

# Positive Activities

## Qualitative Research with Parents

Solutions Research



**Research Report No  
DCSF-RR142**

---

*Positive Activities  
Qualitative Research with Parents*

---

*Solutions Research*

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

© Solutions Research 2009

ISBN 978 1 84775 505 6

August 2009



<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page No</b>
1. Background	1
2. Research objectives	2
3. Methodology and sample	4
4. Summary and conclusions	7
5. Detailed Findings	10
5.1 Context	10
5.2 Attitudes to different types of activity	11
5.3 Location of activities	15
5.4 Parent typology	17
5.5 The benefits of positive activities	24
5.6 Main barriers to participation	30
5.7 Barriers that affected less engaged audiences in particular	34
5.8 Responses to messages	35
5.9 Sources of information	38
5.10 Role of national campaign and further action	39
5.11 Post Evaluation research	41

## 1. Background

Aiming High, the ten year Youth Strategy, seeks to help all young people (YP), but particularly those from poorer areas, to take part in enjoyable and purposeful activities in their free time which can help them develop new skills and raise their aspirations.

Positive activities could include sports, creative activities such as dance, drama and music, volunteering, engagement in the local community (e.g. Youth Opportunity Fund), outward bound activity (e.g. Youth Hostel Association - Do It for Real), Brownies / Guides, Cubs / Scouts, traditional youth clubs, Duke of Edinburgh awards, Prince's Trust and many others.

There are specific commitments within Aiming High that refer to parents. These commitments are:

- The Government will encourage providers of parenting support, funded through the Parent Know-How programme to make available clear information on the importance and benefits of young people participating in positive activities.
- The Government will also expect Local Authorities to make available, as required in the Childcare Act 2006, full and comprehensive information on services and opportunities that are available for young people and include in their Parent's Charter.
- The Government will encourage local areas to incorporate into their parenting strategies the good practice and materials available from successful programmes such as Time To Talk and Speak Easy.

Communications for YP are planned to support delivery of Aiming High, and this will include:

- Publicising the full range of opportunities and investment for activities and facilities in order to meet demand from young people themselves, their parents and the community.
- Ensuring that young people have the information they need to make the most of their free time by taking part in positive activities and access the services on offer to them locally.
- Ensuring that young people believe there is a 'place to go' in their local area and that it is 'for them' so that they make use of the facilities on offer for them.

Qualitative research was commissioned to explore: the barriers and motivators for parents to encouraging participation in positive activities for young people; the level of influence of parents in whether a young person participates / what a young person might participate in; and how parents feel about specific activities.

## 2. Research Objectives

The overall objectives for this research were:

- To understand in depth, the barriers, motivators and messages for parents to encourage participation in positive activities for young people
- To understand the level of influence of parents in whether a young person participates / what a young person might participate in
- To provide a qualitative typology / segmentation of parents in relation to attitudes to positive activities

The specific objectives of this research were:

### *Understanding awareness*

- To gauge how much parents know about current DCSF parenting programmes such as Time to Talk, Speak Easy and Parent Know How.
- To establish how much parents are aware of what is currently on offer across the full range of positive activities.
- To discover how parents might find out about positive activities.

### *Understanding current attitudes*

- To understand whether they are aware of and value the benefits available to YP through participation in positive activities.
- To understand what barriers and motivations (attitudinal and practical) exist for parents in terms of their own involvement (or not) in encouraging YP to participate.
- To understand what barriers they perceive to be their YP's participation (attitudinal and practical).

### *Understanding family dynamics*

- To understand more about the parent/YP dynamics in terms of participation in positive activities.
- To gauge the level of influence that parents have over their YP's involvement and engagement in positive activities.

### *Communication*

- To understand what types of messages parents might find motivating to ensure they support and encourage their YP to participate.

- To gain a greater understanding of the media and channels that parents currently use, or would use to access information about positive activities.

*Segmentation*

- Using all of the above, create a detailed typology/segmentation of parents in relation to positive activities, using a combination of the key demographic and attitudinal factors.

### **3. Methodology and sample**

#### **3.1 Overview**

The sample consisted of parents of 13 to 19 year olds. Eight group discussions were held with parents whose children took part in at least one regular activity. Four mini group discussions were held with parents of occasional participants in positive activities. Thirty-two paired depths were held with parents of occasional and non participants, including lapsed participants. The methodology was designed to allow dynamic discussion of attitudes and messaging via groups, whilst providing a more intimate atmosphere via paired depths to get below the 'social response' condoning participation in positive activities.

#### **3.2 Parents of regular participators**

Eight group discussions lasting 90 minutes were held with parents whose children took part in at least one regular activity. The groups were split by age of child with two groups held for each of the following categories: 13 to 14 yrs, 14 to 15 yrs, 15 to 16 yrs and 16 to 19 years of age.

In each age category the sample was split by how many positive activities the children regularly took part: one or more than one. Regular activities included those that might be run throughout the year or just at particular times of year. The recruitment criterion was that the young person was committed to participating in that activity on an ongoing basis.

Type of activity was also controlled for since some positive activities tend to be more 'internally directed' (e.g. sport, music, dance), whilst others tend to be more externally directed (e.g. voluntary work, Duke of Edinburgh, Scouts and Guides). Within the group of those who took part in one activity regularly a spread of those who had 'hobbies' and those who did more outwards bounds activities such as Duke of Edinburgh or community based activities were included. Within the group of those who did multiple activities some respondents were recruited who took part in both types of activities whilst the others had several 'hobby' activities e.g. sport and music.

As it was felt that the parents in this part of the sample were most likely to be the most motivated and engaged, these groups were held right at the beginning of the research schedule so that issues such as motivations and messages generated in the sessions could be included as stimulus in the other sessions that followed.

#### **3.3 Parents of non participators**

Paired friendship depths were conducted with parents of children not involved in positive activities. It was felt that these parents might find discussing reasons for non participation more intimidating in a group environment since it might lead to the discussion of quite personal issues such as finance or lack of parental motivation. Paired depths allowed the exploration of the 'social response' condoning participation whilst the presence of a friend helped confidence and facilitated dynamic discussion. This methodology also allowed a significant number of interviewing opportunities within the non participant audience, providing the opportunity to break the sample down by, for example, sex of parent, age of child, sex of child and child's position in the family.

### **3.4 Parents of occasional participators**

Mini group discussions and paired depth interviews were conducted with parents whose children occasionally took part in positive activities. It was expected, to a degree, that these parent types might share attitudes with the parents of regular participators, but that they may also feel their children could be encouraged more. The mixed methodology was designed to provide a smaller more intimate group environment where respondents would be relaxed and open to discussion, with depths in addition to gain insight hidden beneath any social response.

### **3.5 Other sample definitions**

#### **3.5.1 Social Economic Groups**

The sample was biased towards C2DE audiences with approximately one third made up of BC1 respondents and the remainder C2DE.

#### **3.5.2 Age of child and family composition**

The sample was split by school year so that parents had a common focus in their group or friendship depth, with their children facing similar issues such as exam pressure and peer pressure. The sample was split according to the following:

- Year 9 - aged 13 to 14
- Year 10 - aged 14 to 15
- Year 11 - aged 15 to 16
- Year 12 - aged 16 to 17
- Year 13 + - aged 17 to 19

Ages 17 to 19 were combined as one audience for regular and occasional participants as it was understood from previous research with parents that they can feel their influence over their children reduces as the child gets older, particularly reaching late teens. For that reason there was also a slight weighting of the sample to younger years 13 to 16. The young people were all living at home and were in either in full or part time education.

In order to explore the influence of other siblings in relation to involvement in activities, respondents were recruited to ensure a mix according to their position in the family. In each group discussion, approximately half the respondents had older siblings and half had younger siblings or were only children. The depth interviews were recruited to ensure a similar spread.

#### **3.5.3 Gender of child**

In order to explore the influence of gender in relation to involvement in activities, the groups were made up of a mix of parents of boys and girls. In the paired depth interviews, both parents had children of the same sex in the same year group, to further explore and understand any impact that sex of the child might have on participation.

### **3.5.4 Gender and working status of parent**

Social research amongst parents tends to be biased to mothers since it is typically mothers who take a lead role in education and organising family life. This research was only slightly weighted towards mothers since it was felt that both mothers and fathers were likely to play a role in encouraging their children to pursue different interests. Most of the groups were single sex although some mixed sex groups were also included. A mix of working status was reflected across the sample and included a mix of working (full and part time) and non working parents.

### **3.5.5 Parental attitude**

Across both the occasional and non participant samples a small number of certain attitudinal types were included. It was felt to be important to understand in more depth the interplay between parents and children and to ensure that the perspective of the more and less engaged parent was understood. To that end, parents who were keen for their children to do more were included, and parents who felt that their *children* were keen to do more, but that other issues were maybe holding them back, were also included.

### **3.5.6 Post evaluation research**

All respondents were given the opportunity to complete a follow up questionnaire after the interviews / groups. Approximately 15 respondents were also called for a short telephone interview to follow up on discussions. The post evaluation wave of research was designed to ensure that respondents had the chance to share considered views on the research issue, which may occur after the actual session has occurred. It was also intended that this would be used to build on and develop the research findings by discussing ideas for reaching parents and children. It was successful both in confirming barriers, highlighting parental views on how to engage children further and in demonstrating that discussion of these matters can raise the issue for consideration. A specific section on these findings is included in the main body of the report and the findings are also integrated in the report where relevant.

## **3.6 Other details**

The research was conducted in a mix of metropolitan, urban, rural and suburban areas across England during October 2008. A spoken charted presentation of the findings was given on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2008.

## 4. Summary and conclusions

This research was commissioned by COI and DCSF to understand in depth, the barriers, motivators and messages for parents to encourage participation in positive activities for young people. Within this the research was designed to understand the level of influence of parents in whether a young person participates / what a young person might participate in and to provide a qualitative typology / segmentation of parents in relation to attitudes to positive activities.

A mix of group discussions, mini group discussions and paired depth interviews were conducted with parents of children aged between 13 and 19 years of age. The sessions were defined by the level of their child's participation in organised activities to include parents of regular participants, occasional participations, lapsed and non participants. The sample was biased towards C2DE audiences and slightly towards mothers.

### 4.1 Attitudes towards organised activities

There is a clear set of activities that are seen as positive and beneficial, and these are widely recognised and understood although they may be referred to somewhat differently. Parents tended to call these "organised activities" and "clubs" rather than 'positive activities' and it was clear that this was more everyday language. The notion that 'organised activities' were a *good thing* was almost universally agreed. Parents liked the fact that they: kept children occupied doing something fun and enjoyable; kept children safe and off the streets; helped with developing confidence and 'soft' life skills. However, levels of participation, child willingness, parental support and parental ability to support varied markedly across the sample.

