



HM Government



# Improving the home learning environment

A behaviour change approach

November 2018

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## Summary

This publication is a policy document setting out the evidence base underpinning the Government's behaviour change model to improve the home learning environment.

## Expiry or review date

This guidance will be reviewed before November 2019.

## Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for:

- Businesses
- Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations
- Early Years settings and experts.

## Introduction

The Rt. Hon Damian Hinds, Secretary of State for Education, set a clear ambition to halve the proportion of children who do not achieve at least expected levels across all goals in the ‘communication and language’ and ‘literacy’ areas of learning at the end of reception year by 2028.

Achieving this ambition requires a society-wide approach to promoting early language development and early literacy skills. We have an early years sector to be proud of, underpinned by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The improvements in children’s outcomes at age 5 that we have seen since 2013 are testament to the commitment and dedication of early years practitioners across the country. It is also true that virtually all parents want the best for their children. Despite this, we need to do more – 28% of children currently leave reception without the communication and literacy skills they need to thrive. We need to support language development in all areas of a child’s life, not just the hours they spend in early years settings.

Across the country, early years professionals, speech and language therapists, local authorities, schools, libraries, charities and social enterprises are working with parents and carers to help them support their children’s early language development. Many businesses are also already actively engaged, helping parents and carers through their products and brands, and championing early language development as employers.

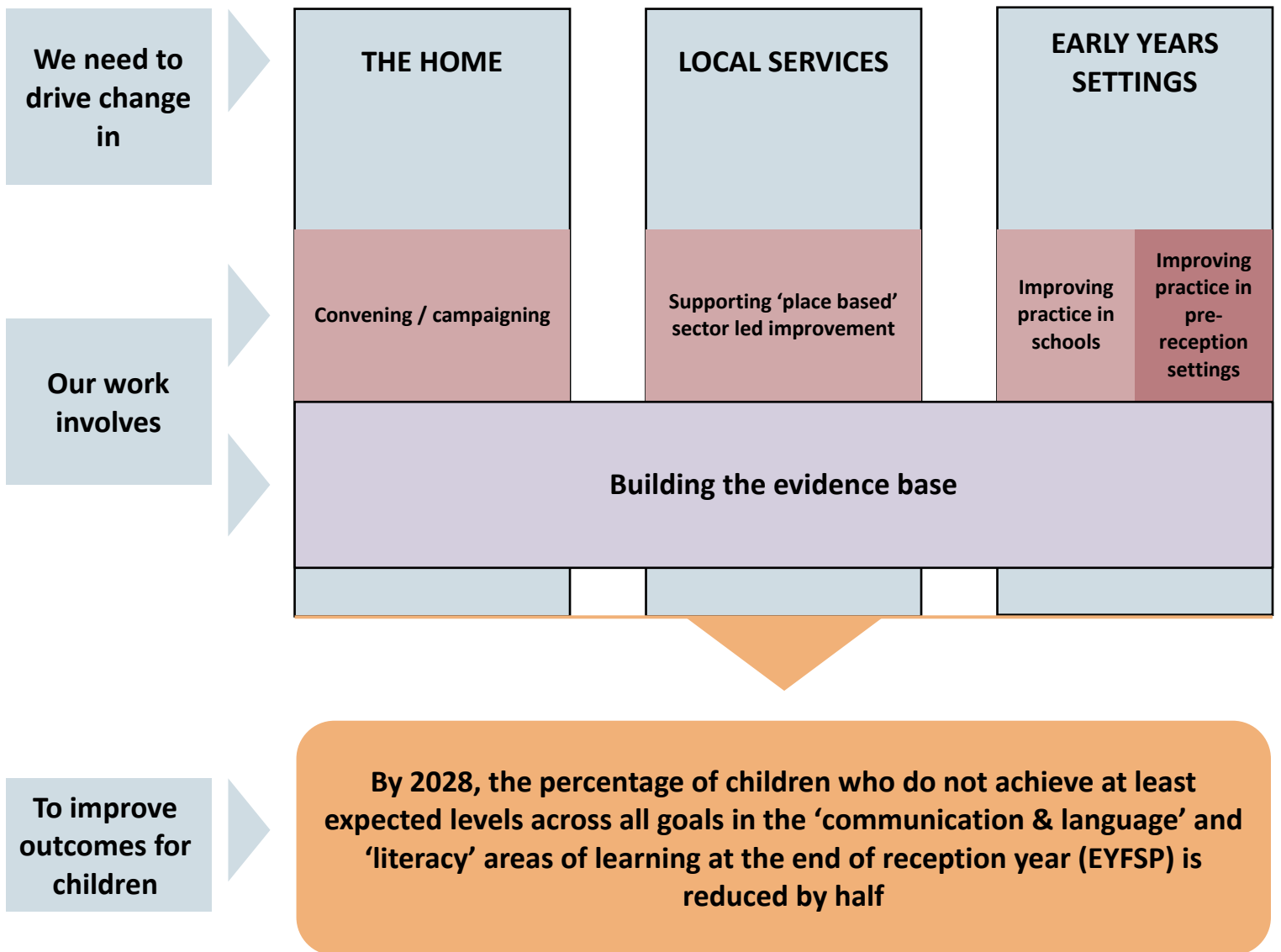
This behaviour change model brings together the latest evidence and draws on the experience of what works on the ground, from speaking to those working with families every day. It attempts to set out a behaviour change approach that all organisations operating in this space can use to inform their activities, to ensure that the messages we are delivering to families are consistent and evidence based. Our hope is that having this information in one place will encourage more organisations, especially businesses, to get involved and work together to ensure that all children have the early language and literacy skills they need to succeed throughout their lives.

