

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Celebrating Diversity

The Commission urges the Church of England

Through all its members, to:

1. Reaffirm the value and dignity of every human being.
2. Honour and celebrate singleness, whether through choice or circumstance, and recognise the full place of single people within the Church and society.
3. Enable and support people to talk openly and honestly about sensitive and difficult issues, including domestic abuse, separation and divorce, mental health, and relationships.
4. Challenge attitudes and behaviours anywhere in the life of the Church which undermine the value and dignity of every human being.

Building Loving Relationships and Supporting Families

The Commission urges the Church of England

Through its clergy, parishes, and deaneries, to:

1. Offer high quality preparation for marriage and other forms of committed adult relationships to every couple planning a religious or civil ceremony.
2. Commit to a culture of invitation for couples and place renewed emphasis on ongoing relationship support after a wedding ceremony, baptism and other church-based celebrations and services.
3. Pool resources at deanery level to focus on different aspects and the delivery of pastoral work, including marriage preparation and relationship support.

Through its dioceses, to:

1. Work collaboratively at parish, deanery and diocesan levels, with relationship support agencies, to support families at all life stages continually to build relational capability.
2. Explore ways to provide loving, caring and non-judgmental support for mothers, fathers and carers to combat adverse childhood experiences.
3. Work in partnership with professionals to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for people experiencing loneliness, mental health challenges, and dementia.
4. Partner with statutory and other agencies supporting individuals, families and children, ensuring that clergy and laity have the support they need in their pastoral work.

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5. Work in partnership with community organisations, other churches and other faith groups to provide coordinated support to enable local families and households to flourish.

Through its parishes, deaneries and dioceses, to:

1. Renew its focus on supporting families whose relationships are in difficulty.
2. Encourage a pastoral response to separation and divorce with a message of grace and a call to peace for families experiencing a stressful process.

Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People

The Commission urges the Church of England

Through the National Church, to:

1. Engage closely with government and organisations working with separating families to ensure that children at risk of harm from parental conflict are supported.
2. Continue to work through the Church of England's presence in Parliament to press for greater awareness of, and resourcing for the support of children at risk of harm in separating families.
3. Encourage the church to explore the use of *The Parents Promise* and partner with the *Positive Parenting Alliance*.
4. Share awareness across the church of the needs of all new parents, including adoptive parents, and ensure that care and support is offered in a non-judgemental way.
5. Advocate for children and young people in the care system, supporting them to find genuine permanency solutions, to the age of 18, and relational and accommodation support for young people leaving care.
6. Advocate for young people whose custodial sentences have ended to find genuine permanency solutions.
7. Work with government and organisations supporting children and parents to use family-friendly language.
8. Bring forward proposals which will enable the voices of children, young people and their families to be heard within the church at local and national levels.
9. Advocate for a greater understanding of the drivers that draw children and young people into the criminal justice system and to challenge negative attitudes towards children and young people involved in criminal activities.
10. Encourage the work of the Growing Faith Foundation to put children, young people and families instinctively at the heart of the Church's ministry and mission.

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Through its parishes and deaneries, to:

1. Encourage and support current and prospective kinship carers, foster and adoptive parents, and honour, celebrate and offer practical support to those who are caring for children and young people.
2. Consider ways to offer accessible and affordable activities for young people within their community, in partnership with local organisations, local authorities and other faith communities.
3. Be especially vigilant in respect of young carers in each community and find ways to support and walk alongside them and their families.
4. Provide parenting support through: quality parenting courses, for all stages of childhood, including in partnership with schools; the provision of high quality toddler groups.
5. Take the opportunity when infants and children are brought in for baptism to encourage good parenting, and to support parental relationships, and to consider promoting *The Parents Promise*

Through its dioceses, to:

1. Explore ways to provide loving, caring and non-judgmental support for mothers, fathers and carers to combat adverse childhood experiences

Through its dioceses and diocesan boards of education, to:

1. Work in partnership with schools and statutory agencies to develop ways to support families in which young people are not thriving in school, are excluded, or getting into trouble.
2. Encourage learning about relating well to each other as early as possible in a child's life.
3. Make its buildings and open spaces available for children and young people as safe places to be, working in partnership with community organisations, sports, creative arts and youth clubs.

