

Parents, Early Years and Learning

Activities book for childminders

The activities in this book are to help childminders prepare for the Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL) training. PEAL has developed a best practice framework, looking at what works best and why, with the aim of supporting the development of parental involvement in children's early learning.

The PEAL programme includes preparatory activities to reflect on practice and look at what is already happening in settings. The key elements of the PEAL model – authentic relationships, communication and partnership – are then explored in a training day for practitioners.

The introductory activities contained in this book are preparation for the PEAL training and are for childminders to use in their own settings prior to attending a PEAL training day.

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Parents, Early Years and Learning

Activities book for childminders

Helen Wheeler and Joyce Connor



Activities for childminders to undertake before PEAL training



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NCB promotes the voices, interests and well-being of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives.

As an umbrella body for the children's sector in England and Northern Ireland, we provide essential information on policy, research and best practice for our members and other partners.

NCB aims to:

- challenge disadvantage in childhood
- work with children and young people to ensure they are involved in all matters that affect their lives
- promote multidisciplinary cross-agency partnerships and good practice
- influence government policy through policy development and advocacy
- undertake high quality research and work from an evidence-based perspective
- disseminate information to all those working with children and young people, and to children and young people themselves.

NCB has adopted and works within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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What is
the PEAL
programme?

Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL) has been funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for two years (April 2005–April 2007) and is a consortium project run by the National Children's Bureau (NCB), Coram Family and the London Borough of Camden.

PEAL set out to develop a model – a best practice framework – for working in partnership with parents living in disadvantaged areas in order to support the development of parental involvement in their children's early learning.

The PEAL team would like to acknowledge all those who contributed to this programme. Details of contributors can be found in Appendix 1.

Aim

The aim of this programme is to support practitioners in developing work to engage parents in their children's learning. The programme has been organised into preparatory activities to reflect on practice and look at what is already happening in settings, followed by a training day. In both the activities and training parts of the programme, key elements of the PEAL model – authentic relationships, communication and partnership – are examined, and related to current research into what works best and why.

The activities contained in this book are carried out in the practitioners' own settings, in advance of the training day.

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How to use this book

Practitioners need to decide when and how to find time and support to do the activities. The illustration on page 8 shows how long each activity should take. This should be referred to while looking through the activities to see what they involve. Not everything in this book needs to be done before the training day – but it is important to plan what to complete in advance of it.

Background to the training: issues of equality and diversity

In tackling this programme, practitioners will be working with issues such as how discrimination and prejudice affect young children and their families, and examining how they can offer inclusive practice.

Also raised are the issues of the diversity of family lives and experiences. Wherever possible these issues have been integrated into the training activities, and research and practice examples. A more in-depth discussion and examination will be carried out on the training day, and is referred to in the *PEAL Reader* in the pack which supports the training events.

The term *working with parents*, as used in this training programme, acknowledges the wide range of people who might be in a parental role in children's lives. The terms *mothers* and *fathers* and *parents* when used here mean all the male and female adults who play a primary carer role in a child's life. This is explored more in the *PEAL Reader*.

Objectives

The objectives of these activities are:

- to enable practitioners to identify why engaging parents is important and who benefits
- to help practitioners start to identify their own skills and knowledge and build on their own practice
- to provide knowledge of the policy context and research that underpins parental involvement in the early years
- to identify some of the barriers that stop parents from being involved
- to identify opportunities for, and barriers to, further work in the practitioners' own settings.

How to approach the activities

The activities are designed to take place in your own setting and to fit in with your own requirements. They should take approximately seven hours in total.

The aim is to have some time to reflect on how you currently involve parents in their children's learning and to look at any issues this raises – both for building on current practice within your childminding setting and for yourself as a learner. The activities are also designed to help you to reflect on what you might want to get from the training, for example what information you might want about how other childminders are working to involve parents in their children's learning.

Although the activities are designed to link to the training, you will not be asked to share the results (such as audits and the feedback from parents and colleagues) in detail. Reflecting on practice in this way promotes autonomous learning and aims to develop understanding and critical thinking skills. There is more about reflective practice on page 9.

