



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

National Parenting Policy

Question & Answer



A PUBLICATION OF THE
NATIONAL FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION

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Log on to www.social.gov.tt to view the Policy



Question: How can parents build positive intra-family relationships?

Answer: The Policy proposes:

- Expanded relationship counselling services: Solid parental relationships bode well for the children in their care. Too often counselling is introduced in the latter stages of relationship decline. The gendered perceptions of counselling often inhibit fathers from attending relationship counselling, despite evident relationship fractures. As such, the promotion and expansion of access to father-friendly counselling service will provide avenues in which potential relationship breakdowns can be addressed at the early stages.
- Partnerships to be forged between Government and University of the West Indies Family Development and Children's Research Centre in the development of parental support initiatives.
- Flexible working hours: Some organisations already operate flexible working hours, though this may not be articulated in company policy. However, the introduction of flexible working hours has numerous potential benefits for parents and their families, as well as for the employers themselves. Parents are able to attend to child care needs such as the school run, a child clinic session or parent teacher consultations without having to be absent from work for the whole day, whilst the company is able to retain valued labour and offer a more favourable work-life balance to current and potential employees.
- Father support groups: With the increasing involvement of fathers in their child's lives, it is important to recognize that fathers may experience unique needs with regard to their parenting roles. The expansion of culturally sensitive father support groups will serve to provide safe non-judgmental spaces in which fathers can express their concerns regarding their parenting roles and through this, sharing experience access the relevant support services.
- National parenting programme expansion: The initial pilot of the National Parenting Programme to develop parent self-efficacy will be expanded, offering the opportunity for all parents to attend the programme and establish parental support groups within their communities. Positive behavioural management approaches will be demonstrated through this programme as part of a multi-agency approach to reduce harsh parenting practices.
- Training in relationship counselling for healthcare staff who work with parents' pre and post birth: Healthcare staff work closely with parents, particularly mothers, just prior to and just after the birth of a baby. All relevant healthcare staff will receive relationship counselling training to equip them to support mothers-to-be and new mothers and fathers in the development and maintenance of healthy relationships.

Question: What are the Policy Implementation Mechanisms mentioned in the Policy

Answer: The delivery of current parenting support services occurs through multiple agencies ranging from Government Ministries through to civil society organizations and the private sector. The proposed expansion of parenting support initiatives will continue through a range of agencies and organisations. Parenting services, as a result of their eclectic nature are accessed in a variety of ways.

Some parenting support, including medical and educational services, is accessed as a result of child development needs and these services are often accessed directly, and this will continue. Other parenting services are accessed through referral, for example birth registration through TTconnect. However, for certain parenting support services, such as relationship counselling, parents will need to be informed about the existence and location of the services.

Other Initiatives/ Mechanisms Include:

1. National Family Services Division Service Centres Service.

- Centres will be established in every district to facilitate increasing awareness of the availability of parent support services and access to such services. If a parenting support service cannot be accessed directly at a Service Centre, an established referral system will allow parents' access to the service most appropriate to their identified needs. To promote national awareness of parenting support services and the function of the Service Centres, a Social Services Directory will be published and updated on an annual basis. Copies of the directory will be made available to the general public through Social Sector Ministries, TTConnect and the Service Centres.
- Some parenting support services will be accessed directly through the Centres. However, the majority of parenting support services will be accessed through an onward referral process. Accordingly, the Service Centre will provide parents with seamless service access through offering the following:
 - Advice on the appropriate services required for specific parents support needs
 - Advice on where the service can be accessed
 - Advice on when the service can be accessed
 - Advice on how the parent can access the service
 - Supporting the parent(s) in accessing the appropriate service

2. Multi-Sectoral Steering Committee

The implementation of the National Parenting Policy will be driven and monitored by a multisectoral steering committee. This Committee will include representations from relevant Government Ministries, Civil Society Organisations, UNFPA, private sector and parents. Utilising the objectives of the National Parenting Policy, the Committee will identify indicators of progress of the implementation of the parenting policy, regularly monitor implementation and publish annual progress reports.

Log on to www.social.gov.tt to view the National Parenting Policy

Question: What is the Rationale for the National Parenting Policy?

Answer: A report of the Cabinet Appointed Committee to Examine the Status of the Institution of the Family in Trinidad and Tobago (August, 2004) concluded that “poor parenting skills and practices” were having a negative effect on family life in Trinidad and Tobago. The National Parenting Policy provides a plan for adopting a needs-driven approach in the support of parenting roles that contribute to the positive development of children.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is mindful that there are particular groups of parents that can be considered vulnerable. These groups, include single parents, teenage parents, grandparents as parents with a disability and parents of children with disabilities, who all face a range of challenges in performing their parenting role.

