



An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

**Toolkit for Parental Participation**  
**National Guidance & Local Implementation**  
**December 2015**



**An initiative of the  
Parenting Support Strategy**



**TUSLA**  
An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

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**“One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.”**  
Bryant H. McGill

**“It means a lot to be actually asked ‘how are you getting on?’  
I would ask for help for my child but wouldn’t ask for myself... might look like I’m not coping”**  
Parent, Parental Participation Focus Group<sup>1</sup>

**“If they want to have meeting without me... I’d be the first to put my hand up and say I want to reschedule that... I need to be there to make sure I’m heard at that meeting too.”**  
Parent, Parental Participation Focus Group

<sup>1</sup>Please see Appendix 1 for additional comments from parents involved in the Parental Participation Focus Groups



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## Foreword

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Tusla is committed to meeting the needs of children and building on the strengths of families, working as dependable and reliable partners to parents. Tusla wishes to involve children and parents in all decisions that affect them and to use their practical wisdom and experience to develop effective practice. For many parents, Tusla should be the silent partner. The voice should be the needs of the child, the focus on the support for the family. This toolkit for parental participation is designed to assist parents and carers to have a voice in all services. Tusla will succeed if we do things with parents, not to them.

The toolkit reflects the government's commitment to support parenting as set out in *Better outcomes, Brighter Futures*, the national policy framework for children and young people (2014 – 2020) the government has also published a high level policy statement on parenting and family support. The government recognises that partnership working with parents is crucial and can strengthen the impact that the Child and Family Agency has for parents. It also needs to be part of a wider strategy within which all services consider the extent to which they are child friendly and parent accessible.

The toolkit reflects on the key principles of participation and how they can be incorporated in to day to day activity. Profiling and checklists in Section 3 can serve as effective aide-mémoires to best practice. Care has of course to be taken to make sure that the practice approach is accessible by parents and does not overwhelm or disempower them.

Tusla believes that core values are crucial for any successful organisation. Tusla values courage and trust; respect and compassion; empathy and inclusion. Tusla seeks to behave according to these values, not least in order that all are encouraged to be trusting and inclusive; respectful and compassionate. Children thrive when seen, respected and participating.

The toolkit is an opportunity for further debate, learning from best practice and for reflection.

As a comprehensive resource, the toolkit will succeed when parental participation is addressed in a straightforward and every day manner and with due humility.

I commend this toolkit and encourage colleagues and partners to work with parents and families in order that they are heard and supported to be influential and effective decision makers.



**Gordon Jeyes**  
**Chief Executive**

## Prevention Partnership and Family Support

### Project Working Groups and Work Streams

Commissioning

Information  
(Quality)

Finance

Human  
Resources

Public  
Awareness

Area-based  
Approach  
& Meitheal  
National Model

Parenting -  
Sponsor:  
Cormac Quinlan

Participation  
of Children &  
Young People

Alternative Care  
Strategy

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Dr. Aisling Gillen was instrumental in identifying the importance of having a Toolkit to guide practice and has been involved throughout the process, together with the National Parenting Lead, Orla Tuohy. Dr. Nuala Connolly of UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre has contributed key research messages and given helpful feedback on various drafts. The Parenting Working Group have been overseeing and helping to develop this project and thanks are extended to all the members for their ongoing support.

Thanks also to the many practitioners who were involved in the consultation workshop from Tusla and partner organisation and who gave very insightful and in depth feedback both at the workshop and afterwards – it is much appreciated!

A special thank you to the parents who gave of their time to take part in the Parental Participation Focus Groups.



# Introduction

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## How to Use this Toolkit

The toolkit is broken into five sections as follows:

**Section 1: Overview and Context**

Section 1 provides the background to Tusla's parental participation project and the policy framework that underpins it.

**Section 2: A Closer look at Parental Participation**

This section looks at a definition of parental participation and why it is important. It describes the principles and how we can enable parental participation to take place. It also gives examples of parental participation in current practice including Meitheal.

**Section 3: Practitioner's Toolkit**

This section highlights practical guidance on best practice for parental participation. It also provides the practitioner with Tools for parental participation and checklists to help the implementation process.

**Section 4: Participation in Practice**

In this section we explore some important issues in relation to parental participation practice. This includes looking at what 'enables' parental participation as well as considering challenges, for example, working with 'seldom heard' families. We also look at what research is telling us in relation to engaging with parents.

**Section 5: Appendices and References**

This section contains appendices focusing on useful resources for parental participation. It also includes signposts to documents and resources used to develop this toolkit and links to additional reading.

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide a manual for practitioners to:

- facilitate parental involvement in the planning of supports and services
- facilitate parents engagement with supports and services, including Meitheal
- facilitate the measurement of parental satisfaction with supports and services
- consider examples of tools of participation
- consider the 'enablers' and 'barriers' to parental participation

## Section 1: Overview and Context

This section provides background information on the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme of work within Tusla and the role of the Parenting Support Strategy.

It focuses specifically on the following areas:

- Overview of the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Development and Mainstreaming Programme
- An introduction to the *My World Triangle*
- Parenting within Prevention, Partnership and Family Support including:
  - The Parenting Support Approach
  - 50 Key Messages – a resource for Practitioners
  - Parenting24seven – a resource for Parents
  - Parenting Support Champions – a learning community
  - Parenting Conferences
- The Parental Participation Project

### 1.1 Prevention, Partnership and Family Support

The guidance for the implementation of an Area based approach to Prevention, Partnership and Family Support is a particularly important document because it sets the context within which parental participation will operate. It specifies the overarching principles for the Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme of work and the specific principles for parental participation are consistent with these wider principles. These Prevention Partnership and Family Support principles are:

- Children, young people and families will be at the heart of everything that we do. There will be a clear focus on wishes, feelings, safety and well being of children.
- The *Children first: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (DCYA, 2011) and legislation must always be adhered to.
- Appropriate supports will be provided at the earliest point of engagement, using a strengths-based perspective that is mindful of resilience.
- Service providers will focus on improving outcomes for children and families, and will track progress and results.
- There will be a focus on a progressive Universalist approach to providing a continuum of support to all children and families. A balanced approach will be struck between developing primary prevention and early intervention services, whilst also maintaining secondary and tertiary services, with a re-distribution of resources to areas of high need.
- Practice and service delivery will be informed by a consideration of evidence on effectiveness in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of services to meet need.
- The agency will work in partnership with children, families, communities, child and family practitioners, and other agencies – both statutory and community and voluntary.
- Services will be cost effective and will demonstrate value for money.
- Practitioners and services will promote human rights and social inclusion, addressing issues around ethnicity, sexuality, disability and rural / urban communities.

See the **Meitheal Toolkit** for an Overview of Prevention Partnership and Family Support within the National Service Delivery Framework

The Guidance also specifies the structure and personnel required to implement a new approach to Prevention Partnership and Family Support. This includes:

- A senior manager for Prevention Partnership and Family Support as part of the Management Team of each Tusla operational area;

- Child and Family Support Network Coordinators, reporting to the Senior Manager for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support;
- A Prevention Partnership and Family Support Steering Committee, to be a sub-group of the Children and Young Peoples Services Committee (CYPSC) where such a committee is in place.

The guidance also defines **Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs)** as collaborative networks of community, voluntary and statutory providers, intended to improve access to support services for children and their families. In order to help families access support, there is a need for clusters of such support serving geographical areas that may be smaller than the Agency areas or CYPSC areas. Therefore, it is proposed that CFSNs will be the unit building blocks of the National Service Delivery Framework and the front line operational structure that will ensure integrated service delivery.



Figure 1. Guidance Documents for PPFS

The role of members of the Child and Family Support Networks is:

- To participate in a collaborative network of community, voluntary and statutory providers so as to improve access for children and families to support services at all levels of need.
- To participate in Meitheal – A National Practice Model by operating a common approach to the identification of strengths and needs, and a practice model for coordinating and reviewing supportive intervention, utilising a Lead Practitioner role and a “team-around the child” approach.
- Specifically, to be a Lead practitioner or a member of a Meitheal Group supporting the lead Practitioner to ensure an integrated intervention that corresponds at all stages to the needs of children and families (as need escalates and also as need decreases and less intensive supports become necessary).

Each local CFSN will consist of all services that play a role in the lives of children and families in a given area and will reflect that the CFSN is a **partnership that recognises that supporting families and keeping children safe is everyone’s business**. So, for example, a CFSN for a given area may include the following: all family support services; Tusla social work services; educational welfare services; public health nursing; child & adolescent mental health services; early years services; youth work services; primary care services;

adult services such as mental health, addiction and homelessness services; local authority services; local development company services; children's disability services; speech and languages services; and psychology services. The concept of 'core' and 'associate' members of a CFSN can be used to distinguish between those services that are currently involved in supporting children, young people and families in the area and those that have a role but are more peripheral.

The Meitheal Toolkit gives more in-depth information on CFSNs.

You can download the suite of guidance documents from the Tusla Website

**Parenting Support Strategy**

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla\\_Investing\\_in\\_Families\\_Parenting\\_Support\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_Investing_in_Families_Parenting_Support_Strategy.pdf)

**What Works in Family Support**

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla\\_What\\_Works\\_in\\_Family\\_Support.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_What_Works_in_Family_Support.pdf)

**Child and Family Agency Commissioning Guidance**

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla\\_Commissioning\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_Commissioning_Guidance.pdf)

**50 Key Messages to Support Parenting**

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla\\_50\\_Key\\_Messages\\_for\\_Parenting\\_Support.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_50_Key_Messages_for_Parenting_Support.pdf)

**Guidance for the implementation of an Area Based Approach to Prevention Partnership and Family Support**

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla\\_Guidance\\_on\\_Prevention,\\_Partnership\\_and\\_Family\\_Support.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_Guidance_on_Prevention,_Partnership_and_Family_Support.pdf)

**Towards the Development of a Participation Strategy for Children and Young People**

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/toward\\_the\\_development\\_of\\_a\\_participation\\_strategy\\_0.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/toward_the_development_of_a_participation_strategy_0.pdf)

**Meitheal A National Practice Model for all Agencies working with Children and their Families**

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla\\_Meitheal\\_A\\_National\\_Practice\\_Model.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_Meitheal_A_National_Practice_Model.pdf)

## 1.2 My World Triangle

At the core of our understanding of parental participation is encouraging parents' positive participation in their own child's care and education. We can do this by reflecting on the *My World Triangle* (see figure 2) which has been developed by the Scottish Government in its National Practice Model developed as part of the *Getting it Right for Every Child* (2012) approach.

In the Meitheal, National Practice Model, the *My World Triangle* is used to guide discussions with parents (and children / young people, in accordance with their age and understanding) in the identification of the child / young person's strengths and needs. This is done by examining key areas of the child's circumstances under three domains:

## How I grow and develop

## What I need from people who look after me

## My wider world and community

By focusing on a child's development, within their family and their wider community, the *My World Triangle* introduces a mental map which helps practitioners explore a child / young person's experience and identify the strengths, needs and challenges to a child's well-being in partnership with their parents / carers. These are recorded as strengths and needs. This should help to plan a more 'whole child, whole system' approach to achieving outcomes for the child / young person. This is in contrast to the more traditional service led approach, where information on a child's different strengths and needs is recorded in parts across the documents of the different services involved.

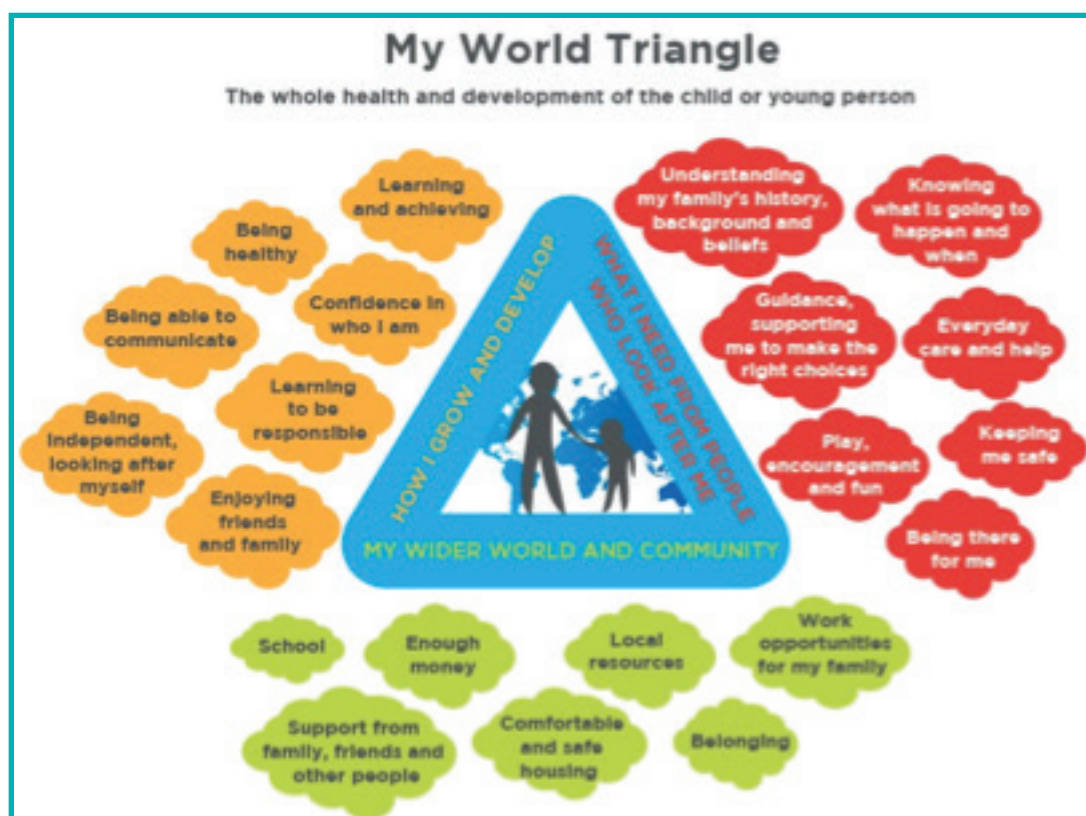


Figure 2: *My World Triangle*

The areas of a child's life that are explored under each of the three domains include;

### How I Grow and Develop

#### Health

Physical and mental; diet, exercise; immunisations; medical and dental care; developmental milestones; major illness or accidents; hospital admissions; impairments / disabilities / conditions impacting on the child's health development; with teenagers – sexual health and alcohol / substance misuse.

### **Education**

Cognitive development (understanding, reasoning and problem solving); learning achievements; skills and interests; opportunities for creativity, exploration, experimentation, imagination, play / social interaction; identification of any special education needs; personal learning plans.

