

Engaging parents and families

A toolkit for practitioners

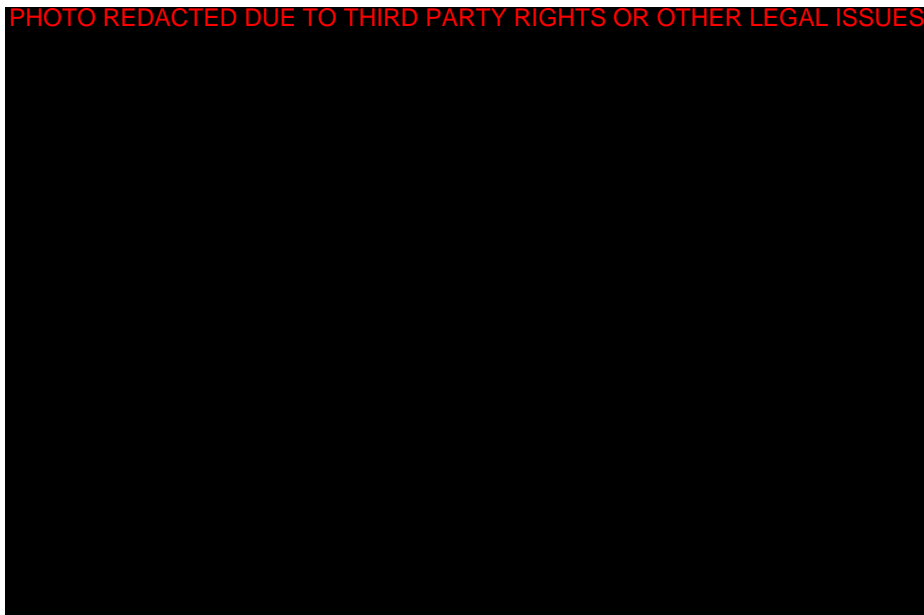
**Section 5: Family learning
and community connections**

Introduction

'Our children mean everything to us, why would parents not want to be involved.'

We want Scotland to be the best place for our children to grow up. Parents entrust some of that learning to early learning and childcare (ELCC) settings and schools. Curriculum for Excellence is learner centred and that means we want to get learning right for every child.

This toolkit has been developed to provide practitioners in all settings, including community learning and development (CLD) teams, family support staff, home/school link workers and additional support for learning staff with a practical resource to help support partnerships with parents and families in all aspects of their children's learning. Practitioners can use the toolkit to help them achieve and sustain high levels of parental involvement and meaningful engagement within their learning settings.



Engaging parents and families: A toolkit for practitioners, provides links to research, examples of practice from ELCC settings, primary and secondary schools, community settings as well as parental organisations. Practitioners will also find useful links to other websites, some of which should be shared with parents.

Practitioners will find activities that can be used as a starting point and/or as a tool to measure and evaluate current practice in parental involvement and engagement in their setting and in the local authority. There are activities that can be used in partnership with the Parent Council, parent committees or associations (depending on your setting), to ensure that all parents, carers and families are fairly represented by this body. These activities support the requirements of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act, 2006, the Children and Young People's Scotland Act (2014) and the commitments in the National Parenting Strategy (2012). The [Engaging with Families](#) website is a helpful source of information to practitioners.

The toolkit is organised into six sections:

- Section 1: Involving all parents
- Section 2: Learning at home
- Section 3: Home/school partnerships
- Section 4: Parental representation
- Section 5: Family learning and community connections
- Section 6: Appendix and other useful information

Each section will have information that is relevant to all settings as well as specific examples relevant to each sector (ELCC, primary, secondary or community organisations).

There are common themes running throughout the toolkit:

- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)
- Children's rights and participation
- Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)
- Building strong, positive relationships
- Family learning/community links
- Equality, diversity and inclusion

'Parent' refers to the mother or father of a child or young person, or to any foster carer, relative or friend who has been given responsibility for looking after or bringing up a child, for example through a supervision order. We will use the term parent or parents throughout this resource.

Section 5: Family learning and community connections

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Family learning and community connections: Introduction

“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”

(Family Learning Network 2015)

Family learning is recognised as having significant benefits for parents, carers and children of all ages. It can be delivered in a range of settings including school, the outdoors, in the local community and is delivered by practitioners from a variety of professional backgrounds, often working in partnership. A strong partnership approach facilitates sustainability and a more robust service for families. Trust is a key factor to families accessing any provision. Working with partners who have already established trust and addressed barriers, enables practitioners to work with families who have disengaged with the life of the setting.

‘The role that parents and carers play in raising the next generation of Scots is central to everything that we want to achieve for our families, our communities and our country’.

(National Parenting Strategy 2012)

Supporting and encouraging children through enjoyable learning experiences is important through all stages of their education. When parents, family members and communities learn together this helps foster positive attitudes towards life-long learning and makes a positive difference to a child’s learning.

