Working with parents and carers
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This session will take a minimum of 75 minutes.

Objectives

• To explore the benefits of working in partnership with parents and carers
• To understand potential barriers to working in partnership and be familiar with some strategies for overcoming them
• To consider strategies for effective communication and joint problem-solving with parents and carers

Resources

• OHTs 1.1–1.10
• Resource sheets 1.1–1.6 (one set)
• Resource sheets 1.7–1.12 (one set enlarged to make A3 posters)
• Packs of cards made by copying and cutting up resource sheets 1.13 and 1.14 (one set per group of two or three participants)
• Handouts 1.1–1.3
• Flipchart and pens
• Sticky notes (several per participant)
• Blank postcards (one per participant)
Linked sessions

This session links to the following general sessions in the Primary National Strategy behaviour and attendance professional development materials.

- Working with colleagues on behaviour issues (1732-2005PD5-EN)
- Focusing on solutions: a positive approach to improving behaviour (1733-2005PD5-EN)

It is assumed that participants will have experienced the session on solution-focused approaches as a basis for later sessions on working with individuals and working with parents and carers.

This session also links to the following specific sessions in the behaviour and attendance professional development materials.

- Positive behaviour and the learning environment (1738-2005PD5-EN)
- Understanding behaviour (1743-2005PD5-EN)
- Relationships in the classroom (1744-2005PD5-EN)
- Classroom communication (1746-2005PD5-EN)
- Conflict and confrontation (1748-2005PD5-EN)
- The importance of emotions in the classroom (1745-2005PD5-EN)

You may want to use this session if school self-evaluation, using the Primary National Strategy Initial review or In-depth audits (1732-2005CDO-EN), has shown that relevant aspects of whole-school ethos are areas which the school wants to address. Many schools will also want to make links to their work on the National Healthy School Standard and to the NHSS briefing Promoting emotional health and well-being through the National Healthy School Standard (DfES, DoH 2004), which emphasises the importance of parental involvement.

Schools using the materials Excellence and Enjoyment: social and emotional aspects of learning (DfES 0110-2005) will be able to make links between this session and the work they may be doing through the Gold set family activities.

If you are using this session with a whole-school staff group, it will be important to be aware of linked materials that some colleagues may have used, for example:

- Behaviour in the classroom: a course for newly qualified teachers (DfES 0030-2004);
- Teaching assistant file: induction training for teaching assistants in primary schools (DfES 0626-2002);
- Self-study materials for supply teachers (DfES 0260-2002);
- Introductory training for support staff (DfES 0594-2003).
Session outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session outline</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding parent-teacher relationships</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barriers to effective partnership with parents and carers</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication and problem solving</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Information for presenters

The session is based on the following underlying principles.

- Positive relationships with children and their parents or carers are key to positive behaviour and regular attendance.
- Parents/carers and schools need to respect and value what each has to offer and work collaboratively.
- The parent is the expert on his or her own child.
- Many parents will need support at times to feel confident and empowered in their skills to meet the challenge of parenting.
- Participants may well already have some or all of the knowledge and/or skills to be covered in this session and we need to draw on their experience.
- Where possible we are trying to take a solution-focused approach so will be asking participants to reflect on what is already working and how they want to develop this, rather than on what is not working for them.

Some of these principles will be explored and developed in this session. Others relate to the linked sessions. It will be important for you to be aware of these principles and you may want to share them with the group (see OHT 1.2).
Introduction

15 minutes

You could start by sharing with the group the objectives of the session and the principles that underpin it (OHTs 1.1 and 1.2).

**Activity 1.1: golden moments**

(10 minutes)

Explain that this activity (OHT 1.3) involves participants working in pairs and sharing a time when engagement with a parent or carer made a difference – however small the difference might have been. The speaker should describe the situation, why they think it went well and the difference they think it made.

The person listening to the story can prompt by asking the following questions.

- What did you do to make that happen?
- What helped you to be able to do that?
- How are you able to use that skill in other situations?

The listener should then provide feedback on the skills and qualities the speaker demonstrated in the situation.