This document is intended to be a living document, to be updated as new evidence emerges and as practice develops. This document has been coproduced with the National Literacy Trust and Public Health England. We have also consulted widely with other sector experts, a full list is included at Annex A.

In this document where we refer to parents, we also mean carers.

This work on the home learning environment sits within a wider social mobility programme which is working across sectors to improve children’s language and literacy outcomes at age 5 (figure 1).

Figure 1: The cross-sector approach



## Section 1

### What is the home learning environment and why does it matter?

A child's language development begins long before formal schooling, when the child first begins to distinguish sounds heard within the mother's womb<sup>1</sup>.

Language skills are then shaped and nurtured by the child's 'home learning environment' (HLE), which includes the physical characteristics of the home, but also the quality of the implicit and explicit learning support they receive from the caregivers<sup>2</sup>. Studies show that every day conversations, make-believe play and reading activities are particularly influential features of the home learning environment, although daytime routines, trips to the park and visits to the library have also been shown to make a positive difference to children's language development. In particular warm and nurturing parenting behaviours that encourage children's natural curiosity and communicate reasonable expectations for learning are especially strong predictors of children's school achievement, over and above parental income and social status<sup>3</sup>.

The HLE and its impact on children's skills have been widely studied in recent decades and its impact on child development has been documented extensively. For example, evidence shows that the quality of the HLE is a key predictor of a child's future success<sup>4</sup> and that there are specific activities and ways of communicating which can help support a child's early language development<sup>5</sup>.

Research clearly outlines the importance of the early HLE for a child's educational and life outcomes:

- The HLE is an important factor in the development of early speech, language and communication. This not only impacts on a child's development in the early years, but can persist until their GCSEs and A-Levels<sup>6</sup>.
- The home learning environment is related to child social and emotional development in the early years and the benefits continue until age 16 (SEED<sup>7</sup> and EPPSE<sup>8</sup>).
- The quality of the HLE is as important to intellectual and cognitive development as parental factors, such as occupation and education, suggesting that what parents do with their child is just as important as who they are<sup>9</sup>.
- As early as 2-3 years, the HLE is predictive of verbal ability and effective in differentiating both over- and under-achieving groups from children achieving at the level expected for their age<sup>10</sup>.

It is important to highlight that whilst focussing on the HLE is critical for all children, more than 10% of children and young people will have persistent and long-term speech,

language and communication needs and will require access to specialist help, including speech and language therapy.

## **The home learning environment and disadvantage**

Self-reported parental engagement in home learning activities has increased within the last generation for all social groups.<sup>11</sup> However, studies continue to show that a number of income-related inequalities nevertheless persist:

- Low-income children often have language skills that are below the age-related expectations at the time they enter reception – putting them at an educational disadvantage from the start<sup>12</sup>.
- Enriching home learning activities are consistently associated with family income and parental education.<sup>13</sup> In particular, middle and upper-income children are more likely to be read to<sup>14</sup> and go on educational outings<sup>15</sup> in comparison with their low-income peers<sup>16</sup>.
- Middle and upper-income children are also more likely to experience ‘language rich’ home learning environments involving frequent caregiver-child conversations that reflect the child’s personal interests<sup>17</sup>.

A good quality HLE can:

- Moderate the effect of disadvantage<sup>18</sup> and offers partial protection against the effects of disadvantage, even into the teenage years<sup>19</sup>.
- Moderate the impact of socioeconomic background on cognitive skills and socio-emotional difficulties<sup>20</sup>.

