

Guidance for Head Teachers and school staff: How to Support Pupils' Parents

Date: 6th December 2011



Introduction



teacher support network

This guidance has been drawn up by Family Lives and Teacher Support Network

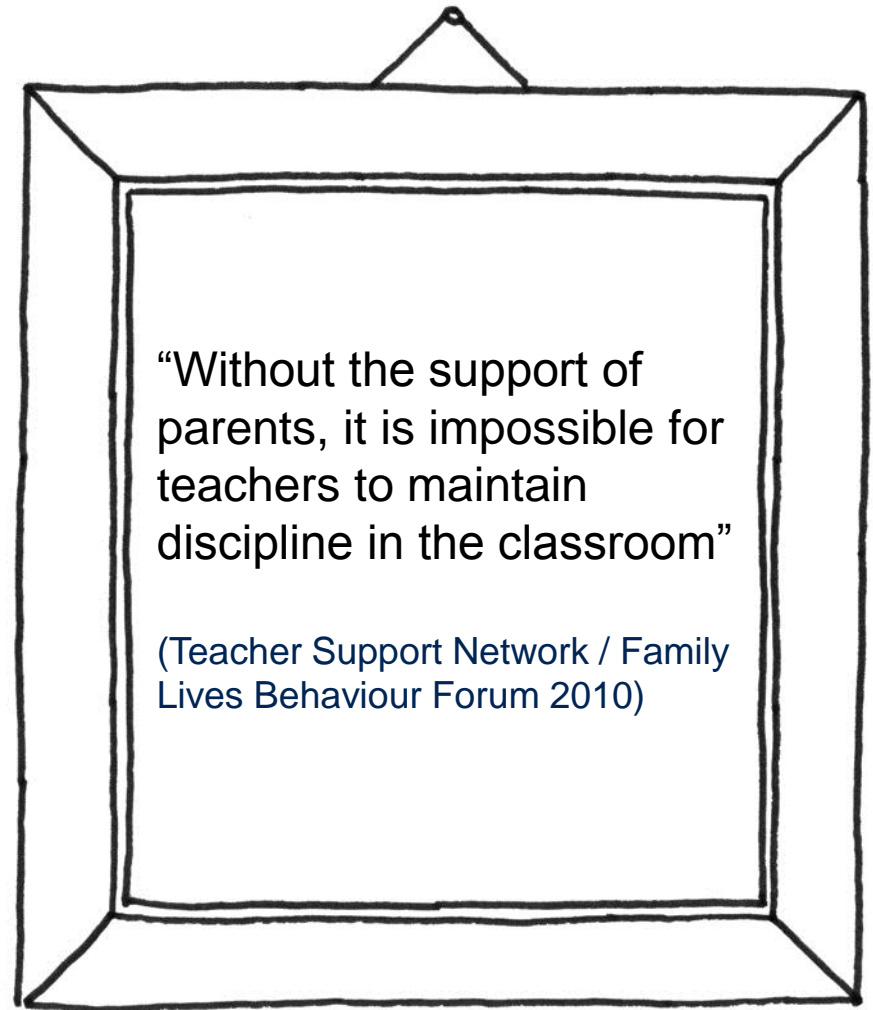
- As a teacher you will know that pupils can be better educated if they receive consistent support, guidance and discipline at home and at school, and for this to happen, parents and teachers have to be well supported.
- Teachers and pupils' parents can sometimes find their relationship difficult, burdensome or stressful, and yet both share a fundamental interest in a pupils' development. This research-based leaflet summarises what you can reasonably do as a teacher to ensure that pupils' parents get the support they need to be as helpful as possible in and out of school.
- Strong leadership in this area is important. In the Ofsted framework introduced in January 2012 one of the criteria for assessing the quality of leadership in and management of a school is: Engage with parents and carers in supporting pupils' achievement, behaviour and safety and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Why care about support for pupil's families?

Teachers tell us that parental engagement is vital

Chances are that you already know what it is like to engage with parents who are in need of support. 90% of teachers who responded to a 2011 survey by Teacher Support Network and Family Lives said that there are families with common parenting problems among the pupils in their school.

If left unresolved, these problems will almost certainly impact on you and your work, as comments like this show:



Why care about support for pupil's families?

Do you know where to signpost pupils' parents for support?

- Where parents are left in need of support, this can impact directly or indirectly – via their child – on you. If you can help to ensure that parents are supported, they will be better equipped to work well with you.
- You may already be a great source of help to pupils' parents, but a 2011 survey by Teacher Support Network and Family Lives found that less than half of teachers know where to find family and parenting help for parents. Teachers are very aware that pupils' parents need support, but few have the information required to refer parents to appropriate services.

Working with both parents

“There are some families who are never there and usually they are the ones we need to talk to”

Teacher Support Network / Family Lives teacher survey 2011

Working with both parents

- It can be understandably difficult to forge a strong working relationship with all of the parents and carers in your school community, but this is something that schools are generally obliged to do. Of course, it is also in the best interests of pupils, who will benefit educationally if all parents and carers are supporting their schooling.
- Unless there is a relevant court order limiting their involvement with their child, parents who do not live with their child, but who contact a school directly to make a request, have:
 - the right to receive information from the school (such as pupil reports);
 - the right to participate in activities (such as voting in elections for parent governors);
 - the right to be asked to give consent to activities (such as school trips);
 - the right to be told about meetings involving their child (such as a governors' meeting on their child's exclusion).
- Schools can just contact the parent with whom a child resides on school days regarding day-to-day issues, but you should take care to involve all parents unless there are clear reasons for not doing so.

Tip 1. Use the support that is available to you.

Check school policies for information and guidelines on referrals, and visit the websites for [Family Lives](#) and your Local Authority to find out which services are available in your area. Utilise the help offered by Parent Support Advisers and other locally-provided services with expertise in parenting and family issues. Share parental engagement work with a pupil's tutor or subject teacher respectively, and use administrative support to help you to get in touch with all parents whenever appropriate.

