

How (not) to Provide Parenting Support: Lessons from Sure Start

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in the Early Years

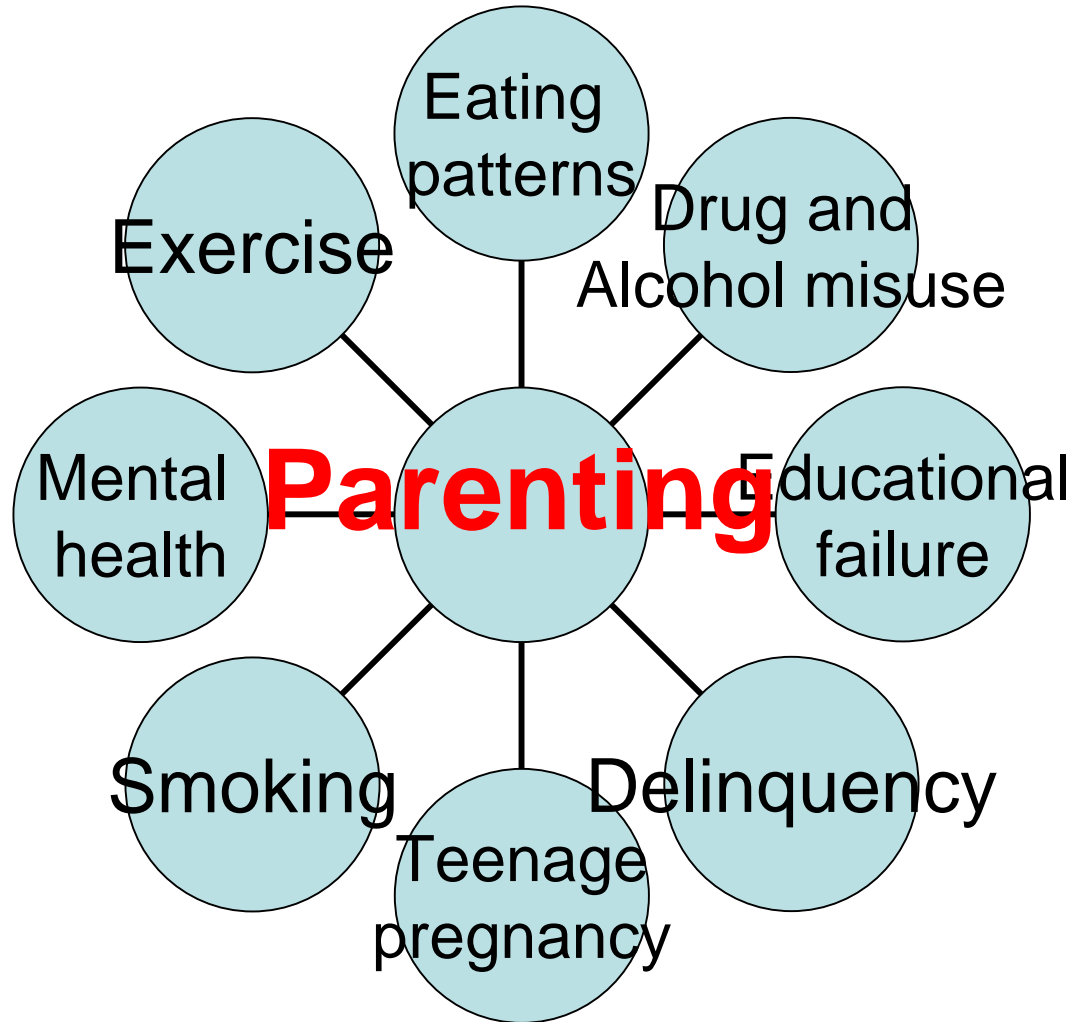
Structure of Paper

- **The power of parenting**
- **How not to support children – findings from a survey of Sure Start**
- **Models of Excellence...more findings from Sure Start**

