

# Planning and Delivering Parenting Groups

## Good Practice Guide

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*Working Together for Children and Young People in Rhondda Cynon Taf*  
*Gweithio gyda'n gilydd er lles Plant a Phobl Ifainc Rhondda Cynon Taf*



FFRAMWAITH



STRONG HERITAGE | STRONG FUTURE  
**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**  
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# 1. Introduction

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This document is intended to provide guidance for professionals (facilitators) involved in planning and delivering parenting groups in Rhondda Cynon Taf and to assist us as we work towards greater consistency and quality in the delivery of support to parents.

The guide is designed to offer practical ideas drawn from experience that might help facilitators when planning and delivering programmes to both closed and open groups. Underpinning this guide is an understanding that support groups are intended to empower and enable parents to achieve positive outcomes for themselves and their children.

Parenting is a very difficult job and the perfect parent simply does not exist. The aim of any parenting group or programme, should be to enable parents to be “good enough” to promote and safeguard the well being of their children.

The objectives of a parenting programme are to build on existing strengths. Every parent will have strengths and positive elements to their parenting and it is up to facilitators to draw and build on these while offering suggestions and strategies to enable parents to become more confident in their parenting.

This guidance has been produced to aid facilitators to meet the complex needs of often very diverse and vulnerable families as well as those families requiring short-term advice and support. In this guide it is understood this includes mothers, fathers, grandparents or any adult who is involved in the care of the child.



## 2. Getting Started

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### 2.1 Preparation

Preparation and planning pays dividends and is key to the success of any group. Get your preparation right and the rest should fall into place more easily. It might seem like a lot of work but it is well worth spending time at this stage to ensure best results.

Often the smallest thing can make the difference between a parent attending or not.

The following suggested preparation is recommended to help promote positive outcomes for parents and their children.

First things first!

### What Type of Support Group?

#### Closed group

A closed group would be appropriate when a parenting programme is being delivered. A group needs to be closed because parents are sharing/disclosing personal information, which at times may be very difficult for them – it's vital to enable them to feel at ease. After the first session, the group should become a closed group and no new participants should join after the first week.

Or

#### Open group

An open group enables any parent to attend at any point in the group's progress. Open groups will probably be arranged as an informal coffee morning, workshop and/or drop-in session. This might include a constant facilitator for the duration of the group with other facilitators attending as and when appropriate.

Facilitators would be responsible for providing a welcoming and encouraging environment for parents to be more likely to make repeat visits. Encouraging equality in the group and developing strengths by consulting with parents as to how the group is organised can be a positive and empowering experience. Offering information on services and community activities or inviting guest speakers can meet the needs of the group.

## Choosing Your Facilitators

“To be really effective, support to families needs to operate in a number of dimensions. The study adds to the substantial body of evidence indicating the need for comprehensive, ‘joined –up’ services, delivered by partnerships between agencies and across sectors. Single agencies working alone are unlikely to be able to make much impact on the lives of families with such complex and interlocking needs.”

*(Ghate and Hazel 2002)*

Working in partnership with other services to facilitate a parenting group is desirable.

The optimum number of facilitators would be three, drawn from partnership agencies. This brings a good skill mix, which addresses the wider needs of the group, providing appropriate support for parents with complex needs.



Parents are sharing/disclosing personal information, which at times may be very difficult for them and their feeling at ease is vital in enabling a comfortable and secure environment.

Therefore facilitators should have the capacity to be actively involved in all processes necessary to set up and run the group. It is important for all facilitators to commit to all the dates and times of the group’s meetings and to be present during the entire sessions, thus ensuring continuity trust and security throughout the programme.

Are the facilitators experienced and trained to deliver to the proposed age group and programme? A sound knowledge of 'age appropriate development' is important. What roles will each facilitator take and what are their strengths and experiences? Facilitators are also role modelling the commitment to the group we expect of parents. When group members change so do the group dynamics; this can have an impact on the trust that has been built between all group members.

This arrangement also offers a confidence building and learning opportunity for those professionals who would like to develop existing or learn new skills, enhanced with effective peer support.

