Family Support

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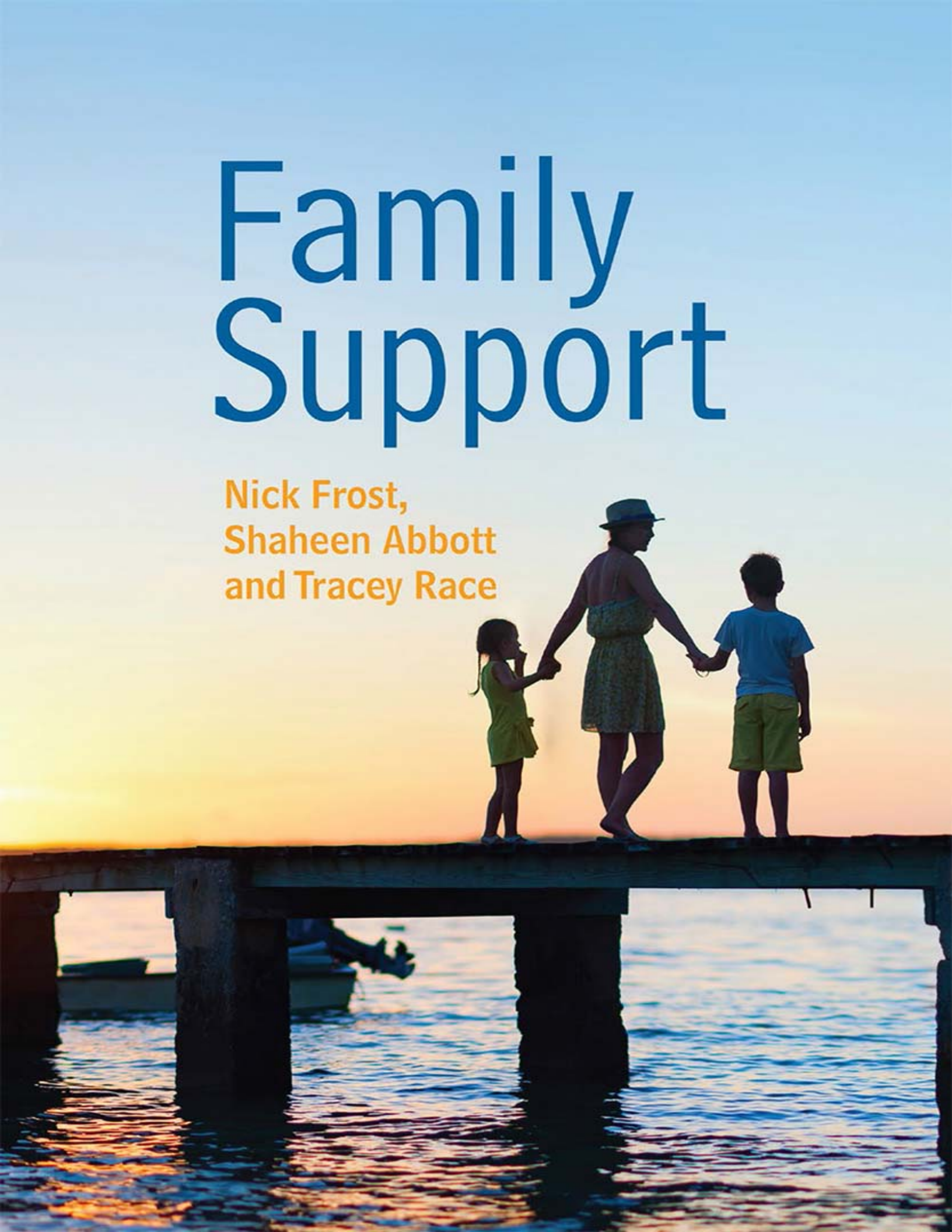

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Family Support

Prevention, Early Intervention and Early Help

Nick Frost, Shaheen Abbott and
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Introduction

