



Family Action and Family Links - Parents, Children and Change Pilot Project: Evaluation Report

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Introduction

Family Action and Family Links have worked in partnership to develop a Pilot Project to support families in a community setting to recognise, adapt to, and cope with life changes. Together they wanted to explore whether a single, structured session facilitated by family support experts could make a measurable difference to families coping with a broad range of transitions such as divorce, bereavement or birth of a child. At a time when budgets for support services are reducing, Family Action and Family Links wanted to establish whether these sessions were able to make a difference in just over two hours to families going through transitions.

The pilot project was delivered to 30 participants across three sites in Manchester, Oxford and Swaffham. It was aimed at any parent going through significant life change that may impact on the family. In this sense the pilot is universal and not solely for specific groups. The sessions were designed to raise awareness of how changes in the family can affect parents' and children's emotions and behaviour. Sessions also aimed to help parents recognise signals that they or their children may not be coping very well with the life change, and assist them to develop strategies and coping mechanisms to better manage their circumstances.

Renaissi were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the pilot project, and the aims of the evaluation were to:

- Assess whether the project has been effective in achieving the desired outcomes
- Explore whether the project has had any effect on the parents' ability to recognise the effects of life changes on the behaviour and emotions of themselves and their children, and their knowledge and awareness of positive coping mechanisms
- Explore the parents circumstances, motivation for attending the sessions and their experience of the programme

Methodology

This evaluation took a mixed methods approach, including desk research, the development of a measurement framework and qualitative interviews with facilitators and participants.

Develop understanding of the pilot programme

Renaissi developed an understanding of the aims, rationale and objectives of the pilot by reading background documents and conducting five interviews with stakeholders. Interviews were conducted with those who developed the pilot from Family Action and Family Links, as well as the facilitators from the three sites. The interviews with facilitators also enabled the research team to understand the operational approach in each site.



Establishing programme outcomes

Following discussions with Family Action and Family Links and a review of the approach, Renaishi developed a set of outcomes for the Parents, Children and Change Pilot Project that formed the basis of what the pilot would be measured against. As the pilot consisted of one individual session for just over two hours, the outcomes focussed on participants' knowledge, awareness and understanding of the material covered during that time. The desired outcomes that were agreed are as follows:

- Participants develop knowledge and awareness of the feelings and emotions that can be experienced during life changes for parents and children.
- Participants develop an understanding of how changes may be impacting on parents' and children's emotions and behaviour.
- Participants develop an understanding of the ways in which difficult emotions and stress can affect parents and children.
- Participants develop knowledge and awareness of helpful and unhelpful ways for parents to deal with their own, and their children's, difficult emotions.
- Participants increase their confidence in helping themselves and their children cope with life changes.
- Participants develop knowledge and awareness about where they can go if they or their children require extra help to cope during difficult times of change.

Designing a measurement tool

To establish the tools already in existence, Renaishi conducted a review of available measurement tools for parenting programmes that measure outcomes related to parents and children's behaviour, emotions, and their ability to cope with life changes. This was done to identify validated tools that may have been useful in measuring the desired programme outcomes.

As this project is new and innovative, the existing validated tools did not align appropriately with the requirements of the pilot. Therefore, Renaishi developed a bespoke pre and post measurement tool to capture the participants' perceptions before and after the sessions. This was to explore knowledge, awareness and understanding, since it is not possible to measure behavioural change after a single, informative session. The questions on the measurement tool are closely aligned with the desired outcomes from the programme. A copy of this tool can be found in the appendix.

Data collection

The measurement tool was distributed to the three sites along with guidance for facilitators about the process for collecting data from participants. The data were



collated by Family Links and entered into a database created by Renaishi for ease of analysis.

To gather qualitative data regarding the experience and any outcomes from the sessions, the research team sampled seven participants from across the three sessions to conduct brief, qualitative semi-structured interviews. This was to supplement the quantitative data gathered via the tools and to gain a snapshot of the participants' experience of the sessions.

Data analysis

Renaishi analysed the qualitative and quantitative data to identify key findings regarding the desired outcomes from the pilot project. This included identifying the strengths and challenges of the pilot and participants' perceptions of the sessions in order to make some practical recommendations on future delivery of the service, monitoring and evaluation. Due to the limited number of survey responses, the data were analysed to identify the percentages and differences in mean scores, but no statistical analysis was conducted.

