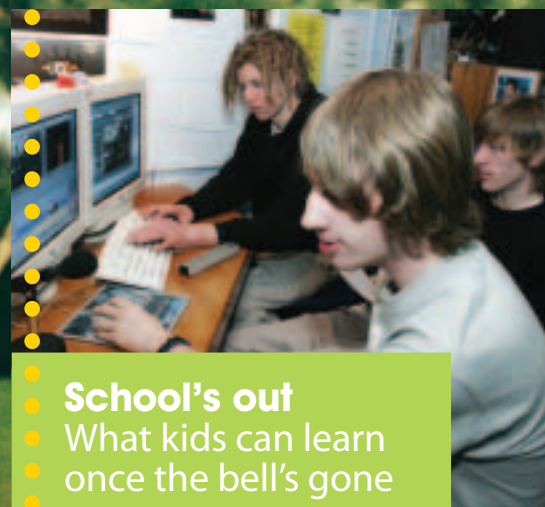


Every Parent Matters



School's out
What kids can learn
once the bell's gone



Child's play
How to make
learning fun

**Helping you
help your child**

A life's work

What's the toughest job going?

Firefighter? A&E doctor? England football manager?

How about parent?

There's no doubt that children enrich our lives, but raising them is hard work. The hours are lousy, there's no annual leave, and crucially, you don't get training.

While we all want to do our best and give our children

a good start in life, it's often hard to know what we should be doing. This is especially true when it comes to education.

The good news is that all the research on child development shows that taking an interest in

your child is much more important than the grades you got at school.

The Government wants to help you to help your child. That's why it has introduced services to make it as simple as possible for parents to

play a part in their child's learning.

It's important that all parents know where to get information, and feel happy to use any support or advice they need.





PARENT POWER

As a parent, you're a very powerful person. How you raise your child will have a profound effect on their whole life.

One of the most important areas where you can support your child is in their schooling. When parents are involved in their children's education, they tend to enjoy school more, go to their lessons regularly, get better academic results and have fewer problems with their behaviour.

Research also shows that:

- **The support you give to your child's learning matters more than your background, size of family or level of education**
- **Taking an interest in your child's schooling makes it more likely that they'll do well in their exams**
- **A dad's active interest in his child's schooling is strongly linked to academic success**

While a parent's involvement has the greatest effect in the early years of a child's life, their influence doesn't stop as children become young adults. In one study, a parent's interest in their child's education was the most reliable predictor of achievement at the age of 16.

Of course, the benefits of parents engaging with their children go beyond academic success. Studies show that children of involved parents have better social skills, are less vulnerable to stress and enjoy better health. They also experience greater life satisfaction and have more successful relationships.



FAMILY FACTS

- In 2004, 7.4 million families with 13.1 million children were living in the UK
- Of these children, 66% lived with married parents
- One in four children lived in a lone-parent family in 2004. This was an increase from one in fourteen in 1972
- The average number of children in a family has gone from 2 in 1971 to 1.8 in 2004

The play's the thing

Many parents are unsure about how

they can help their child to learn.

They really shouldn't worry –

one of the best ways to support

a child's development is to

have fun with them.



"Where's the manual?" wonders the new parent, bringing their child home for the first time. Everyone says that being a parent is a huge responsibility, but no-one tells you what you're actually supposed to do.

Of course, getting in touch with your inner child doesn't come naturally to everyone. For many parents, engaging with children can be a real challenge. That's where public services can help.

As all parents know, helping a child to develop isn't always easy, but it can be very enjoyable. Whether it's dressing dolls or catching criminals in Cluedo, play helps children to develop a range of useful skills. Having fun is also a great way for families to communicate and build bonds.

Jo Hargreaves, 24, is a single mum who gets very little support from her family and friends. She says her life is being turned around by the Early Learning Partnership Project (ELPP). It supports parents who want to be involved in their child's learning but aren't sure where to start.

PLAY TIME

Learning doesn't have to be hard work. In fact, there's evidence to suggest that the greater the range of activities children get involved in, the better their behaviour and social skills.

