



Child Care and Early Education

Good practice
to support young children
and their families



Jennie Lindon

Child Care and Early Education

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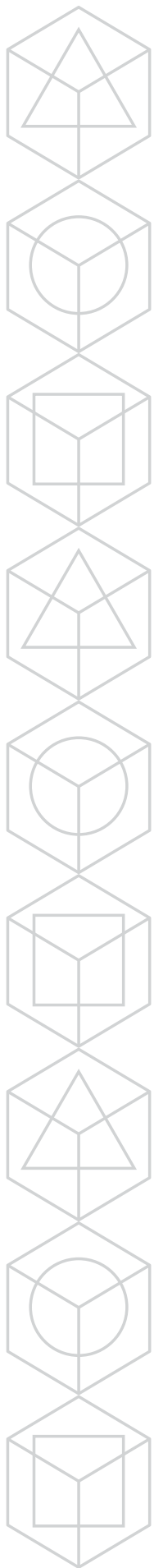
Child Care and Early Education

*Good practice to support young
children and their families*

Jennie Lindon



Australia • Canada • Mexico • Singapore • Spain • United Kingdom • United States





**Child Care and Early Years Education:
Good practice to support young children and their families**

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*To Lance, Drew and Tanith – with my love and appreciation
of the many ways in which you have all helped me*



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Abacus Nursery, Balham Family Centre, Balham Nursery School, Bishops House Early Years Centre, Eveline Day Nursery Schools, New River Green Early Years Centre and Family Project, Newtec Day Nursery, Ravenstone Primary School, Rydevale Community Nursery, Saplings Nursery, St Mary's Pre-School, St Peter's Eaton Square CE Primary School Nursery Class, Staffordshire University Day Nursery and The Grove Nursery School.

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Introduction

Good practice in working with young children

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the early years field has experienced considerable change. There have been many new initiatives since childcare and early education finally became of central political interest. Yet the core of what is regarded as good practice with children and families has remained relatively stable.

Some level of change will always be part of good professional practice and it would be naïve to believe that early years practice is now fixed. Any profession, but especially one that shares the responsibility for our youngest citizens, should be willing to learn and to modify practice in the light of new information and ideas.

Using this book

Early years practitioners can potentially work in a range of different early years settings, in primary schools, out of school care and home based as a nanny or a childminder. Over your career you are likely to experience more than one type of work. This book will support you in any of these working situations and you will find a wealth of information, practical suggestions to apply and ideas to provoke your own thoughts.

Many readers of this book will be undertaking an early years qualification. Some readers will be at the very beginning of their career, whereas others will have gained experience in a job and are now gaining a qualification. The content of this book covers the main modules and units of the major early years qualifications but for flexibility is not locked into any single qualification. You can use Appendix 1 to identify the links to specific early years qualifications and to the Key Skills (Core Skills in Scotland).

You can use this book on your own to extend your own knowledge and examine your practice. But if you are studying for one of the early years qualifications, then your supervisor, college tutor or NVQ assessor will advise you on how to use the chapters of the book to support the current topics studied on your course. You will also find some advice in this book about building your portfolio (page 663), learning to use resources (page 664) and continued professional development (page 32).

Many of the activities, as well as the ideas within the book, will be that much more useful to you if you take opportunities to discuss the issues with your tutor, supervisor, colleagues and, where appropriate, with parents and other users of your service.

The features of this book have been developed to help readers to explore ideas and to support their application to your practice. You will find the following features in highlighted boxes close to the text to which they relate:

- **Activity:** a suggestion for something you can do to explore or apply an idea or find out useful information.

- **Activity (observation):** a suggestion for something to do that includes a brief for an observation.
- **To think about:** taking an idea further and suggesting ways you could consider and discuss it.
- **Scenario:** a description of practice in fictional settings, with questions to consider and relate to your own practice.
- **Tips for practice:** the practical application of what you would do as you apply an idea or suggestion in your days with children and families.
- **Progress check:** questions at the end of each chapter, for you to check your understanding of the content.

Many of these boxed features are cross referenced to some of the Key/Core Skills. Your tutor will help you in planning any work that would form evidence of your skills. It is possible for that work to be more or less challenging.

Terms used in the book

Different traditions within early years services have created a varied terminology applied to settings that serve children and their families. To avoid complicated 'either-or' sentences, I have used the following general words and phrases:

- **Colleagues** is used to mean the people with whom you work or study. An activity or think about box may suggest you discuss with your colleagues. This could be other practitioners who are part of the team where you work or fellow students on a full or part time course.
- **Early years practitioner**, or just practitioner, is used as a general term to cover any person who is working in an early years setting. If I wish to specify a particular qualification or experience background, I will make that clear.
- **Early years setting**, or just setting, is used for any of the different kinds of establishment that offer a service to young children and their families.
- **Manager** is used for the person who is in charge of the early years setting on a daily basis.
- The term **parent** is used to mean any adult who is taking parental responsibility for a child and forming a relationship with early years practitioners. So 'parent' effectively covers the phrase 'parent or other carer'. The term covers children's birth parents, foster or adoptive parents and other relatives or carers who are taking parental responsibility.

Practitioners, parents or children can, of course, be female or male. In order to avoid repetition of phrases like 'he or she', I have usually used the plural. Specific examples include male and female and it will be obvious in any section of the book when the sex of individuals is an important part of the discussion.

Use of scenarios

A range of early years settings and other services for children appear as examples throughout the book to illustrate points and to help you consider the practical application of ideas. In these scenarios, the places and people, both adults and children, are fictitious. However, I have developed the incidents and dilemmas from real experiences of early years practitioners, parents and children. So, however familiar a scenario may be, you cannot know this setting or

people. But I will have encountered, and changed the details, of something very similar. Scenarios are provided from six different group settings, a childminding network and the working situation of two nannies. These are named:

- Sunningdale Day Nursery
- Greenholt Pre-school
- Dresden Road Nursery School
- The Dale Parent and Toddler drop-in group
- St Jude's Primary School, with the nursery class and after school club
- Baker Street Children and Family Centre
- Wessex childminding network
- Two nannies, Nancy and Kimberley

The aim of the scenarios is to give you material to work on, either on your own or in discussion with colleagues.

- Readers who are not currently in post will find it useful to consider and discuss some realistic issues and dilemmas linked with a particular kind of early years practice.
- The scenarios also provide an opportunity to think through practice in work settings of which you have limited or no experience as yet.
- The advantage of using scenarios is that you can also discuss practice in detail, without the sensitive complications that can arise when the real person is part of the discussion.
- However, the scenarios give you the scope then to apply a range of ideas to your own practice.

The dedicated website for this book is
www.cengagelearning.co.uk/childcare/london

Using the website will give you access to further material linked to each chapter and suitable for students and college tutors. You will find:

- Additional ideas for a selection of scenarios, 'to think about' and 'tips for practice' boxes
- Pointers to help with the progress checks at the end of each chapter
- Further resources for some of the topics covered
- The websites given in the book by chapter, with direct links to the sites
- Updates on important issues of practice, changes in legislation or the qualification structure
- An opportunity to email your views, ideas and questions

1

The early years of childhood

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- identify general features of the experience of childhood
- understand the broad areas of child development and theories about development
- describe the early childhood services in the UK
- explain the main features of the legal framework for such services
- understand key principles and values in working with children
- understand the positive framework of anti-discriminatory practice.

Introduction

Childhood is a time of change for children, their families and also for the early years practitioners who care for children. This chapter provides a broad framework of how children change over their first eight years and the range of explanations for that development. Young children live within a society that has organised a range of early years services for them and their families. You will find a description of the range of services, the legislation that mainly affects those settings in which you work and a summary of what are regarded as the most important values to underpin work with young children.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

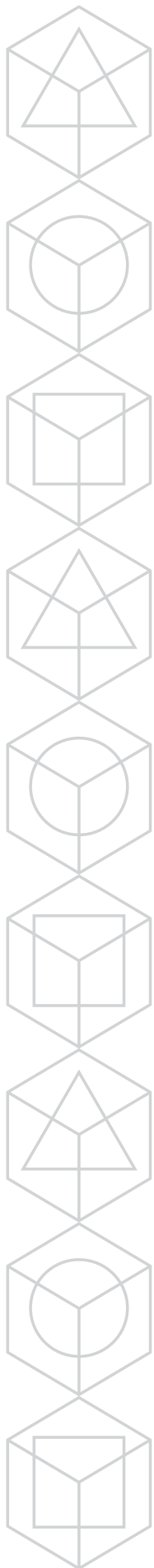
Diploma in Child Care and Education: 4, 8, 9, 10, 11

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: CU10

Level 3: M6

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 1, 4, 7, 12, 21



The experience of childhood

Around the world traditions vary as to how children should be raised. Even within an apparently single culture or social group, you will still find a great deal of diversity. Parents and other adults will not hold identical views about how to raise children, nor behave in the same way day by day. The experience of children varies considerably, both in terms of their daily experiences and the environment in which they live and learn. Despite the variety, there are some general themes that all children share and it is valuable for you to bear these in mind within your work as an early years practitioner.

Childhood is a time of change

It is inevitable that children themselves change as time passes. Even if the rest of a child's world remains fairly static, the child will change. Children grow physically and their abilities extend; this development in turn opens other possibilities for them. The consequence for adults is that you need to adjust as well. Even if you are responsible for a child for a relatively short period of time, there will still be change and, for the well being of the child, you will need to be flexible and sensitive to how the child's world has extended.

Children in their turn react, more or less positively, to changes in their social world. During the early years of childhood, young children are faced with a range of adjustments. Some changes will seem major to the children, even though the events are within normal family life, such as the arrival of a new baby or moving home. Some children deal with even more disruptive life changes, such as the breakdown of their family, the loss of a loved relative through death or a sudden move from one country to another as a refugee.

As childhood progresses, children in UK society have to deal sooner or later with becoming accustomed to non-family group settings such as nurseries. In contrast with the generations raised in the 1950s and 1960s, children of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century are most likely to experience some group setting before formal school.

Experiences affect children

What happens to children changes them one way or another; they learn from their experiences. Sometimes that learning will be wholly positive for their future development, sometimes it may be highly negative and often it will be some blend of the two. Learning from experience may be as simple as the realisation that it hurts when fingers get shut in a door or drawer. Other events may be more complex and it is unwise for adults, even with a great deal of experience, to become over-confident about predicting a child's reaction. For instance, some children are angry over the arrival of a new baby, some are happy and excited, others are perplexed.

Distressing events can create long-term emotional and psychological problems for children but much seems to depend on how a child is supported by people who are close. On balance children seem to be more seriously disturbed by continued stress than single events. Each experience gains meaning for children through how important adults in their lives explain, or fail to explain, what has happened.

Events like divorce are only a word until children can understand what it means for their life and relationships. What matters most is how adults behave

towards children, including what they say. Children need to be helped to understand what is likely to happen as a consequence of any change in family life and to be reassured about the stability of their own daily life.

Adults responsible for children often seek a greater level of certainty than is realistic. It might seem attractive to be able to say this experience or event causes this consequence, or that this way of behaving towards children will ensure positive outcomes. But life does not work like that, as a limited amount of adult reflection will confirm. H. Rudolph Schaffer undertook a careful review of research studies on a range of significant life events for children and concluded that,

care needs to be taken about making sweeping generalisations and advancing global solutions. 'It all depends' may be an annoying phrase and it does not make good headlines, but it accurately reflects reality. (Schaffer, *Making Decisions about Children*, Basil Blackwell, 1990: 235)

Children in twenty-first-century society

Successive generations of children within the same society may share many similar experiences and there is no basis for assuming that children themselves have changed. They still appreciate time, attention and affection from their parents and other key carers. Despite a bewildering array of commercially produced toys, twenty-first-century babies still want to play peep-bo with Mum or Dad or do crawling-chasing on the floor. This generation of children is equally happy with dressing-up clothes, cardboard boxes that become anything they want and with the music of saucepans and a wooden spoon.

Activity

Over about a month collect evidence of the different images of children in our society. You can look at, copy if possible and make notes on:

- advertisements that feature babies and children
- newspaper headlines and leading news stories
- the front covers of magazines in a newsagents
- leaflets that are freely available in health clinics, pharmacies or high street stores.

What are the main images or contrasting themes? Are children promoted as:

- young consumers, agents of 'pester power' to get parents to buy particular food, clothes or toys?
- couch potatoes with eyes stuck to a television or computer screen?
- brave little tots who have overcome illness or accident?
- a highly vulnerable group who have to be protected at all costs?
- a source of trouble, bad behaviour or disruption?

Consider the range that you have collected and share your ideas with colleagues. You could:

- write up your findings with images

- present your ideas to the group on the different images of a 'normal' child and of childhood in our current society
- contribute to a discussion with your colleagues to explore how your own images and assumptions may be shaped.

Key skills link: C2/3.1a–3, depending on the level of challenge introduced into this activity.

Children have not changed but the society in which the current young generation in the UK is growing up has changed.

- One highly visible shift is the significant level of everyday technology.
- Young children can become adept at handling television controls, videos and computers. The availability of such equipment, combined with increased adult concern about safety has raised a genuine problem about whether children get enough physical exercise.
- A strongly consumer society also raises the problems of financial pressure on children and their families and the fact that children themselves are increasingly targeted as direct consumers or indirectly through their ability to nag parents.
- The other significant change for many children in contrast with previous generations, especially now their grandparents, is that so many children attend some kind of early years setting before they go to primary school.
- Some families need childcare because one or both parents have paid work. But it has become very usual for two, three and four years olds to attend nursery, pre-school or playgroup for some sessions in each week as a form of pre-school experience.

Figure 1.1

Children nowadays still enjoy peep-bo!





Activity

Advice to parents and carers can change over time, even within the same cultural group. Children themselves have not changed, so one could reasonably ask what is happening. In some cases new research may overturn previous received wisdom, but not always.

Gather some examples of advice given over the last 30–40 years. You could gather this on your own or with colleagues by:

- Asking your own parents, if possible, whether they used any books to help raise you and are they still on the shelf?
- Look out for older books at jumble sales or second hand bookshops.
- Look through *Perfect parents*, a book written by social historian Christina Hardyment (1995 Oxford University Press). The book describes the conflicting advice given to UK parents over a couple of centuries and the fact that some views return in a circling manner.

Questions

- 1 What differences can you identify in what was or is considered normal for babies and young children in feeding, weaning or toilet training?
- 2 What about views on behaviour and how best to develop appropriate habits in children?
- 3 What could your findings warn you about current assumptions and the need to be ready to check and continue to learn as a responsible adult?
- 4 Write up and present to your colleagues.
- 5 Contribute to a discussion about patterns of advice. Do avoid any temptation to believe that anyone offering what reads like odd advice in the past was just wrongheaded, because the current generation of adults has finally found the correct way to raise children!

Key skills link: C2/3.1a–3, depending on the level of challenge introduced into this activity.

Changing families

Children need to be cared for in their early years and the usual way that this is managed world wide is that children are raised within their own family. There are, however, many variations in how families appear.

Who is in the family?

In twenty-first-century UK most children still live with two parents, although increasingly these may not both be the child's **birth parents** (the man and woman who conceived the child). Marriage is still popular, so often children's parents are married to each other but not always.

About 20 per cent of families in the UK are headed by one parent living with dependent children. **Lone parent** families are most often led by mothers but about 10 per cent of lone parents are fathers. Children in lone parent families may have regular contact with the other parent. But sometimes contact is intermittent or conflict between the parents makes a close relationship difficult.

Key terms

Birth parents

the biological mother and father of a child

Lone parents

mothers or fathers who are raising their children on their own

Key terms**Stepfamilies**

families formed when one or both adults bring their children from a previous relationship into the new relationship. Stepparents will not be the biological parent of all the children in their family

Foster carers

people who take temporary responsibility for children when their own family is unable to care for them

Respite care

a service offering temporary care of children to families in order to give the parents a break from stressful childcare

Adoptive families

when one or two adults take legal responsibility for children whose own families cannot care for them and commit to raise the children

Looked after children

a description for the status of children and young people who have become the responsibility of the local authority because their own families cannot take care of them on a temporary or permanent basis. The local authority assumes parental responsibility

Stepfamilies are formed when adults set up home together with children from previous partnerships. Neither stepfamilies nor lone parent families are a new form of family life. However, in previous decades, especially earlier than the mid-twentieth century, they were likely to be formed as a result of widowhood. Divorce and women choosing to have babies without a permanent partner are now more common.

Although many children will continue to live with their two birth parents, many will experience changes in their family arrangements over the years of childhood. Children who experience their parents' separation will spend some time in a lone parent family or shared custody arrangements and may later become part of a stepfamily. If current trends continue, it is estimated that:

- more than a third of new marriages will end within 20 years and 4 out of 10 will end in divorce
- more than 1 in 4 children will experience the divorce of their parents by their 16th birthday
- 1 in 4 children will spend some time in a lone parent family (most likely with their mother)
- 1 in 8 children will spend some time in a stepfamily.

There are other possibilities for those children who are not raised within their birth family.

- Children who cannot be raised by their parents for some reason may spend time with **foster carers**, who take responsibility for the children within their own family home. Some foster care arrangements are relatively short but some last for years. Sometimes the plan is to prepare children for adoption. Foster parents are usually part of the family support services of local authorities. Private fostering arrangements made between birth parents and another carer remain legal in the UK, although there are moves to introduce regulation for the protection of children.
- Some children stay with a foster family for many years and form strong attachments, others may be with the family for only a short while.
- Some foster families offer **respite care**, a service for parents who need a break from their children for reasons of family stress, illness or the child's severe disability. Respite care is also sometimes offered within residential units for children with disabilities.
- Some children are cared for through **adoption**, a legal process that means they are by law the responsibility of their adoptive parents. Many adoptive parents are not related to the children but in some cases a stepparent legally adopts the child of his or her partner.
- Some children whose families cannot take care of them become the responsibility of the local authority and are **looked after children**. The children or teenagers may be with foster parents or in a residential home for children.

Most parents are heterosexual but there is a growing, although small, group of families led by gay or lesbian parents. Some parents have children from heterosexual partnerships before they accepted their sexual orientation. Others are formed by a child from this partnership, through artificial insemination from an unknown donor or cooperative parenting between gay and lesbian friends. There are some gay or lesbian foster parents.



Since family situations vary it can be useful to get into the habit of using non-specific terms to avoid making assumptions about family structure:

- it is straightforward to refer to 'your partner' rather than 'husband' or 'wife'.
- some children are mainly cared for by relatives other than the parents, so many early years settings use the phrase 'parents and carers' in written communication.

Tips for practice

Extended families?

Increased mobility in many parts of our society has meant that many young people move away from where they were born and raise their own children at some distance from their extended family. Within some cultural and social groups the **extended family** structure is still fairly usual and some families live in households with grandparents or other relatives. In parts of the west country in England, for example, and in parts of Wales it is still the case that children raise their own families in the neighbourhood where they were born.

Who is the primary carer?

In many families women are still the **primary carer** (the person who spends most hours on childcare and organising the household). However, an increasing number of families have the father as primary carer or, over the years of childhood, the parents alternate, depending on other factors like employment.

Changes in social attitudes are more supportive of fathers' involvement in the upbringing of their children and it is certainly far more common to see fathers on the street pushing buggies or with babies strapped to their chest. Mothers are still mainly the primary carer and fathers can find themselves ill at ease in very female environments such as a nursery or drop-in (see chapter 21 on 'Partnership with parents').

Key terms

Extended family

the relatives in a family beyond the mother and father

Primary carer

the parent who undertakes most of the daily care and responsibility for children

Activity

What are the varied patterns in your current early years setting on the types of family patterns represented?

- You need to undertake this activity with sensitivity and the suggestion is that you use information that you already have from partnership with parents. You are *not* being asked to quiz families.
- Make a simple chart of the kinds of families (look back over this section) and the variety that is normal for your setting.
- Discuss your findings with colleagues on your course but maintain confidentiality about individual families.

Key skills links: N2.3 C3.1 a and b

Activity

Many of our own ideas about children and childcare are shaped by our own childhood. It can be useful to reflect on your life as a child. For instance:

- 1 Did you attend a nursery or pre-school?
- 2 Where did you play as a child?
- 3 What do you remember as your favourite games: playing on your own or with friends?
- 4 How did you travel to school?
- 5 How often did you watch television (for instance, every day, with or without time limits)? What were your favourite programmes?
- 6 Did you have access to a computer: at home? at school?
- 7 How old were you when you were allowed to make short local trips on your own or with another child? For instance, to the local shop, or walking to school?
- 8 What kind of diet did you eat? What were your favourite meals?

Write up briefly and then discuss some of the highlights with your colleagues. Your aim is to remember what was important to you as a child and perhaps some contrasts with the children for whom you are now responsible. You could all consider:

- Was your childhood very different in some ways from the childhood you see around you now? Different does not necessarily mean better or worse.
- Compare and contrast different experiences with your colleagues. Be sensitive to the variety and that perhaps the childhood of some people was unhappy or disrupted.
- Use the opportunity to explore diversity if you can share experiences with colleagues who were raised in a very different area from yourself: urban or rural, different countries around the world.

Key skills link: C2/3.3 C2/3.1a

Children in poverty

For all the apparent wealth of some parts of society in the UK, there is also serious poverty and deprivation in certain areas. The UK is one of the European countries with the starkest difference between the 'have's' and the 'have not's' in economic terms and the record on children living in poverty is very unfavourable. The most widely used definition of poverty is a household income that is less than half the national average. By this definition one-sixth of UK children are living in poverty – a total of 4.4 million.

Poverty is often linked with lack of employment for adults and areas of the UK where there has been long-term unemployment with little prospect of any improvement. Lack of work for parents is another way of looking at likely poverty for children. In 2000 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that 2.2 million children in the UK (almost one-sixth of the child population) were living in households where no adult had any paid work.

The picture varies considerably across the UK. For instance the south of England is on balance more affluent than the north but there are definite areas of deprivation in the south. There can be a whole area of a city or town that is blighted. On the other hand, there can be quite small disadvantaged pockets in an area that is otherwise reasonably affluent. Scotland has significant levels of deprivation with 41 per cent of under fives living in poverty. Wales and Northern Ireland have serious pockets of poverty and long-term unemployment. Wales is one of the poorest regions in Western Europe – only Spain, Portugal, Greece and the former East Germany have a lower standard of living. In some areas of the UK particular minority ethnic groups or refugee families are living in especially deprived circumstances, but poverty is a condition that is experienced by families from many different ethnic groups.

Rural poverty

The extent of rural poverty is often underestimated and isolation and lack of neighbourhood facilities can make life considerably more difficult for families who may live in what look like very attractive countryside areas. The Forum for Rural Children and Young People (www.ncb.org.uk/rural.htm), in June 2001, estimated that rural children form about one-quarter of the children judged to be living in poverty in England. Lack of public transport can be a serious issue when families cannot afford a car or the car is the only way for the family breadwinner to get to work each day.

What does poverty mean for children?

There are significant consequences for children whose families are living in poverty and early years settings can play an important role in supporting families and offsetting some of the problems:

- Babies of families living in poverty are more likely to have a low birth weight and to experience more ill health and accidents within childhood.
- Limited family income often means restrictions to a healthy diet (see page 83) and therefore possible health and developmental effects.
- In many families, parents give up things themselves in order that their children may be better cared for. Parents may eat less so there is more for the children or go without warm clothes so that children can have a winter coat.
- Family stresses can increase the likelihood of lower attainment in school, especially where continued poor family prospects mean there are low expectations of achievement.
- Although families may be eligible for financial support, they may not know about or wish to claim some benefits. Children themselves may not wish to stand out at school by accepting free school meals.
- Families in poverty often also live in neighbourhoods with fewer facilities, including play facilities for the children. The local area may be realistically more dangerous for children than other parts of the same town or city.
- Some of the initiatives in early years services have been developed to support children living in poverty or deprived conditions, for instance Sure Start projects that target under fives and Neighbourhood Nurseries initiatives.

To think about

Young children usually assume that what they experience in early childhood is normal, that is that other children have very similar experiences.

- In what ways can you imagine that children who live in poverty could begin to realise that not all families are so financially restricted?
- How might children feel when they realise that some of their peers, perhaps children they know well, are in much more comfortable family circumstances?

Discuss your ideas with your colleagues.

Key skills link: C2/3.1a

Making sense of child development

It is sobering for you to think for a moment about just how much children learn and change over the first eight years of their young lives. The breadth of change can seem ordinary to people who spend time with children, perhaps because you are focused on current events for much of your time. However, useful adults need to step back in order to appreciate what children manage in the normal course of events and to understand that it is not surprising if children sometimes go through periods of confusion and struggle. If somebody offered to set you an equivalent set of learning goals to achieve over the same number of years, you would probably think twice before agreeing. Young children, of course, do not realise what is ahead; they take one day at a time and they are also primed to be curious and keen learners.

What happens in children's development?

As an involved and interested adult, you can observe what happens within the development of children. Your knowledge of child development, and a willingness to continue to learn, will be a vital part of your own professional development as an early years practitioner. Detailed descriptions of what happens in development are usually grounded within a particular cultural and social group. However, many theories are also products of a particular time and place. The majority of theoretical perspectives that have influenced early years practice are European or North American in origin.

It is well worth thinking a bit about the different kinds of influences on how children can develop. Babies have much in common when they are born, they are after all the young of our species. But from day one their development is shaped by the circumstances in which they are raised, including adults' beliefs about what is right and proper to do with children (see Figure 1.2).

You have to develop your own good practice in a particular place and time. So you need some blend of flexibility within boundaries about what you do and why. A major part of the framework has to be developmentally appropriate expectations of children. You will find many descriptions throughout the book of what usually happens in the development of children at different ages. There are undoubtedly potential problems in laying out information that attempts to give a

‘normal range’, but there are even more problems in store for early years practitioners if you do not have some developmental framework to which you can refer.

- You need a balanced approach to using information about norms in development or developmental milestones.
- Such information can be a valuable guide. So long as you remember that individual children can vary considerably and still grow and learn within the bounds of healthy development.
- Recall that children with disabilities will develop along some different paths. But they have some experiences and patterns in common with children who have no identified disability or health condition.
- You need to recall that children develop within a social and cultural context. Different cultural traditions can have diverse views of childhood as a time, the priorities within the early years and how children should be treated.

Tips for practice

Key term

Whole child or holistic approach

a perspective on children's development stressing that children should not be viewed from just one part of their development and learning; they should be treated as entire individuals

Learning in childhood

A **whole child** or **holistic** view of development stresses the importance of treating children as entire individuals. Children continue to change in all areas of their development. It is more manageable sometimes, especially in a book like this, to address one area of development at time. When you make observations of children, you may for the moment focus on one area of their learning. But it is important to recall that children do not develop in separate compartments.

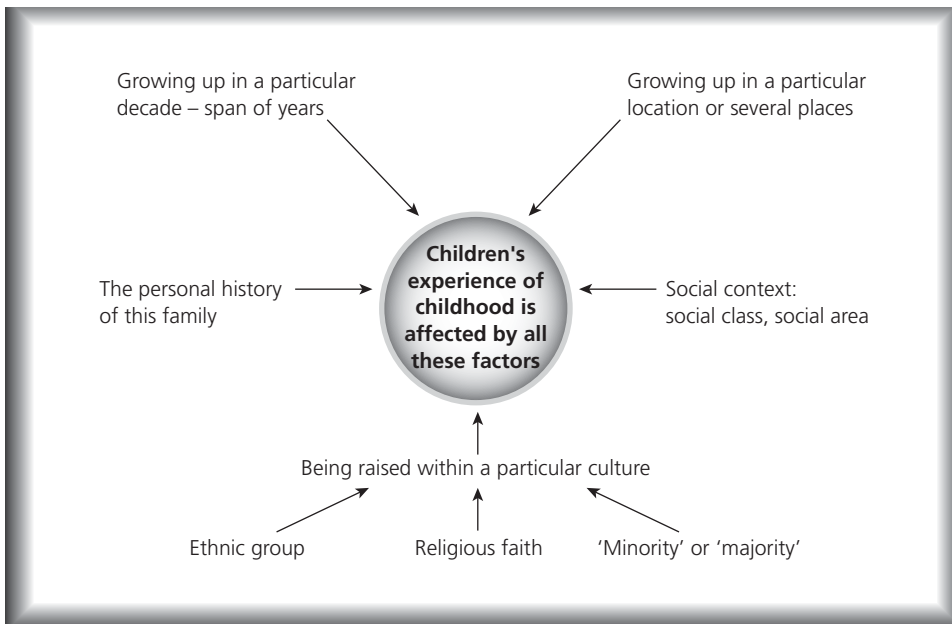


Figure 1.2

Childhood in context: influences on childhood experiences

Different areas of child development

The broad areas of development include the following.

- *Physical development* as babies and children gain control over their bodies and develop skills in fine and large scale movements. They learn to recognise and coordinate the evidence of their senses, to make choices about movement and the use of fine skills.
- Children also change over the years of childhood as they grow physically, changing shape and growing stronger. *Physical growth* and development is dependent on diet and overall health, as well as emotional well being.
- Children develop in the ability to share their own care as they grasp the skills of **self reliance**. Children become more able to make choices and organise themselves, although full independence is still many years away.
- The development of *communication* starts from the earliest use of looking and touching. Children develop in the skills of expressing their own communication and understanding that of others. Spoken language follows, including more than one language in many communities.
- *Intellectual development*, also called **cognitive development**, includes all the skills of thinking, making connections between experiences, recall and reasoning. Even very young children show evidence of the development of ideas and intellectual development is closely linked with communication skills.
- *Social development* unfolds as children develop close attachments and friendships. Children come to understand themselves as part of a social community as well as being an individual. They learn the **social skills** of interaction and other ways of behaving.
- *Personal and emotional development* underpins all other areas of development, since feelings of confidence or anxiety can shape any of a child's efforts. Children develop a sense of personal identity and self worth. Children become more able to recognise, understand and express feelings, their own and those of familiar children or adults.
- *Moral and spiritual development* is usually taken to mean a child's understanding of values and of choices about right and wrong. Spirituality may be linked with a family faith but can be a more general appreciation of experiences that are felt rather than touched or talked about.

Close links between areas of development

You will find many examples and diagrams throughout the book that highlight connections between different areas of a child's development day by day. Here are two examples to show the links now.

Imagine the task required for a child to become literate: to learn to read and write.

- At first sight, this may seem like an intellectual task and so part of cognitive development. Children certainly do need to grasp ideas and use their powers of recognition and recall.
- But learning to read is also part of communication, relating to written rather than spoken language.
- Literacy is also part of a child's social development as they recognise that writing is all around them and directs some aspects of social life.
- Learning to read and write also needs physical skills of coordination and of eye-hand movements. There is greater understanding now that active physical play and movement is crucial for these skills to develop.



Figure 1.3

Any activity can support children's learning in different aspects of their development

There will be further discussion of literacy starting on page 324.

Children can grow in creativity in the early years and this development links with many of the other broad areas of learning:

- Creativity requires imagination and flights of fancy and possibility, so cognitive development is involved.
- Children will want to express their creative ideas in a tangible form, so physical skills can also be important to them.
- Some creative projects involve learning from others, children or adults, so social relations and communication are important.
- An appreciation of possibilities as well as what has been created is an experience of feelings, so emotional and sometimes spiritual development is intertwined as well.

There will be more about creativity starting on page 412.

To think about

Consider the following examples of how a child could learn and change in a way that is observable to alert adults. Look at each example in turn and decide what areas of development could be involved in this achievement. Make brief notes and discuss with colleagues.

- 8 month old Darcus is a keen crawler and looks towards his older sister before he starts. Darcus likes his sister to chase him on all fours.
- Two year old Sara likes to wipe the table after lunchtime in her nursery. She gets the cloth and wrings it out afterwards.
- A group of three year olds play Mums and Dads in the home corner of their nursery.

- Four year old Anthony recognises his own name on his label at playgroup and the names of several stores up and down the high street and on carrier bags.
- Six year old Carrie takes part in a discussion in her after school club about what she likes about the club and what she would like to change.

Key skills link: C2/3.1a

Key term

Theories of child development

attempt to explain how and why the events of child development unfold. People who propose a particular theory try to go beyond a description of what happens in child development to a prediction of what might happen under certain conditions

Why and how does development unfold?

Study of the development of young children partly covers efforts to describe the details of *what* happens as babies and children grow. However, the other side is an attempt to explain *why* and *how* development unfolds. This understanding through explanation is often explored by **theories of child development**.

What is a theory?

Theories are distinctive approaches to a topic and are usually a blend of:

- abstract ideas and beliefs about what is most important in this area: as a starting point to an explanation or a way of organising priorities
- information to support the theory and its explanations and predictions
- some theories are developed from a basis of research, either experimental or observational or from clinical practice with children or adults with problems
- other theories start more from a belief or philosophical stance and may gather information to support the theory along the way
- some theories are developed deliberately so as to make predictions about what will happen under certain circumstances. These predictions form a hypothesis based on theory and are tested in some way through research.

Early years practitioners form a very practical professional group and although theories of child development may seem far removed from everyday actions, the ideas of the main theoretical approaches have made their way into childcare advice, for parents as well as professionals. Therefore, it is useful to recognise the source of some ideas and practice.

Theories about child development

One of the broad differences between types of theory has tended to be how each one handles the relative balance of the impact of nature and nurture in child development.

- **Nature** refers to that part of children's development that is shaped by heredity, that which is inherited through the genes passed on by parents.
- **Nurture** refers to everything that happens to shape development after birth and represents the impact of environment.

The so-called nature–nurture (or heredity–environment) debate has not really been an either–or argument for most people for many years. Even those theorists who place more weight in one direction do not usually claim that the other side of the balance is completely irrelevant. The most recent research on the development of the brain has also made the debate, or any sense of argument over nature and nurture, fairly pointless (see page 243).

Key terms

Nature

the part of children's development that is shaped by heredity, what is inherited through the child's genes

Nurture

everything that happens to influence child development after birth

Biological theories

Biological theorists do not usually claim that biology is everything and that the environment has no part to play. A **biological approach** tends to focus on genetic programming as a pattern that shapes development unless powerful environmental forces knock it off course.

Arnold Gesell and his colleagues, working during the 1920s and 1930s, gathered a substantial amount of material about what children were able to manage by certain ages. This team believed that the sequence of development for babies and children was controlled by a biologically determined process of **maturation**. Gesell's ideas were influential in gaining acceptance for the ideas of 'milestones' and 'developmental norms' and that certain behaviours were phases through which children passed.

Learning theories

Learning theorists focus on what children or adults can learn through experience and the consequences of their behaviour. Humans are seen as having vast potential, bounded by the biological limits. Human behaviour is understood to change following patterns of reward and punishment. The approach is also called **behaviourism**.

The principles of *learning theory* were first explored in work with animals but application to understanding child development gained a social context, recognising that humans imitate out of choice, are motivated by feelings as well as tangible rewards and have a tendency to think as well as act.

Psychoanalytic theories

The **psychoanalytic tradition** (sometimes called psychodynamic) started with Sigmund Freud but has diversified significantly since his first ideas. This theoretical approach focuses on the impact of personality and conflicts on children's development. The approach allows for instinctive drives, that is the impact of biology, but the major influence is then childhood experience. The psychoanalytic group of theories proposes that children's development unfolds in definite stages that everyone shares within childhood. The theory proposes that behaviour is influenced by unconscious thoughts and feelings as well as conscious thought.

Cognitive theories

This theoretical approach focuses on how children think and make sense of their world. Jean Piaget, who was in the forefront of the cognitive emphasis in developmental theories, gave far less attention to the emotional or social aspects of children's development. This focus contrasts with the psychoanalytic theorists who were relatively uninterested in the cognitive aspects. Further exploration within **cognitive developmental theory** has extended into the more social context as well as modifying the firm developmental stages originally laid out by Piaget.

Social constructivism

The social constructivism model developed from the ideas of Piaget and of Lev Vygotsky who emphasised the social context in which children learn. The approach recognises that children make sense of their world and are not simply passive receivers of information and direction from adults. The **social constructivist approach** highlights the importance of alert and sensitive adults who are prepared to observe and consider their own role in any situation relevant to children's learning or behaviour.

Key terms

Biological approach
theories that focus on the importance of genetic programming to explain child development or adult behaviour

Maturation
a biologically determined pattern for the sequence of development for babies and children

Behaviourism
a theoretical approach that emphasises how human behaviour responds to patterns of reward and punishment. The approach is also called *learning theory*. *Social learning theory* recognises the importance of feelings and thinking on actions

Psychoanalytic tradition
theories that focus on how early conflicts and unconscious thoughts shape personality

Cognitive (or cognitive developmental) theory
theories that focus on how children think and make sense of their world

Social constructivist approach
emphasises how children and adults make sense and meaning of situations

Figure 1.4

Any theory has to make sense of real children



The ecological approach

Theorists in the first half of the twentieth century tended to take up rather isolated positions and often studied children as if it were irrelevant where and how they lived. Within the last decades of the century some theorists from all the different traditions have acknowledged the social or cultural context in which children learn. Urie Bronfenbrenner has directly addressed children's development within their social environment. In his **ecological approach**, Bronfenbrenner describes the impact of different aspects of children's environment on individual children.

Key term

Ecological approach
theory that focuses on children's development within their social environment

Early childhood services in the UK

The full name of the UK is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but the shorthand of UK is regularly used and will be followed in this book. The UK comprises four countries: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The central government based in London still makes some decisions that affect all four countries and some legislation remains UK-wide. However, in the last years of the twentieth century many aspects of government became devolved to the National Assembly of Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. The National Assembly in Wales can decide how funds from central government or the European Union are spent. But the assembly does not have the power to make laws, unlike the situation in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The relevant departments in Wales determine guidance, for instance on the early years curriculum (see page 407).

In particular, the legislation and guidance that shapes public services for children and families have become the responsibility of each individual country.

These are the services that especially affect readers of this book: early years services, statutory education, child protection and social services. The principles underlying these services and what is regarded as good practice have a great deal in common between the four countries of the UK. However, the laws and organisation of service can be rather different. Throughout this book it will be made clear when there are national differences of which you need to be aware.

Services relevant to children and families

There are a range of services and professions that are directly relevant to the well being of children and their families. This section describes the most relevant services but you need to be aware that the availability of a service and exactly what it is called can vary between regions.

Educational services

It is a legal obligation that children are given an education from the age of five years in England, Wales and Scotland and four years of age in Northern Ireland. For most children, education means attending school, either a state or independent school. A minority of children are educated by their parents at home. Such families need to reassure local education authorities that they have clear plans to support their children's learning. This pattern is sometimes called **home schooling**.

Local educational services include not only the schools and their staff team but also a number of advisory services.

- *Advisory teachers* support schools or early years settings, may advise on individual children and support the professional development of early years teams.
- *Educational psychologists* offer assessment and advice for children whose educational experience is proving difficult in some way. Some educational psychologists may be able to offer general support to teams.
- *Support services for children with disabilities* (CWD) may include different professionals, some of whom may specialise in early years. The special educational needs coordinator (**SENCO**) will be responsible for supporting children and their families and organising assessment as appropriate (see page 528).

Key term

Home schooling

when families educate their children within the family for part or all of their childhood

Community health services

A range of services are available to families within the general framework of community health care. The primary health care team sometimes works together in a health centre serving a defined local community. In other areas professionals may be based separately in a doctor's surgery and child health clinic. The primary health care team aims to keep children healthy and generally promote health in the population as a whole. The team includes general practitioners and health visitors. Community midwives visit women at home in the ten days after birth (see page 154) and community nurses visit adults who need nursing care or support at home. This section focuses on services for children.

- *General practitioners* (GPs) are doctors who have taken additional training in general practice to serve the health needs of adults and children. When children are ill, parents will take the child to their own GP or telephone for a home visit if a child is too sick to move. The GP may make a referral to other specialised services.

- *Health visitors* have a nursing qualification and further training to enable them to support families in their home. They are responsible for supporting local families with babies and young children. Health visitors will visit families, especially when babies are young, and they organise the baby health clinics that offer regular developmental checks and advice to parents. Health visitors will offer advice about immunisations and these will be given by a doctor at the local clinic (see page 185).
- The *school health service* includes doctors and nurses who visit schools to carry out developmental checks to which parents are invited. The school health service also carries out those immunisations that can be given in school to older children. School nurses are usually responsible for several schools in an area and sometimes become involved in health education for children or teenagers.
- The *community dental service* supports good care of teeth as well as dealing with the results of decay or when children's teeth need corrective work (*orthodontics*). They are usually pleased to see young children for simple checks, so that the children get used to going to the dental surgery. The community dental service may have practitioners who would visit early years settings for information sessions.
- *Opticians* undertake thorough checks of the eyes and assess when children need glasses or corrective work to improve their sight.

Additional support and therapy

Health services offer a range of other professionals to whom a family could be referred when it becomes clear that additional support is needed. These professionals may sometimes be based at the local hospital but can also be part of the team in a large community health clinic. In rural areas there may be considerable distances for families to travel to other services.

The main objectives of therapeutic support are to:

- make an assessment of a child that will be a firm basis for further work
- on the basis of the assessment, develop activities, exercises or a therapeutic programme that will support the child
- share ideas and exercises with parents and other carers so that support for the child can extend beyond appointments with this professional.

Tips for practice

- As an early years practitioner you need to know about these different kinds of services and be able to explain to parents what could be offered.
- However, you would not consult such services about children without reference to parents.
- It will be parents' responsibility to seek further help and take their child to any other professional.
- Your aim is to develop good communication with parents in partnership so that it is easy for you to make suggestions and for parents to share ideas with you.



Activity

- Gather basic information about what is available in your local area.
- Your setting may have a folder or notice board that will help you start your own file.
- Organise your material into types of service and include any useful leaflets to explain what is offered by different clinics or therapists.

Key skills link: LP1/2.2

- *Child and family guidance clinics* offer a service to families who have difficulties of some kind with their children. Examples could include children whose fears dominate their life or who have refused consistently to attend school. Children would not usually be referred to the clinic until a range of support strategies had been tried in the family.
- Children and families are likely to be seen by a *clinical psychologist*, who has a degree in psychology and a further qualification that enables her or him to offer assessment and advice for a wide range of emotional or behavioural problems in childhood or adulthood. A *family therapist* will work with the whole family to identify and support how family dynamics may have affected one or more children. A *child psychiatrist* is a medical doctor who has taken a further qualification related to children with emotional or behavioural difficulties.
- *Paediatric care* is health care that focuses on children. In hospital a *paediatric nurse* will have specialised in working with children and a *paediatrician* is a doctor who has special training and expertise to assess and treat children's health. The prefix *paed* comes from the Greek word meaning child.
- *Speech and language therapists* assess children who are significantly delayed in any aspect of their language development or who are having difficulties in talking. They can then offer specialised support to the children and explain exercises or practice to parents and carers.
- *Physiotherapists* help children with physical difficulties or chronic ill health through appropriate exercise or by providing specialist equipment.
- *Occupational therapists* (OT) advise about appropriate aids for disabled children to enable them to become more mobile or cope with the skills of self reliance.
- *Play therapists* support children who have serious emotional distress for whatever cause. The therapist uses the medium of play to enable children to express and deal with what troubles them.
- *Music, art or drama therapists* will have qualifications in their subject but with further experience in using this medium to support children. Such therapists may be employed by the health services but could also be part of an educational or social services team.

Activity

Choose a practitioner or service from the possibilities described in this section and which is available locally. Make arrangements to visit and prepare some questions before you go. You might like to ask:

- How are children or families referred to this practitioner or service?
- How often and for how long is the child usually seen?
- What are the main ways in which this practitioner seeks to help a child?
- In what ways does the practitioner involve parents or share ideas with them to do at home?

Write up your notes of the visit and make a short presentation to your colleagues. It would be useful if they could have made visits to other kinds of practitioners and then you will learn from each other.

Key skills link: LP1/2.2 C1/2.3 C2.1b

Social services

Social workers support families who are under stress and where children are judged to be in need. Families will be assigned a social worker if there is concern about children's well being and certainly if child protection issues have been raised. Social workers may also be involved in the support of families with children who have severe disability, in order to help organise access to services and respite care. Children who become the responsibility of the local authority (looked after children) should have their own social worker.

Multi-disciplinary teams

The professionals described above will not always operate within one area of service. Sometimes, community health, education or social services bring together different professions on a permanent basis to work as a team.

'Care' and 'education' in the UK system

In common with some other European countries, the UK has a division between services that are known as 'care' and those categorised as 'early education'. This division has a very long history and has not been changed despite the many innovative developments at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first. The two broad types of service are:

- *Childcare services:* for parents who are in work or are students. The hours fit a working day or one of study and parents pay the necessary fees or part of them. A childcare place can be offered from the early months of babyhood through to the school years, when the service becomes known as out of school care.
- *Early educational provision:* for children, usually, from about three years through to their entry into primary school. This kind of provision is normally offered on a sessional basis and follows school terms and holidays. The service cannot meet parents' childcare needs without some additional form of provision.

There is no proper developmental basis to support this persistent division and many early years professionals have argued long and hard for a coherent early years service. The care–education split also tends to create a divide between provision for the under- and over-threes. There are, of course, significant differences between children when they are still very young and as they grow physically and develop. However, differences properly focused on the children do not justify the firmly separate traditions of ‘care’ and ‘education’ and you will notice that the other chapters in this book regularly blend children’s needs and learning within ‘care’ and ‘education’.

Some Scandinavian countries have reorganised the entire system to form a coherent early years service with recognised early years practitioners and Spain has also developed a system to overcome the care–education division. Denmark, Finland and Sweden have successfully created settings for children and a qualification structure that is genuinely for the early years.

Who runs early years provision?

The system of early years provision that you know well can seem like an obvious way to organise services for children and their families. However, many national systems in Europe, including the UK, have not been developed in a logical way. On the contrary, they have emerged in a piecemeal fashion, shaped by the current views of children, parents and families and by economic considerations.

Early years provision in the UK is funded in different ways and falls broadly into three categories: statutory, voluntary and private provision.

Statutory provision is organised and offered by the state: whether by local or national government. Families are unlikely to have to pay for this service, as it will be offered as part of the educational service or as social services to families in need.



Figure 1.5

Many pre-schools have to share space – like this one, which is in a church hall

Provision within the *voluntary sector* covers the very broad range of services run by voluntary organisations. The word ‘voluntary’ is rather confusing because it does not mean that everyone involved in the organisation gives their time as a volunteer, although some may. Voluntary organisations are independent of local or national government and often have charitable status.

Some voluntary organisations work exclusively in early years, for instance the Pre-School Learning Alliance. Others have a broad area of interest, of which early years provision or special units are a part. For example, NCH Action for Children is a national children’s charity that undertakes the promotion of children’s interests, a wide range of projects and has some family and neighbourhood centres.

Private early years provision has expanded in recent years both in terms of childcare and early educational provision. Group settings are run as part of a business and families pay directly for the service.

Home based care through childminding, although regulated as a service, is still an arrangement made between families and self-employed childminders who are paid for their work. Nannies are employed directly by a family and so far have not had to be registered. The exception is a nanny share involving more than two families, because the nanny is judged then to be working like a childminder.

These broad distinctions can be blurred in practice, especially with the complex pattern of funding and new initiatives to expand provision within the Childcare Strategy. For instance:

- Private day nurseries may be registered to offer free early educational places, so that part of an otherwise non-statutory service is free to families. Some nurseries have agreements with the local authority to take an agreed number of children whose fees will be paid for by the authority to support families in need.
- Childminders usually have a business relationship with the parents of the children for whom they take responsibility. But in some areas there are sponsored childminders paid by the local authority to take care of children ‘in need’ because of family stress or because the child is disabled.
- Voluntary organisations may be involved in collaborative ventures with statutory provision of local authorities.

Useful websites

www.pre-school.org.uk
www.nch.org.uk
www.cache.org.uk

The range of early years provision

The system in the UK is highly diverse. We have many different kinds of early years settings, although all the possibilities are definitely not represented in every neighbourhood. All the different kinds of provision are developing and changing. In 2001 CACHE (Council for Awards in Children’s Care and Education) estimated that there were about 600,000 adults working with children in all the different kinds of early years and out of school provision in the UK. Over your career you will probably work in a number of different settings so it is important to have a full perspective on the range.

State (maintained) nursery schools and classes are part of the state education system but are run for younger children than school age, specifically for three and four year olds. Some nurseries are now taking children as young as two and half years of age. Nursery schools are located in separate buildings, whereas nursery classes are part of a primary school site.

Independent (private) nursery schools are part of the independent educational system, sometimes called private schools. These schools may be separate establishments or part of an independent school that takes school age children.

Pre-schools and playgroups emerged from a large network of groups developed in the 1960s to give children the opportunity to learn through play activities when nursery schools and classes were less widespread.

**Figure 1.6**

Many nurseries are in purpose-built environments

Those groups affiliated to the Pre-School Learning Alliance are now called pre-schools. Other groups, some of whom are affiliated to the Playgroup Network, have chosen to continue to be known as playgroups. This kind of setting usually takes three and four year olds, although some groups accept children as young as two and a half years.

Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have playgroup movements that have promoted the national language, either as bilingual playgroups or as Welsh-medium or Gallic-medium groups.

Scenario

Dresden Road Nursery School has developed a wide range of services over the last five years. In response to local community needs, the nursery team has developed a range of services for families and works hard to make links with the local community.

- Many of the local families are bilingual and some are recent arrivals to the UK. As well as their existing commitment to partnership with all parents, Dresden Road has organised English as an additional language sessions for parents. Some moves have been made to gain accreditation for the course.
- A drop-in parent and toddler club started one afternoon a week as a way to ease the entry of children to the nursery. A link made with a community arts project has been extended to the whole nursery.
- The nursery is exploring the possibility of a breakfast club and after school care to meet the needs of children who go on to the local primary school.

- There is a possibility that the new childminding network for the area may meet in the nursery's activity room.

Dresden Road aims to develop appropriate services around the core service of nursery education. The team has learned a great deal about developing additional services: researching a genuine need, planning, reviewing and making suitable changes.

Questions

- 1 What might be the reasons for an early years setting to extend the services offered to children and parents?
- 2 You could make contact with local nurseries and find out in what ways they have built onto the core service of early education.
- 3 Write up and present to your colleagues.

Key skills links: C2.3 C2.1b

Combined early years centres within the UK have worked very hard to merge the service of childcare with opportunities for children to learn. There have been different kinds of combined settings.

- Combined nursery centres in the 1970s and 1980s were an attempt to blend the two traditions.
- Different kinds of children's centres and early childhood centres have been set up with the specific aim of bridging the care–education divide for children and for parents.
- In the 1990s the idea of early excellence centres was launched, again with the aim of a coherent service for children and families.
- The idea of neighbourhood nurseries, launched in 2001, combines the concept of bringing together care and education with other family services. In order to qualify for the funding, a neighbourhood nursery must be able to serve one of the 20 per cent of wards in the UK that have high social deprivation.

Day nurseries and daycare centres offer different types of childcare:

- Private day nurseries offer a childcare service for employed parents and students. These settings offer up to full day childcare places for children from the early months to school age and some also offer out of school care. There are now a considerable number of private nurseries, some of which are part of larger nursery chains.
- Local authority day nurseries and family centres offer a service to families who are under stress. These nurseries do not provide childcare for local working parents. Day nurseries may be called children's centres and those that undertake supportive work with parents will probably be called family centres.
- Community and workplace nurseries offer childcare for families in a local catchment area, to employees of specific companies or to students of a local college.

Mobile provision was pioneered by the playbus movement, taking play experience to children whose play opportunities were limited. Mobile projects often

work with school age children but some are dedicated to early years and making contact with children who are unlikely to attend a nursery or playgroup. Children may live on run down estates with no early years setting or drop-in group. Playbuses have been a way to make contact with traveller families and their children. Some playbuses visit rural areas on a predictable schedule for families who would have great difficulty travelling to their nearest setting.

There are two types of *home based provision* of childcare based in a family home rather than a special early years setting.

- Nannies look after children in the child's own home and are employed by the parents.
- Childminders look after children in the minder's own home and run their own business as a carer. There is a new development of childminding networks, supported by a local authority advisor.

Informal groups run as *drop-in centres* and *crèches*. Drop-in services are often for children younger than three years and parents or carers have to stay with the children. Such provision may be called a parent and toddler group or a one o'clock club (because it runs from that time into the afternoon). Sometimes a day or community nursery offers a regular drop-in session for local families. Crèches are informal settings, often linked with a facility like a shopping mall or leisure centre, or set up to support a conference.

Out of school care services cover the parts of a primary school day that do not match an adult's working or student day. This provision can include:

- breakfast clubs before the beginning of the school day
- after school sessions run in primary schools or as separate clubs; playschemes may then be run in school half-terms and holidays
- some private day nurseries as well as state nursery schools have extended their provision to offer a before and after school service, sometimes called wrap around care.

Activity

Find out all the types of early years provision that are available in your neighbourhood, say within a five mile radius if you live in a large town or city.

- As well as your existing local knowledge, you can find out about provision by accessing your local Children's Information Service in England.
- List the types of provision: what is available, what is in short supply, what is missing?
- Compare your list with colleagues who live far enough away to have researched a different neighbourhood.
- Look for possibilities to link up with colleges in other parts of the UK. If you can establish an email link, then you could exchange information on the local profiles.

Key skills link: C2/3.1b IT2.1C

Free early education places

Throughout the UK, children have free state education from five years of age in England, Scotland and Wales and from four years in Northern Ireland. Each national government has made commitments to offer a free early educational place to children in the year before they start statutory schooling, and increasingly for the year before that.

These places can be offered in any of the kinds of group provision described so far. Childminding networks can be registered, so long as the provision meets the standards of the required inspection. Some mobile facilities also have been registered. The free early educational places are sessional and do not meet parent's childcare needs unless combined with further hours in a nursery or with other forms of provision.

Religious affiliation

Some early years provision, like some schools, are affiliated to a particular religious faith. Within England, Scotland and Wales most settings have no specific religious affiliation. The situation is reversed in Northern Ireland, where the whole early years and educational system has to be understood against the backdrop of the great significance of religion in the Province. Most early years settings are specifically Protestant or Catholic. Settings that aim to be non-sectarian are set up as community provision.

The legal framework for services

All early years services and the practitioners who work in them have to operate within the law. Several significant pieces of legislation are relevant for early years practitioners because these laws affect good practice in the welfare of children and their rights as young citizens, equality legislation, education including the curriculum and health and safety.

Of these areas of law, the equality legislation is UK-wide. Legislation on children with disabilities is set for the whole UK but those parts that are put into practice through early years and educational services operate within the different systems of the four countries.

Why do you need to know about laws?

As an early years practitioner, you are expected to know and understand the practical implications of legislation for your work. You are not expected to read original law documents, nor understand every single detail.

The laws described briefly in this section are what are called **primary legislation**. Laws are written in a precise way and do not usually show readily how practitioners would need to behave on a day by day basis in order to follow the legal requirements. Many laws have associated written volumes of **guidance** issued by the relevant government department. This guidance is expressed in more ordinary language and forms a basis for what practitioners must do within the services for children. For example:

- The Children Act 1989 has several volumes of detailed guidance. Volume 2 is the most relevant to early years settings and is entitled *Family support, day care and educational provision for young children*.

Key terms

Primary legislation

laws that have been passed and have to be obeyed as a legal obligation

Guidance

government guidelines that are issued to explain how the details of laws should work in practice

- Some guidance is shorter, perhaps in booklet form. For example, the Health and Safety Executive has published a guide for employers on *Violence at work*. It is not compulsory for employers to follow this guidance. But by doing so employers could be confident that they were complying with the relevant health and safety legislation.

Good practice in early years is not always tightly related to legislation. Sometimes what practitioners regard as good practice is established before there is any legal requirement. For instance, it has long been regarded as unacceptable in nurseries and pre-schools to hit children as a way of dealing with their behaviour. Although it became illegal to hit children in state schools as long ago as 1986, this requirement was only extended to early educational settings in 1998. (See also page 511.)

The welfare of children and their rights as young citizens

In the UK there are several key pieces of legislation that affect children's overall welfare. The laws provide the framework for child protection, family matters and services for children judged to be 'in need'. These are:

- The Children Act 1989 for England and Wales
- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

These laws have similarities but are not identical and, of course, operate within the social welfare and early years services of the different countries of the UK. In Scotland there was an active attempt to build a greater recognition of children's rights to be heard from the UN Convention (see page 28).

Some key principles are common between these laws, for example:

- The welfare of children must be the primary concern of services, practitioners and parents. The child's own views and preferences must be sought and considered in any decision.
- Parents have responsibilities towards their children, rather than rights over them.
- Services are required to work in partnership with parents and to ensure that as far as possible children are enabled to stay within their family.
- In the provision of services, local authorities must actively take into account the child and family's racial origin, religious persuasion and cultural and linguistic background.
- For the first time, children with disabilities were defined within the law as children in need and it was stated that services should be provided for them and their family.

These laws are of direct relevance to early years practitioners because they:

- establish a system of regulation for the early years settings, other than those in the educational system
- determine a framework for child protection, an area important for your practice and covered in greater detail in Chapter 19.

Registration and inspection

All the different types of provision are regulated through a process of registration and inspection. The main framework for the regulation of services has been set

either by educational legislation for provision within the state education system or by the legislation for child welfare within the UK. The system works slightly differently throughout the UK but still reflects the care–education split in how provision is viewed.

During 2001–2 the responsibility for the regulation of childcare provision in England, Wales and Scotland passed from the local authorities (social services) to newly established national bodies. National childcare standards have been set to replace the previous system in which local authorities set their standards following the guidance of the main Children Act legislation.

England

The Early Years Directorate (a division of the schools inspectorate, Ofsted) has taken responsibility for the regulation of provision for children under eight years. The aim is that eventually the same visit will cover the childcare standards and the inspection required for government funding of free early educational places to three and four year olds. For the near future, the ‘care’ and ‘education’ inspections will remain separate.

Nursery schools and classes that are part of the state education system are still inspected under educational legislation. Nursery provision in independent schools was left exempt from meeting the childcare standards, but proposals being discussed at the end of 2001 mean that these facilities may have to meet the requirements in the future.

Wales

The Care Standards Inspectorate has taken over the regulation of childcare and will apply the new national standards. The Welsh regulation and inspection procedures are similar but not identical to those in England. The aim is that the new Inspectorate and Schools Inspectorate work together.

Scotland

The Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care has taken responsibility for the regulation of early years childcare settings. HM Inspectorate of Education will continue to carry out separate educational inspections and no change is foreseen in this split at the moment. The aim is that HM Inspectorate will work collaboratively with the Commission.

Northern Ireland

The social services inspects the non-school childcare settings for children under 12 years of age and the Department of Education covers the educational settings.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

The Convention was the first international agreement in which the rights of children world wide were detailed in one document. The UK signed the Convention in 1991 and this means that the central government, and the national assemblies, have to ensure that the laws and practice regarding children meet the standards established in the Convention. This Convention is important because it has, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced the drafting of some legislation and the focus on children’s rights has shaped the move to consult with children about their everyday lives and changes.

The UN Convention is organised in a series of statements called articles, that describe the rights of children and young people up to the age of eighteen years.

The articles cover different issues within children's right to be well cared for, safe, free from cruelty and exploitation and to exercise some say over their own lives. The right to be free of all kinds of discrimination is applied to children and the right to practise their own culture and religion, whether raised within their own family or in alternative care. The Convention also states children's right to play and recreation.

Equality legislation

These laws apply to the whole UK and determine many aspects of what is acceptable or unacceptable in the everyday treatment of other people, especially with regard to possible discrimination on the basis of sex, race or disability.

The Sex Discrimination Acts 1975 and 1986 made it illegal to discriminate against people on the grounds of their sex, either as a woman or a man. So, for instance, no early years setting could decide not to employ men, no more than a business organisation can decide it does not want female employees. Exceptions can be only be made if the sex of a worker can be justified as a genuine occupational qualification. Treating someone less favourably just because of their sex is classed as a form of **direct discrimination** and therefore illegal. The law has not been used with reference to children.

The Race Relations Act 1976 aimed to define racial discrimination and make such behaviour illegal. The Act made it unlawful to discriminate on racial grounds, including skin colour, race, ethnic or national origins. Discriminatory behaviour was defined and is applicable to the treatment of children and adults. The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 covers similar ground. This legislation covers both direct discrimination, and **indirect discrimination**, that is when the consequences of an action are discriminatory, although that may not have been the intention. An example of direct racial discrimination in early years would be if children were offered or refused a place in a setting because of their ethnic identity. An example of indirect discrimination would be if conditions were linked with the offer of a place that could not be met by families from some ethnic groups. (See page 589 for further discussion of these issues.)

The 2000 Amendment to the Race Relations Act strengthened some of the requirements of the earlier legislation and made it an active duty for public bodies, which would include early years settings and schools, to work towards racial equality. In practice, this will mean that any organisation must be alert to how it promotes the service, recruits staff and makes the service genuinely accessible to all.

Religious affiliation is not included in the definitions of the Race Relations Act. In Northern Ireland, where religious affiliation can be the basis for discrimination, the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 requires organisations to monitor job applicants and acceptance by religious affiliation. At the time of writing (2001) a Single Equality Bill is being developed in the Province that aims to take account of developments in the rest of the UK, European Union directives and the particular need to address civil rights and religious liberties in Northern Ireland.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 made broad requirements relating to discrimination against people with disabilities but, at that time, excluded education from these legal requirements. The Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability Bill 2001 removed this exception and made it unlawful for educational providers to treat a child less favourably on the grounds of disability. This change means that inclusion of disabled children in mainstream provision is now more

Key terms

Discrimination

when any kind of behaviour is more or less favourable to other people on the basis of their group identity. **Direct discrimination** is when somebody deliberately acts so as to favour or disadvantage members of given groups. **Indirect discrimination** occurs when the actions of a person or organisation result in more or less favourable treatment by group identity, even if this consequence was not deliberately intended

likely. This issue for practice and other legislation relating to special educational needs is also discussed within Chapter 18.

Education including the curriculum

A series of laws have shaped the educational system and the development of a national curriculum within the UK. There are differences between countries in the UK on the organisation of state schooling and the details of both the curriculum for children of school age and those in early years settings. These details are covered in Chapter 14.

Health and Safety

There are a number of laws that relate to health and safety at work. Many of the requirements relate to your safety as an employee. Other requirements mean that employers must offer good standards of health and safety to protect members of the public. Within an early years setting that means the children, their parents, other carers, students or volunteers. The broad requirements of health and safety legislation are that any employer must:

- display the most up to date version of the poster *Health and safety law – what you should know*
- prepare a written safety policy statement appropriate to the organisation
- make suitable assessments of the risks to the health and safety of employees and everyone else who visits this setting
- communicate emergency and evacuation procedures to everyone
- report the more serious accidents or diseases in the setting

Figure 1.7

Early years practitioners bring the curriculum alive for children



- consult with employees before making decisions that could affect their health and safety
- keep records of accidents and any first aid treatment given
- exchange information on hazards or risks with any other employers who share the premises.

These legal requirements fit into what is regarded as good practice for early years provision, schools and out of school care. They emphasise clear communication, consultation, good record keeping and an awareness of risks that leads to sensible precautions. There are responsibilities for employers but the legislation also assumes that employees, in your case early years practitioners, will behave in a responsible and sensible way by using the health and safety equipment provided and reporting any problems.

Principles and values in working with children

The view of what makes up good practice in early years is not fixed and professional discussion should always allow for exploring new ideas and taking a fresh look at areas of practice and perspectives. A considered view of what is good practice tends to be a blend of:

- The experience and accumulated wisdom of people who work with children and their families or who advise and consult in this area.
- The application of new theoretical and research findings about children and what these imply for practice.
- The requirements of the law and associated guidance for early years practitioners. The details of this source are in turn influenced by the two first points through the process of consultation and working committees when changes are proposed to laws and guidance.

The main principles underlying good practice are explored in much more detail throughout this book, so this section offers only a brief summary. The main issues are as follows.

A child-centred approach

Responsible and caring adults should:

- enable children to enjoy their childhood
- care for and care about children, showing respect and active consideration for the child as an individual
- ensure the welfare and safety of each child without making children anxious about their well being or oppressed by over protection
- enable young children to learn without pressure and to move towards their full potential
- use the full range of learning opportunities in order to support children's full development
- use their adult skills, such as observation, to offer appropriate help to children and to appreciate what children can manage and are learning
- behave as a responsible grown up towards children: willing to tune into the perspective of children and to create boundaries where necessary

Key term

Child-centred (or child-oriented) approach
a perspective that aims to make children's interests and focus central to all aspects of child care and learning

- avoid using adult strength of words or action inappropriately or in a way that is oppressive of children.

Key term

Partnership with parents

the value and practice of working together with parents for the care and learning of their children, acknowledging the continuing importance of parents in the lives of their children

Partnership with families

Early years practitioners share the care of children with their parents or other key carers, who are the children's first and continuing carer and educator. Practitioners should:

- work in **partnership with parents**, or other key family carers, as the continuity in children's lives
- respect parents as people with unique knowledge and expertise on their own children
- respect the customs, values and spiritual beliefs of the child and family
- respect and protect the confidentiality and privacy of a child or family, unless disclosure is required for the safety of the child.

There are examples of partnership throughout the book and Chapter 21 covers the main aspects important to good practice.

Key term

Reflective practitioner

an outlook for early years, and other professionals, in which you are ready to think as well as to act and to be open to new ideas and approaches

Continued professional development

Initial training is important but early years professionals need to continue to learn and be open to new ideas and approaches. A positive approach is summed up by the idea of the **reflective practitioner**.

Effective early years practitioners need to be closely involved with the children; there needs to be activity and doing. However, good practice includes reflection as well as action. Being a reflective practitioner means being willing and able to:

- Think over what has happened as well as become closely involved in activities with children.
- Think about issues from more than one perspective, be open-minded and willing to continue to learn.
- Acknowledge and recognise feelings: your own, those of the children and of other adults (colleagues and parents).

Figure 1.8

Parents provide the essential continuity in their children's lives



- Accept that feelings shape events and can affect the sense that you are prepared to make of a situation.
- Be actively involved, enthusiastic about the practice of being a practitioner.
- Take an active part with children, which should bring in other aspects, like sharing feelings (excitement, puzzlement or disappointment when an activity does not go well) and thinking about issues.
- Plan ahead, whilst being flexible for the possibilities of the moment and children's interests. Useful plans all depend on applied adult thinking skills: what will the children learn, how will you recognise it?
- Review activities and approaches – how has it gone, what have you learned, what do the children think and feel? Finding scope for improvement is not necessarily a criticism of what has gone before.

You will find many examples within the book of being a reflective practitioner in action. Figure 1.9 summarises the main strands.

Activity

Look at the diagram of the reflective practitioner (Figure 1.9)

- Take each circle one at a time and note an example of how you have worked as a thoughtful adult in that way.
- Discuss what you have considered with colleagues. Are some aspects of being a reflective practitioner harder than others? Do you have any ideas about why?
- Make some specific plans about ways in which you could improve your own practice.

Key skills link: C3.1a LP3.1–3

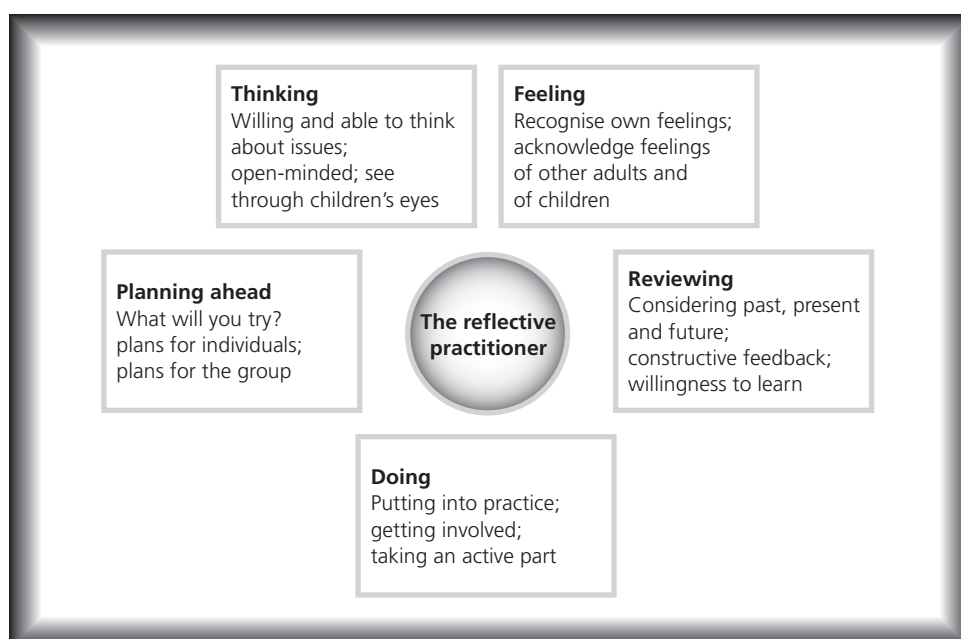


Figure 1.9

Ways of being a reflective practitioner to support children

Sources of learning for adults

If you are currently working towards an early years qualification, then you may focus on that experience as if it is your only source of learning. But many experiences contribute to knowledge and understanding of children. Figure 1.10 suggests some of main sources.

Activity

Look at the diagram in Figure 1.10.

- Take at least 3–4 of the different sources and note down what you feel you have learned from these sources that supports you as an early years practitioner.
- Compare your ideas with colleagues.
- Together discuss what could be the downside of depending too much on one or two of the sources, for instance raising your own children or information from television programmes.
- Consider ways that you could improve your own practice.

Key skills link: C3.1a LP3.1–3

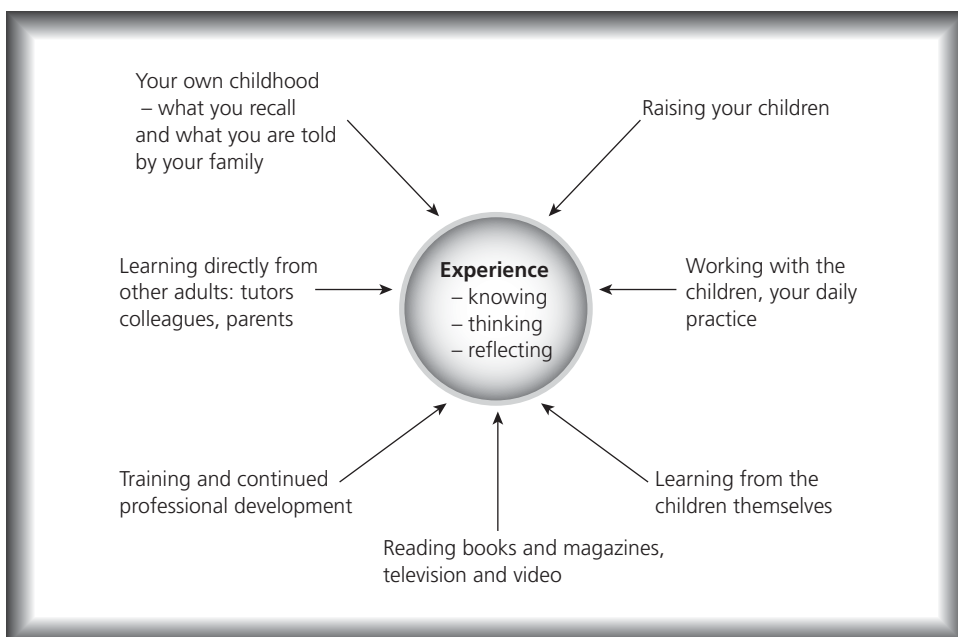
The contribution of your own childhood

As an early years practitioner you will gain professional experience but your own personal experience is also relevant.

- Everyone is shaped by their own childhood and in some ways your experience and memories will support you in offering good quality experiences to children.
- In other ways your own childhood might misdirect, confuse or block your current practice now as a grown up.

Figure 1.10

Possible sources of our own knowledge and understanding about children



- The child that you once were is still inside you and, released as a happy playmate for children, can be a positive force.
- But you will not help children day by day if there is any chance that your own family experience leads you to be very restricted in your view of what is the right or wrong way to raise children.

Activity

This activity has similarities to the one earlier in the chapter on page 8. You may not wish to do both, but if you do this activity then focus on the sources of your learning that influence you as an early years practitioner.

Reflect back on what was normal behaviour in your own family in your childhood. Look at your memories now with a more adult eye. You could consider and make some brief notes on any of the following issues:

- What was the pattern at mealtimes? Did you have meals together as a family? How did the adults deal with table manners, talking over mealtimes or eating habits?
- Who did the household tasks? Were children expected to help out and in what way?
- Did you go to an early years setting and what do you recall of your own experience from that time? What did you like the best and what did you not like much?
- In your family, what kind of behaviour brought you smiles and praise from the adults? What kind of behaviour got you into trouble and how was that handled?
- What are the family phrases that still go through your mind and probably pop out of your mouth? Clichés like ‘Courtesy costs nothing’ or ‘Who’s “she” – the cat’s mother?’
- Perhaps you were not raised in a family home for at least part of your childhood. If you spent time in foster or residential care, then in what ways do you feel you have built a picture of family life?

Questions

Without sharing more personal information than you wish, discuss some of the issues and insights with colleagues or fellow students.

- 1 What variety can you see in a group, even those from apparently similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds?
- 2 If you have diversity in your discussion group, then what may be explained by different cultural traditions? But what is still down to individual family styles or your parents deliberately being different parents to your grandparents?
- 3 What do you bring to your work with children as an early years practitioner. Be honest – what works well and what may be a hindrance?
- 4 How might you deal with those issues that can be a block for you? Make some specific plans for your own practice.

Key skills link: C3.1 PS2/3.1 LP3.1–3

Anti-discriminatory practice

A key value in good early years practice is that you apply anti-discriminatory practice in all aspects of your work. This area of good practice is often misunderstood, so this section describes the main ideas and ways in which principles can be put into daily practice. There are further examples in every chapter of the book.

What is anti-discriminatory practice?

The key issues in good practice are that early years teams:

- actively seek to promote equal opportunities for all children and families with whom they work and come into contact
- work to equalise opportunities for those children and families whose situation or group identity may place them at a disadvantage
- promote respect and mutual understanding between children and families who see themselves as different from each other.

Of course, you and your colleagues can only address those issues that arise within your setting and your direct experience with children and families. However, this framework gives you substantial scope for positive anti-discriminatory practice. You are not responsible for what has happened in the past or elsewhere in the country or your neighbourhood. You are responsible, together with the children, for what happens within and directly around your setting.

Words matter, but it does not usually help good practice in this area if practitioners become too enmeshed in the 'correct' terms or phrases. In this book the phrase **anti-discriminatory practice** is used to mean the active attempt to promote positive attitudes and behaviour and to challenge and change negative outlooks and actions. The phrase **equal opportunities** is very similar in meaning. It is used to mean the daily practice of ensuring that all children are enabled to have positive experiences in an early years setting, to use the resources to the full and ensure that active steps are taken if, for some reason, children's opportunities are being blocked.

Key terms

Anti-discriminatory practice

an active attempt to promote positive attitudes and behaviour and to challenge and change negative outlooks and actions, on the basis of any group identity

Equal opportunities

the daily practice to ensure that all children are enabled to have positive experiences, to use the resources of a setting fully and see that action is taken if children's opportunities are blocked

Sources of diversity

Anti-discriminatory practice refers to all aspects of diversity and group identity; the principles do not only apply to ethnic group diversity.

Good early years practice is sensitive to diversity of all kinds and practitioners need to be aware of diversity issues for children and adults in the areas of:

- gender: boys and girls, men and women
- ethnic group and culture
- linguistic background
- social class and family background, including different ways of running family life, for instance travelling communities
- religious faith and other family beliefs
- disability and continuing health conditions.

Anti-discriminatory practice needs to be an integral part of all aspects of good practice in early years settings and services for children and their families. For

this reason, apart from the explanatory section you are reading now, further discussion and examples of anti-discriminatory practice form part of all the other chapters in this book, rather than being a separate chapter.

Anti-discriminatory practice applies to everyone; we all have a responsibility to consider our adult assumptions, extend our knowledge and promote equal opportunities. It is no more acceptable that girls are offensive to boys on the basis of sex than the other way around. Children who have experienced offensive racial name calling deserve support and action on their behalf. But their experiences do not make it alright, or less important, if they in their turn are deeply offensive, on racial or other grounds. The rules apply to everyone.

Children are in the process of learning, so you can make a difference and support them to learn positive attitudes towards others and help them to want to learn more about life experiences different from their own. You offer this effective support through what is sometimes called an **anti-bias curriculum**, in which you offer play materials and experiences from a wide range of sources, some of which are not to be seen in your local neighbourhood. You extend children's horizons beyond their own backyard. Anti-discriminatory practice within an early years curriculum also seeks to remove and replace materials that may strengthen inaccurate assumptions or stereotypes about particular groups of people.

Stereotypes are simple, strongly held beliefs about the characteristics shared by individuals in an identified group, of any kind. Some stereotypes are clearly negative and can be identified easily as restrictive and offensive. But apparent compliments are not really positive, if they limit individuality, for instance, children with chronic illness are not all 'brave' and children with Down's syndrome do not all have a 'sunny, loveable' disposition.

Good practice needs to recognise that there is great diversity within groups as well as between. All the major world faiths have different sects, some of which have major disagreements. Families whom Europeans may class together as

Key terms

Anti-bias curriculum

a framework of activities, play materials and experiences that avoid stereotypes and actively promote understanding and knowledge of all the groups within society

Stereotypes

simple, strongly held beliefs (positive or negative) about the characteristics shared by individuals in an identified group

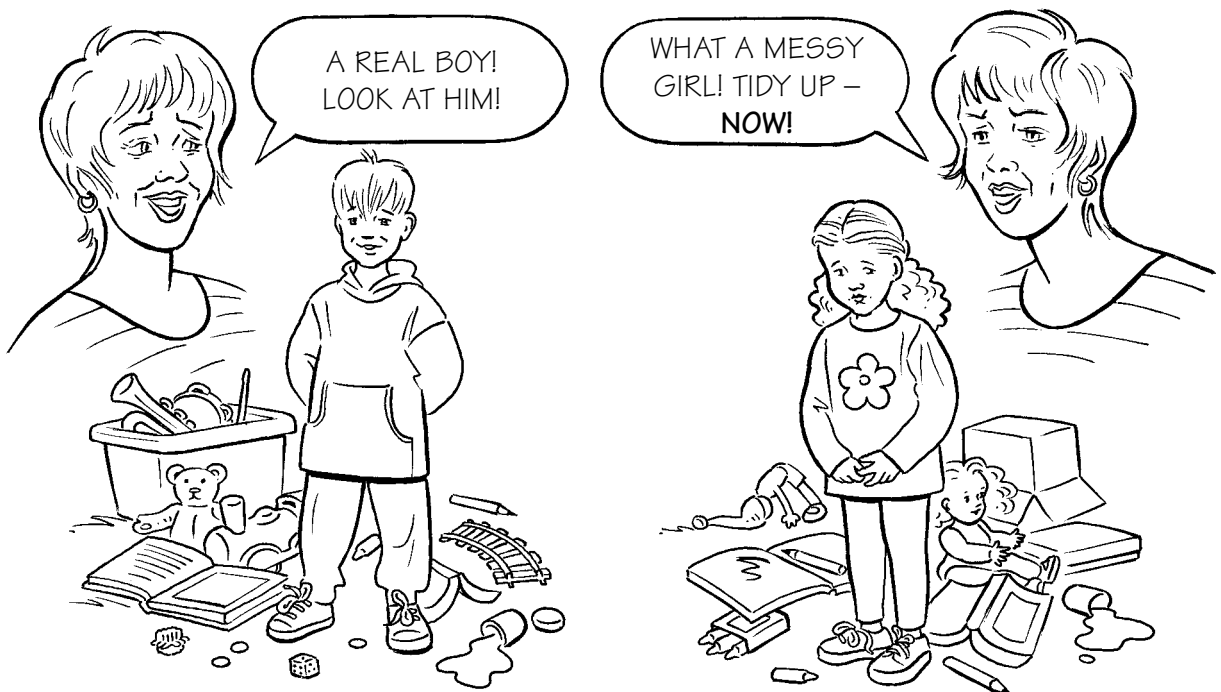


Figure 1.11 Adults' assumptions may be voiced without thought

‘Asian’ vary considerably in ethnic background, language and faith. Even what may seem a basic matter of description by words is not always simple. For instance, some families who choose a travelling life like to be known as travellers but some definitely prefer the term gypsies.

Good practice with children and families

The broad themes in your good practice should be to:

- Treat all children with equal concern and attention to individuality. It is not good practice to claim to treat children ‘all the same’. They are not the same and this approach denies children sources of their identity in some way.
- Avoid and remove discriminatory or unfair practice, even if the result was not intentional.
- Actively promote equality, understanding and personal identity along all the diversity issues.
- Be willing to address and constructively challenge assumptions, in a way that is likely to help you, the children and other adults to change and learn.
- Be willing to extend your own knowledge as well as share with others, respecting your colleagues’ wishes to understand rather than criticising misunderstanding and lack of knowledge.

You will address good practice in many ways, for example, in:

- all aspects of the care and well being of the children, including food, clothes, hygiene and ideas of courtesy
- your understanding of the impact of disability and continuing ill health
- your treatment of boys and girls – consider carefully the meaning of equal opportunities on gender for adults and children
- your partnership with parents through continued and equal communication
- how you plan the early years curriculum, the play materials and experiences you offer
- how you show support for bilingual children, different languages and forms of literacy
- respecting family diversity yet holding true to children’s rights to be protected in childhood
- your careful but active approach in dealing with offensive behaviour and name calling between children.

Further resources

Greig, Liz (2001) *Supporting Development and Learning 3–5* Learning and Teaching Scotland.

Lindon, Jennie (1998) *Equal Opportunities in Practice* Hodder and Stoughton.

Lindon, Jennie (1998) *Understanding Children’s Development: Knowledge, theory and practice* Cengage Learning.

Lindon, Jennie (2000) *Child Care and Education in Europe* Hodder and Stoughton.



Progress check

- 1 Describe two ways in which the daily lives of young children now differ from those of their parents or grandparents.
- 2 Describe three ways in which family organisation might differ between children of a similar age.
- 3 List the main broad areas of child development.
- 4 What are the main kinds of early years provision for children younger than school age?
- 5 Give three examples of why early years practitioners need to have a practical grasp of the law.
- 6 Describe three sources of learning that can contribute to your good practice with children and families, in addition to studying for an early years qualification.
- 7 Give three examples of how anti-discriminatory practice might be shown in an early years setting.



2

Caring for children – caring about children

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand and appreciate the central importance of care and caring for children
- promote children's self reliance as they share in their own care and daily routines
- follow appropriate practice in hygiene for an early years setting
- organise appropriate routines to support children's sleep and rest
- support children in their toilet training.

Introduction

Good quality care is essential for babies, toddlers and children. Their health and well being needs to be supported and protected. But good care of children is an effective support of their all round development. Care routines can be a valuable time for supporting children's sense of self worth and their understanding of how their world works. The role of an early years practitioner is not only to offer good quality care to children but to support them as they learn to take care of themselves, growing in the skills of self reliance. This chapter, together with Chapters 3 and 4, will help you to understand your role in this important area.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 2, 3, 5, 10

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C1, E1, E2, P1, C13

Level 3: C2, E3, P2, M8

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 3, 5, 6

The central importance of care and caring

An integral part of caring for children's development is caring about them as individuals. It is vital that children should feel confident that the key adults in their lives care about them and what happens to them. This vital and positive message is communicated to children through the care routines of a day or session in early years settings or in your work as a nanny in a family home, or a child-minder in your own home.

'Care' and 'education' are equally important

Unfortunately, the development of the early years services in the UK occurred within a split system that has undervalued 'care' in favour of 'education' (see page 2). The consequence has been that many commentators feel able to talk in a dismissive way about services or early years practitioners who 'just care' for children. Such settings are contrasted with 'educational' settings or 'educational' activities as the more valuable sources of learning. I have yet to hear anybody talk about 'just education'. The many exciting developments in early years services have not addressed that basic division to create a coherent early years system.

Of course, the care–education split makes no sense whatsoever when children's development and well being are considered as a whole. Children certainly do not distinguish between 'educational' and 'care' activities as a source of learning. You will find many examples in this chapter and others to highlight how children are ready and keen to learn from all sources.

Any early years setting, whatever its name, should combine a positive outlook on and good quality in care routines with a wide range of opportunities for children to learn, some of which will be in the form of 'educational' activities. Children need to be and feel cared for, which creates a healthy state and positive psychological frame of mind to allow them to benefit from all the opportunities to learn within their day.

To think about

Consider how a child may appear who is cared for and feels that people care about him or her.

- 1 How might the child look?
 - 2 How might he or she behave?
 - 3 How might a child appear who feels that nobody really cares or notices them in any positive way?
- Discuss your ideas with your colleagues and raise any views you have absorbed from other people that could lead you to downgrade the care in your practice.
 - How can you bring care and caring to the fore and really value what you give to children?
 - Attitudes based in 'just care' and 'only caring' create problems for children. Make some specific plans for how you can challenge such attitudes and resolve problems in your own practice.

Key skills link: C3.1a PS3.1 LP3.1–3



Figure 2.1

Sometimes children appreciate a helping hand

Why care matters so much

Caring for children's health and well being is just as important as providing specific activities that stretch them in other areas of their development such as communication or the growth of ideas. You support children's emotional and social development as well as creating opportunities to learn through meaningful routines:

- Respectful, physical care through which you treat a baby, toddler or child as an individual, shows children that they are welcome to your time and skills in caring for them.
- Caring supports children's whole development when it is part of your personal relationship with a child. Children can feel affirmed as an individual. They should never feel like baby number three in a routine of changing, nor child number five at the meal table.
- You can show your pleasure as children grow in the skills of self reliance and begin to share in their own care.
- You show through your words and actions that you value the caring time. You are not rushing through a nappy change or a meal because you or your colleagues regard this as 'lost time'.
- An enjoyable conversation over lunch or tea or an unhurried and affectionate nappy changing time can support children's skills of communication.
- Involvement in tidying up or laying the table not only boosts children's sense of self worth but can be an ideal opportunity to add to their powers of memory, of understanding a sequence or practical early number work.

Scenario

The team at Sunningdale Day Nursery have made significant changes in practice since Erin took over as manager two years ago. The previous manager had put pressure on the staff to introduce a wide range of what were called educational activities but without valuing the necessary care routines for the children, especially the under twos. Erin identified problems that arose because:

- some staff pressed children to eat meals at a swift pace in order to get through what was seen as wasted time
- staff in the baby and toddler room had focused on an efficient changing time rather than one that was personal for the babies and toddlers
- a large group of three year olds had to sit still on the mat for a long story time with one practitioner while the other practitioner tidied up, because it was easier not to involve the children in tidying.

Erin worked steadily to help the staff to broaden their view of what was learning for young children and potential sources for their learning. It has taken time, but most rooms are now more relaxed and the staff are less stressed, since they see the whole day as valuable.

Questions

- 1 What would you anticipate happened to the children in each of the three practice problem areas mentioned above?



- 2 In what ways can a felt time pressure and an attitude of 'we must do all these educational activities' undermine the creation of a relaxed atmosphere for children to learn?
- 3 Discuss with your colleagues and suggest some strategies that Erin may have used to address the problems.

Key skills links: C3.1a PS3.1

Children need touch

Babies and children need physical contact. It is a vital channel for warm communication and is also reassuring when children are upset, scared or ill. Close physical contact is essential while children need help with the routines of physical care and some disabled children will need help well into middle childhood or beyond.

There are differences between families in the amount and kind of physical affection shown to children. Some of these differences may be about this particular family and the way that the parents were raised. Sometimes, there may be a broader cultural tradition about appropriate personal space (how close you sit or stand to another person) and touch. Early years practitioners need to be sensitive to what children have learned so far in their family. But young children usually like to be close, to make physical contact and be able to access such contact when they want.

Children should of course be treated with respect and not used as comfort objects, either by adults or by older children. You may need to step in if some children are treating a younger or much smaller child like a doll or a prop in a game. Equally, it is not acceptable for practitioners responsible for rather exhausting older groups to appear in the baby room for a bit of peace and a baby to cuddle because it makes them feel better as adults.

- Be alert to a child's feelings and do not show hurt just because he does not feel like a cuddle at the moment.
- Babies, toddlers and young children will show you when and how they appreciate close physical contact by being close, touching you and taking your hand or snuggling up close.
- Children who do not want to sit on a lap may like to lean against you or be close enough to reach out when they wish.
- Do not stop showing affection or using appropriate touch to older children. Adults often withdraw, especially from boys, and it is hard for children to avoid a message that contact is less welcome or not for 'big' children.
- Six and seven year olds often appreciate a friendly hand touch or will want to sit very close if they are sad.

Tips for practice

Sources of concerns about physical contact

An increased awareness of child protection issues has confused good practice over touch. See Chapter 19 for a thorough coverage of this topic.

Concern about the minority (and most people do *not* abuse children) has sometimes led to restrictive rules about contact and witnessing procedures in care routines (when two practitioners must be present). Some of these rules, including ‘no-touch’ practices are unworkable for younger children and give some very bizarre messages to slightly older ones.

An excessive concern about ‘what might people think’ will lead to poor practice in which early years practitioners behave in a distant way to children. Far from solving child protection concerns, this approach can be emotionally cold to children, who wonder what they have done that is so wrong that adults do not want them close.

Learning about appropriate touch

Young children are in the process of learning about gentle and appropriate physical contact. They cannot experience respectful contact if early years practitioners keep their distance. In fact the children could be put at risk because they have a less strong foundation for judging intrusive or inappropriate contact. If children have been deprived of safe and happy closeness, then they are even more at risk because they are desperate for affection from anyone who offers.

Early years settings and schools are usually even more sensitive or uneasy about practice for male practitioners. Again, the problem has arisen with an excessive concern about the prevalence of child abuse and also a myth that men are more likely to be abusers than women. Most identified sex abusers are men but most men are not abusers of any kind. So, this perspective is not only untrue but also raises serious equal opportunities issues. It is important that children have positive and affectionate male role models for the healthy development of girls as well as boys.

Within a friendly early years setting you can help children learn about appropriate touch, for instance:

- One child feels squashed by another and wants some more space.
- Another child likes to be asked to hold hands and does not want her hand simply grabbed by her friend.
- Male and female practitioners can set a good example of friendly and respectful physical contact and give children direct experience of how a safe adult behaves.
- Female practitioners often find that a very young child may pat a breast or slip a hand down the front of a blouse. Just remove the hand gently and place it somewhere less intimate.

It would be a matter for concern if children persist in intimate touching once you have said a kind ‘No’. Also you need to be alert to possible problems, if a child seems unnerved by physical closeness. Be aware that it may be the result of a bad experience. These issues are addressed in Chapter 19.

Activity (observation)

Keep a simple log over at least a week of all the occasions when you touch a child and children touch you. You can group the examples by broad types, for instance, touch as part of:

- welcoming and greeting
- offering reassurance or comfort
- showing pleasure, encouragement, a message of 'well done!'
- supporting children to boost their confidence to get involved
- physical care routines
- guiding a child's hand or body to manage a task.

Look over your findings and identify any common patterns.

- Make a simple chart to show the pattern.
- What can you learn about the expressed needs of the children who initiated touch with you?
- What would be the likely consequences if you had withdrawn from their touch?
- Discuss your findings with colleagues or prepare and make a short presentation.
- Use your findings and discussion to plan improvements in your own practice.

Key skills links: C3.1a LP2/3.1–3 N2.3

Promoting self reliance through routines and sharing care

The value of care routines

Predictable routines in the day can be a source of security to children; they start to understand what happens when and how one event follows another. Predictable routines do not have to be inflexible and certainly the routine should never feel more important than the children themselves. A regular pattern creates a rhythm to the day that can be very reassuring to young children who have little understanding yet of time in an adult framework. Babies, toddlers and young children do come to understand mealtime, clean up time, rest or quiet time and lively play time.

Good practice for the physical care of children

Within predictable routines, with some flexibility, you can offer children respectful and appropriate physical care, that is part of friendly communication and a warm personal relationship with a child.

These are the key themes of good practice in every early years setting:

- Let a child know that you are about to start a care routine.

- It is disrespectful to children, and sometimes makes them scared or uneasy, if you appear without warning, start to move them about and do not give them time to adjust.
- Adults need to be alert to children's preferences for their personal care and these wishes may be expressed through words, facial expressions or a child's whole body language.
- Wherever possible you should follow or at least be flexible to the child's wishes.
- All children should be enabled to partake in their own care as much as possible and you need to be alert to promoting children's skills of self reliance.
- Care routines should not be rushed and children should be treated as individuals who deserve time and attention.
- Good practice in physical care routines helps children to understand respectful touch. They are then more likely to treat others with care and to be wary if someone treats them roughly or with disrespect.
- Early years practitioners need to work in partnership with children's parents, so that children are not handled in very different ways. Some families will also have cultural or religious reasons for preferring particular ways of meeting children's physical needs.

Activity

- Even young children have a sense of bodily dignity and some soon show that they want some privacy during care routines.
- Note at least five or six ways in which you could show respect for a child and promote their sense of dignity through physical care.
- Discuss your ideas with colleagues and consider what may block good practice from adults in this area (in general).
- Make some specific plans that could improve your own practice.

Key skills links: C2/3.1a LP2/3.1–3 WO2/3.1–3

Sharing their care with children

Part of growing up is that children steadily learn to take care of themselves. They are able to help in and then take responsibility for physical care routines such as feeding, dressing and toileting themselves. Children also learn broad life skills over a period of time. All these skills of self reliance support their move towards independence. A range of the skills of self reliance will be covered in this chapter and in Chapters 3 and 4. This section highlights the general issues that shape your good practice.

Supporting and encouraging children

Very young children, especially babies, need a great deal of physical care because they cannot look after themselves (see Chapter 6). But if you observe babies and toddlers, you will realise that even babies want to use their physical skills. Young

**Figure 2.2**

This toddler can see his friend needs some help

children are keen to feel competent and they often show by gestures and phrases like ‘me do it’ that they want to feel active and not passive in a care routine. Children who are continually discouraged, prevented from taking part or criticised for their failings will give up in the end, probably only to be further criticised by thoughtless adults for being ‘lazy’.

In this area of children’s learning, the word **independence** can be misleading if it is used to mean that children should manage without help or encouragement on acquiring this skill. During childhood the move towards independence is a steady process, as children become able to take on their own care and make their own decisions. Young children can be relatively independent in some areas of their care and still very dependent in others.

An alternative is to understand and observe how young children practise the skills of **self reliance** within daily routines and become able to share in their own care.

By the time children reach their third birthday they can take an active part in much of their own physical care. They can usually:

- manage a great deal of their own toileting and hygiene
- feed themselves, handle drinks and make choices about food
- dress and undress, sometimes with help, and express preferences about what they will wear
- take appropriate responsibility, so long as adults allow, for instance in tidying up, serving out food and running simple messages
- make choices about activities and plan a bit ahead with the support of a patient adult.

Adult attention to children’s skills of self reliance can be an effective way to promote other areas of their development, for instance:

- Children can be a trusted and enthusiastic helper in an early years setting or their own family home. Feeling of value and importance boosts their sense of self worth.

Key terms

Independence

the move in childhood toward children’s being able to take responsibility for their own care and decisions

Self reliance

an area of children’s skills in which they become more able to use their own resources and knowledge to undertake their own care and make choices

- Ordinary daily routines offer children practice in recalling steps in a simple sequence or to notice that something has been forgotten. Thinking skills, communication and making choices can be involved.
- When adults value children's growing self reliance, the children are supported in a positive disposition to learn (see also page 393). They have direct experience that they can learn ('I can do it') and if they forget or become confused, they can ask for help.

Young children need to feel positive about being more self reliant and adult behaviour is key.

- Children are motivated to persevere and practise when you are generous with your encouragement or thanks. For instance, 'well done, you got your mittens on' or 'you've found the book, thank you!'
- Be patient and give children time. It is better for a child who wants to button up her coat to be allowed to do it, rather than an adult insisting on 'helping'. You can step in if you really are pressed for time, but often this will not be the case.
- Be flexible in your standards and do not re-do something unless really necessary. A child who is proud that she has buttoned up her coat does not really need it re-done because she did not line up the buttons.
- In a friendly atmosphere adults and children help each other out. Sometimes a child is able to do something but for the moment would like you to do it, so he feels cared for by you. You are physically capable of fetching the tissue box or pouring yourself some more juice, but you ask for help because a child is nearby and because she likes to help.
- Children need to practise in order to hone their skills of self reliance, just like any other area of learning. They are more likely to keep trying when their resistance or difficulties are met with patience, good humour and help from adults.
- Children are discouraged by ungracious adults who take the line of 'you're four years old, you ought to be able to ...'. If children are behaving in a hopeless-helpless way, then being rude to them or making them feel silly will not improve matters.
- Children's successes should be met with pleasure and a 'well done' from adults; never with any sense of 'so what, you should be doing that anyway', which is most discouraging for anyone of any age.

Everyday skills can seem ordinary but this does not mean that they are easy skills to learn. Young children can be motivated to learn skills of self care but they need caring adults to show them how and support them. You learned physical skills such as cutting your food or tying up shoelaces a long time ago. Do you recall how difficult these tasks seemed to you as a child?

For example, suppose that a three year old is learning how to pour herself a drink from a jug. She has to look carefully at the jug, pick it up and hold it steady as she moves it to her cup or mug. She has to concentrate on holding the jug and looking at the cup as she starts to pour. She has to stop before the drink goes over the top of her cup. Then she has to straighten the jug and look carefully as she moves it back and places it down on the table.

Activity

Take one daily care routine.

- For instance, when children can manage some of their own dressing and undressing or have understood to wash their hands after going to the toilet or before a cooking activity.
- In what ways could this achievement be linked with their learning in the other areas of their development (see page 12 for a summary)?
- Draw a simple chart to show how such learning could be linked.
- Make a short presentation to your colleagues and explore how you can keep such connections fresh in your mind in your day by day practice.

Key skills links: C2/3.1b LP2/3.1–3

Scenario

Nancy works as a full time daily nanny with 18 month old Annmarie and four year old Jerome. Nancy had previously worked in a day nursery and is having to make some adjustments to how children can learn at home. Nancy had been used to a very structured day working with three and four year olds in the nursery's pre-school group. Annmarie and Jerome are used to a family life in which they have a role in family routines like bringing in the post, shopping in the local market and simple cooking. Jerome has always liked being the helper with Annmarie's physical care and is unhappy when Nancy's first reaction is to do all the care herself.

Questions

- 1 In what important ways is family life unlike nursery life?
- 2 In what ways could Nancy draw on the advantages of family life for the children's learning?
- 3 In what ways could Nancy bring in her experience of the nursery but adjusted for her job as a nanny?
- 4 Discuss your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1a

Activity (observation)

If you are under a lot of pressure, you may be tempted to expect young children to feed and dress themselves without much help or encouragement. But this is expecting too much of many three and four year olds and certainly of two year olds.

Within the last few weeks what have you expected the children to manage largely without any help from adults?

- Going to the toilet?

- Putting on outdoor clothes before playing outside?
- Eating a meal?

Looking back over this section of the book with your own notes.

- Are you expecting too much?
- Or perhaps your expectations are realistic for the children's age, yet you have forgotten to say 'Well done', to appreciate and encourage.
- Bear in mind as well that sometimes children just like some help. It may be their way of asking for some personal attention in a rushed and impersonal atmosphere. You can lose a friendly balance in a family home as a nanny or in an early years setting.

Discuss your observations and thoughts with your colleagues. Be pleased about examples of good practice in your own work and make some specific plans for any improvements in your practice, however minor.

Key skills link: C3.1a LP2/3.1–3 WO2/3.1–3

Activity (observation)

- Look carefully at all that is involved in some other very ordinary activities that young children are learning. Think about the physical skills and the importance of concentration and not being distracted.
- Take one or two of the following ideas, perhaps in discussion with colleagues, and list the separate steps that children have to manage and the skills involved.

Here are some examples from which to choose:

- cutting up a piece of chicken or meat
- turning an inside out sweatshirt or jumper the right way around
- buttoning up a shirt, blouse or coat
- doing up an open-ended zip on a coat or jacket
- tying shoelaces.

What can you learn about your positive help for children?

- What could be difficult, how can you show and encourage?
- Look at the possibility of using photos to show the steps in a self care routine.
- Discuss with your colleagues. Be pleased about the ways that you currently help children and make some specific plans for improvements to practice, even if minor.

Key skills links: C2/3.1a LP2/3.1–3 WO2/3.1–3

The impact of disability

Some features of good quality care are especially relevant when children are very young. However, the need for such an approach continues into later childhood when children have disabilities.

- A child with learning disabilities may take longer than her peers to understand and be able to take over her own care.
- A child with physical disabilities may know what has to be done but cannot manage some part of the physical coordination or balance.
- Alternatively, disabled children may need much more time, and therefore adult patience, and perhaps some special equipment to enable them to take over their own care.

You do need to be sensitive to children's feelings, when physical disability may limit their current ability to take on their own care like their peers. Disabled four and five years olds may be uncomfortably aware that their friends need less help with dressing or going to the toilet. You can help when you:

- Work for a respectful balance between helping and letting the child do as much as she can.
- Ask if a child would like help, rather than swooping in without asking.
- Treat the child in a manner appropriate for her age and ensure that, just because she needs to be changed, she does not feel like a baby.
- Talk with the child's parents and take advantage of any special equipment, for example modified cutlery, that could help this child.
- Be alert to any changes you could make in your routine that would enable a disabled child to be more of a full member of your group. Such a change might mean that a routine takes longer but it would be time well spent if a child feels more competent and involved.
- Children can sometimes help each other and you can look for opportunities for a fully-abled child to help a disabled peer. Ideally look for a way that the disabled child can then help in her turn.

Tips for practice

Children as partners in helping out

Young children are keen to learn everyday skills and are enthusiastic about having a trusted part in the daily routine of home or early years setting. Unfortunately they will give up if their offers are regularly refused. Children also stop offering if adults set such exacting standards that the children inevitably fail.

Helping out in the daily routines

You can find many opportunities for children to help and learn:

- Young children enjoy learning some of the simpler tasks of everyday life. Tasks that seem dull or very routine to you can be refreshing to children and also intriguing because they are part of the adult social world.

Figure 2.3

Children can help with the tidying up



- An 18 month old can be delighted to hand you items you need. Your words and expression tell him that the book or tissue he brought over is just what you needed.
- Young children can learn skills while they help you sort out cupboards or track down the missing pieces of jigsaw. They often like this time for conversation. You chat together while you share the activity.
- Children are flattered that you ask and let them take simple messages from one room to another.
- Children like to be involved in the care of children younger than themselves. Three and four year olds are often fascinated by baby care and basic child development.
- Of course, you must remain responsible for a baby's safety, yet children can hand you a clean nappy or the tub of cream. They could choose clean clothes for the baby. Children are also often adept at amusing a baby while you do the changing.

Tidying up

It is valuable that children learn about tidying up.

- Give children a simple count down that tidying up will be soon. They can then prepare themselves.
- Give enough time so that children are not rushed. They will not want to be involved if tidying up means being nagged and criticised.
- Have a system that makes it easy for children to know where items go: a written label, a picture or a shape board for tools.
- Encourage children to put equipment like a posting box back together and encourage them to be good spotters of missing jigsaw pieces.

- Show the children that you value tidying up time as a routine of learning. It is not wasted time, so be encouraging and say 'thanks' or 'well done'.

Watch out for any sense that everything must be tidied up and put away if that means that a child's work in progress is demolished. Some settings have great difficulties because they share premises, such as pre-school and playgroups that use church halls. However, some settings that do not experience these pressures nevertheless can get into thoughtless habits.

- If children are in the middle of a large construction, a painting or piece of craft or woodwork, do look for places to put it safely, so that they can come back to it.
- Use cameras to record work in progress or take a permanent record of something that took children a lot of time and of which they are proud: a den in the garden, a substantial sand or earthwork that will not survive the next rain.

Scenarios

- The children in St Jude's after school club are keen on rotas at the moment. Pam and Naomi had been puzzled about the request for a 'proper grown up rota'. Then they worked out that washing up the crockery and cutlery from tea is of particular importance because the helper gets the undivided attention of the adult who is also washing up today.
- Tyrone in Baker Street Children and Family Centre has an enthusiastic 'team and delegation' approach that the current group of children clearly relish. Tidying up time starts with a 'team meeting' and agreement about who will tidy up what today. The children scatter and Tyrone moves around to offer help and a humorous chivvying to keep children on track. Tyrone realises that this approach will not necessarily work with all children, but it suits the dynamics of the current group.
- Dresden Road Nursery School has learning spaces with some materials that can only be stacked away in one or two ways. Rosemary recently undertook a project with children in which they took photos of ways to stack their big items like foam or the large wooden blocks. Rosemary fully involved the children in doing this task and explained she believed it would help everyone to have a picture to check. The photos are now enlarged and fixed in the relevant learning spaces.
- Sunningdale Day Nursery has some children who are not used to being involved in tidying up. Penny has developed an approach of asking children, especially the less keen ones, which bit of tidying they would like to do and then offer, 'Shall I come and help?' Penny has found this strategy works better than making the decision and asking children to join her. When she and the child or children have completed one task, she asks what they would like to tidy next.

Questions

- 1 There are different ways to encourage children to be involved in tidying up and much of the strategy depends on positive adult attitudes and behaviour.

- 2 Your own approach needs to fit with your temperament and that of the children. So these scenarios are examples, not a template for what you 'ought' to do.
- 3 Discuss with your colleagues and make some specific plans to improve or vary practice.

Key skills links: LP2/3.1–3 WO2/3.1–3

Step by step learning

You can help children by understanding the step by step process of learning ordinary tasks. Make everyday tasks simpler if necessary or find a part of a task that the children can do. Keep to realistic standards for how long a task will take and how well it is done. Ordinary daily routines in a nursery can take a little longer; maybe you can finish off the task discreetly later and then children feel encouraged and ready to have a go another time.

Remember that the process does not have to be all or nothing. Look at it as several stages:

- You are totally responsible – you judge that babies or children cannot manage something or it is not yet safe for them to try, however much they want to try. They may watch you but do not actually join in.
- You encourage them to join in – you enable children to help you out a bit, though you are still basically in charge.
- Children take responsibility but you watch over them – you can say, 'Go on, you try it' and you stay close to help if they need it
- Children are wholly responsible – you allow children to take responsibility for the task with little or no supervision. You may check on the task afterwards and give encouragement and any helpful feedback.

Activity

Make a list of at least 10–15 tasks that have to be undertaken in your early years settings or in a family home as a nanny or childminder. You might include some of the following as your starter ideas for the list:

- choosing the menu for next week
- taking a message to someone in another room
- cleaning up when the baby has been sick
- cleaning out the rabbit
- answering the telephone, taking telephone messages
- reorganising the book corner or shelf.

Now look at each task and link up with the basic steps of learning in this section.

- To what extent are the children involved?

- Could they be involved if you took more time or adjusted the task a bit?
- Plan and make a short presentation of how you could adjust, or have adjusted, a daily routine so that children can have a helpful, active role.

Key skills link: LP2.1–3 C2.1b

Cleanliness and personal hygiene

Once a nursery, pre-school or home environment is clean enough there is no advantage, and some disadvantages to greater attention to cleanliness. Over attention to cleaning and tidying means that your time is diverted from the children. There is also some suggestion that an obsessive concern with cleaning and ‘zapping’ germs mean that children’s bodies do not encounter the range of ordinary germs that enable their bodies to build up immunities. Basically, children and their surroundings need to be clean but not sterile (see Care and development of babies, Chapter 6.)

In the play area

A safe environment for babies and children is free from threats to their physical well being and health. The environment should be clean, some areas, like toilets and kitchens, need to be kept within a good standard of hygiene. The whole play area needs to be tidy enough for people to be able to move around and not trip



Figure 2.4

Children like helping out and they learn

over objects. However, children need to spread out with their play materials if they are to enjoy and learn.

An appropriate standard of cleanliness allows for enjoyable play:

- Children will get grubby on occasion and happy outdoor play will involve natural substances that mark hands and clothes.
- Children clean up very well and soon become active participants in the cleaning up and tidying process.
- Children who are expected to remain unnaturally clean cannot help out properly in the daily routines, cannot play with their friends and cannot learn.
- Younger children are unlikely to make it through the day in the same set of clothes.
- Older children may be fine apart from the odd accident, so long as they get into the habit of using aprons or overalls for art, craft and cooking activities.
- Play materials need to be clean but, unless children have health conditions that make them especially vulnerable, you do not need to be forever scrubbing and polishing.
- Your storage systems should keep play materials as free from dust as possible.

You will need to pay close attention to the hygiene needs of babies and young toddlers.

- Babies and toddlers suck and chew their play materials, so it is particularly important that their toys are regularly washed in hot soapy water, rinsed and left to drip dry.
- Rattles and similar baby toys should not ideally pass from baby to baby without being cleaned.

Kitchens and bathrooms

Strict standards of hygiene are needed in the kitchen and bathroom. Infections, especially those causing stomach upsets, can pass like wildfire around a group of children and adults who spend their days in close proximity.

- In an early years setting you will be responsible for cleaning up after children but there will be cleaning staff on the team who do the regular cleaning.
- If you work as a nanny then you may share some of the cleaning responsibility with parents – as it affects the children – but you should not be expected to do household cleaning as such.
- As a childminder you will be responsible for your own household tasks and cleaning. But you should ensure that cleaning does not impose on generous time and attention given to the children.

Hygiene procedures

You should wash your hands with soap, or an alternative if you are allergic to soap:

- before and after changing a child
- before cleaning cuts or grazes

- after you have been to the toilet
- before you handle food or prepare a baby's bottle.

You should cover any cuts or grazes on your hands with a plaster.

Adults in an early years setting need to follow a consistent procedure to avoid cross infection between children and adults. Contact with body fluids and body products can be a very efficient way of passing on minor and major infections.

- You should wear a fresh pair of disposable gloves each time you change a child or deal with any accident in which a child's skin is broken.
- After use the gloves should be placed in a sealed bag in the same careful way as a disposable nappy, used dressings and bandages.
- Precautions such as wearing a light apron and using disposable gloves became more usual in nurseries in response to conditions such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis. You will not necessarily know if children are infected and, even if you do, it would be thoughtless to treat that child noticeably differently from his or her peers.

You might still choose to use disposable gloves if you work as a nanny or child-minder, but the risks of cross infection are less.

You can be caring in word and action while you are following hygienic procedures.

- Children should never be made to feel unclean or that there is something the matter with them that makes you wear plastic gloves.
- You should talk to and smile at a baby you are changing.
- You can reassure a child who is scraped and comfort one who is bleeding.
- Explain simply to any child or adult who asks what the reasons are for wearing plastic gloves: that you could otherwise pass on germs between people without realising it.
- However, since you will use gloves with any child under given circumstances, they may not ask. What you are doing simply looks normal; it is what adults do in your setting.

Tips for practice

Sharing the care on hygiene

You can set a good example in hygiene that will promote health without making children over-anxious about bugs and germs.

- Show and remind children so that they learn hand washing after going to the toilet and before handling food or eating their meal.
- In a group setting they also need to understand about using only their own towel, flannel or toothbrush. Children can be helped to follow hygiene when they have an individual peg with the child's name and a photo or picture to help them recognise their own items.
- You can explain simply about germs passing when you sneeze or cough and that is why everyone should put their hand in front of their mouth and use a handkerchief or tissue.

- Younger children need guidance and redirection to understand that sand and earth are not for eating and you may need to clean up their hands more often than those of older children. Children with learning disabilities will take longer to learn and you may need to offer this care and support into middle childhood.
- Children are often very interested in the care of others and like to watch you change or clean a baby. Use these opportunities to explain and answer questions.
- Special care and explanations need to be given about hygiene if you have a pet in the setting or you visit a children's farm. The main dangers come from children touching an animal and then putting their fingers into their mouth.

Activity

- Draft a short description of the main ways to ensure hygiene when children have contact with animals.
- Plan ways that you could communicate this message to children and remind them in ways that do not feel like nagging, nor make them over-anxious.
- Look for ways to use photos and children's drawings.
- Make a short presentation to colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1b LP2/3.1–3

Skin care

Generally you will only need to ensure that children keep clean enough and that you deal with any scrapes or bruises. You may need to use cream on a child if her skin has a tendency to become dry and cracked. This is a normal part of daily care for many dark skinned children and should be discussed with their parents. However, some lighter skinned children have sensitive skin and also need some personal attention. (See page 131 about eczema.) You will probably find a cream that is appropriate for all children who need this extra help. You may not need to put cream on some children unless they have a long day with you or you take the group swimming. Some four and five year olds will be ready to help with their own skin care.

Care in the sun

All children need protection against the sun when they are playing outside in hot weather. Children's skin is especially sensitive and later problems with skin cancer can arise from sunburn in childhood. Light skinned children will be the first to burn but dark skinned children will also get sunburn and heatstroke if you do not take care of them. Children do not understand this risk, although they can comprehend getting hot and sticky. It is the adults' responsibility to keep children safe:

- Children should not be kept inside during hot weather. They need to get out, but equipped with a suitable sun hat and sun cream.
- Discuss with parents the need for sun protection creams and ask them to send in a hat that their child is prepared to wear.

- The best kind of sun hats are the kind with a neck flap as well as the hat part – the legionnaire style.
- You will need to put the sun cream on younger children but you can start the process of encouraging them to rub in the dabs of cream that you put on exposed limbs and their face.
- In a long hot spell, you will need to limit children's time in the direct sun and ensure that everyone has water easily available for drinking.
- You also need some shade in a garden or outdoor area. If you do not have natural shady areas in your garden then you need to create some shade with an awning or an impromptu tent or tepee. Children will like these kind of facilities and play in them even when the sun is not that hot.

Children need sunlight

It is good practice to help children protect themselves from overheating and sunburn. However, children need to get out in the air and they need sunlight; it is a vital and free source of vitamin D. This vitamin is also available from some foods (see page 84), but since the vitamin is stored by our bodies, summer is a good time to build up children's reserves.

Scenario

The team at St Jude's Primary School was aware that sun care and reminders for children should continue into their school years. The nursery practitioners had been putting sun cream on the children and monitoring that they wore hats. The nursery team set a good example by wearing a sunhat themselves. A significant hot spell brought home to staff the fact that the primary school playground has few shady areas and that children have become overheated and close to getting sunburned.

In a recent full team meeting, the primary school staff expressed concerns about the possibility of some children being allergic to certain sun creams and whether anyone should risk the physical contact necessary to put the cream onto children. The playground supervisory assistants are anxious about the contact issues but pointed out that sun protection is too important to be overlooked. They also raised the problems of children getting enough to drink in a hot spell. The nursery team pointed out that they have always worked in partnership with parents to ensure that children come with hats and suitable cream in hot weather, and suggested that a way be found to extend that good practice into the school years.

Questions

- 1 Consider and discuss with colleagues the scope of the problem faced by St Jude's. What are the main issues and what are the priorities?
- 2 Suggest some ways to resolve this problem.

Key skills links: C3.1a PS3.1.

Hair care

Children can learn to brush or comb their hair, although they have to learn how to approach tangles with care. You will need a different kind of comb if children have a head of thick, curly hair. Parents will sometimes have specific concerns about hair and you may be unaware of these if you do not share the same cultural background.

- Boys from Rastafarian families will probably have their hair in dreadlocks and these must not be combed. They wear a tam (hat).
- Young Sikh boys have a small cloth covering their hair, which will have been wound up neatly on the top of their head.
- Some families will require their daughters to keep their hair covered. In Hindu families, this may be a loose scarf; Muslim families will send their daughters in a close fitting head covering the style of which varies. Girls from Rastafarian families will also be expected to keep their hair covered, probably with a scarf.

None of these head coverings should be removed. If you are from a different ethnic group the coverings may seem optional, but they are not. If a child's head covering creates a safety issue, perhaps if the scarf is loose, then talk with parents about acceptable ways to secure the scarf.

Afro-Caribbean girls sometimes have their hair in intricate plaits and it may also be oiled. Boys also sometimes have plaiting. Parents will be cross if they find sand or earth in their children's hair. It is impossible to get it out without abandoning the whole style, and some will have taken hours to do. Talk with parents about a scarf or other head covering that their child is willing to wear when playing with sand or other fine, natural materials.

Tips for practice

- If you are in any doubt, it is always better to talk with parents. It is wiser to admit to being unsure than to offend out of avoidable ignorance.
- You cannot be expected to know everything. Even in a culturally diverse area, you may not have had contact with families from some ethnic groups until now.
- If you work with school age children, they will be far more able than younger ones to tell you and explain themselves.
- Build up your knowledge but be careful about over-generalising. There is great variety within ethnic groups as well as between groups.

Clothes and dressing

Choice of clothes

Ideally children should be wearing clothes in which they can have a relaxed and enjoyable day. From the perspective of an early years setting this tends to mean comfortable clothes that are not too fussy and that parents will tolerate getting a bit grubby or dotted with paint.

Some parents will put their children in clothes that are good for play and be fairly calm about the evidence on clothes of a good day for children. However, some parents want their children well turned out all the time and may spend a



lot of money on fashionable clothes for even very young children. Your preferences for clothes may not be those of parents and in different ways you do need to reach some compromise. For instance:

- Talk with parents before children join your setting about the activities that they will enjoy.
- Offer overalls, aprons or even a change of clothing for art, craft and gardening activities.
- Do your very best to protect children's clothes but not to the point of restricting their play and playful exploration.
- Offer practical advice to parents about how to remove paint or glue. Some paint has to be washed out with cold water; hot water sets it like a dye. Some glue comes off more easily if the item is cooled in the fridge or freezer first of all.
- Understand that for some parents there will be issues about modesty and girls.
- Muslim parents in particular will not be happy for their daughters to strip down to underwear for games or possibly to go swimming. See what compromises can be reached.

Scenario

Baker Street Children and Family Centre has faced several awkward situations recently over children's clothes. The centre team feels strongly about not imposing on parent's choices about how they dress their children. However, they feel they do need to address the problems with two families:

- Four year old Tanya wears slip on shoes and she regularly falls over when she runs. Tanya's key worker wants to suggest that Tanya's father buy her some shoes that will fasten securely or agree to some system of fixing her shoes so they will not trip her.
- Three year old Wesley's parents like to dress him in very smart clothes and get irritated when he has spilt paint or glue. His mother has asked that Wesley does not do any more painting or sticking but, quite apart from the fact that this activity is regularly available, Wesley is very keen on arts and crafts.

Questions

- 1 How could the Baker Street team talk with parents?
- 2 Form pairs to create a role play in which you explore diplomatic ways to approach the problem about a child's clothes. One person takes the role of the early years practitioner and one of the parent in these two situations.
- 3 Explore in group discussion what the main problems and priorities are.

Key skills links: PS2/3.1

Growing self reliance

Very young babies cannot help in their physical care, indeed their waving arms and legs can make simple dressing quite a marathon. Within a few months however they start to join in.

- A baby or toddler will push his arm into a sleeve if you hold it out for him. From the baby's perspective it may be just as interesting to take his arm out again.
- Toddlers who gain the skills required to take their hats on and off sometimes continue this action for the sheer pleasure of doing it successfully.
- Toddlers who are in the mood may cooperate in dressing, so long as they are not rushed and the dressing is not taking them away from a more interesting activity. They aim their arms and legs into clothing that you hold out.
- Two and three year olds learn to manage the simpler parts of dressing: pull on or pull up clothes, slip on shoes.
- They will find some fastenings difficult and it is not unusual to see them tug hard and hope for the best.
- Children also find the sequence of dressing complicated at the outset. Without your help, they may put on pants over the top of trousers, so line up their clothes so they can follow a sequence and say out loud when you dress them.
- Three, four and five year olds learn to tackle the more common ways of fastening clothes and many garments for children are made easier with elasticated waists or velcro to fasten shoes.
- Children of this age need to see what they are doing and you may be able to direct their attention to how the task is progressing.
- Children will have more difficulty if fastenings are at the back or their clothes are tight fitting.
- You can help children by being patient as they learn and helping them sometimes. Children appreciate a helping hand and not just because they have failed and ought to be able to do up their buttons.

Scenario

In the Wessex childminding network the group of childminders has explored issues about time and children learning the skills of self reliance. Sophie shared an experience that had made her think recently.

Sophie had heard herself pressing Alison to let her do the child's coat up with, 'Why not let me help, then you go out to play sooner'. But Sophie then realised that Alison, as much as she loved going out in the garden, was not interested in speed and wanted to do up her coat, every button, herself. Sophie realised that it was unwise to press Alison on the grounds that help would be quicker. There was no real time pressure and Alison could then gain the satisfaction of 'doing it myself'.

Questions

- 1 Do you find yourself pressing children when there is no real time pressure?



- 2 How can you ensure that you relax and be appreciative of what children have accomplished?
- 3 Recognise your current good practice and make some specific plans for improvements, even minor ones.

Key skills links: LP2/3.1–3

Activity

Children benefit from a chance to practise tricky fastenings when there is no pressure of time. List ways that you could help, for instance:

- You could make a fastenings hanging or cloth book in which there is a selection of buttons and button holes, poppers, zips and laces.
- Doing up shoe laces is especially challenging and it can be sobering as an adult to try to explain in words exactly what you do to tie up shoelaces. This verbal task can remind you that it is a complex task.
- Do you have a doll or teddy with clothes that fasten? Can children practise in this way?
- Try one or two approaches with children. Write up the activity and use photos or children's drawings, if they would like to be involved.

Key skills links: C2.3

Rest and activity

Children need a healthy combination of varied activity, quiet and restful periods and actual sleep. Babies, toddlers and children vary in terms of how much sleep they need in total and how they gain this amount. It is in everyone's interests, adults as well as children, that children get enough sleep and that in the end they do their sleeping in the night time.

Children who do not get enough sleep can have dark rings under their eyes or nod off regularly during the day. But they can also be irritable and more likely to squabble with their peers and you may not immediately explain this behaviour by insufficient sleep. Young children do not know that they are lacking enough sleep and they may, of course, be very resistant to going to bed and staying there in the evening at home. It is an adult responsibility to help children develop healthy sleeping habits and that needs a bedtime routine.

Sleeping patterns

Babies sleep for a large amount in total of the 24 hour day but they do this sleeping in bursts of 3–4 hours, waking for feeding throughout the day and night. A lot of babies do seem to reach a more settled pattern, with longer night sleeps by about three months or earlier. But this is not an absolute and some apparently

Figure 2.5

Children need a quiet sleeping area



settled babies start a wakeful pattern later on. At some point during the first year of life many, but certainly not all, babies sleep for the longest period through the night. Their parents, or a nanny with sole charge, will then get a decent night's sleep, although possibly with a prompt start to the day.

Older babies and toddlers will have one or two daytime naps. But some children up to three and four years of age may still need a short daytime nap, probably after lunch, or at least a quiet period. Some children attend an early years setting for full childcare because their parents work or study. The full day can then be long and children are likely to need a quiet, peaceful time to recoup their energy, even if they do not actually fall asleep.

Rest and quiet in the day

An early years setting needs comfortable areas where children can rest or nap in comfort. Sleepers need to be undisturbed by other children who are awake, but close enough that someone can be with them swiftly as they move back into wakefulness.

All children need a set of bedding for nap time that is not shared with others and is laundered regularly. If bedding like sleeping bags have to be dry cleaned, then they must be aired thoroughly before they are used for sleeping, in order to remove any residue of the cleaning chemicals.



Tips for practice

- Babies should be allowed to take naps when they want and not pushed into a nursery routine.
- By 18 months or so, toddlers will be more able to take naps at the same time as their peers, probably after lunch. But you still need to be flexible about the toddler or young child who needs a longer nap.
- Young children appreciate physical contact such as a cuddle or stroke as they drift into sleep and they often feel better if they have a gentle return to wakefulness.
- By your considerate behaviour and words you can help children learn about and recognise their own feelings.
- What does it feel like to be tired and ready for a nap or rest, or pleasantly tired after a good physical game? What does it feel like to be rested and keen to get back into play?

Activity (observation)

Children benefit from a blend of energetic and more peaceful occupations. Gather ideas for what children could do, and what you observe they enjoy, for a quiet time in the day.

Questions

- 1 Do children enjoy browsing through books and how can you make a welcoming corner or choice of books for children who are less keen?
 - 2 Can you use quiet music to communicate that this is a peaceful time of the day?
 - 3 Are there some quiet, yet intellectually challenging activities that older children enjoy because they have your undivided attention?
 - 4 How do you create a useful routine that runs into quiet time and avoids simply telling children they must be quiet now? How do you behave and set a good example?
- Write up your observations with photos and children's drawings, if they would like to contribute.
 - Discuss your ideas with colleagues and add any more that they have encountered.
 - Plan some changes or improvements to your current practice.

Key skills links: C2.1a C2.3 LP2/3.1–3 WO2/3.1–3

Bedtime routines and night waking

By no means all very young children sleep all through the night, every night. Readers, who are not themselves parents, need to be aware that night-time waking and general sleep disruptions in the family are the most commonly reported problems for which parents would like advice, especially for children aged 12–18 months. Studies of sleep and waking patterns show that children,

Figure 2.6

Sometimes children
just need to rest



just like adults, vary a great deal in how long they sleep in total, how restless their sleep is, how deep their sleep is and how much they move about. Young children wake a great deal but some drift back into sleep and do not call for their parents.

You may directly face the issue of night waking because you work as a nanny with some night-time responsibility. Alternatively if you work in an early years setting, parents may ask your advice about night waking.

Tips for practice

If parents ask your advice, there are no certain solutions but some positive guidelines can accompany the ideas in this section about what to do:

- First of all, acknowledge parents' exhaustion and show sympathy for what they are going through. If you have not experienced broken nights, recognise that sleep deprivation is a very effective form of psychological torture!
- Ask open ended questions and listen to what parents say: what is going on with the child and in the family? Is the problem one of very early starts to the day or regular waking in the middle of the night? A child who wakes screaming from nightmares is different from one who wakes wanting a drink and a play.
- Sometimes it helps to keep a sleep diary, so that a nanny or parents can look for any patterns.
- Sometimes there may be a relatively straightforward suggestion to make, such as a last night feed for hungry baby, a night light for a scared toddler or shorter daytime naps for an older child.



The current generation of children has later bedtimes than previous generations and sometimes working parents enjoy a longer evening to spend time with their children. Even with some flexibility, a regular bedtime and bedtime routine is important to help children to settle and to get enough sleep so that they enjoy their days to the full.

- Establish a regular bedtime routine that creates a different feel to the end of the day.
- A wash or bath can be followed by putting on night-time clothes and reading a bedtime story.
- For a younger child, the light is then put out or turned low. Some children of five or six years of age may need a quiet time in bed with books because they genuinely are not ready to sleep yet.
- After settle time, calls from a child or appearances in the living room are dealt with calmly but the child is tucked back in or taken back up and told it's bedtime now. Adults, a nanny or parents, need to be patient and be prepared to return the child again and again.

Three main themes run through the most useful advice about dealing with night waking. It helps if:

- toddlers and children are settled to rest and not to sleep
- adults cut back on lengthy settling rituals that do not help
- children are reassured briefly and then left for short periods of time (the checking procedure).

Many of the lengthier bedtime rituals (at official bedtime and during the night) come from trying to find a way to send young children to sleep. Children are nursed, rocked, sung to sleep, all sorts of patterns, rather than settled to rest. You want to get babies and toddlers into the habit of settling themselves and being content to lie awake and look at a mobile, chat to themselves or hug a teddy. Apparently older babies and toddlers wake quite a lot, the problem comes when they cry and wake everyone else.

A friendly checking procedure is different from the old style of letting children 'cry it out' for ages. The pattern for a nanny in sole charge or for parents whom you advise is as follows:

- Don't go in at the first whimper, see if the young child will settle.
- If not, then go in, say comforting words, settle the child briefly and tuck him in with a comforter.
- Go out of the room or well out of sight and wait it out through a short crying period of only a few minutes.
- If the child continues to cry, then go back in and follow the same short comforting approach.
- Keep going in this way and stay calm. You can gradually extend the time you wait but do not leave a child to cry for more than five minutes in total.
- This approach is not a magical one-night solution but it will work because a young child gradually learns that the situation has changed. Parents or the family nanny are available for brief comfort but not for lengthy contact or night-time play.
- Consistency and support is key between all the adult members of the household. You all need patience and a willingness to have bad nights, maybe even worse until it gets better.

It is a different situation when toddlers and children are ill or frightened, but undoubtedly you have to beware giving more comfort and attention for illness than a child usually experiences.

If children still wake at night, then parents may ask you to restrict their daytime naps or ensure they do not doze off after a certain time in the day at the nursery. Discuss this issue with parents and, if need be, offer some practical advice on settling children and dealing with night waking. But also give what practical help you can, by ensuring that children do not sleep through large amounts of the day.

Self reliance with toileting

Becoming toilet trained is a major issue in early childhood and will take some time, although not always a very long period. Children need to become reliably trained for day and night time and to be confident about dealing with their needs at the toilet, which also includes being able to handle their own dressing and undressing.

When are children ready?

There is no point in trying to toilet train children before they are ready. Being over prompt only means frustration and many wet pants. Talk with a child's parents about their own view and ensure that the toilet training is done in partnership. It is not helpful if parents leave it all up to the nursery; toilet training needs to be a joint enterprise.

The signs of readiness are only partly physical:

- Young children need to have reached the point where they recognise that they have wet or filled their nappy; something has happened.
- This physical awareness is unlikely before 18–24 months of age and some children are really not ready until after their second birthday. Girls on average are ready a little earlier than boys, but you will see a great deal of variety between individual children.
- Children also need to be able to understand simple requests. The new idea of 'Let's sit you on your pot' has to make some sense, so that children start to sit themselves, rather than your doing it all. Nearly all two year olds have also started playing simple pretend and this shows you that they can imagine and think ahead a little.

Some young children will not be ready by two years because their overall development has been slowed for some reason. Perhaps this child was born very premature or has a health condition or disability that means that toilet training is less straightforward. In consultation with the child's parents, you need to be guided by what children can manage and understand, not just their age in years and months.

Be supportive and realistic with parents. If a new baby is on the way, it can seem very attractive to parents to get the older one toilet trained before the new baby arrives. But if the older child is not ready, then everyone's efforts will bring little change and even reliably toilet trained children sometimes slip back when a new sibling arrives.

Helping children to become toilet trained

Children vary a great deal and some get the hang of toilet training in a matter of weeks, some steadily learn over a period of months. Some toileting accidents are



usual for children who are toilet trained. Children are absorbed in play or try to hold on too long.

In a nursery there may be several children at one time in the process of getting toilet trained, so they have company and perhaps some idea of what happens. If you are a nanny working in a family home, then only one child may be working at this developmental task at any one time. A sensible way forward is as follows:

- When it looks as if a child is ready, then encourage him or her to try out sitting on a pot in the bathroom for short periods of time.
- Although little boys will eventually learn to urinate standing up, they start by sitting down.
- Many children start with pots, but some children like to sit on the toilet from the very beginning. In a nursery there will be low, child-sized toilet seats. In a family home, you will need a child seat to set within the ordinary toilet seat and a safe step for them to get up.
- It is an adult responsibility to ensure that a pot or the toilet seat is wiped clean after use. In an early years setting there may be a pot for each child or parents may bring in the child's own pot from home.
- Initially, the aim is to encourage a young child to sit on the pot, or the toilet, several times a day, but only for short periods of time.
- If children are lucky and get something in the pot, then say encouraging words like 'well done' and smile. If not, then maybe next time.
- It does not help to put pressure on children to sit until they have done something.
- In a nursery, there may be times when you encourage all the children to go to the toilet, perhaps before going out into the garden. Try to avoid an institutionalised routine and allow for personal toileting patterns.

Your aim is that the child's parent is following a similar pattern during their time with their child. Keep talking with the parent and compare how the process is coming along. If, after a couple of weeks, a child is really not keen, then stop. You will achieve nothing if toilet training becomes a battleground. It will be wiser to try again in a few weeks' time.

Tips for practice

- An early years team will probably have some agreement about what to call the pot productions. Most children themselves tend to use some version of 'pee' and 'poo'.
- If you are working as a nanny, then be guided by the words that parents would like to use.
- However, do alert parents, if they have not considered it, that their young child will then use the family words at top volume. Robust adult language to describe going to the toilet will be less welcome when broadcast across the local supermarket or bank.

With practice over the weeks, young children start to recognise not just that they've done a pee or a poo, but that they are about to do something. Then they may be able to speak up and say they want to go or simply take themselves to the toilet.

When children are happy to cooperate with going on the pot or toilet and have far fewer wet or soiled nappies, then you can take the next step of trying a child with pants and no nappy. Talk with parents and see if they feel their child is ready.

- Once children are minus their nappy, they do need regular reminders (every couple of hours) to sit on the pot or toilet. They also need continued encouragement by word and expression from adults. They are managing a tough developmental task and there should be no sense of 'about time too!'
- It is important to keep calm about the inevitable accidents and explain how normal this situation is to parents who have their first child. Explain to children that they need to have their pants changed, but avoid looking or sounding cross, because this is an accident.

Nowadays disposable trainer pants offer a halfway house option, but children need to make the move into proper, unpadded pants to be fully toilet trained. Padded pants may be useful on the odd occasion but, despite the enthusiastic advertising hype, are not evidence that children have managed this task.

Activity

- Plan for the toilet training of an individual child who appears ready. Consider what you will do and how.
- Track the progress of the child in toilet training. Write up the work.
- Ideally compare, with discretion and confidentiality, the pattern for several children. Toilet training can be very varied.

Key skills links: C2.3

Figure 2.7

Children learn bathroom hygiene with your help



Self reliance in the bathroom

It is very usual that even children who are toilet trained have some accidents or have a period where they are less reliable. It is important to continue to be encouraging and to offer friendly reminders to go to the toilet.

- Three and four year olds, who are absorbed in their play, may ignore the physical sensations that tell them they should head for the toilet.
- Young children have much better muscle control than when they were younger but they cannot hold for very long.
- Tight clothing or difficult fastenings can defeat a child's fingers and they start to go before their pants are down fully.

When children are toilet trained, it is time to help them share some of the responsibility for hygiene.

- Children need help with wiping their bottom until at least three or four years old.
- Be ready to hand over the task when they are ready.
- Show children how to wipe and explain to little girls that they should wipe from front to back (otherwise they risk vaginal infections such as thrush). Encourage all children in the habit of hand washing after using the toilet.

Boys need to learn to stand up for what they may call a 'big boy pee'.

- Talk with parents about what they would like, but there is no real point until a boy is tall enough to position his penis over the toilet.
- At home, with a full size toilet, he may need the help of a suitable step. Boys will probably be at least three and maybe four years old before standing up to urinate is a realistic possibility.
- Chatty boys also need to be encouraged to focus on what they are doing, or else there can be a wide splash zone.

Tips for practice

Privacy

Children deserve privacy and attention to their dignity in the bathroom. If you pay attention to children's words and expressions, then it will be clear if they want to go to the toilet with the door shut. Some are less concerned and like the door open so they can chat. They may need to understand that their friend or adults prefer some privacy. An early years setting should be designed so that privacy is consistent with safety. For instance, if the toilet doors have latches, it should be possible for an adult to lean over and release the catch if a child has locked herself into the toilet.

When children are in school

Many four year olds are in school in England, Wales and Scotland and children start at this age in Northern Ireland.

- It is unreasonable to expect four, five or even six year olds to wait for break times to go to the toilet. They should be allowed to go when they need; they will manage to hold on soon.

- Young children in school will have some toileting accidents. A run of wet pants for a child could mean that she is uneasy or very unhappy about the new setting.
- Primary school will bring the new experience of separate toilets for boys and girls. Explain this situation to the children since they will not know and may wander into the ‘wrong’ one without any intention of misbehaving.

Tips for practice

- It is very important that school toilets are kept clean and well stocked with toilet paper and paper towels.
- It is unreasonable to expect children to manage if the toilets are unpleasant places. Be a champion for children if the toilets in your school are poorly maintained.
- Children who are repelled by school toilets will try to hold on and this strategy can be bad for their health, either because they risk constipation or they do not drink enough.
- Also listen to the children if they indicate that the school toilets are a trouble zone. Toilets are sometimes a focus for bullying behaviour or disruptive and distressing patterns like children banging on doors, barging in or looking over the top of cubicles. It is an adult responsibility to resolve such problems.

Possible problems

Constipation

Children vary considerably in how often they need to pass stools. A child who usually goes once or twice a day could be constipated when he has not passed a stool for two days. Yet his friend who usually goes every two days would not be having any trouble at this point.

The signs of constipation are:

- A child has pain on trying to pass stools. This pain can make a child resistant to going and the holding back makes matters worse.
- Children show signs of straining and complaining that they cannot ‘go’.
- Sometimes a child experiences ‘overflow’ when more liquid stools leak out around a hard mass that cannot be expelled. Without careful observation, adults may assume wrongly that the problem is diarrhoea.

Constipation is rare in breast fed babies but can occur when bottle fed babies need water between feeds. Children can get constipated because their diet is low on fresh fruit, vegetables and enough liquids. Children also need enough fibre in their diet because the cellulose in fibre holds water in the stools and makes them easier to pass. But children should not have too much fibre (see page 82).

When children are constipated you need to take action, in partnership with their parents:

- Conversation between adults can be important to establish what is happening. For a while everyone may assume the child is passing stools when going to the toilet elsewhere.
- Make this a discreet conversation since children usually do not appreciate their toileting habits being discussed in open conversation.



You can also have a private conversation with a child.

- Constipation sometimes develops because a child has become very anxious over toilet training. The child may be able to express something of her worries.
- Older children in school will sometimes tell you about problems with the toilets. They may be reluctant to use the facility because toilets are poorly cleaned or smelly. Toilets are also sometimes the location for bullying or maybe other children barge in and disturb their peers.

You need to tackle any problems with the environment or other children as well as a specific problem for this child.

- Make any sensible adjustments to a child's diet now and for later. Encourage the child to drink regularly: water, milk or fruit juice. Fresh and pureed fruit, like grapes, apricots or prunes, can help.
- Express sympathy for the child's predicament and encourage taking time on the toilet.
- In a group setting, ensure that other practitioners do not nag the child.
- Discourage straining and pushing, since this can cause anal fissures, tiny splits that can become infected and sore.
- Sometimes it helps if children rock on the toilet as they push, but gently. Breathing out as they push can also help, if children can manage this technique. None of these suggestions should be pursued too vigorously by a child.
- Reassure children that they and you can take steps to help avoid constipation returning.

It is unwise to give a child laxatives as a first step and certainly not as a regular solution. Children's bowels become dependent on the laxative. If children have repeated problems with constipation, then their parents should take them to see their doctor.

Diarrhoea

The consistency of children's stools will depend on their diet: food and drink intake. Sometimes children have a bout of diarrhoea as a direct consequence of over indulgence in a food or as a reaction to a new food.

However, diarrhoea should be taken seriously and regarded as a symptom to watch if you cannot explain it by the child having taken a large amount of fruit juice or fresh fruit.

- Diarrhoea can be a symptom of specific illnesses (see page 135).
- It should be treated since children, especially babies and toddlers, can become dehydrated quickly.
- Give children plenty of fluid and watch out for any other symptoms.
- Be sympathetic to children who are toilet trained and have had an accident as a result of their condition. They will be upset and embarrassed. Talk discreetly with their parents about what has happened.

Low urine

Again children vary as to how much they drink and that will affect their urine. However, children's urine should be pale yellow and should not smell unpleasant when fresh. Dark coloured urine, a smell or very infrequent passing of urine could be a sign of illness, including dehydration.

Getting dry at night

If you work in an early years setting, getting children to be dry at night will not be a task you cover, except in terms of advice if parents ask. If you work as a nanny, you may be involved in this second part to toilet training.

There is no point in trying for dry nights until children are fully reliable in the daytime. Then, if a child has a series of dry nappies at night, it is probably time to try without the night-time nappy. Alternatively, if the months are passing, you may take the chance and remove her nappy.

- It is important to talk with children about what happens next and that you should be ready for some wet beds. Much like daytime training, getting dry at night varies considerably between children, even in the same family.
- Adults need to be consistently encouraging: to be pleased with children about dry beds and do not look irritated about wet ones.
- Some children will have dry beds because they wake and use a pot in their room or wake an adult to take them to the toilet.
- Some children manage but only if their parent or other carer 'lifts' them and takes them to the toilet before adult bedtime. Every couple of months, you need to stop the lifting and see what happens.

Many children manage to become dry at night between three and five years old, some with the support of 'lifting' for a matter of months. However, there is a substantial minority of children of school age who have not yet managed this task. You may need to reassure parents of a five, six or seven year old that many other children are still not dry at night at this age and specialists do not regard children as late developers over bed wetting until seven or eight years of age.

Activity

The Enuresis Resource and Information Centre (ERIC) has experience in offering practical advice including leaflets written for children as well as their parents. ERIC can be contacted at 34 Old School House, Britannia Road, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 8DB tel: 0117 960 3060 email: info@eric.org.uk website: www.eric.org.uk The website has sections that are accessible for children and teenagers.

- Use the website and any other information that you follow up to build your understanding of how children can be helped when toilet training has been especially difficult or children have regressed, perhaps because of emotional distress.
- Write up your findings and make a short presentation to colleagues.

Key skills links: IT2.1–3

Older disabled children

Some children will have physical disabilities that mean it will be much harder for them to become toilet trained. For a number of children their disability means that, with the best will in the world, their body is never going to manage this kind of physical control. If continence continues to be an issue with older children, then they need respectful support and consideration for their dignity.



- When children cannot become toilet trained, they will need proper continence pads. They will not want these items called 'nappies', because young children have those.
- You will need an area where older children can be changed with privacy and attention to their personal dignity.
- Make sure that any toiletries, decorations to the room or changing mats are appropriate for an older child. Where possible, involve the child in making choices about illustrations or styles of equipment.

Progress check

- 1 Give four reasons why early years practitioners need to value care routines and caring for children.
- 2 What are the risks if practitioners hold back on close contact with and touching children?
- 3 Use one daily routine to explain how children's involvement supports other areas of their learning.
- 4 Explain three ways in which you might need to adjust help with self reliance for disabled children.
- 5 Describe the ways in which children of three or four years could share in their own care.
- 6 Give two examples of how children might need extra attention for their skin care.
- 7 What are the main signs that suggest a child could be ready for toilet training?



3

Promoting health and well being through food and mealtimes

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- plan a well balanced diet for children and help to establish healthy eating habits
- understand and support diversity in diet for children from a range of different cultural backgrounds
- help children learn through mealtimes and food preparation
- support children in good care of their teeth.

Introduction

Food matters to children and happy mealtimes can promote their physical health but also their sense of involvement with the daily routines and warm communication with adults and other children. A balanced diet for food and drink is essential for the health of babies, toddlers and children and it is also the opportunity to establish good habits for later life and protect children's teeth. Adults carry most of the responsibility for offering and encouraging a good diet but children can be enthusiastic partners in food appreciation and preparation.

Your role as an early years practitioner is to provide good quality care to children but you can also promote their learning and sense of personal satisfaction in the skills of self reliance. This chapter, together with Chapters 2 and 4, will help you to understand your role in this important area.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 3, 10

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C1, C8

Level 3: C2, M8

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 6

A well balanced diet for children

As a responsible adult, it is up to you to organise children's food and drink intake so that over the days the children have a well balanced diet. You are also responsible for helping children to develop healthy eating habits.

Why is food important?

Food matters because:

- A well balanced diet is essential for good health, energy levels and to fuel all the growing that children have to do.
- Diet also affects children's teeth.
- If children do not have enough food or a very poor diet, they can be tired, lethargic and unable to enjoy the day.
- Good diet supports children in resisting illness and recovering more swiftly after being ill.

Childhood is the best time to establish good eating habits in terms of what and how children eat.

- An enthusiasm for good food is likely to last, as are habits of eating plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Children can learn about feeling hungry, feeling full and enjoying their food. Some of the later problems for children who are overweight seem to arise from constant snacking rather than proper meals.
- Children can enjoy what they eat and learn to savour taste, texture and smell. You can share these sensations with children, at the actual mealtime and smelling the food as it is about to arrive.
- Mealtimes are also a good opportunity for children to learn social skills: enjoying a relaxed conversation as well as eating, helping others with dishing up and using physical and intellectual skills applied to laying the table and clearing up afterwards.
- Food and enjoyable mealtimes are important to children. Several consultation projects have shown that children spontaneously mention 'nice food' as part of what they like at nursery and they recall special mealtimes like picnics with affection.
- Food and eating are part of a child's identity within the family. When children eat home-cooked food, meals are part of the cultural tradition for any family. In some families, special meals are part of the family faith or shared traditions of this individual family.

Activity

Explore ways to demonstrate the importance of food and mealtimes for children.

- Make a visual display with illustrations and photos to share the ideas in this section with colleagues and parents.
- Add children's drawings if they would like to contribute.
- Add some simple written captions to show the possibilities.
- Share your idea with colleagues.

Key skills link: C2.3 C2.1a

You will find it difficult, if not impossible, to balance a child's overall diet unless you have clear meal and snack times. Children need an intake of food and drink spread throughout their day. The usual pattern is three meals: at the beginning of the day, around midday and towards late afternoon or early evening. Children will vary in how much they eat and some also welcome a drink or a small snack at mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Your setting needs some sit-down mealtimes but there can be flexibility about drink and snack times (see the example on page 97).

A well balanced diet works together with healthy physical exercise of children (see Chapter 10). Children who eat well have the energy they need to dash about as well as concentrate on their play. The enjoyable physical activity burns up the calories, as well as strengthening bone and muscles, and leaves children hungry for the next meal.

To think about

With a group of colleagues or fellow students exchange memories about food and mealtimes from your own childhood. This discussion may need to be sensitive if anyone has unhappy memories.

- What were your favourite meals at home and at school (not everybody hates school dinners)?
- What do you recall about mealtimes: did you have sit-down meals with your family, were you expected to finish everything on your plate, how important were table manners?
- Did you help with food shopping, meal preparation or laying the table?

Consider the range of experiences in the group and what you therefore bring to your time with the children.

- For instance, if money was short in your family, it may be hard for you now to tolerate children who appear 'fussy' about good food.
- On the other hand, you may be keen that you never turn into the fearsome dinner lady who made you eat that disgusting liver stew.
- Pull out the main points to guide your good practice now that you are the adult at the meal table.

- How could you resolve your firm feelings about food and promote happy mealtimes within your work?

Key skills links: C2/3.1a Ps2/3.1

A healthy diet

Food is an area where there is no shortage of advice from the media and advertising industry. Newspapers and magazines regularly seem to pronounce new rules about diet or challenge previous guidelines. The advertising and packaging of convenience foods and drinks is also aimed at making consumers accept that this food is ideal for healthy eating or better at delivering necessary nutrients than a rival food.

Despite all the media headlines on diet, in reality, the basic issues are much as they have been for a long time:

- Are children eating an adequate amount of food and drinking enough liquid in total – not too much and not too little?
- Are children eating and drinking a healthy balance between different kinds of food and drink?



Figure 3.1

Mealtimes can be enjoyable, social occasions

To think about

It is important that the messages you give to children are balanced, like their diet.

- There are few, if any, foods that are absolutely good or bad. The problems arise from unbalanced diets and using too much processed and convenience foods, rather than cooking from fresh ingredients.
- For example, carrots are a nutritious food, but you will be ill if you eat them in ludicrous quantities and instead of other foods.
- Chips are not 'bad' or 'unhealthy' as a food. Crisp and tasty chips are enjoyable for children (and adults!) to eat from time to time. But chips should not be eaten every day, nor be the only way children experience that nutritionally useful vegetable, the potato.
- Consider with colleagues the words that you use to help children understand about healthy eating. Do you need to change some of your phrases?

Key skills link: C2/3.1a PS2/3.1

Do you go organic?

Some early years settings and family homes will use organic produce. As an early years practitioner you will fit in with the established pattern. This chapter is not recommending that children should all be fed organic food, because the quality varies depending on the source of food. Some of the marketing claims about 'better taste' or 'free of chemicals' have been very misleading. 'Organic' produce has now also spread into snack food but organic popcorn should no more form a major part of a child's diet than non-organic!

Hygiene and food preparation

A healthy diet is promoted when, over the days, children's food intake includes enough from all the different food groups (see page 81). A well balanced diet is also promoted through good practice in the preparation and cooking of food. If you work in a group setting, then the cook may take responsibility for meal preparation. However, you will ideally do some food preparation and cooking with the children. If you work as a nanny or childminder, you will do the meal planning and cooking.

- Use fresh ingredients as often as you can. Healthy diets have freshly cooked food in preference to processed convenience foods.
- Children, and adults, benefit from eating fresh fruit, salad and some vegetables in their raw state, not always cooked.

Most incidents of food poisoning are caused by people breaking basic rules of kitchen hygiene and food handling.

- Cooked food that has not all been used needs to be allowed to cool swiftly and then placed in the fridge or freezer as appropriate.
- Food needs to be stored with care and used before the 'use by' date.
- Only store cooked food that is left untouched in the cooking or serving dish. Do not store leftover meals from plates or bowls, because once saliva has mixed with food it starts the digestive process.

- Defrost food properly when it is then taken out of the freezer.
- Re-warm only once and then ensure that food is thoroughly heated to 'piping hot'. If necessary, let it cool a little before the children start.
- Defrosted or partially defrosted food should now be used, not re-frozen.

Supermarkets promote a range of anti-bacterial products for supporting hygiene in the kitchen. You need good standards of cleanliness in the kitchen, but using anti-bacterial products will not correct the situation when basic rules are broken.

- Wash your hands before cooking and food preparation. Wash your hands again if you stop to go to the toilet yourself or to change a child.
- Use a different knife and cutting board for raw meat and poultry than for other foods. Or else wash the items thoroughly before re-use.
- In a fridge, raw meat or poultry should be covered and placed on the lowest shelf, never allowed to drip over other foods.
- In a family home with pets you should have separate bowls and spoons for dealing with the animals' food. If you store part-used tins of pet food in the fridge, keep them well covered and away from the family food.

Balanced drink and food

Drinks

Children need liquid from different sources:

- *Water*: tap or filtered, depending on what you use in the setting or family home. Spring and bottled waters may have too much sodium (salt) for babies or very young children.
- *Milk*: once babies are a year old they can drink cow's milk or soya if children cannot have dairy produce. Children need the nutrients from whole milk. They should certainly drink this until they are at least two years old. They can move onto semi-skimmed if they prefer the taste. But in a well balanced diet there is no reason why children should not continue to drink whole milk if that is what they enjoy. Skimmed milk is not suitable for children.
- Water and milk can be supplemented by *fruit* or *vegetable juices*. Dilute the drinks for younger children. However, do not overdo the fruit juice, since teeth do not distinguish between natural sugars in juice and added sugar in squashes.

Children do not need squashes, fortified fruit drinks, carbonated drinks or colas. An occasional drink of squash or cola will not unbalance a healthy diet but their teeth are under threat when these drinks form much of their liquid intake. Sugary drinks are especially risky when they are put into bottles for very young children or when young children have cartons with straws and they swish the drink around in their mouth for some time.

Food groups

Menus should include foods each day from each of the four basic food groups. Children, like adults, need variety in their diet, so it is wise to draw from all the possibilities within each group. Some foods, like cheese or beans, fit into more than one group because of the blend of nutrients they contain.

Carbohydrates form a food group that occurs as sugars and starches. Some foods are also a useful source of fibre – but see the comment below about children and fibre. Children gain carbohydrates from:

- all the different kinds of leavened bread and rolls (bread that has yeast to

make it rise). Children can become enthusiastic about the taste of proper bread when they experience more than the pre-sliced variety

- different kinds of unleavened bread (that remains flat), like chapatis, puris or pitta bread
- cereals, beans and lentils
- dishes made from maize, millet and cornmeal
- the many different kinds of pasta and noodles
- plantains and green bananas
- potatoes – that can be served in so many different ways
- rice
- sweet potatoes.

Children should not be given extra fibre and the high-fibre diets promoted for adults are unhealthy for children. Young children's digestive systems are not yet well equipped to process fibre and any excess fibre can also interfere with their body's absorption of zinc and iron.

Children need the sugar sources of carbohydrates and their diet is unbalanced if adults try to remove this food entirely. The problem in unbalanced diets, for adults as well as children, is when this source of carbohydrate is too dominant.

- Sugar is present naturally in many fruits, both fresh and dried. Sugar, or other sources like honey, is an ingredient in puddings and cakes.
- The problems arise when sweet foods dominate the menu or have unbalanced a child's diet because of excessive consumption of confectionery and biscuits, perhaps as regular 'treats' or filling up between meals.
- Children do not need the added sugars that are in ready made juice and carbonated drinks or in many shop-bought biscuits and cakes. Some convenience foods claim to be reduced or low sugar, but they often have artificial sweetener, otherwise the product has no taste.

Children need *protein* and this food group can be found in two broad types. Some foods provide protein in a form that can be fully used by the body even when the food is eaten by itself. These are called 'complete proteins' and sometimes 'first class proteins'. These foods include:

- milk and cheese
- eggs
- fish
- meat
- poultry.

With the exception of soya beans, the plant proteins are 'incomplete proteins'. They are sometimes called 'second class proteins', but this term can be misleading and causes non-vegetarians to claim that children must have meat in order to be healthy. The plant proteins just need to be eaten in combination to provide the completeness within each meal. Choose from:

- cereals
- chickpeas
- lentils
- nuts – cut up very finely for nut roast or rissoles, do not give them loose to young children, especially the under threes (see also page 96)
- beans.

These foods work in combinations that make ordinary meals. Baked beans on toast is a good example in which the cereal in the bread and the beans combine to give a complete protein. Some grated and melted cheese on top makes a very nutritious child meal or adult snack. Other examples include breakfast cereals with milk, millet milk pudding, rice mixed with lentils (and obviously other ingredients like vegetables if you wish), bread with cheese or hummus (made with chickpeas and sesame seeds).

You can try textured vegetable proteins, such as Quorn, as an alternative to meat. But children from vegetarian families may not find this food palatable, especially if it is made to look like a meat or poultry dish.

The food group of *fats* is equally necessary. Children need this source of nutrition. The fats that are necessary for a balanced diet have been confused with excessive use of fat in cooking or being 'too fat'. There is nothing 'bad' about fats as a nutrient and this food group is as important as the other three groups. Children can get the fats they need from:

- lean meat and poultry
- dairy produce including cheese, milk, yoghurt and fromage frais
- nuts (but not loose for children)
- fats like butter and margarine as ingredients in cakes, biscuits and pastries.

Of course, children's diets can become unbalanced if any of these foods come to dominate their diet, for instance, if children are allowed to fill up on biscuits or cakes between meals and then have little appetite for the other foods. Do not use low- or no-fat products for children, they need the nutrients. Also the very low-fat products often have very little taste and will make it harder for you to encourage young children to enjoy their food. Obviously, you do not load them up foolishly with fats:

- cut the excess fat from meat
- use yoghurt or fromage frais for toppings rather than cream
- use vegetable oils for cooking rather than animal fats like lard and this will mean your menus are suitable for vegetarian children too
- watch out for the hidden fats that enter a child's diet with the regular eating of crisps and biscuits.

Some of the advice over the last 10–15 years about adult diet will be very inappropriate if applied to children. Unlike fully grown adults, children's diet has to fuel their growing as well as maintain their general health. Babies and children need three to four times as many calories per day in proportion to their body size, in comparison with adults. Children also have different nutritional requirements from adults because their bodies work differently.

The low-fat diets generally promoted for adult are unhealthy for children because they need the fat content, for instance from full and not skimmed milk. Children can be missing vital nutrients and be malnourished amidst plenty of food. Children's bodies also seem to be designed to use fat more efficiently than adults are. See page 89 for what to do if children are overweight.

There are a wide range of *vitamins* and *minerals* that children need in their diet, often in small amounts. They will get a balanced diet if they eat a range of fruit, vegetables and salads. Children can enjoy a wide range when they are introduced to different foods and these are presented in an attractive way. Children will get the best from these foods when they eat as much as possible in its raw state (a few foods have to be cooked). Fruit, carrots, peas, salad vegetables, white cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli can all be eaten raw.



Figure 3.2

The nursery cook is an important member of your team

When you cook fruit or vegetables many of the vitamins and minerals are reduced or end up in the cooking water. It is therefore best to cook lightly by steaming or microwaving, so that minimum liquid is needed and wherever possible use the water as juice or to make a sauce or gravy. Go easy on added salt or sugar and avoid practices like adding bicarbonate of soda to keep the colour of vegetables because it destroys the vitamin C.

Activity

- Draft a sample menu for a week to suit a group of two to five year olds. Look at your draft and identify the sources of the four food groups in the meals and snacks you have chosen.
- Make any adjustments to balance the diet over a week.
- Now double check whether you would need to make some further adjustments if some of the children were vegetarian (see page 93).
- Finalise your menu.
- Discuss other draft menus with your colleagues and gather some ideas about how you would make the meals and snacks attractive and appetising to the children.

Key skills link: C2.3 C2.1a

Consequences of dietary deficiencies

If children eat a well balanced diet of raw and freshly cooked food, they should not have nutritional deficiencies. Problems can arise when children:

- are fed a diet heavy in processed and convenience meals
- have become very restricted in what they are prepared to eat
- have allergies or a health condition that seriously limits their range of possible foods
- share a family diet that has removed many kinds of foods. A vegan diet needs very careful balancing for children (see page 94).

You should talk with parents, if you are concerned about a child's health linked with their diet. Some possibilities include:

- Children may develop iron-deficiency anaemia, or be borderline, if their diet does not include sufficient sources of iron. Children may be tired and listless, get out of breath easily and have a lowered resistance to infection. If children eat meat, then good sources of iron include the red meats, liver and kidney. Non-meat sources of iron are egg yolks, peas, pulses, chocolate, bran and wheatgerm, parsley, some dried fruits and shellfish. Watch out for an excessive milk intake by children, because milk is low in iron and a quantity of drink before food makes children feel full.
- Calcium deficiency can lead to reduced growth, badly formed teeth and rickets (a disease in which children's bones do not harden properly). Vitamin D deficiency also puts children at risk from rickets because this vitamin helps the absorption of calcium. Children obtain calcium from milk, cheese, sardines and bread. Vitamin D is available from dairy products and oily fish and the effects of sunlight on the oils in our skin (see page 59).



- Vitamin C deficiency can lead to depression, low resistance to infection, poor skin and slow healing of cuts and scrapes. Our bodies cannot store vitamin C, so children need a daily intake from fruit and vegetables: fresh and ideally eaten raw when appropriate. Some vitamin C is lost as soon as you cut the food and more is lost in the heat of cooking.

Of course children who are tired or prone to infection are not necessarily having an unbalanced diet. Anaemia, for instance, can be a warning sign of leukaemia or sickle cell anaemia (see page 520).

Vitamin supplements

Manufacturers try every trick in the book to persuade parents and carers that their drink or food product has crucial added vitamins or that a sugary drink is somehow 'good' for the development of children's teeth.

- If children have a well balanced diet, they will get all their vitamins from meals. They do not need 'vitamin-enriched' drink or food.
- If children have nutritional deficiencies (see above), then these need to be addressed directly through meals that provide the missing vitamins or minerals.
- There is some concern now from the United States that children can experience a potential overdose of some nutrients because of the ploy of adding them to non-essential products in order to persuade parents or carers to purchase.

There are many vitamin supplements on the market but as a general rule vitamins are best absorbed through meals. The process is not entirely understood, but vitamin pills do not seem to offer an equivalent level of nutrition as the same vitamins eaten as food.

- You should not give a child any supplement without consultation with their parents.
- Some babies or children may take a supplement but as they get older a balanced diet should offer what they need. Vitamins are a supplement, an addition, to a healthy diet; they do not solve the problems of an unbalanced diet for children.
- If children do have vitamin or mineral supplements, you must always use products that are suitable for their age, follow the instructions and never exceed the suggested dose.
- It is possible to overdose on some vitamins or minerals, for example vitamins A and D, that are stored in the body. Excessive amounts of some nutrients can interfere with the effective digestion of other important food groups.
- A well balanced diet is key. It is not the case that, because something is healthy in small amounts, it must be even healthier in larger amounts!

When children are ill

As you will be aware yourself, one consequence of illness can be a reduced interest in food. Healthy children are more likely to relish their food when it is attractively presented and mealtimes are happy occasions (see page 97). When a child feels ill or is recovering, it is doubly important that their interest is encouraged:

- Offer small helpings of what you know the child likes, from a range of nutritional foods.

- Present it attractively and help the child to eat and drink if they need this support.
- If children find it hard to chew or to swallow, then choose more mushy or liquid foods or cut up food very small.
- Talk with children about what they would like. For instance, home made soups can be very nutritious and are an easy way to get food in when you feel ill.
- Consult with parents, who will in turn talk with the family GP, about whether this is an occasion when children would benefit from a vitamin and mineral supplement.

Do you need to provide 'children's food'?

At different times over the past decades the prevailing advice has been that children need very different food to adults. Some of their nutritional requirements are different from adults (see page 83) but not so dramatically that children require completely different meals.

The idea of 'traditional children's food' that now prevails has been created by fast food outlets and convenience food manufacturers. Non-vegetarian children can learn to relish fish or chicken in different meals; it does not have to be fish fingers and chicken nuggets all the time, if at all. Children develop an enthusiasm for pasta, mixed with different other ingredients. It does not have to come in 'fun' shapes or lurid colours.

The best approach is to give young children experience of the kind of food eaten by adults, in smaller portions as appropriate and cut up smaller if necessary. Food should be presented in an attractive way and children encouraged to dish up for themselves, at least sometimes. If they are not keen on a food, then try again another time but do not insist if children's opinion does not change.

Partnership with parents

A conversation with parents about what their children like to eat, any known allergies and details of the family diet should be part of your early information gathering about a family whose child is about to join your setting. In some cases you may need to have a further conversation about a child's diet, perhaps because you are unsure what parents would prefer. If you work with slightly older children, in primary school, a breakfast or after school club, you will be able to talk over the details with the children themselves.

Scenario

The nursery and reception class team of St Jude's Primary School have been planning a topic for the children around healthy eating and wish to work in partnership with parents about promoting good habits for the future.

The team has found a draft policy and letter for parents that was used by another local school. But, within a team discussion, Pam and Maryam start to question what the other school has written. For instance, the food policy has a sentence that reads, 'We provide a mixture of traditional children's fare such as fish fingers, chips and beans and exotic Caribbean chicken with rice and peas'. As Pam points out, why are fish fingers described as traditional and Caribbean chicken and peas is no more exotic than fish and chips, if it is part of the family's usual diet.



Questions

- 1 Discuss with colleagues the reasons that the policy statement is unhelpful. How might the St Jude's team rework the ideas to show how they promote a range of foods.
- 2 In what ways have you encountered views about what is 'normal' food and 'exotic' or what is suitable food for children?
- 3 Be pleased about good practice in your setting and make some specific plans for improvements, even minor.

Key skills link: C2/3.1a LP2/3.1–3 WO2/3.1–3

There will be always be some variety in the diet of children in a group. Children have likes and dislikes in food. It is good practice to encourage them to try new foods and extend their eating habits but would never be appropriate to insist. However, you may be working in an area that is ethnically very diverse and this variety will be reflected in family diets. There are some general guidelines on page 95 but some broader issues can arise whatever the mix of your local area:

- If the children come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (see page 103), it can be complex to find menus that will suit everyone. It is possible to build in some variations but, if there are many different meat preferences, it can often be easier to offer interesting menus built around fish and vegetarian meals.
- If a family diet is unusual to you or the nursery cook, then ask parents for some recipes and perhaps to visit the nursery and demonstrate some cooking. Bear in mind that every ethnic group includes good and bad or unenthusiastic cooks. So do not assume that a less familiar cuisine is unpalatable. You may just be unlucky that this parent cannot cook!
- A genuinely strict diet or firm guidelines about food preparation may be hard to organise. So talk with parents and see if they would be willing to send their child's food in to the nursery. For instance, it simply is not possible to prepare and cook proper kosher food in a non-kosher kitchen. Children from Jewish families who follow strict dietary rules will probably go to a Jewish nursery, but this is not always an option.
- If children have allergies to relatively common ingredients, such as gluten in flour, then parents will usually be happy to send in special biscuits or cakes.

To think about

Some nurseries have a healthy eating policy and part of the written document can be suggestions for what parents can send in for special occasions such as birthdays or leaving parties.

Parents should then be left with some choice about what to bring into the setting. For instance, if you are hoping for a range of foods from families of different ethnic groups, there should be no expectation that Teja's Mum has to send in some samosas because they are an Indian family. Perhaps Teja's Mum would rather bake a cake.

- Discuss with your colleagues in what ways working to involve parents could be restrictive.

- What assumptions may need to be aired if parents are to have a proper choice?
- If Teja's Mum is asked to bring in 'traditional Indian food' why is Gareth's Dad not asked to bring in some 'traditional English food' and what is this?
- Suggest some improvements for practice in your own setting.

Key skills link: C2/3.1a PS2/3.1 WO2/3.1–3

Scenario

Greenholt Pre-school have recently extended their service so that some children stay for the whole day and have lunch at the pre-school. Now that children have a meal rather than snacks and a drink, it has become even more important that the pre-school team communicates clearly about different family eating patterns and any allergies. They have therefore developed their child records to keep more information about food and drink and made simple reminder sheets that go on the board.

Marjorie and Trisha summarise any conversation with a child's parent by written notes in the child's personal file. For example, they have written:

- Lottie is allergic to cow's milk. No cheese, yoghurt, milk puddings or custard. Mrs Pierce will bring in Lottie's soya milk.
- Michael and his family do not eat any pork.
- They have also drafted brief reminders for the board of 'no pork for Michael', 'give Lottie her soya milk' or 'Angela has her special biscuits'.

Questions

- 1 Good practice is to be aware of ingredients in meals. For instance, Michael does not eat pork, so what foods will you need to check for him and what alternatives could you offer?
- 2 What ways can you identify that you could alert Michael not to eat without making him feel left out?
- 3 Discuss possibilities with your colleagues – identifying good and less good practice in what could be said and how.
- 4 Make some suggestions for improvements in your own practice.

Key skills link: C2/3.1a LP2/3.1–3 WO2/3.1–3

Tips for practice

You can help young children to develop good eating habits and enjoyment of food in an early years setting or family home.

- Children should eat most of their food at mealtimes.
- Avoid regular use of fill-up snacks or letting children graze on anything throughout the day.
- Mealtimes should be focused yet social. It is a time for everyone to eat but the meal can still be friendly.
- Set a good example about eating.
- Set boundaries about eating without getting unduly fierce. You can walk a firm but friendly middle course between letting children eat what and when they want and turning yourself into the food ogre.
- Help children, especially younger ones to focus on food and avoid distractions.

Children who are overweight

It is unlikely that children will get overweight if they develop good habits about what they eat and drink, as outlined in this chapter and if they are allowed to run about as children normally wish. Food and exercise work in a healthy partnership.

Toddlers are naturally rounded and some are quite chubby but they grow into a more child like shape. Health practitioners can judge whether a child is overweight



Figure 3.3 Children watch your face as well as listening to your words

by the growth charts but a child who is genuinely overweight can be judged by looking at her or him. Children should not normally have rolls of fat, especially around the thighs and abdomen, nor should they have to have clothes that are two or three age sizes larger because the items will not do up around their waist or wrists.

There is an increasing problem with obesity in children in the western world, including especially the United States. Obesity is defined as weighing at least 20 per cent heavier than the recommended body weight for height. The problem seems to have two closely related causes:

- Children are allowed to develop poor eating habits, with an excessive use of convenience foods, snacks like different kinds of crisps, high sugar drinks and sweets.
- Poor diet is often then combined with a severe lack of physical exercise and far too many hours of passive activity watching television or playing computer games.

Obesity in childhood is a serious issue, not only because obese children grow into obese adults, with the related health risks. Children who are very overweight are often also unhappy about their size and shape and may be bullied by other children. Serious obesity and the often related lack of physical exercise also brings the risk of health problems that are more usually associated with middle age: lack of muscle and bone strength, respiratory problems and the appearance of type 2 diabetes that usually affects adults over 50 years of age (see page 520).

Tips for practice

Unless advised by their doctor, you would not usually put children who are overweight on a slimming diet to lose weight.

- The best approach is steadily to change children's eating habits and increase their level of enjoyable physical activity.
- Children have plenty of growing to do. If you focus on mealtimes, cut out snacks and severely limit sweets and sweetened drinks, they will move into a more appropriate weight for their height.
- There needs to be full cooperation between the family and an early years practitioner, whether you are working as a nanny with the family or children attend your nursery.
- You are less likely to be successful if the good eating habits that you encourage are undermined by parents, or grandparents, who let the children eat sweets and drink cola.

A rare condition, Prader-Willi syndrome, can affect children's eating patterns. The syndrome is a genetic disorder that, amongst other symptoms, causes a chronic feeling of hunger, so that children will continue to eat, unless firmly guided by adults. The syndrome is unusual, but it is worth considering if children eat excessively and there is no other likely explanation, such as eating as a source of emotional comfort or a family pattern of substantial eating.



Scenario

Dresden Road Nursery School has developed a range of services (see the scenario on page 23) and has positive partnership with parents. Recently they have worked with two families whose children were significantly overweight for their age. This work has made the team think about their more general approach to food and weight, for adults as well as children.

- The two children who were genuinely overweight had become aware that they had a 'problem'. The team and the children's parents needed to boost the children's confidence since they did feel low, as well as address eating habits and exercise.
- The team was also provoked to think about setting a good example in their own eating patterns and in obvious enjoyment of physical activity.
- Jessica pointed out that children will probably be confused if they hear adults (parents or early years practitioners) talking at length about being 'fat' (the adults) and needing to diet. This situation has arisen in the parents' group and once or twice with staff.
- The team discussed how they might shift to talking in front of the children in more positive ways related to developing good eating habits. For example that 'I'd like another piece of fruit' rather than 'I'd better not have a helping of steamed pudding'.

Questions

- 1 Consider some practical applications to your own work, both for support of children and adult behaviour and conversation.

Key skills links: LP2.1

Refusal to eat and faltering growth

Sometimes the problem is one of children not eating enough. Understandably, adults can become anxious about this situation and the efforts to get children to eat, or to eat more than they wish, can worsen the situation. If children's limited eating goes on for some time, then they can become tired or recover less well from illness or ordinary childhood scrapes. If they fail to put on weight, the children may be said to have **faltering growth**, the term now used instead of 'failure to thrive'.

The majority of children with faltering growth are in caring family homes; they are not being neglected (see page 568). What has usually happened is that a baby, toddler or child has for some reason become hard to feed or resistant to eating much at mealtimes. There is sometimes a related, temporary health or family problem that may seem to explain what has happened, but often there is not.

More usually, the parents, or other carers, have become anxious or have been told by the health visitor or clinic that they must get more calories into the child. Sometimes this direction by medical professionals is accompanied by some sensible advice, but sometimes there are no helpful hints, only a sense of pressure. The continued weighing of the child raises anxieties even further and parents resort to tactics that make food and mealtimes even more stressful. A vicious circle has then been established.

Key term

Faltering growth when babies and children do not put on weight and may also appear in poor health, for no obvious reason. The condition used to be called failure to thrive

A positive way forward for you as carer, or to advise to parents is as follows:

- Establish proper mealtimes if the child has been grazing. Anxious parents sometimes keep offering food or leaving meals around in the hope that the child will eat. Children then get confused between mealtime and playtime and adults have little idea of what children have actually eaten in total.
- A discrete food diary may sometimes help and be a way of tracking improvement.
- Sit with children and make mealtimes a social occasion but not extraordinarily drawn out. Ensure that all the food and drink offered is nutritious and ideally take at least some meals with the child.
- Give young children, or let older ones, serve themselves a small helping. Support them in eating if they need. They can have a second helping if they want.
- Avoid complex rituals to try to persuade a child to eat but offer sensible flexibility. For instance, sandwiches can taste nicer with the crusts off or children really may like their apple peeled and sliced.
- Avoid giving attention for refusal to eat or pushing food around on the plate. Keep calm and avoid nagging – not easy for parents or carers who have become worried!
- Give simple encouragement when a child has eaten – mainly at the end of the mealtime, not for every spoonful. Say something like, ‘Would you like some more fish pie? (When the child has indicated they would.) Yes, I thought that was tasty as well.’ Alternatively, if you are the cook, perhaps, ‘It’s better with more cheese on top, isn’t it?’ You could also simply comment, ‘Well done, you had a good lunch’ or ‘Looks like you enjoyed the chicken and rice.’
- If children do not eat much, then after a reasonable mealtime, call a halt. Say something like, ‘Are you finished then? Alright, the next meal is teatime’. If children complain later, ‘I’m hungry’, say simply, ‘I’m sorry you weren’t in the mood for food at lunch. There will be plenty at tea’. Avoid the temptation to let them fill up in between mealtimes.
- As a child becomes more enthusiastic or cooperative about food, then involve them in plans for meals and choices.

Finding out more

The Children’s Society has published a free booklet *My child still won’t eat* that offers advice to parents. Download from www.the-childrens-society.org.uk or call 0845 600 4400 to request a copy. *When feeding fails* by Angela Underdown can be purchased from the Children’s Society.

Supporting diversity in diet

All around the world a family’s diet is influenced by cultural tradition and any religious considerations, as well as by what food is easily available locally. Your own view of a ‘normal’ diet will have been influenced by your own upbringing.

- Part of your professional development is to become more aware of the variety in different social and ethnic groups: both in your local area and in the UK as a whole.
- You certainly should not talk about ‘restricted’ diets when you actually mean that a child or family does not eat the same foods as you do. A genuinely restricted diet is when a child, for reasons of allergy or ill health, cannot follow the family pattern of eating.
- Also it is better to avoid the weird phrase ‘ethnic food’. Everybody belongs to an ethnic group, so the phrase has to apply to every possible world cuisine. Fish and chips or steak and kidney pie is therefore ‘ethnic food’ just as much as tandoori chicken or couscous. The phrase is used inappropriately to apply to food other than the diet that the speaker regards as normal.

To think about

You will bring expectations about a ‘normal’ diet and mealtime behaviour from your own childhood as well as your current eating habits. To be a responsible early years practitioner, you need to learn about the variety in diet for families in the UK and to address any firm assumptions that you still hold. For instance:

- If you happily eat meat, then you may wonder at first how to achieve a healthy vegetarian diet.
- If your family is Muslim or Jewish, you will find it hard to grasp how anyone could eat meat from pigs.
- If you are a vegetarian, you will have trouble understanding how people can eat dead animals at all.

You need to show respect to the family diets of the children with whom you work, and it is also fair to expect your workplace to provide food that you are able to eat as well.

Discuss the practice issues with your colleagues and plan any changes that could improve your own work.

Key skills links: C3.1a LP2/31–3 WO2/31–3

People who confidently announce, ‘But I eat anything!’ rarely do eat absolutely anything. Families who eat meat as part of their diet do not usually eat happily every possible kind of animal or fish. Some families, of course, avoid particular animals for religious reasons or require that animals be killed in a particular way (see page 95). However, families who have no religious reservations often draw the line at some animals. For instance, English families will probably be outraged at the suggestion that they eat horse, yet this is an item on the menus in parts of mainland Europe. In contrast, some European countries think it very odd to eat lamb: a traditional meat in the UK and Greece.

A vegetarian diet

Strictly speaking, vegetarians will not eat any food that requires the killing of animals, poultry or fish. If you are planning menus for children who are vegetarian,

then you need to get into the habit of checking the ingredients on convenience foods. For instance, some cheaper ice cream contains animal fat and some ready made desserts are set by gelatine, an animal product. You should also use vegetarian cheese, since some cheeses are made with rennet, derived from animals. The use of 'suitable for vegetarian' symbols has made buying easier.

Some families who describe themselves as vegetarians nevertheless eat fish or are not that concerned about hidden ingredients in convenience foods. As with any other practical care issue, you need to check with parents so that you understand what they would like for their child.

A vegan diet

Vegans go further than vegetarians in that they will not eat any animal products, even those that do not require killing the animal. So a vegan family will avoid all dairy produce, eggs and some vegans will not eat honey. A balanced vegan diet needs careful attention, especially if you are not used to menu planning for vegans. For example:

- Vitamin B12 is largely found in animal products. Vegans can get traces of B12 in sea vegetables (edible seaweeds) but children will need a supplement.
- Calcium can be a problem with the loss of dairy produce. Babies and young children who are not yet on a very mixed diet, may need a calcium supplement. Soya bean milk is sometimes fortified with calcium.
- Fat is only present in traces in fruit and vegetables, so vegans need to ensure they get enough fat from other sources, such as all kinds of nuts and soya flour.

Talk with children's parents about how they balance their child's diet. You certainly should not give children nutritional supplements without discussion with the family.

Finding out more

The tremendous array of cookery books include some on vegetarian and vegan cooking. A cookbook may be useful if you work as a nanny or if your early years setting has not really adjusted to diversity in diets. You can also contact:

- The Vegetarian Society, Parkdale, Dunham Road, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 4QG tel: 0161 925 2000 website: www.vegsoc.org They have produced a helpful free booklet *Growing up: preschool vegetarian catering*.
- The Vegan Society tel: 01424 427393 website: www.vegansociety.com

Religious beliefs and diet

All of the major world faiths have some rules about food or food preparation. Every faith includes different sects and families may also vary in how strictly they follow the rules. So, it is not accurate to follow predictions like, 'Surely all Hindus ...'. Also some parents may no longer practise their faith but are more comfortable following the dietary rules in which they were raised. A good guideline for early years practitioners is, 'if in doubt – ask' on a child's diet as with any other aspect of their care. What follows is a general guide.

- Buddhists are sometimes vegetarian, but not always. Some Buddhist sects believe strongly that diet is a personal decision.
- Most Christians do not follow particular rules for their diet, although some make a case against vegetarianism by quoting the Bible. However, a few Christian groups do avoid certain foods, for instance Catholics may avoid meat on Fridays (the day of the death of Christ) and some give up one or two foods for Lent (the forty days leading up to Easter). Families from the Orthodox Church may avoid meat, eggs and milk products for Lent.
- Jehovah's Witnesses require that meat has been bled in the method of slaughter and avoid foods like black pudding because of the blood.
- Mormons avoid black pudding and caffeine in any form, so children should not have cola drinks.
- Some Rastafarians follow a vegetarian diet which is close to vegan – avoiding dairy products. If families eat meat, they will probably avoid pork and shellfish. (The Rastafarian faith is a blend of Biblical teachings and African cultural traditions.)
- Some Hindus are vegetarian, but those who eat meat will avoid any beef and beef products, since cows are regarded as sacred.
- Orthodox Jewish families follow the laws of Kashrut that determine the permitted foods (kosher, meaning allowed) and the method of slaughter. Additionally, meat and dairy products have to be kept completely separate at all stages of food preparation, eating and washing up afterwards. Less strict Jewish families will ask that their children are not given pork in any form, nor shellfish.
- Muslim families avoid pork in any form. As with meals for Jewish children, you have to watch out for unexpected pork products in processed foods. Any meat or poultry must be Halal (meaning lawful) which is produced by the method of slaughter that allows a body to bleed. If you cannot get Halal meat, then children from Muslim families will have to have fish and vegetarian meals.
- Some Sikhs are vegetarian, but those who eat meat will probably avoid beef and pork. Families will want meat from a butcher that has *not* been bled in the Halal or Kosher method.

Fasting

Giving up foods at particular times or fasting for periods is part of religious practice in some faiths. However, you are most likely to encounter fasting if you work with children from Muslim families, who will fast throughout the daylight hours during the weeks of Ramadan. The Islamic year is based on the lunar calendar and so the exact date moves 'earlier' each year in terms of the western calendar. At the time of writing (2002) Ramadan falls from mid-November to mid-December, but it will make its way back to the summer months.

Families are careful about bringing children into the tradition slowly and younger children are not expected to fast. However, if you work in a primary school or after school club, then be aware that children may join the fast for some days or for a few hours within the day.

Food allergies

Some children need to avoid certain foods in order to stay well. You need to talk with parents at the beginning of your working relationship and understand what

Key terms**Food allergies**

when a child or adult becomes ill after eating particular foods or ingredients. The consequences of a food allergy may be mild through to very severe

Anaphylaxis

a severe and sudden allergic reaction to foods or other substances, that can be fatal without a swift injection of adrenaline or other appropriate medication

this means for the child's diet. Some **food allergies** are life threatening, so take seriously what parents say.

Food allergies are caused by an over reaction of the body's immune system. When a child or adult eats a food to which they are allergic, they will become ill quickly. The food, even small traces, may cause skin rashes, very serious stomach upsets or even life threatening reactions. Some children are allergic to egg, wheat, cow's milk, nuts or fish. Milk and egg allergies sometimes pass when children get older, but many allergies last a lifetime.

It was advised on page 82 that younger children, especially the under threes, should not be given whole nuts. Young children do not chew the nuts properly into smaller bits and the nut can get stuck in their throat. However, some children have an extremely serious reaction to nuts, especially peanuts, and some other foods. The term to describe a severe allergic reaction is **anaphylaxis**. An injection of adrenaline can be essential to reverse the reaction and a family should obviously alert you if this is the case. As with any medicines, you would need to know exactly what to do.

Some adverse reactions to food are less obvious and can be difficult for parents to track and demonstrate. Some children seem to have an intolerance of milk, wheat, caffeine, citrus fruits, chocolate, dairy products and food additives including some colourings. The impact includes rashes, stomach upsets, migraine and some behavioural changes such as hyperactivity and aggression.

Early years practitioners should follow parents' requests where possible and be honest if you are struggling.

- If you have difficulty in maintaining a balanced diet for a child, then ask for advice from parents. In an early years setting you could ask parents to send food in with their child.
- A well balanced diet of fresh, non-processed food will deal with many of the food additive issues.

Scenario

The team of Greenholt Pre-school (see also the scenario on page 88) have discussed what is a sensible approach to family diet and children's allergies. They are aware that the local primary school has responded to the problem of nut allergies by removing, or trying to remove, all traces of nuts from school meals. The pre-school team has also listened to irritated parents, whose older children are at the school, and who received a letter from the head insisting that there must be no nut products whatsoever in children's packed lunches.

The Greenholt Pre-school team consider that the primary school has over-reacted but still wonder should they take this route.

Questions

Obviously any team has to take sensible steps to protect children who have food allergies. Discuss this dilemma with colleagues.

- 1 Weigh up what the scope of this problem is.
- 2 What are possible options for good practice?
- 3 What are the likely consequences of the different options, including the school approach of a total ban?

- 4 Overall, what do you judge is the best balanced approach?
- 5 Write up this option as a brief set of guidance notes.

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.3 PS3.1

Learning around food and mealtimes

Food is an important part of the day for children and they look forward to meals when the experience is pleasant. There are plenty of opportunities for learning as a natural part of this routine, when children are involved in social and friendly mealtimes.

Being appreciative about food

Part of helping children to enjoy their food can be expressing appreciation. A number of world faiths have some tradition of giving thanks for food – either at most mealtimes or on specific occasions. Unless your setting has a specific religious affiliation, it will be appropriate to find general ways of expressing thanks. Certainly, there is no justification for insisting on a specifically Christian ‘saying grace’.

It can be pleasant for the nursery cook to be thanked on occasion, not everyday as a habit because that soon does not sound genuine. Children will have favourite meals or puddings or be appreciative that the cook has completed their own cooking of a cake. Encourage the children to say ‘thank you’ or communicate that today’s apple tart was the best ever.

Activity

- Return to the sample menu plan that you developed for the activity on page 84.
- Describe ways in which the children could be involved in making a large wall menu or menu board.
- Take one or two meals from your week’s plan and describe ways in which the children could be involved in the food preparation or serving.
- Write up your project and present to colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1b

Encouraging good eating habits

You can support children towards healthy eating by a positive approach to mealtimes, creating a friendly atmosphere in which the main task is still to eat and drink.

- Mealtimes need to be relaxed. Taking your time at meals can mean that children are able to chat as well as eat and can come back for seconds if they wish. Mealtimes are more relaxed when you value them as times of learning and not just as routines to get done.

- By all means remind children courteously to keep eating or to eat up as far as possible. But definitely avoid nagging and any situation in which a child is told by different adults in succession to 'hurry up' or 'finish your meal'. Help children with cutting up or spooning in the food as necessary.
- It is worth having food in dishes or on serving plates that enable children to help themselves and their friends. Children can then see and choose the proportions of food they would prefer and add any sauces or savoury additions such as chutney, custard or yoghurt if they wish.
- Sometimes there may be pressure from other staff, perhaps the cook. If you cannot easily resolve the issue with the other person, then it will be important that the manager of your centre addresses what is getting in the way of a relaxed mealtime.
- You need a comfortable seating arrangement for everyone, including yourself. Adults will not be comfortable if perched on a child sized seat.
- You should sit down with the children and ideally eat with them, although you may not want to eat at every meal or snack time. This habit will model good eating habits and helps you to pay full attention and not be tempted to rush children.
- Some children may not be used to a sit-down mealtime when they join your centre. Try to be flexible and understand that the child is not being awkward, she may genuinely have no idea how to sit and eat because her family lets her pick food and move about. With your patience and an attractive social mealtime, she will join you all soon.
- Children also bring different experiences of how to eat. Using a knife and fork in the English way is far from a universal way of eating and some English families may live mainly on take-away and finger food.
- It is a useful social skill for children to learn to use cutlery as well as other ways of eating. But you need to be aware that some families will use other utensils, such as chopsticks or regularly use different kinds of breads as a form of utensil.
- Eating with the fingers is a perfectly hygienic way to eat so long as children have washed their hands before a meal. You can help children in good habits of personal hygiene for meals and when they are involved in food preparation and cooking activities.

To think about

Some early years settings have developed the idea of the self service snack bar for three year olds and older. The mid-session drinks and snacks are put on a table and children are welcome to take their snack when they wish. Children can indicate that they have had their drink by moving their name card from one open container on the table to another 'done' container or into a wall hanging. Practitioners can then easily see which children still need their drink.

- Discuss with colleagues the advantages, and any possible drawbacks, of the self service system.
- Write up the pros and cons and consider whether self service would be a positive change in your own early years setting.

Key skills link: C2/3.3 WO2/3.1

Social skills and table manners

Your own childhood will have influenced your beliefs about the importance or not of table manners and what this idea means in practice. You will want to encourage the children towards courteous behaviour at mealtimes but do be careful that you do not claim a rule is universal when in fact it is the tradition only of the culture with which you are most familiar.

There may be some basics that all children can learn:

- Give other eaters space and don't crowd them.
- You eat what is on your plate rather than sneaking other people's food.
- You say you have had enough rather than dumping your unwanted bits.

Children can learn courtesy at the meal table so long as adults set a good example and are patient in helping children to learn. Some of the practical issues include using courtesy words such as 'please', 'thank you' and 'would you like ...?' Be flexible and recognise that there are more ways to say 'thank you' than the actual words. A nod and an enthusiastic smile is fine.

Learning about food and bodies

Children can learn about healthy eating and develop an interest in how food fuels their energy and growing bodies.

- Friendly communication extends children's vocabulary with the names for different foods and meals. Step by step they also learn the words to express enthusiasm and preferences over taste, smell and texture.
- You can extend the food experience of children and the staff by offering some foods for tasters at snack time and some meals that are outside their daily experience (see page 100).



Figure 3.4

Young children are able to clean up their own spills

- Children will have their own likes and dislikes about food that is unusual to them. It is fair to have a ground rule that children can say they do not like a particular food, but not that it is 'disgusting' or 'muck', especially when this is the family food of a child who is present at the table.

Children can become interested in how their bodies work to digest food and in different kinds of food. You may introduce some of these resources as part of a themed topic (see page 435) but there is no need to wait if children express curiosity now.

Here are some useful books to make available as a resource. These books are written primarily for five and six year olds, but remember that children who cannot yet read the text can be very interested in looking at good illustrations and will ask you for more information:

- The *Look at your body* series from Franklin Watts with titles including digestion, reproduction and growing up, brains and nerves and senses.
- The *How our bodies work* series written by Carol Ballard and published by Hodder Wayland, with titles including *How do we taste and smell?*, *How do our ears move?*, *How do we move?* and others.
- Books can also be a resource about different kinds of food. Try the *Exploring food in Britain* series published by Mantra Publishing and *Food and drink*, a series published by Wayland.

Activity

- Look at one or two of the suggested books and plan how you could use the material with three or four year olds.
- Which illustrations could be useful and how would you link them to children's current knowledge?
- Write up and present to colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1b C1/2.3 C2.2.

Practice for physical skills

Meals and snack times can be good opportunities for children to learn and to practise fine physical skills within a meaningful context.

- Children coordinate sight, feel and movement when they feed themselves.
- As well as feeling helpful, children also apply fine physical skills when they hand round the plate of sandwiches or hold a yoghurt carton steady for a friend to spoon it out onto her fruit.
- Physical skills as well as understanding a sequence are needed to help to lay the table, wipe up spills and clear away at the end of the meal.
- In an early years setting, children are keen to take turns to push the trolley back to the kitchen. A rota for this or other helpful activities can also be a practical way for children to recognise their name label and that of friends, as they come round for their turn.

Abstract ideas in a meaningful context

Children experience a considerable number of meal and snack times. They can learn many things from the routine.

- A sense of pleasant predictability and what follows what in a sequence. Children who are slightly confused by the day or who miss their parents can be reassured by explanations like, 'First we have tea, then we'll do some singing and then your Daddy will be here.'
- Anticipating a meal, including the use of your sense of smell can help children to imagine, think ahead and make connections between information.
- Some days you could lead a discussion around, 'I wonder what we've got for lunch. Now I saw Esme (the cook) with a lot of potatoes, she had the grater out and I smelt fish. What might that be?' (perhaps fish pie with cheese topping, a favourite in the group).
- Laying the table and helping with snack time is often a very practical way to introduce number work (see the tips box).
- You can lay the lunch or tea with name cards for each child (perhaps with a photo) and children learn to recognise letters and look carefully within a meaningful routine important to the group.

Helping out with mealtimes is an ideal application of an early understanding of number. Rising threes are often ready for an active part in this routine and four and five year olds can be very adept.

- You can involve children who wish in the daily routines with 'How many people have we got for tea?'
- With younger children or those who are not sure of their numbers, count by saying the names and showing the numbers on your fingers.
- You can answer as appropriate, 'That's 6 of us. So we need 6 plates. ... Let's count them as we lay the table. ... Now we need 6 spoons, one for each plate.'
- You can sometimes make a deliberate mistake such as, 'Who hasn't got a plate? I haven't, we didn't count me!'
- Children who have practised this kind of practical number work can often take full responsibility for the task. It is then your role to thank them and express appreciation for their skills.

Tips for practice

Choice and planning

It would be unwieldy to give children total choice about food and they would probably find it rather wearing. However, some level of choice and being asked for your opinion is attractive to children.

- Children can be involved in menu planning and displaying the menus for the week ahead.
- A decorated menu board could be made with slots or see-through pockets into which the day's or week's menus are placed with words and an illustration. The board can be a useful form of communication with parents

in an early years setting. As the responsible adult, you need to check all the spellings of foods or meals.

- This kind of activity can work just as well in a family home, if children are interested to discuss, cut out pictures and organise a display.
- Children can be asked for their views on regular meals and kinds of food. They can cut out pictures or sort photos of meals into piles that could become a display. You can use a set of three faces: smiley turned up face, straight face and turned down face to cover the options of 'I like it', 'it's alright' and 'I don't like it'. Four, five and six years olds could do some simple number work on adding up the views of the group on different meals.

Activity

- Take any of the ideas in this section about how children can learn through mealtimes, food preparation and choices.
- Draw a diagram to show the different sources of learning.
- Then plan an activity to explore one of the areas that you have identified.
- Make a short presentation to your colleagues.

Key skills link: C2/3.3 C2/3.1b

Young cooks

Children are very interested in becoming involved in food preparation and cooking. Although a responsible adult needs to keep children safe, there are plenty of opportunities for them to learn. Cooking and food preparation are important because:

- Children learn and apply practical physical skills such as use of tools and techniques like mixing and measuring.
- Keen cooks will learn the safe use of tools or caution around heat.
- Children gain immense satisfaction in making something that can then be eaten by themselves, friends and admiring adults.
- Children are also learning skills useful for later life and they can make sense of your simple messages about healthy eating.
- Cooking and food preparation brings in the skills of planning ahead, understanding a sequence, recall of techniques and 'what we did last time'.
- Children can learn to understand and follow a recipe (see the activity box below).
- Cooking brings in basic science, as it is a kind of chemistry. Children learn about changes as they add liquid, mix and bake.
- Cooking builds children's creative development since they can make choices about decoration and laying out food for a meal in an attractive pattern.
- They gain useful experience in early mathematics: counting, measuring, working out the size of bowl they will need, calculating cooking times and when something will be ready.

Enthusiastic cooks also take their experience into their pretend play and this can be another positive consequence of the cooking activity. However, the real cooking is a source of learning on its own; it does not have to become part of play to be most valuable.

Preparation for cooking

Look also for the possibility of building a shopping trip into the activity. Children can then see the whole process through from purchase all the way to eating the final product. Shopping in a market or local shop can also be the way for children to understand how foods start before they are turned into a meal. There can also be meaningful, practical opportunities to learn about money through the purchase of ingredients.

If you work as a nanny such outings can be part of your week. If you work in an early years setting, you may need more organisation to ensure you can get out with enough adults to keep the children safe. It is important that you make the effort, otherwise children who spend many hours in group childcare can risk losing opportunities to understand how daily life works.

Diversity in cooking

Meal planning and cooking activities are a natural way to include different diets that reflect the families whose children attend your setting.

- It is also a valuable way to explore foods and meals that are not everyday experiences for anyone.
- You can gather your own experience and learn from parents, some of whom may be happy to join you in a shopping or cooking activity.
- Build up experience of different recipes and foods with the children.
- For instance, there are many different kinds of bread to explore or everyone can try a fruit that you discovered on the market trip.
- Basic techniques like learning how to make batter can then be used for different meals.
- Use the correct words for any foods or meals. Avoid, in conversation or written material, the odd phrase 'ethnic food' (see page 93) and the equally odd 'multicultural recipes'. You can draw on recipes from different cultures but no recipe is in itself 'multicultural', any more than the word can be applied to toys or books.

Activity

- Make up a recipe book or set of large recipe cards with the children.
- Look at ways to combine simple written instructions with a picture (sketch or photo) for each stage of the process.
- Do a draft and try out the recipes with children. What do they think, are the instructions straightforward to follow?
- Make any final changes, laminate the cards or use transparent punched pockets in a ring binder.

Tips for practice

Cooking works well as an activity so long as you give children the opportunity to do the work and make some choices. Cooking is not enjoyable for children if they have to wait forever for their turn, are nagged about technique or made to decorate to a set pattern.

- Try to keep cooking as a fairly small group activity and ensure that every child has some materials to work with or gets a go on a longer project.
- Pick recipes that children can manage, so no complicated creaming. Cakes and biscuit mixes are easier to stir if you use the Welsh method of melting the butter or margarine.
- Use materials that are robust. Yeast-based doughs (buns and pizza bases) like to be handled whereas pastry gets tough.
- Pick recipes with choices for decoration: gingerbread people and currants or different cutters for shapes.
- Avoid taking over the work unless it is genuinely too difficult for children. Watch, be ready to help if necessary and encourage children's efforts.
- You need to be aware if children have any allergies, since handling a food can sometimes be enough to trigger a reaction.

If you work as a nanny, then you need to find safe ways to help children develop their cooking skills in the family kitchen. In early years settings there has been considerable reluctance to allow children into the kitchen and some settings work with a total ban, for health and safety reasons. If children spend a full day with you from a very young age, they need to learn about safe behaviour in the kitchen and to do some proper cooking.

You need the cooperation of the cook in an early years setting, but if you work together it should be possible to:

- Organise times when children can have access to the kitchen with an adult.
- Children will learn and understand that they do not simply wander into the kitchen and a gate with a clear illustration will give the message when it is a very busy time in this room.
- If you work with the cook, then you can time cooking activities so that food that needs baking can go in the oven and be ready to be eaten at a suitable time.
- Look for any possibilities for food preparation that does not involve cooking, such as buttering bread and making sandwiches or laying fruit and vegetable slices in an attractive pattern on the plate.



Figure 3.5

Cooking can be a most enjoyable activity



Scenario

The Dale Parent and Toddler group has faced a serious disagreement within the team and between some of the parents. Some people feel strongly that food should be on the meal table and should never be used as a play resource. The difference of opinion arose when Vicky came back from a workshop with the idea of letting the toddlers play in a large container of soft jelly or softly cooked pasta. The group leader, Annie, is very uncomfortable about this activity as she feels that food is in short supply in some parts of the world and it gives the wrong message to let children play with it. One of the fathers on the group management committee agrees and says that he has never been very happy about pasta pictures.

Questions

- 1 Discuss with your colleagues the two different perspectives represented within the Dale Parent and Toddler group.
- 2 In turn make the case for each opinion: that it is fine to use food as a play material and why, then the view that food should stay on the meal table and the reasons.
- 3 Consider what could be a way forward for this group. Can they find a compromise?

Key skills links: C2/3.1a PS2/3.1

Helping children with tooth care

Children's teeth develop during early childhood and good habits can be established from the early years. Healthy eating and drinking habits are one of the most important parts of the care of teeth.

Development of teeth

The first teeth appear in babyhood:

- The first tooth is not usually much earlier than 6 months: incisors come first, with the two central top and two central bottom teeth.
- At about 8 months: two more incisors to make a set of four top and bottom teeth.
- 10–14 months: the first molars, these are the double teeth for efficient chewing.
- 18 months: the canines, at the side of the front incisors.
- Two to two and a half years: the second molars at the back of the mouth.
- In total children have 20 milk teeth and these usually last until about six years of age when the second set start to push out the milk teeth one by one until children have close to a full set of second teeth.
- By the time they are 12–14 years old children will have 28 permanent teeth. The last four of a full set of 32 are the wisdom teeth, right at the back of the

mouth and these do not always emerge until late adolescence or early adulthood.

Ways to prevent tooth decay

Dental decay is a serious problem for many young children in the UK and is largely preventable. The main ways to support good dental health for children are:

- A balanced diet with limited sugar from confectionery and sweetened fizzy drinks (see page 8).
- Regular brushing of teeth with fluoride toothpaste. It used to be said that children should brush their teeth after every meal. But dentists expressed concern that over brushing can damage the tooth enamel and no more than twice a day is now recommended.
- Regular visits to the dentist so that children can have their teeth checked and become familiar with the routine.

Caring for children's teeth is primarily the responsibility of parents. As an early years practitioner you make an important contribution but should not take over that responsibility:

- In an early years setting or family home your role is to organise and promote a healthy diet for the children.
- You will find opportunities to help children learn about teeth as part of their body, through conversation, books or project work.
- If you work as a nanny, then you may help with tooth brushing and may sometimes take the children to their dental appointments.

Figure 3.6

Drinks are as important as food – for teeth and nutrition





Poor diet, with excessive confectionery and sweet, fizzy drinks can cause cavities in the milk teeth, sometimes so bad that children have to have teeth extracted. Worse still, for some children their second set of teeth actually rots in the gums. This level of dental decay is completely avoidable and definitely an adult responsibility.

In partnership with parents you can promote healthy eating and explain how you use different methods of encouragement (see page 485) rather than rewarding children with sweets or biscuits. It would not be appropriate to ban all sweet foods from your early years setting. A birthday cake or special sweetmeats for some religious celebrations can be a change. You can, however, make suggestions to parents about a range of foods that would be welcome for parties and other celebrations, so that sweets are not the main contribution.

Useful resources

Usborne First Experience series *Going to the Dentist* by Anne Civardi and Stephen Cartwright.

Further resources

Whiting, Mary (2001) *Managing Nursery Food: A practical guide for early years professionals* TSL Education/Nursery World.

Progress check

- 1 Give three reasons why food and mealtimes are important for children's health and learning.
- 2 Name the four main food groups and give three examples of foods that would provide nutrition for each group.
- 3 Describe three ways in which you could work in partnership with parents over food and mealtimes.
- 4 Explain the food traditions or rules of three major world faiths, including the faith that has most influenced your own cultural background.
- 5 Describe four ways in which positive experiences of food and mealtimes can support other aspects of children's development.



4

Keeping children well and healthy

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- organise and maintain a safe setting so that children learn about safety and risks
- deal with accidents safely and in a way that promotes children's learning
- recognise the main signs of common illnesses or health problems in children
- take care of your own health and well being as an early years practitioner.

Introduction

Children need to be kept safe and as healthy as possible but in a way that involves them steadily in their own care. Children can learn about their own bodies and health and about other children who differ from themselves. In partnership with parents, early years practitioners can help children to feel cared for when they are ill as well as beginning to understand health and illness.

Keeping children safe

When children are young, they need adults to ensure that their usual environment is safe enough that children can explore, play and learn without undue problems.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 3, 5

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C1, E2, M1

Level 3: C2, E3, C14, M8

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 3, 5, 6, 10

Checks for safety

Play materials should only be bought from reputable companies and should conform to British safety standards, whenever these apply. Even if your setting is very short of money, it is unacceptable to buy second hand or accept donated equipment that does not meet safety requirements.

You need to check play materials and equipment on a regular basis. If something needs mending, for example torn dressing-up clothes or a screw that needs tightening, then make the repair promptly. Children can be part of this safety procedure to the extent that they may point out that something needs mending and will be flattered to hear, 'Well spotted, I'll see about that this morning'. Check with a senior if any equipment looks as if it needs specialist attention or is beyond safe repair.

It is good practice to check your setting for obvious hazards and any problems that arise because of the inconsiderate behaviour of neighbours. Some settings have no choice but to check the garden for rubbish or dog excrement before letting children go out to play.

Beyond sensible checks you will keep children safe by your involved and caring supervision. A supportive early years team needs to be positive:

- Explore the ways in which you can do some real gardening with the children rather than thinking 'We can't do that – what about the dirt';
- Children like to help with pets. Think about how you can give them a safe role in a family home or early years setting, rather than taking over because of hygiene concerns or because you can do the task more quickly.
- Children's play often gets noisy and lively. Respect their play and consider with the children themselves how to make the monster and rescue game less intrusive on other activities. Avoid the knee jerk reaction of 'You're knocking into people. Stop it right now!'

Tips for practice

A learning environment that is safe enough

Normal childhood includes an array of bumps, bruises and scrapes. If adults try to make an environment 100 per cent risk-free, they will not only set themselves an impossible task, they risk creating a boring environment in which children cannot learn.

An equally important point is that children need to learn steadily to keep themselves safe and to assess ordinary everyday risk.

- Early years practitioners make a real contribution to ways in which children learn about taking care of themselves.
- Children become physically more able to take on some of this responsibility.
- However, their understanding of the world also extends so that they can better anticipate what may happen.
- They may grasp why you are sometimes concerned when they are not, although they will still often think you are fussing.

Disabled children still need this support for learning and they do not benefit from over protection:

- Children with physical disabilities may need more support and direct help.

- If children have learning disabilities, then you need to adjust your expectations since the children's understanding may be more like that of a younger child.
- Otherwise the sign of a good day for a disabled child in your setting will mean some mess and the odd bump or scrape.

Supporting children's learning

As an early years practitioner, you are responsible for other people's children. So it is easy, especially in a setting where the team has become anxious, to be too afraid 'what may happen if ...' and of being blamed for any accident. But you cannot run a good day for children in which they will learn, if you mainly think about what can go wrong or abandon valuable activities because of a small level of risk that could be resolved.

Your setting's policy on health and safety should set a framework. But in the end it is attentive and supportive adults who keep children safe enough without harassing them or making the children unduly anxious.

- Young children cannot learn to anticipate and weigh up the very ordinary risks of everyday life, unless they have experienced different situations and been guided by supportive adults.
- Parents as well as early years practitioners are often most sensitive to physical risks, but part of childhood is that children need to handle emotional and intellectual risks.
- They need to experience that mistakes are not all disasters and that some practical problems can be overcome.

Figure 4.1

Lively physical activity helps keep children healthy



- They also need to learn practical life skills, such as how to handle ordinary tools, simple cooking and how to move around their neighbourhood, including road safety (see page 117).
- Early childhood is an excellent time to help children learn since they are keen and still willing, at least sometimes, to pay attention to caring adults.

Scenario

St Jude's nursery and reception team have thought carefully about safety and helping children learn about everyday risks. They offer a well equipped woodwork table that the children greatly enjoy and there has never been an accident with the tools. This term a family has joined St Jude's that appears to be highly anxious about the well being of their children, aged four and six years. Both parents have expressed concern about the woodwork table in the nursery class and the climbing frame and large tyres in the school playground.

Pam and Maryam have spoken with the parents explaining how children are kept safe and still enabled to have an enjoyable day in which they can learn. The head of school, Alastair, is still concerned about the parents who are outspoken in their concerns about 'what may happen if ...'

Questions

- 1 Discuss with your colleagues the main issues that the St Jude's team face.
- 2 What are their learning priorities and how can these be reconciled with partnership with parents?
- 3 Draft some options for how the team could resolve this problem. You could consider the options of further conversation with the parents, bringing in other parents who are not anxious, use of displays as information, and inviting the parents into the setting.
- 4 What are the likely consequences if St Jude's responds to the anxiety of this family and removes the woodwork table or the climbing equipment?

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.3 PS3.1

Step by step

It is important to recall that children's learning stretches over all the years of childhood. Useful skills are learned a bit at a time and rarely in a single activity or conversation. You are not responsible for passing on everything about safe use of tools or personal and road safety (see page 116) in your relatively short period with children in a nursery or playgroup. Children start the process in the early years, ideally within a partnership between home and early years settings. They continue to learn and extend their skills throughout childhood. Children like to help out and this can be an ideal opportunity for practising skills (see page 116).

Children learn some realities of safety the hard way with a bump or a bruise. You cannot prevent them entirely from having accidents, but you should, of course, keep a wary eye and ear and babies or toddlers should not be out of your sight. Early years settings will usually be adjusted for the height of young children and access to rooms

like kitchens will be restricted. The environment may give fewer daily risks than an ordinary home. But poor practice in a setting can develop if practitioners are inattentive to children or ignore basic procedures of hygiene (see page 56).

Tips for practice

Although some under twos have learned a few basic cautionary lessons, the excitement of the moment can push them to the back of a toddler's mind. Helping children learn is a steady process.

- Two and three year olds will learn to follow some basic warnings that relate to their familiar environment.
- Four year olds and older will begin to grasp your reasons for saying, 'Don't touch', 'Watch out' or 'remember what I said about dogs'.
- However you do need to be ready to repeat reminders, warnings and simple reasons.
- Children learn bit by bit about more general safety rules. Helpful adults never forget that this area of learning is closely linked to other aspects of children's development, including their intellectual understanding.
- Children can be very literal when they are young. They may listen carefully to you about standing back a little from the local pond that you visit, but not take this warning to apply to any stretch of water.

A safe setting

Your role in keeping children safe covers a range of actions, checks and your skills of observation. Children do not want to be tracked and watched all the time but attentive early years practitioners can keep an eye and ear without the children feeling oppressed.

- Make sure that children have enough space to move about. Some games may need a bit of organisation or an agreement that they are outdoor activities.
- Do you have some areas that are out of bounds to children? Remember from your own childhood that such a ban is only likely to make children want to go there. See if you can avoid completely no-go areas and enable visits to rooms that do not have unrestricted access, like the office or kitchen, in a setting.
- Adults need to be in sight and earshot of children who are playing. There should always be a practitioner in the garden if the children are playing outside. Your setting will need to be flexible about ratios if adults are not to move abruptly just because the children have moved.
- You do need to have a suitable ratio when you take trips out, and it is worth the effort because children can learn a great deal from trips out and about in your local neighbourhood (see page 426).
- Children must be safe and secure in your setting, so that they cannot wander out of your building and so that people with no legitimate business to visit cannot simply wander in through the front gate or door.
- Attentive adults offer the best protection for children, but secure gates and doors, with a check on visitors, are an important part of safety.
- Unless your setting is situated in a genuinely high-risk neighbourhood, then close circuit television (CCTV) is probably unnecessary.

Scenario

The Dale Parent and Toddler drop-in group operate in a large building where they use different rooms for different kinds of activity. The building itself is kept secure by an entry phone.

A review of safety led to a decision to count the children each time they moved in and out of rooms. This procedure was also influenced by the concern of one of the practitioners, Liz, whose young daughter had been distressed by being left behind in her nursery toilet when the whole group had gone to see a video elsewhere in the school building.

The counting procedure has been followed now for two months and the team decides to review it. They are uncertain about whether it is a wise or necessary way to ensure safety. Two of the children have become anxious, saying, 'Are there bad people here? Is that why you count us?' and one father asked, only half joking, 'How many children have you actually lost?'

Questions

- 1 Discuss with your colleagues the issues that the Dale team need to weigh up.
- 2 They need to keep the children safe but is the counting procedure necessary for safety? Are there other less obvious ways to keep check? What are the possible downsides to this regular counting?
- 3 It was poor practice for Liz's daughter to be left in the toilet of her nursery but what should that team have been doing to avoid such a distressing incident?

Key skills links: C3.1a PS2.1

Tips for practice

- You should know how to get yourself and the children out of the building in the event of an emergency or other kind of crisis.
- In many areas, the emergency is most likely to be a fire. However, there are places in the UK where the emergency could be a bomb.
- Settings should have regular practice drills that enable you and the children to practise a safe exit.
- Adults should be familiar with the location of fire alarms, extinguishers and possible alternative exit routes.
- If you are working as a nanny, you should have equipment such as a fire blanket or extinguisher in the kitchen, but you will be dependent on the family as to whether they have chosen to buy these.

Who is responsible for children?

It must always be clear who is responsible for the children. If you are called away or are taking a break, you must explicitly pass responsibility for your group to another practitioner. You cannot just assume someone will keep an eye on the children. In a family home the responsible person will continue to be you.

Figure 4.2

Responsible adults
are there to help
when necessary



Handing over responsibility

Transition times can be confusing for children and adults. For instance, it needs to be clear when the children pass into your responsibility from their parent or other carer at the beginning of the day and the point at which the responsibility has passed back at the end of the day. You can sort this out between the adults, without it being heavy-handed. You may need a quiet conversation with a parent if the child appears to be playing you off against each other, or if the parent is unreasonably extending the time when you are responsible.

Trips out

Children benefit from simple local trips as well as journeys to venues further afield. Any trip needs enough adults to ensure children are safe and adults are not required to keep a close eye on too many children. But enough adults are also important to enable children to be sure of attention and replies to their questions.

If you do not know the venue of a trip it is wise for somebody to make a visit prior to taking the children. A thorough check of a venue or an activity is called a **risk assessment**.

Key term

Risk assessment

the process of checking the likely risks involved in an activity or an outing and sensible ways to address the risks

- This procedure can be useful to check for any possible issues relevant to this group or individual children and to find ways to resolve any problems.
- Adults should not use risk assessments to become anxious about everything that could go wrong.
- Useful information will be whether the venue is accessible for any disabled children or adults.
- Will it be interesting for the younger children? Are there some parts of the visit that will require more adults and practical issues like the location of the toilets?

Activity

Do a risk assessment on a local facility such as the library or visiting the market.

- Check out any practical issues that need to be resolved, without becoming unduly anxious about unlikely things that can go wrong. Your objective is to problem solve, not to get frightened.
- How will you keep children safe on the route to and from the facility and within the building or area?
- What could they learn from this trip? Collect photos or leaflets to show the potential from this outing.
- Discuss your assessment with colleagues and explore whether there are general themes within the different examples.

Key skills link: C3.1a C3.1b

On trips out with the children, everyone needs to be clear about who is responsible for which children. This check can be especially important for larger group outings and when parents join you as well. If you are the practitioner in overall charge of the trip, then make sure that every adult understands who is in their small group, tell the children as well, and where you will all meet up if you are dividing within the day. Parents and other volunteers need to understand that the outing is a form of work, They are responsible for the named children and the trip is not a free ride.

Tips for practice

- Ensure that all adults know exactly the children for whom they are responsible.
- It can also help to have a chat with children. An experienced nursery teacher explained to me how she evokes children's sense of responsibility. She tells the children that they need to keep close to (named adult) on this trip, because adults do wander sometimes and children need to ensure that they can get the adult's hand.
- Children who are prone to wandering or dashing off will need to be in a more favourable ratio or with more experienced adults.
- A child with very challenging behaviour will need to be one-to-one with his or her key person or the practitioner who has most experience with the child.
- Count all children carefully when you leave any part of an outside trip or move on within a large area that you have visited. But do not count for limited internal travels in your own building (see the scenario on page 113).
- Similar care should be taken if you take a group of children from one part of a large school building to another.
- You can count discretely and five and six years olds can start to work a buddy system in which everyone ensures that their 'buddy' is present.

Skills sharing

No child learns about safe behaviour, like how to hold a hammer safely or how to clean a cut, because they have passed a certain birthday. Children learn because adults have taken the trouble to share their own skills through a process of tell–show–do. You:

- Tell children about what you do in an activity or routine. You can highlight safety without becoming boring.
- Show them how to hold the hammer or needle and demonstrate through your actions and good example how to be calm when there is an accident or gentle with the baby.
- Give children plenty of opportunities to do the tasks, to practise and to ask for more help as and when they want.

Using conversations

In an ordinary day as well as organised opportunities, perhaps in circle time, you can use words and actions to highlight the practical safety guidelines.

- Ask individual children or a small group before they start a gardening or needlework activity to recount what they will do or the best sequence. Give an encouraging ‘well done’ for what they remember and remind the children of anything else that is important.
- Circle time can be an opportunity to review the day’s or session’s activities. Children can also be invited to remind their peers about ‘what do we do first of all at the woodwork table?’ (put on our special goggles) or ‘who uses the big sharp scissors?’ (only an adult).
- You can share useful tips and techniques in how to do a practical activity.
- Be encouraging when a child brings something to your attention or has a good idea. You might say, ‘You’re right, I should watch my fingers with the knife’.
- Support children’s learning and be friendly about mistakes. See also page 393 about developing a positive disposition to learn.

Personal safety

Part of children’s growing self reliance is to be aware of their own personal safety. You can begin to share some basic rules with four year olds but you would not cover personal safety in one telling, nor should you depend upon one source of communication, like a single story book.

Remember that you are not trying to do it all – children learn about personal safety issues over time and they add on ideas and understanding as the months and years pass. Useful learning for children includes the rights over their own body and understanding about their private areas and experiencing respectful touch (see page 43).

You can share and show children’s rights to personal safety:

- The right to say ‘No’ – a child’s body belongs to her. She has the right to say ‘No’ to any adult or child who touches her in a way that she does not want.
- The right to tell – if anybody refuses to take notice when a child says ‘No’, then he can tell on that person.
- The right not to keep secrets – children need to be encouraged not to keep a secret that does not feel right.

- The right not to be bound by social rules – reassure children that if adults do not behave properly, then the usual politeness rules do not apply.

It is misleading to place too much emphasis on adults who are unknown to children: the so-called 'stranger danger'. Most strangers who kill or seriously injure children are behind the wheel of a vehicle. Children are statistically far more at risk of abusive harm from people they know: family and friends and people who have access to children through their work or voluntary activities (see Chapter 19). Furthermore, good safety rules also support children who face bullying.

Communicate with parents about what you do in a low key way, so that they understand what you explain and can support their children at home. You can use incidents that arise and explain simply to children, for instance, why you took the group away from the market because somebody was shouting and appeared to be drunk. You can show children practical safety rules like what to do if you get lost on a school outing.

The aim of supportive safety guidelines for children is to help them to make judgements at the time, to empower them. It is important to avoid leaving children with the feeling that they hold the whole responsibility for keeping themselves safe from harm.

- Adults have the responsibility to behave properly and not impose on children or ask them to do something that makes the child uneasy.
- Adults who do not behave well, do not deserve courtesy.
- Children need to feel sure they have permission to shout, run away and tell on adults or other children who threaten them.
- However, some bullies or abusers may be too strong or it is very hard to tell. Children must not be left feeling that the situation is their fault.

Finding out more

Kidscape has published a range of books and leaflets on personal safety for children. Contact them at 2 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0DH tel: 020 7730 3300 www.kidscape.org.uk

Road safety

You ensure the safety of babies and young children by having them safe in buggies or holding your hand. But you can help children to learn about road safety as part of your normal conversation and local excursions with them.

- Books, role play and play with dolls can support an understanding but effective support of children has to include regular kerb side practice. Otherwise children do not make the link between play and real road safety and they do not get the guided practice that is essential for them to learn.
- Road safety takes time, it is a step by step learning process that can be started when they are young but continues beyond the age when children will leave you.
- Use local trips to show children what you do to ensure their safety by saying out loud what you are doing: looking up and down the road, listening for traffic, finding a safe place to cross or waiting for the 'green person' at a lighted crossing.

- Children learn best through regular safe practice with responsible adults. Do not expect even six or seven year olds to be reliable.

Activity

- Plan for how you can support your current group of children towards road safety.
- What will be appropriate experiences given their age?
- Write up and present to your colleagues.

Key skills links: C2.3 C2.1a

Dealing with accidents

Children will get hurt on occasion, however safe your setting and careful you are. Indeed if you try to make your setting free of any risks, it will be so boring that the children will either become passive and physically inactive, with all the risks that this entails, or else they find excitement and challenge despite your restrictions.

If you follow good practice in care and friendly supervision of children then you will prevent those accidents that can be avoided. Good maintenance of play materials and equipment will reduce the risks even more. However, unless you restrict children in ways that will seriously limit their learning, you will never reduce accidents to zero.

Figure 4.3

There will be minor accidents in any interesting early years setting





Tips for practice

- You can comfort and support a child at the same time that you give whatever care is needed.
- Children actually do feel better for having a plaster and a kind word.
- Sometimes children are more shaken up than actually hurt. Sometimes they may expect you to be angry, since they have been careless or broken one of the rules in your setting.
- You can reassure them kindly and deal with any hurt, as well as emphasise kindly that this was why you warned about, 'Look before you jump'.
- It will not help children to learn if you are angry or nag them. Ensure that your feelings do not blur the main message. You might, for instance, be frightened for what could have happened, frustrated because you warned the child or concerned about what the parents will say.
- It will be disrespectful to deny children's feelings with, 'That doesn't hurt' or 'You're making a big fuss'. Even if you believe that a child is making rather a fuss, given the injury, accept her feelings as she expresses them.
- Look for an opportunity to be encouraging when she takes a braver outlook or is prompter in rejoining the play.
- Do not expect a boy to be more able to hold back tears than a girl of the same age.

Coping with injuries

You need to know what to do in response to common accidents that can happen with young children. This section covers only the most basic points for first aid and cannot substitute for a proper first aid course.

Activity

- Check on the contents of the first aid box in your setting.
- What common accidents can be dealt with by using this equipment?
- Does your setting use any antiseptic on cuts and if not do parents know that they will need to disinfect a cut or scrape when they take their child home?
- Compare your findings in different settings through discussion with colleagues on your course.

Key skills link: C2.1a

Nosebleeds

Children sometimes get nosebleeds because they have crashed into something or someone. But sometimes there is no obvious reason and children just get apparently spontaneous nose bleeds. The treatment is to:

- Sit the child down leaning forward and pinch the nose firmly between finger and thumb just below the hard part of the nose. An older child will probably be able to do this action himself but you will need to help a younger one. A flannel soaked in cold water and then wrung out can be placed on the bridge of the nose.
- This treatment will usually work. Explain to the child not to blow their nose for at least a couple of hours.
- Tell the parents when they pick up the child or come home.
- If the nosebleed does not stop in ten minutes then the child should be taken to the Accident and Emergency (A&E) department of the local hospital.

Bumps and bruises

Small cuts and grazes can be cleaned with water and cotton wool and protected with a mild antiseptic cream. Use the contents of the first aid box to clean cuts and grazes and to cover them if necessary.

Slight bleeding will be stopped by gentle cleaning. More persistent bleeding may need you to lay a clean cloth over the wound and press firmly. Raise a limb slightly and this will help to stop the bleeding.

Activity

Consider any of the possible accidents described in this section.

- Imagine a child falling or getting a nosebleed in your setting.
- Make brief notes about how you would handle the situation.
- Consider also what to do with other children who are close to the accident and watch as you deal with the incident.
- Discuss the possibilities with colleagues and explore whether some settings vary in the more likely accident areas.

Key skills link: PS3.1 C3.1a

Falls

Help the child up and let her sit quietly while she recovers. Children need to be taken to hospital if they are drowsy after the fall, lose consciousness, are limp or very pale, also if they vomit.

If children are very drowsy, they should be put in the recovery position and then get the child to hospital. If you are uncertain what is wrong or the child seems to have a serious injury, then call an ambulance.

Choking

Unless you can reach and hook out an object very easily, then do not persist, you will only push it further. Hold a toddler or young child upside down by the legs and slap him smartly between the shoulder blades with the heel of your hand. If the object does not shoot out, do it again. An older or bigger child should be laid over your knees, face down. Use the same movement.

If you try this several times without success, as a last resort you can give the baby or child's stomach a short, sharp squeeze which should push the object out

- 1 Place the child's head to the side and tilt her chin to clear the airway.
- 2 Tuck the arm closest to you under her bottom, palm upwards. Then bring her other arm over her body.
- 3 Hold onto her shoulder and waist. Cross the child's legs with the leg furthest away on top.
- 4 Gently roll her towards you. Bend the knee of her top leg so it supports her body. Place her top arm palm downwards and release her lower arm. It is important that you straighten her airway once more.

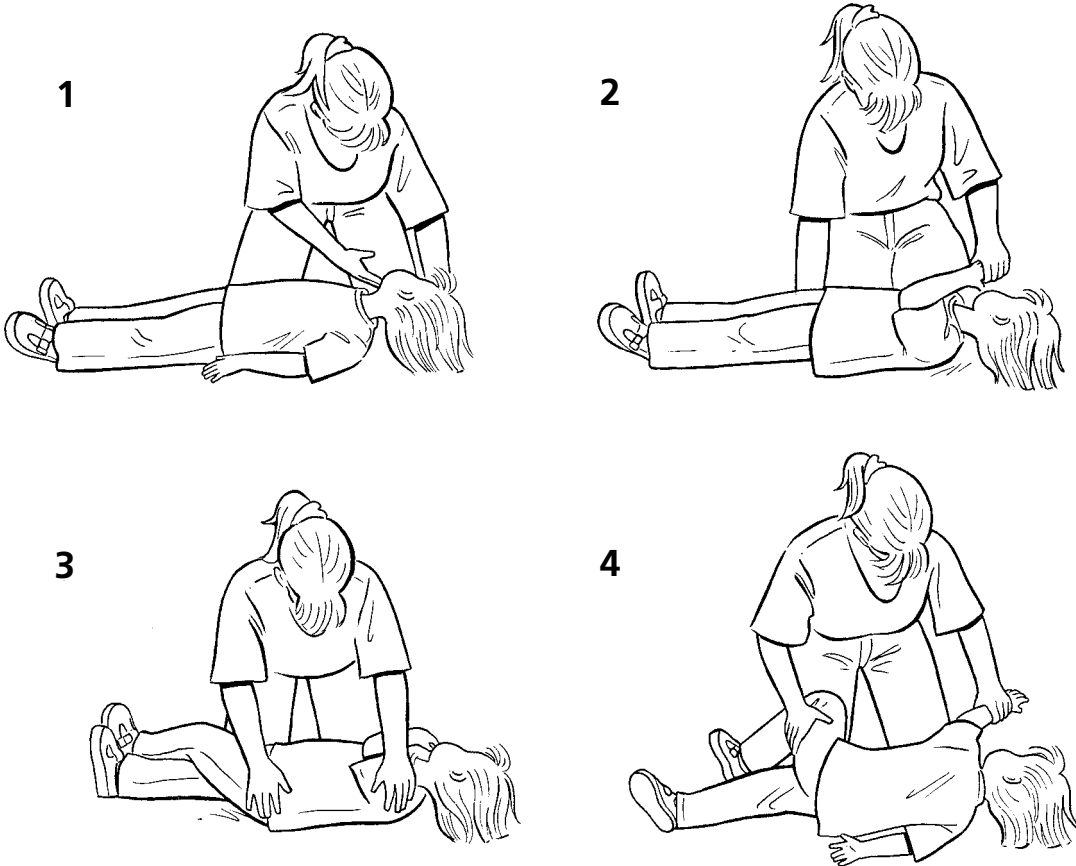


Figure 4.4 Placing a child in the recovery position

of the windpipe. If all else fails then take the child to the closest medical assistance and get someone to phone in advance.

Burns and scalds

- Carry the child to the nearest tap and run cold water over the burned or scalded area immediately. Comfort the child and hold her close but keep the water running for ten minutes. This action reduces the heat in the skin and the risk of scarring.
- Remove clothing that is not stuck to the skin, otherwise leave it. Take off jewellery or belts since burned skin can swell.
- Cover the burn or scald with a clean, non-fluffy cloth soaked in cold water.
- Take a child to hospital for anything more than a very small burn or scald.
- Do not put any cream or ointment on the skin and do not prick any blisters.

The accident book

All settings should have an accident book in which the details and time of any accident are recorded. You should make brief notes of a descriptive kind that follow general good practice in writing records (see page 461).

If you work as a nanny or childminder, you would not use a formal accident book. But it would be good practice to have a working notebook that guides you in a conversation with parents at the end of the day. You would not only talk about what has gone wrong but an accident should be mentioned.

Activity

Look at the accident book in your setting.

- What details are written down each time?
- Are there any very minor incidents that would not be entered?

Communication with parents

You should tell parents when they pick up their child that she has had an accident with a scrape or a bruise that will probably come out later.

- Most parents are understanding about everyday bumps and scrapes, *so long as they are told promptly*. The most cooperative parents will get angry if they find unexplained bruises later.
- Parents will also react unfavourably if the setting policy is to ask them about bruises, for reasons of child protection, and yet the team reacts frostily if parents ask for an explanation of a bruise obtained in the setting. The relationship will seem very unequal to parents and their perception is accurate; this way of working is not a partnership. (See Chapter 19 and the scenario on page 564).
- Parents will also want to know what is being done about the situation, for example if another child was the cause of the accident, by shoving or biting. You would not name the other child but it is fair for parents to want to be reassured that you have the problem in hand.
- Does your setting have rules about what, if anything, is put on a cut or graze? If so, then tell parents, or else they will reasonably assume that you have used antiseptic or other simple first aid measure as they would do at home.

Accidents, near misses and problem areas

Caring adults do not want children to be hurt or frightened, but our own feelings sometimes blur the message. Be honest about your own feelings and ready to apologise if your concern has made you speak sharply to a child. You may need to admit, 'I was frightened you would hurt yourself.'

Good practice in an early years or school team would be some discussion following an accident or a problem area in the setting. However, some teams respond with an absolute ban on an activity, pretend play theme or temporary craze. Imposed bans by adults are disruptive of children's learning and a lost opportunity for children's problem solving schemes in a meaningful context. It is also worth noting that adults tend to ban activities that children like, but that adults do not value, such as playing superhero games or lively football. Problems that arise during activities that adults believe to be educational are far more often addressed as an issue about behaviour.

**Figure 4.5**

Sometimes there are lessons to be learned – but sometimes it's just an accident

If necessary, you can review after an accident, but do not get drawn into knee-jerk reactions of 'this must never happen again' and removing legitimate play materials. There may be sensible steps to take:

- Do the children need a reminder about safe behaviour in the garden? Choose your timing and words with care, so that the child who was hurt does not feel embarrassed or that his accident has caused trouble for the group.
- Were adults inattentive? If so, what needs to be discussed and changed in how you work together?
- If the problem seems to have arisen from the layout of the setting, then the team needs to talk about the issue.
- If faulty or broken equipment was a factor, then it needs to be mended or removed.

Tips for practice

Activity

- Gather information about any outright bans on activities in your setting or other local settings.
- Why was the ban imposed and were the children involved in any meaningful discussion?
- What did the children feel?
- Can you identify other ways through which the problem might have been resolved? Discuss with your colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.1a PS3.1

Learning problem solving skills

Children feel more respected and can learn when adults enable an open discussion about a problem area in an early years setting, school or out of school facility. The basic steps in effective problem solving are as follows:

- Step one: a full discussion about the problem

You need to explore what, who, when, where and perhaps why? Listen to the children: their perspectives and priorities are important too. Be honest when it is you as an adult who feel this is a problem (the children may not think so). Be ready to listen when children tell you, to your surprise perhaps, that there is a problem they want to resolve.

- Step two: generate a range of possible solutions

You want to explore options to resolve the problem, rather than jumping at the first proposal. Children often have good ideas and one suggestion may piggyback onto another.

- Step three: decide on the best solution

Which is overall the best option of those discussed. Talk through how this solution will work in this setting and with the problem you face. Both children and adults have to be committed; it will not work if adults impose the solution.

- Step four: put the proposed solution into action

You need to try out the preferred option for long enough to see how it works. Give it time and remind the children if necessary of what was agreed.

- Step five: review

You need to monitor and evaluate the situation and discuss again as necessary. Be pleased with the children, alert them to the fact that, 'You had great ideas' or 'We've solved it, haven't we?'

This approach to problem solving works well and children become more able to use the skills themselves, even at four and five years of age. The steps work so long as adults give their time and attention and genuinely listen to children. Even children younger than school age soon observe if adults (practitioners or parents) pretend to invite children's views, but then press on regardless with their preferred adult solution. Similar principles apply in the skills of conflict resolution (see page 208).

Activity

- Apply the steps of problem solving to an issue that you currently face in your setting or home.
- Take your time and hold proper conversations with the children. Listen as well as talk.
- Write up what you have done, including the children's views, and present to colleagues.

Key skills links: PS2/31–3

Going to hospital

After more serious accidents, children may well need to visit the accident and emergency department of the local hospital or may stay in overnight for observation. Children and their families need information and support under these circumstances. You will find more in Chapter 18, especially from page 542, about children who have longer or more regular hospital stays.

The children in the group may all be affected by an accident, not only the child who was actually hurt. Children may feel better to play out their concerns and they often like to play doctors at home or in a role play area in an early years setting. You can provide simple outfits and some pretend medical equipment. Sensitive involvement and observation of their play will help you to judge if one or more children need reassurance. You can offer this support in partnership with their parents.

Finding out more

The organisation Action for Sick Children promotes child-friendly hospital practices and changes in organisation that support children and families. Contact them at 300 Kingston Road, London SW20 8LX tel: 020 8542 4848 email: enquiries@actionforsickchildren.org website: www.actionforsickchildren.org

Activity

- The Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) aims to raise awareness of risks to children and to reduce the level of preventable accidents at home and elsewhere in the daily life of children.
- CAPT produced a very useful set of leaflets for supporting children after accidents. You could obtain the leaflet for supporting young children and use the material to plan sensible steps in your setting if you needed to offer emotional support to a child.
- Contact them at Clerks Courts, 18–20 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3HA tel: 020 7608 3828 website: www.capt.org.uk

Key skills links: IT2/3.1–3 C3.2.

Health and illness

This section covers minor and some more major infectious illnesses. You will find out more about illness in the first year of life in Chapter 6 and details about continuing health conditions and chronic illness in Chapter 18.

Talking with parents about illness

Obviously you will have to contact individual parents if children are sufficiently ill that they need to be picked up before the end of the usual day or session. Any

early years setting or individuals such as childminders or nannies should have a contact number (landline or mobile) to get them swiftly in contact with a parent. If you do need to call in the day then explain your reasons, perhaps saying that the child has a high temperature or that she has already vomited twice.

It is practical and courteous to tell parents if you have an outbreak of an infectious illness. You would not usually name the children involved. You would say, or put up a notice explaining that 'we have two cases of mumps in the pre-school' or 'there has been a case of head lice, all parents are advised to check their child's head tonight'.

Children often feel very ill with some of the common childhood infections. An illness like chicken pox may seem ordinary but it is still unpleasant to have. Adults often feel even more ill with the so-called childhood diseases and some illnesses pose a particular threat. Although there have been extensive vaccination programmes, mumps and rubella (German measles) are still around. Rubella can cause very serious damage to a fetus in the early months of pregnancy so pregnant women – parents or practitioners – who have not been vaccinated need to know. Mumps carry the slight risk to men of inflammation of the testicles and subsequent sterility.

Judging when children are ill

Of course you aim, in partnership with children's parents, to keep them as healthy as possible, but they will get ill sometimes, it is inevitable. Some children will experience more ill health than their peers. When a child in your care seems to be ill, you have the difficult task of deciding, in consultation with colleagues or seniors:

- What is the matter?
- How serious is it? And therefore ...
- Do you need to contact the child's parent before the end of the day?

Very young children cannot say much to guide you when they are ill or sickening for something. You will also depend a great deal on your knowledge of this child as an individual.

- Is she behaving in a different way from normal: more lethargic, prone to tears or whining?
- An underused sense is that of smell. Children who are ill may smell different, not unpleasant, just different from how they do normally.
- Four and five year olds may be more able to tell you what is wrong when they feel ill. Children, however, much like adults, can be subjective in answering 'How much does it hurt?'
- Children may also be vague or confused about names for parts of the body, so do ask, 'Show me where it hurts' and not just 'Tell me'.

When you share the care of very young children with parents it is especially important that you communicate at transition times: when you pass over responsibility at the beginning and end of the day. If a baby or child is poorly, you both need to have accurate information on the symptoms and how long they have lasted. Vomiting and diarrhoea can be particularly dangerous for babies and toddlers, who swiftly become very ill and dehydrated.



Activity

Find out about the medication policy and practice in your setting.

- What is seen as medication, in contrast with ordinary first aid measures?
- How is medication stored and what are the safety procedures for dealing with the medication needs of individual children?
- What kind of records are kept? Write up the general policy.
- With the parents' permission, write up a short description of the medication needs of one child in the setting.
- See also the section about regular medication on page 525.

Key skills links: C2/3.3

Activity

- Check with your setting and explore any guidelines on when mildly ill children could be accepted for the day or when you would wait until a parent or carer came to pick up the child.
- What kind of symptoms would lead to prompt contact with a parent?
- What are the guidelines about when a child can return after common childhood infections such as chicken pox? Write up your findings.
- Discuss with colleagues in different settings whether the guidelines vary at all.

Key skills links: C2.1a C2.3

Raised temperature

A child's temperature should usually be 37°C (98.6°F). It is normal for the temperature to vary a little but a rise in a child's temperature is a sign of illness. Fever is reached with a temperature of 38°C (100.4°F) and a child is at risk of high temperature convulsions if it reaches 41°C (106°F).

- You can check a child's temperature with a standard mercury thermometer or a digital thermometer. These are placed under the arm of a child younger than five years.
- Older children can have the thermometer in their mouth, since they will understand not to bite on it.
- It takes 4–5 minutes for the thermometer to register the temperature under the arm and about 2 minutes in the mouth.
- A plastic strip or a fever scan is less accurate but better than a guess, if a child finds it impossible to keep still.

A high temperature should be treated by:

- keeping a child cool
- giving plenty of liquids to avoid dehydration
- a paracetamol liquid suitable for the child's age.
- aspirin should not be given to children younger than 12 years because of the danger of the complication of Reye's syndrome if the child has chicken pox.

Stomach ache

Children quite often complain of stomach or tummy ache. Usually this symptom is not a sign of something serious, but it is important to respond to children and to track their complaints. (See also page 169 about apparent stomach pains and colic in babies.)

- Listen to the child and suggest she sits quiet for a while. If she soon gets bored and starts playing again then she is probably not ill.
- If a child looks to be in pain and clutches or rocks holding their stomach, they probably are in pain. Pain can travel and be felt in the stomach when the problem is elsewhere, because the nerves in the abdomen are linked to the spinal cord.
- Young children are not yet sure of the names for all the parts of their body. 'My tummy hurts' can be a description applying to almost anything on the front of their body from the throat to the lower trunk. You need to ask 'show me where it hurts' to get a better idea.
- Aches combined with a temperature of more than 38°C could mean an infection. So you would need to tell the child's parent and suggest that a trip to the doctor might be wise.
- When children's bodies are fighting infection their immune system is working hard. A lot of the lymphoid tissue that is part of this system is in the lower abdomen, so children's stomachs can feel tender or swell.

Some children have frequent stomach aches. In these cases it is worth looking for a pattern using your own informal observation and some simple questions of the child:

- Are they hungry? Sometimes children have not yet worked out that hunger can make the stomach ache as well as rumble.
- Have they got indigestion because they eat their food very fast, perhaps not chewing well? Try for a more relaxed mealtime. Consider also if this child gets so hungry that she or he bolts the food. Can you produce a meal earlier (as a nanny) or organise a nutritional snack to keep the child going?
- Have they got constipation? Apart from making it painful to go to the toilet and pass stools, constipation can give children stomach and lower back ache. Have a discreet chat with the child and see what is happening or not happening (see page 72).
- The onset of a stomach upset or diarrhoea can give a child pain. You would need to watch out for any other symptoms as well as treating the diarrhoea (see page 73).
- Are they lifting heavy objects in play? Children can strain themselves and you may need to explain how to lift and carry something properly and that it is wise to get help.
- Pain over the loins could mean a kidney problem.

Severe abdominal pain may indicate *appendicitis*, although this more usually affects children older than five years.

- In this case the pain typically starts in the bottom right hand side of the abdomen and may then spread.
- It persists over a couple of hours and is often associated with a slightly raised temperature and vomiting.
- The child's abdomen feels hard to the touch.
- You or the parent should contact a doctor urgently if the stomach ache takes on these features.

Illness and emotional distress

Children may use stomach aches or generally feeling ill as a way of gaining attention or to communicate that they are worried:

- You should find ways to meet this emotional need without criticising the child as attention-seeking or as a hypochondriac (see also page 129 about not labelling children by their behaviour).
- Check that nothing serious is wrong, then pay limited attention to the child's complaints about feeling ill. Ensure that you and your colleagues pay friendly and positive attention to the child at other times. Look for ways to notice what she has done and alert her to what she has learned recently.
- Children sometimes say they are ill as a way of communicating that they are troubled or to get out of going somewhere that makes them very unhappy.
- If there is a pattern that means children avoid going to nursery or school, then you need to open up the conversation with 'Is something the matter?', 'Are you having troubles at playgroup?' or 'Did the teachers sort out that problem in the school toilets?'.

Children who complain of feeling ill when there seems to be nothing physically wrong may genuinely feel that they are at risk.

- One possibility is that the child's parents are so concerned that they have given the child the impression that germs are everywhere. You may need to give the child a more realistic view of ordinary life.
- Another possibility is that the child has experienced bereavement and is scared of serious illness and death. This situation is more likely when parents and other adults have scarcely talked with the child about the family loss. The child needs to be able to express her fears and distress (see page 224).
- In any of these situations you will need to talk with parents to share what you have noticed and suggest that they may wish to talk with their child.

Rashes

You may notice signs of rashes or swellings and there may be more obvious events such as vomiting or diarrhoea. Illnesses that produce rashes will look different on individual children depending on their skin colour and many books still only give photos of light skinned children.

- If children are light skinned, then spots or an unusual flush will show up as red against the skin.
- When they run a temperature, children will look unnaturally flushed or, if very ill, children's colour may drain.

- The darker a child's skin colour, the more the spots or a rash will show as raised areas.
- You may notice a different shading of skin colour around the spots.
- As soon as children start scratching, the spots will show redder and any blistering will be more obvious.
- Darker skinned children may also drain of colour, in contrast with how they look when they are healthy.

Some common illnesses have a rash as one of the symptoms but this is not always the first sign. A few common illnesses are now described. Even though some of these are covered by the immunisation programme, not all children are immunised. In addition, some who have been immunised will still get the illness. As you read the following section, you will notice that children usually become infectious before the first symptoms appear. The most caring parents cannot help the fact that their children may have passed on the illness. Once the symptoms appear, children would need to be cared for at home and remain away from an early years setting, not only for reasons of infection but also because children will feel ill.

Chicken pox

Children with chicken pox have a mild fever and they feel unwell. Small, itchy, dark red spots appear over a period of 3–4 days. Some children have quantities of spots and some only have a few. The spots then blister and crust over. Children are infectious from two days before the rash appears until the last blister has scabbed. The illness is unpleasant but not usually dangerous unless the child's immune system is already compromised for some reason. Children need to be treated for any fever and calamine lotion helps relieve the itching. Discourage them from scratching (and recognise that this is very hard!), otherwise the spots may get infected or leave scars.

German measles (rubella)

Children with German measles may not feel ill enough for anyone to realise. There may be a mild fever, cough or sore throat and sometimes swollen glands. The rash is of pink, slightly raised spots. Children are infectious from one week before until four days after the rash has appeared. The greatest risk is to pregnant women in their first trimester (see page 522).

Measles

Measles is a miserable illness to experience and can bring dangerous complications. The symptoms at the outset are similar to a heavy cold with a cough and a high fever. There may be a rash of small white spots inside the mouth. Then after 3–4 days of the apparent cold, a rash of brownish-pink spots will start, often from behind the ears. The rash spreads across the body sometimes joining to form blotches. Children may have swollen glands and be very sensitive to light. Children are infectious from a few days before the rash appears until five days after it has gone.

You should call the doctor once the illness looks like measles. Children may need antibiotics for a secondary infection and you must be ready for complications that can affect a minority of children. All children need to be kept quiet and given home nursing care, including treating any fever. About 1 in 15 children develop a serious ear infection, pneumonia, bronchitis, convulsions or encephalitis.

Mumps

The first sign of mumps is usually a swelling in one or both of the salivary glands below the ear or in front of the jaw. Children are in pain and they may have earache or difficulty in swallowing. These symptoms can disturb their sleep. Children are infectious for six days before the swelling until it has gone.

Children need care and comfort if they are unhappy. Soft food and plenty of drinks can ease the problems of swallowing. There is no need to call a doctor unless the child is more ill or develops a rash.

Activity

Take one of the illnesses covered in this section.

- Make a brief plan for how you would care for children while they are ill.
- How would you keep them entertained when children are better enough to be bored, but not well enough return to nursery or playgroup?
- Present your ideas to colleagues.

Key skills link: C2.3 C2.1a

Allergic conditions

There are a number of conditions that are triggered by allergies and which children may experience in differing levels of severity.

Hay fever

The term hay fever is used to cover a wide range of allergies to different tree and plant pollens and other common substances such as house dust. The symptoms are like those of a heavy cold: runny nose, sneezing and coughing. Additionally the eyes become itchy and sore, so that they may be red and swollen. Hay fever seems to run in families and is often linked to asthma or other allergies.

Tests can sometimes establish exactly which substances trigger the allergic reaction, although many people do not know exactly what sets off their allergy. Tree or plant pollens may only be around at certain times of the year whereas an allergy to house dust (literally the dead house mites in the dust) is a continuing problem.

Depending on the severity of a child's reaction, there are a number of practical steps:

- A range of medication is now available that deals with the allergy without making a child or adult sleepy. You would need to be guided by parents and their GP, since not all preparations are suitable for young children.
- Children who have an allergy to house dust may need an especially clean environment.
- Allergies to food are covered on page 95.

Eczema

Eczema is a miserable condition for a child, even in a mild version. Children can become very irritated by itchy skin and will be in pain if their skin cracks and

Figure 4.6

Hygiene is important but some children will be allergic to soaps



bleeds. Pain and severe discomfort can keep them awake at night and their parents with them.

Atopic eczema is the most common kind of eczema and is found among babies and young children. Atopic means a family or hereditary tendency to allergic conditions such as asthma, eczema and hay fever. Over the last three decades there has been a significant increase in atopic eczema and it is estimated that the condition now affects about 10 per cent of children. The reason for the increase seems to be environmental change in that many homes now have central heating and fitted carpets. This shift has increased children's exposure to allergens like house dust mites. Some children develop other allergic conditions such as asthma (see page 520).

The symptoms of eczema can vary:

- In babies it can begin with patches of dry and itchy skin on the face.
- The skin behind the knees and ears, the neck, elbow and wrist skin folds are often affected.
- In severe cases the rash can cover a baby or child's whole body.
- The skin irritation can lead to redness and inflammation, tiny blisters that can weep.
- With severe itching the skin may scale and, in chronic eczema, the skin may actually thicken (lichenification) as a self-protective mechanism.
- In severe cases there may be swelling (oedema).
- A child with severe eczema is also more vulnerable to infections because the skin has broken.

Most children seem to outgrow the condition, at least to an extent, but about 10 per cent will continue to have to cope with eczema throughout their lives. A

child's parents and their GP will need to decide on treatment and to review its effectiveness on a regular basis.

Eczema is a dry skin condition, so the most important approach is to keep children's skin soft and moist. You will need to follow the pattern established by the family.

- Emollients in liquid form are added to a child's bath and emollient creams can be applied to her skin, smoothed on in downward strokes. Emollients are mild and part of the daily care for a child with eczema.
- Topical steroid creams reduce inflammation and help to heal damaged skin. They are medicines and should be used according to the instructions and only for short periods of time.
- Steroid creams have the side effect of thinning the skin over time. So you should wash your hands thoroughly after using such cream on a child.
- You will do the skin care for a younger child, although children will learn to take over their own skin care as they grow.

You need to avoid any food or toiletries that parents have discovered makes the skin condition worse. In a family home, the products should all be suitable anyway. If you work in an early years setting, then you will need to be alert over foods. It is good practice to use non-perfumed toiletries with young children in general, but some children may have extra sensitive skin. Children with eczema are best dressed in cotton clothing and they may need to avoid contact with some materials in the dressing up box or within some sensory activities.

For more information

The National Eczema Society has information packs (send an sae) and offers advice over their telephone helpline. Contact them at Hill House, Highgate Hill, London N19 5NA help and information line 0870 241 3604 website: www.eczema.org.uk.

Parasites

Most children will experience at least one visitation from the common parasites – head lice, threadworms and roundworms. Children are not ill but they can be in a lot of discomfort and will be tired if their sleep is disturbed. The other issue to bear in mind is that children may be embarrassed if their parents or other carers have reacted as if lice or threadworms are something to be ashamed about.

If you work on a daily basis with children you are unlikely to treat the children yourself for these conditions. Your role will be to:

- Inform parents discreetly if you see signs of worms or lice. This will not be the most enjoyable conversation of your life, especially if it is the parents' first encounter with the problem.
- Make the conversation private, calm and practical.
- Have some general information available in your setting and show this to parents at the time. You will often find leaflets in a local child health clinic or at the counter of a high street chemist.

Tips for practice

Head lice

The first sign of head lice may be that a child keeps scratching part of her head, although sometimes the lice get well established before this reaction. You may see the lice themselves, but they are small and move swiftly. Alternatively you may spot their eggs, called nits. These are small white or greyish specks that can look like dandruff. Lice are unpleasant and need to be cleared but they do not carry any diseases.

Special anti-lice shampoos are available from the local chemists and parents and carers need to use whatever is currently recommended. Ordinary shampoos do not kill lice. The lice eggs then need to be removed by combing the child's hair with a special fine toothed nit comb. Some shampoos provide the comb in the packet. You would not use the shampoo on a baby.

Do be ready to reassure parents that lice do not mean their child's hair is dirty. It is, however, a myth that lice prefer clean hair; the truth is that they are happy to jump into any available head. Some parents react with horror to the first outbreak of lice and cut their children's hair very short. There is no need to do this and a child who has taken ages to grow her hair will be very distressed.

It is unwise to wash children's hair in anti-lice shampoos as a preventative. The chemicals that kill lice are strong and, like any other medication, the shampoo should not be used in an indiscriminate way. You may find that your local advice is to use gentler remedies like tea tree shampoo. Whichever lotion is used, the best (and preventative) action against head lice is to comb children's hair thoroughly morning and evening. This clears the hair of eggs and dead lice and breaks the legs of any live ones – their days are then numbered. If regular combing is not possible, for religious reasons or because a child's hair is plaited, an adult will just have to check the child's head with great care.

Head lice usually jump from one head to another and this is an easy task in an early years setting, since children and adults often sit very close. Lice occasionally survive for a short while on combs or brushes. So it is wise to wash them thoroughly and not to share the same comb.

Threadworms

These are tiny white worms that easily get onto children's hands (or adults') from contaminated food or just as easily from the toilets or from playing outside. Children put their hands to their mouths and the eggs enter their body. These eggs hatch in the intestine and about two weeks later the female threadworm lays eggs around the child's anus, usually at night. This causes a most uncomfortable itching, children scratch themselves and may break the skin.

Parents or carers need to get the recommended medicine from a pharmacy. It works by giving children mild diarrhoea and this action flushes out the threadworms. The diarrhoea is not usually hard to handle, but if a child is worried about a toileting accident, or has a delicate digestion, it may be better to give the medicine on a day when they can stay at home. Mixtures vary but children are in agreement that they usually taste pretty bad. Until the worms have gone, it can help to cut children's finger nails and have them wear close fitting pyjamas or pants at night, so that they do not make themselves sore with scratching.

Again do reassure parents that it is very easy to pick up threadworms; it is not a sign of a dirty household. Bedding and night clothes can be thoroughly washed but there is no need to start boiling or throwing household items in the dustbin.

The practical steps for reducing the incidence of threadworms are part of good hygiene:

- Show and remind children to wash their hands after playing in the garden and going to the toilet and before mealtimes or cooking activities.

- Make sure that toilets and washbasins are well cleaned and disinfected. They should not run out of soap, clean towels or toilet paper. Children should not share the same towels or flannels.

Activity

- Collect information leaflets about the current advice for dealing with head lice or threadworms. You will find material at your local health clinic or pharmacy.
- Prepare yourself for a friendly conversation with a parent whose child has shown the signs of lice or threadworms.
- Explore a role play with a colleague who plays the parent as distressed or angry ('my child must have picked those up here!') Consider strategies to deal with this situation.

Key skills link: PS2.1

Meningitis

Meningitis causes an inflammation of the meninges, the linings surrounding the brain. There are two kinds of meningitis:

- Bacterial meningitis is more dangerous, needs swift treatment with antibiotics and can be fatal. The serious risk is of meningococcal septicaemia: blood poisoning caused by bacteria entering the bloodstream and multiplying in an uncontrollable way. Most children recover completely but some can be left with serious complications like deafness or learning disabilities. There are different strands of this version of the disease and the immunisations (see page 185) only cover some kinds.
- Viral meningitis is more common than the bacterial version, has similar symptoms but is less severe. Children need good nursing care but antibiotics have no effect with a viral infection. Children recover without complications, although headaches and lack of energy can be an issue.

Meningitis is rare compared with other illnesses but the seriousness means that you need to be aware of the warning signs. Children are particularly vulnerable because they have not yet built up an immunity. Also they tend to play close together and are easily infected by the coughing and sneezing that passes on the infection.

- In babies or children (or adults) you should watch out for a high temperature, possibly with cold hands and feet. There may be convulsions.
- Babies refuse feeds or are sick. Children may have vomiting or diarrhoea.
- Babies give a high pitched moaning or whimpering cry. They may have a blank and staring expression. The fontanelle (soft spot on the head) may be tense or bulging.
- Babies may be floppy, fretful or dislike being handled. Children and babies may be drowsy and difficult to wake.
- Children may complain of a severe headache, neck stiffness (unable to touch the chin to the chest), joint or muscle pains and dislike of bright lights.

- Light skinned babies and children may be pale and blotchy.
- A septicaemic rash is very serious and means that the child should be taken immediately to hospital. This symptom starts as a cluster of tiny blood spots which join to look like a fresh bruise. If you press a clear drinking glass onto the rash, it does not fade. You can see the rash on dark skinned children, although less easily – look on any paler areas of skin, like the palms or the soles of the feet.

Children will not show all of these symptoms and some, like vomiting, could of course be due to another cause. Be attentive and do not assume that some of these symptoms are 'flu. Call a child's parent if you are concerned but, if you cannot get in contact swiftly, do not delay but call your closest health clinic. If the baby or child is getting worse then take her to the nearest hospital and do this straight away if she has a rash.

Finding out more

The Meningitis Trust offers information, advice and posters. Contact them at Fern House, Bath Road, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL5 3TJ tel: 01453 768000 helpline: 0845 6000 800 email: info@meningitis-trust.org.uk website: www.meningitis-trust.org.uk

Tuberculosis

This disease is an example of a serious illness that many people believe no longer poses a health risk in the UK. In fact there are now more people in the UK with tuberculosis (TB) than catch measles. TB never went away and is a disease that continues to be a serious problem in many parts of the world. TB can flourish when families live in poverty. An outbreak in a south London nursery in May 2001 was a reminder that nobody should be complacent. Without close contact TB is not highly infectious, but some children were infected in this nursery because the practitioner had TB for six months before being diagnosed.

TB usually affects the lungs but can affect other parts of the body such as the lymph nodes. The symptoms are fever and night sweats, a cough, weight loss and blood in the phlegm. The disease is passed through the droplets in coughs and sneezes. There is a good chance of recovery when the disease is diagnosed and a full course of antibiotics is taken.

TB should be taken seriously and your local public health authority notified if you have reason to believe that a child or adult is infected. Some city areas of the UK have populations that are at higher risk. Families who come to the UK from very deprived conditions, especially refugee and asylum seeker families, are at great risk of TB. You will need to address the health issues with consideration, because the families may be very uneasy about official intervention. You will need to involve your local advisor for refugee families as well.

Finding out more

You can find more information about TB or any illness by phoning the service NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or by checking their website: nhsdirect.nhs.uk

AIDS/HIV

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a condition in which the body's immune system is seriously weakened. It appears to be caused by a virus named the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). When individuals are infected, they show as HIV-positive on the appropriate test. They can then pass on the condition to others, although they may be outwardly healthy for months or even years. When individuals become unwell, then they are said to have developed AIDS itself.

Children with this condition are likely to have contracted it in the womb from their mothers, who may not have known that they were themselves HIV-positive. The baby can become infected during delivery and through breast feeding. Children can also contract HIV if they have been given medical treatment such as injections or blood transfusions under conditions of very poor hygiene.

Finding out more

Children with AIDS Charity, Lion House, 3 Plough Yard London EC2A 3LP
tel: 020 7247 9115 website: www.cwac.org

This organisation publishes a booklet on *Talking with Children about Illness and HIV*. The booklet has sensible general advice on talking with children about serious illness, their own or that of a loved parent.

In the time since the condition was identified in the 1980s, there has been considerable research and development of drug regimes that enable affected children and adults to remain relatively healthy for longer. Currently AIDS is still ultimately a terminal condition, but there has been significant progress in delaying the disease's pattern and helping individuals to make the most of their periods of health.

It is preferable that parents tell you if their child is HIV-positive, but there has been such negative media coverage over the years that parents may remain silent. Unlike some other serious health conditions (such as scarlet fever), there is no legal obligation to notify the authorities. If families come to trust you, they may tell you and it is certainly preferable that at least one person knows and keeps the fact confidential, since you can then protect the child's health.

Consistent medical advice is that children who are HIV-positive cannot infect practitioners or other children through the normal daily contact of early years settings. Your standard hygiene procedures for changing nappies, dealing with toileting or caring for children who have hurt themselves will be an effective protection (see page 56).

Children who are HIV-positive pose a very low risk to others, but can be at risk from their peers. Infections like measles or chicken pox can be dangerous to children with a compromised immune system. Children have also been put at risk when their HIV status has become known and they have been bullied.

Supporting children's learning about their bodies and health

Children are interested to learn about bodies and health and they can gain in confidence and awareness of their own bodies. You do not want children to

Figure 4.7

Children will learn about cleaning up after enjoyable outdoor play



become anxious that ‘bugs’ are everywhere. But you can explain simply how germs can enter our bodies by:

- *being swallowed* – why we do not suck objects other than food and why we wash our hands
- *being breathed in* – why we do not cough and sneeze over other people
- *entering our body by a cut* – why we clean cuts and grazes.

You can help children through conversation, role play and the use of suitable books and stories:

- Children can learn about the words and feelings needed to express themselves about feeling ill, feeling well and energetic.
- Children whose health means they are very tired can sometimes be the best judge of whether they will sit down with a book or are ready for the climbing frame.
- Children can understand a bit at time about health conditions that they may not experience directly.
- They can link health and a healthy diet (see page 81).
- Books can help them understand about growing, how their bodies work and simple explanations of what happens when they are ill.

Children can learn through your guidance what to do for themselves and a sense of how to help others.

- The best opportunities will be when you explain why you take these steps when Henry has a nose bleed or why it is important to clear up vomit quickly.
- You will need to reassure a child and her friends. It can be scary the first time that a child is sick or blood pours from their nose.
- Children can also learn about what illnesses are infectious and those which are not – an important understanding when a child attends your setting with a condition that is visible but not catching (see page 538).



Activity

- Take two or three of the bullet points in the text and plan how you could take the opportunity to extend a child's understanding as well as deal with any emotional distress.
- Write up any real incidents that you handle, with a view to improving your practice.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 LP2/3.1–3

Taking care of yourself

The work of an early years practitioner requires a lot of physical activity, but also emotional energy and commitment. Young children require that you are able to do several things at the same time and readjust swiftly from one child or activity to another. You need to cultivate the skills of being able to change direction, tolerate interruptions and keep track of several children and events at the same time. For example:

- You change a toddler's nappy while chatting with an older child who is interested in what you are doing.
- You need to hold onto what one child has said to you whilst you, 'Excuse me', deal with a child who had your attention first, then turn back to the second one.

The importance of a positive outlook

Focus on what you have achieved – a supportive practitioner encourages children and alerts them to what they have learned, seeing mistakes as something positive and not as disasters. You need to offer the same kindness and 'half full bottle' approach to yourself. Your colleagues and seniors should support you by pointing out how you have helped and cared for the children, at those times when you are tempted to dwell gloomily on what you have not managed or what has not gone as well as you hoped. You could also look at page 120 for a positive outlook on working with babies and very young children.

Let annoyances go – young children tend to focus on the present and let the past go and adults can usefully learn from them. Your work will not go smoothly all the time and a bad day will only get worse if you chew over frustrations and dwell on imagined slights. By all means, talk about problems and take what action is possible, then start afresh. In a supportive team your colleagues and seniors should help with ways to carry on after an argument with a parent or ways to start afresh with a child whom you do not find at all easy.

Keep healthy

Many of the sections in Chapter 3 focus of course on how you help children to keep healthy and to learn healthy habits in their young life. Do try to apply some of this good advice to yourself. You also need enough rest and good food.

You will inevitably come into close contact with many children and adults. You are therefore liable to catch illnesses, especially in your first years of working

with young children. Some practitioners find that they get more robust. Good standards of hygiene will help to safeguard you as well as the children.

Watch your back

You need to watch your back, as straining and wrenching the back is a common occupational hazard for people working with children.

- It is important to get into the habit of bending at the knees, rather than at the waist, to pick up children or shift equipment.
- Ensure that there are two of you if equipment is heavy or unwieldy.
- Facilities for changing babies and toddlers should be at a comfortable height so that you do have to bend over children. It is surprising how quickly you will feel an ache in your back if you have to bend over to a low angle.
- When you talk and play with young children, they need you at their eye level for good communication. So, get down comfortably – sitting or kneeling – rather than bending over them.
- When babies are very young you may carry them in front baby carriers. Make sure that the carrier is well placed for you as well as the baby. The carrier should support the baby's head and hold him snugly close to you, with his bottom about level with your waist.
- When babies are ready for a back carrier (probably no younger than about 7–8 months), make sure that this type of carrier is also of a good quality and sits comfortably on your shoulders and back.

Figure 4.8

Bending at the knees protects your back and brings you to the child's eye level





Activity

Build up some ideas for how to protect your back in working with young children.

- As well as the ideas in this section you can contact BackCare (the National Organisation for Healthy Backs), 16 Elmtree Road, Teddington, Middlesex TW11 8ST tel: 020 8977 5474 website: www.backpain.org
- Develop a short presentation with some visuals if possible to show colleagues and fellow students how you can all avoid preventable back injuries.

Key skills link: C3.1b

Pregnancy

The early years workforce is overwhelmingly female, so pregnancy is a likelihood within any team. If you are pregnant, then discuss with your senior and colleagues how your pattern of work should be adjusted. You will still be able to complete most of your job. But it would be wise to let a colleague carry heavier equipment or join in the more vigorous games with children.

You do not want to view yourself as a walking project, but the children will be very interested in what is happening to you and your body. So be ready to explain at an appropriate time in your pregnancy that you are expecting a baby and follow through conversations that the children wish to have.

Leave your work behind

When days with the children have gone very well, you will feel a glow of satisfaction. On those days when the children, or the adults, have strained your patience to the limits you may feel as if your reserves are drained.

You do need to leave your work behind at the end of the day and enjoy a personal life. You may find this harder to do if the children with whom you work have unhappy or deprived lives. As hard as it may feel, you need to focus on what you contribute to make their lives better and recognise that worrying outside the job will not make a single difference – except that it may prevent you coming back fresh to them on the next day.

Activity

- What helps you personally to relax at the end of a working day?
- Make a list of simple and cheap ideas or activities that help you unwind.

Sadness when children move on

Part of caring for children as individuals is a sense of loss when they move on, as they inevitably will, even those children who attend your setting for a matter of years. You may be excited for the children as they approach a new stage of their

life and still a little sad at their going. Of course, the exit of some children, who have been a serious handful, may be more of a relief. Early years professionals have feelings and in a supportive team it should be possible to talk about how you feel. (See also the section on attachment on page 000.)

Further resources

Lindon, Jennie (1999) *Too Safe for their own Good? Helping children learn about risk and lifeskills* National Early Years Network.

Miller, Judy (1997) *Never Too Young: How young children can take responsibility and make decisions* National Early Years Network and Save the Children.

Shabde, Neela (1999) *The A-Z of Child Health* Step Forward Publishing (tel: 01926 420046).

Troyna, Alexandra (1998) *Providing Emotional support to children and their Families after an Accident: Guidelines for professionals* Child Accident Prevention Trust.

Vine, Penny and Todd, Teresa (n.d.) *Ring of Confidence: A quality circle time programme to support personal safety for the foundation stage* Positive Press.

Many local health authorities have their own websites, on which they post information directly relevant to local health issues.

Progress check

- 1 List and describe the main ways in which you would check an early years setting or family home for safety.
- 2 Explain the drawbacks of trying to achieve zero risk in any setting.
- 3 Describe two ways in which you could help young children start to learn about personal safety.
- 4 Identify two signs that mean a child needs to be taken to hospital after an incident.
- 5 Briefly describe two illnesses for which a rash could be a warning symptom.
- 6 Identify two sources of risk to the backs of early years practitioners and how you might protect yourself.

5

Conception and birth

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the details of conception and development prior to birth
- understand and support the aims of antenatal care
- understand the process of childbirth
- be able to support in the postnatal care of babies and mothers.

Introduction

In this chapter you will learn about the usual events of the development of babies prior to birth and how antenatal care can support and protect the health of mothers. The role of early years practitioners is to understand what happens in order to be able to support through conversation and information sharing. Practitioners who work in hospitals may have a more direct role. Sharing the care of babies and offering support to families after birth is covered in Chapter 6.

From conception to birth

The development of a human baby is a long process starting before birth. This section describes some of the main events and what the problems or risks can be for the mother or baby. It is important to bear in mind that most pregnancies are without serious complications.

Development before birth

Conception occurs when the sperm from a male penetrates the cell wall of an egg from the female. The development of the resulting baby lasts about 40 weeks and is divided into three phases:

- The germinal period lasts from the moment of conception until the fertilised

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following unit:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 7



Key terms

Embryo

the term used to describe a baby in the first 8 weeks after conception

Fetus

the term used to describe a baby from 8 weeks after conception to birth

Gestation

the development of the embryo and fetus over the months of a pregnancy

Full term babies

when babies are born close to the usual gestation period of about 40 weeks

Premature babies

when babies are born earlier than the usual gestation period, usually less than 37 weeks

Miscarriage

the loss of a fetus before 24 weeks gestation within the pregnancy

Stillbirth

the loss of a fetus after 24 weeks of gestation within a pregnancy

egg is implanted in the wall of the uterus. The process of travelling from the fallopian tubes and implantation takes 10–14 days.

- The embryonic period lasts from week 2 to week 8 after conception. The **embryo** at this time develops all the major organs of the human body.
- The fetal period is from week 8 until the baby is born. The **fetus**, now about 2.5 centimetres in length, develops in size. The organs mature and gradually take on some of their functions. By week 20, the mother can usually feel the fetus move (now about 20 centimetres long). By week 32 the fetus can normally breathe, suck and swallow and by week 36 shows a response to light and sound waves.

The usual **gestation** time for the development of human babies is roughly nine months from the time of conception. This period is an average and healthy pregnancies can last slightly less or more than 40 weeks. A **full term baby** has spent most of the usual 40 week gestation period before being born. A **premature** baby has arrived earlier than the estimated 40 weeks – usually if they arrive before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Being premature is not necessarily a major problem for newborns, so long as they are not very early (see page 157). It is also sometimes the case that women are uncertain about the likely date of conception, especially if their periods follow an irregular pattern and therefore their baby may not be premature at all.

Miscarriage

It is estimated that about one in six of all pregnancies are lost through miscarriage, sometimes at such an early stage that the woman is unaware or uncertain that she is pregnant. The term **miscarriage** refers to a fetus delivered dead before the 24th week of gestation. A baby born dead after this time is referred to as a **stillbirth**. Legally the fetus is regarded as viable, able to live, after the 24th week. The boundary used to be the 28th week but medical advances (see page 157) have meant that very premature babies now have a chance of survival.

Parents can be distressed by miscarriage and wonder if they have done something wrong to cause the loss of their baby. In fact, there is usually no obvious reason for miscarriage and some pregnancies go to full term despite very adverse conditions. It is thought that a frequent reason for early miscarriage is that the fetus has a genetic abnormality. Another possibility is that the mother's womb does not expand to allow the fetus space, sometimes because of undetected fibroids. Women are not usually offered a medical investigation for the cause until they have had three miscarriages.

Full term babies

Full term or close to full term human babies are born at a stage when their bodies are mature enough to survive an independent life outside the womb. However, if their brain were more developed and therefore larger, normal vaginal delivery would not be possible, because the head would be too big. The brain of a full term infant weighs about 350 grams at birth. This weight trebles over the next twelve months to reach about 1000 grams. Brain development continues so that the brain weighs about 1300 grams at puberty and 1500 grams in adulthood.

Antenatal care

Pregnant women are encouraged to attend an antenatal clinic, either at the hospital where they are booked to give birth or with their midwife or GP. The usual pattern of attendance is once a month up to 32 weeks, then fortnightly and

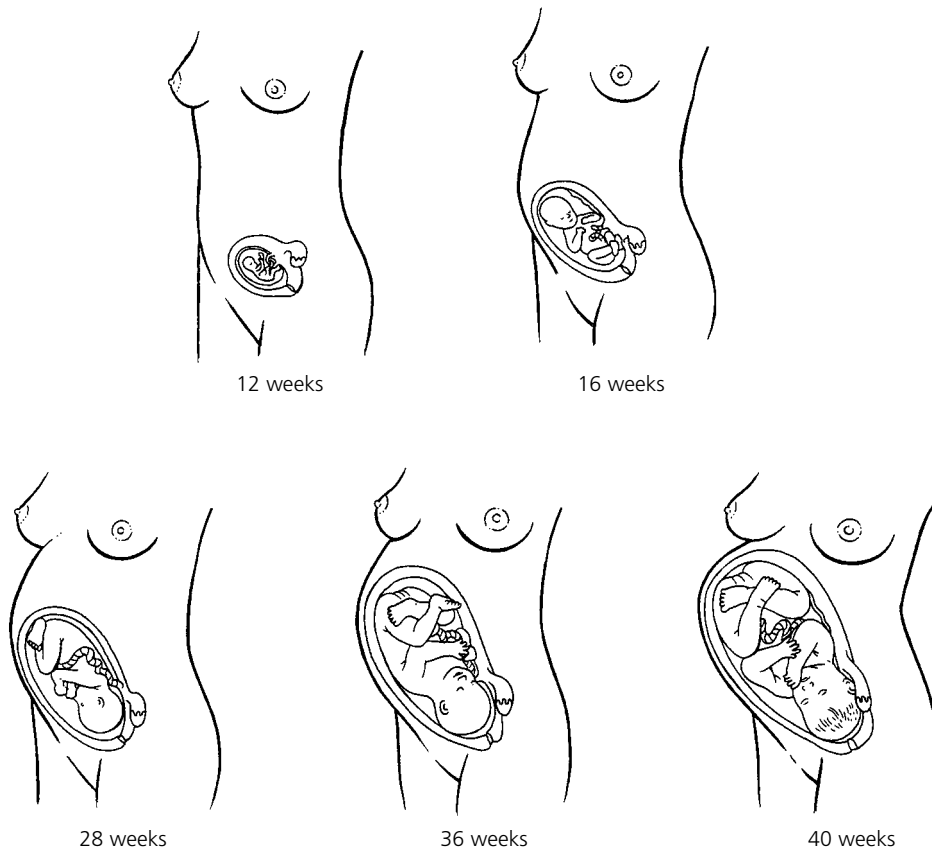


Figure 5.1 The development of the fetus from 12 to 40 weeks

then once a week in the final month of pregnancy. Regular health checks throughout the pregnancy aim to:

- ensure the continued health of the mother and baby
- identify any problems with the pregnancy
- offer advice as required on diet, continued activity and any of the normal physical problems of being pregnant.

Generally speaking, women are advised to continue with the physical activity that is part of their normal life, unless their leisure pursuits pose a risk, for instance, swimming is good exercise but diving is not recommended. A woman should inform any health practitioner that she is pregnant since some medication and procedures, such as X-rays, can harm the fetus.

Normal health changes in pregnancy

The most usual pattern is that women have a pregnancy that is free of serious concerns. However, simple checks at the antenatal clinic can identify conditions that can be serious if allowed to continue. There are a number of normal physical problems during pregnancy. It would be an unlucky woman who experienced more than a few from the possible list:

- feeling nauseous or actually being sick for the first trimester (three months) of the pregnancy and sometimes longer

- increasing tiredness and backache
- constipation, indigestion and incontinence (need to pass urine more frequently and with some urgency)
- fainting and palpitations
- bleeding gums and nosebleeds
- cramps
- swelling of the legs, feet or hands
- varicose veins and piles
- skin stretch marks or itchy skin.

To think about

Many pregnant women will have partners. Fathers in waiting can feel uninvolved or uncertain how to support their partners.

- List five ways in which men could support a woman through her pregnancy in ways that are helpful to her and could help the man to feel involved. Explain briefly why male partners might feel left out or uncertain what to do.
- Discuss your ideas with colleagues.
- Extend the discussion to include ways in which early years practitioners could help, through contact at an early years setting or working as a nanny.

Key skills links: C2.2 C2/3.1a

Health checks

At each antenatal visit, there are a number of standard checks:

- *The mother's weight:* it is inadvisable to put on a great deal of weight, but slow weight gain is usually a concern because it may mean that the baby is not growing steadily.
- *A urine test:* checks for sugar levels (possible diabetes), protein traces (possible pre-eclampsia), ketones (a by-product of when fats are broken down – possible problems with the kidneys).
- *Blood pressure:* high blood pressure can be another sign of pre-eclampsia.

Pre-eclampsia is taken seriously because the placenta may grow poorly so that the baby is ill nourished. The condition is treated with bed rest and possibly tablets to bring the blood pressure down. Women will be carefully monitored since eclampsia is dangerous and can lead to convulsions, threatening the lives of mother and baby.

Women are given a blood test at the first antenatal clinic visit. This test will usually:

- Confirm the woman's blood group out of the four possible different blood groups
- Identify whether she is Rhesus positive or negative. Most people are Rh-positive, which means their blood has an antigen that stimulates the



formation of antibodies to fight disease. Problems arise if the mother is Rh-negative and the baby is Rh-positive. The first baby is usually fine but in subsequent pregnancies the mother's body reacts to the 'foreign' blood cells of the fetus to form antibodies that attack the fetus' blood cells. Once the condition is known there are steps which can be taken to protect the fetus.

- The blood is also screened for diseases that can damage the fetus: syphilis, viral hepatitis and blood disorders such as sickle cell disease (see page 520). Some hospitals offer AIDS/HIV screening to women who are in high risk groups. This test does not identify the AIDS virus itself but shows whether antibodies to the virus are in the bloodstream, in which case that person has been infected.

Blood tests on later antenatal visits are to check the level of haemoglobin to advise if women need to take iron supplements.

Ultrasound scans

Ultrasound scans are usually offered at about 18–20 weeks and sometimes towards the end of pregnancy. These scans work by bouncing very high frequency sound waves off solid objects, in this case the woman's body with the fetus inside. Scans may be done for several reasons.

- To confirm a pregnancy if there is some doubt and identify whether this is a multiple birth. From the end of the second month it is possible to see the fetus kicking.
- To gain an estimated date for delivery from the size and maturity of the fetus.
- To detect certain defects (then called an anomaly scan) such as congenital heart defects, spina bifida and gastrointestinal and kidney malfunctions.
- In the later stages of pregnancy it is also possible to confirm that the placenta is clear of the outlet of the uterus. A low lying placenta causes problems during the birth since the baby cannot be born and the mother may haemorrhage.

Activity

It will be valuable to familiarise yourself with the usual procedures in antenatal clinics. Some ways to do this include the following:

- Make contact with your closest health clinic. Can you talk with a community midwife to help you understand the common checks that are offered to pregnant women?
- It is also important to understand the different experiences of pregnant women. What makes a positive experience of antenatal care and what can be unhelpful or distressing? You could make contact with pregnant women or those who have not long had their baby through the clinic or a local branch of the National Childbirth Trust.
- Write up your findings, ensuring that any personal experiences are presented in a way that remains anonymous.
- Make a short presentation to your colleagues, highlighting the factors that can make antenatal care a positive experience.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1a

Additional tests

Some further checks may be offered depending on the age and health of the woman and the policy of the hospital. Such checks are usually to identify if the fetus will be born with a disability or serious health condition. Women are not obliged to undergo these tests, nor to accept a termination of the pregnancy if a problem is confirmed. Some families will opt for termination, but some want the information in order to prepare themselves for life with a disabled child.

- A chorion biopsy can be done at 10–11 weeks when cells are checked for inherited diseases such as cystic fibrosis, Duchenne muscular dystrophy, haemophilia and thalassaemia.
- Amniocentesis is a procedure done at 15–16 weeks in which a small amount of the amniotic fluid is drawn off and the fetus' cells checked for the chromosomal abnormality that causes Down's syndrome (see page 518).

Since both these procedures bring a small risk of miscarriage, they would not be offered unless the family history included these conditions or, in the case of Down's syndrome, women were older than 37 years old, since the risk is greater with older mothers.

Antenatal classes

The antenatal clinic offers support for health and well being during pregnancy. Antenatal classes offer women a preparation for the birth and very early days with a baby. The main aims of an antenatal class should be to help women to understand what will happen in the birth process, without making them anxious about everything that could go wrong. Realistic expectations can be based on information, whilst allowing for the fact that birth is a very personal experience.

The content of classes varies considerably and not surprisingly women differ in how useful they found their class. Classes run within a hospital usually give women an opportunity to see the labour ward and talk about hospital policy and options during the birth. Some preparation for parenthood is usually offered within classes, although first time mothers are understandably more focused on the impending birth.

Classes run by the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) focus on explaining how the birth process works and the value of specific breathing techniques at the different stages of labour. Successful use of these techniques can help women to feel more in control of what is happening, and manage the contractions as they become more frequent and painful. Breathing techniques can enable women to postpone the use of pain relief (see page 151) and sometimes to manage without it completely, so-called **natural childbirth**. Breathing techniques do not make labour pain free! The involvement of a birth partner, usually the baby's father, can offer support and practical help such as back massage.

NCT classes are organised through a local branch and many also offer post-birth support by linking new mothers with other local women and offering advice services such as a breastfeeding counsellor. Friendships and baby-sitting circles are often formed as a result of NCT classes and this contact can be especially useful for women whose work has hindered their making many local friends.

The **active birth movement**, led by Janet Balaskas, gained influence in the 1980s as part of a reaction against rigid hospital procedures that insisted women in labour should remain on their backs on a bed. In fact, labour is easier to manage and less painful if women can move about and different positions are possible for actually giving birth. Research has now fully supported the idea that

Key terms

Natural childbirth

labour without medical intervention in which women manage the process by breathing techniques and movement

Active birth movement

an approach emphasising that women in labour should be enabled to move and to take up different positions for managing contractions and the birth itself

labour is more straightforward, on average shorter and women need less pain relief if they can move around and take up a position that feels right to them in order to manage painful contractions.

Sheila Kitzinger has also been an outspoken critic of treating pregnant women and those giving birth as if they were ill and should therefore cooperate as 'patients'. Although the approach of community health services varies considerably, the work of Kitzinger and the National Childbirth Trust has been effective in challenging traditional medical attitudes towards women who are pregnant and giving birth.

Finding out more

The National Childbirth Trust was established in 1957, inspired by the work of Dr Grantly Dick-Read who pioneered the use of relaxation and breathing techniques in the UK.

You can contact them for leaflets or specific information at Alexandra House, Oldham Terrace, London W3 6NH tel: 0870 444 8707
email: enquiries@national-childbirth-trust.co.uk
website: www.nctpregnancyandbabycare.com

In collaboration with Harper Collins, the NCT publish a wide range of practical books on baby care.

Labour and birth

Labour itself can begin with three signs but the order of these, like the whole experience of labour and birth, can follow different patterns as well as a varied duration in total:

- During pregnancy the neck of the womb or cervix has been sealed with a mucus plug, which now comes away as the cervix is dilated. The resulting bloodstained mucus is called a 'show', but this may happen a couple of days before full labour.
- At some stage in labour, but not always at the beginning, the pressure of the baby's head breaks the membrane of the amniotic fluid and it flows out in a trickle or a rush, called the 'waters breaking'.
- The woman starts to feel muscle contractions, although Braxton Hicks (practice contractions) can be felt in the days before labour and trigger false alarms.

The process of labour is described in terms of three stages.

First stage

Strangely it is still not entirely understood what starts labour, the process by which the baby moves down the birth canal and is then born through the mother's vaginal opening. It is thought that a chemical or hormonal message may be passed from the baby across the placenta into the mother's blood stream. Something stimulates the production of chemicals called prostaglandins and the hormone oxytocin from the pituitary gland. These together cause the cervix to soften and the uterus to contract, which pulls the side of the uterus upwards and dilates the cervix.

Contractions in labour usually start as a low level ache, sometimes as back-ache, then, over the hours, they build into more frequent, longer and more

painful contractions. The cervix opens to allow the baby to pass through and when the cervix is 10 centimetres dilated, the first stage of labour is complete. This stage is the longest and is unlikely to last less than 10–12 hours in a first pregnancy. Some first births are shorter and some are much longer.

Second stage

The contractions now work to push the baby out of the uterus to be born. The tissues of the vaginal opening stretch to enable the baby's head to emerge, followed by the shoulders and the rest of the body. The second stage is complete with the birth of the baby. If there is no cause for concern, then the baby can be lifted to rest on the mother's stomach and the parents can greet their baby. The midwife cuts the umbilical cord that has joined the baby to the mother through the placenta.

The most straightforward birth presentation is head first. Some babies have not turned in late pregnancy and are feet first (breech delivery). It is possible to have a vaginal delivery with a breech birth but it would be watched very carefully.

This second stage is sometimes fast, but can take longer. If the woman is tiring and certainly if there are signs that the baby is in distress, then assistance will be given by helping the baby out with forceps or suction (ventouse).

Third stage

It is essential that the placenta, or afterbirth, is also expelled from the womb in its entirety. Without intervention this usually takes about 20 minutes but it is more usual for the midwife to give an injection which promotes contractions and speeds up this third stage. The advantage is that a swift delivery of the placenta reduces the risk of bleeding.

The experience of labour

A description of the stages of labour can only be a very general indicator. The pattern varies considerably between women and so does the personal experience of giving birth. Different kinds of support are helpful:

- Personal support from a midwife who stays with the woman and who preferably is already known to her.
- Support from the woman's partner or a friend, who will understand and encourage the use of controlled breathing techniques.

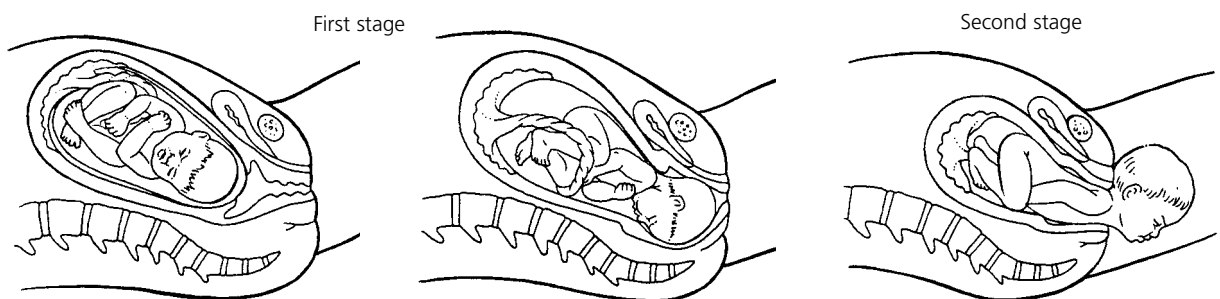


Figure 5.2 The process of childbirth: first and second stages

Pain relief is available but certainly should never be pushed upon a woman. The main options include:

- Entonox (known as gas and air) – a mix of oxygen and a painkiller breathed in through a mask.
- Pethidine that is injected and creates a drowsy state.
- An epidural anaesthetic that is injected into the spine. It either blocks the pain-carrying nerves or can remove all sensation below the waist.
- A small mobile unit can deliver transcutaneous nerve stimulation (TNS) though pads fixed either side of the spine. The system uses electrical impulses to dull the sensation of pain and is controlled by the woman in labour.
- Less frequently women may find midwives or other health practitioners who help the control of pain by acupuncture, aromatherapy or hypnosis.

Caesarean delivery

Normal childbirth is through vaginal delivery. Babies can be delivered surgically by caesarean section, in which an incision is made in the woman's abdomen and the baby is lifted out. The term derives from the belief that this method was how Julius Caesar was born in ancient Rome.

- In some cases this form of delivery is planned – an elective caesarean. This option would normally be taken because the health of the mother or the baby is known to be at risk. The woman might have a very narrow pelvis and measurements suggest that the baby's head will not be able to pass. Some health conditions, such as AIDS/HIV or genital herpes can be passed to the child during vaginal delivery.
- Unplanned or emergency caesareans are undertaken when a woman has begun a vaginal delivery and an unexpected emergency arises.



Figure 5.3

The first minutes of life outside the womb

- Caesareans can be undertaken with a full anaesthetic. However, if the woman wishes, an epidural anaesthetic is sufficient and the baby can be delivered into her arms.

The proportion of caesarean deliveries varies between hospitals and parts of the UK. When the proportion is higher than average there is some concern that surgical intervention in birth is encouraged for the convenience of the medical team.

Postnatal care

Care of babies after birth

There is no need to clean up newborn babies immediately. So long as there is no reason for concern, the usual practice is that they are given to the mother and father to hold close to their body. The midwife will check that the baby is breathing unsupported and gently clean the airway if there is any obstruction. Babies do not need to cry in order to breathe and some do not cry at all at birth, rather they fix their parents with a steady stare.

Newborn babies can be rather wrinkled, may have traces of blood (the mother's not usually the baby's) and their genitals, especially those of little boys, can look alarmingly large. First time parents, and early years practitioners who work in hospitals, can be misled by the fact that most allegedly new babies who feature in fictional television programmes or films are not newborns at all; most are at least several weeks old! Genuine newborns also have some vernix, a white creamy substance that is absorbed into their skin in the last weeks of gestation. This substance is far from unpleasant and, as some parents will tell you, newborn babies smell wonderful. This unique smell seems to support the first attachment between parents and baby.

Health checks

The overall well being of the baby is checked by the Apgar score, named after Dr Virginia Apgar who developed the system. At one minute after birth and then at

To think about

Hospital practice used to be to clean babies and do checks before giving the baby to the mother. It also used to be normal routine to put babies in a nursery rather than in a cot beside the mother's bed. These procedures have now been changed.

- Why is it so important that babies are given to their mother and father to hold as soon as possible after birth? What can be gained by this approach?
- Why is it better for babies to be beside their mother rather than taken away and placed in a nursery with all the other babies?
- Discuss your ideas with colleagues and, if at all possible, with women who have had babies in hospital.

Key skills links: C2/3.1

five minutes the midwife or doctor checks the newborn's heartbeat, breathing, muscle tone, reflexes and colour. Each of these are given a score of 0, 1 or 2 and the total is the Apgar score. A score of 10 is the best but a score over 7 is a normal baby. A newborn with score of 5–7 may need a little help but babies who score less than 5 may need oxygen to help their breathing.

Midwives also record the time of birth, the baby's weight and the circumference of the head. A baby is classified as low birth weight if less than 2500 grams (5½ pounds) and as a large baby if more than 4000 grams (10 pounds). The importance of head circumference is that an unusually large head circumference for the size of baby may indicate hydrocephalus, in which fluid accumulates in the brain. An unusually small circumference may indicate serious learning disability. All these measures also form a baseline to compare the baby against as the months pass. Many hospitals routinely give newborns vitamin K by injection as this protects against a kind of spontaneous bleeding in the newborn period.

Babies are then given a full check after about 24 hours by a paediatrician or nurse practitioner. This check will cover all parts of the baby's body with a gentle physical examination. Babies are observed to check that they can breathe well and that the remains of the umbilical cord is drying. A degree of jaundice is fairly common and more likely in premature babies, but this usually clears by itself.

The first full check will also observe babies' **reflex reactions**, the automatic responses that are normal in a healthy newborn.

- These include the reflex to suck and to blink in response to light or sound.
- Healthy newborns also have a grasping reflex, closing a palm around an adult finger.
- The Moro reflex is an automatic reaction when the baby's head or bottom is allowed to droop or the baby is startled by a sound. The baby flings his arms sideways with fingers spread and then brings them in again close.
- Babies also have a walking reflex. If they are held upright and their soles press onto a firm surface they lift their feet and put them down as if walking.

Key term

Reflex reactions

physical movement of newborn babies that are inborn; the reflexes are instinctive reactions and are not learned



Figure 5.4

Newborns take a while to 'uncurl'

Babies are given the Guthrie test on about the sixth day after birth. This simple blood test checks for a rare but dangerous condition called phenylketonuria (PKU). If babies are affected then a careful diet can limit the effects of PKU that otherwise causes brain damage. The Guthrie test is also a check that the baby's thyroid gland is working properly. Detection of such problems means that treatment can ensure that the baby develops normally.

From Spring 2001 a pilot programme was started for routine screening of newborns for hearing loss. The plan is that national screening will mean that hearing loss will be detected early and very young children can then be offered appropriate support for communication and learning.

Until now, the hearing of babies has been tested by a simple distraction test when they are eight or nine months old. A health visitor or GP makes noises at different angles to babies, including some out of sight, to check whether they turn in the direction of the noise. This test has proved an unreliable way to test hearing, since nine month old babies can be distracted by many events.

Now newborns of a few hours old will be checked by the minute long Oto-Acoustic Emission (OAE) test that establishes whether sounds are echoed back from the eardrum. In any doubt, a further more detailed test can then be undertaken. There are also plans to start universal screening for cystic fibrosis in 2002.

Tips for practice

Some early years practitioners work in the labour and maternity wards of a hospital. Your role can be supportive of parents of new babies:

- Ensure that you understand the procedures of the ward, including the various medical checks on newborn babies.
- Find ways to explain what is done and why in straightforward language, so that you can answer and anticipate the questions that new parents are likely to ask.
- Of course, with some questions it will be appropriate to refer the mother or father to a nurse or doctor. But you will often be able to give information or reassurance.
- Good practice is to recall that parents deserve courtesy as people. Medical practice has improved in many ways, but be wary of any suggestion on your ward that mothers are 'just patients' who ought to follow advice without question or comment.

Postnatal care of mothers

Community health care services will support families with new babies. Unless there is a health problem with mother or baby, it is not usual now for women to stay in hospital longer than a couple of days. Some women with support at home stay no longer than is needed to recover from the birth. The community midwife will visit mother and baby at home and carry out any outstanding health checks on either and offer any advice. Ten days after the birth the community midwife will be replaced by the health visitor assigned to the family.

As well as health checks on the baby, the community midwife will also check on the health of the mother: that stitches are healing and the recovery of a woman who has had a caesarean delivery. The six week check up of the baby at the hospital or local health clinic is also a check on the mother's health and well being.

Women are advised about postnatal exercises that help them regain muscle tone and get their figure back after the expansion of pregnancy. Specific exercises are important to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles and avoid the risk of mild incontinence.

Becoming a parent

First time parents – fathers as well as mothers – can lack confidence in their ability to take care of such a vulnerable little person. Parents can feel very confident in the rest of their lives but a successful job or social network does not prepare you for parenthood. Additionally parents, especially mothers who are more likely to be the ones getting up in the night, can be seriously tired. Fathers can be uncertain about how or whether to become involved in baby care, but in fact men can undertake any of the care routines, with affection and closeness to their baby, except breast feeding.

Baby blues and depression

Uncertainty about their skills, exhaustion and sleep deprivation can be enough to make anyone distressed. Many women feel close to tears in the early days after birth and this state has been called the **baby blues**. With support and help women feel more able to face the challenge and daily practice with their baby boosts mothers' confidence.

Some women experience **postnatal depression**, a state far beyond feeling tired and stunned by the hard work of looking after a baby. Postnatal depression can affect any woman and is characterised by great anxiety and feelings of being unable to cope. Women may feel that they cannot love their baby and are unable to take care of him or her. The baby blues will lift as first time mothers feel more competent and second and third time mothers recall that it will get better. Postnatal depression does not lift without help and families should contact their GP. This condition does not only affect women having their first baby. Postnatal depression may arise with second or third births.

Key terms

Baby blues

the term describing a temporary low state for mothers in the first few days after birth

Postnatal depression

a more serious and longer lasting condition when women feel unable to cope with their baby, are highly anxious and sometimes reject the baby

As an early years practitioner you may work as a nanny in a family with a new baby, either the first or subsequent births. You will be able to help through:

- Your knowledge and support, for instance on breast feeding or encouraging women to make time for their postnatal exercises.
- Communication with parents about what you do and what they do, sharing the care and in what way.
- Being aware of the importance of not taking over. You can share your expertise, showing that confidence takes time and practice.
- Organising a day that enables mothers and fathers to spend time with their babies for close attachments to develop.

Tips for practice

Scenario

A husband and wife team, Marilyn and James, are registered childminders with the Wessex childminding network. One of the children in their care has a new baby at home. Brief recent contact with the mother has made Marilyn concerned that Mum is possibly depressed. She discusses her reasons for concern with James and, since it is mainly Dad who currently brings three year old Callum, they wonder if it would be better if James has the conversation.

Questions

- 1 Look back through this section and check the kind of signs that might have alerted Marilyn to be concerned.
- 2 Consider and discuss with your colleagues what might be said to Callum's father. What would be the possible advantage of James having this conversation?
- 3 In what ways might Callum be affected if his Mum does have postnatal depression?
- 4 Consider what you might need to do as a nanny with a family or an early years practitioner who feels this kind of concern.
- 5 In what ways might you have to weigh up confidentiality with concern for the baby and other child as well as the mother's well being?

Key skills links: C3.1a

Babies who need special care

Some newborns need extra care because of health needs identified soon after birth, for example low birth weight or the potential complications of premature birth. Multiple births with twins, triplets or more babies tend to need additional care because the babies are more likely to be of low birth weight and to be delivered prematurely.

Activity

The availability of fertility treatment has increased the rate of multiple births. A family with twins or more babies has a great deal of hard work ahead and may also have concerns for the well being of one or more of the babies.

Find out more about family life with more than one new baby. You could:

- Talk with the health visitor at your local clinic and perhaps make contact with families who have experienced multiple births.
- Contact the Twins and Multiple Births Association. TAMBA provides information and support networks for families. They can be contacted at Harnott House, 309 Chester Road, Little Sutton, Ellesmere Port, CH66 1QQ tel: 0151 348 0020 helpline (the Twinline) on 01732 868000 and website: www.tamba.org.uk
- Write up what you have found out from these different sources of information. Make a short presentation to colleagues.

Key skills links: IT2/3.1 C3.3 C31.b

Premature babies

Technically speaking, premature babies are those who are born before 37 weeks gestation, although the term is sometimes used to apply to any babies who arrive before their due date.

If babies are a couple of weeks earlier than the estimated 40 weeks, then they may just be smaller than average but perfectly well. The seventh month is usually the earliest age at which a premature baby can survive without medical assistance. Babies are born and survive younger than this maturity, but their outlook is more fragile. With modern technology it is possible for a baby to survive outside the womb from about 23 weeks gestation, although such immature babies do not always survive and have a high rate of disability. Once babies have reached 26 weeks gestation they have about an 80 per cent chance of survival in a special care baby unit. With each further week of gestation the baby's prospects improve.

The difficulty for very premature babies is that their major organs, such as their lungs, cannot yet function independently. There is a high risk of brain damage, with resulting physical and learning disabilities. Some problems do not become apparent until a child struggles to reach the developmental milestones that peers have managed.

Special care on the wards

Nowadays many babies who would previously have been placed in a special unit are given the additional medical help they need while staying with their mothers. Babies with mild jaundice or who needed a little help to start breathing can be observed easily or screening undertaken. Babies may have conditions that are not life threatening, such as cleft palate or Down's syndrome. Parents will need support and information but there is no need to place the baby in a special unit. Medical practice has recognised that unless more significant medical intervention is needed, babies thrive better with their mothers than separated from them.

Special care and intensive care

About five babies out of every hundred will need caring for in a Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU). Modern technology can now enable sick or premature babies to:

- breathe when their own lungs are too immature to do this work
- take in nourishment before the babies are able to suck, swallow or digest
- be safe because the technology monitors temperature, heartbeat, breathing and the level of oxygen in the blood.

Neonatal intensive care units are necessary for the sickest and most fragile babies. The medical distinction between special care and intensive care for babies is whether the baby can breathe unaided. Apart from special help to keep babies healthy, the unit enables very premature babies to continue the growing that they would otherwise have done in the womb before birth. Very premature babies will often stay in hospital until what would have been their time of birth if they had gone to full term. As they improve, the babies will move towards care in an ordinary cot and being looked after in the same way as a healthy baby.

Babies who need intensive care will often need to be in hospital for weeks, perhaps months in some cases. This experience is a significant strain on families and unit teams work hard to involve and make parents welcome in the units. Research has established that babies thrive better if they have physical contact. Incubators are designed so that parents can put a hand into the cot and hold a baby's hand or gently stroke him. Whenever possible parents are encouraged to hold their baby for regular periods and to talk with him or her. This contact is as

important for the parents as the baby since it enables parents to start the process of attachment to their baby (see page 189). Units usually welcome siblings as well and it will be important for them to be able to see their baby brother or sister.

Scenario

Kimberley works in a nanny share with two families. One family has just had a premature baby girl who is currently in intensive care, but whose prospects are good. Kimberley is supporting the family, including the father who is finding it hard to understand why his wife wants to sit by the incubator and hold the baby's hand. Kimberley is also dealing with questions from children of the second family in the nanny share who are distressed that the much-awaited new baby is 'too little and sick'.

Questions

- 1 Consider and practise ways that Kimberley could explain considerably to the baby's father why touch and sound will be so important for this sick premature baby.
- 2 Kimberley is caring for a three year old from the first family and four year old twins in the second family. Discuss with colleagues and practise some appropriate ways for her to talk with the three year old whose baby sister has not come home yet and the other children who had been so excited in preparing for the baby.

Key skills links: C3.1a PS2/3.1

For some families there is the anxiety about whether the baby will live. Parents need honest information as well as support. Families need to make decisions themselves about how they cope with this strain. However, on balance it is better that the parents and siblings make a relationship with the baby as an individual. If the baby does not survive then the family can grieve for the loss of a real person who was part of their life, if only for a short while, and remains in their memories and of whom they have photographs.

Development of babies who had special care

The age of babies is always calculated from their actual birth. But the growth and development of very premature babies will follow more closely the pattern that would have occurred if they had gone to full term. The difference between the babies' chronological age in months and their developmental age will be most marked in the early years. Parents may need support to bear in mind that significant developmental milestones like sitting up, crawling or the first words may be on time, if they count the months from when their baby should have been born.

You may offer this reassurance as a nanny working with the family or as an early years practitioner in a nursery. Of course, you would not continue to give reassurance if other features of the baby or toddler's development gave cause for concern. Babies should usually have their immunisations at the usual chronological age in months, unless the family doctor advises otherwise.



Further resources

- Hilton, Tessa with Messenger, Maire (1997) *The Great Ormond Street New Baby and Childcare Book: The essential guide for parents of children aged 0–5* Vermilion.
- Kitzinger, Sheila (1997) *The New Pregnancy and Childbirth* Penguin.
- Leach, Penelope (1997) *Your Baby and Child: The essential guide for every parent* Penguin.

Progress check

- 1 Describe three routine checks on pregnant women within antenatal care.
- 2 In what ways could antenatal classes help women with the experience of birth?
- 3 Suggest three ways in which an early years practitioner might support mothers and families through pregnancy and childbirth.
- 4 Describe two reflex actions that should be observed in newborn babies.
- 5 Describe three reasons why premature babies may need special care.



6

Care and development of babies

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand and organise to meet babies' needs for physical care in a personal way
- work in partnership with parents as you share the care of babies
- support the health and well being of babies
- recognise when babies are ill and understand what you should do.

Introduction

In this chapter you will learn about good practice in the care of babies up to about one year of age. The role of early years practitioners is a combination of support for parents, especially mothers with very young babies, and responsibility in sharing the actual care of those babies.

Early years practitioners have to meet the physical needs of babies, whilst being very aware of the emotional and social development of such very young children. A warm and affectionate approach to babies is part of good quality care. Early years practitioners need to learn how best to care for children physically but the knowledge and skills described in this chapter are more than technical competence. Babies need caring adults who use care routines in a positive way and are very aware that babies are already learning.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 3, 7, 11

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C12, C13

Level 3: C14

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 6, 8

Meeting the needs for physical care

Babies need a great deal of physical care for them to remain well and healthy. So their care routines are a major feature of their day – and night as well when your responsibility covers 24 hours. You will share the care of babies and very young toddlers with their parents, either as a nanny or as an early years practitioner in a nursery. You will find out more about this important relationship on page 631.

Good practice in care routines

Early years practitioners need to gain confidence in meeting the needs of babies and toddlers. But it is equally important that you value the times of physical care with babies. You gain expertise in:

- Understanding what babies and toddlers need in terms of their physical care.
- How you give this care in a way that ensures the baby's health and well being.
- How to ensure babies' emotional well being by placing them central to the care routines, giving them personal attention and behaving towards babies as if this time of care is as important as any other part of their day.

Activity

- Look at the diagram on page 162 about making care of babies a personal experience.
- Draft a similar diagram for toddlers of 12–24 months of age.
- Look at your own practice and consider how you already use some of these ideas.
- What else could you do to improve your practice, even minor changes? Discuss your ideas with your colleagues.

Key skills links: LP2/3.1–3 WO2/3.1–3

Becoming competent

Of course it takes time to learn the steps in caring for babies: how do you bath a baby safely or change a nappy? Confidence comes with practice as well as relevant knowledge. The value of your becoming confident in your skills is that you can then focus on the baby or toddler.

- Your skills with feeding or changing become a natural part of how you relate to babies; it seems the obvious thing to do.
- So, for instance, you do not have to keep thinking, 'I must support the baby's head because she hasn't got the muscle strength to do it herself'. Your hand and arms move deliberately to pick up a baby with care and support her head. You no longer have to think through your actions in advance.
- You then have some spare energy and attention to give to the baby, to make the routines of physical care a supportive and personal time.
- Poor practice with babies and toddlers develops if practitioners use this additional energy to ignore the baby, rush the routines or chat with colleagues rather than the baby.

Figure 6.1

Ways to make care of babies a personal and individual experience



Scenario

When Erin became manager of Sunningdale Day Nursery she took responsibility for a team that had some very different views about baby care. There is a strong difference of opinion in the baby and toddler room with Christopher and Tamar feeling that care routines should be relaxed. They spend time talking with the children as they deal with their physical needs. In contrast Donna insists on what she calls an efficient approach to changing and feeding. She says that the previous manager introduced a more 'educational' early years curriculum and routines just need to be completed swiftly so everyone can get on to the more valuable activities. Erin calls a team meeting to resolve the conflict in the room and to explain clearly what she regards as good practice now that she is the manager.

Questions

- 1 What is likely to be the impact of Donna's 'efficient' approach with care routines? How are the babies and toddlers likely to feel and react?
- 2 What key ideas need to be aired in the team meeting? Look back at the section in Chapter 2 about caring (from page 41) and use some of those ideas to shape what Erin, Christopher or Tamar may say.
- 3 Donna has seriously misunderstood good practice and early learning. How do you think this could have happened?

Key skills links: C3.3. C3.1a

Warmth and affection

Babies need an affectionate and caring environment, because their brains need emotional support and not just intellectual stimulation.

- Caring adults need to give babies time, attention and affection. You need to relish all the early signs that babies are taking notice and are learning: their smiles, waves and that steady stare showing interest.
- Babies and toddlers learn best at their own pace and by following their absorbing current interests. There is plenty of time for them to explore, find out, practise and learn.
- They learn through everyday experiences, the daily moments of interest and by building on what they already know, understand and can do.
- Children need touch and affectionate communication. Physical closeness, singing and cuddling all send strong and positive messages to babies, that actually stimulate the growth of neural connections.
- Warm social relationships enable learning through the security of a safe base and a predictable, familiar daily life.

These general guidelines are applicable whatever the situation where you work with babies: in a nursery or centre, in the baby's own home as a nanny or your own home as a childminder. You will find more about appropriate learning activities with babies in other chapters, especially the section about early learning from page 267.

Crying and comfort

All babies cry, although some are much noisier than others. Some are undoubtedly also easier to comfort. There are a number of different possible reasons and even very familiar carers do not necessarily know the reason. Considerate carers explore the possibilities:

- Babies cry if they are hungry, starting with a low level cry but definitely building up if their needs are not met.



Figure 6.2

Babies grow fond of their siblings

- Babies may cry because they have wet or soiled their nappy. This condition does not necessarily lead to crying, since feeling rather damp or squishy is a regular experience for babies. Feeling cold or sore from nappy rash, however, is likely to make a baby or toddler cry.
- Discomfort and pain makes babies cry and the type and volume of their cry will tell you something about their pain. Babies sometimes get stomach pains from trapped wind or colic (see page 169). They are also often distressed if they have a cold and cannot breathe easily.
- They may also cry because they are chilled or too hot, either because it is high summer or because they are wrapped up too warmly.
- Babies who are too young to turn themselves over may also cry because they are uncomfortable.
- Babies can be startled or frightened by sudden noises or unexpected sights. They may cry at this experience and need to be comforted. Avoid creating fierce startle reactions in babies.
- Babies can simply cry for company; they want to be cuddled, walked around and entertained. Babies who cry are not always tired and need to have a nap, sometimes they are communicating, 'I'm bored, please entertain me!'

Comfort and cuddlies

Babies need sources of comfort, some of which will be from the comfort offered by caring adults. But they are also able to comfort themselves sometimes by sucking:

- Babies may use their own fingers and thumbs to suck for comfort and some babies learn how to manage this by about 3–4 months.
- For some reason some babies do not suck a finger or thumb, or else are dissuaded by adults. An alternative is that a baby has a soother (sometimes called a dummy).

Adults – parents and early years professionals – sometimes express strong views about different ways that babies and toddlers can comfort themselves. It has been claimed that sucking a thumb or fingers causes teeth to stick out and that dummies are unhygienic. There seems to be no reliable evidence that says thumb sucking causes children's teeth to slope outwards. The possible exception is if children have an unusual thumb-sucking style in which they push hard against their teeth and continue to do so through early childhood. Soothers are only unhygienic if adults fail to keep them clean or allow them to be passed around from one baby to another.

Babies and young toddlers need to be able to comfort themselves and removing all their options will make them very distressed. So long as their thumb or finger is reasonably clean and soothers are kept clean (soothers can also be sterilised), then there is no cause for concern. Genuine risks for health arise if babies and toddlers are permitted to suck on bottles or mini-drink soothers filled with sweet drinks. The consequence of this practice is serious dental decay for babies' first teeth.

It is also wise gently to discourage thumbs and soothers as a full time support when a toddler starts to talk. You can request, not demand, that a thumb or soother comes out of a toddler's mouth, so you can understand what is said.

Other sources of comfort to a baby or toddler will be something that he or she has chosen to cuddle. Such comfort objects may be a soft toy, a baby blanket, bits of cloth, almost anything that feels comforting to this child. These comfort

objects should be respected and you should help a child take care of them. Conversation with parents will let you know what is important to a baby or very young child.

Activity

Build up information on babies you know and talk with parents.

- What are the different sources of comfort for individual babies and very young children?
- How do you think that babies 'decide' on their source of comfort?
- How can you ensure their comfort objects are kept clean enough but not scrubbed or washed so thoroughly that the comforting and familiar smell is destroyed.
- Compare your findings with colleagues and build up a short presentation of how babies and very young children comfort themselves.

Key skills links: C2/3.1

Feeding

For the first four months of life babies are completely fed on milk, either breast or bottle fed or some combination of both options. The baby's full nutritional needs are met by milk in these early months and their digestive system is not ready to manage anything else.

Routines of feeding

Young babies need to be fed on a regular basis over the 24 hour period. Newborn babies feed every 3–4 hours day and night and many will continue to need night or evening feeds for months.

Advice about how to organise feeds for babies has varied over the years. Mothers in the 1950s and 1960s were told very firmly that they should follow an uncompromising four hourly schedule or else they would spoil their babies. By the 1980s mothers were told that feeding on demand, that is whenever a baby cried, was necessary for good care.

Some middle ground is probably the best way forward.

- A fierce timed schedule does not allow for the fact that some babies are hungry more often than every four hours. If babies are made to wait because it is 'too soon' for a feed, they can be in serious distress by the time they are offered milk.
- On the other hand an uncompromising demand schedule can overlook the fact that after a couple of months some babies cry because they want comfort and entertainment, not because they are hungry.
- An often overlooked problem with inflexible rules about demand feeding is that very young babies need food every 3–4 hours and premature or very sleepy babies may not wake and demand milk. They will then get weak through lack of nutrition and be even less likely to demand a feed.

In the early weeks the most workable routine is that babies are fed and then changed. When they wake they want food and will become very distressed if

you make them wait while you change them. A practical point is also that the action of sucking and feeding seems to stimulate the digestive system in general and lead to activity at the other end. Then you will only have to change them again.

Feeding should be an affectionate and calm event. Babies should be held close and the ideal position for breast or bottle feeding is also a young baby's ideal focusing distance. The mealtime is a time of close communication and supports the growing attachment. When you share the care of a baby it is important to follow the personal routines that have been established in the family: babies are fed because they are hungry, not because every baby is fed at this time.

Supporting breast feeding

Human babies are designed for breast milk and it contains all the nutrients they need in the first four months of life.

- The milk emerges at the right temperature, the right consistency and nothing needs sterilising afterwards.
- Breast milk transmits immunities to the baby through the mother's antibodies in the milk and these protect babies from illnesses in the early months.
- Breast feeding is very practical when babies move about with their mothers, because breast milk is ready and available; there is no need to travel with bottles and sterilising equipment. That said, of course breast feeding requires the mother to be available.

Breast feeding needs to be started at birth when a woman's body is ready to give milk. It will be progressively more difficult to breast feed as the days pass by. In the UK it is estimated that about two-thirds of women at least try breast feeding but that many give up, so that less than half the babies are being breast fed at six weeks of age (the lowest rate in Europe). Women obviously stop for many reasons but lack of support, especially if breast feeding is less than straightforward, seems to be a major reason.

You may be involved in encouraging mothers to breast feed at least for some time, perhaps because you work on a maternity ward or as a nanny in a family home when a new baby arrives. For something that is so natural, establishing breast feeding can sometime require perseverance. It does not help women who have become mothers, especially first time mothers, to imply that breast feeding is always easy. The most useful support for mothers is to help them to continue breast feeding if there are problems that can be overcome, for instance:

- Some babies have difficulty latching on to the breast and mothers appreciate help in positioning themselves and the baby.
- Slightly premature babies may be sleepy and need to be woken so that they get enough food until they are strong enough to wake and yell – possibly only a few days.
- Babies produce a strong suck and nipples need to toughen up a bit. Some women develop sore nipples or blocked milk ducts and need support to get through the discomfort and occasionally the pain.

Most problems can be resolved with support within the family, from the health visitor or from a professional skilled in this support, such as the National Childbirth Trust network of breastfeeding counsellors. New mothers also need to rest as much as possible, eat a healthy diet and drink six to eight cups of fluid a day.

Activity

Organise a talk with a breast feeding counsellor from the National Childbirth Trust (see page 149 for contact details). Make notes on issues such as:

- What are the main reasons why women stop breast feeding in the early weeks? What difficulties do they face?
- What are the best ways to offer support and advice?
- Write up your notes to offer a guide on the best ways to support a woman who is breast feeding: if you are working in a hospital, as a nanny or as an early years practitioner.

Key skills links: C2/3.3

There are few circumstances in which women would be actively dissuaded from breast feeding. Some rare viruses can pass to the baby through breast milk, so women would be told not to breast feed if they had AIDS/HIV or Hepatitis B.

The obvious disadvantage of full breast feeding is that other carers and the baby's father cannot feed the baby. If women know they will need to return to work in the baby's early months when the baby is still wholly or mainly milk fed, then it can be wise to get the baby used to a bottle, as a supplement to the breast. Otherwise, a fully breast fed baby can be deeply unimpressed by being given a bottle out of the blue at around three or four months. They may not mind but some show in no uncertain terms that breast is best.

Women who return to work when their babies are very young can sometimes express milk and store it in bottles to be given by a nanny, childminder or early years practitioner in a nursery. Nurseries can also be helpful by welcoming mothers who are close enough to the nursery to come in during the day and breast feed. Of course, that option is not always realistic. Shared care arrangements can involve breast feeding by the mother when she is with the baby and bottle feeding when another carer is in charge.

Bottle feeding

Cow's milk is actually designed for calves. So the formula milk that is produced for human babies has to be modified in a number of crucial ways. Bottle feeding with formula milk provides all the nutrients needed by babies and is safe and hygienic, so long as the exact instructions for making up feeds and sterilising all the bottle feeding equipment are followed. Even with the modifications, some babies are allergic to cows milk and adverse reactions may mean that an alternative will have to be found, probably soya milk.

You must follow the instructions for mixing formula milk. Babies who are hungry after a feed should be given more milk, made up correctly. By four months this further demand is a sign that the baby is ready to start some solid foods as well as milk (see page 170).

Tips for practice

Feeding a baby is a time of close contact and affectionate warmth as well as meeting the baby's feeding needs. When you bottle feed a baby you need to:

- Sit comfortably so that you hold the baby in your arms and at an angle so that he or she can feed easily (see Figure 6.3 on this page).
- You need to be comfortable as well as the baby, since feeding can take 15–20 minutes depending on the baby. This time is long enough to get cramp or to be so uncomfortable that you make the baby restless.
- You always hold a baby for feeding and never, ever prop them with a bottle. Apart from the danger of them slipping and choking, propping shows such an uncaring approach towards babies. It says to them that they do not matter enough to be cuddled.
- While you are feeding, make eye contact and have gentle communication with the baby. Babies need to concentrate on sucking but, once the most pressing needs of hunger are satisfied, they are reassured and warmed by looks and soft words.
- You can feed babies in a room with other babies or toddlers. They like to be part of daily life. If there are older children around – in a family home or nursery – let them stay peaceably. There is no need to shoo them away and they will be interested.

Bacteria multiply fast in milk and saliva starts the digestive process of the breakdown of milk or food. So any milk left in a baby's bottle after he has completed the feed must be thrown away and not kept for the next feed. Bottles and teats must also be sterilised according to the instructions on the products you use. Ordinary washing is not enough to remove traces of milk. The choices are:

- sterilisation by heat in a steam steriliser
- by heat in a container and bottles that can go into the microwave

Figure 6.3

Bottle feeding a young baby



- by cold water and sterilising tablets or liquid in a container designed for that purpose.

Whatever method you use, you must read and follow the instructions carefully. Ensure that anything you put into the microwave is safe for that way of sterilising.

Winding babies after feeding

Parents of previous generations were given the impression that problems of wind (air swallowed along with the milk) were a frequent difficulty for babies and they were advised always to 'wind' babies after a feed. The problem of wind was overstated, but some babies do need to burp or clear a bout of hiccups and some experience painful colic (see below).

If you hold a baby resting over your shoulder after a feed (Figure 6.4) any wind will come up if necessary, probably over you, so a clean cloth or muslin over your shoulder will protect your clothes a bit. This position is an enjoyable cuddle for a baby as you settle her back to sleep, so nothing is lost if she does not have any wind.

Dealing with colic

Some babies cry a considerable amount and draw their knees up over their stomach as if they are in pain. Normally digestion operates with smooth rhythmic movements but in colic the food is moved along in painful spasms. Babies with colic are otherwise healthy, although it is wise to check with the GP if the babies' pains seem severe and definitely if the baby has any other symptoms such as diarrhoea.

The condition is often called three month colic because it happens when babies are aged between two to four months. The only medication for colic is gripe water or a mild antacid suitable for babies, both of which can be bought without prescription at a chemists' shop. Your local pharmacist can offer advice, as can the health visitor. Otherwise families have to find ways to share the care of a screaming baby and this is very wearing. Some babies may be calmed a little

Wind is not always a problem, although bottle fed babies sometimes swallow quite a lot of air with their milk. Put a cloth or muslin square close to where he is likely to bring up any milk with the wind.

- 1 Hold him against your shoulder, supporting his head when he is still very young. Gently rub his back.
- 2 Or lie him across your lap and gently rub his back.
- 3 Not for a newborn, but when he is able to sit more upright, you can cuddle him on your lap and gently rub his back.



Figure 6.4 Three ways to help a baby bring up trapped wind

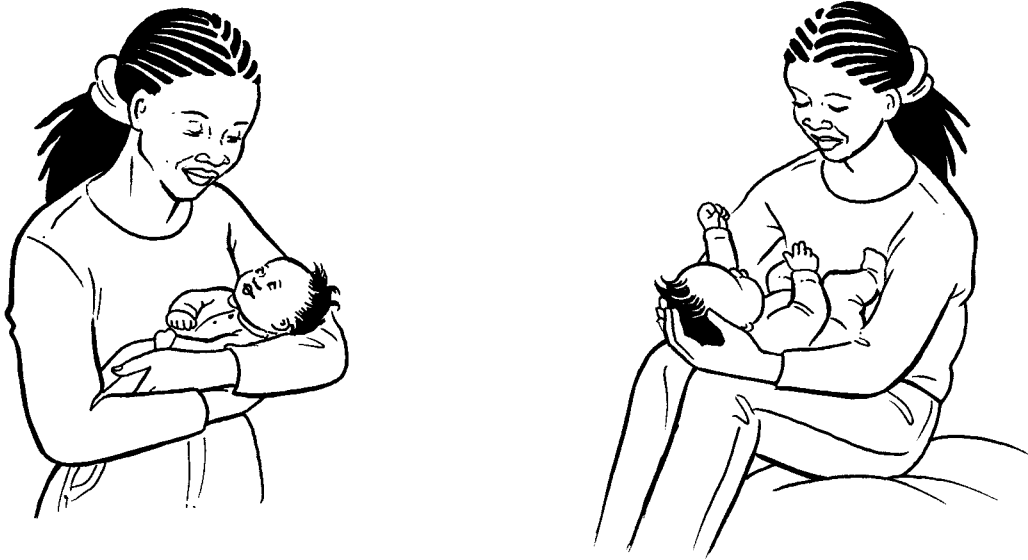


Figure 6.5 The importance of supporting a baby's head

by sucking, being walked around or rocked. Colic often seems to be worse in the evening and in some families that may mean there is more than one person to take turns. If you are a nanny, you may help the family out in the evening, or sometimes have responsibility so the parents can get out together and have a break from the crying.

Weaning

Babies should be totally milk fed until about 16 weeks (four months) of age, when many babies will start to show that they are still hungry after their usual feeds. You can then start **weaning**, also called **mixed feeding**.

Key term

Weaning

when babies are introduced to first foods in addition to their milk diet, also sometimes called mixed feeding

First foods

The first foods are extras, not desperately needed meals, so be relaxed and let the baby become familiar with this new experience. Babies are getting used to foods as first tasters and milk is their main source of nutrition for some time yet. The usual advice is to start babies on baby rice cereal and then steadily introduce foods one at a time. The best way is to give babies freshly prepared food, then you will know exactly what has gone into a baby's meal if you, or the nursery cook, has made it.

Commercially produced baby foods can be useful and convenient when you are on the move or if a baby is still hungry and you have fed him all the food you have freshly pureed. Good quality brands are nutritious but most have combinations of ingredients, so you cannot control the introduction of one food at a time to babies.

Baby rice cereal should be mixed with the baby's usual milk (formula or expressed breast milk) or boiled and cooled water to a runny consistency. You do not want too much difference between this first food and the milk with which the baby is familiar. Babies may take to rice cereal but some are unimpressed. Baby rice is not very exciting in taste and babies can distinguish tastes. Persevere with this simple cereal but also look to introduce other basic foods.

Wheat based baby cereals are not recommended until about 6 months because they are harder for babies to digest. You should never add rice or wheat

based cereals to a baby's bottle (some people do). Such a practice can force a baby to take in more cereal than he needs in order to drink the amount of milk that he does need.

From four to six months you can introduce babies to their first fruit and vegetable purees: ripe apples or pears, root vegetables like potato or carrot. These foods can be cooked until soft, pureed (in a blender or a sieve) with no added sugar or salt. You can steam, microwave or lightly boil fruit or vegetables in a small amount of water. Do not add butter or any other fats. Some fruits, like banana, can be mashed.

Tips for practice

- You feed babies small amounts of food on a proper plastic baby spoon.
- Take your time; if a baby feels rushed she often refuses food or spits it back out. The baby is getting used to the spoon as well as the food.
- Try one food at a time, then you can combine, when you are sure that the baby can digest all the foods you are combining.
- Babies do not like all tastes the first time, so it is worth trying more than once.
- But if the baby still does not seem to like the taste and certainly if any food seems to give him an upset stomach, then leave that out of his diet.
- You should be concerned about reactions such as vomiting, diarrhoea and blotchy rashes, since these could mean the baby is intolerant of these foods.
- It will be important to talk with the baby's parents on a regular basis so that you can effectively share this aspect of the baby's care and the parents can alert you to whether there are any allergies in the family.



Figure 6.6

Babies can enjoy their food

From five to six months you can introduce other fruits that mash or puree easily:

- Examples are mango, peach, melon and vegetables like cauliflower, spinach or tomato.
- You can cook pulses like lentils to a soft mush and perhaps mix in a vegetable that you know the baby likes.
- Avoid citrus fruits like oranges since they can cause diarrhoea.
- From 6 months onwards, depending on the family diet, you could try small amounts of mild cheese, very finely grated or mixed in with pureed vegetables.
- Yoghurt introduces a pleasant texture and flavours.
- Wheat based cereals or rusks produced for babies make an enjoyable change. It is important to use proper baby cereals, since cereals for older children and adults, even if they are mushy like porridge, do not have enough nutrition for babies at this stage of development.
- You can introduce chicken, finely minced, and white fish broken into fine flakes and carefully checked for bones. You would obviously avoid these foods if the family is vegetarian.
- From about 8 months, you can introduce a range of finger foods and finely grated cheese, carrot or apple and then an older baby can enjoy feeding herself.
- Fruit and vegetable sticks can be raw or gently cooked to be soft but not floppy.
- Increasingly you can puree or mash up part of a freshly cooked meal that is also served for toddlers or children, or a family meal in a household. The main point is to avoid added salt or sugar and any highly spiced or seasoned food.
- Current advice is to avoid eggs until children are 12 months old and then to cook them very thoroughly.

Tips for practice

Steadily you can move babies towards being part of social mealtimes. But you need to remain relaxed about food as babies will make a mess.

- They may spit out food, blow raspberries or spoon flick. You can gently discourage these actions and try very hard not to laugh at food spraying, although it can be funny the first time.
- Babies steadily learn to feed themselves, with fingers and using a spoon for them and a spoon for you.
- By six to nine months babies can put a hand to a bottle or be able to manage a feeder cup well.
- Never leave a baby alone with food or drink. She may choke but that is not the only point. As with the rule of never propping a baby with a bottle, it is an uncaring action, the message is 'I have more interesting things to do than sit and keep you company'.

Key term

Projectile vomiting

when a baby brings up milk or food with force – a sign of possible serious digestive problems needing medical attention

It is not unusual for babies to spit food back out or even to vomit up small amounts that have not progressed far down their throat. However, it is *not* usual for babies to vomit a great deal, nor to be sick in such a way that the food hurtles out at speed, called **projectile vomiting**. You should speak with a parent about

either of these situations. Projectile vomiting can be sign of digestive problems that need medical attention.

Babies and toddlers absolutely do not need high fibre or low fat diets (see page 83). They need foods with plenty of calories and nutrients in appropriate amounts, such as eggs, dairy produce, meat, fish and poultry (depending on the family diet). Too much fibre can be bulky and it fills them up before they have been able to eat enough to provide the nutrients. Too much fibre also can reduce young children's absorption of essential minerals like calcium and iron. In terms of fibre, toddlers will be fine with some fingers or squares of wholemeal bread or a small amount of wholewheat cereal. See the section about children's diets on page 81.

Drinks

Babies who are fully breast or bottle fed will not need water unless the weather is very hot. Ask the advice of your nursery manager or a health visitor under these circumstances. Babies who are moving onto mixed feeding will still be taking in most of their nutrition from breast or formula milk. Bottle feeding would normally fade away as an older baby becomes able to take her drinks in a cup.

Breast feeding can continue until the baby or mother wishes to stop, usually by 12 months or not long into the second year of life. There is no need to stop because a baby has developed his first teeth, which can be as early as four to six months. A firm yet kind 'No' and a look can stop a baby biting at the breast. Some mothers do continue to breast feed longer, even until a child is three or four years old. Such a choice is for comfort; the child does not need the milk. Later breast feeding is a family decision, but can lead to socially embarrassing situations in which competent toddlers or young children help themselves in public.

Formula milk can continue until twelve months, when babies can move onto full cream cow's milk, so long as there is no reason to suppose that they may be allergic. You would not give cow's milk as the baby's source of milk before this age because it does not contain all the nutrients the baby needs. A small amount will not hurt in pureed vegetables or in a mashed portion of food that the older children or family are eating. You do not need to use the so-called follow-on milks that are marketed as an interim step between formula or breast and cow's milk. Nor do babies need the flavoured versions of these.

By 14–15 months, toddlers need no more than one pint of full fat milk per day and two small cups of watered pure fruit juice (not squash or squash-type drinks). Older babies and toddlers can drink straight water – from the tap or filtered, whatever you drink. Avoid bottled or spring water for babies and young children, some of it has far too much sodium (salt) for their well being. In a family home, you also need to check whether water softeners have been fixed to the system, since they change the water chemically in ways that are not good for babies.

Babies' needs for drink will be met by these options. They do not need any of the bewildering array of so-called 'baby juice' drinks on the market. None of these are essential for the health of babies or toddlers, whatever the packet claims. Some are bad for health, especially the teeth, if they are used with any regularity. Early years practitioners and parents need to develop a healthy scepticism about marketing claims on commercially produced food and drink, much as with toys.

You should continue to sterilise bottles as long as a toddler is using one and it is also wise to sterilise the lid of a teacher beaker. Cups can be thoroughly washed and milk cannot get trapped in the same way.

Added vitamins

Totally bottle fed babies should not be given vitamin drops since formula milk has vitamins added. Drops may be advised for breast fed babies after 6 months but you should never give babies, or children, vitamins without consultation with their parents. It is the parents' choice and also you must avoid the situation where two carers, who fail to talk to each other, both give a baby vitamin drops. It is possible to overdose on some vitamins, as a child and adult as well as a baby. Once a baby is weaned, vitamin drops (containing A, D and C and formulated for children) are usually recommended up to about five years of age.

Care of teeth

A baby's first set of teeth forms in the gums before birth. Many babies begin to cut their first teeth, known as milk teeth, at about six months, but this is very variable and some babies still have none at their first birthday. When babies are relatively late cutting teeth, you can face a situation in which a 10–12 month old's enthusiasm for more chunky food is not matched by her ability to chew it. You may need to continue with mashing and cutting food up into small pieces while the baby has only hard gums to work with.

The most usual pattern for cutting teeth is as follows:

- *6 months*: incisors, with the two central top and two central bottom teeth
- *8 months*: two more incisors to make a set of four top and bottom teeth
- *10–14 months*: the first molars, that are the double teeth for efficient chewing. Other teeth follow later (see page 105).

It is important to take care of the milk teeth of babies and children. Teeth should be cleaned as soon as they appear. Adults initially do this task for babies by wiping the teeth with a clean flannel and then in the second year with a gentle toothbrush and small amount of toothpaste. Fluoride drops may be recommended from

Figure 6.7

Meals can become a social occasion



about six months if there is no fluoride added to the local water. But this decision is for parents to make and you should never give babies or children drops without consulting parents. Too much fluoride causes discoloration of the teeth.

A healthy diet and good tooth care can ensure that toddlers and young children do not get any cavities and therefore have to endure fillings (see page 106.)

Teething

Cutting teeth does not always cause great distress, but babies and toddlers can be in discomfort. They are more likely to be in pain when the molars start to appear, if they cut several teeth at once or if their teeth are relatively late in appearing and have to cut through tough gums.

Babies who have trouble with their teething need patience and comfort. Previous generations were encouraged to put all sorts of symptoms down to teething. You need to be very wary about ignoring symptoms of ill health, that would usually concern you, just because a baby is teething. The process of teething produces teeth and some discomfort. It does not cause diarrhoea, fever or vomiting.

Tips for practice

- Babies who are teething often feel better if they can press their gums against something hard and cool.
- Teething rings and safe teething toys can be a comfort.
- Some teethers can be placed in the fridge to cool them and then sucking on the teether can be a comfort to sore gums.
- Teethers should *never* be put in the freezer. Teethers may not survive the temperature. But also there is a risk, if they do not warm up enough, that a semi-frozen teether could stick to a child's mouth or lips.
- Older babies may like to gnaw on a carrot stick or a rusk. You would obviously only give them this kind of hard food if you remain with them; they would not take it into their cot like a toy.
- Teething babies sometimes dribble more and may need your attention to pat their chin dry, so that they do not get sore.

Clothes and dressing

Parents will choose how they dress their babies, toddlers and children. You can make suggestions if asked or volunteer a comment if a child's clothes are seriously hampering their chance to play. Otherwise it is a family decision and clothing will of course reflect the family cultural background.

It is preferable that clothing for babies is:

- easy for carers to undo and do up again in order to change a child
- composed of layers, so that it is easy to add another layer in the winter if a baby is not warm enough, yet similarly easy to keep a baby cool in warm weather
- without ties or loose fastenings that could entangle a baby
- suited to easy physical movement – once babies start crawling and later walking, they can do so more easily in all-in-one outfits like babygros and dungarees. Baby girls can become snarled up in little frocks, especially when

they are crawling or climbing – although it will be their parents' choice about clothing

- easy to launder because baby clothes and those of toddlers will get covered in milk, leakage from nappies and interesting play materials.

Self care

Very young babies cannot help with their dressing and undressing. As they start to gain control of their limbs, their energetic physical movements can make life more complicated, as two legs go down one leg space. From 6 to 9 months, babies may start to join in the dressing process, pushing an arm into a sleeve that you line up. But this is a playful activity, so do not be surprised if the baby takes the arm back out again. Toddlers who are given the time and encouragement will start to pull elasticated trousers up or down and pull down the last part of a t-shirt. It is well worth showing appreciation for toddlers' efforts and allowing them time when they want to try, since this is the beginning of the skills of self reliance (see page 47).

Cleaning and toileting

If you work in a nursery, then you will clean babies and change their nappy, but it is likely that parents will do the bathing and hair washing at home. If you work as a nanny, then you are far more likely to be involved in the whole routine.

Unlike mobile toddlers, babies do not get grubby from interesting play and exploration. Babies need gentle cleaning to ensure that their bottoms do not get nappy rash and their mouths do not get sore from dribble or milk.

Any bath products for babies should be fragrance free, with no lanolin (babies are often allergic to this ingredient) and suitable for baby skins. Ask parents if they like any particular products used for their baby or whether the baby has any sensitivities or allergies. Parents can also tell you whether they cream their baby's or toddler's skin. Creaming is usually part of normal skin care for children with dark skin.

Babies often like bathtime and it can be a playful part of their daily routine, regardless of the fact that they do not need that much cleaning. Babies are not all enthusiastic at the outset. Some show a panic reaction when first put into a baby bath. It usually helps to hold them with their feet against the end of the baby bath. This contact seems to reassure them that there is a boundary to their world. Babies who continue to be very unhappy about bathtime can be cleaned perfectly well on a changing mat by 'topping and tailing'. This method simply means uncovering one half of the baby and gently cleaning and drying her and then doing the other half.

Tips for practice

Like changing time, you need a comfortable and warm (not hot) environment where you have everything you need close to hand: a warm towel, baby soap or lotion and any toy the baby likes in the bath.

- Babies should be bathed in a warm atmosphere, free of draughts. They need water that is warm, not hot. Test it with your elbow; your hands will be used to hotter water from domestic tasks.
- Let the baby enjoy the water by kicking or by dribbling it over him. Let him splash.



- Gently clean the baby with whatever products you use, holding a baby who cannot yet sit up firmly under the shoulders. Be ready to support a sitting baby.
- Babies who can sit up will be ready to go in the main bath. Use a non-slip mat for them to sit on.
- *Never, ever* leave the bathroom when a baby, toddler or young child is in the bath. It only takes a moment for a baby to slip and they drown in small amounts of water.

Babies do not need hair washing as such until they have a head of hair. You can wipe their head over gently. Use baby shampoo once they have hair. Most babies and toddlers are deeply unimpressed with hair washing. You can try one of the products that keeps the shampoo from running down their face but some are still unhappy and you just have to be as swift as you can.

Young babies sometimes develop cradle cap, which is a minor skin problem on the scalp. Cradle cap usually shows as non-itchy yellow scales and can be softened and removed by gentle washing or brushing. It does not usually cause discomfort to babies unless it spreads down the face and becomes itchy and red. Cradle cap that has been neglected may need more care to remove and special lotions – ask your manager or a pharmacist.

Activity

- Write up the care routine of bathing a baby and highlight how you would help a baby to feel safe and comfortable.
- What steps might you try for additional comfort with a baby who is not at all keen on being bathed?
- How will you make bathtime a happy and communicative experience?
- Share your ideas with colleagues or make a short presentation to a group.

Key skills links: C2.3 C2.1b

Changing nappies

Over the first couple of years of life a baby and then toddler will get through a considerable number of nappies until they are reliably toilet trained for day and night. The youngest that a child is likely to be ready to start toilet training will be 18–24 months. Any pressure to try to get a child out of nappies much younger will simply lead to frustration and upset all round and masses of wet knickers. Toilet training is covered in Chapter 2, from page 68.

What kind of nappy?

There are two main options: towelling or disposable nappies. Previous generations used terry towelling nappies that are folded to shape and then pinned securely on the baby or toddler, probably with plastic pants over the top. Ready shaped towelling nappies are also now available. All towelling nappies need to be

cleaned with care: first placed in an appropriate sterilising solution in a large container and then washed at a high temperature. The nappy bucket and washing machine is part of the routine unless a nappy laundering service is used.

Over the last couple of decades there has been a great increase in the use of disposable nappies, in which the padding to soak up waste products and the plastic outing coating are part of the same shaped nappy. Most families and nurseries choose this option, since disposables do not require washing; you simply use and then discard with care.

Disposable nappies are often sold in boy and girl versions. They vary in terms of where the thickest padding is provided. The urine of boys tends to go in the front part of the nappy, where his penis is, whereas the urine of girls tends to flow more towards the back. If you use towelling nappies, you can fold them to achieve the same effect.

In recent years there has been more awareness of the environmental impact of disposable nappies. Each baby uses about one tonne of disposable nappies over their early years before they are toilet trained. This creates 800,000 tonnes of nappy waste each year in the UK. It is estimated that disposable nappies now form about 4 per cent of all household waste in the UK and about 50 per cent of the waste in a household with one baby. Most of this ends up in the landfills where local councils put rubbish that cannot be recycled. Disposable nappies are hopeless for any form of recycling; they do not break down over time. The first disposable nappies have yet to degrade – in whatever landfill they are lurking.

As an early years practitioner you will probably have to work with whatever system is in place in the family home where you work as a nanny or in a day nursery. However, it is worth considering the environmental impact of disposables.

A friendly and safe changing time

Hygiene is important for babies but the changing area and your routine can still be warm and personal:

- If you work as a nanny in a family home you can ensure with the parents that the changing area is safe, easy to keep clean and at a level to protect adult backs.
- In a nursery the changing area will be for more than one baby, so it is good practice to have a personal toiletries box or little basket for each child. This contains any special cream that they need, a toy or book they like to hold, any personal wipes and a clear note about any health needs that relate to changing.
- From the baby's point of view changing time is a good time for happy contact and playful communication. You and the baby have many changing routines to get through and it is in everyone's interest to make this a pleasant time.
- Young babies may stare at you with interest. You can smile back, chat with them using infant directed speech (see page 306) or sing.
- Babies of three to four months may like something to hold, like a rattle and this option can be useful if little fingers tend to get in the way.
- Talk with babies or toddlers and tell them what you are doing. Your voice will be reassuring and you develop a good habit of sharing care with the baby or toddler – a matter of courtesy and personal dignity.
- Older children can watch, chat and help with care, either in a family home or in a nursery that has recognised the value of bringing the ages together.



Activity

- Write up the care routine for changing the nappy of a baby.
- Explain what you would have ready before you start.
- How would you help a baby to feel that changing time was personal, a time that you enjoy sharing with him or her?
- How could you organise and decorate a nappy changing area in a family home or in a nursery?
- Share your ideas with colleagues or make a short presentation to a group.

Key skills links: C2.3 C2.1b

Practical hygiene and safety

The changing mat and area needs to be clean and hygienic. But there is no need to be so lavish with disinfectant that the changing area smells.

- Have everything ready easily to hand. Never take your eyes off the child and never move away from them. A moment has been enough for older babies to lever themselves off a changing mat. Babies' physical skills develop swiftly. One day they lie fairly still, but by the next they have achieved a full roll over.
- A natural hazard with baby boys is that, once their penis is uncovered, they sometimes pass urine. It can travel some distance, including upwards and then inevitably downwards. A practical step is to place a tissue or clean muslin over a baby boy's penis. If baby girls pass urine, it simply trickles onto the changing mat.



Figure 6.8

Your friendly presence helps keep babies safe in play

- In a nursery, you will probably wear thin disposable gloves and an apron because you may change more than one child. These items offer hygienic protection for babies as well as for you. In a family home, you would probably not use this equipment, in which case you must wash your hands carefully before and after changing a baby.

The health of the baby

Changing time can be an opportunity to check on the well being of the baby, whilst of course being gentle and communicative as you do it. Look carefully to see that babies are free of nappy rash or sore skin, especially in the folds of their arms or legs.

Make a note of scratches or bruises and if you can guess how the baby came by minor bumps then remember to tell the parents. If you do not know how the baby or toddler gained slight injuries, or the injuries are not slight, then talk with your manager about whether and how you will raise the question with the baby's parents. (See Chapter 19 for when there can be child protection concerns.)

The contents of a baby's nappy will tell you something about her general well being. The stools of a breast fed baby have a milder, milky smell in comparison with a bottle fed baby and both tend to be soft. Once babies move into mixed feeding, then their stools become firmer, although they should not have problems in passing them. Constipated babies and toddlers can be in pain and the first step will be to ensure that they are drinking enough liquid (see page 72).

Rest and sleep

Very young babies will sleep many hours in the day, when they are not being fed and changed.

- Some babies have wakeful periods from the early weeks but all babies will move towards having wakeful times and will not go straight back to sleep after a feed.
- From two to three months onwards babies will want to be entertained and have playful company.
- By six to nine months many babies will have established a fairly regular pattern of naps during the day.
- It is important that nursery staff respect the pattern of a baby and fit in with the personal schedule when babies join a nursery. As the months pass, it is possible to encourage a group of toddlers to take a nap at about the same time, but you still should not insist.

Tips for practice

- Babies and toddlers need a safe and comfortable place to sleep. This will be a cot for the babies.
- Babies and toddlers should all have their own personal bedding and place to sleep.
- If you work in a family, then you will notice that babies and young children can fall asleep anywhere they feel safe and comfortable: in the buggy, on your lap or in their car seat.
- Make sure that older babies or toddlers in a buggy do not get chilled if you are outside.
- If you bring them back indoors asleep in a buggy, then ease off any hats or outer garments. Otherwise they could get too warm and overheat in the home.

Activity

Those readers who have their own children will know from experience that full time care of a baby or toddler is very absorbing and tiring, especially since the care is round the clock. It is valuable for practitioners, who are not also parents, to have an insight into these demands.

One option is to interview several parents of very young children and ask them friendly questions about their experiences in the early months.

- You could ask about their own tiredness and how they managed night waking.
- What had they anticipated in life with a new baby and what was unexpected?
- Write up your findings.

Another option, offered by some colleges, is the 'virtual baby' or 'simulator doll'. Students have full 24 hour responsibility for the doll over a period of about a week. The doll looks and operates like a real baby in that it needs to be supported and is programmed to cry at regular intervals, on an easy, normal or cranky pattern. The locked electronics box in the baby's back provides a readout that shows how the baby has been treated over a period of time.

The advantage of the living doll is that early years practitioners can gain an insight, and it only lasts a week, into how tiring it can be to care full time for a young baby. Even if you never have full responsibility as a nanny, the experience will help you understand the stresses on parents, as a daytime nanny or a sympathetic early years practitioner.

Source: 'Cry babies' a feature about the simulator dolls used in Evesham and Hertford College, *Nursery World*, 21 June 2001.

Key skills links: C2/3.3

Safety in sleep

Some babies in the early months of life die in their sleep for no apparent reason. This loss is called **sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)** and sometimes cot death. Babies who die unexpectedly are normally aged between 1–12 months and more usually between 3–6 months of age. There is often no explanation other than that the baby has stopped breathing, but nobody knows why.

Research in the 1990s established that babies are safest if put to sleep on their backs. Unexplained rises in infant death were linked with firm advice to parents in the 1980s that they should put their babies to sleep on their stomachs and that babies risked choking if laid on their backs. The change in direction is a timely reminder that childcare advice does change over time, in the light of new or more reliable information. The current advice is as follows:

- Put babies to sleep lying on their back and in a position with their feet towards the end of the cot.
- The problem is that young babies cannot move themselves if their mouth and nose is covered. Once they are agile enough to shift from the position in which you lay them, they will be able to move if their nose is temporarily into the mattress.

Key term

Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)

the term that describes the unexpected death of a baby, that cannot be easily explained by specific illness or accident; also known as cot death

- Babies under 12 months old should lie on a suitable mattress with sheet and blanket bedding. They should not have a pillow, because a young baby can be smothered if she turns into the depth of the pillow.
- Breathing becomes more difficult in a smoky atmosphere and can be doubly hard if a baby or child has a cold. Nobody should be smoking around babies and children and this will be a clear-cut rule if you work in a nursery. If you work in a family home and are a smoker, it is undoubtedly good practice that you never smoke in the presence of the children.
- Babies can get too cold and should not be left to sleep outside for long periods. This habit is far less usual nowadays. Certainly a good rule of thumb is that neither babies nor children should be having a sleep outside, unless the weather is comfortable enough for you to sit out close by them as well.
- With the increase in central heating and very warm baby clothes, it has become clear that babies are at risk from being too hot, and not only from becoming chilled. Overheating appears to be a factor in the unexplained death of some babies.
- Young babies need to be warmly dressed until they get better at keeping themselves warm. However, by a couple of months of age, babies do not usually need more layers of clothing indoors than the adults who care for them.
- It is also advised that babies should not have duvets or sleep in baby nests. They need to be in a room without draughts but not hot: a suitable temperature is 18°C (65°F). The cot should not be placed next to direct sources of heat like a radiator.
- Babies taken out in the pram or buggy for a local trip need more clothing than walking adults but hats and extra layers need to be removed when you return to the warm indoor atmosphere, even if babies are sleeping.
- Babies should not usually sweat, nor feel hot to your touch, nor should they get heat rashes in cold weather. You can check whether they are comfortably warm by slipping your hand inside their clothes. Their stomach should feel warm but not hot.
- Sick babies can get hot and run a temperature. Feverish babies need less clothes and bedding, not more. (See page 184 about when babies are ill.)

Activity

- Use the information in this section and supplement it with material from the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths (FSID). You can contact them at Artillery House, 11–19 Artillery Row, London SW1P 1RT tel: 020 7222 8001 for general inquiries, the helpline is on 020 7233 2090 email: fsid@sids.org.uk and website: www.sids.org.uk/fsid
- Make a short presentation to colleagues about safe practices to reduce the possibility of cot death.

Key skills link: C3.2 C3.1b

Health and well being of babies and toddlers

Health checks

Following the newborn checks (see page 152), parents are invited to take their baby for developmental checks at about six weeks, 8–9 months, 18 months, at about three and a half and before they start school. At each check the health visitor or doctor will ask about feeding and sleeping patterns and health.

- At six weeks they will check babies for alertness, ability to follow objects with the eye and ability to support their own head. They will listen to the baby's heart and check that the hip joint fits properly into the socket (a problem that can be corrected if identified early).
- At eight months the baby will be checked for physical abilities appropriate to her age and also that babies have been checked for hearing, as universal checks for hearing are planned for newborns (see page 154).
- Subsequent checks are to see whether the child is reaching the main developmental milestones and is in good health.

Parents are also welcome to bring their babies to the baby clinic sessions at their local health clinic on a regular basis for the baby to be weighed and for any questions to be answered. Parents, especially with first babies, can be reassured by this contact.

The growth of babies

Newborn babies lose weight, about 5–10 per cent of their birth weight in the first few days of life. They then regain the weight and continue to grow. Babies usually put on weight at about 150–200 grams a week (5–6 ounces) but the pattern is variable.

In the first year babies' growth is measured by their weight. Babies are measured for length as well but this is not a very easy task, as babies tend to curl up rather than straighten out. At the health clinic the health visitor or doctor compare the baby's weight against average growth charts and check the baby against the *centile growth curve*. The baby's continued growth is then plotted to monitor whether this individual seems to be putting on about enough weight, not enough or too much.

Some babies will need special attention but most are fine. For example, if the baby was on the second centile, it means that of 100 babies of this age, 98 would be larger than this baby and 2 would be smaller. So this is a light baby, compared with the average and there is not necessarily a problem so long as she continues to put on weight and is healthy. See page 245 for more on growth and the ways in which children's bodies change.

Care in the heat

It is important to keep babies warm enough in the winter but equally important for their well being to protect them in hot weather and against strong sunshine.

- Babies should not be allowed to lie out or play in direct hot sunshine.
- Their skin is especially vulnerable and this care, as with older children, should be taken whatever the child's skin colour and tone.
- In summer hot spells you can keep babies in the shade. You can go out, but keep out of the direct sunlight.



Figure 6.9

Activity and interest are also important for the health of babies and toddlers

- Mobile toddlers need sunhats and suncream and you should talk with their parents about both these practical steps (See page 58).
- Make sure everyone has enough to drink, with drinks that are cool but not cold, throughout a hot day.

When babies are ill

Babies are in some ways tough little beings and they are designed to cry if they do not feel fine. However, they cannot tell you what is wrong and they can become ill very quickly. In this section you will find useful information, but you will need to be ready to continue to learn: in general and from what parents tell you about their own baby or toddler.

Fevers

Babies can overheat and run a high temperature. You need to know how to take a baby's temperature under their armpit. If this proves difficult, you could use a fever scan strip. This method gives a less accurate reading in terms of degrees, but will show if the baby is running a high temperature.

If babies have a fever, they need to be kept cool and not wrapped up. You also need to be aware of signs of possible dehydration as this is dangerous for babies. The signs include:

- a sunken fontanelle, the soft spot on top of a baby's head
- reduced urine output from what is normal for this baby
- a dry mouth or tongue, increased thirst
- sunken eyes
- failure of the skin to go back quickly when pinched (skin elasticity).

These may all be signs that a baby is dehydrated and needs fluids. Some of these signs would also apply to toddlers and young children.

Judging if a baby is ill

You make a judgement about illness in babies from your knowledge of this individual as well as your general knowledge about babies:

- You get to know a baby – is her cry different, does she seem less interested in her surroundings than usual?
- Is she less alert, more floppy or sleepy?
- What does the baby's skin usually look like? Does a light skinned baby look very drained of colour?
- You even get to know how an individual baby smells when she is well. Sick babies often smell different – not unpleasant, just unwell.

There are some symptoms that should raise your concerns for any baby or toddler:

- If babies have taken much less fluid than they usually do – they could be getting dehydrated, and this is dangerous for babies. Likewise it would be concerning if babies had passed much less urine that is usual for them.
- Healthy babies bring some of their feed back up quite often. Vomiting up noticeable amounts over more than one feed could be a cause for concern.
- Green vomit is a cause for concern (unless you know the baby has just eaten vegetables that are green). Otherwise, green vomit will be bile from below the stomach and is a possible sign of an obstruction in the intestine.

- Large amounts of blood in a baby's nappy, not small flecks, could be the result of a blockage or damage to the bowel.
- Healthy babies breathe easily. A bit of wheezing or snuffling may be down to a cold but should still be watched. Babies who are having serious difficulty in breathing, pull in their lower chest and upper stomach with each breath, so that there is a significant dip. This is called 'indrawing' and is a cause for concern. (It occurs in well babies when they have the hiccups or cry very hard.)
- Healthy babies' fingernails are usually pink, they should not go blue in tone.
- A higher temperature than 38.3°C (100.8°F) is higher than normal and a cause for concern.

Under most of these individual circumstances, you might let a parent know the situation when she or he comes home if you are a nanny or picks the baby up from nursery. Parents will decide what to do next, but in partnership with parents, it would be appropriate for you to offer advice or to say that the baby is too unwell to come back to nursery for the next day or so. When more than one circumstance is present or the symptoms are severe, then you need to consult swiftly with your senior and probably contact the parent. The system called Baby Check is a straightforward way of assessing the severity of a illness in babies younger than six months (see the resources box for details).

Conditions that require immediate medical help include if the baby:

- stops breathing, goes blue or has a fit
- cannot be woken
- is unresponsive and not aware of what is going on
- has glazed eyes and is not focusing on anything
- has been badly or seriously injured.

You need to get immediate help under these circumstances. Call the doctor, or an ambulance if you cannot get through (and say it is a baby who is ill) or take the baby to hospital. Do not wait to call the parent before you take action. Call emergency action, then call the parents and explain the situation.

Useful resources

If you are seriously concerned about a baby in your care you would usually contact the parents or the family doctor if you are a nanny. These other resources can be useful if you want more information or guidance.

- NHS Direct is a national helpline for anyone with concerns about health. Tel: 0845 4647 website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
- I also recommend that you send for a copy of *Baby Check: Is your baby really ill?* This valuable booklet gives guidance for assessing the degree of illness in a baby of up to six months of age. Contact Baby Check at PO Box 324, Wroxham, Norwich NR12 8EQ or telephone on 01603 784400.

Immunisations

The UK has a comprehensive, free system of immunisations for babies and children as part of the health programme to prevent serious and life threatening

illnesses. The aim of an immunisation programme is that the vast majority of babies or children in the target group do receive their full set of immunisations. This result then ensures that the disease remains under control.

The recommended pattern of immunisations is:

- Between 2–4 months of age, babies are immunised against polio, diphtheria, tetanus, meningitis C and the type of meningitis called Hib (Haemophilus influenza type b).
- Most babies should also be immunised against whooping cough. Parents used to be advised against this immunisation if there was a family history of epilepsy. GPs will now tend to recommend the immunisation so long as a child's epilepsy is under control.
- At the age of 12–15 months, children are given the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine.
- At 3–5 years children are given a booster immunisation of diphtheria, tetanus and polio and the second dose of MMR.
- The last immunisations are usually given in the early teenage years: BCG (against tuberculosis) and a booster against tetanus and polio. The BCG programme in schools was suspended in 2000, although the reappearance of tuberculosis may lead to a rethink (see page 136).

Reactions to immunisations

It is not unusual for babies to have a slightly raised temperature after immunisations. You would usually give a child paracetamol to keep down the temperature. This preventative step can avoid the situation where some babies and children suffer a febrile convulsion brought on by a suddenly rising temperature.

There has been concern about an increased risk of autism following the MMR vaccine, because of the use of mercury in the vaccine. This link looks unlikely but parents are not necessarily reassured by government pronouncements, given the range of health scares in the last couple of decades. It is the parents' choice whether to accept immunisations for their babies and later for their children. Parents cannot be forced into having their babies immunised (it is not compulsory in the UK) and all parents have a right to reliable information about any health prevention programme.

Tips for practice

- You can gather useful leaflets for information about immunisation and the seriousness of the diseases against which babies and children are immunised. Measles, for example, for all its reputation as a 'childhood illness' is very unpleasant and complications include serious damage to vision and a brain disease called SSPE.
- Nurseries can offer information sessions to which you invite parents to hear a health visitor or GP.
- As a nanny you can share information and listen to parents if they wish to weigh up their decision.
- But do not give reassurance that immunisations are completely safe when you cannot be 100 per cent certain. Parents have to make this decision.



Further resources

Hilton, Tessa with Messenger, Maire (1997) *The Great Ormond Street New Baby and Childcare Book: The essential guide for parents of children aged 0–5* Vermilion.

Leach, Penelope (1997) *Your Baby and Child: The essential guide for every parent* Penguin.

Progress check

- 1 Explain why it is important to support women in breast feeding their babies.
- 2 Give three examples of suitable early foods for babies who are being weaned onto a mixed diet.
- 3 Give three examples of how you could make a care routine with a baby a personal and communicative time.
- 4 Explain four ways to reduce the risk of cot death for babies.
- 5 Give three examples of warning signs that a baby may be seriously ill.



7

Supporting children's personal and social development

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the importance of very early attachment for babies and children
- recognise and promote children's personal development as individuals
- support children's social development and the formation of friendships from an early age
- recognise and support the social skills that children need to develop within play.

Introduction

In this chapter you will learn about the importance of children's emotional and social development. Children need the sense of security that develops from close attachments within their family and with other key adults in their life. Children develop as individuals with personal interests, talents and concerns. They develop friendships with other children from their earliest years and social contact is crucial for their learning. Chapter 8 covers children's emotional development and how adults can support children.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 4

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C4, E1

Level 3: C5

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 4, 8, 9, 12

Early attachment and later relationships

Experiences in early childhood matter a great deal because they shape children's emotional development, their sense of security and how they think about their social world. There is more than one route to a happy and healthy childhood and different family patterns. But overall very young children need to have been able to build a base of emotional security as well as physical well being.

How much does early experience matter?

Patterns of experience, either positive or negative, are usually more significant for children than single events, although a badly handled and distressing event can leave a child very fragile psychologically. Over the decades, opinion in psychological theory and research has swung from one extreme to another in judgements about how far it is possible to compensate later for a very damaging early experience.

Supporters of Freudian psychoanalytic theory (see page 15) proposed that children's personalities and therefore their later reactions were fixed by the age of five years. Later theorists thoroughly challenged this viewpoint and there was considerable optimism in the 1970s that children could overcome, with help, even a very deprived early childhood.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, research established more clearly how neural connections are made within the immature brains of very young children. It seems likely now that grossly depriving experiences in the early years mean that vital connections relating to emotional and social development are never made. High quality care and support can make up some of children's development but they may always have great difficulty and confusion over relationships. This cautious outlook is supported by anecdotal evidence from adoptive families who took children from some of the Eastern European orphanages, for instance in Romania.

The importance of attachment

Children need to form attachments. Most babies are ready to be social – to make links of affection with their close family and regular carers. They need to form the important initial attachments within their family and then to make warm relationships with familiar carers and other children. If babies are not enabled to make a close attachment to their carers, usually their birth parents, then their continued well being can be at serious risk.

Attachment is a positive emotional link between people: adults and children. You can observe children's sense of attachment to someone through their reactions, whether their closeness is within the family or to very close friends.

- Babies and young children are pleased to see their parent (or other important individuals like siblings) after a brief separation.
- Young children often protest at being separated, even for a short period, from parents or carers to whom they are close.
- Young children usually want to be close to parents or other key, familiar carers. They especially want to be physically close, and not just in sight, when they are in unfamiliar or stressful situations.

Key term

Attachment

a positive emotional link between babies, young children and their parents or other key carers

Figure 7.1

Children can enjoy their time in your setting and still be delighted to see their parents again



Activity

Part of settling very young children into an early years setting is enabling them to feel secure and to separate from their parents, most likely their mother. Good practice in settling children involves partnership with parents (see page 629).

- Watch at least two babies or toddlers over the days that they settle into your early years setting.
- Track when and for how long they are willing to move away from their parents to explore the room. Keep a simple time count over the days.
- How do they react when their parent leaves the room for the first time?
- In what ways do the room team work to support both the baby or toddler and the parent?
- In what ways do the two babies or toddlers differ in their pattern of settling and separating?
- Write up your observations and make a short presentation to colleagues.
- Compare your observations with colleagues and discuss good practice in early years settings to support children and their parents.

Key skills links: N2.2 C2/3.3 C3.1a C3.1b

The development of early attachment

Attachment is a two-way process: within healthy psychological development, babies become attached to their birth parents but also parents become attached to their babies. These are two equally important sides to the same coin.



Discussion about attachment used to focus almost entirely on the earliest days of a baby's life and the word **bonding** was used to describe the closeness that ideally developed then between a baby and its mother. The impression was often given that bonding happened, or did not happen, within the first few days and that only the mother was really important. Closer observation and understanding of early social development has led to the concept of a process of attachment, lasting over weeks and months and involving both parents and other close family members.

Key term

Bonding

the term often used to mean the very earliest attachment soon after birth

- A first and important bond with a baby can be established in the period immediately after birth, so long as the mother and father are able to have this very early contact. Sometimes this is not possible or easy and supportive professionals need to let parents know that attachment is not a win-or-lose single opportunity.
- A growing attachment between parents and baby develops from time spent together over the early weeks and months of a baby's life. Both mother and father can get to know this baby as an individual. Strong attachments can be formed through care giving routines, early communication and play.

The development of attachment in childhood

The emotional and social development of children starts with their close attachment to their family as a baby.

- Most babies are born social beings. It is a cause for concern if babies do not seem to be socially responsive. Babies make contact through crying, looking, touching and later smiling.
- Such very early social skills come to be used deliberately to gain the attention of parents and older siblings.
- Babies and toddlers need familiar, trusted people as a safe base from which to explore their world. They turn to key carers for comfort when they are upset, uneasy or ill. They look to them for a check when they are uncertain, as if to ask, 'Is this alright?' or 'Should I be worried?'
- In supportive and healthy development, babies come to know familiar faces and voices and are reassured by their presence. The consequence is that by about 8 months old, babies can distinguish familiar from unfamiliar faces.
- They then tend to be wary or distressed by over close contact with people they do not know. This change is often called 'fear of strangers'. But the reaction is more often wariness, especially if unknown adults are wise and do not insist on invading a baby's personal space.
- At this age, most babies are visibly distressed if they are separated from their most familiar and favourite adult. In western culture mothers tend to undertake most of the primary care, so this most familiar adult is often a baby's mother. However, with changes in how family life is run, it is not unusual that babies are equally, or sometimes more, upset if they are separated from their father.
- Babies and very young children can also develop strong attachments to other family members: often to their father but also to siblings and other relatives like grandparents who are involved in their care. Older babies are well able to distinguish the different familiar people in their life and often show that they anticipate and enjoy different styles in care and games.
- Normal family life has some changes and mild disruptions. Babies and young children can tolerate some variety but healthy emotional development can

be threatened if there are too many changes and carers. Under these circumstances, babies and toddlers cannot begin to predict their lives and they cannot learn to relax and trust.

To think about

Babies and toddlers in families become close to parents, siblings and other relatives like grandparents. Sometimes they may be most closely attached to their mothers, especially when very young.

- For what reasons might babies be most close to their mothers? Discuss with your colleagues.
- Under what family circumstances might they be equally close to other family members?
- Look at this section as you consider your answers and discuss with colleagues. Look also at the section on page 5 about different kinds of families in current UK society.

Key skills link: C3.1a

When attachment is difficult

Circumstances can interfere with the development of attachment between a baby and its parents. Possible problems arise mainly from characteristics of the baby or from problems experienced by the parent(s). Family and professional support can be important in helping parents through these difficulties. For example:

- Parents can find it exhausting to care for a baby who cries a considerable amount. Even patient and caring parents can begin to feel unloved themselves.
- Very premature babies can be unable to respond socially like full term babies and fragile health may mean that babies are in intensive care. Premature baby unit teams work hard to enable and encourage parents to spend time with and, if at all possible, to touch their babies (see page 157).
- Babies with disabilities may not respond to parents' communication by looks and sounds and it may take some time before parents and professionals realise that something is amiss. Babies with visual loss tend to smile less than sighted babies and do not hold a mutual gaze. Hearing impaired babies may not respond until their parent enters the line of vision.
- Parents may have great difficulty in responding to the social signals that babies send to them. There can be many different reasons for this block: a deprived childhood which left the adults with no ideas about how to make affectionate contact, parents who demand that the baby meets their needs or convenience. Depression or overwhelming family stress can take all a parent's energies, as can addictions through abuse of alcohol or drugs.

The development of children as individuals

Personal development

Over the early years of childhood, young children develop a sense of themselves and this can be described in a number of ways:

- Children develop a **personal identity**, an understanding of who they are as an individual and how they fit into the social groups around them.
- Children have a **self image**, a feeling of what they are like as a person and the balance of positives and negatives within this.
- Children develop a sense of **self esteem** and this term is used to describe a child's evaluation of their own worth. Children, and adults, experience a level of self esteem that is created by a comparison between what they feel themselves to be and what they feel they ought to be. Children have a low level of self esteem when they believe there is a wide gap between what they are and what they should be.

A sense of personal identity

All children are dealing with a growing sense of their own self and coming to terms with any difficulties that arise.

- Babies need first to develop a sense of themselves as separate individuals. First of all babies act as if there is no difference between 'me' and 'not me'. They literally have to find and experience the physical boundaries of where their body ends and somebody or something else begins.
- By about 12 months babies not only have a clear sense of their own physical boundaries and their name, but that other familiar adults and children have their own ways of behaving.
- Toddlers show that they see themselves as someone who has a relationship with other familiar people and they see themselves a great deal through how they are treated. They need reassurance that they are loved, perhaps despite what they have just done.
- By three years most children are clear about themselves and others in terms of who is a boy and who is a girl. But they continue to learn what it means to be one sex rather than another and the expectations that are built around gender roles.
- By three and four years, children can also start to develop a sense of what it means for them to belong to a given culture, religion or nationality. Obviously the way in which they develop this aspect of their identity depends on their family and neighbourhood.
- Some children have to deal with clashes within the family or resolve conflict between family expectations and those of school or friends.
- Many of the experiences shaping identity will impinge upon individuals from the outside. For disabled children, their disability or ill health is part of life for them, but they are unlikely to wish to be seen through that exclusive filter.
- Young children are developing a sense of themselves as a worthwhile person, or as a child who is dismissed or apparently disliked by others. Some children's experiences make them very uncertain of their own worth, because of their personal group identity.

Key terms

Personal identity

children's perception of what makes them an individual uniquely different from other people

Self image

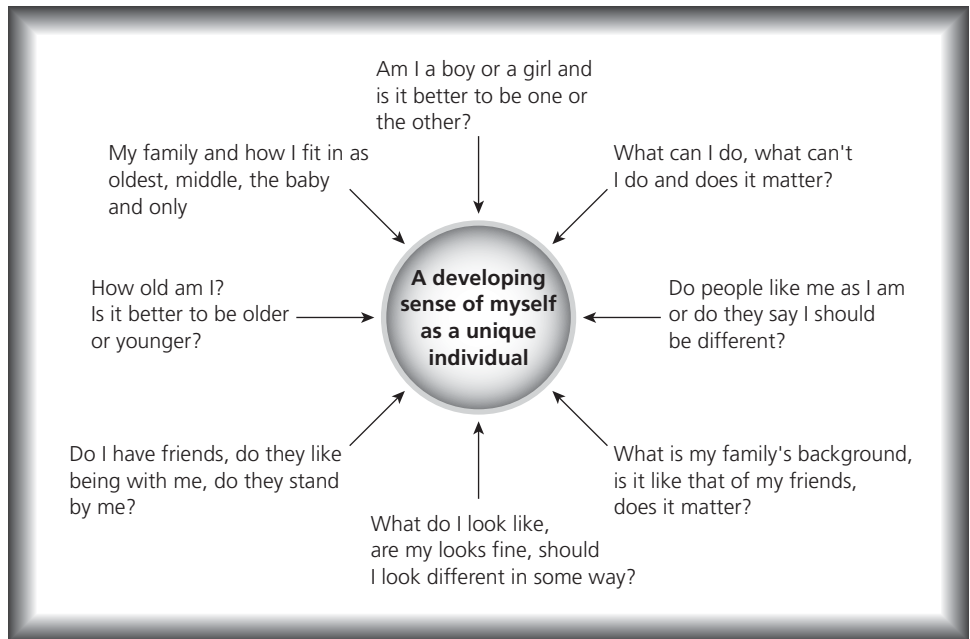
children's view of themselves, as a mix of positive and possibly negative characteristics

Self esteem

children's evaluation of their own self worth, including the relationship between what they feel they are and can do, and what they ought to be as a person and be able to do

Figure 7.2

Sources of possible identity for children as they develop



- Particular experiences as well as the resilience of different individuals affect their level of self esteem. Some individuals will be continuing to deal with the prejudiced reactions of others to some aspect of their personal identity.

Sources of personal identity

By the time that children are four or five years of age, they will have built, and be continuing to build, their sense of personal identity from any of the following sources and by understanding or finding the answer to a whole series of personal questions:

- *Family*: do I live with both my parents or one of them? Do I have brothers and sisters and where do I come in the order? What are my parents like, do they have jobs and does that matter if they do not? How large is my family and who else plays a part in my life?
- *Sex*: am I a boy or a girl and does that mean I look and behave differently? Is it better to be a boy or a girl?
- *Age*: how old am I now and is it better to be older or younger?
- *Competencies*: what can I do and what can I not manage? Am I good at some things and useless at others?
- *Friends*: do I have friends and who are they? Do they like me and will they help me if I need them? Who does not like me and does this create trouble for me?
- *Likes and dislikes*: what do I like and dislike? Do my friends feel the same way as I do, does it matter if friends do not agree sometimes?
- *Pre-school and school*: where do I go on a regular basis and who is in my group? What year and class am I in at school?
- *Ethnic group and culture*: what do I and my family look like and are there other people locally who look like us? Am I supposed to dislike some people because of how they look; do some people dislike me? Do we share



the same language as other people, do we talk in the same way and does this matter?

- *Faith*: is my family religious, what do we believe in and how does that affect our life? Do we share a faith with other local people and does this matter? Am I supposed to dislike some people because they do not share our faith; do some people dislike me?

Activity

- Listen in to the questions that children of five or six years ask each other on first or very early meetings. What questions do they ask and what seems to matter? What information do children volunteer to their peers: name, age, what school they attend?
- You could listen discreetly in a local park or in out of school care if you work in this kind of setting.
- Make brief notes of your observations and ideally discuss them with a colleague who has also undertaken this activity.

Key skills links: C2/3.2 C2/3.1a

Children learn about culture and faith

All children learn something about the cultural and linguistic background of their own family and therefore about themselves. In a neighbourhood with ethnic diversity, children's understanding can be grounded in the observation that not everyone is the same, so their own identity is built from similarities as well as differences. In a neighbourhood where there is very little obvious ethnic group or faith diversity, then children not surprisingly regard the ethnic or faith identity that they know as the only one, it is 'normal'. Broader experience will eventually tell them that everyone does not share the same background at all.

Culture can be seen as a distinctive way of life that is shared within one group and makes a clear distinction between this group and another. The details of culture may include:

- Ways of behaving, including use of communication and body language, expectations about the expression of feelings or certain kinds of emotions.
- Within a given group some skills may be valued above others.
- Cultural identity can include a blend of ethnic background, nationality and sometimes also religious faith.
- Children acquire the cultural patterns of behaviour, skills, knowledge, values from their immediate family and other members of the same community.
- Everybody has a culture and a cultural background.

In an early years setting your responsibility is to support all the children in their own cultural identity. Partnership with parents is crucial for you to understand family patterns in diet (see page 92), religious faith if that is important to this family (page 627) and language (see page 312). It is the responsibility of families to raise children in the way that is usual within their own culture. Whatever your own background, you have an important part to play in showing respect for cultures different from your own. But of course there is considerable variety in

Key term

Culture

a distinctive way of life that is shared within one group and makes a clear distinction between this group and others

any culture and families who share your own cultural background, faith and language will still be different from you in many ways.

How do you support children's identity?

Your most important contribution is to treat children genuinely as individuals and learn about them through partnership with parents and communication with the children themselves.

The importance of names

A child's name is part of him or her and you show respect by learning and using children's names properly.

- If you have any doubts, then do ensure that you pronounce a child's name correctly and get the spelling correct.
- Do not make a fuss about names that are less familiar to you. A child's name is not 'difficult'; you are finding it difficult to say or get right without some practice.
- You should never change or shorten a child's name because it is unfamiliar or initially hard for you to pronounce. Such a step is disrespectful of the child and the family.
- You can courteously ask the child or parents for help and honestly say, 'I'm finding it hard to pronounce Bhadrakumar. I'd be grateful if you can help me get it right.'
- If you really cannot get your mouth around some of the sounds (or if a child or parent has a continuing struggle with your name), then you can reach an agreed compromise.
- Identical twins can be difficult, almost impossible, to distinguish, even when you know them well. Ask their parents for some help; they will be able to point out small individual differences or perhaps come to some helpful arrangement with badges. Definitely do not call out to children as 'twins'.
- For the majority of the time in a group setting, you should call children by their names and not by the name that you have given to their nursery room. It is fine sometimes out in the garden to call in scattered children with, 'Everyone in "Dolphins", it's time for our lunch', because you can then smile and greet children as they come towards you. Avoid the bad habit of regularly referring to children as 'middle room' or 'reception children'.

To think about

- Names matter to children and it can feel very discourteous if adults make a fuss about a name being 'difficult' or if they insist on altering the way a child would rather be addressed.
- It is not for adults either to shorten children's names if they want them in full, nor to insist that they will use their 'proper' names when children prefer the shortened version.
- Do you or your colleagues have childhood memories about the names or nicknames you were called or what happened to your friends?

Key skills links: C2/3.1a

Tips for practice

- The positive development of children's identity cannot be promoted by an outlook that claims 'I treat them all the same' because children are not the same.
- Three or four years olds will be clear that they are a boy or a girl so your approach needs to recognise their gender, just as much as cultural identity.
- Look at the activities that are on offer and check that they reflect different skills and interests. Are you as enthusiastic about the boys' interest in diggers as the girls' curiosity about animals?
- Be aware of your use of words, like 'I'd like two strong boys to help me with the climbing frame' rather than 'the ladders are heavy, I'd like some help'.
- Boys' pretend play themes may be on average more lively and perhaps higher volume. Be wary that you do not assume that the play is less rich. Energetic games may need some negotiation about where they are played rather than an outright ban (see page 124).

Supporting children's self esteem

The term **self esteem** is used to mean an overall evaluation of our own worth that is reached by the difference between what we believe ourselves to be and what we feel we should be.

- If we feel the gap between 'are' and 'should be' is relatively narrow, then we have high self esteem and feel secure in ourselves and our abilities.
- If the gap is wide, then our self esteem can be low and we feel less positive about ourselves and our ability to cope. Adults and teenagers have a level of self esteem as do older children.



Figure 7.3

Caring adults support children's sense of self worth

The development of self esteem

Children's experiences move towards a view of themselves that provide an internal judgement of their own self worth, so that by about seven years of age it is possible to talk about children's level of self esteem. In the early years, children's experiences in their family and early years settings work to build up their view of themselves and what is important. Their experiences can build a strong foundation for self esteem or make it likely that a child's view of herself is already fragile.

Children take on the standards of those around them, about what matters and is really important in how you judge yourself. So children vary, for instance a child in a very musical family may feel incompetent if she struggles to play an instrument when her parents and siblings seem to have such talent. In a non-musical family, her struggles would be far less significant. You can imagine similar situations for families, or schools who value sporting prowess very highly.

Children seem to develop their level of self esteem from five main sources of information through their experience:

- *Feelings of competence or lack of ability*: what can I do, what do I find difficult and does this matter?
- *Confidence in physical skills and abilities*: not just sports, feelings of physical competence are important in many areas of learning (see page 239)
- *Social acceptance and the support of friends*: am I liked, do I have friends to play with, am I chosen in games?
- *Acceptability based on behaviour*: do people like what I do, do I get into trouble with adults and does that matter, do people praise or criticise me?
- *Physical appearance*: how do I look, do I look attractive and what is important for that?

Children who develop a secure and high level of self esteem are not self centred or full of pride: an occasional misunderstanding of the term. On the contrary, children who have high self esteem can recognise that they find something difficult or are not highly talented in one area. But they feel confident that their struggles do not make them less worthy as a person; they are somebody who needs some help and cannot be 'brilliant' at everything.

Children who develop low self esteem can be at risk in a number of different ways because they may develop:

- a sense of self dislike, because they have few feelings of self worth
- better strategies for avoiding difficult situations (learning or social) than for boosting their competence
- a front of apparent confidence, even bravado that covers up their fragile self esteem
- difficulties in relationships or building links with children who are equally uncertain.

As an early years or out of school practitioner you can help by looking below the surface for children who have found disruptive ways to deal with low self esteem. You help all children by forming warm relationships with them and supporting their friendships. The most effective support is to boost children's positive disposition to learn (see page 393) and to take a positive approach to their behaviour (see Chapter 17).



Scenario

Michael attends Greenholt Pre-school. He is four years old and the pre-school staff feel that he pushes out the limits at most opportunities. Michael seems unable to stop himself, but he seems almost relieved when an adult steps in with a firm 'No' sometimes and re-directs him. Michael's way of getting attention is to shout, ever louder, until someone takes notice and then he does not ask for anything in particular. He just seems to want reassurance that he can get an adult's attention. The pre-school staff have noticed that Michael's parents seem to focus far more on what he does wrong than the boy's skills or interests. Michael is regularly compared unfavourably with his younger sister and an older cousin in the extended family.

Questions

- 1 How could the Greenholt team positively support Michael's confidence in himself in the pre-school? Suggest two steps they could take in the near future.
- 2 Discuss with colleagues a possible short-term plan for the pre-school.
- 3 How could the team talk with Michael's parents about their son's outlook and what his behaviour may show about his feelings?
- 4 Work with a colleague to role play what you could say and in what way.

Key skills links: PS3.1 PS3.2

Scenario

Becky is six years old and very quiet in comparison with the other children in St Jude's after school club. She seems uncertain of her welcome anywhere and very concerned about making a mistake of any kind. She is quick to say that she 'can't do' something or calls herself 'stupid'. Compliments, such as admiration of her drawings, are met with a surprised look and Becky often whispers that 'it's not really very good'. Sometimes she tears up her drawings. Becky seems keen to help within the daily routine but appears to be very worried about doing things wrong. Much more than the other children, she asks, 'Is this alright?' or 'Have I done it wrong?'

Questions

- 1 In what way could Becky's behaviour indicate that she has low self esteem?
- 2 Devise a short-term plan for ways that the after school club could boost her confidence and help her feel surer of her abilities.
- 3 Suggest ways that the club team might talk with Becky's parents in a constructive way, drawing on their observations in the club.
- 4 Role play the conversation with a colleague.

Key skills link: PS3.1 PS3.2

Temperament

Even a small amount of observation of children will tell you that they do not all behave the same way when they face what look like very similar happy, confusing or annoying circumstances. Furthermore, if you have the opportunity to observe the same children later on in their childhood, it is very likely, although not certain, that you will notice some continuities in how these same, now slightly older children, behave.

Perhaps Geeta is still more likely to be the group leader than Janie. Dan is still more likely to be hovering on the sidelines than not, although he seems to have conquered some of his anxious feelings when faced with a new situation. Of course children can learn to extend their options in how they face and tackle life. But they probably do not change dramatically in terms of the individual person that you came to know when they were younger.

Variety in temperament

The word **temperament** is usually applied to mean in-built tendencies for individual children that shape their reactions and behaviour towards a more established adult personality. Children are still affected by experiences but their temperament works as a filter. The main sources of variation include:

- *Active-passive*: some children are more physically vigorous than their peers. Some are more likely to go out and find interest, whereas others may wait in a more passive way for experiences to be presented to them.
- *Sociability*: children vary in their predominant style of how they relate to new people and social experiences or objects. Some children are more keen than others to initiate social contact and others may be more cautious, less outgoing.
- *Wariness*: another dimension suggested from observation is that some children have a greater tendency to be anxious or frightened when faced with new experiences.
- *Negative emotions*: children have to deal with frustrating experiences within daily life but some react swiftly with annoyance, so that even minor frustrations (from the perspective of another child) lead to strong reactions of upset or anger.
- *Effort and persistence*: even allowing for the developmental progress in attention control, some children seem to find it that much harder to focus and persevere through distractions.

Key term

Temperament

inborn tendencies for individual children that shape their reactions and behaviour towards a more established adult personality

Tips for practice

An awareness of temperament, possibly inborn, should not make you overlook the impact of how children are treated and their experiences. But temperament can be a useful source of ideas and reflection on how you handle children's behaviour.

- There can be a match or mismatch between the temperament of children and their main carer. You and a child may find it easy to get along or constantly rub each other up the wrong way. It is an adult's responsibility to take a mental step back and find a way through the prickly relationship.
- Watch out for gender assumptions about temperament. For example, some adults are concerned about a boy who is very wary, thinking he should have more courage. Yet it is more acceptable for a girl to be seen as sensitive or cautious.

Activity

Take a fresh look at how your setting is organised and run.

- Will certain temperaments be a better fit?
- Perhaps you require that children are fairly passive and accept the day as you have planned it.
- In that case, children who want a more active part, especially physically, may be labelled as 'demanding' or 'unable to concentrate'.
- Discuss possible adjustments in your practice, even minor ones, that could be more flexible to children as individuals.

Key skills links: LP2/3.1–3 WO2/3.1–3

Social skills and friendships

Children's social and emotional development progresses hand in hand with the rest of their development. Their communication abilities support the friendships they develop and their reasoning abilities help them to consider and sometimes resolve interpersonal problems. Social contact and friendships are very important to children. Consultation projects that have asked children what they like about nursery or school regularly find that children emphasise the importance of friends. They want to be able to play and chat with their friends. Children explain that in the school playground it is very distressing and lonely if a child does not have friends or is rejected from a group.



Figure 7.4

Very young children make friends too

Children's social development

Children's social world is of importance to them and can be a major source of self esteem, or a drain on their feelings of confidence.

- If you watch and listen, you will observe that even older babies and toddlers make social moves towards each other, develop shared games and are pleased to see each other.
- Very young children form friendships with each other and show a preference for playing with or being together with particular children. Friendships formed by four and five year olds can have their ups and downs but some close friendships last for many years, some into adulthood.
- Friends become increasingly central to children. They spend more time together and friends influence each other's opinions. Family remains important for children, even when relationships become fraught over disagreements.
- Children become more able to consider the perspectives of others and are willing, at least sometimes, to use their skills of communication and reasoning to problem solve when relationships have become difficult.
- In middle childhood, boys and girls start to face possible conflicting expectations from different friends or between friends and parents or teachers.

Tips for practice

You can help when you:

- Respect the friendships that children have made and support the development of social skills that enable children to deal with minor blips in social relations.
- Take adult responsibility to run home or nursery life in such a way that children can relax and make warm relationships with each other. If children have to compete for adult attention, in a family home or a poorly run early years setting, then they have limited emotional energy to make contact with each other.
- Help children with social troubles. Supportive friendships can be a strong source of self esteem to children, whereas unresolved troubles can be a drain, especially if key adults fail to take children's distress or worries with any seriousness.
- Listen to children who are struggling with being bullied. Continued bullying, verbal or physical, can be a direct attack on a child's self esteem, whatever the apparent focus of the bullying. Children who are unable to gain support against the bullies can seriously doubt their own worth.

To think about

- There will always be a balance in childcare provision between the needs of working parents (or students) and their children.
- Highly flexible patterns of attendance at nursery or pre-school are not always very positive for children, who may as a result not meet the same children on a predictable basis.
- Complex childcare arrangements, including what is called wrap around care, may also put young children in a position where they are required to find friends in more than one setting each day.
- In what ways do you think adults could resolve some of the social problems created for children by arrangements that are suitable for adult needs?
- Discuss some ideas with your colleagues, including how many changes are probably too many, from the child's point of view.

Keys skills links: C3.1a PS3.1

Social contact across the age groups

Practice in early years settings is usually to organise children into age related groups. If you work in a day nursery or centre, you will probably have three groups with age bands something like: babies younger than about 18 months, toddlers up to three years and then the 'pre-school' group aged from three to five years. There are some advantages of giving children a daily base and playtime with their peers and the physical care needs of the very youngest children require equipment that will be not be necessary for the over threes. However, there are serious disadvantages for children if they are kept separate throughout the day in a nursery.

- Contact between the ages is part of normal family life and of links between local families. Children benefit from regular friendly contact with both older and younger children.
- Older children enjoy and are often very adept at communicating with babies and toddlers and making them laugh. If you watch carefully, you notice that three and four year olds adjust their communication for babies; they understand that a different way of talking and showing is necessary.
- In their turn much younger children watch with interest, listen and anticipate a favourite game with a familiar older child or sibling.
- If you bring children together, at some parts of the day or in the garden, affectionate relationships develop across the age bands. Over threes are good at playing the repetitive 'do it again' games that toddlers adore and older children can be shown how to be gentle if necessary.
- Toddlers often love to share a book with an older child or sibling. Four and five years olds are, in their turn, proud to be the 'big' boy or girl who knows the story and so can 'read' it to the little one.
- The babies and toddlers learn from the older children and the latter get a boost to their confidence with the realisation that they have learned so much in contrast to the babies.

- Older children are pleased to show their physical and thinking skills as they share in the care of younger children. Of course adults remain responsible, but there are plenty of safe possibilities that support the learning of both the older and the younger child.

To think about

Nursery and centre teams, who are alert to what all the children can learn, have been exploring ways to bring the age groups together.

- What does your setting do to support contact across the ages?
- Discuss the different possibilities with colleagues from other settings.
- If possible, arrange a visit to another setting that has worked to bring the age groups together.

Write up the different practices you have heard about or seen and present them to the group. For instance, do nurseries:

- encourage visits between the rooms, for siblings or other children?
- use the beginning and ends of a nursery day as a useful time to have mixed age groups?
- mix age groups for local outings?

Key skills links: C2/3.1 C3.1a

Scenario

Joe is five years old and joined St Jude's Primary School and the after school club this term. Joe seems to find it very hard to trust anyone, taking the view that people make you promises and then break them. He seems uncertain about the predictability of even very ordinary daily events. Compared with other children in the club, he seems very reserved and does not exert himself to make friends. Joe has now attended the club for nearly a month and only yesterday exchanged more than a few words with any adult. This afternoon he had a short conversation with Pam, but he talked with feeling about two children he liked in a playgroup that 'I went to before Mum and I had to move on'.

Questions

- 1 Consider what the key issues are for the after school club in the near future.
- 2 What might they be able to offer Joe in the club and through the daily routines? Suggest some plans.
- 3 Should they try to find out a bit more about Joe's background and recent experience? If so, how should they start?

Key skills links: PS2/3.1–2

Social skills

Children need the **social skills** that they can learn over childhood with the support of observant adults who realise that such skills do not simply appear. If you watch children's play with an open mind, you will recognise the social complexities of playing together and the need for children to learn how to negotiate differences of opinion and interests.

Social skills cover a range of behaviours that enable children to become more attuned to others and to smooth social interaction. It is easy for unobservant adults to underestimate the social skills needed for children in the group life of nursery, playgroup or primary school. Even young children of two and three years start to tackle, or want your support in the following ordinary situations:

- How to approach an existing group of playing children and join them in a way that does not bring rejection by words or actions. Sometimes there is no way to join a closed friendship group and children on the outside need adult help to find playmates.
- Ways to be active in a group, finding a middle way between being told what to do and being too 'bossy'.
- How can you leave a group because you want to move onto something else, play with somebody else or you just want to be on your own for a while?
- Children bring their experience into your setting and some will have learned more acceptable strategies than others. For instance, some ways to make contact are more likely to start conflict than shared play. Pushing into the other child's personal space, or seizing play materials, do not usually go down well.
- Children also find difficulties in coping with children who want to play with them more often than is reciprocated.

Key term

Social skills

ways of behaving that enable children to get along in groups, to play and interact with other children



Figure 7.5

Working together

Activity (observation)

Choose two children, one who seems socially comfortable and another whom you feel often stands on the outside of play or is rejected. What happens?

- In what ways does the socially more adept child join a group or start a game?
- Does the less comfortable child have strategies and how do these work?
- In what ways could you help the less socially adept child?
- Are there more general points to note about how your setting operates to promote social skills?
- Share your ideas with colleagues, while being careful to maintain confidentiality about individual children.

Key skills link: C3.1a,b

Helping children to manage socially

Social skills are part of prosocial behaviour (see page 488). Early years practitioners can help by using their observation skills to identify regular conflict points within the day. There may be times and places where children get irritated easily. A positive approach is to avoid assuming that children's behaviour must be at fault and consider whether changes in the routine could help children to manage. Two examples explored by some early years settings revolve around times when children have to wait or queue:

- Self registration works to avoid the people jam that occurs as children are marked in or a lengthy sit down registration time. Children's names are on laminated card and they find their name, with their parent's help, as they arrive and then place it in a special container or hang it on a hook on a registration display board. Apart from reducing waiting time, this activity helps children to recognise their name and often the names of their friends as well as feeling pleased that they can achieve this task.
- Self service snacks and milk can solve the waiting time for this break and the fact that some children need a drink earlier than others. Self service milk and snack tables avoid irritation and promote relaxed conversation, because children chose when to take their snack break, often taking it with a friend. Children can show that they have had a drink or snack by moving their name label into a box or display hanger.

Social skills as part of play

Children learn the social rules of play and subtle communication cues. Most children manage to learn these skills by four or five years of age and it can seem automatic until you observe a child who has not learned them. Children who have had minimal contact with other children can find it hard to adjust when they join a nursery or playgroup and children who have an autistic spectrum disorder (see page 518) are very confused by social interactions that seem normal to their peers.



Children learn social skills in three related areas: how to behave in social interaction, ways of communication and imagination in play. For instance:

- Young babies of nine or ten months show that they recognise the play experience of joint attention with an adult as both focus on an object of interest. An open, alert expression on the baby's face, combined with deliberate looking at the adult, or older sibling, communicates 'we are doing this together'.
- Two, three and four year olds usually show through their play that they have expectations of how different people they know are likely to behave. They can then work this understanding into their play themes and pretend sequences.
- Happy playful exchanges between children depend on their ability to pick up subtle social cues. Is what my friend just said a serious comment, is it a joke or a telling off? Three and four year olds have gained enough understanding of communication to grasp the difference most of the time, especially with children who are familiar playmates.

You may spend time with children who find these social skills hard, perhaps because they have been isolated or their family life has been unpredictable. You can help when you recognise that these children need support to learn. They are confused and do not recognise the social rules; they are not being deliberately awkward. You can help when you:

- give children enjoyable practice in doing something together with you and show how you can look or take simple turns
- try some games of imitation of actions and follow my leader
- play alongside a child who finds it impossible to play with other children – be friendly and comment on what you are doing, without requiring the child to reply
- talk through what you are doing in simple routines, so the child gets a clearer idea of, 'first we do this ... then we ...'

Tips for practice

Courtesy, apologies and reparations

One aspect of social skills in interaction is to handle when matters go wrong. There are different ways of saying and showing 'sorry' and it is unwise for early years practitioners to insist that there is only one way, perhaps claiming the word is evidence of genuine regret. The opposite can be the case when children are pressured to say 'sorry'; they may well throw out the word in order to stop adults nagging and to get back to their play.

Activity

Consider and discuss with colleagues the different ways that a child could communicate that they are 'sorry', not only saying the words.

If it helps, imagine some everyday situations such as:

- A three year old pinches another three year old for no reason that you can see or hear.
- A two year old knocks over another child's carefully constructed brick tower.

- Three children of about four years old are absorbed in an exploration of the garden. They tell another child that she cannot join in, that she is not wanted.

Discuss issues such as does it matter whether children have a 'good' reason? Do remember that there may be a reason that you have missed. There is also the issue that 'good' reason or not, you may still want to redirect a child's actions. (See the section on skills of conflict resolution below and the discussion about feelings and behaviour on page 480.)

Develop a presentation or display that can show different ways of communicating 'sorry'.

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.1b

The same balance can be true of expressing appreciation and thanks. There are more ways to communicate 'thank you' than saying those two words.

To think about

- It is important that unreflective adults do not end up supposedly promoting courtesy in children through being discourteous as adults.
- Demanding phrases from adults do not help, such as, 'Say "thank you" then!', 'I'm waiting!' or 'What's the magic word!'
- Furthermore, getting into power battles that children must say or do the right thing rarely work to create genuine courtesy, regret or

Learning skills of conflict resolution

Part of childhood (and adolescence and adulthood for that matter) is being able to handle situations in which all does not go well. In early childhood children have to negotiate many situations of minor or more major conflict, for instance:

- More than one child wants the favourite bike, to go first up the ladder of the climbing frame or to have longer at the painting easel.
- Children may have angry exchanges over how a play theme should be worked out or who should be involved.

Adults sometimes sort out children's conflicts for them or decide who is most in the wrong but there is more scope for learning if early years practitioners share skills of **conflict resolution**. If you are not familiar with these skills then you need to practise and become confident yourself.

The practical steps in conflict resolution with children are:

- *Step 1:* Approach swiftly and calmly. Stop any hurtful behaviour between the children, using gentle touch if they have started to fight. However, you need to be calm as an adult and not raise your voice.
- *Step 2:* Acknowledge children's feelings by making simple statements like, 'You look cross' or 'Yes, I hear that you want the bike'.
- *Step 3:* Gather information from the children by asking, 'what has

Key term

Conflict resolution

the skills to address and to try to resolve disagreements without verbal or physical argument

happened?’ or ‘what’s the problem here?’ Listen, be fair and impartial and let children feel confident that they are heard.

- **Step 4:** Restate the problem, using the children’s words but help them with the communication exchange. Ease the interaction between the children.
- **Step 5:** Ask for solutions with, ‘What can we do here to solve this problem?’ Listen to what children suggest and avoid filling a silence with your ideas. Give some time and help the children to find a way out of this situation without a loser. Sometimes, you may need to help, because the result is perhaps that one child really does not want to play with this other child at the moment. So the one who wants company may need you.
- **Step 6:** Be prepared to give follow up support and be pleased when children have resolved the situation.

In using these steps, you also draw on good quality communication skills. Generally, you should remain close to the children, on the child’s eye level and use touch as appropriate. Supporting conflict resolution with children cannot be done from across the other side of the room. Your aim is to help children with the immediate problem. But, equally important, you aim to support them as they steadily learn the general skills of resolving conflicts and problems.

Activity

- Look for opportunities to use the skills of conflict resolution and to show a good model to the children.
- Write up examples and discuss them with your colleagues.
- In what ways could you improve your own practice?

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Finding out more

An explanation and practical visual demonstration is available in the video from High/Scope *Supporting children in resolving conflicts*, available from High/Scope UK tel: 020 8676 0220 website: www.highscope.org

Supporting diversity in friendships

It is appropriate that early years practitioners support friendships across any social, ethnic or religious groups but children also need the freedom to choose their friends. Some practical issues may guide anti-discriminatory practice.

- Friendships are sometimes made between boys and girls, or children from different ethnic backgrounds, when this opportunity is available. But sometimes girls play with girls and children of a similar background gravitate towards each other.
- You need to be alert and use observation skills to ensure that children are neither chosen nor rejected only or mainly because of their sex, ethnic group or disability.

Figure 7.6

Boys and girls sometimes come together in play or conversation



- If children find one another's ways unfamiliar, then you may be able to help them find common ground. Children do play successfully together even when at the outset they do not share the same language. See also page 314 about supporting children whose fluent language is not shared by many, or any, of their peers in an early years setting.
- Children get cross with each other sometimes but it is fair and realistic to have group rules that children are not offensive about other children's social or ethnic group, their sex or any disability (see page 500).

Further resources

Hartley-Brewer, Elizabeth (1994) *Positive Parenting: Raising children with self-esteem* Cedar.

Lindon, Jennie (1998) *Understanding Child Development: Knowledge, theory and practice* Cengage Learning (especially Chapter 2).

Roberts, Rosemary (2002) *Self-esteem and Early Learning* Paul Chapman Publishing

Progress check

- 1 Describe three ways in which babies could show that they are closely attached to family members.
- 2 Describe four circumstances that could make early attachments difficult.
- 3 Describe the possible sources of personal identity for a child of four or five years of age.
- 4 Describe two social skills that children need in order to manage in group life and explain how early years practitioners could support children as they learn each of these skills.

8

Children in a social world: emotions, thinking and actions

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand and appreciate children's emotional development
- support children as they learn emotional literacy
- identify ways to support children in distress or who are experiencing family upheaval
- recognise how children develop moral ideas and reasoning
- appreciate and support children's spiritual development.

Introduction

In this chapter you will learn about the importance of children's emotional development and that adults appreciate what and how children learn in this area. With sensitive adult support, children can develop in emotional literacy, growing in an understanding of their own feelings and those of others. Children's understanding of moral or spiritual ideas are a combination of feelings, thinking about the issues and making choices for action. Supportive adults acknowledge the complexity of what children are learning and are as attentive to their own adult behaviour and conversation as that of the children.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 2, 4, 10

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C4

Level 3: C5

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 8





Figure 8.1

Children also learn about feelings through social interactions

Understanding the development of emotions

Part of children's personal development is about their emotions: what they feel, how they express and handle their feelings and the extent to which they understand that other people have feelings as well.

How children learn about emotions

Throughout the early years, children are learning about their own and others' feelings:

- Toddlers and very young children may be confused about their feelings and even unnerved by the strength of emotions like anger or fear. They need the support of adults who accept the feelings that children express, although the adults may direct children towards different expressions of feeling, if others are being hurt.
- Two and three years old especially can move swiftly from happiness and excitement to distress or frustration. They express their feelings in different ways: facial and body expression, actions, words and sounds and in communicating with adults that they want help or support.
- Strong feelings like anger and frustration may be expressed in what adults call temper tantrums. When adults take a positive approach to this kind of behaviour they address the feelings as well as the actions, which sometimes need to be re-directed.
- With support, three and four year olds learn to recognise their different feelings, to give an emotion a descriptive name like 'happy', 'sad' or 'cross'. In an affectionate environment children may also start to be able to link events with feelings, such as, 'I'm cross with him because he took my bricks!'
- Three to five year olds start to understand that other children also have feelings, some of them very strong. They are not aware or sensitive all the time to their peers or younger children and it would be unrealistic to expect children to be this way.
- Children also learn about social expectations, from adults and later from their peers, in how you deal with and express feelings. See the activity (observation) box.

Activity (observation)

By three or four years of age, children will sometimes hold back their feelings because of the messages they have been given about how they should behave. For example:

- 1 Perhaps children hold back feelings of distress, because they do not want to cry in front of other people. Perhaps children have been told that crying is silly or for babies. Boys may have been told that 'big boys don't cry'.
- 2 Perhaps children hold back their excitement or enthusiasm because important adults or older siblings have scorned their interests or told them not to get 'over excited'.

- Watch out for evidence that children have taken on these kinds of messages about 'good' and 'bad' feelings and emotional expression. They may tell each other or you may see a child struggling with an emotion.
- Gather any comments you hear from practitioners or parents that direct children's emotions.
- Discuss and share the observations you have made with colleagues. Maintain confidentiality about the children and families.

Key skills link: C3.1a

Adult feelings are involved too!

In dealing honestly with children's emotions, reflective adults can become more aware of their own feelings.

- Adults need to be aware that they may be directing girls and boys differently in awareness and expression of feelings.
- There is some growing concern that adults' behaviour in western society towards young boys pushes them towards stereotyped views of male toughness and makes it harder for them to recognise and deal with their emotional inner world.
- Young children of three or four start to appreciate that adults, including their parents, have feelings too. They can be confused sometimes, partly because the adult world is different from the social world of children, but also because adults are sometimes confused.
- For instance, an adult who is scared because a child has nearly walked into the road may shout at the child, who hears the anger and cannot read the adult's mind to understand, 'I was scared you might hurt yourself'.
- Five and six years olds become more adept at reading verbal and non-verbal clues from familiar figures. Their understanding can be muddled when adults are less than open about their feelings, for instance in a family crisis or bereavement (see page 219).

Promoting emotional literacy

The idea of literacy in children's development has so far usually been associated with reading and writing. However, the valuable idea has developed of how adults can support children's learning of **emotional literacy**. This term is used to mean the ability to recognise and understand our own emotions and those of others. Children can be supported as they:

- become clearer about their own feelings
- are more able to name those feelings and talk about them
- recognise the possible source of strong feelings, felt by themselves or others
- find ways to express feelings in non-disruptive and in assertive rather than aggressive ways.

Undoubtedly, adults need to be open-minded in how the ideas of emotional literacy are put into practice and that it does not become culture specific, but

Key terms

Emotional literacy
the ability to recognise and understand our own emotions and those of others

Key terms**Emotion coaching**

supportive adult conversation and behaviour that helps children towards learning emotional literacy

there are many options. Perhaps one of the most important points for an aware adult is to recognise that our own feelings are involved as well as the child's.

Through an approach of **emotion coaching**, John Gottman observed that some parents were supporting their children in three important areas of their emotional development and self esteem:

- understanding their own feelings
- having empathy with others
- being able to control their own impulses.

He described five steps within emotion coaching that parents, or other key adults, need to follow. None are technically difficult; all depend on respect for children. The steps are to:

- 1 Become aware of a child's emotion.
- 2 Recognise children's expression of these feelings as a time of potential learning and of closeness between adult and child.
- 3 Listen with empathy and affirm the child's feelings.
- 4 Help the child to find words to name the emotion.
- 5 Set limits while exploring strategies to solve the current problem.

The approach of emotion coaching is a direct attempt to help children to develop self esteem as they grow to understand feelings. Adults are more honest about their own emotions and perhaps share their feelings, in a simple and appropriate way.

The approach needs to be developmentally appropriate and the aim is certainly not that adults spend ages talking with children about their emotions. You will lose young children very quickly if you try this. Often a simple acknowledgement may be key: 'I can see that you're cross about ...', 'You look sad today ...' 'I can see that you want ...' or 'You don't like that, do you. Is it that it makes you frightened?' The approach is grounded in good communication skills with children and valuing their emotional life.

Understanding the feelings of others

Children can develop in prosocial behaviour, part of which is empathy, the ability and willingness to tune into the feelings of others. Prosocial behaviour (see page 488) is shaped by children's experience and is not an automatic development. You can help to promote children's understanding and supportive reactions to other people's feelings in different ways:

- The tell-show-do approach described on page 116 that builds on children's direct experiences and your setting a good example to them.
- Supportive conversation can be built around the stories in books or story telling (see page 222).
- Guided role play and use of puppets or dolls can add to children's ability to tune into the perspective of others.
- Discussions within circle time (see page 221) can be one way to raise and talk about feelings.

Any of these approaches can work positively so long as you stay realistic about what children are likely to understand at different ages and you keep any exploration or conversation simple, practical and a two-way process: children can contribute as well as listen to adults.



Figure 8.2

Children need
sources of comfort

Using Persona Dolls

Babette Brown and Carol Smith have promoted the use of Persona Dolls as part of a well-rounded anti-discriminatory approach in the early years. The dolls build on young children's willingness to imagine their way into the world of one doll that is given a name, character and life story. The children talk about the doll and sometimes take her or him home for a stay overnight. Careful use of the doll by an early years practitioner gently extends children's ability to empathise with others, apparently unlike themselves. Sometimes the experience of the doll is chosen to reflect the troubles of a child in the group but never in any way that identifies that child.

The conversation and play around the doll can be one way to help children to be reflective about their attitudes and to see individuals rather than broad categories for children and adults who do not seem to be like them at the outset.

Books and stories

Stories and illustrations can be a useful way to approach feelings and encourage children to be more aware of their own and other people's feelings. You will find more books on page 222 about feelings in times of stress but there are a number of more general books to explore emotions:

- Kathy Henderson and Caroline Binch *New Born* (Frances Lincoln 1999) – an illustrated book about the sensations of a very new baby.
- Penny Dale *Big Brother Little Brother* (Walker Books 1997) – a simple story about family life, feelings and relations between siblings.
- Lindsay Leghorn *Proud of our Feelings* (Imagination Press 1995) – a story about the narrator's friends, their feelings and an invitation to children listening to or reading the book to explore 'how do you feel when ...' or 'what makes you feel happy (or other emotions)?'

- Some stories raise the topic of feelings when the characters or main character is less than happy. *Something Else* by Kathryn Cave (Puffin 2000) – explores the experience of not being wanted through the story of a little creature called Something Else who does not seem to fit in with or be like any of the other creatures.

Activity

- Explore one of the books or the use of stories woven around dolls for supporting children's emotional development.
- Plan what you could do with a book or story involving a doll character.
- Create the opportunity for children to explore this activity, while leaving them plenty of choice as to whether to become involved or not.
- Write up the activity after it is complete:
 - In what ways did the children react to the story?
 - How did they choose to comment?
 - What did you learn about the children's views and feelings?
- Share what you learned with your colleagues.

Key skills link: C3.3

Promoting a sense of security

Children need to feel that they belong and to understand enough about how their family or an early years setting is organised so that they can predict the usual events and reactions. Children can feel very uneasy if they cannot get a sense of what is likely to happen and how adults are likely to behave. Children's uneasiness may arise from their own past experiences, that make it hard for them to settle or perhaps they bring disruptive expectations or habits into your setting.

Figure 8.3

There are different ways to help children feel they belong



However, children are sometimes made insecure as a result of the inconsistent or unkind behaviour of adults.

You can support children to feel at ease in your setting by:

- helping them to deal with change and transitions – when they join you and when they leave
- organising a day that has enough predictability that young children can look ahead a little and get to know the rhythms of the day, but not such a rigid routine that children feel harassed (see also Chapter 2 about care and care routines)
- noticing when children look ill at ease or worried and supporting them with words, body language and affectionate contact
- creating an especially secure environment for children who are having trouble coping in an ordinary group with their peers.

Look at page 629 about settling children into your setting and partnership with parents.

When children need extra support

Nurture groups

Sometimes children cannot cope in a group, such as a primary school classroom. Reception classes require children to be reasonably self directed and to manage with an adult–child ratio that delivers limited adult attention, even with a careful and experienced class team. Children who find it hard to cope with this situation may develop behaviour that disrupts the class but they may also remain uncommunicative and separate from the group.

In the 1970s Marjorie Boxall developed her idea of **nurture groups** to meet the emotional and intellectual needs of children whose early experiences had not prepared them for the demands of school. The approach has been successful in supporting children to become able to rejoin their mainstream school class after some months in the nurture group. The main characteristics of the nurture group are a reminder of what children need in order to feel secure:

- The adult–child ratio of 12 children to two adults allows children to relate to a manageable number of other children and to get to know the adults well.
- There is a focus on personal attention, plenty of encouragement and a blend of care and learning. Activities are drawn from an early years curriculum of play and exploration as well as addressing those parts of the reception or year one curriculum that children can manage.
- The day is organised with some choice, but not so much that children feel overwhelmed. Routine is kept predictable so that they can feel secure. Children are pre-warned about any changes and are given an active part in helping with the routine.
- The nurture group team are careful to communicate with and involve parents. The partnership can ensure that parents see the group as an experience that will help their child back into the mainstream; there is no sense of blaming the child or the family.

In many ways the nurture groups draw on good early years practice and are a useful reminder of how much children need this quality of early experience.

Key term

Nurture group
carefully planned small group experience for children who are struggling with the emotional demands of primary school life

Activity

What can you learn from the practice of nurture groups?

- Look at the ideas in this section and make links to good practice with children younger than school age.
- What kinds of positive experiences can you give children in your setting that mean that they are ready to manage the demands of school?
- The nurture group work is a good reminder that children need emotional and social skills for school; it is not all about intellectual development.
- How do you put into practice some of the important themes in a nurture group day? For example, how do you communicate with children about what will happen in their day? How do you let children know about any changes, and how do you avoid the interruptions of unexpected visitors?
- Develop your ideas into a short presentation and share it with your colleagues.
- In what ways could you improve your own practice?

Key skills link: C/3.1b LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Helping children in distress

Even for a mainly happy and secure child, life does not unfold without some troubles. Some of these ups and downs will pass swiftly, especially if an adult is supportive. Some sources of distress are more entrenched and will need more extensive support for children, in partnership with their parents, and sometimes with additional help from other professionals.

Everyday events

Children can be distressed at the events of the day, for example that:

- They have had nobody to play with in the playground and when they try to join games, they are told ‘we’ve got enough people’ or ‘no, you can’t play with us’.
- Their best friend has taken up with another child.
- The pottery jug that they made with such care has been smashed to bits when another child picked it up to look at it and dropped it on the floor.

To think about

Events that distress children can look insignificant to adults, but only if those adults neither listen nor look at the child’s distress. It is important and also respectful to a child when adults make the effort to the child’s experience into something equivalent in their own life.

- For instance, a thoughtless adult might be tempted to say to the child, ‘It’s only a jug. You can make another one tomorrow’.



- Think about it, how would you feel if somebody had destroyed, even by accident, a dress or a complicated cake, that you had spent hours making?
- Or what is the adult equivalent of having no friends in the playground?
- Imagine going to a large social gathering where everyone else seems to be having a grand time and you cannot break into any of the social groups. Perhaps even people who you thought liked your company, edge closer so you cannot join in the conversation. How do you feel in your imagination?
- Discuss your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.1a

Family crises

Within the years of childhood, there will also be some events that children find disruptive or confusing.

- These may include changes that are normal for many families, such as the arrival of a new baby or moving home. But these 'normal' events have substantially changed what has been the child's normal life so far.
- Many children, even young children, now experience the separation of their parents and a new family set up.
- Families may experience financial pressure from unemployment or a slump in the family business.
- Young children may experience bereavement in the family or a close family friend or neighbour.
- For some families there will be disruption when one parent is absent for a considerable time, perhaps because of serious ill health and hospitalisation or through being sent to prison.
- Children from refugee families and asylum seekers may have experienced a massive disruption to life as they knew it, as well as genuinely frightening events.

Young children are aware of atmosphere and notice much more than adults often think or want to believe. It is a mistake to assume that young children do not notice family or neighbourhood upheavals and therefore adults think that children's feelings and views can be discounted.

Children feel more secure if they feel they have someone to turn to who will take their concerns seriously. Some children of primary school age complain that adults do not listen properly, belittle their playground problems or offer clichés that show the adults do not understand the complexity of what they face. A positive experience of support and empathy from an adult helps a child with the current problem, but children can also learn general strategies about how to face and resolve problems. By six or seven years of age, some children already understand that even caring adults cannot solve everything but that talking about a problem can help you to feel more confident and it is good just to have someone listen.

Listening and supportive conversation

All these events are different and, of course, children are individuals and react in varied ways to an apparently similar experience. You will help best by drawing on good communication skills with the children and their parents.

- Listen to what children want to tell you. Pay close attention and show that you would like to understand their feelings.
- If a child is not speaking out, you could invite (but not insist) her to speak with, 'You look sad, is anything the matter?' or 'You are very quiet today, is anything on your mind?'
- Avoid rushing in with a solution that sounds right to you. Consider with a child, 'What could we do about this?' or 'What could make this better for you?'
- Some troubles, perhaps of bullying from another child, will need your direct help but even then, it is better to discuss the possibility with the child rather than insist on operating on their behalf.
- Answer a child's questions if you can, but be honest if you do not know the answer ('why did my Daddy have to go to prison?'). Acknowledge the parents' preferred response to this question: 'does everyone go to heaven when they die?' But don't say you agree if you don't.
- You should give a child the same respect of confidentiality that you would give to a colleague but this does not mean that you keep absolute secrets. What children tell you should never become fuel for gossip among staff. It would, however, be appropriate to say to a child, 'I'd like to tell your Mummy about our conversation and what you would like to do.'
- If a child's problem is from her life outside your setting, then you do need to talk with her parents.

Circle time for general conversation

Children often want a personal conversation when they are concerned or confused but there are also opportunities to raise some issues in a more general way in a group.

Figure 8.4

Some conversations will happen in small group times





The idea of **circle time** developed for children in primary school but with sensitive adjustment for younger children, it can work as a way to introduce topics that are of relevance to three to five year olds and to pick up on issues that have arisen within the day.

Circle time can work so long as you plan carefully and are sensitive to what happens in circle time. A positive circle time experience for children does not happen just because you sit them in a circle or call a regular group slot by this name! Some useful guidelines include:

- Keep the discussion open and suitable for three to five year olds. Think about what they are likely to understand and how they will approach topics.
- Vary the content of circle time and ensure that it is not always very heavy emotionally.
- Pay attention to the children: listen to what they say and how they say it. Circle time will not work if adults overload the time with their talking or telling children.
- Enable all the children to take part at some time and in a way that they wish.
- Be sensitive to the feedback from children's words, expression and behaviour.
- Have a forward plan of what you may cover in circle time but be flexible. If a child announces that, 'My Mummy's going to have a baby', this may be a good time to explore babies, new and old.
- Be aware that if children feel comfortable and trust you, they may sometimes talk in the circle about very personal family issues. You need to be ready to show you have heard and gently bring an end to the topic if the matter is sensitive. Other children will repeat what is said in circle time and it would be inappropriate to try to establish this session as a closed confidential time with children.

Key term

Circle time

a carefully planned small group time to explore issues and ideas with children in a supportive way

Support children's behaviour

When children are under stress because of family changes and crises, you need to draw on a friendly working relationship in partnership with parents. If they trust you as another adult, you are more likely to hear that, for instance, the family has been disrupted because Dad has been made redundant or everyone is distressed because they have lost a baby cousin through cot death.

- You may be able to offer a friendly ear and comfort to parents and liaise with them about supporting the child.
- Children often react to family changes by some level of developmental regression, a backward step in what they can manage.
- Children may find it harder than usual to say goodbye to their parents or may actually say they are worried that 'Mummy is alright' during the day.
- You need to be sensitive to a child's stress, but hold to usual boundaries for behaviour if the child is expressing her distress by hurting others, by words or actions.
- Children's concerns will often emerge through their play or drawings. So long as the play does not impose on other children then it can help for children to play out their feelings and re-run events. If the content of a child's play or their drawings worry you, then it will be important to talk with your manager and the child's parents.

Tips for practice

- You may be able to explain to parents the importance of talking with children. A child whose mother is expecting another baby may be worried that she is sick all the time and needs to know that Mummy is not 'ill' in the usual way.
- Parents need to decide what to discuss and how they speak with their children but you may be able to put the important perspective that children are aware when something is wrong.
- If there is no other explanation, children often assume that they are at fault for the sadness or short temper of their parents.
- Part of the problem, for instance in family breakdown or bereavement, can be that nobody has explained to the child what has happened or is about to happen.

Using books and stories

Stories about other people, or playing out stories with dolls and puppets can be a support for children, alongside a chance to talk and be heard. Books do not substitute for emotional support work from caring adults but they can be a good supplement and may sometimes help a more reticent child to speak. Books can also be a source of information, given through words and pictures.

There are some excellent books about babies and where babies come from. Some are more explicit than others and in an early years setting it is probably better to go for the more low-key books. You need to select books with sketches or photos that you will be comfortable to share with the children. If you work as a nanny, you should also be guided by parents' preferences, but they will probably be pleased for some suggestions.

A story book with illustrations can bring in the children who may relate to the idea that 'Your Mummy brought you home all tiny like that too'.

Some possibilities include:

- Ann Kubler *Waiting for Baby* and *My New Baby* (Child's Play International 2000) – simple picture board books.
- Debbie MacKinnon and Anthea Sieveking *All about Me* (Frances Lincoln 1994) – suitable for three or four year olds with photos.
- Rosemary Stones *Where do Babies Come From* (Puffin 1989) – a very simple presentation.
- *Why is Mummy's Tummy so Big* (no author given, Dorling Kindersley 1997).
- Alastair Smith *How are Babies Made?* (Usborne 1997).

Activity

In a large, high street book shop, look for books for children about life events, such as described in this section.

- Make notes about possible books and the age of children for which you feel they are suitable.
- Are some books, perhaps about how are babies made, more appropriate for use by parents in their own family?



- Describe one book and how you feel that reading and talking about this story or the illustrations could support a child going through this experience.
- Write up your findings and discuss with or present to colleagues.

Key skills links: C2.1b C2.3

There are a range of books that cover family changes and loss. Books can be chosen that are suitable for different age groups and they offer a story that may give children a perspective or a way to express their own feelings. Some books are designed as 'talk about' books through the illustrations or suggestions for the adults to open up a general conversation.

- Rosemary Stones *Children don't Divorce* (Happy Cat Paperbacks 1991) – a title in the *Talking it Through* series.
- Jillian Powell *What do we Think about – Family Break-up* (Hodder Wayland 1998) – a simple story with some explanatory text and illustrations suitable for five year olds and older. The series has other titles by the same author, including *Death*, *Disability* and *Adoption*.
- Julia Cole *How do I Feel about my Parents' Divorce* (Watts 1997) – probably more for seven or eight year olds and older.
- Sarah Levene *How do I Feel about – When People Die?* (2001) is one title in the *How do I Feel about?* series published by Aladdin Books. These books are suitable for four, five year olds and older and have mini 'case studies' in which children talk about experiences.

You will also find series that offer a range of books covering different topics, for instance, *Let's talk about* (Franklin Watts), *Facing up* (Happy Books), *First Experience* (Usborne) or *Events* (Hamish Hamilton). You do not need to have all the books in your setting. If you make regular trips with children to the local library you can find books together that will fit what children want or might want to explore at the time.

Activity

In your support of parents you are not expected to undertake specialist work. You will be helpful as you share the care of their child and in partnership with parents, discuss what will best help a child who is confused or concerned. You can also support parents by having information to offer about other sources of help, advice or support, if parents ask.

It is well worth building up your own file of useful organisations, both local and national. Here are some to start your file. Check out local branches and contact one or two organisations to explore helpful leaflets. Start with the website, where possible, and then contact the organisation with some clear questions in your mind.

- Relate offers support for people with problems in relationships. Check out your closest office in your local telephone directory.

- Parentline Plus is an organisation specialising in support for parents and families and it incorporates Stepfamily. They have a free helpline 0808 800 2222 and you can find information on their website: www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- Cruse Bereavement Care, Cruse House, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR tel: 020 8940 4818 (general), helpline 0870 167 1677 website: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk
- The Child Bereavement Trust, Aston House, High Street, High Wycombe, Bucks HP14 3AG tel: 01494 446648 website: www.childbereavement.org.uk
- Federation of Prisoners' families support groups c/o SCF, Cambridge House, Cambridge Grove, London W6 0LE tel: 020 8741 4578 website: www.fpfsg.org.uk

Key skills links: IT2/3.1 C3.1b

National and international events

Significant events that reach the news affect children as well as adults. Yet the feelings and fears of the children can be overlooked, especially when the adults are themselves confused, distressed or frightened.

The foot and mouth crisis in 2001 seriously affected the lives of families in parts of England, either because their own livestock were slaughtered or because normal life was disrupted in the whole neighbourhood. Children in rural areas were sometimes isolated, unable to reach their usual nursery or school. The children were aware of family stress and anger over what was happening and sometimes witnessed animals being killed.

Where children were able to reach their early years setting or school, aware teams worked hard to support the children, to explain and listen. Early years practitioners can be a very important source of comfort, especially when parents may be so hard pressed, it is hard to give emotional support to their children.

The events of 11 September 2001 and the aftermath has affected everyone's life in one way or another and adults have agonised over what to say to children. The same general guidelines have applied, even to such a distressing and frightening event. Bear in mind the following important points:

- Children's questions should be answered with simple but honest replies.
- Children should be reassured that this event happened a long distance away.
- It is inappropriate to tell children that, 'nothing bad will ever happen here'. You cannot make such a broad-ranging promise; there will be accidents and bereavements in any neighbourhood.
- Children must be helped to understand, especially given the news coverage and words used, that there are terrorists and people who use violence in many cultures and world faiths. Muslim families in the UK, and in the same neighbourhood as some children, are not all terrorists. Any more than all Christian families applaud the violence in Northern Ireland that is considerably closer to home.

Long-term effects of stress on children

Early experiences affect children in ways that can be seen through their development but also in the way they behave. Sometimes you will find that persistent

worries or fears weigh on a child and are not lifting despite your sympathetic communication and attention. Bear in mind that young children can get depressed; this condition is not limited to adolescents or adults.

When children are weighed down

You should never overlook the seriousness of the situation when children continue to express feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Children need help if they make comments about life being not worth living or that they wish they were dead. Heartfelt comments of this kind are not 'just a phase', nor are any events when children threaten, or carry out threats, to harm themselves. If you are responsible for a child who is behaving in these worrying ways you should definitely speak with your manager, the child's parent(s) and recommend that the family seek professional help.

Some confidences that a child offers you might raise concerns about child protection – see Chapter 19 for a full discussion of this topic.

Neighbourhood and domestic violence

Children live in a social world that is broader than your setting and events outside the nursery or pre-school affect children's behaviour. A positive approach to individual children within any early years setting has to start with the experiences that children bring with them into your setting.

Some children may have seen violence in their own homes, even if they have not themselves been on the receiving end of an aggressive attack. An accurate definition of **domestic violence** is that of verbal and physical aggression, threats or attacks made by family members within the home. Some commentators insist that domestic violence is only perpetrated by men on women, but this is not true. Although the majority of the reported attacks in the home are by men, a sizeable minority are by women and are likely to be under-reported. Some children in your early years settings may have violent or highly aggressive mothers.

The experience of domestic violence may mean that children themselves are more likely to deal with even minor upsets with an aggressive attack. Fighting back with words or fists will be what they have known, so it seems the obvious option. Of course, you do not tolerate such behaviour but you cannot help a child to change unless you first recognise that she or he does not know that this reaction is unacceptable. To that child, it is a new idea that 'we don't hit each other here' or 'we don't use that word in the nursery'.

In some parts of the UK children will experience violence in their local neighbourhood. Adults who live and work in stressful neighbourhoods can hope that children somehow do not notice what is happening on the streets. But of course children are aware, can be very frightened and they learn negative attitudes at a very young age in line with local divisions, whatever those are.

More than one generation of children has now been raised in Northern Ireland during what this community calls the Troubles. As much as adults would often prefer to believe otherwise, young children have been affected by the disruptions and deaths. Children also understand the importance of symbols that relate to Catholic and Protestant groups in the Province and, without active adult support to the contrary, take on attitudes of bigotry – along religious lines. The application of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice in Northern Ireland has meant anti-sectarianism: an active attempt to challenge religious discrimination and bigotry and to build positive connections between the communities and their children.

Key terms

Domestic violence

verbal and physical aggression, threats or attacks made by family members of either sex within the home

To think about

One difficulty for adults to recognise is that aggression and war can seem very exciting. Peaceful conditions often get described in terms of the absence of war, rather than positive characteristics of peace.

When you work with children, especially those who are slightly older and in school, you may well need to identify how to bring some excitement and challenge into the children's world that does not depend on conflict and win-lose scenarios.

Children in refugee families

Increasingly, early years settings in different parts of the UK are admitting children who have reached the neighbourhood because of serious disruptions and fighting in their country of origin. Many children will have significant adjustments to make to an unknown culture and language. Unlike families who have migrated out of choice, these children will also bring what may be very distressing experiences with them.

Even young children may have seen vicious fighting, witnessed the injury or murder of members of their family and experienced a terrifying flight out of danger. The children may have been part of experiences that you have only seen on the television news or in newspaper photographs.

Settling distressed and disturbed children can be hard work and any early years setting with refugee children ideally needs to have specialist support. However, such support may not be available locally and in any case nurseries and pre-schools may still be doing much of the supportive work. In terms of behaviour you need to be aware that:

- Children's experiences may make them very vulnerable to what seem to the outsider to be over-reactions to potentially aggressive situations. Children may be very easily distressed or hit out in self protection. You may well need to offer emotional support and understanding as well as guiding children towards more appropriate reactions in a safe place.
- Like their peers, refugee children are likely to play out their experiences: with dolls and small world figures, through pretend play themes and in drawings or stories. (See the scenario in the box.)
- Some children may wish to talk about their memories or continuing worries and some may have realistic fears for family or close friends left behind in a war zone or refugee camps.
- You need to allow for some of your early years routines being unfamiliar to these children.
- Good partnership with parents will help you to find out and understand what may be familiar and what may not be – it will depend a great deal on the family's country of origin.
- If you do not share a fluent language with the parent(s), then you will need to use the help of the local interpreting service.

Activity

- Save the Children Centre for Young Children's Rights has some supportive material for early years practitioners who work with refugee children, including a video pack called *In safe hands*.
- Contact them at 356 Holloway Road London N7 6PA tel: 020 7700 8127 email: cycr@scfuk.org.uk website: www.savethechildren.org.uk
- Gather some information and write up some practical plans for good practice with children from refugee families.

Key skills links: C3.3 IT2.1–3

Scenario

Over the last couple of years, children from refugee families have attended the Baker Street Children and Family Centre. Some of the children have witnessed very distressing events.

The centre team has so far worked to discourage any kind of pretend play involving weapons and fighting. They were close to reviewing the ban, since they were aware of its possible limiting effect on the boys. However, the arrival of Adok and Angelo from Somalia led to a thorough re-think of the centre approach.

The boys took many opportunities to play games built around the use of weapons and used some of the small world figures in fighting scenarios. The centre team, in careful conversation with the parents, realised that the boys' play was far from imaginary; they were playing out what they had actually seen. Sally, who was the boys' key worker, undertook some observation of their games that involved weapons and fights. The games were fairly contained and the boys became less agitated once staff stopped trying to discourage the games. Both Adok and Angelo were interested in other play opportunities and in beginning to make social contact with other children. However, they really needed to have the chance to play out their frightening experiences in the safety of the centre.

Over a matter of several months, the boys' weapon and war play became rare and they established broad interests in the centre.

Questions

- 1 What might have been the consequences if the centre team had stopped the boys working through their experiences in play?
- 2 In what ways have you noticed that some children in your own setting play out distressing experiences in their play? Write up your observations with care and attention to confidentiality.
- 3 In what ways can supportive adults help and under what kind of circumstances might you need to re-direct the play? Suggest such plans appropriate to your kind of setting.

Key skills links: C3.3 PS3.1–2

Children's moral development

Babies are born morally neutral but naturally social. Moral development in childhood has no meaning without social relationships (see Chapter 7). Moral values are relevant to how we treat other people, or how we expect to be treated in our turn. So children's moral development has to be just as much about learning as any other aspect of their development.

Children's understanding of moral issues and dilemmas

There are three main strands to what children learn and how they are able to think about this area: moral behaviour, understanding and judgement.

Moral behaviour

Young children learn about acceptable and unacceptable ways of behaving in different settings. Children may behave in ways that meet adult approval, by taking turns or being gentle with the rabbit. Young children may not yet fully understand concepts of 'sharing' or the hurt that can be experienced by others, even rabbits.

Moral understanding

Children learn ideas about what is acceptable or unacceptable, the words that adults use and their reasons for being pleased or disapproving. It takes time and consistent experience for children to grasp the moral concepts that underpin adult approval of 'kind' or 'courteous' behaviour and disapproval of 'rough' or 'rude' behaviour. Even more abstract concepts like ideas of right and wrong can be harder.

Moral judgement

Children learn to make decisions about how somebody should behave faced with a particular situation. Four and five year olds can start to show a grasp of moral judgement – what should or should not happen – so long as the situation is immediate and makes direct sense to them. Talking about imaginary 'what if ...' scenarios is harder until they are about seven or eight years old.

Understanding ground rules and consequences

Children's grasp of moral issues tends to start with the rules that adults make about behaviour and their understanding grows in response to what they experience. There is further discussion of behaviour and positive response by adults in Chapter 17.

Under twos

- Babies do not have the knowledge required to break any rules; they do not yet know that rules exist. They cannot possibly be 'naughty' any more than they can be 'good'.
- Mobile toddlers are physically able to uncover some of the 'don'ts' in their family or nursery environment. They start to recognise that adults do not want them to follow through some actions. But they cannot yet understand that their actions have consequences, nor why some results are dangerous, messy or unkind to others.

**Figure 8.5**

Children learn to be working members of your setting

Two and three year olds

- Such young children may follow a ground rule about how to behave in a supportive family home or early years setting. Two and three year olds do not understand the reasons or values underlying a rule, but they are happy often to cooperate. They are in the process of learning what you want.
- Toddlers and very young children observe and think, as well as act. Their moral behaviour will reflect what they have learned. For instance, children get to know familiar adults and realise that one person really means 'no' and another can be nagged into 'yes'.
- Very young children tend to judge the 'badness' of an act by the level of mess or how badly somebody has been hurt. But adult reactions probably increase this tendency – see the Think about box.

To think about

- When young children make judgements about actions, they tend to focus on the consequences of those actions and not on the intentions. But if you observe many adult–child interactions when something has gone wrong, adults often make much more fuss when the mess or damage is greater.
- It takes patience and a willingness to check what has actually happened to prevent this often unfair adult reaction. The moral judgements of young children may be less about the limits to their thinking power and more about their powers of observation.
- Discuss these ideas with your colleagues and consider any changes you could make in how you behave towards young children when something goes wrong.

Key skills links: C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Three, four and five year olds

- Children of this age tend to believe that rules are fixed and unchanging, and that everyone will follow the same rules or codes of behaviour.
- Bit by bit, experience tells children that not all adults set the same rules nor the same consequences for rule-breaking. They notice that not all families are like their own and that even the same adult is not always consistent over rules.
- As children gain experience, and their intellectual skills develop, they grasp the subtleties that some rules may be more flexible than others. Their more complex thinking ability allows for some level of 'it depends ...'. They can be confused by adults who, for instance, say it is right to tell the truth and are then heard telling 'courtesy lies'.
- Children of this age still tend to judge how 'bad' actions are by the seriousness of the consequences. They may now make some allowance for the other person's intentions in their judgements of behaviour, but the link has to be very obvious.
- From about four years, especially with adult encouragement, children steadily become more able to allow for what someone else, perhaps another child, intends and that people sometimes make mistakes ('It was an accident', 'she didn't mean to knock over your bricks').
- From about four years of age, or even younger, children have learned the word 'fair', the criticism of 'that's not fair' and a working concept of fairness.
- Children from this age onwards can feel very strongly about fairness and justice in their social world. They lose respect for and will criticise adults who fail to follow their own rules or show unfair behaviour such as inconsistency or favouritism.
- From about four or five years of age, children can have a clearer idea of how and why rules for behaviour can work. They will also often agree that some rules are a good idea, so that a nursery or reception class can run in a way that is fair for everyone.
- Children of this age can take part in a supported group discussion, for instance in circle time, to develop or review sensible rules for their group.

Five, six and seven year olds

- Children are alert observers and will now often judge adults against the agreed rules for a school, out of school club or family home.
- Children do not respect adults (parents, early years practitioners, teachers or any carers) who disregard their own courtesy guidelines like 'don't interrupt' or safety rules like 'we walk in the corridor, we don't run'.
- By seven or eight years of age many children are aware that rules are not always straightforward to follow; it can be hard to do the right thing sometimes. They are more able to explain the moral uncertainties if adults will listen.
- Children lose patience and willingness to cooperate with adults who insist that the situation is simple. For instance, the reality in a primary school playground is that the school rule of 'telling' about verbal or physical bullying can force children to go against another rule, that children do not 'grass' on their peers.
- Children learn within the social context set by adults. Research with children of primary school age shows that they can usually make longer lists



of what is regarded as anti-social behaviour in school than prosocial options. Children are often clearer about what adults do not want them to do and have more words to describe the unacceptable behaviour than what the adults do want. Why do you think this happens?

- Throughout childhood there is not a perfect match between children's moral judgements (what they may say is the right choice) and their actual behaviour, when faced with this situation. This mismatch should surprise nobody; it is equally true for adults that what they say they would do in a theoretical situation is not an exact prediction of what they actually do.

Scenario

Over the last year Alastair, the head of St Jude's Primary School, has tried to build a more coherent team to include everyone from the nursery, reception, years 1–6, the playground supervisory staff and breakfast and after school club. Discussions have slowly revealed that differences in approach by adults have sometimes put children in a very awkward position. One recent example led to a lively discussion:

- The nursery, reception and after school club practitioners have been consistent in encouraging children to express their opinions, including courteous ways to disagree with adults.
- They are concerned that comments that are acceptable from children in the nursery and after school club have been criticised by some teachers and playground supervisors on the grounds that children are being 'cheeky' and 'rude'.
- This part of the team feel that they have supported children to be assertive and courteous. The children are not being rude and the situation is very confusing to them.

Questions

- 1 How might the children be thinking in this situation? What could be the thinking of those staff who regard the children as 'cheeky'?
- 2 What might be a way forward here?
- 3 What examples have you encountered where children have to negotiate very different adult expectations and what the children have learned to be 'right' in one setting is 'wrong' in another?
- 4 Share examples with your colleagues and consider whether there are some applications to your own practice.

Key skills links: C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Supportive adults

The many points and examples in this section are a strong reminder to you that adults often choose to see only one aspect to children's development at a time. You will be a helpful adult when you take a well rounded approach to children's moral development. Children's feeling, thinking and behaving intermingle in daily life.

Key term**Social cognition**

children's ability and learning to merge their understanding of social behaviour with their powers of thinking and reasoning

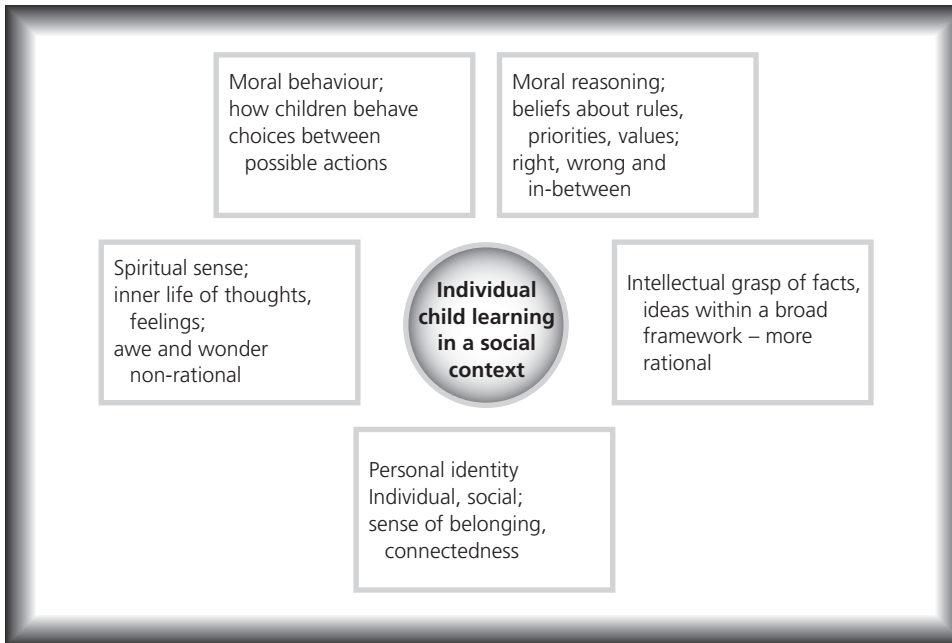
- Their thinking powers are not only applied to how to build a brick tower that does not fall down or to an early understanding of number. The same thinking brain is also trying to make sense of puzzling social situations and to anticipate, at least a bit, how familiar adults and children will act.
- You have to bring children's social behaviour together with their powers of thinking and reasoning. This area of children's development is called **social cognition**.
- Observation of children has shown that they have an impressive ability to learn prosocial behaviour and to support each other so long as adults take an active and positive approach to handling behaviour (see Chapter 17 for more on this topic).
- Young children think about other people: what they do, might do or should do. They also think to an extent about how other people feel or should feel (see page 214).
- Some four or five year olds are undoubtedly more reflective or curious than others and this wish to understand is shown in the questions they ask you.
- You can build on and encourage children's powers of social cognition by how you use stories, role play or puppets and simple drama.
- Some three year olds, and four or five year olds can enjoy the exploration in a story or picture about, 'I wonder what he's thinking' or 'Do you think she meant that to happen?' The ability to tune into the feelings of others is also explored from page 489.

Children's spiritual development

It is hard to know where to place spiritual development in a book of this kind since it relates to different areas of children's development.

- Children's spiritual development includes knowledge and ideas. But all world faiths include acceptance of some beliefs that cannot be judged by rational means: you just believe or you do not.
- Religious faith is also closely linked to feelings of belonging and creates one source of personal and family identity.
- Children can also develop a sense of spirituality, which may be linked with their family faith, but can develop independently.
- For some adults clear moral beliefs and actions are strongly linked to a religious faith or philosophical stance. Children raised in these families will also link the moral with the spiritual.
- But children can learn moral values and behaviour without a faith framework.

It is appropriate for early years practitioners to support children's moral and spiritual development. Good practice means that you need to understand how children learn in this area, as well as show active respect for parents and the children's family background. In order to make sense of children's moral and spiritual development, you need to make connections to the rest of their development. Figure 8.6 shows one way to explore how children's learning connects within daily life and their learning over time. This section explores some of these ideas and issues.

**Figure 8.6**

Learning within moral and spiritual development

Source: Jennie Lindon
Understanding World Religions in Early Years Practice, 1999 Hodder & Stoughton

Children and religious faith

There is almost no research to guide early years practice on how children develop an understanding of and commitment to religious beliefs and practices. On the basis of the rest of their development, it seems very likely that:

- Young children, certainly up to about five or six years of age, will simply believe what familiar adults, especially their parents, tell them to be true.
- This process of learning operates for other information in their life. So there seems to be no reason why it would not also work for religious instruction within the family or in the community.
- At some point children become aware that not all families share the same beliefs and they may start to ask searching questions.
- In neighbourhoods with ethnic diversity, children younger than school age will be aware of different faiths from their contact with other children and their families.
- Young children also notice and may comment upon differences in dress that reflect different faiths as they show in cultural traditions.
- In some neighbourhoods, children of four and five years are aware of conflict between people of different faiths or different versions of the same faith, for instance between Protestant and Catholic Christians in Northern Ireland.
- Five and six year olds increasingly try to make sense of any ideas that are expressed to them and some children are more articulate in their questions or more inquiring than their peers.
- As the years of childhood pass into teenage, some young people will actively commit to their family faith and others will drift away.

To think about

Individual practitioners and teams need to be aware that religious faith is not the same as cultural background. There is great variety:

- People who follow each of the main world faiths come from very different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- Every faith has extended beyond its point of origin and been taken into different cultures, often with changes and the development of different sects to the faith.
- There are often several faiths represented in any country or cultural group, some may be in the minority for that country.
- Some adults may no longer actively practise a faith but feel more comfortable following at least some of the traditions in which they were raised, such as those relating to food.
- A faith can also form the backdrop to national and cultural identity, such that people who have never followed the faith still want to opt in to some of the rituals. In the UK this pattern is shown by adults who are not practising Christians, but who wish to have a church wedding or to have their baby christened, because it seems like the right thing to do.

Good practice in the early years

It is good practice that you show respect for the faith or more general philosophical beliefs of a family since these are part of a child's identity. You may not share those beliefs but you can acknowledge that they are important to children and their parents. You show respect in different parts of your practice:

- Good communication with parents about food or care needs (see pages 95 and 60) helps children to settle into your setting and shows appropriate respect for family ways.
- You can introduce children with care to a range of religious beliefs and celebrations – see the tips for practice box.
- Children will often want to share significant events with you or the whole group at circle time. You can enable children to describe what happened at the christening of their new baby or their elder brother's bar mitzvah. The other children will often be interested at these glimpses into the family life of other people.
- Good practice will also be to explore at some other time the different ways (not just christening) that families welcome new babies or celebrate important family events like the move from childhood into young adulthood.
- Children will draw on their family beliefs to explain serious life changes such as death or serious illness. You need to respect what children repeat of their family faith, such as 'Grandad has gone to heaven' or that he will return in the cycle of life because this family believes in reincarnation.

Tips for practice

Celebrations and festivals can be a positive contribution to anti-discriminatory practice and open children's horizons beyond their own back yard. You and your colleagues need to:

- Set a good example by showing respect and making an effort to understand what will sometimes be unfamiliar customs to you.
- Make some choices because you cannot celebrate all possible festivals. A practical plan is to celebrate the key festivals of families whose children attend your setting. Then add one or two festivals to your long term plan that will be new for everyone.
- Involve parents and the local community in any celebration and be ready to learn from them.
- Respect parents' wishes if they feel strongly that they do not wish their child to be involved in a given celebration. Partnership with parents will need to be balanced against the values of your setting. Much will depend on the parents' reasons for their reluctance.
- Take a distinctive approach to each festival. Definitely do not explain one celebration in terms of the beliefs or events of a religion more familiar to you.
- Show equal respect to all celebrations, both in the amount of time you devote and how you talk about artefacts or stories.
- Challenge any suggestion that 'other people have colourful festivals and myths, that are just a bit of fun' but 'we have serious religious events underpinned by stories that are true'.
- Be careful about activities that you undertake with the children. They should not feel compelled to make a card or other artefact. Equally important, celebrations should be respected in their own right and not just used as source material to support early learning goals or targets.

Anti-discriminatory practice

Children's personal identity can be strongly supported by a sense of belonging to a faith community; it is part of family life and group identity. However, some sensitive issues can arise from the personal and family commitment.

- Early years practitioners, and even more so practitioners in school and out of school care need to be aware that for some children, a sense of clear identity (religious or otherwise) goes hand in hand with rejection of children who are different. This pattern can be shown in any of the major world faiths.
- Some children may bring their family's convictions into your setting that their faith, or the sect to which they belong, is the one and only correct faith. Children, especially in the later years of primary school, may have serious arguments on such issues or inform their distressed peers that they are headed for some version of eternal damnation.
- On the other hand, some children experience verbal or physical harassment because of the outward signs of their religious faith, through clothes or hair (see page 61). Children may be subject to name calling or bullying in ways that are close to racial harassment.

Good early years and school practice has to be even-handed and clear about the ground rules of the group on anti-discriminatory practice. You need to address negative and rejecting attitudes, regardless of their source and direction. It is no more acceptable for children from Muslim or Hindu families to be verbally rejecting of other children on the basis of faith than you should tolerate children in Christian or nominally Christian families showing such an attitude towards any other faith.

Firm remarks from any children about the plight of 'non-believers' need to be courteously fielded with comments that acknowledge, 'Yes I know that you and your family believe that ... but not everyone agrees. I would like you to stop saying (particular remark) to Wendy, because you are making her very upset.'

Learning within spiritual development

There has been very little research on children's spiritual development and this gap is probably related to the lack of agreement between adults on what the word 'spiritual' means. The same confusion can make early years practitioners uneasy about how best to support children in this area of development. Extreme positions do not help to develop practice:

- People who have a personal religious faith may insist that 'spiritual' can have no meaning without a religious context. For people with faith, the two may well be intertwined, but an experience of spirituality can exist without religion.
- The opposite position is no more acceptable for early years or school practice. Some people claim that spirituality does not, and should not, have anything to do with religious belief. Yet for some children and families the two are definitely linked. So this extreme position is equally disrespectful.

My working definition of spirituality is that it is an awareness of and connectedness to that part of human experience that does not have to answer to rational

Figure 8.7

Young children can be intrigued and enchanted by many events



analysis. So, for children you can promote the spiritual side of their development by supporting their inner life of feelings and responsiveness to events. Children are ready to be thrilled or intrigued by sights, especially in the natural world. They can feel enchanted by the sight of a rainbow, appreciate a peaceful time sitting in the local park, feeling the breeze and watching the baby ducks. They can delight in seeing the moon and stars on a dark winter afternoon.

Support children in a sense of wonder

You can support children's spiritual development by the same personal attention that is good practice overall:

- Relax with the children and enjoy experiences with them. If they are keen to watch a spider making a web, what is the advantage in telling them to come and do something else?
- Do not feel you always have to ask questions or make comments. Supportive adults need to join in the delight and not rush to give scientific explanations. Children welcome knowledge but not if adult information undermines the 'what' of an interesting event to press on to the 'why' or 'how'.
- Watch with a child and share their absorption. Supportive adults are observant and respect when a child is peacefully absorbed, perhaps watching the ripples on a pond or how the sycamore leaves flutter down like helicopters.
- Avoid any cynical adult reaction along the lines of 'what's so interesting about that?' Children can rekindle in adults the kind of joy in discovery that you perhaps left behind in childhood.
- Sometimes you let children know by reminiscence that you enjoyed that experience and have not forgotten 'when we saw the baby chicks'.

Activity (observation)

- Watch out for and note those experiences that capture children's attention, the quality of 'Look, look!' or the 'Ooh' reaction.
- Apparently, in the Reggio Emilia nurseries in Italy, the practitioners draw in children with the question, 'Have you wondered about anything today?'
- What experiences can you gather over a few weeks? Share them with colleagues.

Key skills link: C3.1a

Further resources

- Boxall, Marjorie (2002) *Nurture in School: Principles and Practice* Paul Chapman Publishing
- Brown, Babette (2001) *Combating Discrimination: Persona Dolls in action* Trentham Books.
- Gottman, John (1997) *The Heart of Parenting: How to raise an emotionally intelligent child* Bloomsbury.

Lindon, Jennie (1999) *Understanding World Religions in Early Years Practice* Hodder and Stoughton.

Mosley, Jenny and Sonnet, Helen (2001) *Here we go Round: Quality circle time for 3–5 year olds* Positive Press.

Progress check

- 1 In what ways are adult feelings important if you are to support children in their emotional literacy?
- 2 Describe two possible family crises and how the experience might affect a child of three or four years of age.
- 3 Describe briefly the three main strands to children's moral development.
- 4 Suggest two ways you could show respect for the religious faith of a child's family.
- 5 Give three ways you could support children's sense of wonder and enchantment.

Physical development and skills

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the importance of physical skills and activity for children's learning and well being
- recognise and support the ways in which children develop physically during the early years.

Introduction

Within this chapter you will learn about the ways in which babies and young children progress in their physical skills. Babies and toddlers are keen to use all the abilities they currently possess and are enthusiastic about getting on the move. You need to keep young children safe but within an environment where they can practise and use their physical abilities. Physical activity is important for children's health and physical strength but it is also the vehicle for much of their learning. Chapter 10 describes activities to support children's physical development.

Physical development and well being

It is useful for you to contrast a mental picture of a newborn baby with a mobile and active seven or eight year old. There have been many changes over these years.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 2, 3, 10

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C1

Level 3: C3, C14

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 8, 24



Newborn babies are almost helpless. They are physically unable to take care of themselves and they need their early communication skills of crying to call for help. They have reflex actions with which they are born (see page 153), but they are scarcely able to make deliberate physical actions. If all has gone well, a child of seven or eight is physically coordinated, able to choose from a wide range of large physical movements and fine skills to achieve different purposes. It is an impressive achievement and children's physical development underpins many of the other learning tasks that they face.

The importance of physical activity

Children's physical development is equally as important as other areas of their learning. This point needs to be stressed since some approaches to a child's day within early years settings, and some interpretations of the early years curriculum, have downgraded physical development in favour of intellectual. The strange idea has also developed that children can only be learning if they are sitting still and probably indoors (see page 279). A more rounded understanding of child development challenges this view and there are serious concerns about the consequences for children if their physical skills are undervalued and blocked.

Physical health

Children need to be active because enjoyable physical activity, through play and happy involvement in daily routines, supports children's overall health.

- Physically active children burn up their calories in an enjoyable way, work up a genuine appetite and enjoy their food. A positive circle is established.
- Exercise makes the heart and lungs work efficiently. This workout is important for all children, but can be crucial for the growing number of children who have respiratory difficulties like asthma.

Figure 9.1

Children can really enjoy physical activity



- Physical activity helps children to build up strong muscles and keeps their body and joints supple. Strength in the trunk of our body and flexibility of muscles seem to be important to reduce the risk of injury and back pain in later life. Physical exercise also builds bone density.
- Children who have enough physical exercise tend to enjoy better overall health. Of course they catch some illnesses, but active children tend to catch fewer infections and be more robust.
- Getting enjoyably tired promotes rest in much the same way as getting enjoyably hungry promotes eating. Physical exercise helps children to rest and sleep more soundly.

The risks of inactivity

There are concerns in our society now about under-active toddlers and children who risk becoming too passive because adults have limited their physical play, often because of over-concern about safety.

- Of course some young children simply find their way around restrictive adults and create physical activity from whatever they can. Very active children may then be inappropriately seen as having a behaviour problem (see page 285).
- Children who cooperate with the restrictions may lose the motivation to play lively physical games. They will probably turn to more passive activities like television and computer games, with the limits to learning that over-use of these resources can bring. There is a place for television and computers (see page 383) but not to dominate the time of young children.
- Lack of physical activity can also be linked with an unbalanced diet through snacking and the risk of obesity (see page 89).
- In extreme cases, the lack of activity combined with an unbalanced diet can make children and teenagers vulnerable to health problems usually associated with adults from middle age onwards. There are some very daunting signs from the United States, and to a much lesser extent in the UK, about the early occurrence of type 2 diabetes (see page 90), that usually affects adults from their 40s and 50s, and of osteoporosis (bones that fracture easily).

Tips for practice

- Children who are allowed to be physically active through play will be healthy.
- Children do not usually have to be persuaded to be active nor threatened with future back pain or diabetes! The range of activities described in this chapter are welcomed by children.
- A flexible choice of physically energetic games is far better than a schedule of highly organised and directed activities.
- Some parents and carers have responded to the need for physical activity by imposing a weekly round of gym clubs and highly structured sessions.
- Many children enjoy some time in a dance club or activities like Tumble Tots®. But they do not benefit from inflexible routines, nor from being over-supervised and over-organised.

Activity

When children's physical play is curtailed over a long period, they may become lethargic and no longer bother to be physically energetic. Through no fault of their own the children are well on the way to becoming 'couch potatoes'. As Marjorie Ouvry says when she promotes outdoor play, you want instead to encourage children to be 'runner beans'.

Plan and make a display to show the importance of letting children be active. Use photographs and children's own drawings to illustrate what they enjoy doing and how the activities can promote development as 'runner beans'.

Key skills link: C3.1b

Mental and emotional fitness

Observation of children has also highlighted that physical activity and movement is linked with mental alertness and emotional well being.

Increased physical activity actually increases the blood flow to the brain. This change, coupled with learning tasks (the sort of activities described in this chapter and others), promotes neural connections in the brain. Making children sit still and be quiet causes them to be more sluggish and less able to learn.

The idea that children must sit still to concentrate is actually counter-productive for younger children; it makes it harder and not easier for them to learn. Some primary schools have found that giving children a short burst of movement makes concentration easier rather than disrupting it. Staff have experimented with breaks for everyone, such as a brisk walk around the playground. The Active Primary Schools Project in Scotland stresses the importance of daily physical activity for children.

In summer 2001 a project called 'Fit to Succeed' was completed in Exeter, England. Staff encouraged children in seven middle schools (that is children of about eight to eleven years) to take more physical exercise. Scores in the SATs tests were highest in the children who reported exercising at least three times a week. Physical activity does not boost test scores as such. More active children are more mentally alert, because activity primes the metabolism and then children can do their best, achieving their potential.

There are also some indications that activity helps to reduce depression and anxiety in children. Of course physical activity does not remove the cause of a child's distress or worry; you need to offer support (see page 219). But enjoyable games and physical play with friends give children an alternative focus.

To think about

- Adults find it hard to concentrate after long periods of sitting and restrictions on movement. You will have direct experience of how your own mind can go woolly if you have been physically inactive for too long. Children have an even greater need to move.
- Discuss with colleagues whether you do risk believing that children only learn when they are still, or sitting down. What has led you to this conviction?

Key skills link: C3.1a

Learning through hands-on experience

Technological advances have made it possible to show that babies' brains are operating before birth. The neurons (brain cells) seem to be firing most in the part of the brain that will deal with vision and sound. This discovery explains how newborns sometimes seem to recognise sounds they have heard before birth, such as a parent's voice or the song they were sung. At birth, a baby's brain is poised to go; it is neither fully set up nor an empty gap. Most of the neurons are in place – a staggering 100 billion neurons – but a newborn's brain has yet to make many connections.

Babies' brains develop because connections are made between the neurons. All these new brain connections are literally made through babies' experiences from day one of their life. When you understand how babies' brains develop, then it is possible to see the importance of all your ordinary, everyday actions with babies (see also Chapter 5).

- All the babies' efforts with movement, making physical contact and early communication develop the possible neural networks within their immature brains.
- All their activities, from a broad, happy smile for a familiar face to an enthusiastic crawl across the room, support the development of the synapses in their young brain that shape how babies and toddlers continue to relate to the world.

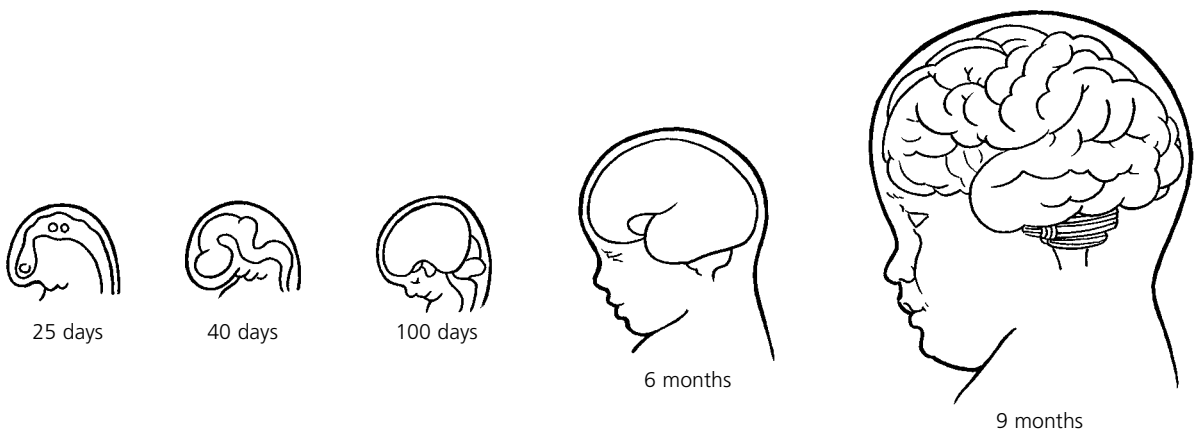
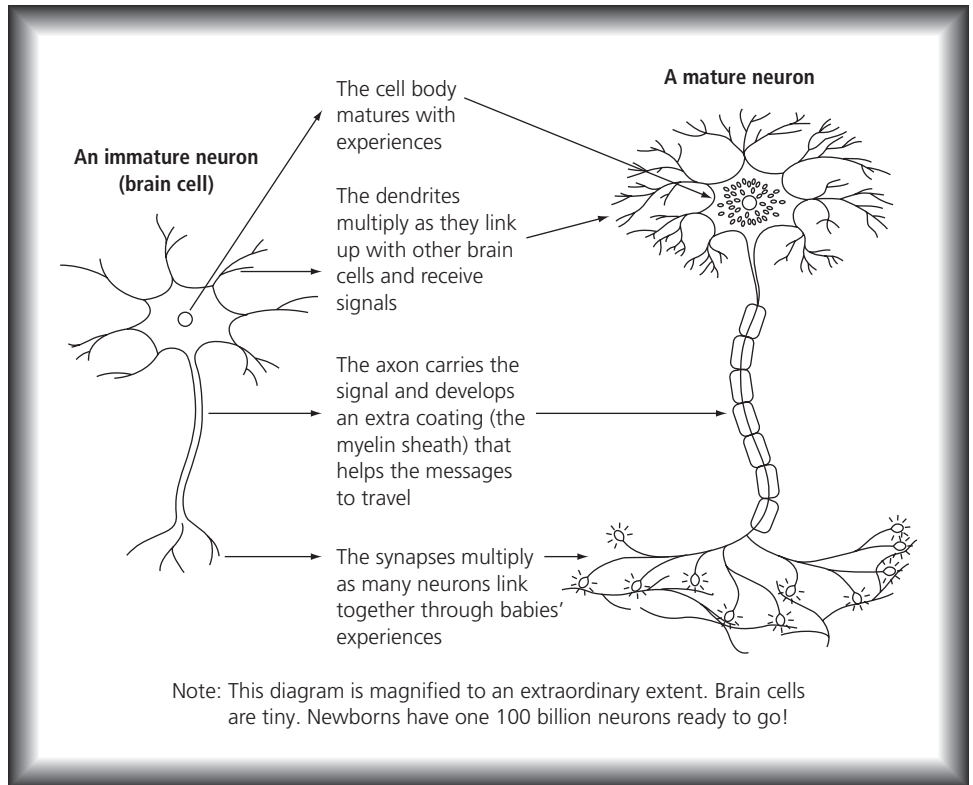


Figure 9.2 The development of the brain before birth. The majority of the development happens in the last trimester

Figure 9.3

Experience and activity builds babies' brains



- Continued experience in any area of development firms up those connections until they are permanent and creates the complex neural pathways on which babies then build more learning.
- Those connections that are not strengthened by repeated experience are less strong and may fade away.
- Babies need a wealth of opportunities to repeat experiences, and in many subtle different ways and they need to practise, to do it again and again.

The research into brain development in very early childhood has confirmed good practice in early years because babies and toddlers learn through physical doing. The enjoyable practice of crawling, grasping and handling objects builds vital neural connections in young brains. Babies and toddlers have a very strong drive to use their bodies and to apply their current muscle control to the utmost. They only require that caring adults keep them safe and let them explore.

Very young children want to make things happen and to work out how their world works. They use all their senses and apply their current physical skills to objects of interest. Their learning grows from the simple physical explorations of being able to get hold of objects and to experiment with actions. This learning is physically laid down through the neural connections in the brain.

Physical development supports intellectual

Sally Goddard Blythe has highlighted the importance of large physical movements for later development in areas such as reading and writing. She points out that these areas of child development are closely linked and adults can block children's learning by rushing them. Her main points are that:

- Attention, balance and coordination are the crucial ABC of later learning.
- The actions of crawling help babies and toddlers to synchronise their sense of balance. The enjoyable practise of this movement brings together the physical sensations and what toddlers can see.
- Crawling and then walking enable a child to recognise what it feels like to be in balance or about to lose their balance.
- Young walkers have to keep moving in order to keep their balance. Watch them and you will see that toddlers wobble when they come to a stop and plump down on their bottoms. It is only after plenty of practice that confident walkers are able to stand still.
- The necessary coordination of moving hands and vision in crawling is undertaken at the same distance that children will use some years later in reading and writing.
- Crawling and crawling games are enjoyable now. But they also form a strong basis for future learning, because young children strengthen their limbs and practise coordination of movement and vision.
- Children need to move in order to understand the messages from their body. This physical feedback about touch, grasp and balance is called **proprioception** and can only be gained by practice.

Key term

Proprioception

the ability to recognise and use the physical sensations from the body that give feedback on balance and the position of our limbs

Activity (observation)

Watch a child who is in the early stages of walking and see how they begin to understand balance.

- Watch their face – can you tell when toddlers feel secure and when they sense they are about to topple?
- How do they stand and move to maintain balance?
- What changes can you observe in how toddlers get up to standing, move around and lower themselves to sitting as they become physically more confident?

Write up your notes and perhaps share observations with colleagues.

Another possibility is to take photos, with the permission of the child's parents and add a visual dimension to your notes.

Key skills link: C2/3.1 b C2/3.3

Physical development from baby to child

Babies have a great deal of growing to accomplish. Part of this development is putting on weight (see page 183) but they also change steadily in bodily proportions and internal development.

- Babies still have bones to develop. For instance, at his first birthday a baby has only three bones in each wrist and hand but by adulthood he will have twenty-eight.
- Babies' bones and the ligaments around the joints are relatively soft and that is why babies can seem to be so bendy. Bones harden and grow in length over the months.

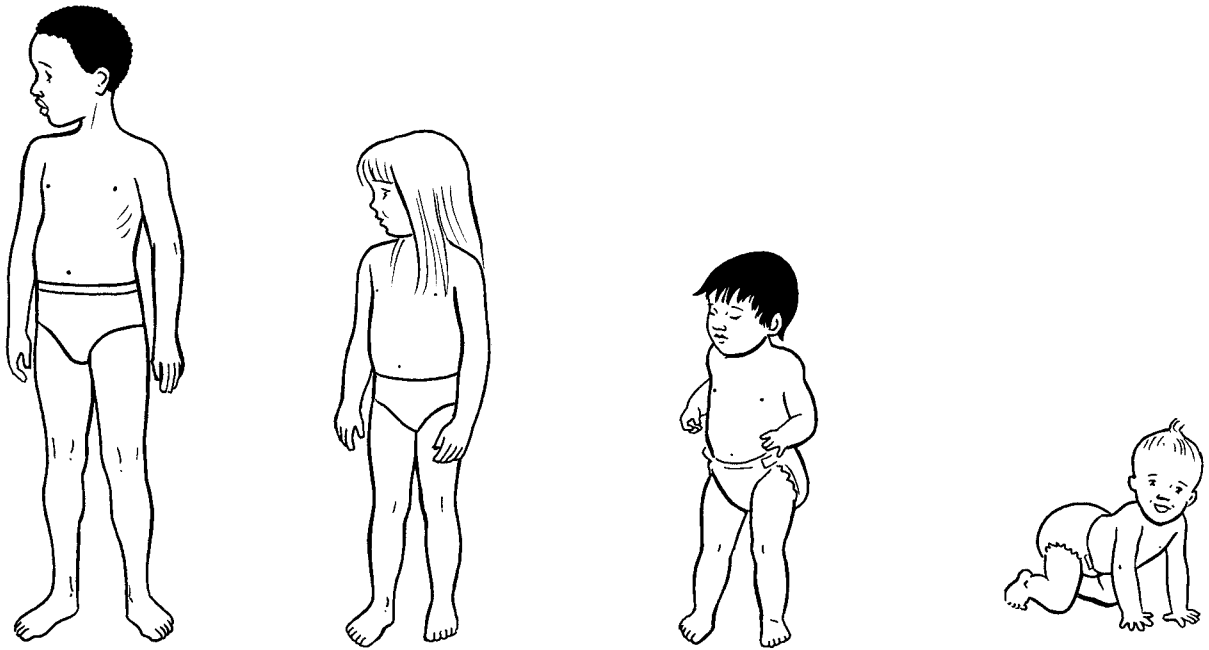


Figure 9.4 The changing shape of childhood

- Babies are born with several head bones joined only by soft cartilage or openings called fontanelles. These allow the baby's head to be moulded and squeezed during birth. The top of a baby's head feels soft and the bones do not completely harden and close over until about two years of age.
- Babies are born with all the muscles they need. But their muscle tone is poor until their physical movements gain them control over their head, shoulders and limbs. They seem a bit floppy and uncoordinated at the outset.

Early childhood is a period of immense change in all areas of development and the physical changes are very visible. Babies and toddlers change in overall body shape and the relative proportions of their body (see Figure 9.4) and their increased mobility requires a lot of adjustment from carers. The next time for an equivalent burst of physical growth and visible change is the onset of puberty. This development will start for the early developers at about 10 or 11 years, but will not happen for most children until they reach adolescence.

The physical changes need to be fuelled by healthy diet (see Chapter 3) and exercise in all the ways that babies, toddlers and young children are able to use their physical skills.

The development of physical skills

Children's physical development progresses in several broad areas:

- The development of bodily control and physical awareness for babies and young children.
- Large movements that enable children to gain mobility. The large scale physical movements like crawling or walking are sometimes called gross motor development (motor simply means movement).

- Use of movement helps children to gain confident balance and to be sensitive to the messages that their body sends through movement.
- Fine physical skills require delicate, deliberate movements and the coordination of senses like sight and hearing with the movement of limbs like hands.

In this section you will find some details of how children's abilities develop over time. As with any other developmental information in this book, you need to take any ages as a guide only. Children vary considerably in when they manage certain skills and the ease with which they put them into daily practice.

A perspective on developmental milestones

Major achievements for children, like learning to walk or the first recognisable words, are called **developmental milestones**. Developmental records in a nursery or centre will track these events. But it is important not to overlook what happens in between the visible markers, nor to rush children. There is no advantage, and many disadvantages in trying to make very young children achieve a physical skill like walking before they are ready. Of course, you need to keep an eye on a child who is much later than average, in case there is any physical problem. Otherwise, children who are given space and encouragement to move will gain new skills when they are ready.

Parents and other carers are of course excited when a child achieves a significant new skill. But it is important to share the likely perspective of children themselves. Toddlers are probably excited about their first steps, partly because the adults and perhaps older siblings clap and look pleased. But from the toddler's point of view, many of the interim stages towards learning to walk are just as interesting.

- Before children can walk they practise cruising along using hand holds on the furniture and practise negotiating narrow gaps that they can lean across.
- A firm hold on a table may enable an older baby to dance in time to some music and this experience may be just as thrilling as the first steps to him or her.

Key term

Developmental milestones

observable achievements for children in the different areas of their development throughout childhood



Figure 9.5

Toddlers are keen to apply their skills

Babies and toddlers are also very interested in applying skills. So, again, the adult developmental milestone is not the end but a beginning.

- A baby who has learned to crawl, or to walk at the same time as holding on to something (impossible to start with), is now keen to try out variations and to apply the skill.
- The crawling baby develops a surprising turn of speed as she triumphantly gets herself to an interesting corner of the room.
- Climbing skills are applied enthusiastically to reach items of interest.
- If you watch babies, toddlers and young children, you will also notice that they use their physical skills simply for the pleasure of the experience. A keen crawler does not always have to have some destination; the crawling is enjoyable in itself.

Activity (observation)

The interest for children and adults is in what can be done with physical skills and the pattern for any young child will reflect their interests and the opportunities in the setting where they spend most of their time. Even apparently simple physical actions from toddlers will also show you how they are thinking.

For example, when my own daughter was 16 months old, she used her skills of hand–eye coordination in many different ways. She used to:

- bring her outdoor shoes to show me in order to indicate that she wanted to go out for a local walk (she followed this with bringing my outdoor shoes as well, if I was slow to respond!)
- hand us items of clothing to put in the washing machine
- wield the dustpan and brush to help sweep crumbs up off the floor
- play with stacking toys, construction bricks and simple jigsaws
- select a book, pull it out of the shelf and carry it to us to be read.

Observe a toddler of 15–16 months and note the physical skills and movements that she or he can manage. But also describe how the toddler applies the skills, what does she or he do and with what purpose? Write up your findings and share with the child's parent(s).

Present or discuss your findings with colleagues and compare how similar fine skills are applied and practised differently by individual toddlers.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1b C2/3.1a

Babies up to one year old

Human babies are very vulnerable and they need the attentive care that is described in Chapter 6. They are dependent on adults like yourself to keep them safe and healthy but do not let this persuade you that the babies are somehow not doing very much at all.

All five senses

The senses of newborns have already been working in the womb and they are ready to take in the sights outside.



Newborn babies cannot move independently or reach out accurately, but they have *sight* unless a disability affects this sense. They direct their eyes towards anything that interests them, such as faces. It has been calculated that by four months of age, babies have already made over three million eye movements. They are taking in considerable amounts of information.

The newborn baby can see well at a distance of about 25 centimetres and this is the distance between babies' eyes and the parent's face when they are held to be fed. Young babies have difficulty coordinating their eye movements but the intention is definitely there.

Babies have the sense of *hearing*. Inside the womb babies have come to know the rhythmic pulse of their mother's heart beat and this familiarity is why they can sometimes be calmed by being held close to the chest of mother, father or a familiar carer. They can be startled by sudden noises.

New babies have already learned to recognise their mother's voice and newborns are responsive to the rhythm of speech from other people whom they now get to know. They soon begin to copy the movements of a speaker's mouth, open their own and put their tongue forward in imitation.

Even babies of a few days old can distinguish between some *tastes* and prefer sweet to bitter flavours. Newborn babies have a good sense of *smell* and learn to recognise the smell of their mother's body and her milk. Babies feel and are responsive to a gentle *touch* and stroking.

Activity (observation)

Newborn and very young babies are particularly attracted to faces and face shapes and they can follow a shape that interests them. Research has also shown that very young babies prefer patterns to solid colours and stripes or angles to circular designs.

- Experiment with making some basic shapes and patterns in plain colours and some face shapes (very simple).
- Show them to a young baby and note how long she or he stares at each one.
- Can you see any preferences in how the baby stares and for how long?
- Write up your observations and discuss with colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1b C2/3.3

Physical control

The development of physical control for babies is a major issue. Babies and young children are designed to be mobile. Watch even young babies and you will see how they work hard to use all the physical skills currently within their power. They repeat and practise what they can do, even when, to an outsider, they look hopelessly uncoordinated. Babies' ability to control their own body develops in two directions:

- from the top of the head downwards
- from the midline of the body outwards.

Babies are unable to control their head and neck and they seem almost surprised when their own hands and fingers come into view. They are learning steadily to control their body and realise that it all belongs to them.

Activity (observation)

Spend some time with two or three young babies, no more than about three months of age. Watch them when they are awake and content. Note what they do and any individual differences that you can identify even at this young age:

- Do they move their arms and legs with equal vigour?
- How do they like to be held? Have the babies already shown preferences for how they are cuddled or carried around?
- What seems to hold their visual attention? Do the babies look at different objects or items of interest?
- Write up and present or discuss with colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1b C2/3.3

Up to three months

- The movements of very young babies are limited to reflex movements such as sucking (see page 153) and their physical movements tend to look jerky.
- They have a surprisingly strong grip if you place your finger in their palm.
- Held securely, for instance in their baby bath, even young babies have a vigorous kick.
- Because babies gain control over their own bodies from the head downwards, initially they need careful support along the length of their body.
- Within the first couple of months, you will see babies' efforts to hold up their relatively heavy head and increasingly vigorous arm and leg movements.
- Physical movements are accompanied by early visual skills. Babies of even a few weeks old spread and flex their fingers and sometimes stare at them in a rather perplexed manner. They gaze intently at an adult's face when they are cuddled or fed.

Three to twelve months – large movements

- By three or four months, babies have become more able to support their upper body. So they can hold up their head and their back is straighter when they sit on your lap.
- They are able to turn their head to track interesting sights or the source of sounds.
- By about six months, babies enjoy more control of their lower body to their waist and their explorations look more purposeful.
- Between six to nine months, babies will learn to sit. They need support to start with because of their tendency to lean off balance. Once babies can sit securely, their hands are free to explore playthings.
- Babies no longer stay still. If they are put on a rug on the floor, they are likely to be able to roll from back to front and soon to make a little distance.
- Once they can manage the position of all fours, they start to try to crawl.



This movement is trickier than it looks, since the baby's top half of the body is still stronger than the lower half. So vigorous rocking and attempts to move often result initially in going backwards rather than forwards.

- Most babies go through a stage of crawling in the second half of their first year. However, some babies never crawl. Either they go straight to walking or they favour mobility by bottom-shuffling.
- By their first birthday, babies are likely to be mobile through crawling and moving themselves along by hand holds on furniture. Some may already be walking, although this is early.

Three to twelve months – fine movements

Young children want to make things happen and to work out how their world works. They use all their senses and apply their current physical skills to objects of interest. Their learning grows from the simple physical explorations of being able to get hold of objects and to experiment with actions.

- Babies have to learn to coordinate the evidence of their senses with physical control of their hands and fingers. They watch with a steady stare but it is not until about five to six months that they are able to reach and grasp an object with confidence.
- To start with, babies get hold of objects in a whole hand scoop and then close their hands around the item. They also learn how to hold on before they learn the coordination needed to unclasp and let go.
- Once babies have got hold of something, like a rattle, they may shake it but without being able to control the action. It is fairly usual that babies manage to hit themselves with an energetically waved rattle.
- Once babies have managed to coordinate a deliberate grasp, then they bring objects to their mouth to suck and chew if they have any teeth. Babies use their mouths to explore because the nerve endings are most sensitive here. You should allow them to mouth objects, otherwise they cannot learn. Just ensure that anything they can get to their mouth is safe and clean.
- Mobile babies and toddlers learn through a fair amount of repetition and by using similar actions on different materials. In the first year of life, babies learn ways to explore objects as their physical skills extend.
- Holding and mouthing are the first methods of exploration. But once babies manage a secure hold, they stare and inspect something of interest.
- With better physical coordination and vision, they explore by hitting or tapping, shaking, poking, tearing, rubbing, dropping and throwing.
- All babies do not use every method and some are more enthusiastic for one method than others. Some actions like dropping or throwing develop into a shared game with an adult or older child.

Activity (observation)

Watch three or four babies in the second half of their first year and observe how they explore their world.

- If they are given an object of interest or reach out for it, what physical skills of exploration do they apply?
- Do they hold and turn the object? Do they stare and for how long?

- Have these babies become interested in tapping, hitting or shaking an object?
- Do they drop it and do they then look expectant as if you should pick it up?
- Do they now use a combination of ways of exploring?
- Write up and present or discuss with colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1b C2/3.3

Activity (observation)

Watch at least two babies who are coming up to their first birthday.

- How does each baby move around: crawling, bottom shuffling, walking already?
- How quickly can they move across a room? (Obviously you must ensure that they are safe as well as timing them!)

Babies in a day nursery are in an environment that has already been modified for their age group. But babies at home are in an environment that also has to be suitable for older children and adults.

- Talk with the baby's parents to understand the modifications that they have made to keep the baby safe.
- Write up and present or discuss with colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1b C2/3.3

Toddlers from one to two years

Large movements

- In their second year, toddlers become confidently mobile as they coordinate their limbs to manage the balance of getting up to their feet, walking, stopping and moving into other positions like sitting.
- Watch toddlers and you will realise that physical tasks that have become automatic to us require some serious concentration as a toddler.
- Walking toddlers still enjoy crawling for sheer fun and for a while they may alternate between a rather wobbly walk and a speedy crawling.
- Confident walkers move to a more child-like stance rather than the wide legged walk of a toddler who still does not feel safely in balance.
- By about 18 months many toddlers are able to add other actions to their walking. So they can carry a teddy or a book at the same time, using their skills of mobility to head across a room, fetch something and come back again.
- By the end of the second year confident walkers can show a striking turn of speed as they move into being able to run.

- Toddlers learn how to move simple push bikes or handle push-along trolleys. They often enjoy wheeled toys that can be pulled along.
- Toddlers are able to use their skills of large movement to further their explorations and play actively with other children and adults.
- Toddlers become able to climb up stairs, at first by a version of crawling and then by climbing one step at a time. Coming downstairs is more tricky and is usually managed first of all by turning around to face the stairs and doing a semi-crawl or slide.
- Even in a safe setting toddlers have accidents: colliding with people or furniture and falling.

Fine movements

- In the second year of life, toddlers have far more control of their fingers and thumb so it becomes possible to look at and move in on objects. They practise picking up, exploring and poking large and small objects.
- They explore possibilities by putting small objects into larger containers – often many times. They enjoy this game with ordinary household materials like saucepans, stacking toys and containers in water and sand play.
- They are able to play with materials like wooden bricks or Duplo™ that can be manipulated by toddler fingers. They start to be able to put one brick onto another to make a small tower and then the fun is usually to knock it down.
- Jigsaws with big pieces and holding pegs are a possibility but some toddlers are more interested in jigsaws than others.
- Toddlers who have been introduced to the enjoyment of books are now able to look at a book sometimes on their own. Thick board pages enable them to turn one page at a time, although soon their fingers will be able to manage paper pages.
- Their ability to coordinate looking and movement means that simple arts and crafts activities become possible and enjoyable. Toddlers can wield thick crayons, chalks and paint brushes.
- They can use their vision and improving physical skills to play with materials like play dough or containers in water play.

Toddlers' fine physical skills are directly applied in ways that support other aspects of their development:

- Within this year toddlers develop a range of gestures that they use to support their growing communication skills. Spoken expression develops over this time (see page 296) but so does a deliberate use of non-verbal gestures.
- Toddlers often learn to hold up their hands towards an adult to show that they want to be picked up.
- They learn the immensely useful gesture of pointing. This action can be used with two broad purposes. Toddlers can indicate that they would like something, for instance another piece of apple. They can use pointing to bring an adult into their area of interest to communicate 'Look at that!'
- Fine physical skills are also important for developing self reliance. Toddlers improve, with adult patience and encouragement, in some parts of dressing and feeding themselves. Toddlers also like to apply their skills to helping out in daily routines (see page 52).

Tips for practice

- Once they are independently mobile, older babies and toddlers engage in a great deal of physical play and sheer joy in using their skills. They need space to move about and hone their skills: to crawl, walk, balance, climb, bounce, jump and chase.
- The sheer practice of physical skills firms up those vital connections in the brain. Children need to be able to move in comfort, with pleasure and to be safe enough.
- They do not need to be hurried or bullied into sitting 'nicely', being 'quiet' and stopping 'fidgeting'.
- Babies and toddlers need plenty of opportunities to use their physical abilities and to apply their ideas.
- The clear preference of very young children for 'do it again!' is ideal for their learning.

Young children from two to five years*Large movements*

Children within this age span can learn, practise and become very confident in a range of physical skills. But you will see a great deal of variety between individual children, because they vary in temperament and experience, including whether they have been given encouragement to be energetically physical.

- Young children become adept at running and three and four year olds are usually able to adjust their speed and direction most of the time.
- Three year olds are usually able to stand on tip toe (harder than it looks!) and maybe walk a few teetering steps before dropping back to full feet

Figure 9.6

Children relish outdoors activities and exploration





walking. Once they have managed this skill, children sometimes enjoy tip toeing around in play or as a game for moving very quietly.

- With practice children become able to jump up in the air, although you will watch two year olds struggling initially with how to launch off with both feet.
- They like to jump from low steps or walls, first of all with an adult hand or welcoming arms and soon without this safety net. It is useful if you show young children how to bend their knees when they land, otherwise they tend to jump stiff legged.
- Children apply their skills of running, jumping and climbing in play with friends, sometimes within pretend play games and often for the sheer satisfaction and enjoyment of vigorous movement. Jumping skills are applied with equipment like a simple trampoline.
- Three and four year olds can become confident with riding three wheeled bikes. It takes some practice to manage to work the pedals in a steady forward action and also to work out how to steer. Young bike riders tend to achieve forward motion before they are confident in stopping or steering round people or obstacle courses.
- Toddlers' enjoyment in push-along wheeled toys has often developed into confident use of wheeled trolleys or wheelbarrows for simple trundling or moving objects from place to place.
- Children use their physical skills and props to develop pretend play games that can be fairly contained or require open space for movement. Four and five year olds will often return to a game with friends and simply pick up from where the play theme was left yesterday.
- Some toddlers really like to dance but young children's ability to direct their movements enables them to explore different forms of dance, music and movement.

The large physical movements that you can observe over this age span require other related skills and bodily awareness. It can be easy for adults to underestimate the complexity of some physical sequences and how much children need to experience enjoyable practice.

Activity (observation)

- Observe a child of three or four years and note down their physical skills, watching out for some of the skills described in each section.
- Then draw a diagram for three of the observed skills to show how this physical ability links with other aspects of the child's development (look at page 12 for a reminder of different areas).
- For instance, does this skill support the child's growing self reliance, does the expression on the child's face suggest to you that her physical competence helps her to feel positive about herself (emotional development) or to make contact with other children (social and communicative)?
- Share your findings with your colleagues and explain the connections you have shown in the diagram.

Key skills links: C2/3.1b C2/3.3

Fine movements

- Children are able to coordinate the handling, moving and lining up of large scale play equipment like ladders in a nursery, often by working together with another child or adult. Although these may look like large physical movements, they actually require delicate adjustments and bodily awareness.
- Children enjoy playing games with equipment like bats or balls. Such play combines careful looking, judgement of timing and aiming, as well as the physical actions of hitting, throwing or kicking. Learning to hit or kick a ball takes coordination and plenty of enjoyable practice.
- With experience of the appropriate materials, two to five year olds learn to work with a wide range of constructional play materials and their skills to build are supported by the mental skills of planning, recall and cooperative working with their friends.
- Children learn to use tools like scissors, craft and woodwork equipment. Physical skills combine with communication skills of understanding so that children can learn good and safe techniques with tools.
- In a range of arts and crafts children can apply fine movements to all different kinds of painting, drawing, collage and printing. As they practise and explore, children's drawings develop in detail and become more recognisable as people, buildings or animals.
- Their improved coordination shows in children's self care. Within this age span children learn to take on the remaining skills for dressing and undressing, going to the toilet, cutting up their food or pouring drinks. They are also able and willing to help out in daily routines.
- At some point over this time period, it will most likely be clear whether children are right or left handed. Some remain somewhat flexible or have a different hand preference for different activities. Adults must respect the child's preference; there is no good reason and plenty of disadvantages if adults try to enforce a choice.

Children from five to eight years

Large movements

- So long as they are not confined for space, older children use their physical skills in spontaneous games that they create. The pretend play of younger children can be very complex with roles and scripts that are negotiated by the children.
- The physical skills of this age group become more varied. They use their earlier skills of running, chasing and climbing. But they may now be able to manage the more complex movements involved in skipping, hopping games or high speed catch.
- In open spaces or on the pavements some children show how skilled they have become with bikes or roller skates. Five or six years olds are more likely to be able to learn to ride a two wheeled bike (without stabilisers) but it takes practice and a deep breath to gain the balance needed. Often the most difficult part, as children learn, is to move from stationary to motion.
- Children now have more confident physical control and visual coordination. They are more accurate throwers and kickers and can handle a wider range of games equipment.



Figure 9.7

Balance requires concentration

- Children's physical skills combine with their greater social skills so that organised games with simple rules are possible. They may play football or simple cricket in informal groups or a wide range of team games organised by adults.
- Compared with older children and teenagers, the majority of six and seven year olds can still look 'clumsy' when they handle a bat or racquet or try to throw a ball with accuracy.
- Children need an adult coach (formal or informal) who makes the games easy and non-competitive. Games of hitting or throwing need to be organised so that it is easier for children to connect with the ball and not made difficult (the aim if you play competitively with teenagers or adults).
- A great deal now depends on what is available for children to learn. Five and six year olds can learn new skills of swimming, horse riding, ice skating or judo. Children of this age in mountainous areas can learn to ski. But of course all such activities are not available for every child.

A great deal also depends on the available play spaces for children and on whether they are encouraged to take physical exercise. Children who have access to adventure playground facilities can be very adept at this age in climbing, balancing, swinging on ropes and negotiating how best to move between different parts of large playground structures. By this age, you can also often see the impact of adult influence or peer pressure as some children decide that particular games or more active physical daring are better for one sex rather than the other.

Scenario

St Jude's Primary School has a large and rather bleak playground area. The nursery has a play area of its own that is fenced around. The nursery team has been aware of children who move into reception and look longingly back at the nursery play area. Pam works in the nursery and the after school club and is aware of growing complaints from the children that playground supervision staff 'stop all our good games, so it's boring'. On the other hand, the staff are aware of complaints from colleagues that 'children don't know how to play any more'.

The nursery, reception and after school staff are sure that, with space and supportive adults, the school age children will play a wide range of physical, pretend and social games in the playground. Difficulties seem to have arisen because the playground staff have become more focused on control and stopping games than promoting play.

Questions

- 1 What could be happening in St Jude's school and the playground and what could be more positive steps forward? You may also want to look at the scenario on page 23.
- 2 How might the children be involved in plans about equipment, games they would like to play and creating areas in the playground?
- 3 Visit some local primary schools and gather information on how they have organised their school grounds and how they promote play.
- 4 Present or discuss your findings with your colleagues.

Key skills link: PS2/3.1 C2/3.1b C2/3.3

Tips for practice

If you work in school, then you may find a more or less favourable attitude towards children's playtime. You can contribute when you:

- Value children's play rather than seeing it as wasted time from real learning.
- Wait and observe before deciding that a game should be banned or that children are not doing anything and therefore should be directed into an activity.
- Negotiate how and where a lively game can be played so as not to impose on other children, rather than bluntly telling this group to stop.
- Be ready to help in play and to join in. Good skipping games need an adult at either end of the rope and some chasing games need an adult to mark 'home'.
- Friendly adults can provide a welcoming place in the playground for a child who is temporarily without playmates.
- Consider with your colleagues ways to provide basic equipment like hoops, bean bags, balls and skipping ropes.
- Explain how to play games with children if they know very few or appear confused.

Fine movements

- Children in this age range are likely to be confident in the skills that need fine physical coordination and close attention. They can gain immense satisfaction from projects in art, craft and design. Children can have learned to handle materials and tools and they have greater patience to complete projects that last more than one session.
- Fine physical skills are supported by communication and intellectual skills so that children can organise projects, plan the steps and make choices. Their physical skills are working together with their increased ability to look ahead and consider what they want or need to make.
- Fine skills enable children to manage the physical coordination needed for forming letters in their writing (see also page 339). They need to move from a whole hand grasp to the finer fingers and thumb hold and some children find this harder than others.
- Children of this age can usually manage the skills of self care, although fastenings like shoe laces can be a struggle and need practice.
- Children also show their fine physical skills when they are given a safe role within domestic routines, at home or in out of school care. Five to eight years olds can be adept at food preparation, simple cooking, organising a setting, decorating and basic DIY and gardening.

Physical skills, exploration and learning***Gaining balance***

Children's balance improves so that three and four year olds can be steady in walking along a low wall or a line on the ground. To become confident, children need plenty of practice in which they feel what it is like to be in balance, to begin to lose your balance and sometimes regain it after a wobble and that sometimes balance is gone and over you go.

**Figure 9.8**

We should be impressed by the skills children manage

Judging physical movements

Young children become adept at clambering on chairs or other furniture and at climbing on apparatus. Some children are more cautious than others and need to take their time. Most children judge how high they can climb safely, although the more intrepid climbers may sometimes want some help in coming back down again.

Children are usually safe at judging what they can manage in physical skills. Problems tend to arise if they are distracted or cannot maintain their balance. Children's learning can also be blocked if adults are over-concerned about very minor risks and either stop physical activities or make children anxious by constant cries of 'be careful, you'll fall'.

Bodily awareness

Babies and young toddlers have limited awareness of their own body, although their movements are much more deliberate. Young children have gained enough control, of large and fine movements, that they become more aware of the physical messages of their body when they make different movements. This awareness of physical feedback is called proprioception (see page 245).

- So, for instance, two to five year olds often like twirling around, even to the point of feeling so dizzy that they fall over. It is fun to make something physical happen in a deliberate way.
- Many young children like to hang upside down, to experience the strange sensations that follow and then to right themselves deliberately.

Through their physical activity, children in this age range learn directly about concepts that later make sense in terms of words (see also page 275):

- Spatial awareness makes sense by closeness or distance and closing distance when children run towards each other.

- Temporal awareness develops through children's ability to vary their speed from very fast to medium to very slow. Movement gives children an understanding of 'how fast' they can get from one place to another.
- Directional awareness develops as they experiment with different movements forwards, sideways, backwards, round and round in circles, up and down the garden and with negotiating sudden turns.

Activity (observation)

- Watch and listen for examples of children using their physical skills deliberately to experience a physical sensation or explore what it feels like to move in a certain way.
- Write up your observation notes, with photographs, so long as children are happy for you to take photographs.
- Discuss your findings with colleagues or make a display.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1a

Young children can manage a range of basic physical skills. But they apply their skills in different ways, depending on the opportunities they are offered and the choices that they make. 'Do I want to?' becomes as important as 'Can I?' So you will not see all two to five year olds necessarily engaged in energetic play. If children have been very confined or required to be very quiet, then they may not be confident in these skills. Sometimes girls may have taken on the view that lively physical play is only for boys.

The idea of schemas

Chris Athey developed Jean Piaget's idea of **schemas**: patterns of behaviour in which young children learn about their environment. The schema shows itself through children's physical exploration but you can also see strong hints of how a young child is thinking about the familiar world.

For instance:

- A two year old may explore the idea and physical experience of 'enveloping' as she experiments with different ways to cover or wrap herself or objects.
- A young child interested in 'rotation' may turn objects around or use his skills of movement to look at familiar sights from unusual angles. A child may rotate or spin herself.
- A toddler involved in a 'transporting' schema may be especially absorbed in moving objects from place to place in the nursery or family home.
- Some young children become interested in 'connection', how things are or could be joined together, as well as how they can become disconnected and separated.

Making sense of a child's way of thinking through schemas can be a very positive approach when adults feel that young children do not really do much in their play or just make a mess.

Key term

Schemas

patterns of behaviour, mainly ways of physical exploration, in which young children learn about their environment



Activity (observation)

- Watch out for schemas in action in the play of young children in your setting.
- Look for examples, such as in this section, that show through different aspects of an individual child's play. Of course not all of a child's activity and interests link with their current schema, but much will.
- Make notes and compare your observations with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1b C3.1a

Right or left handed?

It should be clear now whether children are right or left handed. Some children's preference is not finally clear until seven or eight years of age.

Most people are right handed and this bias can make life difficult for the left handed minority – about one in nine children and more boys than girls. Left handed children can have some difficulties with writing (see page 348) and the hand-eye coordinations in skills like cutting can be difficult with ordinary scissors (those designed for right handed people). When cutting along a curve or spiral, it is usually easier for a left handed child to cut in a clockwise direction, whereas right handed children are better cutting anticlockwise.

Some special tools as well as patience from right handed adults can make a big difference (see the activity box). It is also the case that many people (adults as well as children) do not work with an absolute preference for right or left.



Figure 9.9

Children will take time to develop a right or left preference

Activity

Most readers will be right handed, so you may need to take steps to understand what it is like to be a left handed child. Try the following exercise.

- As a right hander, when you cut along a line, you are able to line up the scissors using your right eye on the upper blade. Now shut your right eye and try to cut along a line on a piece of paper using your left hand. This is the problem for the left handed child.
- Ask any colleagues who are left handed about their childhood experiences. What was difficult? In what ways were they helped or what help would they have liked as children?
- Left handed children can have difficulty in orienting themselves for writing and in manipulating tools made for the right handed majority. The organisation Anything Lefthanded has experience in support of left handed children and a catalogue of useful tools. Contact them at 18 Avenue Road, Belmont, Surrey SM2 6JD tel: 020 8770 3722 website: www.lefthand-education.co.uk
- Use information from the organisation and their website to make a short presentation to colleagues about support for left handed children.

Key skills links: C2/3.1a C2/3.1b IT2/3.1

The impact of disability and ill health

Disability can affect physical development in different ways and you will find more detail in Chapter 11. This section summarises some main points in brief:

- Some children have disabilities that directly affect their ability to move and control their limbs. Children may be frustrated and need support, require extra space and some specialised equipment.
- Learning disabilities may mean that children's physical skills are not yet supported by their understanding of how to keep safe and assess risk. Children may need your watchful eye and guidance when their peers are safe to make independent choices.
- Children with continuing health conditions may need enough care to keep them healthy, without making them feel miserable that they cannot play as energetically as their friends.

Activity

The world is a very different place for a child who is partially sighted or who has almost complete loss of vision. It is hard for sighted adults to appreciate the experience unless they spend some time in a play environment without their sight.

Organise with colleagues or fellow students to spend time in an early years play environment in which you take turns having your eyes covered effectively so that you can see nothing. Ideally this should be a playroom or nursery that you do not know well. Your sighted colleagues are responsible



for your safety. But it is also their task to understand what you need in order to be as independent as possible and able to access materials, drinks or food.

Discuss the experience in detail afterwards and write up the main issues. For instance:

- What was it like to have to negotiate an environment in which you did not know where everything was kept?
- In what ways did colleagues use language to support and guide you?
- What was unhelpful to you when you had to operate without sight?
- As an adult you had experience and ideas to help make some sense of the play environment. Try to imagine what it can be like for a young child for whom everything is new.

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.3

Dyspraxia

Some children experience difficulties in their physical movement and skills but their disability is not that obvious in early childhood. The condition is known as *dyspraxia* or Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD). The word dyspraxia is made of two Greek words: dys meaning 'bad' and praxis meaning 'movement'. The prefix dys is used to describe disabilities where there is a problem with a skill. So, dyslexia is a problem with lexical (Greek word meaning relating to words) skills, that is with reading (see page 350).

Developmental dyspraxia is a possible explanation when children approach five or six years of age and they have not gained physical confidence and competence like their peers. Young children are still learning about physical control and it is normal for them to look relatively uncoordinated. By school, children's difficulties will be more obvious and tend to include:

- Physical movements that continue to look less fluent than their peers. Children may be called 'clumsy' or 'uncoordinated'.
- Children have difficulties with fine physical skills that show up when they struggle with the skills of self reliance such as dressing or feeding themselves neatly. They may regularly be the last one to finish this type of task.
- Learning to write, other fine pencil work and craft activities are hard for the children.
- Planning physical movements is difficult and many tasks in school as well as early years settings require children to be able to follow a remembered step by step sequence.
- Children seem not to read the messages from their own body, whereas their peers have much greater bodily awareness by now.

Children need support and an appreciation of their difficulties. They will not be helped by adult irritation or labelling them as 'clumsy'. Children need careful observation, strategies to help them follow physical sequences and useful equipment such as triangular pencils to help them grip. Children with dyspraxia can also have trouble in writing because they find it so difficult to judge how hard they are pressing with the pencil. Practical experience can be given with a set of

paper, carbon and another sheet of paper. Children can directly see the results on the bottom paper of increased or decreased pressure on the pencil.

Tips for practice

- Ensure that children's sitting position is stable and then they can put their feet on the floor to create a firm base.
- Give instructions one at a time rather than requiring the child to manage several steps at one go.
- Use colour coding, pictures and friendly reminders to help them recall and manage a sequence of physical movements.
- Be patient and give children longer to complete fine physical skills or self reliance and be encouraging of perseverance.
- Provide chunky pencils or paint brushes and make any paper firmly fixed.
- Give plenty of practice with larger scale items like bigger size bricks or larger threading beads.
- Have enjoyable physical activity for all the children and ensure that children with dyspraxia are brought in fully.

To think about

- When you observe a child with developmental dyspraxia it can be a timely reminder of just how much other children have learned.
- This child's difficulties highlight that his peers can now manage, for instance, to do up their buttons without looking, because they can guide the movement of their limbs from feel.
- In a similar way the struggles of a child with autistic spectrum disorder to grasp social skills and subtleties of communication show you how much other children have understood (see page 518).

Finding out more

The Dyspraxia Foundation, 8 West Alley, Hitchin, Herts SG5 1EG tel: 01462 455016 helpline 01462 454986 website: www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

Further resources

Chris Athey (1991) *Extending Thought in Young Children* Paul Chapman.

Blythe, Sally Goddard (2000) 'Mind and Body' (*Nursery World* 15 June).

Healy, Jane (1994) *Your Child's Growing Mind: a Guide to Learning and Brain Development From Birth to Adolescence* Doubleday.

Similar articles from the Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology, Chester, tel: 01244 311414.

Ripley, Kate (2001) *Inclusion for Children with Dyspraxia/DCD: A handbook for teachers* David Fulton.



Progress check

- 1** Describe the main risks to physical and emotional health if children's physical activity is seriously restricted.
- 2** Describe four ways in which babies and toddlers may use their fine physical skills to explore objects of interest.
- 3** In what ways might five year olds use their large physical movements in play or with equipment?
- 4** Suggest two ways in which the physical action of children might highlight their thinking for attentive adults.
- 5** Describe two signs that might alert you to the condition of dyspraxia in a child.

Learning opportunities through physical activities

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the importance of physical skills and activity for children's learning and well being
- provide a wide range of learning opportunities for physical development
- recognise the importance of outdoor play and use the opportunities of an outdoor curriculum
- appreciate how children's attention control develops and what may be genuine problems in this area.

Introduction

Chapter 9 describes the ways in which babies and young children progress in their physical skills. In this chapter you will explore the many possibilities for babies and toddlers to use their physical abilities within an environment that is interesting and safe enough. Children can apply their skills through indoor and outdoor play and as part of their involvement in the daily routines. Children steadily learn to apply their skills of attention in all of their daily activities. Some children have genuine problems of attention and hyperactivity. But adults need to make sense of children's behaviour in light of their age and their learning environment.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 2, 6

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C1, C8

Level 3: C3, C10, C14

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 9, 24

Learning within physical development

There is a wide range of activities that support children's physical development and, of course, enjoyable physical activities promote other aspects of their development as well. Learning opportunities exist outdoors as well as indoors and a full awareness of the potential of outdoor play can create a full day for children.

Babies, toddlers and young children need to be kept safe from harm and preventable accidents, but other than responsible caution from adults, they need to move and use their physical skills. In a well maintained early years setting (see page 109 on health and safety) children should simply be able to access enjoyable play with adults who keep a friendly eye and join in with the children.

You can support children's physical development throughout early childhood so long as you:

- value physical activity as a genuine source of learning (as well as health) not as the poor relation to intellectual development
- keep children safe enough, free from preventable accidents and then let them enjoy play
- give them the space, equipment in the broadest sense and opportunity to practise
- observe and recognise the learning that can happen when children are on the move
- value the outdoors as well as the indoors
- enjoy physical play and using skills with the children, play games with them sometimes.

Tips for practice

Activities with under threes

Babies, toddlers and very young children need plenty of varied materials that they can explore in different ways. So they benefit from a wide range of simple play materials, not all commercially produced, with which they can experiment.

Play materials for babies

Your choice of play materials needs to be linked to babies' development and their individual interests of the day and the moment. Babies only have to be persuaded if an adult is trying to push play materials or an experience that does not currently interest the baby. Otherwise, babies are only too ready to be intrigued and experience their world with all the skills at their disposal. When babies are not interested and are very passive, then it can be a source of concern to parents and practitioners.

Babies have no sense of danger and cannot foresee the consequences of their actions. They simply do not have the knowledge of the world to manage such thinking skills. Toddlers have learned a great deal but they can still predict only a little within their familiar world.

Babies, and to a lesser extent, toddlers, explore a great deal by putting objects in their mouths. They do this because their mouth is the most sensitive part of their body and gives them information about an object as well as being a source

of comfort. It is a hopeless task to try to stop babies putting objects in their mouth. You will upset them and prevent them learning. The task of a supportive adult is to ensure that babies cannot get access to anything that would be dangerous if put in their mouths. So the main issues are:

- Size of objects – no plaything should be so small that the baby could swallow it. Soft toys need to be of a good quality so that neither the parts nor bits of fur come off and into a baby's mouth. The same concern remains an issue with older disabled children whose development is more like that of a younger child.
- Cleanliness of objects – playthings need to be clean enough to go in the baby's mouth. Most items do not need to be sterilised, and some will be ruined if you try. Most playthings need to be wiped with a clean cloth or washed in hot soapy water, rinsed and left to drip dry.
- Good quality in bought toys – well made playthings for babies and children are properly finished off, with no sharp edges or raised screws that hold the toy together. They are made without PVC, that can release chemicals when toys are put in the mouth. They are free of stickers that can be peeled off by keen little fingers.
- Toys made by reputable manufacturers will meet safety standards. The risks tend to come when a setting or family home has a tight budget and second hand toys are used or toys are bought from unreliable sources like market stalls or car boot sales.

Playing with babies

Caring adults are an ideal item of play equipment for babies, as are older children whose play is guided by an adult. Babies are social, they like to make

Figure 10.1

Babies like climbing too



contact with other people, who conveniently come equipped with a voice, the five senses and limbs and hair for easy grabbing.

- In the very early months, babies like human faces and voices. The distance at which you hold a baby is perfect for her to focus her eyes.
- They like movement – both being carried around in your arms and looking at objects that move, such as mobiles.
- As babies become able to control their legs, they like to use you as a baby gym, bouncing on their legs and holding onto you, confident that you will keep them safe.
- Cuddling, talking, laughing and being together are all appropriate play and learning activities for babies.
- Babies like songs and rhymes and by three or four months they will show that they recognise a familiar song.
- Play simple peek a boo and chasing crawling once they are mobile.
- Making funny faces and sounds to each other or in a mirror.

Scenario

The team of the Dale Parent and Toddler drop-in group have become aware that some of the parents are highly anxious about ‘catching the window of opportunity’ in early learning. The parents’ concern has focused on the need to buy play materials that claim to enable babies and toddlers to achieve their potential. Annie, the group leader of the drop-in, does not wish to discourage parents’ commitment to their toddlers’ early learning. But she wants to find ways with her team to show that adult attention and simple materials will be most developmentally appropriate.

Questions

Parents can become anxious, especially with some of the aggressive marketing used to sell play materials and kits to families.

- 1 How could the Dale team show early learning in action through the kinds of activities described in this section?
- 2 Consider and discuss with your colleagues ways that they could demonstrate that an interesting and involved adult is an essential item of play equipment.

Key skills links: PS3.1 C3.1a

Play for all the senses

- Babies like something to watch, so mobiles are of interest as are other babies and activity going on around them.
- As they gain control over their bodies, hands and fingers, babies like to use their skills, so give them rattles and soft balls that they can grab, hold and let go of, when they are able.
- Objects to chew – babies like the comfort of sucking and chewing, and they may find chewing a relief when they are cutting teeth.

- Soft toys are enjoyable to cuddle but do not give so many that babies feel overwhelmed.
- Mirrors, either hand held or fixed to the wall, are a joy to babies and toddlers who like to look, make faces and press their noses to the glass.
- Babies like objects to stack and drop, to put in containers and take out of containers. Many ordinary objects are of great interest to them, they do not need all commercially bought toys.
- Babies like books because they can be looked at, touched and enjoyed with an adult or an interested older child. Sharing books with babies works when it is part of a warm, social exchange. The brain connections are as much, if not more, emotional as they are intellectual (see page 243).

Activity

By their first birthday and within the following year, older babies will show what are their favourite soft toys or other cuddlies. These will be the most important ones or one, that must never be lost and will have to be kept clean and mended as best you can.

- Talk with parents and other early years practitioners to gather information from many families about the favourite cuddly toy of their baby or toddler.
- Describe the range that you discover and suggest reasons why these particular cuddlies became so important for the child. How did it happen?

Key skills links: C2/3.1a

Space to move

The research into early brain development has shown that babies and toddlers need to move. The actual practice of crawling, handling, looking and communicating by gestures builds the neural connections in young brains.

- They need safe space for moving around without undue restrictions and often the best area will be on a comfortable floor.
- You need to be accessible, on the floor too for much of the time.
- You can watch, enjoy and be ready to join in the play.
- Let children crawl all over you and provide the facility of a human gym as they hold on and bounce.
- Play peep boo around furniture or with scarves and cloths.
- Toddlers love crawling–chasing, but you will need a comfortable flooring for this activity.
- Chase and catch and hide and seek become possible, so long as adults adjust to moving slowly and pretending they cannot see young children who believe they are invisible if their head is hidden.

Toddlers' use of wheeled toys is a handy reminder of how play equipment can support so many different kinds of learning and how usage changes over the months. For instance:



- a wheeled trolley is useful to a toddler as a balance for walking
- confident walkers then use the trolley to carry around teddies, bricks or push other small children
- later the same young child will sit in the trolley imagining it is a car or a bus. She or he is the driver, perhaps with an imaginary driving wheel.

Activity (observation)

Explore varied use of the same play materials, like the example of wheeled toys on this page.

- Gather observations of the same child over a matter of months or of different children spanning the ages of 12–36 months.
- Follow the same child's use of similar materials and/or gather observations of children of different ages in their use of the same item.
- Take photos, if possible, with parents' permission.
- Present your findings to your colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1b

What is 'early learning'

The marketing of some electronic consoles and activity centres claims to introduce babies and toddlers to numbers, letters, colours, talking – in fact everything that is jammed on to the toy. Such consoles tend to have a few letters, often in upper case (capitals like ABC), a few numbers (that mean nothing in isolation), some sound making buttons to press, bright colours and sometimes a facility that claims to 'teach early words'.

These marketing claims are nonsense.

- Toddlers can practise physical coordination and may enjoy the sound-making option of these toys, but that is the limit.
- They may enjoy one activity centre but there is no point in having half a dozen in the baby room. Babies will learn the same skills more effectively if you offer a range of separate sound makers that can be picked up and made to work.
- They learn all the other skills through communication and experience of a wide choice of different materials (see for instance the sections on pages 272 and 298).
- Babies and toddlers learn to talk through interaction with real people, not by pressing buttons on an electronic console.

Babies and toddlers do not need computers and toys that claim to introduce them to early computer skills. There is no evidence that a very early introduction to computers is positive for learning and there are strong indications that it can be negative. The main problem with early screen use is that young children need to use their physical skills and senses to make any sense of the concepts. See page 383 for more about sensible use of computers in the early years.

To think about

On a personal note, I admit to having a dislike of the terms ‘stimulation’ and ‘stimulating’ applied to babies’ and children’s learning. The words create a feel that babies need to be pushed and persuaded into being interested in their social world. Such a perspective is inaccurate and has grown with a misrepresentation of the research on early brain development.

Babies do not need to be ‘stimulated’; they develop their own brains through the kinds of activities described in this chapter and others in the book. Nor do they need to be ‘given a headstart’ or ‘jump started’ – two very unpleasant terms in the marketing that accompanies some of the ‘build a better baby’ products from the United States.

- Take claims on packaging or catalogues with a pinch of salt. Some bought materials are excellent but ask yourself if claims to promote early learning seem likely from your knowledge of child development.
- Discuss these issues with your colleagues, perhaps taking opposite sides in analysing the likely value of a commercial toy or a pack promoted in a catalogue.

Key skills links: C3.1a

Exploratory play

Plastic toys can be easy to keep clean and many commercially produced baby toys are in strong plastic. But there are limits to plastic and babies need the chance to experience other textures, smells and the malleability of non-plastic play materials. Babies like a wide range of objects and ideally ones that they can get hold of and explore. Babies and toddlers in a family home have always been interested in saucepans and a wooden spoon and other safe access to objects that are of great interest because adults use them as well.

Elinor Goldschmied developed two kinds of play resource to promote relaxed exploratory play that enabled under twos to discover for themselves. The **treasure basket** and **heuristic play** sessions promote use of ordinary and recycled materials for babies and toddlers. (The term heuristic play is from the Greek word *eurisko*, meaning ‘serves to discover’ or ‘gain an understanding of’.) Goldschmied was concerned about over-reliance in homes and nurseries on commercially made playthings. She stressed the importance of materials that support all of children’s five senses: hearing, vision, touch, smell and taste. She also identified a ‘sixth sense’ in children’s sensitivity to their own bodily movement and recognition of what physical skills feel like when they are used. This idea is very similar to that of proprioception (see page 245).

Key terms

Treasure basket

a play resource developed by Elinor Goldschmied for babies who can sit unassisted. The low basket contains a range of safe and interesting objects that are not conventional toys

Heuristic play

an exploratory play resource for toddlers and young children, developed by Elinor Goldschmied and using a wide range of ordinary objects and recycled materials for children to play with as they choose

Learning with the treasure basket

The treasure basket is an open, low container with a range of materials that can be explored by babies who are able to sit up comfortably on the floor, either without any help or with a support for their back. The basket can be made available to one or two babies, with an adult sitting quietly nearby. The idea is that you let the baby or babies explore as they wish. You do not suggest particular materials nor intervene, unless a baby were pushing something into his throat or hitting another baby. Toddlers often still enjoy playing with the treasure basket and this activity extends naturally into discovery or heuristic play.

The exact contents of the treasure basket can vary but the aim is to gather a range of materials and bring the resource out from time to time.

- You can collect ordinary, safe objects like small containers, large cotton reels, a wooden spoon or spatula, large wooden curtain rings, a bath sponge, a small scoop or pastry cutters and the larger type of wooden clothes peg.
- Other possibilities are fir cones (watch out for bits), woolly balls, a firm fruit like a lemon, a smooth shell – anything that is safe and interesting.
- Make a collection that varies in look, texture, shape and smell so that babies can explore in any way they wish.
- Make sure that no object is so small that a baby could swallow it.
- The resource can be valuable for older children with learning disabilities. In that case, you need to check the items carefully, since the children may still put objects in their mouths and their mouths will be bigger than a baby's.

Activity (observation)

Make several observations of babies enjoying the treasure basket on different occasions.

- Note down what items the babies selected and what they did with the item. For instance, they may look at it, stroke it, put it in their mouth or put one item into another.
- Do the babies return to some items? Do they look at each other if you have two babies sitting at the basket? Do they offer each other anything? Do they invite you to play in any way?
- Organise your notes into a short presentation to colleagues or fellow students. What have you observed about very early learning?

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1b

Learning with heuristic play

Goldschmied further developed the treasure basket into the heuristic play sessions that she introduced into day nurseries.

- A rich resource of materials are kept in containers like large cloth bags and brought out perhaps once or twice a week.
- There is a similar emphasis as with the treasure basket on a wide range of natural materials and no commercially made or plastic toys.
- There should be enough materials that turn taking is not an issue.
- The idea is that toddlers play as they wish and adults watch with interest. They help if asked but do not direct children's play by actions or words.
- Materials can include cardboard and transparent tubes, a wide range of small and larger containers, large wooden clothes pegs, lengths of metal chain and other safe recycled materials.

Activity (observation)

Watch young children exploring heuristic play materials.

- Note what materials they choose and how they explore them.
- In what ways do these young children show absorption and concentration?
- Do children watch each other or play at handing each other items?
- Describe what and how children are learning in these sessions.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1b

Finding out more

If you do not have contact with an early years setting that offers a treasure basket or heuristic play sessions, then two videos show how this form of exploratory play can work so well.

Infants at work: babies of 6–9 months exploring everyday objects by Elinor Goldsmied and *Heuristic play with objects: children of 12–20 months exploring everyday objects* by Elinor Goldsmied and Anita Hughes can be purchased from the National Children's Bureau tel: 020 7843 6000 website: www.ncb-books.org.uk.

Over threes with physical play and activity

There is no firm boundary between what is appropriate for children younger and older than three years. Some ideas have been given in the previous section, because it is useful to adjust to what younger children can manage in large and fine movements. In this section many of the activities are appropriate for an age range from two or three years onwards.

Figure 10.2

Children need space for activities





Space to move and explore

Children practise large and fine movements. They relish opportunities to climb, run and jump within open space, climbing frames and with organised obstacle courses for crawling or negotiating with bikes.

Activity

An enjoyable obstacle course can happen indoors as well as outside.

In your early years setting look at the indoor possibilities. Plan and organise an obstacle course with the help of the children.

- What can you create with large floor cushions, a line of large wooden bricks, hoops that you can step in and out of, a table that you wriggle under?
- You could have a finishing area on a rug for children to stop and get their breath before another round.
- Observe the children as they use the course. What kind of movements are they using? What words could you naturally introduce to describe what they are doing?

Write up the activity and make a short presentation to your colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1b

You can look for appropriate opportunities to use vocabulary about movement and physical actions.

- The aim is to introduce words about speed, height or direction as part of the play. You do not want to overdo it or impose on children's activity.
- Look for natural opportunities to use words like up, down, through or under.
- Movements can be described as fast and slow but also as sliding, creeping or rushing.
- You will also find natural opportunities to help children to become more aware of their own bodies. Perhaps everyone is out of breath after a speed walk around the garden. Hanging by your arms from the climbing frame feels like a stretch. Jumping down feels exciting and the sensation of landing on the ground is felt in the feet.

To think about

Jigsaws are a useful kind of play material. When children enjoy doing them, they can practise looking, experimenting and the physical handling of pieces. However, not all children are enthused by jigsaws and there is nothing to gain in trying to make them play with materials they do not enjoy.

- Consider and list the skills that jigsaws can promote. You could do a diagram similar to that on page 278.
- Then describe other play materials or games that could support the same skills if children do not particularly want to complete jigsaws.

- Discuss your ideas with colleagues. Do you sometimes feel that a play resource is essential, when in fact the same skills can be learned and practised from different play materials and opportunities?

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1a

Music and dance

Babies, toddlers and children enjoy different kinds of music and dance sessions:

- Babies are often calmed by some familiar music, not always quiet. Within the first year of life they show that they recognise some songs and pieces of music.
- Once they are mobile or able to stand resting on a low table, they will often move in time to music and will enjoy being danced around in your arms.
- Sometimes you can put on lively music for dancing together. Younger children like to be helped and held as you dance to the rhythm.
- Experiment with music that has changes of pace from fast to slower and to very slow.
- Build in imaginary themes with the movement, like 'we're tiptoeing through the forest' or 'we're on a roller coaster'.
- Four and five year olds can have enough coordination to try joint activities like simple line dancing. With you as a guide children can manage sequences like stepping from side to side, adding a clap and small jumps forward with both feet. Adding an energetic whoop finishes off the pattern.

Activity

- Collect examples of the kinds of music that young children like and recognise. It can include classical pieces of music as well as recent and older popular music.
- Compare notes with colleagues. What is the range of musical taste?
- Try introducing a type of music that has been well received by children in another setting.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1a

Constructional play

Children can build indoors with materials that range from the smaller scale lego™, a good supply of wooden bricks and recycled materials such as containers and egg boxes. Outdoor projects can be larger scale, perhaps involving large cardboard boxes, milk crates, bubble wrap and lengths of cloth. Children may make dens or work out ways to transport water with a series of crates and guttering.

Children practise their physical skills in constructional play but they are also learning in other areas of their development:

- Children think as they plan what they will do, recall previous works and communicate with other children who are involved in the same construction.



- Children can gain immense satisfaction as they plan, build and revise their constructions. A complex construction takes time and it is important that children's projects are not demolished prematurely because adults are following an inflexible schedule of activities.
- Children may return to an interesting construction over a day or several days. They may also like to use a camera to take photos of their work in progress as well as the final impressive construction.

There are many different kinds of constructional sets sold commercially. But children do not need lots of different types that have a relatively small number of items in each. Their physical skills are better supported, as well as the scope for planning, when settings have a small number of constructional sets but there are plenty of pieces. You will notice children's frustrations when they run out of pieces for a construction or they have to share a limited supply with other children so that nobody has sufficient. It is up to adults to help children manage turn taking over a period of time so that all children have the opportunity to work with constructional materials.

Helping out in the daily routine

Physical skills are used, practised and placed in a meaningful context when children are part of the daily routines of your setting. They may help with or take full responsibility for:

- watering the plants
- choosing and putting out equipment
- sweeping or tidying up
- laying the table for snack or meal time
- taking responsibility for their own organisation through self registration or a self service snack and drinks table.

Activity

There are more ideas about learning through the daily routine in Chapter 2, especially from page 52.

- Look at those suggestions and link them to the physical skills described in this chapter.
- Take one or two aspects of the daily routine and make a diagram to show the potential learning, especially of children's large and fine physical skills.
- Share your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1a

Arts and crafts

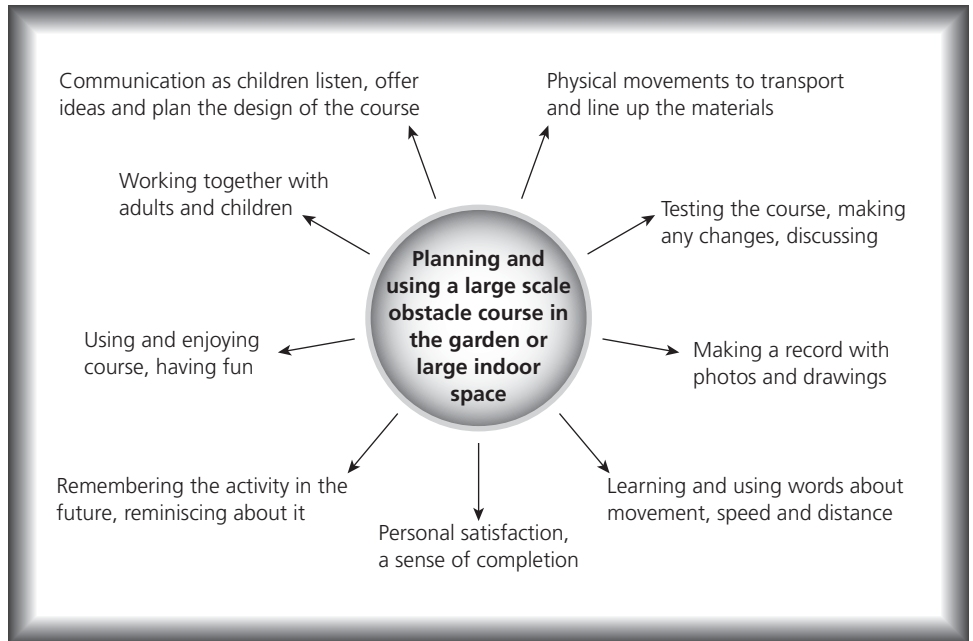
Toddlers and very young children like and can benefit from hands-on arts and crafts activities:

- they work with materials such as play dough to shape, squeeze, press and increasingly make shapes that they say are a sausage or an animal

Figure 10.3

Potential learning from play with an obstacle course

You could create a similar diagram to show a breadth of learning from other activities described in this chapter, for instance constructional play, music and dance or handling natural materials such as sand or water.



- toddlers and very young children like simple sticking and cutting
- with thick crayons and brushes they practise skills in drawing and painting
- different art materials enable them to explore printing with thick sponges, foot, hand and finger painting.

These art and craft activities support children's physical dexterity but the enjoyment also promotes imagination and ability to plan ahead a little. Under threes do not necessarily want or need to produce an art or craft product at the end. They benefit from experimenting and most of the value of the activity is lost if adults direct children's actions to ensure a neat painting or print that can be sent home or become part of a wall display.

One way forward is to use photos that you take of large scale art activity, dough models and of very young children having fun exploring materials.

- You can make a wall display of the photos, with short written explanations as one form of communication with parents.
- Some photos can also go into a child's individual portfolio as a record of what they have enjoyed and explored.
- The photos will be a pleasure for the family and children themselves when they look at them as they get older.

Scenario

Erin, the manager of Sunningdale Day Nursery has become aware that one or two team members in the baby and toddler rooms have become over directive in their use of arts and crafts with under threes. When Erin raises the issue of developmentally appropriate 'baby art' in a team meeting, it becomes clear that some practitioners are putting pressure on toddlers because of a few remarks from parents about 'hasn't she done anything today?'



Some team members had questioned the point of getting babies and toddlers to make neat Easter cards, and similar productions, just because the older children were involved in this activity. Erin diplomatically supports these team members and starts the process of ways to get round something for children to show for their day.

Questions

- 1 What do you think the Sunningdale team could do to enable the under threes to enjoy arts and crafts?
- 2 List some more appropriate craft activities than getting babies and toddlers to make neat cards.
- 3 Share your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: PS3.1 C3.1a

A wide range of arts and crafts can support children's creative development as well as their physical skills. Children learn from these activities so long as they are allowed to make choices about materials and the end product.

- Drawing and painting can be undertaken with crayons, chalks and paint. The materials can be applied with brushes, but also fingers, sponges, rollers or cut vegetables.
- It is possible for children to exercise their imagination in the use of materials, colour and texture.
- Printing can be on paper, cloth or on to shapes and containers.
- Woodwork offers a context for learning about tools as well as the pleasure of making something. You can help children to use tools when they need or appreciate some advice. A good technique will also help children to keep safe.

The importance of outdoor play

The first nursery schools in the UK, such as those pioneered by Margaret McMillan (see page 400), placed a great value on outdoor experience and play for young children. From the 1970s early education came to be much more focused on children's intellectual development and the unbalanced view grew that the most valuable learning occurred indoors, with activities more directed by adults.

Not every early years setting followed this route, but many began to see children's outdoor and physical play as less valuable and as 'just letting off steam'. Access by children to outdoor space was often restricted to scheduled times in the day, with the result that children were very wound up by the time the doors opened. They rushed around the garden, trying to pack in all their games and adults felt this confirmed their view that outdoor play was over-energetic and gave rise to too many accidents.

During the 1990s a more balanced view has returned, led by people like Marjorie Ouvre and Helen Bilton. They have promoted the value of outdoor play and described how flexible use of outdoor space can support every aspect of children's learning.

- Physical play is valuable for itself, and gaining confidence in physical skills supports skills like literacy that are so often associated with the pressure to get children to 'sit down and concentrate'.



Figure 10.4

The woodwork table offers great potential for learning

- Outdoor play between children can be the vehicle for social interaction and communication.
- When children are enthusiastic about outdoor projects, they talk together, plan, discuss ideas and solve some problem, especially if adult support is available.
- Children develop such skills precisely because they are on the move and enabled to make choices, carry out and then admire large scale projects.
- Outdoor space usually allows larger scale projects than are possible inside. Children can create a den, transport material about the garden and spread out with a project.
- Energetic pretend play where the imaginary themes need space for expansion can flourish in the outdoors. Awareness of boys' lively pretend play has raised concern that their learning is blocked if their play is forever curtailed or even banned because it is 'too noisy'.

Ideas for using the outdoors

Settings vary in the scope of their outdoor area but with some minor adjustments it is possible to consider any of the following.

- In the outdoor area children can move about easily with wheeled vehicles, trolleys and wheelbarrows. They enjoy the sheer movement and also use the equipment to transport materials around to serve their play.
- They can practise balance with versatile materials like crates, tyres, logs, planks. All of these can be moved about by the children and made to serve different purposes.
- Natural materials like sand, earth and water can easily be handled outside and do not necessarily have to be in a conventional wheeled tray.
- Children benefit from access to areas for digging and earth works. They can be cleaned up or help with their own cleaning later.
- Children enjoy permanent and temporary shelters, dens or the material to make a den and large cardboard boxes.
- Outdoor areas can provide treasure trails and obstacle courses, some of which the children can help in designing.
- A pavement or asphalt surface will allow chalk markings that can be for a roadway or to enable balancing games along a line or wiggly route.
- Children will develop many of their games themselves but they also appreciate adults with ideas for outdoor games and equipment like ropes, hoops, bats and balls. You can show that you enjoy playing with them.
- Garden projects and helping out with garden maintenance can be undertaken and enjoyed, even by young children. This activity supports physical skills but also gives rich opportunities for learning about the natural world and early science.
- Children are also very proud of gardening projects they have undertaken and have good ideas about making the most of the shared outdoor area, when they are consulted.

To think about

Helen Bilton (1998) reports her observations of the changes in children's behaviour when access to the outdoors was changed.

In the nursery a short fifteen minute timetabled outdoor session was altered so that children could move as they chose between indoors and the garden. The 'mad dash' to the outside stopped when children realised there was no time limit. The outdoor play calmed down and was more sustained when children were no longer trying to pack all their favourites into a scant quarter of an hour.

Helen Bilton, and the nursery team with whom she worked, realised that the restricted outdoor period had been a self fulfilling prophecy. With firm limits to their play, the children had rushed around and 'let off steam'.

Questions

- 1 Consider why some (not all) early years settings undervalue outdoor learning and greatly restrict children's access to the outdoor area.
- 2 How does access work in settings you know?
- 3 How do children use the garden if their time is very limited?

Key skills links: C3.1a

Scenario

Dresden Road Nursery School has taken the garden and use of the outdoors as a key theme in their long-term plan for the current school year. The team has explored several broad issues and implemented changes after discussion and some visits to other local settings, as well as an email link up with several nurseries in different parts of the country. The Dresden Road team is part way through an ambitious plan that involves children and parents as much as staff.

- Throughout the warmer weather, the nursery has explored all the possibilities of taking indoor activities into the garden.
- They now have tables that go outside with an office area and a regular outdoor resource of drawing and writing materials.
- Cushions and a blanket create a comfortable book and story area.
- The staff are part way through working with the children to create a discovery box for use in the garden with magnifying glasses, binoculars, bug boxes and paper and clipboards.
- The children have become enthusiastic gardeners and have almost completed what they call their 'smelly garden' with herbs and scented plants.

The team is aware that the less warm and dry weather will soon be upon them and they are keen not to lose the impetus of their work.

Questions

- 1 What activities could the Dresden Road team continue throughout the autumn and winter?

- 2 What could they do that especially draws on the possibilities of winter weather?
- 3 Discuss your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: PS3.1 C3.1a

Weather and the outdoors

It is important that the weather is not used as an excuse to restrict children's outdoor play, because it is too cold, too hot, too wet, too windy and so on. Enthusiasts for outdoor activities (for adults as well as children) do say that there is no such thing as unsuitable weather, only unsuitable clothing. There may be some limits to this claim but children are able to go out in varied weather.

- They can learn about the weather by watching, choosing appropriate clothing and experiencing different temperatures and weather conditions.
- Children (and adults too) need sun protection in hot weather (see page 58) but can enjoy the outdoors so long as there is some shade.
- Well wrapped up, they can still play in cold weather and rain can be enjoyed so long as they have wellington boots, coats and hats.

Figure 10.5

Taking activities outdoors gives children flexibility



Activity and attention

It is usual for young children to want to move about and for toddlers to go through a phase of 'being into everything'. They are curious and they learn through direct physical contact with their world. Young children can be inattentive, impulsive and boisterous but this is normal behaviour for early childhood.

A serious problem arises for children when adult expectations become shifted so that three and four year olds are expected to sit still for long amounts of time and physical activity is seen as an optional extra. Sally Goddard Blythe (see page 244) has pointed out that the most advanced level of movement for a child is to stay still. Young children often need to move in order to concentrate. They should not be told off for 'fidgeting', these involuntary movements are because they cannot yet stay completely still.

There is also a widespread misunderstanding that concentration can only happen when children are still or even sitting up to a table. If you observe children, it is very clear that they pay close attention as they ride their bikes or walk around the garden spotting flowers or small creatures.

Activity (observation)

- Watch children who are on the move, who are not still or not for very long. In what ways can you observe that they are looking and listening. Describe examples and suggest ways that you could appropriately join in their play and be observant with the children.
- Make a short presentation to your colleagues to promote the theme of 'attention on the move'.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1b

The development of attention

Children steadily develop the ability to attend: to use their skills of looking and listening. You will help children when you have realistic expectations and understand that learning to attend, or concentrate, is more than how long a child can stay focused. There is development in the kind of attention a child can manage, as well as the length of attention span.

Under one year: easily distracted

Babies are naturally very easily distracted; their attention is caught by any new sight and sound. Their interest in new experiences and shifting focus is useful as babies have so much to take in and learn. Supportive adults go with the flow of a baby's interest and move on physically or mentally with the baby.

One to two years: more fixed attention

Within the second year of life toddlers usually move on from being frequently distracted and may in contrast look fixed and inflexible. Toddlers will often concentrate hard on an action or object that has engaged their curiosity. Their attention may look rigid but their learning is supported by an inclination to gain every gram of possible interest from this collection of stones or the interesting

ridges on the soles of their shoes. Anything can be intriguing and deserve their full attention.

Toddlers and young children are not being rude or uncooperative if they ignore your request that they stop now and look, instead, at this object. They can only focus on one thing at a time and find it hard to shift attention. So they may well not have realised you were talking to them, especially if you did not use their name or gain their attention by gentle touch.

Two to four years: more flexibility in attention

Between two and about four years children manage a gradual development of their ability to attend, but they can still only manage one focus of attention at a time.

- Over the months children become more able to stop what they are doing in order to listen to another child or an adult.
- But two and three year olds can have difficulty getting back into an activity from an interruption. They may wander off, not because they had finished their painting but because another child broke their concentration. They need help to settle back.
- Three and four year olds are learning that adults in nurseries or playgroups sometimes address a whole group but this realisation takes time. Children of this age may still need to be addressed as individuals.

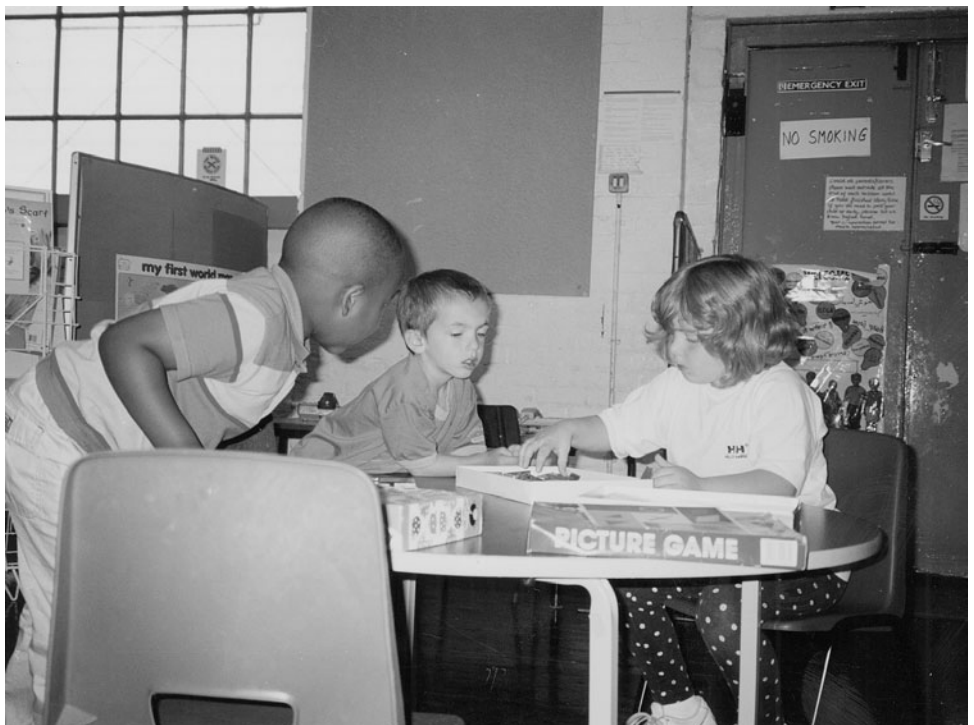
Four years and older: double focus attention

Between four and five years old children become able sometimes to attend to more than one demand for their attention at the same time.

- Four and five year olds are more able to chat with a friend as they are absorbed in their building or drawing.

Figure 10.6

Children can show concentration on many different activities



- They are far more able to get themselves back to an activity once they have stopped to look or listen, even if this other focus is nothing to do with their current project.
- On the other hand, children return to single focus attention when they are coping with a difficult task or a new skill. The same is true of us as adults if we are tackling a new skill. We may say, 'Just let me finish this and then I can talk with you.'
- Following experience in the group life of early years settings, children of this age can also understand that adults sometimes give instructions or explanations to the whole group and each individual needs to attend.

Tips for practice

- Hold realistic expectations for children's age and previous experience.
- Create an environment that is sometimes peaceful as well as sometimes lively.
- Ensure that you have gained children's attention before you start speaking. Use their name at the beginning of your sentence rather than the end. Use touch to gain attention.
- Help children to get back to an activity if their attention has been disrupted.
- Manage children's expectations about shifts in the daily routine, so that they are not required to stop suddenly.
- Recognise that children can concentrate on the move. Be creative about different ways for children to learn and avoid the mistake of claiming children 'can't concentrate' just because they do not appreciate highly structured table top activities.
- Ensure that children get plenty of breaks from more concentrated intellectual tasks.
- Model good concentration yourself and avoid interrupting children's focus.

Attention deficit disorder

Young children learn the skills of attention control and organising themselves. An excessive focus by adults on sitting still and paper and pencil work can make it appear that children have problems when they do not. However, some children reach primary school age unable to concentrate on even simple tasks and they struggle to behave well in a group where their peers can focus.

Children who continue to have such problems may have one of two conditions that undermines their ability to concentrate and learn.

- Children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) find it hard to focus on an activity and see it through, even a game they choose and enjoy. They are easily distracted but, because the children may simply go quiet or wander off, they can be missed in a busy nursery or pre-school.
- On the other hand, you will not miss those children who have Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). They not only move continuously from one activity to another, they also demand adult attention with loud behaviour and may disrupt other children's games. Their non-stop activity can also stretch into the night and their parents are exhausted.

Experts do not agree on the causes of ADD or ADHD but possibilities include a chemical imbalance, an inherited condition and the impact of diet.

- The human brain uses a chemical called a neuro-transmitter to send messages along the nerves. The amount of this chemical increases with children's age and, with appropriate play experience, they learn to attend and to remember. The theory is that children with ADD do not have enough of this chemical and that children with ADHD have too much.
- There seems to be a genetic link, since over a third of children with diagnosed attention problems have a least one other member of the family with similar difficulties.
- Diet, especially food additives, has been linked to hyperactivity in children. It seems most likely that food allergies or intolerance make an existing condition worse for some children, but are probably not the original cause.
- Some families have found that tracking and then adjusting their child's diet and overall nutrition has made a difference.

Children with ADD and ADHD need help, as do their families. However, there is concern in the UK, given what has happened in the United States, that the condition can be too enthusiastically diagnosed in children who just need normal adult attention and guidance, with lively and enjoyable play.

Proper support for children with ADD or ADHD includes structured help for them to learn to attend and to handle their energetic impulses. The amphetamine-type drug Ritalin can be part of the help for some children. But there is serious concern that it should not be prescribed just because children are a 'handful' or will not cooperate within early years or school settings. This concern about medicating normal exuberance in early childhood has been heightened with the shift in some early years settings to an inappropriate level of structure and adult control. In recent years, over-formal approaches have sometimes been developed by adults who are anxious to meet and gather evidence for learning targets.

Figure 10.7

Easy access to the outdoors supports children's learning





Tips for practice

It is very unhelpful to label young children as 'hyperactive'. Early years practitioners and parents need to hold on to a realistic understanding of what is within the normal range for young children.

- Young children do not play quietly or 'properly' all the time. They are naturally very curious and the normal state of toddlers is 'to be into everything' and to throw at least a few tantrums.
- Children are in the process of learning about boundaries to behaviour and social skills like sharing and cooperation. This does not happen overnight.
- Lively children, often the boys, may find a very formal nursery, pre-school or reception class heavy going. They can only be quiet and attentive for just so long and they will become uncooperative if adults stop all their more lively pretend games.

Finding out more

Hyperactive Children's Support Group, 71 Whyke Lane, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 2LD, telephone helpline weekdays 10am–1pm 01903 725182, fax: 01903 734726 website: www.hacsg.org.

ADD/ADHD Family Support Group UK, 1a High Street, Dilton Marsh, near Westbury, Wiltshire BA13 4DL telephone helpline weekdays 9am–5pm 01373 826045. Send a large s.a.e for their information pack.

Other causes of attention difficulties

You need to use your skills of observation with care, because not all children who have genuine struggles with attention have ADHD.

- Some children who have problems with attention have some difficulties with their hearing or vision. Severe loss of sight or hearing can be easier to observe than less severe visual loss or intermittent hearing loss (see page 319). It is worth working with parents to have children's hearing or vision checked, if they have difficulty in responding to positive strategies to help attention.
- Children with epilepsy can have seizures in which they go blank for a very short period of time. They can seem to be an inattentive or daydreaming child (see page 521).
- Children with an autistic spectrum disorder can appear inattentive and behave like a much young child in that they are highly focused on a narrow range of interests and very hard to re-direct (see page 518).
- Children with severe emotional problems and depression may seem to be in a world of their own.

Any concerns about children whose attention control does not meet realistic expectations for their age should be handled through the special needs steps in an early years or school setting (see page 528). Careful observation, strategies to help and further assessment if necessary will help to identify what is happening.

Further resources

- Bilton, Helen (1998) *Outdoor Play in the Early Years: Management and innovation* David Fulton.
- Cousins, Jacqui (1999) *Listening to Four Year Olds: How they can help us plan their education and care* National Early Years Network.
- Green, Christopher and Chee, Kit (1997, 2nd edn) *Understanding A.D.H.D.: A parent's guide to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in children* Vermilion.
- Lindon, Jennie (2001) *Understanding Children's Play* Nelson Thornes.
- Ouvry, Marjorie (2000) *Exercising Muscles and Minds: Outdoor play and the early years curriculum* National Early Years Network.
- Titman, Wendy (1994) *Special Places, Special People: The hidden curriculum of school grounds* WWF/Learning through Landscapes.

Progress check

- 1 Describe a range of suitable materials for physical play that are not conventional 'toys'.
- 2 Suggest three activities that could be suitable for children younger than two years of age.
- 3 Describe three ways in which children's learning (other than their physical development) can be promoted through outdoor play.
- 4 Explain three ways in which the attention control of a four year old is likely to be different from that of a two year old.
- 5 Describe two signs that might make you concerned that a child had problems with attention control.

11

The development of communication and spoken language

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand and explain the development of children's communication and spoken language
- use a wide range of strategies to support the development of communication for babies, toddlers and children
- recognise and support children who experience difficulties within language development.

Introduction

From the earliest sounds and gestures, babies strive to make social contact through communication. Their abilities to understand and to express themselves extend until they can use their spoken language in a wide range of ways. Some children become bilingual within early childhood. Supportive and attentive adults can help children with the skills of communication and broad use of spoken language. Reliable information also enables you to address delays or problems in language development.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

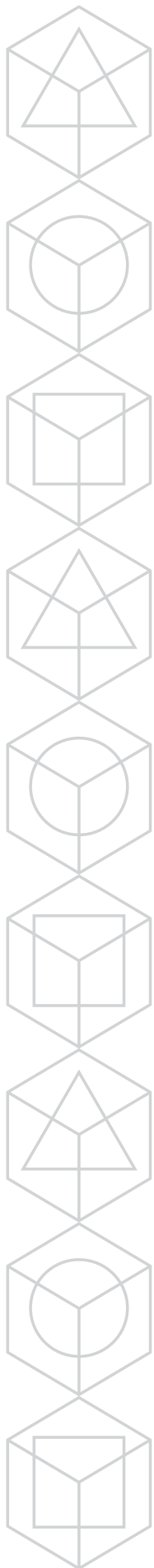
Diploma in Child Care and Education: 2, 4, 6, 10

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C9

Level 3: C11, C14

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 4, 7, 8, 9, 12



The development of communication

Spoken language is a very important part of human interaction and learning, but communication is much broader than spoken language.

Non-verbal communication

As well as spoken language, children and adults communicate in addition to and sometimes without the words. **Non-verbal communication** is possible through using **body language**:

Key terms

Non-verbal communication

ways of communicating without words by using body language and also the qualities of how something is said, such as tone, volume, fluency and pace

Body language

ways of communicating that use gestures, facial expression and body posture

- Facial expression, especially by the mouth and eyes. We have a considerable number of muscles in our face that can be used to produce a wide range of expressions.
- Gestures of the hands and arms or whole body; gestures communicate unspoken messages and mood.

Non-verbal communication is also made through the qualities of how something is said:

- The tone, volume, fluency and pace of what is said all add a message to the actual words of spoken language.

Before they can talk, babies and toddlers communicate a great deal by gestures and the variety of their sound making. They are also very dependent on non-verbal communication to make sense of their world. But of course non-verbal communication does not stop because the verbal expression starts. As adults we all send non-verbal messages and we receive them, although we may not be very aware of what we have noticed. The messages of body language may be positive and very supportive. On the other hand the messages may be negative and undermining. Body language can be confusing when this source of communication does not fit the words. Perhaps the words say, 'I'm pleased to see you' but the facial expression and tone say, 'No I'm not'.

Children continue to be alert not only to what is said but to how it is expressed. It is easy to underestimate how much young children notice of the messages sent non-verbally. Adults may assume that, because nothing is said, perhaps about a worrying or unhappy home situation, then children will be unaware. On the contrary, children know their parents and other familiar carers very well and are alert to different moods. They are very likely to be sure something is the matter, because a familiar adult's body language and general behaviour has changed. Children may not be able easily to put their understanding into words. They are also, unfortunately, likely to think they have done something wrong if there does not seem to be any other explanation. See page 218 for approaches to supporting children who are worried or distressed.

Activity

In pairs, explore how clear messages can be sent without words. For instance, use your face, gestures and whole body posture to:

- show to your partner that you are puzzled
- indicate frustration or annoyance

- communicate that you are pleased to see your partner.

As adults we will usually communicate with words as well as body language.

- Look for examples through observation of young children who have few if any words.
- How do they show the emotions that you have communicated in the pairs activity?
- Discuss your findings with colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1a

Cultural differences

Children learn the social rules for non-verbal communication, including body language, and subtle use of spoken language. There are some cultural differences in the meaning of gestures and how spoken language is used. Your own use of non-verbal communication will have been learned within your own culture and will seem normal to you. When you meet and work with children and adults raised within another culture, unfamiliar to you, the differences may become clearer. You cannot anticipate every difference and, of course, there is a great deal of variation within cultures, as well as between them.

Gestures can vary in meaning. For instance, in the United States you might beckon somebody towards you by extending your hand and curling your index finger back and forth. In the UK you would probably use this gesture only to a child. Families of Indonesian origin would be unhappy even about this use, since in their culture such a gesture would only be used to an animal. It would be considered rude to use to a person.



Figure 11.1

You will notice young children using gestures as well as words

There are cultural differences, as well as individual preferences, about personal space: how close you stand or sit to another person. Europeans tend to stand about one arm's length apart, unless the relationship is affectionate. People of Japanese origin tend to prefer a wider distance and people from the Middle East and some South American countries prefer to stand closer, perhaps almost touching.

Eye contact is another source of variation and individual difference. Children of UK origin tend to be raised to look directly at an adult. This body language is encouraged and directed with words like, 'Look at me when I'm talking to you'. Lack of eye contact in UK culture is often interpreted as lack of concentration or guilt about misbehaviour. Yet children in families of Middle Eastern or Caribbean origin are likely to have been taught the opposite. Looking directly at adults is likely to be interpreted as disrespectful and impolite.

To think about

- Collect ideas within your team or student group on the phrases and sayings that you recall from childhood.
- Many of these still guide us as adults in our body language. For example you may recall, 'It's rude to point' or 'Sit up straight – don't be so lazy'.
- Compare the examples that emerge from different people. You will find variations even if you all share very similar cultural backgrounds.

Key skills links: C2/3.1a

Spoken language

Children's development in spoken language covers two broad areas that are equally important:

- The sounds and then the words and phrase that babies and young children themselves use.
- Their understanding of what is communicated to them, by words and non-verbal communication.

Speech

Children's **speech** or **expressive language** develops from the sound making and babbling of babies into recognisable words said to people. Children learn to speak in the accent and the version of a language spoken by the adults and older children around them. Some children learn more than one language and become bilingual in childhood.

Understanding

Young children also show through their communication and behaviour that they understand what is said to them. This aspect of their growing communication abilities may also be called **comprehension** or **receptive language**. It is usual for toddlers and very young children to show that they understand more words and phrases in a meaningful context than they actually say themselves.

Key terms

Speech or **expressive language**

what children themselves say in words and later in phrases and sentences

Comprehension or **receptive language**

children's understanding of what is said to them. Young children show through their behaviour that they have grasped words, in context, that they do not yet say

Making meaning

It is possible to analyse the development of children's spoken language in terms of vocabulary and grammar. This more technical approach explores the words that young children use and how many in total they have at any given time. It is also possible and interesting to look at how a child's speech shows their grasp of grammatical structures in language, such as how to form a past tense or what is the more normal sentence order.

Yet children are very active in their learning and they are doing much more than passively absorbing words or grammatical forms. They are making meaning of their world and using the symbols of words to do so. Young children use words and put them together in phrases that are unique to them as individuals. Their mistakes in the words they use to describe their world show that they are thinking as well as speaking (see page 297).

Communication as social interaction

Children learn a very great deal in terms of words and phrases but they also learn the subtleties of communication.

- They use communication as a way to initiate social contact with others from the earliest months of babyhood. Communication is part of building close relationships.
- They learn social skills linked to language and gesture. Children also develop in terms of being able to listen, to take turns in a conversation and in learning social courtesies like not interrupting.
- They learn a range of uses for spoken language, depending on their everyday experiences. They can learn about using words to describe, to explain, to express an opinion or argue.
- Communication is part of social learning. Consequently girls and boys sometimes learn different patterns in using communication skills because these have been subtly used by the adults in their lives.
- Communication also links closely with children's intellectual development: how they are able to express their thoughts, use questions to explore and put words to abstract ideas (see page 361).

How do children learn language?

The vast majority of young children learn to speak and many around the world learn more than one language in their early years. There is no question that very young children manage to decode the language system and learn to communicate in meaningful words and gestures. However, there is no single theory about language acquisition that is able to explain fully how the young of our species manage this exciting task. The possible explanations include the following ideas.

Imitation

Learning theory (see page 15) attempts to explain children's acquisition of language through the principles of reward for imitation. The keen ability of babies and toddlers to imitate explains how babies' sound making moves towards the language that they hear rather than any other world language and that children develop an accent similar to the one they hear from adult speakers.

Learning through imitation will not work as a complete explanation, because toddlers soon produce word combinations that they have not heard from adults and other carers. Their creative, personal phrases and logical mistakes in

grammar are a source of endearing anecdotes and show that toddlers and young children are thinking and not only copying.

Reward

Another idea that works as a partial explanation is that very young children learn to speak because parents and other carers are enthusiastic about correct versions of the language. Toddlers definitely flourish with positive feedback and attention for their early attempts at language. However, supportive adults are more flexible than a reward–no reward schedule would predict. Parents and carers are enthusiastic about toddlers' early and inaccurate versions of words and their pronunciation. Indeed, when adults highlight most of children's mistakes or insist on correct versions, this pattern tends to inhibit children in communication rather than encourage them.

A rich experience of language

In order to talk, young children definitely need to hear spoken language and have opportunities to use what they learn. There have been cases of children whose childhood has been severely deprived, with very limited social contact and care. These children have not learned to speak in isolation.

Children need to hear plenty of language and to experience adults who are responsive to their early communication, because language is grounded in social interaction. Babies who experience infant-directed speech (see page 306) seem to develop some aspects of their language slightly faster. But infant directed speech is not found in every culture and children still learn to speak those languages.

Children's rate of language learning and their use of language both appear to be influenced by the communication behaviour of their parents, or other important carers. It matters how we communicate with children, and there are many practical suggestions in this chapter. But neither language theory nor research identifies an exact pattern of how adults should behave, so long as they are communicative, attentive and responsive with children.

An innate readiness for language

Language development is not completely explained through the details of children's experience. Several decades ago some theorists proposed that babies must be born with an innate biological readiness to learn language.

The idea of an inborn language system was supported initially by research that suggested that the pattern of language learning is very similar between the languages of the world. The innate language system theory was shaken when it became clear that language learning patterns were very different. However, more recently research into early brain development (see page 243) has supported this idea that babies' brains are pre-programmed to be sensitive to human language and to sounds. They have a readiness that is in no way ready-wired to any specific language.

Language and thinking

Theorists such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky approached language as it is linked with children's capacity to think and make meaning from their social world. There is certainly no complete agreement on how early language connects to children's understanding of what they experience through their senses. But young children use direct experience to link sounds with objects and people. Young children's use of speech seems to start as a means to guide themselves as the words accompany their actions or are a means to direct the interest and actions of their carers. For some time children and adults may use the same or similar words, but there is good reason to assume that different meanings are assigned.

In conclusion

It seems very likely that several theoretical explanations are needed for early language development. There does seem to be an innate predisposition for babies to be ready to learn spoken language. However, children's learning is also shaped by their experience of language, especially from the key adults in their environment. But it is equally important what children do with this experience; they are active linguists, just as they are active thinkers.

Communication of babies and toddlers

Early sound making

Communication starts from the early weeks and develops in complexity long before the first spoken words.

- Newborn babies' main form of communication is to cry but they also stare and make eye contact with the carer who holds them close to cuddle or feed.
- Parents and other familiar carers learn to recognise and distinguish cries of distress from calls for attention, and contented sounds from firm complaints.
- Over the first six months, babies' attempts at sound making become more deliberate and playful.
- By three to four months they may have a 'conversational exchange' with an adult who responds to the baby's sounds or smiles and then leaves space for the baby to reply.
- From six to twelve months, babies increasingly use sound and gesture to gain attention and to express feelings of pleasure, interest or complaint.

Babies from six to twelve months show a range of deliberate patterns of vocalisation. For instance:

- sounds when the baby is annoyed are different from when she is contented
- vocalisations that accompany simple actions, like giving
- calls for attention or help
- patterns of sound linked with a familiar game like 'peep bo'



Figure 11.2 Babies will show you how they feel long before they have words

- copying sounds that an adult or older sibling makes to the baby in playful communication.

Gestures of communication

Sounds are accompanied by meaningful gestures as babies communicate:

- requests to be given something
- reluctance or full refusal to cooperate
- a wish for social contact
- directing attention with pointing
- holding the attention of an adult or older child with sounds that amuse like blowing raspberries.

From sound making to words

During the period from six months to about a year of age, babies experiment with a lot of deliberate **babbling** of sounds and sequences of sounds. They also respond to the enthusiasm of adults and older children by repeating sounds close to real words. Many, but not all, babies develop expressive jargon around the time of their first birthday. **Jargon** is the term used to describe a string of word-like sounds, expressed with the intonation of speech. There are no 'real' words yet, but it sounds as if there should be.

The first words

The first recognisable words emerge on average any time from twelve to nineteen months. Before the actual words appear, you will often hear young children use the same sound combination to refer to people or objects.

The first single words are likely to be drawn from a young child's familiar environment and from experiences that hold his interest. So, all children do not produce the same first words (or later an identical pattern of phrases). But they may produce the same kinds of words, such as:

- names of people or family pets
- familiar objects that are of importance to a child, like a cup or spoon
- animal noises ('woof-woof' to mean dog) or sounds associated with an object of interest like a car.

Single words are used very flexibly by young children, so that one word, supported by tone of voice and gestures can convey potentially several different messages. These single words, heavy with meaning, are called **holophrases**. So, for example, a toddler who has the word 'dolly' may say this word in very different ways, accompanied by varied gestures and facial expressions. In this way an eighteen month old toddler can be very capable of using one word to indicate the message of 'where's my dolly?', 'she's taken my dolly!' or 'I'm happy to have my dolly back'.

It is very usual for young children to need time and practice to say words correctly. Toddlers and young children often say a word without the beginning sound ('poon' instead of spoon) or the end sound ('ca' instead of 'cat').

As well as words that name objects and people, young children learn words that are useful to them. For instance:

- 'More' or 'Na'one' (another one) can be used to ask for more food, the repeat of an enjoyable play action or be a comment on a similarity.
- 'Gone' or 'no more' can be a simple statement that something has gone, a

Key terms

Babbling

the early sound making, often very tuneful, of babies who are stringing together a series of sounds in a deliberate way

Jargon

the very expressive flow of word-like sounds that many babies make around about their first birthday

Key term

Holophrases

single words used flexibly by very young children, supported by tone and gesture to convey different meanings

**Figure 11.3**

Toddlers enjoy your full attention

request for help in finding something, a description that the toddler has made something disappear and other possibilities.

- Following the social gestures, toddlers often also learn social words such as ‘Thank you’ or ‘Ta’, ‘hello’, ‘hiya’ and other greetings.

Words combined into short phrases

With encouragement from adults or older siblings, toddlers add many more words so that by 20–24 months, sometimes younger, the first word combinations appear.

- The earliest short phrases tend to be communicated as if they are one word: ‘here’y’are’, ‘nomoren’ow’ or ‘allgonen’ow’.
- One word may be used as if it is a movable prefix: ‘moremilk’, ‘nomorebikky’ or ‘nobyebye’.
- Toddlers often make mistakes about words for objects or their short phrase. But such errors are usually logical and make sense if you know the child.

Activity (observation)

Gather examples of words and phrases from young children under two years of age. Focus on the mistakes that they make and see what sense you can make of this error in the light of this child’s experience. For instance:

- Young children often use a word in a sensible way but too broadly. Perhaps anything with wheels is a ‘car’ or everything that is furry and has four legs is a ‘cat’.
- They hear a phrase from an adult and pick the wrong word to use as a naming word: they hear ‘look at the lovely flowers’ and then call flowers ‘lovelies’.

Discuss the examples you gather with your colleagues or fellow students. How do the logical mistakes highlight how much children have learned?

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1a

Many of the early two word combinations only make sense in context and to a familiar adult. Even then you have to pay attention to how a child is saying the words, using tone and non-verbal clues as well as the words. The first combinations are not a random putting together of words; children show the beginnings of a grasp of basic grammar for the language they are learning. So, the early combinations are not the same structure in every language.

In English, the first combinations are often:

- one noun (naming words) and a second noun – ‘Mummy ball’ – which might mean ‘please get me the ball’ or ‘Mummy’s got the ball now’ and so on
- noun plus a verb (doing or action words) – ‘car gone’
- verb plus noun – ‘give drink’.

These are combinations that support the child’s desire to create meaning and to act on her environment.

Understanding of spoken language by babies and toddlers

Young babies are attuned to human speech, even before they are born.

- They turn to look towards the sound of a familiar voice.
- In the second half of the first year, older babies start to move their glance between people as the conversation shifts from one person to another.
- Babies and toddlers are alert to non-verbal clues of gesture, facial expression and following the gaze or the point from an adult.
- From six to twelve months they show signs of understanding very simple messages from carers about familiar routines.
- They show that they recognise a few names of everyday objects in context.

Towards the end of the first year and increasingly within the second year, babies and toddlers show that they understand a number of verbal and non-verbal requests so long as the context is familiar and the talker is known. They:

- are likely to come when called by their own name
- hand over a familiar object on request when an adult makes a ‘give me’ gesture with the hand and says something like, ‘Can I have the cup?’
- can reply by gesture if they want a biscuit or drink
- understand negatives like ‘No’ and ‘Don’t touch’, although they do not always comply.

Toddlers learn the routines, what usually happens, in familiar settings such as home or a day nursery. So, very young children only need to recognise one or two words and they grasp the remaining meaning from the familiar context. For example:

- ‘Put your tissue in the bin’: used tissues always go in the waste bin.
- ‘Let’s tidy up now’: it is routine in the day care centre that children put their plates and cups on the trolley when everyone has finished a meal.
- ‘No, don’t touch the video’: a young child knows from experience that this is not allowed.
- As toddlers start to control their own behaviour, they often use the same intonation and phrasing that has been said to them.

Throughout their second year of life, toddlers show an ever increasing ability to understand requests to fetch, show, give or find. They use their understanding of words but also the non-verbal communication from adults and older siblings.

- Initially toddlers' understanding is limited to the real object. They can point or look when asked, 'Where's Teddy?' or 'Where are your feet?'
- Then later they accept that pictures stand for objects or people and can point out familiar things by request in an illustration in a book or on a wall poster.
- By close to their second birthday, toddlers can often run very simple messages, for instance, to request something from an adult.
- They can fetch familiar objects from other rooms, which shows the operation of their short-term memory.
- Two and three year olds have gathered enough language experience that they are able to respond more to the words and are less dependent on context and non-verbal clues.

Activity (observation)

Organise yourself to undertake a series of observations of the communication development of a toddler. For instance, you could observe the same very young child at 12, 16, 20 and 24 months. Make a list on each occasion of this child's abilities of communication, using this section to guide you:

- What does she or he understand of what is said in a familiar context? Describe some examples each time.
- What meaningful sounds, early almost-words and recognisable words does the toddler use at each age when you observe?
- Share your observations with colleagues and discuss the variations between individual toddlers in the first words that they are motivated to learn and use and how they use their skills of communication.

Key skills link: C2/3.3 C3.1b

Communication skills of two to five year olds

Using different types of words

From two to three years it should be an increasingly tough job to list a child's vocabulary and examples of the phrases they use. Three year olds can have a working vocabulary of several hundred words, perhaps as many as 500. They add new words, create their own short phrases and ask questions. But the development of a two year old's language is more than how many words they say in total.

- A child's first set of words will be names of people and objects. By about two years of age, if the child has started talking by about 18 months, the words will start to include action words that describe what people are doing or what the child wants to have happen.
- Two year olds have usually started to use words to communicate very simple ideas. They show that they are ready to describe characteristics of the world around them, that mean something to a child.
- So the first ideas words are less likely to be about colour or shape than about hot, broken, tasty or nice (see page 368 about the development of abstract ideas and thinking.)

- Two and three year olds start to understand how objects relate together so that they may use words like 'in' or 'on' that describe simple connections between objects.
- Three and four year olds often develop interests that mean they learn a special vocabulary to reflect, for example, their interest in diggers, dinosaurs or different kinds of flowers.

Two to five year olds extend their applications of language to serve their play.

- Children use their language to think out loud and direct their own play. They need to speak their thoughts and find it very hard to keep quiet if something has interested or intrigued them.
- Self directing speech becomes a quiet mutter that older children, and even adults, tend to use when they are tackling a new or difficult task. Otherwise this type of language goes silent as **internal speech**.

Key term

Internal speech

when children's talking to guide their actions or think goes silent or almost silent

To think about

Supportive early years practitioners need to recall that, for young children, there is a very short gap between an interesting thought and wanting to say it out loud. Children work on and process their thoughts by speaking. If adults place too much emphasis on 'sitting quietly' and 'not calling out in a group', they may squash the thinking and communication skills that they want to encourage. See also the discussion on page 311.

- If you listen in to the pretend play of this age group, you will hear them discussing and negotiating play themes: who will be which character and how the plot will unfold. Their language is serving a social purpose in guiding their play.

Figure 11.4

When you are close you can see what children are talking about in their play



- Children continue to learn new words and now know enough to ask the meanings of words or speculate on fine differences, such as ‘what’s the difference between a wood and a forest?’
- Two, three and four year olds show that they enjoy using their communication skills to show and entertain. Young children may enjoy singing or saying rhymes, even in front of a group.
- But children vary in their level of confidence and this can be most noticeable when they are in unusual or more formal situations.
- Some children are successfully learning two or more languages (see page 312).

Activity (observation)

Listen to the spoken language of a child who has not long passed his or her second birthday. Make a list of all the words that he or she uses spontaneously and then divide them into three broad groups:

- words that name people or objects (nouns) like nose, dog or Mummy
- words that refer to action (verbs) like jump, eat or sing
- words that describe an object (adjective) or action (adverb) like big, cold, messy or fast.

Look at your own observation and compare observations that colleagues have also made.

- What is the relative size of your three groups?
- What kind of describing words make sense to just two year olds, what have they learned and now use?
- How do these observations guide you in supporting children’s early spoken language? Make a short presentation about tips for practice. For instance, there is no point in your pushing descriptive words about colour or shape when this child only has a small number of action words and no chosen describing words. He or she is not ready yet.
- Relate these ideas to your practice and plan any improvements. See also page 368.

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.1b LP2/3.1–3

Understanding of grammar

Young children learn new words at a fast rate between the ages of 20 to 30 months and they combine these in simple sentences.

- From about two and a half years of age, when young children have a sizeable vocabulary, they start to learn and use a very wide variety of grammatical structures and inflections that are particular to their language.
- Children learn both the regular and irregular grammatical forms by listening to what is said in their hearing. Adults can help by saying the correct form without pressing children to ‘say it right’.
- Many of children’s logical mistakes are now about generalising a regular grammatical rule to constructions that do not obey the usual rule. For example, children may say ‘badder’ rather than ‘worse’ or ‘I eated’ rather than ‘I ate’. You see the evidence of their logical thinking.

- Children, of course, learn the grammatical forms that they hear. Different versions of English, including dialects, often use variations in the basic grammar ('we was' rather than 'we were' or 'me' instead of 'I').

Use of language

Children use their substantial vocabulary in many ways.

- Even two and three year olds start to adjust their language depending on the listener. Young children talk in a different way among themselves, in contrast to their words and intonation with an adult.
- Two years old have usually grasped the pattern of asking questions as well as replying to them. They use question words and the questioning tone in their voice to ask 'What?' questions and later 'Where?', 'When?' and often a regular 'Why?'
- Three and four year olds often show that they can simplify what they say when talking to a much younger child. Their adjustment shows a sophisticated understanding about the abilities of babies or toddlers.
- Three and four year olds can be capable of forming sentences that serve different purposes: to describe, question or argue, to create negatives ('I didn't make that mess!') or to speculate and wonder.
- They use their communication skills to seek information and their skills of listening to gather new knowledge.
- The spoken language skills of three year olds and older reflect their thinking and how they identify what they do not know or understand. Their questions can become challenging to answer, such as 'How does the light come on when you switch it?' or 'Why did my Grandad have to die?'

Activity (observation)

Collect some examples (by writing notes or tape recording) of the spoken language of three and four year olds. Look especially for the ways in which they use their language. For instance to:

- describe what is happening in front of them
- recount something that has happened from the recent past
- request you or another child to do something
- ask questions, sometimes tough ones
- create a story or retell a familiar one
- explain, justify or argue
- speculate and wonder about how or why.

Use your observations for the following tasks.

- Consider with colleagues the richness of the language that you have gathered from some children.
- Share your findings with the parents of individual children.
- Discuss with colleagues how you might help children with limited uses of their language to extend somewhat.

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.1b C3.3 LP2/3.1–3



Understanding of language and ideas

As well as a complex spoken language, most children also show a broad understanding of what is said to them. Their communicative behaviour shows that they understand a considerable range of ideas.

- Two and three year olds still show that they understand in context more words than they actually use themselves. Sometimes, in a long adult sentence, children still pick out the key words.
- The gap tends to close between what the child says and what they understand. Four and five year olds tend to use the words that they fully understand from the speech of others. If they feel confident, they probably ask, 'What does that mean?' if they recognise an unfamiliar word.
- Three year olds become able to use language as a tool in itself. If you ask young two year olds the question, 'What is a ball?', they will look for an actual ball or a picture of one and show you. When you ask a three or four year old the same question, they are far more likely to understand that this is a request for an explanation in words. The child may say, 'It's for playing' or 'It bounces'.
- Within the same age children grow in understanding of everyday objects and what we do with them. Older two year olds may and three year olds will probably be able to pick out a picture of a bed or a doll's house size version when asked, 'Which one do we sleep in?'
- By their own words and reactions to adult questions, three and four year olds show that they have understood, or nearly understood, a wider range of abstract concepts, ideas about how the world can be described. Children's language reflects their thinking and this area is further discussed from page 361.
- For instance their words allow them to talk about what has happened in the recent past or what may happen in the future. A four year old's understanding is partly a grasp of the grammar that enables them to say, 'I went to my Gran's at the weekend' or 'Tomorrow can we go to the park again?' But if you think about it, these words are also a sign that the child understands the concept of time beyond the immediate present.

Understanding social communication

Children are also learning the 'rules' about communication, including listening to others and holding a conversation.

- Children's general communicative behaviour is shaped by their experience – for instance, whether adults have listened to them or have interrupted.
- Children, who have had very little experience of enjoyable conversations, do not learn the skills or the pleasure of chatting together.
- Three and four year olds who have experienced turn taking in communication are able to start, sustain and end a conversation with peers and with an adult. They show a wish to explain, tell and share items of interest and a willingness to listen to others, at least some of the time.

Children from five to eight years

Older children continue to extend their vocabulary: what they use themselves and what they understand.

Key term**Prosody**

the ability to use intonation patterns and emphasis to shift the meaning of a sentence with the same words

- These slightly older children comprehend some of the subtleties of spoken language. Six and seven year olds begin to learn that there are different versions of spoken language. They may be able to distinguish between ways of talking in a presentation in circle time or school assembly, realising that this form is different from informal conversation.
- Children learn best when the differences between versions of English are made explicit and their preferred spoken language is respected, rather than simply criticised as wrong.
- Five and six year olds are more able to control and direct the volume of their spoken language, whereas younger children find it hard to speak quietly.
- Five and six year olds usually understand how intonation patterns in speech can be shifted to change the meaning. The aspect of language is called **prosody** (see the box for an example). Children with speech and language difficulties linked with dyspraxia (see page 263) may have difficulties understanding how the meaning shifts with a different emphasis on the words.
- Children have extended into an understanding of written communication: writing and reading (see from page 342).
- They are beginning to grasp that some written language conventions are different from spoken and that writing can be used to different purposes.

Activity

- In order to understand the language skill of communicating meaning by intonation, take a simple sentence such as, 'I didn't say that she took my book'.
- Now say the sentence to a partner, but each time with an emphasis on a different word in the sentence. This list will help you; emphasise in turn the word that is in bold.
 - I didn't say that she took my book
 - I **didn't** say that she took my book
 - I didn't **say** that she took my book
 - I didn't say that **she** took my book
 - I didn't say that she **took** my book
 - I didn't say that she took **my** book
 - I didn't say that she took my **book**
- What does this do to the meaning? How does it sound to the speaker and to the listener in your pair?
- What does this activity tell you about the subtle learning in communication?

Key skills links: C3.1a

The phonological system

Children who learn to talk have worked hard to hear and then say the sounds that make up the language. The phonological system in the language is the pattern of sounds that are combined to make words. Young children have to learn not only single sounds such as 's', 'c' or 'r' but also the combination that is created by all three at the beginning of the word 'scream' or 'scrunchy'.

Many enjoyable play and early literacy activities described in this chapter support children to develop **phonological awareness**, that is the understanding that spoken words are made up of syllables ('snowman' breaks up into 'snow' and 'man') and individual sounds (dog is made up of d-o-g). Children do not usually manage to split the individual sounds until they are about five years old, but they do tune into the separate syllables and manage to hear the beginning and end sounds of words.

In order to master the sound system, children need to be able to hear the words clearly and have plenty of practice in speaking, without being pressured to say words correctly. Help and encouragement means that most seven year olds will have mastered all the sounds they need. Even when children are five or six years of age, a few problems are not unusual, although early years practitioners and parents should not wait too long to see if your support will solve the difficulty. Languages often have some more difficult sounds or combinations. In English, the tough groups tend to include sounds made with the letters 's', 'f' and 'th' or 'r', 'l', 'w' and 'y'.

Key term

Phonological awareness

the understanding that spoken words are composed of separate syllables and sounds

Supporting the development of children's communication

In this section you will find many specific suggestions on how to help children's communication at different ages and through a variety of activities and opportunities. However, there are some practical guidelines that apply across every situation and these relate to how you behave as a communicative and interested adult.



Figure 11.5

Warm communication with babies is so important

Tips for practice

- Be close to babies and children and at their eye level. Show your interest and pay attention. Children will then believe that you are genuinely interested and will imitate your attentive behaviour.
- Create an environment in which it is easy to attend: listening and looking. Sometimes enjoyable activities will be higher volume but children cannot communicate if noise levels are always high. Everybody just learns to shout.
- Avoid continuous background noise of any kind. Children can enjoy and learn from music and selected tapes or television that are a clear cut activity. Children are not 'stimulated' by non-stop background music, radio or television. It turns into sound wallpaper and is no longer distinctive as a pattern of interesting sounds.
- Set a good example in communication. Children learn to listen because they have experienced adults, and other children, who have listened to them. They learn to hold genuine conversations because adults have shown an interest.
- Be even handed in your communication with boys and girls. Boys may show less interest in conversation if adults rarely talk about what interests the boys.
- If you are not yourself bilingual, then recognise that learning more than one language in childhood is normal for many children around the world. Children benefit from help but being bilingual is *not* a 'problem'.

Very early communication with babies and toddlers

Babies are ready for social interaction and basic communication exchanges with their carers from the earliest weeks and months. They look and listen and are keen to take part in the give and take that can become a very early 'conversation'.

Use infant directed speech

Babies respond well to **infant directed speech**, a form of communication that is adjusted to the interest and hearing of babies. You communicate through infant directed speech when you:

- Speak slightly higher pitched than your normal speaking voice. You just pitch up a bit – not so much as to sound like a cartoon character!
- Go at a slightly slower pace than conversation with older children and certainly more slowly than with adults.
- Make pauses in which you look expectantly at the baby as if to say, 'Your turn now'.
- Keep what you say simple and say it in short phrases.
- Talk with simple repetitions and a circling quality to what you say, for instance, 'Well, how are you? You've just woken up. You've woken up from a nice sleep. Did you have a good doze then?'
- Speak with extra expressiveness, compared with normal conversation.

When you watch somebody who is at ease with babies, you will observe how they use infant directed speech and how much babies like and respond to this

Key term

Infant directed speech

the adjusted form of language used by adults and some older children to communicate with babies

affectionate communication. Adults, and older siblings, who adjust their speech patterns for babies and toddlers in this way are also paying close attention to the younger ones. This behaviour creates a warm relationship within which babies can feel secure and will learn.

This adjusted form of communication was initially called 'motherese', because the researchers who identified the pattern only observed mother and baby pairs in their research project. The term is inaccurate since infant directed speech is not only used by mothers. Both men and women, and also older children, are capable of this kind of sensitivity to the needs of babies.

Activity

- Practise using infant directed speech with a baby of between 3 and 6 months.
- Follow the ideas in this section to engage the baby's attention.
- It does not matter what you say, babies are interested in any 'topic'. The key point is to have a happy turn taking exchange.
- Present your ideas to colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1a

Listening and talking with children

Young children need to hear words used clearly in a relevant context so that they can:

- understand the word and link it to familiar events, people and situations
- imitate the word, with understanding
- spontaneously use the word in context.

In this way, new words and phrases become part of the active vocabulary of young children.

Unless children are delayed in their language development, you would not set out to help them learn a list of words. You simply use all the opportunities in daily routines and play. Of course, you should not deluge children with so much of your talk that they cannot get a word in edgewise. Be wise, listen and look and use those opportunities that arise. You can:

- Name what you are doing or giving a child, for instance, 'Here's your shoes' or 'Are you ready for more apple?'
- Comment naturally on the choices of a toddler that are shown by gesture or very early words. For example, 'Yes! Here comes Mummy' or 'Do you want the book? You'd like Spot again?'
- Keep your words simple and closely related to what is in front of you and a young child. Use gestures to support your words.
- Respond positively to the toddler's own version of words but there is no need for you to use 'baby' versions like 'gee-gee' for 'horse'. Respond to the child's own words but do not introduce bikkie for biscuit on the grounds that it will be easier to say – it may not be.
- Expand appropriately on what a young child says. For example, a child's comment of 'Paul coat' can be expanded with, 'Yes, that's Paul's coat'.

As young children learn words and phrases you can build on what they know already:

- Make communication a two-way experience, even with the youngest child. You need to talk with children but you need to listen just as much. Children who are ‘talked at’ do not learn to communicate so easily.
- Use child-focused timing and go at the child’s own pace. Look expectant as you wait for a child’s reply in gesture and words.
- Talk with young children as individuals and use their name. Under threes do not learn well by being treated mainly as a group member rather than an individual.
- Talk directly with children and listen to their views about topics that interest them. Young children are focused on the here and now.

Children will make many mistakes in pronunciation and usage of words. It does not help to correct them in a critical way but children learn from accurate language feedback.

- If children have their own way of saying a word, then do not imply that they are wrong. Say the word clearly and correctly as you reply.
- So, if a child hands you a spoon and says, ‘poon’ then you can say, ‘Yes, it’s a spoon. Thank you.’ If a child calls a train a choo-choo, then reply with, ‘Yes, it’s a train, it goes choo-choo’ and maybe do the movements.
- You can suggest or give children words if they are struggling (‘Is it the ... that you want?’)

Figure 11.6

Young children simply enjoy a chat



Sensible use of questions

Questions have a place in communication: from the child to you and from you to the child. But you do not want your use of questions to unbalance communication. Questions come in two broad types:

- Closed questions to which there is really only one answer, such as 'Do you want some more mashed potato?' or 'What shape is this?'
- Open-ended questions to which there could be a number of possible answers, such as 'you know a lot about sharks, how did you find out so much?' or 'how are we going to catch that rabbit?'

There are times in the day and daily routine when you need to ask sensible closed questions about food preferences, choice of stories or songs or the practical questions such as, 'Do you remember where we keep the rolling pins?' Sometimes early years practitioners are tempted to use many closed questions to check a child's learning or to extend play in directions that make sense to an adult. Children feel under pressure if they are asked many of these testing questions, such as, 'What colour is this car?' or 'how many bricks have you got?' Children do not mind a few of such questions but they soon shut down their attention if they cannot play anywhere without having an adult question them.

Over use of questions usually arises when early years practitioners are keen to extend children's learning and not relaxed enough to go with the flow of what emerges from a routine or play activity.

To think about

You can make comments and share ideas as well as ask questions. But do not overdo the commentary. Bernadette Duffy tells a valuable story against herself in her book on creativity. She tells how five year old Shayma brought a drawing but held it behind her back. The exchange went as follows:

Shayma: I want to show you something

BD: Oh let me see, show me.

Shayma: *But* only show you if you promise not to ask me to tell you about it

BD: What do you mean?

Shayma: Every time I show you something you say, 'Oh it's lovely, do tell me about it!' Sometimes I just want to show you my drawings, not tell you about them, sometimes they're for looking at.

What could you learn from the cautionary tale that Bernadette Duffy has shared?

Source: Bernadette Duffy (1998) *Supporting Creativity and Imagination in the Early Years* Open University Press (p. 100).

- Ensure that your use of language is not biased to question asking. Look at page 302 on children's use of language. Are you using all these ways to communicate?
- Ask questions to which you do not know the answer and where you would like to know that answer. For instance, you might ask, 'how did you manage to get that lovely swirly pattern?', 'which route shall we take to the market today?' or 'I wonder why Flopsy keeps running away today'.

- Be sparing with any testing questions because children do not learn faster, or at all easily, by being asked many questions by adults who want to check whether a child knows something. A good guide can be to consider whether you would ask an adult this question.

Promoting children's conversations

The skills needed for a conversation include talking, listening, linking what you say to what the other person has just said and being patient to wait your turn. Children can learn these skills and you can help:

- Have quiet time and quiet areas indoors and outside where children and adults can just chat together.
- Model good social skills yourself by listening, taking turns and showing a genuine interest in what a child wants to introduce into the conversation.
- Go with the flow of a conversation rather than directing it for adult ends.
- Be willing to contribute personally yourself if a child asks you questions like, 'Did you have a nice weekend?' (a question we often ask of children).
- Help children to take turns in a conversation when they find it hard. You can gently say, 'Hold on a moment. Theo hasn't finished yet ... now you're on, Jessica.'

Conversations flourish in an interesting early years environment. Children enjoy talking about real events, solving real problems in the setting, exchanging views and experiences and reminiscing about happy shared past experiences. Sometimes children will want to explore sensitive experiences with you through a conversation. Supportive communication can help children who face distress or major changes in their lives and this area is covered on page 220.

Communication in a group

Early years settings often have a time of the day when children are brought together in a group for stories, songs or guided conversation about issues – see the discussion about circle time that follows. A group time can work for children but it requires some thought by adults, including a realistic perspective on what the experience is like for the children.

- Under threes and certainly under twos cannot make sense of group time. Their communication skills are geared to enjoyable one-to-one talking and listening and they cannot manage the waiting time involved in even a small group.
- Three, four and five year olds can enjoy a group time, so long as the group is not more than 8–10 children maximum with an adult. If you are trying to run larger groups it is better to divide and assign an adult to each small group.
- Larger groups (see the example in the scenario) are too distracting for physical reasons: children are often squashed together on a mat, with somebody's elbow in their back. Discomfort does not promote enjoyable communication.
- The problem with large groups is also that children have to tolerate a very low level of interaction with the adult. Children need to have opportunities to express their thoughts in spoken words (see page 302) and in a large group calling out and not waiting becomes 'disruptive behaviour' rather than an expression of interest.

Scenario

The team of Greenholt Pre-school has been re-thinking the group time that has been part of the routine in the setting.

It has been usual that all the children, sometimes as many as 25, are brought together on a large mat for a story and discussion at the end of the session. There are some very articulate children in the current group and Marjorie has become concerned that group time has become too much 'crowd control'. Furthermore some children are being seen as 'demanding' and 'disruptive' because they are so keen to express views and share personal experiences. In a team meeting, Trisha also points out that none of the adults would feel able to concentrate if they were sitting so much on top of each other and were told off for speaking out of turn. Stephanie also suggests that they should stop calling this part of the day 'circle time' unless they are able to run the activity properly.

The team experiment with creating three groups and taking one group each, rather than all sitting together. They plan ahead to cover similar, although not identical discussion topics in the smaller group time, but allowing children to choose different books for a story. The smaller groups soon work much better. The children have more scope for contribution and any waiting time to express opinions and thoughts is much reduced. Marjorie, Stephanie and Trisha find they now enjoy the group time much more; it feels like enjoyable interaction rather than control.

Questions

- 1 How large a group do you and your colleagues try to run? If you spend a lot of time telling children to be quiet or wait, then the group is probably too large.
- 2 Step back and try to look at group time with a fresh perspective. Would you be able to concentrate under the group time conditions for the children?
- 3 Discuss and plan some possible changes with your colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1a

Using circle time to promote communication

Circle time is a set time in the day when you sit comfortably with the children in a small group to talk about or show something of interest. Circle time works when practitioners in early years settings or schools have a plan of what they will do in this time over the days and weeks. Children then need to be allowed to influence the actual flow of conversation each day.

There are many good ideas for themes and activities in circle time (see the information box below), but these only work through the ground rules of considerate communication. Three and four year olds can begin to understand and practise good communication skills of:

- listening to each other: using their ears and waiting their turn
- looking at each other with their eyes – because we learn by looking as well as listening

- speaking to express ideas, views and feelings
- thinking with their minds and then expressing those thoughts
- concentrating by looking and listening to the adult and to friends.

Positive communication skills are the foundation for an enjoyable circle time and you need to set a good example through your own behaviour. For instance:

- Help children to take a turn in speaking by passing a talking stick or establishing a rule that all speakers – adults too – need to have teddy on their lap.
- Affirm children as they use good skills, including, ‘Dorcas, thank you for waiting’ or ‘Maria, that’s a good idea. I can hear that you’ve been thinking hard’.
- If children find it hard to speak up, they may be able to talk through a puppet of a happy/sad paper plate face.
- Take suitable opportunities to express your feelings and opinions, without of course tipping the balance away from children’s communication. You might want to use circle time to thank children for their kindness to you when you broke your arm.

It is very important that circle time is run in a courteous way that models good communication. Certainly circle time should not be used to tell children off in front of their peers. Even when children go against the communication ground rules, you need to alert them in a considerate way. For instance, if two children are whispering to each other and not listening, then you need to restate the rule positively, with a comment like, ‘Whispering stops us hearing what each person is saying. Let’s try that again’. Circle time can also be used to promote positive behaviour (see page 496).

Find out more

You can find a wide range of useful materials about circle time from these publishers:

- 1 Lucky Duck Publishing Ltd tel: 0117 9732881 website: www.luckyduck.co.uk
 - 2 Jenny Mosley Consultancies tel: 01225 719204 website: www.circle-time.co.uk
- Both sites give information about publications to buy.
 - The Jenny Mosley Consultancies website has some material you can download. Access some items and plan how you could use the ideas in your own practice.

Key terms

Bilingual children

children who are able to, or are in the process, of learning two or more languages

Simultaneous

bilingual learning

when children learn two languages at the same time from a very young age

Key skills links: IT2/3.1–3

Bilingual children

Bilingualism has a long history in the UK with speakers of Welsh, Scottish and Irish Gaelic. More bilingual families arrived as a result of migration to the UK from other parts of the world during the second half of the twentieth century. Depending on their family experience, children learn to be bilingual in one of two ways:

- **Simultaneous bilingual learning:** children learn two languages most likely within their family from a very young age.

- **Successive bilingual learning:** children, who have a good grasp of their family language, then learn a second language when they join an early years setting or go into school.

Diversity of languages is a reality in many urban areas of the UK. Some cities have primary schools where 90 per cent of the children are bilingual. In London it is estimated that more than 300 different languages are spoken across the city and some schools have 40–50 languages represented in the families whose children attend.

Key term

Successive bilingual learning

when children who have a good grasp of their family language, then learn a second language

To think about

A living language is part of cultural identity. A generation ago the future of Welsh looked precarious, since it was spoken only in limited areas of the country. However, a commitment to promote the language, backed by government finance, has made Welsh one of the most successful of Europe's regional languages, spoken by more than half a million of the country's three million inhabitants. The commitment was reflected in making Welsh prominent in the national curriculum for Wales and a system of dual language on road signs and official documents.

You may be asked for advice by a parent in a bilingual family about the best approach for a very young child. The general guidelines are that:

- Young children are clearly capable of learning two languages and bilingualism has only been seen as a 'problem' by adult monolingual speakers.
- Children who are becoming bilingual sometimes go through a period where they muddle words or grammar between the two languages. But bilingual children soon reach the same level of language ability as their monolingual peers.
- Children need to have the languages clearly distinguished. It helps if one parent or another relative is consistently the person who speaks one language to the child. The second language is consistently spoken by another member of the family.
- It is best if adults speak their most fluent language to the child.
- Children also benefit from time spent with child speakers of the language as well as adults. Children use any language in different ways from adult speakers.

Tips for practice

Helping children to learn an additional language

Many children learn English as an additional language (EAL) in an early years setting or on entry to school. Children have an immense capacity to learn but they do not just 'pick up' a second language, or in some cases their third language, without some help.

Children will feel reassured when early years practitioners take the trouble to learn some words of greeting and comfort in the child's first language. Some

settings will be fortunate and have a fluent speaker of the family language on the team. But often, especially in urban areas with great ethnic diversity, there will be many languages that no team member speaks. A range of mail order companies offer useful resources to support your work, including dual language books for adults that provide useful words and phrases for you to learn and use, when you do not know the child's home language, multi-language signs, wall friezes and posters. See page 672 for a list of organisations.

Confidence in English as a shared language will open up real possibilities for children and the process can respect and acknowledge the family language(s). You can help in all these ways:

- Remember that a three or four year old learning a second language is in a very different position to a one year old learning the first. Look at the section on two to five year olds (page 299) and remind yourself that the potentially bilingual child has these ideas and abilities in his or her first language. The challenge is to express ideas, wishes and feelings in a new language.
- Children will assume that the words they hear are directly relevant to what they see in front of them. You can help by ensuring that you talk about the objects, events and activities that children can see and hear at this moment.
- Use your non-verbal communication of looking, pointing and gestures to support what you say.
- Keep your language simple and sentences short. You need to speak appropriately for the age of the child but communicate small amounts at a time. Speak at normal volume and avoid 'broken English'; the aim is to be clear and simple.
- Do not press children to talk in English. It is usual for children to spend time, perhaps a long time, listening before they speak. Encourage them by involving them by words, smiles and gestures. You will observe their interest and attention. Children who are listening and looking will take in language information and start talking when they are ready.
- At that point, you need to encourage children to talk and not worry too much about correct formats. Accept what they say and rephrase it if necessary as you make your next contribution to the conversation. Let children hear clear and correct language from you and they will self correct themselves, so long as they feel secure in your setting.
- Children who are becoming bilingual often imitate useful phrases that are common in an early years setting, such as, 'good morning', 'well done', 'let's have a look at ...'. When you listen to young bilingual children you will hear your most used phrases. The rhythm and repetition of songs and chants will also help the children.
- Children need to play happily with other children. They will sometimes gravitate towards speakers of their family language and it would be wrong to discourage chosen friendships. But try to look as well for ways to promote friendships across the languages.

Activity (observation)

Young children in play use non-verbal clues to follow play and their friends can then help them. But what are the most useful phrases for a child to learn in order to support play?

- In your setting, listen in to exchanges between three and four year olds who share a language.
- Make a note of any common phrases – they might be ‘Can I have ...?’, ‘Do you want to ...?’ or ‘I’ve got a ...’.
- Share your observations with colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 C2/3.1a

Scenario

Dresden Road Nursery School has just admitted four year old Nur whose family has recently moved from Turkey. Nur's father is bilingual Turkish–English and her mother has some English but is far less fluent. Nur has one or two words of English and according to her father is very articulate and communicative in Turkish.

None of the Dresden Road team speak any Turkish and they wish to have a plan to support Nur as she settles into the nursery. The team have a list of questions to address:

- How can we welcome Nur and her family? They wonder about Turkish phrases they could learn – which would be the most useful?
- Are there ways to give a welcome and make Nur feel included by our displays, range of play materials, books and dual language signs in the setting?
- How can we encourage Nur to make social contact with her peers or younger children if she wishes? What activities could be least dependent on a shared fluent language?
- What could be the first useful English phrases for Nur to ease her social interaction?

Questions

- 1 Consider two or more of the issues that the Dresden Road team want to address. Draw up a list of suggestions for practical steps.
- 2 Discuss your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: PS3.1 C3.1a

Figure 11.7

Adult attention supports children's communication in different contexts



Difficulties in language development

Children vary considerably in when they show new skills in their language development and how they use their broad communication skills.

- Some children are quiet or reticent by temperament. Apparent 'limited language' may be more an issue about making sure that they have enough peace and adult attention to speak up with their comments or opinions.
- Some children's limited use of their language may relate to their limited conversational experience. You should be able to build this through a range of activities and attention to the children on their growing interests.
- You need a developmentally appropriate balance so you do not worry too soon but also do not miss difficulties that need some help.
- Some children are later starters on language than others but you need to ensure that you, and a child's parents, do not continue to think, 'he'll come along soon' when the months are rolling by.
- It is hard for unfamiliar adults to understand a two year old they do not know. But once children are past their third birthday, they should be understandable to an adult who speaks the same language with a similar accent, perhaps with a little bit of tuning, in time but not much.
- Young children do struggle with some sounds in the early years, especially those that sound similar, like *f* and *s*. With practice and adult patience and support, five and six year olds should be able to manage the sound range. Problems that persist with **articulation** and a wide range of struggles at a younger age need some specialist help.

Key term

Articulation

how children say the sound system that makes up the words in their language



You should be ready to discuss any worries that you have about a child's broad communication abilities.

- First of all talk with your colleagues in an early years or school setting and your manager.
- You may decide that a detailed observation of the child would give you more information and perhaps put your concerns to rest.
- You also need to talk with the child's parent(s) in a relaxed conversation that brings in the parent's experience of their own child.
- In some situations, you will all have enough concern that another professional opinion, or help, will be appropriate. But it is the parents' choice to agree to a consultation or referral to a speech and language therapist. See Chapter 18 about the process of working with children with special needs.

Tips for practice

Children who choose not to talk

Some children choose not to talk, although they are able to communicate. Children who make this choice are described as being elective (or selective) mutes: choosing to remain silent. You cannot make a child talk, nor should you try to put pressure on a child, however frustrating it may feel. One practical way forward includes:

- Talk with the child's parent and find out what the child is like at home. In some cases a child is communicative at home and even enthusiastic about the setting in which she or he resolutely refuses to talk.
- This information can put your mind at rest, although you may never know why the child chooses to be silent with you. Sometimes children feel ill at ease in an early years setting or simply would rather be at home.
- Try to relax and avoid getting irritated with the child. Continue to involve and invite her. Ignore the fact that she is not talking, but do not ignore her as a child. Welcome and include the child with words and gestures.
- If the child finally chooses to talk, take this change quietly and avoid any drama or questions of the child.
- Seek for any links with home through partnership with the parents. Perhaps the child would like to bring in something to show when there is a sharing in circle time. She could then show but not do any telling.

Stammering

When young children are learning to talk, their speech does not run smoothly all the time. Some three and four years noticeably stop to think of a word or start at the beginning of their thought once more. Temporary problems with **fluency** can get worse if children are put under pressure by impatient adults, but mainly children gain in confidence and language skills.

The British Stammering Association estimates that about 5 per cent of children under five years have difficulties with fluency that are severe enough to call a stammer. The difficulty is about four times more common with boys than girls. Most children emerge with adult patience and support and become more fluent in their speech, but about 25 per cent do not stop stammering and need some specific help from a speech and language therapist.

Key term

Fluency

how easily a child's speech flows. Some problems of fluency are a normal part of early language development

Stammering shows in different kinds of difficulty with fluency in a child's speech.

- Children may have trouble starting what they wish to say. Sometimes you see the silent struggle for several seconds before the first words come out in a rush.
- Children may develop a kind of non-verbal stammering as they struggle for words, for instance, facial tics, gasps or blinking.
- Their speech may emerge in a jerky way or they get out part of what they want to tell you and then stop.
- Words or sounds are repeated – like the first sound of a word (t-t-t-teddy) – or stretched out like verbal elastic (sssstory).

Stammering can become more than a speech difficulty, since the problem of fluency can undermine a child's confidence. Stammering sometimes runs in families and is found in many different languages and cultures.

Tips for practice

- Reassure parents about the importance of a patient approach, while acknowledging that the child does have fluency difficulties.
- Give the child time, show that you are listening, are not about to rush away and are interested.
- Slow your rate of speech to create a relaxed feel to your exchange.
- Avoid putting pressure on the child by your words, asking lots of questions or impatient body language.
- If the child raises the issue, then acknowledge that he or she is having some difficulties but show confidence that you will help the child.

You would not assume that all children with fluency difficulties would develop stammering. Giving children time, attention and patience will usually work well. Children should be referred to a speech therapist sooner rather than later for help if:

- there is a family history of stammering
- the child is having more general problems in learning to talk
- the child is distressed by his difficulties, showing severe struggles to get his words out or a great deal of non-verbal stammering
- he is learning a second language and is already stammering in his first.

Activity

- Find out more about children who stammer and how you can help.
- Write up a plan for practical activities, including positive adult behaviour towards children.
- You can contact:
 - The British Stammering Association, who offer advice and practical leaflets. You can reach the BSA at 15 Old Ford Road, London E2 9PJ tel: 020 8983 1003 helpline 0845 603 2001 website: www.stammering.org
 - The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children, Finsbury Health Centre, Pine Street, London EC1R 0LP tel: 020 7530 4238 www.stammeringcentre.org

Key skills links: IT2/3.1–3

Disabilities that affect speech

Children who are deaf

The National Deaf Children's Society uses the word *deaf* to cover all types of hearing loss, including temporary loss such as from glue ear.

Children need to be able to hear in order to learn to speak with ease. It is not at all easy to be sure whether a baby or toddler has some level of hearing loss because they may be adept at following non-verbal clues by gesture. Adults may reasonably assume for some time in the second year of life that this toddler is just a bit slower than average in learning to talk. It can also seem hard to get the attention of a very absorbed toddler, so it may be some months before it becomes clear that the child is unaware that someone has spoken to them.

If a child is deaf, then the sooner you are aware the sooner it is possible to start other forms of communication including learning signing systems such as Makaton. About 840 children are born each year in the UK with profound hearing loss and currently about 400, close to half of these children, do not have their hearing loss detected until they are more than a year old and a further 200 until about three years old. The distraction test used so far at the 8–9 month developmental check has been unreliable in picking up more than a proportion of babies with hearing loss. From 2001 the Universal Neonatal Hearing Screening test will be phased in for newborns and this test is far more accurate.

Ear infections and variable hearing loss

Children sometimes experience variable hearing rather than permanent hearing loss or a measurable percentage of loss. Variable hearing is a problem to children because adults may view them as inattentive or lazy. Yet the children do not know what the matter is; they cannot judge that they have variable hearing.

Ear infections should always be taken seriously because persistent infection can cause perforations (burst eardrums), which, although they heal, can leave scarring. Scar tissue is less sensitive to sound vibrations and reduces the quality of hearing. Recurrent middle ear infections can cause a condition called glue ear in which the eustachian tubes in the ear become blocked with fluid that has not drained. If the fluid needs to be drained by a doctor, they will often advise that grommets are fitted at the same time. These tiny hollow tubes of plastic allow the fluid to drain if it builds up again.

Finding out more

The NDCS (National Deaf Children's Society) has a wide range of leaflets to guide adults in how to help children who are deaf. Contact them at 15 Dufferin Street, London EC1Y 8PD Information and helpline: 0808 800 8880 website: www.ndcs.org.uk

Tips for practice

Some good practice that will specifically help deaf children:

- Use your skills of observation to explore any signs that a child may not be able to hear or that attention seems to vary from day to day.
- Gather information and discuss the situation with your manager and the child's parents.
- In partnership with parents, make contact with the Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO) for your setting or from the advisory team for your area.

Other good practice will have much in common with helping all children to attend and be able to communicate:

- Be patient with a child and ensure you have his attention by words, touch and gesture before you continue.
- Show, as well as tell, by gesture and words.
- Face a child on his eye level, speak clearly and a bit slower than normal speed. But otherwise speak normally.
- Speak at normal volume. Avoid raising your voice and definitely do not shout. Such changes make it more difficult for a deaf child to understand you, not any easier.
- Take your time and ensure that the child understands what you have communicated. Equally, make sure that you understand what a child has communicated to you. It is unhelpful to any child to believe adults have understood when they have not.
- Learn a form of **sign language**, such as the Makaton system that is mainly used with younger children. Continue to talk as well as sign. The child may be able to form words and your double communication serves to include other children.
- Encourage and help other children to learn to sign so that they can communicate with their peer.
- In group activities such as circle time, it can help a deaf child if everyone puts up their hand to signal when they are about to speak.

Key term**Sign language**

a form of communication that uses agreed signs, made with fingers and hands, to convey words and concepts

Finding out more

The Makaton Vocabulary Development Project is a good source of information and runs courses on learning the Makaton sign system. Contact them at 31 Firwood Drive, Camberley, Surrey GU15 3QD tel: 01276 61390 website: www.makaton.org

Physical difficulties

Some children can understand perfectly and they want to speak, but physical difficulties are getting in their way. Children need to be able to coordinate the movements of jaws, lips and tongue to make different sounds.



Activity

- Experiment with saying different sounds and combinations of sounds to experience directly what happens with your mouth.
- For instance, what has to work with your tongue, lips and roof of your mouth to say, 'cat', 'ready', 'yesterday' or other words.
- It is useful to appreciate the combination of movements that are necessary.

Children with cleft palate may need therapy to help them to pronounce certain sounds. Children with cerebral palsy may need similar help because their condition affects their ability to direct movements and muscles (see Chapter 18). A speech and language therapist will help the child and should share ideas with the child's parent and with you so that practical help can be continued through the child's ordinary day.

Sight and communication

Children who are blind have to experience the world through touch, whatever sight they have, and the efforts of helpful adults to make direct links between what is said and what children can experience through their other senses. You should get practical advice from the SENCO of your setting or local advisory team about helping children who have total or partial visual loss. Some basic ideas are given in the tips for practice box.

Tips for practice

- Get the child's attention by using her name and other words before you move to any instructions or play. You have to keep recalling that the child has no visual information or the world is very blurry to her.
- Use simple commentary to tell a child what is happening as you help her with physical care, playing or moving around your setting. Your words and touch have to substitute for visual information.
- It is hard for a child to work out the naming of familiar objects when there is a confusing mix of real size and play size. Try to have real cups and plates until a child is able to understand about little and big versions.
- Help a child to feel safe moving around, because the lack of visual feedback and ability to check can make a child feel uncertain.
- Look at your environment and organise it so that a child with limited vision can learn the feeling landmarks and move around.
- Young children may need a lot of encouragement to reach out for toys or objects of interest. Help them move their hand out to feel.
- Visually impaired children need the information from their hands and the centre of the hand is the most sensitive.
- Help children to practise listening. Visually impaired children may fidget with their hands, so you may need to say, 'Katie, listen' and hold her hands.

Finding out more

The RNIB is a valuable source of information on supporting children who are blind or have some level of visual loss. Contact them at 224 Great Portland Street, London W1N 6AA tel: 020 7388 1266 website: www.rnib.org.uk

Non-specific language disabilities

Sometimes there is no obvious reason why a child is struggling with language development. Your observational skills and records kept in an early years setting will be important to identify children who may understand what is said to them but are not progressing in their own expressive communication through speech. Some children start to talk but do not manage longer sentences, persist in putting words in the wrong order at an age when their peers can manage or struggle to use words to express ideas. When such problems persist the child will need specific help and you and the child's parents will need some specialised input.

Finding out more

AFASIC is an organisation that supports children to overcome speech and language disorders: 69–85 Old Street, London EC1V 9HX tel: 020 7841 8900 website: www.afasic.org.uk

Further resources

Acredolo, Linda and Goodwyn, Susan (1997) *Baby Signs* Hodder and Stoughton.

Arnberg, Leonie (1987) *Raising Children Bilingually: The pre-school years* Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Murray, Lynne and Andrews, Liz (2000) *The Social Baby: Understanding babies' communication from birth*, The Children's Project.

Quilliam, Susan (1994) *Child Watching: A parent's guide to children's body language* Ward Lock.

Progress check

- 1 Describe three ways in which children and adults could communicate through body language.
- 2 Give four examples of how young children may make logical mistakes in their words or simple grammar.
- 3 Explain briefly what is infant directed speech and why it is important to communicate with babies in this way.
- 4 Suggest three practical ways in which you could help a four year old who was learning English as an additional language.
- 5 Describe three ways in which a child's disability could affect communication.

12

Supporting children's development of literacy

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the range of skills that children need in preparation for reading and writing
- encourage very young children towards an enthusiasm for books and stories
- work within realistic expectations for literacy learning
- support children in the early stages of literacy
- recognise problems in this area of development and support children.

Introduction

As well as grasping all the details of spoken communication, children also have to understand and use the written form of their language(s). The foundations for later literacy can start with babies and toddlers and their interest in books, stories and early mark making. With support, children can develop their interests and skills of literacy, both recognising the written word and producing writing themselves. This chapter will help you to gain a full understanding of this area of learning and to support literacy learning, without putting undue pressure on young children.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 2, 4, 5, 10

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C9

Level 3: C11, C24

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 7, 9, 22



The development of literacy

Children who have become confident in the spoken word have another major task ahead of them, that of learning to cope with the written word: recognising and reading words and writing actual words themselves. Supportive adults need to acknowledge that this is a challenging task for children and to understand the many different skills that support literacy.

When will children become literate?

Obviously, part of your support is to remain realistic about the age at which children are likely to become confident in reading and writing. Some of the pressures in the English early years curriculum have raised the expectation that four year olds should be reading. A few early and enthusiastic readers do emerge at four years, but for the majority of children this expectation is definitely too early.

- With the kind of activities described in this section, four and five year olds can have grasped what writing looks like and be enthusiastic about learning to read.
- They can be interested in making meaningful marks and tell you that the marks say something in particular, and they may be able to write their own name.
- However, managing to read and write with confidence and fluency is a challenging task that most children will not start to manage until closer to six years of age. English is also a particularly difficult language in terms of spelling and grammar (see page 339).
- You will see children's skills and understanding improving over this period. Seven and eight year olds should be able to read and write, although some will be finding this easier or more enjoyable than others.
- Some children will be struggling, despite plenty of help. In this case, it is time for careful assessment of the source of their difficulties and planning of appropriate help, since the child may have a specific disability affecting literacy, such as dyslexia (see page 350).

Figure 12.1

Enjoyable mark making in the children's 'office'



A positive focus on early literacy

Views have changed over time about how children learn to read and write and what are the best methods to support them in this substantial task.

In previous decades reading and writing skills were seen as separate from the developments of early childhood. It was believed that children did not start on literacy until they were developmentally ready. This view is still appropriate, but not with the previously linked belief that no relevant literacy skills emerged until school age. The introduction of reading and writing was previously seen as a skilled adult task, undertaken only by school teachers. Parents and early years practitioners were actively discouraged from being involved in any way.

This exclusive approach was challenged effectively over the 1970s and 1980s. A focus on appropriate **early literacy skills** now highlights all the ways in which children steadily build the skills that they need for actual reading and writing:

- an interest in and enthusiasm for all kinds of books, stories and story telling
- understanding about how the written word is organised
- a sharp ear for sounds and rhymes, for the ways in which words are put together
- recognition of the everyday uses of the written word, that there is a practical point to literacy
- understanding that there are two written systems: letters and numbers
- enthusiasm for marking marks as communication with meaning
- physical practice with eye movements and hand–eye coordination.

Key term

Early literacy skills

a blend of fine physical skills, understanding and a positive outlook that supports children towards being able to read and write

Tips for practice

- Parents and family are equally as important as early years settings and the child's primary school.
- Children's range of experiences will be individual and some may have a narrower range within their family, perhaps because parents feel that books are an expert task.
- As well as offering a suitable choice of activities in your own setting, good practice is to link with children's home experiences and to offer parents opportunities to become involved in children's early literacy learning, especially if they are not initially feeling part of the process.
- Children who learn to read more easily have had a well-rounded experience of language, both spoken and written.
- It is important to talk with and listen to children so that they hear and use language from an early age.
- Conversations support their learning of words and boost their motivation to make themselves understood and express ideas (see page 310). Conversations are also a valuable way of helping children to make connections between different experiences and to encourage them to explore further with books.

This section describes enjoyable experiences and opportunities that have all been shown to support children's later literacy.

Enthusiasm for books and stories

Appropriate early literacy involves enjoying books with and reading to children from a young age, from as early as babyhood. Sharing books engages children's attention and their interest. Children join in favourite stories and they choose their own books. Children learn to talk about the books they like and why and to discuss characters and plots in a simple way.

Books for babies and toddlers

Sharing books with babies and toddlers supports their future development in literacy. But you are definitely not pushing young children to be early readers – you need to be clear about this focus for yourself and in communication with parents. Relaxed enjoyment with stories and an interest in the book illustrations helps young children to feel enthusiastic about books. This feeling links with practical experience built up over time of how books work in terms of the same story line for the same book, turning the pages and talking about the illustrations.

In a nursery it is as important to consider how and where you share books with very young children as it is to think about what books you buy.

- Make looking at books and hearing a story a personal experience for babies and toddlers.
- Be physically close and enjoy a book with just one or two young children so they can be on your lap or right by you.
- Take your time and let babies and young toddlers touch the pages. If you have books with strong cardboard pages, they will take tougher handling. Many well known stories are available in board book as well as paper versions.
- Relax with a simple book and let children ponder the words as well as look at the illustrations. Avoid any temptation to rush a story just because it has few words.

Figure 12.2

Your aim is that children become enthusiastic readers who enjoy books out of choice





- Toddlers, especially as they approach their second birthday often like spotting games with familiar illustrations. You can ask questions like, 'Where is the little girl?' or 'Where's that cat this time?'

Activity

- Find out more about Book Trust, the national charity that aims to promote enjoyment of books to people of all ages. Within the organisation, the Young Book Trust offers a service to support children and their experience with books. The Book Start project has promoted books for babies.
- Their leaflets are especially useful if parents in your nursery are dubious about the point of sharing books with babies and toddlers.
- Contact them at Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ tel 020 8516 2977 website: www.booktrust.org.uk
- Write up some key points about sharing book with babies, in your own setting and also ways to encourage parents, who may not consider books for very young children.

Key skills links: IT2/3.1–3 C2/3.1b C2/3.2

Activity (observation)

Robin Campbell tracked his granddaughter's absorption in books, stories and writing over her first five years (in *Literacy from Home to School: Reading with Alice* Trentham Books 1999). You will not be able to observe over such a long period, but try for regular observations of a child for six months or a year.

Select a toddler or young child with whom you will have contact, either through your work or personal and family life. Make sure that you have the parent's permission to make the observations and share what you have gathered at the end of the observation time.

Make regular observations of the child, say every month, and note down:

- The books that the child chooses and seems to like – what do they look at themselves or bring to an adult requesting the story?
- How many times does the child like to have a immediate repeat of the story?
- What kinds of books does the child like the best?
- How does the child handle books: choosing, looking, turning the pages?
- Does the child join in a story, perhaps with a repeating phrase or tell parts of the story to him or herself?

Compare the changes over time.

- What can you learn about the child's interests and how they change?
- What applications can you see for good practice in early years settings and working as a nanny or childminder in a family home?
- Share your main findings with your colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1b

Choosing a range of books

There is a rich selection of books for children throughout early childhood. An early years setting needs a good range and visits to the local library can ring the changes for a setting or a nanny or childminder working in a family home.

- You need story books with a range of different characters, for instance children and adults, animals and maybe some friendly monsters.
- Make sure that the illustrations reflect the diversity in families and your local neighbourhood, as well as showing people and places that are less familiar (see the activity).
- Books do not always need to have an actual written story. Toddlers and young children like books with a sequence of photographs or illustrations. The children will like you to tell a story to go with the pictures and will require that you tell it the same way each subsequent time.
- Young children like a simple story line that they can come to know by heart. Repeating phrases that recur in the story are enjoyable because the children can chime in with the phrase.
- Many stories are now available in the Big Book format. The larger text and illustrations are useful for groups, because all the children can see the pictures and the print. Big Books have often been associated with the literacy hour but they are valuable for any group story time.
- Children need plenty of books about topics, not all stories. They enjoy looking at pictures and photos of transport, animals, dinosaurs, sharks – almost anything from the world around them or imagination.
- Books can be about life events, either in story format or simple non-fiction to inform and interest children. You will find examples of such books in other chapters, for instance pages 222 and 223.

Figure 12.3

Children enjoy intimate story times





Activity

There are now plenty of books published that feature children from different ethnic backgrounds, strong female as well as male characters and children with disabilities. However, the rich choice is often not reflected in high street book stores.

- Explore your local facilities, book stores as well as your library, and find out how easily you can obtain books that feature:
 - children and families from a range of ethnic backgrounds, especially those that are present locally
 - strong female characters as well as male
 - children or adults who have a disability or health condition (fiction books, not books about the disability).
- Obtain the catalogues for one of these two mail order organisations that specialise in a wide range of books:
 - Letterbox Library, 71 Allen Road, London N16 8RY tel: 020 7503 4801 email: info@letterboxlibrary.com website: www.letterboxlibrary.com
 - Tamarind Ltd, PO Box 52, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 1UN tel: 020 8866 8808 email: info@tamarindbooks.co.uk website: www.tamarindbooks.co.uk
- Identify books that they offer – did you find any of these locally?
- Write up your findings and present to your colleagues.

Key skills links: IT2/3.1–3 C3.1b

A flexible 'story time'

Young children become enthusiastic about books because adults have made story time and use of books an enjoyable experience.

- Babies and toddlers cannot wait for a timed story time. They will learn to love books because you read and enjoy a book with them at the time that they pick a favourite book and bring it to you.
- Read the text expressively, using words and facial expression. You can use dramatic pauses like, 'And what happened then was ...' or wait a moment before you turn the page.
- Be ready to read young children's favourites again and again if they ask. You can add a new book from time to time but do not insist on all new.
- The repetition of familiar books is perfect for young children's learning: they exercise choice and the repetition helps them to remember. You will hear some toddlers begin to tell themselves the simple story to a favourite book.
- Younger children need stories that can be read in one sitting, often allowing several books in a story time.
- Children of five or six years can manage stories read in episodes day by day. Some of the books for early readers are suitable, for instance some of the simpler Roald Dahl stories. Children can support you as you start each day and recall together, 'Where did we get to in the story yesterday?'

Story telling

Good story telling is a bridge between speaking and reading and can be a source of listening and talking for children. You can explore story telling in different ways.

- You will know some books well enough to tell the story by heart. Try it.
- Story telling works well if you use a steady pace with pauses and use expressive gestures and facial expressions which hold the children's attention.
- Some stories lend themselves to audience participation in a question and answer format, such as what will happen next or who's hiding behind the hedge.
- Sometimes it will be appropriate to use a puppet or soft toy to tell part of the story. You may also like a prop if you are still building your own confidence as a story teller.

Key term

Storysacks

large bags that include the props to support a particular story book and so to encourage interest and story telling for and with children

Neil Griffiths developed the idea of **storysacks** as a way to promote story telling and an active interest in books. A storysack is a large cloth bag with not only the book in it but also three-dimensional objects that appear in the story page by page. So you may have an animal or puppet figure and everyday items that appear in the story. You tell the story from the book and bring out the props as they feature. Storysacks can be purchased but Neil Griffiths' aim was that early year settings with parents and children would make their own storysacks for favourite books.

Activity

- Pick a book that you know the children like and look for items that appear in the pages. What can you collect or make with the children that could then be props to support the story?
- Create either a storysack or a storyboard and use it with the children.
- Explore possibilities using puppets from Puppets by Post, PO Box 106, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire AL6 0ZS tel: 01438 714009 website: www.puppetsbypost.com
- Find out more about storysacks from Storysack Ltd, Resource House, Kay Street, Bury BL9 6BU tel: 0161 763 6232 email storysack@cs.com website: www.storysack.co.uk
- Find out more about storyboards from Dickory Dock Designs, Bridgemills, Huddersfield Road, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire HD9 3TW tel: 01484 689619

Key skills links: LP2/3.1–3

You can also enliven a told story or the narrative of a book with a storyboard. A storyboard is made with a piece of board large enough for all the children to see and to take a range of characters and illustrations. You cover the board with a textured cloth, like felt, and then make some of the characters and props from the book in cloth. If you can slightly fill some of them, it gives a more three dimensional image. Fix a piece of velcro to the back of each item. You then tell the story and add (or a child helper adds) each item as you reach that point in the tale.

Story through rhyme

Some books have a poetic pattern to the story and the rhythm helps children to tune into the words and to learn such stories themselves. Children also love poems, although when they are young, adults tend to call the poems nursery rhymes.

Saying and singing rhymes is not only enjoyable as far as children are concerned, it also supports their awareness of sounds and the sound system. Nursery rhymes encourage children to tune into the beginnings and endings of words and to hear similar and different sounds. The steady rhythm helps them to learn as they tune into the word patterns, and they develop phonological awareness that will support them later to learn to read and write.

Alice Sharp has developed the idea of **poetry pockets** to support the telling and enjoying of rhymes. Familiar rhymes like Incey Wincey Spider or Hey Diddle Diddle can be supported by props that appear in the rhyme. Children can be responsible for the props and making them do the actions of the rhyme; it does not have to be you who does all the actions.

Key term

Poetry pockets
containers with all the props to support a poem or rhyme, in order to encourage the interest and involvement of children in poetry

Finding out more

Alice Sharp's Poetry Pockets may be available for purchase at some point in the future. At the moment you can read about the idea in her article '*Bags of fun*', in *Nursery World* 26 July 2001.

There are many ways to encourage children to feel enthusiastic about books:

- Ensure that any story time is enjoyable for children and make sure that they are comfortable. Have two smaller groups if one large group leads to distractions and interruptions.
- Be responsive to requests from children to read a story of their choice at times other than group story time. Settings can plan at least sometimes to have an adult available in the book corner. See how quickly a few children will gather!
- Read a story at a steady pace and be expressive in your voice and face.
- Be ready to use your dramatic skills to hold children's attention. Consider using props, storysacks and poetry pockets to promote greater involvement.
- Make sure that children all have chances over the week to choose which books and rhymes you will do today.
- Be willing to have repeats of stories, poems and rhymes that children enjoy.
- Take the children to the local library so that they can get the book borrowing habit and see an even wider range of books than your setting or home will be able to provide.
- Look at ways to make your book corner welcoming and to involve the children in keeping it easy to access and the books in good condition.

Tips for practice

- Avoid using your book corner as a place to send children to 'be quiet' or 'calm down'. If you use this tactic, there is a high risk that children will associate the book corner, and books, with a feeling of constraint and being told off by adults.
- Be creative over ways that children can express their views on the different books (see the scenario).

Figure 12.4

Adults can make small group story time engaging



Scenario

Baker Street Children and Family Centre have been exploring different approaches to developmentally appropriate early literacy. The families who attend the centre are diverse in terms of ethnic group and social background. Some parents are very encouraging of their children's early literacy and some are keen but uncertain what to do. The Baker Street team have looked at activities that will engage the children but that also have the potential to involve parents who wish. They have several projects underway:

- Kayleigh has taken on the responsibility of running the 'Baker Street Library'. Children are welcome to take a book home each week and they have helped to make a simple card system in which they and their parents write or mark that they have borrowed this book. Several children are keen now that they make a special bag in which they can carry their book of the week.
- The team look for the opportunity to make scrapbooks with children of activities or local outings. The children have just completed 'our story

of the ducks' that arose from regular visits to the local park watching the ducklings grow up.

- The current project is to explore 'early literacy criticism' with the children, encouraging them to express views about the story line of books, their preferences for illustrations and the overall quality of books. So far the opinions are expressed in words, that the children dictate, and by putting books into one of three boxes: with a smiley face, a straight face and a downturned face to indicate judgements.
- The team have some dual language books and would like to promote the family languages of the children. Sian is able to tell stories in Welsh as well as English, but none of her colleagues are bilingual.

Questions

- 1 Consider the activities underway in the centre. In what ways can you see that these could support early literacy?
- 2 Make some plans for your own setting.
- 3 In what ways could parents be involved in each activity, if they choose?
- 4 Share ideas with your colleagues of ideas that have worked in settings you know or have visited.

Key skills links: LP2/3.1–3 C3.1b

Get some books out of the book corner

Ideas about the spread of books throughout an early years setting have tended to arise because of concern about boys and literacy. However, a creative approach to books as a resource benefits all the children.



Figure 12.5

The outdoor 'book corner'

Children need to see books as a source of information, to be consulted when they need ideas or to check something. Books can be useful in many ways in addition to being a source of enjoyable stories. You could put appropriate books in different parts of an early years setting as well as having a book corner. For example:

- Construction, design and technology areas: books about buildings and transport, with plenty of illustrations, ideas about projects to build and simple 'exploded' diagrams. Perhaps stories about building and constructing.
- Home corner: books to support pretend cooking, stories to read to dolls and teddies as they are put to bed, written material that would be in a home like a telephone directory or mail order catalogue.
- Office area: directories and material that supports the office area as it is currently used. For instance brochures for a travel agency as well as the equipment of phones and keyboard.
- Art and craft area: books with inspirational pictures and ideas to adapt, art magazines or books.
- Early science area: books about different aspects of science and basic experiments. Books with illustrations to support current displays like a wormery, caterpillars or a display of materials found on a trip to the local park.
- Maths area and around the setting: books to support counting, puzzle and pattern books, resource books about mathematical concepts like time or quantity. Any stories that raise these themes.
- When the weather is dry and warm enough, create an outdoor story corner with cushions, a range of books and perhaps some storybags and/or storyboards that children can use to tell their own stories.

Activity

- Look at the possibilities for bringing books out of the book corner in your own early years setting. Or use a visit to a nursery or school to provoke your ideas.
- Prepare a short presentation, with photos if possible, and share what you have found with colleagues.

Key skills links: C2/3.1b LP2/3.1–3

Making books

Children enjoy making their own books and this experience offers opportunities for them to practise a range of skills in addition to the early literacy. Children use their creativity, apply skills of planning and discussion and use their physical skills of coordination.

- Books can be on paper, card or see-through plastic envelopes that are built into a ring binder. Stories can be told through a large wall display on strong paper or cloth.
- Children can compile a scrap book or visual record of outings, activities or interesting local trips. Illustrations can be laid out, with written explanations



that children dictate, partly write or completely write, depending on their age and abilities.

- They can create their own fictional story or an adventure for a character in a book they like.
- Some simple paper folding techniques can help children make pop-up, lift the flap or other multi-media books. Look at some of these books available commercially and choose some of the simpler techniques.

Beverley Michael (*Nursery World* 24 February 2000) offered creative ideas such as:

- A zig-zag book created by folding a long strip of card or stiff paper in even folds. The story is told with words and illustrations fold by fold and the whole story or poem is hung up.
- Scroll books can be created when you divide a long stretch of paper into even sections (by pencil lines). Children create the story section by section. Then you tape the top of the story to a piece of thick dowelling stick and roll up the story. It is pulled out to read by a tab fixed to the bottom of the sheet.
- Pocket books are created by having a series of paper pockets, or envelopes on each page of the book and something relevant to the story or poem is placed in each pocket.
- Box book mobiles are created by folding a long piece of card into four equal sections. Each section has one part of the four part story. Children can do illustrations, with or without a few words. Then the card is fixed into a box shape and string run from each corner to enable it to be hung up.

Dual language books

It is important for bilingual children to experience books in their family language as well as English. Another positive aspect is that all the children in your setting gain an understanding that some of their peers are able to speak more than one language. The over fours will have some recognition of the written form of their language and in some cases this will be a different alphabet and script from English.

Your local library should have a resource of children's books in different languages, especially if you live in a diverse neighbourhood. You can also use several mail order firms (see page 672).

To think about

Even very young children are ready to enjoy books, stories and rhymes. If children you encounter are resistant or unenthusiastic, then it is very likely that their experience of books has either been very limited (so they do not know how to use and enjoy books) or actually unpleasant. Children's experience of books is emotional as well as intellectual.

Perhaps children have experienced books only through uncomfortable large group story times or adults have cross questioned them about books or early reading. You then need to be creative about the use of books and stories in your setting so that you build enthusiasm.

Music, singing and rhymes

Children enjoy music making, dancing to music and rhymes with hand movements. This playful activity supports children's physical skills including balance,



Figure 12.6
Enjoying music

attention and hearing. Children also exercise their memory for words, musical sequences and actions. Even young children are soon able to recognise a familiar piece of classical or popular music and the opening notes of their favourite dance song or nursery chant.

You can have sound makers and simple instruments on an open shelf for children to explore whenever they choose. An alternative for younger children, or to try if children do not seem to be interested in open choice, is to place the sound makers in a large container with a lid. Gather a small group around the container and open the lid with, 'Let's see what we've got in here!' Let the children look and choose their own sound maker, while you comment briefly on what they have chosen. Then move into a sound and music making activity.

Research has shown that an enjoyable experience of nursery rhymes and chants directly supports children's early literacy skills:

- The familiar sequence of words and hand movements helps children's communication and memory.
- The repetitive nature of rhymes, as well as repeating phrases in a favourite story, helps children to tune into the opening sounds of a word and to say the pattern of sounds clearly.
- They get practice in hearing words that start with a similar sound and words that rhyme in terms of their end sounds.

To think about

Some adults lack confidence in using music and singing activities with children. Adults may be at ease with art and craft activities, yet feel that you have to have a 'good singing voice' or be able to play an instrument to do music with children. Of course, you do not have to be a talented singer or musician, any more than you need to be a talented artist to do arts and crafts with children. Children are uncritical and simply enjoy the fact that you sing, do rhymes and story songs with them.

Discuss these ideas with your colleagues. If some of you feel uncertain about music, in what ways could you resolve your feelings? Chrys Blanchard (of the Natural Voice Practitioners' Network website: www.naturalvoice.net) suggests you could:

- Sing without any accompaniment (cassette or something on the piano), then you are not concerned about being in time with other music.
- Stay with a couple of songs you know well and sing them several times – children like repetitions anyway.
- Sing as a puppet or teddy bear that you hold on your lap.

Key skills links: C2/3.1a LP2.1–3



You can use music and singing in different ways to help communication and support children's understanding of rhythm.

- Use music to reflect mood, so find some quieter pieces of music for times of the day when children rest or do quiet, thoughtful activities.
- Try out singing a welcome to each other on some mornings.
- Sing some simple instructions to help children focus on, 'This is the way we tidy books ...'.
- Music and movement activities can help children to attend: watching and listening.
- Making music with sound makers can help children practise patterns of sound, deliberate variations in sound and turn taking.

Tips for practice

Learning about reading and writing

In order to cope with the move into written language, children need knowledge of the sound and the structure of their language. Two specific areas of knowledge are especially significant:

- Children's ability to recognise individual letters and to distinguish them one from another.
- Their awareness that spoken and written words are composed of individual sounds that make words when they are placed together in a deliberate way. This understanding is called **phonemic awareness**.

Phonemes are individual sounds. Children now have to learn what familiar sounds look like written down, and grasp that these do not have a one-to-one correspondence with actual letters.

Most four and five year olds have a large vocabulary for talking and understanding (see page 301). Their potential frustration as they start to read and write is that they do not have a clue how the words are written. That frustration can be significantly reduced when children have full experience of suitable early literacy activities. When children start to write they have to recall how a word is written in terms of letters and spelling. When they read, they can recognise the word on the page or on a notice. Children of four, five and six years of age can often read words correctly that they struggle to write from memory.

The tasks of learning to read and write

With time and experience, children have to grasp the important features of written material. These may seem obvious to you but that is only because reading and writing have been part of your life for so long. You will be a more helpful adult if you recognise the scope of the task that children face.

Understanding about written symbols

You need to home in on individual children's current understanding and help them on from that point. Recognise that the children are learning all of the following:

- The letters of the alphabet are symbols that stand for the sounds that children already know from spoken language.

Key terms

Phonemic awareness

learning that spoken and written words are composed of individual sounds

Phonemes

the individual sounds that comprise a spoken language and that are written with combinations of letters from the alphabet

- There is also a written system for numbers as the number itself (2) and the word (two) and children have to unravel that number symbols are different from sound symbols written as letters.
- Letters are put together to form words that build into sentences and which communicate meaning in books and other forms of written material.
- Words carry meaning and may support the pictures in a book, but it is the words that are read for the story.
- Print follows rules of format and layout and is made up of letters, words, punctuation and spaces.
- There is an order to how you print and read any language. English is read from the front of the book to the back, from the top of the page to bottom of the page and from left to right. But not all languages follow the same rules and bilingual children may already have some experience of different systems.
- There is a spoken language associated with using books – terms such as page, word, letter and front of the book.

Activity


- Look at the array of symbols in Figure 12.7.
- What do these mean? What are they?
- Make some notes yourself or use the activity with colleagues or fellow students.
- Now go ahead to page 342 where you will find a commentary on this activity.

Figure 12.7

Different kinds of written symbols

Harry likes fish pie

I ddymuno nadolig llawen

$$2 + 14 = 19$$


HARRY LIKES FISH PIE

ଆମେ ଖାଉଛୁ

ryhmäperhehoito

The physical skills of writing

Children also need plenty of practice in the physical skills that they will need for writing. These include fine physical skills, of course, but the large physical movements and children's confidence in their hand movements and overall motor control are all crucial (see page 256).

There is no advantage, and many drawbacks, for children when adults make them do 'proper' writing practice too young. Children tense up when they are made to do many worksheets, they develop an inappropriate writing posture and they find it harder when it comes to learn the flow of joined-up writing.

Supporting children

Learning to read and write successfully is key for children's later learning and achievement in schools. The most positive approach to teaching reading combines an equal emphasis on

- helping children to learn phonics: the complex relationships between the sound and letter system of language, and
- enabling children to gain plenty of experience in the patterns of letters that make up actual words on the page: that children recognise the letters and can form them through writing.

Activity

- English is a difficult written language to grasp (see also the Think about box) and helpful adults need to recall this fact.
- For instance, the words 'cat', 'circle' and 'church' all start with the letter 'c', but how are they pronounced? Say them out loud.
- The word 'fat' and 'phone' start with the same sound and 'rough' finishes with this sound. But look at the letters in each word and how two letters are put together to make a single sound in some cases.
- We should not be surprised that children get confused sometimes!

As children learn to read, they need some books graded for reading difficulty and a wide range of reading material, not all fiction, for personal choice and browsing. Children need plenty of practice, kind encouragement from adults and focused advice when they are struggling. Learning to read takes time and effort.

To think about

English is not an easy language to learn to read or write. For every rule about spelling, or grammar, there is almost always an exception. English has developed historically by drawing on many other languages for its vocabulary, and the relationship between sounds and letter combinations is complicated.

- In English we have 26 letters of the alphabet and these are the building blocks for writing words.
- But we have over 40 phonemes, which are the separate sounds that are required in total to be able to pronounce all the words in the language.

(The fact that I have encountered different estimates of the total of phonemes, from 40–44, says something about our language!)

- In English there are 1120 different combinations of letters used to spell these different sounds in the full vocabulary of the language.
- In contrast, Italian has 25 phonemes and only 33 combinations of letters are used in the written language to cover all these sounds. It is perhaps not surprising that the diagnosed level of dyslexia in Italy is barely half that of the United States or the UK.
- I am also told that Polish is a more straightforward language because it is written largely how it is said.

Realistic expectations

It is very important that adult expectations are appropriate for children over the major task of learning to read. Some of the early learning goals (ELGs) for communication, language and literacy in the curriculum guidance for England have created unrealistic adult expectations in the area of reading and writing. The ELGs are for the end of what is now called the foundation stage and some children are young five year olds at this point. The curriculum documents for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland include more developmentally realistic goals for this area of learning (see page 407).

It is not realistic to expect that most five year olds should be able to read and write a considerable number of words, even complex ones. Nor is it developmentally realistic that most five year olds should be able to form most letters correctly and use punctuation. Obviously, it depends on quite how these ELGs are interpreted in practice in English settings, but a more appropriate

Figure 12.8

Making marks and shapes in soft sand



expectation is that children are part way along steps towards these skills. Elizabeth Wood (reader in Early Childhood Education from the University of Exeter) undertook research into literacy teaching and commented in autumn 2000 that what was expected of seven year olds ten years ago was now being demanded of five year olds. Such a shift is particularly damaging for children when English is known to be a tough language to learn to read and write (see the To think about box on page 339).

The Literacy Hour

Since 1998 the national literacy strategy in England has required a structured literacy hour each day for children in school. The main features of this development are:

- Teachers are expected to provide reading and writing experiences for children at the level of single words, sentences and texts for a daily minimum of one hour.
- These experiences are offered in three broad ways: shared whole group writing and reading activities, guided work for small groups of children whose skills are at a similar level and independent work for individual children.

The hour is divided into four closely related slots:

- In the first 15 minutes the whole class works on a shared text.
- Then the class works for 15 minutes on individual words.
- The next 20 minutes is for small group work in which children either spend time with an adult on guided reading or work independently.
- The last 10 minutes are for the whole class to reflect and review what they have done.

There has been some confusion about how this method should be introduced, with some early years settings trying to introduce sit-down whole group sessions with three and four year olds. Such methods do not work with young children and carry a high risk of making them dislike literacy activities. Good practice with children up to five years of age is as follows:

- Use all the ideas given in this chapter to help children learn and enjoy early literacy activities. Keep those activities varied, meaningful for children and as natural extensions of their play and interests.
- Avoid lengthy sit-down sessions with young children. The most sensible goal is to build up slowly so that, *at the very earliest*, children at the end of the Foundation Stage (the last term in Reception in England) experience the full literacy hour.

There are sound reasons to question a literacy hour in Reception at all and some early years professionals (myself among them) advocate that the literacy hour approach should not start until Year One. As an early years practitioner in schools, you will need to work within the framework set by that school. Some reception class teachers have held fast to an appropriate early years curriculum on literacy, supported by the Foundation Stage guidance in England.

When the literacy hour is used with children of six years from Year One, then it should be feasible to build on children's broad experience to give regular practice in all the skills for reading and writing. Learning to read and write does require focused practice and children will not pick it up without adult help.

Activity

Here is the commentary on the illustration and the activity from page 338.

The point of this activity is to help you have empathy with young children, as they tackle the whole area of symbols. You know so much about the written language, so it is your job as a supportive early years practitioner to grasp what it is like for children not to know what is obvious to you.

- There are three kinds of symbol systems in the illustration: writing, numbers and musical notation. You will have worked this out, but to young children, they are all different kinds of squiggles.
- Children have to work out that there is a system of written numbers as well as letters. You will have looked at the number line, identified three numbers, know that they are different from the symbols for = and + and realised furthermore that the answer to the sum is wrong!
- If you can read musical notation, you will realise these are the opening notes to 'Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall'. If, like me, you cannot read music, you will have said 'It looks like musical notes' and have to take on trust that it is for Humpty Dumpty.
- You may have said that the English writing is the 'same'. The two versions give an identical message but the capitals, or upper case, version has many different shapes from the lower case. Children need to learn that R and r stand for the same letter of the alphabet, although they look completely different.
- There are two kinds of writing that share the English alphabet. The second example in the list is Welsh and gives the message of 'Wishing you a Happy Christmas'. I took this phrase from a bilingual Christmas card. If you had seen the card, you would have guessed that the Welsh phrase said much the same as the English, because you understand that is how dual language materials work. Out of context, non-Welsh speakers have no clues to help them guess the meaning.
- The last example in the list is Finnish and probably was not understood by many readers. This term describes a kind of childminding in Finland in which several childminders rotate around their different family homes. This word is also a reminder that some languages have accents on letters, but English does not.
- The writing in an alphabet different to English is Bengali and says 'Welcome', except that, as a childminder kindly told me, I have got one letter wrong. I have left the mistake because it is a good example of the task that children face. I neither speak nor write Bengali. I copied this phrase carefully. But I did not know what was important, or even whether I was copying the Bengali equivalent of scribble writing or of ornate italic script.

What insights can you learn from this activity to help you to tune into the task that children face? Think about and discuss your ideas with your colleagues, or share some ideas with parents.

Key skills: C1–3/1

Reasons for writing

Children benefit from shared everyday activities and conversation that alerts them to writing as a useful system. You want them to have plenty of reasons to learn to write and to read.

Writing is all around them and of practical use. You can help children over time, there is no rush, to notice and recognise everyday writing that will make sense to them in their lives. They will recognise the overall shape of a word that has meaning to them before they have worked out all the letters. For instance, some three year olds and many four year olds start to be interested in:

- their own name and the letter that starts their name
- writing on familiar food packets and over shop fronts
- road signs and other writing on directions
- menus in cafes and restaurants
- writing that adults do: hand written notes, 'to do' lists and the informal observations that you make in an early years setting
- writing that adults receive: letters, postcards, celebration cards of different kinds, bills and emails.

Meaningful writing practice

You can build on children's interests so that they become motivated to do their own early mark making and gain the everyday experience that helps them to distinguish the word and number systems and to tell them apart. You can use opportunities that arise naturally for children to see you use writing, and think about what you write and for them to do their own mark making that will become writing. For example:

- Make a list with the children before you go out to the local market, to get seeds in the gardening centre or of books that you want to look for in a library visit.
- Involve the children in drafting the wording, any writing they can do and illustrations for letters that will go to all parents, perhaps asking for help with a project or theme.
- Let children carry messages in your setting: a written note as well as the words said to them.
- Involve the children in drafting and laying our plans for activities, 'we must remember' lists about what will be needed next week or making a menu or weather board that will last.
- See if you can link up with an early years setting in another part of the country, or even in a non-UK setting. The children can exchange letters and drawings. If your setting has an email facility then you could organise to communicate electronically.
- Go on a local print spotting expedition and invite parents to come along as well. Make a list of signs and written notices, or even better take some photographs and have copies done, so that children accompanied by adults can walk around and spot the various examples of print.



Figure 12.9

Early years settings can demonstrate reasons for writing

Activity

- Choose two or three of the ideas in this section about meaningful use of the written word.
- Plan what you will do with the children.
- Write up the activity, with the children's cooperation and include any samples of emergent writing or illustrations of an activity that they would like to contribute.
- Throughout this process look for opportunities to give children constructive feedback (see page 396).
- Make a short presentation to your colleagues.

Key skills links: LP2/3.1–3 C2/3.1a C2/3.1b

Tips for practice

- Let children see you think about what you write, perhaps speak your thoughts out loud.
- Sometimes write down ideas when you ask children for their contributions – perhaps for where you will go on your local trip tomorrow or requests to the cook for puddings that you all really like.
- Be encouraging of children's efforts and do not rush to correct their letter shapes. Give constructive feedback as children wish and make clearly written versions easily available.
- Help children to look carefully at familiar words and to recognise the whole word as well as recognising letters that are familiar.
- Children will often be interested in the first letter of a word or letters they know from their own name. Help them to build meaningful connections.

Your writing and spelling matter!

You need to be a good role model for the children, so it matters that anything you write is well drafted and correct, even when you are working with very young children.

- Make sure that the spelling of any displays, public notices or letters home to parents is always correct, along with any punctuation. You have the opportunity to set a good example.
- Some early years practitioners are uncertain about their spelling or punctuation and perhaps you were not well taught in your own school years. But you are working with young children; they will not criticise you.
- Use a simple dictionary; it is positive for children to observe that you check your spelling. You can say to children, 'I'm making sure that I have the letters correct in (name the word)'.
- Use a simple punctuation and grammar reminder and let children see you using it. Either make your own or try *The Ladybird Book of Spelling and Grammar*.

You will find some more practical ideas on page 465 in the discussion about report writing.

Mark making and emergent writing

Long before children write recognisable words, they are interested in making marks with crayons and pencils. They will tell you that a set of deliberately made marks is their shopping list or a letter to Grandma. You can help in many ways that encourage children to extend the skills they have and take satisfaction in what they produce.

- Show that you take the children's early mark making seriously by keeping their examples safe, perhaps in a portfolio.
- Use individual examples, chosen with children's agreement, to create a wall display of several children's mark making. Use brief written labels and explanations to communicate with parents the many ways in which their children are on the way towards 'proper writing'.
- Children are often enthusiastic about nice stationery materials. Offer as wide a range of materials as you are able. Parents will often be happy to contribute notepads, post it notes, sticky labels or receipt books.
- Make sure that you have supplies of card and marker pens for when children want to make signs for their outdoor bus depot or display cards for the natural history museum they have created.
- You will make writing materials available on a graphics table but also anywhere else that makes sense in your setting. A clipboard and pencils could be left in the garage or office role play area, a notepad by the telephone or a shopping list in the home corner or an order pad for the waiter or waitress in the pretend café.
- Respond to requests from the children if they ask for writing materials like your own, for instance a notepad on which you make informal observations of their play.
- If you have the opportunities provided by a diverse group of families, then be sure to use examples of writing from the different home languages. Children and parents will feel more involved and children who are monolingual English will have a greater understanding of their peers who are learning more than one kind of writing.

Key term

Emergent writing

children's first attempts to make meaningful marks that they relate to the writing they see around them



Figure 12.10

Enthusiastic mark makers do not need to be persuaded to practice

Activity

- Try two or three of the ideas in this section about meaningful writing practice.
- Plan what you will do with the children.
- Write up the activity, with the children's cooperation and include any samples of emergent writing and mark making that they would like to contribute.
- Throughout this process look for opportunities to give children constructive feedback (see page 397).
- Make a short presentation to your colleagues.

Key skills links: LP2/3.1–3 C2/3.1a C2/3.1b

Tips for practice

- Look at children's early mark making with the same positive outlook that you should bring to babies' early sound making (see page 295).
- As Penny Tassoni has pointed out, children's first attempts at letters and the shape of what looks like writing is a kind of written babbling and cooing.
- It would be a foolish adult who told babies to 'Talk properly!' Yet children sometimes hear very discouraging remarks from adults who dismiss their emergent writing as 'scribble' or criticise young children along the lines of, 'You don't make a "d" like that!'
- If adults correct every early spoken utterance of babies and toddlers, those very young children become discouraged. You let them hear the correct version (see page 308) and treat their early spoken language with respect.
- We need to behave in the same way with children's early attempts at their written language.

Scenario

The team at Dresden Road Nursery School has looked at ways for children to be involved in any written activity that is relevant to them.

Recently, an information and request sheet needed to be done for all the parents. The children were interested in setting up a hospital in the role play area and needed 'medical' materials, leaflets and posters. Jessica worked with three children to draft a flier explaining to parents about the project and asking for help with materials. The children agreed the wording and the design of the A4 sheet. Jessica then wrote the words and the children added drawings. With Jessica's help, the children then worked out how many copies they would need, used the photocopier and handed out the flier at going home time.



Question

- 1 What range of skills have the children explored and practised on this project?

Suggested activity for you

- 1 Think of two or three similar planning and writing projects in which children could be closely involved in your own setting or one that you know.
- 2 Write up a more detailed outline plan for one of your ideas, explaining what the adult might need to do, what help could be offered to the children and the parts of the project for which children could take responsibility.
- 3 Present your ideas and the more detailed plan to your colleagues.

Key skills links: LP2/3.1–3 C3.1b

Young writers and readers

Supportive activities for children encourage them to use the skills they have and extend a little, without feeling under pressure to perform.

- When children are happy to have a go at writing their name, you can use 'sign up sheets' for some activities. These sheets have a simple layout with a heading that you read out to the children as well as write down clearly. It might be 'Who wants to do cooking today?' and children sign up for this activity.
- Equally this kind of activity can be done with name recognition, so that children move their name cards into a container.
- A system of self registration can support children's recognition of their names and maybe their friends' as well. Have each child's name on a laminated card. You can add visual information to help, perhaps the picture logo that marks a child's coat peg or a photo. Children, supported by their parents find their card and move it from a table to a simple container. Some settings have made attractive registration displays with the children, for instance, a child's name on a bee shape that is 'flown' across to be fixed to the beehive.
- All the experience of story telling (page 330) can be extended into story planning and writing. Children who are ready can begin to write down their own stories, fitting the writing into any of the creative book formats (see page 334).

If you work with children who can recognise some letters and words, you can create flexible activities that let them work with written materials:

- If you have a magnetic surface, then use a set of magnetic letters.
- You can set up simple messages yourself and encourage children to compose their own names or those of their friends.
- Sometimes have a letter scramble in which the letters of a child's name or well known words are moved about and children need to put them back in the right order.

- Have some ready done words and basic spelling. You can use post it notes on a flat white board. Alternatively, make words on card with velcro on the back and use a cloth board (similar to the storyboard base).
- Again you can put up messages and so can the children.
- You can also start with a clearly written short message with appropriate basic punctuation like a full stop or a question mark. Let the children see the correct version and then scramble it. The children can sort it out at their leisure.

Activity

- Try out two or three of the ideas in this section about practice for children who are learning to write.
- Plan what you will do with the children.
- Write up the activity, with the children's cooperation and include any samples of writing that they would like to contribute.
- Throughout this process look for opportunities to give children constructive feedback (see page 397).
- Make a short presentation to your colleagues.

Key skills links: LP2/3.1–3 C2/3.1a C2/3.1b

Children who can write will like a full array of stationery for different kinds of writing (see page 345). You can also offer hand held white boards for writing practice and having a go at words. Five, six and seven year olds often like the boards because they can wipe out their word and practise until they get it correct. The boards can be used as well as paper and pencil writing.

Children who are learning to write need plenty of practice as outlined in this section. Do recall that some children will now show a left handed preference. The potential frustration for a left handed writer of English is that their writing hand covers, and may smudge, what they have just written. Children have to lift their writing hand to check what they have done so far. See page 262 for an organisation that offers advice and some useful materials.

Helping the boys

Some children are not enthusiastic about reading because their experience of books has been limited or not an enjoyable experience. Positive early literacy experiences, like those described in this chapter, are vital for all children. However, it is becoming clear that such experiences can be especially important for boys, some of whom may decide that books, reading and study are all 'girly' activities and to be avoided. You can help in many practical ways:

- Ensure that you have and encourage the use of a wide range of books and written material. You want the children to understand that reading, and writing, are valuable skills for life in general. You do not just learn to read to stop adults nagging you!
- Boys, and some girls, can be more enthusiastic about information books (non-fiction) than stories. Make sure you have books that tap into the

children's interests (and borrow from the local library). See also the suggestions on page 333 about getting books out of the book corner.

- Be observant of which books the boys choose to hear, or to read themselves when they are able. If you offer to photo each child with one or two of their favourite books, what are the titles that boys choose? (See also other ideas on page 333 for encouraging children to express views.)
- Be encouraging about any reading matter that a child is motivated to tackle. Boys may be keen to read magazines about computing, computer games or sports. Makes sure that you are not 'snobbish' about reading matter and show a genuine interest in what the boys, and reluctant girl readers, want to read.

Teams in early years settings, and primary schools, are overwhelmingly female, so it is important to be creative about bringing in some male role models for the boys, and the girls as well.

- When you have a male team member, he should of course cover the full range of tasks, but it will be especially important that he is seen to enjoy reading and to use information books to find out about topics.
- Male childcare students or teenagers on work placement can be very good role models. Teenagers may also be up to date with characters from television or film that appear in books and would hold the attention of less enthusiastic listeners or beginning readers.
- Invite and welcome fathers, grandfathers and uncles into your setting and encourage them to be in the book corner as well as mend the bikes.
- Older brothers or older boys in primary school are sometimes pleased to read with and to the younger children.
- Watch out for story telling sessions or the appearance of authors at your local library, especially if there is a male story teller or author.

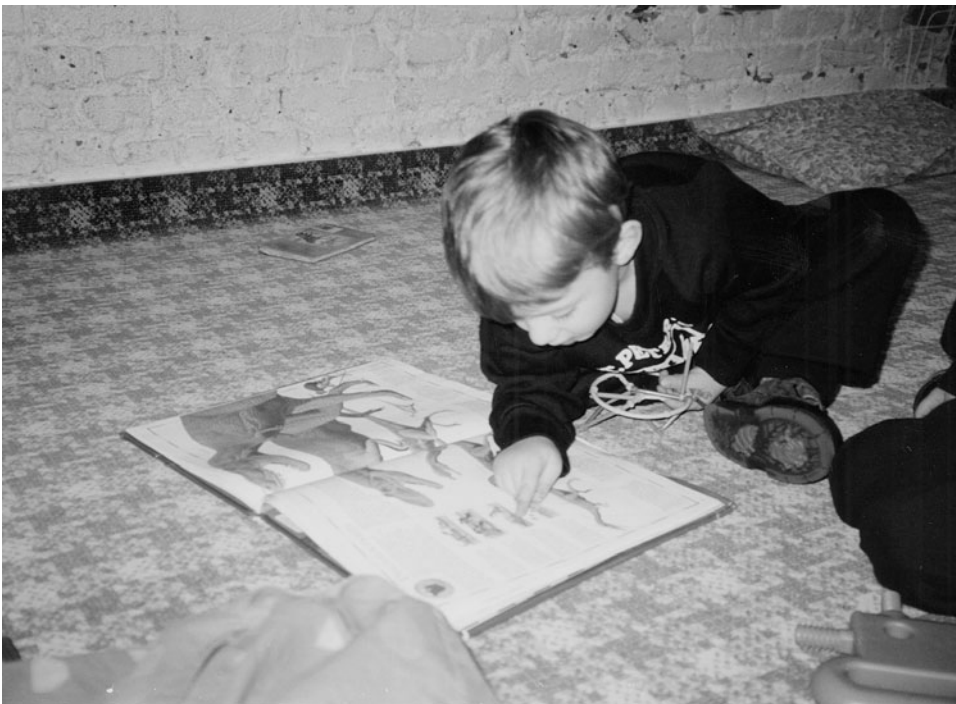


Figure 12.11

You want children to become enthused by books about topics

Activity

- Identify and plan ways that you could give children positive experiences that literacy is for boys too. Write up possible plans.
- Put one plan into action and make a visual record, probably using photos that could form a display. Consider carefully what you write as explanatory captions to any display.
- Discuss your ideas and show any display to colleagues.

Key skills links: PS3.1–3 LP3.1–3 C3.1b

Finding out more

You will find a good source of leaflets and posters about boys and reading from Save the Children publications, 17 Grove Road, London SE5 8RD tel: 020 7703 5400 website: www.savethechildren.org

Helping children with dyslexia

Some children have more difficulty than necessary with reading and writing because their early experience has not helped them in the ways described earlier. However, some five, six and seven year olds have had positive experiences and plenty of help and are still struggling. In this situation the children may be dyslexic. It is estimated that about 4 per cent of the population of the UK is severely dyslexic and the figure rises to 15 per cent if mild versions are included. The condition is three or four times more common for boys than girls and probably affects about 10 per cent of schoolchildren in the UK.

The word *dyslexia* comes from Greek and means 'difficulty with words or language'. However, many dyslexic children do not only have difficulty with the tasks of reading and writing. Children with dyslexia have a broad problem with information processing. They can experience any of the following difficulties and, like many learning disabilities, dyslexia can be anything from mild to very severe.

- The problems that flag up a serious difficulty will focus on reading, writing and spelling. There will be an obvious gap between what children can manage in tasks that require written communication and those which draw on the child's other skills.
- Children who are finally diagnosed with dyslexia may have broader difficulties in communication, perhaps they were slower than average in learning to talk.
- Children may have related attention difficulties because the tasks are hard for them, but they may also find it difficult to stay still and focus on what they are doing.
- Children with dyslexia often find it hard to organise themselves, plan ahead and sort out a sensible sequence in actions. So they need broad help in study skills.
- Some children have related problems with physical coordination, including being muddled between left and right.
- Some dyslexic children also have difficulties with mathematics, but certainly not all of them.

Dyslexia is a learning disability; it cannot be 'cured'. However, early identification and appropriate adult help can allow children to learn to cope and to manage written communication to the best of their abilities. A supportive adult response can help to protect children's self esteem and confidence, which can otherwise can take a serious downturn.

It is important that you take notice of parents' concerns about a five or six year old whom they feel is struggling with the written word. This concern will arise from their knowledge of their own child and should not be dismissed as parents being 'pushy' or 'over ambitious' for their children. This anxiety is very different from parents asking why their three or four year old cannot yet read or spell properly.

Tips for practice

- Be observant for indications that children have more trouble when the written word is involved or clear anxiety from the child about facing the tasks of reading or writing.
- Notice when five, six and seven year olds write their letters or numbers back to front and their peers make few such mistakes. Likewise when children still confuse the order of letters in words for which they have had plenty of practice.
- Talk with parents about their observations of their son or daughter.
- Show patience with the child and ensure that they are able to pay attention. Avoid any assumption or labelling that the child is 'lazy' or 'won't listen'.
- Keep your instructions simple and one step at a time, to avoid memory overload for a struggling child.
- As well as encouraging a child to persevere with efforts at hand writing, look for the possibilities of using a word processing package on the computer. The keyboard does not solve all the difficulties faced by a child who is dyslexic but it does overcome the step of having to form the actual letters.
- Be ready to get some specialist help before children's self esteem is rock bottom.

Activity

Find out more about dyslexia and how you can help by contacting these organisations. Ideally look first at their websites.

- The Dyslexia Institute, 133 Gresham Road, Staines, TW18 2AJ tel: 01784 463851 website: www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk
- British Dyslexia Association, 98 London Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 5AU tel: 0118 966 2677 website: www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk

Summarise the key ideas and practical applications for your setting and make a short presentation to your colleagues.

Key skills links: IT2/3.1–3

Further resources

- Arnold, Cath (1999) *Georgia's Story* Paul Chapman.
- Hughes, Anne and Ellis, Sue (1998) *Writing it Right? Children writing 3–8* Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum
- Ostler, Christine (1991) *Dyslexia: A parents' survival guide* Ammonite Books.
- Riley, Jeni (1997) *The Teaching of Reading: The development of literacy in the early years* Paul Chapman.
- Riley, Jeni and Reedy, David (2000) *Developing Writing for Different Purposes: Teaching about genre in the early years* Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Whitehead, Marian (1999) *Supporting Language and Literacy Development in the Early Years* Open University Press.

Progress check

- 1 Describe three ways to help babies and toddlers develop an enthusiasm for books and stories.
- 2 Explain four ways to help three and four year olds to explore meaningful mark making.
- 3 Suggest three ways to promote books and written materials in order to encourage boys as well as girls.
- 4 Describe three ways that you could help children become alert to written language around them.
- 5 Suggest three ways that children could practise fine physical skills to support learning to write.
- 6 Explain the possible consequences for children's learning if adults expect them to be able to read and write at an unrealistically early age.
- 7 Explain briefly the signs that could indicate that a child has specific difficulties with the written word.

13

Thinking and intellectual development

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- describe ways in which children learn to think from early childhood
- recognise and help children as they learn abstract ideas and ways of thinking
- support children's development in early mathematical understanding
- use information and communication technology appropriately with children.

Introduction

Children develop impressive powers of thinking through early childhood. It is important in all areas of development that adults tune into children's current way of learning and their understanding. This perspective seems to be especially difficult for adults when approaching children's intellectual development. It is too easy to assume that the child knows what we know or that a particular idea or application of knowledge is obvious, because it seems so clear to us. Early years practitioners need a thorough understanding of how children's thinking unfolds and a willingness to see the world through a child's eyes.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

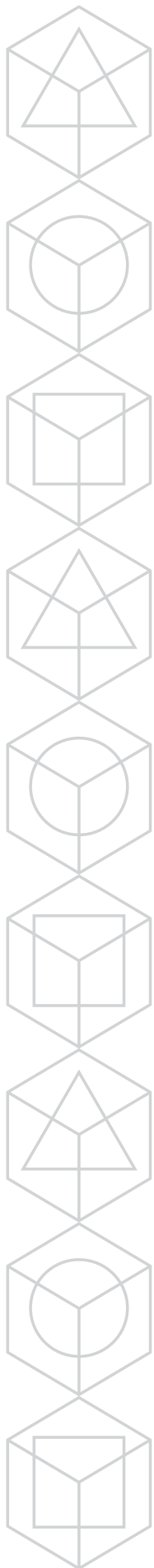
Diploma in Child Care and Education: 2, 4, 6, 10

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C8

Level 3: C10, C25

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 7, 8, 9, 12, 18, 23



Learning to think in early childhood

Key term

Cognitive development

the area of children's learning that focuses on their ability to think, gain knowledge, develop ideas and reason in a logical way

The area of children's development that focuses on their ability to think, gain knowledge, develop ideas and reason is called **cognitive development**. There are several strands to children's thinking:

- The skills that support thinking, such as memory through recognition and recall of people, objects, events and routines.
- The ability to make connections between experiences and therefore to link up more than one strand of thought.
- Using ideas to reason about 'why', 'how' and sometimes, 'That can't be right, because ...'.
- Understanding a wide range of abstract ideas that describe the world around them, experiences and events, and intangibles like emotions.
- Building up knowledge in the broadest sense and a framework in which to make sense of the information.

Tips for practice

From our adult perspective it can be difficult to tune into the intellectual understanding of a child, especially a very young child.

- Part of our difficulty is to put to one side what we know and understand as adults. You need to come afresh to the point that this child has reached.
- You need to imagine what it is like not to know or understand what is now very obvious to you.
- Children do not have your knowledge or grasp of ideas. What you know is not at all obvious to this child or this group of children.
- As a helpful adult, you need to think as well as observe the results of the children's thinking!

How do children think?

Theories about child development, in combination with the study of children, have tried to explain what is happening and how. This section gives a brief explanation of the more influential approaches and the resources at the end of the chapter will help you to find out more.

The ideas of Jean Piaget have been influential for early years practice in the UK. But it is important to realise that researchers into child development have challenged many of his proposals, especially about children younger than five or six years old.

- The exciting part of Piaget's view of children was that he saw them as active learners, making sense of what was around them and exploring in a deliberate way.
- The drawback to his approach was that Piaget tended to describe younger children in terms of what they could not yet do, rather than what they could manage. If you look at the examples given from page 358, you can see how much young children are thinking, so long as you value where they are at the moment.

**Figure 13.1**

Young children are thinkers and explorers

- **Egocentrism** was a key description in much of Piaget's approach to younger children. However, further study, as well as daily observation, has shown that young children are not as egocentric as Piaget claimed and are able sometimes to grasp the mental or emotional perspective of other people at a far younger age than he claimed.

Lev Vygotsky worked in Russia through the 1920s and 1930s and he made strong links between children's social development, their use of language and their thinking. Vygotsky felt that play led children's development because play enabled them mentally to step outside the restrictions of real life and to use their imagination. Piaget's ideas have tended to be used to suggest adults should avoid involvement in children's play since they could interfere. In contrast, Vygotsky was sure that appropriate adult help could support children to extend, so long as it recognised their current point of learning.

Vygotsky developed the idea of the **zone of proximal development** (see Figure 13.2) to explain how adults, or other children, could support a child's learning. The zone of proximal development is the area of possibilities that lies between what individual children can manage on their own – their level of actual development – and what they could achieve or understand with some appropriate help – their level of potential development.

Activity (observation)

Use the ideas of the zone of proximal development to observe and then plan a simple way you can support an individual child to extend in an area of learning, not necessarily intellectual. What interests and motivates this child at the moment: buttoning up her coat without help? being able to read her name? climbing four more rungs up the climbing frame?

- Focus on what the child can do at the moment, her level of actual development in this skill or idea.
- What might be possible with some well chosen help from you? Plan what you will do and how, and carry out your plans.

Key terms

Egocentrism

the quality that Piaget claimed was typical of younger children, that they were unable to envisage a situation from the perspective of other people, what the other person could see or what they felt

Zone of proximal development

the area of possibilities between what individual children can manage on their own and what they could achieve with appropriate help

- Vygotsky also noted that children can help each other. Look out for and make brief notes of times when one child helps another in play or a daily routine, such that the younger or less sure child learns something new.
- Share your activities and observations with colleagues. (You will find another application of this idea on page 000.)

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.1b

Jerome Bruner extended Vygotsky's ideas into the concept of the spiral curriculum. Bruner explained, and you can observe, how children over time return to the same materials or ideas but use them in a different way. For example, children from toddlers to school age often enjoy building bricks, but what they do with them extends in variety as they learn.

Chris Athey developed Piaget's idea of **schemas**. These were the patterns of behaviour that showed how young children were exploring and learning at a given time. You will find a description of Chris Athey's ideas on page 260. The approach can be very useful to help early years practitioners observe the thinking of very young children through their play behaviour. The approach is used in some nurseries and centres to help practitioners and parents move away from the perspective that under threes are not doing much or not 'playing properly'.

Margaret Donaldson and her team approached the study of children's thinking from the perspective that children worked to make sense of a situation and that

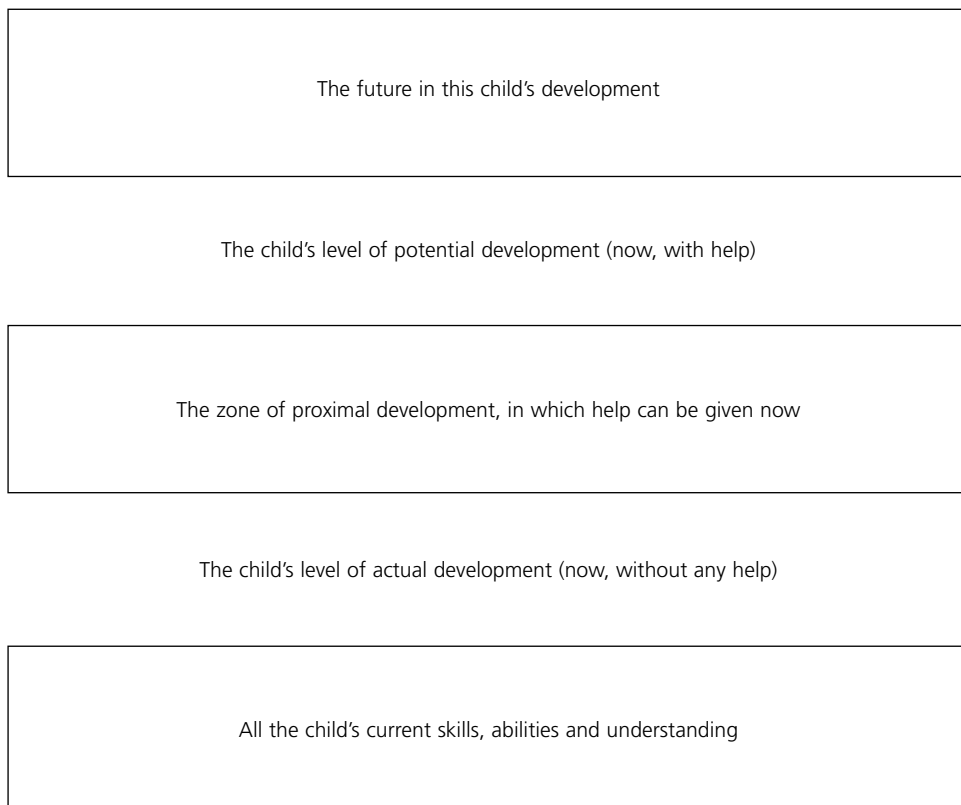
Key term

Schemas

patterns of behaviour, mainly ways of physical exploration, in which young children learn about their environment

Figure 13.2

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development – for an individual child at a given point in time



sometimes adults failed to grasp what a child had understood from that adult's questions. Margaret Donaldson has taken a very child-centred approach to the study of thinking. Her ideas highlight not only how young children think but also how adults can help:

- Children work to make sense of what they hear and observe and, in research studies as well as daily life, are sometimes confused about what exactly an adult is asking this time.
- The sense that children make of adult questions is not always the same meaning as that intended by the adult. For instance children asked to put a family of dolls in order do not necessarily do it by height. Sometimes they organise the family in a safe way for an outing, that is children are put close to an adult.
- Children are increasingly asked to manage what Margaret Donaldson called **disembedded thinking**, that is to handle ideas without a clear or familiar context. But children need to make connections to the knowledge and ideas that understand so far. Children can become very anxious and confused if their early years or school experience does not connect easily.

Key term

Disembedded thinking

when children are required to deal with ideas without a clear or familiar context with which to connect

Observation of children thinking

You can watch how the physical skills of a baby and toddler unfold, but how do you observe how they think? You have several choices:

- You watch what children do, how they react to situations. You have to be careful not to leap to conclusions; there is always an element of 'maybe', especially with younger children.
- You watch how they approach familiar and new situations and how they handle and explore play materials. Your alert observation will give you some strong hints about how children think their world works and the cutting edge of their learning at the moment.
- You listen to what children say and how they say it. Their comments and questions are a window on to how they think at the moment. Their nod of agreement or puzzled look will add information for the observant adult.
- You listen with care to children's answers and reaction to your questions, as well as taking care not to overload communication with adult questions.

Do babies and toddlers think?

If you use your skills of observation, you will see that very young children show evidence of thinking. Long before they put their thoughts into spoken words, babies show signs of making some sense of their world.

Babies and their social world

- Babies as young as 3–4 months show evidence that they recall familiar daily routines. They react to care routines and show pleasure if they enjoy, for instance, bath time or a familiar song at nappy changing time.
- Babies also show that they recall and understand the simple dynamics of playful early communication (see page 295). It would not be possible to

enjoy the turn taking exchanges of sound and expression with babies unless they were primed and able to learn these routines. With experience, babies show that they anticipate a response.

- In some ways the world is a puzzling place for babies and it is not until about 8–9 months that they work out that it is worth searching for objects that have been hidden, even in front of their eyes.

Cause and effect

- The development of communication and thinking are closely linked. Look again at some of the developments described from page 296. For example, the use of gesture by older babies and toddlers shows an understanding of basic cause and effect: ‘I point my arm and hand and people follow the direction and look’.
- By twelve months, most babies have learned to work on simple cause and effect: a loud shout brings attention, blowing raspberries makes people laugh and dropping or throwing a toy usually encourages an adult or older sibling to pick it up and start a game.
- You will see evidence that toddlers have grasped further examples of the principles of cause and effect. Under twos are capable of repeating an action or set of nonsense sounds that makes an adult or other children laugh.
- They are also able to wind up other children, especially older siblings by tried and tested actions that they have learned will tease. Such actions tend to lead to trouble that adults then have to resolve, but you should not lose sight of the thinking power in evidence here.

Memory

- Mobile older babies and toddlers can clearly remember. For example, they recall the location of their books or play materials, within their own home and other familiar settings, such as their grandparents’ home or their nursery.
- At home, toddlers can be very persistent in searching out objects they are not supposed to touch. Adults tend to view this behaviour in terms of a problem. But it does of course show memory, as well as intelligent planning by waiting until an adult’s back is turned!
- Toddlers are able to recall and tell you that personal objects like a handbag or a watch belong to a particular person. Their behaviour demonstrates this understanding when they take the watch to their father or point to the handbag and say ‘Nana’.
- When they are out on familiar local trips, older babies and toddlers in a buggy often show that they recognise landmarks. Perhaps they kick their legs gleefully when they recognise the last part of the walk to their grandparents’ home. Maybe they look excited and start pointing when you are near the baker’s where you usually buy a bread roll for instant eating.
- Under twos show evidence of recall and planning. They may show this in their ability to take a part in daily routines such as tidying up.
- Toddlers also return actively to an enjoyable peek-a-boo game or one of ‘you build up the bricks and I’ll knock them down’. Their actions and expressions show they understand how to start and request the game, rather than waiting for an adult or older sibling to initiate the play.

Let's pretend

- The development of young children's pretend play shows a leap in their thinking because they have understood enough about how their world works to pretend that it is otherwise (see page 366).
- Babies and young toddlers understand the world through real objects and they learn the names for those objects. From about 18 months onwards, toddlers show by their use of words that they have a basic understanding of symbolism. They use the same words for the picture of an object. So they become able to play, and often enjoy, spotting games with books or wall posters.
- Around about the same time young children also work out that objects can be represented by miniature versions such as dolls' house size furniture. The toddler understands that they cannot sit on this chair, it is for a little doll, but it is still a chair.

To think about

Very young children think around what they know and this pattern will be different depending on their daily experience.

Look at the photograph on page 360 of the toddler staring intently at the adult (Figure 13.3). She is looking at the practitioner's identity card for their nursery. This toddler was intrigued by the card and the practitioner patiently let her look and shared her interest. After I took that photograph, the little girl came and sat by me. She gently took hold of the visitor's identity card that hung on a chain around my neck. She looked intently at the card, then up at my face and then pointed at the card itself, with a puzzled expression on her face. She said no words but her actions said very loudly, 'And where is your photo?' because, unlike the practitioner, there was no photograph of me on the card.

Questions

- 1 Identity cards were meaningful to this toddler because they form part of the security system for her nursery. She noticed and questioned (by her body language) details that were a mis-match from her experience.
- 2 Can you recall (or collect) examples from very young children you know, where they show their understanding of familiar events or objects and notice when something is 'not quite right'?
- 3 Share your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.1a

Figure 13.3

A very interested toddler



Activity (observation)

Collect brief observations of children younger than two years of age, looking for examples that suggest strongly that this child:

- has remembered something, for instance, the pattern of a daily routine, the gestures that accompany a song, a playful exchange or a local route or landmark
- is puzzled because something is unfamiliar, out of place or in some way does not 'fit'
- has made a connection between events or objects and so is bringing thinking power to bear and doing something completely original in play or actions
- write up your observations and present the main ideas to your colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1b

To think about

Careful research with young children has established that they are capable of taking the perspective of another person far younger than some developmental theories, for instance that of Jean Piaget, have claimed. This example is one of the intriguing studies reported in *How Babies Think* by Alison Gopnik and her colleagues (see page 391).

Toddlers in the study were aged 14–18 months old and, given a choice between eating raw broccoli and savoury crackers, they all chose the crackers. An adult then showed her own food preference through a pantomime of facial expression and saying 'yum' or 'yuk'. She then put out her hand and asked the toddlers, 'Could you give me some'. When she indicated her favourite was crackers just like the toddlers, she was given crackers. The difference came when she indicated a preference for the raw broccoli. The 14 month olds still gave her the crackers, their own favourite. But the 18 month olds gave her the broccoli, although this was a silly food choice as far as they were concerned. Conventional wisdom about toddlers' thinking would say that they could not have taken a perspective other than their own, but they did.

**Figure 13.4**

'Under' or
'through' make
sense at first by
actually doing it

Thinking skills of two to five year olds

Increasingly, children's use of language will show you directly what they have thought or are puzzling about. Children cannot easily grasp abstract ideas until their understanding has extended to take in ideas. For most children, this shift will be observable through their use of language. Look at, or look again, at the description on page 301 of how children's language extends from naming words, to doing words and then only to words that describe ideas.

Understanding ideas

Increasingly, young children begin to understand and show that they understand abstract ideas, the ways of describing people, objects and situations. There are many ideas to understand in the end and children learn from a range of experiences and from adults who take the trouble to grasp what a child understands, or does not yet understand. The pattern of learning is an individual sequence and you will find some very general indicators in this section. Suggestions for how to help are from page 369.

- From two to five years, children are working on many ideas. Few will be understood in one conversation or play exploration – learning tends to build up step by step. Children need to be able to home in on the difference that is described by a word before they can make sense of the concept. They need, for instance, to have felt differences in texture of 'soft' and 'rough', heard the difference between 'loud', 'quiet' and 'silent' and seen the difference that is 'red' or 'green'.
- Three and four year olds usually have some grasp of shape, number, size or colour and some of the words to accompany these ideas.
- They have basic ideas of temperature, weight, height and speed but do not understand the complexities of how these differences are measured. Young

children gain some idea of gradations in these ideas through using simple language such as 'very fast', 'a bit cold' or 'too heavy' (for me to lift) or 'too high' (for me to reach).

- It takes time for children to grasp opposites for those ideas where there is a flipside. Three and four year olds will usually get one idea, such as 'hot', 'heavy' or 'fast' and they learn the idea that makes most sense within their daily experience. Later they will learn or be told that the opposite of 'hot' is 'cold' and the opposite of 'fast' is 'slow'.
- Four and five year olds can have developed special interests on which they are very knowledgeable and have the relevant vocabulary and related ideas. For instance, some children may know more than you do about sharks, motorbikes or dinosaurs and understand the different groupings in these topic areas.
- Understanding time is much more difficult than some of the other ideas that four year olds can manage. It is not unusual for children of seven and eight years to still be struggling with telling the time with clocks and watches. Three and four year olds often grasp the first ideas of time as that of time passing and sequences in familiar daily routines.

Knowledge and understanding social issues

Children are often very curious and they extend their knowledge of facts. But they also need help, usually from attentive adults, to build a framework in which to make sense of information.

- Some children show great interest in human issues, such as why people behave the way they do, feelings and the basics of where babies come from or why people die. Children's understanding of these ideas is dependent on clear and honest explanations from adults (see page 222). There is also great variety between children and the questions they ask.
- Four year olds for instance usually have a clear idea that they are a boy or girl and the sex of their friends. They may still be confused, however, about what happens later in life: that boys grow into men and can become fathers, whereas girls grow into women and may become mothers.
- They notice and comment on differences in skin colour and patterns of dress that reflect different ethnic and cultural groups. They can begin to understand that not everyone's family runs like their own.
- For young children 'different' does not necessarily mean better or worse. Children develop attitudes about gender, ethnic groups and disability, as well as other social issues and their outlook can be positive with adult guidance.

Activity (observation)

When children are able to ask questions, you can hear directly what is of interest to them and you get a hint of what they understand so far. Helpful adults take note of children's questions because they are keen to learn in those areas. Three, four and five year olds can ask you very searching questions and you may not know the answers to some. It is not unusual for children to ask, 'Where does the rain come from?', 'Why does my Mum give money to the pre-school?' or 'Can rabbits talk?'

Over a period of several weeks, collect questions from children that make you pause to think before you reply. Note down your reply as well.

Look back over your notes.

- What kinds of questions were asked? What do you feel you have learned about children's thinking and their current knowledge?
- Did some children ask very few questions at all? What ideas do you have for encouraging more enquiry from them?
- Were there some questions that you found it hard to answer? What made those questions difficult: because you did not know the answer, because there was an emotional content (perhaps 'why did my granny have to die?')

Compare your observations with colleagues and work together on drafting 6–10 points of good practice through which you can support and meet children's curiosity through questions.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Five, six and seven year olds

During this age range, children consolidate many of the ideas that have been developing in early childhood.

- Existing confusions in some ideas are overcome and the more challenging ideas, such as time, danger and risk level and the concept of left and right become clearer, sometimes with specific adult help.
- Children show an increasing grasp of symbols, such as those involved in mathematical understanding (see page 375).
- Children also develop concepts related to moral issues, reasoning and behaviour (see page 228).
- Children in this age range are even more able to consider ideas inside their heads. They weigh up possibilities or explanations not tied to their immediate experience. Some abstract thinking can be used alongside direct observation.

To think about

Working out left and right is a useful concept for adults to consider because you can often recall your own struggles and the memory can give you some empathy with children.

For instance, I can still recall clearly my confusion over left and right. I can now put into words that my difficulties revolved around, 'My right hand is always my right hand' but 'If I face my friend then her right hand is on the other side'. Since we did country dancing in my primary school, it was also rather important to be able to follow an instruction of 'turn left', otherwise the teacher shouted at us!

- When did you work out right from left? How did you manage it?
- Compare notes with your colleagues.
- Allow for the fact that some adults continue to have difficulty with telling right from left. It is associated sometimes with dyslexia.

Key skills links: C3.1a

What changes and what does not?

As well as extending their existing understanding of concepts, children are also working to grasp what changes and what does not. For instance, three and four years olds tend to say there are ‘more’ cars in a row when those cars are spread out than when they are bunched together. Children hold to their ideas of ‘more’ even if you count the cars with them. A similar situation arises with different shaped glasses and pouring out drink. Even if you use a standard measuring jug, children still tend to say there is ‘more’ drink in the taller glasses.

Jean Piaget took these observations as proof that younger children could not understand the concept of **conservation**, that the number or volume stayed the same despite reorganisation of the actual materials. It seems likely that children are slightly confused about the ideas. However, studies by Margaret Donaldson and her colleagues showed the possibility that children are also thinking about what the adult wants who asks the questions. They found that children were far more likely to say that two rows of the same number of toys were still the same when a soft toy, ‘naughty teddy’, had pushed one row up tighter, than when the adult researcher had brought about the same change.

A likely explanation is that children have social expectations about adult behaviour. When an adult makes a change and then asks a question about whether ‘It’s still the same’, children are misdirected into thinking that something must have happened. Otherwise why would an adult ask that kind of question? If you find this explanation unlikely, then recall that asking the same question several times is a ploy used in law courts to trap adult witnesses into changing their answer. When a prestigious adult repeats a question, some otherwise confident adults find themselves thinking that there must have been something wrong with their first answer and they change it or appear doubtful.

Key term

Conservation

the idea that objects continue to have the same quality such as number or volume even when they are moved to look different

Using logical thinking

Children build ‘theories’ based on what they have experienced. Children up to the early teenage years mainly use **inductive reasoning**. This method means that they work from what they have directly observed to form a more general principle. Because younger children lack information, some of their theories turn out to be wrong or simply too narrow, and they revise them. For example:

Key term

Inductive reasoning

a process of thinking logically from direct observations and experience to reach a general principle

- A bad experience with his grandma’s very fierce cat leads a four year old child to form a view that all cats scratch and should be avoided.
- A positive experience of taking turns in nursery has led a child to develop a general principle about fairness: that it is worth aiming for fairness and ways to behave in a fair way.
- A seven year old has never known anybody to die who was not in his terms ‘very old’. He therefore concludes that only old people die. Now his best friend’s family has lost a baby through cot death and he is very confused.
- A six year old has three friends who are Jehovah’s Witnesses. His friends also happen to be black. So he concludes that all Jehovah’s Witnesses are black, until further experience tells him that this pattern was just chance.
- A five year old is made to eat tinned spaghetti in tomato sauce that she dislikes very much. She says she does not like any spaghetti and generalises this refusal to any kind of pasta when she hears that spaghetti is a kind of pasta.

Activity (observation)

- Build up a collection of logical thinking from children. You will probably have examples where children's logic takes them in the correct direction and where their reasoning is sound, but they lack information.
- Consider the examples and how they help you to understand children and tune into their world view of the moment.
- Share your findings with colleagues, maintaining confidentiality about individual children.

Key skills links: LP3.1–3 C3.1a

Inductive reasoning moves from the particular to the general. So the accuracy of the principles that children develop depends on their experiences. Children can revise their theories with further experience and in conversation with supportive adults who listen and reply to questions.

Teenagers become more able to use **deductive reasoning**. In contrast, this logical approach moves from a general rule or principle to predict a particular event. In secondary school, students use this kind of thinking to handle scientific concepts. Younger children cannot handle this kind of reasoning unless they are dealing with very familiar ideas based on plenty of experience.

For instance, in the example earlier about turn taking, children who have experienced consistent and supportive adults may develop a general principle about fairness. Children in the early years of primary school may well say that rules like 'we walk in the corridor; we don't run' apply to everyone including teachers. So it would be unfair for teachers to run in the corridor.

Key term

Deductive reasoning

a process of thinking logically from a general rule or principle to predict a particular event



Figure 13.5

Imagining and thinking

It is worth bearing in mind that some attempts to teach children road safety go directly against their thinking and reasoning abilities in the early years. Road safety campaigns for children often focus on a general principle like, 'find a safe place to cross' when children have no idea of what this rule means. But children learn about road safety through direct experience at the side of careful adults and then they understand through actions what a 'safe place' looks like and why it is safe.

Imagination and the power of thought

Another way to understand and observe the development of young children's thinking is to track how their pretend play develops. Toddlers in the second year of life often show the beginning of imagination that will steadily develop into the complex pretend play of a three or four year old.

The development of pretend play

Very young children take what they know of familiar life and routines and then play around with it.

- The very first pretend play actions are often fleeting. Perhaps a toddler uses a toy spoon to pretend to feed himself or a brush and pretends to brush his hair, scarcely touching his head. You can miss these swift actions but once you notice, then you realise that this very young child is thinking.
- Pretend play is at first directed by toddlers at themselves, but soon they pretend with someone or something else. They pretend to offer you a drink or to feed Teddy.
- They start to pretend an object is something else, for example, a brick is a car or a plastic bowl is a hat.
- Perhaps the whole action is pretend; there is not only no drink, the drinking action is made without a cup. Toddlers look at you as if to say, 'You know that I know that you know that this is all just pretend'.
- Two and three year olds show ever more complex pretend play. They may develop longer sequences as dolly is put to bed or the toy animals have a tea party.
- Doll's house size figures and small world play with animals become possible, because the children now understand that these little figures can stand in for the full size version.
- Three and four year olds dress up and begin to play pretend with friends, perhaps monsters or chase and rescue. They cook pretend meals and play with a pretend shop or garage.
- Three, four year olds and older children often show complex and rich pretend play sequences that they direct themselves and return to over a period of time. They decide on characters, negotiate the 'scripts' and plan out the action to a certain extent.

Activity (observation)

- Keep track over a period of weeks of the pretend play themes that occur in your setting.
- Given a choice (that is not confined to an adult-organised role play area) how do the children show their imagination, and thinking, through their play themes.

- Children draw from what they know in everyday life to feed their pretend play.
- What do you see and hear that they have built in from experience in family life, what they saw on a local trip or recall from a favourite television programme?
- Keep brief notes of the themes and discuss your findings with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a

The impact of learning disabilities

Some children will have disabilities that affect their intellectual development. You will find much more information about disability in Chapter 18 and this section briefly covers some of the main issues:

- Children with learning disabilities such as Down's syndrome (see page 518) will be delayed to some extent in their development but the patterns are very varied. Children's understanding of ideas or their ability to reason will be more like that of a younger child. But you have to get to know and observe an individual child to make sense of the gap between her chronological age in years and months and her developmental age.
- A child's language development and play, especially pretend play will be a help in building an accurate picture of her abilities. When you are responsible for a child with learning disabilities, it is important that you select activities, including any of the ideas in this chapter, in line with her current ability and support her onwards from that point.
- Children with disabilities that affect their powers of communication (see page 321) may have plenty of ideas in their head but be frustrated in ways to tell you. The children need your support through patience, watching what they show you through their behaviour as well as actual words and using any supports for communication that help this child.
- Children with autistic spectrum disorder have difficulties in making sense of their social world, communication and use of symbolic thinking as in imaginative play. You need to remember that these children are not being awkward. They are genuinely baffled, and sometimes made very anxious, by events or questions that their peers take in their stride (see page 518).

Helping children to think

Understanding and using ideas

Ideas can seem very obvious to adults but that is only because you have become so familiar with concepts of time, number or shape. Such ideas are not at all obvious to young children. An important point for adults to realise is that colour, size or texture (and all the other abstract concepts) are ways of describing the world. These concepts do not exist in their own right. Consider the points in the think about box:

To think about

- A child can see and touch a 'car'; she cannot see or touch a 'red'. She can see a 'red car' but she has to work out what the idea of 'redness' means.
- A child can lift a big wooden block but cannot find and pick up a 'heavy'. But through his actions he can directly experience a sense of 'heavy'.
- Children cannot do a 'fast' or a 'slow' but they can run, walk or crawl in a 'fast' or 'slow' style.

So, of course, children can only learn about all these ideas through direct experience and they need your patience and understanding. Time spent with children is also much more interesting for adults, when you are ready to observe and track the development of ideas, rather than take a blunt line of 'does she know her colours yet?' or even 'why doesn't he understand shapes!'

What are the first ideas?

Children of two to two and a half years of age often show that they have some abstract ideas already. You need to observe young children and especially listen to the words they use. Young children learn through personal experience and their current interests, so the pattern of first ideas is likely to be different between individual two year olds. For example:

- Young children, who are keen builders and like moving materials around your setting, may show a basic understanding of weight and relative weight. They directly experience this concept because they and their friends are busy lifting, pushing and manipulating materials of different weights.
- Keen climbers may soon grasp the concept of height of a climbing frame or walking along a wall. They may want to climb 'up high' or decide that a location is 'too high' to climb. Height in terms of people and 'tall' or 'short' may not be linked until later.
- Speed may intrigue young children, probably in terms of 'fast' rather than 'slow' at the outset. Young children may call out that you should watch how 'fast' they can run or ride the bike. They may be aware on local trips that a vehicle was going 'very fast'.
- Young children probably get their first idea of temperature when adults warn them about 'hot', especially at home where a parent or other carer may say, 'Let me move my coffee, it's hot'.
- Texture may become interesting to children through their pleasure in touch. They feel the contrast between 'soft' textures that are pleasant to stroke or rub and 'rough' surfaces that can scratch.
- Children who like their food may have concepts of 'tasty' or foods that are 'crunchy'.
- Sound may make sense in terms of 'loud' or 'too loud' for voice volume or the television.
- Because of the normal accidents of life, some children grasp the idea of 'broken'. Their knowledge extends to understand that some things can be mended but some are broken for ever.

How do you help?

You will help by being an observant and sensitive adult, who homes in on the children's current understanding. Use your observation skills to become aware of the ideas that children already have, or partly understand. Start with the child's interests, rather than insist that they learn about colour or shape, perhaps because that is a focus for three and four year olds in a group setting. Look at the scenario on page 371 and try some of the suggestions.

To think about

Anne Fine is a very successful author of books for children. In an interview in the summer of 2000 she was asked to pinpoint how she manages to write so well. She said her motto was:

Never overestimate children's knowledge; never underestimate their intelligence.

I think this is wise guidance for all adults who work with young children.

Hands-on play activities

When you provide a wide range of play opportunities and learning through involvement in the daily routines, then children will gain the appropriate hands-on experience.

- Children will feel the differences in textures in various materials in your setting and by playing with treasure bags that have different textures to feel first and then bring out to look at.
- Use of construction materials, transporting materials around the garden and helping with tidying up all give direct experience of different weights and shapes.
- Children can see the difference between 'light on' and 'light off' or the 'dark' of a winter afternoon.
- Young children learn steadily through seeing and feeling the dimensions of same and different. They need to be able to match and sort different basic colours visually before the word has any meaning. Posting and sorting three dimensional shapes has meaning before shapes on a flat piece of paper.

Introduce the words

You can help children to learn the words for ideas by confirming their own use of language and adding a word to a natural conversation. For instance:

- You could provide the words for texture when you accept the invitation to stroke a child's jumper, 'Oh, it's so lovely and soft'. The crash of a cymbal in a music activity is met with, 'what a loud noise, that made me jump'.
- You can comment naturally on what you are doing with children, 'I think we need to make this sand more wet. Our sandcastles keep collapsing' or 'Have you seen my blue pen? It's blue, like this brick.'
- You can help children to notice by showing them direct comparisons to help them notice the relevant visual difference. You might say, 'I think we need another square shape now. We need another one like this' (showing the child).

- You can also help a child extend their language without in any sense suggesting their word is wrong. You might reply to a child, 'Yes, your uncle Ken is big isn't he? He is really tall. I think he's even taller than Jason from the pre-school room. Shall we ask them to measure against each other?'

Figure 13.6a

Different ways of learning about the chicks – a book



Figure 13.6b

Different ways of learning about the chicks – close observation



In this way children will learn the words and the context in which to apply them and their confusion will be much reduced. Children often use the word 'big' to mean 'large', 'tall' or 'older', as in 'when I'm a big boy, I'll go to school'. If you listen, you will hear that adults tend to use 'big' in these ways. So we can help children to learn by being more accurate with our own words.

Ask helpful questions

You can use different patterns of open-ended questions that leave children choice, but will highlight for you what they understand. Here are some examples.

- 'I wonder if we have any ... or some more ... (round shapes, blue cups, larger bricks, soft toys for the baby)?'
- 'Shall we count up how many ... (children we have for tea, spiders we can see on our walk)?'
- 'Can you help me find ... (another round shape like this one, something heavy to hold the door open, a dry tea towel)?' Other phrases might be, 'I need another ...', 'Where did I put ...?' or 'I'm looking for ...'
- 'Shall we sort out ... (the blue cars from the red ones, the large bricks from the small ones, the animals from the people in our farm set)?'

Avoid asking children lots of very directive questions, especially those designed to test or drill young children.

- Children younger than three years old often do not understand questions like 'what colour is this car?' or 'how many bricks have we got?'
- They may look confused, do not reply or give what sounds like a nonsense answer to your adult ear.
- Use confusing answers from children as a message to you that they need plenty more hands-on experience. Children need ways to see the difference in colour or make sense of numbers before they can answer such tough questions.
- Too many questions from adults can unbalance your communication with children (see page 309) and testing questions make children feel put on the spot to be correct.

Scenario

The team of Greenholt Pre-school decided to use observations to help them focus on the ideas understood already by the youngest children in their setting, the two and half to just three year olds. The team had become aware that they were planning as if colour, shape and number were the only concepts. They found themselves talking about the youngest children as if they had no grasp of concepts because they sometimes seemed to be confused about these three areas.

The team explained to parents about the observations and invited any anecdotes from home. A rich array of ideas was gathered and part way through the project the team started to use photos to record the context in which children had shown their understanding. A few examples include:

- The two and a half year to three year olds use words like 'hot', 'warm' and 'cold'. The church hall in which the pre-school runs has metal protectors on the radiators and one child points to those and explains, 'That's 'cos it's hot'.

- One snack time was devoted to raw fruit and vegetable tasting. Children used words like 'yummy' and 'tasty' for food they liked. Carrots were 'very crunchy' to one child. Marjorie, the pre-school leader, laughed as she ate into an orange and the juice ran down her chin. She said, 'it's so juicy' and the children took up and repeated the word.
- Some of the children are aware that Lottie cannot have any food with cow's milk in it. Her friend says dramatically, 'No cheese for Lottie. It makes her very, very sick!'
- The team has realised that their own adult concern about noise levels has been observed by the children. Some of the young three year olds are heard to say, 'that is far too noisy, we have to be quiet, like little mice'.
- Anecdotes contributed by parents include several two year olds' awareness of 'light' and 'dark' in the late winter afternoons. One boy has become interested in the whole idea of visual similarity and shares his observations with phrases like, 'Fox – that's like a cat'. A child whose clothes are passed on to his younger sibling has the idea of 'old' and 'new' coat or trousers.
- And, yes, some children do have a grasp of basic colour and an interest to discover more but there is evidence of many more ideas.

Questions

- 1 What abstract concepts are shown through the examples gathered by the pre-school?
 - 2 Collect similar examples from your own setting from two and young three year olds whom you know. Involve parents in this activity if they wish.
 - 3 Early years practitioners are often tempted to home in on colour and shape, but these concepts will not necessarily be the first ideas to be linked with words. What is likely to interest very young children, what will catch their attention in their personal world?
- Present your findings.
 - Consider possible improvements in your own practice in the light of what you have observed.

Key skills links: C3.1b LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

You will help children when you understand the steps of learning in ideas that seem very familiar to you. There are more ideas on page 375 about early mathematical concepts and from page 230 about moral ideas. Some other common examples are given here.

Learning about colour

Many three year olds are well on the way to being able to distinguish and name the main colours. Four years olds are usually confident about colour. There may be some discussion around the shades, like when does blue become green or orange become red. But adults do not always agree about the subtleties. Learning colours is a process that involves observation as well as the words:

- First a child has to notice those differences in the world that you describe by colour. They have to recognise by sight the difference between red, blue, green or yellow.
- Part of seeing and noticing is also that children need to pick out the colour feature from any other characteristic of an object. For instance, their trousers may be 'blue' but they are also perhaps 'soft', 'stripey' and 'brand new'.
- When a child has realised that colour is a feature shared by different objects, they can pick out the colour and ignore other features. For instance, they can see the blueness of the car, their friend's hat and the water in the tray today.
- Children need to be confident about spotting same and different in colour before they are ready to identify a colour with questions like, 'Can you find me something red?' or 'Who's wearing something green today?'

You can help by enabling children to get plenty of enjoyable practice at the matching stage of learning. They can:

- sort out collections by colour and you help them by visually matching, 'I need another blue brick, just like this one' and holding it up or giving it to the child to match directly
- be involved in search-and-find activities for anything that is yellow or purple and then make a display
- play board games or use sorting apparatus where colour matching is the key to sorting out items
- hear you say the word for this colour, closely linked with the play resource or item of clothing. Use your words to confirm the concepts and resist asking testing questions such as 'What colour is this?'

If five year olds have had plenty of appropriate play experience and they are still confused about colour, there is the possibility that they have some degree of colour blindness. This condition is more common with boys than girls and does not mean that children, or adults, see the world in shades of grey. Some people who are colour blind have trouble with just one part of the colour spectrum, for instance not being able to tell red from green.

Activity

- This pattern of helping children to have plenty of hands-on and visual experience works well with other concepts such as size, shape, weight or height.
- Gather ideas for activities that could give children direct experience of any of the ideas given above.
- Present to your colleagues and consider possible improvements in your practice.

Key skills links: C3.1b LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Helping children to develop their thinking powers

Adults need to be careful about the balance of their communication with children and certainly too many questions can unbalance the exchange. However, there is a place for sensible adult questions that will help a child to think around a situation, rather than an adult telling a child what to do with a problem. For instance:

- If a child cannot reach a shelf or get to the taps to fill a container, you might say, 'How could you get up higher?' rather than just saying, 'I'll do it for you'.
- Perhaps children want your help because their project has gone awry. You could start with, 'You're right, your den is very wobbly. I wonder what would make it more secure. What do you think?' If children have few ideas, then you can suggest. But the aim is to encourage them to think around the problem a bit.
- You can invite children to help each other. For instance, one child may say, 'How do I put the books away? They keep falling out'. You could reply, 'Allan showed me yesterday a good system with the books. Shall we ask him to show you?'

There are also further ideas on page 208 for helping children to develop skills of problem solving and of resolving conflicts.

Scenario

Inspired by the changes in their garden (see page 281), the team at Dresden Road Nursery School have experimented this half term with a rather unusual topic, that of 'What can we do about it? Problem solving power in Dresden Road!'

In consultation with the children, the team has looked for problems they would all like to address. Some problems are local issues, like the children's concern about the 'horrible litter and dog mess in our park – what can we do?' and some are about nursery life with 'how can we get water from the tap to our pretend garage?'

The focus on 'what can we do about it?' has encouraged children to discuss everyday problems in their play. Adults help with questions to support ideas but not to tell children what to do. The children have also become very enthusiastic about recording some of their projects.

The task of getting the water from the outdoor tap was documented by the children, using a camera, and covering the ideas that did not work as well as the final version that did work. With the adults' support, the photos were made into a display with written explanations and drawings.

Questions

- 1 In what ways do you support children's thinking power in your own setting? Suggest some changes, even minor improvements to practice.
- 2 Suggest some ways in which three and four year olds in Dresden Road could be enabled to tackle the problem of the mess in their local park. How might they document the situation with the help of the nursery staff or parents? What might they do with their findings?

Key skills links: PS3.1 LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3



Helping children to remember

Children are learning a considerable amount of information and ideas over their early years. They also need to make sense of everything. Part of their task is to register and remember what they have previously experienced. Children will forget some things, just like us, but supportive adults can help them to sharpen up their memory skills.

Children cannot remember something to which they did not attend in the first place. So you can help memory skills by supporting children's ability to attend: to listen and look. See page 284 for a discussion about the development of attention in childhood.

- Make it easy for children to listen. Say their name first and ensure you have their attention before you say more.
- Be close to a child and at eye contact level.
- Keep your comments, suggestions or instructions as simple as a child needs. Under threes, and especially under twos will tend to forget the first thing you said when you give several instructions at a time.
- Sometimes encourage a child or small group to say back to you what they have just heard or been shown. You can invite them with, 'So, what you're going to do is ...?'

You can use the normal activities of the day to help recall.

- Children need to practise in order to remember, so let them have enjoyable opportunities to become familiar with a rhyme or story, how to use a particular tool at the woodwork table or how to crack an egg.
- Use simple review sessions with three, four and five year olds to reflect back on the session or day. 'What was the best part of today?' or 'Who remembers what we learned about ...?'
- Be ready to reminisce in conversation or to respond to their memories – 'Do you remember when ...?'
- Use simple games like picture pairs, round games like 'I went to the shop and I bought ...' or the memory game of objects on a tray that children see, you cover and remove one object and then uncover with 'What has gone?'
- Use visual supports to help children remember. For instance, make a recipe book with photos of the steps that children take to make gingerbread biscuits.
- Use your own times of forgetfulness with, 'What story did we agree to have today?' or 'Please remind me, whose turn is it to hand out the snacks?'

Tips for practice

How children understand mathematical ideas

As well as all the other abstract ideas that children are learning, they are also working to understand a range of mathematical ideas. These include:

- an understanding of number as an abstract idea, a practical way of dealing with daily routines and as a written system

- ways of dealing with numbers and measurement and the basic mathematical operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division
- the idea of measurement: how and what you measure
- ways of describing the world in basic mathematical terms: size, shape, weight, height and volume
- all the ideas about money: how coins and paper money represent a value (big coins are not necessarily worth more than little coins), how money works in our society and how you do calculations involving money
- the concept of time, time passing and how to measure and tell the time
- ideas such as speed and distance, both small and large scale.

Children have a very great deal to learn and much like other abstract ideas described in this chapter, helpful adults need to tune into children's current thinking. You need to observe what children understand at the moment and help them on from that point. What is obvious to you, perhaps about counting, is not at all obvious to the children.

Tips for practice

- Offer plenty of hands-on activities. Number and other mathematical ideas start to make sense to children because they apply the ideas in a practical context.
- Show what you do with your mathematical abilities. It often helps children if you speak your thoughts out loud and explain clearly why you count or measure.
- Counting and mathematical operations like addition or subtraction make sense to children when they are experienced many times in ordinary daily routines.
- Practical play and routine activities help children to understand the point of weighing or measuring – why we do it as well as how we do it.
- Children need plenty of practice with mathematical ideas in a meaningful context so that they can make sensible connections. The abstract ideas need to come alive.

Helping under threes

Very young children need to build up plenty of hands-on experience and practical knowledge of how their world works. They begin to learn about number, much as they experience appropriate early literacy, through direct experience. Under threes are not ready to learn about written number, any more than written letters; it is too abstract for them. But they are keen, with your help, to build a strong foundation of understanding what will become early mathematics.

Experiencing shape and size

- Babies and toddlers are intrigued to stare at shapes and patterns, either two dimensional or the three dimensions in a mobile. They gain experience in how a pattern or shape starts and where it ends.
- Older babies and toddlers use their hands to feel shapes and what will fit into something else. Resources such as the treasure basket or exploratory play sessions (see page 272) enable children to learn through vision and touch about shape, texture and edges.

- Play materials that can fit and stack offer children plenty of experience in experimenting with what will fit and what will not.
- A range of containers can be used to explore relative size and wheeled transport like trolleys or wheelbarrows offer practical experience of what can be fitted into a given space.
- Young children who become interested in jigsaws or other play materials that fit together, get enjoyable practice in looking carefully at shape and matching what will fit.

Numbers have to make sense to very young children so you need to use number words as a natural part of daily conversation, especially with under threes.

Tips for practice

- You can comment during mealtimes, 'Do you want more potatoes? Here we go, one potato, two potatoes. Is that enough?'
- Helping children with personal care can be a chance for simple numbers. You could say, 'Show me how you wash your hands. One hand, two hands – well done' or 'Now where are your shoes? You've got one, two feet. So we need one, two shoes'.
- Simple physical games provide a meaningful context for use of number. You might remind children, 'one at a time on the slide', say 'there's time for one more turn, then it's lunch'.
- Enjoyable physical games can be accompanied by 'One, two, three – up you come!' or 'One, two, three – go!'
- Young children like spotting games, either from the pictures in a child's favourite book or on local trips. You can comment with, 'Yes, there's one cat. Now where's the other one? Yes, well done! Two cats'. On a local trip you might spot, 'There's a squirrel and another one. Two squirrels!'
- Young children enjoy all kinds of songs and rhymes. Some of these will include numbers and counting on the fingers.
- Early ideas of liquid quantity make sense at drink time and in water play. You can add the words 'a little bit more', 'just enough' and maybe 'Oh no! Too much, it's spilled over!'
- Young children want to be helpful and their enjoyable involvement in daily routines helps them to grasp numbers in action. They like to look for 'one more spoon' or finding the two missing pieces of jigsaw. Increasingly rising threes are also able to join in the practical counting as part of routines.

Helping three, four and five year olds

Appropriate early mathematical activities for the over threes are a natural extension of the ideas that work for younger children. It is equally important that you keep activities very practical so that the ideas have meaning for children.

Counting 'how many?'

Numbers are hard to fathom and children need plenty of practice:

- They need the practice of number order. You count up and back in the same pattern each time. So six follows five each time when you are counting higher numbers.

- But children also need plenty of experience that, when you want four plates, you stop counting at four, rather than going on and on.
- Counting by finger pointing or physically moving the plates, pieces of cheese or pencils all help children to understand how number works.

There are many opportunities for meaningful number work when children are involved in daily routines.

- Meal and snack times naturally lend themselves to ‘How many children have we got for tea?’ You can count by saying the names and showing the numbers on your fingers. ‘That’s 5 of us. So we need 5 plates ... Let’s count them as we lay the table ... Now we need 5 spoons, one for each plate.’
- You can sometimes make a deliberate mistake such as, ‘Who hasn’t got a plate? I haven’t, we didn’t count me!’
- Hanging out washing needs discussion about how many pegs in total and for each item. Perhaps the children have had a good time washing the dolls clothes and now it time to hang them up to dry. (Dry washing also feels less heavy than wet washing – another mathematical idea.)
- Cutting up and sharing a large cake or an apple gives practical experience of dividing into equal shares or cutting into halves or quarters.

So long as you do not over-do the counting, children often like to use their counting skills in different kinds of play.

- Children like to count steps in the stairs, how many big buses you all see on a local trip or creepy crawlies under the stone you turn over in the garden.
- When the children want, you can make some displays out of ‘what we saw’ and ‘what we counted’.
- The Children’s House Nursery School in Edinburgh (reported in *Nursery World* 28 September 2000) developed number bags in a similar way to the storysacks (see page 330). Number songs such as ‘One man went to mow’ or ‘Five speckled frogs’ can be supported by number props as well as the characters. Everything related to the song is then kept in its own bag.

Figure 13.7

Daily routines can be excellent ways to learn practical application of numbers



When children have had plenty of meaningful practice for counting then they are able to look at five dots and know it is five without counting. Or they can start at five and know that you then go on to six, rather than having to count all the way up from one.

Simple ways to measure

You can be creative in finding ways to measure before children can make sense of centimetres and metres.

- Children like to count how many paces it takes to reach the door or cross the garden.
- Hand widths may be a good way to measure some distances or heights. (The height of horses is still measured in hands.)
- Children can explore relative size and volume through how many cups of water it takes to fill the big jug or how many buckets of earth we dug out for our hole in the garden.
- Indoor and outdoor gardening projects can be a good source of measuring and looking at change over time. If children are not yet ready to use a rule or tape measure, then use a length of string to check how tall the tomato plants have grown or other seedlings. Keep a record with the children.

There are many songs and rhymes that include number. These counting up and back rhymes can support children's understanding.

- Young children will join in the words and actions of songs that show number: 'buns in the bakers' shop', 'sausages in a pan go pop', 'ten green bottles' and 'there were ten in the bed'.
- Children become familiar with the order of numbers and practise adding on and taking away.

Cooking activities are a rich source of early mathematical ideas (see page 102).

- Children learn to measure and why it is important to be accurate.
- You can work together to calculate cooking times and when the cakes will be ready.
- Decoration helps with number matching because you need, for instance, a cherry to decorate each cake or two currants for the eyes of each gingerbread person.

Written number

Children need plenty of experience to make sense of numbers that are written. You can help in the following ways.

- Look for appropriate use of written number in your setting. You might have numbered 'parking bays' for the bikes and trolleys in the garden. Some areas of your setting might have a maximum number of children at any one time, so a reminder notice may say that there are to be no more than four children at the water tray.
- You could use a self registration system with some learning areas in your setting. For instance, perhaps the computer area has a display with numbered places for children to put their name card over the day or session. As each child leaves their card it becomes obvious how many children have used this area in total. A movable display could lead to a discussion at the end of the day or session about how many children used this area today.

- Display number books and wall friezes that link the written number to the same number of objects, cats or any other item that children can see.
- Birthday charts can link number to age and how the passing of a birthday means that a child is one year older.
- Simple board games give experience in looking at the numbers on dice and counting on the same number of spaces. Four and five year olds need plenty of help and practice to get the hang of this use of counting.
- Try to provide other games such as card pairs, or picture dominoes, where the written number is given as well as the correct number of objects.

Children need to understand that numbers have a practical use, just as you want them to understand that writing is useful.

- Try a number walk to find all the examples of number that you can: on house and shop fronts, bus route numbers and timetables, the prices in shops and the local market and many more.
- Or go out to spot the numbers in the local neighbourhood shown in a set of photos that you took earlier.

When children are interested in writing numbers, then encourage them to do their practice in a meaningful context. It is counterproductive to rush children into this task and far less meaningful to children if you do it mainly through worksheets. Four and five year olds will often be ready to have a go at writing numbers less than ten. Children of six and seven years of age start to understand the meaning of numbers beyond ten. They have to understand that the 1 in 12 stands for a value of 10 and not for 1.

- Children may like to write up the numbers for the kind of activities described in this section. If they are involved in counting up, they may initially use a tally of marks that are converted into an actual number.
- They may like to do the writing of numbers when they and you set up a pretend market, a café with a price list or a post box in the pretend post office with the timing of the mail pick up on the outside.

Activity

- Take three ideas from this section of the chapter and plan how you will use them in your own practice.
- Carry out your ideas and write up the activity, including any opinions expressed by the children.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 LP3.1–3

Different kinds of size

Children learn about size and relative size by plenty of hands-on practice.

- Initially children can be confused about the different aspects to a broad concept of size: height, weight and volume. You can help by being precise about the words you use. See page 371 for a reminder that adults often use the all-purpose word ‘big’ to cover these ideas as well as getting older as a child.

- Make height charts with children to explore 'big' in terms of how tall and relative size.
- You can talk about the height of children's constructions with bricks or cardboard boxes. Children will like to record with photos the height and other features of especially impressive constructions.
- You can explore weight, relative weight and ways to measure weight that do not initially depend on understanding grams and kilograms. Children can work out which is heavier when they compare play materials or use a balance to try to make the two sides the same.
- Look at different materials in your setting with a view to helping children experience different features. For instance, a balloon may be 'big' when it is blown up, but is much 'lighter' than an apple.

Shape

Children learn about the different kinds of shape by plenty of hands-on practice and seeing what is meant by word names such as 'square', 'triangle' or 'circle'. In a similar way to learning about colour (see page 367), children need to see and notice the visual, and sometimes touch, features of different shapes and then be able to apply the words to the right shape. Children also experience shape in two dimensions when it is drawn on a piece of paper, and in three dimensions with bricks or other sets of sorting shapes.

- Children can experience different shapes by sorting bricks and other three dimensional shapes into different types.
- Construction activities and some jigsaws encourage the search for a particular shape that will fit.
- Children can make different shapes with craft materials like play dough or clay.
- Craft activities such as material patchwork and paper collage offer the opportunity to find and fit different shapes.



Figure 13.8

Pretend play can be a rich source of thinking and communication

- Children can match shapes in a shape lotto or shape dominoes game.
- You can have I-spy hunts to find different shapes and document them by drawing or taking photos. Children will find shapes in the natural world as well as part of the indoor environment in patterns on lino or woodblock flooring.

Understanding time

Young children do not understand clock time and it is not unusual for six or seven year olds to be confused over telling the time. But an understanding of time is much more than clock time and you can support young children as they understand this concept.

- Children learn through familiar routines about a sequence in the day or a session as time passes. They learn the vocabulary of times of the day such as morning and afternoon and time indicators like 'soon', 'later' and 'afterwards'.
- A friendly routine with some flexibility helps children to predict what will happen next and to understand about 'snack time' or 'tidy up time'.
- Some predictability about what happens on days of the week is how children make sense of the fact that Monday comes before Tuesday and that Friday is the day before the weekend.
- Time measures like five minutes or half an hour do not mean anything to three, four or five year olds. They can make sense of 'you have time for one more painting' or 'one last run around the park and then we need to go back to nursery for our lunch'.
- Use simple time measuring devices such as large sand timers. Children are able to operate these and they like the fairness it brings to turn taking on bikes and other shared play materials.

Telling the time in terms of clocks is not easy. The division of time into 60 minutes in an hour and 24 hours in the day is an arbitrary system. Children need to have grasped the number system and to understand that, with the exception of 24 hour clocks, the 12 hour system is repeated in a day.

- When six and seven year olds struggle with telling the time, remember that children nowadays have to negotiate understanding time from clocks with moving hands and the many digital timepieces that give only numbers (in a 12 or 24 hour system).
- Clocks and watches with moving hands have to be understood on a 'big hand'-'little hand' basis. Then there is the confusing business of quarter past, half past and quarter to the hour. If you tune into the task for children, you will recall that telling the time takes lots of practice.

Activity

- Take three ideas from this section of the chapter and plan how you will use them in your own practice.
- Carry out your ideas and write up the activity, including any opinions expressed by the children.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 LP3.1–3

The Numeracy Hour

In England the National Numeracy Strategy was introduced along with the National Literacy Strategy (see page 341) to support standards. The usual approach to early numeracy has been less structured than some of the approaches to literacy.

The methods of supporting children's understanding described in this section are consistent with the expectations for children in the Reception class. The numeracy hour itself has usually been interpreted as a total that is met by activities for children that spread throughout the day.

Using information and communication technology

Information and computer technology, known as ICT for short, covers all the tools and techniques related to the use of computers. In practice, this area tends to include the use of technology to support learning for children younger than eight years. The broad objectives are that children:

- become familiar with all the ways in which they can use computers and the related technology
- learn how to use the mouse and the keyboard and the general ways in which information is organised
- are able to use programmable toys and simple robots as part of their play and exploration
- feel confident in the use of the technology in daily life, including calculators, cameras, remote controls, video and tape recorders.

There is a bewildering array of hardware and software for computer usage. If you are involved in choosing and buying equipment or programs it is wise to get some impartial advice.

- The magazine *Nursery World* has regular reviews of software and an annual supplement *Nursery Computing*.
- Talk with other early years practitioners to find out how well equipment and programs work in practice.
- If you can, visit other settings to see different types of technology in action and children using them.

Tips for practice

Computers for under threes?

Babies, toddlers and very young children learn best by direct involvement with play materials and safe access to explore ordinary objects (see page 270). There are no sound developmental reasons to give under threes regular access to computers.

You will encounter commercial interests who are very keen to sell computer software for toddlers, with the message that earlier must be better. But young children have plenty of time to become computer literate and they do not yet have the understanding of their social world to make sense of screen images. Computers are part of ordinary life now, so there is no need to keep under threes

Figure 13.9

Computers have a place in early years settings, but should not dominate



away from them. But there is also no advantage in pushing computers as a significant part of daily life for very young children. The rest of this section is written with over threes in mind.

Uses of computer technology

Children need to gain experience and confidence in the different uses of computers, and certainly not only about games. Children who have access to computers at home probably mainly, or only, use them for games. However, the range of options includes:

- software for drawing and design
- word processing packages for writing and experimenting with layout and style of text
- searching and finding information from a CD ROM
- simple handling of numbers and layout in spreadsheets
- using a scanner to integrate hand-drawn illustrations or pictures from magazines into a document
- use of images from a digital camera
- email options for sending communications.

You will not necessarily have all these options in your setting and some uses, such as data handling, will be more appropriate for school age children.



Tips for practice

- Ensure that you are familiar with how the computer works and the software packages that are loaded.
- Be ready to show and tell a child how to work the equipment and find their way in and out of a program.
- Then you can be enthusiastic when children can show you what they have discovered. You might say, 'That's an unusual drawing. How did you create it?' or 'I didn't know the program would do that. Can you show me please?'
- Be ready to help whenever children would like you to. Computers will go wrong and paper will jam. So it is important that your timely intervention reduces frustration for the children.
- Explain out loud your own problem solving strategies when it is not immediately obvious how to use a program or achieve a particular effect or function.
- Use the correct terms for computer usage such as 'keyboard', 'mouse', 'save', 'print' or 'menu'.
- Use the appropriate phrase to say out loud what you are doing or to confirm what the children are doing. You might say, 'I'm double clicking on this picture', 'Have you put in the CD ROM?', 'Do you know how to click and drag what you want?' or 'We could cut this paragraph and paste it in here. What do you think?'

Activity

- Take two or three ideas from the tips for practice box in this section.
- Consider especially how you can set a good example in problem solving strategies.
- Plan how you will use them in your own practice to support ICT.
- Carry out your ideas and write up the activity, including any opinions expressed by the children.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 LP3.1–3

A welcoming computer area

You need to take as much trouble over your computer area as any other learning area in your setting. You want children to develop good habits of computer use as well as familiarity with the technology.

- Children need good lighting to see, but not direct sunlight.
- They need enough space to sit comfortably and move their hands with ease.
- Ensure that the seating and layout of any computer area enables children to learn good habits of posture when working at the computer.
- They should hold their hands above the keyboard, keeping their hands in line with their wrists.

- Adjust the chairs, if necessary, so that children either look straight at the screen or slightly down, not up at the screen.
- Children should sit with their back straight. Provide a cushion for the small of their back if necessary.

You can help children to become familiar with the different parts of the computer:

- You can show and tell as children learn.
- You can also have written labels that say 'printer', 'CD ROM box' and 'paper'.
- A large drawing of the computer on the wall can label clearly the different parts, such as monitor, keyboard and mouse.
- Alternatively have a three dimensional junk model that shows the different parts of a computer. Making this model could be a creative project for the oldest children in your setting or for children in Reception or Year One to do for the nursery in a school.
- If your mouse has two or more buttons, then put a smiley sticker on the left hand button, which children will mainly use. Very few children in early years settings will be able to tell left from right yet.

Another source of practical writing will be a short list of ground rules for the computer area. You can write them up with the involvement of the children, who could add drawings. Like any other rules, keep these short and phrased in a positive way. You could include:

- our hands are clean (no sand!)
- two children at one time
- one child on the mouse or keyboard at a time
- we tidy up afterwards.

Children can understand that tidying up the computer area and putting everything away is as important as tidying other areas of your setting. Any CD ROMs need to go back in their containers, paper is tidied back into the box, the equipment is switched off and covers put over each item.

Activity

- Take two or three ideas from this section.
- Consider especially how you can involve children in the activity, like rules for the computer area.
- Carry out your ideas and write up the activity, including any opinions expressed by the children and illustrations of what you have all done.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 LP3.1–3

Monitor computer usage

Children should not spend too long at the computer, neither at one sitting, nor over the day or session, so that they ignore other sources of learning. Computer and other ICT usage should complement all the other learning opportunities and not supplant them. It may help to have some kind of self registration for this area (see page 379) as well as keeping a friendly eye yourself on who is at the

computer and for how long. A self registration system can also help you identify children who rarely if ever use the computer.

There is no need to push children into using the computer area, especially if they are younger than four or five years and busy learning from other resources in your setting. However, it is useful to observe and see if lack of confidence may be stopping a child or perhaps the belief that computers are all about boring games. You can help by encouraging a child to explore what the computer will do and showing that you also use the possibilities of the technology.

It is possible that boys may dominate the computer area, although this is not the inevitable pattern. If you do observe an uneven gender division then look at how to encourage girls to use the technology. You could show, by your own actions, the different ways that computers can be a resource for other projects: to write, to draw and to search for information.

You can encourage use of the potential of computers linked with other resources in your setting, so that technology complements direct experience. For example:

- Images could be found or scanned into the computer and then printed out as part of a project to make books, cards, a wall frieze or any other creative project. The computer is used to extend the search for images and then these are used in hands-on design and creation.
- A project about gardening could involve direct work in the outdoor area, a visit to look for items and buy in the local gardening centre and searches with a CD ROM to discover information about plants and what they need in order to grow.

Tips for practice

- Be ready to show and explain to parents how children use and learn about ICT in your setting.
- If parents do not use computers much themselves, they may believe that children will do nothing but play computer games.
- Involve the children in making a display of how they have used different programs on the computer with 'we wrote about...' 'we drew ...' and 'we found out all about ...'
- Invite parents in for special afternoon or evening sessions to explore what can be done with ICT.

Scenario

Baker Street Children and Family Centre has explored how to introduce children to communicating through email. The computer in the office has an internet link and the centre has built up contact with settings in other parts of the UK and is now working on links in other countries.

Children are encouraged to make contact with the other settings, whose location is shown on a large map of the UK. Children plan what they want to say and dictate the email. Staff and children are learning together how to attach other files and will soon explore how to send photos from the digital camera. Some material is also sent between the settings by conventional post.

A recent team discussion has been about whether to set up an email link with 'Father Christmas'. Sian brought in a suggested project outline that would involve children in emailing to an address, perhaps that of one of the parents and then the parent emailing back as Father Christmas. Tyrone and Natalie are very dubious about this project. They argue that Father Christmas does not exist and surely this use of the technology undermines the existing communication with genuine people and places. Sian and Asha counter that it is just a bit of fun and part of other Father Christmas activities.

Questions

- 1 In what ways could the centre continue to link up with the other settings? Think of some possible joint projects and apply them to your own setting.
- 2 Should the centre use the technology to email 'Father Christmas'?
- 3 Consider the possible advantages and disadvantages of such a project. Discuss your conclusion with your colleagues.

Key skills links: PS3.1 WO3.1–3

Children with special needs

Computer technology can be of equal use for children with special needs and sometimes the possibilities open up a child's world.

- It is possible to get a larger scale mouse or overlays for the keyboard for some software programs. Then children can still be involved who have more difficulty than their peers in the physical movements that are required.
- It can be possible to record short phrases, such as refrains from a song, so that a child with communication difficulties may be able to press a button to add a contribution to songs and rhymes.
- Once children start to write, using the keyboard can ease the task for children. Some will have more difficulty with the physical coordination of writing than their peers and children who have dyslexia can be helped by keyboard use.

Finding out more

Inclusive Technology is an organisation specialising in making computers accessible to children with special needs. Contact them on tel: 01457 819790 website: www.inclusive.co.uk

Technology and play

Computers and other related technology are part of everyday life for children now. You can familiarise children with the equipment through other activities.

Role play areas

You can provide non-functioning computers or keyboards for role play areas, such as an office. An old keyboard can be very useful for younger and more vigorous children who cannot resist banging the keys and switching the buttons.

A technology table

Children are intrigued by how appliances work.

- A technology table can be provided with tools and old items of technology that children can take apart.
- Children can be part of drafting letters to parents requesting unwanted appliances.
- Remove any batteries and explain to children why old batteries need to be treated with care.
- Children need basic tools that work. One star-headed and one ordinary screwdriver plus a pair of pliers with wire cutting jaws will be sufficient.

Children are fascinated by what is inside old tape recorders, ordinary telephones and mobile phones. You can show your own interest and some children may want to document through photos and a display what they have discovered. Three, four and five year olds can understand that these items are for dismantling and looking at. Their valuable curiosity will then not be applied to working examples.

Local technology

You can explore with children through local trips how you can spot examples of technology in the neighbourhood. If you and the children explain your interest then it is likely that some people will give you time to show how equipment works and what it will do. Some possibilities include:

- use of a computer to store information for local businesses, such as an estate agent
- the bar code scanner at the supermarket
- the database for books at the library or the system for registering that books have been taken out or brought back
- video security systems in shops or train stations.



Figure 13.10

Children are interested in and can learn about a range of technology

Using cameras

Children learn how to be careful with cameras when adults take the trouble to show them how to be responsible. An increasing number of early years settings and schools now use cameras as a regular part of the children's day.

- You can use a camera to record activities as a supplement to other observations you make as an adult.
- But children also like to record projects, both the work in progress and the final end product of their hard work.
- A store of photos can be built up over time and made into a display, for example, of the exciting new building going up on the high street or the changes in trees and flowers in the local park.
- Children can use cameras and their later choice of photos to record their views about a setting: favourite places and activities, important parts of the setting and fun moments that nobody wishes to forget.
- Use the photos you take and those of the children to explore good technique, such as keeping your fingers out of shot, holding the camera steady and what is too close and too far away for a good photo.

Most settings will have an ordinary camera but some have invested in a digital camera, which costs more at the outset but then you do your own printing. Children of four, five years and older can become adept at handling the images on the screen, making adjustments and printing. If your system is linked with a website for your setting then you need to have good security systems for access, including passwords.

If necessary, discuss some ground rules with the children about what is photographed and how.

- You should of course follow your own guidelines. It is a good rule of thumb never to take a photo of a child that you would not take of an adult colleague, for instance in the toilet or in a state of undress.
- When you take the camera out on local trips, ask permission before you take photos of people.
- It may be very important to some families that photos of their children do not leave the setting. Some parents may have fled domestic violence and it is crucial that the violent partner does not know the current location of this parent and the children.

Activity

- Take two or three ideas from this section.
- Consider especially how you can involve children in the activity and avoid being an over-directive adult.
- Carry out your ideas and write up the activity, including any opinions expressed by the children and illustrations of what you have all done.

Key skills links: C2/3.3 LP3.1–3



Further resources

Caddell, Dorothy (1998) *Number Counts* Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum.

Donaldson, Margaret (1978) *Children's Minds* Fontana.

Healy, Jane (1998) *Failure to Connect: How computers affect our children's minds and what we can do about it* Touchstone.

Gopnik, Alison, Meltzoff, Andrew and Kuhl, Patricia (1999) *How Babies Think: The science of childhood* Weidenfeld and Nicholson.

Lindon, Jennie (1998) *Understanding Child Development: Knowledge, theory and practice* Cengage Learning.

Progress check

- 1 Describe two ways in which you could observe the results of children's thinking when they do not say much.
- 2 Give four examples of abstract ideas that three or four year olds might understand, other than colour or shape.
- 3 Explain why young children are not usually helped when adults ask closed and testing questions.
- 4 Describe four activities that could help children practice counting.
- 5 Suggest three reasons why you should monitor use of your computing area.

Supporting children's learning within the curriculum

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- explain ways to support children towards a positive disposition to learn
- understand and explain different approaches to an early years curriculum
- consider positive ways to support children's learning in early years settings and school
- understand and promote flexible approaches to learning that give children choices.

Introduction

The overall objective of any early years setting and of early years practitioners has to be that children are supported positively in their learning. Children need not only to extend their learning through the years of childhood but to build an image of themselves as individuals who can learn. Early years practitioners support children through their own positive behaviour and through constructive planning within the curriculum. This chapter considers the broad approaches to children's learning and Chapter 15 then looks at ways to plan within early years settings.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 2, 6

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C8, E1

Level 3: M7, M8

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 3, 7, 9

Developing a positive disposition to learn

Part of healthy personal development for young children is a growing sense that they are competent individuals. By three or four years of age, and certainly within the early years of school, it dawns on children that they have a very great deal to learn and much that they do not currently understand or know. If children are not to feel overwhelmed by this prospect, they need a positive outlook on themselves as learners and the process of learning. Supportive adults can make a very great difference to children's experiences.



Figure 14.1

Your aim is that the children are enthusiastic about learning

To think about

- In Chapter 15 you will find different ways of planning ahead to give children a full range of activities and to support their learning.
- It cannot be emphasised too much that none of this planning will genuinely support children unless you are willing to tune into how children learn.
- Planning and curriculum paper plans or charts, no matter how well drafted and discussed, cannot do the work for you with the children day by day.

Supporting a positive disposition to learn

Learning is not all intellectual or rational; feelings are just as much involved. It is important that children develop a confidence that they can learn. Knowledge about child development will help you to be realistic about what is possible for children at different ages. You need to avoid putting unrealistic pressure on children and to focus on being pleased with them for what they manage now. Children's emotional well being supports them in all their learning.

Children's **positive disposition to learn** includes all of the following:

- curiosity and the wish to find out and explore
- a desire to become competent, to be able to do or say something
- a motivation to keep trying, even if something is neither easy nor obvious at the outset
- a sense of satisfaction for children when they practise, improve and realise that they have managed a new skill or idea.

This positive outlook can develop over time with adult support. Alternatively children may learn from negative experiences that they are incompetent, that adults think they keep making mistakes and that there is no point in trying.

Key term

Positive disposition to learn

an enthusiasm felt by children about learning, supported by a positive self-image and sense of 'I can'

Activity (observation)

Take any of the general points about a positive disposition to learn and look for examples of what this could mean for children of different ages.

For instance, collect some examples of what curiosity looks like in

- toddlers, younger than two years
- a four year old
- a six or seven year old
- perhaps an adult like yourself.

Look at your brief observations and consider in your own setting:

- What could be done to support children in curiosity and the wish to explore?
- What is likely to undermine children – from adult behaviour or the way that an early years setting or family home is organised?
- Then collect some observations relevant to another point.
- Discuss your findings with colleagues.

Key skills links: LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3 C3.1a

What is learning like for children?

Children are not only learning specific skills or gathering factual knowledge; they are also developing an outlook on learning. Adults, practitioners or parents, can help to encourage positive attitudes towards learning and support children's sense of self esteem and confidence.

You can help if you make the effort to look through children's eyes and observe the world from their perspective. Children will not use these exact words but they do wonder about:

- Can learning be satisfying? Can it be enjoyable? When is it fun? Learning is not fun for children all the time!
- Am I someone who can learn? Have I learned in the past? Children are not always aware of what they have learned so far, because they focus on the here and now.
- Are mistakes a disaster or can I really learn from what goes wrong?
- Can I get help and is it alright to ask for help?
- What can I do with what I've learned? Is it useful?
- Is newness a source of opportunity and interest? Or is it more a threat to be avoided?

Adults can often forget that children's experiences include a great deal of newness, sometimes with little time to feel confident in one area before another new skill or area of knowledge is introduced. Children in primary school regularly experience this sense of being moved on, so you need to avoid creating a sense of pressure earlier in childhood!

Studies of learning, by children or adults, has highlighted four general stages in awareness:

- 1 *Unconscious incompetence* – when you are unaware of your lack of



knowledge or skill in a particular area. You do not know that you do not know – blissful ignorance.

- 2 *Conscious incompetence* – when you are only too aware that you do not know something, do not understand or cannot manage a skill. This can be a very uncomfortable stage.
- 3 *Conscious competence* – when you are able to use knowledge or manage a skill, but you have to concentrate with care.
- 4 *Unconscious competence* – when you understand and have practised enough that this area comes automatically to you and you no longer have to concentrate on each step.

Activity

As an adult now, you have a great deal of learning experience behind you. Ideas or skills that seem obvious to you are not at all obvious to children. It can help you to tune into their feelings and struggles if you consider an area of learning that you tackled relatively recently.

For instance, perhaps the experience of learning to drive a car is fairly fresh in your mind or of becoming competent in using the internet. You will have gone through the four stages.

- What did it feel like, perhaps in learning to drive, when you did not seem to have enough hands and feet to manage all the movements?
- What was helpful behaviour from other people when you were struggling with the internet, or with becoming computer literate in the first place?
- What was not at all helpful? What made you feel incompetent and reluctant to ask for help?
- Now take a step across in your mind. How can you use those memories to tune into children's struggles and to be a helpful adult now?
- Discuss the experiences and issues with your colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.1a

It is far too easy for adults to forget that an area of knowledge or a skill, that seems so obvious now, was something that they learned.

- Effective help for children frequently depends on an adult willingness to take a task or skill apart and help a child through the various stages. See the example about self help skills on page 50.
- Part of this help is that adults make an effort to observe and understand how far a child's learning has progressed, where they are at the moment, whether they are stuck, and how they can be helped to move forward.
- Otherwise it is possible for adults to be impatient or assume that children are being awkward, when they do not understand.
- You will find examples throughout other chapters but a particularly useful area for tuning into children is when they are learning about abstract ideas (see page 368).

How you can support learning

In order to help children to learn day by day from the experience you offer, you also need to remain aware of their more general experiences of learning. How are they enabled to learn in your setting, your home as a childminder or their own home if you work as a nanny?

Perseverance, practice and making connections

Children need opportunities to practise and encouragement to persevere through the times when something does not come easily.

- An excessive emphasis that learning 'must be fun' is unhelpful for children, if this means that adults fail to help children to persevere through difficulties.
- You can then share in the delight when that perseverance brings success and satisfaction.
- Children need to learn that some skills take time and that they will understand an idea in the end, even when it does not come easily at the start.
- Without adult help in explaining simply how learning evolves, some children become trapped by their belief that you are either 'good at' something or you are not. By the early years of school, some children have already decided they are 'no good at maths' or 'clumsy at games'.
- Children will have some special talents and interests and helpful adults highlight those. But children will be able to learn in other areas with effort and adult support.
- Adults can help children to make connections between one skill and another or between apparently separate areas of knowledge. Adult comments can guide with 'Do you remember what we did with ... Perhaps that will help here'.

Informative encouragement

So long as adults help, children can learn from mistakes and frustrations.

- Some children need a great deal of reassurance along the lines of 'I can see your painting hasn't gone how you wanted. Let's see what happened' or 'I can hear you're having trouble with the scissors. Show me how you're doing it.'
- Knowing a child well can help adults to boost children's confidence, to encourage them to recognise their abilities in one area and not dismiss themselves as 'stupid' or 'no good at ...'.
- Perhaps you can remind a child how 'you told me you'd never ever be able to do up your buttons. And look at you now. Don't worry, we'll work out this problem together.'

Constructive feedback from adults can help children to focus on what has gone well, not just on what has gone wrong. Children are more likely to accept suggestions and helpful hints from adults who are generally supportive rather than critical. Some children, especially, need to be supported in accepting compliments and recognising their achievements. Good communication skills to support children have much in common with similar skills used in good working relationships with adults (see page 605).

- Adults have to acknowledge children's difficulties and current frustrations. It is unhelpful to pretend everything is fine when it clearly is not for this child.

- You can affirm a child's self worth, acknowledge problems and encourage them forward.
- Useful phrases can be, 'You don't understand this at the moment' or 'You can't do this yet ...' or 'I can see that you're finding this tough. Let's see how I can help' or 'Now I see that's where you're getting stuck, let me show you ...'.
- Adults also need to celebrate successes with children, to help them to register what they have managed before moving onto something else that is new and perhaps difficult.
- Moving on from positives ('You can manage this very well. You know, I think you're ready for ...') is just as important as dealing constructively with negatives.

Useful and constructive feedback for children addresses feelings as well as facts:

- Positive feelings can be expressed in words of encouragement to children along with positive body language and smiles.
- Negative feelings should be avoided in expressions by adults, since they will emerge to the child as blunt criticisms.
- Concerns should be expressed factually. Adults should, however, acknowledge and deal sympathetically with children's negative feelings about their abilities.
- Positive factual feedback is useful for children: what has gone well and why or how a child's perseverance has paid off.
- What could be negative factual feedback can be valuable if given in a constructive way. Focus on what has gone well as well as what has gone awry, and offer genuine help to children to learn from mistakes.

Tips for practice

A focus on continuing learning

Adults help children and young people when they focus on the future as well as the present and the past. Lev Vygotsky's idea of the zone of proximal development is a useful way to consider the learning of any individual child at a given time. Look back at the explanation and the diagram on page 356.

The zone represents the area of possibilities that lies between what children can manage on their own at the moment and what they could achieve or understand with some appropriate help. The size of the zone is not fixed; some children may have a larger zone of proximal development than others. Your help (or that of an interested older child) builds on the young child's existing ability, understanding or skill, and helps her or him to move to a potential level of development through the short distance covered by the zone of proximal development. As children learn, their levels of actual and potential development continue to change.

To think about

When my son was five years old, a close friend of his moved house and we were invited to tea at Piya's new home. I drove us most of the way and then pulled in to check my London A–Z. Drew and I then had a conversation that went like this:

Drew: How do you know where Piya lives?

Jennie: His Mum gave me their new address. I know it's round here somewhere. I'm just not sure of the last bit.

D: So how can we find it if you don't know?

J: I've got the map. I'm going to find it in the A to Z.

D: (looking at the map) But how can you find it on there?

J: It's okay. I know the name of the road.

D: But there's no houses or anything on it (the map). How can you find Piya's house on that?

J: Ah, right. The map doesn't show houses and things. But it shows me the roads. Look. We're here now and Piya's road is there. The map tells me we have to turn right, go straight on a bit and then turn left.

D: But what about his house?

J: That'll be alright because I know the number. We get onto Piya's road and then we look out for number fourteen. The houses will have numbers on the doors.

Questions

- 1 From this short exchange what can you learn about what Drew understood so far and what was confusing him about how maps worked?
- 2 Look out for situations with children you know when they are slightly confused. In what ways can you explain in words or show in actions so that you help them to extend their understanding?
- 3 Write up these examples as short case studies.
- 4 Discuss what you observed and what you did with colleagues.

Source: This example is taken from Jennie Lindon *Understanding Child Development: Knowledge, theory and practice* (Cengage Learning 1998).

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a

Key terms

Curriculum

a framework for supporting learning that specifies broad areas of learning and approaches to promote children's learning of knowledge and skills. A curriculum may describe precise content and methods to support learning

Early years

curriculum

content and methods to support learning that are directly appropriate to children younger than 5–6 years of age

Learning within a curriculum

In general use, the word **curriculum** has tended to mean a course of study. You are following a curriculum in your studies as an early years practitioner. However, when the word is applied to the learning of younger children, curriculum carries a broader meaning.

What is a curriculum?

The phrase **early years curriculum** means the sum of all the experiences, opportunities and activities that you offer in your setting.

- Used appropriately, an early years curriculum is not restricted to particular kinds of learning or ways that children can learn.

**Figure 14.2**

Children's learning is supported through different types of play

- Young children are curious and flexible and they learn positively through many different routes so long as they have time, space and encouragement to learn.
- In the early years, good practice in the UK has been that children are enabled to learn through play and not by very adult dominated activities and formal teaching.
- A play-based curriculum is flexible and recognises that children's interests are broad and their view of play and playful activities extends beyond the boundaries that adults may draw around play.

The whole idea of a curriculum may seem more relevant if you are working with children in a group setting. Yet you still need a well-rounded approach to children's learning when you work as a nanny or a childminder. You may not talk in terms of a curriculum and will not plan ahead in the same way as an early years team. But the children will benefit from your taking a full view of what they could be learning and in what way.

Curriculum frameworks

Any curriculum needs a framework into which the details are then fitted. A curriculum framework is likely to define some or all of the following:

- The broad philosophy that underpins this approach to curriculum.
- The boundaries to what will be covered for children's learning – the broad areas in which their learning will progress.
- How children will be enabled to learn – the different methods that supportive adults will use. This aspect of a curriculum needs to tackle how adults will behave.

- The ways in which children's learning will be different after completion of this particular curriculum. Some curriculum frameworks are worded in terms of targets, goals or outcomes.
- Perhaps the ways in which the learning goals or targets will be observed and assessed.

The innovation of an early years curriculum

The ideas of a curriculum framework for children younger than school age developed from the eighteenth century onwards. Educational innovators developed approaches for young children that diverged from the repetitive drills and harsh discipline that were usual in schools and for children taught at home by a governess or tutor.

The innovators described in this section are all different and some ideas have continued to develop over time. They share a focus on early childhood as a time to be valued and the view that ways to support early learning need to allow children scope to explore, choose and practise, often through the medium of play. The different approaches also share a focus on broad areas of learning rather than narrowly defined school subjects.

Robert Owen (1771–1858)

Owen is often forgotten in discussions about educational innovators. Yet his work was much admired at the time and many visitors came from other parts of the UK and Europe. In 1819 Owen opened the first infant school in Britain for the children of his mill workers in New Lanark in Scotland. Owen was convinced that the early years of childhood were a vital time to develop health and a positive character in children. He insisted that children in the school be allowed to play and not to have to spend all their time with books. His view was extraordinary at the time, because prevailing Christian doctrine claimed that children were naturally sinful and needed uncompromising discipline in school life.

Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852)

Froebel built on the ideas of Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827). Both men were concerned to develop a more kindly approach to children than the very strict rote-led learning normal in schools at the time. They emphasised children's capacity to explore and learn through playful activities. Froebel pioneered educational settings for children younger than school age that he called Kindergarten (German for children's garden). Froebel emphasised children's involvement in daily activities and learning through a wide range of structured play activities (called occupations), play materials (called gifts) and songs. Some of these materials, for instance the sets of wooden blocks, still delight children. Again, this approach may not seem very radical to the modern reader. So it is worth knowing that Froebel's approach caused such a stir that, at one time, the German authorities closed down all the Kindergarten.

Margaret McMillan (1860–1931)

McMillan was especially interested in how children could learn in an outdoor environment and concerned to improve the poor health of many city children. She developed nursery practice with a strong focus on being outside in the fresh air and exploration through the potential of a garden and working with real tools. Children worked on outdoor projects in which they exercised a great deal of

choice. The open air nursery still exists as the Rachel McMillan Nursery School in south London.

In her approach and development of equipment, McMillan was very influenced by the French medical physiologist Edouard Séguin (1812–80). Séguin studied children with learning difficulties and promoted the idea, unusual for his time, that children's bodies and minds were linked, not separate. He developed an educational method for work with disabled children that aimed to train the muscular system through exercises and activities. Séguin's approach then led children from education of their senses to development of thinking and ideas.

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925)

Steiner developed an approach to early education that focuses on how learning can be supported through the rhythm of daily routines. There is a strong focus on letting children, not adults, guide play and a value placed on the senses and physical movement. The curriculum followed in Steiner Waldorf nurseries and schools is based in the conviction that intellectual learning, especially the start to reading and writing, should not be rushed. The view is that children are not ready for this task until they are close to seven years. Steiner nurseries are concerned to offer a fully rounded curriculum and avoid the imbalance towards intellectual development and pressure from adults on children's choices and pace of learning.

Maria Montessori (1870–1952)

Based in Italy, Maria Montessori developed her approach from work with disabled children and those from very disadvantaged backgrounds. Montessori was also very influenced by the ideas of Séguin. She developed his materials into what is now known as the Montessori method, using specific educational equipment to help children manage skills through exploration and self motivated practice.

Montessori believed it was possible to provoke children's interest appropriately at different stages of development and to support their skills of self care, hand coordination and early literacy. The learning materials were designed to encourage individual rather than cooperative effort. However, group working was actively promoted with shared domestic responsibilities within settings such as her *casa dei bambini* (Italian for children's house). Her aim was to support children, especially socially deprived and disabled children, to be able to cope in later life and gain important skills of self reliance through exploration.

Susan Isaacs (1885–1948)

Isaacs was part of a therapeutic rather than an educational tradition. Her development of the Malting House School was very influenced by the ideas of Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, developed in the psychoanalytic tradition (see page 15). However, Susan Isaacs did not see education as a vehicle to analyse deep meanings in children's behaviour. She placed a high value on children's play because it gave such scope for imagination and thinking. Isaacs believed that play could help children work through emotional problems, but that it also helped children to develop social skills and was effectively children's 'work'.

High/Scope

The High/Scope approach developed in the mid-twentieth century in the United States as part of an intervention programme in Ypsilanti, Michigan to support children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This approach to curriculum has developed for general application in early years settings.

The High/Scope curriculum is based on two key principles: that children make sense of their world through interaction with people, materials and events and that adults need to support children's active learning. A consistent daily routine and easy accessibility of materials supports children's learning through a broad range of key experiences. The High/Scope approach places a strong emphasis on attentive observation by adults, since they need to respond to children's current interests. The approach also emphasises children's active choices and full involvement in the curriculum through the plan–do–review cycle.

Te Whāriki

During the 1990s educators developed a bilingual early years national curriculum for New Zealand that aimed to take a genuinely bicultural (English–Maori) approach to learning in early years setting. The Maori word *whāriki* means a woven mat for all to stand upon. The curriculum is built around key guiding principles, for example that children learn through responsive relationships. Broad goals for learning are built around the framework of five key aims: well being, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration.

The approach described in *Te Whāriki* has influenced some local authority curriculum frameworks in the UK through *Quality and Diversity in Education*, the report published in 1998 by the Early Education Forum based at the National Children's Bureau.

National curriculum frameworks

You may work in an early years setting that follows a curriculum developed from the ideas of the innovators described above. Otherwise you are likely to work within an example of the current national curriculum frameworks:

- If you work with children younger than school age then you are very likely to follow one of the national frameworks for early education for children older than three years of age (see page 403).

Figure 14.3

Young children need freedom to move and explore



- Settings that work with children younger than three years of age have to consider what will be a suitable curriculum framework for very young children and babies (see page 407). There are no national curriculum frameworks as yet for these very young children, although some local authorities have developed their own guidelines.
- Children who attend school will follow the educational national curriculum for their part of the UK (see page 407).

Guidance on an early years curriculum

During the 1990s, national guidance on early years curriculum was developed in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The national documents vary in the details, although the curriculum frameworks have much in common in terms of the areas of learning covered and the principles underlying the guidance. All the frameworks also suggest appropriate expectations for what children will most likely have learned in each of the broad areas of learning before they start school.

England

From autumn 2000 a new framework was established for children's pre-primary early education. The period from when children are three years old until the end of their Reception year was called the Foundation Stage. So this stage stretches into primary school, until children are five or six years of age, depending on their birthday.

The Foundation Stage has not changed legal requirements about education. In England, Wales and Scotland children have to start their education in the term after they reach five years of age. Children start school at four years of age in Northern Ireland.

The guidance for the Foundation Stage describes an early years curriculum built around helping young children to work towards early learning goals (ELGs). The ELGs represent achievements that it is expected most children will have gained by the end of their Reception year. A range of early learning goals are described for each of six broad areas:

- personal, social and emotional development
- communication, language and literacy
- mathematical development
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development.

The guidance indicates that children should be supported to learn in a way guided by their own interests and through the opportunities of play and involvement in daily routines. Approaches to support three to five year olds in any early years settings and Reception class are expected to be suitable to their age and understanding. In principle, the early learning goals are not supposed to be met through very formal activities or by making children sit still for long periods of time. In practice, some settings have felt a pressure to become more structured, especially when practitioners have been anxious to show evidence that children have made progress.

Wales

The *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning before Compulsory School Age* describes six areas of learning:

- language, literacy and communication skills
- personal and social development
- mathematical development
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development.

Like all the documents for Wales, *Desirable Outcomes* is written in English and in Welsh. The outcomes are worded in terms of 'By the time they are five, the experiences that children had had should enable them to ...' and the outcomes are flexibly expressed with phrases like 'begin to understand ...' and 'begin to appreciate ...'.

A review is being undertaken of this guidance as part of the planning for early educational places for three year olds. It looks as if a play-based early years curriculum in Wales will be extended into the first years of school for five and six year olds, along with the removal of SATs (Standard Assessment Tasks) at seven years of age.

Scotland

The document *A Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5* is built around five 'key aspects of children's development and learning':

- emotional, personal and social development
- communication and language
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- expressive and aesthetic development
- physical development and movement.

The guidance does not specify mathematical development as a separate area of learning; it appears in knowledge and understanding of the world. Each area has a section of 'children should learn to ...' with a list of broad developmental achievements by the end of the early educational phase. The guidance is also illustrated with 'examples from practice' for each area, with points to consider.

Northern Ireland

The *Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education* describes seven broad learning areas:

- personal, social and emotional development
- physical development
- creative/aesthetic development
- language development
- early mathematical experiences
- early experiences in science and technology
- knowledge and appreciation of the environment.

The guidance emphasises the importance of observation, planning and record keeping. Each learning area has a box at the end on 'Progress in Learning' which

is introduced as ‘a general description of the characteristics and skills that the majority of children who have experienced appropriate pre-school education will display’. The sentences given in the paragraphs have much in common with other early years documents. In Northern Ireland, children whose birthday falls before June will start school at four years. Younger children will wait another year.

Activity

- If you work in an early years setting, it should be easy for you to consult your national guidance on the early years curriculum. If you have difficulty in obtaining a copy, then go direct to the relevant national body (see page 417 for contact details).
- Look at the guidance in terms of the main features (use the bullet points on page 403). Write up and discuss with your colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.2

Learning through play

Young children learn a very great deal through their play and playful interactions. Every curriculum framework and any adult planning has to ensure that the content and approaches within any early years curriculum take serious account of children’s play rather than a bias towards high levels of structure, adult-chosen and adult-led activities.

Children have many years of formal schooling to experience. There is no advantage, and many disadvantages, to pushing formal teaching methods down the age range. The power of learning through play is that:

- Children can make choices in their play and explore the directions that intrigue them at the moment.
- Children can take experiences and rework them or extend them through their play on their own or with friends.
- In play, children can mentally and emotionally step beyond the real limits of their life, especially in their use of pretend play.
- Play enables children to make connections between their own personal areas of learning and to push out the boundaries of what they can do and understand.
- Play and playful interactions can be a positive vehicle for learning from the earliest months of life.
- Play enables children to enjoy life and have a relaxed childhood – a perfectly reasonable objective in itself !

Play is a rich medium for learning but children do not only learn through play, especially if adults define play in a narrow way. Children learn a great deal through relaxed and happy conversation with adults who listen as well as talk (see page 310). Children can also learn a great deal from their natural involvement, in how your setting is run and from having a safe role to take in daily routines.

Tips for practice

Children will be able to learn through play when:

- They have plenty of choice in how they play and with what materials.
- They are able to use all the opportunities of a setting or family home, especially that they have easy access to the possibilities of outdoor as well as indoor play.
- Helpful adults plan ahead in a broad way for opportunities and then encourage and allow children to choose between what is available.
- Adults respect their play and deal courteously with any issues about behaviour within play.
- Adults value and observe how children are learning through their play.

Children are less likely to be able to learn through play if:

- Their choices are severely limited to what adults say is on offer today.
- Adults have been tempted to over-plan and over-supervise children's play and play interactions.
- Children are directed towards what adults feel are more valuable activities, that seem to have a better purpose from the adult point of view.
- Children's play is stopped or re-directed by adults with limited discussion or consultation, because the adults believe the play is unsafe, unacceptable or pointless.
- Children are interrupted in their play to do an activity, such as filling in worksheets, because adults feel this is more valuable or an easier way to produce evidence that children have learned something.

Figure 14.4

Children learn from the whole day or session



Children's development is also supported when they feel part of the routines that make each day run smoothly (see page 51).

- Young children experience a personal satisfaction in being a helper to adults and other children. They appreciate thanks in words and a smile and to be able to say, 'I did that' or 'I helped'.
- Ordinary routines can support children's all round learning and development. For example, when children are part of tidying up, they learn about simple time management, putting objects back into their right place and working together with other children.
- Their involvement in mealtimes can give practice in numbers for laying the table and physical skills with visual coordination are needed to help a friend to another helping of vegetables.
- Young children often chat when they are part of a shared domestic activity with an adult or perhaps one other child.

Young children learn better when they feel they have a trusted role to play within the daily routines. There may be some routines that you do yourself for safety reasons, but there are many in which children can be involved. Your adult contribution is to value this activity as a source of learning and allow enough time so that children can practise their skills and gain in confidence.

A very early years curriculum – under threes?

Currently there is no national framework in any of the four nations of the UK about good practice with children under three years. However, some local authorities have developed and published their own guidance for early years settings with babies, toddlers and very young children.

Over 2001–2 Lesley Abbott is leading a project in England to look at ways to develop a framework for effective practice with very young children. The aim is to cover principles, suitable experiences for babies and under threes and to shape suitable guidance to support practitioners. Lesley Abbott's team talks of a 'framework' and not of a 'curriculum' and their approach is likely to be consistent with the ideas described from page 418. Colwyn Trevarthen is leading an equivalent project in Scotland.

A national school curriculum

Since the 1980s there has been a national curriculum in the UK that determines the content, methods and assessment for education in state primary and secondary schools. Each nation in the UK is able to decide on the final shape of their state education and consequently there are some differences. In each country the school curriculum is organised more on a subject basis, although some have an explicit cross-curricular approach. The approach through areas of learning for the early years curriculum has been a statement that the subject approach is inappropriate for young children.

The legal requirement in the UK is that children receive an education from five years of age (four years in Northern Ireland). It is not the law that children have to go to school, although state or independent school is how most families met their obligations. A minority of families educate their children themselves, sometimes called home schooling.

England

Established in 1989 and revised in 2000, the national curriculum covers children from Year 1, when they are five or six years old until the end of statutory

schooling at 16 years. Children's education is sub-divided into four stages, the first two in primary and the second two in secondary school:

- Key Stage 1 – school years 1 and 2, for five to seven year olds
- Key Stage 2 – school years 3, 4, 5 and 6, for seven to eleven year olds
- Key Stage 3 – school years 7, 8 and 9, for eleven to fourteen year olds
- Key Stage 4 – school years 10 and 11, for fourteen to sixteen year olds

In Key Stages 1 and 2 children are taught English, Mathematics, Science, Design and Technology, Information and Communication Technology, History, Geography, Art and Design, Music, Physical Education and Religious Education. There are required programmes of study for each subject and a national literacy and numeracy strategy. Achievement levels are described for every subject except Religious Education. There are non-statutory guidelines for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship and modern foreign languages at Key Stage 2.

Assessment of children takes place at the end of each Key Stage, by SATs for stages 1, 2 and 3 and GCSEs at the end of Key Stage 4.

Wales

The national curriculum established in Wales in 1989 was very similar to that in England, with the exception that Welsh can be a main language instead of English. However, since that time devolution (see page 26) has meant that Wales has increasingly made their own national decisions about educational content and methods. Wales for instance did not choose to have the literacy and numeracy hours that were introduced in England.

Scotland

The national curriculum in Scotland was introduced in 1991 and revised in 2000. The requirements cover seven years of primary school and four years of secondary school up to the age of sixteen when young people can choose to leave. The years are named from P1–P7 in primary school and S1–S4 in secondary. The required curriculum is described up to fourteen years of age at which point students then take options within specialised and vocational education that lead to the Scottish Qualification Certificate.

There are five main curriculum areas covered in Scottish schools:

- English Language, Gaelic where appropriate and another modern language no later than P6
- Mathematics
- Environmental studies: society, science and technology
- Expressive arts and physical education
- Religious and moral education with personal and social development and health education.

There are also five cross-curricular aspects to education:

- personal and social development
- education for work
- education for citizenship
- the culture of Scotland
- information and communications technology.

The curriculum specifies levels of attainment and teachers use national tests to assess children at the time when they are ready to move from one level to another in English and Mathematics. The timing is left to the judgement of the schools and there is no national assessment programme at particular ages in Scotland.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Curriculum was introduced on a phased basis from 1990. Children start school at four years of age, so the pattern is:

- Key Stage 1 – school years 1, 2, 3 and 4, for four to eight year olds
- Key Stage 2 – school years 5, 6 and 7, for eight to eleven year olds
- Key Stage 3 – school years 8, 9 and 10, for eleven to fourteen year olds
- Key stage 4 – school years 11 and 12, for fourteen to sixteen year olds

In Key Stages 1 and 2 children are taught:

- Religious Education
- English
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology
- History and Geography (known as the Environment and Society Area of Study)
- Art and Design, Music, Physical Education (known as the Creative and Expressive Area of Study)
- Irish in areas where Gaelic is the first language.

There are also four educational cross-curricular themes: Education for Mutual Understanding, Cultural Heritage, Health Education and Information Technology. These themes are not separate subjects but are expected to be woven through the main subjects of the curriculum.

Each subject is defined through programmes of study and attainment targets. The targets are described in terms of Level Descriptions and these form the basis for making judgements about children's attainments at the end of each stage.

Flexibility for learning: a curriculum in practice

Learning spaces in your setting

The aim in any plan for children's learning should be to leave plenty of scope for children to make choices and to extend an activity in the way that they wish. A positive way to promote such flexibility is to have a number of learning areas within an early years setting as semi-permanent spaces. There can be a slight confusion over wording, because 'learning areas' is also used to describe the six or seven areas of development and learning in the early years curriculum documents. Dedicated spaces for certain kinds of materials are not tightly linked to specific developmental learning areas.

Many nurseries and pre-schools have a book corner and a home corner, but other than that activities have often been laid out on tables or the floor in line with the adult plan. If your space belongs to the setting, then it can work well to have more learning areas than these two traditional ones.

You can make labels and illustrations with the children, so that it is clear what is available in this space. Life may be less flexible if you share the space, for instance, pre-schools which run in church halls where nothing can be left out between sessions. But it is still well worth looking at ways to move as far as possible from adult-determined activities on tables.

For example:

- An art area can be equipped with all the materials that children may use for different art activities. Books about art and pictures can be a semi-permanent part of the area – changed from time to time. Materials can be on accessible shelves or containers and ideally a sink is nearby so that cleaning up is an integral part of using this learning area.
- A construction area can have a good supply of flexible building materials and the space to lay out and sometimes display what children have made. A board could be made available for photos that children have taken of recent constructions.
- A graphics area could offer a good writing surface, plenty of writing materials and different kinds of stationery and a board for children to fix up any of their work or work in progress.
- A role play area, perhaps in addition to the ever-popular home corner, could have the flexibility to become a doctor's clinic, a travel agency or a train station, depending on children's interests and perhaps a project that has enthused a group of children.

Tips for practice

Learning spaces will work well when:

- Adults keep flexible about potential learning and the different areas. A construction area should not mean that all building has to happen in that space. Children will feel nagged if they are told that dressing up clothes should stay in the role play area. Why should they?
- Use of materials is allowed to be flexible. If children are enthused by writing and mark making materials they can access in the graphics area, they may well want to take their whiteboard or clip sheet to another part of the setting. The fact that the children see mark making as a transferable skill is very encouraging.
- Adults are observant and ready to adjust the focus and space of a learning area in response to children's play. Perhaps a group of children has become very enthusiastic about small world play and they need a larger space and some reorganisation of materials.
- Children are involved in discussion about new learning areas and re-organising existing spaces.
- It is also valuable to look at ways to enable children to tidy away as easily as possible in each learning space. Storage can be made accessible for children with low shelves and well labelled and illustrated containers. A tool outline board helps children to put the woodwork equipment back correctly and safely. Clear sketches or photos can be fixed up to show how the blocks are tidied back on the shelf.

Adults can use planning to look ahead and consider how they will discretely ring the changes in some of the areas and be available to help if children want, for instance with different kinds of craft activities. You can also be attentive and observant to look and listen to children's play so that you can offer an extension in a way that allows children to accept or decline.

Scenario

Greenholt Pre-school has only a limited ability to leave activities out in the church hall during the week. Discussion with the church warden and committee has established more flexibility through conversations that enabled the committee to understand better what children learn in the pre-school. The team also wanted to get away from the over-planned approach that had guided the pre-school so far (see scenario on page 484).

The home corner was allowed to become a more general role play area and the children's interest in a travel agency has opened the door to some early 'geography' through knowledge and understanding of the world. Trisha brought in a feature from *Nursery World* (26 October 2000) on the 'travelling teddies'. At first the team was uncertain since few of the current families have spare income for proper holidays. But travel could be anywhere that the children go away from home, even within a day.

The pre-school has three soft toys of which the children are very fond: a large bee, a floppy-eared dog and a purple dinosaur. The team explain to the children, and the parents, that the toys need to get out more and would like to travel with the children when they go somewhere interesting at the weekend.

- Over several weeks Buzy Bee, Floppy and Dino get to visit relatives, ride on a double decker bus, go walking in a nearby country park, visit hospital to see one mother and brand new baby and other local trips of significance to the children.
- The Greenholt practitioners follow the children's interest and realise that they are ready to do some very simple map making of the local area.
- A graphics table with flexible materials and a small world area become regular learning spaces in the pre-school.
- A few children also become concerned about the 'fairness' of trips and want to track where each toy has been. With help from Trisha, they draft a chart with written labels, photos when these have been taken and a simple count.
- Michael scans the chart with care and says, 'Buzy Bee is the only one who hasn't been to the garden centre. And it's very nice, with gnomes and a little fountain.' A discussion starts as to who will fill in the gap in Buzy Bee's local experiences.

There is great excitement when Dino is trusted to go off on a trip of several weeks with one of the traveller families whose children attend the pre-school when they are in the area. Dino and the family send postcards from several other locations and the children track him and the family on a map that encompasses several counties. Dino is returned safely with the child, whose family is also pleased that their travelling life style has been respected.

Questions

- 1 Any good idea, like the travelling teddies, can be adjusted for the conditions of a particular setting. How might you use this idea in the setting you know best?
- 2 If you do not use learning spaces in your setting, consider how you could set up semi-permanent spaces and equip them in a flexible way.
- 3 Make a short presentation of how you could, for instance, start with an idea you have heard from another local nursery or read in a magazine like *Nursery World*. Consider how you would develop the idea to fit your setting.
- 4 Discuss your ideas with colleagues, in your setting or on your course.

Key skills links: LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3 C3.1a

Creative development – an example of flexible learning

Each of the national curriculum documents includes children's learning within creative or expressive development. It is well worth thinking as a team about what is included in this area of learning and how you can support and encourage children's creativity rather than stifle its expression.

So what is creativity for children or for adults? Creativity develops when children are enabled to:

- Produce their own image and not reproduce somebody else's image – whether in the form of a picture, a story or a problem-solving idea.
- Learn through doing and exploring, rather than be required to follow a set pattern determined by adults.

Figure 14.5

Children are often pleased to see their work carefully displayed



- Focus at least as much on process as product. Sometimes there is nothing to show at the end of a genuinely creative activity except happy faces, feelings of satisfaction and a good memory.
- Learn useful techniques, because children should not be left to struggle, but then they can apply those techniques or use of tools in a way that makes sense to them.

Activities to promote creativity

A range of activities could potentially support children's creativity. So any planning needs to be open and creative in itself, not taking an unduly narrow view of what are creative activities and what are not. Children can develop in a creative way through:

- using a wide range of arts materials, exploring different textures, use of colours, techniques and styles
- exploring crafts like printing, collage, patchwork, needlework and woodworking
- all the different kinds of music, music making, singing and dance
- drama and role play – either of their own making or guided drama and story telling suitable for young children
- construction and building, especially with a wide range of materials, including recycled materials that leave plenty of scope for children to determine the nature of their project
- creative problem solving using imagination as well as more logical techniques.

But how you plan and then offer activities can make all the difference between whether the experience really does support children's creative development or not. You need to think creatively yourself. Look around, keep your eyes open for good ideas or techniques that children could manage and explore.

- Keep any type of project open. So for instance, you might put to the children that 'we need a shelter in the garden against the sun now it is so hot'. But do not immediately tell them what kind of shelter and how you are all going to build one 'just like this picture'. A creative project, and one that lets children explore the technology side, needs to be flexible.
- Get out and about yourself, and with the children. Bring examples of different painting or music styles into your setting.
- Look and listen with the children and explore the different ways to 'make a picture' or to 'create a tune'.
- Think beyond your own cultural background, whatever that may be. Art forms, dance and music, as well as cooking can seem unusual or exotic to you at first.
- Draw on experience and expertise that parents and other family members may be able to bring to your setting.
- You will help the children to think creatively if you do as well. Think big: projects can happen outdoors as well as indoors, on the walls as well as sheets of paper. Think creatively about how you can record and keep a memory of a good project.
- Look at any possibilities of getting out with the children to see an artist in residence, a dance or theatre group designed for children or a story teller.

Will anyone come to your own setting or close by so that several settings can enjoy the experience?

- In your own adult mind, keep a balance between the creative process and any end product. Avoid rushing children, some projects like woodwork take time and effort. Children cannot develop creatively if they are rushed because 'everybody has to do their hand print before going home time'.
- Introduce the idea of 'work in progress' and have safe places for unfinished projects so children can return to them. You can also be creative about how to 'hold on' to an end product – photos may be the best option with large projects or very fragile ones.

Tips for practice

- Support children to feel they 'can'. Children may very swiftly decide that they 'can't draw' or are 'no good at story telling'. Your adult approach may be too directive if you have many four year olds saying this to you, because at this age they are usually much more robust.
- Avoid following very directive topic books that prescribe very closely what has to happen with 'ask the children to make ...' or 'tell the children to draw or cut ...'.
- Showing and introducing different techniques is a positive and good use of adult knowledge – butterfly paintings, wax crayon rubbings, different ways to print. But then let children use and practise the technique to make what they wish and to experiment with the basic technique.
- You want the children to learn to look closely. Perhaps to consider a flower or leaf in all its details. But it is not a creative activity if children then have to paint the flower in the same way.
- Let children experiment if they wish and avoid the approach that everyone now has to do a painting like Monet, some Celtic knotwork or a representation of Mount Fuji.
- Arts and crafts are no longer creative when they are highly organised, either because sheets are pre-printed or because everyone has to make something very similar – an Easter card, a picture like the one on the wall, etc.
- Children should be able to make something or to solve a problem creatively because they find satisfaction, not to fill up a blank wall or have something neat to send home.

Activity

Under threes can relish many arts and crafts activities but in different ways from the older children. Adults often need to adjust how they view an activity in order to make it more suitable and enjoyable for very young children. But thinking about how best to offer creative activities to very young children can often help to focus your mind on what is the best way for adults to plan and behave in creative activities for the over threes.

In your own mind, or in discussion with colleagues:

- Focus on one activity, for example, painting or working with play dough, and gather ideas on the ways that you can adjust for the younger children, even for toddlers.

- For instance, do you modify how you lay out the materials or use of tools? Do you take a different approach to whether children produce something at the end?
- In your experience, how do toddlers want to use the materials?
- How can you best handle any sense of pressure about having something to show to parents or put on display from very young children?
- Write up and discuss your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: PS3.1–3 C3.1a C3.3

Early science – an example

Some practical thoughts about early science can help early years practitioners to appreciate how much children can understand when potentially complicated topics are presented through familiar routines and materials. Children's early understanding of science is described within the early years curriculum by areas such as 'Knowledge and understanding of the world' (English guidance) or 'Early experiences in science and technology' and 'Knowledge and appreciation of the environment' (Northern Ireland guidance). But it soon emerges that the topic area has connections to all the areas of early learning in childhood.

The enquiring mind

There is a 'scientific' outlook that is as much a part of early science as particular knowledge or skills. In an interesting and flexible early years setting, children can develop a scientific outlook appropriate to their years. They develop:

- curiosity and wanting to learn, to find out about how things work and why
- the language and behaviour of 'I wonder how, when, whether'..., 'Why does that/doesn't that happen ...' and 'What'll happen if I ...?'



Figure 14.6

Adult interest supports children's curiosity

- the skills of experimentation – safe and simple with ‘let’s see what happens if we ...’
- the skills of close observation and an interest in looking and listening
- the perspective of taking time, coming back to see what has happened now
- an interest in and techniques of recording and recalling – in any way children wish and are able
- the ability to make connections between experiences and simple explorations.

Ways into science ‘subjects’

Obviously, the aim with young children, as well as older ones in primary schooling, is to avoid rigid divisions into the separate sciences. But it can be useful for us as adults to track back a little from the big three of physics, chemistry and biology. Young children are ready and able to learn in all these areas; they have already started.

They explore physics and the phenomena of the physical world through:

- what makes what happen – all kinds of cause and effect
- properties of objects such as floating and sinking
- the weather, how it changes, can we see the changes coming, the seasons; how the weather is linked with what else we see, like plants or how animals, wild or more domesticated, behave
- differences of light and dark, the sky, the moon and the stars.

Chemistry is part of everyday experiences:

- cooking is a practical and basic chemistry – mixes, the magic of yeast or making yoghurt, the impact of heat or cold, what works and what does not work
- what makes things happen when you mix them, natural mixes and safe mixing that children can do with sand, water, earth, paint
- what mixes can be reversed and which are now something new and irreversible
- natural chemistry and chemical reactions in the world around us – leaves into leaf mould, a compost heap for the garden, what grows on bread or other foods if you leave them (a link back into biology)
- interested children are keen to use information books about chemical and physical reactions in our environment – volcanoes, mud pools, earthquakes.

Biology is part of many of the ordinary indoor and outdoor activities for children:

- interest in living things of all kinds from the littlest mini beasts to huge mammals
- what we can see around us and watch over the seasons, understanding patterns of growth and change
- the interest of information books about animals, insects, plants, different environments
- plants and trees that we see, watch over time as they flower, fruit or produce conkers
- growing plants, fruit or vegetables ourselves – what do they need, what helps them grow and what makes it more difficult, what is growing without any help from us.

Activity

- Track 4–5 ideas from the section on ‘early science’ in your setting.
- Consider some ways to communicate this learning to parents.
- Write up and discuss with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.1b C3.3

Further resources

- Duffy, Bernadette (1998) *Supporting Creativity and Imagination in the Early Years* Open University Press.
- Lindon, Jennie (2001) *Understanding Children’s Play* Nelson Thornes.
- Perkins, Sam (1998) *Seeing, Making, Doing: Creative development in early years settings* National Early Years Network.

Guidance on the early years curriculum

- England: The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* and *Planning for Learning in the Foundation Stage* are available from QCA publications, P O Box 99, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 6SN tel: 01787 884444 website: www.qca.org.uk or the Department for Education and Skills website: www.dfes.gov.uk
- Wales: The *Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning before Compulsory School Age* is available from ACCAC, Castle Buildings, Womanby Street, Cardiff CF10 9SX tel: 029 2037 5400, publications purchased from 07071 223647 website: www.accac.org.uk
- Scotland: The *Curriculum Framework for Children 3–5* is available from Learning and Teaching Scotland, Gardyne Road, Broughty Ferry, Dundee DD5 1NY tel: 01382 443600 or the website: www.ltscotland.com or the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum website: www.scc.ac.uk
- Northern Ireland: *The Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education* is available from CCEA, 29 Clarendon Road, Belfast BT1 3BQ tel: 028 9026 1200 or download from the website: www.ccea.org.uk

Progress check

- 1 Explain briefly why it is so important that children develop a positive disposition to learn.
- 2 Identify the main learning areas in the curriculum guidance in your part of the UK.
- 3 Give three reasons why any early years curriculum should promote learning through play.
- 4 Suggest two reasons why learning spaces in a setting can give children more scope for learning than activities laid out each day by adults.
- 5 Explain the difference between process and product in creative activities.

Planning for children's learning

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the role of planning to support the learning of young children
- plan appropriately for days with babies and very young children
- understand and use different time scales in a planning approach to support the learning of children from three years of age.

Introduction

An early years curriculum covers the content of what children can learn over early childhood and also the approaches to supporting their learning. In Chapter 14 you have explored ways to support children in a positive disposition to learn. Good practice is for practitioners to plan ahead to provide a well rounded curriculum in terms of children's experiences. This chapter suggests ways to plan that are developmentally appropriate for very young children and for children of three years and older.

Planning for children's learning – under threes

The national early years curriculum guidance documents (see page 403) are not designed for use with children younger than three years and the goals or targets certainly cannot be 'watered down' to use with babies and toddlers. Very young

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 2

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: E1, M1

Level 3: M7, M8

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 7, 9

children need to be approached from their current developmental stage and they are in no way 'pre-foundation'. If the curriculum for over threes is used, there is a high risk that practitioners will be tempted to hurry younger children along and to find them always lacking, because they appear to have achieved so little.

Tips for practice

- The early years curriculum documents were not designed for use with under threes and nor was the topic approach (see page 435).
- It is inappropriate to try to plan around topics or themes for very young children.
- Sometimes there may be one or two activities within the topic being covered for the over threes that are genuinely suitable for younger children: perhaps a trip or an enjoyable game.
- But practitioners need to approach any activity from the perspective of younger children and make developmentally appropriate adjustments.
- It is inappropriate to make babies and toddlers complete activities like making a Mother's Day card just because the four year olds are doing this craft activity.
- Two year olds can enjoy simple mixing and cooking activities but their learning will not be supported if they are required to make neat gingerbread people as part of the topic.

Planning for the younger ones has some aspects in common with a curriculum for older children. But there are also unique features to under threes as they learn. Babies and very young children are primed to learn. But it is important to tune into the flow of their curiosity and current abilities.

- Very young children learn best at their own pace and by following their absorbing current interests. There is time for them to explore, find out, practise and learn.



Figure 15.1

In order to make choices toddlers need accessible materials

- Trying to make young children learn something earlier and quicker does not help them to learn better and can actually disrupt their confidence and flow of learning.
- Babies and toddlers learn through doing and need plenty of opportunities to use their physical abilities and to apply their ideas. The clear preference of very young children for 'do it again!' is ideal for their learning since it firms up their brain connections (see page 243).

Young children need plenty of play materials, but under threes are prepared to be interested in almost anything. There are some excellent play resources on the market, but children do not need all commercially produced toys. They learn best from flexible play materials that can be used in many different ways. You need to think creatively about activities and get well away from any sense of 'this toy will promote this kind of learning'. You will find many examples in other chapters but see especially pages 413 and 13.

Positive attitudes towards the under threes

Planning for under threes needs to be built around a full understanding of what is important in their day:

- Babies and toddlers are social beings. They are primed to learn and communicate. They need plenty of opportunities for early communication including close physical contact and touch (see also page 43).
- They need to develop affectionate social relationships because they learn through the security of a safe base and a predictable, familiar daily life.
- All their activities, from a broad, happy smile for a familiar face to an enthusiastic crawl across the room, support actual connections in their young brain that shape how babies and toddlers continue to relate to the world.

Developmentally appropriate care of very young children depends a great deal on your positive attitudes shown through how you handle the details of daily practice.

Babies and toddlers are interesting in their own right

You need to focus on very young children as they are now: what they can manage, what they find fascinating and the ways in which they relate to the world. What they are learning is important for itself and not just for what will happen later. For instance, the pre-verbal communication skills of very young children (see page 295) are all valuable and exciting – not just as steps towards being able to talk.

Caring adults count more than equipment

Think of yourselves as the most vital items of play equipment in your nursery. If adults relate fully and appropriately with babies and toddlers, then the children will learn through that relationship. Young children will also be able to take advantage of the play materials and activities that you offer. On the other hand, if adults are emotionally distanced from babies and toddlers, then good play equipment cannot make up that loss.

The whole day matters

Babies and toddlers do not split up their lives into different sections, so neither should their adult carers. Look ahead to see how you can use all the learning opportunities for the very young. You need to look at a baby's or toddler's day as a whole



and not as a list of separate activities. It is useful to have plans for each day and young children like some sense of routine. But watch out that nobody in the team is making the assumption that some parts of the day are less valuable than others.

Physical care is important

The care that you provide and give, and that you increasingly share with a young child, is central to a well-rounded day with children under three years. Through affectionate and respectful touch you show children that, 'I care about you as well as care for you'. The view that 'care' is the poor relation compared with 'education' has been a long-standing block to addressing quality in work with babies and toddlers.

The daily routines of care are not something to hurry through in order to move on to other activities that are seen as early learning. Physical care is an ideal vehicle for a great deal of learning and warm communication between child and adult. Toddlers who feel relaxed, who have not been hustled through care routines, will be far more ready to enjoy everything else that is on offer in your setting (see pages 42 and 48).

Once a team has positive attitudes towards care, it is also possible to see and share with parents how children can learn through the care routines, that this time is definitely not 'wasted' time. See Figure 15.2.

Activity

- Look through this section and choose four key points that you can see are equally relevant to planning a good day or week with children over three years.
- Write up briefly the points you have noticed and how you would apply the ideas.
- Make a short presentation to your colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3. C3.1b

Planning for under threes

In a group setting it will be necessary to have a broad daily routine and even in a family home, as a nanny or childminder, it may be easier to have a flexible working plan to ensure that overall you offer a well rounded week to children. Your plan will cover:

- some timed activities within each day
- some materials that are always accessible to children
- some special activities that you plan for some days.

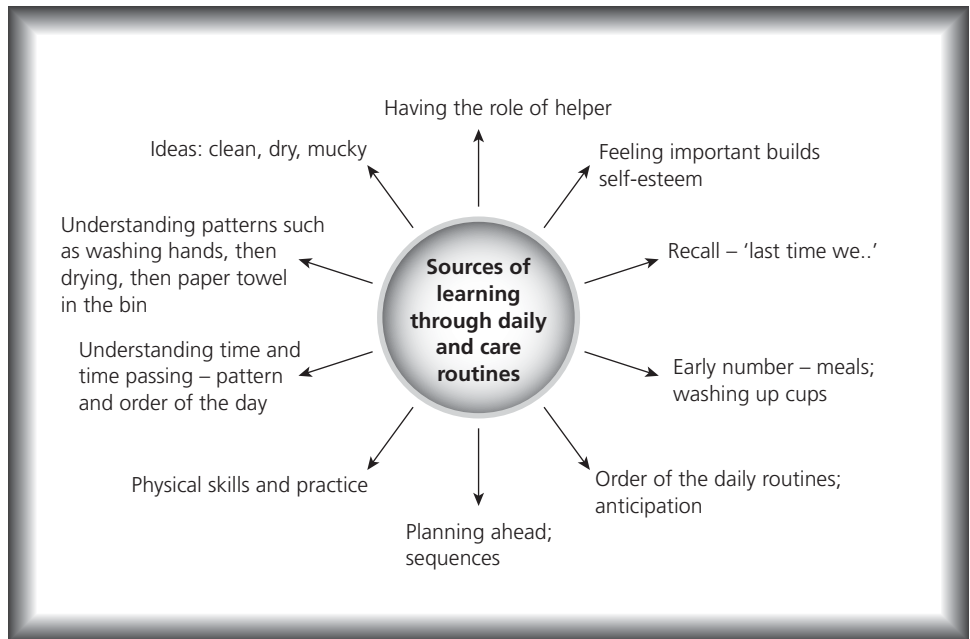
By using these three broad ways of planning, you can have a flexible forward plan that still needs to be responsive to the interests of under threes on the day.

Some timed activities within each day

A broad timed routine is appropriate for children older than about 18 months. You may well have definite mealtimes and nap times. Babies and younger toddlers need to follow their own feeding and rest schedule especially when they

Figure 15.2

Ways that young children can learn through the care routines of the day



join your setting from home. Older toddlers and young children still need the flexibility to rest and have lunch later if they need to.

Care routines like nappy changing and toileting should not be firmly time tabled (see page 45). It is also important that any planning and discussion about the activities of the day should communicate a clear valuing of all the care routines and enabling children to share in their own care.

You may need to time some activities, especially in some group settings:

- Perhaps you do need to have a timed outdoor play period.
- You may have parts of the day when you bring different ages together in a setting.
- You may schedule some 'together time' for young children: singing, story telling, selected television programmes or video. Children can of course have a story or a song at other times as well.
- You may use soft background music at transition times to signal that 'we are moving into quiet time after lunch'.

Accessible play materials every day

Children can learn better, and young children are no exception, if they can access play materials easily themselves. There should be a wide range of materials always available to young children:

- Make it easy for young children to access materials themselves by low shelving, open containers and accessible browser boxes.
- Consideration of space and use of furniture can be important to enable young children to move around with ease.
- Mobile toddlers should be able to get to the water or sand tray and make some choices about what equipment they want to add to this key resource.
- Dressing up clothes and materials for pretend play. Some small world materials might be used from time to time to ensure novelty, but some pretend play materials should be easily accessible each day.

- Constructional materials suitable for this age group. Open containers of different kinds of bricks should be a regular activity that can be chosen.
- Adults are available all the time as play companions and as interested observers.

Special non-daily activities

Over a week or fortnight, you could plan a range of activities that do not each happen every day.

- A time for treasure basket and exploratory heuristic play (see page 272) can be made a regular but not a daily happening. Some play activities will not feel so special to children if they happen every day.
- Unless the weather is really grim, children need to get outside each day. Often this will be in the garden but simple, local outings should be a regular occurrence – if not every day, then several times a week.
- You can schedule a range of arts and crafts activities and plan ahead so that, over a couple of weeks, you ring the changes in terms of the materials that are available for young children to explore.
- Other possibilities are activities for music making and dance, when you might ensure that there is a regular dancing session, although children who dance can enjoy this fun at any time.
- Some special construction activities could be scheduled across a two week span, for instance, large cardboard boxes or major sticky activity involving recycled cardboard tubes and egg boxes.

Observation is key

Flexible planning only works for very young children because practitioners then relax during the day and are ready to be involved in whatever way absorbed



Figure 15.3

Go with the interests that young children show today

babies, toddlers and very young children require. Some early years settings build relaxed observation into how they work. For instance:

- some settings use the idea of schemas (see page 273) to support the team to notice what very young children do and in what way
- the High/Scope approach to children, under threes as well, emphasises the importance of adults being attentive to strands of learning.

Settings that use either of these approaches also emphasise the importance of choice for children. Very young children cannot show you what interests them unless materials are accessible to them. If toddlers are restricted to a small number of toys that are put out as part of a plan, but these play materials are uninspiring, then their only choice is to look and sound bored and distressed.

Planning for children's learning – over threes

The division between under- and over-threes is not a firm distinction and certainly there is no dramatic change over the third birthday. Services in the UK have traditionally been divided in this way (see page 20) and the early years curriculum documents are designed for over threes. Some early years settings have two and a half year olds as their youngest children. In this case, teams need to be sensitive to the needs and interests of these very young children as well as the less mature three year olds in a setting.

Why do you plan?

For planning to be part of good early years practice, you need to keep clear in your mind the reasons why you plan.

- the overall aim in planning is not that you have a plan
- the aim is that what happens day by day, guided by your plan, supports children's learning, their enthusiasm and developing disposition to learn
- you plan ahead to offer opportunities to children; you do not plan in detail exactly what children will do within a given day or session.

You should not be trying to plan all the activities for children. Some materials will always be available, such as sand or water. Some learning areas will always be available for children to use as they wish, for example a role play area, that may change over time but not every week, or a ready-set up art and craft area.

Tips for practice

If the plan, and following the plan, become more important than the children and their enthusiasm, then priorities have gone badly awry. The key issues are that you, and your colleagues, keep flexible:

- Do not forget the key point in the text of this section. You plan ahead to offer opportunities to children; you do not plan in detail exactly what the children will or have to do. This distinction is important; discuss what it means for your setting with your colleagues.
- Good plans are working documents; they are not carved in stone and the day or session should be open to taking a direction that enthuses children, whether or not it is 'in the plan'.

- Planning for learning needs to focus on potential, on what you hope children will be able to learn from the opportunities offered by materials, activities and outings. Only the day or session itself will show what children are most likely to have learned.
- Useful plans have to be grounded in adult understanding that children can learn the same skills or ideas through many different ways (see page 416). Furthermore, the same activity or item of equipment has the potential to support different kinds of learning (see page 379).

Child-initiated and adult-initiated

Useful plans offer a positive balance between activities that are mainly **child-initiated** and those which are **adult-initiated**.

- Adults have an important role in making materials available, perhaps through learning spaces (see page 409), but then children make free choices about how they use those materials.
- Some activities may be to all intents and purposes fully child-initiated and any adult involvement is fully responsive to what the children want.
- Adult initiated activities can be started by adults and offered to children. An interesting activity, offered by an enthusiastic adult, will attract children.
- The activity still has to be offered and run in such a way that children can opt in or out and have a significant input to the activity. Adult-initiated activities should not slide into being totally adult-led and controlled.
- Some plans use the idea of **extension activities** to a main activity plan. Extensions should be seen as possibilities and not run with any sense of compulsion. If the children are interested, then an extension activity is something that practitioners have 'up their sleeve'.

Key terms

Child-initiated activities

those experiences suggested or started by children themselves

Adult-initiated activities

those experiences offered by adults which can then be shaped by children's interest and choices

Extension activities

possible additional activities in a plan that can be offered to children, if they wish to continue



Figure 15.4

You can plan an activity, but it is then the children's choice how to explore it

Scenario

The team at Dresden Road Nursery School has been working hard to inject flexibility into their curriculum plans. When Hannah became head teacher, she found a rigid method of planning that left the existing team feeling that they had to follow the plan, even if the children were obviously bored. The plans had become more important than the learning they were supposed to promote.

Hannah is still working hard with one or two team members who were more comfortable with following a detailed plan with no deviations. The value of local trips has been an issue, with some staff agreeing to go out but then being inflexible about responding to children's interests. If the trip was to see the ducks as part of the topic on baby creatures, then there was no deviation to look at the interesting earth moving equipment on the high road.

Hannah has made a great deal of progress through explanation and encouragement and most of the team now understand the priorities. Over the recent few weeks, the staff and children have gathered materials from their local trips and built them into a large wall display to show the parents. Children have been able to show how they have learned about:

- looking and listening to the sounds of the neighbourhood: traffic, quiet areas, sounds of the park
- sharpening our memory with remembering what we saw last time, different routes, changes since last time we came this way
- favourite routes and landmarks and how we can draw and show these
- keeping a record of what we have done and seen – collecting and displaying, drawing, taking photos
- talking about what we did and planning what we want to do next
- counting up anything of interest like post boxes and the wall with all the snails.

Questions

- 1 Local trips can work in many different ways to support children's learning. Look at the description above and explain the different areas of an early years curriculum that have been addressed through the activity of local trips.
- 2 Note the possibilities of local trips from your own early years setting or one you have known well. Make a short presentation to colleagues.
- 3 Discuss the possibilities and what will make local trips interesting for children, or boring.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1b LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

In this section you will find a number of approaches to planning for children's learning. There is no one right way, although a flexible outlook by practitioners and a willingness to review any approach is always important. See from page 409 in Chapter 14.

Time spans for curriculum planning

Curriculum planning for young children in early years settings usually follows three time scales: long-term, medium-term and short-term. There are no absolute 'rules' about the time span and you would need to check the details in any setting where you work.

- Long-term planning is usually for about a year ahead. This time scale sets a broad framework to help everyone in an early years team to consider the full span of children's potential learning across the day or session that they spend with you. Long-term planning can be useful in helping practitioners to open up on possibilities, as well as to lay a guiding structure for the following months.
- Medium-term planning looks in more detail at 2–3 months into the future. Settings that work on a termly basis would usually have a medium-term plan that covered a term or half term.
- Short-term planning is usually for next week and details what will happen each day, but in a flexible way.

The longer time-scales in planning come alive because of your more detailed planning that occurs close to the time. However, your weekly plans have meaning and can contribute to children's learning, because they are part of a larger framework. Your long- and medium-term plans have ensured that overall your team addresses all the areas of children's learning in an even handed way.

Several key principles run through each of the different time scales of planning.

- A focus on children's learning: what they will be enabled to learn and in what way. Possible plans for activities and experiences follow on from a clear vision of the learning.
- Children's learning crosses any adult definitions of learning areas, experiences or subjects. Young children need to be enabled to make connections and a rich array of applications of what they are learning.
- Teams need to avoid any narrow perspective that makes some times of the day or areas within your setting seem more important for 'real learning'.
- Daily routines and care need to be valued. Children learn from happy involvement in daily routines and relaxed conversation, just as much as narrowly defined 'educational' activities.
- Children can and do learn on the move as well as sitting down at a table. They learn outdoors as well as inside – see the discussion on the 'outdoor curriculum' on page 279.
- The curriculum framework and the supporting planning needs to reflect in a developmentally appropriate way the key principles and policies within any setting, such as equal opportunities.

Long-term curriculum planning

The objective of long-term planning for a team is that you work together to create the broad boundaries for the next twelve months.

Focus on children's learning

It is important in planning to start with children's learning and then explore how experiences and activities you currently offer can contribute to children's learning. Otherwise it is too easy to list activities with the assumption that 'of course' they will promote certain kinds of learning.

- Consider what you are hoping children will learn – in the broad sense, not named individual children at this point.
- You can however discuss questions such as, 'Are we allowing for the situation that some children might have hearing loss?' or 'Are we making the assumption that the group will continue to be a very similar ethnic mix as we have at the moment?'
- You cannot predict the future, but you can check on any assumptions that might make your long-term plan slightly restricted.
- Identify a rich array of connections between the different broad learning areas in your early curriculum guidance. The areas should not be separate in practice.
- Bring into your long-term plan what you have learned from the children who have been with you over the previous year. If you do not know what they think, then discuss how you could find out.

The learning environment, activities and experiences

A long-term plan can be the way that a team reflects on how you might develop what you now offer or reorganise as appropriate. Are there some needs for change and development?

- Perhaps you need to plan ahead for improvements in the outdoor area (see the scenario on page 281).
- Your team may need to step back to consider how to integrate literacy resources across different activity areas. The books do not all have to stay in the book corner, for instance, books on health could go in the pretend clinic role play space.
- You need to focus not only on activities and events but on your own constructive adult behaviour: listening, watching, talking, setting a good example to the children. Are there some general ways in which you could all work towards better support for children's learning?
- For instance, do you need to address more flexibility in how you use your plans? Are you all ready to make the most of children's current interests, do you respond to the unplanned moments?

Drafting the long-term plan

There are different possible ways to lay out and discuss a long-term plan. A possibility is to draft out a large piece of flip chart paper with the curriculum areas of learning along the top. Then take a selection of activities and experiences and work across, discussing how these can support children's learning.

- If you have tended so far to put out activities for children, can you move towards learning spaces (see page 409)? If your setting is organised into indoor and outdoor spaces for children, in what ways could there be change over the next years?
- In what ways can these areas and activities support children's learning across the early curriculum? Take a few examples and discuss in more detail in your team what will this learning look like. How will you notice changes in the children and are there some targets or goals that need to be discussed?
- Are you being as flexible as possible? For instance are you using the full potential of your outdoor area or the local neighbourhood. Has planning so far been too rigid about activities that are 'indoors' and 'outdoors'?

- Have you fully appreciated the value of children's involvement in your daily routines, their part in making choices and planning ahead? Or are you seeing this as lost time or an adult activity, because it is easier and quicker? Have you overlooked the potential of this source of learning?

This is one possible layout for a long-term plan. There are different ways of long-term planning in a team that are equally effective.

Broad areas of learning from your early years curriculum		
January 2002	Personal, social and emotional development →	Communication, language and literacy → Other learning areas
Priorities for children's learning (2–3 points) That we:	Promote their self confidence Encourage them to express and name feelings Support them to ask for help and to be helpful	Promote skills of conversation Help children express opinions Encourage understanding of how books and stories work
Indoor activities	Regular small group activities Books and stories about feelings Range of art and craft	Circle time A chart/display of favourite food or activities or books Different ways to make books
Outdoor activities	Large scale cooperative building – recycled materials Gardening project	Role play suitable story in garden Create seating areas for 'chatting'
Local trips	Involve children in choice and planning of trips Scrapbook or display of our outings	Check on special library sessions Tour of gardens and parks – children express views
Involvement in daily routines	Find more effective way to run 'tidy-up' time Find ways for children to support each other	Project about food, preferences, 'constructive feedback' to nursery cook – think about it! Make a book about the nursery rabbit or similar
Priorities for adult behaviour (2–3 points)	Observe children who seem to lack confidence Notice children's skills and improvements Talk appropriately about our adult feelings	Listen to children Set good example in holding conversations Model courteous ways to express opinions & disagree

Figure 15.5 Example of long-term planning

- Definitely give some discussion time to what the team needs to offer as individuals. Are you all clear within your team about the ways that you can improve your communication with children or how you show them your willingness. For each learning area within the curriculum, you could identify three or four points about what adults will do and how.

In a long-term plan, you need enough detail that the plan fully covers the main areas of learning and kinds of activities and experiences. But if you have too much detail, a team can feel overwhelmed. The long-term plan is a step along the way for supporting children's learning, not the end of your route. You can also use the long-term plan to look ahead constructively as a team to plan for changes in your practice and use of the setting's resources (see the scenario).



Figure 15.6 Find out possibilities in your neighbourhood – children are ready to be interested in many sights

Scenario

St Jude's after school club has children ranging from four years to ten or eleven years. The club has been inspected by social services because children younger than eight years attend. Their last inspection report was positive, although the inspector suggested that the club could make more of the opportunities for outdoor play. The after school club team want to address this area as part of a long-term plan and to be ready with changes under way, when they are inspected under the new system by the Early Years Directorate.

The after school club team have tended to see outdoor play as an opportunity for the children to run off steam after a day at school. Also, many of the children live in flats in the surrounding estate and do not have easy access to open space at home. The team have tended to keep an eye when children are in the outdoor area but not get closely involved, unless children are in dispute over equipment or take a tumble. However, the team are also very aware that play is an issue that needs addressing in St Jude's as a whole (see the scenario on page 257).

A preliminary meeting identified some key themes and an enthusiasm for taking a long-term focus on outdoor play and the outdoor space for the club and the holiday playschemes for half term and the school holidays. Suggestions include:

- Perhaps they could do some observations to get a clear idea of how the children use the outdoor space. The team's impression is that some children play more than others and some seem to stand around a great deal. Can they find out what the children think?
- The club keeps informal records of children's learning and interests and wonder if they could develop these to reflect outdoor play more fully and show that they value physical skills and developing confidence.
- A problem in the primary school has been that of 'policing' the playground, rather than promoting children's learning.
- A regular area of difficulty has been how to deal with a physically very active game developed by the boys and based on a popular cartoon television programme. The playground supervisors have favoured an outright ban on the game. The after school club team want to allow the game but lessen the disruption to other children's play. But there could be trouble if there is inconsistency between what children are allowed to do in school time and after school club time.

The school grounds have an asphalt and a grassed area, although children are usually kept off the grass in the winter time. There is limited seating and a small covered area. Two trees are relatively accessible: the children are not supposed to climb them, although some do. Birds often nest in these trees. Part of the garden has small shrubs and flowers which are tended by the school caretaker.

Questions

- 1 In your opinion, what are the main issues faced by the after school club team?
- 2 What could the children be learning through their outdoor play if the school grounds and its resources were used more effectively?

- 3 Discuss some realistic long-term plans for this team in changing how they currently use and approach the outdoor area. You could consider:
 - What would you do in their position?
 - What would be your priorities and why?
- 4 Write up and discuss your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a

Medium-term curriculum planning

The objective of the medium-term curriculum plan is to focus in more detail on what you hope children will learn over a few months, half term or term. You cannot detail every aspect of every learning goal or outcome; a plan becomes utterly unwieldy. So a team needs to home in on some detail in each curriculum area and to ensure that over time you give some attention across the whole span.

A possible medium-term plan could follow this outline

This is one possible layout for a medium-term plan. It is not the only way for a team to plan.

Area of learning: (cover each area in turn from your early years curriculum guidance) May & June 2002 Knowledge and understanding of the world (Knowledge and appreciation of the environment in Northern Ireland)			
Overall children will learn About their local neighbourhood: – location of market, post office fire station, nearest park – how to get there – change over time, simple local history	Specific skills Close observation (of routes, changes between trips) Conversation and questions during trips	Positive outlooks Curiosity and interest Wanting to know more and to find out (questions, using books etc.)	
Activities and experiences Regular local trips Visit to post office and try to have our postman visit nursery Have children choose and 'navigate' routes Make record of trips – camera, scrapbook Use local library for recent history, invite grandparents in	Resources needed Organise to get out Camera and film Scrapbook or display board	Adult role in activity Make contact with postal service Check on local library – history Show interest and curiosity ourselves Contact local older residents	Focus of observation Listen and talk with children – what interests them? – what do they understand? Adjust trips for events of interest What is children's grasp of 'long ago'?
This plan is a guide and is then finalised week by week			

Figure 15.7 Example of medium-term planning

The main features of a good medium-term plan are:

- A clear focus on what you hope the children will learn and how you will recognise that learning when it occurs. Ask yourselves the question, 'What will it look like?'
- A wide range of activities and experiences chosen deliberately to support that learning.
- Consideration of how the activities will be organised, including some thought about how adults will be involved and behave as people to support children's learning.

Scenario

The team of the Baker Street Children and Family Centre are very aware of the diverse population that they serve. Within the last medium-term plan the team planned a project to highlight the different backgrounds of many of the families and the fact that some had travelled considerable distances from their country of origin. In the current medium-term plan the aim is to have a very local focus but with a historical dimension. Some families have been in the area for two or more generations.

The team start to plan a local history project that will interest the children and ideally intrigue parents so that some will get involved. The first ideas include:

- A lively open discussion about how such a project could support every area of learning in the curriculum in one way or another.
- How to find out about local resources: people and places. What does the local museum have and are they friendly to children?
- What are the possibilities about setting up a 'museum display' in the centre? Do parents or grandparents have household items or artefacts that they would be happy to lend?
- In what ways can the children be 'history detectives' with some support? Can they contact older local residents or open discussions with the local library? How can the children and adults find out about how the neighbourhood used to look?

Questions

- 1 Think creatively about a local history project. The idea may initially sound as if it belongs in only one curriculum area. But look for the connections, ideally with colleagues, to the other areas.
- 2 In what ways might such a project benefit from medium-term planning, what might take some time and organisation?
- 3 Discuss your ideas with colleagues, including how such a project might be developed in your neighbourhood.

Key skills links: WO3.1–3

Once you have a clear focus on what you would potentially like children to learn, then you can plan the range of experiences and activities you will offer. A team needs to think and talk in a flexible way.

- For instance, a focus within creative development that enables children to explore texture, shape, form and space can happen through different kinds of activities, not just art. Shape can be explored through indoor and outdoor activities, sit down and on the move opportunities.

Plans definitely need a balance between adult-initiated and genuinely child-initiated activities (see page 425).

- For example, one part of a medium-term plan linked with promoting physical skills might be to plan for large scale works in the garden. The adult responsibility might be to organise a trip to the scrap bank or other local facility. However, when the materials are made available, practitioners are present as observers unless children invite them to join.
- On the other hand, adults might need to offer close involvement for a tie-dyeing activity linked with helping children to explore choices about pattern, colour and an understanding of bringing about change by printing. Children would still have great scope for choice but adults would help with the technique.
- In a medium-term plan you could plan ahead for some experiences that would be offered to the whole group, to smaller groups or to children whose needs are more specific, perhaps special needs.
- You would not usually name individual children in the medium-term plan for a setting. But a team could well plan some activities to support conversational skills or physical confidence, knowing that some children will especially benefit.
- A medium-term plan allows a large enough time scale to make contacts outside the setting, for visits into the local neighbourhood or to invite someone to visit the setting.
- The plan should build in clear awareness of the potential for children to learn within daily routines and enjoyable conversation between children and adults. No medium-term plan should risk setting up an over-planned future in which a team will feel unable to seize the moment.

A team with a medium-term plan in front of them needs to check that the setting has sufficient resources for what is planned.



Figure 15.8a Pretend play can be supported by bought materials ...



Figure 15.8b ... but sometimes pretend play only needs the simplest of props

- Do you need to get any more supplies, find specific resources or check out local possibilities?
- In what ways can the children be involved in any of these 'planning ahead' activities?
- Be clear about who will do what by when. You want to avoid the situation summed up on the notice often seen in offices: 'Everybody thought that Somebody would do this, but Nobody did.'

Linking records with planning

Chapter 16 covers ways of observing and good practice in keeping records on children's development and behaviour. Often you will focus on records in terms of individual children. It is also possible that exploration with colleagues in a team or group discussion can help you all use the good quality information from your records on individual children in order to support long- and medium-term planning for the whole group.

A careful and honest look at the individual records might provide important links to planning for your group. If you are working with three to five year olds within your national early years curriculum guidance:

- You may realise from individual records that many children in the group need additional support in a particular area of learning, perhaps in using their language broadly in communication and conversation. A constructive focus on the children's conversational skills can help you to reflect on the opportunities you offer, or do not offer, for relaxed conversation (see page 310).
- You might also realise that learning in and through physical development is a real strength in your setting. Perhaps your records show how children are learning a wide range of skills, how even the less physically confident children feel safe to try and how children help each other. Be pleased with yourselves as well as with the children's competence and enthusiasm.
- You might realise from an overall consideration of records that there is one area of the children's learning about which you have noticed very little. Perhaps your team has not really explored children's sense of self respect and there is confusion about how children may develop a positive racial and cultural identity.
- On the other hand, the information from individual records may confirm that the team's efforts over the last couple of months to develop activities within science and technology have made a real and observable impact on children's learning and curiosity in this area.

Do you organise around topics?

Many settings plan in the medium term around a theme or topic. Teams often find this method useful, especially since there are many resources from magazines or booklets that revolve around different topics. You need to consider what will make such an approach work and what could undermine children's learning. Used in a non-reflective way, topics can be more of a convenience for adults than a genuine support to children's learning.

A topic approach can work so long as:

- You build your medium-term plan from a clear focus on the learning and interests of the children in your group rather than just taking the details from an attractive topic booklet without any fine tuning.

Figure 15.9

Some topic work
will lead to a
display



- If your team uses bought topic materials, then do not depend on a statement in a booklet or topic sheet that says, for instance, that an activity 'will promote cooperative working between children'. The activity will not achieve this goal on its own; your team needs to address 'how could we organise and offer our own adult involvement to help children to cooperate within this activity?'
- You need to offer creativity and variety over time, for yourself as well as the children. You really need to do some thinking and discussing when there is a general groan from the team that, 'Oh no, we've got to do that "season's" topic again'. If the children are with you for a while and the plans are repetitive, they may speak up and complain, 'But we did "castles" last year. I remember.'
- Everyone in the team fully understands that children's learning over this period will also happen 'outside' your chosen topic. It is unrealistic and can end up being very boring, when teams try to filter every single experience through the current topic.
- You all need to think creatively about suitable topics for the current group and children's social world outside the setting. Children may enjoy topics such as 'exploring weather' or 'our neighbourhood'. But you can consider a relevant practical theme such as 'our garden project' that involves children and their parents in every step on the way to developing your setting's outdoor space.

Scenario

Sunningdale Day Nursery developed a plan around setting up a greengrocers' shop for the children. Part way through work with the children to organise the shop area, Ian speaks up and asks, 'But does it have to be vegetables? Because, you know vegetables are a bit boring.' Penny replies that it can be any kind of shop they would like. Ian replies, 'Well, you know Jackie? Her Mummy and Daddy have a shop and it's got big, big things of material. Me and my Mum go in there and she lets me pick out the buttons.'

Penny listens as the other children add their comments and it becomes clear that they are keen to have a shop just like Jackie's. All the potential learning that Penny and her colleagues had planned can just as easily happen within the context of a materials and haberdashery shop. The project unfolds and parents, including Jackie's family, are pleased to contribute resource materials.

In Sunningdale, the team look at any topic or theme for developmentally appropriate activities for the under threes. In this case, these younger children are delighted with the feel of materials and ribbons. The four year olds set about making a feely book for the babies and a mobile with ribbons and zips.

The older children are also enthusiastic about games with long ribbons out in the garden. They make large circling movements and create shapes in the air. The children enjoy the game, but it is also excellent practice for their physical skills, balance and sensitivity to feedback from movement.

Questions

- 1 Consider a project like the materials and haberdashery shop. What activities could be developed from this focus?
- 2 Draw a diagram and make some notes in which the broad areas of learning in your curriculum guidance are linked to the shop activities.
- 3 Present your ideas to colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1b

Short-term curriculum planning

Your short-term plan is basically for 'next week' and is your opportunity to finalise the details of activities and experiences that will be made available this coming week. Your medium-term planning supports you to be clear about what you hope the children will learn from the planned activities.

- What ideas, information or experiences are you introducing over the week?
- You identify some areas of learning for most of the children.
- But now is also the point to identify specific learning that you wish to support for named individual children.
- These individual plans should not be so detailed that a child's week is unbalanced. It can be as straightforward as helping a child to have a go at doing up her buttons or stay for two songs or stories before he wanders off.

Possible short-term plan outline

This is one possible layout for a short-term plan. It is not the only way for a team to plan ahead for the week, but any plan has to be responsive to the children's interests of the day.

Week beginning: (date) 1 July 2002			
Area of learning	Activity	Adult role	Observations
Physical development – skills of climbing – balance – going 'under', 'on top of', 'through'	Outdoor obstacle course – large boxes Fixed climbing equipment	Encourage children to choose items and build Use appropriate words for position etc.	Children who are confident – notice and celebrate Children who are uncertain – offer help, celebrate progress
Creative/expressive – planning and choosing – pleasure in making an end product	Large scale collage with twigs, leaves etc collected from park	Encourage children to plan the collage and work together	Children who are full of ideas and those who hold back. Children who need help with fine skills
Early mathematics – recognition of numbers – simple counting	Local 'number walk' – spotting any numbers Measure rooms and garden by pacing	Organise local walk Help, support and say numbers Help with counting	Children who are clear about numbers and recognise Children who confuse numbers and letters
Even this short-term plan needs to be flexible to children's interests. Activities continue and are redirected in response to the children's wishes and enthusiasm.			

Figure 15.10 Example of short-term planning

Your short-term plan details the activities and experiences that are available this week and how they are organised. The plan should give answers to questions such as the following.

- What have you decided to extend or offer again from last week. Your decision may be as a result of your observation and reflection as a team. Alternatively, the final form of a short-term plan should be responsive to requests and ideas from the children.
- What activities, experiences, local outings or events are specifically planned for this week? And are any details that are needed in place?
- Flexibility remains important for the short-term plan. Everyone needs to be able to make choices and not feel tyrannised by the plan. Perhaps the children have plenty of scope left in their outdoor construction, so of course

they can continue. Or, after a very depressing run of weather, the sun is out, so an impromptu local trip is arranged.

In the short-term plan you make some decisions.

- Ways that you may group some children for some activities. Perhaps it will not be possible for everyone to do cooking at the same time.
- So, how many children will be invited and do you have the flexibility to extend or repeat a very popular activity? Are there some children whom you would definitely like to encourage to join a particular activity?
- How will your team be deployed around your setting? Some activities or areas may benefit from having an adult to help and support. Children at the needlework table may appreciate help with technique or some adult support may be needed as children tackle how you plant tomatoes and not have them fall over.
- There should still be plenty of scope for observing, admiring and responding to invitations from children to become involved.

The short-term plan also includes on-going assessment of learning:

- Without getting bogged down in too much recording (see page 440), in what ways are you documenting what the children are learning this week? The short-term plan can usefully identify a small number of named children who will be closely observed this week. The plan does not mean that you ignore the others, of course.
- In what ways do children have plenty of opportunities to record their own activity today or a longer work in progress?
- What do the children want to tell and show you about what worked, what was enjoyable, confusing, frustrating or annoying? Alert and attentive adults can pick up on the moments by watching and listening.



Figure 15.11

Children will be the experts on what they find interesting and absorbing

What have you learned as adults?

All planning benefits from time for reflection and review. The details of the plans as you work ahead focus on what you hope the children will learn. Reflection and discussion also has to highlight what the adults have learned. You can remain alert throughout the week for:

- How is this adult-led activity going? Are the children less or more absorbed than we anticipated?
- Is it time to call a halt or would the children like an extension? Are they keen to take this activity into another direction and will that choice slightly change the plan for tomorrow?
- What happened in an open-ended, child-led activity? How have the children used the office materials that were added to the hospital role play area? What have they done with them and does the activity seem to have more possibilities in the children's view?
- What were you hoping that the children would learn and what do you think they probably have learned? What is your basis for suggesting this? What have the children done or said?
- What has happened in an informal and unplanned way? Perhaps consider in what ways the children have been involved in the daily routines and events of the setting? Have you tried some new ways for children to be involved in tidying up and how have they gone?
- What kind of conversations have children had with each other or with interested adults?
- What have you learned as adults this week? What implications does it have for finalising your plan for next week?

Focus on learning: Support interest in books and promote concentration in a small group session for children who interrupt a lot in story time

In the week of (date) 20 May 2002

Adult Role: Create a small group book time with (Mina) named children

Children: Maximum 4
Definitely include Neil and Simone

Activity: At mid-morning I invited Neil and Simone, along with Jamal who was also interested, to choose a book each. Simone looked enthusiastic and said, 'Just us? With you?' Jamal and Simone chose story books. Neil wanted the large illustrated book about diggers and lorries.

We spent 15 minutes reading the stories, one of them twice ('Mr Bear') and talked about the book on diggers. Jamal is very keen on stories and knows favourites by heart. Neil is very knowledgeable about big trucks and transport. Simone was the one who found it hardest to remain still, but she managed far better than in large story time. She gets easily distracted.

Review of the activity: I suggest we make this a regular event. This small group time worked well. It seems to me that Neil and Simone interrupt main story time for different reasons. Neil has so much he wants to say and share. But Simone seems to find it genuinely hard to concentrate. She needs help to look at the details of a picture and to listen.

Figure 15.12 Planned activity to support named children



Tips for practice

You can learn from reflecting back on a plan or an individual activity – either through a team or group room discussion, or your own thoughts and notes. It is important to be constructive with yourself.

- Be pleased about what has gone well, even perhaps with unexpected success and enthusiasm.
- Do not spend all or most of your discussion and thinking time on what did not go so well.
- What can you learn from the successful activities, outings or new ways that you approached a daily routine with the children?
- If some parts of your flexible plan did not go so well, what can you learn? It is not necessarily anybody's fault; you cannot foresee everything. How can you make it better next time?
- You tell the children 'we learn through our mistakes'. So be kind to yourself and your colleagues and let yourselves learn!
- If your discussion and thinking has highlighted a problem area of any kind, then do not rush into a quick solution. Be clear now about the nature of the problem and then take a bit of time to think and consider a range of options. Consult the children if at all possible.

Further resources

Lindon, Jennie (2000) *Helping Babies and Toddlers Learn: A Guide to Good Practice with Under Threes* National Early Years Network.

Lindon, Jennie, Kelman, Kevin and Sharp, Alice (2001) *Play and Learning for the Under Threes* Nursery World/TSL Education.

It is useful to build up resources for planning ahead with young children. You will gather many ideas of your own but will also find a rich source in magazines like *Nursery World*, *Practical Pre-school* and *Nursery Education*. Contact details are on page 666.

Progress check

- 1 Give two reasons why care and care routines need to be a valued part of the day for young children.
- 2 Describe three ways that children's ideas and preferences could influence the plans of an early years setting.
- 3 Explain briefly the differences between long-term, medium-term and short-term plans for an early year setting.
- 4 Give three examples of a child-initiated and an adult-initiated activity.
- 5 Suggest two ways in which a team could learn by reviewing plans and the planning process in a setting.

Observation, record keeping and assessment

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the importance of observation and use different techniques for observing children
- use different ways of recording information about children
- recognise and follow good practice in making observations and keeping records within any early years setting
- understand different approaches to assessment within early years settings.

Introduction

In this chapter you will learn about different techniques for observing children. You may first use these techniques as a student but you certainly do not leave your skills of observation behind once you have completed an early years qualification. Good practice for all early years practitioners is to be able to use appropriate techniques of observation to supplement a good habit of being observant and attentive to the children.

Responsible practitioners consider why and how they observe. They follow good practice in how they write up observations of children and share appropriately with parents and the children themselves. You will continue to understand

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 1

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: no specific units but observation skills are needed to provide evidence for many of the units

Level 3: C16

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 7, 8

good practice in how you write about and talk about children's development and behaviour. More organised assessment is now part of many early years settings and within the transition on to school. The possible ways that you may be involved in assessment are discussed along with most appropriate practice.

Good practice in observation

If you are currently completing an early years qualification then you will be asked by your tutor to undertake a number of observations to support your learning about children's development and behaviour. However, the skills and techniques of observation continue to be highly relevant once you are in a job as an early years practitioner.

The value of observation

Observation skills are important for the following reasons.

- You can learn about individual children and their interests and current capabilities.
- Careful observation and interpretation will help you to identify the cutting edge of children's learning: what they are ready to learn and where they would appreciate some help. (See page 356 about the zone of proximal development.)
- You will also be more able to give children encouragement and informative feedback (page 396).
- You will be able to see how children use the opportunities of your setting. It is possible to observe a learning space (see page 409) in your setting or to pay close attention to how children handle particular routines and times of the day.



Figure 16.1

Conversation with children supports observation

- Observation can support a positive approach to children's behaviour. You have the opportunity to gain a perspective on a child whose behaviour concerns you in some way.
- Careful observation is crucial if children are set targets for learning or changes in their behaviour. Adults have a serious responsibility to observe with accuracy and not make guesses about the child.
- Experience of using different techniques in observation can help you to develop good habits of being observant. You will become more generally attentive to what the children are doing and in what ways.

Scenario

Since Erin took over Sunningdale Day Nursery she has worked hard to convince her team that continued informal observation of the children is part of good practice. A few team members clearly felt that they should always look busy and that observing was a form of laziness.

Erin has encouraged those team members who were keen to watch and listen and has invited their views on what they have learned about individual children. She has also modelled the behaviour she wants from other team members by asking individuals to sit and observe with her in a relaxed way. Erin then comments on some aspect of a child's interests, behaviour or ways in which the child might appreciate some adult input.

Questions

- 1 Some early years practitioners gain the idea that they should look busy. How do you think that idea develops?
- 2 What kind of support do practitioners need if they are to feel confident about looking and listening to what is going on in a setting or family home?
- 3 How might the problems of 'we must look busy' be resolved?
- 4 Discuss your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.1a PS3.1–3

Preparing to observe

There are differences between being generally observant as a practitioner and making a particular observation.

- You need to make some preparation for an observation, even relatively brief ones.
- You need to decide on your focus and purpose. What do you want to learn about?
- When you are clear what you would like to be able to do with your observation, you have a basis for deciding on a method of observation.
- Choose a method that is appropriate to what you wish to observe. Or understand the possible uses of a method that you are asked to use as a student.

- During your observation you attend selectively, in the way appropriate to this technique. You will make notes at the time and keep a note of the broader context in which an observation is made: where, when, who was present.
- When your observation is complete you need to consider what the observation tells you. What have you learned and what are fair conclusions?
- It is useful to reflect on your interpretations and if possible to discuss ideas with your colleagues.
- After you have observed, you will have some kind of outcome. You might write up brief notes, complete a developmental profile or a short report or contribute to a larger report on a child or group.

Courtesy and cooperation

Good practice in observation means that you explain what you will be doing in your observations and as appropriate you obtain the **informed consent** of anyone involved: your colleagues, the children and the children's parents.

With colleagues

It is sensible and courteous to discuss any plans about observations with your colleagues.

- It will help if your colleagues can know the range of observations you wish or need to undertake as a student.
- You can all then work cooperatively to plan a schedule so that you can complete different observations.
- A team needs to discuss the pattern of observations that are part of weekly practice in a setting.

Key term

Informed consent that adults and children are given sufficient information for them to make a decision about whether to agree to or decline involvement in an event or experience



Figure 16.2

You can observe while keeping children company

With parents

Make sure you are clear about the guidelines for this setting when talking with parents about observations.

- The setting may have a general agreement with families that students on placement will undertake observations and that observation is part of good practice to support children's learning.
- It is still courteous to talk with parents if you are undertaking a detailed observation on their child. Parents know their children, they can contribute to your observation from their experience of their child in the home setting.
- It is also parents' right to refuse consent for observations that are not part of usual practice in the setting, for instance, if the setting is participating in an external research project.
- Parents can also ask questions, show an interest in your observation and have their views respected if, for instance, they do not want photos or videos taken of their children.
- It is fair for parents to want to know what will happen to your notes, especially as a student, since you will leave the setting, and to any audio or video tapes, if you use this technology.

Parents can only give their informed consent when you, your colleagues or other professionals are completely honest about what you will observe, why and what you plan to do with the observations. Parents cannot give informed consent if they are only told half the story and they will probably be irritated if they later feel misled.

With children

The children are also often interested in what you are doing in an observation.

- Be ready with a simple explanation that is honest and does not break confidences about another child, for instance over behaviour or struggles in learning.
- Children often take little notice since they are familiar with adults doing odd things. But they may be interested in your notepad or anything unusual like a stop watch. You can explain simply.
- Look for ways that children could contribute their views and ideas in different types of observation.

Activity

- Find out the guideline in your setting for asking permission of parents to make observations.
- Do they give a general permission to practice in the setting?
- In what ways are parents' views invited and included in observations and record keeping in your setting?
- Compare guidelines with colleagues who have experience of other settings.

Key skills links: C2/3.1a



Tips for practice

You need to consider good practice and issues of confidentiality for any kind of observations and records. Consideration is especially important when you use photographs, video or audio recording:

- Always ask for parents' informed consent for this kind of recording.
- Parents should be fully informed if photos or tapes will be used by students to present to their course group or make displays, even if these will not go outside the college or assessment centre.
- Respect their wishes if the answer is 'no'.
- Parents do not have to give a reason. But family conflict is often the concern if parents do not want photos or video footage of their child to leave the setting.
- Tapes or photos should not be copied and used outside the agreed boundaries. For instance they should not become part of general teaching materials unless parents have given their informed consent.
- Be respectful of children's dignity. For instance it is a good rule of thumb never to take a photo or video of children in a situation that you would not use for adults. It would be inappropriate to take a photo of toddlers on the pot or to video a group as they changed into swimming costumes for a paddling pool session.

Approaches to observation of children

Your aim as an observer is to behave as unobtrusively as possible. It will help if you have everything you need to hand. What you need will vary slightly depending on the technique of observation that you use.

It is not possible simply to decide that you will watch whatever is interesting in a setting. Such a task is overwhelming and you will end up with incomprehensible notes. However, you can observe in a relatively flexible way, so long as you narrow your scope of observation in terms of how many children, over what period of time or with a focus on which learning space. This section describes some different observation techniques.

Tips for practice

There are some useful guidelines that apply to all the techniques of observation:

- Every observation will need a date and time or timings.
- You need a clear note of the child or children observed and a key if you use any shorthand versions, such as the first letter of a child's or adult's name.
- You also need a key if you plan to use pre-coded categories (see page 449).
- Observations as a practitioner in a setting would give the child's full name. As a student you are likely to keep to the first letter, in order to maintain confidentiality, since your observations will leave the setting with you and form part of your portfolio.

Tips for practice

- Lay out an observations sheet, as much as makes sense for the technique you plan to use. It is waste of time when you are actually observing children to be writing in headings or drawing columns that you could have done in advance.
- Record legibly at the time. It will be pointless to write at speed and then not be able to read your own notes later!
- After completion, take time to consider what your observations show (see page 456). You need to show objectivity in how you make sense of what you have observed.
- Use a range of techniques to summarise what you have found: written reports, simple counts, graphs or pie charts.

Time sampling

It is impractical to watch children continuously and make accurate notes at the same time. You would only manage this task if very little indeed were happening in a setting. You could cope if, for instance, children were sitting around a table and staring into space. But it should be a cause for concern if you did observe such a passive situation. So, usually you have to pace yourself for watching and noting. **Time sampling** enables you to make your observations in an organised rather than a random way.

Key term**Time sampling**

a technique in which observations are made on a regular rather than continuous basis

Scenario

The team at Dresden Road Nursery School have used time sampling in different ways to build their understanding of what and how the children are learning within the nursery. Recently two team members have made observations that have then been shared with the team:

- Jessica decided to explore how the computing area was being used by children. Team discussions had raised a concern that some children were dominating the computer so that others could not get a turn. But the team realised that they were not sure and the assumption that the boys were taking over the area needed to be properly checked.
- Maria agreed to make an observation of Owen and Sachin, who have a clear preference for outdoor activities. There has been some concern that the children's play is very repetitive and they are 'not really doing much at all'.

The team agrees to organise so that Jessica and Maria can assign one hour for observation during two mornings in one week and two in the following week. Rosemary, the deputy, is freed up to be in the main nursery at those times.

At each agreed time Jessica sits close enough to see and hear activity within the computer area. She had laid out her paper in preparation for a plan to make notes once every five minutes (timed accurately with a stop-watch). For one minute she observes and then has four minutes to



complete her notes. Her reminder list directed her to note down the names of the children at the computer table (there is room for two) and whether any are waiting. She also notes the programme on the screen and what the children said and did. On completion of the observations, Jessica creates a chart to show the children who most use the computer and the programmes that are used. Some children are more prominent, but not only the boys. The problem seems to be that some children are not aware of the potential in computer usage, rather than that they are excluded.

Maria uses a similar time sampling pattern to track Owen and Sachin in their outdoor play and shadows them in the garden. She is able to show that the children have a rich pretend game ongoing that involves finding and capturing pretend wild animals. The boys communicate a great deal with each other and invite Maria to join in their search for the 'gobbledegook'. Something that the boys say makes Maria think that their game has been developed from a story Sachin has been read at home.

Questions

- 1 How might the two observations be followed up by the Dresden Road team within the nursery?
- 2 In what ways might parents be involved, for instance by asking whether some children have access to computers at home or finding out about the story that Sachin was read?
- 3 Write up your ideas and discuss your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.3

Pre-coded categories

Sometimes you might be interested in a particular area of development or children's behaviour. You may then have a short list of **pre-coded categories** to help you note down the different types of observation that you might make. You will still need to make decisions about when, where, who and for how long you make your observations.

Any categories need to make sense to you, and any colleagues who will undertake similar observations. For instance if you were interested in children's use of language (see page 302), you might have a short list of categories to include: asks question, answers question, makes suggestion, guesses/speculates, describes, explains and argues. You would then lay out your observation sheet with the categories down one side and then you only need to mark the occurrence and ideally note down some actual examples of what children said.

Key term

Pre-coded categories

a set of short descriptions, decided in advance for organising observation of types of behaviour or events

In the scenario of Dresden Road, Rosemary used time sampling to observe the computer corner, so she made notes about any children in that learning space. Another use of time sampling is to make observations of children's spontaneous play over a period of time in your day or session.

Using time sampling you can probably watch three or four children at the same time, so long as they are in the same room or space. Lay out your paper ready and have an accurate watch or time piece at your side. Your observation might look something like the following. The observer has started at 9.45 and written down what Josie is doing, then Jake and then Saima. Then the observer returns to Josie at 9.55. The notes are brief but if you observe for 45–60 minutes you will gain a good idea of what the children do, their interests, play companions and whether adults could support their learning and interests in different ways.

Date: Monday 17 June 2002 Observation of: Josie, Jake & Saima Observation made by: Teresa Location: Main playroom			
	Josie	Jake	Saima
9.45	Playing in sand with Mikey Making shapes	Watching boys at the water tray	Looking at book – sitting on floor Turns pages
9.55	Sand Laughs with Mikey Gestures to staff to come and see	Watching water tray Moves closer Tim says something J. steps back	Chooses another book Joined by Marie who looks over book S. pulls book closer
10.00	Explaining to staff about sand shapes says something to M.	Watching water tray Moves off to window Looking out	Looking at book M. sitting close S. gets up
10.05	J & M are flinging sand Staff calls over to stop – asks them to brush up	Sitting by window Looking at book corner	In home corner Watching play
10.10	M. fetches dustpan and brush J. watches M. brush	Staff comes to J. J. looks up Sits close to staff, touches hand	Joins staff and J. at window seat

Figure 16.3 Example of observation by time sampling

Scenario

The team at the Dale Parent and Toddler drop-in group are interested in tracking examples of early pro-social behaviour (see page 488). The aim of Annie and her colleagues is partly to help parents towards realistic expectations of their children, many of whom are not much older than two or two and a half years old.

Annie, Vicky and Liz discuss some simple categories to ensure that they all agree on the meaning – they are all going to take turns to observe and there is a risk that they will not be consistent. They agree to note examples of named children and their behaviour in six codes, with a shorthand key:

- C – Comforts: one child offers comfort to another child in any way
- I – Indicates need: one child calls an adult's attention to the distress of another child
- MB – Makes better: one child tries to put things right for another child
- H – Helps: a child voluntarily offers help of any kind to a child or adult
- T – Takes turns: a child is willing to wait to take a turn
- G – Gives: a child voluntarily lets another child have an item

The team use the categories in observations made by each of them in turn over a period of two weeks in the drop-in. They then pool their observations, make a simple count of the categories and names of children and discuss what they have found.

- In practice it has been hard to tell the difference between 'comforts' and 'makes better', so they add these codes together.
- Some children's names appear regularly. For instance, Bola has many mentions against 'gives'. So many in fact that the team wonder if Bola needs to understand that she can say, 'No' or 'When I've finished'. Bola's mother is very keen that she behaves well in the drop-in and it is possible that the consequence is interrupted play for the child.
- About half of children's offers to help adults are declined, usually by parents but sometimes by the drop-in team. Vicky suggests that they need to reflect on how to avoid a situation in which children become discouraged because adults want something done 'quickly' or 'properly'.
- There are plenty of examples of prosocial behaviour appropriate to the age of the children. The team are able to identify specific examples to describe to each parent about their own child.

Questions

- 1 In what ways could you use a similar format in your setting?
- 2 Plan and undertake a short observation and then write a brief report about what you have learned about the children and the adults.
- 3 Share your ideas with colleagues on your course, being careful to maintain confidentiality about children and adults.

Key skills links: LP3.1–3 C3.1b

Key term

Event sampling

a technique in which observations are made of specific events or types of behaviour, defined in advance of the observation

Observations of children's behaviour

Sometimes you can use the **event sampling** approach to select events or a specific kind of behaviour. In order to observe children's behaviour in an accurate way, you need to have a clear focus of interest.

This technique is useful if you need an accurate view of how a child is behaving. Observation can help you and your colleagues gain a perspective on a child whose behaviour you find hard to handle. You need to observe at least over several days, to get a sense of patterns for this child.

In this observation, Ruth's behaviour is of concern because she bites other children. Another child might be seen as 'aggressive' or 'disruptive'. In that case, the first step has to be that the team gets beyond the negative label and is clear about what behaviour needs to be observed. So long as the team are clear about the behaviour to be observed, then more than one person can contribute to the observation sheet.

Later the observation has to be discussed in an open and flexible way, with the approach of 'what have we learned?' and 'what can we do now?' There should never be any sense of an observation 'proving' that a child is very difficult and that is the end of the matter.

Dates: 13–17 May 2002 Observation of: Ruth Observation made by: David Behaviour observed: Biting other children and any other unprovoked physical attacks		
Days	Event	Comment
Monday	1 Bit Marina – quarrel over dressing-up clothes 2 Nearly bit Marina again – responded to 'No biting!' from staff 3 Bit Nelson – unclear why	Marina seemed very wound up today Spoke with her father – family worries high at the moment – they are trying the 'No biting!' approach too
Tuesday	—	
Wednesday	1 Pushed Nelson hard – response to pinching from N. 2 Nearly bit Jason – distracted by staff	Said 'no pushing' to Ruth but also 'no pinching' to Nelson. Ruth seemed pleased N. told off as well
And so on ...		

Figure 16.4 Example of observation by event sampling



- If you set out to collect examples of 'sociable' or 'challenging' behaviour, you should work out, ideally in discussion with colleagues, what kind of behaviour you mean by the words. Otherwise your observations could gather in some very different actions.
- A clear agreement about words is also crucial if colleagues are to share in making observations around the same theme.
- Keep your focus as positive as possible. For instance, an observation may be undertaken because the team finds a child's behaviour hard to handle.
- Then it is important that an observation is not approached as a way to 'prove' that this child is so impossible.
- One option is to observe for the flipside of behaviour: look out for cooperative behaviour from Morag who is frequently spotted being uncooperative.

Tips for practice

You can prepare your sheet of notes with a few key headings, including the behaviour you wish to observe, and also time of day, name of child(ren), name of adults involved and space for a brief description of what happened. It can be possible to make these kinds of notes and still remain responsible for the children.

Key terms

Developmental profiles or checklists

Many early years settings have a prepared **developmental profile** for tracking children's learning. The profile will provide a selection of skills in all the areas of development or learning areas within an early years curriculum. A profile can work well to support you in exploring a child's level of skill or overall development. One advantage is that this technique guides you through observation of a wide range of skills, ensuring that you take a well-rounded look at individual children. Reservations about using **checklists** often refer to the risk of building a fixed picture of a child and perhaps one that focuses too much on what a child cannot do. Profiles or checklists have potential disadvantages, but appropriate use of them can produce a positive record of children and a sense that they will continue to learn.

Developmental profile

record sheet for tracking children's progress in development and behaviour

Checklist or tick list
record layout in which it is possible to check or tick individual items relevant to children's development or behaviour

For good practice in the use of profiles, it is important that you follow some guidelines.

- Approach a child with respect and plan carefully how you will explore the different kinds of items in a profile.
- Some items will be in the form of questions and it will matter how you ask these – see page 454.
- A profile in the form of a checklist needs space for you to add examples and explanatory notes.
- If a child does not manage a particular item, there is good reason to make a note that the child partly managed to complete a task. You might also make a supported comment about where the difficulty seems to lie at the moment. Checklists should definitely not be used like a pass/fail test technique.

Tips for practice

- Nevertheless it is important to be honest and not to boost a child's achievements because you like the child or her parents. Inaccurate information will be unhelpful for the child in the long run.
- Keep a balance of children's strengths as well as difficulties as you write up an observation based on using a checklist.
- Spend time on what the child can manage, what he can nearly manage as well as those areas that are currently outside his capability.

Key term

Assessment

a rounded approach to determine what children can manage in defined areas of development

The difference between assessment and helping a child

Early years practitioners spend a great deal of time looking for ways to help children to learn. In your everyday interaction with young children you will look for opportunities to give useful prompts and hints. You will be willing to show children how to do something. However, **assessment** is a special situation and, during the time that you are completing an assessment, you have to hold back on your usual inclination to help.

The point of an assessment is to identify what children can do unaided. You may need to say to a child, 'Just for the moment, let's see what you can do on your own.' The point of your support to children's learning is that they learn to do it without prompting in the end. So assessment and helping need to be kept separate but, of course, a good assessment will give you ideas for how to help individual children on another occasion.

Consistency between practitioners

An effective assessment needs to be organised and run in a consistent way between different practitioners and on different occasions. All the team in any early years setting or school need to have discussions about how to assess the children.

- There needs to be a shared agreement about when children will be assessed and how long any assessment will take.
- The value of a focused assessment is that you gain an accurate snapshot of a child at a point in time. This value is lost if you spend weeks on gathering information.
- A focused assessment can work well alongside a continuous record of children to which you add on a regular basis. But remember that the two methods are different.
- Generally speaking, practitioners should not change items in a development record sheet, vary the wording or their own actions.
- Such changes can sometimes change the nature of what you are asking a child and perhaps make a task more difficult. For instance, copying a shape that a child can see is less challenging than being asked to draw a circle with no example on the table.
- Different practitioners need a shared understanding of what is meant by an item such as 'the child can describe a picture' or 'the child is able to share'.
- Sometimes you will need to create a situation for assessment, perhaps by encouraging a child to look at some relevant materials. Yet sometimes you will be able to observe and assess through children's spontaneous play.
- When you are assessing children's physical skills, it is fine to show them with 'Can you hop like this?' You are assessing their physical ability, not their understanding of the words.

- However, you do have to be careful not to give unintentional prompts with assessment of intellectual and communication development.

Creating an opportunity to observe

Sometimes you will observe children in an early years setting or family home and you can learn by watching their spontaneous behaviour.

- Sometimes, an observation may require you to intervene in one way or another but this involvement does not have to be intrusive.
- You might wish to create a situation to check and explore what a child can do.
- Perhaps you put out particular equipment or deliberately use a certain book, because you want to observe children's reactions.
- You might invite a child, or a series of children, to join you in an activity, ask them questions or invite their opinions.
- If children do not want to join you then it is unwise to insist. Children will not give their best when they feel harassed.

It is very important that early years assessments should avoid any sense of pass or fail. This concern about performance may come from the children, their parents or your own team.

- Be ready to explain to the children, if they ask, what you are doing and why.
- If need be, reassure them, if they are having difficulties, that this activity will help you to help them later on. ('Now I understand better where you get stuck on this' and other encouraging remarks.)
- Profiles should never be laid out in a way that implies blunt success or failure.
- There should be scope to show progress over time. Profiles need options to note that the child can complete an item with confidence, is nearly there, appreciates some help or is unable to manage yet (and does this matter given the child's age?).

Tips for practice



Figure 16.5

Children themselves often want you to 'look at me'

Making sense of your observations

As soon as we hear or see something, we start to make some sense of our observation and to link it to our existing knowledge and experience. To an extent, this making sense is inevitable because that is the way that our brains work. But it is important for good practice in observation that you hold back as much as possible from letting assumptions shape your observations as you write them.

Any interpretations, final conclusions or practical suggestions from your observations or use of a developmental profile must be supported. The key word is 'because ...' – whether you write it, say it or think it.

- Your notes or a summary report should avoid vague words like a 'good' child just as much as general criticisms like 'poorly behaved'.
- Focus on what you have observed and bring out the descriptive information. If you believe that Stevie is 'good at hand-eye coordination', then explain why. Give some examples of what you have observed of Stevie. If you judge his skills are striking for his age, then refer to some developmental material that backs your opinion.
- If you believe there is some reason why a child behaves in a particular way or shows particular interests, then support your view. Remain tentative along the lines of 'my observations suggest that ...'.
- Develop the habit of writing down what you see or hear and not your guesses about what children are feeling or what they meant to happen.
- It might mean the difference between writing, 'May frowns. She is staring at the book' rather than an interpretation that 'May is confused'. The closest you should get to this interpretation is that, 'May looks as if she may be confused'.
- You cannot read minds, so it is important not to imply that you have insight into a child's motivations or intentions. You can observe and write up that Rasheed watched Kelly fill the dump truck with dirt and then told a practitioner that 'Kelly has been naughty'. You cannot conclude from this single incident that 'Rasheed wanted to get Kelly into trouble' or that 'Rasheed must be taught not to tell tales'.
- When you look at completed observations, it is equally important that you check any assumptions and interpretations you make. Cultural bias has been known to creep into some observations of children's self care skills. For instance, eating with a knife and fork is not a universal method at mealtimes.
- Unreflective practitioners have sometimes written that a child has 'no language' or 'very limited language'. But the accurate situation has been that the child is in the process of learning English as an additional language and the practitioner has no idea about the child's ability in her first language.
- Keep within the context that you know this child. Perhaps Julie is 'a quiet child' in nursery and you can describe how Julie rarely speaks without being asked, looks on from the sidelines and other examples. But you cannot be sure, without checking with her parents, whether she is equally quiet at home. You cannot conclude that Julie is 'a quiet child' everywhere.



Scenario

The Wessex childminding network has been exploring ways to sharpen up everyone's skills in distinguishing a range of possible interpretations of an observation. Today they consider the following example provided by one of the group:

The observation was of Donnie, aged 18 months, over a period of fifteen minutes yesterday on the kitchen floor of his childminder. Donnie emptied out the contents of the vegetable rack and played with the vegetables one by one. Some of the separate notes describe how 'Donnie looks at the rack intently. He walks over and pulls the rack onto the floor. Donnie sorts out the potatoes' and so on.

But adults will rarely stop with a blow-by-blow of what Donnie has done; we are keen to make sense of what we see to interpret for meaning. The group has come up with four broad interpretations:

- Donnie is fascinated by what objects will do. He is experimenting and has learned that some potatoes roll, that raw carrots are good to eat and that a lot of sprouts can be fitted into his childminder's winter boots.
- Donnie shows evidence of learning from experience. He has worked out how to hook the vegetable rack off its bracket and what initially took him ten minutes of hard work is now completed in three minutes.
- Donnie is a naughty boy who has been allowed to get away with things. His childminder is too permissive and should give Donnie boundaries for his behaviour. He has to learn that vegetables are not toys.
- Donnie is a real boy, he is 'into everything' and has shown the impressive physical skills that are usual for little boys.

Questions

Consider on your own, or ideally with colleagues:

- 1 The four interpretations show different interests and perspectives – what are these?
- 2 What might lead practitioners to one interpretation rather than another?
- 3 Which interpretations are more accurate and positive?
- 4 Take an observation that has been done in your setting and consider different interpretations.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1b C3.3

Figure 16.6

The same event can be interpreted differently – a toddler artist to be encouraged or getting ‘too messy’!



Tips for practice

You can help yourself to reflect on assumptions or interpretations with a series of questions. Within a team, colleagues can help each other:

- What is the basis for the sense I make of my observation? What is my evidence?
- What leads me to the conclusion that this child is ‘distressed’ or ‘frustrated’? What have I seen or heard?
- What are other possible interpretations of what I have observed?
- Do I have to reach a firm conclusion? Perhaps I do not really understand what was happening in this observation. Can I ask the children or their parents? Perhaps I can just make a note that I am uncertain.

Recording information about children

Early years settings will keep some kind of written records of children and their learning but written formats are not the only way to gather and keep useful information:

- Settings often need to find practical ways to build informal notes into a more permanent record for a child. See the scenario for one option.
- A portfolio or folder for children can include their own choice of drawings, pieces of work they have been happy to do, early writing, photos of constructions or important outings to this child.
- Scrapbooks or photo albums can be important for individual children and for the current group. Children often enjoy poring over records of this kind that have real meaning for them and encourage recall and conversation.

- A diary can travel between a setting and home. This form of record can be one way to communicate with parents, especially if there is genuinely very limited time. A few notes about a child's interests or new skills can be written in a format that invites parents to add their own family perspective.
- Sometimes it may be possible to make audio or video recordings of activities or events. Only do this if you will have time to look at the recording. Children and parents can enjoy watching a video about the setting. Bear in mind the tips for practice on page 447.

Activity

- Look at the options for recording in this section.
- Consider and discuss which of them are suitable for a nanny or childminder and why.
- Write up a brief plan of how a nanny or childminder could keep appropriate records for this working role.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a

Scenario

The team at St Jude's nursery and reception class have experimented with different ways of noting informal observations and then transferring them to the main record of a child.

Jessie first suggested a system of post-it notes that had worked well in her previous school. But they needed a main board to put the notes against each child's name before going into the main record. The only location was really too public. The notes were made with care but still needed to be more confidential than was possible with this board.

Pam brought in an alternative idea that she had heard during a training workshop. A local pre-school had used a notepad that could hang around the practitioner's neck or clip onto a waistband. Notes could be made of interactions or events during the day, then transferred into a child's record.

The team tried out this idea and it suited the nursery and reception as a way to supplement other forms of record keeping. A positive consequence was the great interest shown by some children in the 'special little notebooks'. Several children wanted to make a notebook of their own and were encouraged and helped to undertake this activity. The notebooks have become part of some children's pretend play and have offered a positive route to show reasons to write.

Questions

- 1 In what way does your own setting deal with making informal notes?
- 2 Compare ideas with colleagues on your course. What could be the pros and cons of different methods?
- 3 Try out a new method for a few weeks and write up the activity.

Key skills links: C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3



Figure 16.7

Any observations need to cover outdoors as well as indoors

Sharing records with children

Parents should have access to the records of their own children (see page 461) but communication with children is also important and often overlooked. Children can be involved in several ways:

- Children are often interested in what adults are doing when they notice you making observations. Be ready to explain simply what interests you and why.
- You can even explain what you have learned from observations of a child's behaviour, so long as you express yourself positively. You might say, 'Sometimes you look a little bit lost in playgroup. So I've been trying to work out how I could help.'
- Children usually like to collect and choose material for their portfolios. The range may include some of their artwork, early mark making and photos that document what they like doing as well as projects that are far too big to go into a portfolio except as a photograph.
- Children may like to dictate or partly write some of the explanatory notes in their records.
- Children can and should be involved in setting their learning targets. This discussion might be about 'what you're ready to manage next' in an open way or part of an Individual Education Plan for a child with special needs (see page 529).

Activity

It is well worth considering ways to involve and consult children on different kinds of record keeping. You want after all to support their view of themselves as learners and promote a positive disposition to learn (see page 393).

- Find out the ways that children are involved in your own setting.
- If there is limited involvement and consultation for children, then draft one or two ideas of what could be developed.
- Share ideas with your colleagues in the setting and exchange ideas with colleagues who are fellow students.

Key skills links: C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Confidentiality and access

Parents should feel confident that personal information about themselves or their children is kept confidential. Records should not be simply left lying around a setting nor should they be left visible on a computer screen. Nor should details of families be the subject of gossip, either across a large setting or outside a setting.

However, parents should have straightforward access to the records of their own children. Apart from good practice in partnership with parents, people have a legal right to see records about themselves or your children, unless there are extenuating circumstances, for instance, a child protection case.

**Figure 16.8**

Children enjoy a photographic record of their activities

- Practitioners within the setting, and especially the key worker, should have easy access.
- Anyone else should have only access on a clear need-to-know basis.
- Certainly, children and family records should not be made available to students, researchers or other professionals without the clear agreement of the parents.
- Parents should know the centre's policy on records, because you should have told them early on in the relationship and a clear statement about records should be part of written material on the centre.
- Parents should not have to make a song and dance about getting access; it should be simple. Good records also have sections to which parents can add their own comments.
- Some settings have specific procedures to follow when access is requested but these should not lengthy.
- It has sometimes been usual practice to remove any third party information in a file, that is any letters or reports that have been written by people outside your own setting. However, many local authorities and organisations now follow a policy that material goes on open file unless the other person specifically refuses.

Tips for practice

When you write records it is important to remind yourself that parents will be able to read what you are writing. Early years practitioners sometimes find this realisation daunting. However, if you follow good practice in writing records and reports then the material should support communication with parents rather than annoy them. You will find more suggestions about good communication with parents from page 638.

Good practice in writing records

Good practice when completing any written record is to be clear about:

- *what* you need to record and how much is realistic, given your setting
- the reasons *why* you are recording this information, including the ways in which you hope it will be useful later

- good practice in *how* you record
- the related issues of confidentiality of reports and of appropriate access to them.

Scenario

The team of Greenholt Pre-school have reviewed their approach to record keeping to adjust to the different attendance patterns of the children. Although some children attend every day, others come for only one or two sessions a week. The team wishes to offer this flexibility to local families and feel that some younger children are not ready for full week attendance. However, the team has been trying to complete the same developmental profile on all the children to cover all the learning goals in the foundation stage. This approach has led to impossible pressure on the children who attend one or two sessions.

By the end of a rather anxious team meeting, Marjorie and her colleagues agree a much less ambitious profile for the children who attend for one or two sessions. The more flexible profile has headings for the six learning areas but leaves space for observations of what interests this child.

Questions

- 1 Why do you think that the team has set themselves such a tough observation task?
- 2 What adjustments could make sense when a team is keeping records of children who attend for less than a full week?
- 3 Discuss your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.1a

Be factual

Good, and useful, written records or summary reports are honest and factual. Your supported opinions are important, see below, but it should be easy to distinguish facts, opinions and any suggestions or conclusions on the basis of these.

Support your opinions

It is not possible to avoid giving opinions as an early years practitioner. Your experience and knowledge make it possible to give opinions about the behaviour or development of a child that are built on your observations. The two key points of good practice are that:

- it is easy to distinguish the facts of what you have observed from your opinion and
- you support your opinion; there is a sense of 'because ...'.



Activity

Read through the following draft report. Ideally take a photocopy, so that you can write on the report itself. The report needs work, but what kind of changes could improve this first draft?

First draft of summary report on Joanna Yates

Date of report: 26 November 2001

Age of child: 2 years and 7 months

Date of admission to centre: 20 September 2001

Joanna comes to the centre three days a week. She started to attend because her health visitor was worried the child only had a few words and was too quiet. Mum isn't worried and keeps saying that Jo-Jo (her name for Joanna) is a very good child and was a good baby. Mum is only a teenager herself and doesn't have much idea what to do with Joanna.

Joanna settled in quickly and she didn't seem unhappy at all. She is usually quiet and doesn't join in much. She is a self-sufficient child and looks at the other children but hasn't shown much interest in the kind of activities we would expect her to like. She says 'No' and 'Mine' and follows instructions like going to the bathroom. But she might just be following the other children. When she is asked something directly, Joanna sometimes makes a silly, blank expression. Quite often she does not answer to her name.

Joanna eats well and is nearly toilet trained. She sleeps for up to an hour after lunch. Her clothes are odd but at least her mother keeps them clean. Once or twice lately Joanna wasn't wearing a coat when she arrived in the morning. Joanna seems fairly healthy, although she has a cold at the moment. She was off for a week in October with what her mother said was flu.

Joanna is no trouble to have in the group because she never gets cross with any of the other children, but she doesn't really play properly either. Her concentration seems alright since she will sit at a table activity for as long as it is out. Mainly she sits at the sand tray but I have seen her in the book corner as well.

The main worry is that Joanna says so little and that her mother won't accept that there is any problem. Mum is expecting yet another baby in April.

Questions

Please read through the draft then:

- 1 Mark up your copy with any points you would like to make about the actual wording that has been used in the written report. Be ready to explain your reasons for wanting changes.
- 2 What changes in organisation could improve the draft and why are these important?
- 3 Do you think there is any cause for concern about this child? If so, then what kind of observations would you make? What kind of conversation would you have with the child's mother?
- 4 Discuss your ideas with colleagues, including how you could advise the draft writers about necessary changes in a constructive way (see page 465). You will find some suggestions about improvement on page 466.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a

To think about

It is valuable for you get practice in distinguishing between facts and opinions, in order to develop good practice habits of supporting your opinions. Early years practitioners will have valuable opinions and there is no way that you can restrict your written or spoken communication to matters of fact. Good practice is to be able to support your opinions and to express them in a positive way.

Look at the following comments and consider:

- Which comments are factual and which are opinions?
- Which comments need some changes to how they are expressed?
- Do some comments need further support: if spoken? If written down?
- Discuss your ideas with colleagues. You will find suggested answers on page 467.

- 1 Amy lacks confidence on the climbing frame.
- 2 Daniel hit Fiona this afternoon.
- 3 Lesley was crying for no reason.
- 4 Mrs Richie said she was worried that Teresa is not talking yet.
- 5 Anneka is only four years old and she can already read very well.
- 6 Mr Martinelli is an anxious father.
- 7 Billy is very aggressive and the other children are frightened of him.
- 8 Mrs Warwick claims that Lewis caused the bruises on his sister's arm.
- 9 Winston is sometimes very difficult to control and does not listen.
- 10 Nathan has a lot of colds and awful catarrh.
- 11 Mr Kwok asked if we were going to celebrate Chinese New Year.
- 12 Sara is a bright little girl with very good language.
- 13 Lee has been enthusiastic about the new storybook.
- 14 George is a bit of a bully.
- 15 Rafat only plays in parallel with other children.
- 16 Davie has asked me to help him with writing his letters.

Key skills links: C3.1a

Good quality in writing

It is important to write up any observations promptly because otherwise you will forget details or merge one event with another in your memory. Prompt recording is especially important if you are concerned about a child, perhaps with possible child protection issues (see Chapter 19).

Any records need to be written in a clear and concise style:

- Some records will be hand written. So you need to ensure that your writing is legible.
- Check the spelling of words if you have any doubt. If you work on a word processor, then make sure that you use the spell-check function.
- You will often have a layout with headings under which you write



observations or a summary report of a child. Let these headings help you plan what you write.

- You may be asked to write some reports without a layout to guide you. In that case, work out some sensible headings and ask your senior to help you.
- You will write a more useful report if you take a bit of time to consider, 'What are the areas I need to cover?' and 'What do I want people to know or understand once they have read my report?'
- Make it easy for anyone to follow the flow of your report. Ensure that any narrative about a child or family goes in the right order, with dates given as appropriate.
- If at all possible, read a draft report out loud to yourself or somebody else. This strategy is the best way to pick up on repeated words, very long sentences and confused content.

Tips for practice

- Spelling matters – use a dictionary or spell checker on the word processor. Keep a personal note of words that you use regularly and you know you often confuse.
- But even on the computer, you will need a dictionary to tell you what a word means and whether you are using the word you intend.
- Use punctuation correctly. Many reports will not need any more sophisticated punctuation than the correct use of commas and full stops.
- Many people are confused about the use of the apostrophe and some people who write public notices make the mistake of thinking it is always used in front of the letter 's'.
- The first use of an apostrophe is to show that something is missing from a word, for example in 'don't' because this word is a shortened version of 'do not'. However, you would usually write such words in full because these abbreviations are mainly for spoken communication.
- The second use of an apostrophe is to show possession as in Gemma's coat or Asha's idea.
- Use clear and simple sentences and break your report into paragraphs. Generally you need a new paragraph for each new idea.
- Write clearly and avoid early years specialist language (see page 638).
- Avoid confusing sentence constructions like the double negative or it not being clear who has done what. For instance, in the sentence 'Andy's father did not say he could not go on the trip' who said what about whom?

Everyone needs to practise in order to improve their writing style and to become familiar with the range of written material that is required in your current role or setting.

- You will become more confident with practice but you also need constructive and encouraging feedback from more experienced or senior colleagues.
- You will not be helped if colleagues simply criticise your first drafts with words like 'muddled' or 'vague'.
- It is worth asking for specific suggestions on 'how can I improve?' and 'I found this section really tough, can you suggest how I can organise it?'

If you are dyslexic

Dyslexia is discussed on page 350 in relation to children's learning. But of course this learning disability stays with you for life. If you are dyslexic, then you will need extra support as a student and from your colleagues when you are in post.

- If your education has been helpful, then you may have some strategies that work for you in dealing with the written word.
- You need to explain the situation to colleagues in the team, so that they understand in what ways you would appreciate help and that you are not simply trying to dodge out of writing any reports.
- It is possible that you could think about and tape record your main points from an observation and similarly work them into a summary report. You could then draft a written version, without losing any of your thoughts in the stress of writing.
- Ask a colleague to look at your draft and give you constructive feedback. It may sometimes help if your colleague reads it aloud. You can then identify where the words are wrong, because you are far clearer in the spoken language about what you want to transfer into the written format.

Suggestions

Here are some comments on the draft report from the activity on page 463. You may have generated more or different comments in discussion with your colleagues. There is no single set of 'right' answers here.

- The report needs a clear structure to cover different areas of Joanna's development. At the moment the draft is very confusing. It also needs the name of the person who has written the report.
- Patronising to Joanna's mother, for instance 'only a teenager herself' and 'expecting yet another baby'. A good example of remarks that will be embarrassing when the parent asks to look at her daughter's file.
- Unacceptable offhand remarks: 'her clothes are odd', 'what her mother said was flu'.
- A negative feel to the few comments about Joanna's development: 'doesn't join in much', 'a silly, blank expression', 'doesn't really play properly'. There needs to be a better balance between what Joanna can do and what she cannot manage, as well as a better quality of description overall.
- Of course, the child may not reply because she is used to being called Jo-Jo and not Joanna!
- The report lacks a sense that the writer has any clear expectations about the abilities of a child who is just over two and a half. Sitting for a long time at the sand tray is not necessarily evidence of good concentration.
- A decent structure to the report, with headings for different areas of development, would require more information from the writer.
- As the report stands, it is hard to judge whether there are reasons to be concerned about the child, although the patchy description raises the possibility that Joanna may not yet be comfortable in this setting.



Suggestions

Here are some comments about the To think about box from page 464. You may come up with other points in discussion with colleagues. In each example of a child it would be necessary of course to know the child's age and whether he or she had any disabilities that could affect the sense you make of the situation and what the next steps might be, if any.

1 *Amy lacks confidence on the climbing frame.*

An opinion and needs some more information through descriptive examples. What makes the adult feel that Amy 'lacks confidence'?

2 *Daniel hit Fiona this afternoon.*

Factual, but more of an entry in a daily diary and should include some sense of what led up to the incident and how it was handled (ABC – see page 502).

3 *Lesley was crying for no reason.*

Opinion of an adult and inappropriate. Children always cry for a reason; it is just that adults sometime judge the reason is 'not good enough'. Needs more description and observation for patterns.

4 *Mrs Richie said she was worried that Teresa is not talking yet.*

Factual reporting of parent's concern. The follow up will depend on Teresa's age and abilities.

5 *Anneka is only four years old and she can already read very well.*

Factual for age and opinion about reading, needs to be supported with observation of Anneka, for instance that she does actually read rather than know favourite stories by heart.

6 *Mr Martinelli is an anxious father.*

Opinion and inappropriate as written. Mr Martinelli will have expressed anxiety about some situation(s); that does not necessarily make him an anxious person.

7 *Billy is very aggressive and the other children are frightened of him.*

Opinion that needs to be expressed differently and supported. The comment needs some description of Billy's behaviour and not just a label, as well as some support for the opinion that the other children are frightened.

8 *Mrs Warwick claims that Lewis caused the bruises on his sister's arm.*

Factual as a report of what Mrs Warwick said. It may not be possible for the early years team to assess whether the statement is true or not.

9 *Winston is sometimes very difficult to control and does not listen.*

Opinion that needs more description of what Winston does and under what circumstances.

10 *Nathan has a lot of colds and awful catarrh.*

Semi-factual but poorly expressed. How many colds does Nathan have and his catarrh could be described as 'serious' rather than 'awful'.

11 *Mr Kwok asked if we were going to celebrate Chinese New Year.*

Factual and could lead to the team re-considering their plans if the answer is 'no'.

12 *Sara is a bright little girl with very good language.*

Opinion and unhelpful as it stands, despite the positive feel. What does Sara do that makes the writer/speaker judge her to be 'bright'? Needs examples of her language to support the claim.

13 *Lee has been enthusiastic about the new storysack.*

Opinion that could be supported with more description of how Lee reacted.

14 *George is a bit of a bully.*

Opinion and poorly expressed as a negative label of the child. Needs rewording and description of George's behaviour.

15 *Rafat only plays in parallel with other children.*

Semi-factual or could be an opinion – hard to tell without knowing how far the comment is based on good observation of Rafat.

16 *Davie has asked me to help him with writing his letters.*

Factual reporting of a child's request.

Assessment of children's learning

The introduction of an early years curriculum in the UK has given a new focus for the observation and recording of children's learning. In England, the early learning goals within the foundation stage have been especially associated with the need to track children's learning in some detail. In some settings, the need to record and assess has been experienced as a great pressure.

Yet, good practice in observation, assessment and written records has been central to early years practice for a long time. It is important to recognise existing good practice as well as consider new applications and to deal with unhelpful pressure on how much and in what way to record children's learning.

What does assessment mean?

Different ideas and terms can become confused in discussions about the assessment of young children:

- *Gathering information:* useful work with children depends on good quality information, which you might gather through talking with children's parents, observations of children and talking with colleagues or other professionals who know this individual child.
- *Observation:* the skills of observation need an active use of the senses of sight and hearing. You are watching and listening to a purpose, although there can be many different purposes.
- *Recording:* good practice includes a written report of observations and the careful assessment of a child's abilities drafted in a positive way.

The gathering of information leads to an assessment, which has some element of judgement. What is happening with a given group of children? What can a child do, nearly do or not yet do? What sense can you make of a child's development or behaviour against the backdrop of her age, experience and any special needs (which may or may not be disabilities).

Why assess?

Any useful and sensible assessment of children has to be linked to a clear purpose. You need to be able to answer the questions 'Why are we doing this?' or 'What do we hope to gain from assessment?' In general, the functions of careful observation followed by an assessment are to:

- Provide information, a rounded picture rather than just what chances to catch an adult's attention.
- Inform future planning for this child – in the short-, medium- and longer-term future.
- Identify and diagnose problems, which may be minor or more serious.
- Support full communication with parents about their child. Good practice in assessment involves parents and gives scope for their unique knowledge of their child.
- Support communication with children so that they can understand, in a way appropriate to their age, how their learning has progressed.
- At some points in childhood, assessment is a tool to communicate information about a child with the next setting to which she or he is moving on. Such communication should be in full partnership with the child's parents.

Assessments are made of individual children but what you learn can also inform your future planning for the whole group. You might review the curriculum and approaches taken in the group and consider the balance for all children, given what has emerged from individual assessments (see page 456).



Figure 16.9

You will want an accurate idea of how children's skills are progressing

Tips for practice

- A key issue to bear in mind will always be that record keeping should clearly support your main goal of enabling children's learning.
- Your goal is not to have extensive records; the records should do a job.
- At least some early years settings may need to decide how much is enough in terms of written records and evidence gathering. This part of the job should not overwhelm time and attention given to the children, who are the priority.

Approaches to assessment

A range of different kinds of observation and record keeping can contribute to assessment. You might undertake any of the following or some combination:

- Continuous assessment through keeping notes of children's progress and development. Regular observation may be used to notice what children are doing in their spontaneous play, complemented by talking with children, colleagues and parents.
- A portfolio of work may be gathered, ideally selected by the child as well as an adult. Some settings are now using cameras with the children to document activities, events and work in progress.
- Regular notes may be made under descriptive headings that cover the main areas of children's development and behaviour.
- Settings may complete developmental record sheets on a regular basis and these offer a 'snapshot' of a child at a particular time. This kind of observation and assessment attempts to cover a wide range of skills and knowledge, not all of which children will show through spontaneous play.
- Focused observations may home in on particular developmental skills, children's behaviour, times of the day or session or use of particular items of equipment or learning spaces. Careful use of techniques of time sampling or event sampling can produce a fair observation that supports an assessment (see page 448).

Assessment of individual development and behaviour

There are two main approaches to assessing individual children:

- 1 Comparing a child with him- or herself at a previous point in time (ipsative). This approach gives a direct assessment of how much this child has changed.
- 2 Comparing a child with developmental norms for her age (normative) or against expectations for all children, such as the early learning goals in the English curriculum.

Both approaches are needed for a sensitive balance in assessment.

The **ipsative** approach will show how this individual child is or is not progressing over time. A focus on individual children is crucial if you are to encourage and value children from the point of view of where they are at the moment, rather than where they 'should' be. But a responsible approach to children also requires a **normative** perspective. Without this approach, you will not be able to make full sense of what you have observed. Perhaps Anya has made noticeable progress, but adults have to recognise that she is still very delayed in her language development. Perhaps Darren was strikingly ahead of his peers six

Key terms**Ipsative approach to assessment**

comparing a child with him/herself at a previous point in time

Normative approach to assessment

comparing a child with developmental norms for her age or against expectations for all children, such as the early learning goals in the English curriculum

months ago but seems scarcely to have changed in that time. Perhaps he is bored and needs more challenge?

The normative side to assessment has to be used in a flexible way and well grounded in general knowledge about child development:

- There can be significant variation between children in terms of the age at which they manage a skill. Children may be some months different from their peers and there still be no cause for concern. However, responsible practitioners would, of course, keep alert to the point at which there is reason to worry (see page 11).
- Children are not identical and their development does not progress in an even way for all aspects of their learning. Children have time to learn and any kind of assessment needs to take an overall look at their development, not imply that some aspects are more valuable than others.
- Disabled children may learn to a different time scale and their pattern of development may be very different from their peers, depending on the nature and extent of their disability.
- Care has also to be taken over observation and assessment of bilingual children, especially when the child is being asked to use her least fluent language to answer your questions.

Some important practical issues arise when you are using any kind of focused assessment technique, such as a developmental record sheet. This assessment is always selective to some extent. You cannot possibly observe and assess everything that a child can do or nearly do, without seriously unbalancing your work in an early years setting or school (see page 453 about using developmental profiles or checklists).

Making assessment work well

The potential value of good quality assessment is that:

- You know better what is happening with individual children.
- You can be pleased with children and their parents about what they have learned and can nearly manage. You can help children to see themselves as learners.
- You can spot, and plan to work with difficulties, delays or misunderstandings. You should be able to make a difference to a child.
- You are more likely to be able to identify imbalances in how you approach this child, what you have overlooked.
- A consideration of assessments of all the children should help you to reflect on your overall approach to the whole group. But your early years curriculum should be much broader than focused assessment tasks.

A positive atmosphere

Any kind of assessment of children needs to be undertaken in a calm way without rushing children and with a supportive approach to their efforts. Any assessment scheme can only be as good as the people who use it, their behaviour as they assess children and the ways in which they communicate with parents and with children after the assessment.

Tips for practice

To work well, assessment has to be a part of general good practice in your setting:

- Observations and assessments are an integral part of your work, not extras that you feel you have to do. Assessments lead to new insights, practical plans and actual work with children (not to piles of paper in the cupboard).
- Practitioners keep assessment clearly different from helping children to learn. The goal of assessment is usually to judge through observation what a child can manage without prompting (see page 454).
- Assessment is always undertaken and discussed with parents in a positive frame. Plans start with what a child 'can do' or 'can nearly do'. Written records and conversations are never a list of problems and 'can't do'.
- Progress and learning is celebrated and never dismissed as 'something she ought to be doing anyway'.
- Difficulties and developmental delays are acknowledged and this recognition leads directly into positive action.
- Children are never labelled, whether positively or negatively. Written records and conversations with parents are based on descriptions of what children do.
- Any kind of focused observation is also discussed in the context of everyone's knowledge of this child and of child development in general.
- A balance between subjectivity and objectivity. Early years practitioners, and parents, are personally involved with children and this personal perspective is important. However, it must be balanced with more objective methods of observation and an even-handed approach to assessment that depend on more than one person's opinion.

Feelings are also involved

Assessment is not just an intellectual task; feelings are also involved.

- Adults may experience mixed emotions about assessment. Early years practitioners and teachers can feel that they are being judged as much as the children. In a sense this perspective is partly true.
- Parents may feel that they are being judged, but it depends a great deal on the quality of communication from the early years practitioners. Without effective and genuine partnership, then parents and practitioners may try to assign blame for a child's difficulties.
- Children's feelings will also be involved, but the nature of those feelings will depend a great deal on the quality of work from the adults. Assessment does not in itself label children or discourage them. The communication from adults can send negative messages, or alternatively use the assessment experience to boost a child's confidence.

Baseline assessment

From 2002 there are likely to be changes in baseline assessment and other national equivalents across the four countries of the UK.

England

Until recently, children in England completed one of the over 90 accredited local baseline assessment schemes within the first half term of their start in the Reception class. Changes are underway at the time of writing so that:

- There will be one Foundation Stage Profile, from September 2002 that will be used at the end of the Reception year, so that it is consistent with the end of the Foundation Stage.
- The aim is to have a profile assessment scheme that is far more grounded in ongoing observation and assessment of children's progress. It is planned that the scheme will cover the six learning areas of the early years curriculum (see page 407).

Wales

Wales has used a baseline assessment system with 12 accredited schemes. The chosen scheme is used to assess children within seven weeks of starting in Reception or Year 1. There may be further changes in the Welsh system but it is not clear currently what those might be.

Scotland

So far local authorities have used their own systems of recording to pass information from early years to primary schools. Most systems draw on observations by early years practitioners and nursery teachers. There are plans to move to a more consistent national system but still within the framework of observation rather than testing. A few schools have opted to test children in Primary One, but the Scottish Executive is not in favour of this route.

Northern Ireland

Baseline assessment was planned for introduction in the province for September 2001. But plans were shelved because of a major curriculum review that is being undertaken to cover the period from early years to Key Stage 4. Children currently start school at four years of age in Northern Ireland and one proposal being discussed is to postpone formal education until six or seven years, as is the case in many other European countries.

Specialist assessments

Some children may be involved in other kinds of assessment to which your setting contributes. One possibility is the process of assessment for special educational needs (see page 526). Other professionals who may be involved in assessment are described on page 17. You might again contribute to an assessment or else be informed by parents of the details of a specialist assessment that could usefully shape how you approach a child's development or behaviour.

Further resources

Griffin, Sue (1994) *Keeping and Writing Records: A step-by-step guide for early years practitioners* Starting Points 17, National Early Years Network.

Hancock, Juliet and Dale, Barbara (1999) *Looking, Listening and Learning; Quality Interaction with Children* Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum.

Lindon, Jennie (1994) *Child Development from Birth to Eight: A practical focus* National Children's Bureau.

Lindon, Jennie (1998) *Understanding Child Development: Knowledge, theory and practice* Cengage Learning – especially Chapter 8.

Lindon, Jennie (1997) *Working with Young Children* 3rd edn, Hodder and Stoughton – especially Chapters 1–3.

Progress check

- 1 Describe three broad ways in which observation can support good practice.
- 2 Suggest two general examples of how you might use time sampling to observe a child's learning.
- 3 Explain briefly why it is important that you distinguish fact and opinion and that you are able to support your opinions from an observation.
- 4 Outline two ways to use a developmental profile so that children can experience success and not feel they have failed a test.
- 5 Suggest two ways in which practitioners might need to be aware of their own cultural background when making sense of observations.
- 6 Explain why parents should have easy access to the records of their child.
- 7 Describe two ways in which you should check your actual writing in a report on a child.

A positive approach to children's behaviour

After reading this chapter you should be able you to:

- describe ways in which children learn patterns of behaviour
- identify the elements in a positive approach to guiding children's behaviour
- promote the development of children's prosocial behaviour
- apply positive ways to deal with unwanted behaviour from children
- recognise and avoid unacceptable approaches to dealing with behaviour.

Introduction

Children's behaviour in any given situation will be the result of their individuality, the experience they bring to this setting and the genuine options they face at the time. Children have their own temperament and they are not born with fixed ways of reacting to what happens in their life. Children learn from their experiences, including how adults treat them and the possibilities for different courses of action. A positive approach to children's behaviour focuses at least as much on wanted behaviour as on unwanted. It also has to include adult alertness to their own behaviour; the children are not the only people present and they need the adults in their life to work well together.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 4, 10

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: C4

Level 3: C7

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 6, 12



Children learn ways of behaving

Children's behaviour at any one time in your setting will be affected by their individual temperament as well as the experience and expectations they bring to your setting. They will have learned some ground rules about behaviour. Yet children who are settling in need to learn perhaps that your way is different from adults they have known so far. Children feel as well as act, so the pressures of the moment and the strength of emotions aroused can lead them to behave in ways that they know are not quite right. We need to acknowledge that it can sometimes be hard for children to do the right thing. We are also unfair if we require higher standards from children than we could meet ourselves in equivalent adult situations (see the To think about box).

Reasons are not always obvious

It is important that adults do not require simple explanations of children's behaviour. Even brief consideration of adult behaviour shows you that there are many factors that influence the outcome in any given situation. Children are much younger than we are, but they are alert and we do them no favours by wanting there to be simple answers to 'why?' Children are learning all the time and are responsive to the nuances of any situation they face. It would be most unlikely if adults could identify a neat cause-and-effect explanation for every action that children take.

To think about

For instance, how would you behave in response to the following scenarios? And what reasons underlie your choice?

- You have bought a jacket in a shop. As you leave the till, you realise you have been undercharged. Are you honest, do you speak up?
- You are late for work and driving along a road with a 30 mile limit. Do you let your speed creep towards 35 or 40 mph or do you obey the rule?
- A friend whom you know to be careless with possessions asks to borrow some of your CDs for her birthday celebration party. Do you share?
- A close friend has lent you a novel that she says is wonderful. You have struggled to read the novel and found it very boring. Your friend asks enthusiastically what you thought of the book. Do you tell the truth?
- You are in a training workshop all morning, your chair is uncomfortable and your attention is drifting. Do you sit still and concentrate? Or do you fidget, doodle on your notepad and let your mind drift off?
- At home you are desperate for a biscuit. There is only one left in the packet and you know your partner/flatmate is equally keen on these biscuits. Do you eat the biscuit? Do you hide the empty packet?

Questions

Discuss some of your reactions with colleagues:

- Consider your different reactions and reasons for your likely behaviour. Could you give a logical answer to 'why did you do that?'



- Make the link to children's behaviour and discuss whether adults (including you) demand unrealistically simple reasons from children.
- These examples are the adult equivalent of what we often ask of children: do the right thing, obey the rule, be nice and share. Can you think of other links into adult life for what we ask of children?
- Make some practical applications to your own practice.

Key skills links: C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

The impact of children's experience

All the main developmental theories (see page 10) are helpful to an extent in guiding adults towards sensible and supportive adult behaviour but it is helpful to take an overview that blends these ideas.

Behaviour is mostly learned, not inborn

Observation of children and knowledge of the patterns of child development show that children's experiences shape how they see and react to the world. Children learn ways of behaving from how they have been treated in their early years. Similar experiences do not have an identical impact on different children and so their temperament is almost certainly part of how they react (see page 200).

Temperament probably has some genetic component (it is inherited) so behaviour is not 100 per cent nurture, but a considerable amount of variation can be traced to experience. So, the practical conclusion for early years practitioners is that a positive approach by adults to children's behaviour can make a difference.



Figure 17.1

An early years group setting requires new social skills from children

Behaviour is part of social development

Children are very social; they learn from what they can observe. They learn through imitation of familiar adults, siblings, friends and sometimes characters from television or video. This imitation may be positive as well as negative – an important point to recall if your attention is most taken with imitation you would rather discourage.

Children's ability to learn from experience is also shaped by their age. It is up to adults to hold realistic expectations of what very young children can understand and the extent to which they can manage their own behaviour, especially with limited help from adults.

Behaviour is also linked to thinking

Cognitive theorists such as Jean Piaget or Lev Vygotsky (see page 15) have been more interested in the development of children's ideas and communication skills than their general behaviour. An awareness of children's powers to think, interpret and predict is important in any approach to behaviour. The adult perspective on a situation is not the only one that matters.

Children do not just act, they also watch, listen and think. For instance:

- Children may well observe that adults tell them to take turns, but do not help when they are shoved away after waiting patiently.
- Children are ready to be helpful to others, but the early years setting or school has a poor atmosphere and everyone feels ill-tempered and self centred.
- Children make their choices of action from the options that are genuinely open to them in their situation. It is no good, for instance, being annoyed with children who are reluctant to share if their nursery or family home is such a competitive environment that the only survival strategy is to hold fast to what you have.

Children are also shaped by their experience: what they have found works and what seem to be the various options.

- Young children's thinking is grounded in what they know so far. They can find it hard to imagine a situation with ground rules or social relations other than what they have experienced.
- You will work with some children who have never had the opportunity to learn different ways of handling everyday conflict. Perhaps they have only ever seen an impatient or angry approach and the children have no idea of what else they might do.
- An alternative scenario is that some children enter the hurly-burly of a primary school playground with the expectation from their family life that people stop doing something if you say 'that upsets me'. Children who have learned the habit of consideration can be shocked to realise that some of their peers do not care about causing upset and may actually be pleased.

Key terms

Behaviourism

a theoretical approach that emphasises how human behaviour responds to patterns of reward and punishment. The approach is also called **learning theory**. Social learning theory recognises the importance of feelings and thinking on actions

Learning through reinforcement

Behaviourism or **learning theory** emerged from experimental study of how animals learned. Early versions of behaviourism were too simple to describe the complexity of children's behaviour. However, the social learning theory of Albert Bandura gives a more recognisable explanation of how children think as well as act.

Within behaviourist theory there are two basic propositions to explain how patterns of behaviour are established (in childhood or adulthood). These are that:

- 1 behaviour is strengthened by **reinforcement**
 - 2 behaviour that is reinforced on a partial schedule (that is not every time) is stronger, more resistant to stopping altogether, than behaviour that has been reinforced every single time.
- Bandura's social learning approach added two more important propositions, that:
- 3 children learn new behaviours mainly through the process of modelling, that is, through observing adults or other children and imitating their actions
 - 4 as well as actual behaviours, children also learn ideas, expectations and develop internal standards about choices in behaviour.

Behaviourism proposes that an experience of reinforcement increases the likelihood that a given behaviour will be repeated under similar circumstances in the future. Behaviour may be strengthened by positive or negative reinforcement.

- *Positive reinforcement* is an agreeable experience of something pleasant that follows behaviour. There are many possibilities. Reinforcement can be tangible rewards, like giving children sweets, some kind of treat, privilege or symbolic prize. However, it can just as easily be a smile, hug and words of admiration and encouragement.
- *Negative reinforcement* is the removal of something unpleasant or unwanted from the situation. Again this kind of reinforcement increases the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated in the future. For example, perhaps children have learned that one carer will give in and stop saying 'No' if the children continue to nag.
- *Partial reinforcement* is a pattern in which behaviour is not reinforced (positively or negatively) every single time. Ordinary life for children tends to follow this pattern, since even adults who try to be positively consistent do not manage this all the time. Likewise a child may persist in nagging for sweets or a later bedtime because it works sometimes and adults give in and say 'Alright'.

Reinforcement strengthens a pattern of behaviour, the experience increases the likelihood. On the other hand, punishment may weaken the pattern.

- **Punishment** is the removal of something pleasant from the situation, for instance, withdrawal of friendly attention, cancelling treats or removal of privileges. Or else punishment is the addition of something unpleasant to this situation as a result of the behaviour, for instance, making children sit on a 'naughty chair', critical or rude remarks from adults or physical punishment such as hitting.

So, punishment is different from negative reinforcement (read the two explanations once more if you are confused). The impact of punishment can be unpredictable.

The result of patterns of reinforcement and punishment can be that a particular behaviour effectively disappears.

- **Extinction** is the term describing the complete removal of a pattern of behaviour; the child has stopped behaving this way in response to this situation.

For example, perhaps a child tries moaning and crying in order to be bought sweets at the supermarket checkout. Their parent or carer deals with the situation calmly and does not reinforce the behaviour with attention or giving in to the demands. After a few times, the child stops bothering to whine because she

Key term

Reinforcement

an experience that increases the likelihood that an action will be repeated in the future

Key term

Punishment

an experience that decreases the likelihood that an action will be repeated in the future

Key term

Extinction

when an action or pattern of actions ceases altogether

has learned there is no point. On the other hand, a child may also give up attempts at friendly interaction with adults, if their efforts are consistently met with serious unpleasantness and being told to 'Shut up!'

Observation in everyday practice

Interactions between children and adults in everyday life are complex and the skills of early years practitioners are needed to observe what exactly is going on in the situation. For instance, a child's view of what is rewarding may differ from the adult perspective – see page 486 or the example on page 505. Adults are part of the whole situation as well, so any consideration of patterns of reinforcement has to allow for adult behaviour.

Behaviourism or learning theory has many practical applications within daily life with children and an understanding of the principles can nevertheless be compatible with a friendly and social day. A more organised use of the principles of behaviourism is used in the techniques of behaviour modification. Specific rewards are offered by adults for target behaviours from children in a planned way. These ideas have sometimes been very useful in programmes designed for use with disabled children, for learning and for dealing with challenging behaviour.

Emotional needs and behaviour

Alfred Adler developed a strong social emphasis for child development, especially from children's experiences within family life. He believed that children's behaviour was shaped by the sense they made of social interactions with other people. So children's thoughts and interpretations were as relevant as their emotions. Rudolf Dreikurs extended these ideas and explored the dynamics of how children interact with their social environment. Dreikurs described what he called the four mistaken goals of behaviour. These were that children behaved so as to:

- gain attention
- show superiority or power
- get even or seek revenge
- avoid defeat by appearing inadequate and hopeless.

The practical application of these ideas is that:

- Supportive adults try to recognise the likely goals or purposes behind children's behaviour. Acceptable emotions can lie beneath what emerges as unacceptable behaviour.
- Adults can help a child seek and gain attention through non-disruptive means. Or they can address a young child's fear of failure, creating a situation in which he or she no longer needs to cope by appearing inadequate.
- Dreikurs and his colleagues also raised the important issue of adult feelings; children were not the only ones feeling strong emotions in some tense situations. They pointed out that an alert adult can often gain a sense of children's mistaken goals by the feelings they successfully arouse in adults (see the Scenario box for examples).
- Caring adults are sensitive to children's feelings and help children to redirect them into acceptable and constructive ways of behaving.

Rudolf Dreikurs and others in the Adlerian tradition also developed very practical ideas about the use of consequences in shaping behaviour (page 505) and the importance of encouragement, rather than reward or praise (page 485).

Scenario

In Dresden Road Nursery School the team have worked hard to address children's feelings as distinct from their behaviour and they use many of the ideas developed by Rudolf Dreikurs. The practitioners try to recognise the possible emotional needs underlying a child's behaviour, even when the way of expressing those needs has disruptive results for the group. On some occasions they find that honesty about their own feelings has been a window on the child's likely emotional needs.

Owen

The team initially found four year old Owen hard to handle. In the early weeks, practitioners found themselves in regular conflict with Owen, frequently telling him off and insisting he complete tasks or apologise for cheeky remarks. The team exchanged how they felt about Owen and admitted to having thoughts like, 'He's not going to get away with this!' They had been drawn into a power battle on issues that often did not matter that much. A consistent team approach would be required and it was decided that adults would:

- actively look for ways to give Owen a sense of position and responsibility in the group
- resist replying to Owen's backchat and loud whispers to other children
- decide on those issues where Owen needs to follow instructions and resist the pull into a power battle on unimportant issues.

Ramona

In a different kind of way, the team in another room needed to bring their ideas together to work more positively with four year old Ramona, whose helplessness was making the adults feel irritated and inadequate, because their usual approaches seemed to make little difference. A team discussion brought together what had been learned about Ramona's background and how she behaves in the nursery. Ramona seems to be so unnerved by the possibility of making a mistake that it is preferable that adults, and some of the other children, become irritated with her. The team agree that they:

- have to find further reserves of patience with Ramona
- identify even small successes and encourage the child forward
- recognise that success and approval is actually rather scary for Ramona. She has learned from her family that doing something well just means she is expected to do even better later.

Questions

- What mistaken goals are probably reflected in these children's patterns of behaviour?
- Consider similar steps that you could plan for children that you know.
- Discuss your ideas with colleagues, including how you could involve parents as well. In what ways could you improve your own practice?

Key skills links: C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Positive ways to guide children's behaviour

All children are individuals and there are some different ways to operate as a supportive and positive adult. However, there are some broad guidelines established through research into family life and early years settings that identify the important features in a positive approach to children's behaviour.

Working together in an early years setting

A positive approach to behaviour is a joint effort. The adults in children's lives need to work in partnership and this means conversation and where necessary problem solving between those adults.

- If you have concerns about a child's behaviour, these should be raised sooner rather than later with the child's parent(s) and they should be part of any broad discussion about the best approaches to help their child.
- Parents will also want opportunities to discuss issues or incidents with you and to have any concerns they express treated with courtesy.
- Some parents will agree with your approach to behaviour, but some may have very different ideas about suitable 'discipline' for children. You need to be honest about what approaches you do take, as well as what you do not do in your setting.
- Early years practitioners need to work cooperatively as a team, so that children can experience consistency and fairness. You will find more on this topic in Chapter 20, including the contribution of a behaviour policy.
- And do not forget that you can work in collaboration with children on many aspects of behaviour. They can be involved in discussions and problem solving and you can still remain the adult with overall responsibility.

Create a positive adult role

One way of describing the role taken by adults in relationships with children is to look at the relative balance between the control that adults exercise and the warmth they show to children. Children flourish best with adults who express warmth towards them and who exercise a reasonable, but not excessive level of control, as a responsible adult.

This approach has been called an **authoritative role** and it is characterised by being firm yet fair with children. It is adults' responsibility to create boundaries and children do not benefit from adults who are unduly permissive or who are unpredictable over when they say 'enough' or on what.

In practice, of course, thoughtful adults need to check on the balance they achieve and adults who work together need to talk about what they are doing and why. Helpful adults realise that they are part of the situation; it is not only the children's behaviour that matters.

Key term

Authoritative role

a pattern of behaviour from adults that combines emotional warmth with responsible boundary setting

To think about

Good practice is to be a reflective practitioner (see page 32), an adult who is willing to look at your own expectations, assumptions and action in your time with the children. Be honest and consider the following. If you want to answer 'yes' to any point, then note down a recent example to support your reply.

- To what extent are you willing to reflect on what you bring to your time with children, that your behaviour and outlook are part of the whole situation?
- Do you think thoroughly about what you want the children to do and not just what you want them to stop doing?
- Do you set a good example? Do you create an environment in which it is possible for children to behave in a cooperative or patient way?
- Do you make the effort to look through children's eyes? Do you mentally stand back from the scene and consider what is actually happening?
- Do you take the time to observe what is happening, rather than assuming you know?
- Discuss your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Set a good example

There is a strong focus in this section on the behaviour of adults. This approach does not overlook the fact that the behaviour of children can sometimes be exhausting to handle. It takes physical, intellectual and emotional energy to deal with the normal ups and downs of life with young children, let alone the special difficulties that some children may bring into your setting with their past experience. The point is that:

- Adults' behaviour matters. It is definitely one of the ingredients in the whole situation. Little progress will be made if most discussion about children's behaviour focuses on what the children should not be doing.



Figure 17.2

Children learn about listening or waiting because you set a good example

- Adults are the older ones in an interaction, supposedly the more mature people. You are the grown-up here, so you have a responsibility to make the first move, to be willing to look at your own actions, to consider the child's perspective and listen to what children feel and believe.
- Never forget that children are still learning even when you are not setting out deliberately to show them something. They are well aware of those adults who are inconsistent and can be nagged, or those who do not keep to their own rules.

Hold realistic expectations

Any positive approach to behaviour needs to be grounded in realistic expectations for the age of the children. Otherwise, it is far too easy for unreflective adults to create problems by the way they insist on organising and running the early years setting, out-of-school care or early years of primary school. Other chapters of this book highlight appropriate expectations in terms of children's development, so these are brief reminders:

- You cannot expect young children, especially under twos, to follow verbal instructions without active guidance. They need to be shown as well as asked.
- Children in early years settings cannot tolerate excessive amounts of time being required to sit still or sit neatly up to the table. They need room to move and choose and they need plenty of physical activity (see Chapter 10).
- If children are too constrained – physically or emotionally – then adults create problems that would not have been there otherwise. The same concern applies to children in the early years of primary school.
- It is up to adults to look at possibilities of changing the environment and the daily routines. See the Scenario box for some examples.

Scenario

The team at Greenholt Pre-school have become increasingly concerned that they seem to tell the children off a great deal for minor misbehaviour: fidgeting, being in the 'wrong' part of the pre-school and minor arguing amongst the children. The atmosphere in the pre-school is unhappy and fractious. The team decides to undertake some observations to identify the main sources of irritation. After two weeks they discuss the findings in a team meeting:

- The pre-school runs in a church hall and to keep the noise and movement down, the team developed a tight plan by which children have to follow a schedule and move from table to table. The aim was that children then experience all the learning opportunities within a session.
- But some children are resistant to following the schedule and are told off as a consequence. Practitioners 'waste' time trying to bring the wanderers back to 'their' table and moving children on who do not want to leave their project.
- As a result of the observation, some team members also express concern about the children who fall in with the schedule – are they being persuaded to be too passive?



- Registration and mid-morning drinks are chaotic times, with children milling around, along with parents at registration. The team discusses whether these times need more, or different, organisation and the play needs less structuring.

Questions

- 1 What could be a possible way forward for the Greenholt team? Describe some practical plans.
- 2 What are the disadvantages of over planning children's play (see page 424) and how might the team create a more positive atmosphere?
- 3 How might they introduce some form of self registration or a self service drink time (see page 98 for ideas).
- 4 Consider any applications to how you could improve your own practice.

Key skills links: PS3.1 C3.1a LP3.1–3

Use positives to guide children

In general, it is most effective to focus on being positive about the behaviour you would like children to show. Of course, you do need to deal with unacceptable behaviour (see page 501), but the most positive approach to children's behaviour is weighted towards helping children to feel pleased that they have behaved well.

The effectiveness of encouragement

Although the words 'praise', 'reward' and 'encouragement' are sometimes used as if they are the same, this is not the case in practice.

Rudolf Dreikurs and other writers within the Adlerian tradition stressed the difference between spoken praise (and tangible reward) and encouragement:

- **Praise or rewards** (or treats) focus mainly on the end result of what children have done, whereas encouragement by word and body language is freely given for effort and improvement.
- Praise or rewards risk stressing a fixed quality about children, that they are 'good' or 'clever'. In contrast, **encouragement** can focus on the here and now: what a child has managed this time ('Well done for working that out' rather than 'Good boy').
- Encouragement can focus helpfully on feelings rather than completed actions: adults express their feelings of appreciation that a child has waited for her turn. Children can be supported to acknowledge their frustration with their inability to complete the jigsaw and also feel satisfaction for how much they have managed.
- A pattern of adult encouragement can boost children's feelings of satisfaction and their strengths, with a sense of continued progress.
- Adult dependence on spoken praise and tangible reward can appear unforgiving of mistakes or days when children do not feel like being 'a good child' or 'my little helper'.

When a positive approach to children's behaviour is led through encouragement, then the occasional praise or reward systems can have their place.

Key terms

Praise

positive feedback in words, usually for what has been done or achieved

Reward

giving tangible items or special experiences as a result of behaviour or achievement

Encouragement

positive feedback by words and expression, as much for effort as for achievement

- An effective approach to children's behaviour is to increase the positives in your own behaviour. Many people can double or treble their positive verbal and non-verbal comments.
- You can offer spoken encouragement to children through sincere compliments, saying 'thank you' to a child and showing appreciation of their efforts. Non-verbal encouragement is communicated through smiles, nods and friendly touch.
- Encouragement can be low key and operate on the principle of 'little and often' because children do not have to be especially 'good' to receive encouragement.
- The advantage of verbal and non-verbal encouragement is that it is an immediate and clear message to children. The best approach is to give it as close to the behaviour as possible, as part of natural communication with children. It is less effective if you save up comments for a group time at the end of a day or session. Circle time can be helpful (see page 496) in other ways.
- Consider the strategy that you 'catch children out being good'. You need to acknowledge the cooperative behaviour of a child who is not usually cooperative. But definitely avoid any sour undertone of 'why can't you always be like this?'; be pleased for today.
- You should also acknowledge the behaviour of a child who is usually well behaved, do not just let it pass because this is normal. Adults need to be thoughtful and avoid the kickback of not letting a 'good' child have an off day. Normally well behaved children are sometimes subjected to adult comments along the lines of, 'Now that's not like you, is it?'. Such remarks are very discouraging and impertinent from adults.

Careful use of rewards and incentives

Key term

Incentives

a promise of a reward in the future, as a result of particular behaviour or achievement

Tangible rewards and treats have a place in an early years setting. **Incentives** are also useful and these have a future promise of 'if ... then'. However, rewards and incentives both need to be used with discretion. If you overuse either of them, then children are less likely to develop a sense of personal satisfaction about their choices in behaviour. Rewards can undoubtedly backfire on adults, and in ways that illustrate how sensible adults have to consider what children are probably thinking, the sense that they make of the situation.

If children are regularly rewarded, with treats or prizes for certain kinds of behaviour, such as tidying up, then the likelihood of this behaviour may increase, but not necessarily. Some early years professionals have therefore claimed that 'reward doesn't work' or that 'it doesn't have a long-term effect'. A more accurate view, taking into account the perspective of children as well as adults, is that the reward system clearly has had an effect. The children's behaviour has changed; they are choosing not to help with tidying up any more. Unfortunately this effect was unwanted.

One possibility is that over use of tangible rewards has influenced children's expectations and the way they think about this part of the routine. Instead of developing a sense of internal satisfaction ('I tidy up with my friends because I enjoy helping'), some children view the activity as linked to the reward. So if they do not want the reward, they choose not to do the activity, thinking, 'I only do this if I want to get a prize' or in a family home perhaps that, 'I ought to be paid to tidy my room'.



To think about

- People sometimes say, 'You can never give a child too much praise' but unfortunately this is not true.
- Material reported from the United States identifies the negative consequences when adults give indiscriminate praise to anything and everything a child does.
- This unwise approach is doubly foolish if it is combined with hardly any constructive feedback (see page 494) or boundaries to children's behaviour.
- The results are that children no longer value praise that is given regardless of their efforts or achievements. Without some constructive feedback, children also become intolerant of any adult guidance to their actions.
- Most people can double and treble the amount of warm encouragement they give to children but, like many positive things in a child's life, it is possible to overdo the positives if you really set your mind to it!

Key term

Symbolic rewards
giving something that represents praise for behaviour or other achievements, such as stickers or certificates

Symbolic rewards

When children are slightly older, about four years of age, children can be motivated by **symbolic rewards** such as stickers, certificates and having their name written in a book for specific positive behaviour or good quality work.

Symbolic rewards can be positive so long as:

- The system works flexibly so that even those children who find it very hard to meet adult expectations will get their sticker for something.
- Symbols or stickers are never taken away from a child. Unwise adults usually do this as a punishment for later unacceptable behaviour. This reaction is very unfair and undermines the whole system.
- Adults remain sensitive to what an older child experiences as a positive incentive. Some children do not like being the centre of attention and are deeply uncomfortable about public recognition, say in a certificate given in school assembly.
- Some children – this is probably more likely to be the boys – may be embarrassed by 'most well behaved child of the week' awards. Adults need to find other ways to acknowledge such behaviour.

Tips for practice

Activity

Gather ideas of the use of symbolic rewards for older nursery children or those in primary school.

- What do the children think about the reward scheme? Do they understand how it works?
- You could ask open-ended questions such as, 'What do children have to do to get a smiley sticker?' or 'How do you feel when you get a good work certificate?'
- Compare your findings with colleagues, keeping the details of children confidential.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a

Promoting the development of prosocial behaviour

A great deal of the positive behaviour that early years practitioners like to see from children falls within the area of prosocial behaviour. Adults in early years settings often make requests that children 'share', 'think of other people', 'cooperate together' or just generally be 'nice' to each other.

Within the early years curriculum frameworks for the four countries of the UK (see page 403) the goals or outcomes for children's personal, social and emotional development frequently include aspects of prosocial behaviour. So it is valuable for early years practitioners to understand how this area of development appears to unfold. Then it is more possible for adults to develop realistic expectations of children and understand how you can best promote the development of prosocial behaviour.

Responsiveness to the feelings of others

The term **prosocial behaviour** involves children's feelings and thoughts as well as their actions. A prosocial orientation arises when children have learned empathy and altruism.

- **Empathy** is the ability and willingness to tune into the feelings of other people – children or adults.
- **Altruism** means acting with a selfless concern for the well being of others.

When children show prosocial behaviour, they have made intentional, voluntary actions in the light of what they feel will be supportive to somebody else. Young children can and do develop prosocial behaviour as a result of their early experiences, but it is not an inevitable step in the development of all children. So how can prosocial behaviour develop and how can caring adults support this direction?

Steps towards empathy and altruism

Jean Piaget, in his theory of children's cognitive development, took the view that children younger than four or five years of age could not really grasp the perspectives and emotions of other people. Piaget described younger children as egocentric, grounded in their own world view, but observation of young children

Key terms

Prosocial behaviour

a blend of actions and feelings that can be observed when children have learned empathy and altruism

Empathy

the ability and willingness to tune into the feelings of other people

Altruism

a pattern of behaviour that shows a selfless concern for the well being of others

challenges his claims. Children younger than three years of age do sometimes show awareness of the feelings of others.

- If you observe babies, you will notice that they tend to join in the emotions around them: they often laugh along with others and sometimes their faces crumple and they cry when they see other babies crying.
- Yet, over the period from about one to three years, toddlers and young children behave in a way that shows they can tell the difference between a small range of strong feelings expressed by others and that they react differently, depending on that emotion.
- For example, in families where there is stress between parents, children as young as one or two years are visibly distressed when they witness arguments. Sometimes very young children will try to comfort one parent or shout and hit out at the parent they feel is in the wrong.
- From about 18 months onwards, you can observe behaviour from toddlers that shows they have an understanding that other children are separate individuals. Sometimes they clearly notice the distress of other very young children.
- Toddlers tend initially to offer another distressed child their own comfort object – an act of great generosity in itself. But soon, young children who know each other well (in the same family or early years setting) will offer the other child's favourite blanket or teddy.
- Very young children, as young as two years old, also show a deliberate wish to bring support to other distressed children when they get your attention as an adult, and point out that another child is crying or hurt.

It is important to recall, especially on difficult days with children, that of course they do not behave in a way that shows empathy and altruism all the time. Very few adults would pass such a tough test! Sometimes it is appropriate that young children have their own needs to the fore. Sometimes, unfortunately, they will use their personal knowledge of peers or siblings to wind them up and annoy them. Helpful adults have to intervene in order to deal with the consequences. But do try to notice the evidence of understanding, planning and thinking as well as the less attractive aspect to such teasing behaviour.

Activity (observation)

Look at the section that describes examples of prosocial behaviour, even in children younger than three years. Watch out for and briefly write up examples of children who show concern for other children or familiar adults. You may notice children in your setting or outside who behave in a comforting or helpful way. Perhaps children are pleased to follow a request that they make a new child welcome – what do they do?

- Look at your observations and discuss them with your colleagues.
- What can you learn about individual children? Of course you have to be cautious about any conclusions.
- But perhaps you feel that Saira is able to comfort her friend who is distressed because Saira herself feels loved and secure. Whereas Danny is so desperate for reassurance that he is liked that he has nothing left to give to other children. How can you help him?

Key skills links: LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Supportive adults

The lessons of developmental research into prosocial behaviour provide some practical guidelines for early years practitioners, and parents with their own children. Prosocial behaviour does not develop automatically in children; a great deal depends on their experiences and these are shaped by adults.

Early years settings are undoubtedly happier places for everyone if children behave in a more prosocial way, so how can you help?

- Create an affectionate and warm environment for children from the youngest ages. Children, who feel they have to compete with peers for the attention and affection of the adults, have little emotional energy left to give to each other.
- Be clear about your own rules for considerate or helpful behaviour (see page 494) and be ready to give children simple explanations why you would rather they behaved in this way.
- Just telling a child, 'you mustn't hit people' is less effective than alerting him to the consequences, for example, 'when you bit Sam, you really hurt him and made him cry'.
- Create opportunities for even very young children to do something helpful and then acknowledge what they have done. Again, this means that adults need to run a relaxed day in which children have time and choice to opt into helping. It is also important that adults do not require exacting standards to be met in tasks.
- Recognise helpful or considerate behaviour but avoid trying to make children feel guilty if today they feel less than helpful. Children (much like adults) do not respond positively to being criticised with, 'A nice child would share her bricks', or the pointless, unreal question of 'Don't you think that was a nasty thing to do?' (Is there any right answer to this question: think about it!)
- Probably the most important step for adults is to behave in line with what you would like children to do: model thoughtful and generous behaviour yourself. Telling children that they 'ought' to do this or 'shouldn't' do that is much less effective than being a good role model for what you would like.

Activity

People sometimes say that 'good' behaviour is 'caught and not taught'. This cliché has some useful truth when people appreciate that children learn better from being shown and encouraged than told they ought or must behave in a certain way. Adults need to work together, in a family home as much as an early years setting or school, to ensure that the 'good' behaviour is shown by adults and is therefore observable to be 'caught'.

With colleagues, please explore the following perspectives through discussion.

1 What do you want young children to do in your setting?

- What kinds of helpful behaviour do you want to encourage from children? Be as specific as you can. If this is a hard question to answer, then possibly you are all too focused on what the children should stop doing and on 'bad' behaviour.

- If you use a word like 'kind' or 'patient', then discuss some examples of what kindness or patience looks like in practice from children within the age range with whom you work.
 - Are your expectations realistic given the age of the children and how frequently you expect the 'good' behaviour from them? Nobody is 'kind' or 'patient' all the time!
- 2** What approaches are you all using to help children to behave in positive ways?
- What ways do you use to direct and guide children's behaviour? Look through this chapter for ideas if it helps.
 - In your opinions, what works best to encourage the children?
 - How do you ensure that you all keep alert to your own adult behaviour and that the team is consistent?

Key skills links: C3.1a WO3.1–3

To think about

- Young children, who feel secure and liked, want to be helpful. You do not have to persuade and cajole them.
- Even toddlers enjoy the satisfaction of the role of helper, especially since it tends to bring close contact with a friendly adult.
- If children are showing very little helpful behaviour in your setting, there is a real possibility that you are not making it easy for them to be helpful and you may even be discouraging their attempts.
- Do you tend to think, 'It's quicker if I do it' or the schedule has been set up that children have a story with one adult while another adult does the tidying up?
- Adults create the circumstances for children to learn to be helpful.
- Admittedly, children bring their expectations from past experience into your setting, but you have the chance to give them another perspective.
- A continued lack of helpful behaviour cannot simply be explained away by saying there is something the matter with the children.

Looking at your own setting

It is often easier to be detailed in discussion as an early years team about what you do not want. Perhaps you find it straightforward to list all the different kinds of aggressive behaviour that are unacceptable from children. But are you clear in just as much detail about what it means to 'share' from the children's point of view. Sharing is a social skill that needs to be understood and learned, yet adults are often quick to say it is obvious what is wanted, so you just tell children that they ought to share.

Sharing is an excellent example of what adults call 'acceptable behaviour', but where understanding the child's perspective is crucial if adults are to be fair (and

Figure 17.3

A generous supply of play materials makes sharing easier



empathic!) in their dealings with children (see the box). For instance, does a ground rule of 'sharing' mean that children have to hand over a toy or get off the bike as soon as another child asks? Surely not, or else cooperative children could be very disrupted in their play.

To think about

Children benefit from caring adults who are willing to look through children's eyes and demonstrate the meaning of 'sharing' in daily example of what is needed.

When I first started to work with nurseries, I heard children told to 'share' on a regular basis. I also heard the same instruction a great deal from parents to their children. Undoubtedly, family and nursery life is much happier with a large dose of what adults call 'sharing', but we use the same word to cover three distinct situations.

- 1 In their own home, children are asked to 'share' their toys when other children come to play or to 'share' with their siblings. The toys or books belong to the first child, so the rule should be that anything is returned to the owner. So adults are really asking here that children 'lend' and 'borrow'. It is worth noting that children are sometimes required to 'share' very precious or newly received possessions. It is questionable whether adults are fair to demand this action. They probably would not hand over something of equivalent value and importance from their own possessions.
- 2 In a group, children are asked to 'share' play materials that belong to the nursery or playgroup. But the bikes, bricks or swing do not belong to any one child, so children are being asked here to 'take turns'.

- 3 A third situation is when adults say, 'Share your crisps with the other children'. Crisps, or sweets, are a one-time possession and are not returned, so children are here being asked to 'give'.

Questions

Discuss these options with your colleagues:

- 1 What are the reasons why it matters for adults to understand what they are asking of children?
- 2 What may happen in the relationship between children and adults if the latter will not look through the children's eyes?
- 3 Do you have any childhood memories that can help here? Perhaps you were required to 'share' your new birthday presents with children who attended your party. How did you feel about that?

Key skills links: C3.1a

Helpful adults need to look at a positive approach to directing children away from aggressive ways of handling everyday conflict towards more cooperative strategies. Children are supported best when early years practitioners understand that they need to coach young children in social skills. So adults need to understand the options, for instance that:

- Sharing should not mean in practice that children simply have to say 'yes' if another child asks for something.
- It is also acceptable to say, 'I just want to finish playing with this hat, then you can have a go'.
- Children can also offer trades with, 'I need all these bricks to build my castle, but you can have those shapes'.
- With adult help, children can also use and appreciate simple technology to support turn taking, such as a large sand timer for turns on the bikes.

In any early years setting, school or out of school care, it has to be the adults who take responsibility for creating the kind of environment and daily routine where it is easier for children to behave in prosocial ways. Children cannot make this happen, but they can be active contributors in a happy and consistent setting. It is also an adult responsibility to ensure that more cooperative children do not lose out by following the ground rules. As children themselves would say, it is 'not fair!' if the less cooperative children get away with this behaviour because it makes for a quieter life for adults.

Activity

- Take two ideas from this section and work them into a plan of action for your own setting.
- Apply the ideas and write up the work, including any opinions that children express.

Key skills links: LP3.1–3 C3.3

Working cooperatively with the children

Adults do not have to do all the work about creating a positive atmosphere and approach to behaviour. The children can be part of your efforts when you offer ways that support their learning and are developmentally appropriate.

Be clear what you want from children

It may seem very easy to list all the behaviour that you want children to stop. But they can learn much more effectively if you are clear, and clear with them, about what you would like to have happen, both in general and when children are faced with situations that they experience as difficult.

Activity (observation)

In your setting, gather a list of examples of unwanted behaviour, actions for which children are stopped, told off or experience sanctions as a result. You could observe over a few days and also add any examples of children who are regularly discussed by you and your colleagues.

Now take each example and consider the following points either on your own or in discussion with colleagues.

- You are probably very clear about what you want the child to stop doing. But now consider what do you want them to do, how will they handle the situations that provoke this behaviour?
- For every 'stop doing', you need to come up with a 'start doing' and for every 'don't' you need to find a 'do'.
- For example, when you discuss 'we'd like Matthew to stop hitting other children', you need to reach something along the lines of 'we'd like Matthew to use words instead of his fists'.
- You are the adults in the situation. It is too hard for young children on their own to create enough emotional and intellectual distance to consider, 'I could handle this situation differently'.
- You can help them if you use your skills of observation to identify what is happening and then your skills of encouragement and explanation to direct a child towards a non-disruptive alternative.

Key skills links: LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Have some ground rules

Children like to know where they are in any setting and they often have some clear opinions about what is important to make a nursery or family home a happy place for everyone. Children can be involved in developing a small number of ground rules that apply to children and adults alike. Ground rules in an early years setting or after school club work best if:

- The rules are developed with the involvement and consultation of the children themselves. What do they think is important? What makes life nicer here and what makes a day less happy?
- You ask whether there are there some rules that the children want on the list, because of adult behaviour that is less than acceptable. You can explore this in a sensitive way and children will say, so long as you listen and do not interrupt or disagree.

- Adults recognise that sometimes it is very hard for children to do the right thing. They need adults to appreciate the real dilemmas in the action of some rules. What if telling the truth could get your best friend into trouble?
- Adults need to act to support the rules – in general and specific rules that they themselves clearly need to follow.

When children are younger than four or five, it will probably be an adult responsibility to draft the ground rules, but children can be involved in any appropriate conversation about how the rules can work for everyone's benefit. So, there may be a general ground rule about taking turns but children need to be involved in discussions about, 'how shall we help people to take turns on the computer?'

Scenario

The Wessex childminding network has been exploring possible ground rules that could work with children in a family home and in the childminders' drop-in group. The group has reached five possible ground rules and has ensured that the wording is positive – phrased as a 'do' and not as a 'don't'. The ideas have come from the childminders themselves, conversations with children older than about three or four years in their care and adult discussion of situations that most often lead to problems in the drop-in. The draft rules are:

- We treat other people with consideration and safety
- We take care of the play resources
- We take turns when there is not enough for everyone
- We listen to each other and work to find ways around problems
- We walk around when we are at the drop-in, we run outside.

The network now wants to try out the ground rules in family homes. They also wish to find ways to illustrate a poster that could be made for the drop-in.

Questions

- 1 Make some suggestions for the kind of illustrations or photos that could show the meaning of these ground rules in a visual form.
- 2 In what ways may ground rules like turn taking need to operate differently in the childminder's home (or a family home as a nanny) in comparison with a drop-in?
- 3 Write up your thoughts, with practical application to your own setting.
- 4 Compare your ideas with those of your colleagues

Key skills links: C3.1b C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Tips for practice

If some kinds of behaviour are important enough to be made into a ground rule, they are certainly worthy of acknowledgement when children follow the rule.

- Look for opportunities to say simply to a child, 'Thank you for waiting your turn' or 'well done, you looked out for Nathan before you jumped off the bench'.
- Your comment can as simple as, 'Good listening!' or 'Good idea, I can hear you've been thinking about what we could do.'
- Even if a child's efforts go awry, you can recognise what they were trying to do with, 'Thank you, Jon. I could see you were trying to help Marcie. I think she wants to do it herself and that's why she got cross with you.'

Circle time and golden rules

The idea of circle time is described in Chapter 11 as a way to promote children's communication skills. Well-run circle time can also support a positive approach to behaviour, so long as:

- The communication ground rules (see page 311) are followed by adults as well as children.
- No children feel spotlighted for their misbehaviour. Incidents with individual children should be handled at the time. Circle time can be an opportunity to explore more general themes about how 'we show consideration' or 'ways to show our feelings'.
- Any patterns for highlighting positive behaviour work in an even-handed way, so that every child is mentioned for something over time. You need to avoid a situation in which some children never get their names on the 'kindness tree'.
- Circle time is not used to tell children they 'ought to be nice' to each other or 'everybody must share!' Children will feel nagged and not enjoy this time.

Figure 17.4

Children become able to discuss and negotiate



Activity

Vivian Paley has written about what she learned by observing and listening to the children over the years she worked as a nursery teacher in America. At the outset Vivian Paley saw circle time as a way for her to raise issues as an adult that seemed important for the nursery group. She tape recorded these sessions and then noticed that the children were most enthusiastic to discuss what had happened in their play.

- Read one of her books or ideally several colleagues or students could read different books (suggestions below).
- Write up the main points from this narrative and compare ideas with your colleagues.
- Consider some changes to your own practice.

Vivian Paley (sometimes given as Vivian Gussin Paley) has written several books. You could try *White Teacher* (Harvard University Press 1979), *Boys and Girls: Superheroes in the doll corner* (University of Chicago Press 1984), *The Boy Who would be a Helicopter: The uses of story telling in the classroom* (Harvard University Press 1990) and *You Can't Say You Can't Play* (Harvard University Press 1992).

Key skills links: C3.2 C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Scenario

Sunningdale Day Nursery has introduced circle time with the four year olds as part of developing their practice in personal, social and emotional learning for children. Penny has taken responsibility for this time and has gradually introduced the ground rules for considerate communication.

Today several children speak up confidently and say it is not fair that Ian and Damian keep taking over the block area and will not let anyone else join their game. Penny listens to the children who wish to complain and then invites Ian and Damian to put their perspective. The two children explain clearly about their special game, what they are building and why they need all the blocks. Penny acknowledges with the group that this is a problem to be resolved and invites ideas from everyone.

Questions

- 1 Penny could just have told Ian and Damian they must let other children share in the block area. Why do you believe she resisted that option?
- 2 What are the advantages for all the children of a problem solving approach (see also page 124)?
- 3 Share your ideas with colleagues and make some practical applications for your own practice.

Key skills links: C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Jenny Mosley suggests the following golden rules that can be introduced through circle time for children in school. She suggests that the last three can come later if children need time to understand what the rules really mean:

- Do be gentle, don't hurt anybody
- Do be kind and helpful, don't hurt people's feelings
- Do be honest, don't cover up the truth
- Do work hard, don't waste time
- Do look after property, don't waste or damage things
- Do listen to people, don't interrupt.

Activity

Look at Jenny Mosley's golden rules in this section and consider children in the early years of primary school.

- Children like to see that adults obey their own rules. Take any three of these rules and discuss in what ways teachers, nursery nurses and specialist teacher assistants could be good role models to show the rule in action.
- Try hard to consider the perspective of young primary school children. Are there any rules that, as a child, you might want to say, 'sometimes that's not so easy to do'?
- Apply to your own practice if you work with children older than four or five years of age.

Key skills links: C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Using conversation

Children can learn about ways of behaving and extend their ability to direct themselves and make choices. You can help them through conversation in an even-handed exchange (nobody learns much of positive value when they are being told off). Guided discussions in circle time can also be supportive, so long as they are handled with sensitivity.

In conversation with individual children about behaviour:

- You need to talk with them and not at them. If children do not want to talk about the situation, then do not press them.
- Over particular incidents, you will get further with open-ended questions like, 'What happened here?' or 'What has made you both so cross?' Questions like, 'Why are you hitting each other?' tend to get self-justifying replies along the lines of 'she started it!'
- You need to listen to the children, whether for single incidents or more persistent problems between them. If children cannot get their views heard and you hijack the opportunity in order to tell them off, they will not cooperate in the future.
- Check that you have understood and help each child to hear the other one.
- If the situation needs resolving, then invite ideas from the children. Treat this as a problem that needs to be resolved by everyone.

- Try for a solution and agreement to which all the children will commit and help them to put this into action if they need support.

In any setting, however calm and supportive the atmosphere, children will sometimes get into minor or major conflicts – it is part of social life. You can make a difference by how you approach a trouble spot when you hear the shouting or see the shoving. You can also take the opportunity to help children to learn some social skills of problem solving (see page 208).

Books and stories

So long as children feel supported (and do not think they are being nagged!) books and stories can be one effective way to help three and four year olds, and older, to reflect on choices in behaviour. Good books are valuable because children can talk about the characters and what they face and feel. This discussion avoids the sensitive issues that arise when you talk about real children and their behaviour in the setting.

Some good books include:

- Claire Llewellyn and Mike Gordon *Why Should I Share?* and *Why Should I Help?* (Hodder Wayland 2000).
- Sam McBratney *I'm Sorry* (Collins 2000).
- Brian Moses and Mike Gordon's books in the Values series (Hodder Wayland 1997). Titles include *'It Wasn't Me!' Learning about honesty*, *'Excuse Me' Learning about politeness*, *'I Don't Care!' Learning about respect* and *'I'll Do It!' Taking responsibility*.

Anti-discriminatory practice and children's behaviour

Sometimes you will need to address behaviour from the children that shows they have learned unacceptable attitudes about particular social, cultural, faith or ethnic groups or negative attitudes related to gender or disability. These attitudes have then emerged through cruel words or rejecting behaviour.

You need to tackle such incidents because ignoring them leaves children with the impression that you feel the behaviour is acceptable. However, you are working with children and their attitudes and habits of behaviour are in the process of developing. General good practice guidelines for behaviour still apply when children's words or actions appear to be linked to prejudiced attitudes of any kind.

You need to find ways that make it more likely that children will:

- understand your reasons for finding the behaviour unacceptable
- be willing to change their habits of behaviour, at least in your setting
- be open to hearing information that could help them to think, feel and act differently because they choose to make this change.

None of these positive changes are likely if children are immediately labelled as 'racist' or 'sexist'. This adult action gives them limited manoeuvring room in the same way as negative labels like 'spiteful' or 'attention seeking'. The objective is that you help children to change their habits. So you need to give them the chance to change rather than feeling nagged or even oppressed by adult criticism.

Activity (observation)

It is poor adult practice to label children as 'racist', 'sexist' or any other uncompromising criticism. So, what words will make sense in a child's world? What words will link to ideas that they already have or that you are developing through play and conversation?

Children use words like 'unkind', 'unfair', 'untrue' and 'hurtful'. Perhaps you can think of some more. Here are some examples in action:

- 'It is unkind to call Charlie an "idiot". Charlie has Down's syndrome, as I explained, and he takes longer to think things out than you.'
- 'It is unfair to lump all girls together in that way. I know that Jessie was rude about your painting and we'll talk with her about that. But it's not true that "all girls are liars".'
- 'It is hurtful and untrue for you to shout that Teja is talking "nonsense". She is talking in Hindi; it's just that you don't understand her words.'

Questions

- 1 Over a few weeks, collect any similar examples from your own early years setting or school.
- 2 It takes practice to develop a positive approach to this area of children's behaviour. So do not be concerned if, with hindsight, you feel you could have expressed yourself better.
- 3 Make notes and learn from your observation and reflection on it.
- 4 Share your ideas with colleagues and plan improvements to your practice.

Key skills links: C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Tips for practice

Children who have been on the receiving end of a hurtful or offensive remark deserve a considerate approach from you.

- Your comfort, given with consideration for their feelings by words or friendly touch.
- Acknowledgement that the remark was 'unfair', 'untrue', 'cruel' or other appropriate words.
- A clear message now, and as appropriate at other times, that you feel positive about their source of identity that has been undermined.
- Without too long a conversation, reassurance to this child that nobody has to put up with name calling in this setting and that it is not a joke when somebody's feelings are hurt.

Children who have given hurt or offence need to understand certain ideas.

- You say that the remark was unacceptable, with a brief explanation why, if the child seems confused about the fuss. Say briefly, 'That's a rude word to call somebody and we don't use it in this nursery'.
- Show that you disapprove of children's words or actions but do not confuse them as a person with their behaviour. You can say, 'I think

that was unkind not to let Aaron join your game' rather than, 'You are such an unkind child!'

- Still listen to the child who has behaved unacceptably. Children from all kinds of minority groups can still be 'the one who started it!' The child who used an unacceptable word is far more likely to change in the future if you show that, having said, 'We don't use that word here', you are helpful about the conflict that led to the insults. You ask 'What happened here?'
- Add information to the situation if, once you have listened you can understand some of the confusion. Perhaps you explain that 'Jason has cerebral palsy, he can't control his legs as easily as you and he didn't mean to knock your cars over'.

Dealing with unwanted behaviour

Caring adults can make a difference to children by a clear focus on what behaviour is welcomed and on generous use of encouragement. Of course, adults also need some strategies for dealing with and re-directing behaviour that you do not want from children. Several broad themes underpin a more positive approach to all children.

Focus on the behaviour rather than negative labels

You should avoid simple labels and aim for a description of what a child is doing. You will be more likely to develop an effective approach to individual children if you progress beyond the shorthand of 'aggressive' or 'disruptive'. It is also a matter of courtesy and fairness to children.

Separate children's behaviour from them as individuals. Your affection for them should not change from moment to moment, depending on how they behave. They are not defined by their behaviour: 'bad' or 'good'. You need to communicate clearly that, 'I like you, Donna. I don't like it when you say cruel things to Rosa.'

If appropriate, use some simple techniques of observation to help make some sense of what is happening (see page 452). A possibility is the ABC observational approach: antecedent (what happened before the incident), behaviour (what the child did) and consequence (what happened afterwards, including the adults' reaction).

Scenario

Six year old Freddie attends the reception class and after school club of St Jude's Primary School. The reception class team, Jessie and Maryam, have relieved their feelings by talking about Freddie's daily confrontations in the staff room. But after a term the two practitioners became uncomfortably aware that Freddie was gaining a negative reputation that would travel with him up the school. They decided to step back and, in consultation with the after school club, try to get a positive way through to Freddie.

Discussions with the after school club team revealed that they had experienced some early confrontations with Freddie. Matters had improved when they recognised that the boy had very few strategies to use if he got stuck on

an activity. In the after school club Freddie could move on to something else, although the club team now aimed to help him persevere and learn some problem solving skills. In the reception class, Freddie was not allowed simply to give up on his work, so he seemed to use other tactics to solve his dilemma.

Jessie and Maryam decided to use a simple observational technique to understand what was happening for Freddie in class. They used the ABC technique, although sometimes in the hurly-burly of the class, they had to be swift to recall and note down what had happened first. Less than a fortnight after starting their observations, it became clear that the most common pattern for Freddie was:

- *Antecedent:* Freddie has difficulty with a piece of work or he is distracted by another child and cannot settle back. He starts to fidget or leave the table. He is told to stay still and finish his work.
- *Behaviour:* Freddie may try to settle back but not for long. He then behaves in ways that ensure he is removed from the table. One observed example was that he leaned back on his chair so that he fell over and everyone laughed. Another time Freddie stretched out his arms so that he pushed other children's work askew and they complained bitterly.
- *Consequence:* Freddie is removed from his work and told off. He has successfully escaped a task he found too difficult.

Jessie and Maryam talked over the pattern they had observed and decided that they needed a more constructive approach:

- They needed to gain a clearer idea of what Freddie found straightforward and what he found more difficult.
- They decide to make an effort to move towards Freddie and ask, 'Are you stuck?' or 'would you like some help?', rather than telling him to get on with his work.
- They will look for opportunities to encourage Freddie to ask for help and to be pleased with him for effort and perseverance.

The reception class is very busy but this approach begins to pay off and after a week Freddie calls for help with, 'Mrs Chandler, I'm a bit stuck on this'. Jessie overlooks the fact that the request is shouted and goes across to help.

Questions

- 1 What could have happened if the staff had only focused on Freddie's 'bad' behaviour? Discuss your ideas with colleagues.
- 2 Apply some of these ideas to a child whom you know at the moment. Make some practical plans for positive action.

Key skills links: C3.1a PS3.1 LP3.1–3.

Re-direct children

There are a number of tactics you can use in a positive way:

- Look for the opportunity to catch children before they misbehave. A warning look may be enough sometimes. You can use distraction, re-direction and selective ignoring.

**Figure 17.5**

Sometimes children will sort matters out themselves

- You give children a chance to re-direct themselves, perhaps with a reminder of a ground rule, like, 'we keep the sand in the sand tray' or 'we ask "can I borrow that", we don't just take it'.
- Sometimes it will feel appropriate to thank children when they re-direct themselves. It would be mean spirited of adults to take the line of 'they should have done what I said the first time'.
- Be prepared to repeat requests or to guide a child, especially important for younger children.
- Notice the cooperative behaviour of a child close to one who is not cooperating. This approach may alert the child to what she should be doing or help her to get back on task. But do not embarrass the child who is behaving well by using her as a prop or 'teacher's pet'.

Intervene calmly

If children are unable to re-direct themselves or keep on with the behaviour, you have some other options to undertake calmly and consistently.

- *Removals:* you may remove a child from the immediate situation or remove the play materials or other items from the child. This adult action needs to be as calm as possible.
- *Calm down time:* some children need a calm down time. This option can work so long as the adult remains calm (no shouting), the time is brief (a few minutes only) and the child is helped to get back into the day's action. It is better not to have a 'naughty corner or chair' since this labels children. Some are distressed and others may like the notoriety and time in the 'naughty chair' increases their bravado level.

- *Making reparations*: a suitable consequence is that a child is offered the chance to make reparations. Perhaps Lenny helps to rebuild the section of the obstacle course that he shoved over or Maria is encouraged to comfort the child to whom she was unkind.
- *It is unwise for adults to insist*: children need to have a genuine choice and that adults also recognise there are many ways to say or show 'sorry' other than that actual word. Adult insistence on saying 'sorry' or tidying up risks moving into bullying the child or creating a power battle with children for whom winning means a great deal.
- *Keeping children safe*: sometimes children go beyond being able to stop themselves in angry words or actions. A responsible adult then offers gentle but firm physical containment by body language and holding children if necessary. Alternatively, sometimes you can get between two squabbling children and use gesture, touch and words to take responsible adult control.
- *Calm discussion*: so long as children do not feel they are being nagged, they may well (from three or four years of age) be able to take part in a conversation about an incident or recurring problems with a child or area of the setting. Adults need to set a friendly and communicative atmosphere with open questions like 'what's going on?' 'what can we do about it?' and 'what is going to help you deal with ... better?'

Activity

Imagine different versions of a common scene in a nursery or pre-school. Three year old Harry gets very energetic at the sand tray. Once he is excited he flings sand in the air and over the other children close by.

- Version one: an adult sees what is happening and moves in close to Harry. She touches his arm to get his attention and says, 'Harry, enough now. You remember the rule, "We keep the sand in the sand tray".' Harry nods and manages to resist more throwing. The adult stays close and, when Harry is about to move away from the tray, asks, 'Would you sweep up the spare sand for me?' If Harry agrees, he gets a genuine 'thank you' and if he resists, 'Another time then. I bet you're a good sweeper'.
- Version two: an adult sees Harry, but calls from across the room, 'Harry, remember the rule, "we keep the sand in the sand tray"'. But without an adult close by, Harry cannot resist. The adult calls again, 'Harry, I told you to stop'. Harry keeps going and the adult now has to come across the room, her voice shows irritation and Harry is removed promptly from the tray, 'because you can't play properly'. He is left to find something else to do. Thirty minutes later, at tidy up time, Harry is told he has to clear up the sand, 'because you made the mess'.

Questions

- 1 Think about, and discuss with colleagues if possible, how Harry might experience these slightly different versions.
- 2 What is he likely to learn if his experience in this setting is usually version one or usually version two?

Key skills links: C3.1a



To think about

It is possible for adults to think they are punishing a child's behaviour when they are unintentionally rewarding that child. For example:

- Some children may increase their disruptive behaviour although they are told off at length or sent outside the room in school.
- The adult believes this action is punishment and it might be for some children. But perhaps this child enjoys having the full attention of an adult, having a row with the audience of other children or escaping from a schoolroom task that they cannot manage.
- As far as this child is concerned, the behaviour has been reinforced, it has worked.

Use the consequences of children's behaviour

In behaviourism, the prediction is that punishment will reduce behaviour, but in practice the results are unpredictable as children are complex individuals.

- As described in the think about box, what an adult believes to be a punishment may actually feel like reward to a child who relishes any kind of attention or who likes a power battle.
- Also, in ordinary life with real children, punishment may appear to stop a given behaviour, but sometimes children simply become more secretive and do not let you see them.
- The difficulty in practice is also that punishment is all about 'don't' and can fail to direct children towards how you would rather they behaved (see page 494).

The Adlerian approach to guiding children's behaviour offers a useful way of side-stepping the difficulties raised by the word 'punishment'. Rudolf Dreikurs developed the idea of using the consequences of children's behaviour. He distinguished between **using natural** and **logical consequences** as a way to deal with misbehaviour, to encourage children to take on the responsibility for their own actions and to exercise their own self discipline.

Behaviour that you want to stop or re-direct can be guided by ensuring that children experience the consequences of their actions.

- **Natural consequences** follow on as part of the child's behaviour. Adults can sometimes let a child experience the natural result. For instance, leaving toys on the floor at home may mean that they are trodden on and broken.
- **Logical consequences** are adult-determined but relevant to the behaviour. For instance, squabbling children whose problems cannot be resolved are split up or a book is taken away from a child who keeps tearing the pages.

A great deal depends on how adults behave because an apparently similar action can be punishing or a calm use of consequences. Adults have to:

- Ideally pre-warn that a given consequence will follow if a child continues in this way. For instance, a positive use of 'time out' aims to have children view it as a 'fair cop'.
- The adult remains calm: no shouting, threats or name-calling. Give children the chance to change direction themselves and save face.

Key terms

Using consequences

an alternative to punishment in guiding children's behaviour

Natural consequences

follow on as a highly likely result of a child's behaviour

Logical consequences

are adult-determined but relevant to the behaviour

- Consequences are consistently applied, even when the adult is tired.
- Behaviour is dealt with at the time and then the child is allowed a fresh start. There is no nagging, no harking back.
- Children are given chances in the future – to play carefully or to be trusted. Children receive plenty of positive attention and appreciation when they are behaving well.

Tips for practice

- A strong message running through positive approaches is to look through the children's eyes and consider their feelings.
- What are they likely to take away from different ways of being treated?
- Consider also, would you like to be treated in the negative ways. How do you feel about verbal ridicule or nothing but criticism?
- On the other hand, how might you feel about regular encouragement and being given alternatives?
- Children need to feel they have been forgiven and now have a clean slate. If other children hark back to what a child has done, then say kindly but firmly, 'Please don't go on at Gerry. He and I sorted that out. It's done now.'

Adults whose behaviour has moved towards the positive can shift the whole atmosphere of a home or early years setting. The consequences are that:

- Children feel appreciated for what they have done well, rather than nagged and punished for misbehaviour and perceived failings.
- Their self esteem is boosted rather than undermined. They may also have learned some skills of problem solving and negotiation, helped by careful adult communication and intervention.
- They feel more able to exercise some positive control themselves. They have some choices and will begin to learn some self-discipline.
- They will learn to treat each other in encouraging and courteous ways.
- Time spent together is more enjoyable for adults and children.

Activity (observation)

Asking children 'Why?' they have done something is frequently a dead-end question, because adults usually ask this question about unacceptable behaviour. When children feel criticised and under pressure to justify their actions, they are far less likely to come up with coherent explanations (and nor would you under similar circumstances).

- Keep a simple log over two or three weeks of times you hear yourself, or another adult, asking 'why?' of children about their behaviour.

Then consider, and discuss with your colleagues

- How many of the instances are about unwanted, compared with wanted behaviour from children? Do a simple count.
- Do you have any examples of adults who ask children 'why?' they have done something about which the adult is pleased?



- Are there any examples when it seems to have been constructive to ask a child 'why?'
- What are your feelings as an adult if you are asked 'why?' over something you should not really have done?

Key skills links: C3.1a N2.2

Challenging behaviour from children

Some children have had very negative experiences that affect their emotional stability and ability to cope with life in nursery, pre-school or school. Some children have specific learning disabilities or a condition like autistic spectrum disorder that shapes their behaviour in some ways. You will find out more about children with disabilities in Chapter 18.

Changes to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice mean that all early years teams need to be aware of good practice with children with special needs and that includes **challenging behaviour**. If your positive approaches to a child's challenging behaviour do not make a noticeable difference, then you would use the stages of Early Action and Early Action Plus (see page 528).

Children with disabilities will not necessarily behave in more challenging ways than their peers, so long as you have realistic expectations of the children in the light of their disability. However, some children's disability may increase the likelihood of challenging behaviour. A friendly working relationship with parents will enable you to understand more about a child's disability and situations that she perhaps finds hard to tolerate or handle. An early years or school team may need to decide on areas of compromise that allow a child to cope with the demands of the normal day. You can make such allowances, often by explaining simply to the other children, without presenting an inconsistent front to the group.

Good practice will include the following:

- When children find it hard to cope with the setting, it is especially important to be encouraging of what they have managed and to communicate the positive to parents.
- If a child's behaviour becomes more challenging, then follow the good practice described in this chapter. In communication with parents be honest about the child's behaviour, but in a way that describes rather than labels. Explain how you have handled matters so far and invite comments and ideas from the parent(s).
- If a child's behaviour becomes seriously hard to handle, and your usual positive strategies have made little impact, then definitely have a detailed conversation with parents sooner rather than later.
- If children's behaviour is very challenging and they seem to have strong emotional reactions to your efforts to guide them, it is time to arrange a proper discussion meeting.
- The key person (worker), the child's parents and your setting's Special Educational Needs coordinator (SENCO) need to talk in detail about the child and his or her behaviour.
- You all need to agree a workable plan, written up as an individual education or play plan (IEP or IPP as some areas call it), that will enable this child to cope.
- Early years practitioners should consult with parents before seeking professional advice outside the setting. If you have an informal opportunity to gain advice, then discuss what you have been told with the parent(s).

Key term

Challenging behaviour

a pattern of behaviour from a child that is especially hard to handle and does not initially respond to the usual positive strategies

- It is definitely the choice of parents to agree to any referral. You can advise and share information, but it is not your role to tell parents they ought to take a particular course of action.

Other professionals who can help

You can be supportive of parents by sharing information about other sources of help for the situation you are all facing. The available services may vary from one area to another (so try the activity in the box) but in general the options will be:

- early years advisors or specialist support teachers
- an area SENCO or Children with Disabilities Team
- an educational psychologist.

Look also at page 17 for a description of the different types of services and other professionals who can be a support in your work.

Activity

- Gather information for a file on local resources and professionals who could advise especially on challenging behaviour and children with special needs. Some local authorities have useful guidelines or a booklet.
- A good starting point will be your local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (Pre-School Advisory Group if you work in Northern Ireland). The partnership or group will have a coordinator or support officer, who will be able to alert you to what is available locally.
- If possible, make contact by email with practitioners in other parts of the country or students in colleges. Compare what you have found in this activity about resources local to the different areas.
- Present your findings and discuss with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.1b C3.1a

Figure 17.6

It is very important that we notice children's cooperative behaviour – and not only notice problems



Tactics that adults should not use

Harsh and unkind treatment affects children

Early years professionals have been concerned that young children are deeply affected by harsh treatment and unpredictable daily lives. The impact shows in how the children behave towards their peers, adults and to everyday situations. The discoveries of research into early brain development have explained much of how experience forms connections in the brain (see page 243) for positive learning, but it has also been possible to show how some of the negative patterns affect children.

What seems to happen is that repeated experience of harshness and unpredictable adult behaviour (not the odd 'off day') creates elevated levels of the chemical cortisol in the brains of young children. Cortisol is a steroid hormone that is important in the biochemistry of the brain. It is present in saliva and so changes in its level can be measured with a simple saliva test. Our brains need cortisol but too great a level, caused by stress, can actually destroy brain cells and reduce the density of the synapses, those crucial connections between the cells.

High levels of cortisol block children's ability to learn in positive ways. But, equally important, their brains make other connections that show through their behaviour, including uncertain, anxious or aggressive actions. These young children have become hard wired for trouble and are swift to interpret the actions of others as a potential threat.

In contrast, babies and young children who have experienced warm and consistent nurturing, have lower levels of cortisol than those babies whose daily lives have been highly stressful or traumatic. The other significant difference is that, when the nurtured infants experience stress, the natural elevation of cortisol reduces more rapidly. The brain connections of secure infants are telling them that this is a blip or a bad day, rather than further proof that life is dire and people are not to be trusted.

Bad adult habits

Adults can develop bad habits as individuals or within a team and feeling very tired or stressed does not help. Responsible adults need to take hold of their bad habits and work to turn them around. You owe it to the children to avoid unhelpful responses:

- Some adults' approach to children's behaviour is almost entirely negative, including cross words, nagging or a long stream of 'don't' and 'stop it'.
- It is also very rude to tell children they are 'silly', 'stupid' or 'bad'. They are none of these absolute descriptions, although what they have just done may have been dangerous, foolish or unwise.
- You would not like to be called these names and it does not help children learn new ways of behaving.
- It is usually no more effective to say something six times to a child than once. Children who taken no notice the first time may not have heard and, if they have, then they clearly need more guidance than blunt repetition.
- Make sure you have their attention, use the child's name and guide or show them as well as tell.
- Sometimes, adults deal negatively with dislike of an individual child or insist on getting into a power struggle on the grounds that no child can be allowed to 'get away with it'.

- You will not like all children equally and some will rub you up the wrong way. Responsible adults work hard to find something to like in every child.
- Perhaps for every feeling you have that, 'I am so irritated when Ian wipes his nose on his sleeve' you need to find a balance of, 'I am impressed with the way Ian is so gentle with the rabbit.'

The serious disadvantage of any negative approach is that the message is so limited, 'don't' rather than 'do'. Children are left to work out what they are supposed to do – an unnecessary detective job for them.

Tips for practice

Shouting is an unwise adult habit and, since you will tell children not to shout, you undermine your message if you do not set a good example.

- There are few occasions when it is right to shout. If children are doing something dangerous, you will need to warn them, but in early years settings there is rarely any justification for shouting.
- Shouting as a regular habit has the disadvantage of nagging. The children stop listening to you.
- Practise making your voice carry without raising the volume. It is possible if you pitch your voice a bit lower, especially if you are female.
- Avoid shouting at children who raise their voices to you. Children have limited volume control in any case. If you speak more quietly, they will probably follow your example.
- Use an agreed signal with children for 'Quiet now' or use two loud handclaps.

Unacceptable tactics

Adults are sometimes very forthcoming about unacceptable behaviour from children but, of course, some tactics by adults are unacceptable in any early years setting, school or out of school facility. It is important for everyone in a team to understand the reasons. But you may also have conversations with some parents about discipline that start with, 'Why don't you just ...?'

The guiding rule is that responsible adults, who are committed to helping children learn, do not use any tactics to control children's behaviour that would be unacceptable if the children behaved in this way.

- You will not hit, shove or shake children because this is a misuse of your adult strength and is utterly contrary to your ground rules for the children's behaviour. You will keep children safe, if they endanger themselves or others but this is careful containment.
- You will take care of children and not physically manhandle or drag them, even if they need to be removed. Angry removals frighten children and say much more about the inequality of power between adults and children than about 'how we should all behave'.
- You will not use verbal humiliation, sarcasm or insults towards children. This approach undermines children's self esteem, it is a misuse of adult knowledge and sets a very bad example to all the children.

You will not do any of the above even in retaliation, such as being cruel to a child who has been deeply unpleasant to another child – in order to 'show him how it

feels'. You are then behaving as unacceptably as the child and setting the unhelpful precedent that adults are allowed to break the ground rules of the setting if they feel like it. Children will think you are unfair and unkind and they will not respect you.

Why it is wrong to hit children

Adults who support physical punishment like to call the action 'smacking'. But even-handed observation on the high street will show you that what some adults do to children, often for very minor misbehaviours, would be called 'hitting' if they did it to a fellow adult.

The legal situation

In the UK there is a bizarre and illogical situation regarding children and physical punishment. Unlike some other European countries, the UK does not offer children the same legal protection against assault as is enjoyed by adults. However, a series of laws have restricted the use of physical punishment on children.

Since 1986 there has been no caning or other forms of hitting children in state schools. In 1998 this protection was extended to independent schools and to any early years settings that received funding for free early education places for three and four year olds. However, the legal loophole remains that parents, or people who have taken parental responsibility, can exercise what is called 'reasonable chastisement'. This option was established by a legal case as long ago as 1860. At that time the judge wanted to make it clear that killing children through physical punishment was beyond 'reasonable', since a boy had died as a result of his punishment at school!

In autumn 2001 the government reported on a consultation undertaken in 2000 for England and Wales about possible legal reform over hitting children. The result has been no change to the law regarding parents. In England, despite considerable pressure from early years professionals, the government has also insisted on building the right to hit children into the standards for childminders (so long as they have the written permission of parents). Wales and Scotland have not followed that unacceptable line. It is possible that the exception will be removed in England.

Scotland looks set to introduce legislation that would prevent the physical punishment of children younger than three years of age and limit the kind of physical punishment that was legally acceptable by parents. Northern Ireland is undertaking a consultation that will be complete in 2002.

The good practice arguments

It is important that you understand the compelling arguments against hitting children, since some parents may be perplexed or even irritated that you will not use this option.

- It is unacceptable to use physical violence on anybody. In our society it is not acceptable to hit, shove or shake adults because they have annoyed you or are uncooperative. So it certainly is not acceptable to use such tactics on children who are younger, smaller and have considerably more to learn.
- Hitting children gives the message that this is an acceptable way to deal with annoyance or conflict. Adults tell children not to hit each other. So it sets a very bad example when adults resort to this option.
- Physical punishment can get seriously out of hand. What happens if the first blow does not stop the child? Should an adult then feel justified in hitting harder and longer?

- A habit of hitting often reflects an adult's mood, tiredness or embarrassment because there is an audience. Apart from any other reason, the inconsistency confuses any message to the child.
- Hitting hurts children, physically and emotionally. The hurt again gets in the way of any possible learning. Adults who say, 'this hurts me more than it hurts you' are lying.
- Hitting is unreliable in the long run; it carries all the disadvantages of a focus on punishment and is an entirely negative message. Children who are hit do sometimes stop what they are doing, if only because they are too busy being shocked or distressed. They can see that adults are angry but are often confused about exactly why.
- Adults who claim that 'smacking never did me any harm' fail to come up with evidence that it did them any positive good, especially when there are other ways to guide children's behaviour.

Activity

Imagine the scene and how you will deal with the following:

- Four year old Stefan wrenches other children off his favourite bike and deals with any argument by hitting. Yesterday you heard his mother tell Stefan to 'hit him back' when there was a scuffle with another child at going home time. Somebody needs to talk with Stefan's mother and explain that nobody – child or adult – is allowed to hit other people in your setting.

Role play the exchange with a colleague or fellow student in your course group.

- You are the practitioner and you need to explain why you do not allow hitting to resolve disputes.
- Your role play partner should challenge you as Stefan's mother to explain, 'how do you discipline them here if you don't smack them?' and 'I can't have my son growing up a wimp. He's got to learn to defend himself!'
- Discuss the outcome with the rest of the group.

Key skills links: C3.1a PS3.1

Further resources

Department for Education and Skills (2001) *Promoting Children's Mental Health within Early Years and School Settings* The Stationery Office.

Finch, Sue (1998) *An Eye for an Eye Leaves everyone Blind: Teaching young children to settle conflicts without violence* National Early Years Network and Save the Children.

Leach, Penelope (1997) *Getting Positive about Discipline: A guide to today's parents* and *Why Speak out about Smacking: Questions and answers from the physical punishment debate* Barnardos.

Mosley, Jenny (2001) *Working Towards a Whole School Policy on Self Esteem and Positive Behaviour* Positive Press.

Mosley, Jenny and Sonnet, Helen (2001) *Here We go Round: Quality circle time for 3–5 year olds* Positive Press.

Mukherji, Penny (2001) *Understanding Children's Challenging Behaviour* Nelson Thornes.

Stacey, Hilary and Robinson, Pat (1997) *Let's Mediate: A teacher's guide to peer support and conflict resolution skills for all ages* Lucky Duck Publishing.

Booklets on a positive approach, including the use of encouragement and consequences are available from Adlerian Workshops and Publications, 216 Tring Road, Aylesbury, Bucks HP20 1JS.

Progress check

This chapter will help you to answer the following questions. Look back through the contents if you need to check.

- 1 Describe two ways in which children's early experiences could shape their behaviour later.
- 2 Explain the difference between positive and negative reinforcement and how it can shape children's behaviour.
- 3 Outline four ways in which you could use encouragement of children in your setting.
- 4 Describe three ways in which you can promote children's prosocial behaviour.
- 5 Outline three acceptable ways to deal with unwanted behaviour from children.
- 6 Give three reasons why adults should not use physical punishment on children.

Children with disabilities and continuing health conditions

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the different types of disability or ill health and their impact on children's development
- identify the responsibilities of early years practitioners in working with disabled children and their families
- contribute to the inclusion of disabled children in your setting through support for their learning
- support children and their families through ill health and periods in hospital.

Introduction

This chapter is relevant to all readers and not only to those who work, or intend to work, in specialist units or schools. The revised SEN Code of Practice for England, and the likely revisions elsewhere in the UK, mean there will be a greater emphasis on inclusion for young disabled children.

You are increasingly likely to have disabled children, or children with a continuing health condition, who attend your early years setting, primary school or out of school care. It is important to develop an understanding about the impact of disability and how you can positively support children and families. This chapter will help you to understand your role, provide ideas about what you

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 5, 10, 11

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: P1

Level 3: C17, C18, P2

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 10, 22

can do and give you a sound basis for finding out more information when you need it.

Many disabilities and health conditions are mentioned in this chapter and it would be impossible to give significant information about each. So you will see more *Finding out more* boxes here than in other chapters. Please access this information as and when you need it, but do bear in mind the guidelines given on page 667 about contacting organisations, especially in the context of a student project.

Different types of disability and health conditions

Different phrases are used to describe children who are affected by some level of disability: disabled children, children with disabilities, children with special needs. You may hear some strong views expressed about why one phrase is more acceptable than another phrase.

I most often use 'disabled children' because it tends to be the preferred term among disabled adults who have shared their views about past and current experiences. Older disabled children often say that they do not want to be seen as 'special' in the way that the term 'special needs' is used. But there is nothing like 100 per cent agreement about terminology and it would be surprising if there were. So long as you show respect to children and strive towards good practice, how you behave towards disabled children is in the end far more important than the phrase you choose to use.

The focus on children rather than their disability

Into the 1980s, most professionals treated disabled children as medical cases. Diagnosis, treatment and management of the condition were a greater priority than behaving towards children as individuals with interests, preferences and concerns. Strong criticism of this **medical model of disability** was launched by disabled adults on the basis of their childhood memories and by parents of disabled children. An alternative **social model** of disability focuses on the child as an individual and highlights social restrictions that can mean a child is disabled by social circumstances. This approach does not reject useful programmes or medical treatment but stresses that children should never be seen only as their disability label.

The wide range of disability

The first step in understanding disability is to recognise that:

- There are very many different kinds of disability and continuing health conditions.
- There is great variety within any given diagnosed condition. Different children may have mild through to very severe versions of the same condition.
- Children remain individuals and disability does not stop them having their own temperament, interests and mischievous inclinations.

Key terms

Medical model of disability

an approach to disabled children that focuses exclusively on diagnosis and medical management of the condition

Social model of disability

an approach that focuses on disabled children as individuals and ways they can be disabled by social circumstances and attitudes

Tips for practice

- Even experienced practitioners do not know everything about every kind of disability or health condition.
- In an early years setting or school, you will not encounter every kind of disability and some conditions are rare.
- Good practice is to be very willing to learn and remain open-minded about what may be possible or best for any individual child and family.
- You are not expected to know everything but it is reasonable to expect you to have good ideas about how to find out.
- This chapter offers many useful suggestions for information searches that you may need to do, or support a parent in undertaking, at a later stage in your career.

Physical disabilities

Some children are physically disabled and the effect may be anything from mild to very severe. Some physical disabilities also have associated learning difficulties.

Children with *cerebral palsy* share a condition in which their brain fails to send the appropriate signals to their limbs. Some children experience only mild difficulties in hand control, yet others can have great difficulty in standing and making deliberate movements with their limbs. The brain damage that has led to the cerebral palsy may not only have affected the parts of the brain that control movement. Some children may be deaf, blind and experience severe learning disabilities.

Finding out more

Scope, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW tel: 020 7619 7100 or try www.scope.org.uk

An organisation concerned with all aspects of life with cerebral palsy.

Figure 18.1

Disabled children can have fun – but they will be unhappy sometimes, like any child





Some children are born with disabilities that affect their level of vision or hearing. When children are *deaf* or *blind*, this physical disability affects the ways in which children can learn in a society that assumes children can see and hear. Children do not always have total loss of these senses and partial loss can sometimes be harder to detect in very early childhood.

Finding out more

NDCS (National Deaf Children's Society), 15 Dufferin Street, London EC1Y 8PD tel: 020 7250 0123 email: helpline@NDCS.org.uk website: www.ndcs.org.uk

RNIB, 224 Great Portland Street, London W1N 6AA tel: 020 7388 1266 website: www.rnib.org.uk

Advice and information on all aspects of blindness.

Children with *spina bifida* are born with some of the bones in their spine not properly joined together ('bifid' is from the Latin meaning 'split'). Some children have no more than a slight swelling on their back but if the split is more severe, then the consequences can include physical disability, incontinence and learning disabilities.

Finding out more

ASBAH (Association for spina bifida and hydrocephalus), Asbah House, 42 Park Road, Peterborough, PE1 2UQ tel: 01733 555988 email: postmaster@asbah.org website: www.asbah.org

Muscular dystrophy is a progressive disease in which the muscles in a child's body waste away. The most common type in early childhood is called Duchenne and only boys are affected. The condition is usually diagnosed because a young boy is late in learning to walk and has serious difficulties in physical coordination. The increasing muscle weakness leads to poor posture that makes the boys vulnerable to chest infections. The boys may not survive childhood.

Finding out more

Muscular Dystrophy Group, Natrass House, 7–11 Prescott Place, London SW4 6BS tel: 020 7720 8055 website: www.muscular-dystrophy.org

Learning and social disabilities

Some children's disability mainly affects their ability to learn in the broadest sense. It may be that children find difficulty learning the skills of communication, both understanding and expression (see page 295), so that it is hard for them to learn about their world. Children's intellectual capacity may be affected in a way that learning will take longer for them and they will need help through

the fine steps of grasping an idea or skill that you scarcely notice with their peers.

Finding out more

MENCAP provides information and advice on a wide range of learning disabilities. Contact them at 123 Golden Lane, London EC1Y 0RT tel: 020 7454 0454 (general) email: info@mencap.org.uk website: www.mencap.org.uk

The British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD) offers a range of publications and reading lists and would be a useful contact if you decided in the future to specialise in this area. Contact them at Wolverhampton Road (no number is needed), Kidderminster, Worcestershire DY10 3PP website: www.bild.org.uk

Down's syndrome is an inherited condition that affects about one child in every 1000. Some children have relatively mild learning disabilities and manage well in mainstream nursery and school, especially with some support at later levels. Other children may need carefully structured support from a young age. Many children are relatively healthy, although the syndrome is associated with an increased risk of frequent infections, difficulties with hearing or vision and sometimes problems in the functioning of children's heart that can require surgery.

Finding out more

Down's Syndrome Association, 155 Mitcham Road, London SW17 9PG tel: 020 8682 4001 website: www.downs-syndrome.org.uk

To think about

- Part of good practice in working with disabled children has to be putting to one side any inaccurate assumptions and stereotypes about the children and their condition.
- For instance, the myth has built up that all children with Down's syndrome have a sunny disposition and are easy to manage.
- In fact they vary just as much as any other children. Some children are of an amenable temperament, but some will definitely keep you on your toes.

Some children have what is now called an *autistic spectrum disorder*. This phrase is used to describe children (and also young people or adults) who share a condition that affects their ability to:

- understand and use verbal and non-verbal skills of communication
- make sense of social behaviour so this disability in turn affects children's ability to interact and play with their peers and adults

- think and behave in a flexible way, such as understanding how to adjust their behaviour to certain situations
- deal with pretend and the use of the imagination. It is hard for these children to think about a situation being other than it actually is.

Children with autistic spectrum disorder vary considerably but in general they have a developmental disability that affects their brain functioning. Some children will have immense difficulty in learning to speak and may never use spoken language. Other children will be able to use language but remain confused about the subtleties that are communicated by exactly how something is said or the social conventions that their peers have managed. The ordinary routine of a nursery or playgroup can seem unpredictable and scary. Children may develop what look like rigid routines of their own in order to cope.

An awareness of the struggles of children with autistic spectrum disorder can help you appreciate also the complexity of what their peers have learned. For instance, four year olds have usually understood that the English phrase, 'Can you help me tidy up the bricks?' actually means 'Please do it' and not 'Are you capable of it?' Children with an autistic spectrum disorder may find it impossible to grasp this nuance. They also have difficulties in understanding non-verbal clues in play, what is a joke and what is serious and the social skills involved in pretend play.

Finding out more

National Autistic Society, 393 City Road London EC1V 1NE tel: 020 7833 2299 website: www.oneworld.org/autism_uk

All about Autistic Spectrum Disorders is a free booklet from the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, part of Mental Health Foundation tel: 020 7535 7429 or download it from the website: www.learningdisabilities.org.uk or www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Continuing health conditions

All children become ill at some time and some so-called childhood illnesses can be very unpleasant indeed. Chapter 4 covers illnesses that children may catch in the early years but will subsequently recover from. Some children are less robust in health because of health consequences of their disability or they have a specific continuing health condition that affects their daily life. Such conditions can be managed to an extent but are not curable.

Cystic fibrosis is a life-threatening condition that affects children's lungs and their digestive system. The condition means that the mucus in children's lungs is too thick and blocks the bronchial tubes. Children with cystic fibrosis have a persistent cough, difficulties in breathing and are very vulnerable to chest infections.

Finding out more

Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust, Alexandra House, 5 Blyth Road, Bromley, Kent BR1 3RS tel: 020 8464 7211 website: www.cftrust.org.uk

Asthma is the most common chronic medical disorder in childhood, affecting an estimated one child in every ten. Some children experience mild attacks of breathlessness but about half of the group have more serious attacks with bad coughing fits and an inability to get their breath. Asthma can be very serious and result in young children having regular times in hospital. Although most children and adults manage their asthma, severe attacks can lead to death.

Finding out more

National Asthma Campaign, Providence House, Providence Place, London N1 0NT tel: 020 7226 2260 website: www.asthma.org.uk

Sickle cell disease is a blood disorder and the most common and severe form is sickle cell anaemia. Sickle cell disease is inherited and most common in families who originated from Africa or the Caribbean. But the condition also occurs in families from the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, India and Pakistan. Children and adults with sickle cell anaemia are not ill all the time but experience bouts of illness, called crises, in which severe anaemia and pain require urgent hospital treatment. Children are vulnerable to infections.

Finding out more

Sickle Cell Society, 54 Station Road, London NW10 4UA tel: 020 8961 7795 website: www.sicklecellsociety.org

Diabetes is also an inherited condition and it is usually in the form of early onset diabetes (type 1) when it occurs in childhood. The condition means that the pancreas fails to produce enough insulin, or any at all. Glucose formed by the breakdown of sugars and starch through digestion cannot be absorbed as normal. The person then cannot use sugar and starch for energy and glucose accumulates in the kidneys. Children with diabetes usually need insulin injections, given by parents until the child is able to take over this task. The potential complications of diabetes mean that children need great care with their diet and their general health.

In recent years in the United States, and to an extent in the UK, doctors have seen an increase in children and adolescents of the type of diabetes that previously only affected adults from middle age (late onset or type 2 diabetes). The cause seems to be a serious lack of physical activity and poor eating habits, leading to obesity for some children. The unhealthy life style of some children creates the conditions that usually only affect adults. Type 2 diabetes can have serious health implications if not well managed.

Finding out more

Diabetes UK, 10 Queen Anne Street, London W1M 0BD tel: 020 7323 1531 website: www.diabetes.org.uk

Epilepsy results from a problem in the brain's communication system. The tiny electrical signals from one group of nerve cells become stronger than normal and overwhelm nearby parts of the brain. This sudden, excessive electrical discharge is what brings on an epileptic seizure. About 1 in 200 children has epilepsy but not all of them have a severe version. However, for some children and young adults the condition is very serious and a seizure may be fatal.

Children with epilepsy can have different types of seizure and the main types are:

- Tonic clonic seizures (that used to be called grand mal) are a generalised seizure in which the child may stay unconscious for a few minutes. The pattern is that the child's muscles contract, force the air out of the lungs, causing the body to stiffen (the tonic phase) and possibly also jerk uncontrollably (the clonic phase).
- Absence seizures (that used to be called petit mal) is a momentary lapse of awareness when the child may simply look blank for a short while then carries on with what she was doing. This type of seizure may occur many times in a day and, without careful observation, adults may explain the event as problems of attention or a child who is inclined to be vague.

There is no cure for epilepsy but anti-convulsant medication can help to control the condition.

Finding out more

Epilepsy Action, New Anstey House, Gate Way Drive, Yeadon, Leeds LS19 7XY tel: 0113 210 8800 freephone helpline on 0808 800 5050 website: www.epilepsy.org.uk

Activity

- Take one disability or health condition that is covered in this section.
- Use the resource suggested to build your understanding of the condition. Write up your findings to support practical help for the child and family in an early years setting or family home.
- Make a presentation to your colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.1b IT2/31–3

What causes disability or chronic ill health?

There is no single cause for the different kinds of disability or health conditions. Sometimes there is no obvious cause at all for a child's disability and possibly no clear-cut diagnosis either.

Genetic causes

Sometimes either the sperm or the egg that combine in fertilisation contain genetic material that carries the information leading to a disability. The condition is then said to be **genetic** or inherited through the genes. Some inherited

Key term

Genetic causes of disability

when a child inherits a condition from the genes of their parent(s)

conditions include Down's Syndrome, cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anaemia and muscular dystrophy.

Congenital conditions

Congenital means that the baby is born with a disability or health condition. Inherited conditions are therefore congenital, but not all congenital conditions are inherited. The human fetus is mainly very safe in the womb, but some events can cause lasting damage. If the mother is infected with rubella (German Measles) during the first three months of pregnancy, then there is permanent damage to the organs developing at that time, with resulting blindness, deafness or cerebral palsy. Excessive use of alcohol crosses the placenta and causes fetal alcohol syndrome, which can include learning disabilities. Use of addictive drugs like heroin also affects the fetus and she or he is born drug-dependent.

Key terms

Congenital causes of disability

pre-birth conditions lead to a disability or health condition, so that the baby is born with this condition

Trauma (birth)

unexpected events during childbirth that can create high risk to the future well being of the unborn baby, such as being deprived of oxygen

Trauma during birth

If a baby is deprived of oxygen at birth, the consequence can be brain damage. The pattern of disabilities will depend on the severity of brain damage and what parts of the brain are affected. Very premature babies are at risk of later disability, because their organs are so immature.

Illness and accidents after birth

Very serious illnesses can cause permanent disabilities even though children survive. Meningitis can leave children with hearing difficulties and, less often, with brain injury or epilepsy. Rheumatic fever can damage the heart, leading to the formation of scar tissue, which in turn prevents the valves from operating properly.

Some children's physical or learning disabilities result from injuries, especially damage to the head, and therefore to the brain. Children are involved in traffic accidents or have serious falls at home or at play. Serious head injuries can lead to the development of cerebral palsy.

Multiple possible causes or unknown

There is sometimes no clear pattern of cause and effect. For example, epilepsy can result from brain injury at birth or from a serious accident. Some seizures may be caused by a faulty gene and so the condition is inherited for this child. But for about 6 out of every 10 people who have epilepsy there is no obvious cause.

The role of the early years practitioner

Working well with disabled children depends on all the skills that you will learn and apply within general good practice. There are additional skills and knowledge to gain but these build on the firm foundation of good practice in giving attention to children as individuals. You need to work as always in partnership with parents and to work cooperatively with other involved professionals. Furthermore, effective use of your skills of observation, record keeping and planning are equally important in this area of your work. You also need a practical understanding of the legal framework for good practice with disabled children and their families and the Code of Practice.

Partnership with parents

Good practice in early years is always to build a good working partnership with parents or other important carers who share responsibility for the child. This partnership is vital when children are disabled or have a continuing health condition.

- Parents will often know a great deal about their child's disability or health condition. Even more important, they have unique experience about what the disability means for this child and they know their child as a person.
- When you make the time to have a conversation, you will learn from parents but also they feel welcome and able to learn from you.
- Some parents and other carers have managed with hardly any support before their child attends nursery or pre-school. They will not necessarily know about the local support that is available or a helpful national support organisation for their child's condition.

Settling a child with a disability or health condition

Much of what you will do in your first contact will be a normal part of your process of welcoming and settling children and parents into your setting. If you have a friendly and effective settling in process (see page 630), then you will not need to do anything significantly extra for this family. Some of the issues you cover may be slightly different, for instance:

- Do you need to do some preparations before the child arrives? Will it be sensible to prepare the existing group for the child's arrival?

Scenario

Marcella is joining Sunningdale Day Nursery within the coming week. She is four and half years old and has Down's syndrome. Her understanding and behaviour is more like a young three year old and this is the first time she has attended any kind of early years setting.

This will be the first time that Sunningdale has welcomed a child with learning disabilities. Simon, who is about to move onto school, has serious hearing loss and, with hindsight, the team wish they had prepared more for his arrival. Marcella has been assigned Penny as her key worker and Penny has already done a home visit, meeting Marcella, her parents and her older brother. In a team meeting, Penny leads an open discussion about how best to prepare for Marcella's arrival.

- In what way, if at all, should the other children be given some idea of what to expect from Marcella?
- Are there any adjustments that should be made in the routine or play opportunities for Marcella?
- What kind of questions might the other children or parents ask and what would be suitable answers?

Questions

- 1 Think about the questions above and gather your own thoughts on what would be good practice.

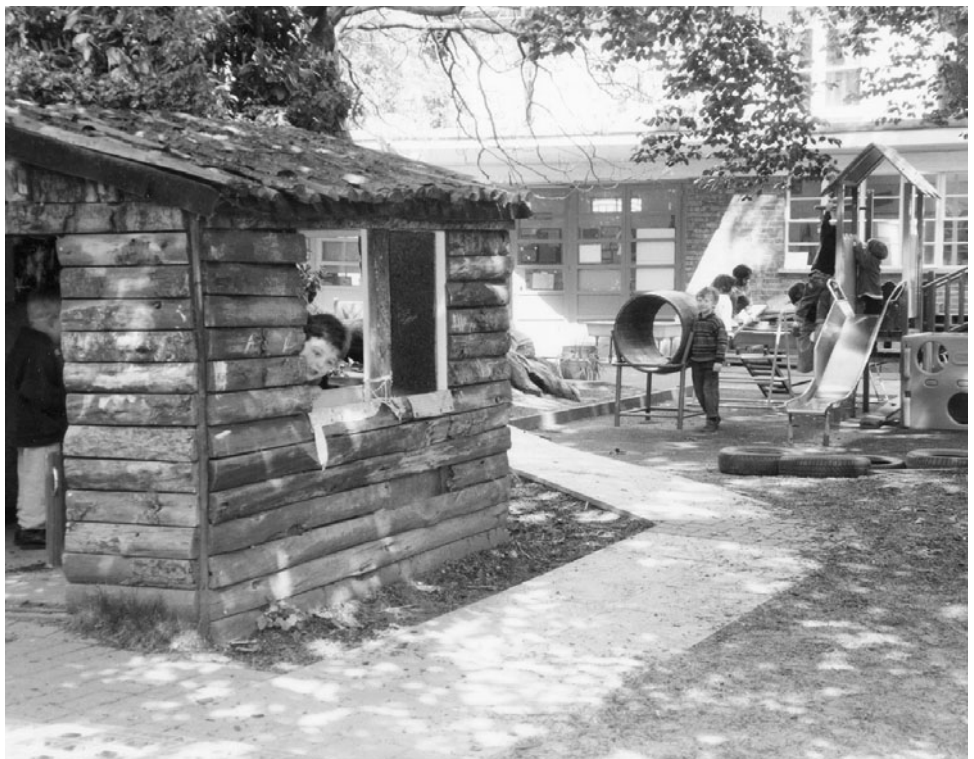
- 2 You might like to make some preliminary notes now and then come back to this scenario when you have read the whole chapter.
- 3 Discuss your answers with colleagues.
- 4 Plan a short presentation to explain what you feel would be appropriate and your reasons.

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.1b

- You need to hear some personal details about this child's needs, even if you have previously worked with children with the same condition. For instance, health conditions like diabetes or epilepsy do not affect all children in the same way. You may have worked previously with a child who has dyspraxia (see also page 263). But this disability affects physical coordination and sequencing in different ways and to different levels of severity.
- When you speak with parents, it makes a difference if you take a positive line. Of course you do not pretend that the fact that Matthew is in a wheelchair will make no difference. You cannot treat him 'just the same' as all the other children, but you can avoid a conversation with his parents that focuses on 'difficulties' and 'I suppose there'll be problems about ...'.
- When you welcome a disabled child into your setting, you are not agreeing to meet all his needs. Other professionals will be involved and you will become part of the network supporting this family. You may also in time be able to help parents make contact with other support services.

Figure 18.2

Easing access in your environment can benefit all the children





You are starting to learn about this child and her condition.

- Do not feel embarrassed about admitting that you do not know something or that you would appreciate it if the parent explained one more time.
- Be clear about any particular health issues to which you need to be alert for this child. You do not want to be too anxious or over-protective, but some children will be especially vulnerable to infections.
- You definitely need to understand warning signs for some children, for instance about an asthma attack and what to do in an emergency.
- Do ensure that all relevant information becomes known to the full team. This sharing is the responsibility of the early years setting or school; parents should not have to track down every person who could have contact with their child.
- For example, Tim who has epilepsy could be at risk if only his key worker is able to deal calmly with a seizure. Suppose Tim has a seizure when out with a small group on a local trip and staff panic because they are uncertain what to do.

Tips for practice

Policy and practice on medication

Every setting should have a policy about medication. The policy in your setting may usually be to say that, if children are ill enough to need medicine, then they should be at home. However, children with a disability or health condition may need regular medication as part of their normal day. An inflexible medication policy may mean that a child with epilepsy or asthma cannot attend your setting. This exclusion is unlikely to be acceptable nowadays. Early years settings, schools and out of school care need a realistic medication policy. Your employers' insurance policies must cover practitioners who support children with health conditions that require medication.

You need to talk with parents to understand their child's needs and whether you can meet them in your setting. No setting should immediately refuse without discussion.

- You need to be clear about what is needed and get the final details in writing through discussion with the parent.
- You need to know if there are any possible side effects of the medication for the child.
- All the relevant details should be recorded in a medication or drugs book, with the full name of the child, name of drug, dosage and timing when the medication needs to be given or supervised.
- You will need parents to give you medication that travels between home and setting. It should never be left in a child's bag or on a table.
- The medication should then be stored in a safe place. An exception will be the inhaler for a child with asthma that should travel with the child. Talk with parents about a suitable container.
- You may give the medication to a younger child, but if you work with school age children, your role may be to remind them to take their medicine in whatever format they need.

- For instance a child with asthma may take regular preventative doses through an inhaler operating as a reliever of the condition. Some children need controlled doses of insulin for diabetes or adrenaline for serious allergic reactions and these may be delivered by pen-like syringes.

Activity

Find out about the policy for medication in your setting.

- What are the main issues that are covered?
- In what ways do the team keep records of medication?
- Does the policy cover the eventualities that are discussed in this section – what if anything has possibly been overlooked?
- Write up your findings.
- Share what you have learned with your colleagues.

Key skills links: C2.3 C2.1a

Continued communication with parents

The discussion so far has assumed that when parents and children join your setting it is already known that the child has a disability. This situation will not always be the case and a child's difficulties may only become clear after the family has joined your setting. The SEN code of practice (see page 528) describes the steps to take when a child is not progressing as well as his or her peers.

Whatever the timing of a diagnosis or assessment, families with a disabled child often appreciate support and a friendly ear. Parents may be trying to balance advice, sometimes incompatible, from different sources. Disabled children and their families are sometimes required to liaise with many different agencies and professionals, some of whom do not really try to understand the competing priorities within a family.

Tips for practice

- Some parents will be very well informed and may already have made contact with an appropriate organisation. But do not hold back on information that you have on the grounds that, 'I'm sure parents will know about that'.
- You can share information, details of useful leaflets and contact details for organisations in a friendly way along the lines of 'I was wondering if you had already heard about ...'.
- Open a file on useful contacts, both local and national, and organise the details in a way that is easy to access and show to parents.
- You also need to gain an insight into the experiences of families with disabled children. You will learn through communication with individual parents but a broader base is useful.
- For instance, the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities (see page 519 for details) has produced a booklet on *Learning Disabilities and the Family: The young child with a learning disability*. You can obtain the booklet from the Foundation or download it from the website: www.learningdisabilities.org.uk

Legislation and good practice

There have been a number of laws that affect services and provision for disabled children and their families. Similar legal requirements apply across the UK. The exact practice varies between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland because educational and social services are organised rather differently.

Disabled children were specifically defined as being 'in need' by the Children Act 1989 (for England and Wales), the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. Local authorities have to offer services to children 'in need' but the details will vary. In some case suitable provision is seen to be an early years place for children.

A series of laws have shaped good practice on equality for disabled children and adults and educational provision for children. The main strands are:

- a policy of inclusion for disabled children
- an agreed process for assessment of special educational needs
- a code of practice for working with disabled children and their families.

The Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability Bill 2001 has placed significant responsibilities on schools in England, Wales and Scotland to ensure that disabled children are able to access mainstream education and are not placed at a serious disadvantage compared with their peers. Similar legislation is likely in Northern Ireland.

Inclusion

Until about the last quarter of the twentieth century, services for disabled children kept them almost completely separate from their peers. Parents were often told to send their children away to special, residential schools and there were often very limited alternatives. Programmes for disabled children often ran with very low expectations for what children could manage and specialist units sometimes brought together children with very different disabilities and ability level.

The situation has now changed significantly. Parents have the legal right to seek mainstream provision, including schooling for their disabled child, supported by additional services appropriate to the child. Of course any family, and professionals who offer advice, can only work with the services that are actually available locally. Some parts of the UK are better served than others.

Children with a wide range of physical or learning disabilities can and do manage in mainstream school. Their special needs are met with appropriate educational support, and sometimes a designated support assistant. An **inclusive approach** is a commitment to enabling children to be part of mainstream early years or school provision and the approach values the benefits of contact for both disabled children and their peers:

- Inclusion prevents the segregation that used to be the norm for all disabled children.
- Children, whose disabilities are physical, need the intellectual challenge that comes from mixing with their peers. Children with learning disabilities can partake in much of the daily nursery or school life and have specialist support as appropriate.
- For generations, disabled or very sick children were effectively invisible. Young children can be very straightforward about difference and early contact with disabled friends and acquaintances can contribute to changing attitudes in society as a whole.

Key term

Inclusive approach

a commitment to enable disabled children to join mainstream early years or school provision as far as possible and with necessary support

Figure 18.3

Mainstream early years play will be suitable for many disabled children – perhaps with some extra help



An inclusive approach should not mean the closure of special units or schools, where this service is in the best interests of children. If you have a disabled child in your early years setting, the result of careful support and partnership between the team and parents may be that this child needs and will benefit from a more specialised environment. Going on to mainstream primary school is not the best choice for every child.

Key terms

Early Years Action and Early Years Action Plus

two stages of special support for children with disabilities in early years settings

SEN Code of Practice

the clear guidelines describing good practice for disabled children in early years and school settings

SENCO

the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator responsible for liaison between the setting, parents and any outside agencies

Finding out more

The Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, Room S203, S Block, Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Lane, Redland, Bristol BS16 1QU tel: 0117 923 8450 website: www.inclusion.org.uk

Support in the early years

In England and Wales the revised SEN Code of Practice now specifically includes early years services and similar changes are also likely in other parts of the UK. The new Code of Practice outlines a two stage approach for children with disabilities and other special needs in early years settings called **Early Years Action** and **Early Years Action Plus**. The approach allows for the fact that it is not immediately obvious with all children that they will need additional help.

In England, every early years setting (that offers free early educational places) should have a member of staff with special responsibility for implementing the **SEN Code of Practice** on the Identification and Assessment of Special Education Needs (SEN). This person is known as the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). The SENCO for the early years setting has special responsibility for liaison between the setting, parents and any outside agencies. The aim is to

ensure that all information is brought together in a workable way and that parents are aware of local advice and support services.

It will take time before every setting has a designated SENCO. If your setting does not have one, you can contact your local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership who will tell you the name of the area SENCO.

Early Years Action is set in motion when any of the following situations occur.

- Despite appropriate help and support, children are still struggling, compared with their peers in some, or most, of their areas of learning.
- Children's behaviour or emotional reactions are hard to handle, even though you have persevered with positive strategies (see page 507).
- Your observation, and the knowledge of parents, shows you that the child has specific difficulties in physical skills, communication, use of the senses or social interaction.
- Some children may enter your setting with a known primary cause of SEN, for example, it is already known that a child has visual loss or there is good reason to suspect that the child has autism. Without a definite diagnosis, then learning difficulties will most likely come to your attention at this stage.

- Be alert to parents' feelings when you raise the issue that their child is not progressing or is showing challenging behaviour.
- Use your communication skills of listening and careful explanation. Check you understand what parents say and feel and be willing to have more than one conversation (see page 531).
- Some parents may not be surprised by what you share. Perhaps they have been anxious about their child's development or behaviour and have been reassured that the child will 'catch up', 'grow out of it'. In this case, parents may feel relief that you understand and agree with their concern. They may be keen to get going in order to help their child.
- But some parents may be distressed or unwilling to accept that all is not well with their child and that some special help is really needed.
- You need to work in partnership whatever the parents' reaction.

Tips for practice

You should then:

- Discuss with the child's parents the need to involve your setting's SENCO. This conversation should be part of a continuing communication between a child's key worker and parents.
- The key worker, parents and SENCO should then work to bring together all the useful information and observations on the child. You and the parents could make further observations and ensure that all aspects of the child's development, health and behaviour have been considered.
- Together you all then develop an **individual education plan (IEP)** for the child. The IEP can cover appropriate areas for this child and needs to be manageable. Focus on no more than three or four targets that are special for this child, in addition to the play opportunities she or he shares with the other children.
- Decide when you will get together to discuss progress – probably no more than a couple of months ahead. If at any point the IEP does not seem to be

Key term

IEP
Individual Education Plan for children whose disabilities require special support and planning in early years or school settings

working, and you have all given the targets your full attention, then be ready to adjust it.

- Parents should be able to be fully involved in this process. If parents lack confidence or feel they do not want to have much say in the detail, then ensure that they are informed in straightforward language.
- The same guidelines on good practice about written material and files on children apply in this instance as in all other parts of your work (see page 461).

The revised Code of Practice emphasised the importance of involving children. Early years practitioners are expected to look for ways to involve the children themselves in any part of the IEP: the targets, the activities and opportunities that can help the child to reach targets and the ways of recording success step by step.

Appropriate work with a child will be enough support for some children. The next stage of Early Years Action Plus is set in motion if, despite well planned and delivered extra help, the child is still struggling in any of the identified areas or the setting is still having difficulty in dealing with challenging behaviour.

- At this point, it is important to involve agencies outside the early years setting, but of course in partnership with the parents.
- A review meeting should be held with the SENCO, key worker and child's parents.
- You would consider what you have learned from all the information and observations of this child: progress as well as continued difficulties.
- The external specialist will need to understand what has been learned about the child so far. Then he or she can be part of a revised IEP, targets and any new strategies.
- The new IEP needs to be reviewed every two or three months (termly if you work on terms). Parents and children need to feel and be an integral part of the work.

Activity

- Ensure that you understand the steps in Early Years Action and Early Years Action Plus.
- Explore how the process works in your setting or make arrangements to visit a local setting.
- Make brief notes to support a presentation to colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1b

Extra help and support for a child

The Code of Practice is flexible about the kind of extra or different provision that an early years setting makes for a child. It might include:

- Extra time to observe a child so you can build on his strengths and fine tune a strategy.
- Individual adult support for a child, either for parts of a day or for most of his time with you.

- Agreement within the team about how everyone will support a child with special learning needs or allow more flexibility for a child who has trouble coping with routine.
- Provision of some special equipment or play materials suitable for this child, or flexible access to specialist resources in a large setting.
- Organisation so that a child can be in smaller groups for some or part of the day.
- Perhaps a flexible pattern of attendance with a shorter day or even a temporary break and re-start when the child has matured enough to cope with help.

It is possible that some strategies will enable a child to cope and not need further special support. However, some children will continue to need specialist help and will move into the process of statementing in school (see page 532). The observations, records and plans made in the early years setting will be very helpful at this later stage. You should follow the same good practice as with any kind of records. So, parents should be a full part of an agreement to pass on records or a summary of a large portfolio.

Scenario

Baker Street Family and Children's Centre have developed IEPs for two children in recent months.

Winston

Winston, who is nearly four years old now, has been diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder. Winston's key worker Kayleigh had been concerned for some time that Winston's communication, social skills and play were not within normal developmental range. It took some time before Winston's parents were willing to consider that there was a greater problem than delayed language. Kayleigh remained patient and supportive, while undertaking observations that she shared with Winston's parents in a positive way. Over time she was able to help his parents to recognise that their son needed special language support and that in play he showed a limited range of interests, as well as having difficulty in playing with his peers. Winston's parents agreed to an external assessment that confirmed autistic spectrum disorder and they are now actively involved in his IEP. A recent target in the plan is to enable Winston to join small groups of children for a story, supported by Kayleigh. She is also starting short play sessions with Winston to help him to learn basic play social skills. First of all, she is working with Winston on very simple turn taking games and imitation.

Joanne

Joanne, two years old, has severe visual loss, and has only recently joined the centre. Tyrone is her key worker and he is at the stage of bringing together information from Joanne's family and his own observations of her in the centre. The first target has been to enable Joanne to feel confident in moving around the room and out into the garden. Discussion around this target has helped to focus the centre team on how everyone can help Joanne by talking simply about where she is in the centre, enabling her to touch and showing the other children how to communicate with Joanne

without alarming her. Tyrone is close to developing a short play programme to support Joanne's language development. Joanne is a very decided child and as likely to say 'No!' as to join in play. Tyrone wants to discuss some strategies with her parents – what might encourage Joanne and what does she enjoy the most in play and other daily routines?

Questions

- 1 Describe briefly the themes of good practice in the examples of Winston and Joanne.
- 2 Draft a possible IEP with two appropriate targets for each child.
- 3 Discuss with your colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a

Key terms

School Action and School Action Plus

two stages of special support for children with disabilities in school settings

Support of special educational needs in school

In order to receive appropriate support, disabled children need to be assessed. Generally this procedure of assessment, followed by a statement of special educational needs, has taken place when a child is in school. However, even before the recent changes it was possible to start the process of special assessment for a child as young as two years of age.

The new Code of Practice has changed the pattern in schools in England and Wales from what was usually a five stage process to two broad stages called **School Action** and **School Action Plus**. This change means that stages one and two are part of School Action and stages three, four and five are School Action Plus. It is possible, although not certain that Scotland and Northern Ireland may move towards a similar system. In case they continue with a four- or five-stage approach, these are given in brackets below. The new Code has stressed the great importance of partnership with parents. The Code has also strengthened the view that good practice means involving children as much as possible in conversations about their learning and setting realistic targets to which children can feel committed.

The process of support and assessment will continue to reflect differences around the UK in the organisation of services. For instance, in England the local educational authority (LEA) would be involved but in Northern Ireland it would be the Education and Library Board. Each school should still have a named member of staff who is the SENCO.

School Action

In the stage of School Action a child's teacher would record any concerns about children's ability to learn and access the curriculum. The information gathered should include parents' knowledge of their child at home and in other settings (previous stage one). When children have attended an early years setting, then there can be valuable information from that experience (see page 531) and the school should be willing to draw on this expertise. Careful discussion involving the parents and child can sometimes identify how to help a child to overcome a difficulty.

If a child continues to struggle then the teacher should draw up an individual education plan (IEP) with other teachers and the child's parents (previous stage two). The plan will set appropriate targets for the child, with suggestions about

how to support him or her and a date for review. The school SENCO should also be involved. Sometimes, extra support helps the child to cope but, if not, then the process moves on to the next stage.

School Action Plus

The school looks for external specialist advice or help, for instance a speech and language therapist or psychologist (see page 17 for a discussion of services). The SENCO will be involved in drawing up a new IEP with any outside specialist who has been consulted and with the involvement of parents (previous stage three).

If the child is not progressing, then anyone involved can request a formal assessment (previous stage four). The head teacher of the school will consult with the teacher, SENCO, parent and external specialist to decide whether the child needs to be formally assessed. This statutory assessment should include the opinions of educational, medical or psychological services, and take account of parents' views. This assessment leads to a written **statement of special educational needs**. Any individual statement should cover:

- 1 The details of this child's learning difficulties: strengths as well as weaknesses.
- 2 The specific learning needs of the child, described to show the kind of additional help that will be appropriate.
- 3 Details of special facilities or equipment that should be made available to this child.
- 4 The statement leads to the further development of the IEP for this child.

The statement of special educational needs is a legal document that sets out what this individual child needs and commits the local authority to supply the extra support or facilities. The requirements of the statement have to be put into practice (previous stage five). The child, with this help, may still continue in mainstream school. In some cases, it may be judged that the child's needs could be better met in a specialist school or unit.

Key term

Statement of special educational needs

description for an individual child of his/her difficulties and needs for support in school

Activity

- Ensure that you understand the steps in School Action and School Action Plus.
- Explore how the process works in your setting or make arrangements to visit a local setting.
- Make brief notes to support a presentation to colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1b

Supporting children's learning and behaviour

This section describes general good practice in working with children who have disabilities. The most important point to bear in mind is to see the child and not primarily the disability or continuing health condition. All the ideas and good practice in the rest of this book also apply to disabled children.

Tips for practice

- You treat disabled or very sick children as individuals. You get to know them and they get to know you.
- In supporting their learning, you look for a disabled child's interests and work on from what they can do and can understand – just as you would with any child.
- A sensitive approach to disabled children means that you work to understand and observe in what ways the disability affects what and how the child can learn.
- You make suitable adjustments to your expectations of a child. But you still have expectations and aim to help the child progress.
- You adjust your communication or suggestions about play materials and ensure that the early years environment does not disable the child by unnecessary restrictions.
- Disabled children will often have a special learning programme but this plan must never be more important than the child. Disabled children need choice, they need sometimes to be able to say or communicate, 'no', 'I've had enough' or 'I'm bored with this'.
- They need friendships, fun, challenge and to be allowed to get messy and make mistakes like everyone else.

Activity

Choose a particular disability or health condition that is mentioned in this chapter. Imagine that a child, with this disability or health condition, is going to join your setting.

- Gather some general information about the condition. You can start your research with contacting the relevant specialist organisation given within this chapter. Start with their website.
- Now consider five or six important points that should guide your good practice with this child.
- Now imagine this child in your setting. Of course you do not know the child as an individual, but would a child with this disability or health condition be able to relate personally to your range of books, posters or play materials?
- Share your main ideas with colleagues through a short presentation.

Key skills links: IT2/3.1–3

Access and welcome within the setting

Contact with disabled children or parents can make you look at your setting afresh. Some issues will be about ease of access for children, or disabled adults, who use a wheelchair or mobility aids. Other issues may be about different ways of communication and an awareness of the play materials and illustrations in your setting.

To think about

- Since the 1980s there has been an obligation for public services and facilities to offer easier access for physically disabled adults.
- I have heard complaints about the cost of making changes for 'only a few people'. But many improvements for disabled people are inclusive; they are facilities that can be used by anyone.
- Speaking as a parent who was pushing a buggy, single and double, in the first half of the 1980s, I can attest that sloped entrances rather than steps, wide aisles in supermarkets and more spacious toilets are an immense help to all those adults who are temporarily pushing wheels!

Perhaps the arrival of a child with cerebral palsy makes you look at how easy it is for anyone to move around in your nursery or pre-school. Creating more space for movement or ease of reaching play materials may improve the environment for everyone.

You need to build a warm and personal relationship with a disabled or sick child, just as you would with any child. Knowledge about the disability or health condition has to be put into daily practice as part of getting to know this child as an individual.

- Adults can have empathy for a child's frustrations, but ensure that you and your colleagues avoid showing a patronising attitude or pity.
- Children do not benefit from sad looks and whispered comments along the lines of 'poor little ...'.
- A positive attitude is shown by avoiding phrases like, 'Marlon suffers from sickle cell anaemia'. You can support Marlon when he feels very ill but he does not 'suffer' all the time, nor he is a 'victim of sickle cell disease' and this image is not helpful.
- Children should never be described by their disability or health condition, as if it were a personal label. Courtesy is shown by the difference between 'Katie has Down's syndrome' rather than 'Katie is our little Down's' or 'Tim is the epileptic'.

Tips for practice

Different channels of communication

Physically disabled children (as well as young people and adults) still experience discourteous and thoughtless people who blithely assume that visible physical disability means someone cannot communicate or hear. Some children will have disabilities that affect communication (see page 319) and some adjustments will be needed and appreciated. All the guidelines for courteous communication with children (see page 305) apply to interaction with disabled children.

- Children who have hearing loss need other people to face them, so that it is easier to see that they are being addressed, and can see any signs and lip read, if possible. Children with slight hearing loss or variable hearing (for example, from glue ear) benefit from the same attention.

Figure 18.4

Supported special play sessions can be a personal time



- Awareness of the needs of a child with hearing loss can alert a setting to noise levels in general and perhaps bad habits in adult communication (see page 356) that can be improved.
- Some children have physical difficulties in forming their words and making themselves understood. Apart from any specialist support, helpful adults are patient and attentive, since pressure to speak usually makes matters harder.
- Children with learning disabilities may need simpler language and shorter sentences spoken to them than their peers, and patience as they understand and reply.
- Adults should talk at a normal volume. Raising your voice or shouting do not make words any clearer and can distort them.
- Some children may use, or be learning to use, sign language. You are most likely to encounter Makaton, a system developed from British Sign Language (BSL) to focus on naming words and concepts most relevant to young children. Makaton is carefully structured so that children first learn the signs for basic needs and more complex ideas are introduced step by step. You sign and talk with a child, so other children in your setting or the family are involved.
- Other children are often ready to learn about communication with their disabled peers. Hearing children can be enthusiastic to learn to sign to a peer who is deaf. Sighted children can soon learn that they need to say their name to Susie who has visual loss until she can recognise everyone's voice. Children will then be pleased to announce, 'Susie knows me already!'

Activity (observation)

Children with physical or learning disabilities that affect spoken language communicate in different ways: gestures, facial and whole body expressions as well as learning to sign.

- Explain to the child's parents what you are doing and ask for their permission and experience of their child.
- Ask the child's permission, unless he or she is very young.
- Build up a record of notes and photographs of how a disabled child communicates without words.

You can observe any of the following:

- How does this child use sounds, perhaps a few words, facial expression or gestures to communicate feelings of happiness, puzzlement or frustration?
- When the child is playing with you or a friend how does he or she indicate 'my turn', 'do it again!' or 'enough now!'?
- How does this child get your attention when she or he wants to express wishes or indicate a question?
- Show parents the final project and if at all possible give them a copy.
- Share your findings and ideas about practice with your colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1b

Tips for practice

Many of the main features of good care of disabled children are identical to that for any child. Some additional issues arise for individual children but these do not change the whole pattern.

- At meal and snack times, communicate directly with children and ask them what they would like as you would for any child. Avoid talking about them as if they are invisible and redirect anyone who ignores the child with, 'Does Eric want carrots?'. Depending on the child, you might say, 'You can ask Eric himself' or show how you ask.
- Disabled children will tell you, in different ways, about the kind of help they would appreciate and which actions are not actually helpful from their point of view.
- If you attend and listen, you will be far more able to offer physical care and assistance that is courteous and enables the child to be as self reliant as possible.
- Good practice is to ask and indicate 'How would you like me to help?' rather than insisting on helping a child. Disabled children may be able to manage with more time, guidance if they want and perhaps some specialised equipment.
- Disabled children may still need help with personal care when their peers can manage in the toilet or feed themselves. A physical disability may mean that a child has greater difficulty becoming toilet trained, or may always have problems with continence. Older children will want privacy and a respectful approach offered by a key worker.

- Disabled children are put at risk of possible abuse if they are given the impression that many different people will attend to their physical needs and with scant attention to them as a person with feelings.
- Children with learning disabilities may take longer to manage skills and need that you break those down into finer stages. You can all be encouraging about what a child has managed, rather than what she cannot yet do.
- Finally, early years practitioners need to be careful to protect their back when lifting or helping some children to move. Sometimes you will need a colleague to help you support the weight of an older child.

Helping all children learn about illness and disability

You can help children understand that not everything is ‘catching’. You will want to encourage children in healthy behaviour and some of this guidance will highlight that coughs and colds can be passed on to other people. Children sometimes assume, not surprisingly, that health conditions can all be passed on to other people and they may also wonder about disabilities.

You need to take those opportunities that arise to explain that children are born with, or later develop, some health conditions and there is no way that these can be passed on. For instance, conversations with some children who have eczema have highlighted how their unhappiness has been worsened because other children are convinced eczema is some kind of ‘lurgy’ that passes with contact.

You encourage children to ask questions when they are curious but adults sometimes become uneasy when those questions are about serious illness or disability.

Tips for practice

- It is not fair to make a curious child feel awkward with ‘Ssh’ or saying, ‘It’s rude to stare’. Adults often make these comments because they feel uncomfortable, but children are not necessarily being rude.
- You can redirect a blunt question or comment like, ‘What’s wrong with her?’ or ‘He’s dribbling like a baby!’. Reply with a factual explanation like, ‘Angelica is having trouble breathing, so she’s using her inhaler’ or ‘David finds it hard to swallow; he’s not a baby. He has cerebral palsy’.
- You can ask parents, or an older child themselves about ways they would prefer you to name and explain a condition. It is not true to say, ‘David is just like you’ when he clearly is not.
- Work on simple but honest explanations like, ‘The part of David’s brain that sends messages to his muscles doesn’t work properly. That’s why he finds it hard to move where he wants.’
- You will often find useful ideas for explanation in free leaflets from the relevant specialist organisation, many of which are listed in this chapter.

Activity (observation)

Young children are learning; they do not know everything and they may believe that a condition like eczema or epilepsy can be passed on by touch. After all, you probably take care to show children how to use a tissue and not cough or sneeze in people's faces because of germs. Children need to learn that some conditions can be caught and some absolutely cannot be passed on to other people.

Open a file and take your time in gathering any comments or actions from children that show how they think of or understand illness and disability. Children in your setting, who have a disability or continuing health condition, may also contribute spontaneous comments that give you an insight into how they are treated. Consider the range of examples and write up:

- What you have learned about how children think at this age. You can make some links to material in other chapters of this book.
- The possible applications to daily practice with children. How might you extend their understanding through conversation, information books and stories and imaginative use of materials like the Persona Dolls (see page 215).

Share your ideas with colleagues through a short presentation of what you have learned, with special attention to the insights provided by the children themselves. Look together for applications to your daily practice.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1b LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Books, stories and illustrations

Two kinds of books are valuable as you help children to learn. These are:

- information books about specific disabilities or health conditions
- stories that have disabled or sick children (or young people and adults) as main characters in the story.

Information books are a good source of straightforward information and illustrations. Possibilities include:

- Nigel Snell's books in the Events series, published by Hamish Hamilton.
- The One World series, published by Franklin Watts, with a long list of titles, each beginning with '*I have ...*' and covering a wide range of disabilities and illness.
- Claire Llewellyn series '*The facts about ...*', with the topics arthritis, asthma, diabetes and epilepsy, published by Belitha Press.
- Some books for older children can be read in episodes with children who cannot yet read the book themselves. For example, Helen Young's story about living with epilepsy *What Difference does it Make Danny?* published by Fontana Young Lions.
- If you are unsuccessful in finding a book about a particular condition, then try the relevant specialist organisation. For example, the Down's Syndrome Association has a list of books suitable for explaining the condition to young children. Or try some of the mail order firms listed on page 672.

You can use information books as part of an explanation to children and some you will find give a sound base of information to you. However, you also need books that offer a story in which disabled or sick children are simply getting on with lives, being happy, bored or mischievous. Some possibilities include:

- Emily Hearn's series about Franny who is in a wheelchair. Some titles are published by Magi and some by the Women's Press.
- Sue Brearley's *Adventure Holiday* (A & C Black).
- Berniece Rabe *Where's Chimpy* (Albert Whitman 1988) – a book in which the main character has Down's Syndrome.
- *Boots for a Bridesmaid* and *Are we there yet?* by Verna Wilkins in which the child's parent is disabled (Tamarind tel: 020 8866 8808).

Finding out more

You will find more ideas as well as reviews of books in Kathy Saunders (2000) *Happy ever Afters: A storybook guide to teaching children about disability* (Trentham Books). Kathy Saunders also offers some ideas about possible discussion that might follow a reading of the different story books to children.

Activity

Early years settings will have a wide range of illustrations in books or on your wall as well as the play materials. All children need to be able to see themselves in some of these illustrations, otherwise they are given the impression that they are effectively invisible. Look around your setting:

- Could disabled or sick children see themselves in any the illustrations or story books?
- If they can see children or adults like themselves, are they in everyday situations and not only specialist settings?
- Disabled children are certainly not always 'heroic' and 'brave'. Are there images of children who are happy, excited, serious, absorbed, perhaps sometimes sad or thoughtful and sometimes in a mess and up to mischief?
- Write up your findings.
- Share your impressions and ideas with colleagues. Explain any improvement you feel could be made to practice.

Key skills links: C3.3 LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Play materials and games

Disabled children do not all need specialist play materials or equipment and those who will benefit from additional play materials do not want these instead of everything else.

**Figure 18.5**

Materials designed originally for disabled children are inclusive play resources

A range of activities

A very great deal of ordinary play activities and equipment are completely suitable for disabled children.

- Some children may need some support to access materials, for instance to get a child's wheelchair or standing frame close enough.
- Children may need some guidance if they have learning disabilities and perhaps your awareness that they do not yet have the understanding about risk that their peers have gained.
- Otherwise disabled children enjoy painting, sand and water play, books and dressing up just as much as their peers.
- Some modifications are minor, like providing materials on tables of different heights suitable for children or having some materials on the floor rather than a table top. Many young children prefer to work on the floor.
- Quiet areas in the garden and sensory areas are enjoyable for all children.
- Visual props to a story help a child who needs different forms of communication but the use of puppets, large gestures and suitable props enhance the story for everyone.
- Flexible ball and throwing games can allow a physically disabled child to join in, perhaps because everyone sits on the floor, but this adjustment still includes the other children.

Many of the materials marketed for disabled children are truly inclusive. Soft play items or mats, soft construction pieces, large foam wedges and shapes and ball pools were developed for disabled children. But you will soon see that all the children enjoy these materials. Disabled children have a more enjoyable time when they can play with other children. It can be very boring to be restricted to 'special' equipment and older disabled children will be insulted if they are limited to play materials designed for younger children, perhaps on the grounds that these are safer or easier to handle.

Special programmes

Some children will have supportive programmes for their disability or health condition, for instance: speech therapy, physiotherapy and directed physical exercises or a graded learning programme. Some children in your setting may have an Individual Education Plan (see page 530). Special programmes need to be a happy part of the rest of a child's day and not feel like a chore or be something that restricts choice and interrupts their conversations with friends. It is a question of balance and keeping activities as enjoyable as possible with the companionship of the adult who is undertaking the special work.

Certainly disabled children will not benefit from an over-organised and serious day. They should never feel like the object of a special educational or physical programme. Children need enjoyable times, the company of other children and opportunities just to mess about without feeling oppressed by targets. If you use your observational skills, then you will be able to notice and write up as disabled children learn and practise, just as you can with any child.

Children who are ill or in hospital

This section covers the general issues in good practice with children and families when the child has chronic ill health or a condition that requires special attention or care. The facts and suggestions here will provide a sound basis for care and working in an inclusive way with children in your setting. It will then be your responsibility as an early years practitioner to seek further information and advice at such time as you work with an individual child who has any of these conditions.

Awareness of health needs

Disabled children may have related health needs that you need to understand, some of which have been mentioned within this chapter.

- Children with continuing health conditions may be especially vulnerable to infection. In partnership with their parents, you need to understand what kind of care and attention the children need.
- Such knowledge will help you to keep children as healthy as possible without over-protecting them and reducing their enjoyment of childhood.
- This balance can be difficult to maintain sometimes and regular communication with parents, colleagues and any other involved professionals is essential.
- It is equally important to listen to what the children themselves tell you about how they feel.

Medication

Some children may be on regular medication (see page 525). Some children may have medication or a health aid like an inhaler, that must be easily available in an emergency. A child's inhaler will be no use locked safely in a cupboard if she has an asthma attack at the other end of the building in a large primary school.

Physiotherapy

Some children may need regular physiotherapy to work their muscles. Children with cystic fibrosis need this help to keep their lungs clear. Your role may be to

welcome a physiotherapist who visits the child in your setting. But often it is possible for early years practitioners, like parents, to learn the appropriate exercises for a child.

Vulnerable children

Some children may be generally prone to particular kinds of infection or you need to monitor their condition. Children with sickle cell anaemia can get very sick from ordinary infections and they need to be kept warm, especially in cold, damp weather. Children who have diabetes need a carefully balanced diet and regular meals. It will be their family who handles the need for insulin injections but you need to monitor food in a discreet way.

In partnership with parents you need to understand serious warning signs for this child as well as what to do in an emergency. What does a sickle cell crisis look like for Marlon? Is there any warning just before Angelica has an asthma attack or Tim fits? Under what circumstances should you call parents to the setting?

Time in hospital

Some children will have to spend time in hospital and this experience is not only unpleasant at the time but it disrupts a normal childhood. You can help in your setting when you have empathy for the child; try to understand the experience through her eyes.

- It is unpleasant to feel ill and some children are very sick indeed. Their medication and medical procedures may cause them further distress, discomfort or pain.
- Children stuck in hospital or ill at home can also become bored and fed up. Talk with parents and make contact with the hospital play staff where the child stays. Together you can promote continuity in a child's life and reassure him that he is not forgotten when he spends time elsewhere.

Activity

- Hospital play staff are invaluable in helping children to be more happily occupied and continue to learn. They are also experienced in using play to support children through unpleasant procedures or operations.
- Make contact with your nearest hospital and arrange to visit the play staff. Write up a brief report on what you learn covering:
 - The range of play activities and events that the play team use with children.
 - Different ways that they support children who are in bed and those able to move around.
 - What play techniques the team use to help children prepare for medical procedures or support them in anxieties about what will happen.
 - Appropriate ways that you can apply what you have learned in your own setting.

Key skills links: C3.3 LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

- Being ill at home or repeated periods in hospital has a disruptive effect on children's friendships. It may be hard to make close friends in the first place or pick up where they left off before this bout of illness. An early years team can help, in partnership with parents, by organising continued contact between friends: messages and drawings, telephone calls and emails if possible.
- Illness interrupts the continuity of children's learning and their education when they start school. Again you can work with families to minimise the disruption as far as possible. Children who are extremely sick will have no energy left for play and learning activities. But there will be a point when they become bored but are not yet well enough to return to your setting. In partnership with parents, you could let the family know what projects are ongoing and the child may be able to do some exploration at home.

Finding out more

Action for Sick Children is a source of publications, information and advice for families whose children are spending time in hospital. Contact them at 300 Kingston Road, Wimbledon Chase, London SW20 8LX tel: 020 8542 4848 email: enquiries@actionforsickchildren.org website: www.actionforsickchildren.org

For information about the work of hospital play specialists send a large sae to the National Association of Hospital Play Staff, Fladgate, Forty Green, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire HP9 1XS or access the website: www.nahps.org.uk

Tips for practice

Children need emotional support as well as your attention to their physical care. They need to see themselves as children rather than through the lense of their illness and this perspective can be hard.

You can help in the following ways, all of which should be in partnership with the child's parent(s):

- Children may feel embarrassed about their symptoms or their need for special medication.
- Or they may not, of course, especially if their parents have managed to keep a positive outlook and enable their son or daughter to play and have as normal a childhood as possible.
- You can talk and play with the child with the aim of helping her to see herself as separate from her illness. This outlook is summed up by the attitude of, 'I'm Saima and I have diabetes' rather than 'I am a diabetic'.
- Give some thought to how you welcome and introduce a child to the group. Is the child's condition such that it would make sense to say something in advance?
- Consider what you tell and explain to the other children or whether you wait for their questions. Talk over with parents, and the child herself if possible, how they would like you to explain.

- Other children in the group will be curious and they are not being rude if they ask direct questions. Your approach needs to be honest and straightforward. You can show them by your behaviour how to ask questions politely and address them to the child herself.
- If they are given information and helped to look through another child's eyes, young children can be suitably matter of fact about another child with a continuing health condition or a disability.

Specific support for health and safety of children

Some children will need very specific support, either on a daily basis or in the event of an emergency. This section gives basic information for some conditions and in all cases you would need to talk with parents about their child, liaise with other involved professionals and be ready to learn more as necessary.

Cystic fibrosis

Children with cystic fibrosis vary considerably: some can manage more physical exercise than others and some need intensive, daily physiotherapy. Cystic fibrosis disrupts digestion because it blocks the pancreatic gland whose task is to help absorb fats and starch. Consequently, these nutrients pass straight through a child's body and he or she can fail to thrive. Children need to take medication that substitutes for the pancreatic gland and some need careful monitoring of their diet.

Epileptic seizures

Parents should tell you if their child has seizures and how you should handle these. You need to know if there is any pattern to an individual child's seizure, including how long they usually last. What follows is very general advice.

Children do sometimes drift off in their mind and seem inattentive but you should share with a parent if your observations suggest that a child goes vague on a regular basis. It is possible that she is experiencing absence seizures. If the parent has also noticed this pattern or is willing to accept your concern, then the family should consult their GP.

If a child has a tonic clonic seizure, your calm support is crucial for her safety and the anxiety of the other children.

- You cannot stop a seizure or shorten it.
- Remain calm and loosen any tight clothing around a child's neck.
- Do not move a child unless her location puts her in danger, for instance, she has collapsed in the middle of a road.
- Ensure the child cannot hurt herself or others. Move objects out of her way or cover sharp edges with padding like a blanket.
- You can aid breathing by putting the child on her side if she has fallen. Definitely do not put your fingers in her mouth or try to force anything between her jaws.
- Stay with the child and keep her safe.
- When she has emerged from the seizure, make sure she is comfortable and keep her company.
- Children sometimes lose bladder or bowel control during a seizure and a child who is toilet trained may be distressed by the accident. Be sensitive

and help children to deal with the consequences when they are fully recovered.

- Call her parents to let them know what has happened and to come to take the child home.

There is no need to call a doctor or ambulance if the seizure follows the pattern that is normal for this child. It becomes an emergency if:

- this is the child's first seizure
- a tonic clonic seizure lasts more than about three minutes
- a child starts another seizure a few minutes after the first
- the child is badly injured during the seizure
- the child does not come properly awake after about fifteen minutes.

Asthma

Asthma is the most common chronic medical disorder of childhood. Some children have only mild attacks but such experiences can still be distressing for them.

You need a conversation with the child's parents to understand fully how asthma affects this child:

- What are the signs that he is about to have an asthma attack?
- The severity of symptoms vary but tend to include coughing or wheezing, increased difficulty in breathing, feeling that the chest is tight and loss of colour compared with how the child usually looks.
- Are there some circumstances that make an attack more likely? Some children are more at risk after physical exercise or at night.
- Some children have an allergic reaction to some foods which then brings on an asthma attack. Parents might explain that they have learned to keep eggs or chocolate out of their child's diet.

Asthma is not curable but medication can help children and adults to cope with the condition. An inhaler is used to send appropriate drugs directly into the lungs and these can be used as a preventative or to relieve the symptoms of an attack. If children need to take medication in a preventative way then you need to understand what they do, or you do for them, and when during the day.

Understand what you should do if children have an asthma attack.

- The most useful adult behaviour will be to keep calm and reassure the child. The last thing a frightened child needs is an adult in a panic.
- Children will have an inhaler, but you will have to help a young child in their use. Ensure that parents have shown you what to do.
- Help a child to sit in the best position to breathe: this will be upright and probably leaning forward slightly. Lying down is less safe.
- Loosen any tight clothing.
- Stay close to the child but do not put an arm around her since this can feel constricting.
- Encourage the child to use her inhaler and to take slow and calm breaths.

If the attack is relatively minor then there may be no need to contact the child's parent, although you should of course say what happened when you hand over responsibility later. A child who has been worn out by a serious attack in an early years setting may be better at home, so you should then contact the parent(s).



On the majority of occasions a child will emerge from the asthma attack. But this is a serious condition; some children and adults have died as the result of a severe asthma attack. Understand the danger signs that mean you should call an ambulance for the child.

- The inhaler should work in about 5–10 minutes. Call an ambulance if the inhaler does not seem to bring relief. Encourage the child to continue to use the inhaler while you wait for medical help.
- Get help if the child is very distressed or unable to talk, or is exhausted.

Sickle cell disease

Parents should tell you if their child has sickle cell anaemia and explain how you recognise the signs of a crisis in their child. Children will be more vulnerable to minor infections and fevers, so it is important that you tell the parents swiftly about any infection sweeping through your setting. It is, of course, important that children with sickle cell anaemia are enabled to play and be with their friends. However, they will need extra care to keep them warm and should probably avoid playing out in cold and damp weather. They need to drink plenty, since dehydration or vigorous exercise may trigger a crisis.

Useful notes are very practical. For instance, the notes of Marlon who has sickle cell disease may remind the team that:

- Marlon needs to be given an indoor activity when the weather is cold or damp.
- He needs to be encouraged to drink, especially if he has been running about.
- It is crucial to call Mr or Mrs Gray immediately if Marlon complains of abdominal or chest pain, headache or stiffness in his neck and if he gets drowsy.

Tips for practice

Activity

One

- In your setting, look at the personal notes of a child who has a specific health condition.
- In what ways do the records help his or her carers to attend to the special needs of this child?

Two

If possible, ask to be part of the home visit or first meeting with a family whose child will join your setting and who has a disability or health condition.

- With the permission of the parent, make notes of the questions that are helpful for practitioners to ask.
- What kinds of information do parents think it important to communicate?

- And what does the child want to add, if he or she is old enough to join the conversation?

Write up your work and share with colleagues, paying attention to confidentiality.

Key skills links: C3.3 LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Serious illness and bereavement

Some conditions are life threatening and you may experience the loss of a child who has attended your setting. You can of course experience bereavement as the result of an unexpected serious illness or a fatal accident involving a child.

As hard as you may find the experience, it is better to be honest with the other children in your setting. Children become upset and very confused when adults avoid talking about the death of someone familiar, or if adults actually lie.

- Tell the children what has happened and speak with them in a group at a quiet time. Explain simply and answer any questions they want to ask now or later.
- Children may need reassurance that all disabled children do not die and that children and adults can recover from serious illness or accidents.
- Share your sadness at the loss of a child and let children express their feelings if they wish.
- There is no need to tidy up everything belonging to or made by the child who has died. Why not leave her paintings on display until her parents would like them or be ready to look at the child in photographs on the display board.
- Look carefully for ways to support children to understand loss with books or puppet play as well as supported conversation.
- See if the children would like to send a message in words or pictures to the child's family.

Activity

Your own emotions are involved in the loss of a child whom you know. It can be hard to think straight at the time along with what you will feel and supporting the other children in your group. Take the opportunity to build a resource of material now. You can gather together within one folder:

- Useful addresses and contact details. This chapter will give you a good start.
- Informative books or leaflets for adults who are supporting children as well as dealing with their own sense of loss.
- Books specifically for children about serious illness, the death of a friend or relative.

Prepare a short presentation that you can give to colleagues or fellow students. What are the main good practice themes for a caring and honest approach to children?

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1b

Activity

Find out more to support your work with children and families under times of distress or bereavement. You can contact these organisations.

- 1 ACT, Orchard House, Orchard Lane, Bristol BS1 5DT tel: 0117 922 1556 email: info@act.org.uk website: www.act.org.uk (ACT stands for Association for Children with Life-threatening or Terminal Conditions and their families.)
- 2 Cruse Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR tel: 020 8940 4818 (general), helpline 0870 167 1677 website: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk
 - Use the website first and organise your questions or requests.
 - Write up your findings and present to colleagues, with the aim of identifying how you can all learn and improve practice in this sensitive area.

Key skills links: IT3.1–3

Further resources

- Dickins, Mary and Denziloe, Judy (1998) *All Together: How to create inclusive services for disabled children and their families* National Early Years Network.
- Drifte, Collette (2001) *Special Needs in Early Years Settings: A guide for practitioners* David Fulton Publishers.
- Jeffree, Dorothy and Cheseldine, Sally (1984) *Let's Join In* Souvenir Press.
- Jeffree, Dorothy and McConkey, Roy (1993) *Let Me Play* Souvenir Press.
- Lansdown, Richard (1996) *Children in Hospital: A guide for families and carers* Oxford University Press.
- Lindon, Jennie (1998) *Equal Opportunities in Practice* Hodder and Stoughton.
- Mason, Micheline (1993) *Inclusion, the Way Forward: A guide to integration for young disabled children* National Early Years Network.

Finding out more

It would be unrealistic for you to aim to know about every possible health condition or disability that you might encounter within your entire career. Furthermore, new research as well as reviews of practice can often mean that the information and advice of ten or even five years ago is overtaken.

You cannot know everything, but you should understand how to find out about a health condition or disability when you need this information, for yourself or to support a parent. There are several ways to be a good detective in your role as an early years practitioner:

- You have the details of many organisations given in this chapter. There are many more since there is a support and information organisation for just about every health condition or disability, even those that are rare.

- Open a file and keep carefully any information that you gain from advice lines, leaflets or that you download from websites.
- If you have a specific search, then some of the more general organisations working in the area of disability and continuing health conditions may be able to direct your search. Some examples follow.

Action for Sick Children, 300 Kingston Road, Wimbledon Chase, London SW20 8LX tel: 020 8542 4848 email: enquiries@actionforsickchildren.org website: www.actionforsickchildren.org

British Institute of Learning Disabilities, Wolverhampton Road (no number is needed), Kidderminster, Worcestershire DY10 3PP website: www.bild.org.uk

Council for Disabled Children, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE tel: 020 7843 6061 email: cdc@ncb.org.uk website: www.ncb.org.uk/cdc.htm

MENCAP, 123 Golden Lane, London EC1Y 0RT tel: 020 7454 0454 or 020 7696 5593/5584 (information department) email: info@mencap.org.uk website: www.mencap.org.uk Mencap have copies of inventories of information and can direct your search in useful directions. For instance they hold the Contact-a-Family material and may be able to identify a support group for even rare syndromes.

These organisations are committed to promoting enjoyable play and leisure for disabled children and young people.

Action for Leisure, c/o Warwickshire College, Moreton Morrell Centre, Moreton Morrell, Warwickshire CV32 9BL tel: 01926 650195 email: john@actionforleisure.org.uk website: www.actionforleisure.org.uk

Kidsactive has a focus on adventure play: Pryor's Bank, Bishop's Park, London SW6 3LA tel: 020 7731 1435 email: KTIS@kidsactive.org.uk website: www.kidsactive.org.uk

Progress check

- 1 Give one example each of a physical disability, a learning disability, a condition that would affect a child's social interaction and a continuing health condition.
- 2 Explain three broad causes of disability in early childhood.
- 3 Give three reasons for the importance of partnership with parents of a child with a disability.
- 4 Explain briefly the advantages of an inclusive approach for children with a disability and for their fully-abled peers.
- 5 Suggest three general ways in which you could support a child who has difficulties in social interaction and play with peers.
- 6 Describe three ways in which fully-abled children can support and understand peers who are disabled.
- 7 Suggest three ways in which early years practitioners can be supportive of children who spend time in hospital.

19

Child protection in the early years

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand what is meant by child protection and the legal requirements that underpin good practice
- explain and follow an appropriate role in child protection for an early years practitioner
- recognise signs in children's development or behaviour that should concern you and could indicate possible abuse
- offer appropriate support to children and families.

Introduction

This chapter covers the details of what you need to know in order to fulfil your role as an early years practitioner supporting child protection. You will find an explanation of the child protection system as a whole and the legislation that underpins it. Your role is to work with other professionals within the local child protection network, understanding your valuable contribution and understanding the role of others. A section then explains how you need to be aware of different types of abuse and what could be possible signs that a child is at risk from or is experiencing abusive treatment. The final section of the chapter explains how you can support children and families within your role.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 9, 10, 11

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: E2

Level 3: C15, P2, M6

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 4



Understanding child protection

The current approach to child protection in the UK has developed over several decades and has several equally important strands. The following points have been established.

- Legislation and guidance for good practice is required because children need to be protected; child abuse is more than a few isolated incidents.
- Children could be abused, and fail to be protected, in different ways: through physical abuse, neglect of their care and well being, emotional abuse and sexual abuse.
- Adults, parents or other carers, are responsible and can be held accountable for how they treat children and young people. There are limits to family privacy or professional judgement about what is an appropriate way to treat children.

Key term

Child abuse

a pattern of ill-treatment of a child or persistent failure to provide appropriate protection and care for children

In broad terms, **child abuse** means:

- Doing something to a child that should not be done, actions that will injure them physically, distress them deeply emotionally or seriously disrupt their natural development.
- Failing as a responsible adult to do something for a child that should be done, for the sake of the child's well being, safety or continued positive development.

Who are the abusers?

Legislation and guidance is needed because children are most likely to be abused by people who are well known to them.

What about strangers?

The idea that 'stranger danger' is a major issue in **child protection** has arisen from media attention to a very small number of cases of child abduction.

Sarah Payne was abducted in July 2000 and her murderer convicted in December 2001. Both events had massive media coverage and there is no doubt that her family deserve heartfelt sympathy for their loss. But families as a whole are not helped by the media message that predatory strangers are on the increase and pose the greatest threat to children's well being. Between June and November 2000 about 50 children in the UK were murdered or died under suspicious circumstances, mainly involving their family or close circle. Few of those children gained more than a brief mention in the media, perhaps only in their local newspapers.

The number of children killed deliberately by total strangers in the UK has rarely risen above double figures (10) annually over the last couple of decades. The vast majority of strangers who kill or seriously injure children are driving a vehicle. Children are most likely to be deliberately hurt, and can only be neglected, by adults or young people who are family, friends or in a position of trust and professional responsibility for a child.

Abusers come from all parts of society

You need to be fully aware that women abuse children as much as men do. Some discussion of child protection has suggested that men are more likely abusers,

Key term

Child protection

preventative systems and direct action to ensure the well being of children and young people and to take direct action to ensure their future health and development

but this is wrong and unjust. The only exception has been that sexual abuse of children has more often been perpetrated by men. However, women have also been known to abuse children sexually. Women are as likely as men to perpetrate other forms of abuse and neglect. So, any assumption that children will be fully protected by restricting their contact with men is sadly misplaced (see page 599).

The more likely abuser is an adult, but young people (under 18s) have abused children who are known to them or for whom they are temporarily responsible. Actions between children, that would be viewed as abusive if done by an adult, will be handled through behaviour and anti-bullying policies in a school or early years setting.

A greater awareness of child abuse has demonstrated that individual abusers can be found in every social class, ethnic, cultural and religious groups. As well as relatives or friends, child abusers have been identified in professions who have contact with children, such as youth workers, social workers in residential homes, day care and educational staff, clergy and other religious leaders from different faiths and people who coach children in sports activities.

Activity

Everyone has some assumptions about abuse of children, likely abusers and abusive situations. Unless you air and discuss these beliefs, they cannot be checked and challenged.

Consider the following statements, either on your own, or preferably with colleagues. For each statement, please think and talk around:

- Is this statement true or false – can you really say either way?
 - How do you think this idea has arisen? What could make people convinced it is true (or perhaps untrue)?
- 1 Child neglect happens in inner city areas with lots of problems; you wouldn't find it in a nice neighbourhood like ours.
 - 2 Lone parents are more likely to abuse their children; two parent families don't have the same level of stress.
 - 3 Men shouldn't work with young children; it's right to be suspicious of anyone who wants to do that kind of job.
 - 4 You can be confident about people with religious faith, like nuns or priests; they couldn't abuse children.
 - 5 Disabled children are safe; nobody would ever be so cruel as to abuse them.
 - 6 Bullying has always been part of children's lives; they just have to learn to live with it. Children are naturally cruel to each other.
 - 7 Sexual abuse doesn't hurt children; it's not like being beaten up.
 - 8 You really have to go with what the adults say. Children can't tell the difference between facts and fantasy and they tell lies very easily.
 - 9 A mother would always know when her child is being abused by her own partner.
 - 10 Abused children would certainly want to leave their family. So if they want to stay, then they can't be abused, can they?

Key skills links: C3.1a

To think about

Assumptions and beliefs about child abuse are built by what you hear locally or on television and read in the newspapers.

- In the nature of 'news', you will hear about less likely events and what is considered newsworthy.
- So stranger danger gets more coverage than children hurt by people they know.
- Child protection cases that go badly wrong get more coverage than the successful work of protecting children. Of course, successful child protection remains confidential, whereas seriously bad practice becomes public.

How common is child abuse?

It is important that you keep child abuse in proportion. Good practice is that you should be aware and understand your role in the local child protection system. However, most children are not abused.

One way of getting a sense of proportion is to look at the numbers of children who are on the child protection register. Now, not all children who are at risk of abuse will be on the register (see page 557) if it is judged that family support will protect children and improve the situation. Over the year 1999–2000 there were 30,300 children on the child protection register in England. This figure represents 0.27 per cent of the child population younger than 18 years of age. The proportions are similar for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, whose total child populations are lower.

Legislation to protect children

During the 1990s new legislation was passed in the UK to provide a more effective framework for the care and protection of children. The relevant laws are:

- the Children Act 1989; applies to England and Wales
- the Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

Each of these laws are primary legislation (see page 26) so they do not explain how child protection works in daily practice. The laws are supported by guidance issued by national government departments. Local area child protection committees, who bring together key professionals, are expected to draft specific local guidance documents.

These laws have similar content and guiding principles (see page 27), but they operate within the different national systems of law and social services. Child protection procedures are very similar across the UK, including the key role of social workers, the use of case conferences and the operation of the child protection register. All countries in the UK also have a system of police checks on anyone who applies to work with children and a register of named people whose behaviour has made them unsuitable to be in close contact with children.



Activity

The local child protection guidelines are a public document and you should know what they look like. Your options are:

- If you are currently working in an early years setting or on placement, then ask if the setting has a copy.
- Otherwise contact your local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, or the Pre-School Advisory Group if you work in Northern Ireland, and enlist their help to find the local guidelines.
- Take a good look through the guidelines so that you get a sense of what is covered.
- To what extent are early years settings are mentioned? Some local guidelines are better than others at recognising the importance of early years practitioners in a fully rounded approach to child protection.
- Make notes and present to your colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.2 C3.1b C3.3

Child protection procedures

Figure 19.1 outlines the necessary pattern of steps in child protection in the UK. The exact detail of your local procedures may look slightly different but the process has been laid down in the legislation.

Step 1: Initial concern and referral

The child protection process is started when someone expresses concern about the welfare and well being of a child. This concern may be raised by a professional, including an early years practitioner like yourself, by a relative or neighbour or because a social worker is already involved with the family.

A concern that raises possible child abuse might be made by contacting the local social services department, the police child protection unit or the local NSPCC. You need to be clear as an early years practitioner to whom you should first speak in your setting (see page 560).

Step 2: Initial inquiries and strategy

The aim in child protection is that concerns are checked carefully and that any action is sufficient but not excessive. Despite the fears of some parents and practitioners, the first step in child protection is rarely to take children away from their family.

The strategy meeting involves professionals who know the family and the group weighs up the information to decide whether to go further in the child protection process. There are three main possibilities at this stage:

- 1 On the basis of the information available, it is decided that there are no child protection concerns. It may be suggested that the family would benefit from support and this option can be taken at any point (see Figure 19.1).
- 2 There are child protection concerns and detailed plans are made for an investigation and assessment of the child and family.
- 3 The child or children in a family are judged to be at serious risk and emergency legal steps will be taken to protect them.



Figure 19.1 Steps in the process of child protection

The police are concerned with evidence and possible prosecution, so their role is different from other professionals. The police cease to be involved in a child protection case for two reasons.

- There is no crime involved, for instance emotional abuse, however severe, is not a crime.
- There is insufficient evidence to ensure prosecution.

It is important to understand that considerable work can be done in child protection without there being any possibility of prosecuting an alleged abuser.

Step 3: Investigation and assessment

A full investigation is now undertaken to gather all the facts of the situation and to identify whether there are grounds to consider that the child is likely to suffer significant harm and from what sources.

Good practice is that any investigation must be child-centred and any interviews or examinations undertaken with the child's feelings to the fore. Parents

also have to be involved and informed, although if parents are uncooperative it is possible to take action to insist on an assessment of the child.

Step 4: The child protection conference

This conference is led by a social worker and brings together any professionals with relevant information to share and the family itself. As an involved early years practitioner your information and observations could be valuable at this point.

The point of the conference is to decide whether to place the child's name on the local child protection register. Children can only be placed on the register if the evidence shows that the child has been abused, or there is good reason to suppose the child has been at risk of abuse, and the risk still exists. When a child's name is added to the register, then the risk to them must be categorised under one, or more, of the four types: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse or emotional abuse.

After the child's name is placed on the register, then a core group must be formed and a key worker identified. A child protection plan must be developed specifically for this child and a more detailed assessment will now be organised. Part of the plan then has to be decisions about how to protect the child and support the family.

Step 5: Meetings of the core group

The core group will meet regularly to bring together a small number of professionals directly involved with the family. The parents should also be involved.

The core group has to ensure that the child protection plan, including any developmental or medical assessment of the child, is now undertaken.

Step 6: Reviews

Children do not just remain on the child protection register for ever. Every six months there must be a review, the aim of which is to assess whether the child's name should remain on the register.

If the review decides that the child's name will be taken off the register, work can continue with the child and family, involving whichever professionals are appropriate. The child and family may still need help, but the child is judged no longer to be at risk.

The role of early years practitioners

You need to understand the bigger picture of how the child protection system works as a whole, in order to grasp your role as an early years practitioner.

The importance of early years practitioners

Early years settings can have a very important part to play in child protection:

- You see children on a regular basis and your setting will keep records that help you to track progress but also any significant changes in a child.
- You get to know the children as individuals and you develop a friendly working relationship with the child's parent(s) and sometimes also other members of the family.
- Your growing experience and knowledge of child development will help you to make sense of a child's communication, play and general behaviour.

Of course, your role is within a broader network of child protection and it is other professionals, notably social workers, who would lead any child protection

investigation. But never underestimate the potential importance of your contribution.

Child protection is supported by your skills

It may at first seem daunting to contemplate your role within child protection. It is a serious matter, but your contribution is fully supported by all the other skills you learn and your knowledge as an early years practitioner.

The good practice you learn and continue to develop in all the other aspects of your work are precisely what is needed to support your role in child protection. These related skill areas include the following.

- Good general practice in communication with children, a habit of attentiveness to their interests and concerns (see page 305).
- A respectful approach to the care needs of young children and disabled children who continue to need this support (see page 45).
- Good communication between the adults, within the team in an early years setting (see page 600).
- Descriptive written records of all children that can track progress and changes in behaviour, combined with your skills of observation, both informal and more structured (see page 461).
- Your skills of observation are important because child abuse often shows up in patterns of a child's experiences, behaviour or injuries. Some single events can be very significant, but patterns are more often what catch your attention and arouse concern.
- Partnership with parents that establishes as far as possible a friendly working relationship that can make raising the tougher issues possible (see page 621).
- A willingness to make links with other local professionals, understanding what they do and how their work relates to your own, but retaining self respect for your own professional skills (see page 612).

Tips for practice

You will continue to learn and extend your skills relating to child protection. Part of your developing good practice is to put to one side any misleading or unrealistic assumptions about abuse or abusers.

- There are no simple predictions about who is likely or unlikely to abuse children.
- Some parents in 'nice' homes and 'nice' areas sometimes attack or neglect their children. Some parents in 'rough' estates and under serious stress still manage to take very good care of their children.
- Most abusers are *not* men any more than most men are abusers. It is an unjust assumption that a male practitioner, or a father as primary carer, should be more carefully watched. Such an approach could also put children at risk if practitioners refuse to believe that a female practitioner or mother could abuse.

Clear policy and procedures

All early years settings should have a clear policy on child protection that explains what you should do if you are concerned. Figure 19.1 offers some guidance of the general steps and you would need to discuss appropriate action with your manager.



In the same ways as any other policy and set of procedures, the guidance on child protection in your setting should be drafted so that it is easily consulted by all the team. Your policy and the obligations of the setting should also be communicated in a courteous way to parents when they join the setting. The procedures should be seen to work both ways: that parents can express concerns to you about their child's experience in your setting as well as your awareness of their child's continued well being.

The child protection procedures in your early years or school setting should lay out clearly:

- The responsibility of all the team to protect children through their own good practice and early response to any concerns.
- The importance of consulting within the team, especially with your senior. Nobody, however experienced, should act on their own in child protection.
- The importance of speaking with parents (see page 579). There would have to be very compelling reasons not to talk with parents if you have a concern.
- The ways in which an early years practitioner might be involved and contribute to a child protection investigation and how you will be supported by the team in this work.
- Good practice in supporting a child, and parent, who is involved in the child protection process.
- The duties of the setting for child protection, including the professional balance between confidentiality and the obligation to pass on concerns.
- Clear guidance with details of who should be consulted locally when you have a child protection concern (names and contact details).
- A child protection policy should also cover how you ensure appropriate security in your setting and checks on new staff and volunteers.
- There should also be clear procedures for dealing with concerns about team members, expressed by parents or colleagues.

Procedures can support your work in child protection but there are no simple answers in this area of work. Even experienced professionals in child protection still have to make careful judgements and weigh up the information. A very experienced social worker will not know the child as well as you do and will need the input of the setting and your knowledge of child development and behaviour.

Activity

- Ask to read the child protection policy and procedures of your setting.
- Take some of the practical points raised in this section. Can you follow how you would be expected to behave in your setting? Note down any questions and discuss uncertain areas with your senior.
- Share what you have learned with your colleagues in a student group, including any significant differences between the procedures you have read for different individual settings or types of early years setting.

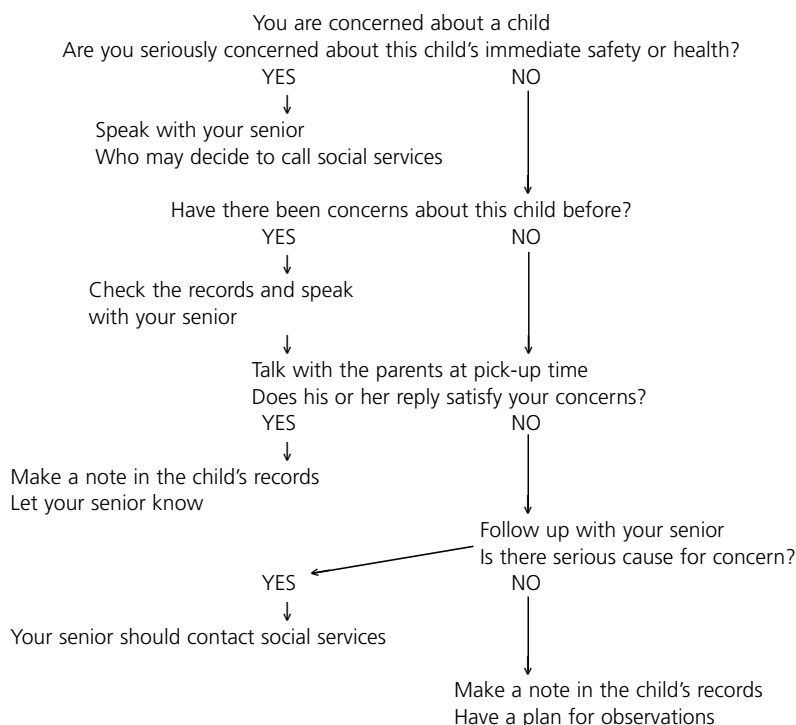
Key skills links: C3.1a

Ways you may be involved in child protection

Early years practitioners have an important role in child protection.

- You or your colleagues might be the first to raise concerns about a child through awareness of the normal range of development and behaviour.
- A child, parent or other carer might disclose to you information relevant to child protection.
- You might be contacted by a social worker because concerns have been raised elsewhere about a child for whom you are responsible.
- You will contribute valuable observations but no early years practitioner, however senior, will undertake an investigation, that is the social worker's role.
- When a child is on the local child protection register then your setting may be asked to monitor this child's attendance and development.
- A child's key worker could present reports at a case conference or later review of the case.
- Support work with the child in an early years setting may be part of the child protection plan. Unless you have additional experience, your support of the child would be through the daily opportunities of play and friendly communication.

It can be helpful to see a simple plan of action to follow if you are concerned. You could use this draft to reach an appropriate plan for your own setting.



Note: This chart is modified from the one in Lindon *Child Protection and Early Years Work*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1998.

Figure 19.2 Possible procedure map for an early years setting

When you work on your own

Working as a nanny

Many early years practitioners spend some part of their career working with families as a nanny. Without a doubt, you are in a different position regarding child protection if you work on your own. You will not have colleagues or a senior with whom to discuss your concerns. Unless you are very certain of professional confidentiality, it will not be appropriate to talk with another nanny, a friend or your partner.

Obviously much will depend on the nature of your concerns:

- In the same way as you would in an early years setting, you need to draw on your skills as a practitioner. Observe the child or children and make sense of what you see and hear against normal range child development.
- It may feel easier to raise the issue with the parent(s), if your concerns are aroused about someone outside the family, perhaps a neighbour or the person who runs the gym club to which you take the children.
- If your concerns are about immediate members of the family, you may want to talk first with an uninvolved professional. Try your local early years department (different areas use varied names) or look for a local NSPCC helpline. Some duty social workers may be willing to have a conversation to help; it will depend a lot on their work load.
- Your responsibility for the children will mean that talking with the parent(s) will become essential soon. Look at page 579 for some of the opening remarks that are suggested.

Much will then depend on the parent's reaction. So try not to anticipate what this may be, at the time or after he or she has had chance to reflect. When parents are able to place their child's welfare to the fore, they may be able to deal with the fact that you brought the situation to their notice. Your supportive relationship may offer very welcome support, if you are relating to the non-abusing parent or relative in a family abuse case, or if the abuser came from outside the family.

Unfortunately, it is very possible that your job will become untenable, if the parent cannot emotionally divide you from what you have had to reveal. If you have to leave your job and you are convinced the child protection concerns have not been resolved, then you should make contact with your local child protection system (see page 560).

Working as a childminder

If you run a business as a childminder, in your own home, you will work alone a great deal but you will have some connections with the local authority through the process of becoming a childminder. Your first step would still usually be to talk with a child's parents. However, if you are uncertain or very uneasy then you can contact the local early years department or local NSPCC helpline in the same way as suggested for nannies. If you are part of a childminding network then you can contact your network coordinator.

Causes for concern about children

You need to build your experience to recognise signs in children's development or behaviour that should concern you and could indicate possible abuse. This section explains the different kinds of child abuse and the possible signs.

There are four broad types of abusive experience for children and these have to be reflected in all local child protection systems:

- physical abuse
- neglect
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse.

Tips for practice

- You will sometimes see brief checklists that claim to list the warning signs of child abuse.
- Such checklists are unhelpful since there are too many 'if's' and 'maybe's' in the identification and assessment of child abuse.
- Many signs should concern you, but there are few that on their own would firmly point towards abuse.
- Any professional, however experienced in the child protection field, needs to draw on a sound knowledge of child development as well as gathering information about this individual child and family.

General signs that should concern you

Your awareness in relation to child protection should be an extension of your normal, good practice alertness to children: their communication, well being, overall health and behaviour. You do not need to develop a whole new skill area of observing for signs of abuse.

Your skills of observation and communication and your knowledge of child development are the very best foundation. Sometimes, you will observe children and be right to feel concern. A small amount of checking will reassure you, and your head of centre, that child protection is not an issue, but the child and family may need and appreciate help in other ways.

Situations that you should never ignore include the following:

- Unlikely accidents or patterns of injury – unlikely given the age, understanding and ability of the child.
- Unexplained developmental delay or regression in a child's skills or behaviour. Children may be distressed by events, but are not necessarily being abused.
- Unexplained and persistent illness or faltering growth in children (see page 569).
- Normally friendly children who seem very resistant to spending time with a particular adult, either in the setting or when someone in particular collects them at the end of the day or session.
- Behaviour patterns that are unusual for this age of child. Of course you can only make sense of such observations from a basis of knowledge of child development and the usual variations.
- Physical self-harm by children, persistent negative remarks about themselves or obsessive rituals such as hand washing.
- Children who are persistently cruel to animals. Younger children need to understand that animals can be hurt and they learn to be kind. Children who are abused may take out their pain and frustration in ill-treatment of vulnerable animals.

Children will sometimes communicate, by words and actions, that they are distressed, frightened or have come to believe that certain experiences are normal when an outside world would judge them to be abusive. Disclosure by children of an abusive experience is covered on page 576.

To think about

- Warning signs are *not* a two-way street and some simple checklists are seriously misleading (hence no lists in this chapter!).
- For instance, some children who have been physically abused are enmeshed in family secrecy and are reluctant to remove layers of clothing. Yet, such reluctance to undress should never be seen as likely 'evidence' of abuse.
- Experience with children will give several alternative reasons, for instance that the child has eczema and is self-conscious about his skin or that a young girl is from a family whose religious beliefs value modesty.
- In a similar way, bed wetting is sometimes on brief lists of signs of abuse. Children who are abused do sometimes respond by regressing in development, including bed wetting. But most children who wet the bed either have continued problems getting dry at night, or are reacting to emotional distress, but not abuse.

Physical abuse of children

Physical abuse is defined as the actual or likely physical injury to a child. Children can be physically abused through direct attack from their carer. However, it is also regarded as physical abuse when a child is put in danger or injured as a result of an adult's deliberate failure to protect them from injury or suffering. Concerned adults would make sense of an incident in the light of an individual child's age, understanding and any disabilities.

Children have been physically ill-treated in different ways. Hearing or reading about what some carers do to children can be distressing.

- It is regarded as physical abuse if adults attack children physically. Children have been hit, kicked, shoved or shaken hard. (See page 511 for the legal situation in the UK about hitting children.)
- Sometimes children fall, or are pushed, and sustain even greater damage as a result.
- Children have been bitten and deliberately burned or scalded.
- It is dangerous to shake any child, but babies are especially at risk because they have limited muscle control and a relatively heavy head compared with their body (see Figure 19.3).
- Sometimes children are not directly attacked but are deliberately poisoned with common household substances, alcohol, drugs or inappropriate medicines.

Signs that should concern you

The most likely warning signs of physical abuse are:

- injuries such as bruises, marks, scrapes and abrasions, especially when they appear on a regular basis or children are injured on a part of their body where it is less likely for someone to sustain an accidental injury

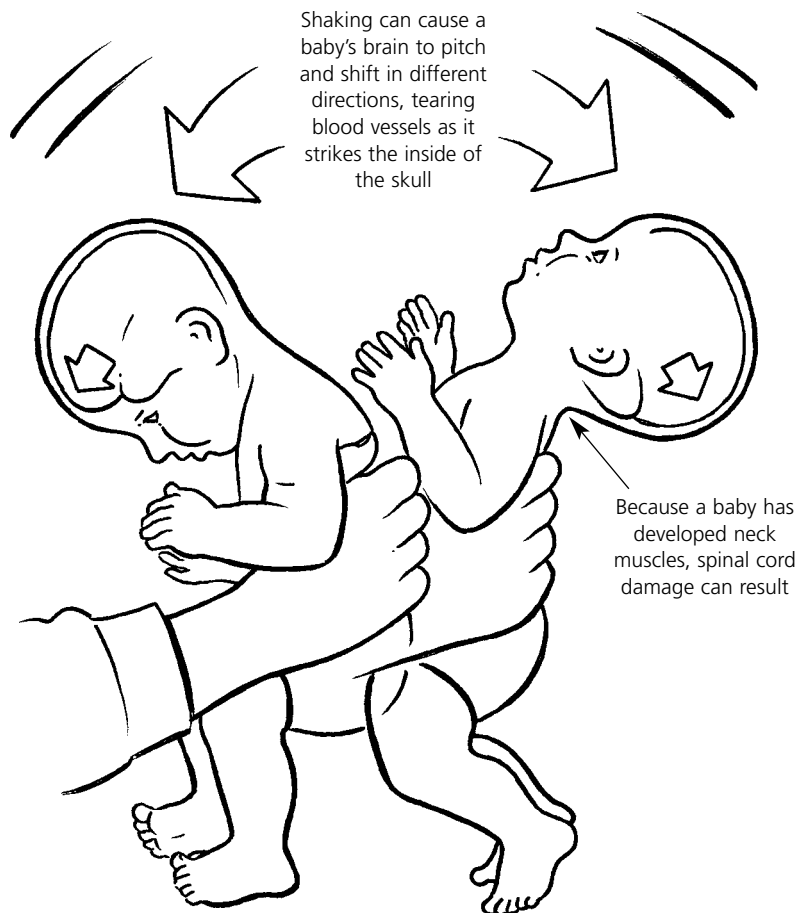
Key term

Physical abuse

non-accidental physical injury to a child or young person, caused either by direct attack or irresponsible actions highly likely to put a child in danger of injury

Figure 19.3

It is dangerous to shake babies



- when children continue to have perplexing illnesses or symptoms of illness
- a continuing pattern of accidents to a child for which the responsible adult(s) give no believable explanation.

Generally speaking, patterns are more concerning than single events. But your role as an early years practitioner will be to ask about unexplained bruises or illness, as indeed you should respond positively if parents ask you similar questions.

Scenario

The team at St Jude's Primary School recently had a day workshop on child protection led by a social worker and police officer. Some of the teachers came away with the strong impression that, if they suspected abuse, then their first step should be to call social services rather than speak with the parents.

But members of the team who work in the nursery and after school club are deeply uneasy about any guideline that cuts out communication with parents. Pam who works in both the nursery and the after school club describes several recent examples where children experienced minor injuries in play that were definitely accidental. One child had not mentioned to staff that she had fallen off the bike and her father came in the next day to say, 'Becky's got this dramatic bruise. What happened?'

Pam comments, 'How would we have felt if Becky's Dad had phoned social services rather than talking with us?'

Questions

- 1 Any setting or individual practitioner needs to be wary of procedures that you would find disrespectful if turned on you and your colleagues.
- 2 Check on the details of procedures in your setting.
- 3 Discuss with your colleagues why it may seem easier to practitioners to avoid talking with parents. What could be the consequences of going straight to social services?
- 4 You can also look at page 579 for ideas about talking with parents.

Key skills links: C3.a

In the case of possible physical abuse, the key question is often 'was this an accident?' It will not be your role to make a final assessment of whether an injury was genuinely an accident. Yet, your knowledge of the individual child, and of children in general, will be valuable to ensure that a real accident and normal bumps and scrapes are not turned inappropriately into a child protection investigation. Equally so, you need to ensure that neither you, nor other members of your early years team, are too accepting of a string of unlikely explanations from a parent, nor for that matter from a colleague or volunteer in the setting.

Activity

Patterns of accidental and non-accidental injury are not always easy to predict.

- With a group of colleagues, look at the front and back body outline that is given in Figure 19.6 on page 583. Copy this or draw similar outlines on a large sheet of paper.
- Now mark up the sites of accidental injuries you have known, either because you injured yourself in that way during your own childhood or because you observed an accident with a child. Maintain confidentiality about the details of any accident involving a child other than yourself.
- Look at the patterns that have emerged. It is very likely that many sites of accidental injury will be the more predictable places. However, in a group you will have reliable anecdotes that illustrate how a child manages to sustain accidental injury in unlikely sites.
- Discuss how this activity emphasises the importance of observation and avoiding assumptions or neat lists.

Key skills links: C3.1a

A consideration of possible physical abuse has to be *both* the visible injury to the child *and* the explanation, from adult and/or the child, of how this injury was caused. A regular pattern of accidents, even if each had a credible explanation, should make you wonder if this child is being adequately supervised.

Figure 19.4

Sites of more likely accidental injury to a child

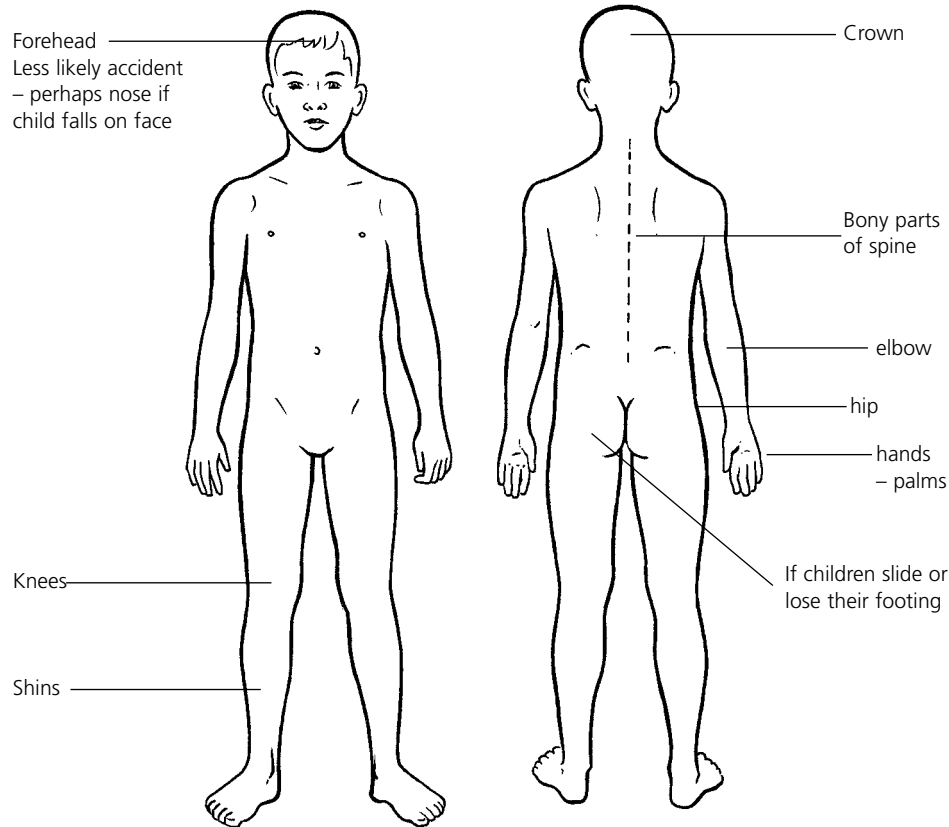
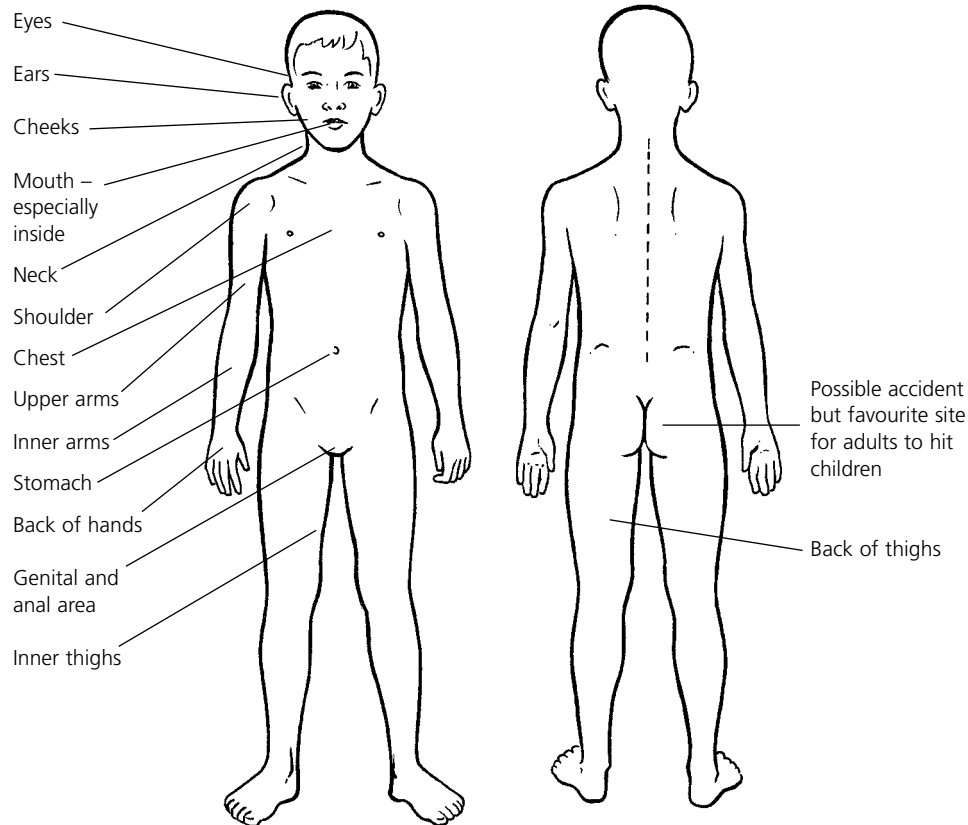


Figure 19.5

Sites of more likely non-accidental injury to a child



Important note:

These diagrams are only a guide, not a definite prediction about injury. Always consider your knowledge of the child, age, ability or disability as well as the pattern of any accidents over a period of time.



Here are some basic guidelines to likely accidental and non-accidental injury:

- Accidents that occur during normal play or boisterous activities tend to lead to a small number of bruises to the bony parts of children's bodies, such as elbows and knees, because they stick out and are likely to be hit in a fall.
- Children usually, although not always, fall forwards so are likely to hit themselves on the forehead or other parts of the front of the body. They may also injure their hands as they automatically put them out to break their fall.
- Bruising to the softer and less accessible parts of a child's body, such as upper arms, thighs and cheeks, are more likely to result from deliberate pinching, biting or beating children.
- Some areas of the body, such as the genital or anal area or under the arm, are very unlikely (although not completely impossible) places for a child to damage by accident.
- Children, especially babies, do not usually manage to bruise inside their mouths.
- Symmetrical bruising is unlikely to be accidental since children tend to hurt themselves naturally in one place, and children in pain do not return to get themselves a 'pair'.
- Some patterns of bruising should arouse suspicions, for instance, 3–4 small bruises on each side of a child's face could be finger marks and outline bruising, rather than solid bruises, may be the mark of a belt or hand.
- Young children do sometimes bite each other, but an oval or crescent shape more than 3 centimetres across will have been made by an adult or older child with permanent teeth.
- It can be hard to distinguish between non-accidental and accidental burns or scalds. Accidental scalds are more likely to have an uneven outline. Explanations should also make sense in terms of any care routine and the age and mobility of the child.

Of course, an apparently non-accidental injury should trigger your concern, but suspicious signs do not tell you who may have made that injury. Children sometimes deliberately hurt each other and very distressed children sometimes engage in self-harm. Either of these patterns should be taken seriously and may bring further child protection issues.

Some child protection books are written as if all children were pale skinned and of course this is not the case. Genuine bruising may be harder to observe on dark skinned children, although some differences in coloration may show and children will experience pain in a bruised area.

One more note of caution: many children have slight differences of coloration in their skin. However, this variation can look like bruising on dark skinned children, especially those of Afro-Caribbean, Mediterranean and Asian origin. These naturally occurring patches are called Mongolian blue spots. They have a defined edge and are a consistent slate blue in colour, unlike genuine bruising that tends to vary in shade and changes over a period of days.

Neglect of children

Neglect is the failure to care adequately for a child so as to ensure their health and well being. Neglect by responsible adults is a continuing pattern in the treatment of a child and may be linked with physical abuse as well. Persistent neglect is very dangerous. Some children have died as the direct consequence of neglect, and

Key term

Neglect

the failure to care adequately for children or young people in order to ensure their continuing health and well being

others have been in a very poor state of health by the time the neglect has been discovered and stopped. Malnutrition in early childhood can have serious consequences of growth and long-term health, some of which can never be reversed.

Types of neglect

It is the responsibility of parents and other carers to ensure the well being of the children in their care. Some families have serious financial problems and child protection professionals should always consider whether family support is the most important step in helping a child. However, children have been seriously neglected when there is enough money and where other members of the family, adults and sometimes other children, are cared for adequately.

Persistent and severe neglect includes different kinds of failure to care properly for a child.

- Neglected children have sometimes been given such inadequate food that they have been starving when found. Babies, toddlers and disabled older children may be fed in an inappropriate way so that they cannot swallow food or vomit it back again.
- Some children become very ill because neither their clothes nor their bedding are warm enough for the winter months.
- Some parents or other carers grossly neglect the basic physical needs of very young or disabled children. The babies or children are not offered basic hygiene so that they are dirty or become sore from unchanged nappies. Ordinary infections get worse because of lack of simple medical attention.
- It would be regarded as neglectful to leave a young or disabled child alone or with another carer who could not be properly responsible, for instance because he or she is young themselves.

Signs that should concern you

Children who are abused through persistent neglect will show the consequences of their poor care, for instance:

- Children may be thin and records show that they fail to put on weight. Some children will always be on the lighter side and slim parents tend to have slim children. So you have to use weight charts with care.
- When children have been malnourished, they lack energy and may seem passive or lethargic.
- Children may eat large amounts of food when it is available and some will take and hide food. In a daily setting you may find that the children are most hungry after the weekend.
- Children may be chilled in winter time because they are not wearing enough warm clothes. Children who are cold on a regular basis can develop chapped hands, chilblains or unnaturally reddened skin in a white child.
- It takes a while for children to smell, since they have not yet developed the body odour of teenagers and adults. Neglectful adults fail to pay attention to body and hair washing and have probably put dirty clothes back on the children.
- No children are healthy all the time, but neglectful parents and carers allow avoidable illness and conditions like nappy rash or infections get worse.
- You may consider neglect when children have a considerable number of accidents, especially given their age and mobility. The possibility arises that



adults do not watch over them properly or leave them with an inappropriate carer.

- It is important to realise that sometimes all the children within a family are equally neglected. However, some parents have singled out one child and treated him or her badly or significantly worse than siblings.

Children who are neglected sometimes have a condition called **faltering growth**, sometimes still described as 'failure to thrive'. This term is used to describe when babies or children do not put on weight, may also appear in poor health and there is no obvious medical reason.

You would of course be aware of a baby, toddler or child who seemed unduly thin or regularly tired. However, this is an area in which different aspects of your knowledge and practice need to be merged. Any concerns about possible faltering growth need to be supported by a careful assessment, over a period of time and with the cooperation of the parents. Key issues include that:

- Growth charts give variations around the average because some babies and children will always be on the 'light' side, just as some are on the 'heavy' side. Small parents are likely to produce children who are smaller and lighter than the average.
- Some babies and children have digestion or allergy problems that affect their ability to keep food down or to digest it properly (see page 95).
- Some children develop problems about eating a range of foods or enough in total. Their parents' understandable anxiety can worsen rather than improve the situation. The family may appreciate advice and support, but they are not neglecting their children (see page 91).

Tips for practice

Key term

Faltering growth
when babies and children do not put on weight and may also appear in poor health, for no obvious reason. The condition used to be called failure to thrive

Emotional abuse of children

Emotional abuse is a persistent pattern of deliberate, uncaring or emotionally cruel treatment of a child or young person. From the child's perspective, all abuse and neglect has an element of emotional abuse. Children's feelings are involved and their sense of security is undermined. Abuse and neglect make children doubt that they are worthy of care.

Not all children experience physical attack or actual neglect. Some children experience a regular verbal battering against their sense of well being and of themselves as likeable. Even when nobody lays a hand on them, children can be so deeply affected by emotional abuse that they are in poor physical as well as psychological health and the damage lasts into adulthood.

Types of emotional abuse

Even the best-intentioned adults have off days and children who mainly experience kindness will take the odd cross remark, and the apology that follows, in a forgiving way. In contrast, emotionally abusive treatment is unrelenting.

- Emotionally abused children are told in words or clear facial expressions from adults that they are 'stupid' or 'hopeless'. Their achievements are never enough or are compared unfavourably with a sibling or other relative.
- Children may be criticised for their looks or blamed for the fact they were born and 'ruined my life!'

Key term

Emotional abuse
a persistent pattern of verbal cruelty to children or young people such that they feel unworthy and unloved

- The behaviour of their adult carers makes the child uncertain of their worth, since approval is made dependent on the child's behaviour. Affection is given in an inconsistent way, so that the child cannot easily predict what will make the adults withdraw their warmth.
- When there is family conflict, children may be made to feel inappropriately guilty about troubles between parents or forced to take sides in a conflict of loyalties.
- An excessively protective attitude towards a child can verge towards emotional abuse. The parent or carer may make a strong case that this child needs extra care. However, adults outside the family have to consider the consequences for children and whether their well being and learning is being blocked.

Signs that should concern you

Children vary considerably as individuals and some will always be more cautious or reserved. You should be concerned about any of the following patterns of behaviour, but would need to discuss your observations with colleagues and carefully with the child's parents.

- All children have down days. But children who are happy in their life do not frequently communicate that they feel worthless, someone who is always making stupid mistakes or is ugly.
- Be aware of children who persistently blame themselves or seem to expect that you will criticise and punish them.
- You should always take notice of children who harm themselves, whether by persistent hair pulling, picking their skin or head banging.
- Children who have compulsive rituals such as very regular and lengthy hand washing may have been made to feel dirty.
- Some children appear very wary of adults and seem to expect unpredictable or unpleasant behaviour.
- Or the other hand, it is important to notice those children who attach themselves indiscriminately to any halfway kind adult.

To think about

- Look at the first four bullet points in signs of possible emotional abuse.
- You will see that this behaviour from children is likely to arise from persistent ill treatment, but you cannot easily know who is ill treating the child.
- If you work in a school or after school club, the children will be old enough that you should consider possible patterns of bullying between the children.
- You would take any of these signs with seriousness, but it will be good practice to keep an open mind about the exact source of a child's troubles.

Key term

Sexual abuse

actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child or young person who has neither the age nor understanding to give their informed consent

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation of a child or young person who has not reached an age or maturity when he or she can give informed consent to sexual activities with another person. Some children experience sexual abuse for a brief



period of time, but for some children the abuse extends over years of their childhood.

Most sexual abusers, whose activities come to light, have been male. But females have been known to sexually abuse children – either on their own or in collaboration with male abusers. It would be very risky to assume that dubious behaviour from a female could not be sexually abusive.

Sexual abusers claim that their actions are not harmful, that the child agreed or was in some way sexually provocative. However, sexual abusers operate in a moral vacuum. It is the responsibility of caring adults to help children learn appropriate boundaries for expressing affection and touch. Sexual abusers deliberately distort the very boundaries they should be helping children to understand.

Types of sexual abuse

Adults, who abuse children sexually, seek to involve them in some kind of adult sexual activity, but the abusive actions can vary.

- Adults (or young people) who sexually abuse children sometimes have full sexual intercourse with them. Children or young people may also be forced into oral or anal sex.
- It is regarded as abusive to involve children in any sexual practices even if these stop short of actual penetration. It is unacceptable for children to be touched in an intimate way or for them to be induced to engage in sexual fondling of others.
- It is also abusive to induce children to watch sexual activity, even if they are not touched themselves.
- Some abusers take video footage or photos as part of the abuse. Child pornography is integral to the use made of the internet by paedophiles.

Children are harmed by sexual abuse:

- They may be at risk physically since sexual practices can cause children physical injury, sometimes serious, and lead to infection, including sexually transmitted diseases.
- Even if the abuse has not caused visible physical damage, children are psychologically damaged by the experience. Adults have abused children's trust and have often used threats to ensure children's compliance and secrecy.
- Depending partly on how long the abuse has lasted, children can be very confused about the expression of affection and of their ability to form close relationships.
- When sexual abuse is uncovered, the trauma in the family or other group can be serious. Without careful support, children can feel even less protected and weighed with feelings of guilt.

Signs that should concern you

Some physical and behavioural signs would make you deeply uneasy about the possibility of sexual abuse, but other signs could have alternative explanations. In this area of abuse you still need to make sense of children's behaviour and play within the context of usual child development.

Disabled children may show different patterns of development as a result of their disability and learning disabled children may behave more like a younger child in some ways. However, adults can put disabled children at risk if they assume that unusual behaviour must arise from the child's disability. If this

behaviour would concern you in a child with no identified disabilities, then you have to ask yourself, and your colleagues, why are we not concerned about this child? Some people assume that disabled children will be less at risk from sexual or other abuse, but unfortunately the reverse is the case (see page 573).

Your concerns might be aroused by any of the following:

- Children like to be close and they are in the process of learning about respect for other people's bodies and private areas. Yet, it is not within normal range development for children to keep on trying to touch the private parts of other children or adults, despite a firm 'No'.
- Some children are more reserved than others, but you may notice that a child seems excessively wary about physical closeness.
- As a nanny, you might notice a child's distress related to a normal routine such as bath time or being read a bedtime story. There is a possibility that the child has been abused as part of this routine (not necessarily by the parents).
- Children often like to express their daily experiences through play with dolls or small figures. So it is possible that children, who have been sexually abused, will make the dolls perform sexual acts that should be outside the normal experience of childhood. Children may also produce paintings or drawings which are sexually very explicit.
- You need to recall that young children often fiddle with their private parts or take off their clothes. So your observations need to weigh up whether a child seems to be masturbating a great deal more than intermittent fiddling. Or does the child look rather exhibitionist about going naked?
- Young children are often interested in bottoms, willies and poo. But their giggly talk tends to revolve around toilets, which they understand, rather than the sexual connotations of private parts.
- Again, careful observation needs to assess in a developmental context whether the children's words or actions suggest a sexual knowledge or curiosity unlikely for their age.

Activity

- Collect some examples of children's natural curiosity about bodies, babies and bodily functions.
- Write up your examples with care and attention to confidentiality.
- Share with your colleagues and discuss the backdrop of normal childhood interests and behaviour against which you need to make sense of behaviour that is out of the ordinary.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a

Some physical symptoms should always concern you and lead to a conversation with parents about the need to visit their GP.

- Pain, itching or redness in the genital or anal area needs medical attention. But do recall that these symptoms can arise from thrush, threadworms or persistent constipation. Broken skin can result from vigorous scratching and the strain of constipation can even lead to anal fissures and bleeding (see pages 134 and 72).

- Any bruising or bleeding in the genital or anal area needs a medical check, as does any child's clear discomfort in walking or sitting down. They could have fallen and hurt themselves, but these are unusual sites for accidental injury.
- A vaginal discharge or apparent infection in a girl or persistent urinary infections and pain in passing urine for either sex should always be checked.
- Pregnancy in an under-age girl and evidence of a sexually transmitted disease in either sex will indicate either sexual abuse or risky sexual activity in older children – in itself a cause for concern.

Combined abusive experiences

For simplicity, each category of abuse has been discussed separately in this chapter but, for some children, their experiences cross the boundaries between physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse and sexual abuse.

It is the responsibility of adults to care for and comfort children. Abusive adults draw on their knowledge of what will distress children in order to abuse them. For instance:

- Some children have been terrified by adults who shut them in cupboards or other confined, dark spaces as a punishment. Sexually abusive adults have sometimes used such techniques to make the children more compliant.
- Neglectful adults fail to meet the basic physical needs of children, but the same adults may also justify such neglect by disdainful attitudes towards the child that are emotionally abusive.
- Uncaring adults may fail to provide a minimum level of emotional and intellectual stimulation to support children's normal development and learning.
- Or harsh adults may make their approval utterly dependent on strict standards of intellectual achievement. Some textbooks refer to this treatment as 'intellectual abuse', but this term is misleading since there is no such category within the child protection system.

The risks for children with disabilities

A sentimental view of disabled children has sometimes led people to believe that surely they must be less at risk of abuse. Unfortunately, there are several factors that can combine to put disabled children at even greater risk. You need to be aware of these issues, since it is more likely nowadays that disabled children will join early years and mainstream school settings. The main issues are:

- Children with physical and severe learning disabilities may need a high level of personal care well into later childhood and perhaps will always need help. Poor practice in care routines can leave disabled children vulnerable to abuse or neglect as well as lacking an important sense of personal dignity, that they should be treated with respect. See also the discussion about physical care on page 46.
- Disabled children can sometimes have a high numbers of carers or attend a range of settings. If nobody is keeping a close eye on the children's experience, they can be vulnerable to abusive behaviour.
- A problem can also arise that children consider it normal for people they scarcely know to undertake intimate care or intrusive medical procedures.

- Physically disabled children may have less capacity to resist an abuser. Children whose disabilities affect communication may find it hard to express what is happening to them. A related problem is that lack of respect for disabled children may mean that their disclosure is not taken seriously.

Activity

- Draw out four or five practical points from the section on support for disabled children.
- Describe how you could support and improve good practice in your setting.
- Share your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Supporting families and children

You need to understand possible patterns and signs of child abuse, in order to support children and families within your role. You also need to have a grasp of the different reasons for how child abuse may arise.

Why do adults abuse children?

There is no neat pattern to predict who is likely to abuse children. Adults who have been found to abuse or neglect children have come from all possible social, ethnic and religious groups, from prosperous as well as economically deprived areas, from professional people – including childcare practitioners – as well as non-professionals. Most adults do not abuse or neglect and some families who are under great strain can be helped away from a high risk situation by support.

Good practice is that early years practitioners have an understanding of what may lead parents and other carers into abusive patterns with children. You can try to understand what has happened without in any way excusing the abusive consequences for the children.

Family stress

Families that are under immense stress may have difficulty in finding time and patience for their children.

- Some families on the edge of coping may be tipped by harder than average childcare, for instance, a baby who is very wakeful, cries a great deal or is difficult to feed.
- In homes with domestic violence the children may be caught in the crossfire, as well as deliberately threatened and targeted.
- Parents with severe problems of addiction – to drink, drugs or gambling – have little energy or commitment left to give to their children.
- Young, very lonely or unsupported parents may feel overwhelmed. Sometimes they may be ignorant of the high risks of their action, for instance, believing that it is better to shake a baby than to hit.

Philosophical, cultural or religious beliefs

Family beliefs may lead to what outsiders regard as an unacceptable risk to children or abusive treatment.

- Some parents who are accused of physical abuse continue to maintain that they were only exerting their right to discipline. Some will quote religious beliefs as justification.
- Extreme views on diet applied to babies and children may lead to severe ill health and malnutrition.
- Some families refuse medical treatment for children on religious grounds. Such cases may go to court and a legal decision can be made to overrule parental choice in these circumstances.
- Female genital mutilation (FGM), also sometimes called female circumcision, is against the law in the UK because of the physical damage caused to young girls. FGM is a cultural practice within some North African communities originating from Somalia and the Sudan, some Middle Eastern countries such as the Yemen and in parts of Indonesia.

Good practice in child protection, as in other aspects of early years work, is to show respect for family cultural and religious beliefs. However, such respect cannot overrule an assessment of the well being of a child (see page 581).

Personal experience of adults

The personal history of some adults may incline them more to potential abuse.

- Some adults, who feel without power and weak in their adult lives, relish wielding power over young and vulnerable children, either their own sons and daughters or those for whom they are responsible.
- It may be easier to blame a child for personal inadequacies than address what the adult has failed to achieve in life. Twisted logic may say that everything would be fine if it were not for this son or daughter's behaviour, demands or even their unwanted birth.
- Sometimes carers bring their own childhood into how they treat children. Adults may excuse harsh words and hitting children as the right way to teach respect and discipline, with the justification that, 'It didn't do me any harm'.
- Without support to consider alternatives, parents and carers may not even contemplate other ways of treating children.

Emotional imbalance and deviant behaviour

Some abusive adults bring children into their own mental and emotional imbalance.

- It is rare, but some parents (more often mothers) have deliberately injured their children as a way of seeking attention for themselves. This pattern is called Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy and sometimes Illness Induction Syndrome.
- Adults who sexually abuse children exploit the unequal power relations in order to satisfy their adult sexual desires. Some sexual abusers are able to sustain adult relationships, but appear to turn to children when they feel under stress or rejected.
- Paedophiles are specifically attracted to children rather than adults. Part of their sexual excitement arises through the process of targeting and preparing a child for abuse, known as grooming. Paedophiles may target only one sex but some attempt to abuse both boys and girls.

Key term**Disclosure**

communication by children's words or actions when they share an experience of abuse or neglect, or their fears that relate to potential abuse

Responding to disclosures from children

Sometimes concerns will first be raised because of your own observations of a child or young person. Alternatively, a colleague, another professional or the child's parent may alert you to events or problems of which you are unaware. Sometimes, however, children will choose to disclose their experience or feelings directly to you. A **disclosure** is a communication by words or actions when children choose to share an experience of abuse or neglect, or fears that relate to potential abuse.

Different ways of communicating

It is important to realise that a disclosure is not always a 'big' or obvious event. Sometimes, it may only be on reflection, or confidential discussion with a colleague, that you realise a child has made a disclosure.

- Younger children may make a brief, almost throwaway remark in conversation or their play.
- Some children may take the opportunity for a long conversation in which many details emerge, but this is by no means always the pattern.
- Children may approach a disclosure through an apparently unrelated comment: they may ask you a question or invite your opinion. What the child says makes you concerned.
- Be aware, however, that children who have experienced lengthy abuse or neglect may not be able to imagine life any other way. Sadly, they may simply be informing you about another part of their life and are not actually asking for help.
- Children may take the opportunity to speak out, when you ask sympathetically about how they got a bump, bruise or cut.
- Some children will not use words but will effectively 'tell' you through their behaviour and body language, perhaps their obvious unhappiness or fear to follow a request or routine.
- Children express themselves through play, so they may weave unhappy as well as happy experiences into pretend games, drawing or story telling.

When disability affects disclosure

Bear in mind that children with communication or severe learning disabilities may not disclose with words, or may have limited spoken communication. Your concerns could be aroused because of their behaviour, in the light of your knowledge of this child and more general knowledge of development.

Give time and listen

You can draw on your existing skills of communication when a child discloses to you. You do not need a whole new set of specialist skills, although there are some sound guidelines given the nature of this communication.

- The first and most important guideline is to listen to children and give them your calm and supportive attention. Listen with your ears and watch with your eyes for their body language and how they say something.
- Be calm for the child. Even if you feel anxious or distressed about what you have just been told, then do your level best not to show that emotion and disturb the child.



- Take what they say seriously. Do not leap in with calming reassurance like, 'I'm sure it's not so bad' or 'You may be mistaken'.
- Be guided by the children themselves; the conversation ends when they wish it. You can offer to listen again, but that is all for the time being.

With children, you should ideally listen now, because this time is when they are ready to communicate.

- If this moment really is impossible, perhaps because the situation is very public, then support the child by saying, 'I have heard/noticed you. Can we talk in private when we get back to nursery/home?' Do not put the child off speaking just because this moment is inconvenient to you; it is clearly right for her.
- The child has chosen to communicate with you, so it is inappropriate to stop the child and ask him or her to speak with someone more senior. You will have to talk with someone else about the disclosure later, but the child has chosen and trusted you.

Use open ended questions

It is very important that you do not cross-question a child. Such adult behaviour can put a child under uncomfortable pressure. It may also direct children into saying what they think you want to hear.

- Keep any questions open ended: 'How do/did you feel?' rather than 'Do you feel frightened?' ask 'What happened next?' rather than 'Did he ask you to keep this secret?'
- You can also use the technique of reflective listening in which you gently repeat back what the child says but with a questioning tone in your voice. If the child says, 'Uncle Jon does dirty things to me' you can reflect back, 'You say your uncle does dirty things to you?'
- You can also simply encourage a child by your open and attentive expression and simple questions like 'Yes?' or 'Anything else you want to tell me?'

Support and reassure

You show positive support and commitment to children by the fact that you give time and listen.

- If it feels right, given your relationship with the child, you can offer a hug or a gentle touch.
- Take appropriate opportunities to show, through words or smiles, that you care about the child. He or she may even ask, 'Do you still like me?'
- Avoid making promises that you cannot keep. You cannot, for instance, make a commitment that 'this will just stay between us'.
- You have a professional responsibility to pass on child protection concerns. You can reassure the child that you will only tell the few people who need to know, 'so that we can keep you safe'.

A supportive conversation for children is one in which the adult follows their lead and stops when the child wishes. You then need to write up the conversation you have had with the child or the incident that you have observed. These careful notes should be made as soon as possible and certainly within the same day (see page 582).

Activity

Early years practitioners are sometimes very concerned that they may 'do the wrong thing' when a child makes a disclosure. However, you need to feel confident that good quality communication skills are what are needed.

- Draw out four or five practical points from the section on communication when children disclose.
- Write them up in your own words to guide practice in your setting.
- Discuss and share your ideas with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a LP3.1–3 WO3.1–3

Scenario

Members of the Wessex childminding network have been discussing the appropriate balance in taking what children say seriously, rather than dismissing it on the grounds that it cannot be true. The network members have taken on board the positive shift in child protection to take full account of what children say, rather than to assume that children are prone to lie or fantasise. However, some network members have read material on child protection that seems to direct adults to believe everything that a child says when child protection concerns are aroused.

Laura, the network coordinator takes an everyday example of conflict between young children to highlight the difference. She asks the group to imagine this situation in a family home or an early years setting and they talk through the possibilities:

- Four year old Nina comes up to you and says, 'Peter hit me and I hadn't done anything!'
- It would be unjust if you immediately took Nina's word as the full truth of what had happened. A fair approach would be to listen to what Nina has to say and show that you take her feelings seriously.
- Then you would find out from Peter his side of the event and perhaps any other child who had been present.
- You would come to a conclusion on the basis of information and then take the best way forward for both children.
- So you are taking what Nina said seriously but you do not accept her version of events as the full truth without checking.

The childminders are well aware that concerns about child protection raise anxieties in a way that conflict between children does not usually do. However, the balance is very similar.

Questions

- 1 Discuss the example with your own colleagues.
- 2 Consider for your own setting how to address the balance between taking what children say seriously while still leaving opportunities to find out more.

Key skills links: C3.1.a

Talking with parents

You may be wary about broaching a concern with the parent and it is fine to ask a more experienced colleague for advice prior to that conversation. But you need to build the confidence to speak up in a friendly yet honest way.

There is no doubt that this conversation will be easier when you have developed a friendly working relationship with parents (see page 625). They know you share exciting events in the child's day, tell them if the child has taken a tumble and genuinely share the care of their son or daughter. You are then coming from a positive basis to ask about the marks on Sandy's inner thighs or to explain how you handled Malcolm's strident announcement in the market about 'ladies' furry bits'.

It is tempting to find reasons not to talk with parents but such reluctance could put children at risk. Failure to have a conversation could also leave you worried, when there is a perfectly safe explanation that a parent can give you. It makes sense that the key worker speaks with a parent. If necessary, a colleague or senior staff should rearrange their time so you can talk without interruption and enough privacy with the parent.

If you have limited experience, then it may help to try some forms of words in advance with a colleague but avoid trying to find a neat formula. You need to sound authentic and there is no perfect form of words. In general, you need to be clear in your own mind what you want to tell or ask a parent (or other relevant carer like a grandparent):

- What exactly is puzzling you about what the child said or did?
- What and where are the bruises, cuts or other marks?
- What patterns of behaviour from the child have concerned you, what is happening or not happening?
- What are your feelings that are relevant and could appropriately be voiced?

Here are some possible ways in to the conversation after saying that you would like to talk with a parent and before you go into more detail:

- 'I noticed a large bruise on Sandy's thigh and she seems uncertain how she got it. Do you have any ideas?'
- 'I'm uneasy about the games Barmila tries to play with two other children.'
- 'I'm confused about what Saima said today. She said that ... Does it make any sense to you?'
- 'From watching and listening to (name of child) I feel that she/he is frightened by ... unusually upset by ... doesn't seem to notice that ...'.
- 'I want to talk about (name of child)'s nappy rash ... the pain from the decay in her teeth ... the fact that he is so very hungry after the weekend ... that her shoes and socks are far too small for her feet ...'.
- 'I feel I need to tell you that Allison seems very upset on the days when your au pair/childminder/stepson picks her up. She is like a different little girl from the days that you or your husband does the pick up. I don't know what's going on, but you need to know that it's a consistent pattern.'

Do not expect that a parent's response will necessarily be negative. He or she may have a credible explanation for a child's bruise or odd remark. Some parents may be relieved you have spoken because they share your concern, without knowing what has happened to their child. They want help and would welcome support. Depending on the situation, you may be able to help or may need to consider involving your manager or a senior team member.

You will not always be able to give considerable time to parents and complicated adult problems need expert help. If parents want to talk with someone else in confidence, you could tell them about *Parentline Plus*. This organisation has brought together several parent and family support organisations (for general support, not specifically child protection). They can be contacted at 520 Highgate Studios, 53–79 Highgate Road, London NW5 1TL tel: 020 7284 5500, helpline: 0808 800 2222 website: www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Tips for practice

If you have a concern, then you need to be ready for when the parent, or other carer, arrives to pick up the child:

- Find a way to talk with parents courteously and in some degree of privacy.
- If the parent wants to rush off, be prepared to emphasise, ‘I appreciate you’re in a hurry. But I think this is too important to wait until tomorrow/next week.’
- Share your concern with honesty but without pre-judging what may have happened.
- Listen to the parent’s reply. If necessary, wait through a short silence.
- Be ready to repeat your question or comment if the parent seems not to have listened or understood.
- Remain calm if the parent or carer becomes distressed or angry.
- Have a conversation that opens up the topic and be ready to make an arrangement to talk further with the parent in the very near future, if this seems appropriate.
- When appropriate, be clear about limits to confidentiality and honest about the next steps if concerns persist.
- Listen with equal attention when parents wish to raise concerns with you about other team members, volunteers or regular visitors.

Activity

Bear in mind also that sometimes a parent will want to raise a concern with you. You really need to set a good example for such an exchange, since your reaction will travel through the local parent grapevine.

Imagine a parent starts a conversation with you along the lines of these examples:

- ‘My child has this huge scrape down the back of her leg. What happened yesterday?’
- ‘When are you going to do something about (name of team member)? She shouts at the children all the time. My daughter says she was called “a little cow” yesterday.’
- ‘My daughter was forced to eat all her lunch yesterday and she was sick. I think this is abusive treatment.’
- ‘I don’t think that (name of male staff member) should be changing nappies. It doesn’t seem right to me.’



- ‘Your son (of childminder or nanny who is allowed to bring child to work) said a very odd thing to my child last week.’

Discuss with colleagues how you could start a positive response, as well perhaps as thinking about what would be poor practice in your reply.

Key skills links: C3.1a

After the conversation

You may talk with parents or other carers and they give a plausible explanation for what concerned or puzzled you. Good practice would still be to make a note in the child’s record of the conversation. Bear in mind that a child’s records will be open to their parents, so consider how you write (see page 582).

Another option is that the conversation does not relieve your concern and perhaps adds to it. Alternatively, the parent is pleased you have opened the subject and makes a disclosure about themselves or someone else involved with the family. The same guidelines for good communication apply, including that you cannot keep secret an adult disclosure about possible abuse. Tell parents what you will be doing next and when you will speak with them again. You need to follow the procedures of your setting (see page 560).

Anti-discriminatory practice

Early years practitioners can feel uneasy about child protection issues when they do not share the same ethnic or cultural background as the parents or carers. Nobody wishes to be accused of racist attitudes and behaviour, but you cannot avoid concerns for this reason. Good practice in child protection will be supported by more general good anti-discriminatory practice within the team, as well as partnership with all parents.

In any setting or group discussion, such as a childminding network, you need to:

- Courteously challenge assumptions that there is one ‘normal’ or ‘right way’ to raise children, or that some people as a whole group do not care about their children.
- The challenge needs to be made whoever is making these statements. It is no more acceptable for an African colleague to make disparaging remarks about a family of Caribbean origin than it would for a white European colleague.
- Focus clearly on the child’s well being and behaviour. No tradition in child rearing from any culture should be permitted to damage children.
- Avoid blunt accusations of racism directed at colleagues. This kind of attack does not help to improve practice and can seriously undermine people’s motivation to learn and change, not only within child protection.
- Strive for open communication within a setting or network so that you can extend your understanding and knowledge of cultures and faiths that are unfamiliar to you, whatever your own background.
- But be cautious about being certain you know ‘all about’ a faith or cultural background just from acquaintance with a few families.

Keeping records

Your notes should include specific details of the conversation with a child or parent and of any incident that concerns you. If this is your first experience of disclosure, then ask for support from a more senior colleague. It will help to talk matters through before you write down the details.

All your skills of good practice in writing records and reports (see page 561) are equally relevant now. You may find it helpful to guide your record of a conversation with a child by answering the following questions about the disclosure:

- When and where did the child talk with you?
- What did the child say to you? Note it down as accurately as you can recall and in the child's own words. Add any necessary explanations if the child uses personal words, for instance, for parts of the body.
- How did the child behave and, from your knowledge of him or her as an individual, what else does that add?
- Support any opinions with your reasons. For instance, that the child was showing a pattern of behaviour that you have seen before when he has been anxious or distressed.
- Avoid any guesses or speculations. You need to take the child seriously; it is not your role to work out exactly where the truth lies in the events.

Continuing records of a child will need to follow good practice as described in more general terms on page 462. When child protection is an issue, it is even more important that you keep high standards in what and how you record:

- Be careful to keep to the facts, what you have observed and when.
- Describe in factual detail any concerns about a child's behaviour, health, development or injuries.
- Support any appropriate opinions that arise because of your knowledge of child development in general and this child as an individual.
- Otherwise avoid any guesses or speculation – your own or those of other people.
- Be specific over concerns raised about the family. For instance avoid comments like, 'Gaby's parents take poor care of her' and be specific about what you have observed, such as, 'Each day this week Gaby was dressed in a thin summer frock when the morning temperature was close to freezing'.
- If a child has injuries, then make an accurate record of the nature and extent of the bruises, cuts or other marks. You could use a simple outline figure of a child, front and back versions, to sketch the location of any injuries (see Figure 19.6). Do not guess about the possible cause of any injury.

Working with child protection

General support for children

Much of your general good practice will support children regarding child protection:

- Respectful physical care of all children helps them understand how responsible adults should behave.
- When you listen to children's interests and concerns, you make it more likely that they will confide in you if something serious is worrying them.
- Physical closeness (see page 43) and showing affection to children, helps them to feel secure and to experience appropriate touch and boundaries.

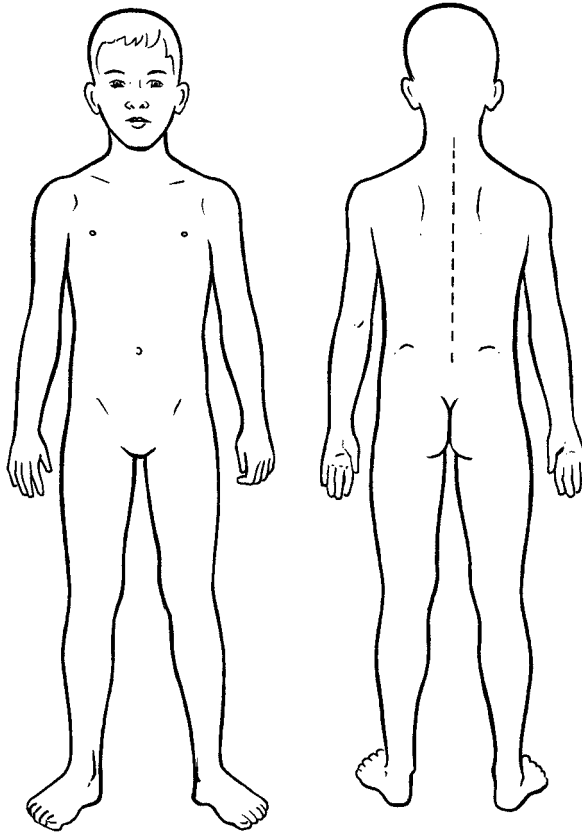


Figure 19.6

Body outline: a way to record patterns of injury in a child

- Your positive approach to dealing with behaviour (see Chapter 17) gives children direct experience of adults who behave well and do not use negative physical or emotional tactics.
- You can help children learn to keep themselves safe without making them feel inappropriately responsible (see page 116).

If children have been abused or neglected, they need your good practice in all aspects of their care:

- Support children's feelings and listen to them if they wish to talk.
- Otherwise treat children as normally as possible. Definitely avoid showing pity, making 'poor little soul' remarks or sad and meaningful glances between adults.
- You may make some allowances for children but mainly they need the same positive approach to their behaviour as their peers.
- Children who have experienced abuse still need boundaries. They should not simply be allowed to vent their feelings on to other children and they need you to ensure that they still have friends.
- Some children may receive specialist help, perhaps through play therapy. It will help if you can understand the kind of work being undertaken. Play therapy is a specialised task but you can support by low-key involvement in children's play.

Tips for practice

Working with other professionals

If you become involved in a child protection investigation, then you will work with other professionals. These will include:

- a social worker
- possibly the police (but see page 556)
- the designated teacher responsible for child protection in a school
- professionals who are already involved with the family, such as the family health visitor or GP
- professionals who become involved in order to assess the child, such as a medical officer or clinical psychologist.

It is important that you show your own professionalism and that of your setting.

- Be clear in your explanations about procedures and clear policy.
- Demonstrate good practice in your records and summary reports.
- Show a professional approach in how you discuss families or children.
- Prepare well for and contribute to meetings. If necessary, speak up to say that you wish to contribute the knowledge of the nursery or playgroup about this child or family.

Support for practitioners

Dealing with child protection issues can be emotionally draining and it is appropriate that you should be able to talk in confidence about how you handle each stage of the work and how you feel. In an early years setting it should be possible to discuss your work with a senior colleague or the manager in a supervision time. Even experienced practitioners need to talk about this child and this family. A professional approach includes the awareness that you have feelings about the child, the family and what has happened.

It is also possible that dealing with child protection will stir practitioners' own memories of childhood abuse, either that they experienced or knew happened to a friend. It is important to talk about these feelings in confidence, although if you are very distressed it will be wise to seek professional help outside your workplace. As with any other deeply felt personal experience, you need to be able to acknowledge and put your feelings temporarily to one side. If you were abused as a child, you can still help children now that you are an adult. But you need to focus on this child now and in no way re-run your own experience through them.

Allegations against early years practitioners

Children are most usually at risk from people they know. Although the risk will often come from within the family, children have also been harmed by adults who are in a professional relationship with them. Procedures for an early years setting or school have to include a response to concerns about or accusations of staff.

Any setting, led by the manager, has to be seen to take seriously any allegations, by parents, children or colleagues, about the behaviour of paid practitioners, volunteers or visitors to the setting. Good practice is similar to what has been described elsewhere in this chapter.

- Other policies in the setting should make it very clear how adults should act, for instance in response to children's challenging behaviour. Some tactics are unacceptable in a setting (see page 510).

- Practitioners should listen carefully when a parent or child expresses concerns about a colleague. You should be able to express concerns yourself in confidence to a senior colleague.
- Concerns should then be checked and information gathered in a way that does not leap to conclusions in either direction.
- Equal opportunities should be seen to apply to all staff. Certainly male practitioners should not be more easily accused or suspected than their female colleagues.

Often there will be an acceptable explanation in response to the concerns raised.

- This explanation needs to be communicated clearly so that no doubts are left.
- Sometimes the possibility of child abuse is resolved but a practitioner's behaviour does not meet good practice and needs to be addressed firmly. In the example on page 580, perhaps a practitioner is unacceptably rude to children and does bully them into eating a dinner they dislike.
- Sometimes a parent's concern might highlight lax practice. Perhaps the team is not careful enough about telling parents of minor accidents children have in play.
- Or the team realises that teenagers come on work placement without any proper introduction and discussion with the children. This lax approach gives children the impression that strangers can appear and play with you, and nobody tells you about them.

A small minority of early years settings and schools will experience a time when the team includes an adult who has abused children in one or more of the four broad ways described on page 562. Depending on the circumstances, the setting may be involved in a child protection investigation or the incident(s) may be dealt with through disciplinary action.

- When children have been ill-treated by practitioners or volunteers it is important that their experience is acknowledged.
- They need explanations suitable for their age including the fact that what the adult did was wrong.
- It is important to talk with parents, individually or in a group meeting. Reliable information needs to be given and questions answered.

Scenarios

A slightly different approach has been taken to scenarios in this chapter. Child protection is a complex area of practice and examples often do not fall neatly into one of the categories of abuse. Please consider the following examples, ideally with colleagues and discuss one or more examples guided by the following questions:

- Would this incident concern you?
- If yes, then on what basis?
- If no, then explain your reasons for feeling that child protection is not an issue here. If you would have other concerns, then explain those.
- If you faced such a situation, what other information might you need?
- What should the people do who are involved in this situation?

- 1 James and Marilyn are jointly registered as childminders in the Wessex network. They are concerned to observe the behaviour of a local childminder, not part of the network, at a drop-in. The childminder is responsible for a physically disabled four year old and she talks about him as if he were not present. It also sounds as if she leaves the child in his wheelchair in front of the television for long periods in the day.
- 2 Kimberley is part of a nanny share with two families. One family has recently had a premature baby (see the scenario on page 158). The baby's three year old sister, Claire, has started to wet herself and be very distressed if Kimberley does not promptly give her attention when she calls. Kimberley was given a checklist during a child protection workshop and this list states that wetting and attention seeking are signs of abuse.
- 3 A boy and a girl, aged four years old who attend Sunningdale Day Nursery have developed a game of mummies and daddies in the garden. Today they were found with their pants down, looking at each other's private parts.
- 4 Two fathers in Dresden Road Nursery School have insisted that their sons should be allowed to hit or bite back if squabbles turn physical. One of the children seems doubtful when challenged by a practitioner but says, 'My Daddy says a good smack never hurt anyone'.
- 5 A mature student on placement in Baker Street Children and Family Centre is uncompromising about the right way to treat young children. A parent mentions to Ciaran, the manager, that her two year old daughter appears to have been left in soiled knickers for most of yesterday afternoon, because she refused to use the pot.
- 6 There is some disagreement currently in Greenholt Pre-school. A four year old has joined whose parents follow a vegan diet. The pre-school team has been happy to take advice from the family to offer a balanced lunch. However, a parent helper has been scathing about 'parents who impose their views on little children' and she brought in today a newspaper cutting about parents who were prosecuted for causing severe malnutrition in their toddler.

Key skills links: C3.1a

Further resources

Hewlett, Sylvia Ann (1993) *Child Neglect in Rich Nations* UNICEF.

Leach, Penelope (1992) *Young Children under Stress* National Early Years Network – Starting Points No. 6.

Lindon, Jennie (1998) *Child Protection and Early Years Work* Hodder and Stoughton.

Lindon, Jennie and Lance (1997) *Working Together for Young Children: A guide for managers and staff* Cengage Learning.

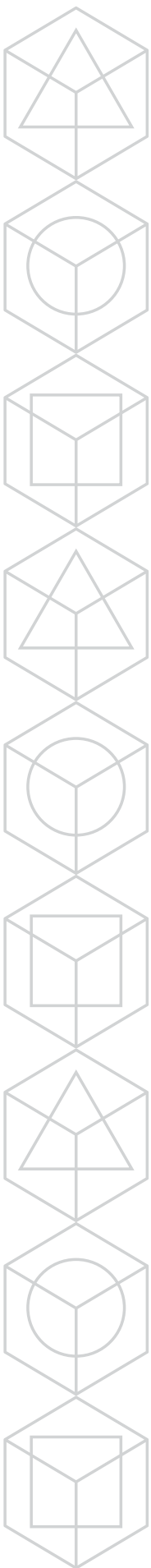
NCH Action for Children publishes factsheets, summaries and reports that provide useful information in a concise format. Contact them at 85 Highbury Park, London N5 1UD tel: 020 7226 2033 website: www.nch.org.uk



The NSPCC publishes booklets useful for early years practitioners or to make available for parents and older children. Contact them at 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH tel: 020 7825 2500 website: www.nspcc.org.uk

Progress check

- 1 Describe two misleading assumptions about child abuse and abusers.
- 2 Explain three broad ways in which an early years practitioner could be involved in a child protection case.
- 3 Describe briefly the four main types of child abuse.
- 4 Suggest two sites on a child's body that are unusual for accidental injury.
- 5 Explain two signs that could raise concerns that a child was being neglected.
- 6 Describe two behaviours from a child that could indicate emotional abuse.
- 7 Describe two behaviours from a child that could indicate sexual abuse.
- 8 Give three possible reasons why parents or other carers might neglect or abuse children in some way.
- 9 Explain in brief how you would use good communications skills if a child disclosed abuse to you.



20

Developing good practice as an early years practitioner

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- understand how to work in a professional way as an early years practitioner
- work as a member of a team and appreciate the importance of teamwork
- understand and apply the skills of communication and problem solving
- understand the importance of policies and their application in practice.

Introduction

Early years practitioners need to develop a professional outlook and to work well with other people. Teamwork is crucial if you work in any early years setting, school or out of school care. Cooperation and support within a team is built through good communication and a willingness to address and resolve issues rather than work against one another, for whatever reason. Good communication and a cooperative approach are equally important when you work mainly on your own, as a nanny or childminder. These practitioners need to work closely with the children's parents, form good working relationships with other members of a childminding network or with local early years professionals.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 8, 10

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: M3, CU10

Level 3: M6, MC1/C4

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 1, 2, 3, 21

Working in a professional manner

There are different aspects to your professional life. You need to apply for and obtain a job, become familiar with what is required in your current post, work in a **professional** manner and continue to develop your skills and knowledge. In all of these areas your employers have responsibilities as well as you.

Seeking a new job

You will most likely approach a possible new job through applying to an advertisement and then attending an interview. You are likely to have a proper interview, even if you obtain a post in a setting where you are already known from a work placement as a student.

An early years setting has a legal obligation to follow a consistent process in seeking new staff that addresses equal opportunities. Legal requirements mean that an early years setting cannot decide they only want female practitioners, wish to employ only certain ethnic groups or will not have anyone with even minor disabilities. However, a setting can advertise for a new team member with specific experience skills, ethnic background or language skills, so long as they can show that this background or knowledge is essential for the post.

Your application

It is your task to present yourself in a positive and honest light, through written and spoken communication and your behaviour during an interview.

- Some jobs will have an application form and you will then need to complete those details.
- It is also valuable to prepare a written **curriculum vitae (CV)** and be ready to update it as you gain experience.
- Where requested, you would send a copy of your CV with a covering letter. Otherwise, take a copy with you to an interview.
- Ensure that any covering letter is well written, checked for spelling and says something appropriate to this job. You will not create a positive impression by general letters that could just as easily be for a job in the Parks department as working with young children.

The same points apply if you write to potential employers without replying to an advertisement. You might, for example, write a prospective letter to a large nursery chain that you know has nurseries in different towns. Or you might very much want to gain experience in working with an early excellence centre.

- This approach is fine, but it is essential to consider what you write. An impersonal 'Dear Sir or Madam' beginning to an all-purpose letter and a general CV will not gain anyone's attention.
- Contact the main office of a chain to ask for the name and title of the person to whom you should write. Or phone a centre and ask for the name of the manager.
- Draft your letter to say something specific and sensible about what attracts you to a job with this nursery chain or why you feel you are suited to working in this kind of centre. Then enclose a copy of your CV.

Key term

Professional

a description of behaviour and outlook appropriate to the responsibilities in a job or a work placement as a student

Key term

Curriculum vitae (CV)

summary of your qualifications, experience and professional career

Tips for practice

- Take care in drafting your CV. It will create the first impression of you for most prospective employers.
- Lay your CV out clearly, spell it correctly and write or type it on good quality paper. If you have more than one page, then use a second sheet, rather than writing on the back.
- There are great advantages to using a word processor and saving your CV in a file. A printed CV looks more professional than a hand written one and you can update it more easily.
- You can also save slightly different versions of a CV if your professional experience means you are suitable for different types of jobs.
- Your CV should include basic personal information, your education and qualifications, relevant experience and any jobs – all with dates. You could add a couple of sentences about your leisure interests.
- Include the names and contact details of at least one, preferably two people who could give you a reference. Ask their permission first. Suitable references would be from a previous employer or your college tutor, if this is your first job.

The job interview

If you are successful, your job application will lead to an interview. If there are considerably more candidates than posts, then settings, or a family seeking to employ a nanny, will make a short list rather than interviewing everyone. This is one more reason why your application and CV, as well as any telephone conversation you have, needs to promote a positive image.

Tips for practice

- Prepare yourself for an interview with a clear understanding of where you need to be and by when.
- Take original copies of your certificates in case the interviewers wish to see these.
- Dress in a smart style. The actual work with children does not require very formal clothes. But you show serious purpose in an interview when you arrive with well pressed clothes, clean shoes and tidy hair.
- Go with a few questions that you would like to ask. You may have some specific queries that could affect whether you would want the job.
- But some sensible questions will show the interviewers or family that you can communicate and have thought about this post.
- It is reasonable for you to ask a setting in advance about the interviewing procedure. For instance, will you be shown around the setting? Will you face a panel of people or just the manager?

No interview is the same and being interviewed for a nanny post is likely to be less formal, although no less serious, than an interview with an early years setting.

- You may be interviewed by one person or more than one, even a small panel in some settings.

- The interviewer(s) will have prepared questions to ask. You should answer honestly and in reasonable detail but not at great length.
- If you face a panel, then speak to the person who asked you the question, but try to include the others in your eye contact.
- You are likely to be asked some questions specific to your experience so far. Be ready to show, for example, how your experience of traveller families will be an asset to this setting. Even if this will be your first job, you could speak positively, perhaps about your voluntary work with children with learning disabilities.
- If you know there are gaps in your CV, then have some sensible replies to what you were doing in the 'empty' six months or why you had three jobs in very quick succession.
- You could well be asked a couple of 'What if ...?' questions to explore how you would approach common dilemmas in work with children or parents. You might be asked, 'How would you handle the situation if a three year old swore in your group?' or 'What should you do if a parent asked you confidential information about another family?'
- Any post should allow that you will continue to learn within this job so you can show enthusiasm for continued professional development. You do not have to know everything.
- You may also be asked what has attracted you to this job. You need to make a professional response linked to the work as you understand it. Interviewers will not be impressed by a reply that it is an easy bus route from your home.

Starting a job

If you are successful in the interview then a final job offer, in a setting or with a family, will usually depend on checking your references. So long as that stage is positive, you will be offered a job. You then want, and need, written confirmation of your terms of employment. If you work with a family, the contract may be short but a formal agreement is still wise to ensure that both you and the family are clear about the conditions.

Conditions of the job

Written agreements manage everyone's expectations of the job. At the most basic you need:

- A contract that provides your conditions of employment, including salary, hours of work and holidays, notice period and any sickness and maternity rights associated with the job.
- In a setting you should have a job description that outlines the main responsibilities of your post.
- If you work as a nanny, then a contract plus a detailed conversation should lead to clarity on the boundaries to your job.

A written contract and job description should allow you to see broadly what is expected of you and then conversations can reasonably fill in the details as you need. In an early years setting, the policies should also help you to understand what exactly is meant by 'use positive strategies to guide children's behaviour' or 'promote equal opportunities'.

Support in your job

In a job with a family, you would use conversation as a means to explore further how the job can develop and resolve any different perspectives. If you work in a setting then it is reasonable to expect a pattern of support from the manager and more experienced colleagues:

- Support and guidance in the early weeks and months of your post. You should not be left to discover what is expected because you make avoidable mistakes.
- Colleagues should be ready to explain and show you the different responsibilities within your work. You need, in your turn, to be ready to ask for guidance.
- Some settings have an organised induction period or offer a named, more experienced colleague who can act as your mentor.
- It is good practice that settings offer supervision to all the team, however experienced. Your supervision sessions, with the manager or deputy, will be an opportunity to ask questions and raise issues.

Continued professional development

Good practice in early years is to be ready to extend your learning, known as **continued professional development**. You will be able to develop your skills in different ways:

- Learning from colleagues who are more experienced than you overall or in some areas. Be ready to ask as well as express appreciation for guidance from colleagues. You will soon offer ideas and experience in return.
- Flexible roles within a setting can ensure that team members add to their skills because no one is fixed in the same pattern.
- You can learn through individual study: reading or using other resources such as video. This approach will probably be more valuable if you can then exchange ideas with colleagues.
- You can attend short or longer courses. Again, you will gain more when team members share key ideas and perspectives on their return to the setting.

You will sometimes make mistakes and a supportive team and manager should help you learn from any error or confusion. The principles of **constructive feedback** are important to create a positive exchange (see page 605).

Key terms

Continued professional development

active efforts to extend and update your own knowledge and skills in your area of work

Constructive feedback

positive approaches to communication in order to enable others to learn from their actions, choice of approach and decisions

Figure 20.1

Early years practitioners build experience by involvement in all activities





Tips for practice

- Everyone needs to be willing to continue to learn. Only stale, irresponsible practitioners take an approach of 'I've done my training, so that's it.'
- You need to be willing to reflect on your practice. Realising that you could improve in an area of practice is not the same as saying you have done it all wrong up to now.
- You need to build the confidence to ask for feedback on your current practice from a supervisor or colleagues.
- It is then fair to expect constructive remarks, designed to help you improve and not blunt criticism.

Some errors may be more significant and any manager will take seriously a pattern of persistent poor practice, especially once a practitioner has received support and clear guidance about what is expected. Serious mistakes that led to potential or actual risk to a child would almost certainly have to be written up as a report. Errors of judgement that affected families have to be documented, in case parents wish to lodge a formal complaint (see page 618).

The development of teamwork

There needs to be a sense of community within any early years setting, so that everyone can depend on support through good working relationships.

Building a team

The development of **teamwork** depends on trust, which grows from direct experience of how other people behave. Teams within an early years setting, or any other workplace, learn to trust each other because daily experience tells them that their colleagues are:

- *Reliable*: people do what they promise to do. Being reliable does not mean you have to be perfect. Reliable team members speak up if there is any difficulty or confusion.
- *Consistent*: you need to trust that your colleagues will show good practice every day. Behaviour should not depend on their mood or whether they like a colleague, a child or parent.
- *Honest*: people will tell you, courteously, what they feel and what is happening, rather than leaving you to guess or to carry on with a misunderstanding.

The manager of a setting has a responsibility to promote teamwork and to address any circumstances that disrupt good team working and open communication. It is, however, the individual responsibility of each early years practitioner in a team to behave professionally and to raise any issues in a balanced and honest way if team working has become difficult.

Key terms

Teamwork

actions and an outlook that enable individuals to work in a way that is consistent and supportive of each other and the values of the setting

To think about

- Saying that a team has to build up trust in each other is not the same as suggesting colleagues are deceitful or untrustworthy characters. If teams have a low level of trust, it usually means that colleagues lack confidence in each other.
- Perhaps you check up on each other too much. Or some team members may have brought their uneasiness into this team because in a previous job they really did have to keep chasing, 'Have you done that report yet?' or 'You haven't forgotten you were going to get the museum tickets?'
- This kind of chasing feels like being nagged and can create irritated exchanges. Colleagues need to discuss what is happening and the feelings experienced by both parties. More general problems of trusting each other may need to be expressed at a team meeting, supported by your manager.

As an early years practitioner you need to recognise that you are part of a team. In any early years setting you do not all have the same responsibilities and some of your work may leave you scope for initiative about exactly how you run a day or session. Any team will benefit from the skills and talents of individuals. But those individual practitioners are interdependent; they depend on each other. **Interdependence** means that:

Key term

Interdependence

when the actions of one person have direct consequences for others in a team situation

- What one individual does in his or her work will affect other team members, for instance, an offhand approach to parents by one person can sour relations in the whole setting. On a daily basis in early years settings, you need to discuss plans. For instance, your wish to take a group to the local library may have consequences for colleagues' potential choices.
- You all need to follow policies and procedures on key aspects of your practice such as health and safety or child protection. Again, one team member cannot decide to opt out.
- Good practice for the children requires a consistent approach on issues such as a positive approach to behaviour. Children recognise that adults are individuals, but they should not have to deal with significant differences in what practitioners will allow (see page 482).

Working well as a team member

You need to understand how your setting is organised and that different early years and out of school care settings can vary.

- Your broad working role should be clear from your job description. However, you and your colleagues will need to discuss the details of who does what within each day or session.
- Flexible working can ensure that work with children is more interesting and that you can extend your skills. Perhaps you have a talent for printing and can take the craft group today. Or perhaps you would like to improve your story telling skills, so would like to work alongside a colleague who is currently more confident in this area than you feel.
- Teamwork and open communication needs to support all your colleagues and to address any problems of restricting anyone in their role.

- For instance, it is important that male colleagues in a mixed team do not end up with all the football and none of the nose wiping. Or none of the football, because the team has become confused about anti-discriminatory practice and believes that challenge to gender stereotypes should be continuous.
- Teamwork also means that you need to be clear when you would need to involve a more senior colleague in a situation, for instance in some aspects of child protection (page 560) or if a parent became highly argumentative.

The key person system

Quality in work with babies and young children can only be delivered through a caring, personal relationship between baby or child and an individual practitioner. It is not possible to meet this good practice without a **key person** (key worker or primary worker) system. This way of organising a team in a nursery applies across the age range, but is especially important in good practice with babies and toddlers.

If it is to work well, the main features of the key person system are:

- The same practitioner is responsible for the physical needs of a very small number of individual babies and toddlers. Very young children need to be able to recognise the face of the person who changes them, feeds them or to whom they wake from a nap.
- The key person can respond sensitively to individual babies and toddlers, know their preferences and develop personal rituals of songs, smiles and enjoyable 'jokes'.
- The key person can develop a friendly relationship with the child's parent, sharing ideas about the young child and communicating important information about the day or the baby's state of health.
- The key person will also be the one who keeps a baby or young child's records, to track her learning and to observe.
- The key person system does not create exclusive relationships; there should be no possessive sense of 'my children' as opposed to 'your children'. You would relate warmly to other children and parents.

Key term

Key person

a named team member who has special responsibilities for working with a small number of named children and building a relationship with their parent(s). Also sometimes called key worker or primary worker

Activity

- How does the key person system work in your setting?
- Compare usual practice with the description in this section.
- Be pleased about good practice and make suggestions about any improvements.

Key skills links: C3.3 WO3.1–3

Diversity in teams

There will always be some diversity within a team; practitioners are all individuals. But sometimes the diversity may seem more obvious or needs to be discussed in an open way because practice issues have arisen.

Figure 20.2

In many settings, adults will include practitioners and parents, also perhaps volunteers and students



The multi-disciplinary team

In some early years settings the team will not all share the same qualifications and sometimes there may be a mix of colleagues who have experience but no formal qualifications as yet. A multi-disciplinary team is more usual in family centres or combined settings such as early excellence centres. It is also usual that schools have a mix of staff with early years and childcare qualifications, teacher training and classroom support assistant training and/or experience.

Tips for practice

Good teamwork requires that everyone shows respect for the experience and qualifications of colleagues.

- You can show actively that you value colleagues' different skills by being willing to consult and learn from them.
- There must be no sense of 'I'm qualified so you do what I tell you' to an unqualified colleague.
- It is equally important that you show confidence and are prepared to be assertive, if you work in a setting where your qualifications and experience are not appreciated.
- Partly your approach needs to avoid unnecessary apology; there is nothing to be gained by comments that start, 'I know I'm only a ...'.
- But then you need to show your good practice and professionalism in work such as report writing, responsible discussion about the children or being able to problem solve rather than argue.



Activity

All teams include some diversity in personal background, skills and interests. Check first with your manager to explain what you are doing. Then undertake a simple 'skills and experience audit' of your own setting.

- Ask your colleagues to describe their particular talents and interests.
- What are the areas of knowledge within the team?
- Do emphasise, if need be, that you are not requiring immense expertise. Many adults are very quick to say, 'I'm not very good at ...'.
- Have colleagues travelled and do they have additional languages?
- What range of social, cultural or faith backgrounds are represented in the team?
- Do not forget your own contribution; what do you have to offer?
- Write up your notes and make a short presentation to your colleagues on the course, being careful to maintain confidentiality about your setting colleagues.
- Discuss what you have found in different settings.

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.1b

Scenarios

These settings have faced some issues and uncertain decisions about appropriate and inappropriate use of the diversity in their teams. Please consider, and ideally discuss with colleagues, each example and decide:

- Is this an appropriate use of this practitioner's individual background or skills?
 - If you feel the situation is inappropriate, then briefly explain your reasons. How might it be made more appropriate, if necessary?
 - Discuss with your colleagues and make links across to similar situations you have faced in your setting.
- 1 *Greenholt Pre-school* has 15 year old Justin on work placement from the local secondary school. The boys in the pre-school have been thrilled to have a 'big boy' coming every morning. They hang on Justin's arm and want him to play monsters with them. Marjorie, the pre-school leader has suggested that Justin also try some quieter activities with the children, especially books and songs, but Justin does not seem comfortable with either reading or singing.
 - 2 *Dresden Road Nursery School* serves an ethnically diverse area that has more variety than the team itself. Rosemary, the deputy, is of mixed heritage, Jamaican and Irish. Some of the less experienced team members seem to lack confidence in talking with African-Caribbean parents and are keen for Rosemary to take these conversations.
 - 3 Within the *Wessex childminding network* James is the only male childminder. In group meetings of the network he feels that he is asked

to speak far too much as a male childminder rather than a childminder who happens to be a man and a father. Laura, the network coordinator, listens, but suggests that if they ignore that James is male then they are losing a valuable perspective.

- 4 In the *Dale Parent and Toddler drop-in group* Liz has experience from another job of using sign language. It has become clear that two year old Kitty in the group may be deaf and is certainly having difficulty in her language development. Kitty's parents are keen for Liz to use her sign language with Kitty and to teach them as well.
- 5 *St Jude's Reception class* is run by Jessie and Maryam. They are currently organising a festivals topic for next term. Maryam was raised a Muslim but she would not count herself as practising. Jessie wants Maryam to gather the information on Id-ul-Fitr and organise the visit to the local mosque. Maryam is unsure why this work should be delegated to her.
- 6 *Kimberley* works as a nanny with two families. The parents of one family recently discovered that Kimberley is relatively fluent in Spanish. They have asked her to introduce the children to this language through books and songs. The family is not bilingual but the parents have read that young children are open to learning a second language.

Key skills links: C3.1a

Male early years practitioners

Most of you reading this book are going to be women, because the vast majority of early years practitioners are female. In 2001 less than 1 per cent of trained nursery nurses were men, about 1.5 per cent of playgroup leaders were male, 0.5 per cent of childminders, 3.3 per cent of classroom assistants and 3 per cent of nursery teachers and still only 17 per cent of primary school teachers. In terms of daily contact in early years settings, the teams are overwhelmingly female.

Figure 20.3

Teenagers on placement can be a positive addition to a setting





A male early years practitioner will be in the minority, usually a minority of one. So it is important that:

- Teams welcome a male colleague and are ready to talk around what he brings as a male grown-up for the children as well as an individual member of the team.
- Of course a male colleague has responsibilities to work well with the team, but everyone needs to acknowledge that he will stand out visually as a minority, at least in the beginning.
- Some parents may be wary and feel that care of young children is more appropriately a woman's task. It is a team responsibility to promote that men can be competent carers of babies and young children.
- A male practitioner can show a good role model of a caring male to all the children, some of whom may not have good experiences of responsible men.
- But it is an appropriate use of his skills that a male colleague also takes a visible role in promoting intellectual learning, especially important for boys and early literacy.
- A misunderstanding of child protection has fuelled unease about male practitioners (see page 553). Your setting should have effective checks on new staff and an atmosphere that enables concerns to be raised about any colleague. It is discriminatory to assume a male colleague is more likely to abuse than a female and therefore to restrict his duties in care.

Diversity in ethnic and cultural background

Some teams will have the opportunities that arise from having colleagues from a range of ethnic backgrounds and perhaps with two or more languages at their disposal. Any use of team members' knowledge or experience needs to be against a backdrop of responsibilities to the children and parents that are shared by everyone. For example:

- It would be inappropriate to say that a Greek Cypriot colleague would always be the key worker for the Cypriot children in your setting, not least because some families may be Turkish Cypriot. But it may be very helpful that your colleague is bilingual in Greek and English for those parents and children who are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language.
- A colleague who follows the Hindu faith may be a good initial source of knowledge in building up the resources of your setting. But it would be unwise to depend upon one person for an understanding of any world faith. All the world religions have different sects and a project exploring celebrations or faith artefacts can be a learning experience for adults too – both for those who are within as well as outside that faith.

Colleagues with disabilities

The larger early years settings (those with more than 15 staff) are required like any other organisation to make reasonable adjustments to allow disabled employees to work effectively. However, equally so, a setting is not required to employ a disabled person if there would be an unacceptable risk to children or anyone else.

So, it is possible that your team could include some colleagues with disabilities or you yourself could have a disability or continuing health condition.

- Teams need to see, and discuss when necessary, the opportunities and need for support that may arise. Practitioners who have disabilities need to be

colleagues first and disabled second (see also the approach to disabled children in Chapter 18).

- A colleague with some level of hearing loss might be able to offer children direct experience of communication when one partner is deaf.
- Some team members may have dyslexia and need support over written material. This disability should not mean that a practitioner opts out of this part of the job, but that he or she will need some practical help (see page 466).
- Disabilities that affect mobility may help a team to consider the use of space and furniture in a way that could open up the environment for everyone.

If you are on your own

Some early years practitioners do not work within a team. Childminders may have a local advisor or a network coordinator who could be consulted in confidence. Nannies are likely to work very much on their own. In both these working roles it can be even more important that you are able to talk with and raise issues with children's parents. Nannies and childminders will still sometimes need to work cooperatively with other professionals in childcare, education or health.

Skills of communication and problem solving

At the most basic level of good practice, good communication means that you take the time to talk with and listen to your colleagues in an even-handed and fair way. You have the right to expect that your views and concerns get a hearing, but you need to offer the same level of attention and respect in return.

Exchange of information

Colleagues in an early years setting need to keep each other up to date with children's progress and with any events in a family. Practitioners who work together will usually pass on information as they carry out the tasks of the day. But conversation between adults should never become more important than paying attention to the children and, of course, you would not discuss confidential family matters in front of the children. You will often have to brief senior or other colleagues responsible for a child or family. A system of written reminders, a diary or notebook, can help.

Activity

Teamwork requires good communication and part of your role is to understand clearly what kinds of information need to be passed on and to whom in your setting. Look at the following examples and check that you are clear on the following points.

- Should you tell or ask someone else about this matter?
 - Who should you tell or ask?
- 1 You notice a plant in the garden that looks like deadly nightshade.
 - 2 You and your room colleague would like to take the children to a story telling session in the local library.



- 3 A parent explains the advice she has been given to support the communication and play of her son who has autistic spectrum disorder. She would like the suggestions followed in your setting.
- 4 A father telephones to say that his daughter is in hospital with suspected meningitis.
- 5 You notice threadworms in the pot after one toddler has gone to the toilet.
- 6 A mother explains her tears to you by confiding that she had a miscarriage last week.
- 7 A parent tells you that she has heard loud arguments and screaming coming from the home of a family whose children also attend your setting.

Discuss your answers and any guidance from your setting with your colleagues on the course.

Key skills link: C3.1a

Active listening and understanding

Genuine listening is hard work because your attention has to be on what the other person is saying, and meaning, rather than on what you wish to say. Colleagues who work together need to listen to each other so that their work with children and parents can be safe and effective. You also need to listen as well as talk in meetings (see page 604), so that all ideas can be gathered and problems effectively resolved.

You need to combine attentive listening with other communication skills to check that you understand. All these skills are generally valuable; in slightly different ways you can also apply them in communication with parents and the children.

Reflecting back

You can reflect back in your own words what you believe your colleague meant. You will not always need to use reflecting back, but it can be useful to confirm that you have understood and to avoid misunderstandings. For instance: 'So, you'd like me to keep Sharon occupied while you have a chat with her Mum. That's fine with me.' Or 'You're not happy about the way we've been organising tea time. Let's talk about it then.'

Summarising

Sometimes it is useful to sum up what you have discussed with a colleague. Your brief summary gives the other person the opportunity to confirm, clarify or expand on what has just been covered. For instance: 'I'll do the first draft of the reports on Melanie and Damian. You'll do Sammi and Alric. Then we'll get together Tuesday afternoon and work on the final versions.'

Using questions

Sometimes these will be closed questions, which need only one-word answers. For instance: 'Did you say that Ella and her daughter were starting next Monday?' On other occasions, the use of open-ended questions invites fuller

answers and will lead to more information. For instance: ‘What issues would you like me to raise with Selena’s health visitor?’ It is far better to ask questions than to risk making wrong assumptions.

You can use your own communication skills to set a positive tone in working well with colleagues. If they do not appear to listen to you, then you may need to address the situation in a courteous way. Perhaps you could say, ‘Is that fine with you? What I’ve just said about writing the reports?’ or ‘I find it hard to believe you’re listening if you don’t look at me’.

Tips for practice

Some people are probably better natural listeners than others, but everyone can improve their listening skills. You need to:

- Plan how to listen well in your own working situation and draw on those communication skills that you already have.
- Pay attention to what seems to distract you from listening well and work to improve those areas within your control.
- Focus on what is being said rather than your next question or immediate concerns about what you have heard.
- Good listeners do not rush to interrupt or make their own points.
- Establish a comfortable personal space between you and the other person.
- Maintain friendly eye contact through regularly looking at the other person, holding the gaze for a while and breaking the gaze, usually by looking down briefly.
- Keep your body language open and gestures simple. Try to avoid both a very closed posture and gestures that are so expressive as to be distracting.

Misunderstandings

However well you communicate, it is inevitable that sometimes there will be misunderstandings. People can draw very different conclusions from the same conversation. This can even happen when communication is at its most straightforward – between two people, sharing the same language, face-to-face and with no interruptions. The potential for misunderstanding can arise for different reasons:

- There is a gap between what someone is thinking about saying and what is actually said. The comment or request does not come out as you or they intended. This situation is the one where one person says, ‘But didn’t I say ...?’ and the other person honestly answers, ‘No you didn’t.’
- If one person is not speaking in their most fluent language, then they may not be easily understood in everything they say. Team members need to support each other and be ready to ask, ‘Can you say that again, please’ or ‘I’m not sure if I follow. Is it that you want me to ...?’
- There are subtleties in every language that may only come to light when you have a mixed staff team. For instance, in English the phrase ‘Would you like to lay the table’ is often used as a request and not a question. A colleague whose English is an additional language, as well as some children, may react as if this is a question and say, ‘No’.

- Everybody approaches communication with some assumptions – about the person speaking and what she or he is likely to mean. These assumptions shape the sense that is made of any conversation and can lead to a gap, sometimes wide, between what was heard and what was actually received.
- Non-verbal communication carries more meaning than the spoken words. Gestures, tone of voice and the facial expression of the speaker give additional messages which may not be intended, although they may be an honest reflection of what is felt.

In a setting with a good working atmosphere, it should be possible for misunderstandings to be resolved before matters become serious. Senior practitioners may need to intervene as a third party if misunderstandings have created a bad atmosphere that is not being resolved.

Honest expression of views

Good communication within an early years team depends on an assertive approach from each individual. **Assertiveness** is frequently confused with an **aggressive approach**, so it is important to distinguish between the two.

When you behave in an assertive way then you are:

- standing up for your own rights, but in such a way that you do not dismiss or ignore the rights of other people
- expressing your wants, opinions, feelings and beliefs in a direct and honest way and allowing space for the ideas and experience contributed by others.

Assertive communication in a team means that opinions or concerns are far more likely to be expressed honestly and in a timely fashion, but also with a sensitivity to the feelings and perspective of colleagues.

The alternative to an assertive approach is not always one of aggression. It is equally unhelpful if team members take a **passive** or **submissive approach**. When you or your colleagues behave in a submissive way, then opinions do not get expressed, or else they are lost in too much apology or, 'I'm sure this really isn't important ...'.

Of course your manager has a major responsibility to run meetings and other informal exchanges in a way that makes it easier for everyone to speak up and be heard. But the responsibility for assertive communication is shared within the team. Managers can only give so much help if a team member chooses to remain silent but moans later, 'I had a good idea but of course nobody bothered to ask me!'

Key terms

Assertiveness

confident expression of your own views and preferences and allowing space for the views and choices of others

Aggressive approach

using fierce words and/or actions to insist on your own views or preferences and to minimise those of others

Passive or submissive approach

reluctance to be honest about your own opinions or preferences and allowing others to make the choice

Activity

Look at the comments that follow and decide which of them show an assertive approach. Discuss your ideas with colleagues, especially:

- What might be the consequences in an early years team of the non-assertive comments?
- How could you re-phrase the aggressive or submissive comments to make them assertive?

(You will find the answers on page 610.)

- 1 'The problem with you is that you always think you're right. Just because you've worked in a school, you think you can lord it over the rest of us. We're qualified too, you know!'

- 2 'I expect this isn't really important. Probably it's because I'm not a physiotherapist. But isn't Dolan's therapy actually making her worse?'
- 3 'I'm concerned. I think the parents who help us in the pre-school aren't getting enough explanation before they start. So they're making mistakes that could be avoided if they knew better what we wanted.'
- 4 'Maybe I've got the wrong impression about this trip. I know I'm new here and I suppose you know best. But shouldn't we have a few more adults in the group?'
- 5 'Jerry, we've spoken before about how you criticise the children's behaviour in their hearing. I believe it's disrespectful towards them. If you keep doing this, I'll have to talk with Olivia (the manager).'
- 6 'That just won't work with this kind of family. If you'd worked with children for twenty years like I have, then you'd understand.'
- 7 'Tony, I would really like your observations of Kathy to add to our report by Tuesday at the latest. Can you do that?'
- 8 'I'm terribly sorry; I know this is short notice and I guess it's because I'm so disorganised. But would you mind very much if I left the keys for you to lock up tonight?'
- 9 'I don't know how you can stand there and ask me to listen out for the phone. Can't you see how busy I am?'
- 10 'I would prefer not to change shifts with Sandy. I'm taking my daughter to an orthodontic appointment that afternoon. I don't want to cancel it because it'll be months before they give me another date.'
- 11 'I appreciate that you're very busy Saira, but welcoming the parents is part of our job in this room.'

Source: This exercise is modified slightly from Jennie and Lance Lindon *Working Together for Young Children: A guide for managers and staff* (Cengage Learning 1997).

Key skills links: C3.1a

Communication in meetings

A great deal of valuable communication in early years settings will happen informally through conversation. But you will experience some communication within meetings, either whole staff or room meetings and possibly some meetings to which other professionals are invited. It is likely that a meeting will be led and chaired by your manager or a senior colleague. This person will be responsible for ensuring an effective meeting but it will be your responsibility to:

- Speak up and express your views in a courteous and assertive way, as described earlier within this section.
- Listen to colleagues and ask questions if you do not understand or completely follow what they have said or suggested.
- Share the responsibility in any meeting to speak up if you are not clear about, 'exactly what we are going to do about ...' or who is going to do what and by when.
- Be ready to fulfil your own commitments to a team meeting, such as give a short report on how the children have reacted to the new role play area. Or



Figure 20.4

Team discussion can mean consistency in the approach to activities

you might present the information you promised to track about opening times and costs for a visit to the new wetlands centre and bird sanctuary.

Some early years practitioners feel more comfortable in meetings than others. You need to get to know how you react and improve your skills from that point.

- Listen properly to others and build your contribution onto what has already been said.
- You can also courteously point out gaps in the discussion by comments like, 'I think we may be overlooking ...' or 'Can we go back to ...'.
- If you know you lack confidence in speaking up, then prepare yourself rather than sit there fuming, 'Why doesn't anybody ask me!'
- You might make yourself a few notes or ask for a specific slot on the agenda. Practise non-apologetic ways of starting your contribution.
- On the other hand, you may realise that you tend to dominate meetings – be honest with yourself.
- Practise making your contribution and stopping. Listen to others and ensure you understand what they are saying before you start.
- You may need to tolerate silences rather than rushing to fill them.

Tips for practice

Constructive feedback

Communication within a team and in other working relationships is much more effective if everyone understands and follows the principles of constructive feedback. In this chapter the focus is on communication in the team but these ideas can also be useful for your partnership with parents.

Giving constructive feedback is a communication technique in the sense that there are basic ground rules to follow, but these are not complicated. Learning to give feedback well requires serious consideration of two key points:

- What is the basis for what I am saying?
- How can I make what I say as useful as possible to the other person?

In working life, or personal for that matter, your feedback will be most useful if you give it in such a way that the person on the receiving end is able to:

- understand the content of the feedback
- accept the feedback
- able to do something as a result of the feedback.

Tips for practice

Be specific

When you are giving feedback, you need to focus on what has happened and on your reactions – positive or negative.

- Vague feedback is not useful in helping others to do better, nor to appreciate what has been very well done.

- Being told ‘you did well this morning’ is pleasant, but the words do not tell you much about your practice. It will be more useful if you hear, ‘I think you’ve really got the idea now of when to speak up in the parents’ group and when to listen.’
- Vague negative comments, especially if they are from a more senior practitioner, may make staff feel that they should change – but in what way?

Describe what you have observed

Useful feedback focuses on *what* someone has done or not done: how exactly this person behaved.

- The emphasis on description rather than judgement makes the feedback more useful, as well as easier to accept.
- Words such as ‘never’ or ‘always’ are best avoided in feedback, since they are rarely true and tend to make the person on the receiving end feel defensive or hostile.
- It is unhelpful to use labels of someone’s personality or style. Negative labelling (for instance, ‘you’re insensitive’) is likely to place other people on the defensive because they have no manoeuvring room.
- Positive labels can restrict workers as well. For instance, a worker who is told ‘you’re always so capable’ may feel unwilling to admit to having any difficulty with anything.
- It is more helpful if you give a recent example of what you mean, whether the message is a compliment or criticism.

What and not why

Useful feedback is restricted to what you have observed and an honest expression of your viewpoint.

- Sometimes people offer an explanation of someone else’s behaviour because it seems to soften the criticism, but this is rarely helpful because it is based on assumptions like, ‘I’m sure what you meant was ...’.
- Undoubtedly, a person’s reasons behind a particular action, or inaction, can be an important part of the conversation that develops from good feedback.
- If you feel you need to explore possible reasons with a colleague, then open-ended questions will do the job much better than guesses. For instance, you could ask, ‘What were your concerns about ...?’ or ‘How were you hoping that the conversation would go ...?’

Be honest about opinions

When you work alongside someone or have observed their practice, you will have opinions.

- These views can be very useful but only if they are honestly communicated, with evidence, as your opinion and not as if they are absolute facts.
- A personal opinion should be expressed honestly as ‘I think’ or ‘I feel’. You should follow with ‘because ...’ or ‘Here’s the way that I’ve been looking at this incident ... Let me explain’.



Scenario

Ciaran, the manager of Baker Street Children and Family Centre, is in a rush this morning and has spoken without thinking. He has said 'Sian, you've got yourself in a state about anything to do with parents, all because Joanne's Dad came charging in over the business of the trip money.'

Ciaran thinks during the morning and goes back to Sian to say, 'I'm sorry. I wasn't very helpful earlier today', and he takes a more constructive approach now with, 'I'd like to talk with you about what happened with Joanne's Dad. I'm concerned that incident has shaken your confidence about facing the more argumentative parents.'

Questions

- 1 What makes Ciaran's first remark less helpful to Sian?
- 2 Discuss with your colleague any recent examples when members of your own team, or you yourself, have expressed an opinion as if it were a fact that needed no further support. (Keep any details about team members confidential.)
- 3 How were people encouraged to support their opinion or could they have been helped to be more constructive in what they said?
- 4 Possibly role play one or more examples in a positive way.

Key skills links: WO3.2 C3.1a

Balance positives and negatives

A brief conversation may focus on a single part of someone's work or on a particular event. If the working relationship between two colleagues has been constructive so far, then there will be no need to add a positive comment to the current constructive criticism. The previous experience of the practitioner receiving the feedback tells him or her that the colleague does not simply pick on what has gone less well in the work. Within your whole working relationship with colleagues, children and parents it is important to balance up positives and negatives.

Feedback will not always be welcome, however carefully you express yourself.

- You can never be certain that people to whom you are giving feedback will not become defensive. You can only increase the chance that they will listen and consider what you are saying.
- Sometimes, other people's feelings about your feedback will be strong enough to make it hard for them to listen.
- In this case, there is little point in repeating yourself. Focus on the other person's feelings and try to understand why the emotions are running high.
- Team members' reactions will be influenced by their previous experiences of feedback. It takes time to build everyone's confidence that the feedback is being shared from a genuine desire to improve the quality of work and to develop everyone's skills.
- Managers and senior team members have a special responsibility to encourage a positive working atmosphere and to model good practice in giving and receiving feedback.

Tips for practice

Receiving feedback

There is a shared responsibility over feedback since good working relationships also depend on how people react to what is said to them. These are positive guidelines for when you are on the receiving end of feedback.

Look and listen

This is a very simple guideline and is the one that is probably most often broken.

- You cannot possibly understand what is being said to you, nor come to decide whether it is useful or fair, unless you keep quiet and listen.
- Allow the other person to finish. Resist the temptation to interrupt and try to quieten your inner thoughts.
- But when you have listened, it is fair that you can comment in a positive way on what you have heard.

Make the effort to understand the feedback

- Suspend, for the moment, any attempts to come to a conclusion over whether the feedback is right or justified.
- Concentrate on making sure that you understand what is being said to you. Use the communication skills of reflecting back and summarising to check (see page 601).
- Asking questions can help you to gain more information or clarification but will not help if you use questions in a confronting way.
- For instance, you will not learn anything much of use if you claim, 'How can you possibly say my records are "messy". I'm a very neat person!'
- As an alternative, you might say, 'I don't like being called "messy". But, perhaps it's just the word. Can you explain it to me another way?'
- If the feedback is vague, then ask for a recent example of what your colleague or manager means.

Scenario

Stephanie has spent a great deal of time drafting a new brochure for Greenholt Pre-school. She presents her draft at the team meeting, along with some illustrations and two estimates of costs from local printers. She finds the reaction from her colleagues disheartening, since it all sounds critical.

Marjorie asks, 'Why haven't you included children's drawings?' and 'Why did you only get two estimates?' Trisha comments, 'I'm really not sure about this paragraph on equal opportunities'. Despite feeling daunted Stephanie says, 'These are all good suggestions and I'll think about them. But isn't there anything you liked about my draft?'

Her colleagues look surprised at Stephanie's tone. Marjorie replies, 'Oh, yes, the cartoons are lovely; I just meant we could have some drawings too' and Trisha says, 'Oh, I thought most of it was fine, I was just pointing to what could be a bit better.'

Questions

Unless a team has slid into very negative relationships, a specific request to 'tell me something good about my idea' will usually encourage people to voice the positive reactions that they are not bothering to express.

- 1 Why do you think people are often swifter with criticisms than positive comments?
- 2 What tends to be the reaction to 'Why?' questions (as in the example)?
- 3 Imagine an alternative version to the scenario in which Marjorie and Trisha's comments were very positive. But Stephanie had replied with, 'Do you really think so? I'm still not happy with the wording.' Or 'I'm not sure the cartoons work'. How might her colleagues have felt?
- 4 Look over the guidelines on giving and receiving feedback. Note three ways that feedback could be improved in your setting.

Key skills links: WO3.2

Think about the feedback received

Listening carefully to feedback can provide some useful thinking time, so long as you are thinking about the feedback details, and not how you intend to argue about it. Further thinking time often occurs afterwards.

- You may especially need to think if the feedback has raised new issues about how you work, or is making you re-evaluate, perhaps uncomfortably, something about which you had previously felt so sure.
- Even if feedback was not put very constructively, there may still be value in what was said. Think over *what* was said more than *how* it was expressed and perhaps consult one or two colleagues.
- Seeking other opinions needs to be done positively, such as 'I'd like to hear your view on ...' or 'I'm trying to understand ...'.
- It is not helpful to force colleagues to take sides, as in, 'What Ted said in the meeting was rubbish, wasn't it? I'm always polite to parents.'

Accepting compliments

Workers are usually most concerned about how criticism will be taken. Yet, some people respond to positive feedback in such a dismissive way that others no longer bother to give them compliments. If this is the pattern in a setting, the result can be discouraging for everyone. It will be the responsibility of senior practitioners to change the team's approach. It is also possible that practitioners who cannot deal with positive feedback may be failing to offer enough encouragement to children or parents.

- An appropriate reaction to a compliment is simply to say 'Thanks' or 'Thank you for telling me'.
- You might follow this with something specific like, 'I'm glad you think I handled Michael's tantrum calmly.'
- Being pleased is not the same as being boastful. Modesty may lay behind comments such as 'It wasn't that impressive' or 'I thought I could have done better'.
- However, another view is that these replies openly disagree with the person who has made the effort to point out what was done well. Dismissing the compliment then actually appears rude.

Figure 20.5

The whole team needs to be committed to shared values – such as the importance of outdoor play



Ask for feedback

You do not have to wait for a colleague to offer you feedback on some part of your work; you can ask. Use all the guidelines to make the feedback as useful as possible to you.

Dealing with disagreement in a team

Practitioners who have experienced a pattern of positive communication with constructive feedback are more likely to be able to handle differences of opinion and even outright disagreement. A team, led by their manager, needs a reasonable balance:

- Most people would rather have less argument than more. But the lack of any disagreement in a team is not always a positive sign. There are likely to be some differences of opinion and they will still affect practice, even if they are never voiced out loud.
- You can of course have too high a level of disagreement in a team or a negative way of handling differences, so that everyone is forced to take sides. Apart from an unpleasant working atmosphere, good ideas can be lost in the hurly-burly of argument.

Answers to Activity box on page 603

- Assertive comments: 3, 5, 7, 10, 11
- Submissive comments: 2, 4, 8
- Aggressive comments: 1, 6, 9



Tips for practice

- Your manager should encourage good communication as well as set a good example to the whole team.
- Everyone should listen as well as want time to express their own views.
- Problems need to be described in terms of examples of 'what' and 'when'.
- Avoid sweeping statements such as 'you never listen to me' or 'you're always going on about ...'.
- Try very hard to see disagreement as something to be discussed and resolved, rather than as a personal attack on you.
- Everyone needs to let incidents go and not hark back once the issues are resolved. You need to start afresh, much as you encourage the children to do after an argument.

Activity

Several scenarios in other chapters could be used to explore problem solving techniques and dealing positively with disagreement.

You can explore by asking:

- What are the more constructive ways out of this difference of opinions?
- What might make matters worse?
- You could role play an incident with colleagues.
- Make links to your own practice.

You can use any of the following scenarios:

- 1 The Dale Parent and Toddler drop-in in Chapter 3, on page 105 about the use of food as play materials.
- 2 St Jude's Primary School in Chapter 8 on page 231 about whether children are being 'assertive' or 'cheeky'.
- 3 Sunningdale Day Nursery in Chapter 10 on page 278, about suitable baby arts and crafts.
- 4 Baker Street Children and Family Centre in Chapter 13 on page 387 about the Father Christmas email project.
- 5 Greenholt Pre-school in Chapter 17 on page 484 about over-planning of activities.
- 6 St Jude's Primary School in Chapter 21 on page 643 about children being made to apologise for something they did not do.

Key skills links: LP3.103 WOI3.1–3

It is important that your manager or a senior colleague runs meetings so that everyone has a chance to speak and more than one side is heard for an issue. Sometimes difficulties in the team will need to be resolved in face-to-face conversation.

An assertive approach can help to defuse a problem situation between colleagues. You need to focus on what is happening, rather than on personal

criticisms. For instance, assertive communication about a problem follows this kind of pattern:

- A brief description of the event or the problem area – for example, ‘When I was speaking with Stefan’s father you interrupted me and started to explain about our policy on equal opportunities ...’.
- Your feelings, expressed honestly – ‘I felt angry and embarrassed ...’.
- Brief explanation – ‘because I felt it made me look as if I didn’t understand ...’.
- What you would rather have happen – ‘I don’t mind you listening or even joining a conversation, but please wait to see what I’m going to say.’

This kind of approach has more chance of being a constructive conversation between colleagues than an approach such as: ‘Why don’t you trust me?’ or ‘You’re always interrupting and undermining me with the parents!’

Ideally colleagues resolve problems in an informal way. But if daily communication does not resolve conflict between you and a colleague, it is your responsibility to ask your manager or a senior to facilitate a discussion in which she or he ensures that both of you get to speak and listen.

Working with other professionals

You will work most closely with the other team members in your setting but you will have contact with other professionals who work with children and families. Look at page 17 for a description of the range of services and professions with whom you may have contact.

Good practice in your working relationship with other professionals will have a great deal in common with teamwork with your colleagues and partnership with parents. Good communication skills and approaches to resolving problems or disagreements are consistent across working relationships with any other adults. It will also be important that you develop a positive and confident professional identity yourself. In society there tends to be a hierarchy of professions and people who work with the very youngest children have often not been fully respected.

Figure 20.6

You may need to explain the value of play to some outside professionals





Tips for practice

- Working together with other professionals means showing confidence in your own skills as well as respecting those of others.
- If other professionals seem to doubt your skills, then show what you can do through your behaviour. Demonstration will be more effective than saying, 'I am a professional too, you know'.
- Share your ideas, perspectives and knowledge without always waiting to be asked. Be courteous, yet assertive and show that you expect a two-way exchange of professional knowledge.
- Be clear about the priorities in your work as well as the boundaries.
- If in doubt, then check with your manager about appropriate practice, for instance if an external professional asks to consult a family's file.
- It is professional to admit that you do not know something or that you would like further explanation. Of course, it is also professional that you ensure you have information at your finger tips that you should know.
- Keep the commitments you offer and avoid making promises or setting time scales which you cannot honour.
- Be ready to follow up courteously on other people's commitments when you are working together.

Policies and practice in a setting

Your responsibilities as an early years practitioner include following the policies and procedures of your setting. The difference is usually that:

- *policies* lay out key principles that inform and guide work
- *procedures* give the details of the steps that must be followed.

The law will sometimes shape policy, for instance over equal opportunities in employment or requirements for health and safety. But policies are also a form of clear communication for a team and parents about values and priorities in the work. Policies need not be very long but should be clearly written, ideally in the main languages spoken by families who attend your setting. Policies should also be open to discussion and review.

Most settings will have written policies on the following issues:

- the application of equal opportunities in the work of the setting
- admissions to the centre, including how any waiting list is operated
- positive handling of children's behaviour and your approach to discipline
- partnership with parents and what this means for this setting
- the details of the early years curriculum in work with the children
- health and safety for workers, children, parents and any visitors
- personnel policy for workers and volunteers.

Of course no policy, however well written, does all the work for a team. Your health and safety policy does not in itself keep children and staff healthy and safe. This goal is achieved because you put the policy into practice day by day. A behaviour policy (see page 614) will contribute to good practice when everyone

on the staff team is involved, parents are consulted and of course children are asked for their opinion.

Tips for practice

- You need to know the details of any policies that affect the work in your setting.
- Be ready to look at the details and to ask constructive questions about how the policy comes alive through practice.
- It is important that you behave in line with the policy but you cannot work for good practice if you are unclear what some details of the policy mean.
- Using principles of good communication and feedback, be ready to ask, 'Does this mean that I should ...?' or 'Can you please explain the consequence here if I face ...'.

Developing a policy on behaviour – an example

Children need and deserve consistency from the key adults in their lives as well as an overall positive approach. Early years practitioners have a responsibility to talk and plan positively about the children. You need to work together consistently for the sake for the children.

- Try to notice children's cooperative behaviour at least as often as problems and preferably much more often.
- You should avoid using tales of 'bad' behaviour as coffee time drama. Teams can slip into this bad habit without realising and it creates a negative work atmosphere for dealing with children.
- Be clear and talk in your team about how would you like the children to resolve everyday conflicts. Of course you do not want them to hit each other or grab toys. So how can a young child be enabled to deal with frustration?
- Are you all making sure that difficult times of the day and areas of your setting are made easier? What changes can you make as a responsible adult?
- Are you all consistent between each other on the main approaches to supporting children's behaviour? Do you all follow your own ground rules?

To think about

Some practitioners and parents are very resistant to the positive approach. Within your team, or in communication with parents, you may need to talk through one or more of the following beliefs, well grounded in British cultural traditions of child rearing.

Some common blocks are described, with suggested ways to counter argue.

Belief

Children should just do what they are told. They should not argue, nor expect explanations. Respect is something that children owe adults.

Counter argument

This approach will not work in our current society unless adults bully children and that is unacceptable. But it can be hard for adults to learn that respect can work both ways.

Belief

You have to tell children what they are doing wrong, or else they will not learn. If you do not punish children, they think they can get away with misbehaviour. You need to make children feel guilty about their actions and motives.

Counter argument

This approach just creates unhappy children, anxious about their mistakes; it does not promote learning.

Belief

Too much praise makes children big-headed and spoils them. Offering incentives is the same as bribery.

Counter argument

Encouragement, well used, does not spoil children and is different from the mistake of rewarding them with sweets or treats. Children who experience encouragement generously given, soon show they can give in return, often to their peers or siblings.

Some adults, because they have experienced very limited encouragement within their own childhood or even now as adults, feel uncomfortable initially about being very positive with children. It takes practice and commitment.

- Discuss in your team.

Key skills links: PS3.1 C3.1a

A clear behaviour policy may help a team to develop and maintain a positive approach to children and such a policy is part of communication in partnership with parents.

A behaviour policy is a public statement about your team's commitment to support children's learning in terms of their behaviour. No policy should be too long, probably two or three pages is enough and your policy should communicate three important areas of your practice:

- 1 The key values that inform your team's overall approach to children's behaviour – similar to those laid out in Chapter 17.
- 2 Your expectations for everyone's behaviour in the setting: a constructive policy is as much about the behaviour of adults as that of the children.
- 3 The strategies you will use to guide children's behaviour: your policy should give a flavour of how you help children to behave within the boundaries that are set.

Your behaviour policy can show the vital links between how you handle children's behaviour and how you support their development and learning. The details of your policy could show that the choices made about how to guide children's behaviour are because you want to support their all round development. Such links are very positive because your behaviour policy then shows that this aspect of your good practice is completely linked with how you support children's learning. You could, for instance, explain briefly in the setting's policy, and by conversation with parents, that you all act to support children's:

- self respect and their growing sense of self esteem

- potential for prosocial behaviour
- ability to guide their own behaviour with encouragement and friendly support
- competence in useful social skills such as negotiation with other children and simple problem solving.

Activity

Look carefully at the behaviour policy of your setting and try to read it as someone new to the setting.

- What are the values that underpin the policy? What does it say really matters in a positive approach to children's behaviour?
- Is there a balance between wanted behaviour from children and unwanted?
- Is there a clear commitment to partnership with parents?

If possible, ask for the opinions of some parents:

- Have they seen the policy?
- Do they understand and agree with it?
- Are there parts of the policy that are unclear to them or with which they disagree?

If you work in a primary school or after school club, take the opportunity to invite the children's opinions of the behaviour policy in action.

- What do the children think works well?
- What do they feel needs re-thinking or perhaps would allow for the experience of children in common playground situations?
- Listen to what the children tell you and try to understand their point of view.
- Resist arguing with them; they probably have valid points to make.

If your setting does not have a behaviour policy, then make contact with another local early years setting or school and ask if you could have a copy of theirs. Explain why you would like to read it.

- Discuss the issues with your team and make a draft policy for consideration.

Key skills links: WO3.1–3



To think about

Adults generally spend a great deal more time talking about children whose behaviour troubles them or that is disruptive in the group. You probably do not spend anything like as much time discussing children's cooperative behaviour, thoughtful actions and pleasant periods spent getting along together. Why do you think there is this gap and does it matter? The imbalance matters for several reasons:

- As helpful adults you could probably learn from some discussion about children whose behaviour makes you pleased. Perhaps you behave differently towards them, although not intentionally.
- Excessive discussion about problems can make a team think that all the children are 'difficult'. It can also lead to a situation in which parents are only told when there is a problem. If a child is behaving well then little is said. Such an imbalance does not promote partnership and it is also unfair towards the children.

Policies to deal with poor practice

Poor practice and unacceptable standards in a setting are dealt with through three procedures:

- 1 *Disciplinary procedures* are started when a worker has failed to comply with codes of conduct in the setting or has behaved unprofessionally.
- 2 *Grievance procedures* are available for paid staff or voluntary workers when ordinary communication has failed to resolve serious issues such as their conditions of service, lack of management support or unacceptable behaviour towards this practitioner.
- 3 The *complaints procedure* is for service users, that will be parents in the case of early years settings, although in theory an older child could also act as an aggrieved service user.

Each of these procedures should be easily available in written form to be consulted in any setting. The aim would always be to try to resolve problems through conversation and discussion in the first instance and not to take the more serious and formal steps unless other forms of communication had failed.

Disciplinary procedures

These procedures should never be started lightly, nor should the prospect be held as a threat against a practitioner. But it is a serious matter if practitioners neglect the welfare of children or behave contrary to the policies of a setting, for instance over anti-discriminatory practice.

Disciplinary procedures should include clear steps to be followed if a practitioner's behaviour falls below acceptable standards and that would include a disciplinary interview. Any practitioner should be able to expect fair treatment and the opportunity to speak as well as listen.

The disciplinary interview should be run by the manager in a way that is business-like and formal, including the taking of objective notes. The aims of this interview are to:

- Check the facts of the situation. A manager should explain clearly the gap between what is expected from this practitioner and what is happening in practice.

Key term

Disciplinary procedure

steps to deal with unacceptable behaviour from a member of the team in a setting

- Explore the reasons for this gap. The manager should ask open-ended questions and *listen* to what you, the practitioner, have to say.
- Agree a plan of action to close the gap. The manager should get commitment from the practitioner about changes in her or his practice and explain the consequences if these commitments are not kept. Under some circumstances the manager may also agree to offer special support.

If the practice does not improve then a practitioner should be given formal warnings, at least one in writing. The manager will keep written records and a case will be made for dismissal.

Grievance and complaints procedures

It will be the choice of practitioner to initiate **grievance procedures**, as it is the option of parents or other users of the centre to make a formal complaint through the **complaints procedure**. The manager should neither encourage nor dissuade anyone from starting the process. It is the manager's role to give any necessary paperwork and explain the steps of the procedure. Managers will not handle any of these procedures alone but will inform and consult with their own line management and with the management committee or board of governors as appropriate.

If disciplinary procedures have arisen because of a formal complaint from a parent, then the two processes have to be kept separate. Both are handled in line with the correct procedures and must be seen to be resolved one way or another. The complaint from the parent will become part of the information that has to be considered in the disciplinary process.

Key terms

Grievance procedure

process for a team member to lodge a complaint that she or he has been treated in an unacceptable way

Complaints procedure

process for parents and other users of the setting to lodge a formal complaint about any aspect of the setting and the actions of the team

Activity

Ask to read the procedures in your setting for grievance, disciplinary action and complaints from parents.

- Are the steps in the process clearly explained in the document?
- If there is any confusion about the details, ask questions so that you understand.
- Is it clear what kind of behaviour from practitioners could lead to a disciplinary interview? Again, ask questions if the circumstances are vague.
- Write up a short report on what you have found.
- Compare what you have found with colleagues on your course.

Key skills links: C3.2 C3.3

**Figure 20.7**

A staff board gives clear communication to staff and visitors

Further resources

- Back, Ken and Kate (1991) *Assertiveness at Work – A practical guide to handling awkward situations* McGraw Hill.
- Hyder, Tina and Kenway, Penny (1995) *An Equal Future: A guide to anti-sexist practice in the early years* National Early Years Network.
- Lane, Jane (1999) *Action for Racial Equality in the Early Years* National Early Years Network.
- Lindon, Jennie and Lance (1997) *Working Together for Young Children* Cengage Learning, especially Chapters 3 and 4.
- Whalley, Margy (1994) *Learning to be Strong: Setting up a neighbourhood service for under-fives and their families* Hodder and Stoughton.

Progress check

- 1 Describe three ways to make a positive impression at a job interview as an early years practitioner.
- 2 Explain briefly why teamwork matters in an early years setting.
- 3 Describe two ways in which trust can be built in a team.
- 4 Suggest two ways that early years practitioners can improve their listening skills.
- 5 Describe two ways that can improve constructive feedback between colleagues.
- 6 Explain two reasons why settings need clear policies.
- 7 What is the difference between disciplinary and grievance procedures?

Partnership with parents

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- explain the importance of partnership with parents
- understand ways to build a friendly working relationship with parents
- use skills of communication appropriately with parents
- offer different ways for parents to be involved in your setting.

Introduction

As an early years practitioner, your involvement with a child can be very positive, but in terms of their childhood, you will be temporary. Parents will create the continuity in children's lives and they continue to be important throughout the time that you are involved with the child and family. It is therefore very important that you work in partnership with parents and show respect for their relationship with their child. Parents should be informed about how you work as an individual practitioner or the approach of your setting. They have the right to be consulted about their own children and involved as appropriate, and to the extent that they wish in your setting. This chapter explains good practice in a working relationship with parents as fellow adults.

Links to early years qualifications

This chapter especially supports the following units:

Diploma in Child Care and Education: 7, 10, 11

National Vocational Qualification in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2: P1, P9, C13

Level 3: M7, P5, P8, C14

BTEC National Early Years Diploma: 3, 21, 22

The importance of partnership with parents

Partnership with parents has been raised throughout this book and has been part of some examples. The aim of this chapter is to bring together some of the most important themes and to discuss some of the issues and possible dilemmas that can arise.

Why is partnership part of good practice?

Partnership with parents is an integral part of good early years practice; it is not an optional extra:

- Parents are the continuity in their own children's lives. They know them as individuals and are emotionally involved in a different way to the most committed practitioner.
- You have expertise and experience but so do parents and your support for children will be that much more effective because you work well with parents.
- Parents have the right to be involved in decisions about their children and to be fully involved in any discussion or specialist assessment.
- You should ask parents for their permission about significant changes in the day that you have agreed for their children or for trips outside the usual schedule.
- Parents and other family members can be a rich source of expertise and experience and are often pleased to help a setting or become involved in different ways that respect and acknowledge their other commitments.

Key term

Partnership with parents

the value and practice of working together with parents for the care and learning of their children, acknowledging the continuing importance of parents in the lives of their children



Figure 21.1

All settings need to relate to parents as well as children

Diversity in family life

Through friendly communication in partnership with parents you will understand some details of a child's home circumstances that help you to settle children and to make both the child and parent(s) welcome. Part of your responsibility as an early years practitioner is to be open-minded about different family styles and to be ready to learn about cultural backgrounds that are less familiar to you.

Scenario

Marsha has recently joined St Jude's reception class. After a slightly confused conversation, it has become clear that the person who staff thought was Marsha's mother is in fact her foster carer. Mrs Chance had been reticent because they had encountered negative attitudes in Marsha's pre-school to children who were looked after in foster care.

Jessie and Maryam in the reception class are concerned to reassure Mrs Chance and to establish a good working relationship with her. They suggest an informal meeting in which they:

- Reassure Mrs Chance that they behave in a professional way and that Marsha's personal circumstances will be kept confidential.
- Talk with Mrs Chance about names: how does Marsha refer to her foster carers and their own children, what other names might crop up in conversation?
- Explain that they are sensitive to family issues of all the children, for instance in activities such as making Mother's Day cards or themes in some stories.
- Would welcome guidance about whether Marsha's experiences might affect her development or behaviour. Mrs Chance is then able to explain that Marsha's birth family became violent and that she is easily distressed or frightened by loud noises or arguments.
- Check whether Marsha's birth parents are likely to come to the school and whether that situation could pose a risk to the child.

Questions

The supportive conversation that you have with a foster carer is very similar to friendly openness that you should show to all parents, with sensitivity to the variety in family patterns and background.

- 1 What could be the consequences if you do not realise that a child lives with a foster family?
- 2 Consider ways that you might support children if they are questioned about their family circumstances. Bear in mind that you can raise this issue in advance with a foster carer and that you should also be guided by how the child wants to handle the situation.
- 3 Write up your ideas and discuss with colleagues.

Key skills links: C3.3 C3.1a

You will have your own experience as a child and some readers may be raising their own families now as adults. It is important that neither you nor your colleagues allow unchecked assumptions to shape your work, because families come in many forms (see page 5).

- Some children are being raised by two parents and some by lone parents. Some families will go through changes while you share responsibility for the children and may divide or form new homes as stepfamilies.
- Some children will be cared for within a family, but not by their parents. Other relatives, such as grandparents, may have primary responsibility. Or children may be in the short- or long-term care of a foster family.
- Adults can become parents at different times of their life. In your setting, or work as a childminder or nanny, you may relate to parents who are very young, perhaps still in their teens and some who are into middle age. It is important that you relate to everyone as a parent without assumptions.
- Older parents are not necessarily more confident about parenting than a teenage parent. You may also need to deal with any feelings you have, if you are very different in age from the parents with whom you relate.
- Parents may or may not share your own cultural background or faith. It is important that, whatever your own background, you make the effort to understand this family.
- But you will not necessarily warm more easily to people with whom you share a social or cultural background. Every social or ethnic group includes a great deal of variation within the group.
- Some families are travellers and although some may remain in the same area for a long period of time, others will move around following seasonal work. Traveller families (some prefer to be called gypsies) are as varied as any other social and cultural group, so it is important not to make assumptions. It is appropriate for you to learn about traveller life and how children's experiences can be respected and used appropriately in your setting.



Figure 21.2

Children like to show their parents what goes on in their setting

- Some parents will have disabilities and it is important that you avoid assumptions about what the disability means to them as parents in your setting. Be ready to talk, listen and make adjustments when appropriate. But avoid thinking of 'disabled parents' as a group who must be similar to each other, any more than applying this assumption about 'black parents' or 'teenage parents'.

The adults whom you think of as 'the parents' have many other roles in their life. You and they get to know each other because they are the parents of the children for whom you are temporarily responsible. You need to develop a friendly working relationship (see page 625) because of the professional link, but do not forget that parents are individuals and a fellow adult like you.

Tips for practice

- Early years settings can be very female environments, so men may feel more comfortable initially if you invite them to become involved in a more 'male' activity, like building or games. But men vary, of course, so do not assume this.
- But offer variety as soon as possible and certainly enable children, especially the little boys, to see that 'real men' read, tell stories and do cooking (see page 598).
- If you are female, do not expect your male colleague(s) to take on all the partnership with fathers or other male carers, any more than a black practitioner should work exclusively with black families. It is a team responsibility.

Activity

The team at the Dale Parent and Toddler Drop-in is aware that, although they are keen to use the word 'parents', they often assume 'mothers' in practice. A couple of fathers have recently arrived with their toddlers, but only one has become a regular. Annie wants to ensure a welcome without over-reacting. Several issues have already arisen:

- A couple of regular mothers have made remarks, not unkind but thoughtless, about why Donovan is looking after his daughter Olivia. There is the assumption that it is temporary or Donovan must be out of work.
- When there were two fathers in the group, one of the regular attenders made a remark about 'all these men coming to our group'.
- Conversation in the drop-in, because it has been all female, has sometimes veered into complaints about men. The first time this happens with Donovan in the group, there is a pause and then laughter with, 'But we don't mean you'. Annie and Vicky are not entirely happy about this way of handling the situation.
- Donovan is entirely competent with Olivia and seems well able to deal with any surprise about his skills. He is also honest about the frustrations. For instance the health clinic has only just stopped asking when Olivia's mother will come to an appointment and despite making a persuasive case he still cannot get entrance to the local mothers and babies' swim session.



Questions

- 1 Consider what the Dale team might do to make Donovan welcome and deal with any issues courteously.
- 2 Discuss for your own setting what will help fathers (or uncles or grandfathers) to feel welcome.
- 3 For instance, are there pictures on the wall of men playing with and caring for children? Suggest some plans for improvement in practice.

Key skills links: C31a WO3.1–3

A friendly working relationship with parents

Good practice in early years is to aim for a friendly working relationship with parents. You have come together because you share the care of the children and not because you have chosen each other as friends.

It is your responsibility to be equally responsive to all the parents and not to spend more time talking and listening to those to whom you find it easier to warm. It does not matter how well you get along with individual parents, you cannot guarantee to behave to them in the way that a friend would react. For instance, a friend might drop all other obligations to help out or would promise to keep all confidences secret. But you have responsibilities to other families that cannot be pushed aside. Furthermore, you are obliged to report some confidences, particularly those that imply possible risk to the child.

Dilemmas can arise if the boundaries between your work and personal life have become unclear: perhaps you work in the same neighbourhood as your home or you went to school with some of the parents whose children now attend the setting where you work. You have a right to a private, personal life, but some circumstances may undermine your professional objectivity. Your manager or a senior colleague should be ready to listen to you and offer support and advice if a complicated situation has arisen.

Scenario

Please look at each of the following examples. Ideally discuss your views with colleagues and together reach some ideas on what should happen in the situation. You could consider these general questions for each example:

- Is the example an appropriate form of partnership with parents and involvement with families?
 - Briefly explain your reasons for concluding 'yes' or 'no'.
 - If you feel 'no', then how should the situation be handled – by this practitioner or by a manager or senior, if appropriate?
- 1 Christopher lives close to Sunningdale Day Nursery where he works. Last week he met one parent with her child very close to the nursery and, since she was in a hurry, took responsibility for the child at that point. This morning the same parent knocked on his front door and asked Christopher to take her child now, since she had an early

- meeting at work. He refused courteously but the parent was not pleased.
- 2 Several children who now attend Baker Street Children and Family Centre have severe disabilities. One team member, Asha, agreed to do some evening sitting for one family, knowing that they had great difficulty getting a sitter. Another family has now asked Asha and when she said she was already committed for that evening, asked Kayleigh to help. Kayleigh refused but felt uncomfortable and has now questioned whether Asha should have agreed.
 - 3 A six year old boy who attended St Jude's Primary School and after school club was recently killed in a road accident. His mother has written to the head of St Jude's with details of the funeral, inviting the staff who knew the child to attend the service.
 - 4 The Dale Parent and Toddler drop-in has had some successful social events over the last year. Two parents have now invited Annie and her team to parties at their home. Annie and Vicky do not really want to go, feeling that this will blur the boundaries between their work and private life. Their colleague Liz feels it will be rude to refuse.
 - 5 Nancy has experienced friendly relations with both the parents in the family with whom she has worked as a nanny for two years. She has felt recently that the parents' marriage may be under some strain. This afternoon the mother came home early from work and started to talk with Nancy about her worries that her husband is having an affair.
 - 6 Sophie is a childminder who takes care of Alison. The child has gone into hospital to have her appendix removed. Sophie has made plans to visit Alison in hospital, taking some books and also her own son who has spent a lot of time with Alison.
 - 7 Hannah is the head teacher of Dresden Road Nursery School. This morning she overheard part of a conversation that makes her think one of her staff was seen at a local restaurant over the weekend with the father of a child who attends the nursery.
 - 8 Marjorie is the leader of Greenholt Pre-school and she attends the church that owns the hall in which the pre-school takes place. Marjorie knows a number of the parents because of church attendance and their conversations in the centre sometimes include church business.

The beginning of the partnership

Your relationship with parents starts when they contact or visit your centre to decide whether they want their child to attend.

- First impressions matter, so courteous communication is important from the first meetings. You also set a pattern for an equal relationship and honesty.
- Be clear about any information that you need to communicate to parents and be ready with a written leaflet or brochure about your setting.
- At some point, you will need to explain any procedures about admissions and details of how you work with the children. But partnership is a personal process and parents will want to talk with you, not only look at written material.

Once the family decides to take up a place for their child, you will need to ask a number of questions and to answer further questions from parents.

- It is important that you approach each family afresh. You should not look as if this is the umpteenth time you have explained about the setting's positive approach to behaviour or why you need an emergency contact number.
- The way that you ask questions can show a family that it matters to you and your colleagues to treat a child and the family in an individual way. It is important to check on matters such as religious faith and diet and not make assumptions from broad guesses about cultural background.
- Explain carefully safety issues, such as why you need to know who will pick up children. You cannot release them to someone you do not know, even if the child recognises her grandma or his teenage cousin. You need to explain what has to happen if there is a real emergency and parents cannot pick up their child.

Part of your first conversation with parents will be to explore details of family life that it is your business to understand. You need to know about family diet and the individual care of this child. But you also need to be correct about names.

- You need to ensure that you say and spell the child's name correctly and that of the parent(s).
- Many early settings are informal and work on first name terms between adults. If a parent or grandparent would rather be known as Mrs or Mr, then it is courteous to follow their preference.
- Adults often do not mind being referred to as 'Paula's Dad' or 'Finn's Gran', so long as their proper name is used sometimes and you do not call them 'Gran' or 'Mum'.
- You also need to know if children prefer to be known by a shortened version of their name. You should not shorten nor change a child's name because you choose or find the name hard to pronounce.
- Some children will not share the surname of the parent whom you meet, so it is important to check rather than assume.
- The European naming system is that the personal name(s) come first, followed by a family surname. All cultures do *not* follow this pattern, so a good rule of thumb is, if in any doubt, ask.

Tips for practice

Agreements between a setting and parents

Partnership will always include clear communication about the service that your setting offers, or a clear agreement between a family and nanny or childminder about the boundaries to your professional role. It is now more usual for early years settings to have a written agreement with parents. The Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 has required that schools have a written **home-school agreement** in England.

Key term

Home-school (or home-setting) agreement

a written description of the obligations and expectations of the school (or early years) team and parents. A representative of the setting and parent(s) would sign a copy

Tips for practice

- A written agreement between any setting and parents should be used to ensure a shared understanding of the service – what the providers of the service offer and what parents and their children can expect.
- Written agreements do not work like legal contracts and will only support genuine partnership if you and the parents develop good channels of ordinary spoken communication.
- Signing an agreement will not force an uncooperative parent to become more amenable.
- Agreements can however undermine the friendliness of cooperative parents if the requirements seem uneven or practitioners fail to keep their promises!
- Agreements need to be written, discussed and used in an even-handed way. They do not work, and parents become irritated and disillusioned, if an agreement is a long list of what parents must do, yet the commitments from practitioners seem to boil down to 'we'll do our best'.

An agreement should not become a long document, since parents can consult the full length policies of your setting. An agreement between any setting and parents would usually include:

- The aims of your setting and key values, expressed briefly.
- What the setting and the team commit to provide for children and parents.
- The responsibilities of parents in return and, as appropriate for their age, the children's own responsibilities.
- The details of the place offered to the child(ren): the number of sessions or days and any payment that is due within an early years setting.
- An agreement might explain the conditions for ending a place and a period of notice, especially for settings that offer childcare.
- No agreement can impose conditions that are either unlawful or unreasonable. For instance, state schools can invite a financial contribution from parents but cannot insist. Nor can there be a required uniform that a child could not wear for religious or cultural reasons.
- An agreement may make clear that the setting does not look after children when they are sick and would expect parents to fetch them in the event of illness or accident.
- Parents would usually give a general permission for local trips that are part of the usual day or session. More extensive outings would require specific permission from parents.

An agreement should be signed and dated both by the parent(s) and a senior practitioner representing the setting, since the commitment is two-way. Although these agreements are sometimes called 'contracts', they are not legal documents. Nor can practitioners, even in schools, insist that parents have to sign.

Activity

- Look at the agreement used by your setting.
- What does it contain and how even-handed are the requirements made of parents and offered by the setting team?
- Ask the views of some parents and listen carefully.
- Suggest some improvements for your setting.

Key skills links: C3.1a WO3.1–3

Settling in

Helping children to settle into your setting is a joint activity with their parents or other carers. Settling in is a process for both children and parents and is not only about the very first day. You will support children's emotional well being when you:

- Value the time that is given to making a relationship with a child and parent.
- Use home visits and familiarisation visits to the setting as a gentle introduction for everyone.
- Encourage the family to provide links from home, such as a photo or drawing to go on a child's peg or drawer.
- Give time and attention to developing a relationship of partnership with parents or other key carers in a child's life.
- Gather individual information about children, such as their personal interests, what comforts them, special words they use that you might not understand, what may concern them and their past experiences of being away from the family.



Figure 21.3

Parents and children can take part in self-registration

Children benefit from a positive approach to their arrival and making sense of the setting.

- They need a real welcome on the first and subsequent days.
- A settling in period for the child: helping her or him to understand and follow the routine, help them make social contact.
- Preparation of the group for a new child is important so that the existing group know that a child is coming and can perhaps greet her or him by name. If children are disabled, there can sometimes be good reason to prepare the group (see page 523).
- Be ready to remind children of names of staff and other children. You can tell and use the names in appropriate phrases like, 'Here comes Tony' or 'I can see Marie over there, would you like to join her?'
- Encourage but do not press a child to join in the daily routines.
- However careful you are in settling a child, some children will find it hard to feel 'at home' with you. It is important that you persevere in supporting a child and do not allow your frustration to tempt you into labelling a distressed child as 'clingy' or 'attention seeking'.

You need to communicate with and reassure parents as well as the children.

- Allow for the mixed feelings that parents could be experiencing, especially if this is the first time they have been separated from their child.
- Enable parents to let go slowly. Perhaps they can call in by telephone to check that their child is reasonably happy and are able to talk about their child's day.
- Parents need to feel confident that you are getting to know their son or daughter as a person, that you value helping their child to get to know you, your setting and your routine.

Tips for practice

- Any setting should have a general policy on how children and families will be enabled to settle. But this cannot be rigid because children and their parents differ so much.
- Mothers will often be the person who settles a child but do not assume this. Sometimes fathers will be very involved, sometimes you may have more contact with another relative or other carer like a childminder or nanny.
- It can really help parents and other carers when you are clear about their role, for instance, making suggestions for ways that they can help in the setting to ease the separation from their children.
- In most early years settings, children will stay without their parent once they are settled. However, if you work in a drop-in facility or your setting offers this service, it will be understood that parents stay and remain responsible for their children.
- Children may settle into after school clubs or holiday schemes mainly without their parents. But some children will want their parent to be around for a while.
- Early years practitioners who work in out of school care still need to make friendly contact with parents and many of the issues in this chapter are equally important.

Activity

Find out the details of the settling in policy of your setting.

- What are the main steps? How well do they work? Ask experienced colleagues but also some parents who have recently settled in their children.
- How quickly do individual children settle? What does settling look like? How do you tell?
- Where can parents stay who are settling in their children, what do they do? Has the team considered what makes it easier for parents to feel at ease in a setting, as well as how to help children to feel comfortable?
- If you work with children of four and five years or older, then ask them for their views. What was it like for the children when they joined reception class or your after school club? What worked well and what could be improved?
- Write up your findings and discuss what you have found with colleagues who work in a different setting or on work placement.
- Look for any improvements that could be made to practice.

Key skills links: C3.1a C3.3 WO3.1–3

Special issues in the care of very young children

You are sharing the care of babies and very young children with their parent(s). It is especially important that you build a friendly working relationship with parents as well as a warm relationship with the baby or toddler. This three-way relationship is important for all shared care, but especially so when children are very young. You need good quality communication with parents and they need to feel reassured that you will take good care of their baby as an individual. You cannot develop this good practice without a key person (or key worker) system in early years settings (see page 595).

- A good working relationship with parents is essential because of the importance of continuity in the shared care of very young children. Partnership between parents and carers depends on open and regular communication that acknowledges the contribution of both parties and works hard to avoid any sense of competition.
- Regular, friendly communication is crucial to ensure continuity between parents at home and nursery over shared routines and timing any changes.
- Babies and toddlers manage some differences between carers but major differences will disrupt their day and make them uneasy.

Tips for practice

- Conversation is the best way to keep one another up to date with what a baby or toddler has learned or is nearly ready to do.
- Early years practitioners and parents need to exchange what they notice and to have a shared satisfaction in the baby or toddler's discoveries and interests.
- But be sensitive to parents' feelings that perhaps all the exciting events are happening in your setting.
- You can help by focusing on all the fine steps rather than the 'big' developmental milestones such as the first word or steps.
- You can also be sensitive in your approach by making comments like, 'She's very close to ... isn't she?', 'He's nearly walking; he'll do it for you soon' or 'Do you think she's talking? It sounds like it, but I wasn't sure.'

The dilemma of attachment

Early years practitioners are often concerned, or feel that parents are anxious, about young children becoming 'too attached' to staff. This area definitely has to be faced with children's needs kept central.

- Babies and toddlers need to form close attachments (see page 190). They cannot be 'too attached' to adults who are key in their daily lives and some young children spend many hours in out of home care. They need and deserve to develop attachments to their key person.
- Adults, practitioners and parents, need to resolve the mixed feelings that undoubtedly exist. Parents who work long hours may well be worried if their young child is clearly fond of her key person. But these understandable feelings need to be discussed between the adults and not 'solved' by making it hard for young children to form attachments in out of home care.

In communication with parents, you might need to consider all of the following issues.

- Let parents know when babies and toddlers missed them or were happy to see them come back in at the end of the day. It is a delicate balance between reassuring parents that they are not forgotten and avoiding worrying them that their baby cries for ages when they are gone.
- Share what babies and toddlers have done during the day: a trip out, a song or game that was especially enjoyed, a new step in the child's development. But make sure that you give parents plenty of space to share with you about what happens at home, and not just about problems.
- Talk with parents about how young children can care very much about more than one person. They are able to make different kinds of close relationships and they can have different special times with a small number of caring adults.
- Reassure parents that they will be the continuity in their child's life. You are pleased to be part of the child's time now, but parents will be there when the child has moved on from your nursery or care as a nanny or childminder.

When children move on

In an early years setting with a full age range, very young children may well have moves within the setting, from a baby or toddler room to the group for older

children. Any setting will face the situation of children leaving finally, either because the family has moved them to a different early years setting or because it is time for the child to go to school.

When children face a move of any kind, you can help.

- Understand that the child is facing a transition from a familiar environment and people to somewhere new.
- Even within the same setting, it helps if children can visit the room they will soon join and spend some time becoming familiar with the new room, children and adults. In a flexible setting where groups mix, then these adults should already be familiar faces.
- It is appropriate to have a flexible approach to the age at which a child moves from one room to another, since some children will be ready at a younger age than others.

It will be parents' responsibility to organise their child's school place and to get to know that school and the staff. An early years setting can help in the following ways.

- Prepare children about the move: talking, exploring what it may be like and listening to any concerns that children express. Some children are rather daunted by the move to 'big school' but others are mainly excited and more than ready to move on.
- Organise a proper goodbye to children and parents. You may have a party, especially if a number of children are moving on to school at the same time. You celebrate the family's time with you as well as show that they will be in your memories.
- Gather children's drawings, photos and other materials into a file or portfolio for them to keep now.

It matters how children leave your setting but it is also important to recall that adults, parents and early years practitioners have feelings too.

- It is right that you form close relationships with children and some will be with your setting for a matter of years. It is fine to express to a child, 'I will miss you' and 'I won't forget you'. If you are very sad, then it is appropriate to share those feelings with colleagues.
- In some early years settings, parents may be very sad at the end of an era. An early years team may have been very supportive of a family and perhaps helped a parent to feel more confident. Even without family stresses, parents have shared the care of their child with you, so a relationship is ending for them as well.

Good practice in communication with parents

Communication with parents should draw on the same skills that you use with fellow adults. You are in a professional relationship, so some of the issues are different from communication with friends or in a social setting. The main issues include:

- A fair and even-handed approach to all parents and carers, so that you are not tempted to have longer or more honest conversations with the parents with whom you feel more comfortable.
- Both practitioners and parents need a clear understanding of confidentiality and the limits. Parents should feel assured that what they say does not fuel gossip within or outside the setting.



Figure 21.4 Visual and written communication supplements conversation

- However, you cannot commit to keep secret any information that could affect a child's safety (see Chapter 19 on child protection).
- Easy access for parents to information about their own child and to conversations with appropriate members of the team when they have concerns or questions.
- Respect for parents' family values and beliefs and clear communication from you that parents' requests will be followed, for instance on food, or when it will not be possible and why.

Partnership with parents is a two-way process and they too have a responsibility to communicate with you. In an early years setting it is your job and that of colleagues to make that communication as easy as possible.

Tips for practice

Partnership with parents will have different applications in practice depending on the setting in which you work as an early years practitioner. However, the basics of good practice do not vary.

- Make friendly contact with all the parents of the children for whom you are responsible.
- Behave towards parents with courtesy and a respect for how important they are, and will continue to be, for their children.
- Offer ways to build continuity between parents' care of their children in the family and your contribution in your own setting or as part of family life, as a nanny or childminder.

A welcome for parents

Partnership is built on regular communication with parents. Your conversations will not always be about something very significant or problematic.

- Express a friendly welcome by a smile and wave to parents if it is not possible to speak. But ensure that you do have short conversations with all parents on a regular basis.
- It is your responsibility to make the first move, since parents may feel that the setting is your 'territory'. Some parents may feel uneasy in school settings, especially if they have less than happy childhood memories of school.
- Parents are disheartened if practitioners only create time to talk when there is a problem. You would feel this way too. So make the effort to say that Daniel has overcome his fear of the hamster or that Mairi made a magnificent dragon out of recycled materials.
- You don't always have to talk about the children. You might ask if a parent feels better from the flu or comment on the bright sunshine outside.
- If you want a longer conversation about a child, it can help to check whether this is convenient. Ask, 'I'd like to talk with you about how Tony is settling in. Is now a good time?' If the answer is 'No', then agree a day and time that will be fine.



Figure 21.5

Parents and carers need to feel welcome



Activity

- Note the conversations that you have over two or three weeks with parents.
- Write up the content in brief and note any differences between parents in the approximate length of conversations or the ease of chatting.
- Are there any parents with whom it is hard to find a few moments? What appear to be the reasons and what can you do to address the situation?

Key skills links: LP3.1–3

Part of the warm welcome for parents and children is that they see people like themselves reflected in your wall displays, books and play materials. All your materials should show a range of ethnic groups, male and female carers and some people with disabilities. If parents or children cannot see themselves, then the message is that they do not really matter or are effectively invisible. It is now possible to obtain a full range of play materials, wall friezes and books – from mail order if they are not available in your local high street (see page 672).

Tips for practice

Courteous communication with parents will follow much the same pattern as you yourself appreciate when you are on the receiving end of service.

- You respond as soon as possible to a parent's approach and apologise if you have to keep someone waiting.
- Give your full attention to what the parent is saying. If you have to break off to deal with a child then acknowledge the interruption with, 'I'm sorry, you were telling me about ...'.
- Show that you are listening with regular eye contact, not staring. If your eyes are distracted, perhaps by what a child is doing, then apologise in the same way as if you need to interrupt to speak with someone else.
- Be alert to the comfortable speaking distance of the other person.
- Make brief comments of your own as appropriate to the conversation.
- Check you have understood a longer or complicated conversation by reflecting back your understanding with, 'Can I check that I have followed what you would like ...' or 'I think I got confused around ... can you please tell me again the bit about ...'.

When communication is less straightforward

It is possible that you, a colleague or a parent has a disability that affects communication, for instance, deafness or a stutter. Communication with adults is not the same as with children but good practice in this area is very similar.

- If you are deaf, then it is important for parents to know, as well as the children, otherwise they may think you were inattentive or uninterested.
- Explain simply to parents how they can make communication easier for you. The ideas are the same as described below for parents who are deaf.

- If a parent is deaf then you need to face the person, talk at normal volume and speak clearly (see page 320).
- All team members need to know that a particular parent cannot, for instance, hear a call from a distance and will not respond unless she can see the message of a wave or a beckon.
- Some parents may have a stutter that interrupts the fluency of their speech. This difficulty is likely to become worse if they feel rushed. You can help by showing no signs of being in a hurry and do not rush to finish parents' sentences for them (see page 317).
- Perhaps a parent with a disability of hearing or speech will find communication easier through a hearing friend. If you are involved in this kind of three-way conversation, then it is important to share your attention between the parent and the friend. It would be very discourteous to look only at the speaking adult or to refer to the parent as 'she'.

Sometimes you will not share a fluent language with parents. In this case:

- Your spoken communication needs to be direct and simple. Use short sentences, communicating one point at a time.
- Support spoken communication with written material (brochures about the centre or letters to parents) in the family's language.
- In the same way as described for children on page 637, you can learn some phrases in the family's language such as greetings or thanks.

Talking about the children

In any setting or practitioner role you should have informal conversations with parents about their children. In many early years settings and schools you will also have regular discussions in which you sit down and talk with parents about their child's developmental progress and behaviour. Good practice in communication is very similar across these different conversations.



Figure 21.6

Early communication is important

Tips for practice

- Most professions have a shared language and early years is no exception. Some words or phrases will be familiar to you from training and conversations within your team. It is easy to forget that the rest of the adult world does not talk in this way.
- Be aware of specialist terms and replace them with ordinary language. Confident parents may ask, 'what do you mean by that?' but sometimes you will need to be alert to a puzzled expression.
- Most adults do not talk about 'motor development', and certainly not 'gross motor'. Parents talk about specific physical skills like walking or jumping.
- Parents do not usually use phrases like 'separation anxiety' or 'gender stereotyping'. So you need to talk (and write also) about 'Jane's concern about letting her Dad go out of sight' or that 'Declan has firm views about boys' games and those just for girls'.

Sharing children's development and behaviour

Your records should be open to parents, to look at the reports on their own child. Early years practitioners can feel uneasy about sharing some observations and assessments, but care taken over records that will be seen by parents usually improves practice (see page 462).

- Many parents will want to talk about their child, as well as read the report. Furthermore, some parents may have difficulty reading a report and want you to talk them through it.
- A conversation with parents, just like a written report, needs to be a rounded picture, in which you share details of what the child can do, as well as what she cannot yet manage.
- Since parents can become anxious, it is also important to communicate whether not being able to manage a particular skill is usual for this age or a cause for concern.
- You can share your observations about what a child can nearly do, the cutting edge of her learning, and how she has changed since the last assessment or written report.
- These perspectives give parents, as well as practitioners, a positive sense of a child who is continuing to learn.
- Neither written reports nor supporting conversations with parents should focus only on difficulties. You should have a decent length conversation with all parents. There should be no sense of 'Andy is doing fine. There are no problems' – with the implication that this is the end of the conversation.
- On the other hand, if you have observed any developmental delays or difficulties for this child, then these need to be placed in a positive, although honest, framework.
- Communicate with parents what you have observed, your reasons for being concerned and your thoughts about what can be done. Your words will help to communicate the facts of what you have heard or seen with the conclusion you draw for the moment.
- In the same way as described on page 464 about written reports, you need to communicate 'I am concerned about ... because ...' or 'I think we can be really pleased that ...'.

- Ask for parents' opinions and, if they are quiet, then encourage them to contribute their knowledge of their child.

Parents may be unhappy of course to hear that there is cause for concern about their child's behaviour or struggles in some aspects of learning. But when you share how you have reached your professional opinion, rather than giving blunt pronouncements, then discussion is much more possible. It sounds and feels very different when you say to a parent, 'I find it challenging to handle Janice's temper tantrums' in contrast with, 'Your daughter has such a temper on her'. In the first approach, your words and body language can show that this is a problem you would like to resolve and you are not blaming anyone.

Early years practitioners are usually more edgy about parents' possible reaction to critical comments. You need to be aware, however, that unsupported positive remarks are not very useful in the long run. Parents may be pleased to hear, or read in a report, that 'Sally is a bright little girl' or 'Mark has good language'. Yet, without the supporting evidence of your observation, in the context of the child's age, then it is hard for parents to tell whether you are giving a well supported assessment of their child or an empty compliment.

Parents whose first language is not English may be fully fluent in written and spoken English but some will not be. Good practice will be to have a conversation that supplements any written reports and to seek an interpreter where possible (perhaps a bilingual colleague or a friend of the parent).

To think about

Confidentiality for families extends to what may seem like little things to you.

- Perhaps you are very clear that you would keep confidential that a child's parents were on the verge of splitting up or that Mark's mother has just been made redundant.
- But it is just as important that you keep confidential to the child's own parent that a child has had a bad day or was the one who did the biting this afternoon.
- It is also crucial never to forget that children have ears and you should not discuss parents or children's personal business in the hearing of other children.
- The address and phone number of families is also confidential, even if the request from another parent seems fine, like a birthday party invitation. But these are not details you should divulge. It is for parents to make contact personally themselves.
- A professional approach to confidentiality continues to apply when families or you have left an early years setting.
- Nannies have a serious responsibility since they are part of intimate family life. This commitment to confidentiality applies to any family and not only to nannies who work for 'celebrity' families.

When parents ask to talk with you

Real partnership between early years practitioners and parents (and other carers) is two-way. A good working relationship is not only about when you

choose to share ideas with parents or want to find a way to express your concerns. You also need to be responsive to parents' concerns and their suggestions, even if these do not initially fit comfortably into your perspective.

Parents who ask, 'Can I have a quiet word?' may wish to raise a concern from a wide range of possibilities and these will certainly not always be complaints. It is very important that neither you, nor your colleagues, behave as if parents are more likely to be moaning than not. Parents may:

- be concerned that their child has been bitten, or is being bullied, and what you are doing to resolve this situation
- wish to raise their own concerns about their child's behaviour or development
- tell you in confidence about a family upheaval or bereavement that is very likely to affect their child's emotional well being
- want to understand the policy or approach of the setting on an important aspect of children's learning
- have a legitimate complaint because someone in the team has failed to act in a responsible way or to communicate with this parent or carer.

You do not have the time for lengthy conversations, but a useful exchange with parents will not take ages. Good communication skills with parents are very similar to those that you need to apply with colleagues and, in a different way, with children.

- Most important of all, listen to what a parent wishes to say to you. Hold back if you are tempted to plunge in with explanations, justifications or advice. Unless you listen, you do not know what is needed.
- Ask open ended questions, so that you can understand the issues for this parent. Useful questions tend to start with 'what?' or 'how?' For instance, 'what has happened that makes you feel Nina has been bullied?'
- You can use simple reflective listening that feeds back a parent's comment as a question to check that you understand. For instance: 'So, you think Marlon is very upset about his dog, but he's not talking about it?' or 'It would help you to know whether Dorcas gets so easily upset here?'

Once you have listened, you can make a sensible response to what the parent has told you.

- Sometimes it will be appropriate to say, 'I'm pleased you told me about Nina. I would like to check out what has been happening'. You should then keep any promise to 'find out about ...' or 'get back to you later'.
- Some parents may need another, or a more detailed, explanation of the positive approach to behaviour in your setting of what early literacy really means for three year olds.
- If a number of parents raise similar issues, it could be a clear message that your team needs to consider a broader communication, perhaps through displays or a parents' evening.
- It will be for parents to choose what they do in their own home, but they may welcome advice from you. For instance, it will be better for Marlon to know that his dog has actually died. Since you have listened to the parent, you now realise that Marlon thinks the dog is still at the vet's, because his family cannot find a way to tell the child.



Tips for practice

Parents may sometimes ask you for advice about their child's development or behaviour. You can share your experience and knowledge as appropriate so long as you keep realistic.

- It may help to be able to reassure a parent that their four year old's development is normal for this age, perhaps that in language development it is not unusual for children to mis-pronounce some sounds.
- Good ideas for dealing positively with children's behaviour are not simple, one-try answers. Adults, practitioners and parents often need to persevere. So you can share how you deal with tantrums or lack of cooperation, but perhaps say, 'It works often enough that we feel it's worth trying'.
- Parents will have to put an idea into action and feel committed. So it is important that you talk about 'what we find works well' rather than imply this approach will definitely work for this family.
- Any good ideas have to allow for family circumstances and the final choice has to be made by parents. For instance, the approach to night waking that suggests parents let their child cry for short periods before going in may be impractical for families whose home has thin walls and complaining neighbours.

Sometimes you may need to get through the particular way in which this parent or carer expresses concerns.

- Some parents will be fairly confident in describing what concerns them and why. Then there will only be difficulties if you or your colleagues are over-sensitive and react as if the parent is complaining or making an excessive fuss.
- Less confident parents, or those whose personal style is louder, may find it hard to express a concern or to question you without higher volume and expansive body language. A calm approach from you and an obvious intention to listen will then shift most conversations in a more constructive direction.
- In some cases you need to be aware of parents' body language, the music behind the words you hear. Some parents may say, 'I'm not really that worried' but their face and posture tells you that they are or 'I'm sure there's a very good explanation for what happened ...' and you need to hear the important, unspoken 'but ...'.

To think about

- We are individuals with a personal style but we are all also influenced by our own cultural traditions.
- The style of communication in some cultures and social groups or classes can be very direct, with forthright spoken and body language and strong eye contact.
- This approach can feel threatening if your social and cultural background tells you this behaviour is aggressive or out of control.

- Equally some social and cultural traditions stress that disagreement and conflict is to be avoided. Individuals may then communicate differences of opinion by subtle words and body language.
- A practitioner of a different social or cultural background may not realise that a parent is seriously concerned or dissatisfied.

Tips for practice

- It is important that you do not swiftly assume a parent, or a colleague for that matter, is being aggressive when they are simply outspoken or passionate about what they want to say.
- Furthermore a dismissive attitude towards parents will show through the body language of a disrespectful practitioner.
- It is poor practice for any setting to develop a team attitude towards parents as 'difficult' or 'ungrateful'.
- It is also bad practice to generalise from a few parents who are hard to work with to talk about the parents as a whole group as 'aggressive' or 'demanding'.
- You would not like this unfair behaviour if it were directed at you.

Activity

- In most cases, parents will not want to make a formal complaint. But all settings should have a complaints procedure that is open to parents.
- Ask to read the procedure for your setting.
- Make sure you understand the steps and how you would need to behave if a parent first made the complaint to you.
- Write up your findings in a short report and discuss with colleagues.

Key skills links: C2.3 C3.1a

Dealing with aggression

You may sometimes face adults who are aggressive in word or action or whose behaviour makes you uneasy that they could become aggressive.

You will be able to defuse some incidents:

- Stay calm, speak quietly and show you are willing to listen. If you are calm, the other person may calm down, whereas this change is unlikely if you tell them to 'calm down!'
- If you answer angry words and gestures with your own anger, then the situation will worsen.
- Acknowledge that the other person has strong feelings. You might say, 'I can hear you're angry. Please tell me what has happened'.
- Listen and find out the reasons for this other person being angry, frustrated or whatever.
- Keep what you say simple and avoid getting defensive or arguing.

- If there is a swift and appropriate solution, then offer it. If apologies are due on behalf of your setting or you personally, then say 'sorry'.
- You should listen carefully to what a parent is saying but then you need to check on the facts before taking any action.
- You should not, for example, take the claims of a furious parent that named children have bullied her child or that a volunteer made her vegetarian child eat a sausage. You can use a phrase such as, 'That sounds serious, I would like to check out what happened and I will get back to you'.
- If a parent or any other fellow adult will not behave in a calmer way, then it is appropriate to be assertive yourself in setting boundaries to the situation. You might say, 'I understand that this situation is very frustrating for you. But I am not willing to listen to you swear at me'.
- You also have a responsibility for the children and may need to say, 'You are frightening the children. I want you to leave this room now'.

Scenario

A difficult situation has arisen recently in St Jude's Primary School. Last week Wayne's mother appeared to see the Year Two teacher, Rona. Mrs Kent demanded that 'something should be done about the children who bullied Wayne' about wetting himself. It turned out that Wayne had a toileting accident and Mrs Kent is now claiming that a number of children made fun of him. Rona finds Mrs Kent very intimidating and takes a list of the children said to have been cruel to Wayne, with the promise that they will be made to apologise properly.

Rona speaks with the children on the list, most of whom say definitely that they had not been horrible to Wayne. Rona feels that she has to go ahead with her commitment to Mrs Kent and tells the children that they must all write a letter of apology and bring it in the following day.

Pam hears about the incident from two children who attend the after school club who want her help with their letters. The children are adamant that they did not say what Mrs Kent is claiming but 'Miss' says they must do a letter. Pam feels the children should not write an apology under these circumstances and speaks with parents as they arrive.

The following day Pam brings the matter up in the staff room and it becomes clear that at least one parent has sent in a letter saying that her child is not going to apologise for something she has not done.

Questions

- 1 What are the issues in this dilemma? In what ways was Rona's reaction poor practice and for whom? What should happen now?
- 2 Discuss the situation with your colleagues. Consider whether you have, or could, make an unwise choice of action, because you felt intimidated by a parent.

Key skills links: PS31–3 C3.1a

It is your choice whether to have a row within your personal life, but you have to take a professional approach in your job. It is, therefore, right that you should be able to expect support from your colleagues.

- A team should have an agreement that someone will come to support you if they hear raised voices.
- You may need a panic button system if your setting has many parents who abuse drink or drugs, since their behaviour could be very unpredictable.
- You should also be offered a supportive conversation after a distressing incident. Your manager or a senior should help you regain your composure as well as identify what you did well in the situation.

Involvement of parents in early years settings

Key term

Parental involvement

ways in which parents can be invited and choose to be directly involved in the activities or running of an early years setting or school

Parents can be involved in different ways within an early years settings. There is no single or right pattern for involvement because families vary and so does the service that different settings offer to parents. Therefore, there should never be any sense that parents have to become involved in the ways that are on offer. Good practice will be to explore what would interest parents as well as what is realistically possible for them. Parents who are unable, or do not wish, to become involved in activities in your setting will still want to be informed and consulted about their own child.

Different ways to be involved

Parents can be offered a role or encouraged to become involved in early years settings in all of the following ways.

Supporting their child

Parents are involved as part of the settling in process for children and families (see page 629) and also through:

- An open invitation to stay a while in the setting or to come to tea and be part of their child's day or session.

Figure 21.7

Parents will like to know what interests their child



- Regular meetings between practitioner and parents to discuss children's progress and look ahead to what they are now ready to learn. Such meetings need to be positive; they are certainly not just called when there are problems.
- Parents may be pleased to support their child's learning at home, either because the child wants to carry on with a project or because some work comes home with the child, for instance, reading practice or homework in primary school.
- Parents remain fully involved with their child's progress and any concerns. There should be a clear procedure to enable all parents to look at their own child's files (see page 461).
- Parents should be involved and fully consulted in any special work, for instance if it emerges that their child has special educational needs (see page 529).

It helps to bear in mind how parents may feel if they are invited to a more formal meeting than just you and them over a cup of coffee. Some settings may have regular reviews or perhaps your service is linked with family support for parents under stress. You can help parents to feel prepared and to reduce anxiety.

Tips for practice

- Talk with parents before the meeting or review and ensure that they understand the aims of this meeting, how it will be run, who will be there and what, if anything, will be decided.
- If you will give a report on the child's development or behaviour, you should have discussed the content with the parents, so there are no surprises.
- If somebody needs to take notes at this meeting, explain to the parent why and that they will get a copy.
- Ensure that parents are properly introduced to everyone at the meeting.
- Seat parents so that they feel part of the meeting and as comfortable as possible. They may appreciate sitting next to the practitioner they know best.
- Some thought beforehand about seating arrangements and furniture can reduce a daunting feel in some more formal meetings.

Information about early learning or other issues

Individual conversations are important and can be supplemented in a number of ways.

- Invitations to open days or evenings for parents. Parents can see their own child's work but some events can be to communicate the setting's general approach on aspects of children's learning.
- Information on offer through a parents' notice board, newsletter or informative wall displays of illustrations and simple written explanations.
- A file that you keep of useful material that is designed to explain what you do and why. For instance, *Nursery World* has published a series of Parent's

Guides within the magazine that can be directly copied and given to parents or used to help draft material that you develop within a setting.

- You can also download information for parents from government websites. For instance, www.parents.dfes.gov.uk has material written for parents about the literacy and numeracy strategies and the Foundation Stage.

Support for activities within the setting

Some parents with available time may be interested in becoming involved from time to time or on a regular basis:

- Parents might take or share responsibility for a project like sorting out the garden or a continuing activity such as running the toy library.
- Some parents may be pleased to be regular helpers within the daily activities of the setting and/or join the group on special outings.
- All parents will have some talent or interest and it is good practice to look for opportunities to invite parents to show a skill or share an experience with the children.
- Parents who cannot give regular time to the setting may be delighted to help out with projects because they can use their leisure time at home. Perhaps parents are pleased to look out some materials for the local history display or contribute to the contents of a storysack or poetry pocket (see page 330).
- Early years settings are very female, so do think around how you can encourage fathers and other male family members to feel welcome and at ease. Perhaps try a 'Dads' day' if the fathers seem reluctant.
- Some parents may be happy to operate as organisers or supporters of fund-raising events for the setting.

Figure 21.8

Parents will sometimes like to stay a while or help





Tips for practice

When you invite parents to be part of the regular day or session, it is good practice for a team to be clear about expectations and boundaries.

- Have an idea how parent helpers will be involved. Would you like this parent to support children at a particular activity? Perhaps you are especially keen that fathers spend some time in the book corner.
- Or has this parent a talent for story telling or woodwork that you really want shared with the children?
- Some parents will be quickly at ease in a group, others will appreciate your suggestions. For instance, 'The children have a big construction project in the garden. Can you keep them company and give any help they want?' or 'We're about to tidy up now. Could you be with the children who are sorting out the bikes? We have numbered parking bays and we encourage them to match the numbers.'
- Parent helpers, like any volunteers, need to behave consistently with policy in your setting, for instance, about how to handle a child's behaviour or that you aim for social, rather than silent, mealtimes. You need to anticipate any differences as far as you can and deal with them in a courteous way.
- Parent helpers will not complete children's records or access confidential material. Nor should they get involved in detailed conversations with other parents about the children; this is the role of practitioners.

Activity

Ask about guidelines for parent helpers in your setting.

- Has the team considered the practical issues raised in this section?
- In particular are there some tasks that parent helpers would not do?
- Write up brief notes and compare with colleagues on your course.
- Draft together a short policy to guide the involvement of parent helpers in an early years setting.

Key skills links: C3.2 WO3.1–3

Activities for parents themselves

Some settings offer involvement to parents directly for their own adult interests.

- There may be social events arranged for parents, either daytime drop-in coffee sessions or evening social events, perhaps as fund-raising activities.
- It is important that any events with food and drink are organised to cater for the needs of all families. Some parents will be vegetarian and a table full of nothing but sausage rolls and ham sandwiches will not feel welcome.
- There may be an ongoing parents' group, club or room for the exclusive use of parents and other carers.
- After consultation with parents, sessions could be offered that interest them, for instance, cooking, learning English as an additional language or early maths.

- Some parents' groups operate as a source of support and advice, perhaps in a very low key way and sometimes as an organised support group.

Tips for practice

Some regular events for parents will be through an organised group. Successful groups do not just happen; they take some planning and communication.

- Make sure that the expectations of parents and those of the team are similar. It is no use planning a group for parents that they do not really want or is not at a time that suits you.
- If parents choose not to support a group or an information meeting planned by the setting, it does not mean they are uninterested in their children. It is more likely to mean that they were not interested in this topic and would have said so, if you had asked them.
- One or two practitioners need to take responsibility, even for an informal group. This is partly because you need to be sure somebody will sort out the coffee and enough chairs.
- However, it is also a courtesy to parents that they can get to know the practitioner who leads or supports the group.
- Everyone needs to know when the group will meet, in what room, for how long each time and for how many meetings, if more than one. You also need to sort out practicalities like refreshments and no smoking in the setting.
- Review your pattern of meetings or groups from time to time. Are there some parents who rarely if ever attend?
- Is there a message perhaps that these activities are for mothers rather than fathers and how could you make the men more welcome?
- Are there some parents who do not share a fluent language with most other families? What could you do to make these parents more at ease?

A role in policy and decision making

Parents should of course have the necessary information and opportunity to participate in decisions about their own child. They may also be offered involvement in the broader running of a setting.

- Some nurseries or centres have parent representatives on management committees.
- Schools have some elected parent governors on the governing body.

Settings might offer less formal ways to influence decisions.

- A setting can give parents the opportunity to comment on the setting by a parents' board, newsletter or suggestions box.
- Open meetings for parents could allow them to express their views about the curriculum for the children or ways to create school grounds that are more child friendly.

These informal ways of communicating and exchanging views will only work if parents can see that their comments sometimes lead to change. No adults are pleased about giving their time and views if nothing comes of their contribution. Nor will it promote good relations if early years or school professionals meet parents' questions or constructive criticism with frosty and defensive replies.

Activity

- Find out the different ways in which parents can become involved in your setting if they choose.
- Talk with colleagues in your setting to understand whether the current pattern has changed over recent years.
- Write up brief notes and make a brief presentation to your colleagues on the course.
- Compare the different patterns of parent involvement that you have found in the different settings that you know.

Key skills link: C3.1b C3.3

Scenario

There can be different patterns of parent involvement that work well in different settings. These two settings offer a different type of service, although some the issues they face are similar.

Sunningdale Day Nursery is a private nursery, part of a small chain and offers a service to working parents who pay fees for their childcare. Currently the nursery offers the following kinds of involvement:

- Parents are closely involved in settling their children into the nursery.
- After children are settled the nursery has an open door policy and parents are very welcome to be part of the normal day. A few parents take this invitation up, but for most their work obligations do not allow this kind of involvement.
- Regular communication with parents is valued and practitioners aim to have at least short conversations with parents once a day. This objective is not achieved with all parents, especially those who dash in and out at speed.
- Regular meetings are offered every two to three months for parents to come in and talk about their child's progress.
- The nursery team monitors any issues raised by parents and plans informative displays and parents' evenings around any theme that seems to concern parents. The most recent evening and display was built around children's early mark marking and early writing, after several parents had expressed concern about, 'when is s/he going to start proper writing?'

St Jude's Primary School is a medium sized school with a nursery class and out of school care on the premises. Some different patterns of involvement have developed in the parts of the school:

- The primary school itself has a 'Friends of St Jude's' association that organises fund-raising activities and some social events. The most active parents in this association are likely to leave soon as their children move on to secondary school.

- Parents settle their children into the nursery and the out of school care. There is no agreed pattern to help children settle who start in the reception class without coming through the nursery.
- Parents are made welcome if they want to help out on a regular basis in the nursery or the school. There has been a particular drive recently to encourage fathers and other male relatives to join literacy activities to boost the boys' interest. The team has realised that they really need some clarity about what parent helpers do and what should be left to staff.
- The school has offered a programme of information evenings but the head has second thoughts about continuing after an argumentative meeting on assessment and SATs last month.

Questions

- 1 What main issues would determine a different pattern of possible involvement in these two settings?
- 2 Parents may not always agree with the approach of the setting over learning or behaviour. How might different forms of involvement address such issues?
- 3 Make links to your own practice.

Key skills links: WO3.1–3

Further resources

- Ball, Mog (1997) *Consulting with Parents: Guidelines for good practice* National Early Years Network.
- Caddell, Dorothy (2001) *Working with Parents* Learning and Teaching Scotland.
- Hyder, Tina, Kenway, Penny and Roels, Clare (1997) *On Equal Terms: Ways to involve parents in early years settings* National Early Years Network and Save the Children.
- Lindon, Jennie and Lance (1997) *Working Together for Young Children* Cengage Learning, Chapters 5 and 6 on partnership with parents.
- Lindon, Jennie and Lance (2000) *Mastering Counselling Skills: Information, help and advice in the caring services* Macmillan, especially Chapter 2 on communication and Chapters 6, 7 and 8 if your setting offers broader support and help to parents and carers.

Progress check

- 1 Give two reasons why partnership with parents is part of good practice in early years settings and schools.
- 2 Explain briefly the difference between making friends and a friendly working relationship with parents.
- 3 Suggest three ways that you could help parents and children to settle into your setting.
- 4 Describe three ways in which good communication skills will support partnership with parents.
- 5 Give four examples to illustrate ways you could offer parent involvement in an early years setting or school.

Appendix 1

Working towards an early years qualification

This appendix covers:

- links between this book and the main early years qualifications
- key/core skills
- building a portfolio of work as a student
- using a range of resources.

Links with different qualifications

In this section the full title of the units is given and then grids provide a cross reference to the different chapters in this book.

CACHE Diploma in Child Care and Education (DCE)

Units

- 1 Observation and assessment
- 2 Work with young children
- 3 Foundations to caring
- 4 The developing child
- 5 Health and community care
- 6 Play, curriculum and early learning
- 7 Work with babies in the first year of life
- 8 Preparation for employment
- 9 The provision of services and protection of children
- 10 Anti-discriminatory/anti-bias practice
- 11 Work with parents.

Units 1 and 11 are also covered in most chapters within activities, scenarios and short sections.



National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in Early Years Care and Education

Level 2 mandatory units

- C1 Support children's physical development needs
- C4 Support for children's social and emotional development
- C8 Implement planned activities for sensory and intellectual development
- C9 Implement planned activities for the development of language and communication skills
- E1 Maintain an attractive, stimulating and reassuring environment for children
- E2 Maintain the safety and security of children
- M3 Contribute to the achievement of organisational requirements
- P1 Relate to parents

Level 2 optional units

- C12 Feed babies
- C13 Provide for babies' physical development needs
- CU10 Contribute to the effectiveness of work teams
- M1 Monitor, store and prepare materials and equipment
- P9 Work with parents in a group

Level 3 mandatory units

- C2 Provide for children's physical needs
- C3 Promote the physical development of children
- C5 Promote children's social and emotional development
- C7 Provide a framework for the management of behaviour
- C10 Promote children's sensory and intellectual development
- C11 Promote children's language and communication development
- C15 Contribute to the protection of children from abuse
- C16 Observe and assess the development and behaviour of children
- E3 Plan and equip environments for children
- M7 Plan, implement and evaluate learning activities and experiences
- P2 Establish and maintain relationships with parents

Level 3 optional units

- C14 Care for and promote the development of babies
- C17 Promote the care and education of children with special needs
- C18 Develop structured programmes for children with special needs
- C24 Support the development of children's literacy skills
- C25 Support the development of children's mathematical skills
- M6 Work with other professionals
- M8 Plan, implement and evaluate routines for children
- P5 Involve parents in group activities
- P8 Establish and maintain a child care and education service
- MC1/C4 Create effective working relationships



This book does not attempt to cover the following optional units:

M2, M20, P4 P7, MC1/C1

BTEC National Early Years Diploma

Core units

- 1** Values and personal development
- 2** Communication and interpersonal skills
- 3** Professional practice
- 4** Protecting children
- 5** Safe environments
- 6** Child care practice
- 7** Learning in the early years
- 8** Human growth and development

Optional units

- 9** Play and learning activities
- 10** Child health

This book does not attempt to cover the remaining optional units 11–24 at the academic level required by the BTEC framework. However, the practice content is covered in part for the following units:

- 12** Developmental psychology
- 18** Design and technology
- 21** Managing the early years service
- 22** Special needs
- 23** Supporting literacy and numeracy skills
- 24** Physical activities

Table A1.1 Cross reference of DCE units to chapters of this book

Chapters	Units										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1				*				*	*	*	*
2		*	*		*					*	
3			*							*	
4			*		*						
5							*				
6			*				*				*
7				*							
8		*		*						*	
9		*		*						*	
10		*				*					
11		*		*		*				*	
12		*		*		*				*	
13		*		*		*				*	
14		*				*					
15		*									
16	*										
17				*						*	
18					*					*	*
19									*	*	*
20								*		*	
21							*			*	*



Table A1.2 Cross reference of NVQ level 2 units to chapters of this book

Chapters	Units												
	C1	C4	C8	C9	E1	E2	M3	P1	C12	C13	CU10	M1	P9
1											*		
2	*				*	*		*		*			
3	*		*										
4	*					*						*	
5													
6									*	*			
7		*			*								
8		*											
9	*												
10	*		*										
11				*									
12				*									
13			*										
14			*		*							*	
15					*							*	
16													
17		*											
18								*					
19						*							
20							*				*		
21								*		*			*

Table A1.3 Cross reference of NVQ level 3 mandatory units to chapters

[illegible]

Table A1.5 Cross reference of BTEC units to chapters of this book

Chapters	Units															
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	18	21	22	23	24
1	*			*			*				*		*			
2			*		*	*										
3						*										
4			*		*	*				*						
5																
6						*		*								
7			*					*	*		*					
8								*								
9								*								*
10									*							*
11			*				*	*	*		*					
12							*		*						*	
13							*	*	*		*	*			*	
14			*				*		*							
15							*		*							
16							*	*								
17						*					*					
18										*				*		
19				*												
20	*	*	*										*			
21			*										*	*		

Key skills/core skills

The revised and accredited key skills (core skills in Scotland) relevant to this book include the areas given in this appendix. The patterns for levels 1, 2 and 3 are similar, although levels 2 and 3 require a more challenging standard. This appendix provides a full list of the skills that are referenced in the text by the short version, for example C2.1a.

Many of the activities within this book can support you in developing and practising these key skills, at a lesser or greater level of difficulty. The activities are cross-referenced within the chapters for both levels. It is up to you, and your college tutor or supervisor, to make the task more or less challenging. Your tutor or supervisor will also be responsible for guiding you towards appropriate sources of evidence to show that you have demonstrated the necessary skills.

All this material is available from QCA Publications, PO Box 99, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 6SN tel: 01787 884444 or on the website: www.qca.org.uk/keyskills

Communication: level 1

- C1.1: Take part in a one-to-one discussion and a group discussion about different, straightforward subjects.
- C1.2: Read and obtain information from two different types of documents about straightforward subjects including at least one image.
- C1.3: Write two different types of documents about straightforward subjects; include at least one image in one of the documents.

Communication: level 2

- C2.1a: Contribute to a discussion about a straightforward subject.
- C2.1b: Give a short talk about a straightforward subject, using an image.
- C2.2: Read and summarise information from two extended documents about a straightforward subject. One of the documents should include at least one image.
- C2.3: Write two different types of documents about straightforward subjects. One piece of writing should be an extended document and include at least one image.

Communication: level 3

- C3.1a: Contribute to a group discussion about a complex subject.
- C3.1b: Make a presentation about a complex subject, using at least one image to illustrate complex points.
- C3.2: Read and synthesise information from two extended documents about a complex subject. One of the documents should include at least one image.
- C3.3: Write two different types of documents about complex subjects. One piece of writing should be an extended document and include at least one image.

Application of number: level 1

- N1.1: Interpret straightforward information from two different sources. At least one source should be a table, chart, diagram or line graph.
- N1.2: Carry out straightforward calculations to do with (a) amounts and sizes, (b) scales and proportions and (c) handling statistics.
- N1.3: Interpret the results of your calculations and present your findings. You must use one chart and one diagram.

Application of number: level 2

- N2.1: Interpret information from two different sources, including material containing a graph.
- N2.2: Carry out calculations to do with (a) amounts and sizes, (b) scales and proportions, (c) handling statistics and (d) using formulae.
- N2.3: Interpret the results of your calculations and present your findings. You must use at least one graph, one chart and one diagram.

Application of number: level 3

- N3.1: Plan and interpret information from two types of sources, including a large data set.
- N3.2: Carry out multi-stage calculations to do with (a) amounts and sizes, (b) scales and proportions, (c) handling statistics and (d) rearranging and using formulae.
- N3.3: Interpret the results of your calculations, present your findings and justify your methods. You must use at least one graph, one chart and one diagram.

Information Technology: level 1

- IT1.1: Find, explore and develop information for two different purposes.
- IT1.2: Present information for two different purposes. Your work must include at least one example of text, one example of images and one example of numbers.

Information Technology: level 2

- IT2.1: Search for and select information for two different purposes.
- IT2.2: Explore and develop information, and derive new information, for different purposes.
- IT2.3: Present combined information for two different purposes. Your work must include at least one example of text, one example of images and one example of numbers.

Information Technology: level 3

- IT3.1: Plan and use different sources to search for and select information required for two different purposes.
- IT3.2: Explore, develop and exchange information and derive new information to meet two different purposes.



- IT3.3: Present information from different sources for two different purposes and audiences. Your work must include at least one example of text, one example of images and one example of numbers.

Problem solving: level 1

- PS1.1: Confirm your understanding of the given problem with an appropriate person and identify two options for solving it.
- PS1.2: Plan and try out at least one option for solving the problem, using advice and support given by others.
- PS1.3: Check if the problem has been solved by following given methods and describe the results, including ways to improve your approach to problem solving.

Problem solving: level 2

- PS2.1: Identify a problem and come up with two options for solving it.
- PS2.2: Plan and try out at least one option for solving the problem, obtaining support and making changes to your plan when needed.
- PS2.3: Check if the problem has been solved by applying given methods, describe results and explain your approach to problem solving.

Problem solving: level 3

- PS3.1: Explore a complex problem, come up with three options for solving it and justify the options selected for taking it forward.
- PS3.2: Plan and try out at least one option for solving the problem, review progress and revise your approach as necessary.
- PS3.3: Apply agreed methods to check if the problem has been solved, describe the results and review your approach to problem solving.

Improving own learning and performance: level 1

- LP1.1: Confirm understanding of your short-term targets, and plan how these will be met, with the person setting them.
- LP1.2: Follow your plan, using support given by others to help meet targets. Improve your performance by:
- studying a straightforward subject
 - learning through a straightforward practical activity.
- LP1.3: Review your progress and achievements in meeting targets with an appropriate person.

Improving own learning and performance: level 2

- LP2.1: Help set short-term targets with an appropriate person and plan how these will be met.
- LP2.2: Take responsibility for some decisions about your learning, using your plan and support from others to help meet targets. Improve your performance by:
- studying a straightforward subject
 - learning through a straightforward practical activity.

- LP2.3: Review progress with an appropriate person and provide evidence of your achievements, including how you have used learning from one task to meet the demands of a new task.

Improving own learning and performance: level 3

- LP3.1: Agree targets and plan how these will be met over an extended period of time, using support from appropriate people.
- LP3.2: Take responsibility for your learning by using your plan, and seeking feedback and support from relevant sources to help meet targets.
Improve your performance by:
- studying a complex subject
 - learning through a complex practical activity
 - further study or practical activity that involves independent learning.
- LP3.3: Review progress on two occasions and establish evidence of achievements, including how you have used learning from other tasks to meet new demands.

Working with others: level 1

- WO1.1: Confirm what needs to be done to achieve given objectives, including your responsibilities and working arrangements.
- WO1.2: Work with others towards achieving given objectives, carrying out tasks to meet your responsibilities.
- WO1.3: Identify progress and suggest ways of improving work with others to help given objectives.

Working with others: level 2

- WO2.1: Plan straightforward work with others, identifying objectives and clarifying responsibilities and confirm working arrangements.
- WO2.2: Work cooperatively with others towards achieving identified objectives, organising tasks to meet your responsibilities.
- WO2.3: Exchange information on progress and agree ways of improving work with others to help achieve objectives.

Working with others: level 3

- WO3.1: Plan complex work with others, agreeing objectives, responsibilities and working arrangements.
- WO3.2: Seek to establish and maintain cooperative working relationships over an extended period of time, agreeing changes to achieve agreed objectives.
- WO3.3: Review work with others and agree ways of improving collaborative work in the future.

Building a portfolio

You will need to build up a portfolio of your work for many of the early years qualifications. This portfolio may be built from a number of specific assignments given to you by your tutor within given units or modules of a course.

Activities in the book will help you to develop evidence of what you have completed in your work and the key issues involved. A habit of keeping clear notes of events and experiences will help you to focus your learning and improve your practice.

Your programme assessor on a CACHE, BTEC or NVQ course should guide you over what should form your portfolio and how much material is needed for a full portfolio or within separate assignments of a course. However, there are some important practical issues to bear in mind for any early years qualification.

The portfolio or assignments matter

- Your portfolio is one way that you are assessed within the framework of these vocational qualifications. The assessor will also sometimes observe you at work but assessors cannot observe everything you can do or have learned.
- Your portfolio is part of the evidence of your competence in a specific unit and all its elements. The quality of your portfolio or separate assignments matters.

Organisation matters

- The contents of your portfolio need to be clearly linked to the relevant module or unit. Your assessor needs to be able to match your portfolio directly with the part of the qualification that it supports.
- For any material, you need yourself to be clear about, 'why am I putting this into my portfolio now?' and 'what does it demonstrate about my competence and understanding on this topic or skill area?'
- You need enough material in a portfolio to support a given assignment. But quantity is not all; everything has to be relevant and shown to be so. It will not work to copy masses of material and put it into the appendix of an assignment or your portfolio folder.
- Organise yourself and your material. You have some personal choice about how to sub-divide, present and order your material. But the best way will never be just a big carrier bag. Your tutor or assessor should have some suggestions that are practical and economical.

Links to your practice

- Equally important, the contents of your portfolio need to be clearly linked to your work with children and families. Your assessor needs to be able to see how you have applied knowledge or information searches directly to your work.
- The portfolio cannot stop at a collection of ideas and underpinning knowledge, as important as that is. Each contribution to your portfolio will need to make a clear link to what you do, and have done in the course of your work.

- Show how you have taken ideas and applied them your work role, or how you anticipate that you could in the future.
- You can build in personal examples of your practice and supported opinions. But they have to be linked into the main theme: why have you chosen this example, how does it highlight other ideas, what have you learned from this experience?

Different types of material

- Part of your whole portfolio may be a ring binder or hard back folder with sheets of paper, but that is unlikely to be all.
- Some units and modules may offer the potential for evidence in the form of photographs, audio or video tapes, maybe sometimes even pieces of work you have undertaken with the children.
- Some craft work or exciting play activities cannot be 'filed', so photographs and written accounts will be important.
- In some cases your portfolio will need authenticated accounts from colleagues, your manager, parents or even older children of what you all did.
- Get into the habit of collecting such evidence at the time and explaining, as appropriate, your reasons for asking the cooperation of other people.
- Date pieces of material and make notes promptly, before the freshness wears away.

Using a range of resources

Tips for using written material

In your work, you will consult some books and articles. It takes some practice to get into the swing of how you use written material, whether a chapter in a book, a magazine or journal article or material you download from a website. Your college tutor or supervisor will help you in the details but here are some guidelines that you will need to bear in mind whatever the nature of your current assignment or project.

Ways of reading and noting material

It helps sometimes to read a chapter or article at least twice:

- First of all take a quick skim to see what is included in the content. Books and chapters that have headings are a great help here.
- Then read in more detail and either highlight key points by underlining or using a highlighter pen (if you own the book or the copy of the article) or make notes.
- In your written notes it can help to use your own underlining or bullet some main points that stand out for you.
- Use your notes to link to your own examples and observations and ensure that an original idea you have had is marked clearly as your own in your notes.
- Always write down the full reference of the book or article as part of your note taking: title, author and date.

- It will be much easier if you get into the habit of making this note at the time. It is much harder, and very frustrating, to have to chase up a proper reference later, when you have read many other sources and have only a vague memory of where you obtained a particular example, quotation or ideas. The other important reason for making this note is to avoid plagiarism (see below).

Acknowledge original material

You are responsible for avoiding plagiarism, meaning the direct copying of the work of another person, either published writers or a fellow student. You might understand very well that copying a fellow student is a form of cheating. But inexperienced students can slip into plagiarism if they do not attend.

When you draw ideas from a published book or article, you must always acknowledge the source of those ideas. Plagiarism does not only involve copying word for word. It is also judged unacceptable and a form of written deceit if students, or any other writer, has taken ideas, a reasoned argument or examples from someone else and has changed them so little that they are recognisable. Perhaps you only change a word or two or simply re-order a list of points.

You can avoid this pitfall by observing the following tips:

- Ensure that you always clearly head any personal notes you make with a clear and full reference to what you are reading at the time.
- Sometimes you will have a good idea that emerges from what you have read. Then mark that up clearly in your notes. You certainly do not want to acknowledge someone else as the origin of your idea when it was a result of your own creativity!
- Give a clear reference when you quote from a written source of any kind or you paraphrase, that is you put ideas into your own words but the origins are still those of another writer.

It is acceptable to use quotations from books and articles but:

- You must fully reference the source of the quotation.
- Choose your quotations with care since they have to do a job in your work. Why have you chosen this section, what does it add to your assignment or this part of your portfolio? The answers to these questions should be clear from how you introduce the quotation or refer to it afterwards.

You should have a list at the end of your assignment of all the books or articles from which you have directly drawn ideas or given quotations within your work. This list should be properly organised and placed at the end of your written work, but before any appendices. You would not usually add books or articles that had not directly supported this assignment.

Proper references

There are correct ways to refer to books, writers and ideas within your assignments. There are some choices and your tutor or supervisor will help you on this decision. This course may have a handbook that explains these details or the college or assessment centre may have a general handbook to assist you in study and writing skills.

Useful magazines

You will often find practical articles in magazines written for early years practitioners. Many of the magazines listed below also have a news and information

page and can be very helpful for keeping you up to date with national developments relevant to your profession.

I find the following publications especially helpful. You will find some of them in the early years settings where you work or are on placement. Others should be available in the library of a college or assessment centre. The magazine websites, where they are available, will tell you something about the publication and some make previous features available to subscribers using a personal number.

You will not want to buy all these out of your own funds. But if you find a magazine regularly useful, then it will be worth the money. You can keep articles and ideas in your own file rather than having to share them with colleagues. Not all the magazines are available over the counter at newsagents; some are only available on subscription whereby you receive each issue through the post. Some organisations offer a special student rate for subscriptions. Where you want to buy a weekly magazine, it is usually cheaper to take out a subscription than to buy each issue over the counter.

- *Nursery World* is a source of articles, topic booklets and news. They have regular supplements. *The Professional Nanny, Training, Nursery Chains, Nursery Equipment, Nursery Computing*. Available from newsagents or on subscription tel: 01454 642480 www.nursery-world.com
- *Nursery Education* had a wide range of practical features and inserts. Published by Scholastic, available from newsagents or on subscription tel: 01926 816250 www.scholastic.co.uk
- *Practical Pre-School* has news, features and a wide range of practice inserts that can be collected in a ring binder format. Published by Step Forward Publishing, available on subscription tel: 01926 420046 www.practicalpreschool.com Step Forward Publishing is also a good source of topic and information books and booklets.
- The National Early Years Network journal *Co-ordinate* is sent to NEYN members but should be available in libraries. If you are searching in vain for a particular issue or feature try the Network tel: 020 7607 9573.
- *TES Primary* is more geared to primary school than nursery but will be useful for readers on placement or working in a primary school. Tel: 020 7782 3000 www.tesprimary.com

Getting used to the internet

If you are not yet confident working with computers and especially in accessing the internet, now is the time to tackle this area of competence. Increasingly, many useful organisations and government departments have websites, some reports are available to print directly off the website and some of the more useful search engines can help you track information. Whenever I have suggested a source that is on the internet, I give precise addresses, so you have directions and are not being directed to lengthy searches.

The dedicated website for this book is
www.cengagelearning.co.uk/childcare/london

Information searches and advice

There are a considerable number of useful organisations for the early years practitioner and some of the main groups are listed in Appendix 2. You will make the best use of the resources offered by these organisations if you allow a little advance thought and planning.

- Consider in advance what you want to know or check. Some organisations (including those listed in other parts of the book) have a very broad remit, but others have a definite focus.
- Read the explanations given with the name of the organisation and you are more likely to contact those organisations that can best help you on this occasion. You will avoid wasting your time and that of the organisation.
- If you are able to use the website information, then you can find out about an organisation in advance. The website will sometimes give you what you need to know and the more extensive websites allow you to download updates, information and sometimes copies of leaflets.

All these organisations will be ready and keen to help early years practitioners, but they cannot be expected to field very broad queries.

- If your query relates to a project or assignment, then make sure you have done some planning about the content before you start contacting organisations. It is your responsibility to organise your thoughts.
- Think a bit about what you want to know. Be ready with the query you want to ask over the telephone. Draft some definite questions or a reasonably narrow focus in a letter or email, or in your own notes before you pick up the telephone.
- The same guideline applies if you write to magazines or individuals (perhaps whom you met through a workshop).

Check out some practical details:

- Some organisations have library and information services where you can visit. Always call for an appointment, since most will have limited sitting space.
- Use of some library services is free, but not all. Ask before you arrive.
- Always check on the cost of any publications. Some will be free, but many will cost something.
- Some organisations will be happy to supply free leaflets but will appreciate your sending a stamped self-addressed envelope.

Continued professional development

Responsible early years practitioners, as in any profession, remain open to learning as part of their continued professional development. Children and families are poorly served by any sense of 'I've done my training now, so that's it' or 'I've got twenty years' experience, don't tell me what to do'. It is important that everyone remains open to new information, ideas and practice.

You are not expected to know everything, no matter how experienced you are. Indeed, one of the advantages of feeling more experienced can be that you feel more able to say, 'I'm not sure about the answer to that, but I know how to find out'. In many of the topics covered in this book you will find suggestions for further reading, useful organisations and information for website research.

There is a considerable amount of information and advice in this book. On any topic, I have given what is, to the best of my knowledge, the most up to date information or the contrasting views when there is no clear agreement. I am especially aware that on health and medical conditions, I have summarised relatively briefly areas of concern about which entire books can be written. It is your responsibility as an early years practitioner, early years advisor or college tutor to pursue some of the suggestions about further resources, particularly when a child's health and well being may be at risk.

Finding out more

Your college may have a study skills handbook. If so, read it in detail and take notice of what you are directed to do and how.

Two books may also be helpful for developing your study and organisational skills. The first book is more appropriate if you are at the beginning of your career or learning to be a student. The second book supports study at a more academic level:

- Mitchell, Alison (2001) *Study Skills for Early Years Students* Hodder and Stoughton.
- Cottrell, Sheila (1999) *The Study Skills Handbook* Palgrave Study Guides.

Appendix 2

Useful organisations

Some organisations are of relevance to the whole of the UK, whereas some are more applicable to one of the four countries that comprise the UK. The first set of organisations are of general interest.

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE), 1c Aberdeen Studios, 22–24 Highbury Grove, London N5 2DQ tel: general 020 7354 8321 advice line (2–5 p.m.) 0808 8005793 email: ace-ed@easynet.co.uk website: www.ace-ed.org.uk

Advice and information on the state education system and a range of publications suitable for parents and practitioners.

Children's Legal Centre, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex CO4 3SQ tel: 01206 873820 email: clc@essex.ac.uk website: www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Publications and information about the legal position of children on a wide range of issues. Good for the legal situation as it affects the UK as a whole and England in particular.

Children's Play Council, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE tel: 020 7843 6016 email: cpc@ncb.org.uk website: www.ncb.org.uk/cpc.htm

Brings together national voluntary organisations who are working to promote children's play.

Children's Play Information Service (CPIS), 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE tel: 020 7843 6303 email: CPIS@ncb.org.uk website: www.ncb.org.uk/info.htm

The CPIS provides a library and information service on all aspects of play and playwork. You can visit the library by appointment or make enquiries about books or research by telephone, letter or email.

Daycare Trust, 21 St George's Road, London SE1 6ES tel: 020 7840 3350 email: info@daycaretrust.org.uk website: www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Provides information for practitioners and parents and a consultancy service for local authorities and organisations, promoting quality in child care services.

Early Years Trainers Anti-Racist Network (EYTARN), PO Box 28, Wallasey L45 9NP tel and fax: 0151 639 1778 email: eytarn@lineone.net

Produces booklets, some posters and other illustrations, and runs training workshops and conferences.



Early Education, 136 Cavell Street, London E1 2JA tel: 020 7539 5400 website: www.early-education.org.uk

An organisation concerned about all aspects of young children's learning, with a particular focus on early educational settings. Promotes good practice in early years work. Offers advice and information, publications, conferences and the journal *Early Education*.

Kids' Clubs Network, Bellerive House, 3 Muirfield Crescent, London E14 9SZ tel: 020 7512 2112 email: info.office@kidsclubs.co.uk website: www.kidsclubs.com

Promotes after school and holiday playschemes for children. Offers consultancy and advice on services for 5–15 year olds.

National Childminding Association (NCMA), 8 Masons Hill, Bromley, Kent BR2 9EY tel: 020 8464 6164 email: info@ncma.org.uk website: www.ncma.org.uk

Supports childminders in England and Wales and promotes the childminding service in the UK.

National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE tel: 020 7843 6000 website: www.ncb.org.uk

The NCB publishes books, reading lists, the journal *Children UK* and the *Highlight* series. The valuable resource collection that used to be in the Early Childhood Unit is now in the main library. The website has pages dedicated to the individual units that form part of the NCB.

National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), Oak House, Woodvale Road, Brighouse, West Yorkshire HD6 4AB tel: 01484 541641 email: ndna@btinternet.com website: www.ndna.org.uk

The NDNA provides a national organisation, support and advice for day nurseries and centres, most of which are private nurseries and chains, that are not funded by local authorities.

National Early Years Network, 77 Holloway Road, London N7 8JZ Tel: 020 7607 9573 email: info@neyn.org.uk

A wide range of publications about early years practice, the journal *Co-ordinate* and some posters.

NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children), 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH tel: 020 7825 2500 email: mbishop@nspcc.org.uk website: www.nspcc.org.uk

A national organisation that works to protect children and promote their welfare. Local branches are likely to work closely with the local authority Child Protection Team.

Playgroup Network, PO Box 84, Middlesbrough TS7 0XT tel: 0191 230 5520 website: www.playgroup-network.org.uk

Playgroup Network provides a national umbrella organisation to support local groups.

Pre-school Learning Alliance, National Centre, 69 Kings Cross Road, London WC1X 9LL tel: 020 7833 0991 email: pre-school.mh@plas-tek.co.uk website: www.pre-school.org.uk

Promotes quality care and education for under fives, with a focus on pre-schools. Publications and posters are available from PPA Promotion, 45–49 Union Road, Croydon CR0 2XU tel: 020 8684 9542.

Save the Children, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD tel: 020 7703 5400 email: enquiries@savethechildren.org.uk website: www.savethechildren.org.uk

A national organisation committed to children and their welfare. Supports a wide range of projects and other units. For instance, *Save the Children Centre for Young Children's Rights*, 365 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA tel: 020 7700 8127.

Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources (WGARCR), Unit 63a Eurolink Business Centre, 49 Effra Road, London SW2 1BZ tel: 020 7501 9992 email: wgarc.r@virgin.net

If you work in Wales

Children in Wales (*Plant yng Nghymru*), 25 Windsor Place, Cardiff CF10 3BZ tel: 029 2034 2434 email: ciw@globalnet.co.uk website: www.childreninwales.org.uk

Works with organisations and professionals working with children and their families in Wales.

Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association, Ladywell House, Newtown, Powys SY16 1JB tel: 01686 624573.

Supports the playgroup movement in Wales.

If you work in Scotland

Children in Scotland (*Clann An Alba*), Princes House, 5 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh, EH2 4RG tel: 0131 228 8484 email: info@childreninScotland.org.uk website: www.childreninScotland.org.uk

Brings together statutory and voluntary organisations and professionals working with children and their families in Scotland.

Play Scotland, Cramond Campus, Edinburgh EH4 6JD tel: 0131 312 80880.

A focus on play and playwork in Scotland.

Scottish Childminding Association, Suite 3, 7 Melville Terrace, Stirling FK8 2ND tel: 01786 445377 email: info@childminding.org website: www.childminding.org

Supports childminders in Scotland.

Scottish Independent Nurseries Association (SINA), Unit 3, West Building, Rosemont Workspace, 141–147 Charles Street, Glasgow G21 2QA tel: 0141 553 1099.

The organisation for independent nurseries in Scotland.

Scottish Out-of-School Care Network (SOSCN), Floor 6, Fleming House, 134 Renfrew Street, Glasgow G3 6ST tel: 0141 331 1301 website: www.soscn.org

Scottish Pre-School Play Association (SPPA), 14 Elliot Place, Glasgow G3 8EP
tel: 0141 221 4148.

If you work in Northern Ireland

NIPPA – the Early Years Organisation, 6c Wildflower Way, Apollo Road, Belfast
BT12 6TA Tel: 028 90 662825 email: mail@nippa.org website: www.nippa.org

NIPPA works with early years practitioners and services in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Childminding Association, 16–18 Mill Street, Newtownards,
Co Down BT23 4LU tel: 028 91 811015 website: www.nicma.org

Focus on childminding in Northern Ireland.

Finding a wide range of play resources and books

Even if you live in a well resourced urban area, you will not necessarily find that your local book or toy store is well equipped for the needs of early years practitioners. Even in ethnically very diverse areas, shelves of books and toys do not necessarily reflect the local neighbourhood, let alone society at large. So a good source of materials will often be through mail order firms.

The following organisations are useful for a wide range of materials, a good list of early years books, children's books or some combination of all of these. Most organisations will have a catalogue that they will be happy to send you, mostly without charge (but check).

Children's Bookshop, HMP Books Ltd, 29 Fortis Green Road, London N10 3HP
tel: 020 8444 5500.

A wide range of good books for children of all ages. No catalogue, but they will suggest titles if you explain what kind of books you want.

Development Education Centre, 998 Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29
6LE tel: 0121 472 3255 email: info@idec.org.uk

Booklets and photo packs on different aspects of development education, families around the world and varied cultures.

Save the Children, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD tel: 020 7703 5400 email:
enquiries@savethechildren.org.uk website: www.savethechildren.org.uk

Publications and research projects concerned with services for and policy for children. Booklets, photo packs and other visual materials.

Community Insight, The Pembroke Centre, Cheney Manor, Swindon SN2 2PQ tel:
01793 512612 email: books@c-insight.demon.co.uk website: www.c-insight.demon.co.uk

Mail order company specialising in publications about children and a range of books for children.

Galt Educational and Pre School, Culvert Street, Oldham, Lancashire OL4 2GE
tel: 0870 2424477 email: enquiries@galt-educational.co.uk website:
www.galt-educational.co.uk

A wide range of play materials and equipment.

Learning Design Ltd, Ground Floor South, Limehouse Court, 3–11 Dod Street, London E14 7EQ tel: 020 7093 4051 email: info@learningdesign.biz website: www.learningdesign.biz

Dual language books and information books about children from a range of cultural backgrounds.

Letterbox Library, 71 Allen Road, London N16 8RY tel: 020 7503 4801 email: info@letterboxlibrary.com website: www.letterboxlibrary.com

Mail order children's books, specialising in a non-sexist and multicultural list. Dual language books and posters.

Little Tiger Press, 1 The Coda Centre, 189 Munster Road, London SW6 6AW tel: 020 7385 6333 email: info@littletiger.co.uk

Publishes children's books in different languages and some dual language books.

Mantra Publishing, 5 Alexandra Grove, London N12 8NU tel: 020 8445 5123 website: www.mantrapublishing.com

A wide range of books in different languages, tape and story packs, song collections and posters.

Multilingual Matters, Frankfurt Lodge, Clevedon Hall, Victoria Street, Clevedon, Avon BS21 7SJ tel: 01275 876519 website: www.multilingual-matters.com

Books and journals about bilingualism and a newsletter for bilingual families.

NES Arnold, Findel House, Excelsior Road, Ashby Park, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire, LE65 1NG tel: 0845 120 4525 email: enquiries@nesarnold.co.uk website: www.nesarnold.co.uk

Dressing-up clothes, dolls reflecting different ethnic groups, dolls with visible disabilities, posters and display cards and other play materials.

Pre-school Learning Alliance through PPA Promotion, 45–49 Union Road, Croydon CR0 2XU tel: 020 8684 9542 email: pre-school.mh@plas.tek.co.uk website: www.pre-school.org.uk

For a wide range of publications and visual materials.

RDS, 8 Merton Road, London E17 9DE tel: 020 8521 6969 website: www.rdsbooks.com

Dual language storybooks, dictionaries and cassettes.

Step Forward Publishing, The Coach House, Cross Road, Leamington Spa CV32 5PB tel: 01926 420046 email: enquiries@practicalpreschool.com website: practicalpreschool.com

A wide range of practical books and booklets, also the magazine *Practical Pre-School*.

Tamarind Ltd, PO Box 52, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 1UN tel: 020 8866 8808 email: info@tamarindbooks.co.uk website: www.tamarindbooks.co.uk

A wide range of fiction, puzzles and posters that show children of different ethnic backgrounds, disabled children and books with non-sexist themes.



Glossary

This is an alphabetical list of all the key terms that are defined in the chapters of this book.

active birth movement: an approach emphasising that women in labour should be enabled to move and to take up different positions for managing contractions and the birth itself

adoption: a legal process through which one or two adults take full responsibility for children whose own families cannot care for them and who then commit to raise the children

adult-initiated activities: those experiences offered by adults which can then be shaped by children's interest and choices

aggressive approach: using fierce words and/or actions to insist on your own views or preferences and to minimise those of others

altruism: a pattern of behaviour that shows a selfless concern for the well being of others

anaphylaxis: a severe and sudden allergic reaction to foods or other substances, that can be fatal without a swift injection of adrenaline or other appropriate medication

anti-bias curriculum: a framework of activities, play materials and experiences that avoid stereotypes and actively promote understanding and knowledge of all the groups within society

anti-discriminatory practice: an active attempt to promote positive attitudes and behaviour and to challenge and change negative outlooks and actions, on the basis of any group identity

articulation: how children say the sound system that makes up the words in their language

assertiveness: confident expression of your own views and preferences while allowing space for the views and choices of others

assessment: a rounded approach to determine what children can manage in defined areas of development

attachment: a positive emotional link between babies, young children and their parents or other key carers

authoritative role: a pattern of behaviour from adults that combines emotional warmth with responsible boundary setting

babbling: the early sound making, often very tuneful, of babies who are stringing together a series of sounds in a deliberate way

baby blues: the term describing a temporary low state for mothers in the first few days after birth

behaviourism: a theoretical approach that emphasises how human behaviour responds to patterns of reward and punishment. The approach is also called *learning theory*. *Social learning theory* recognises the importance of feelings and thinking on actions

bilingual children: children who are able to, or are in the process, of learning two or more languages

biological approach: theories that focus on the importance of genetic programming to explain child development or adult behaviour

birth parents: the biological mother and father of a child

body language: ways of communicating that use gestures, facial expression and body posture

bonding: the term often used to mean the very earliest attachment soon after birth

challenging behaviour: a pattern of behaviour from a child that is especially hard to handle and does not instantly respond to the usual positive strategies

checklist or tick list: record layout in which it is possible to check or tick individual items relevant to children's development or behaviour

child abuse: a pattern of ill-treatment of a child or persistent failure to provide appropriate protection and care for children

child-centred (or child-oriented) approach: a perspective that aims to place children's interests and focus central to all aspects of childcare and learning

child-initiated activities: those experiences suggested or started by children themselves

child protection: preventative systems and direct action to ensure the well being of children and young people and to take direct action to ensure their future health and development

circle time: a carefully planned small group time to explore issues and ideas with children in a supportive way

cognitive development: the area of children's learning that focuses on their ability to think, gain knowledge, develop ideas and reason in a logical way

cognitive (or cognitive developmental) theory: theories that focus on how children think and make sense of their world

complaints procedure: process for parents and other users of the setting to lodge a formal complaint about any aspect of the setting and the actions of the team

comprehension or receptive language: children's understanding of what is said to them. Young children show through their behaviour that they have grasped words, in context, that they do not yet say

conflict resolution: the skills to address and try to resolve disagreements without verbal or physical argument

congenital causes of disability: pre-birth conditions lead to a disability or health condition, so that the baby is born with this condition

consequences: see *using consequences*

conservation: the idea that objects continue to have the same quality such as number or volume even when they are moved to look different

constructive feedback: positive approaches to communication in order to enable others to learn from their actions, choice of approach and decisions

continued professional development: active efforts to extend and update your own knowledge and skills in your area of work

culture: a distinctive way of life that is shared within one group and makes a clear distinction between this group and others

curriculum: a framework for supporting learning that specifies broad areas of learning and approaches to promote children's learning of knowledge and skills. A curriculum may describe precise content and methods to support learning

curriculum vitae (CV): summary of your qualifications, experience and professional career

deductive reasoning: a process of thinking logically from a general rule or principle to predict a particular event

developmental milestones: observable achievements for children in the different areas of their development throughout childhood

developmental profile: record sheet for tracking children's progress in development and behaviour

disciplinary procedure: steps to deal with unacceptable behaviour from a member of the team in a setting

disclosure: communication by children's words or actions when they share an experience of abuse or neglect, or their fears that relate to potential abuse

discrimination: when any kind of behaviour is more or less favourable to other people on the basis of their group identity. *Direct discrimination* is when somebody deliberately acts so as to favour or disadvantage members of given groups. *Indirect discrimination* occurs when the actions of a person or organisation result in more or less favourable treatment by group identity, even if this consequence was not deliberately intended

disembedded thinking: when children are required to deal with ideas without a clear or familiar context with which to connect

domestic violence: verbal and physical aggression, threats or attack made by family members of either sex within the home

early literacy skills: a blend of fine physical skills, understanding and a positive outlook that supports children towards being able to read and write

Early Years Action and Early Years Action Plus: two stages of special support for children with disabilities in early years settings

early years curriculum: content and methods to support learning that are directly appropriate to children younger than five or six years of age

ecological approach: theory that focuses on children's development within their social environment

egocentrism: the quality that Piaget claimed was typical of younger children, that they were unable to envisage a situation from the perspective of other people, what the other person could see or what they felt

embryo: the term used to describe a baby in the first eight weeks after conception

emergent writing: children's first attempts to make meaningful marks that they relate to the writing they see around them

emotion coaching: supportive adult conversation and behaviour that supports children towards learning emotional literacy

emotional abuse: a persistent pattern of verbal cruelty to children or young people such that they feel unworthy and unloved

emotional literacy: the ability to recognise and understand our own emotions and those of others

empathy: the ability and willingness to tune into the feelings of other people

encouragement: positive feedback by words and expression, as much for effort as for achievement

equal opportunities: the daily practice to ensure that all children are enabled to have positive experiences, to use the resources of a setting fully and see that action is taken if children's opportunities are blocked

event sampling: a technique in which observations are made of specific events or types of behaviour, defined in advance of the observation

expressive language: see *speech*

extended family: the relatives in a family beyond mother and father

extension activities: possible additional activities in a plan that can be offered to children, if they wish to continue

extinction: when an action or pattern of actions ceases altogether

faltering growth: when babies and children do not put on weight and may also appear in poor health, for no obvious reason. The condition used to be called failure to thrive

fetus: the term used to describe a baby from eight weeks after conception to birth

fluency: how easily a child's speech flows. Some problems of fluency are a normal part of early language development

food allergies: when a child or adult becomes ill after eating particular foods or ingredients. The consequences of a food allergy may be mild through to very severe

foster carers: people who take temporary responsibility for children when their own family is unable to care for them

full term babies: when babies are born close to the usual gestation period of about 40 weeks

genetic causes of disability: when a child inherits a condition from the genes of their parent(s)

gestation: the development of the embryo and fetus over the months of a pregnancy

grievance procedure: process for a team member to lodge a complaint that she or he has been treated in an unacceptable way

guidance: government guidelines that are issued to explain how the details of laws should work in practice

heuristic play: an exploratory play resource for toddlers and young children, developed by Elinor Goldschmied and using a wide range of ordinary objects and recycled materials for children to play with as they choose

holistic: see *whole child*

holophrase: single words used flexibly by very young children, supported by tone and gesture to convey different meanings

home-school (or home-setting) agreement: a written description of the obligations and expectations of the school (or early years) team and parents. A representative of the setting and parent(s) would sign a copy

home schooling: when families educate their children within the family for part or all of their childhood

IEP: Individual Education Plan for children whose disabilities require special support and planning in early years or school settings

incentives: a promise of a reward in the future, as a result of particular behaviour or achievement

inclusive approach: a commitment to enable disabled children to join mainstream early years or school provision as far as possible and with necessary support

independence: the move in childhood toward children's being able to take responsibility for their own care and decisions

indirect discrimination: see *discrimination*

inductive reasoning: a process of thinking logically from direct observations and experience to reach a general principle

infant directed speech: the adjusted form of language used by adults and some older children to communicate with babies

informed consent: that adults and children are given sufficient information for them to make a decision about whether to agree to or decline involvement in an event or experience

interdependence: when the actions of one person have direct consequences for others in a team situation

internal speech: when children's talking to guide their actions or think goes silent or almost silent

ipsative approach to assessment: comparing a child with him/herself at a previous point in time

jargon: the very expressive flow of word-like sounds that many babies make around about their first birthday

key person: a named team member who has special responsibilities for working with a

small number of named children and building a relationship with their parent(s). Also sometimes called *key worker* or *primary worker*

learning theory: see *behaviourism*

logical consequences: see *using consequences*

lone parents: mothers or fathers who are raising their children on their own

looked after children: a descriptive of the status of children and young people who have become the responsibility of the local authority because their own families cannot take care of them on a temporary or permanent basis. The local authority assumes parental responsibility

maturation: a biologically determined pattern for the sequence of development for babies and children

medical model of disability: an approach to disabled children that focuses exclusively on diagnosis and medical management of the condition

miscarriage: the loss of a fetus before 24 weeks gestation within the pregnancy

mixed feeding: see *weaning*

natural childbirth: labour without medical intervention in which women manage the process by breathing techniques and movement

natural consequences: see *using consequences*

nature: the part of children's development that is shaped by heredity, what is inherited through the child's genes

neglect: the failure to care adequately for children or young people in order to ensure their continuing health and well being

non-verbal communication: ways of communicating without words by using body language and also the qualities of how something is said, such as tone, volume, fluency and pace

normative approach to assessment: comparing a child with developmental norms for her age or against expectations for all children, such as the early learning goals in the English curriculum

nurture: everything that happens to influence child development after birth

nurture group: carefully planned small group experience for children who are struggling with the emotional demands of primary school life

parental involvement: ways in which parents can be invited and choose to be directly involved in the activities or running of an early years setting or school

partnership with parents: the value and practice of working together with parents for the care and learning of their children, acknowledging the continuing importance of parents in the lives of their children

passive or submissive approach: reluctance to be honest about your own opinions or preferences and allowing others to make the choice

personal identity: children's perception of what makes them an individual uniquely different from other people

phonemes: the individual sounds that comprise a spoken language and that are written with combinations of letters from the alphabet

phonemic awareness: learning that spoken and written words are composed of individual sounds

phonological awareness: the understanding that spoken words are composed of separate syllables and sounds

physical abuse: non-accidental physical injury to a child or young person, caused either by direct attack or irresponsible actions highly likely to put a child in danger of injury

poetry pockets: containers with all the props to support a poem or rhyme, in order to encourage interest and involvement of children in poetry

positive disposition to learn: an enthusiasm felt by children about learning, supported by a positive self-image and sense of 'I can'

postnatal depression: a more serious and longer lasting condition when women feel unable to cope with their baby, are highly anxious and sometimes reject the baby

praise: positive feedback in words, usually for what has been done or achieved

pre-coded categories: a set of short descriptions, decided in advance for organising observation of types of behaviour or events

premature babies: when babies are born earlier than the usual gestation period, usually less than 37 weeks

primary carer: the parent who undertakes most of the daily care and responsibility for children

primary legislation: laws that have been passed and have to be obeyed as a legal obligation

professional: a description of behaviour and outlook appropriate to the responsibilities in a job or a work placement as a student

projectile vomiting: when a baby brings up milk or food with force. A sign of possible serious digestive problems needing medical attention

proprioception: the ability to recognise and use the physical sensations from the body that give feedback on balance and the position of our limbs

- prosocial behaviour:** a blend of actions and feelings that can be observed when children have learned empathy and altruism
- prosody:** the ability to use intonation patterns and emphasis to shift the meaning of a sentence with the same words
- psychoanalytic tradition:** theories that focus on how early conflicts and unconscious thoughts shape personality
- punishment:** an experience that decreases the likelihood that an action will be repeated in the future
- receptive language:** see *comprehension*
- reflective practitioner:** an outlook for early years, and other professionals, in which you are ready to think as well as to act and to be open to new ideas and approaches
- reflex reactions:** physical movement of newborn babies that are inborn. The reflexes are instinctive reactions and are not learned
- reinforcement:** an experience that increases the likelihood that an action will be repeated in the future
- respite care:** a service offering temporary care of children to families in order to give the parents a break from stressful childcare
- reward:** giving tangible items or special experiences as a result of behaviour or achievement
- risk assessment:** the process of checking the likely risks involved in an activity or an outing and sensible ways to address the risks
- schemas:** patterns of behaviour, mainly ways of physical exploration, in which young children learn about their environment
- School Action and School Action Plus:** two stages of special support for children with disabilities in school settings
- self esteem:** children's evaluation of their own self worth, including the relationship between what they feel they are, and can do and what they ought to be as a person and be able to do
- self image:** children's view of themselves, as a mix of positive and possibly negative characteristics
- self reliance:** an area of children's skills in which they become more able to use their own resources and knowledge to undertake their own care and make choices
- SEN Code of Practice:** the clear guidelines describing good practice for disabled children in early years and school settings
- SENCO:** the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator responsible for liaison between the setting, parents and any outside agencies
- sexual abuse:** actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child or young person who has neither the age nor understanding to give their informed consent
- sign language:** a form of communication that uses agreed signs, made with fingers and hands, to convey words and concepts
- simultaneous bilingual learning:** when children learn two languages at the same time from a very young age
- social cognition:** children's ability and learning to merge their understanding of social behaviour with their powers of thinking and reasoning
- social constructivist approach:** emphasises how children and adults make sense and meaning of situations
- social model of disability:** an approach that focuses on disabled children as individuals and ways they can be disabled by social circumstances and attitudes
- social skills:** ways of behaving that enable children to get along in groups, to play and interact with other children
- speech or expressive language:** what children themselves say in words and later in phrases and sentences
- statement of special educational needs:** description for an individual child of his/her difficulties and needs for support in school
- stepfamilies:** families formed when one or both adults bring their children from a previous relationship into the new relationship. Stepparents will not be the biological parent of all the children in the family
- stereotypes:** simple, strongly held beliefs (positive or negative) about the characteristics shared by individuals in an identified group
- stillbirth:** the loss of a fetus after 24 weeks of gestation within a pregnancy
- storysacks:** large bags that include the props to support a particular story book and so to encourage interest and story telling for and with children
- submissive approach:** see *passive* or *submissive approach*
- successive bilingual learning:** when children who have a good grasp of their family language, subsequently learn a second language
- sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS):** the term that describes the unexpected death of a baby, that cannot be easily explained by specific illness or accident. Also known as *cot death*
- symbolic rewards:** giving something that represents praise for behaviour or other achievements, such as stickers or certificates
- teamwork:** actions and an outlook that enable individuals to work in a way that is consistent



and supportive of each other and the values of the setting

temperament: inborn tendencies for individual children that shape their reactions and behaviour towards a more established adult personality

theories of child development: attempts to explain how and why the events of child development unfold. People who propose a particular theory try to go beyond a description of what happens in child development to a prediction of what might happen under certain conditions

time sampling: a technique in which observations are made on a regular rather than continuous basis

trauma (birth): unexpected events during childbirth that can create high risk to the future well being of the unborn baby, such as being deprived of oxygen

treasure basket: a play resource developed by Elinor Goldschmied for babies who can sit unassisted. The low basket contains a range of

safe and interesting objects that are not conventional toys

using consequences: an alternative to punishment in guiding children's behaviour – *natural consequences* follow on as a highly likely result of a child's behaviour; *logical consequences* are adult-determined but relevant to the behaviour

weaning: when babies are introduced to first foods in addition to their milk diet, also sometimes called *mixed feeding*

whole child or holistic approach: a perspective on children's development stressing that children should not be viewed from just one part of their development and learning; they should be treated as entire individuals

zone of proximal development: the area of possibilities between what individual children can manage on their own and what they could achieve with appropriate help



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