

Overcoming Barriers And Maintaining Parental Engagement

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Barriers to engagement parents have told us about

Use this checklist to show which barriers to Parental Engagement you already take action on (✓), and which barriers you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

Emotional barriers

- Fear of being judged by other parents or practitioners.
- Comfort level (feeling intimidated in groups/meetings, low self-esteem, low confidence).
- Fear of feeling 'out of place' (formalities, suits, meeting staff, other parents etc).
- Fear of exposing their emotions in public (getting upset, getting angry).
- Fear of being excluded by a cliquy group of parents or practitioners.
- Feeling that they are 'not educated enough' and assuming that what they have to say doesn't really matter.
- Concern around support to meet individual needs (practical, social and emotional).
- Feeling overwhelmed by parenthood and having little energy or 'mental space' to give to anything else (general anxiety, post-natal depression).
- Attitude or perceived attitude of individual members of staff (fear of being judged, undermined, not being valued).
- Attitude of their own child(ren) towards parents/carers engaging with the service.
- Feeling that life is simply 'too chaotic' to commit to engaging with services.

Interest barriers

- Not knowing anything about Parental Engagement – what it means, who to ask, how to get involved, what parents can offer.
- Not understanding the value, relevance or purpose (what's in it for me/my child?)

Suspicion and mistrust

- Feeling that they won't be taken seriously or their views won't be acted on.
- Fear of being seen to 'need help.'
- Fear around confidentiality and trust (what will happen with the information?)
- Previous negative experience of the service (conflict, failure).
- Lack of belief in staff skills (ability to listen, explain, deliver).
- Associated bad memories of services in general (stigma and guilt around being seen as a "bad parent").

Practical barriers

- Lack of childcare provision to attend (and it being left to the goodwill of parents to arrange/fund it).
- Insufficient childcare provision to meet full needs (younger/older siblings, babies, toddlers, teenagers).
- Lack of a car or access to a lift (parents can become isolated in their homes).
- Unavailability of suitable public transport (can be unreliable and require a number of bus changes, especially in rural communities).
- Cost of transport (petrol, parking, bus fares).
- Parking facilities at venues.
- Distance and time required to travel to and from venues.
- Meetings are at the 'wrong' time (working parents are often unable to attend meetings during the day, and face big demands on their 'free time' at evenings and weekends).
- Needing to keep to a schedule based around school / preschool / babies (especially difficult for parents with several children).
- Inability to commit to set timetables (shifts, alternating shift patterns and short lead times put pressure on parents' ability to make 'regular' commitments or commit 'too far' in advance).

Skills and language barriers

- Literacy barriers (filling in questionnaires and forms, reading information leaflets etc).
- Communication skills (speaking in groups or at meetings, negotiation, resolution etc).
- Learning difficulties or disabilities (dyslexia, vision impairment. hearing impairment etc).
- Language barriers (non-English speakers, speakers of English as a second/foreign language).

Read on for:

- Tips for overcoming barriers
- Tips for extending your engagement with particular groups
- Tips for maintaining Parental Engagement.

Tips for overcoming emotional barriers

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Ensure that the service is **friendly, warm & welcoming** to all parents.
- Communicate with parents in ways that **promote their confidence and self esteem**. (Terms like 'support', 'struggling', 'help', can make parents feel judged).
- Ask parents** how the service can make itself **more friendly and appealing** so that more parents are more likely to engage.
- Enable parents to **talk about their needs**. Help them **prioritise** issues over which they can take some control. Help them identify **effective courses of action** that will help them overcome barriers.
- Allow parents **opportunities to express their feelings**. Help them to acknowledge and understand difficult feelings. If emotions come out, don't ignore them. Take time to listen.
- Recognise** when particular or specialist help is needed. Ensure staff know **how to refer** parents to appropriate services in ways that are **supportive and non-judgemental**.
- Give recognition** in a wide variety of ways. **Praise** parents. **Acknowledge** their input (to their child's learning and development / to your service). Say **'thank you.'** **Celebrate** small steps. This will **bolster parents' self confidence and self belief** and help **build trusting and respectful** relationships.
- Offer **incentives** to engage with the service to get parents 'through the door.' Once engaged, put the **right support, help and delivery** in place to maintain engagement.
- Train **parent champions** or **ambassadors** who live in the local community. Pay them **to help other parents access the service** or to **support them** when they begin engaging with the organisation.
- Provide new parents with **peer mentors** and/or **advocates**, so that they feel more comfortable and less intimidated when they first engage.
- Provide **access to drop-in counselling, listening or befriending services**. Make this available around the time that parents are engaging with your service (i.e. when coming in for appointments, educational opportunities, meetings, etc.) Signpost to **support groups**.
- Use **outreach** – go to parents.
- Get **other agencies** on board to **support your service** in overcoming any misperceptions, negative connotations or stigmas about it. Agencies can be good ambassadors for one another.

