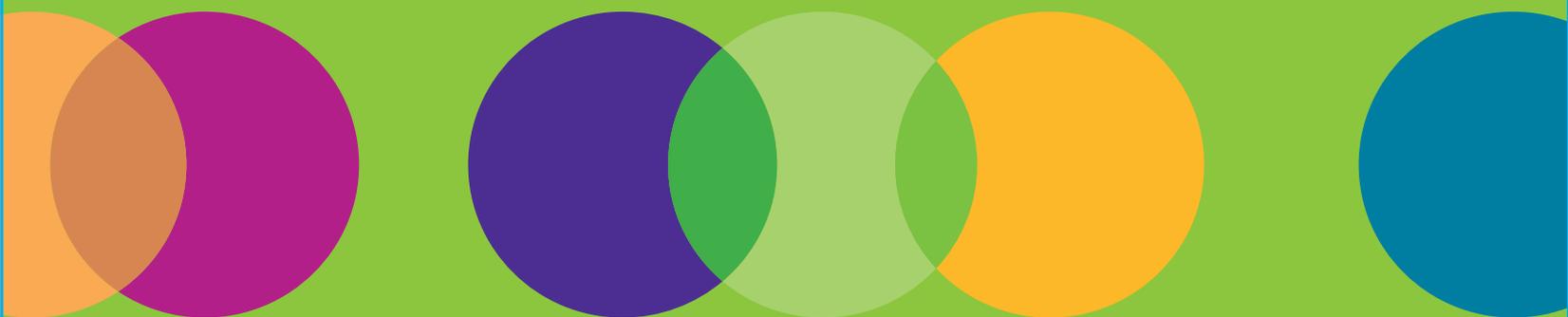


Sharing Good Practice:
Practical Guidance
for Childcare Practitioners



Introduction

In Barnardos' 2003 publication *Supporting Quality: Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Services* the author Geraldine French identifies the features of a good atmosphere in an early childhood service. These are:

- Happy children, happy caring staff, happy parents and positive interactions
- Equality for all, irrespective of gender, race, religion or disability
- A safe, developmentally appropriate environment which respects, supports and celebrates children's individual needs, culture and differences
- An environment which encourages children to express themselves freely and spontaneously and promotes enthusiasm for learning

Sharing Good Practice, which has been compiled by Barnardos Regional Childcare Development Workers, focuses on some of the specific areas of good practice which are important in the creation of this kind of an atmosphere or ethos. These are:

Adult-Child Interactions; Helping Children with Settling In; Helping Children with their Behaviour; Messy Play; Observations; Outdoor Time; Parental Involvement; Planning Programmes; Social Skills; and Storytime.

Barnardos' Regional Childcare Development

Programme was established in Barnardos in 2001 with funding from the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) to provide professional support to childcare providers with a specific focus on disadvantage.

The main purpose of the Regional Childcare Development Programme is to deliver on Barnardos' commitment to increase the range of provision of quality childcare in areas of social and economic disadvantage and to support communities to develop their capacity to develop and run services in response to their own identified needs.

The service is available to Community Groups that provide, or have an interest in providing, childcare services, including out-of-school services, with a specific emphasis on children who experience disadvantage.

Who this publication is aimed at

The need for a resource such as this was identified by the Regional Childcare Development Workers in the course of their provision of information, advice and support to community services but should prove a useful resource for childcare practitioners in a variety of settings.

The resources listed in this publication are provided as suggestions only and not endorsed by Barnardos. The resources are available from your local NCRC.



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Involving parents in a childcare service can be a mutually beneficial and rewarding experience.

When parents participate in a service it will have a positive benefit for everyone, especially the children. Parents have a wealth of information about their child which can help us to get a true picture of the child. We can also share information with parents about their child's progress.

When we respect and value each other by listening and learning it leads to new ways of co-operating. Family values and beliefs can be understood and taken into account by the provider. Parents and practitioners have an opportunity to share what works and what does not work for individual children. Opportunities for communication and information sharing between parents and staff members should be provided formally as well as informally.

What to consider

- Does the staff team need training in the area of working and communicating with parents?
- Does the current system allow for time to be spent with parents and to follow up if necessary?
- How can staff be supported so as not to feel as if they are under constant scrutiny or in a goldfish bowl?
- How can you make it easier for parents to be involved? For example could you be more flexible when scheduling meetings? How can parents share their interests, their cultures or their skills?
- Are there regular meetings between parents and staff?
- Do you have a clear parental involvement policy and procedure that everyone is aware of?
- Do you have a recording procedure that parents are aware of?

How to handle complaints

The service you provide should be seen to be professional, friendly and efficient. It is important to view even one complaint as the opportunity to raise standards for all.

- Make it easy for parents to complain
- Thank them for telling you
- Deal with the complaint immediately if possible or set a deadline for reporting back
- Find out what went wrong and set things right

A complaints procedure that includes guidelines on which issues staff should handle and which should be shared with the manager or committee is useful to avoid people being pushed from post to pillar.

How to help parents feel included

An environment where parents feel supported, respected and appreciated for their time and effort is essential to continued parental involvement.

Think of your own experience in a place you like to visit. What is it that makes you comfortable there? Is it a friendly relaxed atmosphere? Do you feel welcome? Do you meet the same person each time? Some of the same things can help to create a welcoming environment for parents.



