

## Working Together

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

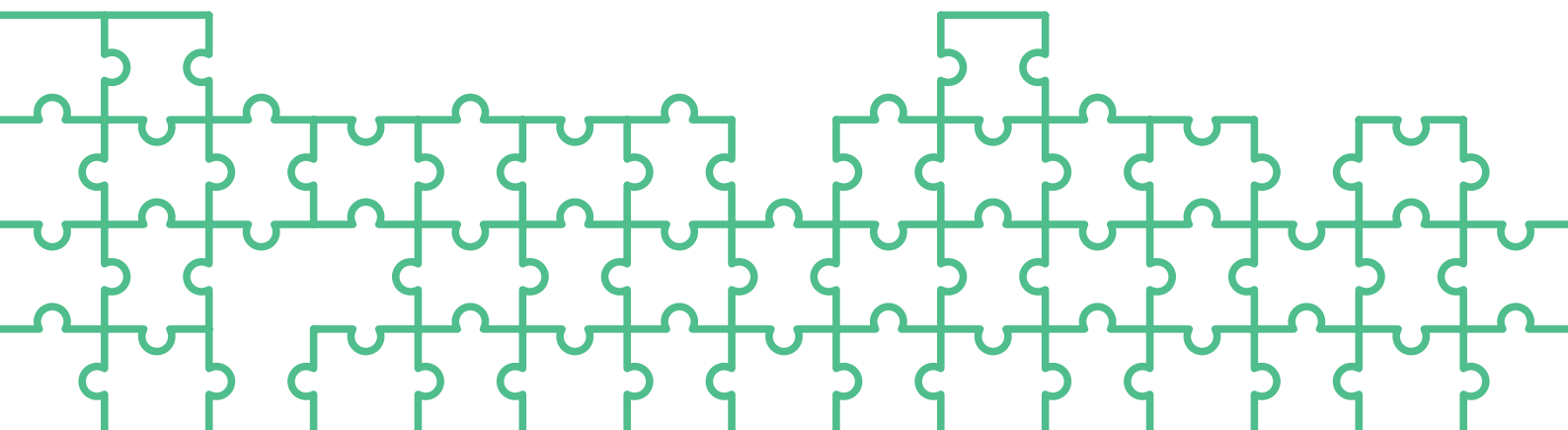


### Module 1

## Why positive communication makes a difference

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*In this section you will explore the benefits of positive communication between education professionals and parents of children with additional support needs*





## Background

*“I know I can reach out to the school when I need to and get a supportive response from the teachers. It’s really reassuring!”*

Parent

*“They [the school] have been really open from the start, which has helped us get over any challenges”*

Parent

## Aims

The aim of the modules in the toolkit is to support relationships between education professionals and parents of children with additional support needs. Working effectively with parents is crucial to ensure that learning at school and learning at home are connected. While it may be challenging to make time for developing relationships, we know that the investment pays dividends.

Parents have told us how much they value supportive relationships and good communication with education staff, and the positive impact this can have on children with additional support needs and their learning.

The modules will:

- Help you better understand parents’ perspectives
- Gain practical tips about working with parents to support children with additional support needs
- Signpost you to resources to help you develop your practice.

## Who are the modules for?

These modules have been written for adults who work in education settings with children aged 3 to 18 years including, but not limited to, teachers, early years practitioners, pupil support assistants, classroom assistants, educational psychologists, and school managers.

These modules are intended to be a flexible resource that can be completed individually or as part of a team and should complement existing resources and policies available within your workplace. Links to relevant national legislation and policy are referenced throughout the modules.

Each module has been created using up-to-date evidence and research and includes short films and reflective questions and tasks.



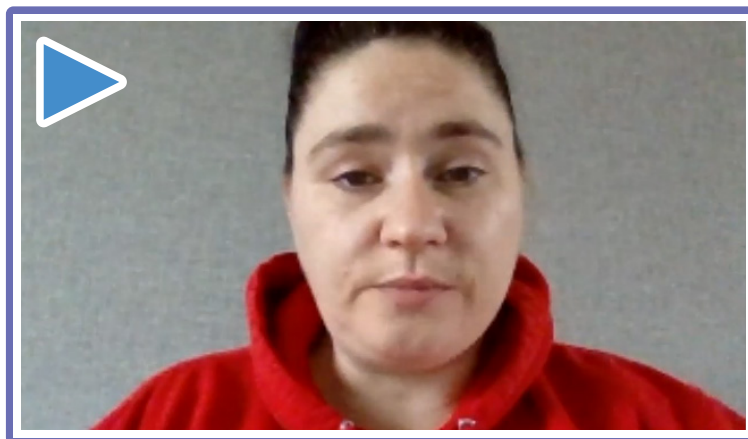
We have worked closely with parents (including 'seldom heard' voices) and education professionals to develop these resources. The modules also draw from Children in Scotland's experience of delivering Enquire, the national Additional Support for Learning information and advice service.

