

From The Thinking Tank

The Future of the family

Report summary

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The Future of the Family

The most supported idea (over 80%) in this debate was that the perfect family would be

- A family full of support, affection and belief in you.

This was despite the fact that half the group agreed that

- Family can be seen as a restriction.

We had two main points of view represented in the debate, those supporting a traditional, strong, nuclear family and those who took a more fluid view.

Threats to families in today's world

Families are seen as facing some challenges today - from societal changes and other distractions. Family life has changed from a nostalgia of sledging and Sunday tea to a confusing, challenging chaos.

Changing state of families

But the changes are not all problematic. The new openness of the idea of family is also seen by many as an opportunity.

- Cultural diversity is a challenge not a threat
- Monocultures are easier to manage but don't offer the same opportunities
- More varied structures have potential to accommodate a greater number of individual needs.

Next steps

Meanwhile, most of us are part of a family, so what should we do for the best? These ideas were supported by the group:

For ourselves:

There was a sense throughout the discussion that we are in transition. The 20th century ways of organising families are yearned for by some and accepted as the past by others. That also presents an opportunity to redefine the notion of family based on the strongest statement that family is supportive and affectionate. The new version of family might successfully include new structures such as step-families, extended family, younger generation still living at home, older generation living longer and "chosen families" of like minded individuals living together. Along with scattered families due to migration and socio-economic needs, still managing to stay close via the internet.

- So we'll go through a messy patch [of changing family structures] - and then... brave new world
- Accept that being a family doesn't mean necessarily living under one roof
- A general broadening of the sense of 'family'

There was also acknowledgement that the power structures within families have changed from the 19th century model of the father as head of household.

- Parenting today is more about leadership than dictatorship

For the authorities:

The state and its structures need to catch up with this fast changing landscape in order to make good use of new family structures rather than ruing the loss of the old order. Well supported suggestions include:

- Challenge organisations who still produce forms that are impossible to fill in if you're not a "proper" family
- [Advice to] Minister: promote positive family models, based on values and behaviour, not structure
- More inclusiveness than exclusiveness.

Dynamics of the group

Views were more diverse than usual in this debate with only 13% consensus (vs Thinking Tank benchmark of 29%). The average support for each idea was 18% with only 1 statement achieving majority support (listed below)

Top statements (ranked strongest first)

- *Certainly support, affection and belief in you has to come from somewhere; a family could provide this.*

Statements achieving 30-50% support:

- *Minister: challenge organisations who still produce forms that are impossible to fill in if you're not a "proper" family*
- *Agree - it makes sense that diversity of experiences and background enriches a group*

Elaborates on: Monocultures are easier to manage - but they don't offer the same opportunities to grow and stretch and broaden our horizons

- *So we'll go through a messy patch - and then brave new world?*
Elaborates on: We threw away the old rule book (thankfully!) but we haven't really worked the new one out yet
- *Family life for me has changed from a nostalgia of sledging and Sunday tea to a confusing, challenging chaos*
- *A general broadening of the sense of "family". Maybe we can learn something from the widespread use of the terms "brother" and "sister" in some cultures*
- *If you don't harm others*
Elaborates on: Yes more freedom - less convention
Elaborates on: more individually living
- *Minister: promote positive family models, based on values and behaviour, not structure*
- *Family can be seen as a restriction*
- *Cultural diversity is a challenge but not a threat, if anything it is making family life a lot more interesting*
- *Possible anti-social behaviour*
- *No longer one family life in same setting but a sequence of stages in which the make up of the family might change family*
Elaborates on: woman that started working more and more are a key difference in the way family life is organised
- *Accepting that being a family doesn't mean necessarily living under one roof*

- *Yes more freedom - less convention
Elaborates on: more individually living*
- *More inclusiveness than exclusiveness, especially also now that the nucleus is getting smaller
Elaborates on: a general broadening of the sense of "family". Maybe we can learn something from the widespread use of the terms "brother" and "sister" in some cultures*
- *Minister: recognise that we are all finding new ways forward. Encourage warmth, imagination, lateral thinking and tolerance in family structures*
- *It's not even that now, those rigid days are gone
Elaborates on: should it stay 1 man + 1 woman?*
- *Lack of confidence. in old world all the rules and roles were very clear. Now we have to think more for ourselves - parenting is more about leadership than dictatorship. That's much harder*
- *I think this is related to TRUST - within families there has to be trust
Elaborates on: lack of confidence. in old world all the rules and roles were very clear. Now we have to think more for ourselves - parenting is more about leadership than dictatorship.*
- *Isn't that an opportunity too? you get more people to choose from, more different things to learn. years ago you might have had 6 siblings, now you have one but you also have halves. steps etc
Elaborates on: the break up an reconstruction of new families*
- *Monocultures are easier to manage - but they don't offer the same opportunities to grow and stretch and broaden our horizons*
- *In eighty years too much to mention. Pre WW2 is so different modern life started circa 1956 or so*
- *Becoming very socially aware and in favour of equality fraternity and liberty à la William Morris*
- *I'd rather see increased development of self discipline - so our future generations can cope with the scope of modern life
Elaborates on: Increased discipline within so then can exist externally. Sadly all too namby-pamby these days.*

The Thinking Tank is an independent not for profit place to encourage meaningful conversation that might contribute to social and human progress.

The Thinking Tank has a dream. That one day its transparent aggregation of views will be a quotable source. A counterbalance to the spin and hype and extrapolation of the sample of one.

The Thinking Tank uses Synthetron's crowdsourcing technology (which also powers Neil Gaught & Associates LikeMIND™), to combine dispersed wisdom and find the strongest opinions and ideas on any topic.

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