‘A child’s network of support begins in the family with their parents...we want to ensure that Scotland’s parents have the skills, knowledge and respect to provide that support with confidence’.

(National Parenting Strategy 2012)

Supporting children’s learning through their family and community

Families who engage in family learning have the opportunity to develop the vital role they play in their child’s learning at all stages of education.

A key component of family learning is the negotiated learning between staff and families. This takes into account prior learning, family circumstance and aspirations. Family learning is a universal provision but can be used as an early intervention and prevention strategy. It can also help increase parental involvement in children’s learning through building confidence and self-esteem.

Practitioners work with families to reduce potential barriers to engaging parents and are responsive to the family circumstances such as families affected by imprisonment, English as a second language and mental health issues. Practitioners work with Community Learning and Development (CLD) staff, agencies, Third Sector organisations and community groups to ensure they are well informed about local circumstances and resources.

For more information, research and to share practice visit the [Engaging with Families](#) website.

Practitioners may find the following websites useful:

[Generations Working Together](#) 'aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations, and contributes to building more cohesive communities'.

The [European Literacy Policy Network \(ELINET\)](#) unifies 78 partner organisations from 28 European countries (including 24 EU member states) engaged in literacy policy-making and reading promotion in Europe.

[Local Authority websites](#) have information about Community Learning and Development (CLD), local groups and organisations.

What family learning and community connections can look like when things go well

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- Creative approaches are used by practitioners and partners to engage families.
- Those families that are engaged in family learning programmes are highly motivated and actively involved in their own learning and development.
- Children, young people and their parents are included, participating, achieving and progressing very well in their learning.
- There is clear evidence that the life chances of those families experiencing particular challenges are being improved as a result of their engagement in family learning.
- Families let practitioners know there has been an improvement in their health and or wellbeing.
- Programmes developed by practitioners are responsive to identified needs during consultation with families and communities.
- Family learning programmes being developed and delivered promote equality, fairness and diversity.
- Participation in family learning programmes is monitored robustly to highlight trends and support effective early intervention strategies.
- Families are matched into the right programme which is negotiated and addresses identified needs.
- Resources and services for families, children and young people are co-ordinated with the wider community, including third sector organisations.



Activity 1: Approaches to family learning

Purpose

To identify ways that practitioners engage with families and communities and how practice is reviewed to ensure there is continuous improvement

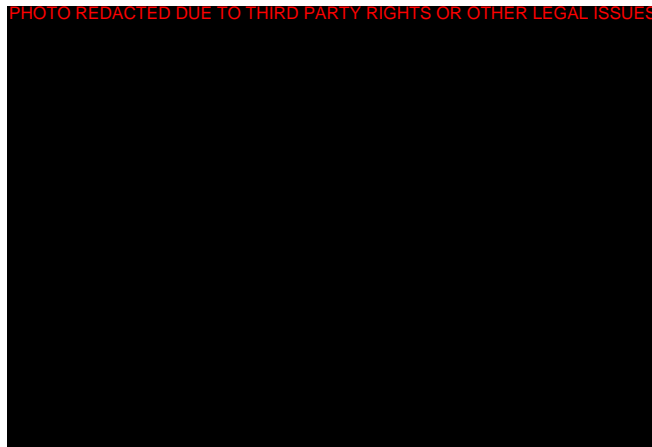
Consider the following reflective questions

- What methods do we use to engage with families in the local community?
- How do we actively seek out meaningful partnerships with local providers?
- How do we keep up-to-date with research and changes? How does this affect delivery?
- What evaluation methods are we using to demonstrate that family learning is improving the life chances of the families involved? How do we record trends to inform interventions?
- How are we monitoring outcomes for children to highlight improvements as a result of their participation in family learning and how is this information being shared between partners as appropriate?
- How are we continuously reviewing our practice to make sure that families are feeling included and that they are participating, achieving and progressing?
- How are we ensuring that provision is responsive to the needs of families?
- In what ways are we actively promoting equality, fairness and diversity?
- How well are we matching the right programme to the right families?

Practitioners should consider the family learning quality indicator in [‘How good is our school?’ \(4th Edition\)](#) for more information and self-evaluation.

Example 1

Transition project - Creative approaches to engage parents and carers in their child's early learning – a partnership approach



A collegial partnership was developed with families, Moffat Early Years Campus, CLD Family Learning, Niddrie Mill and St. Francis Primary Schools, The City of Edinburgh Council multimedia team, Educational Psychologist and Craigmillar Library. In addition to CLD funding, local community groups were also involved in the project through donations: Castle Rock Edinvar Housing Association, Supporting Parents and Carers in Edinburgh and Books for Babies.

