

# The Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Research & Evaluation Study 2015 - 2018



Parenting Support and Participation: The  
Parent Voice in Family Support:  
Opportunities and Challenges for  
Meaningful Engagement and Participation  
Presented by: Dr Nuala Connolly  
**2015**

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Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

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# The Parent Voice in Family Support: Opportunities and Challenges for Meaningful Engagement and Participation



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# Overview

- The Policy Context
- Defining Parental Participation
- What Parents Want
- Barriers to Participation
- Parents in Different Contexts
- Enabling Parental Participation
- Tusla's approach to Parental Participation



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# Why Parental Participation?

- Desire to enable users to exert an influence on the services they receive
- A more ethical and more effective way of proceeding
- An effective means of reducing barriers to engagement and advancing social inclusion
- Shift from seeing people as passive beneficiaries of welfare to “emphasise the capacity of service users to be creative and reflexive and active agents in shaping their lives” (Katz et al., 2007)
- Translating the ideals of participation into reality can be challenging (Corby et al., 2006)



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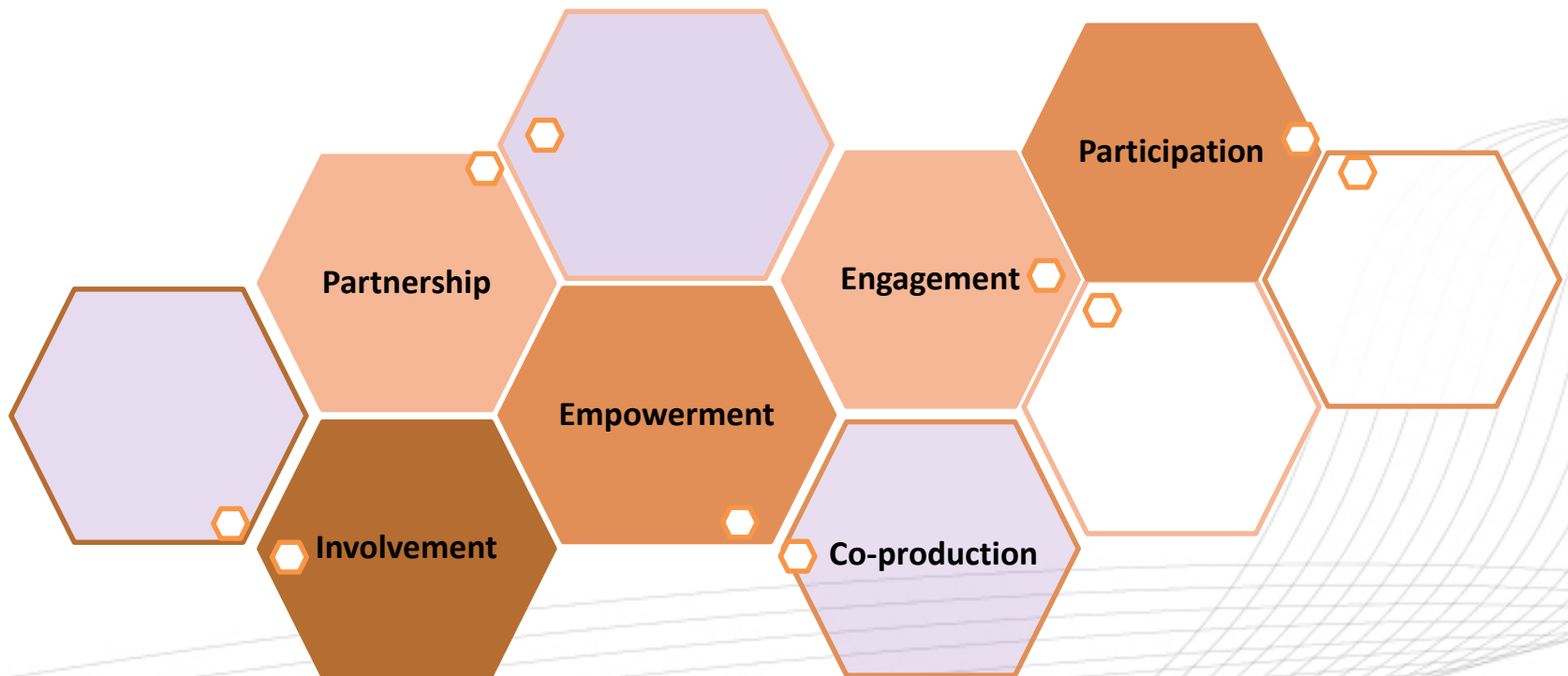
# Policy Context

