



Single Parent Proofing Framework

Mainstreaming Single Parent Inclusion within Local Services

Contents

Introduction

Single Parent Proofing

Who are the Guidelines for?

What is Single Parent Proofing?

Why do we need to Single Parent Proof policies and practice?

How to Single Parent Proof

STEP 1: Raise awareness of the challenges facing single parents

STEP 2: The impact of challenges on single parents' experiences

STEP 3: Consider how an initiative might respond to the challenges faced by single parents

STEP 4: Single Parent Proof Action Plan

Contact for further information

Appendices 1 & 2

Introduction

Single parents face specific challenges in trying to move into paid work and stay and progress in employment. This is because most single parents single-handedly juggle employment with caring and family responsibilities. Additionally, single parents are more at risk of multiple disadvantages, such as low qualifications, limited work experience, low self-confidence, debt, housing problems, domestic violence, ill health and disability.

We believe that the individualisation of poverty is misguided and that we should acknowledge the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination combine and overlap to trap single parents in poverty. Structural features of the economy and society which influence the overall level of poverty must be addressed: the level of wage inequality; employment opportunities; barriers to paid work, such as high costs of childcare; and the tax and benefit systems all matter.

Based on concrete solutions, developed by single parents with direct experience of the above challenges, this toolkit is for organisations whose policies or services impact on single parents' ability to move forward and stay in employment. Input from participative work with single parents has been carried out by OPFS involving consultations with parents through one-to-one discussions, focus groups & on-line surveys. We recognise the need to view the lives and life chances of single parents in a broader context than only their parental roles.

The toolkit aims to: raise organisations' awareness about the fact that single parents face specific challenges; help identify what difficulties single parents may face within the organisation; encourages them to respond to these challenges by suggesting Single Parent Proofed solutions. It provides a framework to develop an action plan, using a process of rights based planning, to set and monitor targets to evaluate the impact of policies and services on supporting single parent families.

Single Parent Proofing

Who are the Guidelines for?

The 'Single parent Proofing Guide' is for those organisations whose work relates to single parents and in particular those who work on employment strategies and employability services.

What is Single Parent Proofing?

Single Parent Proofing is a process, which uses single parent feedback to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of policy and practice so that they respond effectively to the needs of single parents. Policies and services are more likely to be effective if they are:

- **Informed by the views of the parents who they affect.**
- **Make sense to single parents and**
- **Fit with the complexity of their everyday lives**

The process begins with a consideration as to whether an initiative is likely to have a differential impact on single parents. It then moves through a series of questions to ensure that, wherever possible, an initiative is modified to meet their needs. Once this process has been completed the Single Parent Proofing Action Plan enables identification and monitoring of targets to evaluate the impact of any initiative on single parents.

Why do we need to Single Parent Proofed Policies and Practice?

1. Single parent proofed policies and practice will meet the needs of other types of families.

- The challenges and barriers that single parents face when trying to escape poverty, retain a work-life balance and sustain employment.
- Clarify many of the difficulties faced by all types of families.
- Policies and practices that enables single parents to provide and care for their children are more likely to have beneficial effects for two parent families.
- A single parent proofed initiative is a family proofed initiative.

2. Single parent families are an important and increasingly common family form

- There are 144,000 single-parent families with dependent children in Scotland which is 25% of all families with dependent children.
- The vast majority (90%) of single parents are women and the majority (69%) are in employment.
- The average age of a single parent is 38 years old.

3. Single parent families continue to face a high risk of poverty

- In the UK single parents and their children face around twice the risk of poverty as couples - 48% compared to 26%.¹
- A third (36%) of all children in poverty in Scotland live in a single parent family.²
- Almost half of children (50%) in single parent families live below the poverty line.³
- Before the COVID-19 crisis this was predicted to rise to over 62 % by 2021.⁴

4. Single parents and Employment

- Single parent employment is at a record high: seven in ten (69.9 per cent) of single parents are in work.⁵
- However, single parent employment drops when children are young and childcare costs are highest: in 2018, 30.4% of single parents with a child aged three to four years were in full-time employment, compared with 71.6% where the youngest dependent child was aged 16 to 18 years.⁶
- A disproportionate number of single parents are underemployed - the total single parent underemployment rate is 22%, compared to 9.3% across the entire economically active population.⁷

