

Engaging parents and families

A toolkit for practitioners

Section 4: Learning at home

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Background

This section aims to help practitioners to consider the barriers and challenges to learning at home. The reflective questions will allow practitioners to review and develop a home learning policy and activities.

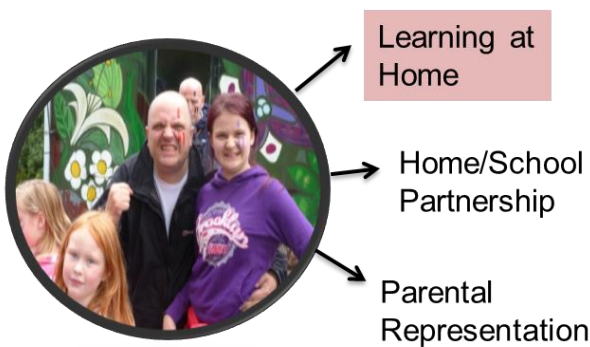
Further information is available in the [Review of Learning at Home](#) (2018).

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 is the first of the three strands of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. Within the Act parents are entitled to receive information and support to help develop their child’s learning at home and in the community. Learning at home should also be included in the local authority’s Parental Involvement Strategy.



Findings from the [Review of the impact of the Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act 2006](#) showed that ‘there was confusion and a general lack of understanding among parents and staff about the difference between homework and the concept of learning at home’ (National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFs), 2017, p19). Learning at home was also identified by headteachers as an area for further development (NPFs, 2017). Both practitioners and parents can have different understandings about learning at home and the [Review of Learning at Home](#) (2018) aims to provide clarity to practitioners.

From the moment they are born, children begin to absorb information and make sense of their world. As well as providing the basics for growth and development - food, comfort and security – parents as their child’s first educator also provide stimulation through everyday activities, games, rhymes and language that help a child to learn. Many of these activities are part of everyday life – preparing and eating meals together, doing the washing, shopping, watching television, visiting friends and family – but for young children they are opportunities for discovery and learning. Further information on ideas to help parents support their child’s learning at home can be found on [Parentzone Scotland](#).

50% of the language adults use is in place by the time children are three years old and 85% by the time they are five years old. This statistic emphasises the importance of parents and the home environment in supporting children’s development. However, once children start school it is not always easy for parents to know how best to help their child. As children grow older it is easy to forget the strong

influence that the home and the community still have on their learning and development, especially as children only spend 15% of their time in school. It is the responsibility of all practitioners and local authorities to ensure that parents are fully informed about how to support their child's learning at home.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings, schools, local authorities and community learning and development organisations and groups can do a lot to make the links between what is being taught and learning opportunities that exist at home and in the community.

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 and sharing books. 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 school or early learning and childcare setting. It can also provide intergenerational learning opportunities for the child, family and extended family and the community. Some families can benefit from using a family learning approach to help support them with learning at home.

Further information is available in section 7 of the toolkit, [Review of Family Learning](#) (2016) and the [Family Learning Framework](#) (2018)

Practitioners from across Scotland have provided the following words as examples of activities and experiences of learning at home that they use in their practice:



What do we mean by the home learning environment?

Research shows that 'when children and young people live in a supportive home learning environment, it improves children and young people's attainment and achievement'.

