

Introduction

There are many different types of early years settings. They include childminders, nurseries and schools. Although they are all different, they all work to the same basic principles. The principles of early years practice are about making sure each child benefits from the opportunities on offer within the setting and that they are properly supported. In this unit we look at each of these principles and why they are so important for children's development.

Assessment: This unit will be assessed through a series of assignments set by your teacher/tutor.

Learning aims

In this unit you will:

- A** understand the importance of inclusive practice in early years
- B** explore ways in which early years settings implement inclusive practice
- C** understand how children are empowered in early years settings
- D** understand the importance of the key person approach in supporting children's development.



I hadn't realised that there is a lot of behind-the-scenes thinking about how nurseries and other early years settings should be run. Now when I visit a nursery or playgroup, I start noticing what they do to make sure everyone is welcomed.

Niamh, 17-year-old early years student

The Principles of Early Years Practice



UNIT 3 The Principles of Early Years Practice



This table shows what you must do in order to achieve a **Pass, Merit or Distinction** grade, and where you can find activities in this book to help you.

Assessment criteria			
Level 1	Level 2 Pass	Level 2 Merit	Level 2 Distinction
Learning aim A: Understand the importance of inclusive practice in early years			
1A.1 Outline three benefits to children of inclusive practice in early years settings.	2A.P1 English Describe how children benefit from inclusive practice in early years settings. See Assessment activity 3.1, page 80	2A.M1 English Explain the potential impact on children of inclusive and non-inclusive practice in early years settings, using appropriate examples. See Assessment activity 3.1, page 80	2A.D1 English Compare how inclusive and non-inclusive practice affects children in early years settings, using case studies. See Assessment activity 3.1, page 80
1A.2 Outline three ways in which children may be affected by non-inclusive practice in early years settings.	2A.P2 English Describe ways in which children may be affected by non-inclusive practice in early years settings. See Assessment activity 3.1, page 80		
Learning aim B: Explore ways in which early years settings implement inclusive practice			
1B.3 Outline how inclusive practice is implemented in selected early years settings.	2B.P3 Describe how inclusive practice is implemented in selected early years settings. See Assessment activity 3.2, page 84	2B.M2 Explain how inclusive practice is implemented in a selected early years setting. See Assessment activity 3.2, page 84	2B.D2 Assess the extent to which inclusive practice is successfully implemented in a selected early years setting. See Assessment activity 3.2, page 84
Learning aim C: Understand how children are empowered in early years settings			
1C.4 Outline why adults in early years settings seek to empower children.	2C.P4 Explain why adults in early years settings seek to empower children. See Assessment activity 3.3, page 90	2C.M3 Explain how effective empowerment of children can benefit their development, using appropriate examples. See Assessment activity 3.3, page 90	2C.D3 Assess the extent to which an early years setting is successful in empowering children, using a case study. See Assessment activity 3.3, page 90
1C.5 Identify how adults in early years settings can empower children.	2C.P5 Describe how adults in early years settings can empower children. See Assessment activity 3.3, page 90		

Assessment criteria			
Level 1	Level 2 Pass	Level 2 Merit	Level 2 Distinction
Learning aim D: Understand the importance of the key person approach in supporting children's development			
1D.6 Identify two reasons why the key person approach is used in early years settings.	2D.P6 Explain why the key person approach is used in early years settings. See Assessment activity 3.4, page 96	2D.M4 Explain how the key person approach supports children's development, using appropriate examples. See Assessment activity 3.4, page 96	2D.D4 Evaluate the contribution of the key person approach to a selected child's development. See Assessment activity 3.4, page 96
1D.7 Identify ways that children's development is supported by the key person approach.	2D.P7 Describe how the key person approach supports all areas of children's development. See Assessment activity 3.4, page 96		

English Opportunity to practise English skills

How you will be assessed

This unit will be assessed by a series of internally assessed tasks set by your teacher/tutor. Your evidence for this unit will be collected and stored in a portfolio, together with any observation records or witness statements. Throughout this unit you will find assessment practice activities that will help you work towards your assessment. Completing these activities will not mean that you have achieved a particular grade, but you will have carried out useful research or preparation that will be relevant when it comes to your final assignment.

The assignments set by your teacher will consist of a number of tasks designed to meet the criteria in the table. This is likely to consist of written assignments and may include activities such as producing:

- a report about the importance of inclusive practice and the effects of non-inclusive practice
- a chapter in a handbook for learners about how inclusive practice is implemented in early years settings
- a handout for learners about why and how early years settings empower children
- a presentation for families about the key person role in early years settings.

▶ How children benefit from inclusive practice

Introduction

Inclusive practice is an important principle in early years practice. The idea of inclusive practice is that every child is important and should be helped and welcomed.

Key terms

Inclusive practice – ways of working that make children feel welcomed and ensure that their needs are met.

Self-image – the way that you view yourself.

It should not matter what a child's race, background or lifestyle is. Nor should it matter how old the child is or whether they have a disability. Inclusive practice means that every child and their family should be able to benefit from the services and opportunities that early year settings offer. In this section we look at the positive ways in which inclusive practice can help children.

▶ Positive effects of inclusive practice

There are many reasons why early years settings provide inclusive practice.

Discussion point

In pairs, discuss the following questions:

- Have you ever been somewhere and felt not wanted? How did this make you feel?
- Did this affect how interested or confident you felt?

