



How to help parents develop their parenting skills – guidance on using the Fusion materials.

(This should be read in conjunction with the Fusion Course materials which can be downloaded from <http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/content/view/283/1036/>)

Version 1.0 - Draft

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Several of The Innovation Unit's Next Practice in Parents & Carers projects address the development of parenting skills, in particular the Fusion and Baby Matterz (<http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/content/view/461/1051/>) projects.

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Getting people to come on a parenting course

<p>How do you get people to come on a parenting course?</p>	<p>Over the years we've found that it was quite tricky to get people on a course primarily because of its title, being called a parenting course. We also have had a number of different consultations that we've held with parents and with teaching professionals to find out what sorts of things might stop people coming on a parenting course, and we found the feedback was quite conclusive from all parties.</p> <p>One of the things was, obviously the name, calling it a parenting course suggests that you're doing something wrong and you need to improve that. That leads to quite a defensive reaction from people. And another thing was the material we were using is very, very wordy which is quite off-putting, and the books are very large. Just some of these practical elements are enough to stop people coming on a course.</p> <p>So we then started to look at ways in which we might change that, and we'd already introduced our way of running the course, we started to introduce our icebreakers, skills practices, lots of different things, and we realised that we'd sort of half written it anyway and we are just using the material now, so the DVD and the actual workbooks.</p>	<p>Karen Todd, Fusion</p>
<p>What hasn't worked?</p>	<p>In school we started by doing a blanket letter that involved 350 children, saying that we were going to be offering a parenting programme, if they would be interested in coming and talk to us. But we had very little response to that.</p> <p>So then we tried advertising with attractive posters on the doors and we hardly got any response from that either.</p>	<p>Katy Phillips, Fusion</p>
<p>Why do you think the letter didn't work?</p>	<p>I just think it's not personal enough, it's like well who are these people? Why should I go? And it's exposure when you're talking about your parenting, it's sort of admitting that something that you're not perhaps getting right.</p>	<p>Katy Phillips, Fusion</p>
<p>What has worked?</p>	<p>We hear about parents either because the teacher of their child will come and say oh, this parent's having real issues, or this child's behaviour is really bad in the classroom, does the parent need support? Or sometimes the parents come directly to me and say</p>	<p>Katy Phillips, Fusion</p>

	<p>I'm having a real struggle with him in the morning. Or they come to school tearing their hair out and you just know they need your support.</p> <p>Because we've found the programme so beneficial ourselves, what we now do is go and invite them personally. I can go and say I've got four children and I've done this course and it's really helped. Straight away you're bringing down their barriers with the fact that we've done the course. Because we're not teachers in school they don't view us as too much as an authority and aren't worried about joining.</p> <p>When we've done the personal introduction and we've talked to them about it, we would then send them a personal letter home giving all the details of the course and when it is. Then we'll do a follow-up letter to confirm their place so that we know that they're committed.</p> <p>Word of mouth is important as are Fusion drop-ins.</p>	
<p>How do you maintain the sense of community generated through the course? How do Fusion drop-ins work?</p>	<p>What we've found was that after a six week course we had created a sense of community within the group, and they really wanted to keep up with each other. It's support and they've built friendships. So after that we started meeting once a month. It ended up being a shared lunch, so they'd all bring a bit of food in and we'd meet together and have a bit of lunch, talk about things they might want support with or things that weren't going so well, and celebrate achievements as well.</p> <p>Then they started to bring their friends telling them this has really helped me, why don't you come along. It's a great introduction to Karen and me and then before we know it we've got enough new people to start another Fusion course.</p> <p>We've had some people that have come on the course a couple of times because it helped them even more. And then bringing friends. One lady came and on the next course she brought her husband.</p>	<p>Katy Phillips, Fusion</p>
<p>How important</p>	<p>When we first started we were still in the place where we were calling it a parenting</p>	<p>Karen Todd,</p>