### 4.2 Parent typologies

The research highlighted five segments in terms of attitudes of parents towards their child's participation:

- *Enforcers*: placed a great deal of importance on participation in organised activities and could use strong tactics to encourage their children to take part.
- *Encouragers*: actively encouraged their child's participation and were prepared to put themselves out to make participation possible.
- *Passive supporters*: supportive when their child showed interest but did not believe in pushing them; easily deterred by barriers such as cost, time and logistics.
- *Passive disinterested*: did not place a particularly high value on participation in activities and quick to think of barriers.
- *Resistors*: although often claiming to appreciate the positives that organised activities could bring, they tended to be more focused on the negative impact on the parent and the family and actively or passively prevented their children taking part.

### **4.3 Barriers to participation**

There were some strong barriers to participation across all the parental types including low child motivation / teen resistance, cost, logistics and low salience / awareness. Low child motivation was seen as endemic, and could move into resistance as children joined secondary school and as peer influence tended to portray such activities as 'uncool'. However it was also clear that child interest could be a positive driver, and peer support was one of the most powerful drivers to participation. Cost was commonly mentioned as a reason for both dropping out and for not supporting trial of activities. Logistics primarily involved transport and child care problems and the issues involved with juggling different children's activities and interests. Low awareness was clearly an issue, with the comment often being offered that there was little for them to do 'around here', but no well known route to discovery of what was available.

### **4.4 Awareness of activities currently on offer**

Parents in this sample were not very clear about what activities were available and where. There was very little awareness of government information programmes or initiatives to encourage children into activities.

Parents tended to rely on their children to tell them about activities they wanted to take part in, but had no one resource they could turn to for information about out of school activities in particular. Parents would therefore welcome clear, concise and up to date information about what was available in the local area, when and where and at what cost. They felt that this would allow them to be more proactive in suggesting things to their children.

Schools and local authorities were seen as key in distributing information to children and parents about in and out of school activities. While leaflets were seen as having their role, many wanted the information to be easily available on line.

### **4.5 Family dynamics**

Most parents felt very strongly that they were only part of the process in encouraging children's participation in extra activities. To a greater or lesser extent, they questioned the amount of influence they had over their children particularly through their teenage years.

Most believed that, during the teenage years at least, parental encouragement was much less important than peer encouragement. They felt that strategies to improve the image and take up of organised activities amongst the peer group would make teenagers more interested and more receptive to parental support and encouragement.

Parents wanted to see other barriers addressed too: the provision of better local facilities and transport; comprehensive information; and improved funding so that, for example, clubs could provide free or low cost trial / taster sessions or scholarships for on-going membership.

### **4.6 Communication**

Messages focused on benefits to children were well received although they were not considered 'new news' by parents. The strongest messages appeared to be those that focused on:

- Blossoming / personal development / self esteem / self confidence
- Fun and enjoyment
- Being off the streets / safe

However, while parents agreed with the sentiments, they questioned whether telling parents about the benefits of taking part in activities was the most effective route to encouraging participation. They argued that they knew about these benefits already and needed evidence that other barriers were being addressed.

There was evidence that a campaign that restated the positive values of organised activities maybe reminding parents of their own experiences, could help, although the tone of voice used would need to be careful as parents are familiar with these benefits, and do not want to feel negatively targeted when they see the problem as often out of their hands.

This would need to happen alongside clear information to enable parents to find activities in the local area with suggested delivery mechanisms being an on-line resource and using local schools, facilities (e.g. libraries, doctors) and local media. Parents also welcomed strategies to help them such as increased and better local facilities, help with transport issues and help addressing all important barriers such as cost - both at a trial level and on an on-going basis to support participation and talent. This would be of clearest benefit to those who are most in need - i.e. lower social economic groups who are likely to be least confident self starters in terms of accessing information and who the research showed are particularly sensitive to economic pressures.

As parental encouragement is only seen as one part of the equation, parents believe that messaging and strategies to encourage children directly are important. This feels important given the need for children to want to take part in activities and due to the role of peer group influence - suggestions raised include targeting children through schools, celebrity endorsement and trialling activities at low cost

## **Conclusions**

There is clearly wide support for children being encouraged to participate in more positive activities, and for a Government programme or programmes that work with schools, clubs, local authorities and parents to help support greater participation.

Such activities are seen as an undoubted good, and increased support for children taking part in them would be welcomed by a substantial majority of parents. The value of such activities is tacitly accepted, but the benefits in terms of avoidance of harm, improved confidence and self esteem, child happiness and long term outcomes are all worth restating.

However the key barriers to parental encouragement for more participation by their children fall under three clear headings:

1. Lack of information
2. Concern about experience, cost and logistics
3. Expectation of child negativity

There is widespread resignation about the non participation of their children among those whose children are less involved, and a well publicised programme that clearly addressed all these barriers (as well as reminding parents of the benefits of such activities) could have substantial effect. However, reminder of the benefits of such activities without a clear programme that addressed both parental and child barriers would be much less likely to succeed in changing behaviour.

## 5. Detailed Findings

### 5.1 Context

Parents in this sample were usually quick to talk about how children's activities had changed since they themselves had been children. Many, particularly those with less active children, felt that children today spent too much time on the internet, watching TV or playing computer games instead of getting involved in sports, clubs or other activities as, they argued, they might have done in the past. They often expressed nostalgia for 'the good old days' when children were able to play out and had more freedom. However, they recognised that times had changed and that safety outside of the home was now a real issue.

*"If you left them to their own devices it would be Play Station, X Box. It's always a fight as to who is going on the computer. I think it's a very strange and sad old world. We didn't have any of this."* Mother, Year 10

Although parents regretted these changes, they seemed to feel powerless to do anything about it. Most parents were interested in their children taking part in organised activities but felt that there was a lack of available and affordable clubs / activities. Many appeared to feel quite isolated, arguing that there was little help to get their children involved in positive activities. With the exception of children who happened to be particularly motivated, many parents felt that a great deal of effort was needed to encourage young people to participate. Many wanted more help from other sources, particularly schools, to encourage their children to get involved in activities so that they were not left to 'battle alone'. They also felt that they would like more information on what was available.

Parents in this sample generally supported the idea of public money being invested in activities. They felt that society would benefit as a result - young people would be off the streets and doing something positive. They thought that more funding would enable young people to try a number of different activities without financial commitment, giving them the opportunity to find something they liked or were talented at.

*"I think that maybe there are parents who can't afford it and I think they should still be allowed to do it."* Mother, Year 12

Despite positive attitudes to organised activities, they were seen as just one of the different activities on offer to children and they were not always top of mind. Parents seemed to look more broadly at their child's life - their overall happiness, any problems, their health and fitness, friendships, family activities, interests, and career aspirations. While many parents saw positive activities as good, they were just part of what children can or might do and they often viewed them as a way of resolving a problem rather than as an aspirational goal in their own right.

*"He is hanging around with some bad sorts, so I am trying to get him interested in something."* Father, Year 11

In terms of language the term 'Positive activities' although understood, was not regarded as a particularly strong term. At best, it was inoffensive and broad - giving the impression of a wide range of pastimes beyond just organised activities.

However, it was not seen as normal, everyday language, and some respondents felt that it was quite prescriptive and predictable. Parents tended to use more everyday language such as 'clubs' or 'organised activities' although they acknowledged that this did not really cover broader activities such as community and volunteering.

## **5.2 Attitudes to different types of activity**

### **5.2.1 Overview**

Parents tended to categorise activities according to whether they were organised or not. Organised clubs included sporty ones (for example, football, tennis, rugby, swimming, dance, cheerleading, boxing, martial arts, attending the gym, holiday clubs) and non-sporty ones (music lessons, drama, singing, chess club, knitting club, language lessons). They also included volunteering activities (such as Scouts, Guides, Duke of Edinburgh and voluntary work in the community) and youth clubs.

Other leisure time pursuits were seen as completely separate from organised activities and these were divided into 'sedentary activities' (for example, television, Playstation, Wii, MSN and computer games) and 'social activities' (for example, 'hanging out with friends', bowling, cinema, football in the park and listening to music).

### **5.2.1 Sporting activities**

Sports clubs and sporting activities were often top of mind for parents and often mentioned first in discussions about activities. Most felt that there was a wide variety of sports on offer and that they were reasonably accessible.

*"It would be nice to do something after school maybe, one of the days, something a bit more healthy and energetic."* Mother, Year 9

Most respondents viewed sports clubs as evoking strong, positive values such as fitness, having something else to think about other than school work, health, weight management, team building skills and discipline. They often saw them as being the 'coolest' activities - there was a view that all the 'trendy' kids were sporty.

*"They can get rid of the anxiety and stress of SATS and O levels. If they go to these activities they can relax."* Mother, Year 13

*"Children in general in the school that are into a lot of sports, they seem to have lots of confidence. They seem popular as well... The two go together. If you're confident and popular you're going to feel good about yourself. And you're going to put more into it. It's a confidence thing, everyone loves you."* Mother, Year 9

However, some parents did argue that sports clubs and school teams could be elitist - only selecting 'the best' children to participate. They were concerned that this could knock the confidence of children who may not have a strong natural talent for sport but who were keen to join in for the fun and exercise.

*"We're not a sporty family by nature, you see, so I don't have a sporty daughter."* Mother, Year 9

### 5.2.2 'Creative' activities

'Creative' activities such as drama and music tended to be less top of mind among parents, unless their child was already involved in such activities. Respondents tended to see these activities as more specialist and skill led - activities for those who had a natural talent or were particularly keen rather than just for 'anybody'. They were often seen as activities for girls.

*"I've been to certain amateur dramatic shows and things and thought how impressive they are and sometimes they're really really good, but I think it's the shyness thing as well with them."* Mother, Year 9

Despite this there were generally positive associations with these activities in terms of skills development, confidence and discipline.

*"I think with music .....there's always something to aim for, to achieve. You can go up to different levels and exams and things and they're quite proud of that, aren't they?"* Mother, Year 13

There was a tendency to view some of these activities as slightly middle class - largely because they were expensive. Music lessons, for example, were often cited as costly - partly because the lessons tended to be one to one and with specialist teachers, and partly because they usually involved the purchase of expensive kit. Getting the most out of music lessons was thought to entail both natural ability and a great deal of commitment.

Some parents found 'creative' lessons slightly intimidating. Drama lessons, in particular, were regularly mentioned as being full of 'pushy parents'. Other parents lamented the lack of creative activities, particularly those whose children were not sporty and had fewer opportunities open to them.

*"There's not one too near us. There's Stagecoach, they've got them all over but it's more like Salford."* Mother, Year 9

### 5.2.3 'Community' activities

Most parents felt positively about guiding and scouting activities, arguing that they inspired discipline and community focused activity.

However, there was a feeling among this sample that these types of activities had become outdated. Many parents anticipated or had found it very difficult to encourage their children to get involved in these types of activities, because teenagers these days did not view these activities as 'cool'. Some did have children who attended Guides or Scouts and went on camps. However, most parents saw these activities as being more appealing for younger (primary school aged) children.

