



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Families First Programme Guidance

April 2017

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.

# Families First Programme Guidance

## April 2017

<b>Audience</b>	All those involved in the design, commissioning and delivery of services funded through the Families First programme, including Families First Coordinators, local authority service leads and delivery partners across all relevant sectors.
<b>Overview</b>	<p>This non-statutory programme guidance has been produced in partnership with local authorities and key stakeholders and replaces the previous document, <i>Families First: Programme Guidance (As at October 2011)</i>. The purpose of this guidance is to enable local authorities and their partners to understand Families First, its purpose and key aims, and sets out the Welsh Government's expectations in relation to programme delivery.</p> <p>This guidance relates solely to the delivery of the core elements of the Families First programme. Separate guidance is available which sets out the Welsh Government's expectations in relation to financial matters and data collection and performance management.</p>
<b>Action required</b>	This guidance must be used to inform the design and delivery of all services funded through the Families First programme.
<b>Further information</b>	Enquiries about this guidance should be directed to: Families First Policy Team Children and Families Division Welsh Government Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ Email: <a href="mailto:familiesfirst@wales.gsi.gov.uk">familiesfirst@wales.gsi.gov.uk</a>
<b>Additional copies</b>	This document is only available in digital format.
<b>Related documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Families First Performance Management Framework Guidance: April 2017</li><li>• Families First Financial Guidance</li><li>• Families First Programme Guidance (As at October 2011)</li></ul>

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# 1. Policy context

## 1.1 Welsh Government policy

The Welsh Government is committed to making Wales a country where people want to live and work and where children, no matter what circumstances they are born into, are able to thrive and achieve their potential. The Welsh Government's five year strategic plan, [Taking Wales Forward](#), sets out clear aims for giving every child in Wales the best possible start in life, and for supporting families to create stable, nurturing environments in which children can thrive.

We are committed to using the [Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015](#) in all our policy decisions to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales both now and over the long term. Families First has a key role in providing support to families when they need it the most to help build communities which are confident and more resilient.

The introduction of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 and the [Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act 2014](#) have placed a number of statutory responsibilities on local authorities and their partners and it is important services are developed with this new legislative landscape in mind. In particular the concept of early intervention and prevention is now firmly embedded as a way of working, people will be placed at the heart of new systems and given an equal say in what happens to them. These concepts are not new in Families First, but it will be important for local authorities to recognise how these principles are being embedded across public service design and delivery going forward as they develop services for families.

## 1.2 Adverse Childhood Experiences

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) include childhood exposure to:**

- **Substance and alcohol misuse**
- **Physical, mental or sexual abuse and/or neglect**
- **Domestic violence**
- **Parental separation and/or family breakdown**
- **Mental illness**
- **Parental imprisonment**

The need for effective early intervention and prevention that builds family resilience and wellbeing is reinforced by the [Public Health Wales Adverse Childhood Experiences Study](#). The study added to a growing body of evidence which suggests that children who are exposed to multiple ACEs are more likely to adopt health-harming behaviours during adolescence which can lead to poor mental and physical health in later life. These children and young people can find themselves in a cycle

of adversity which can lock successive generations of families into poor health, poor life chance outcomes and anti-social behaviour. It is also more common for those who are exposed to ACEs as a child to raise their own children in households where ACEs are commonplace.

Preventing ACEs can have significant benefits to families and individuals, as well as for wider communities. It will be important for local authorities to consider the role Families First can play in providing services which help to prevent ACEs as well as helping to mitigate the effects of ACEs on those who have already been exposed to them to help break the intergenerational cycle of adversity which grip so many families in Wales.

### **1.3 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The Welsh Government is committed to the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) as a basis for policy making for children and young people in Wales.

In keeping with the principles of the UNCRC, the Welsh Government is committed to ensuring all young people fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances. In order to equip them to make an effective transition into independent adulthood and contribute to the social and economic prosperity of Wales, young people should be encouraged, enabled and assisted, either directly or indirectly to:

- Participate effectively in education and training
- Participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities
- Take advantage of opportunities for employment

Not all young people get the support they need from their home environment and it is vital parents are able to receive the right services which can help them cope with the pressures of raising children. Children and young people must also be able to access targeted services which can help them reach their potential and improve their life chances.

## 2. Introduction to Families First

### 2.1 What is Families First?

**Families First is designed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. It places an emphasis on early intervention, prevention, and providing support for whole families, rather than individuals.**

**The programme promotes greater multi-agency working to ensure families receive joined-up support when they need it. The intention of the programme is to provide early support for families with the aim of preventing problems escalating.**

It is widely agreed that it is important for families to be supported in ways that are appropriate to their needs in order to build and create resilience and self-reliance. Interventions which support these principles are more likely to lead to improved longer-term outcomes for both families and individuals within families. Families First was set up with the aim of ensuring these principles are embedded in both service design and delivery.

Families First takes a strengths-based approach where families are supported to recognise what is working well in their situations to support empowerment and ownership of their growth and development. These earlier interventions are designed to prevent families from needing expensive remedial care through statutory services in the future.

### 2.2 What is early intervention?

***“Early intervention is about taking action as soon as possible to tackle problems for children and families before they become more difficult to reverse” (Early Intervention Foundation)***

Early intervention is not just about focussing on early years support for children and families but about helping to prevent young people and families with children of all ages from developing problems which are difficult to overcome.

By equipping families with the skills and support they need at as early a stage as possible, we are far more likely to prevent them from running into difficulties at a later stage, and more likely to help families develop intergenerational cycles of positive parenting, relationships and behaviour.

By building on the strengths of parents we can help them create supportive and enriching environments for their children to give them every chance of reaching their potential and engaging in similarly positive behaviours with their own children.



### 2.3 What do we want Families First to achieve?

Families First must demonstrate that it can improve outcomes for families to ensure they are confident, nurturing and resilient. *Taking Wales Forward* contains a commitment to, “Support families and parents to reduce adverse childhood experiences which can have lifelong effects”, and Families First is a key vehicle through which this can be achieved.

While Families First has dual prevention and protection roles, it should continue to drive improvements to preventative and early intervention support for families and aim to reduce the numbers of families developing more complex needs. Specifically, the programme should aim to:

- Design and develop innovative services which can support families to achieve positive and sustainable outcomes
- Encourage a culture of learning around continued improvement to service delivery, sharing best practice and lessons learned
- Promote effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery through an “invest to save” approach, which has a sharp focus on early intervention and prevention
- Work collaboratively and cooperatively with other agencies and programmes to ensure service delivery is aligned with no gaps or duplication in services

### 2.4 Families First principles

Services provided through the programme should take account of the following guiding principles:

- **Family-focussed** – services should take a whole family approach to improving outcomes
- **Bespoke** – services should be tailored to individual family circumstances
- **Empowering** – services should seek to empower families to take control of their lives, to give them an increased sense of ownership and investment in their outcomes
- **Integrated** - services should be effectively coordinated and planned to ensure a seamless progression for families between different interventions and programmes
- **Intensive** – a vigorous approach and relentless focus must be maintained which can adapt to families’ changing circumstances
- **Local** – services should address the needs of local communities and, where possible, seek opportunities to link in with other local programmes, including Flying Start and Supporting People
- **Pro-active** – seeking early identification of need and securing appropriate interventions in a timely way
- **Sustainable** – services should always seek to provide long-term sustainable solutions. They should seek to address the root causes of problems and not

just the symptoms to enable families to continue to progress after intervention has ceased

## 2.5 Where does Families First sit in the continuum of support?

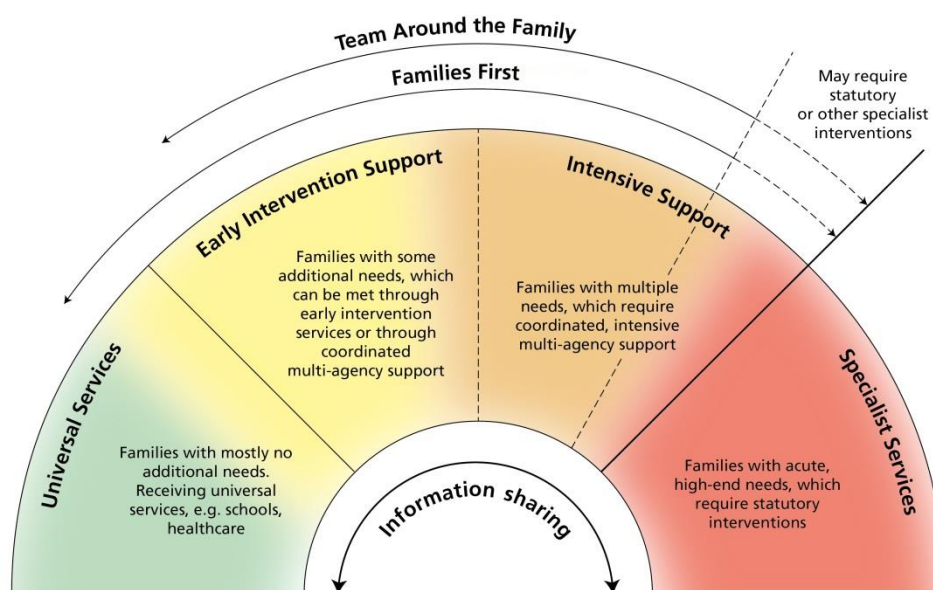
Families First is part of a continuum of support which includes a broad range of needs. We have identified the following key areas of support:

- **Universal** – families with mostly no additional needs who are in receipt of universal services such as education and healthcare
- **Early intervention** – families with some additional needs which can be addressed through targeted early intervention support
- **Intensive support** – families with multiple needs who require a coordinated multi-agency package of support to prevent needs from escalating into crisis
- **Specialist services** – families with acute, high-end needs requiring statutory support

The support provided through Families First spans a wide range of needs, from early intervention support through to intensive, multi-agency interventions but should stop short of supporting families in crisis, who require statutory or specialist services. All services should be underpinned by effective information sharing protocols.

