

Part 2

Slide 1: What is Flying Start Annex – Parenting Support Guidance?

Good morning/ afternoon.

My professional role has changed considerably over the last 12 months, having moved from Early Years education to family support.

In practice this has been supported by a period of shadowing other colleagues.

During which time it became evident that Family Support practice is a very broad area and can look differently depending on the practitioner's knowledge and experience and the needs and values of the families they are supporting.

This has been a significant learning curve for me which has been supported by forming an understanding of government policy.

One of which I would like to analyse with you today. The Flying Start Annex – Parenting Support Guidance (Welsh Government, 2017) specifically links with my own area of practice within family support as an Early Years Support Worker.

This is the guidance from which the Welsh Government suggests local authorities develop flying start provision for parenting support for families within flying start areas to provide families with consistency of support services.

Prior to this guidance being written, Welsh Government (2010) stated that parenting support for Flying Start varied widely between councils as some were recruiting dedicated Flying Start parenting support workers while others were contracting out to facilitators such as Action for Children, however, acknowledged that dedicated Flying Start staff worked best for consistent messages of support.

Welsh Government later commissioned a review into Flying Start Parenting Support, to make sure that the offer was suited to the needs of the families (Welsh Government, 2013).

This review called for formal government guidance for practitioners within family support, to set out clear expectations.

Firstly, I would like to consider the outlined hopes of the guidance.

Welsh Government (2017) is written with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in mind and discusses the important role of parents in the development of children who thrive.

The guidance links processes of practice with the requirements of the UNCRC, to give deeper understanding to practitioners.

Moreover, it acknowledges the need for a variety of supportive functions within local authorities in order to meet the needs of the children and parents supported, putting their needs at the centre of practice.

Additionally, the guidance aims to emphasise the importance of practitioners understanding and supporting parent/child bonds and attachments and argues that attachment and bonding with parents and carers can increase children's brain development.

The guidance also highlights the importance of developing home environments for children which support this development, by increasing parental understanding of their role in their children's development and learning, and giving parents an understanding of development milestones.

Slide 2: How is the guidance structured?

The guidance is well structured with contents pages as well as summary pages, at the front of the document, to enable readers to move around the document with ease.

However, the summary pages could be more thorough to make sections 4, 5 and 6 clearer to the reader, as they appear similar. There is also a definitions section within the guidance, providing the reader with clarity around the meaning of some of the key terms used.

The guidance starts with introduction entitled “About this guidance” within which it outlines the importance of quality, bespoke and family centred parenting support.

The introduction provides the reader with an outline which contains research and evidence base references to provide context and reasoning behind providing parenting support.

The guidance also has a clear introduction to each the sub-section within the document, outlining key messages within that sub-section. The introductions also direct the reader to areas within the appendix or further reading that can support their understanding, which again helps the reader to navigate the document.

This introduction is followed by a more in-depth explanation also containing supporting theory, research and government guidance to be used to widen knowledge and understanding and support the guidance's arguments.

Additionally, important terms are clearly outlined as with section 4.8 discussing the meaning of evidence-based practice.

And the guidance makes use of footnotes at the bottom of the pages, to expand clarity of terms or to support and offer context.

Slide 3 - What are some of the guidance's strengths and weaknesses?

Lipsky (2010) discusses the importance policies being written in a way so as the practitioners on the ground implement the policy as was intended and suggests that if the policy is too vaguely written the implementation may be hindered which can cause disparities in delivery of service.

With this in mind, I note that Welsh Government (2017), considers what tools and programmes are believed to be effective and produce the best outcomes for families, suggesting evidence-based programmes and tools with a list of approved programmes available within its annex. This allows Local Authorities and practitioners to make informed judgements while also giving some autonomy.

Within the sub-sections of the document I mentioned, there are also acknowledgments of potential barriers to its implementation, for example within section 5.1.1 it discusses the lack of parental understanding around the importance of speech language and communication element of support causing a barrier to its uptake, which enables practitioners to be aware and work to avoid such things from happening.

