

# Tips for Better Quality Engagement

Use the links below for a range of tips that will help your service move towards better quality Parental Engagement.

- [Information](#)
  - [Education](#)
  - [Consultation](#)
  - [Involvement](#)
  - [Partnership](#)
  - [Devolved Power](#)
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- [Culture](#)
  - [Skills](#)
  - [Mechanisms](#)
  - [Support](#)

## Tips for achieving better quality engagement through **information**

**Use this checklist to identify things your service already does (✓), and things you don't do but would like to try (\*). You could put these on your Action Plan**

- Ensure that your materials, images and language **reflect the parents you serve** – ie, mothers, fathers, grandparents, step-parents, same-sex parents, teenage parents, kinship carers, special guardians, and parents from different cultural and religious backgrounds.
- Have a **system for checking information** before it goes out. Make sure it is jargon free, easy to read and fit for purpose.
- Ensure that information is **not restricted to what the service delivers**. Tell parents about the effectiveness of the service, the benefits of using it, how parents can help their child's development, consultation results, decisions based on consultations, and opportunities for parents to engage.
- Ask parents **how they prefer to receive information** and **where they get it from**. (Ensure you include working parents, dads, step-parents, teenage parents, absent parents.) Adapt how you provide information to suit your findings.
- Don't rely on just one method of delivery. Provide information **via a range of mediums including modern communication methods** such as text messaging, blogs and twitter.
- Train staff** in visual, auditory and kinaesthetic methods of delivering information, including modern technologies.
- Encourage staff to be **proactive** in giving information about the service and signposting to other relevant services. Ensure they have access to **appropriate resources** to do so.
- Ensure your service has a method for **getting information translated into different languages and formats** (e.g. translation service, large print, Brail, audio, widget etc).
- Provide a **parental liaison contact or named staff contact** for parents to talk to.
- Train parents** as community ambassadors to cascade information **to other parents**.
- Recruit parents to write and produce** information about the services you offer, the benefits for parents and children, and parental engagement opportunities.
- Use **local media**, newspapers and radio as a method of promoting what you do.
- Put information in **places that parents go to** such as GP surgeries, supermarkets, job centres, large local employers etc.
- Have a '**mascot**' and use it in public places to **give out information** i.e. town centres on Saturdays.

For more ideas around 'information' go to [Ideas for extending parental engagement methods](#).

## Tips for achieving better quality engagement through education

*Use this checklist to identify things your service already does (✓), and things you don't do but would like to try (\*). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Ask parents what **educational** opportunities/activities **they would like you to offer**. Use this information to design your services.
- Modify times, venues and ways** you deliver your activities to get **optimum use** by parents.
- Identify the **practical barriers** parents face in accessing educational opportunities. Take measures to overcome these.
- Adopt an **inclusive approach** to all activities. Where necessary, complement this with **specific** educational opportunities for different groups of parents (e.g. dads, grandparents, teenage parents etc).
- Ensure the aims and objectives of activities are shared with parents so that they understand **how they benefit their child's development**. Teach parents how **they can replicate** these activities at home.
- Ensure staff work within their **codes of conduct and professional expertise** when providing educational opportunities/activities for parents.
- Encourage staff to **reflect on the influence** that their own values and beliefs about parenting have on the parents you serve.
- Provide professional development opportunities for staff to increase the **range and variety** of educational opportunities/activities they can offer to parents.
- Develop staffs' skills, knowledge and experience in **working specifically with parents** Ensure they know how to adapt their approach to address the different needs of parents and how to handle parents' disclosures of need appropriately.
- Ask parents to feedback** (directly or in confidence) about the **quality** of educational opportunities, the **skills** of the delivery staff and how well **their needs** have been met.
- Use creative way to **remind parents** about educational activities including text messaging, peer buddy reminders, postcards and emails.
- Create a **calendar of activities** for the coming month or season.
- Consider the use of **mobile units and other outreach work** to take educational opportunities to parents.
- Provide parents with mentors, points of contact and/or parent advocates to **help them stay engaged** with your organisation.

