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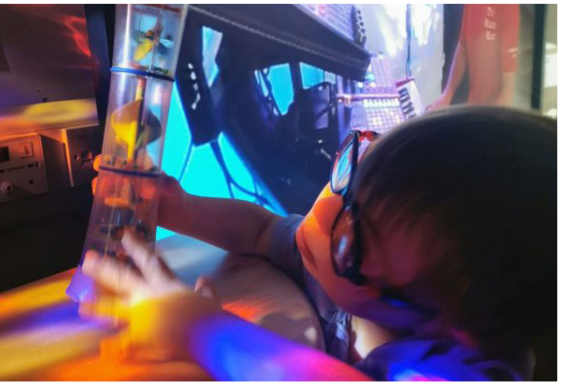
Welsh Government

A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings



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Introduction

This curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings has been developed through co-construction by practitioners, for practitioners. It is expressed from the viewpoint of the practitioner, drawing on expertise from across our non-maintained sector, and on the views of experts in the field of child development and early education. It seeks to engender in practitioners and children a sense of belonging and pride, celebrating the diverse culture of modern Wales and helping children develop a sense of ***cynefin***. It has been developed to support our work with children at the very beginning of the 3 to 16 learning continuum, to ensure they have the best possible start on their journey.

We know that high-quality early education provision is essential to children's development. The experiences, knowledge and skills needed for lifelong learning, active citizenship and future employment begin in the early years. This curriculum aspires to create in children positive dispositions towards learning which, if nurtured, will last a lifetime and provide the firm foundation which all our children need to support them in realising the four purposes of Curriculum for Wales. It addresses the 'how' and 'why' of curriculum design to support children to develop as:

ambitious, capable learners who:	enterprising, creative contributors who:	ethical, informed citizens who:	healthy, confident individuals who:
• set themselves high standards and seek and enjoy challenge • are building up a body of knowledge and have the skills to connect and apply that knowledge in different contexts • are questioning and enjoy solving problems • can communicate effectively in different forms and settings, using both Welsh and English • can explain the ideas and concepts they are learning about • can use number effectively in different contexts • understand how to interpret data and apply mathematical concepts • use digital technologies creatively to communicate, find and analyse information • undertake research and evaluate critically what they find	• connect and apply their knowledge and skills to create ideas and products • think creatively to reframe and solve problems • identify and grasp opportunities • take measured risks • lead and play different roles in teams effectively and responsibly • express ideas and emotions through different media • give of their energy and skills so that other people will benefit	• find, evaluate and use evidence in forming views • engage with contemporary issues based upon their knowledge and values • understand and exercise their human and democratic responsibilities and rights • understand and consider the impact of their actions when making choices and acting • are knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world, now and in the past • respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society • show their commitment to the sustainability of the planet	• have secure values and are establishing their spiritual and ethical beliefs • are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy • apply knowledge about the impact of diet and exercise on physical and mental health in their daily lives • know how to find the information and support to keep safe and well • take part in physical activity • take measured decisions about lifestyle and manage risk • have the confidence to participate in performance • form positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect • face and overcome challenge • have the skills and knowledge to manage everyday life as independently as they can
and **are ready to learn throughout their lives**.	and **are ready to play a full part in life and work**.	and **are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world**.	and **are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society**.

This curriculum recognises that every child in our setting is unique and that their development is rapid between birth and five years of age. It supports holistic development by keeping the developmental needs of our children at the forefront of our pedagogical practice.

It recognises and values the Welsh language as an integral part of the unique culture of Wales, and as a language which should be taught in all settings in Wales. It also recognises that a provider of funded non-maintained nursery education has the discretion to decide that English should not form part of their curriculum in order to enable children to gain fluency in Welsh.

This curriculum links closely to the principles of child development, as well as to the four purposes of the curriculum and the statements of what matters of the six areas of learning and experience. It provides for appropriate breadth and depth of learning, in a range of contexts. Realisation of this curriculum should ensure progression for all children through the descriptions of learning at Progression step 1.

We should use this curriculum, along with our knowledge and experience, to reflect and respond to the individual needs of the children in our setting. We will work with relevant professional networks, as well as drawing from the National Network for Curriculum Implementation, to support continuing professional learning and development. We should look for opportunities to share knowledge, skills and expertise with our partners in both the non-maintained and maintained sectors.

We should work with all our relevant partners to use this curriculum to support planning within our setting. Effective planning allows us to make the best use of our setting's environment and available resources. This supports us in developing appropriate learning environments that respond to children's interests and engages them further in their learning and development.

It is essential that we use this document in its entirety to support our planning to ensure we provide a developmentally appropriate curriculum, which complies with the requirements of Curriculum for Wales, for all children.

Setting the scene for learning

For some children, their first experience of being away from their home environment will be when they enter our setting to begin their journey into education. For others, they will already be familiar with the sights, sounds and routines of life in a setting. It is our responsibility to acknowledge the experiences each child brings to their early education experience, and to work in partnership with children and their parents and carers to support them as they enter this new and exciting chapter in their development. By creating a space that actively promotes listening to the voice of the child, we can begin to recognise and respond to the unique background and needs of each child, and children can begin to understand their rights.

The key principles essential for holistic and meaningful learning for all children start with skilful, observant and interested adults, who provide authentic and engaging experiences in effective, exciting environments. Our role is to use our observations to plan experiences and environments that are meaningful and relevant to children's interests. This curriculum ensures that the mandatory elements of Curriculum for Wales are embedded within an appropriate pedagogical framework that focuses on the needs of the developing child through five developmental pathways – belonging, communication, exploration, physical development and well-being.

Enabling adults

We recognise that our role is integral to the progress of all children and is particularly significant in this period of early learning. We should set the expectation for learning by creating emotionally safe environments that support children to begin to express and regulate their feelings and behaviours in positive ways. We should model a joyful approach to learning, and encourage and support children's natural curiosity, making best use of the **teachable moments** that occur naturally as we observe or engage in their play.

We have a responsibility to make strong connections with the child's home and community, to strengthen their sense of belonging through embracing past and present experiences.

We can have a positive impact on children's well-being, through being consistent in our care and modelling compassion and kindness. We should demonstrate respect for children, by supporting their decisions and choices. We should sensitively support children to cope with uncertainty and change, preparing them to manage transitions and changes in daily routines. We should always look to maximise learning opportunities in these daily routines.

It is essential for us to make effective cross-curricular connections to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, drawing on children's previous knowledge and experiences as well as their current **fascinations**. We should refine planning and the quality of provision, making regular adaptations to meet the needs of all children.

We should have a thorough knowledge and understanding of child development and apply this successfully in our daily work. We should use our careful observations to follow a child's interests and plan future learning experiences. We should take note of repeated patterns of behaviour as children begin to explore the world around them. We should understand that young children benefit from opportunities to repeat and practise actions in many different contexts to develop their thinking. We should support children to develop resilience, independence and confidence by encouraging them to take calculated risks and to challenge themselves.

Engaging experiences

The experiences we offer in the early years should be hands-on, purposeful and meaningful to the child. They should encourage children's independence, and offer risk, challenge and opportunities to experience success along the learning journey. They should be rooted in real-life, authentic contexts, to engage children in deep levels of involvement and long periods of uninterrupted active learning.