### **Emotional and Behavioural Development**

Being able to communicate (speech and language, conversation, expression); confident in who they are (social, presentation, resilience, self esteem, quality of attachments; enjoying family and friends).

### **Behavioural Development**

Becoming independent and looking after themselves; learning to be responsible.

### **What I Need from the People Who Look After Me**

#### **Everyday Care and Help**

Providing for the child's physical needs (food, clothing, personal hygiene, access to medical/dental care).

#### **Keeping the Child Safe**

Ensuring the child is kept safe from harm / danger; recognition of hazards both inside and outside the home, and also from unsafe adults / children and self harm.

#### **Emotional Warmth and Supporting the Child**

Ensuring the child's emotional needs are met and that the child has secure, stable and affectionate relationships with significant adults.

#### **Stimulation**

Promoting the child's learning and intellectual development through encouragement and cognitive development, and promoting social opportunities.

#### **Guidance / Boundaries**

Supporting the child to make the right choices; social problem-solving; anger management; consideration for others; effective discipline and shaping of behaviour.

#### **Stability**

Providing a sufficiently stable family environment to enable a child to develop and maintain a secure attachment to the primary caregiver(s) in order to ensure optimal development. Also ensuring the child has contact with important family members and significant others.

### **My Wider World and Community**

#### **Wider Family and Friends**

People who are considered members of the wider family by the child / parents; related / non-related and absent members; Is there a support network of friends?; What support do they provide?

#### **Housing**

Comfortable and safe housing; amenities; a sense of belonging.

#### **Income and Employment**

Is there a regular income? / Is the family accessing all their entitlements?; Are there financial difficulties affecting the child?; Who is working in the household? / pattern of work / impact on the child.

#### **Community Resources**

Facilities and services in the community; access and availability to the child / family; impact of services on



the family.

### Sense of Belonging and Inclusion

Degree of child / family's integration or isolation in the community / with peer groups and other social networks.

The *My World Triangle* helps parents and practitioners, in a collaborative way, to identify children's strengths and needs holistically. It facilitates support and the sharing of information with parents on how children develop and what is expected of parents in their role as primary carers. When parents are more involved in services that support them as carers and educators they are more likely to be confident, not stressed and be knowledgeable about their children's developmental needs. Parental participation is about encouraging parents to get involved in supports and services that will help them raise their children well. It is also about engaging with them on a regular basis to ensure that their experience of using services is a positive one.

## 1.3 Parenting Support Strategy

The aim of the Parenting Support Strategy is to drive a long term and sustainable approach to how we support parenting and families. The ultimate goal is to achieve best possible outcomes for children and families in an effective and efficient way<sup>i</sup>.

The Parenting Support Strategy is also known as:  
**Investing in Families: Supporting Parents to Improve Outcomes for Children**

You can get a copy on line at <http://www.tusla.ie/publications>

Parental participation is a key objective of the Parenting Support Strategy and is an element of all of the goals. The four main goals are as follows:

- Parenting Support will be an important part of the work of the CFA and parenting supports and services will be included in all plans for children and families in all areas.
- We will use the best evidence we have about what works for parents and families when we are thinking about and delivering supports and services.
- Parenting supports and services will be available in all areas, at all stages of the life course and at all levels of need.
- Parents using the supports and services will experience them as being friendly and accessible.

Parental participation is one of five projects within the PSS:

- Promoting the principles of Parenting Support through Reflective Practice
- 50 Key messages on Parenting including Parenting24seven
- Parental Participation
- Parenting Support Champions
- Parenting Conferences



Figure 3: Parenting Support Strategy Projects

### 1.3.1 Parenting Support Approach through Reflective Practice

The Parenting Support Approach is a way of working that is informed by the most relevant evidence we have at a particular time about what works best for children, parents and families. This includes feedback from parents about how they think and feel about the services that they are using. The Parenting Support Approach recognises the **importance of relationships** in delivering supports and services to families. It helps us to keep in mind the relationships that exist within families and also the relationship between the practitioner and the family. It is also interested in the relationships that family members have with their friends, neighbours and the wider community.

Key considerations in relation to delivering services with a **Parenting Support Approach**:

- Awareness of relationships
- Having a genuine interest in parents and their needs
- Involving parents in every step of the support and monitoring process
- Seeking parents' views on the services they are receiving
- Reporting on parents' feedback
- Changing service provision so that an agreed amount of time is spent in work that promotes family wellbeing and not just responding to family crisis

The approach should be adopted by all Tusla staff and partners. An example of the Parenting Support Approach would be a Family Support Worker giving a talk on positive parenting to a Parent & Toddler group.

The Parenting Support Approach helps practitioners to recognise interactions with parents as opportunities to find out how parents are thinking and feeling about the service they are receiving and if they have any suggestions for improvement. This does not have to happen at every meeting but can be done in a planned way, for example, at every third visit.

### 1.3.2 50 Key Messages

Part of the work of the Parenting Support Strategy is to look at evidence both nationally and internationally about what effective parenting looks like. It helps identify what key messages are useful for parents to enable them to carry out the very important tasks that they do on a daily basis. It also explores what messages are useful for practitioners who are working to support parents in their parenting role.

A review of scientific research has revealed 50 key messages for supporting parenting. These have been divided into 31 messages that relate to parenting across the different ages and stages (lifecourse) of a child's life. The remaining 19 messages are related to when parents have additional challenges in their lives (different contexts), for example; lone parenting, parenting children with additional needs, parenting when there is a drug and / or alcohol problem etc. The 50 Key Messages document is a resource for practitioners working with parents and carers.



#### 50 Key Messages on Parenting Support: A resource for Practitioners

You can download a copy of the 50 Key Messages document from the Tusla website:  
[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla\\_50\\_Key\\_Messages\\_for\\_Parenting\\_Support.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_50_Key_Messages_for_Parenting_Support.pdf)

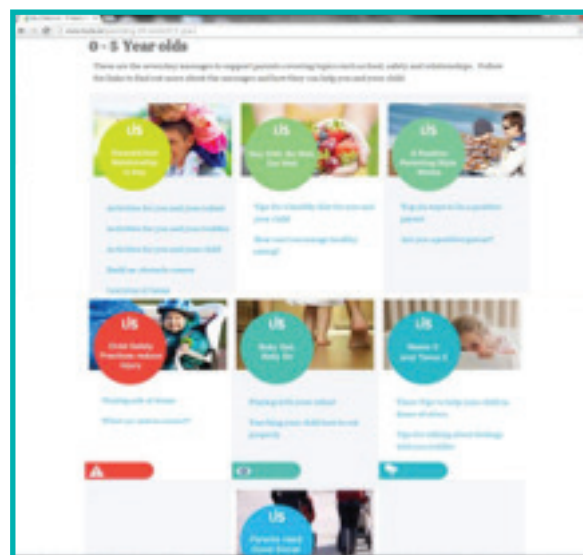


### 1.3.3 Parenting24Seven

Parenting24Seven is the name of the campaign that promotes the 31 key messages relating to the different ages and stages of childhood (the lifecourse) to parents. It is designed as a support to parents who are looking for information and tips on parenting issues. It highlights what is important in parenting at the different stages that children grow through, from pregnancy to the teenage years and beyond. Parenting24Seven promotes seven general messages that apply to parenting children of all ages and 24 messages that are specific to the different stages;

- Preparing for and becoming a parent
- Birth to 5 years
- 6 to 12 years
- 13 to 17 years

These are messages and practical tips for parents on what parenting looks like in day to day reality. There are three videos included on the website that have been developed with the help of parents and young people: Attachment and Bonding; Positive Parenting; and A Teen tell their Story. The website<sup>2</sup> also includes links to relevant partner agencies, organisations and initiatives.



#### **Parenting24seven A resource for Parents**

[www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven](http://www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven)  
[www.parenting24seven.ie](http://www.parenting24seven.ie)

### 1.3.4 Parenting Support Champions

Parent Support Champions will be recruited in each of the 17 Tusla Area Management Areas to help in the implementation of the Parenting Support Strategy. Parent Support Champions will be existing practitioners working with children and families employed by Tusla and its partners.

#### **The role of the Parenting Support Champion will be to:**

- Promote the objectives of the Parenting Support Strategy within their area. Part of this work will be to help support parental participation.
- Facilitate parents getting involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services in partnership with related initiatives and networks.
- Promote the 50 key evidence-based parenting support messages, including Parenting24seven to parents.
- Participate in relevant planning and networking events within their area that are related to the implementation of supports for parenting, where possible.

Whilst it is recognised that there are many practitioners working with Children and Families that already have a role as 'parenting support champions' this project represents an opportunity to carry out that work within a national framework of integrated service provision. There will also be the added benefits for practitioners of participating in training and networking opportunities and being part of a learning community. This is in line with some of the key longterm objectives of Tusla including the development of a workforce that "is valued and supported within a learning organisation"<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup>See [www.parenting24seven.ie](http://www.parenting24seven.ie)

<sup>3</sup>Child and Family Agency (2014) Corporate Plan 2015-2017. Dublin: Tusla Page 8

### 1.3.5 Parenting Conferences

A series of conferences on parenting will be held in 2015 through to 2017. The first parenting conference is called 'Shaping our Parenting Support through Participation'. The second conference, scheduled for 2016, has as its theme - 'Valuing our Parenting Support'. The third conference is based around the theme of 'Strengthening our Parenting Support'. The aim of our parenting conferences is to encourage best practice in parenting related issues, including parental participation, and to promote parenting initiatives, for example, the Parenting24seven website - key messages from research about 'what works' in Parenting ([www.parenting24seven.ie](http://www.parenting24seven.ie)).

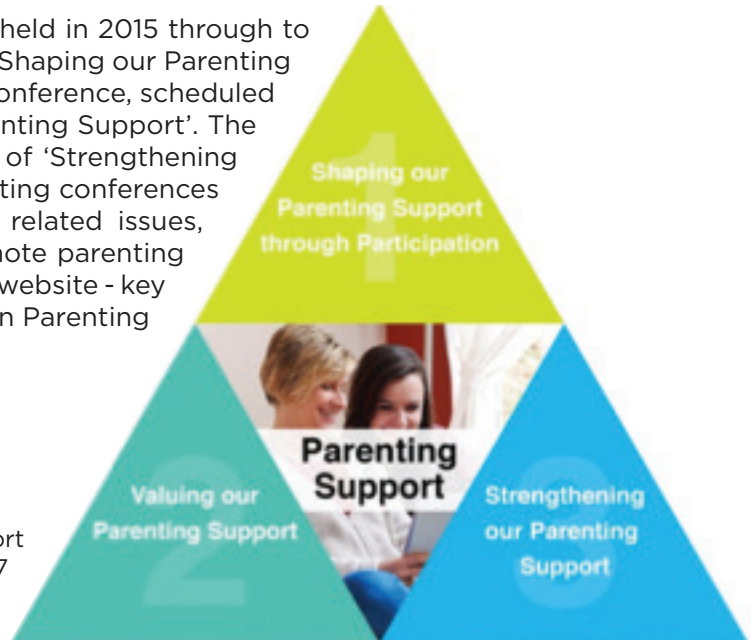


Figure 4: Parenting Support Conferences 2015-2017

### 1.3.6 Parental Participation

Parenting participation is a key objective of many strands of work within Tusla. For example, it is a pre-requisite for the effective implementation of Meitheal, The National Practice Model. The successful integration of parental participation within Tusla and its partners will require embedding a culture of participation within the relevant organisations.

## Section 2: A Closer Look at Parental Participation

This section takes a closer look at parental participation. We consider different aspects of parental participation such as levels of involvement, the multi-dimensional nature of parental participation and why it is important. A key consideration is how engagement in services can benefit children, parents and families and we take a closer look at these advantages which include improved skills for parents and hearing the voice of the child.

It focuses specifically on the following aspects:

- What is parental participation?
- Levels of involvement
- The multi-dimensional nature of parental participation
- Individual and collective participation
- Participation for outcomes evaluation
- Why parental participation is important
- Advantages of parental participation for children, parents and families
- How do we enable parental participation?
- Principles of parental participation
- Some examples of parental participation in practice

### Hearing the Voice of the Child

When parents are involved in participation activities in the community, they are more likely to use participation strategies at home.

### 2.1 What is Parental Participation?

Parental participation, first and foremost, is about supporting parents<sup>4</sup> to participate positively in the care and education of their own children. We do this through raising awareness, providing information, developing and improving parenting skills and providing emotional and practical support to families in their communities. Supporting parenting and parents properly within communities can lead to better outcomes for children and families<sup>ii</sup>. Parents can be involved and consulted in the planning, design and evaluation of supports and services. In addition, practitioners working in a participatory way with parents can support partnership building and enable parents to be creative, reflective agents in their own lives. When people have an active involvement in plans and activities that affect them and their families, these plans and activities are far more likely to work<sup>iii</sup>. Tusla is committed to engaging with children, parents and communities about the design, delivery and quality of its services.

Parental Participation means providing opportunities for all parents to have a say in decisions affecting their lives and the lives of their children and encouraging positive participation in all aspects of their child's care and education.

Implementing an effective parental participation approach involves looking at participation from a number of different perspectives including levels of involvement. It also requires thinking about the multi-dimensional nature of parental participation which can include participation at the individual and collective levels.

#### 2.1.1 Levels of Involvement

It is important that practitioners understand and rationalise the level of parental involvement that they are applying in any particular situation from information provision to consultation to active participation. Levels of involvement can happen at three levels.

