

**2-year-olds are a joy!
Full of beans, and natural
learners, there's so much
adventure built into every day.**

**Discover hints, tips and ideas
to help develop your provision
for toddlers.**

Welcome to this collection of ideas, inspiration and tools to help you reflect on and extend your practice working with toddlers.

You'll find top tips, videos, case studies, downloadable tools and other essential ideas to help you develop your 2-year-old provision.

Together for Twos was a Department for Education grant funded project in England that ended in 2022.

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Chapter 1: Home learning environment

Children are learning all the time when they're with you in your childcare setting. All of the things you do with them - from chatting as you change their nappies to counting out apples in the supermarket and debating whether to cut sandwiches into squares or triangles for lunch - their brains are taking it all in. A rich home learning environment isn't just something that professional childminders can offer. There's lots you can do to help encourage and empower parents to create an active home learning environment as well, helping to create vibrant learning spaces for children.



#Smallthings

Small things make a big difference to a child's learning. These short videos are designed to give parents ideas and hints to help them explore ways of learning at home. Show them to parents and encourage them to give the tips a go.

Small things make a big difference to your child's learning - https://youtu.be/Zz_bWhWs-mg

Learn more about how you can get chatting and the benefits you'll discover - <https://youtu.be/89bWDHoy>

Explore how drawing together can help your child learn and develop - <https://youtu.be/RCAK4FJ2jZ4>

Sing with your child to help them grow, learn and develop - <https://youtu.be/ETu9noOdoGM>

Spend time with your child playing with numbers and letters to help their development -

<https://youtu.be/wGu5SSzahIk>

There are some really simple things
you can do at home



to support your child's learning...



Tiny Happy People

[Tiny Happy People](#), from the BBC, aims to help parents understand the benefits of developing their children's language and communication skills to help them get the best start in life.

The films, animations, activities and ideas are easy to build into a daily routine are fun, but they're also based on expert advice and evidence proven to help children's development.



Sharing books and stories

Reading with your child is a great way to bond with them, but will also have a huge impact on their learning and development. We explore how you can make the most of sharing a wide range of books and stories with your child.

Take a look at PACEY President Penny Tassoni's top 5 story telling tips:

<https://youtu.be/wmZQbmPQNvU>

Sharing books and stories with children helps their learning, development, language and communication. Not only do children learn vital skills for later reading and writing, but sharing books also helps with talking, listening, and communication skills. Sharing books also encourages imagination, curiosity, and emotions.

Sharing a book will not only give your child the opportunity to hear words spoken but it will encourage communication as you talk about what's happening in the book.



Books offer a structure that can be helpful when talking about particular situations or emotions with your child, for example, jealousy of a new sibling, or difficulties with friendships. You can choose stories that will help a child make sense of a situation such as moving house or starting school.

Children enjoy listening to you make up stories, just as much as they love reading them. You can share stories about anything, whether that be your surroundings, experiences or your very own fairy tales!

What does this mean for me?

Making books available to children, telling stories and talking with children from birth is fundamental to the early years frameworks in both England and Wales. Therefore, if your child is with a childminder or in nursery you can be sure that they'll have access to a wide range of books. Extending this activity at home and reading with your child is important, too. There are some tips and hints that might help you read with your child.

- Babies and young children love listening to the sound of your voice so don't be embarrassed about reading to them. Be brave and experiment with different voices and accents when reading stories.
- Stories can provide you with a structure to help you talk aloud to your child and overcome any inhibitions you may have.
- Little and often is best - try not to read for too long as children have short attention spans.
- There is lots of support available for parents who struggle with their literacy skills, don't be afraid to ask for help

What can I do to support my child?

It's never too early to share books with children! Give your baby access to books on journeys, in prams and throughout the day. Let them choose which book they'd like to explore, show them how to hold it the right way up and to turn the pages, and importantly, talk about what's in the book, what they can see and feel.

Have books in your home where possible. You can borrow books from the library or a Children's Centre. Your childcare provider may also be happy to let you bring books home from the setting - particularly if it helps to extend the activities they've been doing together.

Spend time together reading books and telling stories. Try to do this somewhere quiet and remember turn off the TV, radio mobile phone and other devices so you are not distracted. Stories can be shared at any time of the day and anywhere, for example, on a bench in the park or on the bus. Sit so that you are comfortable and ensure children can see the book clearly. Use funny voices, props and music to bring the story alive.

Encourage children to choose the book or story. This helps them feel valued and important. Point to the pictures and talk about them. Talk about the words, emotions aroused, situations and characters, and introduce children to "book language" for example, front cover, back cover, title, author, illustrations.

Give children time to enjoy the book and time to think and respond to your questions. Give children your full attention as you talk with them by using direct eye contact to show that you are really listening. Make books for your child with pictures of family members, pets, special friends and special occasions such as birthdays or holidays that they can recognise and talk about.

Children who cannot yet write will love seeing their words as a book if you write down the stories and words they tell you. They will also take pride in illustrating their own books, "reading" their story to you, and listening while you read the story they created.

Visit your local library, many offer regular story sessions that you can join in with.

You may also like to make story sacks for your favourite books. A story sack is a large cloth bag with a children's book and other supporting materials inside. Your child will love the surprise element of what's coming out of the bag next. You could include a cd or dvd of the story, related non-fiction books, models and objects from the story, activities or games related to the story.

Share books with your child that they may bring home from their setting. Have fun and enjoy the book and spending time together.

Additional resources and further reading

[Booktrust](#) has a website dedicated to children's books, including recommended book lists and information and resources for National Children's Book Week

[World Book Day](#) - is a registered charity celebrating books and reading. It has videos of top tips and people reading stories, resources to download, book recommendations and much more.

[National Literacy Trust](#) - free resources to download, storytelling videos and much more.

[Talk to Your Baby](#) is a campaign run by the National Literacy Trust to encourage parents and carers to talk more to children from birth to 3.

[DLTK-Teach](#) has some free mini-books to download and make together.

Watch story telling top from author Neil Griffiths <https://youtu.be/9TC8c2se0xs>

Make your own storybook on line - <https://www.mystorybook.com/>

Ideas for making books - <https://www.makingbooks.com/>

Legislation and frameworks - how this complements what your child is learning in registered childcare

- [Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage \(England\)](#)
- [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Child Care for children up to 12 years of age \(Wales\)](#)
- [Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(Wales\)](#)

Mark making - tips for parents

Let's explore what mark making is and how you can support your child to develop the early skills needed to start writing and develop mathematical understanding, creative expression, art and drawing.

Children love to imitate adults and will use a wide variety of tools and resources to make marks, these early 'scribbles' are an important part of children developing the necessary hand eye coordination needed for handwriting. For young children mark making is a sensory experience, it is as they develop they begin to understand that marks can carry meaning.

Children start to make marks from the time they can control the movements of their hands and feet, whether that is swishing food around on their tray or picking up a crayon, pressing it down and watching colour appear on the nearest clean surface.

Learning to hold a pencil and make marks that ultimately lead to writing is a complex development. Children move through stages in their mark making, initially it is a physical activity. It starts with large movements using the shoulder, wrist, hand and then fingers. The child grasps tools with their whole hand, moving their arm from the shoulder, over time this becomes more refined until children can hold a pencil between their thumb and index finger.



Children of all ages make marks to explore textures, feelings, to express themselves and make sense of the world, before and alongside using symbols to convey and represent messages. Mark making takes place inside and outside.



What does this mean for me?

Talk to your child about the marks they make, ask them what they are doing, and describe what you can see, this will indicate to your child that these marks are important and that you value them.

Value any mark making your child may bring home from their setting and share any mark making your child has done at home with their key person.

Most importantly, have fun!

What can you do to support your child?