- 2007 ‘Your Service, Your Say’ Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy
- National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Service 2008-2013
  - service users “centrally involved in their own care” through “open dialogue, trust and mutual respect”
- High Level Policy Statement on Parenting Support 2015
  - “partnership with children and their parents”
- Child and Family Agency Act 2013
  - participation of children and parents is embedded in TUSLA’s culture and operations
  - Meitheal privileges the voice of the parent, carer and child
  - Parenting Support Strategy
- Tusla’s Quality Assurance Framework 2014



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# Defining Parental Participation



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# Defining Parental Participation

## Participation

*“Involvement of service users in planning, **delivery** and evaluation of parenting support”*

## Partnership

*“working in partnership with all stakeholders, particularly parents in relation to the development, **delivery**, monitoring and evaluation of parenting support services”*

(Child and Family Agency, 2013)





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# Involving Parents

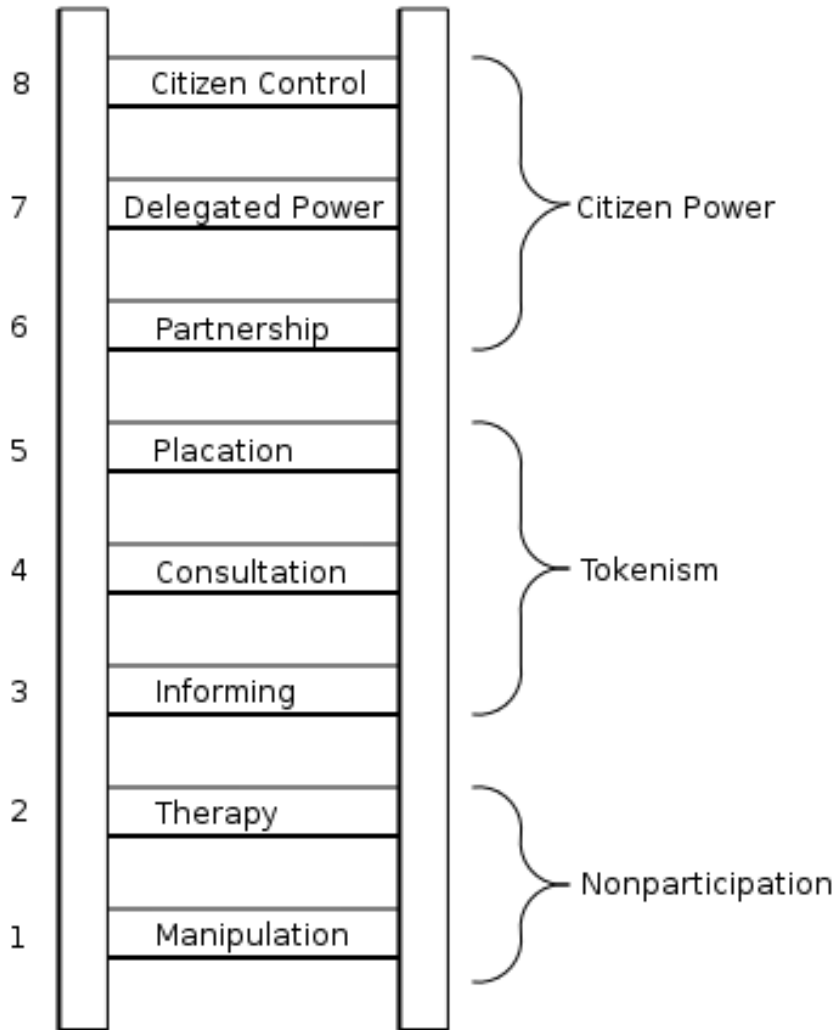
Parents can be included in services at a number of levels:

- **decision-making within service delivery**
- involvement in case planning
- involvement in service-evaluation
- monitoring service planning
- strategic planning

(Katz et al., 2007)







## *Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1979)*



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# Alternative Views

- Sole emphasis on power, fails to recognise that participation itself may be a goal (Tritter & McCallum, 2006)
- Non-participatory acts deemed as meaningful to the overall process (Roose et al., 2013), opportunity for learning
- The undesirable behaviour of parents can be interpreted as problematic, reducing partnership to a protectionist approach designed to activate parents to realise goals set (Roose et al., 2013)



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# Barriers to Participation: Service Users

- Perceived **stigma** in accessing services
- Unfamiliarity with **process, mechanisms and settings**
- Unfamiliarity with the **language, terminology used**
- Feeling **outnumbered** in meetings
- Parents exercising caution or participating to **appear cooperative**
- Parents feeling ignored or that their views may be disqualified or even used against them, **feeling silenced and powerless**



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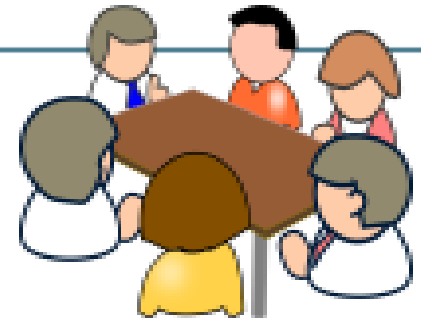
# Barriers to Participation: Services

- Understanding how parents seek help, **informal support**
- Working with **hard to reach** service users
- **Training and tools** to work in a participatory way
- Resource limitation or restrictions, **workload**
- **Access** and geographic location
- **False level of quality**, principles versus practice
- Working with involuntary clients, statutory responsibility and **power asymmetry** in child protection settings



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# What Parents Want



- Being **treated with respect** where time is taken to listen to their views
- **Having a voice** is linked to satisfaction with decision-making
- Parents are more likely to exercise their voices when their opinions are asked for, and where there is **willing and supportive communication**
- Practitioner working in a participatory way, **relationship building**
- Experiencing **teamwork and flexibility** on the part of services



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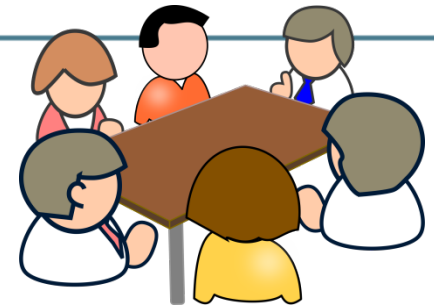
# Parents with Specific Needs

- Changing profile of families in Ireland
- Mainstream services could better engage **fathers**
- **Cultural barriers** may impact on uptake of programmes reflecting different cultural attitudes to parenting
- **Language barriers** may impact on uptake of services
- Parents living in **poverty** face specific barriers
- Parents living with **disability** require additional supports
- **Involuntary clients** require a different approach
- Existence of **specific maltreatment** should be recognised



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# Enabling Participation



- ensuring services are culturally sensitive and the **needs of all parents** are considered in service planning, service design, and the delivery of services
- ensuring the physical environment is appropriate, comfortable and accessible, and providing practical assistance if necessary
- ensuring that the **purpose of any meeting is clear** and that all necessary information is shared in advance, including a written agenda and information on the roles of those present
- taking a **strengths-based approach** and focusing on parental competencies

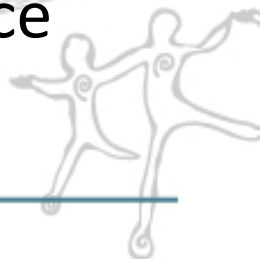




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# Enabling Participation ctd.