**Objectives**

- To explore the benefits of working in partnership with parents and carers
- To understand potential barriers to working in partnership and be familiar with some strategies for overcoming them
- To consider strategies for effective communication and joint problem-solving with parents and carers

**Principles**

- Positive relationships with children and their parents or carers are key to positive behaviour and regular attendance
- Parents/carers and schools need to respect and value what each have to offer and to work collaboratively
- The parent is the expert on their own child
- Many parents will need support at times to feel confident and empowered in their skills to meet the challenge of parenting
- We need in these sessions to draw on each other’s experience
- The session will adopt a solution-focused approach

**Principles**

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- Many parents will need support at times to feel confident and empowered in their skills to meet the challenge of parenting
- We need in these sessions to draw on each other’s experience
- The session will adopt a solution-focused approach
Drawing on this activity, gather ideas from the group about the outcomes and benefits of working in partnership with parents and carers. What are the gains for:

- the child;
- the teacher or other adult;
- the parent/carer?

Compare participants’ ideas with what we know from research on parental involvement (OHTs 1.4 and 1.5). For further information on this research, you or participants may want to look at Charles Desforges’ review *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement* (DfES Research Report 433, 2003).
Understanding parent-teacher relationships 20 minutes

Beliefs about working with parents and carers

Activity 1.2: values and beliefs (10 minutes)

This activity challenges the group to think about the impact of their own value systems on their personal and professional practice.

Have available a clear area of floor space so that participants can move without interference. Separate the floor space into three strips using either lengths of string or chalk markings. (If floor space is not available different corners of the room can be allocated for each position.) Lay out a copy of resource sheets 1-6, as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGREE (A LITTLE)</th>
<th>DON’T KNOW</th>
<th>DISAGREE (A LITTLE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGREE (STRONGLY)</td>
<td>DON’T KNOW</td>
<td>DISAGREE (STRONGLY)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Give participants a blank postcard each and ask them to write one or more statements about why parents and carers sometimes don’t get involved in their children’s education. The statement does not have to reflect the beliefs of the person writing it and can be contentious. Collect in the cards after a minute or so.

Explain that participants will be asked to respond to a set of statements (including those they have just contributed) by moving physically to the space that best represents their viewpoints on each one.

The activity starts with some general statements, then moves on to beliefs about parents and carers and working with them.

Explain that the purpose of the activity is to provide an opportunity to examine beliefs we often take for granted. It will be most useful if participants respond quickly and intuitively and remember that no one is noting or judging their responses, except themselves.

Read out the following general statements (or similar).

- Women are better drivers than men.
- It is right that teenagers should be paid to stay on at school.
- Teachers don’t get enough holidays.

Choose a number of statements about parenting and beliefs about parental involvement in schools from the list below and from participants’ contributions.

- Parents/carers should be automatically fined if their children don’t go to school.
- We are better off working without the input of some parents/carers.
- Parents’/carers’ evenings are hard work but on balance a good use of time.
- All parents/carers want the best educational outcomes for their child.
- Let’s face it – there are some parents/carers who don’t value education and they are never going to come on board so let’s not waste precious resources chasing them.
- The reason that some parents/carers don’t seem involved is that schools are inflexible in their approaches to meetings.
- Schools can engage 99% of parents/carers if they want to try hard enough.
- All the talk of the need for parental involvement is rhetoric to woo the middle classes – most parents/carers are relieved to drop the kids off in the morning and most teachers would rather just get on with the job for which they have trained.

Use **OHT 1.6** to draw out some key learning points.
Understanding parental responses

Ask participants to reflect for a moment on their ‘worst case scenario’ parent/carer meeting (actual or imagined) and share it with a partner. What did/might the parent/carer do or say? Ask for two or three examples to be shared.

Explain that you are going to explore a model that helps us to understand some of the reasons behind avoidant, difficult or obstructive parental behaviour (which in turn can help us to manage our responses to it and forge more positive relationships with parents and carers).

The model used applies equally to our own behaviour and to that of children. Participants will have met the model before if they have used the Understanding behaviour session from the Primary National Strategy behaviour and attendance professional development materials.

