

# Trainer's notes

## Unit No. 3 Corporate Parenting

### Unit objectives

- To identify the meaning of the concept of 'corporate parent', the responsibilities implied by the term and the legislative framework.
- To understand the corporate parent's responsibilities in relation to their own professional role.
- To be aware of the responsibilities of professionals in partner agencies who are part of the wider corporate family.

### Outline of Unit

- Introduction: definitions
- The fragmentary nature of the parenting relationship
- Interpreting the corporate parent's responsibilities
- The concept of the 'corporate family', i.e. the responsibilities of public bodies and the wider community planning partnership

### Resources required to deliver unit

- PowerPoint: Corporate parenting
- Four large paper circles and marker pens for the parenting activity
- Film, Craig's Story, scenes 6/7 and/or scene 12
- Hand-outs: Extract from Paper by Randy Lee Comfort; Corporate Parenting Responsibilities Grid
- 'These are our Bairns: a guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent' (Scottish Government 2008)

### Resources required to support this unit

- The Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS) web site: [www.celcis.org](http://www.celcis.org)
- Corporate Parenting pages of CELCIS website: [https://www.celcis.org/knowledge-bank/spotlight/corporate-parenting/Looked After Children & Young People: We Can And Must Do Better](https://www.celcis.org/knowledge-bank/spotlight/corporate-parenting/Looked%20After%20Children%20&%20Young%20People%20-%20We%20Can%20And%20Must%20Do%20Better) (Scottish Executive, 2007)

Statutory Guidance on Part 9: Corporate Parenting (Scottish Government, 2015)

## **Introduction to trainer**

This unit can be presented as a short two-hour introduction, or could be tailored to suit a half-day workshop or full day conference for corporate parents or the extended corporate family. It can be used with either single-profession or multi-professional/multi-agency groups. If used as part of an introduction, you might opt to play the film, *Craig's Story*, entirely, rather than using the scenes suggested.

This session aims to help participants understand the concept of corporate parenting and to develop their awareness of looked after children's complex support needs. The unit also aims to encourage participants to identify their own particular responsibilities, to consider how these are being implemented locally and to identify aspects for improvement. Trainers should feel free to select from the suggested activities and to adapt them to suit local needs.

## **Trainer Presentation (10-20 minutes)**

Provide a short introduction to contextualise the session (slide 1). This will obviously need to be tailored to suit the needs of the participants. You might, for example, explain the two-fold purpose of the session: to identify the meaning of the concept of 'corporate parent', the responsibilities implied by the term and the legislative framework; and to understand the corporate parent's responsibilities in relation to their own role.

Point out that corporate parenting has been an explicit feature of policy and guidance in Scotland for some time (for example through 'We can and must do better' (Scottish Executive, 2007) and 'These are our bairns' (Scottish Executive, 2008)). Through Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, the concept of corporate parenting has been enshrined in law, meaning that a total of 24 public bodies now have legal duties and responsibilities to looked after children and care leavers. These public bodies include local authorities, health boards, all colleges and universities, the police, the prison service, children's hearings, and many more (see slide 2).

The statutory guidance accompanying Part 9 of the Act defines corporate parenting as

...an organisation's performance of actions necessary to uphold the rights and secure the wellbeing of a looked after child or care leaver, and through which physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development is promoted, from infancy through to adulthood... (p4)

The guidance goes on to clarify that

...corporate parenting is about certain organisations listening to the needs, fears and wishes of children and young people, and being proactive and determined in their collective efforts to meet them. It is a role which should complement and

support the actions of parents, families and carers, working with these key adults to deliver positive change for vulnerable children. (p4)

The Act and accompanying guidance build on the previous 2007 definition from the then Scottish Executive, that corporate parenting is

...the formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children and young people

In more everyday language, when a child becomes looked after, some or all of the responsibilities normally undertaken by parents become the responsibility of the state. Corporate parenting is about public funded bodies listening to children and families, and working together to meet these responsibilities. This is no longer simply the sole responsibility of the local authority, this relationship could be likened to members of the extended family (aunts, uncles, grandparents etc.) contributing to the child's upbringing. Each corporate parent named in the Act has a different role and function, and how they act as a corporate parent will be governed to some extent by their purpose as an organisation. This being said, all corporate parents share the same duties and responsibilities to looked after children and care leavers, particularly in terms of being alert to matters which may affect these children, assessing their wellbeing needs, promoting their interests, providing opportunities to participate in activities designed to promote wellbeing, ensuring these opportunities are accessible to all looked after children and care leavers, improving how they fulfil their corporate parenting function, and collaborating with one another. These duties and responsibilities apply to all employees throughout the organisations, from operational staff to the highest level executive chiefs.