Working with both parents

You may well have witnessed first-hand what many studies have shown: that both parents' perception of their role in educating their child is critical to their child's educational success. Parents' and teachers' attitudes toward each other can hinder efforts to educate a child, so it is essential that the whole school team works collaboratively with all parents so that everyone understands what they need, what they can offer and what they can build on together

Barriers to parental engagement

- Parents' evenings, as well as termly and annual reports, are commonly felt to be effective in ensuring good relations between teachers and pupils' parents, but it is vital that schools do not stick to these strategies alone. Whilst they can be very effective, parents' evenings may deter parents with particular work-life commitments or skills shortages, such as someone who works evening hours, someone who is illiterate, or someone who does not speak English as a first language. Furthermore, parents who did not experience an enjoyable school life themselves can be reluctant to take part in school events, particularly those similar to the ones they experienced in their own childhood. Overall, research shows that parents are more likely to engage in their child's learning if they are able to take part in more informal, personalised communication with schools that provides all parties with positive as well as negative feedback where possible.
- In addition to parents' evenings, teachers have reported success from offering parents videos of lessons (with appropriate permissions), encouraging pupils to exchange knowledge between home and school, using pupils' home language, and coffee mornings and events to celebrate pupils' achievements. Dialogue with parents may help you and your school to develop innovations like these, but remember to continue efforts to engage with parents who are negative or unresponsive too.

Tip 2. Understand parents' needs,

as well as those of school staff, and tailor engagement methods accordingly. It will probably help if you can ensure that parents are able to engage with you and the school in a variety of ways, at a variety of times during the day as well as evenings. Have formal and informal two-way dialogues with parents that involve giving and receiving affirming and adjusting feedback.

Tip 3. If relations with a parent are not good,

consider options that may help them to understand your perspective. Ideas that some teachers have tried successfully include: enlisting parents to help in the school, inviting them to attend lessons, having more parental engagement at open evenings, holding 'meet the tutor' evenings, and involving them in Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs).

Tip 4. Don't give up.

If you feel that you have tried everything that you reasonably can to engage a parent, ensure that someone else in a different role tries instead. Some schools have achieved success by using more parent-focused non-teaching personnel to act as intermediaries. Social workers, parent governors, Parent Support Advisers, home school liaison workers and translators can all help to kick start a positive relationship between a parent and the school.

Your wellbeing

Although efforts to collaborate with pupils' parents are very important, it is imperative that you do not allow parental-engagement efforts to impact negatively on other elements of your work or your own wellbeing. This is a difficult balance to strike, but the following tips from teachers may help...



Tip 5. Raise any unresolved concerns

with your line manager or mentor. They may be able to give helpful advice for a difficult case, and they may be able to help with other common issues, such as lack of time, resource or training on how to work well with pupils' parents.

Tip 6. Look after your personal safety at all times.

If you experience any verbal or physical abuse, or feel at risk of being a victim of it, tell a member of staff who has the responsibility to help. If you envisage that a difficult meeting with a parent is coming up, seek advice from any of the professional sources mentioned above and consider methods that will help you to secure progress, such as setting ground rules at the meeting, or having another member of staff or an adviser present.

Tip 7. If you are unsure about any of the above suggestions,

if you have already tried them without success, or if you feel that your health and wellbeing is at risk of being negatively affected, contact [Teacher Support Network](#) for free coaching and counselling and contact your union for advice on any working-conditions issues.

Call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on

England - 08000 562 561 Wales - 08000 855 088

or [email](#)

What to do if you suspect a pupil's family may need extra support - Safeguarding

- The safeguarding and protection of pupils is everyone's responsibility, including teachers. The new Teaching Standards, which apply from April 2012 to all teachers regardless of career stage, state that teachers must have 'regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provision'. This point will be used alongside others to inform judgements on teacher misconduct cases.
- Although guidelines have changed in the past and will again in the future, you and your colleagues should have received training on child-protection issues as well as special needs identification and support in accordance with current statutory guidelines. Your school should have a child protection policy for you to look at, and a senior member of staff with responsibility for child protection who you can consult. All teachers should be able to recognise the signs of child abuse and neglect, or harm to a child, and know how to cooperate with other professional agencies if any cases arise. Current guidelines also state that whenever someone is being recruited to work in a school, at least one member of the recruitment panel must have completed online training on Safer Recruitment. It is vital that you familiarise yourself with and adhere to all statutory guidelines that apply.

Tip 8. Quite simply, it is vital

that you regularly familiarise yourself with and adhere to all statutory guidelines and school policies that apply. Check for child protection and pupil support updates on the [Department for Education website](#), and contact a colleague, the Department or your union if you have any concerns or queries.

Tip 9. Take the initiative

to suggest a comprehensive range of training for teachers on safeguarding, in order to ensure that all staff are confident in acting in accordance with the latest guidelines. Look at resources such as [Ofsted's 2011 'Safeguarding in schools: best practice'](#) report for further ideas.

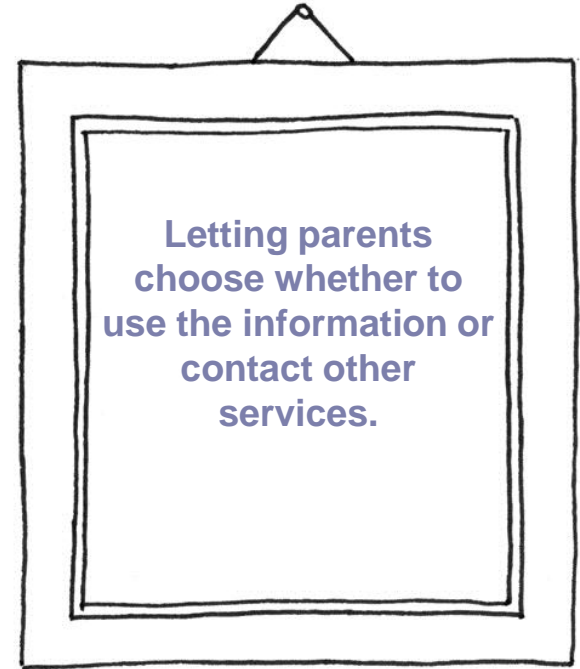
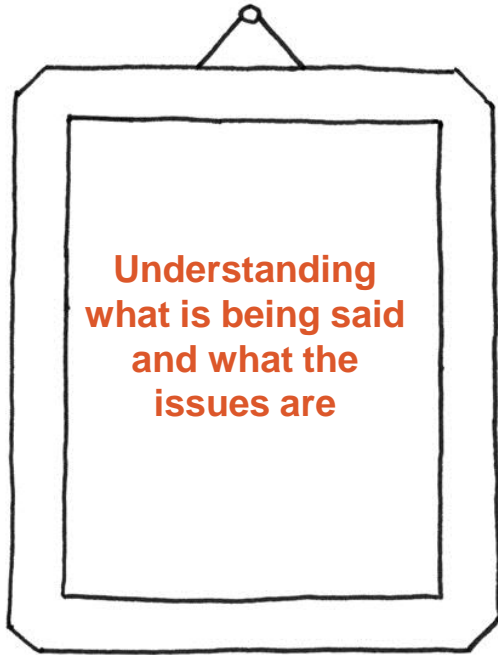
Tip 10. If you come across a case of concern