*"I'm not going ...mates will laugh at me."* Mother, Year 10

Volunteering and Duke of Edinburgh were rarely mentioned spontaneously. Even parents whose children were involved in these types of activities did not mention them until they were prompted. This seemed to be a reflection of the fact that particularly in the case of D of E these activities are usually offered through and driven by schools and required little parental involvement.

Parents tended to view these activities very positively. They felt that volunteering gave their children a good understanding of community and the importance of helping others and that the Duke of Edinburgh Awards were a good all-round activity.

*"I like the character building of the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. They have to go through a lot to actually get their awards."* Mother, Year 13

#### **5.2.4 Youth clubs**

Youth Clubs tended to provoke a mixed reaction among parents. Some parents liked the idea of them - they reminded them of their own youth and the good times that they had enjoyed at organised clubs. They liked and appreciated the principle of a generalist club where children could socialise off the streets without the need to be 'good' at something.

*"My son likes the youth club, hangs out, plays pool."* Father Year 9

*"My shed's been made into the local youth club as well, there's a TV, DVD, you know all the games and that but I think if I know you're here then I haven't got to worry - and I've got a pool table in there."* Mother, Year 13

However, many questioned how widespread youth clubs were today and often argued that there were none available in their area. Of those who were aware of local clubs, many had concerns. The generalist nature of the clubs meant that 'any Tom, Dick or Harry' could go, including children that they did not want their children to mix with.

Some parents expressed concerns about who might hang around *outside* the club and the influence these children might have on their own. Other specific concerns raised included noise, alcohol, smoking and the distribution of condoms. These potential problems made it crucial that clubs were well run and managed - parents viewed the leadership of the youth clubs as very important.

*"You wouldn't want them to mix with the kids at our local youth club.....they give out free condoms."* Mother, Year 10

*"I went to pick up my daughter from youth club and the inside was fine but outside there was all kids smoking."* Mother of Year 9

Like Guides and Scouts, some parents felt that youth clubs held more appeal for younger children.

*"At 15 they are not cool any more."* Father, Year 11

#### **5.2.5 Non organised activities**

Parents were also quite positive about certain non organised activities particularly when some sort of activity was being pursued, rather than just 'hanging out'. Informal activities such as swimming, bowling, kicking a ball around with friends, bike riding and going to the cinema were seen as active, enjoyable pastimes which were good as a part of a mix of different things children do. Some parents felt that it was good for children to find their own interests without being organised by adults.

*"The kids love it and I quite like them doing things with friends."* Mother, Year 10

Parents tended to feel more comfortable when these activities were enjoyed as a family or when they were being pursued in a 'safe' setting such as a friend's home.

*"To me sports are important and I try and get them out as much as I possibly can. There's always a football and a cricket bat in the back of the car."* Father, Year 9

*"My daughter's picked up golf from me... It's all come from me talking about it."*  
Father, Year 11

Parents also appreciated that 'hanging out' with friends (e.g. just being with friends, shopping, listening to music) was also important to children and they realised that social lives and the development of social skills were important. They were keen for their teenagers to be making friends and growing in independence.

However, when children pursued these sorts of non organised activities out of the home, independently with no adult supervision parents did worry about their safety and the risk that they might be harmed or fall into bad company or trouble. This was particularly so of parents of younger children and also in urban/metropolitan areas, although parents of older children and those in more rural or suburban locations were also concerned. They worried, in particular, about *where* they were and who they were with.

*"My husband is protective....they are putting their toe in but you want to protect them."*  
Mother, Year 10

*"Where I live it's a semi main road and it's not safe so my daughter has never been allowed to play outside."* Mother, Year 9

The personal safety of their children was the major concern. Those who had sons were concerned about guns, crime and violence. Those with daughters were more preoccupied with the possibility of attack and the threat of paedophiles.

The fear of their child falling in with the wrong crowd, getting into trouble, or just messing around and causing trouble was also a concern. There was a sense of general negativity about children in groups leading to problems - making noise and getting told off, or just being viewed negatively by society.

*"There are kids their age, and you go past the school and there's kids smoking."*  
Mother, Year 10

Many in the sample did not allow younger teenagers out unsupervised. Those that did imposed conditions. As children got older, parents reported that this became harder to control but they remained very concerned about their children's safety and whereabouts.

*"Where I live, I try not to let them go too far out, I want them somewhere where it's not far. They can go to the park but I want them back by a certain time."* Father, Year 9

*"Especially when nights are drawing in, it's a worry...I'd rather have them at home safe."*  
Father, Year 9

Parents tended to have quite an uneasy relationship with sedentary activities although they recognised that they were highly valued by children. Playing on the computer, chatting on the internet and watching TV were top of the list of activities that their children enjoyed. Parents felt that teenagers were spending more and more time social networking on sites. They also reported that computer games were very popular amongst this age group, particularly amongst boys.

Parents did have some positive associations with these activities. They liked the fact that they occupied their children happily and safely at home.

*“At home...that’s where you want them to be...where they are safe.”* Mother, Year 13

However, they did have strong concerns about the amount of screentime. They felt that their children spent more time than was healthy on screen based activities - particularly because they could get so absorbed and could seem so reluctant to come off. Parents seemed to feel particularly uncomfortable about screentime during the summer months when they felt that their children would be far better off doing something active outdoors. In addition, many of the children of the parents in this sample seemed to have computers in their bedrooms which meant that they were withdrawing from the family.

*“They chat to the same kids on the computer, there’s no end to it.”* Mother, Year 9

*“I’d rather that my 14 year old wasn’t playing on his X Box from when he gets up in the morning at 9.00 am in the school holidays until he goes to bed. If I didn’t make him do other things he would sit there all day.”* Mother, Year 10

*“MSN makes them insular...my daughter got hooked so I banned it.”* Mother, Year 9

### **5.3 Location of activities**

#### **5.3.1 ‘In school’ activities**

Parents did not tend to automatically draw a distinction between ‘in school’ and ‘out of school’ activities. These appeared to ‘merge’ when parents discussed the extra activities that their children partook in. The differences only emerged on prompting.

Many parents felt that in school clubs and activities were most accessible for them as parents. They were sometimes free or low cost and, being in the school grounds, easier logistically. The safety of these activities - i.e. that they were run properly and by responsible staff, tended to be assumed as they were run by schools and teachers. It was expected that the children participating would be motivated since it was not a requirement to be involved.

*“Yes, those are with the teachers and stuff so I feel a bit confident with that one.”*  
Father, Year 9

However, some parents did express reservations about school clubs and activities. A few said that the standard of teaching was unlikely to be as high as at an out of school club since they were more likely to be run by a generalist rather than specialist teacher. Others felt that school sports clubs in particular could sometimes be elitist - only being accessible to those who were the best at sport.

*“He doesn’t think he is good enough”* Father, Year 12

Parents also considered their child’s reaction to being in school grounds. Some reported that their children preferred to get home at the end of the day and away from school, particularly if they were not very keen on being at school. For these children the fact that the club was school based discouraged participation. They also commented that sometimes children did not want to take part in clubs at break times as this was their ‘down time’ with friends. Interestingly, the parents’ own relationship with school (i.e. whether they had enjoyed school or not) was not raised as an issue regarding their preference for in or out of school clubs for their children.

After school / paid for clubs or holiday clubs tended to be less top of mind but were seen as valuable. They were seen as easier logistically and good for working parents. Safety was seen as a guarantee as the club was taking place in school grounds - it benefited from the associations of school, even if the staff involved were not teachers or employed by the school. These clubs were not necessarily seen as specialist, unless it was a holiday club or specific training such as football. They could also be seen as expensive which was a negative.

### **5.3.2 ‘Out of school’ activities**

Out of school clubs and activities tended to feel more specialist. The staff running such activities were expected to be specialist trained and provide high quality tuition. The ‘safety’ of staff involved and staff checking was generally assumed - there was a general belief nowadays that to run a club for children any leader would have to be safety checked. However on consideration of the issue the safety of leadership was not taken as much for granted as for in school activities which had strong associations of safety. Parents felt that there was more need to check out leadership skills. However, they seemed more likely to want to check that an out of school club was *well* run than whether staff were CRB checked (although some did say that they would check for this too).

*“I know two youth club leaders there as well so it’s quite good. You know them and you know they’re safe, more or less.”* Mother, Year 9

Out of school clubs were welcomed for having a wider social reach. This meant that they provided their children with an opportunity for making new friends, socialising outside of school and mixing with other types of people. This was seen as a strong positive for children for giving them a broader social circle.

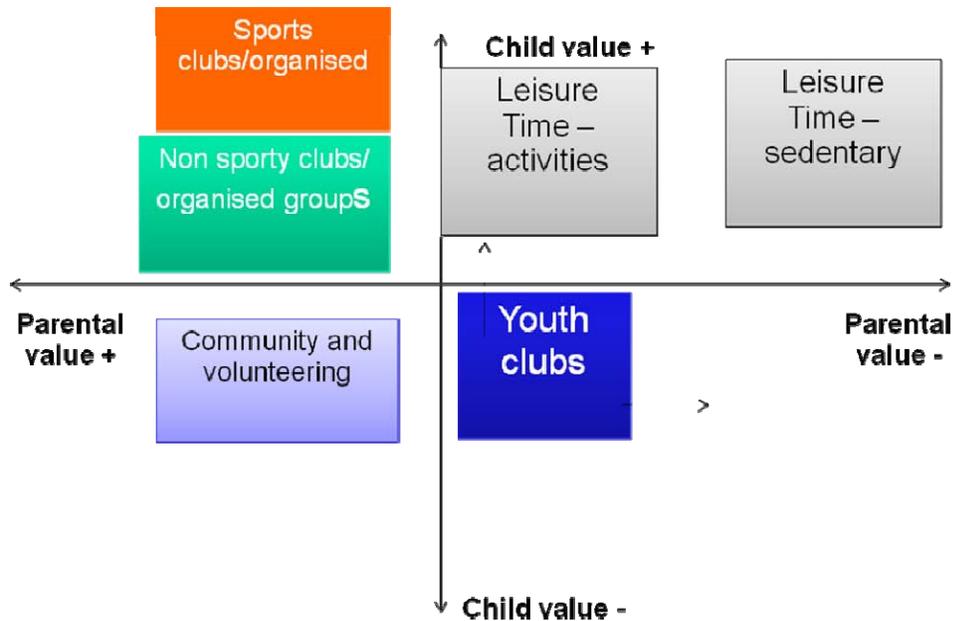
*“I want her to make new friends.”* Mother, Year 13

Out of school clubs however were seen as logistically harder to manage for parents, however and were often felt to be inaccessible unless they were close by or easy to access. They were also seen as costly compared with in school activities.

### 5.3.3 Summary

The chart below is a visual expression of how much these different types of activities are valued by parents and how parents perceive their children to value them.

