

# EYFS – Prime and Specific Areas of Learning



This practice guidance will consider areas of best practice when delivering the prime and specific areas of learning

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**Supporting members to provide the highest standards of care and learning for children**

**This practice guidance has been developed for all professionals including childminders, nursery workers and nannies.**

This guide covers:

1. Section 1 (Learning and Development)
2. The three prime areas of learning and development
3. The four specific areas of learning and development
4. Summary
5. References
6. Support from PACEY

## **1. Section 1 (Learning and Development)**

This practice guidance has been developed for childminders and nursery workers who work within the EYFS framework.

Section 1 (Learning and Development) of the Early Years Foundation Stage (2021) describes what you must do to promote children's learning through the seven areas of learning and development. There is also Development Matters: Non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage the non statutory guidance. *Development Matters* sets out the pathways of children's development in broad ages and stages and gives examples of effective practice. The guidance can help you check that children are secure in all the earlier steps of learning before you look at their 'age band' and the observation checkpoints can help you to notice whether a child is at risk of falling behind in their development.

All childcare settings on the Early Years register must deliver the areas of learning and development unless they have applied for an exemption to certain areas. For example, some Steiner settings have done this to fit in with their ethos of how children learn.

The seven areas of learning and development are split into three prime and four specific areas. Research shows that the prime areas are time sensitive, if a child has not achieved the goals in these areas by the time they are 5-years-old, we know that they are much harder to achieve later in life. Development in the specific areas is underpinned by those in the prime areas.

Professionals working with the youngest children will focus on the prime areas although not exclusively as none of the areas are developed in isolation. For example everyday activities such as singing with babies or setting the table with toddlers can aid learning in literacy or mathematics. However focusing on the prime areas enables early identification of any concerns around development such as speech and language ensuring that support can be sought lessening the risk of children falling behind developmentally.

## 2. The three Prime Areas of Learning and Development

The three prime areas of learning and development are:

- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Personal, Social and Emotional

These lay down the foundation for all children's learning, ensuring that children are able to relate to others, communicate effectively and engage with their environment. The prime areas are dependent on each other and are universal in that they occur within cultures and social backgrounds.

The EYFS requires you to be mindful of children whose home language is not English; be vigilant in the provision of opportunities for children to develop and use their home language as well as gaining opportunities to develop a good standard in English. In order to facilitate this, you will need to work in true partnership with children's families.

### Communication and Language

The two aspects are:

- Listening, Attention and Understanding
- Speaking

From birth babies interact with those around them, they are dependent on their ability to communicate their needs effectively.

The aspects above are underpinned by the research of the Every Child a Talker (ECAT) programme, which showed that whilst childcare professionals were encouraging children to communicate there was a gap in supporting the development of listening skills and building of attention skills.



### Let's consider some ways that you can support children's communication and language development

- Ensure a range of stories and rhymes and help children understand words by the use of actions.
- Talk with and listen to children allowing them time to decide what they want to say
- Encourage them to express their feelings, extend their vocabulary and support them to engage in symbolic play for example by providing dressing up and role play.
- Recognise and support children's home language by working in partnership with parents and invite them to contribute.

Remember the role of the key person in ensuring that they are aware of any specific words or non verbal communications that children use for particular items or needs, for example:

- How do they communicate that they need the toilet?
- What do they call their comforter?

Display pictures and photographs and talk about them with children.

## Physical Development

The two aspects are:

- Gross Motor Skills
- Fine Motor Skills

Children engage with their environment through physical interactions and movement, young children learn and explore through the use of all of their senses. They begin to make sense of their discoveries through experimenting and repeating movements.

### Let's consider some ways that you can support children's physical development

Provide children with opportunities to be active, to develop their fine and gross motor skills and co-ordination. Babies and children need opportunities to move around freely both indoors and out, include experiences of negotiating space which develops an awareness of what their body is capable of and spatial awareness.

Provide tunnels, push along toys and trikes.

Provide opportunities to develop fine motor skills by safely using tools and equipment such as paint brushes, play-dough cutters and scissors.

The aspect of Health and Self-care is part of physical development because children learn about how their bodies work by engaging in physical play.

Encourage children to learn about how to be healthy through the provision of healthy meals and snacks and access to fresh drinking water.

Establish routines that enable children to look after themselves for example using coat hooks, washing their hands and putting on their shoes.



## Personal Social and Emotional

The three aspects are:

- Self-Regulation
- Managing Self
- Building Relationships

In her 2011 report, Dame Claire Tickell recognised that Personal, Social and Emotional Development is one of the main building blocks for children's future success in life, this is also a reflection of the National Strategies research programme Social and Emotional Aspects of Development (SEAD).

