The youngest children in our early years settings and nurseries are entitled to the highest quality care and nurture. This will support them in developing, in their own time and style, as emotionally secure and resilient, curious, confident, communicative and happy children.

To enable this we must recognise that:

• Parents and families are central to the wellbeing of the child
• Play is central to the wellbeing of young children
• Young children are vulnerable; they learn to be independent by having a special person they can depend on
• Young children need adults who will acknowledge, name and help them manage their emotions
• Relationships with other people (both adults and children) are of crucial importance in a child’s life
• Babies and young children are social, communicative beings; they are competent and enthusiastic learners from birth
• Children learn by doing rather than being told; movement and learning are fundamentally linked
• Learning is a shared process and children learn most effectively when, with the support of a playful, affectionate and knowledgeable companion (adult or child), they are actively involved and interested
• Babies and young children are unique individuals and have individual and particular needs

(Adapted from the principles of Birth to Three Matters, Sure Start 2002)

Birth to Three Matters is a framework to support practitioners in their work with the very youngest children. The framework applies to all settings that care for children under the age of three.

The Primary Strategy Early Years Team in collaboration with practitioners from Children’s Centres have produced this statement. It is intended to guide managers, management committees and practitioners in the implementation of best practice in the care and nurture of children under three.

The recommendations in this document will support all early years settings in meeting OFSTED requirements.

This document acknowledges:
Birth to Three Matters, Sure Start 2002
Every Child Matters, DFES 2004
OFSTED Framework for combined inspections, Sure Start 2005
Colwyn Trevarthen et al, Scottish Executive, Education Department 2003
The work of Jennie Lindon and Elinor Goldschmeid.

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“Infants need consistent and affectionate company and good quality care depends on stable and intimate relationships with carers who know the child well.”

Colwyn Trevarthen 2003 (Insight 6, Meeting the Needs of Children from Birth to Three: Research Evidence and Implications for Out-of-Home Provision)

The adults who work with the youngest children need a thorough understanding of the profoundly important nature of this stage of a child’s development. They should possess the following essential characteristics: patience, the ability to be reflective and the ability to be affectionately responsive. These practitioners will have the experience and expertise to provide a warm, secure and interesting environment and to understand the emotional and developmental needs of the youngest children.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

- Are practitioners trained to work with this age group?
- Is there a member of staff responsible for ensuring that each child and family is allocated a key person and co-key person?
- Are staff rotas and shifts organised so that the number of different adults who care for children is kept to an absolute minimum?
- Do children have regular opportunities to play with children of other age groups including siblings?
- Do practitioners plan their time so that they can engage in playful and affectionate interactions?
- Do practitioners plan their time so that as far as possible care routines follow the child’s individual needs?
- Are children given a choice about which adult performs care routines?
- Are children respected and listened to? Is their participation encouraged in matters that directly affect them, in a manner appropriate to their stage of development?
- Do practitioners actively support young children’s friendships?
- Does staffing reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community?
- Are children taken out into the wider community at least twice a week e.g. for a trip to do some shopping, or a walk in the park?
- Do practitioners actively engage with and support children in the outside area?

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS

- Are all families allocated a key person and co-key person?
- Are home visits offered to all parents?
- Are parents’ emotional needs respected and acknowledged?
- When parents leave and collect their children is the key person available to talk with parents?
- If face to face interaction is not possible is there some system in place for parents and practitioners to share information?
- Are photos of special people from the child’s home environment displayed and used regularly in the setting?
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES THAT SUPPORT RELATIONSHIPS:

- Is working in partnership with parents of paramount importance and addressed in all setting action and development plans?
- Are key persons given non-contact time to meet with parents on a regular basis to talk about their child?
- Do the structures and organisation of the nursery take account of the need of very young children for physical closeness, intimacy and tenderness?
- Do practitioners have initial and ongoing training and support to facilitate working with parents in a sensitive and non-judgmental way?
- Are parents welcome to come into the setting at any time?
- Are parents encouraged to participate in the life of the setting?
- Do parents have easy access to their child’s records and are they invited to contribute to them?
- Are extra staff available at meal times, transition times and when particular issues arise which might mean that staff need to work one to one with a child?
- Do managers ensure that as far as possible temporary staff, agency staff and volunteers are not placed to work with children between the ages of 6 –18 months?

Settling In and Transition

Forming emotional attachments takes time and thoughtful awareness; a well planned settling in period is crucial for young children and their parents. Young children need to spend time in a new environment with their parents before they are left there alone. Parents need the reassurance that their child is going to be lovingly cared for. Great care needs to be taken when children and their parents are going through what is often their first experience of separation. All subsequent transitions also need to be well planned and prepared for.

- Is there a policy for settling in and transitions?
- Are home visits offered to all parents?
- Are parents informed well in advance about settling in procedures and the importance of them to their child’s emotional health?
- Are parents able to visit any number of times with their child as part of this process?
- Are parents’ emotions respected and acknowledged?
- Is the need for transitional and personal objects understood and respected?
- Are children’s emotional expressions respected and acknowledged?
- Are there procedures in place which support children in their transitions through the setting and beyond?
“What young children need are thoughtful and affectionate responses to their innate enthusiasm for companionship in learning and their pride in sharing accomplishments”
Colwyn Trevarthen, 2003

The physical environment should support children so that they can engage through their senses and through active exploratory play. There should be sufficient space to allow for a range of quality resources that support physical play, messy play, imaginative play, exploration and discovery. Interactions with caring, responsive and respectful adults count more than resources and equipment. Ideally the space should be organised so that areas can be opened up between age groups to allow all children to mingle freely at times. There should also be the space for some cozy quiet areas and a separate space for children to be able to sleep undisturbed.