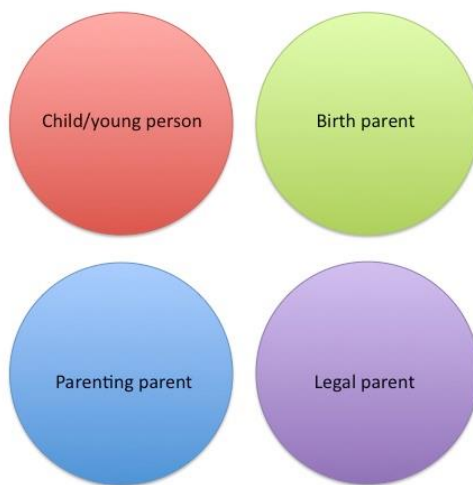
In summary, being a good corporate parent means going the extra mile for looked after children and care leavers, as if they were our own children. This will usually mean collaborating effectively with other professionals or agencies and will often involve advocating on behalf of the child for additional support or resources. Some have characterised the role of corporate parent as being like a 'pushy parent'.

If appropriate, at this point you might like to encourage the group to engage in discussion about the meaning of 'corporate parent' and to gain clarification about the children for whom corporate parent responsibilities apply to – i.e. all looked after children, not just those looked after away from home. There might also be discussion about how the role of corporate parent is shared (with attention given to consistency with the proper exercise of the corporate parent's function) and fulfilled, and how ownership is taken when partner agencies are involved who are not 'legal' corporate parents, but have responsibilities in relation to the concept, e.g. voluntary or not-for-profit organisations and private sector companies. It may be appropriate at this point to explore the concept of the 'corporate family'.

### **Activity: the fragmentary nature of the corporate parent family relationship (20 minutes)**

The experience of having professionals intervening in the parenting relationship, of leaving the birth family for a care placement, or of moving care placements is inevitably distressing for a child. Also, there may have been a long period, perhaps lasting years, of disruption, neglect and trauma, prior to becoming looking after. The activity, developed from the outline used by Vera Fahlberg, is designed to help participants to appreciate the typically fragmented nature of child-adult relationships and the confusion that this may cause for a child involved with so many adults.

There are four definable yet overlapping entities: the child/young person; birth parent; parenting parent and legal parent.



Prepare four large circles of paper and label them child, birth parent, parenting parent, legal parent.

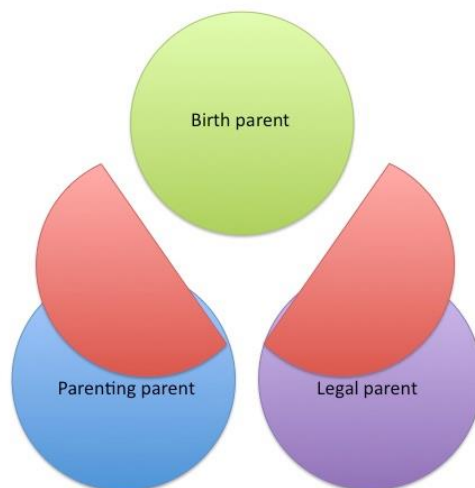
Place the child's circle on the floor and then put down the circles representing the different parental roles. Talk about the key elements of each aspect of parenting.

- **Birth parents** give a child life, family history, the potential for skills and talents, and their health status.
- **The parenting parent(s)** fulfils all those activities associated with bringing up a child. These include providing for the child's basic needs, planning for the future, being a resource to turn to, providing positive experiences, hopes and dreams, and acting as advocate and mentor.
- **The legal parenting** function consists of taking decisions in relation to education, health and medical treatment, where children live, where they go, etc.