- actively encouraging the parent voice by **seeking parents' views**
- **follow-up** on agreed plans or decisions for parents
- being aware of the importance of relationships and **interpersonal dynamics**: developing trust, having authority, handling negotiations, attitudes
- **reflect** in a meaningful way on participatory practice
- promote **joined-up working**, collaboration and the integration of services to help participatory practice



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# Tusla, The Child and Family Agency

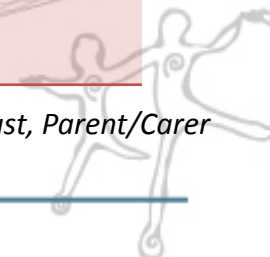
- Parenting Working Group and sub-groups
- 50 Key Messages and Parenting24seven
- Parenting Support Champions
- Three annual Parenting Conferences
  - 8<sup>th</sup> December, **Parental Participation**
- **Parental Participation Project**



# Levels of Involvement

<b>Level of Involvement</b>	<b>Typical Process</b>	<b>Typical Methods</b>	<b>What the person with responsibility for supports &amp; services might say</b>
<b>Information</b>	Presentation and promotion	Leaflets, newsletters, displays etc.	“Here’s what we are going to do”
<b>Consultation</b>	Communication and Feedback	Surveys, meetings, Meitheal process, Social Work process	“Here are our options – what do you think?”
<b>Participation</b>	Partnership Building	Working Groups, forums, Meitheal process, Social Work process, feedback and complaints mechanisms	“We want to make decisions together”

*Adapted from: Cambridgeshire children’s Trust, Parent/Carer Involvement Strategy, 2010*





Key messages from research about how to support children at different stages in their life and in different situations



<http://www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven/>

See the Parenting Support Strategy and 50 Key Messages for more information [www.tusla.ie/publications](http://www.tusla.ie/publications)

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# Tusla: Ongoing Activities

- Parents: Participation Workshops held
- Practitioners: Consultation Workshop held
- PP Project Briefings (November onwards)
- Seed funding: Total €340,000 over two years (2016 & 2017)
- Criteria for funding
- Application Process

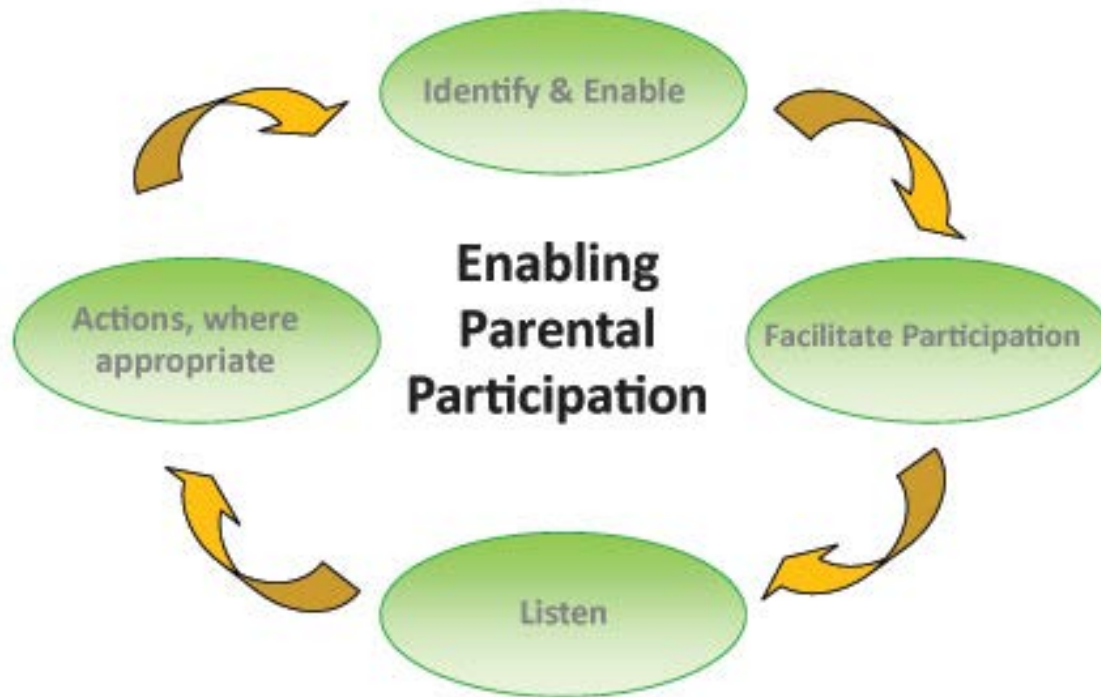




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# Parental Participation Toolkit

## Enabling Parental Participation:



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# Parental Participation Toolkit in Development



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# Parental Participation Toolkit in Development



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## 3.1. Tools for Parental Participation

There is lots of great work being done around the country on parental participation. Thinking about the tools for parental participation gives us an opportunity to reflect on how we are carrying out this work. The first two examples (a and b) are included because, whilst they don't necessarily include parents in the process, they are useful in making decisions about including parents in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services.