is this sense of community in getting new people to sign up for the course?	course so the barriers went up. Also you've got to be absolutely at your wits end and feel desperate to take that step of going on a course that you don't know anything about, you might not have met the person, might not know anybody else that's been on it. Whereas with our new way we build the community first and then the course comes or we have that personal instruction and then the course comes.	Fusion
How important is this sense of community in getting new people to sign up for the course?	Our parents are our ambassadors aren't they? They're the ones that go out into the playground and tell people about it. Or other people notice a change in their relationships with their children - we had one lady the other day saying "I have conversations with my child after school, he's telling me about his day", and she said other people notice that. So they're our best references for the course. They really are.	Katy Phillips, Fusion

What makes Fusion different to other parenting courses?

What makes Fusion different to other parenting courses?	<p>Karen and I have spent three years developing the course and have learned the hard way. With the original materials we had, we found that there was an awful lot of reading. We would say can you go home please and read six or seven pages. In the area that our school is in there are a lot of parents with literacy difficulties and they find it really difficult to do that, and even in a small group to read out a page.</p> <p>So the way we've developed ours is very light on words, there are bullet points which we read out or will come through on a DVD, then there's large areas on each page for them to write their own notes, and then at the end of every chapter there are wonderful graphical mind maps. We have found that these are one of the huge benefits to our course, because if you wanted to reflect quickly back on the week that you've just done it takes you through every stage that you've looked at that week but in pictures.</p>	Katy Phillips, Fusion
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	<p>The other thing that is unique to Fusion is that every week there's a real life story. Somebody who has been on a course with us has written how it has changed their family situation. The DVD shows real life scenarios, featuring real people that have real situations going on and most of them have actually been on our course, which is lovely.</p> <p>And we've spent a lot of time with the leaders' guide making sure that anybody could pick it up and use it very easily. Everything is in there, everything they need is photocopyable at the back. We've come up with all the ideas for the icebreakers and skills practise, they've got a choice in there so really they can pick it up and run with it quite quickly and easily.</p>	
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Logistics

What's the best length of course to run?	We've run two types of courses previously, a teenage course which is six weeks long and a parenting 5-15 year course which is eight weeks long, and we found eight weeks is a huge commitment. Six weeks is a lot more workable for people who have busy lives. So we decided to design this course based around a six week course.	Katy Phillips, Fusion
What is the best time of day to run it?	It works well during school hours with parents of children in school, but obviously that only catches the people who don't have other commitments or jobs outside of those times. But that presents an issue with getting dads on the course, so we also like to run them in the evening so that there are both options.	Katy Phillips, Fusion
Which family members does it work best with?	Currently we're running a course and we have three couples. That's probably more of an exception than a normality, but that would be an area that we're certainly striving towards. We have noticed that the people here have come on the course individually and then have come back on as part of a couple, so the second time they've been produces much better results because of the consistency of both parents being there. We've also had combinations of grandparents or older siblings, anybody that might be working in some sort of partnership with the primary care giver.	Katy Phillips, Fusion

How many participants does it work best with?	We normally run our courses with 12 participants.	Karen Todd
How do you encourage Dads to attend?	We run it in the evenings. It helps if there's more than one man on a course to encourage another to come otherwise it can feel a bit intimidating although we have had that and we try to make that as inclusive as possible.	Katy Phillips, Fusion
Where is the ideal place to meet?	Thinking about where we meet is really important. Karen and I have met in all sorts of place and to us it's really important that it's comfortable, that it's warm, that it's attractive. Because I think people will learn in those environments. They don't sit there on uncomfortable chairs. We don't have them sat at desks even though they've got workbooks, we sit in a circle.	Katy Phillips, Fusion
Why is this important?	We've had sessions where we've met in absolutely awful conditions where it's been so cold. That distracts people from what they're there to do, and it brings an opening and an opportunity to be negative. And once that mindset's set in then you've got to work really hard to turn their minds around to being open to new ideas and stuff. So although it doesn't sound like it's important it is actually very important to get that right. Again, to build a community and make it friendly, we suggest having tea and coffee and biscuits, just to bring that casual and friendly feel into it.	Karen Todd, Fusion
How long does the session last?	The session is designed to last for an hour and a half. Session one we say add an extra 15 minutes on to that just to go through the formalities and the introductions. You're going to be meeting potentially all new people that day. You may be very familiar with some of them but there is that need to get the introductions going on week one. So we say about an hour and 45 minutes for session one but thereafter it's about an hour and a half.	Katy Phillips, Fusion

