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Parenting Skills Classes: Transforming the Next Generation

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary	
Recommendations merging from research	5
Introduction	7
Methodology	11
Summary	13
Current parenting skills groups	14
Historic government approach to parenting skills groups	15
Provision of parenting classes in the UK	17
Challenges	27
References	31
Appendix	32
About the Authors	50

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Families are the bedrock of our society and this is recognised by the public at large—as our survey accompanying this report confirms, 84 percent of respondents endorse this statement.¹ Parenting is a key factor in determining a child's life chances; positive parenting skills can engender enduring positive values such as empathy, self-discipline, and self-sacrifice. These character strengths support children into their futures, helping them make the right choices when faced with moral dilemmas.

Parents from all walks of life want this for their children, but are not always sure they can deliver it as lack confidence in their childrearing skills. This should come as no surprise. Our culture—increasingly materialist and self-centred—is not conducive to parenting, with its emphasis on nurturing and self-sacrifice. Extended families and tight-knit neighbourhoods, which traditionally used to support parenting, have become rare.

Society is both reliant upon, and hopeful for, parents that bring up their children with strong values such as respect for self, others and property. The cost to society when parents fail to transmit these values is immense—poor educational outcomes, drug and alcohol abuse, truancy and self-harm all require expensive interventions by the state.

However, the evidence reveals a powerful truth—while parents may lack confidence and support from the wider community, they do not lack motivation. Today's parents are as determined to do the best by their children as parents in previous generations, and they are looking for resources from which they can draw.

This preliminary report is based on qualitative research—field studies and a survey (carried out by Bheard for the Legatum Institute in March 2017)—that provides strong support for universal parenting skills courses as a cost-effective resource for parents from all backgrounds. Our findings showed that although the majority of parenting classes were not explicitly teaching character and values, the parenting skills groups prompted parents to reflect on their values, while the small group dynamic present in all the classes we visited served to challenge poor values and confirmed positive values.

Public discussion about the role of positive values in combating social problems has been ongoing in Britain and abroad. Work by Angela Duckworth, Paul Tough and Sir Anthony Seldon draw on neuroscience, psychology and child development to show how character traits such as self-restraint and courage help children succeed in terms of academia and well-being. Research has shown that character-based schools help develop these character traits in children.

This principle has affected education policy and education initiatives, most famously, in the US, the KIPP network of schools; while in this country it has led to the Floreat schools, founded by LI Senior Fellow James O'Shaughnessy and character-building curriculum such as the Knightly Virtues pioneered by James Arthur at the Centre for Character and Virtue at Birmingham University.

The Legatum Institute sought to determine whether parenting skills groups could perform the same role as character-based schools in supporting parents to transmit good values to their children.

Sometimes reflecting on values within a group can be constructive; individuals are inspired to embed their values more directly into their everyday behaviour, or adopt new values that can have a positive impact on their lives. Moreover, the group dynamic can be helpful in promoting tolerance and seeking understanding in a community. When others hold a different values system, individuals can feel threatened, angry or feel a need to defend or enforce their position while holding onto their own identity and strongly-held beliefs. This has come to the fore in Louise Casey's recent report on integration. Any conversation about values should therefore include how we cope and manage when people hold different values to our own—how we value tolerance and seek understanding or acceptance.

Our recommendation is that character and values be introduced to parenting classes, but in order for these values to be embedded, classes should adopt a new format. We propose an innovative scheme, the National Parenting Trust (NPT), which would complement evidence-based, existing parenting skills groups with continuous volunteer mentoring, to support parents throughout their childrearing years. The volunteer mentors would be especially trained to lead the parent group into reflecting on their values and developing positive character and values in their relationships with their children.

Our research showed that parenting skills groups teach specific skills — patience, communication, empathy—that reinforced values such as self-restraint. The parents we encountered, after seeing the good outcome of practising these values in their home, were convinced that these made a positive difference to their lives, and their children's.

There were five main findings from our research:

1. Parenting skills groups use a successful three-step process to modify parents' and children's behaviour.
2. Courses make use of 'the power of small groups'.
3. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about parenting classes.
4. Parents want access to longer, more sustained parenting courses.
5. Parenting classes are a way of reflecting on and embedding family values that support positive long-term outcomes.

Given the striking evidence in our report that parenting skills classes help combat the 'deficit' in character and values that lie behind many social problems, we conclude that parenting classes should be made substantially more accessible across the UK.

For this to happen, however, our report recommends that some significant changes are made.

RECOMMENDATIONS EMERGING FROM RESEARCH

There were five key recommendations that emerged from the research.

ACCREDITATION OF PARENTING COURSES

Currently, 60 organisations use the CANParent quality mark, the existing system of accreditation, to validate their programmes. This is useful but represents a small proportion of the parenting programmes being delivered in the UK. The government and local authorities could extend the course accreditation scheme in order to persuade interested parents of the value of parenting skills classes and improve the take-up of such classes.

RESEARCH INTO THE EXPANDING ROLE OF FAITH GROUPS WITHIN PARENTING GROUPS

The National Parenting Initiative (NPI) register, launched in 2012 by a group of 50 churches, has grown from 4 registered courses at its founding to 770 in 2017. This extraordinary rise in faith-group involvement in parenting classes is especially true among black-led Pentecostal congregations. The Muslim community, too, runs parenting classes in mosques and online. The authors of this report believe that there is huge potential in faith groups running parenting courses, but that is an area in need of further research.

DEVELOP A POSITIVE REPUTATION

Successive governments have built parenting education into initiatives designed to strengthen the family. These have typically taken the form of complex policy programmes addressing child poverty, welfare provision, anti-social behaviour, drug addiction, poor educational performance and truancy. Whilst incredibly important work, this has had the unintended consequence of undermining the image of parenting courses. Although 81 percent of respondents who were planning to have a child in the next few years would be interested in taking parenting classes, the majority of parents regard the courses currently on offer as specifically for 'troubled families' or 'poor parents'. Our report recommends that the government 'normalise' the take-up of universal parenting classes by launching a national campaign featuring celebrity parents who attend or are willing to attend parenting classes (as our survey shows, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are seen as top parenting role models within the UK).

IMPROVE THE DATA

Many parenting skills programmes on offer in the UK are evidence-based and shown to be effective. They are registered and delivered by authorised professionals and volunteers. Many parenting skills classes are well-known to, and sometimes supported by, the local authorities, which can track their impact on the community. But a great many parenting skills classes that are popular with parents fall outside official databases. Local authorities have only an incomplete picture of who provides them. This is especially true in relation to the increasing number of parenting classes which have been set up by faith groups—the government would be wary of commissioning these groups to deliver classes because of their lack of evidence base.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATION: THE NATIONAL PARENTING TRUST (NPT)

Our survey, consisting of 1,000 interviews² with a representative sample of the UK adult population, commissioned as part of this exploratory report, found that 81 percent of those who were intending to have a child in the next few years were interested in attending parenting classes. Our study showed that those parents who had attended parenting classes found them inspiring and useful in promoting change and positive outcomes to family life. During our research, however, it became clear that parents felt the classes, which lasted eight to ten weeks on average, offered only temporary support and expertise. Moreover, our research found that there were specific obstacles to parents' take-up of parenting groups. Cost is also a big factor; budget cuts have meant that many local authorities are cutting back even on low-cost programmes. Training is expensive for small charities and private enterprises.

We believe these obstacles could be overcome through a scheme modelled on the National Childbirth Trust (NCT), which has 'normalised' antenatal classes to such an extent that most parents automatically enrol in a class when they find out they are expecting their first baby.

The Legatum Institute proposes setting up a National Parenting Trust (NPT) to help support all parents and build enduring resilience in communities through a universally-available 'wrap-around' approach to families from all backgrounds. These groups could provide a helpful methodology and mechanism to ensure that parents have the opportunity to transmit character skills and positive values to their children through everyday parenting. Trained volunteer mentors will build and maintain long-term relationships with all parenting groups based on trust and rapport. Taking account of contemporary changes in the make-up of the family and of working patterns, the NPT recognises that today's parents, who often live alone and without any extended family, need stronger and more sustained support than offered by existing courses.

The mentoring programme will ensure parents have early access to support and help on a range of issues such as relationship problems, domestic abuse, substance misuse, financial difficulties, mental

health and difficulties with their children's behaviours. Early identification of these parents will reduce escalation of risk and distress and bring down costs to the tax payer associated with late and less-effective interventions. But the classes will be universal, not targeted, in their appeal, offering support to parents from all backgrounds—isolation and loneliness, children's behavioural difficulties and relationship problems affect parents from all backgrounds. The programme could offer a creative and innovative way of helping families to be self-reliant and independent with a structure of ongoing support.

An NPT would build on the valuable foundational work already done by organisations such as Parenting UK, Parentline Plus and Sure Start Children's Centres, as well as voluntary and faith providers.

Our report concludes with practical suggestions for setting up the NPT (Annex A), first as a pilot scheme, which Surrey County Council has agreed to host and support in its 11 district and boroughs. The scheme will:

1. Collaborate with Family Links to deliver one of their parenting courses to 400 parents.
2. Collaborate with Surrey Care Trust to train volunteers as parenting skills facilitators.
3. Support facilitators to offer continuous support for parents in the form of informal meetings once the parenting classes are over.
4. Collaborate with Family Links and Gary Lewis, headmaster of Kings Langley School (Herts), to design material for structured conversations in the informal meetings.
5. Provide the government and sponsors with data about the courses and their outcomes.
6. Provide a rolling evaluation during the duration of the pilot project.
7. Adopt a mandatory (but sliding scale) contribution fee model.

The pilot scheme does not require public funding. However, once established, the NPT could become an 'off-the-peg' resource for the government and local authorities.

The parenting skills groups would not only transform the lives of parents and their children, they could build resilience within communities. These classes could prove a pathway to investing in the next generation in a profound and enduring way.

Our recommendations are therefore as follows:

- » Broader accreditation and availability of information about parenting courses.
- » Those faith groups that seek to be commissioned by local government to deliver parenting skills courses must undertake evidence-based evaluations.
- » Develop a positive reputation for parenting initiatives.
- » Normalise and extend parenting skills groups through the NPT.

INTRODUCTION

'The family is the bedrock of a successful society.' This statement might seem controversial in an era when one in two marriages end in divorce, popular culture celebrates the individual, and politicians shrink from using the term 'family values' lest they be branded hopelessly old-fashioned or hypocritical, yet our survey of 1,000 interviews³ with a representative sample of the UK adult population, commissioned as part of this exploratory report, found that 84 percent of respondents agreed with the sentiment, while a full 97 percent believed that 'the family is important in creating the best environment in which young people can flourish'. Indeed, for 75 percent of respondents, the family was more important than schools, employers, the welfare state and church in creating a 'better society'.

However the family is not always valued in our society, as 76 percent of our respondents agreed. Our culture is not conducive to parenting. In the age of the 'selfie', selfless parental love strikes an odd note. In an era of frenzied consumerism, character strengths such as the ability to delay gratification, display generosity and act altruistically seem irrelevant at best, and counterproductive at worst.

The withdrawal of support from the family has had a huge impact on parenting in 2017, with most parents acknowledging that they lack confidence in their childrearing skills—81 percent of those planning to have a baby in the next few years said they would be interested in attending a parenting class.

The job of parenting requires a wide array of tasks and responsibilities. These have been defined and helpfully summarised as:

- » giving physical care, affection and positive regard
- » providing emotional security
- » setting boundaries
- » allowing room to develop
- » teaching social behaviour
- » helping to develop skills
- » helping cognitive development
- » facilitating social activity⁴

These skills are usually learnt generationally, but sometimes parents are expected to replicate these skills even though they may not have encountered them in their own childhood. Although we may have benefited from experiencing good parenting skills first-hand in childhood, it can be argued that parenting in 2017 is a more complex and complicated job. The extended family is often too scattered to be relied upon for support, and the advent of two-parent working has reduced the hours children spend with their parents. Some of the risks and dangers of young people growing up have completely changed with the availability of the Internet and popular culture.



Above: The parents we interacted with saw the positive outcome of practising patience, altruism and empathy when dealing with their children.

(Stock image)

The reassuring and compelling fact, however, is that parenting is a set of skills that, while often handed down, can also be taught, reflected upon and embedded into everyday life. When these skills are combined with a parent's knowledge and aspiration towards a set of healthy core values, children and young people are likely to get the best foundations in life.

Society is both reliant upon, and hopeful for, parents that bring up their children with positive values such as respect for self, others and property. The cost to society when parents fail to transmit these values is immense—poor educational outcomes, drug and alcohol abuse, truancy and self-harm all require expensive interventions by the state.

We interviewed parents nationally about their experiences of parenting courses. These were delivered by local authorities, charities, churches and private enterprises—and sometimes by a combination of private and public-sector institutions. Many of these courses have already been rigorously evaluated and found to improve parenting skills. Our research found that these classes adopted a behavioural approach, using elements of Social Learning Theory (which argues that children's copying of adults' behaviour is as significant as their inner impulses) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which, by altering the thought patterns and behaviour of parents, helps them to recognise in themselves, and pass on to their children, qualities such as self-discipline and generosity. Independent evidence reviews report the effectiveness of these approaches.⁵

Our research aimed to establish whether or not courses could be ‘vehicles’ to transmit values, with long-term benefits for families and society as a whole. We found that they could, indeed, become such vehicles.

