

Engaging parents and families

A toolkit for practitioners

Section 3: Involving all parents

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Background

This section aims to help practitioners to consider the challenges and barriers to involving all parents in their child's learning and the wider life of the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting or school. Background information is provided on: developing a parental involvement strategy; parenting programmes and interventions; and a family learning approach. Further information on developing a parental involvement strategy and family learning can be found in sections 6 and 7 of the toolkit respectively.

Suggestions for continuous professional development routes are outlined in this section. Ensuring that the workforce is developed through appropriate qualifications and continuous professional development is a key element to effectively working with and engaging parents and families.

Self-evaluation exercises, needs analysis and reflective questions are provided to help practitioners consider options to overcome any challenges and barriers to involving parents.

Parental involvement strategy

Section 2(1) of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 requires every local authority to prepare a strategy for parental involvement and engagement (see section 6 of the Toolkit). The strategy should consider the challenges and barriers that may prevent parents from becoming involved and engaged in the life of the school and their child's learning. This information could be collated through a range of methods such as face-to-face conversations, home visits, questionnaires or a parental needs analysis. It is also important for practitioners to understand what their parents already do with their child as well as being aware of suitable options and methods of communicating with parents.

The time taken to understand the individual needs of families and community demographics is a key starting point. Allowing time and space to develop and build relationships will help create a foundation upon which the home-school partnerships can grow (Hunt et al, 2011). Care should be taken in the early days of building relationships to ensure that assumptions about parents and families are not made without firstly obtaining a holistic overview of their individual circumstances, challenges or barriers. Ensuring families feel valued, understood and listened to is a vital component to developing and maintaining effective relationships.

Further information is available in the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 [Guidance](#).

Parenting programmes and interventions

A review of early interventions concluded that 'to gain the most impact, interventions should include both parent and child together with a focus on enhancing interactions' (Barnes and Freude-Lagevardi 2003, In: Melhuish, 2010, p20). Deciding on an effective programme or intervention should initially be informed by a needs analysis and targeted at particular groups of parents (Goodall et al, 2011). This could include for example, parents who do not live together, teenage parents or minority ethnic groups. Sensitivities and respect should be given to individual circumstances as well as varying cultural norms.

Family learning approach

Consideration should be given to whether a family learning approach is suitable. Family learning can be used as an early intervention and prevention approach which is ideal for reaching the most disadvantaged communities. It can be a catalyst in helping adults take up adult learning courses, training opportunities, gain employment or attain new skills. This in turn positively impacts on children's individual attainment, their aspirations and personal learning journey (Family Learning Review, 2016).

Family learning with its 'strong focus on improving the life chances of disadvantaged families, is also an important part of the wider community learning landscape' (Harding and Ghezalayagh, 2014, p10). It can be delivered in a range of ways and settings as a single intervention and leads to many interrelated positive outcomes for parents, children, families and communities. A family learning approach gives parents, families and children the tools from which they can continue to learn together at home.

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

Family learning:

- recognises the role of the parent as the first educator
- is inclusive and is to be offered as a universal provision with open access
- recognises and values diversity of culture, race, relationships and beliefs
- recognises that 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
- recognises that it is acceptable to make mistakes, which are part of the process of reflective learning
- recognises that achievements within family learning benefit the wider learning community through promoting change and empowering individuals and communities
- raises aspirations and all outcomes of the process, including those which may not be overt, are of equal significance and importance
- operates within a culture of mutual respect for individuals, communities, colleagues and organisations

Further information can be found in the [Review of Family Learning](#) (2016), the [Family Learning Framework](#) (2018) and in section 7 of the toolkit.

Workforce development

Staff turnover in establishments can go through long periods of stability or times of fluctuation. It is more common for people to change careers, occupational fields or jobs more regularly throughout their lifetime than in previous years. This can result in some staff being registered with a variety of professional bodies such as the [General Teaching Council of Scotland](#) (GTCS), [Scottish Social Services Council](#) (SSSC) or the [CLD Standards Council Scotland](#). Staff can also have a wide range of valuable background and life experience which can contribute towards engaging and working effectively with parents and families.