This is illustrated in diagram 1 on page 6.

**Diagram 1 – Families First and the continuum of support**



## 2.6 Relationship with other plans and programmes

Families First is one of a number of plans and programmes which, together, help to deliver the Welsh Government's strategic priorities. Families First cannot operate in isolation and you must seek to establish relationships with these other programmes to ensure support is aligned, joined-up and accessible to as many people as possible.

How you choose to do this will be dependent on issues specific to your local area but we expect you to be able to demonstrate you have given consideration to how delivery of Families First in your local area links in with the other programmes to ensure support is being delivered locally, across the continuum of support.

You will also need to consider how you make effective links with universal services as well as other, more specialist services to raise awareness and understanding of the services offered by Families First and to encourage timely referrals. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Schools and other related professionals
- Health agencies (including midwifery services, health visitors, perinatal mental health services and CAMHS)
- Housing services
- Police
- Youth work providers
- Youth Offending Teams
- Family Information Services (FIS)
- Other specialist agencies, e.g. domestic abuse services etc.

You will also need to consider other existing strategies and plans which have been developed in your local area to ensure Families First links seamlessly with the priorities identified within them.

## **2.7 Assessing the needs of local populations**

In order to design and deliver effective services for families, you must have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of families living in your local area. You will need to undertake assessments to determine these, taking into account the views of citizens and services providers.

In undertaking these assessments, we encourage you to make full use of data from a wide range of sources, including existing communities-based needs assessments, such as the local Wellbeing Assessments, required under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the population needs assessments required under the Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act. We will also expect you to consider a range of other sources which might also be relevant to the programme.

### 3. Delivering the key elements of Families First

Families First promotes system redesign at local level and the embedding of multi-agency working practices into all aspect of family support. This takes place flexibly within a framework that focuses on the following key elements:

- Joint Assessment Framework for Families
- Team Around the Family
- Disability Focus
- Strategic commissioning
- Learning sets

This section explores how these elements have been developed as the programme has matured, using evidence gathered as part of the [National Evaluation of Families First](#) and sets out our expectations regarding their future development.

#### 3.1 Joint Assessment Framework for Families (JAFF)

##### Background

The JAFF was intended to encourage agencies to work together to assess the needs of the whole family and consider the most effective way of addressing those needs.

JAFF models had to fulfil the following requirements:

- Be innovative
- Ensure that information captured is meaningful, accessible and useful
- Support engagement with the whole family
- Take account of the whole family

##### Where are we now?

JAFF models are now operational in all local authorities. A key success of the JAFF is its focus on involving the whole family, rather than the individuals within it, in the assessment process. This approach has enabled more comprehensive assessments of strengths and needs as well as promoting a greater sense of ownership and empowerment for families. There is widespread agreement this model of effective early assessment which brings together a range of agencies and their expertise has a key role to play in the identification of need and the most appropriate ways to address it.

In the main there are two JAFF models in operation across Wales:

- JAFF used in the initial referral process
- JAFF used as part of a subsequent assessment process

## Future development

Whatever model is in use in your area, the inclusive, family-focussed nature of the JAFF has been integral to the successful development of Families First. The continued development of local JAFF models is important to ensure families remain at the heart of service design and delivery and we expect you demonstrate an ongoing commitment to reviewing and improving your models for the benefit of families in your local areas.

This includes working with key partners to further develop flexibilities in your approaches to enable greater degrees of “portability” and/or to consider the development of regional models of assessment if practicable and beneficial to local populations.

### **3.2 Team Around the Family (TAF)**

#### Background

The development of TAF models was intended to build upon the previous Team Around the Child (TAC) approach which was in use in a number of local authorities but with a focus on addressing the needs of the whole family, rather than individual members.

Local authorities had significant flexibility in the development of TAF models provided they fulfilled the following:

- Promoted effective and robust information sharing practices
- Provided a coordinated multi-agency system of support
- Took a family-centred approach
- Were closely allied to the JAFF
- Were flexible enough to deliver support in ways which suited specific family circumstances and needs
- Were reflective of the breadth of need of families

#### Where are we now?

All local authorities have TAF models, which recognise local variation and needs in terms of how they operate locally. The development of TAF models has been one of the key successes of the programme. Generally the models fall into one of three categories:

- **Everybody’s Business** - where practitioners within universal/other services are involved in the core delivery of TAF as key workers or lead professionals
- **Centralised** - in which TAF functions are carried out by a centrally funded team. This may be contracted to an outside agency and they will be either:
  - Co-located in a single location or
  - Based in multiple locations, for example, around a community hub or school

- **Hybrid models** - which combine elements of both of the above.

TAF working typically involves:

- A key worker acting as the main contact for the family and coordinating agencies' support
- Ensuring support meets the needs of the whole family's circumstances and needs
- Professionals from different agencies meeting regularly to discuss a family's needs and how they might work together to address them

### Future development

We expect you to build on the success of the TAF and to continually develop and improve the models in operation in your local areas.

Evaluation evidence has found that the success of the TAF approach is not necessarily related to the model of delivery you have chosen to develop but is centred on ensuring that staff across the agencies involved in delivering the TAF are aware of, and accept, their role the process. With this in mind, we expect you to continue to engage local partners in the active delivery of the TAF to ensure they are involved in developing robust multi-agency packages of support which meet the identified needs of families.

You will need to ensure your TAF model is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of those who are referred into it. This is especially important where TAF interventions are heavily reliant on commissioned projects to deliver services. As the focus of these projects changes, the range of services commissioned may vary. You will need to ensure you are able to work with the most appropriate agencies through the TAF to enable families to access the support they need to achieve successful outcomes.

In continuing to deliver the TAF, you will need to ensure:

- The needs of the whole family remain at the centre of any package of support.
- Robust information sharing practices which encourage professionals from different agencies to meet regularly to discuss a family's needs are firmly embedded in your TAF models
- All those involved with the TAF should contribute actively and positively to solving problems and share ownership of the TAF model they are supporting
- Key workers/lead professionals are supported effectively by all those involved in the TAF to enable them to maximise the support they provide to families.

Where possible, TAF models should not only respond to multiple, embedded needs, but be sufficiently broad or flexible to be able to work preventatively with families at an earlier stage in response to emerging needs.

### **3.3 Disability Focus**

#### Background

This element was developed to recognise that, although families with disabled children and young people, and those with young carers should be seen as an intrinsic part of the programme, sometimes, a distinct focus is required to ensure their specific needs are provided for.

Again, local authorities were given a large degree of flexibility in designing local services, while encouraged to focus on:

- Improved access to employment, education and training
- Improved coordination and integration of services
- Income maximisation and awareness of welfare rights
- Increased access to play and leisure, including pre-school play provision.
- Supplementary provision of short breaks and respite
- Training for specific child care provision
- Training for other opportunities for parents

#### Where are we now?

Evaluation evidence found that services for families affected by disability have improved since Families First was developed. Most of the activities funded through the programme are new services which were not available previously. Evaluation evidence found that the programme has been responsible for a shift across several key areas of disability provision, including:

- A heightened awareness of the wider impact of disability on the whole family, as opposed to the individual directly affected
- Flexibility to address newly identified or emerging needs for support
- Increased support for older children and teenagers affected by disability
- Increased support for families at the diagnosis or pre-diagnosis stage
- Investment in the coordination and integration of existing services

#### Future development

We expect you to build on the progress you have made, continue to develop specialist services and up-skill mainstream workers and to ensure services provided through this element of the programme are able to meet the particular needs of families affected by disability in your local area. This includes considering the benefits of commissioning services on a regional or multi-authority basis to maximise both the reach and impacts of these services.



