

How Many Hats? Activity

What you need to run the activity

- Large number of small different hat-shaped pieces of paper (approx. 2 inches in size, and no need for anything too fancy- witches hats, bowler hats, top hats work quite well and are easy to cut out!)

Aim of the activity

- For participants to begin to understand the considerable knowledge and wide range of skills they hold in relation to their role as a parent carer;
- To empower participants and give them more confidence by acknowledging their skills and experience, both at an individual level but also collectively;
- To support them to realise they are an expert about their *own* child.

How to run the activity

- Break the larger group into smaller groups of approx. 4 people who will need to be sitting around a table;
- Give a small pile of 'hats' to each table and ask them to consider their role as a parent and the range of tasks they need to achieve as a parent for any child (nothing to do with disability or additional needs);
- Ask them to write one role or job on each hat i.e. taxi driver, cook etc.
- Then ask them to write any *additional* roles or jobs they undertake as parent carers i.e. physio etc.
- You may at this stage need to give out more hats but this helps reinforce just how many roles families take on;
- When the groups are ready, ask them to feed back in small batches (2-3) from each table in turn asking them to explain their thinking or experiences if any clarification is needed and if time allows;
- It works best if any repeated roles are turned over and not duplicated but equally allowing everyone a turn to join in and feel involved.

Key learning points

- This is a very visual and interactive way of unpicking just how much individual parent carers do for their disabled child and the high levels of experience, knowledge and expertise that they hold;
- When specific roles are mentioned such as feeding, managing medicines and equipment or managing/interpreting challenging behaviour etc. this is a good time to introduce the concept of how a child's needs can be best met with a combination of our expertise as parent carers in partnership with the expertise of the professionals. For example a Speech and Language Therapist will be an expert about communication but only the parents can fully understand how a difficulty with communication affects their child on a daily basis
- Additional learning points from this session for Parent Carer Forums can be drawn out of this activity looking at how much knowledge and expertise they have, how collectively they are so skilled and how infrequently any one asks 'what do you do/did you do before you had your child'?