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

GOOD PRACTICE TIPS

- Have an orientation visit for families prior to the child starting.
- Provide a comfortable space for parents to gather and have an adult sized chair in the baby/toddler room so the parent can sit down to take off the child's coat/hat, etc.
- Provide a suggestion box – where parents can have their say.
- Form a Parents' Committee and/or a place on the Management Committee for a parent.
- Provide social or informal events where staff and parents can mix in a more relaxed atmosphere.
- Use a key worker system so parents know who to talk to about their child.
- Be non-judgmental in your work with parents.
- If a parent has a particular interest, e.g. music, storytelling, etc. invite them to share it with the children, either as a one off or for a mutually agreed amount of time.
- Provide a weekly information sheet on the door of each room outlining planned activities and meals.
- In the entrance, put up photos of the staff members with their names.
- When sharing information daily do so both verbally and with a note. Parents can arrive very rushed and information shared verbally may be forgotten by the time they get home. Some parents may need information translated.

RESOURCES

- Father/Male Involvement in Early Childhood Programs.* National Parent Information Network 1996
- Getting Involved: Workshops for Parents.* High/Scope Press, 1984
- Getting Involved: Your Child and Language.* Health and Human Services, 1981
- Involving Families in Active Learning Settings: A Curriculum Videotape from High/Scope Press.* High/Scope Press, 2001
- Involving Parents in their Children's Learning.* Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd, 2001
- Learning in Tandem: Involving Parents in their Children's Education.* Scholastic, 1996
- Looking at Learning Together.* Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2005
- The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.* Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE), forthcoming 2006
- On Equal Terms: Ways to Involve Parents in Early Years Settings.* The National Early Years Network & Save the Children, 1997
- Parent Partnership and Special Educational Needs: Perspectives on Developing Good Practice.* National Children's Bureau, 1999
- Parental Participation in Children's Development and Education.* Gordon and Breach, 1983
- Partnership in Action: Working with Parents in Pre-school Centres.* National Children's Bureau, 1987
- Supporting Quality: Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Services (2nd Edition).* Barnardos' NCRC, 2003
- Working With Parents.* Hodder & Stoughton, 1997
- Working with Parents: An Information Pack for Early Years Settings.* NIPPA, 1998
- Working with Parents.* Save the Children, 1997
- Working Towards Partnership in the Early Years.* National Children's Bureau, 1989





Messy play gives children the opportunity to experience a wide range of sensory experiences.

Why include messy play as an activity?

Messy play is more than a child getting messy! Many parents and practitioners have difficulties when it comes to providing messy play activities. It may be that the space is entirely carpeted or parents request that their child does not get dirty or even a fear about using certain materials – and of course the big one is the cleaning up. This type of play allows for experimentation and exploration while fostering the development of physical movement, cognitive thinking and problem solving skills. It also increases the opportunity for social play and the associated skills of turn taking, sharing and communication.

Messy play helps children:

- Relax – it can be a soothing activity that helps release tension and frustration
- Express their feelings in a creative way
- Explore their imagination
- Experiment with the properties of materials

It can involve water, wet and dry sand, bubbles, clay, mud, play dough, paints, glue, paste, gloop and food to name a few. Activities using these materials are open-ended – there is no right or wrong way of playing with them.

How to provide messy play for children at different ages and stages:

BABIES

- Finger feeding
- Water play
- Sand play in a pit or at the beach
- Gloop in an individual bowl/container or spread on the high chair table

Babies generally like to feel the material and don't require additional accessories. At this stage everything is put to the mouth so constant supervision is required.

TODDLERS

- Play dough
- Finger painting with jelly or yoghurt
- Clay
- Using accessories adds another challenge. Use tools that make impressions, lollipop sticks and plastic cutlery. For water use sponges, things that float and sink.

At this stage children play alongside each other but may not be ready to share. Have a good supply of materials for everyone.

YOUNG CHILDREN

[This group can use all of the above also]

- Water play, paint, play dough and sand play should be available on a daily basis in a childcare setting
- Allow children to make the play dough/gloop as a group activity or individually, adding different scents can extend the experience, e.g. eucalyptus or lavender oil, lemon essence, almond essence
- Add food colouring, glitter and/or bubbles to water
- Paint the outside walls and ground with water
- Make bubbles
- Cook – making a fruit salad or bread all involves using your hands
- Glue and paste – papier mâché

This stage involves more co-operative play. Children may plan to do activities together or with an adult.



MESSY PLAY

GOOD PRACTICE TIPS

- Some children may really dislike the feel of some materials – be sensitive to this, gently encourage play but take them at their own pace and level of comfort. Have wet wipes near so that they can be used at any time.
- Talk to parents about the benefits of messy play and encourage its use at home.
- Allow plenty of time for these activities. Having the activity before lunch will put pressure on the child and adult during clean up.
- Join in – model that it is OK to get your hands dirty.
- Individual containers for the material can be of benefit to a child that needs support with boundaries, while a larger container i.e. water tray or sand box can encourage a withdrawn child to interact with others.
- Use old adult sized t-shirts or shirts for young children to wear during activities. Roll up sleeves and put on waterproof bibs for babies. Having a spare set of clothes is always a good back up.
- Try to position the activity near to where the children can wash their hands.
- At clean up time, encourage children to help. Have individual cloths, clearly defined storage areas, washing line for paintings, dustpan and brush near sand.

