



# Supporting and enhancing early education for two year olds

A practitioner's toolkit

[cumberland.gov.uk](http://cumberland.gov.uk)

## I am special, I am two!

Two year olds are curious and keen to explore and discover more about their world.

They are creative thinkers who have a 'can do' attitude to life. They have a strong drive to do things for themselves whilst at the same time needing consistency of routines and caring adults who understand them.

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

### A Good Place to be Two - Community Playthings

#### Toddler rules

If I like it, it's mine.

If it's in my hand it's mine.

If I can take it from you it's mine.

If I had it a little while ago it's mine.

If it's mine it must never appear to be yours in any way.

If I'm doing something or building something, all of the pieces are mine.

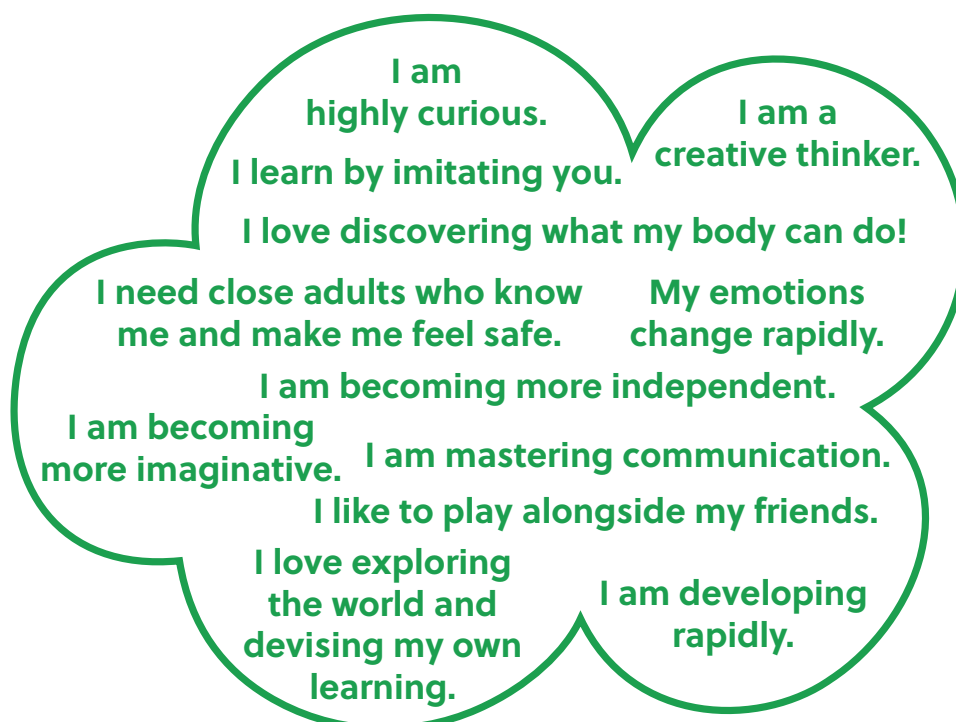
If it looks like it's mine, it's mine.

If I saw it first, it's mine.

If you are playing with something and you put it down, it automatically becomes mine.

If it's broken it's yours.

**Anon.**



# Introduction

In recent years, there has been a strong drive to expand early education provision for two year olds. We know from research that the first three years of a child's life provide a foundation for their later health and development. As increasing numbers of two year olds spend time in early years settings outside of the home, it is vital that the care and education they receive is of the highest quality whilst working in partnership with parents.

This may be the first time a child has had an opportunity to form relationships with anyone outside of the home and close family. It is, therefore, vitally important that those relationships encourage a child to flourish and learn, help them become more independent, resilient and help them on the path to become competent and confident learners.

The Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage: Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five is mandatory for all early years providers: maintained schools; non-maintained schools; independent schools; all providers on the Early Years Register; and all providers registered with an early years childminder agency.

The learning and development requirements cover the areas of learning and development which must shape activities and experiences for children in all early years settings; and assessment arrangements for measuring progress (and requirements for reporting to parents and/or carers). The safeguarding and welfare requirements cover the steps that providers must take to keep children safe and promote their welfare.

## Useful documents

The following can all be found via the Early Years page of the Cumberland Council website <https://legacy.cumberland.gov.uk/childrenservices/childrenandfamilies/cfis/earlyyearsandchildcare/supportforearlyyearsandchildcareprovision.asp>

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Top tips for 2 Year olds.

Development Matters.

Birth to 5 Matters.

# Brain development

When babies are born a lot of neurological structure in the brain is in place. A baby's brain has most of the neurons it will ever have (but weighs only a quarter as much as an adult brain).

## Amazing facts about the growing brain

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

Taken from "Tuning in to Two Year Olds-Improving Outcomes for Two Year Olds"-

Printed by 4Children on behalf of the London Borough of Harrow, 2014

The brain changes in radical ways in the first few years of life and it changes in response to experiences that the child has. Everything they hear, see, touch, taste, and smell and all their movements influences the way the brain makes these connections.

The more stimulating and nurturing the experience provided, the greater the potential to form positive connections. Development will be different for different children and influenced by different experiences/environments. Many factors can affect brain development - parental attachment, health and nutrition, culture.

The connections in the brain that help us to control expression of emotions and behaviour are only just forming. For children to be able to self-regulate they need to have a well-functioning brain.

For the brain to work well the different parts of it need to link together. This is called integration. If this is not developed, they become overwhelmed by emotions and can have tantrums or become aggressive.

The importance of integrating different of parts of the brain is explored in "The Whole Brain Child" by Dr. Dani Siegel and Dr. Tina Payne Bryson.

Integration means that the left logical brain can work well with the emotional right side. Young children are right side dominant, especially in their first three years. When they start to ask "why" their left brain is beginning to be used more. We want the two sides to integrate so that emotions and logic can work well together. This means you are not overcome by emotions or make decisions purely using logic.



Labelling emotions for young children is a way of integrating the logical left with the emotional right.

As well as integrating the left hand and right-hand side of the brain we also need to support children to integrate the three layers of the brain. This deals with different functions that include self-preservation, affection and care and logic, creative thinking etc...

We teach children about different parts of their body, but we rarely teach them about the different parts of their brain and its basic functions. Our brain is the most important part of our body because it controls everything that we do, it controls our movements, it processes information e.g. hearing, taste, sight, touch. It's responsible for our emotions, and our breathing.

## Further reading, research and websites (click on the links)

**[Cumberland Council Early Years advice and guidance - Nurturing children's wellbeing and self-esteem](#)**

**[Centre on the Developing Child - Harvard University](#)**

**[Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families - Early Years in Mind](#)** - This network "provides easy to read and easy to use guidance on supporting the mental health of babies, young children and their families."

"The Whole-Brain Child" by Dr. Daniel J. Siegel and Dr. Tina Payne Bryson, Robinson, 2011

"Assessing Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being (SSTEWS) Scale for 2–5-year-olds provision" by Iram Siraj, Denise Kingston, Edward Melhuish, Trentham Books, 2015

## Sensory play supports brain development

Everything a toddler hears, sees, tastes, touches and smells along with the way they move influences the way the brain makes its connections. The more stimulating and nurturing the experience provided is, the greater the potential to form positive connections. Whenever adults provide sensory play experiences for children, they are helping to stimulate brain development. Resources should be selected to stimulate as many senses as possible – natural resources have greater texture and smell than manufactured products. Two year olds need as many first hand experiences as possible, for example, playing outside in the snow will provide rich, multi-sensory experiences that cannot be replicated through pictures only.

