

# Engaging parents and families

**A toolkit for practitioners**

**Section 1: Involving all parents**

# Introduction

*‘Our children mean everything to us, why would parents not want to be involved’*

We want Scotland to be the best place for our children to grow up. Parents entrust some of that learning to early learning and childcare (ELCC) settings and schools. Curriculum for Excellence is learner centred and that means we want to get learning right for every child.

This toolkit has been developed to provide practitioners in all settings, including community learning and development (CLD) teams, family support staff, home/school link workers and additional support for learning staff with a practical resource to help support partnerships with parents and families in all aspects of their children’s learning. Practitioners can use the toolkit to help them achieve and sustain high levels of parental involvement and meaningful engagement within their learning settings.



Engaging parents and families: A toolkit for practitioners, provides links to research, examples of practice from early learning and childcare (ELCC) settings, primary and secondary schools, community settings as well as parental organisations. Practitioners will also find useful links to other websites, some of which should be shared with parents.

Practitioners will find activities that can be used as a starting point and/or as a tool to measure and evaluate current practice in parental involvement and engagement in their setting and in the local authority. There are activities that can be used in partnership with the parent council, parent committees or associations (depending on your setting), to ensure that all parents/carers and families are fairly represented by this body. These activities support the requirements of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act, 2006, the Children and Young People’s Scotland Act (2014) and the commitments in the National Parenting Strategy (2012). [The Engaging with Families website](#) is a helpful source of information to practitioners.

The toolkit is organised into six sections:

- Section 1: Involving all parents
- Section 2: Learning at home
- Section 3: Home/school partnerships
- Section 4: Parental representation
- Section 5: Family learning and community connections
- Section 6: Appendix and other useful information

Each section will have information that is relevant to all settings as well as specific examples relevant to each sector (ELCC, primary, secondary or community)

There are common themes running throughout the toolkit:

- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)
- Children's rights and participation
- Developing Scotland's Young Work Force (DYW)
- Building strong, positive relationships
- Family learning/community links
- Equality, diversity and inclusion

*Parent refers to the mother or father of a child or young person, or to any foster carer, relative or friend who has been given responsibility for looking after or bringing up a child, for example through a supervision order. We will use the term parent or parents throughout this resource.*

# Section 1: Involving all parents

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# What does parental involvement and engagement in children's learning mean?

**There are three main areas stated in The Act where parents can get involved in supporting their children's learning: Although The Act relates to primary and secondary schools, the information is relevant to other settings.**

**Learning at home:** Parents are the first and on-going educators of their own children and, as such, should receive information and support to help develop their children's learning at home and in the community.

*"Parents, carers and families are by far the most important influences in a child's life. Parents who take on a supportive role in their child's learning make a difference in improving achievement and behaviour."*

**(Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006)**

**Home/school partnership:** Settings must be open to the involvement of parents in the work they do and they should consider ways of providing information that helps parents engage with them and their children's education. This may also include community partnerships.

*"When parents and schools work together children do better."*

**(Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006)**

**Parental representation:** The Act provides a framework for ensuring that parents have the opportunity to express their views and have these taken into account on policy matters affecting the education of their children. It makes provision for parents to be a member of the Parent Forum at a school and to have their views represented to the school, local authority and others through a representative Parent Council for the school. It also gives them the right to raise their concerns and/or make a complaint. Other settings may have parent committees or associations that will represent the wider parental view.

*"Parents are the biggest influence on their children's development – parental involvement and aspirations shape children's and young people's achievements."*

**(Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006)**

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 recognises the vital role that parents play in supporting their children's learning by strengthening the framework for supporting parental involvement in education. There is a duty on Scottish Ministers and local authorities to promote the involvement and engagement of parents in children's education. It aims to help parents to be:

- involved and engaged with their children's education and learning
- welcomed as an active participant in the life of the school or setting
- encouraged to express their views on school education generally.

Curriculum for Excellence promotes settings and parents working together to improve learning and education and to encourage all children to become:

- Successful learners
- Confident Individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and the use of the My World triangle, promotes the wellbeing of all children and young people, and parents should be engaged in this process to ensure that their children and young people are:

- Safe
- Healthy
- Achieving
- Nurtured
- Active
- Respected
- Responsible
- Included

[The Children and Young People Act \(2014\)](#) has a focus on GIRFEC to ensure that:

- all children and young people from birth to 18 years old have access to a Named Person
- a single planning process is put in place to support those children who require it
- a definition of wellbeing exists in legislation
- public bodies have a duty to co-ordinate the planning, design and delivery of services for children and young people, with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes, and to report collectively on how they are improving those outcomes.

Practitioners and local authorities have a duty to help ensure parents understand the key highlights from the relevant legislation.