The Power of Parenting



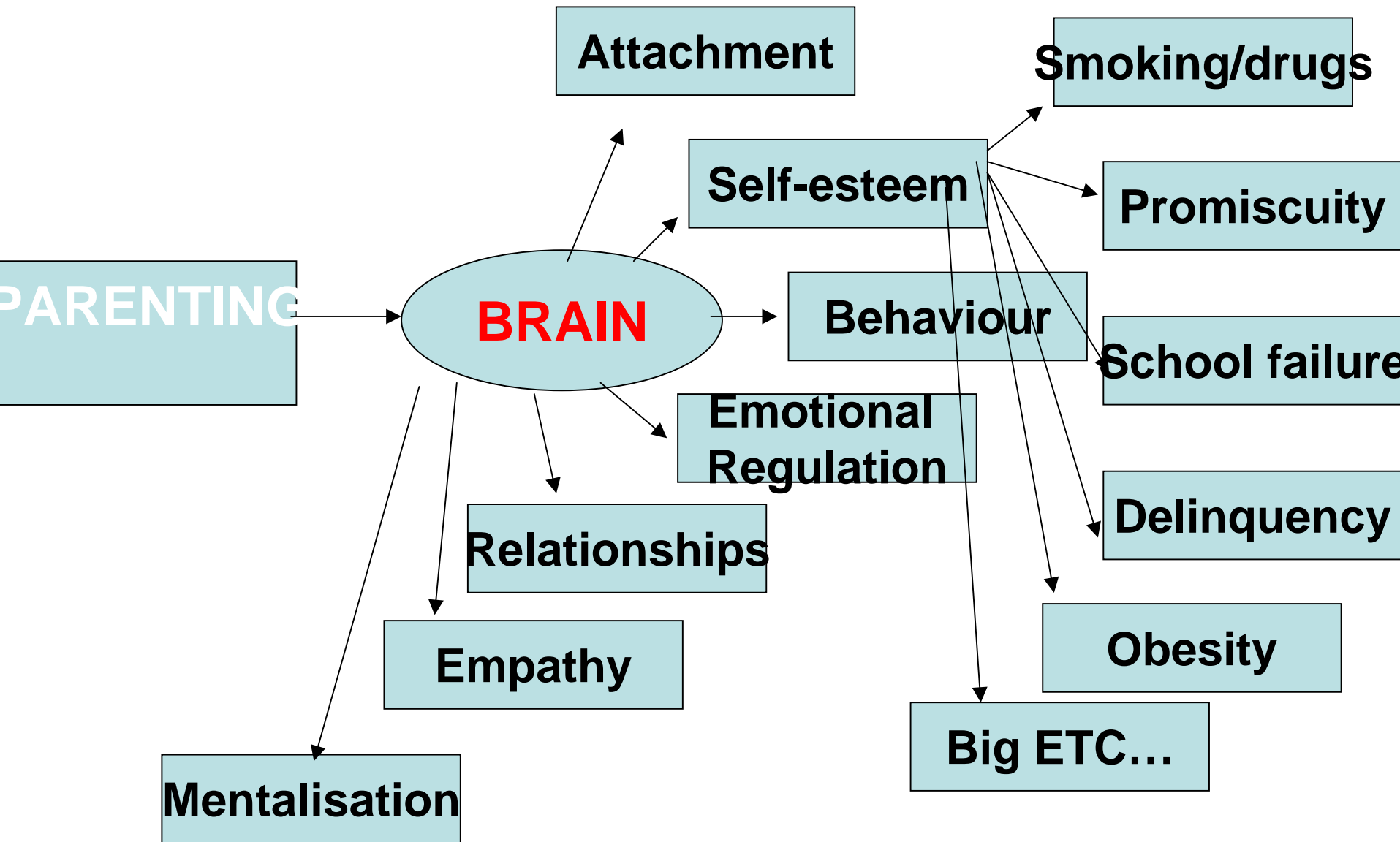
Parenting is at the heart of a range of public health issues



The Evidence...

- **Promiscuous sex and teenage pregnancy** (Scaramella et al., 1998)
- **Healthy eating** (Kremers et al., 2003)
- **Smoking** (Cohen et al., 1994)
- **Alcohol misuse** (Garnier et al., 1998; Egland et al., 1997)
- **Educational achievement; School drop-out** (Desforges, 2003)
- **Behaviour problems, delinquency, criminality, violence** (Patterson et al., 1989; Farrington, 2003)
- **Mental and physical health in adulthood** (Stewart-brown and Shaw, 2004)

Parenting and later outcomes



Supporting parenting...

How NOT to do it

NESS

- **National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) - limited impact on outcomes (NESS 2005a; Belsky et al., 2006)**
- **Programmes that were better led, with clearer objectives, and more effective methods of identifying families, produced **better outcomes** (NESS, 2005b; Melhuish et al., 2007)**
- **But, what happened to the parenting support being provided in SSLPs**

A Survey of Sure Start

- **Survey of 76 SSLPs explore the nature and extent of family/parent and parenting support**
 - **Family/Parent Support: services that reduce the stress associated with parenting.**
 - **Support for Parenting: services to enable parents to enhance their parenting**
- **2/3 of programmes provided were 'parenting support'**
- **Parenting; home visiting; perinatal; early learning**

Parenting Programmes

- A high proportion of SSLPs developed their own parenting programmes

The programme that we came across in America years and years ago was brought over [] by a head teacher that went on a study tour and we sort of looked at it and we thought it has got some potential but it was a long way off what we wanted at the time. So we developed it from there.

