



Engaging Traveller Parents in Parents Plus Children's Programme

Anne Mare McGovern HSCL ran a number of Parents Plus groups with Traveller parents in Ballyfermot. This document contains her Recommendations for Practice.

Engaging Parents to Participate

- Time must be given for relationship-building first before running a parenting course. At least one of the co-facilitators should have a previous relationship of engagement with the family, preferably in a support role (e.g. HSCL, youth worker, family support worker etc). The importance of the relationship between facilitators and parents is crucial, whereby parents should feel like they can trust the facilitators. The strength of the relationship will, in most cases, determine the buy-in from the parents.
- A parenting course should not be the first support offered to the family. Instead, it should be offered as part of a menu of supports, often over an extended time-frame (e.g. 1,2 school years). Supports offered to families should begin with child-focused courses first (e.g. 1-1 key working) and then a parenting course later. This helps to ensure the parent doesn't feel like s/he is being blamed for their child's behaviour. It also allows time for relationship-building with the parent.
- Parents may need to be approached several times about participating. If a family is difficult to reach on the phone a home visit might be more effective. Facilitators, where possible and practicable, should go to the specific families, rather than wait for the families to come to them.
- It is important in all meetings with the families to stress the benefits of participating in terms of what they will learn from other parents and how it will help their children. It's also important for them to know that the course will be tailored to meet their needs (e.g. no literacy demands etc.)
- When engaging parents to participate, it is important to be mindful of family relationships and whether certain parents will participate if others are taking part also. It would be advisable to

prioritise the parents you would like to participate and then ensure there are no conflicting issues with other parents.

- Choose a location that is familiar and comfortable to the parents to run the course. It needs to be a location where parents visit regularly and is acceptable within their community to go to. It is vitally important that the parents feel welcomed and wanted in the environment.

Retaining Parents

- Adding a child and parent session to the end of each group session has worked really well at ensuring attendance each week. It gives an opportunity to model special time and for facilitators to offer practical hands-on support.
- Small groups work very well to ensure that the facilitators can address the individual needs of the group and offering a 'wrap-around' type of support to the parents attending.
- Facilitators may have to call to their homes the day before to remind parents and offer lifts, if practicable, to ensure they attend.
- Sessions need to be flexible. Time-keeping and attendance may impact on the amount of material to be covered. It's important that facilitators can adapt the sessions as needed. The sessions may also need to be more holistic to support parents (e.g. cover topics of personal self-development, resilience)
- If the parents you are inviting have literacy difficulties, you should reduce the amount of literacy required in the course. This might mean using less handouts and worksheets and using more video examples and role play throughout the course. Facilitators should bear this in mind when completing evaluation forms. It may be necessary to complete these individually with some families, asking the questions and writing down their answers.
- It's important for the facilitators to be culturally sensitive to different traditions and parenting styles within the Travelling community. It's also important that facilitators feel comfortable and confident to challenge certain viewpoints, when necessary.
- There needs to be a whole-school awareness of the course running so parents are made feel comfortable in the building. It is essential that staff do not use the opportunity of the parents being in the school for a parenting course to speak to them about other issues. The room where the course is running should not be disturbed by any staff member. A 'Do not disturb' sign may need to be placed on the door to ensure that this is adhered to.
- Facilitators may need to offer additional support to parents throughout the duration of the course (e.g. help with dealing with other agencies) and efforts should be made to link the parents to other courses upon completion of Parents Plus.