An Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children and Youth Affairs

High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families

('Parenting and Family Support')

BETTER OUTCOMES BRIGHTER FUTURES

April, 2015

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Foreword by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

"Science has established two facts meaningful to human welfare: first, the foundation of the structure of human personality is laid down in early childhood; and second, the chief engineer in charge of this construction is the family" (Meyer Francis Nimkoff, Sociologist, 1904 – 1965)

It is my great privilege, as Minister, to publish this High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families ('Parenting and Family Support').

This Policy Statement very much subscribes to the importance of family so concisely and effectively captured in the above quotation. It recognises the reality that there are times and circumstances where the 'chief engineer' needs assistance and goes further to recognise that it is the duty of the State to support families in the interests of the common good.

It will be clear to the reader that 'Parenting and Family Support' is an area where much has been happening across governmental, non-governmental and research sectors. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to those in all sectors who through their foresight, initiative and hard work over the years have put family support firmly on the map of how our services must develop to achieve best outcomes for children.

This Policy Statement does not reinvent the wheel. It flows directly from *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures – The national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020* which was published by my predecessor as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald, in April 2014. That framework sets out a large number of commitments to be implemented across government to achieve five key outcomes for children. One of the six transformational goals to realise those outcomes is to support parents, giving it a wide application that extends far beyond the respective remits of my Department and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

At the core of this High-Level Policy Statement are a number of specific messages that set the policy agenda for strengthening the impact of supports to parents and families. Key elements of achieving success in this endeavour include improved interagency working, workforce development, information and evidence to inform the targeting of resources, integration of service planning and delivery, and partnership with children and their parents. The necessary 'cement' in all of this will be a shared strong commitment to 'Parenting and Family Support' by the relevant State bodies, and positive engagement with non-governmental interests, in accordance with *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

I conclude by recalling that the preamble to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises the family as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children. It is my hope that this High-Level Policy Statement will guide, promote and assist further developments shifting supports to parents and families away from late or crisis intervention to prevention or early intervention.

JAMES REILLY, T. D.,
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

CHAPTER 1: High-Level Policy: Vision, Purpose and Messages

The Vision

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures - the national policy framework for children and young people 2014 - 2020 commences with the following vision:

"Our vision is for **Ireland to be one of the best small countries in the world in which to grow up and raise a family**, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future".

This Policy Statement, formulated to help realise that vision, envisages the development of a system of supporting parents and families - 'Parenting and Family Support' - that:

- seeks to build on family strengths, wherever possible, and values informal support networks; and
- can readily deliver supports to children and their families, that are based on inter-agency, cross-organisational and inter-disciplinary working.

The Purpose

The key purpose of this Policy Statement is to strengthen and grow 'Parenting and Family Support' as an effective prevention and early intervention measure to promote best possible outcomes for children. It aims to achieve this by providing a clear policy platform for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to discharge its statutory responsibility to support and encourage the effective functioning of families. It also sets the policy context for a cohesive policy approach among statutory bodies, in partnership with one another and with non-governmental organisations, to achieve greater integration in the provision of 'Parenting and Family Support'. It further provides a policy imperative to build up the evidence base of what works in 'Parenting and Family Support' and to ensure that parents and children are key participants in that process. The further elaboration of the purpose of this Policy Statement is as follows:

<u>For Parents and Families</u>

- To promote the availability of a coherent continuum of local supports to all parents and families which can be accessed easily and in a timely way.

<u>For Other Departments, Agencies and Service Providers</u>

- To set out a policy mandate to embed a family support orientation into formal and non-formal services interactions with parents.
- To provide a high-level policy framework to guide actions of all relevant State bodies in supporting families in need of assistance to successfully parent children.

- To articulate what is meant by 'Parenting and Family Support' in a way which links the outcomes and commitments in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and *Healthy Ireland* with relevant policy and on-the-ground family support activities.
- To set out a clear framework under which leadership and partnership approaches to 'Parenting and Family Support' can be prioritised and developed.

For Tusla

- To promote the shift of 'Parenting and Family Support' to greatest prominence in Tusla's discharge of its statutory child welfare and protection responsibilities and give impetus to maximising the benefit from inclusion in Tusla's remit of functions of the former Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board.
- To support Tusla in its pivotal role among statutory bodies in relation to supporting parents and families to improve outcomes for children.
- To establish a clear basis for dialogue, commissioning and evaluation for family support activity so that progress on implementation and the impact of these services can be measured in terms of outcomes for children and their families.

This Policy Statement comprehends a complex continuum of parenting and family support services and the wide spectrum of interests involved. It is important to emphasise that 'Parenting and Family Support' is not an alternative to child protection. Where there is a child protection concern involved **Children First processes must be followed** and be led and coordinated by Tusla's Social Work Department.

The Messages

The policy vision, intent and evidence set out in this Statement give rise to a number of key messages aimed at promoting, guiding and measuring progress on future service provision in the area of 'Parenting and Family Support'.

The messages presented in this Policy Statement must be collectively progressed.

Policy Message: Charting the Policy Approach

- A positive parent-child relationship is most important for children's development.
- 'Parenting and Family Support' has long been an objective of government policy.
- Family Support is now a central, and developing, element in child and family services.
- 'Parenting and Family Support' is a priority under the Government's National Policy Framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020.
- 'Parenting and Family Support' is not a substitute for child protection interventions.
- Partnership with NGOs and community bodies is a fundamental element of 'Parenting and Family Support'.
- Parenting support continues to be important where children are in the care of the State.

Policy Message: Evolving Family Forms and Challenges

- 'Parenting and Family Support' must align with the evolving range of family forms in order to be effective.
- Family Support challenges are wide-ranging and can be profound.

Policy Message: Parenting and Family Support – The Evidence

- The majority of families have the capacity to cope with challenges that arise.
- Some families need more help than others for different reasons and at different times.
- Interagency working is critical to effectively support parents and families.
- How support is delivered matters.
- A prevention approach works.
- Targeting supports on the basis of solid information must be a key aspect of service development.

Policy Message: The Operational Objectives

- Policy mandates a proactive, preventative approach which is based on evidence; features targeting of supports and is flexible.
- Workforce development and developing the evidence base require strengthening to deliver real change.
- Greater integration in the planning and delivery of services is critical.
- Parents, children and young people are key actors and partners in the process.

Policy Message: Implementation

- 'Parenting and Family Support' is everyone's business and existing Government commitments need to provide the impetus for consolidation of efforts/action.
- Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a pivotal role in making 'Parenting and Family Support' work to best effect on a cross-agency basis and at local level.
- Realising the Policy Vision requires the maintenance of a strong shared commitment and engagement by relevant State bodies.
- The relationship between Tusla and the HSE is a cornerstone of 'Parenting and Family Support'.
- Tusla's plans for the roll-out of the National Service Delivery Framework (NSDF) encompassing 'Parenting and Family Support' are central to implementation.
- A high priority attaches to shaping services at the local level on the basis of prevention, partnership and family support in accordance with the NSDF and the Meitheal Model[1] being implemented by Tusla.
- Children and Young People's Services Committees will be a key forum for engagement between providers in relation to service need and planning.
- Great importance attaches to working in partnership with community and voluntary providers within this policy framework.