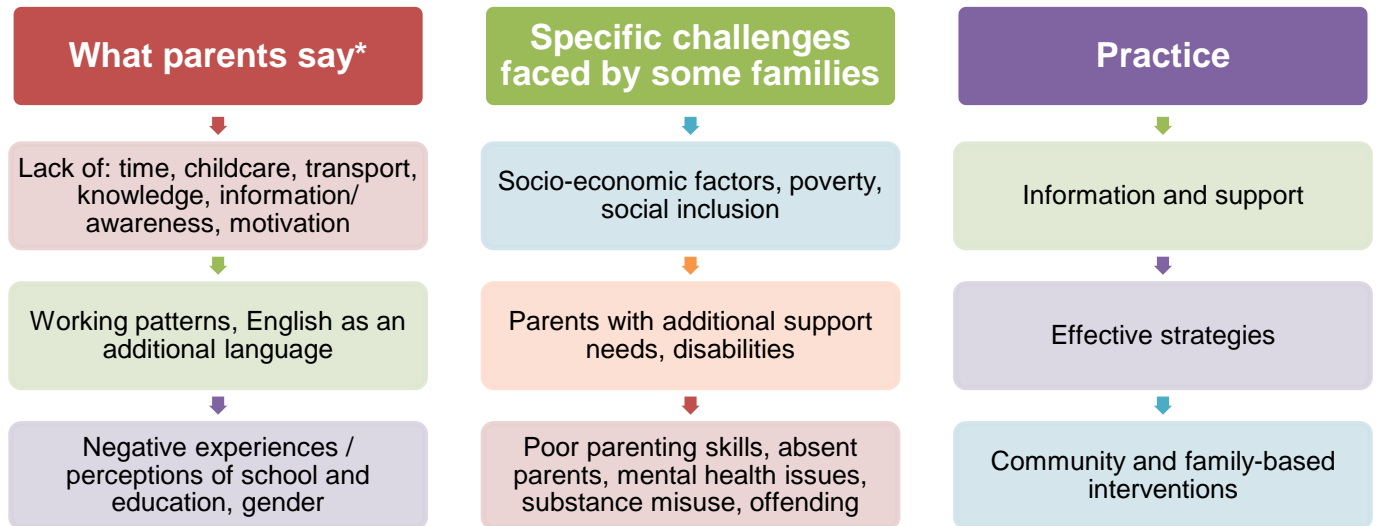
(2018 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan, 2017)

The home learning environment is the combination of everything within the home and the time a child spends out and about, that affect their development and learning. This includes the availability of toys and books, outings and having space and time to learn. The most important feature though, are the people who provide the love, security, encouragement, conversation and positive role models to help the children 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.

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

Barriers and challenges to learning at home

If we are going to effectively engage with parents on learning at home, we need to know what the barriers are. There are a number of factors which restrict a parent’s ability to be more involved in their child’s learning. These fluctuate from external barriers outwith a parents’ control to individual obstacles specific to personal life circumstances (Scottish Executive, 2005; National Parent Forum of Scotland, 2017).



*The contents of this table have been adapted from the Scottish Executive’s (2005) ‘Parents’ Views on Improving Parental Involvement in Children’s Education’ and the National Parent Forum of Scotland’s (2017) ‘Review of the impact of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006’.

Activity 1: Understanding barriers and challenges to learning at home

Purpose

To understand the barriers and challenges that parents and families might face that prevent them from supporting their child’s learning at home.

External barriers to learning at home can be multifaceted. Individual barriers to learning at home can result from an individual’s socio-economic circumstances such as poverty, working patterns, or social exclusion. Examples of social exclusion include families of: gypsy travelling communities; refugees; offenders; those experiencing mental ill health; teenage parents; substance misuse. Some parents also have personal assumptions about what their level of involvement or engagement in their child’s learning should be (Scottish Executive, 2005).

Learning at home can include:

- learning at home/homework activities
- families learning together
- helping parents
- sharing learning
- decision making
- communication methods

Reflective questions:

- Are children and young people able to build on achievements from home and/or homework tasks with family members?
- What opportunities are there for sharing learning e.g. open days, home visits, child-led workshops, stay and play, open afternoons, class reward system, home-school sharing of achievements?
- What opportunities are there for families to learn together? Examples could include: family learning events, family homework club, bookbug, outdoor learning, work with fathers, gardening groups, family nurture projects?
- Do you involve parents in matters such as target setting, Getting it Right for Every Child review meetings, personal learning planning, transitions to help support learning at home?
- Are parents encouraged to support their child's learning through parents' meetings and/or working with the ELC setting or school to address any matters of concern?
- Are parents informed about what their child will be learning and how they can support this at home?
- Are parents made aware of ways that they can share information about their child's learning and achievements at home and in the community, with the ELC setting or school in easily accessible methods?
- Have you undertaken a parental needs analysis to understand barriers and challenges that parents and families might face with learning at home and identified ways to support these?
- Have parents been consulted on ways that they would like to receive information from the ELC setting or school on learning at home?
- How do parents receive information about ways in which they can support their child's learning at home? Is the information provided in a variety of accessible formats, including face-to-face, social media, online methods?
- Are parents informed and offered information about ways to access family learning and/or adult learning to build their own confidence and skills?
- How can your community partners help you to overcome the barriers and challenges to learning at home?
- How well do you pro-actively communicate with and involve parents who do not live together, fathers, parents working away from home, in the armed forces or in prison, in learning at home?
- Do you involve home-link workers in taking forward learning at home initiatives?





