

## Review of the book *A Little Guide for Teachers: Engaging with Parents and Carers*, by Emma Kell and Clemmie Stewart

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*A Little Guide for Teachers: Engaging with Parents and Carers* is a resource that aims to support school staff to build effective relationships with parents and carers. It includes a range of strategies, tips and helpful reflection points, all illustrated by case studies, emphasising the importance of authentic communication and empathy. Both authors have extensive experience in teaching and education leadership across phases and settings. Noting that the term 'parent' can and does refer to carers in all forms, Kell and Stewart draw on their own experiences, as well as research they carried out during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, to provide a practical approach to developing meaningful relationships with parents. This guidance is applicable to education professionals working within and beyond the school setting; many of the themes discussed could be helpful for those in other front-line professions that promote a holistic, child-centred approach.

This book includes six chapters focussing on why parental engagement matters, individual needs and inclusion, relationships, communication, the importance of balance and how to embed efficient and effective practice.

Taking a social constructionist approach and with reference to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979), the guide argues that parent perspectives should be understood in the context of systems (for example: individual; home and family; work and community; and cultural and societal systems) that continue to change over time. The very same systems are considered when discussing school staff and the impact of these on the day-to-day experiences of teaching post COVID-19. Importantly, external influences like Ofsted and government policy are also acknowledged.

Considerations of how to strengthen connections between schools and families are underpinned by the importance of respectful and accessible communication. The authors are explicit about the impact of language – whether spoken or written – and the power imbalances this can either create or dismantle. The importance of true partnerships builds on this, highlighting the need for connections that are rooted in trust, honesty and a shared vision for progress. Similarly, themes of compassion and values illustrate how deliberately seeking to understand the perspectives of others can help staff to respond in a

meaningful way that promotes equity and inclusion.

The guide also acknowledges the professional demands on teachers by way of leaning into the importance of having practical approaches and strategies that make a difference. Simple reflection points are strategically included throughout the book and at the end of each chapter, creating opportunities to pause and think about key concepts covered. Often these come in the form of questions that challenge the reader to evaluate their own and others' practice in a way that intends to promote change despite the challenges at play. Case studies then provide helpful insights and encourage deeper contemplation about what staff might do differently in their own settings. Crucially, the guide prompts staff to examine their school policies at a classroom level right up to whole-school practice, shifting the focus beyond individual action towards a more systemic approach.

While many important wider issues are raised within the guide, I felt that, at times, these would have benefitted from being developed further. An example of this is the argument that many teachers do not access adequate training or professional development in relation to working with families, though no guidance on how this may be addressed is given. I felt the guide could also have been even more powerful with strategies or guidance for how staff could disseminate key messages to school systems and beyond. Additionally, whilst there are many thought-provoking examples of why parents may find it difficult to engage with schools, it is unclear whether the research participants, whose responses contributed to the creation of this guide, were from diverse or representative range of backgrounds. The children themselves were also not included in the research, meaning their perspectives are not captured nor commented upon.

For those working in schools it can seem almost impossible to find time to meaningfully connect with the community we serve. This guide provides a range of practical ideas for how to make the time to do so, with creative solutions to work efficiently around the demands of the school day so that positive relationships with parents are developed and sustained through authentic and empathetic collaboration.



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**References**

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