Positive parenting skills draw upon the Aristotelian definition of values as ‘virtuous habits’; practising good skills (*‘techne’* in Greek) implies having good values. We heard that parents learned specific skills—patience, communication, empathy—that they subsequently adopted in the home. These skills reinforce values such as self-restraint. Parents were learning about positive and negative values and their impact on their children’s behaviour. The parents we interacted with saw the positive outcome of practising patience, altruism and empathy when dealing with their children. This improvement convinced them that good values make a positive difference to their lives.

The impact of the existing courses could be far greater. But, for this to happen, their image needs to change.

Successive governments have built parenting education into initiatives designed to strengthen the family. These have typically taken the form of complex policy programmes addressing child poverty, welfare provision, anti-social behaviour, drug addiction, poor educational performance and truancy. Unfortunately, this has had the unintended consequence of undermining the image of parenting courses—in the public’s mind they are associated with ‘bad parenting’ and ‘difficult children’, not something people openly want to be associated with.

We endorse the view that, ‘It should be possible to build a culture in which parents, by default, seek to extend their understanding of parenting—in much the same way as, a generation ago, parents were persuaded to take up the offer of antenatal courses’.⁶

We believe that parenting classes are a largely untapped resource that should be available to the whole of society. They are an effective and low-cost means of promoting values, such as self-discipline and generosity, that have positive outcomes for society. Moreover, providing an opportunity for peer support and advice, these classes can increase community cohesion and integration.

LEGATUM INSTITUTE PARENTING SKILLS GROUPS RESEARCH PROJECT

The Legatum Institute carried out a research project in 2016 to try and understand the impact of parenting skills groups in allowing parents to reflect on, and discuss, supportive values that improve outcomes for children, young people and their parents/carers.

The aim of the research project was to explore whether parenting skills groups could encourage parents to reflect on the core values that support their parenting and family life—and if so, how?

We found some key similarities between both the courses on offer and the families who attended them.

Courses:

- » ranged in length from 6 to 12 weeks with the longer format being more popular
- » used common underpinning research concepts and theories, e.g. social learning theory or CBT, although they were not facilitated in a theoretical way

Families:

- » tended to be 'low income' and faced complex challenges
- » of 'high income' were underrepresented

Our researchers interviewed parents from a range of ethnic backgrounds attending a cross-section of existing parenting classes across England and Wales.

The parents we interviewed—who, like most parents attending such courses in England and Wales, came from low-income families—were virtually unanimous in their enthusiasm for the classes.

1. More than 90 percent of parents told us that the classes had changed not only their idea of what it means to be a parent, but also their behaviour.
2. More than 90 percent of parents said that the classes had improved their relationships with their children.
3. 100 percent of parents said they would recommend the classes to friends.

Our report highlights the increasing role of faith groups in delivering parenting classes. Three of the 14 courses were founded and run by Christian groups—who did not convey a religious message to the parents. One non-religious course offered classes tailored to the requirements of Muslim parents. Other evidence suggests⁷ that courses led by Christians are the fastest-growing segment of the market for parenting courses.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE EFFICACY OF PARENTING GROUPS IN REFLECTING ON AND ADOPTING SUPPORTIVE FAMILY VALUES

- » A three-part approach was used in which parents:
 - reflected on their own values and how they were raised
 - were invited to reflect with one another on how this affected family life
 - were invited to practice new ways of thinking or behaving within the home
- » The power of the group was clear—it discussed and prompted reflection of existing parental behaviour and then supported and facilitated changes in that behaviour.
- » A sense of community and well-being was created through building social networks.
- » Parents were overwhelmingly positive about parenting skills groups and their impact on home life and their children's outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

The project was careful to select a cross-section of parenting courses. The locations visited varied from Muslim-majority areas in the north of England to a mostly-white housing estate in Hertfordshire. The project took the research team to the cities of Bradford, Cardiff, Manchester and several locations in London, as well as towns such as Watford, Basingstoke and Dartford.

The research included the following:

- » Different models of parenting programmes.
- » Different delivery models.
- » 14 locations across the breadth of England in rural and urban areas.
- » Mixed groups in terms of socio-economic needs and background.
- » Mixed groups in terms of race, culture and religion.
- » In-depth interviews with 65 parents—56 mothers and 9 fathers.
- » Variable monetary contributions to attend from free to £200 for a parenting course.
- » Diversity of course emphasis and motivations for delivery.

Our researchers were given direct access to 14 parenting skills courses across England and Wales. They also gathered and analysed literature from many others. Researchers interviewed providers of parenting skills programmes, and the group team leaders, or facilitators, who were running the classes.

Although providers and facilitators were cautious about allowing the research team to speak to parents, after careful negotiations, researchers conducted formal interviews with 56 mothers and 9 fathers—a gender imbalance reflective of parenting classes in general.⁸

Significantly, the clear majority of parents at the classes came from low-income families. There was, however, considerable ethnic diversity. The two major demographic groups were white Britons and those from a South Asian Muslim background, although researchers also interviewed two women from Poland, one from Nigeria, and two from the West Indies. Here it is worth noting that a study of ethnicity and parenting interventions found virtually no differences in the willingness of white Britons and ethnic minorities to attend parenting classes.

These 14 courses were not a randomly chosen sample of parenting classes in England and Wales: as noted above, there is no central register of such courses or classes, and countless small independent groups remain 'below the radar' so far as government and researchers are concerned. However, this sample did include courses run by the two biggest networks of parenting classes in England and Wales. These networks are Parenting UK, an initiative that supports the Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme in Basingstoke and Dartford, and the NPI, a Christian umbrella organisation of more than 700 children's courses, of which Time Out for Parents in Bramhall, Greater Manchester, is a part.⁹



Above: The two major demographic groups were white Britons and those from a South Asian Muslim background.

(Stock image)

Three of the 14 courses were Christian-run but open to all—though they were not connected to each other. The other 11 were non-religious and had disparate origins. For example, the parenting course in Bradford was offered by Parent Gym, the philanthropic arm of the private company, Mind Gym. In Dartford and Manchester, the courses visited were funded by the local authority and used the Incredible Years template developed Dr Carolyn Webster-Stratton, an American psychologist.¹⁰

SUMMARY

In short, the parenting classes were inspired by a wide, even bewildering, variety of models, techniques and motivations. This diversity was useful to the research findings because it allowed the team to identify common themes, problems and possibilities.

The research also indicated that these classes were attended mainly by people from lower socio-economic groups. Of these, many were parents who faced special challenges—because their children had behavioural problems, or they themselves were struggling with mental health or substance misuse issues. The entirely private and fee-paying Parent Practice, was attended solely by middle-class parents.

Therefore, with one exception, any conclusions reached about the transmission of helpful parenting values were based on parenting initiatives that excluded those in higher socio-economic brackets. There was little sense that these parenting skills groups—or indeed parenting courses in the UK generally—were a resource for the whole population.

CURRENT PARENTING SKILLS GROUPS

Parenting skills groups have been growing in popularity over the last few years, especially those that are 'universal' in their nature, e.g. antenatal courses or groups in Sure Start Children's Centre's for parents of children under the age of five, as well as those offered by voluntary and faith-based organisations (the fastest-growing provider group).

Where there is lack of universality and/or a more targeted approach for parents, such as those with older children or those with emotional or behavioural difficulties, the picture is more complex. Parents may be reluctant to attend these groups due to fears of being perceived as being 'troubled' or guilty of 'poor parenting'. However, from the Legatum Institute research evidence, even parents who are reluctant to attend courses and may have been mandated to do so through Children's Social Care plans or the courts, find them helpful and sometimes life-changing in their impact once they overcome their initial reluctance and resentment.

There are fewer generic parenting courses available for parents with children in primary teenage years—even though this is often when behaviour becomes more challenging and life more complex. There may be an even greater need for understanding the importance of values in family life and understanding core parenting tasks in these life-course stages.

Parenting courses are delivered in community venues such as Sure Start Children's Centres, schools and church halls. Parents who elected to take the courses visited during the Legatum Institute research project found out about the courses through fliers sent home with school children, teaching assistants, church groups and/or parent-to-parent recommendations. The latter was considered by both parents and facilitators as the most effective way of communicating the benefits of the courses.

HISTORIC GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO PARENTING SKILLS GROUPS

Parenting skills groups have often been seen by governments as a potentially valuable tool to address childhood poverty, social exclusion, offending and anti-social behaviour.

The Labour Government of 1997–2010 heavily invested public money in the now well-researched understanding that early parenting interventions make a difference to longer-term outcomes for children and young people. It was responsible for: a National Family and Parenting Institute; the Sure Start Children's Centre programme; parent support advisers in schools; the Parent Early Intervention Programme; and a 'Parent Know-How' service providing helplines and advice websites. Some of these initiatives still exist.

The most relevant is the Parent Early Intervention Programme, which established the principle that public money could be spent on privately developed and delivered parenting programmes so long as they were 'evidence-based' and proven to improve outcomes for parents and their children.

The Coalition government of 2010–2015 created its flagship Troubled Families Programme, which offered families with complex and multiple problems a whole-family approach to tackling issues such as poor school attendance, crime and antisocial behaviour and employment. This brief was extended in 2016 to Troubled Families 2 which introduced to its eligibility criteria, mental and physical health problems, domestic abuse and financial difficulties potentially leading to homelessness. Significantly, the programme has offered one-to-one intensive support around parenting, amongst other issues, and sometimes attendance at specialist targeted groups. Many authorities have seen compelling evidence of the impact of key worker coaching and mentoring a family whilst gathering a multi-agency team around it, as part of a Family Action Plan.

Between 2012 and 2014 the government co-operated with existing providers of parenting classes in a pilot scheme called CANparent (CAN stands for Classes & Advice Network). This gave parents a £100 voucher to spend on classes that could be accessed through health visitors, midwives, doctors' surgeries and children's centres. Only 4 percent of eligible parents took advantage of the scheme and it was later abandoned.

The scheme devised a 'CANparent Quality Mark', awarded to courses that met the (basic) requirements of assessors from Parenting UK, a network of parenting courses that includes the Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme, whose courses our researchers visited in Basingstoke, Fareham, Gosport and South Oxhey. The Parenting UK database of parenting classes has not been updated since 2013.¹¹

In February 2016, a round-table discussion of experts hosted by the Centre for Social Justice critiqued the CANparent scheme. It pointed out that most parents assumed that classes were solely for parents of 'problem families'. The programmes were poorly marketed—they were too heavily weighted towards mothers and providers ran a high risk of losing money, and the voucher value did not cover costs unless classes were at full capacity.¹²

The Early Intervention Foundation, an independent charity and one of seven What Work Centres, established specifically to assess the quality of early interventions, found that for parent support, it is 'critical' that a programme be tested in a UK context and that a UK early intervention body of evidence develops. The Foundation has carried out a groundbreaking assessment of 75 early intervention programmes aimed at improving child outcomes through positive parent/child interactions in the early years.

'The report found that although the overall evidence base for programmes available in the UK is not yet mature, there is a range of well evidenced and promising interventions that, if carefully commissioned to ensure they fit with local need and context, are likely to be effective in tackling problems identified in the early years.'

In its *Every Child Matters* report,¹⁴ the Department of Education made a policy recommendation to make parenting courses more accessible and local. The recent closure (and proposed closure) of many Sure Start Children's Centres concerned many facilitators and trainers the Legatum research team spoke to. They worried that parents who had felt comfortable attending courses in these centres, where their children could play in the adjoining room, or join in with activities there, would stop attending the courses once they had moved out of a familiar venue.

PROVISION OF PARENTING CLASSES IN THE UK

As things stand, the delivery of parenting skills courses in the UK is neither cohesive nor coordinated. There are a number of, and a huge variety among, stakeholders, and their relation to one another is often unclear. For instance, a number of faith-based providers of parenting groups do not register and are carrying out their lessons completely without any central or local government support and scrutiny. The funding and delivery of parenting courses also varies significantly; local authorities may contract trusted independent providers to deliver parenting courses directly; alternatively, councils may give money to schools, a children's centre or a GP surgery and ask them to identify suitable providers of parenting courses. Some school clusters invest in parenting groups for their parents independently.

There is no central register of parenting classes in England and Wales, and the same is true for Scotland and Northern Ireland. Instead, there are incomplete and fragmented databases—for example, the Parenting UK database associated with CANparent has not been updated for three years. The Christian-run NPI has persuaded several hundred faith-based courses to register with it, but could not be described as a systematically monitored database.

The providers of parenting courses are often associated with several overlapping organisations—and it can be difficult to establish which of these providers is responsible for a specific parenting skills programme. For example, the Family Links 10-week Nurturing Programme is delivered by Family Links, which is a member of Parenting UK, which in turn is part of the charity Family Lives (formerly Parentline Plus). Local authorities often have family information service websites which try to help parents identify local parenting skills groups. These are very difficult to keep updated and relevant or to ensure good-quality facilitation and follow-up.

Nearly all local authorities have appointed a parenting commissioner or strategic lead in post to develop and carry out a parenting strategy. Again, the quality and influence of these activities vary across local authorities; less than half have their parenting commissioners or co-ordinators in full-time posts.¹⁵

THE STIGMATISATION OF PARENTING COURSES

Parenting skills groups that are universal are gaining in popularity. Antenatal groups and groups for parents of children under five flourish.