Ensuring that the workforce is developed and equipped to work with parents and families is an ongoing challenge. It should not be assumed that practitioners 'feel comfortable or confident in working with parents' (Dyson, 2007, p3). Previous studies suggest that practitioners do not have the appropriate skills, knowledge or confidence to work with parents, particularly those from deprived communities and there has been 'limited work to develop whole school improvement in this area' (Dyson, 2007).

Developing the workforce through appropriate qualifications and continuous professional development will continue to have positive outcomes for parents, families and communities. Practitioners working with families may wish to consider continuous professional development in:

- family learning
- adult learning approaches
- engaging parents
- other relevant training

What helps parents, practitioners and the local authority to work together?

‘Discussions about school, family and community partnerships begin with a call for mutual respect.....Parents and teachers establish respect for each other in different ways when they work in separate or overlapping spheres of influence on children’s learning’.

(Epstein, 2016, p79)

Parents display different levels of confidence and capacity for parental involvement and engagement in their child’s learning. Capacity can refer to a mixture of skills, abilities, values, motivations, competence and opportunities. While elements of capacity may be ‘shaped by personal attributes others are shaped by social structures’ (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003, p49). Parents may initially get involved to the extent ‘that they feel they have the capacity to make a difference.....The desire and capacity to be involved will be enhanced or limited to some degree by the barriers or opportunities afforded by schools and by individual teachers’ (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003, p49). As the first and ongoing educator of their child, parents play an integral part in their learning. Working together in partnership can be achieved more easily when the factors below are all present:

- **issues** - people are working together on matters which they think are important
- **ways of working** - respect and value each person's contribution. Being realistic in terms of the time and effort it takes. The process welcomes and encourages people who have less experience or confidence, as well as including the children and young people
- **getting results** - working together gets results. People can see their effort has been worthwhile and that they have been listened to
- **involving the community** - working with people outwith the school to contribute knowledge, skills and experiences

Activity 1: Self-evaluation exercise

Purpose

To consider the diverse parent community in your catchment area through a self-evaluation exercise.

With other members of staff or as part of a professional learning session and using the diagram below:

- Consider the diverse parent community in your catchment area e.g. parents who do not live together, refugees, kinship carers, adoptive parents, young parents, gypsy traveller parents, lone parents, parents whose first language is not English, service families, disabled parents, parents whose partner is in prison. Make a list.
- Identify a diverse parent community strand that are you trying to engage with.
- Consider your local and national partners that may be able to help you.
- Work through the other relevant elements of the exercise e.g. barriers.



When working with families to raise parental involvement and engagement, you may consider starting from an assets/strengths based approach and an area within your ELC setting or school that is working well and build upon these successes. Alternatively, you may have to start with an issue and address that through one of the strands of the diverse parent community as identified from your exercise. For example, if your catchment area has young parents who find it difficult to engage, you may wish to work with another ELC setting, school, voluntary organisation, family learning worker, home-school link worker or the National Health Service to develop a tailored and targeted approach to parental involvement and engagement. Consideration could also be given to developing a family learning approach.

Reflective questions:

- Who is in the catchment area for my ELC setting or school?
- Who are you trying to increase parental involvement or engagement with?
- What areas for development are highlighted in your improvement plan?
- Which local and/or national partners can help take this forward?
- Are there existing areas of strength that can be built upon?
- Are your communications inclusive and welcoming e.g. photographs or posters with mothers, fathers, grandparents, ethnic minority parents?
- Are there examples of good practice on the National Improvement Hub that can help you?

Activity 2: Parental involvement/engagement in your ELC setting or school

Purpose

To measure where you are now with involving and engaging parents.

Reflective questions

- What do you understand by the terms effective 'parental involvement' and 'parental engagement'? Definitions of these terms are provided in section 1 of the toolkit.
- What does parental involvement and parental engagement look like in your ELC setting or school?
- How successful do you, your staff and your parents feel parental involvement and engagement is in your ELC setting or school?
- Are you meeting legislative requirements regarding involving and engaging parents in your ELC setting or school?
- Are you using the ['How good is our...frameworks'](#) as part of your ongoing self-evaluation process?
- What would you like parental involvement and engagement to look like in your ELC setting or school? What needs to change in the ELC setting or school to make this happen?
- How are you supporting your parents to become involved and engaged in their children's learning?
- Have you consulted with parents about the opportunities to be involved in the ELC setting or school?
- Have you consulted with parents about the ways in which they are engaged in their children's learning?
- How well are your community partners involved in supporting parental involvement and parental engagement?