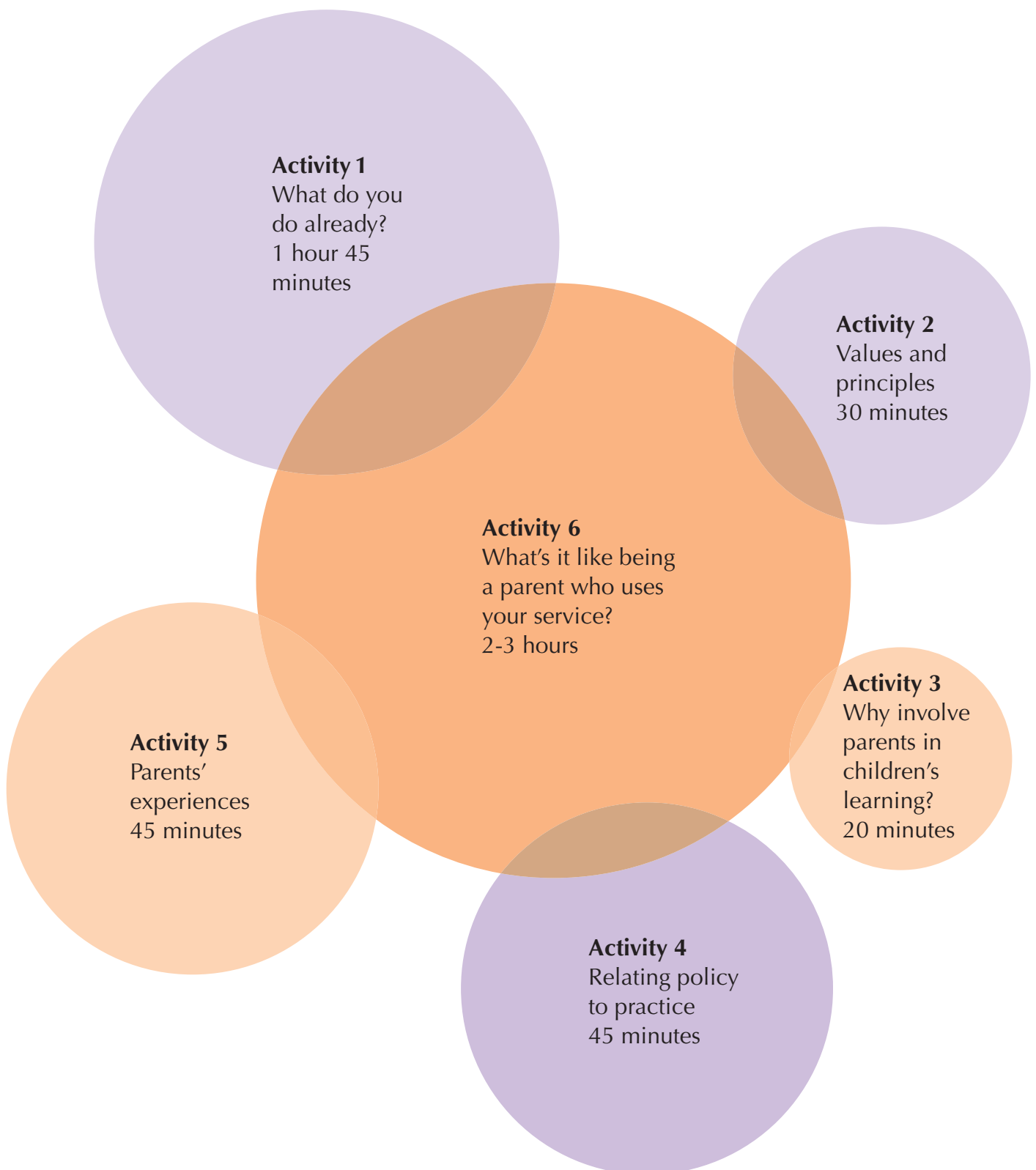
What support might be available

If you are a new childminder and would like to involve another practitioner to aid discussion and find support for the activities, you may be able to use the services of a support childminder. Any practitioner may be able to obtain help from a local development or support worker. In the first instance, please contact your local authority children's services department or information service who will provide details of any help available in your area.

What you will need to do

Plan what time you will set aside to tackle the activities. Some of these, for example the parent interviews in Activity 6, are optional at this stage but you could start to make plans for them. As the activities are designed to prepare you for some of the areas that will be looked at on the training day, make a note of any ideas or questions you want to take to this. You will not be asked to talk about any of your findings in detail, but you will be asked to think back to what you have found out.

PEAL training day activities – planning your time



What is reflective practice?

When talking about reflective practice in this programme, we are referring to an approach in which practitioners reflect on experience to affect what they do and to improve professional practice. Some people refer to this as drawing on our intuition to do what feels right. It is an emotional response that complements our knowledge and what we understand about a subject, and which enables us to act in a situation.

Schön and Kolb refer to *reflective practice* as using and applying a basic principle of reflecting on our own experience to improve action and professional practice. However, this is not a new or original idea; it has been developed by educationalists, such as Dewey and Lewin, and can be traced back to the work of Socrates and a form of learning through questioning and feedback. It forces us to question what it is that we know and how we come to know it.

Reflection can also offer us a chance to ‘unlearn’ things we accepted as knowledge – which may have caused us to form stereotypes or make assumptions – before we learn something new.

More currently, Claxton has suggested that *learning to learn, or the development of learning power, is getting better at knowing when, how and what to do when you don't know what to do*. This lack of certainty forces the individual to examine the basis on which he or she believes something to be true. Reflection on what they know and don't know helps practitioners to decide which ideas are facts and which ideas are open to interpretation. It also helps them to understand that learning is individual, and that only they can make the connections to existing knowledge and so make them make sense for themselves.


The term *reflective practitioners* refers to adult learners who are engaged in some kind of activity (often professional) which they can use to reflect on their strengths, weaknesses and areas for development.