Limitations with the available data must be acknowledged, as there were a relatively small number of participants, and those who took part in the qualitative interviews were self-selecting. Therefore the findings cannot be generalised and must not be taken out of context.

Delivery

The pilot was a new and innovative partnership between Family Action and Family Links and consisted of six one-off sessions, two in each area. The sessions were delivered in the community across three different sites:

Location	Oxford	Swaffham	Manchester
Total number of participants	7 participants	13 participants	10 participants
Location	The session was delivered in a school which helped to recruit participants. This has the advantage of being a familiar place but could influence beneficiaries' participation.	The session was delivered at a Community Centre that Family Action's services are based in. Family Action advertised the sessions and recruited the participants.	The session was delivered in a Children's Centre run by Family Action. Family Action carried out recruitment by word of mouth internally and externally with partners, as well as leafleting local schools.
Aim	The aim for the session was to help parents <i>"feel more</i>	The facilitators presented the outcome for the workshop as	The facilitator described the outcome for the workshop as



	<i>resilient,</i> ” and to better support their children in managing change.	helping parents to understand how children react to change and how the children and family's life chances improve as a result.	a “ <i>normalisation of change,</i> ” and “ <i>a way to explore thoughts and ideas and experiences and the impact it may have on you and your families.</i> ”
Facilitator	The facilitator was a Director of Programmes at Family Links who worked on designing the session. Attendees were encouraged to participate equally.	One facilitator was a freelance experienced trainer specialising in parent coaching (linked to Family Links). Family Action co-facilitated each session with a member of staff experienced at running parenting courses.	The first session was facilitated by a Family Links training lead who primarily trains professionals. She aimed to create a relaxed and informal setting. The second session was co-facilitated by an Operational Manager from Family Action.

Access and engagement

Participants were able to self-refer into the programme or be signposted to the opportunity by an organisation or local professional who they came into contact with. The support consisted of a two hour group session co-delivered by a Family Links trainer and a professional from the host organisation.

Strengths and Challenges

Interviews with staff, stakeholders and participants identified strengths in the delivery model relating to: content, style of delivery, format, environment and recruitment. Identified challenges related to content, style of delivery and recruitment. These are described in the table below:

Strengths	Illustration
Content	The content was reported to be accessible and relevant: <i>‘relevant to everybody,’</i> and <i>‘beneficial for everyone.’</i> [participant] <i>‘It was all completely making sense to their own lives.’</i> [facilitator]
Style of delivery	The delivery style was reported to be inclusive: <i>‘There was a big group discussion rather than being sat there being told this, this, this...They involved everybody in it.’</i> [participant] It was also reported to be a safe space to explore feelings: <i>‘I surprised myself because I found it really emotional’</i> [participant]
Format	Information was given about how change impacts on parents and children: <i>‘I’m learning not only for my family but for myself as well’</i> [participant]
Environment	Making valuable use of local spaces to engage the community. An advantage of using a school is that it is a <i>‘familiar place.’</i> [facilitator]
Recruitment	Many participants were recruited by professionals they already knew or interacted with in a local Children’s Centre or school. This helps to build trust. Feedback received from Family Action after the interviews highlighted how change is addressed a great deal in the Manchester Children Centre, and parents who attended the courses were already involved in other learning pathways, such as Incredible Years. This previous participation was reported to enable them to engage well with



	these sessions as they were already familiar with the service and this made it easier for them to access the service and engage, and to be aware of what to expect.
Challenges	Illustration
Content	As well as being identified as a strength, there was an acknowledgement that 'change' as a topic is extremely broad. This could be challenging in communicating the session to participants, and it could appear vague.
Style of delivery	One facilitator acknowledged a challenge of working with a diverse group across a wide range of topics in one session. The facilitator needs to be skilled and well equipped to manage dynamics and have awareness across a broad range of issues affecting families.
Format	A response from participants and facilitators was that more time could be allocated to the session. There is a lot of content to cover in a short time. One participant said: <i>'I would have loved for it to be longer.'</i> [participant]
Recruitment	Some sessions had fewer participants than anticipated. Facilitators reported that it is often difficult to recruit for a pilot since potential participants did not know what to expect.

