



**Family Action and Family
Links - Parents, Children
and Change Pilot Project:
Evaluation Executive
Summary
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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 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.

Renaishi were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the pilot project to assess whether the project has been effective in achieving the desired outcomes. This evaluation took a mixed methods approach, including desk research, the development of specific outcomes, the development of a measurement framework and qualitative interviews with facilitators and participants.

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 total number of participants reached over both sessions was: Oxford (7) Swaffham (13) Manchester (10).

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

All of the participants would recommend the session to others and the data gathered showed positive outcomes. The largest changes in the pre and post scores from the survey were in relation to the questions about recognising and understanding ways to manage stress, increasing 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 of the impact of change and had welcomed practical ways that they could try to support their children to cope with changes. The following table illustrates the findings relating to each outcome:



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.

Conclusions

This evaluation has demonstrated positive indications from this pilot programme. There is evidence to suggest that the pilot session outcomes were achieved in relation to participants recognising stress and understanding mechanisms for managing stress, increasing awareness of children's emotions and how they may be affected, and knowing where to ask for help and support.