



Introduction

For the past seven years, Barnardos has been on a journey of developing needs-led, outcome-focused practice, based on evidence of what works for children and families to achieve positive outcomes. During this process, a considerable amount of evidence and research data has been gathered and analysed. Literature reviews have been used to inform the design of specific systems (for example, for active case management) and programmes (for example, for Partnership with Parents).

In order to share the learning from this, the Best Practice Team are producing a series of **Translating Evidence to Practice** papers, providing accessible summaries on a range of subjects. The aim is to provide:

- An overview of subject areas and key definitions
- Up-to-date information and evidence
- Practice tips, which are based on findings from the research

This introductory paper looks at using research to inform practice. The next paper will be available in one month, after which the papers will be distributed quarterly. Upcoming papers will focus on: attachment, resilience and interagency work. We hope these will be useful to you in informing your practice.

Current Thinking

Evidence-based practice involves using programmes that have been shown by independent research to achieve positive outcomes for the children or parents who take part in the programme.

Evidence-informed refers to practices or programmes that are based on both the best available evidence (for example, systematic reviews) and practitioner expertise.

Synthesizing learning from multiple studies allows for the identification of key messages from the research. This is done through systematic reviews and research briefing papers:

Systematic reviews provide an overview of what has been demonstrated to be effective and ineffective in different subject areas. A number of systematic reviews of evidence have been completed by a variety of organisations and collaborations. When considering a practice challenge or dilemma, it may be useful for you to utilise some of these reviews: Cochrane Review: www.cochrane.org/cochrane-review; Campbell Collaboration: www.campbellcollaboration.org; SAMHSA: www.samhsa.gov.

Research briefing papers are also useful in the identification of key messages from the research. For example, the Social Care Institute of Excellence website, www.scie.org.uk, provides briefing papers on a variety of topics relevant to children's services. The Economic and Social Research Institute also provides research briefings, available on their website: www.ersi.ie.

HOW EVIDENCE CAN SUPPORT MY WORK

- By informing my work with a client or group.
- By developing a deeper understanding of an issue or topic.
- By exploring and identifying a solution when faced with a practice challenge.
- By helping identify what to do when working with a new need or client, or during interagency work.
- By giving me the knowledge that I am doing what research says will help families.

Sources of information

We can access evidence from a variety of sources, for instance:

Books...

Books are useful for an overview of theories associated with a specific topic and key messages from research. Barnardos' library has comprehensive catalogue of books on a variety of topics, including: general books on child development or child protection and specialised topics, such as bereavement and parenting.

Journal articles...

Journals provide specific information on research with a particular group of people. Barnardos' library has the following journals available: *Irish Journal of Family Law*, *Children and Society* and *Child Abuse and Neglect*. Barnardos' library also provides online access to a number of journals, namely: *Journal of Social Work*, *Child and Family Social Work*, *Child Care and Practice*, *Journal of Children's Services* and *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*.

Online search engines...

The *Social Policy and Practice* online database is a source of social science research. The database provides an easy way to search for information on a range of topics, such as children and families, social policy and mental health. The *North South Participation Hub* is database of research in the area of child protection. Both databases are available via Barnardos' library.

Evaluation reports...

Evaluation reports provide information on the outcomes specific programmes or services achieve. They can also provide details of children's and families' experiences of accessing a service and how organisational factors influence programme outcomes. Over the last ten years there has been rigorous evaluation of services in Ireland, for example: *Foiróige*, *Big Brothers Big Sisters*, Barnardos' *Wizards of Words*. These reports provide information on services delivered to Irish children and families.

Research on children's lives...

The Irish government have commissioned research on children's lives, for example: the longitudinal *Growing up In Ireland* study. These studies provide invaluable information on Irish children's experiences and needs. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs have a publications section, which has downloadable copies of the research spanning from 1996 to this year.

Further Reading

For a comprehensive but accessible overview of the different types of evidence, see Puddy, R.W. & Wilkins, N. (2011). *Understanding Evidence, Part 1: Best Available Research Evidence. A guide to the Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness* available from [www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/](http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/Understanding_Evidence-a.pdf)

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For any easy-to-read overview using evidence to inform service delivery, see Nutley, S. (2010) *Evidence Informed Practice: Using research to improve service for children and young people* available on www.effectiveservices.org

Practice Tips

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CONSIDERING EVIDENCE

- Is there a systematic review on the topic?
- Is the evidence strong or weak?
- Is the research relevant to my question?
- Is there more than one source of evidence?
- Is there any conflicting evidence?
- Is evidence for the programme or practice applicable to children and families I work with? Has it been used in disadvantaged areas?

DOs & DON'Ts

- Do look at all the evidence
- Don't rely on one study
- Do look for evidence which is independent (external evaluation or submitted to peer reviewed journal)
- Do look for evidence which is contradictory
- Don't ignore evidence that conflicts with your own point-of-view or practice