

# SUPPORTING PARENTS IN GMGY

## SUPPORT MATERIALS - GMGY



### WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN GMGY?

The GMGY curriculum recognises the parent as the primary educator of their child and as such identifies the parent as a partner in their child's education. This support material uses the term 'parent' to refer to the child's primary caregivers. These include a father and/or mother, and/or guardians.

GMGY is a multi-belief and values curriculum and as such enables parents to nurture and support the development of the values and beliefs of their child by engaging in a reciprocal relationship with the school. The curriculum enables children to explore and discuss their own life experiences and develop a greater understanding of these experiences through engagement with the home in a structured manner.

Belief-nurturing is an important pedagogy in GMGY. It is used in strand 4: Beliefs and religions. As part of this pedagogy the parents and the school work in partnership to nurture a child in their belief. This belief can be a religious or non-religious belief.



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Parents are given the opportunity to contribute to their child's learning in relation to the Beliefs and religions strand. The school offer an introduction to the topic using a pluralist approach to religious education.

Parents are then given opportunity to complete a Family Project which enables parents to pass on the beliefs of the family to their child and to develop their child's personal understanding of their belief. The school enables the child to express this belief in their classroom by facilitating 'inter-belief dialogue'.

Parents are the primary educators of their children and as such parents have the right to withdraw their children from instruction in GMGY, however it is recommended that before a decision would be made to do so, the school would engage in a dialogue with the parents to see if an agreement can be reached regarding the provision of GMGY.



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### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS IN GMGY?

To feel more secure and benefit from the educational opportunities given to them.	To understand better the children and families in their school and use this information to make learning more enjoyable and rewarding for all children.	To feel valued and respected.
To move from home to school with greater confidence.	To help children develop a sense of identity and belonging in the school by actively engaging with and finding out about family values, traditions and beliefs, and building on these where appropriate.	To become more involved in their children's learning and development.
To see learning as more enjoyable when their home life is 'visible' in the setting.		To feel their family's values, practices, traditions and beliefs are understood and taken into account.
To enjoy hearing and seeing their families' values and beliefs in the school.	Support parents in the process of 'belief nurturing' through informing parents about the Family Projects and facilitating inter-belief dialogue in the classroom.	To feel comfortable visiting the school, talking to and supporting the teachers.
To enable the children to discuss their beliefs and values with their parents.		To know more about their children's experiences outside the home and use this information to support their learning and development more effectively.
		To nurture the beliefs and values of their child more confidently.

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### HOW CAN I SUPPORT PARENTS IN RELATION TO THEIR CHILD'S LEARNING IN GMGY?

There are many ways teachers and schools can support parents in their role as partners in education in GMGY. The following section aims to assist teachers and principals in ensuring the formation of strong parent-teacher partnerships for GMGY. Schools are encouraged to develop communication methods that best meet the needs of their individual school. The following questions aim to initiate conversation and consideration as to how schools might continue to foster parent partnerships.

#### Questions for the Principal and the GMGY Co-ordinator

1. Are parents informed about GMGY and the values it promotes during school enrolment evenings, open evenings and parent teacher meetings?
2. Do we have a GMGY notice board which informs parents about upcoming GMGY events? This could be in the school building or on the school website.
3. Do we have a 'Belief Space' where symbols of all beliefs in the school community are represented?
4. Do we involve parents and community members in policy writing in relation to GMGY?
5. Do we discuss GMGY regularly at staff meetings and Board of

Management meetings?

6. Do we encourage teachers to inform parents about GMGY lessons taking place in school through regular forms of communication?
7. Do we regularly check that teachers are sending home the Family Project aspect of Beliefs and religions lessons?
8. Do we meet with parents who want to discuss GMGY?

#### Questions for classroom teachers

1. Do I inform all parents in my class about the GMGY curriculum and refer them to the GMGY website if they wish to access the curriculum?
2. Do I let parents know what GMGY element is being covered in my class?
3. Do I meet with parents who have any questions about GMGY?
4. Do I have a GMGY display in my classroom that is updated regularly so parents and children can see what we are learning?
5. Do I send home the Family Project at the end of each Beliefs and religions lesson and check that parents have signed the project if the child brings it back to school to present it to their peers?
6. Am I familiar with the GMGY policy in my school (if one exists)?
7. Do I raise any questions or concerns I have about GMGY with my Principal or GMGY Co-ordinator?
8. Do I invite parents into the classroom, where possible, to enhance learning in the GMGY lesson?
9. Do I ensure parents are aware of the values promoted in GMGY?

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## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO PARENT AND TEACHER PARTNERSHIPS?

There are barriers to developing parent-teacher partnerships. Teachers should appreciate that every positive interchange will serve to increase trust and build stronger relationships, not only with individual parents, but ultimately with the broader community as well.

Schools are often a natural point of interaction with parents and because of this they become a vibrant part of the community (Graham-Clay, 2005).

Cultural differences can create significant communication challenges if teachers use their own cultural lenses to interact with culturally- and linguistically-diverse parents (Colombo, 2004). To address this potential disconnect, teachers need to seek out information to understand the cultural and linguistic diversity reflected in the families of their pupils. This knowledge and appreciation can be demonstrated by celebrating the various cultural traditions of their pupils, by incorporating



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speakers from the community, by appreciating the difficulties faced by immigrant parents, and by seeking out interpreter services as needed (Lai & Ishiyama, 2004).

However, knowledge regarding a culture is not sufficient according to Kasahara and Turnbull (2005). The research noted that professionals must also seek to understand the uniqueness of each family based on their own reality within their cultural milieu. The time and effort invested by teachers to research and better understand the cultures reflected in their school community can only serve to enhance partnership opportunities (Graham-Clay, 2005).

Other barriers to effective partnerships include: parents' literacy levels, economic and time constraints, and lack of technology; teachers should never assume that students have access to technology at home (Ramirez, 2001). These barriers can be present in any school but are generally more pronounced in areas of social and economic disadvantage.

## HOW CAN I REACH OUT TO DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES?

Many schools believe that it is important to engage children's parents and their families in order to support children effectively in their education. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that schools who took this view provided services such as:

- courses to help parents understand how to improve their children's reading
- access to lap-top computers/desktop computers for the whole family to use
- events to encourage fathers to become involved in their son's schooling (Northern Ireland Assembly , 2010).

Research conducted on behalf of the Department of Education in Northern Ireland found that schools serving disadvantaged communities and performing better than might be expected recognised that encouraging parental involvement is a key factor in raising attainment (Department of Education, NI, 2008).

A research project conducted by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services found that engaging with the wider community was considered to be essential in schools where improvements in learning outcomes were brought about. The study found that the leaders of such schools had developed positive relationships with community leaders and had built a network of links to other organisations and individuals (Day, et al., 2009).

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