parenting
across scotland

Let's talk teens

Consultations with Parents/Carers

Contents

Executive summary

Parenting across Scotland commissioned Scotinform to carry out consultations with parents/carers as part of a project to assess the information needs of parents and carers of young people (11-19 year olds).

The consultations were carried out through four focus groups of parents/carers in March 2014. The groups were held in Dalkeith and Glasgow, with 7-8 participants attending each group.

The key findings from the consultations were:

- Participants recognised that there was a need for information about teenage children who were perceived as going through a significant period of change due to adolescent development and the transition to secondary school.

- The trigger to looking for information could be the parent/carer concerns, media coverage of a specific issue or the young person asking for information.

- Participants had looked for a range of information on issues such as internet usage, drugs, bullying, homework and exams. The main sources used were the internet and schools, including school websites, and family/friends.

- There was some reference to looking at print material, usually handed out by the school or seen on visits to the doctors'surgeries and libraries. Parents had not specifically sought out printed information, but would browse it if it was available.

- The topics that participants had the highest level of interest in were drugs and internet usage. This interest reflected parents'lack of knowledge about the topics and their perception that they did not understand current terminology/ technology. There were also high levels of interest in other topics such as exams, bullying and health, but it was anticipated that the information on these areas would be provided by schools.

- Comments on the material currently available to parents showed that the most effective format was small format booklets (approximately A6 size) which had an eye catching cover and text that was easy to browse. Participants saw printed material as providing the key points and signposting to additional information available online. A5 leaflets were much less likely than the smaller format to be picked up and browsed, unless the topic was directly relevant.

- One of the key roles of print material was the potential to share it with teenagers: this meant that it had to be designed to appeal to teenage children as well as parents.

- The research suggests that the key factors to keep in mind when developing information for parents are:

  - print material should summarise the key points and act as a signpost to additional online resources for further information
  - information should be current – this was perceived as a potential problem with print, rather than online, material
  - there is a need for information on areas where parents feel they are out of touch, specifically relating to drugs and internet usage
  - the main source of information for parents about issues relating to their teenage children is through schools or via the internet: surgeries, libraries and community centres are key locations for parents/carers to pick up and browse through leaflets
  - whilst the key target audience for material is the parents/carers, the design and content should take into account the possibility that the information will be passed on to the teenage children

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Parenting across Scotland commissioned Scotinform to carry out consultations with parents/carers as part of a project to assess what information parents and carers of young people (11-19 year olds) want. Funded by the Third Sector Early Intervention Fund (TSEIF), the project is managed by Parenting across Scotland (PaS) and partner organisations on the Parent and Carers of Young People Information Group.

As part of the Scottish Government's commitment in the National Parenting Strategy (2012), CHILDREN 1ST carried out a mapping exercise of current nationally provided, physical information resources for parents and carers.[1] The findings identified that there was "very little information available for parents of teenage children and those approaching adulthood". As a result, it was decided that in-depth consultations with parents/carers should be carried out in order to identify gaps in the information currently available.

The overall aim of the consultations was to identify the information needs of parents/carers of young people aged 11-19 years old. In order to achieve this there were a number of specific research objectives:

- to identify what information is required by parents/carers of young people
- to explore views on the current availability of information (including awareness and use)
- to assess views on resources available
- to explore the most effective methods of dissemination of information
- to identify the key issues in the development of information for parents/carers

1.2 Approach to consultations

The approach was finalised at a meeting of the Information Group on 11 February 2014 and refined in the light of difficulties with recruitment via local authorities within the relatively short timescale.

A total of four focus groups were held in CHILDREN 1ST offices in Dalkeith and Glasgow on 26 and 27 March 2014. Participants were recruited through face-to-face interviews, apart from carers in Edinburgh whose contact details were supplied by Healthy Respect.

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[1] Mapping current sources of national information and advice and how this is delivered to parents and carers across Scotland : CHILDREN 1ST (November 2013)

A total of 31 participants attended the groups, with each group including a mix of mothers/fathers and BC1/C2DE socioeconomic groups. The two groups in Edinburgh included carers and the groups in Glasgow included Asian and Chinese parents. All participants received an incentive of £30, as is standard market research practice.

The table on the next page summarises the profile of participants.

