



Seirbhís Tacaíochta  
Oideachais Tusla

Tusla Education Support Service

## Getting Started with Home Visits

Before commencing home visits, you should read carefully all information pertaining to home visits and safe work practices sent to you by TESS. You should also discuss safety and planning with your principal in advance.

When you become a familiar face in homes and the community, home visits happen quite naturally. But starting off parents may be anxious as to why you are calling. It is important that parents feel that you are not visiting because they have been singled out or that they are the source of a problem or issue. Reassure parents that you will never call for any negative reason, all your visits will be positive and supportive with a view to sharing information and helping their child.

It is important that you emphasise that home visits are core to your work in all conversations and communications with parents, be this through coffee mornings, school yard meetings, texts, social media, HSCL flyer, or your parent's newsletter. You may need to gently bring parents along to the idea that home visits are the best form of communication between home, school and the community.

Do not feel bad if parents only speak to you for a couple of minutes on the doorstep, it takes time to build relationships! The more you are seen 'out and about' in the area they live, sharing information, providing support, celebrating achievements, advocating for and championing parents, the more comfortable parents become with home visits and the HSCL scheme.

It is also natural for coordinators to feel some degree of apprehension regarding establishing /re-establishing home visits in their practice.

Below are some suggestions of reasons to visit target parents and ways to create greater links between target parents and the school.

- Visit all target parents to introduce yourself as the new HSCL coordinator, use these visits to identify which target parents need intensive support and regular home visits and which parents need less frequent home visits e.g., fortnightly/monthly.
- If a student has not returned after the school holidays and the school is unable to make contact over the phone, or has a concern regarding the student, visit the home to enquire if there is any issue preventing the student from returning to school.
- Visit the parents of all new to your school pupils (junior infants, 2<sup>nd</sup> class, 1<sup>st</sup> year, new or late enrolments in all year groups) to introduce yourself and the HSCL scheme. You could take flyers explaining HSCL and SCP in the school. Ask how their child is settling into their new school. You may identify parents that need to be added to your target list through these visits.
- Visit parents of students that are newly arrived in the country to establish links with the school and the local community. You could bring a flyer detailing school or community supports in various languages. You could also use the visit to invite parents to a coffee morning with an interpreter or a walking tour of the local area. You may identify parents that need to be added to your target list through these visits.



- Shortly after each new term has commenced, it is a good idea to check in with class teachers (primary) or form tutors (post primary) to see how students have settled back. If a teacher has any concerns, you can follow up with a visit.
- If concerns are raised regarding a target family at a care team/year head meeting or meeting with your principal, volunteer to visit. You may not be able to address the 'issue' but you can call for a check in.
- Work closely with class teachers/SEN & JCSP coordinators regarding involving target parents in numeracy and literacy initiatives. Identify ways target parents can link into what is happening in the classroom and follow up with home visits. You can use these home visits to give advice on how to help their child with literacy/numeracy. You can provide parents with fun numeracy/literacy activities they can complete at home, with a small treat for completion. You can use the home visit to deliver 'good news postcards/photocards' that relate to a numeracy/literacy initiative involving their child. Parents can be encouraged to submit articles to the HSCL Parents Newsletter. You may also invite parents to participate in school literacy/numeracy programmes (on completion of Gardai vetting).
- Home visits regarding exam attainment. Target parents may need additional support and information in supporting their children with exams. This may include help completing paperwork, study guides and information on how parents may promote learning in the home, information on the specific exam or tests e.g., STEN scores explained at Primary level, CBA's and state exams explained at Post Primary. Parents may need additional support in being organised for Post Primary entrance tests, they may also need additional support in choosing subject options in 1<sup>st</sup> year, and in deciding which senior cycle course is most suitable. HSCL coordinators can liaise with the SEN coordinator and Guidance counsellor (Post Primary) regarding supports they can offer students in regards exam attainment.
- Launch or update the HSCL section on your school's website, then visit target parents to let them know that the website is up and running and how it can help them.
- School avoidance and student anxiety are of significant concern for schools. Parents play an extremely important role in easing anxiety and creating positive daily routines. Use home visits to share information and discuss parental role in easing their child's anxiety. Advice for schools and parents regarding school avoidance is available from the National Psychological Service (NEPS) <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/5ef45c-neps>. The Claire School Avoidance Toolkit produced by Claire CYPSC also provides information for schools and parents <https://www.cypsc.ie/fileupload/Clare%20CYPSC/ClareSATWebVersion%20Final.pdf>