## Ideas to support sensory play

### Sight

- Explore shadows.
- Provide objects to look through; tubes, coloured fabrics, acetates, colour blocks.
- Provide light boxes and objects to use on it e.g., opaque beads and blocks, tea, shells, leaves, petals.
- Homemade sensory bottles.
- Painting.

### Sound

- Human voice.
- Outdoor wind chimes.
- Sound walls with pans, tubes, spoons.
- Musical instruments, commercial and home made.
- Listen for sounds in the environment, inside and out.

### Touch

- Sand and water play – do children have opportunities to explore these with their feet?
- Hand/finger painting.
- Cornflour mixture, gloop, shaving foam, bubbles, play dough, clay, mud.
- Trays of natural materials including leaves, lentils, petals, rice, pasta (cooked and uncooked), bowls of made-up jelly (not jelly cubes), cereal.
- Encourage children to be barefoot outside to experience different textures, e.g. grass, sand, hard surface, wood etc.

### Taste

- Be mindful of children's allergies, intolerances and cultural requirements.
- Baking/cooking activities.
- Cooked and raw vegetables and fruit, introducing unusual ones.

### Smell

- Small stuffed fabric bags with essential oils.
- A collection of things to smell including; empty toothpaste tube, empty perfume bottles, empty bubble bath bottles, spice jars, cinnamon stick, a lemon, soaps, bath bombs, mint, garlic.
- Herb pots/garden.
- Essential oils added to playdough and water.

### Vestibular

- Provide two year olds with opportunities to rock, swing, spin, twirl, tip, jiggle, wobble, slide, bounce, hang upside down and otherwise get dizzy!

### Proprioceptive

- Provide two year olds with opportunities to jump, hop, dig, sweep, wash windows, push barrows, throw balls, fill and empty buckets, dance and run.

# Attachment/Key person

John Bowlby's work on attachment theory proposed that children instinctively seek a secure relationship with their caregivers. These attachment figures provide a secure base for the child. The primary attachment figures are the most important (usually parents). The secondary attachment figure acts as a back-up team to support the primary attachment e.g. the key person.

The type of attachment relationship a child forms actually helps shape trillions of connections in the brain that support secure language development, good physical and mental health development, better life chances, better parenting for the future and protects against anti-social behaviour patterns. Secure attachments help a child to develop a positive sense of self, to regulate impulses and emotions, to develop empathy, to be resilient to manage stress and adversity and make friends.

'One of the key activators of stress for young children is separation from their primary attachment figure, as well as their secondary attachment figure, and unpredictability about where their secure base is and who they can connect with.'

**"Tuning in to Two Year Olds" 4Children on behalf of the London Borough of Harrow, 2014**

Positive relationships and attachment are vital for young children in order for them to feel secure, loved and supported. Two year olds need to know that they will be comforted when they are distressed and to have a 'secure base' and a "safe haven" (parent/carer or key person) to regularly return to as they become more confident to play and explore. All children are unique and have had different experiences prior to starting at their early year's setting. Therefore, it is important that the settling in period is carefully planned to minimise the distress to the child and their family. Practitioners need to take account of individual needs and provide a personalised approach rather than a 'one-size fits all'. A supportive settling in period is like building a bridge between the key person, the child and the family.

## How can practitioners help me to settle in?

- Allow plenty of time for my parent and I to get to know my key person.
- Make time to find out as much about me as possible.
- Let me and my family know that we are welcome.
- Talk to the people who know me best and find out what I like and dislike.
- Visiting me in my home environment can make me feel special.
- Allow my special people to stay with me while I get to know you.
- Let me bring my comforters and show me a safe place to keep them.
- If I have any additional needs, find ways to support me and my family.

As the child settles into the setting, their attachment with their key person will be strengthened as they spend time together.

Daily care routines such as nappy changing and mealtimes provide significant opportunities for developing communication skills, social interaction and independence.

### **My key person needs to:**

- Get to know and understand both me and my family.
- Help me as I grow emotionally, socially, cognitively and physically.
- Respect my stage of development and celebrate my progress.
- Have appropriate expectations of what I can do and understand.
- Identify and respond to my interests and way of learning.
- Value my identity and cultural background.

A strong bond with their key person is like an emotional safety net, and it is essential that it is strong enough to 'catch' the child in the absence of their parents. Think about those times the key person may not be available, they may be on holiday, lunch breaks, days off, part time. How will you support your children's wellbeing and attachment at these times?

### **Consider the following:**

- Consistency and continuity of staff.
- Staff who know the children well.
- Keeping parents informed of any changes and giving them time to form relationships with other members of staff.
- Have a back-up key person.

### **Further reading, research and websites**

#### **Centre on the Developing Child - Harvard University**

"Why Love Matters: How affection shapes a baby's brain". Gerhardt, S. (2004) Routledge

"What every parent needs to Know" Margot Sutherland, (2007), Dorling Kindersley (DK.UK)



# Working with parents and home learning

Section 1.1 of the **Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2023** defines what providers must do, working in partnership with parents and/or carers, to promote the learning and development of all children in their care.

Just as a child's needs are individual, parents and carers needs also vary widely. Some parents may come into the setting daily, whereas some parents may only come in occasionally due to other pressures or commitments. It is important to find ways of connecting and building positive relationships with all families. Families are unique in terms of their language used, life experiences and cultural background; all of these factors may influence the way in which the family and setting engage.

**Development Matters 2020** reminds us that 'it is important for parents and carers to have a strong and respectful partnership as it sets the scene for children to thrive in the early years. The help that parents give their children at home has a significant impact on their learning.'

**The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE 2004)**, a study of 3,000 three to seven year olds in their homes and early years settings, found that the quality of the home learning environment is the most important factor affecting a child's outcomes.

"Research tells us that regardless of the quality of settings, the most important predictor of children's future outcomes is the quality of the home learning environment, so involving parents in their children's learning is the most significant factor in enabling children to do well despite disadvantage. The benefits are greatest when practitioners and families work in respectful partnership to develop ways to support children both at home and in the setting."

**Birth to 5 Matters; Guidance by the sector, for the sector - Early Education 2021**

Ensure your setting reflects the culture and diversity of the children and families who access your provision.

Children's learning is enhanced when parents, carers and practitioners share their learning and development together in a joined up, continuous way. Here are some ways that practitioners and families can work together to share this exciting journey:

- Make sure all parents feel welcome in your setting.
- Maintain professionalism whilst also being supportive and friendly.
- Celebrating achievements and sharing interests from both home and the setting. This can be through on-line journals or by sharing paper based learning journals.
- Set up a secure link to share photos with parents and encourage them to send photos to you.
- Day to day exchange of information between the family and key person.
- Sharing the ways that children learn through leaflets and websites.
- Informative displays, photographs of children participating in activities.
- Developing resources for families to borrow, for example books, story bags and activity packs.

