Tuning in to Two Year Olds

Improving Outcomes for Two Year Olds

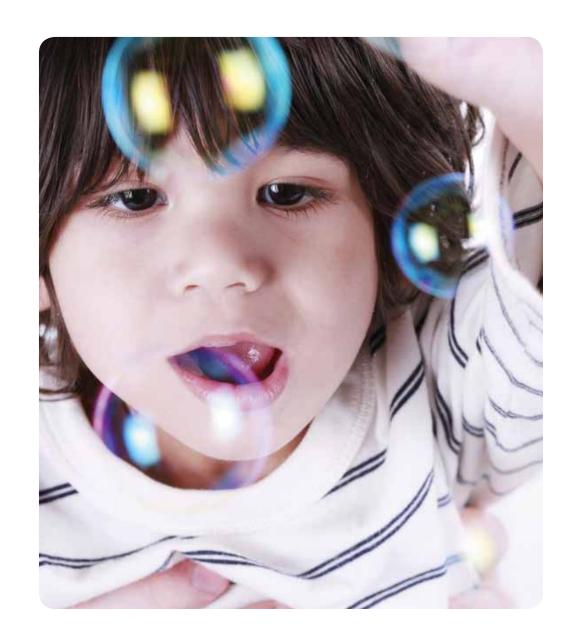*Harrow*COUNCIL LONDON

4Children

Contents

Introduction

This booklet for practitioners was commissioned by the London Borough of Harrow from 4Children, as part of their 'Improving Outcomes for Two Year Olds' project. It aims to celebrate the unique characteristics and development of children who are two years old, and to show how exciting and dynamic this period of each child's life can be. Children go through incredible changes, when their brains grow more rapidly than they ever will again - at times a million connections are forming every second between their brain cells. We hope to show that if children are supported through these changes by a close partnership between parents[1] and practitioners who share the wonder and excitement of two year olds, this can have a life - long impact on children's learning, and on their enjoyment of life.

More two year olds than ever are being offered the opportunity to access early years education in nurseries, pre-schools, and schools, and with childminders. In England, 40% of two year olds are now eligible for free, part-time early education. Eligibility criteria include children living in low income households, children who are Looked After by the local authority or adopted, and children with special educational needs and disabilities.

One of the Government's key goals in funding this offer is to narrow the gap in attainment between children from the lowest income families and those from middle income families. The Sutton Trust[2] found that there is up to a 19 month gap in the level of development between the least and most advantaged children at age five. A key aim of the funding for high quality early years education for the most disadvantaged two year olds is to reduce this gap.

The Graham Allen Report on Early Intervention states that[3]; *'Early Intervention to promote social and emotional development can significantly improve mental and physical health, educational attainment and employment opportunities'*.

But have we thought enough about what two year olds need, how they learn and what this means?

What is being offered is not just a 'place' for a two year old but an opportunity for some of the child's first significant relationships outside of the family home. It is within those relationships that children will flourish and learn, so how we offer that opportunity is crucial.

'Being two is not easy. At times you feel big and strong. You declare your independence in all kinds of ways; you want to be respected and given space. Other times you feel small and vulnerable; the world looms large and scary. You want to be held and hugged and treated like the baby you used to be. Sometimes your special grown ups just don't get it, and then you fly apart!'[4]

What do adults say about two year olds?

Mischief, playful, emotional, loving, superb, adventurous, hyperactive, funny, playful, fantastic, amazing, innovative, inquisitive, versatile, caring, good explorer, story makers, helpful, curious, inquisitive

(practitioner contributions to Harrow 'Tuning in to Two Year Olds' training August 2014).

1   Throughout this book, 'parents' refers to parents and carers with parental responsibility
2   Washbrook, E. & Waldfogel, J. (2012) Achievement gaps in childhood: A cross-national perspective, Presentation to the Sutton Trust/ Carnegie Corportation Summit on Social Mobility, May 2012
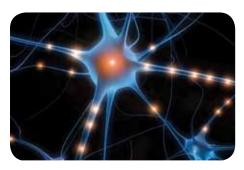3   Graham Allen (2011) Early Intervention; The Next Steps. (HMSO)
4   Community Playthings (2013) A good place to be Two. Community Playthings
     http://www.communityplaythings.co.uk/learning-library/training-resources/a-good-place-to-be-two

Building a two year old brain

'The brain of a toddler is fizzing with activity. But all this activity is happening in a brain not yet equipped to make sense of it. In the second and third years of life the brain is still developing very quickly but this development is now focused on organising all the frantic activity going on in the toddler brain.'[5]

It is not only in the Prime Areas of development - Communication and Language, Personal, Social and Emotional and Physical development -that two year olds are making significant steps[6]. It is the area of brain development that underpins all of this. The way that children become life-long learners is already being influenced and shaped by the way their brain is making connections across and between all areas. The brain has many different parts with different jobs.

In order for two year olds to become life-long learners and to be resilient, prepared, and motivated for future learning opportunities, the foundations for all parts of the brain need to be integrated and capable of working together. Part of this development is known as 'Executive Function', which includes working memory, inhibitory control and flexible thinking. This, alongside emotional regulation, provides the keys to open the doors of learning.

What is happening in a two year olds brain?

A two year olds brain still has much to do in relation to these functions. It is through repeated experiences with their parents, key people and other children that they develop the capacity to use these functions. Executive functions continue to develop through the life time. Of particular importance is the need for two year olds to experience consistent and reliable feedback from trusted adults about their actions. This process is referred to as 'Social referencing', which can be seen when a young child glances at a known and trusted adult to seek approval for something they are about to do. This is the beginning of learning social boundaries, as well as a sense of empathy. A two year old will often shift between impulse and action without using the 'pause' button before acting. The child's ability to pause before acting develops gradually through repeated, supported interactions with attuned adults.

