Supporting the Home Learning Environment

It is widely recognised that a child’s family and home environment has a strong impact on his/her personal development and educational achievement. We know that the home is the single most significant environmental factor in enabling children to develop the trust, attitudes and skills that will help them to learn and engage positively with the world. As children develop, a positive home learning environment provides social interaction, attention and activities which promote the development of a positive attitude to learning, as well as the acquisition of physical, intellectual, language, social and emotional skills.

A good Early Home Learning Environment (EHLE) can make a real difference to children’s future, can improve children’s readiness for school and narrow the gap between children from different backgrounds.

“One day when I was collecting my baby, the childminder told me about this toy that he had wanted to play with all day and suggested I borrowed it overnight so I could play with him at home. I’m not lazy but I couldn’t see the point of doing the same thing over and over again with my baby. I joked that I was looking forward to the day when I could teach him something useful like kicking a football. The childminder said “Well, actually, when repeating this activity - which is probably boring you to tears - you’re reinforcing the connections in your baby’s brain which helps to make his brain grow … because it’s like a road and you’re reinforcing it, and so it stays there, and your child will then be able to do more things.” It was really good to hear that. So now I can see the point and know that what I’m doing is actually making a difference and is important.”

Father of a baby

This toolkit aims to help staff to provide support to parents in order to support their child’s learning at home; to consider things which might be getting in the way of parents being involved in their children’s learning - and how to support parents to address these; and to be able to signpost families to sources of information, advice and support.

April 2017
It is now well documented that the type of parenting and quality of the home learning environment that a child receives has far more significant influence on their later-life outcomes that any other aspect of their lives. Indeed, what parents do with their children at home is far more important to their achievement than social class or levels of education. The Home Learning Environment is not solely about specific learning opportunities, but is about relationships and opportunities. Early years practitioners, childminders, leaders of practice, and keyworkers are all well placed to inform, support and guide parents – enhancing their knowledge, skills, and confidence for enriching the home learning environment - and in celebrating their child’s learning and development.

**Research Evidence on the impact of the Home Learning Environment**

There is a strong body of evidence to show the benefits of supporting home learning. Parental involvement in early learning as part of daily family life at home has a greater impact on children’s well-being and achievement than any other factor, such as poverty, parental education or, later on, school environment.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) reported that parental involvement is one of many factors that have an impact on children’s achievement.

The Effective Provision of pre-school Education Project (EPPE) 2008 found firm evidence that the quality of the home learning environment is not only the factor with the single biggest impact on child development, but that it was more important for promoting intellectual and social development than pre-school provision in addressing the inequalities between children from high and low socio-economic backgrounds.

EPPE studies also show that the quality of the home learning environment for all children is more important than parental occupation, education, income or social class: what parents do is ultimately more important than who parents are. Parents from all social and educational backgrounds can and do provide home environments that are highly conducive to child development. This suggests that poor parents with fewer qualifications can improve their children’s progress and give them a better start at school by engaging in activities at home that engage and stretch their child’s mind.

April 2017
Chris Paterson (2011) found that the most important factor influencing a child’s development is the quality of parenting they receive and the quality of the Home Learning Environment this creates. Paterson argued that:

... getting things right initially is more efficient and ultimately more effective than trying to fix them later – early plasticity means it is easier and more effective to influence a baby’s developing brain architecture than to rewire parts of its circuitry in later childhood or adult years.

Parents

Dame Clare Tickell’s recommendations to involve parents and carers in their child’s learning and the importance of early home learning and good parenting have been accepted as a key priority for the Government. Supporting parents to provide a positive home learning environment is a vital part of fulfilling the Government’s goal of improving outcomes for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The important role played by parents is recognised in the Early Years Foundation Stage 2012 which explicitly includes the requirement for settings to work with parents as partners in their children’s learning and provide information to support early learning at home.

The quality of the relationship between a parent and a child during the first three years is fundamental to children’s later success in school and their longer term development and wellbeing”

(Family and Parenting Institute 2009)

The PPEL project found that the vast majority of parents were keen to help their children, but sometimes needed support to do so. When this support was offered, it had a significant impact, with promising outcomes for:
- children’s development and learning
- parents’ confidence and knowledge about what’s best for their children; and
- the parent-child relationship.