### **3.4 Strategic commissioning**

#### Background

Prior to Families First, it was widely agreed that a more coherent, strategic approach was needed to avoid gaps and duplication in the commissioning of services for families. Families First sought to address this by supporting population based interventions which encouraged local authorities to identify the particular needs of communities and respond to them. Local authorities were expected to commission a small number of strategic projects which had a clear and demonstrable link to community-based needs assessments and focus on early intervention and prevention.

#### Where are we now?

Services have been commissioned across a broad range of areas, which include:

- Advice services
- Domestic violence
- Employment
- Family support
- Health (including mental health)
- Parenting
- Play
- Support for young carers
- Youth support services (including support for young people who are NEET)

To a large extent, the programme to date has been successful in responding to the needs of local populations. However, the range of commissioned services has become increasingly broad which has led to concerns over sustainability, should this continue. The data tells us that the presenting needs of families most often fall into the categories of wellbeing, confidence and resilience. These need addressing before any other issues, such as unemployment or skills, can be tackled.

#### Future development

People who experience poor wellbeing and lower levels of confidence and resilience are more likely to expose their children to ACEs such as domestic violence, alcohol and substance misuse and mental health problems. They are likely to become socially isolated and be less able to create stable and nurturing environments in which to raise children. Children and young people who are being raised in such environments are more likely struggle to achieve long term positive outcomes and are highly likely to raise their own children in environments where ACEs are commonplace, creating a cycle of social and economic deprivation which is difficult to break.

In light of this evidence, services commissioned as part of the programme should focus on parenting and support for young people. Local authorities will still be able

to commission a broad range of services, and will retain the flexibility to design commissioning models which are suited to local arrangements. However, the projects which are commissioned should focus on equipping families with a range of skills to build their confidence and resilience and support them to achieve long term positive outcomes. It is important that services for parents and young people are not delivered in isolation and you will need to ensure services are linked together and coherent to enable families to receive the breadth of support they need.

Our expectations with regard to strategic commissioning for parents and young people are set out in more detail in chapters 4 and 5.

### **3.4.1 Commissioning effective services**

Our expectations around commissioning remain the same as in the first phase of the programme. We expect you to commission:

- A coherent and structured set of evidence-based projects which contribute to population outcomes and which are based on a local assessment of the needs of children, families and young people.
- Jointly commissioned services – both across agencies and local authorities
- Projects which have a strong focus on both prevention and protection
- A small number of large-scale strategic projects, which are time-limited with clear exit strategies.

We expect you will take a thematic approach to the design and delivery of services for families; working through effective partnerships with the agencies delivering projects to ensure there is an agreed common goal.

The strategic alignment with other support programmes in your local area and effective commissioning processes is for you to decide. We encourage you to be innovative in your approaches to aligning services and consider areas where joint commissioning would increase the effectiveness of service delivery. You may also wish to consider the benefits of commissioning services on a regional or multi-authority basis to maximise both the reach and impacts of services.

When commissioning services, you should:

- Follow your own local procurement procedures
- Take all reasonable steps to ensure services represent the best value for money and are strategic in nature
- Avoid the spot-purchasing of goods and service, wherever possible
- Ensure all services are commissioned in accordance with the Families First Financial Management Guidance, which is published annually
- Pay particular attention to the section of the guidance which covers ineligible expenditure. This section has been recreated below, for ease of reference

*Families First funds should be focussed on delivering or supporting the delivery of the key elements of the programme. It would be inappropriate to use Families First Funds for other purposes. Examples of ineligible activities include:*

- *Family or group holidays (with the exception of short breaks and respite services commissioned through the Disability element of the programme)*
- *Purchasing of furniture or domestic equipment for individuals benefitting from the scheme, e.g. washing machines, microwaves, sofas etc.*
- *Food parcels (with the exception of the provision of snacks and refreshments, when used as an engagement tool for families)*
- *The delivery of statutory services*
- *Purchasing ICT equipment for individuals benefitting from the scheme.*

Some families supported through Families First may present with needs which suggest they would benefit from at least some of the above. You will need to ensure you have good links in place with relevant agencies and organisations whose role it is to support families in this way so they can receive these services in a timely manner alongside any packages of support being delivered through this programme. Families First funds should only be used to purchase furniture, domestic equipment or food parcels in the most exceptional of cases, and with the agreement of your Account Manager.

### **3.5 Learning Sets**

The original programme guidance placed an expectation on all local authorities to be actively involved in the development of shared learning activity at a local, regional and national level, and to be able to demonstrate where they have accessed, applied and contributed to shared learning. This requirement was put in place initially because of the innovative nature of the programme. It gave local authority partners an opportunity to develop structures for reflective learning as well as challenge and support during the first phase of the programme in order to improve the delivery of services for families.

Evaluation evidence found there is now a strong learning culture across the Families First programme with the most significant learning happening from more informal approaches and from close monitoring of real-time feedback and monitoring data.

Therefore, while we expect you to continue to demonstrate a commitment to continued learning and the sharing of best practice, we will no longer require you to develop structured action learning sets. Future learning could include making links outside of your local areas to learn from other authorities with whom you may share common ground. Continued learning is essential to the ongoing development of Families First but we recognise there are many ways in which this can be achieved, and we will expect you to consider what will work best for your authority and take appropriate action.

## 4. Strategic commissioning – Parenting

This section sets out our expectations with regard to the commissioning of services which focus on parenting. The section should be read in conjunction with the Welsh Government non-statutory guidance, [Parenting in Wales: Guidance on engagement and support](#)

### 4.1 What is parenting?

In its most basic form, parenting refers to the aspects of raising a child from birth to adulthood. However, the practice of parenting is far more complex. Parents are responsible for promoting the physical, emotional, social, financial and intellectual development of a child. They are responsible for ensuring their health and safety, for their learning and education, and for preparing them for life as productive adults. Good parenting creates a stable, nurturing home environment, sets and maintains appropriate boundaries, provides positive role modelling and is a constant and active part in a child's life.

### 4.2 How can Families First support parents?

Many factors can affect a person's ability to parent effectively, and many parents need extra support to help them cope with the pressures of parenthood. Families First can support parents in a number of ways, from the provision of information and advice to the provision of evidence based parenting interventions.

### 4.3 Core aims of parenting support

In developing services which provide support for parenting, it will be important to ensure services are designed to promote protective factors and /or reduce risks for children and are aimed at the following:

- Developing positive attitudes, aspirations and resilience
- Enhancing positive parenting skills
- Increasing parents' confidence and skills in providing a positive home learning environment and supporting their child with their learning
- Improving parent-child and parent-parent relationships
- Increasing parents' confidence in their parenting role
- Strengthening parents' understanding of child development
- Supporting parents to achieve good mental health
- Supporting parents to achieve positive emotional wellbeing

The services you develop should be responsive to the identified needs of parents in your local communities. The key focus should always be for families who need targeted support, but it should be remembered that open access or minimally

targeted services can be useful in promoting early engagement and developing positive relationships with parents and you will need to keep this in mind when considering the most appropriate ways of delivering services.

You may wish to consider joining up with services outside of Families First to deliver a coherent pathway of support for parents. This would set out what support is available for parents across the spectrum of need to promote engagement across services and encourage those parents who may need extra help to seek it out. If you decide to do this, you must ensure they are flexible and needs-led to provide the best support for families in your local area. Services must be integrated to ensure families can receive the right support at the right time. The pathway must always be clarified with the family at the beginning of their journey so they know what to expect and when.

It is important parents are able to access support which is delivered in ways which are right for them and so a range of options should also be available to meet the individual needs and circumstances of parents. This could include evidence-based parenting programmes, information, one-to-one support, informal or formal parenting groups. For example, while one-to-one support is a popular method of support, group support is often the most cost effective and can have the added bonus of helping families create their own sustainable networks of support as well as reducing the sense of isolation many parents experience.

Support should always take a strength-based<sup>1</sup> and evidence based<sup>2</sup> approach and be complementary to the core aims of the Families First programme.

#### **4.4 Themes of support**

**You will be expected to commission services for parents under the following age-related themes:**

- **Conception and early years support for parents of children to age 7**
- **Support for parents of children in middle childhood aged 7-12**
- **Support for parents of teenagers**

**Each of these should be underpinned by the following cross-cutting themes:**

- **Early intervention support for vulnerable families**
- **Evidence-based theories of child development**
- **Positive parenting**
- **Relationship support**
- **Resilience**

<sup>1</sup> A strength-based approach occurs when key workers place a positive emphasis on resilience, protective factors and strengths.

<sup>2</sup> Evidence based practice is a combination of practitioner expertise and using up-to-date knowledge of sound evidence from external research, and independent evaluation when making decisions about how to work with individual parents.