Tips for overcoming disinterest

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Find out why** parents are not engaging with the service. (Sometimes we assume it's because they are not interested, but it may be for a variety of reasons – e.g. lack of confidence, practical barriers such as child care or transport, the timing of events, not understanding what is wanted from the interaction, assuming that what they have to say doesn't matter or won't be listened to, lack of trust in the service, fear of stigma, simply not knowing about the service/activity.) **Act** on this information.
- Ask parents to tell you** which new opportunities/activities they would like you to deliver. Have **various means by which they can let you know** (e.g. ask them at the school gate, set up a stand at the local supermarket, have a suggestions box, post a questionnaire/on-line questionnaire, set up a parent focus group and ask each member to ask 10 other parents).
- Set up a '**We asked...you said...so we did...**' **promotion** offering additional family learning opportunities that the parent community have told you they want. Ensure you communicate this information in the same places you consulted parents (e.g. at the school gate, local supermarket etc, as well as at your premises) so that parents can see that you are genuinely interested in providing for their needs.
- Put out '**good news**' stories in the local press describing how individual parents and families or the community have benefited from using the service. Tell them how they can join in.
- Make sure engagement is **purposeful and promote the 'what's in it for me'** factor. Describe the benefits to parents, the benefits to their child, the benefits to the local community, and the benefits to the service.
- Allow **community events** to take place in your premises so that parents feel a sense of 'connection' and 'belonging.' Promote your services at these events in a number of subtle ways (e.g. display photos of parents and staff working together, put up an information display about your services, put up a calendar of events, have leaflets/events calendars/freebies advertising your service for parents to take away).
- Advertise a **fun event with great giveaways** on offer (e.g. free pamper opportunities, free use of facilities, free gadgets, free vouchers etc.) Be mindful to promote them as non gender-specific - or have a female-oriented promotion and a male-oriented promotion - so as not to risk alienating mums/dads.
- Promote your services** through an outreach approach.
- Get **other agencies** on board to support your service in overcoming any misperceptions, negative connotations or stigmas about it. Ask them to **display some of your promotional leaflets/posters on their premises.**

Tips for overcoming suspicion and mistrust

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Spend time in the community** to develop a trusting relationship based on mutual respect. (Some parents are suspicious about why services want them to engage and what is trying to be achieved. The more parents see staff in their community, the more they will become familiar with them.)
- Ensure the **language** you use in **information leaflets, advertising materials and during engagement activities** is **safe and non-threatening**. (Some parents fear the consequences of being seen as needing 'additional support' or 'extra help', interpreting this as 'being a failure' or 'being checked up on'.)
- Use **language** that **respects and values** parents' contributions to engagement opportunities/activities. Acknowledge and validate the skills, experience and knowledge that parents bring along.
- Think about **names and titles**. Make sure they don't convey authority or make people feel inferior. (I.e. referring to staff or practitioners as 'professionals' implies that parents are of a lower standing.) Work on a first name basis with parents. Be equals.
- Show your human side** - sometimes parents just see staff as 'officials in suits.' Have **social events** to build relationships. This could include **parents and staff** bingo evenings, dance sessions, sports events and team building activities.
- Always start each interaction as a fresh one**. You or a colleague may have previously had a disagreement with a parent or an uncomfortable interaction. Don't make judgements based on previous interactions as this will fuel mistrust.
- Develop an **interactive website**, where parents can explore the inside of your organisation (take a **virtual tour**) and see the staff who work there. Put video diaries and blogs on the website to show who staff are. This will allow parents to become familiar with them from a distance at first.
- Host safe **online chat rooms** that parents and staff can communicate through.
- Operate an **open door** policy or offer **drop-in access**, so parents can ask questions 'as and when' they arise. By being there for them, you will develop trust and confidence.
- Train parents who live in the community** to be **ambassadors** for your service. Do some local advertising (including word of mouth). These parents can help reduce suspicion or mistrust about your service and support parents when they first engage.
- Do some joined-up work with **agencies that have already got trust** and good working relationships with parents and the local community. Ask them to talk with parents on your behalf. Invite these agencies to **use your premises** so that parents have reasons to come on site.