- Provide different kinds of mark making materials e.g. ribbons, sponges, washing up brushes, tooth brushes, pegs with different things in them, glue spreaders, chunky crayons, chalks, 'bingo dabbers', cars, paint rollers, brushes, felt pens, cardboard tubes, paint, feathers, combs, sticks
- Provide different kinds of material in different sizes and shapes for children to make marks on e.g. wallpaper, newspaper, leaves, material, plain paper, paper with lines and squares, textured paper, card
- Marks can be made in all sorts of media, for example clay, sand, soil, as well as on different types and colours of paper. Remember too that cutting and sticking is another way that your child can make their mark.
- Peg a piece of paper to a fence and paint with spray bottles filled with watered down paint.
- Put some water in a paint tray and use a roller to make big marks on a sunny wall or patio
- Put some paint in a tray, roll cars through it and then roll them on paper
- Have a bucket of water with large brushes, and a selection of sponges for mark-making on a hard ground outside or walls.
- Use large chalks for making marks on tarmac.
- Gather seasonal natural materials to inspire mark-making, for example, leaves, seed pods, fir cones, dried flowers. Do leaf rubbings, flower pressing and collages. Try using flowers and twigs as mark-making tools and brushes.
- Strengthen the muscles in your child's arms and hands by providing activities such as playdough, threading, picking up small objects, making shapes in the air with a wand and dancing with a ribbon in their hand.
- Attach pens to toy trucks and roll them around on paper
- Cut small holes in rubber gloves, or make small holes in a container e.g. yogurt pot, fill them with paint and let it drip onto paper
- Line a tin that has a lid with paper, roll a ball or marble in paint. Put it in the tin, put the lid on and shake.
- Ice cakes and biscuits, letting your child explore the different colours and how the icing blends together.
- Cover a flat tray with either sand, salt, shaving foam, or sugar. Use fingers and combs to make marks with.
- Roll a ball in paint and then bounce it onto paper.
- Children just love messy activities - explore mark making using materials such as jelly, shaving foam, cornflour and water, and wallpaper paste.
- Share with your child the importance of print, that words on food packets and street signs as well as number and letters on car registrations and buses all carry meaning.

Always remember to supervise your child carefully, and be aware of what they might put into their mouths. Most of all, enjoy mark making together!

Toilet training tips

Toilet training can be a tricky time. There is a huge variation in when children will be ready to come out of nappies. Anything between 18 months and nearly 3 years is not unusual. The word "training" is misleading. Children can only come out of nappies when they are physically ready. If the timing is correct, most children will be clean and dry within a week. Too early means lots of accidents and the danger of everyone becoming frustrated. On the other hand if children are left in nappies too long, they become used to being in soiled and wet nappies.



Top tips for supporting children's move away from nappies

- Look out for signs that children are urinating or pooing. Talk to children about what is happening using simple language, for example, "your wee wee is coming out" or "I can smell something. Maybe your poo is on its way".
- Talk about getting children 'comfortable' rather than 'clean' when changing nappies or clearing up accidents. This can prevent some children from feeling shame.
- Do not start toilet training until you are sure that children can hold urine for at least one and a half hours, preferably two, and that they are releasing it in a "flood". Watch out as well for dry nappies after naps. This shows that the bladder is mature. It's best not to wait too long to get out of nappies after a child has bladder maturation.

Hear from childcare expert and PACEY President, Penny Tassoni, as she shares her wisdom on the right time to start toilet training.

<https://youtu.be/p75WEMNyRiw>

The toilet training process - doing a wee

- Start by putting a child in pants and show them where the potty is. Don't make too much of a fuss about it.
- Wait for around an hour since the child last urinated and then suggest that perhaps a wee wee will be ready.
- Help children understand the signals that their body is showing them. If you see signs that a child might need to urinate help to explain it by saying things such as "when you are wriggling like that, it means that your wee wants to come out."
- Expect that there will be accidents at first. When there are accidents, say something such as "your wee-wee came out before you were ready."
- Persist for two days, but do not continue unless there are more 'wins' than 'loses'.
- Unlike adults, children only feel the signs that they need to urinate when their bladder is already very full. They will not be able to wait. Move quickly!

The toilet training process - doing a poo

- When it comes to poo, the most important thing is that children do not become constipated. Once children have become constipated they associate passing a stool with pain. This in turn prevents them from relaxing and allowing the stool to be moved.
- Try to add more water and vegetables into the diet to help prevent constipation.
- Work out if there is a pattern to a child's bowel movements before starting toilet training. This will help you anticipate when the child is likely to need to do a poo.
- Take the lead from children. Some children do not want adults near them when they pass a stool, others want to be distracted or reassured.
- If a child is desperate but wants the nappy back on – let them have it. It is better to take time over the process than have them become constipated.
- If child seems only want to wear nappies to do a poo, try lining a potty with a nappy, putting on the nappy increasingly loosely or even cutting a large hole in the back of the nappy.

Benefits of childcare for your toddler

Childcare can be fun for your 2-year-old - and they'll learn a lot too!

Deciding on childcare is often a complex decision. You know what's best for your child, so trust yourself, but be open to ideas you hadn't thought of too. Perhaps you need to return to work or study, meaning childcare is a non-negotiable. Alternatively, you may be eligible for childcare funding but wonder whether your child needs registered childcare.

Either way, you'll first have to decide whether to take up childcare, then which [type of childcare](#) is best and which childcare provider to try.

There is a lot to think about, but it doesn't have to be a final decision. You can visit more than one provider, and there will often be a settling-in or trial period to give you a chance to get used to each other.



Here are some ways in which childcare can be good for your 2-year-old, you and your family:

Childcare is fun!

Childminders pack a lot of fun activities and games into a day. They might go out and about to toddler groups, soft play, the woods, beach or local farm. When at home, they'll do singing, storytelling, making, building, cooking, painting, or games in the garden. They have a wide range of toys to play with, so whatever your child is interested in, they'll find something to enjoy.

Childcare is safe

Childminders in England are registered with Ofsted or a childminding agency, just like schools and nurseries. Only childminders with a "good" or "outstanding" Ofsted rating can offer funded 2-year-old places in England. In Wales childminders are registered with CIW. They have checks to ensure their suitability (DBS checks) and are insured. They have lots of professional training and know about keeping children safe. They also do regular risk assessments. But even with all this in place, you still need to be able to trust your childminder, so [ask as many questions you like](#) and tell them what you're worried about. Chances are they'll have heard it before and will be able to put your mind at ease.

Children learn a lot

Two year olds' brains are developing quickly. They pick up everything around them - what to say and how to behave. They learn a lot from actively playing and childminders are trained to make sure the activities they do make the most of this.

They make friends

They might not make friends straightaway, as 2-year-olds often play next to each other, rather than with another child, but getting used to the other children will help when they go to school. Childminders look after small groups of children of different ages, so they can get to know each other well, and it sometimes feels like a big family. They will also learn social skills such as sharing and taking the feelings of other children into account.



Structure and routine

Sounds boring, but young children love routine and some structure in their day. Knowing what to expect helps them feel safe and secure. This can be taking the older children to school at the same time each day, or stopping in the park on the way home, when to sit down for a meal, or listen to a story.

You get support and time to yourself

You may need time to just catch up with everyday life. Whatever you use the time for, you can be sure your two year old is in good hands. Childminders are not only trained to look after your child, but they can be a good person for you to talk to too. They are often parents themselves and are connected with a wide range of people that can help if you are struggling or concerned about your child in some way.

There is always someone on the end of a phone to help you make up your mind about childcare too. You can talk through your childcare decisions with your health visitor or family information service, for example.

Your child's key person

Let's explore the role of the key person in a setting and how they will support your child and work in partnership with you.

The key person is a named person who has responsibility in a setting for working with you and meeting your child's individual needs. The importance of the key person is highlighted in childcare policy in England and Wales. In a nursery, one of the childcare staff will be assigned as your child's key person. If you are using a childminder then they are the child's key person.



The key person will get to know you and your child really well, finding out about your child's preferences and routines and will be the person that shares information with you about what your child has done during the session and information about their learning and development.

The key person role is important. Research and evidence show that children thrive when their needs are met by special people that they know, trust and respect. Familiarity, pattern and predictability support children's personal development and helps them understand who they are and what they can do.

Children can concentrate and learn more effectively if they're not under stress or pressure, so having a key person who is attentive and knows the child well will support children in their personal, social and emotional development.

Children learn by observing and being with others. The key person is an important role model for the child who they can relate to and rely on. The key person observes your child to identify how they learn through their play, their next aspect of development, what their interests are and whether there is any cause for concern or need for extra support. They will share this information with you, working with you to formulate a plan of support. The key person supports physical needs too, helping with issues like nappy changing, toileting and dressing.

What does this mean for me?

The key person works alongside parents and carers to ensure that there is continuity of care for the child thus supporting the child's emotional well-being. The key person will want you to share information about your child - the more you can tell them the better the relationship they will be able to form with your child and plan how to meet their needs.

