



# Social and Emotional Aspects of Development

Guidance for practitioners working in  
the Early Years Foundation Stage





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This booklet is part of a package of training and development on Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) which has four parts:

1. This booklet for practitioners is focused mainly on the younger children in the EYFS (birth–36 months), although there is much that will be of interest to practitioners working with the older children. It is designed to be used in a number of ways:

- alongside the SEAD local authority (LA) trainers' handbook as part of an LA-organised training course;
- by individuals or groups of practitioners to aid reflective practice about supporting young children's personal, social and emotional development;
- by practitioners in discussion groups with parents.

2. A SEAD LA trainer's handbook which contains resources for trainers to use in planning professional development for practitioners working with children from birth to five.

3. Excellence and Enjoyment: social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) This is a comprehensive whole-school approach to promoting social and emotional skills. The red booklets targeted at reception classes and older nursery children (30–50 and 40–60+ months) have been repackaged in line with the EYFS.

4. A CD-ROM containing all the above plus case studies and other resources.

These can all be ordered from:

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and downloaded from [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk).

2 **The National Strategies | Early Years**  
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## Section 1

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

#### 1.1 What is Personal, Social and Emotional Development and why is it important?

Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) are three building blocks of future success in life. They are closely linked to each other and often bracketed together as one area of learning and development.

- Personal development (Being me) – how we come to understand who we are and what we can do, how we look after ourselves.
- Social development (Being social) – how we come to understand ourselves in relation to others, how we make friends, understand the rules of society and behave towards others.
- Emotional development (Having feelings) – how we come to understand our own and others' feelings and develop our ability to 'stand in someone else's shoes' and see things from their point of view, referred to as empathy.

Starting the process of successful PSED is essential for young children in all aspects of their lives. It will help them to:

- relate well to other children and adults;
- make friends and get on with others;
- feel secure and valued;
- explore and learn confidently; and ultimately to
- feel good about themselves.

Early PSED has a huge impact on later well-being, learning, achievement and economic circumstances. That is why the Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities (LAs), with their partners in settings 'to improve the well-being of all young children in their area and to reduce the inequalities between them'.

This booklet is intended to support practitioners in doing this.



## 1.2 What can parents and practitioners do to understand and support children's PSED?

The simple answer to this question is 'work together'.

Most children are born into loving families who nurture and support their development. The loving things parents do every day such as cuddling, comforting, talking, playing, being proud of every achievement and celebrating it in the family, are the foundations of successful PSED. We are all competent learners from birth and it is usually our parents who give us the confidence to keep learning and stretching the boundaries of our understanding. Parents are very interested in their children's progress as they join groups of other babies or young children in an early years setting. Practitioners work hard to ensure that children are happy in their learning and development and it helps children if parents are genuine partners with practitioners.

### Brain fact

Did you know...

That the sense of touch is the first to develop in the foetus, and is crucially important in a baby's development. (It is also the last sense to leave us as we die.)

### Learning point:

Appropriate reassuring hugs and cuddles are an essential part of working with young children. It is important to consider your own and colleagues' understanding of this, particularly in relation to the Welfare Requirement – Safeguarding and Promoting children's welfare.

Practitioners can help parents and children by:	See section:
Being knowledgeable about child development	2
Encouraging children and families to have a strong cultural identity and pride	2
Respecting and listening to the views of parents and thus building a strong relationship	3
Understanding the importance of attachment and a key person	3
Understanding and managing the behaviour of children and staff effectively	3
Encouraging a sense of belonging for children and families	4
Making opportunities for children to be successful	4
Understanding why happy sociable children learn better	5
Recognising and celebrating achievement across all six areas of learning and development	5

There is a range of factors that can adversely affect children's PSED. The following can all have an impact:

- Premature / low birth weight
- Poor health
- Poverty
- Lack of warmth and affection
- Parental drug or substance abuse
- Poor housing
- Abuse
- Social, racial or cultural discrimination
- Poor relationships with practitioners

Practitioners alone cannot counter all of these factors but they can make a huge difference by the way they work with young children and their families.

### **Brain fact**

Did you know...

That brain cells develop within the first few weeks of a pregnancy; 50,000 cells are produced every second while developing in the womb. A baby has 100 billion brain cells (or neurons) at birth. By 24 weeks of gestation all these brain cells have been developed and from this time to the end of the first year after a baby is born the cells develop their specific functions and connections (synapses). Within the first 8 months after birth these synapses are created at a phenomenal rate with a baby having developed 1,000 trillion such connections. These connections between cells continue to develop well into childhood, with the number being at a peak when a child is 8 to 10 years of age.

Many things can interfere with the development of the brain while the baby is in the womb. One of these is the presence of high levels of the hormone cortisol in the mother's blood stream, which interferes with the development of the connections or synapses. Cortisol is produced as a response to stress.

Babies and young children can themselves become stressed if their caregivers lack responsiveness to their emotional and physical needs. Their bodies will release cortisol at times of stress, affecting the brain by impeding the development of connections between brain cells. It is these connections that are needed for successful future development and learning.

### 1.3 What does the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) say about PSED?

The themes and principles of EYFS

**A Unique Child:**

Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

**Positive Relationships:**

Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

**Enabling Environments:**

The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.

**Learning and Development:**

Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important.

In order to effectively put these EYFS principles into practice, practitioners have to understand and support children's personal, social and emotional development. Important aspects of PSED are embedded in the principles and explored further in the commitments that underpin each principle. The next four sections of this booklet explain this in more depth.

As well as being embedded in the four principles, underpinning the whole framework, PSED is one of the six areas of learning and development. The EYFS gives providers of early years education and care this statutory responsibility as regards PSED:

Children must be provided with experiences and support that will help them to develop a positive sense of themselves and of others; respect for others; social skills; and a positive disposition to learn. Providers must ensure support for children's emotional well-being to help them to know themselves and what they can do.

(Statutory Framework for the EYFS p. 12)

The EYFS Welfare Requirements are integral to successfully fostering children's personal, social and emotional development and also place statutory responsibilities on providers. The requirement for 'Safeguarding and promoting children's welfare' states that:

*The provider must take appropriate steps to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*

and

*Children's behaviour must be managed effectively and in a manner appropriate for their stage of development and particular individual needs.*

(Statutory Framework for the EYFS pp. 22 and 28)

Under 'Organisation' it says that:

*Providers must plan and organise their systems to ensure that every child receives an enjoyable and challenging learning and development experience that is tailored to meet their individual needs*

and

*Each child must be assigned a key person.*

(Statutory Framework for the EYFS p.37)

Examples of effective practice in PSED that help practitioners to meet these requirements and put the principles into practice are threaded throughout the EYFS. Here are just a few examples, but you can find many others:

1.2 Inclusive Practice

1.4 Health and Well-being

2.2 Parents as Partners

2.4 Key Person

3.3 The Learning Environment

4.1 Play and Exploration

Communication, Language and Literacy

## 1.4 How does SEAD link with the SEAL programme used in primary schools?

If you work in a primary school or have children at school you might have already heard about SEAL. SEAL stands for Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning. Most primary schools, many nursery schools and increasing numbers of secondary schools use SEAL. You will probably be wondering what SEAL is, why it is important and how it links SEAD and PSED.

### What is SEAL?

SEAL is a whole-school programme that supports schools and plans to help children and young people develop social and emotional skills. These skills are the building blocks to learning, behaviour, well-being and attendance. They are also essential for all adults and are important for early years' practitioners and staff in schools. The skills are grouped under five aspects of learning: self-awareness, motivation, managing feelings, empathy and social skills. All these skills are emphasised within the EYFS, and most particularly within this handbook.

### How does SEAL work?

When a school implements SEAL it will consider all aspects of school life and consider how social and emotional skills can be promoted. This might involve reviewing several school policies, developing learning opportunities that explicitly help children to learn the skills and to apply them. If you look at the SEAL materials on the website ([www.bandapilot.org.uk](http://www.bandapilot.org.uk)) you will see a wide range of ideas for assemblies, staff-development activities, learning opportunities, a guidance booklet and resources to use across the school day.

### What are the links between SEAL, SEAD and EYFS?

PSED within the EYFS provides a broad structure and ideas for considering how settings can promote personal, social and emotional development of children. SEAL provides guidance about how PSED can be supported and developed within the school. It provides some specific examples about how a school can help a child, who is ready for a more structured approach (40–60 months), develop social and emotional skills through planned learning opportunities, inside and outside the classroom. PSED (within EYFS) can be divided into three main elements that have clear links with SEAL as follows:

PSED (within EYFS)	SEAL
Personal (being me) <i>Dispositions and attitudes</i> <i>Self-care</i>	Self-awareness and motivation
Social (being social) <i>Self-confidence and self-esteem</i> <i>Behaviour and self-control</i>	Social skills
Emotional (having feelings) <i>Making relationships</i> <i>Sense of community</i>	Managing feelings and empathy

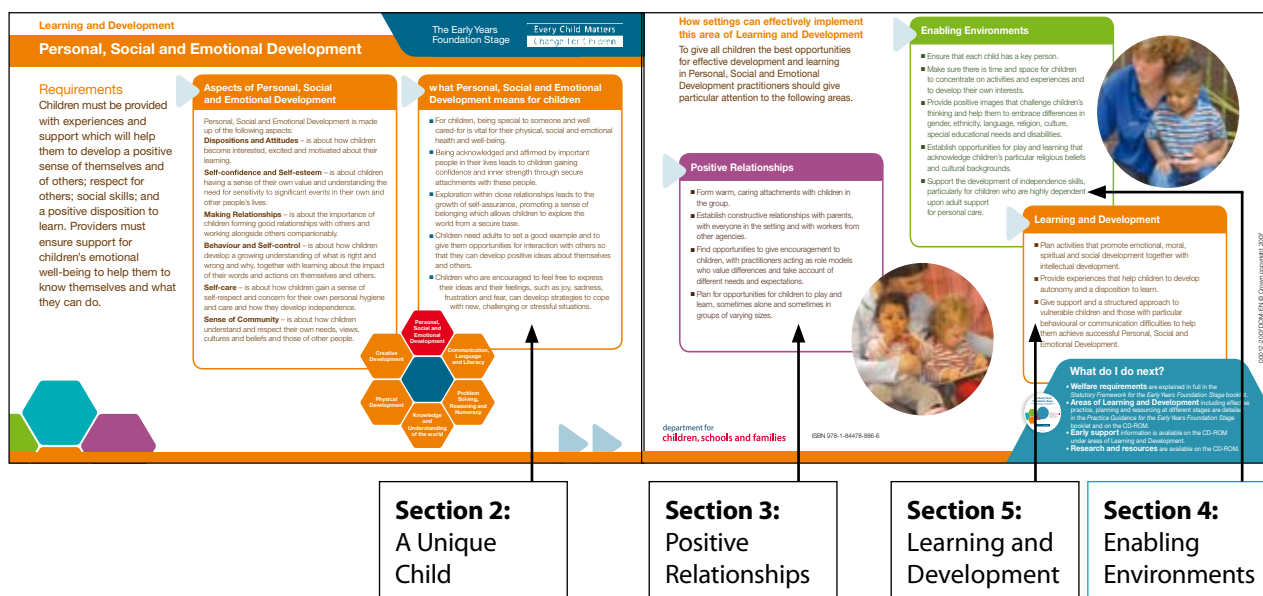
The SEAD materials provide a link between the EYFS and SEAL.

### What role do parents/carers play in SEAL?

Parents and carers have the key role in helping children develop social and emotional skills. SEAL contains specific materials that help parents understand how the school is supporting the development of skills and ideas about how they might help. These include Family SEAL workshops being run in schools.

## 1.5 How does this booklet help practitioners and parents to ensure quality support for children’s personal, social and emotional development from birth to the age of five, and close the achievement gap?

This booklet takes the EYFS card on PSED as the starting point and explores examples of effective practice under the headings of the four EYFS themes. It draws on materials available across the EYFS and brings them together to support practitioners in their work with children and parents. Throughout the booklet there is reference to ‘tuning in’ to children and parents. The ‘Reflect and note’ boxes will support and challenge practitioners in thinking about and tuning in to all the children and families that they work with and help them to close the gap in achievement between the most disadvantaged children and the rest.



## Section 2

### A unique child

#### Introduction

**Principle:** Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

#### **Commitments**

##### **Child development**

Babies and children develop in individual ways and at varying rates. Every area of development – physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual, social and emotional – is equally important.

##### **Inclusive practice**

The diversity of individuals and communities is valued and respected. No child or family is discriminated against.

##### **Keeping safe**

Young children are vulnerable. They develop resilience when their physical and psychological well-being is protected by adults.