Experiences can include children's own choices or emerge from local or current interests. They should support holistic child development, helping children to make connections across their learning experiences. There should be plenty of opportunities in our settings for children to return to experiences, to revisit and consolidate their learning.

As they begin to attribute meaning to their marks, children should have a variety of opportunities to experiment with a range of mark-making instruments and materials. These experiences help young children to notice and develop their understanding of **symbolic representation** using objects, pictures and symbols. They support young children to recognise that marks, signs and symbols carry meaning.

Children need practical experiences that encourage them to use simple mathematical vocabulary when exploring quantity, number, shape and pattern. Effective experiences will support children's cognitive development by providing opportunities for comparing, sorting and classifying living and non-living things. Children should have opportunities to explore and experiment with digital technology for a range of purposes.

All children should have experiences that promote enjoyment in physical activity. Children need regular access to a wide range of physical experiences, indoors and outdoors, using a range of equipment and resources. They should have experiences that allow them to use a wide range of tools and equipment with increasing control. These experiences will support children in developing an awareness of their bodies, in terms of their co-ordination, core strength and balance, and gross and fine motor skills. They will help children to gauge and manage risk, supporting them to think, plan and make decisions about their movements and actions.

High-quality experiences are essential to supporting children to develop social and communication skills. Children need experiences that help them build emotional resilience; they should be given time and support to express and recognise their own feelings and the feelings of others. Experiences should be carefully planned to develop children's attention and listening skills in a variety of contexts, in both the indoors and outdoors.

Experiences should reflect and value bilingualism and the diversity of culture and languages in Wales. Children should experience a wide range of stories, poems, songs and rhymes. Experience of different languages and cultures should be offered in sensitive and meaningful ways that give purpose to learning. These experiences can support children to develop and broaden their understanding of the richness and diversity of Wales, in the past and the present.

Multi-sensory experiences should provide opportunities for children to respond to and be inspired by the creativity of others, and support them to communicate and express themselves creatively. They should provide opportunities to make and choose from a range of materials with different properties, and encourage children to develop their creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Authentic experiences can support children to find out about their environment, develop their appreciation of the world around them and the need to take care of it. They can support children to develop an understanding of how things work, to actively solve problems and develop an awareness of causality. Through their experiences, children should be able to explore how they and objects move in space and experience language that describes and directs movement. These experiences should encourage children to notice, think and comment on their immediate environment and local surroundings, including natural phenomena.

Effective environments

The environment we create in our setting, indoors and outdoors, should be central to children's authentic experiences. For this reason, we should continually monitor and review the effectiveness of the environment and adapt accordingly. During the early years, exploration of the environment is a key driver for development. Through exploration of their environment, children begin to develop a sense of belonging and an appreciation of the world around them.

It is essential that we consider not only the physical spaces but also the emotional climate of our setting. These environments will provide for wide and varied experiences that allow children to express themselves physically, creatively and imaginatively, and allow them to safely follow their interests, independently or with others. We should offer opportunities for children to experience a sense of awe and wonder and which ignite curiosity about the world, motivating children to explore, solve problems, and develop their creativity and critical thinking.

We should ensure the environments in our setting are welcoming and promote a strong Welsh ethos. They should celebrate and value diversity, and demonstrate inclusivity. They should be **communication rich** and focus on promoting emerging communication skills and developing them further. The environment should ensure that children have access to a broad range of authentic resources to help build vocabulary and facilitate **concept development**. A well-planned and organised environment will scaffold the development of children's understanding of mathematical concepts, for example through visual and practical opportunities to experience number, shape and pattern in authentic contexts, both indoors and outdoors.

There should be opportunities for children to develop gross and fine motor skills, as they challenge themselves physically. There should be access within the environment to a range of open-ended resources, including digital media, to enhance learning in developmentally appropriate ways. The environment will also support mastery, by allowing frequent and extended opportunities to practise, rehearse and embed taught skills in a wide range of contexts.

There should be flexibility and variety within the environment, offering risk and challenge, and supporting children to develop confidence, independence and resilience. The environment should be responsive to the range of emotions a young child can experience and should offer time and protected quieter spaces for **self-regulation**, contemplation and reflection to nurture a child's well-being.

Pedagogy

Effective, child-centred **pedagogy**, which is responsive, dynamic and embedded in strong relationships, is essential to realising the ambition of this curriculum. Although the principles of effective pedagogy are embedded throughout this curriculum, it is particularly important for us to ensure that the learning environment within our setting provides consistent opportunities for the following:

- play and play-based learning
- being outdoors
- authentic and purposeful learning
- physical literacy.

Play and play-based learning

Play is a fundamental right for all children. They have a strong intrinsic need to play. Through play and playful experiences, children find ways to explore a range of emotions and learn about the world they inhabit with others.

For all children, but especially in this period of learning, play is something they take very seriously. Play requires concentration and attention to detail, and provides a vehicle through which children learn through perseverance and collaboration. Play is not only crucial to the way children become self-aware and the way in which they learn the rules of social behaviour; it is also fundamental to physical, intellectual and creative development. Play influences thinking and dispositions to learning, and supports feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy which impacts on confidence and independence.

We should all value play, both as an end in itself and as something that we can observe closely with the clear aim of enhancing learning.

Being outdoors

Being outdoors is particularly important for young children. It supports social, emotional, spiritual and physical development, as well as well-being. Being outdoors can also support high levels of confidence and engagement. In an outdoor environment, children can explore, practise and enhance their skills.

The outdoors provides opportunities to inspire awe and wonder, and allows children to be themselves in open, relaxed and stimulating spaces. The outdoors provides rich and authentic opportunities to stimulate children's senses through what they hear, touch, see and smell.

Children who are able to engage and connect with the natural world can build an empathy for the environment, and develop awareness of their potential impact on the world. They can begin to explore the concept of sustainability in a practical way. Exploring the outdoors provides opportunities for children to develop a sense of place within their immediate surroundings, their locality, Wales and the wider world.

The scale of the outdoors provides scope for children to develop an awareness of themselves in space. Outdoor environments can provide a range of opportunities for children to improve balance and co-ordination, develop **motor function** and explore their physical potential. While exploring the outdoors, children can develop their ability to assess and experience risk, helping to develop resilience and confidence.

A rich and diverse outdoor environment allows authentic opportunities for the development of **skills integral to the four purposes**. The use of natural and open-ended resources enhances the development of imagination, creativity and curiosity.

Authentic and purposeful learning

We know that children learn well when actively engaged in experiences that stimulate their interest, ignite imagination and inspire curiosity. These experiences should encourage children to investigate, explore, create and be active participants in their learning. Relevant and meaningful experiences that are rooted in real-life contexts will enable children to make connections, apply knowledge and consolidate skills.

Real-life experiences can enable children to take the lead in asking questions, identifying problems, taking risks and finding solutions. Creating opportunities for children to apply what they are learning to real-life situations helps them understand the purpose of their learning and can enhance well-being, self-esteem and resilience. It encourages exploration and creativity, and will support children to develop an understanding of the world around them.

Physical literacy

Children need opportunities to develop a wide range of fundamental movement skills, which are the basis for moving with competence and confidence in everyday life. It is essential for us to lay the foundations of physical literacy in the early years through modelling positive attitudes towards movement and providing an environment that gives children the opportunity to explore, practise and consolidate a wide range of physical movements in a variety of contexts. This should include creating time, space and opportunity for children to experience a range of play types, for example rough and tumble, exploratory and risky play, exploring the world from different levels, and experiencing a range of positions, movements and contexts that motivate them to move.

