Punctuality and Attendance in the Early Years

This leaflet supports the commitments of the Early Years Foundation Stage:
- Parents as Partners
- Health and Well-being
- The Wider Context
Why is good punctuality and attendance important?

Research shows that children with poor attendance are at a disadvantage later in life.

They often
- find it harder to make and maintain friendships
- are less likely to gain good qualifications
- earn lower wages
- have a higher chance of being unemployed
- have low self-esteem *

Poor attendance and punctuality, even at the earliest age, can affect achievement in later life. Establishing good habits from the start helps children to settle more quickly into new settings and routines.

Whilst the legal requirements for attendance do not apply to children under 5, regular routines for young children support the settling-in process and enhance their sense of security. They can also foster good habits for children’s later life. Even if a child only has a part-time place regular attendance is still important.

As Islington’s primary school attendance figures are worryingly low, and poor attendance is known to be associated with poor educational achievement, this is an important message to get across to parents and carers so that they can support their children to make the most of their potential.

This leaflet includes some ideas and points for further discussion to help support practitioners in working with children and families.

What can be done to promote good punctuality and attendance in your setting?

1. Forming good relationships

Children’s and families’ perceptions and experiences of childcare are important for promoting good attendance. Good relationships and communication
between families and practitioners are key to making a child’s time in a setting happy and rewarding.

A positive relationship will enable practitioners and parents to talk in a constructive way about issues of lateness or irregular attendance.

It is really important to follow up on poor punctuality or attendance with parents and carers in a way that is sensitive and supportive. Parents and children who often come into school late may already feel harassed and judged. Talking to the parent at a later time when they feel calmer will be much more productive than doing so straight away.

The parent may have very young children and/or a new baby, which makes leaving the house on time very difficult. Try to find ways you can support parents: for example, by pairing them up with another parent who lives nearby, who may sometimes bring in the child.

It is important that settings communicate clear expectations about punctuality and attendance to the family before the child starts. Some settings require parents to sign an agreement, which sets out the expectations and the steps the setting takes to follow up on any issues.

Ask parents to telephone on the day if their child is absent. If the parent does not let you know, follow up all absences with a telephone call on the day. This is not about checking up on families but rather about ensuring that the child is safe and well.

2. Explaining the Early Years Foundation Stage – ‘Play is Children’s Work’

Many parents (especially some from different ethnic/cultural groups where young children are generally at home with their parents until five or six) may not be aware of the importance and benefits of play in early years education, or that the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is a statutory document.

They may be unaware that any absence or late arrival at the setting can affect the child’s ability to fully participate and benefit from the day’s activities.

Meetings for parents to discuss the EYFS and the practice and routines in your setting can give them the information they need and allow them to value the importance of play in their child’s development.

3. Environment

Many different families use our early years settings and schools and they all need to feel welcomed and valued. Posters reflecting the ethnicity and languages of the families that use the setting are one example of how to do this.
Some settings have a parents’ room to encourage parents to become more involved in the setting. In turn, this can result in better attendance for their children.

Breakfast clubs at primary schools are also an effective way of improving punctuality and attendance.

**Remember!**

- Regular attendance and good punctuality are important for maximising achievement and obtaining the greatest benefit from education.
- Good relationships with children and their families are vital in encouraging regular attendance and punctuality.
- Children settle well and want to attend settings when they feel valued and have a sense of belonging.
- Praising good attendance and punctuality is likely to promote continued regular and punctual attendance.

- The way that staff respond to families where there are patterns of lateness is crucial in affecting punctuality and attendance. Make sure that absence is followed up on every occasion.
- Parents/carers and settings need to respect and value each other and work collaboratively.
- Many parents will need support at times to feel confident and empowered in their skills to meet the challenge of parenting.
- Good habits of attendance and punctuality are key skills for adult life.


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