Activity 2: Reviewing and developing a home learning policy

Purpose

To recognise the ways that parents already support their child's learning at home and build upon this further.

Practitioners and parents can have different understandings about what learning at home is. Work should be undertaken in partnership to ensure clarity and a shared understanding. Cultural change is also required to move away from common assumptions that learning at home is confined to homework. Practitioners should be cautious regarding their communications to parents to ensure that learning at home is not promoted solely as homework.

Evidence from the Growing Up in Scotland Study (Melhuish, 2010) suggests that children from less advantaged households are less likely to experience a wide range of 'home learning' activities than children from more advantaged households. It is important therefore that ELC settings and schools develop and regularly review their home learning policy in consultation with parents, children and young people, and the community to ensure that it is appropriate for your establishment community.

Reflective questions:

- Are parents and children and young people involved in co-producing and reviewing the home learning policy?
- Has a working group been organised to help review and develop the policy?
- Do you use a range of methods to gather the views of parents and children and young people about home learning?
- Are there any specific support needs for children and young people and/or parents?
- Are you working with your community partners to help address support needs such as family learning, adult learning, literacy teams?
- Is the policy regularly reviewed and updated to meet the changing needs of the establishment community?
- What are the positive elements of your current home learning policy?
- What improvements are required to improve the policy?

Activity 3: Home learning activities

Purpose

To consider home learning activities that will be meaningful and engage parents and families in their children's learning.

Homework is considered to be 'tasks given to pupils by their teachers to be completed outside of usual lessons (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017). Such tasks can include literacy, numeracy and activities to develop inquiry or problem solving skills. Homework can often be an additional source of stress for families with the least capacity to undertake the tasks.

Time is one of the biggest barriers for parents who are supportive of their children's learning at home. Home learning can be more than additional school work being sent home. It should be creatively designed, innovative and able to be incorporated into life at home without requiring additional resources that some families may not have access to.

Short, focused interventions that relate directly to what is being taught and that are built on in ELC settings and schools are likely to be more effective in improving attainment than regular daily homework (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017). Additionally, the 'quality of the task set appears to be more important than quantity of work' (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017). Effective homework is linked to greater parental involvement and support.

Further information is available in the [Review of Learning at Home](#) (2018) and [Parentzone Scotland](#).

Reflective questions:

- Does your establishment issue home learning activities and if so why?
- Do families understand the value/rationale for having home learning activities?
- What do effective home learning activities look like in your establishment?
- How effective are the home learning activities in helping parents engage in their child's learning at home?
- Are the home learning activities specifically designed to enable parents to engage in their child's learning and build upon the learning from school/early learning and childcare setting?
- Do the activities provide intergenerational learning opportunities for the child, family, extended family and the community?
- Do families need support to help them with home learning activities?
- How are families supported to recognise and make the most of the learning opportunities that exist in everyday family life?



Reading list

Education Endowment Foundation (2017), *Teaching and Learning Toolkit: An accessible summary of the international evidence on teaching 5-16 year olds*.

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/resources/teaching-learning-toolkit/#closeSignup>

Education Scotland (2018), *Family Learning Framework*. Livingston. Education Scotland.

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/Family%20Learning%20Framework>

Education Scotland (2018), *Review of Learning at Home*. Livingston. Education Scotland.

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/research/Review%20of%20learning%20at%20home>

Melhuish, E. (2010), *Impact of the Home Learning Environment on child cognitive development: secondary analysis of data from 'Growing up in Scotland'*. Scottish Government Social Research.

<http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/310722/0098010.pdf>

National Parent Forum of Scotland (2017), *Review of the impact of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006*.

<https://www.npfs.org.uk/downloads/review-of-the-impact-of-the-2009-parental-involvement-act/>

Scottish Executive (2005), *Parents' views on improving parental involvement in children's education*. Astron. Edinburgh.

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/37428/0023556.pdf>

Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act (2006).

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/8/pdfs/asp_20060008_en.pdf

The Scottish Government (2017), *2018 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan*. Edinburgh. APS Group Scotland.

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00528872.pdf>

The Scottish Government (2016), *Review of Family Learning: Supporting Excellence and Equity*. Edinburgh. APS Group Scotland.

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/research/Review%20of%20Family%20Learning>

Further Information

[BBC education website](#)

['Learning at Home' - Connect](#) (formerly Scottish Parent Teacher Council)

[Parent Club](#)

[Parentzone Scotland](#)

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