

# Medway Parenting Support Strategy

Abridged Version

**2021-2031**

## Introduction

Welcome to Medway's Parenting Support Strategy, where we set out our vision to work in partnership with parents and carers to continue to improve experiences and outcomes for children, young people and families across Medway.

This strategy has been developed and co-produced with parents, carers, young people and partner organisations across Medway. It gives a broad overview of what we aim to achieve in Medway over the next ten years, based on consultations, national and local policy and national directives. This strategy supports and will work in conjunction with the Medway Children's Services Action Plan, the Medway Early Help Strategy and other key local strategy and policy documents.



## **Who is this Strategy for?**

This parenting support strategy is for Medway the place, rather than for any individual organisation, team or group of people. It is for all families and parents supporting Medway's children and young people and is also for schools and wider partners with a role in supporting parents.

## **Why do we need a Medway Parenting Support Strategy?**

- To make sure that all parents and carers can access parenting support services that lead to positive experiences for them and their families.
- To provide the next generation with the best chance to thrive and the skills to engage in positive parenting themselves.
- Providing coordinated, consistent and multi-agency family and parenting support is crucial in making sure that Medway families are safe, happy and can reach their full potential.

## **What are the key concerns we need to address?**

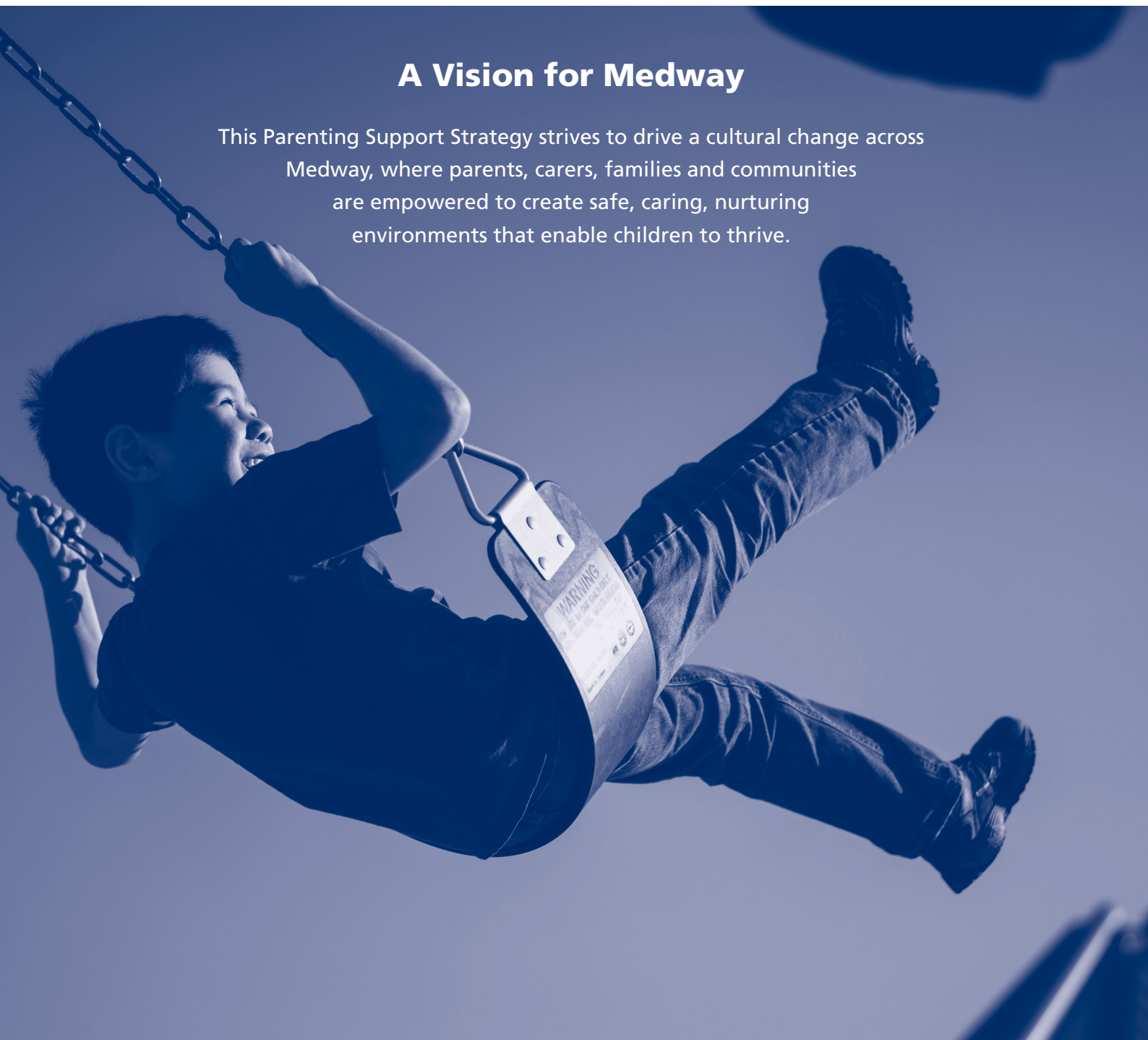
- Support is available but is often fragmented and uncoordinated and parents and professionals are not always clear about how to access it.
- Support is not always available at the right time and in the right places, and community-based services are not always utilised to their full potential.
- Some parents with disabilities and/or additional needs feel that support for their own needs, or those of their children (who may be young carers), is not always timely or accessible.
- Parents often feel there is stigma attached to reaching out and utilising support options, meaning the use of language in describing how support is provided is crucial in reducing this stigma.
- There are some gaps in the support available for parents, particularly when they have children with diagnosed neurodevelopmental conditions.

