

Click to verify































Assessment is at the heart of effective early years practice. It plays a vital role in ensuring parents, carers and practitioners recognise children's levels of development and progress over time. Through ongoing assessment, practitioners will grow to understand children's levels of achievement, interests and learning styles. They will then be able to plan relevant and appropriate learning experiences for each child. Assessment should not entail prolonged breaks from interactions with children, nor require excessive paperwork. When assessing whether an individual child is at the expected level of development, practitioners should draw on their knowledge of the child and their own expert professional judgement and should not be required to prove this through collection of physical evidence. When a child's learning is embedded and secure, they are likely to demonstrate what they know and can do consistently, independently and in a range of situations. Barriers to learning For those children who are not progressing or accessing your curriculum, you may have to observe more to identify barriers to learning and then decide how to address them. Persistent learning and development needs should be addressed between parents/carers and any other relevant professionals. Parents and carers must be kept up to date with their child's progress. The Early Years Service provided briefings in the summer of 2021 covering the main changes across all three sections of the revised EYF5. Assessing children with SEND Assessing children with SEND Many SENCOs may find it challenging to identify current development and track the progress of children with SEND within the revised framework. We encourage all settings to use a range of resources to help them accurately identify where a child is in their development (link to the child development section). While not a statutory requirement, SENCOs may feel that for children with SEND, the bands remain a helpful measure of progress and while not required for all children, you might want to continue to use a range of resources which reference age bands to support you in your role. If settings feel that using a band system is beneficial, they are welcome to continue to use it. If they feel an alternative method of recording progress is better for their setting, the new framework allows flexibility. Suggested reading about changes to assessment under the Revised EYF5 (2021) The following articles were written by Julian Grier, who writes Development Matters (2021) and was part of the advisory group for the EYF5 reforms. The articles may be useful for settings who are reflecting on their assessment practice. Children will develop at their own unique rates and not every child will follow a 'typical' pattern of progression of development, this however does not limit a child's ability to make progress or take away from focusing on the child's individual strengths. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYF5) sets out information and requirements in relation to proactively observing and assessing children as it is crucial to building your understanding of the whole child and their individual characteristics, skills and interests. Assessment of children in the early years can help you to promptly recognise any gaps in learning and allow you to implement appropriate support at the earliest point, ensuring the needs of both the child and their family are met. Starting point - an initial assessment, completed with parent and/or carer views when a child begins attending your setting. This is not included in the EYF5 and is not a statutory requirement. Formative assessments - this is your ongoing assessment and is vital in the learning and development process. It involves you understanding your children's interests, what they know and what they can do, and then shaping teaching and learning experiences for each child reflecting that knowledge. This includes observations, which is the continuous process of noticing what a child knows, understands and can do in order to build knowledge of each individual child. There is no requirement in the EYF5 to keep written records in relation to the formative assessment. Summative assessments - these are often written at predetermined points of the year and provide you and the parents and/or carers with a summary of what the child knows, understands and can do at a particular point in time. There are two statutory summative assessments that take place in the EYF5: Progress check at age two - when a child is aged between two and three, you must review their progress, and provide parents and/or carers with a short, written summary of their child's development in the three prime areas. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile - at the end of Reception Year, each child's level of development must be assessed against the 17 early learning goals (ELGs) set out in the EYF5. There is another statutory assessment point within the EYF5, the Reception Baseline Assessment, which is a short assessment completed within the first six weeks of a child starting Reception Year. A score will be given for each child which will be used as the basis for an accountability measure of the relative progress of a cohort of children through primary school. Support for all children in your setting starts with the careful planning and delivery of a high-quality curriculum, and effective ongoing observation of children's learning and development. For any child who needs more help to progress, you should adapt your approaches, teaching, learning and play to meet individual needs. If a child with potential or known SEND then needs further support, they will benefit from a more detailed assessment of their progress, in line with the assess, plan, do, review cycle (the graduated approach). It may be through your observations and assessments you recognise that a child is not meeting the expected developmental milestones. It is through this early recognition that we can implement effective support for children. You can