[1] Meitheal is a National Practice Model for agencies working with children, young people and their families. The Meitheal Model is a key driver of the development of an area-based approach to prevention, partnership and family support.

Policy Message: Monitoring and Evaluation

- Effective monitoring and evaluation of progress is a core dimension of policy.
- Enhancing the evidence base must be integral to service arrangements.

CHAPTER 2: Charting the Policy Approach

Introduction

Research tells us that generally children are happy in their families:

- *The Health Behaviour of School Aged Children* Survey (2010) found that approximately 90% of children aged 10-17 reported being happy with their lives at present.

- Data from the *Growing Up in Ireland*[2] (GUI) study found that almost all thirteen-year-olds indicated that they got on well with their parents: 99% got on very well or well with their mother and 98% with their father.

'Family Support' covers a broad range of family and parent focused services and programmes. 'Parenting support' may be regarded as intensely related to (but capable of being distinguished from) that wider concept. Parenting and Family Support recognises that improving parental well-being is one of the best ways to improve child well-being.

While the vast majority of families have the capacity to cope with the challenges that arise for their children and wider household, there is a sizeable body of people who need, and can benefit from, supports that aim to address the effects of disadvantage or adverse circumstances. Such circumstances may be 'once-off' or be of a more enduring nature and can challenge the coping skills of any family. This Policy Statement is concerned with promoting measures and approaches to ensure that supportive services are as available and as effective as possible.

The Importance of Parents

Parenting has been shown to influence children's social and emotional development, as well as their behaviour, education and physical health. We know that it is what parents do with their children rather than who they are that is crucial. The parent-child relationship is more important for children's development than the family income or structure. Factors such as a parent's personality, mental health, values, social support and cultural influences are important, as well as characteristics of the child themselves. (Centre for Effective Services, Briefing Paper on Parenting, December, 2012).

'Parenting and Family Support' is directed towards strengthening the capacity of families to nurture children and to function well for all members. It is a critical element of the effort to improve outcomes for children and young people. It ranges from every piece of advice, emotional and

[2] Growing Up in Ireland is a national longitudinal study of children. Phase 1 covered a nine-year period and followed the progress of two groups of children: 8,568 nine-year-olds and 11,134 nine-month-olds. The first phase of the study commenced in 2006. The second phase of the study has been commenced.

practical support that parents get informally from their own social networks and extended families, through to specific formal supports directed at individual parents, children or families.

The Irish Constitution recognises the centrality of the family and the special position of parents in the care and upbringing of their children. This is guaranteed by the Constitution under Articles 41 and 42. Strong recognition of the role of parents and the family in nurturing and protecting children is also to be found in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ireland became a party on ratifying the Convention in 1992 and thereby committed to respecting and ensuring the rights of children as set out therein.

Establishing and Developing the Policy Focus

In Ireland, a clear statutory commitment to Family Support was contained in the Child Care Act, 1991, which explicitly recognises the established policy principle that it is generally in the best interests of a child to be brought up in his/her own family. The policy of supporting families was developed over the subsequent two decades through such initiatives as:

- setting up the first Family Resource Centres in 1994;
- publishing *Strengthening Families for Life*, the Report of the Commission on the Family, in 1998;
- publishing *the National Children's Strategy: Our Children – Their Lives* in 2000;
- passing the Family Support Agency Act in 2001;
- publishing *Family Support in Ireland – Definition and Strategic Intent* in 2004; and
- publishing *The Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook* in 2007.

Strengthening the Policy Focus

The Programme for Government 2011 – 2016 committed to fundamentally reforming the delivery of child protection services by creating a dedicated agency and reforming the model of service delivery. Key developments and reforms which followed included:

- In 2011 the first Minister for Children and Youth Affairs with full ministerial status was appointed and a new Department of Children and Youth Affairs was established;
- In 2013 the then HSE Children and Family Services (predecessor of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency) published detailed strategy and guidance on Family Support, Supporting Parenting and in relation to an area-based approach to Prevention, Partnership and Family Support[3].
- At the end of 2013 the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 was passed;

[3] A suite of national guidance and local implementation documents was published which included What Works in Family Support, 50 Key Messages to Accompany Investing in Families, the Child and Family Agency Commissioning Strategy and Meitheal.

- In January 2014 Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, was established; and

- In April 2014 the Government published *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures - the national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020* which includes a commitment to develop a high-level policy statement supporting parents and families.

Under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* a number of other key strategic documents are scheduled for early publication. These include Ireland's first Early Years Strategy, a National Youth Strategy, a Youth Justice Action Plan and a policy on Young People's Participation in Decision-Making.

Service Developments

In tandem with policy initiatives, over the years a range of parenting and family support services have become available to families across the country. These services take many forms and range from universal support in informal settings for self-referring parents, through to more targeted and specialist services to support families in particular situations; dealing with specific problems that may present at different times in the life-course of a child.

In the case of Tusla, parenting and family support is a constituent element in all aspects of its work, including social work activity, early years, community-based youth work, foster care, residential care, special care, Family Resource Centre programmes, educational welfare and school support services, and local services to women in situations of domestic abuse.

Significant services are also provided by a variety of Government departments and statutory agencies in sectors such as health, education, social protection and justice which rely on the engagement of parents and families in supporting children and promoting their well-being. However, the services provided directly by the State represent only part of the relevant service spectrum as parenting and family support involves a great number of services. Depending on the particular circumstances and the level of support needed, the services concerned - whether directly publicly provided or funded - link, overlap and recur over the period from before the birth of the child to the attainment of adulthood.

The Role of NGOs

Many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) provide parenting and family support services at national and/or community level. These organisations have considerable experience in the area and have established trusted relationships with the communities they serve. In many instances they have pioneered the concept and practice of 'Parenting and Family Support', and in doing so have contributed extensively to the available evidence on the value of supporting parents and families to enhance the opportunities for, and well-being of, children.

These bodies have a strong appreciation of the needs of families and communities coupled with a particular insight into workable solutions to the wide variety of challenges families face. This Policy Statement recognises that partnership with NGOs and community bodies constitutes a fundamental element of 'Parenting and Family Support'.

'Parenting and Family Support' for Children in Care

The focus of this Policy Statement is all children and families who may need support. The same consideration of supporting parents applies in the case of children who are already in care or may be received into care (either by order of a Court, voluntary agreement with the parent(s) or as respite.)

The core policy of supporting children in their families strongly informs the taking of a proportionate approach to child welfare and protection which requires that receiving a child into care at parental request or the removal of a child from the care of his or her parents, is a measure of last resort. The period of non-parental care should be as short as possible unless the best interests of the child dictate otherwise in the particular case. The enduring need for positive engagement between parents and their children at risk or in care is specifically recognised as part of the key principles of best practice in child protection and welfare.

The approach of promoting and facilitating positive inter-action with parents continues to be a fundamental element of child protection and welfare policy.

Aiming Higher

Parenting and Family Support is promoted in law, policy and practice in Ireland and it is being delivered on the ground. Strengthening the structure, integration and evidence-base of these efforts will harness the available resources to best effect.

