



Aligning Family Learning and The Promise

A guide for family learning professionals and GIRFEC strategic leads

August 2024

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Purpose and Context

The purpose of this resource is to provide a foundational knowledge on the background and current delivery approaches of Family Learning in Scotland and how they align with #KeepingThePromise. It has been designed in collaboration with Education Scotland, The Promise Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway's Children's Services Partners locally. The resource will support both Family Learning Professionals and GIRFEC Strategic Leaders who have responsibility for the delivery and governance of both areas.

Raising awareness of the importance of The Promise with Family Learning Professionals is necessary to improve outcomes for children and families. Similarly, GIRFEC Strategic Leaders will benefit from an understanding of how Family Learning as an approach can be utilised to #KeepThePromise. This will help to ensure that we all work towards delivering upon Scotland's commitment to #KeepThePromise to all children, young people and their families, and the priorities within Scotland's vision for Family Learning.

Background

2.1 Family learning

In 2018, Scottish Government published the “Learning Together” National Action Plan on Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home. The plan takes account of available Scottish, UK, and international evidence. It has also been informed by a review conducted by the National Parent Forum of Scotland (2017), Article 5 (Parental Guidance) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2023), Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and the central role of the family.

Furthermore, the Learning Together National Action Plan supports the Community Empowerment Act by tackling inequalities and offering greater support to children, young people, and their families to become more involved in local decision-making in their community. This plan also supports the requirements of the National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan and drives forward the focus, outcomes, and priorities for Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home.

The underpinning vision of the Learning Together National Action Plan is that every parent and family should be supported to be involved and engaged in their child’s, and their own learning.

The plan sets out the following aims:

- ensure that parents are supported to be fully involved in the life and work of their children’s early learning and childcare setting or school;
- encourage and support collaborative partnerships between practitioners, parents, and families;
- get the right support in place so that parents can engage in their child’s learning;
- expand access to family learning opportunities which meet participants needs;
- improve the quality of all communication between practitioners, staff, parents, and families, and;
- improve the skills of leaders, front-line practitioners, and support staff.

2.2 The Promise

In October 2016, the First Minister made a commitment to figure out how Scotland could love its most vulnerable children and give them the childhood they deserve. She commissioned the [Independent Care Review](#) and, between February 2017 and February 2020, the Care Review worked together to figure out how to keep that Promise.

The Care Review listened very carefully to those with experience of living and working in and around the 'care system' to properly understand what needs to change.

The Care Review heard over 5,500 experiences. Over half were children, young people and adults who had lived in care. The rest were families and paid and unpaid workforce.

As well as listening carefully to what matters to children, the Care Review considered the research on the 'care system' and commissioned its own research to fill knowledge gaps. It reviewed all of the laws and rules, collected data, and made connections across the 'roots and branches' of the 'care system'.

Methodology

The Promise Scotland identified a gap in the reporting of Family Learning programmes that supported the foundations for change within The Promise. An initial meeting was held between The Promise Scotland and Education Scotland to discuss strategies to address this gap.

Following intelligence gathering, a number of local authorities were identified as already having strong reporting mechanisms in place, which included Family Learning practice. After consideration, it was agreed that Dumfries and Galloway Council would be approached. A meeting was arranged with GIRFEC and Family Learning strategic leads within Dumfries and Galloway to discuss the identified need and gauge their interest and availability in joining a short-term working group. The remit of this group was to identify appropriate content for a national guide, set timescales, identify appropriate staff and resources to take this forward. A sub-group consisting of colleagues from Education Scotland, The Promise Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway council was tasked with developing this.

An initial starting point was for The Promise Scotland to work with the sub-group on an Empathy Mapping process. This was to identify potential gaps in practitioner's knowledge and understanding of The Promise and Family Learning. From this information a project plan was created with objectives and outcomes.

Members of the sub-group came together online and in person to allocate individual tasks aligned with the objectives and outcomes. These were progressed between meetings and subsequent updates were provided.