##### **Health and well-being**

Children's health is an integral part of their emotional, mental, social, environmental and spiritual well-being and is supported by attention to these aspects.

The commitments listed above are important in putting the principle into practice. The Principles into Practice cards give more ideas about what each of these commitments will look and feel like for children, parents and staff. This section refers to some of the cards, however practitioners will find them all useful in supporting and extending children's personal, social and emotional development. All the commitments of A Unique Child require practitioners to 'tune in' to children as unique individuals. This involves:

- knowing about how children develop;
- observing children closely;
- listening actively, attentively, and with respect, to all children and parents whatever their background;
- being able to put yourself in the child's or parent's shoes by stepping outside yourself, and the way your setting is run, and seeing things from their point of view – often called having empathy;
- valuing what you learn from observing children and from talking with their parents and acting on it for the benefit of the children;
- understanding that physical and mental health and well-being are closely related.

### What Personal, Social and Emotional Development means for children

- For children, being special to someone and well cared-for is vital for their physical, social and emotional health and well-being.
- Being acknowledged and affirmed by important people in their lives leads to children gaining confidence and inner strength through secure attachments with these people.
- Exploration within close relationships leads to the growth of self-assurance, promoting a sense of belonging which allows children to explore the world from a secure base.
- Children need adults to set a good example and to give them opportunities for interaction with others so that they can develop positive ideas about themselves and others.
- Children who are encouraged to feel free to express their ideas and their feelings, such as joy, sadness, frustration and fear, can develop strategies to cope with new, challenging or stressful situations.

Personal,  
Social and

The rest of this section looks in depth at two statements from the EYFS PSED card. They are taken from 'What Personal, Social and Emotional Development means for children'.

## 2.1 Being acknowledged and affirmed by important people in their lives leads to children gaining confidence and inner strength through secure attachments with these people

### 2.1a What is attachment?

Babies are vulnerable and totally dependent on others for survival. When they learn that they can depend on and trust one person (usually, but not always, their mother) who is consistently responsive and sensitive to their physical and emotional needs they have what is called a 'secure attachment'. Research indicates that securely-attached children develop more connections and have well-developed brains. However, no one person can provide everything a growing child needs and children can form close attachments with several people.

These emotional bonds that children develop with their parents and other caregivers are crucial for their personal, social and emotional development. A child with secure attachment feels able to rely on their parents or caregivers for safety and comfort and uses these important attachment relationships as bases from which to explore and learn about the world.

A Unique Child 

says:

- Babies and children are vulnerable and become resilient and confident if they have support from others.
- Early relationships strongly influence how children develop and having close relationships with carers is very important.

Think about the evidence of Maisy's attachment in the following example.

Mel and Maisy have been shopping. On the way home they stop at Mel's mother's house. They often do this because it is quite a long walk back home and Maisy who is 26 months loves to see her Grandma. She is tired when they arrive and, when a man she does not know opens the door, Maisy bursts into tears and clings to her Mum's legs. Mel lifts her up, cuddles her and tells her grandma is coming. Grandma smiles and introduces Tom who is laying a new carpet in the hall. They leave Tom in the hall and go into the kitchen. Maisy lets Mel put her down and she gives her Grandma her usual kiss and cuddle but keeps looking through into the hall. Grandma asks Tom if he would like another cup of tea. They both laugh when he says, no, thanks, he's had three already. Maisy has a drink and then stands and watches Tom. When he speaks to her she looks back to her Mum for reassurance. Mum smiles and talks with Tom herself. Eventually, Tom and Maisy are having a conversation and Maisy is 'helping' Tom but every now and then she turns round for reassurance, looking first at Mel and then at Grandma.


### Reflect and note

- How Mel and her mother reassure Maisy.
- How Maisy knows she can rely on them.
- How they help her to become confident with Tom.

### Learning points:

Her mother and grandmother are taking their lead from Maisy. They understand that it is healthy for a young child to be wary of people she doesn't know. They let Maisy take her time to feel comfortable.

## 2.1b How can practitioners support children's attachment?

One of the key things a setting must do is to provide a key-person approach.  There is more in Section 3 about how important this is for children's well-being.

A key person helps children settle in and provides consistent care and emotional support to individual children. The nature of this support changes as children get older but even older children who go to school need a genuine bond with their teacher or another practitioner who is focused on their individual needs and knows and cares about them and their family.

If you go to the EYFS CD-ROM or website: Positive Relationships/Key Person/Resources/All About Developing Positive Relations with Children you will find an extract from an article by Julian Grenier where he talks about the benefits of the key-person approach:

*Taking this approach means that a child experiences an adult who is 'tuned in', who can develop a special and personal relationship with the child. In an impersonal nursery anyone and everyone changes nappies at a time that is convenient to the organisation. Children may be processed across the nappy- changing table like tins of beans travelling along the checkout at [a supermarket. The key person changes nappies in the context of a relationship with the child. If just anyone changes nappies, wipes noses and rocks children to sleep, then there are no special relationships. The care of the children becomes just another task alongside mopping floors and cleaning tables.*

Before you read the guidance in Section 3 on Positive Relationships consider the following:

### Reflect and note


- How the care of the children in your setting is more than 'just another task'.
- How children know that they are special to you.
- How you cope when children display challenging behaviour.

To be 'tuned in' means that you fully understand the other's point of view and are entirely empathetic. This is a hard task for anyone but every step taken to understand how and why a child behaves as they do is a step to tuning in. This in turn helps every child to develop skills which enable them to blossom in the community in which they live. Practitioners can be responsive to each unique child through applying their knowledge of child and brain development.

Young children often challenge adults' ideas, beliefs and feelings. Grenier talks about how important it is to stop and think for a moment about our own emotions – to tune in to ourselves.

A moment of tuning in to our own responses may help us to think about what emotion a child is throwing out. Crying babies can make our heads spin, leaving us feeling lost, useless and hopeless. Stopping and addressing this can help us to understand something of the emotions of the baby.

Similarly, when children hurt others, especially if they hurt a child who is younger or more vulnerable, we often feel a strong surge of dislike or anger. Again, tuning in to the situation can help us in two ways. First, we can realise that we must control ourselves and respond calmly to the situation. Second, it might help us understand something about the child who is doing the hurting, who may feel angry about something, or feel rejected or unliked.

Tuning in to themselves helps practitioners honour the commitment to inclusive practice and remember that all children have an equal right to be listened to and valued in the setting. 

Jordan is 18 months old. His mother Emma drops him at childminder Kerry's house at 8.30 am one Monday (15 minutes late), saying that she's in a rush as she's going to be late for work, they had a dreadful weekend and Jordan wouldn't eat any breakfast. He is sucking a dummy and smiles at Kerry who lifts him up and cuddles him while she tells his mother not to worry, perhaps they can have chat when she collects him later. His mother kisses Jordan quickly and turns to go, forgetting to wave at the gate as she normally does.

Jordan cries and struggles to get out of Kerry's arms. Kerry puts him gently down on the kitchen floor, bends her knees so she is talking to him at his level and says, 'Jordan, I know you're sad, Mummy will be back later. Would you like some toast like Adam's?' (looking towards the small table where her own son Adam (2 years) is sitting). Jordan stops crying and runs over to Adam and snatches the toast from his hand, Adam shouts and rises to pursue Jordan, but Kerry quickly gives him a replacement piece of toast from the plate she had prepared for Jordan before he arrived. She talks gently to both of them and sits with them while they finish their toast and have some fruit and drinks. She notices that Jordan seems very tired and reluctant to let his dummy out of his sight. She was planning to take both boys to a stay-and-play session at the local children's centre but decides against it as she knows that Jordan will find it difficult this morning and he will probably have a sleep if she reads a book with them on the sofa. She'll then be able to put him in his buggy and wheel him outside where Adam will be happy to continue playing with two buckets and some small stones which he spent a long time with yesterday. He will be very excited to find that Kerry has had added another bucket, some bigger stones, some shells and a box of keys. When Jordan wakes up after about an hour he'll be happy to find himself outside as he always likes to be in Kerry's backyard as he has no outdoor area at home. When Emma comes to collect Jordan, Kerry will suggest they make a time to talk properly about Jordan.

In this scenario, as well as tuning into Emma, Jordan and Adam, Kerry has 'tuned in' to herself and managed her own feelings about the following:

- Emma was late last Monday as well as this one. Monday is when she is supposed to pay Kerry. She is now 3 weeks behind with her payments.
- Emma earns more than Kerry.
- Emma looks very tired and anxious and seems to be trying to avoid talking with Kerry.
- Kerry is not sure what is happening with Jordan's father who seems to have come back into their lives after about a year's absence.
- Jordan bit Adam last Monday morning just after Emma left him.

### Reflect and note

- What makes you angry, anxious or afraid?
- The strategies that you use to manage and deal with these feelings so you are ready to be with children.
- What makes your colleagues angry, anxious or afraid? Are they the same or different?

#### Brain fact

Did you know...

That what is sometimes known as the 'reptilian' part of the brain (at the top of the spinal column and deep in the brain) controls instinctive functions such as breathing and blinking. It is also responsible for the basic survival responses to threat of 'Fright' (frozen in fear), 'Flight' (running away) and 'Fight' (responding aggressively) that occur when a human feels threatened, unsafe or insecure. When the brain is in this mode it is hard to think rationally.

### Reflect and note

When children have responded in fright, flight or fight mode, try to understand:

- What has happened before.
- Reasons the child might feel 'threatened' at that time.

#### Learning points:

Young children need to feel safe and secure. We can facilitate this by:

- considering the possible threats for each child and minimising these threats as far as possible;
- ensuring that the child feels safe both physically and emotionally;
- providing children with territorial space, for example, their own sleepmat, peg;
- helping them feel that they belong by having routines and rituals, for example, welcome and departure songs and greetings;
- helping children to label and recognise their feelings;
- helping children to learn strategies to calm down, for example, simple relaxation;
- helping children to cope with their fears and anxieties.

Think about how Kerry supported Jordan and Adam in some of these ways.

## 2.2 Children need adults to set a good example and give them opportunities for interaction with others so that they can develop positive ideas about themselves and others

Before we can empathise with others (understand their feelings and see things from their point of view) we have to understand three basic and important things:

- our feelings are important to us;
- other people have feelings;
- others may think and feel differently from us.

Practitioners and parents can help children develop empathy by:

- encouraging secure attachment by meeting and greeting, getting to know each child and their parent, being available at the beginning and end of the day, being 'tuned in' to their needs and feelings;
- demonstrating active listening and modelling awareness of the feelings of others;
- encouraging children to listen to each other and notice each other's feelings;
- providing opportunities to develop the skills of empathy and modelling those skills themselves.

If you think back to Mel and Maisy, and Kerry and Jordan, you will remember that the adults are empathising with the children and modelling the skills and behaviour they would like the children to have. If adults are to support children's personal, social and emotional development and help them have positive dispositions for learning, it is essential that they do this.

Being kind, considerate and listening to others is the basis of good relationships and social skills. It is unfair to expect young children to develop empathy if practitioners talk about children, parents or members of staff in unkind terms as soon as their backs are turned. Children may not always understand the words adults use but they have very good radar for tone and feeling.

When practitioners are open and genuine with parents and focused on the welfare of their children, mutual respect can flourish. Being a parent is rewarding but often demanding. Some parents have not had good role models from their own parents and being able to work with practitioners who model consistent loving relationships with young children is very supportive for them and their children. Practitioners can offer advice and assistance to ease parents and children through emotionally-charged times such as weaning, toilet training or tantrums. Knowing that what your child is doing is a normal part of a young child's development can be very reassuring. If there is cause for further concern, practitioners can offer advice and coping strategies. You will find more about working with parents on the EYFS CD-ROM or website at: **Positive Relationships/Parents as Partners/in-depth.**

In a setting where practitioners have high levels of self-awareness and empathy they are able to 'tune in' and respond in a reflective rather than an impulsive way. The relationships they establish with the children and the learning opportunities they provide will help children to develop the personal, social and emotional skills they need and feelings of belonging and emotional well-being



### 1.4 Health and well-being

- Making friends and getting on with others helps children to feel positive about themselves and others.
- Children gain a sense of well-being when they are encouraged to take responsibility and to join in by helping with manageable tasks that interest them.
- Children feel a sense of belonging in the setting when their parents are also involved in it.

## 2.3 Further examples of effective practice from EYFS

There are many examples of ways of working with parents and supporting children in making friends and taking responsibility to be found in the PSED 'maps' on pages 26–40 of the EYFS Practice Guidance. These can also be accessed more flexibly and interactively via the CD-ROM and website by clicking on the hexagon 'flower' entitled 'Search areas of Learning and Development'. This will also enable you to access the links to Early Support material.