¹ <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Measuring-Poverty-2020-1.pdf>

² <https://povertyinequality.scot/Poverty-Delivery-Plan-advice> p41 table 2

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-199495-to-201617>

⁴ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/cumulative-impact-assessment-report.pdf> p153

⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes>

⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork>

⁷ <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/parenting-alone.pdf>

5. Policies and services will be most effective in tackling child poverty if they meet the needs of single parents

- Single parent families are a key policy focus, particularly in relation to Scotland's Child Poverty and Fair Work Strategies .
- Policy and service provision can only be effective if it recognises the differential needs, experiences and priorities of single parents and then modifies its content and practice accordingly.
- Decision Makers can only really understand the reality of single parenthood by listening to what *single parents* say about their experiences and priorities.

Single Parent Proofing

These Single Parent Proofing Guidelines present policy solutions as identified by single parents consulted by OPFS who drew on their own 'real-life' experiences of the barriers preventing access to employment and of moving into and staying in employment. The parents represented a diversity of background and experience.

Single parent Proofing involves:

Step 1:

Raise awareness of one parent families as a key target group and establish whether a particular initiative /service is likely to have a differential impact on single parents.



Step 2:

Identify the challenges that single parents face which may impact on their experience of the initiative/service.



Step 3:

Consider how an initiative might **respond to the challenges** faced by single parents in either:

- a) Moving Forward (Employability) and/or
- b) Supporting sustainable employment



Step 4:

Develop a Single Parent Proofed Action Plan to **set and monitor targets** to evaluate the impact of an initiative on single parents

Step 1 enables an initiative to develop a better understanding of the challenges that some single parent families face.

Step 2 encourages a focus on whether these challenges will lead an initiative to have a differential impact on single parents.

Step 3 then guides through a number of questions that relate to the specific challenges that single parents identified to 'moving forward' and sustaining employment. The guidelines offer potential solutions (as suggested by single parents) to address these challenges.

Step 4 consolidates the previous two steps in proposing a Single Parent Proofed Action Plan, which can be offered to a wide range of agencies. The plan will:

- Illustrate that it has acknowledged the position of single parents and the challenges that they face in engaging with the initiative.
- Detail how the initiative/service plans to address these challenges to provide equal opportunities for single parents to move forward and/or remain in sustainable employment
- Indicate how the initiative plans to monitor the impact on single parents.

These guidelines focus on some of the challenges that single parents might face when moving forward and/or trying to stay in employment. However, each **individual has their own needs and experiences**, which will impact on their lives.

While some single parents may face significant barriers to sustainable employment, others may experience fewer barriers, which are alleviated or encourages over time. However, as previous statistics demonstrate, single parents represent a group who are disproportionately vulnerable to poverty and low paid employment. These guidelines provide a framework to encourage policy makers and service providers to recognise and act upon the solutions to these potential challenges.

STEP 1: Awareness Raising

This step raises awareness of some of the challenges facing single parents moving into and trying to sustain employment to establish whether an initiative/service is likely to have a differential impact on single parent families. Single parents identified the following issues as examples of barriers that they might face in moving forward and staying in employment.

- **Single parents identify positive aspects of being a single parent (explicitly a sense of independence and freedom from unequal or abusive relationships), however, they continue to feel stereotyped and stigmatised.**
"We are often criticised for being single parents, but why should my kids see a violent relationship. I think we should be given an award for what we have survived. Because he did what he did, I'm a single parent, but I'm proud to be a single parent as well."
- **Most single parents provide and care for their child single-handedly and therefore need childcare to move forward**
"Me and only me all the time, to be mum and dad. Having to do everything alone and having no one to share these responsibilities with and feeling like the lynch pin holding it all together."

