

birth to three

supporting our youngest children



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE



birth to three

supporting our youngest children



Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks go to all those who have contributed their thoughts and suggestions, to the individuals and organisations who have provided ideas for examples from practice, and to all those who have helped to gather the many photographs used in this document.

First published 2005

© Learning and Teaching Scotland 2005

ISBN 1 84399 061 X

Contents

Foreword	v
Section 1	
Introduction	1
Key features of effective practice	1
Shared principles	2
Section 2	
The importance of early experiences	5
Babies and young children as learners	5
Environments	6
Developing a sense of self	8
Supporting young children	8
Section 3	
Relationships – promoting effective practice	11
The central importance of relationships	11
Developing relationships	12
Relationships and learning	14
Sensitive approaches towards relationships	15
Section 4	
Responsive care – promoting effective practice	25
Valuing routines	25
Thoughtful and attentive interactions: are you tuned in?	27
Planning and flexibility, observation and reflection	27
Planning for play	28
Section 5	
Respect – promoting effective practice	37
The importance of the rights of the child	37
Respecting children as individuals	38
Respecting parents	38
Valuing respectful care – what does it look like in practice?	39
Experiencing transitions: supporting confident children	41
Section 6	
Reflections	49
Glossary	50
References and further reading	51

Throughout this document, the terms 'staff' and 'adult' have been used to include all adults working with babies and young children.

Throughout this document, the term 'every child' includes children with diverse cultural backgrounds, children with physical and sensory impairment and those with recognised health and social needs.



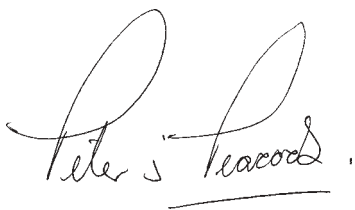
Foreword

Our vision is for a Scotland where every child matters, and where all children experience support enabling them to reach their full potential and giving them the best possible start in life. There is increasing recognition that a child's earliest years are vital in this respect. It is most important that babies and very young children are loved and secure, healthy, and cared for. They also need opportunities to play, develop and learn in a safe environment. This, in turn, will help them develop the self-esteem, confidence, and independence needed to face future challenges.

Birth to Three: supporting our youngest children acts as valuable guidance for all those involved in caring for babies and very young children. This may include early years workers, social care and health practitioners, and students preparing to work in early years settings. It identifies the key features of relationships, responsiveness and respect that support sensitive and well-informed approaches to this age group and beyond.

Birth to Three: supporting our youngest children acts as a foundation for a child's future learning and development, taken forward in *A Curriculum Framework for 3 to 5*, and is based on the same concept that care and learning are inseparable.

Birth to Three: supporting our youngest children also reflects the view in *For Scotland's Children* that the care and wellbeing of children is the concern of everybody. I commend this important document to all those working with our youngest children, for its guidance and practice examples, and as a tool to stimulate dialogue and reflection between colleagues.



Peter Peacock
Minister for Education and Young People



Section 1

Introduction

Key features of effective practice

We know that children's experiences in their early years are very closely related to the quality of the care that they receive. We also know that these experiences can have a real impact on how children develop in the future.

It is important that all those involved in the wellbeing, care and education of babies and young children have guidance that sets a context for high-quality care and education and which identifies key features that support and promote sensitive and well-informed approaches.

This guidance is based on three key features through which effective support and learning opportunities for very young children can be developed:

- Relationships
- Responsive care
- Respect.

In practice, these three key features are interrelated, so that although each has a separate section in this guidance, each is linked to the other. Each of these three key features of effective practice reinforces the other and each also has an important influence in its own right. How these features are interpreted in practice is a question for individuals and for teams, for children and for families.

This guidance recognises the different and complementary ways in which very young children are cared for in different settings. It is based on the fundamental understanding that environment, health, community and family all influence children's personal development and shape children's early experiences.

Equally, whilst children's early experiences play a role in shaping their future attitudes and dispositions, we know that children are able individuals in their own right, with the resilience and inner strength to face and overcome many of life's challenges.

Many countries are looking at the area of birth to three because of a growing recognition of the importance of early childhood and family life. Safeguarding children's best interests and insisting on the best are fundamental to meeting the needs of children, their families and everyone involved in young children's wellbeing, care and education. Drawing upon national and international birth to three research and acknowledging notable practices from other countries in caring for young children, this guidance sets out the three key features of effective practice and suggests sensitive and respectful approaches through examples from practice. It is then the responsibility of individuals within their

It is the responsibility of *all* adults to ensure that children thrive. It is the responsibility of everybody that children grow up both as healthy and as happy as possible.

own contexts to interpret and adapt the guidance as a framework for their own practice. It does not provide a list of the right ways to behave and interact with babies and young children, but it does suggest particular approaches and ways of interacting that we know are beneficial, most importantly for the children themselves, but also for the adults responsible for them.

This document can help to:

- get people together, to share ideas and promote partnership
- promote discussion within a staff group
- build confidence, if you are new to working with young children
- allow you time to 'think' and not just 'do' – time to reflect on your role
- act as a tool for raising awareness and promoting collaboration across different sectors
- inform the ways in which you support children and their families
- support you in your role as someone who works with young children.

Shared principles

This document shares the same underlying principles as *A Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5*.

The best interests of children

Taking young children's and babies' best interests into account means working closely with parents and with others involved with the child. Close partnerships allow all the important information about a child to be shared, reflected upon and acted upon. The expertise and experience of both parents and early years educators are valuable and they have most value when they are shared. They are equally important.

The central importance of relationships

Relationships are influential. They are the basis not only for effective learning, but also for healthy development and emotional wellbeing. Whether in the home, in the early years setting or in the wider community, relationships are of central importance.

The need for all children to feel included

Children need to have a sense of belonging, a feeling of being welcome and of being important and valued if they are to participate and contribute, feel happy and thrive. Feeling included is supported by the responsive care illustrated in this document. Feeling included is based on mutual respect and on warm, reciprocal relationships.

An understanding of the ways in which children learn

As with older children, the learning process for babies and very young children is complex.

Early learning involves opportunities to play, to interact, to explore, to create and to problem solve.

It is supported by:

- environments that are flexible and responsive, which can adapt to children's immediate interests and needs
- relationships that encourage children to participate actively
- opportunities for children to communicate their feelings and their thoughts, for example through quiet one-to-one times with an important adult
- adults who are interested and attentive.

Although we do not fully understand yet the ways in which learning takes place, we know it is complex. Young children learn in many different ways. To respond to children's learning adults need to be closely observant, to be flexible in the ways in which they respond, and to trust children as capable and competent learners.

Equality, inclusion and diversity

This guidance is also based on the fundamental principle of equality of opportunity. An inclusive approach is essential to the provision of high-quality care and education for all young children and their families. Inclusive practices benefit all children.

Inclusion is about working closely with parents and carers, being able to take different approaches to fit individual circumstances and valuing that everyone involved with children and families has an important contribution to make, particularly the child and the family themselves. It recognises that diversity is something to be valued, that children and families have many different and changing needs and that irrespective of needs, the key features of relationships, responsive care and respect apply to every child.



Section 2

The importance of early experiences

Human beings are active participants in the world around them from the moment they are born.

We know that for babies and young children, care and learning are not two separate things. Some of the approaches that clearly recognise the ways in which young children learn throughout their day, are illustrated in later sections contained in this document.

It is important to have an understanding of patterns of development, but it is even more important to be aware that each child progresses at his or her own pace and develops at a different rate and in different ways from any other child. This guidance is based on the understanding that children are unique individuals – active participants in all that happens around them – with particular needs, interests, preferences and capabilities. This requires flexibility, a willingness to adapt and the ability to act upon what you know and what you find out, rather than what you might expect because of a child's age.

Babies and young children as learners

Because of research, we know that babies are born with what is referred to as a 'predisposition' – a natural inclination for learning. They are eager to learn and to make sense of their world. All babies are different and employ a range of senses and abilities to investigate the world they live in, to communicate with others, to adjust to different people and surroundings and to form relationships. Within the first three years of life, most babies quickly learn to interact with others around them, to walk, to talk and to solve problems at a truly amazing rate.

Research into brain development in recent years has established that:

- learning takes place within the womb before a baby is even born
- babies are born with a powerful motivation and ability to learn
- young children's brains develop very rapidly and the responses that babies and young children receive from the others around them actively promote this rapid development
- from birth, babies' brains are ready to begin making connections and many important connections are made in the first three years of life
- by being active and involved, by learning through exploration, discovery and interactions with others, development takes place.