Here are some examples of effective practice from the PSED area of learning and development 'map' and the linked Early Support materials.

- Playfully help babies to recognise that they are separate and different from others, for example, pointing to own and baby's nose, eyes, fingers.
- Help children to learn each other's names, for example, through songs and rhymes.
- Talk to parents about how their baby communicates needs. Ensure that parents and carers who speak languages other than English are able to share their views.
- Introduce simple words for feelings and mental states into conversation like 'happy', 'sad', 'cross', 'hurt' and 'scared'. This helps children start to learn about words that express feelings and about what they are feeling themselves. You might say, for example, 'You like playing in the sandpit, don't you? It makes you happy'.
- Reduce incidents of frustration and conflict by keeping routines flexible so that young children can pursue their interests.
- If another child is hurt or upset, talk about how that child is feeling. Help other children to console them by stroking their arm or cuddling them.
- Involve all children in welcoming and caring for one another.
- Provide books which represent children's diverse backgrounds and which avoid negative stereotypes. Make photographic books about the children in the setting and encourage parents to contribute to these.



## Section 3

# Positive Relationships

## Introduction

**Principle:** Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

### Commitments

#### Respecting each other

Every interaction is based on caring professional relationships and respectful acknowledgement of the feelings of children and their families.

#### Parents as partners

Parents are children's first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in early years settings, the results have a positive impact on children's development and learning.

#### Supporting learning

Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adults support children's learning more effectively than any amount of resources.

#### Key person

A key person has special responsibilities for working with a small number of children, giving them the reassurance to feel safe and cared for and building relationships with their parents.

The commitments listed above are important in putting the principle into practice. The Principles into Practice cards give more ideas about what each of these commitments will look and feel like for children, parents and staff. This section refers to some of the cards, however, practitioners will find them all useful in supporting and extending children's personal, social and emotional development. All of the positive relationship commitments require practitioners to build on the ways in which they are 'tuned in' to children and parents to make positive relationships with them which will support learning and development.

This section looks in depth at two statements from the EYFS PSED card. They are taken from Positive Relationships:

### Positive Relationships

- Form warm, caring attachments with children in the group.
- Establish constructive relationships with parents, with everyone in the setting and with workers from other agencies.
- Find opportunities to give encouragement to children, with practitioners acting as role models who value differences and take account of different needs and expectations.
- Plan for opportunities for children to play and learn, sometimes alone and sometimes in groups of varying sizes.



### 3.1 Establish constructive relationships with parents, with everyone in the setting and with workers from other agencies

Constructive relationships are ones that are mutually supportive, can be built on and will be lasting and effective. In a good-quality setting these will be characterised by:

- respectful language and tone;
- friendly, confident but professional interactions;
- mainly smiling and happy-to-help attitude but appropriate concern shown when the situation demands;
- a problem-solving and 'can do' approach to new situations;
- active interest in parental views about their child and his or her development;
- a willingness to accommodate child or family needs appropriately;
- commitment to support families who find it difficult to communicate and share their concerns;
- involving parents as partners within the setting and finding ways to help parents feel at ease, especially when the child first starts attending;
- being open to the views of others and investing time and energy in working with them;
- the safety to express differences of opinion;
- an open, listening environment.

In good-quality settings there will be an acknowledgement that everyone is continually developing their personal, social and emotional learning. The staff as a group will be able to reflect on the relationships in the setting and ways to improve them.

#### 3.1a Constructive relationships with parents

##### The key person

The EYFS focuses attention on the important role of the key person in securing high-quality care and learning experiences for young children. It is now a specific legal requirement rather than just good practice:

*Each child must be assigned a key person. In childminding settings the key person is the childminder.  
(Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, p. 37)*

The statutory guidance to which providers must have regard emphasises this:

*The key person should meet the needs of each child in their care and respond sensitively to their feelings, ideas and behaviour, talking to parents to make sure that the child is cared for appropriately for each family.*

The key person was first mentioned in Section 2 in the context of children making secure attachments and throughout this booklet reference is made to the key person's role in tuning in to young children and being able to meet their individual needs. Taking on the responsibility of the key person is also an opportunity to reflect on one's own personal, social and emotional learning. Using the EYFS CD-ROM you can access further articles and references to the role of the key person within the resources section.

(See card )

**NB:** If you work in a nursery or reception class you may be interested in the article included in Appendix 1 which unpacks some of the issues particular to the key-person system where there may be larger numbers of children per practitioner.

Sharing learning and observations with parents is a very important way of letting each child see that they are important and that the adults in their life are working together to help and care for them.

A key person will have specific responsibility for a small group of children. For a childminder this will be all the children in their care. For each of the children special efforts will be made to:

- find out about things at home and in the setting which are important to the child:
  - their favourite toys, songs, rhymes and games they like to play with adults or other children;
- develop a shared understanding with parents (and other adults important to the child) of the child's responses and how these are different at home and in the setting, for example, how they show that:
  - they are happy, sad, angry, excited;
  - they are hungry, thirsty, tired, hot, cold;
  - they want a cuddle or need some time alone;
- show the child that they are important by noting and using their unique welcome and goodbye routines, responding to special events and things which are very important to each child and so showing the child that they are valued;
- make observations to identify other signals (including smiles, giggles, facial expressions, body language) the child gives which communicate that they need help, want to try by themselves, are really involved and enjoying what they are doing;
- plan effectively to show the child that the practitioner knows what they enjoy but also plan to make sure that they can find out more and become more skilful in what they do;
- build in to everyday practice the communication of emotions.

### **The parents' view**

For a parent to leave their child with another adult can be difficult to do at first. Any parent will be concerned that they know their child better than anyone else. Parents might wonder if the practitioners will:

- understand their child's communication;
- notice if their child is unwell;
- share concerns with them in a caring and understanding way;
- tell them what happens to their child through the day, sharing joys as well as sadness;
- involve them in their child's life in the setting by:
  - talking to them about their child and what they do in the setting and at home;
  - giving them photographs of their child in action in the setting;
  - encouraging them to take part in activities with their child.

Kwame is three and has been coming to the nursery for about six weeks. Usually, he is very happy to be there. His aunt and cousin are arriving today to stay with the family for a few days. Kwame has been helping his Mum to get things ready for his cousin. He really likes playing with his cousin.

Kwame and his Mum arrive at the nursery and are met by Jamila, his key person. Jamila smiles, says hello and asks if Kwame has been helping his Mum to get things ready for his cousin's visit. Kwame smiles and Mum tells Jamila that he has been finding toys his cousin will like and helping to make his bed. Kwame watches Jamila's face as Mum talks about what he did to help. When Jamila smiles and praises him, he smiles too and looks to see his Mum's response. He holds both Mum's and Jamila's hand while they are talking. Jamila tells Kwame that they can take some pictures in the nursery today for him to show to his cousin. Mum gives Kwame a cuddle and says she will look forward to seeing the photographs when she picks him up. Jamila asks what time the visitors will be arriving; Mum tells her it will be after she has collected Kwame from nursery. Jamila suggests to Kwame that they get the camera now and think about what pictures they will take. Kwame waves goodbye to Mum and goes with Jamila into the nursery.

At lunchtime Kwame gets tearful and upset, Jamila sits with him and they talk about the pictures they have taken. At first Jamila is not sure why Kwame is upset. As they talk Kwame gets tearful again and asks if his cousin will be at his house yet. Jamila talks about his Mum saying that his cousin would not arrive until after she had collected Kwame from nursery. Jamila wonders if Kwame is also tired after helping his Mum the night before and perhaps getting excited about his cousin's visit. She suggests that they choose a book and sit with some of his friends in the story shack to share the book together. Kwame falls asleep for a while on Jamila's lap during the first book.

### Reflect and note

- How Kwame and his Mum may have felt about the setting at the end of the day as they set off home to meet their visitors.
- How Jamila strengthened her positive relationship with Kwame and his Mum.

### Learning points:

- Jamila, as Kwame's key person, is 'tuned in' to and recognises that his tearfulness is unusual.
- She responds sensitively to his behaviour.
- She is seeking to understand why he is upset.

### 3.1b Constructive relationships with everyone in the setting

The relationships between the adults in a setting will be a major factor in the general atmosphere or ethos of a setting. It is hard sometimes to work out what the atmosphere is like in the place where we work. Taking time now and again to listen and reflect on the types of comments which are regularly made between adults, and to children can be one indicator. Also, talking through scenarios of possible interactions between staff and parents and thinking about the social and emotional perspectives and the impact of different ways of responding can be helpful.

Alison arrives for work 20 minutes before her shift is due to start so that she has time to change her clothes, talk to her colleagues and get an update on things which have happened since she was last in work. While Alison is talking to Jamila, the room leader, a new member of staff, Nadhu, comes in. Both Alison and Jamila stop their conversation and smile at Nadhu. They say hello and ask if she enjoyed the film she saw last night. Nadhu tells them she was unable to go to the film because her sister had been taken to hospital. Alison and Jamila ask what had happened. Nadhu tells them what happened and that she had to spend several hours at the hospital during the night before she felt she could leave her sister. Jamila asks Nadhu if she is able to work today, as she must be very tired. Nadhu says she is sure she will be fine and is glad to be here and have people to talk to about her worries.

Jamila talks to Alison and Nadhu about what the children were doing the day before and they plan possible ways to develop their ideas today. The three adults check the room and outdoor area to make sure it is tidy and clean, that children's models and building are safe and that the space looks inviting. While Jamila is cleaning some of the painting materials, Alison goes to talk to her. She suggests that she doesn't mind taking on Nadhu's responsibility for the outdoor area at the end of the day if Jamila wants to let Nadhu leave a little early so that she can get to the hospital. Jamila thanks Alison and says she will talk to Nadhu about it after lunch.

As part of Nadhu's induction programme, Alison has been helping her to get to know the children's parents. She goes to find Nadhu and talk about the information and news Nadhu is going to share. Nadhu talks to Alison about her ideas. She also tells Alison that she finds thinking and talking, about what she is going to say to parents, helps her feel more confident and say things more clearly. As the children start to arrive, Alison stands near to Nadhu as they both welcome the parents as they arrive.


#### Reflect and note

- What the conversations would have been like in your setting in this situation.
- What response would you hope for from your colleagues if you were in Nadhu's situation?
- In a similar situation would you respond in the same way to all of your colleagues?
- What might make you respond differently to different colleagues?
- The importance of consistent professional responses to your colleagues.
- Anything which you could do to make the relationships between the adults at your setting better.

#### Learning points:

- It is very important to ensure that consideration is given to the well-being of staff.
- Working with and caring for young children makes heavy emotional demands on staff and they sometimes need support themselves.
- Allocating a buddy or mentor for a new member of staff is a useful strategy.

### 3.1c Constructive relationships with workers from other agencies

 reminds us that in order to achieve the Every Child Matters outcomes for children – being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being – practitioners need to work together across services.

Early years settings are very busy places. As well as children, parents and staff, there can be many visitors including:

- Health Visitors;
- Speech and Language Therapists;
- Physiotherapists;
- Occupational Therapists;
- Area Special Educational Needs team;
- Early Years Consultants;
- Ofsted.

Each of these people will experience the atmosphere of your setting. The way in which you make them welcome will influence how they feel about working with you for the benefit of the children. For parents, meeting some of those visitors can be an anxious time but so much easier with a supportive relationship with a key person who takes time to listen to colleagues from other professional backgrounds and to be open about differences of language and approach.

Practitioners also need to establish constructive relationships with other settings for those children who attend several – for example, children who go to a childminder in the morning, nursery in the afternoon and then back to the childminder. Children's social, emotional and learning needs should be central to any transition between one setting and another. Effective communication between settings is key to ensuring that children's needs are met and there is continuity in their learning.

One of the key issues for children who experience multiple childcare throughout the day is maintaining the feeling of security. All of the practitioners need to be aware of what is needed by each child and ensure a system of communication between them all. The shared message book is ideal in these situations, together with clear lines of responsibility at the appropriate points during the day. This would ideally be arranged between the parents and the carers, but where this is not easy to do then practitioners need to be proactive in creating a safe routine for children.

Two-year-old Carly has just started at Greenfields Nursery. She was registered by her Mum and came to a session with her Mum a couple of weeks ago and appeared to enjoy the activities. Carly is registered for three mornings a week at the setting. She will spend the rest of the day with a childminder who will pick her up from nursery at lunchtime. Carly's Mum works full-time and has two older children who attend the local primary school. Carly is looked after by her Grandmother when she is not at the nursery or the childminder's.