RESOURCES

Clay and Dough. Pre-School Learning Alliance, 1991

Glueing. Pre-School Learning Alliance, 1991

Guide to Games and Activities for 0-5 Year Olds.
Barnardos' NCRC, 2005

The Little Book of Messy Play: Adventurous Art Inside and in the Garden. Featherstone Education Ltd, 2002

Power of Play – A Play Curriculum in Action. IPPA, 2004

Sand. Scholastic, 1996

Sand and Water. Pre-School Learning Alliance, 1991

Journal Articles

A Fine Mess!
Nursery World, Vol.101, no.3750 2001 pp 12-13

All About ... Messy Play.
Nursery World, Vol.104, no.3942 2004, pp15-22

Dig and Delve.
Nursery World, Vol.105, no.3963 2005 pp12-13

Get Stuck In.
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Websites

www.fresnofamily.com

www.littlies.co.nz

www.under5s.co.uk





PLANNING PROGRAMMES

Planning programmes helps to give a structure which provides predictability for children and staff.

Planning programmes can also create a sense of security for the children. Planning includes long term – looking at the vision for the service – and short or medium term programme planning – looking at the day to day and weekly running of the service.

Planning as a team supports the team in working together and the creation of a sense of ownership. Planning requires setting aside time on a weekly basis when everyone can attend. It allows staff time to discuss observations on the needs and interests of individual children and the group and then how to plan for these. This also helps individual staff members to know what their role is each day, thus ensuring a smoother running service.

It is important to review your plans and their implementation to inform future planning.

Involving the children in planning

We can promote the development of thinking and reasoning in young children by providing two curriculum components – planning and reflection. Both are thoughtful activities that encourage children to consider what they are doing and what they are learning. They also promote a broad range of other academic, social and artistic skills.

Engage children in planning and encourage them to identify their goals and consider the options for achieving them. For example, they might consider what they will do, where they will do it, what materials they

will use, who they will do it with, how long it will take and whether they will need help.

Engage children in reflection and encourage them to go beyond just telling what they've done. This helps them become aware of what they learned in the process, what was interesting, how they feel about it and what they can do to build on the experience.

When children plan, carry out, and review their own learning activities, their behaviour is more purposeful and they perform better on language and other intellectual measures.

What to consider

- The interests and abilities of each child in the group.
- The purpose of the overall plan – how it will help the children's development **Socially, Physically, Intellectually, Creatively, Culturally** and/or **Emotionally (SPICCE)**.
- Plans should always include time for child-initiated or free play.
- Designing a planning sheet to suit your daily/weekly routine.
- Good planning allows for some flexibility. It is ok to change a plan to meet the needs of the children, e.g. if you have planned a quiet activity and all the children have lots of energy you could change your plan to include an active game.

A simple example of a Weekly Planning Sheet:

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Small group Gloop -Sandra	Small group Painting -Sinead	Small group Tracing bodies -Tina	Small group Pirate ship -Elaine	Small group Lego -Sandra
Large group Action songs -Tina	Large group Storytime -Elaine	Large group Musical instruments -Sandra	Large group Garden -Sinead	Large group Musical Statues -Elaine
Lunches-Sinead	Lunches-Tina	Lunches-Elaine	Lunches-Sandra	Lunches-Tina



PLANNING PROGRAMMES

GOOD PRACTICE TIPS

- Make planning a regular part of the day's activities.
- Involve the children in the planning.
- Ask the children questions and listen attentively to their plans. Support and accept all the ways in which they express their plans and encourage them to elaborate on them. Writing down their plans reinforces for the child that you are interested.
- Displaying the general plan ensures everyone is clear about what will happen each day and who is responsible for leading each activity. It also shows parents what their child will do each week.
- For children whose language is not fully developed photos of the different activities in the service support their choices when planning their activities. Make sure that they can look around the room when they are deciding what to do and making their plans.
- When introducing a new activity check it out first, e.g. when going on a trip to the local farm, go there in advance to see what new experiences the children will gain and do a risk assessment of the area.

RESOURCES

After School+: A Practice Guide for Providers.
Barnardos' NCRC, 2004

Childcare Strategic Programme 2002-2007.
Cork City Childcare Committee, 2001

How Planning and Reflection Develop Young Children's Thinking Skills. High/Scope Press

Implementing Sure Start Local Programmes: An Integrated Overview of the First Four Years – National Evaluation Report. Department for Education and Skills Publications, 2005

The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE), forthcoming, 2006

Once in a Lifetime: Early Childhood Care and Education for Children from Birth to Three.
Barnardos' NCRC, 2005

Planning Around Children's Interests.
High/Scope Press, 1996

The Playworker's Handbook. Hodder Arnold, 2005

School's Out: Framework for the Development of Out-of-School Care – Childcare and Activities for School-age Children and Young People.
The Stationery Office, 2003

Supporting Quality: Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Services (2nd Edition).
Barnardos' NCRC, 2003

Working Together for Healthy Young Minds: A Practitioner's Workbook. Russell House, 2003

Websites

www.yorkchildcare.co.uk/out_of_school/out_of_school_planning.htm

www.nurseryworld.co.uk/activities/

www.bigeyedowl.co.uk/index.htm

<http://reggie.net/teaching/#top>

www.highscope.org



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OUTDOOR TIME

If you have you ever been in an open space with young children you will know that the first thing they want to do is to break away from your hand and run!

Children are born with the desire to move, and open space is exciting. Learning to move is not just about making muscles strong, it is also vital for children's growth and development.

