

Working in Partnership with Parents

Why is working in partnership with parents important?

Working effectively with parents is key to building successful partnership arrangements both with children and their families.

Throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), it makes clear the requirement to work in partnership with parents, sharing information regarding their child. Some of the reasons are related to health and safety and others are to share feedback about the child's time at the childcare setting. Research clearly shows that, the more partnership working takes place, the more benefits there are to the parents, the child and the key person in the setting caring for the child.

The aim of working with parents, is to create a real partnership where all parties work together to benefit the child concerned. All parties must recognize, respect and value what the other says and does. Partnership working requires responsibility from all parties.

It is particularly important when the parents of the child are living apart, but both parties are involved in the care of that child to get things right and fair. There may also be step parents, or grandparents involved in the up bringing of a child and therefore partnership working can be more than two parties.

Parents need to be able to **TRUST** their childcare provider is offering a caring, safe and high quality environment for their child, likewise the practitioner needs to trust that the parents will discuss their child's needs and share in celebrating their child's achievements.

Parents need to be **INVOLVED** in all aspects of their child's care, from health needs to what activities their child enjoys. These will help the key person to plan and help the child develop further. All areas should be discussed and agreed and never assumed.

Parents will have expectations for their children's learning and like wise the practitioner will also have learning and development goals for that child. **SHARED**

EXPECTATIONS need to be clearly understood by all parties to ensure consistency for the child.

Information about the child must always be **UP TO DATE**. Often data is collected when a child first starts at a setting, but this can soon become out of date and not relevant. Therefore all information sharing needs to be continuous and current to benefit the child as they grow and develop. You may consider having set times to review these with parents.

What are the benefits to partnership working?

Parents will feel valued and respected. By sharing information about their child they will feel more involved in their child's learning and development and feel that their family values, traditions and practices are taken into account. They will feel comfortable when visiting the setting and feel involved when talking and planning for their child's future. They will know more about the time their child spends away from home and will be able to use this information to further support their learning and development more effectively. This will also help them to understand why early education and care is so valuable and hopefully increase their parenting skills.

Practitioners will gain a better understanding of the children and their families. They can use this information to make learning more enjoyable and will create a sense of identity and belonging for the child. Sharing with parents helps to support and continue the child's learning at home. By sharing everyday information with parents they will build up a strong relationship and help the practitioner to feel more confident if they have to broach a subject with more sensitivity in the future.

When the setting and the parents work together the child will feel more secure. They will be able to move between home to setting more comfortably and approach learning with a positive and fun attitude. When all the needs of the child are taken on board the child will feel valued within the setting.

How do we make it work?

There is an expectation that we work with **ALL** parents. However this will be far more difficult in some cases than others! All parents are different, as are all Early Years practitioners and therefore there is no 'one size fits all solution'! The relationship between all parties needs to begin growing from the beginning and in most cases before the child starts at the setting.

When parents first make contact regarding a place for their child, there is a lot of information that they need about you and your setting. There is also a lot of information you need from the parents about the child's needs. Getting this information sharing is crucial for how the relationship develops in the future.

When parents first start out looking for childcare, they may not have the knowledge or experience to gain the information they need. It is vital therefore, that the setting and you as the practitioner lead this and guide the parent through what is expected now and in the future.

Successful ways to share information at the start of the journey are through parent leaflets, parent packs, prospectus, portfolios etc. All these will allow the setting to put into writing all about them to allow the parent to read in their own time. However, its important to still go through many of the main points written at the first meeting for those who prefer to hear information verbally and may be overwhelmed by lots of written information

Settings will require forms to be completed to obtain important details about the child. Ofsted refer to these as 'starting points'. However, some parents may not have English as their fist language or simply struggle with written word, so assistance may need to be given.

Moving forward the way information is shared will depend on individual preference. Many settings now are using on-line platforms and some forms of social media to share information and photos. But once again we need to be mindful that not all parents will be familiar with or using this form of communication, so it's important to find something that works for them, they may prefer a written diary. Some parents like to have a chat at the end of each day whilst others do not have the time or the child could be picked up by another family member.

So, communication is key! This needs to be right from the first meeting with the parent, to build on the relationships. The parent will be able to understand the level of involvement they will still have with their child, through the time their child spends with you. This can help allay any concerns they may have about handing care of their child to someone else, as they will realise that their wishes for their child will be upheld. All parents are different and it is possible that you need to adapt the ways you would generally engage with parents to enable them to be fully involved.

Remember the key to building and maintaining working relationships is effective communication and understanding parents needs and priorities. Understanding your own and parent's values too can help plan for any difficult conversation you need to have with them.

About Childminding UK

Childminding UK has been supporting childminders for over 30 years. Formed in 1991 by and for local working childminders in Northamptonshire, we now support childminders across the country. A registered charity, we are the only national organisation that solely supports childminders and we have recently achieved the Princess Royal Training Award for 'Ensuring high quality childcare through training and support'. All staff are experienced childcare professionals, and have been childminders themselves and our trustees are working childminders or have knowledge of childminding, so we have a good understanding of the sector.

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