## **Utilising a behaviour change approach to improving the HLE**

We know that the home learning environment has a real impact on a child’s early language and learning. However accessing and influencing the family setting is challenging. There are a range of programmes that have successfully used behaviour change approaches in the family setting.

### **Behaviour change improving outcomes in family settings:**

- Randomised Control Trial (RCT) evidence has demonstrated behavioural impact on family planning and nutrition supplements in pregnancy as well as healthier food choices.<sup>21</sup>
- Successful campaigns have applied both audience insights and cost benefit analysis to their approach. For example, in 2002 a study by the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership Trust’s Speech and Language Therapy Department indicated that 64% of children were entering nursery with delayed language skills. By 2010, six years after the launch of the Stoke Speaks Out health and education campaign, this figure had reduced to 39% of children. The programme included

practitioner training, public health messages and support and resources for parents. To date, this initiative has delivered a positive return on investment calculated at £1.19 for every £1 invested<sup>22</sup>.

## The power of brand

- Public Health England partnered with Disney on a campaign to get children more active. As a result of the 'Train Like a Jedi' campaign, 4 in 5 children (82%) would be inspired to move more if they saw their favourite characters being active<sup>23</sup>.
- The National Literacy Trust partnered with the Premier League to create Premier League Reading Stars, an intervention which uses the power of football to improve reading for children who are struggling. 74% of children who took part in the programme made 6 months reading progress in just 10 weeks<sup>24</sup>.

## Impact of broadcasting

- Studies show that television in moderation has the potential to reduce income-related learning inequalities when the content is educational and engaging. For example, low-income children living in communities where Sesame Street was first broadcast in the 1960's demonstrated a substantial increase in school readiness in comparison to similarly disadvantaged peers who were not able to view the programme<sup>25</sup>.
- However, the quality of content is essential: television programmes that explicitly promote young children's exposure to language are associated with increases in children's vocabulary, whereas high levels of fast-paced cartoon viewing is associated with decreases in children's language use<sup>26 27</sup>.
- A 2017 Department for Education survey of parents in England found that children aged 0 to 5 living in more deprived areas watched more television, videos or DVDs than children in more affluent areas. 57% of children in the most deprived areas watched more than one hour a day, compared to 37% in the least deprived areas<sup>28</sup>.

## The use of social marketing on families

- Too Small to Fail, a charity in the United States, leads a public awareness and action campaign to promote the importance of early language development to support parents with tools to talk, read and sing with their child from birth. Preliminary evidence suggests that the campaign positively impacts parents' understanding of the importance of various activities which support children's early language development<sup>29</sup>.

We also know that there are environmental changes that we could encourage that might create opportunities for conversations.



## Environmental impact of products/services

- Parents are twice as likely to talk to children in face-to-face buggies, than buggies where the child faces forwards<sup>30</sup>.

## Distribution of resources

- 1 in 8 children in receipt of free school meals reported that they don't own a single book at home<sup>31</sup>.
- Through the World Book Day campaign, which distributes book tokens to every child in the UK and Ireland, 25% of children who used their tokens to get a book reported that it was the first book they had ever owned<sup>32</sup>.

## Section 1 summary

### THE HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND WHY IT MATTERS

- The Home Learning Environment (HLE) is the physical home and the interactions in and around the home which implicitly and explicitly support a child's learning.
- The quality of the HLE is a key predictor of a child's early language ability and future success; positive experiences can have lasting and life changing impacts.
- Early language ability is consistently linked to later outcomes – including school attainment and job prospects.
- Children raised in middle and upper-income homes are more likely to experience a language-rich environment. By contrast, children from low-income homes are more likely to arrive at school with below-average language skills, leaving them at an educational disadvantage from the start.
- But this is not inevitable. All parents have the power to change outcomes for their children, no matter what their background.
- And we know that behaviour change approaches can work in the family setting; we can help parents to support their children's learning through public programmes, resources, brands, social marketing and broadcasting.

## Section 2

### Creating a positive home learning environment

#### What makes a good home learning environment?

The amount and style of language that caregivers use when talking with their child is one of the strongest predictors of children's early language development<sup>33</sup>. In particular, back and forth conversations between the parent and child that are age-appropriate and reflect the child's personal interests are consistently associated with increases in vocabulary and use of language throughout development<sup>34</sup>.

