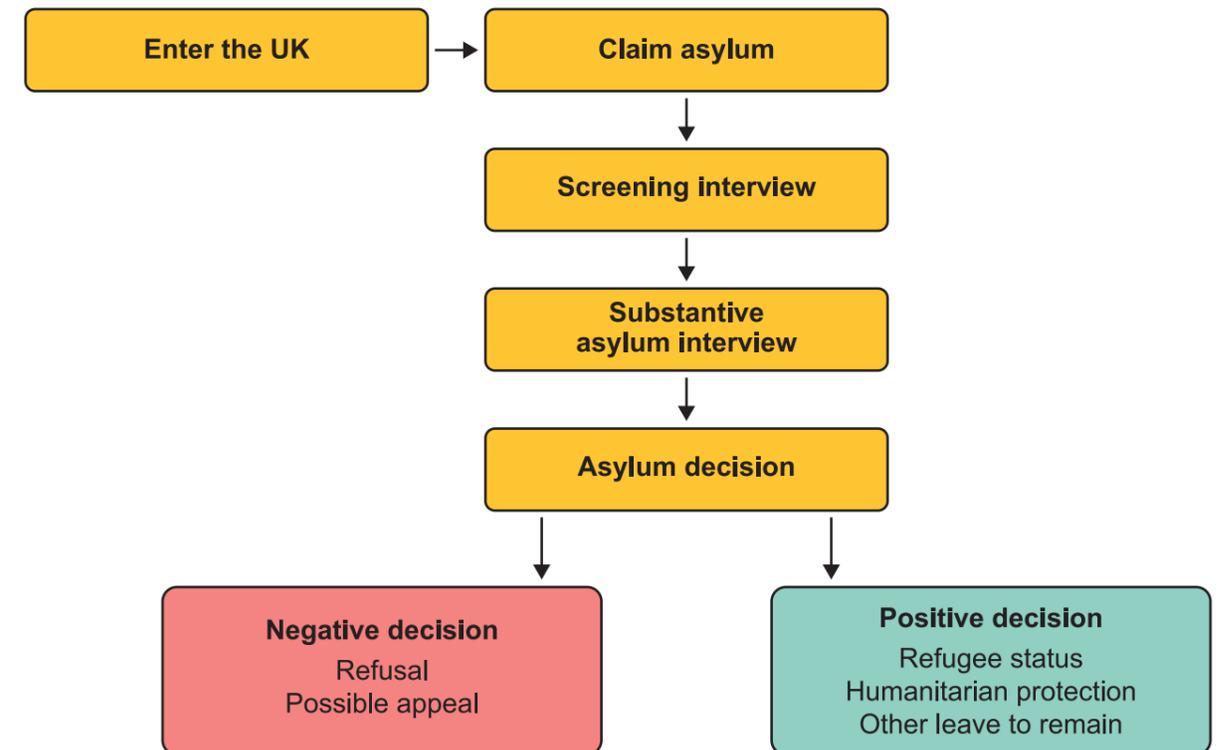


# Collaborating with Parents/ Caregivers



To work effectively with parents and caregivers, it is vital that staff understand the common issues impacting this community.

Firstly, let's take a quick look at the current asylum process families go through in the UK.



This process is often slow and each stage can cause substantial stress to the family claiming. People have to remember and retell traumatic events and share intimate details about their lives, all in the hopes that they will be believed and accepted as refugees. Families may be housed in hotels (with all recreational amenities closed) and live on limited financial support.

The challenges below were gathered from conversations with IRC's asylum-seeking and refugee clients, our Client Advisory Board (CAB) and a 2025 report on education barriers for asylum-seeking families. Underpinning most of these issues is the current policy that asylum-seekers have no right to work (except in very specific circumstances) and no recourse to public funds, leaving many destitute.



The issues most families face fall across 4 key areas:

**Finance**

**Curriculum**

**Communication**

**Access**

“Parents carry a lot – adjusting to a new life, managing the family impact of trauma and displacement, trying to create a sense of normality for their children and spouses.”

Pashtana, Afghanistan.

bringing items into school, discos. One parent said: “Here I go thinking that everything is going to be good. And then they’ve got a dress-up day where the kids have got to put... spotty colours... I don’t have this at home. And you’ve got to go out and say “okay, I’ll try to find this thing”. You don’t want your child to feel left out.”

- **Uniform costs** are out of budget for many families and opportunities to buy second hand or access funding support are often not clearly communicated so families miss out.
- **Transport is a significant cost** that many struggle to keep up with.
- Many families **struggle to buy mobile data** for their children to complete homework and to buy the appropriate IT equipment to access necessary apps and websites.