- **Single parent families are at a very high risk of financial and/or time poverty**
“It’s like the juggling balls. Do you buy the food, pay the gas or electric or buy them whatever they need.”
- **Single parent families are more likely to live in temporary private accommodation and social housing**
“If you want to get a mortgage and there is only one income I mean, how are you supposed to move out of rented accommodation?”
- **Single mothers are more likely than other mothers to have low qualifications and poor work experience**
“I just can’t find the time or finances to train and without that I can’t move forward.”
- **Single parents and their children are much more likely to suffer from ill health (both mental and physical) and disability**
“Constant stress for everyone and then you get depressed and your children, what happens to them then?”
- **Single parents are more likely to experience low confidence and low morale.**
“You need the support to develop the kind of skills you need to stand up for yourself and help you identify the different kind of support that you need.”
- **Single parents are more likely to live in areas of multiple deprivation and in housing estates**
“It’s so expensive to travel to town, for a job interview for example and the amenities here are very poor-local shops are so steep.”

STEP 2: The Impact of Barriers

Identifying the impact of challenges on single parents’ experiences of your initiative.

Drawing on the barriers identified in ‘Step 1’, list examples of the challenges that single parents might face within your initiative and the potential impact . For example:

Challenge: Single parents are often sole carers for their children
How it will affect their experience of initiative: Those parents with school age children will find provision, which starts before 9.30 or after 2.30 a challenge. Those with children under 5 yrs will be limited by the availability of childcare.

Challenge: Single parents in touch with the service have escaped violence, both physical and mental abuse
How it will affect their experience of initiative: (add in as appropriate)

STEP 3: The Action Plan

Consider how an initiative might respond to the challenges faced by single parents

The Action Plan should be informed by Steps 1 and 2. It is therefore essential that these steps are completed before Step 3 is undertaken.

- **The Moving Forward (Employability) Action Plan** provides the questions and solutions to consider when developing/reviewing **Moving Forward** initiatives. These might include learning/training providers; voluntary sector providers; Jobcentre Plus
- **The Sustainable Employment Action Plan** provides the questions and solutions to consider when developing/reviewing **Sustainable Employment** initiatives. These might include: employment programme providers; Jobcentre Plus initiatives; employers; local authority programmes.

Sample Single Parent Proofed Action Plan

The Single Parent Proofed Action Plan templates in Appendices 1 & 2 provide examples of **potential solutions** to the challenges raised by single parents. The aim of the process is not for initiatives to offer all of these solutions, but rather to acknowledge that challenges exist and identify a solution, which meets the needs of single parents within the capacity of the organisation.

Once completed the Single Parent Proofed Action Plan could be integrated into the appropriate sections of an initiative's strategic or operational planning documents and shared throughout the organisation with service users, staff and managers.

We hope this approach will offer new and effective solutions developed by those who experience challenges and are affected by current provision and will

- Ensure your policy/service is grounded in parents realities.
- Ensure your policy/service makes sense to parents
- Increase trust in your policies/services
- Enable a sense of ownership and information and increase take up of service.

This approach will be particularly useful to policy makers and campaigners working on employability, employment support and child poverty strategies. The Single Parent Proofing Action Plan provides examples of potential solutions to the challenges raised by single parents. The aim is not for initiatives to offer all of these solutions, but rather to acknowledge that challenges exist and identify a solution which meets the needs of single parents within the capacity of the organisation.

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Appendix 1

Setting and Monitoring targets for Moving Forward (Employability) Initiatives

Complete the following table if an initiative aims to provide support to single parents who face multiple barriers and are who want to move forward.

Policy/Initiative/service being Single Parent Proofed: **(enter details)**

Single Parent Proofing Question and examples of potential solutions	What solution does the initiative currently offer/plan to offer?	Who is responsible for delivering the solution?	How will impact of Single Parent Proofing be measured?
Challenges raised by single parents	Provide details of solution, how it is delivered and whom	Provide details of individuals or services responsible for delivering solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify success indicators - measurable, realistic outcomes which can illustrate change over a given time frame. • How will outcomes be measured? • Who has responsibility for measuring/evaluating whether the outcomes have been met?

