



# Graduated Response Toolkit for Early Years



**This Early Years Toolkit aligns with and contributes to the Bristol SEND and Inclusion Strategy (2024 to 2028) and the Graduated Response Handbook.**



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# Principles and expectations of inclusive practice in Early Years Settings: a checklist

This Early Years Toolkit aligns with and contributes to the Bristol SEND and Inclusion Strategy (2024 to 2028) and the Graduated Response Handbook.

## Key principles and intent

- Inclusive quality teaching for children with SEND is good practice for all children.
- 'Additional intervention and support cannot compensate for a lack of good quality teaching' (The SEND Code of Practice (2015)).
- Every early years educator is an educator of children with SEND.
- A strong sense of belonging in the early years has fundamental benefits for children, impacting on their learning, development and wellbeing.
- 'All behaviour is communication about a child's underlying emotional state. The behaviours we see are like the tip of an iceberg; these are the things we can see above the surface. Understanding what emotions lie below the surface should inform how we respond' (Eight to Relate - Bristol Early Years).
- The use of strategies, approaches and specific provision should understand the 'why' and consider the 'how' before implementing the 'what'. Creating connection should always be the first step.



## Core expectations and aspirations

### All Providers will ensure:

- A positive warm welcome to all families and a culture of inclusivity and positivity.
- A clear focus on building and maintaining positive partnership working with families and all professionals.
- A regularly evaluated inclusive and accessible SEND policy is in place and is shared with families.
- A 'whole setting' approach to SEND is adopted, and supporting children with SEND is seen as the responsibility of every early years educator.
- Their leadership team understands and fulfils their statutory duties in relation to The Equality Act (2010) and SEND Code of Practice (2015).
- An inclusive enabling environment is available to all children, with reasonable adjustments made where required.
- All children have access to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Curriculum and effective pedagogy that is reviewed regularly to support individual children's interests.
- SEND is a key priority in all development planning.
- Transition plans are in place for each child at every key transition (room to room, setting to setting, adult to adult).

### All Providers will aspire to:

- **All** policies being co-produced with families, reflecting the diversity of the community and promoting anti-discriminatory practice and a sense of belonging for all.
- **All** practitioners in their setting being able to demonstrate a good knowledge of child development. All regularly update their professional development, which influences their practice.
- **All** early years educators being confident to make accurate assessments as to whether a child may need additional support, which may or may not lead to the identification of a Special Educational Need. They will be confident in using the graduated approach cycle of assess, plan, do review to support this process.
- **All** early years educators completing all appropriate modules of the 'Dingley's Promise Early Years Inclusive Practice Programme', with a focus on 'Introduction to Early Years Inclusive Practice' and 'Behaviours that Challenge'.
- **All** early years educators completing Hanen's 'Learning Language and Loving It' and at least one educator in each class of children completing Hanen's 'Adapted More than Words' training as run by Sirona.

## Every Early Years SENCo:

- Will regularly attend the Early Years SENCo clusters and other Network opportunities.
- Will have knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities as set out in the DfE [The role of the early years SENCO](#); the graduated approach; and the 4 broad areas of need as set out in the SEND Code of Practice 2015. If a SENCO is new to role there will be a clear plan for opportunities to develop their knowledge through networking and training.
- Will meet with their Early Years Portage and Inclusion Specialist to consider SEND development planning.
- Will either have completed or have a plan with their setting's leadership to complete the Level 3 SENDCO Award for Early Years Practitioners or the Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator's (SENCO) National Professional Qualification as appropriate.
- Childminders are encouraged to identify a person to act as SENCO but can also access support from the Childminder Support Team and Bristol Childminder SENCo to ensure they are meeting core expectations and aspirations.



# Framework for Universal Inclusive Quality Practice in Early Years

It is expected that providers will apply these principles, processes and strategies to promote positive engagement, support a sense of belonging and encourage curriculum equity.

## 1. Leadership, Accountability and Values

Framework	Description	Considered	Actioned	Embedded
Responsibility for every child	All early years educators understand that they are responsible for the care and education of all children, including those with disadvantage, vulnerability, developmental difference or Special Educational Needs or Disability.			
Classroom/ lesson Observation (continuous)	Focus more on frequency of a behaviour or issue across a period of time.			
Observation in unstructured times	Focus on a specific behaviour or area of SEND for example at break/lunchtime.			
Observation of group session focussing on specific area	Focus on a specific area of SEND e.g. social skills, language, behaviour in a group situation that could be set up for the purpose of the assessment.			
Conversation with CYP	Structured conversation with specific focus.			
Conversation with parent/ carer	Structured conversation with specific focus.			
Staff or Parent/carers perception	Assessment of parent/carers or staff perception of a CYP's SEND with scaling.			
External professional consultation/ advice	E.g. SALT, EP, Teacher of the Deaf (ToD), Qualified Teacher for Vision Impairment (QTVI).			
Standardised questionnaire or assessment tool	E.g. strengths and difficulties questionnaire, Boxall profile, anxiety questionnaire.			
Analysis of school behaviour log	A summary of behaviour organised and analysed to show patterns and trends in behaviour both positive and negative.			