For younger children, these activities could include:

- Painting and drawing
- Playing with letters and numbers
- Reading story books
- Playing with friends
- Singing songs and nursery rhymes

For older children, activities might include:

- Taking part in sports events
- Visiting places of interest
- Going to plays and concerts
- Getting involved in after-school clubs





Following a routine hospital visit, Jo was identified as being at risk of postnatal depression. Her health visitor suggested that she take part in a play project with her youngest son. It's designed to help her bond with him in ways she wouldn't while alone at home.

"We both learn together here. Before we came I was sitting at home looking at catalogues and not paying much attention to my son. Here, you can make more of a mess and really play with the kids. We all start off on the floor, sitting next to each other on the mat and singing.

"When we first started going, my son got this box and put it over his head. I thought he was being naughty, but I was encouraged to do it as well. We turned it into a game. I now know that copying the children helps you understand what they're trying to do.

"We do painting together. In fact, we do all sorts together. We lay our children on paper and draw round them. One time, I painted my son's hair green and gave him big goggly eyes.

"We paint on our feet, then walk on the paper,

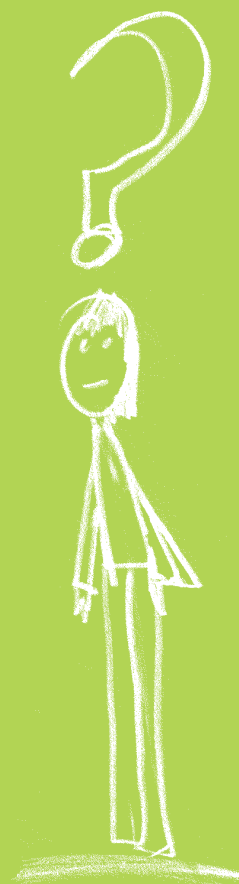
laughing and tickling each other. We definitely wouldn't do that at home. We also play learning games, like choo choo train in cardboard boxes.

"The sessions aren't that big – just four adults, the children and a few workers. We all support each other and talk about the same things. It's easier to talk about problems here that you don't want your family to know about.

"For me, the project has been a lifeline. It gets me out of the house and meeting new people, and it helps me understand lots more about my son."

DO YOU KNOW?

All parents with children aged 3 and 4 can get free early education.



For more information, contact your local Children's Information Service, or go to www.childcarelink.gov.uk.

" The best way to make children good is to make them happy. "
Oscar Wilde



Choosing a school

Finding the right school for your child

can seem like a scary process.

But there's plenty of help for parents.

Choosing a school for your child is one of the most important decisions you'll make about their education. Making the right choice for you and your child can involve lots of research and planning.

Work is currently being done to make sure that information about schools is clear, thorough and easy for parents to understand. In particular, web-based information is being improved because parents say they're using the internet more and more to find what they need.

DID YOU KNOW?

You can tell your local authority about the type of school places you think your local area needs.

While there is a lot of information available to help you choose a school, it's not always obvious what to do with it or how to interpret it. Local authorities are well placed to help parents here. In some cases, they may refer parents to their



local Choice Advice service, which offers more practical support in choosing a secondary school for their child. Ask your primary school if this service is available in your area.

DID YOU KNOW?

Directgov (www.direct.gov.uk) provides advice on how to apply for a school place, what to look for when choosing a school, and how the admissions process works.

Meeting parents' needs

Parents don't just make a big impression on children themselves; they can also influence how they're taught.

Parents are usually the best judges of what children need. They understand their children better than anyone else, and have important insights into what children want.

The Government and local authorities are aware that if they're going to give children and parents what they need, they have to listen to what parents say, and act on their suggestions.

DID YOU KNOW?

A national network of Choice Advisers will be in place by 2008.

That's why mums and dads are now being given more chances to comment on how they think local services should be run. Your views aren't being gathered out of politeness – they're taken very seriously and should lead to improvements in the quality of public services.