During the first years of life children are learning about themselves. Their **self-image** is developing. What they learn depends on the experiences they have. It also depends on how they are treated. Children who feel that they are liked by adults in early years settings are more likely to develop a positive self-image. Children who feel that adults believe in them are also likely to try out new things and be motivated. Being liked and cared for helps children to be positive about others.



How will this welcome support a child's self-image?

Case study

Jonas is 3 years old. In the nursery he has always been comforted by his **key person** when he has fallen down. One day he sees another child who is crying. He puts his arms around the child and tries to comfort her. Why do you think that Jonas did this?



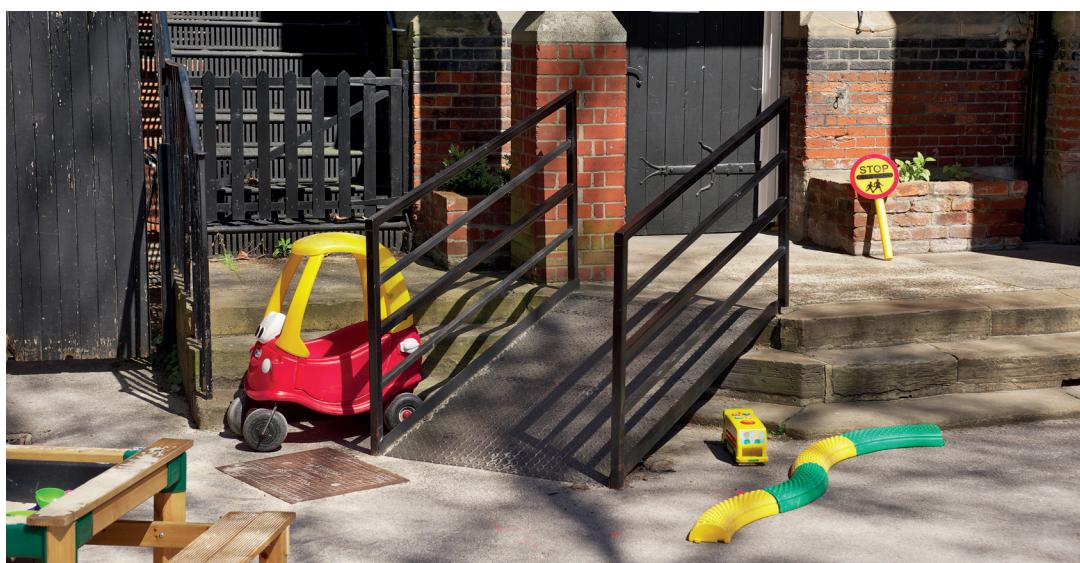
Key term

Key person (key worker) – an adult who develops a strong, consistent relationship with a child and their family to ensure that a child's emotional needs are met.

Developmental benefits

Children who are in inclusive settings are likely to make good progress. This is because a wide range of play opportunities, equipment and activities will be available. It is also because adults are thinking about their needs and interests. Adults will try to work out what play, equipment or materials the child needs. By thinking about a child's individual needs, adults may also be in a better position to realise when additional help is required.

An inclusive setting will work with other professionals, such as speech and language therapists, to make sure that a child is helped. Inclusive settings may also adapt what they do to meet children's needs. They may paint a table white so that a child with sight problems can see jigsaw puzzles or plates more easily. For a child who needs a frame to walk with, they may change the layout so that the child can get inside the role play area.



How does this setting ensure that children with mobility needs are included?

Opportunities to play and socialise

Play is important for children's overall development. It is also enjoyable and enables children to practise social skills. Inclusive settings help children to play and be with others. Adults in inclusive settings think about what help children need so that they can play. An example of this is when an adult helps a child to play with others or adapts games so that a child can join in. Where settings show this type of inclusive practice, children will not only gain social skills through play, but will also learn to express feelings and emotions.



Link

Go to Unit 2: *Promoting Children's Development Through Play* where you will find out more information about how play affects children's development.

Key term

Self-efficacy – a belief in one's own potential abilities.

Development of self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is linked to self-image. It is about the way you think about your potential and can also be called a 'can do' attitude. Children who are developing a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to have a go at new skills and experiences. They have learned that with time and practice they are likely to master them.

Children without a strong sense of self-efficacy are likely to give up easily or not try out things, believing that they will not be able to do them. Inclusive settings make children feel that they are capable and help them develop this sense of 'can do'.



Why is this child's sense of self-efficacy helping him?

Key terms

Nurtured – feeling valued, protected and supported because someone is taking care of you.

Diabetes – a chronic disease where the pancreas does not make enough of an essential hormone called insulin, or when the body can't use the insulin it makes.

Muscular dystrophy – a disease that causes the muscles to become gradually weaker over time.

Emotional well-being

Emotional well-being is about feeling safe, **nurtured** and cared for. Inclusive practice gives children emotional well-being because they feel cared about, accepted and nurtured by adults. In a setting that demonstrates inclusive practice, children are also encouraged to be kind and thoughtful towards each other.

Health outcomes

Some children in settings have health needs that might be life-threatening, such as **diabetes** or **muscular dystrophy**. An inclusive setting will work with parents and other professionals to make sure that these needs are identified and met. This can help children's overall health outcomes.

In addition, an inclusive setting should be a 'healthy' setting. This means that hygiene, food and physical care practices are thought about carefully in order to maintain children's health.

