



# When Parents Engage: Children Thrive

About the  
**AUTHOR**

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**Parents who engage with their child's learning from an early age can boost their progress by around five months.**

— Education Endowment Foundation



Parental engagement can be one of the most effective, low-cost approaches in early years education. According to the EEF Early Years Toolkit, strong parental engagement can consistently improve early learning outcomes and supports foundational literacy, language and numeracy skills.

At the same time, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) makes clear that "working in partnership with parents and carers is central to the early years foundation stage." (EYFS, 2021). Strong relationships between practitioners and families help create consistency between home and setting, building a more supportive learning environment for every child.

As a parent of young children, and someone who works in the early years sector, I have seen and experienced first-hand the vital role parental engagement plays in a child's development, confidence, and learning. In this blog, I will explore how we, as Early Years Professionals, can support and nurture strong partnerships with parents to enhance children's learning and development.

## What does the evidence tell us?

The EEF Early Years Toolkit identifies parental engagement as having high impact with a strong evidence base, showing consistent benefits across many studies. Importantly, the approaches that work best are those that:

- ★ Support positive parent-child interactions at home.
- ★ Provide clear, practical guidance for parents.
- ★ Link home learning to what children are already doing in the setting.
- ★ Are inclusive and accessible, particularly for families who may face barriers to engagement.



However, the EEF also warns that parental engagement strategies can unintentionally widen gaps if they mainly reach parents who are already confident and engaged. This makes strong practitioner-parent partnerships essential, so that all families feel supported and able to take part.



## Getting it right from the start

Like any good relationship, strong partnerships with parents take time to grow. It is not just about us sharing information, two-way communication is essential. When parents feel listened to and valued, they are far more likely to feel confident engaging with their child's learning and with the setting.



Building trust means recognising that parents know their children best. They understand their child's routines, interests, worries and strengths, and this knowledge is incredibly valuable. By inviting parents to share this with us, we can gain a much fuller picture of each child and respond more effectively to their individual needs.

This partnership begins from the very first contact and continues throughout a child's time in the setting. Simple actions such as welcoming parents into the setting during visits and the settling-in period, having regular informal conversations, and involving parents in decisions about their child's learning and wellbeing, all help to strengthen relationships.

Gathering information about children's starting points, current development, needs and interests at home allows practitioners to plan learning that feels familiar and meaningful to the child. It also sends a clear message to families: we value your knowledge, and we are working together to support your child.

When we get this right from the start, we create the foundations for open communication, shared understanding and strong engagement that can make a real difference to children's outcomes.

## From Evidence to Everyday Practice: Strengthening Home-Setting Partnerships

The EEF highlights that parental engagement is most effective when it is built on positive relationships, regular communication and shared understanding between families and practitioners. Strong partnerships help children experience consistency, security and a sense that the important adults in their lives are working together.

Please see below some examples your settings could use to strengthen parental relationships and create shared experience.

### ★ Share stories, songs and language

- Share the titles of books, songs and rhymes used in your setting, with links to online stories or recordings where helpful (e.g. Cbeebies, YouTube).
- Lend books, story sacks or busy bags with characters, puzzles or fine-motor activities.
- For families with EAL, encourage parents to read the same story in the home language to strengthen understanding through repetition.



### ★ Link learning to children's home lives

- Ask parents about children's current interests and routines at home, and share what you notice in the setting.
- Ask about weekends and special events, and invite families to send photos or stories to share in the setting.





- Create family or “all about me” books using photos of family, pets, celebrations and favourite places.
- Set up a home photo board where children can bring in pictures (offer to print if needed).

### ★ Extend Learning Through Simple Activities

- After reading a story, send home simple craft or making activities linked to it.
- Try small investigations, such as:
  - planting a bean in a clear cup after Jack and the Beanstalk and tracking growth
  - sending home a nature hunt or bird-spotting sheet for weekend walks
- Lend families a game or puzzle to enjoy together and support turn-taking and problem-solving.



### ★ Keep communication two-way

- Share learning through learning journeys, online platforms, newsletters and daily conversations.
- Provide simple “wow moment” cards for parents to record achievements at home.
- Invite parents into the setting to read, sing or share skills, reflecting children’s languages and cultures. We have found that special occasion ‘stay and play sessions’ work real well to develop a further connection and allow a parents to see how their child interacts in the setting. Examples of sessions we have run include - Mothers Day afternoon tea, Father’s Day breakfast.



### ★ Support parents with clear information

- Share guidance on online safety, school readiness and the EYFS, using clear, jargon-free language.

Implementation of any of the above examples needs to be effective for your families and your setting. Take time to consider what works best for you to ensure it provides quality opportunities for shared communication and engagement.

## Keeping engagement inclusive

The EEF warns that parental engagement approaches can widen gaps if only confident or engaged parents take part. To avoid this, settings should:

- offer flexible ways to engage (online and in person)
- provide practical resources, not just information and advice
- actively reach out to families who may face barriers to involvement

Small, consistent actions often have more impact than large one-off events.

## Conclusion

Parental engagement is a powerful, cost-effective strategy for boosting early learning. When strong partnerships with parents are combined with practical, accessible home-learning opportunities, children benefit from consistent support across both home and setting.

By focusing on relationships, communication and simple shared learning experiences, early years settings can turn strong evidence into everyday practice that supports every child to thrive.



## Reflective Questions:

- ★ How well do our current approaches support all families to feel welcomed, valued and involved in our setting community?
- ★ Which small changes could we make to better connect children's experiences at home with learning in our setting?

## References and further reading:

Education Endowment Foundation. Parental engagement. Teaching and Learning Toolkit. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/parental-engagement>

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