



Time Together at Home

Early Years



Guidance for settings



Time Together at Home cards have been produced to supplement the Cumbria Parents as Partners pack home learning environment section.

The cards are not meant to be given out to all parents without discussion but used with families according to their individual needs.

The ideas cards can not cover all areas but are meant to be a starting point and support for practitioners when working with families. There is also a blank ideas sheet that you can use to add ideas that will suit your families' needs.

Why home learning?

Research suggests that the quality of the home learning environment has a big impact on children's well-being and achievement, more impact than parental education, family income or school environment.

(The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project – EPPE Sylva et al. 2004. Provider Influence on The Early Home Learning Environment. June 2011).

This means the risks to a child's achievement, can be overcome by a good home learning environment.

Studies also suggest that settings can make the help that they offer to parents more effective without a big input of resources.

(Desforges and Aboucher, 2003)



Why is learning at home so effective?

- * Parents love and want the best for their children. They have the closest relationship with the child
- * The home has a wider variety of people to provide role models, particularly males such as dads, uncles and grandads
- * Children get more individual attention
- * Parents know the child best so understand their needs
- * The child has time to explore in an environment they know well
- * The home has lots of resources for open-ended play
- * The child feels secure and so may take more risks in their learning
- * The home is important to the child and is a real environment, so the learning is relevant to the individual child
- * Home can contain more challenge



Should I try these ideas at home?

Research has shown that if children get the right learning experiences at home they are likely to do better at school.

There are many reasons why your child should enjoy learning at home because;

- * You know your child better than anyone so understand their needs and how to help them
- * Your child will love the individual attention from you
- * Your child has time to explore in a place they feel safe and they know well
- * Your child can develop their imagination using everyday objects
- * Your child feels secure at home and so may take more risks in their learning and so learn more
- * Your home is important to the child and is a real environment, so the learning is relevant to your child
- * Your home may have a wide variety of people to learn from, particularly males such as dads, uncles and granddads



What should children be learning at home?

Research has shown that the children who have the following experiences in the home are more likely to do well at school if;

- * They develop loving, warm and responsive relationships
- * They are listened and responded to
- * They are talked and sung to, even before they are born
- * They play with members of their family and lead the play
- * Their family reads to them every day
- * Their family sing songs and rhymes to them
- * Their family takes them on trips out, maybe to the shops or park
- * They visit the local library
- * They draw and paint at home
- * They play with friends
- * They play with letters and numbers



In settings that make a difference...

The Leadership of the setting acknowledges the importance of helping parents with learning at home and has a culture that finds practical solutions to any difficulties. This will mean all staff being aware of the importance of working with parents and being given the practical support needed. This may include training, allocating time to talk to parents, a room to talk to parents, time to plan information sessions.

All staff are confident to talk to parents about their child's learning and what the parents could do at home for their child. This means staff must have a good knowledge of child development and next steps for the individual child.

Face to face communication is the main method of communicating with parents. A two minute conversation with a parent each day is the most effective way to pass on messages. There is a place for more formal information sessions but not all families will access this.

Parents are invited into the setting. There are many ways that parents can take part in the life of the settings.

Effective use of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) The messages contained in the EYFS are really important to communicate to parents. The EYFS describes how young children learn best through having fun in their play. It helps parents to be realistic about their children's achievements.



The Unique Parent – Finding creative solutions when there are difficulties

Parents want to support their children's learning but are not always able to do this.

Learning at home can be made more effective if keyworkers know that one of the best ways they can help their children is by getting to know the families and working with them to find ways to best help their child. As we know all children are different so are all families and family situations change. An approach that has not worked in the past may work now or something that has worked may need to be adapted to continue to work.

Here are some of the issues that affect parents and possible solutions:

Lack of time - ask the parents how they would most like to have contact with you. You could have short conversations at the beginning and end of the day or ask parents to come back and talk, perhaps in the evenings when they have more time.