Single Parent Proofing Question and examples of potential solutions	Solutions	Who is responsible?	Impact Measurement of Single Parent Proofing
<p>1. How will the initiative challenge negative stereotypes about single parents which increases self-doubt and diminishes self-confidence?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff delivering programmes are aware single parents do a great job, juggling work and family life, often under tight financial pressures and emotional challenges. • Single Parents are recognised as a group with unique needs and issues and there should be an awareness of these challenges and have up to date and ongoing awareness training. • Staff will have a positive attitude and be non-judgmental. • Parents attending programmes will not be financially worse off and should be reimbursed travel without having to request it. <p>2. How will Single Parents have a say in influencing the initiative?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-producing services so parents have a say. • Mentoring schemes might help reduce the number of those dropping out of courses due to initial lack of confidence. • Single Parents involved in activities which support their confidence, raise awareness, so they feel empowered to participate 			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve single parents in the design and delivery of training programmes. • Listen to feedback and change the design of programmes if required . <p>3. How will the initiative provide soft-skills development?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide employability training which brings Single Parents together for mutual support. • Referrals to locally provided training. • Link volunteering with training. • Cover or provide info. about funding for training fees. • Provide related transport and childcare advice and costs or childcare . • Signpost to or identify a single parent mentor • Offer an in-depth voluntary skills check service. • Recognise single parents sole responsibility for parenting and offer tailored programmes • What important barriers within the single parents 'employability' journey require prioritisation? 			
<p>Single Parent Proofing Question and examples of potential solutions</p>	<p>Solutions</p>	<p>Who is responsible?</p>	<p>Impact Measurement of Single Parent Proofing</p>
<p>4. How will the initiative address needs for holistic advice to deal with issues such as ill mental/physical health; disability; debt; domestic violence; homelessness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build an understanding of the impact of these barriers and of the time it takes to tackle them into the design and review of targets and time frames; 			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make allowance for the impact of such barriers when assessing individual's performance. • Initiatives address the need for holistic advice to deal with issues such as mental and physical ill health; disability; debt; domestic violence , homelessness and also if in a caring role for elderly or disabled family member. • Develop links and signposts to single parent organisations and local statutory/voluntary advice agencies. • Allow time to attend advice meetings • Allow time off for emergencies. • Support single parents to access childcare to engage with local services 			
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Single Parent Proofing Question and examples of potential solutions	Solutions	Who is responsible?	Impact Measurement of Single Parent Proofing
<p>5. How will the initiative offer opportunities to gain qualifications and work-related skills?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Medium skills” paid or unpaid work experience opportunities. • Join up skills gap with SP training • Structured and accredited volunteering opportunities to foster employability. • Career guidance built into SP strategies; • Flexible training times • Provide time off for studying/training. • Maximise links with local learning providers who offer family friendly provision. • Provide access to information on courses available and appropriate funding to cover childcare costs for further/higher education. • Invest in partnerships to develop single parent specialist programmes which involves confidence building; group support; personal action planning; work experience; guaranteed interview and aftercare. • Incentives to take up employment should be flexible, with better use of work trials, clothing assistance, bus passes holistic benefit and money advice. 			

Single Parent Proofing Question and examples of potential solutions	Solutions	Who is responsible?	Impact Measurement of Single Parent Proofing
<p>6. How will the initiative address parents' needs for time to care for their children?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiatives will take account of single parents' childcare / caring responsibilities and offer family-friendly scheduling • Entitlement to days off for when children are ill. Entitlement to take leave during school holidays. • Opportunities to replace lost training time. • Entitlement to take a period of time out due to family or health needs without losing place in the programme/service. • Flexible and short times for programme/service delivery • Access to increased childcare before moving into work. <p>7. How will the initiative aim to respond to issues around the benefits system & maximise single parents' incomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice of appropriate courses or type of employment play an important part in how effective they will be. For example, being pressurised into self-employment or zero hour contracts may increase poverty and can result in accumulating debt, and stress. • What specific challenges emanating from the benefits system does the initiative need to be aware of and to address? • Advice on financial planning on moving into work. 			

