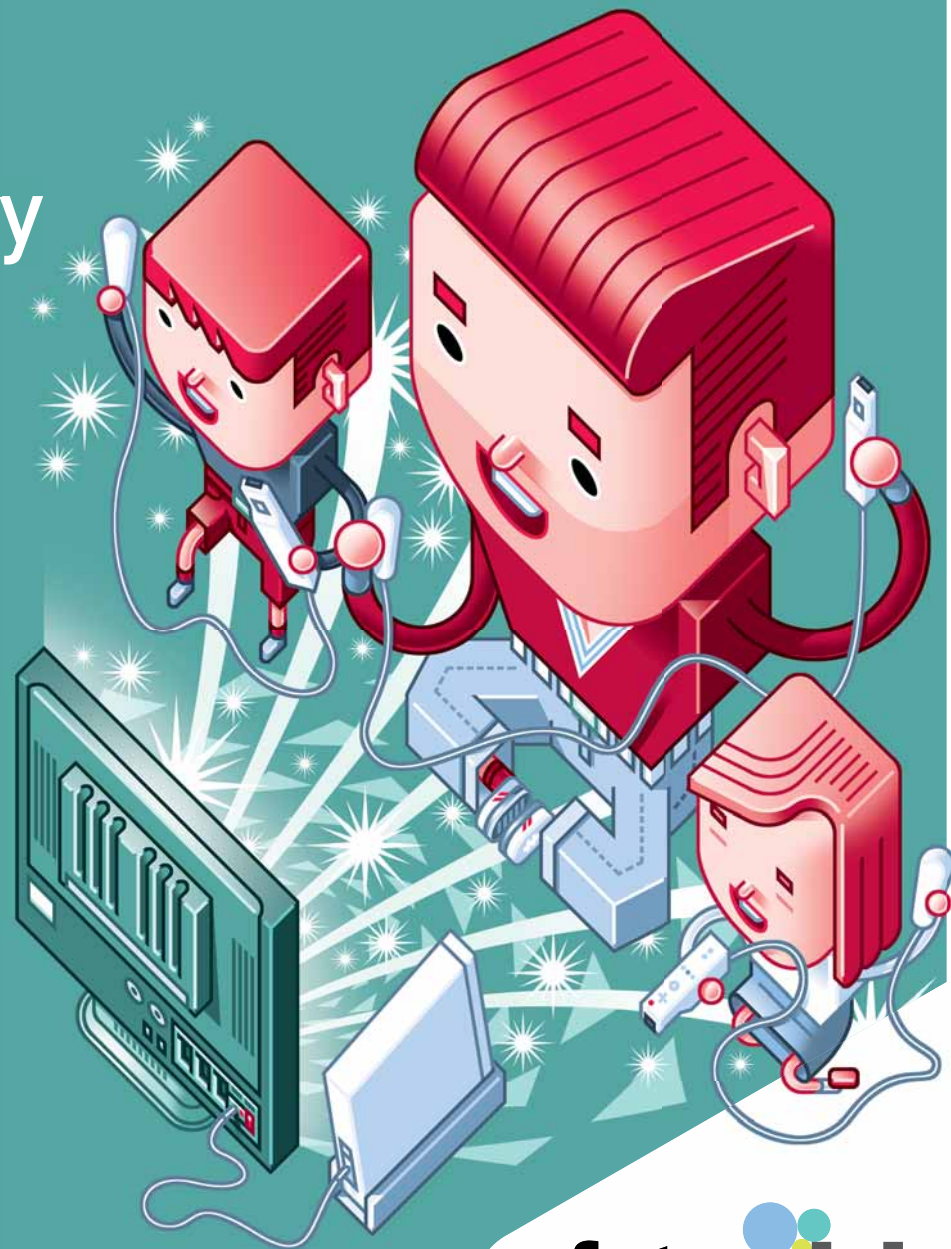


Possibilities for learning in families with technology

These scenarios have been developed to illustrate just some of the multitude of ways in which technologies can support learning in families. They are aimed at newcomers to the subject, as well as policy makers, practitioners and those in industry who may be interested in further exploring the potential of digital technologies to support learning in families. These scenarios provide a starting point for considering the potential benefits of using technologies to support learning in families, and the challenges that learners may face around this issue. Although these scenarios resemble the experiences of real people, they are based largely on the findings from an extensive desk research project and do not represent the learning journeys of specific individuals.

