



A parents' guide to
Teaching and Learning

Teaching and Learning in the Early
Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

EYFS Themes

The EYFS has four Themes which act as 'golden threads', pulling together all of the principles and research that underpin the requirements for teaching and learning of babies and young children in England. These themes reflect the pre-requisites to enable children to become confident learners, who form positive relationships with others and are inspired to love learning forever.

A Unique Child

Babies and young children are first and foremost individuals, with unique personalities and a variety of abilities. Ideally, schedules and routines should flow with the child's needs and not be tailored to meet the needs of adults. Our planning for babies and children starts with talking to parents and carers, and spending time with and observing in order to understand and consider children's current interests, development and learning preferences.

Positive Relationships

The foundations for learning start when children feel safe, secure and happy. Where children form strong attachments with adults, they go on to become confident adults in the future (Bowlby 1986). Building strong and trusting relationship with a child, helps practitioners to know how best to plan for their learning. They take into account: preferences, learning style, home culture and development stage. Good planning meets the 'holistic' (whole person) needs of the child and ensures effective foundations for learning. Our "play partner" allows children to build strong, caring bonds so that they feel secure and confident in the nursery and beyond.



Enabling Environments

Everything in the environment can't be planned for on paper, but cleverly organised environments encourage learning and promote thinking. A learning rich environment is considered to be the 'third teacher' (Malaguzzi 1995) in which children's experiences should respond to their individual interests, needs and learning styles. Our interactive planning, provides not only planned 'adult initiated' activities for groups and individuals, but allows us the flexibility to take advantage of 'teachable moments' that occur throughout the day, using spontaneous and unexpected occurrences. For example, the discovery of a spider in the garden, a rainbow or a fall of snow, all provide wonderful learning opportunities for practitioners to utilize, whilst the child is captivated and interested in the phenomenon. We have the privilege of observing a child's reaction to seeing something for the first time and so we embrace and extend this rather unique opportunity, rather than take the child away from what they are enjoying to do something else. Pivotal learning takes place when children are engaged, stimulated and highly interested.

Children learn and develop in different ways and at different rates

Where the EYFS themes are well catered for, learning and development naturally happens. We know that all children have different ways of learning and some will reach certain milestones quicker than others; this is normal. Some children become skilled in areas such as creativity; others walk or talk earlier or later than their peers; this is all normal. There is no such thing as a 'typical' child; only a 'unique' child. However, sometimes children will struggle and some children will need extra help from time to time to enable them to reach their potential. Where assessments show significant gaps in learning, it is our job, to work with parents and carers to identify what we can do to support the child's learning, to narrow these gaps.

How we plan for your child

The EYFS Framework explains how and what children will need to learn to support their development. The *characteristics of effective learning* (EYFS 2014) explain how children learn through: **Exploration, Critical thinking, Having a go.**

We promote independent learning in our children, so that they have lots of time to explore, talk and think and try things out for themselves. This is how they will learn to make decisions and become confident to learn through their mistakes and successes.

7 areas of learning and development

There are **7 areas of learning and development** set out in the EYFS.

Three prime areas are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive. These are 'time bound' and set the foundations for further learning. All children, from all cultures across the globe need to learn skills within these three areas. Ideally, children need to learn these key skills before they are three years old, in order that they have the tools they need for the future. They are:

Communication and language

Speaking, listening and understanding

Physical development

self-care, moving and handling

Personal, social and emotional development

making relationships, confidence and understanding appropriate behavior.

As children grow, the prime areas will help them to develop skills in **4 specific areas** that link to the National Curriculum in schools. These areas of learning help children to learn specific skills that relate to their learning in the future and will vary from country to country. In England the specific areas of learning are:

Literacy

Reading, writing

Mathematics

Numbers, shape, space and measurements and problem solving

Understanding the world

How does my world work? Early science, geography, history

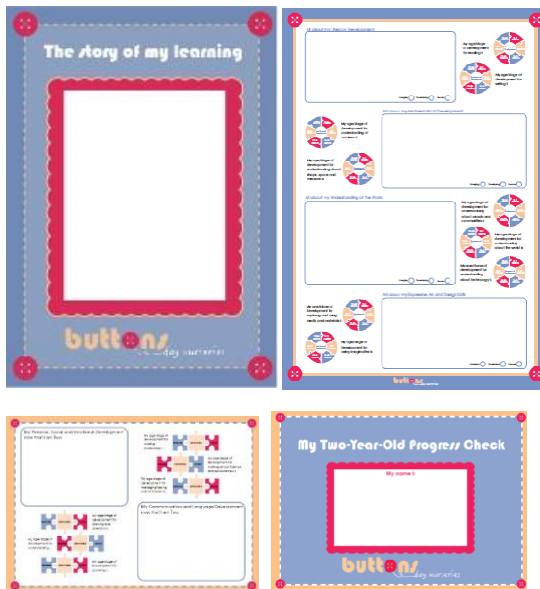
Expressive arts and design

Music, art and craft, dance, storytelling, drama

We use the 7 areas of learning to plan activities that engage and interest children. It is the play partners' role to make sure that the activities are suited to each child's individual needs. Our planning is designed to be really flexible so that we can follow each child's interests as they grow and change; daily planning allows us to adapt our plans as necessary.

Summative Assessment

Regular observation informs planning. Play partners will often stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do and use their observation to try to think what the child will want to do next. They build on children's existing knowledge and their interests to plan activities that will allow children to learn new skills and build on what they already know and can do. Ongoing (formative) and summative (12 weekly) assessment plays an important part in helping parents, carers and practitioners to recognize children's progress, understand their learning needs and plan activities that support children's development.



We never test children and children never know they are being assessed; our practitioners adapt activities to suit the age and stage and needs of individuals and extend learning as they see it happen through appropriate challenge.

Regularly throughout the year you will receive your child's 'summative assessment' and between the ages of 2 and 3 years a 'two year progress check'. You can arrange to meet with your child's play partner and the nursery manager at any time should you wish to discuss your child's development.

Within the summative assessment, the play partner will make a professional 'best-fit' judgement about the age and stage the child is working within, using the 'Early Years Outcomes' document and decide if the child is **emerging, developing or secure**. This information is taken from written and visual observations, our experiences with the child and contributions from parents and any other professionals that may be working with the child. Appropriate supportive next steps will be planned in each area of learning. The most important thing is for the practitioners to check how well the child has progressed since their last assessment regardless of where they are on their personal learning journey.



What does curriculum planning look like?

We use 'wipe boards' for planning. That way we can be spontaneous and flexible. We plan different activities every day and sometimes we repeat favourite activities to allow children to revisit and consolidate their learning. Also, children who enjoy repeated behaviours (Schema) are able to review their 'research theories' and add to their knowledge.

- **Specific planned meaningful experiences that differ from what is already readily available to the children in the environment – this means that we enhance the continuous provision.**
- *E.g. facilitating an experiment in the art area; taking a trip to the library after talking about a favourite book; planting seeds in the gardening to grow our own vegetables etc*
- **Children's current interests, schemas and spontaneous planning.**
- *These are the things that we add as we spot them through observations. They might prompt a separate activity idea, a specific story or allow us to adapt the environment to reflect children's interests.*
- **Mixture of adult and child-led.**
- *Babies planning will be mainly child-led, focused on individual development activities with the balance of adult-led changing as children are preparing for school.*
- **Practitioner role modelling, behaviour or language.**
- *Here we add in what the adult will do or must be aware of with certain activities when considering the needs of the room e.g. provide key words in certain languages, allow babies time to respond, include time for post activity discussion, adult to demonstrate etc.*
- **Indoor and outdoor play opportunities to make sure children's preferred learning environment provides activities that are right for them.**
- *For example, if a child likes to be outside, there is little point in putting his favourite toy indoors; if boys have the opportunity to record the number of buckets of gravel they need to make the scales balance, it is more likely that they will engage in mathematics than if we try to keep them indoors.*
- **Ideas from parents.**
- *We always welcome ideas from our families, please feel free to make some suggestions. For example, tell us when your child has learned to ride a bike and we'll make sure the bikes are outside to help him to build on the new skill.*
- **Cultural and community events.**
- *Any relevant cultural & local festivals that will be meaningful to the children can be a starting point for an activity, change of area or a new resource or book. They also help children to get to know each other and celebrate our differences and similarities.*



The play partners will decide which of the specific planned activities are going to be carried out each day of the week, but the flexibility is there should a more interesting, spontaneous activity occur that can still meet the children's development needs. For our older children, an initial activity idea or interest may spark off an ongoing project or theme that can be added to and last for many weeks!

