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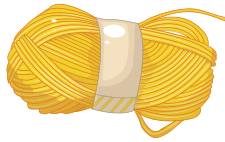
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Hello



There have been a lot of changes over the last six months. One of which is that I have taken over the editor's chair from Jacob Stow. Those are very big shoes to fill and I hope that I will have as good a relationship with the sector as he did.

However, the biggest change affecting everybody has been the coronavirus lockdown. It has thrown up major challenges for everybody in the sector. These have been very difficult times for settings everywhere and we still don't know how things will turn out. However, settings have risen admirably to the challenge.

Global Montessori ambassador Barbara Issacs has said that many businesses feared for their survival and are still concerned about the future. She has reflected on the last six months, the challenges faced and has looked to the future (page 45). But the easing of the lockdown restrictions and a full return can also bring a lot of worry and anxiety. Children coming back into settings, maybe for the first time since March, will feel disconnected and it will take time for them to settle back in. Every child is going to have had a different and unique experience of lockdown, some better than others. It may be particularly difficult for children with SEND to make the change to the 'new normal'. Kerry Payne gives her advice on transition and emotional safety for those children (page 12).

But it isn't just the children that may have difficulty in coming back to work. It is important that staff mental wellbeing is taken into account and any fears that they may have in coming back to the workplace.

Mark Hayhurst - Editor

Regulars

6 Nursery now

Your update from the early years.

9 How was the lockdown for you?

Staff described their nurseries as cocoons, says June O'Sullivan.

15 How to speak child

More than ever our children need to feel safe, says Nikky Smedley.

19 Tales from the setting floor

Emma Davis explains how a lockdown project brought joy to the community.

22 What did we learn from lockdown?

Valuable lessons can be taken away from the enforced break, says Sue Cowley

37 My Snapshots

Laura England suggests simple tips to brighten your setting and maintain a sense of wellbeing.

41 ABC of the Early Years

Our alphabetical exploration reaches H - the letter of helicopter, health and safety and halloween.

45 Reflections on a lockdown

Barbara Isaacs looks at the lessons learned during the last six months.

Subscribe
Don't miss
an issue of
Teach Early Years -
turn to
page 50!



48 Resources

Great ways to support creative learning.

56 The Book Corner

Inspiring titles to share with your 0-5s.

64 Have you seen

TEY's round-up of the latest early years tools, toys, books and activities.

72 In training

James Hemsall explains how to hold successful meetings.

82 Everyday objects

TEY's round-up of the latest early years tools, toys, books and activities.

THE EXPERTS...



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Features

11 Build a strong partnership

Sarah Watkins explains how supporting children with an attachment disorder can be challenging.

21 Crack cultural stereotypes

It's important to bring diversity into Early Years' settings, says Wa'qaar Mirza.

29 Welcome back

Carefully tune in to the lockdown experience of each individual child, says Melanie Pilcher.

32 Make learning exciting online

Jude Harries presents some ideas to blow away any screen time blues.

38 Challenging times

Dr Sherron Curtis examines the effects of Covid-19 on the Early Years workforce and provision.

47 Footsteps to phonics

Nikki Joyce explains how you can support the development of phonological awareness.

52 Don't forget the importance of play

Continuous Provision can be a tool for supporting children's wellbeing, says Alistair Bryce-Clegg.

59 Learning about safety is vital

It has never been more important to teach children about the dangers around them, says Sue McGee.



TEACHING IN RECEPTION?

This issue, read about...

- The importance of quality play, p52
- Budget-friendly activities, p82
- How to overcome anxiety, p15
- The challenge of detachment disorder, p11
- Expand their world with tech, p32

FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF



Key skills

12 Connection not Catch-Up

It will be difficult for children with SEND to return to settings. Kerry Payne gives her tips on getting it right.

16 Removing barriers

Identifying SEN in the Early Years is crucial to remove educational barriers, says Adam Boddison.

34 Ask yourself questions

Reflective practice is needed now more than ever, says Dr Helen Edwards.

Management

- EYFS reforms: What you need to know – p24
- Ofsted visits return – p27
- Embrace digital marketing – p68
- The risks of forcing staff to return to work – p71
- A long road to recovery – p77
- NDNA Q&A: Technological training – p78
- Expert tips on infection prevention – p80



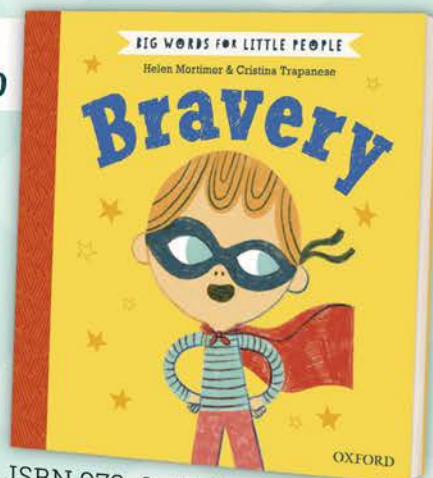
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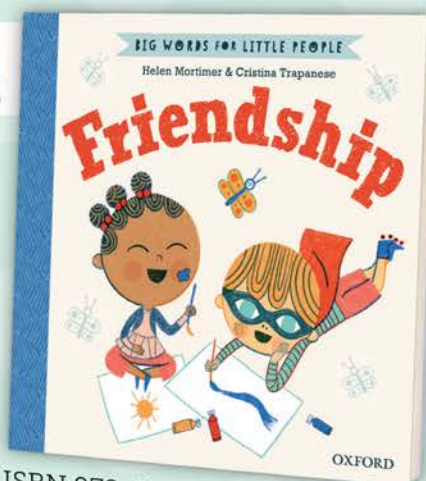
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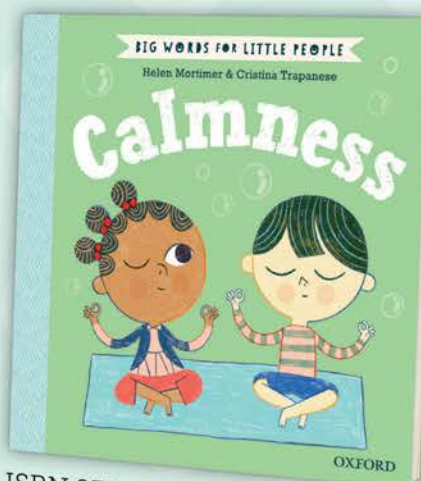


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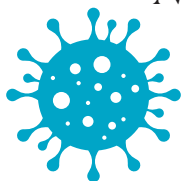


SCAN ME

OXFORD

Nursery Now

News and views from the early years



In brief...

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) and National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) are researching the impact of Covid-19 on the early years workforce in the UK. Dr Sara Bonetti, EPI director of Early Years, said: "It is vital that we understand how workers have been impacted by this crisis."



The Social Mobility Commission is urging the Government to help nursery staff work their way up to primary headship, stating a lack of career progression is a barrier to a stable early years workforce.



The NAO has launched an interactive data visualisation (bit.ly/3fW2iLq) which can find 2019 data on the take-up of free early education and childcare entitlements, and the provision of free early education and childcare in England.



The Competition and Markets Authority will not be taking any enforcement action for the moment against nurseries that have been charging parents fees while they have been closed, due to the pandemic.

It's good to talk

The Duchess of Cambridge was back in the news again at the launch of the BBC's Tiny Happy People initiative. Its aim is to help parents of children aged 0-4 develop their children's language skills with simple activities including free online videos and quizzes. The Tiny Happy People initiative's simple message is - talk to children from as early an age as possible. The Duchess said parents receive help from midwives and health visitors after a baby is born, but there's a gap before they start school. The scheme was initially launched in Manchester last October.



TWEET TALK

@EYAlliance

Worried about potential local lockdowns in your area? Our new blog explains how you can prepare your setting. eyalliance.org.uk/preparing-cov

@PACEYchildcare

How is occupancy building following the lifting of lockdown in early years provision? PACEY has helped @ceeda_uk track the progress in childminding, day nursery and pre-school provision. Read on to get the latest insights and how you can contribute here bit.ly/3adcMF2

@kathybrodie

Download your free schema guidelines to support your practice and give you activity ideas: [/ift.tt/1RqC5UD](https://ift.tt/1RqC5UD) #EarlyYears

"This is something the early years sector has recognised and focussed on for years. And this is why we want to see high quality provision available for all children and families."

PURNIMA TANUKU OBE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF NATIONAL DAY NURSERIES ASSOCIATION

Worrying levels

48%

PEAK SUMMER OCCUPANCY. READ CEEDA'S SUSTAINABILITY REPORT AT [BIT.LY/33IKKQW](https://bit.ly/33IKKQW)



Batten down the hatches

If it hasn't been tough enough already, claims from the Labour Party that a perfect storm could hit early years provision have been backed by the Early Years Alliance.

New analysis by Labour has found that childcare costs have risen between two and a half and three times as fast as wages since the Conservatives came into office in 2010.

Analysis of data from the Early Years Alliance has found that there are nearly 19,000 childcare providers in England that are at risk of closing in the next year.

The Early Years Alliance found that 25 per cent of childcare settings felt it was somewhat or very unlikely that they would be open in 12 months time, meaning nearly 19,000 of England's 75,000 childcare settings are now at risk of closure.

There will be further costs or challenges in accessing childcare if families cannot turn to the informal childcare provided by grandparents. A survey by the Department for Education found that over one in

four children aged 0-4 used childcare provided by grandparents. Without this support available families will find themselves needing to find and pay for additional support.

Kate Green MP, Labour's Shadow Education Secretary, said: "The Conservatives have created a perfect storm for working parents across the country, with a crisis in the childcare sector locking children out of early education and making it impossible for many parents to return to work."

"The Government must urgently provide targeted support to the childcare sector, and ensure that parents can access the childcare that they need."

Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Early Years Alliance, said: "Failure to provide the funding the sector needs in the short- and long-term could mean the closure of thousands more providers, leaving parents without the childcare they need to return to work. If the government is serious about ensuring our economy is able to recover from the impact of the pandemic, it simply cannot let the childcare sector fall by the wayside."



"The Government must urgently provide targeted support to the childcare sector"

KATE GREEN MP,
LABOUR'S SHADOW
EDUCATION SECRETARY,

ee

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SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

The challenges of operating a viable, sustainable early years setting have become more acute in recent years. A number of changes to policy, particularly to funded entitlements, coupled with increasing operating costs, have brought additional pressures to the day-to-day management of services. The need to undertake a strategic review and maintain an oversight of viability has never been more vital. Creating and developing a sustainable setting is not just about money (as important as that is), so reliance on fundraising and grant aid is no long-term solution. To find out more visit bit.ly/3kFkGvL



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“How was the lockdown for you?”

It has been an unsettling time and I was interested to see how everyone coped..



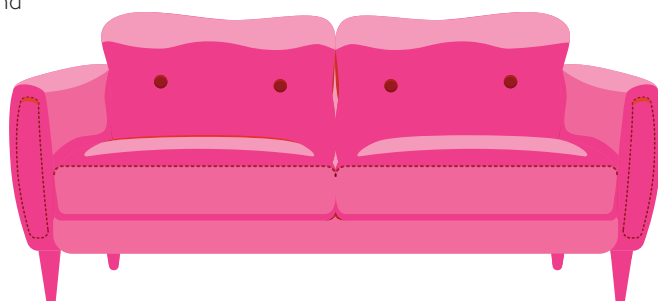
IT IS PROBABLY TOO SOON TO KNOW THE FULL impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Early Years but I hope the sector media is collecting and collating the emerging stories.

On the 23rd of March we went into lockdown, Ceeda research tells us that about 37 per cent of settings decided to remain open in some form or another to support the families of essential workers and vulnerable children. Many of those nurseries were attached to hospitals and others serving local populations. I kept 15 of our 39 nurseries open and the learning was very interesting. I called us the fourth Emergency Service. The health and safety, the support for staff, the Covid pedagogy were all important elements of the staying open experience. For those staff who were furloughed, the focus was regular contact, training opportunities, quizzes and games, online groups and check ins. Combined, they all became an essential part of lockdown life.

CRUSHED

People always remember how you made them feel, and so I am intrigued to listen to the emerging stories as colleagues begin to describe their experiences. Some have done very well, used the time to study and learn new hobbies, others seemed crushed by the isolation and fear and some just danced through and used it as an extended holiday.

During lockdown, I had a daily call to the nurseries which were staffed with colleagues from many of our nurseries all joining up together. The high staff ratios made a real difference to the richness of the experiences for the children and the lack of hurry through the day to push to “get things done” meant the staff and the children could wallow together in pure, deep and uninterrupted play. The sofa, an essential item in any LEYF nursery, was well used for nurturing conversations, reading and singing or just cuddling up and enjoying the moment. The garden had a renewed focus, sustained by the nice weather and the message from the scientists that the virus was less likely to spread outdoors.



On the daily video calls, I got a buzz from watching the children engage in their joyful play. It was a great cure to the stress of leading an organisation through uncertainties, managing changing policy messages and pushing back against unfair interpretations of national Covid funding and furlough grant aids. Nothing new there!

The staff described their nurseries as cocoons

RESILIENCE

The staff described their nurseries as cocoons, calm and slow, perhaps also reflecting the change in many households to slow living and cooking. New staff who joined us just before lockdown had a happy and calm induction, with time to think and absorb the new learning. They benefited from lots of coaching using a relaxed and pedagogical conversation style.

Across the sector the general approach was of positivity and resilience, although I was very aggrieved that it took a long time for us to be acknowledged by the national press and politicians or be thanked for navigating through the toxic debate about returning to school. I also felt sad for those many schools that had also remained open during lockdown who never had a voice in the debate.

So, now we are back. Last count 87 per cent of settings were open in some form or other. We don't know how many will stay open or fail to reopen when the furlough stops in October. The anticipated doom story is that it will be mostly nurseries in areas of deprivation or those serving our poorest children. I hope this will not be the case, these are the very children who need us most.

Lockdown gave us the chance to reflect on what our 'new normal' could be. It showed the power of slowing down life for children and staff, valuing good ratios and recognising childcare as part of the national infrastructure. I do not want a return to the Early Years normality of funding pressures, lack of status and unsustainable services. There is another way, so let's not lose sight of it.

June O'Sullivan MBE is the CEO of the London Early Years Foundation. Visit June's blog at leyf.org.uk/junes-blog or connect on Twitter @JuneOSullivan



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SARAH WATKINS IS A RECEPTION TEACHER AT LEDBURY PRIMARY SCHOOL.

“Build a strong partnership”

Sarah Watkins explains how supporting children with an attachment disorder can be challenging...

JANE SCREAMED WHEN HER carer left and began to throw toys and push over chairs. She refused to interact with other children but wept when a child she had just met left for a dentist appointment. Jane swore and kicked me when I gave her a simple instruction.

Supporting a pupil with an attachment disorder can be challenging. Jane's start to life was traumatic and consequently she was unable to bond with her primary caregivers. It took me a long time to build her trust.

Attachment theory was first proposed by psychiatrist John Bowlby who described it as the 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings'. Bowlby suggested that our early experience of relationships significantly affects our later emotional and social development.

It's important to remember that the way attachment disorder presents is different for every child. Anger and defiant, aggressive behaviour may be

exhibited, as well as fear and extreme sadness. Other signs could be the failure to control emotions or show empathy. Jane, aged four, had low self-esteem and would not try activities where she risked failure. She could not take responsibility for her actions and did not respond well to public praise. Professor Peter Fonagy, of the Anna Freud Centre, which conducts research into attachment disorders, said: "Children who have had bad experiences, particularly in care, don't believe anything anyone tells them because they don't trust them. They're shut off. They understand what they're being told, but won't bring it into their own world as a truth, and they can't modify their own belief that they're not loved or that they're 'bad'."

RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY

So what can be done? According to Philip Riley, author of Attachment Theory, teachers should aim to be a secure base: dependable and consistent. Riley emphasises that relationships are key. Build a strong partnership with the child's carers and communicate with them daily. Ensure that all staff working with the child are aware of the child's needs and understand the strategies in place. Inconsistency can be disastrous for children with attachment disorder.

Make time to hear the child. A child with insecure attachment can feel helpless, disempowered and disregarded. Counselling is essential but funding is not always available. Simply spending time playing together is valuable and the talking will often come later. Observe the child and establish what motivates them. Giving the child responsibility will help to increase their self-esteem.

PRAISE

In terms of managing behaviour, it's important to give immediate positive reinforcement and to take time to celebrate every success, giving specific praise. Help them to recognise their good qualities. Note down triggers for challenging behaviour to build a picture. Examples could be break time or transitions. Jane would become enraged when it was tidy-up time. When I noticed this pattern of behaviour, I began giving her a five-minute warning beforehand. If there are regular times of day that are difficult, make a plan for these times.

Don't assume that the child will understand what you need from them. Clearly model what you are looking for. For example, you might model appropriate physical contact using puppets

BLANK SLATE

Keep your instructions simple, and maintain clear routines and expectations. Challenging outbursts are almost inevitable. Ignore low level disruption designed to get your attention. Acknowledge the child's feelings and work on anger management strategies. Talk through how the child experiences anger and help them to represent it. Establish a safe space where the child can go if they need time out. Remain calm through violent outbursts, stay in control and don't take it personally. Always start the next session with a blank slate. They need reassurance that you have unconditional regard for them and that you will not give up on them. Supporting a child with attachment disorder is not straightforward and it's important to work with specialists.





KERRY PAYNE IS AN EARLY CHILDHOOD SEND SPECIALIST.

Connection not Catch-Up

The current pandemic has led to unpredictability and uncertainty, and so we must consider the role of transition and emotional safety for children with SEND.

Kerry Payne shares some tips for key people...

1 Time to settle-in

There will be an ongoing element of recovery over the next few months, and what we have to value is the importance of taking our time. We may have lots of expectations and pressures but the best thing to do is to write these down and then more than halve them. This relates as much to your to-do list than anything else and it is the starting point for being able to spend uninterrupted time with children. This isn't the time to think about outcomes but instead getting to know each other again. As an educator, you will also need time to settle in too. No significant learning can happen without a significant relationship and enjoying being in each other's presence again will build strong foundations for a healthy adjustment.

Let children know the ways they have been held in mind and make opportunities for uninterrupted time to just be. Transition is a marathon, not a sprint.

2 Model your own ways of dealing with change

The reality is that many of us feel anxious about the way our settings will adjust following the events of the pandemic. Children often pick up on adult's cues and moods and it is important to consider how you can lead with empathy. One such way is to model your own ways of dealing with change and talking to the children openly about this. For example, you might talk about your own feelings and what strategies you use. One of the best techniques for developing empathy is to connect over shared experiences and a simple "I feel that way too" can go a long way in supporting a child to feel emotionally safe.

Reflect back when talking to children and be open to sharing your own feelings as a way of developing empathy.

4 Realistic expectations, not lowered expectations

Unfortunately, there have been some narratives about children during lockdown that can be unhelpful. The use of the term "catch up" suggests that without education children cannot learn, and this is untrue. While there will have been an assortment of experiences, we must acknowledge the efforts of families. For children with SEND, it is likely that parents have been continuing with the strategies and techniques at home. Work from a "can-do" approach and ask questions about progress rather than how far they have fallen behind.

Ask empowering questions such as "what new things did you learn about your child" and value the parent as a co-educator.

3 Provide predictability and allow some control

It might be tempting during transition to aim for order and control because change can make practitioners and children feel unsettled. Contrary to some of the concerns about restrictions, the use of bubbles for some has been an opportunity to tune-in with children's daily rhythms. Practitioners have not been as tied to strict routines and this has led to children having greater control over their play. While some structure is important, particularly for children with SEND, a degree of flexibility means you can meet a variety of needs.

You are likely developing plans and ideas for what an average nursery day will look like. Once this is established, send out a visual or guide for parents to introduce to children.

5 The Child's "Voice"

The Child's "Voice" is a metaphor for the thoughts, feelings, behaviours, actions and perspectives of children and it is crucial that we develop ways to embed children's views into our everyday practice. This is often viewed as difficult when a child has SEND but there are many ways in which we can advocate the child's perspective. Resources such as communication passports can be invaluable ways of ensuring we understand children's needs, interests and behaviours.

Have curious conversations with parents about the ways in which the child shares their "voice".

6 Play is a right, not a privilege

The pandemic has led to difficult discussions around "good practice" and there have unfortunately been examples of play losing its priority. It is crucial that children are still experiencing high-quality play-based experiences and that children with SEND are not subject to integrative practices. Integrative practices mean that the child is expected to change to fit in rather than the setting making adjustments to remove barriers to learning.

Ensure that discussions about reasonable adjustments continue and are in collaboration with the parents.

7 Circles of Connection

Children with SEND are often engaged with other services and specialists, and their interventions will have continued in some format during lockdown. Where possible make contact with specialists to discuss the continuation and transition of strategies and techniques. Discuss whether there are new ways of delivering interventions and discuss the progress. The sharing of information will lead to greater knowledge about how to meet the child's needs.

Liaise with specialists and parents so that you can build a clear picture in preparation for transition.

Kerry Payne is based in London and works as an independent consultant and trainer. Read more from her at eyfs4me.com

PREPARING FOR TRANSITION

- In person or virtual supervision will be crucial during this time to gauge the emotional mindsets of practitioners. Identify specific anxieties around the return of children and consider how we prepare for the varying needs of children.
- View parents as co-educators and place a high value on their knowledge and expertise. Explore home routines and home learning including the benefits and challenges. This will give you key starting points for the transition.



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NIKKY SMEDLEY IS A WRITER, EDUCATOR AND PASSIONATE ADVOCATE FOR THE CHILD.

HOW TO SPEAK CHILD

Dealing with anxiety

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU FIND DIFFICULT TO TELL A GROWN-UP?

"Yes. When mummy worries, it makes me worry too." P (MALE)

Although this little boy answered my question by referring to his home situation rather than school, the emotion he was brave enough to share with me is universal. Young children are acutely aware of their grown-ups' moods, and are quick to take responsibility for any upset in the status quo. This can extend to friends and peer groups too. We've all witnessed that moment of stillness in a group of children when one of them suddenly becomes upset; that temporary hiatus as the group forgets what they're doing in order to focus on the child who is having an outburst. It's only too easy to underestimate how receptive children are to their surroundings.

Now, our status quo has been very much upset and anxiety abounds. I've been receiving an increasing number of reports of previously well-behaved children challenging authority and generally playing up. All behaviour is communication and it's my firm belief that what these children are exhibiting isn't stress. It's anxiety.

An element of sensory immersion can help in difficult times

Whether it's first-hand experience of tension among grown-ups, or overheard reports on television and elsewhere, children will pick up on the current mood and internalise it. As they wrestle with the concern that it is somehow their fault and the knowledge that they are powerless to fix the situation, this frustration and fear can manifest in acting out. So what can we do?

More than ever our children need to feel safe, to feel secure. Use tried and tested techniques that offer reassurance; put clear routines in place and stick to them, let them realise that there are still aspects of life they can rely on. Before embarking on anything, take time to explain what is going to happen, talk through it while it's happening and afterwards, offer the chance to talk about what

happened. Watch out for super-sensitivity in your children: you must be a rock.

Be extra careful about which stories you choose to tell and what activities you set up - even the words you use. Work on restoring confidence and giving comfort. Children who were at school before lockdown have returned to a very different situation, revisiting stories and activities they enjoyed before the pandemic can give children a metaphorical anchor.