We know from the IPSOS MORI survey of parents (2010) that finding time for activities appeared to be the most significant barrier to home learning with just under half of all parents suggesting more free time would be a factor enabling them to do more. Parents who were not working were more likely to report that they needed more information or ideas about what to do, more toys or materials, and
more places to go or local activities than working parents. This survey of parents found that 86% of parents with children aged two to five years looked at books or read stories with their children ‘every day or most days’. Sources of information parents used about learning and play activities differed significantly depending on family structure:

- Couples were significantly more likely than lone parents to use friends or relatives, other parents, children’s TV programmes, internet sites, schools, playgroups and childcare providers.
- The proportion of organisations contacted by parents of children aged two to five about their child’s learning and development varied significantly by area deprivation.
- Parents in the least deprived areas were most likely to speak to their partners, friends and relatives, other parents, childcare providers, and work colleagues.
- Those parents living in the top two quintiles (least deprived) of areas by deprivation were most likely to speak to friend and relatives.
- Those living in the most deprived areas were most likely not to contact anyone.
- Couples were significantly more likely than lone parents to contact organisations about their child’s learning and development (8% of lone parents had contacted no-one compared with 2% of couples).
- Couples were significantly more likely than lone parents to speak to their partner, friends/relatives, other parents, childcare providers, work colleagues, and other organisations.

Consultation with parents suggests that they do not lack interest in their children’s development but that things just ‘get in the way.’

Paterson (2011) contends that families are the foundation for skill development and it is the nature and quality of the interactions that occur within the home environment which, more than anything else, shape the type and quality of brain architecture and skill foundations that emerge in a given child. According to Heckman in a US study of inequality in society:

“An overwhelming body of evidence suggests that parenting plays a crucial role – what parents do and do not do; and how they interact with and supplement the lives of their children, especially in early childhood. The true measure of child affluence and poverty is the quality of parenting. A lone mother living in financial poverty can create a stimulating early environment for her child.”

April 2017
When parents were asked what they would like from staff in settings, they wanted more information about what their children should be doing at different ages and stages and what activities parents can do at home. This showed that although parents do not appear to prioritise advice on home learning as an expectation of staff, they do want it.

“I would like staff to give more information about what level they should be at, such as how much they should know about numbers and shapes.”

“I’d like them to tell me”

Parents talked about a wide range of early home learning activities e.g. learning through play, helping with domestic chores or outdoor activities. This suggests that parents see a wide variety of early home learning activities as benefitting their child. Some parents thought they could play a role in early home learning by doing different kinds of activities to those provided by the setting e.g. outdoor play, tree climbing, riding bikes, sports sessions.

In promoting the characteristics of effective learning, providers can ensure that parents know how to incorporate key activities into a wide range of activities they share with their child, e.g. numbers and letters can be part of outings to the park, nature walks, shopping and so on.

Research evidence suggests that active engagement with some parents is necessary to promote the importance of the home learning environment. As the “Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL) survey (DCSF, 2008) showed, although some parents do more activities with their child after they have started in a funded provision, some parents do less, thinking that it is more the role of providers than parents. Active support and the provision of resources by providers for parents are vital to ensure that parents continue this vital role. It is also important to consider the pressures on parents and which groups may need more support to feel confident to share learning activities with their child at home.

The influence of Early Years providers on the Home Learning Environment

Hunt researched the influence of early years providers on the home learning environment and identified that childcare providers have an essential role in raising parents’ awareness of how to help facilitate their children’s early home learning. This is particularly important as research has found that around one in five (21%) used Sure Start/Children’s Centres, and one in eight (12%) used Family Information Services as sources of information.

April 2017
Interviews with parents show that although some parents do more activities with their child after their child has started in a funded place, some parents do less, thinking that their child has become more independent after starting childcare or that this is now more the role of the nursery than parents. Providers could ensure they reinforce a single key message about early home learning over time by suggesting and explaining a variety of home learning activities - as some parents may need reminding about how important early home learning is.

The aim of the study was to help identify which strategies are most effective in supporting parents to give their child the best start in early home learning.

There were a number of key findings which could influence practice:
- There is significant scope to improve staff awareness of the importance of engaging with parents about early home learning. This could be achieved at little or no cost by ensuring that all staff are confident to provide early home learning information and advice.
- Confident staff are more likely to readily engage with parents on a day-to-day basis by welcoming them into settings and explaining face to face what parents can do at home.
- There should be a real enthusiasm for this because staff themselves, feel they lack training. One-third of practitioners would like more help and information about engaging parents in early home learning.