- Staff felt that programmes were not suitable...too long...

We have – they have trained and tried to do the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities one but we found that that was actually in some ways not relevant to our parents because it covers a span of ages so there were chunks that weren't relevant...and also it is very long with a big commitment, it is a bit too much for our families

- **...or that the programmes were not suitable for local parents because of other reasons...**

Briefly quite a long time ago we looked at that material but what was felt was that it was quite jargonistic and there was a lot of material that we weren't sure that the parents that we were going to invite to come on a course would understand. It was quite you know – it was more appropriate to professionals than the parents in a Sure Start area.”

- Some staff were acting as gatekeepers...

... sometimes people self-refer and say they really want it, we do the assessment and say honestly you really do not need anything. Instead we will do one-to-one behaviour management within the home you know and do it in a different way. So not everyone who wants to go on the group necessarily gets on the group. They do have an assessment to see whether they are suitable first.

- Some staff were trained but hadn't gotten around to providing them...

'Well yes actually quite a few of our staff are trained in Webster Stratton but we have just never managed to set up the groups really... I mean we haven't for the last three years anyway'.

Home Visiting

- **Being directed at families with the most complex needs**
- **Few were being used to provide the type of intensive evidence-based home visiting programmes that have been shown to improve parenting**
- **Few being delivered to children in the home; over a significant length of time; to a structured curriculum; by a trained professional**
- **No training, preparation or support**
- **Many were being used to address common behaviour problems**

...home visiting programmes

I mean formally we do do home visiting. Behaviour management on a one-to-one. Because a lot of families we have found here don't want to come and join a group and don't respond well to such a structure so then it becomes a weekly home visiting or a fortnightly home visiting and we go and we might deal with an issue around temper tantrums or you know issues at meal times so we will actually go and physically go to the family's home at mealtime and sit through a meal time with them, you know it is very much the nanny style off the telly isn't it, you know you go and you see how things are going and then you make comments and ask them to act on that next time. So that is very much how we work. And that is very – well quite popular you know we are not full to capacity but we work at quite a busy level with the one to one stuff.

Perinatal support

- **Small proportion of SSLPs were providing innovative perinatal programmes aimed at improving mother-baby relationship**
- **Majority were predominantly focused on traditional parentcraft classes, management of postnatal depression and breast feeding advice**
- **Infant massage being used widely**
- **Very few staff had received any additional training to prepare them to work in more innovative ways with parents and infants to promote bonding and attachment**

We run baby massage groups. So if they want to come on, obviously to help with bonding. And we do have sort of regular attendances for those. And then there is the baby clinic where they get weighed on a Monday, that is every Monday afternoon so if you know if a new parent is not quite sure what to do with baby at least they know if they don't want to phone up any other time they can come in on a Monday and chat to the health visitor then because they will definitely find her there.

Early Learning

- Some as standardised and evidence-based interventions e.g.
- Most developed locally, covering group-based activities
- No agreed structure or specific format

Good Practice in Sure Start – Centres of Excellence

Primary focus on parenting

Everything we do is ultimately aimed at influencing the way in which parents parent, every single thing from the minute they [parents] walk through the door hopefully, in the way that we are, the way we talk with parents, and the way that we talk with their children...”

A Model of Change



A Model of Change

What we do is grounded in really good theoretical understanding, so none of us is trying to reinvent the wheel. We're actually trying to do things that we know are effective.....how we think about children playing, adults learning...people's emotional lives and relationships. It's grounded in a really good theoretical understanding, and that's what makes it work [...]

Using Evidence-Based Programmes



Using evidence-based programmes

- A number of the most well-known evidence-based parenting programmes were being used including Webster Stratton, Triple P, and Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities
- Parenting programmes were being provided on a rolling basis throughout the year
- Staff said: *“Most participants attend from start to finish. We have to keep starting new groups because mums don’t want to stop coming to our groups” (case study 3); Once they’ve started coming and they’ve built their confidence they are empowered to keep attending, and they do generally ’*

These groups need a structure and you need to follow the plan that's laid down to deliver them in the way they are intended, but on the other hand you need to be flexible as well and respond to parents [...]
The actual group feels very informal, so although it's structured in content, the way it's delivered and it feels, it's chatty, very informal in that way, and encourages people to keep it up.

Active support of parenting from pregnancy onwards...