Knight (2021) argues that evidence – based policy writing helps to support positive outcomes for citizens. As I have outlined, throughout Welsh Government (2017) there are links a wealth of evidence-based practice and theory including the parenting programmes it recommends.

The guidance also considers the importance of the standard of practice delivered by support workers by linking together with the National Occupational Standards for Work with Parents (NOS). Appendix A contains 15 principles and values of the NOS and is written clearly and concisely, for support workers to understand what is expected of them in practice.

There seems to be a reliance on mostly Welsh Government data, although research from other writers and universities is used to support.

Knight (2021) argues that when there are gaps in data, an effective way to create new knowledge is to work with the communities to gather this information such as Welsh Government (2017)'s use of the 'review of parenting support for flying start'.

Slide 4: Change.

Family Support within Flying Start is currently under a period of transformation nationally and locally within Wales (Welsh Government, 2022).

Additionally, the authority for which I work and other councils in Gwent, as well as the health, fire, police, housing and education services in the region became a Marmot Region, seeking to tackle health inequity with the creation of Gwent Public Service Board (Gwent Public Service Board, no date).

The Marmot review (2010) discusses links between child poverty, leaving education with minimal qualifications and unemployment as well as links between unemployment and poor health outcomes.

Children's Commissioner for Wales (2026) states that almost 1/3 of Welsh children live in poor homes and of those just over a ¼ are from homes where parents work and that they found that this was having an effect of children's wellbeing as they have concerns over the access to food at home. Welsh Government (2021) also acknowledges that the rate of the working-poor in Wales is high.

This reinforces the importance of the early years and the need for children to be given the best start to life in order to meet their highest potential.

When thinking of the Marmot review, Flying Start aims to support this by providing 5 2.5hour sessions of childcare a week to children living in deprived areas to establish routine and to provide them with enriching and engaging play and learning opportunities, alongside the parenting support entitlement (Welsh Government, 2025a).

Welsh Government (2019) argues that this has been successful in supporting future child development and explains that since the introduction of Flying Start, school attendance in year 1 has improved for children who live in Flying Start areas.

Flying Start areas are usually defined by measures of poverty, including the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation and the number of children in receipt of free school meals. However, this has the potential to create inequality as this can miss those children living in poverty outside of those areas (National Assembly for Wales, 2018).

In addition to this Welsh Government (2021) discusses inequalities such as these can create cycles of poverty that families find it hard to get out of.

Further from this, Welsh Government (2025b) explains that Wales is now to become a Marmot Nation, to work alongside the commitment of the Well-being of Future Generations Act which includes ensuring a “best start in life” for all children.

However, locally, relating to my own area of work, the geographical area within which Flying Start operates has increased to cover 80% of the county from September 2025 (Caerphilly Early Years and Childcare Service, no date a)

This is a move away from the typical geographical way of delivering flying start in the most deprived areas.

Additionally, parenting support is offered to all families of children under 7 throughout the borough from 20 weeks' gestation (Caerphilly Early Years and Childcare Service, no date b).

Parenting support in my local authority is offered to all parents, as a means of preventing families from becoming at risk of harm, not just those identified as at risk (Auditor General for Wales, 2019) offering early intervention and prevention to break the cycles of poverty discussed in Marmot 2010.

In support of this, National Assembly for Wales (2018) also highlights that 80% of household in receipt of income related benefits live outside of the most deprived areas of Wales and therefore the geographical way in which Flying Start areas are usually defined has the potential to miss many families who could benefit from parenting support.

Meaning that the universal approach to parenting support within my LA could potentially mitigate this risk.

However, in other boroughs, the expansion the Flying Start program has gone in different directions meaning that family support services look different nationally.

In Bridgend family support is offered more widely, in terms of age and the challenges within family dynamics which are supported – for example domestic violence support or housing support with no specific Early Years support (Bridgend CBC, 2026).

