



**FAMILY LINKS**

The Centre for Emotional Health

# Impact Report 2022

25

1997 YEARS 2022

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## We are delighted to share our 25th anniversary Impact Report

On 24th February 1997, Family Links was established to encourage and teach nurturing and relationship skills through schools, families and the wider community. We are proud that over the last 25 years Family Links has established the Centre for Emotional Health, and has reached over 1.1 million families, working with more than 700 schools to deliver emotional health training for staff, parents, and pupils. More recently, we've been able to work with staff in challenging work settings such as the NHS and in social care.

When I look back at the 25 years since Family Links was founded as a charity, I am conscious of the thousands of lives that have been changed for the better by the power of the Nurturing Programme. As one parent said:

***"I have recently finished one of your 10-week courses for parents and have found it life-transforming. Although I did the course for the sake of my children, I have been amazed at the usefulness of all the material in every area of my life. I have used the negotiating strategies with great success when dealing with business conflicts, have relied heavily on the book in trying to deal with a teacher being mean to my daughter at school, and feel that what I've learned has even helped to turn around a failing marriage."***

Many people have contributed to our journey over the past 25 years; there have been triumphs along the way and a number of challenges, not

least the recent pandemic. As we enter the next 25 years, we are conscious that the emotional health assets developed through the Nurturing Programme have never been more relevant.

Since our last Impact Report in 2020 a lot has changed, including the ways in which we deliver training, and how our programmes are used in the community. The pandemic has posed a unique challenge to our usual methods of data collection and this report therefore focuses on case studies from some of our key stakeholders, alongside some of our more standard measures of impact.

We are very grateful to all the Family Links-trained parent group leaders, teachers, and others who support the emotional health and relationships of parents and children every day, and the funders who continue to support our work.



**Sarah Darton, CEO**







# OUR HISTORY

Over the past 25 years, our understanding of mental and emotional health has advanced hugely. When Family Links began, parenting wasn't a verb and the term emotional health wasn't widely used or understood. At that time, the focus of most parenting programmes was on managing children's behaviour. The Nurturing Programme was pioneering in its understanding that children need so much more than this if they are to live healthy and fulfilled lives.

American child psychologist Dr Stephen J. Bavolek originally developed the Nurturing Programme based on his research into family interactions, where he identified four destructive parental behaviour patterns. The Nurturing Programme was developed to address these, and uses the following four constructs as the building blocks of healthy relationships: self-awareness, appropriate expectations, empathy and positive discipline.

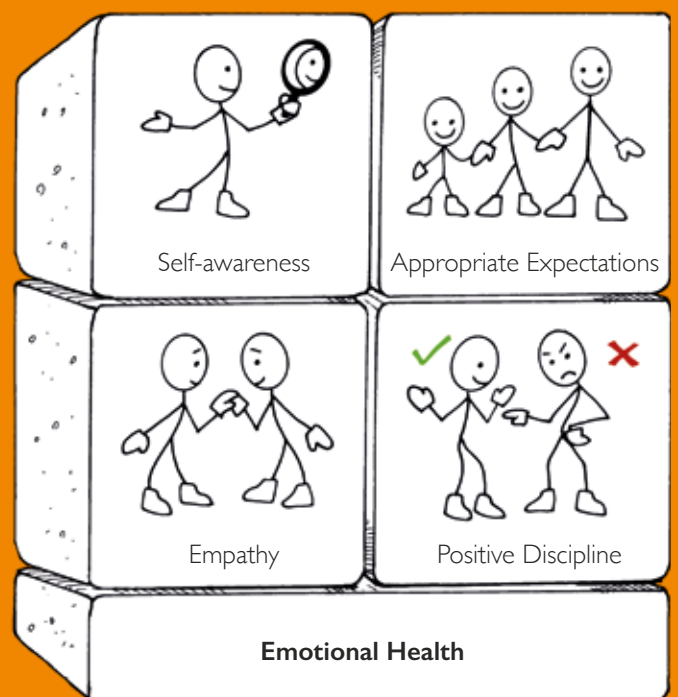
As a charity, we began with the aim of improving and enhancing family relationships by training practitioners to deliver the Nurturing Programme

to parents. We also recognised the importance of children receiving consistent messaging about feelings, relationships and behaviour at home and at school, so we developed a parallel school circle time curriculum.

Over the years, countless parenting practitioners and school staff told us that the Nurturing Programme approach had not only transformed the relationships of their parents and pupils, but that it had improved their own personal relationships and their relationships with colleagues.

We came to realise that while everyone's foundational relationship is with their parents or caregivers, the things we need to have healthy and fulfilling relationships are universal. This can be a relationship between a parent and child, but it can also be between a teacher and pupil, or between a manager and employee. This is how we arrived in our present day form as Family Links the Centre for Emotional Health, a national charity dedicated to the promotion of emotional health at home, at school, and at work.

**Although the four constructs were originally developed within the context of parenting, as our understanding of the importance of emotional health has grown, we realised these constructs are the building blocks for all healthy relationships, and therefore fundamental to good emotional health.**