It helps them learn about the world and their place in it. Movement is important and it requires lots of room. Outdoor space provides children with so much of what they need to stimulate their minds and bodies.

It is critical to look at the whole childcare environment where children learn, play and grow. This includes not only the room inside but also the outdoor space. Natural play spaces can stimulate children's imaginations and engage their sense of curiosity as they explore their physical surroundings and learn in ways beyond what they can experience indoors. Think back to your childhood. What did you enjoy most when you played outdoors? Maybe you made messy mud pies by the river, swung on a tree or played hide-and-seek among the bushes.

Together, play and the outdoors uniquely contribute to learning in young children. Make the most of outdoor time with young children.

What to consider

- Are staff members following the lead of the child?
- Do children have the freedom to select safe materials to use outdoors to build upon their natural sense of exploration?
- Does this outdoor space offer enough choices for children?
- Are child and adult interactions natural and relaxed, allowing for more creative approaches to learning and problem solving?
- Do you review equipment to be sure that it is appropriately designed for the age levels and needs of the children using it?
- If we do not provide controlled opportunities for children to experience and manage a degree of risk appropriate to their age then they may be denied the chance to learn these skills.

Planning play and learning settings

Play and learning settings are defined spaces that support activities with specific toys or play materials. Examples include an active play area, a storytelling circle, a sand and water play area, a tricycle path, a vegetable garden and/or a puppet theatre.

Here are a few key questions to help when planning play and learning settings:

- Is there an array of play and learning settings within the outdoor physical play space? If only large equipment is available for outdoor play, children's experience and opportunities for well-rounded development are severely limited. Boredom and negative social behaviour may result.
- Are there enough materials to eliminate potential arguing over supplies or toys?
- Are there natural things to play with such as acorns, pine cones, vegetables or shells?
- Are there things such as blocks, balls, digging utensils, sand and water toys, and pieces of cloth or chalk?

Planning the outdoor programme

The outdoor programme should address the child as a whole – physically, emotionally, cognitively and socially. You can use the outdoors effectively as a learning space by preparing it to maximise learning opportunities.

If you are uninvolved or too intrusive, judgmental or focused on rules you will limit the creative learning opportunities that children look for. It is the role of the adults to think ahead and to prepare the space for children's play and learning. Be willing to explore and use your sense of wonder to engage children. Ask open-ended questions to stretch the ability of children to wonder even further and to learn through trial and error. Include planned activities and let ideas emerge from interactions that occur while outside.



OUTDOOR TIME

GOOD PRACTICE TIPS

- Ensure that the programme allows children to choose from activities and materials that are rotated for a variety of experiences.
- Facilitate play and learning while also ensuring safety rather than directing the children's play, intruding on their play or judging their ideas.
- Consideration of each curriculum area – such as art, music, science, language, maths – being explored outside.
- Incorporate outdoor play and learning as a regular part of the programme and daily schedule.
- How might you be missing opportunities to engage with children in play and learning activities by being involved in unrelated tasks?

RESOURCES

50 Exciting Things To Do Outside.
Lawrence Educational Publications, 2001

All In! All In!: A Selection of Dublin Children's Traditional Street-games with Rhymes and Music. Comhairle Bhealoideas Eireann, 1984

Best Play: What Play Provision Should Do For Children.
National Playing Fields Association, 2000

The Delivery of Better Play Projects in Public Spaces.
(Better Play Briefing; no. 2). Barnardo's UK, 2005

Exercising Muscles and Minds.
National Early Years Network, 2001

Games Children Play: How Games and Sport Help Children Develop. Hawthorn Press, 1996

Going Out to Play and Learn.
www.early-education.org.uk

Good Practice in Playwork. Stanley Thornes, 1996

Great Big Book of Children's Games: Over 450 Indoor and Outdoor Games for Kids. McGraw-Hill, 2003

Guide to Games and Activities for 0-5 Year Olds.
Barnardos' NCRC, 2005

Guidelines on Outdoor Play Facilities for Pre-School Services. South Western Area Health Board et al., 2001

Learning Outdoors: Improving the Quality of Young Children's Play. David Fulton, 2005

Let's Go Outside: Designing the Early Childhood Playground. High/Scope Press, 1999

The Little Book of Outdoor Play: Ideas for Outdoor Activities for the Foundation Stage. Featherstone Education Ltd, 2001

The Little Book of Outside in all Weathers: Outdoor Activities for the Foundation Stage.
Featherstone Education Ltd, 2003

The Little Book of Playground Games: Simple Games for Out of Doors. Featherstone Education Ltd, 2004

Making the Most of Outdoor Time with Pre-School Children. North Carolina Co-operative Extension Service

More than Swings and Roundabouts: Planning for Outdoor Play. National Children's Bureau, 2002

Outdoor Play in the Early Years.
David Fulton Publishers Ltd, 1998

Outdoors with Young People. A Leader's Guide to Outdoor Activities, the Environment and Sustainability. Russell House Publishing, 1998

Planning The Outdoor Area. High/Scope Press, 2003

Play Activities Series. Pre-school Learning Alliance, 1998

Playing Outdoors in the Early Years. Continuum, 2004

Playing Outside: Activities, Ideas and Inspiration for the Early Years. David Fulton, 2004

Where Do Children Play?
National Children's Bureau, 2002



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EVERY CHILDHOOD LASTS A LIFETIME



HELPING CHILDREN WITH THEIR BEHAVIOUR

Children need support in learning to understand and control their feelings.