It shows how parents value organised activities and leisure time activities, but are more concerned about youth clubs and sedentary activities, which they perceive to be of high value to their children.

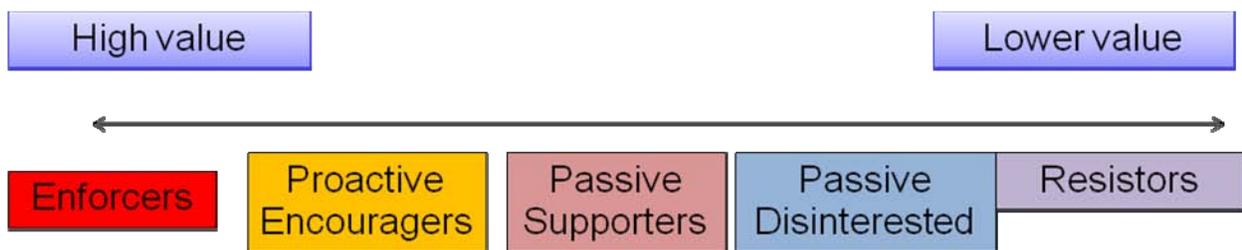


## 5.4 Parent typology

### 5.4.1. Overview

'Organised activities/clubs' were essentially seen as 'a good thing' with many easily recognised benefits. There were differences, however, in how strongly parents valued the activities and in how strongly they encouraged their children's involvement in them. The research identified five major segments in the attitude of parents towards their child's participation: 'Enforcers', 'Proactive encouragers', 'Passive supporters', 'Passive disinterested' and 'Resistors'.

The visual below demonstrates these categories placed on a scale of how highly they value and encourage organised activities.



There was evidence from this research that the age and personality type of the child could encourage parents to move across segments. A parent with fundamental beliefs in the value of organised activities could be a supporter for one very active child, but an enforcer for a 'lazy' one.

*"I have one son and I have to force him - I use reverse psychology, and sometimes turn the electrics off."* Father, Year 10

Negative attitudes to a particular activity - maybe if it was considered not to be appropriate, or potentially dangerous (e.g. shooting, boxing), could also encourage a change in attitude and could lead to a parent discouraging or saying no.

*"My son wanted to do shooting and I said: 'No way'."* Mother, Year 10

A parent's own passion and interest for a particular hobby could also lead to strongly encouraging a particular hobby.

#### **5.4.2 Enforcers**

'Enforcers' tended to be extremely ambitious for their child - they were keen for them to succeed and do well. They believed very strongly in the benefits of organised activities for their children and did not hesitate to use strong tactics to encourage children into activities (including bribery, coercion, even 'forcing'). They could come across as quite forceful and competitive and were sometimes disliked by other parents for being 'pushy'. Those critical of 'Enforcers' argued that they were motivated by the benefits to themselves - that they were living their lives vicariously through their children. 'Enforcers' did, however, talk about the benefits to the child of taking part in activities.

*"You can't have a face to face confrontation, because of course if your children are like mine, if you say no, they'll do the opposite, so it's a kind of a bit of manipulation, bribery."* Mother, Year 13

*"My son noticed pushy parents.....horrible...nightmare....horrible."* Mother, Year 9

#### **Pen portraits of 'Enforcers'**

'X' is the a mother of a 17 year old boy who is not really into sport, but is interested in other creative activities. She described her husband as forcing their son to do some sport as he feels it is important that he gets extra exercise in his life to make it balanced.

'X' is the mother of two daughters, both parents are very 'successful', work full time and are very driven. She believes strongly in giving her children as many opportunities to try new things and discover themselves. Both girls do multiple activities, the eldest child plays piano and flute, she is ferried around to different music groups all weekend as is her younger sister who plays the cello and piano. They also have tennis lessons, swimming, tutors and join summer camps to learn new activities. There are high expectations placed on the children, free time is earned by the 13 year old, dependent on instrument practice.

### 5.4.3 Proactive Encouragers

'Encouragers' believed strongly in the value of organized activities. As parents, they seemed quite engaged and motivated and often felt quite involved in the child's activity enjoying watching them take part or the interaction with other parents. They often talked about the importance of parental input in a child's life - 'you only get out what you put in'. They appeared primarily motivated by the benefits to the child and felt very conscious of the child's needs. Some also had wider motivations, wanting their child to have opportunities opened up for them. Some lower social economic group 'encourager' parents discussed encouraging their children to give them the chance to 'get out' and rise above social problems.

*"You'd feel guilty as a father if you didn't."* Father, Year 11

*"You want them to have the best in life."* Mother, Year 13

These parents actively encouraged their child's participation - often in multiple activities - and were prepared to let them trial different activities in order to give them plenty of opportunity to find an activity that was 'right' for them. They often spent time seeking out activities that may be of interest and were prepared to try and make other parts of their life fit around their child's activities - even if this meant juggling and being 'a taxi service'. They could be very concerned when they were held back by barriers or if their child lacked motivation.

*"I wouldn't force them, but encourage them, yes."* Father, Year 11

*"I'm not comparing the achievements of another child to my child. He can do something and be really bad at it but as long as he enjoys doing it."* Mother, Year 9

*"Mine does football three times per week and, if I can, squeeze in a bit of swimming and when we can squeeze it in, a bit of youth club."* Mother, Year 9

*"Really it's how you want to bring your kids up and if you feel they're going to benefit from it and you've got to encourage them and we've got to make the effort as parents and taxi them around and pay."* Mother, Year 13

*"You can suggest it to them but you can't push them."* Mother, Year 9

#### **Pen portraits of 'Proactive Encouragers'**

'X' is a mother in the South and her son (year 9) does many different activities including Sunday school, volunteering, sports and music. She is a passionate believer in activities and wants him to experience as much as possible and have the opportunity to acquire skills she can't give him at home. She describes herself as pushy, but not competitive, and very focused on her son, his happiness and development. *'I want opportunities for my child and that he can try lots of things.'*

'X' is a mother of two children in the Midlands. Her son, who is 15, spends in her opinion far too much time in front of the computer. She believes in the values of activities and has tried to encourage him, but now feels quite defeated at his lack of interest. She doesn't want to ruin her relationship with him by arguing. She is also concerned about letting him out on his own due to worries about gangs, knife crime etc. She sees the major barrier as his lack of motivation. Her follow up telephone interview showed how happy she was that he had decided to do DofE at school - because all his friends were doing it.

'X' is a builder and a father of three. He is worried about the economic climate at the moment and doesn't feel that he can turn down any opportunity for money. All his children have done sports activities and he was very disappointed when the last one finally gave up. He would love them to do more activities but is held back by his financial situation. He can't bear to see them start an activity and then have to give it up because he can't afford to keep them in it.

#### **5.4.4 Passive supporters**

Passive supporters appreciated the value of organised activities but were united by a belief that the interest and motivation had to come from the child. They were supportive when their child showed interest but didn't believe in pushing them or particularly encouraging them if they were not interested. They typically argued that their child's life was fine whether they were participating in activities (regularly or occasionally) or not at all although there was a spectrum of interest levels.

*"I'm not pushy, but I do care and I do support, but I wouldn't force so I will go with what the child wants, not what I want."* Mother, Year 11

*"There's no point in us pushing our children into activities that they're going to hate, they're not going to like it. It has to be something that's within them that they want to do. If my daughter came in and said I want to do parachute jumping I don't think I'd be very pleased but if she really wanted to do it I'd say: 'Try it.'" Mother, Year 9*

*"I think that some parents are very pushy, they do this and that. It's nice to encourage them, but if they want to do it, it has to come from within. I wouldn't push my daughter to do anything she doesn't want to do because she's going to hate me for it."*  
Mother, Year 9

Passive supporters felt as if they were quite susceptible to barriers such as cost, time and logistics. They could, therefore, almost enjoy the status quo of a child who was not pushing to take part in something. They did not see the point in spending time and money if a child wasn't interested and if the child's life seemed fine. They might feel a bit guilty about their lack of encouragement, however, and appeared open to reminders about the benefits of involvement, although their child had to show interest too.

*"When my daughter was younger she had a few piano lessons which she absolutely hated. If she can't pick something up she gets very bored."* Mother, Year 9

*"At the end of the day you just want them to be balanced."* Mother, Year 11

#### **Pen portraits of a 'Passive supporter'**

'X' is a married plumber with a 17 year old son. He, himself, was in a football team for years and loved it. He feels that he would really like his son to play, but does not want to push, especially as his son rejects anything he suggests. He feels that the exercise and teamwork would be great for his son's confidence, but his son doesn't feel as if he is good enough to be picked for the team. He has given up suggesting any activity to him now.

'X' is a single Mum who works full time. She has one teenage daughter who has tried doing lots of activities but never sticks at anything, and isn't interested in doing much now. She is more interested in going on MSN and meeting up with friends. Her mum knows she spends too much time on the computer, but she feels she doesn't have the time to get involved and is too tired. She says that she would support any activity that her daughter wants to do, but acknowledges that it is all expensive so it is easier for her not to. Her post evaluation questionnaire comments showed that the discussion had highlighted for her how much time her daughter spends on the computer and she commented that it had a positive impact on her child getting more involved in activities in the future.

#### 5.4.5 Passive disinterested

This audience which appeared predominately to be made up of C2DE respondents, shared some attitudes with the 'Passive supporters' in that they appreciated the benefits of positive activities and felt that participation had to come from the child. However 'Passive disinterested' appeared slightly less interested in the whole concept which was not really top of mind to them. They tended not to think extra activities were that important or needed in their child's lives and felt that their children were fine as they were. It was clear for this group that participation in activities would have to be very much child led.

*"I don't know what activities there are for kids.....they don't want to do them anyway."*  
Mother, Year 9

*"I don't push them and it's easier for me if I'm completely honest."* Mother, Year 11

*"If she really wanted to do it...and it didn't cost I wouldn't stand in her way."*  
Father, Year 10

*"Sometimes it's a bit much, come in and have a drink or a snack then homework, my daughter likes to get it out of the way and then she can relax for the evening, almost every night."* Mother, Year 9

*"She gets tired, it's a long day. It's far easier to go on the computer and chill out, and talk to the same set of friends again."* Mother, Year 9

*"I wouldn't want her to sit there for hours like a couch potato but I don't mind a little bit. What is the harm in that?"* Mother, Year 9

Barriers were top of mind when activities were suggested, particularly the issues of cost and logistics.

*"I would say (if asked by child to do something) "How much?"* Dad, Year 10

### **Pen Portraits of 'Passive disinteresteds'**

'X' is a mother of four. One of her children does an activity, but the rest of them do not do anything. She describes them as fundamentally lazy, but is not really bothered about this as they are healthy and happy. She quickly mentioned that a barrier to her children taking part in activities is herself - she probably doesn't encourage them enough, however she worries about the logistics and money involved in taking part in activities and thinks why spend the money and make the effort if they are not interested - you can't force them. Having four children also would make it harder for her to encourage activities due to logistics.