However, in the public's mind, parenting programmes are often associated either with poor parenting or specifically for parents of children with a disability or difficulty such as autism spectrum disorders or attention deficit disorder (ADD). They have often been aimed at families with children and young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties or other issues, and parents have been sent on courses by professionals supporting the family in a statutory capacity—sometimes with the choice of doing the course or having their children taken into care.

It is not surprising that local authorities should target parents who are particularly vulnerable or in need of parenting support, and it can indeed be very helpful and a good use of public money. But this continues to create an impression that only a few parents need or want parenting skills input. The reality is that all parents benefit from thinking about, and reflecting on, their parental journey. At present, however, there is no mechanism for them to do so.

SUMMARY

The combined effect of the issues presented above is that parenting skills groups are not a resource on which parents from all backgrounds and needs can easily draw—or in some cases would wish to draw. In 2016, the Centre for Social Justice published a report that argued for universal parenting classes, presented as an automatic part of parenting, just as antenatal groups were seen as an automatic part of expecting a baby. Achieving this, the report acknowledged, would require a long-term national campaign, backed by evidence of successful parenting programmes where families had taken part resulting in measurable outcomes.

LEGATUM INSTITUTE PARENTING SKILLS GROUPS RESEARCH

The parenting courses we studied asked parents to practise—during the sessions and at home—parent behaviours underpinned by values such as respect, self-restraint and empathetic listening. Parents were also invited to reflect on their own everyday behaviours that might affect family life in an unhelpful way.

Most credible evidence-based parenting programmes are founded on theories or concepts introduced through academic research about how children and young people are best raised towards positive outcomes. All the parenting courses visited drew on influential academic theories of learning—but none of them could be described as ‘theory-driven’ in their delivery. The research did not encounter any programmes run with a dogmatic formulae approach. For instance, Nick Haisman-Smith, the CEO of Family Links, described how the 10-Week Nurturing Programme had been created by US psychologist Stephen Bavolek, but had been ‘adapted significantly’ for delivery in the UK.

Most courses embedded theories like attachment, parenting styles, behaviour management, social learning theory, the importance of play and the use of cognitive behavioural understanding with facilitators illuminating these with examples from their own life and illustrative materials. Some of these theories are now so widely accepted that they were presented as common sense rather than as ‘special wisdom’ that was being imparted. Independent reviews of evidence report the effectiveness of these approaches.¹⁶

One example is Social Learning Theory. In short, children copy grown-ups; they learn positive and negative habits of behaviour from them. Groups with no religious identity used Social Learning Theory—often combined with elements of CBT. One of the groups that cited Social Learning Theory as an influence was the Christian-run Kids Matter.¹⁷



CBT seeks to solve behavioural problems by training adults (and sometimes children) to reflect on their challenges and practise sensible patterns of behaviour in a methodical way. It is now commonly used as a problem-solving tool throughout Western society. Millions of people have undergone some form of CBT. We found that faith-inspired parenting groups were as happy to use it as secular ones.

Moreover, none of the three Christian-inspired courses—Kids Matter (Tower Hamlets), Safe Families for Children Wales (Cardiff) and Time Out for Parents (Bramhall)—used overtly Christian course material. While Christian-inspired, in that the importance of parenting in their faith framework led them to want to support parents, they did not use Christian content. Kids Matter emphasises on its website that its programmes are ‘provided for people of all faiths within the local community’. Likewise, the Christian-run course at Ford’s Lane Church, run under the banner of Care for the Family, uses a template developed by the NPI whose online promotional material makes no mention of faith. It addresses general topics such as ‘setting boundaries’ and specific ones such as unsupervised play and Internet safety.¹⁸ These topics were also covered by most of the other eleven secular courses—i.e. those with no religious identity.

Above: Children copy grown-ups; they learn positive and negative habits of behaviour from them.

(Stock image)

PARENTAL FEEDBACK

Our researchers interviewed parents from a range of ethnic backgrounds attending a cross-section of 14 existing parenting classes across England and Wales. These were delivered by local authorities, charities, churches and private enterprises—and sometimes by a combination of private and public-sector institutions. Many of these courses have already been rigorously evaluated and found to improve parenting skills.

Our research aimed to establish whether courses promoted reflection and adoption of core values systems, with a long-term benefit for families and society. Our findings suggest that this is the case and parenting courses could be widely beneficial.

The parents we interviewed—who, like all parents attending such courses in England and Wales, mostly came from low-income families—were virtually unanimous in their enthusiasm for the classes. As noted:

- » More than 90 percent of parents told us the classes had changed not only their idea of what it means to be a parent, but also their behaviour.
- » More than 90 percent of parents said the classes had improved their relationship with their children.
- » 100 percent of parents said they would recommend the classes to friends.

Both the parents and course facilitators we interviewed expressed frustration that parenting courses tend to be one-off experiences and cannot offer continuing support.

We suggest that such courses should be extended—not only in duration but also in demographic reach and general appeal, so that all sectors of diverse populations can be attracted to and take advantage of them.

FAITH PARENTING PROGRAMME PROVIDERS

Our report highlights the increasing role of faith groups in delivering parenting classes. The NPI, founded in 2012 with 500 participating churches and 4 registered parenting courses,²⁰ now includes 770 registered parenting courses.¹⁹ However, the registration of parenting courses led by faith groups is patchy, as some fail to register, practicing informally in homes and cafes. There is also evidence that parenting classes are being taught by Islamic groups across the UK. Family Links rolled out a version of its Parenting Puzzle course, 'Islamic Values and the Parenting Puzzle',²¹ in 2012, and partnered with the charity UK Islamic Mission (UKIM) to reach families who were reluctant to join mainstream programmes.

SIX KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

With one exception, the courses we studied were targeted at lower-income groups. More than three-quarters of the attendees were women. This has always been the situation in UK parenting classes and therefore (though we believe that these are core factors that should be addressed) we are not presenting these facts as 'findings'. Our six key observations are as follows:

CASE STUDY: South Oxhey: the integrated impact of parenting classes

A sprawling housing estate outside Watford, Herts, South Oxhey was built after WWII to house working-class Londoners who had lost their homes in the Blitz. Today, there are 12,343 residents. Most are still white working class but the area is evolving rapidly.

Evidence of deprivation is plentiful—three food banks are a few minutes' walk from the betting shops, tanning shops, nail bars and Turkish Kebab houses that line the shopping precinct near the Carpenden Park railway station. The area's three Children's Centres have one of the highest child protection caseloads in the UK. Jules Riding, who has been running parenting classes for the past ten years, reports that a few of the parents she has worked with "have been raised in families where unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse are rife".

For the most vulnerable families, says Riding, "the local authority will put in place an action plan that is multidisciplinary. The Family Support Team will give each family someone to meet their different needs: probation officer, drug and alcohol services, learning disability services".

The size and tight-knit nature of the community at South Oxhey means that "everyone knows what the other is doing: who is dealing drugs, who is hitting his partner, and whose children are running amok". But this can have benefits, too: "word of mouth goes that much further and the positive outcomes can be that much more noticed".

Anke Williams, who runs Adult Learning classes at the South Oxhey Children's Centre, reports that she sees the benefit of the parenting classes: "I can see the difference when they are with me. They feel more confident and able to cope because they are clear about who they want their children to be, and how to help them become like that".

"For many of our children school is a safe place" says Nicola Weller, a nursery teacher and special needs teacher at Greenfield School, which shares its site with the centre. "The child of poor parenting shows erratic behaviour: no rewards or sanctions work with these children. Because of the rows at home, the children are always in fight or flight mode—they come to us in a state of heightened alertness".

Weller reports how, "undoubtedly it [the parenting course] did have an impact on behaviour management. Parents would do less yelling and be more consistent and calmer... their parents have unhealthy role models of their own and cannot always change their behaviour".

Rachel [prefers to withhold her last name], a health visitor who has been working in South Oxhey for the past six years, is convinced that parenting classes have a positive impact on participants. She says over the ten weeks the parents undergo a lot of "informal therapy—where they learn greater self-awareness, and self-esteem and generally gain an understanding of a better way to be. So many single mums are out of work and for many this is historic—they saw their mothers never worked, and are now repeating what they saw their mothers do—look for benefits. The parenting group steers them to asking themselves: what do I want my children to be like? And now my children are older, and at school, what am I going to do for myself?"

1. Parenting skills groups use a successful three-step process to modify behaviour.

Researchers noticed that most courses—irrespective of their origins—were run along similar lines. They invited parents to:

- » Reflect on their existing values as parents and those they were raised with and the possible impact these values might have on family life.
- » Engage in discussion and debate with the group around these values or ideas informed by evidence-based research presented in an accessible format.
- » Practice positive parenting skills with a clear value base in the home and report on how they got on at the next group session.

We call this the 'three-step parenting process'. It is our description of the way in which courses supported parents to gain new or embed old values in everyday life based on real information and insight into what works. This process is heavily influenced by behaviour modification, explained through Social Learning Theory and CBT techniques. The facilitators agreed that reflection was an essential first step in the process of 'unveiling' parenting values. Many facilitators reported that parents had said that the courses offered a rare and sometimes the only opportunity to reflect and to think about how they were raised, what they believed to be a 'good-enough' parent, and how their own behaviour had affected their children and family.

Significantly, in moving through the steps, the facilitators blurred the distinction between practical skills such as organising meals and 'thought habits' such as remembering to pause before reprimanding a child angrily. Most classes encouraged parents to work out for themselves, in consultation with other participants, what constituted a positive parenting habit:

"Some of our parents live chaotic lives in pretty difficult circumstances. Stepping out of the home is beneficial. Courses give them a time to think about what they do in their parenting, and why, and what impact it has."

Katherine Putko, facilitator, Incredible Years, Dartford

"We don't impose our values on the parents but lead them to discover their own set of values and underpin the ones that are good."

Sharon Lawton, group leader, Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme, Basingstoke

2. Courses make use of 'the power of small groups'.

Again and again parents told us how much they valued the sense of community created by the classes—this was even when parents had been instructed to attend them by family courts and social services.

"We try to recreate the extended family..." said Amanda Reading, who runs the Mellow Parenting course in Wandsworth. We heard variations of this message from several facilitators who stressed the value of group identity over and above specific parenting advice:

"The group format offers role models; not only the facilitator but also other parents. When parents share their positive experiences, you can see the others sit up and pay attention—here is someone I can copy. When the experience is negative, there is instant support."

Sharon Lawton, group leader, Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme, Basingstoke

Parents were also enthusiastic:

"After the course stopped we tried to keep seeing each other, we'd go for a coffee, meet up at the shopping mall. They'd become kind of friends, so I was sad it stopped."

Kim, mother attending Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme, Harlow

"It felt good to know we're not the only parents struggling with this. I'd felt—we'd both felt—guilty. Now we reckon no one's perfect."

Sara, mother who attends Incredible Years, Dartford, with her partner

The beneficial impact of small groups has been the focus of many social scientific studies. In America, especially, the coming together of groups of people who were previously strangers—whether through Alcoholics Anonymous, victim support groups or book clubs—is a powerful response to the breakdown of community.²²

3. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about parenting classes.

We were surprised by the overwhelmingly positive response to the parenting classes by the parents we interviewed. More than 95 percent told us that:

- » they would recommend parenting classes to a friend
- » the course had changed their idea of what it meant to be a good parent
- » the course had changed their behaviour
- » the course had improved their relationship with their children.

The following quotes help explain why the parents were so satisfied with the experience:

"I realise that I am the role model for my children. If I am kind, honest... they are. I need to live these values so they can."

Lauren, Time Out for Parents, Bramhall

"I never thought of what it was like to be my child. I didn't know how to put myself in his shoes. Now I can do better."

Lisa, Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme, Basingstoke

"I was self-centred, always thinking about me and my problems. Now I try to think about my little man and make time for him."

Stuart, Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme, Basingstoke

"I have learned to do some self-examination, be more reflective."

Sabine, Kids Matter, Tower Hamlets

"I learned to stop faking. I used to pretend that I was listening, that I was paying attention. I've learned to be honest with my children. Once you are honest they feel respected."

Kim, Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme, Harlow

"Shopping is now a pleasure—the children don't grab everything off the shelves."

Daniel, Incredible Years, Dartford

4. Parents want access to longer, more sustained parenting courses.

'I was sad it stopped', said one mother from a parenting course in Harlow. This was the message from several parents and facilitators we interviewed.

"It shouldn't be a one-off, something this good."

Tommy, father attending Lighthouse Kidz, Watford

"Parenting groups could be like going to the gym—you get into the habit of going regularly, for years."

Sharon Lawton, group leader, Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme, Basingstoke

Some parents felt that the classes did not offer enough follow-up, and that they would have benefited from a top-up or refresher course. Some courses offered online support in addition to classes, and parents were grateful for this.

Almost all parents said that they had re-read their materials from the course—an interesting and important finding that denotes the supportive value they put on such materials. Some had enlisted in a second course. Vonny, a mother attending the Mellow Parenting classes in Wandsworth, said she and other attendees had started a WhatsApp social media group to keep in touch afterwards—an indication of the positive attractions of small groups in general. Finally, a small number had become facilitators themselves, which also can often become a pathway towards employment.

