



Personal, Social and Emotional Development: Managing feelings and behaviour

Introduction

Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED), along with Communication and Language (CL) and Physical Development (PD), is one of the **three prime areas** of learning in the EYFS framework. These areas are called prime because they underpin all other aspects of young children's learning and development. From the moment they are born, young children experience the world through interacting and communicating with others, and engaging physically with the environment around them. The three prime areas of learning are regarded as particularly important for inspiring young children's curiosity and enthusiasm, laying the foundations for future success in all aspects of life and education.

Personal development is about how children come to understand who they are and what they can do.

Social development covers how children come to understand themselves in relation to others; how they make friends, understand the rules of society and behave towards others.

Emotional development is about how children understand their own and others' feelings and develop their ability to be empathetic – to see things from another person's point of view.

In the EYFS, **Personal, Social and Emotional Development** covers three key aspects:



Prime and specific areas of learning

The **three prime areas** of the EYFS should be the focus for practitioners working with the youngest children, as they form the basis for successful learning and progress in the **four specific areas**.

As children become older, the emphasis will shift towards a more equal focus on **all areas of learning** as children's confidence and abilities increase.

If at any time a child's progress within any of the prime areas gives cause for concern, practitioners should discuss this with the child's parents and provide focused support in that area. This approach is designed to ensure that any issues are addressed at an early stage of a child's life.

Helping children to manage feelings and behaviour

For practitioners, supporting young children to manage their feelings and behaviour involves helping them to:

- develop social skills and learn how to manage their feelings
- understand appropriate behaviour in groups.

When they are very young, babies and children need support from others – parents, carers and family members – to regulate their feelings. This support, consistently given, helps them to understand basic emotions, begin to control their impulses, and learn how to manage and display their feelings appropriately.

There is evidence from educational practice and neuroscience that suggests that emotional arousal interferes with cognitive engagement. This means that children need to feel comfortable, emotionally and physically, in order to learn effectively. Helping children to learn how to regulate and manage their feelings is therefore a vital stepping stone for success in learning and in life.

Progress in PSED: Managing feelings and behaviour

24-36 months

Children are aware that some actions can hurt or harm others. They seek comfort from familiar adults in the setting, when needed. They respond to the feelings and wishes of others, and their own needs and feelings.

36-48 months

Children are aware that some actions can hurt others' feelings. They begin to accept the needs of others, taking turns and sharing resources with support. They can adapt their behaviour to different events, social situations and changes in routine, and their own needs and feelings.

Early Learning Goal

Children talk about how they and others show feelings, talk about their own and others' behaviour and its consequences, and know that some behaviour is unacceptable. They work as part of a group or class, and understand and follow the rules. They adjust their behaviour to different situations, and take changes of routine in their stride.

[Statements from Draft EYFS Framework, 2011]

The relationship between Personal, Social and Emotional Development and the other prime areas of learning

'Personal, Social and Emotional Development supports Physical Development as a child who feels secure and safe is confident to expand the boundaries of exploration and is motivated to reach, move and test physical capacities; it supports Communication and Language within relationships which establish turn-taking, joint activity, a desire to communicate and understanding of shared meanings of words.'

[Tickell Review of the EYFS, 2011]

Summary of development for two-year-olds

When a child is aged between 24 and 36 months, practitioners must review progress in Personal, Social and Emotional Development, along with the other two prime areas of learning. Parents or carers should be given a short written summary of their child's development as part of the ongoing dialogue between the setting and the family. This summary should identify any areas where the child's progress is less than expected and should shape a targeted plan to support that child's future learning and development in the setting.

There will be no standard format for this developmental summary; instead it should reflect the culture and ethos of the setting and the particular needs of the child and/or parental preferences.

What quality looks like in practice

The first two scenarios describe practice in a small nursery located in a rural area.

Under twos

The baby room is a relaxing, uncluttered environment with soft music playing in the background. Practitioners have used soft lightweight fabrics and voile to create a canopy over the sleeping area and there is a small den under a shelf in one corner where the children enjoy playing 'peek-a-boo'. Spaces for the toddlers have interesting resources to play with, and include small nest areas to cuddle down in if they feel tired or upset.

Practitioners take time at the beginning of the day to talk to parents as they arrive. They enquire about anything significant that may have happened in the baby or toddler's day so far, and endeavour to tune-in to how the child may be feeling. The key person has time to build up a good relationship with the families they work with and is aware of the likes, dislikes and familiar routines of the children they care for.

The language the practitioners use as they talk to the children emphasises the importance of being aware of and considering the feelings and emotions of others. They share this approach with parents and are happy to support parents in understanding more about child development.

Two- to three-year-olds

The children's day is structured to provide a reassuring amount of consistency without being too rigid. The environment, indoors and outdoors, is well resourced with open-ended materials to provide the children with plenty of opportunities to play with things that interest them. Staff listen to the children, observe what they are doing and use their judgement and experience to avoid conflict by intervening sensitively. Where appropriate they use disputes or moments of tension between children as learning opportunities by talking to the children about the effect their behaviour may be having on others.

The setting has a consistent approach to managing children's behaviour, and all new members of staff are helped to observe how this works in practice. Tantrums or excessive displays of emotion are handled in a calm and consistent manner with a view to helping the individual child learn how to control their own feelings and emotions.

Staff talk to children about feelings and emotions, helping them to find the language to express themselves effectively. They understand the importance of making it clear to children that on occasion it is their behaviour that they dislike, not the child himself.