All children have their own pattern of development. Although research has identified what are often referred to as 'norms of development', babies and young children need to be allowed the time and the support necessary for their own personal development.

Birth to three is not just a step along the way towards becoming a person, but an exciting time in a child's development, which deserves to be recognised and celebrated in its own right.

Young children need intimate and flexible environments, with *other people*, who will give them time and attention, who will show a genuine interest and delight in them, who are able to show an enthusiasm and a willingness to be adaptable and who demonstrate that children's feelings and ideas matter.

Research has important implications for the ways in which adults support, care and provide for very young children. It reminds us that it is important not to underestimate the competence of even the youngest child. It encourages us to trust children and to allow them opportunities to show just how capable and knowledgeable they are, rather than assuming that, because they are very small, they are not able to do things. Babies and young children learn positively and begin to make sense of the world through warm and accepting relationships, through enjoyable play and from being involved in everyday routines. Although young children have similar basic needs, all babies and children are unique individuals. Understanding what is unique about each child you care for allows you to meet children's needs in the special and individual way that supports the individual's development and learning.

For example, all babies and children need food, warmth, affection and stimulation. However, there will be many variations in the way that individual babies like to be fed and differences in what they like to eat; there will be differences in the way that babies allow themselves to be comforted and soothed and differences in the ways that babies ask for and accept affection. There will be differences in the ways and the pace at which they learn. This is because they are all individuals and one approach for all will not be appropriate or effective.

Environments

Environments matter. Early care has long-lasting effects and young children are very sensitive to the atmosphere and environment around them. It is important that the environments that children find themselves in have the right ingredients to allow them to grow and to thrive.

The environment includes everything to do with the child's surroundings, both indoors and outdoors. It includes what children are exposed to in terms of lifestyle patterns, such as a healthy diet and opportunities for exercise and fresh air. Even before a baby is born, the environment that the pregnant mother is in plays an important role. Access to a healthy lifestyle, including diet, exercise, hazard-free surroundings and the right kind and amount of support and attention, is known to make a difference to maternal health and to the unborn child.

The environment includes the adults around the child. Children learn in a variety of ways, including through playful exploration and through their interactions with others. Adults who are active and involved, who understand when to interact with children and when to step back, are an essential part of the environment.

Babies and young children learn from the environment they are in from:

- the attitudes and values of the adults in the environment, for example the way in which they are greeted at the beginning of the day and the way in which staff members talk to one another

- other children in the environment, both older and younger
- the play opportunities and resources available to them
- the space available to them and how this is used
- routines, for example nappy changing, hand washing, lunch time and the experience of being dropped off and collected at the end of the day
- daily opportunities for interaction, discovery, active learning, talk and exploration, in spacious, carefully arranged areas both indoors and outside.

Young children develop and learn most happily in an environment that is full of opportunities for them to explore, create and follow their own particular interests. The role of an interested, affectionate, reliable and consistent adult is central to supporting young children's investigations, together with genuine, two-way conversations.

Babies and young children need environments where they:

- feel safe, but not overprotected to the point where experiences are unnecessarily restricted, both indoors and outdoors
- feel trustful that their needs will be noticed and responded to
- feel confident that their interests will be supported and valued
- feel a sense of involvement and belonging

where they can:

- be involved in enjoyable, purposeful and creative activity
- be listened to and communicate
- see familiar aspects of the home environment around them that they recognise, such as comfy settees, mirrors, favourite mobiles, and pictures of themselves, their families and their homes
- move between settings, such as home and nursery, with the reassurance that there will be continuity in their experiences and that individual differences will be valued and reflected in what is provided, through the resources available, through display of photographs and through carefully planned activities

and where they:

- begin to learn how to make healthy choices that support their growth and development, such as what to have for a snack, or when to put a coat on
- can develop warm and reciprocal relationships with important adults and with other children, based upon respect and acceptance
- can join in and contribute.

Babies and young children need the sort of environment that is most likely to foster effective and confident child development and to experience an environment of mutual respect and trust and open communication. Where large numbers of children are being cared for together, it is even more important to be aware of the importance of the environment and its influence on children's wellbeing and sense of self.

The environment that children find themselves in helps to create children's sense of personal identity and sense of self-esteem. The environment also helps to establish the right sort of atmosphere for children to be able to develop and learn.

Developing a sense of self

The people around them can help children to feel good about themselves and who they are. This is important because children's early experiences of being loved and being lovable have a direct influence on their self-esteem and sense of wellbeing as they develop and grow.

This means that the people around children need to demonstrate:

- warmth
- respect
- understanding
- acceptance of the child, which often means needing to separate feelings about a child's behaviour from feelings about the child as a person.

Feeling safe, confident and good about themselves is necessary in its own right. It is also necessary if children are to learn effectively.

A Curriculum Framework 3 to 5 for Children, Scottish CCC, 1999

Babies begin to build up a picture of themselves right from the start. These pictures that babies and young children build up of themselves are influenced by the responses and reactions of others.

A Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5 rightly places an emphasis upon emotional, personal and social development, areas that remain important not only at the 3–5 stage of children's development, but also at earlier and at later stages of development.

Equally, if adults are to cope with the complex demands of caring for babies and young children, it helps if they feel good in themselves. They too need to feel secure and well supported; they need to be cared for and feel that they are respected in their role.

Supporting young children

The number of books sold in the United Kingdom in 2001 on parenting and how to care for very young children was greater than the number of babies actually born in that year.¹ This seems to indicate at the very least an interest in the subject, and perhaps even a degree of anxiety. Regardless, it begins to illustrate the fact that people feel they need to be informed about how to be an adult who cares for very young children.

What may seem like common sense to one person may not appear so to another and it is important that intuition – the feeling that something is 'right' – is informed intuition. Informed intuition is based upon both knowledge and experience. It is gained through opportunities for hands-on participation and observation, through training and development opportunities and through

¹ *The Independent on Sunday* 16 February 2003

opportunities to reflect and discuss. Informed intuition allows you to understand why you do things in certain ways and it allows you to explain and to share why you do things in certain ways with others.

This is important, whether you are a practitioner involved with children and their families, an early years educator working in a nursery, playgroup, or your own home, or a student just beginning to learn about the needs of very young children. It is important to get the balance right between what is often referred to as common sense and recognising that common sense alone is not all that is required in order to meet the wide-ranging and complex needs of babies and young children.

There are many skills involved in working with and caring for young children, which all adults need. These include:

- experience and the support to reflect and learn from experience
- confidence and the ability to respond in the best possible ways to individual children
- really knowing about the child, trusting that knowledge and the judgments that are based on this
- being prepared to learn from the child, for example by listening to what a child tells you and observing what they do.

Supporting babies and young children – as they begin to learn about the world around them, the people who are significant to them, and themselves above all – is most effective when adults are aware of the crucial role of the three key features of effective practice – relationships, responsive care and respect.





Section 3

Relationships – promoting effective practice

Relationships are influential. They provide the basis for young children's development and learning.

Building effective relationships is one key feature in ensuring effective practice with young children and their families, together with the key features of responsive care and respect.

Key considerations for establishing effective relationships include:

- providing opportunities to establish warm and affectionate bonds with significant people
- providing opportunities to interact with others, both adults and children
- maintaining respectful and inclusive partnerships between all those involved with the child
- developing environments that promote security and consistency
- developing environments that promote trust and understanding.

The central importance of relationships

Relationships begin before a baby is born. They begin with the care and attention that babies receive while they are in the womb. Because of this, babies are born already strongly connected to other people. The important process of attachment and forming relationships has begun even before they are born.

'Bonding' is the term that is commonly used to describe the deep and powerful attachment between a baby and the important people in the baby's life.

It used to be thought that babies really only bonded with their mothers but we now know that babies can bond to a number of important or significant people. Babies can form an attachment with a variety of others, including:

- their mother and father
- their grandparents
- their brothers and sisters
- their foster carer
- those who care for them outside the home.

Key to making the most of children's capabilities is the quality of the warm, affectionate and responsive relationships surrounding babies and young children. Children become confident, independent and most resilient where they are secure in the relationships around them.

Although newborn babies are eager to interact with others, the process of bonding is a gradual one. Relationships take time to become established, because they are based on a growing understanding of one another.