Pedagogy: Reflective questions

For practitioners:

- How do I ensure that children are learning and developing skills through play and play-based learning?
- How do I ensure that children are engaged in a wide range of learning opportunities, including physically active play, both indoors and outdoors?
- How do I ensure the authentic opportunities and experiences that are on offer in my setting are developmentally appropriate for children?
- How well do we support children to celebrate living in Wales in a way that is meaningful to them?

For leaders:

- How well do I support my team to model positive attitudes towards play and play-based learning, authentic and purposeful learning, and physical movement in the indoor and outdoor environment?

Cross-curricular skills

Literacy, numeracy and digital competence are mandatory skills across the whole curriculum, and it is our responsibility to ensure children develop and progress in these skills. This section describes the skills young children should acquire and master as part of their learning journey. When planning learning experiences, we should ensure that children have opportunities to apply, develop and extend these skills in meaningful contexts, using the five developmental pathways.

Literacy

Language and communication is key to learning. Speech, language and communication should be developed holistically through real-life authentic experiences and play opportunities. We have a crucial role in providing the building blocks for language, beginning with supporting attention, listening and understanding. We can do this by ensuring that children are immersed in rich language experiences and activities to develop their listening, speaking and communication skills. When developing language and communication, we should ensure that children are given time to process what they hear and see, before responding, reflecting and revisiting. We must understand that some children will also communicate by means other than speech.

The natural world provides a wealth of opportunities for language development through playful experiences, such as the crunch of a leaf or the splash of a puddle. The use of the outdoors promotes well-being, self-esteem and the confidence to communicate. The freedom of the outdoors can lower inhibitions and allow children to express themselves.

We should support and encourage children to foster a love of books and stories through shared reading with individuals and small groups. Books and authentic reading materials, including those created by the children themselves should be available throughout the environment. We should value the stories that children tell through their play.

We know that gross motor skills, such as climbing, spinning and throwing, are integral to the development of fine motor skills and mark-making. We can support this development through ensuring children have opportunities to develop pre-requisite skills for mark-making, such as manipulating clay and dough, and through messy play and activities that help to develop grip.

We should provide opportunities for mark-making across a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes, with a range of tools and media. All children should have opportunities to develop an awareness that Wales has two official languages and that many other languages are spoken in our communities. We have a responsibility to ensure children develop positive attitudes towards different languages and towards the people who speak them. Language skills learned in one language should support the development of knowledge and skills in another language.

Numeracy

Children are naturally inquisitive and develop an understanding of mathematical language, concepts and skills through multi-sensory play and authentic experiences. Children should experience daily outdoor play opportunities to encourage their further exploration of mathematical concepts in everyday life. Within the natural world, there are a wealth of opportunities for mathematical development. Open-ended, natural resources offer endless possibilities for mathematical exploration.

With our support, and by providing an engaging environment, children can discover and understand that maths is everywhere. Modelling appropriate mathematical language and skills throughout the day will help children develop their **strategic competence**.

When developing mathematical understanding, it is imperative that we give children the time to observe, explore, investigate and experiment to work through the process of problem-solving. This problem-solving process should be valued in itself and may not result in an outcome or answer.

Digital competence

Digital competence is a set of skills, knowledge and attitudes that enables the confident, creative and critical use of technologies and systems. Digital competence is essential for children if they are to be informed, capable and have the potential to be successful in today's society. Digital competence focuses on developing digital skills that can be applied to a wide range of situations relevant to their world and should not be confused with information and communication technology (ICT).

In this increasingly digital world, it is essential that children have the opportunity to explore and develop their digital knowledge and skills. This is more than creating tasks involving digital devices or media; children need to be immersed in authentic and purposeful experiences, incorporating digital skills and competencies in their everyday lives. Digital devices and media can be used to enhance children's play and should be made available to them. Digital media goes beyond tablets and laptops to include programmable toys, cameras, CD players, digital weighing scales, tills and more. Developing digital competence should, where appropriate, be integrated into the five developmental pathways as a way of enhancing learning by adding value to activities, both indoors and outdoors.

The needs of the child: The five developmental pathways

This curriculum recognises and celebrates the individuality of each child and what they bring to the learning experience. This early period of learning should be unhurried, allowing time, space and freedom for the developing child to consolidate their learning with opportunities to return, revisit, and refine their emerging knowledge and skills. This cyclical approach is essential for progression through the learning journey.

Central to this curriculum are five key developmental pathways that are fundamental to the learning and development of all young children. These developmental pathways are child-centred and are interdependent, having equal value in supporting overall development and progress. They focus on what is important for the child and link closely to the key principles of child development, as well as to the overarching statements of what matters and descriptions of learning of the six areas of learning and experience. They have been developed to ensure children can be supported to make progress at their own pace and in their **preferred learning environment**.

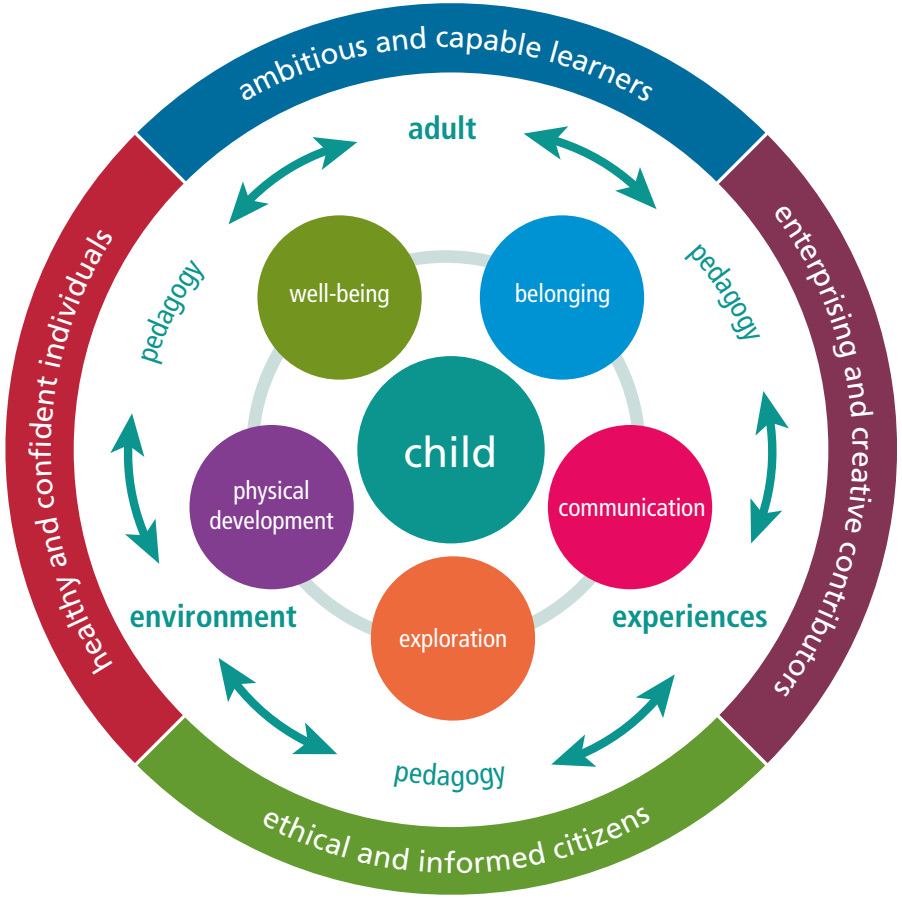
The five developmental pathways are:

- belonging
- communication
- exploration
- physical development
- well-being.