## 4.5 Age-related themes

Every stage of a child's life brings with it unique challenges for parents and a range of factors may result in them becoming unresponsive or neglectful towards their children. It is important for parents to be supported to be able to address these challenges with confidence at the earliest opportunity.

A range of provision should be available for parents across these themes which support the development of responsive and nurturing parenting practices and improve parental skills and confidence. Although we have included three clear, age-related themes here, you will be able to develop themes of support which are best suited to your local areas, providing they cover the period of conception to age 18 (25 for parents of children with additional learning needs).

### Conception and early years support for parents of children age 7

Provision of a range of support for pregnant and new parents should be designed to help parents understand the importance of early relationships to the health and wellbeing of their baby and promote attachment and responsiveness. Getting it right early on not only improves the quality of the parent-child relationship but may also reduce the risks of parents becoming unresponsive to their child's needs later on.

It is vital that strong links are made with those who have the most contact with expectant parents, particularly midwifery services and, following birth, perinatal and community mental health services and health visitors, to encourage timely referrals and a greater understanding of the types of support which can be provided through Families First. Support should be available to all expectant parents and, in particular, first time parents, to make them aware of the different types of support which are available to them and encourage them to be responsive to help should they need it.

When children experience unresponsive, inattentive and inconsistent parenting, they are more likely to develop attachment issues and experience impaired social, emotional and cognitive development. Support in the early years should, therefore, focus on enabling parents to develop responsive and nurturing parenting skills to improve their confidence in raising their children.

Parents are more likely to respond positively to parenting support interventions if they feel they are partners in the process and you will need to consider how this can be best achieved for the families in your local area. For example, sessions such as "stay and play", "language and play" and "numbers and play" can support parents to understand the importance of, and increase their confidence in supporting their child's learning through play. However, for some parents a different approach may be needed initially, for example, home-based or informal support which can lead to more structured learning at a later time.

## Support for parents of children in middle childhood aged 7-12

The middle years of a child's life are an important period for the development of their self-esteem, sense of identity and growing independence. Children experience huge changes during this time, physically, socially and mentally and become more aware of themselves, particularly in relation to the world around them, which can make them vulnerable to changes which take place outside of their control. They also have to make the transition from primary to secondary school during this time. The comfort and familiarity of primary school surroundings are no longer there which can prove challenging for both children and their parents as they navigate the new routines and relationships involved with secondary school attendance.

How children are supported during this time is crucial to their long term outcomes in terms of their academic performance and behaviour, as well as their physical and mental health. Supportive family relationships are critical in helping to shape positive social and emotional wellbeing in children. You should, therefore, consider the best ways to support parents to ensure they understand the complexity of the changes their child is experiencing and the important role they play in helping to guide their child through these challenges.

## Support for parents of teenagers aged 13-18 (25 for those with additional learning needs)

Teenagers experience considerable neurological, physical, emotional and social changes which can have an impact on parent-child relationships. Mood swings, low self-esteem, aggression and even depression are all characteristic of the changes teenagers are experiencing and it is essential parents have an understanding of their role in supporting their child through this period, even if they may feel their child is growing more distant as they mature. Supportive parenting reduces the risk of substance misuse, delinquency, poor mental health, low self-esteem and poor academic performance in teenagers. You will, therefore, need to consider the types of support which should be provided to help parents in your local area improve their skills in supporting teenaged children through these challenging years.

### **4.6 Cross-cutting themes**

#### Early intervention support

Early intervention is a key principle of Families First and services must be designed to maximise engagement with families at an early a stage as possible and, ideally, targeted services should be available alongside open access services.

Families who are living in difficult circumstances which might include poverty, worklessness, bereavement, alcohol or substance misuse, domestic violence, poor physical and/or mental health and social isolation are more at risk of being unable to care adequately for their children. You will need to demonstrate a clear strategy for targeting those families in your local area who are most at risk and demonstrate a proactive approach in encouraging and sustaining engagement with services. You

will also need to have a clear understanding of the barriers to engagement faced by parents, and develop methods to assist parents in overcoming these barriers.

### Evidence-based theories of child development

There are many evidence-based parenting programmes available which are underpinned by various theories of child development (e.g. attachment, social learning and parenting styles theories) to encourage positive parenting techniques and enable parents to be responsive to child's needs at each stage of their life. Evidence suggests that programmes are more likely to be effective if they are underpinned by sound theoretical principles that have been supported by robust research in the field of child development. Parenting programmes focus on improving parenting skills by supporting parents to understand the impact of their parenting practices on their child's behaviour and supporting them to increase positive interactions with their child and reduce coercive and inconsistent practices.

Evidence-based parenting programmes can be successful in helping parents increase their confidence and satisfaction as well as improve their wellbeing. They can also have a positive effect on young children with emotional and behavioural problems.

You should, therefore, give consideration to the types of parenting programmes which would be most beneficial to the needs of parents in your local areas and consider how best they should be delivered as part of the range of services which should be available to them. You should consider whether there is sound evidence the intervention is likely to improve parent or child outcomes; whether it is cost-effective and whether practitioners are appropriately skilled and trained to deliver it. A detailed list of recommended evidence based programmes is available in Appendix B to *Parenting in Wales: Guidance on Engagement and Support* and you should consult this when deciding on which programmes to deliver.

### Positive parenting

The Welsh Government promotes the use of positive parenting styles and alternatives to physical punishment to help diffuse challenging situations and endorses the view that authoritative parenting (high warmth, positive/assertive control and in adolescence high expectations) is beneficial at all points in a child's development. These messages are contained in the Welsh Government's positive parenting campaign, [Parenting. Give it time](#), which includes resources for both parents and practitioners. You will need to ensure the parenting services provided through Families First in your area are complementary to this campaign and promote and endorse the messages contained within it.

### Relationship support

Strong inter-parental relationships are a key factor in promoting the wellbeing of children. Couple relationship breakdown has, been associated with a number of negative impacts on children, including socio-economic disadvantage, lower educational achievement, behavioural problems and poor physical and mental



health. These long term negative outcomes generally apply to a minority of children. Although children may feel short term distress during separation, the majority are able to adjust to these changes in circumstance. Parental separation and divorce which leads to repeated changes in family structure can have a negative impact on a child's outcomes. Likewise, children who grow up in a household where unresolved parental conflict is commonplace are more likely to experience difficulties in forming stable relationships of their own, and exposure to frequent and poorly resolved conflict can have a detrimental effect on a child's long term emotional and physical wellbeing.

Healthy relationships are important for anyone involved in raising children, including members of the wider family. Relationships with extended family members are also extremely important, especially when those members are actively involved in a child's life. Provision should be available, where needed, to help all those in a parenting or supporting role to understand the importance of effective communication and positive relationship management and the impact these can have on the child.

For parents who are separating and separated this could include support to understand and minimise the adverse impact separation can have on their children. Support might also be provided to help parents who may be experiencing difficulties in coping with other issues in relation to their separations, such as care arrangements for their children. Consideration will need to be given as to how support can best be provided to help families through these challenging times.

### Resilience

Although all services provided to parents should have the aim of building resilience, we have included it here to highlight the importance of resilience in creating stable home environments for children and helping parents deal with stress. Research has highlighted the factors most likely to increase resilience. In relation to parenting, this includes:

- A good relationship with one parent
- A lot of attention paid to the infant in the first year
- A wider network of social support
- Positive parent-child relationships
- Structure and rules in the household.

Parental resilience has a positive effect on the parent, the child and the parent-child relationship. By managing stressors, parents feel better and can provide more nurturing attention to their child, which promotes secure emotional attachment. They also feel more able to address their needs and feel empowered to move forward. This in turn, fosters the development of resilience in children when they experience stress.

Resilience is something all parents need in order to effectively manage stressful situations and help ensure families have a better chance of achieving positive long

term outcomes. We expect you to ensure resilience is a central theme running through all services which are delivered to parents.