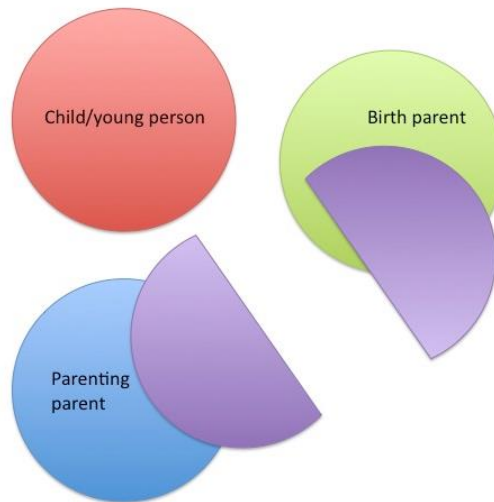
Place all three circles on top of one another to illustrate the optimum situation when children are living with family who share a history, have legal entitlements and who fulfil the day to day parental role.



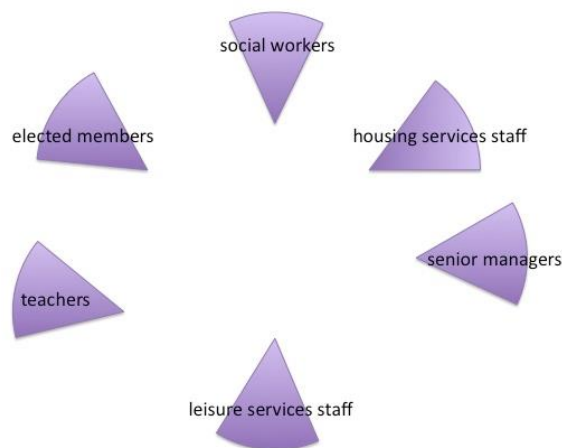
Now move the circles around to illustrate different scenarios, for instance, when a child is living with one parent, but another separated parent also maintains legal responsibility. Explain that birth parents only lose all legal rights for a child when he or she is adopted. In the case of a looked after child, the reality of parenting can be very complex, often resulting in confusion for schools, health services, youth organisations and others who play important parts in the child's life. The child may experience embarrassment and even hurt. They may feel isolated and different to their peers. Day to day caring may be undertaken by relative carers, foster carers or residential workers but the legal responsibility is shared between the parents and the local authority.



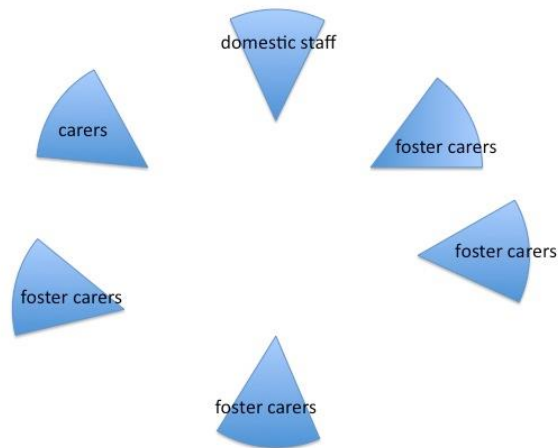
Tear a portion off the legal parent circle and leave a section with birth parents. Tear another section off and place with the parenting parent. Explain that local authorities have legal duties towards looked after children, and carers have day to day responsibilities.



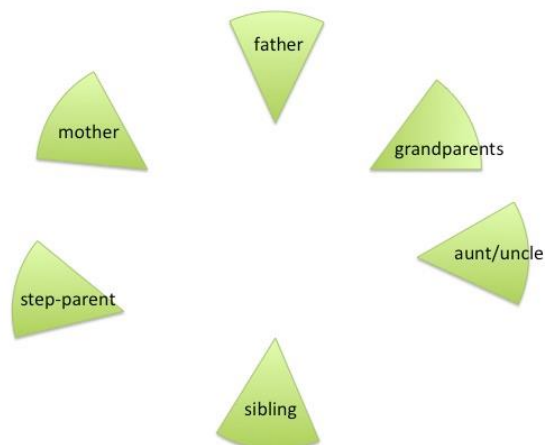
Take the section of the legal parent sheet which represents the local authority and tear it into different pieces to represent different 'players', e.g. social workers, teachers, managers, elected members etc., to illustrate the range of people who are now involved in a child's life. A further section could represent the Children's Hearing, or other corporate parents who have involvement.