Contrasting skills can be found within colleagues, for example:

- Health Visitor
- Community Worker / Project Worker
- Education Social Worker / Project Worker / Education Welfare Officer
- Social Worker

## 2.4 Which Parenting Programme?

Looking for an age appropriate programme is the key here.

Therefore, is the programme appropriate to the ages of the children

involved? Different ages and stages require different approaches and

skills. Any support offered should reflect the needs of the group, being

clear about what you as facilitator are able to offer and what you can't.

Therefore be guided by the assessments and desired outcomes for the

parents as identified by them and their referrer.

## 2.5 Publicity/Recruitment

When recruiting for a parenting group decide on who you are going to offer

this to. Offering the opportunity universally and then targeting parents who

are experiencing identified difficulties is recommended. This prevents

parents from feeling singled out and offers a greater chance of engagement.

This can be done even when you have specific criteria to meet. It's

appropriate to offer information in the form of leaflets or flyers, always

remembering individual abilities, differing learning styles and special

needs.

## 2.6 The Referral Process

Firstly, set a firm deadline for submission of all referrals. This will allow you sufficient time to make home visits and complete the group preparation.

Decide if the group is open for referrals from other services. If so, they need to know the content of the programme being used and the deadline for submitting referrals. Facilitators should always discuss the proposed outcomes of the group and the content necessary to meet the parents' needs with the referrer and receive a full assessment. This will help determine if the referral is appropriate to what you are offering.



Decide if it is the responsibility of the referrer to support the parent to attend the group by home visiting and arranging childcare and transport or will you take on this role?

All facilitators should set aside time to meet and consider all referrals, the following questions should be discussed:

- Is this referral appropriate for the programme offered and the skills of facilitator?
- Is the assessment information sufficient to identify parents to make up the group?
- Is the general referral information complete, for example, ages of children, home address and other services involved etc?
- Have the issues / difficulties changed since the date of the referral?
- Would it be more appropriate to address other issues that are presenting before the parent attends the group?
- Are the parents in the right place and is it the right time for their attendance at the group? If not what other services are available to signpost parents to?
- Are there any community or personal conflicts you are aware of that might hinder attendance?

- Are there any identified 'risk factors', such as staff safety issues?
- Do parents have holidays or other commitments that will prevent them from attending every session? If so it would be better to join a future group when they would be able to complete the programme.



The number of parents to recruit can be tricky there will always be parents who are unable to attend at the last minute, so unless absolutely certain of motivation and commitment recruit more rather than less. It is recommended that between four and twelve participants is a manageable number depending on the programme to be delivered and the severity of difficulty presenting.

The group should be of a manageable size for the facilitators. For the parents not so big as to hinder full participation and offer sufficient opportunity for each participant to have equal time to contribute.

It may be appropriate to have a waiting list for the next planned group or to signpost parents or referrers to other appropriate parenting groups by seeking advice from the Parent Support Coordinator.



## 2.7 What About The Venue

Creating an environment that feels safe and secure is vital to the success of groups. Finding the right venue is important. The venue should be acceptable to parents, and accessible. Is the room private? This is vital, it should be free from gangways or communal areas. Parents need to be confident that they cannot be overheard or seen by anyone outside the group or passing by. Make sure the door can be shut. It is often wise to advise the venue hosts that only facilitators and parents should have access to the room during the group sessions; this ensures continuing privacy and provides security for parents when discussing and disclosing sensitive issues.



It is never appropriate to invite observers into the group, as this compromises confidentiality and changes the dynamics, which can make parents insecure and prevent participation.

The room should be neither too big nor too small, be welcoming, comfortable, warm, ventilated and informal, also, you should ensure the room is accessible for disabled people.



Consider the seating arrangements. Create an informal environment by making an informal circle of chairs, preferably with a small coffee table in the centre of the circle which is also useful for placing water, tissues, pens. Facilitators distributing themselves equally around the circle, avoids a 'them and us' feeling. All of which can provide some security to parents who might be feeling very vulnerable.

