

**Commission on Poverty (CoP)
Task Force on Children and Youth**

Parenting - An Overview

PURPOSE

At the Task Force meeting on 7 October 2005, Members agreed that parenting quality had a crucial impact on the healthy and balanced development of children and youth, including those from disadvantaged background¹. To facilitate Members' further deliberation, this paper provides -

- (a) an overview of the existing policy and programmes in relation to parenting (paragraphs 3 - 12);
- (b) how the policy and programmes address the special needs of some families (paragraphs 13 - 19); and
- (c) way forward for the Task Force (paragraph 22).

PARENTING – KEY ELEMENTS

2. Parents are the first teachers of their children. Their values, quality of parenting and parent-child relationship are key to the balanced development of the younger generation. Parenting quality should not be related only to parent education (parents gaining knowledge and skills for educating their children), but should be viewed as closely related to the wider concept of family education (parents receiving education in the family context for the well-being of the whole family) and personal development (empowerment) of parents as individuals². Seen in this light, parents are not merely seen as passive recipients of skills and knowledge education, but also as actors influencing and being influenced by the different social contexts that they are in.

¹ For details, please refer to CoP /TFCY Paper 4/2005 – “Tackling Intergenerational Poverty – Concept Paper”. (www.cop.gov.hk)

² *The Promotion of Parent Education in Hong Kong* (2001), commissioned by the Board of Education of Hong Kong.

OVERVIEW OF EXISTING POLICY AND PROGRAMMES

3. Family is the foundation of society and family harmony helps promote social harmony. The Government recognizes that family is the first and primary socializing agent for children, and the integrity of the family has significant effect on the healthy development of children as individuals. Hence, the Government strives to provide support to help families adjust themselves to the changing structure and functions of families, as well as a rapidly developing community, notwithstanding that Government's influence on these various developments is also limited to varying extents. The Policy Address delivered on 12 October 2005 reiterates the importance of the family, and that the Government would provide additional resources on family education and promote family values.

Existing programmes

4. In Hong Kong, parenting programmes are provided mainly by three sectors, namely, health, education and social service, representing the key social contexts in which most parents can be accessed and hence a good platform for preventive measures. In addition, there are also various community programmes in support of good parenting and family harmony. Content and format of delivery of these programmes are very diverse, but they generally fall into one of the following categories: (a) promotion and publicity; (b) individual training/group activities; (c) establishment of networks and resources centers; and (d) building up resources relating to parenting. Many of these are universal programmes accessible by all parents regardless of their socio-economic background.

Health

5. Over 90% of parents with new borns use the service of the Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs). The child health service is offered through the "Integrated Child Health and Development Programme" (ICHDP) which adopts a health promotion and disease prevention approach. ICHDP comprises three components designed to meet the developmental needs of pre-school children in the physical, cognitive and social emotional domains in a coordinated way. The three components are parenting programme, immunization programme and health and developmental surveillance programme. The parenting programme consists of two levels. The universal parenting programme is for all expectant parents and parents of pre-school children. They will receive anticipatory guidance on childcare and parenting issues which are appropriate to the ages of their children. The intensive parenting programme,

the Positive Parenting Programme (Triple P), is for parents of children with early signs of behavioural problems or those who encounter difficulties with parenting.

Education

6. School is another important platform in providing support to help parents guide their children at home. The Committee on Home-School Cooperation was established in 1993 to promote home-school cooperation and to encourage schools to set up parent-teacher associations. The Government further set aside \$50 million in Policy Address 2000 to support parent education. During the period from 2001 to 2003, package of parent education reference materials was developed; parents in schools were provided with training on how to organise school-based parent education activities; and parenting programmes were organised. The Committee continues to build on this groundwork with focus on those parents with children studying in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools. The service scope is confined to home-school interface. The present role of parent education undertaken by the Committee is to strengthen home-school cooperation with emphasis on promoting education policies and Education Reform to parents, and to support schools to promote school-based parent education and establish parent support network.