### What parents say



*“Trust should be two-way – parents trusting practitioners and practitioners trusting parents.”*

*“Avoid surprises, give parents plenty of notice of the times of meetings, when decisions are going to be made and changes to support.”*

*“Question parents, ask us what works and why.”*

**(Enquire 2015)**

# What are the benefits of parents getting involved in their children's learning?

*“For school aged children, two kinds of parental behaviour were shown to have positive associations with children's school outcomes: home-school partnership and parental interest in children's academic activities.”*

**(See and Gorard 2015)**

In a review by See and Gorard (2015) thirteen measures of individual and parent aspirations, attitudes and behaviours (AAB) were examined; parental expectations, parenting styles, parent substance abuse, parental involvement, individual aspirations, individual attitudes, individual motivation, self-concept/self-esteem, self-efficacy, participation in extracurricular activities and paid work, individual poor behaviour and substance abuse. Of these measures, the only measure with significant evidence showing an influence on school attainment was parental involvement.

(See, B.H. and Gorard, S. (2015), 'The role of parents in young people's education: a critical review of the causal evidence'. In Oxford Review of Education. Vol. 41, No. 3, 3 June 2014, pp. 346-366)

## The benefits for children and young people are:

- It is easier for children and young people to learn when they get encouragement at home.
- They will attain and achieve more when their parents are involved.
- Children and young people get access to more activities in and out of settings when there are more adults to help.
- Any concerns in the school environment can be addressed more easily when parents and schools work together.
- They are happy when their parents are enjoying events in the setting.

*“With more consistent homework practices, better school communication and parental involvement, children showed greater progress in maths, reading and pro-social behaviour.*

**(Mayo, A and Siraj, I (2015), 'Parenting practices and children's academic success in low-SES families'. In Oxford Review of Education. Vol. 41, No 1, pp. 47-63)**

## The benefits for parents are:

- Their children do better when they are involved.
- They are better supported to help and encourage their children's learning and development.
- They have more information about their children's education.
- Parents can support each other through peer mentoring which can have an impact on reducing isolation and build their confidence and skills.
- Parents get reassurance that their children are receiving a good education.

*“It's well proven that children do better when parents and schools work together. However, not all parents find it easy to be involved in their child's learning. We want to help parents lay strong foundations for the loving, nurturing relationships that we know are integral to children's emotional, physical, socio-economic and educational wellbeing.”*

**(National Parenting Strategy 2012)**



## The benefits for the setting are:

- Parents bring skills which can enhance children's learning.
- Parents contribute their time, so together parents and practitioners are able to do more activities with children and young people than practitioners can do on their own.
- Children and young people's attainment and behaviour improve.
- Parents have ideas about how the setting can best support their children.
- Practitioners have people with whom they can talk over ideas and get help when developing plans for the setting.
- Parents can contribute to school improvement and an enhanced curriculum.

*'School improvement and school effectiveness research consistently shows that parental engagement is one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement.'*

**(Review of best practice in parental engagement: Practitioners summary 2011)**



## The benefits for the local authority are:

- The local authority can draw on the ideas and experience of parents to influence future strategic developments.
- The local authority can benefit from feedback provided by parents on how effective its policies and education provisions are working in practice.
- Local authorities can benefit from parental participation in implementing and reviewing local policies.

*'The largest influence on children in the early years are their parents, with the wider community often playing a significant role.'*

**(The Early Years Framework, Part 2, 2008)**



# What helps parents, practitioners and the local authority work together?

People can work together most easily when these factors are all present:

- **Issues:** People are working together on matters which they think are important.
- **Ways of working:** Respect and value each person's contribution. Being realistic in terms of the time and effort it takes. The process welcomes and encourages people who have less experience or confidence, as well as including the children and young people.
- **Getting results:** Working together gets results. People can see their effort has been worthwhile and that they have been listened to.
- **Involving the community:** Working with people outwith the school to contribute knowledge, skills and experiences.

*“Parents often fear the worst. Honesty is important as the reality of a situation is often not as scary as what parents have been imagining.”*

(Enquire 2015)



## Activity 1: Healthy partnerships

### Purpose

To identify and encourage healthy partnerships with parents.

Questions from this activity could be shared with parents to gather their views. The activity could be carried out again throughout the session to measure the changes/impact of healthy partnerships with parents.

### Consider the following reflective questions

- How are parents involved in deciding what the topics are?
- How do parents choose topics that are most important to them? Are all parents involved in this process in ways that are accessible and inclusive?
- What other ways are parents made aware that they can raise matters that are of concern to them?
- In what ways are all parents given the opportunity to contribute?
- What information is available in the languages used by parents of the children and young people and/or those living in the community?
- How are parents made aware that they can get access to supports such as translators to help them be involved?
- What arrangements are there to include parents who live a distance away or in a rural setting?
- How are parents made aware that they can contribute in many different ways - such as text, email, phone, leaving comments and suggestions at the school or setting, as well as through meetings?
- How are people who are less confident or less experienced encouraged to take part?
- How will people know if their ideas and views have led to changes?
- How are community groups involved?

More information can be found in the Engaging with Families website:

<http://engagingwithfamilies.co.uk/media/258140/Parental-Needs-AssessmentFINAL.pdf>

## Example 1

Although the examples are setting specific, the processes can be adapted for any setting.

