

FAMILIES CONNECT



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Save the Children is committed to ensuring that every child reaches their full potential. Evidence tells us that a positive home learning environment contributes to a child's readiness to learn and has a positive impact on children's educational outcomes. Many families have told us they would like to support their children in their learning but do not know how to or do not have the confidence or assurance that what they are doing is helpful. Based on this feedback Save the Children has developed Families Connect to provide guidance to parents and carers¹ and support them to create a home environment that enhances and promotes learning.

The programme provides a series of activities, techniques and games that parents and carers can practice with their children in order to consider how they can introduce these into their own home environments. The programme recognises the role parents play in the education of their children and the value of creating a home environment that is conducive to learning.

Families Connect is unique in that it focuses on three key areas:

1. Social and emotional development
2. Literacy and language development
3. Numeracy and mathematics

Families Connect uses play as the vehicle for learning and interaction with parents and between parents and their children. No other family learning programme provides support in these three areas together.

Programme aims

Families Connect aims to:

- Stimulate the Home Learning Environment, including increasing the confidence and skills of parents and carers and enhancing the activities they do together with their children and their knowledge of how they support learning
- Model how to approach, engage and work with families (parental engagement)
- Create opportunities for schools and parents to build relationships

The final intended outcome of Families Connect is to ensure that children living in poverty will have a greater chance of reaching their potential and do better at school.

Programme expectations

Families Connect is a programme that enables parents to discuss ideas about how to support their children's learning and provides opportunities to test out activities that can be used at home. Families Connect is not an opportunity for school and other practitioners to advise parents on parenting or their relationship with their child.

Whilst the content of the sessions can be related to what children learn at school, Families Connect is not intended to replicate the classroom at home but to introduce fun activities that complement formal learning.

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The Home Learning Environment

Parenting practices such as reading to children, using complex language, responsiveness, and warmth in interactions are all associated with better developmental outcomesⁱⁱ. Stimulating activities may enhance development by helping children with specific skills (for example, linking letters to sounds), but also, and perhaps most importantly, by developing the child’s ability and motivation concerned with learning generally.

Numerous respected studies have found that the activities parents do with their children at home have a greater impact on their child’s attainment at school than socio-economic status or parents’ education. These activities make up the Home Learning Environment, which can include:

- Reading together
- Painting and drawing
- Going to the library
- Being taught numbers
- Being taught songs, poems and rhymes
- Being taught lettersⁱⁱⁱ
- Playing with numbers
- Home computing
- Parent-child activities outside the home
- Parent-child one-to-one interactions at home
- Expressive play^{iv}

“For all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. What parents do is more important than who parents are.”^v

Families Connect aims to stimulate the Home Learning Environment by introducing play-based activities that can be easily applied at home and that complement children’s learning in school.

Programme design

Families Connect is designed for parents and carers with at least one child who is aged between four to six years old. Ten families attend a series of two-hour workshops delivered in school over eight weeks. The timings of the workshops are flexible to meet parents’ needs. Parents attend some elements of the workshop by themselves and some with their children. See *Workshop Structure* for further guidance.

The programme’s design is based on evidence that activities such as parent-child conversations, numbers games and storytelling are significantly associated with better than expected achievement at age five taking into account social and demographic factors. To ensure the workshops have the maximum impact on children’s education, each of the modules has been written by an expert in their field:

| Module | Workshop Theme | Consultant |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Social and emotional development | Week 1: Focus on Feelings Week 2: The Importance of Praise Week 3: The Importance of Listening | Julie Casey, an educational psychologist who co-developed the SEAL Programme (Social Emotional Aspects of Learning). |
| Literacy and language development | Week 4: Book Talk Week 5: Beyond the Page | The National Literacy Trust is a national charity dedicated to raising literacy levels in the UK. |
| Numeracy and mathematics | Week 6: The Importance of Counting Week 7: Number Talk | Edgehill University pioneered the maths intervention programme Every Child Counts, targeted interventions in schools to help boost attainment in mathematics. |
| | Week 8: Celebration and Evaluation | |

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Families Connect:

- Is not curriculum specific
- Assumes parents and carers have a basic level of literacy and numeracy (i.e. it will not teach parents basic skills)
- Takes an inclusive approach, providing alternatives to activities where literacy levels are low or English is not the first language
- Does not assume families have any resources at home. Each activity advocated will be 'resource light' and provided by the programme
- Encourages a sense of celebrating what parents and carers are already doing and share knowledge and experience between each other

Families Connect seeks to remove barriers to families' attendance by encouraging the provision of additional childcare for participating children when they are not participating with their parents and for other siblings.

Expected impact and programme outcomes

The intended long term effects of Families Connect are that children will have a greater chance of achieving their potential and doing better at school as their parents will do more in the home to support their education. We will do this by developing the skills and confidence of the parents and carers who take part in Families Connect, and provide them with the resources needed to actively engage their children in learning in the home.

Intended outcomes for children:

- Improvements in child's softer skills in regards to education and motivation to learn
- Improvements in child's social and emotional skills
- Improvements in child's communication skills
- Improvements in child's interest in and understanding of literacy and numeracy

Intended outcomes for parents:

- Improvements in parent/child communication
- Increase in understanding and empathy for their child's learning
- Increase in parental motivation to support their child's learning
- Increase in parent's confidence in supporting their child's learning
- Increase in communication between parents and school

Intended outcomes for schools:

- Increase in parental engagement in the school community (including social capital)
- Strengthening of relationships between the school and parents
- Positive changes within the school environment

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References

- i. For brevity, the term 'parents' is used throughout this guidance to refer to the child's primary care giver.
- ii. Bradley, R and Corwyn, R (2002). *Socioeconomic status and child development*. Center for Applied Studies in Education, University of Arkansas at Little Rock
- iii. Sylva, K, Melhuish, E, Sammons, P, Siraj-Blatchford, I and Taggart, B (2003), *The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-school to end of Key Stage 1*. University of Oxford, Birkbeck, University of London, University of Nottingham and Institute of Education, University of London
- iv. Sylva, K, Melhuish, E, Sammons, P, Siraj-Blatchford, I and Taggart, B (2008). *Final Report from the Primary Phase: Pre-school, School and Family Influences on Children's Development During Key Stage 2 (Age 7-11)*. University of Oxford, Birkbeck, University of London, University of Nottingham and Institute of Education, University of London
- v. Sylva et al, 2003