

Sharing ideas
for play and
observations
with parents

Parents, Early Years and Learning: Childminders' practice example

Julie, a childminder in Barking and Dagenham, regularly shares with parents ideas about how play activities help learning and development. She invites parents to spend a little time at her home, joining in an activity with their child.

Jodie, a single mum, came in to play with Mason, her two-year-old son. Julie had prepared yellow rice, a variety of containers and a range of paper shapes in varying shades of yellow for the children to pour, count, stick and make patterns with.

She explained to Jodie how she had used food colouring to make the yellow rice. Mason measured and poured, clearly absorbed in moving the rice from one container to another, seeing how many cups fill a bowl and watching the effect created as the rice fell through a funnel.

Julie also uses a digital camera and prints out pictures of the children involved in activities during the day to show parents when they collect their children.

These offer great talking points and opportunities to share moments together that cause particular delight and interest.

Childminders keep records of learning in all sorts of ways and each observation, exchanged with parents, helps to build a shared understanding of individual children.

Julie keeps a book with a page for each child. She records the highlights of the day and shares these with parents when they come to collect their child. Parents can then follow on the activities at home or talk about them with their child. Julie encourages her parents to write in the book so that she can refer to activities the children have done away from her setting as well.

Jodie tells Julie about how excited Mason was when a ladybird landed on his arm. She also asks about the 'circle song' that Mason sings at home. How does that fit into his day? What other songs does he like?

Karen, a childminder in South Gloucestershire, invites parents to bring in items – books, toys or games to support topics she is exploring. If she knows a child likes to eat oranges, the children are encouraged to think about and bring in other orange objects, discuss where the orange has come from, how it was grown and, of course, how to peel and eat it! Whatever a child has shown a particular interest in, is discussed with parents at pick-up time and encouragement is given to continue the discussion at home, or on the journey home.

Frank shows great interest in the letter F, spotting it in a story book. His parents are told and encouraged to look out for his special letter on signposts and notices on the journey home.



Jodie says, 'Before I met Julie, I had the wrong impression that childminders would leave children to play with each other, and watch TV and DVDs. I'm really pleased that he is getting this sort of experience and one-to-one attention here. I look at the change in him and how much he's progressed, and it's amazing. He's always telling me about things he's done with Julie.'

“I’ve never heard a recording of Shana singing before. She sang roly poly to me yesterday at home over and over again.”

Karen also produces newsletters in order to share current themes. She describes activities she is planning to help the children learn through outings, crafts, games, puzzles, stories and singing, and explains how these link to the Birth to Three and the Foundation Stage Frameworks.* Dates of proposed outings are detailed together with ‘newsy’ facts such as the newborn gorilla at the zoo.

Each child has a scrapbook of pictures showing what they’ve done at Karen’s home and garden and on local trips. Karen sits with the children as they recall what they did. The book is shared with parents and copies of favourite photos are sent home.

Parents can then talk with their children, prompting them to remember events and build language and thinking skills.

Karen also keeps diaries of each child’s progress, matching learning to the curriculum frameworks. Sharing these regularly with parents helps them to engage with what she is doing with their child and to extend this at home.

Dawn, a childminder in Barking and Dagenham, uses a karaoke box to encourage her children to sing rhymes and songs. These recordings are shared with the parents. Shana was proud when her mum listened to her singing on the tape. Adeola, her mum, encouraged her to sing it again.

Dawn keeps a record for planning using post-it notes on the inside of a cupboard door. This provides a quick and easy way to tell parents about their child’s achievements, relating them to curriculum documents and discussing ideas for extending activities at home.

Dawn gets to know her children and families well, adapting to their individual needs and making them feel included. This helps to build a relationship in which parents feel comfortable enough to share observations and ideas.



Jasminder speaks Hindi, German and English, and her mum reads Braille. She is encouraged to use her home languages at Dawn’s setting, and all the children learn a few new words in Hindi from Jasminder. Dawn spends time explaining how the day has gone to her dad at pick-up time and asks him about some of the words Jasminder has used. She reads regularly with Jasminder, using books with text and Braille so that her mum can read the story again at home.

*Replaced by the Early Years Foundation Stage from September 2008.