For more ideas around 'education' go to [Ideas for extending parental engagement methods.](#)

## Tips for achieving better quality engagement through **consultation**

*Use this checklist to identify things your service already does (✓), and things you don't do but would like to try (\*). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Ensure staff know the importance of listening to parents' views and how **parents' views impact on service development and improvement**. Highlight it at induction. Reinforce it at team meetings. Challenge practice. Ensure senior managers model this value.
- Use a **variety of consultation methods**. Aim to use **at least 3** different consultation methods **each time** you collect parents' views.
- Provide staff training and/or refresher training on the **full range of consultation methods**, the **pros and cons** of each method, **when and why** to use it and how to ensure consultation practice is **inclusive**.
- Ensure your service has people trained in **how to write effective questionnaires, deliver focus groups, conduct interviews** etc.
- Use your website or produce posters or leaflets that **encourage parents to give their views**. Tell them why their views are important and explain how parents views have already impacted on the services you deliver.
- Make sure consultation materials are **free of jargon, easy to read, relevant and to the point**.
- Collect both **qualitative and quantitative** data.
- Make use of **events** that parents attend, to **collect their views** (e.g. parents evenings, open days, drop ins etc).
- Go out '**on tour**' in the community to consult (e.g. the supermarket, local shops, play ground, school gates etc.) Tell parents what you do and use the opportunity to collect views. Keep it brief - just one or two questions. Maybe have a small 'freebie' to give out.
- Reimburse parents for any **out of pocket expenses** related to sharing their views (i.e. the cost of travel to a focus group, pre-paid envelopes for questionnaires etc).
- Encourage staff to **feedback comments** that parents make about the service. Have a central way of collating these and analysing the themes.
- Ask or commission agencies that have already established parents' trust, to **consult with them on your behalf**.
- Dedicate time to **analysing** parents' contributions to consultations and **extracting the key messages, themes or ideas** put forward.
- Keep a log of **all the ways you use the information** you find out from parents.
- Maintain a data base of parents who would like to be contacted for '**research**' purposes.
- Make sure consultation data is **up-to-date** before **acting on it**.

For more ideas around '**consultation**' go to [Ideas for extending parental engagement methods](#).

## Tips for achieving better quality engagement through **involvement**

*Use this checklist to identify things your service already does (✓), and things you don't do but would like to try (\*). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Check out what staff understand** by 'involvement' and **raise their awareness** of the valuable contribution parents can bring to decision making.
- Ask staff to put forward ideas on **how the service could involve parents** in the decision making process.
- Provide **training opportunities** for staff to **develop their skills in involvement**. This includes managing group dynamics, setting boundaries, negotiating, overcoming conflict, producing decision making models, problem solving etc.
- Produce materials** telling parents that you value their involvement in finding solutions and making decisions. Explain how parents can contribute and the impact it has on the service, parents and families.
- Advertise involvement opportunities**, through a wide variety of formats. Aim to appeal to **all** parents (i.e. dads, teen parents, working parents, single parents, grandparents etc). Where it is relevant, offer involvement opportunities to **specific groups** of parents.
- Offer **training to parents** to build skills that will help them make an effective contribution (e.g. problem solving, teamwork, speaking and listening, negotiation, compromise, etc).
- Consider what you could do to **reduce barriers** to parental involvement (e.g. confidence building, parent advocates, pre-meeting discussions, peer support, being a 'soundboard' for parents to test ideas on, meet at community venues where parents feel comfortable).
- Allow parents to **contribute to decision making meetings in a variety of ways** (e.g. via a parent appointed spokesperson, through written, visual or auditory media etc).
- Encourage staff to **report monthly** on how they have involved parents, to keep it in people's minds for **future engagement opportunities**.
- Create a **planning pro-forma** that outlines what staff need to plan for when involving parents. (e.g. involve parents from the start – not when most of the decisions have been made, ensure texts are jargon free and easy to read; explain the focus of meetings, explain any constraints and boundaries, explain parent and staff roles etc).
- Reimburse parents for any **out of pocket expenses** they may incur as a result of being involved in decision making (e.g.. cost of travelling to meetings, childcare, printing etc).
- Reward parents** for the time they commit to parental involvement. Reward can be recognition and/or financial.
- Maintain a **data base of parents** who wish to be contacted if involvement opportunities arise. Don't just involve the same group of parents each time.

