

Parent information support needs:



what you told us

What was the project about?

The aim of the project was to find out how parents of young children (aged 0-8) who live in Scotland get information and find support about parenting and about child health.

We wanted to know: **how** parents get information; **who** helps parents get this information; **where** parents find information; **when** it is best for parents to receive information; and, in **what** way.

We asked questions about this to get a better understanding of what parents think works. We reported on what parents told us to NHS Health Scotland.

Our hope is that NHS Health Scotland will use our report about what we learned **from** parents to improve information and help **for** parents.

What did we find?

There were three main points made by most parents who took part:

1. Parent information/support is not very effective when parents are made to feel excluded or unimportant. Negative stereotypes about certain groups of parents get in the way of parents finding out important information.

2. ‘Trust’ shapes how parents look for, receive and use information. The quality of the relationship they have with professionals (or other providers of information and advice) is very important.

3. Parents respond most positively to personalised information and support. Most parents said they need help to understand how general information applies to *their* child and *their* circumstances. It is not helpful to get “one size fits all” answers, because these do not respond to individual realities and do not take into account what is true for individual parents.

Parents generally felt confident in their job as parents. Many felt that they were the “expert” in caring for their child. Some parents did, however, feel a lack of confidence about topics such as feeding and diet, behaviour management, personal relationships and emotional well-being and mental health.

Sources of information parents use now

Parents wanted clearer information about their child’s health. They wanted to have two-way conversations with health professionals and other sources of information. They found that they really trusted the advice of professionals who had practical experience and understood how parents felt. NHS 24 and the health service were two “brands” that were trusted to provide good information and support. Generally, parents did not find television, radio and newspapers to be very helpful.

Sources of information parents may use in the future

Parents felt that the Internet could be more helpful in the future. Some felt that social media might become more meaningful for parents, but that they are not important just now. Some parents were keen to get parenting information and support from a DVD – they felt this would be good because it is convenient.

The strongest finding was that parents value good relationships with health professionals they can trust over and above everything else. If positive, trusting relationships are formed with professionals, then it improves the chances of parents getting, understanding and using information. It is crucial

that parents feel listened to and that their concerns are being taken seriously. Understanding and good, clear communication skills are essential for delivering good information and support for parents.

Why did we do it and what did we want to know?

NHS Health Scotland asked Children in Scotland to find out what parents of young children think about the information they have received from anyone on parenting, child health and child development. They wanted to learn more about what information parents find helpful and unhelpful, now, as well as what kinds of information (and ways of receiving it) parents said they wanted in the future.

NHS Health Scotland asked us to write a report of our findings. They wanted Children in Scotland to talk to parents because they had already talked with the professionals and services that provide information. NHS Health Scotland wanted to hear both sides of the story.

During our research, we asked you lots of questions. These covered:

- how confident you feel as a parent in general and in dealing with your child's health
- who you trust to give you information and support
- how you would like to receive information and support
- where you go to get that information and support just now

How did we do the research?

We heard from a total of 132 parents. The people we heard from were all parents of a young child (up to age 8) who lived in Scotland and are actively involved in their child's life.

We spoke to parents from different backgrounds and with different needs. We were asked by NHS Health Scotland to talk with three groups: fathers; young mothers and parents with "literacy issues" (people who have difficulties with reading, writing, speaking or understanding in English or other aspects of communication).

We did the research in a variety of ways including individual and group interviews, focus groups and an online survey.

The parents came from across Scotland – Fife, Glasgow & Clyde, Grampian, Lothian, Tayside, Lanarkshire, Forth Valley and the Western Isles.

They came from different backgrounds: employed and unemployed; living in cities, towns, villages and rural areas; families with one child or more than

one; parents who spoke English as their first language; parents from ethnic minority backgrounds; parents who lived in more deprived areas and parents who lived in less deprived areas; young parents and older ones.

We put together the main ideas and advice we heard from parents in one report using quotes from parents. No-one's real names or ways of identifying them were used.

Who did the work?

A small team of researchers carried out this work: Kat Allen, Andy Pates, Catriona Thomson, Carole Kelly, Sara Collier, Jeni Bainbridge and Jonathan Sher. You may have heard from several different members of the team during the project.

Were there any specific findings by group?

Fathers

1. There should be information and support especially designed for dads.
2. The role and responsibilities of dads have changed a lot and support services have not always kept up. Most dads want to be more involved in bringing up their children.
3. Fathers actually want to get information and seek support on parenting and child health. This information and support is sometimes difficult to get because of the traditional idea that mums are the ones caring for the children.
4. Information and support for 'parents' should involve dads too, from the start (before the baby is born).

Young mothers

1. These parents see the mother as the person who is responsible for parenting.
2. They like the 'common sense' approach to parenting based on their instinct and the ways that make them feel the most comfortable.
3. They found that lots of difficult changes happened around the time of having their baby: they had to leave school; move house; and, change how they spent their time. Often they lost relationships and had lots more responsibility.
4. Some parents struggled to cope with these changes and wanted support during these times.

Parents with "literacy" issues

1. These parents want professionals to explain written information when

asked, to provide translation services when needed, and to provide information in clear and appropriate language.

2. Parents from different backgrounds, countries or cultures may not be familiar with how the health service works in Scotland. They appreciate clear explanations but also want health professionals to be sensitive to cultural differences.
3. Their children's speech and language development are big priorities for them.
4. Parents who use the health service often tend to be familiar with how it works. But, parents looking for services they have not used before, both parents from Scotland or from elsewhere, do need clear explanations of how the system works and how to get things done.

What are our recommendations based upon what parents shared with us?

Trusting relationships between professionals and parents are the key. These relationships should be based on understanding each other well; mutual respect; and, clear, two-way communication.

We recommend that professionals and support staff get training on how to provide personalised information and support, so parents can better understand the information they receive. This information and support should be provided in a way that suits parents according to their different needs, views and preferences.

We recommend that these new sources of information and approaches to providing them should start with the areas that parents found challenging: feeding and diet; behaviour management; relationships; and, emotional well-being and mental health.

This information should be available in places where parents of young children are most likely to be found. Information **for** parents should be developed **with** parents so that it meets their needs in the best way possible.

We also recommend that face-to-face peer support groups should be more widely available and virtual social networks should be better supported.

Where can more information be found?

This is only a summary of our findings: we collected a lot of very useful and interesting information. Children in Scotland has written a more detailed and formal report of the research and the findings. This is available from the project team. You can request a copy at any time from Sara Collier on scollier@childreninscotland.org.uk or 0131 222 2412.

This report is also available on the NHS Health Scotland website at <http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/5948.aspx>. They can provide the report in different formats and languages. To request this, you can email nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net.

We have produced a short film of our researchers sharing their findings. If you would like to watch this, then it is available on our [Youtube channel](#) (just type in 'Children in Scotland channel' to Youtube and you will see the link).

Thank you

We would like to thank you very much for taking part in the research and supporting our work. We would warmly welcome any feedback or comments you may have and these can be directed to Sara Collier at scollier@childreninScotland.org.uk