Children under three must have easy access to safe, outdoor provision. Outdoor provision enables young children to explore and experiment within a different sensory environment to the one offered indoors. The outdoors provides important experiences of nature through close encounters with soil, leaves, insects etc.

**OUTDOORS:**
- Is there a safe easily accessible space for outdoor play for both toddlers and babies? Does this include a covered area?
- Do children have access to waterproof suits so that they can play out in all weathers and crawlers can access the outdoors easily and independently?
- Are resources of good quality, stimulating and challenging and do they meet a range of developmental needs?
- Is the space large enough for children to use wheeled toys e.g. trolleys and buggies?
- Are there opportunities for children to climb, jump, balance, transport and run?
- Is outdoor provision made available all day and in all weathers?
- Are there a variety of surfaces, textures and gradients?

**INDOORS:**
- Is there easy and independent access to all areas?
- Does the indoor area have a washable floor surface?
- Is there somewhere children can keep personal objects?
- Are displays at the child’s eye level; are they sensory and interactive?
- Does the indoor area provide space for adults to comfortably spend time on the floor with children?
- Do resources and displays reflect and value the child’s family, cultural diversity and home language?
- Are resources of good quality, developmentally appropriate, clean, well organised and accessible to all children?
- Is the area where children are changed and have other care routines carried out a private and pleasant environment?
- Does the indoor area have a comfortable sofa/easy chair where parents and practitioners can feed babies and spend time cuddling with children?
Children need to be given extended and uninterrupted time throughout the day, to become fully engrossed in their play. They need to have the opportunity to repeat and refine until they are satisfied. Children should be given the space and time to daydream and play on their own, as well as being part of a group.

Opportunities, which are based on observation of children's interests, should be on offer for children to access as they please. Responsive practitioners need to listen to the children, following their lead. The daily routines and opportunities should all support the emotional, linguistic, physical and intellectual development of the children.

No child or family will be excluded or disadvantaged because of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, social class, disability or gender.

• Are strategies for inclusion actively planned and promoted?
• Are barriers to development identified and overcome by early identification and intervention through; close observation, collaboration with parents, inter-agency working and planning to meet individual needs?
• Are children respected and listened to? Is their participation encouraged in all matters that directly affect them, in a manner appropriate to their stage of development?
• Are children respected in their choices rather than having to follow an adult agenda?
• Are children given a warning time and some choice of practitioner when care routines are to be carried out?
• Are children changed when they need it, able to eat and drink when they are hungry and thirsty, able to sleep when they are tired?
• Do children engage in a significant amount of self-initiated social and exploratory play?
• Do practitioners give time to hugs and cuddles, and to acknowledging and supporting children with their passionate emotions?
• Do practitioners plan their time so that they can observe, respond to and play with children?
• Do practitioners ensure that groups are kept small, no larger than 5/6 children?
• If occasionally groups are larger do practitioners ensure that all adults are part of the group to support the children?
• Do practitioners plan their time (supported by management) so that care routines and mealtimes are unhurried and a pleasurable part of the daily social routine?
• Do all staff understand that sitting still and listening as a whole group is an inappropriate expectation for children under three?

Observation and Record Keeping

Observation must be an ongoing and daily part of the work with young children. Careful observation and analysis of children’s development, their interests and social interactions is essential in order to provide the environment and opportunities that will best support them.

• Is time planned for all practitioners to make observations each week?
• Are particular children identified to be the focus for observations?
• Do observations focus on children in a variety of contexts e.g. at lunchtime, playing with a friend, exploring alone, and outside?
• Are parents encouraged to contribute observations to their children’s records?
• Do records include a range of evidence including photos and profile books?
• Do practitioners use the Birth to Three Matters framework as a reference when observing, organising provision and planning for children?
Planning

Planning should always start with celebrating what children can do.

Planning must be approached in a holistic and all encompassing way. For children of this age planning is not about “activities”. It is about the interactions between adults and children, the way the environment is organised, the routines that are in place, as well as the opportunities children are offered on a daily basis, e.g. Treasure basket play and Heuristic play.

Planning based on observation ensures that the interests, preferences and needs of individual children are used as a starting point and that practitioners have developmentally appropriate expectations of children.

- Are observations used to plan for the interests and to meet the needs of individual children?
- Does planning take into account the need of very young children for physical closeness, intimacy, tenderness and fun?
- Is planning done for the whole environment rather than just discrete ‘activities’?
- Is time set aside for all practitioners to plan together, ensuring cohesion and a rich, flexible and stimulating environment?
- When planning do you always consider the social and emotional needs of individual children?
- Is planning flexible and responsive to spontaneous interests and occurrences?

Healthy Eating

Mealtimes are a crucial part of the social interaction that occurs in an early years setting. It is from weaning onwards that children are establishing eating habits and it is most important that we provide the best model possible to support the development of positive and healthy attitudes to eating and the enjoyment of food. Mealtimes are an important social occasion.

- Is there a named person responsible for monitoring the quality of food provided for the children, including the recommended daily intake of sugar, salt and fat?
- Are children offered fruit or vegetable snacks rather than salty or sugary ones?
- Are children provided with at least three portions of fresh fruit and vegetable each day?
- Are foods appropriate for the different age groups in the setting, for example, the babies being weaned?
- Do children have independent access to drinking water?
- Is the majority of food provided unprocessed food?
- Are children introduced to a variety of real foods?
- Do practitioners have the knowledge and understanding to support children and parents in the area of healthy eating?
- Are children regularly given the opportunity to participate in the preparation of food, in a way appropriate to their stage of development?
- Are the youngest children given the opportunity to explore their food with their hands?
- Are meal times calm and pleasant opportunities for social interaction?
- Does food offered reflect children’s home experiences and are different cultural expectations around food respected?