- Share the Cumbria 'Time Together at Home' with parents and carers.
- Share rhymes with parents (not all parents will know the words to your songs and rhymes).
- Share the Cumbria "Home Learning, chat, play, share" ideas with parents.
- Share activity ideas with parents. Ideas to share can be found on Cumberland Council website "What can I do today at home?" activities.
- Hold parent workshops.
- Hold open day/evenings.
- Involve parents in trips, outings and walks.
- Set up stay and play sessions.
- Invite parents into your setting perhaps to do some gardening, to read a story, to bake with the children or share their skills.
- Find ways to encourage fathers to be involved in their children's learning.
- Be flexible in your approach to communicating with parents, choose the right time to speak to parents, don't be in a rush.
- Plan for regular chats with parents as they can often feel that they are missing out on their child's day.
- Share information and newsletters about events that are taking place in your local children's centre.
- Promote local community events and fundraisers as a way for families to get to know each other.

## Further reading, research and websites

Information can be found on the Cumberland Council website -

**[Support for Childminders, Early Years and Childcare Provision](#)**

**[What can I do today at home?](#)**

**[Child and Family support Service 0-19 \(Children's Centres contacts\)](#)**

**[Hungry Little Minds](#)**

**[CBeebies](#)**

# Enabling environments and characteristics of effective teaching and learning

“Children benefit from the opportunity to choose their own learning and enquiries through play when settings embrace free flow and choice as children move between activities and experiences, not simply from inside to outside. Given access to natural resources and first-hand experiences, children will independently explore, discover and investigate, choosing the items and the environment that best suit their own interests and their development and learning needs. Such an environment will support a child’s creativity and critical thinking, building the Characteristics of Effective Learning.”

**Birth to 5 Matters; Guidance by the sector, for the sector – Early Education 2021**

Evaluate how and what resources are accessible. You do not have to have all of your resources available all of the time as this can lead to a chaotic environment where practitioners are spending their time tidying up resources that have been left scattered. It is important for staff to effectively interact with the children, model play and show them how to care for their environment. Resources can be rotated to keep children interested.

Click here to find Cumberland Council audits “2 Year Old Provision”  
“Characteristics of Effective Learning”

## Loose parts play

You could consider providing loose parts to support children’s play.

What do we mean by loose parts? “Loose parts mean alluring, beautiful, found objects and materials that children can move, manipulate, control, and change while they play. Children can carry, combine, redesign, line up, take apart, and put loose parts back together in almost endless ways.”

[www.communityplaythings.com](http://www.communityplaythings.com)

## Further reading, research and websites

[Loose parts: inspiring play in young children – blog](#)

[www.playscotland.org/play/playful-learning/loose-parts-play/](http://www.playscotland.org/play/playful-learning/loose-parts-play/)

[Cumberland Council Loose Parts Play document](#)

## Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning

Two year olds have an all-consuming drive to engage in, and explore, the world around them. Young children learn best when they are encouraged to follow their natural curiosity and are supported to appropriately devise their own learning and discoveries (self-regulated learning). Children will be helped in developing skills for lifelong learning when they are nurtured

in an environment that promotes the development of the characteristics of learning:

- **Playing and exploring** - children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go' .
- **Active learning** - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements.
- **Creating and thinking critically** - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.

### Characteristics of Effective Learning - a briefing paper (Cumberland Council)

(Early Years Foundation Stage Briefing – Characteristics of Effective Learning)

"How children learn – The characteristics of effective early learning", Nancy Stewart (2011), Early Education

# Schematic play and common patterns of play

Toddlers can often be seen doing repeated actions for example, dropping the cup from a high chair, throwing objects across a room, spinning round in circles or lining objects up. These repeated behaviours can often be misinterpreted as challenging but is actually schematic behaviour. These are ways in which children can begin to make sense of the world around them.

'The word 'schema' is generally used to describe patterns of repeated behaviour which children use to explore and express their developing ideas and thoughts through play and exploration.' (Understanding Schemas in Young Children: Again! Again Louis et al, 2013) 'Schemas have now been recognised as such an important part of children's growth and learning, that understanding the theory behind schema development is a key responsibility for every early years practitioner.'

**(Understanding Schemas in Young Children: Again! Again Louis et al, 2013)**

Tamsin Grimmer explores this further in her book "Observing and developing schematic behaviour in young children" July 2017.

## What does a two year old need?

- Someone who understands schemas.
- Someone who can observe me well.
- Someone who knows how I think.
- Someone who can provide for my needs.



Schema	Adults can provide	Other resources
<p><b>Trajectory</b> An interest in throwing and dropping things from a height, or climbing up and jumping off things repeatedly.</p>	<p>Balls and equipment that can be thrown at a target (balls, balloons, beanbags, bubbles, wet sponges).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blowing things such as feathers, tissue paper, ping pong balls, lightweight scarves.</li> <li>• Using a simple pulley system.</li> <li>• Spraying water and paint from squeeze bottles.</li> <li>• Using pipes and funnels in the water tray.</li> <li>• Running with kites and streamers, rolling cars</li> <li>• Down guttering, and allowing children to use</li> <li>• Swings safely.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rotation</b> A fascination with spinning, including wheeled toys, being swung round or riding on a roundabout.</p>	<p>Equipment that can be turned or spun round and round (knobs, taps, keys, wind-up toys).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamers and ribbons.</li> <li>• Hula hoops.</li> <li>• Windmills.</li> <li>• Exploring analogue watches and clocks.</li> <li>• Mixing and stirring in creative play.</li> <li>• Waterwheels.</li> <li>• Kaleidoscopes.</li> <li>• Using paint rollers.</li> <li>• Watching sycamore seeds fall.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Connecting and disconnecting</b> An interest in joining different things together and taking things apart.</p>	<p>Equipment that can be joined and then disconnected (train tracks, construction sets), sticking or taping materials together.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making human chains.</li> <li>• Weaving with natural materials.</li> <li>• Connecting straws or magnets.</li> <li>• Building with junk materials.</li> <li>• Connecting pipes and funnels together.</li> <li>• Making a domino rally.</li> <li>• Threading beads of pasta.</li> <li>• Using washing lines.</li> <li>• Making chalk lines to follow.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Orientation</b> An interest in putting objects or their own bodies in different places and positions i.e. upside down and on their sides.</p>	<p>Objects and equipment that can be viewed from different angles, and also sturdy equipment that the children can climb on.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using magnifying glasses.</li> <li>• Mirrors and binoculars.</li> <li>• Creating peep holes.</li> <li>• Climbing and swinging.</li> <li>• Using ropes and tyre swings.</li> <li>• Tumbling mats and headstands.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Enveloping</b> A fascination in covering themselves, objects and their drawings and paintings, as well as wrapping things up.</p>	<p>Bags, baskets and containers for children to put things in, and fabric or clothing for children to hide themselves in.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Envelopes in the writing area.</li> <li>• Wrapping paper, boxes and gift tags.</li> <li>• Nesting toys or Russian dolls.</li> <li>• Shape sorters.</li> <li>• Cellophane in the dough area.</li> <li>• Parachute play.</li> <li>• Sand and soil for burying things in.</li> <li>• Variety of different papers.</li> </ul>