Special needs of participants should be identified within the referral. This is not always the case and consideration should be given to individual participant's abilities and areas where additional support may be required. You should take into account the differing abilities and learning styles.

## 2.8 Refreshments

Good quality refreshments help parents to feel valued.

Refreshments should always reflect the RCT fair trade and healthy eating initiatives and always consider other dietary requirements.

Are refreshments available at the venue or will you need to provide your own? Will you be offering lunch or evening meal? If so where will it be served? Timing of food needs to coincide with session plan timings.

## 2.9 Childcare Support

Providing Childcare is vital to aid attendance. Parents are unlikely to attend the group if they are anxious about their child. Parents must also feel secure and confident in the care being offered.

Therefore introducing the parent and child to the setting or childminder prior to the group meeting is another example of good practice.

Funding for childcare wherever possible could be shared between services involved with the family. If childcare is not available on the same premises as the group. Transport to and from the provision will need to be provided.

Are there school age children and will their attendance at school impact on the parent's attendance? Take into consideration inset days and school holidays.



## 2.10 Organising Transport

Transport to and from the group is vital; attendance is unlikely unless transport is available.

Some parents might have their own transport or be able to easily access public transport, however parents would also need to be confident, motivated and organised in order to get to the venue at the specified time. So initially, at least, it is recommended that transport be provided.

Unreliable transport can also have the biggest impact on attendance.

Again, funding can be an issue, services involved with the family perhaps can share costs. Other considerations, are, are you able to reimburse fares or parking fees? Offer bus and train timetables? Book taxi services that can invoice?

## 2.11 Resources

Does the venue offer resources such as DVD/video/TV/flipchart? If not where will you be able to access these resources from?

## 2.12 Your Checklist

|                                   |  |                         |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------|--|
| Facilitators Skills Mix           |  | Public transport routes |  |
| Facilitators Session Date Diaried |  | Refreshments            |  |
| Parenting programme               |  | Transport               |  |
| Referrals                         |  | Childcare               |  |
| Venue non-stigmatised             |  | Resources:              |  |
| Disability accessible             |  | Tissues                 |  |
| Ease of parking                   |  | Pens                    |  |
| Room privacy                      |  | Flip chart/marker pens  |  |
| Resources                         |  | DVD/Video/TV            |  |
| Room layout                       |  |                         |  |

## 3. Running A Group

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### 3.1 Session One - Information Session for Parents

The aim of the information session is to have a taste of what to expect, gel with others, remove barriers and gain commitment.

The Information session should be held at the same time and place that the group will be held. Making sure the venue is suitable and all arrangements you have made from section one, are in place and running to plan. It is important that all facilitators and parents attend this session.

It is an opportunity for everyone to meet and remove any barriers to attendance, also to consider potential problems between parents with existing personal/community conflict issues.

The importance of parent's commitment to joining the group and agreeing their responsibility to attend every session should be explained. How attending all sessions is important as each one builds on the previous session and parents will not gain as much as they could if they miss meetings. In addition the group dynamics change and parents miss one another.

Support should be given to enable full attendance to complete the course successfully. Agreement should be reached on how parents might be able to 'catch up' if absence is unavoidable. Other appointments with health and social care services should be arranged at times that do not clash with the parent group. This should be discussed and agreed between these services, the facilitator and parent.

Facilitators should also outline their commitment to attending every session. Explaining their roles, responsibilities and how they will support parents to achieve positive outcomes from attending.



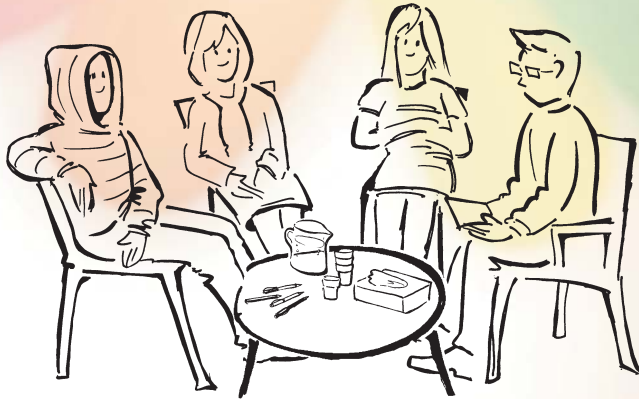
## 3.2 Making Everyone Feel Welcome and Comfortable

Attending a parenting group and walking in to a room full of strangers can feel very threatening. It's a good idea to place a facilitator outside to welcome parents in.