## 2. Learning environment

Framework	Description	Considered	Actioned	Embedded
Safe, inclusive, well-organised learning space	The learning space is well-organised. Equipment is easily accessible to all children and furniture is arranged to allow a range of learning experiences. Resources are clear and uncluttered, labelled using text and images. There are communication friendly spaces and resources to enable learning through open ended play. Adults regularly review the environment to ensure all children are included and the environment meets the needs of all children.			
Diversity is celebrated	Wall displays and role models are representative of the diversity of the local community and national picture. Children can see themselves represented clearly and positively.			
Visual information for the session	There is visual information about what will happen and when using visual timetables. They are amended to include changes from the expected routine or any other information that is important to or for the children.			
Planning for sensory preferences	Adults and children work together to understand each other's sensory preferences to create the best possible environment. This should consider acoustics, temperature and movement.			
Spaces for emotional regulation	Spaces and systems are available and in place to support emotional co-regulation and self-regulation. This may be within the room or other identified area.			
Seating and groupings	Seating and groupings take account of individual needs and reduce barriers to engagement and participation. Adults support children to work cooperatively.			

### 3. Relationships and transitions

Framework	Description	Considered	Actioned	Embedded
Recognition and value of the unique child	Adults take the time to get to know all children and not just by their identified difference or need. Adults take time to listen to what children are saying, through their communication or behaviour. Adults demonstrate their recognition of every child's contribution. There are plenty of opportunities to develop and support self-worth through celebration and sharing of interests and strengths.			
Positive relationships with families	Adults seek to build and sustain positive relationships with all families. Relationships are rooted in mutual respect and understanding for why some families feel less able to engage with services. Adults always ensure a professional welcome and show empathy for families' circumstances and situations.			
Curiosity and empathy	Adults consider behaviour from a position of curiosity and empathy, demonstrating compassion, kindness and hope rather than blame and shame.			
Language of positive regard	The language used by adults demonstrates unconditional positive regard for every child.			
Consistent boundaries	Adults have clear and consistent limits and boundaries.			
Connection and belonging	Adults help all children to connect and belong. Adults support children to develop friendships and constructive relationships with each other and appropriate adults.			
Adults model resilience	Adults model resilient attitudes demonstrating growth mindset and skills.			

Framework	Description	Considered	Actioned	Embedded
Regulation and co-regulation	Children are taught self-regulation through the adults who coregulate with them. This includes using techniques and strategies which maintain a state of calm during challenging tasks and interactions; and self-regulation strategies to help children to plan, monitor and evaluate their emotional and behavioural responses to stressors.			
Rich communication	All adults are continuously aware of the quality of interactions and quantity of interactions. Adults model and encourage the use of rich language and take time to listen to when, what, and how, children are communicating. Adults are aware of their body language and facial expressions. Adults comment on the facial expressions of other people and label feelings.			
Time for speaking and listening	Oracy is built into the day at every opportunity. Adults prioritise and support all children to listen to others and have the confidence to express their views. Adults model, display and reinforce conversational 'rules' for example, turn taking.			
Plans for transitions	Adults are aware of those who will need additional support for all or most transitions, and plan for these transitions. <a href="#">Transition - Bristol Early Years</a>			

## 4. Pedagogy and metacognition

Framework	Description	Considered	Actioned	Embedded
Thinking about attention	Adults keep in mind that attention can be affected by a range of factors, including understanding, emotional needs, motivation, sleep, diet, hearing and vision. Adults support children to begin to understand these factors and develop age-appropriate strategies to help themselves, with parental support as appropriate.			
Backward and forward chaining	Adults use backward chaining to allow children to experience success. In a chosen task, the adult does all but the last step and lets the child complete the work. Then the adult fades back, doing less and less while the child does more and more, always ending with the child performing the final step. In forward chaining, the child will start independently, and the adult supports completion.			
Metacognition	Metacognition describes the processes involved when children plan, monitor, evaluate and make changes to their own learning behaviours. Adults directly teach and model these skills so that children can think, talk about and take control of their own learning and manage their own motivation for learning. Adults model their thinking aloud. Over time, adults intentionally and gradually reduce the amount of scaffolding to promote independence so children can direct their future learning and explain their thinking to themselves and others.			
Teach most useful first	New skills are taught directly and explicitly – and linked to what children already know. Adults only introduce one new skill at a time and the most useful and highly generalisable skills are taught first.			
Spaced practice - little and often	New skills are taught directly and explicitly – and linked to what children already know. Adults only introduce one new skill at a time and the most useful and highly generalisable skills are taught first.			

## 5. Assessment, planning and teaching

Framework	Description	Considered	Actioned	Embedded
Assessment, Planning and Teaching	The Key Person makes regular assessments of attainment and progress for all children in their group and uses these to inform effective planning, teaching and monitoring. Specific assessments are used as appropriate, such as WellComm.			
Independence, not dependence	Staff are mindful that the environment, resources and additional support allow children to develop independence and not create dependence. Adults guide children as they begin to develop independence but then intentionally and gradually reduce the amount of scaffolding (verbal or physical modelling and support) provided.			
Flexible groupings	Adults consider grouping children for specific activities based on the strengths, interests and needs that they share with other children. Allocating children to temporary groups can also allow adults to set up opportunities for collaborative learning and the opportunity to work alongside a different adult and children on a regular basis.			
Plans for transitions	Adults plan for routine, everyday transitions. This includes moving around the setting, changing from structured to unstructured times, and moving from one activity to the next.			
Movement breaks	Regular movement breaks and sensory circuits are part of the session.			
Considered starting points	Adults plan the delivery of lessons around children' strengths, favourite activities and interests to encourage, motivate and inspire children.			
New learning in manageable steps	Adults introduce new learning in small steps, with the opportunity to practice after each step. Examples of new concepts come from child's own real-life experience rather than the abstract.			

