

## Working Together

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

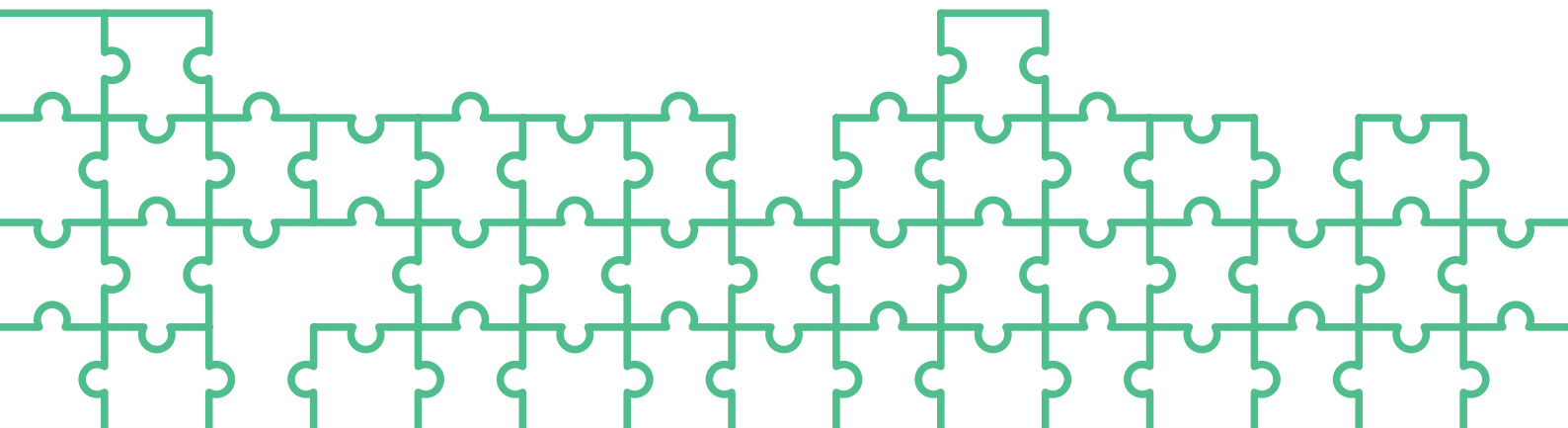


### Module 5

## Finding the best ways to communicate

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*In this module you will explore parents' communication preferences. It will support you to think about how you personalise communications with parents and involve them in planned discussions*





## Background

*“I prefer to have things written down. I can take in the information at my own pace”*

Parent

*“[my daughter’s] teacher asked me how they should stay in touch about her progress. They wanted to know what worked best for me”*

Parent

### Personalising communications with parents



Communication between parents and education professionals is a two-way commitment. For a child to be fully supported in their learning journey, both school and parents need to find a way to communicate with each other in a meaningful way.

There is no one set way of communicating that will suit everyone. Parents, like education professionals, will have their own communication style and preferences.

These preferences are often affected by a parent’s individual circumstances and can include a range of factors such as their environment, their abilities, their confidence, and their mental health. For example, a parent may have a disability or an additional support need that affects how they can receive and process information. Or a parent may be dealing with a bereavement that affects the support their child needs but also impacts on how the parent communicates with the school or education setting.

Finding out how parents in your setting like to communicate, trying new and different ways of communicating and offering flexible approaches will support positive exchanges. It is important to remember that parents’ communication preferences can change over time. Maintaining regular contact with parents and assessing how well communication is working is crucial to sustaining positive relationships.





### What type of communication helps?

Parents say that the following communication can help build better relationships:

- > **Regular communication helps parents to feel informed and engaged with their child's learning.** Consistent contact allows information to be shared about how their child is progressing and how they can support this at home. Regular communication is also a good way of sharing and celebrating their child's successes and achievements. It helps parents to feel more positive and in control.
- > **Contact with a regular staff member can help them and their children.** Consistency of contact helps to develop trust and build relationships with staff. Parents need to know who to contact at your setting or school and how to do this.
- > **Getting the communication balance right is important.** Too little information can lead to anxiety, uncertainty, or misunderstandings. On the other hand, too much information can be stressful and overwhelming for parents and can often have a counter-productive effect on relationships. Find out what each family prefers to ensure you are getting the communication balance right for them.
- > **Parents want a variety of methods of communication.** Offering varied methods of communication supports inclusivity and helps parents to engage with their child's learning in different ways. For example, parents for whom English is an additional language may find written communication or video content is easier for them to engage with compared to telephone calls. Getting to know which methods your parents prefer will help to make communication more effective and support the development of positive relationships.
- > **A professional approach is important.** Choosing the right type of communication in the right circumstances will help build parents' trust in you. For example, sensitive information or other information you think may cause worry or concern should be delivered in-person or over the telephone, whereas providing regular updates about their child's progress and achievements may be fine to send by email or letter.
- > **Parents want lessons to be learned from lockdown.** Children and families had a wide variety of education experiences during the Coronavirus pandemic. Whilst the pandemic has been challenging, in some cases parents and pupils have found the changes to be beneficial, offering a more flexible approach to education and contact with their school. Parents want to hold on to the positive aspects of the lockdown, particularly changes that have led to improved relationships with professionals (for example, more regular telephone contact between home and school).





## Practice reflection

### Reflective questions

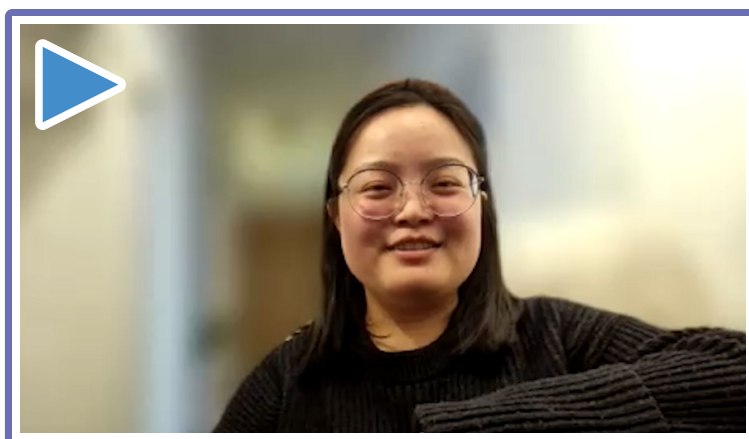
Answer these reflective questions about how you support parents to ensure effective communications.

1. How do you support parents to reflect on their own communication styles and make their preferences known to you? Is there anything else you could be doing?
2. How can you support parents to communicate more effectively with you?

### Exercise



**Film:** Listen to a carer explaining how regular communication from education staff helps her to feel more involved in their niece's learning



Duration:  
5 mins 32 secs

### Making time for conversations and staying in touch

Parents have highlighted the importance of having dedicated time for communication with education professionals. This could be time to talk at the end of the school day, allocated time for discussions or regular telephone calls.

Think about the video and answer the following questions:



- What are the different ways you currently speak to or stay in touch with parents?
- Are the opportunities for communicating with parents planned, less formal, or a mixture of both?
- What are the potential challenges and barriers to maintaining regular contact with parents?
- Is there anything that your setting or school could do to improve communications with parents?



## Evidence & information

### Effective meetings and discussions with parents

Ensuring parents are fully involved in meetings and planned discussions is key to making them work in a meaningful way. Remember, to support effective partnership working all parents and children need to be treated as equal partners. Meetings should be planned with parents so they feel fully included, able to participate, and confident to raise and discuss points that are important to them.

It is essential that children are also listened to as part of this process. Depending on the age, stage, needs and abilities of the child, they may attend the meeting or share their views in advance. When preparing for meetings ask yourself 'how will the child's voice be heard?'

The **GIRFEC National Practice Model** sets out a shared framework and approach to identification, assessment and analysis of wellbeing needs. It provides a consistent way for practitioners to work with children and their families to understand the child or young person's individual growth and development in the context of their rights, unique family circumstances and wider world, exploring strengths, resilience, adversities and vulnerabilities. This approach contains all the key elements of a single child plan and can be developed into a plan if required.

Children in Scotland has created a **checklist for education professionals** to support effective meetings with parents. These steps will help to ensure planned meetings and discussions with parents are productive and the child's needs are at the centre.



Read the checklist, then answer the following questions:



1. Are you already doing these things when planning and attending meetings with parents?
2. Were any of the points new to you? If so, how will you incorporate them into your practice?
3. Are there any aspects of the checklist you find more challenging?

### Next steps



- Discuss the meeting checklist with colleagues at your education setting. How do their experiences compare to you own?