# WHAT IS EMOTIONAL HEALTH?

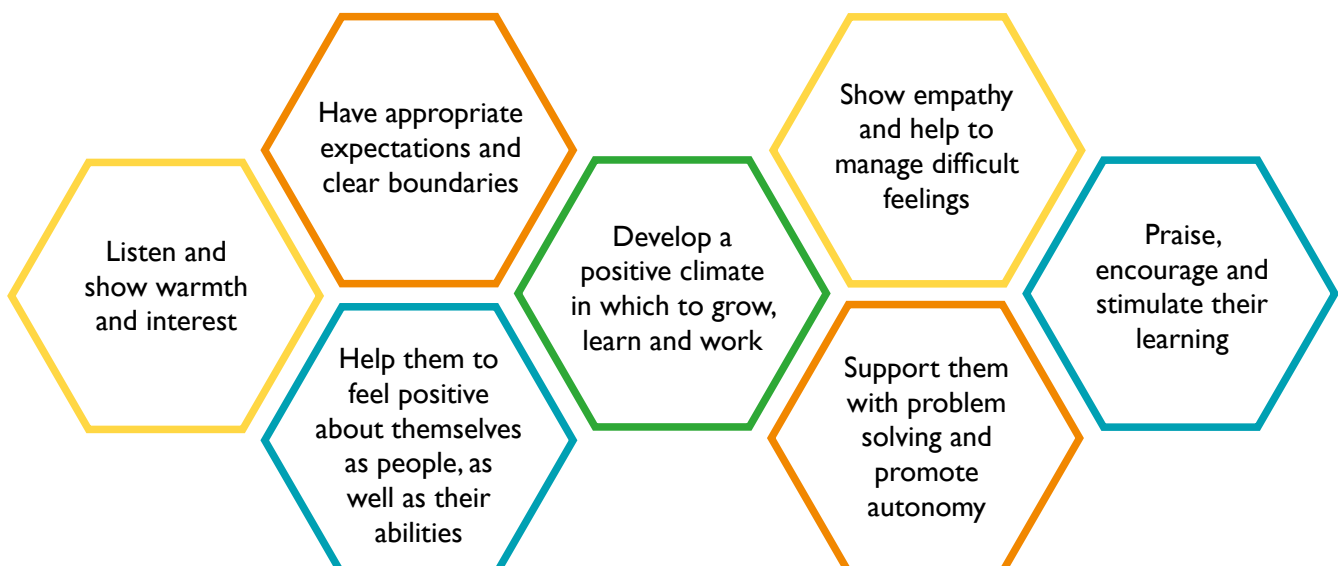
There is often confusion about the term emotional health and how it is different from emotional wellbeing and mental health. We define our emotional health as our ability to look after ourselves, to manage ourselves in times of challenge, and build and sustain healthy relationships with those around us.

This ability provides the foundations for good mental health and wellbeing, as well as resilience, and motivation. We recognise that parents, teachers and all adults need good emotional health for themselves as individuals, and to enable them to create an emotionally healthy culture at home, at school or at work.

## Key features of emotional health:

- Our emotional health isn't fixed, but develops and changes throughout our lives. It can be improved through targeted support or developed within the context of responsive relationships.
- Our emotional health can be enabled or disabled by our relationships at home, at school or at work. Likewise, we all contribute to the emotional climate of our families, schools and workplaces.
- Emotional health is founded on an asset-based model. This means that strategies and approaches that support good emotional health are universally beneficial and relevant for everyone, at any time of their life.
- Developing good emotional health is protective and bolsters resilience. Having good emotional health is not about being happy all the time, it is about being able to navigate challenges when they arise and sustain a stable sense of self.

## Adults and children need others who will:



## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

In order to build and sustain healthy relationships, we need to provide responsive relationships to others. This is a key component of good emotional health. We also know that a stable, responsive environment is essential for children to develop the foundations of resilience and good lifelong emotional, mental and physical health.<sup>i</sup>

Therefore, in order for the next generation to thrive, we need to support the adults in children's lives to develop their emotional health assets so they can provide responsive relationships to the children in their care. This creates healthy intergenerational patterns of relating, benefiting families, communities and ultimately society.

16

Emotional health at age 16 is a stronger predictor of mental health and life chances at age 30 than either demographic or socio-economic factors.<sup>ii</sup>



Children and adults with high resilience resources are half as likely to have a diagnosable mental health condition.<sup>iii</sup>

10

High social and emotional skills at age 10 predict positive adult outcomes, including life satisfaction, wellbeing, labour market success, and good overall health.<sup>ii</sup>



The most important predictor of adult life satisfaction is emotional health, both in childhood and subsequently.<sup>iv</sup>



Better self-regulation is strongly associated with mental wellbeing, good physical health and health behaviours, and socio-economic and labour market outcomes.<sup>v</sup>



**"Having responsive relationships with adults, growth-promoting experiences, and healthy environments for all young children helps build sturdy brain architecture and the foundations of resilience."**

Centre on the Developing Child,  
Harvard University<sup>vi</sup>

## OUR VISION

**For every child and adult to realise their individual potential, enjoy positive relationships, and live healthy and fulfilled lives.**

## OUR MISSION

**To deliver training programmes, based on the Nurturing Programme, that build and sustain emotional health and relationships in families, schools and workplaces.**

## WHAT WE DO

We offer high-quality training and resources that build the emotional health capabilities of professionals working with families, school staff, and employees in the workplace.

All of our training and resources are underpinned by the **Nurturing Programme**, and provide the understanding, skills and ability to support the development of good emotional health.

Our approach understands behaviour in the context of feelings and relationships, and our training develops self-awareness, empathy and self-regulation, supporting people to build and maintain positive relationships.

Based on 25 years of delivery and research, we have developed a range of parenting programmes, school and workplace training that support the development of good emotional health.

## HOW WE DO IT

Our training, programmes and resources provide a foundational approach to building and sustaining healthy relationships with those around us whether at home, at school or at work.

### **Our practical and interactive training:**

- models specific relationship skills through its delivery
- explores and practises strategies to develop good emotional health
- recognises the importance of experiential learning in creating healthy habits of relating

By building the emotional health skills and capabilities of adults across different settings, we can create emotionally healthy communities where both adults and children can thrive.



**Our team of clinicians and freelance trainers model the Nurturing Programme approach when they deliver our training to...**



Parenting practitioners,  
family support workers  
and social workers



All school staff, including  
senior leadership, admin staff  
and caretakers



Senior leadership teams,  
managers and employees



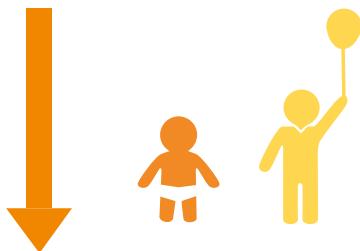
Who deliver our parenting  
programmes and approach in their  
work with parents and carers



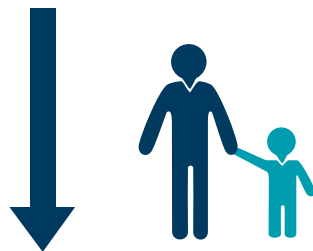
Who use our approach in  
their daily interactions with  
pupils and via our social-  
emotional learning curriculum



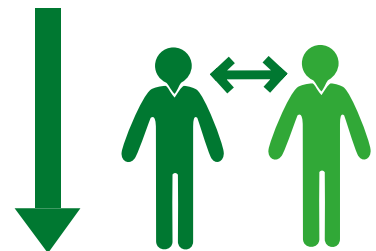
Who model our approach  
with their colleagues, external  
clients and supply chain



