Me, Myself and I

Development matters
- Young babies become aware of themselves as separate from others, learning also that they have influence upon and are influenced by others.
- Babies develop an understanding and awareness of themselves, which is influenced by their family, culture, other people and the environment.
- Young children learn they have similarities and differences that connect them to, and distinguish them from, others.
- Children show their particular characteristics, preferences and interests and demonstrate these in all they do.

Effective practice
- Adults who respond to and build on babies’ actions, expressions and gestures.
- Playfully helping babies to recognise that they are separate and different from others; e.g. adult pointing to own and baby’s nose, eyes, fingers, toes.
- Recognising, accepting and understanding that carrying, sucking or playing with something such as a dummy that they have brought from home helps young children as they move between home and a new setting.
- Practitioners who support and encourage all children enable them to gain confidence and to try new things.

Look, listen, note
- Note how young babies begin to explore their bodies’ movements and the environment in individual ways.
- Note how babies use the opportunities you provide, to develop, show and communicate their preferences and decisions.
- Note how, with your support and encouragement, young children begin to make decisions and develop preferences, thereby beginning to establish their autonomy.
- Note how children explore, play, socialise, and make sense of their experiences.

Play and practical support
- Playfully imitate young babies, giving full eye contact, interacting with them and their play-things, watching the ways they use them and showing them new things to do.
- Provide a variety of mirrors in different places to help babies explore what they look like and who they are.
- Value young children’s comfort objects and show them that you understand that they meet their emotional needs.
- Let children make decisions about how and where to display their paintings or allow them to select which toys to play with or whom to sit with.

“...babies being handled all over, talked to, and gazed at are not only being (made aware) of the human world outside themselves, they are (becoming aware) that they themselves exist”
Schaffer (1992)
Planning and resourcing

- Plan to devote uninterrupted time to babies when you can be attentive and fully focused.
- Encourage parents/the local community to contribute cultural artefacts, such as cooking materials, to your setting to ensure that it is inclusive and respectful of many cultures.
- Plan activities to allow children to show what they can do, for instance, feeding the fish, putting their own coat on their hook, choosing their clothes, washing themselves.
- Plan for decisions to be made by children. This helps them develop a sense of being valued members of the community and helps them increase their independence and sense of control.

Meeting diverse needs

- Some babies who are blind or deaf or who have severe learning difficulties need constant reminders that you are there, and that they are valued.
- Providing materials and resources to help children accept and be proud of their culture.
- Describing to a baby who is blind what s/he looks like, for example "you've lovely blue eyes" while gently stroking his/her eye lids; gesturing and touching to show a deaf baby his/her face, as you look together in a mirror, helps to encourage an awareness of self.
- It is important to encourage parents and children to accept a child who looks physically different from others.

Challenges and dilemmas

- How to reflect, in a meaningful way wider racial and ethnic diversity in an all white setting; e.g. telling stories and using pictures with positive images of people from different races.
- Recognising and accepting that a two year old's tantrum is often part of a struggle for independence.
- The need to respond warmly to all children, whatever your personal feelings.
- How to accept into your setting objects which are important to children, but not always to your own taste.

Case study

Through regular observations of Lamumba, who is two, practitioners at his playgroup notice that he mainly plays with the "small world" toys such as trains, dinosaurs and people. Whilst the adults recognise his need to be involved in this safe and repetitive play, after a while they help him to explore new things. By planning activities in which his favourite playthings are integrated into other areas for example, putting the dinosaurs into the sand and the trains with large construction brites, Lamumba is enabled to explore and enjoy a wider range of experiences.
A Strong Child
Being Acknowledged and Affirmed

Focuses on
- Experiencing and seeking closeness
  - Needing recognition, acceptance and comfort
  - Being able to contribute to secure relationships
  - Understanding that s/he can be valued by and important to someone
  - Exploring emotional boundaries

Development matters
- Young babies seek to be looked at, approved of and find comfort in touch and in the human face.
- Babies seek to gain attention in a variety of ways.
- Young children strive for responses from others, which confirm, contribute to, or challenge their understanding of themselves.
- Children need to feel others are positive towards them, and to experience realistic expectations in order to become competent, assertive and self-assured.

Look, listen, note
- Observe how young babies respond to your attention, noting whether they make eye contact or vocalise.
- Note whether babies are able to be physically close and enjoy being with you.
- Note when, where, how and why you praise and appreciate young children and how they respond.
- Note how you ensure that each child is recognised as a valuable contributor to the group, and how you celebrate cultural, religious and ethnic experiences.

Effective practice
- Be aware of the importance of your facial expressions and body language.
- Actively listen and give your full attention when babies communicate with you.
- Tell, as well as read, stories, looking at and interacting with young children as a way of letting them know that you think they are important and valued.
- Encourage all children to participate in making any rules and help them to understand expectations and boundaries.

Play and practical support
- Find time to play, have fun, sing and laugh with young babies.
- When communicating with babies, crouch down to their level and establish and maintain contact with eye, voice or light touch.
- Use different voices to tell stories and get young children to join in wherever possible, sometimes using puppets, soft toys or real objects as ‘props’.
- Provide dressing up clothes and materials that help children find out what it feels like to be someone else.

“While infants and toddlers are powerfully self motivated to learn with their whole body and all their senses and to communicate what they know, they depend on the affirmation and warmth of trusting relationships to be able to do so.”
Post & Hohmann (2000)
Planning and resourcing

- Plan specific opportunities for all the children in your care to build secure relationships with you.
- Plan additional time to spend with children who need more attention than others, without neglecting other children.
- Collect stories for, and make books about, children in the group.
- Discuss with staff/parents how each child responds to activities/adults/peers and build on this to plan future activities and experiences for each child.

Meeting diverse needs

- Although their responses may differ, children with disabilities or learning difficulties are entitled to the same range of experiences as others.
- An inclusive environment is one which involves parents and the local community in ensuring that resources and activities are respectful of and reflect diversity.
- Linking up with other childminders, going to the local toddler group or visiting the park creates opportunities for children and carers to be with others.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Respond positively to children who constantly seek attention or are disruptive, without reprimanding or dismissing them.
- Decide what you would do if another practitioner constantly dismisses a particular child.
- How to convey to a child behaving inappropriately that you disapprove of the behaviour, not him or her; for example by saying “I’m sorry Chloe made you angry when she took your toy, but smacking is wrong because it hurts”.
- Consider how you would respond to challenges such as: a child who never answers even direct questions; a child who persistently pours water onto the floor; a child who makes fun of another child.

The aims of a carer are to provide comfort and reassurance and create a secure attachment between the child and caregiver.
A Strong Child

Developing Self-assurance

Development matters

- Young babies enjoy the company of others, and also need to feel safe and loved when they are not the centre of adult attention.
- To develop independence babies need to feel safe and secure within healthy relationships with key people.
- Young children explore what they can do on their own, if given support.
- To appreciate what they can do independently children need relationships, through which they develop self-confidence, a belief in themselves and healthy self-esteem.

Look, listen, note

- Observe and note the length of time young babies occupy themselves and whether this depends on the time of day.
- Note how babies become confident in exploring what they can do with less dependence on adults.
- Note how you prepare for and resource playful activities for young children to engage in independently.
- Note how children express their own confidence and sense of self-assurance, by showing they value what they and others do.