Schön (1983) speaks of reflective practitioners who are not just skilful or competent but *thoughtful, wise and contemplative*, whose work involves *intuition, insight and artistry*. Using intuition to inform learning is referred to in education as developing ‘meta-cognitive’ skills. That is, a more developed or higher order version of the ‘cognitive’ (knowledge, reasoning) skills that we employ in learning. Meta-cognitive skills are more likely to be employed in analysis, synthesis, critical judgement and evaluation, autonomy and the ability to learn.

Meta-cognitive skills are important because they affect the ability to understand and make sense of experience. They are essential to the process of reflection and for working in situations of uncertainty, and so are necessary skills for practitioners in the changing world of education and childcare.

Adapted from The UK Centre for Legal Education (UKCLE)

<http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/reflection/what.html> accessed 24 June 2006, Claxton (1999), Schön (1983), Dewey (1909), Kolb (1984) and Lewin (1952).



Learning
outcomes
from the
activities

By the end of the activities you will have achieved the following:

- have information about why parents' involvement is important for children's outcomes and know of two key findings from research to support this
- know what the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) says about working in partnership with parents for children's learning
- be able to identify your own and your setting's current attitudes, activities and strengths in this area, gaps in practice and areas for development
- have identified barriers that prevent parents being involved
- have begun to identify ways in which you or other childminders have tried successfully to overcome particular barriers.

The *PEAL Reader* looks in more detail at the learning from the activities in this training.

Activity 1

What do you do already?

This activity looks at how your setting is currently operating in partnership with parents to enhance children's learning, and asks you to reflect on how this is working.

What you will learn from this activity

You will examine your current practice and begin to identify strengths and gaps.

Time required

1 hour 45 minutes in total over a period of time

What to do

Work on your own or with other childminders. Using Resource sheet 1.1 *What do you already do to involve parents in their children's learning?*, look at how you are currently working to involve parents in their children's learning. Fill in the grid, including some reasons for your responses.

You may have a variety of ways of showing how you reached your conclusions. For example, you may already have policies and can explain how these are put into practice, or perhaps you can think of particular examples of when parents have talked to you about their children's learning and development.

When you have recorded what you already do and your evidence for reaching these conclusions, consider the following:

- Were there any surprises?
- How do you feel other childminders' reactions would compare with yours?
- What areas do you feel are strengths for your own practice? What areas do you feel need development?
- As a practitioner, what do you find hard about working with parents on children's learning? What else would you like to do with parents concerning children's learning? What stops you?
- How much time, in the past week, did you spend talking with parents about their children's learning? What conversations have you had?
- How might you seek support to develop your practice in this area?

What further information or support would you like to gain from the training day in the light of your findings?

What do you already do to involve parents in their children's learning?

The terms *mothers and fathers* and *parents* are used here to mean all male and female parents and carers of children who are in a primary carer role in a child's life. This is explored more in the *PEAL Reader*.

I am approachable and welcoming to mothers, fathers and families.

I have a clear plan for settling children in, and both children and parents are involved.

I am happy for parents to spend time in my home with their children.

Mornings and going home times are arranged to allow time for parents to discuss their children.

All parents share their observations of what children say and do in their own home.

I use parents' observations to help me plan activities for their children.

Parents are given informal support for their children's learning in their own home (e.g. book borrowing, ideas for places to visit, tips on activities to do at home).

I have good knowledge of where to find support for my parents locally, e.g. ESOL classes, housing advice, support for parents with disabled children.

I regularly share information about individual children's progress and development at other settings they attend to support the children's transition into pre-school or nursery.

I do this already.	This is developing.	I need to do more.	How do I know?/How could I demonstrate this?



Activity 2 Values and principles

ACTIVITY 2

This activity invites you to reflect on the values and principles behind the PEAL programme. It provides an opportunity to examine your own attitudes and practice in relation to these values and principles.

What you will learn from this activity

This activity will enable you to learn about your attitudes to working in partnership with parents and to identify your own values and principles.

Time required

30 minutes

What to do

The PEAL training is built on the belief that quality provision for young children develops from acknowledging and responding to the unique experience each child brings.

Look at Resource sheet 2.1 *Values and principles promoting parental involvement in children's learning – the PEAL model*.

