

# Engaging parents and families

**A toolkit for practitioners**

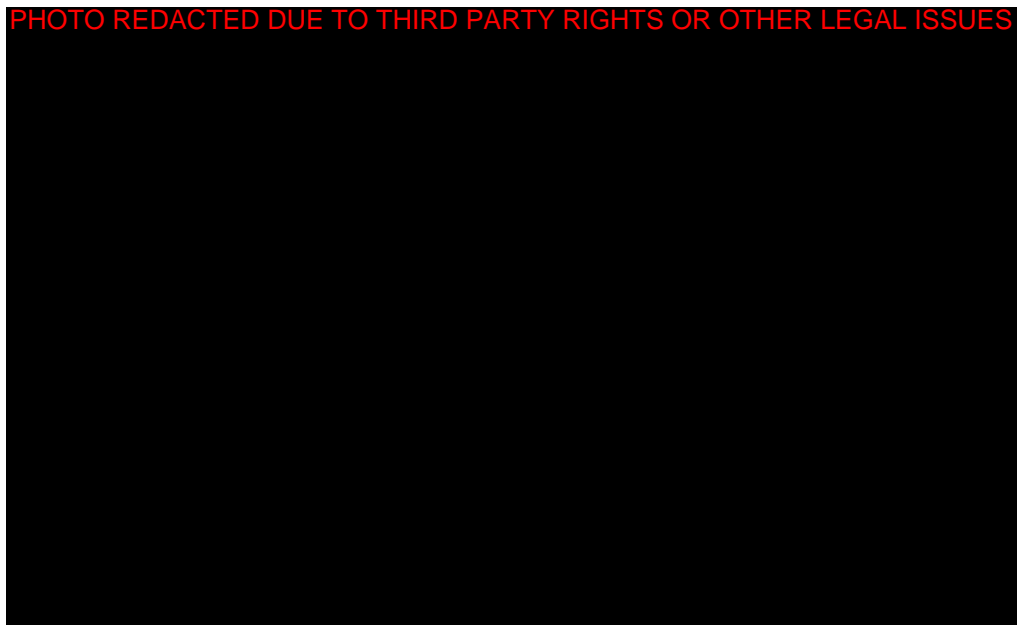
**Section 2: Learning at home**

# 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 (ELC) 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 ELC 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/partnership settings
- 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 (ELC, primary, secondary or community).

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 2: Learning at home

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# Learning at home: Introduction

From the moment they are born, children begin to absorb information and make sense of their world. As well as providing the basics for growth and development: food, comfort and security, parents also provide stimulation through everyday activities, games, rhymes and language that help a child to learn. Many of these activities are part of everyday life – preparing and eating meals together, doing the washing, shopping, watching TV, visiting friends and family – but for young children they are opportunities for discovery and learning. See [Parentzone Scotland](#) for ideas to share with parents to support their child’s learning at home.

50% of the language adults use is in place by the time children are three years old, and 85% by the time they are five years old.

This statistic emphasises the importance of parents and the home environment in supporting children’s development. This usually happens naturally as part of family life. Parents want the best for their children and do what they can to achieve this.

However, once children start more formal education it’s not always easy for parents to know how best to help their child. As children grow older it is easy to forget the strong influence that the home and the community still have on their learning and development, especially as children only spend 15% of their time in school. It is the responsibility of all practitioners and local authorities to ensure that parents are fully informed about how to support their children’s learning at home.

Schools, local authorities and community learning and development organisations/groups can do a lot to make the links between what is being taught in ELC and school and learning opportunities that exist at home and in the community.

The learning at home section looks at how practitioners can help parents to continue supporting their children at home.

The table below shows the effects that parents and schools have on children’s learning. As children get older, research shows the effect that parents have on their learning decreases and the effect of school increases.

Achievement	Parent/schooleffects
Age 7	0.29/0.05
Age 11	0.27/0.21
Age 16	0.14/0.51

# What does parental involvement and engagement in children's learning mean?

There are three main areas stated in The Act where parents can get involved in supporting their children's learning:

**Learning at home:** Parents are the first and on-going educators of their own children and, as such, should receive information and support to help develop their child's learning at home and in the community.

*'Parents, carers and families are by far the most important influences in a child's life. Parents who take on a supportive role in their child's learning make a difference in improving achievement and behaviour.'*

**(Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006)**

**Home/school partnership:** Settings must be open to the involvement of parents in the work they do and they should consider ways of providing information that helps parents engage with them and their children's education. This may also include community partnerships.

*'When parents and schools work together children do better.'*

**(Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006)**

**Parental representation:** The Act provides a framework for ensuring that parents have the opportunity to express their views and have these taken into account on policy matters affecting the education of their children. It makes provision for parents to be a member of the Parent Forum, council or association and to have their views represented to the setting, local authority and others through a representative Parent Council for the school. It also gives them the right to raise their concerns and/or make a complaint.

*'Parents are the biggest influence on their children's development – parental involvement and aspirations shape children's and young people's achievements.'*

**(Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006)**

**The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006** recognises the vital role that parents play in supporting their children's learning by strengthening the framework for supporting parental involvement in school education. There is a duty on Scottish Ministers and education authorities to promote the involvement and engagement of parents in children's education. It aims to help parents to be:

- involved and engaged with their child's education and learning
- welcomed as an active participant in the life of the school or setting
- encouraged to express their views on school education generally.