Many parents were frustrated by the courses' typical time limit of 10–12 weeks. The classes had been an opportunity to build a mutually-supportive network—but sustaining that network without a formal

structure was difficult. They would have preferred to continue meeting facilitators and fellow parents. After all, the challenge of being a parent often lasts for 20 years or more. This raised the question—how could long-term classes be provided and funded, to support the different stages of parenthood?

5. Faith is an important factor in the growth of parenting courses

The two most vibrant religious traditions currently presenting in Britain are those of Christianity and Islam. Both take a strong interest in childrearing, and we encountered enough evidence of faith-inspired parenting courses to suggest that this is an area that demands further and deeper study.

The Christian-based parenting classes we visited were: Time Out for Parents (run by Care for the Family, a nationwide Christian organisation) in Bramhall; Kids Matter in Tower Hamlets; and Safe Families for Children in Cardiff. Of these three groups, the Bramhall group appeared to have the highest proportion of practising Christians among its attendees. Others were from the local community without a religious affiliation.

In the absence of a central register, it is hard to say whether the Christian identity of 3 out of 14 groups reflects the national balance of parenting classes. But there are reasons to think that Christian-inspired parenting classes are growing as a proportion of the whole.

As already noted, the NPI, a fast-growing Christian umbrella group, forms one of the two biggest networks of parenting courses in the UK. At the time of writing, 763 courses are registered with the NPI.

Of our three courses, only Time Out for Parents is part of the NPI. Kids Matter grew out of the parenting courses run by Nicky and Sila Lee at Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), a thriving Anglican church in London. Dr Eli Gardner, who undertook a rigorous quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the Lees' course,²³ showed the benefits for parents and children of these parenting classes (and of their DVD courses). She explains²⁴ that Kids Matter gives "local community leaders a tool to reach the neediest parents". They do not hold courses in churches but in community play centres.

Christian-inspired parenting initiatives are characterised by their loose organisation and non-hierarchical nature. A glance at the NPI website suggests that parenting groups spring up locally and register later.

Black-majority Pentecostal churches—Britain's fastest growing Christian community—feature prominently in the NPI list.²⁵

None of the 14 groups we visited were run by Muslims, although most of the women attending the Parent Gym classes in Bradford were Muslim. They told us that the message of the classes was consistent with their Islamic values.

However, the secular Family Links charity—which runs the 10-Week Nurturing Programmes we visited in Basingstoke, South Oxhey and elsewhere—does offer a version of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme incorporating Islamic Values. This programme has been endorsed by Muslim community leaders, and an expansion of this work was funded by the Department for Education (DfE) earlier this year, including a project to train the staff in madrasas. The CEO of Family Links, Nick Haisam-Smith, expressed his surprise at finding how many Muslim dads wanted to learn parenting skills; many were prepared to say the reason was that their fathers had punished them with beatings and canings, and they did not want to repeat such behaviour with their own children.²⁶ The Family Links Muslim programme is being delivered in Bradford, Birmingham, Slough and a few other urban areas.

In addition, there are independent parenting classes run within the UK Muslim community that are overtly religious in content and purpose. All have the backing of local mosques. These courses include classes designed by Muslim Family Matters, which teaches 'hope and fear of Allah' along with parenting skills.

6. Parenting classes are a way of reflecting on and embedding family values that support positive long-term outcomes

Our research focused on how 'values' were present in the course design and outcomes. This presented a challenge; the term 'values' or the idea that specific values might be presented as 'right' and others 'wrong' by those in supportive or helping roles is a concern to those particularly in the public sector.

Some group leaders explained that they did not talk about 'values' because they felt their group would not understand the term. Although all of the courses we visited were described as skills-based, these skills included listening (respect for others), self-confidence (respect for self) and discipline (personal responsibility and authorship of actions and behaviour). These behaviours could be described as transferable skills that are an expression of positive values. It is these values that create the best chance of positive outcomes for children and young people in taking their place in future society.

The underlying approach of all the courses—secular and religious—was that all parents have the potential to be 'good-enough' parents. The three-step process adopted by the courses set out to fulfil this potential by developing skills that the parents may never have learned.

As we have already noted, more than 90 percent of parents we interviewed said the courses had changed their behaviour, improved their relationship with their children and changed their idea of what it meant to be a good parent. Moreover, participants agreed that the positive atmosphere created by small groups of individuals who had previously been strangers had generated stronger community feelings. These findings suggest that parenting classes are an effective means of encouraging socially useful values throughout society.

CHALLENGES

During our research, it became clear that there were specific obstacles in the way of take-up of parenting groups. Budget cuts have meant that many local authorities are cutting back, even on low-cost courses. Training of parenting group facilitators is expensive for small charities and private enterprises.

We believe these obstacles could be overcome through a scheme modelled on the National Childbirth Trust, which has 'normalised' antenatal classes to such an extent that most parents automatically enrol in a class when they find out they are expecting their first baby. The following factors could help explain the charity's success:

1. The NCT is independent from government. It provides a setting in which parents can explore parenting skills without feeling that they are compelled to be there or being caught up in 'the system'.
2. The NCT relies on a network of local volunteers. Mothers and fathers act as recruiters and facilitators for small classes that are held in homes, church halls, children's centres or GP surgeries. Parents build relationships, and often friendships, with members of the local community. This creates the continuous 'small group' relationships that are already valued by attendees at parenting groups. Moreover, once the course is finished, the volunteers continue hosting daytime meetings and drop-in get-togethers, thus offering continuous support for parents.
3. Experienced trainers run the NCT groups. They are not necessarily experts in all aspects of childbirth but the course material is not difficult to teach. The courses are led by community workers rather than professionals, keeping costs low.

We recognise that to reach the widest possible audience, the NPT would need to avoid the middle-class image that the NCT has earned over the years (over 10 percent of the NCT's 114,000 members live in Wimbledon, Dulwich, Clapham or other wealthy areas in south-east London.)

NATIONAL PARENTING TRUST PILOT

For proof of concept, the NPT is looking to launch a pilot scheme in the 11 Districts and Boroughs in Surrey in the course of 2017. Collaborating with Family Links, which already delivers parenting programmes throughout the county, and with Surrey Care Trust, which already trains local volunteer mentors, the NPT will support parents in informal parenting skills groups. In this way the parenting programme will be extended in terms of duration from ten weeks to as long as participating parents require. The NPT will also commission Family Links and Gary Lewis, Headmaster of Kings Langley School (Herts), to design the material that the volunteer mentor will use to lead group discussions.

The pilot project will involve 400 parents in Surrey. It will be funded by a group of sponsors, as well as Surrey County Council and the Legatum Institute.



Above: Most parents acknowledged that they learned skills—"I held my tongue", "I put him first", "I stopped faking attention".

(Stock image)

Once established, the NPT could become an 'off-the-peg' resource for government and local authorities to ensure that the local delivery of parenting resources becomes coordinated and, like the NCT, the NPT will aim to provide a setting in which parents can explore parenting skills without feeling that they are compelled to be there or are caught up in 'the system'.

The pilot will be rigorously evaluated through parental feedback including the use of evidence-based evaluation tools such as Outcomes Star or the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaires. We are in discussion with the University of Birmingham to provide a rolling evaluation of the pilot as part of its research into parenting.

CONCLUSION TO THE REPORT

Public discussion about the role of positive values in combating social problems has been ongoing in Britain and abroad. Work by Angela Duckworth, Paul Tough and Sir Anthony Seldon draw on neuroscience, psychology and child development to show how character traits such as self-restraint and courage help children succeed in terms of academia and well-being. Research has shown that character-based schools help develop these character traits in children.

This principle has affected education policy and education initiatives, most famously, in the US, the KIPP network of schools; while in this country it has led to the Floreat schools, founded by LI Senior Fellow James O'Shaughnessy and character-building curriculum such as the Knightly Virtues pioneered by James Arthur at the Centre for Character and Virtue at Birmingham University.

It also should give new impetus and a new vision to the parenting programme movement supported by successive governments since the 1990s. However, there is a thin tightrope to be walked in not being perceived by the public as 'the nanny state' and many parents are resistant to the idea that government should tell them how to raise their family. This is why an independent National Parenting Trust could hold greater credibility.

While many providers and deliverers of parenting courses contend that explicit reference to 'values' could offend their audience (which is like to be ethnically and religiously diverse), it is also evident that parents are attracted to and are very keen to get their children into schools where values are explicit as they tend to bring about better holistic educational outcomes. This inconsistent thinking needs to be addressed.

Our research sought to determine whether parenting skills groups could serve as a key opportunity to reflect on the importance of values in creating positive family foundations while also providing a chance to practise these within a supportive group.

Our study provides helpful insights into how courses that teach positive parenting skills do indeed engender enduring positive values. The courses we researched held up a set of behaviours based on values such as empathy, self-discipline and self-sacrifice that constitute a model of positive parenthood. This notion corresponds closely to the Aristotelian idea that 'virtue' is a result of 'virtuous behaviour'—we become virtuous by acting in a virtuous manner. Parents were learning, even if mostly in an implicit and unconscious manner, virtuous behaviours and the values that generate this behaviour. Crucially, behaviours that would support their children into the future.

Most parents acknowledged that they learned skills—"I held my tongue", "I put him first", "I stopped faking attention". Some recognised that these skills were linked to values such as patience, self-sacrifice and honesty. Our research found that parents linked their children's improved behaviour and a happier and more serene family home to the lessons they learned in parenting skills groups. These positive outcomes reinforced the parents' commitment to practising the virtuous behaviour they had learned on the courses.

Given that parenting courses are so useful in allowing reflection and the embedding of skills and values, why are we not seeing a greater positive impact on families, and through them, on society?

Two reasons—take-up is limited and courses are limited in duration, so they can affect short-term but not always long-term positive outcomes.

Limited take-up is due to:

- » **Stigma:** the politicisation of parenting courses has often led the public to associate them with 'troubled families' and 'poor parenting'.
- » **Accessibility:** courses should be delivered locally, with childcare provision, and in the evening after work.

- » **Familiarity:** parents needed to feel comfortable with the venue of the courses (school, children's centre, local church) and with the trainers/facilitators.

Limited duration is due to:

- » **Cost:** budget cuts have meant many local authorities are cutting back on even low-cost courses. Training is expensive for small charities/private enterprises.
- » **Priority:** while some local authorities, such as Hertfordshire, prioritise parenting, most do not.
- » **Format:** the courses we researched met as groups of 10–12 members, with 1 or 2 trained facilitators, which is expensive to deliver (as above).

These obstacles could be overcome through a scheme modelled on the successful NCT, as proposed above. By helping parents rediscover those character-building skills, a new nationwide scheme of parenting courses can promote the character strengths that, for most of the past 2,500 years, have been recognised in Western society as 'virtue' or 'virtues'. Moreover, by relying on community volunteers and small groups of local participants, the NPT classes will strengthen community ties and promote social cohesion and integration.

Even in 2017, most people, as our survey confirms, believe that the family is the bedrock of a successful society and that it offers the next generation the best environment in which to flourish. The NPT is designed to support parents build the strong and loving families that remain the core of a prosperous nation.

The groups we visited

- | | |
|--|---|
| » Basingstoke—The Parenting Puzzle (Family Links) | » Wednesbury—Incredible Years (Family Action) |
| » Bradford—Parent Gym | » Isle of Dogs—Kids Matter |
| » Wandsworth and Roehampton—Newpin /Mellow Parenting | » Gosport –The Nurturing 10-Week Programme (Family Links) |
| » Southend—Mellow Parenting | » Watford—Lighthouse Kids |
| » South Oxhey—The Nurturing 10-Week Programme (Family Links) | » Bramhall—Time Out for Parents (Care for the Family) |
| » Manchester—Parent Survival, part of Incredible Years | » Fareham—The Nurturing 10-Week Programme (Family Links) |
| » Dartford—Incredible Years (Family Action) | » West London—The Parent Practice |

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APPENDIX

FAMILY IN SOCIETY: CONSUMER RESEARCH RESULTS

24 JANUARY 2017



METHODOLOGY & SAMPLE

1,000 interviews were conducted with a representative sample of the UK adult population, aged 18+.

The survey was carried out online with fieldwork undertaken by Research Now over the period January 19-22, 2017.