## 6. Adaptations and differentiation

Framework	Description	Considered	Actioned	Embedded
Reasonable adjustments	Adults identify any barriers to learning and participation. Children' strengths and barriers are observed and monitored, in different settings and contexts, to inform planning. Adults make reasonable adjustments and explore creative solutions to enable children to continue to make progress.			
Differentiation is intentionally planned	Activities are differentiated in line with all development and communication differences and stages, using relevant aids and modifying the demands of the task. Differentiation involves activities which are intentionally planned over time for all children to develop learning, retention and confidence.			
Planned regulation	Adults acknowledge there will be times when children will need some additional support for emotional regulation. This requires planned and purposeful opportunities that meet the child's needs at that time, for example, choosing from a selection of calming activities, use of a quiet space or a movement break.			
Physical equipment to aid concentration	Adults are open and willing for children to experiment and use physical equipment to aid their concentration, for example, fidget toys.			
Visual approach to aid organisation	There is a visual approach to support children's motivation and understanding of task requirements, expectations and independence. This may include breaking tasks up and/or prompts with a clear start and finish point.			

Framework	Description	Considered	Actioned	Embedded
Timers to support transitions	Visual displays of the passage of time will support children with starting and stopping activities and transitioning from area to area. This might include sand timers or traffic light visuals.			
Referrals for additional support	Adults know when to refer for extra support or advice and make use of external support, when needed and relevant.			
Working to independence	Initially, an adult would adapt and differentiate so that children can successfully complete tasks that they could not do independently. The adult will regularly review the adaptations and may gradually reduce differentiation or confirm that the adaptation reflects the child's on-going learning difference.			

## 7. Recognition and feedback

Framework	Description	Considered	Actioned	Embedded
Growth mindset	Adults and children recognise effort, perseverance and that mistakes are a natural part of learning. Children are encouraged to take risks and attempt learning in new ways. Adults are aware of the protective factors need to build resilience and support these.			
Regular, meaningful feedback	Adults provide regular and meaningful feedback, recognition and praise. Feedback is specific, encouraging, clear and manageable.			
Learning goals	Adults intentionally teach children to set short and longer-term goals, and how current decisions and behaviour can positively affect longer-term goals (longer-term 'delayed gratification'). They are aware of their progress and the next steps in moving learning forward.			
Help to value strengths and understand any barriers	Children are helped to understand barriers to their learning and to value their achievements, progress and strengths. Children are aware of their progress and the next steps in moving learning forward and support is given for building resilience in continuing to apply skills.			

# Identification of Needs, Strategies and Provision

Where it is identified that a child does not appear to be meeting expectations or is making less than typical progress within an area of their development, it is important to consider all potential contributing factors; personal, environmental and familial. Practitioners should remain curious about what their needs are communicating to us and when relevant review our provision - whether it reflects and celebrates our diverse communities, providing a sense of belonging.

The Bristol Early Years service provides template documents to support and record the implementation of the Graduated Approach. The Bristol Early Years Support Plan ([A Graduated Approach - Bristol Early Years](#)) should be used to capture a holistic overview of a child's story including thorough identification of need and of outcomes and provision. It is a working document for professionals supporting the child and should actively promote co-ordinated support for the child to progress. Partnership working with parents/carers and other professionals involved in the child's care is essential.

This section is designed to support practitioners to identify needs, strategies and provision for children who require a different package of support to the one provided within universal inclusive quality practice. This section is supported by and links with the [Dingley's Promise Early Years Inclusion Programme](#) and [Bristol Early Years Guidance such as Bristol Assessment Guidance - Bristol Early Years; Bristol Early Years Characteristics of Effective Learning \(CoEL\); Eight to Relate - Bristol Early Years](#). There are also templates and tools on the Bristol Early Years website.

When considering an area of need, professionals should adopt a holistic approach and consider all interrelating factors and the impact of other areas of need. If strategies do not appear to be supporting progress, practitioners should reflect on how provision is being delivered and should discuss with parents/carers to try and identify why. Adults should ensure that they are taking time to connect with a child - observing, listening and responding – as part of all interaction and support.



## Area of Need: Cognition and Learning

Cognition and learning refer to the processes by which children acquire new knowledge, skills and competencies. Bristol Early Years has developed an adapted version of the EYFS document, [Bristol Early Years Characteristics of Effective Learning - Bristol Early Years](#), to capture the fundamental elements for every child as a lifelong learner: 'It is our responsibility as early years practitioners to support the development of these skills during these crucial formative years'. The Characteristics focus on how children learn rather than what they learn, and the Bristol guidance also considers an emotional wellbeing strand.

Some children may experience barriers with playing and exploring, active learning and/or creating and thinking critically due to developmental differences such as reduced working memory. Early years educators should also consider whether they fully recognise the way the child is engaging with the world around them and learning through a less typical play style.