## What have parents told us they would like?

- To have confidence in their skills and ability, and to be able to focus on their children's behaviours and emotional regulation.
- To be able to access support in the management of relationships within the whole family.
- The de-stigmatisation of accessing support from the universal offer through to the most complex needs, as well as improved access to support for all communities within Medway.

## A Vision for Medway

This Parenting Support Strategy strives to drive a cultural change across Medway, where parents, carers, families and communities are empowered to create safe, caring, nurturing environments that enable children to thrive.



## **The Medway Parenting Support Strategy will:**

### **Be inclusive**

Parenting services are for everyone and must be considerate of ethnic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

### **Be co-produced**

Parents, carers, children and young people will be involved in the design and delivery of services.

### **Be timely**

Services should be accessed as and when parents need them, at the right time in their individual journey.

### **Offer choice**

Offer a broad range and choice of services to allow parents and practitioners to determine what services are most appropriate for their personal circumstances.

### **Improve access**

Parents have a right to expect swift and easy access to support.



## Links to other work across Medway

### Children and young people's mental health and emotional well-being services

- Supporting children and young people with mental health and emotional wellbeing needs.
- The full range of work in this area is contained within the Local Transformation Plan (LTP).

### Mental health support teams (MHST)

- To support mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in and around schools and colleges.
- Link with parents to develop and embed strategies that support the emotional wellbeing of children, ensuring consistency of approach in home and school settings.

### Early help strategy development

- A collaborative support approach to ensure professional networks offer coordinated information, advice and targeted support for families at the earliest opportunity.

### Sufficiency strategy for children on the edge of care, children in care and care leavers

- Support to improve the ability of families to look after their children within the community and reduce the need for statutory services.

### Positive behaviour support (PBS)

- To improve the quality of life for individuals with learning disabilities and/or autism as well as their families/ care providers.
- A proactive and preventative person-centred approach, focusing on teaching new skills to replace behaviours that challenge.

### Supporting parents with mental health needs

- A vision that Medway will be a place where individuals are supported to have good mental wellbeing.
- People know how to look after their own mental wellbeing and where to go for support when they are experiencing difficulties.

### **Perinatal mental health service development**

- Increasing access for women and families to the specialist community perinatal mental health service.
- Providing increased psychological interventions.
- Partner assessment and signposting services.
- Creation of a Maternal Mental Health Service.

