

Family learning: A toolkit for libraries

Hello! This toolkit is designed for public libraries interested in delivering family learning activities as part of their commitment to the Society of Chief Librarian's Universal Offers. It contains information, ideas and inspiration about family learning, and a seven-step plan for your activities and events.



What is family learning?

LEARNING FOR DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

“Family learning” is a term used to describe activities where different generations of a family are present, and where both adults and children gain knowledge or a new skill.

AN APPROACH, NOT A SPECIFIC ACTIVITY OR EVENT

In practice, the phrase “family learning” is not often used as a phrase to promote or market activities. Rather, it is an approach applied to planning and evaluating lots of different workshops, classes and community events.

BASED ON INTERACTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Family learning is not just about individuals learning separately but in the same place. Really successful approaches encourage children and adults to help and encourage each other to learn something new.

Family learning activities often include:

- A workshop or series of workshops
- A one-off family event encouraging adults and children to try something new together
- Treasure trails or worksheets which families can do together

Notes:

Libraries have lots of experience of family learning – even if they don't label or promote activities as such. Most libraries, for example, run activities for parents/ carers and early years children which aim to get children interested in reading and stories, and give the parents tips and encouragement on how to help their kids learn.

But family learning **approach** can also be taken when providing activities for older children and other age groups too. An activity for children or adults can become a family learning activity by integrating **learning outcomes** for other family members, who may already be present during the activities but only engaging passively.

Family learning is...

- ✓ ...when adults and children (from the same family) learn together, even if they learn different things
- ✓ ...when children and adults are encouraged to interact and learn from each other
- ✓ ...fun!

Family learning is not...

- ✗ ...simply about adults teaching children, or adults being present when children learn. Adults should learn something too!
- ✗ ...**only** about activities which encourage "good parenting"
- ✗ ...just an approach to activities for parents and their babies and toddlers

Notes:



Why family learning?

There are many reasons why libraries use family learning approaches. These are a few common examples.

TO REACH NEW PEOPLE

Family learning is a great way of engaging with adults who may not regularly visit the library – as many parents and carers will be motivated to help their kids learn or try something new if it benefits their children.

TO RAISE AWARENESS OF OTHER LIBRARY SERVICES

Family learning activities can be used to signpost other activities, services and opportunities for families, adults and children. Or simply be a reminder about what the library has to offer!

Notes:

TO SUPPORT EARLY YEARS DEVELOPMENT

Supporting families with early years children is often a key focus of family learning, because this is such an important stage in their development. Reading, telling stories, and singing songs have been proved to have a positive impact on talking capabilities. Singing (with hand actions), painting, and arts and crafts have a positive impact on the development of movement skills. There is lots of evidence around how parental involvement and engagement in these activities improves the child's development,, impacts on their happiness and wellbeing, and has implications for development and socio-economic achievement in later life. However, family learning can also be targeted at families with older children too.




Inspiration!

The library in **Norfolk** ran a Family Digital Literacy course for children aged 3-4 years and accompanying adults, using learning resources available on the CBeebies website. The aim of the course was to support parents and carers to encourage early digital literacy and use apps and screens as a learning tool rather than solely for entertainment purposes.

The libraries service in **Kirklees** worked with local artist Fabric Lenny to run drawing workshops for families as part of the Big Draw programme. Across seven workshops held at different library and community centre locations, over 50 adults and children learned new drawing techniques together.

In **Lambeth**, the library made a connection with a local Polish community group to address isolation and improve access to council services. They set up a Polish-speaking Storytime in one of the libraries in an area of the borough with a high Polish population. This led to them extending and improving other offers and activities targeted at the Polish community, including an Eastern European cultural day.

Bournemouth wanted to address the issue that children are not as physical as they used to be – they are often taken from the buggy or car seat straight into the house then sit down. In response, the library worked with physiotherapists to create *Storycise* sessions, where parents and children do movements and actions to a story. Health Visitors help advertise the sessions.



Do you already do family learning?

Many family learning interventions, even if nominally targeted at children, aim to change the behaviours of the adults present, by modelling behaviours or introducing new methods and techniques such as how to communicate with children. Or, the aim might be taking more of an active interest in the children's homework, or visiting the library more.

A number of activities may already be family learning even if this term isn't used. Or, activities may have the potential to adopt a family learning approach – by ensuring there are learning benefits for both adults and children.