Following the meetings, a draft of the guide was disseminated to the Strategic GIRFEC and Family Learning Leads for consultation and sign off. It was agreed that to support a greater understanding amongst practitioners, the guide and blank template would be accompanied by a completed version from Dumfries and Galloway Council. It is hoped that this example will provide further support to practitioners when completing their own template.

What is family learning?

Family learning is an approach to engaging families in learning that has an impact on both children and adults. It has been woven into a number of cross-cutting Scottish policies and strategies as illustrated in the diagram below. The diagram also highlights the diversity of partners that can potentially be involved in developing programmes at a local level. The range of partners involved will vary depending on local needs, intended outcomes and resources. A more detailed policy mapping overview is provided in the [Review of Family Learning](#) (2016).

Family Learning can be utilised as an early intervention and prevention approach which reaches the most disadvantaged communities aligning it with the principles that underpin The Promise. Family Learning helps close the poverty related attainment gap through breaking the inter-generational cycles of deprivation and low attainment. The effects of Family Learning are known to extend beyond the duration of the intervention and provide lasting impact and improved outcomes.

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 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' (Scottish Family Learning Network, 2016).

Further information about what Family Learning is can be found on the Education Scotland Parents and Families [Theme Page](#).

Family Learning approaches and practice

One of the strengths of Family Learning, as an approach, is its adaptability to be used across sectors whilst supporting families with varied identified needs.

Responsibility for delivering Family Learning programmes can vary across local authorities, ELC settings, schools, Community Learning and Development, colleges and the third sector. These different settings are similar in that each work towards the same goals which is confident, achieving, happy, lifelong learning children and families. Family Learning provides a common language between sectors who work together on shared priorities with identified individual and family needs. Partnership working is one of the key values that underpin family learning.

Early Years - Family Learning is a key driver for change in the [‘Realising the Ambition: Being Me National Practice Guidance’](#) for early years in Scotland. It supports the idea that parents know and understand their child best.

Schools - Family Learning is a key driver within Parental Involvement and Engagement [Strategies](#) which every local authority requires to have under the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. It is also a key driver in the National Improvement [Framework](#) and the Learning Together [National Action Plan](#).

Community Learning and Development - Family learning and parenting programmes that are delivered by [Community Learning and Development](#) can be a conduit to increasing parental involvement and engagement in the life of the setting or school and in children’s learning at home. Programmes can also be independent of school activity and focus on wider family and community needs such as health and wellbeing and community capacity building.

As the child’s first educator, parents are key partners in supporting their child’s learning. As pedagogical leaders, it is essential that practitioners develop positive relationships, work in partnership with parents and value their contributions. Understanding the complexities, diversities, and cultural differences of individual families and how this can impact each child is essential. Relationships are key and should be based on respect, transparency, and trust. Developing and delivering Family Learning needs to be considered carefully. It is important to take into account a number of factors to ensure the approach is as successful as possible

and has the desired impact. Factors include the interests and needs of the families, potential barriers to participation, sustainability, resourcing, and demographics.

Planning for Family Learning is most effective when carried out collaboratively, actively involving families, relevant colleagues, and stakeholders, for example from ELC settings, schools, CLD, colleges and the third sector. An on-going collaborative approach, from the planning through to the evaluation stages, can support high quality outcomes. Successful Family Learning takes account of families' views about the learning they want to undertake, with any subsequent follow up programmes being developed in partnership with them.

Family Learning approaches range across literacy, numeracy, STEM, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), parental engagement and health and wellbeing. They can 'draw on a number of traditions from adult literacy and community development to school improvement and parental engagement' (NIACE, 2013, p12). Programmes can be 'considered as a bridge between informal home learning and formal school learning' (NIACE, 2013, p12). Family learning programmes can vary in length, format, and delivery.

The Structure of Family Learning

The planning, reporting, monitoring, and governance of Family Learning activity varies across Scotland. With Family Learning being delivered in a wide range of community and educational settings by both statutory and third sector partners, it can be difficult to get a fully comprehensive picture of activity in any given locality.

