

# Planning for Learning through The environment

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## Contents

Making plans 2-3

Using the 'Early Learning Goals' 4-6

EYFS Planning Chart 7

Theme 1: My environment 8-9

Theme 2: Taking care of the environment 10-11

Theme 3: Clean-up week 12-13

Theme 4: Other environments – Rainforest 14-15

Theme 5: Other environments – Hot deserts 16-17

Theme 6: Other environments – Cold deserts 18-19

Bringing it all together – The environmental patchwork day 20

Resources 21

Collecting evidence of children's learning 22

Activity overview 23

Home links 24

Family page Inside back cover



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# Making plans

## Child-friendly planning

The purpose of planning is to make sure that all children enjoy a broad and balanced experience of learning. Planning should be flexible, useful and child-friendly. It should reflect opportunities available both indoors and outside. Plans form part of a planning cycle in which practitioners make observations, assess and plan.

Children benefit from reflective planning that takes into account the children's current interests and abilities and also allows them to take the next steps in their learning. Plans should make provision for activity that promotes learning and a desire to imagine, observe, communicate, experiment, investigate and create.

Plans should include a variety of types of activity. Some will be adult-initiated or adult-led, that focus on key skills or concepts. These should be balanced with opportunities for child-initiated activity where the children take a key role in the planning. In addition there is a need to plan for the on-going continuous provision areas such as construction, sand and water, malleable materials, small world, listening area, role-play and mark-making. Thought also needs to be given to the enhanced provision whereby an extra resource or change may enable further exploration, development and learning.

The outdoor environment provides valuable opportunities for children's learning. It is vital that plans value the use of outdoor space.

## The UK Frameworks

Within the UK a number of frameworks exist to outline the provision that children should be entitled to receive. Whilst a variety of terms and labels are used to describe the Areas of Learning there are key principles which are common to each document. For example they advocate that practitioners' planning should be personal based on observations and knowledge of the specific children within a setting. They acknowledge that young children learn best when there is scope for child-initiated activity. In addition it is accepted that young children's learning is holistic. Although within the documents Areas of Learning are presented separately to ensure that key areas are not over-looked, within settings,



children's learning will combine areas. Thus the Areas of Learning are perhaps of most use for planning, assessment and recording.

## Focused area plans

The plans you make for each day will outline areas of continuous provision and focused, adult-led activities. Plans for focused-area activities need to include aspects such as:

- resources needed;
- the way in which you might introduce activities;
- individual needs;
- the organisation of adult help;
- size of the group;
- timing;
- safety;
- key vocabulary.

Identify the learning and the Early Learning Goals that each activity is intended to promote. Make a note of any assessments or observations that you are likely to carry out. After carrying out the activities, make notes on your plans to say what was particularly successful, or any changes you would make another time.

## A final note

Planning should be seen as flexible. Not all groups meet every day, and not all children attend every day. Any part of the plan can be used independently, stretched over a longer

# Making plans

period or condensed to meet the needs of any group. You will almost certainly adapt the activities as children respond to them in different ways and bring their own ideas, interests and enthusiasms. The important thing is to ensure that the children are provided with a varied and enjoyable curriculum that meets their individual developing needs.

## Using the book

Read the section which outlines links to the Early Learning Goals (pages 4-6) and explains the rationale for focusing on 'The Environment'.

The chart on page 7 gives an example format for weekly planning. It provides opportunity to plan for the on-going continuous provision, as well as more focused activities.

Use pages 8 to 19 to select from a wide range of themed, focused activities that recognise the importance of involving children in practical activities and giving them opportunities to follow their own interests. For each 'The Environment' theme, two activities are described in detail as examples to help you in your planning and preparation. Key vocabulary, questions and learning opportunities are identified. Use the activities as a basis to:

- extend current and emerging interests and capabilities
- engage in sustained conversations
- stimulate new interests and skills

Find out on page 20 how 'The Environment' activities can be brought together within an 'Environmental Patchwork Day'.

Use page 21 for ideas of resources to collect or prepare. Remember that the books listed are only suggestions. It is likely that you will already have within your setting a variety of other books that will be equally useful.

The activity overview chart on page 23 can be used either at the planning stage or after each theme has been completed. It will help you to see at a glance which aspects of children's development are being addressed and alert you to the areas which may need greater input in the future.

As children take part in the activities, their learning will progress. 'Collecting evidence' on page 22 explains how you might monitor each child's achievements.

There is additional material to support the working partnership of families and children in the form of a reproducible Family Page found inside the back cover.

It is important to appreciate that the ideas presented in this book will only be a part of your planning. Many activities that will be taking place as routine in your group may not be mentioned. For example, it is assumed that sand, dough, water, puzzles, role-play, floor toys, technology and large scale apparatus are part of the ongoing early years experience. Role-play areas, stories, rhymes, singing, and group discussion times are similarly assumed to be happening in each week although they may not be a focus for described activities.