Show OHT 1.7 and suggest that the way parents and carers behave towards adults in school will reflect:

- how they see the situation – their own perceptions about what is happening, which may not be the same as ours;
- the thoughts, experiences and feelings that stem from these perceptions.

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**OHT 1.6**

**Our values and beliefs about working with parents and carers**

**Key learning points**

- We will differ in our beliefs, attitudes and values
- We need to be aware of our own beliefs and the fact that others will have different ones
- There are no ‘right’ beliefs, but some are more helpful than others in our professional practice
- Our beliefs shape our behaviour. If, for example, we believe that working with parents and carers is a distraction from the real business of educating children, we may give up after a parent doesn’t attend a meeting, feeling that we have ‘done our duty’

**Understanding parental responses**

Ask participants to reflect for a moment on their ‘worst case scenario’ parent/carer meeting (actual or imagined) and share it with a partner. What did/might the parent/carer do or say? Ask for two or three examples to be shared.

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Show OHT 1.7 and suggest that the way parents and carers behave towards adults in school will reflect:

- how they see the situation – their own perceptions about what is happening, which may not be the same as ours;
- the thoughts, experiences and feelings that stem from these perceptions.
Ask the group to imagine themselves as a parent/carer who has had a request to come up to the school to discuss their child’s behaviour or attendance. How might the parent/carer see the situation? What might their expectations be? What might they feel?

It is likely that the group will suggest that the parent/carer will have negative perceptions, pessimistic expectations and anxious or angry feelings: ‘They’ll think it’s my fault’, ‘How am I supposed to find time to go up the school?’, ‘They’ll want me to control him and I keep saying I can’t.’

Now ask participants to imagine a parent/carer who responds differently: ‘I know she’s not been happy at school lately … this will give me a chance to sort things out.’

Ask for ideas about factors that might influence the parents’/carers’ perceptions of the situation. What key differences might there be between the parent/carer who perceives the situation negatively and the one who perceives it positively?

Suggestions might include:

- the way in which the school communicates the request (language, impersonality, and so on);
- the parent’s/carer’s mood and the context in which the request is received;
- the parent’s/carer’s beliefs about themselves as a parent/carer;
- their confidence in the school;
- their existing relationships with school personnel;
- their past experience of similar situations;
- their learned skills for dealing with situations involving professionals.
Activity 1.3: understanding angry behaviour  (5 minutes)

This activity is designed to illustrate how the model described might help us to understand the apparently irrational angry behaviour of a parent or carer in response to a school concern.

Give out handout 1.1 and ask participants to work in groups of two or three to discuss the questions about the case study.

Handout 1.1

A case study

The school sends a letter to Billy's mother to invite her to a meeting to discuss his behaviour. There have been a number of such letters before, all telling her that Billy has behaved badly. She has literacy difficulties and a busy life with four other young children, and doesn't get around to reading the letters until long after they have been written. When Billy's teacher rings her during a particularly chaotic teatime to say he had been expecting her for a meeting in school she becomes defensive and shouts, 'Well don't you think I've got enough to do without doing your job for you? I have to cope with him at home, you can sort your own problems while he's at school.'

• What is Billy's mother's perception of the situation?
• What is contributing to this perception?
• What thoughts and expectations is she likely to have experienced when she realised it was the school ringing?
• What emotions might she have experienced?
• What might the teacher's response be?

Some examples of responses from other groups who have undertaken this activity are given below and can be shared with the group if appropriate.

- What is Billy's mother's perception of the situation?
  - Seeing it as more bad news from school – they never have anything good to say about Billy.
  - Seeing it as school not doing their job – what a cheek!
  - Seeing it through a ‘negative filter’ – as yet another burden rather than an opportunity to make things better.

