

## Home visits

### Parents, Early Years and Learning: Practice example

It is established practice in many centres to visit families at home before children start at a setting. It helps to begin forming the relationship between parents, practitioners and children; and starts the process of sharing information.

“Mandy came to visit Hannah at home. It really helped. She knew her when she started nursery and I felt more certain that she would be well cared for.”

There are real benefits to visiting children in their homes more often. It can be particularly useful in reaching families who, for a variety of reasons, find it hard to take up opportunities offered within the setting.

### Why do more home visits?

Parents and children often feel more relaxed in their own home, and parents appreciate having time to talk on a one-to-one basis. It helps to develop a relationship and build trust in a more relaxed environment. After a home visit, parents often feel more confident in approaching a practitioner with comments and questions. The closer relationship may also mean families are more inclined to take part in the workshop sessions, events and trips offered by the setting.

Children always remember and talk about a home visit long after the event; it is a special occasion in their lives and enhances the practitioner-child relationship. Digital photographs can be taken of the visit (with permission) and used, with the child, to recall the event.

Seeing a child in their home environment can also help to explain certain behaviour patterns and interests.



At school, Yasir seeks out adult company actively and prefers this to playing with other children. He loves to help with cleaning and sorting tasks. Visiting him at home helped his key worker to understand that his role as a much younger sibling in a large family means that he spends most of his time with older children and adults, joining in with what they do.

Home visits help to break down stereotypes as practitioners gain knowledge about varied family practices, cultures and histories; they learn that all families are very different. Having greater knowledge about a child's home and family also enables a practitioner to 'tune in' to the child and have more meaningful conversations. This is particularly useful for children who have speech and language needs or who are in the very early stages of learning English as an additional language.

During a visit, practitioners can discover what learning activities are already taking place in the home – whether the child has favourite books, likes particular videos, goes out on visits, cooks regularly. And information may be gathered on who else might be able to support home learning – fathers, grandparents, older siblings, other relatives.

At nursery Pali, who is acquiring English as a second language, often speaks about members of his family, but staff find it hard to understand what he is saying. He also talks a lot about the number 8 and clearly recognises the numeral. By walking with him to his house, taking photographs and talking to his mother, his key worker was able to find out the names of the people who live in his flat and understand their relationship to him. She also discovered that he lives on the 8th floor and likes to press the button himself for the lift. 'This my house (8), this my car (G – ground floor).'



Home visits can be used to model positive interaction, working together with parents and children to re-tell stories, play games, sing rhymes or listen to stories on tape in the home language.

A game, activity or tape can be used; or started and left with the family to repeat or complete. Videos of children playing in the nursery can be watched together and discussed; then left with the family to share.

Parents can also be supported to think through how to manage certain aspects of behaviour at home, and strategies can be planned between home and the setting.

*“We find some parents are much more relaxed and open when discussing their child at home.”*

Amina’s mummy was very reluctant to borrow books from the library. She said she cannot look after them, all books get destroyed by her younger children. She has three children under four and is on her own with them most of the time. Amina’s key worker visited her at home. They talked through ways to help, finding a special place for the book bag to be kept and deciding on one special time when mummy would read the book with Amina and her younger brother after their meal. Practitioners also talked to Amina at nursery, with her mummy, about books and how to care for them; they made a point of asking Amina each morning if she had her bag and would she like a new book.

### Things you may need to consider!

There will be some families who will not want a home visit and this should be respected. You may repeat the offer at a later date, once you have built a trusting relationship. Also consider offering a one-to-one meeting in the setting instead.

It’s important to plan home visits well. Plan the route and how you will travel. Allow enough time for each visit so that you don’t feel rushed. Take telephone numbers with you. Tell the family who to expect in advance of the visit and the time you will arrive. Plan and gather equipment to take with you, for example something for the child to

play with; a story bag or maths game to share; and a digital camera.

It’s important to be friendly and relaxed, making the experience enjoyable – be prepared to adapt and be flexible. Parents must feel confident that you are not there to judge them. You may benefit from training before visiting or from accompanying more experienced colleagues at first.

Rather than asking lots of prepared questions, share some information about yourself, news about the centre, listen to parents and children carefully, and follow up on what they say and ask.

Try to be sensitive to cultural differences – for example, some families will appreciate it if you offer to take your shoes off before walking into their house. Always ask permission before you take photographs.

It is likely that you will be offered drinks and even food. People feel good about being able to offer you something. Think about what your approach to this will be. Televisions are often left on during the day at home, even when visitors arrive. Think about how to approach this. It can be best to settle in a little first, and then ask for it to be switched off before you start any activity with a child. Think in advance how you will phrase this request.

You will need to adhere to your setting’s health and safety procedures for home visits. For example, you may not wish to visit homes alone. If possible, ask for support staff or even volunteers to assist you. Before they can assist, however, their CRB checks must be completed and they must have been informed about issues of confidentiality and child protection. There should be a record kept at your setting of where practitioners go and what time they are expected back and you may be encouraged to carry a mobile phone.

See practice examples: Story home visits, Settling in and Time to talk.



Ideas combined from the experience of parents and practitioners in early years settings.

© Crown copyright 2006