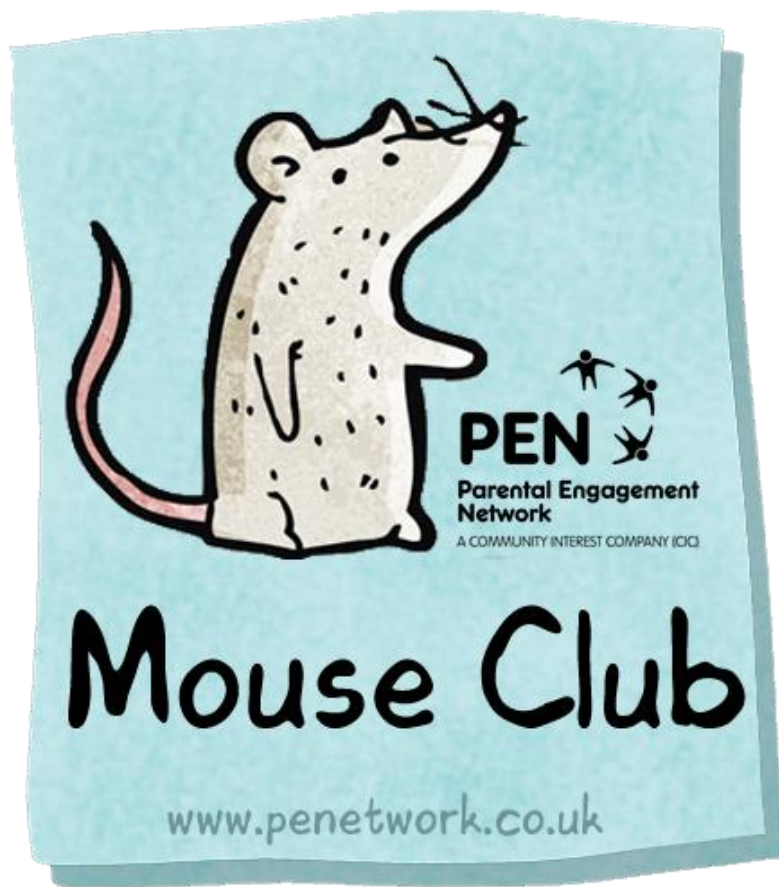




Guidance Notes

Mouse Club

Supporting transition and home learning
in the early years

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Introduction

Early years development is the foundation of human adaptability and resilience. Early experiences have a great potential to affect brain development, children can be especially vulnerable to persistent negative influences.

The early years are a window of opportunity for parents, caregivers and communities to provide positive early experiences that will have a huge effect on learning, achievement, and wellbeing.

The 'Mouse Club' project was developed to support staff to develop positive

relationships with parents/carers prior to starting in school or settings.

The project gives parents/carers the opportunity to meet school/setting staff, share their knowledge of their child, their strengths and aptitudes. Staff support the families' understanding of 'school readiness', providing opportunities for the families to meet and engage in a lot of fun activities to ensure their children are ready for learning.

Once children have begun school, staff support parents to provide a stimulating home learning environment.

Why is there a need to tackle disadvantage?

"We know from our research that by the time children start school there's already a 19-month gap between the most and least advantaged pupils. Tackling this disparity early on is critical to breaking the cycle of disadvantage and improving social mobility."

James Turner, Director of Programmes at the Sutton Trust.

Why engage parents?

What the research says:

- 'What parents do is more important than who they are for children's early development; i.e. home learning activities undertaken by parents is more important for children's intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income.'
The impact of parental involvement on a child's education DCSF (2008)
- The need to engage parents more effectively in their children's learning and the impact that learning at home can have on children's achievement.
Desforges, 2003
- Parents' involvement in home learning activities makes an important difference to children's attainment.
Sylva et al 2010, EPPE 3000 children

- To help staff build positive relationships with families particularly families that do not traditionally engage with their child's learning or school;
- To help parents understand how they can help their child get ready for and settle into school (including sleep, healthy diet, play, developing routines etc.);

- To give parents the opportunity to develop their confidence and skills to support their children's learning;
- To help parents build relationships and support each other.



The project has been developed on the premise that school/setting staff will develop and sustain effective working relationships with parents and carers. The parents are the first educators and they know their children best.