Effective practice

- Provide support for babies when they are not with their key person to give them manageable experiences of being with others.
- Provide accessible resources so that babies can choose what they need to begin an activity independently.
- Encourage young children to be part of collaborative activities, making sure they are not always dependent upon your presence for them to contribute and participate.
- Clear and consistent expectations and trust in children’s abilities will help to increase their self-confidence and show you value and appreciate their efforts.

Play and practical support

- Give young babies a favourite or preferred toy and encourage them to play independently under your watchful eye.
- Increase the time babies play independently, remembering it is comforting for them to hear familiar sounds and have you near.
- Collaborative games and communal sharing times encourage a young child to take more responsibility.
- Talk to children about an activity and discuss with them what resources they need and where they might find them. Then encourage them to get things for themselves, so developing their sense of self-assurance.

“...the child who has benefited from security in her relationships is likely to develop a sense of self confidence and assurance, so that she will have better resources to cope with difficulties.”

Murray & Andrews (2000)*

Planning and resourcing

- Plan times when young babies will be encouraged to play near to an observant adult who shows a quiet interest.
- Provide sufficient resources for babies, ensuring their choice of materials is respected.
- Ensure that there is time for young children to complete a self-chosen task, such as putting on their own socks.
- Plan to allow children to pour their own drinks, serve their own food, choose a story, hold the puppet or water the plant, as soon as they are able.

Meeting diverse needs

- Children's self-confidence is affected and influenced by the way adults respond to them, and less confident children will need greater reassurance.
- Children differ in their degree of self-assurance, so it is important to convey to each child that you appreciate them and their efforts.
- Ensure that differences as well as similarities between the babies and young children in your setting are valued in a way that communicates your respect.
- Some children may require more time than others to undertake a task. Encouraging them to 'try' and showing you appreciate effort can lead to feelings of self-worth.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Maintaining a watchful presence when babies and children are becoming more independent is not always easy in a busy environment, but is essential to the development of self-confidence and assurance.
- Protecting children from physical harm whilst enabling them to be independent, responsible and self-sufficient.
- Children who are insecure may respond by becoming over dependent on an adult, or choosing to isolate themselves from others. Finding ways of responding without appearing to reject, dismiss or further alienate them is a challenge.

Case study

Caitlin, who is six months old, is cared for during the day by Jack, a childminder, in his home. Jack has noticed Caitlin becoming increasingly curious about objects that move and make different sounds. In response to this, Jack has planned an experience where ribbons and bells are attached to a helium balloon, which is then fixed securely to her wrist. Jack makes sure she is comfortably lying on a blanket and spends some time enjoying the balloon with her. As Caitlin becomes more aware of the control she has over the balloon, Jack gently moves away and sits nearby on the sofa observing her joy at doing something all by herself.
A Strong Child

A Sense of Belonging

Focuses on
- Acquiring social confidence and competence
  - Being able to snuggle in
  - Enjoying being with familiar and trusted others
  - Valuing individuality and contributions of self and others
  - Having a role and identity within a group

Development matters
- "Snuggling in" gives young babies physical, psychological and emotional comfort.
- To sustain healthy emotional attachments babies need familiar, trusting, safe and secure relationships.
- Young children's developing attitudes and beliefs are shaped by the value that others place on individual differences and similarities.
- The development of a strong sense of identity both individually and within a group helps children feel they belong.

Effective practice
- Recognise that young babies will find comfort from 'snuggling in' with a variety of objects and people in different places, such as cosy corners with soft, inviting surfaces.
- At times of transition (such as the beginning or end of the day or change of shifts) greet and say goodbye to babies and their parents. This helps to develop secure and trusting three-way relationships.
- Find ways to value and celebrate each young child within the group by making routines such as feeding and changing personal.
- Encourage all children to participate in and contribute in a group, being mindful that some will find this more difficult than others.

Look, listen, note
- Note when you provide opportunities for young babies to 'snuggle in'. Is it only when you have time or is it in response to their needs?
- Note the ways you nurture babies' sense of themselves whilst also helping them feel they belong to the group.
- Note young children's questions about differences; e.g. skin colour, hair, friends.
- Observe the strategies children use to join in or avoid a group during play.

Play and practical support
- Talk to parents about significant events in the young baby's day. Ask them about important events at home and encourage them to contribute to their baby's records.
- Provide experiences that involve using all the senses, such as relaxing music, soft lighting and pleasant smells for babies to enjoy.
- Create opportunities for young children to be involved in the domestic routines that link home and the out of home setting, being mindful of ways in which these may differ culturally.
- Provide a soft toy for children to take home in turn. It could have an overnight bag with a note to parents encouraging them, with their child, to care for it and return it safely.
Planning and resourcing

- Plan for all staff to have frequent information-sharing opportunities so that all have some knowledge of each child. This creates a close community spirit.
- Provide each child with their own place in which to keep their own things. This nurtures a sense of belonging.
- Provide an area to display pictures of children's families, pets and homes and any pictures they have brought from home.
- Plan for key people to be with babies and children to create opportunities for 'snuggling in'.

Meeting diverse needs

- Try to find ways of making all children feel valued by, for instance, celebrating their own cultures, achievements or significant events in their lives.
- Giving children the chance to explore and talk about physical characteristics, things they like to do or eat, are important aspects of self-identity and help children learn about each other.
- The recognition of the significance of each child's race, culture, ability and gender comes from the respect for, and value of, difference. Don't be afraid to discuss different physical characteristics, as well as individual preferences, as these are important aspects of self-identity and inform children about others.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Consider how to reinforce children's sense of individuality whilst also nurturing a sense of group belonging; e.g. by giving each child a place for their special things.
- Finding ways to support children when their closest friend leaves your setting; e.g. by talking about what their friend might be doing now.
- How to help children from a family, whose first language is not English, gain a sense of belonging within what might seem a strange and unfamiliar context; e.g. by learning how to say 'hello' in the child's home language.
- Encouraging a child who often remains on the edge of a group to feel that he or she belongs; e.g. by playing alongside them with other children.

In this example, bringing their own flannel from home and keeping it in their own special place helps these babies to share a sense of belonging.
A Skillful Communicator

Being Together

Focuses on
- Being a sociable and effective communicator

Including:
- Gaining attention and making contact
- Positive relationships
- Being with others
- Encouraging conversation

Development matters

Young babies are sociable from birth, using a variety of ways to gain attention.

Babies use their developing physical skills to make social contact.

Young children form friendships and can be caring towards each other.

Children learn social skills and enjoy being with and talking to adults and other children.

Look, listen, note
- Note the skills babies use to make contact; e.g. inclining their heads, wiggling their toes, eye contact, banging, smiling, vocalising.
- Listen to the sounds babies make and the words children use as they make friends, noting differences in the way they communicate with adults and other children.
- Note how adults and other children respond; e.g. mirroring, echoing, interpreting and sharing objects.
- Observe the ways in which young children make friends and note the attachments they make with adults and children; e.g. giving an object and taking it back.

Effective practice

- Being physically close and making eye contact, using touch or voice provides an ideal opportunity for early 'conversations' between adults and babies; and one baby and another.
- Ensure there is good communication between parents and practitioners to provide babies and children with positive models.
- Help children learn the names of other children and important people in their lives; e.g. through songs and rhymes.
- Create areas in which to sit and chat with friends; e.g. a space under stairs with bright cushions, an outdoor den.

