UNIVERSAL UNITS
UNIT 7
WORKING WITH PARENTS

Learning outcomes

Trainees will:

- have knowledge of some research on the theme of parent/carer involvement in education
- have knowledge of relevant government publications and initiatives
- be aware of the difficulties encountered by parents/carers
- have knowledge of some strategies to support the involvement of parents/carers in their child's education
- have knowledge of the support offered by other agencies including the voluntary sector
- be able to provide guidance and support to colleagues in their work with parents/carers.

ONLINE RESOURCES

The content and tasks throughout these PDFs are supported by online resources that are designed to facilitate and supplement your training experience.

Links to these are signposted where appropriate. The resources use graphics and interactive elements to:

- Highlight salient points
- Provide at-a-glance content summaries
- Introduce further points of interest
- Offer visual context
- Break down and clearly present the different stages and elements of processes, tasks, practices, and theories

The online resources offer great benefits, both for concurrent use alongside the PDFs, or as post-reading revision and planning aids.

Please note that the resources cannot be used in isolation without referencing the PDFs. Their purpose is to complement and support your training process, rather than lead it.

You should complete any learning or teaching tasks and additional reading detailed in this PDF to make full use of the Advanced training materials for autism; dyslexia; speech, language and communication; emotional, social and behavioural difficulties; moderate learning difficulties.

To find out more about the resources, how they work, and how they can enhance your training, visit the homepage at: www.education.gov.uk/lamb

The first resource for this unit can be found here:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/parents/intro

Briefing

The following notes and links provide some background information on the research and government initiatives which have driven the parent/carer involvement agenda.

DfES publication

It is widely recognised that if pupils are to maximise their potential from schooling they will need the full support of their parents. Desforges, C. & Abouchaar, A. (2003)
You should read this short DfES report of a literature review conducted by Desforges and Abouchaar, which can be found here:

https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/RB433

SEN Code of Practice[1]

The code emphasises "There should be no presumption about what parents can or cannot do to support their children's learning. Stereotypic views of parents are unhelpful and should be challenged." (Para 2:6). It is important not to make assumptions about the quality of support that parents/carers will give their children based on, for instance, ethnicity, social class, education or marital status. Teachers and other professionals should understand parental circumstances (SEN Code of Practice 2.7). Sometimes parents'/carers' assumptions and expectations may differ from those of teachers and other professionals working with pupils with SEN and/or disabilities.

The Lamb Inquiry (2009)[2]
The enquiry was tasked with investigating ways in which parental confidence in the SEN assessment process might be improved.

Achievement for All
 Achievement for All (2009) includes a strand concerning parental engagement in order to address concerns that schools were not listening well enough to parents of pupils with SEND.

Research Article
In the 2004 study conducted by Lindsay & Dockrell[3], the attitudes of 66 parents of Year 3 children with SLCN were examined. Lindsay & Dockrell (2004) argue for parental choice of provision for this group.

The authors noted the difficulties that parents of children with SLCN had in achieving identification and diagnosis of their child's language impairment, and in obtaining appropriate intervention. 'Parents in this study thought they were often not listened to, both at the outset and later, and that they had to fight hard for appropriate support services or entry to an appropriate school for their children. Difficulties in identifying appropriate services are likely to reduce the early identification of favourable environmental niches to support development'.

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[1] SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=3724
[2] Lamb Inquiry (2009) http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/sen/sen/types/a0063735/lamb-inquiry-special-educational-needs-and-parental-confidence
[3] Lindsay, G. & Dockrell, J.E. (2004), Whose Job Is It? Parents' Concerns About the Needs of Their Children with Language Problems, The Journal of Special Education, 37 (4) 225-235.

Engaging with parents/carers

Parents are often the experts on their children, and their knowledge of their children's interests, dislikes, triggers for anxiety or challenging behaviour, and strategies which are effective in supporting them can be very valuable for school staff. Some pupils may not show the difficulties and frustrations they are experiencing during the school day, but will bottle them up until they get home. So parents will be able to alert teachers to problems which may not be apparent in the school environment.