Schema	Adults can provide	Other resources
<b>Positioning</b> An interest in lining up objects.	Toys, books and other objects that can be lined up or stacked e.g. cars.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mosaics.</li> <li>• Peg boards.</li> <li>• Small objects (stones, shells, buttons).</li> <li>• Creating layers in paint/collage.</li> <li>• Train tracks.</li> <li>• Sorting activities.</li> <li>• Games involving hiding and finding objects.</li> </ul>
<b>Transporting</b> A fascination in moving themselves or objects from one place to another, bringing objects to an adult, and carrying things around in bags or containers.	A wide variety of containers to help children transport items e.g. bags, jugs, cars, buckets and wheelbarrows.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add gravel, shells and pebbles to sand play.</li> <li>• Building waterways with guttering.</li> <li>• Using logs, rocks and bricks.</li> <li>• Using different sized stacking boxes.</li> <li>• carts, trolleys, pushchairs and prams.</li> <li>• Shopping baskets, and filling egg cups with small items.</li> </ul>

## The role of the adult

The role of the adult is to observe children in their play, identify possible schemas, and plan for these in the children's next steps for learning and development. Schemas may not be seen in isolation; young children can often display more than one schema in their play – this is referred to as cluster of schemas.

## Ideas for sharing knowledge of schemas with parents and carers:

- Consider creating a display to inform parents about schemas.
- Offer the parents handouts or leaflets.
- Direct parents to useful websites.

## Further reading, research and websites

### Pen Green Key Concepts Schemas

Jean Piaget (1896 - 1980) was amongst the first to recognise patterns of behaviours in young children (schemas)

Lev Vygotsky (1896 - 1934) discussed the symbolic functions of language in more detail

Professor Tina Bruce worked with Chris Athey and further developed the research "Extending Thought in Young Children. A Parent-Teacher Partnership", Athey, C. (2007) 2nd edn. SAGE Publications Ltd.

"Understanding Schemas in Young Children: Again! Again!" Louis, S., Beswick, C. and Featherstone, S. (2013) 2nd edn. Featherstone Education.

"Threads of Thinking: Schemas and Young Children's Learning" Nutbrown, C (2011). 4th edn. SAGE Publications Ltd

# Managing Behaviour

Two year olds experience a lot of frustration as they often know exactly what they want to do and how they want to do it, but they may not yet be able to do it for themselves or express what they want to do verbally. A two year old's brain is still developing. The pre-frontal cortex, the part of the brain that deals with planning and organising is not yet developed sufficiently to enable children to think through the consequences of their actions.

Below are some factors that may have an impact on children's behaviour, this list not exhaustive;

- Limited communication can cause frustration as the child struggles to make themselves understood.
- Tiredness can mean children will struggle to cope and may have more tantrums.
- Hunger and thirst, if a child is hungry or thirsty, they cannot concentrate. Low blood sugar can affect their ability to regulate their emotions. Allergies and food intolerances can also affect their behaviour as they may have stomach ache or feel not well.
- Over and under stimulation can affect a child's mood and behaviour. Too many sounds, sights and smells can impact on a child's behaviour as they become overwhelmed. On the other hand, toddlers need to be able to run around and move and cannot be expected to sit for long periods of time. Their core strength is still developing.
- Changes in a child's personal life can affect a child's behaviour, it is important for the key person to be aware of this to support the child appropriately.
- Developmentally inappropriate expectations. For example, expecting them to share. Two year olds are not developmentally able to share. They don't understand the concept of sharing. "I see, I want and I grab without thinking about the consequences."  
Tassoni, P (2018) Getting it right for two year olds: Hodder education.
- Special Educational Needs – it is important to understand children's individual stage of development and how their disability or needs may affect this.
- Feeling unsafe. Children need secure attachments, continuity of care, predictable routines and good transitions. The role of key person is important in supporting a child to feel safe and secure. Any changes in the people who care for them, their environment etc. may affect a child's behaviour.

## How can you help?

- Give children the vocabulary to express their emotions and feelings. Modelling language through simple role play and small world play with figures can support this.
- Help children to deal with conflicts and misunderstandings and show empathy towards each other by joining them in their play and modelling appropriate behaviour.
- Talk calmly, acknowledging that the child is feeling cross or upset and reflect their feelings back to them for example by saying 'I can see you are feeling sad'.

- Remember time out is developmentally inappropriate as the child cannot automatically change their behaviour in this situation.
- Have consistent approach that is followed by all staff in your setting and share this with parents.

## Tantrums

- Be available when a child is having a tantrum or is upset as this can be a frightening time for a child. So, stay close to show that you are available until he/she is calm again.
- Consider how other children may be feeling as they may be upset by the noise and disruption and will be reassured by the practitioner staying calm and acting kindly.
- When the tantrum has passed, help the child with a drink of water and some kind, quiet words of reassurance.

## Biting

- This is an age and stage related behaviour. It is commonly seen between the ages of 18 months and 2 years.
- It can be very upsetting for the children, parents and staff.
- It is important to know the reason why children bite and how to deal with effectively and sensitively.
- Biting can be a sensory experience, a learned behaviour, a means of communication.
- Staff should be trained in how to respond to biting, to be able to support parents, the child who has been bitten and the child who bites.

## Further reading, research and websites

Early Support: Information about behaviour Downloadable from:

**[Early support - Information about behaviour](#)**

**[Early Years Alliance Biting advice](#)**

**[Cumberland Council "Supporting children with behaviour"](#)**

"Getting it right for two year olds", Tassoni, P (2018): Hodder education

"I am two! Working effectively with two year olds and their families" Mathieson, K. (2013). Early Education.

# The seven areas of learning and development

The EYFS comprises of seven areas of learning and development. While practitioners will plan challenging and enjoyable experiences across all seven areas of learning, the three prime areas are particularly important for young children from birth to three years.

## Prime areas of learning

- Communication and Language.
- Physical Development.
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development.

## Specific areas of learning

- Literacy.
- Mathematics.
- Understanding of the World.
- Expressive Arts and Design.

## Prime areas of learning – prime importance

It is vitally important that practitioners remember the three prime areas are interconnected and that they are the foundation on which the other four areas of learning are built. If the child is not secure in the prime areas between three and five years of age, it can hinder the child's development – the specific areas of learning rely on a firm foundation in the prime areas.

## Communication and Language

“The development of children’s spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. Children’s back-and-forth interactions form an early age form the foundations for language and cognitive development. The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language rich environment is crucial.”

**Development Matters, Dept for Ed, July 2021**

## What does a two year old need?

- A calm, quiet space with little background noise.
- Someone who is interested in what I have to say.
- Someone to listen and understand that I am communicating.
- Something to talk about.



- Someone to tell me what words mean.
- An interesting environment.
- A communication-friendly space, indoors and outdoors.
- Somewhere where my home language is valued.
- Support with pictures or gestures where I struggle to make myself understood.

## What a two year old can do

- Talk/communicate to 'my adult' and friends.
- Learn new words when I play.
- Can follow a simple instruction.
- Can point to objects in a book when asked.
- Can start to put two or three words together.
- Experiment with sounds and language, and try things out.
- Develop my listening skills and sound recognition.
- Use pictures and/or signs to support my language.
- Identify different sounds.
- Communicate my needs effectively.
- Learn new songs and rhymes.
- Enjoy my favourite stories.
- Know that some of my friends may use words in a different language.