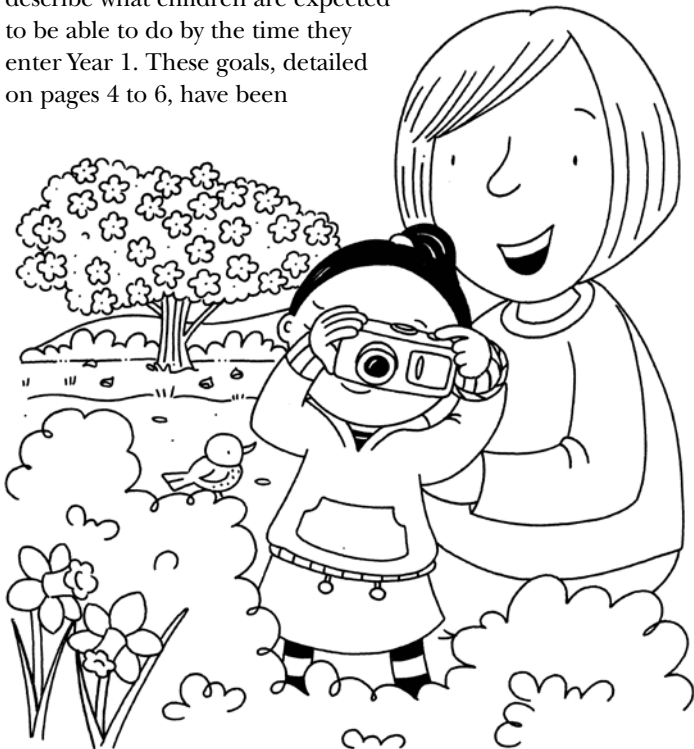


# Using the ‘Early Learning Goals’

The principles that are common to each of the United Kingdom curriculum frameworks for the early years are described on page 2. It is vital that, when planning for children within a setting, practitioners are familiar with the relevant framework’s content and organisation for areas of learning. Regardless however, of whether a child attends a setting in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales they have a right to provision for all areas of learning. The children should experience activities which encourage them to develop their communication and language; personal, social, emotional, physical, mathematical and creative skills. They should have opportunities within literacy and be encouraged to understand and explore their world.

Within the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2012), Communication and Language; Physical Development and Personal, Social and Emotional Development are described as Prime Areas of Learning that are ‘particularly crucial for igniting children’s curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive’ (page 4, DfE 2012). The Specific Areas of Learning are Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding the World and Expressive Arts and Design.

For each Area of Learning the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) describe what children are expected to be able to do by the time they enter Year 1. These goals, detailed on pages 4 to 6, have been



used throughout this book to show how activities relating to ‘The Environment’ could link to these expectations. For example, for Personal, Social and Emotional Development, one aim relates to the development of children’s ‘self-confidence and self-awareness’. Activities suggested which provide the opportunity for children to do this have the reference PSE1. This will enable you to see which parts of the Early Learning Goals are covered for a given theme and to plan for areas to be revisited and developed.

In addition, an activity may be carried out to develop a range of different Early Learning Goals. For example, when the children make posters to remind people to switch off lights when leaving a room they will develop their writing skills for Literacy. Also, when they write with a pencil and illustrate their posters, they will use their fine motor skills which are part of Physical Development and creative skills. Thus, whilst adult-focused activities may have clearly defined goals at the planning stage, it must be remembered that as children take on ideas and initiate their own learning and activities, goals may change.

## The Prime Areas of Learning

### Communication and Language

**Listening and attention:** children listen attentively in a range of situations. They listen to stories, accurately anticipating key events and respond to what they hear with relevant comments, questions or actions. They give their attention to what others say and respond appropriately, while engaged in another activity. (CL1)

**Understanding:** children follow instructions involving several ideas or actions. They answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions about their experiences and in response to stories or events. (CL2)

**Speaking:** children express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners’ needs. They use past, present and future forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are to happen in the future. They develop their own narratives and explanations by connecting ideas or events. (CL3)

‘The Environment’ provides many opportunities for children to enjoy listening, understanding and speaking. There are a wide range of books featuring a variety of environments and these can be used to stimulate interest in the chosen themes,

## Example chart to aid planning in the EYFS

Week beginning:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>FOCUSED ACTIVITIES</b>					
Focus Activity 1:					
Focus Activity 2:					
Stories and rhymes					
<b>CONTINUOUS PROVISION (Indoor)</b>					
Collage					
Construction (large)					
Construction (small)					
ICT					
Imaginative play					
Listening					
Malleable materials					
Mark making					
Painting					
Role play					
Sand (damp)					
Sand (dry)					
Water					
<b>CONTINUOUS PROVISION (Outdoor)</b>					
Construction					
Creative play					
Exploratory play					
Gross motor					
<b>ENHANCED PROVISION (Indoor)</b>					
<b>ENHANCED PROVISION (Outdoor)</b>					