For more ideas around 'involvement' go to [Ideas for extending parental engagement methods](#).

## Tips for achieving better quality engagement through **partnership**

*Use this checklist to identify things your service already does (✓), and things you don't do but would like to try (\*). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Provide **training** to develop staff skills and knowledge about **effective** partnership working with parents.
- Provide parents with the 'big picture'** and **ban jargon**. This will help parents to make effective contributions to meetings and the work they do alongside staff.
- Ask **teams** what work they **currently** do with parents, what they have done in the **past**, and what opportunities they would like to offer **in the future**. Log and review regularly.
- Ask parents** how they would like to work with the service.
- Maintain a **data base** of parents who wish to be contacted when partnership working opportunities arise.
- Set up a series of **peer observations** whereby staff can watch each other's interactions with parent workers, to further good practice.
- Audit the skills, knowledge and experience** of parents you work with. Use the results to consider ways to use parents' skills most effectively within your service.
- Promote examples of partnership working as '**good news stories**' in communications to parents and staff.
- Ensure **recruitment and induction** reflects the value you place on working with parents.
- Raise the profile** of partnership working by having a dedicated month in which you tell parents how they can work with the service and why this is important. Theme your website and notice boards and include photos and examples of partnership working.
- Ask parents who work in partnership to write a '**day in the life of...**' **article** for your website, or record a short **podcast**, talking about the difference their work makes to the service, children, other parents, and themselves.
- Advertise **new opportunities** through **a range of different mediums** to appeal to the **whole** of your parent community. Make sure the wording is **welcoming** and **inclusive**.
- Offer **training opportunities** to parents to **develop skills and confidence** to engage in partnership working.
- Train parents who already work with you** to be **peer supporters** to new parents - or to **act as ambassadors** in recruiting parent volunteers.
- Reward** parents for working in partnership and **meet their out-of-pocket expenses**. Offer childcare or cover childcare expenses.

For more ideas around '**partnership**' go to [Ideas for extending parental engagement methods](#).

## Tips for achieving better quality engagement through **devolved power**

*Use this checklist to identify things your service already does (✓), and things you don't do but would like to try (\*). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Make sure your engagement policy **outlines the benefits** (to the service, children, parents and the community) **of empowering parents** to run aspects of the service or make sole decisions.
- Ensure that senior managers **talk to staff and parents** about devolved power, reinforcing the commitment and value the service has in engaging parents this way.
- Audit** what **activities, projects or pieces of work** are delivered or run solely by parents.
- Think about **areas of service development** that parents have suggested. Consider how parents could take responsibility for running these areas.
- Commission** parents or **offer other incentives** to run projects.
- Ask staff to ensure **they** consider devolving power to parents when potential opportunities arise.
- Ensure that each project, piece of work, decision making forum etc has **clear boundaries or terms of reference** so parents know what they can do and what expectations there are of them. Establish clear lines of accountability.
- Audit staff skills in supporting parents** who run projects, deliver services or make decisions. Provide **training/professional development** where necessary.
- Build '**skills, knowledge and experience of devolving power**' into **job descriptions**. Make it a 'desired' or 'essential' quality in the recruitment of **new staff**.
- Allocate resources** to parents to enable them to fulfil their roles effectively. Regularly check if they have what they need.
- Have a '**take over**' day or '**take over week**', where parents take on staff roles for an hour.
- Set up a **Parent Board**. Decide what power the Board has and **devolve funding, decisions and/or projects to them**. Make sure the Parent Board is embedded as part of your work and not just a bolt on.
- Ask parents to **plan, design and/or run events** that the service normally puts on for parents (e.g. parents evenings, celebration events, open days etc).
- Provide **parents with training** to empower them to work effectively with devolved power. Provide opportunities that develop their skills and confidence for future transition to work.
- Celebrate** parent-led projects or activities and **feedback their impact** to staff, parents and the community.

