

British Sign Language (BSL) Toolkit for Practitioners

Section 3

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3. Terms and Definitions

The following terms and definitions have been taken from the [Engaging parents and families: A toolkit for practitioners](#), [Deaf Research Report](#), and 'Understanding Deaf Culture: In search of Deafhood' (Ladd, 2003). The Toolkit was developed to provide practitioners with a practical resource to help support partnerships with parents and families in all aspects of their child's and their own learning. The various sections in the Toolkit can be used in all educational settings by early learning and childcare practitioners, teachers, parental involvement officers, family learning practitioners, community learning and development teams, family support and home-school link workers, third sector and national organisations who work with BSL families. The 'Engaging parents and families: A toolkit for practitioners' should be used alongside this Toolkit for practitioners working with British Sign Language users.

3.1 Terms

'British Sign Language' (BSL) - is the preferred language of over 87,000¹ Deaf people in the UK for whom English may be a second or third language. Sign languages are fully functional and expressive languages; at the same time they differ profoundly from spoken languages. BSL is a visual-gestural language with a distinctive grammar using handshapes, facial expressions, gestures and body language to convey meaning (Definition taken from the [British Deaf Association](#) website).

'British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015' – Act requiring public bodies to set out how they will promote the use of British Sign Language.

'BSL Awareness' – is a programme of awareness which focuses on the language of BSL, culture, identity and Deaf community.

'Child' - For the purposes of support for children and families, 'child' means a person under the age of 18 years. 'Family', in relation to a child, includes any person who has parental responsibility for a child and any other person with whom the child has been living (Children (Scotland) Regulations, 1995).

'Corporate parenting' is defined in the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act](#) (2014) as 'the formal and local partnerships between all services responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers'. Throughout the Toolkit the term 'care experienced' will be used to denote looked after children and young people and care leavers to ensure a more inclusive definition.

'Deaf' - a cultural and visual way of being. It relates to being a visually oriented person and user of a signed language such as BSL.

The lowercase **'deaf'** refers to those for whom deafness is primarily an audio-logical experience. It is also used to describe those who lost some or all of their hearing in early or later life, but whose first or preferred language is English.

Whereas, the uppercase **'Deaf'** refers to those born Deaf or become deaf in early (sometimes late) childhood, for whom the sign languages, communities and cultures of Deaf collective represents their primary experience.

'Deafblind' - Deafblindness is the loss of sight and hearing to the point where communication, mobility and ability to access information are impacted. It affects everyone differently ([Deafblind UK | Supporting Deafblindness in the UK](#)).

'Deaf culture' – The term 'Deaf culture' was developed in the 1970s to give utterance to the belief that Deaf communities contained their own ways of life mediated through their sign languages (Ladd, 2003). Deaf culture has in fact a history which expands over hundreds of years.

¹ The latest figures from [Scotland's Census](#) (2022) were not available at the time of printing. However, the Census now includes questions on British Sign Language.



'Deaf community' – The community of visually oriented Deaf people sharing a common signed language like BSL and common cultural references and experiences. Further information about Deaf community can be found [here](#).

'Deaf organisation' – A loose term that can refer to an organisation or charity led by Deaf BSL signers.

'Parents' - refers to people with parental responsibilities (within the meaning of section 1(3) of the [Children \(Scotland\) Act](#) 1995) and others who care for or look after children or young people. A person with 'parental responsibilities' refers to someone with the rights and responsibilities that parents have in law for their child. Individual family units will comprise a wider range of people who might also contribute to a child's learning at home.

