



Policy to support positive parenting

All parents want to be a good mother or a good father to their children. Yet parenting, besides being a joyous and rewarding experience, can also be a stressful one. Most parents have found themselves in situations where they would have welcomed help, not only in overcoming stress and controlling anger, but also in making everyday decisions. Other parents need specific attention because they are raising their children in difficult social, economic or personal circumstances. It is a challenging responsibility to raise children and create the conditions necessary for them to develop their potential to the fullest.

While parenting is in many respects private, it is also a legitimate domain of public policy. Public authorities should create structures and services that enable parents to learn and practise good parenting skills. This would be a major step towards laying the groundwork for genuinely positive parenting.

The Council of Europe has always been a forerunner in furthering understanding of childhood and family life experiences. Based on its wide experience and fully acknowledging that there are many different ways to raise children, it has drawn up a set of general principles that underlie the concept of positive parenting as well as guidelines on how policy makers can support it. The reference document for the Council of Europe's work in this area is Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2006)19 on policy to support positive parenting.

What does positive parenting actually mean?



Children's rights make families grow.

Positive parenting refers to parental behaviour that respects children's best interests and their rights, as set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – a convention which also takes into account parents' needs and resources. The positive parent nurtures, empowers, guides and recognises children as individuals in their own right. Positive parenting is not permissive parenting; it sets the boundaries that children need to help them develop their potential to the fullest. Positive parenting respects children's rights and raises children in a non-violent environment.

The concept of positive parenting is based on the following basic principles.

Parents should provide their children with:

- *Nurture* – responding to a child's need for love, warmth and security;
- *Structure and guidance* – providing a child with a sense of security, a predictable routine and necessary boundaries;
- *Recognition* – listening to children and valuing them as persons in their own right;
- *Empowerment* – enhancing a child's sense of competence and personal control;
- *A non-violent upbringing* – excluding all corporal or psychologically demeaning punishment. Corporal punishment is a violation of children's right to respect for physical integrity and human dignity.

In short, children do best when their parents:

- are warm and supportive;
- spend quality time with them;
- try to understand their life experiences and behaviour;
- explain the rules they are expected to follow;
- praise good behaviour;
- react to misbehaviour with explanation and, if needed, non-violent punishment such as "time-out", repairing damage, less pocket money and so forth, rather than with harsh punishment.

Learn more:

- Parenting in contemporary Europe: a positive approach, Council of Europe Publishing, 2007;
- Eliminating corporal punishment – A human rights imperative for Europe's children, Council of Europe Publishing, 2008;
- Views on positive parenting and non-violent upbringing, Council of Europe Publishing, 2007.

How can states support positive parenting?

Through family policy measures which:

- secure appropriate living standards for families with children;
- prevent child poverty and social exclusion of families with children;
- enable parents to reconcile family and professional life;
- provide high quality care services for all children.



Parents need help in overcoming stress.



Positive parenting means balancing family and professional life.

Through services to support parents such as:

- local centres and services dispensing information, counselling and training on parenting;
- spaces where parents can go to exchange experiences and learn from one another, and play with their children;
- educational programmes for parents, during pregnancy and other stages of the child's development;
- help lines for both parents and children in a crisis situation;
- programmes to support children's education, prevent school drop outs and promote co-operation between schools and parents;
- services targeting populations at risk such as migrant families, parents and children with disabilities, teenage parents or parents in difficult social and economic circumstances.

Through mainstreaming children's rights in policymaking:

- incorporating children's rights into all policies that will affect their lives;
- creating possibilities for children to make their opinions heard and participate in political decision making on matters concerning them;
- establishing and supporting institutions to safeguard children's rights, such as children's ombudspersons.



Children's rights concern us all.



Children need guidance to develop their potential to the fullest.

Through awareness raising:

- ensuring comprehensive awareness of positive parenting among parents;
- encouraging, in particular, fathers to assume their share of responsibilities in caring for and rearing their children;
- ensuring that all professionals working with children (teachers, caregivers, educators, childminders, etc.) are provided with guidelines and training on how to practise and support positive parenting.



Positive parenting can be learned.

Council of Europe legal instruments related to family policy and children's rights

The importance that the Council of Europe attaches to families and children is reflected in its wide range of legal instruments.

Council of Europe conventions

- The *European Convention on Human Rights* and the respective case law of the European Court of Human Rights guarantee to everyone the right to respect for private and family life.
- The *European Social Charter* and the revised *European Social Charter*, while fully respecting the autonomy of the private sphere, describe the family as a fundamental unit of society, with the right to appropriate social, legal and economic protection.
- The *European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights* allows children to exercise their rights in family proceedings before a judicial authority.
- The *European Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* is the first international treaty that identifies and criminalises sexual abuse of children.
- The revised *European Convention on Adoption of Children* is guided by the principle of the best interests of the child and aims to make national adoption procedures more transparent, efficient and resistant to abuse.



Children need more protection not less.

Committee of Ministers recommendations

- Recommendation (2006)19 on policy to support positive parenting encourages states to recognise the importance of parental responsibilities and the need to provide parents with sufficient support in bringing up their children. Member states are recommended to take all appropriate legislative, administrative and financial measures to create the best possible conditions for positive parenting.
- Other recommendations set legal standards on coherent and integrated family policies, family mediation, child day care, and children's participation in family and social life.

For a complete list of Council of Europe legal instruments and publications on positive parenting and children's rights see: www.coe.int/children and www.coe.int/familypolicy

BUILDING A EUROPE FOR AND WITH CHILDREN



About the Council of Europe

Founded in 1949, the Council of Europe is an international organisation bringing together 47 member states to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It seeks to develop common and democratic principles based on the European Convention on Human Rights and other reference texts on the protection of individuals, including children. A key priority of the Council of Europe is to promote social cohesion and social rights as a precondition for the genuine enjoyment of fundamental human rights and the respect for human dignity.

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