'X' is a married father of two. He is really not bothered about activities and they are not top of mind. He thinks his children are fine without them although he appreciates that extra activities are of benefit, he is worried about cost and logistics.

### **5.4.6 Resistors**

'Resistors' either actively or passively prevented their children participating in activities or put up barriers so it was difficult for them to partake. They tended to have quite good reasons for non participation and felt quite confident about their beliefs. These were often focused on the impact of participation on 'me' and 'my family' for example the difficulty of logistics or cost, rather than the benefits to children of participation. They could feel that kids' lives were organised enough and that they needed 'downtime'.

Some 'Resistors' came across as quite controlling, wanting to be involved in and in control of their child's lives. They could feel reluctant to let their children be any more independent than they had to be. They often did quite a lot as a family and tended to argue that this was sufficient for their children.

*"I can't go because on a Monday I have a cleaner, I just can't go, so I stopped her, well I suppose I have really. I've not encouraged her because it doesn't fit in with me... That's the truth, those things are very important. My husband plays golf on a Saturday so I'd be running to the other side of town again.... It disrupts family life."* Mother, Year 10

*"I like to be involved with my children, so I know what they're up to and what they are doing."* Father, Year 9

### **Pen portraits of 'Resistors'**

'X', BC1, is a married Mum of a 14 year old girl. She feels that children have enough structure in their lives and need to be able to "chill out". They have two hours of homework each night so there is no time for anything else. It also interferes with family life. She feels it is important that the family all eat together in the evening and talk about their day. She likes the idea of activities but says it is too hard logistically especially when there are siblings. Her daughter wanted to join the school netball team but she said no due to travel time and the importance of being at home.

Her friend also feels disinclined to encourage out of school activities - she believes that children have such organised lives that they need down time and that watching the TV and playing on the computer / internet is a good way of relaxing at the end of the day.

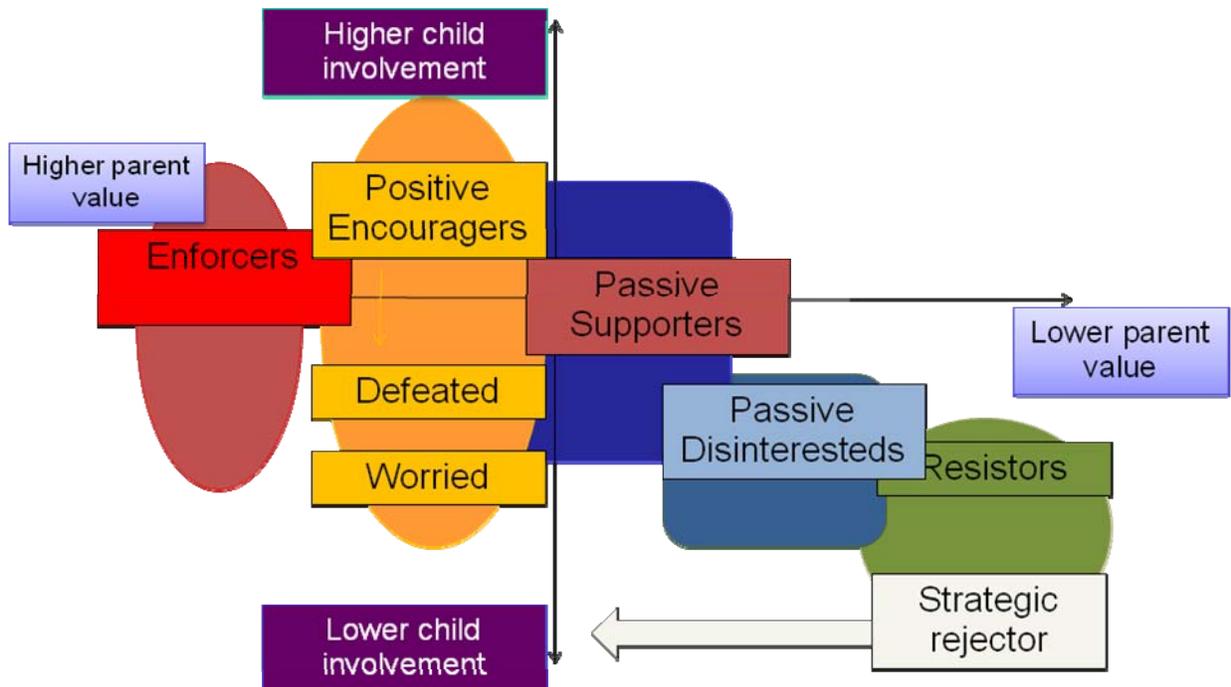
'X' is a male Asian. He is very engaged with his children and wants to be their role model. He spends as much time as he can partaking in activities with them. He is very concerned about school work and does not want his children falling in with the wrong crowd. Although not against extra activities he does not think they are necessary in his son's life. He would carefully vet anything his son wanted to take part in, and feels that their community actually provides lots of opportunities for the development of social skills anyway e.g. through weddings, parties.

In addition to the segments above, the research also uncovered a number of cases of vulnerable children whose parents had found that involvement in positive activities was exposing their children to bullying and unhappiness and this audience is described as 'Strategic rejecters'. They were typically overweight, not sporty or had a disability and in most cases they had experienced bullying at school as well as at activities. While schools may have acted to support the child and parents, the decision had been taken to exclude them from clubs as they 'couldn't cope'.

*"I would love her to do something but it would need to be well run - I have no idea where to turn to find out." Father, Year 11*

*"It could be good for his self esteem - but so far he has just been knocked down." Mother, Year 8*

The visual below illustrates a mapping of the various segments uncovered in the research alongside child involvement.



## 5.5 The benefits of positive activities

### 5.5.1 Overview

Parents across the sample tended to be of the opinion that they did not really want their children sitting around doing nothing. They did not particularly like them being at home all the time in their spare time, bored, not doing very much or spending too much time watching TV or being on the computer. Some described this as not 'healthy' behaviour. Others also commented that it meant that children were in the way and that there was no space for the parents. However also as discussed parents were worried about their children being in potentially unsafe situations outside of the home.

Parents therefore saw three main benefits to their children participating in organised activities: that they were occupied doing something they enjoyed; that there were strong personal development benefits; and that this could take place in a safe environment where they did not have to worry about them.

*"Just to feel good about themselves, about herself and to have confidence in the ability to be able to do new challenges and things." Mother, Year 9*

*"It's good for their social and communication skills and that has to be good for life, to get on in life in general." Mother, Year 9*

*"Keeps them off the streets, gives them more confidence to see them happy doing what they enjoy most." (Mother, post evaluation questionnaire)*

There was a sense that parental aspirations reflected those of the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see diagram below). Once basic needs were fulfilled and safety was reassured, parents then started to look to the psychological development, the chance to excel and self actualize and then the possibility of achieving peak experiences through the joy of participating.



## As well as meeting needs such activities can inspire hope and ambition

---



45

### 5.5.2 Occupied, doing something they enjoy

The benefit of keeping children occupied, participating in something that they enjoyed was seen as a strong benefit to parents and a basic requirement of an activity. However this benefit meant that children would be busy, having fun and enjoying themselves. They would be happy, positive and interested. At a basic level this was seen as the most important benefit - children had to enjoy an activity to want to continue participating.

*"I don't like staying at home and being a couch potato or the kids doing that and it irritates me."* Father, Year 9

*"Kids enjoy it....he's going to Disneyland Paris with the rugby club."* Mother Year 13

*"They are tired but when she comes back from her dancing, she's on such a high from doing it that she's got all that adrenalin."* Mother, Year 13

Parents also recognised a secondary benefit here - that they could almost share in this enjoyment - the parent would be happy, enjoying their child having fun. Parents across the sample discussed the enjoyment of sharing these moments together and hearing about their child's activity and enjoyment levels. It was also seen as keeping communication channels with their child open, which many parents valued at a time when their children were maybe sharing less with them.

*"There's nothing that gives me more pleasure than my boys or girls coming through the door having enjoyed themselves..."* Father, Year 11

The benefit of enjoyment was not seen as exclusive to organised activities, however and therefore not 'ownable' as a hook. Parents felt that their children could 'have fun' out and about, doing other things. In fact some felt that the ultimate fun for their child was when they were free to spend time out with friends, away from structure.

### **5.5.3 In a safe environment, away from trouble**

Taking part in organised activities felt fundamentally safe to parents and as discussed parents were concerned about their children being allowed out of the house unsupervised. They were aware of where their children were, they were 'off the streets' and therefore not hanging around outside getting into trouble, or potentially being the victim of crime. Parents tended to agree that taking part in activities meant that their children were less likely to go astray - have early or unsafe sex or get involved in drugs.

*"To get them off the street...I think it gives them a good foundation for later on in life... They are active, and they are busy."* Mother, Year 9

*"I'd rather they do this type of thing and I know where they are than standing on street corners."* Mother, Year 13

*"If they are occupied sufficiently and doing things that interest them and it's doing them good, hopefully they won't go down that area."* Mother, Year 9

Also as discussed earlier in this report, parents tended not to have concerns about leadership and felt that being in organised activities, particularly those in schools, were safe as they were being supervised and led by a trained leader. This appeared to give parents the opportunity to relax about what their children were doing.

*"You don't have to worry, they are with people that have organised it."* Mother, Year 10

As mentioned in Section 5.2.4, however, some concerns did exist around youth clubs in terms of inappropriate behaviour of other children attending (smoking and drinking, for example). Indeed there was occasional evidence of youth clubs where parents were not happy with the leadership and stories of alcohol or cigarettes being too readily available.

*"Then you get the little stragglers that can cause trouble outside.... Children in school clubs really want to go and in the youth club you get every Tom Dick and Harry."*  
Mother, Year 9

Some parents also had specific concerns about certain activities they deemed unsafe e.g. boxing, shooting, however they often agreed that learning these skills in an organised club would be the safest it could possibly be.

#### 5.5.4 Personal and 'soft skills' development

Parents tended to agree with the sentiment that taking part in organised activities could have a very positive impact on the personal growth and development of their child with confidence and self esteem being core end benefits - this benefit felt potentially ownable by organised activities and could be described as a child blossoming. Some parents mentioned this both quickly and spontaneously, whilst others agreed on prompting. These benefits felt very significant and important to parents who tended to want to see their children develop into well rounded, confident adults.

*"Confidence, I think it gives them the ability to be themselves... More independent, they are totally away from them... Trust, not smothered in cotton wool. Socialising skills... No teachers, a bit more relaxed."* Mother, Year 9

*"Builds them into better people."* Mother, Year 13

Confidence and self esteem were developed through taking part, achieving at activities, being independent and 'coming out' of themselves. The development of social skills - through making new friends, getting on with a wide range of people and moving in different circles - was seen as an important part of this 'personal development' benefit. Occasionally there was mention of the development of skills that give you social standing such as playing an instrument, singing and rugby.