There are many ways in which families learn both with and without technologies and these scenarios are not exhaustive and are not intended to endorse particular models of learning journeys. Instead, they point to the many diverse opportunities that technologies can provide to enhance and transform learning, as well as some of the issues and difficulties that need to be considered when we seek to use technology to support learning in families. Please see the General Educator's Report for the background research and discussion on which these scenarios are based.

To download scenarios online or for further information go to:
www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/learning-in-families.



2. Family engagement in learning for pleasure: all aboard the SS Great Britain

The story so far

Oliver, 11, has been studying local history at school, while his father, Neil, has a lifelong personal interest in boats and ships. Both parents work and the children often spend time with their friends, so it is difficult for them to find time and activities to do together that they all enjoy. Neil and Michelle are also keen to introduce their children to new activities and interests.

Challenges

Practical barriers including time, transport to venue and cost of tickets.

Provision of appropriate facilities and activities for both children and adults.

Prioritising a museum visit over other activities; special family events hosted by the museum can prompt visits.

Perceived cultural barriers can dissuade visitors from working class, minority and ethnic backgrounds from visiting museums, feeling it's 'not for them'.

What they did

Neil and Michelle took their children, Oliver and Alice, to visit the SS Great Britain; on the ship, everyone chose an audio guide of a different character. As they explored, the guide played the relevant part of the commentary. Oliver followed the Cook's boy, Michelle listened to a maritime archaeologist, Neil chose a first class passenger and Alice chose the ship's cat. As they each listened to their own tours, they called each other over to swap notes about what they had found out, sharing their learning.

The whole family developed skills of learning to learn, and strengthened a family culture in which learning is valued.

Further challenges

Practical barriers including time, transport to venue and cost of tickets still need to be overcome.

Schools need to be aware of and understand the learning children do in their families in order to build upon it in school.

Information about opportunities and events at local, accessible venues needs to be easily available so families are aware of learning opportunities in museums and cultural venues in their area; through children's school; online; via other venues etc.

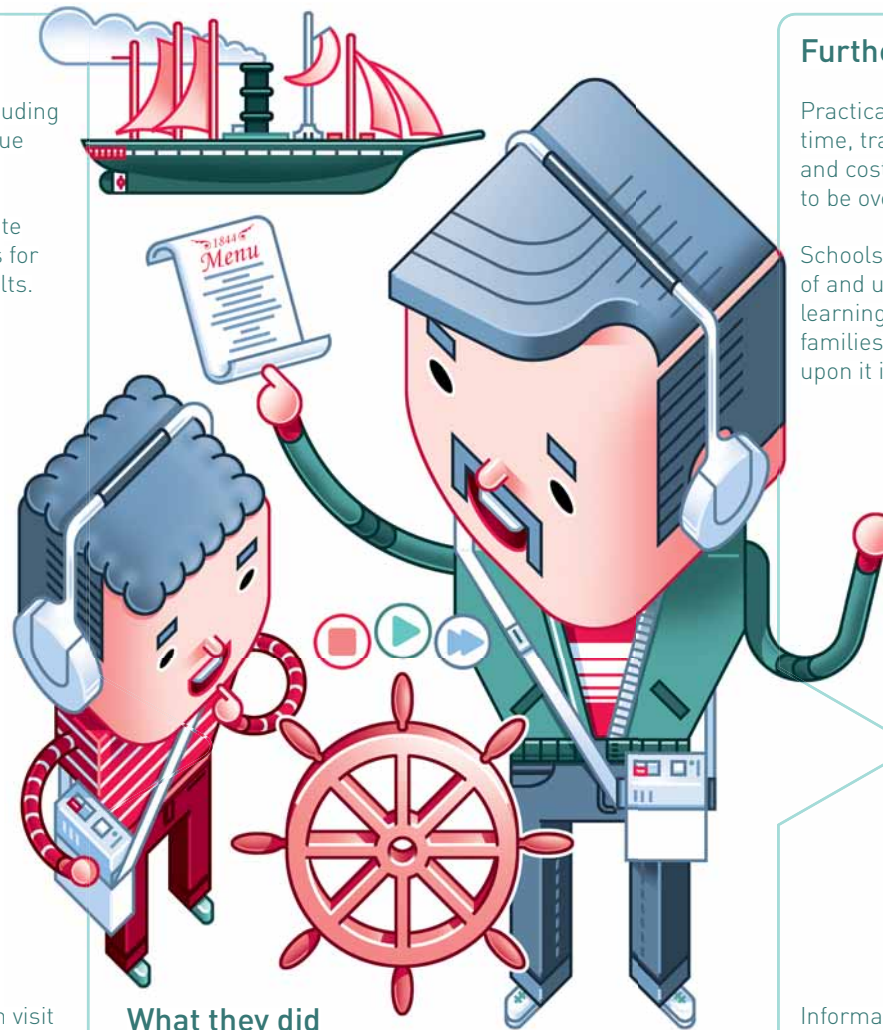
What next?