Example of how one activity can support so many areas of learning

Make a bug hotel in the garden.

Consider this activity and the many different skills needed to carry it out:

- discussing what a bug hotel is
- what resources and actions are needed?
- designing the bug hotel
- collecting resources
- carrying and sorting resources
- team work and problem solving
- putting wellies and raincoats on
- assessing risk before, during and after



Once we have achieved what we set out to do, no doubt with numerous additions and contributions from the children, we consider how the activity may become a tool to extend learning if the children are still interested:

- Spot and count the insects that are using the bug hotel
- make a bug hotel diary
- draw pictures of bugs and write their names
- create imaginative designs for other bug hotels with junk modelling, construction or sketches
- Discuss how to care for living creatures and how this applies to us humans.
- Consider stories and songs about bugs that could be brought into the provision.



The possibilities are endless and the learning taking place is immeasurable.

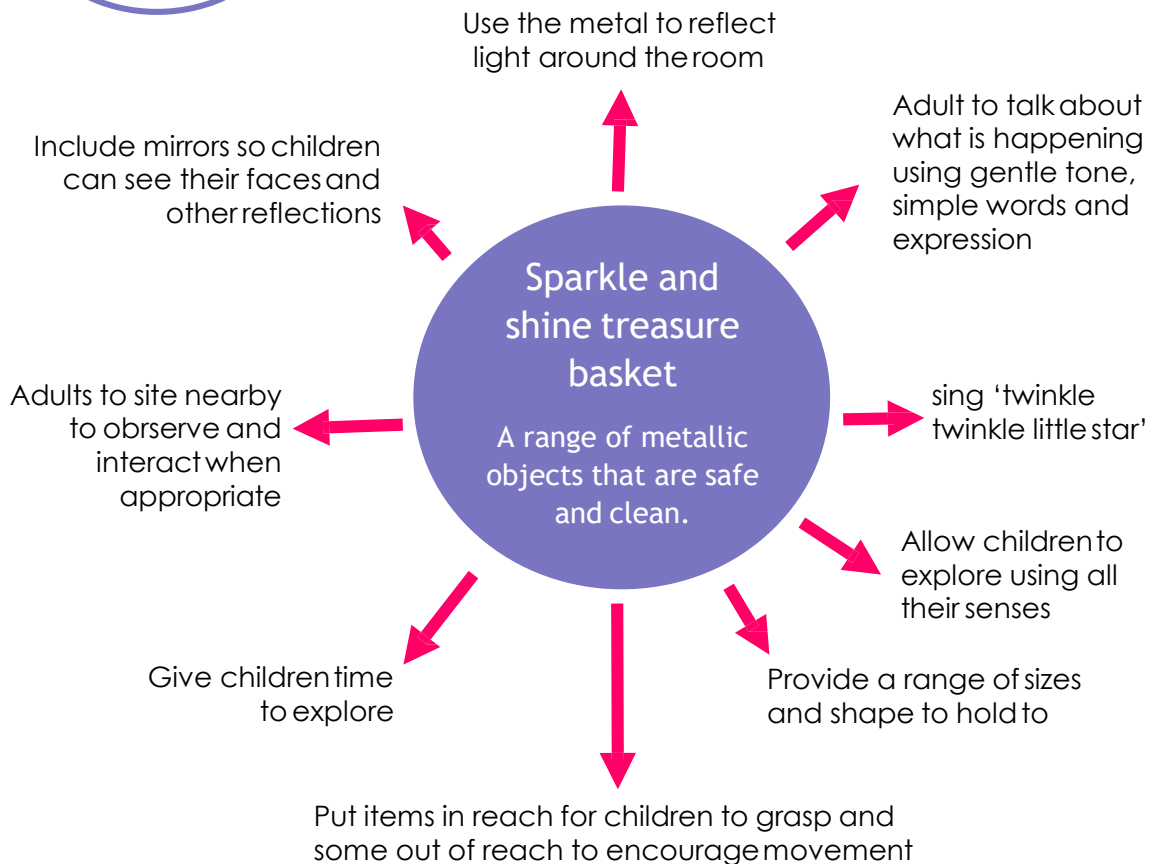
Babies

For younger babies the planning will look very different. It is important to remember with babies we are focusing on Communication and Language, Physical development and Personal, Social and Emotional development, not an end product or post activity discussion. This relies on the adult being alert and reflective 'in the moment' and knowing the child well enough to know how to extend their learning. Staff in the baby room will adapt and change activities many times throughout the day to capture babies' excitement and interests.

Here is an example of a baby room activity.

Treasure Basket

Learning through exploration of the outer world



Teaching and learning is not limited to what we plan for and we know that different children will learn different things from the same experience. Learning is everywhere reflected in:

- The environments,
- The resources,
- The daily routines
- Relationships with parents and carers and of course... the other children.

It is our job to identify those 'teachable moments' and make the most of them.



School Readiness - Preparing for school

"The best way to prepare children for school is to allow them to be two when they're two, three when they're three and four when they're four" (Professor Cathy Nutbrown).

Children must be given time to develop at their own rate putting the necessary foundations in place at each stage for them to be socially and emotionally ready for school.

OFSTED are clear that the teaching methods between early years and schools will be different and the reception year at school is a bridging gap between the two; so please don't worry that your child needs to be fully prepared to adapt to a classroom situation and routine from the day they start school.



OFSTED state that in the early years:

*"Teaching should not be taken to imply a 'top down' or formal way of working. It is a broad term which 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."*

