

HELPING FAMILIES MOVE INTO **PRIMARY** SCHOOL  
**FOR PARENTS**

DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING  
RELATIONSHIPS



Developing positive relationships  
with teachers





---

# CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3
.....	
2. WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A PARENT	4
.....	
3. WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR CHILD	5
.....	
4. IMPACT ON CHILDREN	6
.....	
5. SOME IDEAS AND RESOURCES	7
.....	
6. WHAT SOME PARENTS SAY	9
.....	
7. WHAT SOME PRINCIPALS SAY	10
.....	
8. WHAT SOME RESEARCHERS SAY	11
.....	
9. SOME USEFUL BOOKS ON PARENT ENGAGEMENT	11
.....	
10. REFERENCES	12
.....	
11. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	12
.....	

## Acknowledgement

The use of the words *parents* and *families* throughout this module refers to all types of home arrangements and parental figures, including carers and legal guardians, who care for and rear children.

Any images of people in this module do not indicate these people were in any way part of the project or are in agreement with any information contained in this module.

Except where otherwise indicated, and save for any material in this document owned by a third party or protected by a trade mark, a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia Licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/deed.en>) applies to this document.

**This project was funded by the Australian Government Department of Education through the Grants and Awards Programme 2015-16 to 2018-19.**

First published July 2019

Cover image: © Areszpua | Dreamstime.com



# 1

## INTRODUCTION

Families and their children undertake many transitions through their lives, none more important and challenging than starting primary school.

Early engagement with your child's school will make a difference to their experience of education which will shape their lives.

Schools are like every part of life we deal with - relationships matter and the effort of building them is repaid. The resources in this module cover how to build your relationship with the school and what you should expect.

An important start is to form a relationship with the teacher who will spend six hours or so a day with your child. This involves doing more than just dropping your child at the school gate. It requires contact with the teacher in the school or through the online channels that are part of school communication.

Your responsibility is for your child to be "school ready" however you should expect the school will also be ready for your child. This means you taking the advantage of opportunities to both participate in school activities and to build the skills your child needs.

It's important that teachers and parents respect each other's role in the lives of children and this is achieved best through open two-way conversations.

“*Early engagement with your child's school will make a difference to their experience of an education which will shape their lives.*”



## 2 | WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A PARENT

Early engagement with your child's school is important for all concerned.

Ask the school what learning opportunities it offers enrolled families to practice the skills their children will need in order to be school ready.



© Alexsokolov | Dreamstime.com

These may be part of a pre-school orientation program which endeavours to assist in the transition from home to formal schooling. These can include programs like the 'Positive Parenting Program' (Sanders, Markie-Dadds & Turner, 2012) and reflections such as that by Tsousis (2017) - cofounder of Skoolbag (please refer to links in section 5). This is also the opportunity for the school to identify areas in which they may need to make adjustment to meet your child's needs. Take advantage of these sessions to meet other parents and also to engage with school staff.

Once school starts, parent-teacher meetings are a good opportunity to meet with your child's teacher. Participation in information evenings, parent groups or school boards provides the opportunity to build connections with the school community. These are an important down payment on the

positive relationships that will influence how you and your child see school and how the school sees you and your child.

Ensure that your child's teacher is aware of your eagerness to be part of your child's educational journey and that you are hoping to do this in partnership with them. Provide the teacher with a little background about your child, such as their special interests or if they may have any particular issues that may affect their learning.

Pushor (2015) speaks of parent knowledge as the unique knowledge through lived experience that you as a parent have of your child. This parent knowledge you have is worth sharing with your child's teacher. It is also a good idea to let the teacher know the best way to contact you and to set parameters around this.

Take the time to understand what your child will be taught so this can be part of the conversation when you meet their teacher.

Often parents don't tend to interact with teachers unless there is a problem. Positive interactions early in the school year help to develop mutually respectful relationships. So when a difficult conversation has to be had down the track (as happens with most of us!) it has more chance of being conducted in an effective and respectful way.

Remember that you are part of a community with shared but diverse interests, and decisions have to reflect the needs of that community as well as the needs of your child.



3

## WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR CHILD



© Evgenyatamanenko | Dreamstime.com

In the home environment there are many things parents can do which will enhance their child's enjoyment of primary school. In turn, these home activities can also enhance the relationship between the family and the child's teacher.

These activities include having conversations about all manner of things that are of interest either to you or your child. Conversation leads to the development of an extensive vocabulary which is vitally important when your child commences formal learning in all areas, including literacy and numeracy.

The positive outcomes that are realised from reading every day cannot be emphasised enough. Reading together not only enhances your relationship with your child, and therefore contributes positively to their wellbeing, it also demonstrates the importance you place on learning.

Parent expectations and the importance they place on education have a significant impact on their child's learning throughout all years of schooling. The foundations set in primary school are vital to the high school years.

It is also important that as parents we make sure that our children get plenty of sleep, exercise and healthy food. Once our children commence their formal educational journey, it is important that they come to school ready for the day ahead. It makes a big difference in the classroom when children arrive at school prepared and well rested.