MUSIC AND DANCE

An element of sensory immersion can help in difficult times. After all, while we are limited in the amount of physical connection we can make, we need to compensate in other ways. We need to provide alternative physical stimulus and solace, to find other techniques to make that connection. Music and dance help children explore feelings they may be having difficulty processing. You can set up restrictions as part of the game, whether with physical boundaries or by taking on the role of a 'conductor', thereby enabling them to express themselves safely.

I find the use of some kind of conduit invaluable when it comes to helping children with difficult or negative feelings. For example, a simple puppet made from a face drawn on a paper plate attached to a chopstick, can act as an extra layer of protection to encourage children to communicate more truthfully. Bringing teddies and soft toys to life in play can provide a similar outlet.

And don't forget yourself in all this. Attend to your own needs, be kind to yourself and look after your own anxieties. Remind yourself, as often as you can, of all the wonderful reasons you went into this job. Remember to feel the joy. Joy is contagious too and will be your most effective tool against anxiety.

Nikky's book *Create, Perform, Teach!* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £14.99) is available on Amazon.

LEARN MORE

As part of the How to Speak Child project, Nikky has been collecting interviews with children about how adults communicate with them. She'll look at a selection of prominent themes over the course of the series, but to read more now, you can...

 head to the How to Speak Child blog, at howtospeakchild.com/blog

 join her Facebook page at facebook.com/Howtospeakchild





It's time to remove the barriers

Identifying SEN in the Early Years is crucial, says Adam Boddison...

FOR TOO MANY CHILDREN in our education system, they have already fallen significantly behind their peers by the time their SEN are identified. It is clear that if needs are identified earlier, then effective provision can be put in place sooner. nasen (National Association for Special Educational Needs) commissioned research on identifying SEN in the early years to shine a light on the barriers to early identification.

This study was led by Dr Helen Curran and considers the perspectives of SENCOs in relation to identifying SEN in early years settings as well as the resources they used and the wider support they accessed. The study makes ten recommendations grouped into five broad areas.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY

- Guidance for identifying SEN in the early years should take into account the variance between different types of early years setting.
- Greater representation of the early years sector, and the different types of setting, when seeking views for future policy making should be ensured.

The recommendations in this area essentially acknowledged the broad range of early years settings and that this should be factored into strategic thinking and decision making. The challenges and opportunities of childminders, which make up more than half of all early years providers in England, can be very different to those of maintained or PVI settings, so it is

no surprise that Dr Curran's research is pushing for guidance to be more nuanced.

In 2018, the government funded four mini guides supporting effective identification of SEN in the early years, which had multiple versions to reflect the breadth of the sector. Moving forwards this should be a routine expectation rather than the exception.

THE SENCO ROLE

- Guidance should be developed to help determine the time allocated to the early years SENCO role in different settings.
- A job description, specific to the early years SENCO role, should be developed.
- Work should be undertaken to help develop understanding of the early years SENCO role across the education, health and care sectors.

The research highlights significant levels of variation in the deployment of early years SENCOs. While the Department for Education has published a recommended job description for the early years SENCO role, this is not statutory guidance since it is not incorporated into the SEND Code of Practice. As a consequence the job description is not routinely used and the study suggests this is considered in the government SEND Review that is currently underway.

Dr Curran highlights the need for early years SENCOs to have allocated time to undertake the role and for guidance on the effective deployment of SENCOs. Such guidance at a national level is essential in setting out the expectations of the sector in identifying and meeting needs, but it is important

that this does not become a barrier in relation to settings being responsive to individual needs.

SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

- The sharing of good practice developed by early years SENCOs, particularly in relation to developing family relationships, should be facilitated across the sector and later phases.
- Good practice demonstrated by early years SENCOs, in relation to developing inclusive environments, should be shared across phases.

It may seem like common sense to say that good practice should be shared, but the findings in this study suggests this is not always common practice. Strong and meaningful relationships between families and early years practitioners can be a powerful factor in driving inclusive environments. Effective relationships are the foundation for bilateral sharing of effective practice for the benefit of children with SEN.





- To access nasen's Early Years Miniguides, visit: bit.ly/2PwD0cj
- nasen's dedicated early years suite of free resources is available at bit.ly/31w2k7E

Professor Adam Boddison is the chief executive of nasen, a charity that supports and champions those working with, and for, children and young people with SEND and learning differences. For further information, visit www.nasen.org.uk or [@nasen_org](https://twitter.com/nasen_org).

TRAINING

- Training in relation to speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) should be prioritised within the early years sector.
- Early years practitioners, particularly those new to the role, may benefit from support with how to develop family relationships.

It is not a surprise that SLCN emerged in this study as a priority as this is clearly an important aspect of early childhood development. Early years professionals may well have ready access to training in relation to the development of speech, language and communication, but it is important that this includes a focus on children who are not making expected progress.

For a child with SEN, it may be an early years practitioner who is the first person to have a conversation with their family about their needs. This can be hard conversation for all concerned, so it is very important that sufficient training has been provided for this to be

effective. For families, this may be their first experience of the SEN system, which increases the significance of ensuring it is a positive experience.

LIAISON WITH OTHER SETTINGS AND AGENCIES

- Information from the progress check at aged two should be shared between the child's providers as standard practice.

Essential information from the progress check at age two is not always shared. This may be because of concerns about not wishing to label children too early or about GDPR. Dr Curran states that information should be shared between providers to ensure there are no delays in children accessing the support they need.

NEXT STEPS

Managers and SENCOs are encouraged to read this report in full.

- To download the report, visit bit.ly/2F1CRer

SEN ADVICE FOR EARLY YEARS SETTINGS

- It is important to ensure that SLCN is reflected in the professional development and training for early years practitioners.
- Setting Managers should consider the different options for deploying their SENCO and how allocated time could be used to help them to be more effective in the role.
- Working with families as equal, meaningful partners is a critical aspect of coproduction and this is the foundation for effective SEN provision. Settings should evaluate the impact of coproduction and produce an action plan.
- Early years SENCOs should review the information they have about children with SEN and how this is shared across other phases and professionals. Subject to data-sharing restrictions, there should be complete transparency to ensure a continuity in provision.



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- Planning the Curriculum around a Quality Text in the Early Years
- Supporting Transition – Foundation to Key Stage 1



EMMA DAVIS IS MANAGER AT BUSY BEES LEDBURY

Bringing smiles with SPOONS

Emma Davis explains how a lockdown project brought joy to the community

Like many settings, we closed our doors on March 20th with much uncertainty around when we'd be able to reopen. This was unsettling for everyone – parents and carers, staff and the children. There were so many questions we were unable to answer as there was no knowing how long we would be in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sadly, it would be another three months before children would return. This followed rigorous risk assessments, audits, policies and amendments to terms and conditions. Although we couldn't completely eliminate any risk, we could minimise it. During our time away, we remained connected to families at Busy Bees using a closed Facebook group and Tapestry. Having developed excellent partnerships with our parents and carers, this was something we felt it was important to maintain during lockdown. Connecting digitally enabled us to offer play and learning ideas as well as being a form of support for each other during the lockdown period.

Community

As a setting, we've been fortunate to build a strong relationship with the Ledbury community which helped us during lockdown. I had an idea for a project, involving the Busy Bees families and community, working together to make people smile during their daily exercise. We would start a spoon person project, inviting the community to join the children in making characters out of wooden spoons. These would all live on the park, opposite Busy Bees. This is an area which is easily accessible for everyone to visit, whether just to admire the spoons or to add their own. Spoons were available free of charge outside our premises, meaning families did not need to source their own, difficult during the period of lockdown.

News of our spoon person project was posted on our social media pages with instructions on how to make them waterproof, what to avoid using (we didn't want small bits to blow off and litter the area) and advice that the spoons were not keen on dogs!

In the coming days and weeks, the lone spoon person which was first to arrive at the park gained more and more friends. New ones were appearing daily, much to the delight of the community who would purposely walk past to spot the new additions! The creativity astounded us – there were astronauts, football players, animals, cartoon characters and members of staff. It was such a popular project that we even had a member of the community buy us more spoons to replenish our quickly diminishing stock!

Distraction

What made our project such an astounding success was the way in which the community embraced the idea. Social media was flooded with images of the spoon people with comments on how many there were, new characters which had appeared and which ones were favourites. During the dark, uncertain and scary period of lockdown, our project brought joy and distraction to the community. Members of the public thanked us for giving them something else to think of, a reason to go out for a walk, a project to complete as a family. As we are very much a community based setting, this was a delight to hear.



Learning can be fun

The initial idea was for our spoon person project to be a play and learning idea for our Busy Bees families. We wanted families to feel supported by us as a setting, with us offering ideas to keep children busy when usually they would have been in Preschool. The project was successful in connecting us all at Busy Bees with parents and carers commenting on the enjoyment, learning potential and feel good factor of the project. Our ideas of how making a spoon person could contribute to learning and development were embraced. We heard about how children were learning colours, developing their vocabulary, exploring textures, thinking about size and shape and counting. This really helped us promote the message that learning can be fun and can happen naturally through normal interactions. Not only this, but the engagement between parent or carer and child is what we were hoping to achieve. We recognise that through play and talk, important skills can be achieved, not to mention strengthening the bond and attachment.

Although we reopened on June 15th, our home learning play and learning ideas didn't stop. With many families choosing to keep their children at home, there was still a need to remain connected online. Staff uploaded phonics activities, personalised play ideas, videos of themselves reading stories and links to interesting ideas to try. Throughout our time being back, the spoon people have remained in their home on the park. We know that there will come a time to remove them but for now, they continue to bring a smile to the community.

Emma Davis is manager at Busy Bees Ledbury.
Follow her @EmmaDee77



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WA'QAAR MIRZA IS CEO OF SAFI IDEAS AND CREATOR OF ZAYN & ZAYNA'S LITTLE FARM.

It's time to crack cultural stereotypes

Wa'qaar Mirza explains why it's important to bring diversity into Early Years' settings

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY IS a hot topic and for good reason. Teaching children to have cultural awareness from a very early age is the best way forward to crack those stereotypes and help prevent future classroom racism and bullying.

By engaging children in culturally responsive experiences we know that their awareness and inclusion of diverse cultures and beliefs increases. And you can never start too early.

Learning does begin at home, but unfortunately not all parents are aware or even know how to teach diversity. You don't know what you don't know after all. And with a gap in true diverse content in preschool television programming, and very little in the way of books and toys, parents are limited to the educational resources they have available in the home. And television is most often the most influential learning medium for this impressionable age. Preschoolers' screen exposure to diversity often comes in the forms of tokenistic animal species in varying colours, rather than authentic human characters of different racial, religious, sexual and other backgrounds. It's no surprise these young children have limited understanding of cultural unawareness when they start nursery.

So where does this leave Early Years' practitioners when many children reach their learning environments having never seen that cultural differences even exist? Thankfully we have the ability to make a difference. Here are a few suggestions on being more culturally inclusive:

1 Use culturally rich stories, room displays and poems from around the world to bring awareness of cultural differences within your environment.

2 Challenge those stereotypes. If a child unwittingly makes a racist comment for example, don't ignore it! Talk to the children about it and bring in positive messaging surrounding diversity and inclusivity.

3 There are over 7,000 languages spoken around the world but only one language we can all understand - music. We hear the rhythm and feel the emotions and it's a great fun way to introduce multiple cultures and sounds to young children.

4 Food is another opportunity to raise awareness on the positives multiple ethnicities bring. Learning about (and tasting) cuisines from around the world broadens minds and opens that cultural awareness dialogue.

5 From the spire of your local church to the minaret at the mosque, places of worship are beautiful buildings that hold an abundance of culture and interest

inside. Most places of worship welcome visitors and open their doors for people to take a look and explore inside. This is a great opportunity to create an awareness and understanding of multiple religious groups.

6 A fun way to teach children diversity is through arts and crafts. Try making a colourful Diwali Rangoli or have a go at creating Tibetan prayer flags. There are many crafts you can do introducing cultures from all over the world.

Many parents also need tools and techniques to give them the ability to teach and learn cultural diversity within the home, yet there is still a gaping hole in available children's educational content featuring a fair representation of multiculturalism, ethnicity, race and genders. At Safi Productions, when developing Zayn & Zayna's Little Farm we wanted to help fill this gap by creating a preschool content that offers a diverse range of human characters in real-world scenarios. We want to help young children identify with the diverse communities around them through communication, creativity and confidence building, while delivering important and universal messaging around mindfulness, diversity and sustainability. I feel that with educational programming along with nurseries and schools integrating diversity and inclusivity as an everyday norm, we can help make a difference in cultural awareness and education through those very important early years and beyond.

Wa'qaar A Mirza is co-founder and global CEO of Safi Ideas. He is an accomplished British entrepreneur with over 30 years experience in direct response marketing strategy.





SUE COWLEY IS AN AUTHOR AND EDUCATOR AND HELPS RUN HER LOCAL PRESCHOOL.

What did we learn from lockdown?

Valuable lessons can be taken away from the enforced break, says Sue Cowley..

WITH LOCKDOWN HOPEFULLY behind us, and settings asked to fully reopen to all children, practitioners will be hoping for something that looks a bit more like 'normality' in September. But

as our current children return, and new children join us, practitioners need to consider the variety of experiences that the children have had during lockdown. How can we build on and celebrate the learning that happened at home; how can we support the children whose families have experienced difficulties? It is important to remember that "every family has their own story of lockdown" – it is important not to generalise when the range of experiences will be so diverse.

MESSY AND RANDOM

The narrative coming from the DfE during lockdown was one of deficit – children would have 'lost out on learning', there would be "gaps" that need to "be filled". It seemed impossible for the DfE to understand that children could still learn when they are not in school, perhaps especially so in the early years. The government's vision of 'an education' seemed to be an expert teacher delivering a pre-existing curriculum to compliant novice learners, rather than the joyous, messy and often random experience that is working with children from birth to five and beyond. Experiences of lockdown will have varied considerably for different families. For those in key worker roles, lockdown may have meant working patterns that were

similar to normal, but with the added anxiety of potentially contracting Covid-19. It was generally those in higher paid office-based jobs who had to continue to work from home, as well as look after their own children. Many parents in lower paid jobs, such as retail or catering, were likely to have been put on the jobs retention scheme and to have had some unanticipated quality time with their children during lockdown.

LIBERATED

On social media, many parents are reporting that they effectively felt liberated from the demands of the workplace by being furloughed. Many have clearly loved the opportunity to spend time playing and learning with their small children. Lockdown will of course have been hard for some families, particularly those without access to outdoor space, those with financial worries, those who have been bereaved and those where there were existing strains or stresses in the home environment. However, for many it will have come as a welcome opportunity to spend some extra time with their young children



Experiences of lockdown will have varied considerably for different families.

REFLECTION

In a phase where “positive relationships” with our families play such a crucial role in our philosophy, and where we view parents as a child’s “first and most enduring educators”, we need to firmly reject the DfE’s ‘deficit narrative’. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) do not have to be in our settings – if their parents wished, and they were financially in a position to do so, they could keep their children at home until the term after they turn five. It is a reflection both of the pressures on working parents, but also of how parents view our settings positively, and see early education as so important, that such a high proportion of parents take up a childcare place.

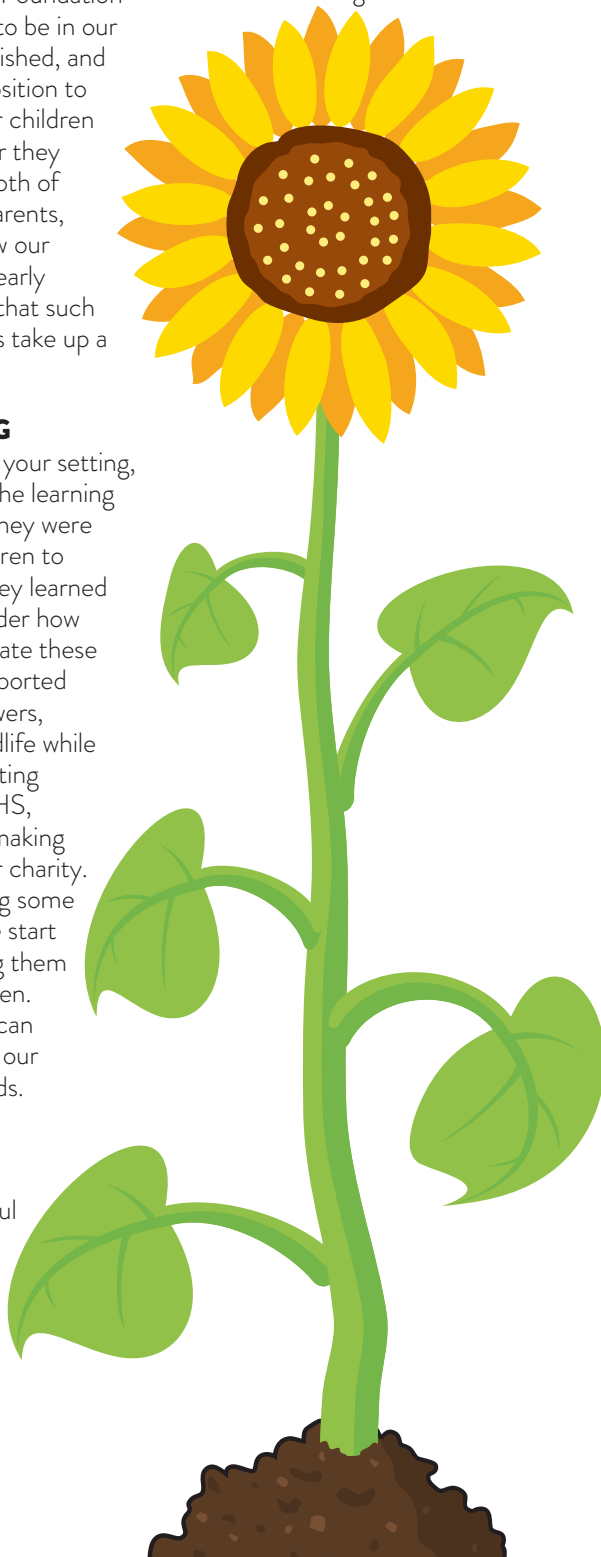
CELEBRATE LEARNING

When the children arrive in your setting, remember to celebrate all the learning that they have done while they were away. Ask parents and children to share the stories of what they learned during lockdown, and consider how you can build on and celebrate these successes. Families have reported growing vegetables and flowers, spotting and identifying wildlife while out for walks together, painting rainbow pictures for the NHS, helping out neighbours by making deliveries, raising money for charity. One parent reported sowing some sunflower seeds right at the start of lockdown, and measuring them as they grew with her children. All these are activities that can be built on and extended in our settings as we move forwards.

STRONG LINKS

As well as celebrating the children’s learning, it is useful to think about what we can reflect on and learn from this period as early years practitioners too. Perhaps most of all, it

has reinforced the importance of strong links with our families, so that we can support children’s learning whatever the situation. Even if our settings have to close, where localised lockdowns come into place, that partnership with parents will help us continue to support their children’s learning.



This period has also clarified the need to view all our children as “unique” – where the child’s context and interests play a defining role in their learning, and in how we support them to progress. And this time has taught us how valuable and useful learning in the outdoors is – the enduring importance of an enabling environment. Because outdoors is somewhere that we can play and learn together in relative safety, as we deal with the uncertainties of the coming months and years.

Sue Cowley has helped to run her local early years setting for the last ten years. Find out more at www.suecowley.co.uk.

READ MORE

Teachearlyyears.com features a huge range of articles sharing advice and insights on topics spanning the EYFS – why not check out four more from Sue Cowley.

- A trip to the woods promises limitless learning opportunities, but it also requires careful management - bit.ly/2PA0EVl
- When children start using their teeth to express their fears or frustrations, you must take preventative measures - bit.ly/3koepEI
- In some children, confidence can escalate into controlling or aggressive behaviour. Here is some advice on managing the leaders of your pack - bit.ly/30zAMio
- Trying to calm a furious toddler can feel like trying to defuse a bomb, but there are ways to ease the process - bit.ly/2DmSU6F



BEATRICE MERRICK IS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF EARLY EDUCATION

What you need to know

Beatrice Merrick takes you through the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Reforms and what it will mean for your setting...

From September 2021, there will be changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), applicable to all early years providers from birth to five. For all childminders and PVI's and many schools there's no need to worry: you have a year until the changes become statutory, so you have plenty of time to get to grips with the changes.

However, schools were given the option to be early adopters from September 2020 before Covid-19 hit and, despite having since been given the option to opt out again to focus on supporting children's return in the autumn, some may still be planning to go ahead with early adoption. If you work in a school make sure you know whether or not it is an early adopter.

What stays the same

The EYFS is a well-respected framework around the world, and a survey of practitioners we carried out in 2019 confirmed that practitioners did not think it needed much in the way of reform. So it's good news that the overall structure of the EYFS will remain the same. Key components that remain include:

1. The overarching principles, often expressed as a formula: the unique child + positive relationships + enabling environments = learning and development.
2. The seven areas of learning and development.

3. The distinction between prime and specific areas.

4. The characteristics of effective teaching and learning (COETL).

The safeguarding and welfare requirements also stay the same, apart from a small amendment to add a duty to promote good oral health.

But not quite the same

Much remains the same, but there are changes and the devil is in the detail. For instance, the COETL are weakened in the new framework. The current framework says: "In planning and guiding children's activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice" and then sets out the three characteristics. The new framework says: "In planning and guiding children's activities, practitioners must reflect on the different rates at which children are developing and adjust their

practice appropriately." This is muddled, as the COETL are about how children learn, not how quickly. Moreover, the requirement to report on the COETL in the EYFS Profile has been watered down to a choice instead of a requirement. Recent research emphasises the importance of the COETL for children's future learning so if anything they should have had a greater emphasis. The COETL should remain a key focus for your observations, so adding a comment in the Profile should not be time-consuming, meaning there is no need to discontinue this important practice.

In the new framework, the explanation of the relationship between the prime and specific areas is not as clear as before. The current framework says: "Practitioners working with the youngest children are expected to focus strongly on the three prime areas, which are the basis for successful learning in the other four specific areas" (our emphasis). In the new framework this changes to "Practitioners working with the youngest children are

Much remains the same, but there are changes and the devil is in the detail.



expected to ensure a strong foundation for children's development in the three prime areas. The specific areas of learning provide children with a broad curriculum and with opportunities to strengthen and apply the prime areas of learning." But don't be confused: it's still the case that the prime areas matter because they are foundational for the other areas of learning and, moreover, are particularly time-sensitive in terms of children's development. The wording may have changed, but child development has not.

What has changed

The most extensive changes in the new framework are the Educational Programmes and the Early Learning Goals (ELGs). These have been entirely re-written. Key changes to the ELGs include:

- Communication and Language (C&L) "Listening and attention" has become "Listening, attention and understanding" and the separate "Understanding" ELG has gone. "Speaking" (and several other ELGs) refer multiple times to "recently-introduced vocabulary", which is an unhelpfully ambiguous term despite the DfE's aspiration that these ELGs should be clearer than the previous ones.
- Physical Development is reduced to only fine and gross motor skills, with self-care confusingly removed to Personal, Social and Emotional Development, and no mention of proprioception and the vestibular system which are key to cognitive and emotional, as well as physical, development.
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development includes a problematic attempt to include Executive Function which, while important, is a complex concept not well captured in the proposal and not

widely understood. The ELG on Building Relationships also includes an inappropriate requirement for children to "Form positive attachments to adults and friendships with peers", despite the evidence that attachment is dependent on a range of factors which children cannot control, and particularly the behaviour of the adults around them.

