

# Working in Partnership with Parents

Good Practice Guide



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## Key points:

# Working in partnership with parents



**This guide is designed to assist settings in supporting staff with little or no experience of talking to parents. It can also be used as a refresher tool for those staff with more experience.**

## *Key Elements of Working in Partnership:* **First Impressions**

First impressions of a setting are a decisive factor for parents. A positive response to their initial enquiry regarding the setting is the foundation to the partnership. All members of staff have a shared responsibility to ensure that the family are made to feel welcome on their first visit, given the time to look around and the opportunity to ask questions.

All parents will feel slightly apprehensive on their first visit. Practitioners must always be aware of this and endeavour to make the parents feel at ease.

It is the responsibility of all managers to ensure staff receive appropriate training in working with families.

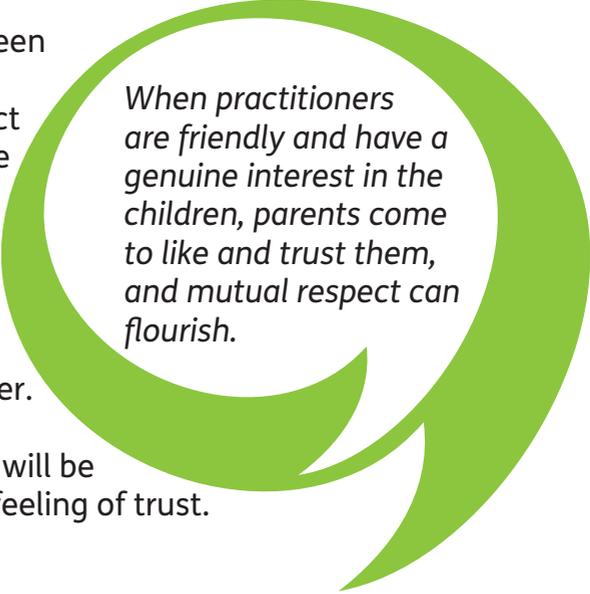
Some children will have a disability or additional needs which parents may disclose at their first contact/visit. Others may not wish to discuss any personal issues or may be struggling to come to terms with their child's problems and not mention any issues. These parents will have additional anxieties as to whether their child will be accepted.



*The smile that greets the parent as they walk through the door conveys a really important and simple message, “you are welcome here”, the lack of a smile, can convey “you are not welcome here”.*

## Trusting Relationship

A trusting relationship between the practitioner and parents begins with the initial contact and it is crucial that from the start, parents appreciate that staff value their knowledge and understanding of their child. Parents need to feel that they can trust the practitioner. A professional and honest approach by all staff will be the baseline in building the feeling of trust.



*When practitioners are friendly and have a genuine interest in the children, parents come to like and trust them, and mutual respect can flourish.*

## Supporting Staff

*If a member of staff has difficulty working with parents, you will need to ensure that:*

- they have access to relevant training
- they are given support including the opportunity to work alongside a more experienced member of staff
- they are given praise and encouragement
- they are included with all the staff in discussions and regular team meetings.

## Develop Two-way Communication

Successful relationships become partnerships when there is a two-way communication, where parents and practitioners listen to each other's views to achieve the best outcomes for each child.

As well as listening to parents, staff can share their expertise. Different stages of development can cause stress and tensions, and practitioners can offer advice and assistance to ease parents and children through emotionally charged times such as weaning, toilet training and behaviour issues.

Settings communicate with parents in a range of ways and it is vital to keep the parent fully informed about their child, these can include:

### **Arrival and collection times**

An opportune time for communication to take place. In larger settings this may be more difficult as some parents may be at work and cannot be regular visitors.

### **Two-way diaries**

Can be useful when daily contact is limited. However, it is important that regular times are made for the key worker and parent to review the child's progress and for the parent to contribute to their child's profile.

### **Parent and Key Worker meetings**

Early years settings tend to organise parent and key worker meetings on a regular basis and in a more structured way. Again, the timing of these meetings will depend on the parents' daily routines and commitments, and the staff team will have to be flexible when arranging them.