Parents and carers then model  
our approach and strategies with  
their families and children



Pupils and school staff then  
model our approach with  
parents, carers and each other



Employees then model our  
approach at home with their  
families



 **AT HOME**



 **AT SCHOOL**



 **AT WORK**

## OUR REACH

*over the past 25 years*

We have trained over

**35,000**

professionals working  
with families, school staff, and  
employees in the workplace

We have sold over

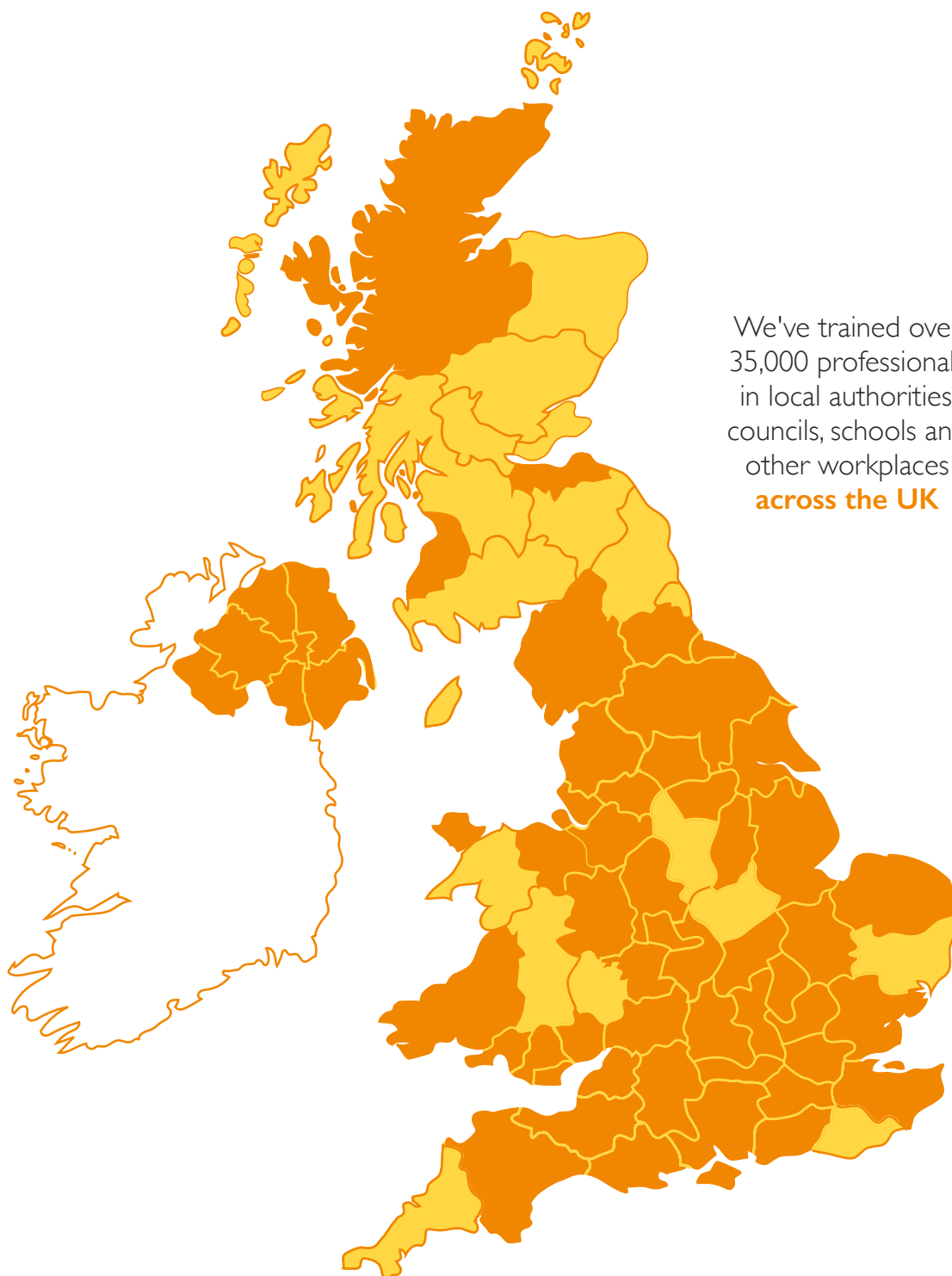
**210,000**

copies of our best-selling  
parenting guide  
*The Parenting Puzzle*

We have reached over

**1.1million**

parents and children  
at home and  
at school\*



# OUR REACH

*in 2021*



We trained over



practitioners



We trained over



school staff



We trained over



employees



We reached over



parents and carers



We reached over



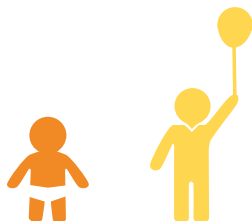
pupils



across the UK in



organisations



...and we reached over



children



...and we reached over



teachers via our online module



...including an



Trust



# OUR IMPACT AT HOME

We offer training courses for professionals to deliver our parenting programmes in a group setting or one-to-one, and also to develop their knowledge and skills in specific areas. All our training courses enable practitioners to work more confidently and effectively with parents and carers.

Our programmes provide a consistent approach to work with parents across 0-19 services, with programmes suitable from pre-birth to 19 years. They are all underpinned by the **Nurturing Programme** and work to develop an understanding of behaviour in the context of feelings and relationships. The universality of the Nurturing Programme approach will result in a calmer, happier home life for all parents, and for some it will repair the impact of damaging early relationships and allow them to rebuild their relationship with their own children.

On the following pages you will see examples of our impact, both for the practitioners we train and the parents they deliver our programmes to.

## Our parenting programmes:

- **10-week Nurturing Programme** is our core parenting programme. Adapted versions are available for parents of children with additional needs, for parents in prison, and with Islamic values for Muslim parents.
- **8-week Welcome to the World Programme** is our antenatal programme which supports expectant parents.
- **4-week Talking Teens Programme** explores the importance of parents for teenagers and focuses on strategies to reduce conflict.
- **4-week Parenting Puzzle Workshops** provide strategies to support young children's development and school readiness.
- **2-week Playful Parenting Workshops** help parents to understand the value and importance of play.