The central importance of relationships is recognised in many of today's care and education practices, through environments:

- where space is carefully arranged to encourage the development of relationships, the opportunity to explore and the chance to be in inviting, cosy areas
- that reflect the importance of the child's home and community

through practices that:

- encourage parental involvement, such as informal drop-ins, open evenings and events, displays and newsletters
- encourage interagency working, where staff from different sectors work together to support young children and their families, through joint meetings and exchanges of information

and through policies that:

- include well-thought-out key-person systems that provide continuity, someone for children and their parents to get to know well, and a back-up person in case that special person cannot be there
- support settling in and transitions, such as inviting parents to stay with their child, asking parents advice on whether the child has a favourite object such as a teddy or a blanket that will help the child to settle into new surroundings or provide comfort if distressed.

Relationships are built as individuals get to know, trust and understand one another. Relationships are built by taking the time to listen, by welcoming smiles and comments, and through showing understanding and acceptance of individual circumstances

Developing relationships

Newborn babies are skilled, not only at responding to others but also at initiating interactions themselves. The ability to establish and maintain relationships is, of course, a lifelong process, but one that we can see beginning even in the first few days and weeks of life.

- Newborn babies have a fascination with the human face and will spend long stretches of time simply gazing at the face of the adult holding them.
- Even babies a few minutes old focus intently on the face of another person and can attempt to imitate facial expressions and sounds.
- As early as 3 months, babies can be seen to respond to gestures and to use body language and sounds purposefully in order to attract attention, and communicate.
- Even earlier than 3 months, babies are demonstrating their interest in communicating and in the conversations of those around them.

Young babies are also very interested in other babies and children.

Opportunities for children to interact with one another and with older and younger children are important. Children's relationships and friendships have an important role in supporting children through transitions and in coping with new situations, such as the birth of a sibling.

Babies and young children are very perceptive and aware of the feelings and atmosphere around them. Relationships between adults and children, between adults and other adults and between children themselves all have an important role to play in developing the young child's sense of self and their understanding of how to interact with others.

Good relationships help to encourage, maintain and promote other good relationships.

Consistently warm and secure relationships are of central importance if children are to be able to:

- communicate their needs and feelings
- rely on others and build up a sense of security and trust
- develop a positive sense of themselves and who they are
- learn to interact in positive ways with others
- develop the skills necessary to cope with conflict, challenges and new situations.

Even in situations where children have been neglected and abused and where the relationships they have experienced are inconsistent and lacking in warmth, research has shown that successfully being able to build a warm, secure and reliable relationship elsewhere can help children to recover.

The resilience or inner strength that children possess has been the subject of much discussion and there are many examples that show us how competent and capable young children can be, even in conditions that are adverse to healthy development and growth. Resilience can be acquired in a number of ways, but key factors could include:

- having the experience of coping with challenging situations
- forming a positive relationship with an adult, not necessarily a parent, who is reliable and unconditionally supportive
- having access to high-quality early years provision that takes account of the needs of the whole child.

Although we cannot always be sure exactly where resilience comes from, there is no doubt that children can be helped to be resilient and resilience can help children to cope with and move on from short-lived adversities experienced in childhood.²

Relationships and learning

Children's emotional and social development cannot be separated from their cognitive growth and development. In order to be able to learn effectively, young children need to have the self-belief and knowledge that they can learn; they need to be able to see themselves as competent and capable individuals.

Confidence and self-esteem are both important for learning. Positive, warm and responsive relationships are the key to children's sense of personal identity and self-worth and they are also the key to helping babies and young children to develop and learn. Young children learn, not only from what they see and experience around them, but also from how they are treated.

They learn how to:

- explore their environment confidently
- communicate and interact
- be accepted by and accepting of others, which further develops self-confidence and positive relationships
- make sense of and trust in the reliability of what is expected of them, for example, through consistent and fair expectations and boundaries.

High-quality care and education that supports children's learning involves:

- recognising that relationships support learning and that they take time to develop
- acknowledging the close relationships that children already have and valuing the information that comes with the child, about children's likes and dislikes, about the people and things that are important to them
- being responsive to individual children's needs, interests, preferences and capabilities and ensuring opportunities for the one-to-one time that all children need, by finding time for a cuddle, the time to read a story or the opportunity to sit peacefully and listen to the child talk about something that is of interest to the child
- focusing on what children can do, taking delight in their achievements and sharing this information with others, including the individual child.

Adults who work with young children need to understand:

- the significance of a baby's or young child's behaviour, for example that sitting quietly in a corner may be a way of relaxing for one child, but could indicate unhappiness in another
- their own role in supporting, in a consistent way, young children's understanding of the expectations of their behaviour
- the importance of using partnerships between home, the community and early years settings to support relationships and to support transitions
- the diversity of family lifestyles and the significant events in the lives of families.

For babies and young children, learning to form relationships successfully is partly to do with experiencing how people relate to one another.

Through positive personal relationships with others children begin to learn that they are valued and appreciated.

Sensitive approaches towards relationships

Children's earliest experiences usually take place within the family. Families are complex, and each family is different. Just as each child is a unique individual, each family is also unique. Each family, however it is made up, is extremely important to the child within it. To be effective, adults who work with children and their families need to take into account that it is crucial to be able to engage with parents in all circumstances.

Effective partnership with parents involves fully appreciating that parents have a deep understanding of their own child, from which others need to learn. It involves:

- respecting and valuing the knowledge, skills and experience that parents have
- being non-judgmental and appreciating children's strong feelings about their families
- trying to understand things from a parent's perspective as well as from your own
- valuing the parent's contribution, whatever form that contribution may take.

Parents experience joy and fulfilment as well as disappointment and frustration. Parenting is not an easy or straightforward task. It is full of responsibility and it is sometimes overwhelming. Parents do not become effective parents the moment that a baby arrives. Effective parenting develops and evolves.

Where the care of a child is shared, it is important to get the balance right. It can be hard for parents suddenly to see their child begin to form an important relationship with someone other than themselves. Knowing that children have the ability to attach to more than one significant person in their lives is important, and understanding how important it is that children do become attached to all those involved in their care helps to ensure what is best for the child. Children need to form warm and reciprocal relationships with those involved in their daily lives.

Developing strong and secure relationships with parents is essential for all those involved. Genuine relationships between staff and parents are based on partnership.

This includes:

- finding the time to engage in a genuine dialogue with parents and other carers in order to reassure them and in order to build trust, for example by finding out about their child's personality and what interests them at home
- recognising that parents feel most at ease when they feel that their child is known by all the adults who play a role within the early years setting
- making sure that parents feel confident that their child will be welcomed and valued as an individual.

Building positive personal relationships outside the home requires patience, sensitivity and recognition of all the significant people in a child's life.

Most parents need support at some point. Parents *deserve* support, because the job that they are doing is complex, highly skilled but at the same time, much of it is learned through experience.

For many parents, ensuring that they feel genuinely included relies upon communicating all of the small details of the day, however trivial they might seem. Others, however, may find it difficult to hear all the details of exciting developments made by their child when they were not present. Knowing parents well helps you to tune into their needs and preferences. Taking the right approach with individuals helps parents to feel included, confident and in control.

Sensitive approaches towards parents help to overcome any difficulties associated with shared care and they help to establish mutually respectful relationships.

Sensitive approaches towards parents include:

- understanding the demands on parents, for example, by accepting that all parents cannot and may not wish to be involved in the setting in the same way or to the same degree
- understanding individual circumstances and being respectful of differences
- understanding and responding to the changing needs of parents, for example when there might be change or an upheaval in a family
- understanding that parents may need reassurance with regard to the continuing importance of the parental role.

Sensitive approaches involve:

- communicating sensitively and supportively with parents, even in difficult circumstances, perhaps where their child is being aggressive to others, struggling with tantrums and the desire to get their own way, or not settling well
- sharing important information consistently, through informal chats and more formal meetings
- showing warmth and interest through what you say and what you remember
- creating environments that welcome and value the parental role, for example by having a dedicated space for parents to sit or a parents' room
- ensuring that parents and carers feel comfortable and well informed about transitions that affect their child.

Recognising and respecting that time spent with parents is valuable time is important. Parents know a great deal about their own child and have specific knowledge of their child that others can never have. Early years practitioners and others who work with young children often have in-depth experience of working with many different children. Put together, this knowledge works very effectively in ensuring that the child is understood.

Parents not only benefit from but are entitled to feel included and one way of ensuring this is to consistently share important information with parents, where possible, on a daily basis. There are many ways of doing this, including:

- informal exchanges of information as parents or carers drop off and collect children

- more formal exchanges of information, such as baby care sheets, parent-held records, documented observations of the child during the day and children's profiles
- displays of children's work
- digital photographs of the day's events on display where parents can choose whether to look at them
- video footage, where parents agree, for parents to take home with them of their child that day
- opportunities for parents to spend time in the setting and opportunities for support and discussion with parents within the home.