Group	No of participants	Age of young people	Gender
1. Midlothian	8	11-14 year olds	4 female 4 male
2 Midlothian	8	15-19 year olds	4 female 4 male
3. Glasgow	7	11-14 year olds	5 female 2 male
4. Glasgow	8	15-19 year olds	5 female 3 male

The discussions lasted approximately 90 minutes and were facilitated by Janet Sylvester, Scotinform, using a topic guide agreed with the Information Group.

2. Consultation findings

2.1 Information sought

Participants recognised that there was a need for information about young people as they went through what was perceived as a significant period of change due to adolescent development and the transition to secondary school.

> *"Didn't have any issues with kids at Primary 7, it is just when they are starting 1st year, starting to grow up and the hormones kick in." Glasgow parent of 11-14 year old*

> *"You get bombarded by information from health when they are young and when they start high school it's like they fall off the health radar." Edinburgh parent of 11-14 year old*

The majority of participants recalled a number of topics that they had had concerns about and had sought out information. The topics highlighted in bold were mentioned in several groups, the others were mentioned by one participant only.

- **internet usage**
- **drugs**
- **homework**
- **exams**
- **bullying**
- **careers advice**
- domestic abuse
- alcohol
- child benefit
- dyslexia

From the discussions, it was clear that the trigger to looking for information could be external (for example, media coverage of an issue) or the young person asking for information as well as issues of concerns to parents.

> *"There are so many things out there drugs and alcohol wise, as a parent I'm not sure what is available – the terminology is different now from what was available years ago. It's all the different E's that are worrying." Edinburgh parent of 15-19 year old*

"The things my kids come and ask us is what things they do at a certain age, when they get discounts, when they don't. When they can get on and off a bus at different ages, when they can go to the cinema, when they can be left at home alone? The Young Scot card what does that qualify them for?" Edinburgh parent of 15-19 year old

Several participants with 11-14 year olds described how they addressed concerns about internet safety by logging onto to their child's account to see what they had been looking at.

"I keep my kids'passwords so I have access to everything they do online: one of the parent websites said you should do that. My son had a bullying issue before, so I like to keep on top of things." Edinburgh parent of 11-14 year old

"I spy on them on Facebook." Glasgow parent of 15-19 year old

2.2 Sources of information

The internet was seen as the main source of information: almost all the participants said they would automatically Google a topic that they were concerned about. Most parents would browse the sources on the internet looking for relevant and up-to-date information. A small number of participants would print out information from the internet, but the majority preferred to read online. Most participants could not recall the websites they had looked at: only two mentioned specific websites (Talk to Frank and Circle of Mums).

Printed material was also used, with some participants preferring hard copies as they considering these easier to refer to. Other participants preferred looking online, but would pick up leaflets/brochures in school, libraries, doctors' surgeries, etc.

"If I saw a leaflet at school I would certainly pick it up. One of the downsides of the internet is that you can put something into a search engine and get mincemeat." Edinburgh parent of 11-14 year old

Schools were perceived as a key source of information:

"Some of the schools give you leaflets out or letters in case you want behavioural classes." Glasgow parent of 11-14 year old

"I've seen a lot of stuff at school on bullying and internet and things." Edinburgh parent of 11-14 year old

One issue for school communication for non-resident parents was the introduction of text services: a father described how the school's text service only applied to texting one number per household which meant that he could not receive texts.

School websites were seen as an important source:

> *"All the schools now, you can go onto their web page and there is masses of information." Glasgow parent of 11-14 year old*

> *"I tried to look at XXX school website as it has a parenting section and when I tried it had a password. So I rang the school and they said the password is really simple: but why do they need a password to get into something like that – we just want to find out what our kids should be doing." Edinburgh parent of 11-14 year old*

Other sources provided through the school were Triple P sessions and Parent Council discussions.

> *"At my son's school they have something called 'Triple P'where if you have concerns you can go. It's a bit like this [focus group], meeting other parents, discussing issues – in fact you can get one to one sessions too." Glasgow parent of 11-14 year old*

> *"A lot of the conversations you have at the Parent Council groups, it's not just about the school, it's about the parents. When you have a mixed culture of parents it's a good way of getting feedback." Glasgow parent of 11-14 year old*

Family/friends were the other key source of information.