Amazing facts about the growing brain

- A baby is born with all of the brain cells they will need for their life time (100 billion)
- A baby's brain processes information about 16 times slower than the adult brain
- A baby's brain doubles in weight and size in the first year
- At times in the first 2 years of life the brain is making a million connections every second
- In the first 3 years the brain is growing more rapidly than it ever will again
- 'Resting periods', when the brain is less involved with external tasks but is nonetheless very active, are important in development[3]
- *'We can therefore conceive sleep, not just as a rest period , but also as a cognitive process in which activity in certain brain regions play a critical role in learning and memory throughout a lifetime.'[7]*
- Connections between brain cells continue to develop through the life time.

5   Kate Cairns Associates (2013) Five to Thrive; The things you do every day that help your toddlers growing brain; a supplement for parents of toddlers.
6   DFE (2014) Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage; Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five

7
 Oates, J. (2007) Attachment Relationships; Quality of Care for Young Children. Open University Early Childhood in Focus 1

Executive Function and emotional regulation	What would this look like?	Pause for thought
Working/short term memory	Children repeat preferred actions, play sequences, activities, interactions and social routines, initially with prompts and guidance from adults and peers (scaffolding) and gradually with less scaffolding and guidance. Children anticipate, complete and fill in familiar words of songs, rhymes, stories eg Going on a bear hunt	In our planning how much consideration is given to opportunities for repetition and returning to familiar activities? Do we scaffold children's learning and give them opportunities to rehearse and consolidate independently? Are there books available that promote children's engagement with recalling words, sentences and rhymes? Do we give positive feedback to children for 'thinking' and 'remembering'?
Pause button	Children look at, or check in with an adult before engaging in an unfamiliar task. Children espond to an adult's facial expression of approval or disapproval by continuing or stopping what they are doing or about to do. Children pause briefly rather than act from impulse, this may not be consistent.	Are we aware of how our key children 'check in ' with us throughout the session/day and how we check in with them? Do we use facial expression and body language to attune to our key children and offer guidance and boundaries? How do we support children to use their 'pause button' before acting and do we praise and reinforce this through verbal and non-verbal communication e.g Get to child's level, smile, and say the child's name followed by 'you remembered' ..
Flexible thinking	Children attempt to solve simple problems by exploring their own solutions. Children start to use established knowledge and skills in a variety of situations. Children make connections between different experiences and activities.	Do we provide open ended resources (see heuristic play section)? Do we allow children to do things in their own way? Do we provide opportunities to experience risk- taking with support? How do we provide opportunities for children to practice, rehearse, generalise and adapt what they have learnt into different contexts?
Emotional regulation	Children use their parents and other attachment figures as a secure base to explore from and a safe haven to return to and re- charge with.	Do we provide opportunities for children to name and recognise their emotions? Can children depend on an adult to be physically and emotionally available and attuned to regulate their strong and wide ranging feelings and emotional expression?

Attachment

Attachment relationships

'Early attachment relationships are a crucial consideration in realising children's rights. These relationships are normally with a small number of key people, most often parents, members of the extended family and peers, as well as caregivers and other early childhood professionals.[8]

Attachment relationships form throughout life and are the basis upon which children begin to feel safe and secure. The first attachment relationship with a primary care giver is the 'blueprint' for attachment relationships which form in the future. Attachment is a core process in child development and is supported by the role of the key person. However, the role of the key person extends well beyond the requirements of the EYFS Framework (see next section on the Key person).

'Children who are securely attached as babies have a sense of trust and confidence in themselves , because they know that – if something happens that they can't cope with there'll always be someone there to help sort it out'[9]

This sense of safety and security underpins the foundations for children to develop and learn successfully. The key person provides the opportunity for the young child to develop one of their secondary attachment relationships. This relationship provides a 'secure base' from which they can explore and a 'safe haven' to return to in times of needing reassurance or a recharge of the emotional batteries. The attachment relationship with a key person develops best when time is given for the primary attachment figure (usually a family member), the young child and the potential secondary attachment figure to spend time developing a trusted relationship. The availability of a key person as an attachment figure is fundamental to the child's positive learning experiences.

Most young children establish a hierarchy of attachment figures. Some attachment figures are preferred to others, particularly when young children are experiencing stress. [10]The stress mechanism for a child is switched on when they perceive that they are in danger or under threat. This instinctively sends a message to the brain and nervous system, which sends out an alarm call to 'fight' , flight' or 'freeze', accompanied by the release of a chemical known as cortisol. Cortisol is an important chemical for our immune system, however when activated for long periods of time or repeatedly this can have a considerable impact on the architecture of the brain. Whilst cortisol is in the body, activity in the brain and body, including language, memory, impulse control and digestion are all slowed down as the blood supply goes to other parts of the brain and body to prepare for the impending danger.

One of the key activators of stress for young children is separation from their primary attachment figure, as well as their secondary attachment figure, and unpredictability about where their secure base is and who they can connect with. A young child's stress levels can also be activated by many events during the day that adults may consider inconsequential. For example, in a group setting where door bells rang in each room, children repeatedly became alarmed. The switching on of the 'alarm' system for a child without an adult being available to 'co-regulate ' their feelings can lead to children 'switching off' from adults around them and not seeking or using them as a 'secure base' or a 'safe haven'.