A TWO-WAY RELATIONSHIP

Schools achieve most when they involve parents, but it's important to remember that the relationship works both

ways. Just as you listen to teachers who urge you to take an interest in your child's homework, so teachers listen to you when you express a view about how the school is run. If you have the time, your school would value your involvement as a parent governor.

The school inspection process looks at how schools capture the views of parents. This can be done in a range of ways. Some schools will use parents' questionnaires,

some will use parents' workshops and some will use parent councils.

However feedback is asked for, it's important that you take the opportunity to influence how your child is taught.

DID YOU KNOW?

All schools have to offer a School Profile, which gives an accurate picture of a school's qualities.



A very strong engagement

Children achieve more when parents and schools work

together. That's why schools are introducing more convenient

ways for parents to stay in touch.

Cardinal Wiseman Catholic College in Birmingham runs an innovative programme that allows parents to access a range of online information about their children's performance at school.

Keeping in contact with your child's school is crucial. When parents and teachers act as allies, they can ensure that children reach their full potential.

However, building a good relationship with a school isn't always easy. Many parents don't feel a natural connection with teachers, and some simply don't have time for regular face-to-face meetings.

Imagine, then, being able to follow your child's progress online: to keep an eye on their attendance, punctuality, and results – without leaving the house.

For some parents, this is already a reality. James Tremaine's 14-year-old son, Dashiell, attends Cardinal Wiseman Catholic College in Birmingham. James doesn't always have time to attend school events, so he keeps up-to-date with his son's progress over the web.

While no substitute for parents' evenings, the school's e-portal is a great way for James to stay involved.



// Our secure e-portal gives parents access to a range of important information... //

"Of course I'm interested in how Dash is doing, and I want to play a part in his education, but realistically, there's no way I can drop into school every month.

"I work full-time as a painter and decorator, which makes it difficult to guarantee when I'm going to be free. I also get a bit intimidated around Dash's teachers because I never did very well in school myself.

"The school's e-portal is brilliant. It's reassuring to know that if I can't make it to a scheduled meeting, I can at least get an idea of how he's doing. Obviously, if the portal showed that there was a problem with his attendance or performance, I'd make time to go into the school and sort things out.

"Now that I've started using the portal I've noticed that Dash is more likely to tell me about school issues himself. Before, he never said much about what was going on with his studies. I like to think he's more honest with me these days."

Cardinal Wiseman's Headteacher, Martin Jones, explains the thinking behind the e-portal:

"We believe that parental engagement is key to a child's success at school. We started using internet techniques to engage parents two years ago after we received feedback that traditional communication routes like newsletters and meetings weren't working for everyone.

"Our secure e-portal gives parents access to a range of important information and creates a useful communication channel. Teachers use the portal to let parents know what their child's assessment targets are, and how they can reach them – for example, 'Dashie'll needs to improve his maths by doing x'.



"For parents who don't want to venture into school, the e-portal is a great way of maintaining contact. We estimate that around 65% of parents currently have internet access, and at least a quarter use the e-portal regularly, so it's undoubtedly a useful tool.

"Setting up the portal and the surrounding site has helped the school focus its attention on how we can build successful relationships with parents – something that matters to us greatly. It's also motivated pupils to improve their behaviour, which is no mean feat."

KEEP IN TOUCH

There are several ways of staying in touch with a school. If you'd like to know more about your child's learning, why not investigate the following:

- **Home-School Agreement**
This document lets parents know what a school is trying to achieve and their role in supporting this.
- **Electronic copies of reports, notices, newsletters**
- **School websites**
- **School intranets**
- **Truancy call**

This automated calling system lets you know if your child arrives late or misses school.



A helping hand



Parents struggling the most are often the least likely

to ask for help. But thanks to organisations like Home-Start,

support is getting where it's needed.

There are many reasons why parents feel unable to ask for help. They might have moved house and feel isolated from friends and family; they could be suffering with illness or depression; or they may be struggling to cope with a child who has a disability or other special needs.

This is where outreach services such as Home-Start can make a real difference.

