





## CODE OF PRACTICE FOR PEOPLE WORKING WITH YOUNG PARENTS

UPDATED FOR 2010

# 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Many young parents who return to learning will seek information, advice and financial support for their childcare under the Care to Learn scheme. Young parents like to have someone to talk to about the different issues and problems that they face in life – both generally and as parents. As someone who has regular contact with young parents, they may turn to you for advice and support. This Code of Practice sets out the ways in which you may be able to help.
- 1.2 The circumstances and needs of young parents tend to be different to those of other parents. This Code of Practice is designed to help you to understand these circumstances and needs. It suggests ways in which you can work confidently and effectively with young parents, their children and others who play a role in their lives.
- 1.3 Your local Early Years Team, or others involved in teenage pregnancy partnerships, may have developed information packs to support young parents and childcare providers. This Code of Practice builds on these packs and other good practice learned from working with young parents. We have included two case studies to show how good advice at the right point can help young parents to address issues that are troubling them.
- 1.4 If you would like to improve your skills and knowledge further, more information is available from:
  -  your local authority Early Years Team and their training directory; and
  -  Early Years professional bodies (see Annex B).

- 1.5 Many young parents have clear goals, and some have a network of family and friends to whom they can turn for advice and support. These young parents are fortunate and may only expect you to assure them that their child is being well cared for. They may go elsewhere for information and advice.
- 1.6 Other young parents may have no one from whom to seek advice and support on a regular basis. They may be unsure about the services that are there to help them with parenting and other issues affecting their lives. They may feel insecure and be wary of unknown institutions and officials. When these young parents get to know and trust you, they are more likely to confide in you and ask for advice and support than to go elsewhere.
- 1.7 Many young parents worry about issues such as their own status, relationships, having nowhere to stay, their financial situation, the risks of abuse to themselves or their child, and drug or alcohol misuse. The relationship of trust that they have established with you may mean that you are the first adult that they turn to for help. This does not mean that you are expected to know everything that is needed to help them – far from it. We would prefer that you work within your own knowledge and, where you are not sure about the answers to their questions or about how to respond to their needs, refer them to those who are responsible for the various different issues that arise.



## 2. INITIAL CONTACT WITH YOUNG PARENTS

- 2.1 The first thing to remember is that each young parent is an individual. There is no 'typical young parent' – everyone's circumstances are different. Some young parents will be confident and able to explain their circumstances and needs. Others will lack confidence and worry about explaining their situation and asking for help. You will need to read the signs of this when it happens, and encourage the young parents to let you know whether everything is going OK for them.
- 2.2 For many young parents, the thought of leaving their child in the care of strangers – especially for the first time – makes them very apprehensive. Few will know about the quality of care provided by registered childcare providers and their thoughts may well have been coloured by 'scare stories'. It should be simple to explain to them how childcare providers on the Early Years Register are checked against the Early Years Foundation Stages Standards to make sure that their care is appropriate for both welfare and development, or how childcare providers on the General Childcare Register may be inspected to ensure compliance with Ofsted requirements. If you are a childcare provider and use the approaches recommended by Quality Counts or Quality First, or if you are a member of a quality-assured childminding network, this too may help you to reassure the parent. However, they will ultimately form their own opinions and decide for themselves whether they want to trust and talk to you. Young parents tell our evaluators that they value effective relationships with their learning and childcare contacts, as these are people who could provide the help and support that they need to complete their learning and go on to further successful development.
- 2.3 It is important that each young parent is treated with respect. Some young parents may have experienced situations where adults have assumed that they do not know how to look after their child and appear to tell them what to do. You should make a point of consulting young parents on their children's care, e.g. diet, activities, rest periods. One way of doing this is to keep a 'day diary' of all activities with the child – to be discussed together.



- 2.4 There may be situations where a grandparent or friend attempts to tell you what to do on behalf of the young parent, and you may be tempted to listen to them instead of the young parent. Unless there are risks to the child, you should always discuss the childcare arrangements with the young parent in person.
- 2.5 Young parents have the same rights as other parents in terms of the choice of childcare. They may wish to explore the quality of care and the kind of activities that you engage in with the children. Some may not be aware of the regulations governing smoking and smacking, and may seek reassurance on these points. Show them around the premises, introduce them to the staff who will care for their child, and encourage them to ask questions.
- 2.6 Provide clear written information about the service that you provide and agree terms, e.g. hours of childcare, when the child has to be collected, when/if the parent can 'drop in', rules on smoking, holiday arrangements and fees.
- 2.7 Try to ensure that the young parent really understands the childcare arrangements. They may have language or basic skills needs. In these cases you need to take more time and arrange assistance if necessary to ensure that they understand.
- 2.8 Care to Learn will fund 'trial sessions' or a settling-in period to help young parents to experience childcare to see if the provision in question is suitable. If you feel that this option might be helpful to the young parent, discuss it with them and their advisers. A Connexions Personal Adviser, Reintegration Officer or Sure Start adviser can help to complete the application form for a trial. Childminders who are part of a locally brokered arrangement can also seek help from their network contact. Again, reassure the young parent that this is one way of ensuring that they and their child are happy with things.
- 2.9 One common complaint from young parents is that people appear to be 'judging' them. This is one thing to avoid; it really does put young parents off. The most important issue is to help the young parent to feel in control of their own childcare and other arrangements, and to feel respected. They need to know that you are behind them and will either help them yourself, if appropriate, or refer them to someone else who can.