Parents of pupils with SEND can find it depressing if communication focuses on what the child finds difficult or what they are unable to do or if they are only contacted to discuss the problems their child is having or if there has been an incident. Good home-school communication will also highlight the positives. That might be in relation to doing a good piece of work, but for a child with SEND doing well at school will be measured in many other ways than just academic progress. So a positive report might highlight how the pupil was able to sit on the mat at story time for 10 minutes or answered a question in class.

See online resource:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/parents/engaging

Attending meetings at school, such as reviews, can be stressful for parents. Some parents of children with SEND may also have SEND themselves, and so meeting situations will be particularly difficult for them. Schools can do a lot to make meetings more accessible for parents, including:

- Keeping the number of attendees to a minimum – while it's important to have all the relevant professionals present, it can feel intimidating for a lone parent to attend a meeting with lots of professionals
- Informing parents that, if they want to, they can bring someone with them for support and to help them remember everything that is discussed
- Providing parents with as much information as possible prior to the meeting to let them know what will be discussed and give them time to prepare
- Choosing a suitable venue – this will be a particular issue if the parent also has SEND, and
- Avoiding jargon or language which parents may not be familiar with.

See online resource:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/parents/meetings

Tasks

The tasks in this unit focus on the structured conversation, supporting a colleague in their work with parents/carers and multi -agency support for parents/carers.

Task 1: The structured conversation

To address concerns that schools were not listening well enough to parents of pupils with

SEND, the Achievement for All (2009)[4] includes a strand concerning parental engagement and specifically includes the recommendation that schools should hold 'structured conversations' with parents about their child. The bullet points below give the guidelines for working with parents and for the structured conversation. The following suggestions are made (p. 23):

- schools to become more effective at listening to parents' and pupils' views and taking them into account

- schools to provide better information to parents about their child's learning

- schools to have structured conversations with parents

- parents to have appropriately challenging expectations of what their child can achieve

- parents to feel they can engage more with schools

- parents to have increased trust that the system will support their child.

The structured conversation is intended to be a listening conversation and will, in some cases, change the nature of the dialogue between parents and schools. It should be open, but supportive, and must:

- focus on progress and outcomes

- draw upon the knowledge of parents to help the school to target its teaching, interventions and activities more effectively

- allow the school to feed back on progress, the strengths of the child or young person and to discuss stretching, but achievable targets for the future

- enable the parent to tell the school about the things that their child can do well but also of the barriers that can get in the way of progress, for example problems related to a specific condition such as dyslexia

- encourage the school and the parent to discuss short term activities or goals that might improve well-being and engagement with learning; and

- help to raise the aspirations of the school, parents and their child.

See online resource:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/parents/structured-conversation

The briefing notes outlined why some parents/carers can find meetings stressful. Reflect on some meetings you have attended and the possible stress triggers involved. What does your school already do to try to minimise stress and work towards a successful outcome for parent/carers, pupils and staff? Did the parent/carer seem happier or more concerned

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[4] Achievement for All (2009). http://www.afa3as.org.uk/

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at the end of the meeting than at the beginning? How did you feel -did the conversation achieve the aims you set out in the beginning? Make notes in your learning log.

Watch this short video of a parent talking about his experience of going to his daughter's school for a meeting.

http://forms.ncsl.org.uk/mediastore/image2/video/1248874857Cotgrave_Parent.wmv

See this clip:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/parents/structured-conversation-video

Read pages 7-17 of the handbook to support training (found as an attachment to the page in the link) which outline the stages of a structured conversation.

What impact do you think using the structured conversation strategy would have in your school? Make notes in your learning log and outline any actions you propose to take.

Task 2: Supporting a colleague in their work with parents/carers.