- Home visits to promote positive mental health. During home visits you can promote wellbeing/mental health talks that you have organised for parents. You can provide information and encourage parents to join the school's yellow flag committee. You can also promote parental participation in a wellbeing challenge or a parent class that improves wellbeing (healthy eating & exercise). You could also set up a support group for parents dealing with anxiety and encourage participation during home visits.
- Improving school attendance is an important focus of your work with parents. Initiatives to address this in school should always involve target parents. All target parents should receive visits to reinforce the importance of attendance and to be made aware of initiatives the school is running. Target parents can also be involved with the positive aspects of attendance campaigns, you can invite your target parents to decorate the school with posters, judge competitions, hand out prizes at awards ceremonies etc.
- It is important that any attendance issues are discussed with target parents during home visits. This is particularly important as parents will be more comfortable sharing information regarding issues that may be impinging on their child's attendance when in their own home.
- It is also important to note that home visits regarding attendance issues are part of the pre referral checklist when referring to the Education Welfare Service ([EWSTusla - Child and Family Agency](#)). If an EWS referral is made details of HSCL involvement should be clear and ongoing. HSCL coordinators should continue to visit families and support them in working with the Education Welfare Officer to improve attendance.
- Any child or young person referred to SCP should be visited by the HSCL coordinator, to share information on the role of SCP and to support parents in the referral process ([SCPTusla - Child and Family Agency](#)). HSCL visits should continue after the SCP referral (as in the case of EWO) to provide ongoing support to the parents.
- Traveller and Roma children are at a significantly higher risk of early school leaving. Consider initiatives specifically for Traveller and Roma parents. Home visits are important in helping parents feel connected to the school and in supporting Traveller and Roma families in key areas such as literacy and transition.
- Transition visits. All target parents should receive a home visit at the key stages of transition: Preschool-Primary, Primary-Post Primary (Junior Cycle-Senior Cycle) Post Primary-Third Level. There may be school based information sessions, but it is important that all target parents also receive individual check ins and assistance. Parents can also be encouraged to attend initiatives organised by the HSCL, such as a trip to a 3<sup>rd</sup> level College.



- Visit target parents to encourage participation in Parent-Teacher meetings. You can also organise follow up visits if target parents are unable to attend. If meetings are online, you can check all target parents are able to access the meeting.
- Visit parents with a view to creating champion parents, identify parents with talents or leadership qualities and identify how you can utilise these qualities.
- Visit target parents to encourage participation in the Parents Association, but if they say no this does not mean they no longer have a voice on important issues. Parent involvement in school policy is not just limited to the Parents Association. If an important policy is due for review, you could visit your target parents outlining the policy and asking if they wish to give their feedback on the policy, you may then help them complete questionnaires or feed-back sheets on the policy.
- If you are running classes for parents, visit your target parents to encourage their participation. Also use your home visits to identify parents needs in relation to classes, ask their opinions on what they would like to see offered, their interest in participating or why they don't participate.
- Positive news stories, invites to class celebrations and delivering positive postcards/photocards are a great reason for a home visit.
- Keep an eye on our HSCL newsletter which will have information on initiatives that involve home visits as well as information that you may wish to share with your target parents.

***This list is not exhaustive, and you may not be in a position to complete all suggestions, but it may be of benefit in clarifying why you should visit and help you get home visits embedded in your practice.***