# 3. DIFFERENT PROBLEMS AND RESPONSES

3.1 There are three types of issues that young parents may raise with you:

- ❁ Issues that relate to routine childcare, parenting or life skills.  
Examples include diet, routine and activities that the child will undertake while in your care. There may be questions about parenting, e.g. sleep patterns, behaviour or diet at home. There may also be issues about shopping, cooking or travelling.
- ❁ Issues that need more specialist expertise, e.g. those relating to financial circumstances, learning, relationships and housing. The young person may need the help of the student support officer at their college, the year tutor at school, their Connexions Personal Adviser, the Department for Work and Pensions, etc. Few of us have a full understanding of these particular specialisms. If in doubt, someone from Connexions can find out who is the best contact.
- ❁ Issues that relate to the young parent or their child being at risk.  
Where there is reason to believe that either the young parent or the child may be at risk, these cases must be referred without delay. Follow the established local authority rules for suspected child abuse or adult abuse – this will usually involve social services and the police.

3.2 If you are working in an extended service, e.g. a Neighbourhood Nursery or a Children's Centre, you will already have access to a range of specialist advice and support such as health and social services. Some services also provide support to parents, such as classes in parenting skills, literacy lessons or more general opportunities to socialise with other parents.

3.3 If you are an individual childminder, your ability to offer information, advice and support will depend on your own background, skills and knowledge. As a registered childcarer, you will know about childcare issues. Your ability to give reliable advice on different issues is for you to assess in the light of particular issues and your own knowledge. If in doubt, you should seek to refer the young parent to someone who can provide them with accurate and reliable information and support. This is especially important where specialist services and support are available, for example for financial issues, employment, training, housing or social services.

### **CASE STUDY: GINA AND DANIEL**

You are a childminder who is looking after Gina's two-year-old son Daniel while she attends college. You have worked hard to establish a trusting relationship with Gina. She also has a very good relationship with her mother, who often drops off or picks up her grandson if Gina has a late class. You notice that when Daniel is dropped off or picked up by his grandmother he is always clutching chocolate or sweets. Sometimes he doesn't want to eat his lunch and asks for a chocolate biscuit instead. Gina asks you how she can persuade her mother to 'stop giving Daniel all these sweets'.

The next time she and her mother pick Daniel up together, you offer them a cup of tea and give them some information and advice on the best kind of nutrition to ensure that Daniel grows up to be fit and healthy. You could suggest that while treats are good occasionally, Daniel needs a balanced diet to make sure that his teeth and bones grow well. You could suggest that his grandmother might like to give Daniel a piece of fruit instead of sweets or chocolate. You find that this approach works well and Daniel often comes with a banana or a piece of apple now. He is eating better (although he still doesn't like his greens).

### **CASE STUDY: MEL AND HER MUM**

Mel is a 16-year-old parent with a nine-month-old daughter. You have been caring for her daughter in the nursery for the last three months while she attends the local college to do her GCSEs. Mel hopes to go to college in September to study beauty therapy. She has been living at home with her parents, who seem supportive, but recently she has confided that her mother 'is always complaining about the baby crying at night'. This morning she arrived late and very agitated, carrying a suitcase and a box of toys. She says her mother has 'had enough' and has told her to get out. She has no other relatives living nearby and is at her wits' end trying to work out where she can stay tonight. She has even asked if you could look after the baby tonight so that she (Mel) can 'sleep in the bus station'.

You know that this is not the answer. After discussing it with Mel, you contact social services and the local Connexions Personal Adviser, who is the named contact for teenage pregnancy issues. Together they are able to find temporary accommodation for Mel and her daughter in a local mother and baby hostel. They also agree to work with Mel to try to restore her relationship with her mother so that she can return home. You suggest that both Mel and her mother might like to attend some parenting classes so that they both feel confident about the baby's health and development. Mel agrees and is able to leave her daughter with you while she sorts things out. You also call the college and explain that Mel will not be attending classes today but will be back tomorrow.












