

# Children in Wales Conference

to mark Parents Week & UN Eradication of Poverty Day

Much Work Still to be Done



**Parenting programmes:  
All have won and all must  
have prizes?**



Future Inns, Cardiff Bay

October 17th 2007

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# Questions for this workshop

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- What do we know about how to reach and engage parents?
- What do we know about which strategies, locations, formats and programmes work best?
- What information do we need to collect to evaluate programmes effectively?

# The evidence base, Part 1

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- ↓ Most programmes go down well with most parents
- ↓ Low rates of take-up are common
- ↓ High rates of attrition/non-attendance/irregular attendance are common with some programmes
- ↓ Meta-analyses tend to conclude that shorter, cheaper, group-based behaviourist-oriented (social learning theory) courses are as good as, if not better than, longer courses

# The evidence base, Part 2

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- ↓ Most evaluations of programmes do not meet the criteria for inclusion in meta-analyses (c16% do)
- ↓ Meta-analyses inform about central tendencies, not about tail ends or unusual cases
- ↓ Randomised controlled trials often 'lose the baby with the bath water'
- ↓ Conclusions from qualitative evaluations are distrusted by funders

# The evidence base, Part 3

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- ↓ Many parents who attend programmes ask for more
- ↓ We know very little about how to choose and use programmes
- ↓ Certain parents are less well represented among participants, e.g. fathers, parents with competing commitments, full-time working parents, 'chaotic' families with multiple and complex problems

# What do most parenting courses offer?

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- ↓ Simple strategies  
e.g. reward good, ignore bad behaviour
- ↓ Non-judgemental acknowledgement of difficulties
- ↓ Recognition of parents as experts yet opportunity to reflect on and to extend skills repertoire
- ↓ Information exchange - peers and others
- ↓ Acceptance and support - all in the same boat

# The challenge:

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- ↓ Parents in the most severe difficulty usually confront multiple, changing and unpredictable stressors
- ↓ Many of the difficulties they face are not simply reducible to poor parenting
- ↓ Poor parenting may be a consequence of many other factors rather than a primary problem

# Parenting in a Vortex

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- ↓ Multiple stressors →
- ↓ Hopelessness, anger, despair, anxiety
- ↓ Low self-esteem, infective disgust
- ↓ Isolation, lack of support (can be self-reinforced)
- ↓ Difficulty coping with everyday and other challenges
- ↓ Helplessness - feeling overwhelmed, persecuted

# Voice from the Parenting Vortex

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Leave me alone!

# Some strategies that help

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- ↓ Outreach work
- ↓ Lengthy relationship- and trust-building
- ↓ Wide publicity and networking to ensure enough and appropriate referrals
- ↓ Friendly 'shop window' with back door entry points
- ↓ Follow-on and ongoing support (on peer group or individual basis)

# Do you have any other suggestions?

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## **For specific groups of parents?**

e.g. Black and minority ethnic parents, parents-to-be, new parents, fathers, lone parents, foster or adoptive parents, parents with learning difficulties, parents with physical disabilities, parents with sensory impairments (visual/auditory), gay or lesbian parents, teenage/young parents, parents on parenting orders or contracts, step-parents, parents who are carers for adults, grandparents, parents with histories of abuse/neglect, parents with mental health problems, parents in rural areas, parents whose first language is not English, parents in prison, parents with partners in prison, asylum-seeking or refugee parents

# Factors that don't help

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- ↓ Uncertainties about future funding
- ↓ The cost and risks of external evaluations
- ↓ The time involved in internal record-keeping
- ↓ Lack of staff for fund-raising, networking and publicity
- ↓ Lack of staff for outreach work
- ↓ Lack of continuity for relationship-building

# How internal monitoring can help

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- ↓ At referral stage: can provide evidence of who refers, who is referred, what referrers expect from referral, outcome of referral
- ↓ On point of entry to programme: can provide substantive details of who actually attends (how they heard of programme, what they hope to gain from it)
- ↓ Throughout attendance at programme: can show who drops out (and, possibly, the reasons given), can provide information about progress through programme
- ↓ At end of programme - feedback from users
- ↓ Follow up/Ongoing contact