**Curriculum for Excellence** promotes schools and parents working together to improve learning and education and to encourage all children to become;

- Successful learners
- Confident Individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and the use of the My World triangle, promotes the wellbeing of all children and young people, and parents should be engaged in this process to ensure that their children are:

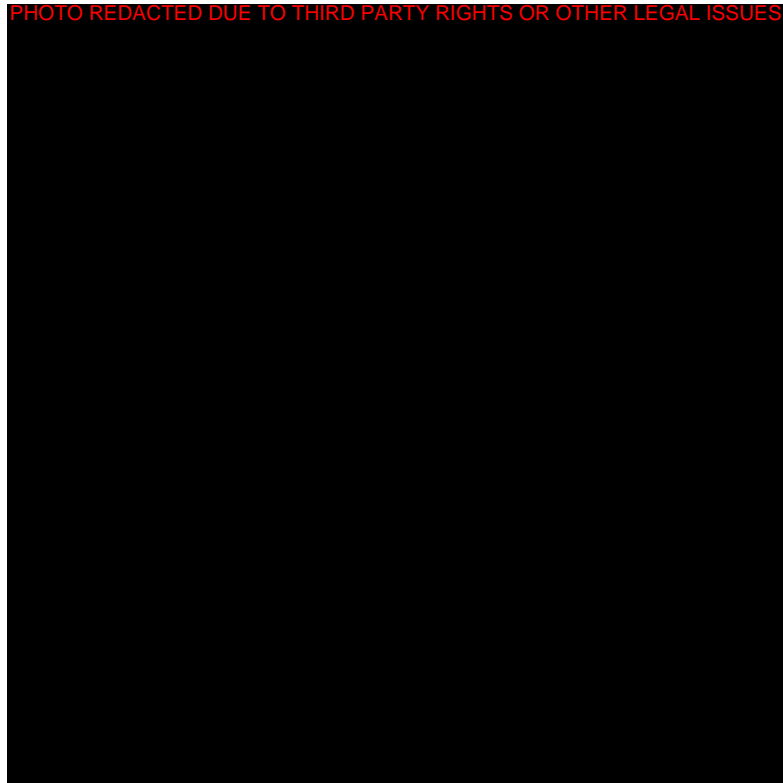
- Safe
- Healthy
- Achieving
- Nurtured
- Active
- Respected
- Responsible
- Included

The Children and Young People Act (2014) has a focus on GIRFEC to ensure that:

- all children and young people from birth to 18 years old have access to a Named Person
- a single planning process is put in place to support those children who require it
- a definition of wellbeing exists in legislation
- public bodies have a duty to co-ordinate the planning, design and delivery of services for children and young people, with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes, and to report collectively on how they are improving those outcomes.

Practitioners and local authorities have a duty to help ensure parents understand the key highlights from the relevant legislation.

## What it looks like when parental involvement is going well at home



- Parents get lots of encouragement from the setting to take part in their children's learning.
- Practitioners keep parents informed of what their children will be learning so that they can discuss this with their children at home.
- Parents and practitioners can tackle areas of difficulty and concern together.
- Practitioners provide specific fun activities for children and parents to do at home.
- Parents support their children's learning by helping with home learning and making links with other areas of work.
- Parents spend one to one time with their children and also enjoy shared family activities/visits.
- Parents and children know that everyone's contribution is valued.
- Children receive additional support from the individual attention they get from their parent.
- The ways of communicating with parents reflect the diversity of parents and their needs.
- There are open channels of communication so that parents feel comfortable talking to teachers and making them aware of how children's learning is being supported at home.
- Practitioners discuss with parents and children the activities they undertake at home so that this can be incorporated into their learning.



# Challenges to parental involvement

If you haven't completed Activity 3 in Section 1, you may wish to consider this also.



## Activity 1: Parents and practitioners working together

### Purpose

**To identify ways that parents and practitioners can work together to promote parental involvement in children's learning**

Consider the following reflective questions:

- How are parents getting information about how they can help support their children's learning? Is the information provided in a variety of formats including written and face-to-face? Are other forms of electronic and/or social media methods used?
- How are parents made aware of ways they can share information about their children with the setting? How are they able to do this?
- Are parents asked about how they want to receive information and communicate with the setting? What arrangements are in place to respond to parents?
- How easy is it for parents to communicate with the setting in ways that suit them?
- Does the school website include a parents' section? Does it contain details of what children will be learning each term? Does it contain suggestions of what parents can be doing at home to extend and reinforce this learning?
- Is there information in the setting and other places about access to adult learning and other ways parents can build their own confidence and skills?
- How are parents encouraged to share their interests and skills with their children?
- How does the setting ensure that they understand the needs of all parents and provide ways of supporting them to help their children's learning at home? For example, some parents might need help with literacy and numeracy skills in order to support their child?
- How do parents who are not living with their children – for example, parents who are separated, working away, in the armed forces or in prison – get regular updates on what is happening for their child?
- What support is there within the local authority to support parents, families and children who may be experiencing particular difficulties?
- Do parents know that members of the extended family can be involved too?