Other fears parents might have are being taught or told how to parent or to be blamed for not being good enough. Parents might have had negative school experiences, poor literacy skills or learning difficulties that might not have been disclosed in the referral. Will they be expected to write or answer questions. These are real fears and therefore barriers to participation.

Facilitators can address these fears by being welcoming and informal introducing themselves and the other parents. Helping parents feel comfortable with the event and at ease with each other,

Avoiding a 'them' and 'us' seating arrangement by spreading facilitators and parents evenly around the circle.



Explaining how the group will be structured and what can be expected. It can be helpful to recruit parents who have attended previous groups; peer support is a positive way of engaging new members and developing community skills.

Support should be given to enable full attendance to complete the course successfully. Other appointments with health and social care services should be arranged at times that do not clash with the parent group. This should be discussed and agreed between these services, the facilitator and parent

## 3.2 Timelines for Joining the Group

The importance of commitment to attending the group has been discussed in 3.1 Session One Information Session for Parents.

Each session builds upon the other so to attend a few sessions holds no value to the parent and could offer a distorted view of the course content. Having a negative impact on parenting skills and outcomes for children.

Therefore parents, who are unable to attend the information and the first session, should be encouraged to attend a later group. The group becomes a 'closed group' from the second session and parents should be discouraged from joining a group at or after this stage.

## 3.3 Preparing the Venue

Facilitators should allow themselves at least half an hour before each session to set out the room, remembering seating arrangements Ensure refreshments are ready and all resources are available and working. Also to familiarise each facilitator of the session content and the tasks they will each undertake.

## 3.4 Ongoing Support

Facilitators should support parents by phone or in person as appropriate. This helps to keep parents engaged and provides an opportunity to support, encourage and discuss any difficulties associated with the programme content. It is a good idea to match facilitators to parents this aids trust and builds rapport; continuity is vital.

Parent absences from the group meetings may occur due to illness, medical appointments or unforeseen circumstances. This is understandable and acceptable. However, action should be taken if absences occur that are thought to be due to lack of motivation on the parent's behalf. It is good practice to contact parents and positively explore their reasons for not attending the group. Facilitators should be sensitive to the reasons offered and make every effort to remove these barriers. Recognising that as facilitators we can only do our best to support participation.

### 3.5 Confidentiality

Private, personal and sensitive information will be discussed and shared by members of the group and needs to be handled appropriately. Parents should feel that their contributions can be made in confidence and in the privacy of the venue in which the group meet. However, you must explain to members of the group that you have a professional responsibility to report to Children's Services any concerns you may have about the safety of children

The following rules should apply:

- What is said in the group should not be repeated outside the group
- What is said privately between a parent and another parent or facilitator should remain confidential unless the parent decides that they wish to share with the wider group
- Information disclosed in the group should not be shared outside the group without the parent's full permission. Always obtain permission by asking the parent.

The only exception for breaking confidentiality is if you identify a risk to a child (or adult). In these cases you will need to follow the established child protection procedure.

### 3.6 Be Prepared

During the sessions, facilitators should be continually assessing and identifying needs. Offering information and appropriate support (always with the parent's permission and consent). This might be information (preferably in leaflet form) on any other services to which parents could be referred or leisure/community activities they and/or their children could enjoy.

Child protection issues and disclosures are possible at any time and facilitators need to be aware and equipped to deal with them appropriately.

It is never appropriate to invite observers into the group, as this changes the dynamics can make parents insecure, prevent participation and compromise confidentiality.

### 3.7 Evaluating Session

Facilitator evaluating and de briefing after the session is as important as planning for sessions.