### Parental involvement in improvement planning



At Maisdondieu Primary in Angus Council, there is a great deal of involvement from parents. They are very much involved in evaluating and contributing to the School Improvement Plan in a variety of different ways.

One way that parents were involved was to rate ten outcomes for learning in order of priority that they wanted their children to achieve by the end of Primary 7 in Maisondieu. Practitioners used the priorities listed by parents within the School Improvement Plan.

Below are the outcomes used at Maisondieu. For reference, you can download the [School Improvement Questionnaire](#).

Rating	Outcomes of Learning
	To be literate and numerate.
	To have an appreciation of how to enjoy a healthy lifestyle.
	To be able to work with others to solve problems, or achieve results.
	To be able to work alone to achieve results or solve problems.
	To be keen to learn and know how to learn.
	To build resilience when facing challenges.
	To be able to express thoughts and feelings with confidence.
	To show respect for their own culture and history and that of others.
	To be socially responsible and proactive.
	To develop life skills.

# Involving all parents

Because **all children and young people** benefit from the interest and involvement of their parents, it is important to make sure that **all parents** have opportunities to be involved in their children's learning and education.

Parents, like learners, are diverse. Effective inclusive practice will ensure that barriers to participation are removed for parents and that inclusion and equality are promoted. Information and resources about inclusion and equalities within the framework provided by Curriculum for Excellence, and Additional Support for Learning and Equalities legislation, are available from [Education Scotland](#).



## Activity 2: Parental involvement in our setting

Engaging with Families website has information that will support this activity <http://engagingwithfamilies.co.uk/strategy/evaluating-your-strategy/>



### Purpose

To measure where you are now in involving parents.

This activity should be repeated to measure progress and to consider how progress has been achieved

- a) Consider the following (you may want to work in pairs or small groups)
  - What do you consider to be effective parental involvement and engagement?
  - On a scale of 0-5 where are you in relation to involving your parents?  
0 = a lot of room for improvement  
5 = things are exactly how parents want them
  - Where on the scale would you want to be? Think about timescales
  - What does parental involvement look like in your setting?
  - What needs to change to move to where you want to be next?
  - What difference would this make to the partnership with parents, children and young people and practitioners?
  - How well do parents know about parental involvement and engagement in your school or setting?
  - How are your community partners involved in supporting parental involvement and engagement?

b) How effectively are you supporting your parents to become involved in their children's learning?

Think about this in terms of:

- Parental involvement opportunity/activity
- Success 0-5 (use same measures as above) to measure: raised attainment and achievement, positive children and young people attitudes, behaviour and attendance and encouraging parental participation, involvement and/or engagement.
- What made it successful (e.g. format, time, parental involvement in planning and decision making, multi-agency approach)?

c) Use this information to form the outcomes for parental involvement in your setting or local authority improvement plan. Share and discuss this information with your parents.

## Example 2

### Parental involvement at secondary school

A secondary school in Aberdeen has introduced drop-in surgeries which are held on a monthly basis. The head teacher is available for a number of hours during an evening or a Saturday morning. Parents can drop into the school to speak to the head teacher without having to make an appointment. If a problem or query crops up parents know that they will have an opportunity to take it up imminently. This enables them to overcome issues as soon as they occur. The flexibility makes it easier for working parents or parents with other commitments or child care issues to attend at convenient times.



## Example 3

### Supporting Gypsy and Traveller families

A primary school in Dunbartonshire supports Gypsy and Traveller families offering parents the chance to take worksheets and lessons with them when they travel away from the site for any length of time.

Due to the school facilities being so good, many parents will stay at the site for years to maximise their children's learning opportunities. Travelling lifestyle may require families to leave on a temporary basis. The school accommodates this by making home based lessons available for their time away. This helps the child return to the school without having missed out on their learning.

This school also accommodates integration by having books in the school library that deal with the Gypsy Traveller lifestyle.

# Challenges to parental involvement

Every parent wants the best for their children but may have difficulty in participating in some activities. This does not mean that parents are not interested or not involved in supporting their children's learning. It may mean that some parents find it difficult to be involved in the life of the setting.



## Activity 3: Challenges to parental involvement

### Purpose

To consider what challenges parents may face in becoming involved in their children's learning and how practitioners can address these challenges to support parents more effectively.

- a) Consider the key challenges in promoting parental involvement. Make a list.
- b) Which of the key challenges would you consider the most difficult to address in your setting? Why?
- c) Consider one or two of the key challenges.
  - What changes could be made to overcome challenges and promote parental involvement:
    - in your own practice?
    - in practice in your department?
    - in practice in the wider setting?