The activity that parents most frequently report doing with their child is looking at books or reading together.<sup>35</sup> Book sharing explicitly supports the kinds of caregiver-child conversations that are found to be associated with children's early language learning. A wide variety of other activities have also been proven to be beneficial<sup>36</sup>. For example, conversations about toys, food and other household items during infancy are consistently associated with accelerated vocabulary growth and awareness of the communicative purposes of language. During toddlerhood, make-believe play and conversations about feelings and memories are also associated with children's vocabulary development and expressive language use<sup>37</sup>.

Studies also consistently show that the following home learning activities support children's early language development:

- Going to the library
- Painting and drawing
- Playing with/being taught letters
- Playing with/being taught numbers
- Songs/poems/rhymes<sup>38</sup>

In particular, studies show that the quality of caregiver-child interactions taking place during these activities are a better predictor of school attainment at age seven, than is children's exposure to computers or other learning technologies during the early years<sup>39</sup>.

## Early speech, language and communication development

Having established the activities that will create a good home learning environment, the next step in developing the behaviour change approach is to understand stages of early language and communication development and how parents can support their children at each stage.

**Table 2**<sup>40</sup> details the stages of speech, language and communication development from pre-birth to age 5 and the actions that support a child to achieve these milestones. It should be noted that development in young children is not linear, the age-range stated here is indicative of when a child should reach a milestone and we recognise that not all children develop typically.

Age	Milestone	Caregiving behaviours that support the milestone
From birth to 1 month	Babies can recognise and turn their head towards their parent's voice. Makes pre-speech lip and tongue movements in response to talk <sup>41</sup> . Demonstrates a strong preference for human faces.	Spend time together face-to-face – see if baby can copy your tongue sticking out, blink your eyes, make lip sounds. Talk to your baby about anything and everything in a gentle, even voice when your baby is awake and try to make eye contact. Feeding and cleaning provide particularly good opportunities to start a 'conversation'.
1 - 4 months	Vocalises delightedly in response to chat or enjoyable play Recognises the difference between happy and sad faces and can copy simple facial movements. Responds to positive touch and can see, hear and smell. Can discern whether a person's gaze is towards/away from them or if people are behaving in a socially contingent way.	Talk to them in an animated, tuneful voice with lots of smiles, laughter and facial expressions. Respond to baby's movements and communication – copy the noises they make. Interpret their sounds and say what they are trying to tell you. Sing songs and rhymes with actions or lots of repetition. Play with your baby following predictable routines, but also contain an element of surprise. 'Body' or 'lap' games that include tickling or tactile stimulation, such as 'mousie creep' or 'koochy-koo' are especially liked by babies during the first few months of life.

Age	Milestone	Caregiving behaviours that support the milestone
4-6 months	<p>Babies can recognise own name.</p> <p>Expresses a range of emotions such as pleasure, fear and excitement through facial expressions, vocalisations and body language.</p> <p>Begins to engage in babbling that replicates the pitch and tone of adult speech.</p> <p>Shows clear like, dislike, acceptance and rejection of experiences<sup>42</sup>.</p> <p>Can track the gaze of others and share attention towards an object, such as a household item or a toy.</p>	<p>Continue to do the above, and chat with your baby (without distraction), look at them.</p> <p>Respond to infant babbling as if they are initiating a conversation.</p> <p>Describe your baby's emotions as you speak to them.</p> <p>Use daily activities as an opportunity to stimulate your baby's learning (e.g. go outside and smell a flower).</p>
6 months	<p>Babies will start to respond when others are chatting to them.</p> <p>Canonical/reduplicative babbling begins – babies tunefully using repetitive sounds in a sing-song tone.</p> <p>Babies start to understand routines, simple words and activities.</p> <p>Looks around the environment at people, objects and things that are happening.</p> <p>Responds when name is called<sup>43</sup>.</p>	<p>Talk and sing while rocking them, walking with them and doing actions with them, e.g. 'round and round the garden', 'heads, shoulders, knees and toes'.</p> <p>Point out pictures in books and things of interest in the environment around you.</p> <p>Make lots of actions and gestures along with speech - use gestures and actions to help your child understand what you say, e.g. saying "bye bye" and waving.</p> <p>Respond when your baby tries to communicate. Take the time to have "conversations" with your baby with each of you taking turns.</p> <p>Use every day experiences such as shopping or going to the park as a chance to point things out and name things.</p> <p>Use books with textures that your baby can feel.</p>
9-12 months	<p>Gesturing and joint attention – baby looks to where another person points.</p>	<p>Gain your child's attention and talk to them about things as they happen gesturing to increase their understanding.</p>

