

Bite - size CPD: Best beginnings: caring for babies



Aim: To investigate the latest research and statutory guidance when creating safe, nurturing and supportive learning environments for babies.



Two is too late!

The building blocks for lifelong emotional and physical health are laid down in the period from conception to the age of two.

“Human babies are unique in the animal kingdom in the extent of their underdevelopment at birth. What other offspring is unable to walk until it is a year old, or fend for itself in any way until it is at least two years old? Those physical challenges are only the beginning; the human brain is itself only partially formed at birth and becomes hardwired by the baby’s earliest experiences, having a lifelong impact on their physical and emotional health.” (2021:p.5)

The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days

There are certain things that every baby needs as the foundations for a healthy and happy life:

- *Loving, nurturing relationships with parents / carers.*
 - *A safe home free from stress and adversity.*
 - *The right to develop good language and other cognitive skills.*
 - *Support to manage behaviour and regulate their emotions.*
 - *Good physical and mental health and access to healthcare.*
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Best Beginnings in the Early Years

1. Loving, nurturing relationships with parents / carers



Babies are born to attach

They have a strong preference for human faces, seeking out eye contact and learning to smile at positive carers.

Attachment is a clinical term used to describe a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings." Children can form attachments with more than one caregiver, but the bond with the people who have provided close care from early infancy, is the most important and enduring.

Bowlby, John (1997) Attachment and loss. Volume 1: Attachment. London: Pimlico.

Attachment and Child Development



The key person

*Each child **must** be assigned a key person. In childminding settings, the key person is the childminder, or can be an assistant where appropriate. Their role is to help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs, to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents and/or carers. They should also help families and engage with more specialist support if appropriate.*

EYFS Statutory Framework

Pause: read [Attachment and the Role of the Key Person](#)



2. A safe home free from stress and adversity



Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traditionally understood as a set of 10 traumatic events or circumstances occurring before the age of 18 that have been shown through research to increase the risk of adult mental health problems and debilitating diseases. The 10 ACEs are:

- *physical abuse*
 - *sexual abuse*
 - *psychological abuse*
 - *physical neglect*
 - *psychological neglect*
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Adverse Childhood Experiences (Cont.)

- *witnessing domestic abuse*
- *having a close family member who misused drugs or alcohol*

- *having a close family member with mental health problems*
 - *having a close family member who served time in prison*
 - *parental separation or divorce on account of relationship breakdown*
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Exposure to prolonged, repeatedly harmful events or adversity from combined sources during childhood and adolescence, in the absence of nurturing relationships, impacts throughout life on many health and social outcomes including mental health and wellbeing. [Improving the Mental Health of Babies, Children and Young People](#)

Co-ordinating early help services for families and young people in times of need.

The five family hubs in Shropshire are located as follows:

- *Oswestry - 9 Arthur Street, Oswestry, SY11 1JNN Every Monday from 9:30am - 12:30pm*
 - *Market Drayton - Raven House, TF9 3AH Every Tuesday from 9:30am - 12:30pm*
 - *Shrewsbury - Sunflower House, SY1 4ES Every Tuesday from 9:30am - 12:30pm*
 - *Ludlow - Ludlow Youth Centre, Ludlow, SY8 1RT Every Monday from 9:30am – 11:30am*
 - *Bridgnorth - Youth Centre, Innage Lane, WV16 4HS every Tuesday from 1:30pm - 4pm.*
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Pause: watch [How a Child's Brain Develops](#)



3. The right help to develop good language and other cognitive skills



Supporting babies' early communication skills

Babies are amazing learners. They are born ready to learn about their home language or languages. Here are some tips to support babies' communication skills:

Be face to face: *Babies learn a lot from looking at your face and body language when you talk. Make it easy for the baby by getting down onto the floor with them and being face to face.*

Take turns: *Copy the sounds and actions that the baby makes. If the baby says 'ga' - you say 'ga' back. If the baby claps - you clap. This is the first step in helping the baby to take turns in a conversation.*

Watch closely: *What is the baby doing or looking at? Watching the baby closely can help you know when they are ready to hear a new word, and when they are busy thinking and don't want to be interrupted!*

Repeat words: *Babies need to hear words lots of times before they can understand the words or use them to talk. Keep your sentences short and say important words several times- 'Shoes. Your shoes. Red shoes. Bye-bye shoes'.*

Choices: *Even before babies can talk, they can often find other ways to communicate what they want if given a choice. Show the baby two things to choose between (e.g. 'teddy or ball?', or 'apple or banana?'). They may show you by looking, reaching, pointing, or by trying to say the word.*

People play: *Babies learn to communicate best by spending time playing and communicating with other people. Find more ideas [here](#).*

Songs, nursery rhymes, and music: *Babies can learn words and actions through songs and nursery rhymes. Share songs, nursery rhymes, and music with your child in any of the languages that you use at home.*

Share stories: *Looking at books together is a great way to help babies and toddlers learn new words. Start by simply talking about the pictures that the child seems interested in. See our information on [book sharing](#).*

Supporting Babies Early Communication Skills



1 - Dad and baby having a conversation together.