Hunt also reported on the ways in which providers provide home learning environment advice and support to parents and found that although there is a significant amount of support, training and guidance given to childcare providers for working with parents, there are still unmet needs in this area and in the area of providing support and information about home learning. 32% of providers indicated they felt their own home learning environment training and support needs were not being met, and the kind of home learning information and support they felt in need of covered areas such as:

"I've never been on any course to help with my management role of supporting parents."

"If it was a curriculum-led subject I'd know who I could go to, but for this issue I've not had the information. It probably is out there but hasn't been drawn to my attention."

"I'd like support from the rest of the team and from my managers to learn how to work with parents who work full time."
The Early Years Foundations Stage: Learning and Development Requirements

The Statutory Framework’s ‘Learning and Development’ requirements state quite clearly that: “Each child **must** be assigned a key person. **Providers must** inform parents and/or carers of the name of the key person, and explain their role, when a child starts attending a setting. The key person **must** help ensure that every child’s learning and care is tailored to meet their individual needs. The key person **must seek to engage and support parents and/or carers in guiding their child’s development at home**. They should also help families engage with more specialist support if appropriate.”

The Nutbrown review highlighted the importance of early years staff interacting with parents. The review suggested that: “**Students must learn how to work effectively with families. From my own research I know the positive impact that working effectively with parents can have on children, so I believe this must be a core part of any early years course**”. That the fundamental content of the new level 3 qualification should: “Provide an understanding of the importance of working in partnership with parents to support their children’s learning and development; and equip students with an understanding of why engaging families in a two-way process is important, and the skills to do this effectively.”

The Early Years Foundation Stage: Supporting the characteristics of effective learning at home

**Engagement – Playing and Exploring**

Practitioners can help parents to understand how to see the value in their children’s self-chosen play, and to support their children to find out and explore, play with what they know and be willing to ‘have a go’ with new experiences. (see parents’ hand-outs in Appendix, particularly “Child Directed Play”)

**Motivation – Active Learning**

Practitioners can encourage parents to notice the positive learning behaviours in their children; in balance to noticing when things have gone wrong! Help parents to praise behaviours such as concentration, perseverance, the process of doing things and enjoyment as well as achievements and outcomes. (see parents’ hand-outs in Appendix, particularly “Helping Young Children with their Emotions.”)
Thinking – Creating and thinking critically

Practitioners can help parents to understand ‘creativity’ in the EYFS, and the value of their child’s explorations and investigations in all areas of learning. This will support parents when ‘tuning into’ their child’s conversations and activities and in asking questions which will sustain shared thinking. Practitioners may be able to share ideas for developmentally appropriate and affordable, accessible ‘provocations’ for exploration and investigation: sharing books, magazines or photos as talking points, arranging free outings, for example to watch the car-wash, or to feed ducks. (see parents’ hand-outs in Appendix, particularly “Reading with Your Child”)

The qualities that underpin a helping relationship with parents

**Respect:** valuing parents as individuals, believing in their fundamental ability to cope and make a difference in their family lives and working within the ethos of partnership.

**Empathy:** showing an understanding of the challenges a parent is facing in their lives and being able to see the situation from their point of view.

**Genuineness:** being sensitive, honest, non-defensive and trustworthy.

**Humility:** working in the context of an equal relationship and using parents’ strengths, views and knowledge alongside your own at every stage of the process.

**Quiet enthusiasm:** bringing a friendly, positive energy to the relationship and a consistently calm, steady and warm approach.

**Personal integrity:** in addition to empathising with the parent, being able to hold alternative views and offer these when appropriate.

**Expertise:** the knowledge and experience that the helper brings to the work to complement the parents existing knowledge and skills, both in building the relationship and in providing information and support.