Possible future learning journeys

The children's interests in local history motivate and support historical projects at school. Their confidence in themselves as learners also supports their learning at school.

Family members follow up interests online, through books and magazines, evening classes, and visits to other historical and cultural events and venues.

This experience may contribute towards a 'family learning culture' in which family members are confident and interested in learning, and are able to support one another's learning.



3. Supporting children's personal, social, emotional development and life skills: playing safe

The story so far

Soo Jin has noticed that her daughter Mi Cha (9) is playing games in online virtual worlds such as Club Penguin for about an hour every day after school. Soo Jin thinks that it is important that Mi Cha uses computers, but doesn't understand everything she does on it. Soo Jin has some familiarity of using computers; she sends e-mails, searches the internet, and shops online, but doesn't know much about games.

Soo Jin wants to make sure that Mi Cha is using the internet safely; she is concerned about online bullying, computer addiction and contact from strangers.

Mi Cha wants to carry on having fun with her friends online, but she also wants to be in control and keep herself safe.

Challenges

Reliable information and guidance about the risks and benefits of different technologies can be difficult to find.

High levels of literacy skills are required to read information and guidance, evaluate it and apply it to your own context.

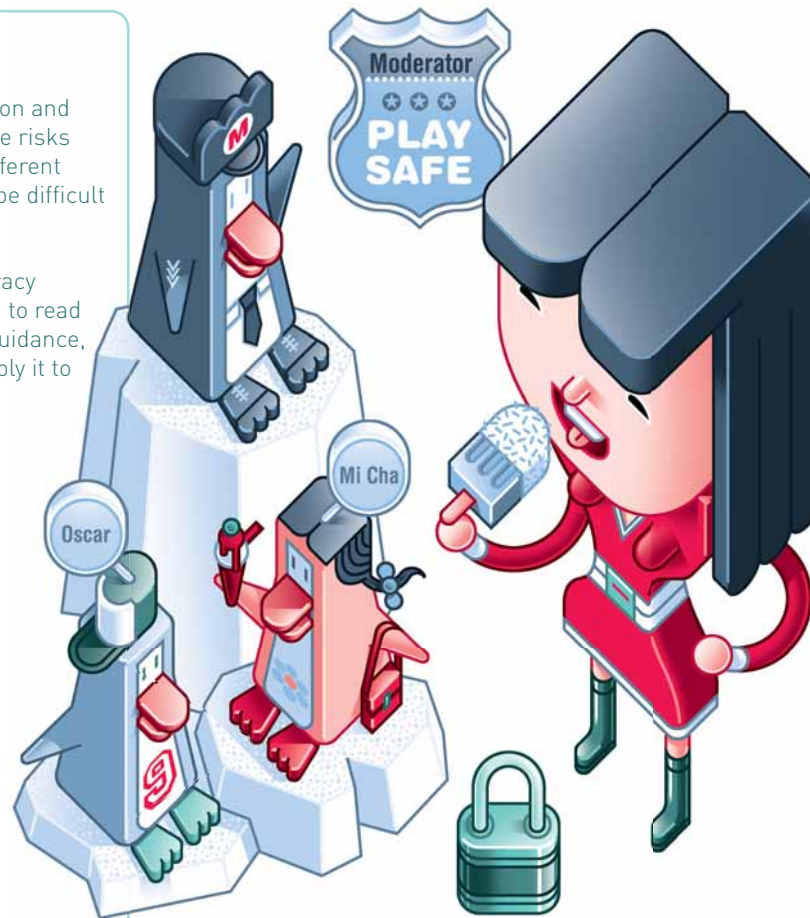
Children can resent parents' demands to know what they are doing online as an intrusion of privacy; a trusting relationship is required to handle potentially sensitive conversations.