Home-Start volunteers visit families in their own home to offer support, friendship and practical



help. There are over 17,000 volunteers, all of whom are parents themselves. As well as sharing their own experiences, they can

give parents a break and arrange for them to meet others in the same boat, so they know their problems aren't unique.

Volunteers will only get involved if the family want them to, which means the parents remain in control, rather than having help forced on them. In fact, one in four of the families helped by Home-Start make the first contact themselves.

If the families have more complex problems, Home-Start may involve other services and act as the main co-ordinator for them all. This type of combined support is a key part of the Government's plans to help families facing many challenges.



A HELPER'S PERSPECTIVE

Home-Start volunteer Paul supported a young single mother, Nikki, who had recently split with her partner and was struggling to cope. With Paul's help, Nikki now has a better relationship with her family, has found herself a job, and has a new network of friends.

"Supporting Nikki has been eye-opening and greatly rewarding," says Paul.

"I have watched her change from a shy young person with very low self-esteem into a chatty, confident young woman who is looking forward to a bright future with her son."



Ann, a mother of three, was referred to Home-Start by her health visitor. She had postnatal depression after giving birth to her third child, and was struggling to cope with two other young children.

"After spending some time with the family, our volunteer Karen helped us realise that two of our sons had learning difficulties. We also had some concerns about our third son, which she talked through with us.

"Karen then arranged for my partner and I to

meet with a group of professionals, including a school nurse and a child psychologist.

"With their help, we looked at benefits we could apply for, talked about schools, and agreed the best way to move forward."

A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME

Two months later, Ann and her partner had acted on all the group's recommendations.

"We booked places for our two older boys at local play schemes, and

applied for a Disability Living Allowance as well as further support at school. The boys have also seen a speech therapist, and the group have made a request to social services for a Disability Assessment."

Ann and her family now have a network of support they can call on. "It's a huge comfort to know we aren't dealing with everything by ourselves and that there's help out there when we need it."

One in four families helped by Home-Start make the first contact.



" We looked at benefits we could apply for, talked about schools and agreed the best way forward. "



A problem shared

Children are usually full of questions,

but parents can be too. Do you have a

query about childcare or school facilities?

Hopefully, we've got an answer.

Q. Having stayed at home for the first 18 months of my daughter's life, I've decided to go back to work. I need to look into childcare, but I don't know where to start. I'd be grateful for any advice.

Lesley, Plymouth

A. You probably already know that there are many different types of childcare available (child minders, nannies, nurseries, pre-schools). What I'd advise you to do first is to work out what suits your needs best based on your working hours and budget.

The next step is to find out what's available near you. Your local Children's Information Service (CIS) can tell you what's out there. It will hold up-to-date lists of the majority of local childcare and education services.

As well as contact details, the CIS will provide you with useful information such as opening hours, age restrictions, parking facilities and costs.

You can get the phone number of your local CIS by calling 0800 096 0296.

DID YOU KNOW?

Families with children aged 3 to 4 will begin to be able to access 15 hours of free early education per week in 2007.



Q. My 5 year old daughter loves it when we read books together. At the moment, I really enjoy it, but I'm worried that in the next couple of years, the books are going to get too hard for me to read. I want my daughter to be a better reader than I am, but I'm worried I'll hold her back. What should I do?

Karl, Haringey

A. Your daughter is lucky to have a dad who cares so much. The fact that you take an interest in her learning is much more important than how good a reader you are. Please don't stop what you're doing. You're instilling a love of books, which is possibly the best thing you can do for someone who's learning to read.

You're certainly not alone in worrying about your reading – over five million British parents struggle with reading and writing.

One way of getting more confident about your reading skills would be to look into a family learning course. This will give you an idea of how literacy is taught in schools, which might help you to support your daughter's learning. If you're interested in finding out more, contact your local Children's Information Service.

DID YOU KNOW?

Bookstart provides free packs of books to every family in England with children at 6-9 months, 18 months and 3 years. From Autumn 2007, every 5 and 11 year old will receive the gift of a free book.

Q. Both my children attend a secondary school that will soon offer 'extended services'. What does this mean for me and my kids?