*Adapted from Cambridgeshire Children's Trust, Parent / Carer Involvement Strategy 2010*

<sup>4</sup>The term 'parent' includes mothers, fathers, step-parents, grandparents in a caring role, foster carers and other adults with a responsibility for caring for a child including children in residential care

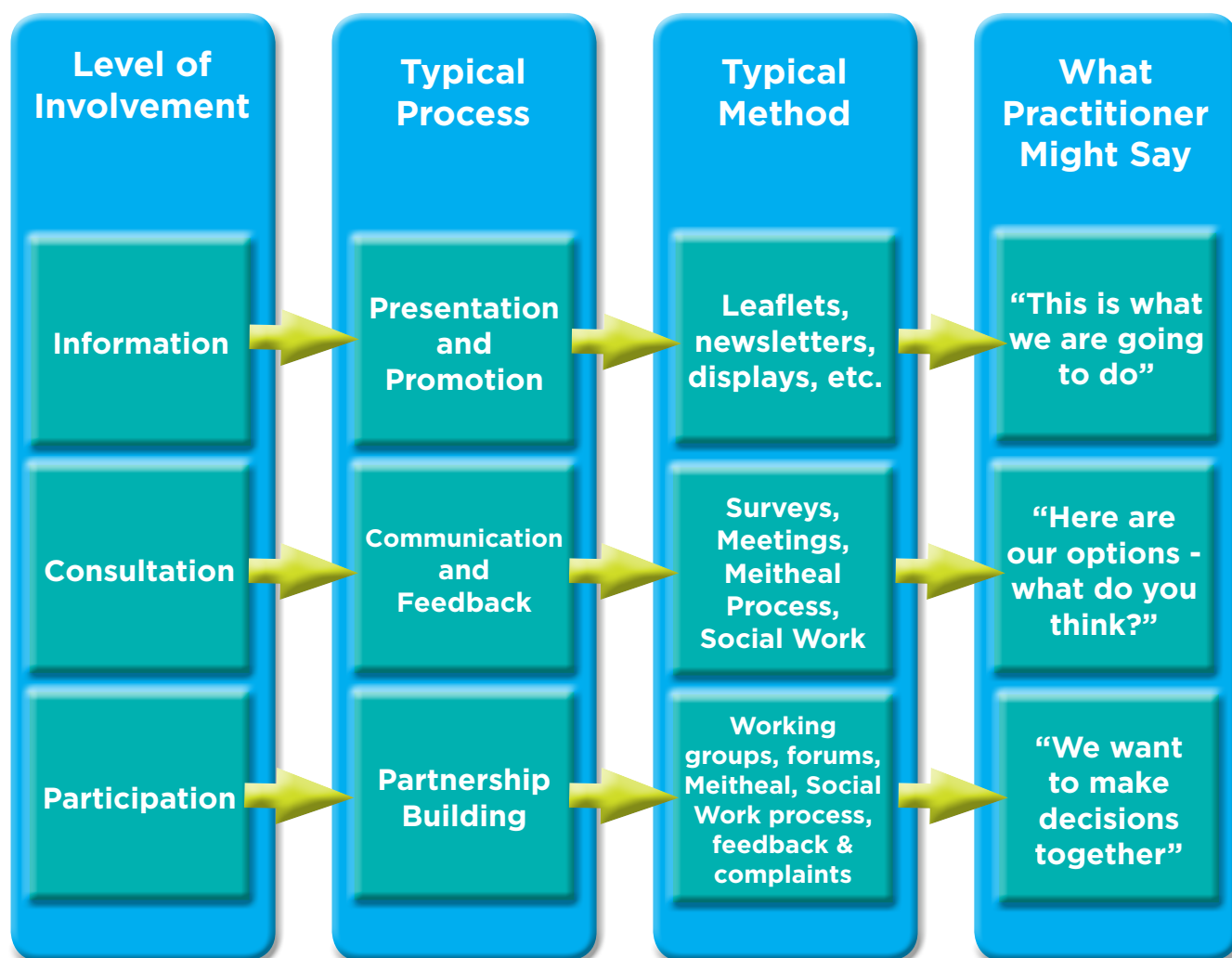


Figure 5: Levels of Involvement

It should be recognised that, while we might like to include parents in a participatory way at all times, sometimes this is not practical or realistic. In these situations we should try and engage with parents at the highest level possible – aspire to working in partnership with parents rather than simply telling them what is going to happen.

### 2.1.2 Parental Participation is Multidimensional

The diagrams below reinforce practitioners' awareness of the different levels of support that may be required throughout the different ages and stages in families' lives (the lifecourse).

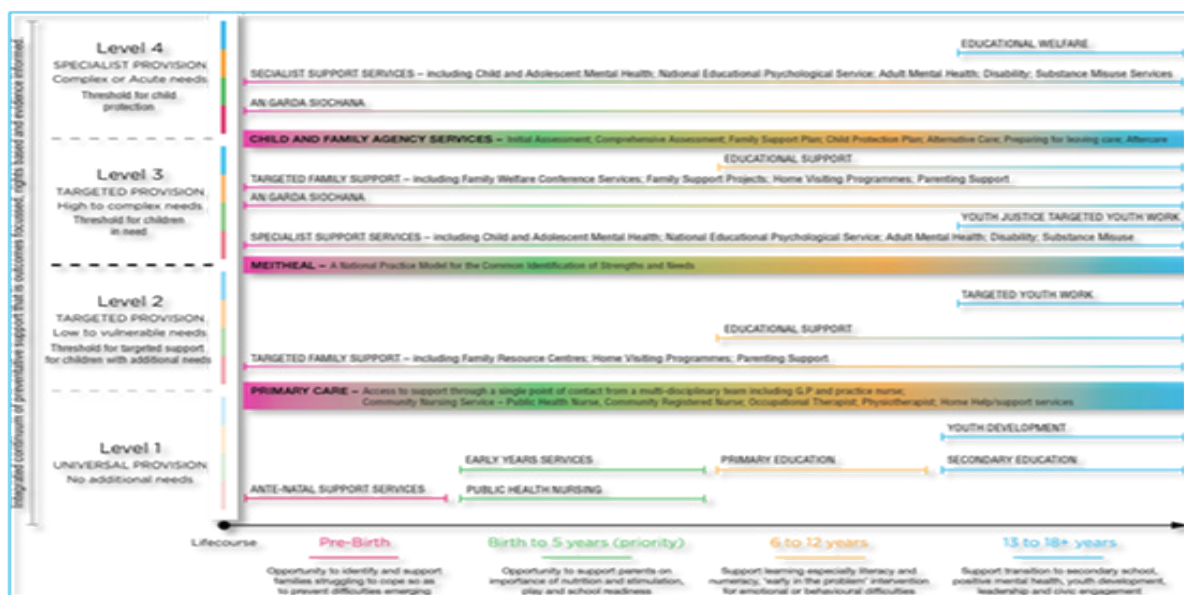


Figure 6: Integrated Continuum Of Preventative Support

Levels of Need (Hardiker, 1991)	Examples	Case Study
<b>Level 4</b> Supports & rehabilitation for children and families, with established difficulties and serious risk.	Respite Fostering, Support Groups for Refugees and Victims of Domestic and Gender Based Violence and Intensive Youth Work, etc.	<b>Youth Advocacy Programme (Y.A.P.)</b> - a strengths based mentoring programme.  Children and young people accessing this service have an allocated Social Worker. Aim is to keep Children in their own communities, avoiding care & custody.
<b>Level 3</b> Services for children & families targeting early difficulties and significant risk	Parent Support Services, Education and Welfare Services, Targeted Youth Services etc.	<b>Springboard</b> - A family support service providing a range of programmes and interventions.  Families using this service will have access to a range of supports including family services and parenting programmes
<b>Level 2</b> Includes support for children and families with additional risk	Parenting Support, Personal Development Groups, Speech and Language Therapy, Early Years Services	<b>Lifestart's Growing Child Programme</b> - An evidence based parenting programme on young children's holistic development.  Parents using this service receive weekly, biweekly or monthly visits by a trained and quality assured Family Visitor in their own home.
<b>Level 1</b> Universal services for all families.	Public Health Nurse (P.H.N.), Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme, G.P. Services	<b>P.H.N.</b> - Care and support to mothers and babies in their own homes and at health centre clinics  Families will get advice and support around ante natal and post natal care, screening, health and developmental checklists, etc.

Figure 7: The Multidimensional Nature of Parental Participation

See **What Works in Family Support** document for an overview and examples of evidence based family support practices and programmes for children and families

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Family\\_Support\\_CFA\\_What\\_Works\\_in\\_Family\\_Support\\_\(2\).pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Family_Support_CFA_What_Works_in_Family_Support_(2).pdf)

### 2.1.3 Individual Parental Participation

There are many different ways in which parents can individually engage with services about issues that are important to them. The most common forms of individual parental participation are:

- Involvement in the planning of supports and services. This can be facilitated using surveys, questionnaires and focus groups.
- Participation in the delivery and evaluation of services. Parents' feedback on their experience of using Tusla and partner services can be obtained using a variety of methods including 'Satisfaction with Services' questionnaires, direct feedback etc.
- Practitioners working in a participatory way with parents can support partnership building and enable parents to be creative and reflective in their own lives.

### 2.1.4 Collective Parental Participation

Parents can get involved in groups that will facilitate the collection of information that is relevant to the planning, delivery and evaluation of services. Many advocacy groups and non-governmental organisations (NGO's) provide opportunities for parents' voices to be heard about matters that affect them. Certain participatory approaches, for example, parenting forums, can be helpful in enabling the views of parents to be heard at the collective level.

### 2.1.5 Parental Participation facilitating Outcomes Evaluation

All work with children and families should be underpinned by the best available evidence of what is effective in achieving family wellbeing and improving outcomes. This entails adopting a culture that supports the collection and collation of evidence of effectiveness. This evidence of effectiveness can come from a range of sources including Parent Satisfaction with Services Questionnaires.

## 2.2 Why is Parental Participation Important?

Partnership working is a key theme of the policy, strategy and guidance documents in Prevention Partnership and Family Support throughout Tusla. Having an awareness of what parents' needs are in relation to parenting supports is important so that we can collectively plan and deliver services well. What parents have to say about the services that they participate in, will be an important part of the evidence about what is working for children, parents and families. Working in a participatory way with parents can support partnership building and enable parents to be creative and reflective in their own lives.

Parents that are actively invited to be part of service planning, delivery and evaluation and who have positive experiences of being involved and being listened to are more likely to use participatory practices in their own homes.

### 2.2.1 Advantages of Parental Participation for Parents and Families

The reasons for promoting a participatory approach within Tusla include the following widely accepted issues, some of which have been documented by the HSE<sup>iv</sup>:

- **Improved Services:** Consulting with parents, engaging in participatory practice and developing effective partnerships enables practice to be improved. It also ensures that services are more



responsive to families that are experiencing additional challenges. These are challenges that families themselves will have helped to highlight.

- **Improved Decision-Making:** Participation leads to more accurate, relevant and timely information being available. This helps the decision making process, which is then more likely to be implemented and supported.
- **Enhancing Skills:** Participation helps parents to develop skills which can be useful in communicating, negotiating, prioritisation and decision making. These skills are all useful for effective family and community working<sup>iv</sup>.
- **Enhancing Democratic Processes:** Representative democracy can be strengthened as parents, agencies and communities gain new opportunities to develop better services for families<sup>iv</sup>.
- **Hearing the Voice of the Child:** When parents are involved in participation activities themselves they are more likely to use participation strategies at home. Parents should be encouraged to listen to children and give consideration to their views in matters that concern them<sup>v</sup>.

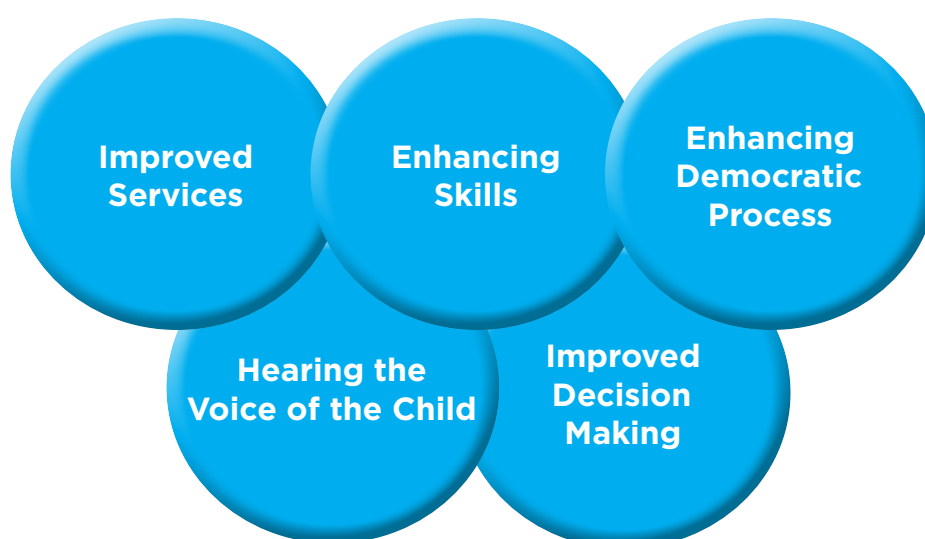


Figure 8: Advantage of Parental Participation for Families and Children

## 2.3 Principles of Parental Participation

The principles below provide a value base in relation to encouraging and supporting parental participation at local, regional and national levels. Services and organisations providing child and family services should be able to demonstrate that they are applying these principles in their work with families:

Principles	Description
<b>Participatory Practice</b>	Working in partnership with parents to ensure the involvement of parents in the planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of child and family services. Working in a participatory way enables parents to be 'reflective' and active agents in shaping their lives and decisions that affect them.
<b>Focus on Outcomes</b>	Measuring the impact of parenting programmes, services, practice and interventions on children's outcomes through a range of measures and indicators.

Principles	Description
<b>Strengths-Based</b>	Adopting a strengths-based perspective and supporting parents, families and communities in a non-judgmental way, to do the best for their children. By doing this, the culture of 'parent blaming' or 'professional dependency' can be avoided.
<b>Multi-Dimensional - Individual &amp; Collective</b>	Parental participation is experienced as multi-dimensional. Parents will be involved in decisions that affect them and their children as individuals. Parents' voices will be heard as part of representative groups that collectively represent them and their families.
<b>Transparent</b>	Adopting an open and transparent parental participation process to ensure that the process of participation is easily understood and easy to get involved in.
<b>Two-Way Process</b>	Communication at all stages of participation is two-way with a sharing of responsibilities and power. This means really listening to the suggestions and concerns of involved parents and making changes to services when appropriate and within existing budgets. Participation needs to be understood as a process and not a one-off event.
<b>Inclusion &amp; Equality</b>	All parents will have the opportunity to participate if that is their wish. Parents are treated with fairness and respect and their individual needs and specific requirements are taken into account. Barriers to participation are identified and every effort made to find solutions to these barriers.
<b>Cultural Diversity</b>	Taking into account the culturally diverse nature of many parents and families in Ireland and ensuring that the needs of these diverse parents are identified using appropriate methodologies which recognise cultural differences.
<b>Role Modelling</b>	An awareness that children of involved parents are more likely to use participation strategies themselves and have a greater chance of enjoying their childhood and developing into healthy, knowledgeable and caring adults.

