



Theory of Change: Mellow  
Caring for Young People  
Parenting Programmes

# Theory of Change: Mellow Caring for Young People Parenting Programmes

## 1 Vision:

We want every child – wherever they are in the world – to be part of a safe and nurturing family that will allow them and future generations the best possible start in life.

## 2 Problem / Need

Adolescence is a key transition point in the life course, where changes in identity, autonomy, and emotional regulation place increased pressure on family relationships. For many parents and carers, approaches that were effective in earlier childhood no longer feel sufficient, leading to rising conflict, reduced confidence, and breakdowns in communication and connection.

Within a Whole Family Wellbeing context, these pressures rarely sit with the young person alone. Caregivers often experience increased stress, reduced emotional capacity, and difficulty maintaining warm, consistent boundaries at a time when young people continue to require relational safety and guidance. Where families are also affected by poverty, trauma, parental mental ill-health, neurodiversity or social isolation, these challenges are intensified.

Parents and carers commonly report difficulties in:

- Accessing timely, trauma-responsive, relationship-based support.
- Understanding and responding to their young person's emotional and behavioural needs

- Managing increased conflict, risk-taking behaviours, and peer influence
- Maintaining warm boundaries and consistent routines
- Supporting emotional regulation and mental wellbeing
- Navigating digital pressures and social media influence

Despite adolescence being a high-risk period for relationship breakdown, access to early, preventative, relationship-based support for parents and carers of young people remains limited. Without timely intervention, difficulties can escalate, increasing the risk of family breakdown, poor mental health, and longer-term adverse outcomes for both young people and their caregivers.

### **Programme Purpose**

The Mellow Caring for Young People programme strengthens relationships between parents/caregivers and their young people by improving parental wellbeing, confidence, and reflective capacity. Through therapeutic, relationship-based work, the programme supports caregivers to understand adolescent development, communicate more effectively, and provide consistent, warm boundaries. It reduces isolation, enhances emotional regulation for both caregiver and young person, and promotes healthier, more resilient family relationships during this critical transitional time in their young person's life.

### **Target Group**

Mellow Caring for Young People is for parents and carers of young people aged 11+, particularly those who:

- Are experiencing increased family stress, tension, or conflict as their young person moves through adolescence
- Want support to strengthen communication, emotional regulation, and mutual understanding within the family
- Are navigating challenges such as risk-taking behaviour, emotional distress, school disengagement, or conflict with the law
- Are rebuilding trust, repairing relationships, or managing complex social, emotional, or mental health needs
- Are affected by additional pressures such as poverty, trauma, parental mental ill-health, neurodiversity or social isolation
- Would benefit from intensive, reflective, relationship-based support rather than advice-led or behavioural-only approaches

## **5 Assumptions (Core Mechanisms of Change)**

- Secure attachment is built through sensitive, attuned, consistent caregiving.
- Parental/caregiver wellbeing directly affects their ability to engage and respond sensitively.
- Reflective capacity (ability to understand the young person's perspective) increases warmth, empathy, and responsive caregiving.
- Learning is most effective when practised during real interactions with their young person, both through purposefully doing things together and reviewing
- their relationship through strength-based video feedback.
- Peer support reduces isolation and reinforces positive behavioural and relational change.

- Structured and purposeful routines, warm boundaries with co-regulation and emotional containment reduce stress, family conflict and improves emotional regulation (for both parent and young people).
- Shifting from a parenting approach of control to one of positive influencing through healthy relationships, gives opportunities for the young person to explore their changing world, take balanced risk taking, gain increased autonomy, to make safer mistakes, all while staying connected during the adulthood transition phase.

