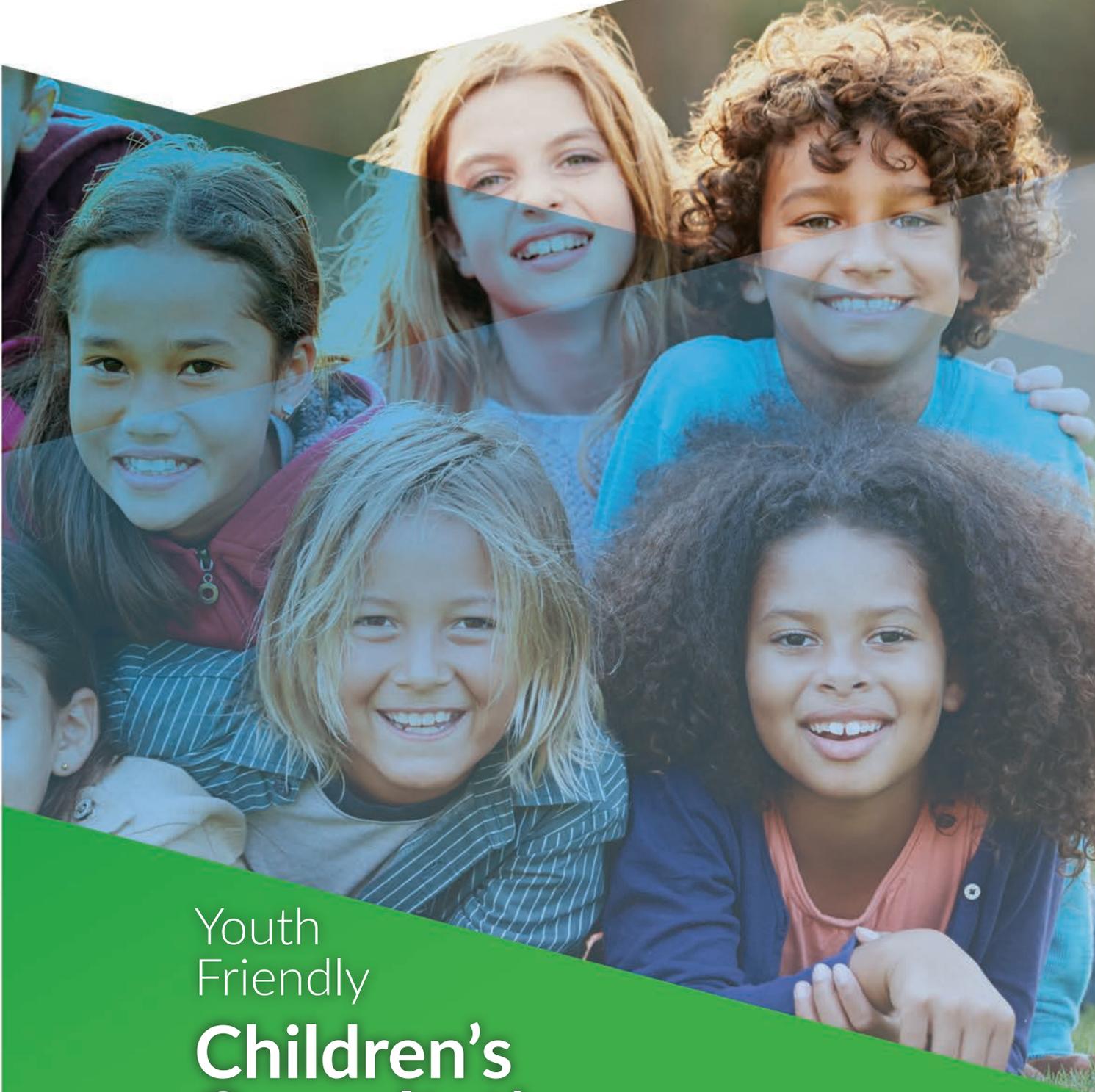




An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice



Youth
Friendly
**Children's
Consultation**
Report

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THE REASON FOR THE CONSULTATION

