

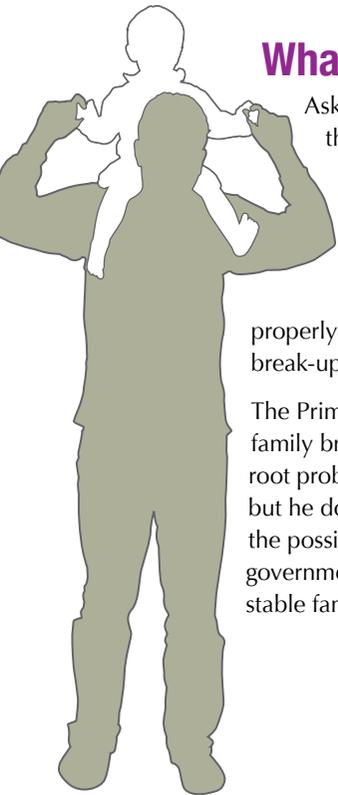


RESPECT BEGINS AT HOME

**WHY THE
GOVERNMENT
NEEDS TO SHOW
PARENTS MORE
RESPECT**

RESPECT has become something of a buzz-word – more because of a widespread perception that it is lacking throughout our society than because it is prized. It is a lack of respect for people and for property that lies at the root of the rising tide of anti-social behaviour and violent crime.

A YouGov survey of 3,771 adults in Britain found that 91 per cent of respondents believed that people show each other either ‘a lot less respect’ (73 per cent) or ‘a little less respect’ (18 per cent) than they did in the past, and 89 per cent were of the opinion that anti-social behaviour had ‘increased a lot’ (65 per cent) or ‘increased a little’ (24 per cent).



What has gone wrong?

Asked to select two factors that they thought were most responsible for the increase in anti-social behaviour, 85 per cent of respondents to the YouGov survey cited ‘parents not bringing up their children properly’, with 25 per cent mentioning ‘the break-up of so many marriages’.

The Prime Minister has also identified family breakdown and poor parenting as root problems of the current social malaise, but he does not appear to have considered the possibility that some of his own government’s policies are militating against stable family life and responsible parenting.

Where is respect learned?

The family is the first school in which a child is enrolled and respect is among the first and most important lessons to be learned. If children don’t learn to respect their parents in the home, they will find it more difficult to respect other authority figures and to grow up as orderly, productive and law-abiding citizens.

As Winston Churchill put it:

There is no doubt that it is around the family and the home that all the greatest virtues, the most dominating virtues of human society, are created, strengthened and maintained.

While encouraging respect for public servants and services including teachers and schools, health and emergency services and the police is doubtless a laudable aim, our political leaders are less vocal about the need to foster a culture of respect for parents. Yet it is from a proper respect for their parents that respect for other people and their property will naturally flow.

What can the government do?

There is clearly a limit to what the government can hope to achieve through the education system, as the Deputy Prime Minister has acknowledged:

We already expect our teachers to be social workers, child psychologists, nutritionists, child protection officers. We expect them to police the classroom, take care of our children’s health; counsel our sons and daughters. Guide them, worry about them. And, on top of that, educate them too. When you consider that list, it is phenomenal that so many rise to the challenge. But it is too much to ask. Teachers are not surrogate mothers and fathers; they cannot do it all.’



Commenting on anti-social behaviour, the Leader of the Opposition stated:

[W]e need to ask deeper questions about what causes this irresponsibility. About why some parents are not teaching their children the difference between right and wrong.’²

And in the view of the Prime Minister:

[I]f we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we’ve got to start.’³

Yet while leading politicians from all three of the major political parties trumpet the importance of parents, they continue to pursue policies that undermine and marginalise them.

On the one hand parents are held responsible for their children’s behaviour at school and in the community, while on the other their role is being undermined by growing pressure on mothers to work outside the home, official disapproval of effective methods of discipline, and the confidential provision of contraception and abortions without the knowledge or consent of parents. Increasingly, schools are appealing to the ‘right of the child to confidentiality’ to justify keeping parents in the dark on all manner of issues.