To help children benefit from a consistent approach, parents are encouraged to discuss the way the setting helps children to manage feelings and behaviour, and to raise any questions they may have.

The scenario below gives a snapshot of daily life in small urban pre-school in a church hall where the practitioners have to pack away at the end of each session.

Four- to five-year-olds

At the beginning of the session the environment is set up with interesting resources that are displayed within the children's reach, and they are encouraged to make choices and to access the materials they need. To make this approach work well, a great deal of time and effort is invested in helping children to understand their responsibilities for caring for the resources in the setting. Practitioners are consistent in their approach and pay attention to making the environment an interesting, inviting and exciting place to be.

Time is spent talking with children about rights, duties and responsibilities, and about acceptable and non-acceptable forms of behaviour. Children are encouraged to talk about why they might have behaved in a particular way and how they might manage a situation differently the next time. The staff have very high expectations of the children but are always quick to praise consideration, cooperation and care for others.

Practitioners share with parents the importance of children feeling emotionally comfortable and secure in order for them to be able to learn effectively. They regularly run workshops for parents on behaviour management, passing on ideas to help to ensure a consistent approach for the children.

How to support young children to manage their feelings and behaviour

Use these reflective questions to think about how you might help young children to manage their feelings and behaviour.

Under twos

- At the start of the day how easy is it for parents to spend time talking to us about how their child is feeling?
- Are there ways we could make the routines of the setting more flexible to accommodate individual children's emotional and physical needs?
- Do we talk enough to the babies and toddlers, engaging them in conversations about what they are doing and how they are feeling?
- How consistent are we in making sure all babies are able to enjoy some time out of doors every day?
- Do we encourage children to express their feelings and learn to manage them, or do we try to suppress any show of emotion?
- Are we all consistent in the way in which we talk to the children and in how we manage different types of behaviour?
- Do we know if staff in the baby room feel well supported and connected to what happens elsewhere in the setting?
- Are we effective in supporting parents to understand more about their child's emotional development?

Two- to three-year-olds

- Do we feel the opportunities we provide for children are sufficiently interesting and varied to prevent them from becoming bored?
- Do we know if we have achieved a successful balance between structured routines and making time to tune in to children's interests?
- Do we all know how to put our behaviour management policy into practice?
- Do we always take time to use 'conflict situations' as learning opportunities?
- Are we clear enough with children about what we expect of them in different situations?
- Do we encourage children to express their feelings or do we try to avoid this?
- Can children choose when and where they go to rest or sleep during the day?
- How well do we support parents in addressing any challenging behaviour that their child might demonstrate?

Four- to five-year-olds

- Do we feel our start to the day always works well, or is it a time for rushing around dealing with minor issues?
- How well do we recognise and value individuality rather than striving for conformity?
- Do we always value the interests and obsessions of boys as much as those of girls?
- How effective are we in helping children acquire the language they need to express their emotions?
- Do we spend enough time on helping children to understand their duties and responsibilities as well as their rights?
- Are we consistently good role models in how we manage our own feelings and behaviour?
- How well do we help parents understand the importance of children's getting sufficient sleep to recharge their emotional batteries?
- Are we effective in sharing our strategies for managing behaviour with parents to ensure children experience a consistent approach?

Ideas for parents

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Personal development is about how children come to understand who they are and what they can do.

Social development is about how children come to understand themselves in relation to other people, how they make friends, understand the rules of society and behave towards others.

Emotional development is about how children understand their own and other's feelings and develop their ability to see things from another person's point of view.

Supporting young children's **Personal, Social and Emotional Development** is all about:

- encouraging their self-confidence and self-awareness
- helping them to manage their feelings and behaviour
- supporting them in building relationships with other people.

Helping your child to manage their feelings and behaviour

To help your child learn how to manage their feelings and behaviour you will need to provide lots of opportunities for them to:

- develop social skills and learn how to manage their feelings
- understand how to behave as a member of a group.

You could use the ideas below as starting points to help you do this.

Under twos

- Talk to your baby by making eye contact and using funny faces.
- Respond to your child's emotion by joining in his laughter and soothing his upset.
- If your child is upset use quiet language and lots of cuddles to calm him.
- Try to create a regular routine at mealtimes and bedtimes as your child will find this comforting and reassuring.
- Read picture books and stories together to gently explore feelings and emotions.
- Praise your child when he shows care and concern for others.
- Don't forget the importance of children getting enough rest and sleep every day.

Two- to three-year-olds

- Be consistent in your approach so your child can understand what is expected of her in different situations.
- As far as possible, persuade other family members to follow the same approach.
- Find out if your early years setting has any useful ideas about managing behaviour that you could use.
- If your child has a tantrum, try to stay calm. Your child may feel frightened and they need to see that you are in control.
- Use words to express feelings so your child can learn how to put her feelings into words.
- When your child plays with other children she will be learning how to be part of a group.
- Children learn how to control their emotions as they grow older so have high expectations, but don't expect the impossible.

Four- to five-year-olds

- Help your child to talk about what makes her happy, sad, angry or upset.
- Remember, children learn best when they feel comfortable, safe and secure.
- Being tired, hungry, thirsty or bored may have an effect on your child's behaviour.
- Be consistent in how you respond to your child's behaviour.
- Value your child as an individual but help her to learn the social skills she needs to get on well with others.
- Make sure your child gets enough sleep to recharge his physical and emotional batteries.
- Have high expectations, but remember we can't all be perfect all the time.