'Interpreter'

- **'BSL/English Interpreter'** – an interpreter of BSL into English and vice-versa
- **'Tactile BSL Interpreter'** – an interpreter for Deafblind BSL users

'Tactile BSL' – is a method of communicating using touch that is used by some children who are deaf and blind. The Deafblind child places their hands over those of the signer to follow what is being communicated through touch and movement. This is sometimes called 'hand over hand', 'hands-on signing' or 'tracking'. The signs are based on British Sign Language (BSL) and it includes the Deafblind manual alphabet, which is based on the BSL fingerspelling alphabet. **This method is particularly used by Deaf children and young people who used BSL as their first language before losing their vision.**

3.2 Definitions

3.2.1 Parental involvement

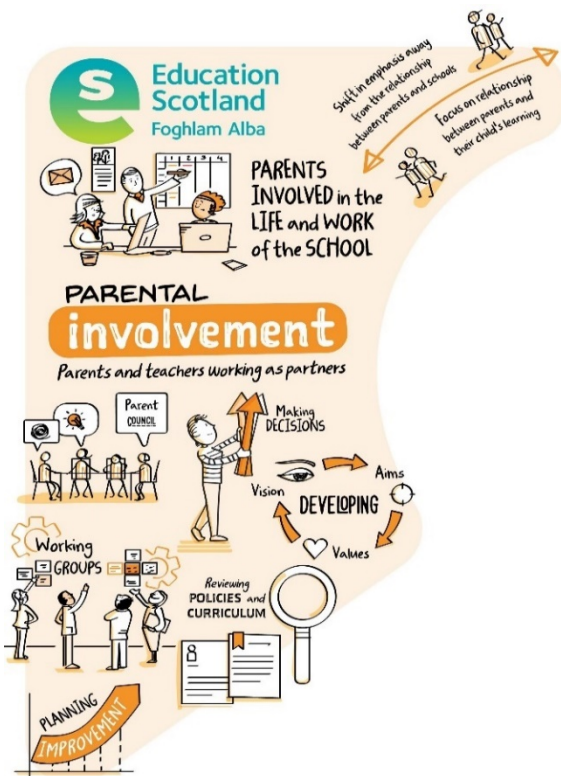
'Parental involvement is about supporting pupils and their learning. It is about parents and teachers working together in partnership to help children become more confident learners.'

(Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act Guidance, 2006)

'Parental involvement' is not a clearly or consistently defined term in literature. It has been described as:

- representing many different parental behaviours;
- parenting practices such as parental aspirations for their child's academic achievement;
- parental communication with their children about school;
- parental participation in school activities;
- parental communications with teachers about their child; and
- parental rules at home which are considered to be education-related.

(Harris and Goodall, 2007).



The range of definitions implies that parental involvement is multifaceted in nature because it subsumes a wide variety of parental behavioural patterns and parenting practices.

While there are no universally recognised definitions of 'parental involvement' in Scottish education, the term most often focuses on parents getting involved in the life and work of the establishment.

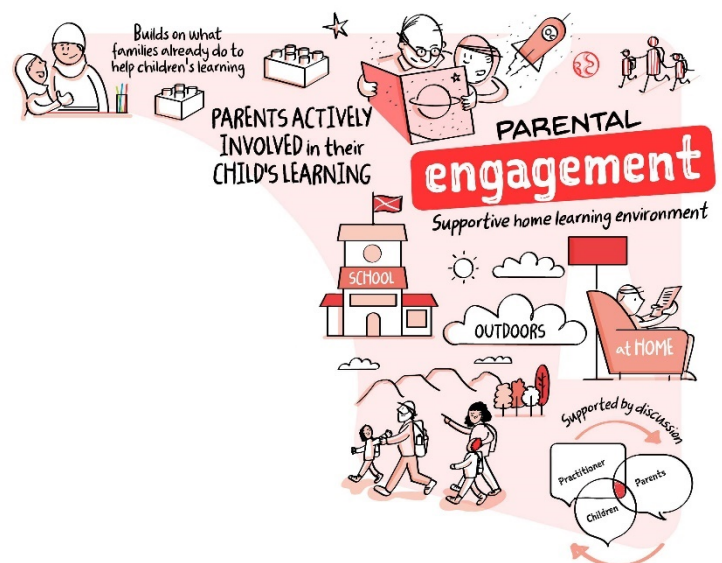
Early learning and childcare settings and schools involve parents by encouraging on-going, two-way communication between home and the establishment. They make sure parents views are represented and they have opportunities to contribute to improvement and decisions that affect the establishment as well as using the skills of parents to enrich the curriculum.