All of our parenting programmes improve the emotional health of both parents and children, strengthen family relationships, and develop an authoritative approach to parenting, combining parental warmth with clear boundaries. They provide an opportunity for parents to increase their self-awareness and to think about the relationship they want with their baby, child or teenager, giving them the strategies and ideas they need to achieve this.



## Our other training:

- ◆ **Working 1:1 with Parents** prepares practitioners to work with parents using the Nurturing Programme one-to-one .
- ◆ **Working with Families with Multiple Challenges** equips practitioners to work effectively with families who are experiencing particular challenges in their parenting and to support them in developing and maintaining a consistent and positive approach under difficult circumstances.
- ◆ **Parenting, Culture & Religion** enables practitioners to build successful relationships within a diverse community, and **Working with Muslim Families** is for practitioners working directly with Muslim families to develop positive relationships.
- ◆ **Understanding Teenagers** provides practitioners with an opportunity to understand teenage brain development and the adolescent developmental process.
- ◆ **Stress and the Brain in Children and Teenagers** helps practitioners to understand more about what children and young people need from adults to help them to manage stress.

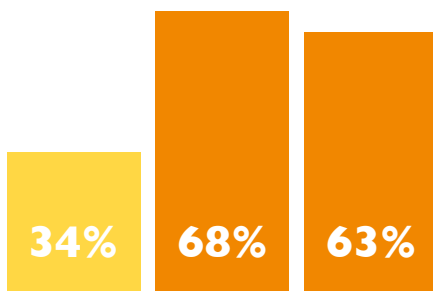


# OUR WORK IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

## Manchester City Council Early Help Parenting Team

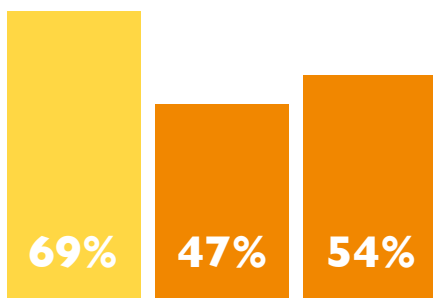
The Early Help Parenting Team is based within Manchester's Early Help Hubs. In addition to our usual pre- and post-group measures, the team in Manchester collects follow-up data 3 months after parents have completed the **10-week Nurturing Programme**. This has allowed us to assess whether any improvements in parental mental wellbeing and children's behavioural and emotional difficulties are sustained in the longer term.

We evaluated data from 28 parent groups held between January and December 2021 and found statistically significant improvements both at the end of the group, and at the 3 month follow-up, supporting the long-term outcomes articulated in our theory of change, which can be found on our website.



Before the group, 34% of parents had a wellbeing score above the British norm. After the group, this increased to 68% of parents. <sup>1\*\*</sup>

At the 3 month follow-up, 63% of the parents still had a mental wellbeing score above the British norm, showing a sustained improvement compared to baseline scores. <sup>2\*\*</sup>



Before the group, 69% of children were identified as having clinical levels of behavioural and emotional difficulties. After the group, this decreased to 47% of children. <sup>3\*\*</sup>

At the 3 month follow-up, 54% of children were identified as having clinical levels of behavioural and emotional difficulties. Again, showing a sustained improvement compared to baseline scores. <sup>4\*\*</sup>

A key question asked of many parenting programmes is whether the positive changes seen at the end of a parent group are sustainable in the longer term. These data shows that the statistically significant improvements achieved in parental mental wellbeing and children's behavioural and emotional difficulties at the end of the course were maintained 3 months after the end of the programme.

# OUR WORK IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

## East Riding of Yorkshire Children's Centre Team

At the start of the pandemic, the Parent Project Officer for East Riding got in touch with us to think about ways in which they could continue to use their Nurturing Programme skills during lockdown, when they could no longer offer face-to-face parent groups.

In discussion with Family Links, agreed content from the **10-week Nurturing Programme** was compiled. The team in East Riding went on to develop a system for working 1:1 with parents using email, video and telephone calls. This allowed them to carry on their important work throughout the pandemic, supporting parents through the unique challenges faced by families during this time.

An important theme of the feedback was the quality of the relationship with the family support worker. As this work was being done one-to-one, family support workers were able to be responsive to individual parents' needs, were able to take more time over certain parts of the course when needed, and arranged calls at times to suit the family.

100%

100% of parents felt they had gained ideas from the programme to help them support their child's behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

100%

100% of parents would recommend the programme to family and friends.<sup>1</sup>

## After working through the Nurturing Programme content:



Children showed an improved ability to talk about their feelings and manage their emotions.<sup>1</sup>



Families felt working through the programme had brought them closer together and made life at home calmer.<sup>2</sup>



Parents and children showed improved self-regulation and self-esteem.<sup>1</sup>



Positive changes in children's behaviour were picked up and noticed by schools.<sup>1</sup>



Parents felt empowered to manage situations differently, having open discussions and negotiations instead of shouting.<sup>2</sup>



Parents found using strategies around praise and boundaries the most transformative in their relationships with their children.<sup>1</sup>



# OUR WORK IN PRISONS

Lyndsay and Hannah both work for Barnardo's in the Mother & Baby Unit at HMP Askham Grange, a women's open prison and young offender institution. They use Family Links programmes and run parent groups with the residents.

"We've both worked for Barnardo's for a number of years and we've had the opportunity to run the **10-week Nurturing Programme** in the community as well as for our service and, at the last count, we've delivered it 10 times. Once we were trained in the Nurturing Programme, we decided: that's it - no more of the other programmes. We were converted because we realised that it wasn't just a parenting programme, it was a relationship programme.

The impact on our residents has been absolutely amazing. From the very get-go, we say, 'Look, this isn't just a parenting programme. This is so much more. This is like a way of life. This is an ethos'. We have had people make life-long friends from attending the parent group. We've had people who literally haven't had places to go after they've been released and, because of those friendships formed during those 10 weeks they've actually been able to stay in each other's houses.

A great part of the programme's success at HMP Askham Grange is because it's about respect and the residents are allowed to have

an opinion in the group. That's quite difficult in the prison setting; they're not really allowed an opinion because they're often seen to be trouble causers or aggressive, when actually they've just got an animated opinion. But we encourage that and that's, I think, one of the most important things they take away.

