

Family Education Trust

(Family and Youth Concern)

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Government needs to show more respect for parents, says family group



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The government needs to stop undermining parents and show them proper respect if its war on antisocial behaviour is to have any hope of success, according to the Family Education Trust.

The Trust's Director, Norman Wells, commented:

'It's doubtless a good thing to encourage children and young people to respect their teachers, the police and other public servants, but the government's "Respect" agenda has been completely silent on the need to foster a culture of respect for parents. But that's the key to all the rest. It is from a proper respect for their parents that respect for other people and their property will naturally flow. 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.'

In an effort to raise public awareness of the various ways parents are being undermined by public policy and to embolden parents to take more responsibility for their children, Family Education Trust is launching a 'Respect for Parents' campaign.

In the first of a series of publications, the Trust highlights the government's schizophrenic attitude towards parents. While on the one hand the government trumpets the importance of parents and holds them responsible for their children's behaviour at school and in the community, on the other hand 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.

Trustees: Arthur Cornell MEd F.Coll.P (Chairman); Betty, Lady Grantchester; Eric Hester BA (Vice Chairman)
Dr John Guly MB BS DMJ; Simon J Ling MA FCA (Hon Treasurer); Denis Riches BSc (Secretary);
Mrs Valerie Riches (Founder President); Dr Trevor Stammers BSc FRCGP; Robert Whelan MA

Sponsors: John Bonnar MA MD FRCOG; The Viscountess Brentford OBE; Peter Dawson OBE BSc FRSA; The Baroness Elles;
The Duke of Montrose; The Baroness O'Cathain OBE; Professor Dennis O'Keeffe; J S Scott MD FRCS FRCOG

Norman Wells observed:

‘There is increasing concern about the lack of respect in society, and a widespread recognition that it has something to do with family breakdown and poor parenting, yet the government appears oblivious to the fact that many of its own policies are militating against stable family life and responsible parenthood.

‘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’, we are in danger of losing sight of the personal responsibility of parents for their own children.’

Notes to Editors

- In response to widespread public concern, the Labour government has made ‘Respect’ one of the major emphases of its third term of office and has established a Respect Task Force to promote a ‘culture of respect’.
- The Prime Minister has identified the breakdown of traditional family structures and ‘poor parenting’ as root problems of the current social malaise. (Speech on improving parenting, 2 September 2005.)
- Asked to select two factors that they thought were most responsible for the increase in anti-social behaviour, 85 per cent of respondents to a YouGov survey cited ‘parents not bringing up their children properly’, with 25 per cent mentioning ‘the break-up of so many marriages’. (YouGov survey reported in the *Daily Telegraph*, 27 May 2005.)

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- In his Criminal Justice System Review, published on 20 July 2006, Home Secretary, John Reid, announced the introduction of Parental Compensation Orders in ten areas, under which parents would be required to pay compensation for damage caused by the anti-social behaviour of children under the age of 10, making parents take more responsibility for the actions of their children.
- The way in which parents are being undermined and marginalised was highlighted earlier this year when the High Court ruled against Sue Axon and upheld the government's confidentiality policies for children. Sue Axon's case brought to public attention the dichotomy between the rhetoric about the importance of parents and a fundamental lack of regard for them in practice.
- Family Education Trust's 'Respect for Parents' campaign will focus on areas where parents are being marginalised and undermined, including childcare in the early years, extended schools, discipline in the home, sex education, and confidentiality policies.

For further information:

Norman Wells 020 8894 2525

Family Education Trust is an educational charity committed to promoting stable family life and the welfare of children and young people.

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