Social Service

7. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) and some Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) provide Family Life Education (FLE) services, both preventive and developmental in nature, to arouse the awareness of the importance of wholesome family life. It aims to prevent family and social problems, promote harmonious interpersonal relationship and help families function effectively through a wide range of educational and promotional programmes such as seminars, talks, groups, family activities and exhibitions etc. Parenting is one of the service foci of FLE, which is provided by Family Life Education Units (FLEUs), Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) / Integrated Services Centres (ISCs), Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSS), as well as through school social work service. It is noteworthy that parenting programmes are not only targeting at parents. Parents-to-be can also benefit from the parenting programmes organized by FLEUs and IFSCs / ISCs.

8. The Family Life Education Resource Centre (FLERC) of SWD provides supportive service to social workers and other related professionals in organizing FLE programmes through the development and lending of audio-visual resource materials. In addition, FLERC promotes FLE to the public through the mass media, the

management of FLE Web, the publication of FLE booklets / leaflets and other related publicity materials.

Women

9. The Women's Commission has identified nurturing caring families in the community as one of their work foci as parenting education is a major concern of women. Members recognise the important role of parents in cultivating positive life values in the younger generations. In this connection, the Commission has recently commissioned consultants to conduct a research to establish a set of core values to be promoted through parenting education, and is exploring the possibility of conducting a quality parenting pilot project at a local district.

Other Community Programmes

10. The Home Affairs Bureau works closely with the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education (CPCE) in the promotion of civic education outside schools. While there has been no specific programme on parenting skills and attitudes, efforts are continually made to target parents mainly through the production of family-based publications and educational materials, and sponsoring projects involving parents' groups which are organized by non-governmental organizations at district level under the annual funding scheme (the "Community Participation Scheme"). The CPCE is now exploring how best to target working parents in its promotional efforts on corporate citizenship or corporate social responsibility.

11. The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong also collaborates with community partners in promoting healthy, happy and harmonious families, targeting at parents-to-be at a much earlier stage. Please refer to Annex for an overview of the existing parenting programmes.

Coordination

12. Apart from intra-Government coordination, there are various structures to help enhance coordination among Government departments, NGOs, schools and community organisations on their respective work on parenting -

- (a) Working Group on Family Life Education Resource Development - the Working Group is set up under SWD to advise on the development of FLE resource materials and multi-media resource items. Members of the Working Group include representatives from SWD, NGOs, DH, Family Planning Association of

Hong Kong and Social Work Training Institute.

- (b) District Coordinating Committees (DCCs) on Family and Child Welfare Services – DCCs chaired by District Social Welfare Officers coordinate services at district level and serve as a link with the central level on matters relating to family and child welfare service including family life education.

FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

13. Given the crucial role of parenting, it is important to ensure that our policy and programmes (both content and delivery) have taken into the special circumstances of families with special needs due to poverty situations. This is also in line with the focus of the Task Force to reduce the risk of intergenerational poverty.³ The following paragraphs discuss the needs of three categories of families - (a) low-income families; (b) workless households; and (c) families with weak social capital who are hard-to-reach for parenting assistance.

Low-income families

14. There is no evidence suggesting that poor parents are more likely to be bad parents. Nor are these parents unmotivated or hard-to-reach for parenting assistance if necessary. While lack of means may easily increase stress in the family context, studies have shown that the effect of low income is limited in causing behavioural and academic difficulties of children⁴. Local research has also demonstrated that affective and supportive parenting has a substantial effect on helping children develop a positive attitude (instead of a negative perception of poverty), and some have even attached a positive meaning to their experience of poverty in facilitating the process of overcoming adversities⁵.

³ Please see the gist of discussion of the second meeting of the Task Force on Children and Youth held on 28 July 2005. (www.cop.gov.hk)

⁴ Lipman, Offord, & Boyle (1995). Members also noted at the Task Force meeting on 7 October 2005 that Hong Kong students generally perform well regardless of their social-economic status.

⁵ Coping with economic disadvantage. A qualitative study of Chinese adolescent from low-income families, Ching Man LAM, Mong Chow LAM, Daniel TL SHEK, and Vera MY TANG. *International Journal of Adolescent Medical Health* 2004; 16(4): 343-357.