#### 4.7 What types of support should be delivered?

Parenting support can be delivered through a variety of means and you will need to give consideration to the most appropriate approaches to meet the needs of families in your local areas. Broadly speaking, however, we would expect to see support being provided which includes, but is not limited to, some or all of the following:

- **Evidence-based group-based structured parenting programmes.** These are programmes where there is independent evidence which demonstrates improved outcomes for children and families. Many of these also have evidence that they are cost effective. You may wish to build on any existing provisions to extend and maximise the reach of these services to increase the numbers of families who are able to access them.
- **Informal parenting support.** This type of support can be used to engage parents in services and prepare them for more formal interventions and can be an effective way of building trust with parents who are anxious or reluctant to receive support.
- **Informal drop-in support.** This type of support can be an effective tool for engaging parents and introducing them to more structured types of parenting support. It can also be a useful way of keeping in touch with families and encouraging the use of positive parenting techniques in a less formal setting. It can provide parents with the opportunity to talk to staff about their concerns and seek practical advice and information whilst giving staff the opportunity to observe parental behaviour and identify areas where more specialist support may be beneficial.
- **One-to-one support.** This support should be available to parents who may not benefit from group-based interventions and/or who might require a more tailored package of support. One-to-one support in a home-based setting should also be available to those families who may not be able to attend group-based settings for reasons such as lack of transport. Appendix D to *Parenting in Wales: Guidance on Engagement and Support* contains a suggested list of one-to-one parenting support and home visiting programmes. All one-to-one or home based support should meeting the following criteria:
  - Be delivered by suitably qualified, trained or competent staff
  - Be underpinned by a sound rationale
  - Collect feedback from parents on whether it has achieved its aims
  - Have a learning session plan and suggested mode of delivery
  - Identify goals and expectations
  - Identify who the intervention is intended for
  - Meet the core purposes of support
- **Relationship support services.** These may include counselling and/or mediation services or other therapeutic services. Staff delivering evidence-based programmes may also be skilled in providing consistent and effective relationship support to parents. These services can help parents (whether together or

separated) understand their relationship with each other and the effect their relationships can have on the child. This type of support can also be beneficial to parents who have experienced ACEs in their own childhood, or who may be experiencing a life changing event, such as a partner in prison or deployed overseas, which may affect their ability to effectively parent their children.

#### **4.8 Priority groups**

**Whilst the needs of all parents are important, some parents' status or situation may make them particularly vulnerable and they may require more specialist support.**

**Priority groups will vary from area to area. You will need to identify those groups who are most in need in your areas, and ensure you consider their requirements as you design and commission services. These might include:**

- **Disabled parents**
- **Families affected by domestic abuse**
- **Families affected by parental imprisonment**
- **Fathers**
- **Gypsy and Traveller families**
- **Parents with learning difficulties (diagnosed or suspected)**
- **Parents of disabled children**
- **Parents with mental health problems**
- **Parents with alcohol or substance misuse issues**
- **Refugee/asylum seeker families**
- **Young parents**

##### Disabled parents

Parents with a physical or sensory disability or long term illness may need additional support to fulfil their role in the same way as other able-bodied parents. You will need to consider the individual needs of disabled parents and make any necessary adjustments to enable them to access services. This might include ensuring venues are accessible and that materials are produced in an accessible format.

##### Families affected by domestic abuse

There are a number of ways in which domestic abuse and other hostile but non-violent conflict can negatively affect the quality of parenting. Children can grow up believing violence and aggression to be an acceptable and normal part of conflict resolution in relationships, and may also experience harsher, more hostile parenting from both the abused parent and/or the abuser. Alternatively the abused parent may withdraw from the child and become less warm towards their child as they try and cope with the abuse. The experience of domestic abuse can also lead to inconsistency in parenting, particularly in boundaries and expectations set for

children. Witnessing domestic abuse can in itself have damaging, long term effects on children.

You should ensure appropriate safeguards are in place, including effective screening during the assessment stage. Staff should be trained to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and be able to respond appropriately at the earliest opportunity. The [National Training Framework](#) on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence outlines the Welsh Government's requirements for training on these subjects across the public service and specialist third sector.

If you have not commissioned services specifically for families affected by domestic abuse, you will need to ensure staff know where families can get help and have a strong working relationship with those services to ensure they are able to request appropriate and timely support.

### Families affected by parental imprisonment

The children of prisoners and their families are a highly vulnerable group. Families of prisoners are more likely to face financial difficulties, housing disruption, have mental or physical health problems and experience social isolation and stigmatisation. The quality of family life can be severely affected when a parent is imprisoned and families can face a great deal of uncertainty which can cause stress for the remaining parent. The children of prisoners may also suffer anxiety and insecurity and struggle to cope with the (often sudden and unexpected) absence of a parent. Visiting a parent in prison can also be a stressful and traumatic experience for a child and they may feel unable to communicate these worries to the remaining parent for fear of causing further stress.

We expect you to actively work to identify families who may be affected by parental imprisonment as part of the assessment process. Very often these families may not volunteer this information due to embarrassment or concerns about stigmatisation but may be more likely to respond if they are asked the question directly. You will need to ensure families who are affected by parental imprisonment are provided with relevant support and information, for example, through links with other organisations which provide services for these families. You may also wish to consider whether it is necessary to commission specific services through Families First.

### Fathers

Fathers (resident or non-resident, biological or step) can have a significant impact on the lives of children. It is, therefore, important for you to ensure you take into account the importance of the father-child relationship when considering what support should be provided to parents in your local area. We know that there are many benefits to children if their father is actively involved in their lives as they grown up but fathers often feel support services are primarily designed to support mothers and may be reluctant to attend services as a result. It will be important for you to develop strategies to encourage and increase father engagement. Methods

of effective engagement with fathers will often be different to those used to engage with mothers and you will need to consider which methods should be adopted to meet the needs of fathers in your local area. The Welsh Government's Good Practice Paper, [Strategies for working with fathers](#) provides lots of practical ideas.

### Gypsy and Traveller families

There are a number of different groups who fall under the title of Gypsies and Travellers. These include Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish Gypsies and Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and Travellers, New Travellers, Bargees and others living in boats and Travelling Showpeople. They are generally considered to be among the most marginalised and socially excluded groups in society and, despite strong cultural values with regard to the importance of the family unit, and strong community relationships, often experience poor outcomes in relation to health, education and housing.

Engagement with these groups can be challenging for a variety of reasons, including historical mistrust of authority figures and a fear of stigma and prejudice. It is important for practitioners to understand why these barriers exist and work with services and organisations who are engaged with these families to ensure support can be provided where it is needed and in ways which are culturally appropriate to these groups.

### Parents with learning difficulties (diagnosed or suspected)

Parents with diagnosed or suspected learning difficulties often experience a range of challenges including poverty, social isolation, stress, mental health problems, low literacy and/or communication issues. They may also be reluctant to ask for support with parenting issues because of fears that this will raise child protection concerns. Appropriate early intervention support, which is tailored to the needs of parents with learning difficulties, can help achieve positive outcomes for many children and their parents. Examples might include making use of audio visual teaching materials, simplifying language or teaching skills through behavioural modelling. Parents learn more effectively where they are given praise and feedback, and where complex tasks are broken down into simpler parts and more time allowed mastering them. Families might need ongoing support i.e. support at every stage of the child's development.

You will need to consider how you can best identify and address the needs of these parents through your family support services and how you can encourage engagement with services.

### Parents of disabled children

Although Families First provides ring-fenced funding for the development of services specifically to meet the needs of parents with disabled children, the needs of these families must also be intrinsic to all parts of the programme. They will face the same parenting issues experienced by other parents, but will also have to adjust to the challenges associated with their child's disability, which can result in additional

emotional, social, physical and financial pressures. You will need to consider how these needs can be met, either through the mainstream programme, or through the Disability Focus element.

#### Parents with mental health issues

Mental health problems may not necessarily affect the parent-child relationship, but they may result in a reduced capacity to parent consistently and positively. Parents with low level mental health issues may benefit from services which can improve resilience and wellbeing as part of a comprehensive package of support.

Parents with a severe and enduring mental health condition may expose their children to adverse experiences which can result in them displaying emotional, psychological and behavioural problems. The role of Families First will be quite limited for these parents, but they should be encouraged to seek help to address their mental health so they are able to meet their child's needs and be reassured that by seeking help, they will not be judged negatively.

#### Parents who misuse alcohol or illegal substances

Parents who are misusing alcohol or drugs are at an increased risk of becoming unresponsive or neglectful towards their children. They may also be experiencing a range of other issues such as poverty, social isolation, stress and mental health problems as well as physical health problems. It is important practitioners understand the risk factors associated with these parents and work with them to help them engage with appropriate support services at an early stage. Any immediate risks faced by the child must be prioritised and practitioners must engage with the relevant agencies as soon as possible to ensure the correct support can be provided.

#### Refugee/asylum seeker families

Refugee and asylum seeker families face several key barriers to accessing services, including language and communication issues as well as cultural and social isolation. Many families could also be experiencing poverty, stress, and mental health problems. It is important that practitioners understand the needs of these families and can make strong links with other community and refugee organisations who work with refugee and asylum seeker families to ensure a package of support can be offered which promotes social inclusion, independence and wellbeing.

#### Young parents

Teenage parents and their children can face considerable challenges. They are more likely to be a lone parent, live in poor housing and live on a low income. They may have experienced family and relationship breakdown and may also have been looked after children which may have left them with negative views of professionals. They may also have concerns that professionals will judge them as unfit parents should they seek help.

Young parents who have made a positive and proactive choice to have children may also face considerable challenges and you should consider the needs of all young parents in your local area and ensure services are available which can provide effective support to them. You may wish to consider separate provision for young parents which focuses on a more informal approach which is designed to build trust and promote engagement and participation. You may also wish to consider ways in which services can target young mums and dads both separately and together.