April 2017
The DfE Early Home Learning Evidence Paper (2012) suggests that the successful ‘5-a-day’ concept used to promote fruit and vegetables in a healthy eating context could be adapted as a national model for promoting the home learning environment. Chris Paterson suggests that parenting is a learned skill at which all can improve. He recommends that the ‘5-a-day’ concept identifies the five most beneficial things that could be done by parents on a daily basis to aid their child’s development in the earliest years. (see Appendix 3)

This model provides the basis for the North Yorkshire Home Learning Toolkit

1. Read to your child for 15 minutes.
2. Play with your child on the floor for 10 minutes.
3. Talk with your child for 20 minutes with the television off.
4. Adopt positive attitudes towards your child and praise them frequently.
5. Give your child a healthy balanced diet and be active

1. Share a book or story with your child for 15 minutes

One of the core components of a positive Home Learning Environment for a developing child is being read to regularly from a young age (with evidence from the National Literacy Trust suggesting that this is the single most important determinant of early language and literacy skills). The brain’s language learning capacities are significantly higher in the early months and years of a child’s life than at any other point. Being read to consistently throughout this period - providing exposure to as large a vocabulary as possible – is one of the most effective ways of building the language centred neural connections in the brain. It is also highly conducive to the development of literacy skills and has positive impacts upon memory and other skills. Furthermore, the process aids broader emotional and social development, in part through the fact that the repeated shared reading experience itself fosters the bonding and closeness of the parent-child relationship that has been shown to be so central to early childhood development.

April 2017
Conveying these benefits and providing clear advice on how important it is to read consistently to a child, how early it is beneficial to start (as early as the first few months) and what types of reading materials are particularly suited to particular stages of development are all aspects that could be conveyed under this strand of the campaign. Indeed, this is one area in particular where there seems to be evidence of significant behavioural asymmetries between social groupings. For example, there is evidence that more affluent parents spend significantly more time reading to their children than those from poorer backgrounds and that this has a direct impact on verbal and literacy skills upon starting school. This is again particularly significant in a context where the evidence suggests that vocabulary at age five is the single best predictor of later social mobility for children from lower-income backgrounds.

2. Play with your child on the floor for 10 minutes

At the core of the crucial ‘serve and return’ developmental relationship between child and parent is the idea that when young children naturally reach out for interaction through babbling, facial expressions, words, gestures, and cries, the relevant adult responds by getting in sync and doing the same kind of vocalizing and gesturing back at them (with the process then continuing back and forth). The most effective way of carrying out this process in the home is simply through the activity of playing with the child and, because a crucial element of this process lies in the child sensing and seeing the full effect of the reciprocal process, the full benefit is gained when adult and child are at the same physical level (i.e. sitting together on the floor). The importance of ‘play’ in child development has been heavily emphasised in both the Tickell Report and in the EYFS.

3. Talk with your child for 20 minutes with the television off

The rationale for this is just how crucial the exposure to language is in the earliest years of development. The discrepancies between the average number of words heard in a given hour by children from different social backgrounds is staggering, particularly when considered on a cumulative basis. Indeed, evidence again points to more affluent mothers tending to talk more to their children than lower-income parents, with this more conducive communication environment tending to have a direct impact on verbal and literacy skills at school entrance.

It is in this context that allowing for full engagement and for the full effect of the reciprocal process to operate – by switching off external distractions, such as the television, is crucial. Again, evidence points to the fact that mothers from lower-income backgrounds are more
likely to spend more of their time with their child watching television than more affluent mothers, with a corresponding negative effect on the conduciveness of the HLE.

4. **Be positive towards your child and praise them frequently**

Almost as staggering as the statistics on the differences in the quantity of words heard in an average hour by children from different backgrounds is the difference in the quality of those words. In the relevant study, a child in a welfare-dependent home was hearing 11 negative prohibitions to 5 positive affirmations whereas a child in a professional home was hearing 32 positive affirmations to only 5 negative prohibitions.

There is significant evidence that more positive parenting strategies are significantly more conducive to desirable child development outcomes in the early years than more negative or critical strategies. One aspect of this is that positive strategies maintain and strengthen the crucial bonding relationship that facilitates healthy child development and enables young children to deal positively with situations that could otherwise give rise to toxic stress levels. Positive parenting also impacts more directly on early social and emotional development in terms of self-esteem and confidence, outlook and attitudes as well as impacting directly on brain development itself.

Conveying the key benefits of adopting a more positive and sensitive parenting approach – of positive and consistent discipline and structure, of praising a child frequently and criticising in a constructive manner whenever possible is the core message: “Children do better when they have a close and positive relationship with their parents, and mothers and fathers work together to provide warm, authoritative, responsive, positive, and sensitive parenting”.