High-Level Policy Messages:

1. A POSITIVE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP IS MOST IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT
2. 'PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT' HAS LONG BEEN AN OBJECTIVE OF GOVERNMENT POLICY
3. FAMILY SUPPORT IS NOW A CENTRAL, AND DEVELOPING, ELEMENT IN CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES
4. 'PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT' IS A PRIORITY UNDER THE GOVERNMENT'S NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 2014 – 2020
5. 'PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT' IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR CHILD PROTECTION INTERVENTIONS.
6. PARTNERSHIP WITH NGOS AND COMMUNITY BODIES IS A FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENT OF 'PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT'.
7. PARENTING SUPPORT CONTINUES TO BE IMPORTANT WHERE CHILDREN ARE IN THE CARE OF THE STATE.

CHAPTER 3: Evolving Family Forms and Challenges

The Profile of Families in Ireland

Families in Ireland today

The "family" in today's society takes many forms. For Census 2011 purposes a family was defined as a couple with one or more children, a couple without children or a lone parent with one or more children.

Parents may be single, married, separated, divorced, widowed, or cohabiting. They may be of opposite or the same gender or of different cultural backgrounds. Children may be living with one parent, two parents, one parent plus step-parent; they may be fostered or adopted or in the care of a relative who is acting in *loco parentis*.

The 2011 Census of Population tells us that:-

- A 12% growth in the number of families has taken place since the 2006 census.
- An 800% increase has occurred in those who were divorced between 1996-2011.
- A 550% increase has occurred in those who remarried following divorce or annulment between 1996-2011.
- 1 in 5 families with children in Ireland is a one-parent family.
- Irish residents born outside Ireland account for 17% of the population.
- 4,042 same sex couples were living together in 2011 of which 230 were couples with children (majority being female couples).
- The number of children living in cohabiting households increased by 41% between 2006-2011.

According to Growing Up in Ireland Research:

The following proportions of children live in two-parent families:

- **86% of nine-month-olds,**
- **85% of three-year-olds,**
- **82% of nine-year-olds**
- **81% of thirteen-year-olds**

It is clear that a diverse range of family configurations must be included and catered for if meaningful, effective supports are to be provided. Accordingly, from a policy perspective the terms "family" and "parent" must be seen as applying across a wide range of circumstances. In this context

it is essential that parenting and family supports and services are designed to be fully inclusive and take full cognisance of evolving family forms.

Some of the Challenges Families May Face

In a family support context, there are other factors relevant to the profile of families in Ireland. For some families, the welfare or best interests of the child may not always guide parental actions or choices. This may be the result of impaired capacity due to substance misuse or mental illness. For a very small number of families, it may be deliberate because of criminality (including domestic violence).

External stressors on parents, such as poverty and social exclusion, greatly exacerbate the challenges families face arising from their particular make-up or life events. Poverty indicators show that 16.5% of the Irish population are at risk of poverty, 26.9% experience material deprivation and 7.7% experience consistent poverty.

Potential significant challenges to the coping capacities of families are evident in statistics that show:

Children

- Almost 6% of the child population aged under 15 years have a disability,
- Approximately 6,500 children are currently in care,
- Approximately 8,500 young people aged 19 and under are carers.

The General Population

- 1.3% have an intellectual disability,
- 3% have learning difficulties,
- 2.1% have a psychological/emotional condition.

Further insight about families provided by data sources and qualitative research includes the following:

Growing Up in Ireland

- Found strong associations between the quality of the relationships between parents and the quality of the parent-child relationship;
- 9% of mothers and 4% of fathers of nine-year olds were categorised as depressed;
- Processes within the family and child characteristics remain the most important predictors of children's social and emotional outcomes;
- Relatives, and grandparents in particular, were identified as one of the most important sources of non-parental childcare for families of nine-month olds and three-year olds.

Other Sources

- RAISE (Social Work Information System) data nationally showed alcohol abuse was mentioned in one in every three child protection cases and alcohol was identified as a risk factor in three-quarters of Irish teenagers for whom social workers applied for admission to special care;

- *Listening to Children: Children's Stories of Domestic Violence* (Hogan and O'Reilly, 2007) found that in 7% of 286 cases referred to social work teams, domestic violence was the main reason for the referral. In a further 11% of cases, domestic violence was also cited as a child protection concern; this increased to 32% upon investigation.

The top three problems most commonly associated with the occurrence of child abuse and neglect and identified in families involved with child protection services are: parental substance misuse, domestic violence and parental mental health problems. Regarding parental substance misuse, the Advisory Council for the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), in its 2003 report in relation to Hidden Harm[4] noted that *"The adverse consequences for children are typically multiple and cumulative and will vary according to the child's stage of development... ... These can range greatly in severity and may often be subtle and difficult to detect".*

High-Level Policy Messages:

1. 'PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT' MUST ALIGN WITH THE EVOLVING RANGE OF FAMILY FORMS IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE.
2. FAMILY SUPPORT CHALLENGES ARE WIDE-RANGING AND CAN BE PROFOUND.

[4] The experience of children living with, and affected by, parental substance misuse has become widely known as "Hidden Harm". The term encapsulates the two key features of that experience: the children are often not known to services; they suffer harm in a number of ways through physical and emotional neglect, including exposure to harm and poor parenting.

CHAPTER 4: Parenting and Family Support – The Evidence

Parents And Families Are The Most Important People in Children's Lives

Children are dependent on adults to secure their needs and welfare and develop their resilience. For children who have the benefit of a warm, continuous and intimate relationship with their parent(s) throughout their childhood, there is the opportunity to develop a strong sense of identity, self-worth, trust in others, the ability to handle stress and to develop and maintain relationships (Richardson, 2005). Good outcomes are achieved through positive parenting, a stable environment, a stable family life, strong family and kin relationships, community involvement and supportive networks (Connolly, 2004).

The social ecology within which children and families live, and the social capital which is accrued by the close ties which individual family members develop as part of these community-based relationships, is drawn on as a resource in good times and bad (derived from Devaney, 2011).

Some Families Need More Help than Others

When we look at the profile of families in Ireland as set out earlier, we know that, in certain circumstances and for a myriad of reasons, some families' capacity to care for their children can be reduced or compromised, and as a result they require support and assistance in carrying out this fundamental function.

Circumstances differ greatly amongst families, consequently requiring the availability of a wide spectrum of responses and practice approaches, ranging from child protection measures through therapeutic intervention to basic supports to help navigate day-to-day living. Engagements with families and children cannot be static or rigid but must operate on a continuum which accommodates families moving back and forth between degrees of need in tandem with life events and the challenges of child-rearing. This must be recognised in the planning, organisation, delivery and development of the relevant services.

It is important to recognise that, prior to engagement with formal services, families themselves, in particular parents, often access their own naturally occurring supports and resources to cope, survive and develop (Devaney, 2011). This demonstrates that informal sources of support for families can often represent an effective form of early intervention and prevention. Integration of the informal and formal must also be recognised in the planning and delivery of services.