learn more about delivering an ambitious curriculum and effective assessment for all children in the Early Years child development training (EYCDT) Module 7: Effective curriculum and assessment; and more about the graduated approach and how you can support children with differences and needs in Module 8: Supporting individual differences and needs. When recording observations and assessments for a child with SEND it is beneficial to use strengths-based language. Child: Aislinn Practitioner: Charlie Date: 27/02/2024 As you can see, this observation has captured what the child was able to do and how they expressed themselves and communicated their need for support throughout the interaction. When observing children with SEND, you may also find it helpful to note how what you have observed is relevant to the child's individual needs. Observations like this could be recorded in any format you prefer (notebook, clipboard, online journal system). It is useful to make note of the important learning that you observe, which can include characteristics of effective learning, the Leven scale (see further reading) or other support tools you feel are beneficial for reviewing the child's development. What you observe, and your knowledge of the child, will be crucial when using the tools in this guidance, formative and summative assessments. It is important to remember that observation and assessment should not involve spending a long time away from interacting with children. Planning in the early years is a cyclical process that involves using assessments to plan appropriate activities and experiences that promote children's learning and development. Practitioners use observations and formative assessments to identify children's interests, strengths, and areas for development. They then plan activities and experiences that build on children's interests and strengths and support their development in areas where they need additional support. The planning cycle in the early years is a continuous process that involves four key stages: observing and assessing, planning, implementing, reviewing. Practitioners use this cycle to continually assess children's progress, plan appropriate activities and experiences that promote learning and development, and evaluate the effectiveness of their provision. The first stage of the planning cycle in the early years involves observing and assessing children's learning and development. This stage is critical, as it provides practitioners with important insights into children's interests, strengths, and areas for development, which can inform subsequent planning. Practitioners use a range of tools and methods to carry out observations and formative assessments, such as anecdotal notes, checklists, and learning stories. These tools enable practitioners to gather a wealth of information about children's learning and development in different areas, such as communication and language, physical development, and personal, social, and emotional development. Observations and formative assessments allow practitioners to gain a holistic view of children's learning and development, taking into account their unique strengths and challenges. Practitioners use this information to inform planning, ensuring that activities and experiences are tailored to individual needs and interests. For example, if a practitioner observes that a child is particularly interested in animals, they might plan activities that focus on learning about different animals, such as visiting a local farm or creating a role-play area based on a zoo. This approach ensures that activities and experiences are engaging and relevant to children's interests, promoting their overall motivation and enjoyment of learning. The second stage of the planning cycle in the early years involves using the information gathered during the observation and assessment stage to plan appropriate activities and experiences that promote learning and development. Practitioners use this information to create a curriculum that is tailored to the unique needs and interests of each child. Practitioners consider the different areas of development when planning activities and experiences. These areas include physical development, communication and language, personal, social and emotional development, literacy, and mathematics. They use this information to create activities that promote learning and development in each of these areas. When planning activities and experiences, practitioners also consider the different learning styles of children. Some children learn best through visual stimuli, while others may respond more to auditory or kinesthetic stimuli. Practitioners try to incorporate different approaches to cater to the different learning styles of each child. Planning appropriate activities and experiences also involves considering children's interests and preferences. Practitioners take into account children's likes and dislikes to ensure that activities are engaging and motivating. This approach promotes children's enjoyment of learning and helps to foster a positive attitude towards learning. The third stage of the planning cycle in the early years involves implementing the planned activities and experiences. This stage is where the learning and development opportunities identified in the planning stage come to life. Practitioners use a range of teaching methods and strategies, such as play-based learning, to engage children in meaningful and purposeful activities that promote learning and development. Play-based learning is a common method used in the early years, as it allows children to explore and experiment with the world around them in a fun and engaging way. Through play, children can develop their imagination, creativity, problem-solving skills, and communication skills. Practitioners use different types of play, such as construction play, imaginative play, and physical play, to provide children with a wide range of learning experiences. Other teaching methods and strategies used in the early years include storytelling, role-playing, and