but do not feel confident in what to do, or feel that your own health and wellbeing could be at risk, seek advice from your line manager or another colleague with relevant responsibilities, seek practical support from your union and do not hesitate to seek emotional support from [Teacher Support Network](#)

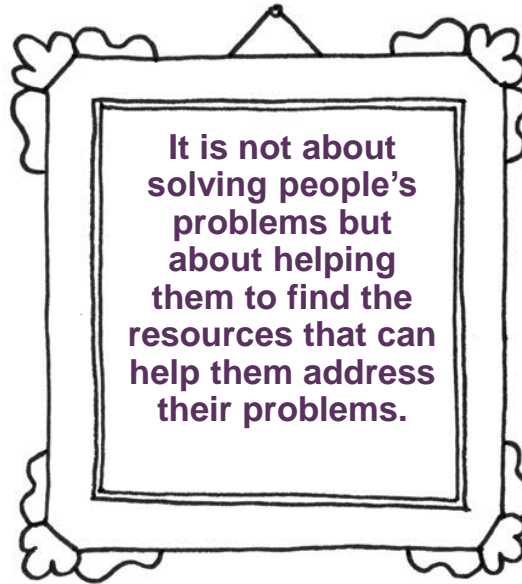
What can you do if you feel a family have unmet family support needs?

The following tips and information have been brought together to help give you the tools and the confidence to get help and support for pupils' families who you believe may need it.

Effective Communication and Signposting: What is it?



Effective Communication and Signposting: What is it not?



Who will benefit?

- Parents will be enabled to make better use of the appropriate resources in their community
- Primary Health Care Team, schools and professionals will have an extra resource and will provide options for families for whom referral to health services is not appropriate.
- Signposting helps professionals deal with parents in an informative, knowledgeable and sensitive way.
- The benefits of signposting have been shown to include more appropriate services to families and greater satisfaction with the service your own agency provides.

What it involves

The key skill in signposting is listening attentively to the whole content of what is being said or requested, checking back that you have understood the issues correctly and recognising the limits of your own expertise, so that you can:

- identify issues that can be handled by external agencies
- refer appropriately
- provide the right information and resources available from your agency

Tip 11. Use the LEAP method

Listen. When parents are upset, they want to be heard. They may raise their voices to be heard. So listen -- actively!

Empathise. Even if you think the parent is wrong or misguided, their feelings are real. Acknowledge that they are upset. Eg: I'm sorry this happened or I'm sorry you feel that we made a wrong decision or I can see you're very upset. These statements help the parent feel like you are hearing their complaint.

Ask. Ask questions eg: Is there is anything else you want me to know? or Do you have anything else that you are concerned about? Those questions help a parent feel you care and are concerned, and that their feelings and viewpoint are valued.

Problem Solve What do you want me to do? or What do you think I should do?

Tip 12. Useful phrases for introducing signposting

It sounds like you are (concerned, struggling to cope, upset, angry, confused...) about (specific issues). Maybe it would help to talk to somebody about it? I could give you a contact number/ website/ phone number to call if you like.

I'm not qualified to deal with some of the issues you've raised, but I could give you the contact number of an organisation that should be able to help.

Would you like to talk to someone from another organisation that should be able to help?

You've mentioned a lot of issues. I can help with /some of them, and I have some phone numbers of organisations that could help with the others. Would you like those numbers?

Tip 13. Points to remember

Some of the organisations you are signposting to can be difficult to contact, either because of limited opening hours or because they are very busy. It is important to remember this when you signpost to them.

Remember that you are not trying to solve family members' problems, just referring them to another agency that can offer information, advice or other types of assistance.

Useful Organisations

This section offers suggestions for organisations you may wish to signpost to, with information about how they can help and how to contact them.

Useful Organisations

Family Lives

CAN Mezzanine
49-51 East Road
Old Street
London
N1 6AH

Tel: 0808 800 2222 (Parentline)