Here's a few examples of how a family learning approach can be applied to existing activities:

a) Storytime session for toddlers

Take a family learning approach by...

...making sure parents and carers have an active role in actions, games or songs with room for maximum interaction with their children. They may also pick up behaviours or tips from other parents.

b) Digital literacy skills for adults

Take a family learning approach by...

...basing the workshops around helping children learn and have fun online. Together, adults and children navigate online educational sites and learning resources for children. Children learn from the content of the sites, and adults learn about how to use the internet to help their children have fun and learn new things.

c) "Nature trail" for primary school aged children

Take a family learning approach by...

...including facts and information for adults to pass onto children about the things they find on the trail. This will encourage interaction and communication between children adults during the activity.



Family learning: A seven-step plan



Purpose and
aims

1

Partnerships and
collaboration

3

Timings and
key dates

5

Measuring and
evaluating
impact

7

Participants
and target
audience


2

Planning
content and
format

4

Publicity and
marketing

6



1. Purpose and aims

First, think about the issue you want to focus on.

Has a need or a gap in knowledge and skills amongst children or adults been identified, perhaps by the local authority or local schools, such as healthy living or digital skills?

Do different groups in the community have a specific need, or is there a particular time you want to engage families such as during school holidays?

At the end of the activity, what do you hope will have changed for adults and children? What will they learn both directly and indirectly from engaging in the experience?

You may want to think about these questions in consultation with colleagues, partners, or local groups (for more about working with partners see the next section).

Family learning and SCL's Universal Offers

Family learning approaches can be integrated with many of SCL's Universal Offers beyond the learning offer.

Your events may be aimed at encouraging families to read together, improving digital skills amongst adults who can then help their children online at home, giving adults and children new insights and tips for healthy living, signposting information that will be useful for family life, and encouraging new attitudes to culture and community life.

Notes:



2. Participants: Who are the audience?

The aims of your family learning activity, and the issue you want to address, will inform whether you reach out to specific groups in the community, or aim to attract as many people as possible to participate.

CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES. The nature and content activities will undoubtedly depend on the age of the children involved. ASCEL's children's library journeys framework provides a helpful way to think about the needs of children at different age. At each stage, what can parents and carers learn to support their children?

THE ADULT FAMILY MEMBERS. Family learning activities may include grandparents, guardians, childminders, foster parents, older siblings, uncles, aunts and even neighbours or family friends. Some activities may be tailored for certain adults, such as young parents, grandparents or dads to attend with their children.

Family learning and ASCEL's children's library journeys

This framework highlights the key interactions public libraries should have with children as they grow, at the following life stages:

- Pre-school
- Transitioning to primary school
- Primary school
- Transitioning to secondary school
- Secondary school

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FAMILIES. Remember, not all families will consist of traditional "mother" and "father" roles. Depending on the partners you are working with you may be tailoring your activities for lone-parent families or same-sex parents.

SPECIAL NEEDS. You may have identified the aims and focus of your learning event as providing an activity or service to families with special needs, such as children with autism or a grandparent with dementia.



3. Partnerships and collaboration

Do you have the experience, expertise and capacity amongst library staff to plan and deliver the activities? Or do you want to work with another organisation, the Council, a professional facilitator, or a community group?

Many libraries open their doors to community groups, or commission professional facilitators or experts (such as artists, coding clubs, or health workers) to lead the activities.

You could work with others to:

- Think about the aims and purpose of the family learning event or activity
- Collaborate on planning and logistics
- Promote the activity or event to your intended audience
- Deliver or facilitate the event or activity

Local stakeholders you could consider working with include:

Primary schools
Nurseries
Children's centres
After school clubs
GP surgeries
Health visitors

Social workers
Housing associations
Local charities
Job centres
Community support groups

Notes:



4. Planning content and format

The aims and issues you identified may influence the activity itself, but then again it might not! For example, if the aim is encouraging reading then your event may be based around adults and children reading stories together, or designing a costume based on the story, or playing a game about popular books.

On the other hand, if the aim is to engage with families that don't access the library often or are at

risk of social isolation, then the exact nature of the activity could be anything! Just remember to think about the potential learning outcomes for both the adults and the children.

The same family learning activity can be hosted at different libraries in the library authority, but you may wish to tailor the activity slightly depending on the place, or choose the location based on your intended audience.