*The table of perceived barriers to parental involvement will be useful when completing Activities 3 and 4.*

Area	Challenge	Details
Supporting learning at home	Lack of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work commitments (shifts, working away from home)</li> <li>• single/lone parents</li> <li>• more than one child/child care arrangements</li> <li>• child with a disability</li> <li>• children attending different schools</li> <li>• new/complex family structures</li> </ul>
	Children's attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• educational activities v social/leisure activities</li> <li>• parents don't do it the same as the teacher</li> </ul>
	Parental attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• school's responsibility</li> <li>• their own lack of knowledge or skills puts them at a disadvantage</li> </ul>

	<b>Parental knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of knowledge about curriculum and methodologies</li> <li>• lack of guidance on supporting children’s learning at home, at different stages</li> <li>• parents have literacy difficulties</li> <li>• parents whose first language is not English</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting children’s learning in school and beyond the home</b>	<b>Lack of time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work commitments (shifts, working away from home)</li> <li>• single/lone parents</li> <li>• more than one child/child care arrangements</li> <li>• child with a disability</li> <li>• children attending different schools</li> <li>• new/complex family structures</li> <li>• lack of opportunities for more flexible/less frequent involvement</li> </ul>
	<b>Parental attitudes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• responsibility of school</li> <li>• commitment of one parent results in lack of involvement from the other parent</li> <li>• engaging fathers</li> <li>• negative consequences for children, eg. bullying</li> <li>• children become more dependent</li> <li>• brings back unpleasant memories of their own school experiences</li> <li>• fathers or male carers may feel that they don't have a role to play. They may also feel uncomfortable attending activities because these are mainly attended by females</li> <li>• no place for them in the school</li> </ul>
	<b>Children’s attitudes to parental involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• resistance to parental involvement</li> <li>• embarrassment</li> </ul>
	<b>Setting barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of opportunities for meaningful involvement</li> <li>• lack of information about opportunities to become involved</li> <li>• lack of flexibility of opportunities</li> <li>• lack of regular opportunities to discuss child’s progress</li> <li>• the setting is unwelcoming</li> <li>• lack of opportunity for social events</li> <li>• the setting’s lack of knowledge of parents’ skills and expertise and how these could support Curriculum for Excellence</li> <li>• lack of awareness of community-based activities</li> <li>• lack of awareness of different cultures and influences on family life</li> <li>• lack of awareness of family background or issues at home that are impacting on children’s learning</li> </ul>

	<b>Parental representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• resistance of parents to formal groups</li> <li>• lack of confidence when speaking in public forums</li> <li>• lack confidence that views are respected and valued</li> <li>• lack of opportunities for less formal opportunities to listen and share information</li> <li>• many parents feel that membership of a formal parent body is 'not for them'</li> <li>• they may perceive parent councils/bodies to be 'closed', cliquy', 'elitist' or 'formal'</li> <li>• do not see themselves as the right kind of person to be involved</li> <li>• English is not the parent's first language and they may be unaware of available support through translators</li> <li>• the parent may have additional support needs and feel that they can't be involved</li> </ul>
	<b>Specific barriers faced by some families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• families located remotely from school</li> <li>• parents with disabilities</li> <li>• setting's lack of awareness of different cultures and influences on family life</li> <li>• setting's lack of awareness of family background or issues at home that are impacting on children's learning</li> <li>• travelling distance to the school</li> <li>• difficulty with transport or have to walk through unsafe areas</li> <li>• children are being educated some distance from their home</li> <li>• young parents</li> </ul>

Adapted from Parents' Views on Improving Parental Involvement in Children's Education, <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2005/03/20759/53608> Chapter 7



# Successful parental involvement

Although there can be many challenges to getting parental involvement and engagement right, when practitioners involve the wider community, parents, wider family, children and young people, parental involvement and engagement is very rewarding for all concerned.

## What parental involvement can look like when things go well:



- The setting is a welcoming place with space for parents and clear indications that they are welcome and valued – e.g. a parents' room or welcome posters, possibly developed with parents, in the languages represented in the setting.
- There are opportunities for parents to meet with practitioners to discuss their children's progress at various times during the day, evening and possibly weekends.
- There is a whole setting approach to involving parents.
- Events and activities take account of any specific cultural or religious festivals that may affect the involvement of some parents.
- Parents are able to get actively involved at various times – in both regular (e.g. weekly commitments) and infrequent activities.
- Practitioners are aware of any particular difficulties a parent may have in participating in activities (e.g. through disability, access or language difficulties) and makes arrangements to provide appropriate support.
- Parents are asked when their child enrolls if there is anything that would help them get involved, e.g. translation, interpretation, childcare, transport.
- The Improvement Plan provides an opportunity for practitioners, parents and children and young people to have discussions about the different ways parents could be involved in setting activities and how these will be developed and supported.
- Childcare and/or transport is arranged (or paid for) for parents evenings, Parent Forum or Parent Council meetings or other events where some parents might need it.
- There are social events that build relationships between practitioners, parents, children and young

people.