3.2.2 Parental engagement

Parental engagement can be considered as active involvement in learning. Such learning can take place in a variety of settings including:

- early learning and childcare settings (ELC);
- schools;
- the community;
- through family learning; and
- at home.

(Goodall and Montgomery, 2014)



'Parental engagement' most often refers to parents actively and meaningfully engaging in their children's learning (Harris and Goodall, 2007; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Such learning can take place in a variety of settings including early learning and childcare, schools, the community, through family learning and learning at home. Parental engagement is supported by discussion between parents and practitioners. It focuses on how families can build upon what they already do to support their children's learning and provide a supportive home learning environment. Parental engagement represents a greater 'commitment, ownership of action' than parental involvement within educational settings such as early learning and childcare and schools.

It is recognized, however, that there is a continuum between parental involvement and parental engagement. The movement between the two represents a 'shift in emphasis, away from the relationship between parents and schools, to a focus on the relationship between parents and their children's learning' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Defining what is parental involvement and what is parental engagement is not always easy. Regardless of whether parents are involved with the wider life of the school or engaged in their children's learning, they can make a positive difference.

3.2.3 Family learning

Family Learning encourages family members to learn together as and within a family, with a focus on intergenerational learning. Family learning activities can also be specifically designed to enable parents to learn how to support their children's learning. 'Family learning is a powerful method of engagement and learning which can foster positive attitudes towards life-long learning, promote socio-economic resilience and challenge educational disadvantage'.

(Family Learning Network, 2016)



Family learning is an approach to engaging families in learning outcomes that have an impact on the whole family. In order to support a consistent understanding of family learning, Education Scotland has published a number of documents, reports and case studies on the [National Improvement Hub](#) and resources such as 'I am a Scientist', 'I am a Mathematician', 'I am an Engineer' on [Parentzone Scotland](#) or [Scottish Sensory Centre: British Sign Language Glossary of Curriculum Terms](#). A copy of the postcard with the current definition of family learning in Scotland can be downloaded from the [National Improvement Hub](#).

The definition of family learning in Scotland was developed after a series of consultation events throughout Scotland. Those involved in the process worked across sectors and were employed in a variety of positions. After an extensive process it was ratified by the National Family Learning

Network of Practitioners in Scotland. Further information is available in the [Review of Family Learning](#) (2016) and [Family Learning Framework](#) (2018).

A family learning approach gives parents, families, and children the tools from which they can continue to learn at home together.

Where practitioners are considering using a Family Learning approach, they should ensure that Deaf BSL users are able to access these programmes.

3.2.4 Learning at home

'Learning at home is the learning which happens in the home, outdoors or in the community. It can take place through everyday activities that families already do and can overlap with aspects of organised or active learning activities'.

(Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network, 2018)





Learning at home can happen through a range of events including:

- play;
- leisure activities;
- fun events;
- sports;
- trips;
- cultural or volunteering experiences; and
- everyday family life.

It can also happen through curriculum related activities, homework, reading, sharing books and [BSL videos](#). Activities for learning at home can be specifically designed to enable parents to engage in their child's learning and build upon the learning from the early learning and childcare setting or school. It can also provide intergenerational learning opportunities for the child, family, extended family, and the community. Some families can be supported with learning at home through a family learning approach (see Section 4).

The definition of learning at home was produced as a result of a range of consultation events with practitioners from across Scotland and in partnership with the Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network (SPION). Further information can be found in the [Review of Learning at Home](#) (2018).

Learning at home can present its own unique challenges for Deaf parents and British Sign Language users if for example information is not in an accessible format, for example, BSL videos.

3.3 Home learning environment

'A growing body of research suggests that good parenting skills and a supportive home learning environment are positively associated with children's early achievements and wellbeing'.

(Economic and Social Research Council, 2012)

The home learning environment is the combination of everything within the home and the time that a child spends out and about, that affects their development and learning. These include the availability of:

- toys and books;
- outings; and
- having space and time to learn.

Most importantly though, are the people who provide the love, security, encouragement, conversation and positive Deaf role models to their child to encourage and support them to thrive. A good home learning environment encourages children and young people to have positive attitudes to learning, to be curious and to have confidence in themselves.

