



Helping vulnerable parents to support their children transitioning back to school

Within education, the children and young people we serve are obviously our primary focus. However, children and young people do not exist in a vacuum. They are part of a range of systems. We can consider these systems surrounding a child or young person from Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystemic Model (1979):

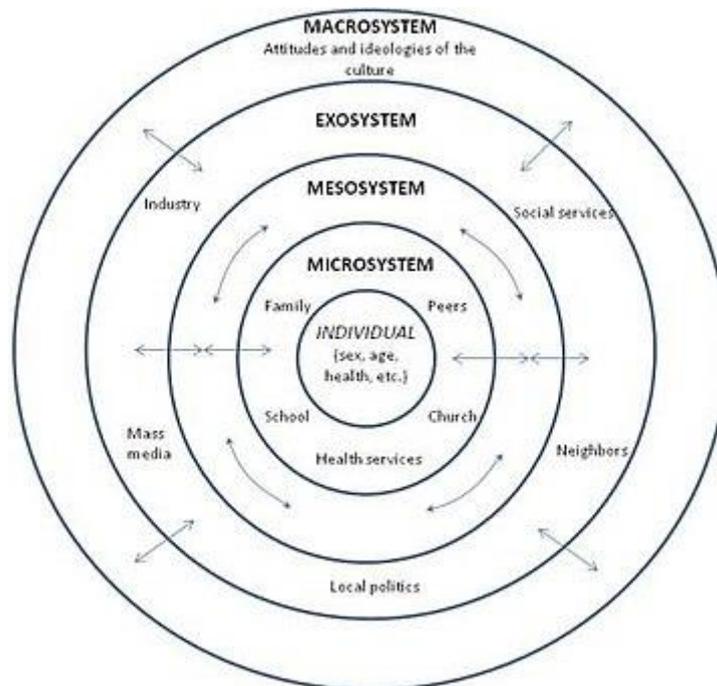


Figure 1. The Ecosystemic model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

As can be seen from Figure 1 there are five levels to this model, and it is important to consider all of them when thinking how best to support a child or young person. One might consider the microsystem to be the support system for the child or young person. We must however as professionals consider how we can support members of the microsystem in order to allow them to best support the child or young person at the centre of the system.

This information sheet focuses on supporting children and young people by considering the needs of their parents who may be considered as vulnerable themselves. More specifically parents who may have learning disabilities, a neurodevelopmental condition, literacy needs, or parents who have enduring mental health or physical health needs. This support will be especially critical as we prepare for children to return to school in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis.



Below are some different ideas about supporting vulnerable parents to manage the transition back to school but it is by no means an exhaustive list. The best way to meet

Different vulnerable parent groups and potential areas of need:

Parents with learning disabilities, social communication needs or literacy difficulties –

1. Parents in these groups may experience difficulties with the volume and complexity of information communicated to them regarding their child/children's transition back to school.
2. Parents in these groups may also struggle to communicate or advocate their needs to the school.
3. The change in routine from social distancing might be extremely challenging to manage and cause a great deal of anxiety

Parents with mental health needs –

1. Parents within this group may have specific anxieties about allowing their children to school and the associated risks relating to Covid-19.
2. The volume of information given to them and specific changes relating to school may feel overwhelming.
3. These parents may also find it very challenging to managing their child's anxieties and frustrations regarding returning to school.

Parents with physical health needs –

1. Parents from this group may be especially vulnerable to the ongoing health related challenges that we face due to Covid-19.

It will be important for schools to support these parents by ensuring their children follow all necessary hand hygiene processes when returning home from school.



the needs of a given parent is to make time to discuss and identify reasonable adjustments to support them.

Support for parents with learning disabilities, social communication needs or literacy difficulties

1. Develop easy read letters to communicate information to these parents where possible use Arial, Font 14 for the text. Make sure sentences are short, using concrete information and only contain one piece of key information. Support the written information with pictures where possible.
2. Avoid using Jargon either in written or verbal communications.
3. If transition is staggered for different age groups be sure to provide colour coded visual timetables so that parents can easily follow when their children are expected to be in school.
4. Where possible ensure the parents have a contact person within the school who they feel comfortable to approach if they have any questions.
5. Ensure any changes are announced in advance where possible to allow parents time to process them and seek support from the school if required.
6. Allow parents/carers time to process information.
7. Be sure to allow enough time when you are giving information to parents or carers over the phone or in person.
8. Identify any support systems the parent/carer has and communicate key information to them with signed prior consent from the individual.
9. Ensure children are accessing support from Young Carers where appropriate.

Parents with mental health needs

1. Support the parent to understand the process school is taking to manage the health and wellbeing of all people within the school.
2. If transition back to school is staggered for different age groups be sure to provide easy to follow guidance so that parents can follow it and not feel overwhelmed at what will be a potentially anxiety provoking time.
3. Provide practical guidance about maintaining hand hygiene and other protective steps when transitioning between school and home. This may help to reduce anxieties at transition points during the day.
4. Monitoring student wellbeing and provide practical advice on managing any mental health needs of the child as well as the parents.
5. Where possible ensure the parents have a contact person within the school who they feel comfortable to approach if they have any questions.
6. Ensure the parent engages with any existing support resources and networks to help them manage transitions.
7. Ensure children are accessing support from Young Carers where appropriate.

Parents with physical health needs



1. Follow any necessary protective processes and risk assessment to safeguard the parents under the advice of primary health care professionals supporting them.
2. Ensure the children follow all hand hygiene procedures thoroughly at school and ensure they have a clear process to maintain hygiene when returning home.
3. Ensure children are accessing support from Young Carers where appropriate.

Table of resources

Parents with Mental Health Needs	The Mind Guide to parenting with a mental health problem (2019)
Parents with Learning Disabilities	Supporting Parents with Learning Disabilities – CHANGE Good Practice Guidance (2006) Good Practice Guidance on Working with Parents with Learning Disabilities Bristol University, Esme Fairbairn Foundation (2007)