The idea of ‘prevention’ has been an essential element of child welfare practice since its Victorian origins (Stedman Jones 1976): what has changed over the years has been the way the aim of ‘preventing’ the emergence of social and family problems has been conceptualized in policy and then put into practice. These changes are reflected in family support ‘projects’ aimed at preventing family breakdown and related social problems; such projects include the Victorian National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), the post-Second World War Family Service Units, the New Labour Sure Start initiative and the contemporary ‘Troubled Families’ programme. Such initiatives reflect changing ideologies about, and approaches to, family support. These ideologies are also reflected in shifting terminology – from ‘prevention’ through to contemporary debates about ‘family support, ‘early intervention’ and ‘early help’. These important conceptual issues will be discussed and dissected in the opening chapters of this book and will inform the rest of our policy and practice analysis.

Surprisingly little has been written about ‘family support’, especially in the form of texts suitable for students and/or books which focus on how to actually plan, organize and deliver family support. One aim of this book is to address this gap by producing a readable, accessible and practical text aimed at outlining and explaining current theory, policy, research and practice relating to ‘family support’. We aim to make a contribution to the rehabilitation of ‘family support’ as a concept and as a practice: we want to argue strongly in favour of the crucial role of family support which in recent years has been displaced by the

predominant safeguarding and child protection agenda (see Featherstone, White and Morris 2014).

This book is made up of chapters which can be read independently, but which as a whole are intended to provide a comprehensive overview of family support theory, policy, practice and research. One aim of the book is to help future and current child welfare professionals extend their use of theory and research to inform their practice within a changing and complex multi-agency context.

The book is designed for all those professionals involved in child welfare and safeguarding education and training at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as well as at more experienced practitioners progressing towards post-qualifying awards or those in practice who want to inform their family support practice. In recent years, there has been a growth in degree-level programmes with titles such as Child and Family Studies, or indeed Family Support Studies, for which this may be a core book. We also hope that the book will be of interest to academics, researchers and policy makers alike.

Whilst this book is part of a series aimed primarily at social workers we contend that family support is essentially multi-disciplinary or indeed trans-disciplinary. Social workers do have a key role: we hope they can apply some of the approaches discussed here in all their work, including safeguarding and looked-after children work (Frost and Parton 2009). The role of family support has however been displaced from social work to a myriad of other settings and professions and para-professionals, so we hope the book is of interest, for example, to youth workers, play workers, community health staff, children centre staff and many others.

The book stresses the existence of a continuum in relation to family support practice – from universal family support

through to the targeted safeguarding of vulnerable children and young people. This continuum reflects that, while all families require some sort of support in raising their children, some identified families will be recognized as families with ‘children in need’ or as ‘troubled families’, while a smaller number will receive family support as part of a child protection plan. The book draws on restorative practices – those that are high on support but are also authoritative in providing clear limits and boundaries (see http://www.irrp.edu/).

The eight features of family support outlined below have underpinned our analysis in this book.

1. Family support offers inclusive and engaging practices based on the idea of offering support to families and children who feel they require it. Family support is therefore strongly suggestive of partnership, engagement and consent.
2. Such support can be offered early in the life of the child or early in the emergence of the identified challenge facing the family. It is important that family support services can be relevant to all children and young people, and not only to younger children.
3. Family support is a proactive process which engages with the parent(s) and/or young person in a process of change. Implicit in the term ‘family support’ is the suggestion of bringing about change within the family network.
4. Family support attempts to prevent the emergence, or worsening, of family challenges.
5. Family support is necessarily based in a theory of change. Any family support intervention should aim to result in some desirable change, and it draws on a belief that change is achievable.

6. Family support draws on a diverse ‘tool kit’ of skills and approaches. It attempts to develop and encourage local, informal support networks.
7. Family support aims to generate wider social change and benefits. Such results may lead to a saving in public expenditure, a decrease in social problems, an improvement in the quality of family life or a reduction in measurable outcomes, such as the number of children coming into care.
8. Family support works with children and young people in partnership and encourages and develops their resilience.

These eight principles will inform core arguments and practice suggestions made throughout this book.