These are aligned with the Mellow Parenting Evaluation Framework domains:

- Parental wellbeing
- Parental/caregiver reflective functioning
- Parent/caregiver relationship with their young person
- Young persons social-emotional development

## **6** Activities (What the programmes deliver)

- 12-weekly, 2-hour group sessions for parents/caregivers of young people aged 11 years and older.
- Therapeutic discussions addressing stress, relationships, confidence, and emotional well-being.
- Modelling of attuned interactions and thoughtful thinking about the young person's needs.
- Psychoeducation on developmental milestone, routines, boundaries, and co-regulation.
- One-to-one parent/caregiver – young person video feedback.

- Use of participant journals to support reflection, learning, and continuity
- Peer support and group bonding, when delivered as a group.

## **Session structure and content:**

**Session 1:** Creating Safety, Belonging, and Reflection

**Sessions 2-4:** Understanding Adolescence and Emotional Development

**Sessions 5-7:** Relationships, Connection, and Boundaries

**Sessions 8-9:** Emotional Containment and Thoughtful Caregiving

**Sessions 10-11:** Building Strengths, Resilience, and Confidence

**Sessions 12:** Reflection, Consolidation, and Ending Well

## **7 Outputs (Immediate participation)**

### **Parents and carers:**

- Attend and actively participate in the 12 structured, therapeutic group sessions
- Feel safe, welcomed, and emotionally contained within a non-judgemental group setting
- Practise new parenting and caregiving strategies that are developmentally informed and relationship-focused
- Identify and build on personal strengths and positive qualities as caregivers

- Engage in reflective conversations about behaviour, emotions, and relationships
- Facilitators observe improved caregiver sensitivity, reflective capacity, and strengthened parent/carer–young person relationships.

## **Short-Term Outcomes (0–6 Months)**

(Mapped to Mellow Parenting Evaluation Framework)

### **Caregiver Outcomes**

- Increased understanding of adolescent brain development and how neurological change influences behaviour, emotional regulation, and risk-taking
- Improved understanding of young people’s social and emotional development, including identity formation, peer influence, and emotional expression
- Increased caregiver confidence, emotional literacy, and self-belief
- Reduced feelings of isolation and increased sense of support
- Increased reflective capacity, including greater awareness of personal stress “hotspots”
- Improved ability to respond rather than react during moments of challenge

### **Relationship Outcomes**

- Improved communication and relational warmth between caregivers and young people
- Increased frequency of positive, attuned interactions
- Greater consistency in boundaries and routines
- Increased trust and emotional safety within relationships

## **9** Medium-Term Outcomes (6–18 Months)

### **Caregiver Outcomes**

- Sustained improvements in emotional regulation, resilience, and well-being
- Increased confidence in adapting parenting approaches as young people seek autonomy
- Greater use of developmentally informed and relationship-based strategies

### **Relationship & Family Outcomes**

- Reduced family conflict and escalation
- Stronger, more stable parent/carer–young person relationships
- Improved capacity for relational repair following conflict or rupture
- Increased mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation

## **10** Long-Term Impacts (18+ Months)

### **Family & Relationship Outcomes**

- Stronger, more resilient family relationships sustained over time
- Empowered families able to navigate transitions and challenges together
- Reduced likelihood of family breakdown

### **Intergenerational Impact**

- Disruption of intergenerational cycles of insecure attachment, conflict, and harmful parenting practices
- Increased likelihood of nurturing, relational approaches being passed on to future generations

## System-Level Impact

- Reduced demand on statutory and crisis services (social work, CAMHS, youth justice)
- Stronger alignment with Whole Family Wellbeing and preventative approaches
- More effective early intervention and improved outcomes across health, education, and social care systems
- Contribution to a more coordinated, relationship-centred family support ecosystem