- How are settings working together to help parents as well as children with the transition from early learning and childcare settings to primary and from primary to secondary school?
- What links are there with other agencies that can support parents in their role as educators – for example, libraries, community centres, family learning teams, home school link workers, community learning and development teams, adult literacy practitioners?
- How do parents know about and get access to the resources that are available, such as Parentzone Scotland, Read, Write, Count, and other useful websites?
- Have parents been involved with practitioners in developing the school handbook, improvement plan, policies and procedures, and any other information that is sent to parents?

For more information please visit:

Parentzone Scotland [www.parentzonescotland.com](http://www.parentzonescotland.com) where parents can download tip sheets to support learning at home. These will also be available in Gaelic.

National Parent Forum of Scotland <http://www.npfs.org.uk/> will provide Nutshells and other information to support learning at home.

Scottish Parent Teacher Council <http://www.sptc.info/> provides schools, parent councils and local authorities with information on involving parents in learning.

Read, Write, Count <http://www.readwritecount.scot/> provides tips and ideas for parents of children in P1-P3.

Royal Caledonian Education Trust <http://www.rcet.org.uk/>.

ADES – Service Children <http://adescotland.org.uk/service-children/>.

Families Outside <http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/>.



## Activity 2: Reviewing and developing a home learning policy – This activity can be adapted and amended for any setting

*'When parents are actively involved in reading with their children at home their children's reading scores improve, on average, by between 12-18 months.'*

(Parents as Partners in Excellence Celia Burn Scottish Learning Festival September 2007)

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### Purpose

To identify and build on how parents already support their children's learning at home, to make clear links for parents between learning in ELC and school and learning at home and to encourage children and young people to become independent learners.

Consider the following reflective questions:

- What are the positive elements of your current policy about homework or learning at home?
- What improvements are required to improve this policy?
- What support strategies do you have in place to improve the nature and quality of parental involvement in supporting learning at home?

Different methods can be used to gather the views of parents and children and young people about the early learning and childcare centre or school's homework/home learning policy including:

- Carrying out a survey of parent and children and young people's views on homework/home learning. This could even be carried out by some children and young people as part of a homework task.
- Parent council or other parent group and headteacher establish a working group of parents, children, young people and practitioners. The group could run a survey or hold meetings to find out parents' views about:
  - what they already do to support and extend their children's learning at home and how they do this
  - any additional support and information from the setting they would find useful to support their children's learning.

## Collating information

Collate the views and consider:

- what the priorities might be to provide clearer, more specific information for parents, for example, developing home learning logs or diaries
- organising activities for parents and children around specific subject areas, for example, involving parents in devising and developing maths games; building up a science lending library; setting up a book/reading club for children and parents
- whether there are any specific issues or support needs for some parents or children
- what other resources there may be to support learning at home, for example, family learning or literacy teams
- how a policy could be developed to address the priorities.

## Implementing and reviewing the policy

Once a policy and actions to implement the policy are identified, the next step is to inform all parents, children and young people.

Agree when the policy and actions will be reviewed and evaluated to assess the difference it has made to parents, children and young people.



## Activity 3: Home learning – This activity can be adapted and amended for any setting

*‘Doing homework regularly through their years at school has roughly the same benefit as an extra year’s schooling.’*

(Parents as Partners in Excellence Celia Burn Scottish Learning Festival September 2007)

### Purpose

**To create home learning tasks that are meaningful and make links between learning at ELC/school and at home.**

3 (a) Consider the following reflective questions:

- Why do we issue homework?
- What are the features of good quality homework?

3 (b) Individually consider a homework task that you currently issue and answer the following questions:

- How effective is the homework task at developing dialogue between parents and their children?
- How does the homework task increase parental involvement in children’s learning at home?
- How is the homework task intended to support the skills focus of the class lesson (problem solving, working with others, literacy/English, numeracy/mathematics, STEM, modern languages, art and design, careers)?

3 (c) Having considered the above, how could future home learning tasks be adapted so that parents can support practitioners to raise attainment and achievement of their children?

For more information visit:

Parentzone Scotland’s Learning at Home pages:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone/learningathome/index.asp>

BBC education website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/education>

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## Example 1

### Home learning activities

It is important that home learning is useful, meaningful and takes account that parents may have time constraints. Time is one of the biggest barriers for parents who are supportive of their children's learning at home. Home learning can be more than additional school work being sent home. It should be creative and innovative and able to be incorporated into life at home. A school in Glasgow has been able to do this with their home learning tasks. These aim to include the whole family and can be based on the learning already happening in school to enhance the skills being taught in the classroom.

There are a selection of these examples included to download here:

- [Word file: Shared home learning activities – Primary 1](#)
- [Word file: Shared home learning activities – Primary 2](#)
- [Word file: Shared home learning activities – Primary 3](#)
- [Word file: Shared home learning activities – Primary 4](#)
- [Word file: Shared home learning activities – Primary 5](#)
- [Word file: Shared home learning activities – Primary 7](#)

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