Setting up a Fusion course

<p>If somebody saw the need for a course like Fusion, how would you advise them to go about putting it on?</p>	<p>Ideally to get the real flavour of it it's best to go on a course yourself so you know what it's like to be a part of that group, to enjoy that community that's built and to learn and practise the new skills and strategies. After that, a good simple way to start is to co-facilitate the Fusion drop-in, because that's very low-key and doesn't put too much pressure on anybody.</p> <p>If people are interested in running a course after that, the best thing for them to do is to go on a training day which would equip them with everything they need. The leaders' guide is very user friendly, and I think just with a few basic ideas as to how to manage groups then you'd be equipped with everything you need.</p>	
<p>Who can facilitate the course?</p>	<p>We think the peer model is the most successful model. We make it clear to the participants that we ourselves are parents and we ourselves have been on courses. This isn't about us being experts or us being perfect, and I think that really helps for when we come alongside. And also in the sessions we share things that are personal to our families and our situations, and I think that just helps to break down those barriers, it stops it being about them being wrong and us being right or them needing help and us knowing all the answers. This is just about us all being there together in the same place in life, all with children and with the same triumphs and struggles, and we're just there to support each other.</p>	<p>Karen Todd, Fusion</p>
	<p>In Dorset they want anyone working with parents to have the City & Guilds Working with Parents Basic Level (4 day course), but even with that we've said as long as one person is trained up in that the other person can be the co-facilitator.</p>	<p>Katy Phillips, Fusion</p>
<p>What preparation do you need to undertake?</p>	<p>The first time you run it you're going to need a little bit more preparation than the second or third or fifth or seventh time you run it. But the key to the leaders working well is for them to work together, and so it's ideal if the leaders can spend some time together just getting to know each other and each other's strengths and weaknesses. I</p>	<p>Karen Todd, Fusion</p>

	<p>personally think it works better if you know which leader you are. In the leaders' guide it has leader 1's role and leader 2's role, and it's probably helpful if you perhaps just stick to being one or the other of those initially. So if you are leader 1 then you know what you're going to be doing each week is going to be the same, and that's going to build consistency and help you to get more comfortable in that role. It's having those understandings of what each person is going to do because then you're not time wasting or causing any friction.</p> <p>It takes some preparation in terms of photocopying the relevant parts for that week, so if you've chosen an icebreaker that requires photocopying then making sure that's done, making sure that the parts of skills practise are done, having the register ready each week and having your session guide ready which will take you through your evening. It's very, very user friendly, very easy to see, it's colour coded so you know only to go with the colour that you are, and it's easy just to see in a flash.</p>	
<p>Is there a standard structure each week?</p>	<p>There is a standard structure to follow. Week one has a couple more additions because in week one you need to set the standards and there is the participant's agreement to go through. Week six is a bit different also because it's bringing everything you've learnt together and looking at how we're going to live that out. But apart from that it's really the same format every week so it becomes very familiar, and again just user friendly.</p>	<p>Karen Todd, Fusion</p>
<p>What training can you provide potential facilitators?</p>	<p>We decided that the ideal way to become a Fusion Leader is actually to attend a six week course yourself, get a feel for it, and then just come on a training day that teaches you tips and strategies for how to facilitate groups and leading the course.</p> <p>However, we are aware that there's a whole group of people out there that might not have a Fusion course in their locality so we've designed training days which will look at how to run a group and facilitate leading the course, but within that there'll also be an opportunity to have a look at a condensed version of the Fusion Programme. So we would do an icebreaker with you, we'd practise the skills practice, we would look at one</p>	<p>Karen Todd, Fusion</p>