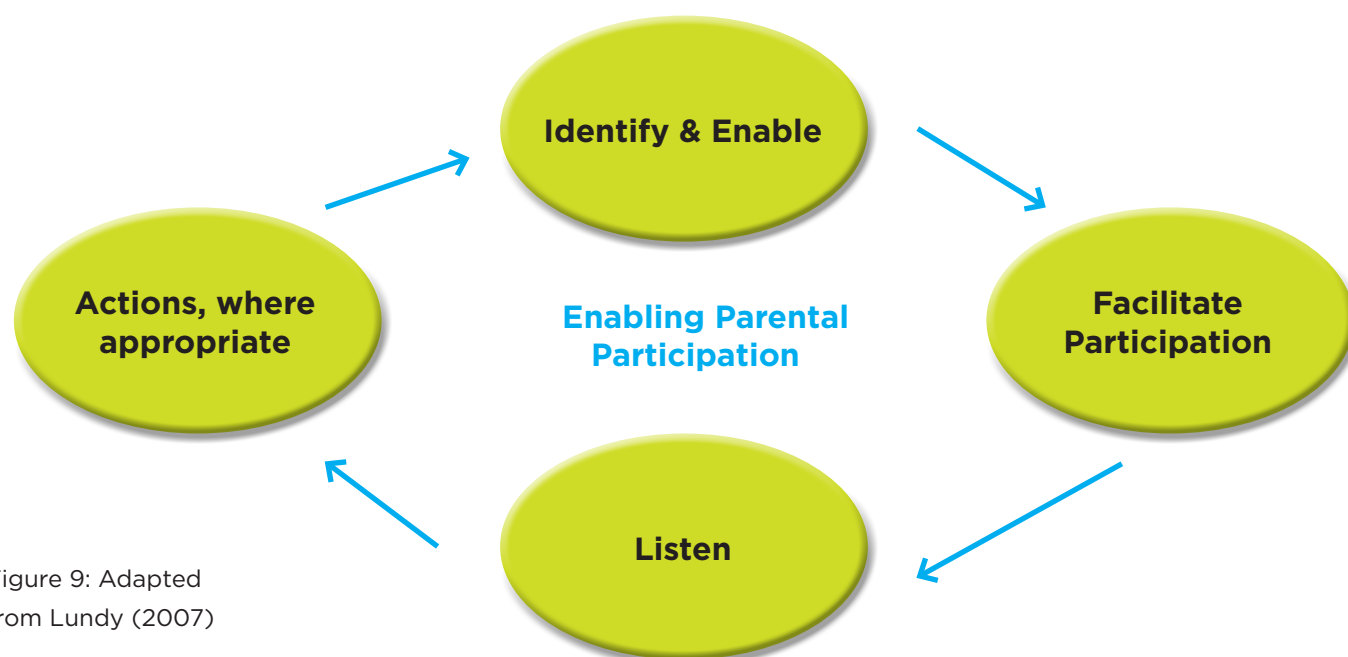


Figure 9: Adapted from Lundy (2007)



## 2.4 Enabling Parental Participation

It is important that parents are given the opportunity to express their views about their family's needs and about the supports and services in their area. This must happen in a safe and inclusive environment. Parents must be supported to articulate their views and concerns; their views must be listened to and their ideas must be acted upon, as appropriate. In some situations parents may require more intensive Parenting Support interventions to enable their active engagement with a family plan and services.

## 2.5 Parental Participation in Tusla

Parental participation needs to be consistently applied within Tusla and its partner organisations.

### **A commitment to Parental Participation**

Parents will have opportunities to express their views in a safe and inclusive environment; they will be facilitated to articulate their views; their views will be listened to; and these views will be acted upon, as appropriate.

There is already some very good practice in relation to parental participation in Tusla and partner organisations. Here are a few examples of how parental participation is an element of our current work within Tusla:

### **Practice Example: Tusla Quality Assurance Framework**

The Tusla Quality Assurance Framework (2014) highlights the following aspirations in the development of services:

- Children and families are integral to and valued in the communities and by all agencies with whom we will work in partnership
- Children and families are consulted on decisions that affect them and will influence policy development
- Families are supported to set clear boundaries and maintain loving environments
- Evidence based support services are available ranging from early intervention to more intense services in environments and premises fit for purpose
- Staff feel valued and contribute to the development and delivery of services of the highest possible quality
- Staff will be reflective and self evaluating professionals with opportunities to shape best practice
- Decisions and authority operate at the most local practical level

Parental participation is an essential component in the design of effective services which are responsive and child centred. Parental consultation and feedback are used to highlight good practice, to inform the improvement of services and to identify and address services that are not at the expected standard<sup>9</sup>.

### **Practice Example: Feedback and Complaints Mechanism**

'Your service, Your say' sets the procedures on how to comment, compliment or complain about a service and outlines how the communication will be dealt with. It is applicable to all health and social care settings. Tusla aims to create an environment where children, young people and families feel comfortable and have the opportunity to provide feedback about the services they experience. All practitioners have a responsibility to participate in and manage this process. It is acknowledged that both parents and service providers have an equal voice and are of equal importance in this process. There is an emphasis placed on the swift and positive resolution of suggestions and complaints at a local level where possible. It is important that policies and procedures for the management of parental feedback is complementary to other existing procedures, for example, Meitheal, A National Practice Model, and Children's First Guidelines.

A section of the Tusla website is dedicated to responding to comments, compliments and complaints in relation to Tusla services. You can do so by looking for the button across on the Tusla website or following the link; <http://www.tusla.ie/about/feedback-and-complaints/>

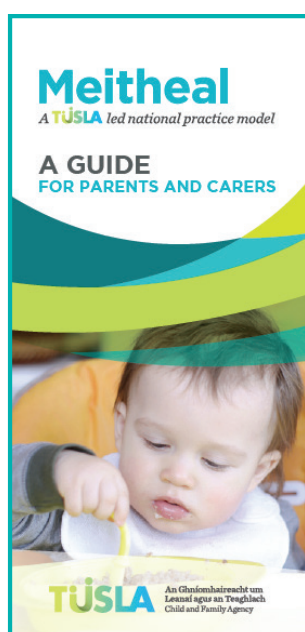
**TUS**  
Making  
a Comment,  
Compliment or  
Complaint

Meitheal is the Tusla led National Practice Model to ensure that the needs and strengths of children and their parents are effectively identified, understood and responded to in a timely way. This is to make sure that children and families get the help and support they need to improve outcomes and realise their rights. The Meitheal Model is a good example of participatory practice. It is critical that parents engage fully with Meitheal and parental consent and co-operation is an essential element of the process.

### Practice Example: Meitheal

Meitheal is a parent led process and is, therefore, a very good example of parental participation in practice.

Parents and their children availing of the Meitheal service need to be fully involved and participating in order for the process to be effective. The consent of parents, or a parent, to the process is fundamental. Practitioners implementing Meitheal can use the principles of the Parental Participation Toolkit to guide them in their engagement with parents. A lead practitioner supports the parent in identifying their child's strengths and needs. The Strengths and Needs Form is then filled out with the family. The Lead Practitioner can at this stage bring together a 'team around the child'. The team will deliver preventative support that is properly planned, is focused on the child's developmental needs, is documented and evaluated. Parents and their children will be actively involved and participating in each step of this process.



## Section 3: Practitioner's Toolkit

This section has been developed to support practitioners working with parents and families so that their children can enjoy their childhood, achieve improved outcomes and help realise their rights. The purpose of this toolkit is to help develop effective and meaningful practice in relation to parental participation.

This is illustrated by highlighting:

- What tools are useful to encourage parental participation
- How should we be thinking about the phases of implementation for effective parental participation
- What questions should we be asking to include parents in the 'planning, doing and evaluation' process
- What actions need to be done to encourage effective parental engagement, who is responsible and what is the time-frame

The Parental Participation Toolkit enables an exploration of parental participation in practice in children and family services at local level. It highlights what tools might be useful to enable participation at the individual level (for example, monitoring a parent's experience of Meitheal) and at the collective level (for example conducting a focus group). The Parental Participation Toolkit also highlights points to consider facilitating parental participation in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services.

### 3.1 Tools for Parental Participation

There is lots of great work being done around the country on parental participation. Thinking about the tools for parental participation gives us an opportunity to reflect on how we are carrying out this work. The first two examples (a and b) are included because, whilst they don't necessarily include parents in the process, they are useful in making decisions about including parents in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services.

Ref.	Name of Tool	Individuals	Groups	Planning	Delivery	Evaluation	Cost <sup>5</sup>
A	Children and Young People Services Committees			✓	✓	✓	€
B	Community Profiling			✓			€€€
C	Blue Sky Thinking*		✓	✓			€
D	Displays and Exhibits*	✓		✓	✓		€€
E	Focus Groups		✓	✓	✓	✓	€
F	Kitchen Table Discussion*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	€
G	Local Area Parenting Support Survey	✓		✓	✓	✓	€€
H	<i>My World Triangle</i>	✓		✓	✓		€
I	Parents Satisfaction with Services Questionnaire	✓			✓	✓	€€
J	Poster Competitions*	✓	✓	✓	✓		€
K	Study Circles*		✓		✓	✓	€
L	Survey Monkey	✓		✓	✓	✓	€(€)

\*Adapted from The Community Engagement Network (2005)<sup>vii</sup>

Each tool has coloured stars. These icons will inform you who the tool is suitable for (individuals and / or groups) and where the tool can be used (planning, delivery, evaluation).

<sup>5</sup>€ = Low cost

€(€) = Can be low or medium depending on method chosen

€€ = Medium cost

€€€ = High cost



## A. Children and Young People Services Committees

### Description

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are a structure to plan and coordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland. The overall purpose is to improve outcomes for children and young people through local and national interagency working. CYPSC are county-level committees that bring together the main statutory, community and voluntary providers of services to children and young people. They provide a forum for joint planning and coordination of activity to ensure that children, young people and their families receive improved and accessible services. Their role is to enhance interagency cooperation and to realise the national outcomes set out in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014 - 2020.

See the CYPSC website for more information <http://www.cypsc.ie/>



## B. Community Profiling

### Description

Community profiles are a useful way of developing an understanding of families in a geographical area or a specific community of interest. This understanding can assist in the development of area plans. Profiles can clarify the makeup of a community and could include information about the diversity within the community, their history, social and economic characteristics, how active people are (i.e. the groups and networks used) and what social and infrastructure services are provided.



A community profile can also provide information on the level of interest that community members may have in being actively involved in a project and their preferred method of engagement.

### Objectives

To develop a more in-depth understanding of communities of interest within an area.

### Strengths

- A profile is an effective way of gathering information about the diversity of a community and the potential stakeholders that may otherwise not be recorded.
- Profiles can highlight the gaps in our understanding of a community or different stakeholders and therefore guide future research.
- Profiles can encourage broader thinking about 'who' a community is and 'who' is involved in a project and 'how'.
- Profiles can help determine who is likely to be influenced by change or affected by a project.
- Developing a profile can be used as a means to develop relationships in a community / stakeholder group as the understanding is researched and developed together.
- The process of profiling can in itself raise awareness, interest and build the capacity of members in the community.
- Profiles are a means to gather community intelligence over time as projects develop and therefore this information can be easily passed on.

### Weaknesses

- Community profiling is in itself an engagement activity. People involved in profiling need to be clear about why it is occurring and what will happen with the information that is collected (i.e. data protection).
- Communities are often complex and over time a rich and diverse picture may develop. It is important to think about how such information will be collected, managed and presented in order to prevent 'information overload'.
- Some of the most interesting questions to ask about a community can be the most expensive / time intensive to research.

### Resources Required

- Profile Coordinator (to manage the above tasks)
- Social research texts
- Publicity
- Statistical resources (i.e. [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie), [www.outcomesforchildren.org](http://www.outcomesforchildren.org))

### Method

1. Scoping
  - 1.1 What is the purpose of the community profile for the overall project?
  - 1.2 How will the community profile assist the overall project?

- 1.3 What information needs to be in the community profile?
- 1.4 How will the community profile information be used?
- 1.5 Who will be involved in the development of the profile?
- 1.6 What resources / constraints will influence the development of the profile?
2. Develop a research proposal
  - 2.1 What are the key questions to be researched by the profiler?
  - 2.2 What research approach will be taken?
  - 2.3 What methods will be used?
  - 2.4 Estimate the time / cost for development.
3. Endorsement
  - 3.1 Who needs to endorse / support the development of the profile?
4. Research Activity
  - 4.1 How will the information be collected and recorded? (e.g. community maps)
  - 4.2 How will privacy issues be managed?
5. Presentation of profile
  - 5.1 Presentation of profile to project team / children & young people services committee (CYPSC) (dependent on purpose of profile)
6. Production of profile document
  - 6.1 Will the profile be added to over time as more understanding is developed?
  - 6.2 Who will be responsible for the profile?

## C. Blue Sky Thinking

### Description

Blue Sky Thinking is a method for groups to develop creative solutions to problems. It works by focusing on a problem, and then having participants come up with as many unusual solutions as possible and by pushing the ideas as far as imaginations will take it. During the Blue Sky Thinking session there is no criticism of ideas – the objective is to open up as many solutions as possible – literally ‘the sky’s the limit’. When the Blue Sky Thinking session has taken place the results can be analysed.



Blue Sky Thinking is a useful exercise to break down barriers between participants and create a sense of unity and common purpose.

A variation of Blue Sky Thinking is the addition of White Cloud Hats and Black Cloud Hats. After an initial session that produces some ideas, the group is broken up into two groups – one with ‘white cloud hats’ and the other with ‘black cloud hats’. The white cloud hat group considers the positives of the different suggestions that have been listed and the black cloud hat group think of what the negative issues might be.



### Objectives

Blue Sky Thinking aims to develop the broadest possible range of creative options, to evaluate these, and to select the best.

### Strengths

- Can serve as a warm-up exercise.
- Can encourage creative solutions.
- Can assist in developing unity between participants.

### Weaknesses

- Ideas are unrestrained and may not be achievable.
- Sessions may be difficult to record.
- Realistic outcomes are not guaranteed.

### Resources Required

- Whiteboard, Flip chart and Sheets, or projector
- Pens, markers
- Venue large enough for participants
- White Cloud Hats (or equivalent) & Black Cloud Hats (or equivalent) (Optional)
- Facilitator

### Method

1. Select participants from as wide a range of disciplines with as broad a range of experience as possible. This brings many more creative ideas to the session.
2. Select a leader for the session, who can:
  - 2.1 Outline any criteria that must be met.
  - 2.2 Keep the session on course.
  - 2.3 Encourage an enthusiastic, uncritical attitude among Blue Sky Thinkers.
  - 2.4 Encourage participation by all.
3. Set times for the whole brainstorming session, and for generating ideas.
4. Keep fresh ideas coming, and welcome creativity.
5. Do not allow any one train of thought to dominate for too long.

