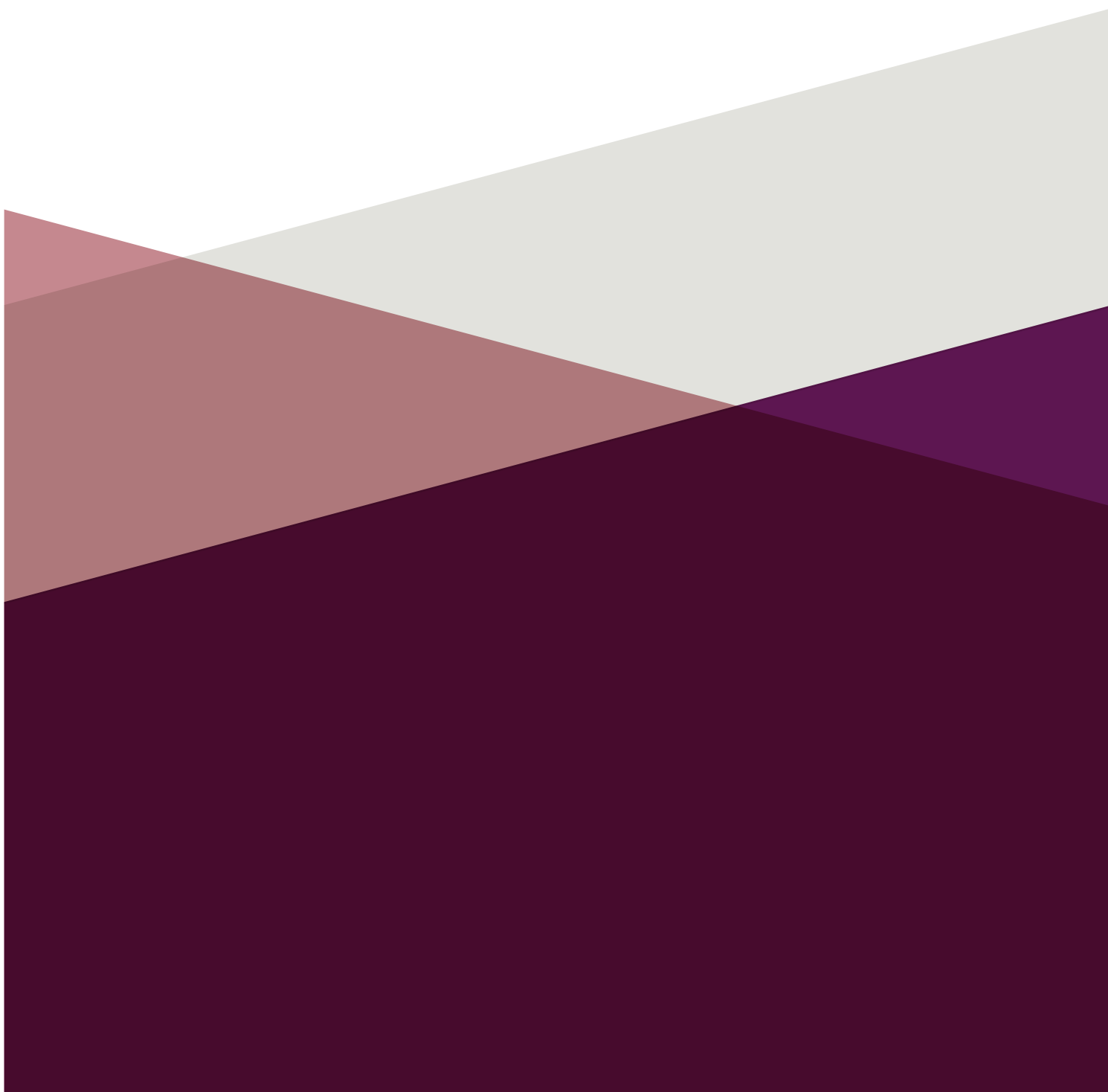




**An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt**  
**Department of Justice**

# **Children and Young People Consultation**

## Youth Friendly Report



## THE REASON FOR THE CONSULTATION

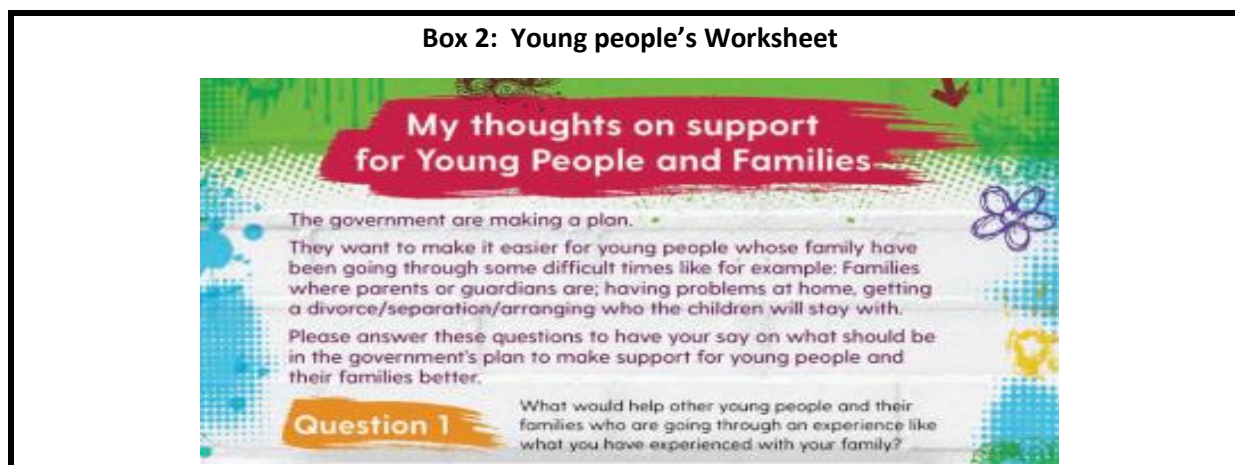
The Family Justice Oversight group, formed by Helen McEntee Minister for Justice, is currently developing a plan for the family justice system for Ireland. To develop this plan, the Oversight group asked children and young people who have had experiences of family law for their opinion and suggestions.