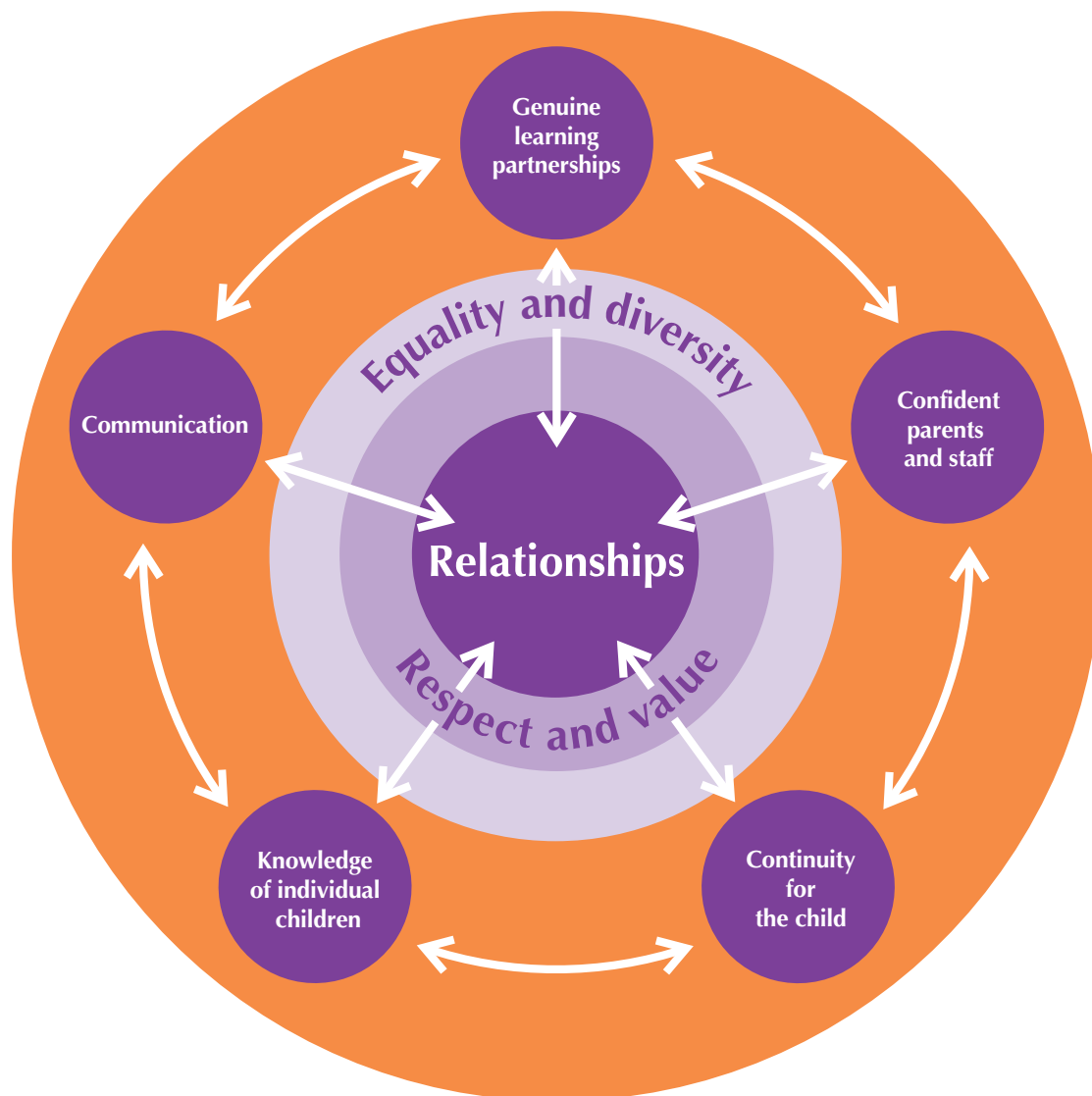
Think about the model and any ideas or questions it raises. Answer the question: How does it relate to what you know about parents and their involvement in children's learning?

Look at Resource sheet 2.2 *Values underpinning the PEAL programme*. Consider each one in turn, using the prompts at the end of the statements.

How do you react to each of these statements? Are there any which you feel uncertain about or disagree with? How do they relate to the work you do in your own childminding setting? Have you looked at your own values for this area of work? If so, how do they compare with those listed here?

This activity serves as an introduction to values and principles, which are covered in more detail in the *PEAL Training guide* and *PEAL Reader*.

Values and principles promoting parental involvement in children's learning – the PEAL model



Explanation of the model

The model has been built by looking at the widely available research that shows why parental involvement in children's learning is important and how it can be supported.

The value at the heart of the model is that good quality relationships between parents, practitioners and children are fundamental and need to be developed before anything else can happen.

These relationships need to be built on respecting and valuing each other's

contribution, and embedded in principles of equality and diversity. If these relationships are developed well, communication will flow backwards and forwards between settings and home.

This will lead to genuine learning partnerships and to confident parents and staff, enabling them to provide continuity for the child. This continuity will allow parents and staff to really get to know individual children, and this will enable planning to take place which will provide further continuity for the child.

Quality relationships enable knowledge to be communicated between the setting and home. Again, this leads to an increase in knowledge of individual children; and helps to provide a setting or activities that will build on what happens at home and vice versa.

Communication helps to enable parents and staff to work together in a genuine partnership to provide positive learning environments for each child.

Resource sheet 2.2

Values underpinning the PEAL programme

The terms *mothers and fathers* and *parents* when used here refer to all the male and female adults who are in a primary carer role in a child's life. This is explored further in the *PEAL Reader*.

Children learn best in the context of warm, loving relationships.

Parents play the key role in children's learning. They are experts on their own children and they are a child's first and enduring educators.

Parents want the best for their children and want to be involved in their children's learning.

All parents are entitled to be involved in their children's learning and to be supported in whatever way they are able or they wish to engage.


All families and individual children are different, and acknowledging and respecting this is crucial to building genuine relationships built on trust and openness.

Life for young children isn't separated into education and care times and places, play times or learning times. It is a seamless whole, whether they are in their homes or in early years provision; and the importance of this continuity should be reflected in settings.

What are your first thoughts on these?

