

Sharing books with families

Hainault Children's Centre, Redbridge, believes that encouraging a love of books and reading in the early years is a key factor in improving the life chances of their children. They are also committed to working with parents, and want to build parents' confidence in using books and sharing stories with children at home.

They have established a book-sharing scheme for families. A children's library has been constructed, which is well stocked with a variety of texts: fiction, non-fiction, dual language books, poems and rhymes.

The library also contains novels and other material for parents to borrow, and a range of DVDs about child development – on listening and talking, chatter matters, and the importance of play. This adult section is being expanded by asking parents to donate their own material from home. It is hoped, in this way, to encourage more family reading, discussion of books generally, as well as knowledge about how children play and learn.

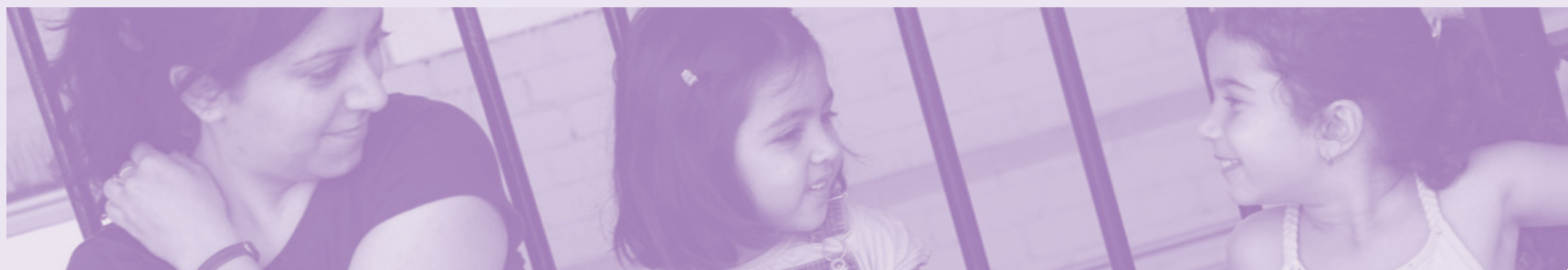
The library is located at the entrance to the nursery, near the manager's open-plan office. The location is important – as parents drop off and collect their children they walk past the shelving and their attention is easily drawn to the library.



Children have regular library sessions, facilitated by practitioners, and exchange their book for a new one. They have a 'book bag' in which to carry the book home. Children and parents often select books together and, in some cases, the whole family, including older and younger children, have all gone home with their own book to read and share.

Parents are given a leaflet explaining the scheme and its purpose. The leaflet, translated into community languages, gives some tips on how to share books effectively with young children.

Books should be enjoyed, loved and shared.



Reading with children

Find a quiet place and turn off the TV or radio so there are no distractions.

Share favourite books over and over again.

Read wherever you can – signs, labels, shopping lists and cards.

Don't rush! Give your child time to stop and chatter in response to ideas in the book.

The centre is now also developing '**learning sacks**' which are available for families to borrow for use at home. These are fabric bags, made at the centre, containing books and play activities – for example, a story with props, 'a garden bag' or 'a cooking bag'. Each bag includes a card detailing possible learning intentions and contains something for the family to keep – a plant pot with soil and seeds in the gardening bag, or a recipe in the cooking bag.

Ensuring access to the library at a variety of flexible times has been a key factor for the centre, as many parents are very busy and have little time to spare.

Staff are also on hand to offer support to parents. This is particularly important for parents who may lack confidence or require a little more help in making their choices. The process has led to more conversation about individual children's learning between parents and practitioners.

Future plans

Other children's centres in Redbridge have expressed an interest in the book-sharing and learning sack scheme. It is hoped that the ideas can be spread to other services.

Story book Dads is a charity which maintains family ties between imprisoned parents and their children through the production of story CDs on which prisoners record stories for their children. The centre has registered interest with the programme through the prison family support worker, and hopes to develop the scheme this year.

“I liked having the props with the book so that my children could role-play the story. I have a better understanding now that my children learn more through play and not just reading the story to them.”