### What might we have noticed about the child?

- They don't seem to join in with play.
- They are reluctant to try new things and/or stick to areas they know.
- Their attention is fleeting and/or they move quickly around the environment.
- They are not joining in at group times.
- They are not demonstrating that they can recall their learning.
- They often repeat the same action over and over.
- They frequently show big emotions and may hit out, throw items or run away.
- They spend periods observing, unsure what to do.
- They don't seem to be happy.

### What might this mean?

- They are overwhelmed by the environment and the sensory input.
- They don't yet feel secure in the setting, or the environment and/or resources are not familiar to them.

- They need more connection with an adult before they can begin joining in.
- They haven't had much play experience previously.
- Their working memory is impacting on their information processing.
- They may receive and/or process information differently, which can impact on their ability to remember verbal instructions, their organisational skills and/or how they process emotions. These differences are likely to be accompanied by strengths in other areas, such as creativity.
- They find it difficult to link cause and effect.
- They find it difficult to make choices.
- They may have other needs which effect with wanting to join in for example sensory differences which need consideration first.

### What could we try?

- For the practitioner to adopt the role of a co-adventurer who explores and engages with the provision with the child.

- Use objects of reference to develop understanding of and anticipation of events. For example, nappy for nappy change.
  - Use visuals to support working memory – objects, pictures/ symbols, Makaton.
  - Instructions, information and tasks broken down into small steps with reduced language and key word focus. Tasks broken down into stepped instructions and consideration given to structuring learning using ‘first... and then ...’ visuals. Slow the pace at which language is delivered and give children time to process single pieces of information before giving additional language to process.
  - Match language used to children’s developmental stage or learning style and their level of understanding of language. Use Gestalt phrases with ‘GLPs’ (Gestalt Language Processors) [Speech, language and communication – Children and Young People’s Services](#).
  - Develop motivation to listen through use of song, music, actions, visuals and movement. Incorporate games and songs that involve waiting watching and listening for a cue. Use instruments to initiate a sound for children to copy with their instruments.
  - Use song and rhymes to build anticipation and engagement. For example, ‘peek a boo’, ‘round and round the garden’. Use of books and songs to teach vocabulary through picture naming and reinforce the vocabulary using objects of reference. Slow the pace of rhymes and songs to ensure the language can be accessed.
- Ensure rhymes and songs are used regularly with intonation, actions, props, objects of reference and pictures to reinforce the language.
- Use of ‘Ready... Steady...Go...’ to develop motivation and interest to listening. Include a range of activities – knocking down tower blocks, marbles down a tube, rolling a ball, toys in a box, releasing a pop-up toy, going down the slide etc.
  - Embed opportunities for children engaging in repeated patterns of behaviours or schemes to promote the repetition. This repetition enables children to build up understanding and develop concepts. Some common schemas to attend to are:
    - Trajectory - throwing items in various directions, climbing up and jumping off
    - Enveloping - wrapping self in a blanket, covering whole painting with one colour, putting notes in envelopes to post
    - Enclosure - filling and emptying containers, climbing into boxes, making dens
    - Transporting - carrying small items round in bags and buckets, pushing other children and objects round in pushchairs
    - Rotation - rolling and being spun round, playing with wheeled toys
  - Use a variety of developmentally matched resources and play equipment to promote learning in the areas of problem-solving, reasoning and concept development. Use books that are developmentally matched to the child and promote interaction through touch and sounds.

- Matching and sorting activities using objects relevant to the child and progress on to pictures of the objects. Consider the individual child's interests and motivations and incorporate into the provision. Give choices and watch for signs of preferences and build in play that the child finds motivating. Transfer elements of child's interest to different areas of provision - for example, a child who likes diggers can be encouraged to engage with books through using books about diggers in the first instance.
- Find motivating toys that are slightly hidden for child to find. Progress on to treasure hunts in provision.
- Provide high interest cause and effect toys and model the action needed to get a result. Support with language of 'ready steady go' to draw attention and interest.
- Ensure opportunities for developmentally appropriate short tabletop play facilitated by adults using jigsaws, beads and patterns, blocks, matching sorting, lotto, etc.
- Extend existing play through modelling and support with language, introducing variety of objects or toys to further exploration. Develop confidence in an underused area of provision through teaching and modelling play in those areas.
- Create and embed opportunities for high levels of repetition, revisiting, reinforcement and consolidation of skills and learning experiences within the provision across different learning areas of the indoor and outdoor provision with different staff or different resources so children can progress from acquiring learning in a specific context to generalisation of that learning.
- Consider group size, peer group and timing of activities to maximise child's motivation, potential for modelling and potential to engage.
- Raise children's profile and promote a sense of purpose through assigning jobs and responsibilities at key points in session.
- Use of regular targeted specific praise, that focuses on process rather than product, for progress in independence.
- Engage in backward or forward chaining of sequences of actions required to complete a task to identify the skills and sequence of skills to enable completion of a task. Teach and model each section of the action. For example: for finger food feeding; teach reaching, grasping, maintaining grip, putting to mouth and putting in mouth.

## Area of Need: Communication and Interaction

Children with communication and interaction differences may have difficulty in understanding language and interacting with others and the world around them. Barriers mean they have difficulty articulating what they want to say, understanding what is being said to them and/or understanding typical social rules of communication. Every child's profile is different, and their needs may change over time.

They may have difficulty with one, some, or all the different aspects of speech, language or social communication at different times of their lives. The fundamentals of communication and language are built on the foundations of attention and listening skills; but practitioners need to be aware that some children may demonstrate this in different ways. Being able to engage with environments around them will prompt exploration, curiosity and a desire to play and interact, understand and communicate.

