

Parenting classes for parents of children with SEND: an open letter to David Cameron

Katherine Runswick-Cole (/News/Author/Katherine-Runswick-Cole)

12th January 2016 at 11:01

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One leading expert in disability studies offers her suggestions to the prime minister on what good parenting support should look like for parents of children with SEND

Dear Dave (if I may be so bold),

I was prompted to write to you by your announcement of a £70 million investment in parenting support for families. Firstly, I welcome your move away from a focus on so-called "troubled families" to talking about "everyone". However, I also worry that this initiative is yet another attempt to shift responsibility for "good parenting" firmly on to the family while seeking to downplay wider structural social inequalities.

As you are talking about "everyone", I began to wonder what "good parenting" support would look like for parents of children with special educational needs and disability. I'm guessing that the answer to that question depends on whom you ask, so here I offer a few suggestions based on my research with disabled children, young people and their families, as well as on my own experience as a mother of a young person with a learning disability.

I'm guessing that the "parenting curriculum" is still in development so here are a few topics for your consideration:

- **Session 1:** how to master the hugely complex and (despite promises made before the Children and Families Act 2014) adversarial SEND system, followed by getting to know the Code of Practice inside out and

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backwards and forwards;

- **Session 2:** what to do when your child is unhappy at school and everyone tells you that there are no resources available to support them;
- **Session 3:** what to do in a multi-professional meeting when everyone else is addressed by their full name and job title and you are introduced as "mum";
- **Session 4:** how to disagree with a professional view without them thinking that you are either grief-stricken or in denial about your child's SEND;
- **Session 5:** how to ignore tuts and stares from other parents when your child behaves a bit differently at the school gate;
- **Session 6:** what to do when your child is the only child in the class who isn't invited to any birthday parties;
- **Session 7:** what to do when your child is excluded (a child with SEND is still nine times more likely to be excluded than other children);
- **Session 8:** managing transitions, with a special emphasis on managing the transition to adult services (or lack of them).

And if you are wondering where you will find people with the skills and talents to deliver such a diverse curriculum, you might do well to consider recruiting parents of children with SEND, although if you want them to take up the post you might also have to sort out the lack of affordable and accessible childcare for children with SEND too.

Yours sincerely

Katherine Runswick-Cole

Dr Katherine Runswick-Cole is a senior research fellow in disability studies and psychology at the Social Change: Community Wellbeing Research Centre at Manchester Metropolitan University. She tweets at @k_runswick_cole (https://twitter.com/k_runswick_cole)

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