Depending on where Family Learning sits within the locality, examples of activity may be found within:

- School and Early Years establishment development plans
- Community Learning and Development Service Plan
- Community Learning and Development Partnership Plan
- Children's Services Plan
- Education Plan
- Library Service Strategic Plan
- Third Sector Organisational Development Plans

What is The Promise?

The Promise is part of the culmination of the Care Review and outlines the need for a redesign of the 'care system' including a fundamental shift in how decisions are made, and how money is spent in supporting Scotland's children and young people. It is fundamental that the voice of our children, young people and their families is at the heart of decisions that we make.

The Promise sets out the vision for transformational change. At the heart of The Promise are 5 foundations for change.

Voice

Children must be listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care with all those involved properly listening and responding to what children want and need. There must be a compassionate, caring, decision-making culture focused on children and those they trust.

Family

Where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay, and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties that get in the way.

Care

Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed.

People

The children that Scotland cares for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community who in turn must be supported to listen and be compassionate in their decision-making and care.

Scaffolding

Children, families, and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when it is needed. The scaffolding of help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.

Further information about what The Promise is can be found on The Independent Care Review [website](#).

What do we all need to know?

The various outcomes of Family Learning in general means that it can be a catalyst for changes in cross-cutting social, educational, and economic policy areas. Given that parents, children, and families are a common denominator in so many agendas, increasing learning within this is 'the catalyst for wide-ranging changes, not just related to skills and qualifications but also in terms of community cohesion and wellbeing' (Lamb, 2007, p17).

National Drivers

- [GIRFEC](#)
- [Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act 2006](#)
- [The Promise](#)
- [Plan 24-30](#)
- [Review of Family Learning in Scotland 2016](#)
- [UNCRC](#)
- [Strategic Framework for Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home](#)
- [National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan](#)
- [Learning at Home Review 2018](#)
- [Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland 2022 - 2027](#)
- [The Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#)
- [Education \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#)
- [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)
- [The Scottish Attainment Challenge \(Scottish Government Policy\)/ Scottish Attainment Challenge \(Education Scotland\)](#)
- [The Requirements for Community Learning and Development \(Scotland\) Regulations 2013](#)
- [Curriculum for Excellence \(2004\)](#)

Policy	Local Example
National Improvement Framework	INSERT LOCAL EXAMPLES
Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategies	
Learning Together National Action Plan	
Adult Learning Strategy 2022 - 2027	
The Early Years Framework	
National Community Learning and Development (CLD) Policy	
Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC)	

Practice	Local Example
Family Learning Framework	Outlined within Appendix 2
Engaging Families in Learning – A Thematic Inspection of Family Learning	
Realising the Ambition	
How Good Is Our School	
How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare	
How Good Is Our Community Learning and Development	
National Occupational Standards	
Common Core of Skills, Knowledge & Understanding and Values for the "Children's Workforce" in Scotland	

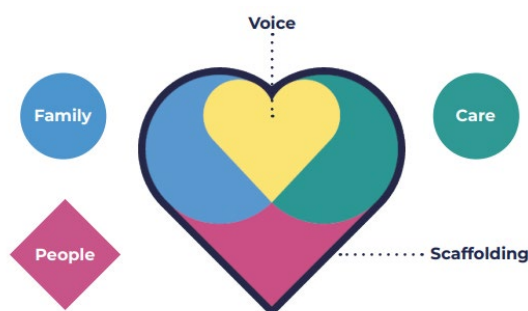
Aligning Family Learning Values and The Promise Principles

The Promise outlines 10 principles for intensive family support. These principles aim to promote and instil relational practice that shifts away from managing risk and needs to supporting families to find their own solutions.

The Family Learning National Occupational Standards (NOS) detail 8 core values for the delivery of Family Learning activity. The values focus on recognising the strengths and capacity of families as their child's first educators and seeks to build on that capacity through supportive, caring, and relational practice.