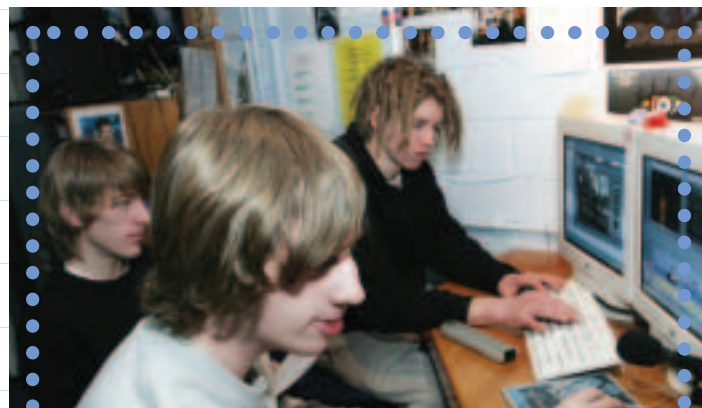
Radhika, Bristol

A. In short, it means the school won't just operate between 9am and 3.30pm. Extended schools offer children and their families access to a range of services outside the normal school day. These might include childcare, subject tuition, clubs, and parenting support.

There's evidence that extended services can help to raise pupils' motivation and improve their attendance, so it's worth checking out. Types of services vary from school to school, so your best bet is to ask about what's available. The Government is currently testing a range of additional activities to get a better understanding of what children and parents find most useful.

DID YOU KNOW?

By 2010 all schools will offer access to extended services.



Q. My 16 year old daughter has just given birth to her first child. She wants to get back to studying within a year, but she's worried about the cost of childcare. Is she entitled to any help?

Tina, Stockport

A. The Government is really keen to help young parents build a secure future for themselves and their children – that's why it offers financial help to those who want to get qualifications. The Care to Learn scheme covers all childcare and travel costs for new parents who return to learning or training before the age of 20. Please let your daughter know that if she takes advantage of the scheme, any benefits she or her family receive won't be affected.

DID YOU KNOW?

Over 4,000 young parents took advantage of Care to Learn funding in 2005-06.



Tough times

Raising a child isn't always smooth sailing.

But if things do get tough, it's important

to remember that help is available.

For some parents, making sure their child gets to school can be one of their biggest challenges. For others, a child's all round behaviour is the bigger concern.

In both cases, parents have a vital role to play. But the school, local authority and other organisations are there to provide advice and support to parents during these testing times.

PLAYING TRUANT

Getting a good education is not just about academic learning. School also helps children build their confidence and develop social skills that are vital for their prospects later in life.

By skipping school, children are missing out

on these opportunities. But they're also putting themselves at risk of becoming victims of crime, or getting drawn into antisocial behaviour.

If children think it's okay to regularly miss school from an early age, they are more likely to play truant when they're older.

Parents now have a legal responsibility to make sure their children attend school, and need to do everything they can to ensure this happens. If they don't, they could face prosecution.

Thankfully, they are not alone – local authorities are there to support parents and help ensure their children are getting a proper education.

If parents are struggling to get their child to school, they should involve the local authority as quickly as possible. Once they do, there is a range of support they could receive.

An Education Welfare Officer might work with them and the school to keep check on when children are missing school, and help identify any problems. In other cases, parents can volunteer to sign a

parenting contract with the school and/or local authority. This sets out what the parents need to do, and what support they will receive.

Parents also need to set a good example themselves, from when their child first goes to school. It's important not to take their child out of school unless absolutely necessary, and to always let the school know if they are going to be absent.

// Parents should trust their instincts and contact the school if they think their child is being bullied. //



BEATING BULLIES

A common reason children skip school is because they're being bullied. This could be anything from direct physical or verbal attacks, to spreading rumours about another child.

As with truancy, parents have a key role to play – but again, there is plenty of support available.

If a parent thinks their child might be being bullied, there are several signs they should look out for. Their son or

daughter might seem anxious and irritable at home, and find reasons not to go to school.