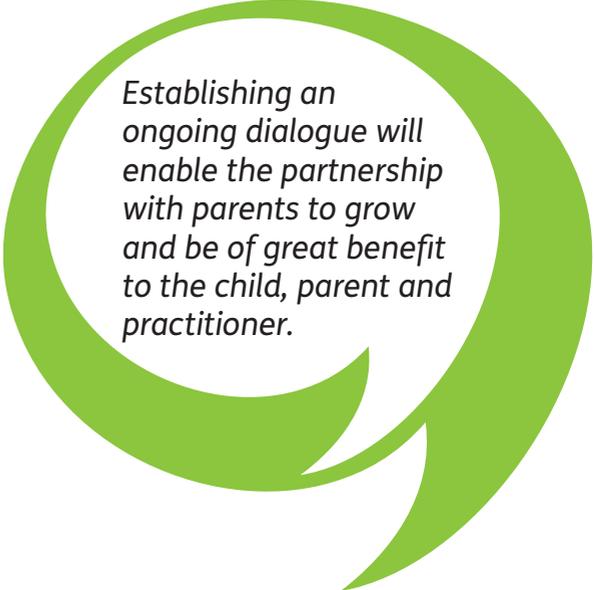
## Develop Two-way Communication (cont)

### Displays

Displays, such as a permanent board designated for parents' information, can be an effective way of sharing up-to-date news about events in the nursery and community. Copies of the nursery newsletter and guidance leaflets could be made available there. Other displays celebrating children's work around the nursery should be annotated to make clear to parents the significance of their children's play and learning.

### Information Technology (IT)

A setting may have the use of IT facilities, i.e. website and/or email. Communication on many issues can be made to parents in this way.



*Establishing an ongoing dialogue will enable the partnership with parents to grow and be of great benefit to the child, parent and practitioner.*

## Be Open, Honest and Realistic

Being open, honest and realistic with parents will be the foundation to a firm partnership. It is important to share positive information with parents but as important to inform parents of any concerns. Close working between parents and practitioners is vital for the identification of childrens' needs and to ensure a quick response to any area of particular difficulty.

As the relationship develops, parents may choose to share confidential issues. Settings should ensure that there is somewhere private for the parent to talk. If the practitioner needs to pass on any confidential information; they must firstly inform the parent.



A non judgmental approach should be used at all times.

## Establish a Respectful Relationship

Establishing respectful relationships takes a lot of hard work by practitioners. To succeed, practitioners should avoid making assumptions about parents. They should treat each family as individual and spend time getting to know them well, showing interest in them and build on the family's strengths. The success of this relationship will attract engagement and regular attendance.



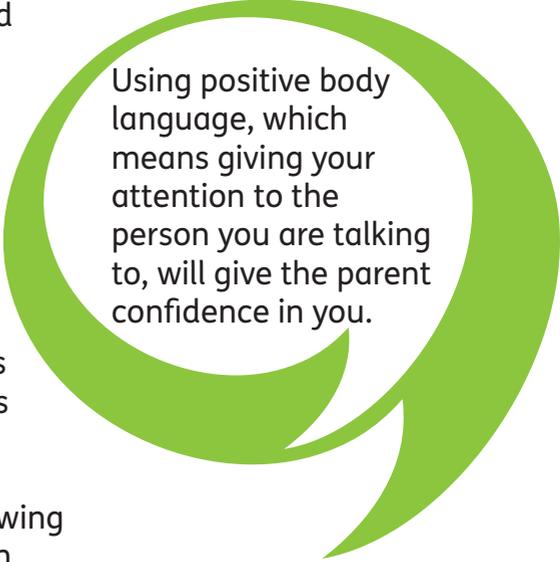
Children feel more confident and positive about themselves and their learning when parents and practitioners work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

## Respect and Value Diversity

Practitioners should respect diversity and be responsive to the cultures within their community. We live in a diverse and changing society. Young children's attitude towards diversity is affected by the behaviour of adults around them. All families must be valued and welcomed.