The key person is someone you can talk to about any concerns, they will know your child well and will be able to provide advice and support with all aspects of learning and development. You should be offered regular times to talk to your child's key person and look at their child's learning and development records.



What can you do to support your child?

- Talk to your child about their key person so that they know they can go to them for help. Keep the key person updated with any changes in routines or changes in your child's home life, for example, if you are moving house or expecting a sibling, as your child's key person will be able to support your child through transition times.
- Share any new interests your child may have or special experiences they may have taken part in as their key person will be able to follow up on these in the setting.
- Tell your child's key person about any 'wow' moments your child has had at home and when they meet developmental milestones. Together you can celebrate your child's achievements and plan suitable next steps to support them.

Legislation and frameworks

- [Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage](#)
- [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for children up the age of 12 years \(2016\)](#)

Chapter 2: The 2-year-old offer

The 2-year-old offer provides funding for 570 hours per year of early years education to some of the most disadvantaged 2-year-olds in England. 570 hours per year works out as 15 hours per week during term time (38 weeks per year).

What is the 2-year-old offer?



When a child reaches age 2, they may be eligible for 15 hours of funded early education for 38 weeks of the year (term time), if parents already receive some level of government support. Families with a 2-year-old who meet the following criteria are eligible for the free places.

If families claim any one of the following:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit - if they and their partner have a combined income from work of £15,400 or less a year, after tax
- tax credits and they have an income of £16,190 or less a year, before tax
- the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- support through part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act
- the Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment given when someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit)

A child can also get free early education and childcare if any of the following apply:

- they're looked after by a local council
- they have a current statement of [special education needs \(SEN\)](#) or an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- they get [Disability Living Allowance](#)
- they've left care under a special guardianship order, child arrangements order or adoption order.

If you're a non-EEA citizen who cannot claim benefits

- Your 2-year-old may get free childcare if you are getting [support under the Immigration and Asylum Act](#) and have either:
 - [claimed asylum](#) in the UK and are waiting for a decision (known as 'part 6')
 - been refused asylum in the UK (known as 'section 4')
- A 2-year-old you care for may also get free childcare if your household income is £15,400 a year or less after tax, and you have either:
 - leave to remain with 'no recourse to public funds' on [family or private life grounds](#)
 - the right to live in the UK because you're the main carer of a British citizen (known as a [Zambrano Carer](#))

This video from The London Borough of Bexley shows just how valuable the 2-year-old funding can be to families.

[Using the 2-year-old funding - YouTube](#)

Here is a parent, describing her experience of accessing and using the 2-year-old offer.

[The 2 year old offer - a parent's experience - YouTube](#)

Childminder Lisa talks about offering and delivering the 2-year-old funding in her setting.

[Childminder Lisa on offering 2-year-old funding - YouTube](#)

The 2-year-old offer in action

Delivering the 2-year-old offer

If you're a registered childcare provider, contact your local early years team to see if you're able to offer funded childcare places in your setting. Some local authorities have extended requirements, for example that you have a Good or Outstanding grade from Ofsted, or that you have or are working towards a level 3 qualification.

Find your [local early years team](#) here.

Caring for a funded 2-year-old

I care for a funded two year old child who has been adopted into a same sex family. She had been attending a private nursery but her parents weren't happy about how she was getting on there and chose a childminder for a smaller and more personal care/learning environment.

The child had a very good level of language when she started with me - in both understanding and speaking (above that of her age). She was also on track in all other prime areas although 'making relationships' and 'managing feelings and behaviour' were perhaps areas that required a bit more focus. She is a sensitive child who makes very strong bonds with other children. Managing the emotions that surround having friends and relationships with both adults and children is something I have used funding to purchase resources for.

Role play activities have played a big part in my planning. Dolls that are used as babies, a buggy for acting out every day things that families do such as going to the park, to a friend's house, to the doctors etc. Role play that sometimes involves a Mummy and a Daddy and other times that involve two Mummies for example - play that demonstrates all family arrangements are a normal way of life but that there are differences between some families. A play kitchen for role play activities such as making dinner and it also acts as a shop. A doctors set for doctor and hospital role play as well as dressing up items (that this child particularly enjoys doing). I look after have three girls of similar age so a lot of these role play games are played together in free play time. The dynamics of play is often where I intervene to help solve conflicts and to help the child to learn about sharing as well as listening to everyone's ideas.

My childminding setting has enabled me to give parents more detailed feedback about the child's day, to regularly send them photographs of her activities and to work together on strategies for dealing with her emotions. The parents sent me a link to a model called PACE that they follow at home so that I can work with the same approach within my setting.

I believe the child has benefited from me being able to take her out to playgroups (using funded money) where she gets to mix with different children of different ages as well gaining confidence in exploring new environments. I have also used funded money to go on day trips and we have been to the local zoo, country park and soft play centres a number of times.

Read about the 2-year-old offer in action from a range of professionals and providers [here](#).

Benefits information

Benefits, allowances and universal credit are there to help if you are on a low income or caring for very young or disabled children. This information may be useful for you and your own family, or to share with parents.

The amount you are entitled to is different for everyone and depends on where you live, how much you earn, how many children and the savings you have. Claiming what you are entitled to can make a difference to your family budget and circumstances, but it can be tough to keep up with changes.

For example, if you are currently claiming housing benefit, tax credits, income support or job seeker's allowance, you may be affected by the move to [universal credit](#). If you are earning, you can still get universal credit, but the amount for each family will be different to fit your situation.

Help with childcare costs

Even if you don't have a job, if your child is between 2 and school age, you may be eligible for [childcare funding](#) to help you go back to work, study, train or take a few hours for yourself each week. 2-year-olds in receipt of Disability Living Allowance are eligible for 15 hours' funded childcare. All 3- and 4-year-olds are entitled to 15 hours of childcare per week. Watch our short video on claiming Disability Living Allowance for a child, and use the [online calculator](#) to check what help you could get with childcare costs.

[Disability Living Allowance - information for parents - YouTube](#)

Gingerbread has a handy [guide to childcare and universal credit](#) depending on the age of your child.

You can find out more information about Government help available for childcare costs with [Childcare Choices](#).

How the government childcare offers interact

Parents are encouraged to check the Childcare Choices website for more information and to use the childcare calculator to find out which support is best for their individual circumstances.

With...	Can you get...					
	Tax-Free Childcare	15 hours	30 hours	Tax credits	Universal Credit	Childcare vouchers
Tax-Free Childcare		✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
15 hours	✓		✓	✓*	✓*	✓
30 hours	✓	✓		✓*	✓*	✓
Tax credits	✗	✓*	✓*		✗	✓*
Universal Credit	✗	✓*	✓*	✗		✓*
Childcare vouchers	✗	✓	✓	✓*	✓*	

* 15 and 30 hours childcare and childcare vouchers will reduce a parent's tax credit or universal credit award

Local discretionary payments

Your local authority may have their own schemes for help with council tax and other discretionary payments too, so it's worth checking with your council if you are claiming all you are entitled to.

Childminders and universal credit

If you are a childminder and claiming housing benefit and you live in an area where universal credit isn't compulsory yet, it might be worth staying on your existing benefits (called legacy benefits) as two thirds of your income is disregarded and expenses aren't counted. [Discover more about this.](#)

There is no disregard under universal credit. The [rules for childminders](#) are the same as for all self-employed people. It is still worth putting in a claim as even if you are earning below the 'minimum income floor' as you might be entitled to some money depending on your personal situation or if it is your first year of trading.

Top tips

Do a family budget so you know exactly how much money is coming in and going out of your household. If you are a childminder, make a separate one for your business income and expenses (ideally, keep a separate bank account for this). Citizens Advice has an [online budgeting tool](#) to help.

Use an online benefits calculator to get an idea of whether you may be entitled to some help from benefits, allowances or universal credit. Here are some links to benefits calculators: [Turn2us](#), [Policy in Practice](#), or [entitledto](#).

Get advice in person or on the phone from your local authority benefits advisors, work coaches or Citizens Advice to make sure you are claiming all you are entitled to.

Review regularly to keep up to date with changes in your family circumstances, changes in working patterns or hours, or money you're paying out on childcare.

Handy links

[Gov.uk](#) has everything you need to know about benefits for families all in one place.