### What have we noticed?

- They are speaking less than we would usually expect for their age.
- They are using repeated words or phrases which don't appear to vary in intonation, context or in response to others.
- They seem to have difficulty using or interpreting gestures, facial expressions, and body language, misunderstanding typical social cues.
- They don't appear to understand and be able to follow simple directions.
- They are finding it difficult to take turns in games and/or interactions with others.
- They consistently seek solitary exploration and engagement or parallel play; they have difficulty focusing on an object or activity with others.
- Behaviours that communicate big emotions stemming from frustration, confusion and/or a sense of not belonging.

### What might this mean?

- They may have physical needs which are causing a barrier, for example hearing difficulties due to glue ear (see Area of Need: Physical and Sensory).
- The environment, resources, language, sounds and/or smells are not familiar to them and are a barrier to belonging and interaction.
- They may have differences in the receptive and expressing language skills, impacting on their interactions with others. They may experience the world differently through their senses. They may have trouble choosing words or muddling up words. Related strengths may include visual thinking and attention to detail and empathy.
- They may be developing language differently. For example, Sirona has a video on their [webpage](#) about how to support 'Gestalt Language Processors'.
- If a child is finding it hard to listen and concentrate, they may have difficulty understanding what is being said to them, joining in conversations, staying on topic, and tuning into different speech sounds.

- They may be experiencing, anxiety around talking in certain situations.
- Some children have challenges making or using speech sounds which can lead to difficulties in their interactions and cause frustration.
- 'Shall we get ready to go outside' might become 'First coat, then garden'
- 'Don't climb on the table' might become 'Feet on the floor'

## What could we try?

- Provide language-rich environments, model language, and use simple, clear phrases. Use WellComm screening and implement some of the activity ideas; also refer to the Sirona advice and information pages: [Early Years Speech & Language Therapy resources – Children and Young People's Services](#)
- Use Makaton alongside speech to support language development. Ensure intonation and gesture matches language, context and intent.
- Model and expand on their phrases to enhance understanding and vocabulary and collaborate with parents/carers to identify the meaning and context of echolalic phrases.
- Be alert to signs of glue ear and signpost parents/carers accordingly: [Sensory support service](#); [Listening to Learn – Ewing Foundation](#)
- Instructions, information and tasks broken down into small steps with reduced language and key word focus. Slow the pace at which language is delivered and give children time to process (15-30 seconds before you repeat again) single pieces of information before giving additional language to process. Be clear that instructions are given as such and tell the child what you want them to do rather than what you don't want. For example:
  - Use non-verbal communication and communication aids such as visual timelines, now/next boards, communication boards, choice boards:
    - to support understanding
    - to help working memory
    - to ensure consistency of language modelled
    - to encourage expressive language
    - to reduce anxiety
    - to support turn-taking

How they are used is important. The practitioner must understand the purpose and the importance of leaving gaps, consistency of language and linking to activities/resources in a timely way.

- Develop listening and attention skills through use of song, music, actions, visuals and movement. Incorporate games and songs that involve waiting watching and listening for a cue. Use instruments to initiate a sound for children to copy with their instruments.
- Use song and rhymes to build anticipation and engagement. For example, peek a boo, round and round the garden. Use of books and songs to teach vocabulary through picture naming and reinforce the vocabulary using objects of reference. Slow the pace of rhymes and songs to ensure the language can be accessed. Ensure rhymes and songs are used

regularly with intonation, actions, props, objects of reference and pictures to reinforce the language.

- Role-play social cues and teach emotional vocabulary and expression through social stories for better communication and emotional understanding.
- Use of 'Ready... Steady...Go...' to develop motivation and interest to listening. Include a range of activities – knocking down tower blocks, marbles down a tube, rolling a ball, toys in a box, releasing a pop-up toy, going down the slide etc.
- Use highly engaging and motivating activities, differentiated to meet children's needs.
- Introduce Attention Autism sessions, which most children will enjoy, and use the principles within continuous provision.
- Stay calm, co-regulate with the child, support communication, and model emotional expression with words or visuals. Allow time for regulation before discussing incidents to avoid further dysregulation.
- There are self-help sheets on the [Bristol Early Years website Early Years SEND Self Help Guides - Bristol Early Years.](#)

## Area of Need: Social, Emotional and Mental Health

Early years children often need to manage big feelings that can feel overwhelming. It is helpful to understand that all behaviour is a form of communication.

For children, learning to understand these feelings, manage their emotions and make positive relationships is part of typical development and is fundamental to achieving positive cognitive development. Being able to self-regulate and control immediate impulses is a key skill but one that is often challenging for children presenting with SEMH needs. Positive connections and relationships are fundamentally important to develop the foundations for continuing good SEMH and positive self-awareness.

### What have we noticed?

- Difficulty building relationships.
- Low interest in others' play, may present as isolated with limited interactions.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Reluctance to have a go and/or gives up easily.
- Low levels of involvement in group learning/opportunities through withdrawal, non-engagement or disruption.
- Reluctance to explore the provision.
- Physical symptoms that are medically unexplained e.g. sickness or soiling.
- Frequently presenting with dysregulated behaviour.
- Struggles to be soothed or comforted by familiar adults.
- Finds it hard to follow routines or cooperate with boundaries.
- Difficulty expressing feelings.
- Impulsive or dangerous behaviour.

