

HELP DON'T JUDGE: 24 BETTER IDEAS

than a marriage tax allowance

**A call for evidence from
DON'T JUDGE MY FAMILY**



The government plans to spend £700m on the marriage tax allowance to “send a signal” that marriage is better than any other relationship.

By giving a £200 a year tax break to just one third of married couples (those with a breadwinner and a homemaker) David Cameron is discriminating against:

- the one in four children growing up in single parent family
- widows and widowers
- people who leave abusive relationships
- working parents
- people who choose not to be married

We believe government should help families, not judge them. So we asked for your ideas for how to better spend £700m to help families, relationships and children get the best start in life. We had hundreds of responses from supporters, academics, think tanks and charities.

This report sets out 24 better ideas than a marriage tax allowance.

24 BETTER IDEAS THAN A MARRIAGE TAX ALLOWANCE

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**What's your better idea? E hello@dontjudge.org.uk T [@dontjudgemy](https://twitter.com/dontjudgemy)
F facebook.com/DontJudgeMyFamily #HelpDontJudge**

1 CHILDCARE THAT WORKS FOR ALL FAMILIES

Increasing the provision of childcare was the most popular alternative to marriage tax breaks.

Suggestions included:

- widening access to 15 hours of free nursery care for every child aged two
- providing tax breaks for employers who invest in childcare schemes
- expanding wrap-around care including breakfast, after-school and holiday clubs
- funding childcare vouchers for working parents
- 'storing-up' entitlement when parents prioritise full-time caring for a period when their children are young
- investment in the formal and informal support networks around nurseries to help parents who might be struggling.

"There is a clear and urgent case to invest a further £200 million in childcare under universal credit, to cover 85% of childcare costs for all instead of just – as proposed – to those who earn enough to pay tax. Parents need more help with childcare costs now and simply can't afford for the government to wait until 2016."

Gingerbread

2 HELP FOR WIDOWS, WIDOWERS & THEIR CHILDREN

Many people told us they thought widowed people needed help more than married people.

Some suggested using the funds to reverse cuts to bereavement support payments, estimated at 90% for new claimants by the [Childhood Bereavement Network](#). Instead of forcing bereaved parents into full-time work, a simplified system could underpin the crucial support they provide to their grieving children.

“We are very disappointed that the government is introducing tax breaks for married couples at the same time as planning to cut benefits for those who are widowed with children. Widowed parents, through no fault of their own, can no longer enjoy the benefits of a traditional married life and will not be eligible for the marriage tax allowance as currently envisaged.”

WAY Widowed and Young

3 FOCUS ON CHILD TAX CREDITS

Increasing child tax credits was a popular alternative to spending funds on marriage tax breaks.

They were also found to be more effective in tackling child poverty. A study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, commissioned by [Gingerbread](#), compared marriage tax breaks (for families with under fives), child tax credit and working tax credits. The research found that investing £800m in Child Tax Credits would lift 130,000 children out of poverty while a married couples transferable allowance lifted 10,000 children out of poverty.

“We both work. We can't afford to pay the mortgage, bills and put food on the table on just one wage. And now the Government wants to tell us we're not the right kind of family. I can't stay home for £200. What is it the Government wants us to do?”

Supporter

4 SUPPORTING SURE START & CHILDREN'S CENTRES

Many people praised Sure Start services and suggested spending more on them not less.

Sure Start centres, according to the [Government's website](#), "are open to all parents, carers and children and many of the services are free. You can get help and advice on child and family health, parenting, money, training and employment."

More than **£430m has been cut** from English local authority Sure Start budgets between 2010-11 and 2012-13 and more than 400 Sure Start children's centres have closed.

"Put the money into Sure Start Children's Centres - which help parents with parenting skills, regardless of their marital status."

Supporter

"Maintain Sure Start and similar groups for very young children to ensure that the next generation aren't penalised, whatever their home background."

Supporter

5 SUPPORT FOR GRANDPARENTS & OTHER KINSHIP CARERS

Many replies focused on helping grandparents and other family members who are bringing up children.

