

Parenting Support Strategy 2022-2027





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List of abbreviations

DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
HSE	Health Service Executive
PPFS	Prevention, Partnership and Family Support
SLA	Service Level Agreement
CYPSC	Children and Young Peoples Services Committee
CFSN	Child and Family Support Network
PSC	Parenting Support Champion
WLD	Workforce Learning and Development

Tusla's VISION for Parenting Support Parenting support will be available for all parents, when and where it is needed helping them with any challenges they face.

To provide the necessary resources and supports to achieve **better outcomes** for children, young people and their families.

Tusla's MISSION

for Parenting Support

Tusla's AIM
for Parenting Support

To support parents by building on their strengths, giving them choice, and helping them to identify solutions that will work for them.

Foreword

Supporting parents and those in a parenting role is an integral part of how Tusla delivers services to children, families and communities. In 2013, Tusla's first Parenting Support Strategy, Investing in Families: Supporting Parents to Improve Outcomes for Children, was launched. Today, this new Parenting Support Strategy is underpinned by a programme of work on parenting support that has been undertaken since the launch of the first strategy in 2013, including the development of the Parenting24seven website, the Parenting Support Champions initiative, and the Parental Participation Toolkit and Seed Funding.

A key focus of this new strategy is to ensure its alignment with the National Model of Parenting Support Services under the Department of Children Equality Diversity Integration and Youth. This recently launched model aims to develop a more coherent and strategic approach to the development and delivery of parenting support services so that all parents can access the support they need when they need it.

The Parenting Support Strategy 2022-2027 is built upon a foundation of research, commissioned by Tusla, and undertaken by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, to guide its development. Throughout the development of the strategy, the voices of stakeholders have been heard – over 650 Tusla staff, 200 stakeholders from community and voluntary services, and over 30 parents have contributed their experiences and have told us what they need from us in the future to support them

Under this new strategy, the Agency is committing to a programme of work that includes training and quality assurance to further embed parenting support and parenting participatory practice within the organisation. It will require from individual practitioners a commitment to personal development, reflective practice, openness to learning and growth, and dialogue with colleagues and service users.

Supports for children, parents and families are only possible through collaborative interagency working to deliver services that meet their ongoing needs. The focus of this strategy is to support, nurture and celebrate the Agency's commitment, and that of our partners, to supporting parents and those in a parenting role.

Bernard Gloster

CEO

About this document

This document presents the 5-year Parenting Support Strategy (2022–2027) for Tusla and its funded services. Throughout this document, we will call this strategy the 'Parenting Strategy'.

We recognise that supporting all parents strengthens families. This support improves outcomes for children and promotes children's rights. This support is at the heart of our work.

To us, a 'parent' is any person with a parenting role. This can be any person who is responsible for the care of a child under the age of 18. The term 'parent' includes the following:

- · biological parents;
- adoptive parents;
- foster parents/carers;
- · stepparents;
- kinship carers and
- · guardians.

In this Parenting Strategy we also talk about 'practitioners'. These are people who work with parents as part of their role. A practitioner might be, for example, a person or people in services working with parents offering parenting programmes, and people who work with parents on a one-to-basis to provide parenting support. Both the National Model of Parenting Support Services and this Strategy define parenting supports as:

The provision of information and services aimed at strengthening parents' knowledge, confidence and skills to help achieve the best outcomes for children and families.

Our responsibilities

Under the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013, our responsibilities are:

- to support the development, welfare and protection of children;
- to support and encourage families to function successfully; and
- to maintain and develop support services for families, including support services in local communities.

Our response

We have developed response pathways based on families' levels of need. These response pathways make sure that families receive support as early as possible. Our goal is to **stop any difficulties from getting worse.**

Our focus

- to build on families' strengths by using their own family connections, their communities, as well as the professional supports and services we offer;
- to work with other supportive services, voluntary partners and agencies in the community to ensure children and families receive an integrated response (Tusla Corporate Plan 2021–2023, p.6); and
- to take a whole-family approach to meeting the different needs of families, particularly those families experiencing distress and social exclusion.