\* Adapted from The Community Engagement Network

Ref.	Name of Tool	Individuals	Groups	Planning	Delivery	Evaluation	Cost <sup>5</sup>
a.	Children & Young People Services Committees			✓	✓	✓	€
b.	Community Profiling			✓			€€€
c.	Blue Sky Thinking*		✓	✓			€
d.	Displays and Exhibits*	✓		✓	✓		€€
e.	Focus Groups		✓	✓	✓	✓	€
f.	Kitchen Table Discussion*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	€
g.	Local Area Parenting Support Survey	✓			✓	✓	€€
h.	My World Triangle	✓		✓	✓		€
i.	Parents' Satisfaction with Services Questionnaire	✓			✓	✓	€€
j.	Poster Competitions*	✓	✓	✓	✓		€
k.	Study Circles*		✓		✓	✓	€
l.	Survey Monkey	✓		✓	✓	✓	€(€)

(2005)<sup>11</sup>

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## 4.2. Working in Partnership with Parents- Key Research Messages

Partnership between service providers and families is the act of working together for the benefit of children. Participation is key to achieving and maintaining that partnership, particularly in the delivery of services to families. The parent voice is emphasised as an important factor in satisfactory partnership working and contributing to positive outcomes. Having opportunities to actively express an opinion in a respectful, supportive and encouraging environment where the parent feels that their voice is valued and their competencies are acknowledged contributes to satisfaction with decisions made during that time. Practitioners working in a participatory way strengthen this partnership.

Understanding what parents want in this context is crucial to effective partnership working, potentially improving engagement levels with services, informing the planning of services and contributing to better outcomes for children and families. A number of factors contribute to successful participation and partnership working with parents, including:

- being treated with respect,
- having competencies acknowledged,
- having a voice,
- experiencing teamwork and flexibility on the part of services,
- collaborative and cooperative communication, and
- non-judgemental attitudes.

Barriers to participation may be from a service, professional and user perspective. Parents may feel ignored or powerless if their voice is unheard or not respected. Parents can feel defensive, threatened and may feel silenced, thereby failing to have their needs met. They may resort to a cooperative voice with a view to ensuring a positive outcome, or fail to exercise their voice entirely. This can be influenced by the power dynamics in place in some contexts, for example a child protection setting. In addition, services may be working with large caseloads and limited resources.

# Parental Participation Toolkit in Development



## 4.3 Working with 'Hard to reach parents'

We know that 'hard to reach parents' is hard to define. Broadly speaking however, hard to reach parents can be understood as;

- Parents who are underrepresented in service provision
- Service users (or potential service users) that may be invisible or overlooked by service providers.
- Service users (or potential service users) considered for various reasons to be resistant to services.

We need to be aware of the challenges many parents may encounter within the life course. The following headings are significant in engaging parents in services<sup>vii</sup>:

- Personal Relationships between staff and service users
- Practical issues
- Service Culture
- Consultation, information and targeting
- Service delivery issues
- Community development approaches



For more information on key messages when engaging with parents who are experiencing different challenges please see 50 Key Messages for Parenting support. This document can be found here:

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla\\_50\\_Key\\_Messages\\_for\\_Parenting\\_Support.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_50_Key_Messages_for_Parenting_Support.pdf)

See also

Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook. This document can be found here:

[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/CF\\_WelfarePracticehandbook.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/CF_WelfarePracticehandbook.pdf)

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je participe  
tu participes  
il participe  
nous participons  
vous participerez  
ils profitent



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Thank You!  
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