All these actions not only demonstrate the importance you as a parent place on nurturing your child's education, it also nurtures your positive relationship with your child's teacher.





## 4 | IMPACT ON CHILDREN

*“Parents and families are children’s first teachers and they continue to help their children to learn and thrive throughout the school years. When their family’s love and support is combined with the expert knowledge of teachers, it can have a significant and lasting impact:*

- *Children can be more likely to enjoy learning and be motivated to do well.*
- *Children can have better relationships with other children, improved behaviour and greater confidence.*
- *Children can do better at school and are more likely to graduate and go on to college, TAFE or university.*
- *Children can be less likely to miss days at school.*

Extract from the Parent Fact Sheet, ACT Government, Education Directorate - available at: [https://www.education.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/686550/52741-DET-Parental-Engagement-A4-Factsheet-4pp\\_FA2\\_ACC.pdf](https://www.education.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/686550/52741-DET-Parental-Engagement-A4-Factsheet-4pp_FA2_ACC.pdf)

Researchers highlight that the family and effective parenting are central to children’s mental health. Parenting practices and the quality of the parent-child relationship have implications for children’s development in the early years as well as their academic achievement, social competence and behaviour at school.

Understanding the range of changes a child is likely to encounter as they transition from early childhood education and care into school, can enhance parental confidence and in turn, also enhance children’s confidence.

(Hirst, Jervis, Visagie, Sojo & Cavanagh, 2011).





## 5 | SOME IDEAS AND RESOURCES



© Dreamstime Agency | Dreamstime.com

Following are some resources (with links) that you might find useful around developing positive relationships with your child's teacher(s).

*Building a relationship with your child's School.*

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/school-learning/working-with-schools-teachers/relationship-with-school>

*8 Tips for Building a Good Relationship with Your Child's Teacher.*

<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/partnering-with-childs-school/working-with-childs-teacher/ways-parents-can-build-good-relationships-with-childs-teacher>

*10 Ways to Build a Positive Relationship with Your Child's Teacher.*

<https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/10-ways-to-build-a-positive-parent-teacher-relationship>

*A version of the Positive Parenting Program is available at:*

<https://www.triplep-parenting.net.au/qld-uken/triple-p/>

*3 ways engaging parents in schools empowers students (2017), available at:*  
<https://www.moqproducts.com.au/skoolbag/blog/engaging-parents-in-schools/>

*Information on transitioning to school can be found at:*

<https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/early-years/transition-to-school>

*Building Parent-Teacher Relationships.*  
<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/building-parent-teacher-relationships>

*The Parent Teacher Partnership.*  
<http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/going-to-school/parent-involvement/parent-teacher-partnership/>

*The Benefit of Parents and Teachers Working Together.*

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/parents-and-teachers-working-together-620922>



## 5 | SOME IDEAS AND RESOURCES CONT'D

*[Learning Potential](#) is a free app and website for parents, families, and carers packed with useful tips and inspiring ways parents can be more involved in their child's learning. It is designed to help parents be part of their child's learning and make the most of the time they spend together, from the high chair to high school. Visit the [Learning Potential](#) website, or download the app for free from the App Store or Google Play. (Department of Education & Training).*

Some ideas to assist in developing a positive relationship with your child's teacher include:

- Meeting the teacher and demonstrating your interest in being engaged with your child's learning.
- Ensuring your child is well rested and has had a nourishing breakfast in preparation for school each day.
- Sharing with the teacher some background (parent knowledge) on your child.

- Taking part in any school programs that advance your parenting skills.
- Joining in activities the teacher creates to invite family participation.
- Learning to use the technology that keeps you informed about your child's learning.
- Reading with your child every day.
- Engaging proactively with your child's teacher.

*A guide to engaging with families of children with a disability.*

[Parental Engagement: Engaging with families of children with a disability](#)

*Children starting school in rural and remote Queensland – parent resource.* Queensland Government (2018).

<https://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/PDF/qcycn/isolated-childrens-orange-book.pdf>



© Esmehelit | Dreamstime.com





6



## WHAT SOME PARENTS SAY



© Zaikina | Dreamstime.com

The following quotes are taken from interviews conducted as part of the Re-Energising Parent Engagement in Australian Primary and Secondary Schools Project.

*“My job as a parent is to make sure that I help her with everything that she needs for school, getting her to school, making her feel safe, and always being there when she needs me to discuss things.”*

(Parent, regional primary school, Victoria).

*“So I think some people have a really positive relationship and feel comfortable going to teachers and just asking straight away what’s going on.”*

(Parent, regional primary school, New South Wales).

When asked about how their school promoted the development of relationships with parents one parent

made the following positive comment:

*“They’re now doing programs before the preps even come to school whereby the parents can bring them along and get them used to the school and there are quite a lot of information sessions as well ... for things like cyber safety and to introduce Phonics and Spelling Master and other such learning programs.”*

(Parent, metropolitan primary school, Queensland).