Adults play an important role in helping children develop skills to cope with disagreements and hurt feelings. Through their behaviour children give us messages about what skills they have and have not learned. Using observation can help us to identify what the child can do and what support they need.

We need to support children to develop skills that will enable them to participate in groups and in society. It is about supporting children to understand what behaviours are acceptable rather than telling them what not to do. It involves using 'do' instead of 'don't'.

What to consider

- Try to see things from the child's point of view – understanding how children see the world will help you to help them as they learn.
- Focus on the positive – make the effort to catch children out 'being good'. Children learn best when they receive generous encouragement for what they have actually done.
- Feelings matter – both the children's emotions and your own are part of any situation with young children. It is very helpful to be aware of your own moods as well as the children's when enjoying yourself with them and during difficult moments.
- You don't have to be perfect – everyone does something they don't mean sometimes. Children can be forgiving as long as we are thoughtful most of the time and are ready to say sorry when we should.

How to support children to deal with conflict

The High/Scope approach to resolving social conflict is very practical. **There are six steps involved.**

1. Approach the situation calmly. Be on the children's level between them. Stay neutral.
2. Acknowledge children's feelings.
3. Ask both children what happened.
4. Restate the problem for the children.
5. Ask for ideas for solutions and choose one together, preferably one both children agree to.
6. You may need to give follow up support, so stay nearby.

You need to use the same approach consistently. The children will learn that they can get support in moments of conflict. They will also learn the first steps in resolving their own conflict which is an invaluable tool for life.

Another strategy you can use in helping children with their behaviour is the Marte Meo Co-operation Cycle. In structured situations it is important for the adults to take the lead. This involves letting the children know what is going to happen and what you expect from them.

3 Steps in Co-operation

1. Tell the child what you want him/her to do, e.g. "Put your coat on". Make sure you have the child's attention by using his/her name.
2. Stay with the child while they carry out your instruction. You might need to give extra support, e.g. "Put one arm in, yes that's right, now the other arm".
3. Confirm the child when they complete the task e.g. "Great you have your coat on now".

It is also important to look at reasons behind the behaviour. Children who have not developed certain skills may find it difficult to cope in a group situation. This can lead to the child acting out or displaying challenging behaviour. It is important to support the children where they are and support them to move on to the next step. This may mean not assuming that once a child is a certain age they have developed certain skills.



HELPING CHILDREN WITH THEIR BEHAVIOUR

GOOD PRACTICE TIPS

- Be consistent.
- Stay calm.
- Use the child's name to get their attention before giving an instruction.
- Give clear instructions – don't ask questions to which the child might answer "No".
- Use informative tones – not aggressive or passive tones.
- Use positive language, e.g. "Sit on the chair" instead of "Don't stand up".
- Acknowledge that feelings are OK but some behaviours are not.
- Think of the long term solution rather than the quick fix.
- Talk things through with your colleagues.
- Try to find positive moments with all of the children.

RESOURCES

104 Activities That Build: Self Esteem, Teamwork, Communication, Anger Management, Self-discovery, Coping skills. Rec Room Publishing, 1998

The Anger Alphabet: Understanding Anger – An Emotional Development Programme for Young Children Aged 6 to 11. Lucky Duck Publishing, 2002

Behaviour Problems in the Early Years: A Guide for Understanding and Support. RoutledgeFalmer, 2005

Behavioural and Emotional Difficulties. Scholastic, 2002

Book of Toddler Tantrums: How to Tame Your Child's Temper. National Childbirth Trust, 2000

Bringing Up Responsible Children. Veritas Publications, 1999

Child and Adolescent Behaviour Problems: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Assessment and Intervention. British Psychological Society, 2000

Educating Young Children: Active Learning Practices for Preschool and Child Care Programs, (2nd Edition). High/Scope Press

Healthy Anger: How to Help Children and Teens Manage their Anger. Oxford University Press, Inc. 2003

Helping with Behaviour: Establishing the Positive and Addressing the Difficult in the Early Years. Routledge, 2006

Label with Care: A Behaviour Management Book for Parents. Lucky Duck Publishing, 1998

Marte Meo Basic Manual. Aarts Productions, 1996

Once in a Lifetime: Early Childhood Care and Education for Children from Birth to Three. Barnardos' NCRC, 2005

Parent Parachute: A Three Step Approach to Better Behaviour in Children. Simon and Schuster, 1999

Parenting the Strong-willed Child: The Clinically Proven Five-week Program for Parents of Two-to Six-Year-Olds. Contemporary Books, 2002

Problem Postcards: Social, Emotional and Behavioural Skills Training for Disaffected and Difficult Children aged 7 to 11. Lucky Duck Publishing, 2005

Seeing Red: An Anger Management and Peacemaking Curriculum for Kids: A Resource for Teachers, Social Workers, and Youth Leaders. New Society Publishers, 2003

Supporting Quality: Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Services (2nd Edition). Barnardos' NCRC, 2003

Think Before You Act! Thinking Skills and Behaviour Improvement for 9 to 16 Year-Olds. Lucky Duck Publishing, 2003

Understanding and Supporting Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999

Understanding Children's Challenging Behaviour. Nelson Thornes Ltd, 2001

A Volcano in my Tummy: Helping Children to Handle Anger. New Society Publishers, 1996



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One of the ways that children learn to enjoy reading is through stories.

