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New research finds video the key tool for engaging families in early years

Early years staff are using one to one video calls, recorded video and live video broadcasts to stay in touch with parents and carers to a far greater extent than prior to the pandemic. The findings are part of a new survey of more than 370 early years practitioners and teachers carried out by Tapestry, the online learning journal used by nurseries and schools.

The survey found that before the pandemic only 9% of settings used recorded video messages but that's now increased significantly with a third (30%) planning to use them. Similarly, 7% used one to one video calls previously, and a quarter (26%) now plan to use them. Live video broadcasts have also increased from 3% pre-pandemic to 11%.

Use of the traditional printed letter has reduced. Over three quarters (79%) of respondents used these before the pandemic but this has dropped to just under half (44%) who now plan to continue to use them. Similarly, there has been a shift from face to face to online parents' evenings. Face to face parents' evenings have fallen from 86% to 47% whilst online have risen from 6% pre-pandemic to 30% who now plan to use them.

Peter Farrant, Head of Operations at Dolphins Pre-school, said: *"Despite the challenges of remote communications and drops offs at the gate, relationships with many of our families have been strengthened through the shared experience of the pandemic. How we communicate with families, and more widely, has changed. Approaches we started in the first lockdown such as our WhatsApp group or remote consultations, are now just part of daily life."*

When supporting parents who experience barriers in engaging with settings and schools, traditional methods are still important. More than three quarters of respondents (79%) reported that phone calls and face to face chats were key. However, almost three quarters of respondents (74%) also reported that an online learning journal was a key communication tool, and having a key person for each child/family was also high on the list.

The survey found that virtually all respondents (95%) believed a clear plan was important in helping to nurture good relationships with families, and three quarters (78%) also reported having a plan already in place. Continuing professional development (CPD) in how to support families was a priority with almost nine out of ten (87%) believing this was important, while 91% highlighted the importance of CPD relating to diversity and inclusion.

Dr Helen Edwards, Co-founder of Tapestry and a former teacher, said: *"At Tapestry we have long been aware of the value of video in sharing children's learning and development. However, these results show how much it*

has 'come of age' as a medium for communicating with families. We feel it is a powerful medium that has the potential to foster stronger links between settings and home and can help make the limited time you may have with face to face chats as productive as possible."

"However, we need to ensure all staff have the training and support needed to make good use of these new approaches and we need to ensure teachers and practitioners receive the necessary CPD to support families effectively."

Over three quarters of respondents (77%) believed that they had reduced the barriers to engagement for their parents. A similar number (71%) felt they'd also engaged with more families due to the pandemic.

Looking ahead to supporting children's learning and development over the summer, virtually no-one (0.8%) believed that extra learning was a good approach. Rather, providing parents and carers with suggested play activities to try with their child (32%), providing a focus on language and communications (21%) and simply giving time for play (21%) were felt to be more important.

Tom Harbour, Founder of the charity Learning with Parents, said: *"It's encouraging to see how those working in early years are supporting parents and carers. Engagement with families must go beyond the day to day practicalities, we need to enable all parents and carers to really appreciate that they are crucial partners in their child's learning. The pandemic has actually helped to communicate this, now we need to make lasting changes so that parents and carers can have even more impact on their child's learning."*

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Notes to editors

Survey responses were received between 30th April and 31st May 2021. There were 373 respondents from those working in early years and primary education.

About Tapestry

Tapestry is an online learning journal which enables educators to capture children's learning and development throughout the day.

Tapestry has been developed by Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, an educational technology company which was founded in 2012 and is based in Lewes. Tapestry has more than 18,000 accounts and is used in more than 40 countries.

Using sophisticated digital technologies, Tapestry is changing the way children's learning journeys are recorded in early years education and also helping practitioners to use their time as effectively as possible. Tapestry is also transforming the way parents and carers stay in touch with what their young children are doing throughout the day and helps to strengthen the link between young children's development at home and in their early years setting.



Tapestry is the brainchild of technologist Steve Edwards and his early years practitioner wife, Dr Helen Edwards. They are deeply involved in the early years sector and previously created the successful Foundation Stage Forum which has more than 30,000 members. Tapestry is also a sponsor of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Childcare and Early Education.

For more information visit: <https://tapestry.info>