Development within and across the five developmental pathways is dependent upon the quality of our interactions and the learning experiences and environments we create. Taking a holistic approach to teaching and learning will ensure that children have opportunities to develop skills within and across the developmental pathways. We should ensure that we provide ample time and opportunity for the successful mastery of skills, with long periods of uninterrupted play during which children can become absorbed in their learning.

It is usual for children to make faster or slower progress along some developmental pathways, dependent upon the quality of interactions, experiences and their individual developmental journeys up to the point of entry into our setting. It is therefore our responsibility to provide developmentally appropriate practice, within nurturing relationships, which meets the needs of all children. We can lay the foundations for positive dispositions and attitudes towards learning through ensuring learning experiences are relevant, meaningful and responsive to the needs and interests of the children in our care.

The five developmental pathways should be used holistically when planning learning experiences to ensure authentic and purposeful learning takes place.



Understanding the developmental pathways

Children are at the heart of this curriculum and, as such, the five developmental pathways are expressed from the child's viewpoint to ensure that provision focuses on the needs, interests and curiosity of three- and four-year-olds. Children are learning to express themselves; they are gaining in independence and they are becoming more aware of their value to those around them. The developmental pathways represent a child's right to experience an environment where play is valued for itself and as part of learning.

Each of the five developmental pathways contains:

- a clear rationale that captures the essence of what children need to develop at their own pace and in a way that is appropriate to them
- statements that begin with and expand on the following:
  - 'I need to … '
  - 'I am learning to … '
  - 'My … is enhanced by … '

The 'I need to … ' statements articulate the biological and social drives that children cannot or should not ignore. These statements frame the fundamental opportunities that children require to thrive. It is our responsibility to recognise and understand these drives, so that we provide purposeful play opportunities for children to fulfil these needs. They are inclusive statements that apply to children of all abilities. The 'I need to …' statements should be used to support provision planning and not be used for summative assessment purposes.

The ‘I am learning to … ’ statements demonstrate the skills and dispositions that children are developing on their learning journey. If we recognise what children are learning to do, we will be better able to provide learning experiences that may develop deeper understanding, or opportunities to apply new skills in familiar contexts. We know that progress for individual children is likely to be uneven within and across the developmental pathways; it is therefore important that we use our observations to provide guidance, support and challenge when needed

The ‘My … is enhanced by … ’ statements describe the ideal conditions that can have a positive impact on the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of the child. How well we respond to and plan for these developing needs will be the foundation of success.

The developmental pathways focus on what is important for the child and what we can do to support development and encourage curiosity and exploration.

The interplay between children, adults, experiences and environments are expressed in each developmental pathway through the statements. These are deliberately inextricably interwoven within the five developmental pathways so that opportunities are holistic, making it possible for all children to reach their potential.

The developmental pathways

Belonging

Belonging is essential to our sense of happiness and well-being. When they are young, children begin to develop a sense of how they fit in to the many groups to which they belong, and their importance within them. Strong, secure relationships are vital to this sense of belonging.

This sense can bring positive feelings of connection with the home and the setting, and can expand to the community, Wales and the wider world. Settings that value, celebrate and build upon children's past and present experiences from home and their community can strengthen a sense of belonging. It is our responsibility to ensure children feel safe and secure within the setting environment, and to show genuine care and emotional support to help build a firm sense of belonging.

Belonging is important to shaping children's sense of who they are and who they can become and, as such, should underpin the ethos of all settings in Wales.

I need to:	I am learning to:	My sense of belonging is enhanced by adults who:
• feel valued as a member of the setting community • play (on my own, alongside or with others) • make connections with people, places and things • be heard and understood • see myself and people like me represented in my setting.	• recognise who I am • recognise that I am important to those around me • participate in the life of the setting • take care of myself • follow familiar routines • understand and follow some rules and boundaries • recognise my own needs and the needs of others • recognise that some things are unsafe • take care of things in my environment, living and non-living • recognise that I belong to a wider community • recognise similarities and differences.	• provide me with consistent care and respect • provide familiar resources that reflect my cultures and communities • perceive me as a capable learner • model a joyful and curious approach to learning • respond to my interests, likes and dislikes • plan experiences as a result of observation of my play choices and preferences • prioritise my needs when making decisions that impact on me • enable me to play by myself and/or with others • promote an inclusive ethos that values the diverse culture of Wales • provide appropriate opportunities to experience my own culture and different cultures of others in authentic contexts • have strong connections with my home and local community • use visits and visitors to support connections and enhance interests • make effective use of image, sound, video and technology.

Communication

Communication is fundamental to children's development; it is vital to the foundation of relationships and essential for learning, play and social interaction. To learn effectively, children need to understand and be able to make themselves understood. Communication involves developing listening, attention and understanding, alongside vocabulary and speaking skills.

The amount and type of talk children hear and interact with can have a marked effect on their communication development. Children acquire and develop skills at different rates, and we can support their language development by modelling active listening and speaking for different purposes. An environment that is communication rich should provide children with opportunities to express and communicate their needs, thoughts and feelings. As new skills are learned, children should have opportunities to use them in a variety of contexts with each other, or with adults, in small groups or on a one-to-one basis. Regular and frequent opportunities to participate in stories, songs and rhymes support the development of vocabulary and grammar. Developing effective communication, language and early literacy skills are important to self-expression, to the development of strong social relationships and to a child's learning more generally. Being able to assign meaning to marks is a creative endeavour that enables children to begin the journey of written communication, be that in drawings, writing or mathematical marks.

I need to:	I am learning to:	My communication is enhanced by adults who:
• communicate • notice things in my environment • develop social relationships • be listened to and understood • have time to think and process.	• develop my listening, attention and understanding in my play and interactions • recognise and respond to verbal and non-verbal cues • express my needs, thoughts, feelings, ideas and opinions • take notice of others • act out familiar routines and take on roles in my play • share my own stories • retell stories and recall events using pictures to support me • join in with familiar stories and rhymes	• support and respond sensitively to my verbal and non-verbal communication • use a range of strategies to support my understanding of language • model good communication skills including engaging in **sustained shared thinking (SST)** and effective use of open-ended questions to support my thinking • make effective use of open-ended questions, balanced with comments, to support my thinking • use modelling to support and extend my concept and vocabulary development • actively engage me in stories, songs and rhymes from my own culture and that of others

I need to:	I am learning to:	My communication is enhanced by adults who:
	• notice symbols in my environment and begin to recognise that they carry meaning • use mark-making tools with increasing control • assign my own meaning to my marks • use language in a fun and playful way • use language with purpose • engage with different types of reading materials, including digital ones • notice and explore visual, auditory and physical patterns in my environment and through my play.	• develop my confidence in communicating with others • provide access to picture books to enrich the development of my vocabulary and mathematical concepts such as number, shape and pattern • explore digital resources with me • provide and plan authentic opportunities for mark-making • create environments that provide a wide range of varied experiences that give me opportunities to express myself physically, creatively and imaginatively • provide time for me to talk about and reflect on experiences and events that are important to me • give me time to process and respond • use books, puppets, props and digital media skillfully, in order to engage me in my learning • provide opportunities for authentic and familiar role play • provide opportunities for me to have fun with sounds and discriminate between sounds • provide one-to-one, small group and whole-group opportunities • provide opportunities for turn-taking.