## 11 Summary Causal Pathway

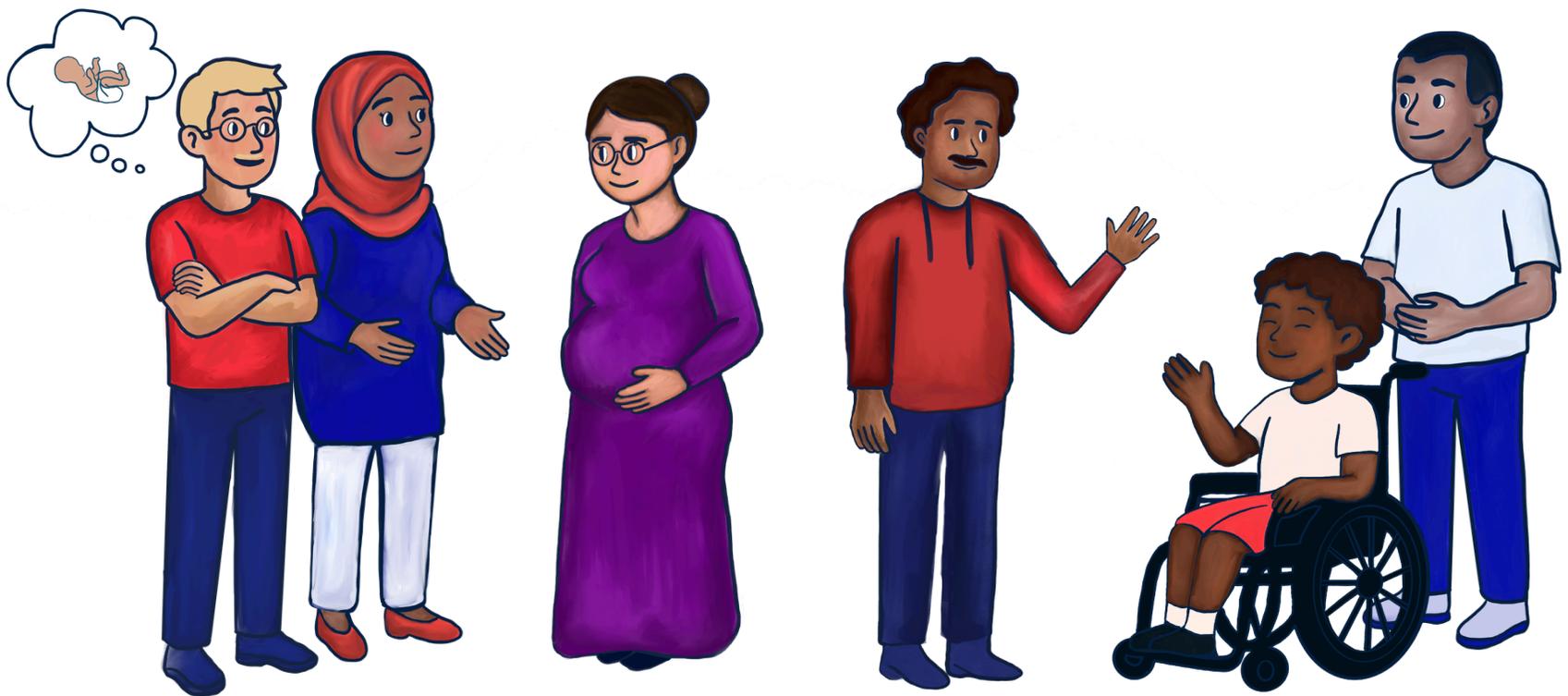
Mellow Caring for Young People uses structured, relationship-based group work to improve caregiver understanding of adolescent brain, social, and emotional development, while strengthening caregiver wellbeing, confidence, and reflective capacity. This enables caregivers to respond with greater warmth, consistency, and emotional containment, leading to stronger relationships and reduced family conflict. Improved relational safety supports young people's emotional regulation, wellbeing, and engagement during the transition to adulthood, reducing escalation and reliance on crisis-led services.

- Stronger, more resilient family relationships with improved communication, trust, and relational repair
- Empowered caregivers who feel confident, supported, and better able to adapt to adolescence
- Reduced pressure on statutory and crisis services, supporting early intervention and Whole Family Wellbeing approaches



# Mellow

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