documents and links, covering short breaks and the wider aspects of services for disabled children and their families. http://www.togetherfdc.org/default.aspx • Other useful sites include: Contact a Family http://www.cafamily.org.uk/index.html The Council for Disabled Children http://www.ncb.org.uk/Page.asp?sve=785 The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) http://www.scie.org.uk/children/index.asp

Working with Families with Disabled Parents

Sure Start Children's Centres should work together with other professionals to help disabled adults and their children receive the right emotional and practical support to meet the assessed needs of the child and family.

(Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance, 2006)

Checklist for Children's Centres – Working with Families with Disabled Parents	
Prompts	Ideas
<p>This broad category might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parents who may have additional requirements related to physical and/or sensory impairments • parents with learning difficulties/disabilities • parents with mental health problems • parents with drug and alcohol-related problems • parents with serious illnesses such as HIV/AIDS • parents who identify as 'Deaf' • parents who may or may not identify with the term 'disabled'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has published a guide on 'How to develop inter-agency protocols to support families in which parents have additional needs related to physical and/or sensory impairments, learning disabilities, mental health, drug and alcohol-related problems or serious illnesses.' http://tinyurl.com/nqttbo • The TfC toolkit on 'Reaching Priority and Excluded Families' contains a useful prompt and planning checklist on Working with parents with learning difficulties and Working with parents with drug or alcohol problems. http://tinyurl.com/nkppnq (TfC)
<p>The SCIE suggests that potential barriers to the development and maintenance of appropriate services for disabled parents include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited funding • a lack of skills among professionals for assessing and supporting parents with learning disabilities • negative attitudes about parents with learning disabilities, and • tendencies to pass responsibility between children's and adults services. <p>Services in local authorities tend to be organised according to either medical or social categories, rather than the more holistic reality of family life, and that parents with learning disabilities encounter many of the same social</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SCIE research briefing 'Helping Parents with Learning Disabilities in their Role as Parents' looks at parents with intellectual or learning disabilities and the support they may need to help them as parents. The briefing aims to bring together medical and social elements in a single document, and to address some of the specialist requirements of parents with learning disabilities. <p>This briefing summarises the policy, guidance and research literature on how parents with learning disabilities may be supported in their efforts to provide the best possible type of parenting for their children.</p> <p>http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/briefings/briefing14/index.asp</p>

Checklist for Children’s Centres – Working with Families with Disabled Parents	
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and organisational barriers as parents with other forms of disability or impairment.	
<p>There may be families where a ‘young carer’ has had to pick up some responsibilities for younger children due to the position of the parents.</p> <p>Do you have effective links with young carers services and adult social care services which will enable you to identify and contribute to support packages?</p>	<p>The Children’s Society, Disabled Parents’ Network and the Princess Royal Trust for Carers have formed a partnership to work together on the issue of young carers, a carers’ strategy and strategies to support disabled parents:</p> <p>http://www.youngcarers.net/professionals</p>
<p>SCIE research indicates that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black and minority ethnic (BME) parents with mental health problems are likely to experience poverty, unemployment, and homelessness. • Some common family structures, such as lone parenting, can increase the risks arising from isolation and lack of support for both parents and their children. • People from BME communities are poorly served by mental health services. • BME parents with mental health problems are often reluctant to use existing services because these are often not culturally sensitive to their needs. • Reluctance to access services may result in mental health problems becoming more severe before diagnosis, treatment and support is obtained. • Mental health problems among BME parents, compounded by lack of treatment and support, can have enduring effects upon their children and contribute to their over-representation in the child care system. 	<p>The full SCIE research briefing covers these issues in detail: http://tinyurl.com/nw44hu</p>

Glossary

BME	Black and minority ethnic
CAB	Citizens' Advice Bureau
CAF	Common assessment framework
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DoH	Department of Health
ECM	Every Child Matters
FPI	Family and Parenting Institute
FSA	Financial Services Agency
HMPS	Her Majesty's Prison Service
JCP	Jobcentre Plus
NAPP	National Academy for Parenting Practitioners
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NPPN	National Parent Partnership Network
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PEAL	Parents, Early Years and Learning Project
PPS	Parent Partnership Service
PSA	Parenting Support Adviser
SCIE	Social Care Institute for Excellence
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely
TDA	Training and Development Agency
TDC	Together for Disabled Children
TfC	Together for Children