### What might this mean?

- They may have unmet physical needs that are causing pain or discomfort (e.g. tiredness, constipation, hunger, sensory).
- They may have had little experience of interactions with other children of a similar age.
- Their experiences of interactions with others may have been emotionally and/or physically harmful, or emotional connection may have been withheld.
- Their experience of attachment with caregiver may be unusually intense – resulting in finding play with others or independent play more challenging.
- They may have limited experiences of being soothed by caregivers and are unsure how to respond to this or may self-regulate in different ways.
- They may have strong interests that dominate their play, engaging them more than interactions with peers.
- They may receive and understand social communication differently, which leads to confusion, anxiety and/or frustration.

- They may find it very difficult to relax due to past experiences or differences in the way they process information, leading to hypervigilance.
- They may experience a disproportionate reaction to perceived demands or situations that trigger anxiety or sensory overload including time, plans, questions or decisions.
- Provide physical activities that support the child to recognise their emotions – developing their sense of interoception. Sensory circuits that complete with a calming activity. Example: [Mindful Mats - Action Mats](#)
- Offer opportunities for more structured play, or games with clear rules such as board games.
- Offer opportunities for fun, non-verbal games such as popping bubbles or playing tag.

## What could we try?

- For there to be spaces in the setting to meet children's emotional needs – e.g., a space to be quieter, a space to calm, a space to be loud and excited.
- Work in partnership with parents to understand child's interests and provide corresponding irresistible invitations to explore.
- Focus on a strong key person relationship – tune in with the child's interests and needs and meet those through a warm and attuned relationship. Follow the child's preferred interests and join insensitively.
- Frequent demonstrations of the key person being a warm and emotionally available adult to build trust and security.
- Embed time for connection with the key person or other known and familiar adult throughout the child's day. Focus on attunement, mirroring actions, emotional states and expressions.
- Model peer interaction and play alongside children. Give clear language and actions that the child can imitate if they want to.
- Be playful, modelling curiosity and exploration of the provision.
- Speak positively about the child in the hearing of their peer group.
- Narrate or interpret the actions of other children – for example, explaining what a child is doing.
- Be curious about the child's physical needs – have they had enough sleep? Have they had enough to eat? Might they have unmet sensory needs? Meet these needs to the extent possible.
- Be curious about the child's communication style and possible differences. Offer visual supports and try adapting the language you use. Be clear, be positive, allow time to process.
- Use visuals and preferred communication methods consistently.
- Have clear boundaries for behaviour that are consistent across the staff team and are shared with children using positive language, visuals and the child's preferred methods of communication.
- All staff to have an awareness of regulation and dysregulation, and to understand the role of the adult in co-regulating children.  
[Eight to Relate - Bristol Early Years](#) is a great guidance document.

- Staff to recognise dysregulated behaviours and work with parents to understand what might reduce the likelihood of these and what might soothe the child.
- For all staff to understand some de-escalation strategies and to work to the settings physical contact/physical intervention policy.
- Tune in to what children might be feeling and have an embedded emotional literacy curriculum supporting the understanding that all feelings are okay, but not all behaviours are.
- Model emotional literacy, using “I feel... I need...”
- [Bonus Idea: Declarative Language](#)

## Area of Need: Physical and Sensory

Physical activity is vital to the all-round development of a child, enabling them to pursue happy, healthy and active lives. Gross and fine motor experiences develop incrementally throughout early childhood, starting with sensory explorations and the development of a child's strength, coordination and positional awareness through tummy time, crawling and play movement with both objects and adults.

**Physical** Gross motor skills provide the foundation for developing healthy bodies and social and emotional well-being. Fine motor control and precision help with hand-eye coordination which links to the development of early literacy skills. For children with physical difficulties, their ability to move or coordinate actions is limited or delayed.

**Sensory** comprises hearing loss, visual impairment and sensory integration differences. Hearing loss can be permanent or temporary. Glue ear is a very common condition, especially in pre-school children. Most deaf children can hear some sounds and with the use of hearing aids or implants they are often able to hear more sounds. Visual impairment is a reduction in vision which causes difficulties with normal daily life that cannot be fully corrected by glasses. Sensory integration differences can affect children in different ways: children who under-respond to sensory information may not notice typical levels of sensation. Children who over-respond to sensory information may feel overwhelmed by everyday levels of sensation. Some children have difficulty understanding what their senses are telling them, and some children may have difficulties matching their energy levels to the situation.

### What have we noticed?

- Difficulty maintaining attention, understanding verbal communication and responding.
- Squinting, rubbing eyes, headache, unable to locate things, holding objects close. Bumping into things, falling over.
- Difficulty moving around and/or holding positions. Struggling with crawling, climbing etc.
- Difficulty with cutting, threading, drawing, dressing etc
- Struggle to match numbers/ letters or find hidden objects.
- Impulsiveness or restless or sedentary.

- Very tired and disengaged; or very upset and dysregulated (have we noticed a link to touch, sound, smell, taste, movement or busy places?).
- Not aware of their body in space and movement.

### What might this mean?

- The child may be experiencing temporary hearing loss, such as glue ear; or they may have more permanent hearing loss of which the setting and/or family is unaware or that is not fully understood and supported.
- The child may have a visual impairment of which the setting and/or family is unaware; or that is not fully understood and supported.