Activity 3: Developing effective partnerships with parents

Purpose

To establish and maintain effective ongoing partnerships with parents.

Questions from this activity could be shared with parents to gather their views. The activity could be carried out again throughout the session to measure the changes and impact of effective partnerships with parents.

Reflective questions

- How are parents involved in identifying which topics are of concern or interest to them? Are all parents involved in this process in ways that are accessible and inclusive?
- How are parents made aware that they can raise matters that are of concern to them?
- In what ways are all parents given the opportunity to contribute?
- What information is available in the languages used by parents of the children and young people and/or those living in the community?
- How are parents made aware that they can get access to supports such as translators to help them be involved?
- What arrangements are there to include parents who do not live together or those who live/work a distance away or in a rural setting?
- How are parents made aware that they can contribute in many different ways – such as text, email, phone, leaving comments and suggestions at the school or setting, as well as through meetings?
- How are people who are less confident or less experienced encouraged to take part?
- How will people know if their ideas and views have led to changes?
- How are community groups involved?

Further information can be found in the [Engaging with Families](#) resource on the National Improvement Hub.

Activity 4: Understanding barriers and challenges to parental involvement and parental engagement

Purpose

To understand the barriers and challenges that parents and families might face that prevent them from becoming involved or engaged in their child's learning.

There are many reasons why parents might not be engaged in their child's education and it is important that ELC settings, schools and parents work together to identify what the barriers are and how they can be overcome. Some of the barriers may include:

- Practical issues such as lack of time or availability, lack of information about the school, lack of opportunities to get involved or not knowing how to get involved with schools. Other barriers can include busy work schedules, lack of transport, lack of childcare or poor health including stress, Protecting Vulnerable Groups procedures.
- Negative experiences of education from their own childhood which can lead to a lack of confidence to engage, feeling distanced or alienated by schools and teachers. Similarly, parents themselves may lack the knowledge and confidence to support their children with their homework or future career planning.
- Some parents living in areas of multiple deprivation can suffer from isolation in their own community which can lead them to feel embarrassed, cautious or unable to engage with schools. Parents' evenings and Parent Councils may not be options for parents in this context.

- Language and communication are common barriers to parental engagement. If a parent has English as an additional language or is not confident in literacy or communication they may not be able to access a school or practitioner's attempts to engage them via letters, reports, newsletters or phone calls. In addition, the language of education may be a barrier itself for parents and especially where families have different educational or cultural backgrounds.
- Cultural differences can cause a barrier to families engaging. The role of families in education and views of education practitioners are varied across different cultures and they may not be aware of the expected norms of parental engagement. Evidence shows that 'in many cultures not only are educators highly respected and considered experts in their field, it is also considered disrespectful to question them or interfere in their work.'
- Parents of children with a disability can face multifaceted barriers in engaging with education. These families' engagement in their child's education can be held back by the multiple concerns and challenges involved in caring for the overall wellbeing of their child. The processes for negotiating support for their child and engaging with the education system can be confusing, intimidating and discouraging for families. Families can struggle to understand all the rights their child is entitled to in order to act as their advocates. Due to this, parents of children with a disability often express feeling excluded from important discussions and decisions made about their child's education. All these factors can affect the building of relationships with schools.

Further information can be found in the [Engaging with Families](#) resource on the National Improvement Hub.



Barriers to parental involvement

The table below has been adapted from studies by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) and Fan, Li, and Sandoval (2018) to better explain how the different barriers can have interactive and confounding effects on effective parental involvement.