What they did

Soo Jin researched online safety on the internet to find guidance and learn about online virtual worlds and spoke to parents of her daughter's friends about what they were doing.

Soo Jin learned from Mi Cha about virtual worlds, and realised how her daughter could speak in a reflective and sophisticated way about her gaming. She talked to Mi Cha about bullying, addiction and strangers and they agreed ground rules. Soo Jin now keeps the computer in the hallway and tries to be around when Mi Cha's on it, although this isn't always possible.

Soo Jin learnt about internet safety, virtual worlds, and her daughter's expertise. Mi Cha learned strategies to stay safe online.



Further challenges

Children's natural desire for more privacy and control over their own activities can mean they resent parents' attempts to ensure they are being safe online.

Finding a safe online context, such as amongst trusted friends, in which to begin exploring online communication and game play can be difficult.

What next?

Possible future learning journeys

Mi Cha teaches her grandparents in the USA to keep in touch and play games with her on Club Penguin.

Soo Jin learns more about online communication and uses different channels (MSN, social networks) to keep in touch with her own friends and Mi Cha.

As Mi Cha grows up she learns to use lots of other technologies to connect with and learn from peers, making good judgements about online behaviour.

4. Participation and acculturation in family life: Wii are family

The story so far

Stephen Curtis lives with his girlfriend Mia and their children, Leah, 4, and Lewis, 6. Stephen enjoys playing computer games and is excited to try out the Nintendo Wii. Leah and Lewis like to spend time with their dad when he's home, and get involved with things that he is interested in. They are also familiar with and enjoy playing computer games at home. They especially like it when they can beat their dad at a game.

Challenges

Finding time when all the family are available to play together is difficult, especially when it involves negotiating with extended family in other locations.

Games consoles such as the Wii are expensive, as are individual games. Internet-enabled features incur further expenses.

Finding games that are age-appropriate and fun for the whole family can be difficult.



What they did

Stephen, Mia, Lewis and Leah all enjoy playing games on the Wii; especially where they can compete against one another, such as Mario Party. Sometimes their cousins join their games via an internet connection.

When Leah plays on the Wii she learns to be patient, make decisions, and develop motor skills. Play doesn't stop with the Wii console; both children use characters, songs and themes from the Wii in their open-ended play with their parents as they play out their feelings and ideas. Playing together on the Wii provides a shared context and reference point for talk and play.

Further challenges

Confidence, imagination and skill to incorporate Wii games into other joint and open-ended play in the family.

Finding and prioritising time to play together with children can be difficult, particularly when there are pressing demands such as work and there are multiple children in the home.

The Wii and Wii Fit are unlikely in themselves to inspire joint play and healthy living in families where this does not already happen; they may however reinforce and support these practices where they already take place to some extent.

What next?

Possible future learning journeys

Playing and talking together, including during games on the Wii, can help children develop their communication skills and express themselves confidently with peers and adults.

Alongside other aspects of a healthy lifestyle, playing Wii Fit games can help both children and parents learn about and take part in exercise.

Playing on the Wii together is one of a number of activities in which the family are able to spend time together strengthening their family relationships.

5. Developing adult basic skills: RaW ambition

The story so far

John didn't do well at school. He had very low confidence, and at work he hid the fact that he couldn't read or write very well by copying from other people.

When his son, Ryan, started nursery, John realised that Ryan would soon be reading and writing better than his father. John wanted to be able to help Ryan with his homework and for Ryan not to be embarrassed by his dad's low skills.