Research shows that the home learning environment has a strong impact on attainment and wellbeing. Furthermore, the influence of the home learning environment is 'over and above that of standard measures of family socio-demographic factors such as parental education, socio-economic status and income' (Melhuish, 2010, p3). Providing a 'supportive home learning environment is also positively associated with children's early achievements and wellbeing' (ESRC, 2012, p1; Kluczniok et al, 2013; Clarke and Younas, 2017). Parental support of 'learning within the home environment.....makes the maximum difference to achievement' and raising attainment more than parents supporting school activities (Harris and Goodall, 2007).

Further information can be found in the [Review of Learning at Home](#) (2018) and on [Parentzone Scotland](#).

Deaf children need to have early access to language and information as opposed to only seeking a 'medical solution'. This is particularly important given that the reading age of most Deaf adults at age 17 is between age 8 and 9 (Qi and Mitchell, 2012, p6; O'Neill, Arendt and Marschark, 2014). Exposure to sign language in the home environment can positively influence children not just to become bilingual but more importantly, to support the development of the brain and cognitive function (Rowley et al, 2019). In addition to this, acquiring a fluent language in the home environment will contribute to and support children's learning.

Findings from the Conrad report which was published in 1979 showed that large numbers of Deaf young people left school with poor reading skills and struggled to cope with basic reading in everyday life ([British Association of Teachers of the Deaf](#)). A more recent American study by Qi and Mitchell (2012) showed that the 'achievement gap between deaf and their hearing peers remains large. It may well be that lack of opportunity to learn, which itself may have its roots in language acquisition delays or the reported deficiency of curriculum and instruction in at least some programmes serving deaf students'. It should be noted, however, that 'exposure to sign language at an early age is different for children of Deaf parents as compared to the children of hearing parents. Those born to Deaf parents are more likely to have had early exposure to a fluent model of adult BSL' (Sutton-Spence and Woll, 2019, p23-24).

3.4 Community learning and development

'Community learning and development (CLD) is a field of professional practice that enables people to identify their own individual and collective goals, to engage in learning and take action to bring about change for themselves and their communities. It uses a range of formal and informal methods of learning and social development with individuals and groups in their communities'.

([Standards Council Scotland](#), 2018)

Community learning and development (CLD) covers a broad range of practice including youth work, community-based adult learning, family learning and community development. It empowers people of all ages to work individually or collectively to make positive changes in their lives and in their communities, through learning, personal development and active citizenship.



Programmes and activities are developed in dialogue with communities and participants, working particularly with those excluded from participation in the decisions and processes that shape their lives. Working in these ways enables community learning and development to extend the reach of democracy and widen its scope. Further information can be found on the [Standards Council](#) and [Education Scotland](#) websites.

Local authorities may have provision such as British Sign Language classes which are held in the evening and are available to support parents of Deaf children and/or Deaf BSL parents.

3.5 Third sector organisations

'The third sector, which includes charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups, delivers essential services, helps to improve people's wellbeing and contributes to economic growth. It plays a vital role in supporting communities at a local level'.

([Scottish Government](#))

In 2011, the [Christie commission on the future delivery of public services](#) made several recommendations regarding the reform of Scotland's public services, including the third sector. The Scottish Government's response, [Renewing Scotland's Public Services: priorities for reform in response to the Christie Commission](#), recognised the role of the third sector, particularly in regard to partnership working, collaborative spend in localities and preventative spend.

The third sector workforce offers specialist expertise, an ability to engage with families in a meaningful way, including vulnerable groups and a flexible and innovative approach. When working in partnership, these skills support families to achieve their goals as well as accessing community venues such as church and community halls suitable for deaf children, young people and parents. For some families these venues are less intimidating and allow easier access to provision at a reduced cost. Examples of partnership working could include mentoring, transitions, using Deaf role models, peer support.

Third sector organisations such as the British Deaf Association Scotland, [Solar Bear](#), National Deaf Children's Society Scotland and Deaf Action have a range of activities to support parents.

Further information and contact details are contained in Appendix 2.