Lack of trust - some parents feel they are being judged and their efforts are not good enough. The key to building trust is the keyworker respecting the parents and starting with their interests and needs.

Lack of confidence - as parents work with you and trust you their confidence in helping their children should grow. This will improve as the keyworker builds close relationships with their families.

Lack of knowledge - as Early Years professionals it is easy to forget parents do not have the same knowledge as you about child development. Parents like to find out things that are relevant to their child. There are lots of ways to get the information about the EYFS across to parents.



Finding creative solutions when there are difficulties

Lack of understanding - parents sometimes believe it is best to leave it to settings to teach their child without realising the impact they can have. This is about sharing with parents ways they can help their child in their learning.

Lack of literacy of numeracy skills - parents will have differing levels of literacy and numeracy skills. If you give all parents the opportunity to let you know how they would like you to communicate with them they may let you know this. As you get to know the parent you will be able to give appropriate support.

Other family pressures - all families have pressures on them. It is up to the parent if they share these with the setting and they may want to share different things at different times. It is important not to judge families and make assumptions when you may not know their situation.



How to use the Time Together cards with families

Your setting will need to make decisions about how to use the cards and this will be different for each setting. This guidance includes case studies of how the cards have been used in different ways.

The things you will need to decide before you begin to use the cards are:

- * What do we do now for home learning?
- * How can we include Time Together at Home in our current planning and assessment systems?
- * What do we know now about our families?
- * What do we do to build good relationships with our families? This will include questions about when and how you talk to different parents
- * How would different families benefit from using Time Together at Home?
- * What could we do if the families do not engage?
- * How will we know our home learning work is making a difference?



Possible ways to make use of the Time Together cards

- * Find out from your parents the sort of things they do at home with their child. Agree as a setting the best way to do this. The type of support you give will depend on this.
- * Choose a card that will support the child's needs and interests and this will inform the type of support that you give. This could be linked to the child's next steps, for example, to support speech and language development.
- * Talk to the parent about using the card at home with their child. This will probably work best if the child's keyworker chats to the parent informally at the beginning or end of a session. The keyworker could talk about what the child has been doing in the setting and suggest the child may like to carry on with some activities with the parent at home.
- * Encourage parents to revisit the activities over time and not rush through the cards as this will embed their child's learning.
- * Talk to the parent about how the activity went and build on this.
- * You may feel the activity could be repeated in a different way or another card introduced that could move the child forward. This is where the blank cards could be useful.
- * Evaluate the impact on learning.



How do you know you have made a difference?

You already have lots of ways of making sure that children are making progress. You do not need to add to these.

If you have a child at risk of delay using the Time Together at Home cards could help narrow the gap.

For the children's progress this could be: Learning Journeys (containing observations, photographs and children's work), progress checks, individual and whole group tracking.

Evidence from parents to support impact could include:

Verbal feedback while discussing the activities, sharing of photographs from home, home / setting books, other written feedback as long as they are not too time consuming for parents, on line development files.

Cumbria County Council Learning Improvement Service Early Years Team would like to thank all those involved in producing the Time Together at Home Cards.



Little Monkeys Day Nursery & Pre School Time Together at Home

Why did we feel it was important to implement Time Together at Home at Little Monkeys Day Nursery and Pre School?

As part of our 2015 Focus improvement plan we were looking for strategies to engage our families in home learning, ensuring to encourage this to happen through play and day to day environments rather than the stereotypical judgment of learning involving sitting at a table and working!

We found when we spoke with our families they were keen to support their children's development and learning at home but again did not realise that the simple activities were so vital in their child's learning.

How we got started

We began by having a staff meeting to discuss how we could best use the pilot copy of the Time Together at Home cards. We decided we could use them in our current planning system as we have a home learning form where we give parents ideas of activities to enhance the learning from nursery. We decided these cards would support this process and give the families more detail as to what they could do.

What happened?