On her first morning she is brought to the nursery by her next-door neighbour with her own two children. Carly did not settle well, needing close support and comfort from her key person. She looked fretful and wary all morning, often crying, despite knowing some of the other children. When the childminder came at lunchtime to pick her up, she asked where Carly's 'cuddly' was, and told the nursery staff that she would not usually leave her Mum without the cuddly (a piece of fluffy fabric). It appeared to act as her comforter and soother.

The next day that Carly came, she had her piece of fabric, which the staff allowed her to keep with her, being careful not to let other children take it or use it. When Carly wanted to play with the sand and water her key worker suggested pinning the fabric to her apron, so that it was still with her. Carly had a better morning.


Over time Carly was able to leave the fabric in various places in the nursery, further away from her, as she began to be more confident and know that the childminder (who was a significant and key person to her) would always come for her. Carly talked affectionately about her mother and sisters and wanted to show them some of the things that she did at nursery. The staff arranged a book with photos, including where she kept her cuddly, that Carly took home to show her family.

Constructive relationships with parents, colleagues or visitors are all improved when the early years setting is a place where learning is actively encouraged, not just for children but also for the adults.

### Reflect and note

- How you learn from situations, including visits from other agencies.
- What others may think about similar situations.
- What may be done differently.
- Your own strengths.
- Which areas you agree need to be developed.
- The relationships with the people we get on with easily.
- Think about the lessons for relationships which are harder work.
- The actions you need to take to be better at making positive connections with people.

### 3.2 Find opportunities to give encouragement to children, with practitioners acting as role models who value differences and take account of different needs and expectations

 2.2 'Parents as Partners' talks about respecting diversity which is a first step to supporting equality and inclusion.

*All families are important and should be welcomed and valued in all settings.*

*Families are all different. Children may live with one or both parents, with other relatives or carers, with same-sex parents or in an extended family.*

*Families may speak more than one language at home; they may be travellers, refugees or asylum seekers.*

*All practitioners will benefit from professional development in diversity, equality and anti-discriminatory practice whatever the ethnic, cultural or social make-up of the setting.*

The relationships which develop between practitioners and parents strongly influence children in their learning about themselves, their relationships and their sense of value.

It is important to remember that there are different social expectations in different cultures about displaying emotions. Finding out about individual and cultural ideas is an important element of staff development and personal, social and emotional learning.

Jackie gives a reassuring smile to Mrs Gdowski and greets her and the baby in their home language. Then she says, 'Let me help, shall I take that bag (pointing at it) so you can cuddle him before you go?' Mum hugs and kisses the baby, sadly commenting that he cries every morning. Jackie responds, clearly and sympathetically, checking the mother's face and body language for understanding. 'I understand he's sad to leave you, you are sad, but he'll be OK soon.' Then she reaches out and smiles at the baby saying, 'Are you coming to me now then?' To the baby she says: 'Say "Bye-bye" to Momma now, see you later'. When his mother has gone Jackie comforts the baby, gets out his favourite toy and holds him close while she talks softly to him. She later takes some photos of him playing happily so that she can share them with his mother when she picks him up.

#### **Learning point:**

In this scenario the whole setting has had training on equalities and anti-discriminatory practice which helped Jackie recognise both the importance of respecting all cultures and the value of home language. The setting has also invested time in the staff's own emotional well-being, supporting them in putting children's needs first. Jackie has regular opportunities to reflect with colleagues on the children's learning and development and her manager supports her professional development plan at regular review meetings.

Many practitioners in settings across the country already work successfully with children and families who speak languages other than English. For growing numbers of settings, providing care and learning opportunities for children and families new to English, or at various stages of proficiency, is a new experience.

#### **Reflect and note**

- The EYFS principles apply to children learning English.
- Effective EYFS practitioners include all children by meeting their needs.
- The skills, knowledge and understanding of children learning English as an additional language are often underestimated.
- Bilingualism is an asset, and the first language has a continuing and significant role in emotional well-

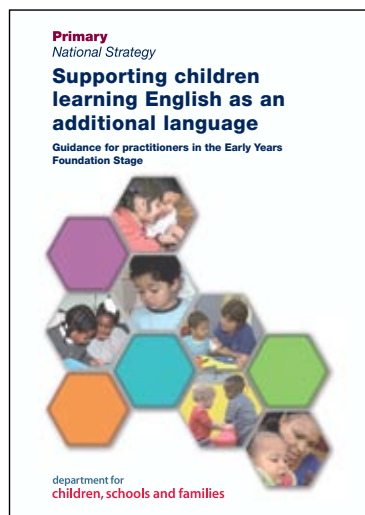
being, learning and the acquisition of additional languages.

- Children need to develop strong foundations in the language which is dominant in the home environment, where most children spend most of their time.
- Developing and maintaining a home language as the foundation for knowledge about language will support the development of English and should be encouraged.

There is further guidance on this area in the National Strategies booklet entitled:

*Supporting children learning English as an additional language* (Ref: 00683-2007BKT-EN

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/publications/foundation\\_stage/eal\\_eyfs](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/publications/foundation_stage/eal_eyfs))



**2.2** suggests some simple ways that settings can respect diversity of language and culture and be inclusive.

- Display lists of words from home languages used by children in the setting and invite parents and practitioners to contribute to them. Seeing their languages reflected in this way will encourage parents to feel involved and valued.
- Find out from parents the greetings they use either in English or in other languages. Encourage staff, parents and children to use the greetings.
- Make sure that everyone who enters the setting receives a friendly welcome.
- Talk with parents about their children's progress and development, providing appropriate support for those who do not speak or understand English.
- Ask parents for their views on the care and education you provide.

Robin arrives at pre-school with his son Alexander. As he is helping Alexander hang up his coat, Nikki, his key person, says hello to them both. Robin apologises that his wife was not able to bring Alexander to pre-school today. Nikki smiles at Alexander and says what a treat it is for Daddy to be able to come with him today. Alexander smiles and looks at his father. Robin smiles a little nervously. Nikki suggests Robin might like to have a look round and that Alexander would like to show him the building he made with the crates the day before. Robin smiles when he sees how pleased Alexander is and goes with him to the outdoor area. After a little while, Nikki joins them and talks about Alexander's favourite activities which are mostly outdoors and to do with making things. Robin begins talking about how he likes making things too, especially with wood. Nikki suggests he may like to show the children something he has made, or help them with an activity sometime. Alexander is very excited about the idea and Robin says he will think about it.

### Reflect and note

- As childcare is mainly a female occupation, how to help fathers to feel welcome at your setting.
- How to find out what activities the fathers at your setting would like.
- The positive male role models that are involved with your setting.
- The ways that you communicate a positive view of boys and the things they like to do.

#### Learning points:

- Nikki is aware that Alexander's father may be feeling unsure and nervous about bringing him to pre-school.
- She skilfully uses the opportunity to learn more about Alexander's family.
- She shares information with his father about what Alexander likes to do at pre-school.
- She suggests to Robin that he might like to get involved in the setting using something he feels confident about.
- She knows that Alexander's excitement will encourage his father.

There is further guidance on working with boys in the National Strategies booklet entitled *Confident, capable and creative; supporting boys' achievements* (Ref: 00682-2007BKT-EN, [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/publications/foundation\\_stage/supporting\\_achievements/sba\\_0068207bkt.pdf](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/publications/foundation_stage/supporting_achievements/sba_0068207bkt.pdf))



The Playing and Learning Together DVD includes a section on working with fathers (Ref: 00671-2007DVD-EN)



Children learn about people, relationships and ways of being with each other from the adults around them – whether we like it or not, adults are always modelling social and emotional skills for the children by:

- how they speak to each other, to individual children and to groups of children;
- the way they treat each other when things go wrong;
- their body language;
- their facial expression.

Learning about relationships and the skills we need to maintain positive relationships is something which happens all through our lives. In our work with young children it is important that we also learn things about ourselves, for example, how we deal with our own emotions and how this has changed over time.

### Reflect and note

- How you show you are happy, sad, angry, worried.
- Your own first sign that you are feeling one of these emotions.
- Strategies which are effective for you to deal with your feelings. This will mean you can still be professional and supportive even when you feel one of these emotions.
- Which of these emotions would it help you to be able to deal with in a different way?
- What are you going to do about it?

Adults create the emotional 'climate' in the setting and influence and shape the personal, social and emotional development of the children in their care. Every child will have a unique life experience which shapes the way that they have grown and developed, both physically and mentally. Every child's response to a situation will be unique to them as a result of their experiences and their own individual profile of abilities and skills. Sometimes, these responses or behaviours seem inappropriate and may trigger our own negative responses and result in labelling the children as naughty or wilful. However, an understanding of how each child is unique and how they learn and develop gives practitioners the opportunity to use this knowledge to support and extend children's personal, social and emotional development; helping them learn skills such as conflict resolution. When helping children learn social and emotional skills it is particularly important for practitioners to be 'tuned in' to and show empathy for each other.

Blue has been coming to Pipkins for three months. He is two-and-a-half years of age and enjoys quieter activities, both inside and out. He seems eager to please adults and shows them anything that he has constructed or created. He can become excited and sometimes very angry if he has an idea which he finds difficult to execute or cannot find the bits and pieces that he wants. When he becomes frustrated he sometimes hits or bites other children if they are in his way or have toys and equipment that he wants. The staff are aware that parents of other children are discussing Blue's behaviour and the biting outside of the setting and that they are expecting the staff to 'do something about it'. They are also aware that Blue's behaviour is telling them something, and that they have to work out how to help Blue communicate more positively.

The staff have spoken with Blue's father about his biting. Blue's older brother has profound communication and physical difficulties and also bites others. Blue's father, Mr Fellowes, knows that this is a problem but has his hands full looking after both boys especially as his older son needs high levels of care. Together, the staff and Mr Fellowes agree that they will observe very carefully to see if they can spot what triggers Blue to be frustrated – whether it is always in certain situations or with particular children.

They agree that, although this behaviour is undesirable, it's still a way that Blue is communicating. They need to find another way for Blue to communicate that doesn't involve hurting others. Mr Fellowes is grateful for the concern and promises to keep in touch and to tell the staff if he thinks of anything which might help.

Observation over one day shows that Blue tends to be more cross with himself and others just before lunchtime. The staff decide that they will ensure that they will stay close at such times. They also decide that it may be that Blue becomes tired and that planning more close time with his key worker throughout his day may be helpful.

The staff implement various strategies to test their ideas and after a week there have been no more biting incidents. Further observation shows that there are times when Blue does not snatch a toy, nor resort to hitting. The staff are all mindful to praise Blue when this happens, and, by so doing, Blue is more likely to continue with this positive behaviour and learn to use other means of communicating. He will also develop friendships as children are less wary of him, and so his confidence will grow and his learning will continue.

### Reflect and note

- The practitioners do not blame Blue, his father, other children, or themselves for his biting.
- Blue has strong feelings which he has difficulty managing.
- The practitioners see their role as supporting Blue's personal, social and emotional development by finding ways to help Blue manage his feelings and be kind to other children.
- As Blue begins to feel more confident and in control, he will be more able to relax and enjoy the company of other children.
- Early years settings have been known to exclude children for biting – what messages do you think that might give the child, parents and wider community?

### Learning points:

- Observation is the key to finding solutions for children who are struggling to manage their feelings.
- By observing closely, practitioners can find out what happens before the child behaves in an antisocial way, exactly how they react and what happens next.
- Then practitioners can take appropriate action based on assessment of the child in the whole situation and plan for the best ways forward for all the children's personal, social and emotional development.
- Children's friendships are very important for their well-being. Children who find it difficult to be friendly are usually very unhappy and need sensitive and sustained support from practitioners.

The EYFS CD-ROM and website 'in depth' section of Positive Relationships gives more information and suggested further reading for these topics.

### 3.3 Further examples of effective practice from EYFS

There are many examples of ways to give encouragement to children, with practitioners acting as role models who value differences and take account of different needs and expectations to be found in the PSED maps on pages 26–40 of the EYFS Practice Guidance. These can also be accessed more flexibly and interactively via the CD-ROM and website by clicking on the hexagon 'flower' entitled 'Search areas of Learning and Development'. This will also enable you to access the links to Early Support material.

Here are some examples of effective practice from the PSED area of learning and development map and the linked Early Support materials.