Play and practical support

- Mobiles above changing areas, feathers to tickle and music to share, help young babies to enjoy being together and communicating with their key person.
- "What is it?" is one of the earliest questions as a baby holds up an object, accompanied by a questioning facial expression. Provide interesting objects such as a squeaky toy.
- Spend time with young children sharing photographs, either in books or placed where they can be seen; e.g. on skirting boards or mobiles, showing family, friends, favourite foods, or pets.
- Provide opportunities for all children to become part of a group, encouraging conversation.

"Babies are attracted to other people from birth and they quickly prefer the people who have become familiar. But the baby doesn’t simply want to be near her family and their friends – she wants to share her experience with other people and interact with them!"

Murray & Andrews (2000)*

Planning and resourcing
- Plan for a key person to sit with individuals or their group, focusing on different ways of communicating; e.g. listening, smiling, singing, clapping.
- Plan opportunities for talking together in quiet places both indoors and outdoors.
- Provide objects and resources in different areas which stimulate interest, such as pictures, a new book, some crinkly paper.
- Plan times when other adults, parents, visitors are available to interact with children.

Meeting diverse needs
- 'Being together' for children whose home language is not English can be bewildering. They need to hear familiar words of endearment, stories and songs in their home language, together with close physical contact.
- For children with a hearing impairment, supplement your use of voice with touch, gesture, and facial expression, encouraging others to do the same.
- Children are more willing to communicate when all their needs are met, that is when they are rested, well fed and not in need of changing.
- Children with a visual impairment may miss non-verbal signals such as facial expressions and body language; a sensitive adult may need to interpret to avoid misunderstandings.

Challenges and dilemmas
- In group settings babies and older children are often separated. Consider how you might encourage all children in your care to be together at times, talking and interacting and making friends.
- Early efforts to ‘make friends’ can be clumsy: hugs and strokes can quickly become squeezes and pokes. Sensitive adult intervention and support is required at these times.
- It is tempting to tell children to share, but important to question whether their age, the activity in which they are involved, and sufficiency of resources makes this appropriate; e.g. by explaining to an older child why the baby should keep a toy which others want.
- How to prevent routines getting in the way of conversation, intimacy, and treating children as individuals.

Case study
Eleven month old Tariq is engrossed in exploring the sounds, texture and colour of a pile of autumn leaves in which he’s sitting. Della notices he needs to be changed. Instead of sweeping him up in her arms, she sits with him and has a conversation about the leaves. He responds with a smile and offers her a handful, which she takes, thanking him. She then explains it's time to be changed, asking 'Is that alright with you Tariq?' and reassuring him he'll be back with the leaves soon. He holds a leaf up to her questioningly and she says ‘Are you going to bring it with you while you’re being changed?’
Finding a Voice

Development matters
Young babies communicate in a variety of ways including crying, gurgling, babbling and squealing.

Babies enjoy experimenting, exploring and using sounds and words to represent objects around them.

Young children use single word and two word utterances to convey simple and more complex messages.

Children use language as a powerful means of widening contacts, sharing feelings, experiences and thoughts.

Look, listen, note
• Note the wide variety of sounds a young baby produces and how adults try to understand and respond to them.

• Listen to the sounds and early words babies use and how familiar adults show that they understand them.

• Note the meanings young children generate in their language through the creative ways in which they combine words.

• Note what children say as they begin to combine words, to ask questions, describe and predict.

Effective practice
• Adults who interpret, give meaning to and echo young babies who are making a variety of sounds.

• Sharing the fun of discovery and valuing babies’ ‘words’; e.g. by bringing the doll in response to ‘baba’.

• Recognise young children’s competence and appreciate their efforts when they show their understanding of new words and phrases.

• Opportunities for children to talk with other children, visitors and other adults about what they see, hear, think and feel.

Play and practical support
• Use everyday routines; e.g. dressing, changing and mealtimes to sing with, talk to and encourage babies to vocalise.

• Encourage exploration and imitation of sound by providing objects such as firmly sealed yoghurt pots or plastic bottles filled with water, sand, gravel.

• Provide everyday objects found in the home for example sponge, soft nail brush, plastic pan scrub, for babies and children to explore, investigate and talk about.

• Role play and dressing up, visits to parks, shops, or libraries encourage children to take on roles, meet others and express feelings and thoughts.

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“Although most infants do not learn to talk until their second year, their voices are there for us to hear from birth.”

Rouse Selleck (1995)*

“A child’s first word has behind it a history of listening, observing and experimenting with sounds and highly selective imitations of people.”

Whitehead (2002)**
Planning and resourcing

- Plan time to listen to young babies’ first attempts to use language and provide resources such as a shiny ball, bell, teddy and encourage them to respond vocally.
- Pretend play with materials such as dolls, tea sets, cardboard boxes encourages imitation, labelling and symbolic understanding (one thing standing for another).
- Plan play activities and provide resources which encourage young children to engage in symbolic play; e.g. putting a ‘baby’ to bed and talking to it appropriately.
- Provide play experiences, visits and group activity which enable children to talk about their lives and feelings and try out other voices; e.g. farmer, bus driver, storybook character.

Meeting diverse needs

- Children who learn English as an additional language need the opportunity to ask questions and express thoughts and feelings in their first language as this is so closely linked to the development of understanding.
- Learn as much as you can about the particular disabilities of children in your setting; e.g. Autistic Spectrum Disorders, or physical disabilities such as a cleft palate which may result in communication difficulties.
- For children with learning disabilities, learning to talk may take longer because they can find it difficult to make sense of the meaning of sounds. Patient practitioners, willing to find out more about the disability and encourage meaning-making, contribute to the development of confidence and competence.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Babies need their key person to follow the pattern, tone, rhythm and meaning of their communications. The importance of this is sometimes overlooked.
- Children’s language development requires two-way exchanges. Answering “Why?” questions can be demanding. Videos, books and stories, however captivating, do not provide this.
- It’s not always easy to find time to join in with role-play, yet children’s language development benefits greatly from adult involvement.
- Freeing up time to be with children and learn as much as possible about their ways of communicating is difficult but requires careful planning.

Case study

Eighteen month old Ben is playing with his key person, Leroy, on the floor. Leroy has hidden the toy car with which Ben had been playing behind his back. Although he had seen this happen he was not very happy that it had disappeared. He looked at Leroy enquiringly and said “car?” “Come and find it Ben. Where’s Ben’s car?” asked Leroy. “Ben, car”, he replied, walking towards him and peering behind his back. Finding his car, he let out a delighted squeal. “Car, Ben” he announced, holding it up in triumph.
A Skilful Communicator
Listening and Responding

Focuses on:
- Listening and responding appropriately to the language of others

Including:
- Listening and paying attention to what others say
- Making playful and serious responses
- Enjoying and sharing stories, songs, rhymes and games
- Learning about words and meanings

"Whether it involves children, babies or adults, interpersonal communication is a two way process... Listening to children shows our respect for them and builds their self esteem." 
Petrie (1997)“

Development matters

- Long before young babies can communicate verbally, they listen to, distinguish and respond to intonations in adults' voices.
- In a familiar context, with a key person, babies can understand and respond to the different things said to them.
- Young children are able to respond to simple requests and grasp meaning from context or situation.
- Children learn new words very rapidly and are able to use them in talking about matters which interest them.