Decision-making and families

We believe that parents, children, young people and communities should be actively involved in the decisions that affect their lives. For this reason, we listened to parents' views to inform the goals of this Parenting Strategy. We also consulted our staff and organisations that receive funding from us. Based on these views, we identified six priority themes. You can see these priority areas in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1 - Priority Themes of this Strategy



Parts of this Parenting Strategy document

Part 1: Background and context

We outline the background and the policy context for our Parenting Strategy.

Part 2: Research behind our Parenting Strategy

We describe how we developed this Parenting Strategy. We discuss the consultations with parents and practitioners involved in the delivery of parenting support services, as well as the study of strategies and policies from other countries and their effectiveness.

Part 3: Our Parenting Strategy (Goals and strategic actions)

We outline our goals (6) and strategic actions, which are based on the themes for action identified in the research.

Part 4: How we plan to implement our Strategy

We explain how this Parenting Strategy will act as a framework to help us develop yearly plans (implementation plans) to help us achieve our goals.

Part 1: Background and context

Our previous strategy

Our last parenting strategy was called 'Investing in Families: Supporting Parents to Improve Outcomes for Children (2013)'. This set out our strategic direction to support parents in improving outcomes for children and young people (Gillen et al., 2013, p. 1). It also stressed the need to make parenting supports as standard. The goal was to do this through continuing and steady support for families, involving targeted and specialist services as a particular family needed. The need for parents to take part in developing these supports was emphasised.

The strategy sought to have a positive impact on family wellbeing and children's outcomes. It proposed that we look carefully at local needs in each Tusla area. It also stated the need to ensure services are in place to support parents and parenting practice, as well as to ensure that practitioners can spend more time with families in the community on promotional and preventative work. This would include the sharing of key messages and parenting information.

Its successes

Parenting support and parental participation have continued to grow and strengthen as a core part of Tusla's business. This was achieved through the Prevention Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) service – a service that creates a culture of parenting support and parental participation throughout the organisation. This was central to the development of our first Parenting Strategy. Since then, we have developed other initiatives, including:

- The Parenting Support Champions Project;
- The National Parenting Commissioning Framework;
- Parental Participation Seed Funded Projects;
- · Parent Learning Initiatives; and
- The Parenting24Seven website.

Tusla has adopted the Lundy model to underpin its approach and training in participatory practice for both parents, children and young people:



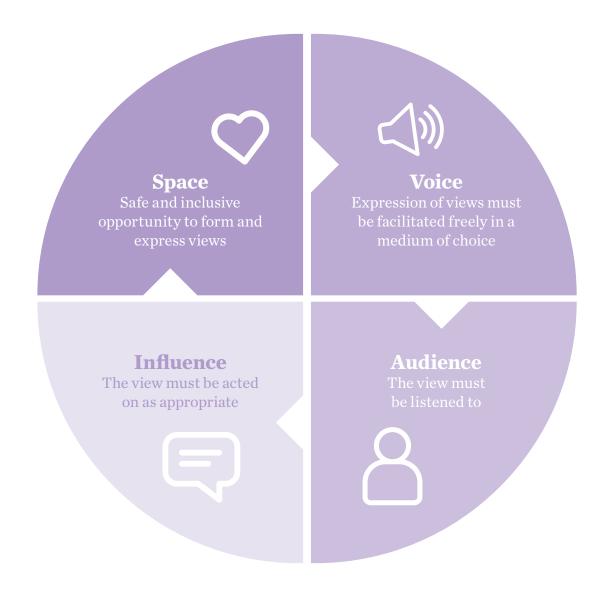


Figure 2 - Lundy Model of Participation

Links with the DCED14

(Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)

Shared understanding and policy

Tusla's work in the area of parenting support is closely connected to the Department of Children Equality Diversity Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY) who are responsible for crossgovernment coordination of policy direction relating to parenting support. Within this context, Tusla is a key provider and funder of parenting support services. Individual policy frameworks, strategies and action plans under the remit of the DCEDIY that impact on parenting supports include:

- Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020, and its successor framework to be finalised in 2022;
- High Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families 2015;
- First 5: A whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2018;
- Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025;
- Supporting Parents: A National Model for Parenting Support Services, 2022; and
- The Programme for Government: Our Shared Future (2020).