Up to 300,000 children in the UK live with grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles and other family members, usually due to parental drug or alcohol misuse, death, illness or disability, domestic violence or imprisonment. It would cost **£12bn each year** if these children were in care.

Many live on a pension or have to give up work and 40% live alone. None had planned for providing for a child.

Other alternatives included allowing parents who've returned to work to transfer part of their leave to a grandparent, a kinship family allowance and giving kinship carers similar rights to adopters.

"We believe if Government has money to spend on families it would be much better used to provide financial and practical support for kinship carers who have done the right thing and stepped in to bring up a vulnerable child and keep them out of care. It would cost £550 million to provide every kinship care family with an allowance of £2,750 a year to help with the extra costs of bringing up a child."
Grandparents Plus

6 HELP CHILDREN WITH READING

Many people suggested the best way help children was to spend it on helping with reading.

Booktrust concludes *“Reading is one of the most effective means of promoting social mobility, increasing life chances through increased educational outcomes, employment opportunities and aspiration”*.

Alternatives to funding marriage tax breaks included increasing Reading Recovery programmes in primary schools, ensuring greater access to books and creating role models who can show children that this is a skill that will open many doors.

£700m could provide **Reading Recovery** programmes for an extra 250,000 children.

“As a secondary English teacher I see increasing numbers of children coming up to us who cannot do basic phonics, comprehend passages of text or write a story that is legible. If young people reach secondary school with such low reading ages and literacy levels, they are already vulnerable in our society.”

Supporter

7 MAINTAIN THE REAL VALUE OF CHILD BENEFIT

Many people suggested that instead of marriage tax breaks the money should be used to increase child benefit which would target funds to families with children.

Between 2011 and 2016 the real value of child benefit looks set to fall by over 14 per cent as a result of being frozen for three years and then up-rated at 1 per cent subsequently.

Just 1.4 million of the 7.8 million (less than 1 in 5) families with children will be eligible for marriage tax breaks.

“Everyone – childless people, as well as those with children – will eventually benefit from the productivity and wellbeing of today’s children, so society should share the cost of bringing them up. CPAG believes that the £700 million earmarked for the Marriage Tax Allowance should instead be used to contribute towards restoring the real value of child benefit.”

Child Poverty Action Group

8 PROVIDE FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Several respondents supported the use of marriage tax allowance funds to provide free, or very cheap, school meals including healthy breakfasts.

A pilot scheme of providing free school meals for primary school children in **Durham and Newham** found the children advanced by two months on average as a result.

“Too many children arrive at school hungry.”

Supporter

It's not just about the food, it's about children sitting, eating and talking together and trying food they might not normally eat”.

Supporter

9 INCREASE SERVICES FOR TEENAGERS & YOUNG PEOPLE

Many of our respondents suggested marriage tax allowance funds could be invested into youth services.

Youth services and youth clubs can provide a valuable support network for young people and their parents.

However as a non-statutory service in many areas these have suffered as local authority budgets have been cut. Thousands of young people across the country - most of whom are from the most disadvantaged backgrounds - have lost that vital support, advice and just somewhere to go in the evening.

“For young people with behavioural problems, the expert youth workers take the strain off parents, which, tenuous though it may seem, is better for sustaining a family than £3.85 a week.”

Supporter

10 TARGET FINANCIAL HELP TO PARENTS

Several respondents felt that marriage tax break funds should be better targeted on families most in need.

This included providing extra financial support for low-income parents of disabled children and directing additional support to parents who are disabled, unemployed or still in education.

Another suggestion was to give new parents a one-off payment on the birth of every newborn.

“Easy. £900-ish of supplies (bedding, nappies, toys) for the mum of every newborn. Make life a little easier when it’s scariest.”

Supporter

11 PROVIDE RELATIONSHIP COUNSELLING

Many people responding to our call for evidence suggested making counselling available to all families would a better use of money than tax breaks for a few.

The Relationships Foundation estimates that the **cost of family breakdown this year is £46bn**. However even supporters of marriage tax break admit it won't prevent any divorces.

A well promoted and accessible counselling scheme would entitle all families (married or unmarried) to state-funded counselling vouchers redeemable if and when needed. This would equip people to be proactive about protecting their relationship.