Opening Times: 24 Hours

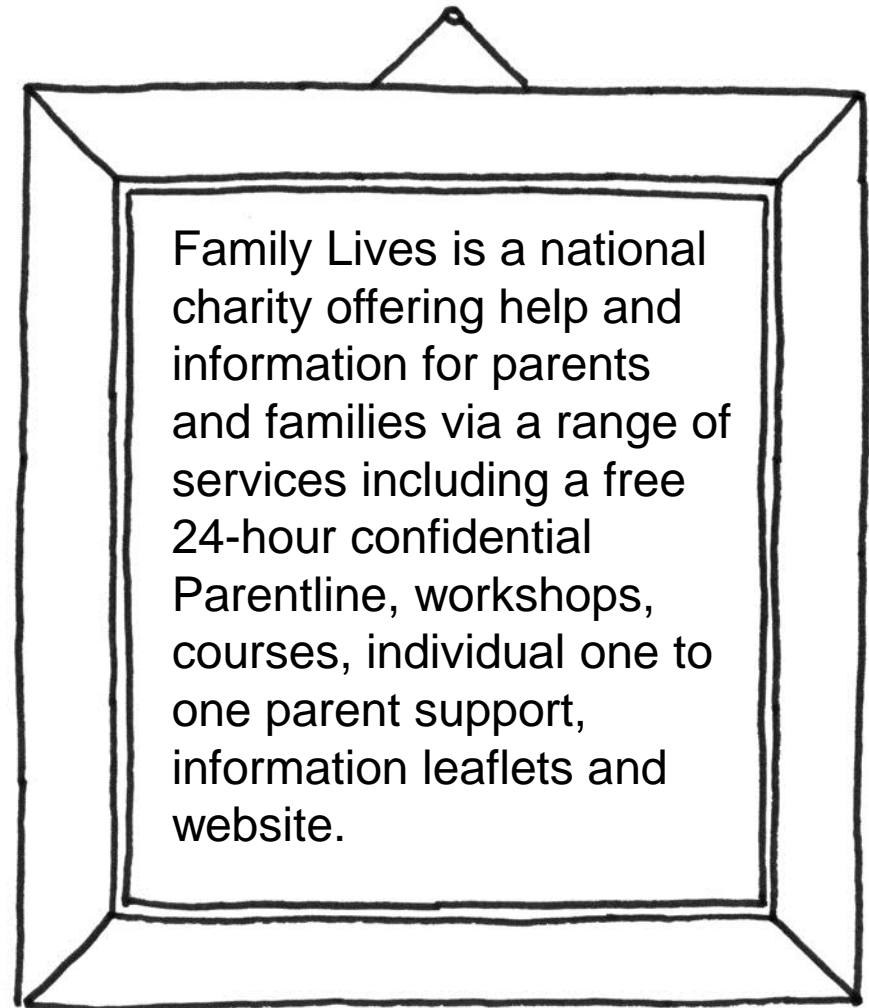
Text phone: 0800 783 6783

Tel: 0207 5503 3080(Office)

Opening Times: Mon to Fri 9am - 5pm,

Website: www.familylives.org.uk

Email Helpline: parentsupport@familylives.org.uk



Useful Organisations

Relate

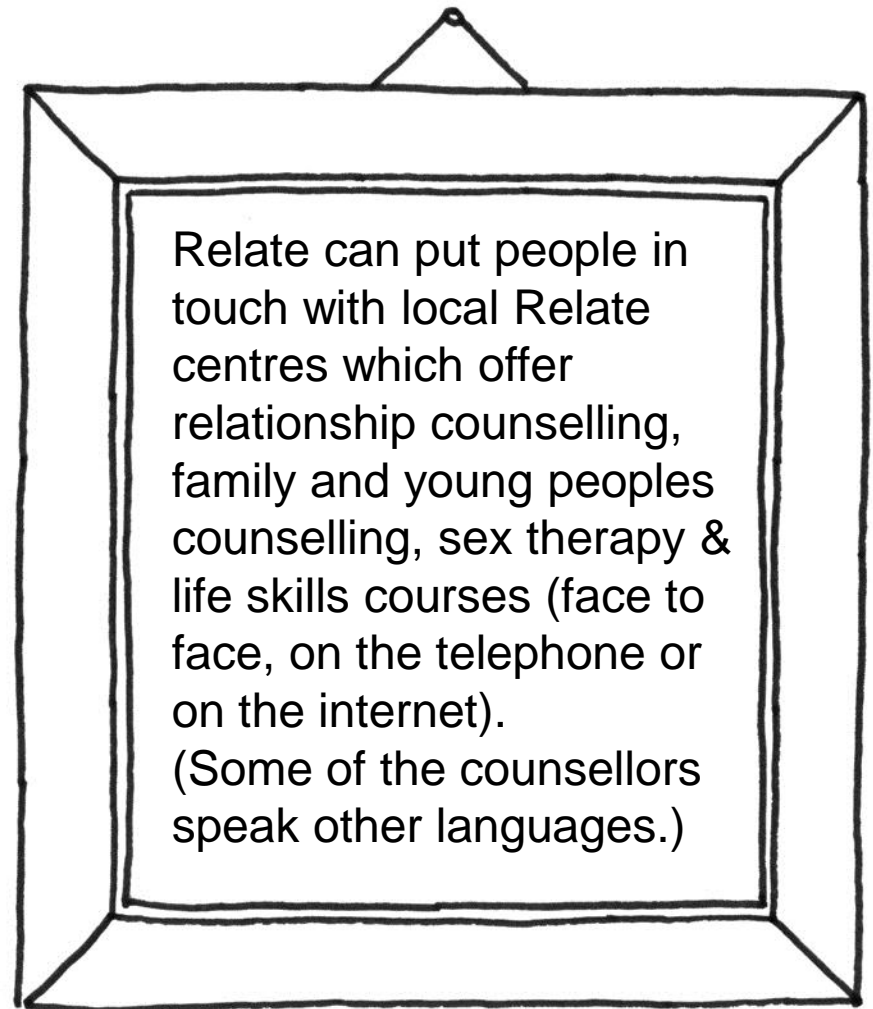
Premier House
Carolina Court
Lakeside
Doncaster
DN4 5RA

Tel: 0300 100 1234 Central office and to find nearest office and to book an appointment for counselling by phone.