John also wanted to improve his reading, writing and computer skills so that he would have the opportunity get a job in an office as he felt he was getting too old for manual work.

Challenges

Low confidence can lead to reluctance and embarrassment in admitting basic skills learning needs and seeking help.

School environment can be intimidating for people who had bad school experiences; settings such as libraries and community centres can be less intimidating.

Finding information about available opportunities can itself require a basic level of literacy skills, whether that is via posters, leaflets or radio and TV adverts.

Finding time to attend classes regularly and complete homework can be difficult to fit in with employment and family duties.

What they did

John enrolled in Learn Direct courses at his local Community Centre, where he also started to use computers, using the BBC RaW website to practice reading and writing skills. RaW also gave him ideas to help his son learn; at home they make up stories together using pictures as starting points, writing them down into homemade books.

John improved his reading, writing and computer skills, and improved his confidence in himself as a learner. By sharing and enjoying stories together, he is also supporting his son's learning and instilling the confidence and love of learning in his son that he himself missed out on.

Further challenges

Longstanding low confidence is hard to dispel entirely. People returning to learning need safe, supported and manageable steps to progression.

Practical barriers to taking part in face-to-face and online basic skills courses such as time, transport, childcare, fees and cost of equipment need to be overcome; free courses and supportive employers can play an important role here.

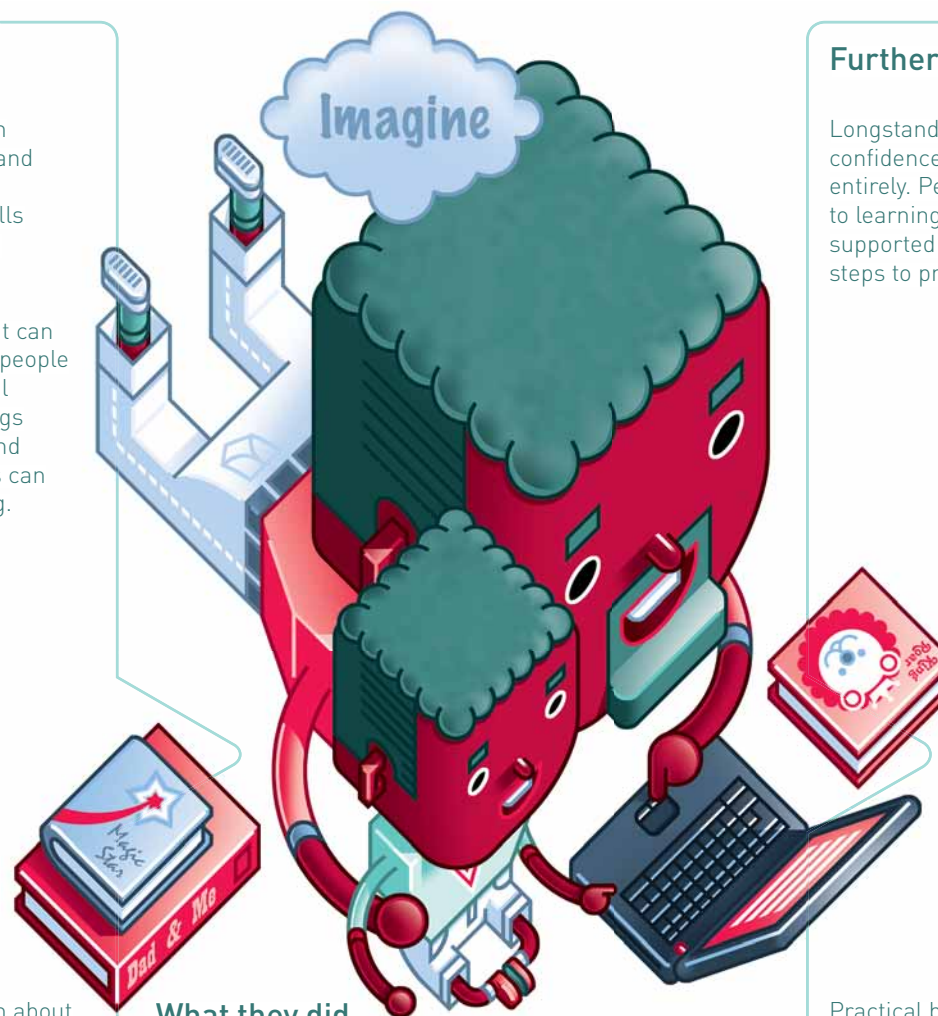
What next?