Effective practice

- Encourage playfulness, turn-taking and responses, including peek-a-boo and rhymes with young babies.
- Talk to babies about what you are doing throughout the day, so they will link words with actions; e.g. welcoming, preparing lunch.
- Be available to explore and talk about things which interest young children indoors and outdoors, and listen to and respond to their questions, both serious and playful.
- Extend the range of stories, songs, games and rhymes from their own and other cultures and languages.

Look, listen, note

- Note the ways in which the gestures and sounds of very young babies change when you respond to them.
- Note the ways in which babies show you they have understood your request and note their responses to you.
- Different kinds of activities encourage young children to listen and respond. Observe young children's reactions in play, to music, story, rhymes, TV and computer activities.
- Note how children begin to use words in context; e.g. in questioning, imitating with understanding, playing, negotiating.

Play and practical support

- Have fun with babies by making a game of everyday activities; e.g. waiting for fingers to pop out of a sleeve, or head through a vest when dressing.
- Provide tapes of rhymes and stories, sounds and nursery rhymes, spoken words; some that require young babies to respond, others that engage them to listen.
- Use puppets and other props to encourage listening and responding; e.g. when singing a familiar song, asking questions, joining in young children's play. Encourage repetition.
- Use familiar photographs to introduce new words and encourage responses from children.

Planning and resourcing

- Plan time to have ‘conversations’ with young babies.
- Create an environment which invites responses from babies and adults; e.g. touching, smiling, smelling, feeling, listening, exploring, describing, sharing.
- Include things which excite young children’s curiosity; e.g. hats, bubbles, shells, seeds and snails.
- Create ‘story sacks’ which contain puppets, pictures, props to go with familiar stories, and which children can take home.

Meeting diverse needs

- Children with severe communication difficulties should be encouraged to use non-verbal ways of making contact, and to feel that their attempts to listen and respond are being valued.
- The kinds of verbal messages about gender, ethnicity, ability, language etc. which young children hear affect their self worth either positively or negatively.
- Children need to know that their home language is valued without being pressured to respond in a particular way.
- Listening and responding involves encouragement, valuing, appreciating and having appropriate expectations.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Involving families and sharing information so that the early conversations of babies and older children (either verbal or nonverbal) are celebrated. A diary or notebook kept by both setting, childminder and home is useful for recording interesting events and developments in order to share them with others.
- Widening children’s experience of listening and responding to different adults might be difficult to organise. Taking children to a playgroup is one way in which childminders meet this challenge.

Case study

Nine month old Emily listened intently as Debbie, her key person, told her a story, pointing to her toes and wiggling them; moving her fingers as she gripped her hand, indicating her toes and ears as she incorporated these into the tale. Emily fixed her with her eyes and, each time she paused, responded with a delighted gurgle encouraging her to continue. When she finished she broke into a long ‘story’ of her own, moving her hand up and down as Debbie had done with hers, gripping her fingers tightly.
A Skilful Communicator

Making Meaning

Focuses on

- Understanding and being understood
  - Communicating meaning
  - Influencing others
  - Negotiating and making choices
  - Understanding each other

Development matters

- From the very beginning of life, young babies convey messages about what they want and need, as well as how they feel.
- Babies learn that their voice and actions have effects on others and they strive to share meanings.
- Young children use actions and words to make and justify choices and influence the behaviour and responses of others.
- As vocabulary increases, children make sense of the world through bargaining, negotiating, questioning, describing and labelling.

Look, listen, note

- Note how young babies influence adult behaviour and the ways in which different adults respond.
- Try to understand and note the personal words babies create as they begin to develop language.
- Note the ways in which young children negotiate with adults and other children and the circumstances in which this takes place.
- From what children do and say, note how they show what they understand; e.g. actions, questions, new words.

Effective practice

- Try to "tune into" the different messages young babies are attempting to convey. Share your interpretations with parents and other staff.
- Respond to what babies show they're interested in and want to do by providing activities, stories and games.
- Respect young children's choices and encourage their growing ability to negotiate and bargain with you.
- Talk to children about choices, reasons for doing things in a certain way and explain why sometimes you say "no".

Play and practical support

- Let young babies know you understand what they're saying; e.g. when they are hungry, tired, happy, sad, lonely.
- Provide opportunities for babies to make choices; e.g. which spoon to choose, which bib to wear, the size of paintbrush to use, to go outdoors or stay in.
- Display and discuss photographs with young children which convey specific messages; e.g. a child in conflict with an adult, taking on a role, choosing a biscuit.
- Provide play situations in which children can take on different roles and adults can help them to communicate; e.g. home, shop, hospital play.

"Children are enthusiastic to struggle to make meaning of adults' communications and they need to encounter adults who are equally enthusiastic to make meaning of their communication."
Efer, Goldschmied & Selleck (2002)
Planning and resourcing

- Plan time to talk in depth to parents about how their young baby communicates needs.
- Share with parents and other practitioners the specific interests and concerns of the babies for whom you are responsible.
- Plan opportunities which allow children to make and discuss their choices with regard to food, activities, people and visits.
- Plan stories, songs, rhymes, visits and visitors to encourage children to learn that other people have different views from theirs.

Meeting diverse needs

- It is important to be aware that family and culture influence the way in which children's abilities to negotiate and bargain are encouraged.
- For a child with a language impairment or communication disorder, sharing meanings is important; e.g. using a combination of signs and words.
- For children using non-verbal rather than spoken language, provide a range of opportunities for them to communicate ideas, make choices, negotiate a role; e.g. by use of photographs of activities from which to select, or pictures of food for choosing meals.

Challenges and dilemmas

- For babies and children who cannot talk, the only way they can indicate refusal may be by turning away or screaming. Keeping calm and respecting this message can be challenging for the practitioner.
- Saying "no" can be an expression of a child's growing independence: something to be celebrated but also frustrating for parents and practitioners.
- Though worrying for the adult, standing back rather than intervening immediately, gives children a chance to resolve their minor disputes.

Case study

Richard, a two and a half year old, has an Autistic Spectrum Disorder. He can say a few words in imitation of adults but doesn't use them spontaneously. Although his parents feel he understands much of what they say, he cannot express his own needs and wishes. Helped by the Portage worker, he's been taught to point to things he wants in picture books.

His mum recently found him, alone in the kitchen, pointing at a cupboard. This suggests Richard doesn't understand that communication requires a partner. He now has symbols or photographs of things he likes to eat and drink which he gives to his mother, father or childminder to indicate what he wants. In this way he is able to communicate meaning more effectively.
A Competent Learner

Making Connections

Focuses on

- Connecting ideas and understanding the world
- Making connections through the senses and movement
- Finding out about the environment and other people
- Becoming playfully engaged and involved
- Making patterns, comparing, categorising, classifying

Development matters

- Young babies use movement and sensory exploration to connect with their immediate environment.
- As they become more mobile babies connect with toys, objects and a wider group of people.
- Young children learn through repeating patterns of play (sometimes called Schema). See CD-ROM
- Children begin to connect objects and ideas: a pair of socks, a big teddy, armbands for swimming.