- Engage in playful interactions that encourage young babies to respond to, or mimic, adults.
- Ensure all staff have detailed information about the home-language experiences of all children.
- Wave children's hands for 'Bye-bye' when someone is leaving the setting and ask the person to wave from a distance as they go out.
- Be positive about differences and support children's acceptance of difference. Be aware that negative attitudes towards difference are learned from examples the children witness.
- Help children to begin to negotiate with one another using language. For example, if they want to join in a game or if another child has a toy that they want to play with, talk about what they could say. Model the language for them.
- In turn-taking games, help children to learn how to wait to take a turn, say, 'Ready? Wait, it's my turn first' and 'Whose turn is it now?'
- Talk about the behaviour and intentions of adults and children in the setting so that children get more curious and interested and begin to understand what other people are doing.
- Help children to understand their rights to be kept safe by others, and encourage them to talk about ways to avoid harming or hurting others.
- Talk to children about their friends, their families, and why they are important.
- Encourage children to talk about their own home and community life, and to find out about other children's experiences. Ensure that children learning English as an additional language have opportunities to express themselves in their home language some of the time.



## Section 4

# Enabling Environments

## Introduction

### **Principle:**

The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning

### **Commitments**

#### **Observation, assessment and planning**

Babies and young children are individuals first, each with a unique profile of abilities. Schedules and routines should flow with the child's needs. All planning starts with observing children in order to understand and consider their current interests, development and learning.

#### **Supporting every child**

The environment supports every child's learning through planned experiences and activities that are challenging and achievable.

#### **The learning environment**

A rich and varied environment supports children's learning and development. It gives them the confidence to explore and learn in secure and safe, yet challenging, indoor and outdoor spaces.

#### **The wider context**

Working in partnership with other settings, other professionals and with individuals and groups in the community supports children's development and progress towards the outcomes of Every Child Matters: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and economic well-being.

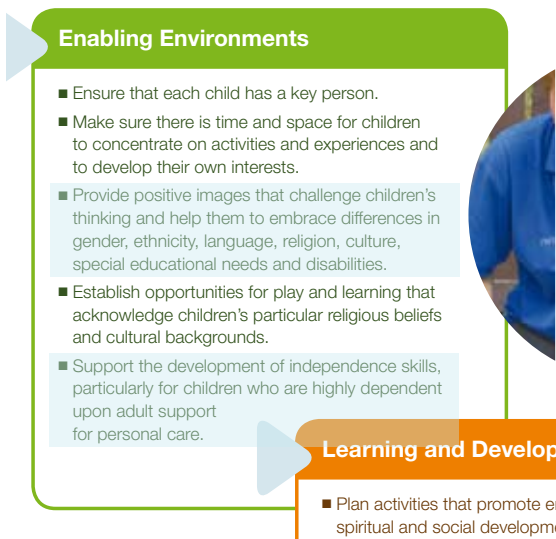
The commitments listed above are important in putting the principle into practice. The Principles into Practice cards give more ideas about what each of these commitments will look and feel like for children, parents and staff. This section only refers to some of the cards, however, practitioners will find them all useful in supporting and extending children's personal, social and emotional development. All the Enabling Environments' commitments require practitioners to build on their knowledge of the unique child and their positive relationships with children and parents to improve the environment for learning and development.

### **What is an enabling environment?**

An enabling environment supports and promotes active learning and development for all children. It is a place where all children feel safe, cared for and relaxed because they are in the continuous care of adults who know them well and are 'tuned in' to respond to their needs and interests. It involves both the physical environment – the space in which children learn and develop, and the emotional environment – the atmosphere and ethos created by all who are part of the setting. An enabling environment is key to:

- young children's safety – both physical and emotional;
- effective learning and development;
- successful PSED.

This section looks in depth at two Enabling Environment statements from the EYFS PSED card.



## 4.1 Provide positive images that challenge children's thinking and help them to embrace differences in gender, ethnicity, language, religion, culture, special educational needs and disabilities

### Brain fact

Did you know...

That children have brains that are trying to make sense of the world from the moment of birth. It is in sharing everyday ordinary encounters that brain development is promoted as well as other aspects of development such as emotional attachments and self-esteem.

At Grangehill Nursery, Cheryl, the room leader, had just completed a course about diversity and inclusive practice. It had prompted her to reflect on the resources that were provided in the centre where the children and families were all white with at least one parent working. She noticed that although there were a lot of positive images of white children and families from different backgrounds and positive images of disability, there were very few Black or Asian children or parents featured in books or on posters.

After a staff meeting where she shared her ideas and in consultation with the manager and other staff, she ordered some new resources that provided positive images of children and families that were different from the children and families that used the setting. These included some Asian and Chinese cooking utensils for the home corner, clothes from these countries and dual-language story books.

She decided to put up a display on the parents' information board about the new resources. It included photographs and observations of the children using them with some of the things that they had said, highlights about the learning opportunities they provided for the children, and some suggestions for parents about how they could support this aspect of learning at home. She also asked parents to tell her about their children's reactions and comments.

Cheryl noticed that some of the children were interested in the dual-language text and when Rosie pointed to the Urdu script saying 'scribble', Cheryl used it as an opportunity to explain that there were different ways of writing and that this way was called Urdu.

### Reflect and note

- What can be achieved with Cheryl's approach to the new resources?
- What might you have done differently?
- Review resources in your setting to consider if they provide positive images of gender, ethnicity, language, religion, culture, special educational needs and disabilities.
- How accessible is professional development on diversity and inclusion issues?
  - is this considered a priority within your setting?

#### Learning points:

- Providing positive images of our diverse society is just one small step. The most important resource in any early years setting is the practitioners who work there. They have to mediate images and the resources.
- When new resources are introduced it is important to talk with children about them, to model ways of using them and to connect them with children's lives and experience and let them air their views and questions.
- In this way children's knowledge and understanding of the wider community they are part of – a key aspect of social development – is fostered.
- Children are less likely to behave hurtfully to others who are different from them if they are encouraged to see each other as special and unique and to understand the things that make them similar and different from each other. This contributes to children developing the skills of empathy with others.

In the home corner two children are making tea for the practitioner.

#### Scenario 1

Megan sees Ahmed using the teapot and says, 'No, you put the teabag in the cup like this'. She mimes dunking a teabag with a spoon and snatches the teapot from Ahmed and puts it in the cupboard, slamming the door. Ahmed tries to open the cupboard to get the teapot back but Megan stands in front of it. The practitioner says, 'Megan, let Ahmed get the teapot please'. Megan ignores her at first and she says it again. This time Megan moves away from the cupboard and Ahmed gets the teapot back out. Megan pushes him away from the sink area where they were both playing. Ahmed looks at the practitioner but she is talking to Megan. Ahmed puts the teapot down and walks away.

#### Scenario 2

Megan sees Ahmed using the teapot and says, 'No, you put the teabag in the cup like this'. She mimes dunking a teabag with a spoon and snatches the teapot from Ahmed and puts it in the cupboard, slamming the door. Ahmed tries to open the cupboard to get the teapot back but Megan stands in front of it.

The practitioner says to both children: 'Actually, you know, there are lots of ways of making tea. You have thought of two. Megan thought of putting a teabag in the cup, Ahmed thought of putting tea in the teapot. Sometimes when I'm at home I make tea in a cup and sometimes I make it in a teapot. Can you think of any other ways?' Ahmed says, 'My Nana makes it in a saucepan; my Mum likes it but my Dad doesn't like it, he makes a face when Nana's not looking', he laughs. Megan says, 'What sort of face does he make?' Ahmed pulls a face and both children laugh. The practitioner says, what does your Nana use, is it teabags?' Ahmed says 'No, it's black stuff, in a metal thing'. The practitioner says 'Those are tea leaves' Megan, excited, shouts, 'From a tea tree!' The practitioner explains about tea bushes and

goes to find a book with a picture. While she is doing this, Ahmed gets the teapot out, Megan finds a saucepan and they talk to each other about the tea they are making in different ways.

When the practitioner returns with the book they sit and look at it. Megan says, 'They're Pakis', pointing at the photo of women in saris picking tea. The practitioner says, 'They live in a country called India which is near to a country called Pakistan. People from Pakistan and India don't like to be called Pakis'. Ahmed says, 'My Dad doesn't like to be called Paki'. Megan looks surprised and says, 'You're Turkish, not Paki'. Ahmed says, 'But we have brown skin'. The practitioner says, 'Well it's not good to call someone anything they don't like, is it?' Megan says, 'I like Ahmed, I have a bit brown skin', pointing to a large mole on her arm. Just then, two other children come to show the practitioner a model they have made and when she turns back, Megan and Ahmed have moved away.

### Reflect and note

These two scenarios illustrate the crucial role that practitioners play in fostering children's personal, social and emotional development. In the second scenario the practitioner is extending both children's understanding and knowledge about many aspects of PSED, including how to behave towards others and how to make friends.

- What else would you note about this interaction with the two children and what sort of things might you plan for the next steps in their learning?
- How do you as a staff team respond if and when young children make discriminatory comments about differences?
- The time that you spend discussing and reflecting on your own attitudes and practice – or do you avoid doing it because it may be uncomfortable?
- What is it like for different children and families in your setting?

It is by asking these types of questions that awareness is raised and unequal practices can be challenged in a safe and supportive environment. Challenging discrimination in society starts with children's attitudes to others – which they learn from adults.

## 4.2 Support the development of independence skills, particularly for children who are highly dependent upon adult support for personal care

The development of self-care skills is an important and integral part of PSED contributing to children's growing confidence and self-esteem. Time spent on supporting this aspect of development impacts on their dispositions, attitudes and motivation in many areas.

In a busy family or setting it is often quicker and easier to do things for children, such as putting on coats and shoes. It takes time and patience to allow a child to have a go themselves and perhaps end up with clothes inside out or boots on the wrong feet.

Tom had just woken up from a sleep and needed to get his trousers and shoes on before going outside. Sally, his key person, said, 'Come on, Tom, time to get your trousers on...'

'Me do it, me do it!', said Tom as he rolled around on the floor with his trousers. He put one leg and then the other into one trouser leg.

'Oh, come here, you've got two legs in one hole', Sally commented. Tom pulled one leg out, looking at Sally.

'That's right, take that leg out – now – can you put it in the other side, in the trouser leg?'

Tom got his leg in the other trouser leg and smiled.

Sally gestured the actions of pulling up trousers as she said:

'Good boy – now, pull them up – oh, where are your feet? I can't see your feet.'

Tom pulled the bottom of the trousers up to reveal his feet.

'Oh, there they are! Can you stand up now – that's it - pull them up to your tummy.'

Tom stood up and pulled his trousers up as he said, 'Me do it!'

'That's great! Well done, Tom. Now, your shoes', says Sally.

### Reflect and note

- How Sally supports Tom's growing independence without taking over.
- How you make sure that you give all children opportunities and provide the expectations that support their growing independence.

Some children may need a lot of support to look after themselves or to move around. Making sure that they are encouraged to be independent and included in risk taking with all the other children may be a challenge. Nevertheless, they are entitled to a physically enabling environment.

The physically enabling environment provides:

- stimulating and challenging opportunities, both indoors and outdoors, that support all aspects of children's learning and development;
- opportunities to learn about risk taking and keeping safe;
- resources that have many possibilities, some of which are familiar and some that are new and reflect the diversity of the wider community;
- places for children to be noisy and boisterous as well as quiet and still.

It is planned and organised to ensure that all children are included and can recognise themselves within the environment.

### Reflect and note

How do you enable children to take sensible risks? If we never learn what it is like to have a scraped knee or a bruised elbow – to feel the pain and know that it passes – we will probably be very nervous about challenging ourselves in new situations.

### Brain fact

Did you know...

That what is evident from neuroscience is that 'normal' brain development in early childhood is dependent upon environmental input and, for parents and carers, this means warm and loving, appropriate interaction with children who are living in a safe context, in which they are nourished and nurtured and allowed opportunities to explore.

 asks –

What activities or experiences in the setting help children to think about:

- the things that make them feel good about themselves?
- the people who help them?
- how to keep themselves safe?
- how to recognise and avoid possible danger?
- reasons for making particular choices?
- the reason they are allowed to do or to have some things and not other things?

Chantelle is profoundly deaf and has some mobility problems. She particularly enjoys being outside. John, her key person, is concerned that Katja, her Mum, seems worried about her going outside at nursery. He decides to ask her what her worries are. Katja says she is concerned about other children pushing Chantelle or her getting 'run over' by the bikes. John explains that for the last few mornings Chantelle has been having a go on a bike herself and really enjoyed it. Her friend Kadisha has been sitting at the front and making it go, Chantelle has been helped to position her feet safely and John has been keeping an eye on them. John says he will take some photos to show Katja tomorrow as he knows she has to go to work. He also explains that if anybody pushes Chantelle he will take action if appropriate but that a bit of rough and tumble is good for children and that Chantelle loves rolling down the grassy slope and yesterday she enjoyed the game they were playing making 'thunder'. She shook the metal sheet and banged the drums and could feel the vibrations. Katja smiles and says she knows she can be over-anxious but she doesn't want to 'wrap Chantelle in cotton wool'. John reassures her, saying that he understands her anxiety because Chantelle is vulnerable but she is also strong-willed and getting very independent and the nursery believes that all children have the right to 'be their own person'.