Opening Times: Mon to Fri 9am - 5pm

Website: www.relate.org.uk

Email: enquiries@relate.org.uk



Useful Organisations

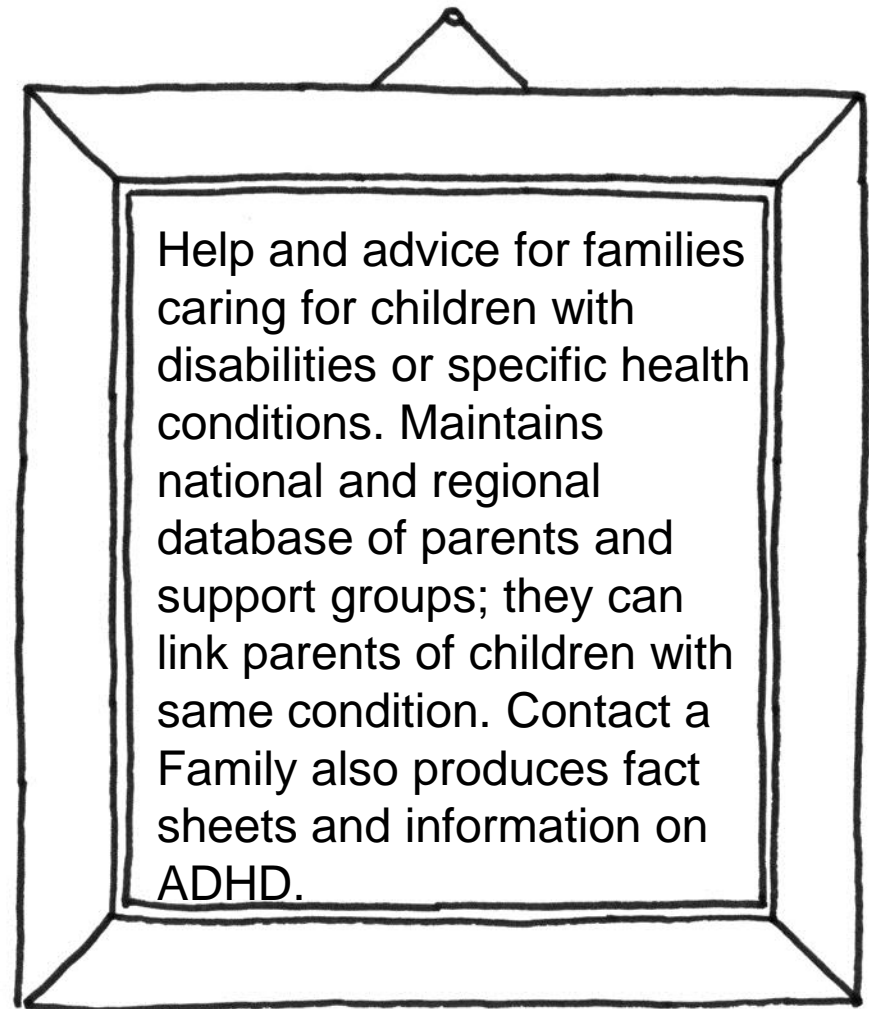
Contact a Family

209-211 City Road
London
EC1V 1JN

Tel: 0808 808 3555 (Helpline)
Text phone: 0808 808 3556 (Helpline)
Opening Times: Mon to Fri 10am - 4pm & Mon
5.30pm – 7.30pm

Fax: 020 7608 8701
Admin Tel: 020 7608 8700
Opening Times: Mon to Fri 9am - 5pm

Website: www.cafamily.org.uk
Email: helpline@cafamily.org.uk
Email: info@cafamily.org.uk



Useful Organisations

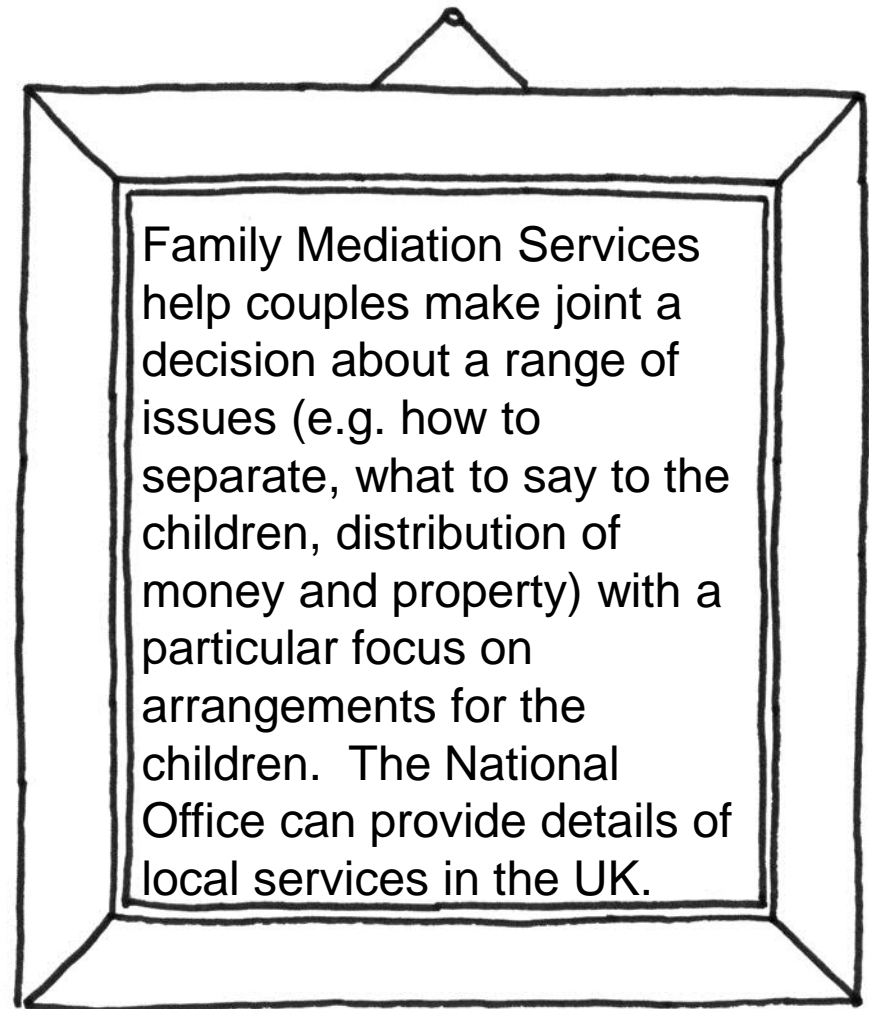
National Family Mediation

Margaret Jackson Centre
4 Barnfield Hill
Exeter
Devon
EX1 1SR

Tel: 01392 271 610 (General Enquiries)
Opening Times: Mon to Fri 9am - 5pm

Website: www.nfm.org
Email: general@nfm.org.uk

National Family Mediation is the umbrella organisation for local family mediation services for separating or divorcing couples.



