

Schools know the importance and benefits of engaging parents in children's learning. The evidence supports this view, with parental engagement consistently being associated with academic success. However, 'the evidence about how to improve attainment by increasing parental engagement is mixed and much less conclusive, particularly for disadvantaged families'.<sup>1</sup>

It is therefore important that, during the current crisis, teachers and leaders are able to target their efforts towards approaches most likely to have a positive impact. This is especially the case when considering how best to support vulnerable and disadvantaged children in the community.

At this time, schools are likely to be using a blend of existing, adapted and new approaches for engaging parents in their children's learning. Many of these approaches will already be having a positive impact. However, schools may wish to consider the following principles (adapted from the best available evidence) when considering how to plan, monitor and modify their approaches during school closures:

## Communication

### 1 Take a flexible approach that can be adapted to a broad range of socio-economic, home and family circumstances.

Consider using different mediums of communication to ensure all parents and carers in the community can access information coming from the school: For example, [mobile phones may be more readily accessed than email](#).

### 2 As with the physical school environment, online environments that are positive and welcoming may lead to increased parental engagement.

This could be especially true amongst parents who themselves had negative school experiences. Try to create a non-threatening digital space that takes this into account and welcomes parents in the same way that a school's reception area does: The less complex the process, the better.

### 3 Use written communication that can be easily read and understood.

16.4% of adults in England have very poor literacy skills and are likely to find reading information from unfamiliar sources, or on unfamiliar topics, particularly challenging.<sup>2</sup> Many parents with low literacy will be reluctant to ask for help so it is important that communication from school is accessible if it is to reach all families as well increase parents sense of self-efficacy.



# Support with learning

**1 Consider providing activities for children in a range of formats.** Children from low-income families are less likely to have easy access to laptops, tablets or internet access, limiting their ability to participate in digital activities set by teachers. Conversely, some will have access to digital technology but lack physical resources such as pencils, glue sticks, protractors etc. Many schools are already targeting resource pack home deliveries for pupils in need.

**3** Tailor your focus and strategies for helping parents according to different age groups:

## For younger children

- Promote shared activities such as reading together or playing with letters and numbers
- Set short and focused learning projects that parents can more easily manage
- Encourage establishing a positive home learning environment, ensuring that there are resources such as books, puzzles, and toys available

**4 Encourage parents to know about the work that is sent home and support their children to do it rather than get directly involved in the actual assignments.** This may help avoid conflict at home, whilst making clear that there is not an expectation for parents to act as teachers.

**5 Build-in opportunities for parents to promote the self-regulation in children that is necessary to achieve academic goals** including goal-setting, planning, perseverance, and the management of time, materials, attentiveness, and emotions. For example, guiding parents to have a *'five-minute plan'* chat with children before they get started with home learning can pose helpful reflection and involve parents in ways that they can help.

**6** Some parents may wish to involve themselves more directly in their children's learning. Where this is the case, schools could look to **suggest some pedagogical principles to support parents** to do this most effectively such as [scaffolding](#), or [using quizzes and flashcards for retrieval practice](#).

**2 Offer parents support that is practical, focusing on clear guidance that they act on.** Many parents lack confidence in their ability to support their children's learning and so simple strategies are more likely to be adopted. Small prompts for shared reading or tips for how long to keep your child studying are actionable and don't require too much specific expertise.

## For older children

- Parental encouragement for, and interest in, older children's learning is more important than direct involvement
- Provide general information to parents on child development or curriculum content to create helpful context, whilst ensuring that the work is linked to specific actions that they can take to support learning
- Set between one and two hours per school day (slightly longer for older pupils). Effects diminish as the time that students spend on homework increases beyond this point

## References & Further Reading for Schools

1. *Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning*. Education Endowment Foundation (2018). [educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/ParentalEngagement/EEF\\_Parental\\_Engagement\\_Guidance\\_Report.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/ParentalEngagement/EEF_Parental_Engagement_Guidance_Report.pdf)
  2. National Literacy Trust: information on adult literacy in the UK. [literacytrust.org.uk/parents-and-families/adult-literacy](https://literacytrust.org.uk/parents-and-families/adult-literacy)
- Education Endowment Foundation: Teaching and Learning Toolkit [eef.li/toolkit](https://eef.li/toolkit)
- Parental Engagement [eef.li/toolkit-parental](https://eef.li/toolkit-parental)
- Homework (Primary) [eef.li/toolkit-homework-primary](https://eef.li/toolkit-homework-primary)
- Homework (Secondary) [eef.li/toolkit-homework](https://eef.li/toolkit-homework)
- Improving Behaviour in Schools*. Education Endowment Foundation (2019). [educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Behaviour/EEF\\_Improving\\_behaviour\\_in\\_schools\\_Report.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Behaviour/EEF_Improving_behaviour_in_schools_Report.pdf)