Ultimately, parents should trust their instincts and contact the school if they think their child is being bullied. The first step is to contact the head teacher and raise any concerns. The school will then try and deal with the problem, using its anti-bullying policy – which every school must have in place.

If the problem isn't sorted out, parents can

then contact the Chair of Governors, and their local authority to ask them to get involved.

If neither of these can resolve the problem, the DCSF can investigate the situation with the school and ensure the bullying is stamped out.

It's just as important for parents to get involved if their child is the one doing the bullying. They should let them know that what they're doing is unacceptable and is hurting other children.

And parents should speak to the child's teacher, and discuss how they can work together to stop the child bullying.

Parents who are concerned their child might be bullying, or being bullied, can also call Parentline Plus for advice and general information. If their child doesn't want to talk about the situation, parents can encourage them to call Childline and talk to someone in private.



DEDICATED SUPPORT

Increasing numbers of schools are employing dedicated parent support advisers for families and children who need extra help. This might be about putting parents in touch with other parents in similar situations, or organising for the parents to attend a group with other mothers and fathers to get advice and tips on how to deal with difficult situations.

The Government is looking at examples of schools that have already used this system particularly well, to help guide other schools in the future.



Tackling the teenage years

Despite what they might say,

teenagers need their parents as much as ever.

Adolescence can be hell

– for young people themselves, and for parents who want to help but don't know how.

As children grow up, they tend to spend more time with their friends, and less time with their family. It's easy for parents to feel like their child doesn't need them or want their company.

While teens might seem knowledgeable and confident, they still need help and advice. And if they don't get this from their parents, they'll go elsewhere – probably to friends their own age, who know as little as them.

Parenting of teenagers involves a fine balancing act. On the one hand, you have to encourage independence; on the other, you have to maintain authority as a parent. Striking the right balance isn't easy.

One thing many parents find particularly hard is talking to their teenagers about sensitive issues like sex and drugs. When it comes to tricky subjects like these, it's important that parents are well informed. Talking openly leads to later first sex and better contraceptive use so very important to reduce teenage pregnancy.





// Successful parenting of teenagers involves a fine balancing act. //



The Government is aware that it's not just parents of very young children who want support. That's why it funds a range of services that help parents of teenagers get through these difficult years.

EXPERTS IN THE FIELD

The Dads against Drugs (DAD) scheme was set up in Hull as a way of helping dads talk to their kids about drugs.

"It's based on the idea that teenagers will only listen to parents if they know what they're talking about," explains Steve, one of the dads involved in the scheme.

"The organisers set up a football team, which we were invited to join. As well as training and playing together, we get advice about the dangers of drugs from experts who really know their stuff.

"One of the most important things we've learnt is to involve the kids and listen to their opinion. This shows you respect them and that you're not simply telling them what to do.

"Playing in the team also gives me and the other dads a chance to talk to each other about problems we're having with our kids.

It's really useful to hear how others have dealt with similar situations."

GETTING THE BALL ROLLING

In addition to one-off schemes like DAD, there's a range of other local and national programmes offering support for parents of teenagers.

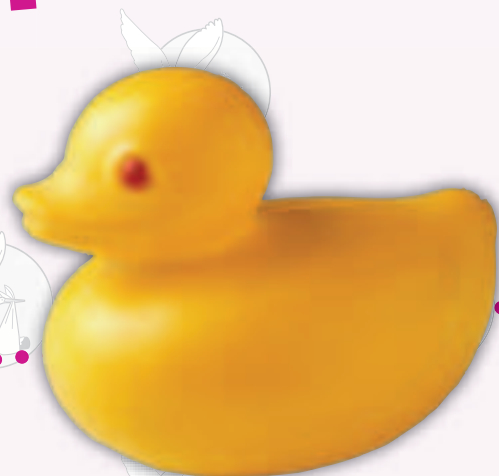
Later this year, for instance, Transition Information Sessions will be rolled out in schools across the UK. These will provide information and advice for parents whose children are starting primary or secondary school.