All of these policy documents commit to working in partnership with parents and to advocate on their families' behalf. Ireland's Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) have been established in every county in Ireland to help coordinate supports for parents, children and young people. Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs) also have a role to play in local communities to improve access to information and support services and work collaboratively to meet particular family needs through the Meitheal process (Ireland's national early intervention practice model). These committees and networks are made up of local statutory providers and local voluntary/community child and family services, as well as Tusla staff. They are all responsible for improving provision and delivery of key services.

In addition, the DCEDIY has established a Parenting Support Policy Unit which has developed a national model of parenting support. The model takes a whole-of-Government approach to improving support for the important task of parenting and helping parents to feel more confident, informed and able. The model encourages and is built on the principles of positive parenting.





This model addresses parenting supports services from pre-birth up to adulthood. It describes the provision of parenting supports in Ireland, as well as the respective roles and responsibilities of publicly funded organisations. The model also sets out actions to improve parenting supports by increasing awareness, improving access and promoting inclusive, high-quality and needs-led parenting supports. Both the national parenting support model and Tusla's parenting support strategy are committed to improving support services for parents and working collaboratively with all those who provide support to parents.

As outlined earlier in this document both the National Model of Parenting Support and this Strategy define parenting supports as:

The provision of information and services aimed at strengthening parents' knowledge, confidence and skills to help achieve the best outcomes for children and families.

Parenting Supports are provided across a continuum of need ranging from services provided to all parents, to those provided to very few parents. Using the Hardiker (1991) framework the DCEDIY parenting support model has categorised these supports as promoting positive parenting, early intervention, intensive supports, and long term supports (2022, P. 19). Figure 3 below describes the types of parenting supports provided under these categories.



Parenting supports - from level 1 to 4

Parenting supports are provided across all levels of need, ranging from services provided to all parents, to those provided to very few parents. Using the Hardiker (1991) framework, the DCEDIY parenting support model has categorised these supports as (2022, P. 19):

- promoting positive parenting;
- early intervention;
- intensive supports; and
- long-term supports (see Level 4 below).

Parenting supports provided under these categories are provided at 4 levels:

Level 1: Universal services and information for all parents, including parenting talks, online information, helplines, drop-in advice clinics and eLearning parenting conferences.

Level 2: Services for parents with specific one-off/ongoing support needs, including home-visiting programmes, parenting programmes, educational support services.

Level 3: Services for parents with complex support needs, including Meitheal, therapeutic services and safety plans.

Level 4: Services for parents requiring longterm intensive supports, including alternative care, therapeutic services, care plans.

Figure 3 below shows the different levels of parenting supports and services provided:

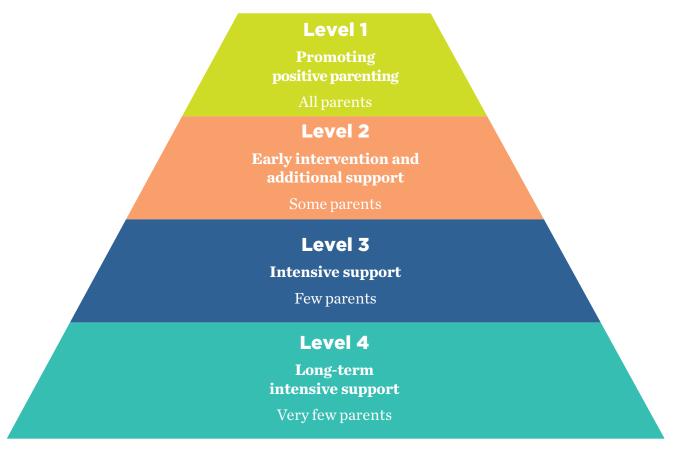


Figure 3 - Parenting Support and Services provided

Tusla's Parenting Strategy 2022-2027 - sponsor and legal context

The development of this Parenting Strategy was supported by a National Parenting Support Strategy Working Group, which was sponsored by Tusla's National Director for Integration and Services. This working group was made up of Tusla staff who are involved in parenting support and service delivery. This Parenting Strategy is also informed and supported by:

- The Child Care Act 1991
- The Child and Family Agency Act 2013
- Tusla Corporate Plan 2021–2023
- Tusla-Child and Family Agency Parenting Support and Parental Participation Research Report (Devaney, Crosse, O'Connor and Jackson 2022).
- Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services (DCEDIY, 2022)





Part 2: Research behind this Strategy

Tusla-Child and Family Agency Parenting Support and Parental Participation Research Report (Devaney et al., 2022)

The engagement and participation of parents is increasingly acknowledged as an important issue for policy makers and service providers, both in recognising parents as having a right to participate in decisions affecting their families (Healy et al., 2011), and in contributing to better outcomes for children (Darlington et al., 2010). Consultation with service users and their involvement in planning services have also been seen as an effective means of reducing barriers to engagement and advancing social inclusion (Katz et al., 2007; Connolly and Devaney, 2016). To this end, researchers at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUIG, at the request of Tusla reviewed the current Parenting Support Strategy and parenting support practices in order to inform and support the development of this Strategy. Researchers engaged and consulted with a wide range of stakeholders in order to better understand the experiences of parents and those involved in the delivery of parenting support services.

This included speaking one-on-one with parents (n=33) from various parts of the country who had experience of different Tusla services. This resulted in very specific detailed insights into the challenges that parents face as well as concrete suggestions on what is needed going forward to support families in Ireland. As well as speaking with parents, an online survey was conducted with Tusla staff (n=653) and staff in Tusla funded organisations (n=205). In addition, a documentary analysis on National and International Parenting Support Policies and Strategies in Ireland, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Malta, Australia, New Zealand and Canada was conducted. The analysis identified key features of policies and strategies in Ireland and in other countries, considering their strengths and weaknesses to inform Tusla's Parenting Support Strategy.

A number of key themes emerged from this research, which have informed the goals of the strategy. These themes and goals were subsequently presented at further consultations with parents, Tusla staff, and those employed in Tusla funded organisations in order to identify possible actions to achieve each goal.



The research highlighted that parenting support does make a difference to those who receive it.

Parents described positive experiences of receiving parenting support services and emphasised the value of peer support. Parents felt they were listened to, involved in decision-making and they spoke positively about their support practitioners.

Practitioners reported how their approach to supporting parents had changed over the last 5 years, concentrating more on parental engagement, empowerment, decision-making and working in partnership with parents.





When I linked in with services I just think that was the best thing ever. At the time it happened I said no, no, no. But it was the best thing ever. (P. 61)



Six themes from the research

1) A range of specialised supports are required to meet the needs of diverse family forms and respond to specific issues.

Parents and practitioners stressed a need for a broader range of supports to meet the needs of particular family forms and contexts. The following were mentioned as some examples of different family forms:

- · lone parents;
- Traveller parents;
- parenting in direct provision;
- parents with disabilities;
- homeless parents;
- kinship carers;
- fathers; and
- bilingual families.
- Parents and practitioners identified the need for specific, targeted supports to respond to particular family needs.
- Other jurisdictions emphasised how extra guidance on how best to respond to specific needs were important resources to have available.

- 2) Increased awareness is needed among the public and practitioners on our role in parenting and family support.
- Parents expressed concern about the lack of knowledge of support available and their fear of being involved with our services.
- Practitioners are aware of and use the resources available to support their work with families.
- The documentary analysis highlighted how providing supports that are available to everyone lowered stigma and increased the use of support services.
- 3) More information for staff, organisations and parents delivered through different means is needed.
- Parents, practitioners and the documentary analysis highlighted a need for information that would be accessible and available to all through community-based services.

4) Agencies and government departments must work together at local and national level.

- Parents and practitioners stressed the need for all agencies involved in supporting parents to work together.
- Many of the parenting strategies reviewed stressed a common vision for agencies and government departments. The strategies involved all departments working to the same goal to provide 'joined-up' support.

5) Ongoing and refresher training for practitioners is needed to ensure best practice in meeting the needs of parents.