- What is contributing to this perception?
  - Past experiences – maybe unsuccessful meetings in the past where there has been conflict.
  - Mismatch of understandings between her and the school about the parental role in education.
  - Awareness of her difficulties in dealing with letters from school.
  - Current context - bad timing.
  - Manner of contact – the letter and phone call may not have struck the right tone.
  - Quality of relationship with the person who sent the letter.
• What thoughts and expectations is she likely to have experienced when she realised it was the school ringing?
  - ‘Oh not them – he must be in trouble again.’
  - ‘They must think I’m a really bad parent.’
  - ‘They mustn’t find out that I can’t read or he won’t stand a chance.’
  - ‘How can I possibly go up for meetings when I’ve got the others to look after – they’ve got no idea of what they’re asking.’
• What emotions might she have experienced?
  - Anxiety
  - Helplessness
  - Frustration
  - Anger

Draw out the key point that we may routinely need to put ourselves in the shoes of the parent or carer in order to fully understand how they might respond to the school’s communications. Elicit ideas about how the school might have approached Billy’s mother differently, in the light of this kind of understanding.

One helpful idea that participants may have come across is that of the ‘relationship bank’, introduced in the Relationships in the classroom session of the Primary National Strategy behaviour and attendance professional development materials. It offers a model for explaining why it is important to establish regular positive contact with parents/carers so that when a negative event has to be reported, there is plenty of credit in the ‘relationship bank’.
You might want to make reference to this earlier learning, or to work participants have done on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (OHT 1.8). You could ask them to consider whether Billy’s mother might have experienced threats to her basic needs. Participants may have ideas about how the school could work with her in the future to increase her sense of belonging and of being valued as a member of the school community.

![Maslow's hierarchy of needs](image)
Barriers to effective partnership with parents and carers

Activity 1.4: blocks and barriers

Divide participants into two groups. Ask one group to generate a list on the flipchart of blocks and barriers to effective communication with parents/carers. What is it that stops them communicating effectively with parents and carers? Work with this group yourself, providing prompts as necessary to make sure that responses move beyond practical considerations, such as lack of time, to consider skills and school systems.

Ask the other group to put themselves in the shoes of a parent/carer and consider the question ‘What is it that prevents you from communicating effectively with schools/teachers?’

Take some feedback. You are likely to find that the same sorts of issues arise from both groups. Draw attention to the similarity of the two sets of responses.

Generally the responses will fall into six categories.

- Practical considerations – lack of time, working alone, not being able to do home visits, and so on.
- Style of communication – tone and type of language used in communications with parents, use of English where this is not the family’s first language, use of letters as the medium for communication.
- School procedures – lack of clarity and consistency about when parents/carers are invited to meetings, and why.
- Lack of confidence – feeling unsure about one’s own skills in dealing with adults.
- Lack of trust/understanding – parental liaison is not seen as a good investment of time; lack of commitment to involvement of parents/carers at school or teacher level.
- Demotivation/disengagement – feeling that parents don’t turn up or respond and that schools can’t make a difference.

Activity 1.5: overcoming barriers

Have resource sheets 1.7-1.12 (each representing one of the above six categories) enlarged to A3 size and placed around the room. Give each participant a set of sticky notes and ask them to walk around the room, writing on their sticky notes any strategies they have found effective or think might be effective in overcoming any of the blocks and barriers listed.

Alternatively, you might want to divide the group into six smaller groups, with each group focusing on one of the categories.
The ideas suggested can be collated and typed up for participants.

You might want to focus on one area (styles of communication) and discuss with the group what has worked for them in inviting parents/carers into school. Draw out effective practice such as regularly communicating with parents/carers about ‘good news’ so that invitations to discuss problems are embedded in a positive context and are not the first communication the family will receive about their child.

**Communication and problem solving**

**20 minutes**

**Opening up discussion**

Explain that while the previous activity focused on engaging parents and carers so that they are willing to come into school, the next part of the session will focus on what happens when they do come in – the techniques we have for opening discussions with parents/carers and working with them to find shared solutions to problems affecting their child.

**Activity 1.6: choosing our words**

**5 minutes**

Explain that the language we use to seek the support of parents/carers is crucial – particularly our opening comments.

Words do more than give factual information. They let people know how we feel about them, whether we value their input, and so on. With hard-to-reach parents or carers who may come into school with a whole set of negative expectations and fired up with years of anger and frustration, as well as feelings of helplessness and a lack of confidence in their ability to make things better, the opening words can make or break the situation.

This activity aims to offer some positive scripts for opening up discussion.