	<p>week's DVD content, and we'd give you a real taste and flavour of what it's like to be on a Fusion Programme in a condensed session, without you then having to travel miles to try and get to one in Dorset every week. So it makes it a fun way for people to have enough confidence and enough understanding of the Fusion Programme to be able to then actually take it into their area.</p>	
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Running the sessions

<p>Where should the facilitators sit?</p>	<p>People sit in a circle. It's nice if the two leaders don't sit next to each other otherwise that suggests that they're the tutors and the other people are the learners, and it just brings a barrier before you've even started.</p> <p>It's good to be intermingled with your participants, ideally on opposite sides so that you can maintain eye contact with the other leader. There are times where you just need that eye contact, either because you know that we've got to bring something to a close for time, or perhaps somebody is sharing something in a session that might be going in an inappropriate way. By getting that eye contact we know that we can rein it in or perhaps just quietly talk to them.</p>	<p>Karen Todd, Fusion</p>
<p>What kind of tricky situations can arise and how do you deal with them?</p>	<p>It's a very vulnerable conversation that you're having with people. Sometimes we talk about how they were parented and the effect that has on their parenting. Quite often in the first week, (because that's when we talk about it) we've had a few occasions where people have just broken down because they're so relieved to share, to have that time to share and to know that other people in the room have experienced something similar and share that understanding. And straight away you build community, because everybody wants to help and to be with those people.</p> <p>On the last course we ran we had one lady who just left and so I gave Karen the eye. Karen carried on running the group and I went and chatted to the lady. She came back</p>	<p>Katy Phillips, Fusion</p>

	in and she carried on with the course but she just needed that support at that time.	
	<p>On the not so pleasant side of it, we have had times where we've had a couple of very strong personalities, so you're having to control people with very differing opinions, with plenty of confidence to share those opinions, and if they're not agreed with, plenty of confidence to carry on from their angle. And so the eye contact with the other facilitator is important in knowing when we need to invite them to finish their discussions after the session. What we don't want is for other people's session to be ruined by dominant personalities taking over.</p> <p>On the training days we teach how to facilitate, how to bring people back and how to close people down. We've learnt that over years and years, and I think because of our relationship we've learnt who handles certain situations in a better way.</p>	Karen Todd, Fusion
	The other thing we find is that quite often it becomes marriage guidance, and they start talking about their partners or they think about ways that they could use the skills and strategies with their partners. But sometimes they're rude about their husbands. That's another situation where you say "well thank you, that's obviously quite important to you but this isn't the time to share that now", and we draw them back.	Katy Phillips, Fusion
How do you draw people out of themselves?	That's another skill that we teach on the trainers training course. Karen and I will notice who the vocal people are and we may have to close them down a little bit. But then we'll notice the people who aren't saying anything so we would say "Annie I'd be really interested to hear what you think about this." But then we have get out clauses for them as well, like when we're reading we just say if you'd rather not read just say pass, so they don't have to. I mean people will say I'd rather not share, but more often than not if we do it that way and actually use their names and ask them specific open questions, not a yes and no, they will share. But sometimes they just need us to encourage, to draw them out really.	Katy Phillips, Fusion
	The other significant thing we do is we break up into small groups to do work. So twos or threes. That's particularly important in the early days to develop those people who	Karen Todd, Fusion

	<p>are more group wary and more inclined to be shy. Working in a two or a three is much less intimidating for them. When those groups feedback it can be one of the stronger characters that feed back. So they kind of build up their confidence before they feel that they are ready to talk in a group of 12 or 14 or something.</p> <p>In our participants' agreement as we go around, one of the things talked about is that if you are inclined to dominate conversation please try and include those who are less so.</p>	
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