

Parental engagement

Moderate impact for moderate cost, based on moderate evidence.



+5

Actively involving parents in supporting their children's learning and development. Strategies include: approaches that encourage parents to read and talk with their children at home or to participate in activities in the early years setting; programmes that focus directly on parents themselves, for example, providing training in parenting skills or adult numeracy and literacy support; and more intensive programmes for disadvantaged families or families in crisis, for example, through counselling.

How effective is it?

Parental engagement in early years education is consistently associated with children's future academic success. On average, parental engagement programmes evaluated to date have led to a positive impact of approximately five additional months' progress over the course of a year. However, there does appear to be some variation in effectiveness between programmes, suggesting that careful thought is needed when developing and introducing parental engagement approaches, and that on-going monitoring and evaluation is essential.

Approaches that encourage general parental engagement, for example, by encouraging parents to read with their children can have a small positive impact for all children, including those from low-income families. Studies highlight the benefits of reading to children before they are able to read, and then of reading with children as soon as they are able to read. A number of studies have identified the positive impact of encouraging parents to talk with their children.

Approaches that focus on developing parents own skills, for example by providing structured training, can have a moderate positive impact on learning. In general, more intensive approaches are associated with higher learning gains.

How secure is the evidence?

Overall, there is moderate evidence related to parental engagement programmes in the early years. There is a long history of research into parental engagement, and the association between parental engagement and a child's academic success is well established. However, there is clear need for more high quality evaluations of programmes that have tried to increase involvement to improve learning. Currently, though it is clear that parental engagement is valuable, much less is known about how to increase it, particularly in low-income communities.

Many of the highest quality studies conducted to date are from the USA.

What are the costs?

The costs of different approaches vary enormously, from running parent workshops (about £80 per session) and improving communications, which may be inexpensive, to intensive family support programmes with specially trained staff. The cost of a specialist community or home liaison worker is estimated at about £35,000. Overall, costs per child are estimated as moderate.

What should I consider?

Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:

1. Have you provided simple guidance to parents about how they can support their child?
2. Home visits can help parental engagement, but aren't always essential. How can you make your setting welcoming, to encourage regular attendance from parents?
3. How will you monitor the impact of your parental engagement approach?