Types of activity

Family learning can happen across lots of different activities and events, including:

ONE-OFF WORKSHOPS – such as a half-term arts workshop which may be facilitated by a practitioner or subject expert, or by library staff.

REGULAR EVENTS OR A SERIES OF CLASSES – such as regular weekly Storytime sessions which may be run regularly by library staff.

COMMUNITY EVENTS – such as a fun day which encourages family members to drop in to try out new activities together.

WORKSHEETS OR "TRAILS" – which families can undertake in their own time. This may be part of a specific activity day or over the school holidays.

Or, they can be a mixture of the above. For example:

A community event is used as a way to trial the popularity of a learning activity and sign families up for a series of regular workshops.

A professional facilitator delivers a workshop during half term, and also helps design materials that families can do themselves when visiting the library during term-time.

5. Timings and key dates

Thinking about when to host the event will naturally depend somewhat on who you want to involve. Family learning events targeted at families with school-aged children are often programmed during the school holidays, whilst activities for families with early-years children may happen during the day in term time.

Family learning activities are often integrated with community events and “hooks” already taking place such as Science Week, the Big Draw, or the Summer Reading Challenge for example. These are great opportunities to engage with families who may not usually come to the library together,

Notes:

SCL have a comprehensive calendar of events taking place throughout the year that relate to the six Universal Offers. **Here’s just a few ideas:**

JANUARY National Storytelling Week Chinese New Year	FEBRUARY Safer Internet Day FairTrade Fortnight
APRIL World Health Day Earth Day Easter	MAY British Science Week Dementia Awareness Week Local and Community History Month National Walking Month
JUNE Carers Week Fathers’ Story Week Festival of Learning Empathy Day Eid el-fitr	OCTOBER Fun Palace Weekend Family Learning Festival Get Online Week The Big Draw My Family Week Diwali

6. Publicity and marketing

Most family learning activities and events are not described as “family learning” in publicity and promotional materials. Instead, many libraries use language such as “adults welcome” or “an event for all the family” to indicate that different generations will benefit and have fun together.

As well as the communication channels and networks you usually use to promote library activities (such as local schools) working with different partners may help you reach out to new families. There are also LOTS opportunities to promote family learning events online.

Notes:

Popular events listings websites

EVENTBRITE – a free events listings website where you can list the date, venues and details of the event and track registration. Users can browse forthcoming events by location and category, for example “Family and education”.
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/d/united-kingdom/family-and-education--events/?crt=regular&sort=best>

MEETUP – a site hosting different interest groups and social clubs which anyone can join. Users can browse groups by location and interests, for example “Family”.
<https://www.meetup.com/find/parents-family/>

GUMTREE – a UK-wide classifieds listings site which includes a section on community groups and events.
<https://www.gumtree.com/community>

Using social media such as Facebook and Twitter are also good ways to promote your event to local families. Perhaps you could promote a “teaser” of the event, such as a short video of the workshop facilitator talking about what you will do, or quotes from a parent or family who attended a previous similar event.



7. Measuring and evaluating impact

It may seem a challenge to measure the impact of the events – and the approach you take will be different for different types of activities, and whether they are run as a one-off event or as a regular series. Some outcomes can be measured through a questionnaire with participants directly after the event. Others may require follow up at a later date or observational insights from library staff and your partner organisations over a number of months.

DIRECT KNOWLEDGE OR SKILLS DEVELOPED

What have the children learned or improved? And what have the adults learned? Remember, this may vary between adults and children – children may have learned new words for example, while the adults present may have learned a new technique for helping their kids read out loud. On the other hand, adults and children may have learned the same thing – such as how to code!

IMPROVEMENTS IN FAMILY/ SOCIAL LIFE

What are the adults more likely to do at home or elsewhere with their children as a result of having participated in the activity? And how has changed the way that children relate to the subject area, engage with adults, or view the library setting? Have the adults and children who have participated met new friends?

WIDER EFFECTS ON THE COMMUNITY

Do you have an increase in participation in other library or community events? Are there improvements in community cohesion or social mixing?

