

Supporting Children's Holistic Development

Introduction

As childcare practitioners, we are in a perfectly placed position to support children's overall development and help them grow into competent individuals who will become confident and well-prepared to conquer whatever the future entails. There are different areas of children's learning that interlink when we provide daily experiences and activities that support their 'holistic' development.

Within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework for England (Department for Education, 2025), there are seven areas of learning that are clearly defined, each one being a key factor in enabling children to make friendships and become inquisitive and enthusiastic learners. The EYFS clearly details what we must do, as childcare practitioners, to support children and help them to achieve their full potential in all areas of their development. Other parts of the UK use different frameworks with different terminology. Despite the alternative wording, the intentions remain the same with regards to promoting children's overall development.

Three prime areas of learning create a firm base for children to thrive and to make progress in their specific areas of development.

The three prime areas include:

- Communication and language
- Physical development
- Personal, social and emotional development

The four specific areas include:

- Literacy
- Mathematics

- Understanding the world
- Expressive arts and design

The Development Matters non-statutory guidance (Department for Education, 2023) details the importance of promoting children's overall learning, it highlights the following:

'Childminders should be ambitious for all children. To do this, they must consider the individual needs, interests, and development of each child in their care. They must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all areas of learning and development.'

When planning activities and experiences for children we should consider the whole child, to enable them to grow into self-assured and well-rounded individuals.

The Importance of Holistic development

Instead of focusing on one area of learning it is beneficial to provide opportunities that encourage children's natural curiosity and creativity, their coordination, and their social and communication skills - helping them to develop confidence and resilience.

When we support multiple areas of children's development it helps them learn to solve problems, to develop coping skills and be able to self-regulate their emotions alongside using their own imagination to express their creativity. When children have strong and stable emotional well-being this is beneficial for improving their mental health and for preparing them to manage life's challenges. When children develop well, in all areas of their learning, they also learn to respect others and to show empathy towards their peers, helping their friends to feel valued and accepted as part of their community.

If we do not provide opportunities for children to develop in certain areas of their learning, this can have a detrimental effect on other areas of their development. Children who may not have opportunities to socialise with peers may struggle to cope with interactions and they may not want to participate in group activities - this can have a negative impact on their language skills. When children find physical tasks difficult such as not being able to independently dress themselves, this can have a dramatic impact on the child's self-worth. Well-planned activities that support children's holistic development can have magnificent effects on children's overall emotional and physical development, as well as their intellectual and creative abilities!

Promoting Holistic development in everyday practice

A nature walk can cover all aspects of learning because children can move freely in their own ways developing physical skills as they search for treasures that have fallen from the trees or practice keeping their balance as they wobble along wooden logs. They may be intrigued by what they observe in the environment and develop their cognitive skills by asking questions like, 'Why do caterpillars have so many legs?' This experience also enables children to make friendships with their peers as they describe and share their discoveries, developing their personal and social skills, and the fresh outdoor air creates a soothing and relaxing vibe that supports emotional well-being. You can help the children to build on their vocabulary by naming the creatures hidden beneath sticks and stones and encourage them to sort and match different materials to strengthen mathematical skills. It is important to recognise mathematics is everywhere and there are many ways we can incorporate this in everyday activities such as sorting rocks and leaves by their size, shape, length or weight. Finally, everyone can have a fun-filled time gathering nature's treasures to make their own woodland collages.

Playdough modelling is another example of an activity that you can adapt to promote holistic development in the following ways:

Communication and Language: You can provide a language-rich environment with laminated cards that spell out the names of the playdough tools, this will enable the children to find and match the objects to the correct words. You can also model and repeat unfamiliar words to help the children extend their vocabulary (e.g., "bending", "rolling", "chopping").

Physical Development: By providing playdough scissors, and other utensils, children can practice their fine motor skills using the one-handed tools. If you provide pictures of different shapes, numbers or letters, the children can use their hand-eye coordination to manipulate the playdough into various shape formations.

Personal, Social and Emotional development: You can encourage the children to take turns with a variety of tools and, by being a good role model, you can demonstrate how to ask for a turn in a respectful and polite way.

Literacy: Providing books with pictures will help the children to develop their own ideas about what playdough characters they might like to design, and you can ask questions to help them create their own storylines.

Mathematics: Show the children how to make long and short objects with the playdough or you could use different coloured bowls for sorting and matching their playdough creations, helping them to recognise their resembling features.

Understanding the world: You can provide images that will help the children to make their own playdough animals, or people, and ask questions about where the animals live or what they like to eat.

Expressive arts and design: Provide a variety of materials for the children to investigate and decide what they would like to make. You can also ask questions to encourage the children to share their own ideas and use their imagination to craft their own playdough designs.

Most activities can be adapted to enable children to develop in all seven areas of learning. When we create purposeful environments full of endless possibilities with the appropriate levels of adult support, children can enjoy and achieve their full potential.

Conclusion

Supporting children's holistic development is a crucial part of the role of a childcare practitioner, we have tremendous potential to nurture all aspects of their growth and help them to develop the necessary life skills needed to navigate the world around them. When children develop their creativity and critical thinking, along with their communication skills and calming self-regulation control, they become more ready for life's challenges and for all future learning!

About Us.

Childminding UK has been supporting childminders for over 30 years. Formed in 1991 by and for working childminders in Northamptonshire, we now support childminders across the country. A registered charity, (Charity Number 1182575) we are the only national organisation that solely supports childminders and the only early years organisation that has achieved the Princess Royal Training Award for 'Ensuring high quality childcare through training and support'. All staff are experienced childcare professionals and have also been childminders themselves and our trustees are working childminders or have knowledge of childminding, so we have an excellent understanding of the sector.

To find out more about Childminding UK or to get in touch, please call us on 01536 210685 or email info@childmindinguk.com, or visit our website - childmindinguk.com