Once we began rolling the cards out we got lots of positive feedback and families were amazed that such simple activities were actually teaching their children. We found the families were confessing that the previous system where we had handwritten a quick idea was either not understood or they didn't even look. The children have enjoyed telling us at nursery that they had been doing these games at home.



What we have learned

We have learnt that finding the right approach to home learning with our families is vital for their engagement and that parents want to help their children progress but their understanding of learning is very formal. Once we explained what they get from these very simple games the parents were really pleased.

Challenges and Dilemmas:

Finding a system as to where and how to keep the cards was a challenge as we tried keeping them electronically and just printing as and when they were needed but the staff found this time consuming so we decided to keep a set in each room in a file where the staff could flick through and photocopy the one they wanted. It was time consuming setting up and discussing with the families but definitely worth the time.

Possibilities and Opportunities:

The possibilities and opportunities for Time Together at Home cards is endless. We plan to use them in other ways too, such as children with additional needs could have them linked to each target on their IEP or Education, Health and Care Plan targets. We also plan to use them in our parent workshops.

Outcomes:

Parents became much more engaged in the home learning with their children, the children were excited to share their experiences at nursery and the practitioners have a starting point to support families.



Barnardos Pre School

Time Together at Home



Why did we feel it was important to implement Time Together at Home at Barnardo's Pre-School?

We believe that parents, carers and the home environment are the most important influence in a child's early years. Our setting is committed to working with parents to ensure that they play a full and positive role in their child's learning and education. We believed that the Time Together at Home scheme would provide an innovative approach to working with parents and carers through increasing their understanding and involvement in their child's learning and development. A number of parents also asked for ideas to enhance their child's learning at home, and one dad in particular asked for support to help his child "be the best he can be".

How we got started

The pre-school leader met with the dad and discussed with him what he and his son enjoy doing together. The dad was encouraged to hear that much of what he was doing everyday was already helping his son to learn. The dad chose some cards with activities that he felt he would be confident in trying at home with his son.

As part of our planning we inform parents and carers on the parents and carers noticeboard what their child will be doing in pre-school each week and suggest activities the adults might do at home with their child to support their learning. We will display a number of the Time Together at Home cards on the board, as a way of encouraging parents and carers to ask for more information.

What happened?

Parents and carers appear to be positive and "on board" with this scheme. They are slowly losing their inhibitions about being the most important teacher in their child's early years and having fun together at home. They enjoy talking to staff about what they have been doing at home with their child. They are more confident to ask for support to help their child learn every day. We believe the parents are proud to be taking such an active role in their child's learning and development.

What we have learned:

We have learnt that a number of our parents and carers do not have positive memories of their own education, and did not understand that they could play a full and positive role in their child's learning and development. We also realised that we know our parents and carers well, and that an individual, personal approach works best for them, as they are often apprehensive about asking for help.

Challenges and Dilemmas:

A number of our parents and carers in the setting have difficulties with literacy; it was important that they were included in the Time Together at Home programme and given an appropriate level of support to read and understand all relevant information, and cards.

Possibilities and Opportunities:

The pre-school leader will share the information about Time Together at Home with the outreach childcare practitioners within Allerdale Children's Centre so that Time Together at Home can be implemented from a very early age, through a wide variety of settings to give children the best possible start with their early years education.

Outcomes:

- * Parents and carers became more aware of the benefits of engaging in Time Together at Home with their child, and had an increased understanding of their child's learning and development.
- * Parents and carers were keen to share with staff accounts of how activities they had done with their child had gone, and the impact they had on their child. Therefore building positive relationships between the setting and home.
- * Children enjoyed talking about what they had been doing at home with their parents.
- * Practitioners developed skills which enabled them to cascade the Time Together at Home approach throughout the pre-school.

Where to get more information

Useful websites

www.wordsforlife.org.uk

www.ican.org.uk

www.literacytrust.org.uk

www.playtalkread.scot

www.foundationyears.org.uk

www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies

www.early-education.org.uk

www.bestbeginnings.org.uk

localoffer.cumbria.gov.uk