We strongly support the deployment of the term ‘family support’. Writing in 2006, Dolan, Canavan and Pinkerton argued that: ‘Family support has become a major strategic orientation in services for children and families. It now occupies a significant place within the array of care and welfare interventions’ (2006: 11). At the time of writing this book (2015), we are concerned that this ‘strategic orientation’ is becoming lost as we are concerned about the predominant use of the terms ‘early help’, and in particular ‘early intervention’, as they tend to:

- devalue the ‘support’ element of family support;
- draw on a restrictive model of research that suggests that all interventions can be measured;
- promote early intervention which is particularly authoritarian in nature;
- promote short-term, time-limited programmes, as opposed to ongoing responsive support;

- emphasize ‘early’ years programmes as opposed to support through the whole of childhood.

The book draws on international research and other data to inform our argument: inevitably, given our geographical base, the reader may observe that much of the material is drawn from England. It is difficult to accurately reflect the variations of policy and legislation across the United Kingdom, where England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have differing degrees of devolution (see our Resources section for guidance on this). As a result, child welfare and family support differ across the four jurisdictions: we have attempted to provide examples from all four nations. In general, however, we would argue that, once local detail is placed to one side, most of the material has implications across regional and national boundaries.

The structure of the book

This volume is divided into three parts. In Part I, Understanding Family Support, we address three different contextual elements:

- social history, political context and theories of ‘family support’;
- the contemporary political context;
- the challenges of researching and measuring ‘family support’.

In chapter 1, the social history, context of and definitions and theories of ‘family support’ are explored. Family support has a long history which dates back, at least in the United Kingdom, to Victorian times. The roots of family support, for example, can be found in the early work of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

(NSPCC). As we will discuss, the early SPCC inspectors utilized court proceedings and sometimes removed children, but their predominant approach was to reform family life (Ferguson 2004). Further historical roots are explored before we move to examine the definitions of both ‘family’ and ‘support’. Both ‘family’ and ‘support’ are explored as contested and complex concepts, which must underpin our understanding of this area of practice. Differing theoretical approaches to ‘family’ are explored, presented and analysed. A technique for understanding family support will be developed, based on the primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary framework devised in the 1970s by Hardiker et al.

Chapter 2 explores the broader context of family support work. All forms of child welfare practice have political and ideological elements, and this is certainly the case in relation to family support, which is inseparable from key political debates about welfare, the role of the state, the family and childhood. The impact of social and economic policies on families and family breakdown is explored. This leads to a discussion of contemporary debates about the utilization of ‘prevention’, ‘family support’, ‘early help’ and ‘early intervention’. The relevance of this debate to students, researchers and policy makers is explained and analysed.

Chapter 3 explores the challenges of researching family support. Family support, it is claimed, offers particular challenges to research in terms of measuring success and outcomes. Differing approaches to research have been adopted across the globe with differing underpinning methodologies. The advantages of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and more qualitative approaches are explored and explained. Specific research projects, demonstrating differing approaches, are presented. A detailed case study of the recent LARC studies is provided.

Having developed a historical, political and research context for family support in Part II, Delivering Family Support, we explore specific approaches to family support, including an examination of:

- community-based projects;
- home visiting;
- parenting education;
- targeted approaches;
- relationship-based practice;
- family group conferences.

We do not suggest that these approaches make up the whole of 'family support' but that these six forms of practice make essential contributions to family support as a system, which encompasses a range of approaches.

In chapter 4, we explore community-based approaches to family support. In many ways, this is the 'soul' of family support, offering grass-roots, universal and non-stigmatizing services to families in local areas. The advantages and disadvantages of such universal programmes based on community development and participation will be explored, drawing on research and practice examples. A case study of such approaches will be presented.

In chapter 5, 'home visiting' is explored, which is often a key element of family support programmes, including for example Home-Start and Perry High Scope. The nature of home visiting will be explored, including some of the extensive research carried out in this field. Some of the issues around volunteer and professional approaches to home visiting will be presented.

In chapter 6, programmes for parenting education, which stands both independently and as part of more comprehensive family support, are explored. The differing schools of parenting education will be discussed and the research findings are presented in relation to key programmes, such as Webster Stratton and Triple P. The debates about whether parenting education should be universal or targeted are outlined and discussed. A case study of the role of parenting education is provided and analysed.