> *"I would always speak to my friends who have kids the same age." Glasgow parent of 11-14 year old*

> *"I think you learn a lot from friends, parents of friends of kids: generally what works for one will work for them all." Glasgow parent of 15-19 year old*

Organisations that were expected to publish information included the Scottish Government, health board, social work, education and charities (e.g. CHILDREN 1ST or Barnardos). Participants, however, would not go directly to these internet sites, but would use Google searches to identify sources and then go to the source they felt was likely to be most reliable/up to date.

2.3 Interest in topics

Participants were shown a list of topics and asked if they were interested in information on each.

The table below summarises the comments on each of the topics.

Topic	Comments
Alcohol	This was a concern for parents/carers of 11-14 year olds, mainly due to perceived peer pressure, but it was generally felt that the parents, based on their own experience, knew the key messages to convey to their children. Participants believed advertising campaigns targeting underage drinking were effective and several schools had "Booze Busters" or equivalent campaigns, or sessions from campus police officers on alcohol awareness. Muslim participants felt that they had to address this topic at an earlier stage than other parents. They also thought it was less likely to be a problem as abstaining from alcohol is part of their religious beliefs.
Behaviour/ discipline, setting boundaries, managing behaviour (including going out)	Whilst this was perceived as a "major challenge" in parenting teenagers, participants were unlikely to feel that there was a need for information. The schools were seen as the main sources of support/help, along with friends/other parents. Using these sources meant that any information could be tailored to the family situation: participants felt that there was no "one size fits all" information about behaviour/ discipline.
Bullying	A few participants had experienced issues with bullying, and there was a general consensus that information should be available on how to deal with bullying. This was an area, however, that schools were perceived as covering through zero tolerance policies backed up by leaflets and advice.
Communication	Communication was linked by some participants to behaviour/ discipline, with the discussion identifying that this was seen as an issue that needed a tailored approach for each family.

Topic	Comments
Drugs	There were high levels of interest in information about drugs, mainly because participants felt they were not up-to-date with the latest drugs and current situation with legal highs. Concerns about drugs had been heightened by the recent news stories about young people who had fallen ill or died after taking drugs in Glasgow. Although participants were aware of information available through schools, surgeries, libraries and TV campaigns, there was a general view that "there could not be too much information" about drugs as young people appeared to continue to see taking drugs as acceptable.
Employment/ jobs	Although this was an issue of interest to parents of older children, it was seen as the role of schools to provide information on employment, through careers fairs and other events. Several participants whose teenage children were considering options after leaving school commented that they would like more information that they could discuss with their children.
Education, exams, homework and curriculum	The provision of education-related information was also seen as the remit of schools: parents were very interested in this area and anticipated accessing it via the school website, events or information provided by schools. The introduction of the new National Qualifications exam system had raised specific need for information about examinations, but this was also expected to be provided by the schools.
Family relationships	Carers and step-parents who were separated felt that there was a need for information on family relationships, but it was recognised that the information had to be tailored to take account of individual situations. One participant identified a specific need for information on sibling rivalry.
Food and nutrition	Although schools were providing information about healthy eating, several parents felt that there was a need for additional information relating to healthy eating. The parents interested in information all had concerns about their daughters' eating habits, although participants in one group identified increasing concerns amongst boys about weight issues.

Topic	Comments
Friendship	Although schools were providing information about healthy eating, several parents felt that there was a need for additional information relating to healthy eating. The parents interested in information all had concerns about their daughters' eating habits, although participants in one group identified increasing concerns amongst boys about weight issues.
Health **- sexual health** **- mental health** **- other health**	Sexual health was seen as being covered by schools, including via the school nurse and organisations such as Midlothian Young People's Advice Service (MYPAS). Mental health information was the area that parents were most likely to be interested in. It was recognised that there were links between mental health and several of the other topics (e.g. communication). For other health issues, participants would refer to their GP or search online, and felt there was sufficient information available through these channels.
Internet use/safety	This was a major area of concern for parents, who felt there was a need for information for both parents and young people. Access to the internet on mobile phones and devices was a concern, along with the awareness that young people often had a far greater understanding of technology than their parents.
Teenage/ adolescent development – physical, emotional and cognitive development	Participants were interested in this topic – one described it as requiring an "entire manual" – but they felt it would be most useful to have information specific to the individual young person rather than generic information on development.

The only topics that were identified as missing from the list were "smoking" (both groups in Glasgow mentioned this unprompted) and "bereavement", especially mass bereavement (mentioned by one group in Edinburgh).