What do they mean for you as a practitioner?





Activity 3 Why involve parents in children's learning?

This activity introduces some key pieces of research about the importance of engaging with parents on children's learning, highlights the benefits this engagement can bring to outcomes for children and compares this with your own experience.

What you will learn from this activity

You will learn about two major research reports that detail the benefits of involving parents in children's learning.

Time required

20 minutes

What to do

Read Resource sheet 3.1 *Why involve parents in their children's learning?*

Reflect on what this research means and your reaction to it.

How does this fit in with your own experiences as a learner, in your own early years as well as your personal, family and childminding setting observations?

Make a note of your thoughts and reactions, and any questions this may raise for you.

Why involve parents in their children's learning?

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE)

EPPE is a study of 3000 children in their early years settings and homes between the ages of three and seven years.

It shows that by the age of three, there are already marked differences between individual children's social and intellectual development. The most important factor that impacts on the difference is the quality of the home learning environment. This effect continues through to the age of seven. What parents do at home has more impact than their own occupation, income and education levels.

EPPE concludes that:

What parents do is more important than who parents are.

All parents who regularly involve their children in home learning activities that 'stretch a child's mind' can enhance their children's learning and development. *(Sylva and others 2004)*

EPPE's findings are confirmed by other studies

A wide ranging review of research by Desforges (2003) confirms that what parents do at home with children is critical.


Research consistently shows that what parents do with their children at home is far more important to their achievement than their social class or level of education.

Parental involvement has an impact across all ethnic groups and social classes.

In the primary age range, the impact on achievement of different levels of parental involvement is bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools.

Home influence is powerful because it is *enduring, pervasive and direct*. Children absorb enthusiasm and a positive attitude towards learning from their relationships with adults at home. A parent who feels it is his or her role and believes they can make a difference, models positive interest in learning.

In the early years, children also pick up skills and knowledge directly from parents and carers. *(Desforges and Abouchar 2003)*



Activity 4 Relating policy to practice

This activity helps you to make links between policy and practice. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (2007) makes clear the expectations for good practice in working in partnership with parents. Having knowledge of this will build practitioner confidence and help inform parents about what they can expect. It will also assist with preparations for your Ofsted inspection.

What you will learn from this activity

You will find out what the Early Years Foundation Stage says about parental involvement in children's learning.

Time required

45 minutes

What to do

Refer to Resource sheet 4.1 *What do key policy documents say about partnership with parents?*

If you don't have your own copy, the EYFS document can be read on line or downloaded from the web address given on the Resource sheet.

Spend time reading the suggested extracts from the Statutory Framework and Principles into Practice card.

(You can find a summary of the key points in Appendix 2, page 38.)

- What do you understand by the term *partnership* and how do the requirements of the EYFS fit in with your understanding?
- What kind of relationship do you think would be most useful for parents to have with you to enable them to be involved in their children's learning?

What do key policy documents say about partnership with parents?

The Early Years Foundation Stage (2007)

From September 2008, all settings offering early years provision will be required to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This provides a single framework for the delivery of integrated care and early education. It will replace Birth to Three Matters, the Foundation Stage and the National Standards for Under 8s Daycare and Childminding.

The principle of working in partnership with parents is woven throughout the Statutory Framework, Practice Guidance and Principles into Practice cards.

Read the following sections from the **Statutory Framework** to see what the requirements are for working in partnership to involve parents in their children's learning and development.

Statutory Framework

1.16 Partnership working underpins successful delivery (page 10)

2.19 The assessment arrangements (page 16)

You can then read and reflect on some examples of best practice in:

Principles into Practice card 2.2

Positive Relationships: Parents as Partners

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs>



Activity 5 Parents' experiences

This activity offers a range of real-life experiences, in parents' own words.

What you will learn from this activity

You will identify barriers to parental involvement and begin thinking about what to do to make parents feel welcome.

Time required

45 minutes

What to do

Read Resource sheet 5.1 *Parents' voices* and think about the parents' experiences. List what you think is good and poor practice.

How do you think they compare with what happens in your setting?

Think of an example from your own experience of being made to feel welcome or unwelcome somewhere. What stopped you being as involved as you could be? How did others make you feel and why?

What do you think are the main factors that prevent parents being involved in what you offer in *your setting*?

List the main factors that you think may be preventing parents being involved in what you offer. Think about what you would like to change. What information and support would you like to get from the training day to help you with this?

The main barriers referred to in research are listed in Resource sheet 5.2. *What stops involvement?* Can you think of ways in which you have tried to overcome barriers to parents being involved in their children's learning?

Parents' voices

Debra and Sam's story

When my child first needed a childminder, I went to see a number to choose one that would suit me. I was a residential worker and worked shifts. Some I looked at seemed to be trying to make our lives fit in with theirs. Then I found this one, and it fitted into our lifestyle and patterns.

I also felt I might be missing out on what was happening. The childminder involved me in getting to know what they'd do, gave me an account of a typical day, how they'd go out swimming or to the park and how she believed in learning through play.

