

International Parent-Centred Network Symposium Wednesday 14 May 2025

09.00-17.00

(walk-in from 08.30)



Resilience of parents in a polarised society

Parents have to deal with the impact of a polarised society as a circumstance of their parenthood. They can be confronted with a multitude of themes (democratic values at stake, different views on migration, climate measures, legalisation and bureaucratisation, ...).

In today's increasingly polarised society, parents face unique challenges as they navigate a landscape shaped by divisive issues such as democratic values under threat, differing views on migration, climate policies, legal frameworks and the growing influence of bureaucratisation. These societal tensions inevitably impact the parenting experience.

This symposium seeks to explore how parents can build resilience in the face of such polarising themes.

Through a multi-faceted approach, it will address the following key aspects:

- **Parents' Perspectives:** Parents will share their firsthand experiences, highlighting the challenges they encounter and the types of support they find most helpful when navigating societal divides.
- **Professional Insights:** Experts in welfare, healthcare and education will discuss the vital roles they can play in supporting parents to remain grounded and resilient amid these challenges.
- **Research and Theory:** Researchers and academics will present insights into how resilience in parenting can be understood and strengthened, drawing from social discourse, theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches and organizational practices.

The symposium combines real-life experiences with academic and professional perspectives, offering a platform for dialogue, learning and the development of actionable strategies to empower parents in polarised times. Together, we aim to better understand how to create a supportive environment for parents and families within a divided society.

Practical information:

- **Location:** Governorate Province of Limburg, Maastricht, Limburglaan 10, 6229 GA Randwyck-Maastricht
- **Interested in participating as a parent, teacher, student or professional?**
Register before 5 May via this link:
[Symposium: 'resilience of parents in a polarised society' | UCLL Research & Expertise](#)
As the number of participants is limited, we would appreciate any cancellation in good time.
- **If you want more information, let us know!**
Contact: wim.goossens@zuyd.nl or Liesbeth.lenie@ucll.be



About IPCEN: IPCEN consists of colleges and universities from Flanders (Belgium), the Netherlands, the UK, Malta, Lithuania and Finland.

This programme is organised by Zuyd UAS (Sittard, NE) and UCLL (Hasselt, BE)



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Morning programme

| Time | | Speakers |
|---------------|--|--|
| 08.30 – 09.00 | Walk-in & registration | Secretariat UCLL and Zuyd UAS |
| 09.00 -09.20 | Opening words and welcome | Representative Governorate Province of Limburg, Netherlands and the dean of Social Work, Zuyd UAS, Netherlands |
| 9.20-9.40 | Introduction & focus on the theme of the symposium | Wim Goossens, Chair Consortium IPCN |
| 9.50-10.20 | Keynote Navigating the Impact of Multiple Polarizations on Parenthood: implications for Parent- Professional Relationships | Professor Carmel Borg, University of Malta |
| 10.30-11.00 | Intermezzo and short break | |
| 11.10-11.40 | Keynote Resilience of parents | Dr. Sarah van Haeken UCLL |
| 11.50-12.20 | Dialogue session The final words to Parents! | Parents with facilitators Bea van Mechelen (UCLL) en Hilde van Schaeren (Zuyd UAS) |
| 12.30-13.30 | LUNCH | |

Afternoon programme

| Time | | Speakers |
|---------------|---|---|
| 13.30 - 13.45 | Welcom back and intermezzo | |
| 13.45-14.30 | Lecture In times of hardship and polarization, with parents as full-fledged participants and co-directors navigating through complexity and weaving resilience | Sabine Vermeire Interactie-Academie Antwerpen |
| 14.45 - 17.00 | Worldcafe <i>Collect:</i> Reflection and dialogue about the theme of the symposium: ideas for building up resilience of parents. <i>Complete</i> ideas for building up resilience of parents <i>Consequences:</i> Conclusions and actions Intermezzo and short break Summary and concluding remarks | Parents, students, teachers, professionals and keynote speakers |

DESCRIPTION AND NOTES IPCN SYMPOSIUM 14-05-2025

Keynote:

Navigating the Impact of Multiple Polarizations on Parenthood: implications for Parent- Professional Relationships.

Prof Carmel Borg

Carmel Borg, a graduate of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education – University of Toronto, is a professional educator with over 35 years of experience. Former Dean and Head of Department at the University of Malta's Faculty of Education, he researches and lectures on curriculum studies, social-justice education, critical pedagogy, and community development. He holds visiting professorships in a number of universities across Europe. Borg has co-/authored numerous publications on education and democracy and serves as editor of academic journals. In 2022, he received Malta's National Order of Merit for his contributions to social justice in education.

Content

The presentation explores the multifaceted impact of polarisation on parenting and parent-professional relationships. Part 1 defines polarisation and examines its societal consequences, setting the stage for understanding its complexities. Part 2 delves into the effects of economic, racial, and discourse-based polarisation on parenting, highlighting how structural inequalities and ideological divisions shape parental experiences, expectations, and challenges. Part 3 presents a manifesto for professional training, advocating for solidarity with parents in polarising times. It calls for equipping professionals with the skills to navigate tensions, foster inclusive dialogue, and strengthen parent-centred approaches that empower families amid growing societal divides.