group activities. These methods help to foster children's communication and social skills, as well as promote their overall learning and development. In the implementation stage, practitioners also adapt their teaching methods and strategies to meet the needs of individual children. They provide support and guidance to children who may need extra help or encouragement, while also providing challenges to children who are more advanced in their learning and development. Practitioners also promote positive attitudes towards learning by providing positive feedback and encouragement to children. This approach helps to build children's confidence and self-esteem, encouraging them to take risks and explore new ideas. The final stage of the planning cycle in the early years involves reviewing the effectiveness of the provision. This stage is critical as it allows practitioners to assess the impact of the planned activities and experiences on children's learning and development. Practitioners use a range of methods, such as observations, evaluations, and feedback from parents and carers, to gather information about the effectiveness of the provision. Observations and evaluations provide practitioners with valuable insights into the effectiveness of the planned activities and experiences. They help practitioners to identify areas where children have made progress and areas where they may need further support. For example, if a practitioner observes that a child has made significant progress in their language development, they may plan more activities that focus on developing communication skills. Practitioners also seek feedback from parents and carers to gain a more complete picture of children's learning and development. This feedback helps practitioners to understand the impact of the planned activities and experiences outside of the early years setting. It also helps to identify any areas where parents and carers may need additional support. Using this information, practitioners can then make informed decisions about future planning. They can adjust the curriculum to better meet the needs of individual children, ensuring that activities and experiences are tailored to their individual needs and interests. This approach helps to ensure that all children are supported to reach their full potential. Key points: Formative assessment is an integral part of teaching young children. Practice starts with the child, and grows in partnership. Responsive pedagogy is needed to recognise what children know, understand, and can do. Children and adults construct the curriculum together. Observation, assessment and planning is part of professional practice. Summative assessment involves stepping back to gain an overview of children's development and progress. Reliable summative assessment grows out of formative assessment. An informed professional decision is based on a holistic view of a child's development and learning. Summative assessment serves several purposes that can enhance development and learning opportunities for children, including by informing improvements to provision and practice in the setting. Formative assessment is an integral part of teaching young children. Children's development and learning is best supported by starting from pre-difficult learning experiences and building on children's needs. The learning and development planning (OAP) cycle describes how to support individual children through effective practice. It supports quality as practitioners use their knowledge, skills, and experience gathered from OAP to reflect on the quality of education and care the children receive, and think about how to improve practice. Summative assessment involves stepping back to gain an overview of children's development and progress. When daily interactions involve observing, reflecting and deciding how best to support a child, practitioners hold in their mind many details of each child's development and learning. At certain times it is important to step back, to pause and reflect, and create a summative assessment which takes a holistic overview of the child's development, learning and progress. Summative assessments are made to provide a summary of a child's development and learning across all areas. There are two statutory summative assessment points in the EYF5 - the 2-year-old progress check, and the EYF5 Profile at the end of the EYF5. Settings may decide on further summative assessment points. Reliable summative assessment grows out of formative assessment. Summative assessment should not be a time-consuming process. It should be a straightforward summary, pulling together insights from formative assessment and then making a professionally informed decision about the child's development and learning. It requires a pause to think about what is known about the child, together with reviewing any notes, photographs or other records that may be held, alongside what is known from the child, parents, colleagues and other professionals. This process is an excellent opportunity for professional reflection and discussions with colleagues to moderate decisions about progress and build a stronger understanding of children's development in all aspects of learning. An informed professional decision is based on a holistic view of a child's development and learning. Young children's development does not follow a predictable step-by-step sequence, and each child will have their own unique pathway, progress, and momentum. There are, however, some aspects of development which enable you to describe the child's progress in terms of whether it is typical for their age, for example learning to talk. Practitioners need to consider all relevant development within these aspects and not rely on matching every element in a judgement to justify the child's progress. It is important to take a holistic perspective in your view to determine whether a child is roughly on track or developing more slowly or more quickly than particular peers. A holistic summary will give attention not just to areas of knowledge and skills, but also