Useful Organisations

Families Need Fathers

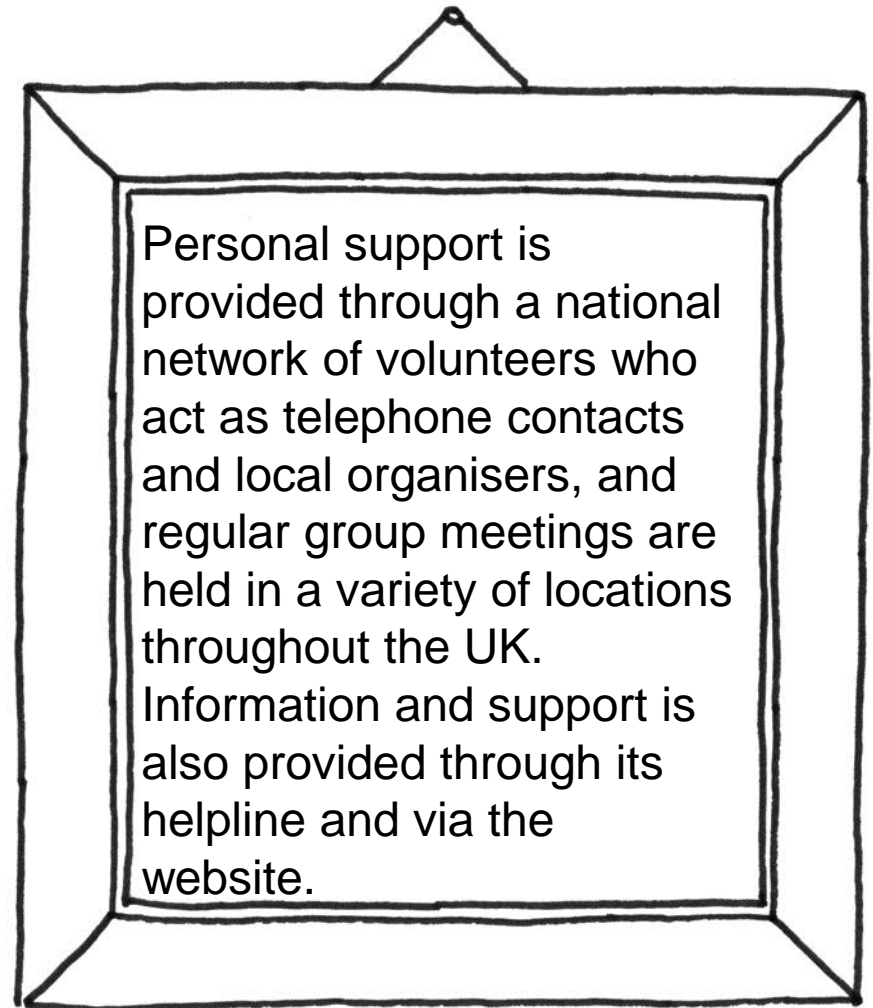
134 Curtain Road
London
EC2A 3AR

Tel: 0870 7607 496 (Helpline)
Opening Times: Mon to Fri 6pm - 10pm

Tel: 0207 613 5060 (Office)
Opening Times: Mon to Fri 9.30-4.30pm
Fax: 020 7739 3410

Website: www.fnf.org.uk
Email: fnf@fnf.org.uk

FNF is a registered charity providing information and support on shared parenting issues arising from family breakdown to divorced and separated parents, irrespective of gender or marital status.



Useful Organisations

Family Rights Group

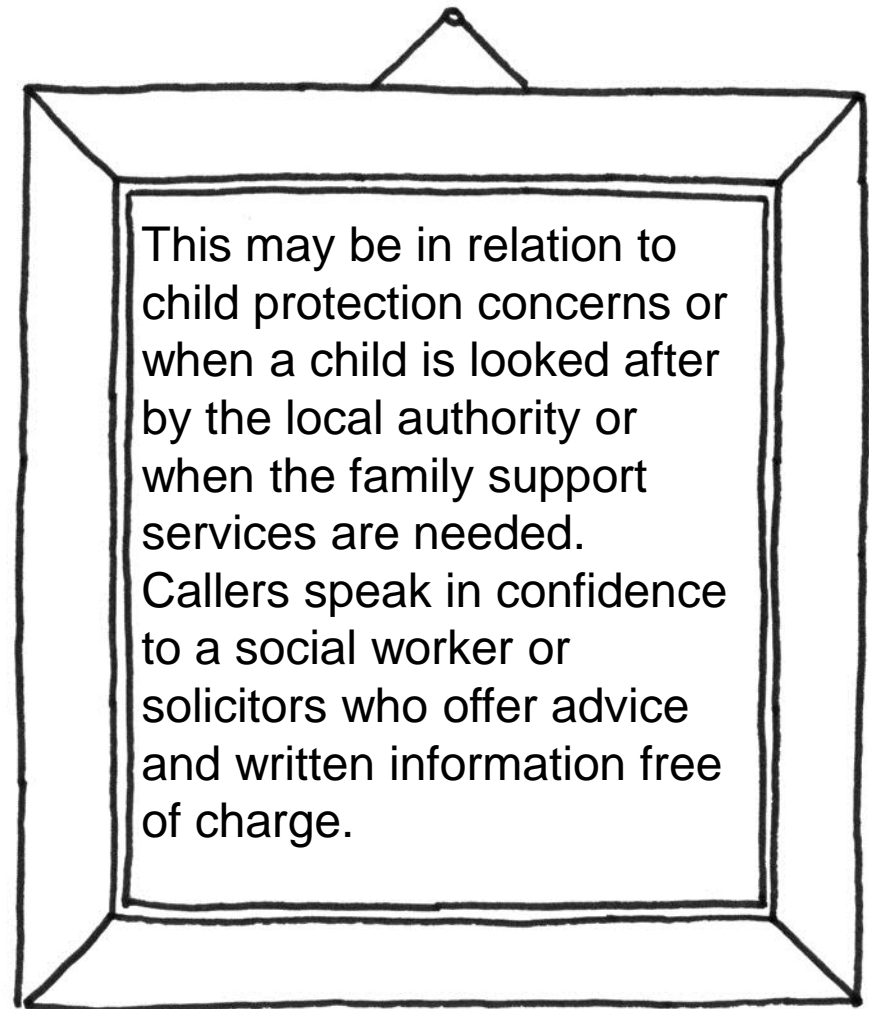
The Print House
18 Ashwin Street
London
E8 3DL

Tel: 0808 801 0366 (Advice Line)
Opening Times: (Mon to Fri 10am – 3.30pm)

Tel: 020 7923 2628 (Office)
Opening Times: (Mon to Fri 9.30am - 5pm)

Website: www.frg.org.uk
Email: advice@frg.org.uk

Offer advice and information to families when social services are involved with a child in the family.