Look, listen, note

- How young babies use their senses to investigate your hair, jewellery, own clothes.
- How a baby explores open-ended resources such as cardboard boxes, tubing, floaty scarves.
- Note connections in young children’s movements and activities: e.g. how they paint in circles, run in circles.
- Note those children who distinguish between big and small blocks, or know, when tidying up, that different kinds of toys go in different containers.

Effective practice

- Follow young babies’ lead as they explore their environment, people and resources.
- Accept babies’ pace of learning and give them time to make connections.
- Provide stimulating materials for young children to match, sort, classify and categorise; e.g. shades of paint to their skin colour, sorting and counting animals during play with a farmyard or zoo.
- Use everyday experiences to help children count and focus on patterns and shapes.

Play and practical support

- Use feeding, changing and bathing time to play with young babies; e.g. finger play, such as ‘Round And Round The Garden’.
- Provide resources for babies to play with; e.g. pots and pans, wooden blocks, soft toys.
- Make a diary of photographs with a young child to record an important occasion; e.g. finding a worm or visiting a special place.
- Thoroughly investigate environments with children; e.g. when outside, consider how to shift leaves off a path, enlarge a puddle, collect water dripping from a tap.


“...children make predictions, they do experiments, they try to explain what they see, and they formulate new theories based on what they already know.”
Gopnik, Meitoff & Kuhl (1999)*
Planning and resourcing

- Regularly change the picture over the changing area so young babies have new things to look at when being changed.
- Plan activities and space where babies are free to move, roll, stretch and explore.
- Plan opportunities for exploring interesting objects and resources together; e.g., vegetables, textured material, household objects.
- Provide magnetic boards for play with shape, number and sequence, and collect bags and baskets of patterned material and wallpaper; e.g., gingham, polka dot, stripes etc.

Meeting diverse needs

- Help a child familiarise themselves with a new setting through using visits, pictures of people and places they will encounter when they start, or giving them quiet time to explore with a supportive adult.
- For some children the world is their home language, family and street. Use this prior experience to help them connect to new experiences.
- Girls and boys often play in different ways, but some differences are learned. Role models of caring and strong females and males help them go beyond stereotyped limits.
- Give children with hearing or visual impairment additional experiences to support their growing understanding of objects and people. Provide children with physical disabilities with materials that are easily accessed and with resources that meet individual needs.

Challenges and dilemmas

- We are sometimes torn between giving a baby time and the demands of a busy day. This might be solved by having a baby near you and talking with him/her while you prepare a feed.
- Encouraging passive or shy children to become exploratory (see Case Study).
- Giving each child time to follow personal interests and make connections, even if this means adapting routines.
- How to give children time and choice indoors and outdoors within required adult-child ratios.

Case study

A two year old new to nursery, Ella, was reluctant to move away from Hyacinth, her key person, preferring to stay close hugging teddy. Hyacinth noticed however that she loved talking about what the bear could do. Hyacinth suggested to Ella that they teach teddy to find his way around the nursery. They took photographs as teddy explored the nursery and made a book for him.

Ella’s confidence grew. She began fetching things for teddy and going out to play with other children and telling him she would return. After six weeks Hyacinth wrote in Ella’s record: “Ella has begun to enjoy nursery. She talks to other adults and looks forward to playing with Rashida, her new friend. Ella likes to point to an activity or area, before leading Rashida off to play.” This experience with the teddy has helped Ella to become playfully engaged and involved, and in doing so to find out about the environment.
A Competent Learner

Being Creative

Focuses on:
- Responding to the world creatively
  - Exploring and discovering
  - Experimenting with sound, other media and movement
  - Developing competence and creativity
  - Being resourceful

Development matters

- Young babies explore their immediate environment of people, objects and feelings through all their senses.
- Babies quickly make sense of and respond to what they see, hear, feel, touch and smell.
- As young children become more mobile, they express themselves through physical action and sound.
- As children become more skilful in using language and other forms of communication, such as dance, music, 2D and 3D art, they talk about, and share in other ways, the things they paint, draw and play with.

Effective practice

- Encourage young babies to enjoy repetition in their movement, language, music and other sensory experiences.
- Provide opportunities for creative physical experiences for babies, such as bouncing, rolling and splashing both indoors and outdoors.
- Encourage independence as young children explore particular patterns of thought or movement, sometimes referred to as Schemas.
- Provide children with a range of materials to help them to represent their unique and individual perception of the world, unrestricted by adult ideas; e.g. rabbits need not have whiskers made of drinking straws.

Look, listen, note

- Note the novel ways young babies find out more about themselves and their environment as they become mobile.
- Observe the movements and sounds babies make as they explore materials such as musical instruments, paint, dough, glue and the space around them.
- Observe how young children create new situations in their play; e.g. combining materials such as sand and water and transporting them from one area to another.
- Watch how children with a specific sensory impairment use other senses in order to enjoy experiences.

Play and practical support

- Use finger play, rhymes and familiar songs from home to support young babies’ exploration and enjoyment in learning about their bodies and environment.
- Materials such as finger paint, PVA glue and wet play give babies the opportunity to delight in sensory exploration and mess making.
- Even the youngest children can, with support, relish playing with sand (both damp and dry), water and play dough.
- A collection of everyday objects such as wooden pegs, spoons, pans, corks, cones and boxes can be explored alone or shared with adults or other children.

*Where there are high quality opportunities for babies and toddlers to create and imagine..., the key person is attentive to a child’s creative explorations, providing assistance in a way that does not disrupt the child’s flow of thinking and through their unobtrusive support gives the child the emotional security to experiment.*

Manning-Morton & Thorp (2001)
Planning and resourcing

- Plan times when you can join in with young babies’ explorations of fingers, toes etc.
- Provide paints, brushes and protective clothes for babies to enjoy the colour, feel and experience of painting.
- Hats, bags, shoes, scarves, lengths of material and assorted dressing up clothes offer a choice of roles.
- Provide resources such as tins and boxes, pegs, lengths of chain, strips of beads etc. and note how children use them. These will help children to engage in Heuristic Play. See CD-ROM

Meeting diverse needs

- The materials offered should reflect a wide variety of cultural settings and allow children to experience many forms of creative expression.
- It is essential that children positively identify with young children of the same gender. However, this does not need to limit their creative play.
- Art, music and movement that is dance-like, may offer a means of self-expression and creativity when spoken language is difficult or not appropriate.
- Creative activity provides opportunities to be resourceful in finding different ways of doing and making things.

Challenges and dilemmas

- It is tempting to step in and teach young children how to hold tools; e.g. a paintbrush, crayons etc. before they have had a chance to try for themselves.
- Children like a challenge, but something that is too challenging will simply frustrate them.
- For young children the process of creating is more important than an end product. Be sure that everyone understands the importance of the process so that they do not expect ‘products’ from babies or very young children.
- When children do produce a painting, your response and the way it is displayed are important.

Case study

Megan (18 months) tentatively looks at wet paint being poured onto a table. She watches from a distance as the practitioner puts her fingers into the paint and slides them about. The adult sits down by the table and draws Megan into the circle of her arm towards the table. Megan watches other children but does not want to touch the paint herself. Only when the adult moves away does she touch it with one finger. Soon she is lost in the experience, whole palm in the paint, smoothing, sliding the wet, coloured liquid, making patterns with her fingers and eventually asking others to “Look, look!”
Being Imaginative

**Development matters**

- Young babies enjoy learning by imitating others.
- As they become mobile, babies use their whole bodies to recreate an experience.
- Young children re-enact familiar scenes with the help of people, props and resources.
- Children engage in concentrated imaginative play in which they extend their language and try out ideas, feelings, relationships and movements.