*"Interact, the social side of it."* Mother, Year 10

*"Builds their confidence... 'x has' got no confidence really and if she hadn't done football she would have been one of these sitting at home because she hasn't got the confidence."* Mother, Year 13

Other related skills mentioned included learning to be part of a team, discipline/organisational skills (being somewhere on time, taking part in something, working together as a team) and self reliance/independence - learning to be away from parents and operate as a growing adult. All of these benefits were felt to be very important and valued by parents.

*"Individuality... Also you go in as an individual and you come out as a team."* Father, Year 11

*"Independence and discipline.....helps build confidence."* Father, Year 13

Some of these benefits resonated particularly with parents of teenagers who were getting older and were closer to adulthood and those whose children lacked confidence.

Some low income parents also argued that they wanted more for their children and wanted their children to feel good about themselves and have the confidence to move out of their immediate circle. Discussions with some very low income parents living in deprived settings who were strong believers in the benefits of organised activities also demonstrated that they felt that not being able to take part in activities actually had a negative effect on a child's self esteem and attitude.

*"It's important to help them get access to things so they can have self-belief. If they don't have these chances like their friends they think: 'Who am I?' It makes them resent the parents, they feel worthless and beneath other children. I've seen it. They feel depressed and stressed and just give up."* Single black mother (C2DE)

In addition, parents of children who were not that academic felt it was important to gain these benefits.

### **5.5.5 Fitness and health**

Keeping fit, healthy and active was seen as an important benefit of participating in sports activities. This was often top of mind for those with active children and also for those whose children had weight issues. Some mothers of daughters also mentioned keeping a good figure as being an important driver for their child to take part.

*"It keeps them fit, keeps them active, gives them variety."* Mother, Year 9

*"Quite a lot of children have started to put quite a lot of weight on. They are both really scared about that. It keeps the weight down and it's healthy for their muscles and their bones."* Mother, Year 9

*"Looking good is important but that comes with health. If you're healthy within it will shine. I'm sure the outside of you does."* Mother, Year 9

*"If they find something that's going to improve them in fitness like swimming they think if I do so many lengths, it helps my body and I lose weight."* Father, Year 11

A range of attitudes were displayed relating to sport within school - some of which appeared conflicting. Some parents argued that sports at school were not very good any more and that there was generally a lack of competition and opportunities. This meant that 'out of school' sports were particularly important. However others complained that school teams were too focused on the elite players and that schools did not provide enough opportunities for children who did not excel at sport - sport just for competition rather than for enjoyment in their view created a culture where children did not want to participate for fear of rejection.

### **5.5.6 New skills development**

The development of new skills that children may not get in school or at home was seen as important for some parents, particularly the more engaged. For some this was something that may lead to a career in later life. For others it was just about having another interest or hobby in their children's lives.

*"It gives them experiences and knowledge of something that you don't know about."*  
Mother, Year 9

*"I think they're fantastic, they give them things I can't give him. I don't know how to play any musical instrument, I'm not particularly talented in them so I don't know."*  
Mother, Year 9

The idea of opening up opportunities and horizons to their children was also interesting. Activities were seen as enabling children to try new things and to find something that they liked and were good at. This was particularly motivating for 'encouragers' and those concerned about their child's outlook on life.

### 5.5.7 Potential success

The possible contribution to success in life was a driver for some parents, although this idea tended to engage the more engaged and 'pushy' parents including Enforcers. Finding something that their child was really good at, maybe being the best and achieving highly, made participation in activities sound attractive. Some linked this to the possibility of their child making money or achieving status.

*"Could be a career, that's what I am for... Could be the next Owen."* Mother, Year 9

For many other parents however, the idea of *general* participation was stronger. They preferred the idea that 'anyone' could take part in organised activities and that a child did not have to be particularly good to enjoy taking part. They were concerned that focusing too much on success was not realistic to most children.

### 5.5.8 Impact on education or future

The skills that were most immediately associated with organised activities tended to be non academic, therefore the immediate associations with any future success tended to centre around being really talented at something such as football or dancing.

The idea that participation in organised activities might help in the classroom was a new thought for most and as such it did engage for being thought-provoking. Many in the sample tended to disagree - not seeing a link with non academic activities to success in school or feeling that out of school activities could be distracting to school work.

*"I don't think by agreeing to a club it's going to make them any cleverer."* Mother, Year 12

*"I don't think it makes their grades any better."* Mother, Year 13

However some, on reflection did appreciate that skills developed could impact positively on school life - they could see that confidence, discipline and improved concentration might have a positive impact on performance, although this tended to take some time to think through.

*"I know it's good for self esteem, and they enjoy it - but that has made me think now - it probably does go back to school work too."* Father, Year 10

Parents also did understand that having activities on your CV was a positive contribution to finding employment, although this seemed too far into the future for parents of younger teens, and some were fairly cynical arguing that 'you can say anything' on a CV anyway.

*"Don't think it makes a difference.....they can just write what they want on their CV anyway."* Mother, Year 10

### 5.5.9 Positive community benefits

Parents did see a benefit to the wider community if children participated in certain organised activities; however this was not a strong driver to encourage participation. This benefit tended to be linked to voluntary work which was seen as giving a sense of community awareness to children whilst helping the wider community. Some parents felt that they would like to see more opportunities for children to get involved in voluntary work, perhaps through schools, although they recognised that it might not be particularly motivating to children.

Although not top of mind, once they thought about it, most respondents agreed that participation in organised activities also gave children in an area the opportunity to mix and get to know each other which would be good for community relationships and community cohesion.

*“Bring kids together as a group and meet people.”* Mother, Year 9

## 5.6 Main barriers to participation

### 5.6.1 Child motivation

Across the sample, child motivation was seen as the key barrier to participation in organized activities.

Parents argued that children who did take part in activities at primary school often wanted to drop out of activities in their early teenage years. Parents of girls argued that they started to lose interest in activities, particularly sport, around 12 or 13 years of age. Boys seemed to lose interest in activities at a slightly older age than girls and were more likely to stick at sport. Although sporting ability was still seen as important, there was the sense that sport was more of a unifier for boys than for girls.

*“At that age they get bored, it’s like the hormones from the child to the adult and it’s the hormone period.”* Mother Year 13

*“He does judo as well and he’s going through a stage of I don’t want to go, why should I go?”* Mother, Year 13

*“Quite a few dropped out (dancing) but I’m proud of her as she carried on.”*  
Mother, Year 13

*“I have to push my oldest twin, he would be one of those who would lie on the settee and pass me the remote, that kind of laziness.”* Mother, Year 13

Parents believed that children had an increasingly important role in their own involvement in activities from around 12 to 13 years of age. The period between transfer to secondary school and the early teenage years was cited as a key moment in the starting shift of balance of power. Children were seen to be taking more control of what they liked to do and didn’t like to do.

Some parents reported that their children (including those who were previously interested in activities and those who were not) were just not interested in outside activities, preferring to stay at home, play on computers / the internet or spend time with their friends. Those with a tendency for introversion, in particular, preferred to stay at home in their free time.

*"She's always been a bit of a homebird."* Mother, Year 10

*"All she does is veg in bedroom.....stays in pyjamas all weekend."* Mother, Year 9

*"I would prefer it if he switched the computer off on a hot day."* Mother, Year 11

Parents often argued that for some, the lack of motivation was driven by a lack of confidence. Children were quiet, shy, or lacked confidence to come forward, try new things or socialise. The self-consciousness of many children seemed to increase at this age. Teenagers could become very conscious of how good they were at an activity. For girls, issues such as changing in public reportedly became important and sometimes discouraged participation.

*"My son would be worried about failure."* Mother, Year 10

Sport clubs and school teams were often seen as restricted to those with ability. Activities could be seen as damaging to confidence when a young person was not picked for the team.

*"Schools pick the cream."* Mother, Year 10

*"When they are younger they have dreams....and then reality kicks in and they become despondent."* Father, Year 12

Sports clubs in particular were also seen as requiring major commitment - maybe training several times per week. This was seen as appealing only to the very sporty or committed children, particularly with the amount of homework and other commitments increasing as children got older.

*"You either have to be very serious or give it up..."* Father, Year 11

### **5.6.2 Negative peer influence**

Parents argued that socialising with friends seemed to become more important than activities in the early teenage years and there seemed to be a greater interest in opposite sex and 'hanging out' with friends.

*"They are very influenced by their friends, they're at that age, impressionable age where my daughter will come over and say such and such a body has got this or she's having a sleepover and I want a sleepover, so it's very much what their peers are doing, what their friends are doing."* Mother, Year 9

*"I think girls aren't so bad, but with my son it's all about what his class mates are doing and then I will learn and he doesn't want to go there. If all his class mates are there I'm sure he'll go there."* Father, Year 9

Some parents viewed this positively, particularly if the socialising took place in 'safe' settings. They felt that it helped their child's self confidence and self esteem and that it was useful for them to find their niche without the hierarchies of organised activities.

*"She has lost two stone since she has these new friends and is interested in make up....doing her hair."* Mother, Year 10

*"It has a place....not hierarchical....they can find their own level."* Mother, Year 10

However these relationships were seen as having a strong influence on their child's interest in organised activities. They argued that their children were very conscious of how 'cool' or 'uncool' an activity was seen to be among their peers and they would only join in if the 'right people' were doing it or if they thought their friends / peer group would approve.

*"She won't sign up to an activity unless people she knows have put their names down."*  
Mother, Year 9

*"He says: 'I'm not going (to Scouts)...my friends will laugh at me'."* Mother, Year 9

*"She wouldn't tell anyone at school that she was doing air cadets."* Mother, Year 9

The parents in this sample often felt they had little or no influence on whether their child got involved in an activity arguing and that it was not possible or desirable to force a teenager to do something they did not want to do - this was extremely frustrating to more encouraging and engaged parents.

By 17 years old children were seen as deciding for themselves in most situations what they did and did not do. Parents often still had the ultimate power of veto, however, as they were still in control of travel and finance and had 'house rules' to be adhered to. Despite this, however, they felt that it was harder to fight the will of older teens.

*"I would only suggest something if I had put riot gear on first."* Mother, Year 10

Many parents also were unwilling to cause friction in the home by arguing over participation in activities - they said that they did not want to negatively affect the relationship with their child by forcing the issue. There was a sense that some relationships were already becoming difficult or at least going through change. Children were spending less time with their parents and more time on their own or with friends. Parents were reluctant to do anything that might risk closing down the lines of communication or causing major family rows. Some argued that if their child was happy, (relatively) balanced and without problems, then they would rather not address the issue at all.

Many parents worried that their input might have a negative affect - that anything they suggested would lack credibility or be immediately dismissed.