## Communicate Effectively

Communicating effectively with parents enables partnerships to succeed. Being a good listener is a vital skill which all practitioners should develop. Many parents may have concerns about their child and greatly appreciate knowing someone is always there to listen.



Using positive body language, which means giving your attention to the person you are talking to, will give the parent confidence in you.

## Positive Body Language

For all of us body language occurs subconsciously but those subconscious movements often send powerful messages to the person we are talking to.

The tips on the dos and don'ts of body language will help practitioners avoid obvious pitfalls when talking to parents.

The main point, is to be alert and give full attention to the person you are talking to.

## Positive Body Language

*Do:*

- give your full attention
- be aware of yourself and the image you are projecting
- nod your head (not vigorously) when a parent is talking to you – this gives a signal that you are listening
- have consistent ( but not intrusive) eye contact
- have a relaxed posture but stand straight
- Be understanding and empathise with what the parents have to say
- Focus on the parent and not on things around you in the setting
- Be aware of your actions whilst talking to the parent i.e. watching the clock, folding your arms
- Be aware of personal space
- Look interested in what the parent has to say

## Good listening skills are vital in building a successful working relationship with parents

*Key elements to achieving Good Listening Skills are:*

- make time to listen in an appropriate place
- give your full attention
- be aware of your own body language
- reflect back on what the parent has said - to ensure no misunderstanding
- do not offer advice unless it is asked for
- resist recounting your own experiences
- acknowledge parent's feelings or emotions
- develop empathy - put yourself in the parents position

## Positive Relationships

The success of the working partnership that practitioners have with parents can be put in jeopardy when a staff member makes inappropriate comments/actions.

*Avoid comments/actions such as:*

- "I know how you feel"
- being critical of parenting skills, lifestyle or religious beliefs
- emphasising what the child cannot do or has done wrong
- not acknowledging parents' concerns

- diagnosing the child
- discussing any issues in front of other parents or the child

*When asking parents what they need from practitioners, their comments include the following:*

- someone who really likes my child and knows them well
- listens, and does not just tell us what to do
- understands if we are a little late arriving to the session
- cares about me as well as my child
- gives me time to talk
- smiles and has a sense of humour
- helps my child learn
- keeps me informed



*Parents should feel comfortable approaching practitioners, without feeling they are imposing on them*

## Good Product Knowledge

Ensure all the staff have a good knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), to support parents' understanding of their child's development and progress. This will ensure realistic expectations from both parents and practitioners. Please find below the link to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

**<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/a0068102/early-years-foundation-stage-eyfs>**

You can find further information at **[www.haverling.gov.uk](http://www.haverling.gov.uk)**

## *First impressions checklist:* **Parents first contact**

- Did you give a positive response to parent's initial enquiry?
- Did you make the family welcome?
- Did you give enough time for parents to look around and give them the opportunity to ask questions?
- Did you make the parents feel at ease and valued as an expert on their child?

## Questions to ask yourself

### How well does your setting manage parents with challenging behaviour?

*Do you:*

- Stay calm
- Find an appropriate area to talk
- Make time and listen to what a parent has to say
- Recognise their feelings and be aware that they may be going through a difficult time
- Be open and honest - offer positive comments before any negative ones
- Remain respectful
- Try to make some positive and useful suggestions as to how you and the parent can work together to address the issue
- Get support from other members of staff
- Seek guidance from other members of staff/professionals

## Questions to ask yourself

### How well does your setting manage parents who are hard to reach or do not engage?

*Do you:*

- take gradual steps in gaining their interest/trust
- extend an invitation to meet
- have a flexible/practical approach taking into account individual circumstances
- have a non-judgmental and respectful approach
- use pictorial communication or an interpreter (for parents who are unable to read or are unable to speak English)



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[www.havering.gov.uk](http://www.havering.gov.uk)



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