to the child's emotional wellbeing and connections, and development of attitudes and dispositions for learning (Characteristics of Effective Learning). Summative assessment informs improvements to provision and practice, to enhance children's development and learning. Leaders and managers can use the information strategically to improve provision and practice. For example: Are some children not as far along or significantly ahead in their development and learning compared to most children? How are we further supporting these children? Should opportunities, resources or support within some areas of the curriculum be improved? Is there a professional development need for individual staff members, or the setting as a whole? Information can be communicated clearly in a summary form to inform discussions with parents, other agencies, or professionals involved with the child and family. Transitions can be supported so that children's journeys of development and learning continue smoothly. Resources Bibliography Previous page: The wider context | Next page: Overview of Characteristics of Effective Learning and Areas of Learning and Development This guide will help you answer 2.2 Describe how, when and why to conduct the observation, assessment, and planning cycle to analyse and respond to children's development and interests. Understanding the observation, assessment, and planning cycle is a core part of an Early Years Practitioner's role. It helps support children's development and interests. This cycle ensures that every child is valued and given opportunities to progress and thrive. In this guide, we will look at each part of this process to explain how, when, and why it is done. Observations are the foundation of understanding a child's needs and interests. These can be conducted in several ways, depending on the purpose. Each method provides valuable insight into the child's development. Narrative observations: Writing a detailed account of the child's actions during play or an activity. Time sampling: Observing a child at regular intervals and recording what they are doing. Event sampling: Focusing on specific behaviours, often triggered by particular events or interactions. Photographic/video observations: Capturing moments where the child demonstrates learning or interest. Post-it/comments-based observations: Writing short, specific notes about observed behaviours or achievements. Choose your focus - Decide what you are observing, such as communication, physical skills, or social interaction. Prepare materials - Use observation sheets, post-it notes, or digital tools, depending on your setting. Position yourself appropriately - Observe in a way that does not interrupt the child's natural behaviour. Record what you notice - Stick to objective observations, describing what the child says or does without making assumptions. Observations should avoid assumptions or personal interpretations. For example, instead of saying, "Ben was upset," record what Ben did, such as "Ben folded his arms, turned away, and said, 'I don't want to.'" Observations should happen regularly in natural, everyday situations. Waiting for planned moments may overlook spontaneous learning opportunities. Key times for conducting observations include: When a child is playing freely. During planned activities, such as storytime or craft sessions. When the situation highlights strengths or challenges in development (e.g., trying a new skill). After introducing new resources, materials, or themes. Using a mixture of planned and spontaneous observations creates a rich picture. It ensures that the child's abilities and preferences are viewed comprehensively across various contexts and scenarios. Observations help practitioners identify: Individual strengths and achievements. Developmental progress in relation to frameworks, such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYF5) in England. Specific needs, such as areas where extra support or challenge is required. Emerging interests that can guide future planning and engagement. They are also essential for spotting potential concerns. For example, delays in speech may need input from a speech therapist or involve creating strategies to foster language development. Assessment involves analysing the information gathered through observations. This step helps practitioners understand what milestones the child has reached and what areas need attention. Link to developmental frameworks: Comparing observations to EYF5 Development Matters or other guidance ensures expectations are realistic and age-appropriate. Look for patterns: Reviewing multiple observations helps identify consistent behaviours, skills, or interests. Consider the whole child: Assess not only intellectual skills but also emotional, physical, and social development. Take a collaborative approach: Work with parents/carers and other team members to reflect on the child's development. Document findings: Include observations, notes, or Learning Journals that track a child's progress over time. Assessments should be ongoing. They occur after observing and regularly reviewing information collected. Examples of key times include: At the end of each term to summarise progress. Before meetings with parents, in preparation for effective discussions. When concerns arise about the child's development. When a child transitions to a new room, setting, or school. Regular assessments ensure that parents and professionals stay informed about how the child is progressing. They also help maintain accurate and useful records. Assessments: Highlight what a child has achieved and any areas where they are falling behind. Help practitioners plan appropriate next steps for learning and development. Allow parents to understand their child's progress and how they can support learning at home. Support early intervention if additional help or specialist input is required. Sharing assessment outcomes lets everyone involved in the child's care work together. Once assessments are complete, practitioners must plan activities to improve learning