[Citizens Advice](#) has lots of information about the different benefits you may be entitled to and you can make an appointment to talk to someone at your local Citizens Advice too.

[Gingerbread](#), the single parent charity, has plenty of information about benefits and universal credit

There are several charities that can offer help and advice if you have a disabled child:

- [Contact](#)
- [National Deaf Children's Society](#)
- [Mencap](#)
- [Cerebra - for children with a brain condition](#)

Chapter 3: English as an additional language

If you're working with children who are learning English as a second language, then these hints and tips might be helpful. You can also [download our checklist](#) and [action plan](#) to see how you're getting on in your setting.



Watch the videos or read the transcripts below.

Children with English as an additional language - an introduction

[Children with EAL - an Introduction - YouTube](#)

Some children will grow speaking one language (monolingual) other children may speak two (bilingual) or three or more languages (multilingual). Some children may also use a sign or symbol language.

Some people worry that when a child learning to speak two or more languages they will be confused or unable to communicate effectively in either language. This is not the case. Children develop fluency in both languages, although they may at times switch between languages in the same sentence. This is called code-switching. Children may also use the languages they speak in different situations e.g. English in a childcare setting and their home, or first language at home.

Being able to speak more than one language is extremely advantageous. It can enhance a child's self-esteem and identity, as well as developing and enhancing cognitive and thinking skills.

Some children will learn to speak two languages from birth and other children may learn one language first and then a second language.

It is important for children and families to maintain the language /s they use at home. This supports communication in the family and a sense of identity and community.

Working with children with English as an additional language

[Working with children with EAL - YouTube](#)

Some practitioners may be monolingual. Others may speak more than one language but may not speak the same languages as children. This is not a barrier to working with children with and supporting children with EAL. One of the most important things is to show you value and respect all languages and that children and families need to feel welcome, valued and respected in the setting.

- Work with parents and find out about the languages spoken by the family. Find out the key words a child uses e.g. mum and dad, toilet. Start to keep a book for each language. This can become a very useful resource in your setting. Put a picture of the word in the book, write the word down in the script used by the child. Write down how to pronounce the word. You can also make a picture card / key ring card of important words that children can carry and point to as they need e.g. the toilet, drink, mum.
- Pronounce and spell children's names correctly. Ask parents to write their child's name in the script they use. Put this on the child's coat peg. Make some sticky name labels to be put on paintings etc.
- Use visual timetables and visual clues e.g. photos on toy boxes.
- Use song boxes and activities with visual prompts. Learn and sing songs and rhymes and listen to music in children's home languages
- Use story sacks and tell stories with puppets and find stories in a children's home languages.

Remember that children need time. Time to settle, build relationships and time to take in a new language while keeping their first / home language.

Working with parents with English as an additional language

[Working with parents with EAL - a guide for practitioners - YouTube](#)

Chapter 4: Development in 2-year-olds

2-year-olds develop at an astonishing rate. A secure knowledge and understanding how children develop is critical for early years practitioners as it affects and influences every area of work.

There can be a lot of pressure on practitioners to complete paperwork related to observation, assessment and planning as well as the 2-year-check and reports to parents. Whilst it is important to keep records of children's development these records need to be useful and relevant.

It is important to remember that whilst practitioners need to understand child development to ensure that children's needs are being met, children haven't read the manual and will not always do what is written down.

We need to know where children are developmentally when they start in a setting and what may influence their development. We need to celebrate what a child can do and help them to grow, develop and enjoy life. It is not about ticking boxes or rushing children onto the next stage. We also need to remember that children will grow and develop at different rates in each area of development.

Let's remind ourselves of some the fundamentals of child development. Development follows a sequence/ directional pattern.

- From head to toe / top to bottom (Cephalocaudal development) e.g., babies hold their head up first
- From inside to outside (Proximodistal development) e.g., muscles around the core / trunk of the body develop first followed by the extremities ending with the fingers and toes.
- From simple to complex e.g., a child will walk before hopping, and say single words before sentences
- From general to specific, e.g., a young baby shows pleasure with their whole body, an older child shows pleasure by smiling.



One way to remember the areas of development is using the acronym **SPICES**

S = Social development is about relationships, how children build relationships with peers, children of different ages and adults and how they interact with others.

P = Physical development is about how the body grows and develops. This incorporates gross motor skills i.e. large motor skills such as moving arms and legs walking, running and movements of the whole body and fine motor skills i.e. picking things up, wriggling toes, using lips to feel things.

I = Intellectual development is about the development of reasoning, knowing, judging, conceptualizing and thinking.

C = Communication development is about how children communicate, this may be through body language, signs and symbols, spoken and written communication.

E = Emotional development is about the emotions, how children feel about themselves as well as being able to express and understand their emotions and the emotions of others.

S = Spiritual development is about awe and wonder. It does not have to be linked to religion.

It is important to remember that all areas of development overlap and interlink e.g. how a child feels about themselves can affect and influence all other areas of development. We need to look at the whole child, not just parts of their development. All children are individuals, and no two children will ever be the same. Every child is a unique individual with their own personality and temperament.

Remember! There is a big difference between a child who is 24 months old and one who is 35 months old, but they are both 2! A lot can happen in a year.

Adults can help and support a child's development by providing children with the things they need.



Additional resources:

[Activities and toys that support caregiver–child interaction in the early years;](#)

This guide from the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) describes over 80 activities that support children’s development in their understanding of objects, other people, numbers and language. The EIF champions and supports the use of effective early intervention to improve the lives of children and young people at risk of experiencing poor outcomes.

Read our blogs:

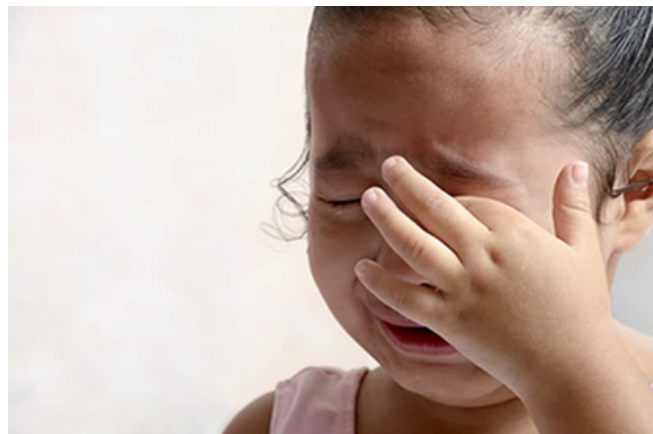
- [Tech savvy toddlers: technology and communication development | PACEY](#)
- [Tackling stereotypes in early years with Gender Action | PACEY](#)
- [The three Ls: language, literacy and learning | PACEY](#)
- [Reasons to be verbal: the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of learning verbs | PACEY](#)
- [Keep calm – let’s talk about self-regulation | PACEY](#)

Check out our Spotlight on key areas of development

- [Spotlight on Nutrition | PACEY](#)
- [Spotlight on Mark-making | PACEY](#)

Supporting behaviour in 2-year-olds

Two-year-olds can be challenging. Their developmental stage means that they can be very determined, but also impulsive. This will change as they develop language but in this "in between" stage they can become very frustrated as they struggle to communicate their feelings.



Here's a short series of videos and a few tips that might make this phase a little easier. Why not share these with parents?

- [Supporting behaviour: "not saying much" \(youtube.com\)](#)
- [Supporting behaviour: Tantrums \(youtube.com\)](#)
- [Supporting behaviour: not listening \(youtube.com\)](#)
- [Supporting behaviour: Frustration \(youtube.com\)](#)
- [Supporting behaviour: running off \(youtube.com\)](#)
- [Supporting Behaviour - Biting \(youtube.com\)](#)

Top Tips:

- Try not to let 2-year-olds become overtired. Most 2-year-olds will still need a nap, and this can make a significant difference to their mood and ability to cope with frustration.
- Try to keep a routine so that 2-year-olds develop an understanding of what they need to do, but also what is about to happen
- Try using visual timetables to help 2-year-olds understand what is about to happen
- Don't rush 2-year-olds. Allow plenty of time to change activity, go out or get dressed.
- Recognise that 2-year-olds find it hard to see things that they cannot have or do. Try to create an environment that is 'enabling' and so try to put away things that might cause problems.
- Spend as much time as possible outdoors. This is where 2-year-olds are often at their happiest. Being outdoors also helps with appetite and sleeping.
- Observe what 2-year-olds want to do. This might be opening and closing, climbing or moving things from one place to another. Use this knowledge to organise resources and activities that will interest them.
- At the first sign of a tantrum, try distraction. Do something surprising and remember to smile and look relaxed.
- Try to sing your way through the tricky parts of the routine. Singing will keep you relaxed and also help any other children to feel that everything will be fine.
- Remember that 2-year-olds are not trying to be difficult on purpose. They have no plan but are just reacting to what is around them. Try to be proactive. Think about what you might get out or do next with them.



