

Supporting the home learning environment

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What's the idea?

Parental engagement with learning at home is a vital part of young people's educational journeys. We've known this for more than 20 years, but now more than ever we need to support parents to support learning. 'Parent' here means any adult with a significant caring responsibility for the young person – it might be a parent, grandparent or other adult.

What does the research say?

Research has shown the value of parental engagement – it supports better attendance, behaviour and achievement. But it's important to understand what 'parental engagement with learning' actually means. It doesn't mean coming into school, and it doesn't necessarily mean checking on homework. Rather, it refers to the attitude toward, and support for, learning in the home (Goodall and Montgomery, 2013).

How does this work in practice?

Parents' engagement with their children's learning will obviously change as children age (Jeynes, 2014), moving from direct involvement with learning when children are quite young, to supporting learning without being directly involved in providing content as children grow and mature.

What matters is that parents show young people that learning is valued in the home. In our research, secondary students were clear that they valued someone asking how their day of learning had been (even if they had no intention of answering!).

They told us that being asked the question showed that someone cared.

Parental engagement in learning isn't as much about delivering content as about supporting young people's self-confidence, their view of themselves as people who can learn. Of course, in the current situation, we are seeing roles and responsibilities change, but this principle remains key.

What teachers can do to support parents

- Remember to 'put your own oxygen mask on first'. Many teachers are parents themselves, so they are working to support pupils at a distance as well as supporting the learning of their own children, or caring for other family members. This is a very difficult time for everyone; it's far better to do fewer things that have impact than many things that don't.
- Taking into account what's been said above, don't produce so much work that parents are going to feel they are failing their children if they can't get through it all. This is not a time for busy work, or homework that has any aim other than supporting learning (Goodall, 2020).
- Concentrate on what's really important – what do pupils really need to know? What can be left aside?
- Treat creating materials for home learning as you would creating learning experiences for the classroom – look at the outcome first.
- Remember that not all families will have access to lots of materials; as far as possible, suggest ideas for learning that don't put a burden on families in

terms of money or excessive time.

- Just as you try to make learning in your classroom an enjoyable experience, try to help parents recreate that for their children.

What parents can do

- Keep the conversations about learning going. Perhaps near bedtime have a family round-robin, where everyone says three things they've learned that day (these don't all have to be about 'school' subjects – learning that your brother can't throw a balloon as far as you can is still learning!). This also shows that adults are still learning.
- Parents often feel that they can't support the learning of older children because the children are learning things they didn't learn, or learning in unfamiliar ways. It's not important that parents know the answers; it's fine to say, 'I don't know – how can we find out?'
- If your child is working on something that's new to you, ask them to explain it. This not only helps the child's self-confidence, it helps to embed the learning.
- Try to be as positive as possible about learning at home. You don't need to recreate a classroom at home – classrooms are set up the way they are because they serve to support the learning of a whole group of children.
- Children and young people are adaptable, but they are likely to take time to adapt. They may also be frightened and not understand why all the changes are taking place. It's far more important that your children feel loved and supported than that they finish every possible worksheet.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

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- Goodall J and Vorhaus J (2011). Review of best practice in parental engagement. London: Department for Education.
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