- Parents and practitioners stressed the need for ongoing supports and training on diverse family forms and those with particular challenges.
- Other jurisdictions emphasised the need for all staff working in children and family services to have a common and consistent approach to training and skill development.

6) Evidence

- Practitioners and the documentary analysis highlighted the importance of support services and programmes being evidence based.
- A range of research methodologies and evaluation tools are required to build an evidence base on parenting supports and ensure evidence informed practice.





Part 3: The Strategy (goals and strategic actions)

This section outlines our six goals and the strategic actions for each. Each of these goals is based on one of the six themes identified in the research behind this Strategy.

At-a-glance view of our goals

- 1. We will provide a range of tailored parenting support services for families when and where needed.
- 2. We will make sure the public is aware of parenting supports Tulsa and its funded agencies provide and and how people can access them
- 3. We will make sure all parents and practitioners know what parenting supports and services are available locally and nationally, and how to find or access them.
- 4. We will make sure that all relevant agencies and sectors work together with parents to consult, plan and deliver parenting services and supports.
- **5.** We will make sure practitioners and services are supported to continuously learn and develop knowledge and skills. This will allow them to deliver high-quality services to meet the needs of diverse family forms and families with particular challenges.
- 6. We will make sure we use the best evidence, information, and feedback available to improve services provided in partnership with children, parents and communities so that they can benefit from services.

Let's look at each goal and its strategic actions. Each goal is linked to one of the six themes that emerged from the research to develop this plan.

Theme 1: Specialised and tailored supports

Theme 1	Wide ranging and tailored supports to meet the needs of diverse family forms and families with particular challenges and issues
Goal	To provide a range of tailored parenting support services for families when and where needed.

In order to meet this goal, Tusla will continue to develop the strategic actions both nationally and locally as well as future activities, while being mindful of current activities in this area.

Table 1. Theme 1 Strategic Actions

Strategic Actions	National Structures and Frameworks	Leads & Key Partners
Continue to develop collaborative working	Tusla National Parenting WG	Tusla
between National Parenting Support Leads in Tusla and	Sláintecare Healthy Communities	HSE
the HSE.	Community Families: oversight and support group	Parenting Unit, DCEDIY
	Supporting Parents National Steering Group	
Promote cohesive planning and delivery of parenting	CYPSC	Tusla
support services across areas and agencies.	CFSNs	Funded partners
	Tusla Area Commissioning Plans	
Review all types of Parenting	Tusla Area Commissioning Plans	Tusla
Support services currently		
available and identify gaps	Tusla National Parenting	Funded partners
in provision for particular	Commissioning Framework	
needs through Tusla Area		Area managers,
Commission Plans.		PPFS managers,
Implement Tusla's National		Commissioning leads
Parenting Commissioning		
Framework in each area.		

Theme 2: Public and Practitioner Awareness

Theme 2	Public and Practitioner Awareness
Goal	For the public to be aware of parenting supports provided by Tusla and funded agencies and how to access them.

In order to meet this goal, Tusla will continue to develop the strategic actions both nationally and locally as well as future activities, while being mindful of current activities in this area.

I encourage a positive parenting approach with clients as outlined approach with clients as outlined in 50 Key Messages and direct parents to these websites so that they can inform themselves (FRC Practitioner)

I direct parents to the Parenting
24seven website for tips and
information. I also use it myself
to inform practice. The parent
champion representative on our team
will share information and resources
with us as well to use with families.
(Family Support Worker)

Do you know what, if it wasn't for my friends recommending all of this I wouldn't even know there was any support groups or anything or where to turn to. I didn't know myself about anything like that. (P. 61)

Table 2. Theme 2 Strategic Actions

Strategic Actions	National Structures and Frameworks	Leads & Key Partners
Increase visibility of national services	Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services Tusla National Parenting Working Group Tusla website	Tusla HSE Parenting Support Policy Unit, DCEDIY
Promote parenting supports to all parents (normalise & destigmatise parenting supports), Increase access to parenting support services	CFSNs Social Work Teams Parenting Hubs Funded partner agencies Supporting Parents National Steering Group	Tusla HSE Parenting Support Policy Unit, DCEDIY CYPSC members Funded partners
Increase awareness, enhance signposting of parenting support services (ensure parents know what support is available)	CFSNs Parenting Support Champions Project Parenting Hubs Supporting Parents National Steering Group	Tusla HSE Parenting Support Policy Unit, DCEDIY CYPSC members Funded partners

