



# Building a child-friendly Europe: turning a vision into reality

Conference on the Council of Europe Strategy  
for the Rights of the Child 2012-2015

Children's rights start at home: strong families for strong children

Workshop on parenting and family support

Monaco, 21 November 2011, 9.00-12.00

## REPORT

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The work shop builds on CoE Recommendation 19 (2006) on policy to support positive parenting. Positive parenting refers to policies that encourage parents and other caretaker to respect children's best interests and their rights, while at the same time taking into account parents' material situation as well as their need – the rights for support. This double perspective is paramount to the positive parenting concept.

I will highlight some common elements from the workshop that are promising with regard to how the positive parenting concept and programs may contribute to the new strategy 2012-2015.

1. The recognition of - and enthusiasm - for the importance of supporting parents and enabling them to take care of their children, according to the UN convention of the rights of the child, were very present in the workshop. A message from the workshop is that there is a need for a new division of labour between state parties and parents. We live in dynamic and fluid times and parents are met with high expectations. The gap between the expectations and services must be bridged with more adequate public services. Not only vulnerable parents need support, all parents do. The general family policy measures must take the whole population of parents into consideration.
2. The values underpinning the programs were also highlighted in the workshop; i.e. the necessity to collaborate with parents as partners in non-judgmental and anti-discriminatory ways, to focus on parental strengths and respect their knowledge about their children as well as the variety of family compositions. This is in accordance with Jesper Juuls message that parents are ahead compared to pedagogical institutions, when it comes to how they treat their children. Even if the workshop dealt with parents, children were recognised as partners and informants of their own situation.
3. A third promising element is the wide variety of programs already existing. I will mention some dimensions of variation:
4. The positive parenting programs have **different target groups** - some programs are organised according to children's age; starting with pregnancy, moving on to baby/toddlers/secondary school etc. Other programs target children at risk; due to disability, to behaviour such as crime or to their family situation such as divorcing. Some programs are targeting both parents, some mothers and some fathers, and we were reminded that half of all parents are men!! Prevention and early intervention are other key words.
5. When it comes to **different methods and interventions**, professional interventions are supplemented with informal support. Parents are also encouraged to form groups and support each other.
6. The **content** covers a wide range of topics from Child rearing practices, how to organise the everyday life, family school collaboration, healthy peer relationships to give some examples.
7. When implementing parenting programs **practitioners** are key – but practitioners at the local level must be linked to regional and state levels, of course including **policy makers**. Some countries have already established these links!

8. Some countries also reported on how they are linking parenting programs to **researchers** at postgraduate schools and universities. For example, Spain has established collaboration between national/and local child-protection agencies and Spanish Universities to develop and implement parenting programs and to evaluate the programs.
9. There is an increased attention on Evaluation. It is not sufficient to have good intentions; service providers are expected to be able to prove the effects of their work. Several presentations advocated evidence based methods, cf. RCT. --- Without going into details, RCT designs can briefly be defined as comprising treatment and control group in order to evaluate effects. The issue of evaluation caused a discussion in the workshop that may be summed up in the following way: Evidence based approaches may be relevant in some cases, but there was a warning against arguing “that one size fits all”. Parenting programs are engaging in complex human relations and there is a need of a variety of methods to evaluate their effect. Parents and children themselves must be included as informants when program are being evaluated.
10. To sum up: Collaboration and bridging the gaps were key words: Collaboration between services and parents and children, but also collaboration between different services at local levels and services at local, regional and state level. Further, bridging gaps between professionals, researchers and policy makers was pointed out as important.
11. Finally – returning to values: “How we work with and relate to parents - and children - is as important as what we do when working with them” to quote Mary Crowley.