

Learning at home: Engaging with parents



Remote Learning

Working effectively with parents will be essential while schools are closed. The research on parental engagement can help school leaders to develop a parental engagement strategy and maximise its impact. This guide will consider the research on two key questions:

- **How** should schools communicate with parents?
- **What** should schools communicate to parents?

How should schools communicate with parents?

Here are some key messages from the research that could increase the impact of schools' approach to parental engagement.

- **Don't overcomplicate it.** Keep your system for contacting parents simple and reliable. Now is probably not a good time to introduce parents to new technology or complex processes. A simple system might be to use emails or texts for universal messages and phone calls for one-to-one support.
- **Be positive, encouraging and celebrate success.** Alongside the challenge posed by home learning, parents might be experiencing unemployment, anxiety or illness. Kindness and positive encouragement are more important than ever. It is especially important that all parents regularly receive positive information about their child's strengths and successes. It can be highly demotivating for parents to receive nothing but negative messages if a student is struggling.
- **Continue to build the community around the school.** Provide opportunities for parents to (virtually) meet with each other and school staff, support each other, and share experiences of home learning. Some schools have invited parents to online 'coffee mornings' using video or conference calling. This is also an opportunity to collect feedback about your parental engagement approach.
- **Personalise some of your messages.** It is relatively easy to personalise emails and letters using a mail merge. Although this will take a bit more time, including some details specific to the individual student is likely to result in greater engagement from parents and caregivers.
- **Monitor and evaluate your approach.** After the initial approach has had time to 'bed in', take some time to review and think about how it can be improved. You could consider whether there are parents that the school is not reaching, the type of communications that work well, or whether parents feel represented in decision making. This does not need to be onerous. Information can be collected via meetings with parents that are already taking place and brief online surveys. Be prepared to stop or change activities if they are not working, or embed and extend activities that work well.

What should schools communicate to parents?

The last thing we want to do is increase the pressure on families by overwhelming them with schoolwork. It makes sense to communicate a few learning priorities to parents and focus on implementing them well.

- **Wellbeing is the top priority.** Many students will be frightened by the situation or miss their friends, and the lockdown could put family relationships under strain. At the moment, it is more important that children are happy and feel loved than they complete all the work a teacher sets for them. Make it clear that students should be spending time outside, taking breaks, and having fun!
- **Self-regulation and independent learning.** Distance learning places greater demands on students' self-regulation than attending school in person. Parents can help children to develop these skills by helping to establish a routine, setting up a productive study space and listening to their children talk about their learning.
- **Academic priorities depend on the age of the student.** This will involve **maths and shared book reading for younger children**, and schools can support parents to provide direct support for their children's learning. **For older children, independent reading and learning** are more important. It is probably not beneficial to expect parents to get directly involved in secondary students' work, as parents may not necessarily have the relevant skills and knowledge to support some learning at secondary level. Instead, the focus should be on supporting independent learning by providing information about routines, study skills, progress and upcoming work.

Having established some priorities, schools might consider giving parents **practical activities, strategies and resources** they can easily use at home. Expecting parents to develop their own activities is unlikely to be effective. When choosing activities, it is important to remember that many families will not have access to lots of books, outdoor and indoor space, or technology.

The Education Hub is developing a series of practical resources for parents of [pre-schoolers](#), [primary and intermediate-aged children](#), and [secondary school students](#) with evidence-informed, accessible activities for home learning. We'll be publishing a new activity for parents and children every day. Sign up to our mailing list using the profile tab on our website and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to see our daily activities.

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