The most common challenges are listed below:

- **Students not accessing free school meals (FSM)** as parents were unaware of their eligibility. Sometimes schools were unaware of the eligibility so students had to pay.
- **Surprise expenses.** For example, non-uniform days, fundraising activities, outfits/costume days,

- Families often experience **sudden accommodation changes**, meaning they have to switch schools and start the whole process again.
- Parents reported **feelings of stigma and shame** at not being able to afford basics for their children to go to school.
- Many parents reported they are **not provided translated materials or interpreters**, leaving them with no way to advocate for their children or learn about available support or other key information.
- Many families **cannot afford school trips**, so their children are excluded from learning and community building opportunities with peers.
- Any money spent on education is coming out of families’ pots for the rest of their basic needs. Many parents are **constantly weighing up where the little money they have can be best spent.**

“The focus needs to be on the whole family rather than just the child. Schools need to know about families. Are parents literate in their first language? In English? With technology? Many schools rely on tech and digital communication.”

Mir, Afghanistan.

In the report, it was found that many asylum-seeking children were “growing up in deep poverty and severe material deprivation” (Pinter, 2025).

We spoke to our Client Advisory Board (CAB) and other clients from our refugee integration programmes and found the following challenges:

- **Fear and rumours around what (and how) topics are discussed** in PSHE, Religious Studies and Sex Education. Parents withdrawing children as result but children still having access to online content which can teach these topics in a harmful and dishonest way.
- **Bullying, racism and xenophobia** in some schools not being dealt with in a serious way and parents receiving little support to navigate such situations.
- **Parental digital literacy is a huge issue** leaving some parents with no contact with school and students missing key events due to this. Some parents are not literate in their first language so require interpreters rather than written communication.
- Some parents **lack information about schooling in Britain** or what is expected of parents. Teaching and learning approaches vary greatly across countries.
- **Parents often feel isolated** and would appreciate events that could bring them into school to meet others in the community.
- **Communication is a huge issue.** Often asylum-seeking parents will rely on a strong English speaker in the hotel to accompany them to meetings but if they don’t have this person, they can struggle.
- **Lack of opportunities to learn about British culture and the English language.** Parents sometimes struggle to find ways to integrate with limited finances and no right to work.

**“Parenting support contributes a lot to community resilience.”**

Pashtana.



- Invite guest speakers** to talk to all students about different cultures, religions and migration.
- Second hand uniform shop**, all year around. Free equipment packs with necessary stationery.
- Ensuring parents know what they can apply for** (e.g. FSM, uniform grants, travel bursaries – if available in your area).
- Utilise Pupil Premium funds to help fund trip places.**
- Homework clubs** where parents can volunteer.
- Parent forums** where parents of different language groups are invited into school with an interpreter. This provides an opportunity for parents to ask any questions and for school to discuss important issues with communities.
- Explain the purpose of events** (e.g. a jumping competition for charity). These events may seem strange to parents, but quick explanations can help.

*Tick any of the above that your school/setting currently does.*

### What can schools do to help?

- Translate all communications with parents.**  
This empowers parents to understand and act immediately rather than having to find someone to translate or not reading letters at all. This also shows parents that school cares and wants to involve them. Some parents may be illiterate in their own language. It is important to gain this information using an interpreter during the first meeting.
- Interpreters during initial meeting with parents are essential** to get key background information and adapt from there.
- Create homework and communications options that are offline and accessible.**
- Organise relevant and accessible events** for parents to come into school. Examples: decorating a classroom, sharing/selling food to fundraise, re-designing a garden in the playground, organising books in the library, running a workshop on a cultural skill or craft. Bringing parents into school can help facilitate their integration and foster trust between the school and the family.
- Language support sessions in school.** For example: beginners English clubs, conversation clubs with volunteers from the community, partner with local university or charity so they can use a classroom for free English classes.

**“Schools could offer information evenings and invite people based on language in different groups to make interpretation easier. They may feel more confident asking questions surrounded by others from their community.”**

Marah, Syria.



## Case Study

The Kareem Family from Nablus, Palestine



The Kareem family have two children in your school and are currently living in a hotel which has been the target of anti-refugee protests in recent months. Anas, the youngest sibling, has told his teacher all about his mum and her wonderful artwork based on different places back home in Palestine. He tells his teacher how lonely his parents are in the hotel and how they wish they could work or become more involved in the local community. Khaled, the oldest sibling has been showing you the traditional Arabic dance of dabke and was teaching his friends how to do it in PE. Khaled says his surname, Kareem, means generous in Arabic and tells you how important community is in Palestine. He says here feels too quiet and people seem to keep to themselves. He misses his home so much.

*What can your school do to help welcome and include this family in the community?*

What HC technique will you use?	How will you implement this technique?	What is the intended impact?