GET HELP

If you're seriously worried about your teenager, you can get free support through Parentline Plus. Call 0800 800 2222, or go to www.parentlineplus.org.uk

A better start for teenage parents



Raising a family is never easy.

But it's particularly hard

for parents who are still

growing up themselves.

Being a parent at the same time as making the difficult move from adolescence to adulthood is a real challenge, often resulting in problems for teenage mothers, young fathers and their children. For example, teenage mothers are three times more likely to suffer post-natal depression than older mothers and their babies are much more likely to be born prematurely and to have a low birth weight. That is why we have a strategy to help young people prevent early pregnancy until they are

ready emotionally and have the qualifications they need to have the financial independence that young parents say they want. As a result, teenage pregnancy is on the decline and at the lowest level for 20 years.

But while increasing numbers of young people are delaying parenthood until they are older, we need to make sure that those who do become pregnant get the support they need to make successful futures for themselves and their children. Research shows that what works best is for teenage mothers to have a one-to-one adviser who makes sure they get all the help they need on health issues – stopping smoking, encouraging breastfeeding, eating

healthily, and preventing repeat pregnancies; advice on benefits; and help with getting back into education and training to secure a positive future through, for example, taking up the Care to Learn scheme which helps with childcare costs enabling young parents to return to learning.

Young fathers also need support to develop a positive relationship with their child – even if the relationship with the teenage mother has ended. It's clear that when fathers are positively involved, children are happier and do better at school. Alongside their work to reduce teenage pregnancies, all areas have been asked to put these support services in place. There are several examples of excellent support work in areas where

// Teenage parents might wonder how they're going to achieve the goals they set before their child arrived. //



teenage pregnancy rates are also dropping. This is how one of these services really helped a young parent.

A FRIEND IN NEED

Having someone there to listen and help out made a huge difference to Tina who found out she was pregnant at the age of 18. When she met her adviser, Tina had fallen out with her family and had no friends she could talk to. To make matters worse, her ex-partner, the child's father, was in prison.

"My adviser was fantastic. She helped me find out about housing and benefits, and kept me looking on the positive side when I was feeling down. She also came with me to all my scans and was with me when I gave birth. I couldn't have done it without her."

Tina's adviser also helped her get back in touch with her own family, who she'd fallen out with following the news that she was pregnant.

"My adviser has made such a difference for me," says Tina, "and I really hope that one day I can get a job helping other teenage mums."

It's not just young mums that benefit from having an adviser. The initiative also works with young dads, encouraging them to get involved in their child's upbringing and giving them the chance to talk to other young men in the same position. They're encouraged to bring their children along to sessions, which helps with bonding and boosts young parents' confidence.

DID YOU KNOW?

Young parents under the age of 20 who want to get qualifications can get help with the cost of childcare and travel.

To find out more, go to www.dfes.gov.uk/caretolearn



Family fortunes

What's happened to the traditional family?

It's moved with the times.



Britain is changing.

Since the 1970s, the number of unmarried couples living together has trebled, the number of babies born outside marriage has increased five-fold, and the number of single-parent families has also trebled.

There have never been so many TV programmes, magazines, books and websites offering advice on parenting issues – and they've never been more popular. This shows that mothers and fathers are keen to find out how to do their best for their family.

And although we all live busy lives, most parents say that they spend more time with their children – talking and socialising together – than they did with their own parents.

While modern families might come in all shapes and sizes, they remain an important source of love, support and education.

// Most parents say that they spend more time with their children than they did with their own parents. //



FATHERS

Dads are now playing a bigger part in raising their children.

- 93% of dads take time off when their child is born
- 87% of dads feel as confident about caring for their baby as their partner
- The average time dads spend with young children has increased by 800% since the 1970s
- In 2005, 31% of dads of babies worked flexitime, compared to 11% in 2002

Research shows that children with involved dads have stronger relationships, get better academic results and are less likely to commit crimes than children whose dads are absent.

It's also thought that children benefit from the different qualities that mums and dads bring. This is particularly true for boys: a lack of involved male carers can lead to bad behaviour among teenage boys.