*"I've given up."* Father, Year 12

*"They have to think it is their idea."* Father, Year 11

Many parents wanted to see moves to help overcome the negative influence of peers by, for example, offering a range of positive activities and making them more mainstream.

*"There was an introduction to sixth form week - they all had to go, and they did kayaking, coasteering, they came back full of it - because they all joined in."*  
Mother, Year 12

### 5.6.3 Cost

Cost was an extremely significant barrier to participation, particularly for lower income families and single parents. Respondents thought that many out of school clubs and activities required significant investment - money to cover 'subs', kit, equipment, and teaching. Some felt that there was no point their child starting if there was a risk that (for whatever reason) they might not continue with it since this meant money wasted through paying for kit and subscriptions.

*"She's got an electric guitar but we said no to lessons.....too expensive."* Mother, Year 10

*"I would rather say no now, than tell them they had to give up if I'm on the dole."*  
Father, Year 10

*"No point in pushing them if it costs."* Mother, Year 10

*"Obviously they want money to have snacks and things like that and it's going to cost us, and if they are in two or three activities a week then you're talking about a good £200 and it's not just one kid but the other that wants to do it."* Father, Year 9

Some payment structures exacerbated this concern by, for example, requiring payment up front.

*"It would be OK if you could pay as you go but you have to pay upfront for a term."*  
Mother, Year 10

There was evidence in this sample of children dropping out of activities specifically because of cost factors. For example:

- County tennis player stopped because of court and kit costs
- Judo brothers taken out of class, now doing nothing
- Grade 5 pianist now getting no lessons
- Club swimmer and medal winner - subs too much

Some parents were unwilling to start paying for something that they might not always be able to afford as they did not want to disappoint their children in the future. This could be extremely disappointing to lower income 'encourager' families who naturally wanted their children to be involved in activities.

### 5.6.4 Travel safety

Parents - particularly of girls but also of boys - were often unwilling for their child to travel on their own out of school, particularly while they were under 16 and after dark. This made getting to and from activities a real issue. Many parents preferred to take their children rather than let them use public transport which could be time consuming and - depending on other commitments and work - logistically difficult.

Some parents had some safety concerns about the actual activity, for example, boxing, dangerous sports and shooting, although they tried to reassure themselves that doing these in a club / society would be as safe as possible given the supervision and training.

### **5.6.5 Availability and awareness**

Some parents felt that there was little available in their local area - particularly those in suburban and rural areas. They argued that schools and the local council did not offer anything (that they had heard about) or that they did not offer anything of interest. They felt that the best activities tended to be a long way away and there were no easy transport options.

*"The schools close their doors at tea time." Mother, Year 10*

*"I don't think they (youth clubs) exist...there are no good local activities around here...nowt for them to do." Father, Year 10*

### **5.6.6 Bullying**

A small number of parents in this sample had found that involvement in positive activities was exposing their children to bullying and unhappiness. These children tended to be overweight, non sporty or to have a disability. In most cases they had experienced bullying at school as well as during extra activities.

## **5.7 Barriers that affected less engaged audiences in particular**

### **5.7.1 Logistics**

Less motivated parents (supporters to resisters) said that it was very difficult to get their children to activities logistically. They appeared much less prepared than other typologies (encouragers and enforcers) to 'put themselves' out by taking their children to activities, and reluctant to organise things around their children or to spend too much time travelling.

*"I said find one local to home if you want to do it... I said see if somebody will do it with you and I'll do a rota and no it didn't work." Mother, Year 10*

'Encouragers' were much more likely to try and work something out by juggling their lives, lift shares and organising complex rotas, although the logistics could still impact on decisions about signing up for clubs and sometimes logistically it was just not possible. The logistics of getting children to and from clubs was therefore not just an issue for less motivated parents and could be particularly problematic for working parents. If activities were not based near home it could just make the day too complicated. Parents of more than one child could also find it difficult to juggle different children's needs and interests.

*"I had to say no as I work weekends....I can't take him." Father, Year 10*

*"I don't push them and it's easier not to....to be honest." Mother, Year 10*

### **5.7.2 Importance of personal time**

Some parents in the sample felt very strongly that children today led very busy structured lives. They often did not get home until late anyway and tended to have lots of homework. They argued that it was important for them to have downtime - time to relax after a demanding day at school.

*"They are taught to learn not 'to be'...they need time to unwind." Mother, Year 10*

### 5.7.3 Disruption of family life

Some parents felt that they did not see much of their children during term time and argued that extra activities would only keep them away for longer. They saw after school and weekends as family time - time to catch up - and did not want organised activities to get in the way of valuable family time. This view tended to be expressed by 'resistor' families.

*"I've lost them during the week."* Mother, year 10

*"I am happy for them to hang out at home.....happy that they are happy to do that and don't feel the need to run off.....I treat them as friends."* Mother, Year 10

### 5.7.4 Parental motivation

More encouraging respondents often argued that a lack of parent motivation and encouragement was a barrier to other people's children. They said they knew people who were not interested in their children taking part in anything or who were not interested in their children at all. This included both parents who worked full time and 'never saw their children' as well as those who 'didn't care about their children'.

*"I think some people do it when they've had a lacking childhood, they are trying to live their life through their children."* Mother, Year 13

Other more engaged respondents felt that children should be encouraged and supported, particularly in early childhood so that they continued on 'the right path' with activities becoming a way of life.

*"Getting children involved as young as possible" (post evaluation questionnaire)*  
Mother, Year 9

While more passive parents did recognise that they did not actively encourage their children to participate in activities, they saw child motivation rather than parental behaviour as the key barrier to greater involvement.

Some parents also recognised that working full time was a barrier - it was much harder to organise activities after school.

## 5.8 Responses to messages

The following messages are in broad order of interest.

### 5.8.1 Let your child blossom.

*'Organised activities are not only fun, but they help your child grow in independence, confidence, self esteem and give them a real sense of achievement at being part of something and these are important skills for life.'*

Respondents liked the mention of 'fun' at the beginning of this statement because it immediately identified a key child-led reason for participating. The notion that participation had additional benefits to key life skills - confidence, self-esteem and sense of achievement - was a powerful message for parents. Some (often more downmarket and/or parents of older teenagers) saw

these benefits as going even further - providing a helping hand to living a fulfilling/successful life in adulthood.

A few parents felt uncomfortable about the reference to 'independence' because they felt that teenagers typically sought too much. Their nervousness about giving them too much independence was often reported as a source of friction between parents and teenagers.

### **5.8.3 Safe**

*'Kids should be out and about having fun, but where are they really and what are they doing? When they are taking part in organised activities you know they are safe, being kept busy doing something constructive and not hanging around getting into trouble.'*

Parents identified with the sentiment expressed in this statement due to safety concerns. They were particularly concerned about the personal safety of their children as they grew older and more independent - particularly in metropolitan areas, where they expressed nervousness about an increase in knife crime and violence. Few parents in the sample were happy about their children travelling on their own before the age of 16, particularly after dark.

### **5.8.4 Give your child the opportunity and see them come alive**

*'Children thrive when they try new things. They don't know what they are going to love and neither do you. Give them as many opportunities as you can to find out what they love to do.'*

This statement was also motivational. Parents viewed 'opportunities' as a positive word and identified with the underlying sentiment of watching their child 'come alive'. This statement sat particularly well with 'encouragers'.

*"It is about providing them with opportunities - helping them reach their potential."*  
Father, Year 9

However, some found this statement rather 'middle class', even judgemental and it could leave them feeling frustrated. They argued that while they would like to 'give as many opportunities' as they could, expense and logistics meant that it was not always realistic.

### **5.8.5 Taking part**

*'Taking part in organised activities that children enjoy makes for fun, interested, happy children brimming with confidence. Give them the opportunity to find out what they love doing and give them experiences that will help them grow.'*

There were a number of positive elements to this statement including the notion that positive activities could help children grow and develop in confidence. However some respondents found the tone rather condescending. 'Brimming with confidence' had some negative associations, sometimes suggesting 'over confidence' and making others feel inadequate and some also argued that it was over the top - they questioned the extent to which a child's happiness was dependent on their participation in organised activities.

### **5.8.6 Success**

*'It's great to let children find out what they are good at and they might be the next David Beckham or Leona Lewis. Taking part in organised activities gives them the chance to be the best at something.'*

Most parents agreed with the sentiment that it was great to let children find out what they were good at. However, they strongly rejected the idea that it was about finding something that their children were 'best' at. This came across as not only far too 'pushy' but also as setting parents and their children up for disappointment - it was not possible for everyone to be 'the best' at something. Most liked the use of ethnically diverse, positive role models but they disputed whether it was appropriate for the goal to be reaching celebrity status. This led to discussions about society's obsession with celebrity and the negative effects of this (setting unrealistic expectations and prompting feelings of failure). They argued that success/happiness was not about being 'the best' or achieving celebrity status, but about finding out what you were good at and enjoying it.

### **5.8.7 Benefits both ways**

*'If she's happy, I'm happy! There's nothing better than hearing my children talk about the fun they have and I get so much satisfaction from seeing them develop.'*

During the group discussions, parents of participators did discuss the pleasure and personal enjoyment they got from seeing their child doing something they found enjoyable and rewarding. However, the focus on parental satisfaction / reward could feel at best rather idealistic and at worst, rather selfish. Most argued that positive activities should be about the children and not about the parents.

*"When my daughter comes home from riding it's about the only time she's upbeat and happy to talk to me these days."* Mother, Year 10

### **5.8.8 For the future**

*'Children are like sponges - taking part in extra activities means they'll absorb new skills which will help them at school and beyond.'*

The idea of acquiring transferable skills seemed to hold particular relevance for audiences who were keen to improve their children's chances for success. However, although many acknowledged improved self esteem and confidence could positively affect performance at school, not everyone agreed, and few saw it as a key motivation for encouraging their children to take part in organised activities.

### **5.8.9 Be happy, be healthy, why not join in?**

*'Taking part in organised activities helps keep your child busy, active, fit and healthy and they are great fun too.'*

Most parents felt that as a sports specific message, this statement worked well. However, they did not feel that it worked as a generic message and some found it slightly 'Butlins' or as if it were aimed at younger children.

### **5.8.10 Good for them, good for others**

*'Positive activities are as important for your child's development as school itself. While bringing benefits to your child's behavior and overall wellbeing, most of the time your child also gets the chance to help others and make a difference - by volunteering, or coaching younger children or helping disabled peers.'*

This message was seen as relevant specifically to Scouts, voluntary work, and Duke of Edinburgh. Although parents agreed with the positives of 'community activities' expressed in this statement, many were slightly cynical about the extent to which their children would be motivated by a notion of helping others and 'making a difference'.

### **5.8.11 Good for the present, good for the future**

*'Employers are more likely to hire someone who has been involved in other activities apart from school. At the same time out of school activities relieve boredom and make your child more social, integrated and active.'*

Parents tended to agree with the sentiment that participation in activities was good for a young person's CV because it demonstrated motivation and commitment. However, for many (particularly parents of younger children), the reference to employers felt too far in the future. Not all found the reference to relieving boredom particularly motivating arguing that most teenagers seemed quite happy to do nothing.

