

# Parental engagement in children's early learning doesn't just happen!

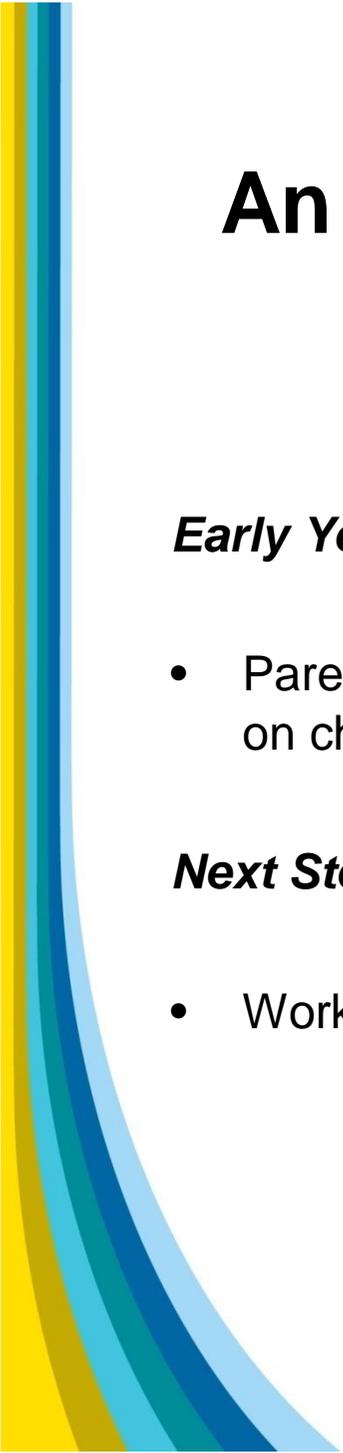
*The importance of public policy initiatives to  
support practitioners to support parents.*

# Evidence of significant studies

- What parents do is more important than who they are (*Sylva et al; 2004*)
- Parenting behaviour influences children's development from the moment of their birth (*Gutman and Feinstein 2007; Feinstein, 2003*)
- Fathers have an important part to play (*Flouri and Buchanan, 2001; Hobcraft, 1998*)
- The influence of the home is 'enduring, persuasive and direct' (*Desforges, 2003*)
- It is possible to engage vulnerable parents and improve the home learning environment (*Evangelou et al., 2008*)

# The legacy of the last administration

- The vital role of parents, both fathers and mothers, in early learning to secure good outcomes for children was reflected in the last Government's policy agenda for children, young people and their families.
- Every Child Matters
- National Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services
- Social Exclusion Task Force
- Childcare Act
- Children's Plan
- Every Parent Matters
- Early Years Foundation Stage
- Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare



# An acknowledgement that it ‘doesn’t just happen’

## *Early Years Foundation Stage (2008)*

- Parents and practitioners working in partnership have a positive impact on children’s development and learning.

## *Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare (2009)*

- Workforce development for early years services.

# Practitioners need support to work with parents

Research has identified a range of barriers to parental involvement in children's early learning. Some of these barriers relate to practitioners and include:

- Poor experiences of school or professionals, leading to negative attitudes and lack of trust on the part of parents.
- Lack of practitioner knowledge about the importance of parental involvement.
- Lack of practitioner confidence and skills to work with parents.
- Poor communication on the part of practitioners, such as using jargon and behaving like an expert when talking to parents.
- Services not tailored to parents' needs, level of knowledge or circumstances.
- Practitioner resistance to parental involvement.
- Negative attitudes towards parents and a lack of respect for, and recognition of, their role.
- Staff unrepresentative of the parents that they are trying to reach.

# The difference training makes

- **Much valued by practitioners and vital in ensuring that practitioners are effective in their work.**
- Practitioner re-focusing away from parents as vulnerable clients to seeing them as parents as active partners in their children's learning.
- Understanding what really helps – practitioners need to understand the research evidence about the importance of the home learning environment as well as brain and child development in the early years.
- Ability and skills to be flexible to meet the different needs and situations of each parent, to support them to support their children as early learners.

# Sustaining the impact of training

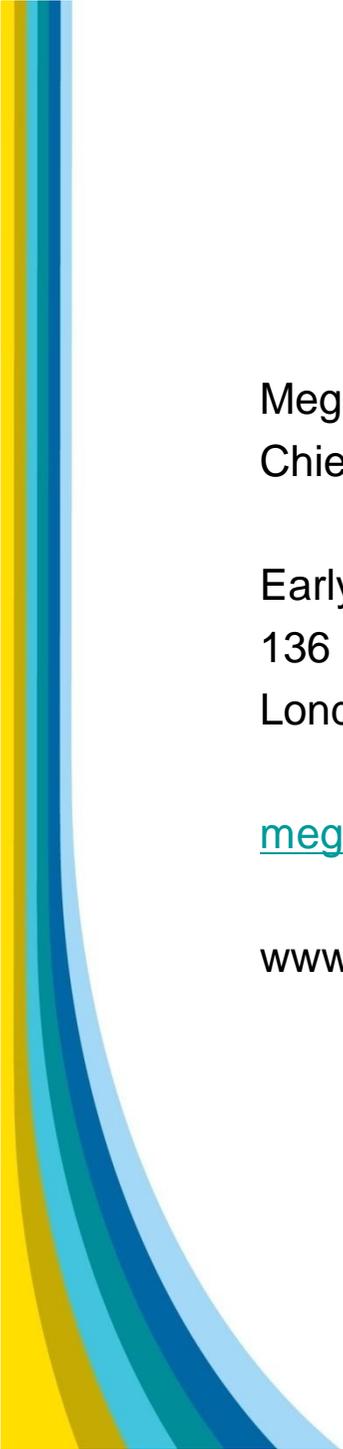
- Importance of a 'whole setting' approach – integrating parental involvement into every activity has a much greater impact than specifically trained staff delivering discrete programmes to parents.
- Working cross-organisationally
- Embedding learning through supervision
- Regular refreshing and reflection as well as building parental involvement in children's early learning into the induction of new staff.
- Recognising and addressing outstanding training needs that may be impeding service development.

# Initial indications from the new Coalition Government

*“What happens in the home has a profound affect on a child’s outcomes.”* Nick Clegg.

The new government’s axe has already hit the earliest years hard:

- two early years pilot schemes to support practitioners have been scrapped
- the future of the Early Years Foundation Stage remains unclear following confirmation of the closure of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority.
- Refocusing Sure Start Children’s Centres on the most disadvantaged families.
- Work can not continue with only accolades.



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