Children need activities which require their own imaginations to be active. Development of imagination is one of the most significant functions of storytelling. Storytelling also teaches children a great deal about the use of language, narrative form, how to interact with others and how to live morally. Stories can also help children to deal with the problems and fears that they experience in everyday life.

The Setting

Careful thought and consideration must go into the setting in which children hear stories and investigate books. The right physical environment can help young children to feel good about sitting alone with a book, sharing books with friends or listening to a story in a large group. The area should be comfortable with mats/carpet and soft cushions so that it is nice and cosy. Include a space outdoors with waterproof beanbags. Books should be displayed on low shelves with covers showing.

Getting to Know the Story

It is a good idea to read the story first yourself before introducing it to the children. This way you can get a sense of the story, know its patterns and the characters. It gives you an opportunity to see if you enjoy the story and this enjoyment will transfer in the storytelling. Children can also sense that you know the end of the story. This is an important way of ensuring that they will experience trust and safety while hearing the story.

The Telling

Your voice will add to the story in the many subtle changes in pitch, volume and pauses. Different accents can be used for different characters. Eye-contact, facial expressions, gestures and body posture can make the story real for the listeners. Don't worry if you don't know the story perfectly, let the illustrations guide you and add your own words.

The Listeners

Having the children sit in a semi-circle for large group storytime with you sitting close is probably the best way so that everyone can see and hear the story. Holding the book so the children can see it is essential. Oversized books are great when children are being introduced to group storytime so everyone can see comfortably.

Choosing Books

Quality titles will be identified by the language used, the illustrations and the range of challenges they offer. Books can evoke emotions in children – happiness, sadness, fear.

They should challenge not overwhelm a child, so pick titles at the child's level.

Providing storytime for children at different ages and stages

BABIES

- Young babies will enjoy the warmth of your company and the sound and rhythm of your voice, long before they can understand the words.
- Babies can start to learn to enjoy books from birth as you show them brightly coloured pictures and name the objects or sing a rhyme about the picture. They love being with you and will learn to understand the words that you say long before they can talk.

TODDLERS

- Stories need to be simple and short because toddlers have short attention spans.
- Toddlers enjoy books with colourful pictures, simple rhymes and stories about things they know.
- Very young children often want their favourite stories over and over again and this can be important to them as they grow and learn.
- Two year olds will often correct you if you even leave out a word or will enjoy saying some of the words as they get to know their loved stories.



STORYTIME

YOUNG CHILDREN

- Stories can be acted out by you and the children.
- Children can make pictures or models of stories.
- Ask the children to tell you a story – and listen to them. Show you are interested.
- Stories should still not be long – find books that you can start and finish in one go.
- Don't make storytime a reading lesson – it is a time for sharing, relaxing and fun.
- Don't expect too much too soon when children are learning to read stories for themselves. It takes a long time after children can read before they read well enough to really enjoy the stories they are reading. They will need you to read stories to them long after they can read for themselves – and there is something special about having stories read to you at any age.
- Allow the children to choose books they like to read, even if they are not your choice.
- Help children find books about their interests, e.g. if they love dogs, cars or dinosaurs, look for books on these topics.
- Beginner readers need books with simple words for success and enjoyment. Books that are too hard can put them off.
- All children are different. One child might not enjoy the same books or be at the same reading level as another child, or as an older brother or sister did at the same age.
- Many children (and adults) like to return to old favourites from time to time, even when they can read much more difficult stories. This can also happen if children are unwell or unhappy because familiar loved stories can help them to regain a sense of security and well being.

GOOD PRACTICE TIPS

- Allow the children to participate in the story by asking questions, repeating the rhythms or asking children to open the 'flip ups'.
- When you are doing group storytime children love to be able to see the picture so it is worth practising looking at the book upside down!
- Develop story bags – making props for the story can really bring it alive. E.g. in Goldilocks and the Three Bears story bag include bowls, spoons, chairs, beds and the bears in the three different sizes.

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EVERY CHILDHOOD LASTS A LIFETIME



OBSERVATIONS

Observing and reflecting helps practitioners to look at how well programmes are running, how the children's holistic development is being supported and what other supports are necessary.

Observing and reflecting helps effective planning for overall practice and for individual children.

Observing can help:

- To identify strengths of individual children and supports they may need
- To plan programmes to meet each child's individual, holistic, development needs
- To check how the programme is working
- To inform planning
- To make reports on the service or individual children

What to consider

Practitioners need to observe children to:

- Get to know them and to understand them and their individual needs.
- Check that all aspects of their development are considered when planning and reviewing programmes – to do this effectively practitioners need to know what to expect at each age and stage of development.
- Understand the possible causes and help to identify solutions to any behaviour problems.
- Check whether children are having any difficulties playing and interacting with each other or with adults.
- Support children in getting along with each other.
- Inform parents how their child has been throughout the session/day.

There are different kinds of observations. The one used will depend on the kind of information needed.

Some specific types of observation are:

Time Sampling

Selecting a child or group of children or an activity and observing what is happening at specific intervals.

Frequency Observation

To observe and note an aspect of behaviour every time it is happening to find out if it is increasing or decreasing.

Focused Observation

This is usually a short, intensive observation and can give a lot of information about a child or an activity. It involves detailed notes of everything that happens.