Sensitive approaches towards children help to build mutually respectful relationships. They reassure children of their own importance.

Sensitive approaches towards children include:

- a genuine acceptance, shown through what adults say and do, but also, importantly, how they say and do it
- valuing the time spent in interactions with the child, rather than being too focused on completing tasks
- providing as integrated a social experience as possible, a sense of togetherness rather than 'them and us'
- making sure that you are available to the child and planning quiet intimate time together
- not spending time with one child to the exclusion of others.

Sensitive approaches involve:

- understanding that children need to feel they are being 'kept in mind'³ – so that even in the busiest times of the day, young children feel secure that they have not been forgotten: by being given a smile, by being talked to, by being noticed
- understanding the use of physical care can help to build relationships, where it is personalised and attentive to individual needs and preferences
- understanding that children all have their individual pace, which fluctuates and changes, often in the course of just one day
- understanding that there are times when babies and young children wish to be quiet and reflective and to opt out of a busy environment.

All of these approaches to both parents and children need to be underpinned by an awareness of the importance of striking the right balance and building close relationships with children, set within the context of other significant relationships that the child might already have, for example with their parents, their siblings, their grandparents or a carer.

Examples from practice

Sensitive approaches towards relationships

Calum, 16 weeks old, is a new arrival at nursery. He is settling well and his key person, Heather, is able to tell Calum's parents that he is content throughout the day.

Calum's mother, however, is distressed each morning as she leaves Calum and tells Heather that she is concerned that Calum is upset during the day and that the nursery is not telling her. Calum's mother has taken to phoning the nursery several times each day from work, asking to speak to Heather. This is not always possible, as Heather is busy and occupied with the children. This is making Calum's mother increasingly concerned.

The nursery manager explains to Calum's mother that Heather is busy with the children and offers to check on Calum herself each day and report back, but Calum's mother prefers to hear directly about Calum's day from Heather.

Heather and the other three members of staff in the baby room, all of whom are building relationships with both Calum and his parents, discuss the situation with the nursery manager and share their views on how well Calum is settling and how best to reassure Calum's mother.

Staff members agree that whilst Calum has settled very well, his mother needs to be reassured of this and needs to feel more included in his day. They decide, with the permission of Calum's parents, to take the opportunity to use the video camera to take footage of Calum at different points each day to give to his mother to take home with her, in addition to the digital photographs on display, so that she is able to see that he is contented and settling well.

Some points to consider

- *Do you think the approach taken helped the relationship between staff and Calum's parents?*
- *What are the likely benefits of involving all staff?*

Working in partnership

Charlene is two and a half and lives with her paternal grandparents due to her mother's ongoing drug problem. The relationship between Charlene's mother and grandparents is very tense and because of this, contact between Charlene and her mother cannot take place in the grandparents' home.

Contact between Charlene and her mother is important however, and therefore has to be made possible elsewhere, somewhere that feels both familiar and comfortable to Charlene.

Charlene has attended a family centre since she was a year old and staff members at the family centre agree to facilitate the contact between Charlene and her mother, by allowing the social worker to bring Charlene's mother into their 'under threes' room. Charlene's mother is unable to go on her own to these visits as she has been intoxicated in the past, which has caused distress for Charlene. With the support of the family centre staff, the social worker can observe the appropriateness of the contact between Charlene and her mother and assess each contact to ensure that each occasion has purpose, meaning and value to Charlene.

The social worker being present also allows him to assess from a distance, as he can be involved in playing with other children in the 'under threes' room, at the same time as observing mother and child in a familiar and usual environment.

Some points to consider

- *Why is it important for Charlene that the contact is taking place in the family centre?*
- *How might the ongoing partnership between the family centre staff and the social worker continue to support Charlene?*



Examples from practice

Valuing communication

Craig's mother is concerned that he is very lively when he returns from his childminder in the evening. He will not go to bed when his mother wants him to, so she asks Zara, his childminder, not to let him sleep any more during the day as he does not usually have a sleep at home.

Zara explains that Craig is finding it tiring being with the other children all day and describes the kind of day Craig usually has with her. This often involves several outings, collecting older children from school, going to playgroup and to the park or the local shop.

Zara and Craig's mother agree that if Craig seems tired, he will have his sleep a little earlier in the afternoon, and that if he still seems very active at night time that they will get together to review how things are going in a few weeks' time.

Some points to consider

- *Was the right approach taken in this situation?*
- *What benefits was Zara trying to achieve?*



Developing strong relationships

Samantha is a 26-year-old who gave birth to her first child Connor yesterday. Samantha had planned to go home after a 48-hour hospital stay, but as the time gets closer she begins to feel unsure about her abilities to be able to look after Connor. She thought that understanding the needs of a baby would come naturally, but this is not how she is finding things. Even understanding why Connor is crying is difficult to interpret. Samantha has no family living close by and this is making her feel more vulnerable as a new parent.

The midwife speaks to Samantha about her plans for going home and asks how she is feeling about being a new mother. The midwife explains that often new mothers take time to learn this new role and develop relationships with their babies. Samantha, being given an opening to express her feelings, explains to the midwife how unsure she feels in her abilities to care for Connor. After discussion Samantha asks to stay an extra night in hospital. During this extra time in hospital the midwives take time to encourage and praise Samantha on her abilities to care for and love Connor.

On discharge the midwives plan to visit Samantha daily, to offer support and praise to help support Samantha in her skills as a new mother and her developing relationship with Connor. The midwives share this information with the health visitor to ensure that Samantha continues to receive the encouragement and support she needs: to help develop a strong bond and relationship with Connor.

Some points to consider

- *What do you think Samantha learned from this situation?*
- *After Samantha and Connor are home, what key elements of caring for Connor might the health visitor want to concentrate on?*



Examples from practice

Important interactions

Linda is a single parent with a 2-year-old living in an isolated rural area. The nearest bus stop is one mile away and the service is very irregular. Getting to the nearest town by bus is difficult and during the cold, wet winter months Linda does not manage this at all.

The local Family First service offered her an opportunity to meet another adult one to one, who was to become Linda's volunteer. This now meant Linda could go for walks away from her immediate environment, have a coffee, go for a swim or just sit at home and have someone to chat to. Also on offer was weekly transport for Linda and her child to a Family First group, where her child could meet and interact with other children and where she could meet other parents.

Linda enjoys the company of the volunteer and has made new friends at the group. Recently, when the group was shut for a week, one of the other mothers from the group drove out to see Linda and they enjoyed a chat, whilst their two children played together.

Some points to consider

- *What are the benefits to both Linda and her child, of this type of support?*
- *Why was it important that Linda had choices to make?*



Time to reflect on your practice

Now, thinking about some of the bigger issues that arise from these examples, reflect on the strengths you have in your own practice and also some ideas for improvement.

- How can differences between parents' expectations and the setting in which children are cared for be sensitively resolved? What instances have you had recently? Are there strategies that might be helpful for reassuring your parents about their child's wellbeing?
- Which methods do you currently use to support and maintain key relationships with children and between staff? What evidence do you have that these methods are effective and that everyone feels included and that their needs are understood? What next steps do you see yourself taking?
- What are your key qualities helping you to establish the strong, reciprocal relationships with families that you need? How could you build on these?
- Why is it important for children to have ongoing relationships with their parents, even in difficult circumstances? Can you add anything further to what you currently do to enhance child/parent relationships?
- Does parenthood come as naturally as we often think it should? How are parents supported in your setting as they develop relationships with their new babies? Is there anything else that you can try?



Section 4

Responsive care – promoting effective practice

Responsive care means knowing and accepting each child and respecting each child as an individual.

Establishing responsive care is one key feature in ensuring effective practice with young children and their families, together with good relationships and respectful approaches.

Key considerations for establishing responsive care include:

- building a knowledge of the individual child
- building an understanding of the needs and dispositions of each child
- ensuring interested, affectionate and appreciative adults
- using flexible, personalised and relaxed approaches
- working to enhance sensitivity and respect.

Responsive care is where the adult is highly observant of, and involved with, the child, demonstrating a sensitive approach to the child through words and facial expression, through touch and through physical closeness. Responsive adults are closely observant, are reflective and are in tune with what the child is trying to tell them, so that they can make sensitive decisions about what to do and how to respond.

Valuing routines

Children learn throughout their day, regardless and sometimes in spite of what adults may be doing or have planned.