Tips for overcoming practical barriers

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Provide childcare** to enable parental engagement (ensuring provision is suitable for parents' needs and not simply what the service perceives their needs are).
- Provide transport.**
- Offer to **reimburse** parents for childcare costs, travel and any other **out-of-pocket** expenses incurred as a result of engaging with the service.
- Provide more **early morning and evening opportunities** to cater for parents who find it difficult to attend between 9am and 5pm.
- Hold **family breakfast events** and have opportunities between 7.30am and 8.30am before parents start work.
- Hold **family fun events at weekends** so that children are occupied **while parents can engage with the service.**
- Allow children at meetings** – provide toys or resources to keep them interested.
- Devise **innovative ways** of engaging parents that **don't rely on them physically being on site** (e.g. phone conferencing, Skype, instant messaging, video demonstrations etc).
- Understand parents commitments** (i.e. shift working, shift patterns) and work flexibly with parents to allow them to engage. Don't necessarily always run the same meeting on the same day at the same time.
- Use **premises in the hub of parent communities** to run education opportunities, meetings, forums etc. Ask parents to choose the venue (and possibly ask a group of parents to arrange it).
- Work closely with a **local child minder** who may be able to create extra space as and when required.
- Support parents who need **specialist childcare** and help them to make those arrangements.
- Be more effective with time management. Double-up or even triple-up on the reason why parents are coming in.

Tips for overcoming skills and language barriers

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Boost your **physical presence** in the community. Do more **out-reach** to engage new parents. Don't rely on parents finding out about your services **solely through written** advertisements, posters and leaflets.
- Ban jargon, abbreviations and acronyms.** Use **plain English** when speaking and writing.
- Be mindful of the **reading level** of parents when making leaflets and other information resources. Use short sentences and keep the number of words over two syllables to a minimum. Check the reading level of your texts by carrying out a SMOG test. (Visit www.niace.org.uk/current-work/readability for more information.)
- Ask **parents** to carry out a review of your leaflets, **checking for readability.**
- Produce resources in a **range of different media** to increase **accessibility.** (e.g. digital media, video demonstrations, photo demonstrations, pod casts).
- Produce resources in a **range of formats** (e.g. different languages, Braille, easy read, audio etc).
- Print on **pastel backgrounds** to make text more accessible for **dyslexic** parents.
- Use pictorial '**flash cards**' to stimulate debate and collect responses.
- Collect parents views by conducting **face-to-face** or **telephone** interviews (thus removing the need for them to use literacy skills)
- Subscribe to a **language translation** service for **spoken translations** and **text translations** (or call on the skills of bilingual parents or staff).
- Check parents have understood** what you have said by asking questions. Correct misunderstandings by using different words than you originally used to communicate the message.
- Provide parents with appropriate support** (e.g. use pairings or group work, designate readers or scribes, provide advocates and mentors).
- Provide **opportunities** for parents to **develop their literacy / communication / language / ICT skills** in a safe, non-threatening environment.
- Offer short workshops to develop other skills that will enable parents to engage more effectively with the service (e.g. **confidence and assertiveness skills, problem solving, team working etc.**) This could be in-house training, delivered jointly to parents and staff.