Pause: read [Let's Talk Baby Talk - The science of baby language skills](#)



4. Support to manage behaviour and regulate their emotions



"We know that children who at an early age can manage their own emotions and behaviour go on to have much better outcomes later in life. Babies and very young children cannot regulate their emotions alone, and so need help from parents and carers to do so – which in turn helps them learn to regulate their emotions independently."

Evidence shows that children who are less able to control their feelings and behaviour in the early years are more likely to have worse long term outcomes – for example they are more likely to struggle in education; children with poorer socio-emotional skills at age ten are more likely to be unemployed, and to have a criminal conviction, by the time they are adults." (2020:p.7)

Best Beginnings in the Early Years

Create a calming, emotional environment

- Observe babies' emotional responses and plan the routines, the environment and play experiences to support them.*
 - Encourage parents / carers to bring their baby's comforter / transitional object to ease the change from home to setting.*
 - Create a cosy, quiet place for babies to be calm.*
 - Provide comfortable seating such as a sofa or cushions for baby and key person to be together.*
 - Create spaces and experiences in which babies feel secure enough to explore and play.*
 - Provide resources including picture books and stories that focus on a range of emotions.*
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Birth to Five Matters

- Communicate with parents / carers daily to ensure continuity of care between home and the setting.*
 - Communicate with sensitivity when interacting with parents / carers who do not speak or understand English and draw on the language skills available where possible.*
 - Develop close partnerships with parents / carers to discuss and agree boundaries of behaviour. (2021:p.62)*
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Birth to Five Matters

Pause: watch [Supporting children with their emotions](#)



5. Good physical and mental health and access to healthcare



"Good health is a vital foundation for later life... Good mental health is just as essential, and will depend on all five of these building blocks being in place.

What this evidence shows is that the environment and care a child has in their earliest years, and the early indicators of their health, socio-emotional well-being and cognitive development all make a

difference to how well they do later in life. If we want to see children doing better at school, forming healthy relationships, and having good mental health and well-being all this suggests that we need to be helping children and investing very early on." (2020:p.8)

Best Beginnings in the Early Years

Physical guidelines for under 2's

Infants (less than 1 year):

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- Infants should be physically active several times every day in a variety of ways, including interactive floor-based activity, e.g. crawling.*
 - For infants not yet mobile, this includes at least 30 minutes of tummy time spread throughout the day while awake (and other movements such as reaching and grasping, pushing and pulling themselves independently, or rolling over); more is better.*
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Physical Activity Guidelines

NB: Tummy time may be unfamiliar to babies at first, but can be increased gradually, starting from a minute or two at a time, as the baby becomes used to it. Babies should not sleep on their tummies.

Toddlers (1-2 years):

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- Toddlers should spend at least 180 minutes (3 hours) per day in a variety of physical activities at any intensity, including active and outdoor play, spread throughout the day; more is better. (2019: p.21-22)*
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Physical Activity Guidelines

Pause: read [Baby Moves](#)



Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Requirements



All early years providers must adhere to the statutory requirements within the EYFS.

The EYFS states that:

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- *Paediatric first aid training **must** be renewed every 3 years and be relevant for providers caring for young children and where relevant, babies.*

- Each child **must** be assigned a key person. Children need to build an attachment with their key person for their confidence and well-being.
 - Early years providers (other than childminders) working with children under the age of 2 "at least half of all staff **must** have received training that specifically addresses the care of babies." (2024: paragraph 3.40)
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Further information and useful websites:

Bottle feeding and sterilising

[Bottle Feeding Advice](#)

[Making Up Baby Formula](#)

[Sterilising Baby Bottles](#)

Safer sleep care for babies to reduce the risk of sudden infant death

[Unicef Safer Sleep Resources](#)

[Safer Sleep Advice from the Lullaby Trust](#)

[Suffocation Prevention](#)

Nappy Changing

[Potty Training - how to start and best age to potty train](#)

[Preventing and Controlling Infections - safe disposal of soiled nappies](#)

Additional hazards and information

- *Travel seats and buggies*
- *Self feeding cushions*
- *Hanging things*
- *Training wires and cords*

- *Ventilation and temperature*
 - *Things that could blow into the cot / bed*
 - *Burns from lights, toys etc.*
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Baby and Toddler Safety

Baby Self-Feeding Pillows Poster Consumer Alert.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Car Seats and SIDS

Keeping Kids Safe (RoSPA)



*Additional information can also be found in **The know how guide working with under 2's***

Babies and toddlers | Shropshire Learning Gateway (shropshirelq.net)

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