6. Do not criticise or evaluate during the brainstorming session (criticism stifles creativity and spoils the fun).
7. Record ideas no matter how unrealistic, until there are no more ideas, or the time allocated for generating ideas is up.
8. Record all ideas on a whiteboard / flip chart or projector so that all participants can see all the ideas.
9. Encourage 'spark off' associations from other people's ideas, or combinations of ideas.
10. Either evaluate solutions at the end of the brainstorming session to agree on the most practical way forward, or record the session either as notes, tape recording or video for later evaluation.



## D. Displays and Exhibits

### Description

A community event intended to provide project information and raise awareness about particular issues. Displays can be interactive, and can be used as part of a forum, workshop, exhibition, conference or other event. Displays and exhibits can include feedback opportunities such as blank sheets with one-line questions, and can include drawings, models, posters, or other visual and audio representations relevant to community issues and interests. Interactive displays can include 'post-it' ideas boards, maps for people to vote on their most and least favourite ideas, and flip charts or blank posters for comments and questions.

### Objectives

Displays and exhibits use drawings, maps, models or audio representations of community issues and interests to inform the community, and to help to engage community members in the process of planning and decision making about an event, proposal or issue.

### Strengths

- Focuses public attention on an issue.
- Can create interest from media groups and lead to increased coverage of the issue.
- Allows for different levels of information sharing.
- Provides a snapshot of opinions and community issues based on feedback.

### Weaknesses

- Public must be motivated to attend.
- Needs a facilitator to encourage involvement and written feedback.
- Can damage the project's reputation if not done well.

### Resources Required

- Publicity
- Venue rental
- Staffing
- Recorders
- Artists
- Photographers
- Events organiser
- Cleaners
- First aid
- Overhead projectors
- Printed public information materials
- Response sheets
- Video
- Projection screen
- Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.)
- Furniture
- Children's requirements
- Insurance

### Method

1. Select a date and venue that will encourage the greatest number of participants to attend (generally weekends or public holidays / shopping centres / public spaces).



2. Arrange for a number of displays / exhibits to give details of the event / issue.
3. Advertise and publicise the event with an emphasis on the issues to be considered. Advertise times when display / exhibition will be open.
4. Provide adequate staff and consider the use of volunteers from the community to help.
5. On the day, ensure that facilitators are circulating to ensure questions are answered and to facilitate participation.
6. Collect feedback and share results.

## E. Focus Groups

### Description

Focus groups are used for exploratory studies, and the issues that emerge from the focus group may be developed into a questionnaire or other form of survey to verify the findings. Relatively inexpensive, focus groups can provide fairly dependable data within a short time frame. Focus groups are a technique used to find out what issues are of most concern for a community or group when little or no information is available. They allow people to answer questions, but also to bounce ideas off one another, and hence provide more detailed information as people share and elaborate on their issues. Where large-scale objective information is needed, a minimum of four focus groups and as many as 12 may be needed to collect all the information needed. Using independent researchers to run groups and analyse data will ensure objectivity for organisations which need to maintain transparent processes.

### Objectives

Focus groups aim to discover the key issues of concern for selected groups. Discovering these issues can help determine which of a number of options is the preferred way forward, or to determine what are the concerns that would prevent a proposal going ahead. The focus group may also be undertaken to discover preliminary issues that are of concern in a group or community, and on which to base further research or consultation.

### Strengths

- Highly applicable when a new proposal is mooted and little is known of community opinions.
- Can be used to develop a preliminary concept of the issues of concern, from which a wider community survey may be undertaken.
- Can be used for limited generalisations based on the information generated by the focus group.
- Particularly good for identifying the reasons behind people's likes / dislikes.
- Produces ideas that would not emerge from surveys / questionnaires, because the focus group allows opportunity for a wider range of comments.

### Weaknesses

- Such small groups may not be representative of the community response to an issue.
- May be confronting for some to be open about their opinions depending on how well people know one another.
- People must be able to operate within their comfort zones.
- Requires careful selection to be a representative sample (similar age range, status, etc.).
- Skilled facilitators should be hired.

### Resources Required

- Venue rental
- Moderator / facilitator
- Recorders
- Depending on age group, may require child care
- May use audio-visual or audio recording of discussion.

### Method

1. Randomly select 6–10 people affected by or interested in the community issue to make up the focus group.



2. Book venue and arrange catering if meeting goes across a meal time.
3. Hire a facilitator.
4. Prepare preliminary questions.
5. Send reminders to participant with time, date, venue and questions.
6. Brief participants and the facilitator on the aims and objectives of the session.
7. Establish ground rules: keep focused, maintain momentum, get closure on questions.
8. Encourage shy participants if they feel anxious about revealing their opinions / feelings.
9. Engage a co-facilitator to record issues raised by individuals (may use audio, a / visual, and / or written notes).
10. De-brief the participants and the facilitator.
11. Compile a report of proceedings for the organisers, and offer a copy to the participants.

## F. Kitchen Table Discussion

### Description

Small meetings within the neighbourhood, usually at someone's home or a local coffee shop. These settings make the meeting informal and participants tend to respond to the more relaxed surrounds. Because they are informal, participants generally are more willing to discuss issues and dialogue is maximised. A kitchen table discussion group is a small collection of people who get together in someone's home to talk, listen and share ideas on subjects of mutual interest. The host often begins by reminding everyone that there are no right or wrong ideas, and that everyone's contribution is valuable. The host also encourages people to listen, to ask clarifying questions, and to avoid arguing or interrupting.

Kitchen table discussion groups can be a prime vehicle for social change. Kitchen table discussions are now going 'online', and are being held around virtual kitchen tables where anyone can join in to discuss an issue.

### Objectives

Kitchen table discussion aims to encourage people to continue discussing an issue until all members have had a chance to be heard, and provide an opportunity of sharing not only opinions, but information and alternatives for community proposals or issues.

### Strengths

- Maximises two-way dialogue.
- If issue is likely to be contentious, provides an ideal setting to scope for early conflicts.
- Maximises the likelihood of engagement in debate and allays likelihood of conflict because held in 'neutral turf' setting.
- Builds social networks within the community.

### Weaknesses

- Needs organisers / facilitators who are polite and relaxed.
- Requires creativity and may require additional resources to reach a large number of people.
- Needs a diversity of interests to be invited.
- Best for small group discussions (6-10 people).

### Resources Required

- Possible venue rental
- Catering
- Staffing
- Hired facilitators, or volunteers with facilitation skills
- Children's requirements (e.g. child minding)

### Method

1. If a kitchen table discussion arises informally, those who wish to follow up on this opportunity should seek advice on how best to encourage participation and how to handle the issues / information that arises. The informal beginnings can be discouraged if the person or people organising further discussions do not understand how to ensure all members of the discussion feel that their opinion will be taken seriously, valued and can be freely expressed.
2. Kitchen table discussions can be formally planned to reach targeted groups by advertising the venue and time.
3. Because these discussions reach groups that are not attracted to formal participation programs,



sensitivity must be used in organising and facilitating meetings so as to encourage continued participation.

4. Select a centralised, neutral space (not affiliated with any one interest group in the locality).
5. Use informal neighbourhood networks to organise the first round of events.
6. Set ground rules about respecting other's opinions, and recording all issues for further discussion.
7. Needs sensitive handling to ensure no one dominates the discussion, and all opinions are valued.
8. Encourage group to record the outcomes of discussions and feed back into a broader participation program.
9. Encourage ongoing discussions.
10. Use these discussions as a means of gauging ongoing public response to a participation program.

## G. Local Area Parenting Support Survey

### Description

Local Area Parenting Support Surveys help to gauge the level of awareness of parenting supports within a particular area. They are a useful tool to start assessing what supports and services parents would like to have within a community. They can help the planning process as part of the implementation of parenting support services. Parenting Support Surveys can also include questions that ask if parents would like to get more involved in Parenting Supports at local and national level and so are a useful tool to enable parental participation at the strategic level (See Appendix 5 for an example).

### Objectives

To find out what local parents' level of awareness about supports and services are. To establish what supports and services they would like to have and what are the potential barriers to accessing these services.

### Strengths

- They give a good overview of awareness of existing supports and services
- Enable an insight into what types of services that parents would like to avail of
- Highlight potential barriers in relation to not being able to access services.

### Weaknesses

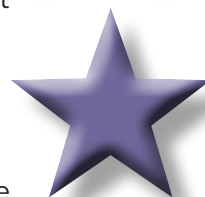
- They can raise expectations about the delivery of supports and services that might not be able to be realised due to resource and other constraints.

### Resources Required

- Staff or volunteers
- Access to expertise in developing / adapting survey
- Small trial group for trialling survey and ensuring that the data you collect is the data you are seeking

### Method

1. Amend questions as required. Keep as short as possible.
2. Trial survey with a small sample (pilot group) to determine whether they are straightforward and not open to misinterpretation.
3. Include demographic data (e.g. age, sex, address, education, etc.) to allow for further extrapolation of the results.
4. Include any new names / addresses in the mailing list.
5. Send out with printed information materials.
6. If the budget allows, provide free mail reply (stamped addressed envelope; freepost mailbox, etc.) to improve responses.
7. Document responses as part of the participation process.



## H. My World Triangle

### Description

The *My World Triangle* is a tool developed by the Scottish Government in its National Practice Model developed as part of *Getting it Right for Every Child*. In the Irish Context it has been adapted by Meitheal, a national practice model. The *My World Triangle* is used to guide discussion with parents (and children / young people in accordance with their age and understanding) in the identification of the child / young person's strengths and needs. This is done by examining areas of the child's circumstances under the three domains:

- How I grow And Develop
- What I need from people who look after me
- My wider world and community

### Objectives

The World Triangle helps identify a parent's perception of their own child's strengths and needs.

### Strengths

- It is a parent led process.
- It takes an ecological and holistic approach.
- It is strengths based and outcomes focused.

### Weakness

- May be time consuming to gather all the necessary information.
- It can be more engaging when used with a practitioner that has an existing positive relationship, with the parent or child / young person.

### Resources Required

<http://www.tusla.ie/services/family-communitysupport/guidance-documents/>

### Method

1. The area of the child's life is explored under each of the three domains, through exploration of each of the elements with parents and child or young person.
2. Practitioners support parents in identifying the strengths and needs of the child or young person.
3. The *My World Triangle* introduces a mental map which helps practitioner's explore a child or young person's experience and identify the strengths, needs and challenges to a child's wellbeing in partnership with parents / carers.

For Example in the domain "How I grow and develop", "Health" is an element. Exploration of this element would include considering; physical and mental health, immunisations, developmental milestones, complex health needs etc.





## I. Parents' Satisfaction with Services Survey Description

### Description

Questionnaires are the basic research tool used to collect information, and are usually developed and tested to ensure that they are easily understood and will collect the information required. Parents' Satisfaction with Services Questionnaires ensure that exactly the same questions are presented to each person surveyed, and this helps with the reliability of the results. Questionnaires can be delivered via face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, self-complete forms, mail outs or online (see Survey Monkey). Questionnaires can be distributed by email as well as posted. Response sheets can be collected at a workshop, or can be picked up at a workshop and mailed back. These can also be mailed out in ways that reduce postage costs, when they are included in routine mail-outs such as the distribution of fact sheets (See Appendix 4 for examples).

### Objectives

Questionnaires and response sheets are a measure of community opinion and / or issues at a certain time or in a certain area.

### Strengths

- Less personal than interviewing, their anonymity can encourage more honest answers.
- Works well to reach respondents who are widely scattered or live considerable distances away.
- Provides information from those unlikely to attend meetings and workshops.
- Permits expansion of the mail list.
- Can be used for statistical validation.
- Allows results to be extrapolated by subgroups.
- Allows the respondent to fill out at a convenient time.
- More economical and less labour intensive than interviews and telephone surveys as they provide larger samples for lower total costs.

### Weaknesses

- Generally only useful for qualitative data.
- Low response rates can bias the results. Can involve follow up telephone calls and letters to encourage returns.
- Needs a return envelope / freepost address to encourage participation.
- Depends on a high degree of literacy.
- Wording of questions needs to be unambiguous to avoid bias, and should be pre-tested on a sample audience to ensure that you receive the information you desire.

### Resources Required

- Staff or volunteers
- Access to expertise in developing questionnaires
- Small trial group for trialling questionnaire and ensuring that the data you collect is the data you are seeking

### Method

1. Draft questions. Keep as short as possible.
2. Trial questions with a small sample (pilot group) to determine whether they are unbiased, straightforward and not open to misinterpretation.
3. Indicate the purpose of the questionnaire at outset.



4. Include qualitative data (e.g. age, sex, address, education, etc.) to allow for further extrapolation of the results.
5. Include any new names / addresses in the mailing list.
6. Send out with printed information materials.
7. If the budget allows, provide free mail reply (stamped addressed envelope; freepost mailbox, etc.) to improve responses.
8. Document responses as part of the participation process.

## J. Poster Competitions

### Description

Poster competitions raise awareness of issues and participation programs (e.g. a poster competition about children's play areas will elicit ideas that generate discussion and can lead to planning to incorporate these ideas). Posters provide visual, colourful, simple ways to communicate community issues and events, and are suitable for display in community spaces. Poster competitions that display children's work can reflect the attitudes of much of the community as children between certain ages tend to reflect their parents' ideas. Poster competitions can generate publicity and provide information.

### Objectives

Poster competitions aim to engage the community's interest in an issue, reveal community issues, and raise awareness of an issue in a way that is visual, inclusive and fun.

### Strengths

- Provides basic information about a process, project or document in a fast, concise and clear way.
- Can allow easy updates on an issue / process / project.
- Can create publicity for an issue / event.
- If the poster competition is displayed in public spaces, they can provide easy ways for people to get information.
- Provides easier ways to absorb information for those more comfortable with pictures than words (and those from other cultures who speak languages other than the dominant language).
- Can be humorous, interesting, colourful and may include cartoons and diagrams.
- Provides an informal gauge of community attitudes to issues.
- Creates interesting graphic material for the project.
- Can lead to greater participation.
- Generates ideas.
- Excellent for children's participation.
- Can encourage people to seek more information.

### Weaknesses

- May need descriptions to explain the concept portrayed on the posters.
- Where posters are developed by school children or members of the public, may not cover all aspects of an issue / process / project (may need some knowledgeable staff to accompany a display of the works to answer questions).
- May need continual staffing to watch display to avoid vandalism and explain the display (see above).
- Competitions can cause ill will if the judging is considered to be unfair.

### Resources Required

- Staffing
- Publicity
- Judges / prizes
- Venue for display

### Method

1. Determine issues / aspect for poster competition and the community groups to be asked to participate. Encourage participation from all ages and community groups.
2. Set time frame for poster competition (one month), size of posters, media, due date and where they



are to be delivered. Specify how many words for any captions / explanations.

