

If your child is under the age of 5 and attends a childcare provision they will be looked after and educated by early years professionals who understand how children develop and learn.

You may choose to send them to a pre-school, a nursery or a childminder, your choice will depend on what you think is best for your child and what is available in your local area.

One thing that your child's early years provider will have in common is that they will all have to meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

What is the Early Years Foundation Stage?

The EYFS was introduced in 2008 and is how the Government and professionals working with young children describe the important stage in a child's life between birth and age 5.

The EYFS has been updated several times over the years, to take account of current research into how young children learn and develop, and government policy related to children and families. The most recent version of the EYFS came into force on 1 September 2021.

Nurseries, pre-schools, and childminders (early years providers) registered with [Ofsted](#) or a Childminder agency, must follow the EYFS framework. They are registered and inspected by Ofsted to ensure the quality and standards of their provision. Because the EYFS goes up to age 5, this includes Reception classes in school too.

Ofsted's role is to establish whether the early years provider is meeting the requirements of the EYFS and decide on whether they remain suitable for registration.

The EYFS is a legal document and any failure to meet a requirement of the EYFS may result in action being taken by Ofsted.

Why do we have the EYFS?

Children learn and develop rapidly from the moment they are born.

The home is the first environment where play and learning take place, supported by parents and other family members. Babies learn to crawl, walk, and talk, they begin to interact with people and the environment around them.

Their brains develop rapidly in the early years and create vital foundations for learning throughout life.

Research confirms that the experiences that a child has in the early years has a significant impact on their future life chances and that high quality early years care and education makes the biggest difference to every child.

The EYFS provides a framework that 'sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good progress through school and life'. (EYFS 2021)

What is in the EYFS?

The EYFS has three sections:

Section 1 Learning and development describes what early years providers must do to promote the learning and development of all children in their care in seven areas:

- communication and language
- physical development
- personal social and emotional development
- literacy
- mathematics
- understanding the world
- expressive arts and design

The first three areas listed are described as the prime areas of learning and development because they are closely linked to a child's brain development in the first three years of life.

The following four areas are described as specific areas of learning that develop when parents and early years educators know what they want children to learn and create the right opportunities for learning to take place.

The activities and experiences (educational programmes), that early years settings provide are based on a child's individual needs and interests.

The emphasis is on learning through play because 'play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, relate to others, set their own goals and solve problems' (EYFS 2021).

Section 2 Assessment describes how children's progress is recognised.

There is additional guidance that supports the EYFS to help educators to recognise and interpret where a child is in their learning journey. The additional guidance is not intended to be a checklist that educators use to track a child's development by ticking off one stage after another.

Learning does not progress in a set sequence of events which is why educators observe children constantly and use their professional knowledge to identify the areas of learning that a child is secure in, what they need to know next, and any areas where they may need additional support.

Assessment is not all about paperwork and written reports, but the EYFS expects that 'parents and/or carers should be kept up-to-date with their child's progress and development' and discuss any additional needs with you and any relevant professionals, for example, if your child appears to be struggling with their speech and language, your child's key person may suggest that they would benefit from being referred to a Speech and Language Therapist.

There are three formal assessment points in the EYFS:

- the progress check at age 2 when you will receive a short, written summary of your child's development in the prime areas
- the Reception Baseline Assessment completed by your child's school within the first six weeks of them starting reception, and...
- assessment at the end of the EYFS – the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) which is completed in the final term of the year your child turns five. The profile is assessed against a set of early learning goals for the seven areas of learning and development that the early years educators have been supporting them towards.

Section 3 the safeguarding and welfare requirements explain what providers must do to safeguard children; ensure the suitability of adults who have contact with children; promote good health; manage behaviour; and maintain records, policies and procedures (EYFS 2021)

How are parents involved?

Early years educators are professionals who understand how children learn and develop, they are appropriately qualified for the role they undertake and continue to update their skills and knowledge.

They understand that you make a vital difference to children's outcomes which is why the EYFS places a strong emphasis on the importance of working in partnership with parents.

A two-way flow of information between you and your child's key person helps to ensure that your child gets the best possible care and learning.

What you do at home with your child makes a big difference.

By Melanie Pilcher

Photo by [Atikah Akhtar](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Useful links

The Early Years Alliance (which runs Family Corner) has a wide range of fun and [educational family activities](#) to support your child's learning and development.

We also have the Alliance's [YouTube Channel](#) with more than 100 videos of activities, songs, stories and crafts for children aged 0-5yrs.

The channel also includes some [video tutorials for parents](#) showing you how to support your child's literacy and numeracy at home.