Outcomes and Impact

Overview

This section of the report documents the outcomes and the impact of the programme on participants using data from the pre and post surveys, and the qualitative interviews with seven participants. All participants completed the pre and post surveys meaning the survey data is representative of all those who attended the workshops. The survey data is based on self-reported information from workshop participants, and demonstrates the changes in their responses after attending regarding their knowledge, awareness and understanding of the issues covered. Without further longitudinal research methods actual behavioural change could not be measured in this evaluation.

Motivation for attending

The parents who attended the workshops had a range of reasons and motivations for attending. Some reasons related to specific changes participants were experiencing within their family. Twenty five, out of a total of thirty survey respondents, stated they were currently experiencing a life change, three chose not to respond to the question, and two reported they were not currently experiencing life change. From the qualitative interviews, the small number of participants who had not reported a change described how they were attending to increase their knowledge and build confidence more generally.



From the survey, 100% of participants reported that they would recommend the workshop to others, highlighting an extremely positive participant experience overall. Additionally, the survey highlighted that 50% of respondents expressed an interest in gaining further support for themselves following the session, and 27% in gaining further support for their child. This is positive for those who may not have engaged with family support before but do require links into different or more intensive support. However, the longer-term outcome of this will depend upon availability and the wider context of the local area as to the types of services on offer.

As mentioned in the methodology section of this report, the pilot project had six desired outcomes. The chart below illustrates the difference between pre and post survey responses, which were scored out of 5, according to the outcomes they are aligned with. Participants' answers were analysed by the average difference between pre and post scores for each question to illustrate the mean differences in the scores across the outcomes. This self-reported data about changes in the knowledge, understanding and awareness suggests an improvement was made towards all of the agreed outcomes.