8   Oates, J. (2007) Attachment Relationships; Quality of Care for Young Children. Open University Early Childhood in Focus 1
9   Siren Films Attachment in Practice User notes

10   Oates, J. (2007) Attachment Relationships; Quality of Care for Young Children. Open University Early Childhood in Focus 1

Title of section	What would this look like?	Pause for thought
Providing a secure base to explore from and a safe haven to retreat to	The key person is introduced to the child and family over time and a 3 way relationship begins to develop. When the parent leaves the child may demonstrate separation anxiety but can be soothed by the key person in time. When the child has settled in they are willing to explore the environment for brief periods of time without the key person. The child can explore and take risks in their play and learning and return to, or check in with, the key person when needed. The key person holds the key children in mind and is able to anticipate and tune in to their individual personalities and support needs The key person knows when to step in and when to withdraw from the child's play and learning The child knows that their key person can be relied upon to be responsive.	Do we allow plenty of opportunities for the parent and child to become familiar with and build a relationship with the key person? Do we recognise that each child's separation anxiety can be co-regulated by an attuned adult and allow for that? Do we recognise the importance of the welcome and hand over as well as the reunion at the end of the session? In a group setting, do we consider the scheduling of breaks, leave and other situations when the key person may not be available, from the point of view of the child? Do we consider how the environment can enable a secure base to be provided through cosy and relaxing places where children can go with adults or alone? Do we observe and recognise the importance of each child using their key person as a safe haven, and the contribution of this to the development of the child's resilience, self-esteem and independence? Do we allow for each child to move between dependence, inter-dependence and independence according to their current stage and the demands they may be feeling? Do we regularly take stock of what each child can do alone, with some support, with a little support and with the support of other children and celebrate this? Does each key person reflect on the role they have in providing a secure base to explore from and a safe haven to retreat to?

Key person

'Children need adults who understand the research and theory which underpins their day to day work and decisions, so that they can develop their own, personal interactions with babies and young children and create environments for them where they are respected, nurtured and emotionally secure; those adults must be able to work with parents too'. [11]

The key person[12] is central to the child's wellbeing, sense of safety and belonging. The relationship which develops between the key person, the child and the parent, forms the foundations for all of the child's current and future experiences. This relationship provides a secure base to explore from and a safe haven to return to. When we think about the role of the key person in supporting two year olds, we want to go further than what we **must** do. To meet each child's social and emotional needs we also have to consider the personal qualities necessary for a strong, reliable and warm relationship.

Practical steps:

- Review 'All about me' profile, settling in and transition documents to ensure they include information about children's emotional responses
- Ensure the key person and parent/carer have the opportunity to communicate daily
- Connect with our key children regularly using non-verbal and verbal communication
- Create communication friendly spaces and cosy areas, where children can withdraw to or share with an adult
- Review our environment regularly to ensure it responds to individual children's fascinations and supports their development
- Keep the dignity of the child in mind at all times
- Allow time for child-led interactions and expression of emotions and feelings.
- Use a range of observation techniques and opportunities, such as Tracking to understand how children respond to different situations
- Plan to build on each child's experiences as well as presenting challenges and new opportunities

In a group setting:

- Minimise number of agency/bank staff used
- Limit the number of times adults come in and out of the room
- Children and staff self-register using photos, at children's level
- Within staff supervision sessions ensure there is enough time to discuss each of the key children

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11   Nutbrown Review (2012) Review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications:Interim Report
12   The key person is the childminder, or the practitioner who is assigned to a child in a nursery, pre-school or school. *'Each child **must** be assigned a key person'* DFE (2014) Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (*1.10, 3.27)*

Key person qualities	What would this look like?	Pause for thought
Responsive	The key person recognises and notices the wide range of emotional states of their key children and how they express these emotions. The key person is confident and consistent in being able to adapt their interaction to match the child's state	Do we include questions and information about children's emotional expression in their 'All about me' profiles and settling in discussions, for example: How do I respond to unfamiliar adults? What do I do when it is noisy/quiet? What makes me smile/laugh /giggle?What do I do when I am excited?How do I let you know when I am feeling…frustrated, happy, engaged, looking forward to something? How do I let you know I want our interaction to finish? Do we regularly exchange information about how each child is feeling on a day to day basis?
Reliable	The key person offers every key child time for greetings, playing together and building relationships and independence	Do we allow time for greetings and departures? Do we let the children know, in a way they can remember, if their key person is not in on that day?
Protective	The key person provides a secure base for children from which to explore new opportunities and experiences. Manages risk and ensures the safety and wellbeing of their key children. Ensures consistency and dignity in carrying out personal care with their key children	Do we have places where children can retreat on their own but still be in sight and hearing of an adult? Are we proactive when individual children's responses change to the environment? Eg if a child is fascinated by snow? Is the key person in a group setting responsible for the personal care of their key children?
Emotionally intelligent/ attuned/ empathic	The key person is confident and consistent in responding to 2 year olds' emotions. The key person can tune into situations and experiences which may impact on the child and provide appropriate emotional support.	How do we support children in 'naming and taming' their emotions and feelings? Are staff supported work through children's emotions with them? How do we recognise the impact of the emotional and physical environment on individual children? How do we tune in to and make sense of a 2 year olds emotional responses to things or people?
Available	The key person is able to offer proximity, both emotionally and physically, which reflects the growing independence and fluctuating dependence of 2 year olds.	How do the children know that they are held in mind even when we are not in the same room? How do we connect with our key children throughout the day? What do we do to support growing independence, whilst still providing a safe haven and secure base?