In Caerphilly, these challenges would be signposted to agencies with a more in-depth knowledge and ability to support. Family support workers would focus on the early years of a child's life and how the parents can best support this, while drawing in external agencies to help with more specialist support needs all the while maintaining relationships with the family.

Bridgend CBC (2026) states that the expansion offered through transformation will only cover a child's eligibility for childcare placement, meaning that parents will not also automatically access family support.

Vale of Glamorgan Council (2025) offers Early Years support and Parenting Support separately, covering relationships, baby massage, support for fathers and budgeting advice.

Merthyr Tydfil Council also has two different roles - Parenting Support offers support to children from birth to 18 while Family Support offer help to families to avoid reaching crisis point (Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, no date).

Therefore, Councils seem to be implementing the guidance in many different ways which is causing a disparity in service for families across the country.

This variety means that parents across Wales will have a completely different experience of support while raising a child, dependant on where they live, within the same country, despite the hopes of the guidance being to provide a continuity in how parenting support should be delivered.

This is discussed by Muers (2018) who suggests that this decentralisation of decision making may cause an unavoidable "post code lottery" in order to meet the needs and values of the cultures of communities such as how LAs are implementing the guidance.

With that said Muers (2018) does acknowledge that these disparities in service could still see Welsh Government being held accountable for the service received across Wales.

However, it is important to consider here whether this is as a result of Councils listening to the needs of their own communities, as is suggested in Welsh Government (2017) and tailoring the support they offer to meet those needs.

This is additionally argued within Elliott (2022) who highlights this ability to be responsive to the needs of the community as being an advantage to decentralised decision making within communities.

Welsh Government (2013) also suggests that practitioners may also work in different ways across the Flying Start areas, meaning that practice differs as well as offer.

Slide 5: Barriers to Parenting Support implementation.

However, there are barriers to successful parenting support services, and unintended consequences. One of which is lack of uptake which may be due to perceived stigma for accessing parenting support as suggested in Welsh Government (2017).

Another may be that families feel judged or misinterpreted the support as government monitoring (Tees Safeguarding Children Partnerships' Procedure, 2026; Southampton Safeguarding Children Partnership, 2024).

I feel that my local authority's direction, with the roll out of automatic allocation at 20 weeks pregnant and providing family support as a universal service for all, may possibly change public perceptions, reduce stigma and fear of judgement and therefore increase uptake, as support workers sit alongside all families throughout the Early Years similarly to the Health Visiting team, creating a universal approach.

In support of this, National Assembly for Wales (2018) argues that when whole communities access services, this can reduce stigma and builds relationships between services and communities.

This universal approach to offer was a suggestion within Welsh Government (2013)'s review and is highlighted as a tool to minimise stigma within this document.

Muers (2018) discusses that it can be difficult and time consuming to change the views of the public if they are set in their values or culture meaning it is important that the local authority gives this approach time to embed.

However, the volume of antenatal allocations causes barriers to its successful implementation with increased strain on the caseloads held by support workers as well as then causing funding strain if more practitioners are required.

With parents being automatically allocated a support worker at 20 weeks' gestation, through information sharing with the local health board in order to meet the perinatal demands as discussed in the Parenting Support Guidance (Welsh Government, 2017) support worker caseloads will increase significantly.

If we consider that almost 1600 live births were recorded in 2023 in the local authority, (Freeman, 2024) and over 1600 in both 2022 and 2021 according to South

Wales Argus (2023) that is a significant number of extra families to support each year.

Slide 6: What does this mean for service?

To alleviate this barrier, I suggest that a new role be created, I would call this an Antenatal support worker, and antenatal allocations would solely be given to the Antenatal Support Worker within each of the three teams in the local authority, who are zoned according to ABUHB areas.

These Antenatal Support Workers would be the first point of contact and a single point of contact for all antenatal families. NHS Wales (2025) suggests that single point of access would enable all families to have the same, consistent messages. Although NHS Wales (2025) is discussing a health and social care context, the same could be said of the messages given by Flying Start.

Creating this new role would also allow the Antenatal support workers to form a close working relationships with each other and the areas lead midwife, who currently has the job of liaising with all support workers across the local authority.