## Adult role

- Get down to the child's level and use eye contact when talking.
- Use children's names first to get their attention.
- Tune in and listen before responding.
- Give children space and time to understand and process language before responding.
- Be comfortable with silences which allow them time to think.
- Show real interest in what the children have to say.
- Try to comment on what the children are saying and doing rather than asking too many questions, think 1 question to 4 comments.
- Be aware of appropriate questioning techniques.
- Keep questioning to a minimum to avoid interrogation.
- Let children initiate conversations and do not overwhelm them with too much talk – keep a balance.

- Sing familiar nursery rhymes, action songs, popular culture songs and made-up songs.
- Share stories throughout the day with individuals or in small groups – ‘a sofa full of two year olds is enough!’
- Provide opportunities for children to develop their listening skills.
- Model and expand children’s language, and avoid correcting their speech.
- Be ‘tuned in’ to the children’s interests in order to support and extend their language.
- Value non-verbal communication.
- Work in close partnership with parents, particularly for use of specific words from child’s background.
- Encourage parents to borrow resources to support language development at home.
- Use signing and picture prompts where needed.
- Understand the importance of speech, language and communication development, and how to support it.
- Know what to expect at different stages / ages and what to do if there are concerns.
- Monitor children’s speech, language and communication development on a regular basis.

## What the adult can provide

- Model clear and correct pronunciation of words (avoid too much dialect).
- Provide comprehensive information and resources to parents and carers.
- Language development at home.
- Create a language-rich environment both indoors and outdoors.
- Value the child’s voice in the setting.
- Imaginative play toys, e.g. dressing-up clothes, doll’s house, tea set, Playmobil, etc.
- Messy play with sensory exploration, e.g. water play, sand play, chalk boards, finger painting, play dough, etc.
- Inset puzzles – opportunities to develop early vocabulary.
- Listening to appropriate CDs – helping to develop listening and attention skills.
- Repetitive books, e.g. ‘Dear Zoo’, ‘The Gingerbread Man’, ‘We’re Going on a Bear Hunt’, etc.
- Simple lotto boards – helping to develop early vocabulary.
- Colour and shape matching, as well as counting games and activities.
- Puppets – make up stories and act them out.
- Sequencing toys, e.g. coloured bricks, threading beads, etc.
- Rhyming lotto, rhyming books – helping to focus on the differences and similarities between word sounds, building the foundations for reading and writing.

- Take a consistent approach to the use of signs, symbols and pictures, where used.
- Make use of an effective speech and language monitoring tool.
- Arrange training and development opportunities for staff, parents and carers.
- Provide a range of musical instruments, both commercial and home made.

“Speaking more than one language has lots of advantages for children. It is the norm in many countries around the world. Children will learn English from a strong foundation in their home language. It is important for you to encourage families to use their home language for linguistic as well as cultural reasons.

Children learning English will typically go through a quiet phase when they do not say very much and may then use words in both languages in the same sentence. Talk to parents about what language they speak at home, try and learn a few key words and celebrate multilingualism in your setting.”

**Development Matters, Dept for Ed, July 2021**

## English as an additional language

### Further reading, research and websites

**Cumberland Council Early Years website - Support for Childminders, early years and childcare provision -**

- Supporting children’s speech, language and communication development in early years settings and schools.
- Developing good EAL practice in the EYFS.
- Embedding cultures and diversity within an early years setting.
- Home learning – Chat, Play Share.
- What can I do today?
- Home learning and time together.

**[www.speechandlanguage.org.uk](http://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk)**

**[www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)**

**[www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk](http://www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk)**

**[wordsforlife.org.uk](http://wordsforlife.org.uk)**

**[en-gb.facebook.com/CumbriaCommunicates](https://en-gb.facebook.com/CumbriaCommunicates)** - Facebook page for Cumbria speech and language therapists

“Communication Friendly Spaces: Improving speaking and listening skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage”, Jarman, E. (2007)

“Babbling Babies”, “Toddler Talk” – I CAN, 2011

# Personal Social and Emotional Development

“Children’s personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is crucial for children to lead healthy and happy lives and is fundamental to their cognitive development. Underpinning their personal development are the important attachments that shape their social world.”

**Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2021**

“Who we are (personal), how we get along with others (social) and how we feel (emotional) are foundations that form the bedrock of our lives. As we move through life, we are continually developing our sense of self as we weave a web of relationships with self, others and with the world.”

**Birth to 5 Matters; Guidance by the sector, for the sector – Early Education 2021**

## What does a two year old need?

- My adult’ who knows all about me even before I start.
- Time to get to know my new environment.
- People who understand me and my needs.
- A safe base.
- An environment that enables me to make independent choices.
- Somewhere to put my things, such as my comfort object.
- To see photos of my family, pets and toys.
- Enough time for me and my learning.
- Someone to talk to my parents about how I can learn at home.
- Unhurried and flexible care routines.
- Support to dress and undress myself.
- Support for me to be healthy and to care for myself.
- Healthy food and drink.
- Opportunities to learn about healthy living.
- To make friends.
- My own culture and background to be valued.

## What a two year old can do

- Go to my adult when I need support.
- Be confident about my new environment.
- Find my coat and shoes when I want to play outside.
- Look at photos of my family when I want to.
- I am starting to express myself and I may become frustrated and impulsive.
- Can learn to put on my own coat and shoes.
- Begin to learn to play co-operatively with my friends.
- Learn how to share the toys.
- Be proud of my own culture and background.
- Continue my learning at home.
- Wash my own hands.
- Go to the toilet independently, but I may need a bit of help pulling my pants up.
- Dress and undress myself, but I may need support with zips, buttons and fasteners.
- Learn about healthy food and drink.
- Enjoy harvesting, cooking and eating my own produce.

## Adult role

- Be patient, calm and affectionate.
- Build positive relationships with parents and carers during settling-in periods and ongoing.
- Gather important information about daily routines, nappy routines, comfort objects, likes and dislikes, and people who are important to them when the children first start.
- Listen to and talk with the children.
- Be supportive and understand the children's developing emotions and feelings.
- Use photographs of the children and their family in discussions.
- Be flexible with the children's routines.
- Use care times to strengthen the key person bond.
- Support young children to dress and undress themselves.
- Be understanding about helping young children to share and take turns.
- Understand a typical two year old perspective of 'I see, I want, I take'.
- Work closely with the children's family and carers to continue the learning journey at home.
- Model and support positive interactions.
- Be sensitive to and embed the different cultures and backgrounds within the setting.



## What the adult can provide

- An effective key person system.
- Flexible settling-in policy and arrangements.
- Use of 'All About Me' documentation and regularly updating the details.
- A whole staff approach to supporting home learning.
- An accessible space for the children to put their belongings.
- Low-level access to family photographs (display, baskets, books, etc.)
- Unhurried and flexible day-today routines.
- Focused one-to-one attention during routine care times.
- Give children time to develop their independence skills.
- Balance of space and multiple sets of some equipment to help with turn taking and sharing ( 1 wheelbarrow is not enough).
- Choose equipment that can be used by more than one child as well as individually e.g. double easel.
- A calm, homely and uncluttered environment.
- Create an environment that reflects diversity, with equipment that reflects the children's homes, and notices in home languages.
- Provide mirrors where children can see and talk about themselves.