Useful Organisations

Home Start Central Office

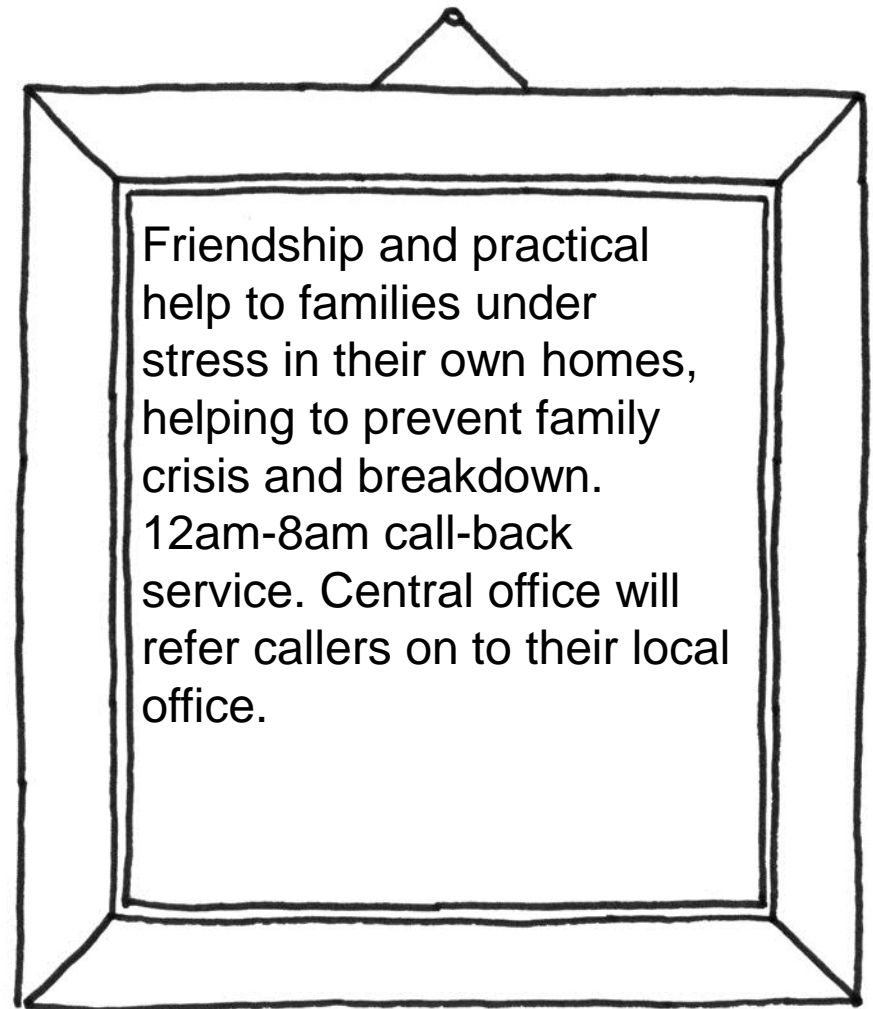
2 Salisbury Road
Leicester
LE1 7QR

Tel: 0800 068 6368 (Info Line)
Opening Times: Mon to Fri 8am - 8pm & Sat 9am
– 12pm

Tel: 0116 233 9955 (Office)

Website: www.home-start.org.uk
E-mail: support@home-start.org.uk

A voluntary organisation in which volunteers offer regular support, to families with children under 5 years of age only.



Useful Organisations

Parenting UK

Unit 431 Highgate Studios
53-79 Highgate Road
London, NW5 1TL

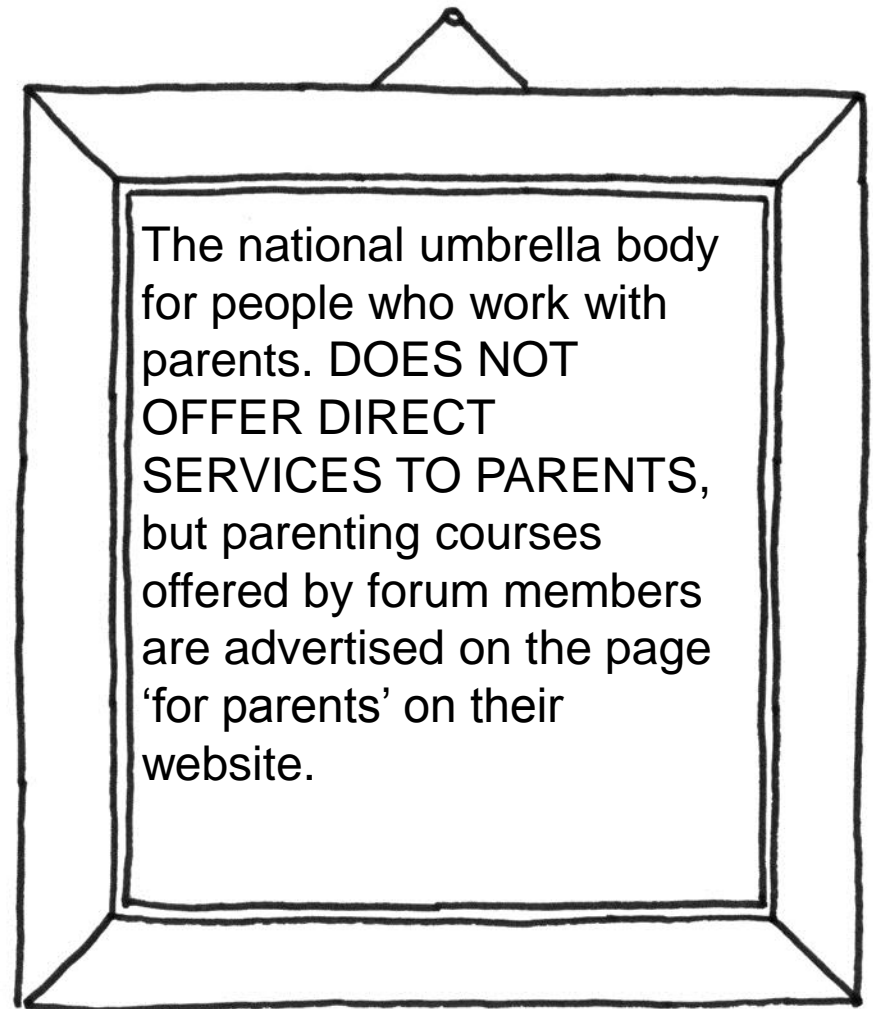
Tel: 020 7284 8370

Tel: 020 7284 8389 (Information Service)