- Parents are asked directly and personally to participate in a particular activity by the head teacher or class teacher.
- Parents are encouraged to get other parents involved – by bringing a friend or other family member.
- No parent is turned away if they volunteer to help and the skills and enthusiasm that parent volunteers bring are matched to the needs of the setting.
- There are activities that make it easy for families to take part and develop positive relationships with each other, practitioners and other families, e.g. outings, picnics, cultural events.
- Parents are encouraged to work in the setting alongside the practitioners to share their skills – presenting a story in two languages.
- Parents take on responsibility to support children and young people in a specific area of learning – outdoor play, cooking, paired reading, school library, supporting extra-curricular clubs.
- Parents feel able to approach practitioners for advice and support.

There are organisations who can support practitioners to increase their parental involvement as well as supporting parents themselves:

The National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) <http://www.npfs.org.uk/>  
Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC) <http://www.sptc.info/>



## Activity 4: Parents' skills and experiences



### Purpose

**To conduct a survey at a parents' meeting to identify the skills and experience parents have which they could offer at a time which is mutually convenient. You may wish to involve Parent Council members or other parent groups to talk to other parents.**

A sample parent survey is provided which can be adapted to suit the needs of your setting and parents. The survey is designed for an 'interviewer' to complete a one-to-one conversation with parents. A parents' meeting or another event might be good times to carry out the survey.

The survey could be extended to meet parents in places they feel comfortable. Visits to community groups, projects and family learning/adult learning events might help parents feel more at ease. Talking to parents when they drop their children off or pick them up from the setting can present another opportunity.

Once the survey has been completed the information can be used to work out ways to involve parents by asking them to share their skills and experience. Information about times, which are good for parents, will help with planning activities, events or meetings. This information can be linked into the improvement plan and parents can be involved in the self-evaluation process and in setting outcomes.

The survey should be repeated at various points to include parents who are new to the setting, as well as at transitions days.

## Sample parent survey

Name of School / Setting / logo

### Introduction

Hello.

I wonder if you could spare a few minutes. My name is ..... and I'm a member of the Parent Council, Parent Committee, or Parent Association. One of the things we do as a Parent Council is support the school by involving all parents as far as possible. We know that everyone is busy but it would really help us if you could answer a few questions about your interests and skills and whether you feel you have time to get involved in some way to support your child and all children at the school.

By answering this you are not making any commitment and you don't have to take part but it would really help us to plan activities for parents and children in the future. (If parents are unable to spend time at this point, offer them the form to fill in at home and return to school if this is what they would prefer.)

Could you tell me your name and which classes your child/children are in.

<b>Parent Name:</b>	<b>Child Class:</b>
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### Question 1

Do you think you have any particular interests, experiences or skills that could help the setting in any way? Use examples from School Improvement Plan (cooking, modern language, EAL).

#### Prompt

There may be things that you already do at home, cooking, DIY, sewing or craft activities, gardening, decorating.

There may be skills that you use at work, IT skills, typing, web design, catering.

You may have interests or hobbies, sports activities, or arts and music skills or interests that you could share.

### Question 2

We know that parents are very busy people but we would like to ask if you have any time that you could spare to support the school or support school activities. We are not looking for any long-term commitment but just to get an idea of what times suit people best.

What time would suit you best?

- Before school
- Immediately after school
- During the school day
- Evenings [If yes] start time finish time
- Weekends

Is there anything that would help you to be able to attend at a particular time – e.g. transport or childcare?

If you are interested in getting involved would you rather do something occasionally (say once a term) or could you make a more regular commitment?

How much time do you feel you would be able to offer – even ten minutes can be useful?

Thank you very much. One of the things we would like to do is to share this information with the school to help us to plan future activities. Are you happy for us to do this?

Yes

No

If yes could you please sign this form to show that you are happy for this information to be shared.

Are there any other comments or suggestions that you would like to make about the school or the Parent Council?

Signed .....

Thank you again.



## Example 4

### Bilingual reading club

Four primary schools which are part of a Learning Community in an area of Glasgow with a large number of minority ethnic families worked together to set up a Reading Club initiative for parents and children where English is not their first language. Regular afternoon reading clubs were held for parents and children with interpreters present to translate and support discussion with teachers. Themed storypacks with activities (games, soft toys, puppets) were provided in the families' own language and sessions were held emphasising the value of reading together at home. Other resources available included:

- Dual language books – fiction and non-fiction
- Dual language dictionaries – Urdu, Slovakian, Russian
- Translation and interpreting services

Many parents reported a benefit to their own learning and felt that their English improved. Mothers reported social benefits in meeting with other mothers, and a general improvement in their own relationships with their children. Practitioners said that they have developed a greater insight to and understanding of the needs of bilingual learners and parents. They can now enjoy much more positive, supportive relationships with bilingual parents.





## Activity 5: Supporting families who find it most difficult to become involved



Children growing up in poorer families tend to emerge from school with substantially lower levels of educational attainment. This is a major contributing factor to patterns of social mobility and poverty. The Engaging with Families website will be useful when completing this activity and to find out more from research in this area.

