

Creating an Inclusive Environment for Pre-School Children

This document aims to provide practical support for people working with early years children in mainstream settings, or those working in universal NHS services. It has been written in partnership with the Advisory Teaching service.

Each section covers a different area of learning/developmental need and provides specific advice relating to the area of need. In all cases, if an Advisory Teacher is working with a child, they are happy to be consulted for advice and strategies

Children with physical disabilities

Practitioners where possible should

- Think about the layout of the room making sure it is not too cluttered
- Make sure there is a clear pathway from one activity to another and to the toilet etc, (you may need to reposition tables etc)
- It would be good to include other children in the child's daily exercise programme – if they all do the stretches/exercises it is more motivating and more fun
- Make sure the child is physically supported and positioned correctly in order for them to fully take part in activities etc
- Make sure the child has the adult support they require (and the adult understands the child's physical needs) in order to achieve and reach their full potential (NB the amount of support each child needs will vary, so a careful assessment of support needs between physiotherapist and setting should ensure that independence is promoted while supporting each child as needed)
- Make sure the activities are presented in a way that promotes the child's independence (parent and physiotherapist should be able to advise setting)
- Request that the child's physiotherapist visits the setting to pass on information and advice

Children with speech and language difficulties

Practitioners where possible should

- Liaise with parents and other professionals involved to identify the child's method of communication e.g. signing, 1 or 2 word level, pictures and make sure that everyone is communicating to the child with consistency and in the same way.
- Reduce your language and keep it simple (e.g. instead of saying "could you put the spoon in the bowl?" say instead "spoon in bowl")
- Follow best practice guidance e.g. ECAT, BEEL, IDP etc. If you're not sure, ask your Early Years Consultant or the child's Speech and Language Therapist
- Work in partnership with the child's Speech and Language Therapist and implement all the advice given.
- Attend training (e.g. Pre-school letters and sounds – provided free of charge by the Early Childhood team, learning together course run by the Advisory Teaching Service or other similar courses)
- Offer a total communication environment. Total Communication training is available free – for more information see www.totalcommunication.org

Children with social communication/interaction difficulties

Practitioners where possible should

- Provide a total communication environment. Refer to advice above
- Reduce over-stimulation, de-clutter environment and don't have too many activities to choose from
- Think about a planned and staggered transition into setting
- Avoid changes in routines
- Keep transitions to a minimum
- Use visuals (objects of reference, photos, symbols, now and next boards etc) to support transitions and to inform the child what is happening during the day e.g. snack times, change of activity, when going outside etc
- Give the child time
- Support child during structured activities
- Promote joint attention skills and small social group work
- Be aware of any sensory sensitivities the child has to inform any adaptations which may be needed to the environment (e.g. have identified quiet area for child to access owing to sensory overload from noise).
- Prepare for the child's entry into setting through use of social stories (these are simple made up stories that could include photos of important things about the new setting e.g. the entrance, the key person who will work with the child etc. The stories can be told repeatedly to the child by parents/grandparents etc so that the child gradually absorbs the information and is better prepared for starting pre-school)

Children with hearing impairment

Practitioners where possible should consider

Communication

- It is important that ALL children are ready to listen before you start to speak.
- Think about the communication method the child uses e.g. Speech, Makaton, BSL, symbols, objects of reference
- Face the child when you speak; get down to their level so they can see your face
- speak clearly, but don't shout
- Use an appropriate level of language for the child

The listening environment:

Reduce background noise:

- Use as many carpets on the floor as you can.
- Curtains at the window help, and it is a good idea to close them for quiet activities such as story time
- Mobiles and other things hanging from the ceiling are good at improving sound quality
- Cushions and other soft furnishings all help
- Close doors and windows if it is noisy outside or in the corridor
- Turn off any noisy equipment whenever possible, e.g. computers, noisy heaters
- For construction activities such as Lego, Duplo, Stickle Bricks etc put them on a carpet on the floor. If they have to be used on a table put a cloth on the table first to reduce the noise made

Circle time or story time:

- Children who do not hear well should sit towards the front.
- The children really benefit from visual clues, whether this is seeing the pictures in the book, soft toys of the characters etc, it all helps their understanding
- Visual clues are good if you are talking about something new

NB If the child needs to wear hearing aids please make sure they are wearing them!

Children with visual impairment

Practitioners where possible should consider the visual environment:

Think about lighting and glare:

- do not stand in front of the window to speak as your face will be in shadow
- For children with visual difficulties they may be sensitive to sunlight/glare and need to sit with their back to a window;
- some children may need coloured paper rather than white for some activities; white paper causes glare
- When going outside they may need to wear a sun hat/cap even on a dull day; they may need sunglasses
- Make sure young babies/children lying on the floor are not directly under a bright light
- Some children may need extra light to carry out some activities e.g. a task light or lamp
- Some children cannot see well in the dark, or their eyes may take longer to accommodate to a change in lighting – make sure they are supported and not left alone if the lighting suddenly changes
- Some children need to hold their head at an angle to use their vision residual well
- Keep the floor clear where possible between tables and activities, reducing obstacles
- Reduce visual clutter

NB If the child needs to wear glasses or an eye patch please make sure they are wearing them!