

References:

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ParentingNI

A MANIFESTO FOR
CHANGE
2022-2025

ABOUT PARENTING NI

Parenting NI is the leading charitable organisation for supporting parents in Northern Ireland. Parenting NI has supported parents for over 40 years in a range of ways, including parenting programmes, family support services, parental participation, employee wellbeing services and online support.

Our vision is of a society where parenting is valued, parents' voices are heard and where every family is given the support they need. Parenting NI work with and for parents and families. Our mission is to ensure parents have access to timely support and information to guide them through their parenting journey.



BACKGROUND TO PARENTING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Parenting is one of the most challenging and rewarding endeavours that anyone can undertake. Even if you are not a parent, almost everyone has experience of being parented. The experience we have of parents whether they are biological or foster, or if they are kinship carers or corporate parents are part of who we are. Each person's experience of being a parent or being parented is unique, and helps to frame our understanding of the world.

Northern Ireland remains a singular place to parent. Our political, historical and geographical context means that being a parent here is not like being a parent anywhere else. Changes on the horizon – climate change, Brexit and new technologies – promise to revolutionise the realities of parenting.

The family, centred on the parent-child relationship is one of the most fundamental building blocks of society. Every family will have their challenges and their triumphs. These might be fairly regular and simple – managing screen time for a child or encouraging a teenager to study. But many families struggle with issues that are more serious or severe, like a mental health crisis or bereavement. All parents will have a time when they could use some support.

Northern Ireland remains a close, community-minded society. Our slightly larger than average families and small cities, towns and villages mean that many families have robust support from friends and families.

We are good at helping each other when we know that someone needs help. However, there are families who lack that support, who may be isolated, new to Northern Ireland or lack access to interpreters. The challenges faced by families may be common across regions, ages and other characteristics, but the ability to access support remains patchy. What causes great difficulty for one family on one street, may be a minor issue for another in the next town.

The COVID pandemic has affected families in many ways and has highlighted the importance of supporting parents throughout their different stages of parenting. As a result, parents are now dealing with increased child anxiety; worries about their child's education after schools were closed alongside more traditional issues such as digital safety and bullying. This has created a perfect storm where parents now need support more than ever.

The Executive and Northern Ireland Assembly need to show that they support parents and the value they bring to society. It is imperative that regional support services are adequately funded to support parents, and those in a parenting role, with children from infants to teenage years. This will ensure that outcomes for families in Northern Ireland will improve and contribute to a fair and compassionate society.

OUR CALLS TO ACTION

PARENTING AND FAMILY STRATEGY

The Families Matter: Supporting Families in Northern Ireland Strategy came to an end in 2019. We have now had several years without a dedicated Parenting and Family Strategy. As 87% of parents believe they do not get enough support, it is imperative that a new cross-departmental strategy is developed and fully funded to ensure parents are properly supported in Northern Ireland.



87% of parents believe they do not get enough support

MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

1 in 5 parents have reported that they have a low level of emotional and mental health. We believe a fully-funded Mental Health Strategy should be a priority for the Executive. This must include early intervention and prevention programmes specifically targeted to parents to give them the tools to support themselves and their children.



Northern Ireland has a 25% higher prevalence of mental health problems than England

LONELINESS STRATEGY

Parents are a group of people that are at high risk of experiencing loneliness. Single parents and parents with young children are especially at risk. We are calling for the development of a fully-funded cross-departmental Loneliness Strategy for Northern Ireland. This will support parents to keep talking and help improve the emotional and mental health of parents.



More than half of parents experience a problem with loneliness

SINGLE PARENT SUPPORT

In the UK, it's estimated that more relationships will break down than stay together, leaving more than 1 in 4 children experiencing parental separation by the age of 16. Specific support needs to be developed for families that experience parental separation to ensure their specific needs are met. In particular, as dads are at greater risk of suicide during a separation, support specifically for men needs to be implemented on a consistent basis across Northern Ireland.



Divorce / Separation has been identified as a key risk factor for suicide with separated men being nearly 10 times more likely to take their own lives than separated women

PARENTING TEENAGERS SUPPORT

We know that parenting a teenager can be challenging. We are calling for further funding support for early intervention support for parents with teenagers. This will give parents the tools and strategies to parent their teenager which will ensure a more positive outcome.



The COVID pandemic has had a significant impact on teenagers' wellbeing from an average of 8 out of 10 pre-COVID to an average of 5 out of 10

PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Parents with children with additional needs had a particularly tough experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is unacceptable that more than 5,000 children are waiting to be assessed for autism or ASD in Northern Ireland. We are calling for this to be addressed as a priority along with ensuring that appropriate investment in support for these families is included to ensure positive outcomes for children and parents.



5,000+ children with suspected autism currently on waiting lists in Northern Ireland