We have a lot of issues with guilt. The mums feel guilty for being inside, for what their children have been through: the loss of power; the fact that they're not the main caregivers at the moment, that they don't have a say over what happens with their children. We are working with very vulnerable women: a lot of them have been abused in some way. They've often self-harmed. Suicide attempts.

Sometimes they get their family on the outside involved too. They've requested extra *Parenting Puzzle* books and asked about Family Links programmes locally, saying 'I think this would really help them because they're struggling.' So, we have sent books home to make sure that they're also following the same approach so that the children are not getting different experiences from two sets of parents."

**"For some of the women it has been absolutely life-changing. But for all of the women, it has been a very positive experience. We can't sing the praises of the Nurturing Programme and Family Links highly enough."**

Lyndsay, Parenting Programme Co-ordinator  
Barnardo's

# OUR WORK IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

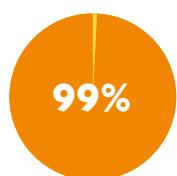
## Buckinghamshire Council Family Support Service

The service co-ordinates Early Help Support across Buckinghamshire, covering universal support through to targeted level 3 work. The service was looking for a consistent approach across their early help provision and commissioned us to deliver training in parent group delivery as well as one-to-one work with parents.

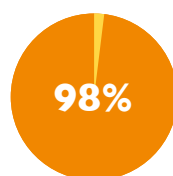
Since the end of 2020, we have delivered 14 training courses and trained 137 staff from Buckinghamshire Council Family Support Service

in our **10-week Nurturing Programme**, **4-week Talking Teens Programme**, **Working 1:1 with Parents** and our **Understanding Teenagers** training. To evaluate this cross-service training, we administered pre- and post-training surveys in addition to following up with practitioners 3 months after they had completed the training.

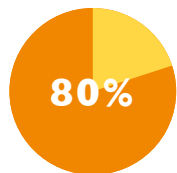
We are now also working with the service to develop a programme to reduce parental conflict called **Keeping the Child in Mind**.



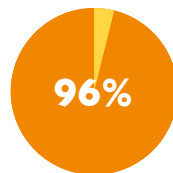
99% of practitioners rated the training as useful or very useful.<sup>1</sup>



98% of practitioners would recommend the training to others.<sup>1</sup>



80% of practitioners felt their understanding of the importance of empathy increased as a result of the training.<sup>2</sup>



96% of practitioners said the training increased their understanding of what young people need from their parents and other adults.<sup>3</sup>

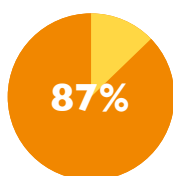
"The difference between the Family Links approach and programmes compared to others? All the parenting courses talk about positive reframing, but Family Links shows you how to do it. It validates people and gives both parents and children the language to talk about their emotions and to recognise their feelings. Personally, it has improved communication in my family. I believe it's also improved my communication as a manager and as a leader."

Jayne Foster, Family Support Service Team Manager  
Buckinghamshire Council

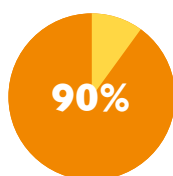




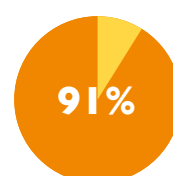
### 3 months after the training:



87% of practitioners felt the training improved their ability to support parents who have issues or difficulties with their children or teenagers.<sup>4</sup>



90% of practitioners felt the training increased their self-awareness as a practitioner.<sup>4</sup>



91% of practitioners felt the training equipped them with more strategies and approaches to work with parents and their children or teenagers.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Feedback from 137 practitioners across all training <sup>2</sup> Feedback from 67 practitioners who trained in Working 1:1 with Parents and to deliver the 10-week Nurturing Programme <sup>3</sup> Feedback from 39 practitioners who attended Understanding Teenagers training <sup>4</sup> Feedback from 79 practitioners across all training

# OUR WORK WITH MUSLIM FAMILIES

**Saqib delivers the 10-week Nurturing Programme with Islamic Values to groups of dads at his local mosque in Rochdale. Here, he discusses the impact the programme has had on parents.**

"I first came across Family Links through the ladies associated with the mosque who talked about this truly remarkable course. In 2016, I became the Head of Education for UK Islamic Mission and I thought, 'You know what? Everyone goes on about the Nurturing Programme,' so I did the training to become a Parent Group Leader and realised it would be such a wonderful thing if we could run this for fathers. I got on to Family Links and we got people from up and down the country to go on this accredited programme to be able to deliver it in mosques. Hand on heart, it's probably the best training course I've ever done.

A dad at one group spoke very little English and after about three weeks he wasn't really contributing, so we had a chat afterwards in private. It was such a new thing for him and he just opened up when we said, 'Look, it's a safe space.' We watched him go from shy, non-contributing to sharing dilemmas at home with his children, allowing the whole group to input. He would come back the following week and say, 'Look, I actually tried this technique...' It was just so good to witness, to experience, and I thought, 'Even if you change that one person, it's been worth it'.

Look at it from a religious perspective; you're sat in a mosque, you're delivering this course and you're talking about taboo subjects like sex and abuse, and you think, 'Wow, this has never been done.' Now we're doing it and people feel comfortable talking about it. We found that the majority of fathers said at the end of the course that they've learnt about themselves, and it's changed them for the better, and how they interact not just with their children, but with their wives, their parents, their friends. And you just think, 'bingo.'"



**Arifa has delivered training to Muslim communities for 10 years and has also helped Family Links to develop the 10-week Nurturing Programme with Islamic Values. Here, she discusses how the programme was developed and shares some of the challenges in delivering training to strict Muslim households.**

"The traditional Muslim upbringing is normally very strict. The father is strict and firm, and whatever the parents say, that's it. There is no listening to children or communicating with them: empathy is nowhere, and expectations are very high around behaviour. It is very gender divisive with boys and girls having certain roles.

When we developed the programme, I researched what Islam says about the rights of children and women and I engaged with the Muslim College in Ealing. This allowed us to share examples of what is written in the Quran and Hadith in relation to empathy and self-awareness, for example. It breaks down the cultural barriers, and it makes them think that what they are practising is cultural, not religious. We use a lot of, 'We are all the shepherds of the family, and we all have to look after each other'. So, it's the father's and the mother's responsibility, not just the mother's. That really helped to engage fathers.