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce welfare rights advice which supports parents to forward plan.• Advice on coping strategies when moving into work to deal with debts (e.g. water rates)• Ensure advice available on impact of moving onto Universal Credit; benefit conditionality rules and sanctions advice.			
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Single Parent Proofing Question and examples of potential solutions	Solutions	Who is responsible?	Impact Measurement of Single Parent Proofing
<p>8. Have digital inclusion issues been addressed? This covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital skills Being able to use digital devices (PS's laptops or smart phones) and the internet. This is important, but a lack of digital skills is not necessarily the only, or the biggest, barrier people face. • Connectivity Access to the internet through broadband, wi-fi and mobile. People need the right infrastructure but that is only the start. • Accessibility Services need to be designed to meet all users' needs, including those dependent on assistive technology to access digital services. • Confidence Many people fear online crime, lack trust or don't know where to start online 			

Appendix 2

Setting and Monitoring targets for Sustainable Employment Initiatives

Complete the following table if your initiative aims to support individuals in employment. For example, an employment programme provider.

Policy/Initiative/service being Single Parent Proofed: (Enter details)

Single Parent Proofing Question and examples of potential solutions	What solution does the initiative currently offer/plan to offer?	Who is responsible for delivering solution?	How will the initiative measure the impact of Single Parent Proofing?
Challenges raised by single parents	Provide details of solution, how it is delivered and to whom	Provide details of individuals or services responsible for delivering solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify success indicators - measurable, realistic outcomes which can illustrate change over a given time frame. • How will outcomes be measured? • Who has responsibility for measuring/evaluating whether the outcomes have been met?

Single Parent Proofing Question and examples of potential solutions	Solutions	Who is responsible?	Impact Measurement of Single Parent Proofing
<p>1. Does the initiative provide in-work support that doesn't stop when the person finds a job?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The aftercare service will have access to up to date information and resources supporting Single Parents to sustain employment - benefit changes, childcare provision, Financial Inclusion Services etc • Services will be flexible to reflect the hours that Single Parents in work are able to access for example - online & out of hours. • A recognition of the barriers / fears caused by the transition from benefits to the pressures of managing finances & time and problems with benefits when returning to Job Centre. • The aftercare should be flexible enough to include support to handle any work based issues which arise, and support should the job not work out or the employment ends. • A predicted "in-work income" assessment for participants taking up employment will be provided which can help make a decision about whether they would be financially better off in work. 			

2. Does the initiative involve atypical working hours and if so, how will you enable those with childcare responsibilities to meet this requirement?

- Provide childcare on site for atypical hours
- Find out whether there are any local atypical childcare providers and provide information to parents
- Find out about local youth/community facilities for children aged over 11 and relay information to parents
- Provide information on childcare element of UC and what can be used to cover home based childcare costs for example .

Single Parent Proofing Question and examples of potential solutions	Solutions	Who is responsible?	Impact Measurement of Single Parent Proofing
<p>3. How will the initiative provide opportunities for advancement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a commitment to providing opportunities for advancement to single parents? • Provide training opportunities and cover training fees • Provide training on the job during working hours • Provide childcare or cover childcare costs attached to attending any training development opportunities run in the evenings or weekends • Provide paid time off for study • Develop links with local further and higher education providers. • Provide time off to attend open days and taster courses at local training providers. • Aftercare support through a mentor for 4/6 months 			

Single Parent Proofing Question and examples of potential solutions	Solutions	Who is responsible?	Impact Measurement of Single Parent Proofing
<p>4. How will the initiative allow time to care for children?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider flexible working, fostering short working weeks practices, and allowing paid time off for childcare related emergencies • Guarantee flexible working to parents of all children, including those over the age of 11yrs. • At least 8 days paid time off for children's sickness • Parental leave paid at 50% wage <p>5. How will the initiative ensure access to good information on local childcare provision, universal credits and other benefits?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strong links with & signpost parents to: single parent organisations, family support services, CAB or money advice agencies etc • Ensure information available on support and advice services available in the workplace. • Offer a service to support parents with financial planning capacity pre-employment 			

Single Parent Proofing Question and examples of potential solutions	Solutions	Who is responsible?	Impact Measurement of Single Parent Proofing
<p>6. Will the initiative guarantee sufficient childcare opportunities for working parents?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the need for wrap-around and atypical childcare been considered? • Has the role played by informal childcare providers been considered? • Review availability of atypical and home- based childcare. • Childcare during school holiday periods • Assess the need for 11ys + provision • Foster development of home based childcare projects in low income communities. • Consider the costs endured by informal childcare providers. • Consider the implications of insufficient childcare access in terms of equality legislation 			