Partnership with parents

'Bridging the child's two worlds the setting, nursery managers and workers have to make a conscious effort to build a bridge between the centre and each child's home and family over which information can flow freely both ways, and people, too, can cross from one side to the other so that there is as much consistency and continuity as possible for the child.'[13]

New relationships are started through the settling in process. When this is carried out well, children settle sooner and relationships with families are deeper and more supportive. If this process is rushed, children take longer to settle, needs emerge that could/should have been planned for and relationships with families are harder to build. The deepening and strengthening of relationships between the child, parents and key person continues through the sharing of experiences, development and learning together throughout their time in the setting.

Practical steps

- Talk to parents about how we work in partnership with them and the opportunities for them to become involved when they are considering their child attending the setting.

- Review how parents and families are initially welcomed and invited into the setting

- Consider where best to meet with parents to have more private discussions about their child: home visits/ a parents space/ room

- Share settling in procedures with families before the child starts. Ensure that the process involves an agreed understanding of sensitive separation, gradually building up periods of time apart for the child and parent

In group settings

- Ensure that **every** parent is in some way involved and channels for communication are set up e.g. face to face meetings , emails, texts, sharing photos, inviting parents in, communication diaries, coffee mornings.

- Examine how the community's diversity is reflected in the events and communication that take place with families:

- Establish ways to bring children, families and staff together for shared learning and the building of relationships e.g. outings, visits, cooking/eating together, reviewing learning journeys/stories and each child's progress.

- Find ways of regularly inviting parents into the setting, working alongside the practitioners e.g. parent helper rota, birthday/special celebrations, sharing skills, workshops for parents

- Make links with the nearest children's centre to make sure that parents know about workshops and events that are offered there.

13   Goldschmied, E. Jackson, S. (2004) People under three; young children in day care; second edition. London Routledge

Partnership with parents	What would this look like?	Pause for thought
Starting the relationship	Child and family are welcomed into the setting/home. Parents are told about the ethos of working together with the family to support their child. Parents are invited to welcome 'events'/ meetings at the setting. Parents and key person meet and start the 'getting to know you' processes through home visits/ 'All About Me' booklets and discussion.	How do we explain the role of the key person to parents? How do we establish good communication with parents? What is the best way for each family? How do we ensure that we know as much as possible about the child before they start and work with parents prior to their child's start date?
Transition and settling in	Settling in procedures are explained and shared with the parents. Children are settled sensitively with parental support and involvement over an agreed period of time that is at least a fortnight in duration (in line with the needs of each individual child)	How do we address parents' anxieties and fears about leaving their children? How do we explain our settling in procedures and work with parents to settle their children together? How do we support a child that is missing their parents and parents who are missing their child?
The continued relationship with families throughout the child's time in the setting	Parents continue to play an active role in the child's learning and development alongside the setting. Parents are regularly involved and informed of their child's progress in all areas of development including social and emotional well-being. Parents and the setting continue to share information, thoughts and experiences about the child.	How do we reflect the diversity of our community through the ways in which we involve parents? How do we help them to feel comfortable and welcome to keep coming into our setting? How do we help the child to feel in contact with their parents over extended periods of time apart? (eg by displaying their photos) How do we nurture a relationship with parents whereby they remain confident of their relationship with the child as well as ours? How do we share and discuss children's progress, learning and development?

Including children with special educational needs and disabled children (SEND)

'Early Years practitioners have a crucial role in the new SEN support system, backed up by the strategic role of SENCOs and strong leadership from manager''[14]

As the number of two year olds accessing free early years education increases it is more important than ever for all practitioners and providers of early years education and childcare to take responsibility for including children with SEND. The EYFS Framework (2014), The Special Educational Needs and Disability code of practice (2014) and The Equality Act (2010) [15] provide the legislative requirements in relation to children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities. However, it is a 'can do' attitude, partnerships with parents and others and knowledge about the individual child that ultimately lead to effective inclusive practice. The DfE Early Years guide to SEND code of practice (2014) makes this clear:

- 'Early years providers must have arrangements in place to support children with SEN or disabilities. These arrangements should include a clear approach to identifying and responding to SEN'.

It is particularly important to note that a delay in learning and development for a two year old may or may not be an indication that a child has SEN. Careful observation and formative assessment, and discussions with parents to gain a better understanding of the barriers to learning and development that the child may be experiencing should take place. The key person will identify strategies to support each child using a '*differentiated approach*'[4] seeking alternative ways of supporting a child; for many young children this will be enough to build their confidence and support their development. However, some two year olds may require a little more support, in which case the key person should gather further information from

observations and discussions with the SENCO and parent and provide SEN support. This process is known as the graduated approach and is *a continuous cycle of: assess, plan, do, review, applied in increasing detail and frequency to ensure the child progresses.*[16]

The EYFS framework requires early years providers to have arrangements in place for meeting children's Special Educational Needs. Those in group provision are expected to identify a SENCO. Childminders are encouraged to identify a person to act as SENCO and childminders who are registered with a childminder agency or who are part of a network may wish to share that role between them. [5]

As a key person you will be expected to take a lead role in identifying children's individual strengths and areas requiring more support, and to be the person who builds the partnership with parents throughout the graduated approach. The SENCO is there for support and advice for practitioners to refer to when needed.

Practical steps

- Get to know the key changes in the SEND Code of Practice 2014, EYFS Framework 2014 and the Equality Act 2010.
- Discuss with colleagues how this will influence what happens in your setting.
- Consider what you already do in relation to getting to know children and families, and if this is working for children with SEND and their families
- Think about how you already use assess, plan, do, review to inform your practice, particularly with two year olds
- Discuss and develop a plan about what you think is important in relation to the SEND Code of Practice 2014 and two year olds.