Positive attitudes towards others

The way that you are treated influences the way that you are likely to treat others. Inclusive practice helps children to be warm and caring because they have this experience themselves. An inclusive setting also helps children to value others regardless of age, disability, race, background, gender or lifestyle. Children learn this from seeing adults value everyone. Inclusive practice also helps children to explore their surroundings in a positive way and learn about the differences between people.



Take it further

Find out more about the needs of children who have the medical conditions diabetes and muscular dystrophy. Now go to www.pearsonhotlinks.co.uk, search for this title and click on this activity.

Case study

Hazir is 3 years old. His mother would like him to go to the local playgroup. She is worried that, because she is new to the country and that Hazir does not speak English, they will not be accepted. Hazir and his mother live in a cramped bedsit. Hazir has severe **asthma**, which needs careful management. There are few toys and he is often bored.

When Hazir's mother decides to visit the playgroup, staff are friendly and welcoming. A short while afterwards, Hazir is attending three sessions a week. He is very happy. There are plenty of play opportunities and new experiences for him. His key person helps him join in with the other children and he is quickly learning to talk in English. He is making good progress in other areas of development too, especially social skills and physical development. The setting understands his health needs and keeps an eye on his breathing, especially during physical activities.

- 1 What are the benefits of inclusive practice on children's outcomes?
- 2 Give examples of how Hazir might benefit from being in this playgroup.



Key term

Asthma – a long-term lung disease in which the airways become inflamed and narrow.

Just checking



- 1 What is meant by the term 'inclusive practice'?
- 2 How might children's emotional well-being be supported by inclusive practice?
- 3 Can you think of an example of how inclusive practice can support social development?
- 4 How can inclusive settings improve health outcomes for children with health needs?
- 5 How might adults in inclusive settings teach children to value others, regardless of their background?

► How non-inclusive practice may affect children's outcomes

Introduction

We have seen the benefits of inclusive practice to children's development. But what do you think might happen if a child was in a setting that did not show inclusive practice?

By law, early years settings have to show that they are meeting children's needs and are showing inclusive practice. In this section we look at why inclusive practice is so important and why non-inclusive practice can be damaging to children.

► Negative effects of non-inclusive practice

There are a number of different ways in which children might be affected by being in a setting that does not demonstrate inclusive practice.

Poor self-image

We have seen that children's self-image is developing from an early age. It is important for children to learn that they are liked and also that they can do things for themselves. Children can develop poor-self image if they are always reliant on adults to help them or if they see that other children are liked more. Poor self-image means that children start to think they are not as good as other children. Over time this leads to a lack of confidence.

Low self-efficacy

As well as developing a positive self-image, children need to think that they have the potential to be competent. If the environment or layout of a setting is not suitable for a child, they may often have to wait for help and may need to rely on others to do things for them. This means that children learn to be helpless and passive. This is called 'learned helplessness'. Over time, this means that children may give up quickly or believe that there is no point in trying to help themselves.

Case study



Aidan is 4 years old. He has significant mobility and physical needs as a result of a birthing injury. He was in a setting where there were no ramps or adaptations. He had to be lifted in and out of his wheelchair. He could not move around easily because the layout had not been changed. He often spent time sitting, waiting for adults to move him from one activity to another. Adults in the setting would dress him because it was quicker for them, even though he could manage tops, shirts and jumpers unaided. His parents were worried that he was 'giving up'. He is now in an inclusive setting where he can, with some effort, move himself around. Staff also give him time and encouragement to do as much as he can alone.

- 1 Why was the first setting not showing inclusive practice?
- 2 What were the effects of non-inclusive practice on Aidan?

Delayed development

If children's needs are not identified quickly, this can affect their learning and development. An example of this is hearing. If a child is not fully hearing, they will find it harder to make progress with their speech and language.

As well as recognising the individual needs of children, it is important that adults meet these needs. A child who is just learning to talk needs adults to take time to listen carefully to them. If adults do not take the time to listen, the child will stop trying to communicate.



It is important to listen carefully when children are learning to talk.

Poor health outcomes

Children become poorly if their health needs are not met. These include skin care, a balanced diet, enough to drink and also appropriate clothing. Where settings do not meet these needs, children are more likely to have health problems.

For those children with existing health needs, these can become worse. A baby who has **eczema**, but whose nappy is not changed quickly, is likely to develop nappy rash. This might become infected. A child who is allergic to dairy products might become seriously ill if they are given ordinary milk.

Case study

Jayden has diabetes. His condition means that his **insulin** level has to be monitored and he needs regular injections. He also cannot go for long periods without food. Without insulin and food being given at the right time, Jayden can become dangerously ill. His parents are keen for him to go to nursery so that he can play with other children and benefit from activities. They have told the nursery about his medical condition and his needs. They have also decided that if there are any problems, they will keep Jayden at home so that they can be sure he is safe.

- 1 Why is it important that Jayden is in a setting that meets his health needs?
- 2 What might be the short- and long-term effects on Jayden if a setting does not attend to his needs?

Key terms

Eczema – a skin condition that causes skin to become red and itchy.

Insulin – a hormone that is essential to the health of the body. It helps to regulate the amount of sugar in the blood.



This baby has eczema. Why is it important that a setting meets children's health needs?