15. As a result, from a policy perspective, instead of devising special parenting programmes focusing on low-income families, we should ensure that lack of means would not become barriers for these families to seek help through the universal parenting programmes. Such an approach would also minimise any negative labelling effect on children living in low-income households.

Workless households

16. Comparatively speaking, parenting issues relating to workless households may deserve more attention. In 2004, there are 110,000 children aged 0 – 14 living in workless households. Unemployment of the breadwinner, or both parents, will not only affect the financial condition of the families, but will also bring other negative impact on family relationship as well as low self-concept and role-modelling for the children. Some suggested that unemployment of the father might have a great psychological impact on the family, which may give rise to much frustration and stress for family members.⁶

Families with weak social capital

17. In conducting parenting programmes, certain families with special circumstances (families with older parents, new arrival families and single-parent families etc.) may also deserve more attention. Study has shown that these parents have lower involvement at home and in school, more child problems and less patience to reason with their children when conflicts arise.⁷

How existing policy and programmes address the special needs of families

18. SWD has put in place welfare services to help those in need. There is an extensive network of 61 IFSCs and 2 ISCs operated by SWD and NGOs over the territory providing a continuum of preventive, support and remedial services. Apart from counselling service on effective parenting, various parenting groups and programmes are designed to cater for the needs of parents, particularly those in disadvantaged circumstances, such as low-income families, single-parent, new-arrivals etc. To facilitate working parents or those who are not available in day-time to participate in these programmes, IFSCs / ISCs provide extended hours service in some of the evenings

⁶ Community Partnership for Family Empowerment: The Hong Kong Model, TAM Wai-ming, LAM Ching-man, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, A Paper presented at the Australian 5th National Parenting Conference, November 22-23, 2001

⁷ *The Promotion of Parent Education in Hong Kong* (2001), commissioned by the Board of Education of Hong Kong.

and / or Saturday afternoon. IFSCs / ISCs also work collaboratively with schools, Maternal and Child Health Centres, etc. to establish referral networks to facilitate early identification of problems and timely intervention for the needy, including parents with difficulties in parenting.

19. With an emphasis on early identification and early intervention of problems, the pilot Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) was launched in Shum Shui Po in July 2005, to be followed by pilot implementation in Tin Shui Wai, Tseung Kwan O and Tuen Mun in early 2006. CCDS is a community-based programme which aims at augmenting the existing universal service in our MCHCs through better alignment of the delivery of health, education and social services. CCDS identifies the varied needs of children aged 0 to 5 and their families so that appropriate services, including parent education, could be provided for them.

MACRO ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

20. We recognize that parenting quality and degree of parental involvement at home, in school and in the community are not simply a result of the lack of parenting skills or the level of parents' willingness in joining parenting activities. There are other environmental factors which affect the ability for parents to take part in parenting activities, and the effectiveness of parenting programmes. Some of these factors are independent of income and background while others are. Insofar as the work of the CoP Task Force is concerned, the emphasis should be put on the latter, with the objective being to help ensure that the opportunities for quality parenting empowerment would not be denied to parents solely because they come from low-income/disadvantaged background.

21. It has to be recognized that, for a metropolis in an information age, there are developments whose formulating forces are far bigger and more pervasive than any one domestic institution can grapple with, be that institution the Government, schools, family, business, media or the social service sector. Nevertheless, we believe that concerted efforts by all these players can help ameliorate the adverse consequences on our society and younger generations. This reinforces the need for coordinated actions by all to help nurture in our younger generation the right values, a willingness to work hard for their future and a sense of responsibility for their own actions and the sustainable development of various social contexts to which they belong. Therefore, the Government would continue to work with parents, schools, the social service sector and other sectors of the community in this direction.