Give out a pack of cards made by copying and cutting up resource sheets 1.13 and 1.14 to each group of two or three participants.

Ask participants to match the scripts on each card with the underlying message of the script on a corresponding card.

Take feedback, pointing out that there are no ‘right’ answers, and offer handout 1.2 as a summary.
Optional additional activity: choosing the setting  (5 minutes)

If you have time, you could ask participants to work in pairs and try out three different seating arrangements for an imagined meeting with parents/carers:

- Sitting opposite each other with a desk or table in between.
- Sitting at a table at right angles to each other.
- Sitting in two chairs angled towards each other, without a table.

One person in each pair should be the parent/carer, the other the teacher. The parent/carer should give feedback to the teacher about their feelings in each seating arrangement.

Take feedback on the messages conveyed by different types of setting when we meet with parents/carers.

Solving problems together

Remind participants of the work they have covered in the Focusing on solutions session from the behaviour and attendance professional development materials.

Show OHT 1.9 to emphasise the particular benefits of a solution-focused approach when working with parents and carers.
Ask participants to recap on the skills necessary for a solution-focused approach to be effective.

- Listening skills (involving genuineness, a non-judgemental attitude and empathy).
- Emphasising and reinforcing the skills and qualities that parents/carers bring with them.
- Building on success by using questions to help parents/carers focus on and amplify small successes and build a sense of self-efficacy.

Stress that using a solution-focused approach with parents or carers is different from counselling. The role of the teacher or other adult might be to find an appropriate source of counselling or other support for or with parents, but not to act as a parent’s counsellor themselves.

Remind participants briefly of the strategies covered in the session on solution-focused approaches (OHT 1.10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solution-focused strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy 1 - Building on success</td>
<td>Strategy 2 - Exception finding</td>
</tr>
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<td>What skills and qualities does the parent/carer bring to the situation?</td>
<td>When is the problem not there or less? When is success experienced and how can we build on this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy 3 - Preferred futures</td>
<td>Strategy 4 - Rating scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying goals and envisioning life without the problem – recognising that even a small change can bring about major changes in others’ responses</td>
<td>Where are we now and how close are we to our desired solution? What would success look like? Breaking the problem down into small steps</td>
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Why is a solution-focused model helpful?

- It encourages adults to adopt a positive stance in which energy is directed towards finding satisfactory ways forward rather than focusing on what is going wrong in a situation.
- It recognises that there are a range of solutions to the problem.
- It aims to build confidence and bring about change chosen by the parent or carer and at a pace chosen by them.
Activity 1.7: structuring a meeting with a ‘hard-to-reach’ parent

Remind participants of the activity involving Billy’s mother and the unsuccessful phone call trying to get her to come into school.

Ask participants to imagine that she has eventually (and reluctantly) been persuaded to come into school and meet with Billy’s teacher to talk about his behaviour.

They should decide with a partner on a strategy for structuring the meeting, choosing an appropriate setting, one or more of the ‘positive scripts’ discussed earlier to begin the meeting, and one or more of the solution-focused strategies that they think might be useful.

It might be helpful for you to model the use of solution-focused strategies using a member of the group as a role-play partner.

Alternatively, if participants are more experienced in using solution-focused approaches, pairs might devise their own role-play or write notes on the scenario.

Take feedback on which of the solution-focused strategies participants felt would be most helpful in this situation and why. Record this feedback and any other successful strategies that participants share with the group.
Conclusion

Recap on the key messages from the session by returning to OHT 1.1.

Ask participants to jot down:

- one new thing they have learned about the benefits of working with parents/carers;
- one strategy they would like to try in order to improve their partnership with the parent(s) or carer(s) of a child they teach;
- one sentence for opening a discussion with the parent or carer and one question they might ask in that discussion.

Participants could record key points for action from this session on handout 1.3.
Post-session activities

If you are using this session in school with all staff, identify with the group some tasks and activities that will help everyone to apply the learning from the session to their own situation or classroom. Some suggested ideas are given below. Make time, when you next meet to focus as a staff on promoting positive behaviour, for people to talk about the activities they undertook, and what they learned.