Lower educational outcomes

Inclusive settings think hard about children's needs. They also try to make sure that children try out new experiences and activities that will help them learn. Where there is non-inclusive practice, children may not be given the support and time they need to do as well as other children. For example, a child who needs more time to respond than the other children will lose out if additional time is not provided. Over time, this may result in the child not having the same opportunities to learn. It may lead to children not doing as well in school.

Case study



Tom is 3 years old. He watches the older children in the setting trying to write their names. He stands and watches. He asks the adult if he can try. The adult tells him that there is no point because he is too young and that boys are not good at writing.

- 1 Why is this an example of non-inclusive practice?
- 2 Why might the adult's comment affect what Tom thinks about learning to write?
- 3 What should the adult have said and done?

Just checking



- 1 How might non-inclusive practice affect children's self-image?
- 2 What is meant by the term 'learned helplessness'?
- 3 Can you think of an example of how development might be delayed in non-inclusive settings?
- 4 Can you think of an example of how a child's health might be affected in a non-inclusive setting?
- 5 Why might educational outcomes be lowered if there is non-inclusive practice?

Assessment activity 3.1

2A.P1 | 2A.P2 | 2A.M.1 | 2A.D.1

You have been asked to write an article about inclusive practice in early years settings. You can use examples from the case studies of Hazir and Aidan – see pages 77 and 78.

Your article should cover:

- the meaning of the term 'inclusive practice'
- the impact of inclusive practice on children and how it benefits them
- the impact of non-inclusive practice on children.

Tip

- When giving examples of the impact on children of inclusive and non-inclusive practice, you need to explain in detail the consequences of inclusive and non-inclusive practice and give reasons for your statements. Make sure that you explain the similarities and differences of each type of practice and refer to both case studies.

► Ways in which early years settings implement inclusive practice

Introduction

We have seen how important inclusive practice is for children's development. There are many ways that early years settings can show inclusive practice. Sometimes it is by doing simple things that make a difference, such as creating a welcoming environment.

► Inclusive practice

Early years settings need to ensure that all children and their families are respected and valued, and that every child is included and supported. Inclusive practice covers everything from how welcome families feel to how well settings understand and meet children's needs. It also includes the attitudes that adults show towards individual children. Let's look at some key ways in which settings might demonstrate inclusive practice.

Adopting a non-judgemental attitude

This is the starting point for inclusive practice. A non-judgemental attitude means being accepting and ready to value others, even if they do not act in the same way as you. It can be hard for adults to become non-judgemental because we tend to prefer people who are similar to us in some way. This might be because of a shared culture, religion or lifestyle. It could mean we prefer people of the same age or who live in the same area.

A non-judgemental attitude makes all families feel comfortable within settings. It helps children to feel that they are unique and special. This is important because if children and their families do not feel welcome, they may not want to attend. Adults in early years settings can demonstrate a non-judgemental attitude by taking an interest in what children are doing, showing through their communication that they care about each child and their family.

Activity 3.1

With a partner, look at the following list of activities and then discuss the questions.

- Camping overnight in freezing weather.
- Not eating certain foods because of your religion.
- Going to the opera.

- 1 Do you do any of these things?
- 2 Do you have any close friends or relatives who do any of these things?
- 3 Why might these be normal activities to some people, but be considered odd by someone else?

Discussion point

In pairs, discuss ways in which settings can make children and their families feel welcomed.

A welcoming environment

A welcoming environment is important. It is created by the way children and families are greeted and by the physical signs around the setting. For example, there might be posters in different languages or a message saying 'Happy Birthday, Sav!' on the day of a child's birthday.

Creating a welcoming environment might also include displaying examples of children's paintings, providing information leaflets for parents and having an area where parents can sit. A welcoming environment is also about what the staff do when parents, children and other visitors arrive. Greeting parents, smiling and acknowledging children when they arrive and leave is really important.

Resources

An inclusive environment is one where the resources reflect the lives of children and their families. This makes children feel at home in their surroundings. It also helps children learn about other families and how they live. It is good practice for settings to look for items in the home corner such as cooking utensils or ornaments that reflect the range of homes that children will come from. Decorations in the setting such as rugs, ornaments and items for children to explore in treasure baskets may also reflect children's home lives.

Understanding children's individual needs

An inclusive setting meets children's needs. To do this, settings have to understand what these needs are. Settings need to establish a good relationship with children and their families, as this will help them find out information. For example, getting to know a baby well will allow the adult to recognise what might be the cause of the baby's crying. Having a strong relationship with parents will also mean that sensitive information about changes at home which might affect the child can be spoken about.



Why is it important for parents and staff to have a good relationship?

Adapting provision to meet individual needs

In order to meet some children's needs, settings will need to adapt their provision. This means that they might need to change the layout, order some new resources or change their routines slightly. There will be many reasons why settings will need to adapt their provision, for example, to help children with mobility needs, dietary needs or any **sensory impairment** they might have.

Keeping children safe

An inclusive environment is also one that ensures that children feel and are kept safe. Staff must be trained to understand the causes of accidents and incidents and know about ways of preventing them.

Establishing routines

An inclusive setting also establishes routines that meet the individual needs of children. These routines include feeding, sleeping, resting, toileting and time spent playing. This is particularly important when it comes to babies and toddlers who may each have their own feeding and sleeping pattern. Establishing these routines links back to working closely with parents and developing a positive relationship with them, as they provide the information needed to establish these routines.