Exploration

Children's natural curiosity about the world around them is a strong motivator for exploration. Children are endlessly curious problem solvers who often find delight, awe and wonder in everyday occurrences. They enjoy exploring and investigating by themselves and with others. They are often keen to share their delight in new knowledge or skills and learn from each other. Young children actively seek knowledge and skills that are both within and beyond their current capabilities. When supported and enabled, they can focus attention for extended periods of time on things that are of interest to them. As their exploration develops, they rehearse and practise skills and test **emerging theories**, both alone and with others.

Learning involves the gradual development of skills, knowledge and competencies in increasingly complex ways. Inclusive environments, both indoors and outdoors, that provide time and opportunity to play, explore and investigate, with adults attuned to children's interests, can support positive dispositions to learning as well as increasing knowledge and improving skills.

I need to:	I am learning to:	My exploration is enhanced by adults who:
• explore, investigate and discover • share my curiosity with others • make connections • develop my imagination in a variety of ways • compare, sort and classify • create, communicate and express myself • explore movement and direction, and develop my spatial awareness • experiment with cause and effect.	• focus my attention on things that interest me • develop my understanding of how things work • use my mistakes to further my understanding, with support • share my experiences and what I am thinking • communicate my ideas through mark-making or the use of appropriate technology • explore the properties of materials • develop my creative and critical thinking through my explorations • notice shape, symmetry and pattern in the natural and built environment	• provide authentic opportunities to play and experiment with a variety of materials, textures and tools, indoors and outdoors • understand the diversity of Welsh culture and provide opportunities for me to become curious about, and explore aspects of, Wales and Welsh culture • observe, notice and use my fascinations to deepen learning • support me in constructing understanding through skillful interactions • share in my joy and enthusiasm • view me as confident, capable and curious • support, celebrate and encourage my curiosity • enrich the environment with open-ended resources that enliven my curiosity • use outdoors as a learning space

I need to:	I am learning to:	My exploration is enhanced by adults who:
	• play with quantities and numbers • use simple mathematical language in my play and with purpose • transfer my learning to new situations • solve problems and reflect on my learning • develop resilience and perseverance • develop my concept of time • notice similarities and differences in people, places and things • use my senses to explore the world around me • select appropriate tools and resources to enhance my learning.	• support and develop mathematical and scientific concepts and language in meaningful ways • value the process of learning rather than the end product • support me as I learn from my mistakes • recognise and celebrate my determination and effort • provide access to digital resources that help me to investigate and reflect on my learning • model thinking and problem-solving processes • follow my interests • use music and dance as a stimulus for learning • use authentic resources to bring stories, rhymes and poems to life • support me to use non-fiction books and appropriate digital resources.

Physical development

All children have a natural need to move, or be moved, and to move or manipulate objects, often repeatedly, as part of their development. This involves both gross motor and fine motor manipulation. These motor movements become more refined and smoothly coordinated with time and opportunity. Repetition and variety are critical to development as children begin to explore their increasing physical capabilities.

Physical activity has multiple benefits for the developing child. Movement is linked to cognition and learning, and engaging in physical activities can enhance children's sense of belonging and well-being. It can support greater levels of concentration, motivation and memory, as well as support healthy bone and muscle development. For this reason, physical development skills are woven into the other four developmental pathways as well as being a separate developmental pathway in and of itself.

I need to:	I am learning to:	My physical development is enhanced by:
• express myself in large and small spaces • move in and around objects, indoors and outdoors • move in a variety of ways to support the development of my gross motor skills • develop my fine motor skills in real-life experiences • test out my capabilities, challenge myself physically and explore what I can do with my body • have choice over how, when and where I move • be curious about how I can interact physically with the world around me.	• co-ordinate my movements • move safely • maintain balance • move on a variety of surfaces • co-ordinate my hands and eyes • throw and catch objects • take risks in my physical play • manipulate and explore properties of smaller objects • plan and make decisions about my movement • persevere and develop my resilience.	• authentic experiences in the natural world • a learning environment that provides daily opportunities to develop both my gross and fine motor skills • opportunities to develop my co-ordination and core strength • opportunities to experience joy in my physical activity • an inclusive environment that supports me to move and be active • supportive adults who encourage me to gauge and manage risks and to challenge myself • opportunities to experience music, dance and games using images, sound and video • opportunities to explore, in my physical movements, concepts, including size, shape, pattern, rhythm and position.

Well-being

Children are influenced by the adults, experiences and environments they encounter. When these three work together successfully, they create a strong sense of well-being for all.

Feeling connected, secure and safe are key elements to developing a strong sense of well-being. Adults who create emotionally safe environments can support children to begin to recognise and manage their feelings and behaviour in positive ways. They can also help children begin to understand that actions have consequences.

Children with secure attachments and relationships can feel confident in themselves and are therefore better able to make choices, show greater resilience and independence, and participate positively in everyday activities.

I need to:	I am learning to:	My well-being is enhanced by adults who:
• feel safe and secure • make choices • follow my own interests • show my emotions • feel connected to others • feel valued • see me and my world reflected in my environment.	• interact with others • take turns and share • show my likes and dislikes • be kind • show consideration of and for others • recognise my feelings • recognise the feelings of others • regulate my responses with support • recognise how I am the same as and different from others • recognise that my actions and those of others have consequences • become independent in my personal hygiene.	• respect and value my play • provide a range of choice within my play • give me time, space and freedom to explore and discover • listen to my views and trust my choices • promote my increasing independence • support me to manage uncertainty and change • recognise and validate my feelings to help me to find ways to express, and begin to regulate, my emotions • encourage me to be actively involved in my learning • listen, observe and notice my developing understanding • work together to meet my needs • ensure that the environment reflects me and my unique family through the careful selection of resources and the content of displays • respect, value, understand and support my culture, heritage and beliefs • provide opportunities to develop self-esteem through creativity and participation • develop my understanding of how to keep my body and mind healthy.

The five developmental pathways: Reflective questions

For practitioners:

- How will I know whether the environment in my setting is meeting the needs of all children?
- To what extent do I provide children with a range of authentic, developmentally appropriate experiences?
- To what extent does curriculum and assessment planning start with the needs and dispositions of the children in my setting?
- How well do I respond to and feed the individual fascinations and curiosities that children have?
- To what extent do I provide meaningful opportunities for children to experience the Welsh language every day?

For leaders:

- How do I ensure that the developmental pathways are used effectively to support learning?
- How well do I communicate high expectations of teaching and learning in respect of the developmental pathways?
- How well do I support practitioners with their Welsh language delivery and development?

Child-centred practice

Getting to know the child in our setting

A child's early years are both relatively brief and highly significant to their overall development. Development is rapid from birth to age five, as babbling becomes conversation and as physical movements become increasingly more complex and sophisticated. It is important to value this period of time and to nurture the playfulness and curiosity of children. The temptation for us to rush through skills, knowledge and experiences can have an adverse effect on the next stages of learning. At every stage of development, we should remain focused on the present needs and not those of the coming year(s). If we get to know the children in our setting, their development needs and their interests, we are more likely to foster enjoyment in, and positive dispositions to, learning.