opportunities. Planning involves adapting the environment and teaching methods to match developmental goals. Set learning intentions: Identify what you want the child to achieve (e.g., practising fine motor skills through threading beads). Incorporate the child's interests: Make learning fun and engaging by including things the child enjoys, like dinosaurs or music. Use appropriate resources: Provide tools, toys, or materials that will help stimulate learning. Plan for inclusivity: Ensure all planned activities work for children with different needs or abilities. Create a flexible structure: While planning is important, you may need to adapt if the child leads play in different directions. Document the plan: Make simple notes in the child's Learning Journal or a shared planning document so your team follows the same steps. Planning is an ongoing process. It happens after assessments and often feeds into weekly and daily lesson plans. Times to plan include: After noticing consistent interests (e.g., lots of role play in the home corner). When addressing specific goals (e.g., helping with early number recognition). Following a review - for example, where gaps in learning have been identified. Planning doesn't have to be time-consuming. What matters most is how practitioners tailor activities to individual needs and abilities. Planning helps provide structure and direction. It ensures: That activities cover a wide range of developmental areas (e.g., cognitive, social, and physical). Children feel supported but also challenged. Learning becomes meaningful and builds on what the child already knows. Resources, time, and space are being used wisely. It makes learning manageable for staff, as activities are prepared with all needs in mind. The observation, assessment, and planning cycle is not a one-off process. Practitioners revisit each stage on an ongoing basis to support continual learning. Observe A child repeatedly stacks blocks while playing. Assess They demonstrate problem-solving and early mathematical skills, such as balancing and sizing. Plan Provide more opportunities for stacking, pattern-making, or constructing towers. Include resources like counters or bricks. Reassess with new observations By continuing observations, practitioners see whether the new activities extend the child's skills. This cycle ensures that practitioners remain responsive to the changing needs and interests of the child. Involving families in this cycle makes it more effective. Share observations or Learning Journals with parents to keep them updated on their child's development. Encourage them to share what their child enjoys at home. This way, planning will reflect the child's full picture of development. This cycle supports all children, including those with additional needs. Practitioners can work with external agencies (e.g., speech therapists or occupational therapists) to make sure that planning includes specialist strategies when required. The observation, assessment, and planning cycle brings thoughtfulness to child-centred learning. It helps practitioners recognise the child's abilities, interests, and personality, while responding flexibly to strengths, needs, and interests. Building this cycle into the daily practice supports both the child and their family effectively. Assessment plays an important part in helping parents, carers and practitioners to recognise children's progress, understand their needs, and to plan activities and support. The statutory assessment requirements in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYF5) framework are: ongoing assessment; the progress check at age two; the reception baseline assessment (RBA); and the EYF5 Profile. It is important to remember that assessment in the EYF5 should not require prolonged breaks from your interactions with children or excessive paperwork. Ongoing assessment Ongoing assessment, which is also known as formative assessment, is an integral part of the learning and development process. It involves practitioners understanding children's interests and what they know and can do, and then shaping teaching and learning experiences for each child reflecting that knowledge. This should be happening across the EYF5. In your interactions with children, you should make and act on your own day-to-day observations about children's progress, as well as the observations that parents and carers share. There is no requirement to keep written records of your day to day observations. Progress check at age two The progress check happens in an early years setting when a child is aged between two and three. This involves practitioners reviewing a child's progress and providing parents and/or carers with a short written summary of their child's development in the prime areas. It is up to you what further information, beyond the prime areas, you would like to include within the summary. The summary must celebrate the child's progress, identify areas where further support might be needed and where there might be a development delay, and describe how you will address any concerns. The progress check at age 2 guidance supports practitioners in completing the progress check. Reception baseline assessment The reception baseline assessment is conducted by a child's teacher in the first six weeks of a child starting reception. It is used to form the starting point for cohort school progress monitoring. Data from the reception baseline assessment informs the RBA. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile The EYF5 Profile is a summary of the child's development at the end of the final term of the year a child turns five, this is usually reception year. You must assess each child's level of development against the 17 early learning goals set out in the EYF5. You must indicate whether children are meeting expected levels of development, or if they are not yet reaching expected levels and are assessed as 'emerging'. The purpose of this is to support a successful transition to year 1. The EYF5 Profile handbook helps support teachers to complete the EYF5 Profile.