## 4. REFERRAL

- 4.1 If you have decided that you do not have the appropriate knowledge and experience to give the requested support and advice to a young parent, the next step is to decide how best to introduce the young parent to someone who can help.
- 4.2 Sometimes it will be enough to give the parent the contact details of a person at another agency or service. In some circumstances, and for some parents, it will be better for you to make an appointment for the young parent or to invite an adviser to meet with the young parent. If you think that you need to arrange things rather than risk nothing happening, the young parent may be happy for you to make contact. The timing of this may be important – depending on the issue and the young parent's needs. You might follow up the approach by asking the young parent how it went.
- 4.3 If the issue involves referring a young parent to another official agency such as social services, you should follow the local arrangements for doing this. It is important not to refer a young parent to another agency without discussing it with them first and getting their permission. You should talk through the options with the young parent and ensure that they understand why you are suggesting that another agency may be able to provide additional support and advice. The exception to this is where there is a possibility of either the child or the young parent being at risk. If this is the case, you should follow the established local authority rules for suspected child abuse or adult abuse. If in doubt, contact social services immediately.



4.4 Only you will know if you are able to give advice, but examples of areas where you may feel qualified to do so could include:

-  general queries about the child's health – if in any doubt, refer to the young parent's GP, health visitor or practice nurse;
-  general queries on nutrition and diet, for both parent and child;
-  general queries on child development;
-  budgeting and general housekeeping;
-  managing child behaviour;
-  appropriate play activities; and
-  parenting skills.

4.5 It is likely that key 'crisis' issues will involve money, benefit entitlement, housing or relationships. Other problems (e.g. problems with domestic violence or courses) may arise. Annex A provides details of some national agencies you can contact for help. Connexions, Sure Start Plus and Teenage Pregnancy Coordinators can help you to contact key agencies locally.



## 5. CHECKLIST FOR SUPPORTING YOUNG PARENTS

1. Have you identified the support needs of the young parent?  
Remember, there may be more than one. Problems could include having nowhere to stay, not being able to access benefits, not being sure how to feed a child or not knowing what food is best. Each problem will have to be dealt with.
2. Have you identified those issues that you are confident about dealing with yourself, e.g. questions on diet or child development? Have you been able to give appropriate support, including information leaflets where these would be helpful?
3. Have you given the correct referral advice to the young parent if you are not confident about giving support personally?
4. Have you checked that the young parent understands your advice and is happy to take action on their own? If not, have you made contact with the appropriate referral agency on their behalf?
5. Have you checked that your actions have helped the young parent to deal with their immediate problems, and that there is someone e.g. a Connexions Personal Adviser or a social worker who is providing long-term support?
6. Have you read the Care to Learn guidance? This document contains useful information for people involved in delivering Care to Learn. It is available to view on the Care to Learn website [caretolearn.ypla.gov.uk/](http://caretolearn.ypla.gov.uk/).

















# ANNEX A

## CONTACT DETAILS FOR REFERRAL PURPOSES

For local contact details, seek help from your local authority Early Years Team.

Area of support and/or advice	National contact details
Welfare benefits	<b>Citizens Advice</b> adviceguide.org.uk Tel: 020 7253 7243
Homelessness and housing problems	<b>Shelter</b> shelter.org.uk Tel: 0808 800 4444
Working with children with special needs	A range of specialist organisations deal with working with children, depending on the need. Talk to your local authority Early Years Team.
Queries about education courses or careers	<b>Learndirect</b> learndirect.co.uk Tel: 0800 101 901 <b>Connexions Direct</b> connexions-direct.com Tel: 080 800 13 2 19
Sexual health and/or sexually transmitted diseases	<b>Sexwise</b> Tel: 0800 28 29 30 (A confidential helpline for under-18s on anything to do with sex, relationships and contraception)
Pregnancy and contraception advice	 Sure Start or Sure Start Plus (in local authorities where Sure Start Plus operates);  the young parent's midwife;  Connexions;  the young parent's GP;  the local family planning clinic; or  the local Brook Centre.
Parenting skills	 Sure Start, Sure Start Plus Children's Centres;  the local FE college (if they run courses in this area); or  the local Families Information Service.
Relationships with the child's father and/or other close relationships	 social services; or  Connexions.
Child abuse	 social services.

# ANNEX B

## NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING SUPPORT TO REGISTERED CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

### **Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)**

Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester M2 7LA  
Tel: 08456 404040  
[ofsted.gov.uk](http://ofsted.gov.uk)

### **National Childminding Association of England and Wales**

Royal Court  
81 Tweedy Road  
Bromley  
Kent BR1 1TG  
Tel: 0845 880 0044  
[ncma.org.uk](http://ncma.org.uk)

### **National Day Nurseries Association**

National Early Years Enterprise Centre  
Longbow Close  
Huddersfield  
West Yorkshire HD2 1GQ  
Tel: 01484 40 70 70  
[ndna.org.uk](http://ndna.org.uk)

### **Pre-school Learning Alliance**

The Fitzpatrick Building  
188 York Way  
London N7 9AD  
Tel: 020 7697 2500  
[pre-school.org.uk](http://pre-school.org.uk)

### **National Association of Family Information Services (NAFIS)**

Grosvenor Gardens House  
London SW1W 0BS  
Tel: 020 7953 4085  
[familyinformationservices.org.uk](http://familyinformationservices.org.uk)





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