The biggest difference in the parents that come to the course is that they develop awareness about their own feelings, their own emotions, why they get upset or angry. In a South Asian culture, self-awareness is the last thing we are taught because we are taught to give, not to take things. When we do role plays in the programme, it's a huge success and learning point because the parents understand how the children are feeling when they are not listened to. This has a huge impact on the relationships between the parents and the children."

**"I think the Nurturing Programme is about human relationships. When I'm running the programme, we are talking about strategies for the wider family too - for husbands, for mothers-in-law, for relationship building - because it's about emotional health and understanding each other. This programme is about human relationships of all ages: how can we love each other and live happily with each other?"**

Arifa, Trainer and Islamic Values Consultant  
Family Links the Centre for Emotional Health



## OUR IMPACT AT SCHOOL

Our At Home, At School and At Work strands come together in schools, empowering parents, children and staff within a working environment. We know emotional health is built, supported and sustained through our relationships with others, and in the context of the culture in which we live, work and play. Schools are therefore crucial spaces where we can develop the assets of emotional health, as individuals and through shared culture.

In partnership with senior leadership teams, we facilitate a whole school approach to emotional health based on the **Nurturing Programme**. This approach supports schools to build sustainable, enabling environments that empower all members of their community to build resilience and emotional health.

Schools are complex systems navigating multiple challenges. They are also social hubs where we can support children and young people, from all backgrounds and with a breadth of experiences to build their emotional health. We know our emotional health is a strong predictor of life satisfaction at aged 16<sup>ii</sup> and that therefore

supporting and developing emotional health should be a core purpose of the education system. Our approach is foundational, proactive, and focuses on developing positive relational habits within both families and the school context.

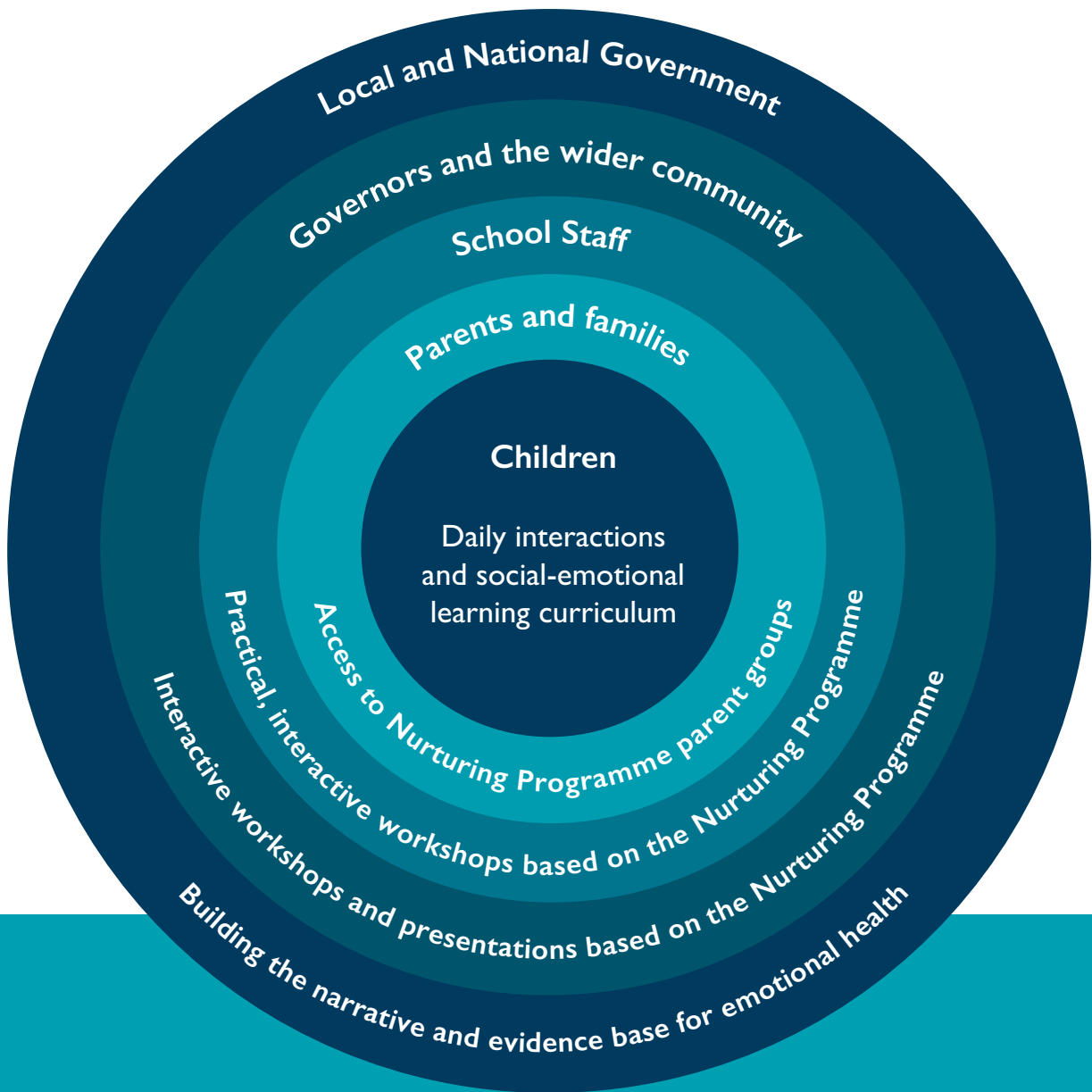
**We know our emotional health is made up of our ability to look after ourselves, manage ourselves in times of challenge, and build and sustain healthy relationships with those around us. Within a school community, the assets of emotional health enable all learners, adults and children alike, to thrive.**

Through the facilitation of reflective workshops for senior leadership and staff, with tools, strategies and resources for developing emotional health, alongside intensive training for relevant school staff to deliver parent programmes, we build the capabilities of adults in the lives of children.

**Resilience is more than an individual trait. It is a capacity which arises through interactions between people within organisational contexts. Teachers' resilience needs to be actively nurtured through initial training and managed through the different phases of their professional lives. <sup>vii</sup>**



## Emotional Health at School: the importance of a universal, whole school and system approach



"Going to this parent group has changed everything for me. Before, my two boys couldn't be in the same room together because it would end up in WW3. But the other week we all sat on the sofa and watched a film together. I never thought that would happen ever, but it did because of me coming to this group. It's completely changed my home life. I honestly don't know where I'd be without this programme. I'd recommend anybody to do it."

