

Principles of engaging asylum seeker and refugee parents in their child's learning

A guide for all school staff working with asylum seeker and refugee families

Clear evidence exists that the most successful schools encourage high levels of parental involvement. The principle of working to involve all parents and carers in their child's learning is firmly established within national policy but is particularly important for refugee and asylum seeker families whose experience of the English, Welsh and Northern Irish education system may be limited.

This leaflet provides some examples of how best to involve asylum seeker and refugee parents in their child's learning and outlines ways for schools to be inclusive of all families.

What Can Your School Do?

Start with an audit of your school on parental involvement. Include in the audit different ethnicities and languages spoken. Try and identify any potential barriers to parental involvement.

Ensure your school literature is inclusive of all families, and states how newly arrived families will be supported. Link this with Every Child Matters' expectations and how you will meet the needs of all students in the school.

Language & Culture

- Be aware of cultural differences, but be wary of seeking more information about the family background than the family are willing to share.
- Where possible employ bi-lingual assistants to provide continuity of support to families.
- Be prepared to offer translation, but do not assume parents are literate in their native language.
- Don't assume families from the same country or ethnic group will get on – be aware of ethnic divides/civil conflicts.
- Encourage families to attend extra language classes.
- Offer opportunities for children and their parents to learn together, such as joint ESOL classes.
- Explore/offer opportunities for students to undertake a qualification in their home language.

The use of interpreters to help out parents is really important and they don't just help out with education issues but other issues as well. (Year 6 Sri Lankan girl)

My ESOL classes are really good and help me the most to learn. I can come here anytime and they help me. (Unaccompanied Year 10 Sri Lankan boy)

I learnt English at the local college and that has helped me to help my children, now we learn together, it's a nice way for the whole family to be together. (Somali foster parent)



Communication

- Explain school culture/policies and how the education system works – don't assume they will know.
- Be clear about your policy on confidentiality and who will be privy to information about the family.
- Ask parents what information about the school and their child's learning they may need, for example:
 - curriculum
 - homework policy
 - behaviour policy
 - expectation of home/school contact
 - parents evenings
 - what to do if there is a problem and who to contact
 - school staffing structure.
- Ask the child what would help them to feel more integrated into the school.
- Be clear with parents about how you want them to support their child's learning.
- Appoint a key worker in the school who has regular contact with home about achievements, as well as concerns, and is a point of contact for the young person.
- Inform families of the main contacts in their local area that can help with other matters such as housing and school uniform.
- Liaise regularly with community and outside agencies to see what support is needed from the school.
- Review the settling-in process with parents/young people and assess the level of support offered by the school.

The most positive thing has been contact with EMA person at the school. She has helped me the most to know what is going on and how I can help my children. (Somali foster parent)

There has to be good communication between home and school. (Somali foster parent)

Ways you can make families feel welcomed and valued

- Arrange an induction package and allow the young person time to settle in.
- Have clear enrolment procedures.
- Allow mid-term entry to the school.
- Place visual signs around the school.
- Make sure signs are in different languages.
- Arrange meetings with families and consider the use of interpreters.
- Highlight your equal opportunities and diversity policy.
- Ensure that your curriculum reflects the diversity of the students you have on roll.
- Make support available during transition times.
- Allow the family access to their child's school records.
- Encourage parents to meet together to offer mutual support.
- Give information to parents about how they can pursue qualifications/work they may have started in their country of origin.

Supported by

If schools make a little effort then parents really appreciate that. (Kurdish parent)

Written by Anita Bratherton, Principal Officer, Pupil Inclusion, National Children's Bureau, in collaboration with parents, students and staff of Morden Mount Primary School and Gladesmore Secondary School.