### **Special education needs and disabilities (SEND) progress**

- We will build on the work that has commenced to coproduce services to support parents in the best possible ways and fully link parenting support services into the upcoming SEND strategy development.

### **Oral health for children and young people**

- The Medway Smiles Dental Passport given to new parents promotes regular dental attendance from six months of age.
- The Medway Oral Health Strategy launched on 21 April 2021 with partners from different organisations joining to make a difference to the oral health of Medway residents.

### **Nutrition, physical exercise and weight management**

- Across Medway there are a wide range of initiatives and programmes to support parents and childcare settings/schools to support children and young people to access healthy and nutritious food and support a healthy weight including:
  - The Healthy Early Years (HEY) Award.
  - Tri Club children's and young people's weight management programmes.
  - Medway Healthy Weight Network.

### **Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education**

- Schools award.
- Work to develop PSHE across Medway.



## The Covid-19 Pandemic

Throughout the development of the Medway Parenting Support Strategy, the world has been responding to the COVID 19 pandemic. Nationally, this has meant a number of 'lockdowns', periods of school closures, closures of local businesses and a significant change to the way services can be delivered and accessed.

### The impact on parents and carers

- Parents and carers have been worried about their children's development and the effect of missing school or nursery.
- Parents and carers have been creative in using online educational, social, emotional and wellbeing resources.
- Many parents have reported that they have struggled to cope with the competing demands placed upon them, often in addition to concerns relating to their own work, financial and family situations throughout the pandemic.

“For my son, the last two lockdowns he really struggled with the work at home and the lack of routine. He is at school this time and the difference in him is amazing.”

“Alison is now going to school and she definitely needs the routine and her friends. She was also adamant mum wasn't going to teach her this time!”



## The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people (CYP)

**Young Minds** surveyed children and young people and discovered how the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on their mental health, as evidenced below:

**Young Minds surveyed 2,111 children and young people with a history of mental health needs between 20-25 March 2020 (when schools closed and lockdown began), here are their results:**

32% said their mental health had got much worse.

51% said their mental health had got a bit worse.

9% said there was no difference in their mental health.

6% said their mental health had become a bit better.

1% said their mental health had become much better.

1% unknown.

### Why are children and young people at risk?

- Increased isolation and loneliness
- Lack of free school meals
- Potential exposure to problem gambling
- Unable to attend school
- Unable to complete qualifications
- Potential accommodation issues including overcrowding
- Potential strain on family relationships
- Loss of 'safe' place away from home
- Unable to meet up with friends and family
- Potential disruption to existing support e.g. MH services
- Potential strain on family relationships
- Increased anxieties e.g. health of loved ones
- Potential parental unemployment
- Potential poor parental mental health
- Disruption to routine
- Uncertainty about the future
- Loss of formal or informal pastoral support
- Potential exposure to parental substance misuse
- Unable to participate in normal daily activities



## Digital Inclusion

Whilst parents and carers in Medway report that they welcome the use and accessibility of digital platforms eg social media, internet and email to deliver services, interventions and information, not all families have access to digital device(s)/smartphone(s) and/or internet access. The main reason for difficulties in accessing digital services was reported to relate to costs - both in terms of the cost of devices and the costs of the data required to access the internet.