Supporting language in 2-year-olds

Two-year-olds' language comes on leaps and bounds over the course of the year. At the start of being 2, most children have around 50 words and are likely to be putting two words together. If all goes well, by the time they reach 3, they will have hundreds of words and will be talking in short sentences. They will also understand most of what is said to them.



You can support the language development of 2-year-olds, helping them grow in confidence to chat and extend their language skills.

- To encourage talking, try making a simple statement or comment and then leave a pause e.g. "the car is rolling down the slope".
- Talk about what children are looking at or playing with. Following children's lead and joining in with their play can encourage their language.
- Avoid asking one question straight after another. This can put too much pressure on children and they are less likely to respond. For children who are starting to stammer, the expectation that they should answer can be problematic.
- Try to share picture books every day and if they are of interest, repeat them again and again. This can support the development of vocabulary. Look at them at the child's pace and don't worry if they want to skip forwards or go backwards.
- Be proactive at watching out for children who may not be fully hearing, especially during the winter and after colds. Conductive hearing loss, where fluid builds up in the ear, can stop children from hearing words and sounds which may impact their communication development.
- Recognise that a lot of screen time when children are not interacting with adults or other children reduces opportunities to learn how to talk and listen to others.

Creating enabling environments

What makes an environment enabling? How can I put it into practice? Find all you need to know with these brilliant resources, activities, guidance and tools from PACEY.

Enabling environments overview

To create an enabling environment, childcare professionals must consider not only the physical environment indoors and outdoors but also the emotional environment, recognising the significance of parent-practitioner relationships and how safe and at home the children feel within the setting.

An enabling environment plays a key role in supporting children's learning and development. It is well recognised that children learn and develop best in caring, supportive environments which respond to their individual needs, allowing them to play and explore.

You can access a range of materials from this page to help you create an enabling environment for children in your care, simply click on the different areas below for a list of resources available to PACEY members.

Creative ideas

England and Wales	
<p>Imaginative play</p> <p>An in-depth look at the value of imaginative play and how to support children to play imaginatively in your childcare setting.</p>	
<p>Child-led play and adult-led play</p> <p>An overview that explores the key points and tips to support child-led and adult-led play in your setting.</p>	
<p>School and out of home activities</p> <p>Information outlining key points and suggested activities for childminders and nannies in England and Wales.</p>	
<p>Telling Stories</p> <p>A seven minute long video on the topic of story telling and the benefits in learning and development it provides.</p>	
England	Wales
<p>Outdoor play</p> <p>An information factsheet that summarises the value of outdoor play and the key points to remember.</p>	<p>Inspiring Environments</p> <p>Developed in partnership with Elizabeth Jarman and childminders in Wales. This toolkit will be of interest to anyone working in childcare to develop environments that support children's well-being, learning and development.</p>

Guidance for best practice and regulations

England and Wales	
<p>Child Observations and Learning Journeys</p> <p>A step-by-step guide to the observation process and the importance of child observation and learning journeys. Plus discover the benefit of online journal system Kinderly, complete with extra benefits for PACEY members.</p>	
<p>Schemas Factsheet</p> <p>This factsheet explains patterns of children's behaviour, known as schemas.</p>	
<p>Sustained, shared thinking</p> <p>Information on what sustained shared thinking really means and how you can encourage and make opportunities for it in your setting.</p>	
England	Wales
<p>Planning for learning</p> <p>What is the importance of assessment, the different types of assessment and planning? Find out with this practice guide, including examples to support you</p>	<p>Our Spotlight on the new curriculum for Wales includes useful information and links.</p>
<p>Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning</p> <p>Best practice when it comes to delivering the prime and specific areas of learning and the ways you can support children's development in these.</p>	<p>Pedagogy</p> <p>This factsheet for early years and childcare professionals in Wales provides an overview of the pedagogy of the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings.</p>
<p>Assessing children's progress</p> <p>A factsheet for early years and childcare professionals that explores the process for assessing children's progress.</p>	<p>Play and play-based learning</p> <p>This factsheet for early years and childcare professionals in Wales provides an overview of the importance of play and play based learning in Wales.</p>

<p><u>Characteristics of effective learning</u> This factsheet gives an insight into how children learn. Including playing and exploring, active learning, creating and thinking critically.</p>	<p><u>Cross curricular skills</u> This factsheet for early years and childcare professionals in Wales provides an overview of the cross-curricular skills of the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. The curriculum for Wales has been developed with the mandatory skills embedded within the developmental pathways. These include literacy, numeracy and digital competence all of which are skills young children should acquire and master as part of their learning journey.</p>
<p><u>Observations, assessments and planning to support children's progress – the planning cycle</u> A factsheet for early years and childcare professionals in England outlining the importance of observations, assessment and planning.</p>	
<p><u>The progress check at 2 years of age</u> "When a child is aged between 2 and 3, practitioners must review their progress..." find out more with this handy factsheet.</p>	<p><u>Developmental pathways</u> This factsheet for early years and childcare professionals in Wales provides an overview of the of the five developmental pathways of the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings.</p>

Child development

<p>England and Wales</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Transitions</u></p> <p>An in-depth look at different types of transitions that children go through and the support you can give with the settling-in process.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Supporting children's thinking</u></p> <p>This practice guide gives you an insight into how children's brains develop and start the thinking process.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Supporting children's language development</u></p> <p>Want to know how to support and understand children's language development? This practice guide can help.</p>

[Starting from children's interests](#)

This guide gives you information about the value of settling children in; the role of the key person in building positive relationship and using children's interests to inform planning.

[Children's emotional needs](#)

A fantastic factsheet that gives you information to explore the importance of supporting children's emotional wellbeing.

[Managing feelings and behaviour](#)

If you'd like to know how you can encourage and support children's development and managing feelings and behaviour, check out this factsheet.

[Key person](#)

Discover the value of the key person and how you can fulfil this role this effectively.

[Routines](#)

Find out why routines are important and how you can help children learn about and establish routines.

[Working with Babies](#)

This video for PACEY members looks at how different childcare professionals approach working with babies and helps you reflect on your practice and suggest practice development areas.



Early maths

What is mathematics and why is it so important to early childhood development? “It is an often overlooked fact that we all, whether children or adults, are constantly using and applying mathematics in our everyday lives.” Says Di Hatchett, Founding Trustee at National Numeracy. “Research into children’s development and learning in the early years confirms that early experiences have long-lasting outcomes in terms of educational achievement and life chances.”

As a childcare professional you can make a real difference to ensure every child has a chance to become a confident learner and user of mathematics. Here you’ll find a handy round-up of key resources, products, blogs and activities to help you support mathematics in the early years.

If you're a member of PACEY you can access these resources for free by logging into the MyPACEY members' area.

[Numbers, shapes and problem solving practice guide](#)

This practice guide, written by PACEY experts, covers:

- Learning about numbers, shapes and problem solving
- Role of the key person and an enabling environment
- Songs and rhyme
- Maths outdoors
- Numbers and shapes
- Problem solving
- Supporting the home learning environment

[Numbers, shapes and problem solving factsheet](#)

This fantastic factsheet gives an introduction into supporting children’s mathematical development in your childcare setting. It gives practical examples and ideas and a reflective task to try.

Blogs

Read more on the subject of mathematics with our blogs provided by experts.

[Maths: it's an attitude](#) – Julia Sudbury, Head Consultant, Cambridge Early Years
We use maths in every aspect of our lives. However, here in the UK we have a long term and increasing issue with low levels of numeracy in the adult population. Early years practitioners can use simple tips to create a positive attitude towards maths, to help make a step in the right direction.