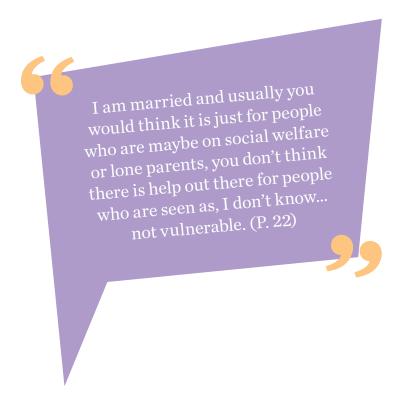
Theme 3: Information for Parents and Practitioners

Theme 3	Information for Parents and Practitioners
Goal	All parents and practitioners know what parenting supports and services are available locally and nationally, and how to signpost or access them.

I wonder should we provide more information – we focus mostly on engagement and relationship. Perhaps we should give out more information on the agency – procedures, complaints policy, etc. We work in a community setting and try to deliver services without too much formality but perhaps we need to formalise how parents are informed (Project London)

Table 3. Theme 3 Strategic Actions

Strategic Actions	National Structures and Frameworks	Leads & Key Partners
Ensure the availability of high quality, accessible	CYPSC	DCEDIY
information for all parents by providing effective	CFSNs	CYPSC
signposting to services	Parenting Hubs (in some areas)	Funded partners
Enhance the role of Child and Family Support Network	CFSNs	Senior CFSN Coordinators
co-ordinators in the		CFSN Coordinators
and partnership approach to		Funded partners
parenting support services in local areas.		



Theme 4: Integration and Collaboration

Theme 4	Integration and Collaboration
Goal	All relevant agencies and sectors work together with parents to consult, plan and deliver parenting services and supports.

It would be helpful to communicate with healthcare professionals at frontline level (like myself as a Public Health Nurse) to educate & enlighten us in the level of support that is available via Tusla so that we can share this information when

I think get the schools on side, get the schools to communicate it ... I just feel that that is not targeted, that that is something that has gone to everybody in the school. (P. 18)

Table 4. Theme 4 Strategic Actions

Strategic Actions	National Structures and Frameworks	Leads & Key Partners
Support existing national, regional and area structures to enable collaboration with	Tusla National Parenting Working Group	Parenting Support Policy Unit, DCEDIY
regard to parenting services	CYPSC parenting sub group	Funded partners
Parental participation is encouraged and supported	CYPSC	Parents
at local and national level by adopting a collaborative	CFSNs	Funded partners
approach in the provision of services, seeking to build on parents' existing knowledge	Parenting Fora Working group	
and expertise		
Provide parental participation training for	WLD	
practitioners	Parenting Support Champions Project	
	Tusla Parental Participation toolkit	



Theme 5: Training

Theme 5	Training
Goal	To support practitioners and services to continuously learn and develop knowledge and skills to deliver high quality services to meet the needs of diverse family forms and families with particular challenges.

In order to meet this goal, Tusla will continue to develop the strategic actions both nationally and locally as well as future activities, while being mindful of current activities in this area.



Table 5. Theme 5 Strategic Actions

Strategic Actions	National Structures and Frameworks	Leads & Key Partners
Provide high quality services delivered by practitioners with appropriate training and skills	Service provision through SLA agreements WLD	Tusla staff Practitioners from funded agencies
Establish a greater understanding of the support, needs and preferences of specific groups	CYPSC CFSNs Area commissioning plans	Parents Practitioners from Tusla & funded agencies
Make staff aware of available training	WLD Parenting Support Champions Project	PSCs WLD
Continue to support and develop learning communities	Parenting Support Champions Project CYPSC WLD	Tusla staff Practitioners from funded agencies Parents

Theme 6: Evidence on effective practice

Theme 6	Evidence on effective practice
Goal	Use the best evidence, information, and feedback available to improve services provided in partnership with children, parents and communities so that they can benefit from services.

