

Good quality relationships are essential for a thriving Scotland

Strong and stable couple, family and social relationships are the foundations for a thriving society and economic prosperity. Over the next four years, the Scottish Government has the opportunity to ensure that Scotland becomes the world-leader in valuing and supporting resourceful and resilient relationships. There is now an overwhelming body of evidence which demonstrates the importance of investing in relationships:

- The Relationship Foundation (2015) estimated that the cost of family breakdown in Scotland was **£3.5bn** each year, with an annual cost per taxpayer of around **£1,500**.
- The National Audit Office (2007) stated that if only **14%** of cases that proceeded to court had been resolved through mediation, there would have been a resulting annual saving of around **£10m** across the UK.
- Research from the Department of Education (Relationship Support Interventions, 2014) found that every **£1** of funding spent on relationship support resulted in a saving to the taxpayer of **£11.50**.



About Relationships Scotland

Relationships Scotland is the largest provider of relationship and family support in the country. Our network of 22 Member Services provide face-to-face support across the whole of Scotland. We have a strong focus on prevention and early intervention, and our services include relationship counselling, family mediation, child contact centres and a wide range of other support. We empower people to enjoy healthy and respectful relationships and to live with dignity and safety. We provide face-to-face support for over 15,000 people every year.

Our vision is for **Positive and Respectful Relationships to be at the Heart of Scotland.**

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

- 1** People across Scotland to be supported to cope better with key life transitions such as relationship breakdown.
- 2** The Scottish Government to lead an urgent debate on how to ensure there is far greater uptake of mediation and other forms of dispute resolution as an alternative to court action in family cases.
- 3** All future Scottish Government policies which impact on children and families to highlight the vital role relationships play in ensuring the best opportunities and outcomes in life.



Priorities for action 2016

1

People across Scotland to be supported to cope better with key life transitions such as relationship breakdown.

Life transitions include the birth of a first child, losing a loved one, being diagnosed with serious illness or going through separation, divorce or dissolution. Such transitions can place a significant strain on family relationships. Support needs to be available to help people maintain the quality of their relationships, manage conflict, and minimise the impact of relationship distress, especially for children.

We believe that simple relationship advice and signposting information should be introduced in parenting packs distributed by health visitors for first-time parents. There also needs to be access across Scotland to relationship counselling, information and advice for everyone diagnosed with a serious illness, something our current partnership with Prostate Cancer UK has successfully achieved.

Frontline staff, such as GPs, health visitors, nurses, police officers, teachers, social care providers, housing officers, social workers and foster carers will be key to implementing this. They should be equipped with specialist relationship support training to help identify relationship difficulties, to offer initial support and to signpost to relevant organisations.

The Scottish Government to lead an urgent debate on how to ensure there is far greater uptake of mediation and other forms of dispute resolution as an alternative to court action in family cases.

The law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland now directs separating parents going through the courts to find out if family mediation would be more suitable than court action, which often

costs more, takes longer and leads to less sustainable outcomes for families.

The Scottish Government, legal professionals and key public and third sector partners should debate how best to ensure there is a far greater uptake of alternative forms of dispute resolution in family court cases. These could include family mediation, post-separation Parenting Apart information sessions and other forms of dispute resolution.

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3

All future Scottish Government policies which impact on children and families to highlight the vital role relationships play in ensuring the best opportunities and outcomes in life.

The Scottish Government has already acknowledged the vital role of relationships in policies such as the National Parenting Strategy and the GIRFEC framework – we must not lose this momentum. All policies affecting children and families should highlight the vital role of positive and healthy relationships.