3. Advertise competition, with details of where, when and how to deliver the posters, and how they will be judged, and where the finalists will be displayed.
4. Select an appropriate local personality / politician to announce the winners.
5. Sort posters and determine which are suitable for display. Advise contributors whose posters have been selected for display and where they can be seen.
6. Invite the media to the judging, and announce winners.
7. Provide options for visitors to the poster display to make comments / provide feedback.
8. Prepare a report on the issues raised in the posters and the feedback, and forward this to relevant stakeholders.

## K. Study Circles

### Description

The study circle is a simple process for small-group deliberation. For example, a study circle might be formed to discover more about a specific interest (e.g. what parenting supports would be useful to have within a particular community). A study circle comprises 10-15 people who meet regularly over a period of weeks or months to address a critical public issue in a democratic and collaborative way. A study circle is facilitated by a person / facilitator who is there not to act as an expert on the issue, but to serve the group by keeping the discussion focused, helping the group consider a variety of views, and process difficult questions. A study circle examines many perspectives. The way in which study circle facilitators are trained and discussion materials are written gives everyone 'a home in the conversation' and helps the group deliberate on the various views and explore areas of common ground. A study circle progresses from a session on personal experience ('how does the issue affect me?') to sessions providing a broader perspective ('what are others saying about the issue?') to a session on action ('what can we do about the issue here?').

Study circles can take place within organisations, such as schools, or government agencies. Yet, they have their greatest reach and impact when organisations across a community work together to create innovative programmes.

### Objectives

Study circles provide a venue for in-depth, regular, lengthy discussions that allow exchange of information on a particular topic or issue.

### Strengths

- Allows participants to gain ownership of the issues, discover a connection between personal experiences and public policies, and gain a deeper understanding of their own and others' perspectives and concerns.
- Since the dialogue does not promote one particular point of view or try to persuade people to take a specific action, potential coalition partners can usually find ways to work through ownership issues, mistrust, or genuine disagreement.
- Fosters new connections among community members that lead to new levels of community action.
- Can create new connections between citizens and government, both at an institutional level and at the level of parents and teachers, community members and social service providers, residents and Gardaí.

### Weaknesses

- Building a coalition that represents many points of view takes time and effort.
- This kind of coalition building for democratic participation requires leadership, a working knowledge of community dynamics, and a willingness to learn by trial and error.

### Resources Required

- Venue
- Facilitator
- Publicity
- Background information
- Food (can be 'bring a plate' if not catered)

### Method

1. Identify an issue of community concern or a more specific issue i.e. parenting supports within the



community.

2. Let people start where they are. It must be clear from the outset that the dialogue is not just for conservatives, or for liberals, or for any one group. By bringing personal stories and experiences into the discussions early on, the dialogue will naturally welcome people of all backgrounds and points of view.
3. Arrange a venue for study circles, and determine whether there will be one facilitator, or shared facilitation within the group.
4. For large, community-wide study groups, build a broad coalition to implement and sponsor the dialogue. Community members will get involved in the dialogue when people they know and respect make it clear that their participation is essential.
5. For small-scale study circles, an individual or group within a grassroots organisation (churches, neighbourhood associations, businesses, schools, and clubs) need only find a topic of community interest and invite people.
6. Aspects of the topic can be determined from one meeting to the next, depending on current issues or specific aspects of interest to the group.
7. Facilitators should try to move the group from the personal to seeing the issue within the wider systems at work within their community.

## L. Survey Monkey

### Description

Survey Monkey<sup>6</sup> is a piece of software that enables the collection and collation of information and data through the internet. The software is user friendly and includes a 'free' option that allows the design, distribution and collection of basic questionnaires. In this regard it can be cost effective if the 'free' option is used or more expensive if a community opts for the 'tailored' version.

### Objectives

Survey Monkey enables the collection of information relatively quickly and economically.

### Strengths

- Less personal than interviewing, parents' anonymity can encourage more honest answers.
- Works well to reach respondents who are widely scattered or live considerable distances away.
- Provides information from those unlikely to attend meetings and workshops.
- Permits expansion of the mail list.
- Can be used for statistical validation.
- Allows results to be extrapolated by subgroups.
- Allows the respondent to fill out at a convenient time.
- More economical and less labour intensive than interviews and telephone surveys as they provide larger samples for lower total costs.

### Weaknesses

- Low response rates can bias the results.
- Depends on a reasonable degree of literacy.
- Depends on a reasonable degree of computer literacy.
- Depends on the availability of suitable hardware and internet access.
- Wording of questions needs to be unambiguous to avoid bias, and should be pre-tested on a sample audience to ensure that you receive the information you desire.

### Resources Required

- Staff or volunteers
- Suitable equipment (computer / laptop) and internet access
- Access to expertise in developing questionnaires
- Small trial group for trialling survey and ensuring that the data you collect is the data you are seeking

### Method

1. Draft questions. Keep as short as possible.
2. Trial questions with a small sample (pilot group) to determine whether they are unbiased, straightforward and not open to misinterpretation.
3. Work out a suitable response time and include this in explanatory piece at start of survey.
4. Document responses as part of the participation process.



<sup>6</sup>Please note that for the purpose of an example for the toolkit we used survey monkey but other survey tools can be used.

### 3.2 Implementation

The Centre for Effective Services (CES) has produced a comprehensive guide to implementation<sup>vi</sup>. In the guide the implementation process is discussed together with research that indicates that there are generally four stages of implementation: exploration, planning, implementation, embedding and evaluation. It is useful to consider parental participation at each of these four stages.

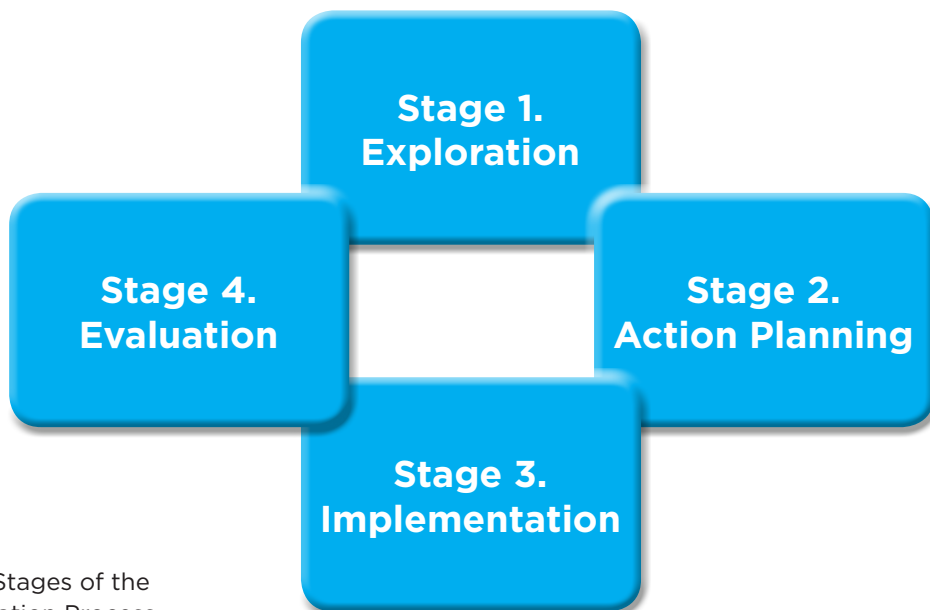


Figure 10: Stages of the Implementation Process

When considering how to facilitate parental participation it is helpful to think about what is already in place and working well, are we being inclusive and participatory and who are our partners in this process.

### 3.3 Checklist for Parental Participation - Planning, Delivery and Evaluation





### 3.3.1. Enabling Parental Participation in the Planning Process

I want to include parents in the  
**Planning Process**  
What do I need to consider?

Many areas have a regular process of community profiling. Below is a list of questions for practitioners when enabling parental participation in the Planning Process.

#### Stage 1: Exploration

Here are some questions to think about in relation to community profiling:

- Do we have an up to date profile of families in our area?
- Were parents involved in this profiling exercise?
- Were parents' interest groups involved in the profiling exercise?
- Were parents that are 'seldom heard' included in the profiling exercise?
- What is the profile of families in our area?
- What are the key issues facing parents in our area?
- What supports and services would parents like to see available?

What methods have you identified to engage with parents around the planning process?

- Have we thought about the objectives of the different tools of engagement?
- Have we identified a suitable tool to involve parents in the planning process, for example, Survey Monkey, Focus Group?
- Have we explored the strengths and weaknesses of the different examples?
- Have we completed a costing exercise on the preferred methods?
- Have we the resources to use this tool properly?

Who are the stakeholders that you need to consider when engaging with parents around the planning process?

- Is there a Children and Young Persons Services Committee (CYPSC) in the area?
- Is there a way for parents to get involved in the planning of services through CYPSC and / or local Child & Family Support Networks?
- Who are the other state agencies that need to be involved?
- Who are the relevant Community & Voluntary agencies that need to be involved?
- What managers and practitioners need to be involved in this process?

#### Stage 2: Action Planning

By completing an Action Planning exercise you can begin to identify key issues: who is the team member / practitioner that is responsible for the different activities; who are your partners / stakeholders; and when does an action have to be completed by. You can also add to this template and include columns for Costs / Resources etc. This is a useful tool to aid the communication process when planning for parental participation.

Action	Who's Responsible	Partners / Stakeholders	When to be done by?
Source suitable tool			
Organise venue and refreshments			

Action	Who's Responsible	Partners / Stakeholders	When to be done by?
Identify support staff			
Cost exercise and obtain resources			
Communicate with staff and partners			
Call for parents to participate			
Follow-up on 'call to participate' with marginalised / under-represented groups			
Conduct session			
Analyse session and compile report and recommendations			

### Stage 3: Implementation

Practitioner can consider the following areas during the implementation process:

- Give parents the opportunity to input into the planning of services for families in their area.
- Regularly check with parents on 'what is good' and 'what is not so good'.
- Check with parents to see if they are aware of existing processes that makes it possible for them to have a say in the planning of supports and services in their area.
- Ask parents to tell you about themselves and their experiences.

### Stage 4: Evaluation

Practitioner can consider the following questions for parents during the evaluation process:

- Can you as a parent identify any barriers for parents in participating in the planning of supports and services?
- Did you feel supported in participating in the planning process?
- Did you feel your voice was heard in the decision-making process?
- What might stop you from talking at a meeting and how might you be supported further in this area?

### 3.3.2. Enabling Parental Participation in the Delivery Process

#### a) Enabling Parents to Participate in Support Services

I want to ensure that all parents have a chance to  
**Participate in Supports & Services**  
 What do I need to consider?

#### Stage 1: Exploration

- Do we know what supports & services parents want? (see 3.3.1. Enabling Parental Participation in the Planning Process)
- Do all parents know what supports and services are available? How do we monitor this?
- Are marginalised / under-represented groups aware of our services?
- Are parents able to access supports & services?
- Are there transport issues for parents? How can we remedy this?
- Are there childcare issues for parents? How can we remedy this?
- Have we made it easy for parents to access the service?
- Are there access issues for parents with a disability? If yes, how can we remedy this?
- If parents are not attending the service have we asked them why not?
- Do parents see the service as being friendly and inviting?
- Are we continuously assessing our parental participation throughout the delivery process?

#### Stage 2: Action Planning

By completing an Action Planning exercise you can begin to identify key issues: who is the team member / practitioner that is responsible for the different activities; who are your partners / stakeholders; and when does an action have to be completed by. You can also add to this template and include columns for Costs / Resources etc. This is a useful tool to aid the communication process when planning for parental participation.

Action	Who's Responsible	Partners / Stakeholders	When to be done by?
Choose Parenting Support Initiative (Refer to Needs Analysis / Community Profiling process)			
Consider Barriers & Enablers to participation (See section 4.2)			
Cost initiative and obtain resources / budget stream			
Identify support staff			
Organise venue & refreshments			
Communicate with staff & partners			
Call for parents to participate			
Follow up on 'call to participate' with marginalised / under-represented groups			
Conduct session			
Seek feedback from parents about their experience			

Action	Who's Responsible	Partners / Stakeholders	When to be done by?
Analyse session and compile report & recommendations			
Suggest changes where appropriate and monitor			

### Stage 3: Implementation

- What staff members are going to support the delivery of the initiative?
- What staff members are going to collect the data?
- Who is going to analyse the feedback from parents?
- Who makes the decision about affecting change, if this needs to happen?
- If parents have 'dropped out' of the support / service, do we know why?

### Stage 4: Evaluation

- How did the process go?
- Did parents feel empowered by their participation in the initiative?
- Were the tools chosen suitable for monitoring the initiative? If not, why not?
- Were any changes made as a result of the feedback?

## b) Hearing what parents think about the delivery of support services

I want to hear parents views on  
**Service Delivery**  
What do I need to consider?

Below are some questions to consider when you want to find out what parents think about the supports and services they are receiving.

### Stage 1: Exploration

- Do we have systems in place to 'check in' with parents throughout service delivery? If no, why not?
- If no, what do we need to put in place to review parents' perceptions about our service (for example, Parents Satisfaction with Services Survey, See Section 3.1).
- If yes, are all parents contributing to this process?
- Do we seek feedback from marginalised / under-represented groups that are attending our service?
- Do parents see the service as being friendly and inviting?
- Are we continuously assessing our parental participation throughout the delivery?
- Do we check levels of satisfaction at some defined interval during the programme (for example, half way through)?

What methods have you identified to engage with parents?

- Have we thought about the objectives of the different tools of engagement?
- Have we identified a suitable tool to involve parents in the review of our service, for example, Survey Monkey, Focus Group?
- Have we explored the strengths and weaknesses of the different examples?

Have we communicated decisions to relevant staff / partners / stakeholders?

## Stage 2: Action Planning

By completing an Action Planning exercise you can begin to identify key issues: who is the team member / practitioner that is responsible for the different activities; who are your partners / stakeholders; and when does an action have to be completed by. You can also add to this template and include columns for Costs / Resources etc. This is a useful tool to aid the communication process when planning for parental participation in the review of services.

Action	Who's Responsible	Partners / Stakeholders	When to be done by?
Choose tool to measure parents satisfaction with services			
Cost the use of this tool and obtain resources			
Identify support staff			
Choose review intervals, if applicable			
Communicate with staff & partners			
Invite parents to give feedback			
Call for parents to participate			
Follow up on 'call to give feedback' with marginalised / under-represented groups			
Get feedback			
Seek feedback from parents about their experience			
Analyse feedback, compile report & make recommendations			
Suggest changes where appropriate and monitor			

## Stage 3: Implementation

- What staff members have collected the data?
- Has a date been set to analyse the data?
- Who is going to collate the data, write a report and disseminate to appropriate stakeholders?