5. **Give your child a healthy balanced diet and be active**

Appropriate nutrition is crucial to child development both in terms of the mother’s diet during pregnancy and the child’s diet during the early months and years of life when body growth and brain development are more rapid than during any other period. The proposed ‘5-a-day for Child Development’ campaign could intersect directly with the original ‘5-a-day’ fruit and vegetable concept potentially adding to its credibility and salience. However, the extent of the information that could be conveyed under this strand is much broader: for example, which nutrients and vitamins are particularly key at which stages of development and which foods are strong providers of such nutrients / vitamins. Similarly, the emphasis on and advice relating to a healthy diet at the earliest stages of development would be important in order to reflect the research indicating that a child’s tastes and eating habits are formed early in life with consequences for child health and obesity and also for later attainment.

April 2017
The North Yorkshire toolkit provides a range of tools to support providers when working with parents to promote ‘5 A Day’:

All elements of the toolkit are colour-coded in the same way to ensure that they are ‘parent-friendly’, accessible and so that it is easy to make links between the different strands.

Providers and parents are able to use the tools which best fit with their interests and needs, it is not necessary to use them all or to use them in any order, and it may be helpful to revisit some of the tools, for example, the quiz or the goals at different times to celebrate progress or to re-focus thinking on a particular strand as the child grows and develops.
The ‘Parents Quiz’ – a tool to use with parents to explore what they currently do with their children at home.

Parents Goals – a tool for parents to identify the ‘next step’ which they would like to try - one thing at a time to develop or change in order to enhance their child’s home learning experiences.

Parents Pathway – a tool to celebrate with parents the differences that they have made, and the impact for their child.
Shared resources: shared learning

Include in your planning ways of extending everything that you do into the home; prepare a selection of resources to loan that you know the child will enjoy sharing with their parents and siblings. Have parent-friendly ‘handy hints’ information and ideas for engaging young children in conversations, explorations and investigations.

Treasure boxes: Make a ‘special treasure’ box for individual children with things which interest them and which they might like to share with their parents. You could pop something in it from the child’s day with you, perhaps a pebble that they have found, a book shared or a picture or construction made.

Songs: Have a small bag or box with two or three songs printed and illustrated on card so that the child can choose from to take home to sing with parents and siblings – include a puppet or a few percussion instruments to extend the experience. Have ‘song of the week’ sheets for children to share with parents over the weekend.

Stories: Have a basket of books or story sacks so that children can take one home to share with parents, include a variety of stories, early reference materials, poetry books etc.

Photos: Take a photo of an activity in which the child has taken part, something that they have enjoyed during the day - to share experiences and as a starting point for sustained shared. Give it to parents, encourage discussion with their child without asking too many questions, and to encourage them too, to share this with other family members. Encourage parents to take a photo of something they’ve enjoyed doing over the weekend – create a scrapbook or noticeboard when children can put their ‘home’ photos to browse through with their keyworker or friends.

Joint outings/events: As an alternative to setting open evenings, try planning an outing or an event when families can come together with staff. This strengthens relationships for all concerned; provides a comfortable and robust emotional environment for sharing celebrations, promoting shared learning experiences and opportunities, and maybe for sharing concerns.

April 2017
Training: Let parents know when you or your staff are attending training, and include a brief summary of your key learning and how you’re going to introduce new experiences for the children, for example through newsletters. This will help to engage families in your learning journey and shows your value of the shared setting / home learning partnership and respect for the parents role as the child’s first educator.

Providing Information for Parents

Ensure that prospectus and introductory information about your setting includes your support to parents for their home learning environment.

Ensure that notices and displays for parents relate to children’s learning and development not just notices about fees and head lice! Do you have copies of the ‘EYFS for Parents’ leaflets to display / loan? Can you provide information about the range of family-friendly websites which support parents?

Discussions between parents and key workers provide valuable opportunities to re-visit conversations about the ways parents can support the developmental stages for a child through the home learning environment – and particularly at times of transition, for example, when children move between rooms in a nursery.

Sharing learning stories and narrative stories with parents provide good opportunities to explore how a child’s interests and motivations can be further explored through the home learning environment.

Let parents know you understand how difficult being a parent can be. Let parents know that you are aware that family life is not always straightforward. Keep a handy library of leaflets for services that support families.

Have information about the local Children’s Centre services handy to share with parents; remember this is their one-stop-shop for all relevant services and if they work full time, you might be their only link with those services.