For more ideas around '**devolved power**' go to [Ideas for extending parental engagement methods](#).

## Tips for achieving better quality engagement by improving your culture

*Use this checklist to identify things your service already does (✓), and things you don't do but would like to try (\*). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Run **training** using the Activities and Fact files that accompany this toolkit to **develop a common language and understanding of Parental Engagement** throughout your organisation. Jointly train staff and parents who currently work with you.
- Have a **parental engagement policy** which outlines the value you place in engagement and your commitment to it. **Share this policy with staff and parents** (ask parents to produce parent-friendly versions) and **ensure new staff** are given time to read the policy as part of their **induction**.
- Establish routes** through which parents' involvement, views and skills are **regularly sought and used**.
- Audit the **day-to-day services and activities** within your organisation. Ask staff to reflect how you can develop parental engagement opportunities **to support these day-to-day activities**.
- Establish **Parental Engagement Champions** within your workforce with a remit to publicise, develop and improve parental engagement within your service.
- Make sure **all senior managers** are committed to parental engagement, that they role model and talk about it as common practice, and support it's improvement and development within your organisation/service.
- Establish a **Parental Engagement Advisory Board** (where parents make up a substantial percentage of the management committee) to **oversee the development and improvement** of parental engagement projects and practice. (Do this on top of engaging parents in the design and delivery of the service).
- Make sure engagement opportunities are **relevant and meaningful** and not tokenistic. Engage parents in things that **really matter and make a difference**.
- Regularly feedback** to staff, parents and the wider community **the impacts** of parental engagement on **service development** and the **benefits** enjoyed by the service, children, parents and the local community.
- Publicly celebrate** all the ways that parents are engaged with your organisation, how their views influence what you do and how they contribute to decisions and delivery.
- Ensure the places that staff and parent's access **convey messages that you value parents**. Display **photos of parents and staff** to make them more 'parent-friendly.'

See [Overcoming barriers and maintaining parental engagement](#) for more ideas around the **culture** required to engage parents effectively.

## Tips for achieving better quality engagement by improving skills

*Use this checklist to identify things your service already does (✓), and things you don't do but would like to try (\*). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Ensure staff **understand each of the methods** through which parents can become engaged with your service. Ensure they know what each one **looks like in practice**. (I.e. information, education, consultation, involvement, partnership and devolved power.)
- Undertake an audit of the **skills** staff have to **engage parents through each of the six methods of engagement**. Provide training to fill any gaps across your organisation.
- Have a **pool of staff** trained in **specific engagement techniques** (e.g. writing questionnaires, interviewing, Samoan circles etc).
- Train staff in **effective methods of communication** (verbal and written).
- Train staff in **using new technologies to initiate and maintain engagement** (e.g. text messages and reminders, twitter, Facebook, instant messaging, Skype etc).
- Check that staff **working in partnership** with parents are skilled to do so. Make sure they work within the “**National Occupational Standards for Working with Parents**” (Visit [www.ukstandards.org.uk](http://www.ukstandards.org.uk) to find out more.)
- Provide training opportunities for staff to develop their skills in **involvement and devolving power**. (e.g., managing group dynamics, setting boundaries, negotiation, overcoming conflict, decision making models, problem solving, building confidence, empowerment etc).
- Train staff in **visual, auditory and kinaesthetic** methods of delivering information.
- Set up a **staff mentoring or observation scheme**, whereby teams can learn from one another, share good practice, develop new skills and provide support to raise Parental Engagement standards.
- Ensure staff have the skills (or access to training) to enable them to **differentiate their engagement approach** to meet parents' needs.
- Provide training around ‘**overcoming barriers to engagement**.’ Ensure staff know how to address the different needs of parents and strategies they can use to help break down barriers. (E.g. building trust with individuals and the parent community, avoiding jargon, using inclusive language, varying delivery techniques etc.)
- Undertake **regular checks** around Parental Engagement to assess staff understanding, skills and practice. (You could ask parents to make checks in innovative ways (e.g. mystery shoppers, jargon spotters etc.)

See [Overcoming barriers and maintaining parental engagement](#) for more ideas around **skills** required to engage parents effectively.