#### **4.9 Who needs to be involved?**

The provision of effective and timely support for parents is dependent on a range of key partners working together to identify those families who need help and you will need to ensure you build strong links with them. Key partners can include, but are not limited to:

- **Schools/school counsellors/pupil referral units/other education professionals.** These can play a key role in the early identification of need and can work with families to prevent problems from escalating. Primary schools in particular tend to have regular contact with parents and children and are often well placed to notice the small changes in a child's behaviour, appearance or attendance, which can be an indication of problems at home. Building good links with schools and education services in your local area can ensure they are aware of Families First and are able to refer families into services at an appropriate time. You may also wish to consider investing in training and support for staff in schools to provide early stage, low level support to children and families displaying the early signs of need to prevent them from escalating and needing more intensive support at a later date.
- **Midwifery services.** Midwives are usually the first and main contact for families during pregnancy, throughout labour and the early postnatal period and are in a key position to identify and work with families who may be displaying signs of need. They can be vital link between parents and services and can be instrumental in ensuring referrals are made at the earliest opportunity.
- **Health visitors.** Health visitors play a key frontline role in encouraging and supporting parents in their own home and play a valuable frontline role in engaging families as well as referring them for further support. It is important you build positive relationships with health visitors to ensure they promote the benefits of family support services and encourage parents to engage with them.
- **Other health agencies.** Perinatal mental health services, GPs, CAMHS and other services can play a central role in helping to identify and support families who may have more complex needs. In addition, some families may require more specialised interventions and it is important Local Health Boards are engaged with services and can work alongside them to provide more tailored expert support for parents.
- **Housing services.** Housing services, whether they are local authority services, housing associations or social landlords, have a valuable role to play in supporting families. Frontline housing workers are in a good position to identify

families who may need support and you will need to ensure you have good working relationships with service providers and can work with them to provide effective packages of support for parents.

- **Family Information Services (FIS).** FIS can play a key role in providing free and impartial, quality, up-to-date information, advice and assistance to families and can identify families in need of further support. FIS also works closely with other professionals to provide up-to-date and relevant information for the families they support.
- **Police.** Community Police services can help to identify families who may be in need of support and can also provide valuable advice on other influencing factors which may be affecting a family's particular situation, for example, imprisonment, community tensions.
- **Statutory Services.** Families who don't meet the criteria for support through statutory services, may well be "stepped down" into Families First for further assessment. Further guidance on the relationship between Families First and statutory services is provided in section 7.
- **Third sector community youth services.** Third sector community groups play a valuable role in supporting young people and are well placed to identify young people in families who may be in need of further support. It is important workers in these groups are aware of the support which is available through the programme and are encouraged to make necessary referrals.
- **Other organisations providing specialist services.** These may include services such as specialist domestic abuse support, substance misuse services, or other specialist support services. These services can help to identify families who may need other types of support and can also support families to seek the additional help they need.

#### **4.10 Engaging families**

There are a variety of reasons why engaging with families can be challenging. These can include physical barriers such as lack of transport, or cultural barriers such as historic mistrust of service providers, or language barriers. In order to overcome these barriers it is important you understand the local issues which may be preventing some families from accessing services provided through Families First. This section will consider some of these issues, but we encourage you to look beyond the issues explored here and consider the action you can take to maximise engagement in your local area.

Whilst we expect most of the services you commission to be delivered through venue-based settings, such as integrated children centres, community centres etc. or in a home-based setting, you will also need to consider whether these are always the most appropriate ways to deliver support. You will need to consider carefully ways in which services can be delivered which can encourage parents to access them, at the time of day which is most convenient for them and suited to their childcare arrangements. This will be especially important when you are providing support to working families where both parents may not be able to access services during the day, or shift workers, whose availability may be more intermittent. Venues will need



to be local and convenient for parents to access. You will also need to consider whether crèche services need to be delivered to encourage one or both parents to attend services where childcare might otherwise have prevented them from engaging.

Initial engagement with support services is by no means a guarantee that parents will continue to engage. Careful consideration should be given to ensure services can build upon initial engagement to encourage families to return to them to ensure progression and increase chances of long term success. Building trust is key to successful outcomes and it may take a while for a trust relationship to develop. Patience is essential and families must not feel pressurised to engage before they feel ready.

Consideration should be given to the most effective ways to build trust with parents, bearing in mind there is no “one size fits all” solution. A range of strategies should be considered and put in place to ensure that parents’ engagement with support services is maintained.

Below are some practical suggestions which may encourage parents to attend and engage with services:

### ***Encouraging engagement***

- Choose a venue which is well known and acceptable to parents. Certain venues may be seen in a negative light and parents may be concerned at the possible social stigmas attached to attending them. Trusted and non-threatening environments should always be considered, with private areas to increase parents’ confidence that they will not be overheard or seen by anyone outside of the group, or passing by.
- Clear communication with parents to ensure they are fully equipped with accurate information in advance of attending services, for example, inclusion of a map if a venue is difficult to find, be clear on start times etc.
- Early engagement is vital to building a relationship of trust – families may form a connection with a practitioner but be reluctant to engage with anyone other than them. In situations such as these we would encourage you to be flexible in your approach and consider who is best placed to develop the best relationship with the family, even if it means them working outside of their individual role as long as they are suitably qualified to do so.
- Engage with partners such as the police and community development workers to understand the dynamics of the local area and whether there are any reasons why some people cannot work together.
- Provision of transport (if necessary and where possible). This may help those who are physically isolated, for example, living in a rural location with limited access to public transport. This may be especially important to help parents attend group settings which may, in the long run, be beneficial to them through the development of peer networks of support.
- Provision of snacks/meals/refreshments. This can be a hook to encourage engagement and helps to provide a more informal atmosphere to help

parents feel more at ease, especially when accessing services for the first time.

### ***Maintaining engagement***

- Effective management of group dynamics to ensure all parents feel equally involved. This is especially important in a group setting which may see many differing personality types competing to be heard.
- Encourage peer support and informal peer-led networks outside of the formal setting, ensuring this can be achieved safely and positively.
- Encouraging personal ownership of parenting objectives, identifying “quick wins” to help increase confidence, and regularly reviewing progress.
- Ensure information is accessible to parents with limited literacy, learning difficulties, or who may have English as a second/additional language.
- Ensure services are delivered in a collaborative way, drawing parents into discussion at an early stage to encourage them to help develop solutions to their own problems.
- Ensure support is delivered in a way parents can relate to, for example, use their own examples of parenting challenges in discussion and encourage them to share ideas and knowledge with others.
- Maintain contact with all parents outside of the formal setting, especially with those who may miss a session, and take the time to listen to feedback on delivery and try and act on it, where possible and, if it's not possible, explain why.
- Offer informal support outside of sessions to parents who may be struggling or who may be on the brink of disengagement. This may be especially important where family priorities have changed and the parent may need more flexible support or a different approach entirely, to accommodate these changing circumstances.

### **4.11 Monitoring interventions**

Having systems in place for monitoring and evaluating parenting interventions is an important aspect of measuring service quality; assessing whether services are working effectively; and gauging whether parents are benefiting from the support they receive. It also provides valuable information that can be used in planning and developing services and may be useful for identifying workforce development needs.

One of the main points of evaluating a parenting support service is to be able to recognise whether there has been positive change; determine whether the change is attributable to the intervention and ascertain whether the aims of the intervention have been met. There are a number of tools which can be used to measure changes in the child's behaviour and parental well-being and efficacy and these may be used at the beginning and end of the intervention and ideally followed up longer term. These tools can also be used to assess parenting need and identify parents' strengths as well as areas where they need additional support. It can help parents identify their own goals and demonstrate any progress made in meeting these.

*Parenting in Wales: Guidance on Engagement and Support* contains more information about monitoring and evaluating parenting support.

## 5. Strategic commissioning – Support for young people

This section sets out our expectations with regard to the commissioning of services which focus on providing support to young people. This section should be read in conjunction with the following publications:

- [National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014 - 2018](#)
- [Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes](#)
- [Youth Engagement and Progression Framework: Implementation Plan](#)
- [Early identification: effective practice guidance](#)

### 5.1 Why should Families First provide targeted support to young people?

The provision of good quality support for young people is essential to helping families reach their potential. Providing young people with access to the right help at the right time is an important part of any package of support which is provided to families. It can help to build resilience to enable young people to develop the skills they need to live, learn and achieve. It can assist them in taking greater control of their lives and make more informed choices, and protect them from the effects of the potentially damaging experiences to which they may have been exposed.