Tips for engaging more carers

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Make sure that **staff culture** does not exclude carers. Ask staff to use the term '**parents and carers**', so that carers are not forgotten by staff or made to feel excluded by continuous references to 'parents'.
- Ensure that staff understand the **legal responsibilities** of carers.
- Ensure your **communications make it clear** that your service is for carers as well as parents. Ensure that you make it clear that you welcome kinship carers, foster carers, special guardians, respite carers and all those undertaking a carer's role, as much as you welcome grandparents, step parents and birth parents.
- Post** information and **advertise** engagement activities/opportunities to carers as well as natural parents.
- Ask carers whether your service makes them **feel included**. Ask **what could be done differently**. Involve carers in **finding and being part of solutions**.
- Consult** and **involve** carers in reviews and service planning.
- Ask carers if they need **alternative venues**. (Sometimes carers are prevented from using particular facilities as they are required to have restricted contact with a child's natural parents.)
- Provide opportunities for carers to be around other carers so that they can **share experiences**.
- Offer **childcare** or **be flexible to having children present**. (Carers of young babies may have older children too. They may have a child - or several children - with special educational/emotional needs.)
- Write **specifically to carers** about engagement opportunities. Treat carers as expert sources of information about children's needs.
- Be mindful of the **time commitment**. Ensure focus groups, meetings, partnerships are offered at times that are suitable for carers.
- Develop a **carers network**.

Tips for engaging more dads

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Ensure staff, mums, dads and carers **understand the importance of fathers and male role-models** on children's educational, social and emotional development.
- Make sure that **staff culture** does not exclude dads. Ask staff to use the term '**mums, dads and carers**', so that dads are not forgotten or made to feel excluded or marginalised. Use this term in **printed materials**, rather than 'parents.'
- Make sure that promotional materials about your service contain **photos/pictures of dads**. Use posters with interesting images and messages **relevant to males**. Use **cartoons, captions and eye-catching headlines**.
- Understand the **culture of 'modern fatherhood'** Use catchy phrases (e.g. dads & lads, just for men, fathers' day, fathers' play).
- Ask dads what they want** (e.g. activities, venues, timings etc.) and **act on this**. Be **flexible** about meeting times to make sure you **don't exclude working dads**.
- Offer prizes, rewards or incentives that are '**male-focused**' (e.g. football tickets, play station games, outdoor activities, DVD's health & fitness magazines) to **encourage more dads** to engage with the service.
- Provide opportunities to **access training** or **skills development** as an incentive.
- Approach dads in terms of '**solution finders**'. Engage them through 'competitions.'
- Communicate in 'male-friendly' ways. **Keep messages short**. Use **CAPITAL LETTERS** to place emphasis. Talk about '**objects and things**' rather than 'people and feelings.' Use **strong positive language** like 'results', 'success' or 'achievement.'
- Increase your use of **new technologies**. Use more text messaging, blogs, face book, online polling. Use more **visuals**, videos, You-tube, DVD clips.
- Give examples of **how other dads have been involved and why**. Refer to male role models from sports or films. Use quotes from famous dads.
- Communicate directly with **dads**. Ask for work/home details and send emails/letters
- Be mindful of **single dads** and **fathers living away** from their children. Consider how you can best meet their needs.
- Offer **activities** dads enjoy (e.g. outdoor pursuits, building dens, IT, gadgets). Work from **venues** like football clubs, pub function rooms and internet cafes.
- Put information in **places that dads go to** or **in magazines they read**. (Dads told us to put messages in newspapers and football programmes, and put posters in pubs, health centres, gyms, toilets and local shops.)