Families were taken on a transition journey from their Early Learning and Childcare setting, through the summer break and into primary one by way of a series of six, enjoyable challenges, developed around the children's books by Ronda and David Armitage. The need for the project was initially identified through low attainment figures for the area. As a collegial group the aims were to create a high quality, interactive and creative learning experience for local families and in doing so, raise attainment by supporting parents and carers to become more fully engaged in their children's learning. In the first year (2012) 122 families were successfully engaged and worked with practitioners on negotiated learning journeys.

Intended outcomes of the project:

- to increase the confidence of parents to engage in their child's learning
- to enable parents and carers to familiarise themselves with and increase their confidence in the Early Learning and Childcare setting to primary experience through using a creative project as a focus for transition
- to increase parents' and carers' confidence to read with their children
- to increase partnership working between services to effectively support families and build capacity
- to offer different creative mediums and methodology as a way of attracting parents and carers who would not normally get involved in their children's learning
- to encourage families to engage with other local educational services, such as the local library
- to promote positive health and wellbeing through healthy eating experiences.

The project has shown to have impact in the following areas:

- increase in parental engagement in both library attendance and school activities
- the children seem more ready to learn when the context is familiar to them
- the children are demonstrating good listening and developing their oral comprehension skills.

“It was a good link between the school and nursery, makes transition easier.”

Parent, St. Francis PS

“He has loved reading the story and tries to read it back to himself. Now he is familiar with the story and can recognise certain words. We also both enjoy doing the treasure box activities together in nursery/school and at home.”

Parent, Niddrie Mill PS

“We have been impressed with the numbers of parents joining the children in school for each challenge and the enthusiasm with which both children and adults have shown towards the project. This is a success in itself, in terms of parent participation.”

Primary 1 teacher

The key to the success of this project was the engagement and development of meaningful partnerships with parents. As is increasingly acknowledged by researchers, educational practitioners and politicians, engaging parents and carers at a point of interest and creating opportunities for a genuine partnership that respects their knowledge of their children and emphasises the importance of their educational role is vital. Moving from Early Learning and Childcare settings to primary 1 is an important transition for all and provides an opportunity to create a model of best practice.

For more information on this project see the [Education Scotland](#) website.

Example 2

Family Club – St John’s RC Academy, Perth and Kinross (3-18 years with Extended Early Learning and Childcare Provision on North Inch Community Campus)

The Family Club is a multi-agency approach to engagement and learning for the whole family. It is run on a weekly basis and involves a variety of professionals including community workers, an adult literacy and numeracy worker, art specialist, cookery specialist and sports workers. There are a number of activities which are offered on a weekly basis with parents and children choosing which ones they wish to participate in. Crèche facilities are provided to allow families to attend.

Families have reported to practitioners that the classes enhanced their skills in a variety of areas including arts and crafts, sports, literacy and numeracy and cooking. Children and parents worked closely together, which parents said had a positive impact on communication and bonding with their child. Family Club also offers practitioners the opportunity to link in with colleagues from different services. This creates strong referral pathways and collaborative approaches. One practitioner commented that she had a number of families being successfully referred to other services when needed.

Working in this collaborative way practitioners have referred families to other family learning based programmes based within the setting such as Handling Children’s Behaviour Parenting Course and Family Cooking Classes.

Intended outcomes:

- Families are able to communicate better when a challenging situation arises.
- Parents and carers feel more confident about how they will challenge behaviour and work out a positive solution so that conflict in the home can be avoided.
- Children and young people feel safe and secure to voice their opinion in a nurtured environment.
- Families are more confident in trying new food and making healthier choices at meal times. Children and young people were more likely to eat the food they had prepared with their parent or carer.

- Cooking together had an impact on the overall communication between families and how they interacted as a unit.
- Families also enjoyed cooking with others in the community and meeting new friends who they can then go on and socialise with. Feeling part of a community and being supported is important especially for families who are living in isolation.

Impact on families:

- “I feel it has motivated me to get my daughters out after tea time as normally they would be stuck in at home due to winter weather.”
- “It has been good doing something with my son after school instead of being stuck in the house.”
- “Has given us ideas for family activities.”
- “It has given my daughter and I more skills in the kitchen.”
- “Family Club has enabled us to support our children.”
- “Has enabled us to meet other parents and children.”
- “It gives me ideas to do at home with my children.”
- “It’s been great to speak to other parents and this has made me feel part of the community.”



Activity 2: Family learning methodology

Purpose

To:

- actively and meaningfully engage with all parents and carers and children and young people in a creative and sustainable way
- agree intended and negotiated outcomes for the family as a whole as well as addressing individual needs as appropriate
- work in partnership with families in their widest sense, including stakeholders within the setting and beyond
- support an early intervention and prevention strategy for families.