2.4 Views on material currently available

Participants were shown a range of printed material on different topics and asked to comment on the design, content and terminology. The material included:

- Parenting across Scotland (PaS) booklets – Top Ten Tips series (approximately A6 size)
- Parentline pocket guides (A7)
- Talk 2 leaflets (A6)
- Family Lives/Parentline leaflets (A5)
- print outs of online information from respectme, NSPCC, Healthier Scotland

Comments on the material have been grouped under the key topic areas.

Design

Comments on the design of the material suggested that parents wanted leaflets/booklets with covers that were eye catching and were suitable for potentially handing on and discussing with their teenagers. The use of cover photos (Family Lives leaflets) and illustrations (PaS booklets) were seen as effective and both of these would be shared with other members of the family – particularly younger teenagers. The use of cartoons and colour of the Parentlineplus leaflets was not seen as eye catching and participants were unlikely to share these with their teenagers.

"The small ones [PaS] are nice because you can pick them up and put them in your pocket." Edinburgh parent of 15-19 year old

"The children wouldn't pick the bigger ones up, too much in them, whereas the smaller ones they would." Edinburgh parent of 11-14 year old

"That photo of gangs [Family Lives] – I would pick that one up because of the image and because that is the age of my kids and their pals." Edinburgh parent of 15-19 year old

The size of the Family Lives/Parentline leaflets were seen as good, but participants generally preferred the smaller "bite size" look of the PaS and Parentline pocket guides.

"These [A5] leaflets are the sort of thing you see in doctors'surgeries where you can pick up lots of different things." Glasgow parent of 15-19 year old

"There is more in the bigger ones, more in depth whereas the little ones are quick hits." Edinburgh 11-14 year olds

"The smaller ones are more to the point [than A5]. I would read them." Edinburgh parent of 15-19 year old

Content/terminology

Participants were looking for short, straightforward content, with references to further resources for more information.

The content and terminology of the PaS booklets was described as "readable" and most participants said they liked the big writing and simple text.

"It's straight to the point, Plain English." Edinburgh parent of 11-14 year old

"I like this one because it has no big words, it is simple. It starts by acknowledging the parent: it isn't being a parent." Glasgow parent of 11-14 year old

"I like the Teenagers and Risky Behaviour one [Family Lives] – as parents we probably don't talk as much as we should to our kids about everything." Edinburgh parent of 15-19 year old

It was expected that printed material would provide links to further, online resources.

"This is quite good because it tells you about extra help online for a parent of child." Glasgow parent of 15-19 year old

The content of print outs of information from websites was seen as intended to offer far greater depth than the printed material. In some cases this was seen as a very good thing, particularly for information that participants were interested in such as drugs.

"The content is too much, there is too much text, but the pictures of the different drugs are really useful." Glasgow parent of 11-14 year old

Overall comments

Printed material was seen as having a role by some participants if they needed information on a specific issue and wanted to discuss it with their teenager.

"I think if you were stuck, and there was an issue developing, you might look for information [like these leaflets]." Edinburgh parent of 11-14 year old

"If it's a subject that catches your attention, if you're having issues with gangs or whatever then you would read it whatever it looked like." Glasgow parent of 11-14 year old
"If my daughter was younger then I would print something off like that [Home alone guide from the NSPCC] because we had an issue with that – it would prove what the guidelines are." Edinburgh parent of 15-19 year old

2.5 Developing information for parents

The topics of the highest interest were drugs and internet usage/safety. In both cases parent/carers felt they were "out of touch" with these topics because there had been significant changes since they were teenagers.

Other topics of interest were food/nutrition, how to find a job and mental health. There was also interest in much more information about education/schools on topics such as the new examination system, homework, child's progress and subjects.

There was also interest in other areas, but it was generally felt that either they were already well covered (e.g. alcohol) or that it was the remit of the school to provide information (e.g. employment and education).

2.6 Access to information

Access to up to date information was a key concern, reflecting the interest in the latest information on drugs and internet usage.

"I think the information is out there, it is how relevant it is. Like alcohol, drugs, sex or whatever you want to be able to find it and to know it is up to date."
Edinburgh parent of 15-19 year old

As noted earlier, there was a strong preference for accessing information via the internet, although participants did see a role for printed material available through schools and in public places such as libraries, community centres and doctors'surgeries.