# Theme 1: My environment

## Communication and Language

- Tell the children that their local environment is the area in which they live. Explain that it includes natural things such as trees and also buildings and things added or changed by humans. Having first gained permission from parents, take groups for walks to get a feel for the buildings, plants and other features in their local environment. Record the walk with a digital camera. (CL1)
- Search the book corner for pictures of places similar to the children's local environment. Whilst searching, also draw the children's attention to the variety in environments such as islands, woods and cities. Enjoy sharing the stories. (CL1)



## Physical Development

- Use clay and mark-making tools to make models of creatures found in the local environment. (PD1)
- Enjoy playing in safe outdoor areas. Encourage the children to realise why particular areas are good for play. (PD1)

## Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Use construction toys and scrap materials to make models of the local environment. Encourage the children to select their own resources. (PSE1)

## Literacy

- Make a collection of words to describe the local environment. Display these with the photos taken on the walks (see above). (L1, 2)
- Invite children to add a descriptive word to the phrase 'My environment is ...' to make a record-breaking, long sentence (see activity opposite). (L1, 2)
- Make a book about people who live and work in the local environment. Include pictures drawn by the children, photos and descriptions of what the people do. (L2)

## Mathematics

- Use comparative and positional language to describe the size and position of features in the local environment. (M2)
- Work in groups and use card flat shapes to make a picture or plan of the local environment. Encourage the children to name the shapes that they pick to represent buildings, trees, traffic on roads etc. (M2)

## Understanding the World

- Talk about features in the local environment that are liked and ones that are disliked. Draw pictures to show

both what the environment looks like and, also, possible improvements. (UW2)

- Make pictures of buildings found in the local environment. Talk about the materials used to make the buildings. (UW2)
- Invite parents, who lived within the local area as children, to talk to the group about 'my environment'. How, if at all, has it changed? (UW1)

## Expressive Arts and Design

- Paint pictures of the local environment. (EAD1)
- Use boxes, paint and scrap materials to make models of the local environment. (EAD1)
- Enjoy singing nursery rhymes. After each one talk about the environment in which the rhyme takes place (see activity opposite). (EAD1)
- Enjoy role-play based on the local environment. Is there a shop, tourist attraction or area that particularly interests the children? Encourage them to make suggestions to help in developing the role-play area. (EAD2)

## Activity: Giant Environmental Sentence

**Learning opportunity:** Collaborating to write and read giant sentences.

**Early learning goal:** Literacy. Reading. Writing.

**Resources:** Flip chart, pens, pencils, strips of plain paper.

**Key vocabulary:** Environment, sentence, capital letter, full stop.

**Organisation:** Small group

**What to do:** Sit with the children on the floor in a circle. Write down the word 'environment'. Help the children to recognise the letters and to say the sounds each one makes. Count the number of 'e' and 'n' letters.

Remind the children what an environment is and ask them to take it in turn to say a word that describes their local environment. As the children make suggestions write each one on an A4 piece of paper and lay it on the floor in front of the child who offered the word.

When no more ideas are forthcoming, show the group a paper with 'My environment is...' written on. Tell the group that they have just made a very long sentence!

Together read it. Say that something is missing from the end of the sentence. Ask how a sentence should start and end. Show the group that their one has a capital letter but needs a full stop. Put one at the end. Finish by re-reading the sentence.

On future occasions, encourage children to write their own complete environmental sentences.

## Activity: Nursery Rhyme Environments

**Learning opportunity:** Exploring well-known nursery rhymes.

**Early learning goal:** Expressive Arts and Design. Exploring and using media and materials.

**Resources:** Picture book of nursery rhymes.

**Key vocabulary:** Environment, words within chosen nursery rhymes.

**Organisation:** Large group

**What to do:** Show the children the book of nursery rhymes. Invite children to select rhymes for the group to sing.

Sing 'Humpty Dumpty' and look at the illustrations. Encourage the children to use their imaginations as they suggest ideas of where the wall was that Humpty Dumpty sat on and where he lived. As a group describe Humpty Dumpty's local environment.

Help the children to imagine environments for other familiar nursery rhyme characters. If time allows, ask the children to draw pictures to show an environment for a nursery rhyme character chosen by each child. Finish by singing a rhyme and adding actions to the words.

## Display

Cover a large board with black paper and a green border strip. At the top in large letters have the phrase 'My environment is ...'. On the board display the children's sentences, their paintings and also the photos taken on the walk.

Each morning put out three or four of the models of the local environment on a table. Also, place on it a card showing a letter. Each day ask the children to spy things in the models that start or end with the given letter.

