

What works to promote development in the early years of life: A focus on disadvantage

Engaging with disadvantaged communities

To close the disadvantage gap, first we need to identify and then engage the families most needing support. The Early Intervention Foundation conducted a literature review of the available evidence about how to engage disadvantaged and vulnerable parents, (Inês Pote, 2019). They summarise effective recruitment methods as those which provide targeted advertisement materials (so that people understand how programmes will benefit them personally), on a widespread basis. They suggest face to face meetings with parents initially and **motivational interviewing** for higher risk parents (to overcome negative expectations). Referrals can be increased through **meaningful collaborations** with partners, especially by **targeting transition stages** (e.g. a child's birth), when other agencies may have stronger relationships with the family. **Universal, preventative provision** will help to catch families before crisis point and therefore offer a greater chance of real prevention, rather than crisis management.

Improving the quality of the Home Learning Environment



We know that the Home Learning Environment is fundamental to improving outcomes for children early on. The Early Home Learning Environment Index, tested by the EPPE study (Sylva et al, 2004), proposes 7 key activities which promote learning at home:

- Parent reading to the child
- Parent taking their child to the library
- Child playing with letters
- Parent helping their child to learn the alphabet
- Parent teaching their child numbers or counting
- Parent teaching their child songs, poems or nursery rhymes
- Child painting or drawing at home

Evidence of strategies and programmes in early education

The Education Endowment Foundation summarises the strength of the evidence base behind approaches in early years interventions. The approaches with the optimum cost-evidence base ratio, and over 4 months (the size of the disadvantage gap in early years, according to the Education Policy Institute, 2017), indicated learning advances for children were:

1. **Communication and language approaches**
2. **Early literacy approaches**
3. **Early numeracy approaches**
4. **Parental engagement approaches**

Place-based social action



As one of the most widely recognised, national and publicly funded, place-based approach to early education, Sure Start Children's Centres have provided a model from which to develop. Universal provision, located in community hubs which are accessible to all, with stepped up support for specific areas of need are still one of the strongest platforms on which to promote mixing, support parents and weave in parenting skills and advice to encourage a good Home Learning Environment. This approach continues to be explored by funders, and think tanks such as The National Lottery & Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (in their [programme](#) to fund place-based social action), The King's Fund (see their [article](#) around place-based systems of care in health), and Joseph Rowntree Foundation in their [programme](#) in Bradford.

Increasing access to quality childcare provision

- "Disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially where they are with a mixture of children from different social backgrounds... Overall disadvantaged children tend to attend pre-school for shorter periods of time than those from more advantaged groups (around 4-6 months less)." (By Kathy Sylva+, 2004)
- Evidence suggests that "across all areas, children from the most disadvantaged families, who stand to gain most, are least likely to access the funded entitlements" (Muslihah Albakri, 2018), such as funded childcare for disadvantaged 2 year olds.

