

Engaging with parents

Including and empowering parents

Parents and children reading together

School and their child's reading.



Our long-term aim is to empower parents so that they feel that they can do exactly what we're doing outside of the DL sessions. We're not experts either! We just love books. So, even though it's great for parents to grab a break during the reading session, ultimately we want them to be a part of it.

Getting to know the parents you visit takes time, and can involve quite a lot of conscious friendly effort. The best way is to be interested and open, and to let them know you love reading with their kids.

Below are some things to think about.

N.B. Always remain sensitive. It might be that a parent is stressed and doesn't feel like chatting with us during the session. Be patient in your relationship building.

Including and empowering parents

Do...

Make space! Lots of parents hover at the edge of a reading session but feel like they can't get involved. Try to draw them in.

Ask parents' advice.

Involve them in the choice of books. Ask children to show their choice to parents.

If you're not sure about the suitability of a particular book -- because of its themes or reading level -- then definitely ask the parent to look at it and decide.

Listen to their answer to show that we value their opinion.

Praise children in front of their parents -- their parents should be proud and valued too.

If the parents don't join you throughout the session, make sure you keep them updated on what you've been doing. What books you've read from; what their children have done well. Even better, invite the children to explain.

Try to find a common interest to talk about. Is there a particular show always on the TV when you arrive, pictures around the house? Ask them about a TV show that is popular (i.e. Did you see x-factor at the weekend?).

If your sessions are online, show an interest in them, e.g. how was their weekend? Try to start a conversation that they may respond to/ be interested in having. It doesn't always have to be about the child.

Don't...

Give up on a parent who's always busy in the kitchen or offscreen. From time to time, make a point of keeping in touch with them -- by putting your head round the door, or chatting when they first dial in to the online session.

Be negative if books get damaged. It happens, and no one needs to feel bad about it.

Ignore a parent's suggestion about books to try or not to try with their child. We are always guests and ultimately need parents to feel listened to if we want to keep visiting.

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Do...

Make the session fun: silly voices, commenting on the pictures, counting, asking questions about the characters, etc. If you're not afraid to be a bit silly during the session, it may help parents feel comfortable doing the same when they're reading with their children. You could also invite parents to join in the fun – they might provide funny voices or noises for instance, or explain the meaning of something.

Tactfully and over time, find out if parents enjoy reading with their child. If so, when is their best reading time? What kind of stories do they most enjoy together, so you can bring more?

Take notice of what other children's books are in the house. In some families, you pick up that the sources of books are just Doorstep and school.

Don't...

Make assumptions! It's best to observe and take notice. For instance, loads of Doorstep parents are happily and regularly reading with their children, and would do so even if we never visited! But equally, not all parents are confident readers themselves. Be careful not to invite a parent to read a page until you know they'll be comfortable with that.

Interview parents. Instead, be circumspect; keep it casual, look for the right chance to find out more. It may take weeks before you start getting a picture. Definitely don't ask questions during every session.

Pump the child for information. You don't want them to think you're judging their family.

School and their child's reading

Do...

Ask parents' advice about the child's favourite things about school, and what they're less keen on.

Ask about any books the children are bringing back for school. Do they enjoy them, do they find them easy / difficult?

Ask what they would like their child to read.

Find out if there's anything specific to practise, for instance, tricky words, or reading certain books from school.

Ask how the parents are finding the school.

Don't...

Make negative comments about school. Just listen and say something like "I see".

Make parents feel like you are testing them, or trying to find out how much school work they do with their children.

Make assumptions about a parent's relationship with the school and their own experience with the education system in general.