

Working Together

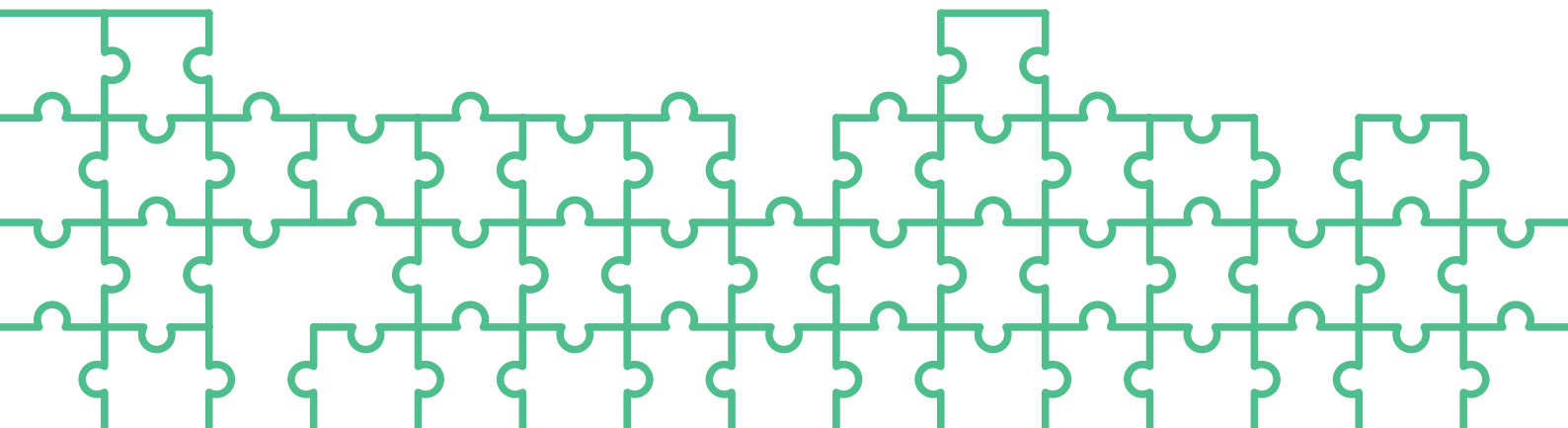
Supporting positive communication between education professionals and parents and carers of children with additional support needs



Module 7

Providing information and support for parents

This module will help you consider what information and practical supports parents need





Background

“Trying to understand everything felt like information overload. Having someone guide me through it and answer my questions made the world of difference”

Parent

“Receiving extra support helped me to become more confident”

Parent

Why do parents need information and support?

Families come in all shapes and sizes. We know from our work with parents of children with additional support needs that not everyone has positive support networks they can rely on for practical advice and emotional support.

It can be complicated and challenging for parents to get to grips with a child's additional support needs. Some parents may struggle with the emotional impact of finding out their child requires additional support. Others may have difficulty understanding the systems and procedures connected with additional support for learning.

Without appropriate information, support and guidance, it can be difficult for parents to focus on being fully involved in their child's learning and/or the wider life of the setting or school.

There are a range of factors that can affect how confident parents feel to engage with their child's learning. These include:

- Parents may be unfamiliar with the Scottish education system, and unaware of their rights and their child's rights
- Parents may have had a negative experience of school themselves and not believe schools have changed
- Parents may be dealing with additional personal challenges – for example, English may not be their first language, they may be experiencing mental health challenges or have their own disability. This can cause communication barriers and make them feel isolated
- Parents may have experienced discrimination from parts of their local community and feel reluctant to reach out or put their trust in other adults (including education professionals).

It is impossible to identify the unique challenges all parents face but trying to understand their circumstances and establishing what level of support and information parents want and need is an important part of helping them to engage fully in their child's learning.



Film: Listen to this Principal Teacher of English as an Additional Language talk about his experience of working with and providing support for families



Duration:
6 mins 15 secs

Film: Listen to this charity worker talk about the impact receiving support can have for parents

Duration:
4 mins 58 secs



How did these videos make you feel?

What key elements stood out for you?

How do you think receiving tailored support benefits families?

Evidence & information



Parents' rights to access information and support

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 states that parents, schools, and communities have a shared role and responsibility in educating children. Parents have the right to receive clear advice and information about their child's education and general information about the school. Parents must be told about meetings involving their child, and given information about how to participate in activities, such as taking part in the Parent Council and decision-making.

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 Statutory Guidance recognises that “the better the information that schools provide to parents, the more parents can support their children’s learning and the school”.

Parents of children with additional support needs continue to highlight the positive difference that feeling informed, listened to and supported has made to their confidence in talking to the school.

As covered in Module 5, parents have stressed the importance of meaningful relationships when receiving information and support from education professionals. They have said that having a key contact who they can turn to for advice, guidance and information makes a big difference.

Parents have also highlighted the benefits of receiving tailored information. For many parents, caring for a child who requires additional support for learning, the quantity of information can sometimes be overwhelming. Providing tailored information can help support parents to feel more confident, empowered, and willing to engage with education staff.