The more the state undermines the authority of parents, the less responsibility parents will be inclined to take for their children. Authority and responsibility go hand in hand. The government can’t have it both ways: it can’t disempower parents and at the same time blame them for society’s ills. If the government wants parents to take proper responsibility for their children, it must first of all respect their authority.

Over recent years there has been a tendency to regard children as the shared responsibility of parents and the state, with the state assuming an ever-increasing role in their lives. Behind the rhetoric about ‘supporting parents’, the personal responsibility of parents for their own children has all too often been lost sight of.

What can we do?

1 We can impress upon the government the need to show greater respect for parents in the policies they pursue. For example, with regard to:

Childcare

All the major political parties support the expansion of state-funded childcare in the early years and the provision of incentives to encourage mothers to return to the workplace. Such policies fail to respect the vital role of parents in caring for and nurturing their children during their earliest years..

Extended schools

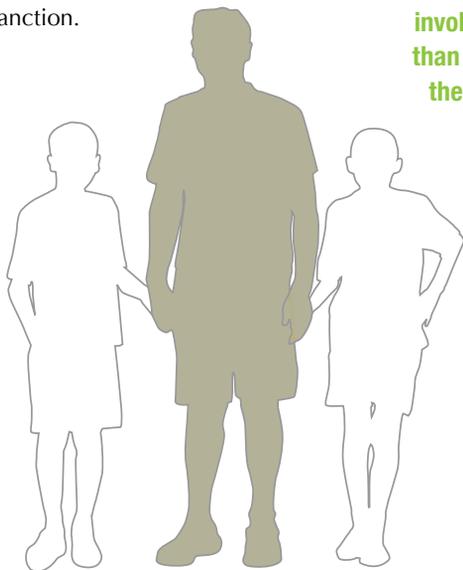
Schemes offering affordable childcare from 8am to 6pm all year round for children up to the age of 14 also fail to respect parents as the biggest single influence in their children's lives and their primary educators.

Discipline in the home

Government ministers have announced that they wish to discourage parents from smacking their children and promote alternatives to physical chastisement to manage children's behaviour and the government is under pressure to make it a criminal offence for parents to smack a willful and defiant child. To impose a ban on moderate parental smacking as a method of discipline would not only represent an unwarranted intrusion into family life, but would also harm children and deprive parents of an effective sanction.

Confidentiality policies

The government is persisting with its view that young people under the age of consent should be entitled to obtain contraceptives and abortions without the knowledge and consent of their parents. Keeping parents in the dark about the illegal activities of their children demonstrates a lack of respect for them as the primary carers and protectors of their children.



2 We can make parents more aware of how their responsibilities are being threatened and undermined by writing letters to local newspapers, taking part in radio phone-ins and online discussions, and passing on literature that encourages parents to fulfil their responsibilities towards their children. Literature published by Family Education Trust can be used as a source of helpful reference material.

3 We can aim to order our own homes in such a way that our children learn to respect their parents and other authority figures. While we long to see the government showing more respect for parents and for the family unit in the policies it pursues, we don't have to wait for that to start building the true and lasting foundations of respect in our own families.

A literature review published by the Department for Education confirms the importance of the involvement of parents in the lives of their children:

Research...establishes that parental involvement has a significant effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors (such as social class, maternal education and poverty) have been taken out of the equation... Differences in parental involvement have a much bigger impact on achievement than differences associated with the effects of school in the primary age range. Parental involvement continues to have a significant effect through the age range...⁴

¹ Nick Clegg speech at Southfields Community College, Wandsworth, 5 September 2011.

² Ed Miliband speech delivered at Haverstock School, 15 August 2011.

³ David Cameron speech delivered in Witney, 15 August 2011.

⁴ Desforges C, Abouchaar A, *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review*, DfES, 2003, p.86.