Target Child Observation

Focus on one child if you are concerned about them. You can see how this child is developing in different areas, e.g. socially by observing interactions with adults and other children.

Video/Audio Observations

This is sometimes the only way to capture fully what children say. When using this method it is important to get permission from parents and to inform them about the purpose of the observation.

Anecdotal Records

These can be written after activities having reflected on behaviour, what a child may have learned from the activity and so on.

Tools to use for observation

- Design an observation sheet based on the information you want from the observations.
- Use abbreviations to make note taking much easier and quicker, e.g. HA for Home Area, TC for Target Child, A for Adult, ⇒ for speaks to, etc.
- Use concrete language and describe what is happening. Don't make judgements. Write "Child A is jumping up and down and running around the room" not "Child A is hyperactive".
- Use the S.O.U.L. approach:

Silence: Silently observe and listen to children. When adults sit back and observe they gain perspective on the child's thoughts and ideas.

Observation: Observe a child regarding a specific focus or area of development.

Understanding: Use the child's point of view to gain a better understanding of his or her thoughts and actions.

Listening: Be an active listener to children.



OBSERVATIONS

GOOD PRACTICE TIPS

- Make sure you are prepared.
- Be clear about what information you want from the observations.
- Make sure your colleagues know your plan and the purpose of it.
- Know when, where and for how long the observations will take place.
- Use your observations to:
 - Plan for individual children
 - Plan group programmes
 - Give feedback to parents

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Barnardos

EVERY CHILDHOOD LASTS A LIFETIME



Social skills are very important tools for life. Without them we would not be able to mix with others.

Children are not born with social skills and they need support to develop them. Children use their behaviour to tell us what skills they have and have not developed. Those who have not had appropriate opportunities to mix with other children may need extra support to develop their social skills.

Social skills are like building blocks – the first step must be in place before the next step is added. If children are unable to play with other children or have lots of fights they may not have developed social skills.

How to support children to develop social skills

Every time you talk kindly to the children, you are modelling for them how to talk kindly to each other. You can also help children to learn acceptable ways to respond to difficult situations. Don't just tell children to share. Show them how to share. They could take turns or they could divide the toys up so that each has some. They could also find a way to play together with the toys. Children who grab toys from others or bother other children who are playing sometimes just want to play with them but they do not know how to join the group. Help them to ask to play. Children can also learn words to use when they are hurt or bullied by other children, e.g. "That really hurts!" and "Stop that!"

There are certain specific supports that will help children to develop their social skills:

Supporting the Child's Play Ideas

Children who have not developed social skills may need support with having play ideas and making play sounds. It is important to encourage this by repeating the play sounds that the child does make and by naming the child's play ideas.

Naming the Child's Actions

It is important to give the child words around his actions, e.g. "You are pouring the sand". This will support the child to become aware of his own play and will help him to develop language around his play. These are important steps in linking him with other children.

A child who uses words around his ideas will often have more interactions with other children, e.g. if a child stands up and says, "I'm going to play with the sand" often other children will hear this and join him. However, if a child stands up and walks to the sand without using language they will have no social interaction with other children.

Naming Other Children's Actions

You may need to bridge the gap between one child and the other children. You can do this by using words around the other children's actions, particularly when the child is watching the other children. This will support the child to become aware of the other children and their play – to become more socially aware.

Building on the Child's Strengths

Organise small group activities that incorporate activities the child is interested in or good at and therefore will be more confident with.

By offering the support described in these steps the child should begin to develop some of the social skills necessary to play with others.



SOCIAL SKILLS

GOOD PRACTICE TIPS

- Observe to see what the child can do and build on this.
- Do not assume that because a child is a certain age they automatically have developed social skills.
- Help the child to give and take.
- Remember there are many steps involved in developing social skills and children need to achieve one step before moving on to the next one.
- Children need support on each step.
- Helping a child to develop social skills is giving them a tool for life.

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HELPING CHILDREN WITH SETTLING IN

Starting childcare is a major life transition for both young children and their families. Change, even when positive, can be stressful.

In many cases this may be the first time a child is away from their family. Young children have been developing an attachment to their parents and are generally secure in their daily home life and routine. A slow transition is one specific measure that can ease the transition to childcare and alleviate separation anxiety.

What to consider when devising a settling in procedure

Plan for the separation

- Encourage the child and the parent/carer to visit the service to meet staff and have a look around ahead of the planned start date. They can give information about their child's likes/dislikes so that they may be taken into account. Ask the parent/carer to bring with them any comforter the child may have, e.g. blanket, teddy – sources of comfort like these can help a child feel secure.
- Outline and discuss the service's settling-in procedure and the policy regarding behaviour with parents/carers.
- Label the child's coat hook and other personal spaces in advance.
- Assign one staff member as the child's key worker.

Encourage the parent/carer to stay with their child

- The child is introduced to the service on a gradual schedule to allow them to adjust to childcare in a gentle way. Maybe only an hour the first day, two hours the next, until the child is comfortable remaining for the full session. Parents/carers are invited to stay with the child. Every situation and family must be treated individually and the service needs to meet their needs through a flexible approach.

Key Worker

- Assigning one specific staff member to be responsible for welcoming, settling-in the child and, where possible, returning the child to the parent at the end of the session helps the child cope with separation and change. It also enables the staff member and the child to form an attachment.

