

Conservative Party Speeches (/)

Speeches recovered from the Conservative party's online archive [More... \(/about\)](#)



[\(/speaker/theresa-may\)](/speaker/theresa-may)

Speech by **[Theresa May \(/speaker/theresa-may\)](/speaker/theresa-may)** on Oct. 5, 2004

May: I will put family at the heart of Government

Speech to Conservative Party Conference 2004

"Thank you Carole and thank you to everyone who has taken part in this important debate this afternoon.

As you'll have noticed conference is a bit different again this year.

We've got a new set, a new format, and a new approach.

Our debates aren't divided up to match government departments. We're thinking about issues the way people think about them.

That's why I was delighted when Michael Howard asked me to take on the job of Shadow Secretary of State for the Family.

Because the family is something that touches us all.

Yet the family has never been properly represented in Government.

So I'm delighted to be doing something about it.

I'm delighted to be taking on this role.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the family is back at the heart of the Conservative Party.

My role and this debate show our new approach. You know all politicians spend too much time talking about structures.

People don't.

People talk about the quality of their lives. About how every day is a struggle. About the real things - sometimes just the simple things - that a Government could do to make their lives that bit easier.

People don't think like government: in separate compartments - got a question about childcare - go to this department got a question about work and benefits go to that department, got a question about health ask another department.

People know that if your childcare isn't working you can't get to work, if you can't find a care home place for your elderly father your life can be turned upside down. If your GP surgery closes on a Saturday, what are you supposed to do but go to a hospital or hope you're not worse by Monday.

Most people in this country think that Government and Officialdom live on another planet. As far as they're concerned, Government just doesn't get it. It makes everything so difficult, so complicated. Nothing is joined up.

My job is to bring it all together, to make sure it works - for people, not for Government.

We Conservatives know that this country is stronger when people are stronger, when individuals and families have the freedom to make decisions for themselves, when government doesn't decide your future - you do.

When Government's there when you need it but steps back when you don't.

Tony Blair talks (let's face it that's about all Tony Blair does do) about hard-working families

But what I see are hard-pressed families.

Because life for many families has become a battle

- A battle to get your child in to the school where they can reach their true potential.

- A battle to get into work without being worn to a frazzle

- A battle to pay the mortgage and balance the demands of work and home.

We have to find ways to make life easier for people.

For the vast majority of people the family is a great source of security and comfort. It is worth defending and protecting.

But family life is coming under threat as never before.

We live in a world that heaps pressures onto relationships in a way unthinkable 50 years ago.

Modern life is forcing people to work harder and longer than ever before to provide for their family.

And this Labour Government has done precious little to help them.

A Government that has spent millions of pounds on childcare, but has seen one childcare place close for every two it has opened...

A Government that has put up taxes 66 times making it harder for many families to meet their everyday bills...

A Government that has presided over the closure of tens of thousands of care home beds with all the added pressures on families that brings...

This is a Government that has let down families, and that has been supported every step of the way by the Liberal Democrats.

Let us not forget, the Liberal Democrats are the party that wants to put up income tax, slap on a regional tax, and bring in a local tax on top.

Let us be clear - A vote for the Liberal Democrats isn't just a wasted vote

- For families, it is a dangerous vote!

It's time for a party to put quality of family life at the heart of its agenda for government.

To champion the interests of families.

To reach beyond Westminster's artificial boundaries and touch people's everyday lives.

That party is the Conservative Party.

When we talk about the Right to Choose in Health we're not talking about structural change. We're talking about giving an elderly person who lives hundreds of miles from her family the chance to have an operation in a hospital near where they live so that her family can visit and support her.

When we talk about the Right to Choose in Education we're not talking about structures, we're talking about giving parents the ability to get their child into the school that suits them - not one mile away because the Council says it's the only place left.

When we talk about putting more police on the beat we're not talking about structures, we're talking about giving parents greater peace of mind that their children will be safe on the streets.

Putting people first - that's why we will shortly announce plans to widen the variety of childcare available to hard pressed families. It's mothers and fathers not Government Ministers, who know the best way to care for their children.

That's why my job is not to build a great new department of the family.

It's to be the voice of families in Westminster.

And to send a very clear signal to the millions of hard pressed families who have been let down by Tony Blair's Government...

We are on your side.

We must give people hope.

Hope that life can be more than just a ceaseless grind.

Hope that life can get better.

Hope that they and their children can achieve their dreams.

As Conservatives we say you too can dream of a better future and we will help you to achieve it.

Because we believe that society is built on the goodwill, initiative, understanding and hard-work of millions of individual people.

We know that individuals are responsible not only for themselves, but for each other.

And we know that government cannot solve all of your problems for you.

But we're saying - you are not alone with those problems . There is such a thing as society.

And at the heart of society lies the family.

However we define it.

Family is about sharing. About commitment. About Sacrifice. It is also about joy, and love, and about care.

We still believe that marriage is the best environment for bringing up children.