Parent, Abingdon Schools Project



# OUR WORK IN SCHOOLS

We recognise that developing an emotionally healthy culture takes time and requires investment and hard work from everyone within a setting. This is why our focus since 2020 has been to work more intensively with fewer education settings over a sustained period of time. This enables us to build relationships and support the ongoing implementation of the Nurturing Programme approach within the school and with their families and the wider community.

## Oxford Schools Project

In our third year of support we continue to work intensively with four schools and two early years' settings in Oxford, providing ongoing CPD and training for all staff, as well as support to facilitate parent groups. Our flexible and responsive approach to working with schools was all the more important through the pandemic, when we were able to facilitate conversations with senior leadership about the challenges they faced, as well as providing online training and hard copies of resources for them to support families.

## Abingdon Schools Project

We are working with three primary schools, one secondary school, a volunteer-run children's centre and a Military Barracks. The aim of the project is to build and sustain the emotional health and resilience of the schools and wider community, including the emotional health of individuals, organisational culture and community relationships. To date, we have provided CPD for staff, training to deliver our parenting programmes, supervision, webinars and online training for all members of the school community.

## Eynsham Partnership Academy Trust

We have recently started working with the Eynsham Partnership Academy Trust, an alliance of six primary schools that have developed a support hub on the site of the old children's centre. The hub is working with a number of Year 1 children at risk of exclusion, supporting them and their families to develop social, communication and healthy relationship skills. Family Links is providing intensive support for staff working in the hub, as well as whole school CPD and training to deliver our parent programmes.

**“If Family Links was compulsory throughout schools, I think pupils' empathy towards others, the way they spoke to each other and the way they treated each other, would improve an awful lot. I think it ought to be compulsory, it ought to be on the curriculum!”**

Staff member, Abingdon Schools Project

# KEY FINDINGS

## School staff views on the impact of working in partnership with Family Links: <sup>1</sup>



Staff felt they had a greater understanding of emotional health and a broader range of strategies and tools for working with children around emotional health.



Teachers recognised the importance of pupils working through their emotions in order to be in a better place to learn, rather than placing all the emphasis on academic attainment.



The increased focus on emotional health and the new strategies that teachers were learning translated into more positive interactions between teachers and pupils.



Using the Family Links approach in school has had a positive impact on school staff personally when interacting with their own family.

## Factors that have enabled impact so far: <sup>1</sup>



Having a shared language around emotional health has enabled more effective communication across the school community.



Giving teachers time and space to reflect has allowed them to consider the strategies and start using them in their own time and in a more natural way.



Family Links resources were seen to provide a useful focal point for families to engage with each other and find improved means of communication.

## After attending a Family Links parent group: <sup>2</sup>



Parents felt that improvements to their self-efficacy and confidence from attending were central to creating positive change within their family.



Parents felt that their existing relationship with the facilitators through the school was essential to them joining the parent group.



The focus group highlighted the importance of the group in providing a non-judgemental space for parents to share and recognise they are not alone.



The opportunity to reflect on how they themselves were parented created powerful paradigm shifts in how parents wanted to parent their own children moving forward.

<sup>1</sup> Findings taken from stakeholder interviews carried out by New Philanthropy Capital in 2021 <sup>2</sup> Feedback from parent focus groups.



# OUR WORK IN SCHOOLS

**Francis is Headteacher of a middle school in an area of significant deprivation. He has worked with Family Links programmes both as a teacher and now as a school leader.**

"Throughout most of my teacher training and early career in education, I've been based in areas of high deprivation. We had very young parents with little emotional resilience, people who experienced domestic violence, people with substance misuse, drug addiction. We had a huge amount of very, very complex needs, and the boundaries that a lot of our children experience at home were so very different to what you might see in other families.

I first came across Family Links programmes when I was a class teacher. I was sent to two days' training, and I remember saying to the trainer "I don't know if this is for me, because I think this approach must be for early years foundation stage children - and I'm a year five and six teacher." At the end of the training, I felt the need to apologise because I was completely wrong. Everything that was being covered was relevant to whatever age group I was working with.

For the first two or three years, my involvement with Family Links was as a classroom teacher. But as I became a school

leader, it became apparent that the school wouldn't ever go anywhere further in an area of such high deprivation, such poor emotional resilience, such high challenges, and complex needs of families. At that senior level you're trying to work out, "How am I going to raise expectations and standards?" But actually, what was important was providing an emotionally healthy environment for children to thrive and succeed in. Subsequently, there wasn't an INSET day when we didn't touch on the power of emotional literacy, and the Family Links approach was the best way of doing that.

Importantly, through using the Family Links approach we were able to provide a haven for pupils - bespoke timetabling of a weekly session where they could speak about their feelings, and we provided children with a language. Family Links simplifies things for those with limited language to "hurting touch, gentle touch, warm and fuzzy, cold and prickly", to give someone who might feel mute in what they're experiencing the words to describe what's happening for them; that ability to offload is hugely helpful."

**"My first impression of the impact of the Family Links approach was realising what it did for staff working in an environment where they were celebrated, and their emotional health was understood. It's about recognising the emotional temperature in your staff team and giving them strategies, because the strategies that you'd use with pupils aren't just unique to children; they're just unique to humans. I couldn't have done the headship without the Nurturing Programme."**

Francis Murphy, Headteacher







# OUR IMPACT AT WORK

As adults we spend a lot of our time working, and the culture that exists in our workplace has a big impact on our lives. When our own emotional health is good, we are able to look after ourselves, manage ourselves in times of challenge, and build and sustain healthy relationships with those around us. It also enables us to support others to make a positive, meaningful contribution to our home and work environments.

We know that organisations thrive when they are emotionally healthy. When employees feel safe and empowered they can also feel free to use their voice, to collaborate well and to innovate. Where high performance is a priority, psychological safety is a prerequisite.

Our **Nurturing Programme** approach offers leaders, managers and teams a chance to reflect together during practical, interactive workshops and to practise strategies and skills which can build and strengthen healthy habits of relating. A sense of belonging, of being valued as an individual, and a sense of self-agency are all crucial to creating an emotionally healthy culture.