Possible future learning journeys

John has an ambition to provide opportunities for young people that he missed out on, and enrolled on a youth work course.

John is able to show his children how to use the computer, as well as to help them enjoy reading and writing.

John's son grows up in a culture of valuing learning. Ryan is highly motivated to learn for himself, joining after-school computer clubs so he can come home and share new tips he's learned with his dad.



6. Enhancing family relationships: am I being unreasonable?

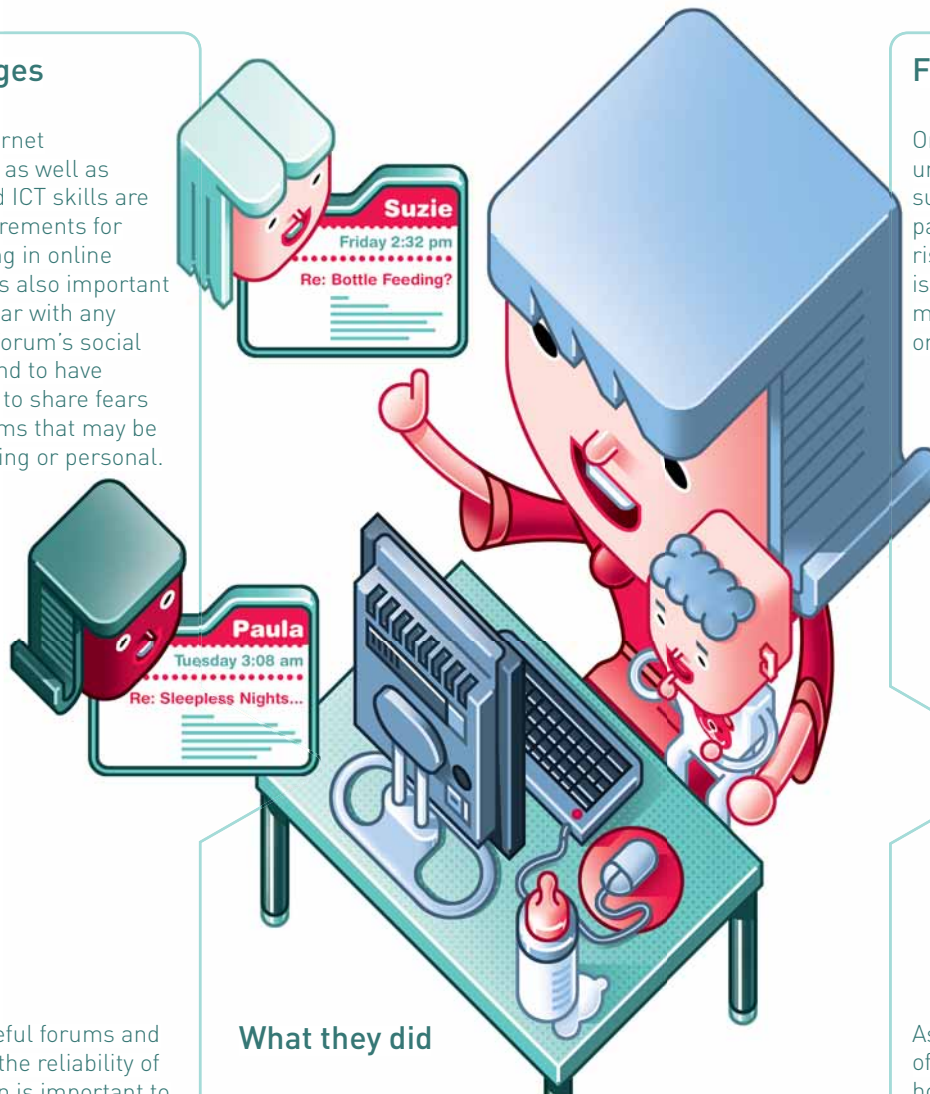
The story so far

Angela is 27 and learning to bring up her three-month old daughter, Alisha, and adjusting to the changes in her relationship with Alisha's father, Leon. The other new mothers in Angela's pre-natal group provide her with support and advice as does Angela's own mother.