**Look, listen, note**

- Note the situations in which young babies mimic their key person’s facial expressions, movements and sounds.
- Note the differences between babies’ imitations and the bodily movements which they use to re-create a situation; e.g. bouncing on the adult’s knee.
- Look at the kinds of props and materials which young children use imaginatively – note anything you might add.
- Listen to the words children use in their imaginative play and note the learning they are displaying.

**Effective practice**

- Playful interactions in which young babies and adults imitate and mimic each other.
- Imaginative opportunities for babies to explore movement and materials which use all the senses, both alone and in a group.
- Provide resources which support young children’s imaginative learning; e.g. hats, scarves, boxes, materials.
- Adults who play and talk with children and who encourage them to express themselves imaginatively.

**Play and practical support**

- A playful adult is a valuable resource for a young baby. Even sticking out your tongue, wiggling your fingers and tickling is an important game for them.
- Discover from parents the imitative games their babies enjoy and use them as the basis of your play.
- Young children enjoy playing with real things. Telephones, pans and brushes provide a link with home and lead to imitative and imaginative play.
- Create spaces and opportunities for quiet and noisy play providing opportunities for adults and children to act as playmates, observers, initiators.

*In their play, babies and toddlers try out their recent learning, skills and competences. ...Although there is no pressure to perform, even babies, when they play, show their highest levels of learning.*

Bruce (2002)
Planning and resourcing

- Stimulate young babies’ imaginations using sound and movement.
- Plan to engage with babies in pretend play focusing on everyday activities; e.g. ironing, driving, cooking, shopping.
- Provide materials which encourage young children to pretend without your intervention; e.g. a real telephone, old camera, cooking equipment, blankets and tents outdoors.
- Collect together ‘small world’ materials; e.g. animals, people, trees, tracks, farmyards etc. for children to play with and talk about.

Meeting diverse needs

- Young children may express feelings in a role play situation. Any concerns relating to their safety, protection or special needs should be shared with other professionals.
- For those learning English as an additional language, imaginative play provides rich opportunities to practise in a non-threatening environment.
- Taking photographs (for instance, of constructions such as tall towers) can provide an opportunity for children to recall the experience.
- A diversity of materials can encourage positive feelings and ensure that children with different needs are catered for; e.g. materials which appeal to all the senses for children with learning difficulties or sensory impairment; dolls, puppets, books which reflect children and families from different cultures.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Young children sometimes imitate the less desirable actions of others. Consider how to distract attention and offer a more positive experience.
- It is important to strike a balance between leaving babies to play uninterrupted, risking boredom, and intervening when they need more time to explore.
- Young children play with deep concentration, often in ways adults consider messy. To get things into perspective, remember that, for children, play is a basic need.
- Safety considerations are important but should not be allowed to prevent rich opportunities for imaginative outdoor play, especially for children with disabilities who may be thought to be more at risk.

Case study

Two year old Anna shares a cup of pretend tea with her teddy and key worker Sam. Anna drinks, then holds the cup to Teddy’s mouth. She offers it to Sam who says “Ooh, how lovely, tea for me”. Sam pretends to sip, then says “It’s a bit hot. I’ll put some milk in to cool it down”. She picks up a jug and pretends to add milk. Anna watches carefully, then picks up a cup, looks at Teddy and says “hot”. She pours milk into the cup before offering it to Teddy. As she does so she says, “no hot”, shaking her head.
A Competent Learner

Representing

Focuses on
- Responding to the world with marks and symbols
  - Exploring, experimenting and playing
  - Discovering that one thing can stand for another
  - Creating and experimenting with one’s own symbols and marks
  - Recognising that others may use marks differently

Development matters
- Young babies discover mark-making by chance, noticing for instance that fingers trailed through spilt juice can extend it.
- Babies imitate and improvise actions they have observed – a scarf is made to stand for a blanket or a plastic cone for a microphone.
- As young children explore tools and materials they make marks to which they give meaning.
- Children begin to recognise some marks and realise these mean something to others.

Look, listen, note
- Observe babies and children as they make marks in food, water, spilt drinks etc. How do they respond to what they have done? Do they repeat the action?
- Observe the early marks babies and children make when given a crayon or brush for the first time.
- Note examples of young children using one thing to stand for another; e.g. a box for a car.
- Note all the marks that children make and how they ‘tell’ you what their ‘products’ mean.

Effective practice
- Talk to babies and children about the patterns and marks they make, showing them that you value what they do.
- Provide varied resources to anticipate what babies and children might need to represent their experiences.
- Give young children who are keen to represent the same experience repeatedly a range of mark-making materials.
- Provide materials which reflect a cultural spread so that children see symbols and marks with which they are familiar; e.g. Arabic script on bags from the local shop, Chinese writing on a poster or introduce a ‘feely’ book for a child who is blind.

Play and practical support
- Use gloop (corn flour and water) in small trays so babies and children can enjoy making marks in it.
- Draw attention to marks, signs and symbols in the environment and talk about what they represent.
- Discuss with young children what their marks represent and help them to understand that print carries meaning.
- Focus on meaningful print such as the child’s name, favourite cereal or book, in order to discuss similarities and differences between symbols.

“Children need to represent their experiences, their feelings, and ideas if they are to preserve them and share them with others. When we represent we make an object or symbol stand for something else.”
Duffy (1998)
Planning and resourcing

- Observe when, how and why babies and children name or label what they have made.
- Provide tools that imprint texture and depth in clay, dough or wet sand (rollers, pastry trimmers, moulded rubber etc.).
- Have a range of markers, felt pens, deodorant rollers filled with paint to give children a variety of materials for their mark-making.
- Provide a variety of books and pictures, magnetic and floating foam letters, felt and wooden alphabet symbols, to help children recognise symbols and talk to adults about their meanings.
- Provide ‘tool boxes’ containing mark-making materials for use throughout the indoor and outdoor areas.

Meeting diverse needs

- Symbols and pictures which represent home experiences, language and culture help children recognise they are valued and recognised.
- All children enjoy the sensory experience of making marks with fingers and toes in damp sand, paste, paint. This is particularly important for visually impaired children.
- Encourage boys to engage in activities involving mark-making, print and representation.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Recognising and valuing the early marks children make with their fingers in food and drink is not always easy when it is also messy.
- Being involved in children’s exploration of shape and pattern and talking with them takes time, but helps adults interpret the marks they make.
- Resisting formality and making sure that children experience the beginnings of reading and writing in the ways described here is challenging for adults.

Case study

Malachi, aged twenty-six months, is sitting with his key worker as she makes notes whilst observing another child. He takes a piece of paper and a crayon and begins to make his own marks, whilst looking at the same child.
A Healthy Child
Emotional Well-being

Focuses on

- Emotional stability and resilience
  - Being special to someone
  - Being able to express feelings
  - Developing healthy dependence
  - Developing healthy independence

Development matters

- Young babies are social beings. They crave close attachments with a special person within their setting.

- Warm, mutual, affirmative relationships give babies the courage to express their feelings.

- When young children have a close relationship with a caring and responsive adult, they explore from a safe place to which they can return.