Reflecting on what worked well, what didn't and why, will help to guide future delivery. Therefore set aside time at the end of each session. If an evening group is being delivered, time can be built in at the end of the session e.g. session finishing at 8pm and then debriefing until 8.30pm. Alternatively a meeting first thing the following morning should be arranged.

It is important that facilitators are able to access good quality professional supervision regarding programme delivery and issues arising in the group. At times issues can be discussed during the session, which can highlight facilitator's own personal difficulties. In this instance counselling services can be accessed as appropriate.

### 3.8 Ending the Group

An extra session to mark the ending of the group could include an outing. Perhaps lunch, goody bags, etc. Whatever is decided on should consider transport – childcare - special needs - appropriateness of venue and budget.

Certificates are presented at the last session with the participant and facilitators names correctly spelt. This acknowledges their achievements.



## 4. Exit strategy

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Members of the group will usually have formed friendships and informal support networks. Confidence and empowerment will often have improved and many parents will have formed close bonds with their peers following months of sharing personal information. At the end of the group some participants may be feeling an acute sense of loss and it is critical that any exit strategy addresses the need for a mechanism to enable the group to move onto the next stage.

Therefore an exit strategy should be being planned from commencement of the group sessions. It is desirable that we encourage the use of local community amenities. This will benefit parents and children to participate equally within their community and empower parents to support themselves in the future.

Needs that have been identified will depend on what might be offered. It is very important to always keep in mind individual choice; Information should be available to all with guidance to match individuals specific needs.

Building an information bank that can be made available through out the sessions is a valuable resource.

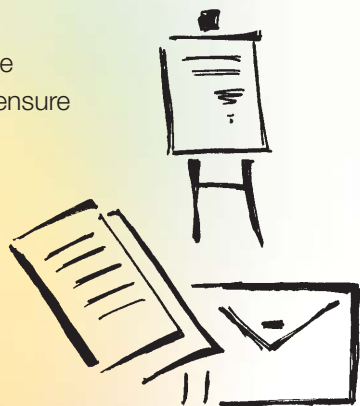
### 4.1 Communication with referrers at the end of the group

Facilitators should always provide feedback to the referrer at the end of group, remembering confidentiality protocols.

## 4.2 Evidence/Record keeping

An evidence file should always be kept. Evidence gathering can help to guide future support and ensure continued funding.

The minimum evidence should consist of signing in sheet (in parents own hand) session plans, facilitator's session evaluation, and end of group parent's evaluation and all flip chart sheets used.



It is a good idea to keep copies of invoices for future costing.

## 4.3 Professional boundaries

When facilitating a parenting group, facilitators need to find the balance between keeping professional boundaries and building a rapport with participants, avoiding collusion.

As participants are disclosing sensitive and personal information, they may begin to see facilitators as friends and allies, also a degree of trust and rapport has to be build with participants in order to support them effectively.

Facilitator personal disclosures should be appropriate and minimal. We all have issues and difficulties and at times it can be appropriate to disclose some of these to parents, it might be to show empathy or illustrate a topic.

## 5.Hints and Tips

### 5.1 Jargon

Don't use jargon! Plain and simple English is the language to use. Jargon is confusing and exclusive. We might know what we mean, but others might not.

### 5.2 The 80/20 Rule

We are aiming for 80% parent talk and 20% facilitator talk.

We all want parents to succeed and benefit from the programme and it is very easy for facilitators to do most of the talking.

A few moments of silence while parents think is fine. Encourage parents to talk through the difficulties they are experiencing, problem solve and reach their own conclusions.

### 5.3 Open ended Questions

To encourage participation use open ended questions:

What, where, when,who, how.

### 5.4 Mindful of Gender Bias

Be mindful of gender bias in parenting groups Equal opportunities is a statutory requirement. Facilitators may need to reflect on how their practice can be more inclusive.



## References

Ghate, D & Hazel, N. (2002) *Parenting in poor environments: stress, support and coping*. London: Jessica Kingsley

This guidance is in accordance with  
Rhondda Cynon Taf Policy and Procedures -

Equal Opportunities

Child Protection

Confidentiality

Lone Worker

### For more information contact:

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