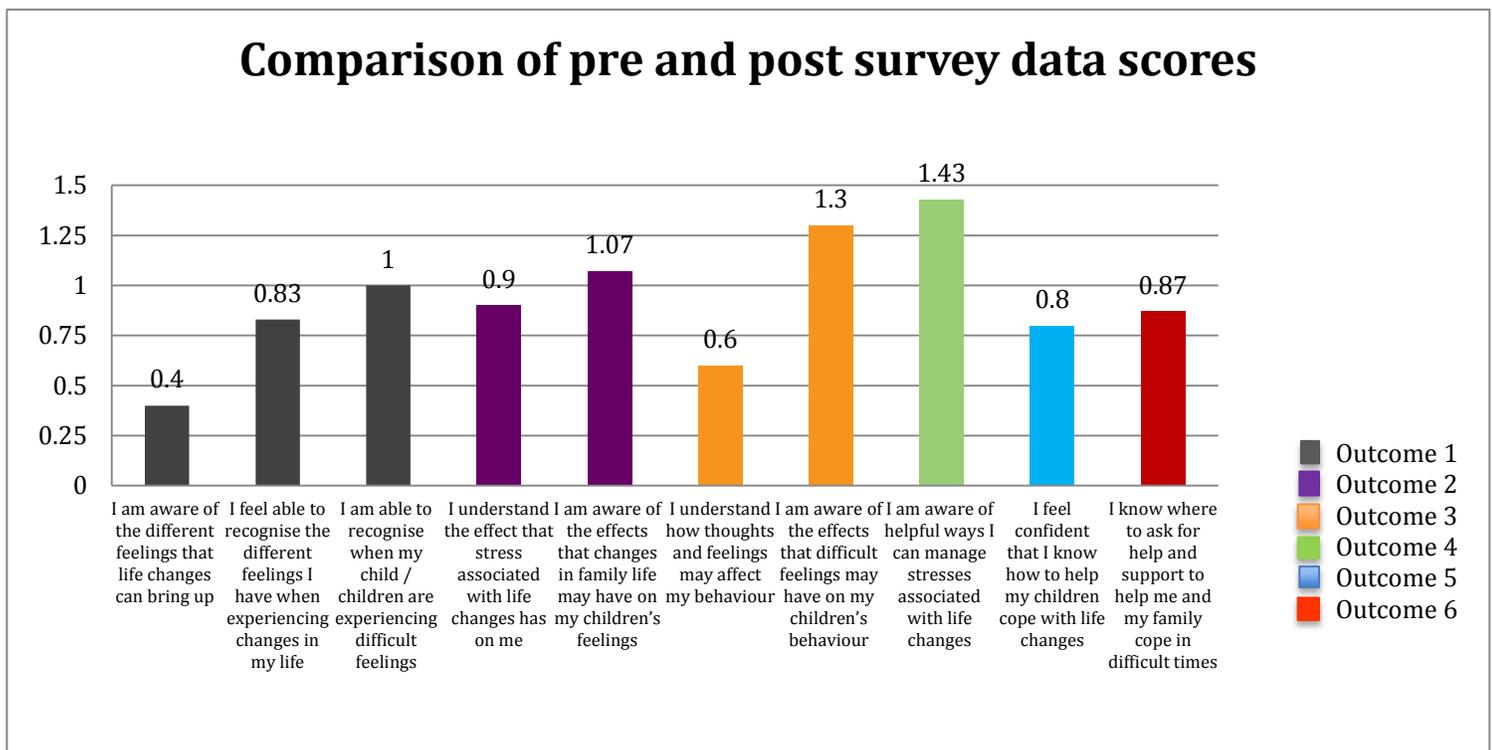


Fig 1.

The most notable increases were in the survey questions about managing stress, awareness of children's emotions and how they may be affected, and knowing where to ask for help and support. For some questions the pre scores were already high at the



beginning of the session which makes it difficult to demonstrate changes after the session. Reasons for this remain unknown but could potentially be due to recognised methodological challenges in developing surveys using scale questions, or due to participants feeling competent across these areas at the beginning of the session. These elements could be further explored in future research.

Programme Outcomes

The following table illustrates all of the desired programme outcomes targeted by the course. The data from the self-reported survey and the qualitative interviews has been aligned with the six desired outcomes. Whilst all distinct in their aims, the six desired outcomes can broadly be categorised into those that focus on developing an understanding of the issues and emotions encountered during periods of change, objectives one to three, while objectives four, five and six focus on increasing knowledge and practical strategies for the future. During the interviews, some of the participants made comments regarding the ways in which they had attempted to use the strategies that were shared with them during the session. However, as this pilot and the evaluation were conducted over a short period of time, it is not possible to make definitive statements about behavioural change.

Further information shared with the research team after the sessions highlighted that the impact of this short course has been marked for some parents. Following the sessions, one parent who attended in Manchester is now a volunteer, and another has had the confidence to apply for work. In addition, it was noted by the facilitators that these short sessions may be a useful introduction to link participants into longer parenting courses that already exist, such as the Solihull Approach.



Outcome	Examples and Illustration
1. Participants develop knowledge and awareness of the feelings and emotions that can be experienced during life changes for parents and children.	Information shared around this was frequently stated as a useful aspect of the workshop. One participant said that the session had helped her with: <i>'Understanding how the change can affect the way my little boy is'.</i>
2. Participants develop an understanding of how changes may be impacting on parents' and children's emotions and behaviour.	Understanding effects of change in life on children's feelings showed an average change in score of 1.07 between pre and post score. As a result, one participant commented: <i>'I'm a lot more understanding and patient'.</i>
3. Participants develop an understanding of the ways in which difficult emotions and stress can affect parents and children.	The question relating to awareness of the effect of difficult feelings on children's behaviour showed an average difference in the pre and post scores of 1.3. One participant said: <i>'If he plays up I'm a bit more understanding and have a bit more patience with him'.</i>
4. Participants develop knowledge and awareness of helpful and unhelpful ways for parents to deal with their own, and their children's difficult emotions.	By recognising certain behaviour as associated with emotions, some participants reported being able to deal with this differently. The question relating to dealing with stress showed the largest average difference in pre and post scores of 1.43.
5. Participants increase their confidence in helping themselves and their children cope with life changes.	An average difference in the pre and post score relating to confidence was evidenced (0.8.) A participant recognised that she had learnt <i>'how to help children and go through change and how to manage change'.</i>
6. Participants develop knowledge and awareness about where they can go if they or their children require extra help to cope during difficult times of change.	Responses to these questions demonstrated an average difference between the pre and post scores of 0.87. 50% of respondents surveyed requested further support for themselves while 27% requested further support for their child.