Individual parent and family factors	Child factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents' belief about parental involvement • Perceptions of invitations for parental involvement • Current life contexts • Class, ethnicity and gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age and developmental maturity • Learning difficulties and disabilities • Gifts and talents • Behavioural needs • Social and emotional competency
Parent-teacher factors	Societal factors
Differing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals • Agendas • Attitudes • Language used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical • Demographic • Political • Economic

Findings from Hornby and Lafaele's study (2011) showed that the declining support for families from external agencies and services was adding pressure to parents. This had resulted in schools developing broader roles in supporting parents.

Table of perceived barriers to parental involvement and engagement

The table below has been adapted from the Scottish Executive's (2005) '[Parents Views on Improving Parental Involvement in Children's Education](#)'.

Area	Challenge	Details
Supporting learning at home	Lack of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work commitments (shifts, working away from home) • single/lone parents • more than one child/child care arrangements • child with a disability • children attending different schools • new/complex family structures
	Children's attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educational activities vs social/leisure activities • parents don't do it the same as the teacher
	Parental attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ELC setting or school's responsibility • their own lack of knowledge or skills puts them at a disadvantage • negative experience of education themselves
	Parental knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of knowledge about curriculum and methodologies • lack of guidance on supporting children's learning at home at different stages • parents have literacies difficulties • parents whose first language is not English

Area	Challenge	Details
Supporting children's learning in ELC settings/schools and beyond the home	Lack of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work commitments (shifts, working away from home) • single/lone parents • more than one child/child care arrangements • child with a disability • children attending different schools • new/complex family structures • lack of opportunities for more flexible/less frequent involvement
	Parental attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responsibility of ELC setting or school • commitment of one parent results in lack of involvement from the other parent • engaging fathers • negative consequences for children e.g. bullying • children become more dependent • brings back unpleasant memories of their own school experiences • fathers or male carers may feel they don't have a role to play and there is no place for them in the ELC setting or school. They may also feel uncomfortable attending activities because these are mainly attended by females
	Children's attitudes to parental involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resistance to parental involvement • embarrassment of older children • asserting right to independence
	ELC setting or school barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complexity of data • working time agreements • lack of opportunities for meaningful involvement • lack of information about opportunities to become involved • lack of flexibility of opportunities • lack of regular opportunities to discuss child's progress • the school is unwelcoming • lack of opportunity for social events • school's lack of knowledge of parents' skill and experience • lack of awareness of community-based activities • lack of awareness of different cultures and influences on family life • lack of awareness of family background or issues at home that are impacting on children's learning

Area	Challenge	Details
Parental representation	Specific barriers faced by some families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resistance of parents to be involved in formal groups • lack of confidence when speaking in public forums • lack confidence that views are respected and valued • lack of opportunities for less formal opportunities to listen and share information • many parents feel that membership of a formal parent body is 'not for them' • they may perceive Parent Councils/bodies to be 'closed', cliquy', 'elitist' or 'formal' • do not see themselves as the right kind of person to be involved • English is not the home language and those parents don't know about solutions, such as translators • children have additional support needs and parents think they can't or feel unable to get involved • families located remotely from ELC setting or school • parents with disabilities • ELC setting or school's lack of awareness of different cultures and influences on family life • ELC setting or school's lack of awareness of family background or issues at home that are impacting on children's learning • travelling some distance to the school • difficulty with transport or have to walk through unsafe areas • children are being educated some distance from their home, outwith their catchment or council boundary and live in a hostel/with carers • parents who do not live together, refugees, kinship carers, adoptive parents, young parents, gypsy traveller parents, parents whose first language is not English, service families, disabled parents, parents whose partner is in prison

Reflective questions

- What are the barriers and challenges to parental involvement and parental engagement in your ELC setting or school?
- What changes can be made to overcome the barriers and challenges?
- How can your community partners help you to overcome the barriers and challenges to parental involvement and parental engagement?
- Do you have a 'support directory' of community partners that could help you overcome barriers and challenges?
- How have other ELC settings or schools in your cluster, local authority, regional improvement collaborative overcome barriers and challenges to parental involvement and parental engagement?

Activity 5: Parental skills and experience

Purpose

To gather information on the range of skills and experience parents could potentially offer.