Positive role models

An inclusive setting helps children learn about how to treat and respect others. It also helps children learn that we all have different needs, preferences and ways of living. A key way that children will learn this is by observing how adults behave towards other adults and children. Children who see adults showing interest, respect and kindness towards others are more likely to behave in the same way. Adults who do this are acting as positive role models.

Key term

Sensory impairment – a difficulty with one or more of your senses, for example, your sight, hearing or touch.



This child can learn to identify colours using a special colour chart.

Just checking

- 1 Why is it important for adults to adopt a non-judgemental attitude?
- 2 Can you think of two examples of resources that might support inclusive practice?
- 3 How can a good relationship between a setting and a family help meet a child's needs?
- 4 Can you think of one reason why early years settings should make necessary adaptations?
- 5 How might adults act as role models to support inclusive practice?



Assessment activity 3.2

2B.P3 | 2B.M2 | 2B.D2

You have been asked to find out about how inclusive practice can be implemented in early years settings. Children may need inclusive practice if they are shy, or if they are struggling to settle into a new setting. You are to write a report about this. Choose an early years setting to visit or ask someone about how they implement inclusive practice in their setting.

Your report should include:

- ways in which it is possible for early years settings to implement inclusive practice
- how the early years setting that you have learned about implements inclusive practice, and how successful it is in doing this.

Tip

- Try to give examples of how inclusive practice is implemented. These examples should be from the early years setting that you have researched. You should also discuss how successfully the setting is implementing inclusive practice. To do this, think about what they are doing well, as well as how they could improve, making sure you consider all the relevant factors and which are the most important.

► Empowering children in early years settings

Key term

Empowerment – giving children involvement in decisions that affect them, appropriate to their age and level of understanding.

Introduction

The **empowerment** of children is an important principle in early years settings. Think about the things that you have done for yourself today. Maybe you have chosen what to wear, fed yourself and decided what and when to eat. What would it feel like if someone else always made these choices for you?

Discussion point

In pairs, imagine your day. Now, discuss how it would feel if someone else made a decision about:

- what you wore
- what you ate
- when you ate.

For children to grow into confident, active people, they need to be given opportunities to make choices and gradually to take responsibility for themselves. Settings therefore try to find ways of helping children to make choices or be involved in decisions as part of the everyday running of the setting.

The term empowerment is used to describe this way of working. Adults working with children have to judge carefully how they empower children. Children can only make choices and decisions if they understand the consequences and the different options. The choices they are given must be right for their age and understanding. This means that 2 year olds are not given the option of only eating chocolate at mealtimes!

► Why early years settings empower children

Empowering children is seen as an important way of working with children for a variety of reasons.

Legal right

Interestingly, children actually have a right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to be informed and consulted about things that will affect their life. It is therefore considered to be good practice to find ways of helping children to make decisions – even small ones – such as choosing what to play with or serving themselves food. It is important to stress that the level of choice and decisions must be right for the age and stage of the child.

Valuing and respecting children

Working in ways that empower children also shows respect for them as human beings. It is a way of showing dignity. Waiting for a baby to be ready before cleaning his face is a way of showing that we value him, even though he is not yet talking or making decisions. In the same way, asking children where and how they would like to say goodbye to their parent is a way of valuing their feelings. This, in turn, is a way of showing respect for a child.

Helping children to respect themselves and others

How you are treated as a child affects how you feel about yourself and how you treat others. Children who have been in settings that are empowering learn how to make decisions. This helps them to have confidence in their own judgement, and they can develop self-respect. Children who have also seen the way that adults respect other children by empowering them are more likely to treat others with respect.



Take it further

Many people do not know that children have rights. Find out more about children's rights. Now go to www.pearsonhotlinks.co.uk, search for this title and click on this activity.



How has this child been empowered?

Involving children in decision making

Early years settings also empower children to ensure that their provision works well. Children who have been involved in the choice of play opportunities or in the development of routines are likely to be happy. This helps the setting to run smoothly. Settings that are good at empowering children tend to be happy places.

Case study



Happy Lions staff realised one day that their main 'customers' were really the children. This made them start to think about how they could find ways to make sure their customers' wishes were really met. Some of the staff thought that this would not be possible, as the setting included babies. After some training, they realised that, in all sorts of small ways, even babies could make decisions or be supported to make their wishes clear.

Staff began to notice babies' reactions to toys and activities and used this information to plan. They also made a photo album of resources so that toddlers who were not yet speaking could communicate to staff what they wanted to play with, by pointing. After a few months staff found that children were actually quite good at making decisions. The children also appeared happier.

- 1** What skills were children gaining from being consulted more?
- 2** Why might being more involved in decision making help children feel happy?



When children choose for themselves, they are more likely to try out a new skill.

► Benefits of empowerment

Early years settings are aware that there are many developmental benefits associated with empowering children.

Emotional development

Children develop a strong sense of self-esteem because they have been involved in decision making and because they feel valued. Empowering children also helps them to manage their own behaviour. This is because, if they have been involved in boundary setting or talking through the expectations for their behaviour, they can understand the reasons behind it.

Physical development

Because children are making decisions about what to play with, they are more likely to try out new skills and practise them. Children also learn about weighing up risk when they have the opportunity to make their own decisions about play.

Social development

As we have already seen, children who feel valued are more likely to show self-respect and to respect and value others. Empowering children also helps them understand the importance of recognising their own feelings and the feelings of others.