There are nine modules in total (including this one), and each module is expected to take between 30-45 minutes to complete. We recommend you approach each module separately and ensure you plan sufficient time to complete each module in one sitting. Please make notes when completing each module. These notes could include practical tips and ideas, notes relating to the reflective questions, resources that you would like to review in more detail, and things you would like to share with your manager or colleagues.

## Exercises



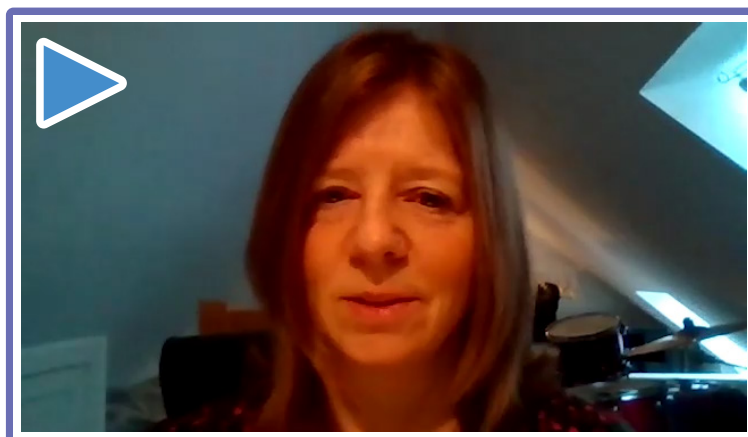
**Film:** Listen to a parent talk about the impact of being actively involved in planning their child's support



Duration:  
3 mins 7 secs

**Film:** Listen to a Deputy Head Teacher talk about the importance of building positive relationships with parents and carers of children with additional support needs

Duration:  
2 mins 52 secs



## Glossary

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Throughout these modules, we will refer to a number of key terms.

**Child/children:** When referring to a child or children we mean a person under the age of 18.

**Parent/Parents:** The term parent or parents means anyone with parental responsibilities for a child, and carers or guardians who look after children. It is important to remember that all families are unique, and some may include a wide range of people who contribute to a child's learning experiences such as foster carers, grandparents and extended-family members.

**Parental Involvement:** Parental involvement is about supporting pupils and their learning. It is about parents and teachers working together in partnership to help children become more confident learners (Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act Guidance, 2006). Parental involvement includes communication between home and school, and opportunities for parents and families to get involved in the wider life and work of the education setting (such as parent representation in decision-making and school improvement planning).

**Parental Engagement:** There is a difference between parental involvement and parental engagement. Parental engagement is about parents' and families' interaction with their child's learning. It can take place in the home, at school or in the community. Parental engagement means the ways in which parents, carers and families support and encourage their children's learning in school and in everyday life. Schools and early learning and childcare settings play a vital role in supporting families to do this effectively and with confidence.

Both parental involvement and engagement rely on the principle of trust and collaboration, good conversations and positive relationships. Parents need to be involved and engaged in a meaningful way from the beginning of key processes, throughout those processes and in the evaluation stage.

**Additional Support for Learning:** All children need support to help them learn. A child is said to require additional support for learning if they need more, or different support to that which is routinely provided in schools or pre-schools to children of the same age.

In 2021, 33.0% of children in school in Scotland had an identified additional support need. There are many reasons why children and young people may need extra or different support to help them learn. Additional support needs can be either short- or long-term, or can simply refer to the help a child needs to get through a difficult period.

The following are examples of additional support needs:

- the child has a disability or a health condition;
- the child's family circumstances are affecting their ability to learn;
- the child is experiencing social or emotional problems that impact on their learning;
- the child's learning environment is creating barriers to their learning.