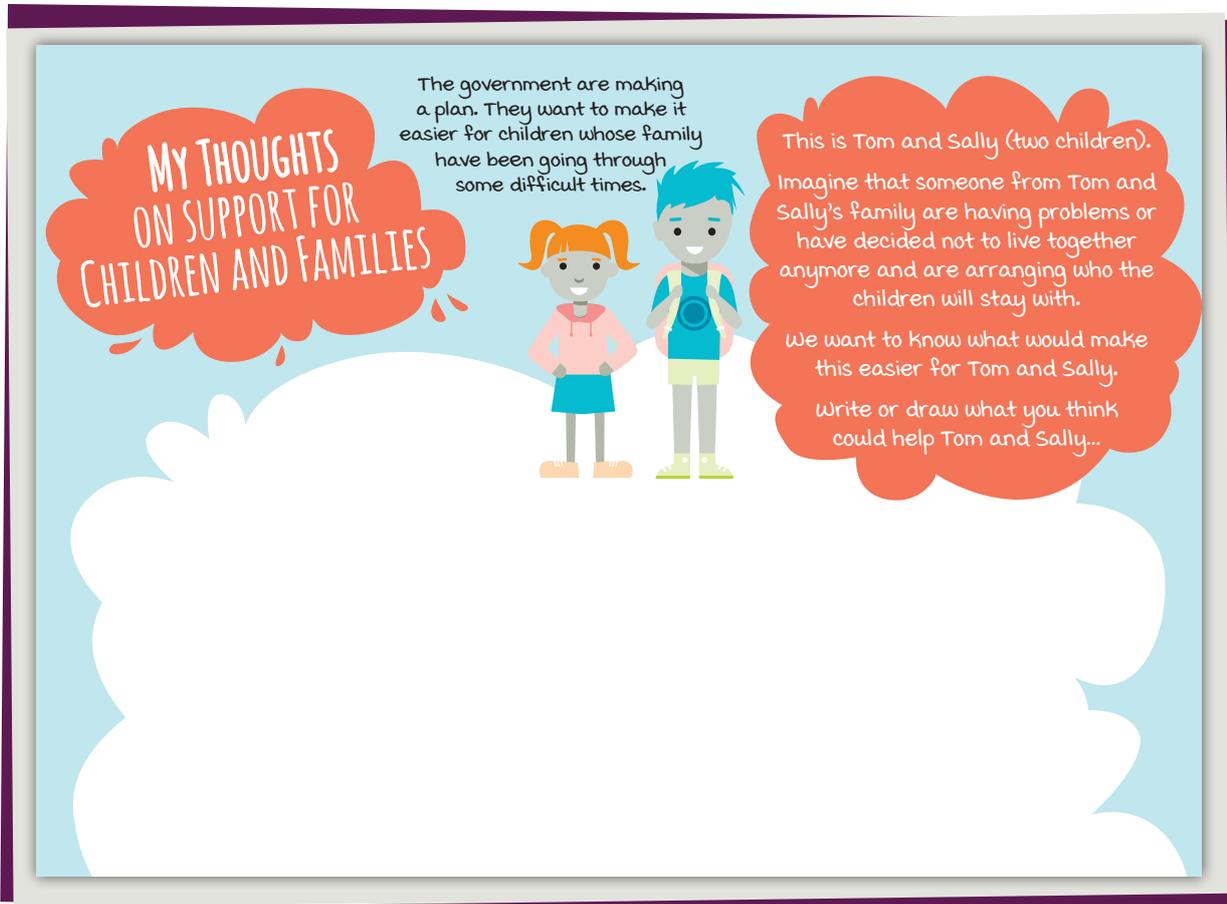
The Family Justice Oversight group, formed by Helen McEntee Minister for Justice, is currently developing a plan for the family justice system for Ireland. To develop this plan, the Oversight group asked children and young people who have had experiences of family law for their opinion and suggestions.

HOW WE CONSULTED WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Oversight Group worked with the Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and Hub na nÓg to design a child and youth friendly consultation. The Participation Officers approached professionals from organisations who work with children and families to ask children and young people for their opinions and suggestions using short worksheets.

Younger children were asked to think about a situation where two children (Tom and Sally) whose family is having problems or the parents are getting a divorce. The children were asked to write or draw their views or suggestions on what might make it easier for children.