The main advantages of information on the internet were that it was up-to-date and easy to browse, while the disadvantages were the amount of information that searches produced and the difficulty in identifying the most "trusted" and current sources. Printed material was perceived as useful if it was very simple and straightforward, could be kept as a reference and, where appropriate, shared with the young person.

"If a leaflet was lying there I'd pick it up, but I'd go online if there was a specific problem." Glasgow parent of 15-19 year old

Participants did not see a role for social media in providing information to parents: this reflected a cautious attitude towards using social media (mainly Facebook) and concerns about confidentiality.

"The thing with Facebook is that it is not very confidential, it tells you who is doing whatever – that would put me off." Edinburgh parent of 11-14 year old

A few participants thought that communication via social media could be effective, mainly because it could reach both the parent and the young person.

The likelihood of accessing online parenting forums was very limited: one participant had looked at NetMums, another at Circle of Mums.

> *"I use the internet a lot, but I wouldn't use an online forum because it is out there and I wouldn't want my kids to find out anything." Edinburgh parent of 15-19 year old*

Most participants felt that resources should be relevant to all parents and that there was no need to target information specifically at different types of parents.

> *"As long as it is covering all the different areas, why would you want to single people out? Usually problems are the same problems." Edinburgh parent of 11-14 year old*

> *"If you're a dad or a mum, you're a parent and it doesn't make any difference." Glasgow parent of11-14 year old*

A few participants highlighted where they felt there should be information targeting specific types: fathers who were single parents and gay parents. For the former it was felt that specific information on parenting could be helpful as they often had to take on a role that the mother had mainly carried out. For the latter it was felt that children of gay parents were more likely than average to experience negative attitudes and bullying from their peer group.

3. Conclusions

The key conclusions from the findings are:

- Parents/carers will seek information when they have specific concerns about their teenage children. These concerns can be triggered either by personal circumstance or by media coverage of particular events. Internet searching is the main way of finding information on most topics. For education-related information, school websites are an increasingly popular source. Parents of all types and socioeconomic groups accessed the internet suggesting that the digital divide is not an issue for this audience.

- Whilst Google searches were the favoured method of finding information, a few participants referred to printed material accessed either by printing off from websites or from leaflets provided by schools.

- Schools, including school websites, are a very important source of information for parents. There is an expectation that schools will provide a wide range of information relating to educational topics (homework, exams, etc), but they are also perceived as the main source for information on topics such as sexual health and bullying.

- The review of examples of printed material suggested that parents prefer small formats with "bite size" content that can be quickly scanned. This reflects the expectation that booklets/leaflets are likely to be picked up on visits to libraries or doctors surgeries, rather than being specifically sought out. Whilst their limited content was seen as sufficient for a casual read, it was anticipated that there would be reference to additional online resources for more information.

- The PaS "Top Ten Tips" series was the most effective resource in meeting this ad hoc, casual reading requirement. Parents who had specific concerns felt that the relevant leaflets could be useful and were more interested than the casual readers in the detailed content in leaflets such as the Family Lives "Gangs, teenagers and your family" leaflet.

- An attractive and relevant front cover was identified as critical if parents are going to pick up and read printed material. Relevant photos and illustrations appeared to work effectively, but a cartoon-style approach can appear childish and therefore not relevant to teenagers.

- The topics that participants were most interested in were drugs and internet usage.

- Internet safety/usage. This reflects the interest in areas where parents feel they lack up-to-date knowledge and may not understand current terminology/technology. There was also interest in education-related topics, but a widely-held perception that schools should have responsibility in providing information on homework, exams, employment, etc.

- The most effective methods of disseminating information to parents appears to be through schools and public places such as libraries and doctors'surgeries. The most regular contact for parents is via schools, which suggests that this is likely to be the most effective distribution method.

- The research suggests that the key issues in the development of information for parents are:

  - the expectation of print material is that it should summarise the key points and act as a signpost to additional online resources for further information

  - information should be current – this was perceived as a potential problem with print, rather than online, material (although it was recognised that it could be difficult to establish the dates of information on the internet)

  - there is a need for information on areas where parents feel they are out of touch, specifically relating to drugs and internet usage

  - the main source of information for parents about issues relating to their teenage children is through schools or via the internet: surgeries, libraries and community centres are key locations for parents/carers to pick up and browse through leaflets.

  - whilst the key target audience for material is the parents/carers, the design and content should take into account the possibility that the information will be passed on to the teenage children to read

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