Who can be involved:

- Parents, carers, significant person in the child's life
- Family Learning Workers
- Community Learning and Development staff
- Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and school staff
- Partners and stakeholders
- Third Sector staff

- (a) Intelligence gathering – consultation with families through a variety of ways. This can include letters being sent home, face to face contact, multimedia ie Facebook, texting, twitter etc., to identify need within the community.

Running alongside consultation with families, partners and stakeholders should be identified. These may be workers that are delivering within the Third Sector, Community Learning and Development, Private Sector or within neighbouring ELCs or schools. ELCs and schools can build on the relationships that these partners may already have with families which can make engagement easier. Working with partners at the earliest stages will enhance provision for families and reduce duplication.

Practitioners and partners should use available data and analysis that they have gathered as well as the Local Authority's Statistical Information Team as this will inform targeted support needs.

Evaluation should be built in at this stage as it will give more robust evidence at the end. This will inform future improvements.

Evaluation methods will vary due to the ages and stages of the families involved.

- (b) Develop a programme for families. This can be something new or from existing programmes that are currently running within your local area. These should be monitored and negotiated through the life of the programme. Evaluation should be at the start of the learning journey and throughout.

Programmes may include:

- Family Literacy

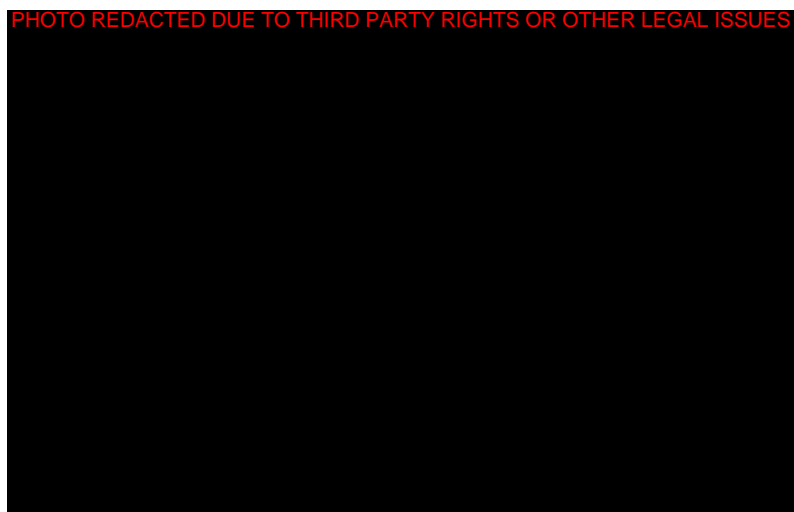
- Family Numeracy/Mathematics for Parents
 - Family Cooking – Healthy Eating
 - Cooking on a budget for families
 - I am a scientist!
 - Fit Families
 - ESOL Family Learning
 - Family Learning within the Prison Service – Linking with schools
- (c) End of programme evaluation and progression. Evaluation of the programme will be individual and significant for each family. Progression will be negotiated as appropriate and could be for the whole family or for individuals within the family. Links with partners will support this.
- (d) It is important to celebrate successes as this gives families a sense of achievement and increases confidence. This could be done through awards ceremonies, articles in newsletters or local press, information and pictures posted on setting and partner websites etc.
- (e) Self-evaluation is important after each programme. Learn from what went well or areas for improvement. This will support growth within your service and inform future programmes. Collaborate with partners and families that were involved and share the final report.



Activity 3: Active and meaningful engagement

Purpose

Use creative and sustainable methods to engage families in learning



Education Scotland have produced a resource in partnership with stakeholders that engages families in learning through science. The purpose of creating this resource was to support families to learn together and increase parental engagement.

This resource can be used with families by staff in the classroom and is also designed for families to use on their own at home and in their communities. It strives to show science as a fun, family, interactive process which supports literacy, numeracy and scientific interest and capabilities amongst children, young people and parents. The resource is inclusive as it utilises everyday items and outdoor activities which have a limited cost to families. Staff and families are also encouraged through Parentzone Scotland to share their scientific experiments which creates ownership and involvement in a wider scientific community.

Quotes from parents

'I don't normally get to do this because I'm at work. Now I know what to do and can try this out at home.'

'It's definitely something I would do as a family at home.'

'I've got four boys so it's definitely something we could do together at home.'

'We were quite a reserved group but the younger ones got right into it.'

'I've learned to listen to my daughter.'

'Had so much fun and love Babble and Dabble.'

'Didn't think science could be so easy to do.'

Quotes from children

'My favourite part was putting all the things in the jar and seeing it glow in a dark room.'

'I learned that one colour is stronger than a few together.'

'I thought it was really fun.'

'I liked the 3, 2, 1 blast-off and then it reached the space station.'

'I liked the tornado the best.'

Useful links

[Supporting science at home](#)

['How Good is Our School?' \(4th Edition\)](#)

[How Good is Our Third Sector Organisation?](#)

For more information and to share practice visit [Engaging with Families website](#).

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