Factors which may cause a young person to need targeted support may include:

- Bullying
- Exposure to adverse experiences such as parental substance misuse, family conflict, parental imprisonment, domestic violence or poor parental mental health
- Negative influences from peer groups
- Poor family relationships and a lack of family support
- Poor support networks outside of the family
- Poverty
- Teenage pregnancy

These experiences can result in a young person displaying or being at risk of developing:

- Behavioural problems
- Poor mental health
- Poor school attendance and attainment
- Poor social and emotional wellbeing
- Tendency towards risky behaviours

Addressing these risk factors and building the resilience of young people can help achieve a number of long term positive outcomes and reduce instances of:

- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Low educational attainment
- Poor mental health
- Teenage pregnancy
- Youth offending

All local authorities have a statutory duty to provide services which seek to ensure all 11-25 year olds have access to the services they need to achieve their potential. In delivering services which support young people, Families First should be seeking to build on this core provision to ensure it can add value to services which are already available. The programme should not be seeking to duplicate or replace any existing core provision for young people. We want to ensure that young people who are living in difficult circumstances can receive targeted support to help them overcome the challenges they are facing.

## **5.2 Core aims of support for young people**

In developing services which provide support for young people, you will need to ensure services are designed with both a protective and preventative focus and are aimed at the following:

- Empowering young people to become active and productive participants in society
- Increasing confidence and resilience
- Improving social and emotional wellbeing
- Improving the life chances of young people

In addition to these, services should also aim to support young people in the following areas:

- Building the capacity of young people to consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control
- Developing positive attitudes, behaviour and aspirations
- Developing the ability of young people to manage personal and social relationships
- Preventing needs from escalating
- Protecting young people from the damage caused by exposure to ACEs and other similar experiences

It is important for young people to be active participants in their own development. Support must take a strengths-based approach and be complementary to the core aims of the Families First programme.

### **5.3 What is the age focus of support for young people?**

The primary focus of targeted youth services is on young people aged 11-25; however, improving outcomes for young people in this age range is often dependent on children receiving effective support at an earlier age. With this in mind, we encourage you to take a flexible approach to the age groups who will receive help through Families First and to use your own discretion when deciding the ages at which these services should be targeted. These decisions should, however, be linked to the identified needs of young people in your local communities and we will expect you to be able to demonstrate how you have come to this decision in your Families First Delivery Plan.

### **5.4 Identifying the needs of young people**

The services developed through Families First should be responsive to the identified needs of young people in local communities. How these needs are identified will be very important; early identification is key to providing the best chance of long term positive outcomes for young people. We expect Families First to work in an integrated, collaborative way and develop positive partnerships with all those who have regular contact with young people. The use of early identification tools, such as the Vulnerability Assessment Profile (VAP), introduced as part of the implementation of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, have proven to be very effective. These tools use a range of data, supported by professional dialogue, to identify children and young people at an early stage that may need more targeted support.

Whilst the early identification of need is important, there will be groups of young people who may present with needs which are specific to certain groups. Practitioners working with these young people will need to be skilled in identifying these needs and the associated risk factors. These skills and knowledge are a vital factor in helping to ensure the right services are in place to support the young person. These groups might include, but are not limited to:

- Children affected by parental imprisonment
- Children who have experienced bereavement
- Children who are educated outside of mainstream school
- Children from Gypsy and Traveller communities
- Children with mental health issues
- Refugee and asylum seekers
- Victims of domestic abuse
- Young carers
- Young parents
- Young people who have been looked after but are no longer in receipt of statutory services
- Young people leaving the youth justice system

However, the criteria for accessing services should always be based on need, and not on whether the young person belongs to a particular group.

When considering the needs of the young person, it will be important to develop an understanding of what is happening to them in the context of their family and be ready to consider, if necessary, what further measures can be put in place to meet the needs of the whole family, should they not already be known to the programme. However, it may also be apparent that the needs of the young person are unrelated to their family situation and you will need to consider the most appropriate ways to support them, if that is the case.

## 5.5 Who needs to be involved?

The success of targeted youth support is dependent on a range of key partners working together to identify and address the needs of young people. Key partners can include, but are not limited to:

- **Young people.** The views of young people must be taken on board when considering what interventions they may need. Involving young people in planning processes can also lead to the development of sustainable models of intervention. Young people who feel part of this process are more likely to engage successfully with services and increase their chances of long term success.
- **Education settings.** Education settings, such as schools, counsellors, Pupil Referral Units, further education and work-based learning settings are key partners in helping to identify children and young people who may be displaying signs of emerging needs. We expect Families First to actively engage with them to create solid partnerships with robust information sharing practices which will allow efficient referrals into Families First to enable young people to access services early on.
- **Local Authority Engagement and Progression Coordinators (EPCs).** EPCs play a key coordination role in identifying and supporting young people who are least likely to make a successful transition when they leave compulsory education. They help to broker understanding between partners as to which organisations are doing what to support a young person at any given time. They also facilitate the allocation of the most appropriate lead worker.
- **Youth work providers.** Those who are already working with young people are well placed to identify young people in need and build the trusting relationships which are important to ensuring engagement and participation. We expect you to develop positive working relationships with these providers in terms of referrals and service provision.
- **Health agencies.** Health agencies, including GPs, CAMHS and other services can play a central role in helping to identify and support young people who may have more complex needs. In addition, young people in receipt of targeted youth support may require more specialised treatment and so it is important Local Health Boards are engaged with services and can work alongside them to provide more effective support for young people.

- **Police.** The Police, and in particular, Police Community Support Officers can help to identify young people engaged in or at risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour and can also provide valuable advice on other influencing factors which may be affecting a young person's behaviour, for example, community dynamics and family tensions.
- **Criminal justice services.** Criminal justice services, including, Youth Offending Teams, the Probation Service, prisons, and community rehabilitation services have substantial experience of providing support to young people and identifying support needs. We expect you to be linked in with these services and share information to enable young people who have been involved with youth justice system to access a full range of support to help them overcome the challenges they are facing.
- **Third sector community groups.** Third sector community groups play a valuable role in supporting and enriching the lives of young people and are well placed to identify those who may be in need of further support. We expect you to develop positive working relationships with these providers in terms of referrals and service provision.
- **Housing services.** Housing services can often be an initial point of contact for vulnerable young people, for example, teenage parents. We expect you to build positive links with these services and encourage them to identify and refer young people who may benefit from support provided through the programme.

## 5.6 How should support be delivered?

Families First should focus on adding value to existing services by working with a range of agencies using a collaborative and coordinated approach. Targeted support services should encompass a variety of elements which focus on the reduction of risk for young people

Vulnerable or disengaged young people are not the preserve of targeted services, and many may attend open-access provision such as youth clubs. Existing services can play a vital role in developing trusting relationships with young people and may often be able to identify emerging needs to enable early intervention. Families First should be offering targeted provision *within* existing services, as well as services which are commissioned outside of statutory provision, which can utilise existing relationships between young people and youth workers and deliver support in a non-stigmatised, safe environment. By encouraging support to be delivered in this way, vulnerable young people may be also able to develop informal support mechanisms with their peers and not feel "singled out" as being different or troublesome. Support delivered in this way should always be linked to sustainable outcomes for the young person, as part of an agreed plan of support.

We recognise that it may not be practical for all support to be delivered in this way, and there may also be a need to develop more specialised support which caters specifically for the needs of an individual young person. Partner agencies may also have specific targeted support services which may be beneficial to a young person as



part of a holistic package of support and you should seek to join up with those services where possible.

The delivery of support for young people through Families First should be based on a comprehensive understanding of the needs of your local areas and positive engagement with all key stakeholders, including young people. This will help you create sustainable delivery models that are tailored to the needs of your communities and ensure services are delivered collaboratively.

In considering how support is delivered at a local level, you must ensure the young person is always placed at the centre of the process to maximise the chances of long term success.

## 5.7 Key themes of support

**Commissioned services for young people should address the following key themes:**

- **Co-production and empowerment**
- **Health and wellbeing**
- **Relationship support**
- **Transitions support**

### Co-production and empowerment

The principles of co-production and empowerment should be central to all services which are commissioned through Families First. To bring about lasting change, targeted support for young people needs to enable them to become partners in, and share responsibility for, the opportunities and decisions that affect them. The voice and active participation of young people should be central at every level to encourage them to feel a connection to their immediate environment and be invested in the support they receive.

Services will be helping young people gain the confidence, social and emotional skills they need to actively participate in decisions which have an impact on them. It can help to prevent young people choosing to participate in risky behaviour and increase their personal safety, as well as build their confidence and resilience to make better life choices.

### Health and wellbeing

The promotion of healthy lifestyle behaviours can have a positive effect on self-esteem and emotional wellbeing in young people.