[Play by numbers](#) – Dr Amanda Gummer, Fundamentally Children

This blog explores a few examples of the toys and activities you can provide to encourage development in some of the areas of numeracy, for early years and Key Stage 1. Read on to find more about how children can develop their mathematics skills at different ages and stages.

[How do you support the development of maths in the early years?](#) - Judith Dancer

Get a taster of what to expect from our book – Mathematics in the Early Years with these fun, practical activities that include “the number robber” and mud kitchens. Sounds like fun right?

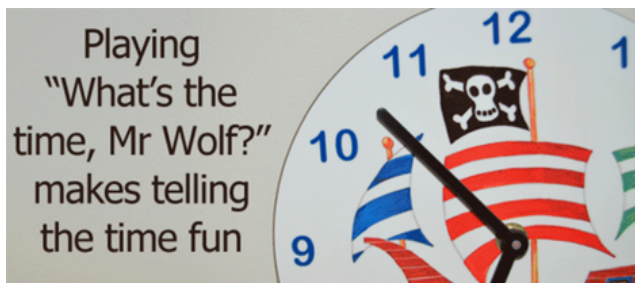
Additional resources

Early Childhood Maths Group have a huge range of resources for the early years. Their 'Building firm foundations' resources are suitable from birth to key stage 1.

[Download them here.](#)

Members' tips

We asked members on our Facebook page to share their top tips for including maths every day. Here are some suggestions.



Get involved

Support our campaign to inspire children with early maths on social media by tweeting and retweeting using the hashtag #earlymaths.

Here are two suggested tweets:

- Inspire our children with #earlymaths in learning and through play
- Give every child the chance to become a confident maths learner #earlymaths

Early movers

Physical development involves developing control of muscles and physical coordination and it is the primary function in all other life skills. In a school setting, it enables children to complete simple tasks such as sitting still, holding a pencil, putting on shoes and reading – all skills essential for school.

A new website, www.earlymovers.org.uk, has been developed by a team of academics from Loughborough University. It aims to help parents and early years practitioners feel confident in delivering physical development opportunities to children. It's full of practical ideas to help ensure babies and young children get lots of physical development opportunities which, in turn, helps make sure that they are physically ready to start school.

Early Movers.

The website aims provide guidance and activity ideas to help the physical development of babies and young children. It's split into two key sections: 'Core Skills' and 'Activities'. The first section breaks down core skills into categories – such as rolling, balancing and catching – and gives examples of the movements that would be expected to be seen emerging in babies, toddlers, and pre-schoolers. Watch the video here for three examples for pre-schoolers
https://youtu.be/mJgAQs5r_Sc

The Activities section is full of creative and fun suggestions for games parents and early years practitioners can initiate with children to develop their core skills. Ideas range balance and throwing games to exploring how Treasure Baskets – a box and simple household items - can help with hand-eye co-ordination, picking-up objects and other skills.

The website also provides a handy glossary that explains technical terms that relate to physical development.

[Explore the Toddler section.](#)

Literacy in the early years

The term "literacy" is used by some to simply describe reading and writing, but in fact literacy covers a much wider range of learning.

Literacy in the early years includes talking about books, print in the environment, early mark making and writing, as well as sharing books and reading. The statutory frameworks in England and Wales emphasise the fundamental importance of literacy and sharing books, and this page will be your helping hand to achieve that.

Literacy in your childcare setting

“From the day our children are born (yes), to the day they tell us to stop, we should read to them,” says Michael Rosen (pg.39 Good Ideas How to Be Your Child’s and Your Own Best Teacher).

Introducing literacy into your childcare setting doesn’t have to be confined to the printed ink on a page.

Chatting away in funny voices as you flick through picture books, enjoying interactive eBooks together, listening to stories being told via video or audio and singing nursery rhymes can all spark communication and literacy learning. Essentially it is these ideas and questions the activities promote that create the foundation for developing reading and writing skills.

“A shared story between a child and a familiar, loved adult has a huge impact on children’s interest and motivation for reading later on,” says PACEY President, Penny Tassoni. Watch the video to find out more

<https://youtu.be/wmZQbmPQNvU>

National Storytelling week

Once upon a time (15 years ago to be exact) the Society for Storytelling’s [National Storytelling Week](#) was launched. Of course the art of telling a tale, spinning a yarn and using narrative skills goes back way before that.

National Storytelling week takes place each year and is a fabulous way to celebrate literacy in your childcare setting. Events take place in storytelling clubs, school, theatres, hospitals and theatres around the country. To find out what’s going on in your area take a look at the [National Storytelling events](#) website.

We've rounded up a bunch of the best literacy tools around for childcare professionals. You'll find fun and educational children's books and a selection of favourites from Clickety Books and I CAN.

Discover a range of resources including practice guides about sharing books, videos about communication and partner activity sheets from the BookTrust and ICAN's Chatterbox Challenge amongst others.

Read along with Michael Rosen's video of 'Going on a Bear Hunt', and read our guest blog about early speech and phonics .

Free literacy resources for members

Here are a variety of materials, available free for members, including practice guides and factsheets, all of which support literacy learning and development.

[Very Hungry Caterpillar Early Years Resource Pack](#) - written by PACEY in conjunction with Puffin Books, this downloadable resource will inspire activities linked to the early learning outcomes in England and Wales, based on the much-loved book.

[Literacy practice guide](#) - a brilliant guide to help you think about supporting the development of literacy skills in children.

[Supporting children's language development](#) - A guide to help you support and understand children's language development for under and over 3s, and causes of communication difficulty.

[Sharing books](#) - A guide to help you think about sharing books with children, looking at why sharing books is important, creating a book friendly setting, sharing books from birth, encouraging book sharing at home and what children learn from book sharing.

[Supporting children and families with English as an additional language \(EAL\)](#) - A factsheet exploring how to support children and families with English as an additional language.

[Routines](#) - A factsheet that explores the benefits of routines in children's learning and development. Children can learn literacy skills from routines from learning vocabulary associated with time to reading about routines in books and through stories and rhyme.

[Transitions](#) - A guide that explores the different types of transitions that children go through, as well as how you can help children settle in well to your childcare setting.

[Partnership with parents](#) – a factsheet giving you information about working in partnership with parents, encouraging parents and carers to become more involved with their child’s learning of literacy.

[Blog: How a floppy-hatted scarecrow, a spider and a magic box can be your top tools for early literacy](#) - Amanda Baxter from I CAN tells us her interesting top tips for early literacy and language development.

[Telling stories video](#) – A practice video that explores how to engage children in stories and the learning and development benefits they bring.

[PACEY Live webinar: Stories and Poetry. The Michael Rosen Masterclass](#) - Dive into the science and explore how words, storytelling and poetry support children’s brain and emotional development.

[BLOG: The power of books and reading](#) - Ben O'Donnell, Children's reading and creative literacy consultant, talks about the impact that books have had on his life and why books can be so powerful for children.

Storytelling videos

Author Michael Rosen performs the children’s classic - We’re going on a bear hunt: <https://youtu.be/0gyI6ykDwds>

[Clickety Books storytelling](#)- the YouTube channel from our friends at Clickety Books have a fantastic variety of clips from story books including Jake the Achy Snake, Tracy the Pacy Plaice and Corky the Squawky Hawk voiced by Rik Mayall and Ronni Ancona.

BookTrust - [Book Start - I love stories and rhymes!](#) - A short top tips video with the blue bears from Bookstart.



Free partner resources

[Picture Book Party activity sheets](#)

[Bookstart Rhymetimes sheets](#)

[Tips and advice from BookTrust](#)

We hope this page has been useful for developing the literacy learning in your childcare setting. We'll leave you with this quote from Michael Rosen that sums up the importance of literacy and empowering children with words:

“The feeling of entitlement about words is one of the most important platforms we can give children – whether that’s for getting what they need from education of beyond.”

Toilet training tips

Toilet training can be a tricky time. There is a huge variation in when children will be ready to come out of nappies. Anything between 18 months and nearly 3 years is not unusual. The word "training" is misleading. Children can only come out of nappies when they are physically ready. If the timing is correct, most children will be clean and dry within a week. Too early means lots of accidents and the danger of everyone becoming frustrated. On the other hand, if children are left in nappies too long, they become used to being in soiled and wet nappies.