Parents have a range of skills, experiences and interests that they may be able to offer to the school at a mutually convenient time. Collating this information could be undertaken in a variety of ways such as questionnaires, face-to-face and social media. Members of the Parent Council may be able to help identify what questions to ask and the best ways of communicating with the wider parent forum on this. You may wish to liaise with other ELC settings or schools in your cluster or wider local authority for examples of best practice and what has worked well. Providing the questionnaire through a range of methods such as social media, apps or paper versions will help ensure more parents are reached.

Reflective questions

- Do I know what skills my parents and families may be able to offer to the ELC setting or school?
- How can my parents and community partners help me undertake a skills audit?
- What information do I need from the skills audit? What questions would help me gather this information?
- Do I want to target specific groups of parents or all parents for the skills audit?
- What are the best ways to communicate with parents and families about the skills audit?
- How will I analyse and use the information from the skills audit?
- Is the skills audit linked to the improvement plan?
- How often should the skills audit be repeated?
- Have other ELC settings or schools in my cluster, local authority or regional improvement collaborative undertaken a similar exercise?

Activity 6: Supporting families who are vulnerable to poorer outcomes

Purpose

To consider ways of involving and engaging families in their children's education.

Children growing up in families who are vulnerable to poorer outcomes tend to leave school with lower levels of educational attainment. This can have a significant impact on social mobility and poverty. Further information can be found in the [Engaging with Families](#) resource on the National Improvement Hub.

Gathering a wide range of assessment data and other information about children's learning and achievements helps intervention strategies to be selected to meet the needs of children and families. Self-evaluation data sources helps to identify trends across the school for particular cohorts of pupils, and better determines whether socio-economic factors are influencing attainment and achievement. It can also help identify priorities to improve outcomes for children and families.

Further information is available in '[How good is our school?](#)' (Fourth Edition) Self-Evaluation Framework.

Reflective questions

- Does your ELC setting or school use a range of methods and data to target specific areas of improvement?
- How effectively does your ELC setting or school use current data on levels of poverty in your community to help target interventions?
- Are staff confident in analysing and interpreting a range of data so that they can identify trends, patterns and gaps in attainment for the children in their class?
- Are staff aware of and confident in the Getting it Right for Every Child approach, the wellbeing indicators and how these can have a positive impact on children and families?

- How do you currently support families who are vulnerable to poorer outcomes? What is working well? What needs to change?
- What activities could your ELC setting or school undertake to better support families who are vulnerable to poorer outcomes?

Activity 7: Involving fathers

Purpose

To consider how well ELC settings and schools involve fathers.

Involving fathers in their child's learning and life of the ELC setting or school is vital to improve outcomes for children. Fathers Network Scotland have published their key findings and recommendations of the [How Father Friendly is your school?](#). This initiative was designed to raise awareness and promote the engagement of fathers with the education of their children and increase their involvement in primary schools.

Further information on engaging fathers can also be found in the [Engaging with Families](#) resource on the National Improvement Hub.

Reflective questions

- How well do you pro-actively communicate with and involve fathers in their child's education?
- Is your ELC setting or school father friendly?
- How are the views of fathers collated?
- Does the ELC setting or school have a variety of methods and opportunities to allow fathers to get involved and engaged in their child's learning and life of the school?
- How can community partners help overcome barriers to involving and engaging fathers in their child's learning and life of the school?



Activity 8: Involving parents who do not live together

Purpose

To consider how well ELC settings and schools involve parents who do not live together.

There are various reasons why parents who do not live together might not be engaged in their child's education and the life of the ELC setting or school. It is important that ELC settings, schools and parents who do not live together, work to identify what the barriers are and how they can be overcome. Involving parents who do not live together in their child's learning is vital to improve outcomes for children. Guidance to help practitioners build positive and inclusive relationships with parents who do not live together can be found in the guide from Families Need Fathers Scotland '[Helping Children Learn](#)'. Information to help parents who do not live together, stay involved in their child's learning can be found in the '[Equal Parents](#)' guide.

