

## Family Learning Guidelines at a glance

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

(Paulo Friere, 1972: 3)

Literacy is constantly evolving through time and from one social context to another. That is why guidelines for good practice in family literacy in terms of organisation, practice and positive outcomes should be regularly reviewed to match each diverse set of circumstances. This process should involve all stakeholders, including learners and tutors.

What follows are **14 guidelines** around which that collaborative discussion might usefully take place:

### **1. Taking time to think about family literacy**

#### **1.1 Retain a learner-centred ethos that values parents' role**

A learner-centred ethos should underpin family literacy work. Parents are experts in their own children, and family literacy should begin from a position of enabling parents to be the best learning guides possible for their children.

#### **1.2 Identify and agree terms used in family literacy strategies**

Definitions are diverse. Like our ethos, definitions are important for who and what they include or omit. When developing a family literacy strategy, each ETB should include agreed definitions of key terms like:

- family;
- literacy;
- digital literacy;
- ESOL family literacy, and
- other relevant expressions.

#### **1.3 Focus on the value of learning relationships and resource this work**

Recognising the value of learning relationships is fundamental to adequately resourcing this time-consuming, core element of family literacy work. These learning relationships will enable more extensive and effective family literacy delivery, and ultimately they will contribute to reaching national and EU targets in lifelong learning.

#### **1.4 Celebrate achievements: learning and other**

A particularly joyful part of the adult learning process is celebrating achievements and these events should be organised to acknowledge the work of both learners and tutors.

Celebrations are both a way to recognise successes and a means of inspiring new learners.

## **2. Developing and delivering learner-centered programmes**

### **2.1 Provide a range of relevant and accessible courses for learners**

Each ETB will have its menu of family literacy activities that are published in ways that make them accessible to prospective learners. Courses may be bespoke or adapted from a wide range of existing activities like [fetchcourses.ie](https://www.fetchcourses.ie). These activities will be closely related to family, school and community interests.

### **2.2 Use a central repository of family literacy resources**

ETBs should use a central repository for all family literacy materials – when developed, and this should be centrally managed so that the provenance of ideas and materials is clear and safe storage ensured. The ETBI digital library may contribute to this collaboration. Delivery of family literacy should be sensitive to learners' needs and the learning environment should be comfortable, relaxed and accessible.

### **2.3 Prioritise access for learners with greatest need**

Those with greatest need should have priority access to family learning opportunities. Equitable strategies to engage underrepresented groups in family literacy, including men, should be designed with stakeholders so that the benefits are extended to all family members. In addition to local marketing, available learning opportunities across the country can be posted on [helpmykidlearn.ie](https://www.helpmykidlearn.ie). These posts should be regularly updated.

### **2.4 Establish clear and agreed ways to measure – and track – success at local level**

Establishing criteria for success will be part of each local family literacy strategy. Accreditation should remain optional and effective alternative measures of family literacy achievements should be shared and disseminated widely. In collaborative

family literacy partnerships, success should be measured across the partner groups. Alongside FET gains, DEIS schools, libraries, CYPSCs and others should track the successes attributable to family literacy so that a full and inclusive result can be captured.

## **2.5 Involve family literacy tutors, organisers and learner at all phases of design, delivery and promotion**

Family literacy tutors and organisers are best placed to support learners as they begin to identify the next learning steps they wish to take. Educational guidance workers are available by appointment and will speak to groups or individual learners. It is worth reminding learners that they are the most influential form of publicising family literacy to other parents. Word-of-mouth recommendations are a trusted means of information sharing particularly where people are wary of reengagement in education.

## **3. Future-proofing for flexible, responsive and appropriate family learning**

### **3.1 Remain familiar with, and contribute to, policy and research**

It is important to be clear about the policy and research context for family literacy work so that provision delivers on, and is accountable in terms of, national objectives as well as prioritising individual and group needs and interests.

### **3.2 Create and maximise family-literacy strategies that meet local needs and get the most value from funding**

Through building robust local collaborative partnerships, each ETB should develop a family-literacy strategy that answers local needs and maximises funding provided for the work.

Responsibility for leading the design, implementation and accountability of the ETB strategy should be allocated to an individual or individuals skilled in learning relationship management. DEIS schools, libraries and CYPSCs, that have family literacy goals and budgets, will be core partners.

### **3.3 Ensure there are sufficient learner supports**

Because learners benefit from opportunities for peer learning, ETBs should facilitate these opportunities in their collaborative approach to their strategic planning. An online peer chat forum might be established so that parents and others can exchange ideas and learning. Career Guidance Information Services, book-gifting and access to community childcare and transport should be available to parents, where possible.

### **3.4 Ensure there are sufficient tutor supports**

Family literacy tutors are often part-time and relatively isolated in their work. Sustaining supportive links with tutors is an important aspect of family literacy work. Ways of recompensing tutors for collaboration, administration and training need to be planned into individual ETB structures.

### **3.5 Ensure reliable data is gathered in a user-friendly way – and reported on to track learning outcomes**

Reliable data is important in tracking the full extent of family literacy delivery and outcomes. Obligations to report on family literacy, as part of ESF funding, are at the root of much of the learner registration process, and so user-friendly data collection mechanisms need to be developed and put in place both locally and nationally.

## **Conclusions**

These guidelines are a beginning rather than a limitation, and they should be used creatively by ETBs to establish and develop their own distinctive family-literacy culture. This is a sure way to engage new family literacy learners, to positively impact children's schooling and to begin to redress cycles of educational disadvantage.

The guidelines aim to strengthen existing good family literacy practice so that it reaches as many families as possible and, bit-by-bit, contributes to more literacy equality for adults and children in Ireland.