Translated information and British Sign Language

Being bilingual or multilingual can have many benefits for children. However, if parents are struggling to communicate with a school or early learning and childcare setting because of their own English proficiency, this can negatively affect a child’s learning.



The majority of education authorities in Scotland provide key information leaflets for parents in various languages. Education authorities also provide appropriate translating and interpreting services to help schools engage with parents. Local English as an Additional Language (EAL) services can also play a key role in supporting families who migrate to the country, enabling access to the curriculum, signposting practical support and helping families to develop their English.

The Scottish Government’s **British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan 2017-2023** has identified a number of actions to support parents who use BSL. This will help them to have the same opportunities as other parents and to be fully involved in their child’s education

Where can parents go for help?

In addition to receiving support and guidance from staff at your setting and the local education authority, a range of organisations and services are available to provide information and support for parents.

Enquire is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. It provides direct information for parents and carers and can advise education professionals about creating information for parents.

ENQUIRE

Many national and local charities can also provide free advice about conditions, guidance and services to parents of children with additional support needs. You can find out more in the '**resources**' part of this toolkit.

What is advocacy and how does it help parents?

An advocate is someone who can speak up for a parent to have their voice heard.

Advocacy means supporting another person to communicate their views and opinions. Advocacy can be helpful if a parent is facing a challenging, stressful or complicated situation to make sure that their views are understood and considered.

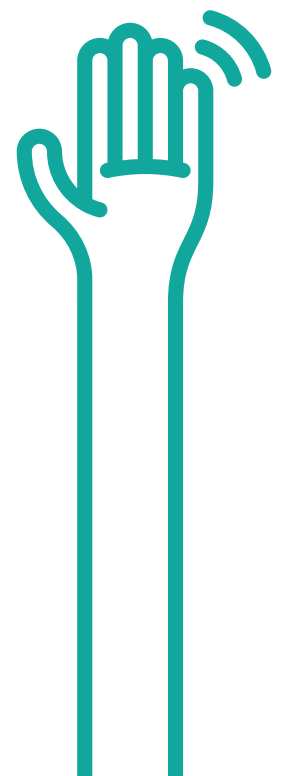
Many parents find it difficult to speak about their child's additional support needs. As highlighted above, this can be influenced by a range of factors including previous negative experiences of working with professionals, a parent's confidence levels and other practical barriers (like a parent who struggles with reading and writing).

Advocates can play an important role supporting parents, and they act independently from the school or education setting. Advocates can attend meetings with parents, and they can also help with follow-up communications and the development of plans. If you don't already know, you may want to find out what advocacy services are available in local authority.

Children also have a right to advocacy

It is vital to remember that children have a right to advocacy too! All children have the right to share their views about the extra help they get in school and for these views to be considered when decisions are being made about their support.

Children with additional support needs aged between 12 and 15 have specific rights to be involved in decisions about their education and support. **My Rights, My Say** is a free, national service that was created to ensure children have their voices heard. The service includes children's views workers, advocacy workers and legal advisers who are specialists in children's rights and additional support for learning. The service also provides advice and support to education staff to help them involve young people in decision-making.



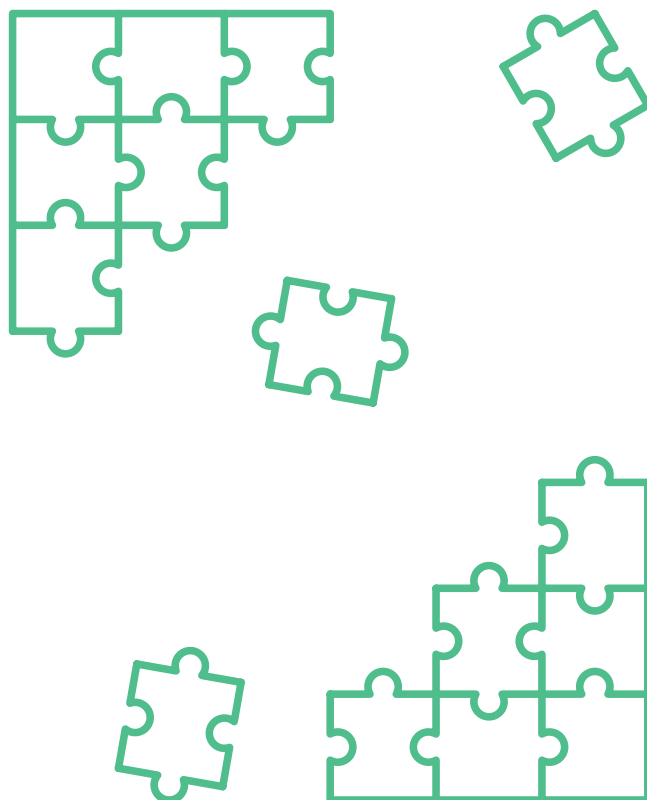


Practice reflection

Reflective questions

Answer these reflective questions about the support and information your setting provides to parents.

