



Hampshire  
County Council

Early Years and Childcare  
Training and Support



# Ordinarily Available Provision in EYFS

A how-to-guide to implementation



Hampshire  
County Council

Services for Young Children Early Years Advisory Team

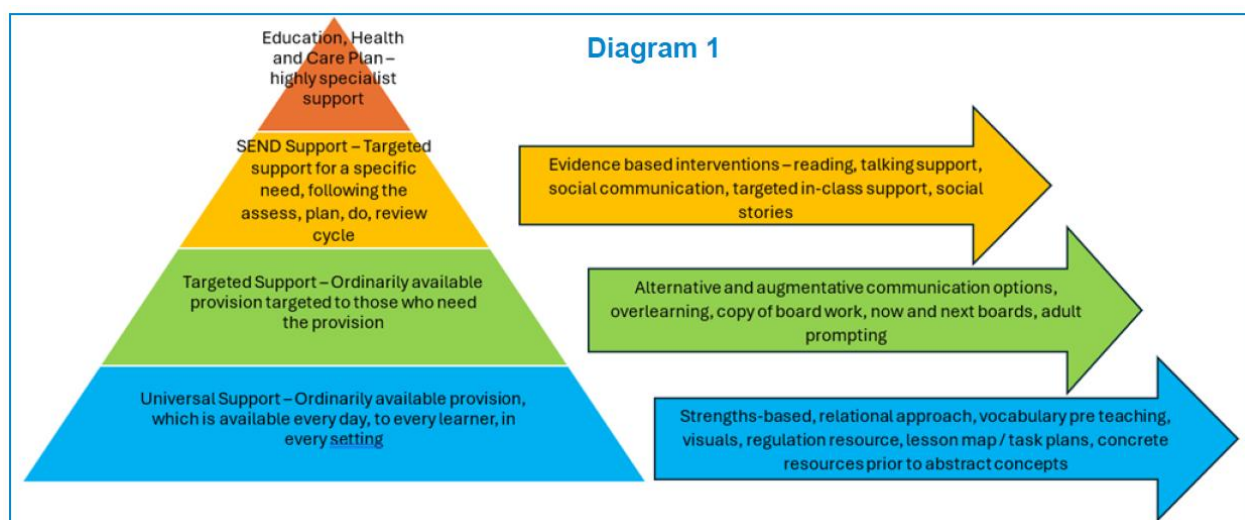
# Contents

Title	Link to page
Introduction	<a href="#">Introduction</a>
Section 1 – Essential knowledge	
Unique Child	<a href="#">Unique child</a>
Positive Relationships	<a href="#">Positive Relationships</a>
Enabling Environment	<a href="#">Enabling Environment</a>
Learning and Development	<a href="#">Learning</a>
Role of the Adult	<a href="#">Role of the Adult</a>
Communication and Language	<a href="#">Communication</a>
High Quality Interactions	<a href="#">Interactions</a>
Vertical Transitions	<a href="#">Vertical Transitions</a>
Horizontal Transitions	<a href="#">Horizontal Transitions</a>
Parent Partnerships	<a href="#">Parent Partnership</a>
Section 2 – Strategies – a ‘how to’ guide	
Sense of Belonging	<a href="#">Belonging</a>
Organised and Accessible	<a href="#">Organised</a>
Use of Outdoors	<a href="#">Outdoors</a>
Language Rich and Communication Friendly Environments	<a href="#">CFE</a>
Visuals	<a href="#">Visuals</a>
Low Arousal Environment	<a href="#">Low Arousal Environment</a>
Sensory Exposure	<a href="#">Sensory Exposure</a>
Sensory Stories	<a href="#">Sensory Stories</a>
Regulation Toolbox	<a href="#">Regulation Toolbox</a>
Calm Spaces	<a href="#">Calm Spaces</a>
Schemas and Play Progression	<a href="#">Schemas</a>
Recognitions	<a href="#">Recognitions</a>

# Introduction

Creating inclusive, supportive, and high-quality early years environments is a fundamental goal of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). One of the key ways this is achieved is through **ordinarily available provision**—the everyday strategies, resources, and adaptations that early years settings are expected to provide for all children, all of the time, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), without the need for additional funding or formal diagnosis.

**Ordinarily available provision** refers to the consistent, proactive practices that ensure all children can access learning and thrive in their early years setting. This includes differentiated teaching, flexible routines, accessible environments, and nurturing relationships that support a wide range of developmental needs. These provisions are not ‘extras’—they are part of the offer that every child must receive.



*Image taken from HIAS ordinarily available provision and special educational needs and disabilities guidance*

This practical guide has been designed to complement both the HIAS ordinarily available provision and special educational needs and disabilities guidance and the SEN Support Guidance for Early Years Providers. In the above triangle it focuses on the bottom two sections – universal and targeted support. For more specific information on more targeted support provided at SEN support or EHCP level, please refer to the other two guides.



This guide will walk you through practical steps, examples, and reflective prompts to help you embed ordinarily available provision into your setting's daily practice. It is not designed to be read in one sitting or to provide a checklist of everything you need to provide. It is designed as a practical 'how to' guide to dip in and out of to support you in evaluating the effectiveness and quality of your ordinarily available provision. For example, one section or strategy at a time could



be explored as a team during staff meetings to support you in evaluating what you already offer and how you could further strengthen your practices.



**Section 1** begins with the '[Unique Child](#)' and covers the essential knowledge and skills all practitioners need to enable high quality inclusive teaching in the early years. It covers the four main themes of the Early Years Foundation Stage along with some other key areas, such as high-quality interactions and parent partnerships. Each area within this section includes some reflective questions to support you in evaluating your own practice, along with some suggested further links and training to access for continuous professional development within these areas.



**Section 2** begins with '[Developing a Sense of Belonging](#)' and takes a range of different strategies and provides a 'how to' guide on how to implement this within your setting. Each strategy includes an explanation of why this would be an important part of your ordinarily available provision along with some photographic examples and videos highlighting what this would look like for the younger years, preschool and Year R. Each section also includes some top tips to support you in implementing this within your provision.

This guide has been created with images, practice ideas and support from schools and early years settings in [Hampshire](#). It serves to both share and celebrate the high-quality ordinarily available provision across the county, facilitated by skilful and dedicated early years professionals who are committed to giving every child in Hampshire the best start in life.

We will continue to update the guide to include more examples, photos and videos, so please do fill out the feedback form to provide any suggestions for anything else you would like to see included. [FEEDBACK FORM](#)



# Foreword

The early years are a time of wonder, discovery, and immense potential. Every child deserves to feel valued, included, and empowered to thrive—regardless of their starting point or individual needs. This belief sits at the heart of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and prevails throughout this guide to Ordinarily Available Provision.

Across Hampshire, practitioners, teachers, and leaders have demonstrated unwavering commitment to creating inclusive, nurturing environments where all children can flourish. This guide brings together this excellent practice in the form of practical strategies, reflective questions, and real-world examples, offering a clear and accessible roadmap for embedding inclusive practice into everyday provision.

Ordinarily Available Provision is not an 'extra'—it is the foundation of high-quality early years education. It is about the consistent, proactive steps we take to ensure every child can access learning, participate fully, and develop a strong sense of belonging. This guide recognises that inclusion is not a destination, but an ongoing journey—one that requires curiosity, collaboration, and a willingness to adapt and grow.

Whether you are new to early years or an experienced practitioner, I hope you find inspiration and practical support within these pages. Use this guide as a tool for reflection, a source of ideas, and a prompt for professional dialogue with your team. It is also rich in links to resources and excellent training opportunities. Together, we can continue to build settings where every child's strengths are recognised, every family's voice is heard, and every practitioner is empowered to make a difference.

Thank you for your commitment to inclusion, and for giving every child the best possible start in life.

Natalie Smith

Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion, Hampshire County Council

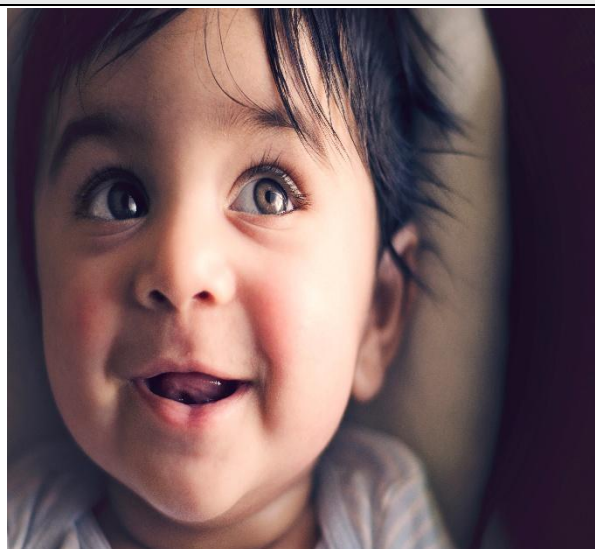
# Unique Child

## What does the statutory guidance say?

“Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured.” (Page 7)

“Practitioners should be ambitious for all children. To do this they must consider the individual needs, interests, and development of each child in their care. They must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all areas of learning and development.” (Page 16)

“Practitioners must stimulate children’s interests, responding to each child’s emerging needs and guiding their development through warm, positive interactions coupled with secure routines for play and learning.” (Page 17)



## How does this link to our Ordinarily Available Provision?



Recognising the unique child is essential for inclusion in the early years because every child has **their own strengths**, interests, and ways of learning. By valuing each child as an individual, practitioners can tailor support to meet diverse needs and ensure that all children feel respected, understood, and included. This approach helps build confidence and **a sense of belonging**, creating a foundation where every child can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

It is important to also consider children’s **Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning (CoETL)** when considering

the unique child, to ensure we are taking account of how all children learn. By encouraging playing and exploring, active learning and creating and thinking critically, we will be helping all children to feel confident, capable and valued regardless of their background or ability. **Valuing children’s interests** alongside how they learn will also help to promote curiosity, resilience and independence in all children.

## Key questions to consider?

- Are your children’s interests reflected in your environment?
- How do you gather information about your children’s interests from home?
- How do you ensure children’s Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning are fostered?
- How does each child’s key person use what they know about their children to plan meaningful experiences for them?
- How do you consider and plan for each child to be able to communicate in their preferred way (e.g. verbally or non-verbally)?
- How do all practitioners carefully consider each unique child’s possible barriers to learning and consider how they are going to adapt the curriculum or environment to meet their needs?
- How do you celebrate individual children’s successes and achievements?

## Helpful links

- SfYC Moodle – Inclusion and Diversity: [SFYC: All courses](#)
- SfYC Moodle - Help for Year R Teachers – supporting vulnerable children in Year R: [Course: Help for Year R Teachers – supporting vulnerable children in Year R](#)
- Family Blog - Nancy Stewart Interview: The Characteristics of Effective Learning: [Nancy Stewart: Characteristics of Effective Learning | Family](#)
- Inclusion in Early Years – What is it?: [Inclusion in Early Years – What is it? | A Unique Child | Teach Early Years](#)
- EEF - The unique child: tailoring personalised support in the early years: [The unique child: tailoring personalised support in the early... | EEF](#)
- Birth to 5 Matters - Promoting voice and inclusion: [Promoting voice and inclusion – Birth To 5 Matters](#)

## Training to support continuous professional development in this area

**For Schools:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)  
Search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

- Our introduction to EYFS training for schools – Early Years Essentials
- Inclusion in Year R - Ordinarily Available Provision
- Inclusion in Year R – Schemas for Schools
- Inclusion in Year R – Let's talk Transitions and Assessment

**For Settings:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders \(Flipbook\)](#)

The Unique Child is threaded through:

- The Wonder Years [CLICK HERE](#)
- Nurturing Beginnings [CLICK HERE](#)
- I Spy a Schema [CLICK HERE](#)

## The Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning

### How adults can support children's development as learners

**Key messages for fostering playing and exploring** *Further examples on page 49*

Ensure children have uninterrupted time to play and explore.

Model self-talk, describing your actions in play.

Focus on processes and not outcomes – not the end quality of what was produced, but the challenges faced, the effort, thought and learning involved, and the enjoyment.

**Key messages for fostering active learning** *Further examples on page 75*

Observe and reflect on what arouses children's curiosity, looking for signs of deep involvement to identify learning that is intrinsically motivated.

Enable children to exercise choice over their activities – setting their own goals and methods.

Encourage children to persist with difficulties, trying again or in a different way.

**Key messages for fostering creating and thinking critically** *Further examples on page 101*

Model being a thinker, showing that you don't always know, are curious and sometimes puzzled and can think and find out.

Be a sensitive conversational partner and co-thinker.

Encourage divergent thinking: *What else is possible?*

How children learn. The characteristics of effective early learning.  
Nancy Stewart, Early Education, 2011

### The 100 Languages of Children No way. The hundred is there.

The child is made of one hundred  
the child has  
a hundred languages  
a hundred hands  
a hundred thoughts  
a hundred ways of thinking  
of playing, of speaking

A hundred always a hundred  
ways of listening  
of marvelling of loving  
a hundred joys  
for singing and understanding  
a hundred worlds  
to discover  
a hundred worlds  
to invent  
a hundred worlds  
to dream

The child has  
A hundred languages  
(and a hundred, hundred, hundred more)  
But they steal ninety-nine.

The school and the culture  
separate the head from the body.  
They tell the child:  
to think without hands  
to do without head  
to listen and not to speak  
to understand without joy  
to love and to marvel  
only at Easter and at Christmas.

They tell the child:  
to discover the world already there  
and of the hundred  
they steal ninety-nine.

They tell the child:  
that work and play  
reality and fantasy  
science and imagination  
sky and earth  
reason and dream  
are things  
that do not belong together  
and thus they tell the child  
that the hundred is not there.

The child says:  
No way. The hundred is there.

Loris Malaguzzi

(founder of Reggio Emilia Approach)  
Translated by Lella Gandini

We cannot predict what challenges children will face in their unknown futures in a complex and rapidly changing world. The best preparation we can give them in their early years is to promote positive dispositions by providing living experiences of making choices, innovating, taking responsibility, facing challenge, thinking flexibly and critically, and learning how to learn so that they will be able to respond to their unfolding futures. Supporting children in the Characteristics of Effective Learning, a statutory element of the EYFS, is a central responsibility in early years provision.

p.22 [Birth To 5 Matters](#)





# Positive Relationships

## What does the statutory guidance say?



“Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.” (Page 7)

“Strong, warm and supportive relationships with adults enable children to learn how to understand their own feelings and those of others. Children should be supported to manage emotions, develop a positive sense of self, set themselves simple goals, have confidence in their own abilities, to persist and wait for what they want and direct attention as necessary.” (Page 9 – PSED Educational Programme)

“Children need to build an attachment with their key person for their confidence and well-being. The key person also promotes children’s learning by developing a deep understanding of their individual needs and children can particularly benefit from their modelling and support.” (Page 17)

“Children learn best when they are healthy, safe, secure, when their individual needs are met, and when they have positive relationships with the people caring for them.” (Page 22)

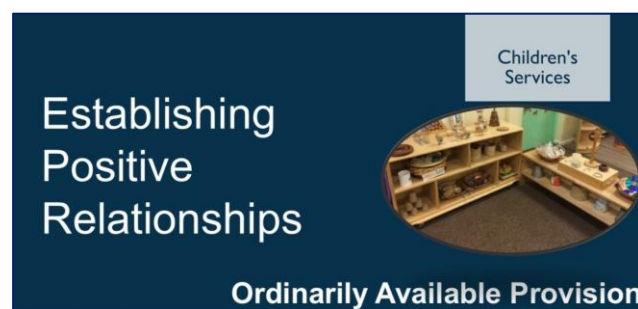
“Each child must be assigned a key person. Their role is to help ensure that every child’s care is tailored to meet their individual needs, to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents and/or carers.” (Page 28)

## How does this link to our Ordinarily Available Provision?

Positive relationships are fundamental for a child’s well-being, cognitive development and sense of self. As practitioners it is vital that we **build relationships with both children and their parents** to ensure all children’s needs are met. When a child’s needs are fully met this enables them to feel safe and secure, which in turn will support their independence and confidence and allow them to build other meaningful relationships as they develop. Our positive relationships with children will also support them in developing a sense of self. Children need to feel valued and understood as an individual – this will in turn support their understanding of inclusion and diversity.



Click on the images below to watch some videos with further information on the importance of positive relationships and some practical tips to support fostering these.



### Key questions to consider?

- Do you have an effective key person system in place?
- How do you gather information about your children so their care can be tailored to their individual needs?
- How do you ensure consistency in care and individualised approaches when a key person changes or is absent?
- Do you have time within the provision to build positive relationships and support children in developing crucial PSED skills?
- How do you build positive relationships with families?

See the section on '[Developing a Sense of Belonging](#)' to further explore how this could be implemented.

### Helpful links

- Help for providers - Relationships: [Help for early years providers : Relationships](#)
- Help for providers – Sense of self: [Help for early years providers : Sense of self](#)
- Family Blog – Positive Behaviour support in the Early Years: [Positive behaviour support in the Early Years | Family](#)
- Beacon House – Attachment strategies: [The-Space-In-Between-1.pdf](#)
- EEF – Early Years Evidence Store – PSED: [EEF | Personal Social and Emotional Development](#)
- Barnardos - The Key Person Approach: [Barnardos-Key-Person-Booklet.pdf](#)

### Training to support continuous professional development in this area

**For Schools:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

Search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

- Our introduction to EYFS training for schools – Early Years Essentials
- Inclusion in Year R - Ordinarily Available Provision
- Inclusion in Year R – Schemas for Schools
- Inclusion in Year R – Let's talk Transitions and Assessment
- Positive Beginnings: Sparking Executive Function

**For Settings:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders \(Flipbook\)](#)

- Wonder years [CLICK HERE](#)
- Nurturing beginnings – understanding babies in the prime areas of learning and development [CLICK HERE](#)
- Sustained Shared thinking in EYFS [CLICK HERE](#)
- Positive PSED [CLICK HERE](#)

# Enabling Environment

## What does the statutory guidance say?

Reducing overwhelm in the early years can significantly support communication and language development. When children are in a calm and focused environment, they are better able to listen, process information, and engage in meaningful interactions.



Careful zoning   Neutral backgrounds   Less is more

Background noise   Accessibility of resources   Neutral backgrounds

Hampshire County Council   Services for Young Children: Early Years Advisory Team

“Children learn and develop well in enabling environments with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time.” (Page 7)



## How does this link to our Ordinarily Available Provision?

Enabling environments are key to inclusion in the early years because they provide spaces where every child feels safe, valued, and able to participate fully. These environments are thoughtfully designed to reflect and respect children's diverse backgrounds, needs, and interests.

By offering accessible resources, flexible routines, and opportunities for choice and independence, enabling environments support all children to learn, explore, and thrive at their own pace.

Communication Rich Environments

Cosy spaces

Communication-friendly spaces and cosy corners are highly beneficial. These areas can provide a quiet and comfortable environment where children feel safe and secure to talk.



Hampshire County Council   Services for Young Children: Early Years Advisory Team

## Key questions to consider?

- How do your environments support children to gain the skills within your curriculum?
- How do your environments progress over time to support children in embedding new skills they have learnt?
- Are adults available within the environment to be able to support children and model skills to them?
- How do your environments reflect your children's interests and take account of cultural capital?

For all questions listed below, please see the relevant section later within this document for further information to support implementation.

- Are your environments [organised](#) and accessible, with children being able to independently access resources?
- Are your environments [low](#) arousal and do they take account of sensory sensitivities?
- How do you provide a [language](#) rich environment with communication friendly spaces?
- How do your environments foster a [sense](#) of belonging for all children?



- How do you have free flow access to outside - are children able to access the [outdoors](#) daily?
- How do you use [visuals](#) within your environments to support children?
- How do you provide a range of resources to support children's [regulation](#). For example, [calm](#) spaces and [sensory](#) aids?
- How does your environment consider and provide for all children's [stages](#) of play, for example including Treasure Baskets and Heuristic Play?



### Helpful links

- SfYC Moodle – Leading Foundation Stage Practitioners: [Course: Leading Foundation Stage Practitioners](#)
- Family blog – Enabling Environments in the EYFS: [Enabling Environment: Make Your Setting More Homely | Family](#)
- An A to Z of a Nurturing Environment: [An A to Z of a Nurturing Environment](#)
- Enabling environments and their impact on children's learning: [Enabling environments and their impact on children's learning - Early Education](#)
- Community Playthings – What happens in the baby room: [The baby room: a practical guide for early years educators](#)
- Community Playthings – A good place to be two: [A good place to be Two | Training resources | Community Playthings](#)
- Community Playthings – The power of purposeful pre-school environments: [The Power of Purposeful Preschool Environments](#)
- Birth to 5 - Learning Environments: [Learning environments – Birth To 5 Matters](#)
- Community Playthings – Outdoor Environments: [Outdoor environments | Training resources | Community Playthings](#)
- Community Playthings – Universal learning spaces: [Universal learning spaces](#)

### Training to support continuous professional development in this area

**For Schools:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

Search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

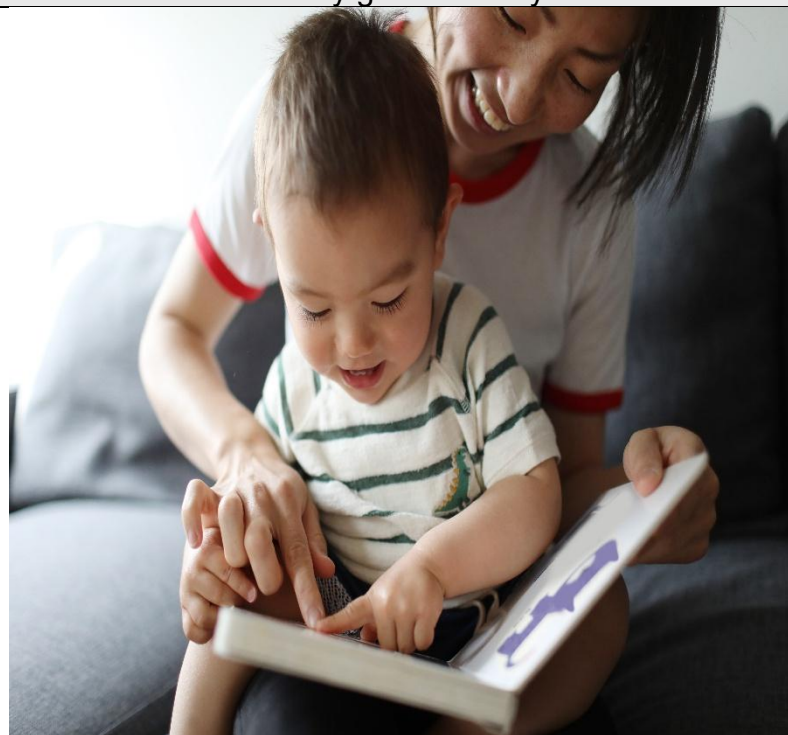
- Our introduction to EYFS training for schools – Early Years Essentials
- Inclusion in Year R - Ordinarily Available Provision
- Continuously Challenging Continuous Provision
- The Great Outdoors

**For Settings:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders \(Flipbook\)](#)

- Creativity through Continuous Provision [CLICK HERE](#)
- Continuously Challenging Continuous Provision [CLICK HERE](#)
- Step by Step Curriculum [CLICK HERE](#)

# Learning and Development

What does the statutory guidance say?



“Children develop and learn at different rates. The framework covers the education and care of **all children**, including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).” (Page 7)  
“The EYFS seeks to provide a secure foundation through planning for the **learning and development of each individual child** and assessing and reviewing what they have learned regularly.” (Page 7)  
“Practitioners should be ambitious for all children. To do this they must consider the **individual needs, interests, and development of each child** in their care. They must use this information to **plan a challenging and enjoyable experience** for each child in all areas of learning and development.” (Page 16)

How does this link to our Ordinarily Available Provision?

To enable all children to progress and reach their full potential we must take them forwards from their **individual starting points**. To support practitioners in being able to do this, everyone must have a **secure understanding of child development**. This will support practitioners in being able to identify children who may need extra support in all areas of learning. Having a secure understanding of child development, will support in designing a **sequential curriculum** that is appropriately pitched for the age and stage of your children. This will allow all practitioners to effectively identify children who are not working at the typical stage of development and consider what changes could be made to the curriculum, role of the adult and environment to effectively support the child in their next steps.

Our curriculums should be tailored to the **specific needs of each cohort**. In addition to supporting individual children's needs, we must also identify any particular areas of focus relevant to the cohort as a whole and ensure these are thoughtfully and effectively planned for.



Key questions to consider?

- Is your curriculum built upon secure child development knowledge and the needs of your cohort?
- Do all staff have a secure understanding of child development?
- How does your curriculum have a clear progression over time?
- How do you ensure all staff know how your curriculum progresses through the age ranges / across the year, to enable practitioners to identify and support children who are not 'on track'?
- Are the needs of your specific cohort considered when designing your curriculum?

- How do supervisions / pupil progress meetings include discussions around how you are supporting the needs of all children, especially those who are not 'on track'?

#### Helpful links

- SfYC Moodle: [Course: Child Development](#)
- Help for providers – Curriculum planning: [Help for early years providers : Curriculum planning](#)
- Help for providers – Areas of learning: [Help for early years providers : Areas of learning](#)
- Development Matters: [Development Matters - Non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage](#)
- Birth to 5 matters: [Birthto5Matters-download.pdf](#)
- What to expect in the Early Years Foundation Stage: [What-to-expect-in-the-EYFS-complete-FINAL-16.09-compressed.pdf](#)
- A Celebratory Approach to Working with Children with SEND: [A Celebratory Approach to Working with Children with SEND | Pen Green Children's Centre](#)

#### Training to support continuous professional development in this area

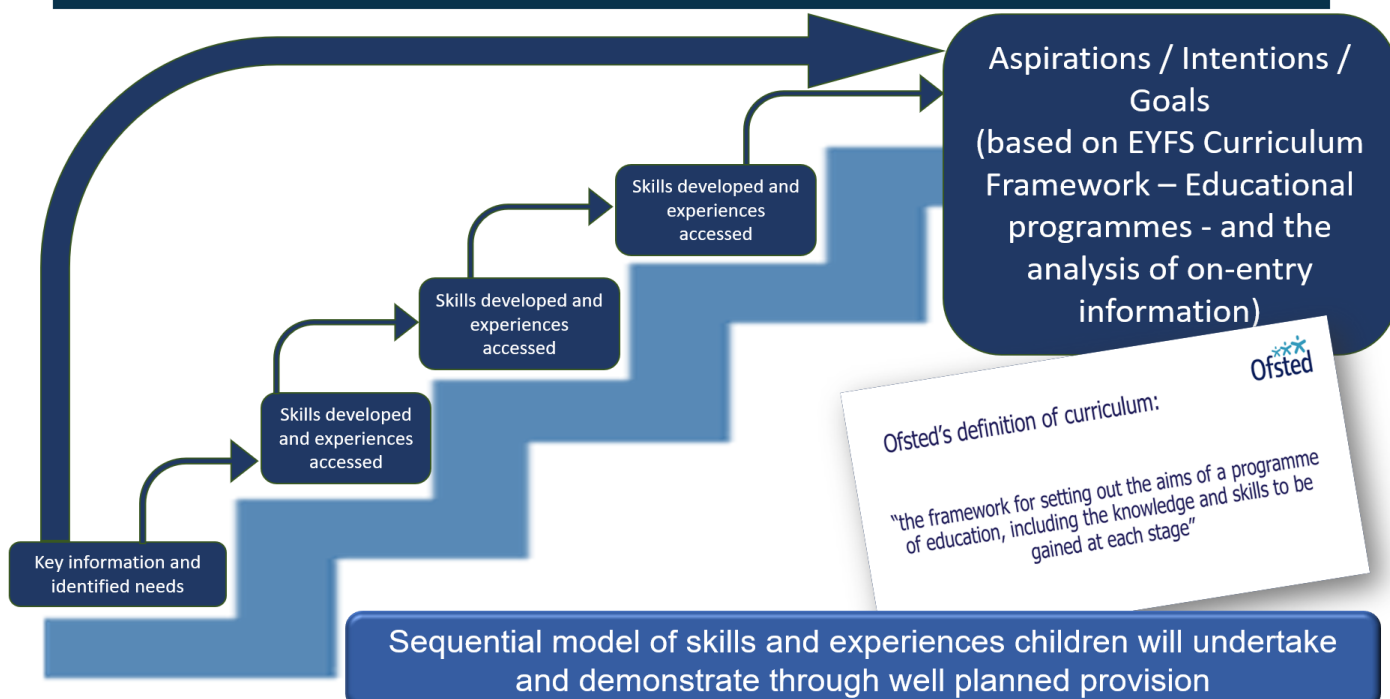
**For Schools:** Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools (Flipbook)

Search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

- Curriculum in action
- An introduction to EYFS - Early Years Essentials
- Headteachers and Senior Leaders new to EYFS
- Leading the way in Year R

**For Settings:** Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders (Flipbook)

- Step by step [CLICK HERE](#)
- Wonder years [CLICK HERE](#)
- Nurturing beginnings – understanding babies in the prime areas of learning and development [CLICK HERE](#)
- Sustained Shared thinking in EYFS [CLICK HERE](#)





# Role of the Adult

## What does the statutory guidance say?



“Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.” (Page 7)

“Children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play and learning that is guided by adults. ... Practitioners must stimulate children's interests, responding to each child's emerging needs and guiding their development through warm, positive interactions coupled with secure routines for play and learning.” (Page 17)

“A well-trained, skilled team of practitioners can help every child achieve the best possible educational outcomes. Children need to build an attachment with their key person for their confidence and well-being. The key person also promotes children's learning by developing a deep understanding of their individual needs and children can particularly benefit from their modelling and support.” (Page 17)

## How does this link to our Ordinarily Available Provision?

The vital role of the adult is consistently emphasised across all Educational Programmes within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). When reflecting upon the content laid out with these, it is apparent the crucial role we play in the lives of our youngest children. From fostering rich, high-quality interactions and supporting emotional regulation, to nurturing both gross and fine motor skills, reading a diverse range of books, and broadening their experiences - our influence is both far-reaching and foundational.

The role of the adult is essential for creating an inclusive environment, as it threads through every part of our ordinarily available provision. Adults can create nurturing environments where every child feels safe, valued, and supported. Through strong relationships, careful observation, and responsive teaching, adults can meet each child's unique needs and remove barriers to learning. By modelling inclusive attitudes, adapting activities, and working closely with families and professionals, adults help ensure that all children - regardless of background or ability - can participate fully and thrive.



## Key questions to consider?

- How do you ensure you build positive and trusting relationships with children and get to know their individual needs?
- How do you observe and respond to children's interests, needs, and developmental stages?
- How often are you able to join children in play to model, guide and support?
- How do you support children's communication and language development through everyday interactions? (See high quality [interactions](#) section for further guidance)
- How do you adapt routines and [transitions](#) to meet the individual needs of children?
- How do you engage in high quality continuous professional development, to ensure you can challenge and support children within all areas of learning?
- How do you promote inclusive practice and reflect the diverse backgrounds of the children and families you work with?
- How do you involve and communicate with [families](#) about their child's learning and development?

## Helpful links

- Help for providers – support for practitioners - [Help for early years providers : Support for practitioners](#)
- Froebel Trust - Slow pedagogy - [Froebel Trust | Slow pedagogy](#)
- Nursery World - The Adult Role Part 1 - Leading or following? - [Nursery World - The Adult Role Part 1 - Leading or following?](#)
- Nursery World - The Adult Role Part 2 - Follow the leader - [Nursery World - The Adult Role: part 2 - Follow the leader](#)
- Nursery World - The Adult Role Part 3 - Rise to the occasion - [Nursery World - The Adult Role, Part 3 - Rise to the occasion](#)
- Nursery World - The Adult Role Part 4 - Value judgement - [Nursery World - The Adult Role, Part 4 - Value judgement](#)

## Training to support continuous professional development in this area

**For Schools:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

Search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

- Our introduction to EYFS training for schools – Early Years Essentials
- Inclusion in Year R - Ordinarily Available Provision
- Inclusion in Year R – Schemas for Schools
- Inclusion in Year R – Let's talk Transitions and Assessment
- Moving on Up!
- Positive Beginnings: Sparking Executive Function
- Diving Deeply into Literacy
- Developing learning through meaningful interactions

**For Settings:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders \(Flipbook\)](#)

- Power of Print [CLICK HERE](#)
- Stretch and Challenge [CLICK HERE](#)
- Positive PSSED [CLICK HERE](#)
- Sustained shared thinking in EYFS settings [CLICK HERE](#)

## Ofsted definition of teaching

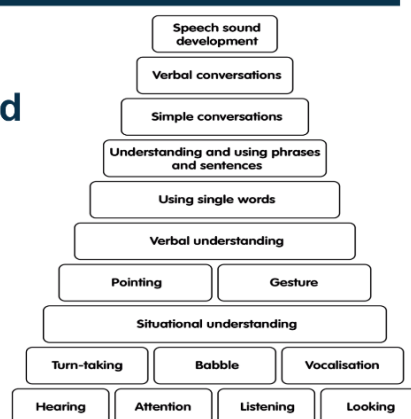


“Teaching is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities, communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment that adults provide, and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and to monitor their progress.”

# Communication and Language

What does the statutory guidance say?

## Building blocks of communication and language



“The development of children’s spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. Children’s back-and-forth interactions from an early age form the foundations for language and cognitive development. The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is crucial. By commenting on what children are interested in or doing, and echoing back what they say with new

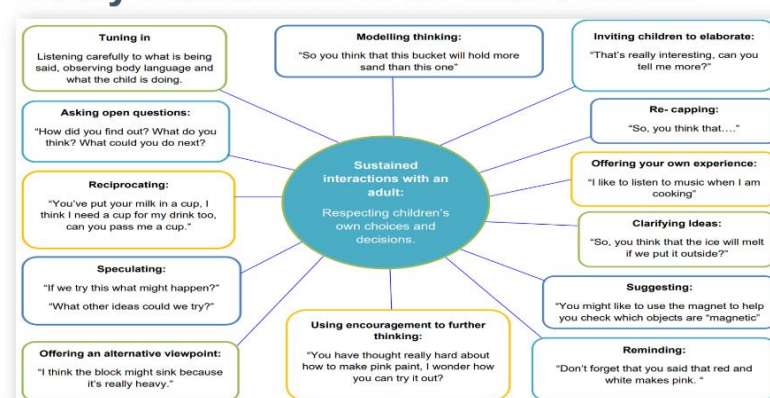
vocabulary added, practitioners will build children’s language effectively. Reading frequently to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, will give children the opportunity to thrive. Through conversation, storytelling and role play, where children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher, and sensitive questioning that invites them to elaborate, children become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures.” (Educational Programme for Communication and Language – Page 9)

How does this link to our Ordinarily Available Provision?

“Supporting children to become better communicators is one of the most powerful things we do as early years educators. Oral language skills are fundamental to children’s learning, thinking and emotional wellbeing. Children who can communicate well can make friends, play, resolve conflicts and tell us how they are feeling. In the short term, children who are better communicators at age five become better readers. In the longer term, they go on to achieve better exam results at age 16 and are more likely to gain higher-paid employment as adults (Shuey and Kankaraš, 2018).”  
([The ShREC approach](#) | [EEF](#))

Interactions in the early years are vital for developing children’s communication, language, and social skills. From birth, babies seek connection, and meaningful conversations with trusted adults which helps them thrive. When adults respond to children’s interests with enthusiasm, it supports language growth and emotional bonding. These interactions also help children build friendships, empathy, and the ability to share emotions. It is important for all practitioners to know what makes a high-quality interaction and how to support children with speech and language difficulties. Ensuring practitioners understand what typical child development looks in this area, is key to ensuring children receive timely and targeted speech and language support should they need it.

## ‘Every interaction is an intervention’





### Key questions to consider?

- Is development in communication and language prioritised by all staff?
- How do you ensure all practitioners have a secure understanding of what makes a high-quality interaction? (See high quality [interactions](#) section for further guidance)
- How do you ensure all practitioners have a secure understanding of typical child development in this area or know where to find this information?
- How do you ensure practitioners talk to parents about their child's development in speech and language and share useful ideas and tools to support learning at home?
- How do you use any speech and language screening tools?
- How do you ensure all staff know where to seek additional support for children with any speech and language delays or difficulties?
- How do you ensure all practitioners understand the key definitions below to support them in understanding where a child may need support?

**"Speech"** – this is the sounds that make up words (shoe" is made up of two sounds "sh" and "oo")

**"Language"** – this includes:

- receptive language which is the understanding of information given to you. This includes the understanding of directions, grammar, vocabulary, stories and conversation.
- expressive language is the ability to convey thoughts, feelings and needs through both verbal and non-verbal communication methods. This may include spoken language (including sentence structure, spoken vocabulary and grammar), written information and signs/gestures

**"Communication"** - is the broader process of conveying information. It encompasses the speech and language elements as well as wider aspects such as facial expressions, tone of voice, understanding the listeners needs and their perspective.

### Helpful links

- Speech and language UK: [Home - Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives](#)
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight NHS Foundation Trust Speech and language therapy service: [Children's Therapy Service :: Hampshire and Isle of Wight NHS Foundation Trust](#)
- Hampshire Happy Talkers: [Family Information and Services Hub | Hampshire Happy Talkers - Speech, Language and Communication Pathway](#)
- Tiny Happy People/The Parenting Hub: [Tiny Happy People](#)
- National Literacy Trust: [National Literacy Trust | UK Literacy Charity](#)
- The ACE centre – for information about using visuals: [Ace Centre | Charity specialising in AAC & Assistive Technology](#)
- EEF Early years Evidence Store – Communication and Language: [EEF | Communication and Language](#)
- Help for Providers – Interactions: [Help for early years providers : Interactions](#)
- EEF - The ShREC approach: [The ShREC approach | EEF](#)
- [documents.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/SolentNHSTrustDevelopmentChecklist3.pdf](https://documents.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/SolentNHSTrustDevelopmentChecklist3.pdf)

### Training to support continuous professional development in this area

**For Schools:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

Search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone:

- Inclusion in Year R - Ordinarily Available Provision
- Inclusion in Year R – Schemas for Schools
- Developing Learning through Meaningful interactions
- Diving Deeply into Literacy
- Positive Beginnings: Sparking Executive Function

**For Settings:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 PVI's](#)

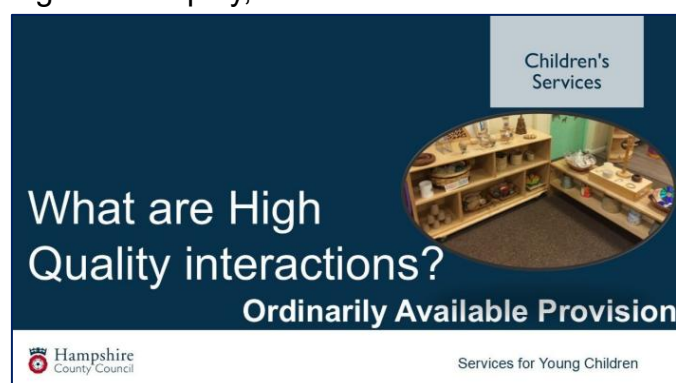
- The Power of Print [CLICK HERE](#)
- Sustained Shared Thinking in EYFS [CLICK HERE](#)
- Stretch and Challenge [CLICK HERE](#)
- Nurturing Beginnings: babies in the prime areas of development [CLICK HERE](#)

# High Quality Interactions

## What does the statutory guidance say?

“The development of children’s spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. Children’s back-and-forth interactions from an early age form the foundations for language and cognitive development. The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is crucial. By commenting on what children are interested in or doing, and echoing back what they say with new vocabulary added, practitioners will build children’s language effectively. Reading frequently to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, will give children the opportunity to thrive. Through conversation, storytelling and role play, where children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher, and sensitive questioning that invites them to elaborate, children become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures.” (Educational Programme for Communication and Language – Page 9)

Click on the image to watch our Speech and Language Therapy Advisor, talk about what a high-quality interaction is.



## How does this link to our Ordinarily Available Provision?

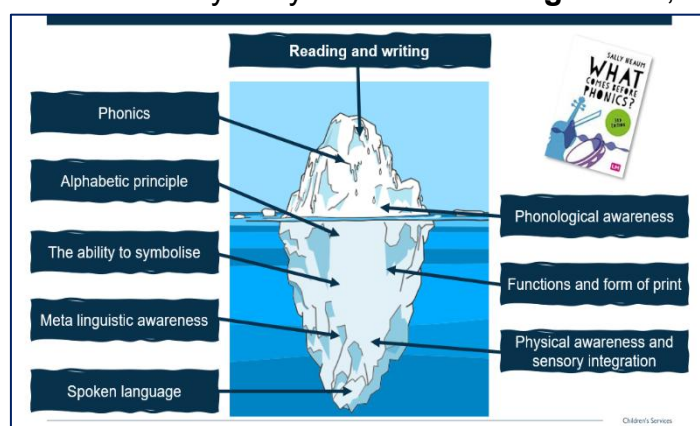


The ‘Listening to unheard children’ report (September 2023) highlights that 1.9 million children have speech and language difficulties. It stresses that one of the solutions to this is to “train all teachers and early years practitioners to spot which children are struggling with talking and understanding of words and know how to help or where to refer them to.”

[Listening-to-unheard-children-report-FINAL.pdf](#)

## Essential information to support embedding high-quality interactions

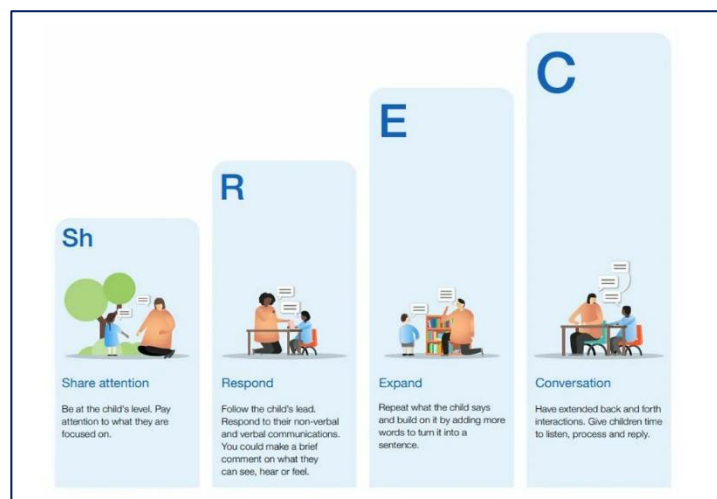
There is no shortcut to learning to read and write. As illustrated by Sally Neaum’s **iceberg model**, literacy is built on many essential foundational skills. At the base of this iceberg lies spoken language—an area that must be prioritised to equip children with the complex skills required for reading and writing later in life. High-quality interactions are key to developing these foundations. It is therefore vital that all practitioners understand what meaningful, high-quality interactions look like and ensure they are embedded into everyday practice—especially for our most disadvantaged children.



Research highlights the importance of ‘serve and return’ interactions. These are responsive, back-and-forth exchanges between a young child and a caring adult and play a key role in shaping brain architecture. “These interactions, much like a lively game of tennis, form a critical part of a child’s

social environment and are crucial for early development.” “They support development of early language and social skills that serve as a foundation for more complex, high-level cognitive abilities that form later in life.” ([Serve and Return: Back-and-forth exchanges](#))

Click on the link or the image below to watch a short video explaining this further: [https://youtu.be/m\\_5u8-QSh6A](https://youtu.be/m_5u8-QSh6A)



To ensure all practitioners understand what a high-quality interaction looks like, the **ShREC** approach can be helpful. Do all practitioners ensure they are on the child's level when interacting? Do they respond to the child's verbal and non-verbal cues? Do they expand their language by adding more words? Do they have extended back and forth interactions, giving the child adequate time to reply?

Alongside knowing what a high-quality interaction looks like, it is vital practitioners understand what typical child development

looks like in this area, so that children receive timely intervention and support where needed. **Speech and Language UK** have a useful ages and stages section on their website which can support practitioners understanding in this area.

[Ages and stages - Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives](#)

They also have a helpful progress checker which is based on what they know about how babies and children develop skills. You choose the age of the child and answer the questions and at the end, you will be directed to some helpful advice and resources.

[Child's Progress checker - Speech & Language UK](#)

**Speech and Language UK**  
Changing young lives.

Children's Services

## Top Tips for Quality interactions

**Ordinarily Available Provision**

Hampshire County Council  
Services for Young Children

Click on the video to see our Speech and Language Therapy Advisor, talk about some top tips for high quality interactions.

Click on the image to play the video

### Key questions to consider?

- Do practitioners have time to engage children in meaningful discussions during play using a range of strategies?
- Is a speech, language and communication screening tool utilised?
- Do all staff have a secure understanding of typical child development in speech, language and communication?



- Do you know where to seek additional support for children with any speech and language delays or difficulties?
- Do all practitioners understand what a high-quality interaction looks like and how this will vary across different ages?
- Do staff inductions include training on why high-quality interactions are important and examples of these in practice?
- How do you intentionally select which vocabulary to teach and then ensure children can use this in range of contexts?
- Do practitioners actively embed and extend children's vocabulary during play, including taught vocabulary?
- How are interaction and vocabulary prompts used within the environment to support practitioners to be effective in their role?

#### Helpful links

- Speech and Language UK – Ages and Stages: [Ages and stages - Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives](#)
- EEF Early years Evidence Store – Communication and Language: [EEF | Communication and Language](#)
- EEF - [Improving early education through high-quality interactions | EEF](#)
- EEF - The ShREC approach: [The ShREC approach | EEF](#)
- EEF – Preparing for Literacy: [Preparing for Literacy | EEF](#)
- Help for providers – Interactions: [Help for early years providers : Interactions](#)
- Help for provider – Exploring Language: [Help for early years providers : Exploring language](#)
- Family blog - The power of open-ended questions in early childhood education: [The power of open-ended questions in ECE | Family](#)
- Serve and Return: [Serve and Return: Back-and-forth exchanges](#)
- Family blog - What Is Sustained Shared Thinking?: [What Is Sustained Shared Thinking? With Kathy Brodie | Family](#)
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight NHS Foundation Trust Speech and language therapy service: [Children's Therapy Service :: Hampshire and Isle of Wight NHS Foundation Trust](#)
- [Family Information and Services Hub | Hampshire Happy Talkers - Speech, Language and Communication Pathway](#)

#### Training to support continuous professional development in this area

**For schools:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

Search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

- Headteachers and Senior Leaders new to EYFS
- Our introduction to EYFS training for schools – Early Years Essentials
- Inclusion in Year R - Ordinarily Available Provision
- Inclusion in Year R – Schemas for Schools
- Inclusion in Year R – Let's talk Transitions and Assessment
- Moving on Up!
- Positive Beginnings: Sparking Executive Function
- Diving Deeply into Literacy
- Developing learning through meaningful interactions

**For settings:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders \(Flipbook\)](#)

- Power of Print [CLICK HERE](#)
- Stretch and Challenge [CLICK HERE](#)
- Positive PSED [CLICK HERE](#)
- Sustained shared thinking in EYFS settings [CLICK HERE](#)

# Vertical Transitions

What does the guidance say?

**Vertical transitions are the larger, more significant changes** that children will have to navigate, such as starting school or moving to a new home. Horizontal transitions are smaller, more frequent changes in routine or environment, like moving between activities or from setting to home.

**Schools What went well?**

**Useful ideas**

100% of schools surveyed offered additional visits for vulnerable children to ensure that they were familiar with new adults and the new school environment.

Small group visits following on from home visits so that we could really get to know the children quickly.

We offered parents the opportunity to enjoy a school lunch with their child.

We shared bedtime stories on our website

We used the same visual supports as the feeder nursery for the first half term, we then transitioned over to our school visuals

We sent postcards over the Summer to keep communication going during the break.

The child's key person was invited to visit the school with the child.

We invited our main feeder setting to story time, changing the day each week so that all children had the opportunity to visit.

We offered a flexible school start

Stay and play opportunities were the most popular way of welcoming and getting to know children and families.

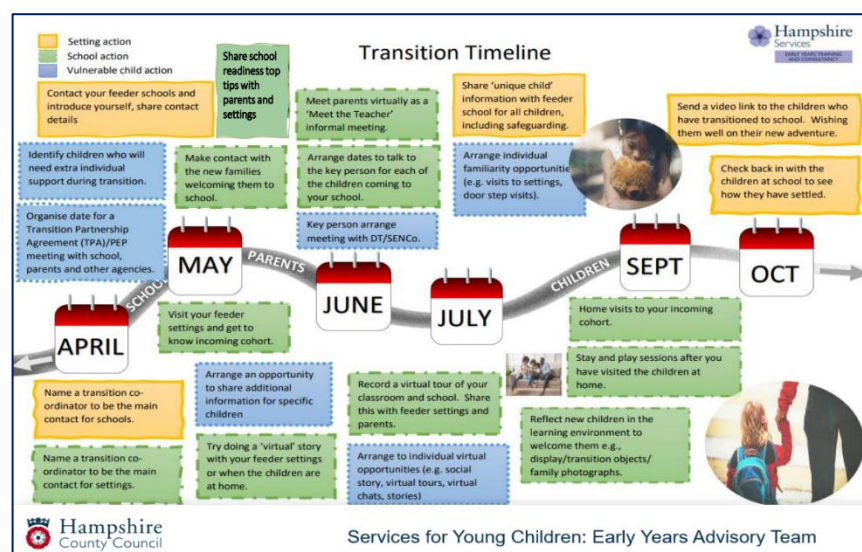
We shared social stories with pre-schools and found out what children were interested in so we could get the environment ready.

Our Year 6 buddies wrote letters to the new cohort. They added some photos and a keyring bought by the PTA

Transitions “are times of exciting change certainly and times of new opportunities and growth for every child. They can also be times of uncertainty where surroundings are not the same, expectations and procedures different and faces still yet unfamiliar. Getting transition right is vital for every child and is not a single event that merely ‘happens.’ Transition should be viewed as a process rather than an event that involves children, practitioners, and parents together. Transition has been described as an ongoing journey rather than a destination.” (Early Years Matters 2023)

How does this link to our Ordinarily Available Provision?

Vertical transitions in the early years are vital for inclusion because they are more than just a moment—they are a process that supports each child's sense of security and belonging. High-quality transitions ensure that children feel ‘known’ by the adults around them, which is especially important for those who may be more vulnerable during times of change. These moments offer valuable opportunities for professional dialogue, helping practitioners share insights and plan effectively. The key person plays a crucial role in making meaningful connections that support the child emotionally and developmentally. Whether it is starting nursery or moving from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to Key Stage One, thoughtful, inclusive transitions help every child feel confident, supported, and ready for their next step.

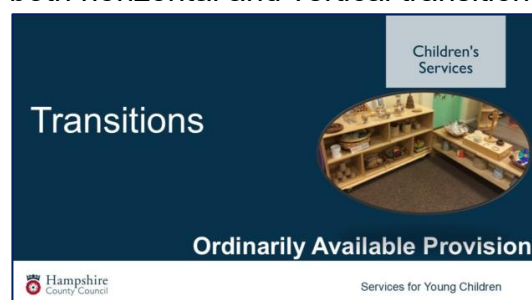


Key questions to consider?

- Are transitions planned flexibly to meet each child's individual needs, rather than being driven by routines?
- Do children have time and support to explore new environments and routines, and build relationships at their own pace?
- How are families actively involved in the transition process, including visits and opportunities to meet new key staff?
- Is accessible, timely information shared with all families? For example, is information shared in the family's home language.

- Are children's emotional responses during transitions observed, supported, and communicated with parents?
- Do staff use systems such as "All About Me" forms or a similar tool to understand each child's current needs and preferences? Are these shared with child's new key person to ensure effective information sharing?
- Is there a clear transitions policy in place, which is shared with any relevant parties?
- How are transition activities adapted to reflect the diverse needs of children and families? For example, do children need to take a transition toy based on their interests from their old setting to their new setting.
- Are transitions supported using visuals, for example photos of their new learning space and any key staff?
- Are any key strategies utilised with individual children effectively shared with their next key person to ensure consistency in how these are implemented?
- Do you have a transition champion to support the process of transition between settings?

Click on the images below to watch some videos with further information and some top tips about both horizontal and vertical transitions and how we can support children with these.



#### Helpful links

- SfYC Moodle – Transitions: [Course: Transitions](#)
- SfYC Moodle - Year R – Supporting children with vulnerabilities: [SFYC: All courses](#)
- Starting School in Hampshire: [StartingSchoolinHampshirebooklet.pdf](#)
- Hampshire School Readiness leaflet: [schoolreadinessleaflet.pdf](#)
- Family blog - 9 Ideas for an Easier Transition Back to Your Childcare Setting: [9 Ideas to Transition Back to Your Childcare Setting | Family](#)
- Family blog - Early Years Transitions and How They Set Our Children Up For Life: [How Early Years Transitions Set Children Up For Life | Family](#)
- Birth to 5 Matters – Transitions: [Transitions – Birth To 5 Matters](#)
- Birth to 5 Matters - High quality transitions: [High-Quality-Transitions.pdf](#)
- Birth to 5 Matters – case studies: [Transitions-case-studies.pdf](#)
- Early Education – Transitions: [Transitions - Early Education](#)
- EEF - 'Big steps for small children' The importance of PSED for smooth transitions: ['Big steps for small children' The importance of PSED for... | EEF](#)

#### Training to support continuous professional development in this area

**For Schools:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

Search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

- Our introduction to EYFS training for schools – Early years Essentials
- Inclusion in Year R - Ordinarily Available Provision
- Inclusion in Year R – Schemas for Schools
- Inclusion in Year R – Let's talk Transitions and Assessment
- Moving on Up! Taking the EYFS into Year one

**For Settings:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders \(Flipbook\)](#)

- The Wonder Years [CLICK HERE](#)
- Nurturing Beginnings [CLICK HERE](#)



# Horizontal Transitions

What does the guidance say?

**“Horizontal transitions occur on a daily or regular basis** and usually refer to movement or a change in routine. Horizontal transitions are a part of everyday life involving the changes and adjustments that children make when, for example, going from home to nursery”

([FACT63-WALES-Transition-in-the-Foundation-Phase.pdf](#))

“Transitions within the daily routine provide important structure and security for children, allowing them to predict and cope with changes during the course of the day. It is important that the daily routine still remains flexible enough to meet children’s ever-changing needs and interests.”

([Transitions-Tip-sheet-Daily-Routine.pdf](#))

Resources to hand..



It is vital that you have resources to hand to support children in times of need or stress...







Resources that can support children to remain on task and cope with the routines of the day.

First




Then






Services for Young Children: Early Years Advisory Team


How does this link to our Ordinarily Available Provision?




Understanding and Supporting Anxiety

Child







5 areas of self-regulation





Services for Young Children: Early Years Advisory Team

Daily transitions are a crucial part to consider as part of our ordinarily available provision because they help young children feel secure, develop independence, and build routines that support learning and emotional well-being. Daily transition periods, for example moving from indoors to outdoors or into lunchtime, can be busy, overwhelming and overstimulating periods of the day for children if not carefully considered and planned for.

When considering our daily routines and timetables it is important to consider if children have enough time to be fully absorbed in self-chosen play, allowing them to foster their ‘Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning’. If our days consist of lots of bite sized chunks, children can spend more time in transitions than they can in exploring, enjoying achieving what they have set out to do and working with ideas. It is important to consider what transitions are vital for our day, and how we can adequately prepare children for these to ensure they are smooth and well structured. For example, are children supported with visuals so that they know which items to collect when getting ready to go home, or which clothes to put on when going outside. Do you have a daily timetable, so children are clear on where they are in the day. Do you have any children who need more individualised prompts such as now and next boards.

See the [visuals](#) section of this document for further ideas.

Key questions to consider?

- How many transitions do your children have to go through in one day?
- Do children have long periods of time for uninterrupted play, before encountering another transition?

- Is it clear what children need to do during the transition?
- How do you use visuals to support children with transitions, for example a visual timetable or now and next boards?
- How do you support children in knowing what to do during transitions?
- Are children given enough time to prepare before a period of transition?
- How busy does the transition feel, for you and for the children?
- Are children having to wait before or after transitioning from one part of the day to another? If yes, how long for?
- How long does the transition take?
- How do you provide individualised strategies for children who need extra support for transitions?

Click on the images below to watch some videos with further information and some top tips about both horizontal and vertical transitions and how we can support children with these.



## Helpful links

Transitions – Supporting transitions within the daily routine - [Transitions-Tip-sheet-Daily-Routine.pdf](#)

Nursery World - Good habits - learning through routines - [Nursery World - Good habits - learning through routines](#)

Nursery World - Parent's Guide: Routines - [Nursery World - Parent's Guide: Routines](#)

## Training to support continuous professional development in this area

**For Schools:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

Search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

- Our introduction to EYFS training for schools – Early years Essentials
- Inclusion in Year R - Ordinarily Available Provision
- Inclusion in Year R – Schemas for Schools
- Inclusion in Year R – Let's talk Transitions and Assessment
- Moving on Up! Taking the EYFS into Year one

**For Settings:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders \(Flipbook\)](#)

- The Wonder Years [CLICK HERE](#)
- Nurturing Beginnings [CLICK HERE](#)

# Parent Partnerships

## What does the statutory guidance say?



“The EYFS seeks to provide partnership working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers.” (Page 7)  
“Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.” (Page 7)  
“Throughout the early years, if a provider is worried about a child’s progress in any prime area, practitioners must discuss this with the child’s parents and/or carers and agree how to support the child.” (Page 16)  
“Assessment plays an important part in helping parents, carers, and practitioners to recognise children’s progress, understand their needs, and to plan activities and support.” (Page 19)  
“Each child must be assigned a key person. Their role is to

help ensure that every child’s care is tailored to meet their individual needs, to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents and/or carers. They should also help families engage with more specialist support if appropriate.” (Page 28)

## How does this link to our Ordinarily Available Provision?

“Research shows that involving parents and carers in their children’s learning is the most important factor in enabling some children to do well regardless of background.” ([Help for early years providers : Working in partnership with parents and carers](#))

‘Strong partnerships between schools and parents lead to better pupil behaviour, attendance, and academic outcomes.’ Ofsted Report: Schools and Parents – Developing Partnerships April 2011. More recently the Education Endowment Foundation research found that parental engagement has a positive impact on average of 4 months’ additional progress for children. However, it is crucial to consider how to engage with all parents to avoid widening attainment gaps.

Working with parents and carers is an essential part of Ordinarily Available Provision in the early years because they can offer valuable insights into their children’s needs, strengths, and experiences. Building strong partnerships ensures that every child feels understood, supported, and included, both at home and in the setting. When practitioners and families work together, they can create consistent, responsive approaches that celebrate diversity and promote equal opportunities for all children to thrive.

“Parents and carers make a crucial difference to children’s outcomes. It is vital that early years practitioners recognise parents’ commitment to their children’s early development and education and give priority to working with parents. Research tells us that regardless of the quality of settings, the most important predictor of children’s future outcomes is the quality of the home learning environment, so involving parents in their children’s learning is the most significant factor in enabling children to do well despite disadvantage. The benefits are greatest when practitioners and families work in respectful partnership to develop ways to support children both at home and in the setting. Working together ensures a good understanding of a child’s needs, leading to appropriate provision within the setting and the possibility of supporting learning in the home.” (Birth to Five Matters, page 28)





## Key questions to consider?



- How do you give parents the opportunity to **share** what they know about their child?
- How do you facilitate an effective two-way flow of information between home and setting including:
  - Child's **interests and fascinations** at home and school/setting
  - Child's **progress** at home and school/setting
  - **Concerns** at home or school/setting
  - Effective **strategies** at home and school/setting
  - **Celebrate** significant events/achievements at home and school/setting
  - Use information from home to **support learning** in school/setting
- How do you get to know parents and foster **positive relationships** with them when children first join your setting?

- Do you use a **range of strategies** to ensure you engage with every parent? For example, online-communication, newsletters, handwritten messages, emails.
- How do you engage with parents with English as an Additional Language by using Google-translate, EMTAS?
- Do you invite parents to join your setting? For example, stay and play, read with children, cooking, share their profession or interests, join visits out of school, etc.
- How do you ensure parents are kept regularly **updated** about their children's progress?
- Do you effectively share with parent's what **strategies** are used with their child in the setting to support consistency of approach at home?
- How do you use information shared by parents to effectively support children within your setting?
- How do you use information gathered from parents to celebrate children's individuality?
- How do you provide opportunities to enable parents to discuss and raise any concerns they have about their child's progress?

## Helpful links

- Help for providers - Working in partnership with parents and carers: [Working with parents](#)
- Family Blog – How to encourage and stronger home learning environment: [How To Encourage Stronger Home Learning Environment | Family](#)
- Improving the home learning environment: [Improving the home learning environment](#)
- Family Information and Services Hub: [Portage - Parent Support Platform](#)
- CAMHS – Parent and Carer Support: [Parent and Carer support – CAMHS](#)
- Hampshire Healthy Families: [Workshops, Courses and Groups : Hampshire Healthy Families](#)
- Autism Central – Wellbeing resources for parents and carers: [Wellbeing resources for parents and carers | Autism Central](#)
- Autism Hampshire – Parent Workshops: [Parent Workshops | Autism Hampshire](#)
- The Solihull Approach series - [Online courses for emotional health and wellbeing](#)
- What to expect in the Early Years Foundation Stage: [What-to-expect-in-the-EYFS](#)

## Training to support continuous professional development in this area

**For Schools:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

Search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

- Our introduction to EYFS training for schools – Early Years Essentials
- Inclusion in Year R - Ordinarily Available Provision
- Inclusion in Year R – Schemas for Schools
- Inclusion in Year R – Let's talk Transitions and Assessment

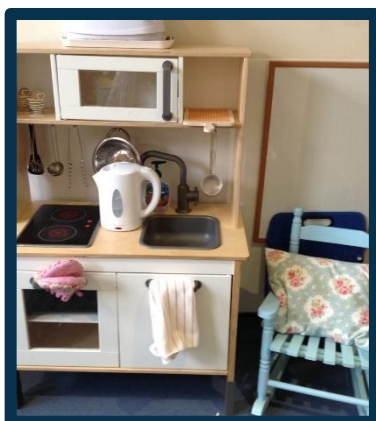
**For Settings:** [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 PVI's](#)

- Nurturing Beginnings [CLICK HERE](#)
- Positive PSSED [CLICK HERE](#)
- I Spy a Schema [CLICK HERE](#)

# Developing a Sense of Belonging

## What is it?

A sense of belonging refers to a child's feeling of being accepted, valued, and included within their environment. To nurture this, settings should reflect the diverse backgrounds of their children and incorporate familiar elements from home. When children feel secure and included, they are more likely to develop confidence, take positive risks in their learning, and fully engage with the opportunities available to them.



## Why?

This is a foundational element of emotional well-being and learning. When children feel they belong, they are more likely to develop:


- **Emotional security:** Children who feel they belong are more confident and emotionally secure.
- **Build trusting relationships** with adults and peers.
- **Willingness to explore:** Feeling safe and valued encourages curiosity and engagement in learning.
- **Identity development:** It supports the development of self-esteem and a positive sense of self.

## How can it help?


Watch the video below to listen to a member of the Early Years Advisory Team talk about why developing a sense a belonging is so important and to hear some practical tips for how to do this.

Children's Services

# A Sense of Belonging



Ordinarily Available Provision

 Hampshire County Council

Services for Young Children

Click on the image to play the video

## What would this look like?

- Reflecting diversity
- Incorporating familiarity (home from home)
- Celebrating individuality
- Building consistent relationships
- Encouraging participation
- Role-play and representation
- Visitors and community links



**Celebrate individuality** Recognise and value each child's unique background, interests, and voice. This might include celebrating cultural festivals, different family structures or learning key words in a child's home language.



**Incorporate familiarity** Use home-from-home touches, such as family photos, comfort items, or familiar routines, to help children feel connected, comforted and secure.



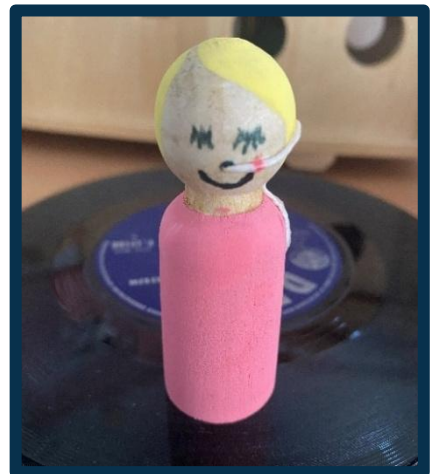
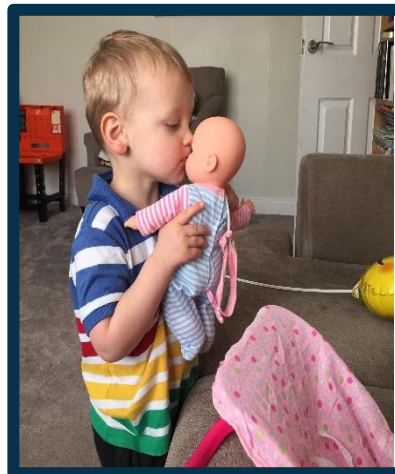
**Build consistent relationships** Assign key persons who build strong, nurturing and trusting bonds with children and families, helping them feel known, valued and understood.





**Reflect diversity** Include books, images, resources, and displays that represent the cultures, communities, languages, family structures and diverse needs of the children in your setting.

**Role-play & representation:** Provide opportunities for children to see themselves reflected in the environment through mirrors, “mini me” figures, and inclusive resources that affirm their identity and promote belonging.



**Encourage participation:** Involve children and families in decision-making, routines, and setting up their environment to give them ownership and agency.



**Visitors and community links:**

Welcome visitors into the setting and organise visits into the local community to help children feel connected to the world around them while introducing new perspectives in a safe and inclusive way.

**Top tips for implementing****Create a home-from-home environment**

Reflect life at home by using real, familiar and natural resources throughout the provision. Use soft furnishings, family photos, and familiar objects to create a warm, welcoming space where children feel safe, secure, and valued.

**Reflect every child's identity**

Each child should see themselves in the setting – use photos from home where possible in displays, in books and as part of resources. Ensure resources, displays, and play materials represent the children's cultures, languages, family structures, and abilities – as well as representing the diverse nature of society. Include mirrors, "mini me" figures, and diverse dolls to support self-recognition and inclusion. Ensure children can see their lives reflected in books and resources.

**Build strong, consistent relationships**

Prioritise key person attachments and consistent staffing. Use familiar routines and language to help children feel emotionally secure and understood. Strong key person relationships with parents and carers further support the children's sense of safety and security in the setting.

**Involve children in planning their environment**

Encourage children to help co-construct areas, make choices, and contribute to daily routines. This builds independence, confidence, and a sense of ownership. Use their emerging fascinations and interests as starting points for developments, planning possibilities together.

**Connect with the wider world**

Invite visitors into the setting and explore the local community. These experiences help children see their place in the world and strengthen their sense of belonging beyond the setting.

Developing links with the people and places in the local community can offer new experiences for children to extend their understanding of the world and their cultural capital.

**Further reading**

<https://hampshirelibraries.blog/whenabookmighthelp/>

[How to make your setting culturally inclusive.pdf](#)

[Making your baby room the best it can be | Topics | Community Playthings](#)

<https://www.communityplaythings.co.uk/learning-library/articles/the-power-of-a-smile>

[Enabling Environment: Make Your Setting More Homely | Family](#)



# Organised and Accessible

## What is it?

Creating a well-organised, clutter-free, and accessible environment is a powerful strategy for fostering independence in young children. When children feel confident in their surroundings and understand where resources belong, they are more likely to engage meaningfully with their environment.



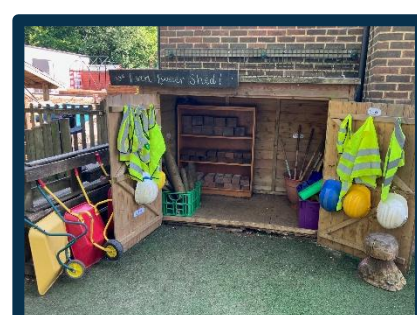
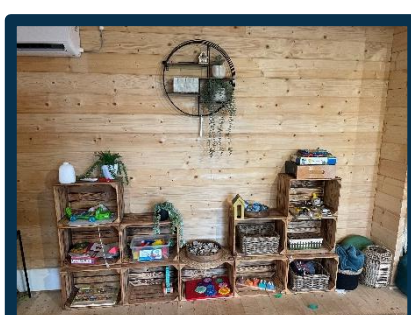
## Why?

The benefits of organised accessible environment are clear in supporting children's skills for learning and thinking. Having a well-organised, well-structured space lessens the visual overwhelm of cluttered and untidy spaces. This promotes a sense of calm, aids visual processing, understanding and creates an attractive environment which is known to support well-being.

When children feel confident in their surroundings and understand where resources belong, they are more likely to engage meaningfully with their environment. They are more likely to develop a 'can-do' approach, try out their ideas and develop resilience for when things go wrong.

They can locate what they need, return items to their proper place, and make purposeful choices during play, all of which support autonomy and self-direction.

For our youngest learners, especially those just beginning to develop verbal communication, accessibility is key. When resources are within reach and clearly visible, children are empowered to explore independently and express their needs through actions and play. This not only nurtures their sense of agency but also strengthens their communication skills, builds confidence, and helps them feel capable and successful in their environment. By intentionally designing spaces that are child-centred and easy to navigate, we create opportunities for children to take ownership of their learning and daily routines, laying the foundation for lifelong independence.

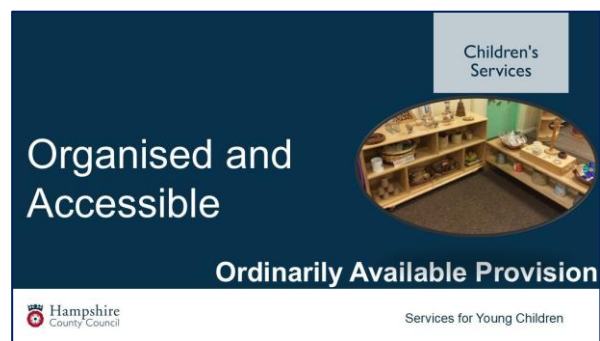




## How can it help?

'Since decluttering my classroom and ensuring everything is clearly labelled and within children's reach, I have found my children to be more independent during their play, able to find the things they need, without running to an adult for help. This in turn has increased their ability to focus for longer periods of time within their play.' – Hampshire Leading Foundation Stage Practitioner

Listen to one of our Early Years Advisory Teachers talk about creating an organised and accessible environment:



Click on the image to play the video

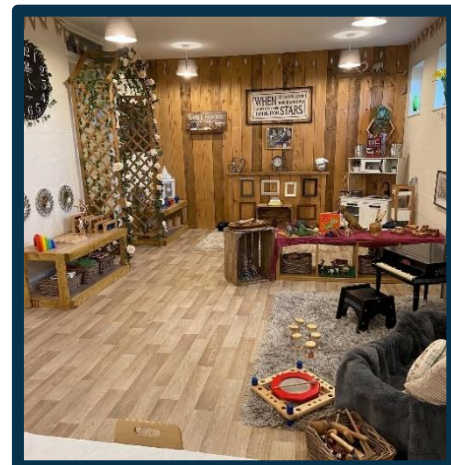
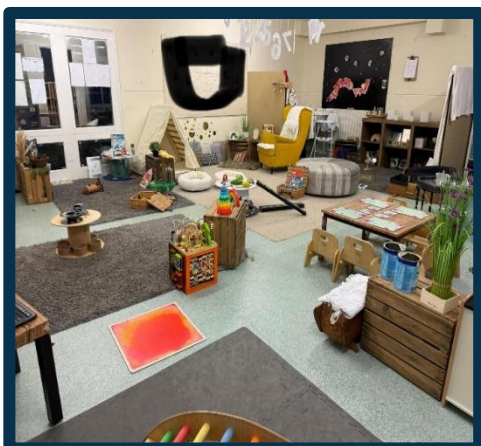
## What would this look like for the younger years?

- Ground-level resources
- Clearly defined areas to separate different types of play (e.g. loud and quiet, wet and dry)
- Heuristic and natural materials
- Open shelving and low tabletops
- Push-and-pull toys and soft furnishings, such as rugs, support access through mobility



### Clearly defined areas

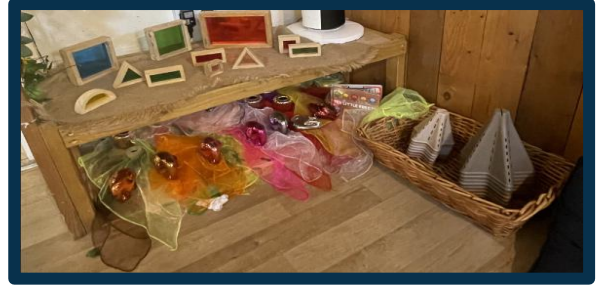
Soft furnishings, rugs, or low dividers help define spaces for different types of play (e.g., sensory, messy, construction, quiet area), making the environment predictable and easy to navigate.





### Heuristic and natural materials

Open-ended, sensory-rich resources such as wooden objects, fabric, and natural items encourage exploration and decision-making.



### Open shelving and low tabletops

Materials are displayed openly to encourage standing, reaching, and choice-making, supporting both physical and cognitive development.



### Ground level resources

Placing resources at children's level empowers them to independently access what they need, encouraging choice-making, fostering autonomy, and building a sense of accomplishment as they plan and carry out their own activities.





## What would this look like for Pre School and Year R?

- Child-height shelving and furniture
- Open-ended resources
- Clearly labelled storage
- Resources are clearly displayed and visible to children
- Self-service stations
- Accessible and inclusive tools/resources



### Self-service stations

Make sure items like tissues, water, and coats are within easy reach. This empowers children to meet their own needs and builds self-reliance.



### Design with the child's perspective in mind

Position furniture and resources at children's eye level to promote independence, self-selection, and active exploration. Consider what children can see, reach, and access on their own in each area of the environment.





### Accessible and inclusive tools/resources:

Are the materials you provide suitable for children at varying stages of development? Consider whether your environment offers support for emerging skills while also providing appropriate challenges for children who are more experienced.



### Clearly labelled storage

Use picture, word labels and consider shadowing on storage containers and shelves. This supports early literacy and helps children return items to the correct place, promoting responsibility.



## Top tips for implementing

### Less is more

Regularly audit your resources to ensure everything you offer is purposeful and meaningful – too many resources, crowded spaces or cluttered environments contribute to ‘visual noise’ and sensory overwhelm across the board. A well-curated space supports focus, regulation and intentional play.

### Label everything

Give every item a clear home using photos, written labels, or shadowing. This helps children know where things belong and encourages responsibility, independence and ownership. This also prompts decision-making as children select resources and materials to follow their ideas.

### Make it visible

Children can't use what they can't see. Use shallow baskets and open shelving instead of deep boxes to make resources easily accessible and inviting. This supports the maintenance of a safe, effective and attractive working space that supports well-being and learning.

### Location matters

Be intentional about where resources are stored. Ask yourself: *Is this item located where it will be used?* Strategic placement supports independence and smooth transitions. Children may well transport and move equipment around the provision, but careful and thoughtful placement of resources enables children to initiate and then follow their ideas more easily.

### Co-construct the environment

Create your environment with the children. It helps them feel at home within their learning space and enables you to be able to model how to look after each area within the provision. The planning process allows them to feel ownership but also explore problems and make decisions.



Listen to a member of the Early Years Advisory Team talk through some top tips for creating an organised and accessible environment.

Click on the image to play the video

## Further reading

[Working in the baby room](#) | [CPD training](#) | [Community Playthings](#)

[LFSP](#)

EPISODE 164, • Early Excellence Podcast:

**Redesigning EYFS Environments with Emma Hudson.**

EPISODE 143, • Early Excellence Podcast:

**SEND Focus: Developing Learning Environments in Specialist Provision**

**Training for Schools:** - search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

'Inclusion in Year R'

'Continuously Challenging Continuous Provision'

See our brochure [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

**Training for Settings:**

The Wonder Years [CLICK HERE](#)

Nurturing Beginnings: babies in the prime areas of development [CLICK HERE](#)

Continuously Challenging Continuous Provision [CLICK HERE](#)

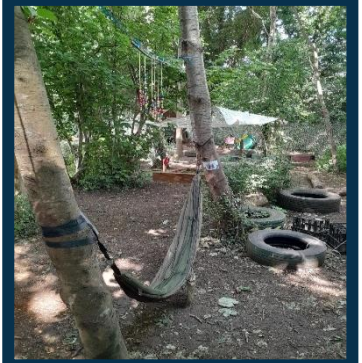
See our brochure [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders \(Flipbook\)](#)



# Outdoor Learning

## What is it?

**Outdoor learning** involves hands-on, direct experiences in natural or outdoor environments. It supports development across all areas of learning; cognitive, physical, social, and emotional, by encouraging exploration, problem-solving, creativity, and connection with the natural world. Providing children with free-flow access to outdoor spaces offers countless benefits for children with additional needs. If your layout does not allow for free flow access, it is essential to establish consistent, well-embedded routines that ensure children have regular opportunities to spend meaningful time outside throughout the day.



## Why?

Outdoor learning provides a highly inclusive learning environment as it offers sensory-rich experiences that support regulation and development. The relaxed, less structured environment can reduce anxiety and improve emotional wellbeing. Open spaces encourage movement, which benefits children with physical or movement-based learning needs. Activities like building dens promote communication and teamwork, while the flexibility of outdoor learning allows it to be easily adapted to individual interests and abilities. Nature also provides calming, meaningful experiences that help children connect with the world around them.

## How can it help?

Listen to a member of the Early Years Advisory Team, talk about the benefits of outdoor learning.



Click on the image to play the video

## What would this look like for the younger years?

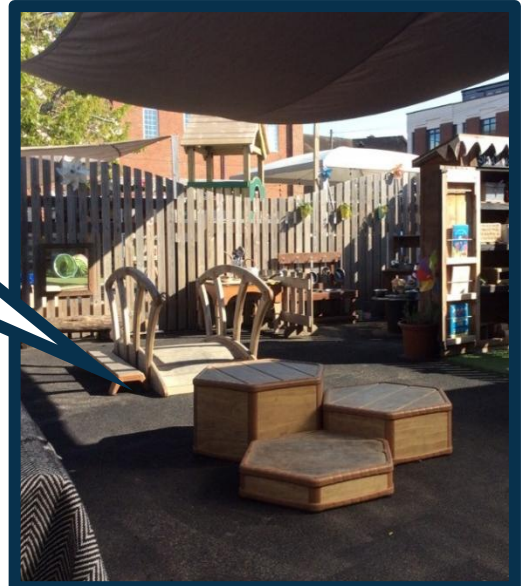
- Open space for movement
- Varied surfaces
- Natural elements
- Sensory play
- Community trips
- Adult interaction
- Tactile paths
- Cause-and-effect play



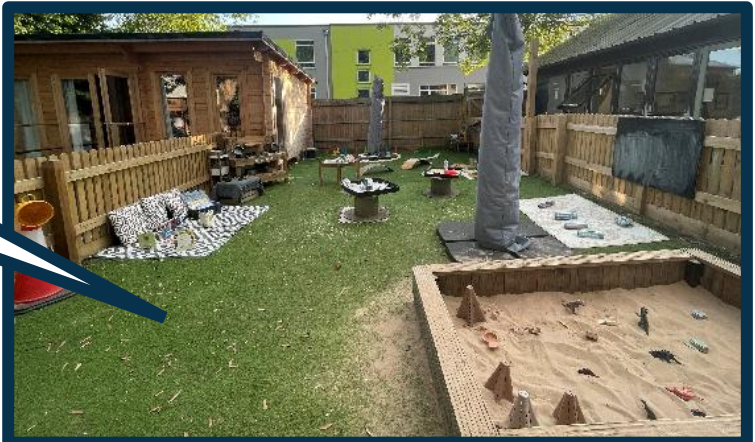
**Accessible equipment** - Low-level ramps, wide paths, and tiered seating. Children at varying stages of physical development are supported.



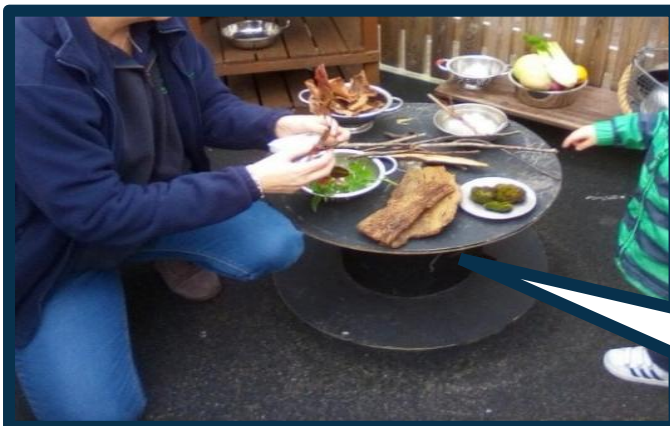
**Community trips** - Walks and outings in buggies introduce new sights, sounds, and social experiences.



**Open space for movement** - Encourages crawling, toddling, and physical exploration.



**Cause-and-effect play** – Items like wind chimes, water wheels, or sensory panels help children understand



**Adult interaction** - One-to-one or small group play outdoors can encourage communication and social engagement in a low-pressure setting.



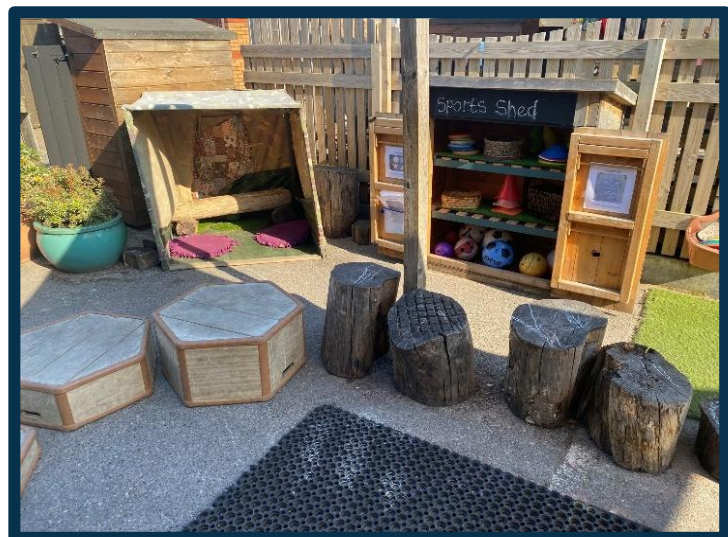
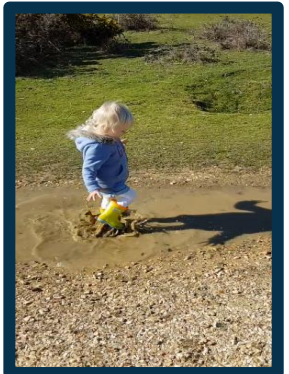
**Natural elements** - Leaves, sticks, flowers and stones offer safe, hands-on sensory experiences.



**Sensory play** – Sand and water experiences stimulate touch, sight and sound.



**Varied surfaces** – Grass, sand, bark, and soft mats help develop coordination and balance.





## What would this look like for Pre School and Year R?

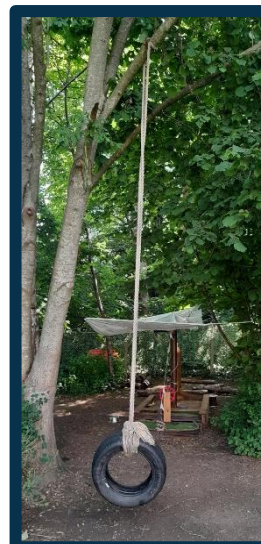
- Open-ended play opportunities
- Sensory-rich environment
- Calming nature zones
- Movement and physical play
- Visual supports
- Social interaction spaces
- Flexible and adaptable activities
- Risk-taking in a safe way
- Inclusive equipment – Accessible paths, raised planters, and adapted tools ensure all children can participate

### Open-ended play opportunities –

Sand, mud kitchens, and loose parts encourage creativity and support different learning styles.



**Sensory-rich environment** – Incorporating natural textures, sounds, and scents helps support children with sensory processing needs, encouraging exploration and self-regulation. Hanging or spinning objects can also enhance vestibular and proprioceptive development, supporting balance, spatial awareness, and body control.





### Visual supports –

Outdoor visual timetables, signs, and symbols help children understand boundaries and routines.



**Social interaction spaces** – Den building, role play, and group games encourage communication and teamwork in a low-pressure setting.



### Calming nature zones –

Quiet garden areas or sensory paths can support emotional regulation and reduce overstimulation.





### **Movement and physical play –**

Climbing, balancing, running, and jumping help develop motor skills and support children who learn through movement.



### **Risk-taking in a safe way –**

Exploring uneven ground, climbing, or using tools builds confidence and resilience.




**Flexible and adaptable activities** – experiences and activities can be easily tailored to suit individual interests, abilities, and attention spans.


Watch the video below to hear a member of the Early Years Advisory Team, talk about some top tips for outdoor learning.

Children's Services

# Outdoor Learning: Top tips



**Ordinarily Available Provision**

 Hampshire County Council

Services for Young Children

Click on the image to play the video

### Top tips for implementing

- **Outside is bigger, louder, messier, and more active**  
Make sure your outdoor provision offers something different from indoors. Think movement, noise, mud, weather, and wild imagination.
- **Nature is free**  
Use the weather, seasons, and natural changes as your ever-changing learning environment.
- **Risk it (safely)**  
Teach children to explore, take safe risks, and build confidence through challenge.
- **Get stuck in**  
Don't just supervise, join the fun. Explore, play, and learn *with* the children.
- **It's a non-negotiable**  
Outdoor play isn't optional, make it part of your daily rhythm with free-flow access and everyday opportunities.

### Further reading

[Infants education and learning in nature | Community Playthings](#)

[Outdoor environments | Training resources | Community Playthings](#)

[Learning outdoors | Training resources | Community Playthings](#)

[Re-engaging With Nature](#)

#### **Training for Schools:**

'The Great Outdoors' – search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

See our brochure [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

#### **Training for Settings:**

'Let's Go Outside' - [CLICK HERE](#)

See our brochure [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders \(Flipbook\)](#)



# Communication Friendly and Language Rich Environments

## What is it?

A **communication-friendly environment** is one that actively supports and nurtures every child's speech, language, and communication skills, regardless of their stage of development. It ensures that communication is thoughtfully planned for and consistently supported throughout the day, creating opportunities for all children to express themselves, connect with others, and thrive. This covers three aspects: The **physical environment**; the **strategies** that **adults** use; the **opportunities** that children have to practise their communication skills.



## Why?

A communication-friendly environment supports and nurtures children's ability to focus, understand, and express themselves during everyday activities. It offers a variety of ways for children to communicate, tailored to their individual stage of development, whether through speech, gestures, signs, visuals, or other tools. Creating such an environment is essential because strong communication skills are the foundation for learning, social interaction, and emotional wellbeing.

## How can it help?


When children feel understood and are given the means to express themselves, they are more confident, engaged, and ready to explore the world around them. This inclusive approach ensures that every child has a voice and can participate fully in their learning journey.

Listen to a member of the Early Years Advisory Team Communication, Language and Literacy strategic group, talk about why communication friendly environments are so important and some key elements of these.

Children's Services

# Communication Friendly Environments

Ordinarily Available Provision



Hampshire County Council

Services for Young Children

Click on the image to play the video

### What **strategies** could the **adults** use in the younger years?

- **Commenting on the child's actions** Describe what the child is doing in the moment (e.g., "You're stacking the blocks!"), using real-time narration.
- **Using expressive communication** Use gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice to add meaning and emotion to their words.
- **Using objects of reference and onomatopoeia** Introduce new words using real objects, familiar sounds, and playful onomatopoeia (e.g., "moo" for cow, "vroom" for car).
- **Echoing and expanding on child's vocalisations** Repeat what the child says or babbles and then add a little more (e.g., child says "car," adult says "Yes, a red car!").
- **Modelling simple, clear language** Use short, grammatically correct phrases and repeat key words (e.g., "All gone!" Or "More juice?").
- **Following the child's lead** Tune into the child's interests and talk about what the child is focused on, building engagement and showing that communication is meaningful and responsive.
- **Creating opportunities for turn-taking** Pause during interactions to give the child time to respond, even non-verbally.
- **Using repetition and routines** Repeat familiar songs, rhymes, and phrases during daily routines.

### What would the **physical environment** and **opportunities** look like in the younger years?

- Cosy spaces for connection
- Scaled-down role-play opportunities such as playing with the dolls and pots and pans
- Role-play and care routines
- Low-level, open storage
- Mirrors at child height
- Sensory-rich materials
- Books in every area and regularly sharing books
- Songs and Rhymes
- Treasure baskets and heuristic play

#### Role-play and care routines

Dolls and soft toys are available to support nurturing play, helping children explore language related to emotions, body parts, and daily routines like feeding or changing.



#### Cosy spaces for connection

Enclosed, soft areas such as an overturned cot bed with cushions and blankets provide a calm, secure space for one-to-one interactions, stories, and quiet communication.





**Scaled-down role-play areas** Small, accessible role play setups (e.g. mini kitchens, baby care stations) encourage pretend play and early language around routines and familiar experiences.

### Low-level, open storage

Resources are stored at child height in open baskets or trays, encouraging independence and opportunities for children to point, choose, and request items.



### Mirrors at child height

Mirrors encourage self-awareness and facial expression play, supporting early social interaction and communication.

### Sensory-rich materials

Natural and sensory materials (e.g. fabric, wooden toys, textured objects) encourage exploration and adult-child dialogue about how things feel, sound, and move. Fabric, wooden toys, textured objects) encourage exploration and adult-child dialogue about how things feel, sound, and move and smell.

**Books in every area** - Board books and cloth books are placed throughout the environment, not just in the book corner, to encourage spontaneous sharing and language opportunities during play.





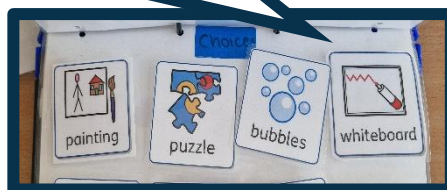
### What additional **strategies** would the **adults** use in Pre School and Year R?

- **Giving the child time to process information** Pause after speaking, giving children time to think, process, and respond. Remember to allow at least 10 seconds.
- **Using visuals, gestures, and tone of voice to support understanding** Enhance spoken language with visual aids, expressive gestures, and varied tone of voice to reinforce meaning.
- **Breaking down longer instructions into manageable steps** Simplify and break down multi-step instructions into smaller, manageable parts (e.g., “First get your coat... now find your peg”).
- **Reducing the number of direct questions asked** Instead of asking frequent direct questions, adults use comments and observations to model language and reduce pressure.
- **Expanding on what the child says to model more complex language** Listen carefully to what the child says and then expand on it by adding new words or ideas (e.g., child says “dog,” adult says “Yes, a big brown dog is running!”).

### What would the **physical environment** and **opportunities** look like in Pre School and Year R?

- Range of visuals available
- Language rich
- Resources clearly labelled
- Cosy corners
- Purposeful print
- Consideration given to background noise, reducing visual distraction, lighting
- Bumping into books
- Clearly defined learning spaces
- Display key vocabulary
- Talking partners
- Small group activities
- Choosing boards (e.g. How am I feeling today?)
- Encourage Curiosity

**Range of visuals available** - Visual supports such as timetables, behaviour prompts, and emotion cards are displayed throughout the setting. These help children understand routines, make choices, and communicate their needs more independently. (see visuals sections for more information)



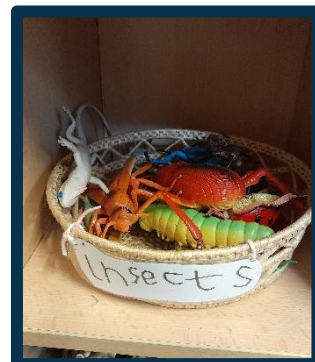
**Cosy corners** - Designated quiet areas with soft furnishings, designed for just two or three children at a time, will offer a safe retreat for children and increase their opportunities to be able to communicate and connect with others in a low-pressure environment.

**Language-rich environment** - The environment is filled with opportunities to hear, see, and use language, including storytelling areas, rhyme displays, and labelled resources. This constant exposure supports vocabulary development, listening skills, and expressive language.



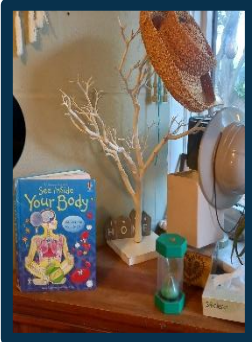
**Consideration given to background noise, reducing visual distraction, lighting** - The environment is thoughtfully designed with soft furnishings to absorb sound, neutral wall colours and decluttered spaces to reduce visual noise, and natural lighting where possible. These adjustments help children focus, feel calm, and develop their receptive skills.

**Purposeful print** - A range of print types (including handwriting) is used meaningfully across the setting, such as signs in role-play areas and labels on furniture. Children can be encouraged to make and talk about their own signs. This helps children understand that print carries meaning and encourages early literacy skills.





**Bumping into books** - Books are placed in every area of the setting, such as recipe books in the home corner or construction books near the building blocks. This encourages spontaneous reading, helps children make connections between literacy and their play, and develops their understanding of the world around them, ultimately expanding their vocabulary.



### Clearly defined learning spaces

Each area of the environment is clearly marked and resourced for specific types of play and learning, such as a writing table, maths area, or investigation station. This helps children understand the purpose of each space and supports focused engagement.



**Choosing boards (e.g., "How am I feeling today?")** Interactive boards allow children to express their emotions or make choices about their day using pictures or symbols. This promotes emotional literacy, independence, and helps staff respond to individual needs effectively.





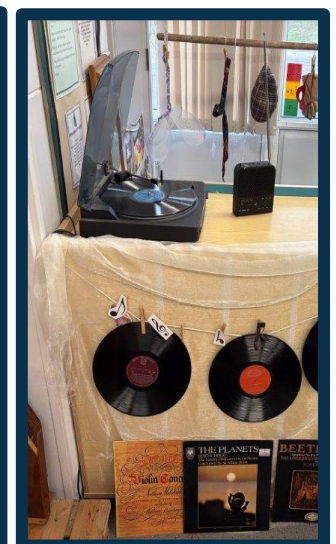
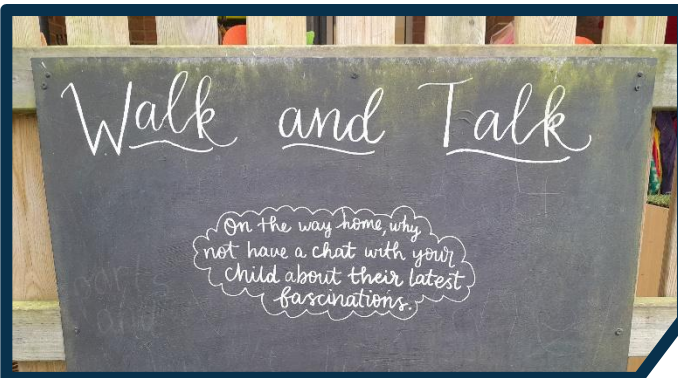
### Displays of key vocabulary and talking points

- Current topic words, phonics sounds, and key questions are displayed at child height and updated regularly. Additionally, walk and talk boards or 'ask me about' stickers could be provided for parent interaction. These reinforce learning, support language development, and encourage children to use new vocabulary in context.



### Encourage curiosity

Include intriguing objects that spark wonder and invite questions, like magnifying glasses, natural materials, old technology, or mystery boxes. Display items at child height and rotate them regularly to maintain interest. Pair these with prompts like "What do you notice?" or "What do you think this could be?" to encourage exploration, critical thinking, and rich language use.



### Talking partners

- Children are regularly paired up during carpet time or group activities to discuss ideas, answer questions, or share thoughts. This builds confidence in speaking, develops listening skills, and fosters positive peer interactions.

### Small group activities

- Adult-led sessions such as key person time, storytelling circles, or rhyme times are planned for small groups. These provide targeted support, allow for adaptive teaching, and help build strong relationships between adults and children.

## Top tips for implementing

### **Consistency is key to communication**

Make sure all staff understand what a communication-friendly environment looks like and how to embed it into daily routines. Consistency across adults helps children feel secure and supported in their communication.

### **Create conversation corners**

Design cosy, communication friendly spaces both indoors and outdoors where children can talk, listen, and interact without distractions. Use den-making materials and let children co-construct these areas to give them ownership and spark imagination.

### **Treasure hunt for talk**

Visit car boot sales and charity shops to find quirky, unusual objects that provoke curiosity, questions, and rich vocabulary. Items with history or mystery are perfect for sparking awe and wonder.

### **Cater for all communicators**

Plan for a wide range of language abilities, from children using single words or gestures to those confidently using full sentences. Use visuals, gestures, and open-ended prompts to support every stage of communication.

### **Model, don't muddle**

Adults should model rich, clear language throughout the day. Narrate actions, comment, ask open-ended questions, and extend children's sentences to build vocabulary and understanding.

### **Sing, rhyme, and shine**

Songs and rhymes are powerful tools for language development. Their rhythm, repetition, and melody help children remember new words, develop phonological awareness, and build confidence in speaking. Use familiar tunes to introduce routines, transitions, and new vocabulary and don't be afraid to get silly.

The video below talks through some top tips for implementing a communication friendly environment.



Click on the image to play the video

## Further reading

[Breaking the code of baby babble | Family](#)

**Training for Schools:** - search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

'Diving Deeply into Literacy'

'Continuously Challenging Continuous Provision'

See our brochure [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

**Training for Settings:**

- The Power of Print [CLICK HERE](#)
- Nurturing Beginnings: babies in the prime areas of development [CLICK HERE](#)
- Continuously Challenging Continuous Provision [CLICK HERE](#)

See our brochure [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 PVIs](#)



# Visuals

## What is it?

Visual aids are visual cues that present information in a clear, accessible format or break tasks down into manageable steps. These can include pictures, symbols, or objects that represent actions, choices, or events. Visuals may take the form of photos, drawings, real items, or printed icons, and are often used to represent routines, transitions, or communication options. This type of support is also referred to as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), which encompasses a range of tools that assist in expressing and understanding information visually.



## Why?

Using visual aids in EYFS can significantly enhance children's ability to focus, understand routines and concepts, and express their needs, thoughts, and ideas. Visuals provide consistent, accessible cues that support communication and learning, especially for children with emerging language skills or speech and language difficulties.

## How can it help?

Watch the video below to hear our Speech and Language Therapy Advisor talk further about visuals and how they can help.



Click on the image to play the video

## What would this look like for the younger years?

To create a home-from-home environment, the visuals in your under-twos room should be personalised and familiar to each child. This helps foster a strong sense of self, emotional security, and interdependence which are key foundations for early development.

- Images of themselves and their families
- Makaton signs
- Objects of reference
- Choosing props for activities
- Gestures and facial expressions
- Black and white/ high contrast visuals
- Real life images within setting

### **Makaton signs/symbols**

Simple, consistent signs used alongside speech to support early communication and understanding.

### **Objects of reference**

Real objects used to represent routines or activities (e.g. a nappy for nappy time, a cup for snack time).

### **Images of themselves, families and their key person**

Personalised books or photo frames with pictures of themselves and their families around the setting.



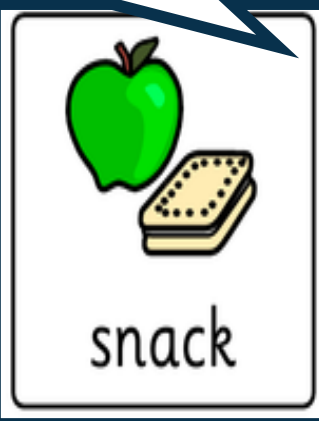
### **Photo visuals for routines**

Step-by-step photo sequences showing daily routines like washing hands, snack time, or getting ready to go outside.



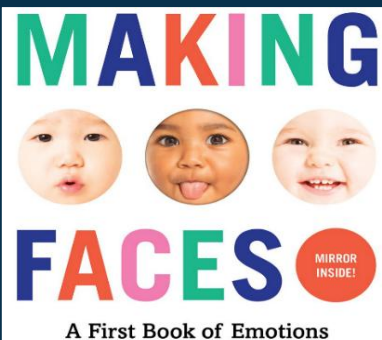
### **Black and white / high contrast visuals**

Especially beneficial for very young babies, these visuals support early visual development and attention.



### **Real-life images within the setting**

Use of real photos (rather than illustrations) in books and pictures around the setting, making visuals more relatable and meaningful for young children.



### **Choosing props for activities**

Children select from real or symbolic props to represent an activity (e.g. a paintbrush for art, a spoon for nursery rhymes, a ball for outdoor play).



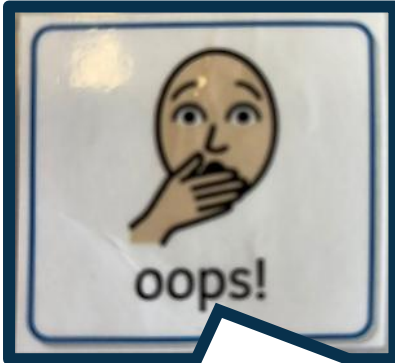
### **Facial expressions from adults**

– e.g. exaggerated smiles, surprised faces, or calm expressions to help babies and toddlers recognise and respond to emotions and social cues.



## What would this look like for Pre School and Year R?

- Objects of Reference
- Now and Next Boards
- Choosing Boards
- Visual Images
- Communication Books
- Aided Language Boards (Communication Boards)
- 'Who's Here Today' Boards
- Makaton and other signing systems
- Gestures and body language
- Electronic devices
- Feelings thermometers



### Visual timetables

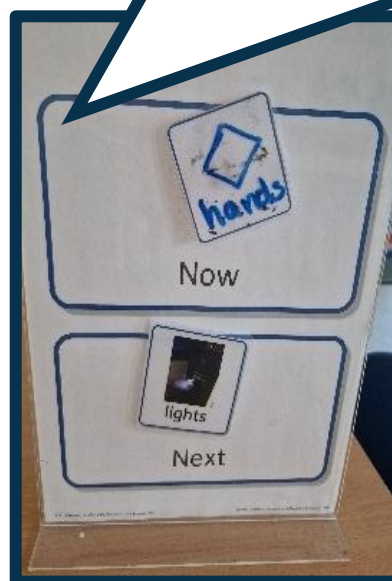
Full-day or part-day schedules using pictures or symbols to help children understand the structure of their day, reducing anxiety and supporting transitions. Pictures can be taken off the timetable once that part of the day has passed, to support children's understanding of where they are in the day.



### Oops card

A visual cue used when there's a change to the usual routine. It helps children prepare for unexpected changes and supports emotional regulation by signalling, "Something's different, and that's okay."

**Now and next boards** Simple visual schedules showing what's happening now and what's coming next to support routine and transitions.



### Communication books

Personalised books with pictures or symbols that children can use to express needs, feelings, or ideas.

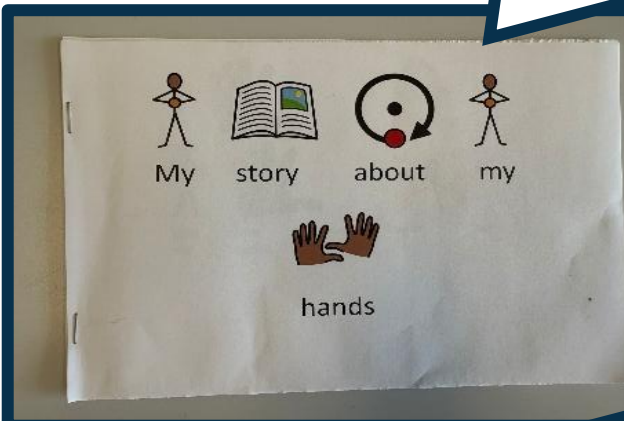
### Aided language boards

Communication boards with a range of symbols or words that support expressive and receptive language during interactions and play.



### Social stories

Short, personalised stories using simple language and visuals to help children understand social situations, routines, or expectations.



**Choosing boards** Boards with pictures or symbols that allow children to make choices (e.g. which story to read or which area to play in).

### Electronic devices

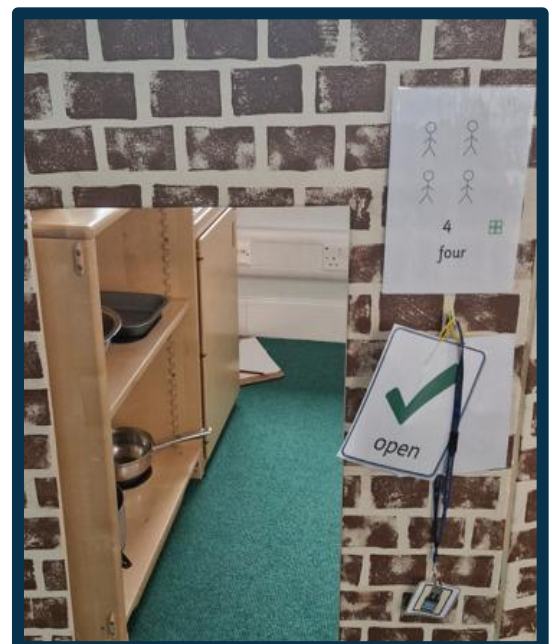
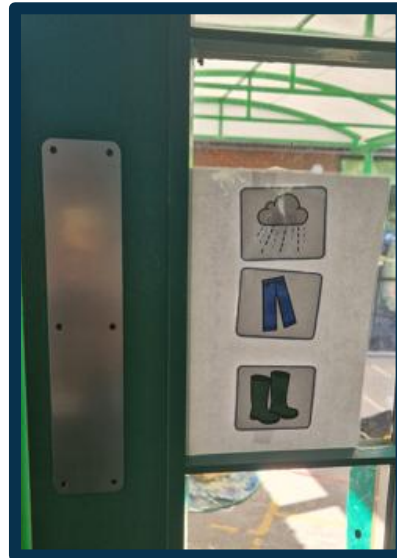
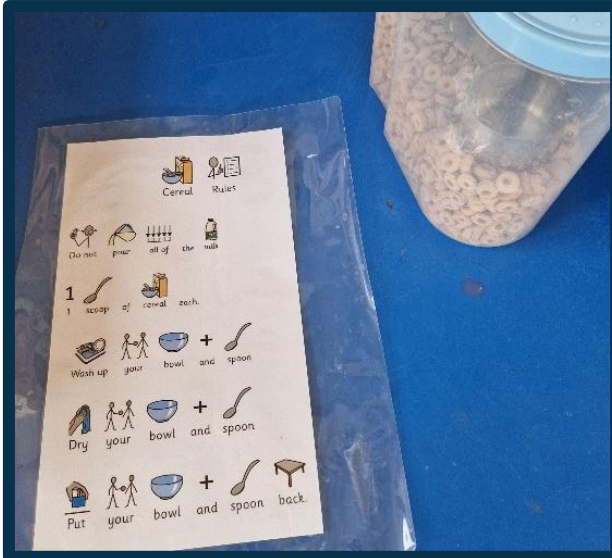
Use of tablets or speech-generating devices with visual interfaces to support communication and choice-making.

### Gestures and body language

Consistent use of non-verbal cues like pointing, nodding, or open arms to reinforce meaning and support communication.



**Visual images** Photos, symbols, or illustrations used throughout the environment to label areas, support instructions, or reinforce learning.



## Top tips for implementing

### **Keep it consistent**

Use visuals all day, every day and ensure the same visuals are used throughout the setting—routine is key.

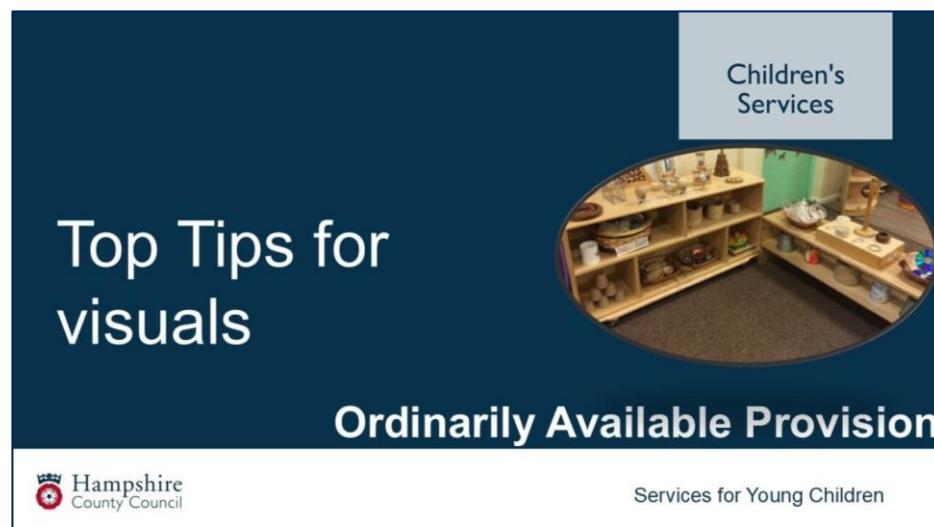
### **Say it and show it**

Speak the word as you show the visual — double the impact.

### **Team up with the experts**

Chat with your NHS speech and language therapist to find the *just-right* visuals for each child.

Watch the video below for some more top tips on the use of visuals, from our Speech and Language Therapy Advisor.



Click on the  
image to play  
the video

## Further reading

- [Getting Started with Paper-Based Symbol Resources \(acecentre.org.uk\)](https://www.acecentre.org.uk/)
- [Nursery World - Using symbols to support the development of early years behaviour, learning and communication](#)
- [How to use objects of reference - YouTube](#) – video aimed at parents
- Free symbols and communication boards including additional languages - [Helping Refugees Communicate | Widgit](#)



# Low Arousal Environments

## What is it?

A low arousal environment is thoughtfully designed to reduce sensory stimulation and create a calm, predictable space that supports emotional regulation and focused engagement. These environments typically feature soft, neutral colours, minimal visual clutter, and gentle lighting to avoid overstimulating children's developing nervous systems.



## Why?

By minimising visual and auditory distractions, children, particularly those with sensory sensitivities, can be supported to feel safe, secure, and better able to concentrate. Resources are carefully selected and displayed to avoid overwhelming choices, and the overall layout promotes a sense of order and calm. Low arousal environments are especially beneficial for supporting self-regulation, positive behaviour, and inclusive practice, ensuring all children can access learning in a way that meets their individual sensory and emotional needs.


## How can it help?


Click on the image to watch our Speech and Language Therapy Advisor/Advanced Sensory Integration Practitioner talk about the importance of low arousal environments and how these can support children.

Children's Services

# What are Low Arousal Environments?

Ordinarily Available Provision



 Hampshire County Council

Services for Young Children

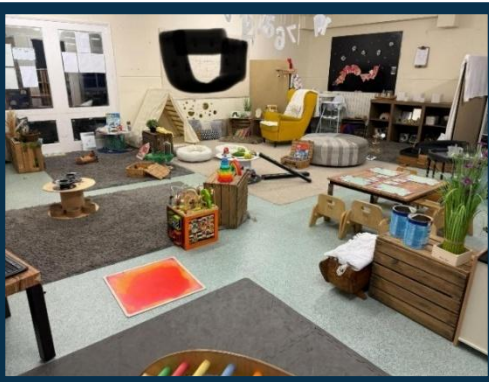
Click on the image to play the video

## What would this look like for the younger years?

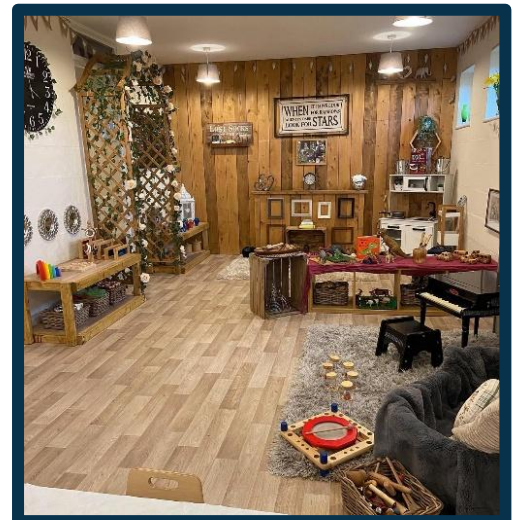
- Soft, neutral colours
- Minimal wall displays
- Natural light
- Quiet background noise – no loud music or constant chatter.
- Soft furnishings
- Adopt a less is more and accessible approach to resources



**Natural light** is preferred, with soft lighting (e.g., warm LED lamps or using lamp shades) to avoid harsh glare.



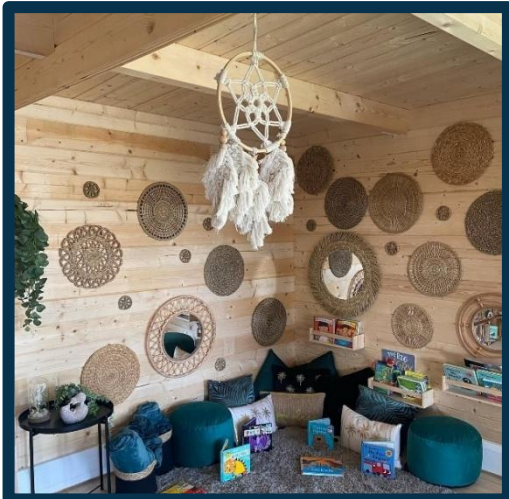
**Soft, neutral colours** on walls and furnishings (e.g., beige, soft greys, muted greens).



**Minimal wall displays** ensure they are simple, uncluttered, placed at child height.







**Soft furnishings**  
(rugs, cushions, curtains) to absorb sound and reduce echo.



### What would this look like for Pre School and Year R?

A low arousal environment for older children, shares the same calming principles as for our younger EYFS children, but is adapted to meet the developmental needs of older children, who are more mobile, curious, and socially interactive.

- Uncluttered, tidy space
- Visual cues and prompts
- Spaces for emotional regulation
- Purposeful displays



**Uncluttered, tidy spaces**, inside and outside, to reduce overwhelm.







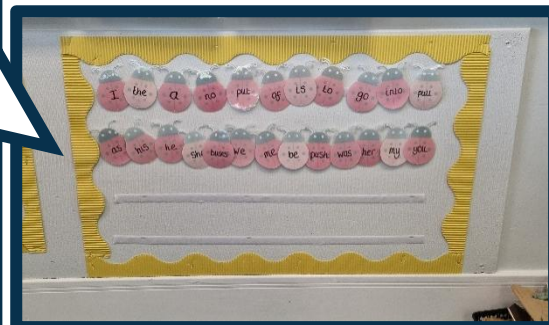
**Calm spaces** (inside and out) for emotional regulation. See further information on implementing these in the calm spaces section.



**Visual cues and prompts** (e.g., simple labels or pictorial schedules) may be used to support independence without overwhelming.



**Displays are purposeful** children's work is displayed thoughtfully, not cluttered, and at their eye level. Every area of your environment does not have to have a display.





## Top tips for implementing

### **Keep it calm**

Use soft, neutral tones and natural materials to create a soothing atmosphere. Avoid bright colours and busy patterns that can overstimulate young children.

### **Declutter with purpose**

Limit the number of resources on display. A calm space with fewer choices helps children focus, reduces overwhelm, and supports deeper engagement.

### **Soften the sound**

Use rugs, curtains, and soft furnishings to absorb noise. Keep background sounds low and be mindful of how adult voices and music contribute to the sensory environment.

### **Create cosy corners**

Designate quiet, semi-enclosed spaces where children can retreat when they need calm and can still remain visible. Use canopies, cushions, or tents to create a sense of safety and comfort.

### **Mind the lighting**

Go for natural light where possible, and use warm, soft lighting instead of harsh fluorescents. Dimmable lights or lamps can help create a more relaxed mood.

The video below gives some top tips for ensuring you have a low arousal environment.

Children's Services

## Top Tips for Low Arousal Environments?

Ordinarily Available Provision



Click on the image to play the video



Hampshire County Council

Services for Young Children

## Further reading

[Working in the baby room](#) | [CPD training](#) | [Community Playthings](#)

[We need less colour in the Early Years](#) | [Family Sustainable play](#) | [Topics](#) | [Community Playthings](#)

### **Training for Schools:** - search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

'Diving Deeply into Literacy'

'Inclusion in Year R'

'Continuously Challenging Continuous Provision'

See our brochure [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

### **Training for Settings:**

The Power of Print [CLICK HERE](#)

The Wonder Years [CLICK HERE](#)

Nurturing Beginnings: babies in the prime areas of development [CLICK HERE](#)

Continuously Challenging Continuous Provision [CLICK HERE](#)

See our brochure [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders \(Flipbook\)](#)

# Sensory Exposure

## What is it?

This is the process of gradually exposing children to a wide range of sensory experiences, both through incidental input from their environment and through carefully planned activities. These experiences stimulate and engage multiple sensory systems, including the **vestibular** system (responsible for balance and spatial orientation), **proprioceptive** system (body awareness), **tactile** system (touch), **visual** system (sight), **auditory** system (hearing), **gustatory** system (taste), **olfactory** system (smell), and **interoception** (internal body awareness, such as hunger, thirst, or temperature).



## Why?

Working on sensory input in early childhood is crucial for overall development, as it lays the foundation for learning, emotional regulation, and social skills. Sensory experiences help children understand their world, build connections in the brain, and develop essential skills like fine motor control, problem-solving, and communication.



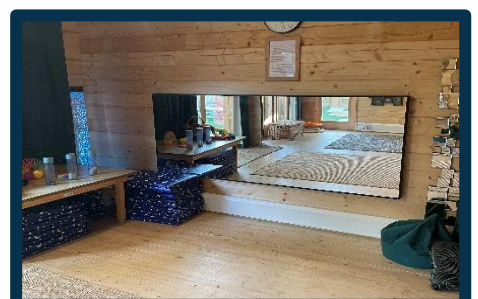
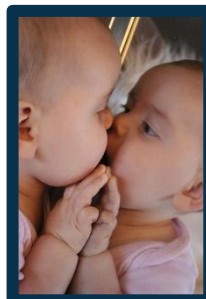
## How can it help?

Sensory exposure supports young children's development by stimulating brain growth and helping them build essential skills. Through activities that engage the senses—like touching, listening, smelling, and moving—children enhance their cognitive abilities, language, motor skills, and emotional regulation. These experiences also encourage social interaction and help children make sense of the world around them in a playful, meaningful way.

## What would this look like for the younger years?

- Soft music and natural sounds
- Mirrors at baby height
- High-contrast visuals
- Textured mats and rugs
- Natural materials
- Water and messy play
- Soft toys with different textures
- Movement opportunities
- Gentle scents

**Mirrors at baby height** Mirrors help babies explore facial expressions, movement, and self-awareness.





**Soft music and natural sounds** Gentle background music, lullabies, or nature sounds (like birdsong or water) to stimulate auditory development.

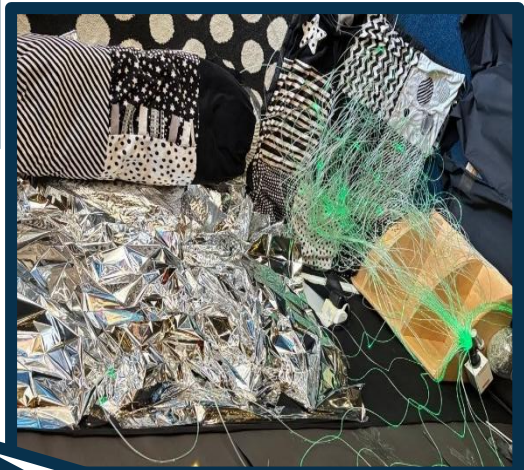
**High-contrast visuals** Black-and-white patterns for younger babies, and small areas of bright colour for older babies to support visual tracking and focus.



**Textured mats and rugs** Different surfaces to crawl or sit on like soft fleece, bumpy rubber, or woven mats to stimulate tactile and proprioceptive senses.



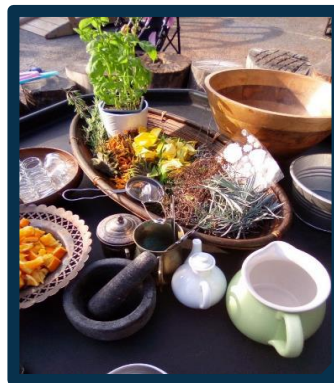
**Water and messy play** Simple water trays, edible finger paints, or scented playdough for safe, exploratory messy



**Natural materials** Items like pinecones, shells, or smooth stones (always supervised) offer rich sensory input and connect babies to nature.



**Movement opportunities** Rocking chairs, baby swings, tummy time, and soft climbing cushions support vestibular and proprioceptive development.



**Gentle scents** Mild, natural smells (like lavender sachets or citrus peels) introduced occasionally to stimulate the olfactory system.

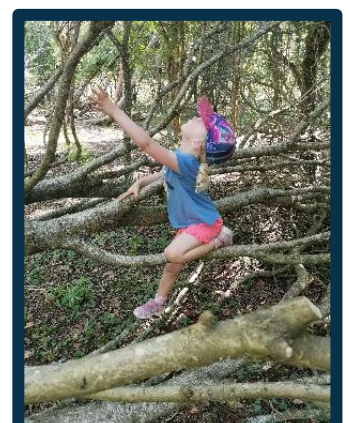
### What would this look like for Pre School and Year R?

Sensory opportunities should be provided during everyday learning activities throughout the day. These should include sounds, smell, taste, sights and movement activities. Consideration should be given for both indoor and outdoor learning environments.

- Interactive story corners
- Messy play stations
- Movement zones
- Music and sound exploration
- Role play areas with sensory additions
- Light and shadow play
- Nature and outdoor sensory trails
- Tactile art activities
- Scent exploration stations
- Calm corners with sensory tools



**Nature & outdoor sensory trails**  
Include natural materials like leaves, bark, stones, and water, plus opportunities to run, dig, climb and explore.

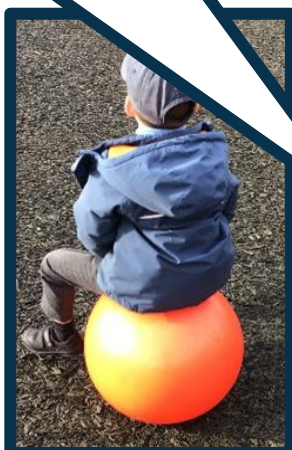




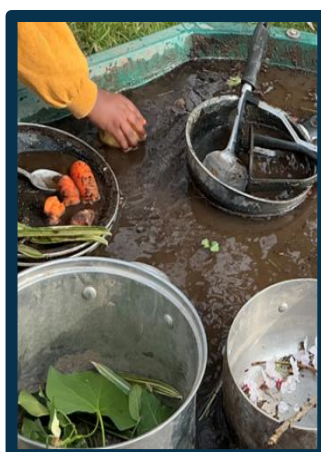
### Interactive story corners

Include props, puppets, and sensory elements (like textured pages or scented items) to bring stories to life.

**Movement zones** Provide space and equipment for jumping, balancing, hanging, and climbing to support vestibular and proprioceptive development.



**Role play areas with sensory additions** Add real-life textures, smells, and sounds to role play areas (e.g. a café with herbs, fabric menus, and clinking cups).



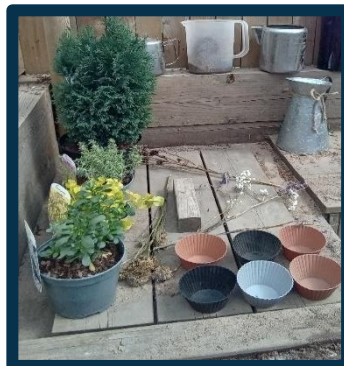


### Sensory corners and dens with sensory tools

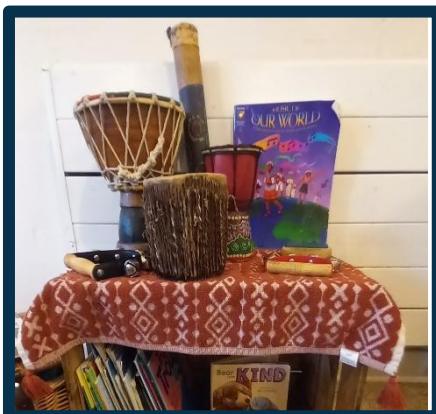
Provide soft lighting, weighted blankets, fidget toys, and soothing sounds to support emotional regulation and interoception.

### Scent exploration stations

Offer safe, familiar scents (like lavender, citrus, or cinnamon) in jars or sensory bottles for olfactory play.



**Music & sound exploration** Offer instruments, music players or echo microphones to explore rhythm, pitch, and cause-and-effect. Explore how different genres make us feel.





## Top tips for implementing

### **Layer the senses**

Enhance existing activities by adding sensory elements—textures and scents in the role play areas, sounds in outdoor spaces and dens, or movement paths like hopscotch and balance lines.

### **Talk about it**

Encourage children to express what sensations they enjoy and which ones they find uncomfortable. This builds self-awareness and communication.

### **No pressure, just possibility**

Let children explore at their own pace. Watching others is a valid way to engage—never force sensory experiences.

### **Tune in**

Observe closely. If a child shows signs of discomfort or dysregulation, pause or remove the sensory input.

### **Take small steps**

Introduce sensations gradually. For example, start with dry textures before moving to wet ones, allowing children to build confidence and comfort.

### **Have “safe” options available**

This may include having a flannel to wipe textures off hands, having a toy from home that the child can smell if they don't like the smell of something, having quiet areas available.

## Further reading

[Course: Sensory Processing](#)

[5 benefits of sensory play | Family](#)

[Sensory Ladders Open Access | anyone | anywhere | anytime – Sensory](#)

[What Are Sensory Processing Difficulties? | SIE](#)

# Sensory Stories

## What is it?

Sensory stories are everyday narratives that incorporate a range of sensory experiences to engage the senses and enrich the storytelling process, making it more immersive and accessible for all learners.



## Why?

Sensory stories provide immersive exposure to a wide range of sensory input, including sights, sounds, textures, smells, and movements. This multi-sensory approach not only supports the development of sensory processing skills but also fosters attention, active listening, comprehension, and curiosity. By engaging multiple senses simultaneously, sensory stories create meaningful and memorable experiences that can be especially beneficial for individuals with sensory integration needs or learning differences.

## How can it help?

Click on the image to watch our Speech and Language Therapy Advisor/Advanced Sensory Integration Practitioner, talk about what sensory stories are and they are useful to implement.



Click on the  
image to play  
the video

## What would this look like for the younger years?

- Treasure baskets / sensory baskets
- Messy play activities paired with simple stories
- Mirrors
- Musical instruments
- Songs and rhymes



**Treasure Baskets / sensory baskets** These are shallow baskets filled with a variety of safe, everyday objects made from different materials (wood, metal, fabric, natural items). Babies explore them using touch, taste, and sound, encouraging curiosity and sensory discovery. See also section on [schemas](#).



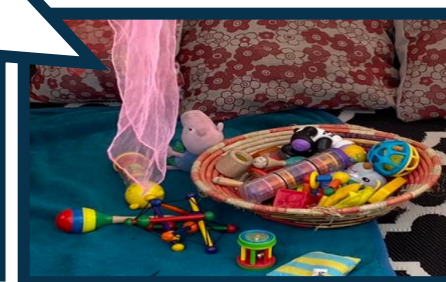
**Messy play** Messy play activities are paired with simple stories. For example, while reading *"We're Going on a Bear Hunt"*, children might explore trays of grass, water, or mud to match the key features of the story.



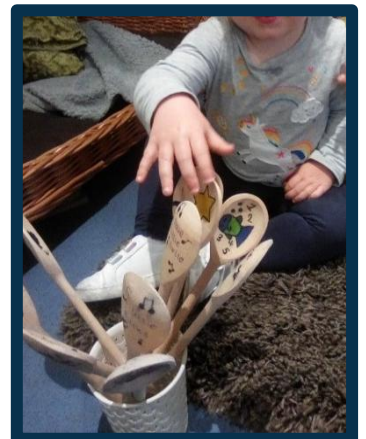
**Musical instruments** Simple instruments like shakers, drums, or bells are introduced during stories to represent characters or actions. For example, a drumbeat might mimic a giant's footsteps, helping children connect sound with narrative.



**Mirrors** are used during storytelling to help babies explore facial expressions, movement, and self-awareness. They can watch themselves while listening to a story or song, which supports social and emotional development.



**Songs and rhymes** Familiar songs and nursery rhymes are woven into stories to support rhythm, language development, and memory. Repetition and melody help very young children engage and anticipate what comes next.





## What would this look like for Pre School and Year R?

- **One-to-one or small group story times**

Sensory stories can be shared in calm, focused one-to-one sessions or in small groups, allowing for interaction, repetition, and individual engagement.

- **Simplified stories**

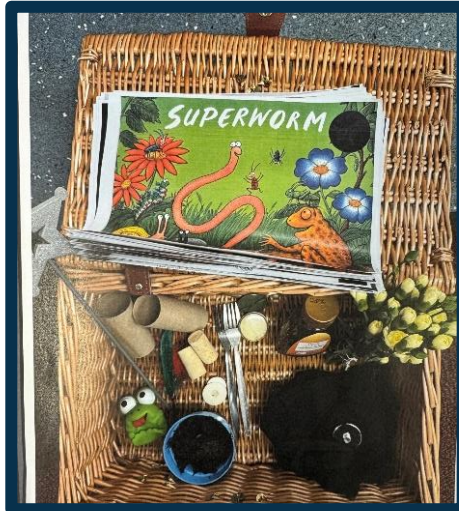
The stories are shortened to around 8–10 key lines or moments, making them easier to follow and remember. Each line represents a clear action, feeling, or event.

- **Multi-sensory engagement**

Each line of the story is paired with a sensory element, such as a prop, movement, sound, or texture, to stimulate different sensory systems:

- **vestibular** (balance and movement): swaying, spinning, jumping
- **proprioceptive** (body awareness): pushing, pulling, squeezing
- **tactile** (touch): soft fabrics, rough textures, water play
- **olfactory** (smell): scented items like herbs or spices
- **gustatory** (taste): safe, simple tastes like fruit or edible props
- **auditory** (hearing): sound effects, instruments, voice modulation
- **visual** (sight): bright colours, puppets, lights, picture cards

Below are images of sensory stories used with pre-school and Year R children, highlighting the range of different resources used to engage different senses.





## Top tips for implementing

### **Explore & express**

Give children time to explore each sensory item. Encourage them to share how it feels; Do they like it? Have they felt it before?

### **Wipe & wonder**

Keep wipes or towels nearby for wet or sticky textures. This helps children feel more comfortable and in control.

### **Watch & wait**

Never pressure a child to join in. It's perfectly okay for them to observe others until they are ready to explore at their own pace.

Click on the link below to see some top tips about implementing sensory stories.



Click on the  
image to play  
the video

## Further reading

[Early Years, Childcare Settings and Childminders in Hampshire - NEW! A – Hampshire County Council Shop](#)

<https://www.thechildrenstrust.org.uk/virtual-learning/sensory-stories>

[Sensory play for children with SEN | Community Playthings](#)

How to create a sensory story - <https://youtu.be/6PeZ7r6aekA>

# Regulation Toolbox

## What is it?

A regulation toolbox refers to a collection of strategies and techniques that help children recognise, understand, and manage their emotions. Just like a physical toolbox contains different tools for different tasks, a regulation toolbox equips children with a variety of emotional tools they can use in different situations. These strategies support emotional development by improving focus, behaviour, and resilience, while also helping children build strong friendships and resolve conflicts effectively. By having access to a range of regulation tools, children are better prepared to navigate challenges and maintain their mental well-being.



## Why?

A regulation toolbox is essential because it helps children develop the foundational skills needed for emotional well-being and social success. It supports them in recognising and naming their emotions, understanding how they feel, and learning to express those feelings in safe and respectful ways. With tools to control impulses and calm down, children can better manage their reactions in challenging situations. It also encourages healthy communication, allowing them to express needs and frustrations through words or gestures. Most importantly, a regulation toolbox fosters resilience by teaching children that emotions are temporary and manageable, helping them bounce back after disappointment or conflict. By using regulation techniques consistently throughout the day, rather than only in moments of crisis, children can maintain a more balanced emotional state, reducing the likelihood of becoming overwhelmed or dysregulated.

## How can it help?

Watch the video below to hear a member of the Early Years Advisory Team talk about creating a 'regulation toolbox' and some of the strategies you may want to include in yours.



Click on the  
image to play  
the video



## What would this look like in the younger years?

Many of the strategies listed below have been covered in more detail elsewhere within this document, so for further details on how to implement a strategy, please click on the link to be taken to the appropriate page.

- **Consistent [routines](#)** - Predictable daily routines help children feel safe and in control, reducing anxiety and emotional overwhelm. Use visual schedules, familiar songs for transitions, and consistent timing for meals, naps, and activities to create a sense of security.
- **Calming [spaces](#)** - Quiet, cozy areas with soft lighting and familiar items offer children a safe retreat when they feel overwhelmed. Create a “home-from-home” environment with cushions, blankets, and comforting toys to support emotional regulation.
- **Physical [comfort](#)** - Gentle physical contact like cuddles or rocking can soothe a dysregulated child and help them feel connected and calm. For our youngest children, offer comfort through hugs, lap time, or holding hands when needed.
- **Music and movement** - Rhythmic activities like singing, dancing, or bouncing songs help children release energy and regulate their emotions. Incorporate these throughout the day, especially during [transitions](#) or high-energy moments.
- **[Schemas](#) and repetition** - Repetitive play patterns (schemas) such as transporting, enclosing, or rotating objects provide structure and predictability, which support emotional regulation. Encourage these natural play behaviours to help children feel grounded.
- **Space for physical movement** - Physical activity helps children manage big emotions and maintain regulation. Provide opportunities for jumping, climbing, crawling, or stretching throughout the day to support their [sensory](#) and emotional needs.
- **[Outdoor](#) time** - Spending time outside offers a calming, less stimulating environment that supports sensory regulation. Regular outdoor play allows children to explore, decompress, and reset emotionally.

## Boundaries and Consistency

Boundaries and consistency are essential parts of helping young children feel safe, secure, and emotionally regulated. Boundaries are the clear, age-appropriate expectations we set for behaviour, like using kind hands, walking indoors, or tidying up after play. Consistency means applying these expectations in the same way each time, so children know what to expect and what is expected of them. When adults respond calmly and predictably, it reduces anxiety and helps children feel more in control. For example, consistently using a visual timer for transitions and having a clear routine for snack time, all help children feel grounded. Over time, this structure supports self-regulation, independence, and positive behaviour.

Watch the video below to listen to a member of the Early Years Advisory Team discuss why clear boundaries and consistency are vital in Early Years settings.



Click on the  
image to play  
the video

## Co-regulation

“At its simplest, co-regulation is when an adult helps a child self soothe in times of stress. It's a building block for self-regulation, and a big step in learning how to handle our own feelings, which is why it is so important to start co-regulation in early childhood.” ([Help children handle emotional distress with co-regulation](#))

Dr Stuart Shanker developed five steps to self-regulation. We need to co-regulate with children and model how to deal with big emotions, before they will be able to self-regulate.

1. Reframe the behaviour – remember that the child is having a hard time, not trying to give you a hard time.
2. Recognise the stressor – understand what has caused the child to be stressed. It may help to consider the five domains below when unpicking what may have caused a period of dysregulation for the child.
  - Biological – for example too much visual stimulation or noise or not enough movement
  - Emotional – feeling intense emotions, such as anxiety over a change in routine
  - Cognitive – difficulty in processing certain types of information
  - Social – difficulty in understanding the effect of their behaviour on others or in understanding social cues
  - Prosocial – difficulty in coping with other people's stress, for example intense feelings when a friend is sad
3. Reduce the stress – once you know what the stressor is you can begin to think about ways you can reduce the stress for a child. For example, increasing or decreasing their sensory input, giving them additional time outside to move.
4. Reflect – both you and the child (as they develop) can begin to reflect and build a picture of their individual stressors so you can pro-actively plan to reduce these.
5. Restore energy – help the child to restore their energy levels and come back to a state of calm and readiness to learn.





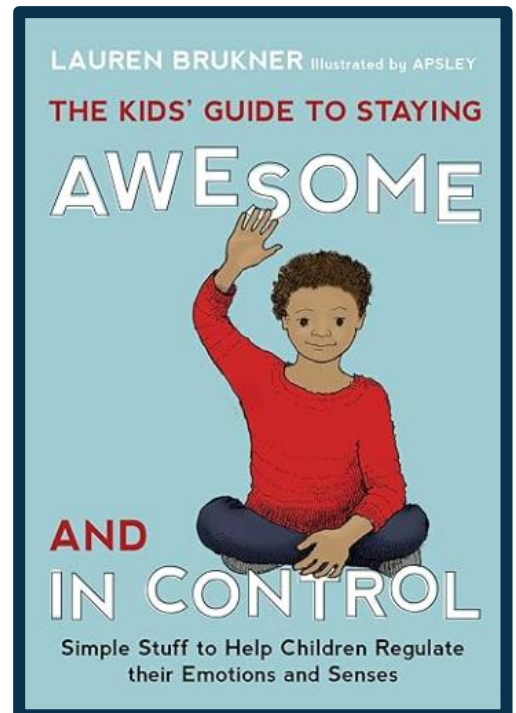
What **additional** strategies could you include in your regulation toolbox to support preschool and Year R children even further?

- Movement breaks
- Sensory circuits
- Breakfast available
- Choosing boards

### Movement breaks

Quick, purposeful physical activities that help children reset and regulate throughout the day.

- **Mindful activities** – Gentle stretches (shoulder rolls, neck stretches, toe touches), breathing exercises (deep breaths, box breathing), or chair yoga (seated twists).
- **Active breaks** – Jumping jacks, high knees, dancing on the spot, or marching.
- **Obstacle courses** – Use classroom items or furniture to create simple movement challenges.
- **Walks** – A short walk indoors or outdoors to reset energy and focus.
- **Quick games** – Rock, paper, scissors, ball games, or target games to re-engage attention.
- **Dance party** – Play music and let children move freely to release energy and boost mood.



### Sensory circuits

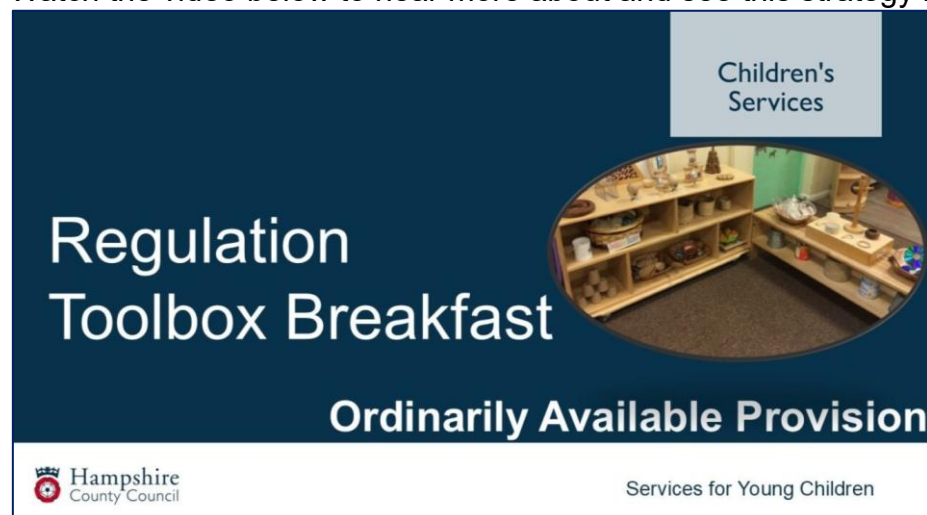
Short, structured sessions of physical and sensory activities that help children become more alert, focused, and ready to learn—especially beneficial for those with self-regulation, sensory processing, or attention difficulties.

- **Alerting phase** – Wakes up the body and brain (e.g. star jumps, skipping, bouncing on a therapy ball).
- **Organising phase** – Supports focus, coordination, and planning (e.g. balancing, crawling, obstacle courses).
- **Calming phase** – Helps settle the body and mind (e.g. deep pressure, breathing exercises, yoga).

## Supplying breakfast or extra snacks

Providing a nutritious breakfast or offering extra snacks throughout the day helps regulate children's energy levels, mood, and focus. Young children may struggle to concentrate or manage emotions when they're hungry, especially if they haven't eaten enough before arriving with you at school or your setting. Regular access to healthy snacks supports stable blood sugar levels, which in turn helps with attention, emotional regulation, and overall well-being.

Watch the video below to hear more about and see this strategy in action.



Click on the image to play the video



## Choosing boards

Providing individual children with their own choosing boards, featuring a small, personalised selection of activity options, helps reduce the overwhelm that can come with too many choices during continuous provision. By narrowing the focus to areas, the child enjoys and engages with most, these boards support emotional regulation, reduce anxiety, and encourage deeper, more sustained play. This also helps children concentrate better, rather than flitting between areas, and gives them a sense of control, autonomy, and independence in their learning environment.



## Top tips for implementing

### **Involve families**

Share strategies with parents and carers so they can reinforce them at home, creating consistency and deeper understanding.

### **Reflect and review regularly**

Talk with children about which tools helped and when. Adjust the toolbox as their needs and preferences evolve.

### **Create a calming environment**

Ensure the physical space supports regulation, use soft lighting, quiet corners, and sensory-friendly materials to create a soothing atmosphere.

### **Embed tools into daily routines**

Incorporate regulation strategies into transitions, group times, and free play. The more familiar they become, the more likely children are to use them when needed.

### **Model the strategies**

Regularly demonstrate how to use the tools yourself and co-regulate with the children, whether it's deep breathing, using a calming space, or choosing from a visual board. Children learn best by watching trusted adults.

### **Start small and build gradually**

Introduce a few key strategies at a time so children can become familiar with them. Build up the toolbox as their understanding and confidence grow.

### **Use positive language**

Frame regulation as a strength: "Let's use our breathing to help our bodies feel calm," rather than focusing on behaviour as a problem.

### **Be proactive, not reactive**

Get to know your children's individual triggers and early signs of dysregulation. This allows you to respond with supportive strategies before behaviours escalate, creating a more responsive and emotionally safe environment.

Watch the video below to see a member of the Early Years Advisory Team talk about some top tips for creating a regulation toolkit.



Children's Services

# Regulation Toolbox Top Tips

Ordinarily Available Provision

Hampshire County Council

Services for Young Children

Click on the image to play the video

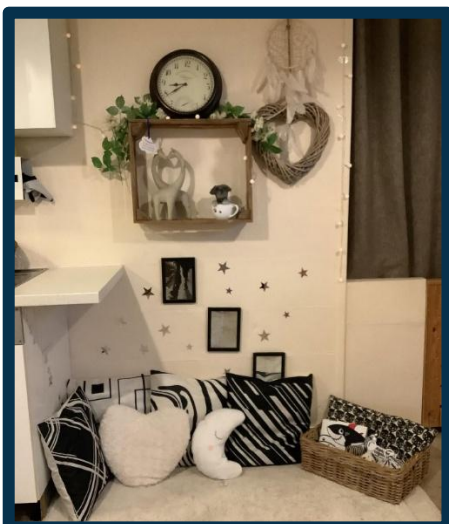
## Further reading

- [Promoting movement provoking learning | Topics | Community Playthings](#)
- [ANXIETY/ANGER - Using Slow-Low-Low to calm things down](#)
- [https://self-reg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/infosheet\\_5-Domains-of-Self-Reg.pdf](https://self-reg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/infosheet_5-Domains-of-Self-Reg.pdf)
- [MergedFile](#)

# Calm Spaces

## What is it?

A **calm space** is a designated area within an environment created with the sole purpose of offering children a safe and supportive environment to retreat to when they are experiencing overwhelming emotions. It is a place where they can regain emotional and physical control, enabling them to return to learning when they feel ready. This space should always be accessible, clearly labelled, and inviting—free from clutter and ideally located away from high-traffic or noisy areas. Children may choose to use the space independently or be gently guided there by an adult when signs of dysregulation are observed. More than just a cosy corner, an effective calm space is a thoughtfully designed area of the environment that can be used for both co-regulation and self-regulation.

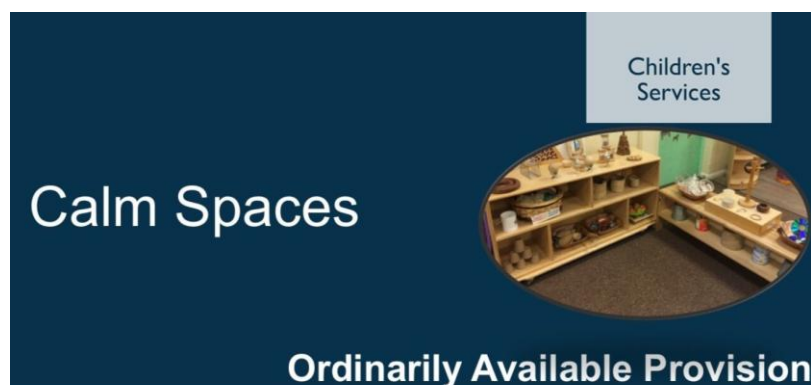


## Why?

Calm spaces are essential in early years environments because young children can often experience sensory overload due to fast-paced routines and visually stimulating surroundings. For example, bright, primary-coloured walls and an abundance of resources can overwhelm their senses, making it difficult for them to concentrate and regulate emotions. Without opportunities to co and self-regulate in a peaceful, quiet atmosphere, children may struggle with emotional control and perseverance as they grow. Creating calm, soothing environments helps reduce overstimulation and supports the development of vital self-regulation skills, ultimately enhancing their ability to learn and thrive.

## How can it help?

Watch the video below to listen to a member of the Early Years Advisory Team talk about what calm spaces are and the benefit of implementing these within your environment.



Click on the image to play the video



## What would this look like in the younger years?

- Easily accessible to less mobile children
- Soft and cosy items are included, such as cushions and teddies
- Uncluttered and looks inviting
- Warm and neutral or pale colours are used to lessen overwhelm
- Placed in low traffic areas of the environment
- Sensory items, such as tactile books, are included to support regulation
- Practitioners available to co-regulate with children



### Easily accessible and cosy

Spaces are easily accessible for younger children and include cosy, soft items, such as cushions and blankets.

### Sensory objects

Include sensory objects, such as tactile and cloth books, to support regulation.



### Uncluttered and inviting

Spaces are thoughtfully arranged to look inviting and are kept free of clutter.



### Sensory considerations

Warm, neutral or pale colours are used, and calm spaces are located in low noise, traffic areas of the environment.

## What would this look like for Pre School and Year R?

Calm spaces for older children, share the same principles as for our younger children, but are slightly adapted to meet the developmental needs of older children.

- Wider range of resources for sensory regulation
- Visuals to support use of range of resources or taught breathing techniques
- Books centered around emotions
- Adults will still need to be available for co-regulation



## Inside and outside

Spaces are provided both inside and outside – all spaces are still thoughtfully arranged, clutter free and take account of sensory processing differences, by being in low noise areas of the environment and in calm, neutral colours



## Tools for regulation

A wider range of sensory tools and books focused on emotions are available to support regulation

## Visual support

Visuals are used to support children in using strategies to regulate



## Individualised spaces

For all ages, more individualised spaces may be used to meet a child's individual needs. These would have specific resources tailored to the child, for example, linked to their interests or sensory needs.





## Top tips for implementing

### **Always accessible**

Ensure your calm space is always accessible so that children will always have a safe space to retreat to when they are experiencing big emotions.

### **Consider positioning**

Set up your calm corner in a quiet, low traffic area of your environment. This will support children in being able to regulate if they are feeling overwhelmed as it will be less stimulating.

### **Co-regulation before self-regulation**

Children will need to be taught how to use this area and any resources included within in. Only after lots of modelling, will children be able to use this area independently.

### **Consider your outside**

Set up a calm space outside as well as inside, so children have an easily accessible safe space to retreat to when they are outside as well.

### **Individualised approach**

Some children may need their own calm space to support them in regulating their emotions. If children need an individualised space, consider what specific resources will help them. For example, do they like reading books or blowing bubbles. Are they calmed by visual input such as fairy lights or soothed by tactile input such as feeling certain materials. Plan their space around their individual needs to make it as effective as possible.

Watch the video below for some top tips for setting up a calm space in your environment.



## Further reading

[Creating calm corners for self-regulation in early years settings](#)

[Help children handle emotional distress with co-regulation](#)

[Nooks for self-regulation in early years | Case Study - RAFAKids Brize Norton | Community Playthings](#)

[Self-Soothe Box – CAMHS](#)

[We need less colour in the Early Years | Family](#)

**Training for Schools:** - search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

'Inclusion in Year R'

See our brochure [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

### **Training for Settings:**

The Wonder Years [CLICK HERE](#)

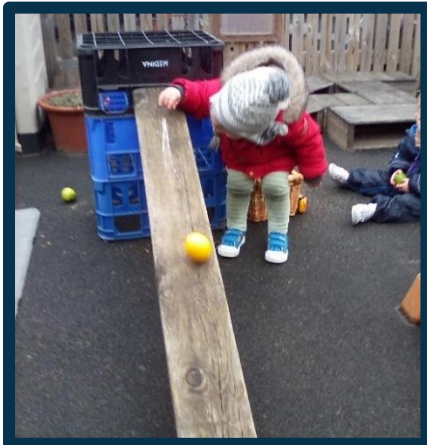
Nurturing Beginnings: babies in the prime areas of development [CLICK HERE](#)

Continuously Challenging Continuous Provision [CLICK HERE](#)

# Understanding Schemas

## What is it?

Schematic behaviour refers to the way children explore and make sense of ideas through play. This often appears as repeated actions that might seem puzzling to adults, but they are a key part of how young children investigate and understand the world around them.



## Why?

Understanding children's schemas is essential because it helps practitioners make sense of the repetitive actions children often display, such as filling, stacking, or spinning, which are not random, but purposeful behaviours that support learning through repetition and exploration of cause and effect. Recognising these patterns allows adults to better understand children's behaviour and tailor activities that align with their natural interests and learning styles. This not only supports engagement but also promotes deeper cognitive development, as schemas lay the foundation for more complex thinking and learning processes over time.

## How can it help?

Listen to the video below, where a member of the Early Years Advisory Team explains how a deeper understanding of schemas and play progression can help you better support each child's unique learning journey within your setting.



Click on the image to play the video

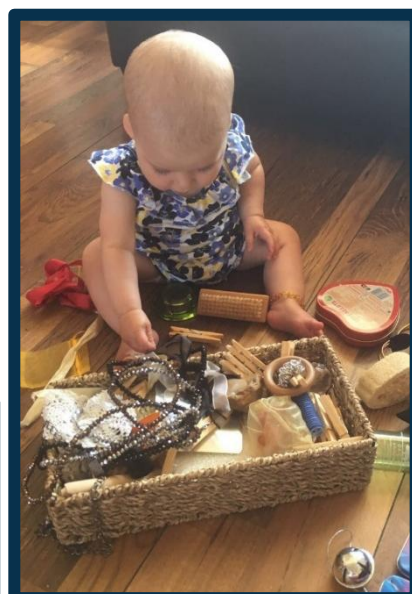
## What would this look like for the younger years?

- Observe and follow the child's lead
- Offer Treasure Baskets
- Create Heuristic Play opportunities
- Include rich sensory play





**Treasure Baskets** These are shallow baskets filled with a variety of safe, everyday objects made from different materials (wood, metal, fabric, natural items). These invite exploration and support early schematic behaviours.



### Create Heuristic Play opportunities

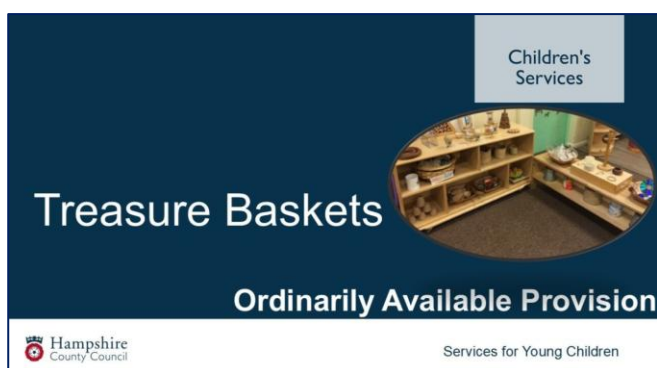
Encourage discovery through open-ended materials such as spoons, lids, tubes, and fabric.



Watch the two videos below for further information about Treasure Baskets and how they can support children's development.



Click on the image to play the video



Click on the image to play the video

### Include rich sensory play

Use materials like water, sand, dough, and textured fabrics to support tactile exploration and schema development.



Watch the video below to hear a member of the Early Years Advisory Team talk further about Heuristic Play and how it can support children's development.

Children's Services

# Heuristic Play

Ordinarily Available Provision

Hampshire County Council  
Services for Young Children

Click on the image to play the video

What would this look like for Pre School and Year R?

- Embrace loose parts play
- Design open-ended activities
- Follow the child's lead
- Encourage deep-level thinking



### Embrace loose parts play

Offer a wide range of open-ended materials; stones, fabric, tubes, lids, sticks, that children can move, combine, and transform.

### Follow the child's lead

Observe children's repeated actions and interests. Use these observations to extend their learning by offering resources and experiences that align with their current schema focus.





### Design open-ended activities

Provide invitations to play that have no fixed outcome. Activities like building, role play, and mark-making allow children to explore their schemas through creativity and experimentation.



### Encourage deep-level thinking

Ask open-ended questions and offer time for sustained play. This supports children in making connections, testing ideas, and developing their own theories through schematic exploration.



Watch a member of the Early Years Advisory Team talk about some top tips for implementing Treasure Baskets and Heuristic Play – click the image below.



## Top tips for implementing

### **Spot the patterns**

Watch for repeated actions—lining up, wrapping, spinning, transporting. These are clues to the schemas children are exploring.

### **Plan with purpose**

Use your observations to plan activities and set up environments that extend children's schematic interests in meaningful ways.

### **Keep it open ended**

Offer materials that can be used in many ways; loose parts, blocks, fabric, and natural items. These invite creativity and deeper exploration.

### **Make space for movement**

Schemas often involve physical action. Ensure your environment allows for safe movement, construction, and experimentation.

### **Value the process**

Schematic play may not always result in a product, but the thinking, testing, and repeating are where the learning happens.

## Further reading

[Play Matters Guide 2025 Final](#)

[The state of play | Topics | Community Playthings](#)

[Treasure baskets | Sensory baskets for babies | Community Playthings](#)

[Heuristic play | The meaning of heuristic play | Community Playthings](#)

[Open-ended Play | Training resources | Community Playthings?](#)

[Loose Parts for Children with Diverse Abilities | Community Playthings](#)

[The hidden benefits of loose parts play | Family](#)

[Cathy Nutbrown Interview: How To Identify Schemas In Play \(family.co\)](#)

[Play schemas and why they matter | Family](#)

**Training for Schools:** - search 'EYFS' on the Learning Zone

'Inclusion in Year R'

'Schemas for Schools'

See our brochure [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure 2025 - 2026 Schools \(Flipbook\)](#)

**Training for Settings:**

The Wonder Years [CLICK HERE](#)

I Spy a Schema [CLICK HERE](#)

See our brochure [Early Years Advisory Team Training Brochure: 2025 - 2026 Preschools, nurseries and childminders \(Flipbook\)](#)



# Recognitions

This practical guide has been created with the support of dedicated Hampshire teachers and early years practitioners.

**With thanks to the following schools and settings in Hampshire:**

Alphabet City Day Nursery, Highfields

Alverbridge Nursery

Fairfield Infant School

First Steps Yateley

Four Marks Primary School

Freegrounds School

Hart Plain Day Care

Haven Nursery School

Little Ducklings

Little Fingers

Little Gems Cowplain

Manor Field Infant School

Mill Rythe Infant School

Morelands Primary School

Nightingale Primary School

Pinecones Nursery

Potley Hill Early Years

Salisbury Infant School

Scantabout Primary School

Shipton Bellinger Preschool

Springwood Infant School

St Pauls Preschool

Wickham Church of England Primary School

Wickham Preschool