- Agree one idea from the session (for example, from activity 1.5) that might help you to engage ‘hard-to-reach’ parents and carers. As you put the idea into practice, keep a tabletop diary in the staff room in which to note issues and problems. On each page mark out the top third to describe the ‘problem’ and challenge staff to fill the other two-thirds with positive problem-solving ideas and potential solutions.

- Identify a member of staff or small group to act as researchers and gather further ideas and examples of other schools’ work to overcome barriers to partnership with parents. There are many examples on the websites www.teachernet.gov.uk and www.parentcentre.gov.uk, and in the Primary National Strategy materials Parents: partners in learning (DfES 0747-2004).

- Conduct a survey of parental perceptions of behaviour and attendance using an audit tool such as the Primary National Strategy behaviour and attendance Initial review or In-depth audits (1732-2005CDO-EN). As a staff group, discuss the outcomes and any steps you might take in the light of this feedback.

- As a whole staff, revisit your school’s ‘mission statement’ in light of your understanding of effective ways of working with parents and carers. Re-establish the professional values and beliefs that underpin it.

- Arrange with a colleague from another school (or colleagues from a local network of schools) to shadow each other during a parents’/carers’ evening and pick out examples of good practice in parent–school partnership working. Then share these between the two (or more) schools.

- Try out a staff room game. Everyone needs to agree, when they are in the staff room, to listen out for comments about behaviour, attendance or working with parents that are negative or about ‘problems’. Every time one is heard, it is identified by a code word (for example, ‘Eureka!’) and positive solutions/re-framings have to be offered by the rest of the group before anyone can continue their conversation/lunch/work. Keep the game light and friendly. After two or three weeks discuss whether the game has made a difference and how it might be taken further.

- Find creative ways to identify parents’/carers’ skills and abilities and then encourage pupils to invite their parent or carer to take a ‘talent turn’ by coming in to class to share these with the children. Discuss as a group any impact this has had on children’s behaviour, attendance and learning.
Objectives

- To explore the benefits of working in partnership with parents and carers
- To understand potential barriers to working in partnership and be familiar with some strategies for overcoming them
- To consider strategies for effective communication and joint problem-solving with parents and carers
Principles

• Positive relationships with children and their parents or carers are key to positive behaviour and regular attendance

• Parents/carers and schools need to respect and value what each have to offer and to work collaboratively

• The parent is the expert on their own child

• Many parents will need support at times to feel confident and empowered in their skills to meet the challenge of parenting

• We need in these sessions to draw on each other’s experience

• The session will adopt a solution-focused approach
Golden moments

Share a time when your engagement with a parent or carer made a difference.

Ask:

- What did you do that made that happen?
- What helped you to be able to do that?
- How are you able to use that skill in other situations?
The impact of parental involvement

- Parental involvement in a child’s schooling for a child between the ages of 7-16 is a more powerful force than family background, size of family and level of parental education.

- Children whose parents are involved with their learning progress 15-17% more in mathematics and reading than other children.
The impact of parental involvement

- When similar schools are compared, those with strong home-school links have consistently fewer problems related to pupils’ work or behaviour.

- Most parents believe that the responsibility for their child’s education is shared between the parents and the school.

- Most parents want to be involved in their child’s education. In a recent study in England 72% of parents said that they wanted more involvement.

The impact of parental involvement on children’s education, DfES 0339/2003
Our values and beliefs about working with parents and carers

Key learning points

• We will differ in our beliefs, attitudes and values

• We need to be aware of our own beliefs and the fact that others will have different ones

• There are no ‘right’ beliefs, but some are more helpful than others in our professional practice

• Our beliefs shape our behaviour. If, for example, we believe that working with parents and carers is a distraction from the real business of educating children, we may give up after a parent doesn’t attend a meeting, feeling that we have ‘done our duty’
A model for understanding behaviour

Behaviour is linked to our thoughts and feelings about a situation, which in turn are coloured by the way we look at the situation (our perception of it).

Cognition
(thoughts and expectations)

Stimulus → Perception

Action → School response

Emotional responses
(feelings)
Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

- Physiological or survival needs
- Safety
- Love, affection and belonging
- Self-esteem
- Self-actualisation
Why is a solution-focused model helpful?