**Reflect and note**

- How John supports Katja.
- How will this support Chantelle to develop personally, socially and emotionally?
- How your setting supports children with physical disabilities to join in and belong.
- How does everybody in your setting show that they understand and appreciate the importance and value of the outdoor environment?
- What opportunities do the children in your setting have to play and work outside?
- Are they able to choose to go outside or does everyone go out together for 'playtime'?

**Learning points:**

Regular sustained access to the outside contributes to encouraging children's spontaneity and provides for children who learn best in the outdoors. Settings that have prolonged periods of free access to a challenging outdoor environment report that generally children behave more cooperatively – particularly boys.

Chantelle's learning and development are being supported and extended in a nursery which is a physically and emotionally enabling environment

 refers to the emotional environment.

- The emotional environment is created by all the people in the setting, but adults have to ensure that it is warm and accepting of everyone.
- Adults need to empathise with children and support their emotions.
- When children feel confident in the environment they are willing to try things out, knowing that effort is valued.
- When children know that their feelings are accepted they learn to express them, confident that adults will help them with how they are feeling.

Appendix 2 page 56 contains an audit entitled 'Reflections on the emotionally enabling environment.' You may find this useful to use with children, parents, practitioners and setting leaders in order to test the emotional climate for all the groups that make up the community of the setting.

### 4.3 Further examples of effective practice from EYFS

There are many examples of ways to support children in embracing diversity and becoming independent to be found in the PSED maps on pages 26–40 of the EYFS Practice Guidance. These can also be accessed more flexibly and interactively via the CD-ROM and website by clicking on the hexagon 'flower' entitled 'Search areas of Learning and Development'. This will also enable you to access the links to Early Support material.

Here are some examples of effective practice from the PSED area of Learning and Development map and the linked Early Support materials.

- Provide a variety of cosy places with open views for babies to see people and things beyond the baby room.
- Allow enough space for babies to move, roll, stretch and explore.
- Work with staff, parents and children to promote an anti-discriminatory and anti-bias approach to care and education.
- Collect information that helps children to understand why people do things differently from each other, and encourage children to talk about these differences.
- Display pictures of groups of young children, showing what they look like, and the things they like to do, eat, or play with.
- Provide positive images of all children including those with diverse physical characteristics, including disabilities.
- Have resources including picture books and stories that focus on a range of emotions, such as 'I am happy'.
- Provide role-play areas with a variety of resources reflecting diversity.
- Provide time, space and materials for children to collaborate with one another in different ways, for example, building constructions.
- Help children to begin to negotiate with one another using language. For example, if they want to join in a game or if another child has a toy that they want to play with, talk about what they could say. Model the language for them.
- Affirm and praise positive behaviour, explaining that it makes children and adults feel happier.
- Ensure that there is time for young children to complete a self-chosen task, such as trying to put on their own shoes.

- Make activities playful, for example, by calling, 'Boo', up a sleeve to encourage children to put their arm in clothing. Say 'Where's that wriggly worm?' as a foot is pushed down into trousers.
- Understand that young children may want to be very independent sometimes, but will also be very clingy and need physical reassurance at times, particularly when tired, anxious or needing affection. Be available when children need emotional and physical support.
- As children play independently more often, encourage them to come and find you. This helps them to move and explore and lets them know that you're still available, even though you are out of physical contact or sight.



## Section 5

# Learning and Development

## Introduction

### **Principle:**

Children develop and learn in unique and different ways and at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and interconnected.

### **Commitments**

Children's play reflects their wide-ranging and varied interests and preoccupations. In their play children learn at their highest level. Play with peers is important for children's development.

Children learn best through physical and mental challenges. Active learning involves other people, objects, ideas and events that engage and involve children for sustained periods.

When children have opportunities to play with ideas in different situations and with a variety of resources, they discover connections and come to new and better understandings and ways of doing things. Adult support in this process enhances their ability to think critically and ask questions.

The EYFS is made up of six areas of Learning and Development. All areas of Learning and Development are connected to one another and are equally important. All areas of Learning and Development are underpinned by the Principles of the EYFS.

The commitments listed above are important in putting the principle into practice. The Principles into Practice cards give more ideas about what each of these commitments will look and feel like for children, parents and staff. This section only refers to some of the cards, however practitioners will find them all useful in supporting and extending children's personal, social and emotional development. All the Learning and Development commitments require practitioners to build on their knowledge of the unique child, their positive relationships with children and parents and the enabling environment of the setting to support and extend children's Learning and Development.

## 5.1 Why are play, active learning, creativity and critical thinking important for PSED?

A playing child is a learning child and yet early years practitioners sometimes talk about play and learning as separate activities.


If you go to the EYFS CD-ROM or website: Learning and Development/Play and Exploration/Resources/Caring for under threes: play you will find an article by Julia Manning Morton which explores why we might make a mistaken distinction between play and learning.


*Babies and toddlers have an insatiable appetite to explore and control their own bodies and to move around their environment. The idea that toddlers 'don't really concentrate' and 'just need to let off steam' may lead practitioners to make a false distinction between 'play' (running about) and 'learning' (sitting down). This distinction disregards the huge amount of learning that occurs as toddlers move around in their play. Movement and exposure to varied physical experiences allows them to explore various concepts and thereby lay down more connections in the brain (Gopnik et. al. 1999)*

Babies and toddlers, therefore, need play opportunities that support physical activity indoors and outdoors throughout the day and match closely their rapidly changing physical skills.

Babies and young children are continually learning about themselves and their relationships with others. The secure attachments they form are the base from which they can explore and find answers to questions such as 'Who am I?' and 'What can I do?'. So a child's personal, social and emotional development is a fundamental consideration for practitioners when thinking about the play experiences they provide.



Learning takes place when there is enjoyment, and when children are physically active. Active learning means that children are keen to learn and are interested in finding things out for themselves.  To be mentally and physically engaged in learning, children need to feel at ease, secure and confident – to have their personal, social and emotional development supported by sensitive adults.

Like play and active learning, creativity and critical thinking are involved in all areas of Learning and Development and are not necessarily about making an end-product such as a picture, song or model. Being in control of their play helps children to make connections in their learning – to be creative and think critically.  Children will more easily make connections between things they've learned if the environment encourages them to do so. For example, they need to be able to fetch materials easily and to be able to move them from one place to another. This supports personal, social and emotional areas of development. A child will be developing their understanding of their own limitations, setting their own goals and working cooperatively with others.

### Brain fact

Did you know...

That after about the age of ten, the number of brain cells starts to reduce and carry on reducing throughout life. It is by being stimulated and using connections and pathways in the brain that connections are kept and this allows for more learning.

The rest of this section looks in depth at two Learning and Development statements from the EYFS PSED card.

## Learning and Development

- Plan activities that promote emotional, moral, spiritual and social development together with intellectual development.
- Provide experiences that help children to develop autonomy and a disposition to learn.
- Give support and a structured approach to vulnerable children and those with particular behavioural or communication difficulties to help them achieve successful Personal, Social and Emotional Development.

What's next?


## 5.2 Provide experiences that help children to develop autonomy and a disposition to learn

At Leigh Farm Nursery the outdoor area is small with a grassy area with some small logs, stones and rocks. Jimmy is two years old, and very inquisitive. He has moved one of the small logs and stoops to look at the movement of earwigs, and an earthworm. He is engrossed in this, talking to the creatures. He then lifts another small log to find more. Eventually, Jimmy lies down and watches for a period far exceeding his usual level of concentration at nursery.

Jimmy's key person is observing him and noting his focus. When Jimmy notices her, he calls her name and she goes over to him where he tells her about the earwigs and the worm. She responds with enthusiasm and talks about putting the logs back gently so that the creatures' home is not disturbed too much. She listens attentively to Jimmy and asks some open-ended questions such as 'I wonder where that earwig is going now?'

### Reflect and note

- How Jimmy was in control of this learning.
- That his key worker leaves him thinking time and does not jump in to answer her own questions.
- This way of being with children has been called 'companionable learning' (Trevarthen, 2006). How does being a companion fit with your current role?
- How you can learn about children by standing back and watching.
- How you would extend this observation and so encourage further learning and development.

In the most effective settings practitioners support and challenge children's thinking by getting involved in the thinking process with them. This sustained shared thinking is described on  as follows.

- Sustained shared thinking involves the adult being aware of the children's interests and understanding and the adult and children working together to develop an idea or skill.
- Sustained shared thinking can only happen when there are responsive trusting relationships between adults and children.
- The adult shows genuine interest, offers encouragement, clarifies ideas and asks open questions. This supports and extends the children's thinking and helps children to make connections in learning.

Jimmy is actively learning. He is using his natural disposition to learn and is more likely to explore in this way again, taking his learning and play further. In this way Jimmy is developing and learning in many areas.

When children play they are creating new connections, in their journey of discovery.

Note what  Creativity and Critical thinking says about this process.

- New connections help to transform our understanding but this can often be a long process.
- For example, children may need to run, jump and walk through puddles many times to check out what happens. In this way they begin to understand more about the effect of force on water (Knowledge and Understanding the World). They learn how to stay steady on their feet on a slippery surface (Physical Development). They might create a little dance about splashing (CD) or say a rhyme such as 'Doctor Foster' (Communication, Language and Literacy).
- Effective practitioners record the processes that children go through. This will help everyone to see how the children's thinking is developing. Both children and adults can then talk about the learning that has taken place.

Children need to be stimulated to ask 'what if...' in their play. It is for the adult to ensure that there is richness of opportunity to not only ask the 'what if...' question but also for children to be able to explore sufficiently to answer it, maybe, occasionally, with adult help. For example, 'What if I put that tube over the side like that...oops!'

An adult might want to intervene and prevent the accidental spilling of water but the action of the child on their creative experiment means that the child has learned. The child will think beyond this, rationalising the experience, taking it onto the next level ('above the head of his normal behaviour' as Vygotsky claimed). This is what we would expect of Jimmy with his creepy-crawlies play.

Children therefore need:

- opportunities to share ideas through interaction;
- opportunities to use conversation to express their ideas, their thinking and their joy;
- an atmosphere offering warmth, humour and nurturing which values children's ideas and learning;
- interaction with adults who have high but realistic expectations of children;
- environments which allow freedom in the use of materials and space unrestricted by convention, allowing children's imagination to take precedence;
- encouragement to play and experiment with all aspects of the learning environment, with words, activities, song and movement;
- time to learn at their own pace.

### **5.3 Give support and a structured approach to vulnerable children and those with particular behavioural or communication difficulties to help them achieve successful personal, social and emotional development**

If you think back to the scenarios in previous sections involving children such as Blue, Megan and Ahmed, you will remember different strategies for helping children resolve conflict and understand each other better. In the following scenario the practitioner adopts another strategy to help the children involved to be more confident communicators and learners, thus reducing their aggression with others.

At a Children's Centre staff have noticed that two boys, Daniel and Shahid, have difficulty in relating with other children and adults. They often resort to physical means of gaining access to materials and equipment for their play (snatching, pushing, treading on or hitting other children who get in the way). Their play tends to be repetitive and solitary. They will follow the direction of adults and engage in adult-led activity.

Both children's parents say they interact well at home although they often entertain themselves. The staff decide that perhaps the children are a little anxious in the Centre and resolve to try to lessen this, to enable the children to be more adventurous in their play, to communicate better and more gently with their peers and the staff, and to be more autonomous.

The children are invited to a table with paper taped to it covering the top. There are felt pens and crayons in pots and some small-world figures including people, animals and vehicles. Sarah, their key person, says, 'Look at this huge piece of paper - what shall we put on it?' and she picks up a felt pen and draws a line. At first the boys do the same but then Shahid makes his line into a rectangle and places a train inside it. Sarah does the same and pauses. Daniel is drawing shorter lines across his original line and says, 'Look, train tracks', Sarah says, 'You are drawing train tracks' and copies this without saying anything else. She does the same when Shahid places a tree beside Daniel's tracks.

The boys soon realise that Sarah is copying everything that they do. They are fascinated that this is happening and begin to engage in the turn-taking game – making marks and placing figures. They begin to talk to each other. Eventually, they begin to offer more direction to Sarah, who asks for clarification of the instructions when they tell her to put the sound of the train down. This leads to an episode of sustained shared thinking where all three try out different ways of representing sound on paper and a joint 'map' emerges which tells the story of the train's journey and represents the sounds.