She knew I'd get a bit anxious and there would be a bit of anxiety about separation and she would acknowledge this. I felt encouraged to ring to see how things were going. I felt I could share what my child had been doing at home. My child could take things in from home – it became a home from home. That was the place with the sort of person I wanted.

When my child started nursery I went with the childminder and we both stayed and settled him in. I feel it's important to connect with the person, to see how open they are to questioning and how reassuring they are. Now my son is seven, but my daughter goes to the same childminder.

Jenny and Mel's story

I went to collect my daughter from nursery. The nursery worker said she wanted to have a quick word because my daughter had been showing what she felt was some unusual behaviour, running across the room and being completely disruptive and pushing other children. She said she had never seen her behave that way before and just wanted to let me know. I went home feeling very worried but not really knowing what to do about the conversation. I didn't know what I should do about it.

A year or two later, she was diagnosed with autism and ADHD [attention deficit hyperactive disorder]. The teacher then said that the nursery staff had always been worried about her learning, about her reading and about her development generally. I hadn't known there were these worries about her learning – only the time when I was told she was being disruptive, they'd never discussed it with me.

Parents' voices

Adrian and Thomas's story

Thomas, who's almost two, had been with his first childminder Rosemarie, for about 2 months. My wife was a full-time student and I worked full time. We had told Rosemarie from the start that we would share drop-off and pick-ups. Rosemarie was fine with this and said she would make sure she passed on and shared any information or requests, for example, about his sleep, nappy changes and food, etc. with us both. However, what actually happened was that Rosemarie appeared not to acknowledge my role as a parent and would say things like 'can you tell his mummy...' or 'can you ask Thomas's mummy to make sure she sends his wellies tomorrow as we're going to the park!'

This made me feel very inadequate as a parent and excluded from my own child's life, as Manuel in Fawlty Towers would say 'I know nothing!!' or so it appeared to Rosemarie. Needless to say, we didn't use Rosemarie much longer and have now found Julie who's different again and involves both of us in every aspect of Thomas's life.

Azhar and Tazneem's story

We had not long arrived in the country, everything was new. I took my child to the nursery. We didn't know anyone there; it was all different to home. I put my child's name down and they offered her a place the next week. When we came on the first day we went to her peg to hang up her coat. They'd spelled my child's name wrong, so I told them – it's not Tasmin, it's Tazneem. The next week something came home with the name spelled wrong again. I thought 'that is not my child's'. I told them again but they kept getting it wrong. It made me feel I don't want to go back again... they don't listen to me or care about my child.

Parents' voices

Lisa and Sophie's story

At six weeks it all started with Sophie. She went for a six-week check and found out that she had an ASD and a VSD, which is a hole in the top chambers of her heart and a hole in the bottom, meaning that her heart's enlarged as well because it works harder, so she's prone to viruses. That's why she's on the small side as well. It was nice to have some free time to think. I know she's alright with Tracy, Tracy knows what the difference is and I knew she'd be safe but at least I could keep an eye on her. Tracy was probably the only other person she's been with apart from family members.

Jasbinder, Nila, Niren and Dani's story

Nila is nearly four and the twins are nearly one. When I arrived one morning with Nila at nursery school, the teacher wanted a word because I was getting her in five minutes or so late. She said it was really important to get her there on time. I told her about how hard it is getting out with the twins as well. If one of them needs a nappy change at the last minute I see to them – I have to see to them first as I have to take them to the childminder ready for going on to work. It's twice as likely something will hold us up with the two of them. I felt she was telling me off but I don't think she really understands what my life is like.

The teacher asked me why I wasn't reading to Nila for half-an-hour every night. She said it was really important to fit that in. I told her I have to fit things in around getting in after work and getting the meal and getting the babies fed and to bed. I do tell the children stories – often when we're out together, or I try to read to Nila when I can or point out words in the supermarket when we're shopping. It's a case of what's possible at the moment.

Parents' voices

Paulina and Raoul's story

When Raoul was in his last few months with his childminder, before leaving to go to nursery school, I thought she would do some visits to the school with him. The school had asked for this and I had tried to do some myself but it was difficult to fit in with work. Every time I made what I thought was a suitable appointment time for the childminder, Chrissie, and Raoul to visit, she would cancel it or re-arrange it and not go, saying something had cropped up or 'it was such a lovely day I decided to take the children to the park!' I was really disappointed as I thought Chrissie wanted to help me. I don't think she appreciated how difficult it was to take time off as a single working parent. I had to save my holidays for times when Chrissie wasn't available anyway.

Alice and Beth's story

My childminder Jon is brilliant with Beth who's only three and a half! He's been really positive with her about going to the 'big school' – visiting the school with her and meeting her teacher and talking about what she does at his house. He's also been reading stories to her about it, doing pictures and taking her with him to school when he goes for the older children. That's so she can see where they play and where to meet him after school when that time comes. It's made such a difference. He's also been really good at helping her to be more independent, helping her with things like putting her own shoes on, using the toilet, trying to put on her coat and doing zips and buttons. He's made it so exciting that Beth can't wait to go to nursery now. I'm sure she'll cope and settle in quickly when she does start, especially as she'll still be going to John's before and after school. I'm so glad I chose him as my childminder.