When parent/carer leaves

- It is a good idea to warn the child that the parent will be leaving in five minutes, or that after the story they will be going to work. When it is time for the parent to go, encourage the parent to say goodbye and go. Continued extensions to the separation seem to only add to anxiety and make the separation more difficult.
- Discourage the parent from 'sneaking' out. Regardless of how upset the child is, sneaking out only adds to their anxiety, increases fear of abandonment, and breaks down the child's sense of trust.
- Reassure parents/carers that they can contact the service at any time. Parents need to know that their anxieties will be taken seriously and that they can trust staff to support them.

Introducing the child to the routine

- Gradually increase the time spent by the child in the service in the first week. Depending on the individual child this may need to be continued until the child is comfortable with staying for the full session.
- Allow the child to experience the environment at their pace.
- Introduce the child to the other children in the group.
- Gently introduce the routine aspects of the service e.g. "At the paint we put on our aprons. Which colour apron would you like?"

Overcoming separation anxiety and adjusting to childcare, like any major life change, is a gradual process. Acknowledging and providing for this will result in each child developing increased confidence and experiencing less anxiety about the separation.



HELPING CHILDREN WITH SETTLING IN

GOOD PRACTICE TIPS

- Provide opportunities for the family and child to get to know you and the service before the child starts.
- Before the child starts encourage parents to talk to the child about where they will be going, what they will be doing, who they will meet and why they will be going to childcare.
- Talk to parents about important events in the child's life such as how well they have slept the night before or what they did at the weekend.
- Recognise the parents' feelings – both parents/carers and children are undergoing a major life change. Realise that parents may have feelings of apprehension or guilt in leaving their child in your care. Be sure to make both the child and parents feel welcome.
- Communicate with parents – be sure to let them know if you have any specific concerns and needs. Don't be afraid to specifically ask how you can be of assistance.

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ADULT-CHILD INTERACTIONS

Research shows that while high quality childcare positively influences children's development and learning, poor quality care is shown to have negative effects on children.

Caregivers are the most critical factor in determining the quality of childcare. According to High/Scope research studies of adult-child interaction, when adults are responsive to and supportive of children's interests, children learn that their behaviour is accepted and valued. This results in feelings of confidence and high self-esteem on the part of the child.

Children's social and emotional development is shaped by their environment. While it may not be possible to control external environmental influences on young children, we can control our style of interaction when working with young children. Interactions with the children should be frequent, warm and responsive.

It is important to interact with each child according to their individual personality and to remember that:

- Holding, cuddling and talking actually affect how a child's brain grows.
- Loving and supportive childcare 'programmes' the brain to handle stress and control emotions.
- The first years of life lay the foundation for future experiences.
- Reading to and singing with a child every day is a simple and effective way to help brain development.

Childcare that is designed to promote good health, positive social experiences and support for emotional development can improve the prospects – and quality of life – of children.

What to consider

1. The key element in interactions is joining children at their level. This means getting down on the child's eye-level. This communicates to the child that you are interested in what he or she is saying or doing.
2. Use the SOUL approach:
 - Silence:** Silently observe and listen to children. When adults sit back and observe they gain perspective on the child's thoughts and ideas.
 - Observation:** Observe a child regarding a specific focus or area of development.
 - Understanding:** Use the child's point of view to gain a better understanding of his or her thoughts and actions.
 - Listening:** Be an active listener to children.
3. Share control of the activity or conversation by taking turns with the child. This will provide balanced interactions with the child and allow the child to become a partner in the activity.
4. Use comments or observations as an opener to interact with children.
5. Describe and comment on children's actions. This gives meaning to children because you are commenting on something that interests them.
6. Encourage children to continue expressing themselves by acknowledging what they have to say. Repeat or restate what the child said. This lets them know that you are interested.
7. Extend the conversation by adding new ideas into the conversation. This can include making comments about your personal life or own experiences.
8. Ask questions, but sparingly. Do not overload or control the conversation by asking too many questions. Ask open-ended questions that stimulate children's language and thoughts and encourage children to express ideas and feelings.



ADULT-CHILD INTERACTIONS

GOOD PRACTICE TIPS

- Listen to children. Really listen. Physically get down on the child's level. Establish eye contact. Ask questions. Remember what you've heard.
- Ask. Never jump to conclusions about the motives behind a child's behaviour. Give the child a chance to explain. We all deserve a hearing or chance to tell our side.
- Offer real choices – children should be able to select the activities in which they wish to participate. They may be given choices about which story to have read, whether they want carrots or celery for snack or which friend to sit beside during group meetings. Sometimes choices need to be limited to acceptable options only.
- Value ideas and opinions – ask children what they think. Storytime may offer many opportunities for children to express their thoughts as they discuss story characters and events. Children can also be asked their opinions about daily happenings in casual conversations.
- Encourage independence – provide materials and supplies where children can get to them on their own. Encourage children to try to take care of their own needs. Resist the temptation to do those small but important tasks for children. A child can usually zip his or her own coat (after you get it started) put his or her artwork in his or her own bag and write as much of his or her own name on paintings as possible.
- Use redirection – redirection and diversion are particularly effective with the very young, e.g. you might entice a child to become interested in a different activity or suggest trying the same activity with a variation. When using redirection and diversion spend a few minutes playing with the child to move play in a more positive direction.
- Set reasonable standards. If standards are stated as rules, keep them short, specific, and positive, e.g. "We walk when we're indoors" or "We need to wear an apron at painting".

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