- The child may have delayed or reduced gross motor skills and/or fine motor skills due to a physical difference, a co-ordination difficulty or limited opportunities/experiences.
- The child may find it harder than most to respond and adapt to sensory input, so their behaviour is out of context relative to the degree, nature, or intensity of the 'sensory intake'. This can trigger a 'fight, flight or freeze' response.
- They may find it harder to regulate themselves by doing something that increases or decreases their energy so that they can stay balanced with their energy matching the activity they are participating in.
- Make mark making irresistible throughout the setting with a variety of tools and surfaces e.g. marks in wet sand or gloop. Try mark making standing up or lying down. Encourage squeezing, squashing and pinching through use of play doh or tennis ball buddy. Get involved with baking (mixing, rolling and squeezing). Use tweezers and tongs to move objects around. Encourage use of pegs in different activities. Set up opportunities to bang objects e.g. pans outside. Pop bubbles in different ways, using whole hand or a finger at a time.
- Use carpet mats or wobble cushions to sit on to reiterate where children need to sit and allow a constant sense of movement. Use fiddle toys that children can squash, squeeze, twist, manipulate and provide some resistance to help with concentration.

### What could we try?

- Plan a multisensory curriculum. Adults to support physical play and model physical activities.
- Ensure children are using a range of positions for play linked to their developmental stage e.g. tummy time or moving from squatting to standing. Develop body awareness with use of songs e.g. 'Head Shoulders Knees and Toes' and 'The Hokey Cokey'.
- Balance, swing, lift, pull, hang and climb on outdoor equipment. Use scooters and bikes. Have time for bare feet exploration on different surfaces. Encourage catching with various items especially light things like balloons or scarfs. Scaffold hand to hand passing games. Provide toys that pull apart or push together. Sing rhymes that encourage finger action and clapping.
- Provide sensory retreats and ensure there is time for quiet time with less people, noise and low lighting.
- Link with the [Sensory Support Service](#)
- Evaluate the hearing environment and the acoustics. Introduce mats and cloths on tables to reduce sound.
- Ensure all adults are using visuals, Makaton and facing children as they communicate.
- Evaluate the visual environment. Ensure that the environment is walked through with the child and changes in permanent furniture plans are shown to them.
- Provide verbal commentary as a child with visual impairment moves around to describe what's going on for them.

- Ensure practitioners have a good understanding of the senses and strategies to support. Essex have a great Sensory Awareness Document: [SEND advice and guidance: Support sensory needs | Essex Schools Infolink](#)
- **Proprioceptive:** find heavy items to push and pull e.g. chairs under a table.
- **Touch:** provide a den and try squeezing in. Build massage into group times. Involve children in food preparation.
- **Smell:** build different smells into play and games e.g. scented play dough, cooking, smell trail.
- **Auditory/Hearing:** play listening games and draw attention to different sounds during play. Play games with instruments and add sounds to story times.
- **Visual:** pick resources that are contrasting in colour. Play games highlighting what we can see.
- **Oral motor activities:** offer chewlery, blow bubbles, use straws for blowing paint, or provide snacks that are alerting (spicy foods/ice lollies) or calming (toast/chewy bread).

## Physical and sensory needs: a quick guide to calming and alerting sensory input

When supporting children with the sensory information they are managing, we need to consider whether they are 'hyper' or 'hypo' sensitive and whether they need calming or alerting accordingly. The quick guide below provides more information and SEND advice and guidance: [Support sensory needs | Essex Schools Infolink](#) provides further detail too.

### Quick guide to calming and alerting sensory input

Sense	Calming sensory input	Alerting sensory input
Vision	Soft and constant lighting; pastel colours; toys with minimal lights; reduced clutter; warm glow lights; lava lamps.	Bright lights; toys with flashing lights; bright colours; screens, such as tablets and games consoles.
Hearing	Quiet and calm voices; consistent rhythms and noise levels; white noise.	Loud music with a fast beat; unexpected noise; unexpected noise; screaming and high pitched sounds.
Touch	Deep, firm pressure; hugs; warm bath and wrapping in a big towel or wrapping a blanket firmly round them; fidget toys; soft tactile object.	Vibration; messy play, such as cold and gloopy; misting cold water from a spray; cold air; tickling and light touch.
Smell	Sweet smells, such as vanilla, cinnamon or lavender.	Strong or pungent smells such as citrus, mint, perfumes, aftershave, air fresheners.
Taste	Sweet flavours such as vanilla, milk chocolate.	Sour, salty, spicy or bitter tastes.
Balance and movement	Slow rhythmic movement, such as rocking in a chair; rhythmical bouncing on a trampoline or therapy ball; slow swinging, backwards and forwards; sucking through a straw; eating chewy or crunchy snacks.	Fast and unpredictable movement; bouncing on a ball or trampoline; swinging fast; spinning; roundabout.
Internal awareness	Warmth, such as heat pad or hot water bottle; ensuring eating regular filling meals to keep satisfied; warm drinks such as milk, malt drink or hot chocolate.	Drinking very cold drinks; crunching or sucking ice; very hot or very cold foods.