## Stage 4: Evaluation

- How did the process go?
- Did parents feel empowered by the process?
- Did we ask parents 'what was good' and 'what was not so good'?
- Were the tools chosen suitable? If not, why not?
- Were any changes made as a result of the feedback?

### 3.3.3. Enabling Parental Participation in the Delivery Process

I want to include parents in the  
**Evaluation**  
of our supports & services. What do I need to consider?

Ensuring that parents are actively involved in the evaluation of services is a key consideration for service providers. The questions below can help practitioners to reflect on how they can best facilitate parental participation in the evaluation of their services.

#### Stage 1: Exploration

- Are parents involved in the planning of the evaluation process? If not, why not?
- Are parents involved in the evaluation of our service? If not, why not?
- Did we make it easy for parents to comment on and evaluate our service? If not, why not?
- Are we evaluating at each stage of the process?
- Are we identifying and analysing issues?
- Are we planning for change and implementation, where appropriate?
- Have there been measurable changes in the service based on evaluations from parents?
- Do we have a mechanism to inform parents of the results of the evaluation?
- Are we continuing to gather evidence of success through:
  - Service satisfaction surveys
  - Questionnaires
- Are we reflecting on our professional practice in relation to parental participation, for example, through the supervision process?
- What tools would be useful to include parents in the evaluation of our service?
- Have we the personnel and the financial resources to fund this method?
- What partners do we need to inform in order to make the evaluation happen in a participatory way?

At what stage should you be asking parents for feedback on the service / programme?

- Is it useful to get baseline data from parents at the start of an initiative?
- Do we check levels of satisfaction at some defined interval during the programme (for example, half way through)?
- How do we get parents feedback at the end of the programme? What tools are useful for this process?

What methods have you identified to engage with parents on the evaluation of the service?

- Have we thought about the objectives of the different tools of participatory evaluation?
- Have we identified a suitable tool to involve parents in the evaluation of our service, for example, Survey Monkey, Focus Group?
- Have we explored the strengths and weaknesses of the different examples?
- Have we completed a costing exercise on the preferred methods?
- Have we the resources to use this tool properly?
- Have we communicated decisions to relevant staff / partners / stakeholders?

#### Stage 2: Action Planning

By completing an Action Planning exercise you can begin to identify key issues: who is the team member / practitioner that is responsible for the different activities; who are your partners / stakeholders; and when does an action have to be completed by. You can also add to this template and include columns

for Costs / Resources etc. This is a useful tool to aid the communication process when planning for parental participation in the evaluation of services.

Action	Who's Responsible	Partners / Stakeholders	When to be done by?
Choose tool to evaluate service			
Cost the use of this tool and obtain resources			
Identify support staff			
Choose assessment intervals (Beginning, Middle, End, Follow-up)			
Communicate with staff & partners			
Invite parents to contribute to the evaluation			
Follow up on 'call to contribute to the evaluation' with marginalised / under-represented groups			
Collate data			
Analyse data, compile report & make recommendations			
Suggest changes where appropriate and monitor			

### Stage 3: Implementation

- What staff members have been involved in the evaluation process?
- What staff have collected the data?
- Who is going to analyse the data?
- Is the analysis going to be done internally or externally?
- Who makes the decision about affecting change, if this needs to happen?

### Stage 4: Evaluation

- How did the process go?
- Did parents feel empowered by the process?
- Where the tools chosen suitable? If not, why not?
- Were any changes made as a result of the evaluation?

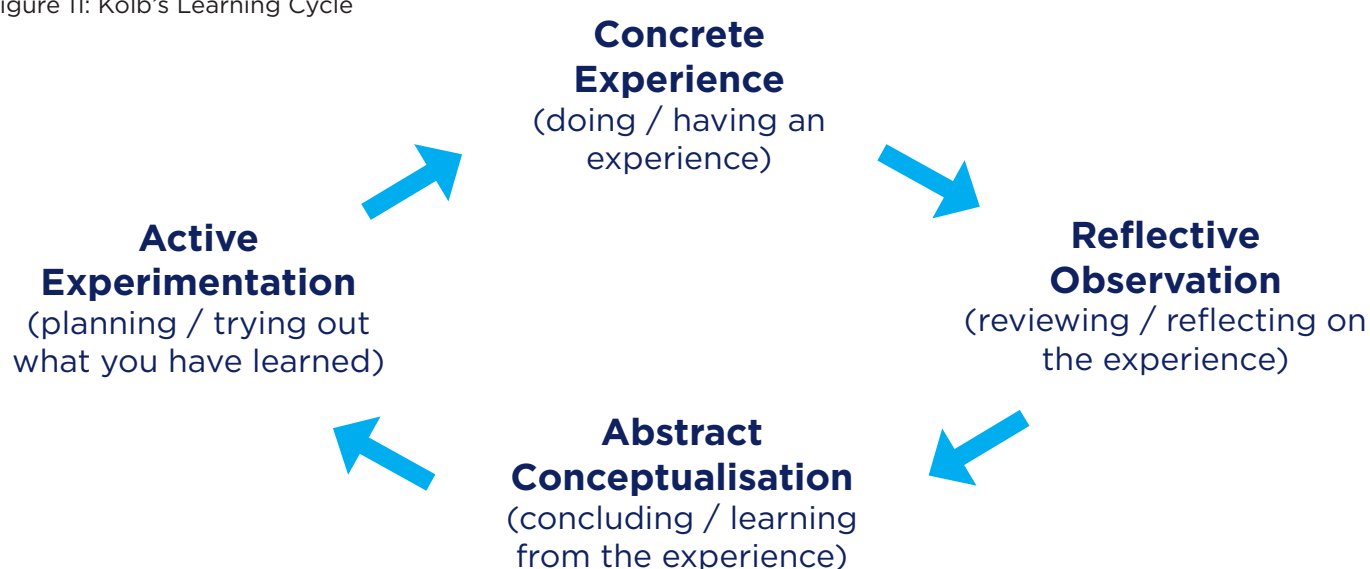
## Section 4: Participation in Practice

### 4.1 Reflective Practitioner

To support ongoing professional development of skills, practitioners need clear structures to develop reflective practice to support and process their own learning when using tools and techniques outlined in the toolkit.

This process may be used within their own supervision process. Kolb's theory is a mechanism for practitioners which may support and guide their work practice. The theory represents a cycle of learning, from experiencing and reflecting on this experience, to thinking and learning from the experience, and finally acting by trying out what has been learned.

Figure 11: Kolb's Learning Cycle



### 4.2 Working in Partnership with Parents – Key Research Messages

Partnership between service providers and families is the act of working together for the benefit of children. Participation is key to achieving and maintaining that partnership, particularly in the delivery of services to families. The parent voice is emphasised as an important factor in satisfactory partnership working and contributing to positive outcomes. Having opportunities to actively express an opinion in a respectful, supportive and encouraging environment where the parent feels that their voice is valued and their competencies are acknowledged contributes to satisfaction with decisions made during that time. Practitioners working in a participatory way strengthen this partnership.

Understanding what parents want in this context is crucial to effective partnership working, potentially improving engagement levels with services, informing the planning of services and contributing to better outcomes for children and families. A number of factors contribute to successful participation and partnership working with parents, including:

- being treated with respect,
- having competencies acknowledged,
- having a voice,
- experiencing teamwork and flexibility on the part of services,
- collaborative and cooperative communication, and
- non-judgemental attitudes.



Barriers to participation may be from a service, professional and user perspective. Parents may feel ignored or powerless if their voice is unheard or not respected. Parents can feel defensive, threatened and may feel silenced, thereby failing to have their needs met. They may resort to a 'cooperative voice' with a view to ensuring a positive outcome, or fail to exercise their voice entirely. This can be influenced by the power dynamics in place in some contexts, for example a child protection setting. In addition, services may be working with large caseloads and limited resources.

Professionals may also feel constrained by the nature of their role and agency agendas. The challenge for professionals and practitioners is to overcome barriers to working in partnership with parents, acknowledging this inherent power imbalance.

**Barriers to successful participation identified by parents include:**

- feeling poorly informed about the purpose of the meeting
- feeling poorly informed about who is present and why
- feeling outnumbered by the number of professionals present
- feeling unfamiliar with the terminology and mechanisms used by professionals
- a perceived lack of respect for the parents' opinions or suggestions, or
- a perceived negative attitudes towards parents
- lack of knowledge of service times
- access, transport and childcare issues
- social & cultural issues such as gender, ethnicity, language fluency & literacy
- stigma issues
- not understanding parents 'help seeking patterns', use of informal networks

Professionals need to be aware of their essential role in facilitating and supporting parents in the decision-making process as well as the necessity of acquiring the communication skills and competencies to engage with parents in different contexts and different parenting relationships. Some groups of parents have specific needs. These include migrant parents, parents from minority communities, lone parents, teen parents, disabled parents, fathers and parents in living in poverty. Many parents have multiple issues, for example, lone parents are more likely to have economic disadvantages and parents with mental health issues are more likely to have substance misuse problems. Participatory practice should reflect these differences and multiple challenges. In addition, it should be acknowledged that parents who are uncooperative should not be seen in a negative light. Perceived lack of co-operation in parents needs to be examined and understood. The role of the practitioner, where possible, is one of shared responsibility.

**Enablers contributing to meaningful participation can include:**

- ensuring the physical environment is appropriate, comfortable and accessible; providing refreshments if appropriate
- ensuring that the purpose of the meeting is clear and that all necessary information is shared in advance
- providing a written agenda for the meeting
- clarifying the roles of all those present
- actively encouraging the parent voice by seeking parents' views throughout
- taking a strengths-based approach and focusing on parental competencies
- follow-up on agreed plans or decisions
- providing other practical assistance where necessary
- reflecting in a meaningful way on participatory practice
- being aware of the importance of relationships and interpersonal dynamics: developing trust having authority, handling negotiations, attitudes
- paying attention to access issues: patterns and timings, transport, childcare
- promote joined up working, collaboration and the integration of services to help participatory practice

### 4.3 Working with 'Seldom Heard' Parents

We know that 'seldom heard' parents is hard to define. Broadly speaking however, seldom heard parents can be understood as;

- Parents who are underrepresented in service provision
- Service users (or potential service users) that may be invisible or overlooked by service providers
- Service users (or potential service users) considered for various reasons to be resistant to services

We need to be aware of the challenges many parents may encounter within the life course. The following headings are significant in engaging parents in services<sup>viii</sup>:

- Personal Relationships between staff and service users
- Practical issues
- Service Culture
- Consultation, information and targeting
- Service delivery issues
- Community development approaches

For more information on key messages when engaging with parents who are experiencing different challenges please see 50 Key Messages for Parenting support. This document can be found here:

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla\\_50\\_Key\\_Messages\\_for\\_Parenting\\_Support.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_50_Key_Messages_for_Parenting_Support.pdf)

See also

Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook. This document can be found here:

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/CF\\_WelfarePracticehandbook.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/CF_WelfarePracticehandbook.pdf)



### 4.4 When Engagement is not Voluntary

In terms of the programme factors that make a difference when engagement with services is not voluntary, the existing literature identifies funding, and its associated structures, as an important factor when engaging with and sustaining work with seldom heard groups. Adequate stable and long term funding promotes the best service delivery.

In terms of the issues that influence reach and engagement, the evidence from research highlights that service promotion strategies are very important. Other considerations include appropriate entry and outreach points and staffing and child centred practice approaches in which relationship building plays a central role.

Other important factors that should be considered when engagement is not voluntary are:

- Targeting interventions to vulnerable families early in a pregnancy
- Using single, non stigmatising entry points for a range of coordinated services
- Ensuring adequate time frames are allocated for interventions in order to build trust and relationships and to ensure sustainable outcomes
- Facilitate transport and childcare, where possible, and parent-friendly scheduling of appointments and meetings

An example of 'engagement that is not voluntary' is when parents are mandated through the courts to participate in services. This can happen in private family law cases, child protection cases or through the direction of the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS). An example of this would be parents requested by the court to attend a parenting course or engage with a Parental Capacity Report.

On such occasions practitioners should bear in mind the additional time it may take to build a working relationship and the key skills they need such as patience, interpersonal skills, listening skills, empathy and leadership to support the process. Practitioners need to be supported by line managers as often time pressures can make this task more challenging.

It is useful to keep in mind the 'admirable' desire to work 'with' rather than 'against' parents, to reduce the imbalance of power between parents and professionals<sup>ix</sup>. Partnership with parents whose capacity is diminished for one reason or another may not be possible, no matter how well intended practitioners are<sup>x</sup>.

## Section 5: Appendices and References

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**Appendix 1** a) 'Hearing the Voice of the Parent' - Feedback form Parental Participation Focus Groups  
b) Sample questions for Focus Group on Parental Participation  
c) Attendance Sheet (Sample)

**Appendix 2** Data Protection Issues

**Appendix 3** CYPSC Parenting Support Sub-Committee  
Terms of Reference (Example)

**Appendix 4** Parents' Satisfaction with Services Questionnaire - Example A  
Parents' Satisfaction with Services Questionnaire - Example B

**Appendix 5** Local Area Parenting Support Survey

**References**

**Further Reading**

## Appendix 1

### A) 'Hearing the Voice of the Parent'

#### Feedback from Parental Participation Focus Groups

This feedback was obtained from parents who participated in a series of Focus Groups on Parental Participation in September and October 2015. Many thanks to staff from Workforce Learning & Development, PPFS Participation Officers and a Parent Support Programme Manager who facilitated the sessions.

*At the end of the day, we're the mothers, we decide...*

**She could have said I'm here to support you... (With reference to mandated support)...**

**They know what pressure we're under...**

**She makes you feel close like a family...**

*I say what goes...*

*It needs to be joint decisions...*

***It works out between the two of us... (Talking about problem solving with the family support worker)***

**A worker who persists with a parent will help a parent to see that they need help as a parent, and that is ok...**

*If there is anything we would like to do in relation to courses, we just tell her...*

**Some don't know what they need... Some people need to be pushed... Some haven't a clue what to do with kids...**

**It's about partnership at the end of the day...**

**We can give them ideas and they can take them to the bosses...**

*She listens to ya...*

*If they had more posters, leaflets around doors... something put on Facebook*

***I do think that we need to have a say and know what's best for our child...***

**I was asked about me... she asked me what I might need... about childminding...**

**If they want to have a meeting without me... I'd be the first to put my hand up and say I want to reschedule that... I need to be there to make sure I'm heard at that meeting too...**

*You don't always identify with what is in leaflets...*

## B) Sample Questions for Focus Group on Parental Participation

### PPFS - Parenting

#### Focus Group on Parental Participation

- Facilitator thanks everyone for coming and does a round of introductions.
- Facilitator explains that the focus group is part of a Parenting Project within Tusla and Partners to try and ensure that there are a range of parenting supports in every area and that they are easy to get to and are friendly. The Parenting Project is also looking at how parents are helped to get involved and participate in their local family support services.