Take the time to look at the leaflets in your local Children’s Centre to see what services are available and provide some for parents to take some home. You could try displaying one or two leaflets in weekly rotation to draw their attention to specific local services, both specialist and general, for example, times for Speech and Language Therapy drop-ins or leaflets for Family Fun events over the summer holidays.

April 2017
Helpful links

https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/Childrenandfamilies/Page9/DFE-RR142

http://wsassets.s3.amazonaws.com/ws/nso/pdf/92b90c382fcdacda789de64969c3ef8b.pdf

Reflecting on Practice / Self Evaluation

You might find it useful to evaluate your current practice in supporting parents with their child’s home learning environment, and then to plan steps to enhance your practice.

The questions below may help you to in reviewing your practice as a team. We have provided suggested questions which you may choose to use all - or just one or two sections, depending on your provision. They can be used as individual questionnaires or informally through staff meetings, chats with parents, committee meetings, etc.

When you answer these questions, ask yourself:

- How do we know?
- What is our evidence and where is it?
- Is this always the case?
- Is this true for everyone using our provision?

The column for “further development needed” is best completed by the whole team or by a childminder and assistant if you work in this way. This can then become part of the development plan for your provision so it’s important that it is thought about and completed by the person/people who will be responsible for carrying it out.

Consider if it would also be helpful to ask parents and children their views and feedback about your provision, and how you might do this.
Questions

*How do parents know that they will be welcomed into the setting? How comfortable are they in the nursery, school or childminding environment? How can we tell?*

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<th>Examples of the evidence of this within our setting</th>
<th>Further development needed</th>
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<td>What will parents’ first impressions be, arriving at our setting?</td>
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<td>How do we help parents to know that they are welcome regardless of their family background or situation?</td>
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What do parents’ communications with us ‘look like?’ How do we find out about their hopes, their expectations for their children, questions they may have about their child’s learning and development, or their challenges in supporting their child’s learning at home?

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<td>How many different ways are parents able to communicate with us?</td>
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<td>Are parents confident in sharing with us?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussions aside, how else might we find out what parents are thinking, feeling and experiencing? Think about body language, facial expression and general behaviour</td>
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How do we help parents to understand how children learn; the characteristics of effective learning and teaching, and what they can easily do to improve outcomes for their children?

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<tr>
<td>The content of our brochure, weekly newsletters, leaflets</td>
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<td>Is HLE information included in key person discussions?</td>
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<td>Do we provide information and support equally to fathers, mothers and other regular carers?</td>
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<td>Do we offer a book loan scheme – or other resources to share?</td>
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<td>Do we use EYFS terminology in the daily end of day feedback, with suggestions and ideas for sustaining learning at home?</td>
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April 2017
**Do staff ensure that they understand the needs of all parents and provide ways of supporting them to help their children’s learning at home?**

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<td>Do we provide information in a range of ways and in accessible formats?</td>
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<td>Do we know if any parents might need help with literacy and numeracy skills in order to support their child?</td>
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<td>Do we know if they might need help to access to the internet?</td>
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<td>Do we signpost parents and carers to Children’s Centre adult learning, employment and training opportunities?</td>
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April 2017
Fridge notes: Reading with your toddler

- Read at a quiet time with TV and music turned off
- Get comfy!
- Read when your toddlers seems calm and alert – like bedtime
- read to your other children too
- speak in "parent-ese" (\_what’s that?!)
- use a sing-song voice = higher pitched = clearly (not baby talk) =
- repeat words = pause ...wait for a response = exaggerated facial
- expressions = use sound effects = have fun!
- Point to the pictures as you talk about them
- Re-read their favourites often
- Chant or sing rhymes
- Use hand movements with words
- Praise and give positive feedback (\_that’s right!*’
- Let you toddler turn the pages
- Read everyday
- Visit your library
- Go to the library - to browse or to borrow books
- Let your toddler choose several books from the library

Choose books that encourage your toddler to ‘chime in’ and
repeat words; books that label objects and parts of the
body; books that illustrate actions words like ‘walking’ or
‘running’ and ‘lift-the-flap’ books.

Choose books that reflect your toddlers experiences such
as having a bath or getting dressed, books that use familiar
phrases such as ‘good bye’ or ‘thank you’, books that reflect
their interest such as trucks or cats ...CHOOSE BOOKS!