Sample Profile

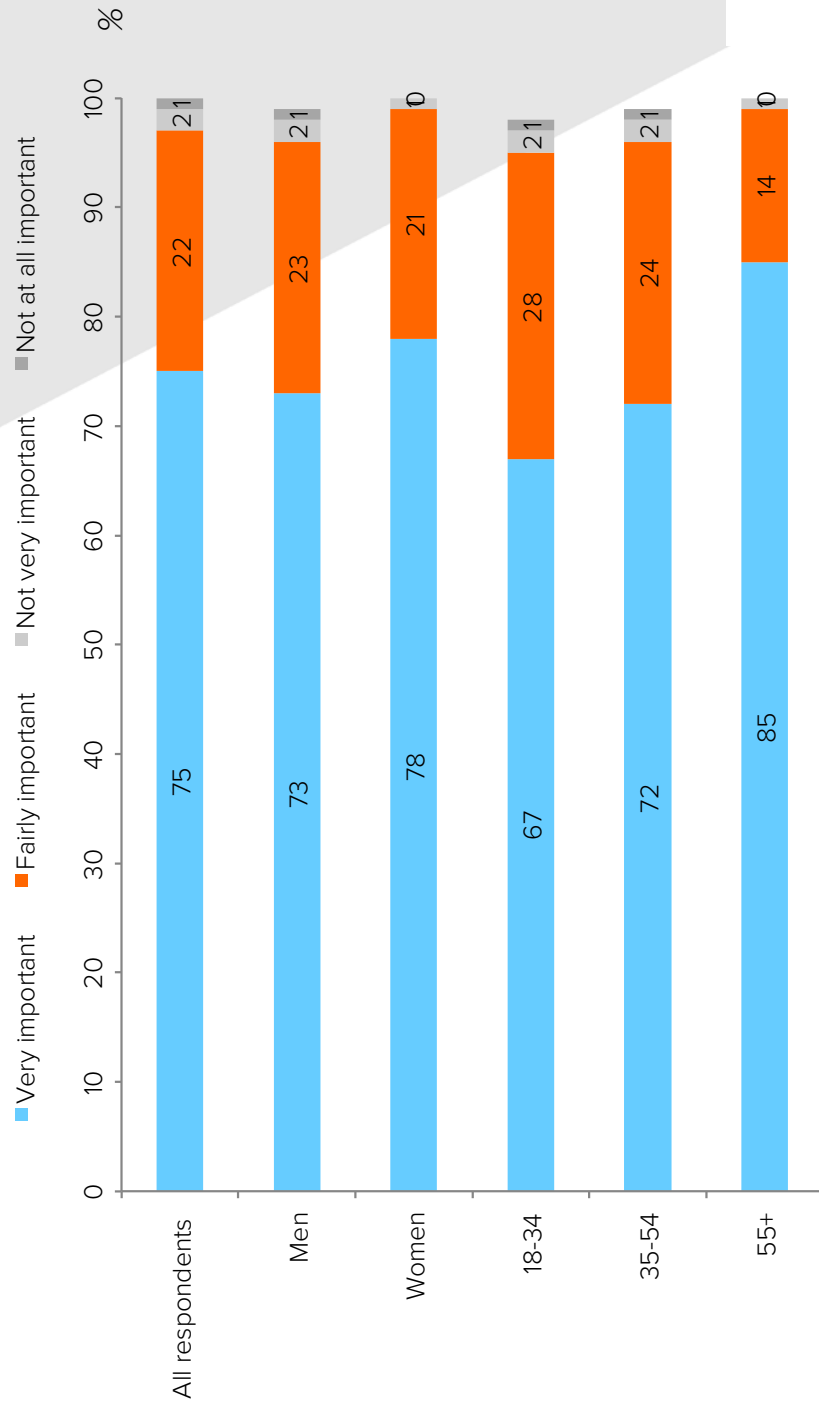
Men	49%	Pre tax HH income:
Women	51%	<£20k 21%
		£20k-£40k 37%
Aged 18-34	29%	£40k-£75k 23%
Aged 35-54	36%	£75k+ 9%
Aged 55+	35%	Not stated 10%
North	34%	
Midlands	18%	
South	47%	

RESULTS

IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY

Q. How important do you believe the family is in creating the best environment for young people to flourish?

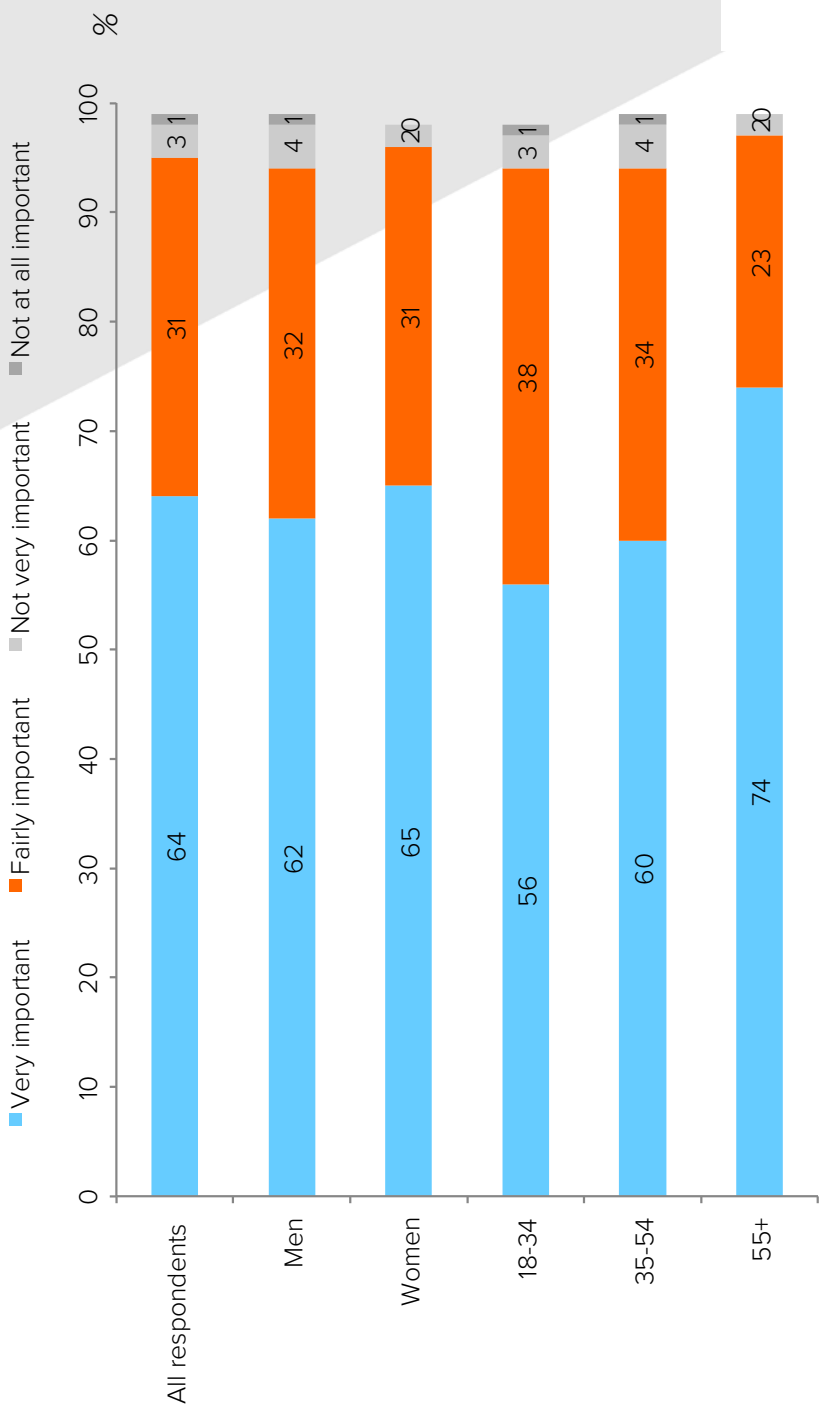
97% of respondents believe the family is important in creating the best environment for young people to flourish



Bases: 1000 / 491 / 509 / 291 / 359 / 350
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY

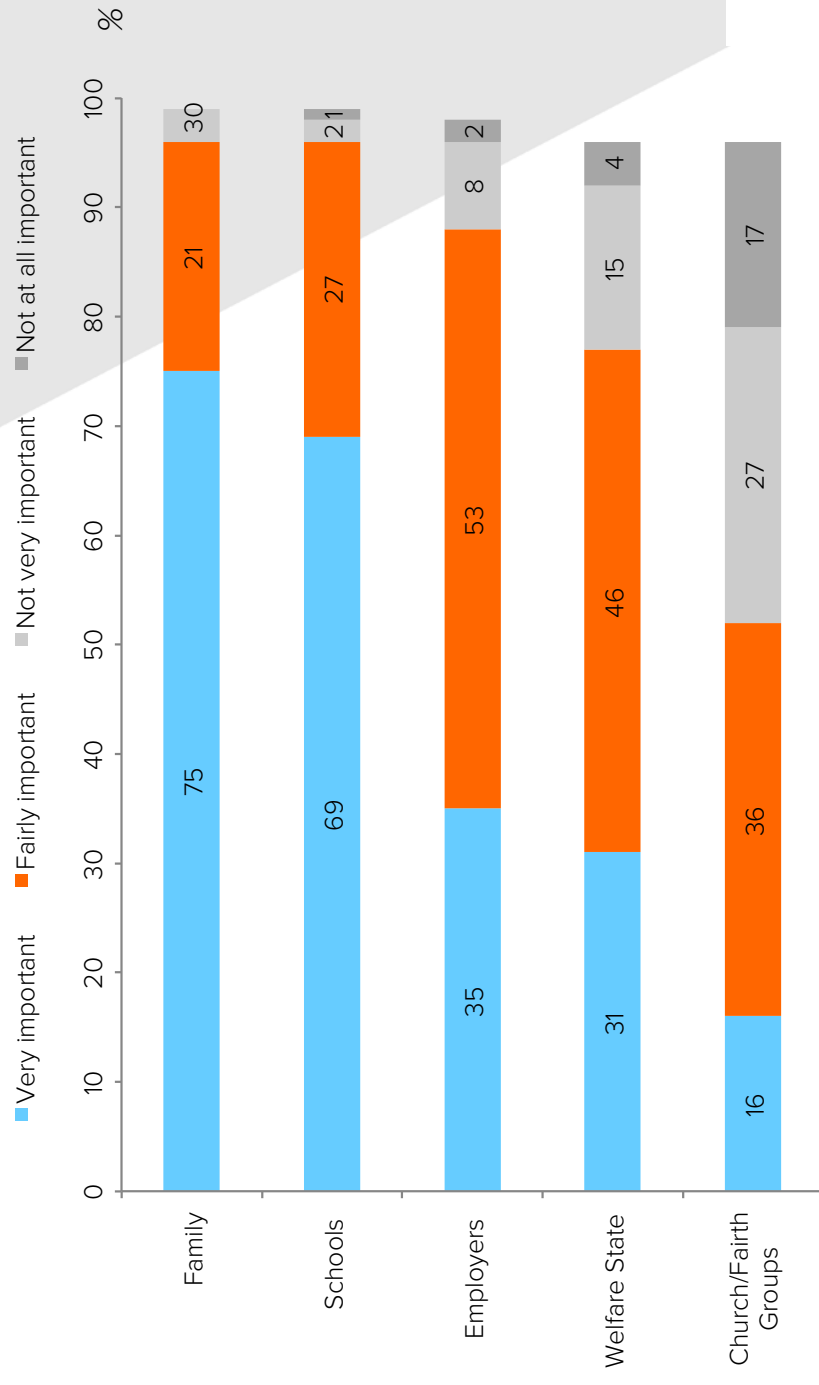
Q. How important do you believe the family is in building a just and fair society?



Bases: 1000 / 491 / 509 / 291 / 359 / 350
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY VS OTHER STRUCTURES IN SOCIETY

Q. Please rate each of the following for the importance of the role they play in creating a better society?

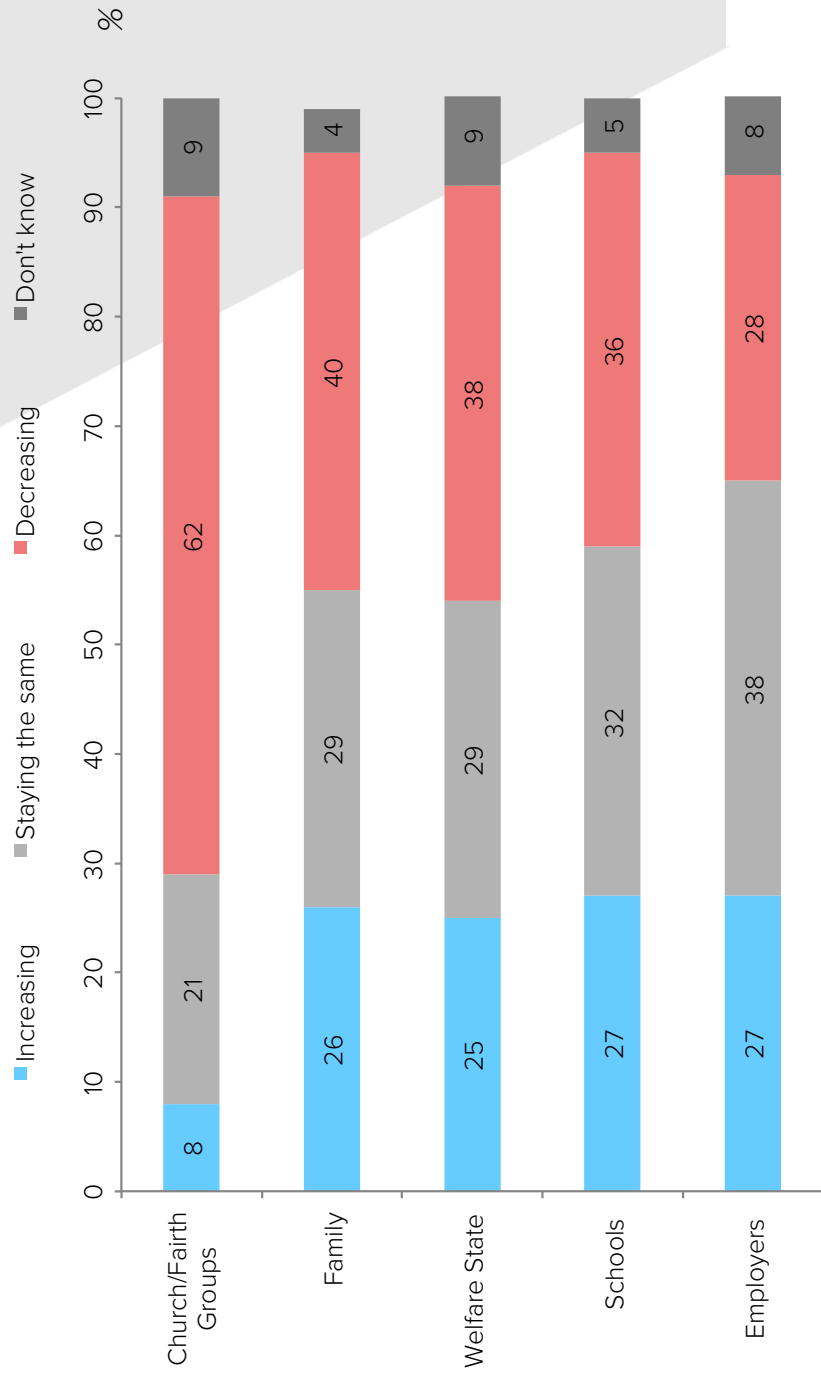


The family is rated as more important than schools, employers, the welfare state and the church in creating a better society