## Tips for achieving better quality engagement by improving mechanisms

*Use this checklist to identify things your service already does (✓), and things you don't do but would like to try (\*). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Build in an **annual consultation** with parents to inform your **service planning cycle**.
- Schedule an annual or biennial self-assessment** of your **Parental Engagement Standards**, carried out by parents and staff using this **Toolkit**. Build in **regular monitoring** of the resultant Action Plan.
- Have a **system for checking that information for parents** (leaflets, meeting agendas, forms, etc) is **easy to read** and **jargon free**. (You could engage parents in devising the system, the 'checking' process and making recommendations/alterations.)
- Have a **mechanism** for checking **parents' needs** prior to meetings, and provide material in ways that are **accessible** to them (e.g. dyslexia friendly, large print etc).
- During your **application and recruitment process**, ask for 'skills in engagement.'
- Include 'Parental Engagement' as an **agenda item at team meetings**. Have it as a regular feature, not a one off.
- Devise and set up a **system** whereby **parents' input is a constant feature** (e.g. suggestions boxes, graffiti walls on a topic, compliments and complaints leaflets, online forums, a named contact to feed ideas and views to, etc). Complement this with **mechanisms for providing feedback to parents** (e.g. 'you said, we did...', FAQs etc).
- Have a dedicated **data team** to analyse information from parents (i.e. consultations, feedback, incoming ideas etc.). Draw out **themes and trends** to assist effective service planning.
- Maintain records** of the services' **engagement activity** and the **impact** it has had. Set up processes whereby staff can **log or report on** engagement activity.
- Allocate a **budget** to Parental Engagement.
- Produce **standard pro forma** that can be used by staff during different engagement methods (e.g. planning forms for parent-led projects, visual agendas for meetings with parents, checklists for facilitating decision making forums etc).
- Amend **staff performance reviews** to include reflection on their own engagement practice.
- Ensure staff have an avenue to **feedback any key messages** from the parents they work with. (Staff who work with parents on a day-to-day basis are an excellent source of information about parents needs, what parents want and potential barriers to engagement.)

See [Overcoming barriers and maintaining parental engagement](#) for more ideas around **mechanisms** required to engage parents effectively.

## Tips for achieving better quality engagement by improving support

**Use this checklist to identify things your service already does (✓), and things you don't do but would like to try (\*). You could put these on your Action Plan**

- Provide **mentors, named points of contact, parent advocates and peer supporters** to build parents' confidence to engage with the service.
- Offer **training opportunities** to help parents develop skills and confidence to engage more effectively (e.g. communication skills, teamwork, negotiation skills etc).
- Provide **materials in different formats** (i.e. Braille, large print, easy read, dyslexia friendly, audio etc.) to meet specific needs.
- Provide **alternative channels** through which parents can put forward their ideas, opinions and views. (E.g. texting, online polling, paper-based questionnaires, online forums, discussion groups, telephone conferencing, face-to-face, image prompts, audio, video diaries, advocates etc.)
- Don't take a 'one size fits all' approach. **Differentiate activities** to suit different ability levels and **vary delivery techniques** to suit different learning-styles (i.e. **visual, auditory and kinaesthetic**).
- Be flexible** about when and where you can meet parents. **Modify times and venues** to get optimum use by parents (including working parents).. Use venues parents feel comfortable with.
- Provide a **named contact** who can give parents further information or answer follow-on questions.
- Provide **outreach services** to establish links with parents who have traditionally not engaged with your service. Work to **build trust** and undertake engagement activities one-to-one. If necessary, **ask to be introduced** to 'hard to reach' groups by services who already have a trusting relationship with the parents.
- Provide parents with **rewards and incentives** for engaging. This could be tangible rewards, financial rewards or recognition.
- Make sure parents are **offered childcare** or are **reimbursed for childcare costs**. Provide **pre-paid envelopes** with questionnaires.
- Reimburse any **out-of-pocket expenses** parents incur when engaging with the service (e.g. travel costs, printing etc).

See [Overcoming barriers and maintaining parental engagement](#) for more ideas around **support** required to enable parents to engage effectively.