Top tips for supporting children's move away from nappies

- Look out for signs that children are urinating or pooing. Talk to children about what is happening using simple language, for example, "your wee wee is coming out" or "I can smell something. Maybe your poo is on its way".
- Talk about getting children 'comfortable' rather than 'clean' when changing nappies or clearing up accidents. This can prevent some children from feeling shame.
- Do not start toilet training until you are sure that children can hold urine for at least one and a half hours, preferably two, and that they are releasing it in a "flood". Watch out as well for dry nappies after naps. This shows that the bladder is mature. It's best not to wait too long to get out of nappies after a child has bladder maturation.

The toilet training process - doing a wee

- Start by putting a child in pants and show them where the potty is. Don't make too much of a fuss about it.
- Wait for around an hour since the child last urinated and then suggest that perhaps a wee wee will be ready.
- Help children understand the signals that their body is showing them. If you see signs that a child might need to urinate help to explain it by saying things such as "when you are wriggling like that, it means that your wee wants to come out."
- Expect that there will be accidents at first. When there are accidents, say something such as "your wee-wee came out before you were ready."
- Persist for two days, but do not continue unless there are more 'wins' than 'loses'.
- Unlike adults, children only feel the signs that they need to urinate when their bladder is already very full. They will not be able to wait. Move quickly!

The toilet training process - doing a poo

- When it comes to poo, the most important thing is that children do not become constipated. Once children have become constipated, they associate passing a stool with pain. This in turn prevents them from relaxing and allowing the stool to be moved.
- Try to add more water and vegetables into the diet to help prevent constipation.
- Work out if there is a pattern to a child's bowel movements before starting toilet training. This will help you anticipate when the child is likely to need to do a poo.
- Take the lead from children. Some children do not want adults near them when they pass a stool, others want to be distracted or reassured.
- If a child is desperate but wants the nappy back on – let them have it. It is better to take time over the process than have them become constipated.
- If child seems only want to wear nappies to do a poo, try lining a potty with a nappy, putting on the nappy increasingly loosely or even cutting a large hole in the back of the nappy.

Childcare expert and PACEY President, Penny Tassoni, shares her wisdom on the right time to start toilet training. [Toilet Training - YouTube](#)

Chapter 5: Building the toddler brain

Self-regulation

In simple terms self-regulation is the ability to manage our emotions and behaviour in different circumstances in a socially acceptable way. Read more about self-regulation, and how you can support children to develop the self-regulation skills they'll need as they grow.

Executive function

Executive function is a concept that is key to children's brain development. It's the group of skills that helps us to focus on many and different streams of information at once and gives us the mental flexibility to revise our plans as necessary. This useful video from Harvard University in America explores the concept of executive function and how you can support a child's grasp of it.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efCq_vHUMqs



Putting brain development into practice

The neuroscience behind the development of a toddler's brain can feel overwhelming, so we spoke to award-winning author, lecturer and trainer, Mine Conkbayir about the science behind behaviour and how practitioners can help to support toddlers' developing brains.

We know that at birth, a child already has almost all of the neurons they'll need for the rest of their lives – that's approximately 86 billion!

Although a lot of brain development happens in the womb, there is still much to be done and you play a critical role in shaping the early brain development and overall wellbeing of the 2-year-olds in your setting.

As we know, being 2 can be a tricky time. They are making the exciting but sometimes scary leap from total dependency to wanting to go it alone, independently of adult support or guidance. Given this is a time of exponential growth and development, the more you invest now, the better the foundation you are laying for healthy future development.

At 2, children's ability to use language suddenly increases rapidly. This is particularly important to consider with regard to (some) children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who have speech and language skills that are significantly lower than those of other children of the same age.

Repetition and practice help promote neuronal growth and learning

Why it is important we know this

Everything we do and say – and how we do, shapes early brain development. This can have positive or negative consequences for a child's wellbeing and development.

Whenever we perform an action, the neurons involved in that action start firing electrical signals, or action potentials, and form an active network of cells. One effect of repeatedly practicing the action may be increasing myelin (a fatty coating) around the network, leading to faster and more efficient processing of neuronal signals – and improved ability. This highlights the importance of good quality early experiences in laying a healthy foundation. This is significant because at approximately 5 years old, brain regions responsible for language, physical, cognitive, social and emotional begin to close down as those neurons that are not frequently used are pruned away and those that are frequently used, become strengthened.

That's not to say development cannot occur after this time, just that it happens at a slower rate.

What this means in practice and how we can support this

Consider Bruner's concept of the spiral curriculum: re-visiting previous experiences results in the child consolidating their understanding as they continually return to basic ideas while new subjects and concepts are added over the course of a curriculum. When you plan these incrementally, the child has the opportunity to reflect on their learning, build on their knowledge and the ability to think creatively when encountering new learning experiences.

Facilitate learning through effective scaffolding (i.e. through simplifying the task, motivating, encouraging and providing a model for the child to imitate).

Make sure your 2-year-olds have opportunity to regularly practice skills such as language, movement and exploration and problem-solving. These in turn, build familiarity, confidence and competence.

Encourage learning extensions based on repetition of the child's favourite story, activity, experience or song. This repetitive learning will help them to forge the neurological connections they need for more complex learning.

Ensure you have a robust observation and planning process that supports each child's current interests and abilities so that you know how and when to encourage them to move onto the next phase of their learning.

Early years practitioners can support brain development.

Why it is important we know this

Early brain development occurs at an exceptionally rapid rate, especially from birth to 2 years old, with experiences, relationships and interactions shaping this precarious process for good or bad – and their legacy lasting across the life trajectory.

What this means in practice and how we can support this

Look critically at the learning environment and resources – do these encourage babies and children to engage using all their senses? Each brain processes, responds, reasons, thinks and solves problems differently!

Existing neuronal networks change in response to learning experiences – reflect on whether you (and your team) provide learning experiences which challenge the ability of the brain to respond actively, to assimilate information from a range of sources and generate new ideas.

Do the activities and resources provide enough stimulation while encouraging problem-solving among toddlers?

The development of executive function and self-regulation

Research continues to show poorer children exhibit more conduct and behavioural problems than their wealthier peers – evident from 3 years old – and that these differences persist throughout pre-adolescence.

Why it is important we know this

We often expect far too much of infants and children. We expect them to listen on demand, to do as their told, to sit, to pay attention, to stop doing what they're doing and to try harder (the list goes on). These are by the way, are executive functioning skills.

The issue is, if a child lacks self-regulation skills (i.e. Managing their emotional responses), they will find it very difficult to 'do as they are told'.

At this age, children often experience emotional distress (unpleasantly called 'tantrums'), which are often a result of their inability to express themselves clearly. Your role in helping to co-regulate these intense outbursts and bringing the child back to a calm and safe state is vital in nurturing self-regulation.

Co-regulation (the supportive, guiding process between two individuals and the strategies used in this process to help regulate the child's emotional responses to triggers) is critical in the development of self-regulation.

Many factors influence a child's ability to self-regulate and you need to be familiar with these. Use Dr Shanker's five domains of self-regulation and stressors (biological, cognitive, emotional, social and pro-social) to help you identify stressors in your provision that may be inhibiting development of self-regulation.

What this means in practice and how we can support this

Familiarise yourself with the concepts of self-regulation and co-regulation. Inform parents of what this is and why it is important to children's all-round wellbeing and how they can help to nurture self-regulation at home.

Your three ultimate aims in co-regulating emotional responses, are to:

1. reduce stress levels
2. help the child return to a state of calm
3. model/provide self-regulation strategies for them to use in the future.

If you know this is an area for improvement – get planning!

- Provide warmth and nurturing
- Anticipate needs and swiftly respond to cues for engagement
- Provide structure and consistent routine (while allowing for flexibility as necessary)
- Provide swift physical and emotional comfort when a child is distressed or dysregulated, speak calmly, softly and giving affection
- Adapt the environment to decrease demands and stress
- Teach age-appropriate rules and expectations
- Support children to label and express their emotions
- Model waiting and self-calming strategies (e.g. Taking deep breaths, having access to a comfort object, doing some simple stretches or mindfulness activities – strategies that can be effectively used in the moment)
- Redirect the child's attention to help regulate their behaviour (you will become adept at doing this with whatever resources you have around you at the time)

Language development in 2-year-olds

Language development for 2-year-olds goes through sudden, massive growth at this age, with research showing greater brain activity for children who engaged in more conversation at home.