## HOW WE CONSULTED WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Oversight Group worked with the Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and Hub na nÓg to design a child and youth friendly consultation. The Participation Officers approached professionals from organisations who work with children and families to ask children and young people for their opinions and suggestions using short worksheets.

Younger children were asked to think about a situation where two children (Tom and Sally) whose family is having problems or the parents are getting a divorce. The children were asked to write or draw their views or suggestions on what might make it easier for children.

The worksheets were completed by 12 children and young people, both male and female, aged between 8 and 21 years. Three completed the children's worksheet (Box 1) and nine completed the young person's version (Box 2).



Teenagers were asked three questions to get their suggestions of ways to help young people and their families who are having problems at home or getting a divorce/separation or are arranging who the children stay with.

**Question 1:** What would help other young people and their families who are going through an experience like what you have experienced with your family?

**Question 2:** What support or services would you like to see available for a young person going through something similar to you?

**Question 3:** What is the most important thing that the government can put in their plan to make sure there is enough support for young people and their families who are going through experiences like this?

## WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US

### Suggestions on ways to help children and young people

**Question 1:** What would help other young people and their families who are going through an experience like what you have experienced with your family?

- **Communication, information and preparation**

Children and young people's suggestions included having:

- ✓ More communication
- ✓ More information about the family situation.
- ✓ More input to the decision-making process in relation to their family
- ✓ All in clear age-appropriate language.

*'Have proper information, to be included, proper space to ask questions'*

*'Knowing the whole process and steps rather than learning about it step by step'*

*'telling the young people what is happening and keeping them up to date'*

*'children and young people to be included in specific meetings with a professional and parents'*

*'It would help if they said that there (are) just problems, not bigger words that younger kids might not understand about and them not knowing what is happening'*

*'One or two facilitated meetings to focus on the child/young person which provides space (for them) to ask questions'*

- **Info**

Some young people wanted more information on the legal processes such as the role and functions of the different professionals they will encounter.

*'To educate young people on the system, the courts and how it works and what certain titles mean i.e., social worker, judge, solicitor, foster carer, Tusla. Children and young people shouldn't have to wait to find out what these mean when they are in care, they should be educated on it beforehand'*

- **Having a say in the process**

Children and young people would like the opportunity to have their say and to be listened to.

*'Having more of a say in what's happening...Us being in control about the decisions'*

*'That children have a voice and choice of what happens in their lives'*

*'Young people being more involved and having more of a say...'*

*'I would talk to the judge; that we decide together what access to be fair'*

Some asked to have different options available to them to have their say in the process e.g., opportunities to express their views privately (without their parents if desired) etc.

### **Suggestions on supports that should be available for children and young people**

**Question 2:** *What support or services would you like to see available for a young person going through something similar to young people.*

Children and young people made suggestions of different types of support for children and young people, and their families.

*'Tell them not to be scared because things will get better'*

- ✓ Support for children from school and youth services
- ✓ Support for parents and families
- ✓ Peer support
- ✓ Counselling
- ✓ Promote and signpost available services.

Some suggested having youth friendly spaces in the court settings and in places where they access support.

*'More young people friendly places to go when you have to talk about the experiences as a lot of them are very scary looking and can make young people feel uncomfortable and overwhelmed'*

*'If there was a different room for the kids so they don't have to be with the adults....if the room had bright coloured walls and toys and staff to make it feel safer and not scary room'*

*'I felt scared on the way there because I didn't know what the place looked like and I would be less scared if I'd seen some pictures of the place first'*

### **Suggestions for the Government to put in their plan**

**Question 3:** *What is the most important thing that the government can put in their plan to make sure there is enough support for young people and their families who are going through experiences like this?*

Young people's views on what the Government might do to ensure that young people and their families have enough support were similar to their ideas in Question 1 and 2.

- ✓ Develop a structured plan to protect the child and young person in the process
- ✓ Ask children and young people what they need and what they think about available services
- ✓ Educate children and young people on the process
- ✓ Provide a network of support for young people and their families
- ✓ Provide financial support for lone parents.

*'The most important thing would be to introduce the same plan/programme for what must be done for the child during a separation. The child does not have the same sense of security as parents do'*

*'Professional supports available that are mandated by law to include child/young person so they feel included / have proper information and knowledge of what is happening'*

*'For them to listen to young people and their needs and what they want and to have supports and services available'*

*'..parents also need help with their problems because if they (the children) go somewhere for help they are only going to go home to arguments'*

Young people also talked about the importance of the Government ensuring that children have a say in the process, and these views are listened to and acted on.

*'For them to listen to young people and their needs and what they want and to have the supports and services available'*

*'Child should be included to some degree because it affects their lives as much as the parents, they deserve to be informed'*

Website: [www.gov.ie/justice](http://www.gov.ie/justice)



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