A child does not need a formal diagnosis of specific conditions in order to have additional support needs. Every child is different and will need different levels of support.



## Evidence & information

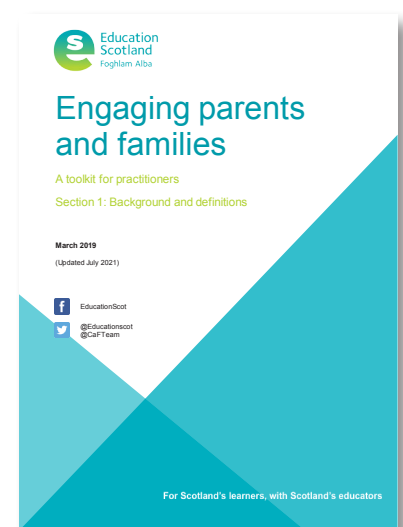
### The benefits of involving and engaging parents

For all children, the most positive outcome of good parental involvement and engagement is enhancing their learning experience and helping them to achieve their full potential.

Parents are the primary educators of their children and experts in their individual needs. Parents know their children best and will be able to share their knowledge and experience with education professionals when relationships are built on trust, mutual respect and collaboration.

The benefits of parental involvement and engagement have been widely documented and are recognised across the Scottish education system. The Scottish Government is firmly committed to parental involvement and engagement and it features as one of six key drivers for improvement in the National Improvement Framework for education in Scotland.

Education Scotland has produced '**Engaging Parents and Families**' (pictured right), a useful toolkit for practitioners that explores the benefit of involving and engaging parents and provides practical advice and support to support educators to self-evaluate and develop their relationships with parents and families. The modules in this toolkit aim to build upon this resource.



### How can additional support needs affect parental engagement and involvement?

Some parents of children with additional support needs face additional barriers and challenges to being involved in the life and work of their child's school or being engaged in their child's learning. This resource includes materials to support consideration of some of these additional barriers.

Effective parental engagement can be seen as a tool to support parents, ensure education settings get it right for children's individual learning and, most importantly, help children achieve their best outcomes.

Supporting a child with an additional support need can be challenging for many parents. As highlighted above, the different types of additional support needs that children experience can be incredibly wide-ranging, but one common factor is that parents often feel additional pressure, anxiety and worry about their child.

Parents may feel anxious about their child's future, overwhelmed by information, concerned about their child being stigmatised or may just need time to understand their child's situation. All parents supporting a child with additional support needs will

have their own individual experiences and needs, and no two adults or families will experience any one situation in the same way. However, there are common approaches that educational professionals can employ to show empathy, provide reassurance, and support the development of positive relationships with parents.

## What is the legal and policy framework?

These modules are underpinned by a range of national policy approaches and legislation aimed at improving outcomes for children with additional support needs. We have highlighted key policy and legislation documents below. The range of information can feel overwhelming at times, however support and advice is available to help education professionals to understand their duties and responsibilities. You can click on the relevant links for further information.

**Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)** is the Scottish Government's approach to providing all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time – so that every child and young person in Scotland can reach their full potential. The GIRFEC approach assesses children's wellbeing in terms of eight key indicators – Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included. These indicators are often referred to as SHANARRI and are used in planning for children who require additional support for learning. GIRFEC helps to support professionals to work alongside families to provide the best care for children.

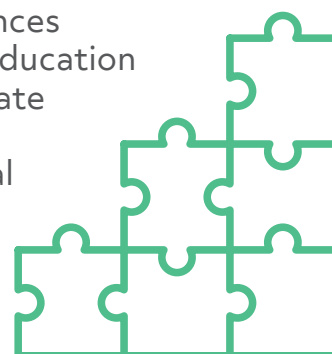


**The Curriculum for Excellence** is the national curriculum for learners aged 3-18 years old. The Curriculum offers all children in Scotland a broad general education and the opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to flourish. The Curriculum for Excellence offers an inclusive and flexible approach that supports all children to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

**The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended** provides the legal framework for the provision of additional support for learning. The Act places key duties on education authorities to identify, make provision for, and review provision for the additional support needs of children and young people for whose education they are responsible.

**Supporting children's learning code of practice (Revised edition, 2017)** is the statutory guidance that exists to help explain the principles of The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act to education authorities and education professionals. The guidance helps individuals to understand the application of the Act in their day-to-day work.