Reference to the focus of the symposium and IPCN

The presentation underscores the challenges parents face in an increasingly divided world, highlighting IPCN's focus on contexts rather than personal pathology. Against such a backdrop, characterised by polycrises, this presentation will make a case for the importance of professional formation that nurtures parental agency, collaboration, and shared decision-making, all essential in mitigating these tensions; a parent-centred approach that fosters trust, dialogue, and mutual respect, ensuring that professionals engage parents as equal partners rather than passive recipients.

Keynote

The Evolution of Parenthood in a Polarised Society – Challenges, Resilience, and Support.

Dr. Sarah Van Haeken

Dr. Sarah Van Haeken is a researcher at University College Leuven – Limburg (UCLL) and core expert for the research line 'Strong Families'. She has a doctoral degree in biomedical sciences (PhD) and a MSc in clinical psychology and in health care management and policy.

The title of her PhD project is: 'From theory to practice. The development and evaluation of a resilience-enhancing intervention for pregnant women.'

Content

What defines "good" parenting? How we understand parenthood is influenced by societal shifts, with increasing pressure and a growing sense of individual responsibility of the parent. Research

indicates that parental stress begins as early as pregnancy, affecting not only the parent's well-being but also the child's development and overall family functioning. This keynote will explore how we can shift our perspective to focus on resilience-building and preventive support for parents.

Reference to the Focus of the symposium and IPCN

The keynote integrates research-based insights on the evolving nature of parenthood in a continuously transforming world. It explores the challenges individuals face during the transition to parenthood and the impact of these challenges on the mental health and resilience of (future) parents. By adopting a parent-centred approach, the keynote highlights resilience-building strategies and reflects on how professionals can learn from parents and how to support parents in navigating these challenges.

Dialogue session: The final words to Parents!

Parents from different organizations and backgrounds with facilitators Bea van Mechelen (UCLL) en Hilde van Schaeren (Zuyd UAS)

Content

Parents, under the guidance of their facilitators, talk about how polarizing society manifests itself in their lives. Where is the impact on parenting? What critical factors of polarization undermine the strength of their parenthood? And most importantly what are their sources of support and resilience to deal with this polarizing society. The dialogue session ends with a reflection on what it takes from professionals in terms of attitude, knowledge and skills to support parents in dealing with polarization in society.

Reference to the Focus of the symposium and IPCN

Parents raise their children in a society. It will always be influential. Society can show itself to parents as a community of solidarity. However, in today's era, society is increasingly polarizing. Promoting awareness of the impact of a polarizing society from the parent perspective is the core of this dialogue session.

Lecture

In times of hardship and polarization, with parents as full-fledged participants and co-directors navigating through complexity and weaving resilience

Sabine Vermeire

Sabine Vermeire, Staff member of Interactieacademie Antwerpen Belgium- systemic and narrative psychotherapist, trainer and supervisor. Areas of expertise include parents and children in multi-stress contexts and trauma and working in creative ways when talk falters. She has published on these topics and engaged in several projects within this field. She is also an associate trainer at The Institute of Narrative Therapy (UK) and The Faculty of Dulwich Center (Australia)

Content

In times of uncertainty, unpredictability and increasing complexity, an "overload" of information and "snapshot" news thunders into our families and households. Many social and relational issues challenge parents, and put parent-child relationships under pressure while all kind of problems get

nestled in between them. How can we be mindful of, and talk with parents about these complexities that get a grip on their lives and the lives of their children?

As co-researchers, we invite parents and their networks to playfully contribute to unraveling the tentacles of these challenges. We are looking for “out of the box” antidotes to their feelings of isolation, alienation and hopelessness, seeking safe spaces in unexpected corners to re-create a “team of support and solidarity. Instead of trying to erase complexity, we are trying to work our way out of this tangle.

Reference to the Focus of the symposium and IPCN

This contribution explores several collaborative ways of working with parents and their networks to unravel their concerns, dilemmas, challenges in times of hardship and polarisation. Instead of just zooming in on the child or the parents, together we enlarge our scope. While walking together through their daily life and exploring the obstacles and constrains, we are zooming out on the relational and social context rather than searching for personal pathology. In doing so, we re(dis)cover a sense of parental agency but also a sense of belonging and coherence and weave parental networks of resilience. This approach underlines the ideas of parents as full-fledged, active participants of our journeys and owners of their stories and lives.

Worldcafe

Participants

Parents, students, teachers, professionals and keynote speakers

Content

A World Café is a structured method for facilitating group discussions in which participants sit at tables in small groups and discuss various questions in 20-30 minute rounds. After each round, participants switch tables, allowing ideas and insights to spread and deepen. The goal is to generate collective knowledge and find creative solutions through dialogue and collaboration.

In this worldcafe, parents, students, teachers, professionals, and and keynote speakers will engage in a dialogue about how to strengthen parental resilience and what role professionals can take in it.

Reference to the Focus of the symposium and IPCN

In keeping with the theme, the aspiration in this symposium is that in addition to knowledge sharing and reflection, we take action and show solidarity toward parents in this polarised society.