*“My role is to make sure that he is coming to school regularly and so his attendance is good. Having a good relationship with the teacher that supports his education, so that communication is key to his day to day experience.”*

(Parent, regional primary school, Victoria).



7



## WHAT SOME PRINCIPALS SAY

The following quotes are taken from interviews conducted as part of the Re-Energising Parent Engagement in Australian Primary and Secondary Schools Project.

*“Our relationship with parents is driven by strengthening our relationship with them to have those conversations and to empower them so that they can also be directing us in what we’re doing to meet their kids’ needs.”*

(Primary principal, metropolitan school, Victoria).

*“Willing and engaged parents want to be kept informed; they want feedback on their kid’s learning. They want to know what is being taught. Sometimes how it is being taught. And those parents will tend to develop relationships with the class teacher and any other support personnel and potentially the leadership team of the school.”*

(Primary principal, metropolitan school, Queensland).

*“I will make a phone call to the parents just to ring and say how have you found your child’s first few days at school ... so making one to one contact with them I’ve found has been really rewarding and creates a very positive relationship between the parents and the school early on.”*

(Primary principal, regional school, Western Australia).

*“Instead of parent-teacher interviews, it’s learning conversations. So a conversation is two-way. So we’ve changed our terminology.”*

(Primary principal, regional school, Victoria).

*“Because we’re working for the learning growth and wellbeing of their children, we wouldn’t have the children in our school, I don’t think, unless relationship between school and family was an open and trusting relationship.”*

(Primary principal, regional school, Queensland).



© Iakov Filimonov | Dreamstime.com



8



## WHAT SOME RESEARCHERS SAY

*“The benefits of home-school partnerships are apparent with research consistently finding that teacher and family relationships are important for young people’s social and emotional wellbeing and academic achievement. The development of positive relationships between families and school staff takes effort from both parties and typically develops over time rather than over a single event.”*

(Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

*“Both parents and teachers have an important role to play; their roles do not replace but rather complement and reinforce the other’s role thus providing the student with a consistent message about reading and learning. Thinking of parents and teachers as ‘partners’ refers to this mutual effort toward a shared goal. It also implies shared responsibility of parents and teachers for supporting students as learners.”*

(Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).



9

## SOME USEFUL BOOKS ON PARENT ENGAGEMENT

[Please click here to peruse a list of useful books on parent engagement](#)





## 10 | REFERENCES

Christenson, S.L. & Sheridan, S.M. (2001). *School and families: Creating essential connections for learning*. New York. The Guilford Press.

Commissioner for Children and Young People (2018), *Speaking Out About School and Learning - The views of WA children and young people on factors that support their engagement in school and learning*. Commissioner for Children and Young People, WA, Perth.

Desforges, C. & Abouchar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievements and adjustment: A literature review*. Department for Education and Skills. Research Report RR433. Queen's Printer.

Hirst, M., Jervis, N., Visagie, K., Sojo, V. & Cavanagh, S. (2011). *Transition to primary school: A review of the literature*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Pushor, D. (2015). *Living as mapmakers - Charting a course with children guided by parent knowledge*. Debbie Pushor and the Parent Engagement Collaborative II Department of Curriculum Studies, University of Saskatchewan, Sense Publishers, Canada.

Sanders, M. R, Markie-Dadds and Turner, K. M. T. (2012). *Practitioner Manual for Standard Triple P. 2nd ed*. Brisbane, Australia: Triple P International.

## 11 | ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ethics approval for research was obtained through the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee.

### **Special thanks to the following for contributing to the project.**

Project partner - The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) for assistance with survey development and data analyses.

National principal associations for various assistance with dissemination of project information.

National parent associations for various assistance with dissemination of project information.

Australian primary & secondary school principals who completed surveys.

Australian primary & secondary school principals who participated in interviews.

Australian school children's parents who participated in interviews.

Project partner - Professor Sue Saltmarsh (USQ) for ethics approval submissions, interview protocols, training of interviewers, qualitative and quantitative data analyses, research publications and presentations.

Dr David Saltmarsh for data analyses and research publications.

Presenters of preliminary findings: Professor Sue Saltmarsh (USQ), Tony O'Byrne (Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA)), Carmel Nash OAM (CSPA) and John O'Brien (CSPA).

Interviewers: Tony O'Byrne (CSPA), Bernadette Kreutzer (Catholic School Parents Queensland (CSPQ)), Siobhan Allen (CSPA), Linda McNeil (CSPA), Rachel Saliba (CSPA) and Greg Boon (CSPA).

Dr Tim Sealey for assistance with survey generation and survey data analyses.

Interview data analyses and generation of qualitative data report: Barbara Barker (ARACY), Neil Stafford and Dr Caroline Ladewig (ARACY).

Parent Engagement Module writers: Carmel Nash OAM (CSPA), Siobhan Allen (CSPA), Rachel Saliba (CSPA) and David Fagan (Backroom Media Pty Ltd).

Charmaine Stevens (CSPQ) for graphic design and art direction.

Schoolzine for web design and Adventure Clipz for video footage.

John O'Brien (CSPA) for project coordination.