As children join our setting for the first time, they may encounter new expectations and routines. We know that this transition may be smooth and relaxed for some, but for others it may require a longer settling-in period. By using our knowledge of children's previous experiences, likes, dislikes and interests, we will be better placed to ease this transition.

Our focus on getting to know children helps to build a picture of each individual child. We do this because we value the unique sets of skills and knowledge each child brings to our setting. Developing our relationship with the child should be a joyful experience for everyone.

We should ensure we are appropriately skilled to understand the role of observation and how it supports assessment. We should watch and listen to children, and reflect upon what they are doing and saying. Assessment is made through in-depth analysis of observations that focus on what children can do.

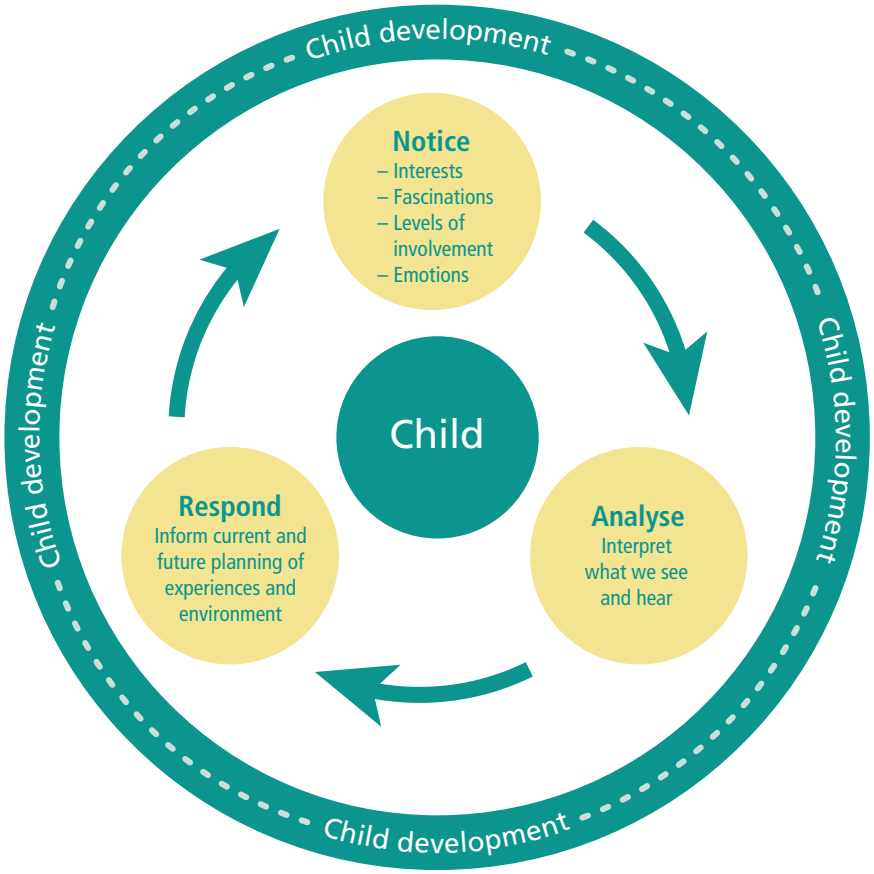
Observing children

Observation plays a key role in our practice. It should be grounded in our thorough knowledge of child development and the child should be at the centre of the process.

Observation helps us to find out what motivates, interests and engages young children. It helps us to understand their levels of involvement, their emotional states, their friendships, skills and competencies. Effective observation enables us to analyse what we see and hear, and to respond in ways that will help children make progress. We should use these observations to inform current and future planning in our setting. Our observations may be planned and specific; they may be timed over a period or be spontaneous occurrences when something new or significant is noticed. Using a range of observation techniques will ensure that we obtain detailed understanding of each child.

Observations help inform us of children's fascinations. Making the most of these fascinations can help extend learning, especially when planning the experiences and environments through which concepts can be explored.

We should observe children throughout the day, indoors and outdoors, in solitary and collaborative play. These contexts will help us identify a range of skills and knowledge as children engage with different experiences. As part of this process, we should consider when and how best to interact with the child during learning. We should ensure we record our observations in a concise and manageable way that works well for our setting. Our observations should be the catalyst for our planning of future learning experiences and environments.



Schemas

In our practice, there may be times when we wonder why young children do what they do. We may observe a child repeating an activity over and over again, for example tipping over containers and emptying contents on the floor, making circles in the sand or paint, wrapping themselves or objects up in fabric. These repetitive actions support vital brain development and are called schemas. These actions may seem a little odd, or even a little irritating, at times, but to a child they are a necessary step in their understanding of the world and themselves. Schemas can support children to express their developing ideas and thoughts through their exploratory play. The repetitive actions of schematic play allow children to construct meaning in what they are doing.

Some children have a very strong drive to repeat actions such as lining objects up, moving things from place to place, filling and emptying containers, covering things or throwing them. Schemas may change over time, for example a child may experiment with a particular schema such as enveloping themselves in blankets before moving on to enveloping objects of varying sizes in fabric, paper or paint. As children integrate new learning into existing schema, they adjust their current thinking to accommodate these new experiences.

It is important to note that some children may display more than one schema while others may show none at all.

Schemas can play a key role in laying the foundations for future mathematical and scientific understanding; they provide physical opportunities to understand language concepts fully and encourage problem-solving and creative thinking. Children's exploratory drive to find out how and why things happen strengthens their **neural pathways** making it easier for children to make connections in learning, test out their **emergent thinking**, and make choices and decisions. Failing to provide opportunities for children to embrace and explore their schema fully may be detrimental to their sense of **agency**.

Types of schema

There are many different types of schema, the most common types seen in children's play and exploration are listed below.

We can see that many of these patterns of repeated behaviours are testing out mathematical and scientific concepts as children use objects and materials in their play. Children may show a fascination for one, some or all of the following schemas.

- **Trajectory** – This involves exploring height, speed, distance and how things move (horizontally, vertically and diagonally) and how children can affect that movement.
- **Rotation** – This involves exploring shape, space, spatial awareness, movement and rotation, including how children turn themselves around, and how objects spin and bounce.
- **Enclosing** – This involves exploring the properties of size, shape, measurement and volume of spaces through creating and/or occupying enclosed spaces.
- **Enveloping** – This involves exploring space, volume, capacity, weight, spatial awareness and size through covering or wrapping objects or themselves completely. Children may also fill bags, baskets or containers.
- **Transporting** – This involves exploring quantities through moving objects, a collection of objects or themselves from one place to another.
- **Connecting and disconnecting** – This involves exploring size, shape and estimation through joining things together and taking them apart.

- **Positioning** – This involves exploring ordering, sequencing and classification through placing and arranging objects in patterns or rows.
- **Orientation** – This involves exploring balance, height, width and length through looking at things from different angles, either by using objects or themselves.
- **Core and radial** – This combines the straight movements of the trajectory schema with the circular movements of the rotation schema. This can be seen in mark-making and when children combine schemas in their play.

Schema dominance may change over time, as children explore individual schemas and then combine them in more complex play. Our observations of play will often show children using pairs and groups of schemas that form a network of clusters, grouping and regrouping as their learning and interests evolve. Positive and purposeful interactions and experiences impact on the development and coordination of schema clusters; this requires us to balance how or if we enter into children's play to extend current thinking. As children develop, their schema clusters begin to function together, enabling the child to think and act more efficiently, showing greater dexterity and understanding of concepts and language. At this point, it may be more difficult for us to identify individual schemas; however, regular observations should inform practice and provision.