• It encourages adults to adopt a positive stance in which energy is directed towards finding satisfactory ways forward rather than focusing on what is going wrong in a situation.

• It recognises that there are a range of solutions to the problem.

• It aims to build confidence and bring about change chosen by the parent or carer and at a pace chosen by them.
Solution-focused strategies

Strategy 1 - Building on success
What skills and qualities does the parent/carer bring to the situation?

Strategy 2 - Exception finding
When is the problem not there or less? When is success experienced and how can we build on this?

Strategy 3 - Preferred futures
Identifying goals and visioning life without the problem - recognising that even a small change can bring about major changes in others' responses

Strategy 4 - Rating scales
Where are we now and how close are we to our desired solution ... what would success look like? Breaking the problem down into small steps
AGREE (A LITTLE)
Resource sheet 1.2

AGREE (STRONGLY)
Resource sheet 1.3

DISAGREE (A LITTLE)
Resource sheet 1.4

DISAGREE (STRONGLY)
DON’T KNOW
DON’T KNOW
## Practical considerations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the teacher</th>
<th>Some strategies</th>
<th>For the parent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The times that the parents/carers can make to meet don’t suit my working hours.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I am a working parent but the times they give me for meetings I can never do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s difficult to have a private meeting with parents.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t like meeting when everyone can hear what the teacher is saying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time to create relationships - many children in a class.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher won’t have time to listen to my worries - he/she has got so many children to teach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Style of communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the teacher</th>
<th>Some strategies</th>
<th>For the parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do we communicate with parents who speak English as an additional language or have disabilities (including literacy difficulties), which make it hard for them to access information?</td>
<td>I don’t understand the letters.</td>
<td>I can’t get to the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s difficult to find good things to say about some children.</td>
<td>There’s no point going up to the school, as I won’t understand what they say.</td>
<td>I never seem to hear anything good about my child.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# School procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the teacher</th>
<th>Some strategies</th>
<th>For the parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m never quite sure where or when to see parents.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I often don’t understand why I’m going to the school or what is expected to happen afterwards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t know who to contact or whether I should.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School meetings focus on the school ‘telling’ the parent/carer what to do and how to do it.</td>
<td></td>
<td>There is no recognition of my years of experience with my child.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Lack of confidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the teacher</th>
<th>Some strategies</th>
<th>For the parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m new to teaching - I’m not a parent - what can I offer?</td>
<td></td>
<td>I can’t read well/am not academic so how can I help my child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I haven’t been trained to work with adults - especially angry ones ...</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers scare me - they always seem to be looking down on me because I wasn’t very good at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t really know a lot about the culture of some families in our school - I’m worried about offending people.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The school doesn’t understand my culture or religion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Resource sheet 1.11

#### Lack of trust/understanding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the teacher</th>
<th>Some strategies</th>
<th>For the parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You feel that whatever you do, there’s some solicitor waiting around the corner ready to stitch you up.</td>
<td>I don’t think teachers care about my child. They won’t listen to me when I explain what I know about what is best for him/her.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We live in different worlds and have different values.</td>
<td>What do teachers know about living round here?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m really interested in the children’s home lives but if you ask a question I get the impression they think I’m nosy ...</td>
<td>You can’t confide in teachers because they’ll tell social services if you let on that things are hard at home ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The parents just don’t seem to understand what I’m telling them.</td>
<td>Teachers just don’t understand what I am saying.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Resource sheet 1.12

### Demotivation/disengagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the teacher</th>
<th>Some strategies</th>
<th>For the parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I wonder what impact I can possibly make in two or three terms.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The teachers are always changing and you never have the chance to get to know them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They can’t be bothered to turn up for parents’ evenings so why should I chase them – my time is precious.</td>
<td></td>
<td>They don’t seem to understand that I can’t just leave the little ones for meetings all the time …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s no point in seeing parents round here – they just want to have a go at you.</td>
<td></td>
<td>What’s the point of another meeting – I’ve been up there so many times and nothing ever changes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let me just say back to you what I think you've told me, so that we can both be sure we've got it right.'