Base: 1000
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

HOW INFLUENCE IS PERCEIVED TO BE CHANGING

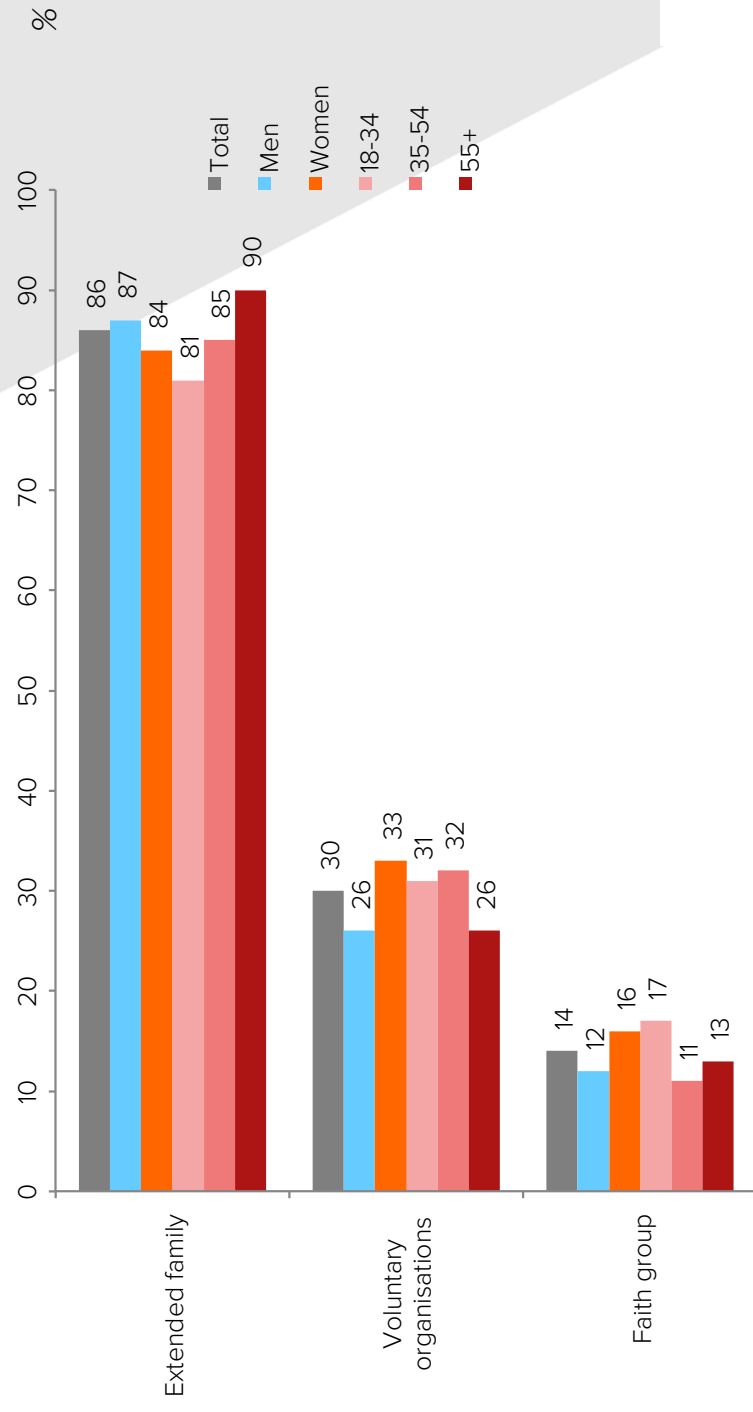
Q. For each of these please say whether you think their influence on society is generally...?



Base: 1000
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

THE BEST SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Q. Which of the following are the best sources of support for families today?

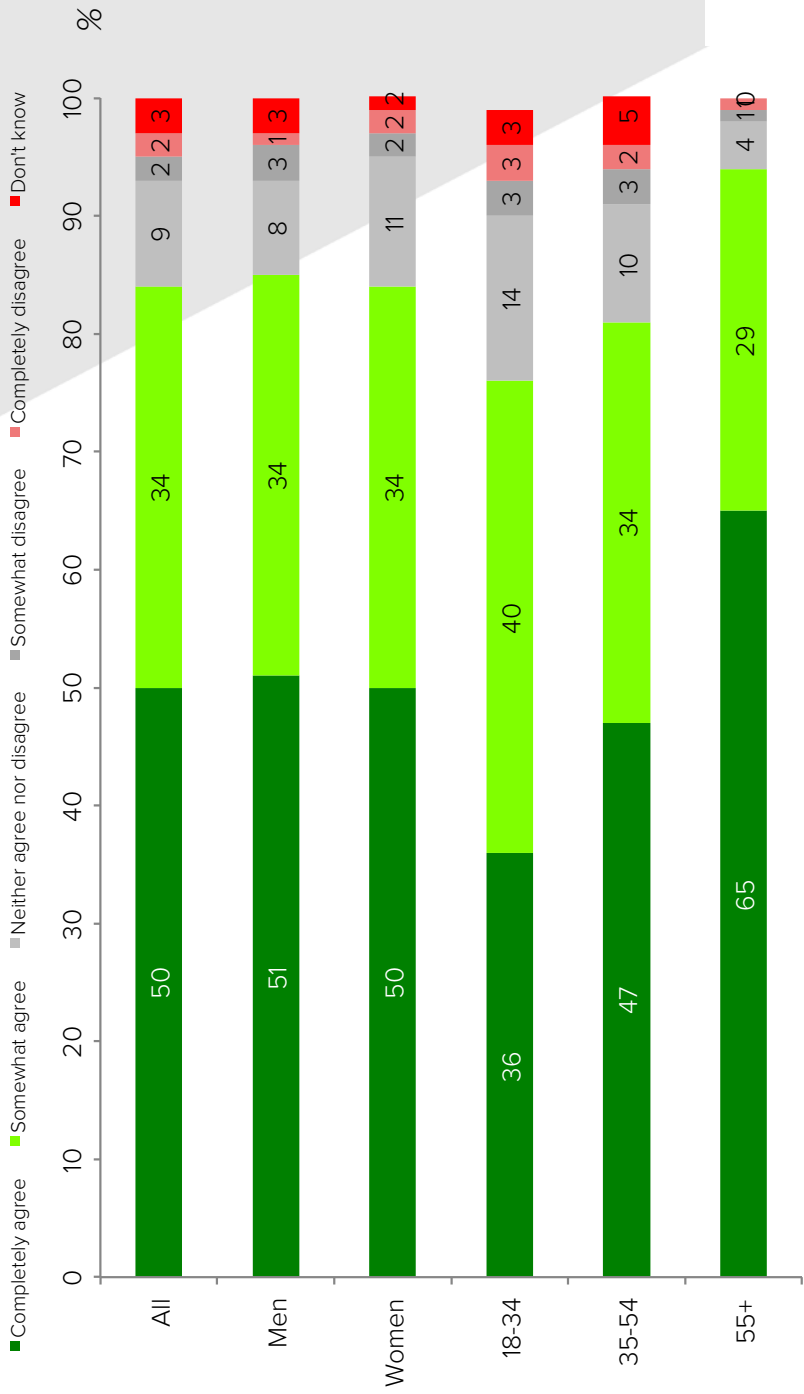


Bases: 1000 / 491 / 509 / 291 / 359 / 350
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS

Q. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following:

The family is the bedrock of a successful society



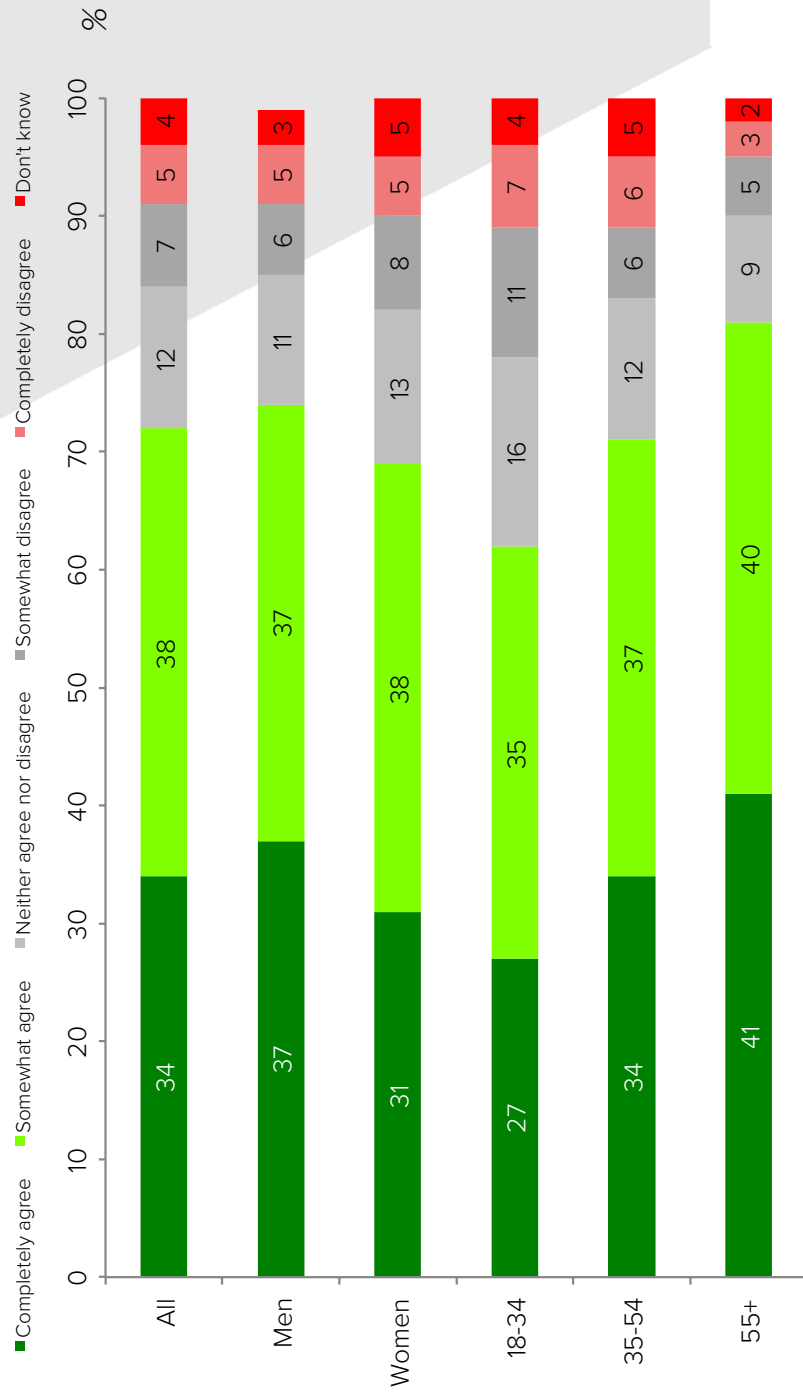
84% agree that the family is the bedrock of a successful society

Base: 1000
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS

Q. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following:

Family values in Britain are threatened by too much political correctness



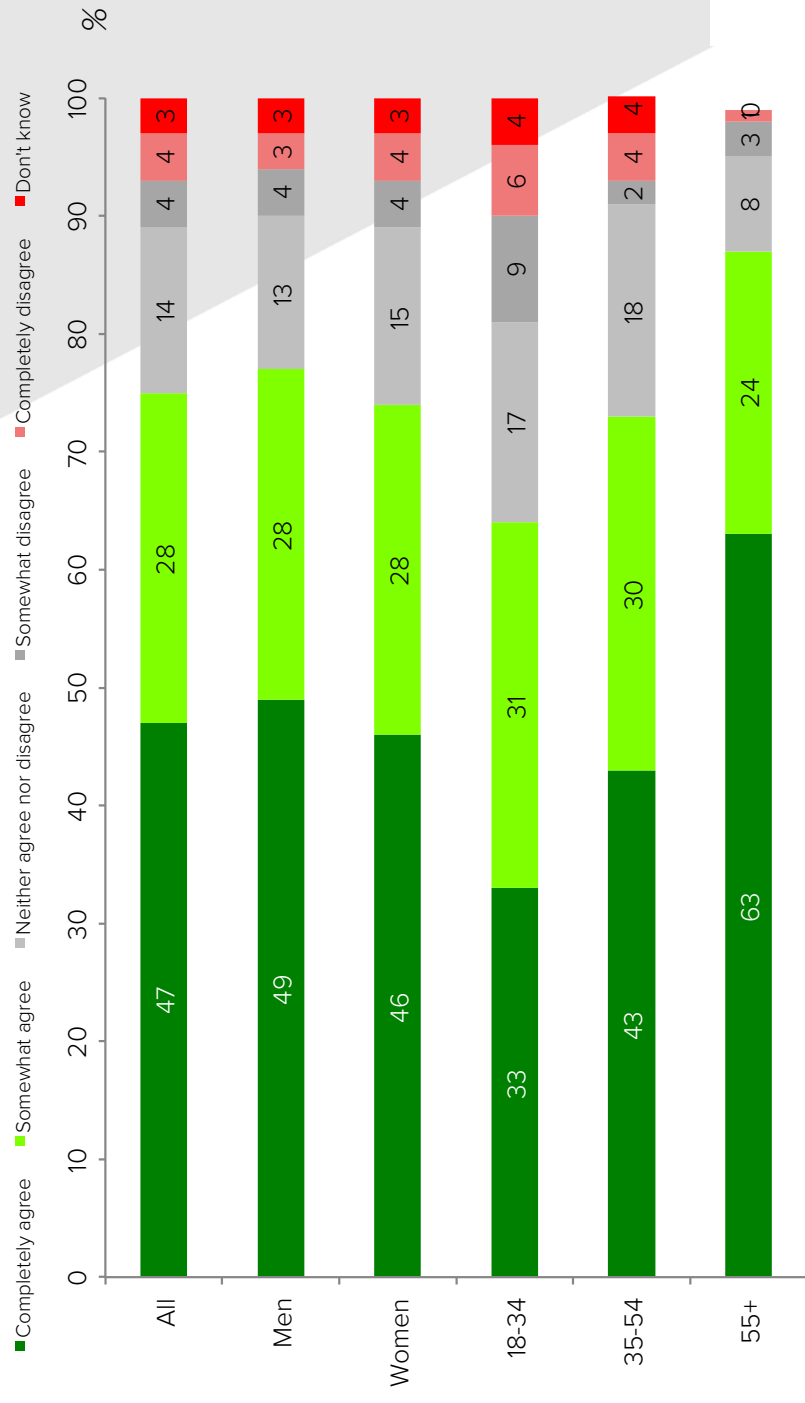
**72% agree that
family values in
Britain are
threatened by too
much political
correctness**

Base: 1000
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS

Q. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following:

We should be more vocal about supporting British values

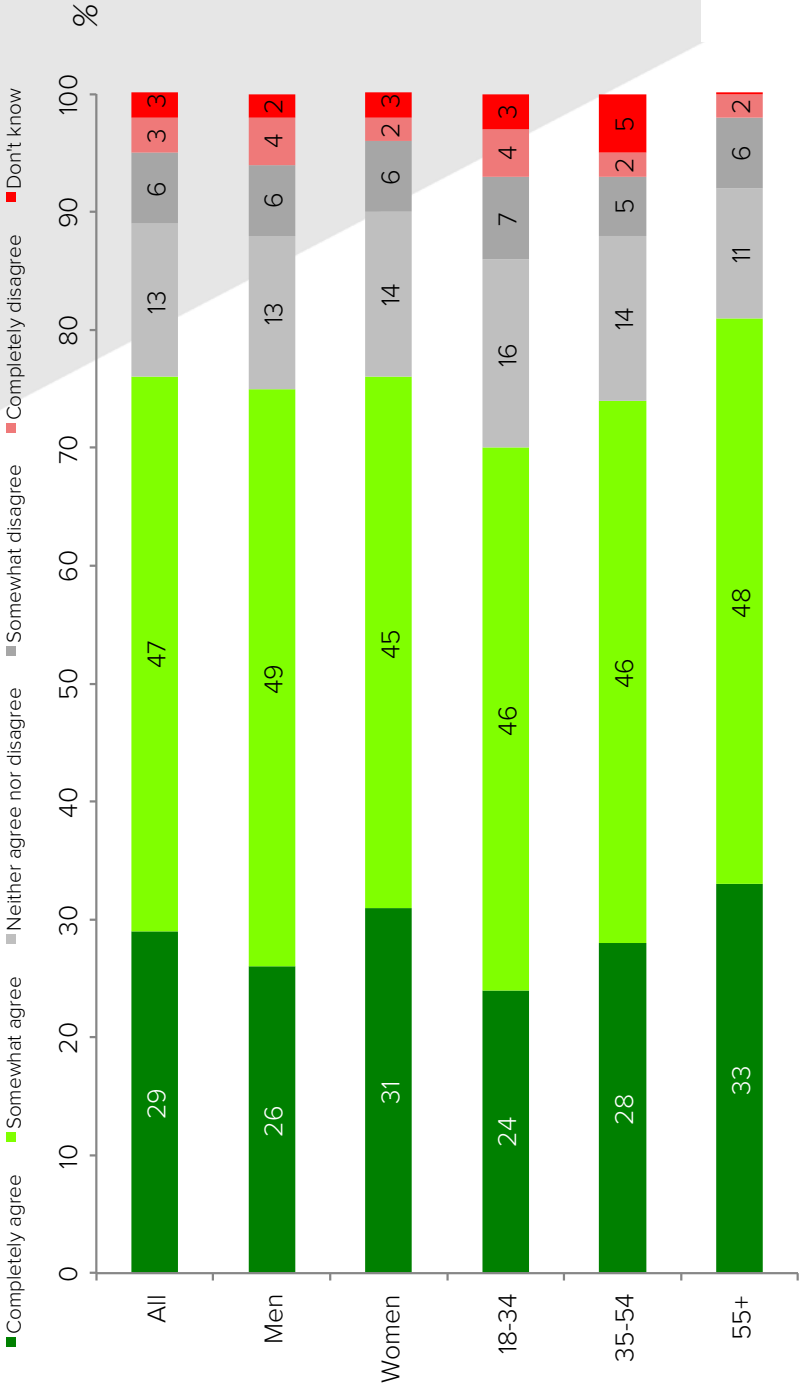


Base: 1000
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS

Q. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following:

The family is not always valued in today's society



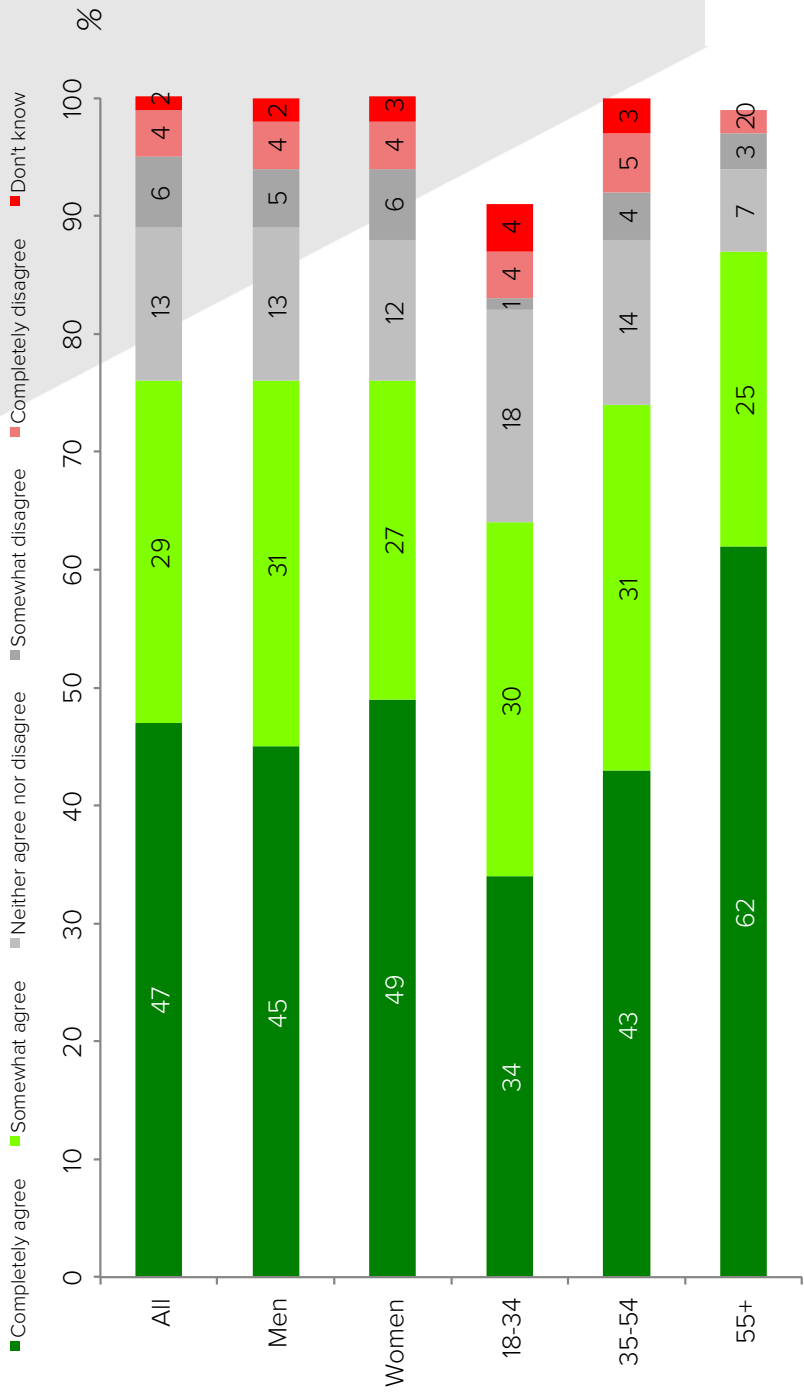
Base: 1000
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)



AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS

Q. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following:

More importance should be given to teaching British values in our schools

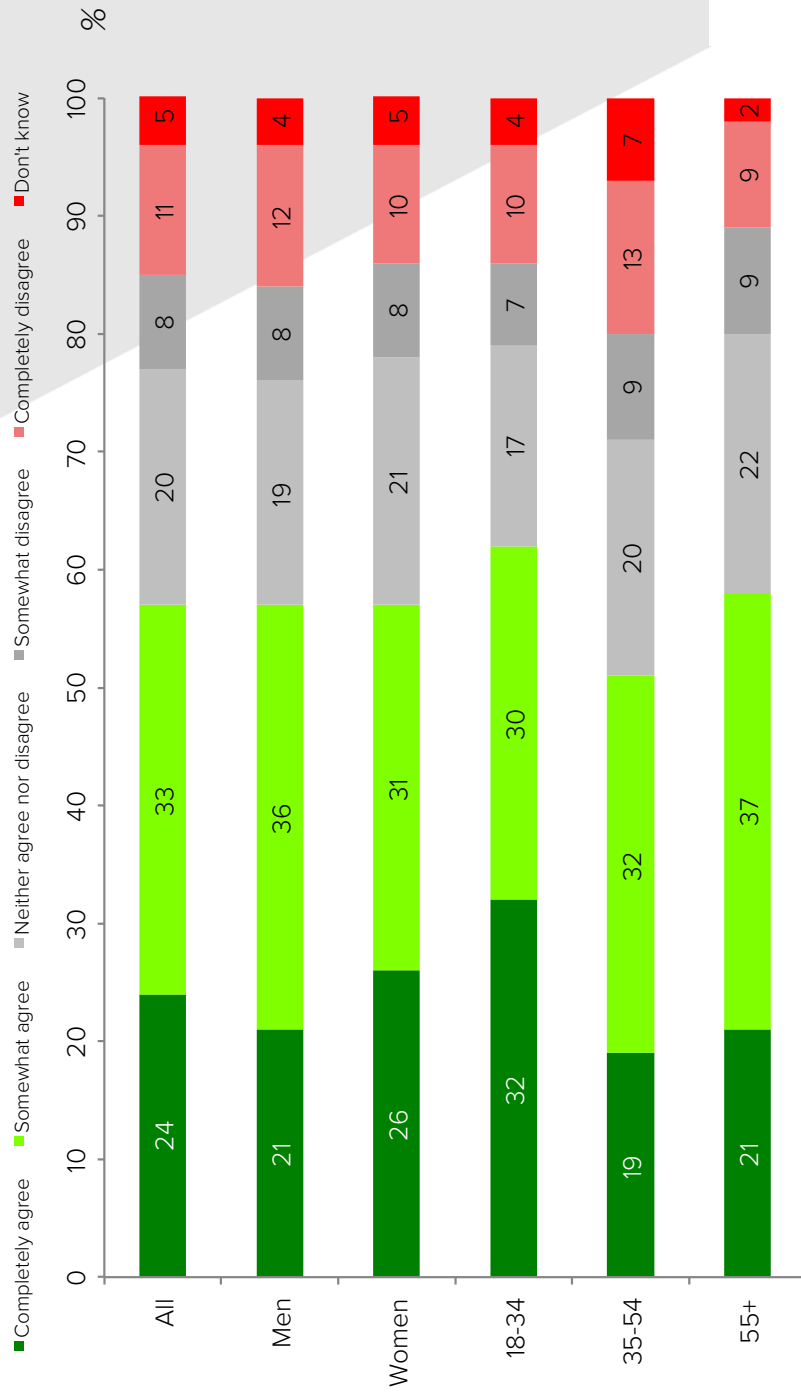


Base: 1000
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS

Q. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following:

More support should be provided to immigrants to help them integrate in to their community



57% agree that more support should be provided to immigrants to help them integrate in to their community

Base: 1000
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

THE CHALLENGES FAMILIES FACE

Q. In your own words, what do you feel are the main challenges facing families today?

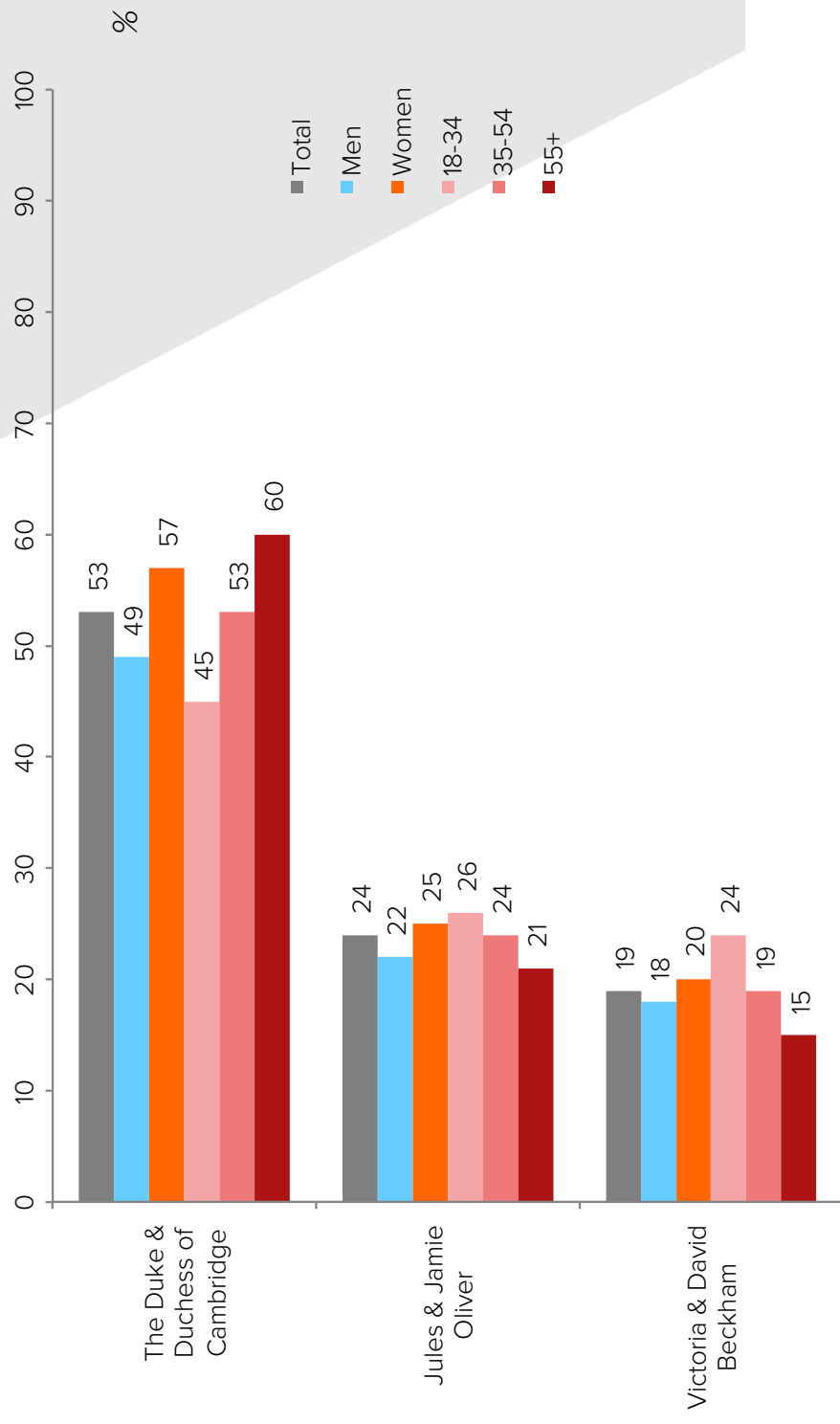


Money, finances, cost of living	26
Employment opportunities	8
Communication/lack of time together	7
Fragmentation caused by internet	6
Work/life/family balance	6
Housing	5
Education	4
Broken homes/divorce	4
Social media	4
Lack of respect	4
Immigration	3
Consumerism/materialism	3
Poor government	3
Lack of discipline	3
Other	24

ROLE MODELS

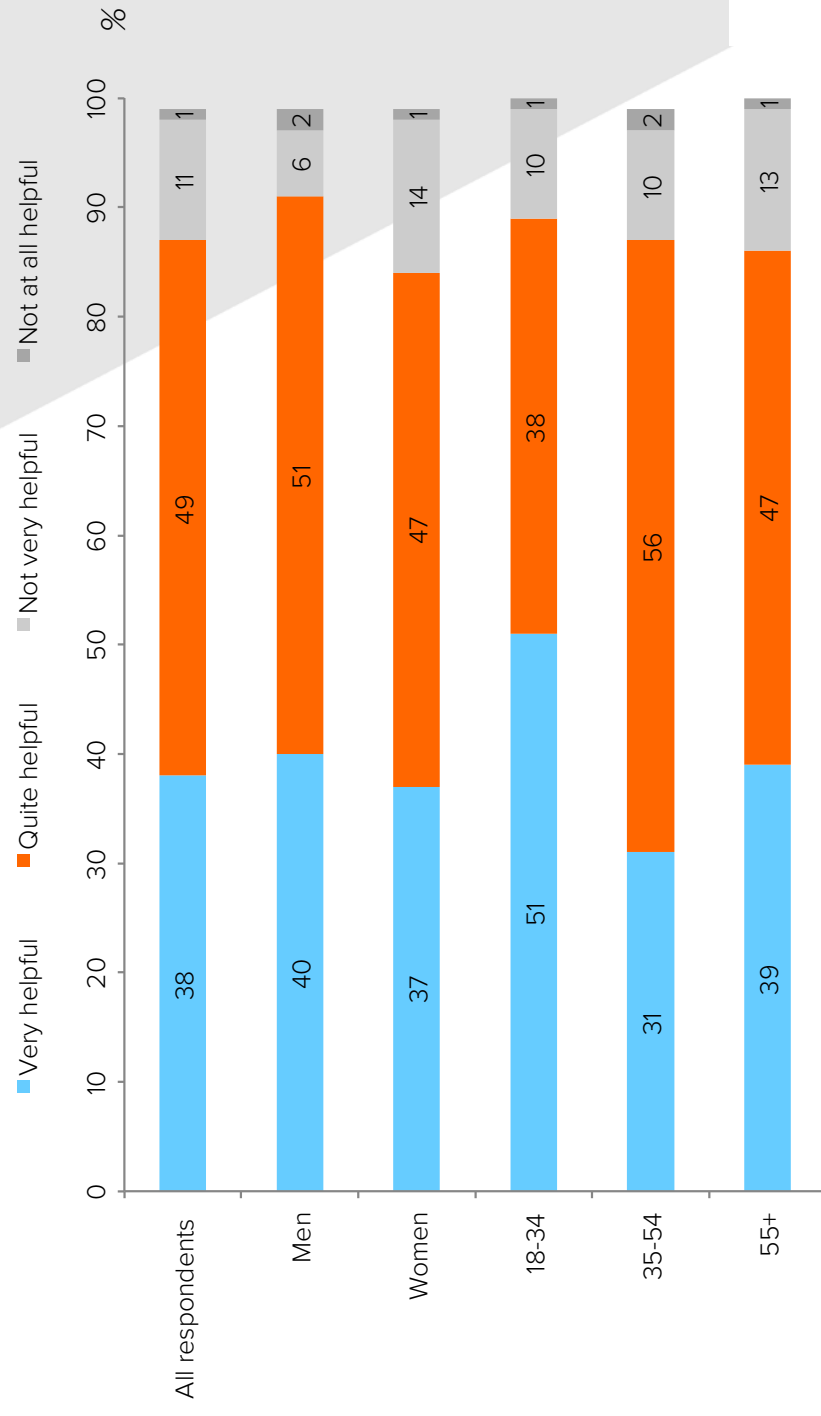
Q. Which, if any, of the following people make for good role models for families in today's society?

53% of respondents believe the Duke & Duchess of Cambridge make for a good role model for families today



USEFULNESS OF ANTENATAL CLASSES

Q. (IF ATTENDED AN ANTENATAL CLASS) Was the antenatal class helpful?

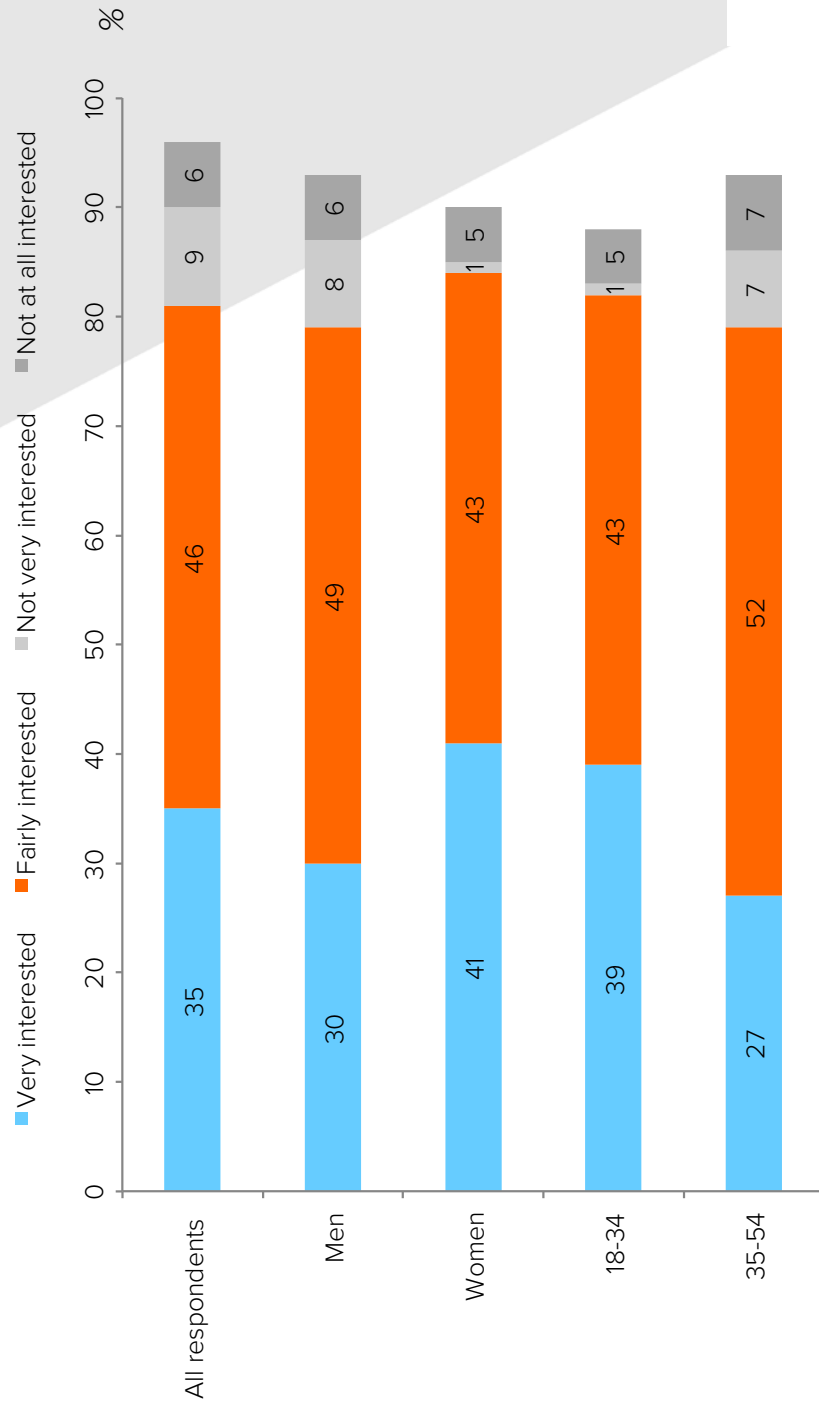


**87% of those who
had attended an
antenatal class said
they found it
helpful**

Bases: 350 / 129 / 221 / 71 / 135 / 144 (those attending)
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

INTEREST IN PARENTING CLASSES

Q. (IF PLANNING A BABY IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS) Would you be interested in attending a parenting class?



Bases: 283 / 145 / 138 / 194 / 84 (those planning a baby)
(figures may not add to 100% due to rounding)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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