Schemas: Reflective questions

For practitioners and leaders:

- How confident am I in recognising and understanding schemas and their link to learning?
- How well do I share my observations with parents and carers? Is it a two-way sharing process?
- How well do I use my observation of children's play to identify and plan for schematic learning?
- How do I ensure there is a range of open-ended resources, indoors and outdoors, to support schematic learning?
- How do I ensure that children are provided with opportunities to engage in deep levels of schematic play?
- How do I use my knowledge of schemas to support a child's transition into a new setting?

Assessing children

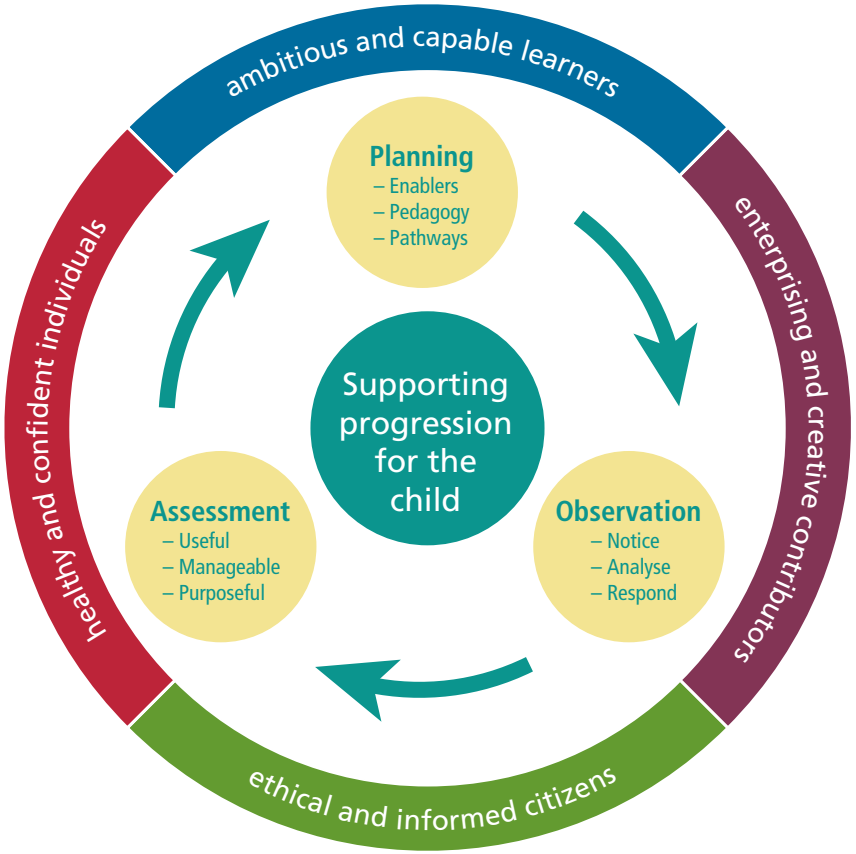
Assessment has three main roles:

- supporting the individual child on an ongoing, day-to-day basis
- identifying, capturing and reflecting on individual progress
- understanding group progress over time to help the setting reflect on their practice.

Assessment aims to find out what children can do and should be carried out through in-depth analysis of our observations. Assessment plays a fundamental role in enabling each individual child to make progress at an appropriate pace, ensuring they are supported and challenged accordingly. It gives us a greater understanding of the child's emotional, social, cognitive and physical development across the five developmental pathways. It allows us to tune in to the ways in which children prefer to learn and understand how best to motivate them. Effective assessment can also support us to identify those children who may need extra support or challenge to help them reach their potential.

It is important we understand that learning is not linear and that different children are likely to progress in markedly different ways. We must recognise this and allow for a variety of diversions, stops and spurts in a child's learning journey.

Assessment should not be a tick list or a one-off event. It should be a continuous process that is useful, manageable and purposeful, both to us and to children's progress. Assessment should be indistinguishable from teaching and learning. Assessment can support us to provide experiences and an environment that supports the child's learning through authentic contexts.



Child-centred practice: Reflective questions

For practitioners:

- How well do I use analysis of observation to inform day-to-day planning?
- How well do I use a variety of observation methods?
- How do I ensure a balance of observations across the five developmental pathways?
- How do I ensure observations focus on a variety of aspects?
- How do I ensure enough time is taken to observe, listen to and tune into each child to see that they are progressing well?
- How do I ensure my interactions do not interrupt children's learning?
- How do I ensure parental contributions are valued in the process of getting to know the child?
- How do I tune in with the child in order to collaborate in the learning process?

For leaders:

- How well do I support and maintain a strong learning culture that supports and challenges practitioners to enable children to make appropriate progress?
- How do I use my team's observations and assessments to inform strategic planning?
- How do I ensure practitioners focus on a full range of aspects in their observations?
- How well do I identify the professional learning needs of practitioners in my setting?
- How do I ensure practitioners have the time to observe all children on a regular basis?
- How well do I reflect on the quality and usefulness of the observations and assessments to develop my setting's practice and pedagogy?

Inclusion

Inclusive practice recognises, values and promotes the diversity of children and families, and ensures they receive equitable treatment, representation, opportunities and respect. Inclusive practice respects and responds to the unique experiences of children and their families, ensuring that all children receive appropriate support to participate fully in learning.

During their time with us, it is essential that children feel confident in who they are. Implementing inclusive practice within our pedagogical approach can ensure that all children have a strong sense of belonging, feeling that they are valued and represented in our setting, and have an equal opportunity to thrive.

We know that children are influenced by their environment and the adults around them and that they learn from everything they see, hear and do. We have a responsibility to influence children's development positively through creating an accessible and inclusive environment in our setting, one that values and celebrates everyone.

Our environment should:

- be well organised to ensure accessibility for all
- include diverse and authentic representation within resources, images and text (in terms of gender, ability, sexual orientation, religion, etc.)
- make appropriate adaptations to remove barriers to participation
- offer open-ended resources that reflect diversity and are not gender-specific.

Adverse childhood experiences

The term ‘adverse childhood experiences’ refers to traumatic events a child may experience before the age of 18. These could include: abuse, neglect, bereavement, parental separation, parental imprisonment, and exposure to substance misuse or domestic violence. Research suggests that adversity and trauma can have a lifelong impact on mental and physical health and well-being. Adversity can impact each family and child differently. In general terms, exposure to adversity and trauma can mean that children are exposed to higher levels of stress, which they can find difficult to manage.

Families may experience short episodes of adversity and trauma, others may occur over a longer and more sustained period of time. In such circumstances, families may struggle to provide responsive care and a nurturing environment for their children. Exposure to adversity and trauma, over the short or longer term, can have a detrimental effect on children’s capacity to learn and develop.

We have a responsibility to keep children safe from harm. Research suggests that good-quality settings can reduce the impact of adversity on children. We can help children to develop the necessary skills to build resilience, through consistent, positive relationships in emotionally safe environments.

