

'Families are the main context of learning for most people. Learning within the family is usually more lasting and influential than any other. Family life provides a foundation and context for all learning.'

*Riches beyond price: making the most of family learning, NIACE, 1995*

## What is Family Learning?

Family Learning describes a whole range of activities and programmes where parents, grandparents, children and carers are involved in learning. Sometimes it involves the adults and children learning together at the same time. Sometimes it involves the different age groups meeting separately in order to learn and understand more about living with, communicating with and taking care of each other.

A policy discussion paper published by NIACE in 1995 "Riches Beyond Price" identified five distinct aspects of family learning:

- ◆ informal learning within the family
- ◆ family members learning together
- ◆ learning about roles, relationships and responsibilities within the different stages of family life
- ◆ learning how to understand, take responsibility and make decisions in relation to the wider society, where the family is a foundation for citizenship
- ◆ learning how to deal with the agencies and organisations that serve or impinge upon families, such as schools, health services, social services, voluntary organisations and the criminal justice system

Family learning therefore encompasses family literacy, family numeracy, family IT, classes and activities for families, courses in parenting such as living with teenagers, playing with your child, helping your child learn, dealing with your child's school, understanding about drugs etc.

This is the fifth in a series of briefing sheets which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues

Also available:

1. A history of the development of NIACE
2. What motivates people to learn
3. Student non-completion (drop out)
4. Who learns - key facts

Suggestions for future issues to be covered are welcome.

Copies of this and other sheets are available from NIACE, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GE.  
Tel. No. 0116 2044 261  
E-mail: [information@niace.org.uk](mailto:information@niace.org.uk)

They are also available on the website at [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

If you require a different format - e.g. a large print version please let us know.

## Who is involved in Family Learning?

Much family learning happens informally in the home. Watching a TV programme together and talking about it afterwards; using a program on the computer together; learning the piano together. All these activities involve learning. All are at their best when parents and children are relaxed and at ease.

Many agencies and organisations are involved in providing or supporting family learning. These include pre school groups, schools, local authority adult and community education services, further education colleges, universities, community centres and projects, voluntary organisations, libraries, museums and arts centres, clubs and societies, religious and cultural organisations and leisure services. For some, the provision of learning opportunities - either for adults or for children - is their main purpose. For others their primary function may be something else: to support young families under stress for example, or to provide entertainment, or to secure commitment to a particular faith or leisure pursuit. But in doing this, they also enable adults and children to learn.

It is important therefore to take a very broad view of:

- ◆ where family learning happens
- ◆ the curriculum content of family learning
- ◆ the methods used

## What is NIACE's particular interest in family learning?

NIACE is interested in all contexts and settings where adults learn - in the family, in the home, at work and in the community as well as in centres, colleges and universities.

NIACE is also interested in what motivates adults to learn. There is no doubt that being a parent often rekindles the interest of adults in learning, either because they want to be able to support their child at school and they want to know how best to do this; or because they become more interested in the kind of environment they are bringing their children up in, and this can lead to involvement in activities in the community and foster a sense of citizenship.

NIACE is particularly interested in breaking down the barriers that get in the way of adults learning. For many adults having young children at home can

stop them going out to a class. Family classes and activities can provide a place where adults and children can go together to learn and to have fun. Making learning fun can open people's minds to learning in a way they previously thought impossible. Finally NIACE is committed to lifelong learning and establishing a culture of learning. Building a shared interest in learning in the family provides a good foundation for an interest in lifelong learning.

## What is NIACE doing in family learning?

Currently NIACE liaises regularly with some of the agencies and organisations listed overleaf and attends relevant network meetings, launches and conferences. NIACE also ensures that one conference each year is on the theme of family learning.

NIACE is currently seeking funding for two projects. The first of these being an research, information gathering and networking project to identify and make contact with all the key players in family learning and to map the contribution of each in more detail. The second is a partnership project involving work with parents to build the confidence, communication skills and self esteem which may reduce the risk of abuse and mistreatment of their children.

NIACE believes there is a need for a national forum for family learning which can maintain its profile, extend its scope and encourage networking and innovative approaches to providing or supporting family learning.

## Where you can find out more?

Below are some of **the national organisations** which have an interest in one aspect or another of family learning. There are also countless services, organisations and networks **operating regionally and locally**, such as the London Language and Literacy Unit which provides a range of programmes for parents and children across London.

**The Basic Skills Agency** - Commonwealth House, 1-19 New Oxford Street, London, WC1A 1NU. Tel: 0171 4054017 Web Site: <http://www.basic-skills.co.uk>. *Advice and support for family literacy and numeracy programmes*

**The Campaign for Learning** - 19 Buckingham Street, London, WC2 6EF. Tel: 0171 930 1111 Web Site: <http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk>. *Promote learning in all forms, organise a Family Learning Day in September each year*

**Community Education Development Centre (CEDC)** - Woodway Park School, Wigston, Coventry, CV2 2RH. Tel: 01203 655700. *Run a number of programmes with local authorities on working with parents to support their children's schooling*

**Homestart UK** - see local telephone directory *provide home and group based support for families with children under five under stress*

**National Children's Bureau** - 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE Tel: 171 843 6000 Web Site: <http://www.ncb.org.uk>. *Share knowledge and raise awareness of all the issues which affect children*

**National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty for Children (NSPCC)** - National Centre, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH. Tel: 0171 825 2500. Web Site: <http://www.nspcc.org.uk>. *Works with parents and children in ways which reduce the risk of abuse and harm to the children*

**Newpin** - Sutherland House, 35 Sutherland Square, London, SE17 3EE. Tel: 0171 703 6326. *Provide home and group based support for families with children under five under stress*

**Parent Network & Exploring Parenthood** - both organisations which provide information advice and training for parents

**The Parenting Education and Support Forum & The National Home School Development Group** - both networks of agencies organisations and providers with a common interest purpose

**Pre School Learning Alliance** - 69 Kings Cross Road, London, WC1X 9LL. Tel: 0171 833 0991 *Provide information, advice, support and training for parents running pre school playgroups across the country*

**Riches beyond price: making the most of family learning** Titus Alexander and Peter Clyne. NIACE. 1995. ISBN 1 872941699. £5.00

**Family learning: foundation of effective learning** Titus Alexander. DEMOS. 1997. ISBN 1898309981. £7.95

**Adults learning in pre-schools** Veronica McGivney. NIACE, in association with the Pre-school Learning Alliance. 1998. ISBN 1862010404. £6.00

**Learning in the family** Peter Barnes, Martin Woodhead and Peter Woods. Open University Press. 1981. ISBN 033513002X

**Upstairs - downstairs** Chris Chew and John Platten. Adults learning. Oct 1998 Vol 10 No 2 p6

**Families as learning environments for children** edited by Luis M. Laosa and Irving E. Sigel. Plenum. 1982. ISBN 0306409399

**Learning together** Wendy Cole and Sue Goodhand 1997

**Writing: the golden thread in family learning** Ian Goethel. Adults learning. Nov 1995 Vol 7 No 2 p26

**Learning to play - playing to learn.** Bridget Lyne. The Exceptional parent. Oct 1997 Vol 27 No 10 p25

**An adult learns to read: a family affair** Margaret Moulton and Vicki Holmes. Journal of reading. Apr 1995 Vol 38 No 7 p542

**Older adults and family learning** Jane Reynolds. Adults learning. Mar 1997 Vol 8 No 7 p182

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient resources.

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## Resources for Family Learning