(With thanks to parents who gave permission for their stories to be used; please see Appendix 1 Acknowledgements.)

'We need to begin with the firm belief that all parents are interested in the development and progress of their own children.'

The Pen Green Team
Nursery World, June 2004

What stops involvement?

- Work commitments
- Time and pressures in busy life
- Childcare needs
- Pressures due to lack of money, illness, disability, single-parent status
- Own education level, confidence that you can make a difference
- Knowledge of what to do
- Negative feelings about schools from own experience
- Own literacy and numeracy levels poor
- English not first language
- Attitudes – 'it's the school's job,' 'intelligence is innate'
- Feeling unwelcome, not trusting teachers
- Poor experience of other professionals – suspicion of motives
- Past and ongoing experience of discrimination – including race, gender, class, disability, sexual orientation
- Parents unable to understand or share educational approach
- Practitioner attitudes – not valuing or listening to parents' view of child
- Parents not confident in the face of professional expertise
- Practitioners lacking confidence in talking to parents
- Practitioners unable to communicate educational approach effectively

84% of parents at Pen Green were involved in their children's learning when offered a range of options. (**Whalley 2001**).

98% of parents surveyed believe they have either equal or some responsibility for their children's education; 58% said equal. (**Williams and others 2002**).


Pugh and De'Ath (1989) found parents interested in their child's progress and appreciated information.

(Desforges 2003)

(Draper and Duffy 2006)

(Harris and Spencer 2000)

(Whalley 2001)



Activity 6
What's it like
being a parent
who uses your
service?

This activity is about looking at your setting from a parent's point of view and asking, 'What's it like?' Is parental involvement really encouraged? If so, how?

This activity could be done after the training, if necessary. It involves setting up discussions with parents. When you have looked at the task below, you may find you have recently asked parents similar questions for a different purpose. If so you could draw on this experience rather than ask parents again.

What you will learn from this activity

You will be able to identify your own current attitudes, activities and strengths in this area, gaps in practice and areas for development.

Time required

2–3 hours in total

What to do

Using Resource sheets 6.1 *Planning your interview*, and 6.3 *Parent interview sheet*, as guidelines, interview one or two parents using your service. You can be flexible in how you approach this. You could interview two parents together, or arrange to talk to them in their own home or somewhere you could meet that is quiet and where the parents will feel comfortable and at ease.

It is easier to ask a parent with whom you already have an established relationship to help you with this task but, if possible, include parents you don't know quite so well. Alternatively you could ask a parent who has recently moved on from using your setting to reflect back on their experience. It may be easier for that parent to express any reservations they have more openly.

Some people may have difficulty talking about their experiences because they have felt excluded or feel they have experienced discrimination. Discuss with your support worker or another local childminder how best to structure interviews to make them accessible to all parents who want to be involved and the most appropriate ways of communicating to ensure that parents feel able to contribute.



The suggested questions provided are meant as prompts to help you have a conversation about involvement in learning, but you will need to adapt them to enable parents to focus on a particular area if they wish, giving a picture of their experience in their own way.

Look at Resource sheet 6.1 *Planning your interview* before you begin and consider the issues of confidentiality covered in Resource sheet 6.2 *Confidentiality*.

Look at your findings. Consider how the views compare and what might be the reasons for this. Are there any issues that you think the interviews raise for you in your setting?



Planning your interview

You have daily discussions with parents on an informal basis to exchange information, e.g. about their child's day. It is also good practice to make this more formal by arranging a mutually agreed time to meet without children present. This can be used to discuss contract reviews, changes of information and records held.

Therefore, setting up an interview to ask parents for feedback on your setting is merely an extension of your existing good practice.

The purpose of the interview is to find out what it's like for parents using your setting and what they feel about how they are encouraged to be involved in their child's learning and development. The following are some general principles for conducting interviews.

Introduction: Explain what you are finding out about and why, what kind of questions you want to ask, and how long it will take. Talk about confidentiality and ask if it's okay to tape the interview (if you wish to do this to ensure you record their own words). Give your parent(s) an opportunity to ask any questions.

Opening: Start with easy-to-answer questions. You can move on to more sensitive questions later.

Probing: In-depth questions draw more relevant information. You should not prompt. Keep questions relevant.

Closing: Make sure the interview has a good ending. Ask easy, closing questions which don't bring up sensitive issues, so you finish on a light note. This is particularly important when sensitive issues have already been discussed.

Ending: Thank your parent(s) and provide reassurance if they have spoken about sensitive or personal issues.

Terminating the interview: Make sure it is easy for your parent(s) to remain quiet or finish the interview at any time. It can be hard for people to say 'no,' so this should be made as easy as possible.

(Adapted from McKeown and Hedges 1996.)

Resource sheet 6.2

Confidentiality

You should be aware of the need for confidentiality and it is good practice to have a written policy for your childminding setting.

The following guide will support the planning of this activity.

People who take part in any feedback about their experiences in a setting are entitled to confidentiality. They need to know the purpose of the information and how it will be used, and if the material they give you can be linked to them as individuals. They will need you to listen to their views and to address any concerns they have about this.