In this way the children are developing control over the activity, and begin to feel more confident that they have this ability. This strategy is repeated and extended into other activities. Gradually, the boys learn that sharing responsibility and other people's ideas is fun and they are able to take part in more activities with other children. Sarah, her colleagues and the boys' parents observe that the children seem happier, more relaxed and confident.

The staff at this Centre are very 'tuned in' to each unique child. They understand the importance of PSED for all areas of learning. They use their observations and assessment of children to inform planning for next steps in learning. In doing this, the staff are demonstrating empathy and a whole-Centre commitment to inclusive practice.

### Reflect and note

- How to ensure that you are aware of the personal, social and emotional development needs of all the children in your care.
- How quiet or reserved children are listened to as well as those who are more boisterous and forthcoming.
- How to let children's play flow, and wait to be invited to be part of the game, rather than taking over.
- What you think the benefits of Sarah's structured approach or something similar might be for some of the children with whom you work.

### Learning points:

- Effective communication is the key to learning and practitioners may be concerned that some children find it difficult to communicate or are not communicating well.
- In the example above, Sarah identified the need to support Shahid's and Daniel's communication skills in a structured way.
- There is plenty of detailed advice and guidance about many other ways of supporting children's communication and learning in the *Inclusion Development Programme, Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs: guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage* (Ref: 00215-2008BKT-EN).
- *Letters and Sounds* Phase 1 Teaching Programme also describes a range of activities designed to develop all children's speaking and listening skills. (See Resources and Further Reading page 47 for details.)

## 5.4 Further examples of effective practice from EYFS

There are many examples of effective ways to support children in developing autonomy and a disposition to learn and examples of how to support vulnerable children and those with particular difficulties to be found in the areas of Learning and Development 'maps' on pages 24–116 of the EYFS Practice Guidance. These can also be accessed more flexibly and interactively via the CD-ROM and website by clicking on the hexagon 'flower' entitled 'Search areas of Learning and Development'. This will also enable you to access the links to Early Support material.

Here are just a few of the many examples of effective practice from all six areas of Learning and Development maps and the linked Early Support materials.

### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Encourage babies gradually to share control of food and drink. This provides opportunities for sensory learning and increased independence.
- Demonstrate clear and consistent boundaries and reasonable yet challenging expectations.

- Support children's growing independence as they do things for themselves, such as pulling up their pants after toileting, recognising differing parental expectations.
- Consider ways in which you provide for children with disabilities to make choices, and express preferences about their carers and activities.
- Talk to children about choices they have made, and help them understand that this may mean that they cannot do something else. Enlist support to ensure children learning English as an additional language can express preferences.

### **Communication, Language and Literacy**

- Share the fun of discovery and value babies' attempts at words, for example, by picking up a doll in response to 'baba'.
- Put on tapes of singing, rhymes and favourite stories. Sing along with them. Show children how much you love to hear music and sounds and how much they interest you.
- Plan to talk through and comment on some activities to highlight specific vocabulary or language structures, for example, 'You've caught the ball. I've caught the ball. Nasima's caught the ball'. This approach is helpful in encouraging all children's developing-language skills.
- Prompt children's thinking and discussion through involvement in their play.

### **Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy**

- Play games that involve curling and stretching, popping up and bobbing down.
- Help children to touch, see and feel shape through art, music and dance.
- Sing counting songs and rhymes which help to develop children's understanding of number, such as 'Two Little Dickie Birds'.
- Encourage parents of children learning English as an additional language to talk in their home language about quantities and numbers.

### **Knowledge and Understanding of the World**

- Provide support for young babies when they are not with their key person, to give them manageable experiences with others, for example, ensure that others know a young baby's special characteristics and preferences.
- Nurture babies' sense of themselves, while also helping them to feel that they belong to the group, for example, saying, 'This is Max's cup and there is a cup for Earl, Frankie and Lacey too'.
- Encourage young children as they explore particular patterns of thought or movement, sometimes referred to as schemas.
- Support children's friendships by talking to them about their characteristics, such as being kind, or fun to be with.

### **Physical Development**

- Listen carefully and ask questions that show respect for children's individual contributions.
- Discuss the cultural needs and expectations for skin and hair care with parents prior to entry to the setting, ensuring that the needs of all children are met appropriately and that parents' wishes are respected.
- Talk to children about their movements and help them to explore new ways of moving, such as squirming, slithering and twisting along the ground like a snake.
- Create opportunities for moving towards independence, for example, have hand-washing facilities safely within reach, and support children in making healthy choices about the food they eat.

### **Creative Development**

- Accept wholeheartedly young children's creations and help them to see them as something unique and valuable.
- Help children to listen to music and watch dance when opportunities arise, encouraging them to focus on how sound and movement develop from feelings and ideas.
- Demonstrate and teach skills and techniques associated with the things children are doing, for example, show them how to stop the paint from dripping or how to balance bricks so that they will not fall down.
- Make suggestions and ask questions to extend children's ideas of what is possible, for example, 'I wonder what would happen if...!'



## Section 6

### Resources and further reading

*Seamless Transition – supporting continuity in young children’s learning* (DfES 0267-2006PCK-EN) available from [dcsf@prolog.com](mailto:dcsf@prolog.com) and to download from: [www.publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/0267\\_2006\\_DCL\\_EN\\_web\\_book\\_edition.pdf](http://www.publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/0267_2006_DCL_EN_web_book_edition.pdf)

*Letters and Sounds: Principles and Practice of High Quality Phonics Phase One Teaching Programme* Phase 1 describes a range of activities designed to develop children’s speaking and listening skills and phonological awareness as part of a rich enabling early years environment. Available to order free of charge from [dcsf@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dcsf@prolog.uk.com) (Ref: 00113-2008PCK-EN). Download from: [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk)

*Inclusion Development Programme, Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs: guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage*, available to order free of charge from [dcsf@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dcsf@prolog.uk.com). (Ref: 00215-2008BKT-EN). Download from: [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk)

*Communication Friendly Spaces Toolkit: Improving Speaking and Listening Skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage* (ISBN 1 85990 428 9) A collection of research summaries, case studies, a DVD and an audit workbook that can help you to plan and improve your environment, available from the Basic Skills Agency

Continuing the Learning Journey: [www.naa.org.uk/naa\\_17856.aspx](http://www.naa.org.uk/naa_17856.aspx)

I CAN DVDs ‘Learning to Talk’, ‘Chatter Matters’, available from: [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

Early Support [www.earlysupport.org.uk](http://www.earlysupport.org.uk) – all materials free of charge

Information for parents of under threes:

[www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk](http://www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk)

[www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)

[www.socialbaby.com](http://www.socialbaby.com) for details about the Children’s Project and two books and associated DVDs: *The Social Baby* and *The Social Toddler*

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## Appendix 1

# The key person in reception classes and small nursery settings

By Julian Grenier, Peter Elfer, Julia Manning Morton, Katie Dearnley and Dilys Wilson

## Introduction

### Theme: Positive Relationships

**Principle:** Children learn to be independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

The Early Years Foundation Stage requires that each child in a nursery setting or reception class should be allocated a key person.

Sometimes a 'key-person' is understood to be a person to coordinate observations and record-keeping for the child. While an administrative system like this may be an important part of the way you work in nursery or reception, it is not the same as a key-person system. A key-person system is not principally about administration and record-keeping.

A key person:

- is a named member of staff who has more contact than others with the child;
- is someone to build a relationship with the child and their parents;
- helps the child become familiar with the provision;
- meets the child's individual needs and care needs (for example, dressing, toileting, etc.);
- responds sensitively to the child's feelings, ideas and behaviour;
- is the person who acts as a point of contact with parents.

In a large free-flowing nursery setting, this is important because otherwise children can be cared for indiscriminately by ten or more adults, without developing a particular relationship with any one. Considerable research indicates that the outcomes for children in settings like these are not good: it is a system of group care that can lead to anxiety, aggression or withdrawn behaviour.

In a smaller nursery or reception class, children do not have to cope with so many different adults. But it will be helpful to think about certain points of the day, such as lunchtime: are the children in the EYFS assigned to the care of specific adults at times like these? How is the transition managed? Who gives children extra help if they need it at times of transition like this?

Other elements to consider, which are part of the key-person approach in smaller nursery settings and reception classes, are:

- How do parents and carers work with staff during the settling-in period? How do staff make sure that children feel secure when the time comes to say goodbye and stay in the nursery or reception class without the parent or carer?
- How are care routines like toileting, getting dressed or changed, eating, resting or sleeping managed for children so that they feel personalised, not in an institutional and uncaring system?
- How are children comforted when they feel distressed or tired?
- If children's behaviour is challenging, how do you ensure that a limited number of staff who have a trusting relationship with the child manage difficult incidents?

In the rest of this document, we have tried to summarise some of the important aspects of the key person approach. There is more information and guidance on the EYFS CD-ROM and website. We think it is useful for practitioners to consider the principles and rationale behind the approach, and how these can best be put into practice in each nursery setting or reception class. We think it is important that staff discuss and think about this and use professional judgement, rather than try to follow a single prescription.

## Why have a key person?

Can you remember or imagine what it is like to be at a party or an important meeting where you don't know anyone, or when travelling alone in an unfamiliar city, how comforting and reassuring it is if the party host, chair of the meeting or travel guide, introduces you to people you can join with, explains what the agenda is or shows you where the important places are. It is helpful to us all, when in a strange situation, to have someone we can rely on to interpret unfamiliar experiences for us until we feel confident to manage the situation on our own. Even then, if we feel unwell, unsure or overwhelmed, knowing that there is someone there, whom we can ask for help if necessary, is reassuring and can enable us to tackle something on our own that we might otherwise avoid.

This is what key people do for their allocated group of children. Young children need to know that someone in particular keeps them 'in mind' while they are away from their parents. When they have someone who gets to know them well and supports them in their interactions with others, their confidence and well-being is supported.

## What does having a key person mean for children?

As adults we value the people we are close to in our lives because they understand us well, accept our good and bad sides and give us their time and attention when we need it. Young children also need familiar and trusting relationships in order for them to develop emotional well-being.

The people we feel close to are the people we may feel most anxious about losing. They are also the people with whom we can express our feelings. Therefore, young children may show their need to feel secure through clinging to their parent or key person and being uncooperative with people they do not know well. They may protest when their parent or key person leaves them and show their distress by rejecting comfort or distraction, becoming aggressive or defiant or withdrawing and not engaging in activities. Though difficult to manage, these are ordinary ways in which children respond to separation and anxiety. In these situations, children benefit from having a key person who can accept their emotions and respond with understanding.

This does not mean condoning negative or anti-social behaviours but by acknowledging the feelings that may underlie such behaviours such as anger, anxiety, distress or jealousy, it gives children the message that we empathise with their difficulties even when we do not approve of their method of expressing them. Providing vocabulary for feelings will support children to become aware of their emotions.

By adopting a key-person approach that emphasises the centrality of 'loving and secure relationships' to their practice (EYFS 2007), practitioners are supporting children to feel good about themselves and be confident. When children feel like this, they are more likely to be able to engage in more complex and creative play, freely access a broad curriculum and take risks in their learning through guessing, experimenting and making mistakes.

## Being 'tuned in'

The key to effective early years practice is knowing the children in your group really well. This enables you to start with what the children already know and are interested in rather than what you think they should be taught. Deep knowledge and understanding of individual children comes from spending time with your key children at play, good information sharing with parents and close and regular observation. Therefore, effective implementation of the key- person approach includes observing your key children regularly

and analysing the information both to increase your understanding of the children and also to provide evidence for the records of your key children's developmental progress. Learning what your key children's conversations, play and behaviours mean will enable you to better understand the connections they are making in their learning and to engage in sustained shared thinking (EYFS, Learning and Development: Creativity and Critical Thinking, see: [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs/site/4/3.htm](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs/site/4/3.htm)).

## Being available and responsive

Young children understand much by observing our body language and facial expressions and will interpret these according to their previous experience, sometimes in ways that we do not intend. Therefore, it is important that we make it clear to children that we are available to support them through what we do as well as what we say. By sitting at the children's level and being involved in their play, you will show that you are available to them to come to as they need and, especially for new children, by drawing their attention to interesting things around them and smiling and nodding as they explore, you will support their explorations and independence, thereby providing a secure base. It is often tempting to move away from an activity once children are 'settled' but for new children or children who find peer interactions challenging, this can be very disruptive so practitioners need to be sensitive to when their presence and involvement in play is necessary.

## Being consistent

In small nursery and reception classes, where there are two members of staff working as a close team, there are good opportunities for children to experience consistent interactions and expectations. This kind of experience is important for children moving between the worlds of home and school where the environment and routine are very different.