Promoting Positive Family Policies

The Commission urges the Church of England

Through National Church Institutions, to:

1. Encourage an understanding of spirituality in health interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT

Building and Supporting Strong Relationships

The Commission urges the Government to:

1. Recognise and value the diversity of families and households, and to reflect this in policy and decision-making.
2. Ensure that registrars are required to signpost couples to marriage/relationship preparation available in their community when the couple give notice of an intention to marry or form a civil partnership.
3. Invest in relationship capability and relationship support for all couples to build and maintain strong, stable families and, when necessary, enable them to separate well. This should be done in partnership with specialist charities, community groups, statutory agencies and faith communities.
5. Ensure that relationship support is routinely offered at life transitions, especially at the transition to parenthood and when assuming caring responsibilities.
6. Develop a cross-departmental relationships strategy, which:
 - provides a coordinated approach to parental separation
 - keeps the child's best interests and wellbeing at the centre
 - is culturally specific
 - promotes a shift from the language of hostility to the language of peace
 - brings together the strands of policy that currently sit with several government departments
7. Ensure that the 20-week waiting period within the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020 is used effectively to support families, by:
 - offering a range of information and support services as soon as an application to court is made
 - ensuring that the Separated Parents Information Programme is made available to all parents free of charge at the earliest opportunity during the 20-week waiting period
 - ensuring that appropriate levels of resources, information and support are available across the Family Justice System when parents separate

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8. Encourage businesses to partner with *The Parents Promise*, in order to support better outcomes for children when parents part and reduce the number of days lost when parents take time off work due to stress.

Protecting Children and Young People

The Commission urges the Government to:

1. Develop a clear cross-government strategy to end child poverty.
2. Ensure that all prospective parents, including adoptive parents and guardians, have access to and receive comprehensive information about the support available from professionals working with new parents.
3. Portray adoption as a way for children to find the family they need in order to enjoy the security and stability of a loving home in which their wellbeing and happiness is the paramount consideration.
4. Implement at pace all of the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care
5. Encourage the imaginative development of different forms of relational and accommodation support for young people leaving care, ensuring that every young person leaving care should have consistent, loving relationships to help them flourish.
6. Encourage the imaginative development of different forms of relational and accommodation support for children and young people leaving custodial sentences.
7. Ensure that children and young people are protected as far as possible from harmful material online, in conjunction with supporting parents and carers, and to ensure that children and young people are able to navigate social media confidently and appropriately.

Learning about relationships

The Commission urges the Government to:

1. Ensure that Relationships and Sex Education is delivered well, consistently, and its effectiveness monitored.
2. Encourage learning about relating well to each other as early as possible in a child's life.
3. Promote education on the primacy of the early years, supporting parents and carers to promote their own and their child's wellbeing during the first five years of life.

Supporting Children and Young People

The Commission urges the Government to:

1. Reduce waiting times in the family justice system and the youth justice system.
2. Ensure that every child and young person is offered the opportunity to be heard in the family and youth justice systems and kept informed of decisions which will impact on their lives.
3. Work with community groups and statutory agencies to urgently address the disproportionality of Black children within the criminal justice system, improve relationships, call out discrimination, and ensure appropriate support is available for young people affected.
4. Deliver the National Youth Guarantee by guaranteeing shared safe spaces for every child and young person to gather, play and engage with their peers, with a renewed vision for the place and role of sports, creative arts, community service and youth clubs.
5. Include a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation in the Modern Slavery Bill
6. Bring forward proposals to offer specialised help as quickly as possible to all children and young people who are victims of traumatic experiences, whether public or behind closed doors.

Promoting Family Policies

The Commission urges the Government to:

1. Ensure that building strong and stable relationships in every family and household is central to the priorities of every government department, with a designated Cabinet level Minister holding responsibility for the implementation, oversight and publication of a family review.
2. Prioritise tackling poverty and reforming the social security system so that it better reflects the complex reality of family life.
3. Address inequality and widen opportunity by working in partnership with all faith communities.
4. Review the Family Test to increase the focus on children and wellbeing; require completion and publication of the assessments to increase transparency and learning across Government; and to be reviewed every three years and updated as appropriate.

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5. Encourage local authorities and organisations to apply a family test when developing policies and practices that will impact on families and children.
6. Develop Family Hubs in such a way that they:
 - are co-created at a local level in consultation with all relevant parties, especially families who will draw on their services
 - work to an agreed set of principles, values and standards to ensure high-quality services across the country, and conform to a national system of oversight to ensure that those standards are consistently met
 - have a core offer of universal services for families with children and young people, to be adequately resourced to support the agreed principles and values
 - are accessible in every community in the country
 - design their services in consultation with children and young people, mothers, fathers and carers from all kinds of family, including extended and wider family members
 - ensure that they are welcoming, open to all, responding to local demand
 - include the provision of counselling support for all parents whose relationship is in difficulty
 - include the provision of services for parents and children going through separation and divorce
 - are integrated into wider services to ensure seamless transitions at the interface of other services
 - work in partnership with the Church of England, other churches and other faith groups
 - ensure that these priorities are delivered as soon as possible