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14   *All early years providers in the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sectors that a local authority funds, are required to have regard to the 0-25 SEND Code of Practice', DfE (2014) Early Years: guide to the 0-25 SEND code of practice.*

15   Equality and Human Rights Commission (2011) Equality Act 2010 Statutory Code of Practice; Services, Public Functions and Associations

16   Pre school Learning Alliance (2014) SEND Code of Practice for the Early Years ;

The graduated approach	What would this look like?	Pause for thought
Assess	All practitioners carry out regular observations of their key children and act on these to plan for individual children's strengths and interests, and take account of learning styles and stages of development. The practitioner discusses concerns with the parents and take their views into account. The practitioner liaises with and plans appropriate action with the SENCO and others	Do we all understand our roles in relation to early identification and support for children with SEND and their families? Do we have sufficient knowledge of child development to be able to ascertain if children are making good progress? Do we provide support for practitioners to develop confidence and skills for working in partnership with parents? Do we support practitioners to become familiar with helpful resources which are available?
Plan	The practitioner and the parent with the support of the SENCO meet to discuss the desired outcomes of the SEN support The action plan for SEN support is recorded using ordinary language to express clear outcomes with a review date.	Do we take account of the views, aspirations and preferences of the child and family in drawing up an action plan? Are we clear about the expected outcomes of the planned SEN support Is the plan child centred? Does the plan highlight the child's strengths and capacities? Does the action plan focus on the child rather than the SEN label?
Do	The practitioner implements strategies and interventions consistently and with guidance and support from the SENCO. The strategies are implemented, where possible, as whole setting approaches to promote inclusive practice	Do we ensure that we are clear about the strategies we are intending to implement, and why and how these will make a difference to the child? Do the strategies which are put in place enable the child's increased inclusion within the provision? Do we know what progress we expect the child to make as a result of the strategies, interventions, adaptations and adjustments, and how we measure this?
Review	The child's progress is celebrated and built upon and informs the next cycle of SEN support There is a continuous and regular review of the SEN support and its impact with the practitioner, parent and others. Where the chosen approach to SEN support is not making an impact this is revised and adapted for the next cycle of the graduated approach.	Do we know what constitutes significant progress for individual children? How do we share this with the parents and child? Do we adhere to a cycle of reviewing all practice, including the impact of SEN support? Do we ensure that parents and carers are included in reviewing the impact of SEN support? Do we listen well and make use of all of the information to inform how we adapt and revise our approach to SEN support for individual children?

Communication and Language

'It is a skill which has to be taught, honed and nurtured. Yet children's ability to communicate, to speak and understand [is] taken for granted'[17]

Three areas are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive. These three prime areas are: communication and language; physical; and personal, social and emotional development.

The role of parents and practitioners in developing young children's communication skills will have a big impact on the futures of the children they support. Skillful communicators are more likely to develop better life chances in relation to mental health, educational achievement and long term job prospects.

What we know about language development

Children are born pre-programmed for communication and language learning. From the moment they are born they seek to communicate. Communication develops through everyday contexts that are meaningful for the child and helps them make links with previous experiences. Language development is a gradual process. Although we continue to learn language throughout our lives, by the age of two we have already been on quite a journey. Children's rates of development in this area are very variable; a language rich environment that promotes and values the use of language and communication is vitally important in ensuring children have the best possible experiences. Just hearing language is not enough.

Practical steps

- Create an environment where talk and playing with language is valued
- Ensure we gain as much information as possible about the children's speech, language and communication development as they join the setting, including home languages and home words for specific items such as 'home', 'mummy' and 'daddy'.
- Signpost parents to websites and information that will help them support their children's development in this area, such as ICAN, Talking Point and the Communication Trust (see resources).
- Ensure there are a wide range of resources to support communication , including well known and loved stories, puppets, phones and 'joint attention' activities such as bubbles
- In group settings:
- Ensure that practitioners have time to engage with children during social routines such as snack time, getting ready to go outside or going home
- Carry out a 'Speech, language and communication' audit within the setting. Focus on the practitioners use of language, the opportunities provided to develop skills and the provision of communication friendly spaces
- Ensure that all staff are trained and have a good understanding of the development of speech, language and communication skills
- Support staff in making high quality observations and assessments of the development of communication and language through resources such as ECAT (Every Child a Talker)
- Ensure all staff are aware of and use the 'Top Techniques' for developing 'Speech, Language and Communication (Learning to Talk DVD, ICAN)

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17   DCSF (2008) The Bercow Report – A review of Services for Children ands Young People (0-19) with Speech, language and Communication Needs

Communication & Language	What would this look like?	Pause for thought
Communication	Effective communication involves: An understanding of verbal and non-verbal communication e.g. understanding the meaning of words but also what a shake of a head or a smile may convey Encouragement and co-operation through interactions e.g. being listened and responded to attentively Information given in small chunks that can be built upon e. g. breaking down tasks into smaller parts Shared knowledge of communication, language and experience e.g. understanding key words and concepts such as 'tidying up' or 'snow' The development of social skills such as turn taking in conversations, expressing emotions and showing and interest in others play	How do we ensure that children have an understanding of the words and concepts we use? Such as 'snack time'? Do we take into consideration cultural differences in non-verbal communication such as it being impolite in some cultures to give adults eye contact? Do we ensure that we give each of our key children our undivided attention at some point throughout the day? Do we use short and simple language when making requests or explanations? Do we ensure that we use visual supports or key vocabulary for children who speak English as an Additional Language? How do we provide opportunities for children to take part in conversations?
Speech	The clarity of spoken language used, which is determined by speech sound production, fluency, intonation, rate, volume, and voice quality. Beginning to ask questions such as why, where and who? Can use intonation, pitch and volume to convey meaning	How do we introduce new language, concepts and their meanings? Do we speak in a calm, clear voice and vary our expression, tone and volume when sharing stories or playing with children? Do we use model language by repeating children's words back to them correctly?
Language	There are two elements to language: Expressive language (what we say through speech sounds and talk). Receptive language (what we understand through listening and attention skills, making links with previous experiences and the meaning of words or phrases).	Do we provide opportunities for children to 'play' with language daily through songs, rhymes and games? How do we assess if children understand the meaning of the words they are using? Do we provide and name real items for children when introducing new vocabulary?