Here are the different ways, as early years professionals, that we teach children:

Communicating and modelling language	Showing	Explaining	Demonstrating
Exploring ideas with children	Encouraging	Questioning	Recalling
Providing a narrative for what they are doing	Facilitating	Setting challenges	Listening and extending

Through the Specific areas of learning, children will learn essential skills that will prepare them for school. Counting the number of children at the table, laying the table for lunch and helping to prepare snack, all help to provide the foundations for early mathematics (calculation, subtraction and addition). Pouring drinks and serving their own lunch, provides opportunities to learn about capacity and develop new physical skills.

Sharing books, developing group stories in the role play area and self-registration, all support early reading. Songs, rhymes and music provide the basics for phonics, whilst listening to stories and circle time activities are essential for developing early listening skills, providing the building blocks for recognising sounds in words later on.

Children are encouraged to write for a purpose, so they can see themselves as writers of the future. They write their names on artwork; shopping lists or parking fines; they give meaning to the marks they make when they paint and draw. Babies and younger children make marks as they explore the food that they spill on the table or play in shaving foam in the tough-spot. Rolling sausage shapes in the dough provides opportunities to develop fine muscle skills and moulding those sausages into letters to 'write' your name is much more fun than doing it on paper.



Play is the highest form of research – Albert Einstein

Practitioners as teachers

Early years practitioners hold a range of qualifications from apprenticeships to post graduate degrees, with many practitioners having specialist skills and interests through attending various courses. All are considered as teachers in the context of early years. This diversity is important in order that the children we care for have access to many different skill sets and experiences.

Children's interest and skills in Mathematics, Science, English language and literacy are nurtured from an early age in nursery through the routines, activities and environments provided. The manager's analysis of children's assessments helps the nursery to understand how well they support children's learning and what their next steps for priority are.

Learning through play

Play is the main focus of our nursery day; play is the natural way in which children learn. It is the process through which children can explore, investigate, recreate and come to understand their world. Play is a means for children to establish, practice and test everything they know as well as make sense of what is new. Play is vital to children's early brain development and establishing the type of learner they will be as they grow.