Parents of children with SEND may have wider concerns about their children's development and progress. Conti-Ramsden, Botting and Durkin (2008)[5] investigated the views of parents of adolescents with SLCN. They found that they were concerned with their children's future, their socialisation and community resources. However, a positive factor was that family relations were not significantly different from a typically developing group. The parents of the SLCN group were concerned that others might take advantage of their child, that there was a lack of resources in the community and restricted employment opportunities. The authors note that children with SLCN are more likely to be bullied at school than typically developing children. They also found that although all parents of adolescents are concerned for their children's future, choices for work and socialisation, these issues for the parents of children with SLCN brought more concern and less reward than for the parents of typically developing children.

Task activity:

Serdar joined the school in Year 5 and has now been in school for just over a year. Mary, the class teacher is concerned that this pupil is not keeping up with the rest of the class and is beginning to show signs of misbehaviour and lack of engagement. Serdar is already at the School Action stage due to concerns about his SEND. For example, he does not always appear to understand questions and will sometimes give irrelevant answers. His written work is very poor. Staff have noticed that he is rather isolated socially. Serdar's mother is a single parent and the school staff have already noted that she appears distressed and may not have the capacity to manage her child adequately as well as having other possible personal problems. There are two younger children in the family, one

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[5]   Conti-Ramsden GM, Botting NF, K. Durkin. (2008). Parental perspectives during the transition to adulthood of adolescents with a history of specific language impairment (SLI). *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 51, 84-96. eScholarID:1d28128

is still pre-school. Her own communication skills are not particularly strong.

How should you help Mary before she talks to Serdar's mother? Write a short document that could cover the possibilities. You might include:

1. Informal assessment of Serdar in class for Mary or any other evidence to ascertain his areas of strength, and possible barriers to his learning
2. Some detail of how Mary plans to design her lessons with Serdar
3. Routes to support for Serdar's mother
4. Tactful approaches that will engage Serdar's mother in discussion of the issues and her view of approaches that should be adopted
5. Aspects of the research quoted above that could be helpful to Mary

Suggested answers are in Appendix 2.

See Appendix 3 for a useful grid for assessing and gathering information in a meeting with parents/carers and planning next steps.

Task 3: Multi agency support for parents/carers

Early childhood experiences can have a major impact on later development, with the lack of a positive attachment to an adult being seen as particularly detrimental to some children. Parents are the biggest influence on a child's development. Social circumstances can also impact on development. Children, who experience family difficulties, including parental conflict, separation, neglect, indifference or erratic discipline, are more likely to develop BESD. Defining BESD (para.61) BESD Guidance (2008)

Where families may become 'hard to reach' they may require agencies to agree on strategies and resources aimed at re-engagement. These processes are often time consuming and frustrating and demand a high level of involvement from a range of professionals.
Much of the recent research on supporting families and multi agency working determines that the following factors need to be considered for programmes to be effective:

1. Belief in the innate resilience of pupils;
2. Respect and lack of judgement;
3. The offer of guidance without coercion;
4. The promotion of choice, within a structure of clear boundaries;
5. A focus on strengths;
6. Offering challenge alongside support and encouragement;
7. A willingness to spending time with and show interest;
8. An approach which promotes active listening
9. Being non-judgmental - distinguishing the person and the behaviour; understanding that the fundamental motive for difficult behaviour is usually good

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Parent Training

Gibbs et al (2003)[6] summarised some of the findings that led to the development of parenting programmes, reporting that as much as 30-40 per cent of the variation in child anti-social behaviour may be attributable to parenting and family intervention factors. Particularly implicated in negative behavioural and emotional outcomes are harsh and inconsistent discipline, high levels of criticism, poor supervision, low involvement, and a lack of warmth in the parent-child relationship. Research conducted within a behavioural and cognitive-behavioural tradition has furthered our understanding of the mechanisms linking parenting approaches and child outcomes, and this in turn has formed the basis for the development of successful intervention programmes

A number of programmes exist to support and train parents. The content of such programme may include:

- Teaching on ages and stages of development so that parents have an idea about what they can expect from their children at different stages of development
- Assertiveness training to assist parents to understand the importance of setting clear and reasonable expectations and avoiding overly passive or aggressive parenting styles
- Instruction and discussion on the use of rewards and sanctions in the home
- Information about the importance of play and recreation for building parent-child bonds, and
- Showing parents and carers how to work together to solve difficult issues, e.g. coping with toddlers in the supermarket or keeping track of adolescents' increasingly independent comings and goings.