Age	Milestone	Caregiving behaviours that support the milestone
	<p>Object play – using every day objects, infants understand they can communicate and share information.</p> <p>Joins in with give-and-take games.</p> <p>Makes requests by pointing<sup>44</sup>.</p> <p>Imitates playful vocalisations and actions, e.g. cough, smacking lips<sup>45</sup>.</p> <p>Shows understanding of a few every day object words and words embedded in familiar routines, e.g. bedtime<sup>46</sup>.</p> <p>Baby's first words.</p> <p>Understands “no” and “bye bye”<sup>47</sup>.</p>	<p>Join in play activities with your child, let them lead the play using objects and toys they are interested in. Talk about the things they explore or look at. Use words and simple phrases and lots of repetition. Tell your child the name of things when they point to them.</p> <p>Play ‘people games’ like ‘Row, Row, Row Your Boat’ and get other family members to join in.</p> <p>Let baby turn the pages in books.</p>
1-2 years	<p>At around 18 months, children will know around 50 words and can say about 20.</p> <p>Children use sounds to represent meaning, e.g. “moo” for a cow.</p> <p>Starting to form sentences – combining two words, e.g. “doggy gone”<sup>48</sup>.</p> <p>Can follow simple commands in context, e.g. “come here”, “give it to me”<sup>49</sup>.</p> <p>Follows two-part instructions.</p>	<p>Building on the ideas above, chat and play with the things that interest your child. Ask them what they want to sing, play with or read. Play, sing and read together.</p> <p>Name objects and offer choices to build vocabulary. When you are playing, ask your child to hand you items you ask for, e.g. teddy, book, ball.</p> <p>Talk about what you are doing together – use words for actions as well as things. Use short simple sentences.</p> <p>Encourage use of and play with sounds.</p> <p>Introduce more songs and rhymes using gestures and objects to reinforce key words.</p> <p>Share picture books with your child and help them to name the pictures. Ask them to find familiar objects in books.</p>

Age	Milestone	Caregiving behaviours that support the milestone
2-3 years	<p>Understanding of words and phrases grows quickly during this time. Children of this age understand between 200-500 words.</p> <p>Uses “no” or “not” in phrases.</p> <p>Refers to past/future events.</p> <p>Asks questions, e.g. “What’s that?”<sup>50</sup></p> <p>Can pick out objects by function, e.g. which one do we drink from?<sup>51</sup></p> <p>Uses pronouns “I”, “me” and “you”.</p> <p>Uses descriptive concepts, e.g. big/little<sup>52</sup>.</p>	<p>Continue doing the activities above and build on children’s talk, e.g. Child: “Dog!”, adult: “Yes, a big dog”.</p> <p>Tap out the beat to songs and rhymes.</p> <p>When playing with your child, give a running commentary on what they are doing, using action words, describing words, position words and feelings as well as object words.</p> <p>Engage in conversations about feelings and important memories.</p> <p>Encourage the child to talk about the future and anticipate events.</p>
3-4 years	<p>Ability to form multi clause questions and narrative skills develop.</p> <p>Phonological awareness grows.</p> <p>Can listen to stories with increasing attention and recall. Joins in with repeated refrains and anticipates key events and phrases in rhymes and stories.</p> <p>Understands sentences of three to four information-carrying words (at 4 years)<sup>53</sup>.</p> <p>Uses pronouns “he”, “she” and “they” (36-40 months)<sup>54</sup>.</p> <p>Asks questions – “Why?” (36-42 months)<sup>55</sup>.</p> <p>Uses language to pretend (42-48 months)<sup>56</sup>.</p>	<p>Tell your child about your day. Ask your child questions about what happened in their day, helping them to use memory and to talk about things that happened in the past.</p> <p>Play make-believe games together or games which use opposites such as on or off, big or little.</p> <p>Reverse roles when you are playing together so your child gives you instructions, e.g. brush teddy’s hair, wash dolly’s feet.</p> <p>Play rhyming games – can your child come up with a word that rhymes with “cat”?</p>
4-5 years	<p>At 5 years, children are now able to understand sequencing, e.g. first we will eat breakfast and</p>	<p>Use open questions with lots of possible answers. “What are you going to play with today?”, “How do you think the character will solve the problem?”</p>

Age	Milestone	Caregiving behaviours that support the milestone
	<p>then we will go to nursery. They understand past, present and future tense.</p> <p>Children will choose their own playmates.</p> <p>They are able to take turns in longer conversations and will not need to stop what they are doing to listen and understand what is being said to them.</p> <p>Most speech sounds are clear by 5<sup>57</sup>.</p> <p>Enjoys jokes<sup>58</sup>.</p> <p>Uses language to compare e.g. bigger<sup>59</sup>.</p>	<p>Use new words in the context of play and activities.</p> <p>Ask decontextualized questions about past and future activities, “What did you do at the park last week?”, “What will you do on your field trip next week?” Tell your child about things you did in the past and will do in the future.</p> <p>Talk about sounds at the beginning of words and words that start with the same sound e.g. words beginning with ‘p’.</p> <p>Ask your child if they can give possible solutions to problems, e.g. their favourite hat is missing.</p>