Active Support of Parenting from pregnancy – antenatal groups

The midwife runs a group for parents-to-be.....although she does talk about labour and all the things that parents are interested in, **the emphasis all the time is on the growing relationship between the parent to be and their baby, and how it changes, the dynamics of the household, and all of that.** And it is delivered by the midwife but we always have a child psychotherapist or our CPN in that group. So what we are trying to do is all the time from the outset get away from the idea that the baby is a package that they do something unto....but trying to develop the idea that that it is the relationships that will decide how that baby is.....”

Tuning in to Babies

- **Parents attend a two-hour group sessions where they have structured activities which help them learn about communication with babies**
- **They are encouraged to think about their baby as a social being and to become aware of, and understand, his or her capabilities**

It is all about talking to your baby and recognizing that when they are gurgling or smiling or making faces...they are indicators of your child communicating with you.

Little Star Groups

- Run by workers experienced in child development, working closely with parents on small activities such as Rhythm and Rhyme, that are enjoyable and that contribute to enhancing the **bond between parent and child**

“It’s about getting the parents to know that they can get down on the child’s level and play and enjoy being with them.”

PIPPA Groups

- **‘PIPPA’ stands for ‘Promoting Infant/Parent Attunement’ – based on Solihull Approach**
- **It is a ‘slow, open’ group lasting a year, modelling family dynamics with group members leaving or joining at the end of each term**
- **The group develops its own themes for the term and the role of the group leader(s) is to support the framework of the group to work together to discuss these themes and to find their own way forward with them**
- **The children are an integral part of the group, though are eventually separate from their parents and in an adjoining or nearby room**
- **The childcare staff model with the children the approach and themes being discussed in the parents’ group**

“Because a lot of the time you can see that, you can actually see that the way a person is treating their child is the way they have been treated. Not always. But you know from their childhood. And part of the PIPPA group is about changing that I think. Breaking it. You know and being able to do it a different way. And I think that is where it can get kind of emotional.”

“It is a lot to do with how you [yourself] are behaving[...] how you can change your behaviour to try and change theirs [child’s] as well.”

Early Learning - PEEP

- The PEEP programme offers developmentally appropriate support for parents and carers.
- It aims to promote parents' and carers' awareness of children's very early learning and development through making the most of everyday activities and interactions
- During the weekly group sessions the leaders model different ways of sharing books with children, songs and rhymes are taught, and the contribution of everyday talk to children's development
- The programme can be offered in groups and one-to-one sessions

“When you have got a baby it will tell you like scenarios that might happen and how to deal with it, how the baby might be feeling, how you might feel as a parent. And it is things you can relate to, you can understand and you can apply.

You get a file, and every week you learn something new [...] and you can take it home and it gives you ideas on play. Information on what your child will know at that age and how it will respond to things at that age. The nursery rhymes they will appreciate at that age....”

When you read a story to the child you don't know how to read it – but they do it so you can see what will actually get the child's attention.

Growing Together

- A group which meets a specific need for parents who wish to enhance the quality of their relationship with their child
- A ten week course lasting most of a whole day each week
- The facilitator provides specific themes for parents to discuss, directed interactive time with their children, and a lunch prepared by the parents and shared together with all the children
- Each parent and child are videoed together at home and the parent is able to choose which part of the video they wish to show the other parents for discussion

“If they are angry or they’re sad the staff here explain their feelings to them and help them to recognise their feelings. My daughter will say “I’m cross so I’m sitting on my bed for a while” We wouldn’t have had that when we were little. Instead of thinking – what’s this feeling? They learn to recognise their feelings and put a name to it.”

Using 'Parent Support' to Improve Parenting



Parent Support Groups – confidence building

- **Formal courses in confidence building and personal development training and adult learning**
- Many of the courses enabled parents to gain experience and qualifications in peer support and mentoring, often in family related areas such as breastfeeding, peer support training and volunteer training.
- As with many of the other programmes being provided within these case study programmes, **adult learning was regarded as a means of improving parenting by improving parents' ability to be more in tune with their children's learning needs.**

For me it was a case of seeing things that my mum used to say to me that really kind of brought you down, down, down. It relates back to the positive parenting course I attended – having the positiveness in your children, praising your children.

Innovative practice: Centres of Excellence

- **Whole of their raison d'être relationship between parents and children, and helping parents to develop new ways of parenting**
- **All staff activities with parents underpinned by a model of change**
- **The regular provision of at least one standardised, evidence-based parenting programme**
- **The active provision of parenting support from pregnancy through toddlerhood and beyond**
- **Using parent support to support parenting**

Do not underestimate parents!!

Some [parents] who have been 'labelled' by other agencies as 'no chance they'll stay the course' have not only stayed but very much benefited from it – some families have even done it twice. We've had really good feedback.