However, there are times when Angela finds herself frustrated and worrying about whether she's doing the right thing as a parent. Sometimes she's embarrassed to talk to Leon or her mother about feeling like a bad mother and sometimes she needs advice at three in the morning and doesn't feel able to wake them up.

Challenges

A good internet connection as well as literacy and ICT skills are basic requirements for participating in online forums. It is also important to be familiar with any particular forum's social etiquette and to have confidence to share fears and problems that may be embarrassing or personal.



Finding useful forums and evaluating the reliability of advice given is important to get the benefits from online support forums.

Many parenting forums are tailored towards mothers and may seem to exclude fathers; while there are now some forums targeted at fathers, this kind of support seems to be less attractive to them.

What they did

Angela was introduced to mumsnet.com by a friend from her pre-natal group. Angela asked a question on the forums, and received lots of encouragement, frank responses and advice. She participates regularly on the forums, asking questions and giving advice and opinions.

Talking to other parents helped Angela reflect on her own parenting style and relationship with Leon, as well as discovering practical tips. She made local friends, who give her the social support needed to be a good parent. Learning to be a good parent, and to adjust to her new relationship with Leon, helps them all learn how to cope and grow as a family.

Further challenges

Online forums alone are unlikely to provide all the support parents need, particularly for families at risk or with more serious issues such as abuse, mental health problems or poverty.

As well as practical issues of internet access, learning how to participate in online forums and evaluate advice is important in making effective use of online peer parenting support.

What next?

Possible future learning journeys

Angela continues to find support from Mumsnet contacts. Having a broader social network provides significant support for parents.

Following Angela's example, Leon agrees that sometimes they need help to develop their parenting skills and seeks out guidance on the internet.

Angela and Leon's approach to seeking help allows them to provide a supportive environment for their children and to deal with problems early.

About Futurelab

Futurelab is passionate about transforming the way people learn. Tapping into the huge potential offered by digital and other technologies, we are developing innovative learning resources and practices that support new approaches to education for the 21st century.

Working in partnership with industry, policy and practice, Futurelab:

- incubates new ideas, taking them from the lab to the classroom
- offers hard evidence and practical advice to support the design and use of innovative learning tools
- communicates the latest thinking and practice in educational ICT
- provides the space for experimentation and the exchange of ideas between the creative, technology and education sectors.

A not-for-profit organisation, Futurelab is committed to sharing the lessons learnt from our research and development in order to inform positive change to educational policy and practice.



About Becta

Becta is the government agency leading the national drive to ensure the effective and innovative use of technology throughout learning. It is our ambition to utilise the benefits of technology to create a more exciting, rewarding and successful experience for learners of all ages and abilities, enabling them to achieve their potential. We do this in many ways. We make sure the right technology is available, we influence the development of policy, and we set standards and provide tools that help establish and promote best practice. We know that technology has the potential to transform learning. We are committed to inspiring education providers to realise that potential, and equip learners for Britain's future success.

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About this programme of work

Futurelab is undertaking a programme of work - supported by Becta - to contribute to their 'Harnessing Technology: Next Generation Learning 2008-14' strategy which aims to bring about a step-change in the way technology is used across the education and skills system, enabling learners to take greater control of their learning.

As part of this programme of work, Futurelab is investigating the potential of digital technologies to support learning in families. We are carrying out research into families' learning needs and aspirations and the role of digital technologies in widening access to and supporting learning in families.

This poster is one of the outcomes from this work but for further information, go to: www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/learning-in-families.

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What is learning in families?

This project includes a wide range of activities within the scope of learning in families. We have included both formal and informal learning where adults, children or both are learning in a family context that involves two or more family members from different generations. We take an inclusive view of families, including step-families, carers, extended and divided families.