This could cut down on the number of missed families, or families who are not getting the contacts at the time frames they are supposed to, due to antenatal families currently being allocated to support workers who also support high risk families and demanding caseloads with families with a high level of need.

Moreover, this would not require a new member of staff to be employed, and therefore an extra cost to the local authority, as this could be done with a reorganisation of staff and caseloads.

By this I mean that Family Support workers would take on all the requests for support for families in need (which are still being received in this period of transformation for all the children who were born prior to September 2025 who's families require support and currently has a waiting list).

They would absorb between the remaining team any families that would have been allocated to the member of the team that becomes the Antenatal Support worker, while all the pregnancy notification then would go to the Antenatal support workers.

Although this would give the Antenatal Support Workers a large volume of families, they would be completing less home visits than Family Support Workers, have families with lower level of need and mostly welcoming families to the service and

making the handful of key contacts required of them within the antenatal programme. These could be done en masse if their caseloads are organised into expected dates of delivery followed by month of birth once born.

Additionally, this could enable a higher uptake in the service as potentially that Antenatal worker could base themselves around the LA with the health teams such as at the GP surgery with the Midwife or at the Antenatal unit at the local hospital a couple of times a week, to increase the public's awareness of the role and be the face of the team. Increasing the uptake of parenting support was highlighted in Auditor General for Wales (2019) as an objective for the local authority.

The service provided within Caerphilly follows a What Matters ethos (Caerphilly CBC TV, no date) which means putting the voice of the family at the centre of our offer for support, one size does not fit all, and although the service is a universal access for all, the service is bespoke to each family.

With that in mind I am aware that my intended Antenatal Support Worker would be providing a one size fits all approach, so I suggest that when they become aware of any higher level of need for a family, be that parenting concerns, behaviour support or concerns from outside agencies, they could hand over to another member of the family support team, as is current practice when families move within the zones of our borough.

Thank you for listening, are there any questions?

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PowerPoint presentation:

Slide 1:



Source: Bridgend County Borough Council (no date)

What is Flying Start – Annex, Parenting Support Guidance?

- Used to support the delivery of consistent parenting support services in Flying Start Areas.
- Written with United Nations Convention for the rights of the child (UNCRC) in mind.
- Discusses concepts such as attachments and bonding and the importance of home environments for child development.

Slide 2:



Source: Gov.wales (no date)

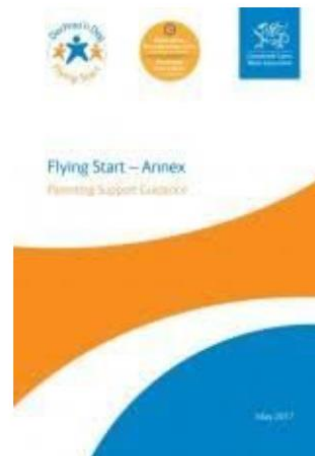
How is the document structured?

- Use of Contents and summary pages
- Use of definitions section and foot notes to improve clarity of meaning.
- Written with evidence-based parenting tools in mind.

Slide 3:

Strengths and weaknesses?

- Acknowledges some of the barriers to its own implementation
- Evidence used to support its arguments.
- Written with links to the National Occupational Standards (NOS)
- Reliance on data gathered by Welsh government.



Source: Gov.wales (no date)

Slide 4:



Source: Bridgend County Borough Council (no date)

What is changing?

- Currently a period of change for Flying Start
- In Practice this means my local authority has increased the Flying Start Offer to 80% of the borough.
- Parenting support offered universally locally.
- Antenatal allocations at 20 weeks gestation

Slide 5:



Source: Menninger (no date)

Barriers to parenting support implementation?

- Stigma
- Judgement
- Government monitoring

How can we find ways to break down these barriers?

Slide 6:

What does this mean for service in practice?

- Single point of access
- One voice
- Better distribution of caseloads
- No extra pressure for funding

Source: St James (no date)