**Table 2: Stages of Early Speech, Language and Communication Development and Supporting Parental Actions**

Source: EIF Early Intervention Framework with Input from National Literacy Trust and Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

We have a good understanding of what makes a good HLE and the stages of speech, language and communication developmental of a child. This gives us a clear basis to set out the actions we want parents to take.

## Distilling the activities and behaviours into actionable themes

We have consulted with experts and voluntary sector organisations on our approach. This has helped us distil our approach to focus on three pillars which will drive the behaviours known to create a positive home learning environment, whilst remaining simple and easy to communicate through a range of channels and behavioural nudges to parents. This can also rally and support those professionals, volunteers and communities working with families every day.

**Chat, Play, Read** cuts across the activities that we know make a good home learning environment, are well evidenced as having a positive impact on early development and, we propose, offer a simple basis to form a meaningful and engaging framework for activities and messages which brings together a range of stakeholders.

We need to tap into parents' intrinsic motivations. Some parents may be more likely to take part in activities that they believe contribute to their children's happiness, whilst others will be motivated by explicit messages about the importance of particular activities to their child's later outcomes'.

We are confident the 'Chat, Play, Read' model can be used to create messages, prompts and activities that are fun for parents and children and support children's language development.

### Chat

- Encourages talking but also infers reciprocal communication, which is key<sup>60</sup>.
- Parental time investment can have a direct effect on wider cognitive attainment for children<sup>61 62</sup>. It also helps provide basic language input for children and helps children to develop their vocabulary and language skills.

### Play

- Encourages communication and opens the dynamic to peers.
- The components of playing, e.g. language, narratives and symbolic representation, have an impact on early literacy skills. Language thrives when children are interacting with adults and peers in a playful manner<sup>63</sup> as has been documented in a range of studies including Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff 2003; Smith 2010; Vygotsky 1967.
- Learning through play supports overall healthy development, acquisition of both content (e.g. maths) and learning-to-learn skills (e.g. executive function)<sup>64</sup>.

### Read

- Toddlers who are read to or shown picture books daily are significantly less likely to be late talkers at two and a half years<sup>65</sup>.



- 3-year-olds who are read to on less than a weekly basis are around 4 months behind their peers who are read to more often<sup>66</sup>.
- Parents and carers reading daily with their child in the early years can have a significant impact on later academic ability<sup>67</sup>.
- Dialogic reading (a way of sharing books in which parents and children talk together [i.e. have a dialogue] about the story and pictures) has a positive impact on young children's language skills, especially their expressive vocabulary<sup>68</sup>. Studies have shown that supporting parents and teachers in a dialogic reading intervention can be effective for children from low income households, at least in the short term<sup>69</sup>.

## Section 2 summary

### CREATING A POSITIVE HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- The full behaviour change model sets out the stages of speech, language and communication development from pre-birth to age 5 and the parental actions which support a child to achieve these milestones.
- The model distils this evidence to three simple concepts:
  - Chat:** encourage talking but crucially, reciprocal communication;
  - Play:** language thrives when children interact and explore in a playful and creative manner;
  - Read:** sharing books, parents and children talking together.
- Chat, Play, Read summarises how parents can create a positive HLE, whilst remaining simple and easy to communicate through a range of channels and nudges. Chat, Play, Read can also rally and support those professionals, volunteers and communities working with families everyday.

## Section 3

### The barriers that lower income families face, and how interventions might address these

In order to have a meaningful impact on the HLE, any approach must understand and seek to address the barriers faced by parents.

**Table 3** outlines the barriers faced by lower income families when it comes to supporting their child’s early language and literacy development, and suggested interventions to address these barriers.