- As children learn to do things for themselves they gain confidence, knowing that the adult is close by, ready to support and help if needed.

Look, listen, note

- Observe and note the sounds and facial expressions young babies make in response to affectionate attention from their parent or their key person.

- Note verbal and non-verbal expressions of feelings which take place when babies are changed, fed, cuddled etc.

- Observe sounds and facial expressions as young children express feelings of frustration, anger or as they separate from a carer.

- Note examples of healthy independence; e.g. a child playing happily with building blocks, or looking through a window.

Effective practice

- Key person and parent handing the young baby directly to each other at the beginning and end of each day.

- Establish shared understandings between home and setting about ways of responding to babies' emotions.

- Flexible routines which allow young children to pursue their interests can reduce incidents of frustration and conflict.

- Recognition that children need a predictable environment in which to feel safe and that their independence may be affected temporarily by changes of staff or by moving to another room.

Play and practical support

- Introduce baby massage sessions to reduce stress and make young babies feel nurtured and valued.

- Collect and share stories and songs which parents and babies use at home.

- Through play, young children can explore emotions beyond their normal range. Even reading about ‘going on a bear hunt’ can benefit a timid child.

- Provide stories, pictures and puppets, which allow children to experience and talk about feelings.

"Physical care and loving attention is required in different ways as a toddler becomes mobile.... exploratory behaviour... take the child away as she crawls, walks and inspects the world around her. The educator is required not only to protect the child through closeness, but also to let go to encourage growing autonomy."

Selleck & Griffin (1998)
Planning and resourcing

- Provide a sofa or comfy chair in the room or entrance so that parents, practitioners and babies can sit together.
- A photograph board is a useful way to show parents and children who will be working in the group today.
- Keep toys and comforters in areas which are important to each child.
- Plan times when staff can talk together about children’s expressions of feelings.
- Plan specific times when babies and children of different ages are together with their key person.

Meeting diverse needs

- Ensure that, when children move between settings, a key person in each setting welcomes them on arrival.
- Babies can sometimes become attached to an older child as their special person in mixed age groups and can get value from this relationship. A relationship with a key adult remains important.
- Valuing children’s race, cultural identity and gender by choosing appropriate resources, activities and experiences, increases their sense of belonging and contributes positively to their emotional well-being.
- Key persons need to be able to work with any family, not just those who speak the same home language.
- Activities which provide small steps to be achieved will support all children, including those with disabilities, thus reducing frustration and supporting them to become independent.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Ensuring that there is always a person who is special to them supports children’s sense of well-being. See CD-ROM
- Some children find it hard to cope with the inevitable staff absences. They need extra support and, if possible, preparation to deal with these.
- Children inevitably experience anger and frustration. How might you change provision and practice in order to reduce outbursts and support them?
- When a child’s independence is developing, they may reject offers of help. Try not to see this as personal rejection but as progress.

Case study

7.30 a.m. Christine hurries into the day care centre with 18 month old Jon, still in pyjamas. She sits on the sofa provided at the entrance and begins to dress Jon in clothes she has brought with her. Leyla, Jon’s key person, comes to welcome them and Jon beams at Leyla, putting out his arms for the milk she has brought. Leyla pours Christine a cup of coffee, gives her a piece of toast (Christine has not had time for breakfast) and sits to talk with them both. Christine, happy, leaves and Jon goes with Leyla into his room to start the day.
A Healthy Child
Growing and Developing

Development matters

- Young babies thrive when both their nutritional and emotional needs are met.
- For babies and children, rest and sleep are as important as food.
- Young children have a biological drive to use their bodies and develop their physical skills.
- Children only gradually gain control of their whole bodies.

Look, listen, note

- Note young babies' hunger patterns and how they regulate the speed and intensity with which they suck.
- Observe how babies' behaviour changes as they get tired and require sleep.
- Note how young children develop large motor skills for walking, climbing or jumping.
- Look for ways in which children begin to develop fine motor skills; e.g., the way they use their fingers in trying to do up buttons on a coat, pull up a zip, pour a drink, use a watering can.

Effective practice

- Encourage and facilitate mothers to breastfeed their babies.
- Treat mealtimes as an opportunity to help children to enjoy their food and become independent in feeding themselves.
- Learn to recognise the signs of tiredness in babies, children and adults.
- Support, supervise and become involved as babies and children try out their developing skills.
- Support children's growing independence as they strive to gain control of their bladders and bowels by offering flexible routines, and by encouraging and valuing effort.

Play and practical support

- Encourage the young baby to gradually share control of the bottle. This provides opportunities for sensory learning and increased independence.
- Provide a comfortable, accessible place where babies can rest or sleep when they want to.
- Make opportunities for young children to feed themselves using fingers, forks and spoons.
- Offer choices for children in terms of potties, small toilets, trainer seats, steps and recognise and support their fascination with bodily functions.


"The most important factors for healthy development are that you should recognise the skills a child has developed and provide plenty of opportunities to practise them."

Bruce & Meggitt (2002)
Planning and resourcing

- Plan feeding times which take account of the individual cultural and feeding needs of babies and children in your group, e.g. discuss with parents ways in which they would like the weaning phase to be handled.
- Plan alternative activities for babies and children who do not need sleep when others do.
- Provide a range of everyday objects to be sucked, pulled, squeezed and held, to encourage exploration and development of physical skills.
- Provide safe outdoor experiences which challenge and support the development of both large and small movements.

Meeting diverse needs

- Mealtimes which are inclusive and culturally relevant value all children and respect their individual needs and differences.
- Provision of furniture which enables a child with physical disabilities to eat with other children recognises the importance of mealtimes as a social occasion for everyone.
- If the baby cannot see the bottle, shaking it before touching the baby's lips helps the baby to anticipate it is coming.
- Outdoor exploration and testing of physical abilities is important for all children. A sensitive, supportive adult can help children experience and achieve pleasure and control in sensations and movement.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Although it is important to allow babies and young children, including those with complex needs, to feed themselves, mess and experimentation are inevitable consequences of this.
- Manipulating spoons and chewing food is tiring, though rewarding for babies and small children. Some may give up too soon, remain hungry and require extra support.
- For busy adults it is often tempting to talk over the heads of babies at feeding times. Try to involve children in conversations.
- Achieving a balance between a baby's need for sleep and what adults have planned for them requires practitioners and parents to work closely together.

Case study

One nursery provides opportunities for parents, staff and children, some with disabilities, to eat together. Meals and snacks are well balanced and nourishing and include: carrot, pieces of fruit, raisins, sultanas, bread to be eaten with the fingers alongside mashed potato, rice, stewed fruit, ice cream and other food to be eaten with a spoon. Adapted from Lindon, Helman & Sharp (2001)

Bruce & Meggitt (2000) suggest that mealtimes can also provide a valuable opportunity to further the child's social development by promoting:

- Listening and other conversational skills.
- Independence and confidence in eating and serving food.
- Courtesy towards each other and turn taking.
- A shared experience which provides a social focus for the child's day.
- Self-esteem — the child's family and cultural background are valued through their mealtime traditions.
A Healthy Child
Keeping Safe

Focuses on

Being safe and protected
Including:
- Discovering boundaries and limits
- Learning about rules
- Knowing when and how to ask for help
- Learning when to say no and anticipating when others will do so

Development matters

Young babies make strong and purposeful movements. They tend not to stay in the position in which they were placed.