The guidance document, [Extending Entitlement: support for 11-25 year olds in Wales](#) states that young people are entitled to lead a healthy life, both physically and

emotionally. As such, young people should be able to access advice and support relating to their health when they need it. Youth work can play an important role in this through the use of educational tools as well as direct practical support. Support can be provided in a number of areas, which may include, but are not limited to:

- Promoting exercise and fitness
- Positive relationships, raising awareness of sexual health and reducing teenage pregnancy
- Diet and nutrition
- Substance and alcohol misuse

Youth support services can also help to address lower level mental health issues either directly or indirectly, through the provision of advice, support and other specialised interventions. Providers may be able to offer direct support or provide assistance in helping a young person access services from a relevant key agency.

#### Relationship support

Strong relationships and / or strong role models are a key factor in promoting wellbeing in young people. Young people who may have been exposed to ACEs or may have significant attachment issues, which can profoundly affect their ability to form secure relationships in later life. They may also experience poor physical and mental health, lower educational achievement and behavioural problems. Young people need to be supported in ways which can help them build the right kinds of honest, supportive and trusting relationships with their parents, peers and other people. This can promote open and positive communication, stability and resilience both in current and future relationships and have a positive impact on a young person's long term emotional and physical wellbeing.

#### Transitions support

Many young people struggle when they reach transition points in their lives and the extent to which they are able to cope with these changes is often dependent on the network of support which surrounds them. Even children and young people who may appear to be resilient and able to cope can struggle to deal with transitions which take them out of situations which were previously comfortable and familiar.

For young people, transitions generally fall into four key categories:

- **Emotional** which might include personal experiences such as bereavement, family breakdown/divorce, parental re-marriage
- **Intellectual** which can include the transition from primary to secondary school, school to further education or university, or from child to adult services
- **Physical** which might include moving to a new school or moving home
- **Physiological** which can include going through puberty or onset of a long-term medical condition

Targeted transition support can help young people to navigate a range of transitions and provide them with a variety of skills to cope with future challenges. Whilst we expect you to address the need for transition support across all themes of support, we have included it here to highlight the importance of providing young people with the right support to increase their capacity to cope with change.

## **5.8 Types of support**

Support for young people can be delivered through a variety of means and you will need to give consideration to the most appropriate way of doing this to meet the needs of your local areas. Young people should be able to access services in settings which are known to them, such as schools, colleges, youth centres and other community based facilities, including outreach and street-work provision. Types of support might include:

- Advocacy services
- Counselling or mentoring support
- Information, advice and guidance tailored to the needs of young people
- Online or digital support tools which complement face to face services
- Peer group activities which enable young people to help themselves and each other

## **5.9 Maintaining engagement**

Building trust is key to developing successful relationships with young people which, in turn, can encourage their engagement with support services. A good starting point would be to reflect on the reasons why young people *do* attend services, and consider how any strategies or methods which support positive engagement can be replicated across services.

Young people may feel disinclined to access a service for a number of reasons, either real or perceived. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Cultural barriers
- Disability
- Family commitments
- Financial reasons
- Geographical isolation
- Mental and physical health problems
- Peer group influences
- Perception that support may be exclusionary and segregate young people increasing the risk of stigma
- Previous involvement with services with no perceived benefit
- Services are irrelevant
- Social isolation
- Speech, language and communication issues
- Support is service led rather than user led

- Timing (for young parents)

By understanding why young people may be reluctant to engage with services, steps can be put in place to overcome these barriers. This may take time, depending on how entrenched these barriers are. Services must be able to take a flexible approach to work with the young person in the design and delivery of service provision to maximise understanding and engagement.

## 6. Delivering quality services

The workforce delivering Families First will consist of a wide range of individuals from a variety of agencies and sectors. They may range from paraprofessionals who do not have formal qualifications to graduate or post-graduate level professionals. It is essential that all practitioners working with families in the delivery of the programme are appropriately skilled, trained and supervised to fulfil their role, and hold the necessary professional qualifications, where relevant.

Staff must have the skills to build and sustain relationships with families (or individual members within families) from a diverse range of backgrounds, be able to recognise their needs and make informed decisions about the suitability of interventions. Their work must also be underpinned by relevant occupational standards.

Training and ongoing professional development is essential to deliver services that meet and exceed agreed quality standards. We expect all staff working to deliver Families First to demonstrate a commitment to continual development through either formal or informal means to manage their professional learning and growth. This will have a direct and positive impact on the people who access services provided through the programme as well as the quality of practice and services.

You may wish to consider taking a joint approach with other programmes such as Flying Start to support greater multi-agency working and further develop the multi-agency approach to supporting families. You will also need to consider the needs of staff involved in the delivery of support to families to further enhance their skills and on-going development. This may include group work, master classes to enhance practice, signposting and referral pathways, monitoring and evaluation and enhancing training to deliver new programmes or services.

Good practice requires opportunity for reflection and personal evaluation this can be enabled through effective staff supervision and mentoring. Supervision can have a positive effect on the confidence, capacity and competence of the workforce and can help promote reflective practice and continuing professional development as well support stability and positive morale amongst those working directly with families.

## 7. Families First and statutory services

It is important that families who are in need of support are able to access the right types of services to help prevent their needs from escalating or from becoming embedded.

The focus of Families First is, and should continue to be, on providing early intervention and prevention support. However, we recognise that the programme will often work with families with more complex needs, particularly through the TAF. Thresholds for support are determined at a local level and every case must be considered on an individual basis. Any action taken must be based on the principles of early intervention and prevention and if, following assessment, you do not consider that interventions from Families First would be able to halt the escalation of needs, a further referral to a statutory service may be necessary. This is true of any case where a Families First intervention would not be considered appropriate, including cases where families have been “stepped down” into the programme.

### 7.1 Working with families who are open to statutory services

As a general rule, Families First should not work with families who are in receipt of, or who are open to, statutory services. However, in certain cases, a family may be referred to the programme for support and, if this happens, each case will need to be considered individually. Circumstances in which you decide to work with a family might include:

- The support is for a child within the family
- The family are making good progress and are likely to respond well to the intervention

Circumstances in which you decide not to work with a family might include:

- There are signs that matters within the family may be escalating
- The family have not engaged with or made progress with the interventions they have received so far
- The Families First intervention is not appropriate to meet the needs of the family
- You do not feel Families First staff are suitably qualified to work with a family given the severity of their needs

In cases where you decide to work with a family, the following criteria should be met:

- The roles of the Families First service provider and those of the statutory agency should be defined and agreed at the outset
- Overall responsibility for the family remains with the statutory agency, who must be kept informed of the family’s progress at regular intervals

- The family's case must be reviewed regularly to consider whether the Families First intervention remains appropriate

## 8. Planning requirements

You must submit a comprehensive Delivery Plan setting out how you intend to deliver Families First in your local area and include any evidence which is relevant to your decision making processes. A template will be sent to you for completion but, as a guide, all plans should contain the following:

- Local authority overview of Families First Delivery Plan
- Funding
- Delivery of key elements
  - JAFF
  - TAF
  - Strategic commissioning
  - Disability Focus
- Alignment of programmes
- Challenges and risks
- Outline of planned cost savings activities
- Planned learning activity
- Governance arrangements

All local authorities will be required to submit a Delivery Plan for 2018-19, but how often you submit your plans after that will depend on your local planning cycles and length of contracts.

We expect you to review your plans regularly to assess whether they remain fit for purpose. You will need to submit amended plans in the following circumstances:

- Changes to programme funding
- Changes to any of the key elements, e.g. decommissioning of services, changes to TAF models etc.
- Changes to governance arrangements
- Other significant changes which may affect delivery of the programme

All Delivery Plans will need agreement in writing from your Account Manager.



## **9. Cost savings of Families First**

The Welsh Government believes that the continued development of effective early intervention support represents an intelligent approach to working with families and investment in services. Not only can these services provide effective, timely support to families, prevent escalation of need and poor long term outcomes, they can also deliver long term savings at both a local and national level.

Families First evaluation evidence highlighted that the programme has the potential to generate large cost savings where families are helped to avoid very poor long-term outcomes and included a number of case studies to illustrate the range of savings which could be made.

We expect all local authorities to build on these initial findings and actively demonstrate a commitment to calculating the cost savings which can be achieved through Families First. You may wish to consider looking at this from a regional or multi-authority perspective, and we can support you in making these connections. You may also wish to consider focussing on specific elements of the programme rather than the programme as a whole, for example, it may be more practical to consider the costs savings achieved through the TAF separately to those achieved through the strategic projects.

We will expect you to include how you intend to take this work forward in your Families First Delivery Plans from 2018-19 onwards.

## **10. Welsh language**

The Welsh Government is committed to promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language. The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 gives the Welsh language official status in Wales and establishes the principle that the Welsh language should be treated no less favourably than the English language.

The Welsh Language Commissioner published the Welsh Language Standards in March 2016 and all local authorities must comply with those which apply to them. You will need to ensure you are complying with these legally binding standards as you design, commission and deliver services for families in your local area.