Capability barriers	Activities to overcome barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness among some parents around why it’s important to communicate with your baby and how best to go about it<sup>70</sup> (regardless of income). Most parents believe that they do enough play and learning with their child.<sup>71</sup></li> <li>• A fifth of parents-to-be surveyed by The Communication Trust believed communication with babies was only beneficial from the age of three months. One in 20 believed communicating with their child was only necessary once their child had reached six months or older<sup>72</sup>.</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of early development and the activities that can support it, e.g. talking to babies from birth, importance of contingent, bi-directional speech, shared reading, and guided play<sup>73</sup>.</li> <li>• Qualitative research indicates that, although some types of activities can suffer from parental embarrassment or concerns about skills, such as singing or reading, for some parents a barrier may be not appreciating the types of communication activities that are relevant at different stages of child development<sup>74</sup>.</li> <li>• Parents may have low literacy skills themselves. Those with poor literacy skills are more likely to have lower incomes or live in more deprived communities<sup>75</sup>.</li> <li>• Some parents do not see a need or gap in skills and do not proactively seek information. The experiences of early parenting differ according to social grade; there is a particular need to ensure that information, support and activities are accessible to parents from the lowest income groups<sup>76</sup>.</li> <li>• The benefits of time spent communicating with their child may not be fully appreciated by parents and carers and may therefore not be front of mind<sup>77</sup>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrating simple messages about the ease and importance of chat, play and read on everyday products and services around daily routines where parent child interaction takes place such as mealtimes, bath time, bus journeys.</li> <li>• Embedding nudges in places and spaces parents spend time (supermarkets, buses, shopping centres, workplaces), channels they already access and media they consume (print, social and broadcast).</li> <li>• Messages should be simple, not requiring parents to have good literacy. Use of imagery and video content can also support parents with low literacy skills to chat, play and read.</li> </ul>

Opportunity barriers	Activities to overcome barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families with limited financial resources are restricted in the provision of age-appropriate books<sup>78</sup> and toys, family days out<sup>79</sup>.</li> <li>• The physical environment can also be a barrier both inside and outside the home, e.g. living in cramped conditions limits opportunities for quality one-to-one engagement<sup>80</sup>.</li> <li>• Living in areas with poor housing and anti-social behaviour can make it difficult to go outside to access stimulating child-friendly activities such as going to a park<sup>81</sup>.</li> <li>• Vandalism, playground misuse and danger of injury all act as deterrents to use what might otherwise be good facilities<sup>82</sup>.</li> <li>• Lack of time or importance placed on parent-child interactions compared to other more pressing tasks, e.g. work, other children, etc)<sup>83</sup>.</li> <li>• Parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds have been found to be less likely to access enrichment opportunities in their child's first year of life, particularly those types of activities intended to improve parent-child communication and interaction<sup>84</sup>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrating messages and prompts into everyday routines such as bus journeys or trips to the shop can address parents lack of time.</li> <li>• Lack of resources can be addressed by distribution of free resources through commercial partner channels such as with a popular magazine or the purchase of a child targeted product, and the distribution of free resources via existing media channels (e.g. tailored video content or free educational games)</li> <li>• By targeting interventions and campaign activity in poorer communities we will increase the support for parents using both the existing workforces already interacting with families, and volunteers to deliver and support prompts, messages, resources and opportunities such as play sessions.</li> </ul>

Motivational barriers	Activities to overcome barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some parents are unaware of the benefits of early literacy, so it is not a priority for them<sup>85</sup>.</li> <li>• Parents' motivations to engage with their child and beliefs about their capability may also be limited by aspects of their environmental context which may leave parents feeling stressed, anxious, unhappy and emotionally drained<sup>86</sup>, often because they are consumed by other concerns, particularly in relation to finances and related issues such as housing.</li> <li>• Parenting is typically influenced by communities and networks. Those on low incomes are often vulnerable, isolated, young and single<sup>87</sup> - typically without a network of support<sup>88</sup> or without positive role models.</li> <li>• In some cases, parents may not have been played with or talked to when they were children, meaning they are without a suitable parenting role model to emulate. This links back to barriers associated with capabilities (e.g. because no one is available to provide them with the relevant knowledge and skills). Social influences within communities can also impact on motivations (e.g. if people around the family lack jobs and aspirations, this can limit a parent's perception of the benefits of education).</li> <li>• Parents across the income-spectrum rely heavily on their mobile phones. Social media can provide an online network of support but the information may not always be helpful and risks playing into a parent's beliefs about their capabilities in a negative way<sup>89</sup>.</li> <li>• Children's happiness, rather than academic attainment, may be a more immediate motivator for C2DE parents<sup>90</sup>.</li> <li>• Dislike of reading and other 'educational' activities may inhibit action. A survey of families from C2DE backgrounds for the National Year of Reading campaign (2008) found that books were associated with hard work in school, and to an extent were viewed as antisocial as reading was an "individual activity, in the main" while families preferred to "relax and share their leisure time as a unit"<sup>91</sup>.</li> <li>• Lack of confidence in their own literacy skills or fear of embarrassment<sup>92</sup>.</li> <li>• Some parents decrease the number of home learning activities once the child starts in a funded childcare place, believing that their child has become more independent after starting childcare or that it is the childcare setting's role to provide these activities<sup>93</sup>.</li> <li>• Although difficult to find in the literature, consultations or research to develop and assess the campaign may present an opportunity to explore whether families from different cultural backgrounds hold diverse views about the role of parents as their child's primary educator.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using 'celebrity' parents that have a similar background to those families we are targeting via familiar media to share the message of chat, play, read and its importance.</li> <li>• Focusing strongly on play and positive messages for families who may be less motivated by an attainment message.</li> <li>• Using both celebrities and local champions to role model and normalise behaviours in the community.</li> <li>• Working with partners to role model positive behaviours in everyday situations such as frontline retail staff supporting parent/child communication.</li> </ul>