Beginning to walk, climb and run with little sense of danger, babies focus on what they want.

Given opportunities to practise what they can do in safe surroundings, young children learn some sense of danger.

Children’s need for affection, attention and being special in some way makes them particularly vulnerable in relation to keeping safe.

Effective practice

- Provide opportunities for babies and children to have choice in an environment kept safe by knowledgeable adults who know there should be a balance between freedom and safe limits.
- Demonstrate clear and consistent boundaries and reasonable yet challenging expectations.
- Have agreed procedures outlining how to respond to changes in children’s behaviour. Be aware of current information regarding child protection and know how to implement procedures when necessary.
- Maintain regular, informal communication with parents which develops strong partnerships between all those involved in keeping children safe.

Look, listen, note

- Observe the ways in which young babies show determination in going for what they want.
- Note the ways in which babies indicate what they need, including help from the adults.
- Note anything which tells you about a young child’s concerns and preoccupations.
- Note the way in which children respond to different people. Always listen to what they tell adults about their experiences.

Play and practical support

- For young babies, provide different arrangements of toys and soft play materials to encourage crawling, hiding, peeping.
- Provide puppets, role-play materials and songs and rhymes which help babies and children focus on who they can trust. Let them know the importance of sharing their fears with an adult.
- Have transparent boxes, clearly labelled with a picture outline of the object, or the real object stuck on, so children can see where things belong and can return them safely.
- Talk with parents about a consistent approach when responding to challenging behaviour such as scratching and biting.

Planning and resourcing

- Plan flexible arrangements of equipment and materials for babies and children that can be used in a variety of ways to maintain interest and challenge.
- Plan to involve children in helping to tidy away and be involved in the preparation of snacks and food.
- Plan activities to enable children to learn who to ask for help.
- Meet with others to discuss ways of helping children to understand the need for boundaries.

Meeting diverse needs

- When other children are climbing, exploring and running, a child with a physical disability may become frustrated and will require sensitive adult support, additional resources or adaptations to equipment.
- Children who have limited opportunity to play, particularly outdoors, may lack a sense of danger.
- Children with a hearing or visual impairment and children who are learning English as an additional language will require cues, signs or pictures in the environment (indoors and outdoors) to be safe and to know what is available.
- Liaising with others where there are concerns about children’s development, protection or welfare is crucial.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Following the children’s lead is not the same as losing control – adults always remain responsible for setting boundaries and keeping children safe.
- Overprotectiveness can limit children’s capacity to learn how to protect themselves from harm.
- Speaking out about concerns is important, even if they prove to be groundless.
- Recognising and acting on non-verbal signals from children, especially those who are unable to voice their anxieties, feelings and concerns whilst maintaining sensitivity to others involved.

Case study

Two year old Mary is from a large family where her older brothers and sisters always help her, whether she is playing, getting dressed or eating. Since she is never allowed to express her needs she has become very passive. She is very small and the older children at nursery love to try to pick her up. On Monday morning, after the children have been playing in the outdoor area, some marks on her legs become apparent to Elsie, her key person, when she is changing her nappy. Elsie asks Mary about the bruises, and because she is in a hurry, rather than wait for an answer, she says to Mary “Did they do it, when you were outside?” to which Mary turns her head away. On reflection, Elsie decided to pursue this with other staff. She talked to them to try to discover whether the marks on Mary’s shins had happened in the nursery. No one had seen anything happen. Elsie noted the conversations and her concerns and, following child protection procedures, consulted the named person in her setting responsible for child protection issues.
A Healthy Child

Healthy Choices

Focuses on
- Being able to make choices
  - Discovering and learning about their body
  - Demonstrating individual preferences
  - Making decisions
  - Becoming aware of others and their needs

Development matters
- From birth, young babies show preferences for people and for what they want to see, hear and taste.
- Babies continually discover more about what they like and dislike.
- As young children become more mobile and their boundaries widen, they make choices that can involve real risk. Adults need to ensure their safety, whilst not inhibiting the risk-taking.
- Children become more aware that choices have consequences.

Effective practice
- Provide opportunities for babies and children to make choices without overwhelming them.
- Value and support the decisions children make and then go on to encourage them to try something else, recognising that one decision leads to another.
- Create time to discuss options so that children really do have choices: e.g. whether they will drink water, juice or milk.
- Engage with parents in discussions about the choices offered within the setting.

Look, listen, note
- Observe the strategies young babies use to demonstrate their likes and dislikes.
- Note how the environment (setting and adults) supports or might limit babies in expressing preferences and making choices.
- Note how you react when a young child makes a choice you do not consider to be healthy; e.g. a child making a gun from building blocks, children always bringing sweet things to eat at snack time.
- Watch the way children choose not to do things, as well as choose to do them. Note any patterns in what children consistently choose to do.

Play and practical support
- Allow time to observe what babies and children do when presented with several options.
- Talk to children about the choices they have made and encourage them to find new areas to discover.
- Support children in accepting choices made by other children and adults, even when this limits their own choice.
- Provide non-specific play materials such as boxes and blankets so that play can move in different directions.

“Infants and toddlers in group care have no choice about being in childcare. Each part of the day, however, presents opportunities for choices and decisions they can make—what to hold, look at, or whether, how and how long to participate in an activity... Making these choices and decisions on a daily basis and being able to change their mind from one day to the next tends to give children a sense of control over their day.”
Post & Hohmann (2000)
Planning and resourcing

- Provide stimulating, accessible materials which minimise risk and maximise opportunity; e.g. tactile surfaces for young children to explore.
- Recognise that outdoor provision presents rich choices for babies and children and include this opportunity in your planning; e.g. streamers, bubbles and windmills in a windy day box.
- Duplicate materials and resources to reduce conflict; e.g. two bikes, two copies of the same book, two watering cans.
- Provide natural resources for children to choose and explore the properties of the materials and their own developing skill in using them.

Meeting diverse needs

- Supporting parents to recognise that children with sensory impairment or learning difficulties, like all children, will have a favourite place, activity or toy.
- Consider ways in which you provide for children with disabilities to make choices and express preferences about their carers and activities.
- Discussion and information-sharing with parents whose home language is not English takes time but is essential.

Challenges and dilemmas

- Health and safety may sometimes be seen as a block to the provision of wide choices.
- Providing opportunities for choice and decision-making may involve finding time for team discussions and agreements.
- Consider when and where children have to share or are allowed to play in parallel and when it is appropriate for them not to have to share.
- Accepting that children have the right to express choices, even when this conflicts with adults’ views of what is appropriate; e.g. not feeling rejected by the child who chooses to be with a particular adult other than their key worker, a boy who persistently chooses to wear a dress, a girl who seldom chooses to go outdoors.

Case study

Laura, a two and a half year old with severe learning difficulties, explores a length of chain during heuristic play. See CD-ROM. She repeatedly pulls it back and forwards across her mouth, constantly watching the adult and checking her response. When viewing this sequence on video, Laura’s mum explained “I know why she keeps on looking at you, she’s waiting to see if you will react like I do, and say ‘stop putting things in your mouth!’”

By viewing the video sequence with the parent, the adult was able to share this experience with the parent and to talk about what Laura enjoyed doing and her responses and choices.