<http://engagingwithfamilies.co.uk/evidence/supporting-vulnerable-families/>

### Purpose

To find ways to involve/engage families that find it most difficult.

- a) Consider and discuss the following:
  - Some parents may see your setting as hard to reach.
  - Settings in some of the most deprived areas in Scotland recognise that without building relationships with families, the most disadvantaged children will be further disadvantaged.
  - Most parents feel unable to support their children's learning beyond practical terms, especially as their academic capabilities are limited once children reach secondary school. (Parents as partners: Harder to engage parents)
- b) How effective are you as a practitioner or a setting in supporting those families who find it most difficult to become involved in their children's learning?
- c) On a scale 0 – 5, how well do you support families finding it difficult to engage?
  - 0 = not supporting at all
  - 5 = doing all you can
- d) What activities could you and/or the setting undertake which would better support families?

If you have examples of good practice and would like to share with others, please use the [professional learning community on Glow](#) or share on the [Engaging with Families](#) website.

If you are a partner of Scottish education then contact [enquiries@glow.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@glow.gov.uk) to find out how Glow can work for you. You can also visit [Glow Connect](#) for more information





## Activity 6: Equal opportunities and diversity



### Purpose

To measure the level of inclusion and involvement of parents.

Consider the following reflective questions:

### Parents' circumstances

- How do parents whose first language is not English get information about their children's learning and about opportunities to get involved? (This includes parents who are deaf and use British Sign Language as well as people who use other spoken languages.)
- How are parents who have a disability made aware of support they can receive to get to the school and to other events such as consultation meetings?
- How practical is it for parents and practitioners to have access to aids and equipment, or to services such as translators, which will help them to communicate with each other?
- How are parents who find it difficult to come to the setting on their own made aware that they can bring a friend or relative who may be able to support them?
- What arrangements are in place for parents who have other daytime responsibilities to keep in touch with the settings?
- What encouragement and practical help is provided to help fathers become involved in learning?
- Is the environment welcoming for dads?
- How are both mothers and fathers encouraged to be involved in every aspect of parental involvement?
- What practical support is available to support parents who are living on their own with the children?
- How are parents made aware that their partner or a relative can represent them in situations where the involvement is specific to their role as the child's parent?

- How welcome are partners of parents made to feel about getting involved as volunteers at the setting, and be part of events to involve families, so that each child is there with their family?
- What arrangements are in place to make it easy for parents living in each part of the catchment area to be involved?
- How does the setting keep parents of children and young people who are temporarily absent from the school informed of activities?
- How does the setting take account of parents from armed forces families and ensure that the information they need is readily available?
- What arrangements are in place to fully involve and engage young parents in their children's learning and life of the setting?

### Children's circumstances

- Are the parents of children with additional support needs encouraged to take part in the same range of activities as the parents of other children?
- Are children who are looked after encouraged to identify the people who are taking on parenting roles for them and who they want to see being involved?



There are many organisations who will be able to provide support to settings, parents and families. These organisations have a wide variety of information, research and examples of practice that will be useful to practitioners when considering parental involvement

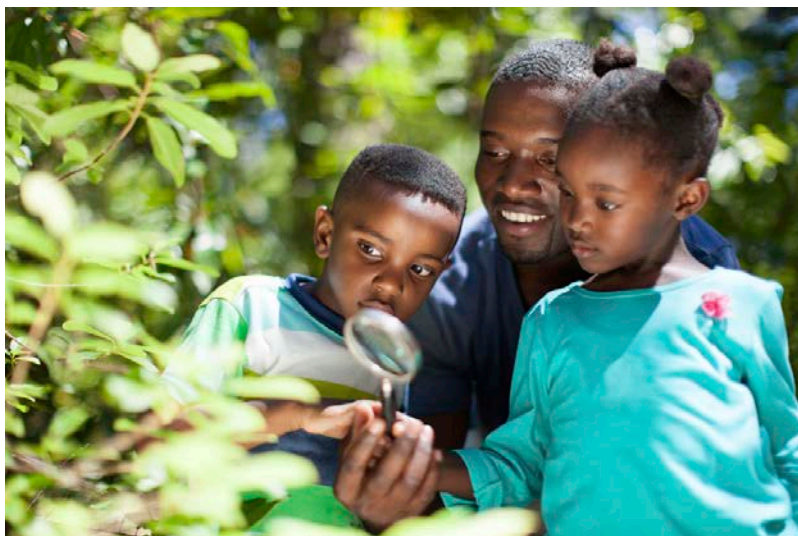
BEMIS <http://bemis.org.uk/>

Gathered Together <http://gatheredtogether.bemis.org.uk>

Enquire <http://enquire.org.uk/>

Enable [http://www.enable.org.uk/Pages/Enable\\_Home.aspx](http://www.enable.org.uk/Pages/Enable_Home.aspx)

## Involving fathers



Involving fathers in children's outcomes extends to their engagement in their children's learning. However, there continues to be a relative scarcity of father-specific evaluations, reviews, and services, as most of the programmes and literature specifies 'parents'. Fathers reported the following as barriers to involvement in parenting support services and parental/family engagement in learning programmes: work commitments; a lack of awareness of services offered; a lack of organisational support; and concerns over the content of the services (Passey 2012; Goodall and Vorhaus 2011; Bayley et al 2009).