Cognitive development

Children are more likely to concentrate and persevere if they have been involved in making decisions about what to do and play with. Concentration is important for learning. Children will also develop logic and thinking skills, as these are required when making decisions.

Just checking



- 1 What is meant by the term 'empowerment'?
- 2 Can you think of two reasons why early years settings might seek to empower children?
- 3 Why might the empowerment of children help their self-esteem?
- 4 Why might the empowerment of children support their social development?
- 5 Can you think of a way in which empowerment benefits children's cognitive development?

TOPIC

C2

► How adults in early years settings empower children

Introduction

There are many ways in which settings can empower children. Some of these are very small, but still important. It is good practice, for example, for adults to let children put on their own shoes, rather than automatically doing it for them. Can you think why?

The principles of empowerment are fairly simple to understand. They are about giving choice, being respectful and encouraging children to be actively involved in what is happening. Adults working in early years settings need, though, to think about the age and stage of each child, to make sure that children are empowered according to their age and stage of development. Adults also have to find ways of empowering babies and very young children who may not be speaking.

Case study



Harriet is working in an inclusive setting. She has been in the job for just a few weeks and she has been listening to staff members talk about the importance of choice and empowering children. Today she is working with children at the painting table. A 2-year-old child picks up a paint pot and a brush and takes it over to the book corner. The child starts to paint books. Another member of staff intervenes. Afterwards, Harriet is asked why she did not stop the child. She says that it was the child's choice to do this and she wanted to empower the child.

- 1 Why did the staff member intervene?
- 2 Explain why empowerment needs to be linked to the age/stage of the child and their understanding of consequences.

▶ Empowering children according to their age

There are many ways in which adults work to empower babies and children in early years settings.

Physical care routines

Physical care routines include dressing, washing, going to the toilet and also nappy changing. Empowering babies and children means helping them to do as much as they can. Even babies can often pull off their socks! With nappy changing, we empower children by letting them hold items or even go and get their clean nappy from the box. Not rushing nappy changes and making them feel as important as possible is also a way of showing respect for the child.

Privacy

As part of the physical care routines, it is important to be aware of the need for privacy when children get a little older. Holding a door slightly ajar, so that a child can sit on the toilet without feeling watched, would be a good example. In the same way, encouraging children to pull up their own underwear, even though they might need help with fastening other garments, helps to show that we respect their privacy.

Mealtimes

Being able to feed yourself is an important stepping stone for children's independence. This begins when children are babies, for example, recognising that a baby has had enough during a feed because she has turned her head away.

It is not good practice, therefore, to force a child to keep eating, although, where there are concerns about food intake, adults might encourage a child to have some more. It is good practice with toddlers and older children to let them serve themselves. This works well, provided that all the food on offer is nutritious. By letting children choose how much food goes on their plate, children also learn to judge their appetite.



How are these children developing their independence?

Child-initiated play

Child-initiated play is provided in all early years settings. By choosing what they wish to play with and how they wish to use resources, children are empowered. Adults might join in this play, but it is the children who initiate it. Children can decide who they want to play with as well. For babies, empowering them in child-initiated play means following their interests. As most babies can point from around 9 or 10 months, they may indicate what it is they wish to play with.

Involving children in planning and gaining feedback

We can ask children who are talking to let us know what they would like to play with or do. This can be incorporated into the planning. Some settings also take photographs of activities so that children who are not yet talking can point to things that they would like to do.

Children can also give feedback about what they like or don't like! Feedback from babies and toddlers can be gained by observing their reactions. Older children might tell us what they think.

Caring for their environment

Empowering children also makes them feel part of the setting. It helps them to feel involved. Most children enjoy helping adults and doing things. This gives them a sense of responsibility. Many settings will encourage children to put out equipment, tidy away and help the adults prepare snacks and drinks. Some settings also encourage children to do a little simple gardening or to put food out for the birds.



Did you know?

Many nurseries and pre-schools have 'snack bars'. These allow children to help themselves to their morning or afternoon snack at a time that suits them. Children serve themselves, although an adult is on hand to check which children have had a drink and to help children if needed. Many settings find this system better than making the children sit down all at once.



Link

Go to Unit 2: *Promoting Children's Development Through Play* where you will find out more information about how child-initiated play is provided in early years settings.



These children have chosen to come to clear the leaves. What skills are they learning?

Just checking



- 1 Can you think of an example of how to empower a baby as part of their physical care routine?
- 2 Can you think of two ways in which children might be empowered as part of a setting's toileting routines?
- 3 How might supporting children to be independent at mealtimes be beneficial?
- 4 Why might a setting encourage child-initiated play?
- 5 Why might encouraging children to tidy up support their empowerment?

Assessment activity 3.3

2C.P4 | 2C.P5 | 2C.M3 | 2C.D3

An early years manager has asked you to do a training session for new members of staff. You decide to visit the nursery first. You see that children spend a lot of their time being told what to do by adults. At mealtimes adults serve the children. In the afternoon there is a period when children are able to choose toys and equipment to play with. You also see that children are encouraged to put their own wellingtons and coats on before going outdoors.

In your training session you should cover:

- what is meant by empowerment
- ways in which adults in early years settings can empower children
- why empowerment is considered important for children's overall development.

Tip

- Remember to provide detailed examples of how effective empowerment can benefit children's development. Think about the information that you have about the early years setting and consider how it is empowering children. You can also give examples of what they are doing well, as well as suggestions for improvements.