Interagency Working

Looking at the challenges for families today, only some of which are highlighted in the previous chapter, it is clear that parenting and family support services have to work conjointly to enable parenting capacity or address risk. However, many past cases have demonstrated that these efforts have not been adequately co-ordinated. For example, cases such as the Roscommon Child Care case (2010) highlight the need for effective inter-disciplinary working and assessment processes to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to the needs of children.

It is also the case that good family support has to work to ameliorate the effects of external stressors and for some families these are primarily what is impacting on how the family is functioning. This situation emphasises the critical role of cross-sectoral; cross-agency and cross-disciplinary action and co-ordination when looking at families who may present as needing support – both to co-ordinate and manage assessment and supports; but also to recognise and tackle external stressors. Researchers have found this broader context to be significant. *Geddes et al.* (2011:25-6) state that "even the most impressive early child development programmes will struggle to shift the social distribution of human development outcomes unless these enabling social and economic policies are also in place" (cited in Cotter, 2013).

Delivering Family Support

Regardless of the type or severity of adversity faced by a family, support can be provided at a primary, secondary or tertiary level to good effect (Frost and Dolan, 2012). However, services are more likely to be effective where the intervention is matched to factors such as robust integration of supports (formal and informal), clarity on duration and levels of support, clear leadership and responsibilities for service delivery, coupled with effective monitoring and evaluation of performance (Whittaker, 2009).

The building and strengthening of informal support networks and the provision of supports and resources in a flexible, responsive and targeted manner to meet the changing needs of families, are prerequisites of good practice in family support. This means that a variety of service provision must be available at a local level. There are major strengths found in services that are neighbourhood based and are seen to be responsive to the local community i.e. accessible, informal and comfortable to families.

McKeown (2000) notes that in order to be of any benefit, interventions with children and families who are vulnerable and experiencing adversity must (for as long as is necessary) be tailored to the family's definition of need, be based on a strong therapeutic relationship, build on existing strengths and resilience, develop the family's social support networks and restore faith and hope in the family's capacity to solve its problems. Involving children and family, with a positive relationship underpinning all interventions undertaken, is also noted as essential to collaborative problem solving and more likely to result in a greater commitment to outcomes (Connolly, 2004).

In terms of types of support, the importance of tangible support as well as emotional support and advice are well established (Dolan and Brady, 2012). Cutrona (2000) has highlighted that the over-supply of advice support, most typically from professionals, is seen by families as least desired and in some cases not useful.

Families may require support in a one-off time limited manner or on a more ongoing regularised basis. As *Thoburn et al.* (2000) report, for some families repeated short periods of 'task-centred' help, following recurring referrals and assessments may be counterproductive. More sustained interventions over a longer period may be more helpful.

Prevention

Cotter, (2013) argues that parenting quality should be the target of interventions and, citing Heckman (2008), says that "*experimental evidence on the positive effects of early interventions on*

children in disadvantaged families is consistent with a large body of non - experimental evidence showing that the absence of supportive family environments harms child outcomes. Early intervention is more cost-effective as well as providing better outcomes than intervening later in life or not at all". Research conducted for UNICEF into family and parenting support policy and provision in a global context found that provision for parents of adolescents seems to be fairly under-developed and that momentum around parenting support is primarily for young children. The achievement of a good balance across a continuum of need is an important consideration in the monitoring of services and development of the necessary evidence base.

Barlow et al. (2010) emphasise a focus on universal service provision preventing difficulties arising in the first instance; examples directed at parents with young children include Parent and Toddler Groups, Early Years Services and Public Health Nursing Services.

In the Irish context, the Prevention and Early Intervention Network (comprising 24 organisations seeking to improve outcomes for children) reported on *'The Case for Prevention and Early Intervention: Promoting positive outcomes for children, families and communities'* (Harvey, 2014). The benefits associated with a number of universal and targeted programmes were identified along the following lines:

For children:	For Parents:	For society (projected outcomes):
• Improved cognitive development, problem-solving skills, educational, speech, motor skills; • Improved school readiness, more pro-social behaviour; • Reduced risk of social, emotional difficulties, fewer sleep problems; • Less internalisation/ externalisation of problems; • Improved eating patterns; • Higher immunisation; • Less likely to have chest infections, asthma, less likely to be hospitalised; • Less disordered, hyperactive behaviour.	• Improved parenting skills, strategies, confidence, mood; • Improved parent-child, sibling behaviour, higher quality, less hostile relationships with children, improved interactions; • Reduced parental stress; • Reduced marital conflict; • More friends, meeting them more frequently, more social support, improved connections to their community; • Reduced use of alcohol; • Raised aspirations for children; • More knowledge of infant development; • Planned rather than unplanned pregnancies.	• Reduced truancy and exclusion; • Less use of psychiatric and general hospital in and outpatient services; • Less need for special education and other in-school assistance; • Less demand on foster care, social work; • Reduced use of services: nurse, speech therapist, physiotherapist, social worker, paediatrician, casualty, outpatient; • Better birth outcomes.

Targeting Supports

Anderson et al. (2005) concluded that although it is unrealistic to provide long-term support for all families, those most at risk could receive additional attention and there should be accessible re-entry points into services where needed, and these should be facilitated by the expansion of preventative inter-agency programmes for multiple risk families.

Targeting families on the basis of extra need or vulnerabilities (and issues associated with so-called "hidden harm") via early engagement of supports and service responses is also a key preventative strategy (*Barlow et al.,* 2010). Such targeting measures can identify children at risk before they reach the threshold for the intervention of formal services.

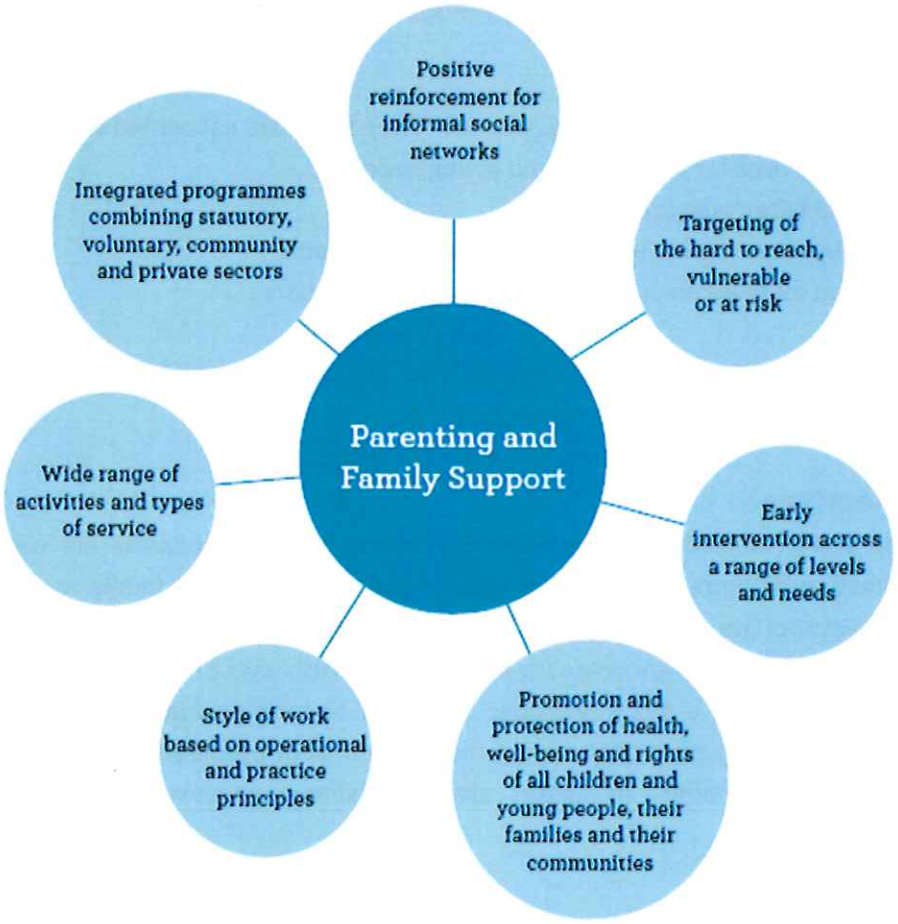
High-Level Policy Messages:

1. THE MAJORITY OF FAMILIES HAVE THE CAPACITY TO COPE WITH CHALLENGES THAT ARISE
2. SOME FAMILIES NEED MORE HELP THAN OTHERS FOR DIFFERENT REASONS AND AT DIFFERENT TIMES.
3. INTERAGENCY WORKING IS CRITICAL TO EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT PARENTS AND FAMILIES.
4. HOW SUPPORT IS DELIVERED MATTERS.
5. A PREVENTION APPROACH WORKS.
6. TARGETING SUPPORTS ON THE BASIS OF SOLID INFORMATION MUST BE A KEY ASPECT OF SERVICE DEVELOPMENT.

CHAPTER 5: The Operational Objectives

Working Definition

For the purposes of this Policy Statement, 'Parenting and Family Support' is *"recognised as both a style of work and a set of activities that reinforce positive informal social networks through integrated programmes. These programmes combine statutory, voluntary, community and private services and are generally provided to families within their own homes and communities. The primary focus of these services is on early intervention aiming to promote and protect the health, wellbeing and rights of all children, young people and their families. At the same time particular attention is given to those who are vulnerable or at risk"* (Dept. of Health and Children, 2004; Dolan, Canavan and Pinkerton, 2006). This definition is presented figuratively as:



A Stepped Availability of Supports

This Policy Statement mandates a focus on a progressive approach to providing services across a spectrum that ranges from universal provision to highly targeted and specialised support. There will be a balance to be struck between ensuring accessibility of primary prevention and early support

services at the universal level; and maintaining secondary services (for children with additional needs) and tertiary services (children in need and child protection).

Universality combined with more targeted elements ("progressive universalism") has the benefits of reducing the stigma that might be associated with some programmes while, at the same time, ensuring that supports can be varied in intensity to match the needs of children, families and communities.

Classification of Supports

Gilligan (1995) usefully characterises Family Support as variously, developmental, compensatory or protective[5]. This orientation is useful in two ways; firstly it acts as 'a compass' in terms of differentiating the purpose of family support on offer. Secondly, rather than seeing family support as soft child protection or a luxury in terms of provision, from an early intervention and prevention perspective, it appropriately places the relationship between protection and support as integrated rather than separate.

The necessary support is accessible at four levels of need. These levels are concerned with –

1. Universally available services for all children and young people;
2. Support services for children who are vulnerable;
3. Supportive intervention for children in need in the community; and
4. Specialist intervention for children at risk or in need of rehabilitation.

Over the lifecourse of a child, depending on the level of need, the services required can range across a very broad spectrum, which is illustrated at Appendix 1.[6]

Operational Objectives

The overarching operational objective of this Policy Statement, whether supports are formal or informal or a combination of both, is to seek to ensure that each child and family receives the support that is most appropriate to their needs, with the most vulnerable children and families receiving integrated support, increasing in intensity in accordance with level of need.

The orientation must be towards a more **proactive approach** to building families strengths and resilience; and a preventative approach to deterring the occurrence of problems. This is to remove negative factors or lessen the effect of factors already having a negative impact of family functioning.

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[5] **Developmental Family Support** seeks to strengthen the social supports and coping capacities of children and adults in the context of their neighbourhood and community. This type of Family Support is not problem focused and is available to all who are experiencing the everyday challenge of parenting.
Compensatory Family Support seeks to compensate family members for the negative or disabling effects of disadvantage or adversity in their current or previous experiences.
Protective Family Support seeks to strengthen the coping and resilience of children and adults in relation to identified risks or threats experienced in families.

[6] As published in the Child and Family Agency Commissioning Strategy – August 2013

Under this Policy Statement the provision and development of **evidence-based** parenting and family supports must be promoted and developed. It recognises the great breadth of provision arising, the **flexibility** of approach demanded and that evidence-building continues as a work in progress, including as regards outcomes for children.

There must be strengthened capacity for **targeting** to identify families with multiple challenges – with children in care and their families, child/parent disability, teenage mothers, children who are carers, or victims/witnesses of domestic abuse included among key groups requiring support. This will pose significant operational challenges. However, the policy expectation is that, in addition to the considerable experience already acquired in the social work and family support areas, Tusla, working with partners, will leverage research and data in the areas such as epidemiology, multiple services use, child maltreatment, and domestic violence to shape and determine appropriate targeting of parenting and family supports with ever-increasing effectiveness.

Reflecting on the evidence, it is clear that there is a context within which parenting and family support services operate to best effect. This context must also reflect and acknowledge the following central elements:

- ✓ The **role of parents** as potential key mediators in the welfare of their children and as core support providers needs to be recognised.
- ✓ The **recognition of the child/young person** as a key partner. This is not just to be seen to listen and act on what young people tell us about how best to meet their needs; but also to treat young people as having 'agency' and 'resilience' (Rutter, 2012; Ungar, 2012). This has an impact on the effectiveness of the supports and the young person's engagement with them.
- ✓ **Integrated working** must be the norm across a full range of services from universal through to more targeted and specialised services. This must be rooted in efficient working linkages between all bodies that have children's or family well-being as a key focus of the services they provide.
- ✓ The non-governmental and community dimension is a crucial aspect of service provision which requires **strong partnership and commissioning practices** to ensure the ongoing relevance and effectiveness of services.
- ✓ The **role of the workforce** who plan and provide support is key. While reflecting the research and evidence in programme service design and delivery is important, there is also the need to value evidence-informed practice wisdom in its own right. Practice-based expertise is a key ingredient as is the importance of positive casework relationships in family support and in particular with children. These practice relationships need to be flexible enough for staff at the point of service delivery to offer and give the support needed, (Lewis 2010).
- ✓ Development of a strong systematic **information and evidence base** to support the optimum targeting and use of resources, and to strike the right balances between challenges inherent in providing for a continuum of supports, is an essential element of the planning provision and management of services.

High-Level Policy Messages:

1. POLICY MANDATES A PROACTIVE, PREVENTATIVE APPROACH WHICH IS BASED ON EVIDENCE; FEATURES TARGETING OF SUPPORTS AND IS FLEXIBLE.
2. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPING THE EVIDENCE BASE REQUIRE STRENGTHENING TO DELIVER REAL CHANGE.
3. GREATER INTEGRATION IN THE PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF SERVICES IS CRITICAL.
4. PARENTS, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE KEY ACTORS AND PARTNERS IN THE PROCESS.