Reflective questions

- Are you aware of the parents in your ELC setting or school who do not live together?
- How well do you pro-actively communicate with and involve parents who do not live together in their child's education and the life of the school?
- Does the ELC setting or school have a range of methods and opportunities for engaging parents who do not live together in their child's education and life of the school?
- How are the views of parents collated including those who do not live together?
- How can community partners help overcome barriers to involving and engaging parents who do not live together?

Activity 9: Parents and carers of care experienced children and young people

Purpose

To measure the support and impact on children and young people when parents and carers are involved in their learning.

In this toolkit we use the term 'care experienced' to denote looked after children and young people, or those who have been looked after in the past, as it is a more inclusive definition. A child who is looked after may be cared for in their own home under a supervision order, in kinship care, in a foster home, residential unit or residential school. Care experienced children and young people face barriers to achieving success in education. The guidance for the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 states, 'Children who are looked after should have the same educational opportunities as all other children'. In order to achieve this, it is vital that ELC settings and schools are aware of the care experienced children in their establishment and that they keep in contact with the appropriate parent or carer. Additionally, children who are in care are deemed to have additional support needs (ASN) under the Education Additional Support for Learning Act (Scotland) 2004 as amended. This means that local authorities must treat children and young people in care as if they have additional support needs (ASN) until they are assessed as not having such needs or requiring a Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP).

Further information can be found in Enquire's Parents' [guide](#) to Additional Support for Learning:

Reflective questions

- How regular is our communication with carers and agency workers? Do we all exchange relevant information about the progress and possible problems of our care experienced children and young people?
- How do we encourage care experienced children and young people, their parents/carers and practitioners to possess high educational expectations and aspirations for their achievement and attainment?
- How do we provide advice and support to carers on strategies and methods to best engage in learning in the home setting?
- How are our records of information about children and young people's personal details kept up to date and accurate?
- How good are our procedures for keeping contact details for parents, residential staff, foster carers, relatives and social workers up to date and accurate? Do you know which of these contacts is your primary contact (as identified in the child or young person's care plan)?
- What systems are in place to ensure these records are treated sensitively and confidentially?
- How do we consult and communicate with parents, social workers, foster and kinship carers and others?
- How do we link with carers to provide information and support to children and young people in care on issues such as careers, further and higher education, and funding for education/training?
- How do we involve kinship carers, foster carers and residential staff and others in making decisions?
- How do we support carers to ensure there are suitable arrangements for study and completing homework?
- How do our arrangements ensure we include kinship carers, foster carers and residential staff? Are invitations and communications handled sensitively?

Local authority reflective questions when working with care experienced children and young people:

- How does the local authority ensure kinship carers, foster carers, residential staff and social workers, etc. are involved in developing and reviewing the Strategy for Parental Involvement?
- How does the authority facilitate communication between settings, social work services, carers and parents?
- What guidance is given to settings on liaising with parents and carers of care experienced children and young people?

- What guidance is given to parents of care experienced children, kinship carers, foster carers, residential staff and social workers on liaising with practitioners?
- What guidance or advice is given to social work staff and carers on supporting the learning of the children or young people in their care? For example - through encouraging home learning, providing areas for study, provision of books and IT equipment or knowledge of education system.
- Have all care experienced children and young people been assessed to establish whether they have additional support needs (ASN) and require a Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP)?
- What arrangements are in place to support a child or young person's additional support needs while further assessment is being carried out?

Although these reflective questions have been highlighted here specifically regarding care experienced children and young people, they can be used to reflect on practice with all parents in different settings.

Activity 10: Involving minority ethnic parents

Purpose

To consider ways to engage minority ethnic parents.

It is important that schools are working to support minority ethnic parents with a view to helping them become more involved and engaged in their children's education and the wider school community. Research has been carried out to find out what barriers parents with English as their second language faced regarding getting involved and engaged in their children's learning at home or school. Further information on ways to involve and engage minority ethnic parents is available from the Gathered Together team at Bemis (Scotland) [here](#).

Further information is available on the Bemis [website](#).