21ST CENTURY PARENT

Being a parent has never been easy, but social changes in the past 30 years have created several new challenges.

• Mums are working more

Today, 70% of women work. In 1971, the figure was 56%

• More people are caring for elderly parents as well as children

By 2010, the number of adults caring for elderly relatives will have risen to 10 million

• Family structures have changed

Today, 28% of children born to married parents will experience divorce before the age of 16

• There are more single parents

The number of one-parent families in Britain has tripled since 1971

• Technology has made children more powerful and more vulnerable

Mobile phones and computers have increased children's access to information, but they bring big risks with them

Making informed choices

Keeping parents informed is essential if they're going to make use of the services available to them.

What you don't know

can't hurt you, the saying goes. However, in the case of parenting, this doesn't hold true.

In order for parents to take advantage of services designed to help them, they need to know what's available. If they're not aware of what's there, they could be missing out.

While there's a vast store of information available on the web, not everyone has internet access, and those who have don't always know what they're looking for.

That's where Children's Information Services come in handy. They have a

duty to provide accurate, impartial information about a range of education services. Jane, a lone parent, describes how her local CIS helped her.

"I contacted my CIS after deciding to join the emergency services. Before I could start my training, I needed to sort out childcare for my two sons, Elliot, 5, and Sam, 2.

"When I arrived at the centre, I got chatting to a really helpful adviser called Mary who talked me through my childcare options.

"After weighing things up, I decided to use a

childminder. My next problem was sorting everything out. I'd never needed to find a childminder before because I'd only ever left the boys with family members. I also didn't have a clue about what benefits I might be entitled to.

"Mary explained the childcare tax system, and using the 'brokerage' service she helped me find a childminder who suited my requirements and budget.

"Then, out of the blue, I heard that I was going to have to wait some time before I could start my

emergency service training. Having already sorted out the childcare, I was keen to start working, but I didn't know what I could do.

"Mary was brilliant. She put me in touch with a lone-parent adviser at Jobcentre Plus who found me a part-time position. She then helped me negotiate my childcare to fit my new hours.

"I've now completed my training and my childcare arrangements are working out really well. I'm so grateful to Mary and the CIS. Without their help, I couldn't have got this far."

// A CIS provides accurate, impartial information about a range of services. //





The Government wants to make life easier for parents. That's why it's putting more money into public services that help parents to help their children. While there have been big improvements in recent years, there's still more to do. Over the next three years, families will be able to take advantage of a range of extra services. Opposite you'll find a quick guide to what you can look forward to.

DID YOU KNOW?

By April 2008 all local authorities in England and Wales will be required to provide a full range of information about local and national services to parents of children from birth to the age of 19.

KEY

- More for kids
- More for parents
- More for families

THE NEW OFFERS	YEAR	
Bookstart provides free packs of books to every family in England with children at 6-9 months, 18 months and 3 years. In Autumn 2007, every 5 and 11 year old will also receive the gift of a free book.	2007	
Parents with literacy and numeracy needs will be able to attend a Family Learning Course. They'll also be able to get a pack that helps them support their children's learning.	2007	
Families with children aged 3 to 4 will begin to be able to access 15 hours of free early education per week.	2007	
Whatever school their child attends, parents can be sure they will receive consistent standards of learning, development and care.	2008	
All vulnerable young people will receive targeted support.	2008	
It will be easier for parents to find the childcare place they need once the childcare sufficiency duty and brokering service starts.	2008	
Parents will be more confident of a quality childcare place following the introduction of voluntary Ofsted Childcare Register.	2008	
All parents will be offered information sessions around the time their child enters primary and secondary school.	2008	
Parents of children and young people from birth – 19 years will have access to a full range of information on parenting and local services.	2008	
All families with children under 5 will have access to Sure Start Children's Centres. There will be 3,500 centres in total – that's one for every community.	2010	
All families will be able to access extended services through their children's school.	2010	
Parents are increasingly likely to have access to a Parent Support Adviser through extended schools.	2010	

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