Then take the parenting parent circle and emphasise that again this often is not just one person, with responsibilities shared, for example by carers and domestic staff working shifts in a residential unit, or a series of foster carers. Tear this sheet into sections to represent these different elements.



Finally take the birth parent sheet and talk through the different people who are often represented here, i.e. mother, father, grandparents, aunt/uncle, sibling, step-parent. Tear the paper into sections to represent these people. Mention the frequency with which a child's family can change dramatically whilst they are looked after, e.g. new step-parent, new sibling, sibling adopted.



### **Trainer presentation (15 minutes)**

The result of this activity will be to have a circle representing a child surrounded by fragments of paper. Explain that this highlights the range of people involved in caring for a child and the vital importance of adults working together. It will also demonstrate that for the child concerned it can be a very bewildering, and at times frustrating situation, not knowing who can make what decisions, and also perhaps feeling powerless. They may feel singled out and thus different from their peers. Powerlessness may also be experienced by others such as birth parents and carers. Allow a lot of discussion about the feelings this evokes for participants, which may mirror those, for instance, experienced by parents or carers. Ensure, however, that participants are also enabled to suggest strategies and solutions so that they are not left feeling completely powerless.

You might find the extract from an article by Randy Lee Comfort a social worker and educational psychologist (provided on with the training materials as a hand-out 'Effects of Fragmented Parenting'), useful to help support a discussion about the effects on the child or young person of fragmented parenting.

### **Activity (20-45 minutes)**

Use the film, *Craig's Story*, scenes 6/7 (review meeting) and/or scene 12 (meeting chaired by depute head teacher to plan reintegration to school following an exclusion). Invite participants to discuss how the professionals work together, demonstrating good corporate parenting. You might like to invite participants to go beyond the information provided in the film to consider the further supports that would need to be in place.

### **Trainer presentation: Interpreting the corporate parent's responsibilities (10 minutes)**

Introduce the Scottish Government guide to good corporate parenting 'These are our Bairns: a guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent', a copy of the guide is included as part of the training materials. Although it pre-dates the legislation and statutory guidance, it provides specific examples in relation to different professional roles with regards to being a good corporate parent. The statutory guidance is more general in nature. Direct participants to the Introduction and allow time to read it. Introduce the activity below, designed to help participants to interpret particular responsibilities relevant to their role with looked after children and young people.

### **Activity (45 minutes)**

Invite participants to go to the section of the guide which is most relevant to their role and to read the section through. Distribute the *Corporate Parenting Responsibilities Grid*. Provide instructions for completion as follows.

'Complete each row of the template so you have a set of bullet points under the headings: 'You will want to...' and How will I know I've made a difference? Begin with what you do now, or feel that you do well. Next, add things you feel you ought to do now but don't, or could do better. Then note actions required on your part or by others.'

Form participants into pairs or groups to discuss what it will take to implement the aspects of the role identified in the third row. Take feedback about actions suggested in the fourth row of the grid.

### **Key Messages (slide 5)**

- A child who is looked after is dependent on effective co-operation and working relationships between all those who carry a parenting function for him or her.



- It is vital that all players are acknowledged and enabled to make their contribution to a child's life, especially birth family who contribute to a sense of history and identity.
- A clear framework for planning for children is needed if the many elements of corporate parenting are to work together.
- When you think about it, this is the same as in all families, only more complicated!

## **References**

Comfort, R. L. (2007). For the love of learning: Promoting educational achievement for looked after and adopted children. *Adoption & Fostering*, 31 (1), 28-34.

Fahlberg, V. (1994). *A child's journey through placement*. London: BAAF.