From what you say, it sounds as though things are really tough for you just now ... but despite all these difficulties, you're coping! Is there something we could be doing in school to help?'

'What do you most want to get out of our meeting?'

'I'm sure that if we can stick with it and work together on this, we can crack it!'

'I'm having some trouble getting Matt interested in reading and I'm wondering if you could help me? I know you feel you don't know much about how we teach reading, but you do know Matt ...'

'Is there anyone else you feel we should be asking for an opinion/help?'

'Thank you for coming in to see me tonight; I know how busy you are.'

'It'd be really good if we could work out together how we can best help Sanjit with his behaviour.'

'How is Rebecca feeling about school and her work this term? Are there things I could be doing differently, so she could get on better?'

'Thank you for coming in to see me tonight; I know how busy you are.'
**Resource sheet 1.14**

**Underlying messages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition that this is a two-way communication and a two-way process</th>
<th>Immediate acknowledgement of parental interest and their sense of priority</th>
<th>Demonstration of accurate listening and opportunities to clarify any misperceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of the parent as the true expert on the child</td>
<td>Emphasis on joint planning for maximum benefit</td>
<td>Introduction of the idea of parent/carer having valuable opinions and working together to achieve the desired result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure the parent or carer has a level of control within the discussion</td>
<td>Acknowledging that lack of involvement may not be due to lack of interest, but to over-riding personal and domestic needs that may take priority at times</td>
<td>Expressing belief in parent's/carer's competence, resilience and capacity to develop through positive expectation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Handout 1.1

A case study

The school sends a letter to Billy’s mother to invite her to a meeting to discuss his behaviour. There have been a number of such letters before, all telling her that Billy has behaved badly. She has literacy difficulties and a busy life with four other young children and doesn’t get around to reading this latest letter.

When Billy’s teacher rings her during a particularly chaotic teatime to say he had been expecting her for a meeting in school she becomes defensive and shouts, ‘Well don’t you think I’ve got enough to do without doing your job for you? I have to cope with him at home, you can sort your own problems while he’s at school.’

• What is Billy’s mother’s perception of the situation?

• What is contributing to this perception?

• What thoughts and expectations is she likely to have experienced when she realised it was the school ringing?

• What emotions might she have experienced?

• What might the teacher’s response be?
Examples of positive scripts

- ‘Thank you for coming in to see me tonight; I know how busy you are.’ (Immediate acknowledgement of parental interest and their sense of priority.)
- ‘What do you most want to get out of our meeting?’ (Recognition that this is a two-way communication and a two-way process.)
- ‘How is Rebecca feeling about school and her work this term? Are there things I could be doing differently, so she could get on?’ (Recognition of the parent as having valuable opinions and working together to achieve the desired result.)
- ‘Let me just say back to you what I think you've told me, so that we can both be sure we’ve got it right.’ (Demonstration of accurate listening and opportunities to clarify any misperceptions.)
- ‘I'm having some trouble getting Matt interested in reading and I'm wondering if you could help me? I know you feel you don't know much about how we teach reading, but you do know Matt …’ (Recognition of the parent as the true expert on the child.)
- ‘It'd be really good if we could work out together how we can best help Sanjit with his behaviour.’ (Emphasis on joint planning for maximum benefit.)
- ‘From what you say, it sounds as though things are really tough for you just now … but despite all these difficulties, you're coping! Is there something we could be doing in school to help?’ (Acknowledging that lack of involvement may not be due to lack of interest, but to overriding personal and domestic needs that may take priority at times.)
- ‘Is there anyone else you feel we should be asking for an opinion/help?’ (Making sure the parent or carer has a level of control within the discussion.)
- ‘I’m sure that if we can stick with it and work together on this, we can crack it!’ (Expressing belief in parent's/carer's competence, resilience and capacity to develop through positive expectation.)
Handout 1.3

Key points for action from this session

What do I want to do in my classroom in order to develop my practice?
•
•
•

How will I do this?
•
•
•

What is my timescale for this to happen?
•
•
•

How will I know I have been successful?
•
•
•

Do I need to involve anyone else in enabling this to happen?