The universal approaches explored in chapter 4 will be contrasted with more targeted approaches in chapter 7, usually at the 'secondary' or 'tertiary' level of intervention, and often aimed at combatting issues such as domestic violence and substance abuse. The complex issues around targeting and identifying potentially 'troubled' families are discussed. The authors provide and analyse a case study that illustrates the debates around 'targeted approaches'.

In chapter 8, the nature of the relationship in family support and the centrality of this to family support is explored and analysed. We argue for the importance of this approach and that it is in danger of being undermined by more programme-based initiatives. Again, a case study is presented and analysed.

In chapter 9, family group conferences (FGCs) are discussed: they form a crucial and increasingly utilized element of family support programmes. The developing research in this field will be presented. The differing findings of studies related to 'outcomes' are analysed and the reasons for inconsistent findings debated. The links of FGCs with the 'restorative practice' movement will be outlined and critically analysed. A case study of an FGC will be provided.

In Part III, Overarching Issues in Developing a Sustainable Approach to Family Support, we explore issues that provide a connection between our specific practice areas. Two chapters are provided which explore:

- multi-disciplinary working; and
- professional workforce development.

It is argued, in chapter 10, that effective multi-disciplinary work should underpin family support. A theoretical approach is recommended and explored. How this maps onto work with families is explained and argued for.

In chapter 11, the often neglected issue of workforce development is explored. This chapter proposes that the core of family support work has shifted from 'social work' settings to voluntary sector settings, and this has profound implications for the sustainability of family support and for workforce development. The current state of workforce development and a previously unpublished survey undertaken by the authors are presented. A proposed way forward is discussed.

The final chapter provides a critical overview of the material presented throughout the book. It identifies links between the past, present and future of family support and suggests future directions for the development of the family support agenda.

At the end of the book, we provide a resource guide which will help professionals put into practice some of the ideas and challenges provided in the first three parts of the book. These include:

- useful websites;
- family support organizations;
- training packs and practical resources;

- bibliography.

PART I
UNDERSTANDING FAMILY SUPPORT

1
The Historical, Social and Political Context of Family Support

This chapter explores the historical roots and origins of family support in order to understand the contested definitions, theories and practice of family support in the contemporary policy context. Throughout the book, we will make the argument for family support as a fundamental practice within child welfare, and we will explore the implications for policy makers, researchers and practitioners alike of placing family support at the centre of child welfare policy and practice.

Understanding the historical context is crucial if we are to situate current debates within child welfare and if we are to truly understand continued tensions in the wider realm of child welfare policy and practice. Since the 1970s, high-profile child deaths, subsequent media campaigns, public concern and political controversy have together created a seemingly irresistible move towards a potentially punitive child protection system based upon an emphasis on risk assessment and authoritarian intervention. This varies across the globe and is perhaps more apparent in England, whilst being less so in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This trend towards risk assessment-based work has contributed to the marginalization of prevention and family support: thus child protection has become increasingly dominant at the cost of more partnership and family support-based practices. This key tension has dominated the literature, and the argument for a rebalancing of family support and child protection has been

widely discussed (for example, see Featherstone, White and Morris 2014; Frost and Parton 2009; Parton 1997).

Whilst debates within child welfare about whether to use ‘family support’, ‘early help’ or ‘early intervention’ may seem technical and perhaps obscure, we see them as actually key to wider social issues of concern to us all: debates about social equality, childhood, opportunity and well-being. As Featherstone and colleagues have commented on the influential work of Wilkinson and Pickett:

> A linked insight from their work concerns how inequality within a society quite literally ‘gets under the skin’ of individuals, leaving them feeling unvalued and inferior. They note the work of the sociologist Thomas Scheff, who has argued that shame is a key social emotion. ‘Shame and its opposite, pride, are rooted in the processes through which we internalize how we imagine others see us’ … Greater inequality heightens our anxieties because it increases the importance of social status. We come to see social position as a key feature of a person’s identity in an unequal society.’ (Featherstone, Morris and White 2013: 4)

Thus the concerns around family support link to wider concerns about poverty, inequality, identity and well-being. Structural problems, such as poverty and inequality, generate social problems, such as child neglect and child abuse, and are linked to the nature of state intervention in family life. These are the core concerns of family support workers.