Routines are an important part of the babies' and young child's day. They can also take up a large amount of time each day and this is why it is so important that routines are seen as valuable opportunities to be with children and to develop relationships. In an attempt to complete a routine task quickly, adults often lose a valuable opportunity to interact responsively with the child.

Respectful and well-informed physical care is really about handling a baby or young child with respect. It is not just a routine task. Respectful and well-informed physical care is crucial to establishing the relationships and responsive care practices talked about earlier.

Tuning into children effectively means recognising that some of the everyday activities and the more routine parts of the day, such as mealtimes, bath-times and changing a nappy, all provide valuable opportunities for adults to interact with children and for children to develop and learn.

Routines can offer many possibilities for the sorts of playful encounters that babies and young children enjoy, whether it is a game of 'peek-a-boo' during a nappy change, playing with a baby's fingers and toes, or taking the time to respond to children's humour while they talk over lunch.

Being sensitive, supportive and interested ensures that planning remains open-ended and flexible. It allows adults to make well-informed decisions about what resources and materials to provide and it allows adults to identify the value of what they have provided.

Respectful and well-informed physical care includes:

- talking to, singing to and making eye contact with a baby whilst changing their nappy
- asking the child's permission to wipe their nose
- knowing how a baby likes to be held when being given a bottle
- noticing that not all young children like to wear plastic aprons to play in the water.

Where adults become too focused on adult-led activities and tasks, they may be in danger of forgetting about the individual child. Adults need to recognise that for the child, the process is often far more important than any end product and that allowing children to follow their own interests, at their own pace is part of respectful care.

Opportunities to be with an adult who is affectionate, appreciative and relaxed are important to babies and young children. Taking the time to talk, smile, play with and respond to each child, to show them that they are important and interesting, can be done during routine activities. Many of the tasks that adults carry out during a busy day provide ideal opportunities for children to get involved. Unloading the washing machine, making a snack and wiping the table are activities that can become enjoyable if they are shared and children are allowed to become genuinely involved. Playful interactions during routines and simple turn-taking games also serve as a means of learning and bonding for babies and young children. Being aware of the value of routines can help to ensure that the child remains the focus and not the task.

It is also important to adapt routines to individual needs, interests, preferences and capabilities and this means ensuring that children:

- have opportunities to be involved or to opt out
- have the chance to have quiet times alone with an adult
- are allowed to be independent, practise new skills and do things for themselves, as well as have things done for them.

The most important thing about routines is to keep them as flexible and individualised as possible. Not taking the time may sometimes allow tasks to be completed more quickly, but misses out on the opportunity to be really involved with and connected to the child. Working with young babies who benefit from a sleep during the daytime does not mean that they all need to be settled and put down for their sleep at a particular time. Young children who might like a snack between breakfast and lunch do not all need to sit down together at the same time each day either. Having a flexible routine means that having a sleep is possible when you feel tired and that eating a snack is possible when you are hungry.

Babies and young children are very perceptive – they know when they are having things done to them rather than done with them. Being included in 'we' has great significance at any age.

Thoughtful and attentive interactions: are you tuned in?

Being 'tuned in' allows you to know the child. Adults who are important in children's lives need this knowledge to support children's development and learning. Being tuned in to the child means:

- being closely observant, attentive and responsive
- understanding what a baby or child's behaviour indicates
- interpreting the child's interests, thoughts and dispositions
- using knowledge and experience to help in making decisions
- being reflective and thoughtful about what you see.

In early years settings, a carefully thought-out, clearly defined and well-backed-up key person system should allow babies and young children to build the close, one-to-one, reciprocal relationships so crucially important to health, wellbeing and development. The key person system can promote significant relationships between adults and young children and allows the child to experience close, trusting and reliable contact with others.

Getting the balance right includes meeting the challenges of:

- staff turnover
- transition arrangements for children
- reaching a common understanding of what an effective key person system entails and how it should be backed up, so that the child always has someone available to them that understands and knows them
- ratios of adults to children.

Tuning in to children means that early years settings need to take account of these issues and their effects on quality.

Planning and flexibility, observation and reflection

Flexible planning, close observation and the ability to reflect on how things have gone all help adults to ensure that the environments children find themselves in are as responsive and thoughtful as possible.

Planning for young children does not mean organising every aspect of their day. Planning structures that remove the child's choice are not respectful of babies and young children. Planning needs to:

- be flexible and open ended, and allowed to be responsive to the changing pace and flow of the children's interests and enthusiasm
- be individualised and create familiarity for the child by making links with home surroundings
- be reflective, and allowed to be based on something that you may have just learned about a child, such as an interest in tractors, a fascination with patterns or a need for more quiet times
- be directed by the child's interests, needs, capabilities and preferences.

Babies and young children benefit from having access to different age groups. Babies like to observe older children as they interact and play. Older children learn important skills of looking after and caring for others by being given the opportunity to play alongside those younger than them.

When we plan for children and reflect on how best to support them, we need to remember the importance of the child's voice. The child's voice must not be neglected; the importance of it must not be underestimated.

Reflecting on how to organise environments effectively for babies' and young children's needs means adults need to focus on the value of talk, play, paying attention, interacting and spending meaningful time with children. Loose and flexible plans allow adults to choose the moment that is right for the child, to either introduce something new, or to step back and not invade the child's play.

Planning flexibly for young children also involves understanding the importance of continuity and familiarity to children and the importance of the day-to-day happenings in whatever setting they are in. Children like to return to and revisit things that were important to them that morning, the day before, or the previous week.

Adults who work with very young children need the time to share their observations of children, to talk, plan and to reflect, where possible, in groups. This not only helps to make sure that the provision for children is thoughtful and attentive; it also supports adults in a demanding and complex job. If children are being cared for outside the home, they also like to revisit the key person they have moved on from and the room they may have been in as a baby or toddler.

It is important to value children's social life and what can be learned, on both sides, between, for example, a 3-year-old and an 11-month-old. Allowing children to have opportunities to be together, rather than being in a room with others simply because of their age is an ideal chance to promote the rights and responsibilities that the section on 'respect' goes on to talk about.

Planning for play

Opportunities for play that allow children to become deeply involved are very important. Babies and young children often benefit most from being able to concentrate on something in depth, rather than being surrounded by many different objects and choices.

Play is a very powerful tool that promotes children's development and learning. Play allows children to make important connections about what they know; it allows babies and young children to celebrate what they can do. Through their play babies and young children show observant adults how competent and skilled they are.

Adults who are sensitive and attentive can help to create play environments that encourage and support young children and that enhance children's play.

Being observant and reflective involves the tuning in talked about earlier; it involves acting upon what you have observed and what you have learned from tuning in.

Adults can effectively support children's play by knowing when to introduce a new object and when to interact as well as knowing when to step back and watch. Play opportunities need to:

- avoid unnecessary interruptions and restrictions
- recognise that children use everything in the environment around them for their play, not just manufactured toys
- reflect that children need to play with people as well as with objects
- recognise that play can include other or imagined people who are not present
- be accessible and adaptable to all children, in order that children's individual needs can be met
- be supported by adults who know how to extend and support children's play without taking over and spoiling it.

Adults need to understand what children's play is telling them about the child. Play helps children to find a voice.⁴



⁴ Bruce, T, 'Play Matters' from Birth to 3 Matters Conference, 2003

Examples from practice

Responsive care

Staff members decide to put out the water tray for the small group of children aged between 11 and 16 months, providing a range of containers for filling and pouring, plastic sheeting, a mop for any spillages and towels placed on the radiator to warm. The children get ready, and, wearing their nappies, begin to play with the water, watching it pour, splashing and dabbling in the water. Staff members sit around the children, watching them, smiling and encouraging the children through words and gestures.

Anna, 14 months, watches the other children. She has shown that she does not want to take part and has not changed out of her clothes. She edges closer and sits on Nicola's lap, who is her key person. Nicola talks softly to Anna, pointing out what the other children are doing. She takes Anna's hand and asks 'Would you like to feel the water Anna?' Anna nods her head and puts her hand in the water.

Anna then tugs at her top and shows Nicola that she is ready to get changed to play in the water. Nicola helps Anna to get changed and Anna sits for a while on Nicola's lap again, before reaching out towards the water tray.

Nicola sits at the side of Anna as she begins to play, talking to her about the water and showing excitement and pleasure in what Anna is doing.

Anna is splashed by the water as another child plays and she begins to cry. Nicola quickly takes Anna on to her lap, wrapping her in a towel, rocking Anna and reassuring her. Anna now wants to put her clothes back on. Nicola sees this and helps her to get dressed again, talking about each item of clothing as they put it on and giving Anna a cuddle.

