

## Supporting disadvantaged parents to engage in their children's learning

Schools have risen so admirably to dealing with the current situation. From managing provision for vulnerable children and the children of key workers to quickly implementing the most radical home learning strategies seen in generations, schools have really shown their mettle. Above all, the desire to help and support the children, families and communities they serve has been astounding. Engaging parents with their children's learning is so valuable but can be a real test if it is to level up and meet everyone's needs, particularly those children and families who are most vulnerable. Developing and implementing manageable approaches to engaging parents to support their children's learning is unsurprisingly the topic of much debate and activity, particularly for our most disadvantaged and vulnerable families. After almost a month, the home learning wave continues and it's a good time to reflect on parental engagement now and in the future.

- **What we do and how we do it- the culture of engaging parents.**  
We're now in the hottest parental engagement climate ever. Schools have had to adapt incredibly quickly and what they learn now may well support their parental engagement and involvement approaches in the medium and long term. Understanding how our best intentions to support learning at home 'look and feel' to the wide range of parents and children we serve is a real opportunity. Read the EEF working with parents summary [here](#) and further recently published EEF material [here](#).
- **Home learning; what's really important?**  
Parents trying to recreate a school, a classroom and school experiences at home is impossible. So, what are the most helpful and important home learning goals and experiences, particularly for your disadvantaged children, given their very different family circumstances?
- **Parents from disadvantaged backgrounds don't want any less for their children.**  
There is a range of research evidence which challenges the myths around poverty and aspiration which highlights that almost all parents, irrespective of background, want the best for their children. They may be less likely to know how to support their children's education so starting with an asset- based mindset and considering what parents **can** do well and most importantly **feel** successful at is empowering for everyone. Build from that position. They may not be able to do some things...yet.



- **Expecting new learning to happen could be unrealistic.**

Parents' good intentions to teach their children may not be manageable in the current reality. Setting up strong learning routines and habits can be more achievable for many parents. These may help children to maintain their knowledge and skills but most importantly their enjoyment and happiness, through reading for example. Helping parents to establish small learning goals and enjoyable 'low stakes' opportunities may be more palatable and productive.
- **Communicate in ways which closely match the needs and opportunities of your parents and families.**

We can't assume everyone has internet access but evidence suggests that through text messaging, schools can reach more disadvantaged parents. Use this to regularly keep in touch, remind parents about positive learning routines and habits and to set achievable goals- 'Don't forget to read today!'
- **Look again at the barriers to learning that our children and families face.**

What's driving disadvantage or vulnerability and what do we do now? Actively use evidence along with professional judgement to develop an evidence informed approach to understanding barriers and creating provision for our most disadvantaged children and families. Look again at what's facing them; what do these issues look like with the additional pressures families face such as unemployment, finance and mental health. Read the Education Policy Institute Literature review [here](#).
- **Parents don't need to be experts at teaching and they need to know this.**

Parents don't need to know all the answers to support their children's learning but they do need to care about helping their children to find things out.
- **What can we most easily and effectively influence?**

Focus most on the things that you, your staff and families can realistically do and achieve and use this to manage expectations and well-being.
- **This too, shall pass.**

We're all in this together. Being mentally and physically well when we emerge is the single most important asset that we have to tackle an exciting but challenging future!

