

# Why Relationships Matter

Research evidence from the **Centre for Research on Families and Relationships**

## Families come in all shapes and sizes



### Many families include people who are neither blood nor legal relations

- Half of babies are born to unmarried parents but the over-whelming majority of their parents live at the same address<sup>1</sup>
- Many children have parents in different households
- Most extended families will include ex-partners, ex-in-laws, ex-auntie or uncle relationships who often remain included in what we call family

### Families are not just people you live with

- What happens in the neighbourhood and in other households is an important part of family life<sup>2</sup>
- More people live alone now than in the past<sup>3</sup>, but most have significant engagement with families, friends and social networks<sup>4</sup>

## Most families support each other

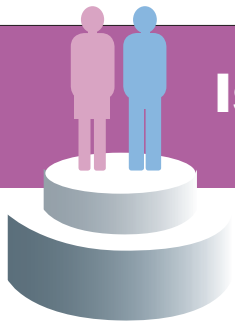


### Most families and communities are strong

- Most young children in Scotland live in families who eat, play games and read stories together every day<sup>5</sup>
- Most parents feel that people in their communities look out for each other's young children and can be trusted<sup>6</sup>

### Family and friends are key to supporting parents and children

- What we call the 'nuclear family' of parents and children are often 'not so nuclear'<sup>7</sup> or rather draw on support from others outside. A very significant amount of support and care go on between family members across household boundaries
- <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of parents with young children in Scotland have good informal support from family or friends giving advice and assistance<sup>6</sup>
- Grandparents are important, supporting young families significantly<sup>8,9</sup>



## Is marriage best?

### Many factors combine to contribute to children's wellbeing

- Parents fighting, mother's mental health and repeated changes in living arrangements are much more likely to have a detrimental effect on children than the structure of their family<sup>10</sup>
- For those on lower incomes, the neighbourhood, employment, support services and absence of debt help ensure good outcomes for children<sup>11,12</sup>

### Getting on well together is most important

- The quality of family relationships is a more fundamental aspect of children and young people's wellbeing than change, family structure<sup>2,12</sup> or even quantity of time spent together<sup>13</sup>
- Reading to and playing with your children on a daily basis as well as visiting a range of events and places have more effect on child development than family structure<sup>11</sup>
- Consistent loving care from at least one carer is better than chaotic or conflict ridden family lives<sup>11</sup>

### Experiencing family change has more of an impact on wellbeing than family structure

- Recent change, particularly in the family household, is more likely to lead to lower wellbeing than family structure<sup>14</sup>
- The disruption or absence of a family member for reasons other than divorce or family breakdown all carry their own stresses and the more they stack up, the more the balance is towards risk<sup>15,16</sup> for all family members
- The evidence is not settled when it comes to the claim that marriage is a more stable arrangement than cohabitation<sup>17</sup>

## Supporting families who need help



### Even strong families need help sometimes

- Over a lifetime, all families can go through periods of time where they experience change and they need help
- Family breakdown is not an event but a process. It is important to support families through periods of change

### Factors associated with poverty can add up to make it tougher for families

- Working towards reducing health inequalities, debt and issues related to long-term unemployment will have a positive impact on families and children
- Supporting community development can help families. Parents living in deprived areas are most likely to report their community as not being 'child friendly'<sup>6</sup>
- Mothers and children living in deprived areas are more likely to be without important wider family or friend support and also less likely to feel comfortable about approaching formal support services<sup>5</sup>. Special or tailored support for different groups of mums might be helpful

### Listening to and supporting children and young people is important for strong families

- Finding ways of listening to children and respecting how they define their needs, rights and interests and including them in discussion and decision-making will help support relationships in the long term<sup>13</sup>
- Finding ways of supporting children's relationships with adults and other children may help families through tough times<sup>16</sup>

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