Tips for engaging more parents from ethnic minority groups

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Ensure staff have training around **culture and diversity** and how this relates to engaging parents. Ensure they are familiar with different cultural **norms and values** and respect these in all areas of engagement.
- Explore and understand **cultural issues** that may act as **barriers to engagement**. Raise staff awareness and take measures to reduce or remove these barriers.
- Find **existing trusted access points** into communities (e.g. individual mums, dads or carers, faith groups, social clubs, organisations etc.) Explain to them how your service benefits parents, children and the local community. **Ask for their help in cascading** this information and **meeting with** parents or groups of parents.
- Make sure printed information is **available in different languages** (e.g. advertising promotions, questionnaires etc).
- Subscribe to a translation service** (e.g. Language Line) or call on the skills of **local interpreters** or **multilingual parents/staff**, to ensure effective communication can take place.
- Go into the community**. Invest time in relationships and **build trust**. Put the child and benefit to children and young people at the centre.
- Use **innovative methods** to reach out, such as attending local festivals and events, running local community days etc.
- Hold consultation events **on premises** people are familiar with. **Recruit** people who **live/work** in the community you wish to reach, **to help organise and run the event**.
- Use **practical and fun** ways to engage. Hold **events to bring people together**. Consultation may be the secondary outcome of an event.
- Advertise in the local community**. Reinforce the message that **parents matter** and develop a two-way relationship with parents based on trust, respect and a commitment to improving outcomes for children.
- Engage with **faith groups**. By working closely together, you may be able to extend your access to larger populations of parents who have received reassurances from people they trust, that your work is relevant to their needs.
- Recruit parents from minority groups** to help **engage and support** other parents
- Offer **skill building** as an incentive to engaging with the service. Offer bespoke forms of **support** (e.g. ESOL classes, literacy skills, ICT training, confidence building etc.) or **training** to become **mentors, advocates, service ambassadors**.

Tips for engaging more working parents

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Be **flexible** with venues and meeting times.
- Hold **family breakfast events** to engage parents in children's learning and development. Use the opportunity to consult and involve parents in decision making.
- Provide appointments between **7.30am and 8.30am** before parents start work. Provide appointments **after 5.30pm**.
- Keep **meetings short, concise and to-the-point**.
- Run **twilight** education, consultation and involvement sessions.
- Allow children at meetings** (Working parents often feel that they have already 'stretched' the goodwill of childminders.) Provide toys or resources to keep children interested.
- Pay for childcare** to enable parents to attend evening consultations and meetings.
- Offer **lifts** or **reimbursement** for out-of-pocket travel and parking costs.
- Hold **weekend fun events** that all family members can come along to. Engage mums, dads (or both) through information, education, consultation and involvement at the same time that children are occupied.
- Devise **innovative ways** of engaging parents that **don't rely on them physically being on site**. Make use of **telephone conferencing** for meetings. Make use of **new technologies** (e.g. Skype, instant messaging, video diaries, online forums, online chat rooms, online polling, etc).
- Understand parents commitments** (i.e. shift working, shift patterns). Don't necessarily run the same meeting on the same day at the same time.
- Approach large local employers to support **lunch time focus group meetings** where parent ambassadors can collect parents' views and ideas.
- Create a relaxed environment away from your premises (e.g. hold meetings **at the local coffee shop**).
- Send information to parents **through their workplace literature** and **workplace notice boards**.
- Offer **outreach** or **home visits**.
- Produce **online videos** of meetings. Ask parents to forward their views/comments.
- Develop **virtual partnerships**.

Tips for keeping engagement high profile

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Make 'parental engagement' part of your **mission statement**.
- Include 'parental engagement' as a regular **agenda item at staff meetings**.
- Recruit a member of staff to **champion parental engagement**. Make sure it is someone who parents trust - someone who will set the tone of the relationship between the service and parents.
- Have **visuals** around your building to reflect the importance you place on parental engagement (e.g. photos of parents and staff working together, a calendar of events relating to consultations and involvement, 'good news' stories celebrating partnership working and parent-led projects etc).
- Maintain records of **what you do to engage parents** and the **impact it has had**. Produce an **annual publication** and distribute it **in the community**.
- Self-assess** your parental engagement practice and the **standards** to which you work. Monitor your **Action Plan** on a regular basis to keep developing and improving parental engagement.
- Review your **practice** regularly, making sure you engage across all six methods of engagement (i.e. **information, education, consultation, involvement, partnership working and devolved power**).
- Audit your foundations for engagement (i.e. **culture, skills, mechanisms and support**). Prioritise specific areas for development.
- Provide in-house training to raise staff awareness of the various **barriers to parental engagement**. Ensure that, as individuals and an organisation, you **continue to break down these barriers**.
- Have a continuous programme of '**recruitment**' ensuring that **new parents** are made aware of **how to access your services** and **what activities you deliver**. (As children get older, it is inevitable that parents who currently engage with you will reach a point where your service is no longer relevant to them or their child.)
- Recruit **parent champions** or a **parent focus group** to provide parent's points of view. **Meet with them monthly to discuss relevant issues and ideas**.
- Continue to develop new and innovative ways** for engaging parents, especially through the use of new technologies.
- Celebrate** as an organisation what it is you do and achieve.
- Apply for awards** for your parental engagement work.