As part of our practice, we should reflect on how well we relate to families. Settings that demonstrate best practice will have an open-door policy for all families and carers to feel comfortable in sharing any relevant information that may affect the child. It is equally as important that we are able to recognise the extent of our own knowledge and responsibilities, and that we know when to seek further advice or signpost families to other sources of support.

Inclusion: Reflective questions

For practitioners:

- Do the routines and resources in my setting reinforce or challenge stereotypical thinking? How do I know this?
- How well do the resources in my setting authentically represent the range of communities living locally, nationally and internationally?
- How well do the resources in my setting reflect a range of family structures and backgrounds?

For leaders:

- Have I considered the impact of **unconscious bias** on practice and provision? Is there a need for professional learning among my practitioners?
- How frequently do I evaluate our equal opportunities policy? How do I ensure it is effective and comprehensive?
- How well do I implement a whole-setting approach to supporting children who may have experienced adversity and trauma?
- How well do I identify a need for relevant professional learning for staff and how well do I support it?
- How well do practitioners in my setting understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding?
- How well do I share relevant information about children and their families with staff?

Transitions

Transitions are changes that take place in a child's life and that require them to adapt to a new set of circumstances. These may include major changes such as bereavement, divorce, moving home or the transition from home to setting. Smaller, but still significant, are the transitions that take place within our setting, such as moving from room to room or activity to activity. Some children may find moving from situations that were previously comfortable and familiar more challenging than others and will require support to develop the skills needed to cope.

There are three main types of transition.

- **Horizontal** – The multiple changes that occur throughout the day, from home to setting, from periods of play to mealtimes, from outside to inside.
- **Vertical** – The major changes that occur in families, that may require them to adjust socially and culturally to new sets of rules, routines and expectations, for example when moving from home to setting or from setting to primary school.
- **Multiple** – Some children may transition more than two or three times in any one day or week. These multiple transitions may be, for example, from home to breakfast club, breakfast club to nursery, nursery to grandparents and grandparents to home.

How well we manage transitions can determine whether the experience is positive or negative for the child. A lack of appropriate support through the transition process can lead to negative long-term effects on children, for example low self-esteem and confidence, an inability to form meaningful relationships, and a reduced capacity to cope with change in the short and longer term. Ensuring the well-being of children is an integral part of the transition process. Taking a child-centred approach to transitions can positively influence how well children are able to make the necessary adjustments to the challenges and opportunities of any new situation.

It is essential we plan transitions with the individual needs of the child in mind. Every child is different, and some will need more support than others. We should work in partnerships with parents and carers to understand the individual needs of each child and work together to make transitions as smooth as possible.

Building trusting relationships between the home and our setting, where we share the same aspirations for learning and development, nurtures children's well-being and sense of belonging. Recognising parents and carers as the child's first educator and valuing what they know about their child is vital not only for smooth transition from home to setting, but also for ongoing effective partnerships. Settings that foster open dialogue with parents and carers, and that listen to and observe children, will be better placed to provide a positive transition experience.

Transitions: Reflective questions

For practitioners and leaders:

- How well do I use the information shared through my engagement with parents and carers to support effective transitions?
- How do I ensure good partnerships are established and developed with schools and other settings?
- How do I ensure that the voice of the child is represented in the transition process?

Leadership

When we talk about leadership in our setting, we are referring to all staff in a management, leadership or supervisory role, as well as the single leader with overall responsibility for the setting.

Effective leaders should be inspiring role models. They should model a high standard of practice, knowledge and care, and value the skills and knowledge of the practitioners in their settings. They should ensure that all practitioners understand their roles and responsibilities, and work with them to create a shared vision that has a clear Welsh ethos, which is understood and practised by all. They should be committed to continual professional learning, both for themselves and other practitioners, using a range of approaches within and outside of the setting. They should encourage reflection and regularly monitor and assess practice to ensure improvement.

Effective leaders should have good communication skills, ensuring that all within the team know exactly what is going on, and should delegate tasks where appropriate. They should also model good listening skills, and be prepared to take on board ideas and suggestions from team members. Effective leaders should welcome collaborative working with a range of partners, including parents, carers and others within the community, and involve them in decision-making, where appropriate.

Effective leaders should make good use of the self-evaluation process, to consider how best to maintain and improve their setting to ensure it offers the best experience for young children. All relevant partners should be included in this process to ensure their views are heard.

Leadership: Reflective questions

For leaders:

- How well do I include partners in creating, developing and realising the vision for my setting?
- How well do I evaluate the implementation of this vision?
- How well do I identify my own professional learning needs as well as those of the practitioners in my setting?
- How well do I evaluate the impact of professional learning?
- How well do I identify the need for change and how do I ensure it is successfully implemented?
- How successfully do I include all relevant partners in the self-evaluation process?
- How well do I evaluate quality?

Glossary

English	Welsh	Definition
Agency	Galluedd	The ability of children to make choices and decisions to influence events and to have an impact on their world.
Communication rich	Llawn cyfathrebu	A communication-rich environment is thoughtfully designed to develop children's speaking and listening skills, their emotional well-being, and their physical and general engagement.
Concept development	Datblygu cysyniadau	A process, linked to language development, that supports learners to gain an understanding of direction, location, position, number, quantity, sequence, attributes, dimension, size, and similarities and differences.
Cynefin	Cynefin	The place where we feel we belong, where the people and landscape around us are familiar, and the sights and sounds are reassuringly recognisable. The historic, cultural and social place which has shaped and continues to shape the community which inhabits it.
Emergent thinking	Ffyrdd newydd o feddwl	The process through which children develop theories and ideas through exploration.
Emerging theories	Damcaniaethau sy'n dod i'r amlwg	The ways in which children make sense of the world around them, by drawing on their personal and social experiences.
Fascinations	Diddordebau arbennig	Things that ignite great interest or delight within a child.
Motor function	Gweithrediad motor	The ability to control movements and postures.
Neural pathways	Llwybrau niwral	A series of connected neurons that send signals from one part of the brain to another. Children develop connections through everyday experiences and interactions.

English	Welsh	Definition
Pedagogy	Addysgeg	The method or practice of teaching.
Preferred learning environment	Amgylchedd dysgu a ffefrir	An area in the setting where a child chooses to spend most of their time.
Self-regulation	Hunanreoli	A foundational skill of early childhood. As children grow and are supported by adults, they learn how to manage their emotions and behaviours.
Skills integral to the four purposes	Sgiliau sy'n hanfodol i'r pedwar diben	The key set of skills all children need to develop and which underpin the four purposes of the curriculum. They are: • creativity and innovation • critical thinking and problem-solving • personal effectiveness • planning and organising.
Strategic competence	Cymhwysedd strategol	The ability of a child to apply strategies to formulate and solve mathematical problems.
Sustained shared thinking	Cyd-feddwl parhaus	Adults and children working together to solve a problem, clarify a concept or evaluate an activity. This usually takes the form of a conversation with the adult and child both contributing ideas to come to possible conclusions together.
Symbolic representation	Cynrychioli drwy symbolau	The ability to depict ideas through the use of words, sounds and objects during play.
Teachable moments	Cyfleoedd dysgu digymell	Unexpected or unplanned events or experiences that offer opportunity for learning. They provide meaningful contexts for adults to introduce or expand on something or which arouses the curiosity of the child.
Unconscious bias	Rhagfarn ddiarwybod	Non-deliberate prejudice or unsupported judgements in favour of or against one thing, person or group as compared to another, in a way that is usually considered unfair.

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.