**The Equality Act 2010** protects the rights of individuals and advances equality of opportunity for all. The Act makes it unlawful for any education provider, including a private or independent provider, to discriminate between pupils on grounds of disability, race, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. These are often called protected characteristics. There is a clear link between this legislation and the provision of additional support for learning in Scottish education settings.



**Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act (2006)** places a duty on Scottish Ministers and local authorities to promote the involvement and engagement of parents in their child's early learning and childcare setting or school and their learning. The Act recognises the benefits of involving parents in the wider life of the school and the vital role they play in supporting their children's learning. Providing and strengthening the framework to support parental involvement and engagement is therefore a key focus of the Act. Parents are encouraged to express their views and have these taken into account not just on matters affecting the education of their children but also the school's arrangements for promoting parental involvement and engagement, as well as other matters or issues of interest to parents

**The Learning Together National Action Plan** provides a national vision whilst still allowing for local and community voice, innovation and flexibility. The plan highlights the leadership of those who make a difference every day to children's outcomes, namely, parents, families, teachers, headteachers, managers, early years practitioners/childminders, partners and relevant stakeholders. At the heart of the National Action Plan is the building of meaningful relationships between home, settings and schools.

**The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** is an international agreement setting out the rights of every child. The UNCRC highlights what governments must do to meet children's basic needs and help them reach their full potential. Almost every country in the world has signed up to the UNCRC. Scotland is in the process of incorporating the UNCRC into Scots Law to ensure that these rights become legally enforceable. This will have implications for all public bodies in Scotland, including education authorities.

**How good is our school?** (now in its fourth edition and often referred to as HGIOS 4) is a framework for school self-evaluation and improvement. It requires schools to reflect on questions including how parents contribute to their child's learning and how educators communicate a child's progress and achievements to parents.

**The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) Professional Standards for Registration** are the professional standards for teachers in Scotland which were refreshed in January 2021. The standards are underpinned by the themes of values, sustainability and leadership.

**Education Scotland's Empowered System guidance** explores how eight key partners can work together in an empowered system to improve outcomes for children and young people.



## Important recent developments

### Additional Support for Learning Review and Action Plan

The Scottish Government's **review of the implementation of additional support for learning**, which began in September 2019, looked at the quality of learning and support available, the different approaches to planning and assessment, resources for additional support for learning and staffing.

The review also examined the importance of relationships between educators and children with additional support needs and their families.

Some significant findings of the review:

- All school staff need to have more knowledge and understanding of additional support needs so they can meet everyone's needs
- Children and young people with additional support needs don't want to be underestimated for their ability and capability
- Communication between school and home needs to improve
- Meaningful relationships between children, young people and staff are important for learning
- Support for children and young people with additional support needs must be consistent
- Additional Support for Learning needs to be adequately funded to ensure everyone gets the support they need, when they need it.

A summary of the full report can be found on the [Scottish Government website](#).

The Scottish Government welcomed the findings of the review and with COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) and ADES (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland) set out a plan of action to address the findings. The findings include action points to ensure that schools and local authorities work in partnership with parents to develop and deliver ways of working together that support and promote positive relationships, communication and cooperation.





## Incorporation of the United Nations Committee for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The Scottish Government has underlined its commitment to incorporate the UNCRC into Scots Law to ensure that children's rights are enshrined in national legislation.

Ministers are currently exploring options for how this will work in practice within the context of the devolved powers of the Scottish Parliament.

If incorporation of the UNCRC goes ahead, this will have significant implications for public bodies, including education authorities, schools and Early Learning and Childcare settings. It will also have implications for parents as advocates for their children. Many public bodies are already anticipating incorporation of the UNCRC as part of their future planning.



## Practice reflection

### Reflective questions

Please answer the following reflective questions. We recommend that you take notes to refer to these later on.

Think about the parent and the teacher in the films;

1. How well does your setting and staff work with parents of children with additional support needs?  
What is working well? What areas do you think could be improved?
2. Has the Coronavirus pandemic affected the way you and your setting communicates with parents with children with additional support needs?  
What has worked well? What have the challenges been?



## Next steps

- If you haven't already, create a plan on how you will complete these modules.
- Think about how you will share resources and learning with your school community or setting. This could include 1:1 sessions, team meetings or in-service days.