Tips for maintaining parents' interest

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Embrace the diversity** that males, females, teenage parents, grandparents and parents from minority groups and different cultural backgrounds can bring.
- Make sure your practice is **inclusive to all parents and carers** and that **everyone feels valued**.
- In the main, ensure engagement opportunities are suitable and inclusive to **all parents and carers** – but have occasional events/activities for **specific interest groups** (e.g. just dads, just mums, teenage parents, grandparents etc).
- Regularly** seek parents views. **Ask them** what they want.
- Act on parents' feedback**. Give them a **timescale** so that they can recognise you have acted swiftly. Similarly, feedback to parents if you are unable to act on their ideas – and explain why.
- Tell parents **'what's in it for them/their child.'** Use this as the starting point so that parents can assess the pay off to them and their families right from the start.
- Ensure parents and their children **experience the benefits** of engaging. (Be overt in pointing this out while it is happening.)
- Don't put pressure** on parents to engage. Some will not want to - or the time may not be right for them in terms of their own life and commitments. **Have an opt out clause**.
- Ensure that engagement opportunities are **relevant, timely and meaningful**. Engage parents in things that **really matter to them** and that will make a difference that **they** can benefit from.
- Have **incentives** to attend (e.g. buffets, freebies, skills development etc).
- Use **video diaries** to monitor changes, so that parents can look back to see the difference that has been made.
- Engage parents through a **range of methods**. Include means by which parents can still take part without necessarily having to be at the venue. Make use of **new technologies** (e.g. Skype, instant messaging, video diaries, online forums, online chat rooms, online polling, etc).
- Publicly celebrate** the **impact** parents or groups of parents have had. Describe the **benefits** for other parents, children, the individuals involved, the community and the service. **Promote** this message via local newspapers, newsletters, parish news etc.

Tips for ensuring engagement is inclusive

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Encourage all **staff and parents** to work within the principles of anti-discriminatory practice and valuing diversity. Provide knowledge and information that enables **parents and staff to avoid stereotyping**.
- Ensure the language you use is inclusive of **mums, dads and carers**. Don't continually refer to 'mum and baby' or call staff/practitioners 'professionals.'
- Ask local mothers and fathers about their preferences for how and where information is presented. Act on their requests.** (In our survey, Dads told us to put information in football clubs, barbers, pubs, local shops, public toilets, newspapers, health magazines, on websites, blogs and face-book. Mothers said they get information from school, newspapers, parish magazines, local supermarkets, shops, play barns and activity centres. Both said they would like information at their place of work and through community networks. Both said they use e-mail and text.)
- In cases where there is a **family break-up**, be aware of **if and how** both mum and dad want to engage with the service. Be mindful of different parents' solutions – it may need planning and careful management, but there are important payoffs for the child if both their parents support their learning and development.
- Offer **different ways** of engaging with the service (e.g. online chat rooms, telephone conferencing, text voting, visual imagery, audio etc.) so that working parents or absent parents are not excluded.
- Have events for just dads or just mums **occasionally**, but **in the main** ensure engagement opportunities are suitable and inclusive to males and females.
- Be mindful of the **different needs** parents have. Be aware of **disabilities** and take these into account when engaging parents.
- Make sure **venues are accessible** to parents with physical disabilities and that **specialist transport** is readily available.
- Provide **appropriate support, access and resources** to allow parents to engage effectively. Provide **materials** in different formats and languages.
- Subscribe to a **translation service** (e.g. Language Line) or enrol the skills of **local interpreters or multi-lingual parents or staff**.
- Target information at parents and carers of **all ages**. Express the value you place on parents and carers of all ages, and the different experiences they bring.
- Welcome and embrace the diversity of different **cultures, values and beliefs**.
- Welcome and embrace the parenting skills of **gay, lesbian and same sex parents and carers**.