Reflective questions

- Do you have minority ethnic parents and families in your ELC setting or school?
- Have you identified what barriers might prevent parents and families from minority ethnic groups from getting involved and engaged in their child's learning?
- What support do you currently have in place to help minority ethnic parents and families understand the Scottish curriculum and get involved/engaged in their child's learning?
- How do parents whose first language is not English get information about their children's learning and about opportunities to get involved? This includes parents who are deaf and use British Sign Language as well as people who use other spoken languages.
- How can community partners help overcome barriers to involving and engaging minority ethnic parents and families?



Activity 11: Inclusion

Purpose

To consider ways to provide equal opportunities for all parents to be involved and included.

Parents play an important role in supporting their child's learning and education journey. They have a unique expert knowledge about their child, which they can share and practitioners can draw upon, at every stage. Many parents can often feel excluded or isolated for a variety of reasons. It is vital that practitioners ensure all parents are involved in their child's learning and have opportunities to be involved in the life of the ELC setting or school in ways that suit their needs.

Further information is available on Enquire's [website](#), [Parentzone Scotland](#), and the [How Good is our Early Learning and Childcare?](#) and [How Good is our School? \(Fourth edition\)](#) self-evaluation frameworks.

Reflective questions

- How are parents who have a disability made aware of support they can receive to get to the school and to other events such as consultation meetings?
- How practical is it for parents and practitioners to have access to aids and equipment, or to services such as translators, which will help them to communicate with each other?
- How are parents, who find it difficult to come to the ELC setting or school on their own, made aware that they can bring a friend or relative who may be able to support them?
- What arrangements are in place for parents who have other daytime responsibilities to keep in touch with the ELC setting or school?
- How welcome are partners of parents made to feel about getting involved as volunteers at the ELC setting or school and be part of events to involve families, so that each child is there with their family?
- What arrangements are in place to make it easy for parents living in each part of the catchment area to be involved?
- How does the ELC setting or school keep parents of children and young people, who are temporarily absent, informed of activities?
- How does the ELC setting or school take account of parents from armed forces families and ensure that the information they need is readily available?
- What arrangements are in place to fully involve and engage young parents in their children's learning and the life of the ELC setting or school?
- How are parents who do not live together involved and included in their child's learning?

Evaluation

Evaluating the impact of the work and communications with parents including the parental involvement/engagement strategy, parenting programmes and interventions is crucial. This will help practitioners to know the impact of their efforts and whether these are making a difference. Evaluation can also help practitioners to be reflective and consider what they would do differently next time. Changes in families can take place over a longer period of time and as each family is at a different stage, it might be more difficult to measure the longitudinal impact (Family Learning Review, 2016).

Why evaluate?

Evaluation can help practitioners to:

- learn about the impact(s) on families, individuals, partners and stakeholders
- make necessary changes to a strategy, parenting programme, intervention, improvement plan or to build on what is working well
- identify un/expected results, impacts or outcomes
- indicate possible areas to research
- demonstrate to funders such as the Pupil Equity Fund, Scottish Attainment Challenge that outcomes have been met
- to obtain future funding

How to evaluate

Practitioners need to know why they are undertaking evaluation, who is going to use it, what they need to know and why it is being collated. Consideration should be given to the scale of evaluation required as this can help prevent resources being allocated to a task that may not be needed.

Asking the right questions, at the right time and avoiding intrusive questions which take a long time to complete will be more appealing to stakeholders. Questions should be objective and seek answers to what you want or need to know. Using a range of evaluation approaches can help. These may include:

- creative qualitative and/or quantitative questions
- a variety of mixed methods to ask questions and gather data, for example, focus groups, questionnaires, sticky notes. Examples could include using video boxes, tablet computers, scribing for families, voice recordings, social media, photographs.

Consideration should be given to identifying families who may have barriers to participating in certain types of evaluation activity, such as those with literacy difficulties, English speakers of other languages (ESOL), or who need help with completing written evaluations for other reasons.

Who is involved in evaluation?

Stakeholders involved in the evaluation process may include:

- staff
- parents
- pupils
- partner organisations
- wider community
- stakeholders involved in the implementation of the parental involvement/engagement strategy

Reading list

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Further Information

[Community Learning and Development](#)

[National Standards for Community Engagement](#)

[Review of Learning at Home \(2018\)](#)

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