“They should set up a national network of family support, parental education, and – for when things go really wrong – low-cost or free therapy and counselling. If a person has therapy, others in their network are often affected in a positive way. Family therapy means that children don't get blamed for what is going on.”

**Andrew Samuels,
Professor of Analytical
Psychology, University
of Essex**

12 EDUCATE CHILDREN ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

We head from people who thought Government should be helping the next generation form great relationships, rather than rewarding those in the “right” marriages now.

Relationship education is a fundamental way of providing children and young people with skills to develop strong and stable relationships and to protect themselves from abuse and exploitation.

This could include learning about consent as well as teaching self-esteem and self-worth. Anti-homophobia and transphobia campaigns could help lessen prejudice against same sex relationships and same-sex parents.

"Currently, young people are saying they aren't receiving good quality Sex and Relationships Education and this is storing up problems for the future. We can help prevent the problems associated with relationship breakdown by teaching young people relationship skills that will last a lifetime."

Relate

13 ENCOURAGE COUPLES TO MAKE A WILL

We also received suggestions that some of the money spent on marriage tax breaks could be better spent informing people about and providing will services.

It's estimated that 56 % of all adults in the UK and 70% of co-habiting couples haven't made a will. Many cohabiting couples wrongly assuming that their possessions will go to their partner.

Not only does leaving a will resolve any issues if a partner unexpectedly dies, but the creating of a will, like applying for a mortgage or deciding to marry, provides an opportunity to make a commitment.

"Making a will made us think about and discuss our commitment, our children and our future. It made us feel more secure - that we had a shared plan. Much more than planning a wedding."

Supporter

14 MAKE IT CHEAPER TO MARRY

Many suggested that if the Government wanted to show its commitment to marriage it could take more practical measures that would help everyone who chose to marry, not just those with someone who stays at home.

One suggestion was scrapping marriage notice fees, currently £70 a couple, which would make it cheaper and easier for couples to wed. Similarly a one off grant could be given to help with the costs of the wedding celebrations.

"I <3 #marriage but reject the #marriagetaxbreak."

Supporter

15 TAKE ACTION ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Many of our supporters were worried that a marriage tax allowance sent a signal that people should stay in unhappy or abusive marriages

Over two women per week are killed by current or ex-partners and it's predicted **1 in 4 women in the UK will experience domestic violence in their lifetime.**

Marriage tax allowance funding could be used to support parents fleeing abusive relationships, fund sufficient spaces in women's refuges or to educate children about domestic violence.

"I plead with the government for the sake of all who have been, are, or ever will be trapped in an abusive relationship, and for their children too. Being able to leave a relationship easily poses no threat to society but being unable to leave a relationship poses a considerable threat to domestic abuse victims. Financial help out of abusive relationships is far more important than a marriage tax allowance!"

Supporter

16 SUPPORT FATHERS' ACCESS TO THEIR CHILDREN

Suggestions were made from men and women that the money could be better used to fund information, advice and support to all parents who are seeking to maintain a meaningful and responsible relationship with their children after family break down or divorce.

*"We could work wonders
with just ONE MILLION!"*
Men's Aid

17 FOCUS ON HOUSING AND REVERSE THE “BEDROOM TAX”

Using the money to improve the quality of housing and reduce the cost were popular responses to our call for evidence. Many recognised the impact that poverty and poor housing can have on people's lives and relationships.

Lots of people suggested the Government repeal the spare room subsidy, also known as the “bedroom tax”, which is estimated to affect 660,000 people in the UK (two thirds of whom have a disability) and others suggested the money should be used to build more homes.

It's estimated that reversing the spare room subsidy would cost around £470m, much less than the amount being spent on creating a marriage tax allowance.

“A marriage tax allowance is a good idea but building houses would do more to help families”

Tim Montgomerie, *The Times*

1.6 million children live in overcrowded, temporary, or run-down housing. Bad housing has a massive impact on children's lives, affecting everything from health and educational achievement, to their emotional well-being and overall life chances.

Shelter

18 PROVIDE FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Family support services can be a vital life line for families facing difficulties. Many respondents called for more investment in this area, particular at a time when many local authorities have had to reduce services in recent years.