Tips for supporting parents to engage effectively

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Be **friendly and welcoming** and make it as easy and as comfortable as possible for parents to **engage and stay engaged**. Concentrate on **building confidence** and **developing trust**.
- Run some **fun activities for parents and staff to do together**. Let them see your 'human' side.
- Provide parents with **mentors, points of contact and parent advocates** to help them engage and stay engaged with your organisation.
- Don't be judgemental or over-prescriptive. **Recognise parents' skills** and **help them to acquire new ones in ways that are fun and non-threatening**.
- Pair parents** to do things together (e.g. support one another, give reminders etc).
- Differentiate** materials and activities to **match the ability** and **meet the needs** of individual parents and their children.
- Use **role play** and/or **skills shadowing**.
- Explain **why** it is important for you to hear **their** views and ideas. Emphasise **how this helps other parents and children**.
- Take **small steps**. Gradually get parents engaged. Don't overwhelm them by overloading them the first time they engage.
- Have a **named contact** in the organisation whom they can go to, text or phone, for further support and guidance.
- Provide **training** to parents to build skills that will help them to engage effectively (e.g. confidence and assertiveness training, team building exercises).
- Offer **incentives for continued engagement** (e.g. vouchers or free use of facilities after 3 months, 6 months, 12 months, etc.) Advertise how your incentive programme works and have a system whereby parents can monitor their own progress.
- Send **text reminders** (or **'tweets'**) to encourage parents to remain in contact.
- Ask parents** what further support or activities they would like you to provide.
- Remove **practical barriers** to engagement (e.g. provide childcare and transport to venues or reimburse parents for any **out-of-pocket** expenses).
- Operate an **open door** policy or offer **drop-in access**, so parents can ask questions as and when they arise.

Tips for acknowledging and rewarding parents

Use this checklist to show which things you already take action on (✓), and which you hadn't considered before and may need to think about (). You could put these on your Action Plan*

- Ensure that you know the names of individual parents.** Use preferred names and titles and make sure that you use the correct pronunciation / spelling.
- Simply **say 'thank you'** or **send a personalised card** to express how the parents' engagement has supported the service and the impact it has made on outcomes for children.
- Frequently tell** individuals and groups of parents and carers how much you **value their input** and describe the **impact** it is having on parents, children, the local community and the service.
- Hold **celebration events** and thank individual parents. Celebrate their achievements and show your appreciation.
- Have **'parental engagement awards'** for parents.
- Produce **'parental engagement certificates'** that outline the skills parents have demonstrated. (These are useful for parents to 'crib' from when writing CVs. See the [example](#) that accompanies this Toolkit.)
- Get the **press, radio, local newspapers or magazines.** to feature an article on how parental involvement, partnership or devolved power has made a difference.
- Enter parents into **local and or national acknowledgement awards.**
- Constantly feedback the **difference** parents and carers are making by being engaged. **Publicise this in local newspapers, leaflets, posters** etc.
- Provide parents with **rewards and incentives for engaging.** This could be tangible things such as a **payment** for parents' time, **vouchers** (which do not affect benefits), or **access to opportunities** (for the parent and/or their children) which they may not otherwise be able to afford.
- Provide free **skills training** or **educational opportunities** in return for parents' engagement (e.g. ICT training, payment for nationally recognised qualifications etc).
- Offer rewards or incentives that are **'male-focused'** (e.g. football tickets, play station games, gadgets, outdoor activities, DVD's, etc) to **acknowledge the work of dads and encourage more dads** to engage with the service.
- Ask parents to give their ideas and make suggestions** for suitable incentives and rewards.