## Further reading, research and websites

### [Cumberland Council Early Years website - Support for Childminders, early years and childcare provision](#)

- Supporting an anxious child
- Fun activities to support children's personal and social skills and emotional wellbeing
- Nurturing young children's wellbeing and self-esteem
- 1001 Critical Days

"Why Love Matters: How affection shapes a baby's brain", Gerhardt, S. (2004). Routledge.

"People Under Three: Young Children in Day Care", Goldschmied, E. and Jackson, S. (1994) Routledge.

"A Nurturing Environment for Children up to Three", Hope, S. (2007). Islington.

"I am two! Working effectively with two year olds and their families", Mathieson, K. (2013). Early Education.

# Physical Development

“Intricately interwoven with emotional, social, cognitive and language development, physical development underpins all other areas of a child’s learning and development. Extensive physical experience in early childhood puts in place the neurological, sensory and motor foundations necessary for feeling good in your body and comfortable in the world”

**Birth to 5 Matters; Guidance by the sector, for the sector – Early Education 2021**

## What does a two year old need?

- Space to be active both indoors and out.
- A flexible routine that allows me to move when I need.
- Plenty of opportunities to move in order to understand the messages from my body.
- Somewhere to run, crawl, climb and jump.
- Opportunities to throw, kick and catch a ball.
- Somewhere to rock, swing, spin and slide.
- Activities to help develop my fine motor skills e.g. threading, lacing, building towers.
- Unhurried nappy changing in pleasant surroundings, and flexible care routines.
- Opportunities to develop my balance and sense of spatial awareness.
- Daily opportunities for outdoor play.
- Opportunities to learn about healthy living.

## What a two year old can do

- Have fun moving my body in different ways.
- Enjoy my time running, jumping, spinning, rolling, swinging, twirling, wobbling, bouncing, sliding, crawling and mark making.
- Digging, sweeping, washing the windows of the cars, filling the toy trucks and buckets, pushing the wheelbarrow, pulling the trolley, using the pulley and hanging things on the washing line.
- Go to the toilet independently, but I may need a bit of help pulling my pants up.
- Dress and undress myself, but I may need support with zips, buttons and fasteners.
- Learn about healthy food and drink.
- Enjoy harvesting, cooking and eating my own produce.

## Adult role

- Promote a positive approach towards healthy lifestyles.
- Promote the importance of good oral health with children and families.
- Support parents with ideas for healthy nutrition, e.g. healthy lunchboxes, non-sugary drinks, etc.
- Review the indoor and outdoor environments in terms of promoting physical development.
- Support the children to be independent during meal times, e.g. pouring their own drinks, preparing snack, serve their own food, etc.
- Allow time and encourage the children to be as independent as possible with their own care routines.
- Support parents with ideas for toilet-training and sleep routines.
- Allow some risk-taking and provide appropriate levels of challenge.
- Be aware of typical stages of physical development in children and do not expect them to sit for long periods of time.
- Focus on the development of gross motor skills (single limb movements, throwing, pushing, pulling, etc.) and muscle strength which in turn will lead to promoting fine manipulative skills (precise use of hands and fingers, development of pincer grips, using cutlery, drawing, writing, etc.)
- Share with parents the importance of the stages of physical development.

## What the adult can provide

- A stimulating and well-resourced outdoor environment.
- Opportunities to promote physical development indoors.
- Opportunities to support large motor play: milk crates, guttering, logs, planks, bikes and trikes, tunnels, climbing, frames, barrels, tyres, large blocks, wheelbarrow, bats and balls, sweeping brushes, parachute, scarves, streamers, construction and building blocks, bags, large paint brushes, mud pit, stirring and whisking in water tray, etc.
- Opportunities to support fine motor development: putting on hats, coats and boots, playdough and other malleable materials, washing line and pegs, chinks, paints, gloop, slime (soap flakes and water), finger paints, small objects for sorting and to develop pincer grip (corks, lids, cones, pebbles, shells, large buttons, cloths, tubes, chains), using tweezers, peg boards, threading, water squirters / plant spray bottles, bubble wrap, crayons, pens, scissors, cooking equipment, small blocks and construction materials, jigsaws, boxes with lids, bags with zips, sponges, chopsticks, etc.
- Low toilets, sinks and towels and taps that can be turned on and off as needed.
- Healthy and nutritional food and drink.
- Appropriate child-sized cutlery and crockery for mealtimes.

- Appropriately sized tables and chairs that enables children’s feet to touch the ground for stability.
- Positive ethos towards healthy lifestyles.
- Space to grow own fruit and vegetables e.g. raised beds, garden pots, growbags, etc.

## Further reading, research and websites

### Cumberland Council Early Years website - Support for Childminders, early years and childcare provision

Get a Grip – developing ideas for early writing

Top Tips to develop: Fine motor skills

Top Tips to develop: Gross motor skills

Healthy families Cumbria Pledge

[www.cumbria.gov.uk/publichealth/healthyfamiliescumbriapledge.asp](http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/publichealth/healthyfamiliescumbriapledge.asp)

NHS Change 4 Life

<https://legacy.cumberland.gov.uk/publichealth/healthyfamiliescumbriapledge.asp>

NHS Change 4 Life

[www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities)

Early Movers

[www.earlymovers.org.uk/about](http://www.earlymovers.org.uk/about)

“A good place to be two: Developing quality environments indoors and out”.  
Community Playthings with Jan White (2013), Community Playthings.

“The Well Balanced Child: Movement and Early Learning” Goddard Blythe, S (2004).  
Hawthorn Press.

“Outdoors and active”, Julie Mountain, Early Education

“Every Child a Mover: a practical guide to providing young children with the physical opportunities they need”, Jan White, Early Education, 2015

“50 Fantastic ideas for outside all year round”, Alistair Bryce Clegg, Featherstone (2015)

The Little Book of Gross Motor Skills, Featherstone (2012)

# Children with Additional Needs

## Recognising additional needs

There is great variation between young children and much will happen, although in different patterns, over the year they are two. Early years practitioners need a sound knowledge of child development to ensure that they do not become concerned about skills that are unrealistic for this age group. Emotional control and social skills are a work in progress for most two year olds!

Practitioners or parents may have concerns at any time about a child. Without leaping to any conclusions, you can do a few informal observations and talk with a child's parent about your findings.

You may need to share your knowledge of child development with parents.

For those children who, even with targeted support do not make progress we would hope or expect to see, additional advice may need to be obtained from external services with more specialist knowledge.

## Two year olds with pre-existing needs

Some two year olds will join you and their family already has a clear understanding, possibly a diagnosis, of how a special educational need and/or disability is affecting their child's pattern of development. Usual good practice for partnership working applies – talk with parents to understand their child as an individual with familiar routines, likes and dislikes. Parents will be able to tell you about their child's current ability level and any special help that will be needed.

