Growing Child: An integrated evidence based model of family support

Supporting parents, particularly those whose children are deemed vulnerable is now understood as key to interventions aimed at: improving child protection; promoting good infant and child mental health; enhancing child resilience, health and school readiness and improving educational outcomes. This presentation will address the theme connecting Child Protection and Family Support by describing a collaborative model of parenting support developed by the Lifestart Foundation working in partnership with statutory health and social care professionals. The model was designed to synthesise Lifestart practice with the health promotion and child development/child protection goals of statutory partners.

The Lifestart Growing Child programme delivered through home-visitation is outcomes focused and is based on sound empirical research on parenting and child development. It was designed and is regularly reviewed by a group of child development experts and it has been empirically tested in Ireland through a Randomised Controlled Trial (n=424) based on a rigorous experimental design (2008-2015) that showed significant positive effects across a number of parenting variables and child development outcomes.

The presentation will describe the implementation of the collaborative model of parenting support which incorporates (1) a targeted service for the parents of vulnerable, at-risk children referred by Public Health Nurses, Social Workers and other Health and Social Care Professionals and (2) an early intervention and prevention service aimed at all first time parents referred by Public Health Nurses. In the presentation the factors shaping the capacity of organisations and agencies to collaborate to develop and successfully implement best practice models of parenting support will be identified and discussed.

The presentation will also report on the Lifestart evaluative study findings and will outline the implications of these findings for parenting support practice in general and for Lifestart practice in particular, including maintaining fidelity to the Lifestart evidence-based and proven model of parenting support.