If you want to tape-record your interviews to ensure that you accurately represent people's words, think about what will happen to the tapes. Sometimes it is agreed to destroy tapes after a certain time. Consider exactly how you will request permission to record, and how you will explain exactly who will hear the tapes. People being interviewed are often nervous about being recorded.

It is always helpful to discuss issues of confidentiality with all those participating – they will give you helpful pointers to issues of concern to them. The information you gather should only be used to inform the improvement of your practice. Specific responses should not be shared with other childminders.

Stories can sometimes be altered so as to disguise identifying details, without interfering with the findings, but at times it may be obvious who has volunteered the information and individuals may want to opt out of giving their views if this is going to be the case.

(Adapted from Save the Children 2000.)




Resource sheet 6.3

Parent interview sheet

- How easy is it to talk to me about your child? What makes it easy/hard?
- How was the settling-in period? How did it make you feel?
- What worked well during settling-in? What might have made it better?
- What do you know about how children are learning here?
- What do you think you do at home with your child (children) that helps them learn?
- Has anything I have provided or done in my childminding setting helped you to do more with your child at home?
- What additional support would you like to help you understand more about how your child is learning and developing, for example some training, information sheets, or more time for us to talk?
- Have you heard about any opportunities from me to find out more about how children learn?
- Do you feel able to ask to see any records I hold about your child? For example, accident records, observations and individual plans. Do you understand them?
- Have I ever asked for your own observations of your child's learning? Have you written anything on the records?
- What do you think, for future parents, would make it easier to understand how children learn? What could I do better?
- If you could describe what makes a good early years practitioner/childminder, what would you say?
- If I had known more about you as a family, would it have helped?

NB: The above questions provide a structure and guide: you do not need to ask every question and you can of course make changes to the questions.



What will
happen next?

These activities will be built on in the training part of the programme – a group event with a trainer to lead the day's sessions.

A programme for the training day follows.

Training programme materials will be given out on the day.

Look at the information you have collected. What do you feel you need more information on or support in developing?

Outline of training programme

Session 1

Welcome and introductions

Session 2

What is it like for parents?

Session 3

Respectful relationships

Session 4

Why work with parents?

Tea and coffee

Session 5

What might stop us?

Session 6

Involvement at the heart of practice

Lunch

Welcome back

Session 7

Communication and confidence

Tea and coffee

Session 8

What needs to be in place? Action plan and evaluation



Appendix 1

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Appendix 1 (continued)

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What do key policy documents say about partnership with parents?

The Early Years Foundation Stage (2007)

From September 2008, all settings offering early years provision will be required to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This provides a single framework for the delivery of integrated care and early education. It will replace Birth to Three Matters, the Foundation Stage and the National Standards for Under 8s Daycare and Childminding.

The principle of working in partnership with parents is woven throughout the Statutory Framework, Practice Guidance and Principles into Practice cards. The following sections from the Statutory Framework set out what the requirements are for working in partnership to involve parents in their children's learning and development.

1.16 Partnership working underpins successful delivery (page 10)

Close working between early years practitioners and parents is vital for the identification of children's learning needs and to ensure a quick response to any area of particular difficulty. Parents and families are central to a child's well being and practitioners should support this important relationship by sharing information and offering support to learning in the home

2.19 The assessment arrangements (page 16)

Assessments should be based on practitioners' observations of what children are doing in their day-to-day activities. As judgements are based on observational evidence gathered from a wide range of learning and teaching contexts, it is expected that all adults who interact with the child should contribute to the process, and that account be taken of information provided by parents. An essential feature of parental involvement is an ongoing dialogue, building on the partnership begun by any previous practitioner(s). Settings should report progress and achievements to parents throughout the EYFS.

Principles into Practice card 2.2 – Positive Relationships: Parents as Partners – enables you to read and reflect on some examples of best practice. A summary of points:

Parents are children's first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in early years settings, the results have a positive impact on children's development and learning.

Effective practice includes valuing and welcoming all families; respecting and reflecting diversity; acknowledging and celebrating home languages; actively involving fathers; making time for regular talk between practitioner and parents; ensuring communication provides a genuine two-way flow of information, knowledge and expertise between parent and practitioner; using this dialogue to support and extend the individual child's learning and development; encouraging parents to review and contribute to development records regularly; providing information and workshops on important areas of learning to parents; explaining policies and practice to parents; asking for parents' views.

**Adapted from Parents, Early Years and Learning Activities Resources sheet 4.1*

Appendix 3

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Parents, Early Years and Learning

Activities book for childminders

The activities in this book are to help childminders prepare for the Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL) training. PEAL has developed a best practice framework, looking at what works best and why, with the aim of supporting the development of parental involvement in children's early learning.

The PEAL programme includes preparatory activities to reflect on practice and look at what is already happening in settings. The key elements of the PEAL model – authentic relationships, communication and partnership – are then explored in a training day for practitioners.


The introductory activities contained in this book are preparation for the PEAL training and are for childminders to use in their own settings prior to attending a PEAL training day.

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Parents, Early Years and Learning

Activities book for childminders

Helen Wheeler and Joyce Connor



Activities for childminders to undertake before PEAL training