Why it is important we know this

“Toddlers and other vulnerable children from disadvantaged communities can be as much as 10 months behind their more advantaged peers in vocabulary development by the age of 3.” Blanden and Machin (2010).

Children need to regularly experience genuine, reciprocal interactions with adults. This to-and-fro engagement shows them that are truly valued and listened to. Brain regions responsible for language are experience-dependent: they need your input to ensure healthy growth and development.

What this means in practice and how we can support this

Ensure you make plenty of time for face-to-face interactions with children. This is valuable in teaching them the rudiments of engaging in conversation – something which many children do not experience at home.

Encourage them to engage in conversations with their peers while being patient as they try to understand the ‘rules’ of effective communication (e.g. Listening, taking turns to speak and giving eye contact).

Make lots of time in the routine for lots of singing, poetry and fun rhymes, to help build a love of language while promoting phonological awareness. Consider creating communication friendly spaces.

Reflect on how you respond to young children’s invitations to conversations - especially babies’ and toddlers’!

Engage in dialogic reading. For more information about [dialogic reading](#) see this explainer from Nursery World.

Attachment and relationships affect how the brain develops

Attachment and relationships affect how the brain develops. The infant brain develops within an interpersonal context, where structural and functional networks are shaped by the nature and quality of early caregiver–infant interactions.

Why it is important we know this

Secure attachments are vital – from conception, across the life trajectory. If this loving, emotional relationship with at least one consistent and reliable caregiver does not take place, the development of the brain will be affected, in particular, the capacity for empathy and compassion towards others may be diminished.

Practitioners who are attuned to babies and children and consistently emotionally available to them are vital in building children’s sense of security, confidence and resilience.

What this means in practice and how we can support this

An effective key person system is vital. Children need to feel secure and valued in your setting. Ensuring that the key person builds a trusting and open relationship with families, is one way to pave the way for a healthy attachment with a child.

Small group experiences are also useful in building children’s confidence through acknowledging their voices and feelings.

Re-visit your key person policy. When was it last updated? Some simple 'brain facts' could help to enhance it while developing parents' and staff' understanding of their invaluable role in making the attachment process work.

Neurological changes in the infant occur in response to affirming interactions with the primary carer such as playing, comforting, holding and communicating both verbally and non-verbally through smiles and gazing – what are you waiting for!

The environment can influence brain development

Why it is important we know this

The environment has a profound influence on children's wellbeing and development.

Two-year-olds need a balance between dependence and emerging independence. It may seem obvious, but 2-year-olds are no longer babies, nor are they fully able to be as independent as they wish. This can often lead to them getting into trouble for doing things that may be considered as dangerous.

What this means in practice and how we can support this

Could your setting be improved to better nurture children's ability to thrive?

Consider this with regard to:

- adverse childhood experiences
- children who have sensory integration difficulties
- special educational needs or disabilities.

Closely refer to Dr Shanker's five domains of stressors to facilitate your audit
In which ways does the layout of your indoor environment meet the emotional and cognitive needs of all children? A setting that is too cluttered and bright, with minimal space to move and communicate is detrimental to children's health and development.

What are some of the barriers to achieving quality in the set-up of the environment in your setting? (Consider features of different areas such as noise levels, uncluttered and cosy spaces.)

Consider this take on the ABC of behaviour: Always Be Curious! This means taking the time and effort to consider what might be going on in the mind of the 2-year-old? Are they bored? Are they over-stimulated? Are they becoming frustrated as they are not being listened to or understood? Talk with your team to reflect our current approaches to planning the environment (indoor and outdoor) and what needs to be changed, in order to ensure every child can thrive.

Mine Conkbayir.



Mine (pictured) has worked in the field of early childhood education and care for over 18 years. She is the winner of the Nursery Management Today (NMT) Top 5 Most Inspirational People in Childcare Award. Mine is the founder of the award-winning Cache Endorsed Learning Programme, Applying Neuroscience to Early Intervention. She is currently undertaking a PhD in early childhood education and neuroscience to develop her work in the complex and challenging subject of early brain development. Her key objective is to bridge the knowledge gap between neuroscience and early years discourse and practice.

Discover more about Mine and her work, [visit her website](#). Use the code PACEY10 to get your 10% discount on her online courses.

Chapter 6: Separation and transitions

Starting in a childcare setting can be hard for parents as well as children. As a childcare professional, you're in a great place to support parents and children through this transition.

For parents

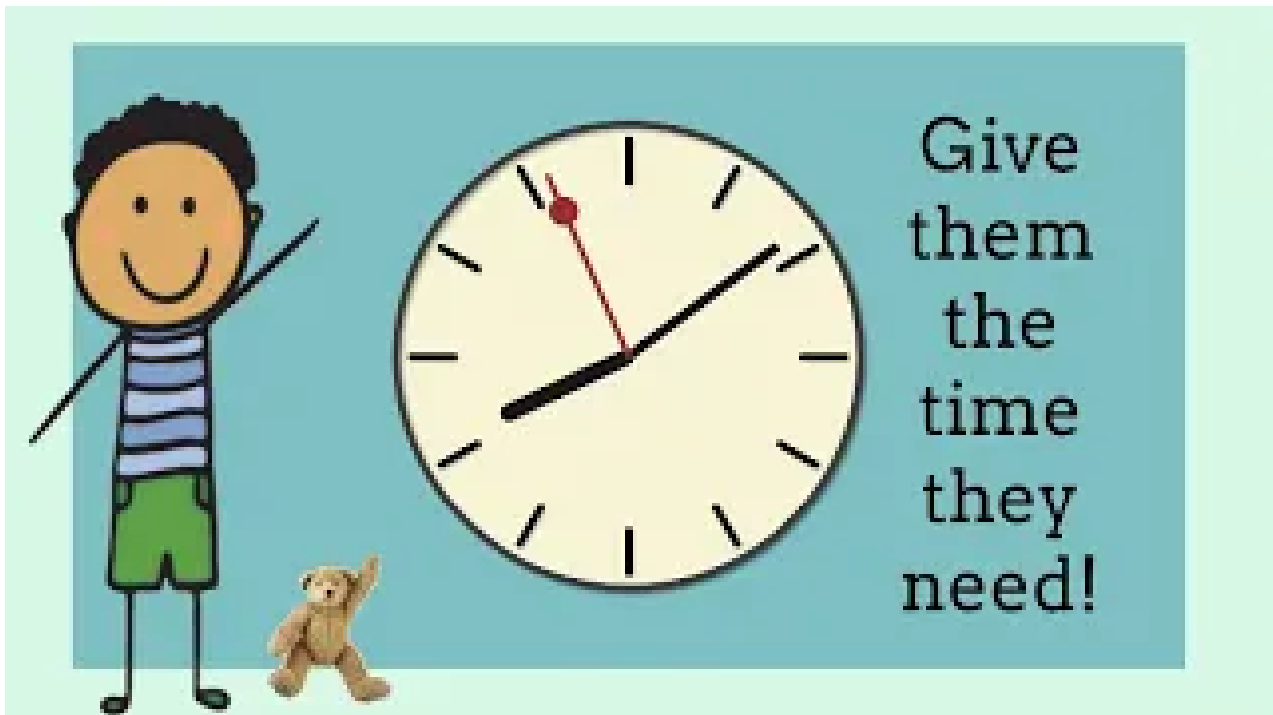
[Penny Tassoni - settling in 2-year-olds - YouTube](#)

[Transitions and Settling In - a guide for parents \(youtube.com\)](#)

For practitioners

[Transitions and Settling In - a guide for practitioners - YouTube](#)

[Penny Tassoni - settling in - YouTube](#)



Chapter 7: Chattersacks

A chattersack is a sack or bag containing a range of resources to support a theme or the particular interest of a child. Watch our videos below to learn how to make, and use, a chattersack.

[Chattersacks - what are they? \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Chattersacks: why and how to use them - YouTube](#)

[Chattersacks: extending their use \(youtube.com\)](#)



Chapter 8: Songboxes

A songbox contains a range of resources to support participation in songs and rhymes in your setting. Watch our videos below to learn how to make and use a songbox.

[What is a songbox and why use one? - YouTube](#)

[How to make a songbox \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Using Songboxes to extend children's learning \(youtube.com\)](#)