Domestically, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has ensured that the rights and responsibilities of parents are clearly articulated in the Children Act 2012 and in the National Development Strategy Vision 2030, wherein it is stated that the family is “... the foundation of the society (and) contributes to its growth, development and stability...” The National Parenting Policy therefore represents another vital step in the social transformation process.

At a global level, recognition has been also given to the importance of the parental role. This recognition has been articulated through several international conventions and covenants including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child all of which Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory.

Question: How are parents defined in the National Parenting Policy?

Answer: The Policy recognizes that, “Parents can be genetic, adoptive, or generally, anyone who performs the parenting role. Further, the personal and private role of parenting, based on the decisions of relevant adults within the household is acknowledged.”

Question: Why is Parenting Important?

Answer: The role that parents and caregivers play in raising the next generation is central to everything that we want to achieve for our families, our communities and our country. Among the areas of concern regarding parenting practices in Trinidad and Tobago include:

- Insufficient and ineffective communication within some families;
- Poor and at times abusive methods of discipline;
- Poor socialization skills in some instances;
- The negative influence of the media / cable television; and
- Changes in community and societal values.

Question: What are the Objectives of the National Parenting Policy?

Answer: The objectives of the National Parenting Policy are to:

- Ensure the development of effective multi-sectorial provisions to support parental empowerment in the performance of their parenting duties, irrespective of family form, in order to promote the optimal holistic development of children at all stages of growth;
- Improve the linkage between current parent support services in Trinidad and Tobago through the reduction of any existing service provision gaps and minimization of programme overlap to ensure that parenting needs are adequately met;
- Provide parenting education to persons who are not yet parents to ensure that they are equipped with knowledge and skills necessary to make responsible and informed decisions that pertain to becoming parents and parenting;
- Foster greater appreciation and support for responsible and effective parenting in Trinidad and Tobago; and
- Promote inclusive healthy family functioning that contributes to the building of strong communities in Trinidad and Tobago.

Question: What provisions are there in the National Parenting Policy for Child Care

Answer: The Policy addresses the following areas:

- Teen mothers returning to education: This group of potentially vulnerable mothers, should be supported in their efforts to gain further qualifications. To this end, subsidized child care at training facilities during classes/lectures will be expanded.
- Father-friendly child care services: Traditionally, services for parents have generally operated under the gendered assumption that parents equate to mothers. However, the contemporary reality is shifting from this assumption. Accordingly, all Government registered child care providers will be trained in providing father friendly services.
- Unemployed parents returning to educational and vocational studies: Subsidized child care will be provided for these parents as an incentive to further their qualifications and self-development.
- Nursery regulations: These regulations will serve to provide assurance to parents that their children will be attending government-approved institutions providing a safe, healthy environment for positive child development.

Question: What initiatives are there for Child Health and Development Needs?

Answer: The Policy proposes the following:

- Consultation with parents with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities: These consultations will serve as an initial stage in the improvement of multiple services to these two potentially vulnerable groups of parents.
- Extended support for parents of children with disabilities: In some instances the health needs of children with disabilities will require longer term engagement with health services. This engagement can take a toll on parents and therefore additional support services for parents of children with disabilities will be offered in tandem with health services being offered and delivered to children with disabilities.
- Baby box initiative: A starter pack will be given to low or no income expectant mothers who have accessed medical care prior to their fourth month of pregnancy. The Means Test of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services will be the measure utilized to determine eligibility.
- Father information pack: Fathers are now able to attend child birth in public hospitals, and the Government will also introduce a father’s information pack for all new fathers.
- Parental leave: As a result of rising female employment rates, the time for child care responsibilities has become more limited. Parental leave will serve to support working parents in the provision of paid leave for the purposes of child care or making arrangements for the child’s welfare

Question: How does the Parenting Policy address Education and Training ?

Answer: The Policy proposes the following:

- Strengthened age appropriate parenting education in Health and Family Life Education (HFLE): As parenting has been associated predominantly with mothers, the sensitization on fathers’ unique and essential role in childcare and development will be introduced and reinforced through a revised HFLE curriculum.
- Strengthened age appropriate sex and sexuality education (HFLE): With the increasing trend in teen pregnancy, the prevention of this phenomenon is a priority. Age appropriate awareness of sex and sexuality is an essential step in pregnancy reduction which can start in schools.
- Provision for the continued education of teen mothers: In opposition to the gendered exclusion of teen mothers, the inclusion of teen mothers in education will serve to recognize that support and continued education is necessary for this particularly vulnerable group of mothers.