Both The Promise and the NOS Family Learning recognise and support mums, dads and carers as key assets in their children's lives and development. Family Learning offers a mechanism for non-threatening, early engagement with services helping to #KeepThePromise with its strength-based approach.

Figure 2 below illustrates how the principles and values align.



There are eight values that underpin the [Family Learning National Occupational Standards](#).

- family learning recognises the role of the parent as the first educator (Family)
- family learning is inclusive and is to be offered as a universal provision with open access (Scaffolding)
- family learning recognises and values diversity of culture, race, relationships, and beliefs (Voice/Scaffolding)
- equal partnership is the basis for all developments in family learning: all learners and educators, regardless of generation, recognise that learners and educators can frequently exchange ideas (Voice/Family)

- family learning recognises that it is acceptable to make mistakes, which are part of the process of reflective learning (Family/Scaffolding)
- achievements within family learning benefit the wider learning community through promoting change and empowering individuals and communities (People/Scaffolding)
- family learning raises aspirations and all outcomes of the process, including those which may not be overt, are of equal significance and importance (Voice/Scaffolding)
- family learning operates within a culture of mutual respect for individuals, communities, colleagues, and organisations (Voice/Family/People/Scaffolding)

What might this look like in practice?

Below is a composite story about the experience and impact of Family Learning on one family. The family is not real however, their experience has been taken from case studies and reflections of real families who have engaged in Family Learning activities and the impact it has had on them.

Family Learning Keeping the Promise – Composite Story

Elena and James have recently moved to the village with their four young children, Taylor (7), Rhys (6), Sophie (5) and JJ (3).

James works long shifts at the local supermarket warehouse, leaving Elena on her own with the children. Both James and Elena grew up in care and have no family nearby. With four young children, life can be very busy and demanding.

Elena “feels alone in the world of parenting” and worries that she is not good enough, but she doesn’t want to worry James as he is working really hard for the family. After JJ was born Elena struggled with her mental health and still worries about the impact that has had on all of the children. James, however, is very proud of Elena and what a good mum she is.

When dropping the children at school and nursery Elena meets Mary who is a Family Learning worker. Elena is not really sure what that means but Mary seems really nice and comes to chat to her every day at drop off. Mary invites Elena to ‘Tea with the Teacher’. She says it’s a chance to get to know school staff and just have a chat. Her childhood

experiences of care have made Elena really wary of getting involved with services, so she politely declines Mary's offer.

A few weeks later Mary gives Elena an invitation from JJ with his drawing on it asking her to join him at a Stay and Play session. Mary explains it's a chance to learn from JJ what he does in nursery and how she and James can help with fun activities at home. Mary explains that most of the parents from the class will be there, so Elena doesn't feel singled out.

Elena is quite anxious and not sure but decides to go along. Mary welcomes her at the door and reassures her. JJ loves showing his mum around the nursery, and they have a great time. At the session Elena finds out about the Fit Food programme which gives mums and dads ideas to help their children learn with fun, activities related to healthy eating. Elena decides to give it a go as it can be hard to get the children to eat well.

Through going along to the programme, trying activities at home, and having fun as a whole family, Elena starts to get more and more confident. As she takes part in more programmes, Elena gets to know more parents in the village and Mary asks if she would be interested in helping out in the school as a volunteer. Through this, Elena has started to gain qualifications, something she never saw herself being able to do and is even thinking about the possibility of going to college. Elena has started to feel more connected to her community and can see that those around just want the best for her and her children.

When the school raised some concerns about Rhys' reading, Elena was worried but with Mary's help she was able to meet with the teacher and support the development of a learning plan. Elena felt more confident that as Rhys's mum she should be part of that plan and could help, whereas before she would have taken it as evidence of her poor parenting.

Knowing how she and the children have benefitted from the activities and how much fun they have had together, Elena encourages James to go along to a monthly, Saturday Dad's Club at the local library.