Fathers are less likely to get involved with their children's education than mothers. One Ipsos MORI family learning survey revealed 68% of mothers read with children compared to 54% of fathers (Grant 2009). Visit the Engaging with Families website for more information relating to fathers

<http://engagingwithfamilies.co.uk/evidence/engaging-with-fathers/>

Some settings have developed successful programmes for involving fathers that are not based on the traditional models of activity based family learning. Examples include:

- Engagement with individual fathers about their child's/children's learning and behaviour
- Open House events for fathers, Dads into School days, Dads breakfasts, Dads lunches and 'celebrate Father's Day' evenings
- Making use of father specific skills to support work in the classroom and also to support children in a mentoring capacity
- Father-support networks and adult learning programmes for fathers as part of an 'extended school' programme.



## Activity 7: Engaging fathers

### Purpose

To measure how well settings involve fathers in their children's learning

- a) How well do we involve and engage fathers? Using the scale 0 – 5
  - 0 – a lot of room for improvement
  - 5 – doing everything we can
- b) How do we know? What evidence do we have?
- c) What will we do to move up the scale even just one place?

### Consider the following reflective questions

- Do we specifically target our information about expectations, activities, and event invitations to the child's father, especially when we are aware of their role in the family (eg. as lone parent or primary caregiver)?
- Do we begin any specific targeting for paternal engagement from day one or do we wait until there appears to be a problem or barrier to the child's learning?
- Do we gather and listen to fathers' experiences, views, and knowledge in order to integrate them with our educational services and programmes?
- Are fathers' contributions to their children's learning fully understood, including alternative forms of involvement that are not traditional or typically associated with mothers' activities?

There are other organisations that will provide more information on fathers impact on their children's learning.

Families Need Fathers <http://www.fnf.org.uk>

Fathers Network Scotland <http://www.fathersnetwork.org.uk>



## Example 5

### Boys Night

The headteacher at St Patrick's Primary School in Falkirk Council had recognised the need to increase fathers' engagement in their boys' learning. In partnership with the Parent Council, a Boys Night was organised. This gave not only fathers, but other male carers the opportunity to come into school with the boys to have fun while learning new skills and how to better support learning at home. This increased their confidence, skills and knowledge as well as building better relationships with the children and the school staff.

### Other examples

If you have examples of good practice and would like to share with others, please use the [professional learning community on Glow](#) or share on the [Engaging with Families](#) website.

If you are a partner of Scottish education then contact [enquiries@glow.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@glow.gov.uk) to find out how Glow can work for you. You can also visit [Glow Connect](#) for more information



# Parents and carers of looked after children

Looked after children and young people face barriers to achieving success in education. A child who is looked after may be cared for in their own home, or in a foster home, residential unit or residential school. The guidance for the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 states, “Children who are looked after should have the same educational opportunities as all other children”. In order to achieve this, it is vital that schools are aware of the children in their school who are looked after and that they keep in contact with the appropriate parent or carer. Additionally, children who are looked after are deemed to have additional support needs (ASN) under the Education Additional Support for Learning Act (Scotland) 2004 as amended. This means that local authorities must treat looked after children and young people as if they have an additional support needs (ASN) until they are assessed as not having such needs or requiring a Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP).

Enquire Parents’ guide to Additional Support for Learning has more information on this:

<http://enquire.org.uk/publications/parents-guide>

A strong home-school partnership is critical to narrowing the attainment gap for looked after children, and this partnership must often include the state as the parent (Wigley 2011; Fernandez 2008). Looked after children’s lives often lack stability, carers, educators, and any agency workers must all work together strategically to support their learning (Zetlin et al 2010). Additionally, when a child or young person experience of learning is positive, the learning environment and the educational process can offer structure, boundaries and security to looked after children (Wigley 2011; Zetlin et al 2010).

The wellbeing of children in care can present particular difficulties, as a significant number of children come from deprived and disadvantaged backgrounds compounded by neglect, maltreatment and domestic violence.

To ensure that looked after children and young people get the most out of their education it is vital that all practitioners and parents work together for planning. There should be clear information about who is involved, this may include their foster carer and their parent and who is taking responsibility for the planning. The Children and Young People Act (2014) has made provision for every child and young person in Scotland to have a named person.

*“Unless there are strong reasons against it, parents in contact with their children should receive regular information about their children’s progress in school, including end-of-session reports.”*

Learning with Care, HMIE, March 2001



## Activity 8: Parent and carers of looked after children and young people

### Purpose

**To measure the support and impact on children and young people when parents and carers are involved in their learning.**

Engaging with Families

<http://engagingwithfamilies.co.uk/evidence/looked-after-children-and-their-carers/>

Enquire

<http://enquire.org.uk/publications/briefings/looked-after-children>

Consider the following reflective questions. You should refer to the following for more information and research.