But we live in the real world, and we know that today people support each other in many different ways.

That is why my role goes further.

- if you're living together, a single mother on benefits, two elderly sisters or a same sex couple with a commitment to one other,

You are all families and I will stand up for you.

It is not about what you are, it is about how you live.

We will be a party of all Britain and all Britons -

But sadly of course, to many in modern Britain the family is simply what remains of a broken marriage or relationship.

Too many families have been torn apart by bitter disputes about contact with the children, with parents and grandparents prevented from seeing their children or their grandchildren.

Too many families end up fighting it out in court and it is the children who loose out most.

When we passed the Children Act, we wanted to make it easier for parents to share in their children's upbringing after divorce. The Act had good intentions but sadly it hasn't always worked well.

Normal parents are being prevented from caring for their children. In some cases prevented from seeing their children at all. We believe that the best parent is both parents.

That is why, in my first month in Government, I will publish a Bill to give a presumption of co- parenting and a right for both parents to be involved in bringing up their children, when couples separate. We will ensure that the law serves the best interests of the child - and children deserve to see both parents.

But the biggest mistake in family policy was Labour's decision to set up 'CAFCASS' - the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.

Not everyone here will have come across CAFCASS. If so, I hope you never will.

CAFCASS writes reports on some 70,000 children a year whose parents find themselves in the family courts.

These reports decide whether those children should be allowed 'contact' with both their parents.

But CAFCA has no guidelines about allowing proper contact with both parents.

No guidelines saying whether proper 'contact' is just a two-hour visit once a fortnight - or half the holidays.

Amazingly no records on how much contact it allows.

We know because we listen to the heartbroken stories of mums and dads and grandparents.

They are spending years in the courts, trudging from one hearing to the next, hoping to see their children for a two-hour 'contact session'. Like the man who was going to his 81st court hearing to try to see his children.

Like the separated father, under investigation by CAFCASS for "buying his daughter toys".

These are the results of this Government's policies. Policies designed in Westminster, implemented in Whitehall, but felt far and wide across the country.

It is a bureaucratic shambles, it is deeply unjust and it is letting families down.

Ladies and Gentlemen it is time for Action.

That is why in my first week in office, I will publish proposals to abolish CAF/CASS and replace it with a mediation service. Court should be the last resort, not the first. The aim will be to intervene early to make sure disputes don't have to go to court but are sorted out quickly in the best interests of the children. -And child safety will remain a priority.

Our Country deserves a better system of family justice: one that is open, fair and accountable; a system that protects children and a system that recognises as we do, that the best parent is both parents.

Families will look to us to be the Government they need.

A Government that lets people make the most of the opportunities that are open to them, but that provides a safety net for those in need.

A Government that knows the importance of better schools to provide children with a good start in life.

A Government that ensures they can walk the streets safely.

That helps them retire secure in the knowledge that their pension will support them.

A Government that gives individuals the freedom to make decisions for themselves and their families, lets them keep more of their own money to spend, that understands that people know better than the state how to support themselves and their families.

This Party has always been the party of the family. Today we change the definition but not our commitment.

We accept the changes in the way people live and we change our approach to meet it.

But we never let families down.

It's time to put the family at the heart of Government policy again.

Only the Conservative Party can do it."

Source (http://www.webarchive.org.uk:80/wayback/archive/20080907231009/http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=116356&speeches=1)

[← Speech at the Independent frin... \(/speech/600576\)](#)

[Speech to Conservative Party C... → \(/speech/600562\)](#)

[Conservative Party Speeches \(/\)](#) | [About \(/about\)](#)

[Back to top](#)

SayIt

An open source tool for making transcripts really easy to read, search and share on the modern web

[Get involved \(http://sayit.mysociety.org/about/community\)](http://sayit.mysociety.org/about/community)

[Developers \(http://sayit.mysociety.org/about/developers\)](http://sayit.mysociety.org/about/developers)

[Transcripts \(http://sayit.mysociety.org/about/transcripts\)](http://sayit.mysociety.org/about/transcripts)

[Help \(http://sayit.mysociety.org/about/questions\)](http://sayit.mysociety.org/about/questions)

[The Leveson Inquiry \(http://leveson.sayit.mysociety.org/\)](http://leveson.sayit.mysociety.org/)

[Charles Taylor Trial \(http://charles-taylor.sayit.mysociety.org/\)](http://charles-taylor.sayit.mysociety.org/)

[Plays of Shakespeare \(http://shakespeare.sayit.mysociety.org/\)](http://shakespeare.sayit.mysociety.org/)

Your donations keep this site and others like it running

Built by

A [Poplus](http://poplus.org) component

mySociety Limited is a project of UK Citizens Online Democracy, a registered charity in England and Wales. For full details visit [mysociety.org](https://www.mysociety.org) (<https://www.mysociety.org>https://www.mysociety.org/donate?utm_source=sayit.mysociety.org&utm_content=footer+full+legal+details&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mysoc_footer).