- Literacy splits the ELG for Reading into an ELG for Comprehension and one for Word Reading (ie decoding). Splitting comprehension and decoding is not helpful, and the ELGs are based on contested and restrictive approaches which focus on phonics only.

● Mathematics has controversially lost Shape, Space and Measure as an ELG although after extensive pressure from the sector it was restored to the Educational Programme. The ELGs are now "Number" and "Numerical Patterns". The focus on a deep understanding of numbers to ten has been widely welcomed, but the inclusion of automatic recall of number bonds and double facts is not supported by any research relating to children of this age. The numerical pattern ELG is too narrow, meaning that broader understanding of pattern making as well as shape, space and measure may be seen as less important, despite the extensive evidence about the importance of spatial thinking.

- Understanding the World loses all its current ELGs, and technology disappears entirely from the framework despite the importance of STEM subjects.

The new "Past and Present", "Culture and Communities" and "Natural World" ELGs inappropriately mirror a Year 1 split of History, Geography and Science and suggest children should be learning primarily from books instead of first-hand

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE EYFS REFORMS

● A revised EYFS Framework will become statutory from September 2021. The Framework is likely to be virtually identical to the early adopters EYFS framework - see link below.

● Infant and primary schools could choose to become Early Adopters from September 2020.

● Early Adopters are exempted from the current Statutory Framework and instead use the Early Adopters EYFS Framework (bit.ly/30L9INr) and Early Adopters EYFS Profile Handbook (bit.ly/2PGnnz5).

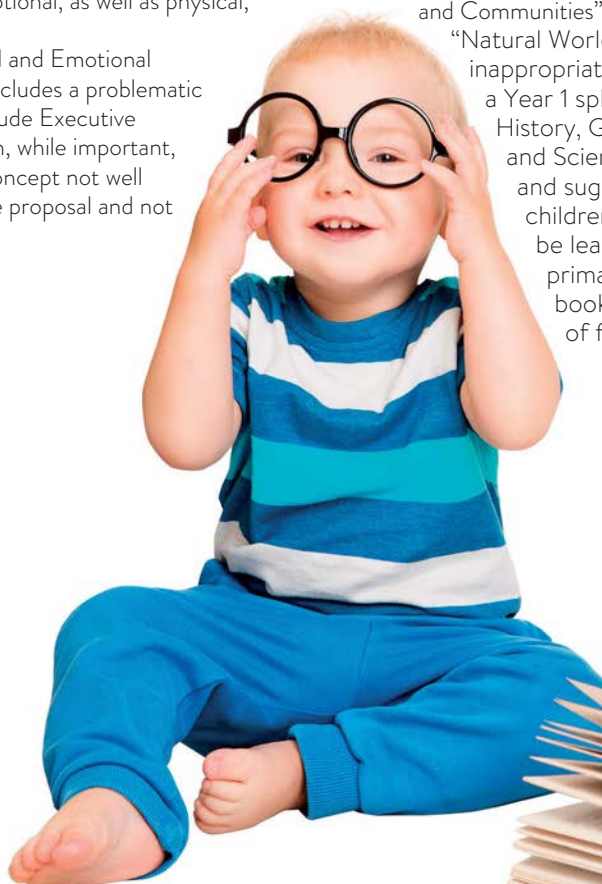
experiences, in decontextualised ways which are inappropriate for children of this age.

- Expressive Art and Design changes from "Exploring and using media and materials" to "Creating with materials", focusing more on product than process. "Being imaginative" becomes "Being imaginative and expressive" but unfortunately focuses more on passive consumption of cultural experiences, rather than prioritising exploration and creativity, which are key for young children.

Next steps

New non-statutory guidance and exemplification materials will be published in due course (see box above), so there will be plenty more to digest. So we hope schools don't rush into early adoption, especially given other current challenges. Let's all give ourselves time between now and September 2021 to get to grips with the changes and make sure that we keep focusing on what is best for our children.

Beatrice Merrick is chief executive of Early Education, a national early years membership association providing professional learning and support for the early years sector.
early-education.org.uk





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GILL JONES IS SCHOOLS AND EARLY EDUCATION DEPUTY DIRECTOR AT OFSTED.

Sensitive and safe

Gill Jones *explains the mechanics of Ofsted visits going forward...*

THESE HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT months for all of us who have devoted our professional lives to the development, safety and well-being of young children.

For many people the world paused in March. Now we are starting to see, if not a return to normality, then at least the gradual acceptance of a new normal. At Ofsted, we are also adjusting. Our regular inspections were put on hold. However, we have continued our regulatory work and, since June, we've been doing face-to-face registration visits.

From this month, we will start to make visits to some early years providers who were judged to require improvement or be inadequate at their last inspection. As the government has disapplied the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage until September 25, these visits will be to those providers that have been given safeguarding and welfare actions. For most interim visits we will call the day before the inspection.

My early years regulatory inspector colleagues will visit these places to see if they have met the safeguarding and welfare requirements. After this, they will write a short summary that will be published on our website - giving reassurance to parents that those requirements have been met.

CONVERSATIONS

Please be assured that these visits will be done sensitively and with the safety and health of staff and children in mind. We will observe social distancing and follow the setting's arrangements for safety. We'll be happy to have the main conversation outside - even as winter weather approaches.

For schools and colleges, we will be having collaborative conversations. Our early years interim visits will be a little bit different, given our regulatory role, but we will also be helping you to

get back on your feet. This is a new and temporary arrangement. I am confident that it will work well, but I'll be keen to hear your feedback.

When this temporary form of visits will end obviously has to be kept under review, but we are aiming to resume our education inspection framework inspections in January 2021. We will prioritise those we inspect first, depending on when a provider was last inspected, the inspection grade and whether or not a provider has yet to be inspected. Indeed, I was heartened at an Ofsted Big Conversation webinar in July to hear that some childcare providers want to be inspected, to show that they are now good or better.

INTERACTIONS

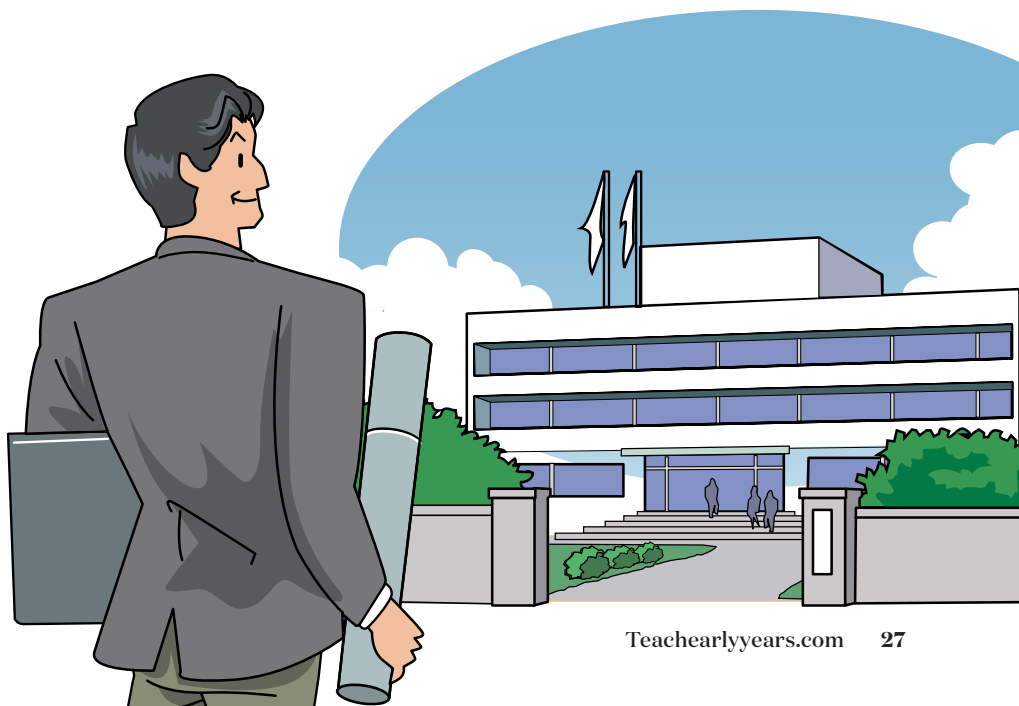
Personally, I am looking forward to having curriculum conversations, once the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has been reinstated and after a transition phase of a few months. We will want to find out how leaders decide what it is their children need to learn and why. We know that what an early years setting does through its EYFS curriculum and interactions with practitioners can make such a difference for children.

DEVELOPMENT

And that brings me to the new-look Development Matters which, as I type, is itself in development, although I expect it will be published soon. If the EYFS is the skeleton of the early years curriculum, then the new Development Matters will be the flesh on the bone - the substance that will be helpful to those of us who work for the development of young children. We can expect there will be more emphasis on developing children's communication and language through all the areas of learning and much less emphasis on data collection.

It is important to honour, treasure and value young children's learning and development through the early years. It has its own intrinsic worth. But if the last six months have taught us anything, it's that our economy and society cannot function without a thriving early years sector. The work that you do is so important.

In all circumstances, we will continue to follow Public Health England's expert guidance. And, as you do, we will act in the best interests of children - helping them to achieve their full potential in the years ahead.

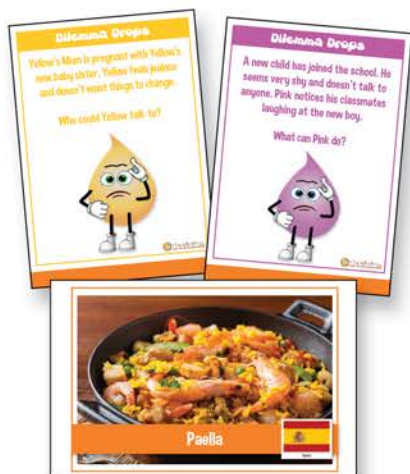


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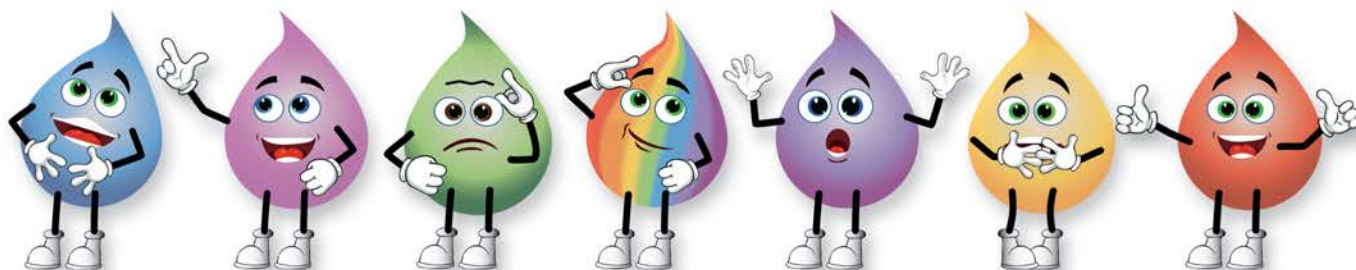
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MELANIE PILCHER IS THE EARLY YEARS ALLIANCE'S QUALITY AND STANDARDS MANAGER

WELCOME BACK *Looking forward*

*Early Years practitioners must carefully tune in to the lockdown experience of each individual child says **Melanie Pilcher***

If we were to reflect on the last six-months it would be very difficult to make any generalisations about the early years sector. Some settings remained open throughout the coronavirus lockdown period to provide care for vulnerable children and the children of essential workers. Other settings closed their doors, not knowing when (or if) they would be able to reopen. Those that remained open were in many cases doing so for only a handful of children.

From June onwards, as restrictions were gradually lifted, more children were able to return to their early years setting and providers had to juggle staff availability against demand for places and the financial viability of offering a limited service. By mid-July just 61 per cent of Ofsted registered early years providers were open, 31 per cent remained closed and the status of the rest was unknown.

Now, after months of restrictions and challenges that have tested early years providers to their limits, most children are

expected to return to their schools and early years provision as we take another big step toward a more normal service.

Despite the uncertainty of recent months there are some things that we do know for sure. The children that many practitioners said goodbye to in March this year will not be the same children who have gradually returned to them after such a long absence. Yes, they will have grown and they will have moved on in their learning and development. But most importantly they will each have had a unique experience of lockdown that may have a long-term, if not immediately obvious, impact. This means that early years practitioners must carefully tune in to the lockdown experience of each individual child so that they can respond appropriately to their needs.

We also know that far too many vulnerable children who were entitled to a priority place during lockdown did not take it up. This is concerning because these are the children who during normal attendance at their setting would have been monitored and any deterioration in their circumstances would have been followed-up. In many cases other services involved with the child and family will have maintained contact, but there are also children for whom practitioners had low-level concerns, whose circumstances may have worsened during lockdown. These are the children who may have been on the edge of needing support. Practitioners will need to be alert to any deterioration in their circumstances and should take appropriate action to secure further support immediately. We must be particularly alert to these children as they return to the setting, as they are the ones whose needs may have changed, but nobody else has noticed yet.





Did you stay in touch?

Providers were encouraged to stay in touch with children and families during lock-down. Some set up WhatsApp groups, or made use of Skype, Zoom or other social media to maintain contact with groups of children and to facilitate contact between peer groups. There are many inspiring examples of practitioners recording story-time sessions or sharing activity ideas with parents and carers. Similarly, providers have used information technology to record videos of new arrangements for dropping off and collecting children as they prepare to return.

What has been less achievable is the opportunity to dig a little deeper into the child's experiences at home and to have those important discussions with parents about their child's progress. The information that practitioners gain from parents forms a big part of on-going assessment and must now be the basis of re-settling every child as they return to the setting. There is a delicate balance between maintaining the required level of social distancing in the setting, while not alienating parents at a time when close partnership working is essential to meet children's needs.

Your aim is to make them feel settled, safe, and secure as quickly as possible



SUPPORTING THE RE-SETTLING PROCESS

It is important to remember that you are not just resettling children, you are resettling parents too. Make sure that the measures you have put in place to open safely are clearly communicated to everyone. Parents will still have their own concerns about returning to your setting which they may have transferred to their child. It is important to acknowledge these concerns, no matter how trivial they may seem. It is likely that practitioners will have had similar worries about returning to work, so creating an opportunity to ask questions or share experiences will instil confidence all round.

Building on what you already knew about a child and what you have since learned about their lockdown experience is essential. Practitioners should review the last observations and assessment they completed against the information they have gained from parents. It should be possible to identify some areas where it seems a child has made progress, or where they appear to need further support. This information will help you to focus your planning for the child from the outset.

The transition back into your setting should not be an event – it is a process that will require a great deal of sensitivity and patience from everyone involved. Do not assume that the child who settled quickly when they first started with you is going to cope as well this time round. The principles of settling in still hold firm. Children need to re-establish an attachment with their key person so that they have a secure base from which to adjust to a new normal. There will be many emotional 'transactions' to be carefully negotiated, these must first be recognised by the key person who then plans to meet the individual child's needs. Your aim is to make them feel settled, safe, and secure as quickly as possible.



Create a nurturing environment

The physical and emotional environment have an important role to play as you support the transition between home and your setting. For the children that have continued to attend, they must also be supported in their transition back to a busier, more

structured environment. Their circumstances either as vulnerable, or the child of a key worker brings its own unique set of challenges that must be recognised.

When you are thinking about your environment the aim should be to make it familiar, flexible, friendly, and focused on the needs of the child:

- While you have a duty of care to keep children safe, don't let any remaining restrictions you have to work under, detract from a child-friendly environment.
- Keep the unique child in focus and create an environment that feels both safe and welcoming.
- Children need to escape from the relentless focus on coronavirus. An enabling environment in which they can choose how they play, (role-play in particular), will help them to make sense of what is happening and to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Keep it simple, remember that you may have to limit certain activities and resources but give children back the right to play and socialise that has been denied to them for so many months.

There may be difficult times still to come for the sector, but the resilience and fortitude that have got us this far will continue to see us through. We must remind ourselves and the children of the positive times we have shared previously at the setting and celebrate the fact that we are back together at last.

THE STEPS YOU SHOULD TAKE

- Make sure that you have information from parents about their child's experiences at home since you last saw them. Find out what they have enjoyed doing, what activities they have taken part in with their families, what they have found challenging etc.
- Build on information from parents to plan for the individual needs of every child as they return. Complete a summative assessment that builds on the last assessment you completed before lock-down and the information that you have sought from parents in the interim period.
- Identify the children due to return that you are most concerned about. Contact any other services that may have been involved with the child and family to get an update and/or share information that you have.
- Be particularly alert to children for whom you had low level welfare concerns before lock-down. Make sure that their circumstances have not deteriorated since you last saw them
- If you have been caring for children during lock-down, plan to support their transition to what is likely to be a busier and more structured environment as more children return.
- Remember that new starters still have the same settling-in needs. Settling them will be more challenging as you also focus on re-settling other children. Make sure that you re-establish starting points for returning children with as much thought and attention as you do when establishing starting points for your new starters.
- Continue to build on the support you have given to the home learning environment by keeping some of the initiatives you have used to communicate during lockdown.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Early Years Alliance's 'Welcome Back Pack' Resource Bundle

The 'Welcome Back' series contains three comprehensive resource packs designed to support nurseries, pre-schools and childminders to ensure their re-opened provision meets the needs of their children and families. The bundle is free to Alliance members and is available at the special price of £40 to non-members. bit.ly/39RCH5f

Melanie has written many publications, training packages and other resources for the Alliance, focusing on best practice and meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Melanie also represents the work of the Alliance at public events, conferences and seminars in this country and abroad.

Make learning exciting online

Jude Harries presents some ideas to blow away any screen time blues with these fun online and ICT activities for EYFS...

Literacy, communication and language

ONLINE LETTERS

Go to phonicsplay.co.uk for a wealth of interactive resources for all phases of phonics teaching. Try 'PhonicsPlay Comics' - simple decodable comic stories for children to read. Practise recognising real and fake words in the 'Dragons Den'. My personal favourite is 'Welcome to the zoo' where children have to listen to animal sounds and name the animal. There are lots of apps available for tablets that develop children's literacy skills. Go to teachyourmonstertoread.com a free app that complements synthetic phonics programmes and progresses from letters and sounds, through blending and segmenting, to reading sentences.

'FONTASTIC' FUN

Children who are learning to write will enjoy exploring different fonts, styles, colours and sizes on the word processing app on a computer or tablet. Show children how to change the fonts in a variety of ways and invite them to write their name using lots of different fonts. Ask children to create their own name card, print them out and laminate. Go to abcya.com/games/word_clouds and let children create 'word clouds' or graphics of a group of words.

STORY TIME

The computer or tablet can be used as a fantastic resource for listening to and telling stories. Try the CBeebies Storytime app which includes interactive stories featuring favourite CBeebies characters and shows. At booktrust.org.uk there are lots of well-known and new books read aloud so children can read along. Many children's books can be found read aloud on YouTube including some by the authors.



Mathematics

ONLINE NUMBERS

Go to topmarks.co.uk and try out some counting games such as 'Ladybird Spots' or 'Teddy Numbers'. There are opportunities to practise counting, matching and ordering in a selection of games. Explore shapes with the 'Shape Monsters' and learn some basic data handling with Curious George in 'Hat Grab'. Try some of the numeracy games in the Little Learners section of CBeebies and meet the Numberblocks in lots of counting activities and the Numtums starring in their own radio and TV shows. Practise handling money with the 'Coin Counting Quiz'.

CALCULATOR CLUB

Show children how to use the calculator on the computer or tablet. Start with a game of 'Calculator clues' on the IWB and ask children to read the numbers and then try making up simple number sentences. Let children take turns to enter the numbers into the calculator. Set up a calculator club where children can use the calculators on the computers or tablets to work on number challenges together. Provide them with some simple 'Calculation cards' to solve. Can they check their answers using other mathematical equipment?

TABLET TABLES

Try out some maths activities and games apps on tablets such as 'Eduguru Maths' which is aimed at three to five year olds and uses cute animations to develop basic maths skills. 'Elmo Loves 123' is another popular app designed for this age group that includes counting from one to 20 and simple addition and subtraction presented by Elmo from Sesame Street. Try 'Komodo Maths', 'Doodlemaths', and 'Maths-whizz' for more subscription apps that can be personalised to suit your children's needs.

Understanding the world

RESEARCHERS

Show children some useful child-friendly non-fiction websites and challenge them to become researchers. Go to natgeokids.com and find out about animals, space and famous people from the past. Look at the spotter sheets at wildlifewatch.org.uk/seasonal-wildlife/ autumn and design their own list of things to find in Autumn.



GOOGLE EARTH

Look at Google Maps on the computer and find the location of your nursery or school. Can the children locate their addresses and other local features or buildings? Model changing the view so children see the satellite view of their surroundings. Is it easier to find landmarks in this view? Show them how to explore using photos of specific buildings and features. Extend this activity by looking at Google Earth and letting children choose places to explore.

KEEPING SAFE ONLINE

Share Chicken Clicking, by Jeanne Willis, with the children. This rhyming picture book illustrates the dangers of putting personal information online and of over sharing. Chicken Clicking wants to make friends online and uploads a picture of herself including some personal details. Her new friend is not 'all as it seems' – a cautionary tale that it is never too soon to share. Talk about this new type of 'stranger danger' and the importance of not sharing their own personal details online.



TIP:

Children can develop their personal, social and emotional skills by playing an online game together at bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/games/waffle-and-friends-game. In 'Waffle and friends' there are dual controls so two children can work co-operatively on the game. Have fun online together.

Expressive arts and design

BUSY THINGS

Go to www.busythings.co.uk and discover activities and games for Art and Music as well as The World, Number, Space and shape, and Communication, all important parts of the EYFS curriculum. There are specific sections for nurseries including lots of free trials of games and also a family area. The art activities include a really accessible painting app called 'Busy paint and publisher' and some authentic 'Aboriginal dot painting' along with lots of colouring. For musical rhythms and sounds, try 'Bobble Beat' and 'Colour choir'.

ILLUSTRATOR ART

Many children's authors are also award-winning illustrators. A quick exploration of their websites reveals some great resources on how to create some artworks that will look very familiar to children. Learn to draw with Nick Sharrat at nicksharrat.com, check out activities to print, colour and make at www.oliverjeffersworld.com, and check out how Quentin Blake tells stories with his drawings at quentinblake.com.

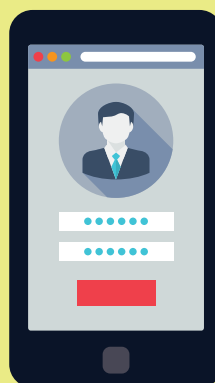
TABLET ARTISTS

There are some really good apps for exploring art, music and design. Most tablets will have a free Drawing pad app that allows children to draw and paint to their heart's content and without running out of paper or resources. Drawings are automatically saved to avoid disappointments. Show the children some examples of professional iPad art by David Hockney to inspire them. Try singing along with the nursery rhymes sung by the animals in 'Animal Band'. 'Loopimal' is a very creative musical app that allows children to create loops and sequences and develops music and ICT skills simultaneously.



The plus side of screen time

The new EYFS guidelines for 2020 controversially do not include any reference to technology and children's ability to use computers, tablets and cameras. And yet they do aim to 'strengthen literacy and numeracy outcomes', both of which can be significantly supported by some of the activities recommended in this article. Clearly, some children may spend too much time on screens, but to ignore it as a helpful resource in the early years seems short-sighted. During the Covid 19 crisis many children have only been able to access their education through online platforms, so their ability to do this is surely essential.



Judith Harries is an author and teacher of music and drama, with experience of working with children aged nine months to 11 years.



Ask yourself Questions

Reflective practice is needed now more than ever, says Dr Helen Edwards. Here are some tips to help you on your way...

AS THE NEW ACADEMIC YEAR begins and nurseries open to even larger numbers of children, it is worth pausing for thought and reflecting. In the past few months we have all had to cope with new ways of working, adapting to a great deal of new guidance and operating in very different ways to those we are used to. These changes require reflection so that we can all focus on what is working, adapt what isn't and continue to grow and improve teaching and learning experiences for children.

I am sure that many practitioners have been busy thinking about a whole host of things – how roles and routines have changed; how resources are used and rotated; keeping staff safe and supported; and how a growing number of children can be welcomed back.

It may not feel like it, but much of this planning has probably included a large dose of reflective practice. Here are some practical ideas that you might want to implement for autumn.

CELEBRATE SUCCESS

Reflection starts with a simple 'taking stock': the process of stepping back, thinking about what we have been doing, what has gone well and what could be better. Here are some helpful 'taking stock' questions:

- What area of our practice/ environment are we going to focus on?
- What have we been doing?
- Who benefits from doing it this way? (Children, staff, families?)
- What has gone well?
- What needs improving and why?
- Who/what else do we need to think about?
- What can we keep/adapt to meet these needs?
- How are we going to do this? (You could include external CPD, in-house training, who will do what, when will you return to this area of reflection to see how things are going?)

In this new educational era, we face a great deal of uncertainty.

Remember to celebrate all the things that have worked well. It's so easy to slip into the treadmill of 'what next?' and a never-ending to do list. Make sure you acknowledge the really good things, share with your colleagues and congratulate others.

QUICK WINS AND ACTIVE REFLECTION

There will be areas where you feel things could be improved. Think about quick wins that would solve some immediate problems. For example,

what if you can't think of a way for children to access all your resources safely. How do you choose which ones to use? Is it easier to put into storage those resources that are just too hard to clean daily?

Sometimes reflective practice can sound like we need to tuck ourselves away in silence before we can even start. I don't know any practitioners that can do that easily! Instead think about 'active reflection', something that can be part of your day-to-day practice.

- **Be mindful** – use your observations as a starting point. What can you see/hear? How do you feel? How might you be contributing, what influence are you having on the area you are thinking about?
- **Make a quick record of your thoughts** – this could be in a notebook or using an online tool. Not only will this help you to remember what you are thinking, it will also create a timeline so you can record this reflective journey, big or small.
- **Share with colleagues** – whether your reflection is about your individual practice or about teaching and learning in the setting as a whole, it's good to talk!

USING TECHNOLOGY IN REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Lockdown forced many of us to embrace the use of technology more fully. We saw this first hand at Tapestry where the number of videos and postings increased dramatically as practitioners devised new ways to



into informal reflective practices and they're important to note. As reflective practitioners we need to learn to be alive to these and to capture them.

In this new educational era, we face a great deal of uncertainty

Developing our own

An illustration of a person with dark hair, wearing a green t-shirt and dark blue pants, standing and looking up at a large, stylized green question mark. The background features soft, light green clouds. A small blue paper airplane is shown flying away from the question mark, leaving a dashed green trail. The overall style is clean and modern with a pastel color palette.

Another thing that lockdown has underlined is the value of informal reflective practice. For many, being at home and away from children was a real loss, but it also offered a chance for us to step back and think about what we might want to change ‘when we got back’. I lost count of the number of chats I had with people about what they’d learnt during lockdown and how that might change what they did once settings opened to more children. In lots of cases these were fleeting thoughts. I feel these fit into ‘informal reflective’ practice and they’re important to note. As reflective practitioners we need to learn to be alive to these and to capture them.



Tapestry is an online learning journal for early years and schools which encourages reflective practice. For more information visit tapestry.info



ASK THE EXPERT

“Maths in your hands”

*Professional development leader, **Louise Pennington**, tells us why Numicon is the perfect resource for children to start learning maths with...*

Why is Numicon the perfect resource to start learning maths with?

Numicon is such a tactile and visual resource, it's perfect for small hands as early maths concepts are first explored through rich play opportunities and teacher led activities. The multi-sensory approach underpinning Numicon means that children literally hold maths in their hands. This ensures a positive and engaging start to learning maths because children can feel and see numbers, understand how the number system works, and make links in their learning as they explore early concepts.

Why are Numicon's Early Years resources different to other maths resources?

Numicon aims to facilitate children's understanding and enjoyment of maths by using structured imagery. The combination of a teaching manual and apparatus makes Numicon's Firm Foundations programme for the Early Years Curriculum unlike other resources. All areas of the Early Years curriculum are covered with engaging activities that promote talking and communicating mathematically, as well as exploring relationships by doing maths. Tried and tested by teachers, these activities range from snack time to outdoor learning, and link to other areas of the curriculum too.

What support does Numicon offer for staff teaching maths in Early Years?

The Firm Foundations pack contains a comprehensive teaching guide to help practitioners get started with Numicon. Long and medium term planning charts are available in the manual with additional ideas and support on Numicon online (along with a wealth of other resources). Activity groups provide a progressive programme for building children's understanding of number, shape, space and measures. Each activity highlights 'have ready resources' and key questions. Activity cards can be handily taken out of the ring binder as an aide memoire for teaching.



EXPERT PROFILE

Louise Pennington is a professional development leader and an expert in teacher professional development and teaching. Find her on twitter @pdLouiseP

How easy is it to start teaching with Numicon?

Numicon is really easy to introduce. You can add Numicon Shapes to a sand or water activity, or set up a baseboard with a picture overlay for children to access freely. Teaching activities are really engaging, with 'Have ready' resources and 'Key questions' clearly highlighted in the manual. Each Teaching Resource Handbook (print or digital) has familiarization activities to ensure that all primary age children can have a positive start to using Numicon, whatever year group it might be introduced.

What feedback have you had from teachers and parents who use Numicon?

In our recent Oxford Impact report 97 per cent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that Numicon helps pupils improve their use of mathematical language and vocabulary, 99 per cent perceived that it helps children think and communicate mathematically with 98 per cent reporting gains in developing fluency, reasoning and problem solving skills. Parents regularly tell us how much progress their children have made at home and in school using Numicon. There is a strong Numicon community, find us on: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube (Oxford Education).

ASK ME ABOUT

The Numicon Guide for Parents and free resources, available on Oxford Owl for Home (bit.ly/Numicon_at_home).

Numicon NCETM accredited Professional Development, available face to face or digitally, where you can access it anywhere, at anytime, online.

Activity and 'How to...?' videos on our YouTube channel explore the key Numicon manipulatives (youtube.com/OxfordEducation).

Email: globalpd@oup.com

Website: oxfordprimary.co.uk/numicon-pd

Versatile and calming

Laura England suggests simple tips to brighten your setting and maintain a sense of well being...

Cable reel stations

Cable reels are cheap (if not free) to purchase and offer lots of possibilities for creating different stations within your continuous provision, you can upcycle them and use them outdoors which means they're really versatile and can be adapted for every environment.

Want to create a dough station but don't have a table spare? Use a couple of cable reels pushed together. Want to create a changeable small world station outdoors? Stack a smaller cable reel onto a larger one and create a fairy garden using some AstroTurf, this can be easily changed into a Jurassic world by swapping the fairies for dinosaurs.

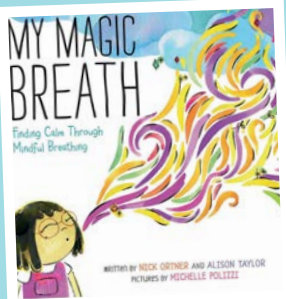
With the ever-changing needs and interests of young children, cable reels have been invaluable in my setting as we can easily change their use and move them around to suit the differing needs of both practitioners and children.



Laura England is preschool leader at Blythe Bridge Day Nursery.



Follow @littlemiss_ey and visit bit.do/TEYle for more great ideas.



HAVE YOU READ...

MY MAGIC BREATH

by Nick Ortner, Alison Taylor and Michelle Polizzi

My Magic Breath is a beautifully interactive book that encourages children to use their magic breath to overcome different thoughts and feelings.

Natural spaces

As many of you know, I am a huge fan of natural environments and resources. Some people question why I favour wooden toys and decorate my setting in natural colours. So, I thought I would share a few facts, taken from the Wild Network's youtube video 'The science of nature'.

Firstly, just a view of nature is proven to have many benefits. For example, hospital patients with a view of nature recover quicker than those without and students do better in exams when they have a view of nature compared to those that do not. Furthermore, being within nature lowers stress levels and boosts the immune system. And, the more time we spend in nature as children the more time we will want to spend in nature as adults.

If we gain all these benefits just from surrounding ourselves with more natural light, plants in the indoor environment and free flow to the outdoors, why wouldn't I favour this way of organising my classroom?



Mindfulness

During these unprecedented times many of us have begun to adapt to a simpler way of life; realising the importance of slowing down and being in the moment. I am a huge fan of Jude Brown, from Nurture in Mind, who offers lots of meditations

for children in the early years. Having tried these myself I can confirm that both practitioners and children were much calmer after a session. I now use this as one of my techniques when dealing with behaviour, whereby we encourage children to use the meditation area when they're feeling angry.

There are lots of other ways to bring mindfulness into your setting and it's a great way to wind down. We enjoy playing calming music while manipulating scented play dough or making patterns in sand. Moving forward it is definitely something I will be adding into our daily routine to ensure both practitioners and children get some quiet time to be in the moment.



“There are lots of other ways to bring mindfulness into your setting.”



DR SHERRON CURTIS IS TACTYC'S VICE-CHAIR.

Challenging times

Dr Sherron Curtis examines the effects of Covid-19 on the Early Years workforce and provision...

The return of early years settings has been a challenging time for many early years staff, it is important to take stock of the challenges we have yet to face and the lessons we have learnt in recent months.

Staff Wellbeing

With an increased number of children returning to their settings comes increased risk of infection. As we adapt to social distancing measures there is an added layer of complication for early years staff who are expected to look after babies and toddlers, which inevitably requires physical contact. These circumstances ultimately put the workforce under increased levels of stress, anxiety and fear – for them and their families.

Understandably, staff across the workforce must protect their families' health and wellbeing as well as their own. Many of those who work in early years settings will be facing issues around their own personal childcare, their own health and wellbeing if they have pre-existing health conditions and even the risk of infecting their loved ones who might be vulnerable or living with health complications.

Early years practitioners are 'stuck in the middle' and seem to have been forgotten about again, although they are acutely aware of the physical care and attention necessary to support babies and toddlers and wish to continue to do their best for the families they support while recognising the potential risks for their own families.

Strong leadership

At this time, it has never been more important for setting leaders to be present and supportive for their team. Returning to work poses many challenges so it is important for staff to feel they can share their concerns constructively and get support and guidance from their employers. This ongoing dialogue with the team will ensure a transparency of decision making. Employers should ensure that the correct procedures have been put in place and they are being followed consistently so staff and children are as safe as possible.

Similarly, setting leaders should ensure they are supportive and prepared to listen to the parents, carers and their families within their settings.

This will be particularly important in areas of deprivation, for families who have lost employment and are experiencing financial hardship. Strong evidence has been presented during this time to show that Covid-19 does not affect all population groups equally, exposing particular inequalities in health and access to services in the UK's BAME communities. The pressure of supporting stressed and anxious families will inevitably take its toll on staff and contribute to an even more challenging work environment. In addition, there is a need for further improvements in multi-agency



working, to enable families to access the support they may need from other agencies, particularly if they have lost loved ones.

Financial management

For those who own settings and for charities, these will have been uncertain times for their businesses. For many, the news of settings reopening has been welcomed, however, there are still questions about the number of children who will return.

Many parents still judge the situation to be too unsafe and are therefore choosing to keep their children at home. Parents and carers in families who do not use English as their first language may be unable to access information about how to keep their children safe. As a result, there are questions about whether early years settings will have enough children in September. This will create challenges around staff numbers needed day-to-day, and generally, for the viability of settings.

Throughout Covid-19 there has been confusion about financial support for settings, and for practitioners themselves. With furlough support set to end in October, it is not clear whether the Government recognises that settings are still in an extremely precarious position.

The sector has been in a funding crisis long before Covid-19, and the reserves which many other sectors have been able to fall back on were not available for many in the early years sector. Based on current funding rates, it seems inevitable that this will not only impact on the remuneration of the workforce, but also on settings' abilities to meet core welfare requirements and ultimately their ability to keep their doors open.

Children's wellbeing

In my role as manager of a children's centre in Sheffield, I have seen first-hand the challenges that vulnerable children and families are facing and have been increasingly concerned about some of the young people I work with. Working in an area of acute deprivation and diverse culture, there has been a significant increase in anxiety and worry among parents.

Along with my fellow practitioners, I have been frustrated by how vulnerable children have been monitored throughout the lockdown period. Many children were already in vulnerable circumstances and this has been exacerbated by delays and confusion resulting in staff having to implement new strategies to support young children.

Early years practitioners are 'stuck in the middle' and seem to have been forgotten about again

I have also seen signs of a sharp rise in domestic abuse, and therefore, practitioners are having to deal with complex issues beyond their usual job role. The added pressures of social care workers having less direct contact and working remotely has increased pressure on early years staff and contributed to the challenging environments children are living in.

In addition, external services - such as speech and language therapists, have stopped their visits, adding further challenges for practitioners who are trying to fill this gap for young children. This again results in staff having to work beyond their designated responsibilities to support young children and provide them with a stable and caring environment.

Unprecedented challenges

It is well known that early years staff are vastly underpaid and experience a huge amount of pressure, even in normal circumstances. Many tolerate the

overwhelming pressure and underfunding in the sector because of the personal reward they get from being a crucial part of the workforce that provides play, education and childcare for young children and so allows people across the country to work. However, at this time, it appears that the rewarding and fulfilling part of their job is lessened and they are having to cope with immense pressure and job uncertainty in the face of Covid-19.

The Government must put in place appropriate provision and funding to support the early years workforce, to ensure that the sector can continue to provide a much-needed national service which protects young children and allows their families to return to work and to 'normal life'.

Dr Sherron Curtis is TACTYC's vice-chair and member of the Early Years Workforce Commission. TACTYC promotes and advocates the highest quality professional development for all early years educators in order to enhance the educational well-being of the youngest children. For more information visit tactyc.org.uk

FIND A SOLUTION

The Early Years sector faces significant change and challenge in the face of COVID-19, for the sector as a whole but also for practitioners on an individual level in adapting to their daily lives. Effects of the pandemic on the Early Years Workforce include damaging staff wellbeing, ensuring strong and confident setting management and offering care which safeguards and enhances children's wellbeing.

The Early Years Workforce Commission has been set up to address the ongoing challenges that the workforce faces, and devise workable and effective solutions which can be implemented to ensure that the sector is highly valued, well paid and satisfied in their current roles and broader careers. In this article we have looked at the ways COVID-19 puts at risk these key elements from being embedded to ensure sustainable and high-quality child care is available for all young children. To find out more about the Commission, visit our twitter page @EYWC2020.

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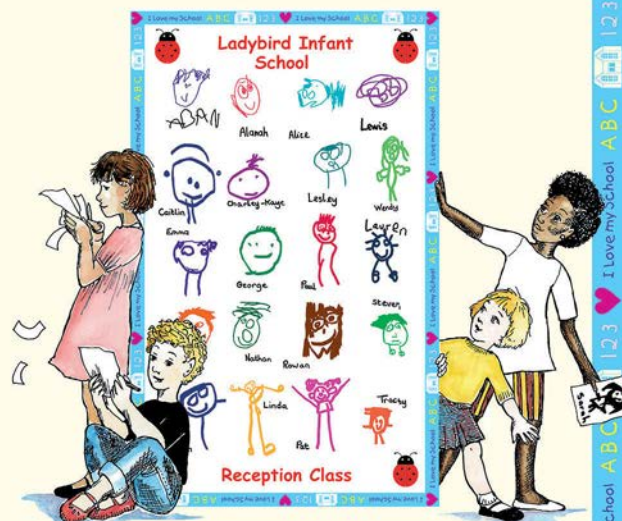
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ABC OF THE EARLY YEARS



Find out how to have a spooky Halloween, how helicopters help literacy skills and why shells are good to play with. It's all here....

Health and safety

Keeping the children in their care safe from harm is every early years provider's most important responsibility. Ensuring the wellbeing of a setting's worth of small children can seem daunting – and it's vital that owners, managers and their teams don't underestimate the task and grow complacent, certainly. For more guidance go to teachwire.com and fine-tune your approach to health, safety and hygiene in the nursery at bit.ly/2DWHHTp

Helicopter stories

Helicopter Stories is a fresh approach to teaching PSHE and literacy skills in early years.

It's an exercise whereby children write a short story and proceed to act it out. Not only can it make the process of acquiring literacy more fun, it can also help to bring more reticent children out of their shell. Find out more at bit.ly/2DSmJvM

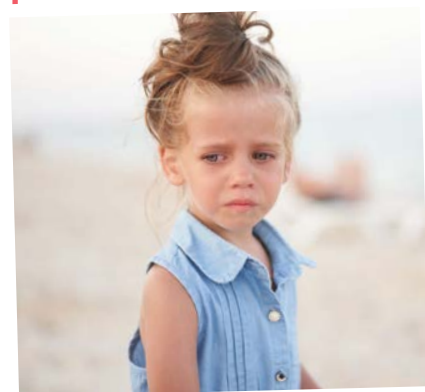
Halloween

It's a time for skeletons and ghosts and all things chilling and frightening. It also means there are all kinds of ghoulish activities to be had in your classroom. So teachwire.net have created a wide range of free downloadable resources and thrown in a selection of the most fiendishly fun activities, resources and decorating ideas to get your class in the Halloween mood. Find them at bit.ly/30SJZCD



How to speak child

Nikky Smedley writes a regular column in Teach Early Years on How to Speak Child (see page 15). She is an inspiring international conference speaker with presentations at the Bett Show, in London, and the EU Presidency Conference on Cultural and Creative Crossovers in Riga, Latvia. Her book "Create, Perform, Teach!" is published by Jessica Kingsley. To catch up on her columns head to bit.ly/2FIQmWW



Heuristic play

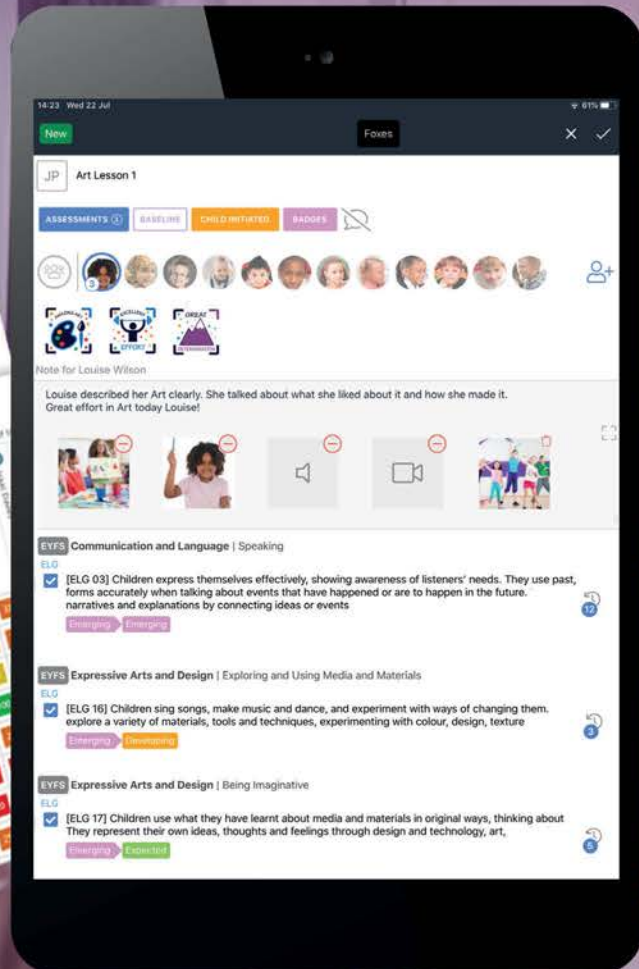
Laura England has introduced heuristic play into her setting for her 0-2 year olds and it's gone down really well. Children are given the opportunity to explore a range of natural and found materials, including shells, tubes, tins, wooden utensils and tubs. To find out more visit bit.ly/3gUirCI



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resource UPDATE

Highlighting all the latest additions to classroom observation and assessment solution, ReallySchool...



Observations and assessments can be time-consuming, so we worked directly with teachers to create a solution to help streamline the process. The result is ReallySchool, an easy-to-use app to capture, record and assess the stages of skills acquisition for every pupil in your class, plus create insightful class and whole-school reports in its online portal.

Designed in the style of regular social media apps, it's intuitive and accessible for teachers who are less confident with technology. You can apply assessments quickly and easily via ReallySchool's in-built UK-wide criteria, and attach photos, video, audio and written notes to observations as supporting evidence. It highlights any learning gaps, enabling you to address them – and you can even award badges to pupils to celebrate their achievements. The best part is that teachers tell us that ReallySchool saves them around two hours each day!

SPOTLIGHT ON...

From the online portal, teachers and school leaders can gain insights into how pupils are progressing via ReallySchool's dedicated reports dashboard. From here, you can generate a number of reports for your class, such as Student and Class Progress reports to monitor how pupils' attainment has changed over time (half-termly, termly or over the school year), Student Attainment reports to view what stage a student has reached in each subject and how many statements they have left to achieve, and the extremely useful Class Attainment reports grid that instantly highlights where the learning gaps are. Senior leaders are able to gain wider insights from Whole School Attainment and School On A Page reports, as well as see data on entire classes – all of which is valuable information they may not have been able to easily obtain from paper journals or other solutions.

ENGAGING PARENTS

Parents can access their own version of the ReallySchool app,



which is also extremely easy to use – no training required! It's a great way for them to engage with their child's learning without the fear that can sometimes be sparked by the thought of communicating with the school.

Supporting the recent increased emphasis on home learning, teachers can add learning activities and send them out to parents via ReallySchool – attaching photos, videos and audio clips to illustrate them. It's really easy for parents to comment on these via the app – or even add their own observations of their children taking part in this (or any other) activity, share them with the teacher and have a quick chat about it if they wish! It's a great way to encourage the continuation of learning at home, while at the same time, boosting parent-teacher communication.

VIEW FROM THE FLOOR

Becky Waters, head teacher at Dogsthorpe Infant School in Peterborough, explains ReallySchool's impact in her school: "We knew that, in theory, ReallySchool would save a lot of time – but it was great to test it out and prove it to ourselves. Our teachers now have much more time to dedicate to teaching each day.

"Because it allows us to link to so many different things in just one observation, it really helps us get the whole picture of each child's progress. Our observations are now more comprehensive and much better quality than before – and being able to see from timelines and reports where learning gaps are is such a time-saver.

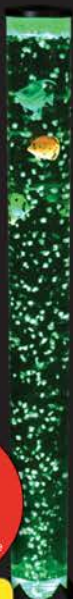
"ReallySchool has added value with its reports and insights. We can now tailor our teaching and learning so much more and be more active with planning, instead of simply rushing to complete our observations each day."

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BARBARA ISAACS IS A GLOBAL MONTESSORI AMBASSADOR.

Reflections on a Lockdown

Barbara Isaacs looks at the lessons learned during the last six months

THERE HAS BEEN NOTHING especially Montessori about the first half of 2020 as the world has experienced the covid pandemic. However, the many stories shared by Montessori practitioners of this period of time reflect the importance of relationships, of play and sense of belonging and mirror experiences of other early years educators.

The announcement of lockdown has challenged many Montessori nurseries. Like most settings in the voluntary independent and private (VIP) sector, initially the owners as well as employees were anxious about the survival of the business and this is very likely to continue as the new academic year begins. There is no doubt that many in the VIP sector will not be able to balance their books in respect of the 30 hour grant funding, the additional policy and procedures burdens that COVID has brought with it and the income they will receive from the returning families. There is also strong evidence that not all families will send their children back to nursery as they themselves reassess their financial situation against family needs and possibilities of future work.

Challenges

During the months of lockdown we have witnessed a stronger bond growing between settings and families as parents came to realise and appreciate the daily challenges faced by early years educators. The government expectation that parents would be able to homeschool was supported by many settings by providing families with ideas about activities, and in some cases even lesson plans for these activities. Suddenly many commercial organisations started to offer free activity packs and suggestions of how to educate children at home. For many children from toddlers to teenagers – home is a home – not a school, and



parents are parents – not teachers, and so it was inevitable that conflicts have arisen and parents realised that teaching is a skilled occupation, and that supporting learning through play is a very viable option when play is sensitively shared with young children.

As the terms of furlough were announced many early years educators took this opportunity to extend their learning and engage with their own families. Those who remained in employment engaged in story and music and movement time delivered via zoom, prepared activities which they delivered to the children's homes, started regular conversations with their key children. They also realised how much they missed the children and their discussions with colleagues at the nursery.

Support


At the same time new relationships were established between early years educators and families, particularly in settings where the owners and managers quickly realised that parents themselves may need help and support. We found many nurseries

have contacted parents for a chat and to find out how they were doing. They recognised the challenges of isolations, juggling work and parenting, as well as anxiety and real concern about their children's wellbeing. They reassured parents about the value of engaging children in tasks of daily life such as helping with cooking, washing and keeping one's rooms tidy. They talked about spending time together, playing and exploring nature be it local parks or the countryside. In many cases these conversations established a closer contact with families and so when the doors of nurseries finally opened children, teachers and parents were happy to see each other and reconnect and be a part of their social bubble.

Open-ended play

Everyone benefited from the more relaxed play-based learning, much of which was taking place in the outdoor classroom. As children played and teachers observed, they realised how much the children benefited from being with their families, how much they have learned since they last attended nursery. They came to appreciate the value of open-ended play which offers glimpses into children's experiences in these unprecedented times and the reality of their everyday life.

I wish them well as they prepare for their new experience in their reception classes in September and hope the opportunities to open ended play will continue to support children's learning as we navigate the "new normal".

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Footsteps to *phonics*

Nikki Joyce explains how you can support the development of phonological awareness...

PHONICS CONTINUES TO BE A KEY strategy to teaching reading but did you know that phonics is based completely on a child's ability to process speech sound information?

The underlying skill for phonics is phonological awareness. This is the ability to play with sounds within words – take them away, add them in, substitute them – all to make new and different words. For phonological awareness to develop effectively, it needs to be a speech only skill. It's not about seeing visual patterns and seeing the letter shapes, it's about being able to hear and manipulate the sounds themselves.

Phonological awareness starts developing with an understanding of rhythm and is why singing, dancing, nursery rhymes and playing with simple percussion is so crucial for toddlers.

Skills

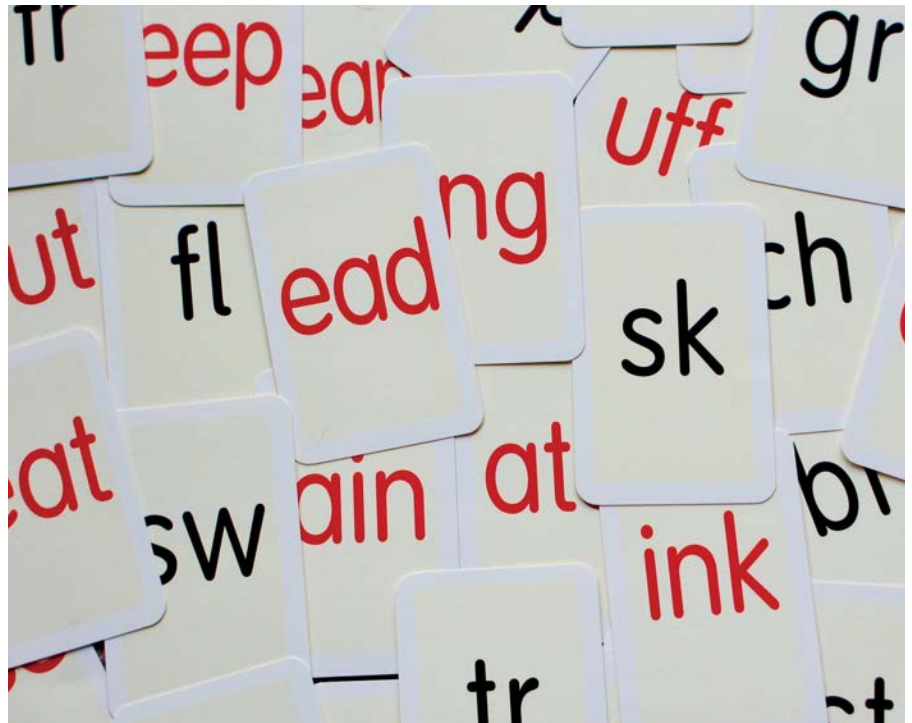
From that, children learn to hear the "chunks" of words (the syllables) and from there breaking those words into still smaller parts; the first sound of the word and the rhyme at the end.

Until those skills have been mastered and a child has this level of phonological awareness, they can't start to break down and blend and manipulate individual sound units. There's no shortcut to phonological awareness and without it, phonics cannot be an effective decoding strategy.

So how in Early Years can you support the development of phonological awareness? First step is syllable patterns – can the children clap along to the syllable pattern of their name? Can they march along with the syllables in words in sentences? Can they move with the syllable pattern of words – *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* has some lovely opportunities for timing gestures with syllable patterns and there are many other books with repetitive phrasing that allow for clapping/gestures /stomping along to the syllable patterns.

Identify

Once a child can recognise syllable patterns, we can help them to identify "how many



claps" are in a word. You can play a sorting game with a pile of pictures, each child claps out the syllables and places the picture on the corresponding number – helicopter would be four claps and would go on the number four, crocodile would be three claps and would go on the number three and so on. One game I enjoy playing is a take on "what's the time Mr Wolf". The children turn over a picture, identify the number of syllables by clapping it out and then they shout the word out loudly taking steps forward along with the syllable pattern! Who can get to Mr Wolf first!

Once the children are demonstrating awareness and identification you can move onto the next steps in phonological awareness – rhyming and identifying the first sound.

Again, it's important to avoid using written words – pictures and spoken words only. You can play "snap" with pictures of words that rhyme so they "snap" when they find a rhyme rather than the same picture. You can go on rhyming walks – each child has a picture (something with lots of possibilities for rhyming) and they have to explore and find three things that rhyme.

For example – a child could take a picture of a tree and they could find a knee, the sea and a bee!

Sound

I-spy is a great game for spotting what words begin with but another one I enjoy is making first sound feely bags! You can fill a bag with objects starting with a sound and see if the children can identify the objects in the bag by touch alone and then work out what sound they all start with. Once they've got the hang of it, see if they can create their own feely bags for their friends.

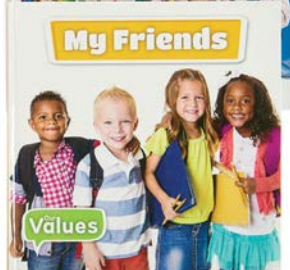
If you can work through these steps with your Early Years children, you can be confident you are giving them the best chance to get ahead in phonics.



BLAST is Boosting Language Auditory Skills and Talking. Everything you need to deliver BLAST is in the box – all of the planning, the resources and the photocopiable materials. All you need is a group of children, a CD player (for BLAST 1) and a trained BLAST leader. For more information visit blastprogramme.co.uk

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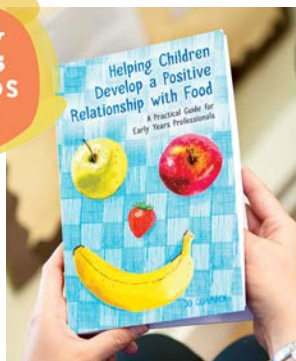
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Yum, yum

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THE WORRY BOX

The perfect picture book for children dealing with anxiety. It follows a bear called Murray who has lots of worries – happily, his sister Milly is there to help make a secret box in which to put all his concerns.

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educationaladvantage.co.uk

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Mark Hayhurst, TEY Editor

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ALISTAIR BRYCE-CLEGG IS AN AUTHOR AND EDUCATION CONSULTANT

Don't forget the importance of **PLAY**

*Continuous Provision can be a tool for supporting children's wellbeing, says **Alistair Bryce-Clegg**...*

AS MORE AND MORE children come back to settings across the country practitioners are all grappling with how to ensure every child is supported to make a positive return.

For some children lockdown will have been a great experience. They will have loved being at home with their family and had the opportunity for lots of shared experiences that they might not otherwise have had. For others, their experience will have been the opposite. However, for all children lockdown has taken up a significant proportion of their life so far.

When children have been away from a setting for any length of time there will be a number of skills that they will have to revisit to remind themselves of what they learned and how to apply it. But, the most important focus for children's return at any time, and especially after a long period away as a result of coronavirus, is their wellbeing. They won't be open to engaging with the resources and experiences that you provide for them if they don't feel comfortable with the learning space and the key adults that they will be interacting with.

To help children to move on and readjust to coming back into your setting it is important for them to be able to reflect on the things that are important to them, and that might be lockdown. If we don't give children an opportunity to process their experiences in a positive way, they will process them anyway and that might result in negative emotions and behaviours.

CONTINUOUS PROVISION AND WELLBEING

Continuous Provision involves providing a wide selection of open ended and specific resources for children to play and interact with that not only support the adult in their observations, scaffolding and teaching with children, but also continue the provision for learning when the adult is not there.

Good Continuous Provision (CP) motivates children to get lost in a world of play and exploration. It is during these periods of self-motivation and discovery that children can process their understanding of their world and use play to make sense of it. This is a valuable process all of the time, but especially pertinent as they return to settings after lock down.

CP is not just a collection of resources that the children have continuous access to. It is a plan for the environment that is based on assessment and observation. It supports your children's current learning while also creating opportunities to take that learning forward. CP should change with your children as they rehearse, consolidate and extend their knowledge, the provision should support them to do that.

EXPERIENCING THE WORLD AS A THREE-YEAR-OLD

It can be hard to remember how we experienced or processed the world when we were three years old. When you have only been alive for a relatively short period of time, lots of the things that you come into contact with outside of your day-to-day routine can

Another key thing is to make lots of time for talk.



be unfamiliar and sometimes difficult for you to process.

I often talk about imagining children's subconscious as a filing cabinet and events that occur in their lives as the files for the cabinet. When something familiar, or similar to a previous experience, occurs it is easy for children to process and 'file' because they have done it before. When something very different or unfamiliar happens, like coronavirus and lockdown, then children can struggle to understand and process it. Often, they will revisit that experience (or their version of it) through their play. This helps them to normalise what they are struggling with.

CONTINUOUS PROVISION AND SAFETY

Of course, the safety of staff and children is paramount on our return from lockdown and the Government has produced guidance for the early years on the sort of precautions that they would advise that we take. However, CP can still be available for children to interact with, we just



need to ensure that it meets the Government guidelines. I don't think there is anything in the guidance that will be a barrier to providing rich play experiences, it is more how senior leaders interpret that guidance.

This is something I talk about in my interview with the Foundation Stage Forum and Tapestry education team for their podcast series - do have a listen if you need to think about this more.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AS THEY RETURN

It is important that we provide enough open-ended play opportunities to allow children to be able to play out a wide range of possible scenarios both real and imagined. We don't know what children's lockdown experiences might have been and, more importantly, we don't know how they are going to process them. They probably won't engage in a game of 'lockdown' in the home corner, but you might find that elements of what they are trying to process appear in other games and play.

I would ensure that there are lots of resources available that encourage children to engage in small world play. Make sure the resources are open ended enough that they can use them to represent themselves and their family members, as well as fantasy creations from their imaginations.

When you are creating a role-play area, a home corner is a great idea to start with as most children will have spent most of their time at home. Also make sure that you have got other open-ended resources like boxes, baskets and bricks to add to your home corner for those children who don't want to play traditional 'house'.

Another key thing is to make lots of time for talk. Take a look at the structure of the day, is there potential for more chat? It is always really important for children to get as many opportunities to talk as they want to take. Some children will not respond well in a large group time so provide lots of different opportunities to talk in groups of different sizes.

Continuous Provision is a valuable part of any early years learning

environment. Done well, it produces high levels of engagement from all children which in turn promotes high levels of wellbeing. This is an essential recipe for successful learning. As children return to the routine of your setting their wellbeing must be at the forefront of everything that we do, and what better way to do it than through quality play and interaction in Continuous Provision?

Alistair Bryce-Clegg is a former headteacher and now works as an education consultant, he is a leading expert in Continuous Provision. Listen to his podcast with the FSF/Tapestry education team at bit.ly/3iq5noL.

FOUR THINGS TO CONSIDER NOW ABOUT CONTINUOUS PROVISION

- 1** Give yourself lots of time to observe and assess your children while they are playing. Create an environment that is based on those observations and assessments for maximum impact.
- 2** Try and keep your Continuous Provision continuous! Children gain most benefit from CP when they can invest uninterrupted time. Let sessions run for as long as possible without a break.
- 3** Don't tidy everything away. Children gain a huge amount by being able to revisit and revise the props that they use to support their play. So, at the end of a session, leave what you can and see how children will build on their learning.
- 4** Create a playful atmosphere (for adults and children). Although you can't see it, hear it or touch it, the atmosphere you create in your space has a huge impact for everyone. Make your space a playful one where risk and failure are celebrated just as much as success - most of all...have fun!

Dens & Shelters

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10355



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34760



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Be smart with space

*You have to make the most of your surroundings,
says Colette Giaretta...*

WELL, ONE THING WE CAN SAY is that not all spaces are smart! A smart space is about making any space more agile, multifunctional and sensorial. It's about making a space work better, making it more creative and happier! Transforming cluttered rooms with limited possibilities, into flexible rooms filled with endless possibilities. In these times, more than ever, making spaces quick to change is hugely important.

As children return to nurseries and schools, calm, harmonious and purposeful spaces are nurturing, supportive and lower anxiety levels for everyone. Welcoming places, with an underlying complexity, where children feel safe.

PROJECT

It's about making the room itself, by the things we choose to put inside it, an extra pair of hands: a third teacher (and we all need one of those!).

Thinking carefully about what we put inside any room is key to the way we develop a project together with our customers. We want to understand who the room is for and what it must be. Only then can we share meaningful ideas and propose solutions.

SMART SPACE

So, again: what is a smart space?

It's one that is furnished and resourced with care. Where children can have ownership of making changes and choosing accessible resources themselves. Teachers and children can quickly and easily reconfigure the space by moving mobile, modular furniture to create new zones for different groupings and activities, or a pop-up class in any room.

It might be about choosing nesting tables and storage, or perhaps wall-mounted folding tables, so workspaces can expand and be stored away whenever required, creating more

floorspace and more possibilities when tables are not in use.

MODULAR

It might be about having interchangeable worktops, so a storage unit can be sometimes a play kitchen, sometimes a light table, sometimes a sand or water tub. It can be modular partitions, which themselves offer interactive and sensory play opportunities and encounters, while also creating new pathways inside the classroom. Or simply a play loft, offering multiple play activities (roleplay, construction, movement, sensory, cosy corner) with a relatively low footprint in the room.

INTERACTIVE

Above all, it's about creating spaces for learning that are not static places. They should be engaging, interactive and responsive, able to support different demands and propose many different possibilities throughout every day.

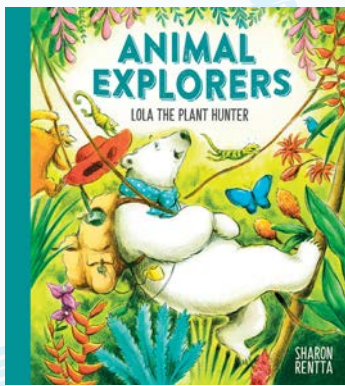
Smart spaces are spaces for the future!

Colette Giaretta is the managing director of Creating Classrooms and has 20 year's experience in education and space design. Creating Classrooms is a new company bringing HABA furniture and play equipment to the UK. For more information visit creating-classrooms.com



The Book Corner

GREAT TITLES TO SHARE WITH YOUR BUDDING READERS



LOLA THE PLANT HUNTER

(Scholastic, paperback, £6.99)

A polar bear in the Amazon jungle? That's not something you expect to see every day! In *Lola the Plant Hunter*, the first book of Sharon Rentta's new *Animal Explorers* series, that is exactly what you have. In a story inspired by real-life plant hunters, we see Lola the polar bear learn about her Grandpa's adventures as a famous plant hunter. Lola then leaves the Arctic in search of the one plant her Grandpa could never find - the elusive Singing Orchid in the Amazon jungle. She becomes determined to make her Grandpa proud and complete his search. Along the way, Lola makes lots of friends and sees an amazing variety of flowers. Her mantra, "I'm a bear on a mission!" takes her through the jungle in search of that one great prize. After battling heat, a shark and escaping a river of mud, Lola's dreams finally come true. She finds the Singing Orchid! The highly detailed illustrations bring the story life as the reader follows Lola throughout her search. Lola shows that determination is important in making dreams come true.



SUPER SLOTH

(Andersen Press, paperback £6.99)

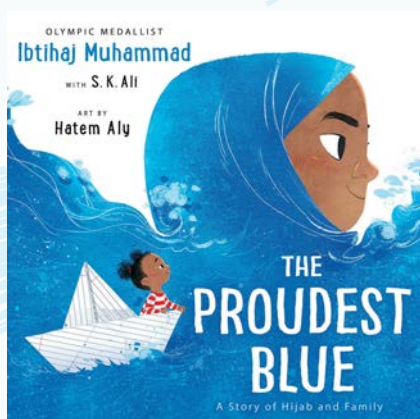
It's a bird! It's a plane! It's.....Super Sloth?? In the world of superheroes there emerges the most unlikely character. Every student will be cheering for Sloth as he saves the day. Robert Starling follows up on his success from his debut book *Fergal is Fuming* to introduce us to Sloth. Everything about Sloth is ordinary, until the day he discovers a strange new leaf - a comic showing him what a superhero can do. When Toucan's mangos are stolen, Sloth becomes inspired. Even though he can't fly, or run fast, or leap tall buildings, he demonstrates that courage and tenacity can overcome adversity - and recapture the missing mangos! The children will enjoy the simple, straight-forward story and colourful illustrations as they follow Sloth in his quest. While cheering Sloth as he makes his way past the guards to sneak up on Anteater, the children will learn that maximising your strengths leads to success. Sloths may be quiet and slow, but Starling shows us that they, like our students, can often surprise us. Get ready to be inspired while learning to love sloths all over again!



LITERALLY

(What on Earth Books, hardback, £11.99)

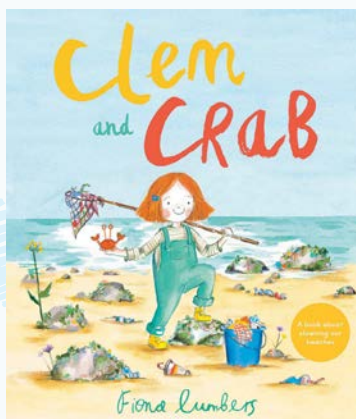
Where do words come from? How do we start using them in everyday language? What words do we commonly use that came from a language other than English? Most of us are accustomed to using borrowed words in our everyday lives, without putting much thought into it. A lot of these words revolve around food and clothing: taco, pizza, pashmina or pants. But what if we were to stop and look at where common words came from? As we know, incorporating entertaining non-fiction into the day can be a struggle. Patrick Shipworth's latest picture book turns on our brain when delving into the science of etymology, while Nicholas Stevenson's illustrations delight the eye. Focusing on English words, the book looks at the origin of the word, it's current meaning and links the word to languages around the world. With strong ties to geography, children have fun exploring the connections to indigenous languages and cultures both past and present, showing how - no matter where we are from - we are all interconnected. A riveting must-read!



THE PROUDEST BLUE

(Andersen Press, paperback, £7.99)

In today's climate of racial unrest and religious controversy, this book is an excellent way to either introduce the conversation to your class, or help them to view differences as special, and not as "other". American Olympic Medalist Ibtihaj Muhammed, with S.K. Ali, tells the story of Asiya's first day wearing a hijab to school. Little sister Faizah thinks it is the most beautiful hijab in the world, and that her sister looks just like a princess. When she hears a loud boy making fun of her sister, she is confused, but Asiya uses words of wisdom from her mother to keep her spirits up. Illustrator Hatem Aly brings the story out in vivid detail, showing us the bright blue of hijab, the faces of the girls, and the wonderful drawing Faizah makes of the day she and her sister will both wear hijabs the colour of the sky! The tormentor's faces are kept in shadow, leaving to the imagination who is making fun of her. This book is great as a stand-alone introduction to diversity, or part of a larger unit.



CLEM AND CRAB

(Andersen Press, paperback, £6.99)

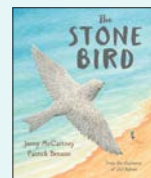
We often tell children that one person can make a difference. This story by Fiona Lumbers shows how one little girl- Clem- made a difference on her local beach. On weekends, Clem went to the beach with her bucket to pick up shells, pretty pebbles, bits of glass, and the trash other people left behind. One weekend, she met Crab. He had his claw stuck in a plastic bag. Clem saved him, taking him home with her to keep him safe. After taking him to school for Show and Tell with her beach collage, Clem explained to her class that she was trying to keep the beach clean, but that it was a big job for one little girl. Clem knew that taking Crab back to the beach was best, so the next weekend, she headed back to her beach. But there was a big surprise waiting for her there - the entire class was cleaning the beach!! This story shows how one little girl truly made a difference in her world. Use this to springboard a discussion of recycling, using waste bins properly, and volunteering in the community to clean up common areas.

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

Have you seen these fantastic publications?

The Stone Bird

(Andersen Press, paperback £6.99)



This debut book by Jenny McCartney sees Eliza find an egg-shaped rock at the beach. Nurturing the rock, her imagination leads her to see that it hatches, and Eliza now has a stone bird to keep her company. The illustrations by Patrick Benson bring this lovely story to life, taking the pet rock concept to a new level. Visit andersenpress.co.uk

The Huffalots

(Andersen Press, hardback £12.99)



This beautifully illustrated picture book will turn every Huffalot into a Luvalot! Spend a day with the Huffalots, as they transform from grumpy and irritable, to lovable and cuddly. While playing together, they share blossoms and sticks, and a hug that changes everything. Eve Coy's wonderful tale shows us how spending time together, sharing treasures and giving hugs can change us completely. Visit andersenpress.co.uk

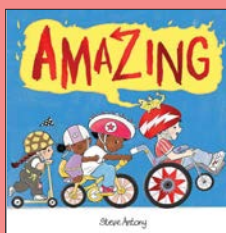
Every Second

(What on Earth Books, hardback, £12.99)



Young children love to learn about the world around them, and are full of questions. This Bruno Gibert book will feed their imaginations, and give them another dozen reasons to ask "Why?" So, whether you are interested in how many lightning strikes there are each second, or the volume of cow farts produced each second, there is something in here to tickle everyone's imagination! Visit whatonearthbooks.com

A FIERY ADVENTURE



Get creative with Amazing (Hodder Children's Books)...

● Invite the children to

create their own mixed-media imaginary dragons, just like Zibbo in the story.

● Start off by talking about the features and characteristics that most dragons share (wings, pointy tail, scales, fiery

breath), and look at examples of dragons from art and other picture books.

● Give each child a dragon shape cut from sturdy card. Paint the dragons with pearlescent and metallic paint, leave to dry and stick on sequins, buttons, silver foil and fabric scraps.

● Encourage the children to name and tell stories about their dragons.





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Learning about safety is vital

It has never been more important to teach children about the dangers around them, says Sue McGee...

YOU CAN'T TAKE YOUR EYES OFF A young child for one second for fear that an accident may happen. More accidents involving children happen at home than on the roads, while many are injured on the beach.

More than 75 per cent of under-fives who die from unintentional injury do so from accidents in the home. The Covid-19 lockdown has increased the risk of injury and put greater emphasis on the need to teach young children how to avoid accidents in and around the home – especially accidents arising from the following:

Choking and strangulation: These injuries result in the highest number of deaths for the under-fives, with injuries categorized in the following groups: inhalation of food and vomit, and suffocation; looped blind cords; nappy sacks, both being major hazards.

Falls: Falls from furniture take the lead in the bulk of hospital admissions as well as falls on and from stairs and steps.

Medicines and household chemicals:

Every week over 100 under-fives are hospitalized due to accidental poisoning. Medicines are the cause of almost 70 per cent of poisoning admissions and household chemicals account for over 20 per cent of the admissions.

Burns and scalds: Every week around 60 under-fives are hospitalised as a result of burns or scalds, primarily from boiling water and hot drinks left unattended on tables or cupboards.

Button batteries: A major new cause of accidents is button batteries, which are found in many children's toys and household appliances. These can get stuck in the throat of a young child and not only cause choking but can cause severe tissue burns in less than two hours resulting in lifelong injuries.

More than 75 per cent of under-fives who die from unintentional injury do so from accidents in the home.

KEY AREAS

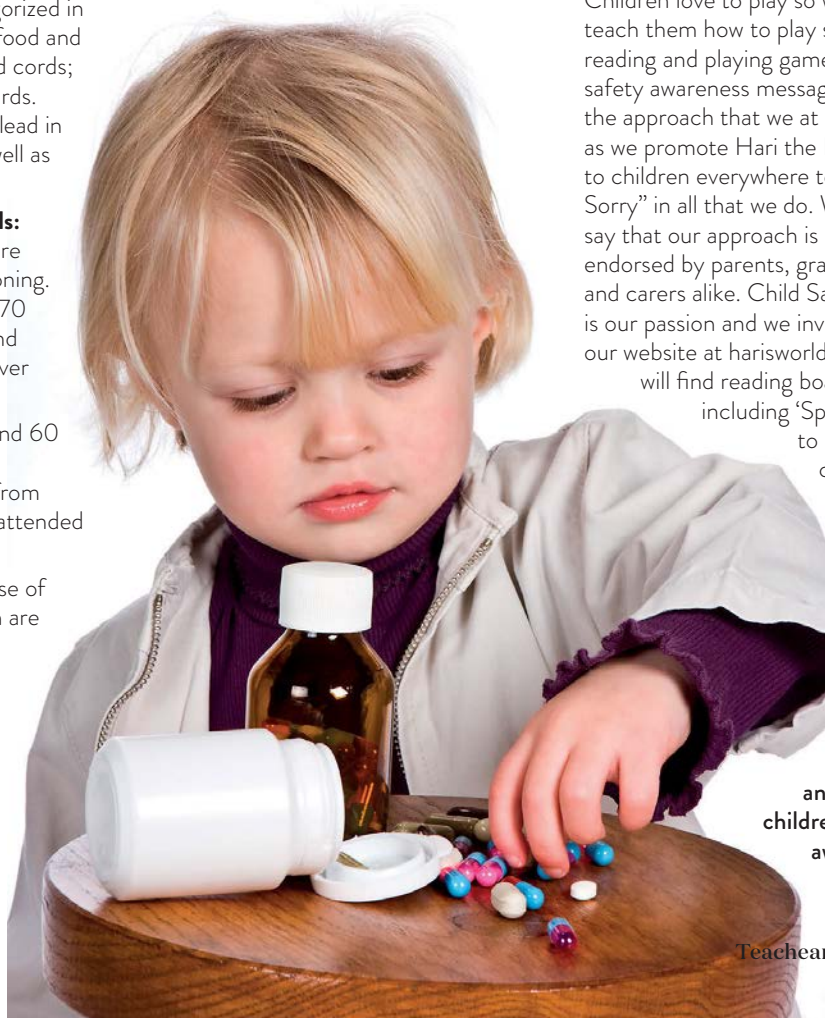
Other key areas for accidents affecting young children are the garden, the road, the play park and the beach. During summer months it is essential on hot days

to keep young children hydrated with lots of water and to apply appropriate children's suntan lotion. Water is always fascinating for children, so having fun in the paddling pool is lovely, just don't leave them alone when you go inside – a child can drown in less than two inches (six centimetres) of water. That means drowning can happen in a sink or bath, toilet bowl, fountains, buckets, inflatable pools, garden ponds or small bodies of standing water around your home, such as ditches filled with rainwater. Extreme caution is required whenever and wherever water accumulates in and around the home.

WATER

Children love to play so what better way to teach them how to play safe than through reading and playing games together with safety awareness messages woven in. This is the approach that we at Hari's World follow as we promote Hari the Elephant's message to children everywhere to "Play Safe Not Sorry" in all that we do. We are proud to say that our approach is enthusiastically endorsed by parents, grandparents, teachers and carers alike. Child Safety Awareness is our passion and we invite you to visit our website at harisworld.com where you will find reading boards and games, including 'Spot the Hazards' to enjoy with your children during these difficult Covid times.

Sue McGee is managing director at Hari's World, whose range of books, safety sacks and resources teach children about safety awareness.



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A joyous (eventually) Christmas production for children aged three to six.

AT A GLANCE

- Easy to learn songs
- Age-appropriate script
- Closely follows the nativity story
- Fully resourced

REVIEWED BY MIKE DAVIES

FOR MANY PEOPLE, the traditional nativity show cuts the ribbon on the festive season. For the teacher, of course, it can be a very different story. No matter how sentimental you get about Christmas, putting on a nativity can be every bit as stressful as trying to find accommodation for a heavily pregnant young woman during the peak census season.

Even though parents would forgive anything as long as they can glimpse their little darlings on stage, professional pride compels teachers to put on the best show possible. That can be an enormous undertaking. Fortunately, the clever people at Out of the Ark Music are experts at providing more heavy lifting in this area than any grumbling donkey.

Their latest festive offering for children aged three–six is called *A Bundle of Joy*. This cheerful retelling of the Christmas story looks at the whole fable from the miserable perspective of the poor donkey that carried Mary to Bethlehem. Spoiler alert: the bundle of joy that is Jesus turns out to be the perfect cure for donkey's grumbles.

As you would hope and expect, the script features all the usual characters from the Christmas story, which means there are enough short speaking parts to cater for a whole class of children. There are also plenty of suggestions for staging, costumes and props, as well as ideas for increasing or reducing the cast list according to the needs of your school.



At the heart of the show, however, are the songs. As existing fans of Out of the Ark will appreciate, they excel at creating the perfect soundtrack for each of their shows. Carefully crafted for their charm and age-appropriate simplicity, they are the glue that holds each production together.

Most importantly for the busy teacher, they provide everything required for even the least musical amongst us to teach each song with confidence, including optional sing-along software, Words on Screen™ that allows the children to learn the music and lyrics with the minimum of fuss and preparation. I've known classes snatch valuable practice whilst changing for PE. So, there'll be no anxiety attacks as to whether the kind lady in the village will have recovered from her cold in time to accompany the children on the piano.

Now, you might be a creative genius who would rather produce a nativity from scratch. For the rest of you mere mortals, however, *Bundle of Joy* could be the answer to your prayers.

THE VERDICT

- Great songs
- Charming script
- Well resourced
- Guaranteed crowd-pleaser
- This nativity is bubble-friendly

UPGRADE IF...

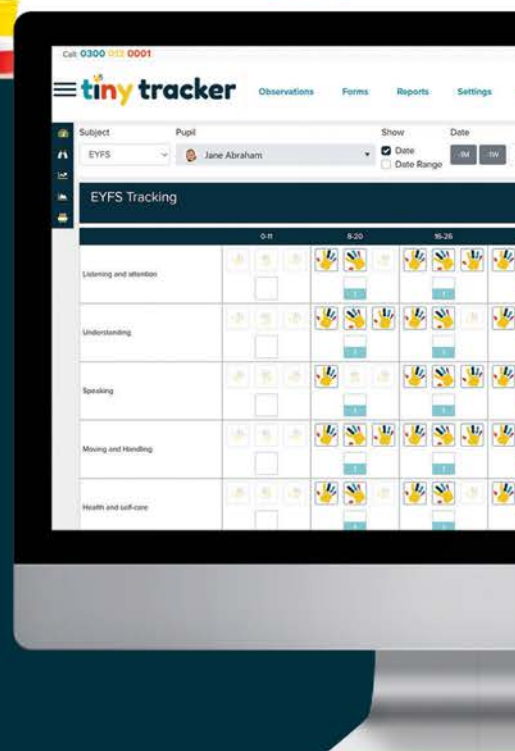
You doubt your ability to create a musical nativity show by yourself.
RRP £53.85 (with Words on Screen™ eSongbook and Annual Performance Licence)



tiny tracker

Tiny Tracker can help you to record and share observations with parents so that they can see for themselves how their children flourish at the start of their learning journey.

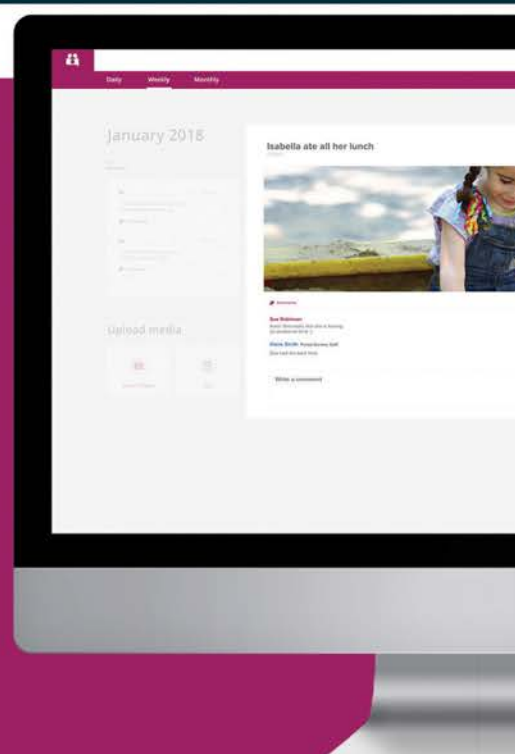
- Track and monitor against a range of early years curricula.
- Stress-free termly assessments using uploaded evidence or against curriculum bands.
- Use reports to analyse the attainment, progress and next steps in children's learning.
- Build care diaries for each child.
- Easily manage Online Learning Journal and share key moments with parents using Parent Passport.



Parent Passport

Parent Passport is an easy-to-use online parent portal that allows schools and early years settings to communicate directly with parents.

- Share observations with parents and easily allow them to communicate with feedback and comments.
- Parents can see upcoming activities and events with the calendar view.
- Create care forms and diaries with meal times, sleep patterns and medical details.
- Upload newsletters and correspondence to keep parents updated with important news and announcements.
- Parents can view observations and updates quickly from any device and switch between multiple children.



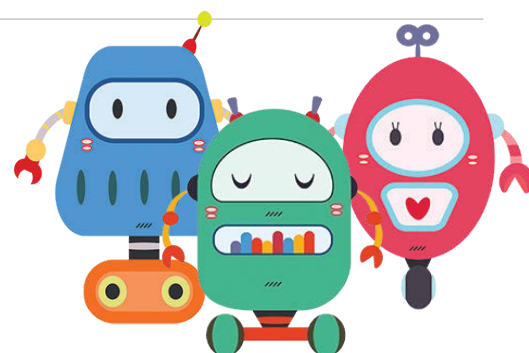
Get in touch for more info

e: support@tinytracker.co.uk | www.tinytracker.co.uk

TinyTracker

Visit: tinytracker.co.uk

An easy-to-use online journal and pupil tracker



tiny tracker

AT A GLANCE

- A user friendly Early Years journal suitable for childminders, nurseries and schools
- Easily upload observations of children on the go with a simple web-based app
- Share achievements and information with parents at the touch of a button

REVIEWED BY BEN WHITE

TRACKING THE PUPILS IN

your Early Years setting is crucial to ensuring progress and development. With numerous tracking applications out there, finding a user-friendly one isn't always easy. So let me introduce to you TinyTracker: the online journal and pupil tracker that anyone in your setting can use with ease.

This online EYFS learning journal can be used on any device within the setting - including tablets, mobile phones and computers - making it great for recording quick observations at any time of the day. Simply log on, click the icon on the handy sidebar and you're on the way to uploading your first observation. Attach a photograph or file to demonstrate the learning, quickly select the objectives being met and then save; it really couldn't be easier!

The simplicity and versatility of TinyTracker enables it to fit into any early education setting, from a childminder to a large primary school. I particularly like the options available when submitting an observation: firstly, at the click of a box, the journal entry can be shared with parents - for celebrating an achievement or milestone objective perhaps. Alternatively, the entry can be shared with just staff within the setting, useful for group or minor observations not necessarily relevant to a wider audience. Finally, there is the option to share with just the manager of the

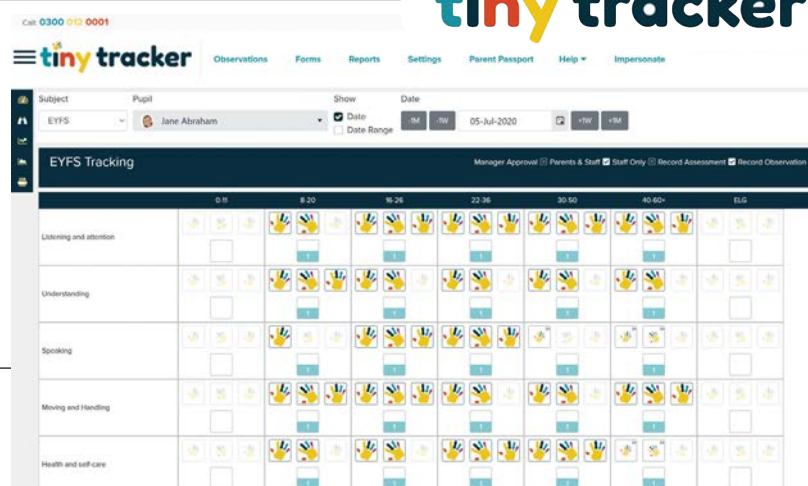
setting for their approval, maybe to share sensitive information or for monitoring.

Sharing reports with parents on a daily or termly basis is straightforward through the 'Parent Passport' and can include a variety of information. A feature I have not seen in other tracking systems is the flexibility of recording pastoral information and personal care, such as nappy changing, sleep routines and food diaries, keeping parents in the loop at all times. Practitioners can also record any medication that is given to children with the time and staff member who administered the medicine. Notes and reminders for an upcoming event can also be sent out at the touch of a button.

Reviewing completed observations is seamless as each entry contains the child's name, a mini photograph and, cleverly, their age in months which comes in handy when tracking child development. For both managers in the preschool setting and senior leadership in schools, the individual and group trackers can provide a snapshot of the progress within an instant. For teachers and key workers, delving deeper into the trackers will quickly help practitioners in identifying gaps and planning future learning opportunities.

The versatility of TinyTracker really

does allow it to slot into any setting and, with a small amount of staff training, practitioners will be on their way to creating detailed and holistic learning journals in no time. For any technical support, the team at TinyTracker are on hand to support via a phone call, online chat or email.



THE VERDICT

- Very user friendly and straightforward to navigate on any device.
- Versatile with options to track achievements as well as pastoral care.
- Useful in any early years setting - childminder, preschools, nurseries and schools.

UPGRADE IF...

You're looking for a comprehensive, well-developed journal and tracker app that puts child development at the heart whilst being easily accessible for both the practitioner and parent alike.



Outdoor Learning

The Muddy Puddle Teacher Approach brings together curriculum-based education with outdoor learning and works with the passing seasons and weathers to give educators and parents a way in which to learn and discover together – with a month's free subscription during school closures. To create a FREE account go to themuddypuddleteacher.co.uk/register. Subscriptions offer hundreds of resources EYFS-KS2, accredited courses, mini courses, eBooks and a dedicated SEND area. With a subscription, you can access outdoor learning activities for all ages, from babies to juniors and carefully tailored SEND content too. For more information visit themuddypuddleteacher.co.uk

HAVE YOU

TEY's look at the latest early years tools, toys, books and activities...

See...

Exciting range

BookLife Publishing has produced the perfect reading scheme to help teachers and parents, encourage aspiring readers to develop their literacy skills without halting enjoyment. Created using the recognised educational document, Letters and Sounds, BookLife Readers focus on phonetically decodable reading, offering a consistent approach to learning whether at home or in the classroom. All bookband labelled, and soon to offer clear Lexile and Accelerated Reader levels, these books are ready to fit alongside your classroom resources.

With over 120 titles, this ever-growing range will excite even the most reluctant of pupils and with expansion planned (including non-fiction) this scheme offers the perfect solution to learning to read. For more information visit booklife.co.uk, email info@booklife.co.uk or call 020 7649 9565.



STORY WRITERS

The award-winning Tales Toolkit uses easy-to-remember symbols that represent story structure. The resources give children the independence to create and write stories around their interests using anything to hand! It comes with an online training package created with top educational experts to ensure maximum impact across many areas of learning. For more information, visit talestoolkit.com



EXPLORE EMOTIONS

Big Words for Little People is an exciting new series from Oxford Children's Books that encourages young children to explore their emotions and understand the world around them. Each picture book contains carefully-chosen feature words that are woven into a flowing narrative. These are combined with fun illustrations to create supportive and engaging picture books that are perfect for sharing and reading together. Big Words for Little People supports grown-ups to talk about feelings and how to express them with children, while children can feel confident as they start to build their own vocabulary. Visit <https://global.oup.com/education/children/bigwords?region=uk>.

Little People supports grown-ups to talk about feelings and how to express them with children, while children can feel confident as they start to build their own vocabulary. Visit <https://global.oup.com/education/children/bigwords?region=uk>.

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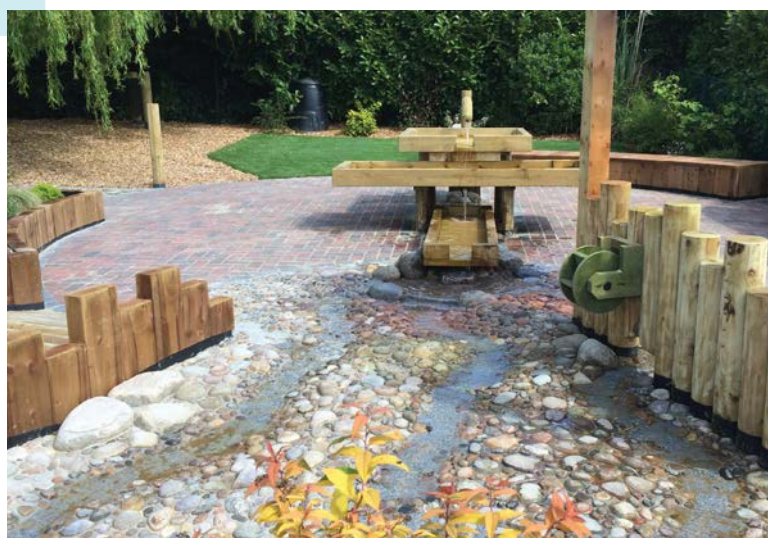
BRING NUMBERS TO LIFE!

Develop strong basic numeracy skills with Ten Town's new learning platform and web app. Featuring over 70 online activities, children can collect stars and badges as they work their way around the exciting world of Ten Town, meeting King One and all his friends. Over 200 ideas for practical activities encourage learning through play and problem solving, while optional home access helps to consolidate learning. New outdoor wall friezes have been added to the range of hands-on resources that include playing cards, role play tabards and number bags. For more information visit tentown.co.uk, email info@tentown.co.uk or call **0345 474 1232**.



DARK DEN

Create the most sensational sensory hideaway with the new versatile Tuff Tray Dark Den Kit – containing a Tuff Tray, adjustable stand and dark den cover. Simply pop the cover over the Tuff Tray and stand to reveal your dark den. Add sensory lighting and UV equipment to heighten the children's senses and give them a magical cosy experience. This kit is a fun way to enhance the children's development in all areas, while bringing a whole new level of exploration and investigation to sensory play. To view the full sensory range, visit earlyyearsresources.co.uk or call **0161 865 3355** for more information.



Outdoor advice

Time outside is crucial to early development – it gives young, growing children access to one of the most enriching environments in which to access key areas of learning, from language, literacy and mathematics, to PSED, physical development and understanding the world. Timotay Playscapes has a free inspiration guide to outdoor play spaces and play equipment, packed with innovative and engaging educational ideas, which can help you bring your outdoor space to life. For your copy, email enquiries@timotayplayscapes.co.uk or call **01933 665 151**.



Why I Love...



Lead EYFS teacher, at Ghyllgrove Community Primary School, Keeleigh McKeon explains why Ten Town gets children excited about numbers

“It’s now part of our daily routine

We introduced Ten Town to our school because we’d noticed our children really struggled with number formation. Ten Town stood out as a perfect resource thanks to its useful rhymes that help children remember how to write each number and the colourful animated stories and catchy songs really caught their imagination. Initially Ten Town was a resource that we could dip into when we needed it, but as the year has progressed it has become an important part of our daily routine. We can pick and choose songs and stories based on the theme of the week or we can follow the adventures of King One and his friends from start to finish.

“There are lots of activity ideas

Our children love Ten Town! They sing along with the songs, join in with the actions and respond really well to the characters. It’s great to see them so enthusiastic and interested in maths. There are lots of ideas for activities such as role-play, problem solving and opportunities for communication. For example, the character tabards allow us to create physical representations of number problems and the fantastic outdoor resources have enabled us to extend the learning into our new Early Years garden.



“It helps children’s understanding

One of the reasons it has really worked in our school is that Ten Town isn’t just about learning number formation and early counting, it has also developed the children’s understanding of number value and how to apply their knowledge in practical situations. The ten to 20 activities have also given them a foundation in shape, space and measure. Not only has Ten Town worked as a focus for maths but it has become an integral part of our continuous provision and planning, from making King One’s crown in art to discussing Fiona Five’s ideas for healthy eating.

“It can be accessed at home

As well as becoming a well-used and valuable resource in school, we also arranged home access. Parents have commented on how well their children have engaged with Ten Town and that the activities have supported their weekly homework. They also like the insight into how their children are taught early numeracy skills. During lockdown, Ten Town proved to be an invaluable resource that parents could easily use with their children and it was a great way to support learning at home as it provided continuity and familiarity to what we do in school.



Ten Town has developed a new learning platform and web app with exciting number-based stories, songs and games. It encourages learning through play with 100s of ideas for practical activities. Memorable characters help integrate maths throughout the day with many cross curricular opportunities. It introduces numbers to 20 with focus on partitioning and links to space, shape and measure. For more information visit tentown.co.uk, email info@tentown.co.uk or call 0345 474 1232.



NURSERY BUSINESS

*Practical support and comment for the owners
and managers of early years settings...*



Have you seen our Brilliant Teacher Box Sets? Get free CPD sent to your inbox, including 56 top tips from Kathy Brodie – sign up at teachwire.net/free-teacher-cpd



This issue...

68 BOOST YOUR BUSINESS ONLINE

It's time to embrace digital marketing after the lockdown, says Kathleen Quirke.

71 WHAT ARE THE DANGERS?

Jane Hallas examines the risks of forcing staff to return to work.

72 TAKE CONTROL AND BE FIRM

James Hemsall tells you how to hold successful meetings.

74 MAKING USE OF YOUR OUTDOORS IN A COVID WORLD

Matt Robinson explains how to use all the space you have to the maximum.

77 A LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY

Low rates of occupancy mean tough times ahead, says Jo Verrill.

78 Q&A: TECH TRAINING

NDNA's Bev Seymour answers your questions on how technology has changed training.

80 INFECTION CONTROL

Keep your staff and children healthy with this advice from Laura West.

82 YOU DON'T HAVE TO BREAK THE BANK

Sourcing new activities and resources doesn't have to be expensive, says Jonny Keen.

Expert advice from...



JAMES HEMSALL OBE

is director
of Hemsall's



DR JO VERRILL

is director
at Ceeda



LAURA WEST
is MCW's childcare
health & Safety
specialist



KATHLEEN QUIRKE IS MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER AT THE EYA

Go online to boost your business

*It's time to embrace digital marketing after the lockdown, says **Kathleen Quirke**...*

DIGITAL AND MOBILE

communication has already significantly changed how we communicate and engage with our families in recent years. The initial lockdown period and more recent easing of restrictions has simply pushed us forward along the digital path even more quickly. Today, marketing is much less about obvious promotion of your service. It is more about creating authentic connections with potential new customers and working to retain the loyalty of your current families. There are so many advantages to using these digital technologies, even after the current situation eases. If you are unsure of the best way to start embracing digital marketing, here are just a few ideas to help you gradually move your business and promotion online.

VIRTUAL PARENT TOURS

Not being able to physically connect has not stopped us continuing with friendships or relationships. We can still see and connect with each other or share or show things visually using technologies like Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

It is easy to arrange a virtual tour to parents interested in placing their child at your setting. Simply set up a meeting via a secure app such as Zoom and invite parents to join and experience your virtual show-around. Do try to make the empty space as inviting as possible by asking children who are attending or planning to return to create or send in some nice pictures to freshen up the reception area.

It is important to plan an informal 'script' to predict parent questions. You should explain how you are managing the current restrictions including what you would do if someone in the setting is experiencing symptoms or has been tested positive for the virus. Parents are likely to look for reassurance, so it is important to explain the specific processes you have in place to ensure your space remains safe and secure, such as regular cleaning throughout the day and limiting access for adults. It will play an important role in reassuring parents (virtually) that your setting or home space is safe and secure.

PARENTS AS 'INFLUENCERS'

In the early years sector, personal recommendations and positive reviews from parents using your service are a hugely important factor in attracting new enquiries. Evidence also supports the view that parents are most likely to find out about a childcare service through personal recommendations.

Over the past few months, there have been few physical opportunities for parents to catch-up and share their experiences of childcare, however online forums and social media continue to be popular ways to do this.

Digital childcare search engines such as Daynurseries.co.uk and Childcare.co.uk are vital platforms for helping parents to find you and to review your service. Registering your early years business on these sites should be integral to your digital marketing plan. The more reviews you receive, the higher your setting is registered in the search. This means

that you can easily be found by parents who may not be aware of your service yet.

Make sure your website also shares positive parent quotes on the home page. Often childcare search platforms will enable you to install a widget on your website that displays your review rating from their site on your home page too.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS KING

Social media, particularly Facebook, is a popular way for parents to keep in touch – and this is even more true now. If you do not already have a Facebook page to promote your service, you should consider setting one up.

Facebook offers an easy way to create an online presence which encourages families to engage with you in a more informal way. It will give natural, relaxed insight into what makes your service special. For example, you can share pictures showing what children enjoy doing at your setting, how happy your team is, what kind of learning through play activities are available and you can showcase your lovely outdoor area. In response parents can quickly post reviews, share posts with their friends or just simply 'like' your page.

FACEBOOK FOCUS – DO AND DON'TS

Do use Facebook to bring existing parents together, to create a supportive online community or forum and to



encourage interaction via comments, 'likes' and 'shares'. This helps to raise your profile and reach potential new families in your local area.

It is important to post useful and interesting information rather than relying on obvious promotional plugs.

Use different formats to communicate such as nice images, video and infographics. Short videos work particularly well online. You should always add links to your posts to drive traffic to your main website. Source relevant news and views from recognised and well-respected early years experts. Encourage interaction by asking for reactions or comments to your posts.

Facebook also gives parents an easy way to get in touch with you. You should encourage parents to feedback positively about your service by leaving reviews on your page, and make sure you keep track of messages from parents both old and new.

To make it work well, monitor every day, respond quickly to comments, choose interesting things to share and post regularly – three times a week ideally. You should ensure that you have a clear Facebook policy in place with secure login and password process limited to few trusted individuals, covering issues such as who will have access to the account and what is and isn't acceptable in terms of content.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Every marketing strategy should include success measurements against each marketing activity chosen. This helps you to accurately review how well the marketing activity is going and where further improvements could be made. Digital marketing is incredibly effective in tracking engagement and interactions. Facebook and website analytics can provide you with considerable insight into what your customers are interested in, what they like and dislike, where they go after reading something online. Make sure you make it as easy as possible for them to contact you or 'take action' by using 'call to action' buttons such as 'Get in touch' or 'Register now'. Your review should not happen at the end of the marketing strategy. It would be too late to refine and keep your plan on track.

Put simply, agree success measurements against each activity at the beginning and monitor constantly. This gives time to tweak and improve at key stages which minimises overall risk of failure.

MORE INFORMATION

Further details on the various elements of the 'sustainability jigsaw', from effective leadership and financial management to marketing and developing high-quality provision, can be found in Operating a Viable Early Years Provision (Early Years Alliance, 2019). Social Media Marketing for early years settings and Marketing your early years setting online CPD-recognised EduCare bundle is available free to members. Special offer for non-members, only £13.50.

THE SEVEN Ps

Product (your service): is it what your parents are after? Can you show its high quality (Ofsted rating) and flexible? What makes you unique compared to other providers? How do you add value?

Price: how do your fees compare to competitors? Do you offer good value or free 'extras'? Are your fee payment terms parent-friendly, consistent, and transparent?

Place: is your physical space accessible and attractive? Nice indoor and outdoor play areas? Do you promote where you are clearly in all communication?

Promotion: is your digital promotion clear, consistent, well-branded (recognisable) and professionally presented? Are service benefits obvious for families (not features)? Are staff and parents involved?

People: are your staff experienced, kind and well-qualified? Are families happy and positive about how they support them? Do you promote your professional, valued team prominently online?

Process: do parents 'journey' happily through your online enquiry processes? Do you respond quickly to parent comments on Facebook and resolve quickly? Do you choose individual parent communication preferences when you contact them such as email rather than phone?

Physical evidence: do you share parent reviews across all your digital communication platforms? Do you encourage feedback about your service?!



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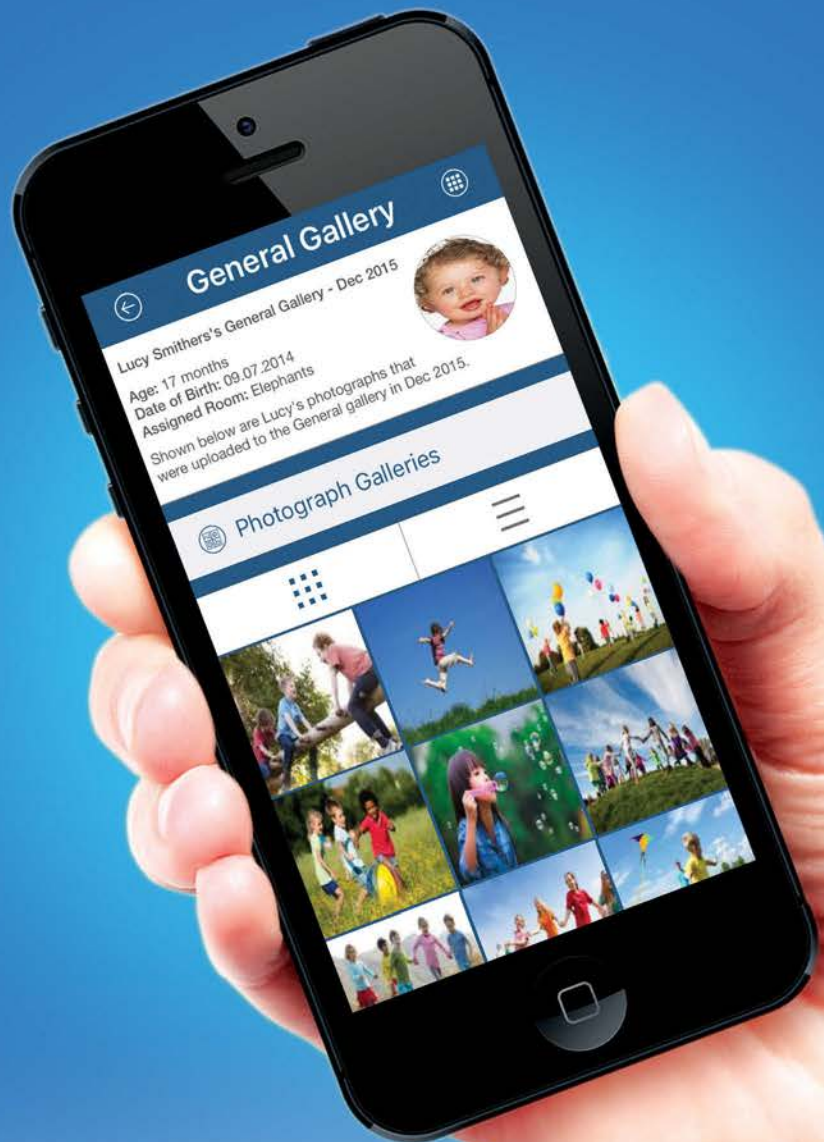
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What are the DANGERS?

Jane Hallas examines the risks of forcing staff to return to work...

With nurseries and early years settings now reopening more widely, dealing with anxious staff may become a more pressing issue. While the coronavirus infection rate has subsided, it is likely that certain members of staff may be reluctant to return to work. Risk assessing your environment, implementing “reasonably practicable” controls and sharing your findings may be enough to put staff at ease. However, staff may insist they feel at risk despite the arrangements in place to protect them. So how should these matters be approached?

FIRST, IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE RISKS

Reluctant returners will require careful handling, as mismanagement may result in Employment Tribunal claims. If an employee is pregnant, for example, placing pressure on them to return to work where they do not feel safe to do so could amount to discrimination. Even in normal circumstances, employers have a duty of care to ensure that the health and safety of pregnant employees is not put at risk at work. Regarding coronavirus, it is essential that individual pregnancy risk assessments are undertaken to identify what level of risk the individual is exposed to.

With shielding now paused, except in Wales and for those areas currently in local lockdown, high-risk staff should be able to return to the workplace provided all government guidance on social distancing and health and safety protocols are followed. If these individuals refuse to return in view of



their vulnerable status, given that their medical condition is likely to qualify as a disability under the Equality Act 2010, forcing a return may similarly leave you exposed to discrimination claims. In these situations, you should discuss their concerns with them and undertake individual risk assessments. If attempts to address concerns fail, or the employee is able to provide specific medical advice confirming that it is not safe for them to be at work, they may be eligible to remain on furlough if you are able to, though you should seek confirmation from HMRC or, if possible, allow them to work from home. Otherwise, a period of unpaid leave would likely be a more proportionate response than taking disciplinary action.

More generally, Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 gives employees the right not to be subjected to any detriment on the grounds that, “in circumstances of danger which the employee reasonably believed to be serious and imminent”, they left or refused to return to their place of work. A detriment will include

a decision to withhold pay. If the employee is dismissed or resigns in this scenario, you could face an automatic unfair dismissal claim. These claims cannot be justified or defended, and employers cannot escape liability by arguing that it was “fair”.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT WAY TO MANAGE REFUSALS?

- 1 Undertake appropriate risk assessments and in consultation with health and safety representatives, if you have them, or staff, if you don't.
- 2 Communicate your findings and control measures to parents and staff to instil confidence and an opportunity to raise questions or concerns.
- 3 Where staff have specific reservations, speak with them on an individual basis to go through the risk assessment to pinpoint and address their concerns. A vulnerable person's risk assessment may be required to take into account the employee's specific circumstances and the associated workplace risks.
- 4 If their concerns are health related, consider whether medical advice is needed to see whether it is safe for them to be at work. If the employee is disabled, it is important that you make all reasonable adjustments.
- 5 If the employee is still adamant they won't be returning, you will need to consider whether their refusal is reasonable or not. Their refusal to return only has to be reasonable, it doesn't actually have to be correct.

Download free specialist practical guidance, setting-specific risk assessments and policies from the Coronavirus Advice Hub at bit.ly/33UO1WC

Jane Hallas, head of education and solicitor at employment law and HR support firm Ellis Whittam

How to hold successful meetings

Meetings are one of those essential things of management. Early on in my career I was fascinated by them, enjoyed them, studied and analysed them, and even looked forward to them. Fast forward 30 years and I am less enthusiastic. For me, a successful meeting is one that is needed, time and cost efficient and makes decisions or progress.

There are lots of different types of meetings, I am thinking of things like: team meetings (information sharing and consultative), focus group meetings (problem solving or opinion gathering), progress meetings (checking how things are going against a clear plan), one-to-one meetings (often private and personal, or focused on the individual or relationship), workout meetings (to sort things out), reporting meetings (sharing information and holding people to account), team building

meetings (supporting a teams' stages of development), and impromptu meetings (unplanned ones that take you by surprise). There are many more.

ADVICE

- Make sure everyone knows the aim and purpose of meetings.
- Support people to understand what is expected of them.
- Always ask, is a meeting needed? Be bold enough to postpone if not. Think, how much time and money this meeting is costing? The answer may shock you.
- Think about the stage of development your team is in (Tuckman 1965). How should you approach the meeting so it meets the team's needs and helps performance? For example, if the team is storming, I would recommend a coaching style. Pre-meeting discussions would help as well.
- Be prepared. Read the minutes or notes in advance, share a timed agenda or a set of goals.

- Don't always wait for things to be done in meetings, work in-between them as well.
- Meetings are not opportunities to show off; if you want to do that join the theatre.
- You should not aim to hijack people or take people by surprise; instead have pre- or post-meeting conversations to set out what you need. Enable people to be prepared.
- Remember there are always people who will be first to talk and be active; and others will carefully think and reflect, they will want to speak later or at the end. Make sure you give everyone their preferred opportunity.
- Be timely, carefully estimate the time needed (for each item and for the whole meeting) so people can better plan their diaries. There are limits to people's concentration spans. Only in exceptional circumstances should you overrun.
- Circulate brief notes, agreed actions, and/or important points as soon as you can afterwards.

If this advice is followed then we have a chance to ensure meetings are positive and enjoyable, and we can manage them rather than them managing us.



James Hemsall OBE is director of Hemsall's training, research and consultancy. Visit hemsalls.com or follow on Twitter: @hemsalls



Train Online



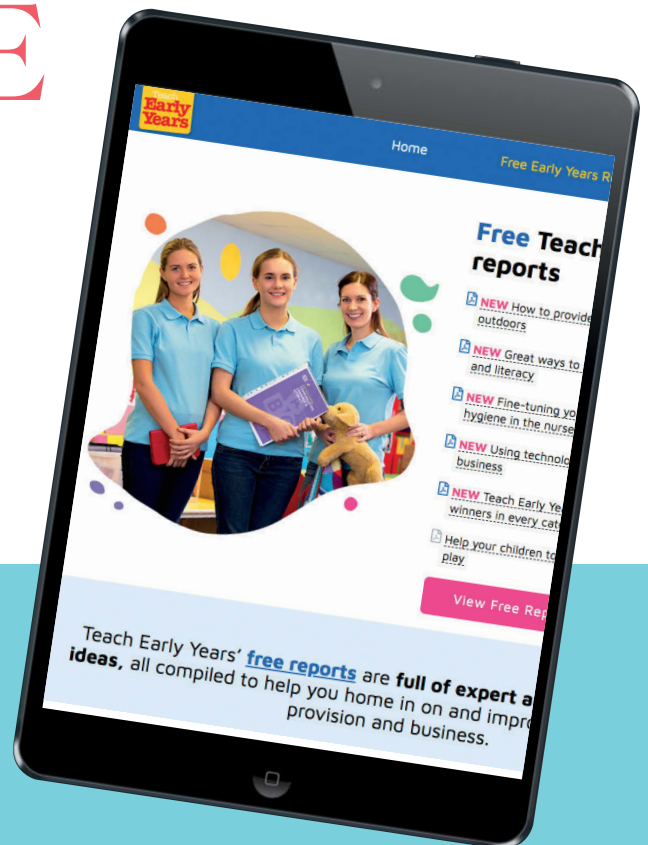
INTENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

This bite-sized NDNA course will help you understand the terms intent, implementation and impact, which fall under the Ofsted judgement area Quality of Education (Education Inspection Framework 2019). In this 1.5 hour course, you will learn how you can assess your practice against these criteria, so that at inspection you can demonstrate how you implement your curriculum and provide evidence on the impact it makes. Visit bit.ly/3kJpiBh

PLANNING FOR NEXT STEPS

This PACEY course is packed full of information to enable you to support individual children's learning and development by planning and ensuring clearly identified next steps. The course covers these topics: identify the importance of planning; define the requirements of a statutory framework, identify the varying factors that shape planning; explore methods for planning including next steps for learning and identify how to evaluate plans. Visit bit.ly/3aiuuXZ learn and develop."

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From computational thinking in the classroom to the latest tracking tools for nurseries – this report ticks every box when it comes to using technology in the early years.



MATT ROBINSON IS SCOTLAND DIRECTOR FOR LEARNING THROUGH LANDSCAPES

Making use of your outdoors in a Covid world

Matt Robinson explains how to use all the space you have to the maximum...



The outdoor space in nursery and the local greenspaces we access have never been so important as they are now. The pandemic and ensuing lockdown was most challenging for our families who lack a personal garden space. I personally can only imagine how the four walls pressed in for some of our children and their parents or guardians.

As we start the journey into what the new normal looks like this autumn, with the myriad of unsolved challenges and unknown factors, we know that to use all the space we have is a key starting point.

By using outdoor and indoor spacing to the maximum, we enable our physical distancing and bubble groups.

The unique nature of outdoors encourages children's imagination, curiosity, risk taking and physical movement in a way that indoors we struggle to match. By adding in the changing days and seasons which nature offers, outdoors becomes a deeply important place for our children to be. Yet we know through lockdown, play parks were closed and movement to access greenspace restricted. So many young children have not had the time outdoors which they benefit from.

We should also be aware of our narrative about being outdoors, possibly tainted with concerns over meeting others, 'bad' weather and 'danger'. We have a duty and challenge to rewrite the narrative into one of outdoors being a safer place, a friendly place, and an option that is good for us and our children.

For many of us working in outdoor play and learning, now feels like quite the moment to really encourage a shift in behaviour.

What about hygiene and cleaning?

Many of you are working through what controls are needed to protect our children and staff, and the use of outdoor spaces needs consideration. There are some excellent guidance documents from the World Health Organisation and UK Government on the management of outdoor spaces (including hygiene and cleaning) which are clear on the subject. The overly simple summary would be:

- Outdoors is safer than indoors, so focus more on indoors and 'squeeze points' such as entrances and exits.
- Handwashing is the main area of infection control, make sure handwashing is available outdoors.

- You can wipe or submerge some toys and surfaces, but this is not a major factor in infection control.
- Don't hose, spray or jet wash to clean, you only get the virus airborne where it is a greater risk.

For more information go to <https://bit.ly/2PbCekJ>

How to increase capacity and use the space in all seasons?

To enable learning in every wind, sun, rain and snow conditions, shelter and shade are key. Many nursery and school yards are an open wind-tunnel where the sun beats and the rain drums down. Simple tarpaulins above, bamboo screening on fences and planting all play their part for a quick and cheap fix to creating a more balanced micro-climate. Long term, canopies, solid wind-breaks and cosy areas can all be added when you invest thought and finances.

Do you currently have a corner behind that shed, or indeed a shed which is full of little-used resources? Now is the time to look again and consider if your need for physical space outweighs the storage need, or if you can use spaces you have shied away from in the past. A top tip here is that mirrors or shiny surfaces can provide a view into hidden areas for modest cost. Even the most challenging of tarmac can have added nature. Using large planters we can add good sized shrubs, flowers and event small trees. Many nurseries have repurposed containers such as potato boxes, cut down stainless air-vents or culvert pipes, or used drainpipes, wellies and baskets for vegetables.

Planting for seasonal change, and encouraging our children to access the planting up close and personal, is probably the biggest improvement you can make to a nursery space.

One area to consider is how much space a particular activity takes up – physically and timewise. As an example, does your bike riding or football use occupy a large space which a few times a week could be used for another provocation or play



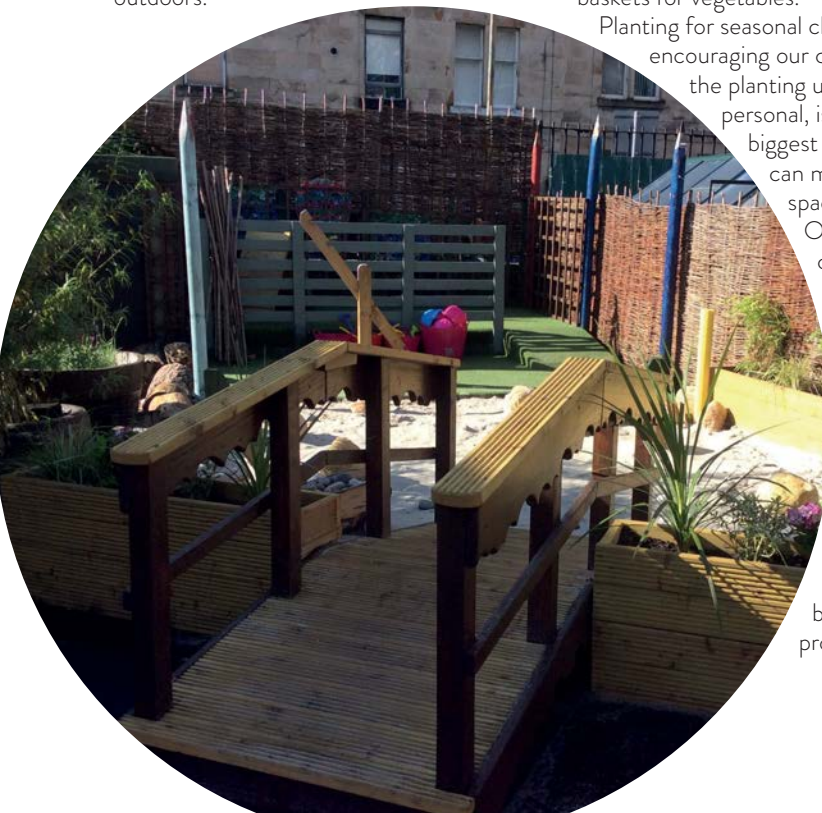
opportunity?

Try gathering outdoors – parents can drop off or collect children from outdoor space. This can reduce the time to head indoors and gather, only to head back outdoors shortly afterwards. A further benefit currently is that parents can see the children at play or chat to staff across a fence or outdoor space, more safely than trying to meet in a building.

These changes will be a challenge for many staff and parents, and therefore we need to support them in this. Some areas are very practical – how do we support staff and families to have access to warm and waterproof clothing for example. However, much of the support is around staff confidence and skills, helping our colleagues feel confident. For parents it is often helping them understand the true benefits, many of which are only seen long term as we see more confident, emotionally and physically robust children, risk literate and with a love of nature and recreation outdoors.

For many of us working in outdoor play and learning, now feels like quite the moment to really encourage a shift in behaviour. Taking play and learning outdoors is not the responsibility of one – it is a shared endeavour, resourced as well as any other area of our setting, and provided to the benefit of our children. The pandemic has focused many minds on what really matters – and in early years, outdoors and nature really matters.

LtL is a UK charity dedicated to enhancing outdoor learning and play for children. Visit ltl.org.uk/free-resources to download free early years resources.



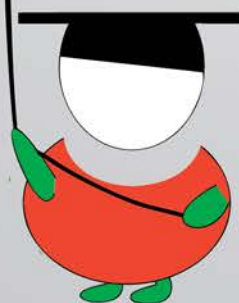
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DR JO VERRILL IS MANAGING DIRECTOR AT CEEDA

A long road to recovery

Low rates of occupancy due to the Covid-19 pandemic means tough times ahead, warns Jo Verrill...

Occupancy is the life-blood of early years provision with recent research from Ceeda revealing a sector in very poor health. In April 2019 occupancy averaged 77 per cent in private voluntary and independent nurseries and pre-schools; in the week commencing July 6 it averaged just 48 per cent. Childminders have seen occupancy flatlining at an average of 35 per cent in recent weeks (bit.ly/33IKKQw). A look at the evidence base suggests a long and bumpy road to recovery.

DECLINING EMPLOYMENT LEVELS

To date official headline measures of employment and unemployment are largely unchanged due in most part to the cushioning effect of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Uncertainty about future employment is increasing, however, as the end of furlough support draws near. Announcements of large-scale redundancies across retail, travel, hospitality and leisure industries are increasing at pace. Many posts are in lower-paid sectors, impacting low-income families hard and reinforcing existing inequalities.

Job vacancies in the UK in April to June 2020 were at their lowest level since the Vacancy Survey began in April to June 2001, at an estimated 333,000; this is 23 per cent lower than the previous record low in April to June 2009 (bit.ly/3kslrXT).

CHANGING WORK PATTERNS

While the government has shifted its message from an emphasis on home-working to a return to the workplace, working from home is likely to remain more common than in the past. The implications of this changing work pattern for long-term childcare demand are not yet clear.

Analysis by the Office for National Statistics shows that jobs earning higher hourly wages are most adaptable to home working, potentially impacting on private fee income in affluent areas. The analysis found the top 20 per cent of workers most likely to be able to work from home are fairly representative of the gender split in the workforce as a whole: 49 per cent are women (bit.ly/2DBNCE7).

Any lasting impact will of course rest on the extent to which childcare and work commitments can be met on a long-term basis at home – this is far from clear.

LOCAL OUTBREAKS

Local Covid-19 outbreaks are likely to factor in the coming months, creating unpredictable occupancy troughs at local level. The impact on providers will largely be determined by how quickly outbreaks are identified and contained through national track and trace strategies and local public health measures together determining the duration and severity of any lockdown arrangements.

When it comes to isolated outbreaks within a specific setting, a

recently reported experience suggests recovery can be swift when the incident is managed well.

REDUCED ACCESS TO CARE FROM EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS

One feature of the pandemic which may inflate formal childcare demand is sadly the greater vulnerability of older age groups to Covid-19 and their related withdrawal from informal childcare support.

CLOSURE OF THE CORONAVIRUS JOB RETENTION SCHEME

The ending of furlough support is a double-edged sword for the sector. The furlough scheme depressed demand for formal provision, giving working parents the option to care for and educate their children at home. A return to work on original terms and conditions of employment is likely to encourage a return to previous childcare arrangements. Retraction of the scheme will also mean redundancies and possible reductions in working hours and earnings, tempering demand. Finally, retraction of furlough support (and other forms of assistance) will mean providers are faced with the full cost of their payroll at a time when demand is still recovering, and funding rates are falling significantly short of operating costs. The toxic mix of low occupancy, increased costs and funding shortfalls is likely to fuel setting closures in 2020.

These findings are drawn from Ceeda's independent AboutEY research programme. Register for our newsletter (bit.ly/2XLEnbk) to get all the latest insights.





BEV SEYMOUR IS A NDNA SENIOR EARLY YEARS MANAGER

Q&A: *How has technology changed training?*

During the sudden lockdown from March onwards, IT technology became crucial to communication and training. NDNA sped up its development of live virtual classrooms, which is the nearest to face-to-face training that we can achieve.

Q How does this differ from other forms of online learning?

A The live virtual classroom (LVC) provides the opportunity for live interaction with other participants and with the trainer. A group of students come together virtually in real time with a trainer to learn together. The LVC is an added enhancement to NDNA's training offer, allowing us to bring together learners from far and wide in a highly-interactive virtual online platform.

Q What are the benefits of the LVC?

A The LVC takes online learning to a new level. Students stay engaged because they are able to fully participate in the training by using a range of interactive tools. Throughout the training they are able to communicate with both the trainer and other learners. The trainer is on hand to talk them through the subject matter, share videos and documents, facilitate discussions, answer any questions and share their insight. Students undertake a variety of practical activities including splitting up into small groups for discussions. This allows them to share their own experiences with learners across the country – widening their

knowledge and understanding of how practitioners across the UK differ in their approach and practice.

The sector has told us what their priorities were for training and NDNA have adapted them for the LVC. Each topic is delivered over two weeks through 90-minute modules. Having a break between sessions allows students time to consider how the learning can be fully implemented in their own practice and setting. The courses range between two and four modules – two being the equivalent of a half-day face-to-face course and four is the equivalent of a full-day course.

Each module has its own fully interactive handbook which is downloaded prior to starting the next module. Between sessions learners complete a gap task to extend their learning and reflect on the course

content. They revisit these and share their experiences together as a group at the beginning of the next module.

Q Next best thing to face-to-face learning?

A Live virtual training sessions are led and facilitated by trainers with expertise in early years. The subject matter is laid out in a rich and creative manner and learners can ask questions just like they could on face-to-face training, by using a headset or a chat stream. The tools available in the LVC – such as the whiteboard, poll questions and breakout rooms make it easy for the students and trainer to interact freely.

For some learners and settings, LVC can be more convenient and cost effective in terms of flexibility, travel and staff time. Learners can access the training from anywhere – at work or home – and practitioners do not have to take a full day out from their setting to travel to a training venue. LVC provides many benefits and similarities to a face-to-face learning environment.

As with face-to-face training, delegates are provided with a handbook containing a PowerPoint presentation, handouts and activities. At the end of the last module, learners complete a quiz and download a certificate.

Q How interactive is it?

A There are many interactive elements to the LVC, including emojis and raising your hand if you



have any questions or you are unsure about any aspect of the course. Students can use a live chat stream to ask or answer questions from the trainer and there are break out rooms for smaller group discussion.

Other interactive elements include polls which use multi-choice questions, multiple chat boxes for simultaneous discussions and a whiteboard to share annotations and drawings.

Designers have focused heavily on providing as much interactivity as possible so that participants don't have to listen for too long. Interaction supports deeper learning and understanding.

What IT knowledge is required?

Students only require basic IT knowledge. For many people, this may be the first time they have accessed a live virtual training session. At the start of the session, the classroom host will give learners an opportunity to try out the main functions of the classroom and

introduce students to each other. The host will then be available in the background throughout the session to give support and help to learners as needed. The trainer and host are there to make this the best possible experience for learners.

Delegates who are new to the technology can also take part in a "test session" prior to embarking on their course to check their internet connection. These take place weekly.

What subjects can I learn with the LVC?

The list of course topics is expanding weekly, developed based on what the sector has told us they need. It includes popular NDNA courses such as Advanced Safeguarding, Basic Child Protection, Supporting Staff Wellbeing, Behaviour Management and Brilliant Babies.

How has it gone so far?

The LVC has been a great success with everyone able to interact with

each other and build their professional development through this new format. Delegates have stayed engaged throughout the modules due to the interactive components in the courses and everyone has been able to get to grips with the IT element. It has been wonderful to see practitioners increase in confidence in the new platform and be able to share ideas and learn from the training despite not being able to get that face-to-face environment.

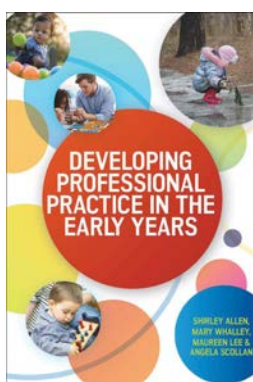
Plans to expand for the future?

Listening to feedback from our members and by popular demand, we are widening our course programme for September to include further titles from our most popular training courses. Brand new courses include supporting children with Autism, Developing quality outdoor provision and Introduction to the Revised EYFS to support practitioners to be ready for implementation of the new framework in September 2021.

CPD BOOKSHELF

THREE READS THAT WILL IMPROVE YOUR PRACTICE...

Developing Professional Practice in the Early Years (McGraw Hill, £21)



Developing Professional Practice in the Early Years, by Shirley Allen, Mary E. Whalley, Maureen Lee and Angela Scollan, encourages the reader to critically consider key aspects of early childhood education and care. Each chapter will help the reader to engage with challenging concepts and ideas.

Visit: mheducation.co.uk

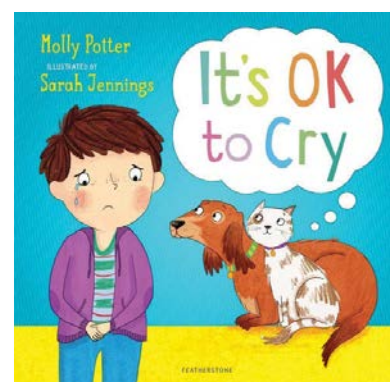
50 Fantastic Ideas for Forest School (Bloomsbury, £9.89)



Jamie Victoria Barnes, creator of The Childcare Guru, uses her wealth of knowledge to present an invaluable resource filled with activities that spark creativity and encourage development and learning in a natural environment, perfect for helping young children enjoy a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

Visit: bloomsbury.com

It's OK to Cry (Bloomsbury, £9.89)



Molly Potter covers a whole range of emotions from those that are uncomfortable to happy feelings.

Perfect for starting those all-important conversations, it includes colourful illustrations, child-friendly strategies and vocabulary for managing feelings, and helpful notes for parents, carers and practitioners.

Visit: bloomsbury.com



COVID-19

Infection prevention and control measures

In these uncharted times we find ourselves in, how can you be sure you are doing everything you can to keep the children in your care, their families and your staff as safe as possible.

Infection prevention and control has always been a critical part of everyday life within a nursery setting to prevent both staff and children contracting and/or passing on infections and diseases. The biggest risk used to be activities dealing with clinical waste (nappy changing and toileting to you and me) and although this remains a high-risk activity, and staying vigilant is crucial, we have a new and more scary enemy. One that you can't see, you can't hear and you can't smell. Yet over the past few months we have all heard about it and life has changed dramatically all due to Coronavirus (Covid-19).

In order to understand what we need to do to help prevent people becoming ill from this virus we need to understand what it is and how it is transmitted in order to break the chain of infection.

Chain of infection

Covid-19 is a newly discovered infectious disease and while most people infected will only experience a mild to moderate respiratory illness (similar to seasonal flu), and generally recover without needing specialist medical treatment, some people with underlying medical problems, such as cardiovascular

disease, chronic respiratory disease or cancer, are not so lucky and are more likely to develop serious illness needing medical interventions.

The spread of infection is also known as 'The Chain of Infection' and like all chains by breaking a link we can prevent infection spreading.

The links in the chain are known as:

- The organism – the bacteria, virus or fungi.
- The reservoir – a reservoir can be environmental, such as the workplace setting, the water supply or in a living organism such as a rodent or bird. Humans are the only reservoir for many human pathogens.
- Portal of exit - how the organism leaves the reservoir. It could leave in faeces, blood, mucus, in contaminated water or in the bloody meal of an insect.
- Transmission – how the organism is transmitted from one host to the next host.
- Portal of Entry - how the organism enters the body.
- Vulnerable Host - commonly the most vulnerable are the very young, the elderly and people with a suppressed immune system.

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) can be spread by both direct and indirect transmission.

This virus is primarily spread via respiratory droplets from an infected individual being transmitted to another person during coughing and sneezing but also happens during breathing and talking and this, in turn, can infect them. This is direct transmission.

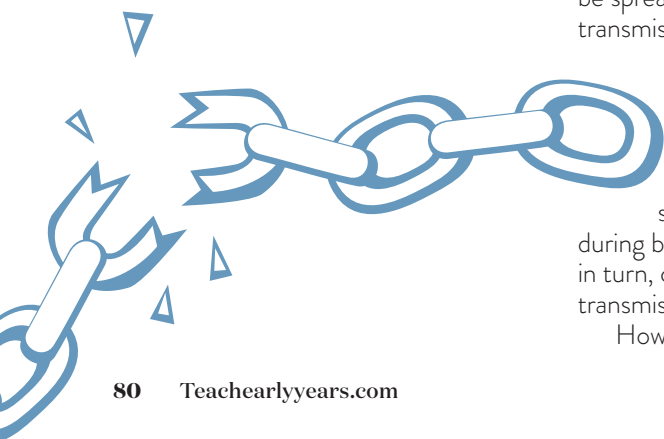
However, the infected droplets can

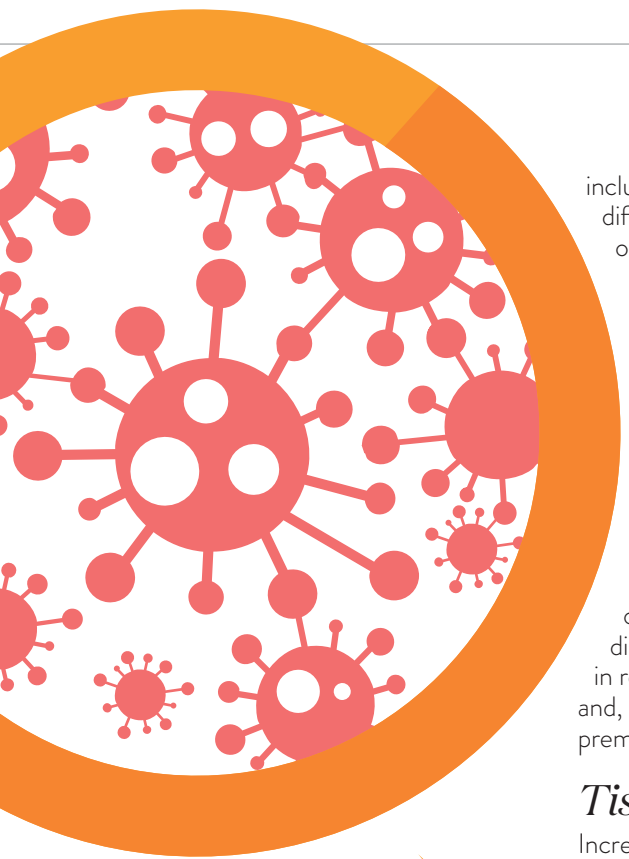
also get on to surfaces and live outside the body for some time, these surfaces are then touched and the virus can be introduced to an uninfected person, generally via their mouth but could be through their eyes or nose, and that is known as in-direct transmission.

So relating this to the links in the chain we can see the following:

- The organism is COVID-19.
- The reservoir is the infected person.
- The portal of exit is infected respiratory droplets.
- Transmission is either via direct contact coughing, sneezing etc or in-direct living on contaminated surfaces.
- Portal of entry is people breathing in the droplets, or touching their mouth, eye or nose.
- Vulnerable host – anyone can be infected but vulnerable people mentioned above are most at risk.

Breaking a link in this chain will stop the spread of infection, so how do we do that?





Infected

If you, a staff member or a child is feeling unwell and displaying symptoms of Covid-19 they should not come to nursery. If they are at the setting when they become ill they should be isolated where possible and collected straight away or if an adult they should go home, self-isolate (following government guidelines) and get tested. This will prevent the infected person (portal of exit) coming into contact with other people and prevent the spread of the virus.

As a nursery you should be fully engaged and understand the NHS test and trace process so that you know what you must do should a child or staff member within your setting be suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19. You must also ensure you know how to contact your local PHE Health Protection Team if you have a confirmed case or rise in your overall suspected cases.

Social distancing

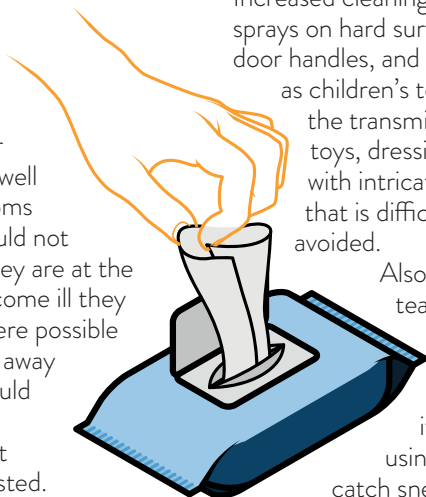
Use social distancing measures where possible. With young children this can be extremely difficult so other measures which can be taken may

include minimising contact between different classes i.e. staggering use of the garden or meal rooms so different classes don't mix, trying not to mix staff class teams, keeping where possible the same groups of people together (staff and children) and making sure communal rooms, such as sensory rooms or soft play areas, are thoroughly cleaned in between use.

Stagger collection and drop off times to prevent large influx of people at one time, as well as discouraging parents congregating in reception areas and entrances and, where possible, not entering the premises.

Tissues

Increased cleaning with anti-bacterial sprays on hard surfaces i.e. worktops, door handles, and even resources such as children's toys all help prevent the transmission. Children's soft toys, dressing up clothes, toys with intricate parts or any toy that is difficult to clean should be avoided.



Also, promoting and teaching children good respiratory hygiene using the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach using disposal tissues to catch sneezes and coughs, throwing them in the bin straight away and then washing hands. As well as encouraging children not to touch their mouths, eyes and nose (which is far easier said than done).

Behaviour

Recently I was asked a question regarding the use of air conditioning within a setting. The risk of spreading COVID-19 via air-con is extremely low as long as there is an adequate supply of fresh air or ventilation.



However, if you use a centralised system which removes and circulates air to different rooms it is recommended that

ADVICE

My top tip would be to use signage and posters dotted around your setting. This is a great way to remind employers, parents and older children to practice good hand washing techniques, to use the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' technique and to remind people to avoid touching their faces especially mouth, eyes and nose.

There are many available that can be either purchased or downloaded for free. Using a good search engine you should be able to find many organisations that have produced them, including The World Health Organisation (WHO), National Health Service (NHS) and your local health authority to name just a few. You could even make your own. I would recommend laminating them so they too can be wiped clean to keep everyone safe.

the recirculation be turned off and a fresh air supply is used instead.

There may be times when children's behaviour may increase the risk of droplets such as licking, biting or spitting. Where it cannot be discouraged or safely managed the use of additional PPE should be considered.

Thorough and regular hand washing with soap and running water for 20 seconds is an effective way to stop the transmission and where this isn't possible hand sanitizer should be used. This is to help prevent the portal of entry.

Staff and children who are more susceptible may need to be shielded from society and should be following the current advice from the NHS and government.

Laura West is the childcare health and safety specialist at MCW Nursery Support Service Ltd, a family-run business specialising in health and safety, auditing and training for the childcare industry. Visit mcwnss.co.uk Read Laura's advice on infection control - visit bit.do/TEYInc



Read more from Laura on Teachwire – visit bit.do/TEYlw



JONNY KEEN IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND FORMER NURSERY PRACTITIONER.

Cheap and cheerful

*Coming-up with new activities doesn't have to break the bank, says **Jonny Keen**...*



Anyone working with children every day knows how it is. There's an endless struggle to think up new and improved activities to entertain and engage the little ones and once we've exhausted the basics it can be difficult to think of new resources to use. Especially on a tight budget. Fear not! There are plenty of other resources that are both cheap and incredibly flexible. I've compiled a few of my own favourites for you to try.

"Paper plates are another fantastically versatile art supply."



Ice

I'm not suggesting freezing the entire water area and letting the kids contract

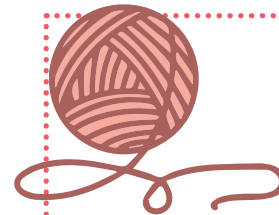
frostbite. Instead, incorporate different shaped ice cubes into the water tray. Use a range of moulds, anything from jelly moulds to cups and bowls.

Ice is also a great table top activity, if you can use some kind of tray or plastic covering to stop water getting everywhere. It can be crushed, cut up or slid around. It's a great conversation starter to discuss basic science.



Rice and pasta

Dry rice and pasta are cheap and easy to store and form the basis of several activities. Both go great inside homemade musical instruments or rattles, or work well in counting activities. They're also a staple in art projects. You can get really creative here. Paint pasta tubes green and thread them together, then hang them from the ceiling to create vines for a jungle theme.



Yarn

Yarn is great for a number of art projects; make spooky spiderwebs or

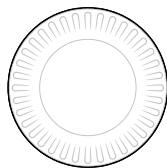
roof hangings, your own soft toys or anything else you can come up with. This is great for developing motor skills. Kids can use yarn to make threaded patterns which helps them develop their fine motor skills and the bright colours and soft textures are appealing to children of all ages.



Plastic cutlery

A fork or spoon can be a great alternative to a paint brush, creating exciting shapes. Forks, knives and spoons can

all make intriguing patterns and different sides of each utensil will create different effects. Children can even decorate the cutlery itself, using glitter, or glue. Due to the risk assessments required, this one is probably better suited to preschoolers than toddlers, but it's feasible in small, supervised groups.



Paper plates

Paper plates are another fantastically versatile art supply. You can use

them to make masks, collages and decorations, or simply as an alternative to paper. Since they're a bit sturdier than regular paper, they're often great for the little ones prone to tearing their masterpieces before they've ever had time to stick them up on the kitchen fridge.



Sand

Dry sand is great for art projects. Stick it to paper with PVA glue to create appealing, textural beach scenes or create a seaside habitat for a nature activity. Pre-school aged children don't really care about how snazzy their resources are. Far more important is the enthusiasm and creativity of the grown ups caring for them.

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