CHAPTER 6: Implementation

The Breadth of Policy Defined

The five national outcomes for all children and young people set out in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, refer to health, learning, protection from harm, economic security and inclusion. These provide an immediate insight to the breadth of involvement required of government departments and agencies in supporting families in order to improve outcomes for children. The statutory services such as health, education, An Garda Síochána, local authorities all have a responsibility in contributing to the protection and welfare of all children through strengthening the capability of families and communities.

Research points out that the well-being of children is closely tied to the well-being of their parents. This brings into play issues such as poverty, health, education, training and community life. It makes clear that the protection and welfare of children needs the involvement of a wide spectrum of policy makers and service providers (as illustrated at Appendix 1).

What is expected of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, other Government Departments, Tusla and other State Agencies/Public Bodies is clearly set out in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*: *The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020.* There are also relevant commitments to be delivered under *Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Well-being 2013-2025*. The commitments in both of these detailed policy documents that are particularly relevant to the Parenting and Family Support approach are shown at Appendix 2.

Implementing the messages set out in this Policy Statement will rely on establishing, as quickly as possible, how cross-government and interagency collaboration and cooperation provided for under these existing commitments will be advanced.

Tusla as a Driving Force

In addition to the commitment to bring forward a High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families ('Parenting and Family Support') made in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures,* this Policy Statement logically flows from the inclusion in the remit given to Tusla under the Child and Family Agency Act of 2013 of responsibility to:

- *"support and encourage the effective functioning of families";*
- provide *"preventative family support services aimed at promoting the welfare of children"; and*
- *"facilitate and promote enhanced inter-agency cooperation to ensure that services for children are co-ordinated and provide an integrated response to the needs of children and their families".*

These provisions place Parenting and Family Support considerations at the very centre of Tusla's discharge of its child welfare and protection responsibilities, whilst recognising the wider cross-agency responsibility that exists.

This Policy Statement also mandates Tusla to develop and drive an integrated system of children's services that will have formal linkages with the providers of other services; with clear and consistent referral pathways for children and families; timely and proportionate provision of parenting and

family support services; support for referrers to work collaboratively to use their resources in the best interests of children; and clear and transparent information-sharing between its core services and other services. It recognises the importance of strong engagement by, and partnership with, other statutory bodies and non-governmental organisations in the pursuit of best outcomes. The approach is rooted in a recognition of the principles of prevention, partnership and family support as providing the optimum chance of securing successful outcomes for children and families. The development of such an approach applies learning from the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) (2007 – 2013), co-funded by the Government and The Atlantic Philanthropies, and is consistent with the expansion of the PEIP in the form of the Area-Based Childhood Programme (2013 – 2016), being similarly co-funded.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) as a Key Partner

In the context of effective functioning of families, and the achievement of best outcomes for children, it is evident that the services of the HSE are of fundamental importance. These services range from engagement with families at a very early stage by way of Public Health Nursing, through supports for children or other family members with disabilities, to the treatment of mental illness or substance misuse. Accordingly, the engagement between Tusla and the HSE around implementing a parenting and family support approach has the potential to substantially shape the service experience and quality of outcomes for children and families. This Policy Statement recognises the inter-agency relationship concerned as a cornerstone of 'Parenting and Family Support'.

Other Key State Participants

This Policy Statement underscores Tusla's role to facilitate and promote advances in making available co-ordinated and integrated responses by State Agencies to children and their families. However, making this work will require relevant Government Departments and State bodies to be clearly invested and actively engaged in driving the development of Parenting and Family Support. It is mandated by the Government commitment in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* that the State and its partners will work better together and plan service provision in a way that is child-centred.

Local Delivery

It is fundamental that the services to be provided are accessible, effective and valued by children, parents and families in the areas where they live. The role of Tusla in this regard is pivotal. It will develop the necessary capacity in the following ways:

Organising Area-Based Prevention, Partnership and Family Support

Tusla will take an area-based approach to Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PP&FS) in the delivery of Parenting and Family Support. The PP&FS approach will seek to align services to support children and families in local communities and geographical areas. In practice, this will link management responsibility, coordination between statutory and non-statutory partners, and consistent application of a national practice model through which those in need of support will be identified and the necessary support delivered.

Tusla will develop and drive this approach by:

- Appointing Senior Managers for PP&FS to lead this initiative, under the Area Managers, in each of its Area Management Areas;
- Establishing Steering Committees for PP&FS in each of the areas to take forward this initiative and these will be sub-committees of Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) where such already exist;
- Establishing Child and Family Support Networks, as clusters of multi-disciplinary and inter-agency support for children and families, serving geographical areas smaller than the Area Management or CYPSC areas; and
- Consistently implementing 'Meitheal' nationally to ensure that the needs of children and their families are effectively identified, understood and responded to in a timely way so that children and families get the help and support needed to improve children's outcomes.

National Service Delivery Framework (NSDF)

Tusla will work to develop and implement a single, transparent, consistent and accountable Framework for the delivery of all Tusla services with the focus on improving outcomes for children. This constitutes a key component of Tusla's approach to carrying out its functions.

Role of Partners

Tusla-led structuring to implement an area-based approach to PP&FS requires an alignment of the understanding of, and response to, Parenting and Family Support across both statutory and non-statutory providers.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures reiterates the Government's commitment to enhance delivery by strengthening on-the-ground multi-agency working through the work of **Children and Young People's Services Committees** (CYPSCs). These Committees will provide the key interface between Tusla's core services and other services at the crucial local level. Under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, the Government has committed to roll out CYPSCs nationally and in a coordinated fashion connecting them with Local Government and Tusla. An agreed resourcing framework is also to be put in place for the CYPSCs. Tusla has specific responsibilities to lead the establishment and further development of CYPSCs through the leadership of the Area Managers, in partnership with the Local Authorities and other service providers.

The community and voluntary sector is also heavily invested in contributing to families and children receiving every opportunity to achieve their fullest possible well-being and potential. It is important that community and voluntary providers and Tusla work together in a new model of commissioning to meet the strategic objectives which Parenting and Family Support strives to achieve and to utilise the best evidence in devising, delivering and developing services.

High-Level Policy Messages:

1. 'PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT' IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS AND EXISTING GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS PROVIDE THE IMPETUS FOR CONSOLIDATION OF EFFORTS/ACTION.
2. TUSLA, THE CHILD AND FAMILY AGENCY, HAS A PIVOTAL ROLE IN MAKING 'PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT' WORK TO BEST EFFECT ON A CROSS-AGENCY BASIS AND AT LOCAL LEVEL.
3. REALISING THE POLICY VISION REQUIRES THE MAINTENANCE OF A STRONG SHARED COMMITMENT AND ENGAGEMENT TO THAT END BY RELEVANT STATE BODIES.
4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TUSLA AND THE HSE IS A CORNERSTONE OF 'PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT'.
5. TUSLA'S PLANS FOR THE ROLL-OUT OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY FRAMEWORK (NSDF) ENCOMPASSING 'PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT' ARE CENTRAL TO IMPLEMENTATION.
6. A HIGH PRIORITY ATTACHES TO SHAPING SERVICES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL ON THE BASIS OF PARTNERSHIP, PREVENTION AND FAMILY SUPPORT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NSDF AND THE MEITHEAL MODEL BEING IMPLEMENTED BY TUSLA.
7. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES COMMITTEES WILL BE A KEY FORUM FOR ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN PROVIDERS IN RELATION TO SERVICE NEED AND PLANNING.
8. GREAT IMPORTANCE ATTACHES TO WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY PROVIDERS WITHIN THIS POLICY FRAMEWORK.