In order to meet this goal, Tusla will continue to develop the strategic actions both nationally and locally as well as future activities, while being mindful of current activities in this area.

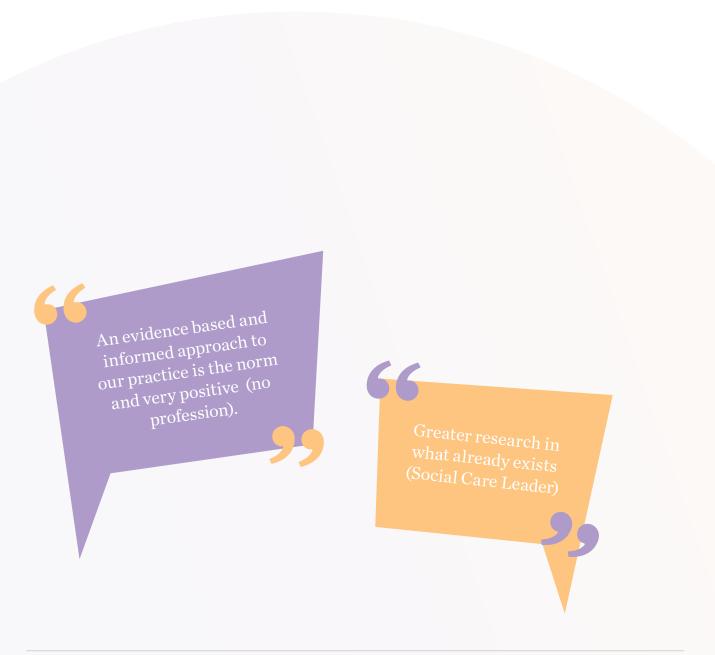


Table 6. Theme 6 Strategic Actions

Strategic Actions	National Structures and Frameworks	Leads & Key Partners
Use of Parental Participation Guidance Documents and practice tools for engaging	Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services	Parenting Support Policy Unit, DCEDIY
parents	Parenting24seven	Funded partners
	Parental participation toolkit	Tusla staff
	Parenting Support Champions Project	PSCs
	E-learning modules	
Actively promote participation of service users in the design, planning, delivery and evaluation of Tusla services.	Tusla Parenting Fora Working Group	Parents Tusla staff across the continuum
Develop high quality data collection, monitoring and evaluation to build an evidence base on parenting supports and ensure evidence informed practice.	Family Support Metrics Tusla outcomes framework Tusla Research department	Research colleagues

Part 4: Implementation plans (the how of achieving our strategy)

Use this Strategy to develop yearly implementation plans for each of the years 2022 to 2027 inclusive.

This national Parenting Strategy will act as a framework to help us develop a plan to implement this Strategy. We will use the themes, goals and strategic actions in this document to create a detailed implementation plan for each of the five years. These yearly plans will give a national overview of the actions that will be supported and implemented at an area level.

Each implementation plan

The implementation plan will list, where evident:

- timeframes
- key partners
- responsible leads
- key indicators (signs of success towards achieving our goals).

Use key indicators (milestones) to monitor progress towards goals

We will identify key indicators in implementation plans. This will allow for ongoing monitoring and reporting of progress against yearly and longer goals.

Good governance to help ensure success

The Tusla National Parenting Working Group, which is chaired by the Tusla Parenting Lead, will provide governance for the Strategy. This group comprises Tusla colleagues, together with partners from the community, the voluntary sector and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). This working group will report through the Tusla Parenting Lead to the Tusla National Operations group.



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the development of this Parenting Support strategy. Special thanks to the parents who gave their time and participated in semi structured interviews and focus groups and to the Tusla staff and community partners who participated in the consultations and completed the surveys.

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Caroline Jordan, National Policy Manager Family Support and Social Inclusion

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Maria Tobin, National Manager, TESS

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Steven Peet, Quality Assurance & Monitoring Officer

Clare Murphy, Regional Chief Officer South East/South West

Valerie Everard, DSGBV Services

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Notes

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