Enabling Environments

The EYFS Framework 2014 states that 'a rich and varied environment supports children's learning and development. It gives them the confidence to explore and learn in secure and safe, yet challenging, indoor and outdoor spaces'.

Practical steps

- Ensure that there are spaces for physically active play as well as cosy corners, both indoors and outdoors.

- Develop areas that are bright and stimulating as well as spaces that are more peaceful

In group settings:

- Use an audit to review the learning environment in your setting: e.g. Infant & Toddler Environment Rating Scale

- Have smaller spaces where children can have more intimate moments e.g. use some sheer draping or a canopy where children can go to snuggle inside, or use the underneath of a table draped with sheer material to become a den.

- Use soft furnishing such as rugs, drapes, canopies to help reduce background noise levels

- Plan daily for sensory experiences both indoors and outdoors. e.g. Develop a growing area, set up a mud kitchen (see Resources section)

Mud kitchen

Communication and language
Provides opportunities to: describe, exclaim, discuss, and learn new words, share experiences

Physical development
Provides opportunities to: be active, move with whole bodies as well as refine hand control and manipulation, explore sensory experiences, be messy, be challenged, learn new words

Social & emotional development
Provides opportunities to: take risks, experiment, explore, be imaginative, play collaboratively, take turns, have fun, be excited, become engaged

Learning environment	What would this look like?	Pause for thought
Physical	Indoor and outdoor spaces that provide safe, secure yet challenging spaces for children. Stimulating spaces that support active play and exploration. Spaces that offer children the freedom to explore, use their senses and be physically active and exuberant.	Do both indoor and outdoor spaces reflect all areas of the curriculum? How free is the access to outdoor play? How much space is taken up by tables and chairs? How much play happens on the floor? How do we provide spaces that are for active play and also define and protect spaces that are for more contained and quieter play or rest?
Social and Emotional	A place where two year olds know that their feelings are accepted as they learn to express them. An environment where children feel confident and are willing to try things out and take risks Children are supported to play alongside others and encouraged to take turns in cooperative games.	Are there cosy areas with soft cushions where two year olds can relax? Do we create 'interest' baskets for individual children, so they can share and discuss their fascinations? How do we vary resources to maintain interest and develop new experiences? What resources do we have that support and develop the language needed to develop co-operation and social skills?
Communication and language	A setting that has cosy, contained, quieter areas where children can share books, sit and chat peacefully with their friends as well as adults. Areas where children can express joy and excitement. A place where adults support children to communicate, allowing them time to start conversations, building on their vocabulary and commenting on their experiences.	What 'communication friendly spaces' do we have where children can listen, understand and speak? E.g. tents How do we use displays and resources to stimulate conversation? How do we minimise background noise? When do we play music and why? How much time do we spend listening to children, allowing them to lead conversations?

Characteristics of Effective Learning

- Playing and exploring
- Active learning
- Creating and thinking critically

The Characteristics of Effective Learning[18] are crucial in igniting children's desire to find out more about their world. At times two year olds will be explorers, scientists and inventors who will have a unique view of the world. Every new experience can become an adventure, experiment or new creation, only limited by the imagination, time, resources and the support that is available.

The role of the key person is to be a safe base from which new ideas, sensations and resources can be experienced and risks can be taken, moving children's learning on to new and exciting places.

Practical steps

- Use a wide variety of open ended and found materials such as cardboard boxes, shells and corks to develop imagination and exploration
- Use open ended questions so children have the opportunity to think critically and creatively, and voice what they think will happen next
- Promote children's problem solving skills by setting new and exciting challenges
- Allow children the time and space to finish their play – teach children to tidy up throughout the session instead of stopping children playing at the end of the session
- Provide opportunities for children to take 'safe risks'. Be responsive and encouraging to children who wish to share their achievements with you

In group settings:

- Ensure that all practitioners are aware of the importance of the Characteristics of Effective Learning
- Through staff supervision sessions ensure that practitioners are providing opportunities for children to develop these characteristics
- Offer parent workshops on the Characteristics of Effective Learning and practical ideas on how to promote these