- How regular is our communication with carers and agency workers and do we all exchange relevant information about the progress and possible problems of our looked after children?
- How do we encourage looked after children, their parents/carers, and our practitioners to possess high educational expectations and aspirations for their achievement and attainment?
- How do we provide advice and support to carers on strategies and methods to best engage in learning in the home setting?
- How are our records of information about children and young people's personal details kept up to date and accurate?
- How good are our procedures for keeping contact details for parents, residential staff, foster carers, relatives and social workers up to date and accurate? Do you know which of these contacts is your primary contact (as identified in the child or young person's care plan)?
- What systems are in place to ensure these records are treated sensitively and confidentially?
- How do we consult and communicate with parents, social workers, foster and relative carers and others?
- How do we link with carers to provide information and support to looked after young people on issues such as careers, further and higher education, and funding for education/training?
- How do we involve relative carers, foster carers and residential staff and others in making decisions?
- How do we support carers to ensure there are suitable arrangements for study and completing homework?
- How do our arrangements ensure we include relative carers, foster carers and residential staff? Are invitations and communications handled sensitively?

Local authority reflective questions when working with looked after children and young people:

- How does the authority ensure relative carers, foster carers, residential staff and social workers, etc. are involved in developing and reviewing the Strategy for Parental Involvement?
- How does the authority facilitate communication between settings, social work services, carers and parents?
- What guidance is given to settings on liaising with carers and the parents of looked after children and young people?
- What guidance is given to parents of looked after children, relative carers, foster carers, residential staff and social workers on liaising with practitioners?
- What guidance or advice is given to social work staff and carers on supporting the learning of the children or young people in their care? For example through encouraging home learning, providing areas for study, provision of books and IT equipment or knowledge of education system.
- Have all looked after children been assessed to establish whether they have additional support needs (ASN) and require a Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP)?
- What arrangements are in place to support a child or young person's additional support needs while further assessment is being carried out?

Although these reflective questions have been highlighted here specifically regarding looked after children and young people, they can be used to reflect on practice with all parents in different settings.



## Example 6

### Support for looked after children

One authority, which had a high percentage of its looked after children in residential care, made considerable efforts to make their residential units educationally rich environments. All the children had access to computers and special programs were purchased for children with learning difficulties. Children were encouraged to be library members and there was a wide range of books available.

Another local authority operates a tutoring support service for its looked after and accommodated children and young people. Due to its success, they are expanding the service to include children and young people who are looked after at home.

Many local authorities have created educational support positions for looked after children. These may include learning/behaviour support assistant, outreach teachers and/or educational psychologists for looked after children. They work with, provide support to and liaise between looked after children, parents, carers, schools and social work services, amongst others. They deal with a range of common issues including loss, trauma, attendance, exclusion, achievement and attainment.

# Involving ethnic and cultural minority parents

The Scottish Government has:

*“a continuing commitment to achieving a fairer Scotland in which there are opportunities for all to flourish... We have an ambition for an equal and just Scotland... This is why we maintain our strong commitment to equality across all that we do.”*

**John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth. (Scottish Government Draft Budget 2014-15)<sup>1</sup>**

It is important that schools are working to support ethnic and cultural minority parents to become more involved in their children’s education and the school community. According to the 2011 Census, 7% of people over 3 years old living in Scotland use a language other than English at home.

## Challenges for ethnic and cultural minority parents

Research and workshops have been carried out to find out what barriers parents with English as their second language faced when becoming involved in supporting their children’s learning at home or school. More information can be found on the Gathered Together website as well as other information that schools should use when working to increase parental involvement



### Activity 9: Engaging with ethnic and cultural minority parents

#### Purpose

**To highlight the difficulties faced by ethnic and cultural parents and what we put into place to break these down to encourage confidence and involvement of all parents in children’s learning.**

Consider these reflective questions

- What barriers to supporting learning might parents from ethnic and cultural minorities face?
- How do you communicate with parents whose first language is not English?
- What do you do to support parents from other cultures to understand the Scottish curriculum?
- How do you support parents to build their own confidence in engaging with their children's learning?

#### Example 7

#### Involving parents whose first language is not English



Gathered Together have examples of good practice from schools working with parents whose first language is not English. Examples can be accessed here <http://gatheredtogether.bemis.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Involving-All-Parents-Report-on-Work-with-Parent-Councils.pdf>

## Parents whose children have additional support needs



Parents play an important role in supporting their children's achievement and education and their overall experience. Parents have a unique expert knowledge about their children, which they should share and practitioners should draw upon, at every stage. Parents who have children with additional support needs can often feel excluded or isolated. It is vital that practitioners ensure parents are involved in their children's learning and the life of the setting in ways that suit their needs. You will find more information on [Enquire](#) and [Education Scotland's website](#).

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