WAY FORWARD

22. Taking into account the existing policy and programmes in relation to parenting and how they cater for families with special needs, the Task Force may wish to consider -

- (a) how to promote the importance of parenting in particular to families with special needs among relevant agents conducting parenting programmes in Hong Kong;
- (b) whether the content and delivery of existing parenting programmes can address the special needs of certain families;
- (c) whether the existing policy and programmes have given adequate focus on early intervention;
- (d) whether there is a need for more focussed action/additional incentives/facilitating measures to motivate the unmotivated/hard-to-reach group to participate in parenting programmes;
- (e) whether the policy/programme interface can be enhanced to strengthen assistance to families with special needs; and
- (f) how to further promote social capital building to facilitate the genuine participation and integration of families with special needs and to motivate parents to move to self-help and mutual help at the community level.

Commission Secretariat

(with input from Education and Manpower Bureau, Health, Welfare and Food Bureau, Home Affairs Bureau, Department of Health and Social Welfare Department)

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Parenting Programmes in Hong Kong – An Overview

	Platform	Targets	Major strategies / programmes	Statistics of Relevant activities
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents with children 0 - 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal parenting programme Intensive Positive Parenting Programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal parenting programme - from Sept 2002 to Oct 2005, 7 795 sessions have been conducted, with a total attendance of 75 254 (52 018 families). Intensive Positive Parenting Programme (Triple P) - from Sept 2002 to Oct 2005, 419 groups have been conducted with a total attendance of 3 777, and 3 481 clients (3 221 families) have completed the programme. Data on 1 137 clients who had completed the Triple P indicated significant decrease in child behaviour problems, parenting stress and increase in parenting sense of competence after programme completion
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee on Home-School Cooperation (CHSC) Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School children and their parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise parenting activities Build up parenting resources Promotion Establish territory-wide parent support network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2004/2005 school year, there are some 1 400 PTAs and 97.1% of government and aided schools have formed PTAs. Out of 18 District Council districts, 16 have set up their PTA Federations.

	Platform	Targets	Major strategies / programmes	Statistics of Relevant activities
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since September 2004, about 2,420 school-based/district-based activities have been organized by schools/PTAs/PTA Federations to promote parent education and enhance home-school co-operation
Social service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Life Education Units (FLEUs) Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs)/Integrated Services Centres (ISCs), Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYs), and school social work (SSW) service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and parents-to-be, as well as couples-to-be, married couples and adolescents Individuals and families at a specific locality/school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A wide range of educational and promotional programmes such as seminars, talks, groups, family activities and exhibitions, etc. Topics / content of the programmes are similar to those of IFSCs. Parent education is an integral part of service programme of IFSC/ISC/ICYSC/SSW. A wide range of therapeutic, supportive, educational and developmental groups/programmes organized according to district needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not available During the period of April to September 2005, a total of 290 groups/programmes with “parent education” as the theme were organized.
Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women’s Commission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a research on core values for promotion through parenting education. Explore the possibility of conducting a quality parenting pilot project at a local district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A set of core values to be established for promotion to parents Identifying potential partners and project details to be worked out.

	Platform	Targets	Major strategies / programmes	Statistics of Relevant activities
Other community programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotional programmes /publications by the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education (CPCE) 1. Production of publications and family magazine 2. Interactive drama 3. Second series of the TV animation programme on civic education Community Participation Scheme 	<p>Families in general</p> <p>Families in general</p> <p>Families in general</p> <p>Families in general (The scheme targeted a wide spectrum of service groups, with families being one of them)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family magazines e.g. “Handbooks for Parents”, “Blue Sky” and “Matchman” Some stories in the interactive drama are related to the promotion of family education Some stories in the short animation programmes are related to the promotion of family harmony Provide financial subsidy for non-governmental organizations and voluntary agencies to carry out activities covering a wide range of civic education themes, with enhancing family cohesiveness being one of them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not available Four projects targeting families were sponsored under the scheme in 2004/05, with a total allocation of \$122,720.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 親子方程式親職倡廉活動 (English name not available) 	Families in general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A territory-wide parenting programme jointly organized by the Independent Commission Against Corruption, CPCE and Commission on Youth (COY) imparting positive civic values on the young through parenting education. 	