All children benefit from the emotional security that familiarity of people, places and experience brings. This can often be overlooked in the organisation of play and lunchtime sessions, when suddenly children are expected to engage in very different routine activities with a different group of staff. Such changes in familiarity and routine can raise the stress levels of all children, though most will be able to use their existing emotional and social skills to adapt quickly to new situations. For some children such as those with additional emotional, social or learning needs, or who are newly arrived in the community and learning English as an additional language, the stress caused by frequent changes of practitioner (such as playtime, lunchtime, PE), may result in either distress or negative behaviour. Thought needs to be given to the organisation of these times so that children are given time to become gradually familiar with all the relevant practitioners, the routines and the environment over an extended period of time.

## Liaising with parents

To support children's sense of well-being and belonging, practitioners need to develop close working partnerships with parents in which there is mutual respect and trust. By learning about and understanding each family's customs, the practitioner can extend their knowledge of the individual child to provide effective care and learning opportunities. This means sharing information about children's:

- emotional needs, for example, any fears or worries the child has;
- physical needs, for example, the degree to which the child can dress and use the toilet independently;
- language and cultural heritage: can the practitioner use important words in each child's home language and are they knowledgeable about significant events in the child's cultural and religious life?

It is important to spend time with your key children's parents regularly, sharing observations and information and gathering ideas for future plans.

## Settling in

Starting at nursery or school can be stressful for children. They are in a strange and perhaps overwhelming environment, meeting several new children and adults, encountering unfamiliar toys and experiences, and then the person they rely on most leaves them. Settling new children into a setting successfully, with minimum distress is probably one of the most skilful and challenging things a practitioner does. It can be a fraught time for parents and children. For practitioners, too, memories of their own separations and losses in life make this an emotionally-charged time. For all these reasons, it can be tempting to cut short or even dispense with settling-in times. While some children might cope with the sudden loss of their parent or carer in this way, others may not. They may be damaged by the experience.

An effective settling-in system gives parents, children and practitioners sufficient time to get to know each other well before children are separated from their parents. An agreed settling-in policy might include:

- advance planning of admissions;
- home or initial visits;
- periods of time when parents support children as they get used to the nursery or reception class;
- special planning for the first day;
- ways of supporting children and parents at the point of parting, and reuniting;
- guidance for parents on ways to help children at times of change.

## Dilemmas

The key-person approach is not simple to implement. Sometimes dilemmas arise. As with all good early years practice, the best way to address these dilemmas is through observation and discussion, and making a professional judgement.

In order to be able to respond sensitively to children's feelings, practitioners need to be sufficiently open emotionally to be able to understand those feelings and yet also retain their own sense of 'adulthood' in order to deal with the child's distress. Sometimes adults can find themselves responding to children's demands 'in kind'.

Some examples of this are:

- feeling overwhelmed by the crying of unsettled children who themselves are overwhelmed by being in school;
- getting impatient when toddlers become frustrated.

These are times when it is useful to take a step back and talk with colleagues about what is going on for the child, and think about how the adults can provide help, and set appropriate limits if necessary.

Practitioners need to understand that in order to be healthily independent a child needs to be able to express dependency at vulnerable times.

This is an emotionally demanding and skilful area of practice that some practitioners find overwhelming and so avoid becoming close to children. Yet those that are able to be available, sensitive and responsive to their key children can take pride in knowing that not only are they contributing positively to the quality of their key child's mental model of relationships for the future, they are also assisting healthy brain development and learning abilities.

Research indicates that an effective key-person approach leads to:

- more satisfied and engaged staff;
- improved care and learning for children;
- parents who feel confident about the quality and devotion of professional staff.

## Appendix 2

### Reflections on the emotionally enabling environment

In Section 4 reference was made to an audit for use with parents, practitioners, leaders and children. The purpose of this is to support staff teams in making a judgement about how they look after and promote personal, social and emotional well-being for everybody in the setting, not just the children. It is well documented that unless the needs of the adults working with young children are considered, so that they feel respected, valued and looked after, they are unlikely to be able to do their best to utilise their skills and knowledge to promote the health and welfare of the young children in their care. Unless you look after yourself, how can you look after other people?

#### Reflect and note

How do I, living in a community including my workplace, protect and enhance my self-worth and self-competence, while at the same time, maintaining and enhancing the worth and dignity of others, the children, my colleagues and parents?

#### How to complete the audit

This tool can be used very flexibly within a setting to explore the emotional environment for different groups at key times. For example when:

- new children and families are starting at the setting;
- children are in the process of transition – either into, within or leaving the setting;
- a new project involving parents is starting;
- new members have joined the staff team.

It is important to consider what the reason for completing the audit is. As with all self-evaluation tools it should not be a 'one off' activity. It should be something that is returned to, after a period of time, when plans have been implemented and results from the original audit and the new can be compared. There is a box on the form to identify the purpose of the audit.

It can also help practitioners in identifying and understanding some of the factors that are contributing to why children may be behaving in certain ways.

The audit is laid out so that parents, practitioners and leaders can respond to the statements – 'Is this a place where...?' – for themselves but also consider the statements from other people's perspectives. By doing this you are starting the process of empathising with colleagues and others who are part of the community that makes up your setting.

Simply, you are asking yourself, 'How does it feel for me in this place? How does it feel for other people in this place?' 'Is this a place I want to be?'

You may like to use the tool through staff meetings, asking staff to complete it using the instructions below, varying them to suit how you are collecting the data. It is very important that you can evidence the judgements made about statements as this will enable you to make decisions about the next steps.

Start with your own responses to all of the statements.

You can make a judgement (yes or no) to the statements and complete a simple tally of responses.

Alternatively, you could respond on a scale of 0 to 4 where 4 indicates that you feel very positively that the statement is true for you and a 0 means 'no'. The advantage of giving a value to your response is that when you return to the audit at a later date you will be able to compare how you rate. It is also worth remembering that how you respond will depend on many factors – particularly what has happened recently. For that reason, respond how you feel at this point in time.

Next, consider how you think others would respond.

If you are a practitioner or a manager, consider the statements from a parent's perspective – and not just one parent – think about the diverse and unique people who make up the parents who use the setting. Complete the column for the parents' voice as to how you think it is for parents in your setting. Again, you can use a 'yes or no' response or a rating from 0 to 4.

If you are a practitioner, do the same from the management's viewpoint – what do you think it is like to be a manager in your setting?

If you are a manager or leader, think about how it is for the practitioners working in the setting, again, consider not just one practitioner but a range – experienced, new, qualified, unqualified.

Parents' own responses must be sought. This is possibly best done by inviting them to the setting for a stay-and-play session so that the tool can be discussed with them. Otherwise, Appendix 3 has a suggested letter for you to amend and use to send the audit home to parents. It is suggested that parents are asked to respond for themselves and their children.

### **The child's voice**

Recording the child's voice can be hard to do, but will really test your empathetic skills, your knowledge of the children that you care for and, of course, your observations. For instance, if you think that this is an environment where children can:

- recognise themselves and where their own unique qualities are respected and valued

then tick 'yes' or give a higher rating, but you must also record the evidence for this. Ask yourself what you see children doing that makes you believe that this is so.

You may find the '*Listening to Young Children*' (Lancaster and Broadbent 2003), materials useful in promoting deeper thinking and more effective practice in this area.

By considering each statement in turn you, will build up a valuable bank of information upon which to plan the next steps in the setting's development. These can go into 'How can it be made better'. We are never perfect, and whether you are an outstanding setting or not there is always something which can be worked on to make experiences even better for children, staff and parents.

### **What to do with the information**

It is advisable to use any form of audit tool cautiously so that you do not become overwhelmed with data and then lose heart. Start with the staff in the setting first. You might also be lucky enough to find a data expert amongst the staff who will take this role on!

If you have decided to use 'yes or no' responses then a simple tally sheet will enable you to see the balance between agreement and disagreement with the statements. This will give you some quantitative data and a baseline on which to make judgements on progress when you repeat the exercise in the future.

If you have elected to use a 0 to 4 rating, then you will be able to tally how many responses there are under each rating. This will enable you to make a more detailed analysis of responses and explore why there may be differences within groups.

The qualitative information from answering the questions, 'How do you know?' and 'How can it be made better?' is going to be invaluable. Remember that even if one person disagrees with a statement, then this may need to be explored, if only to see if there is a simple solution.

Reflections on the emotional enabling environment	I am a child/parent/practitioner/leader/other (circle)					The main focus of this audit is ...
Is this a place where?	Child's voice	Parent's voice	Practitioners' voice	Management voice	How do you know? What do you see?	How can it be made better?
<p>1.1* I can recognise myself and my own unique qualities are respected and valued</p> <p>1.2 I am supported and encouraged to develop a positive sense of my own identity, culture and self- image</p> <p>1.2 My thinking is challenged to understand and embrace differences in gender, language, culture, ethnicity, religion, special needs, disabilities</p> <p>1.3 I have been involved in developing the rules, boundaries and limits that help us to feel safe and secure</p> <p>1.4 I am supported to develop my physical and mental health and well-being</p>						
The Unique Child						

\* The number beside each statement refers to the EYFS card where you will find relevant information.

Is this a place where?	Child's voice	Parent's voice	Practitioners' voice	Management voice	How do you know? What do you see?	How can it be made better?
2.1* I am respected and expected to build warm trusting relationships and show sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others						
2.1 I am allowed to laugh, cry, 'stamp my feet'						
2.2 Parents are communicated with, engaged and involved for the benefit of everybody's learning and development						
2.3 I am supported to make friends and get on with others						
2.4 I am Special, Noticed, Missed, Valued, Understood by someone						

\* The number beside each statement refers to the EYFS card where you will find relevant information.

Is this a place where?	Child's voice	Parent's voice	Practitioners' voice	Management voice	How do you know? What do you see?	How can it be made better?
The Unique Child 1.1* I can recognise myself and my own unique qualities are respected and valued 1.2 I am supported and encouraged to develop a positive sense of my own identity, culture and self- image 1.2 My thinking is challenged to understand and embrace differences in gender, language, culture, ethnicity, religion, special needs, disabilities 1.3 I have been involved in developing the rules, boundaries and limits that help us to feel safe and secure 1.4 I am supported to develop my physical and mental health and well-being						

\* The number beside each statement refers to the EYFS card where you will find relevant information.

Is this a place where?	Child's voice	Parent's voice	Practitioners' voice	Management voice	How do you know? What do you see?	How can it be made better?	
<p style="text-align: center;">Enabling Environments</p> <p>3.1* My thoughts, ideas and feelings are sought and noted and used to influence planning</p> <p>3.2 There are planned routines, experiences and activities that support and challenge me</p> <p>3.2 I can admit I am wrong and be forgiven</p> <p>3.3 I am supported to make choices and I am allowed to say no</p> <p>3.3 I am given helpful feedback about my efforts and achievements</p> <p>3.4 I am part of a wider community that is welcomed</p>							

\* The number beside each statement refers to the EYFS card where you will find relevant information.

Is this a place where?	Child's voice	Parent's voice	Practitioners' voice	Management voice	How do you know? What do you see?	How can it be made better?
4.1* The importance of play and recreation for my health, well-being, independence and spontaneity is appreciated, encouraged and developed						
4.2 I am given time and space to explore, observe, experiment, discover, question, reflect, concentrate and develop my own interests						
4.3 I feel it's OK to be unsure, ask questions, take risks, make mistakes and LEARN						
4.3 I am allowed to reflect and change my mind, ideas, thoughts, beliefs						
4.4 All aspects of my learning and development are considered equally important. My strengths and areas for development are recognised and supported.						
Learning and Development						
This is a place I want to be						

\* The number beside each statement refers to the EYFS card where you will find relevant information.

**A People Place**

If this is not the place where tears are understood, where do I go to cry?

If this is not a place where my spirits can take wing, where do I go to fly?

If this is not a place where my questions can be asked, where do I go to seek?

If this is not a place where my feelings can be heard, where do I go to speak?

If this is not a place where you'll accept me as I am, where can I go to be?

If this is not a place where I can try to and learn to grow, where can I just be me?"

William J. Crocker

## Appendix 3

### Draft audit letter to parents

Dear Parent,

We are always trying to make sure that we do the very best for all the children, and this means that we also have to do the best for all the adults. We have decided to ask questions about how people feel about our setting. The enclosed questionnaire is for you to fill in for us, by simply agreeing or disagreeing with the statements, from your point of view (Parents' voice) and from what you imagine to be the voice of the practitioner and the leader. As you can see, there is also a column for the voice of the child. We wonder how you think children might respond to the statements if they could. It would be helpful if you could tell us why you have answered in the way that you have, as this information might help us to make things better.





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