#### Focus Group Questions on Parental Participation

##### Section A: Service Planning

1. Has anyone ever been asked to input into the planning of services for families in their area?
  - a. Can you describe the experience?
  - b. What worked well? What didn't?
2. Do you know of anything that is in place that makes it possible for you to have a say in the planning of supports and services?
  - a. Can you tell us about them?
3. Do you think parents should be consulted in the planning of services for families?
  - a. Why should parents be consulted?
4. What services would you like to be consulted on?
  - a. Parenting Programmes
  - b. Early Intervention Services like Meitheal
  - c. Social work / child protection services
  - d. Other supports for Parents
5. What would need to be in place to make this happen?
  - a. How can all / other parents be helped to participate in the planning of services?
  - b. Are there groups that are harder to reach?
  - c. Who do you think these groups are?
  - d. How could they be supported to get involved?
6. When should parents be consulted? Prompt on each ...
  - a. Service design
  - b. Service delivery
  - c. Service evaluation
7. How (in what form) would you like to be consulted?
  - a. Group meetings / focus groups
    - i. Where / Who sets agenda? / Who participates?
  - b. Consultation workshops
    - ii. Where / Who sets agenda? / Who participates?
  - c. Written feedback, questionnaires
  - d. Input into staff training / training materials?
8. What difficulties might there be with trying to get parents to participate?
  - Do not prompt as would be leading but note comments relating to: power dynamics, reluctance to speak, need to appear cooperative?

9. What actions should be taken to make it easier for parents to get involved in the planning of services?

### **Section B: Meaningful Participation in a Service**

10. Do you think parents should be supported to participate at meetings where decisions are being made that affect their family?
  - a. Why should parents participate?
11. Do you know of anything that is in place for parental participation at meetings?

### **Prompt:**

There are lots of different kinds of family support services around, for example, parenting courses and supports for teenagers:

12. Has anyone ever received any Family Support Services?
  - a. If yes, what type of support was it?
  - b. Parenting Programmes?
  - c. Case conference / family welfare conference / Meitheal

If no, go to question 15.
13. Do you feel your voice was heard when decisions were made that affected your family?
14. In relation to Family Support services, have you ever been asked for your views?
  - a. Were you asked for your side of the story at the meeting?
  - b. Were you asked for your input into decisions about your family?
  - c. Did your worker listen to / understand your point of view?
  - d. Did you feel your voice was heard?
  - e. Did you feel respected?
  - f. Did you have satisfying experience?
    - i. If yes, how was it satisfying?
    - ii. If no, why was it not satisfying?
15. What would need to be in place to improve participation of parents?
  - a. How can all / other parents be engaged to participate in meetings?
    - i. Should all parents be encouraged to participate?
  - b. Are there hard to reach groups?
    - i. Do you know who these hard to reach groups are?
    - ii. How could they be supported to get involved?
16. What might stop you from talking at a meeting?
  - Do not prompt as would be leading but note comments relating to: power dynamics, reluctance to speak, need to appear cooperative?

**Many thanks for participating!**



### C. Attendance Sheet (Sample)

#### Parental Participation Focus Group

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Venue: \_\_\_\_\_

No.	Name👤	Area You Live In*	Male (M) / Female (F)	Ages of Children	Your Age	Country You Were Born In	Email👤
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							

👤You do not have to give your full name if you don't want to (first name only will do). Also there is no need to write your address if you don't want to – general area will do. Only give us your email if you are comfortable to do so. Please be assured that all feedback will be kept anonymous and the information you give us is confidential.

## Appendix 2

### Data Protection Issues

Parental participation exercises may include the collection of data about a person (for example the demographic information in *Parents' Satisfaction with Services Questionnaire*). It is important that parents are aware of the purpose of data collection and that the rules governing data protection are applied where applicable. Below please find a brief summary of some of the issues relevant to the collection, analyses and storage of data.

### The Eight Rules of Data Protection

You must...

1. Obtain and process information fairly
2. Keep it only for one or more specified, explicit and lawful purposes
3. Use and disclose it only in ways compatible with these purposes
4. Keep it safe and secure
5. Keep it accurate, complete and up-to-date
6. Ensure that it is adequate, relevant and not excessive
7. Retain it for no longer than is necessary for the purpose or purposes
8. Give a copy of his / her personal data to an individual, on request

### Basic Data Protection Checklist

- Are the individuals whose data you collect aware of your identity?
- Have you told the data subject what use you make of his / her data?
- Are the disclosures you make of that data legitimate ones?
- Do you have appropriate security measures in place both internally and externally to ensure all access to data is appropriate?
- Do you have appropriate procedures in place to ensure that each data item is kept up-to-date?
- Do you have a defined policy on retention periods for all items of personal data?
- Do you have a data protection policy in place?
- Do you have procedures for handling access requests from individuals?
- Are you clear on whether or not you should be registered?
- Are your staff appropriately trained in data protection?
- Do you regularly review and audit the data which you hold and the manner in which they are processed?

Further information is available from the Office of the Data Protection Website ([www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie)) or you can contact the Office directly by email or by phone. Brochures and leaflets relating to the Acts are also available free of charge, on request from:

The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner  
 Canal House  
 Station Road  
 Portarlinton  
 Co. Laois

## Appendix 3

### Children and Young People Services Committees Parenting Support Sub-Committee

#### *Terms of Reference (Example)*

##### **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the Parenting Support Sub-committee is to assist in planning, operational and quality issues relating to supporting Parenting and to promote the implementation of the Parenting Support Strategy. Objectives for this work include:

- Promotion of the Parenting Support Strategy and its Action Plan
- Support the monitoring of Needs Analysis and Commissioning relating to the Parenting Support Strategy
- Promotion of the 50 key messages including the Parenting24seven campaign
- Support the Parental Participation Project
- Support training
- Provide support around the implementation of an evaluation framework

##### **Membership**

The Parenting Support Sub-committee will have a maximum membership of [state number] made up of parents from the relevant geographic areas and from as many Interest Groups as possible.

##### **Guiding principles**

The work of the PSSC will be guided by the principles laid out in the Parenting Support Strategy and the Parental Participation Toolkit.

##### **Operational Issues**

Chairperson: A chairperson will be appointed prior to the setting up of the committee and will hold this position for one year. Thereafter, an annual chair will be appointed by the committee members based on volunteered nominations.

Minutes of Meetings: Minutes of meetings will be recorded by somebody other than the chair – possibly a clerical assistant if funding permits.

Frequency of meetings: When the committee is up and running there will be [insert number] (for example, three to four meetings annually or approx. one meeting per quarter). However, initially (for example, in first 6 months) meetings will be held more frequently to facilitate start-up - every [insert number] weeks.

Meetings Venue: Meetings will be held in the [name venue].

##### **Working Groups**

Working groups may be established to work on specific projects under the remit of the Parenting Support Sub-committee. Membership of working groups will be voluntary.

## Appendix 4

### Parent Satisfaction with Services Questionnaire (Example A)

We would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to complete the following questionnaire. It will greatly help us to plan and deliver child and family services in our area.

1. Were you clear about the purpose of the visit / meeting?

Yes ☐

Not sure ☐

No ☐

If you answered not sure / no

What other information do you need to clarify the purpose of the visit / meeting?

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2. Did you have the opportunity to express all your concerns during the visit / meeting?

Yes ☐

Not sure ☐

No ☐

If you answered not sure / no

What other concerns do you have about your family's wellbeing / welfare?

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3. Are you satisfied with the actions that have been proposed?

Yes ☐

Not sure ☐

No ☐

If you answered not sure / no

What other actions would you like to be taken?

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4. Have you any other comments that you would like to make?

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Many thanks for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Parent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Practitioner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Visit: \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent Satisfaction with Services Questionnaire (Example B)**

We would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to complete the following questionnaire. It will help us to plan and deliver Parenting Support services in the [name] area.

**Q1.** What type of parenting support services do you use and how often do you use them?

	More than Once a Week	Once a Week	More Than Once a Month but Less Than Once a Week	Once a Month	More than Once a Year but Less Than Once a Month	Once a Year
Parent & Toddler Group						
Home Based Support: PHN						
Home Based Support Family Visitor / Support Worker						
One on One Parenting Support - Centre Based						
Group Parenting Programme - School Based						
Family Resource Centre / Drop in Centre						
Specialised Services						
Other: Please Describe						

**Q2:** What type of parenting support services would you like to use and how often would you use them?

	More than Once a Week	Once a Week	More Than Once a Month but Less Than Once a Week	Once a Month	More than Once a Year but Less Than Once a Month	Once a Year
Parent & Toddler Group						
Home Based Support: PHN						
Home Based Support Family Visitor / Support Worker						
One on One Parenting Support - Centre Based						
Group Parenting Programme - School Based						
Family Resource Centre / Drop in Centre						
Specialised Services						
Other: Please Describe						

**Q3.** Are there any reasons why you cannot access Parenting Support Services in your community? *Please tick all boxes that apply to you.*

There aren't any		
I have transportation difficulty		Please go to Q4
I need childcare support		Please go to Q5
The times are not suitable		
They are too far away		
They are not suitable		Please go to Q6
They are not affordable		
Other (please specify)		

**Q4.** What type of transport would help you to access Parenting Support?

Taxi ☐

Bus ☐

Other: please describe \_\_\_\_\_

**Q5.** What type of childcare would you need to access Parenting Support? *Please tick one box.*

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Full Day
Childcare				
Specialist Childcare: Please Specify _____				
Other: Please Describe _____				

**Q6.** Why are the Parenting Support services on offer not suitable for your family?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Q7.** How would you describe your experience of finding Parenting Support services in your community? *Please tick one box only.*

Very Easy	Quite Easy	Okay	Quite Difficult	Very Difficult

Why do you say that?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Q8.** How satisfied are you with the following aspects of Parenting Support services? *(Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is "Strongly agree" and 5 is "strongly disagree").*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
People working in the service are friendly and interested						

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
We feel included and supported						
My views are looked for and acted on						
Staff have offered positive feedback and encouragement						
Staff have remembered personal details about me and my family when they are speaking to us						
There is a caring atmosphere						
Staff have given information that is consistent from person to person						
Staff have given information about other supports that are available in the community						
We have been provided with opportunities to meet with other parents						

**In this section of the questionnaire, we would like to get a few more details about you and your family.**

**Q9.** Are you Female ☐ Male ☐  
Please tick appropriate box.

**Q10.** What age are you: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q11.** Could you please indicate your partnership status? Please tick one box.

Single	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cohabiting	<input type="checkbox"/>
Married	<input type="checkbox"/>	Separated or Divorced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Re-married	<input type="checkbox"/>	Widowed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Civil Partner	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

Are you a lone parent? Yes ☐ No ☐

Are you a step parent? Yes ☐ No ☐

**Q12.** Could you please indicate your Nationality? \_\_\_\_\_

**Q13.** Education. Please tick appropriate box.

Secondary School	<input type="checkbox"/>	Leaving Certificate (or equivalent)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Junior Certificate (or equivalent)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Third Level Degree / PLC	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q14.** How many children have you? \_\_\_\_\_

**Q15.** Could you please fill in the number of children at each age?

Ages	U-1	1 Yr Old	2 Yr Old	3 Yr Old	4 Yr Old	5 Yr Old	6 Yr Old	7 Yr Old	8 Yr Old
No. of Children									

Ages	9 Yr Old	10 Yr Old	11 Yr Old	12 Yr Old	13 Yr Old	14 Yr Old	15 Yr Old	16 Yr Old	17+ Yr Old
No. of Children									

**Q16.** What is your occupation?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Q17.** Would you be happy to be contacted again to take part in other research that may be undertaken about the Parenting Support services in your area? Please tick one box only

Yes ☐ No ☐

**Q18.** If you would be happy to participate in further research, please provide your contact details below

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.**  
**Please complete and return this questionnaire in the envelope provided by [name].**



## Appendix 5

*Example of a survey that can be administered using the free version of Survey Monkey.*

### Local Area Parenting Support Survey

[Exit the Survey](#)

Being a parent is an exciting and important job that can be challenging at times. Tusla is committed to working with parents so that children and young people will be safe and reach their full potential.

We would like your help to plan and deliver Parenting Supports in the [name] area. We would also like to find out if the existing Parenting Supports in your area are accessible and friendly. To help us find out this information, please fill out the survey which should only take a few minutes to complete.

If you would like to hear more about this work please include your name and contact details at the end of the survey.

MANY THANKS!

*Parenting Support is about sharing information and practical skills on the day-to-day work of caring for children so that they are healthy, happy, enjoy learning and are making friends.*

[Next](#)

### Local Area Parenting Support Survey

1. What types of Parenting Support do you use?

	Once a Week	Once a Month	Once a Year	Never
Parent & Toddler Group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Home Visits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group Parenting Programme	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School-based Parenting Programme	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (Please specify)	<input type="text"/>			

2. What other types of Parenting Support would you like to attend if they were available?

3. Would you like to get more involved in Parenting Supports in your community?

☐ Yes

☐ No

4. If you would like to get more involved in Parenting Supports, how would you like to participate?

- ☐ Get involved in a particular Parenting Support service
- ☐ Be part of a Focus Group
- ☐ Be a member of a local Parenting Forum
- ☐ Be a member of a national Parenting Forum
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

5. If you would like to be part of a Focus Group, what would interest you?

- ☐ Planning Parenting Support Services
- ☐ Evaluating Parenting Support Services
- ☐ Parent & Toddler Groups
- ☐ Parenting Education
- ☐ Home Visits
- ☐ Early Years Services
- ☐ Group Parenting Programmes
- ☐ Teen Parents
- ☐ Lone Parenting
- ☐ Parents living with a disability or illness
- ☐ Parenting a child with a disability or illness
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

6. You do not have to give your full name if you don't want to (first name only will do). Also there is no need to write your address if you don't want to – the general area that you live in will do. Only give us your email if you are comfortable to do so. Please be assured that all feedback will be kept anonymous and the information you give us is confidential.

First Name:	
Surname / Family Name:	
Address 1:	
Address 2:	
Address (General Area):	
City / Town:	
Email Address:	
Phone Number:	

Prev

Done

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**TúsLA**

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Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency



An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency