



Department
for Education

Development Matters

Non-statutory curriculum guidance
for the early years foundation stage

First published September 2020
Revised July 2021



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1

Introduction.

Introduction

No job is more important than working with children in the early years.

Development Matters is for all early years practitioners, for childminders and staff in nurseries, nursery schools, and nursery and reception classes in school. It offers a top-level view of how children develop and learn. It can help you to design an effective early years curriculum, building on the strengths and meeting the needs of the children you work with. It guides, but does not replace, professional judgement.

The curriculum consists of everything you want children to experience, learn and be able to do. It must meet the requirements of the educational programmes in the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). These are included throughout Development Matters for ease of reference.

This guidance sets out the pathways of children's development in broad ages and stages. The actual learning of young children is not so neat and orderly. For that reason, accurate and proportionate assessment is vital. It helps you to make informed decisions about what a child needs to learn and be able to do next. It is not designed to be used as a tick list for generating lots of data.

You can use your professional knowledge to help children make progress without needing to record lots of next steps. The guidance can help you check that children are secure in all the earlier steps of learning before you look at their 'age band'. Depth in learning matters much more than moving from one band to the next or trying to cover everything. For example, it is important to give a child many opportunities to deepen their understanding of numbers to 5. There is no value in rushing to 10.



Children who may struggle in their early learning are not ‘low ability’. We do not know what their potential might be. Every child can make progress with the right support.

The **observation checkpoints** can help you to notice whether a child is at risk of falling behind. You can make all the difference by acting quickly. By monitoring a child’s progress closely, you can make the right decisions about what sort of extra help is needed. Through sensitive dialogue with parents (‘parent’ is used throughout this document to refer to parents, carers, and guardians), you can understand the child better and offer helpful suggestions to support learning at home within the family.

Health colleagues, like health visitors or speech and language therapists, offer vital support to this work.

Development Matters is not a long list of everything a child needs to know and do. It guides, but does not replace, your professional judgement.

The reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage are statutory from September 2021. They will help you to improve outcomes for all children, especially disadvantaged children. They put early language at the heart of a broad curriculum. They help you to reduce the time you spend on unnecessary assessment paperwork. That means you can spend more time with the children.

The aim is to improve outcomes for all children and help close the gap for disadvantaged children.

Development Matters includes more guidance about children’s communication and language. Language is the foundation of children’s thinking and learning.

High-quality early years education, with a strong focus on communication, is good for every child. It is especially positive for disadvantaged children. By reducing workload expectations, this guidance can free up time. You can use that time to help children who are struggling with their learning. This can stop gaps in learning from opening and widening. Gaps by the end of the early years will, on average, double by the end of primary schooling. The early years are the crucial years for making a difference.

The EYFS is about how children learn, as well as what they learn. Children need opportunities to develop their own play and independent exploration. This is enjoyable and motivating. They also need adults to ‘scaffold’ their learning by giving them just enough help to achieve something they could not do independently. Helping children to think, discuss and plan ahead is important, like gathering the materials they need to make a den before they start building. These are ways of helping children to develop the characteristics of effective learning.

When children are at earlier stages of development than expected, it is important to notice what they enjoy doing and also find out where their difficulties may lie. They need extra help so that they become secure in the earlier stages of development. It is not helpful to wait for them to become ‘ready’. For example, children who are not speaking in sentences are not going to be able to write in sentences. They will need lots of stimulating experiences to help them develop their communication. That’s why the time you spend listening to them and having conversations with them is so important.

Children learn and develop more from birth to five years old than at any other time in their lives. If children are at risk of falling behind the majority, the best time to help them to catch up and keep up is in the early years. Every child can make progress, if they are given the right support.

When we give every child the best start in their early years, we give them what they need today. We also set them up with every chance of success tomorrow.



2

**Seven key features
of effective practice**

Seven key features of effective practice

1. The best for every child

- All children deserve to have an equal chance of success.
- High-quality early education is good for all children. It is especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- When they start school, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are, on average, 4 months¹ behind their peers. We need to do more to narrow that gap.
- Children who have lived through difficult experiences can begin to grow stronger when they experience high quality early education and care.
- High-quality early education and care is inclusive. Children's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly. All children promptly receive any extra help they need, so they can progress well in their learning.



¹ Education Policy Institute: Education in England Annual Report 2020 (https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/EPI_2020_Annual_Report_.pdf) and Early years foundation stage profile results: 2018 to 2019 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2018-to-2019>)

2. High-quality care

- The child's experience must always be central to the thinking of every practitioner.
- Babies, toddlers and young children thrive when they are loved and well cared for.
- High-quality care is consistent. Every practitioner needs to enjoy spending time with young children.
- Effective practitioners are responsive to children and babies. They notice when a baby looks towards them and gurgles and respond with pleasure.
- Practitioners understand that toddlers are learning to be independent, so they will sometimes get frustrated.
- Practitioners know that starting school, and all the other transitions in the early years, are big steps for small children.

3. The curriculum: what we want children to learn

- The curriculum is a top-level plan of everything the early years setting wants the children to learn.
- Planning to help every child to develop their language is vital.
- The curriculum needs to be ambitious. Careful sequencing will help children to build their learning over time.
- Young children's learning is often driven by their interests. Plans need to be flexible.
- Babies and young children do not develop in a fixed way. Their development is like a spider's web with many strands, not a straight line.
- Depth in early learning is much more important than covering lots of things in a superficial way.

4. Pedagogy: helping children to learn

- Children are powerful learners. Every child can make progress in their learning, with the right help.
- Effective pedagogy is a mix of different approaches. Children learn through play, by adults modelling, by observing each other, and through guided learning and direct teaching.
- Practitioners carefully organise enabling environments for high-quality play. Sometimes, they make time and space available for children to invent their own play. Sometimes, they join in to sensitively support and extend children's learning.
- Children in the early years also learn through group work, when practitioners guide their learning.
- Older children need more of this guided learning.
- A well-planned learning environment, indoors and outside, is an important aspect of pedagogy.

5. Assessment: checking what children have learnt

- Assessment is about noticing what children can do and what they know. It is not about lots of data and evidence.
- Effective assessment requires practitioners to understand child development. Practitioners also need to be clear about what they want children to know and be able to do.
- Accurate assessment can highlight whether a child has a special educational need and needs extra help.
- Before assessing children, it's a good idea to think about whether the assessments will be useful.
- Assessment should not take practitioners away from the children for long periods of time.

6. Self-regulation and executive function

- Executive function includes the child's ability to:
 - hold information in mind
 - focus their attention
 - think flexibly
 - inhibit impulsive behaviour.
- These abilities contribute to the child's growing ability to self-regulate:
 - concentrate their thinking
 - plan what to do next
 - monitor what they are doing and adapt
 - regulate strong feelings
 - be patient for what they want
 - bounce back when things get difficult.
- Language development is central to self-regulation: children use language to guide their actions and plans. Pretend play gives many opportunities for children to focus their thinking, persist and plan ahead.



7. Partnership with parents

- It is important for parents and early years settings to have a strong and respectful partnership. This sets the scene for children to thrive in the early years.
- This includes listening regularly to parents and giving parents clear information about their children's progress.
- The help that parents give their children at home has a very significant impact on their learning.
- Some children get much less support for their learning at home than others. By knowing and understanding all the children and their families, settings can offer extra help to those who need it most.
- It is important to encourage all parents to chat, play and read with their children.



3

**The characteristics
of effective teaching
and learning**

The characteristics of effective teaching and learning

In planning and guiding what children learn, practitioners must reflect on the different rates at which children are developing and adjust their practice appropriately. Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

- **playing and exploring** – children investigate and experience things, and ‘have a go’
- **active learning** – children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements
- **creating and thinking critically** – children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things

Statutory framework for the EYFS



Playing and exploring

Children will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Realise that their actions have an effect on the world, so they want to keep repeating them.

Encourage babies' exploration of the world around them. Suggestions: investigating the feel of their key person's hair or reaching for a blanket in their cot.

Offer open-ended resources like large smooth shells and pebbles, blocks and lengths of fabric for babies and toddlers to play freely with, outdoors and inside.

Plan and think ahead about how they will explore or play with objects.

When playing with blocks: encourage children to discuss what they will make before and while making it, or draw a picture before building.

Guide their own thinking and actions by referring to visual aids or by talking to themselves while playing. For example, a child doing a jigsaw might whisper under their breath: "Where does that one go? – I need to find the big horse next."

Visual aids can help children to keep track of what they need to do next, for example counting on their fingers or referring to a series of pictures on the wall to remind them what they must do before lunch.

Verbal mental aids include providing a sensitive commentary on what a child is doing. You might comment: "I see you are looking for the biggest pieces first" or ask "how well do you think that's going?"

Children may copy your commentary by talking out loud to themselves first. In time, this will develop into their 'inner voice'.

Children will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Make independent choices.	<p>Provide a well-organised environment so that children know where materials and tools are and can access them easily.</p> <p>Provide enough materials and arrange spaces so that children can collaborate and learn alongside peers. Give children enough time and space to engage in large-scale projects that may continue over several days.</p> <p>Explore the reasons behind children's choices e.g. 'I'm interested that you're using a paintbrush rather than a pencil to make your picture.'</p>
Bring their own interests and fascinations into early years settings. This helps them to develop their learning.	<p>Extend children's interests by providing stimulating resources for them to play with, on their own and with peers, in response to their fascinations.</p> <p>Join in with children's play and investigations, without taking over. Talk with them about what they are doing and what they are noticing.</p> <p>Provide appropriate non-fiction books and links to information online to help them follow their interests.</p>
Respond to new experiences that you bring to their attention.	<p>Regularly provide new materials and interesting things for children to explore and investigate.</p> <p>Introduce children to different styles of music and art. Give them the opportunity to observe changes in living things in the setting, and around the local environment. Take children to new places, like a local theatre, a museum, a National Trust heritage site, a fire station, a farm or an elderly people's home.</p> <p>Involve children in making decisions about science experiments: what might we feed the plants to make them grow? Why do you think fizzy water might work? How will we know if one is growing faster than another?'</p>

Active learning

Children will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Participate in routines, such as going to their cot or mat when they want to sleep.

Begin to predict sequences because they know routines. For example, they may anticipate lunch when they see the table being set, or get their coat when the door to the outdoor area opens.

Show goal-directed behaviour. For example, babies may pull themselves up by using the edges of a low table to reach for a toy on top of the table. Toddlers might turn a storage box upside down so they can stand on it and reach up for an object.

Begin to correct their mistakes themselves. For example, instead of using increasing force to push a puzzle piece into the slot, they try another piece to see if it will fit.

Help babies, toddlers and young children feel safe, secure and treasured as individuals.

The key person approach gives children a secure base of care and affection, together with supportive routines. That can help them to explore and play confidently.

Provide furniture and boxes at the right height to encourage babies to pull themselves up and reach for objects.

Opportunities to play and explore freely, indoors and outside, are fun. They also help babies, toddlers and young children to develop their self-regulation as they enjoy hands-on learning and sometimes talk about what they are doing.

Help young children to develop by accepting the pace of their learning. Give them plenty of time to make connections and repeat activities.

Children will be learning to:

Keep on trying when things are difficult.

Examples of how to support this:

Help children to think about what will support them most, taking care not to offer help too soon. The following strategies will help children at different times, depending on their confidence, how much previous experience they've had with an activity, and how motivated, or distracted, they are:

- repeating something hard on their own; learning through trial and error.
- asking a friend or an adult for help.
- watching an adult or another child, modelling what to do, or listening to their guidance.

At times, children respond well to open-ended activities which they choose. Other times, they benefit from a supportive structure established by an adult. It is important to provide both kinds of opportunities.

Adults can teach children to use self-calming to help them deal with intense emotions. For example, you could introduce a 'calming jar'. Or you could introduce 'zones of regulation'. These can help children to become more aware of their emotions and think about how to calm themselves.



Creating and thinking critically

Children will be learning to

Examples of how to support this:

Take part in simple pretend play. For example, they might use an object like a brush to pretend to brush their hair, or 'drink' from a pretend cup.

Sort materials. For example, at tidy-up time, children know how to put different construction materials in separate baskets.

Review their progress as they try to achieve a goal. Check how well they are doing.

Solve real problems: for example, to share nine strawberries between three friends, they might put one in front of each, then a second, and finally a third. Finally, they might check at the end that everyone has the same number of strawberries.

Help babies, toddlers and young children to find their own ideas by providing open-ended resources that can be used in many ways.

Encourage, support and enjoy children's creative thinking as they find new ways to do things.

Children need consistent routines and plenty of time so that play is not constantly interrupted. It is important to be reflective and flexible.

Help children to reflect on and talk about their learning through using photographs and learning journeys. Share in children's pride about their achievements and their enjoyment of special memories.

Suggestion: you could prompt a conversation with questions like: "Do you remember when...?", "How would you do that now?" or "I wonder what you were thinking then?"

Children will be learning to

Examples of how to support this:

Use pretend play to think beyond the 'here and now' and to understand another perspective. For example, a child role-playing the billy goats gruff might suggest that "Maybe the troll is lonely and hungry? That's why he is fierce."

Help children to extend their ideas through sustained discussion that goes beyond what they, and you, have noticed. Consider 'how' and 'why' things happen, and 'what might happen next.'

Know more, so feel confident about coming up with their own ideas.

Make more links between those ideas.

Help children to come up with their own ideas and explanations.

Suggestion: you could look together at woodlice and caterpillars outdoors with the magnifying app on a tablet. You could ask: "What's similar about caterpillars and other insects?" You could use and explain terms like 'antennae' and 'thorax'.

Concentrate on achieving something that's important to them. They are increasingly able to control their attention and ignore distractions.

Offer children many different experiences and opportunities to play freely and to explore and investigate. Make time and space for children to become deeply involved in imaginative play, indoors and outside.

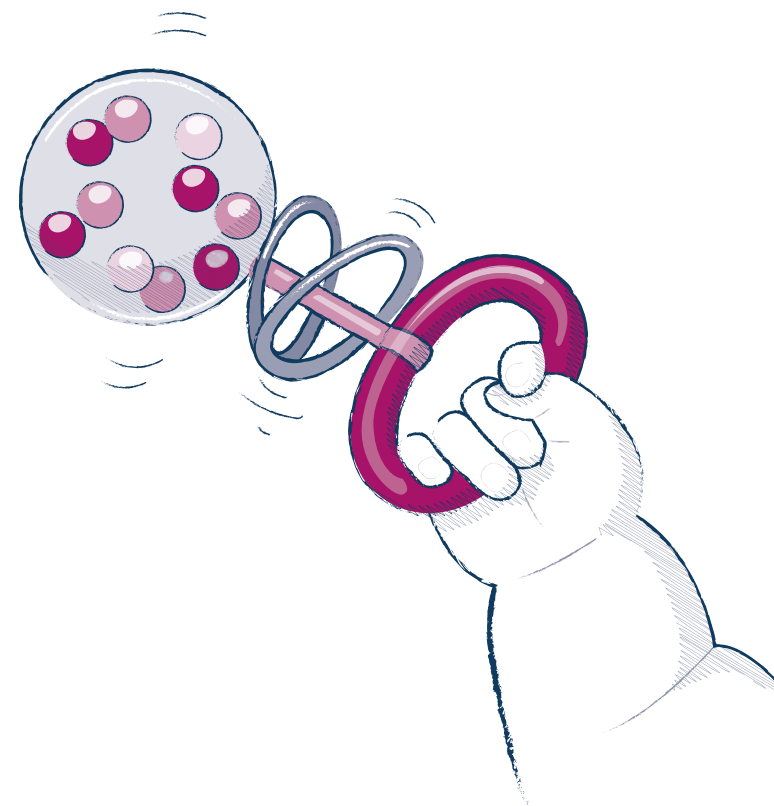


Communication and language

EYFS Statutory Educational Programme:

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.



English as an additional language

Speaking more than one language has lots of advantages for children. It is the norm in many countries around the world. Children will learn English from a strong foundation in their home language. It is important for you to encourage families to use their home language for linguistic as well as cultural reasons. Children learning English will typically go through a quiet phase when they do not say very much and may then use words in both languages in the same sentence. Talk to parents about what language they speak at home, try and learn a few key words and celebrate multilingualism in your setting.



Birth to three – babies, toddlers and young children will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Turn towards familiar sounds. They are also startled by loud noises and accurately locate the source of a familiar person's voice, such as their key person or a parent.

Gaze at faces, copying facial expressions and movements like sticking out their tongue. Make eye contact for longer periods.

Watch someone's face as they talk.

Copy what adults do, taking 'turns' in conversations (through babbling) and activities. Try to copy adult speech and lip movements.

Enjoy singing, music and toys that make sounds.

Recognise and are calmed by a familiar and friendly voice.

Listen and respond to a simple instruction.

Babies and toddlers thrive when you show a genuine interest in them, join in and respond warmly.

Using exaggerated intonation and a sing-song voice (infant-directed speech) helps babies tune in to language.

Regularly using the babies and toddlers' names helps them to pay attention to what the practitioner is saying for example: "Chloe, have some milk." It is important to minimise background noise, so do not have music playing all the time.

Babies love singing and music. Sing a range of songs and play a wide range of different types of music. Move with babies to music.

Babies and toddlers love action rhymes and games like 'Peepo'. As they begin to join in with the words and the actions, they are developing their attention and listening. Allow babies time to anticipate words and actions in favourite songs.



Birth to three – babies, toddlers and young children will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Observation checkpoint

Around 6 months, does the baby respond to familiar voices, turn to their own name and ‘take turns’ in conversations with babbling?

Around 12 months, does the baby ‘take turns’ by babbling and using single words? Does the baby point to things and use gestures to show things to adults and share interests?

Around 18 months, is the toddler listening and responding to a simple instruction like: “Adam, put on your shoes?”

Make sounds to get attention in different ways (for example, crying when hungry or unhappy, making gurgling sounds, laughing, cooing or babbling).

Babble, using sounds like ‘baba’, ‘mamama’.

Use gestures like waving and pointing to communicate.

Take time and ‘tune in’ to the messages babies are giving you through their vocalisations, body language and gestures.

When babies and toddlers are holding and playing with objects, say what they are doing for example: “You’ve got the ball,” and “Shake the rattle.”





Birth to three – babies, toddlers and young children will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Reach or point to something they want while making sounds.

Copy your gestures and words.

Constantly babble and use single words during play.

Use intonation, pitch and changing volume when 'talking'.

Where you can, give meaning to the baby's gestures and pointing for example: "Oh, I see, you want the teddy."

Chat with babies and toddlers all the time, but be careful not to overwhelm them with talk. Allow babies and toddlers to take the lead and then respond to their communications.

Wait for the baby or toddler to speak or communicate with a sound or a look first – so that they are leading the conversation. When responding, expand on what has been said (for example, add a word). If a baby says "bottle", you could say "milk bottle". In a natural way, use the same word repeatedly in different contexts: "Look, a bottle of milk– oh, you've finished your bottle." Adding a word while a toddler is playing gives them the model of an expanded phrase. It also keeps the conversation on their topic of interest. Suggestion: if they say "bag", you could say: "Yes, daddy's bag".

Observation checkpoint

Is the baby using speech sounds (babbling) to communicate with adults?

Around 12 months, is the baby beginning to use single words like mummy, dada, tete (teddy)?

Around 15 months, can the baby say around 10 words (they may not all be clear)?

Around 18 months, is the toddler using a range of adult like speech patterns (jargon) and at least 20 clear words?



Birth to three – babies, toddlers and young children will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Understand single words in context – ‘cup’, ‘milk’, ‘daddy’.

Understand frequently used words such as ‘all gone’, ‘no’ and ‘bye-bye’.

You can help babies with their understanding by using gestures and context. Suggestion: point to the cup and say “cup”.

Talking about what you are doing helps babies learn language in context. Suggestion: “I’m pouring out your milk into the cup”.

Observation checkpoint

Around 12 months, can the baby choose between 2 objects: “Do you want the ball or the car?”

Understand simple instructions like “give to nanny” or “stop”.

Recognise and point to objects if asked about them.

Singing, action rhymes and sharing books give children rich opportunities to understand new words.

Play with groups of objects (different small world animals, or soft toys, or tea and picnic sets). Make sure you name things whilst playing, and talk about what you are doing.

Observation checkpoint

Around 18 months, does the toddler understand lots of different single words and some two-word phrases, such as “give me” or “shoes on”?

Generally focus on an activity of their own choice and find it difficult to be directed by an adult.

Listen to other people’s talk with interest but can easily be distracted by other things.

Help toddlers and young children to focus their attention by using their name: “Fatima, put your coat on”.

You can help toddlers and young children listen and pay attention by using gestures like pointing and facial expressions.



Birth to three – babies, toddlers and young children will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Make themselves understood and can become frustrated when they cannot.

Start to say how they are feeling, using words as well as actions.

Start to develop conversation, often jumping from topic to topic.

Develop pretend play: 'putting the baby to sleep' or 'driving the car to the shops'.

You can help toddlers who are having tantrums by being calm and reassuring.

Help toddlers to express what's angering them by suggesting words to describe their emotions, like 'sad' or 'angry'. You can help further by explaining in simple terms why you think they may be feeling that emotion.

Make time to connect with babies, toddlers and young children. Tune in and listen to them and join in with their play, indoors and outside.

Allow plenty of time to have conversations together, rather than busily rushing from one activity to the next. When you know a young child well, it is easier to understand them and talk about their family life. For example: "OK, I see. You went to the shops with Aunty Maya".

Observation checkpoint

By around 2 years old, is the child showing an interest in what other children are playing and sometimes joins in?

By around 3 years old, can the child shift from one task to another if you get their attention. Using the child's name can help: "Jason, please can you stop now? We're tidying up".



Birth to three – babies, toddlers and young children will be learning to:

Use the speech sounds p, b, m, w.

Pronounce:

- l/r/w/y
- f/th
- s/sh/ch/dz/j
- multi-syllabic words such as 'banana' and 'computer'

Examples of how to support this:

Toddlers and young children will pronounce some words incorrectly. Instead of correcting them, reply to what they say and use the words they have mispronounced. Children will then learn from your positive model, without losing the confidence to speak.

Toddlers and young children sometimes hesitate and repeat sounds and words when thinking what to say.

Listen patiently. Do not say the words for them. If the child or parents are distressed or worried by this, contact a speech and language therapist for advice.

Encourage children to talk. Do not use too many questions: four comments to every question is a useful guide.





Observation checkpoint

Towards their second birthday, can the child use up to 50 words?

Is the child beginning to put two or three words together: “more milk”?

Is the child frequently asking questions, such as the names of people and objects?

Towards their third birthday, can the child use around 300 words? These words include descriptive language. They include words for time (for example, ‘now’ and ‘later’), space (for example, ‘over there’) and function (for example, they can tell you a sponge is for washing).

Is the child linking up to 5 words together?

Is the child using pronouns (‘me’, ‘him’, ‘she’), and using plurals and prepositions (‘in’, ‘on’, ‘under’) – these may not always be used correctly to start with.

Can the child follow instructions with three key words like: “Can you **wash dolly’s face?**”



Birth to three – babies, toddlers and young children will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Listen to simple stories and understand what is happening, with the help of the pictures.

Share picture books every day with children. Encourage them to talk about the pictures and the story. Comment on the pictures – for example: “It looks like the boy is a bit worried...” and wait for their response. You might also ask them about the pictures: “I wonder what the caterpillar is doing now?”

Books with just pictures and no words can especially encourage conversations.

Tell children the names of things they do not know and choose books that introduce interesting new vocabulary to them.

Identify familiar objects and properties for practitioners when they are described: for example: ‘Katie’s coat’, ‘blue car’, ‘shiny apple’.

When appropriate, you can check children’s understanding by asking them to point to particular pictures. Or ask them to point to particular objects in a picture. For example: “Can you show me the big boat?”

Understand and act on longer sentences like ‘make teddy jump’ or ‘find your coat’.

Understand simple questions about ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘where’ (but generally not ‘why’).

When talking with young children, give them plenty of processing time (at least 10 seconds). This gives them time to understand what you have said and think of their reply.



Birth to three – babies, toddlers and young children will be learning to:

Observation checkpoint

Examples of how to support this:

Around the age of 2, can the child understand many more words than they can say – between 200–500 words?

Around the age of 2, can the child understand simple questions and instructions like: “Where’s your hat?” or “What’s the boy in the picture doing?”

Around the age of 3, can the child show that they understand action words by pointing to the right picture in a book. For example: “Who’s jumping?”

Note: watch out for children whose speech is not easily understood by unfamiliar adults. Monitor their progress and consider whether a hearing test might be needed.



3 and 4-year-olds will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Enjoy listening to longer stories and can remember much of what happens.

Pay attention to more than one thing at a time, which can be difficult.

Offer children at least a daily story time as well as sharing books throughout the session.

If they are busy in their play, children may not be able to switch their attention and listen to what you say. When you need to, help young children to switch their attention from what they are doing to what you are saying. Give them a clear prompt. Suggestion: say the child’s name and then: “Please stop and listen”.



3 and 4-year-olds will be learning to:

Use a wider range of vocabulary.

Understand a question or instruction that has two parts, such as: “Get your coat and wait at the door”.

Understand ‘why’ questions, like: “Why do you think the caterpillar got so fat?”

Examples of how to support this:

Extend children’s vocabulary, explaining unfamiliar words and concepts and making sure children have understood what they mean through stories and other activities. These should include words and concepts which occur frequently in books and other contexts but are not used every day by many young children. Suggestion: use scientific vocabulary when talking about the parts of a flower or an insect, or different types of rocks. Examples from ‘The Gruffalo’ include: ‘stroll’, ‘roasted’, ‘knobbly’, ‘wart’ and ‘feast’.

Provide children with a rich language environment by sharing books and activities with them. Encourage children to talk about what is happening and give their own ideas. High-quality picture books are a rich source for learning new vocabulary and more complex forms of language: “Excuse me, I’m very hungry. Do you think I could have tea with you?”

Shared book-reading is a powerful way of having extended conversations with children. It helps children to build their vocabulary.

Offer children lots of interesting things to investigate, like different living things. This will encourage them to ask questions.



3 and 4-year-olds will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Sing a large repertoire of songs.

Know many rhymes, be able to talk about familiar books, and be able to tell a long story.

Consider which core books, songs and rhymes you want children to become familiar with and grow to love.

The BookTrust's 'Bookfinder' website can help you to pick high-quality books.

Activities planned around those core books will help the children to practise the vocabulary and language from those books. It will also support their creativity and play.

Outdoor play themed around 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' might lead to the children creating their own 'hunts' and inventing their own rhymes.

Develop their communication but may continue to have problems with irregular tenses and plurals, such as 'runned' for 'ran', 'swimmed' for 'swam'.

Develop their pronunciation but may have problems saying:

- some sounds: r, j, th, ch, and sh
- multi-syllabic words such as 'pterodactyl', 'planetarium' or 'hippopotamus'.

Children may use ungrammatical forms like 'I swimmied'. Instead of correcting them, recast what the child said. For example: "How lovely that you **swam** in the sea on holiday".

When children have difficulties with correct pronunciation, reply naturally to what they say. Pronounce the word correctly so they hear the correct model.

Use longer sentences of four to six words.

Expand on children's phrases. For example, if a child says, "going out shop", you could reply: "Yes, Henna is going to the shop". As well as adding language, add new ideas. For example: "I wonder if they'll get the 26 bus?"



3 and 4-year-olds will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Be able to express a point of view and to debate when they disagree with an adult or a friend, using words as well as actions.

Start a conversation with an adult or a friend and continue it for many turns.

Use talk to organise themselves and their play: “Let’s go on a bus... you sit there... I’ll be the driver.”

Model language that promotes thinking and challenges children: “I can see that’s empty – I wonder what happened to the snail that used to be in that shell?”

Open-ended questions like “I wonder what would happen if...?” encourage more thinking and longer responses. Sustained shared thinking is especially powerful. This is when two or more individuals (adult and child, or children) ‘work together’ in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative, etc.

Help children to elaborate on how they are feeling: “You look sad. Are you upset because Jasmin doesn’t want to do the same thing as you?”

Observation checkpoint

Around the age of 3, can the child shift from one task to another if you fully obtain their attention, for example, by using their name?

Around the age of 4, is the child using sentences of four to six words – “I want to play with cars” or “What’s that thing called?”?

Can the child use sentences joined up with words like ‘because’, ‘or’, ‘and’? For example: “I like ice cream because it makes my tongue shiver”.

Is the child using the future and past tense: “I am going to the park” and “I went to the shop”?

Can the child answer simple ‘why’ questions?



Children in reception will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Understand how to listen carefully and why listening is important.

Promote and model active listening skills: “Wait a minute, I need to get into a good position for listening, I can’t see you. Let’s be quiet so I can concentrate on what you’re saying.”

Signal when you want children to listen: “Listen carefully now for how many animals are on the broom.”

Link listening with learning: “I could tell you were going to say the right answer, you were listening so carefully.”

Learn new vocabulary.

Identify new vocabulary before planning activities, for example, changes in materials: ‘dissolving’, ‘drying’, ‘evaporating’; in music: ‘percussion’, ‘tambourine’.

Bring in objects, pictures and photographs to talk about, for example vegetables to taste, smell and feel.

Discuss which category the word is in, for example: “A cabbage is a kind of vegetable. It’s a bit like a sprout but much bigger”.

Have fun saying the word in an exaggerated manner.

Use picture cue cards to talk about an object: “What colour is it? Where would you find it? What shape is it? What does it smell like? What does it look like? What does it feel like? What does it sound like? What does it taste like?”



Children in reception will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Use new vocabulary through the day.

Model words and phrases relevant to the area being taught, deliberately and systematically: “I’m thrilled that everyone’s on time today”, “I can see that you’re delighted with your new trainers”, “Stop shrieking, you’re hurting my ears!”, “What a downpour – I’ve never seen so much rain!”, “It looks as if the sun has caused the puddles to evaporate”, “Have you ever heard such a booming voice?”

Use the vocabulary repeatedly through the week.

Keep a list of previously taught vocabulary and review it in different contexts.

Ask questions to find out more and to check they understand what has been said to them.

Show genuine interest in knowing more: “This looks amazing, I need to know more about this.”

Think out loud, ask questions to check your understanding; make sure children can answer who, where and when questions before you move on to why and ‘how do you know’ questions: “I wonder why this jellyfish is so dangerous? Ahh, it has poison in its tentacles.”



Children in reception will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Articulate their ideas and thoughts in well-formed sentences.

Use complete sentences in your everyday talk.

Help children build sentences using new vocabulary by rephrasing what they say and structuring their responses using sentence starters.

Narrate your own and children's actions: "I've never seen so many beautiful bubbles, I can see all the colours of the rainbow in them."

Build upon their incidental talk: "Your tower is definitely the tallest I've seen all week. Do you think you'll make it any higher?"

Suggestion: ask open questions - "How did you make that? Why does the wheel move so easily? What will happen if you do that?"

Instead of correcting, model accurate irregular grammar such as past tense, plurals, complex sentences: "That's right: you drank your milk quickly; you were quicker than Darren."

Connect one idea or action to another using a range of connectives.

Narrate events and actions: "I knew it must be cold outside because he was putting on his coat and hat."

Remind children of previous events: "Do you remember when we forgot to wear our raincoats last week? It poured so much that we got drenched!"

Extend their thinking: "You've thought really hard about building your tower, but how will you stop it falling down?"



Children in reception will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Describe events in some detail.

Make deliberate mistakes highlighting to children that sometimes you might get it wrong: “It’s important to get things in the right order so that people know what I’m talking about. Listen carefully to see if I have things in the right order: ‘last week...’

Use sequencing words with emphasis in your own stories: “Before school I had a lovely big breakfast, then I had a biscuit at break time and after that I had two pieces of fruit after lunch. I’m so full!”

Use talk to help work out problems and organise thinking and activities, and to explain how things work and why they might happen.

Think out loud how to work things out.

Encourage children to talk about a problem together and come up with ideas for how to solve it.

Give children problem solving words and phrases to use in their explanations: ‘so that’, ‘because’, ‘I think it’s...’, ‘you could...’, ‘it might be...’

Develop social phrases.

Model talk routines through the day. For example, arriving in school: “Good morning, how are you?”



Children in reception will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Engage in storytimes.

Timetable a storytime at least once a day.

Draw up a list of books that you enjoy reading aloud to children, including traditional and modern stories.

Choose books that will develop their vocabulary.

Display quality books in attractive book corners.

Send home familiar and good-quality books for parents to read aloud and talk about with their children.

Show parents how to share stories with their children.



Children in reception will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Listen to and talk about stories to build familiarity and understanding.

Read and re-read selected stories.

Show enjoyment of the story using your voice and manner to make the meaning clear.

Use different voices for the narrator and each character.

Make asides, commenting on what is happening in a story: “That looks dangerous – I’m sure they’re all going to fall off that broom!”

Link events in a story to your own experiences.

Talk about the plot and the main problem in the story.

Identify the main characters in the story, and talk about their feelings, actions and motives.

Take on different roles in imaginative play, to interact and negotiate with people in longer conversations.

Practise possible conversations between characters.

Retell the story, once they have developed a deep familiarity with the text, some as exact repetition and some in their own words.

Make familiar books available for children to share at school and at home.

Make time for children to tell each other stories they have heard, or to visitors.



Children in reception will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Use new vocabulary in different contexts.

Have fun with phrases from the story through the day:

“I searched for a pencil, but no pencil could be found.”

Explain new vocabulary in the context of story, rather than in word lists.

Listen carefully to rhymes and songs, paying attention to how they sound.

Show your enjoyment of poems using your voice and manner to give emphasis to carefully chosen words and phrases.

Model noticing how some words sound: “That poem was about a frog on a log; those words sound a bit the same at the end don’t they? They rhyme.”

In poems and rhymes with very regular rhythm patterns, pause before the rhyming word to allow children to join in or predict the word coming next.

Encourage children to have fun with rhyme, even if their suggestions don’t make complete sense.

Choose a few interesting longer words from the poem, rhyme or song and clap out their beat structure, helping children to join in with the correct number of ‘claps’.



Children in reception will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Learn rhymes, poems and songs.

Select traditional and contemporary poems and rhymes to read aloud to children.

Help children to join in with refrains and learn some verses by heart using call and response.

When singing songs by heart, talk about words in repeated phrases from within a refrain or verse so that word boundaries are noticed and not blurred: “Listen carefully, what words can you hear? Once upon a time: once – upon – a – time.”

Engage in non-fiction books.

Read aloud books to children that will extend their knowledge of the world and illustrate a current topic.

Select books containing photographs and pictures, for example, places in different weather conditions and seasons.

Listen to and talk about selected non-fiction to develop a deep familiarity with new knowledge and vocabulary.

Re-read some books so children learn the language necessary to talk about what is happening in each illustration and relate it to their own lives.

Make the books available for children to share at school and at home.



Personal, Social and Emotional Development

EYFS Statutory Educational Programme:

Children's personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is crucial for children to lead healthy and happy lives, and is fundamental to their cognitive development. Underpinning their personal development are the important attachments that shape their social world. 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. Through adult modelling and guidance, they will learn how to look after their bodies, including healthy eating, and manage personal needs independently. Through supported interaction with other children they learn how to make good friendships, co-operate and resolve conflicts peaceably. These attributes will provide a secure platform from which children can achieve at school and in later life.