Some points to consider

- *What do you think Anna learned from this situation?*
- *How did Nicola demonstrate that she was in tune with Anna and would you have responded differently?*

Feeling welcome

Sarah's baby, Iona, 5 months old, attends all-day care provision while her mother works at an office nearby. Iona is being breast-fed as well as taking solids and Sarah comes across to the centre each lunch time in order to see Iona and feed her.

Staff members have made Sarah feel very welcome by providing a choice of seating, a rocking chair and a low settee with comfortable cushions. When Sarah arrives she is greeted warmly by the staff and asked if she would like a drink of water or orange juice while she is feeding Iona. Both Iona and her mother clearly look forward to and enjoy having this cosy and satisfying time together.

Some points to consider

- *What are the key elements that staff members have recognised and acted upon here?*
- *Is there anything else that might have been done?*



Examples from practice

Tuning in

Robert, who is 3 years old, is a quiet child and seems to respond to the suggestions others make to him without appearing to have any particular wishes of his own. His childminder, Julie, is concerned that Robert is unwilling to make decisions and choices of his own, although this is now his third week with her.

Julie sets out a variety of activities for the children she cares for to choose from and encourages Robert to choose for himself. He begins by always picking the train set, so Julie plays with him, interacting with him and observing what Robert says and does. As they play, Robert begins to respond and join in more, talking enthusiastically about what he is doing. Julie uses this opportunity to ask Robert about what he likes best about what he is doing, and uses his responses to try and interest Robert in some of the other activities on offer.

Over the next few weeks Robert begins to make more choices for himself, which Julie encourages, showing interest and delight. Robert gradually appears more confident and becomes more interested in what the other children are involved in, joining in and making suggestions of his own.

Some points to consider

- *Julie took the time to observe Robert and reflect on what his behaviour was telling her. How might she share her observations with Robert's parents?*
- *What would you suggest she do to learn more about Robert from them?*



The right to explore

David, who is 3 years old, explores most comfortably by crawling around the play space at his nursery. He stops at a table with leaves on and pulls himself up to stand and examine the leaves. He moves on to the table with playdough and again pulls himself up to play with the dough. Occasionally he has a fall, but does not injure himself.

The early years worker observes him but does not intervene, encouraging him to continue his explorations.

Later on, when David has a snack, he reaches the sink to wash his hands using a step and sits with a group of other children where all the children choose and prepare their own snack.

Some points to consider

- *Why is it important that David has the same opportunities to explore as his peers?*
- *What other opportunities could be provided for all the children, to develop their skills of independence?*



Examples from practice

Observation and reflection

The 2–3-year-olds' room in the nursery is a busy, active environment catering for 25 children. The head of the nursery regularly spends time observing the children and the provision in each area of the nursery.

Recently, the nursery head has observed that some children in the 2–3-year-olds' room appear restless and unable to focus on anything, which the views of the staff confirm.

Together, the nursery head and staff review their plans and decide that they will plan for better use of both their outdoor area and their quiet room and agree to review at the end of each week whether individual needs are being met more effectively.

Some points to consider

- *Was the right approach taken in this situation?*
- *Is there anything else that staff might have done?*



Time to reflect on your practice

Now, thinking about some of the bigger issues that arise from these examples, reflect on the strengths you have in your own practice and also some ideas for improvement.

- What methods do you use to demonstrate to babies and young children that they are important and that you are keeping them in mind? Think about specific examples in the past couple of weeks. Is there more you might have done on these occasions? Share any concerns about any children in your care who may be missing out and need different strategies, perhaps because they are quieter.
- How do you use physical care routines to build on your relationship with babies and young children? How can you check that this is effective? Can you think of other daily occasions that might be turned into valuable opportunities to interact with children on a one-to-one basis?
- Thinking about encouraging independence and sustained play, what strategies have you found to be effective in encouraging children to make their own decisions and choices? Are there any more daily tasks and routines that could be used to extend these opportunities?
- Providing good, restful and welcoming facilities for breast-feeding mothers is an excellent way to build that early relationship with mothers and babies. What other mechanisms can early years settings put in place in order to encourage parents of very young babies or those new to a care setting to feel welcome and supported?



Section 5

Respect – promoting effective practice

Each child is an individual, a person who has the right to be responded to and treated with genuine respect at all times.

Establishing respect is one key feature in ensuring effective practice with young children and their families, together with good relationships, and care that is responsive to individual needs and circumstances.

Key considerations for establishing respect include:

- valuing diversity, in terms of children's language, ethnic background, faith and family circumstance
- respecting children's different experiences
- being sensitive to and understanding of differences, to ensure fairness, equality and opportunity.

All adults involved with children have an important role to play in ensuring that children's rights are actively promoted. Children's rights and the respect that they are entitled to must not be overlooked just because babies and young children cannot safeguard their own interests.

The importance of the rights of the child

The way in which we should respect children in Scotland is governed by legislation, most importantly, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. The United Kingdom has also signed up to an international agreement, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The 'National Care Standards: early education and childcare up to the age of 16' are also founded on principles that reflect the rights of children and influence how services for children and young people are run. Importantly, they are based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

All of us, whether parents, carers, early years educators, health or social work professionals involved with children and families, need to fulfil the obligation to safeguard and promote children's rights.

Taking account of the diversity that children and their families have to offer enriches the experience for all children, as they learn about others and begin to appreciate and value differences and similarities.

At different times in every child's life, they will experience situations that make them vulnerable and in need of additional support and attention. For some children, the need for additional support will be more significant and sometimes long term.

Respecting children as individuals

Children's views and attitudes have begun to be shaped from a very early age. Being a member of a family and a community helps to determine individual children's attitudes and values. It helps to shape children as individuals and to establish their needs and preferences.

Children's needs and preferences are important. For adults who work with young children, respecting the parent's knowledge of their own child and learning from the parent about strategies for supporting and responding to the child are fundamental to effective practice.

Effective practice that recognises children as individuals can often be reflected in the level of understanding that adults have of each child. Adults who understand the needs and dispositions of children gain this important knowledge from:

- close observation
- a willingness to learn from the child and from those closest to the child
- flexible, individualised and inclusive approaches.

Children with additional support needs and children who are vulnerable in other ways also require the timely and individualised support and attention that feature in this guidance, as do their parents.

Respecting parents

Parents are the most significant people for babies and young children and they continue to be the most significant when their children spend time being cared for outside the home. The sensitive approaches illustrated earlier in this guidance help to ensure that each child continues to be viewed as a unique individual with their own ways of understanding the world, whether they are cared for in their own home, whether they are cared for outside the home or whether they are cared for within a group setting.

Often parents have a feeling that something has either changed or is not as it should be. It is important that parental views and concerns are listened to and that whenever a parent may think their baby or young child needs support they feel able to access further advice.

Most parents of young children seek support and advice about their children and both children and parents do best when help and support is readily accessible. This support can help to provide the resilience that children need.⁵ Because all parents can experience feelings of isolation and the need for support, those who work with babies and young children are in a responsible position. Staff members who are closely observant and who have a sound understanding of child development are often ideally placed to offer the support and information that parents need.

⁵ Kirk, R, 'Family Support: the Roles of Early Years Centre', in *Children and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 2, April 2003

Support and advice can be formal or informal. It can come from:

- early years practitioners, community health and social work professionals, who may find themselves in the position of being able to reassure parents who have concerns
- child health checks that may identify additional shorter- or longer-term support needs, as well as presenting early opportunities to pick up on vulnerable children and families
- relatives, friends and the local community who can offer important social and emotional support as well as practical help.

There may also be circumstances where staff members need to express concerns about the welfare of a child to other agencies. In situations where a child may be being abused, relationships with parents still need to be maintained, for the benefit of the child.

All those involved in work with children and their families have opportunities to offer support. Because of this, it is important to work collaboratively to ensure that important information is shared for the benefit of the child. Working in close partnership with others involved with the child helps to ensure that as full a picture as possible of the child is available.

Valuing respectful care – what does it look like in practice?

From a very early age, children are finding out about their rights, often through the ways in which others treat them. They are learning about expressing themselves, about their interdependence with others, about sharing, making choices and about their place in the world. Children are active citizens in the world and when adults make decisions that affect children they need to:

- think first about what is best for the child
- listen to children carefully
- take children's views into account.

Encouraging self-respect and respect for others can begin through the sorts of experiences children have. Children need to be seen as knowledgeable about themselves, with interests, needs and wishes that must be taken seriously. Young children need opportunities to:

- participate actively
- be involved in making choices and decisions
- be genuinely consulted with
- feel that their ideas and feelings matter
- see that their ideas and feelings make a difference.