1. What information about support does your setting provide to parents of children with additional support needs? For example, do you have a section about additional support for learning on your school website? Do you signpost parents to relevant local or national organisations?
2. How do parents know who to talk to about their child's additional support needs?
3. Do structured support networks for parents exist within your educational setting (for example, through the Parent Council or an Additional Support Needs parent peer support group)?
4. Is there an agreed process for checking that parents have the information they need?

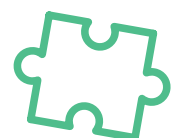




Providing information and support for parents

Key points to consider:

- > **Provide support and information when a child's additional support needs are first identified** – Parents have highlighted this as a crucial time, when information can feel overwhelming and they experience a range of emotions. Parents want friendly, personal support from the school or education setting. They may already have multiple relationships across the setting, so ensuring they have one key contact can help.
- > **Share information about services that may be able to help families** – Supporting parents to feel informed and knowledgeable will help them feel included and enable them to engage in the planning discussions with staff at your setting. Supporting parents to access information and helping them to understand their rights can also help build trust between parents and professionals.
- > **Try to provide tailored information** – Navigating the range of additional support for learning information available can be overwhelming. Providing tailored recommendations to parents can help overcome this. This could be information about specific support needs or signposting to organisations or services that may be able to provide specialist advice. Always make sure you have checked a resource is relevant before recommending it to a parent. A list of useful resources for parents has been provided with these modules.
- > **Be clear about the approaches in your local authority or education setting** – Remember, each local authority and each education setting has their own approach to additional support for learning. Referring parents to your School Handbook and local authority website can help parents understand what happens in the local area. If doing this, take time to point out specific sections or webpages that might be particularly relevant to parents.
- > **Share information about services that may be able help families** – A range of independent services exist to provide advice and support to parents of children with additional support needs. Enquire: the Scottish advice and information service for additional support for learning, provides advice to both parents and professionals, helping families and education settings to work in partnership. Local and national charities can also provide practical support to parents and specific information about their child's support needs and families' rights.
- > **Structured support networks can be of great benefit to parents of children with additional support needs** – Groups like a Parent Council or an additional support for learning parent group can help parents to voice their opinions, share their experiences and benefit from important peer-to-peer support.





Consider the following **scenarios** and the prompt questions for each situation. Make notes about the key issues and how you would respond.



Michael's parents are from Nigeria, but they settled in Scotland when he was five. Michael is now seven and he has recently moved to your school. Michael struggles with his reading and writing which he finds frustrating, and you believe he requires additional support to help him progress. Michael seems happy at the school, but you noticed that he is having some difficulty making new friends and he spends most of his breaks on his own. You have noticed that Michael often comes to school underdressed or in inappropriate clothes. What factors do you need to consider in this situation? What steps do you take to ensure Michael's family are supported and they have the information they need?



Kyla is 13. Her father and mother were separated, but her father passed away two months ago. At first Kyla seemed to be coping well but you have noticed that every week she is becoming more and more withdrawn in your classes. How do you progress this issue? What are important things to consider when thinking about engaging with Kyla's mum and how to support Kyla appropriately?



Dylan is two years old and is in nursery half the week. His mum, Kelly, rarely visits the nursery and he is often dropped off by his granny. One of the workers recently attended a training session and she suspects that Dylan may have Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, although there has never been any formal diagnosis. As the setting works to ensure Dylan has the right support, what are the key issues that should be considered in ensuring Dylan's mum is fully involved, informed and supported?

Things to consider:

Michael:

- As Michael is new to the school, what is currently in place to welcome him and his family into the school community?
- What level of contact does the school and staff members currently have with Michael's family?
- What support is Michael receiving at home for his learning?
- What are the communication needs of Michael's parents?
- Is the family currently receiving support from statutory services or charities?

Kyla:

- What are the key issues or observations you've made?
- Which staff members have been working with Kyla since her father passed away (e.g. guidance teachers, head of year, etc), and what supports, if any, are already in place?
- Kyla's mum has also experienced a bereavement which may be affecting her in different ways. What support is Kyla's mum receiving?
- Are any of your colleagues in direct contact with Kyla's mum?
- Are there any external organisations that you could look to for support in this situation?

Dylan:

- What contact does the setting have with Dylan's mum Kelly? Nothing can progress without Kelly's permission.
- What interaction and relationships do staff at the setting have with other members of Dylan's family? Is the relationship with Dylan's granny a positive one?
- What is the plan to discuss concerns with Dylan's mum?

Always remember:



- Avoid stereotyping and making negative assumptions about families.
- Speak to other members of staff to gather information or to discuss concerns
- Always look for a family's strengths and supportive factors
- Make a plan with colleagues about how to progress any issues identified with parents.

Next steps



- Explore what information your school or setting provides to parents. Is there a School Handbook that covers additional support for learning? What information about additional support for learning is available on your settings' website and social media pages?
- Explore the information and support services available to parents of children with additional support for learning needs in your local authority. What information is available and easily accessible for parents?
- Visit the **Enquire** website to find additional information and tips on supporting parents.