You are expected to make reasonable adjustments to include children with special educational needs, disabilities and/or health conditions that affect their development or behaviour. The legislation does not insist that all children must be admitted. Some children with profound disabilities or complex health needs may genuinely need more than some providers can manage, but it would be regarded as obstructive if a child was refused for a reason like they are not toilet trained or require medication.

## Communicating with external services

It is important to liaise with any professional who works with a child in your provision. Children's needs may vary between home and provision, and practitioners sometimes have different questions and queries from parents. The expertise that a particular professional has can help provide you with specific and focused targets, and their ideas and suggestions can feed into your planning for the child. This can be a time-consuming task and requires mutual perseverance.

To get the best out of any communication with professionals, practitioners ought to consider the following questions:

- What do I want to know or need help with?
- Who is the best person to help me or give me the information I need?
- Have I got the parents permission to talk to the professional concerned?

- Do I have all the relevant contact details for the professional?
- How will I record the information and pass it on to colleagues?
- When will I next review progress and contact the professional again?

## Further information

You are not expected to know everything about every special educational need and/or disability. Good practice is to know how to find out more. Parents will be experts about their own child but may not necessarily have had much support so far, especially if a diagnosis was recent. A good place to start is the Cumberland Early Years Ordinarily Available Provision document and the Early Years SENCO toolkit - or contact an Area SENCO.

### **Cumberland Early Years Ordinarily Available Provision**

#### **Contact: A to Z of medical conditions**

#### **Council for Disabled Children: Disabled children and the Equality Act 2010**

# Six steps to recognising additional needs and planning for two year olds with identified needs

## Step 1: A unique child – A holistic view

- Think about what you already know.
- • Think about what is happening in the child's life and family circumstances.

Talk to parents.

## Step 2: Enabling environments – The reflective provider

- Reflect upon your own provision and practice.
- What is the child's experience of their time in your provision?
- Are you differentiating and adapting to meet their needs?
- Talk to practitioners.

## Step 3: Child development

- Think about what might be developmentally appropriate for the child.
- Consider their age and stage of development.
- Remember every child will develop at a different pace, in different areas, at different times.

## Step 4: The graduated approach (assess)

- Focus on the child's areas of strength and those which are cause for concern.
- Carry out a few observations.
- Ask other practitioners for their observations of the child.
- Analyse/reflect upon the observations.
- What are the most important points you have noted?

## Step 5: The graduated approach (plan, do and review)

- Alongside parents decide on a plan of action, this may mean more individualised planning for the child.
- How can you use the child's strengths?
- What needs to be done and who is going to do it?
- Regularly review your plan and review the child's progress against the plan.

## Step 6: The graduated approach (plan, do and review)

If there are still concerns, and with parental consent, seek further advice from outside services by submitting a referral form:

Cumberland's SEND Local Offer

[Early Years Professionals page](#)

Education

[Cumbria Safeguarding Children's Partnership: SEND in the Early Help Process](#)

Health

[NHS Foundation Trust - North Cumbria Integrated Care: Children's physical health and development team request for assessment](#)

Family Action

[0-19 Child and family support service](#)



# Progress check at age two

The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage states on p. 18

“2.4. When a child is aged between two and three, practitioners must review their progress, and provide parents and/or carers with a short written summary of their child’s development in the prime areas. This progress check must identify the child’s strengths, and any areas where the child’s progress is less than expected. If there are significant emerging concerns, or an identified special educational need or disability, practitioners should develop a targeted plan to support the child’s future learning and development involving parents and/or carers and other professionals (for example, the provider’s Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) or health professionals) as appropriate.”

## Cumbria revised 2 year old review template

With the introduction of the revised EYFS from 1st September 2021, the 2 Year Old Review template has been updated and refreshed in order to meet the requirements of the Statutory framework. The template has been shared with colleagues in the Early Years Reference Group who represent the sector and feedback has informed the new template.

The 2 Year Old Review remains a statutory assessment for all 2 Year Olds attending an early years setting including childminders, PVI’s and schools. The 2 Year Old Health Assessment remains a mandated contact for health between 2 and 2.5 years of age. Due to the current situation, some children may not have had their 2-2.5 year old visit, however if you have any concerns about the health or development of a child please contact your local health visiting service.

The updated template can be found here if you wish to use it for your 2 year old mandatory assessments.

### [Cumbria 2 year old review template](#)

### [Guidance for using the Integrated 2 Year Old Progress Check](#)

Health Visitors provide a supportive outreach service for children and families under five years. They work in the community and families with children under 5 always have a named Health Visitor that they can ask for advice. Health Visitors often identify children that will need this enhanced support and work with other agencies ensuring the families get the support needed and ensure a smooth transition to school with all the appropriate support required.

# Mixed age provision

Two year olds are at a unique stage of development. They are developing their independence and do not want you to do everything for them (this may mean that tasks will take a lot longer!) children experience many positive advantages by being cared for in mixed aged groups, for instance social interaction and contact with siblings. However, it is important to remember that a two year old should not be treated as a mini pre-schooler or be expected to behave in the same way as an older child - their brains and bodies are at a different developmental stage.

## Tips for supporting two year olds in mixed age groups:

- Remember that three and four year old children may want to participate in group role play activities in the home corner whereas a two year old may be more interested in using the space to embed their understanding of schemas e.g. transporting the resources elsewhere. Provide other resources for schema exploration to try to minimise this conflict.
- Expectations of two year olds during group times need to be realistic. Shorter gathering times in a small group work best.
- A sofa full of two year olds at story time is enough.
- In mixed age provision, there needs to be flexibility in rules which may need to be relaxed for the younger children. For example, a two year old may want to bring a favourite toy to the snack table. With explanation, older children will often understand this.

Having children in a mixed age room for the first time can be daunting and there are lots of things to think about. Once practitioners start seeing the nursery through the eyes of a two year old, it not only becomes easier but also much more fun. Two year olds can be overwhelmed by being in a large mixed group. The activity and busy-ness can be too much for them and they need the security of their key person close by. There should be a **calm area available at all times** for children to retreat to for quiet time or even a sleep. Ideally children should be able to access this area, as they need it throughout the day and also be able to spend some one to one time with their key person.

**When staffing mixed age provision thought should be given to how the adult:child ratio is used. Are the older children benefiting from the additional staff who are there to support the younger children?**

## Further information

"Getting it right for two year olds", Tassoni, P (2018), Hodder education

Kathy Brodie Two Year Olds in Mixed Age Groups

[www.abcdoes.com/abc-does-a-blog/2012/05/two-year-olds-in-a-mixed-agegroup-by-kathy-brodie](http://www.abcdoes.com/abc-does-a-blog/2012/05/two-year-olds-in-a-mixed-agegroup-by-kathy-brodie)

# Free Early Education for 2 Year Olds

Eligible children are entitled to 570 hours annually which equates to 3 hours per day - term time (although this can be stretched over more weeks if agreed with the family and childcare provider)

For further information please click on the link below

<https://fid.cumberland.gov.uk/kb5/cumberland/directory/advice.page?id=fqfj2DzrC8k>

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: I try to plan activities for toddlers but often they will not come and take part. How can I make them?**

A: There is no requirement in the EYFS for toddlers to do particular activities. Rather, the focus is on following children's interests and taking the lead from them.

