

2.2 Parents as Partners

Parents are children's first and most enduring educators. When **parents and practitioners work together** in early years settings, the results have a **positive impact on children's development** and learning.



Respecting diversity

- All families are important and should be welcomed and valued in all settings.
- Families are all different. Children may live with one or both parents, with other relatives or carers, with same sex parents or in an extended family.
- Families may speak more than one language at home; they may be travellers, refugees or asylum seekers.
- All practitioners will benefit from professional development in diversity, equality and anti-discriminatory practice whatever the ethnic, cultural or social make-up of the setting.

Communication

- A welcoming atmosphere with approachable staff helps to create effective communication.
- Effective communication means there is a two-way flow of information, knowledge and expertise between parents and practitioners.
- All communication is important, including gesture, signing and body language. Actions can speak louder than words.
- Posters, pictures and other resources on display will show the setting's positive attitudes to disability, and to ethnic, cultural and social diversity. They will help children and families to recognise that they are valued.

Learning together

- Parents and practitioners have a lot to learn from each other. This can help them to support and extend children's learning and development.
- Parents should review their children's progress regularly and contribute to their child's learning and development record.
- Parents can be helped to understand more about learning and teaching through workshops on important areas such as play, outdoor learning or early reading. Some parents may go on to access further education at their own level.
- In true partnership, parents understand and contribute to the policies in the setting.

Effective practice

- Display lists of words from home languages used by children in the setting and invite parents and practitioners to contribute to them. Seeing their languages reflected in this way will encourage parents to feel involved and valued.
- Find out from parents the greetings they use either in English or in other languages. Encourage staff, parents and children to use the greetings.
- Make sure that everyone who enters the setting receives a friendly welcome.
- Talk with parents about their children's progress and development, providing appropriate support for those who do not speak or understand English.
- Ask parents for their views on the care and education you provide.



Reflecting on practice

- How do you open up opportunities for informal talk with parents?
- How do you know parents understand the setting's policies on important areas such as learning and teaching, inclusion and behaviour? Have they been involved in drawing them up?
- Do parents contribute to children's profiles?
- Do they regularly review their children's progress with you?
- Do you really listen to and value what parents say?
- Do you provide workshops and other sessions?
- Do you run family learning courses or other opportunities for parents to access learning and continue to college and elsewhere if appropriate?
- Does the documentation provided for parents in your setting explicitly recognise and value the hard job in which they are engaged and their role in children's learning and development?

Challenges and dilemmas

- How to get fathers involved. Think about planning events that are just for men. Some men may feel more comfortable knowing that other men will be there.
- How to communicate with parents who are working or simply very busy. Ask them to let you know their preferred time and method of contact, and be flexible! This might mean getting in touch by letter, telephone, email, or by a message sent through a friend, relation or childminder.



What do I do next?

- **Welfare requirements** are explained in full in the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* booklet.
- **Areas of Learning and Development** including effective practice, planning and resourcing at different stages are detailed in the *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* booklet and on the CD-ROM.
- **Early Support** information is available on the CD-ROM under areas of Learning and Development.
- **Research and resources** are available on the CD-ROM.

