

Designed to support developmental assessment of twos

What does it mean to be two?

What every practitioner needs to understand
about the development of two-year-olds

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Updated in accordance with the 2012 Early Years Foundation Stage

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Focus on two-year-olds

What does it mean to be two? explores the developmental needs and likely skills of two-year-olds. The approach and ideas of this book are relevant to practitioners who are working with twos anywhere in the UK. However, the structure of the book follows the statutory framework for England of the Birth to Five Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This new edition of *What does it mean to be two?* has been updated following the revised framework, to be implemented from September 2012. The main EYFS documents can be accessed through the Department for Education website (details on page 56). At the time of writing, Scotland is the only other nation in the UK which has specific guidance about best practice with under-threes (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010).

A learning journey across early childhood

In England, early years practitioners have been working within the EYFS since September 2008. The revised statutory framework and supporting guidance are much reduced in length and some details, like the early learning goals for the end of the stage, have been changed.

Of course, everyone has to become familiar with the revised framework. Yet, early years provision with established best practice will not need to make sweeping changes to their approach to children and families. The crucial elements of best practice have not changed.

One focus of change is that the six areas of learning from the first EYFS framework have become seven areas, divided into three **prime** and four **specific** areas. This framework is one way of considering the breadth of children's learning. But of course children do not learn in separate compartments; the whole point is that children's learning crosses all the boundaries. The overall aim of identifying particular areas of learning is still to ensure that early years practitioners do not overlook important areas of development.

The rationale for identifying three prime areas of learning is that secure early development rests upon:

- Communication and language
- Physical development
- Personal, social and emotional development.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS: CARE OVER QUESTIONS

When adults – parents as well as practitioners – are concerned about a child’s language development, they often increase their adult talk, frequently by asking more questions of the child. The adult thinking is well-intentioned but unwise. Perhaps you are offering support to an anxious parent, or perhaps supporting a less sure colleague.

Help the fellow-adult to look from the child’s perspective. If young boys and girls struggle to understand you in the first place, then increasing questions is likely to make a child feel under greater pressure to respond ‘correctly’. It is far better to adjust how you talk to make a simple comment, then pause and look expectant. Do not rush to fill short silences.

Even when children’s language is progressing well for their age, the best approach is still to ask children questions when you genuinely want to know the answer. Avoid testing questions to check if a child knows names, colours and so on. When you spend time close to young children in play and conversation, you will find out easily enough what they understand by watching and listening to them. Twos often enjoy spotting games led by ‘Where’s the...?’



talk with a child’s parent. The pattern of a child’s attention, or apparent inattention, might make you wonder about hearing loss.

Communication – part of daily life

The key message about supporting the communication skills of very young children is to use the opportunities that arise within a normal day. Unless children are known to have specific difficulties with language development, twos need the personal attention of familiar adults: within play, enjoyable local outings, relaxing and watching the world go by and ordinary domestic routines such as mealtimes.

I have placed this example here with ‘Communication and Language’. Yet what I observed also highlights other areas of these two-year-olds’ learning. For instance, they were learning about food in the practical, hands-on way that makes sense to young children. They were recalling highlights of a recipe that had extended their understanding of how ingredients can change: the rising of the pizza dough. It is also important not to overlook the ways in which children use and improve their physical skills through the regular routine of mealtimes.

WHAT ARE CHILDREN LEARNING?

I joined the Rumpus Drop-in for their pizza lunch.

This group of children had made pizzas, supported by Lesley (the Drop-in leader) and their parents (see page 31) and were able to stay to eat their meal.

The mealtime was relaxed and conversational – and children still ate their food and showed real enjoyment in what they had helped to make.

- The adult language was directly related to what was happening at the time. For instance, the pizzas were dished up one plate at a time, with the warning, ‘It’s hot’. Several parents suggested to their young child, ‘you blow on it’.
- Parents took the chance to reminisce with their young children about the ingredients they had all used to make the pizza.
- At one point, Will (2yrs, 6mths) was having trouble cutting his pizza. He said to his mother, ‘I’m getting annoyed’. His mother affirmed with, ‘Well done for saying you were annoyed. Because you were, weren’t you.’ I had heard her earlier directly encouraging her son to use feelings words.



Understanding the world

There are many ways of describing the natural, as well as the made or built, world and two-year-olds will have some of the vocabulary needed to describe the characteristics of the world. They will also start to address puzzling issues around time and place.

Learning through the senses

As adults we could benefit from an image in our mind of a young child with a quizzical expression on their face – maybe even a little frown – and the serious question from that child of, ‘do you know and understand my world?’. Twos are interested, often fascinated, by their world. Yet, practitioners and parents need to tune-in to young knowledge and the enjoyment that can come to us when we are open to sharing a child’s fresh outlook. Much of this adult respect and attention has to be led through informal observation of what children are actually doing and their chosen conversations, including their questions – whether asked in words or through a puzzled expression.

Over the year that they are two, children gain a larger vocabulary that enables them to describe qualities like texture, weight, temperature or colour. However, they reach this

understanding through practical experience, when the words can be connected with something that already makes sense. It is important that adults look for this connection of meaning – through young children’s current interests and knowledge.

You will tune-in properly to two-year-olds when you pay attention to how they choose to experience their world and how direct first-hand experiences lead their understanding of abstract ways to describe that world. It is valuable to think in terms of learning through the senses.

- **Vision:** young children need to use sight to recognise and distinguish different colour and shades. They have to see the difference before they can assign a word to that colour. When the day closes-in swiftly during wintertime, two-year-olds can see the difference between light and dark and how adults need to put the light on.
- **Touch:** children need to feel textures such as rough, smooth, bumpy (which could also be experienced by riding over) and some temperature changes like warm, hot or cold. As well as seeing basic shapes and lines, young children often learn by feeling the curves of a ball or cylinder or the edges of a squared box.