Family learning planner template

	WHEN?	DATE
Identify the issue, need and aims <i>Tip - Why not have an ideas board or suggestions box in the library to find out what families would like to do or learn more about!</i>	3+ months before	
Identify partner(s) or facilitator	3+ months before	
Meet with partner and start planning	3+ months before	
Agree outcomes you want to measure <i>Tip - Remember, different age groups don't have to learn exactly the same thing. Think about how adults and children each benefit from the experience.</i>	3+ months before	
Agree date	2+ months before	
Book space	2+ months before	
Finalise activity plan	2+ months before	
Design feedback/ evaluation questionnaire	2+ months before	
Publicise the event(s) <i>Tip - Encouraging library visitors to sign up to an email newsletter or a Facebook page will mean that you can keep families up to date with the latest updates.</i>	1+ month before	
Circulate evaluation/ feedback questionnaire <i>Tip - Evaluation questionnaires don't have to be boring or an afterthought, but can also be something which adults and children complete together.</i>	At/ after the event	
Follow up meeting with partners	After the event	































Notes:

Sample checklist: Purpose and aims

	CHILDREN	ADULTS
Improve literacy skills		
Read more frequently		
Improve numeracy skills		
Improve language and communication		
Gain knowledge about topics such as languages, sciences, history or nature		
Gain knowledge about different cultures and faiths		
Are more likely to engage with other community events or activities		
Learn new skills such as arts and crafts, digital making and coding, music		
Develop parenting skills or techniques		
Develop social skills, and are supported in their emotional development		
Repeat the activity together at home		
Know where to find information about other services		
Meet and interact with other families		
Love coming to the library!		

Notes:

Sample feedback questionnaire

	CHILDREN			ADULTS		
Did you enjoy the event today?	 Yes	 Maybe	 No	 Yes	 Maybe	 No
Tell us one new thing you learned today						
Will you do the activity again together at home?	 Yes	 Maybe	 No	 Yes	 Maybe	 No
Will you do the activity again together somewhere else?	 Yes	 Maybe	 No	 Yes	 Maybe	 No
Would you like to come to another event like this again?	 Yes	 Maybe	 No	 Yes	 Maybe	 No
Have you met any new friends today?	 Yes	 Maybe	 No	 Yes	 Maybe	 No



Find out more...

[The Experiential Library: The future of family learning](#)

Common Vision conducted a research and consultation exercise with a number of library practitioners in early 2017, and drew on academic and policy literature, case studies, qualitative interviews and impact studies to identify different types of family learning activities and where libraries can provide highlighted some of the social outcomes which can be achieved by applying a family learning approach to the design and delivery of existing and activities.

Notes:



Useful links

The **Society of Chief Librarians** has a downloadable calendar of events relating to the Universal Offers on the resources page of the website.

<http://goscl.com/about/resources/>

The **Family Learning Festival** is a week of events each autumn. The associated Pinterest page lists inspiration for activities.

<http://www.familylearningfestival.com/>

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/flfestival/>

BBC Skillswise has downloadable resources and materials which can be used on family learning courses.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/tutors/using-skillswise-as-a-tutor/tutors-article-family-learning>

The **National Literacy Trust's** website for parents, Words for Life, contains a number of materials and resources for parents which could be used as part of a family learning activity.

<http://www.wordsforlife.org.uk/>

Arts Council England has a list of cultural education resources which lists numerous arts organisations familiar with working with children and young people.

www.nfer.ac.uk/culturaleducationresources/search.aspx

Code Club allows you to search for local registered volunteers via its website. They may be IT professionals, university students or teachers or they may be amateur enthusiasts. <https://www.codeclub.org.uk/>

Fun Palaces encourage people to take part in arts, science, craft, tech and digital activities over a weekend each year. Their resources include a toolkit for libraries.

<http://funpalaces.co.uk/toolkit/>

The **Fatherhood Institute** has a top tips guide for attracting fathers to activities aimed at parents and families.

<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Ten-top-tips-for-attracting-fathers-to-programmes.pdf>



About Common Vision (CoVi) www.covi.org.uk

Common Vision (CoVi) is an independent, not-for-profit think tank launched in 2014. We look at issues which require long-term, intergenerational solutions and which reach beyond conventional partisan debates or sector-driven interests. We use creative and crowdsourced methods to promote civic engagement and policy understanding beyond a politically active minority, and help build a vision of society based on the common good.



About the Society of Chief Librarians www.goscl.com

The Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) leads and manages public libraries in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is made up of the head of service of every authority and takes a leading role in the development of public libraries through sharing best practice, advocating for continuous improvement on behalf of local people and leading the debate on the future of the public library service.



About Arts Council England www.artscouncil.org.uk

Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. It supports a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Between 2015 and 2018, it plans to invest £1.1 billion of public money from government and an estimated £700 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.