Case Studies

To illustrate the experiences of two participants who attended the sessions, this section documents two case studies. The outcomes for these participants relate to increased awareness and confidence about how to help children cope with life changes, and recognising how emotions affect the behaviour of themselves and their children:



Case Study 1 – Becky (fictitious name)

Becky is currently going through a divorce and has four children, two younger and two older. She was recruited to the session by school staff and attended the session in the school that her children attend.

Before attending the session, she had engaged in other discussion groups and had been looking for some support on how to cope with life changes. The novelty of the pilot session especially attracted her to it. *'[It was] very different to something I'd heard and seen before.'*

Becky reported that she found the session to be really positive and explained that she had experienced difficulties in expressing how she was feeling, but the style of delivery had helped her to engage with her emotions. This had encouraged her to open up and talk with her children to explore how they were feeling. She said that during the session *'writing it down on paper was a really good way of getting in touch with my feelings.'*

Becky said the workshop helped her to gain a greater awareness of her children's emotional and behavioural experience of change that may be different to an adult's response: *'things to them are big and they have upsets about it.'* She also reflected that change is normal: *'everyone is going through something.'*

As a result of the workshop, Becky reported that she has made attempts to change how she interacts with her children. She has tried allowing her youngest some time to express her emotions if she is upset. Becky is also trying to create a space for communication, giving her daughter the time and space to open up. *'I'm trying to spend more time with her, trying to communicate, picking my moments and not leaving her [in her room on the iPad].'*

Looking forward, Becky said she is aware of some of the impacts of difficult emotions and now has increased confidence to be emotionally open around her children, and to help them understand that *'when I get upset, don't panic, mum is going to be ok.'*

Case Study 2 – Andrea (fictitious name)

Andrea was told about the session by a member of staff at the Children's Centre in Manchester and decided to go along. Having recently experienced a big change in her own life with the birth of her first child, she felt the workshop would be relevant to her situation and offer her a *'different perspective'*.

Andrea reported that the workshop was good, and that the small group size made it feel more personal, enabling everyone to have a chance to share their own experiences. Andrea described how the workshop enabled plenty of discussion between participants instead of being like a lecture.

Andrea commented that the workshop provided some useful *'food for thought'* and allowed her to consider ways to understand and cope with her emotions during periods of change. Andrea reported that as a result of the workshop she is paying more attention to recognising emotions. For example, she said that she *'might feel everything is fine, but might have problems sleeping'*. This illustrates how she may not have recognised that it might be in relation to the changes her and her family are experiencing before going on the course.

Conclusions

Andrea now wants to use these strategies to *'make it easier for everyone in the family and also for myself'*. Andrea would recommend the workshop to others as she thinks it is *'relevant to everybody'* because everyone goes through change at some point in their lives.



Overall, the sessions were reported to be valuable by the participants and the facilitators. Strengths and challenges were identified with the delivery of the sessions, and there is evidence to suggest that the pilot session outcomes were achieved. As documented throughout this report, there are limitations with the data that must be acknowledged; however, this evaluation has demonstrated the positive indications from the themes that emerged.

Delivery

The strengths of the delivery were reported to be that sessions were relaxed and informal, they were delivered in a style that enabled everyone to participate, and the information shared was practical and relevant. The challenges were that it proved difficult to recruit participants to the sessions, and that the broad nature of the topic requires a skilled facilitator to work across the various issues which may affect participants.

Outcomes and impact

All of the participants would recommend the session to others. The largest changes in the pre and post scores were in relation to the questions about recognising and managing stress, awareness of children's emotions and how they may be affected, and knowing where to ask for help and support. The qualitative data also illustrates that some participants experienced increased knowledge and awareness and had welcomed practical ways that they could try to support their children to cope with changes.

Recommendations

Recruitment

- Consider further exploration of how the recruitment is carried out across the different sites to improve this in the future and potentially standardise the recruitment methods that appear to be successful.

