

Supporting EAL Families

What are the main challenges for EAL families?

Communication

- ❧ Language barriers make it much more difficult for EAL parents to communicate with their children's teachers. There may also be different cultural and social norms which mean that parents don't feel comfortable communicating with the school. Consequently, there may be misunderstandings about expectations of them and their children and understanding and clarifying instructions from teachers.
- ❧ Understanding government sanctions and news reports around COVID-19 may also be a challenge for families with low levels of literacy.
- ❧ Disrupted schooling, and reduced literacy or language skills may also mean they parents may lack the ability or confidence to help their children with their school work.

Competing demands

- ❧ With children at home, EAL families are going to find it hard to balance competing demands such as work, primary care and education. It is worth remembering that families from CALD backgrounds often have larger households, which can make the home environment more chaotic, and may mean there is less time to focus on their children's education.
- ❧ Additionally, families from CALD backgrounds are less likely to have employment which allows them to work from home. This may mean that they are now unemployed, or are still having to go out to work in a riskier environment, or are caring for other children whose parents are working.

These, and other factors, make it much more of a challenge for parents to act as proxy teachers for their children during the lock down period.

What can your homework club do to help?

The capacity of your homework club to help during this period will vary a lot, depending on the level of communication and the relationships you have with your students' parents; your resources, whether financial, physical, or mental; the capability of you and your students' families to access and use technology; and many other factors. Here are some ideas, which you may choose to adopt or adapt.

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Check in on them

- ✦ CALD and EAL families may have smaller support networks, so knowing that there is support there for them can make a big difference.

Offer to help them with their correspondence with their children's schools

- ✦ Schools with a high CALD family population should have a Multicultural Education Aide that is helping families with communication with the school, but you could also offer to talk them through correspondence with the school. Encourage them to seek translation services in community languages if their English language skills are low.

Guide them towards other support services in their area

- ✦ Charities and organisations are continuing to providing food and emergency relief packages. Councils are putting out information about these services, which can be found on individual council websites, and organisations like the ASRC and the Smith Family continue to provide relief for families in distress.

Help them access information in their language.

- ✦ Circulate translated documents with information about COVID-19 or government restrictions. You can find some general information here: <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/coronavirus>; and information specifically related to Victoria here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/translated-resources-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>
- ✦ Offer to talk them through information if literacy is an issue, or get them in touch with translation services. Families can call the free Interpreter service on 131 450 then request transfer to the Victorian Coronavirus Hotline on 1800 675 398. They can also call their local council via the Language Line on 03 9932 1212 for free interpreter support.
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Including families in online tutoring

If your homework club has the capacity to continue tutoring students through online platforms, it's great to include parents as much as possible. There are several advantages:

- ✿ It makes the process more child-safe, as parents are able to supervise interactions.
- ✿ It makes the learning process more collaborative and inclusive, and might boost parent's confidence in helping with their children's learning.
- ✿ It helps to build the positive relationship you have with families, and provides social connections at a time when this is hard to achieve.
- ✿ It empowers parents to be more active in their children's education.
- ✿ Parents may also learn content through the process, improving their ability to help their children as well as their own capabilities.

There are several ways to go about this:

- ✿ Ask parents to sit in on any virtual discussions you have with students.
- ✿ Empower parents by consulting with them and including them in discussions with your student around expectations, achievements and information.
- ✿ Encourage parents to ask questions, making them an active participant in the process. If the question is for the school, help them to work out a means of asking the school, according to their language abilities.

Keep an eye out for further tip sheets on resources for families, and sign up to our Slack network to share resources with other homework club coordinators.