18   DFE (2014) Statutory framework for Early Years Foundation Stage

Characteristics of Effective Learning	What would this look like?	Pause for thought
Playing and exploring Finding out and exploring Willing to have a go Playing with known items	Two year olds will have particular interests and fascinations – these may change from day to day. Children explore and discover the world by the use of their senses Two year olds are beginning to make choices and create new activities They enjoy finding out ways to use objects and have clear ideas of what they want to do, even if it involves a lot of trial and error	How do we plan to build on children's interests and fascinations to develop their learning? How do we ensure there is a multi-sensory approach to introducing and teaching new ideas and concepts? Do we provide opportunities for children to make simple choices?
Active Learning Keep on trying Achieving Being involved and concentrating	Two year olds are very eager to achieve their goals and will try again and again to do so. This may involve taking part in new activities or trying a new way to do something. If a challenge arises they are eager to overcome it, but may become frustrated and need some sensitive support in how to do this Two year olds are very proud of their achievements and are eager to share them with their important people. Two year olds can remain engaged and pay attention to details such as how a worm wriggles or how water feels.	Do we allow children the opportunity to consolidate previous experiences? Do we offer children the opportunity to meet and conquer a challenge (i.e. climbing a slide or painting a picture)? Are we attentive to children when they want to express their joy at completing a task or mastering a new skill? How do we ensure children have enough time to experience their fascinations and sensory experiences for as long as they need to?
Creating and Thinking Critically Having their own ideas Choosing Ways to do things Making Links	Two year olds can use materials in a variety of ways, often coming up with original ideas and ways to solve a problem they set themselves-e.g. how do I get this water from here to over there? Once set on a plan of action they may find this doesn't work (e.g. I got this cork in the bottle, now I can't get it out) and will come up with solutions to the problems (I can bang it on the table or I could use a piece of string or I could cut the top off). Resilient children will keep trying until they have achieved their goal.	Do we use open ended questions to support children's ideas about how to solve problems (i.e. I wonder what would happen if…) Do we provide enough time and space for children to try a variety of ways to solve their problems or do we finish it for them? Do we provide a range of cause and effect resources? Are we proactive and reactive to children's play, adding or removing resources as needed?

Heuristic Play

'offering a group of children, for a defined period of time in a controlled environment, a large number of different kinds of objects and receptacles with which they play freely without adult intervention' [People Under Three' (1994), Elinor Goldschmied and Sonia Jackson].

The idea of heuristic play was introduced by Elinor Goldschmied, and comes from the Greek word 'eurisko' which means 'discover '. She described it as particularly important for two year olds: '*Increasing mobility is the central factor in the child's developing abilities in their second year of life. The newly acquired skill in moving is practised ceaselessly throughout the waking day, and it is often this passion for moving about which creates anxieties for the responsible adults and causes them to restrict the child and limit her opportunities for learning'*.

'Heuristic play is an approach and not a prescription. There is no one right way to do it and people in different settings will have their own ideas and collect their own materials.

One of the attractive and creative aspects of these varied materials lies in the infinity of possible combinations that go far beyond the imagination of any one person. It has been calculated that four bags with 60 items in each allow for the possibility of 13,871,842 combinations!' [19]

Practical steps

- Buy or make 15 large fabric drawstring bags. These bags will then serve to contain 15 individual collections of objects, neatly and safely.
- Source large tins or baskets if the setting has space to store them
- There should be about 50 examples of each chosen object for a group of six two year olds. This means that you need to provide, for example, 50, pine cones, pom-poms, coloured ribbons etc. The objects will range from natural objects (pebbles, shells, and so on), household objects (rubber door wedges, wooden doorknobs, wooden dolly pegs, and so on), recycled objects (metal lids, corks, cardboard tubes), toys (ping pong balls, wheeled wooden vehicles, wooden bricks, and so on) and general purpose objects (bath chains, hair rollers, coasters, scourers etc.).
- It is important that all items used have a thorough risk assessment carried out on them each session. No sharp corners, no very small items
- Regular checks on all items for wear and tear
- Ensure all items are regularly cleaned or replaced
- The adult MUST supervise at all times but NOT be involved
- Think carefully about how to arrange time /the environment so children have enough time to experience the items, but children not engaged in the activity also have room and space to play
- Think about how to 'tidy up' after the session. Build on 2 year olds desire to 'help' by holding the bags open and asking children to fill them
- Create a display around Heuristic Play (alongside Characteristics of Effective Learning)
- Involve the parents – sponsored 'shoe box' collection – grandparents can help too!
- Ask local businesses for things like large coffee tins

[19]   Goldschmied, E. Jackson, S. (2004) People under three; young children in day care; second edition. London Routledge

Heuristic Play	What would this look like?	Pause for thought
Suggested items for heuristic play To collect or make To buy	Woollen pompoms, not too big, in primary colours, small bags and boxes, cardboard cylinders of all kinds (such as insides of kitchen rolls and clingfilm), ribbons of velvet, silk and lace, wood off-cuts, old keys, tied together in small bunches, metal jar tops, cockle shells, large chestnuts, bottle corks, pine-cones, tins and containers of all sizes, curtain rings, wooden laundry pegs, ping-pong balls, varied lengths of chain, fine to medium size	How do we store these items? How do we ensure there are a variety of items? How do we risk assess items to ensure they are suitable for two year olds Where can we carry out a heuristic play session that allows children time to take part and experience the items for the length of time they are ready to be involved? Are there places locally where we can source items such as recycling shops or local businesses?
Key themes	Helps children to solve problems All children can participate Children experience a range of textures and shapes Encourages the child to take the lead Encourages concentration Children can become absorbed in their own exploration NOT directed by an adult Independent discovery	How do we ensure children can access the session at their own rate and level of development? Do the items we have provide a wide range of textures and shapes? How do we promote the child being independent during the session? How do we ensure we are observers, facilitators and organisers without leading the child's play?

The Progress Check at Age Two

'If I was given a report or document written about my son, I would like the report to show that the person who has written it really knows him .. and most importantly show something of his true self'. [20]

It is a legal requirement that parents and carers must be supplied with a short written summary of their child's development in the three prime areas when their child is aged between 24-36 months[21].

The aims are to review development, understand needs and plan for support, including actions that address any developmental concerns. Key principles: The Progress Check should be carried out by a practitioner who knows the child well (normally the key person or childminder), with the parents; based on ongoing observation and assessment of skills, knowledge, behaviour and understanding that is demonstrated consistently and independently by the child; take into account parent's views and also enable children to contribute actively to the process.