**Q: Should we insist that toddlers sit down to do activities?**

A: Most toddlers prefer to do activities while standing up or being down on the floor. Insisting that they should sit may result in toddlers leaving the activity very quickly. You could put out a few chairs but also leave spaces at the tables for standing too. Do not make an issue out of those wanting to stand up!

**Q: How can we prevent biting in our toddler room?**

A: Biting is fairly common among young children – often from around 18 to 30 months. It is usually linked to frustration and jealousy and generally disappears once toddlers are talking well. If a bite does occur, play it down and spend a moment with the victim. Telling the biter off will not prevent another bite as this age range is very impulsive. Rather, keep the biter busy and ensure an adult is near them otherwise there is a strong likelihood that the child will bite again.

**Q: There are often tussles between toddlers. Why do they not seem to understand that they must share?**

A: It is normal for children of this age group to see things and take them, even if someone else is holding them!

This type of behaviour usually reduces once children can talk and use language for some reasoning. When a child snatches another's toy, calmly return the item to the original owner and distract the child with a similar or different toy.

**Q: If you tell a toddler not to do something, why do they carry on anyway?**

A: Toddlers are keen for attention so you have to be careful not to fall into the trap of giving the attention for unwanted behaviour. Try ignoring unwanted behaviour and distract the child instead.

**Q: We have been told not to use baby language with toddlers and to use proper words. Is this correct?**

A: Try to give toddlers as many words as possible rather than restricting them to the more simplistic words. For example, once a toddler knows what a shoe is, try and use the word for the types of shoes that they are wearing, such as boots, wellingtons, sandals or trainers. In this way toddler's language can be extended.

**Q: When should we start showing children letter shapes?**

A: Formal teaching of phonics should not begin until the start of Reception year. At this earlier stage, it is important to work on sound recognition skills (often referred to as auditory discrimination skills). Help children to tune into different sounds in English, for example through rhymes and songs. The number of words children hear increases the more they are read to. You can support this learning of words through reading, re-reading and talking about books.

**Q: We find it hard to get toddlers to come and sit down at story/song time. Any suggestions?**

A: This age range are not great sitters! Group story/song time is not really appropriate for toddlers. They prefer to hold and look at books with an adult rather than as part of a group. At song time start off by getting out some simple shakers rather than expecting the children to come and join you. Sitting down when hearing music is actually quite difficult, as most children naturally want to move their body. Think about changing your routines.

**Q: Should we be showing toddlers how to write?**

A: While you can encourage toddlers' interest in the process of writing by talking as you write and draw, it is too early for toddlers to be formally taught to write. They are at an earlier stage when they need to explore how to make marks and enjoy making them.

**Q: What types of marks should toddlers be making?**

A: Many toddlers will be interested in making lines and circular shapes, although their main focus will be exploring the feel of the mark-making materials that have been provided.

**Q: Should children be doing tracing activities?**

A: No, this is not required and is likely to be too difficult for children of this age. Hand control is gained at this age by being given opportunities to use tools, make marks and playing. Tracing too early can put children off writing and can encourage poor pencil grip.

**Q: Should we be correcting the children's pencil grip?**

A: It is normal for children in these age ranges to be using a palmar grip or simply experiment. The children need plenty of different experiences of using tools.

**Q: At what age should toddlers be able to recognise numbers?**

A: It is unlikely that toddlers will be able to recognise numbers, although you will start to hear some of them counting. Counting is an important first step as it shows that children have learnt the sounds of numbers, although it does not mean that a child knows that 'three' is a smaller number than 'five'.

**Q: We have been told that worksheets are not to be used. Why is this?**

A: Because of the way young children process information, they learn concepts better at this age through doing. You may also find that when children are engaged in playful activities they will concentrate for longer and be more enthusiastic.

**Q: How many times a day should we be doing mathematical activities?**

A: While you can plan some mathematical activities you should really be looking for naturally occurring opportunities each day, such as counting the number of buttons that need doing up on a coat.

**Q: Why do toddlers keep repeating their play, such as putting things in and out of boxes?**

A: This is part of normal development and seems to be important in helping toddlers develop a sense of space and order. Observe what fascinates them and try to plan other activities that build on this fascination.

Further reading: Louis, S., Beswick, C. and Featherstone, S. (2013) Understanding Schemas in Young Children: Again! Again! 2nd edn. Featherstone Education.

**Q: Do we have to go outside?**

A: It is necessary to go outside for some play because the EYFS puts emphasis on both indoor and outdoor learning. Puddles, cobwebs and gravel are great starting points for investigation.

**Q: Do I have to provide activities outdoors?**

A: Yes, because toddlers enjoy having the space especially when they are using wheeled toys. As this age group is not likely to be playing cooperatively, it also allows the play to spread out so that each child can explore their own ideas.

**Q: What type of objects could I use with these age ranges?**

A: Try trays of buttons, shells, pot-pourri and toys that will stimulate the child to problem solve or investigate.

**Q: What about safety?**

A: Most children in this age range should no longer be mouthing, but you should carry out observations to be sure of this. If putting out objects that are small, you must check that a child could not choke on them.

**Q: Should I put out construction toys?**

A: Yes, you can put out age-appropriate constructions toys, but also consider materials such as large cardboard boxes, fabrics and tubing, so that children can explore things on a large scale.

**Q: Should we be expecting this age range to share?**

A: No, although you might start to see children aged three years begin to share in some situations.

**Q: Should we be doing group activities?**

A: You are likely to find that most children are happy doing things by themselves or in pairs. The staff to child ratio is low for this age group because it is recognised that children are not yet ready to be working as part of a group.

**Q: When we take two year olds for a walk, one minute they want to run about and the next moment they want to get into a pushchair. Why is this?**

A: All children seem to take exercise in bursts as their cardiovascular systems are not designed for endurance. When planning exercise this 'stop-start' pattern needs to be considered. To help children walk at a regular pace, you will need to talk to them or give them something to push.

**Q: At what age should toddlers be toilet trained?**

A: There is no specific age. Most children move out of nappies somewhere between 15 months and 3 years, so it is important instead to focus on signs that a toddler is ready. One indicator that a toddler might have the physical maturity is when they are able to walk up and down stairs using alternate feet.

**Q: We have one child who dislikes getting their hands dirty and so will not do any messy activities. What can we do?**

A: Children's hands are more sensitive than adults and sometimes this can cause some children to perceive sensory activities such as dough, sand or gloop as being unpleasant. It is important to take this fear seriously. Ironically, though, these children need more exposure to sensory activities so their hands can desensitise a little. Start by letting children feel the sensory activities through a barrier such as a clear bag or by wearing see-through gloves. After several times, put out a bowl of water and suggest that the child can wash their hands at any point when they feel uncomfortable. Do not force children to put their hands into something they dislike as the distress can result in a long-term phobia.

**Q: While most of our three year olds cooperate when they are in the home corner, the younger children seem to play alone. Is this normal?**

A: Yes. Playing cooperatively and taking turns and roles in imaginative play is quite demanding in terms of language and cognitive skills. This means that most young children, although often interested in playing imaginatively, cannot yet do so with other children. We can help younger children by being their play partners.

Adapted from: Tassoni, P. (2008) Practical EYFS Handbook. Heinemann