



Your 2-minute guide to...

Getting a good start with parents



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We need to respect the uniqueness of all our children and families.

As practitioners we must recognise that parents know their children best. We need to encourage them to share this knowledge with us. This will only come out of a respectful relationship between the setting and the family.

If we want parents to trust us as carers for their children, we must build a relationship based on mutual trust and respect. This will support the child and help both child and family have the best possible experience in our settings.

The relationship between the setting and a family is unique: for some it will be more 'natural' and wanted. For others it will take more time and be a more delicate matter. It can be complex: for instance, sometimes we have misconceptions about parents, whether consciously or not. Equally parents can have the same about us.

Bearing these things in mind, all we can do is aim to be open-minded and get to know all the parents as well as we can.

It is especially important to get off to a good start.

Initial meeting

First impressions matter.

It is critical that we welcome each family into the setting, ensuring that every team member does likewise. If possible, before the meeting find out if the family need an interpreter: arrange one or ask if they can bring someone. This will show that you respect their language and want to hear what they have to say.

Be mindful that:

- Parents will have had different experiences of education settings and may be anxious about visiting
- Some staff and parents may have had a stressful morning before they arrive, so be attuned to this and maybe acknowledge it
- Parents may be experiencing stresses at home such as issues of housing, finance, health, relationships
- Some may be nervous because they are a first-time parent
- Ensure you listen to what parents have to say: pause for a short time, allowing them time to gather their thoughts
- Give the parents time to ask questions and / or express concerns
- Don't bombard them with too many questions or information

Home visit

This should be done by the key person as they will be the main point of contact for the parent each day.

If parents allow you to visit their home this may be a big event for them. Before entering, ask if they would like you to remove your shoes.

It is important to cover the following areas:

1. Explain why you are there, emphasising your wish to form a partnership.
2. Listen carefully so that you can begin to establish an accurate understanding of the family.
3. Try not to make assumptions – prioritising careful listening should help prevent this.
4. Ask about the family make up and who is important the child.
5. Take an interest in the family's cultural and religious identity and how this is celebrated. You may want to share yours (a personal decision).
6. Clearly explain the settling in process and any policies and procedures that are important to a smooth transition. Try to make sure that parents understand them.
7. Leave plenty of time for repeating things and answering any questions.

Day to day communication with all parents

Greeting all parents warmly is basic good practice.

As well as this, it's important to look out for those parents who don't often make contact, or possibly avoid doing so. You may have things you want to share with them about their child, and they may be able to share things with you. Sometimes it's worth emailing or texting as a first point of contact if it's tricky face-to-face. As positive relationships develop, parents will be more likely to communicate openly without the fear of being judged.

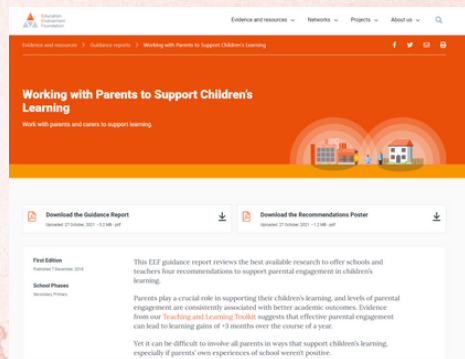
The Education Endowment Fund (EEF) make it clear that parental support is critical in supporting the child's learning. Better levels of parental engagement are associated with better academic outcomes. Evidence from their [Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#) suggests that effective parental engagement can result in learning gains of over 3 months during the course of a year.

Parental support is key to the child's learning

Respect is the foundation of effective communication and partnership

A longer read:

EEF (2021) [Working with parents to support children's learning](#)



family (2023) [Effective Communication with parents and carers](#)