Family Learning supports us to deliver the foundations of the Promise by:

- Building the confidence of mums, dads, and carers
- Building and strengthening, trusting, non-threatening relationships between families and services
- Building and strengthening positive bonds between family members

- Providing safe and supportive spaces for families
- Engaging families early and at key transition points in positive experiences
- Adopting a strengths-based approach

Appendix 1 – Demographics

You may wish to include within this section the demographics of your region and why this is important in the context of Family Learning within your areas (i.e. geographical spread or challenges etc).

Appendix 2 – Family Learning in Action

Peep Learning Together Programme

The [Peep Learning Together Programme](#) supports parents, carers and practitioners make the most of the learning opportunities in everyday life, supporting their babies' and young children's learning through play. This is a nationally recognised evidence-based programme for parents and families through the Peep organisation. contributes to this, by helping:

Parents and carers to improve their children's life chances, by:

- Developing sensitive and responsive relationships with their babies and children.
- Making the most of day-to-day learning opportunities – listening, talking, playing, singing, and sharing books and stories together.
- Recognising and building on their own learning potential and achievements.
- Babies and children to become confident communicators and learners through play.
- Practitioners to develop their work with parents/carers and young children.
- Communities to narrow the attainment gap, which appears even before children reach school.

The Peep Learning Together Programme values and extends what parents/carers already do to support their child's learning in everyday life. Peep is a strengths-based approach to working with families, focusing on doing with rather than doing to parents. Key priorities for Family Learning throughout this programme (from pre-nursery, nursery to Primary 1) are:

- Personal, social, and emotional development
- Communication and language
- Early literacy
- Early maths
- Health and physical development

This programme can take place within nurseries, communities and within prison.

Peep Progression Pathway

The [Peep Progression Pathway](#) offers formal recognition of parents'/ carers' learning based on supporting their child's learning and development through Peep, with nationally recognised units to cover three qualification levels for parents and carers as learners. This builds parental capacity and 'learner identity' which research shows makes further progression into volunteering, further learning or work more likely.

Peep Antenatal Programme

The [Peep Antenatal Programme](#) is the Learning Together sister programme and supports strong parent-baby bonding and attachment relationships during the perinatal period, beginning in pregnancy.

STEM Learning

[Lifelong Learning](#) provides opportunities for families to explore and experience other cultures and customs through STEM based activities. STEM Learning programmes are designed age appropriately and to understand how best to help families understand this umbrella term and the key related learning disciplines. Our key focus is to help families learn about this subject area together and how early STEM exposure is critical for later educational outcomes.

Topics covered in this delivery is diverse from cooking, climate change, maths, engineering etc. This provision is linked to the Youth Scotland Hi5 accreditation for children award through Youth Scotland where families are encouraged to participate in STEM and Climate Change challenges, recording activities, learning and evidence of participation, resulting in accreditation for children through the Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) framework.

Intended Outcomes:

- To develop an awareness and tolerance of diversity and culture.
- To increase knowledge of different traditions throughout the world.
- To develop skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics (STEM).
- To foster discussions on climate change and the individual impact we have on the planet.
- To encourage and develop the importance of the home learning environment.

Families Connect

The [Families Connect](#) programme is an evidence-based programme developed by Save the Children UK to support parents engaging in their children's learning. Building on parents' existing skills and knowledge, Families Connect provides them with the confidence to support their children's learning in the home.

The programme builds relationships between parents and settings (schools, nurseries, and children's centres) and provides opportunities for parents to share their parenting experiences with others.

Families Connect is delivered through a series of two-hour workshops in settings over eight weeks to groups of families. Over eight weeks, parents discuss aspects of their children's learning during informal workshops.

Parents are introduced to a series of adaptable activities, techniques, and games that they can do with their children at home to support their children's learning in three key areas:

- Social and Emotional development
- Literacy and language development
- Numeracy

Impact:

The evaluation found that Families Connect increases parental engagement in children's learning, improves parental skills, and improves aspects of children's social and emotional development. Some of our key findings include:

- Parent self-efficacy, their confidence, and skills in supporting their children's learning, are critical to supporting a positive home learning environment.
- Social disadvantage was found to negatively impact on children's numeracy skills and families' home learning environments.
- Families Connect was more impactful on the home learning environment (measured immediately after the programme) for families on lower incomes and those eligible for free school meals.