Very young children have opinions and views. They benefit from opportunities to resolve situations through expressing their feelings and being listened to, both individually and in a group. They benefit from being included in decision making, for example about what to choose for a snack, about choosing and setting out resources, about how to solve a problem.

Children gain confidence when they can see that their interests and decisions inform what happens.

Young children are also able to solve problems from a very early age and, if given the opportunity, can solve problems together. Encouraging consistent opportunities for children to make decisions and to participate in problem solving are important features in developing:

- self-esteem
- respect for others
- a safe and secure environment for everyone.

Safeguarding children's rights and ensuring that their interests, needs and wishes are taken seriously, is a responsibility for all adults; it is everyone's responsibility to make sure that children are all right. Where children are too young or are unable to express their needs and wishes through what they say, the supportive role of the adult becomes even more important, through sensitive interpretation of the child's wishes and needs.

Respecting babies and young children involves:

- taking children's concerns seriously, listening carefully to what children say
- and responding to children's concerns, however small they might seem
- valuing children's relationships, with their friends, their families, their pets and with the objects that are important to them
- giving children the freedom to express themselves, through group times and through cosy opportunities for individual attention
- helping children to understand what is and what is not acceptable, by responding to them positively, with encouragement and reflecting on what children's behaviour tells you
- showing respect through what you say and do and how you express yourself.

Children's feelings of self-respect continue to develop as they become more independent and able to do things for themselves, such as being able to wash their own hands and use the toilet, put their own socks and shoes on, serve their own food or pour their own drink.

All children need opportunities for independence and to do things for themselves. Where children's abilities to develop self-help skills are restricted, it is the adult's responsibility to ensure that the child is treated with respect and a deep understanding of the individual.

This includes:

- following advice from parents about their child's preferences
- planning activities carefully to enable all children to participate
- being observant and interpreting children's wishes sensitively.

As children themselves gain independence and the ability to care for themselves and others it is important that adults recognise that these opportunities continue to stem from a secure base – from being surrounded by loving, caring and secure relationships that can support them through transition and change.

Experiencing transitions: supporting confident children

Young children may be cared for in the home by a parent, by grandparents or other relatives, by an au pair or a nanny. They may be cared for in their relatives' home, or by a childminder in the childminder's home. Many young children attend a parent and toddler group, a playgroup, a family centre, a private nursery or a local authority nursery. Many children may have multiple carers, spending some time at home, time with a childminder and time attending a playgroup or nursery. At times, children will also experience the involvement of others in their lives, such as doctors, health visitors or social workers.

Transitions occur as children move between settings, as they move in day care settings from one room or area to another.

Many young children are experiencing a wide range of transitions each and every day. Because of the many different experiences children may have in just one day, it becomes even more important that there is some continuity and similarity of approach in the ways in which the important adults in children's lives behave and interact, not only with the children themselves, but also with other adults that are involved with the child.

Having as full a picture of the child as possible is helpful when supporting children through changes in their lives, and this means that all those involved with the child need to work collectively and share important information.

Changes can be stressful at any stage in life, but for babies and young children they can be particularly challenging. Moving on to different surroundings, or having to adapt to losing a close friend as they leave a setting, make demands on young children as they learn to cope with a new situation. Parents also need support to cope with change and new situations. Because of this, the sensitive care and attention given to ensuring smooth transitions is extremely important and must not be overlooked.

When experiencing transitions, babies and young children need:

- experiences that reflect their own home life and culture
- experiences and routines that are familiar and welcoming
- familiar objects and surroundings that reflect the surroundings they are used to at home
- care practices that take them into account as individuals and that show them that they are important and cared about.

In day care settings, where children feel secure in the knowledge that they can revisit the familiar people and places that were important to them earlier, they will find it easier to settle into a new situation. This approach helps children, parents and staff to cope with change. Coherent and integrated services help to

Ensuring smooth transitions needs to involve, on an equal basis, the children, parents and carers and all the staff within the setting.

Relationships, respect and the need for responsive care matter when children are very young and they continue to matter as children develop and grow, and as they prepare for important events in their life such as starting school. In order for children to face change confidently and positively, they need the continued support of the adults around them.

secure the best start for all children. They can help children to cope with new situations and can ease transitions for children, parents and those who work with children and families.

Adults need to support babies and young children through change. They can do this by:

- working closely with all other adults who are involved with the child and making sure that effective and ongoing communication takes place
- providing warm and affectionate opportunities for talk and discussion, stories and play, which help children to express their feelings
- being closely observant of gestures and body language and asking themselves what the baby or young child is trying to tell them
- showing through physical contact that they are aware of the child's needs, through holding out their arms, through a hug, by picking the child up, and by providing a safe and secure lap for the child to sit on
- providing opportunities for children and also siblings to see one another and not be separated for entire sessions into different age groups
- setting aside the time to plan for and ensure smooth transitions
- deliberately building shared memories that can be revisited with individuals and in a group.

Throughout all times of transition and change in a child's life, it is important that the actions of adults reflect the three key features of effective practice:

- the central importance of relationships
- the need both to be treated and to treat others with respect
- the responsive and sensitive approaches that say to children that they are valued and important.



Supporting transitions

Four children in the nursery are due to move from the baby room to the 1–2-year-olds' room at the end of April. Staff members are aware that one of the children will be particularly difficult to settle and that one father is very uneasy about the move and about having to form a new relationship with another member of staff. He has been very happy about the amount of support he has received from staff in the baby room and is concerned that there will not be the same level of support once the move has taken place.

It has been arranged that there will be no new starts in the baby room until the end of May, freeing baby room staff to help in ensuring a smooth transition for the children.

Claire is key person to two of the children and is a familiar person to all of the children who are moving. She will move up with the children and will settle them with their new key person, which will help parents to settle to the new arrangements also.

When staff members feel that all is well and parents feel well supported, Claire will move back to the baby room and begin to prepare for the arrival of the new babies.

Some points to consider

- *How would you respond in this situation?*
- *How can the new key person begin to build effective relationships with parents?*



Examples from practice

A community of children

Tracy is the childminder of four children, two who are at primary school, a 3-year-old and an 11-month-old baby. When the two older children return from school, Tracy encourages all the children to sit down together with a snack and share what they have done that day.

Everyone contributes to the conversation and Tracy includes the baby, by saying:

And what did you do today, Ryan? Shall we tell everyone? You played with the bricks, didn't you? And we went to the park. And then you had a lovely lunch – what did you have? Cheese toastie and ... banana! Mmmm, you enjoyed your banana, didn't you?

Ryan joins in with gurgles and says na na.

Some points to consider

- *What are the benefits, to all of the children, of Tracy's approach?*
- *How might it serve as a useful reporting mechanism to parents?*



Learning together

Debbie and her 9-month-old son Ruaridh, attend their local parent and toddler group. Ruaridh has his first experience of being given a treasure basket⁶ to explore. Debbie sits quietly alongside Ruaridh, ready to reassure him if necessary, as he explores the contents of the basket.

Ruaridh takes each item out and looks at it. He turns the objects over in his hands, shakes them and explores them by putting them into his mouth. Catriona, who is two and a half, sits next to Ruaridh, and begins to explore the basket too. She offers a piece of fur fabric from the basket to Ruaridh. Ruaridh hesitates but then takes the fabric from her, smiling when he feels it.

The playleader comes and sits next to Debbie and they have a chat about other objects that Ruaridh might want to explore.

Some points to consider

- *How do you think both Catriona and Ruaridh benefit?*
- *What other opportunities could be provided for Ruaridh and for Catriona?*



⁶ A treasure basket contains collections of objects for babies to explore using all their senses. The contents are usually natural or made from natural materials which can be easily collected from around the house or setting.

Examples from practice

Changes

Jack has just turned 3 years old and is due to start nursery school. His mother Pamela has just had her second baby Sophie two weeks ago. Pamela has recently noticed a change in Jack's behaviour, he has become very clingy and unwilling to do anything for himself. The health visitor had discussed the possibility of sibling rivalry and some of the behaviours Jack might elicit with Pamela prior to the birth of Sophie and therefore Pamela was expecting this might occur.

Pamela knew from her discussions with the health visitor that Jack would need more attention and love to ensure he did not feel replaced in his parents' affection by Sophie. Pamela included Jack in caring for Sophie and gave him lots of praise for being a good big brother. Pamela arranged times where just Jack and she would spend time together without Sophie.