► Why the key person approach is used in early years settings

Introduction

In early years settings a key person system is used. A key person is someone who builds a special relationship with a child so that they feel cared for. This is important as young children can feel quite lost without their parents.

► What is a key person?

Babies and young children rely on their parents to meet their emotional needs. When children's parents are not there, they need instead to have someone looking after them who will build a strong relationship with them. Parents also need to know who will be looking out for their child. In early years settings each child will have a key person who takes on this role. Although the term key person is used in this qualification, this role is sometimes referred to as 'key worker'.

Discussion point

In pairs, discuss the following questions:

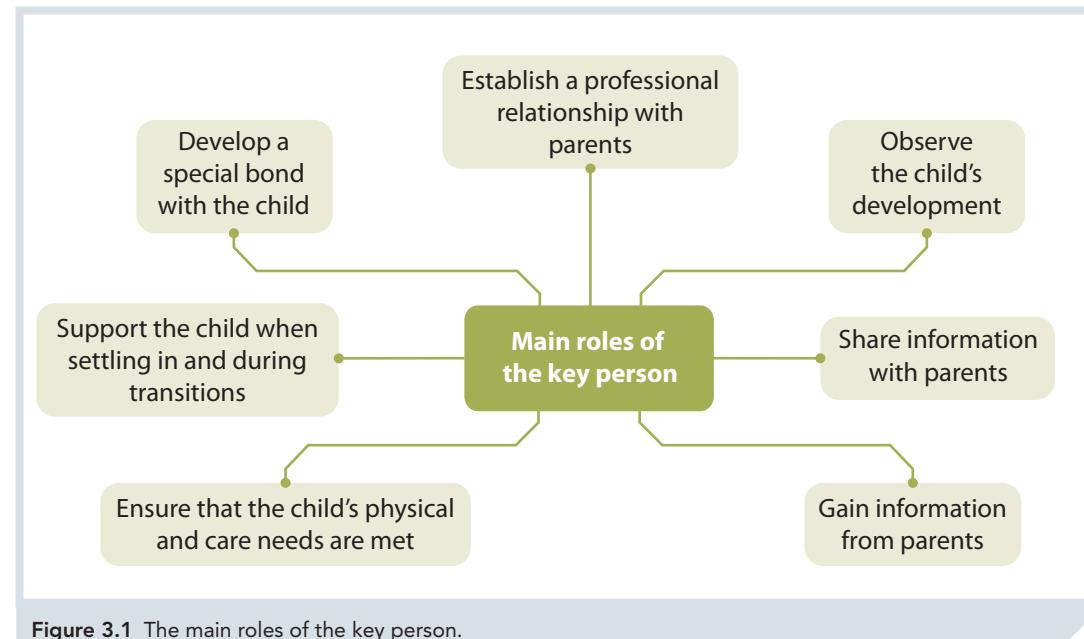
- Have you ever been somewhere new and someone has looked after you?
- How did this make you feel?

► The role of the key person

The key person has several roles.

Develop a special bond with the child

It is the major role of the key person to be able to develop a strong bond with the child. They do not take on the role of being a parent, but more that of a close family member who cares for the child. The bond means that this is an enjoyable relationship for both child and adult.



Establish a professional relationship with parents



How can you tell that this key person has a special bond with this baby?

It is essential that the key person develops a strong relationship with parents or carers quickly. This has to be a professional relationship, although it must be a friendly one. This relationship is important, as information about the needs and development of the child will be shared. Parents can find it hard to leave their child in the care of people who are not family or friends. By establishing a strong bond with the child, as well as with the parents, the key person can make this separation easier.

Observe the child's development

As the key person will spend time with the child and know them well, they will also have a role in the observation of their development. The key person will look at each area of a child's development. In many settings, the key person will also plan activities to support the child's development.

Share and gain information

There is a surprising amount of information that must be exchanged in order to meet children's needs and support their development. This includes details of any medical conditions, such as asthma, as well as information on dietary needs or allergies. The setting should be given any other practical information they might need, such as emergency contact details.

Parents should tell the key person about their child's likes and dislikes and about the routines their child is used to. In addition, parents need to know details about their child's care and development when their child is at the setting. The key person has a major role in exchanging this information with parents.

Activity 3.2

We all have different preferences and needs, which may include dietary or medical ones. Children are not always able to explain these to adults. With a friend, imagine that you are in another country where you cannot talk or understand what is happening, but you have an interpreter. None of your belongings are with you. You are in a building with people that you have never met. You will be there for ten hours.

- 1** What information should your interpreter provide the people with which will help them to meet your needs?
- 2** Why is it important that these people and your interpreter get on well?

Ensure that the child's physical and care needs are met

By working well with parents, the key person can find out all they need to know about the child's physical and care needs. The key person must ensure that these needs are met while the child is in the setting. They may, for example, personally serve their key child food to ensure that the child's dietary needs are met or they may keep a close eye on a child with asthma during physical activity. As well as being aware of health and dietary needs, the key person must also make sure that children's routine physical care needs are met. A child might need a comforter to help him fall asleep, or a parent might request that the key person uses a barrier cream when changing a nappy.