Handling Separation and reunions

Let your children know that you are leaving in a
predictable manner; don’t forget different ways of
communicating ...with gestures or with pictures

Don’t sneak away – this will increase their
insecurity

Say good-bye briefly with a hug and say something
positive like “have a lovely time playing with your
friend” or “have a lovely time on the bikes!”

Let your child know when you will see him again
and when he’ll be picked up and by whom

Walk away and avoid giving too much attention to
the child’s normal protests

When you return greet you child with Love and Joy
– let them know that you’re pleased to see them.

Give them some transition time; it’s difficult for
children to suddenly stop what they’re doing.
Teach your toddler ‘Calm Down’ strategies

- When your child is calm – practice taking deep breaths and praise your child by telling he or she is very strong at calming down.
- Notice times when your child stays calm in a frustrating situation and praise him or her for patience and calmness.
- Use emotion coaching and comment on times your toddler is happy, excited, curious, calm, angry or frustrated. Try to comment more on happy feelings rather than angry or sad.
- Model staying calm yourself in frustrating situations! Take a deep breath and say “I can calm down” in front of your child.

Handling Tantrum Storms

Daily tantrums are a normal part of the toddler years. They occur because their bodies, including their brains are going through a very specific period of growth and development. They have very strong urges to explore and experiment and have limited language to express their feelings and frustrations; what a recipe for trying times!

- Stay calm in the face of your toddler’s storm; including kicking, screaming or throwing things;
- Don’t try to reason or use distraction in the middle of a storm; reasoning and yelling will just add to the storm.
- Stay in the room with your toddler while the storm occurs but busy yourself with something else temporarily.
- As soon as the storm is over, return your attention immediately remember that your toddler’s distress is real; praise your child’s calm behaviour and distract him to some other activity.
- No matter how long the storm lasts, don’t give in or negotiate (even in public) this short term solution will lead to long-term consequences!
- STAY CALM AND IN CONTROL: – a tantruming child is feeling out of control and really needs to feel that his parent is in control and able to comfort him afterwards.
- If your toddler’s tantrums endangers himself or others, pick him up and carry him to a safe place. Then stay with him but ignore the tantrum.
- Think about why the child is having a tantrum? Try to pre-empt storms when possible.

**Possible Causes:** tiredness, hunger, change/transition, can’t have what they want?

**You might need to think about:** keeping healthy snacks handy, calling an earlier nap time, preparing for change/transition in advance, AND Monitor how often you are giving commands or using the word “NO”

Remember whatever you do, Toddlers will still have tantrums and need to learn to calm themselves!
Helping young children with their emotions

Children need help to develop a vocabulary to express their emotions about events and to help manage their feelings. If a parent understands and names emotions it helps children to do so and they are less likely to bottle things up and become frustrated or angry.

Social skills need to be taught, practiced and praised. Children around the age of two are 'ego-centric' and rarely share. This is the age of 'mine, mine, mine.' Toddlers will play alongside others "parallel play" unaware of what each other is doing. Children learn their social and emotional skills purely by observing the adults around them.

This is how you can help...

- Describe children’s play activities as they play using words for colour, shapes or numbers. Use descriptive commenting (like a running commentary) instead of asking questions.
- Encourage and describe children’s expressions of emotions. Like you’re very excited. "You are excited" "you look happy," "you are calm" or "you are concentrating really well!"
- Prompt, coach and praise children’s friendly behaviours like sharing, helping, taking turns and being polite.
- Provide positive support for children’s emotional regulation skills like being calm, waiting or using words.
- Try to give enough help so the child can be successful but not so much help that you take over.
- Praise and encourage children’s ideas and avoid criticism.
- Join in with role play and make believe with your child. eg puppets or pretend phones.
- Encourage "play dates" and prompt children to notice each others activities and good behaviours.

Laugh and have fun!

Fridge notes – child directed play

Encourage you child to explore
Follow you child’s lead
Pace at your child’s level
Don’t expect too much – give your child time
Don’t compete with your child
Praise and encourage your child’s discovery and creativity; don’t criticize
Engage in pretend and make-believe play with your child
Be an attentive and appreciative audience
Give your toddler choices when possible
Allow you child to change her mind, play is about the ‘doing’ not about an end product
Give enough help to avoid frustration but don’t take over your toddler’s play
Reward quiet play with your attention
Laugh and have fun.

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