In this book, we argue for comprehensive family support for all families rather than, for example, narrow programmatic, time-limited approaches. Family support needs to operate alongside wider-scale economic and social reforms. Thus we maintain that we should not separate

debates about family support from those about poverty and inequality. We live in an era of gross inequalities, both within specific societies and more widely between different nation-states. For example, it has been estimated that 30 per cent of children in the United Kingdom live in poverty, compared with other developed European countries such as Norway, where it is 4 per cent (Browne 2012).

Post-global crash public-spending restrictions and benefit reforms in many late capitalist societies have increased trends towards inequality. A major programme of research funded by the Family and Parenting Institute (Browne 2012) analysed the experiences of 'Families in an Age of Austerity'. The research indicates that families with children are 'shouldering a disproportionate burden' of the austerity measures (Browne 2012: 3). The disparity increased in 2014, seeing families with children with children losing 6 per cent of their income, compared to the 2 per cent lost by pensioner households, and also losing more income than working-age households without children (3 per cent), as well as all households (3 per cent) (Browne 2012: 3). In England, it is particularly concerning that the lowest-income families seem to be losing the most through the reforms, thus undermining the intentions of the Child Poverty Act 2010 and its avowed aims of reducing child poverty. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there are specific anti-child-poverty programmes which underpin family support policy. For example, the Welsh government is promoting a programme known as 'Tackling Poverty and Promoting Children's Rights'. Child poverty in Northern Ireland is analysed in a report known as *Child Poverty in Northern Ireland* (Child Poverty Alliance 2014). The Scottish approach works towards three outcomes as follows:

- Maximizing household resources – our aim is to reduce income poverty and material deprivation by maximizing financial entitlements and reducing pressure on household budgets among low-income families, as well as by maximizing the potential for parents to increase family incomes through good-quality, sustained employment and by promoting greater financial inclusion and capability. (Pockets)
- Improving children's well-being and life chances – our aim is to break intergenerational cycles of poverty, inequality and deprivation. This requires a focus on tackling the underlying social and economic determinants of poverty and improving the circumstances in which children grow up – recognizing the particular importance of improving children's outcomes in the early years. (Prospects)
- Children from low-income households live in well-designed, sustainable places – our aim is to address area-based factors which currently exacerbate the effects of individual poverty for many families by continuing to improve the physical, social and economic environments in local areas, particularly in those areas of multiple deprivation in which child poverty is more prevalent. (Places)

Whilst this book is aimed specifically at that those professionals involved in child welfare practice, the issues raised here are fundamental to wider debates around problems such as poverty which are central to the well-being and quality of life for all citizens.

Point for reflection: What are the links between poverty, inequality and family support practice?

Child welfare in history: 1870–1914

It is essential to place contemporary debates about family support in a wider historical context. The origins of child welfare can been found in the nineteenth century, characterized by the *rescuing* and *reclamation* of children predominantly through the heritage of the Poor Law, and were led by emerging philanthropic organizations. Victorian constructions of child welfare practice enabled the practitioner to understand the concepts of risk, danger and child cruelty within failing families which were seen as 'feckless' and 'immoral' (see Gordon 1988). The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) acquired predominant responsibility for both preventing and addressing child cruelty. It adopted a largely reforming approach towards parents in contrast to the early 'rescue' approach, favoured by Dr Thomas Barnardo, for example (Frost and Stein 1989). These early practices highlight the fact that child welfare was at the time predominantly in the sphere of philanthropy; the national, state-based interest in children and families emerged in the late nineteenth century, to be consolidated by the Children Act 1908 (Hendrick 2003).

The shift in attitude towards intervention in childhood, exemplified by the foundation of organizations such as the NSPCC, developed after the British industrial revolution, when cities grew rapidly and social processes developed a professional and commercial bourgeoisie. It is estimated that at least five million people were removed from their homes to make way for industrial change (Stedman Jones 1976). The British industrial revolution led to rapidly growing cities and often grim conditions for the new industrial working class. A crucial impact of this was the attempt to control the poor, the 'dangerous' and the

‘feckless’ by rendering them liable to philanthropic and state intervention (Hendrick 2003).