Delivery

- Potentially extend the length of the session to cover the material in the programme but balance this against retaining the element of a relatively short one-off session.
- Consider the challenges of participants with broad experience of change attending the same session.
- Consider standardising and further clarifying the aims of the session to help with recruitment of participants.
- For those who require extra support, ensure that facilitators are aware of the available services and the context of the wider locality.
- Signpost and refer those participants that would welcome extra support to other parenting courses on offer locally.

Evidence



If this pilot is to be extended or rolled out:

- Survey data should continue to be collected to evidence outcomes with a larger population of participants, allowing more comprehensive data analysis.
- The development of a Theory of Change should be considered to communicate the aims, expected outcomes, in-built assumptions, and related activity to external audiences and strengthen the programme.
- Other research methods should be utilised to capture changes for participants.

Appendix: Measurement tool



Pre survey: Parents children and Change Pilot Project

Age: Renaishi	Session attended: <input type="checkbox"/> Oxford <input type="checkbox"/> Manchester <input type="checkbox"/> Norfolk
Sex:	
Are you or your family experiencing any changes at the moment? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If yes please specify _____	How did you find out about this session? <input type="checkbox"/> I saw a poster and decided to come along <input type="checkbox"/> I saw a leaflet and decided to come along <input type="checkbox"/> It was suggested to me by someone who works in the School / Children’s Centre / Family Support Project <input type="checkbox"/> Other please specify _____

Please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: 1 (disagree strongly) 5 (agree strongly)

- 1) I am aware of the different feelings that life changes can bring up
1 2 3 4 5
- 2) I feel able to recognise the different feelings I have when experiencing changes in my life
1 2 3 4 5
- 3) I understand how my thoughts and feelings may affect my behaviour
1 2 3 4 5
- 4) I understand the effect that stress associated with life changes has on me
1 2 3 4 5
- 5) I am aware of helpful ways I can manage stresses associated with life changes
1 2 3 4 5
- 6) I am able to recognise when my child / children are experiencing difficult feelings
1 2 3 4 5
- 7) I am aware of the effects that changes in family life may have on my children’s feelings
1 2 3 4 5
- 8) I am aware of the effects that difficult feelings may have on my children’s behaviour
1 2 3 4 5
- 9) I know where to ask for help and support to help me and my family cope in difficult times
1 2 3 4 5
- 10) I feel confident that I know how to help my children cope with life changes
1 2 3 4 5

Post survey tool for Parents, Children and Change Pilot Project

Ref:



Please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements 1 (disagree strongly) 5 (agree strongly)

1) I am aware of the different feelings that life changes can bring up

1 2 3 4 5

2) I feel able to recognise the different feelings I have when experiencing changes in my life

1 2 3 4 5

3) I understand how thoughts and feelings may affect my behaviour [1-5]

1 2 3 4 5

4) I understand the effect that stress associated with life changes has on me

1 2 3 4 5

5) I am aware of helpful ways I can manage stresses associated with life changes

1 2 3 4 5

6) I am able to recognise when my child / children are experiencing difficult feelings

1 2 3 4 5

7) I am aware of the effects that life changes may have on my children's feelings

1 2 3 4 5

8) I am aware of the effects that difficult emotions may have on my children's behaviour

1 2 3 4 5

9) I know where to ask for help and support to help me and my family cope in difficult times

1 2 3 4 5

10) I feel confident that I know how to help my children cope with life changes

1 2 3 4 5

11) Would you recommend this session to others who may be facing changes in their life?

Yes

No

If you have any other comments about today's session please let us know:

If there is anything else you think should be covered in this session please let us know:



Please turn the page

Following this session, I would like to receive further support for myself to deal with the changes I am going through *[if you answer 'yes', please leave your details so we can contact you]*

- Yes
- No

Following this session, I would like to receive further support for my children to help them deal with the changes they are going through *[if you answer 'yes', please leave your details so we can contact you]*

- Yes
- No

Would you be happy for an independent researcher to contact you by phone to ask you about what you thought about this session? Yes / No

If yes please include contact details:

Name:	
Contact telephone number:	