(Source: Essex County Council SEND Strategy and Innovation Team)

# Useful websites and resources to support inclusion

Website name and link	Description
<a href="#">50 Fantastic Ideas for Neurodiversity Book Companion Website</a>	Website which accompanies the book, "50 Fantastic Ideas for Supporting Neurodiversity in Early Childhood", written by Kerry Murphy and Fifi Benham - two early childhood educators who are also autistic+.
<a href="#">Achievement For All</a>	A whole-school improvement programme that aims to improve the academic and social outcomes of primary school pupils.
<a href="#">Bristol's SEND Local Offer</a>	Provides comprehensive information and support for children and young people aged 0 to 25 with SEND, including details on services, education, and local support networks.
Council for Disabled Children: <a href="#">Disabled Children and the Equality Act 2010: What Early Years providers need to know and do</a>	Guidance on the Equality Act 2010 and advice for early years providers about how this affects them and how to fulfil their duties under the act.
<a href="#">Council for Disabled Children</a>	Provides policy advice, resources, and advocacy for SEND, including practical tools to support inclusion.
<a href="#">Differentiated Early Years Outcomes (DEYO)</a>	A Bristol document that enables early years educators to show progress and reflect the achievements of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).
<a href="#">Dingley's Promise</a>	Online training modules designed with the aim of building confidence in early years practitioners. The practical elements of these courses provide information and strategies to support those working with children with a range of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to work more inclusively.
<a href="#">Down's Syndrome Association</a>	Provides information and resources for supporting children with Down's Syndrome.
<a href="#">Early Years Inclusion Team</a>	The Early Years Inclusion Service offers advice and guidance to all providers of early education and childcare. This support includes guidance on: good inclusive practice in early years, processes and procedures around SEND and strategies and targets for individual children.
<a href="#">Education Endowment Foundation</a>	Research-based resource and tools to help schools improve outcomes for disadvantaged children. Offering guidance on effective teaching strategies, interventions, and best practices.

Website name and link	Description
<a href="#">Bristol Eight to Relate</a>	Eight to Relate is a values-driven auditing tool for the personal, social, and emotional provision in early years settings.
<a href="#">Essex Sensory Awareness Toolkit</a>	A great guidance toolkit to help education providers, SENCOs, parents and carers and others understand children’s sensory behaviours and how to support them.
<a href="#">MENCAP</a>	A UK charity that supports people with learning disabilities and their families. It provides information, advice, advocacy, and practical support to help individuals live more independent lives, access services, and overcome challenges.
<a href="#">National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN)</a>	Offers resources, professional development materials, and tools to help educators implement a graduated response to meet the needs of children with SEND and support a whole school approach to inclusion.
<a href="#">Rainbow Trust</a>	Provides emotional and practical support to children and families affected by life-limiting or life-threatening conditions.
<a href="#">Royal Institute of Blind People (RNIB)</a>	Links to useful resources and a document listing teacher-reviewed resources for blind and partially sighted learners.
<a href="#">SEN Tools</a>	Offers practical tools, assessment resources, and guidance for teachers to support children with SEND and implement a graduated response framework.
<a href="#">Sensory Support Service</a>	For CYP with sensory impairment (vision, hearing or multi-sensory) information from Sensory Support Service is available to support settings understand the specific, individual needs of these CYP.
<a href="#">Sirona Children and Young People’s Services</a>	Advice and signposting information, including early years speech and language therapy, early years support practitioners, health visiting service, physiotherapy and occupational therapy.
<a href="#">Neuroinclusive Education Network (NEN)</a>	<p>Autism expertise at the core, strengthened by an inclusive perspective that supports wider neurodivergence including learners with ADHD, dyslexia and Tourette Syndrome.</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● training programmes</li> <li>● practical resources: range of teaching materials, toolkits, strategies to help support learning and inclusion</li> </ul>
<a href="#">The Communication Trust</a>	<p>A charity focused on supporting children and young people with speech, language, and communication needs.</p> <p>This will include information on Dyspraxia (CAS), Developmental Language Disorders (DLD), ‘Phonological Disorders and Speech Sound Disorders.</p>

Website name and link	Description
<a href="#">The National Autistic Society</a>	A leading UK charity for autism that provides advice, resources and training for educators to help them include autistic children in mainstream education.
<a href="#">The National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NSIP)</a>	The NSIP provides resources, training, and best practice guidance to support the education of students with vision, hearing, and multi-sensory impairments. It helps educators create inclusive environments, offers professional development, and advocate for improved services and inclusion for these students.
<a href="#">West Sussex Local Offer: specific needs for 0 to 5 year olds</a>	For additional tips and ideas around specific areas of need.
<a href="#">Widgit Online</a>	Widgit Online is a popular software product that can be used to create visual aids, such as timelines, social stories, communication boards and EAL supports.

# Glossary of terms

**CAMHS:** Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

**PIMHS:** Primary Infant Mental Health Service

**CIC:** Children in care

**EHCP:** Education, Health and Care Plan

**EHCA:** Education, Health and Care Assessment

**ELS:** Emotional Literacy Support Assistant

**EP:** Educational Psychologist

**VI:** Visual impairment

**HL:** Hearing loss

**SEMH:** Social, emotional and mental health

**DAF:** Disability Access Funding

**MSI:** Multisensory impairment

**OT:** Occupational Therapist

**PfA:** Preparing for Adulthood

**SALT:** Speech and Language Therapist

**SENCO:** Special Educational Needs Coordinator

**SEND:** Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