### **5.8.12 Your encouragement counts**

*'The cost of positive activities is a problem for young people. If you encourage them to start an activity and help them cover the cost of it, they will be more inclined to participate.'*

This statement was often disliked and could fuel frustration or bemusement. Respondents argued that it was far too simplistic and failed to truly understand the problems faced by those on low incomes.

*"At that age I wouldn't expect her to pay she doesn't work or anything"* Mother, Yr 9

## **5.9 Sources of information**

The parents in this sample did not feel particularly clear about what organised activities were available in and around their local area. There also appeared to be a great deal of variance regarding the availability of activities across locations. Some schools were clearly more proactive in providing clubs and activities, and some local councils appeared to offer more or at least to publicise what was on offer more clearly.

Most parents said that they found out about activities through word of mouth - child to child or (less as they got older) parent to parent. Word spread quickly if an activity was particularly good or had a particularly good leader. Other routes to information included schools (who sometimes handed out information), local papers (particularly for holiday clubs / activities), local council publications, and the internet.

Parents tended to rely on their child to tell them about in school activities but had no one resource they could turn to for information about out of school activities. All said they would welcome clear, concise and up to date information about what was available, where and when. They felt that this would allow them to be more proactive in suggesting things to their children.

There was interest in an up to date comprehensive list - perhaps available through a net resource such as Directgov. Schools were also seen as a key medium for distributing information to children and parents about both in and out of school activities via a newsletter, or preferably on the school website (since letters did not always reach the parents). The local council, too, was seen as an important route, ideally providing the information online, through leaflets, or over the phone.

Local newspapers, libraries, in local sports facilities, doctors' surgeries were also mentioned as important sources of information, although there was little evidence of use.

*'Schools, flyers through the doors' (post evaluation questionnaire)*

*'Through school, then further information via internet' (post evaluation questionnaire)*

*'Via schools and online' (post evaluation questionnaire)*

*'Online, local newspaper' (post evaluation questionnaire)*

*'I would like to find out via schools, as this will be more relevant to the area. Also posters could be put up in local shops etc' (post evaluation questionnaire)*

*'Advertised by the borough' (post evaluation questionnaire)*

Parents were generally unaware of specific government information programmes or initiatives to encourage children into activities. There was, if anything, a perception that there was decreasing government support, for example, sports being cut back in schools, and legislation holding back youth clubs and sports clubs. There was the occasional mention of the government encouraging participation in sport through offering free swimming sessions. Some local initiatives were also mentioned, for example: cards that gave money off activities (Coventry, Leeds); taxi schemes to pick up kids and take them to matches; activity camps for disadvantaged children.

## **5.10 Role of national campaign and further action**

Parents of children who were already taking part in activities thought that there was a role for a national campaign to encourage wider take up. They recognized the importance of extra activities both to children and to society in general, and felt that involvement should be encouraged.

However, there was a mixed reaction amongst other parents. Most felt they knew the benefits of participation, but felt that it was their children who needed to be motivated. They were sensitive to any implication that the reason their children were not getting involved was down to them. They wanted to see a campaign to motivate children via routes other than through their parents: for example, encouraging young people through their peers or offering no / low cost trials and tasters through road shows, activity fairs, exhibitions or schools. Many thought that using (local) celebrities would help encourage children and young people to try activities they may not have considered before. Strategies to boost peer attitudes would allow parents to reinforce, support and push at appropriate times with their children. However parents also felt that wider support would be needed such as increasing local facilities e.g. clubs, helping with access problems such as travel, and importantly, helping with the major barrier of cost - both at a trial and on-going support level.

*'Get local celebrities involved, free lessons to be structured to have activities, who attended the school' (post evaluation questionnaire)*

*'Through media, or by using celebrities to show the benefits of getting involved in activities' (post evaluation questionnaire)*

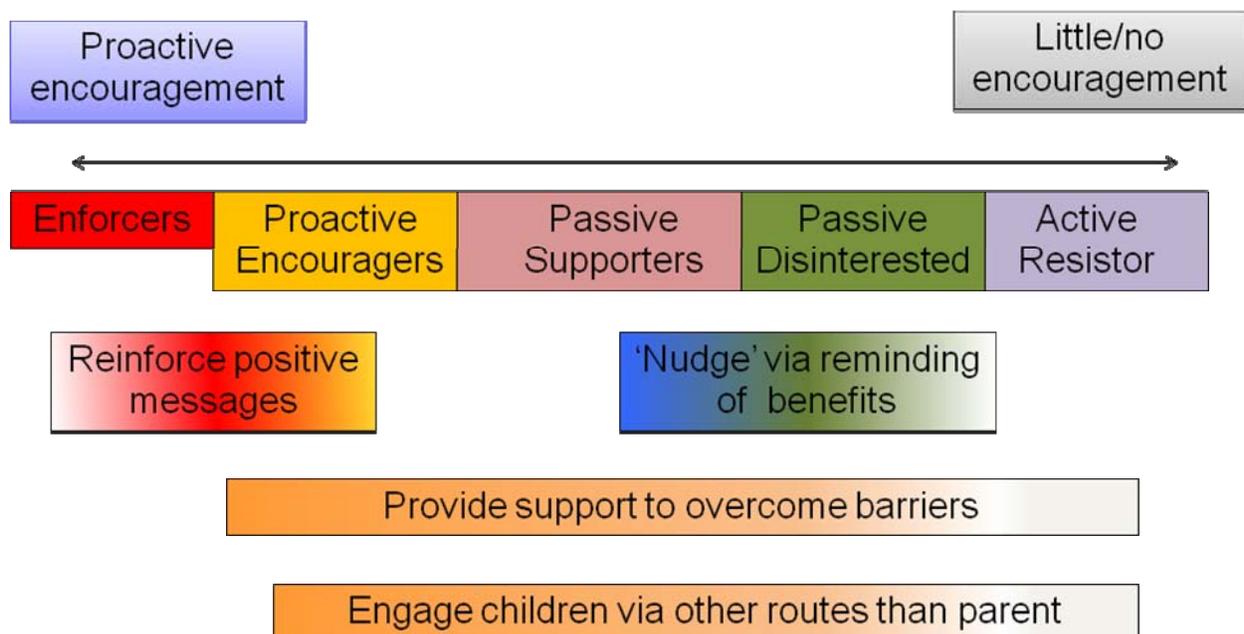
*'Being able to watch a class before taking up a class' (post evaluation questionnaire)*  
*"It should start from the government and then filter into local government and then be distributed via the network or already existing community projects and services into people, into schools particularly."* Father, Year 11

*"They should have taster sessions, so kids can try things cheaply to see what they like."*  
Mother, Year 10

The visual below outlines potential next steps according to each parental segment. As described earlier, for the more engaged audiences the most effective strategies will be to communicate in ways that reinforce the positive messages focusing on personal development / confidence, fun and enjoyment, and reminders of the benefit of being off the streets / safe.

For the less engaged audiences key communication tasks are to get the message over about any available support to overcome (financial) barriers, and reinforcement of their children's engagement via other routes (school based activities that overcome negative peer pressure), while also reminding them about the generic benefits described above.

The more engaged audiences appear capable of being nudged towards supporting such activities quite easily, through reminders of their benefits and a sense that they are being more widely taken up by children. The less engaged audiences have more entrenched barriers and reasons why they don't support such activities, that require concrete solutions as well as communication of general benefits.



## 5.11 Post evaluation research

The post evaluation research supported the findings from the main body of the research. The quotes below illustrate some of the reasons parents gave for participation in positive activities.

*'Enjoyment, feeling of confidence and personal success. Giving a balance and a focus away from school, social interaction'*

*'To help build confidence and to keep healthy'*

*'Health, fitness, team building, meeting friends'*

*'To keep fit and healthy, keeps them off the streets and gives them confidence. To see them happy, doing what they enjoy most'*

Parents again discussed cost, peer pressure, lack of interest and confidence as barriers

*'Lack of confidence, feeling a failure at certain activities especially more 'able' children take part. Not enough diverse activities offered'*

*'Peer pressure, cost and stigma in certain activities'*

*'Lack of confidence, not wanting to try new things'*

*'No street cred, lethargy, TV / Internet / MSN. Homework'*

*'Age, to be cool / not cool! Too engrossed in computers'*

They also recognised that parental barriers included time, cost and logistics.

*'Money is one of the biggest hurdles and finding out what activities are available'*

*'The cost, and also if you don't want to drive, you worry if the children will arrive and return safely'*

*'The cost, no knowledge of events'*

*'Lack of money as some activities are expensive, especially if there are more than one child in the family wanting to do more activities'*

*'The cost of some activities, not being able to take the child there due to work commitments'*

There was evidence from the post evaluation stage of the research that discussing these issues with parents did work to remind some of the benefits of participation.

*'I thought maybe my child might be missing out'*

*'Giving me a conscience to maybe go and do something'*

*'It did make me think more in general about how much exercise my child gets and highlighted how much time she spends on the computer'*

*'(Did you feel differently after the session?) Not really, but would feel different about doing more when my youngest is older due to advantages we talked about'*

*'I think most things were covered in the session and have had a positive impact on getting my child more involved in more activities in the future'*

As discussed and illustrated through quotes earlier in the report, they suggested that children could be better encouraged through schools and using celebrities to boost peer pressure to take part.

*'Friends are a big influence. Schools should do more to encourage the kids'*

*'Posters in school, curriculum subjects, celebrity endorsement, if friends go, incentive to go first time e.g. a voucher, things that support school work i.e. typing, photography, pc, web design, art, drawing'*

Although they also recognised that other help was needed.

*'Bring back funding for local facilities which have been taken away - definitely more funding for villages; it's not just inner cities that have poor people in them'*

*'There doesn't seem to be enough 'alternative' activities for children such as diving courses, rap sessions or more creative ventures where I live. Most things geared toward sport which suits some but not others... my eldest son hates sport but is into film making, radio, rap... If there were more local ventures involving these activities he would then meet like minded people in his area instead of feeling quite isolated a lot of the time. I enjoyed the discussion'*

*'I think there could be something in place to encourage parents to actually get involved in the activities. I am a qualified play worker and do voluntary activities in the area. We find it very difficult to get parental help so some activities cannot go ahead. If more parents were encouraged to give up some of their time a lot more activities could be put in place for children. If there was an incentive for the parents it could prove successful'*

*'I think there should be a modern equivalent of Scouts / Guides, or reinvented to do modern activities. Get local celebs to lead activities'*

Ref: DCSF-RR142

ISBN: 978 1 84775 505 6

© Solutions Research 2009

**[www.dcsf.gov.uk/research](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research)**

Published by the Department for  
Children, Schools and Families