CHAPTER 7: Monitoring and Evaluation

National Level

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures and *Healthy Ireland* have been put in place to chart the way to delivering improved services to, and outcomes for, children, their parents, families and the wider community. They provide the basis to momentum for change and assessing achievement at the national level.

Arrangements are in place for the oversight, monitoring and evaluation of delivery of all of the commitments contained in both of the National Strategies referred to above and these will continue to provide the impetus for action and sustained momentum. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has the central role in the effective operation of implementation structures to ensure accountability, drive implementation and provide a forum for stakeholder engagement under *Better Outcomes, Better Futures.*

Departmental and Agency Level

All Departments and Agencies

This Policy Statement strongly mandates a culture of evaluation, learning and growth in the planning and implementation of parenting and family support services. The service planning and delivery system should be geared to self-generate the recognition of success, identification of the risks to success and how to reduce or avoid such risks.

Relevant Departments and Agencies should reflect the commitments relevant to Parenting and Family Support in strategic and business plans. In turn, progress on the achievement of these outcomes should feature as part of the performance review processes and annual reporting to Ministers and, where relevant, to Government.

Tusla

Regarding Tusla's central role, performance management tools provided for under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, already reflect the commitments relating to Parenting and Family Support through the national service delivery framework, workforce development and the advancement of Children and Young People's Services Committees. The Tusla Corporate Planning and Business Planning processes allow these commitments to be more fully articulated and time-lined. Consequently, reporting on progress in the planning, implementation and development of parenting and family support activities will be integral to, and clearly ascertainable in, Tusla's on-going business planning and performance reporting.

The Developmental Agenda

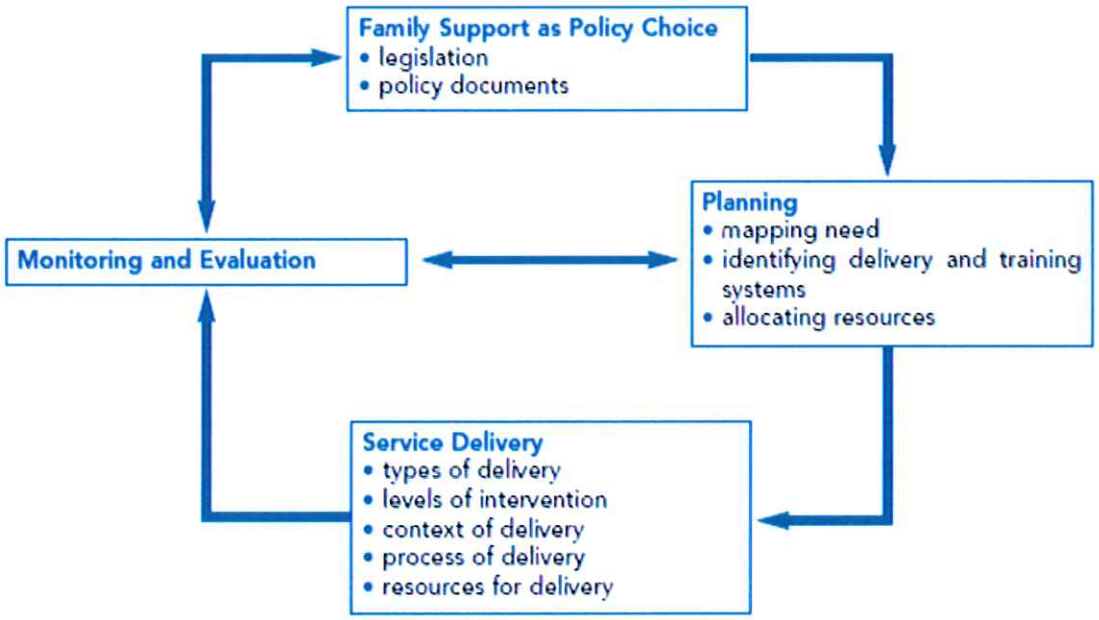
Parenting and Family Support as promoted in this Policy Statement is a broadly-based concept, with the objective of securing better outcomes for children both now and in later life. Broadly conceived, it is concerned with helping both the majority of families whose children's lives will be improved with support from community based services, together with those families where risk factors which

give rise to adverse child experiences require timely interventions from service providers to protect the interests of children as well as enhance their well-being.

Research suggests that children from families who experience a multiplicity of problems are likely to experience poor outcomes across a range of domains in adulthood (Spratt, 2008) and harm to children is now located as much in the future as it is in the present and is diffused over a greater range of signifiers (James and James, 2004). Such research underlines the importance of developing relationships between service providers at area level to identify families at greatest risk in order to provide services to them and measure their impact.

This underscores the importance of developing data collection and collation processes which can inform research to help parenting and family support policy, planning and service delivery that is responsive to changing needs.

Strategic Implementation of Family Support as a Policy Choice



In co-operation with Tusla and other partners, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will continue to develop improved evaluative mechanisms which will include:-

1. Ensuring the reconfiguration and development of parenting and family support services that are underpinned by information systems which support evaluation, the promotion of good practice, effective corporate learning and understanding of what works best in Parenting and Family Support in the Irish context.
2. Putting in place evaluation measures that are attuned to hard-to-reach and at-risk children.
3. Recognising as a basic practice principle the involvement of service users and providers in the planning, delivery and evaluation of parenting and family support services on an on-going basis.