Opening Times: Mon to Thurs 9.30am - 5pm

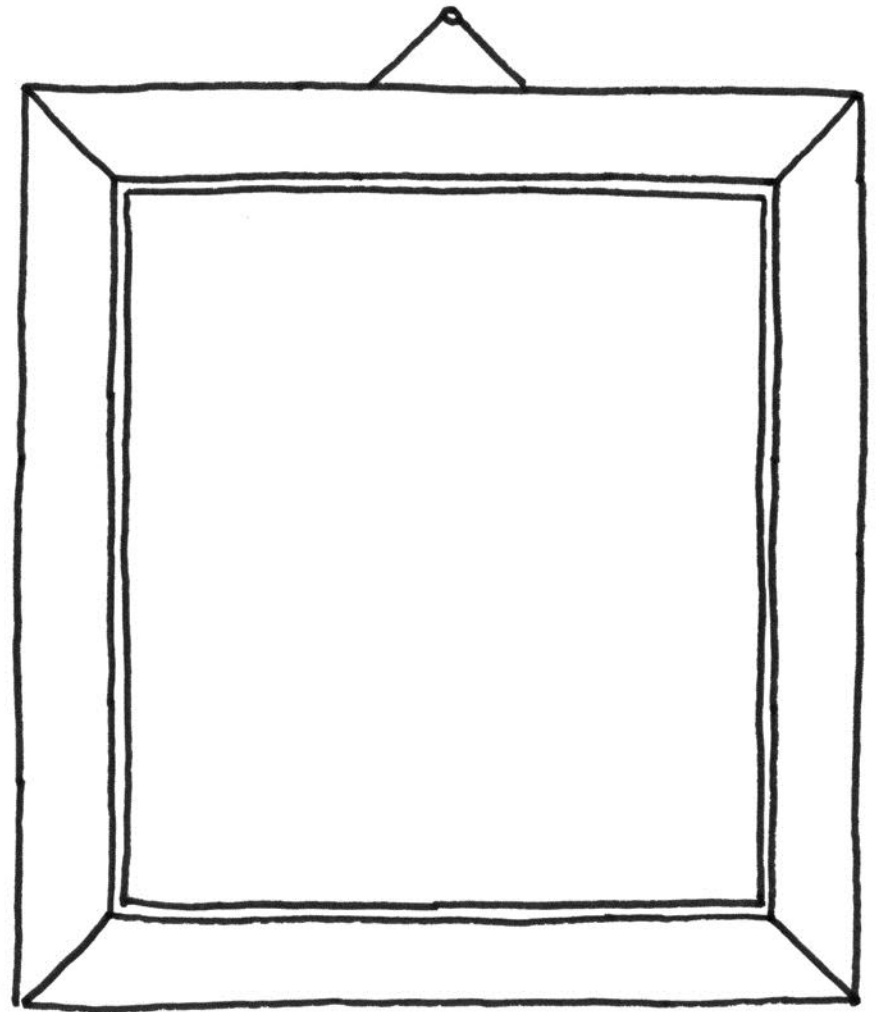
Website: www.parentinguk.org.uk

Email: info@parentinguk.org

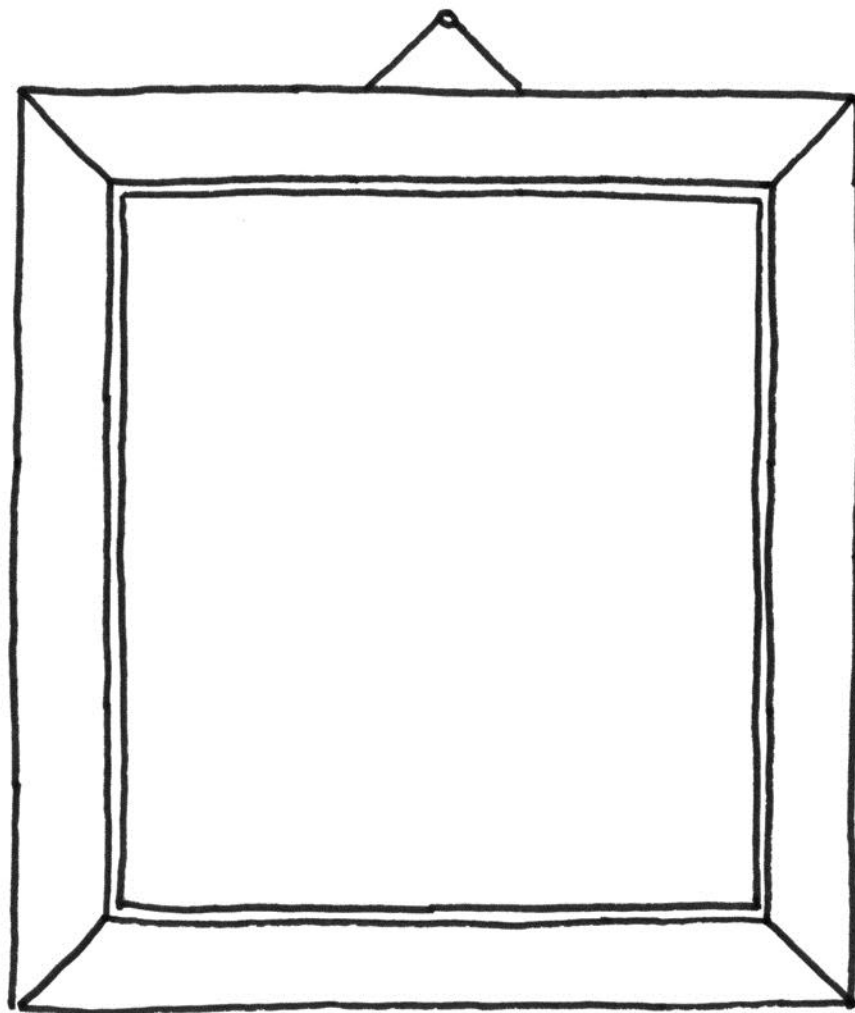


In Your Area

Use the following pages to add information about locally available support for parents



Local Support



Local Support