The progress check at age two must identify the child's strengths and any areas where the child's progress is slower than expected. If there are significant emerging concerns (or identified SEN or disability) practitioners should develop a targeted plan to support the child, involving other professionals such as, for example, the setting's SENCO or the Area SENCO, as appropriate.

Harrow provides settings and practitioners with a guidance document for Children's Integrated Two Year progress check offer[22], which has been produced jointly by Harrow Health and Children's Services as a local response to the national agenda. The document outlines the best use of professional knowledge, resources and evidence-based practice to provide a consistent, coherent and collaborative service to all two year old children and their families in Harrow. It embeds innovative ways of effective partnership working within a multi-agency context in Harrow. The goal is to provide an inclusive and equitable, high quality service which will result in

better outcomes for children and their parents and carers in Harrow, while bringing opportunities for Health and Early Years professionals to work closely through this shared agenda.

Practical steps

- Involve parents as part of the ongoing process and discussion about their child's learning and development prior to, during and post the progress check. Set up specific times and places for meetings.
- Increase opportunities for children to be involved in their own learning and development, for example through choices they make, learning stories, interests and patterns of play being supported. Reflect the 'voice of the child' in the progress check
- Ensure that SEN procedures are in place for children who need additional support.

In group settings:

- Ensure that all staff are trained in and have a good knowledge of child development and the Early Years Outcomes
- Support staff in making high quality observations and assessments of all children as part of an ongoing process. Resources such as photos, video, learning stories/journeys should be part of everyday practice
- Ensure that observations have a purpose and lead onto considered next steps and planning for the child
- Establish the process, timings, format and who is involved with the Two Year Old Progress Check

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20   A Know How Guide – the EYFS progress check at age two, NCB, 2012
21   EYFS Framework DfE, 2014
22   Guidance For Health Review and Progress Check - July 2013

The progress check at age two	What would this look like?	Pause for thought
Assessing in partnership	A clear picture of the child is formed through the gathering and sharing of information. This will involve practitioners and parents observations and knowledge of the child's development at a particular point in time as well as the 'voice' of the child. Practitioners speak with parents seeking their views and contributions, as well as addressing any concerns.	At what point do we start the review? Who leads the process? How do we use our ongoing observations and assessment to track children's learning and development? How do we reflect on what a child likes to do, is learning to do and their particular interests or patterns of play? How do we listen to the voice of the child and include them in ongoing assessment?
Completing the progress check	Practitioners review and reflect upon the picture of development that has been gathered for each child, referring to their overall knowledge of child development. Practitioners identify priorities for the child and how to support learning at home.	How is an individual child's progress assessed in relation to expected Early Years outcomes[1]? How do we identify any concerns? How do we create an ongoing dialogue with parents, sharing their child's learning and development? How do we communicate with parents if we do not have a common language?
Providing information to parents	A clear and easy to read summary of a child's learning and development is produced. This is a truthful and sensitive reflection of the child's stage of development that identifies if a child is progressing at a slower rate than expected. Actions and next steps for how a child's development will be supported in the setting and suggestions for parent's support at home are noted. Parental consent is obtained should information be shared with any relevant professionals.	How do we use the summary to plan for the child's future learning and development? How are parents involved in this? What actions do we take if there are concerns about a child's development? How and when do we speak with other professionals?

Resources

Further reading and information

- Early Childhood in Focus 1 (2007) Attachment Relationships Quality Care for Young Children. Bernard Van Leer Foundation.
- Early Childhood in Focus 7 (2012) Developing Brains. Bernard Van Leer Foundation.
- Featherstone, S (2013) Supporting child initiated play; Like bees, not butterflies.
- Gerhardt, S (2004) Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain. Bruner Routledge.
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- Hughes, A (2010) Developing Play for the under 3s – The Treasure Basket and Heuristic Play book .
- Louis, S (2013) Understanding schemas in young children; Again, Again.
- Mathieson, K (2013) I am two! Working effectively with two year olds and their families. Early Education.
- Pre School Learning Alliance (2013) How playful relationships enable brain development and support learning in the first years of life.
- Stewart, N(2013) How children learn; The Characteristics of effective early learning. Early Education.
- Zeedyk, S (2014) Sabre tooth tigers and teddy bears; the connected baby guide to understanding attachment.
- Making a Mud Kitchen booklet; Jan White, Muddy Faces www.muddyfaces.co.uk
- ITERS –Infant and Toddlers Environment Rating Scale; Thelma Harms, Debby Cryer, Richard M. Clifford www.eurospanbookstore.com/tcp

Websites

- 4Children: www.4Children.org.uk
- Bernard van Leer Foundation: Early Childhood in Focus; research and downloadable resources http://www.bernardvanleer.org/English/Home/Publications.html - .VCRlZUtZFrc
- Communication Friendly Spaces Approach http://www.elizabethjarmantraining.co.uk
- Early Support http://www.ncb.org.uk/early-support/resources
- Foundation Years; early years and childcare http://www.foundationyears.org.uk
- Five to Thrive; Key messages from neuroscience for early intervention and positive parenting http://www.fivetothrive.org.uk
- Harvard Centre on the Developing child; film clips and research http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/
- Harrow Families Information Service: FIS@Harrow.gov.uk
- ICAN: Toddler Talk activity cards, Learning to talk, Talking to learn, A guide for early years practitioners; Chatter Matters; DVDs and posters http://www.ican.org.uk
- SEND gateway; one stop shop for SEND information 0-25 http://www.sendgateway.org.uk
- The Communication Trust; Every child understood https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk
- Talking Point; the first stop for information on children's communication http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk
- Talk to your baby; Quick Tips sheets http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/talk_to_your_baby/resources/filter/talk to your baby/p2s1

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