The worksheets were completed by 12 children and young people, both male and female, aged between 8 and 21 years. Three completed the children's worksheet (Box 1) and nine completed the young person's version (Box 2).



Box 1: Children's Worksheet

My thoughts on support for Young People and Families

The government are making a plan.

They want to make it easier for young people whose family have been going through some difficult times like for example: Families where parents or guardians are; having problems at home, getting a divorce/separation/arranging who the children will stay with.

Please answer these questions to have your say on what should be in the government's plan to make support for young people and their families better.

Question 1 What would help other young people and their families who are going through an experience like what you have experienced with your family?

Box 2: *Young people's Worksheet*

Teenagers were asked three questions to get their suggestions of ways to help young people and their families who are having problems at home or getting a divorce/separation or are arranging who the children stay with.

Question 1: *What would help other young people and their families who are going through an experience like what you have experienced with your family?*

Question 2: *What support or services would you like to see available for a young person going through something similar to you?*

Question 3: *What is the most important thing that the government can put in their plan to make sure there is enough support for young people and their families who are going through experiences like this?*



WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US

Suggestions on ways to help children and young people

Question 1: *What would help other young people and their families who are going through an experience like what you have experienced with your family?*



Communication, information and preparation

- ✓ Children and young people's suggestions included having:
- ✓ More communication
- ✓ More information about the family situation
- ✓ More input to the decision-making process in relation to their family
- ✓ All in clear age-appropriate language

'Have proper information, to be included, proper space to ask questions'

'Knowing the whole process and steps rather than learning about it step by step'

'telling the young people what is happening and keeping them up to date'

'children and young people to be included in specific meetings with a professional and parents'

'It would help if they said that there (are) just problems, not bigger words that younger kids might not understand about and them not knowing what is happening'

'One or two facilitated meetings to focus on the child/ young person which provides space (for them) to ask questions'

Information on the legal process

Some young people wanted more information on the legal processes such as the role and functions of the different professionals they will encounter.

'To educate young people on the system, the courts and how it works and what certain titles mean i.e., social worker, judge, solicitor, foster carer, Tusla. Children and young people shouldn't have to wait to find out what these mean when they are in care, they should be educated on it beforehand'

Having a say in the process

Children and young people would like the opportunity to have their say and to be listened to.

'Having more of a say in what's happening...Us being in control about the decisions'

'That children have a voice and choice of what happens in their lives'

'Young people being more involved and having more of a say...'

'I would talk to the judge; that we decide together what access to be fair'

Some asked to have different options available to them to have their say in the process e.g. opportunities to express their views privately (without their parents if desired) etc.

Suggestions on ways to help children and young people

Question 2: *What support or services would you like to see available for a young person going through something similar to young people.*

Children and young people made suggestions of different types of support for children and young people, and their families.

- ✓ Support for children from school and youth services
- ✓ Support for parents and families
- ✓ Peer support
- ✓ Counselling
- ✓ Promote and signpost available services.

'Tell them
not to be scared because
things will get better'

Some suggested having youth friendly spaces in the court settings and in places where they access support.

'More young people friendly
places to go when you have
to talk about the experiences
as a lot of them are very scary
looking and can make young
people feel uncomfortable and
over-whelmed'

'I felt scared
on the way there because
I didn't know what the place
looked like and I would be
less scared if I'd seen some
pictures of the place first'

'If there was a different room
for the kids so they don't have
to be with the adults....if the
room had bright coloured walls
and toys and staff to make it
feel safer and not scary room'

Suggestions for the Government to put in their plan

Question 3: *What is the most important thing that the government can put in their plan to make sure there is enough support for young people and their families who are going through experiences like this?*

Young people's views on what the Government might do to ensure that young people and their families have enough support were similar to their ideas in Question 1 and 2.

- ✓ Develop a structured plan to protect the child and young person in the process
- ✓ Ask children and young people what they need and what they think about available services
- ✓ Educate children and young people on the process
- ✓ Provide a network of support for young people and their families
- ✓ Provide financial support for lone parents



Young people also talked about the importance of the Government ensuring that children have a say in the process, and these views are listened to and acted on.

'For them to listen to young people and their needs and what they want and to have the supports and services available'

'Child should be included to some degree because it affects their lives as much as the parents, they deserve to be informed'