**Key recommendations from the Kent and Medway survey report regarding service changes were:**

### Active Promotion

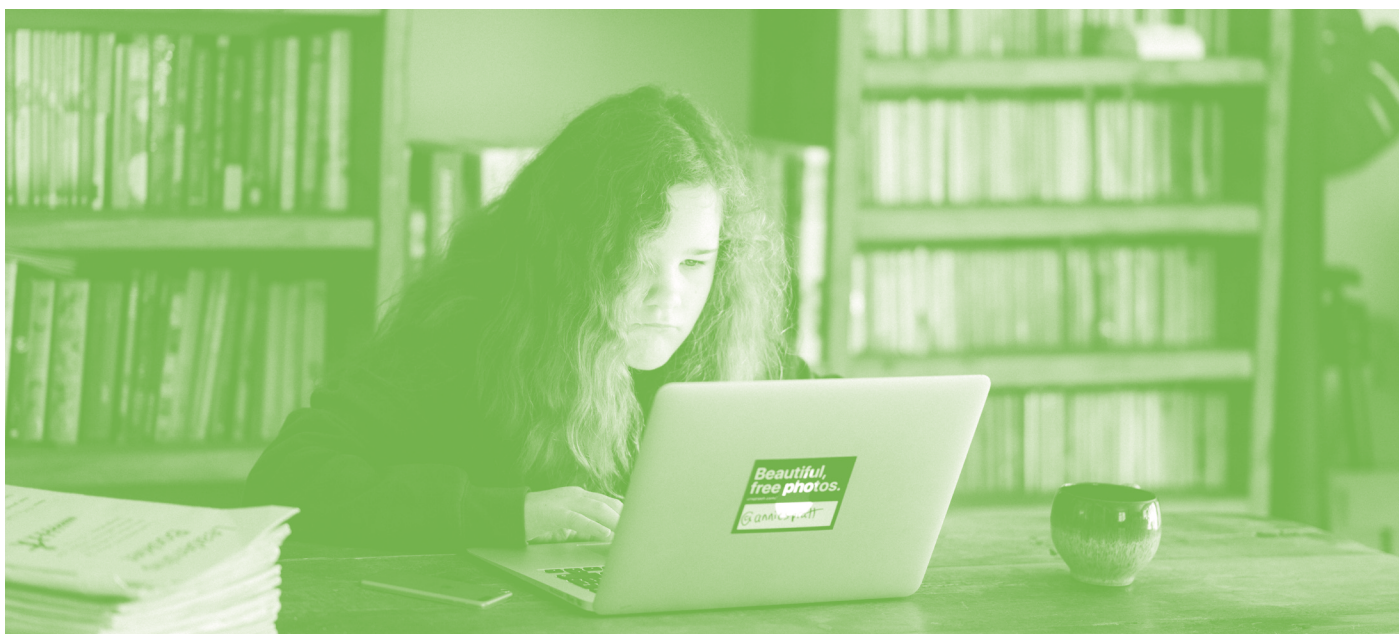
Services should actively promote digital engagement. Staff need to encourage and notify people about the different pathways of accessing services.

### Workforce development

Ensure staff have the right skills to support people who might not be confident and comfortable digitally.

### Positive Experiences

Digital engagement should be straight forward and user friendly. Clear guidance and support should be available to give people positive experiences of using digital tools to connect with services.



## Our common approach to supporting parents

To support parents across Medway, we will continue to embed a strong universal offer, with a graduated approach through targeted and specialist services, to enable parents to access the right level of support at the right time for them.

### Universal services

**No referral is usually required for these services, and they include:**

- Women's health services
- Family planning/sexual health services
- Midwifery services
- Health visitors (*referral required*)
- School nurses (*referral required*)
- Medway Council's Family Solutions service (*referral required*)
- Healthy weight services
- Oral health services
- Support that is ordinarily available from schools

### Graduated approaches to increasing need

Services should be delivered in a timely way, to meet the individual needs of parents. To achieve this, we will ensure that the offer of universal services is supplemented by additional services that can provide differentiated support when it is required, for example:

- Targeted parenting support for care leavers who are parents themselves.
- Specialist support for Foster Carers.
- Support for children and families where a neurodevelopmental condition has been diagnosed (including pre-diagnostic support).
- Support for families where children and young people are known to youth offending services.
- Support for families where the parent has a disability/additional needs of their own and/or children are young carers for their parents.
- Child health programmes facilitated by Medway public health teams.

### Working in partnership with schools

Schools have an enormous influence on the development, health and well-being of children and young people and work in partnership with parents and allied services to ensure that there is consistency of approach in the key areas of a child's life.