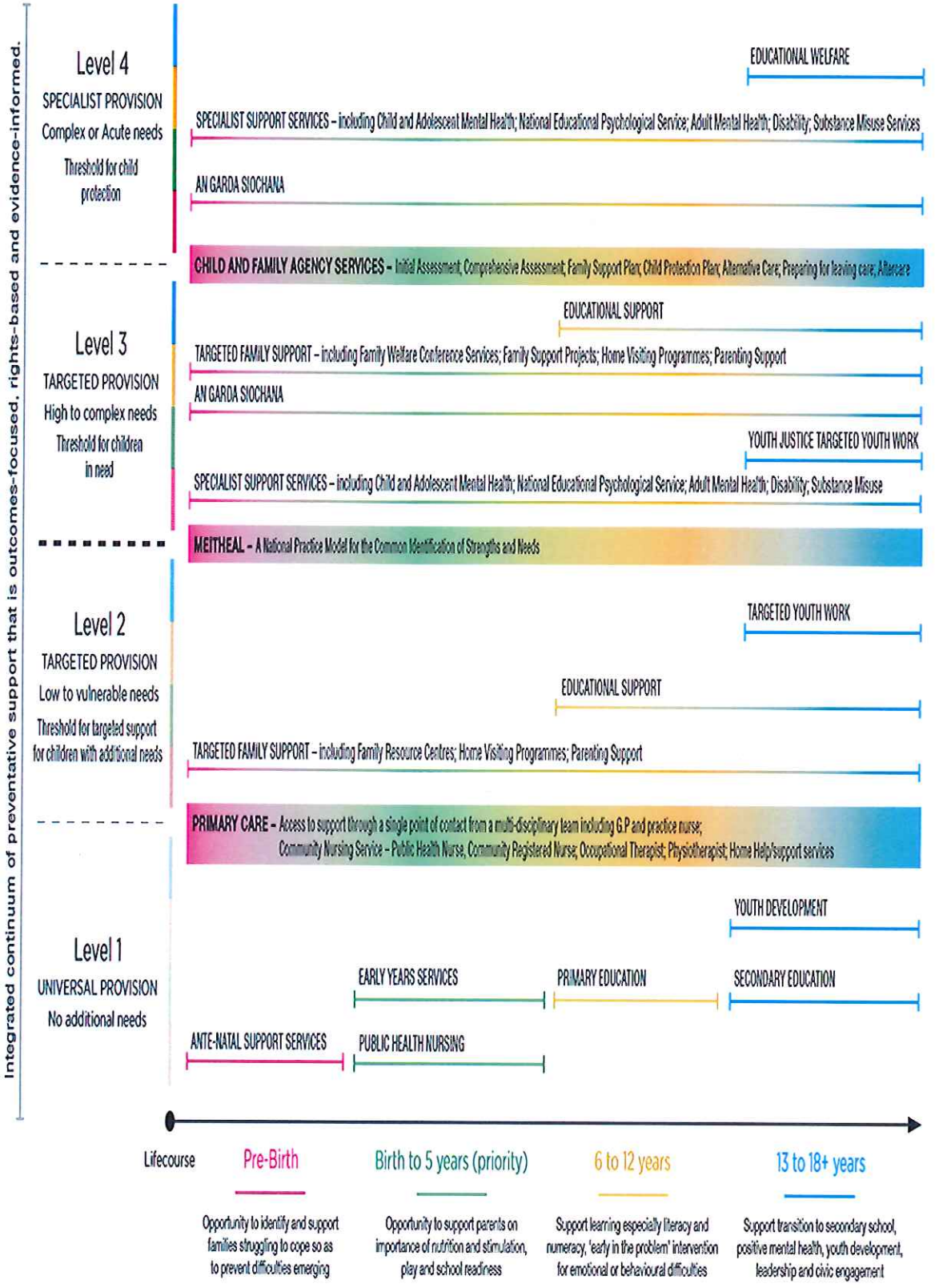
Over time such evaluation should serve to inform the ongoing strengthening of implementation; best matching of resources and programmes to need; the identification of priorities for development; and areas of particular challenge that need to be addressed.

High-Level Policy Messages:

1. EFFECTIVE MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PROGRESS IS A CORE DIMENSION OF POLICY.
2. ENHANCING THE EVIDENCE BASE MUST BE INTEGRAL TO SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS.

Appendix 1

Graphical representation of the integrated continuum of preventive support



Department of Children and Youth Affairs – www.dcya.gov.ie

Appendix 2

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 - 2020

Commitments (bold tick indicates lead Government department or agency)	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	Tusla	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
Goal 1: Support Parents																			
G1 Develop a high-level policy statement on Parenting and Family Support to guide the provision of universal evidence-informed parenting supports. This should address parental and familial factors impacting on parenting capacity and family functioning (e.g. mental health and substance abuse) and identify responses required for 'at risk' children, families and communities.	✓																		
G2 Ensure planning and coordination of parenting supports at local level through Children's Services Committees.	✓			✓										✓	✓	✓			
G3 Continue to support parents financially with the costs of rearing children through the provision of Child Benefit.					✓														
Goal 2: Earlier Intervention and Prevention																			
G5 Work towards a rebalancing of resources to place a greater emphasis on prevention and earlier intervention.	✓	✓	✓	✓										✓	✓				
G6 The HSE and Tusla, The Child and Family Agency will explore the provision of an enhanced maternal ante-natal and early childhood development service, building on the review of the Community Nursing Services and related developments in family support provision (including home visiting), incorporating the learning from the *Growing Up In Ireland* study and the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme.	✓		✓											✓	✓				
G7 Provide and commission both universal and targeted evidence-informed parenting supports and ensure early identification of 'at risk' children and families to strengthen families and reduce the incidences of children coming into, and remaining in, care.															✓				
G8 Continue to increase investment in high-quality Early Years care and education for all children, prioritising families on low incomes. introduce a second free pre-school year within the lifetime of this Framework, once the required quality standards are achieved and subject to resources becoming available.	✓	✓			✓										✓				
G12 Profile key risk factors for poor outcomes for children and young people and develop practice tools to assist professionals in identifying and – working with families – mitigating these risks.	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓				

Commitments (**bold tick** indicates lead Government department or agency)	DCYA	DES	DH	DJE	DSP	DECLG	DPER	DJEI	DCENR	DF	DTTS	DAFM	DAHG	HSE	Tusla	Local Gov	AGS	Others	All
G13 Implement the Area-Based Childhood Programme to address the impact of child poverty and improve child outcomes in 10 or more areas of disadvantage and mainstream the learning from the programme to services throughout the country.	✓	✓	✓															✓	
Goal 4: Ensure Quality Services																			
G24 Work towards a common assessment approach within all agencies working with children and young people, and ensure that, where necessary, assessment and decision-making regarding children coming into care are undertaken in a timely and comprehensive manner.	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓				

Relevant to all ages Specific to under-6s (Early Years) Specific to youth

Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Well-being 2013-2025

Reference	Action	Partners
2.4	Agree a method and timeline to explore the potential contribution of interagency Children's Services Committees (CSCs) to improve the health and wellbeing of families and communities.	DCYA, Tusla, DH, HSE Directorates, DSP, local authorities, CSCs.
2.13	Combine mental health promotion programmes with interventions that address broader determinants and social problems as part of a multi-agency approach, particularly in areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation and fragmentation.	DH, HSE, NOSP, DCYA, Tusla, other Government Departments, statutory agencies, C & V Bodies
3.4	Support, link with and further improve existing partnerships, strategies and initiatives that aim to improve the capacity of parents, carers and families to support healthier choices for their children and themselves.	DH, DES, DCYA, other departments, local authorities, HSE Directorates, statutory agencies, C & V Bodies and the private sector.

Abbreviations Used:

DCYA – Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES – Department of Education and Skills
DH – Department of Health
DJE – Department of Justice and Equality
DSP – Department of Social Protection
DECLG – Department of Environment, Community and Local Government
DPER – Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
DJEI – Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
DCENR – Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources
DF – Department of Finance
DTTS – Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
DAFM – Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
DAHG – Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
HSE – Health Service Executive
Tusla – Child and Family Agency
AGS – An Garda Síochána
NOSP – National Office for Suicide Prevention

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