

Personal development, behaviour and welfare in the EYFS

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Independent and successful learning



What this chapter will cover:

- Children's social and emotional development, including self-confidence, self-awareness and self-regulation
- Children's involvement in experiences using their imagination.

The previous chapter of this book looked at the environment and culture across the whole setting to promote learning, now we go on to look at the child themselves. We are looking at self-confidence, self-awareness and how very young children can begin to understand how to become successful learners. Linked with this we will look at developing independence for exploration and imagination. As in Chapter one, first we need to explore why these things are important as this helps us to put them effectively into practice. Over the last ten years research has suggested that a major

source of the difference between the highest and lowest achieving children in school settings is the degree to which children become regulators of their own learning'. Martha B Bronson

'Self-confidence is an essential ingredient for all aspects of your child's healthy development and a key ingredient for school success. Confidence is a belief in your ability to master your body, behaviour, and the challenges you encounter in the larger world. Children who are confident are eager to learn new skills and face new challenges. They also expect adults to be helpful and supportive of their efforts. Self-confidence is also crucial for getting along with others and working out the many social challenges - such as sharing, competition, and making friends - that children face in school settings. Self-confident children see that other people like them and expect relationships to be satisfying and fun.' (www.zerotothree.org)

Emotional development

Emotional development is closely related to social development and is the ability to recognise and deal appropriately with one's emotions. Children need to know that all emotions are alright and nothing to worry about but it's how they handle them that is important. For example it is ok to be angry, everyone experiences anger from time to time, but it is not ok to hit someone because you are angry with them. The child needs to learn strategies for dealing with the anger that don't upset other people. One strategy is to count to three, another to squeeze a soft toy that they keep in their pocket, another to give that anger to an adult to deal with. It takes time to learn these strategies and one of the best supports for a child is good language role models and sympathetic and understanding adults supporting them.

Self-confidence, in young children this is difficult to pin down and therefore it is hard to record developmental milestones, especially as confidence is shown by different people in different ways. Some children are naturally keener to try out new experiences and some need more time and more encouragement. Some children are eager to show off to adults, but that can mean that the child is actually more needy than the one that quietly thinks about it and then gets on with a new experience. Children, like adults, can be naturally introverted or extroverted, the extrovert displays a more confident approach but this is not necessarily a true story, as practitioners we have to look a little deeper. Providing open ended experience where allowing the child to succeed without pressure is a sure way of seeing self-confidence blossom.

The children who have stronger relationships with caring adults are more likely to be confident to have a go. Similarly children who know the environment and boundaries, and the rules and expectations within it will be more confident to explore it because they know where they can and cannot go and what they can and cannot do. Children's confidence, like adults, will vary depending on the situation they are in. At home with their parents they are likely to be more confident than in an early years setting which is unfamiliar to them. It is worth talking to parents to discover how confident their child is at home. This is one reason why it is important to take notice of parent observations of their children, as it is quite likely that they are more competent at home where they are totally confident.

To promote self-confidence in young children we need to provide opportunities where they can be able to succeed and to be noticed when they have achieved. This is because competence breeds confidence. They need to be able to celebrate achievements. Open ended activities where there is no right or wrong outcome are perfect for promoting self-confidence as well as providing children with simple choices are, however it is important to limit choice as too much of it can be confusing. For a two year old a choice of



two things is enough – ‘would you like to play with the sand or the trains’?

Children gain self-confidence through feedback from adults, so it is vital that in the early years setting that they receive warm, caring interactions with their key carer at least once every three hour session and more for longer sessions. Notice that this is a minimum requirement. As adults, we can create confidence in others, for example if we look as if we know what we are doing others trust us. For children this comes about through reinforcement.

Self-confidence is something that does not naturally continue to grow it can be knocked and diminished. This means that we need to build a reserve of self-confidence in young children so that they have resilience to cope with the inevitable knocks in life.

Top tip

Make a chart where you can record positive encouragement given to each child after each session, to ensure none slips through the net.



Achievement

A major contributor to self-confidence is achievement. As practitioners, we need to think about how children know that they have achieved and how they know what they are trying to achieve. This is really difficult for such young children, but it revolves around making it possible for them to experience success. With older children you can discuss goals and achievements, but it would be wrong to set too many targets for them as there is no ceiling to learning.

Through self-chosen activities children are more likely to achieve or feel a sense of achievement. Some achievement will obviously happen organically and a child will receive praise. An example of this will be the first time the child descends the slide unaided and the adult that notices says 'well done Jack you came down the slide all on your own'. So in this scenario Jack has achieved something and been praised for it. It's very visible and noticeable and it will be a boost to Jack's self-confidence that he has achieved this. However what if an adult hadn't noticed? How does Jack know that he has achieved a milestone? In this instance, it would come from within so be intrinsic, it is a sense that you have made something happen that you wanted to happen and with this comes a sense of pride.

Practitioners also need to consider how children know what their next steps are in a very relaxed, non-pressured way. As mentioned in the previous chapter children need time to celebrate an achievement before being moved on to the next goal! Have you ever been asked to do something, you do it and do it well then someone comes along and says 'and now can you add this to it?' I have! Many times and it can be disheartening, the same is true for children – no child wants to hear 'oh well done you've held that pencil perfectly now can you draw a circle going anticlockwise'. For young children one next step at a time is enough. Often settings have a next step for each area of learning.

Self-awareness

A kin to self-confidence, but not exactly the same, is self-awareness. Self-awareness is about a child's knowledge of themselves. Young children for example learn to recognise themselves in the mirror, they learn that it is them as opposed to someone else. They begin to learn other things about themselves, for example if they are a boy or a girl, when they need food, when they are thirsty. They then begin to learn about expectations and this is where it can become tricky at times for example if they want to cross dress and Daddy expects his boy to dress as a boy and not in a fairy costume! It is incredibly important at this stage to work closely with parents to encourage them to accept and encourage their children so that they are accepted for what they are and that their choices are celebrated so that they have a positive image of themselves.

It is also important to provide plenty of resources that are not gender specific alongside some that are. Children need to feel that you like them no matter what and that whatever they do won't change that.

A point to consider

Many early years settings are staffed predominately by women and resourced by them so they may have a slightly 'pink' leaning environment. It is important to try to think 'like a boy' as well as a girl when resourcing the setting.

In a setting of many children it is important not to single out favourites. This seems obvious but it is only natural that we might warm to some children more than others, however, we must remain professional and need to treat all without favour. It is important that we notice all children and that if they are looking shy or withdrawn or needy that we meet that need. We need to provide children with loving relationships and