Amongst others, we have worked with an NHS Trust and a women's prison over the past year. For many people working on the frontline to support others, it is clear that a supportive, emotionally healthy culture in their place of work is crucial if they are to remain well and feel able to provide the best for the people they are working with.

## Mother & Baby Unit, HMP Askham Grange

In 2021 we delivered an Emotional Health in the Workplace workshop to the Barnardo's team at HMP Askham Grange, who work to support mothers who are in prison with their babies. This team has delivered our Nurturing Programme parent groups for a number of years and recognised the need for them to address their own emotional health as a team after a very challenging two years during the pandemic. Read our case study on page 17 to find out more about their parenting work.

## NHS Trust

In 2021 we were able to continue our work with a large NHS Trust, delivering more workshops for staff to support them with practical ways for building their own emotional health and that of those around them. Read our case study on page 31 to find out more.

100%

100% of attendees said they would recommend the training to other NHS staff. <sup>1</sup>

100%

100% of staff found the training useful in supporting their role as a wellbeing ambassador. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Feedback from 24 NHS employees

**"The topics covered in this training are so important for all aspects of the NHS. It reminded me that we need to stay well in order to look after others. As a result of the training I feel able to encourage my team to speak up, feel listened to and I feel more empowered to help."**

Employee, NHS Trust



# OUR WORK IN THE NHS

**Alenka is a consultant anaesthetist with an NHS Foundation Trust. She was first introduced to Family Links programmes when her children were young. Since then, she has used the Nurturing Programme approach to develop a workplace charter for the Trust's operating theatres, an initiative never seen before in the NHS.**

"I initially came across the Nurturing Programme when my children were young and I did the facilitator training to become a Parent Group Leader. The training was wonderful, completely unlike anything else I'd experienced; it was very experiential. It was done in such a nurturing way, and everything was modelled during the training. It's a lot about communication - about feeling heard and valued - and that's really stuck with me and has been the biggest thing that has changed, the way I interact with people.

It struck me that what the NHS really needed was the equivalent of the Nurturing Programme: an emotional literacy programme for staff. Fast-forward to 2019, and I was invited to be wellbeing lead for our department. I got in touch with Family Links and things suddenly started to come together. We've now run four sets of workshops for staff. They have helped, along with the other wellbeing improvement initiatives, in terms of creating that expectation among staff that wellbeing is now an established part of the general cultural agenda.

At a meeting I flippantly said, "What we need is something like a charter for theatres." I was thinking about the Nurturing Programme family rules. We held a meeting with people of all

grades of seniority and different disciplines from across our theatre systems to thrash out what we'd like to see go into a charter. People felt able to say how it really felt for them, how communication was lacking, and how the impact of one colleague's lack of doing something impacted on them.

We drafted six charter items that represent the full range of concerns. A successfully performing team really does mean the difference between safety and lack of safety, and we're all aligned in terms of what we want for our patients, which is the best care. What we're trying to do with the charter is to make everybody aware of how important it is to think about the team rather than individuals, because nobody can work in isolation. It feels like family, with disagreements and some big ones, but it feels like family, which is great.

I don't know of any other charity or business that does what you do - linking everything up so any professional, parent, or child can experience the Nurturing Programme approach. So when we saw that you were running the workplace programme, we said, "Yeah, we need that."

**"What I would really love to see is emotional health training for all NHS staff, but particularly for team leaders right across the NHS because I think that would be the one single thing that could really start to change things."**

Alenka, Consultant Anaesthetist  
NHS





# OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The three 'systems' of relationships most of us are part of every day are families, education settings and workplaces. We would like to see every child and adult being able to enjoy positive relationships with those around them, so that each person can both contribute to and benefit from an emotionally healthy culture.

The evidence is clear that it is the places and circumstances in which people are born, grow, study and work that have a powerful influence on their mental health.<sup>viii</sup> By building the emotional health skills and capabilities of adults across different settings, we can create emotionally healthy communities where both adults and children can thrive.

All of our training courses and programmes, based on the **Nurturing Programme**, provide adults and children with the understanding, skills and ability to lead emotionally healthy lives, build resilience, empathy, self-esteem and support positive relationships.



 **AT HOME**



 **AT SCHOOL**



 **AT WORK**



# OUR NATIONAL IMPACT

One of our three organisational goals focuses on our ability to promote and communicate the importance of emotional health. The work we do in partnership with other individuals and organisations is crucial in our ability to do this. We need to influence policy at a national level to ensure systemic change.



**Anna Freud Centre for Children and Families:** Providing our free online module on *Mental and Emotional Health in Schools: Effective Strategies and Support* through the Mentally Healthy Schools website



**Family Stability Network (FASTN):** Close collaboration with FASTN and others to create principles of excellence, and an accompanying reflective tool for senior leaders in schools, to implement Relationships Education.



**Best Beginnings Early Years Digital Partnership:** Working as part of a collaboration of parents, healthcare professionals and partner charities to develop the Baby Buddy 2.0 app for parents in pregnancy and the early years.



**Learning with Parents:** Part of alliance of organisations supporting the development of research and practice in home-school relationships.



**Big Change:** Taking part in the 'Big Education Conversation' canvassing views of parents and local communities about the big challenges and opportunities in education.



**National Children's Bureau Schools' Wellbeing Partnership:** As part of the steering group, we have worked in collaboration with the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition to influence the Department for Education on their approach to educating the whole child.



**Centre for Social Justice:** Supporting research and understanding about the importance of Early Years and the Home Learning Environment.



**New Philanthropy Capital:** supporting Family Links in evaluating our whole school approach to emotional health.



**Early Years Commission:** Working with the Centre for Social Justice and the Fabian Society to produce a cross-party manifesto with recommendations for local and national government on the actions needed to give every child the best start in life.



**Parent Infant Foundation, 1001 Days Movement:** Member of this movement to motivate national and local decision makers to value and invest in the emotional wellbeing and development of babies from conception to 2 years.



**Fair Education Alliance:** Steering group member of this alliance of over 200 cross sectional organisations working to reduce educational inequality.



**Parenting Programmes Alliance:** Working with other programme developers for our voices to be heard at the national policy level.

# WHO WE WORK WITH



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The Centre for Emotional Health

 AT HOME  AT SCHOOL  AT WORK