All aspects of the project are initially **modelled** (shown, discussed, explained), followed by the families actually doing the home learning activities together with their child in a Stay and Play, being **mentored** by the school/setting staff. The activities are then taken home and the families do the activities with their child and the staff **coach** by asking how they are going, encouraging, praising, chatting about how to develop the ideas.

Model	Mentor	Coach
Introduce the activities and show (model) parents how to do them. Clearly explain the positive benefits of the activity.	Support and encourage (mentor) the parents to do the activity with their family. Let the parents practise the activity first to build confidence before they to do it with their child.	The family then take the activities home. Keep the lines of communication open. Check how things are going and whether any support is needed (coaching) .
Show : Explain : Inform	Support : Encourage : Praise	Ask : Listen : Suggest

Strategies for Mouse Club

Home visiting

To meet the family, introductions, opportunity to chat about child, talk about Mouse, and any specific support/needs prior to starting at school/setting e.g. Toilet Training.

A 1:1 meeting with the family is very important as part of **building positive relationships** with families.

Some schools have taken the opportunity to support their induction information with some resources to support Mouse Club activities e.g.:

- Knife and fork
- Crayons and paper
- Scissors
- Toothbrush and toothpaste

Leaflets for parents getting children school-ready

To support the Home Visit/1:1 meeting, to go through with parents, providing a scaffold for

discussion, left with the parents. Can be made widely available for families to pick up if required.

Mouse Club Stay and Play Sessions

Following the home visits deliver 2 or 3 stay and play sessions prior to the children starting at school/setting.

It is very important to do the Home visits/1:1 and the Stay and Play sessions before the children start as it gives the parents/carers time to do the activities with their children prior to starting. It is the parents/cares role to prepare their children for change!

The sessions provide the opportunity for school/setting staff to familiarise the families with the routines and 'how we learn' and what parents/carers

can do to support their child's learning.

Staff will **model the Mouse Club activities** for the families, the opportunity is given to them to do the activities with their child. The school/setting staff will support the families to engage in the activities – **mentoring**.

All the families are given the Mouse activity to take home and do together, before meeting again at the next stay and play. The staff will ask the families how they have got on, feedback, pictures to start the learning journeys, post into 2Simple/Tapestry or via a group email etc.

Mouse activities

The Mouse activity sheets are sent home with the families for them to do together. The importance of having a home

environment that supports learning **cannot be underestimated.**

Communication

TOP TIP - personalise as much communication as possible! Use parents' names; do not talk to them through their child (e.g. Alfie's mum)

To build and maintain relationships it is important to facilitate families being able to share the learning that they do at home with staff in the school or setting. An essential part of engaging families who are often reluctant to engage is to have opportunities to support, praise and encourage participation.

Schools have set up email groups, specifically for Mouse Club, encouraged families to send photographs/videos that can be added to their child's learning journey/portfolio, school app and texting.

Current practice

What do you currently do with families before children start school? What do you know works well for your community?

Mouse Club is a flexible resource, if the important elements of

building relationships, working in partnership and the model, mentor, coaching framework is used, Mouse Club can enhance your current programme.



Some examples of how schools have implemented Mouse Club:

Trial school: Medlock

- The little girl had no bedtime and there were lots of concerns. The staff gave her mother Mouse, routine charts and toileting charts;
- She took Mouse to bed and got into routines with Mouse. Her

concerns became Mouse's concerns. It led to a great dialogue with the family and the child is progressing well with much better routines.

Stanley Grove

- Rolled the project out to 60 children in the nursery;
- 85% attended the workshops, did activities and got key messages through the tip sheets;
- Children loved getting Mouse ready for school;

- Big impact on the nursery – established relationships and communication;
- Children better prepared: Previous year 30 children were not toilet trained – after Mouse Club it was 3.

Case study: St Margaret's

- Home visited the families in May/June
- From the home visits identified the target families
- Invited the targeted families to the workshops in June/July
- Targeted families helped to roll the workshops and mouse activities out to other nursery families in September



Case study: Cheetwood

- Ran the introductory workshops for all the class in June – gave everyone activities and mice;
- Home visited targeted families and followed up progress in July and September.