Joint working with schools to support parents is well established within Medway, with specific teams working alongside schools and parents on key issues such as reducing exclusions and improving attendance, as well as offering advice and guidance relating to the individual needs of specific children and young people.

In Medway, we are developing a document with schools and for parents, outlining the services and interventions that should be ordinarily available for all children and young people. This will include services that are delivered directly by schools and those that are delivered in partnership with other services and will outline the expectation that schools and parents should work together to support issues such as a child's well-being or behaviour. Some of these will include Child Health programmes facilitated by Medway Public Health Teams.

Specific training is available to help Medway schools provide consistent advice and guidance to children and parents, and this will be refreshed on a regular basis. In addition, many schools directly commission bespoke packages of training to meet their specific needs.

### **The development of peer support approaches**

Families and communities play a key role in managing their own health and wellbeing. Peer support involves people sharing knowledge, experience or practical help with each other, often becoming what is sometimes referred to as an 'expert by experience'. Many voluntary and community groups already support and encourage peer support.

**Across Medway we will ensure peer support systems for parents are researched, developed, and supported.**



## How will we measure success?

To determine whether this strategy is delivering improvements, we have established a set of outcomes. These were outlined by the multi-agency group that led the development of this strategy and have been refined through further discussion. They will be monitored throughout the life of the strategy.

### Short term outcomes

- Parents and professionals know where and how to get the support they need.
- Parents can access services easily.
- Parents report stigma attached to seeking and receiving support is reduced.
- Parents can access reliable information about child development, so they can identify when they may need to seek support.

### Medium term outcomes

- Parents value the support they are receiving.
- Parents feedback that support services meet their needs.
- Improved parental confidence in relation to the demands of parenting.
- Parents and children report things have changed positively.
- Families are not referred to services repeatedly.
- Increase in parental recommendations for support services to other parents.
- Reduced referrals to neurodevelopmental service that do not result in formal diagnosis.
- Reduced referrals for EHCP's that do not result in a having an EHCP plan developed.

### Long term outcomes

- Increased rates of school readiness and improvement in educational attainment.
- A reduction in referrals and re-referrals into statutory processes of social care.
- Reduction in youth offending.
- Reduction in school exclusions.
- Positive changes in key public health indicators such as childhood obesity, smoking in pregnancy, drinking in pregnancy and domestic abuse.
- Services are able offer more of a focus on proactive and preventative approaches.
- Improved school attendance.
- Reduction in people accessing substance misuse services.
- Reduction in children entering the care system.
- Reduction in people requiring specialist support from mental health services.

## How will we deliver on the strategy?

Priority	Domain	Lead action
1	<b>Engagement</b>	Coproduce the Medway Parenting Support Strategy and action plan with parents and partner agencies across Medway.
2	<b>Bolstering universal interventions</b>	Develop a rounded offer of parenting support, spanning universal and public health interventions, to ensure that all parents can access support at the earliest possible point of need.
3	<b>Targeted support/ provider engagement</b>	Encourage and support schools and service providers to offer behaviour management strategies, advice and signposting as part of the provision that is ordinarily available to children and families.
4	<b>Support for families with additional needs such as SEND</b>	<p>Bolster the options of support for parents where there are additional needs, including pre- and post-diagnostic support services that can help when there are children and young people with neurodevelopmental conditions, physical ill health, and mental health and emotional well-being difficulties.</p> <p>This will also include support for families who have other parenting support needs, such as care leavers who are parents, families known to Youth Offending Services, families who have difficulties accessing services, and families where there is domestic abuse.</p>
5	<b>Improve information and accessibility</b>	Clearly communicate Medway's parenting support offer to parents and stakeholders, utilising the Medway Local Offer and Medway Family Information Service (and other appropriate communications channels). Ensure that support for parents is available online and via a range of accessible locations.

## **Acknowledgements and Contributions**

We wish to thank those parents, carers, colleagues, and stakeholders whose assistance and guidance has been instrumental in this work.

Your help in identifying the priorities for parenting support in Medway has been invaluable, and your commitment to continue to work in partnership in this area moving forwards is greatly appreciated.