The influential social historian Harry Hendrick contends that this industrialization and urbanization process led to a situation where ‘children were given a new social and political identity as belonging to the nation’ (2003: 19) at the end of the nineteenth and the start of the next century. Reforms, such as the Children Act 1908, embodied a wider range of services provision for families, including public access to health and education. These reforms were largely motivated by concerns about the health and well-being of children, who were seen as essential to the future of Britain as an industrial, imperial and military power (Hendrick 2003).

In the late nineteenth century, the exercise of unfettered parental (or more specifically paternal) responsibility had significantly decreased and marked the beginning of tensions between parental and state authority. A shift in attitude had emerged which meant that the welfare of children began to take precedence over parental claims to privacy and authority over their families.

A brief history of the NSPCC

The NSPCC was founded in the United Kingdom in 1884. Lord Shaftesbury was appointed as president and Reverend Benjamin Waugh and Edward Rudolf as joint honorary secretaries. This came about as a result of a letter from Reverend George Staite published in the *Liverpool Mercury*, highlighting the significant impact of abuse, cruelty and inhumanity on children, underpinned by social deprivation and inequality. The letter called for the formation of a society to prevent cruelty to children and is in retrospect a landmark in the history of child welfare (Frost and Stein 1989). Victorian social attitudes remained

clear on the boundaries between public and private lives; however, Staite wrote a letter to Lord Shaftesbury, a leading philanthropist, requesting legislative backing for intervention in abusive families. Although Shaftesbury agreed that the evils of child abuse were ‘enormous and ‘indisputable’, he also stated ‘they are of so private, internal and domestic a character as to be beyond the reach of legislation’ (quoted in Behlmer 1982: 52). Shaftesbury’s response highlights the predominant attitude at the time: that the family home was inviolable and not to be disturbed or intruded upon. This dividing line between the family and the state remains the key tension in child welfare, a divide that family support continually negotiates and brokers.

The social, economic and political climate of the time is crucial to understanding the continued struggle of the NSPCC to bring child abuse into the public domain. The profoundly unequal condition of the United Kingdom created a chasm of wealth disparity, and after living with and witnessing the deprivation of children in his home town of Greenwich, London, Waugh began to draw public and government attention to the social condition of children. Influential observers at the time began to see that the ‘poor’ needed assistance in aspiring to the domestic model of family life, and that this adverse lifestyle was not only impacting the poor, but also the respectable working class, whose values of responsibility and independence were being undermined (Hendrick 2003: 24).

The initial delivery model of the first SPCC (Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children) focused on parenting support, rather than prosecution, and sought to keep children within their homes, unlike much of the development of the nineteenth-century practices of child rescue, carried out by Barnardo, for example. The intention

was to ‘deal directly with the parents and to reform the home rather than punish the culprits’ (Behlmer 1982: 55).

Following the initial growth in influence of the NSPCC, the legislative reform of the 1889 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act demonstrated for the first time that child protection had become a public concern that could generate public and political support.

The Children Act 1908, which applied to the entire United Kingdom, followed and highlighted the shift towards parental responsibility and punishment, strengthening the law to include ‘wilful cruelty and negligence’. Cruelty included the failure to provide adequate food, shelter or clothing, or, if parents were unable to do so, then ‘failure to take such steps to procure the same to be provided under the Acts relating to the relief of the Poor’. These court powers and responsibilities were largely a result of the NSPCC’s drive to ensure and reinforce parental responsibility for the welfare of children (Ferguson 2004: Gordon 1988).

Point for reflection: How does social history influence our present practice?

Child deaths, ‘moral panics’ and the displacement of family support

To understand more recent thinking, we move on to explore developments in the last three decades of the twentieth century. The death of Maria Colwell in 1973 (Parton 1985), a child in care placed back with her mother by social workers, triggered a chain of events that fundamentally changed the role of children’s services with families. Maria Colwell was one of nine children and had been in foster