Roots of Empathy

[Roots of Empathy](#) is an international, evidence and empathy-based classroom programme designed for children in Primary school. Lifelong Learning works in partnership with Action for Children Scotland to prioritise delivery to Primary 3 age children. Roots of Empathy is an early intervention programme that helps develop emotional literacy in children aged 5-12. Through the participation of a local mother and baby, a trained instructor guides the children to identify and label the baby's feelings, reflect on, and understand their own feelings and then understand the feelings of others.

The programme helps promote emotional competence and the development of empathy in primary school children. It also decreases aggression, including bullying, and has been found to increase pro-social behaviours such as caring, sharing and inclusion. Key findings from Action for Children reported that in the 10-year evaluation, 96% of teachers felt pupils were talking more about their feelings, while 75% stated pupils were more empathetic to one another and 80% of pupils reported a better understanding of how others feel and 86% were more pro social towards their classmates.

Family Learning ESOL (English for Speakers of other languages)

The [Family Learning ESOL](#) programme is promoted as an important means of bringing about social inclusion. Language skills and cultural diversity can be a barrier and restrict access and influence in educational institutions. ESOL family learning programmes seek to remove these barriers.

Informal sessions for ESOL parents/carers of infants and children under the age of two years of age. The aim is to provide informal and relaxed opportunities for parents/carers with English as a secondary or other language to improve their speaking and listening skills within the context of caring for an infant, accessing health visitors, child health services and postnatal support services.

Intended Outcomes

- Parents/carers report increased confidence in using English with their children.
- Parents/carers report increased knowledge of early years services and support services.
- Parent/carers report increased confidence in accessing peer support and other local services.
- Parents/carers report increased knowledge of further ESOL opportunities, and the support to access them.

Overview

The workshops provide a safe space for parents and carers to get to know each other and take part in active learning around a relevant theme linked to their child's health and development and their own health and wellbeing. The sessions are informal, and parents/carers can attend all or some of the sessions and help with peer learning in terms of language and community integration.

Learning at Home

[Learning at Home](#) is a key ingredient of all our family learning school and community programmes. This aligns with research that evidences that a positive home learning environment makes a significant difference to children's learning. Lifelong Learning ensure that all programme resources used can be replicated at home or indeed if this is not the case, we always provide free resources to encourage home learning. This includes practical resources but also digital links to literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

M.A.T.C.H – Men & Their Children Programmes

Research indicates that children whose fathers spent more time with them have a higher IQ and were more socially mobile than those who had received little attention.

At the [M.A.T.C.H – Men & Their Children Groups programme](#) focus is on fun learning through sport, science, engineering, cooking, and STEM related subjects, all in alignment with the curriculum. Through their participation in groups many fathers and grandfathers have increased their skills and confidence in their ability to support their child's learning.

As well as supporting their child's learning the men are encouraged by local Adult Learning workers to reflect on their own learning needs and aspirations. Many have successfully undertaken adult learning classes for example computing digital photography, storytelling, and core literacy skills development.

This programme has also been included in external research written by Jane Jones and Catherine Macrae on behalf of Linked Work and Training Trust. Jane Jones has also chosen the Sanquhar Primary/Academy group as subjects for further research examining the impact that involvement in the groups had on fathers and children.

Impact

- Increase in the number of men more actively involved in their child's education.
- Most men who have been involved feel that they are now more comfortable in the school environment and in approaching school staff regarding their child's primary school experience.
- Men taking up Adult Learning opportunities, for example:
 1. Literacy/Numeracy support
 2. Basic Computing

3. Adult Learning Tutor / Youth Worker

4. Role models for Lifelong Learning

- Community capacity building - formed their own fundraising committees increase male parent/carer voice to ensure that they continue to provide worthwhile learning experiences and quality time with their children.

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First published August 2024.