# THE HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT BEHAVIOUR CHANGE MODEL: SUMMARY

## THE HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND WHY IT MATTERS

- The Home Learning Environment (HLE) is the physical home and the interactions in and around the home which implicitly and explicitly support a child's learning.
- The quality of the HLE is a key predictor of a child's early language ability and future success; positive experiences can have lasting and life changing impacts.
- Early language ability is consistently linked to later outcomes – including school attainment and job prospects.
- Children raised in middle and upper-income homes are more likely to experience a language-rich environment. By contrast, children from low-income homes are more likely to arrive at school with below-average language skills, leaving them at an educational disadvantage from the start.
- But this is not inevitable. All parents have the power to change outcomes for their children, no matter what their background.
- And we know that behaviour change approaches can work in the family setting; we can help parents to support their children's learning through public programmes, resources, brands, social marketing and broadcasting.

## CREATING A POSITIVE HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- The full behaviour change model sets out the stages of speech, language and communication development from pre-birth to age 5 and the parental actions which support a child to achieve these milestones.
- The model distils this evidence to three simple concepts:
  - Chat:** encourage talking but crucially, reciprocal communication;
  - Play:** language thrives when children interact and explore in a playful and creative manner;
  - Read:** sharing books, parents and children talking together.
- Chat, Play, Read summarises how parents can create a positive HLE, whilst remaining simple and easy to communicate through a range of channels and nudges. Chat, Play, Read can also rally and support those professionals, volunteers and communities working with families everyday.

### Barriers lower income families face

**Capability:** Parents (i) may not understand the importance of language development or the activities that can support it; (ii) may have low literacy skills, or lack confidence in their ability to support their child's language development (iii) may not see a need for these skills, and some (C2DE) parents are less likely to proactively seek information.

**Opportunity:** Fewer financial resources, physical environments in or near the home, and other disadvantages (e.g. poor health) may make it more difficult to provide enriching activities, and the reality of daily life can reduce parents' time or prioritisation of these.

**Motivation:** Parents, and the communities that influence them, may not understand the potential benefit of early language development, or education – prioritising other areas of child development and wellbeing. They may lack confidence or networks of support.

### Interventions to address these

Develop simple messages (including video/imagery) about the ease and importance of Chat, Play, Read through everyday products and services around daily routines; nudges in places parents spend time, channels they already access and media they consume.

Distribute resources and information on Chat, Play, Read through existing opportunities, e.g. commercial channels, targeted products, and professionals (e.g. school/early education, health professionals). Focus on everyday routines to reduce time costs.

Reach families through media to promote Chat, Play, Read. Use both celebrities and local champions to role model and normalise behaviours in the community. Emphasise positive, empowering messages for families.

## Annex A

The following organisations and academics have been consulted on this work:

- Early Intervention Foundation
- Professor James Law
- Jean Gross CBE
- Professor Kathy Sylva
- Save the Children
- The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
- I CAN
- Naomi Eisenstadt
- Office of the Children's Commissioner
- Professor Ted Melhuish
- The National Children's Bureau
- Barnado's
- Action for Children
- Beanstalk
- Booktrust
- Homestart
- Big Lottery Fund, A Better Start
- Education Endowment Foundation
- The Behavioural Insights Team
- NSPCC
- South London and Maudsley NHS Trust
- The Race Equality Foundation



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<sup>89</sup> Information on motivations and opportunities draws on a range of sources, including qualitative data captured through a survey and focus groups conducted with practitioners who work in the homes of low-income families with young children as part of Eat, Sleep, Learn, Play! programme. It also features insights gathered by PUSH who conducted ethnographic research with 16 families across the UK.

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