

Supporting families in poverty this winter



The UK Cost of the School Day project, delivered by Child Poverty Action Group and Children North East, works with children, parents and school staff to identify cost barriers in their schools and take action to remove them. The project, centred on the voice of children and young people, aims to ensure all children can meaningfully participate in their community. Here, Kathryn Newman and Richard Barrie of Child Poverty Action Group offer practical suggestions to support families with the cost-of-living crisis this winter.

In the months ahead, millions of families across the UK will need help with the rising cost of living, including heating homes, purchasing nappies and heating milk bottles. With 3.9 million children in the UK currently growing up in poverty, recent research has shown that households with a child under five are more likely to be below the poverty line ([North East Child Poverty Commission, 2022](#)).

Ending child poverty will require commitment and action from national and local government, with investment in family incomes through the social security system and the financing of public services to provide the support families need. However, collaborative approaches by those that work with families can ensure that children and families are not left without this winter.

As your early years setting plans ahead,

consider the small tweaks that can be introduced to support families and improve their experiences. Below, we share our own 'quick wins' from our research that can be adapted to your own early years setting:

- **Signposting:** It is vital that families eligible for support with early years costs are given the necessary help and support to ensure that they have claimed those hours. This will help to save families money which can help with stretched household budgets.
- **Designated lead:** For some families who may not have the confidence to come forward to say that they are struggling, it can really help to normalise talking about money in all of your communications. Acknowledge that many families are finding things more difficult at the moment and make sure

that signposting information easily accessible both within the setting and on all communications sent out. Nurseries and pre-schools should consider designating a lead member of staff to be the first point of contact for families finding things more difficult financially.

- **Reducing costs:** Review current costs at your setting for scheduled events and activities in the lead-up to the festive season and look at ways costs can be reduced or removed. Make sure that families have plenty of notice for any activities that may cost money or resources. The Cost of the School Day team have produced a [calendar](#) for the 2022/23 academic year that may be useful for your setting to reflect on.
- **Clothing costs:** Explore ways to facilitate clothes recycling and swapping. This could include encouraging families to donate any outgrown winter coats and shoes so that all families have access to cold weather clothing for outdoor play. Make sure all clothes are freshly laundered and inviting for families to browse. You can help to reduce any stigma by having a donation pot for families to make a voluntary contribution.
- **Toy library:** Consider establishing a toy and games loan scheme to support families this winter. Having access to a variety of toys and games can support the children's development without impacting

on family finances. Some local authorities have a dedicated play resource team that may be able to assist with this.

- **Partnership working:** Above all, partnership working is beneficial in offering your families a wide range of support. Taking a holistic approach to the individual needs of each family, and having an integrated services approach means families will receive the right support.

This winter, we are asking early years settings to work with family hubs, health visitors, food and clothing banks, and welfare rights organisations such as Citizen's Advice to ensure that families are getting the necessary support and help that they need. This could include collating a list of what national, local government and discretionary support is available in your area, and supporting families to access their entitlements.

Over the winter, early years professionals and settings should prioritise being mindful of the challenges all families will face this winter, be prepared to talk about challenges with money and introduce practical ways of supporting families. Most importantly, we know that establishing meaningful relationships with families is vital: actively listening to their concerns provides a solid foundation to give them the confidence and courage to speak up and ask for support when things are difficult financially.