Research also demonstrates the importance of babies making early secure attachments with adults who are responsive and sensitive to their emotional and physical needs and the impact this has on their development. This is where the role of an effective key person is vital in recognising children's individual needs and uniqueness, how children develop social skills in their interaction with others, and develop a positive sense of themselves. This in turn enables children to manage their feelings and behaviour.

### **Let's consider some ways that you can support children's personal, social and emotional development**

- Ensure a range of stories and rhymes and help children understand words by explaining their use.
- Ensure you consider your role as a key person to support children to feel safe and secure.
- Think about how you meet and greet children and say goodbye to develop trust particularly with very young children.
- Display photographs of the children's family and other special people
- Provide spaces for children to sit and chat without interruption.
- Provide mirrors for babies to see their own reflection.
- Give children the opportunity to make choices and ensure your resources are accessible
- Share books and stories that focus on emotions
- Ensure comfort items are easy for babies and small children to find
- Have agreed policies on supporting children's behaviour

### 3. The Four Specific Areas of Learning and Development

The four specific areas of learning and development are:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

These are considerably less time sensitive than the prime areas but cannot be developed alone; they build on the development gained through the Prime areas. The specific areas reflect individual children's life experiences including their cultural and social background. Practitioners will be able to plan for children's next steps in the Specific areas through their observations and knowledge of children's likes, dislikes and family background.

#### Literacy

There are three aspects

- Comprehension
- Word Reading
- Writing

Literacy development involves encouraging children to link sounds and letters and begin to read and write. Research such as the ECAT programme showed that children were being supported to acquire the knowledge of how to link letters and sounds but did not sufficiently support them to apply it in practical terms to reading and writing.

The skill of handwriting sits in the Prime area of Physical development as it has been recognised that children need to develop the physical skills such as wrist control and the tripod grip in order to be able to perform handwriting.



#### Mathematics

There are two aspects

- Number
- Numerical Patterns

The aspect of Number includes numbers as labels and for counting and calculating. Evidence from EYFS profiles demonstrated that children were able to recognise numbers but struggled to use any numerical understanding to solve problems or calculate.

The aspects aim to encourage children to develop these skills. You can support this through conversation with children which includes the use of positional language, for example, telling that the paint brushes are under the shelf. Also by promoting conversations such as how many plates do we need so we have one each?



## Understanding the World

There are three aspects

- Past and Present
- People, Culture and Communities
- The Natural World

There is a strong recognition within this area that children firstly learn about the things that are important to them and relevant in their lives. Their immediate family, community and cultural background. Once they have a secure base in this they can go on to develop knowledge and experience of the wider community and living and non living things.

## Expressive Arts and Design

There are two aspects

- Creating with Material
- Being Imaginative and Expressive

The ethos of this area is developing children's creativity in the broadest sense. There is a strong focus on how children explore and experiment in order to gain varying experiences. It builds on their enthusiasm to express themselves and gain confidence to do so. The area recognises the value of children's imagination through role play or symbolic play.

## 4. Summary

This summary illustrates how the prime and specific areas and the characteristics of effective learning are interconnected.

When you are planning your activities for children it is important that there is sufficient

- Depth
- Breadth and
- Challenge

So what do we mean by this? Lets take an example of sharing books ask yourself these key questions.

- Consider the number and variety of books.
- Where are they kept?
- Is your environment enabling?
- Think about where story telling takes place.
- Which areas of learning?
- Which characteristics?
- Are children active in their learning?
- How can you extend the learning?
- Does the story led to other activities?
- How are you supporting individual children's progress?
- How are you deciding which books to share?

The key focus of planning for children's learning and development needs is that of observation and assessment. In order to do this effectively, it is vital for the key person to know and understand the developmental stages, likes and dislikes of the children in their care and ensure the activities are flexible and informed by observations.



## 6. References

Department for Education (2021) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*.

Department for Education (2020) *Development Matters Non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage*

## 7. Support from PACEY

As a PACEY member you can get more help by visiting the website [www.pacey.org.uk](http://www.pacey.org.uk) or by calling 0300 003 0005

PACEY is the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years. A standard-setting organisation, we promote best practice and support childcare professionals to deliver high standards of care and learning.

Since 1977 we have provided high quality support to our members and have worked with government, local authorities and others to raise standards.

Together with our members - childminders, nannies and nursery workers - we are working to become the professional association for everyone in childcare and early years and ensure our members are recognised for the vital role they play in helping children get the best start in life.

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