Parent training programmes generally involve a mixture of input from a trainer and group discussion and role-play. Many parents feel isolated and unsupported and the opportunity to discuss and share problems with other parents and carers is, in itself, a big support.

Sometimes parenting classes are based in schools. Many however are based outside schools and run by other agencies, as some parents can find schools rather daunting. The majority of parents who attend parent-training courses do so on a voluntary basis. However, some parents subject to parenting orders may be compelled to attend parenting classes.

Family Therapy

Where family problems are more acute, family therapy may be available. This is generally provided via the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and is led by psychiatrists and trained counsellors.

Such therapy generally takes the form of a series of discussions between the trainer/counsellor and members of the family, both together and separately.

Working in this way family therapists are able to observe, at first hand, how the family

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[6] Gibbs, J., Underdown, A., Stevens, M., Newbery, J. & Liabo, K. (2003). Group-based parenting programmes can reduce behaviour problems of children aged 3-12 years. What Works for Children group Evidence, Nugget April 2003.

functions. In between therapy sessions, families may be set tasks, during which they might observe or try to change some aspect of the way they behave. Family therapy may include solution-focused approaches   in which therapists invite their clients to focus on how they might act to change their situation. Focusing on solutions makes use of questioning techniques to help families to think about their situation and how to change it. For example:

- Families are asked to rate an aspect of family life:
  How would you rate your present situation on a scale of 0 to 10?
  They are asked to assess the assets and resources that are available to them:
  What prevents you from being at zero?

- They are asked to envisage what improvement would look like:
  Suppose your situation has changed for the better and you were at number 9 on the scale, what would you see and hear? How would you know things have I improved?
- Finally, they are asked to set small achievable steps to move them to the next step on the rating scale:
  What small things might you do to get you to the next step on the scale?

Task:

Watch the following video clips, each shows a different approach to schools working with parents:
- "Engaging parents"
- "SLCN:parents"
- "ASD:SNAAP"

Each school demonstrates a different approach to working with parents. Think about a parent who may be very concerned about the progress of their child with SEN. What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different approached illustrated in the videos given these circumstances?

Think about ways in which you might engage with other agencies involved with parents/carers and families to support pupils with SEND in your school/setting. What actions do you need to take to ensure that work being carried out with families is supported in school and confidentiality is maintained? What can teachers learn from the approaches outlined above? Make notes in your learning log.

See online resources and clip:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/parents/engaging-video

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/parents/communication

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/spld/parents/snaap

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<u>Evaluation of Learning</u>

- Make a grid of agencies and organisations that can offer information, advice and support for different areas of SEND to be shared with colleagues.
- Look over the notes in your learning log and answer the following questions:
- Will I do anything differently in meetings with parent/carers in the future?
- What could my school/setting do to promote successful outcomes from work with parent/carers and what is my role in this?
- How effective is the partnership between my school/setting and other agencies working with parents/carers? Is there anything I could do to improve/build on this?

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Appendix 1

Suggested answers:

1. Mary needs to be clear about her concerns before she talks to Serdar's mother. A teaching assistant could be briefed to keep detailed records over a lesson of his comprehension, attention and so on. Mary also needs to be aware of Serdar's strengths and interests and can perhaps discuss these with him and her colleagues. With your help, Mary could look at the other sections of this programme or websites, e.g. ICAN, to find resources for informal assessment, particularly in looking at the possibility of receptive language difficulties.
2. You will be able to suggest approaches that will help Mary teach Serdar. (See the Lesson Planning unit). Mary could observe other staff who are successful with teaching pupils similar to her pupil and look at the exercises in the TDA Toolkit and Inclusion Development Programme on SLCN. You could model appropriate approaches for teaching the pupil. You could suggest other school staff or professionals she might consult, for example, the speech and language therapist, who may have information and be able to suggest helpful strategies. The school may have useful books, videos, or other resources that will help.
3. Introduce Mary to some of the ideas and evidence in this Unit. She needs to know how the mother feels about her child's communication difficulties and particularly to listen carefully to her description of major concerns. Make sure she thinks of ways to gain understanding of how the family situation impacts on the pupil's life. She needs to find out how the mother feels about any form of role in helping her child with school and discuss what would be most appropriate. (See the section on the SEN Code of Practice and Achievement for All above).
4. Stress to Mary that parents' concerns may be different from school staff. For example, they may be less concerned about attainment and more concerned about possible bullying. Serdar's mother may have anxieties about how best to help her child at home and her ability to do this. Mary should very clear about the help Serdar is receiving at school. You should also make sure Mary realises that Serdar may find it hard to communicate with his mother about his school day. The school may need to think of alternative ways to allow him to do this (pictures, photos etc.). Finally, Mary should be ready for the possibility that Serdar's mother is very depressed about her situation and Serdar's condition and will need support and sympathy before she can discuss it.
5. In a case like Serdar's it may be that more serious concerns about (for example) receptive language impairment surface. It is then your task as the specialist to ensure that Mary is properly briefed on proposals for action and that you or another senior staff member should be part of the meeting.
6. An action plan and a review date for it should be agreed before the meeting comes to an end.

Appendix 2 Assess and gather evidence from the meeting.

	SEND notes	Evidence	Strategies, areas for development, action plans
Are there regular formal meetings and other informal meetings with parents?	Parents' evenings, IEP meetings, etc. Informal end of day/week meetings		
Are there opportunities for parents to discuss their concerns with the class teacher and/or a senior/management member of school staff (not always a TA)?	What means of communication between parents and school are there? EG phone, email, home/school diary, etc.		
Have there been opportunities for the parents' view of their child and the nature of his SLCN to be listened to?	Communication with the parents should be reciprocal, allowing their views to be taken into consideration		
Understand parents' views of the barriers to their child's learning	Parents' views may be significant in working with the school.		
Understand parents' views of their child's strengths	Parents' views of what their child is able to achieve at home may be significant		
Understand the parents' views and expectations for their child (including past experiences of the health, education and social services provision)	The effects of past experiences, especially difficulties in recognition of the child's SEND may colour their attitudes and expectations		
Reach a measure of agreement with the parents as to the pupil's SLCN	What language levels is he/she functioning at, what pragmatic difficulties does he/she experience?		
Gather information from school staff and parents on progress.	Have the parents been informed of their child's progress and any concerns and/or successes?		

Understand and agree criteria for measuring progress			

Appendix 2 cont'd. Develop a hypothesis and an intervention plan

	SEND notes	Evidence	Strategies, areas for development, action points
Develop a measure of consensus on child's strengths and needs	Decide how the pupil's SEND are affecting his/her learning		
Plan and agree joint programme of intervention with clear roles for school and parents (allowing for what parents feel they can contribute)	Make a clear programme of support for the pupil using well informed teacher and TA support and the areas to be addressed		
Understand the different conditions of home and school and how these may affect the pupil's language and behaviour	Different environments may influence behaviour, some skills may be transferred and built on at home or at school		

Appendix 2 cont'd. Implement strategies/interventions

	SEND notes	Evidence	Strategies, areas for development, action points
Decide strategies and programmes to be used to support the pupil	Do staff have access to the types of strategies and programmes that will be helpful?		
Do other professionals need to be involved?	Will an assessment and intervention from another professional be required?		
Discuss what support parents feel willing or able to give and for what activities	Levels of parental understanding should be carefully assessed so that they are able to contribute with confidence		
Decide on which personnel are to provide additional support in school	Ensure that the staff providing support for the pupil are well informed about the pupil's SEND and their role with him/her		