

Parents as First Teachers (PAFT)



“PAFT group meetings are always great as you not only learn something, but you get to meet other parents in the area and you realise that you are not the only one going through problems like sleep and feeding.”

“The visits are excellent as it is a chance to talk to someone about how you feel and how you are doing as a parent.”

Parents as First Teachers is an outreach programme offering parent education and family support to families with children aged from prenatal to five years.

The PAFT programme is used by a range of schools and settings – in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, London, the West Midlands and Wales – to support the work they do with children and families.

The core element of the work is a regular personal visit that lasts for an hour and is usually, but not always, held in the home.

On a visit, PAFT-certified project workers share age-appropriate child-development information with parents. They help parents to learn to observe their own child's developmental milestones; talk about their parenting concerns; and engage the family in activities that provide meaningful parent-child interaction, such as making toys and books together. Every visit also involves book sharing.

Although visits have a clear, structured plan behind them covering five essential elements, these elements are integrated in such a way that the visit flows naturally. Frequency of visits depends on individual family needs, but is usually monthly.

In addition, parents are invited to group meetings held at the setting and led by project workers or invited speakers. These meetings provide opportunities to share information about parenting issues and child development. Parents learn from and support each other, observe their children with other children and practise parenting skills.

The programme is universal by design and advertised to all parents in an area through printed publicity, verbal invitation, and referral from health and family support workers.

“It’s good to have this child-development information in bite-size chunks.”

“Parents as First Teachers has given me confidence in learning to teach and play with my son.”

PAFT aims to increase parent knowledge of appropriate ways to stimulate their children’s intellectual, language, social and physical development.

The programme is based on a ‘strengths model’, recognising that one of the parents’ strengths is that they are the experts on their child. It hopes to increase parents’ feelings of competence and confidence; enhance parenting skills and parent–child interaction; prevent child abuse and neglect; develop strong partnerships between parents and schools; provide early detection of developmental problems, and increase children’s school readiness and success.

“One of the most important things my PAFT worker has taught me as a mother is to look for the little things that my son is achieving which, without her pointing them out, would have gone unnoticed and unpraised.”

The PAFT programme has been the subject of independent evaluations in the US, which have drawn the following conclusions.

- On starting school, children are significantly more advanced in language, problem-solving and social skills.
- Parents are more confident and knowledgeable about child development and become more involved in their child’s schooling.
- Children score higher in early school maths and reading tests.
- Children with learning difficulties are identified earlier.
- There is a reduction in the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

www.parentsasteachers.org

Project workers also help families to identify and connect with other local services. PAFT programmes take an active role in establishing ongoing collaborative relationships with other organisations that serve families.

PAFT trainees have a variety of experience and professional backgrounds. Some parents, who have enjoyed and benefited from the programme themselves, have moved on to train as PAFT project workers.



The PAFT training course is initially five days, with a follow-up day six months later.

Participants are given extensive materials to use in their work. They are provided with a common, structured approach that allows for flexible delivery.

For information about training opportunities, please contact: Pam Holtom, National Development Officer, Parents as First Teachers (UK). pamholtom@paft.org.uk . 01844 345847.

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