Pamela also arranged for Jack's start at nursery to be delayed, so that he had time to get used to sharing his life and parents with Sophie and begin to develop a relationship with Sophie before he went to nursery.

Some points to consider

- *Try to list all the changes in Jack's day-to-day life, from his perspective.*
- *What other strategies might have been used to ease his stress?*



Building shared memories

Kirsty is 2 years old and in the process of being adopted. She has been in foster care for the last one-and-a-half years, due to her mother having an illness that prevented her from caring for Kirsty. Kirsty's mother is frequently an in-patient at hospital.

Kirsty's social workers have arranged a birthday party for Kirsty, just two weeks away from her adoption date and this will be Kirsty's mother's final contact with her child.

Social workers know this will be the last experience that Kirsty and her mother will share. Kirsty will need this memory, including video and photos from the birthday party. The birthday party also provides an ending for Kirsty's mother and gives her a place as Kirsty's mother.

The party is held in the foster carer's house. Kirsty's mother brings presents, but most important of all her presence at the party leaves important messages for Kirsty and allows images of her at the party with Kirsty to be kept.

Later, a meeting takes place a week before Kirsty's adoption, between her mother, social workers, Kirsty's adoptive parents and her foster carer. All of the information, including the presents, photos and video was shared with Kirsty's adoptive parents, as significant objects that were important to keep and that hold important memories for the future.

Some points to consider

- *Identify the difference in memories and the sense of personal identity for an 'average' 2-year-old and Kirsty, who has undergone many transitions from birth.*
- *How might Kirsty be helped in the transition to the next stage, of living with her adoptive parents?*

Time to reflect on your practice

Now, thinking about some of the bigger issues that arise from these examples, reflect on the strengths you have in your own practice and also some ideas for improvement.

- What strategies do you currently use to ease transitions for children and parents? What are the particular needs of the staff at these points? Take one instance from your recent experience – what would have been ideal from the child's point of view, and how far did you achieve it?
- How do you ensure that children's needs and wishes are taken seriously and how are children's decisions allowed to influence what happens? What single step might you take towards more inclusion of children in decisions?
- How do you plan for individual time with children? How often does this not work out? Try to analyse the weaknesses in your plans and how you might manage to fulfil them better.
- What strategies do you have in place for sharing information between staff members so that they have a good knowledge of all children, their families and their changing needs? How could you build on these? How might you raise parents' awareness of the way this works?

Section 6

Reflections

'My babies know I will look after them ... I'm their mum.' 'How do you look after them?' Mum asked, and Rosie said 'I make their teas and I tell them stories and I take them for walks and I talk to them and I tell them that I love them.'

Waddell, M, *Rosie's Babies*, 1990

Of course, adults always bring their own assumptions, ideas and feelings to their encounters with children. It matters very much how adults view the capabilities of the children in their care.

Gillespie Edwards A, *Relationships and Learning: Caring for children from birth to three*, National Children's Bureau, 2002

A child's pride in knowing and doing must be recognised and supported, too. Shame of not understanding, or of not being understood, is destructive of learning. The child who is proud to learn, and whose pride is recognised with admiration, will learn.

Trevarthen, C, 'Learning in Companionship' in *Education in the North: The Journal of Scottish Education*, New series, No. 10, 2002

The important thing about being looked after is that it is done by someone who keeps you in mind even when you are not there, someone who wants to know what you would like to eat, to play with, to take to bed when you go to sleep, who knows about how you began in life and how to deal with you when you behave badly.

Extract from Kraemer, S, 'Parenting Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow' in *A Professional Handbook for Enhancing Parenting*, Dwivedi, K, N, (ed.), 1997

We must have the courage to insist on the best, not just an adequate quality of education and care with 'fit persons' for babies and toddlers ... we need the vision to plan for whole human beings.

Selleck, D, and Griffin, S, *Quality for the Under Threes: Contemporary Issues in the Early Years*, 1996

Glossary

Key person system

A system in which each child has someone in the early years setting to whom they can relate, who has a special relationship with the child and the child's family and who is responsible for the child's care and wellbeing.

Genuine dialogue

In this context, a meaningful conversation between a child and an adult, characterised by close attention being given by the adult to what the child is saying.

Inclusive approaches

Inclusive approaches are those that clearly value and welcome the contribution of everybody and that take individual circumstances into account.

Reciprocal relationships

In this context, the relationships that adults have with children and their families, characterised by mutual interest, warmth and respect, and based on acceptance and an understanding that all feelings and points of view are important.

References and further reading

Abbott, L, Ackers, J, Barron, I, Johnson, M, Holmes, R, Langston, A, Powell, S, Bradbury, C, Gooch, K, David, T, *Birth to Three Matters – A Framework to Support Children in Their Earliest Years*, DfES, 2002 www.dfes.gov.uk

Abbott, L, and Moylett, H, *Working with Under Threes: Training and Professional Development*, OU Press, 1997

Abbott, L, and Moylett, H, *Working with the under threes: responding to children's needs*, OU Press, 1997

Adventures in Foodland: ideas for making food fun from an early age, Health Education Board for Scotland, 1999

Aronson, S, (ed.), *Healthy Young Children: a manual for programs*, National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2002

Bredecamp, S, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programmes*, NAEYC, 1997 www.naeyc.org

Bruce, T, *Learning Through Play: babies, toddlers and the foundation years*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2001

Dowling, M, *Young Children's Personal, Social and Emotional Development*, Paul Chapman Publications, 2000

Elfer, P, Goldschmied, E, and Selleck, D, *Key Persons in the Nursery: Building Relationships for Quality Provision*, David Fulton Publishers, 2003

Gillespie-Edwards, A, *Relationships and Learning: caring for children from birth to three*, National Children's Bureau, 2002 www.ncb.org.uk

Goldschmied, E, and Jackson, S, *People Under Three: young children in day care*, Routledge, 1994

Gopnik, A, Meltzoff, A, and Kuhl, P, *The Scientist in the Crib: minds, brains and how children learn*, William Morrow & Co, 1999

Health for all Children in Scotland (Hall 4)
www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/health

Kraemer, S, 'Parenting Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow' in *A Professional Handbook for Enhancing Parenting*, Dwivedi, K, N, (ed.), 1997

Lindon, J, *Helping babies and toddlers learn: a guide to good practice with under-threes*, The National Early Years Network, 2000

Murray, L, and Andrews, L, *The Social Baby: understanding babies' communication from birth*, CP Publishing, 2000

National Children's Bureau, *Everyday Stories: Working with children under three*, 2003, www.ncb.org.uk

Nutbrown, C, (ed.), *Children's Rights and Early Education*, Paul Chapman Publications, 1996

Parlakian, R, and Seibel, N, *Building Strong Foundations: Practical Guidance for Promoting the Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Toddlers, ZERO TO THREE*, 2002 www.zerotothree.org

Pugh, G, (ed.), *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years*, Paul Chapman Publications, 2001

Ready, Steady Baby! a guide to pregnancy, birth and early parenthood, Health Education Board for Scotland, 1999 www.hebs.scot.nhs.uk/readysteadybaby

Roberts, R, *Self-Esteem and Early Learning*, Paul Chapman Publications, 2002

Rodd, J, *Young Children's Close Relationships: Beyond Attachment*, Sage Publications, 1993

Selleck, D, and Griffin, S, *Quality for the Under Threes*, in Pugh, G (ed.) *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years*, 1996 www.surestart.gov.uk

SOEID, *A Curriculum Framework for children 3 to 5*, Scottish CCC, 1999 www.LTScotland.org.uk/earlyyears

The Child at the Centre: self evaluation in the early years, Scottish Executive, 2000 www.scotland.gov.uk

National Care Standards: early education and childcare up to the age of 16, Scottish Executive, 2001 www.scotland.gov.uk

Stephen, C, Dunlop, A, Trevarthen, C, *Meeting the Needs of Children from Birth to Three: Research Evidence and Implications for Out-of-Home Provision*, Insight 6, Scottish Executive, 2003 www.scotland.gov.uk

Trevarthen, C, 'Intrinsic motives for companionship in understanding: Their origin, development and significance for infant mental health' in *International Journal for Infant Mental Health*, 22 (1-2): 95-131, 2001

Trevarthen, C, 'Learning in Companionship' in *Education in the North: The Journal of Scottish Education*, New series, No. 10, 2002

Waddell, M, *Rosie's Babies*, Walker Books, 1992

Warden, C, *The Right to Be Me*, East Ayrshire Council, 2002 www.mindstretchers.co.uk

www.carecommission.com

www.healthscotland.com

www.LTScotland.org.uk/earlyyears