Suggestions included early intervention services, family support projects, parenting skills training and additional support services connected to schools, social services and the health service.

“We should spend that money, and more, on providing floating and outreach support for families in crisis. I've worked in a homeless hostel for young people and families for several years now and if many people here had someone to step in and help them when they needed it, they wouldn't be here today.”

Supporter

19 INVEST IN HEALTH CARE

We received suggestions that the money for a marriage tax break could be invested in the national health service.

Suggestions included nursing care, paediatric care, pre- and ante-natal care, and mental health services as better uses for the marriage tax allowance funds.

Others suggested investment in funds for drug and alcohol recovery programmes for parents.

“Support people in recovery so that they don’t end up damaging other people with their problems or seek refuge from their demons in a damaging relationships.”
Supporter

20 SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE INTO FURTHER EDUCATION

Another suggestion was restoring the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) which provided a grant to 16-19 year olds in further education from low income backgrounds.

The cost of the EMA was £560m per year, much less than the cost of the marriage tax allowance.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies concluded, when assessing the spending on EMA, that the “costs of EMA are completely offset” by their impact on participation.

“The Government should restore EMA and support families to give their children the best chances in education, rather than obsessing over what type of family they’re raised in. There is far more evidence that supporting families financially helps their educational attainment and future life chances than there is that any one type of family structure does.”

Supporter

21 CHAMPION FLEXIBLE WORKING

Many people told us that most family arguments are about time and money and that the best way of helping families is by increasing their income. However many were skeptical that encouraging one partner to stay at home was the best family model.

We received suggestions including better paid leave that would allow new mums and dads to spend time with their young children without worrying about losing their jobs and the hit to the family budget.

And we heard from many dads (married and unmarried) that they want to have a bigger role at home to share the joys and burdens of being a parent – better paid paternity leave and help for working dads to spend less time at the office should be a priority.

“I would use it to allow working parents to take one morning or afternoon a week off work (paid by the Government) in order for children to be taken out of nursery and spend time with their family.”

Supporter

22 GREATER SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO ADOPT

We heard from people that thought families that adopted children needed the help more than the minority of married couples.

Many adopted children have lived through terrible experiences which do not just simply disappear once they have settled with their new families.

Suggestions included providing appropriate therapy for all members of the family with adopted children and respite care for families.

“Do something about the UK’s woefully inadequate post-adoption support.”
Supporter

23 HELP PEOPLE INTO WORK

Helping people into work was a priority for many respondents to our call for evidence. There's also much evidence that being in work makes you happier and healthier as well as increasing your household income.

Suggestions included funding individual, one-to-one guidance and assessment for those looking for work, greater rights to work for disabled people, and special assistance for those seeking to re-enter the workplace after having a baby or a stay at home period.

"It's really hard working out what you want to do after you've been off work and at home with children. You need to get your confidence back up, talk through your options and get some help with interviews and applications."
Supporter

24 HELP FOR CARERS OF ADULTS

Financial support or respite for carers of adults was suggested as an alternative use for the marriage tax break funds.

It's estimated that there are around **six million un-paid carers** in the UK, some of whom are also parents of young children. Carers often report suffering from depression, isolation and emotional and physical exhaustion.

“£550m would go a long way to support older carers of older people. As people work longer, there is pressure to balance that care with employment, with their own lives, with support for their children or grandchildren. This tax allowance would largely not help people of any age who are unseen as carers, regardless of their "status" as married, never-married or in any other relationship.”

Age UK Berkshire

MANY OTHER BETTER IDEAS

We've only showcased 24 better ideas here, but there were many other fantastic ideas of how to better spend money than on a marriage tax allowance.

These included plugging the deficit, cutting taxes, backing credit unions and tackling debt and financial exclusion, investment in ICT in schools, reversing coastguard closures, increasing pensions, spending on infrastructure, increasing encouraging volunteering, encouraging social mobility, help for sick children, tackling bullying, providing more school teachers and teaching assistants, investing in family planning and allowing every non tax payer to transfer their tax allowance to a person of their choosing.

SEND US YOUR IDEAS:

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