

Supporting the prime and specific areas of development

# What does it mean to be one?

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

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Updated in accordance with the 2012 Early Years Foundation Stage

## Contents

Focus on one-year-olds	2
Personal, social and emotional development	6
Communication and language	15
Physical development	26
Literacy	36
Mathematics	40
Understanding the world	44
Expressive arts and design	49
Further resources	54
Acknowledgements	56

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# Focus on one-year-olds

*What does it mean to be one?* covers the baby year up to the first birthday and into the year in which toddlers are one plus how many months. A huge amount happens developmentally over this timespan and some babies and toddlers will remain the full responsibility of their own family: parents or other adult family members. However, over the first part of very early childhood, some babies and toddlers will experience the transition into some kind of early years provision for part or all of their week; within a nursery or with a childminder.

The approach and ideas of this book are relevant to practitioners who are working with babies and toddlers 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 one?* has been updated following the revised framework, implemented from September 2012. The main EYFS documents can be accessed through the Department for Education website (details on page 54). At the time of writing, Scotland is the only other nation in the UK that 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 (ELGs) 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 babies and children do not learn in separate compartments; the whole point is that their 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.



# Personal, social and emotional development

It is complicated to explain and predict how young children manage some of their impressive developmental achievements. For instance, no single theory can fully explain how toddlers learn to speak a language within the very early years, with some toddlers learning more than one language. But the consistent messages about how adults – practitioners and parents – can best help do not point to complex techniques. The most positive experiences and opportunities for babies and toddlers are straightforward and a great deal rest upon treating them as individuals worthy of caring attention and personal interaction.

All the seven learning areas in the revised EYFS are important. However, as Moylett and Stewart (2012) explain, the three **prime** areas are more time-sensitive than the four **specific** areas of development. The earliest years of childhood are crucial for secure personal development, the building blocks for communication and healthy physical development. The great advantage of a Birth to Five years span, as established with the first EYFS framework, is that

it should demand respect for babies, toddlers and the youngest children as a whole. A huge amount happens before the third birthday and well-informed, emotionally warm adults make the difference at this crucial early time.

## Social babies

If all is normal and going well, babies are born sociable. They are motivated to make physical and emotional contact with those adults who will become familiar. Babies use eye contact; sometimes a piercing and steady stare, and sound making; including crying, along with touch and a quite tight hold around manageable bits of the human body such as fingers or hair. Alert adults notice if young babies show few signs of being social, although in the early weeks and months it can be hard to assess what is wrong. Babies show a unique temperament from the earliest weeks, and some start and continue as more vocal and physically lively.

peace from younger ones, and reasonably object if their constructions and drawings are not protected from demolition by busy little hands.

A separate room or area for the very youngest children is not a closed space. Older children are welcome to visit the indoor area or the part of a garden that is especially for babies and toddlers. Mobile babies, and certainly walking toddlers, are able to choose to leave the indoor or outdoor space that is their home base. Low-level indoor or outdoor boundaries mean that older children can easily choose to 'chat' to the babies over the fence.

## Warm personal relationships

Some babies and young toddlers will spend their first part of early childhood within their own family, although it is very unlikely that they will only spend time with their parents. Unless a family, or lone parent, is very isolated (a reason for possible concern and offering support), the social world of babies includes some time with their extended family and family friends. Some babies will start to spend some of their days with a childminder or an assigned key person in a nursery.

Babies can cope with more than one familiar adult: this pattern is normal family life for many of them. However, babies and toddlers cannot tolerate the stress of changes



if there are too many faces, bodies, smells and styles of care. So the key person approach is a non-negotiable part of early years practice and the revised EYFS statutory framework has confirmed this requirement. Childminders, and a named key person in nurseries, develop a close relationship with individual babies and their family. It is appropriate professional practice that babies, toddlers and young children form an emotionally warm and affectionate relationship with their key person and most likely another practitioner in a small group room.

Young children need to feel secure in the safety and comfort of your arms and lap. They need to be held and to hold in their turn. However, even babies need to feel the emotional foundation of having a secure place in your mind – your thoughts and feelings. They are never 'out of sight – out of mind'. You might like to think about how individual babies, for whom you are the key person or their childminder, feel that

### LOOKING CLOSELY AT ONES

Some babies and toddlers will experience early years provision through a regular drop-in facility, where their parent or other family carer remains with them. Even with the continued presence of such a familiar figure, it is important that the atmosphere is peaceful and relaxed.

In the Rumpus drop-in, Marie (4½ months) was sitting on her mother's lap. Marie vocalised in a string of happy-sounding trills and then sucked her fingers. From the secure position on the lap, Marie looked in a steady gaze at Lesley (the drop-in leader).

Marie was also comfortable to be positioned, lying over her mother's bent leg. (Her mother was sitting on the floor.) Marie looked out and stretched out a hand. Her mother lifted up the cloth book that Marie was staring at. She was keen to look, touch and stare at the book.

Marie looked at her ease in different positions on the comfortable floor of the drop-in. She spent time on her stomach and then, a little later, lying on her back, Marie used a two-handed hold on a little tin, which caught her attention. She was able to bring it to her mouth.

Marie was interested in the solid wooden peg shapes, a bit like a mini skittle. She held one and dropped it, held and dropped again. Her mother moved Marie closer to a small resource that could be pushed around easily and had little coloured bits inside that were visible as it moved. Marie was able to push this backwards and forward and it spun around very easily. She was keen to touch and push it, then tried holding the side and was able to make it move in that way too.