Support the child when settling in and during transitions

- **Settling in.** The key person plays an essential role in **settling in** the children in their care. A strong relationship with the key person will help children cope when their parents leave. Settling in can take some time, as children will have to get to know their key person and also the setting. Many settings organise a series of visits to help settling in, including a visit to the child's home by their key person.
- **Transitions.** During their lives, children will make many **transitions**. This will include moving to different rooms within a setting, transferring to a different setting or on to a school. Key persons can help children prepare for a transition. They may do this by talking about the changes that are going to be made, reading stories that deal with similar situations or giving children opportunities to talk about their fears. For some transitions, such as the start of school, key persons may also go with their key children on a visit to the new setting.



Key terms

Settling in – the process by which children become familiar with the setting and their key person.

Transitions – long- or short-term changes that affect the child's life, for example, starting pre-school or changing carer.

The key person approach is a statutory requirement

The key person approach is a requirement of early years education and care frameworks in the UK (for example, the Early Years Foundation Stage in England, or the Foundation Phase in Wales). Sometimes the term 'key worker' is used, for example, in Wales. In England it is a statutory requirement, which means that there is a legal requirement for every child who attends an early years setting to be allocated a key person.



Take it further

Find out whether the term 'key person' or 'key worker' is used in settings near to where you live.

Just checking



- 1 What is meant by the term 'key person'?
- 2 Why might the key person role support a child's emotional development?
- 3 Why is it important for key persons to work with children's families?
- 4 Can you think of two examples of information that might be shared between a key person and a parent?
- 5 Can you think of two reasons why an early years setting might have a key person system?

► How the key person approach supports children's development

Introduction

Children benefit from being with someone who they care about and who nurtures them. Can you think of someone in your childhood with whom you had a strong relationship? What do you feel you gained from being with them?

The key person approach benefits children in a range of ways. It has been shown that children's development can be affected if children do not have a strong bond with another adult when they are not with their parents or primary carers.

► Emotional development

One of the main ways in which the key person approach benefits children is in their emotional development. The support that children gain from their key person prevents them from becoming distressed. This is because they have a relationship with the key person and feel nurtured.

The key person also knows the child well and understands how to meet the child's emotional needs. They will, for example, understand when a child is wanting a cuddle or needs their comforter. When children have a key person, they are likely to find future separations easier, for example, starting school, because they are emotionally secure.



How will the emotional connection between this child and her key person help the child's emotional development?

► Language development

Children talk to and communicate with people more when they are comfortable with them. When children are benefiting from a strong key person system, they are more likely to want to chat or, in the case of babies, to babble.

As the key person spends quite a lot of time with their key children, they are likely to understand what babies and children are trying to communicate. This is particularly important in the early stages of language development. If children keep trying to communicate and the other person does not understand or acknowledge them, they may stop trying after a while. The key person will also know how best to communicate with the child, as they will know how to encourage the child to respond.

► Children's learning

The key person approach is also essential for developing children's skills and overall learning. Children learn more when they enjoy being with an adult that they like and by doing things that interest them. As the key person knows the children's interests, they are more likely to provide opportunities for the child to try new experiences or to explore. They are also likely to provide activities that will really engage the child and help them to develop concentration skills.

► Physical development

We have seen earlier that a key person is likely to observe a child and so know a great deal about the child's stage of development. This knowledge is important when planning activities to promote children's physical development because the equipment, activities and resources will be right for their interests and stage of development. Children are also more likely to have a go or practise skills because they enjoy being with their key person.

► Social development

In order for children to develop friendships from around the age of 3 years, they need first to have experienced nurturing relationships with adults. The key person approach means that children learn to have trusting relationships beyond their family circle. This teaches them to trust other people. In addition, the key person can help children learn to play with others by playing alongside them. This helps children learn to build relationships with other children.

Just checking



- 1 How might a key person support the language development of a child?
- 2 What is the link between children's learning and the role of the key person?
- 3 How might a key person support children's social development?
- 4 Can you give an example of how the key person role supports children's learning?
- 5 Can you think of two examples of how a key person might support a child's physical development?

Assessment activity 3.4

2D.P6 | 2D.P7 | 2D.M4 | 2D.D4

You have been asked to **explain** to a new parent why early year settings use a key person approach. You should cover:

- the reasons why the key person approach is used in early years settings
- the benefits to children's development when the key person approach is used.

You will also need to **evaluate** the contribution a key person makes to a child's development and include specific examples in your response.

Tip

- In order to evaluate the contribution of a key person, you will need to show that you can consider the effects on a particular child's development and link the theory that you have learned about the importance of a key person to practical examples. You will also need to show that you have formed your own conclusions about the effectiveness of the key person approach.

WorkSpace

► Lin Chapman

Pre-school supervisor

I have been working at this pre-school for ten years now. I am responsible for the smooth running of the setting. We have many volunteers and work experience students who come here on placement. I try to help them understand the principles behind how we work. It is known as being a happy place.

We pride ourselves on being an inclusive setting. This means looking for ways to make sure that everyone feels that they are welcome, especially families and children, and also that their thoughts, ideas and needs are important to us. As part of this, we spend a lot of time talking and listening not only to families about their needs and ideas, but also to the children themselves.

We want children to feel that they are special and that their ideas count too. We therefore look for ways of letting children make choices about what they want to do and play with. We also encourage children to do as much as they can for themselves so that they can gain in confidence. Alongside this, every child has a key person – someone special who spends time with them and really gets to know them.



Think about it

- 1 What have you learned about in this unit that links to this pre-school's way of working?
- 2 Explain how this pre-school is empowering children.
- 3 Why do you think that this pre-school is known as being a happy place?