

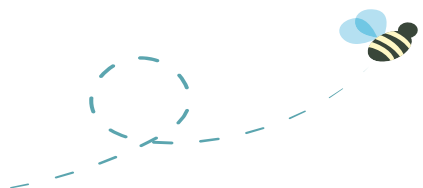


Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Assessment Arrangements for 0 to 3 year olds in Wales



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## Section 4: Areas of Assessment

Areas of assessment: questions for us to consider as we observe babies and young children in our setting:

- Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development
- Speech, Language and Communication
- Exploration and Play

Here I am! (0-12 months):

- Assessing Social and Emotional Development
- Assessing Physical Development
- Assessing Speech, Language and Communication
- Assessing Exploration and Play

I'm exploring! (1-2 years):

- Assessing Social and Emotional Development
- Assessing Physical Development
- Assessing Speech, Language and Communication
- Assessing Exploration and Play

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Look at me now! (2-3 years):

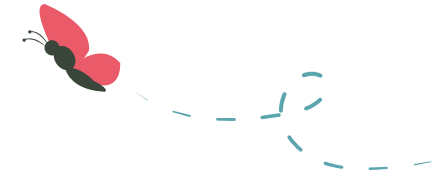
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# Introduction



This guidance has been co-produced with practitioners and key partners across the childcare, play and early years sectors in Wales, drawing on emerging Welsh practice and international evidence. It is designed to support us, as practitioners, as we care for and nurture babies and young children from birth to age three in creating consistent, high-quality, play-based care and learning experiences rooted in children's rights and developmentally appropriate practice.

The guidance reflects the principles of Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) and builds on the rich, responsive practice many of us are already doing each day. For some, it may affirm current practice; for others, it may offer an opportunity to reflect, refocus or introduce fresh approaches.

Every baby and young child is unique, with their own interests, strengths, identities and circumstances. This guidance recognises that assessment, observation and provision must respond to these individual needs. There are no templates or 'one size fits all' approaches, as we acknowledge and value the different ways in which you and your settings work. By tuning in, observing, and listening carefully to babies and young children, we can better understand how to support their learning, development and well-being, and create joyful, meaningful experiences that nurture their curiosity, confidence, and strong foundations for lifelong learning.

This guidance complements other ECPLC materials, including the:

- [A Quality Framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales](#)
- [Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Developmental Pathways for 0 to 3](#)
- [Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Reflective practice toolkit](#)

and key Welsh Government guidance for the non-maintained sector:

- [Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#)
- [Assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#)
- [Enabling Learning](#)
- [An Introduction to Early Childhood, Play Learning and Care – Early Years Wales](#)
- [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare in Wales](#)
- [Flying Start: guidance](#).

This guidance is set out in 4 sections:

- [Section 1: Assessment](#)
- [Section 2: Observation](#)
- [Section 3: Starting with us](#)
- [Section 4: Areas of Assessment.](#)

**Sections 1 to 3** are presented in a question-and-answer format. Through addressing common questions directly, this guidance aims to be accessible, easy to navigate and practitioner focused. This format supports us to locate clear and useful information quickly.

**Section 4** provides practical examples of how you can observe and assess babies and young children's progress across the key developmental areas. These examples are designed to support you in recognising and responding to each baby and young child's unique development and learning journey through play and everyday routines.

Together, these resources help provide a clear, coherent framework for supporting high-quality early years practice across Wales.



# Section 1: Assessment

Assessment is a vital part of Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care. It helps us build a deeper understanding of each baby's and young child's development, so we can support their well-being, sense of belonging and help them progress in a way that's right for them.

Assessment should be rooted in our strong knowledge of child development and seen as a natural part of our daily practice. Through meaningful assessment, we can:

- understand and celebrate each baby's and young child's unique developmental journey
- recognise and respond to individual needs, interests, and preferences
- support babies and young children to express themselves and ensure their voices are heard
- plan inclusive, meaningful experiences that nurture learning and well-being
- guide smooth transitions by recognising each baby and young child's changing needs
- ensure our practice supports every baby and young child to thrive and feel safe, valued and included.

Although the cycle of observation, assessment and planning is widely used across the early years, the concept of assessment can sometimes feel daunting.

It is important we feel confident in understanding what assessment means, what it looks like in practice, and how it can help us provide high-quality play, learning and care.

This approach also aligns with wider assessment processes in Wales, such as the [Healthy Child Wales Programme \(HCWP\)](#), ensuring that we work in partnership with families and professionals to support each baby's and young child's development through responsive, informed care.



What is our role as the enabling adult in assessment?

Who can help inform our assessment?

What do we assess as part of our day to day practice?

How do we assess effectively?

Why should we assess?

What do we do with this assessment information?

What do we mean by assessment?

How does assessment inform our planning and help us see things from the baby's/young child's perspective?



## What do we mean by assessment?

Assessment is a cycle of careful observations that supports our understanding of babies and young children's play, behaviour, care, learning and development. A baby and young child's behaviour through responsive interactions, helps us to understand their developmental needs, how they are progressing and guides us in planning for their next steps.

We recognise that, in the past, assessment may have focused on outcomes – such as whether a baby or young child had reached a certain level – and was often used as a measure of accountability. It is encouraging to see a shift towards an approach that prioritises ongoing, responsive assessment rooted in strong relationships. This approach reflects each baby and young child's unique journey, interests, and context. To ensure we support babies and young children's development, we should remember that:

### Assessment should:

- remain focused on the present needs of the baby and/or young child
- capture what babies and young children can do, be strengths-based, recognising both babies and young children's abilities and areas where support is needed
- help us understand how each baby or young child is developing for us to provide the appropriate support
- form part of our daily practice and contribute to building a holistic picture of the baby and young child's understanding the progress made over time
- be meaningful and useful to our practice and to parents/carers
- include the perspective of the baby and young child and their parents/carers
- support us to see things from the baby and young child's perspective (through their eyes)
- be unobtrusive
- include analysis of our observations
- inform you and your practice/planning
- be a shared responsibility, where we work closely with all members of staff, families and the wider community to build a detailed picture of each baby or young child's development.

### Assessment should not:

- be a tick-list, a one-off event or a series of tasks
- be used as an accountability measure
- be seen as only collecting evidence for childcare and education regulatory bodies<sup>1</sup> and early years services
- focus entirely on perceived gaps/deficits in development
- categorise or label babies and young children
- be separate from play, care and development
- interrupt authentic play opportunities
- be demanding or time-consuming
- be the responsibility of one adult alone
- be completed in isolation
- necessarily need to be written.

## Who can help inform our assessment?

Babies and young children are at the heart of our assessment, and we should recognise them as active participants in their care, development and learning. The more we know about babies and young children and their development, the more we should appreciate how remarkable this period of early childhood is. We should work with parents/carers, and other key individuals to develop a shared understanding of each baby and young child's needs, interests, and opportunities for development.

This will support our decision-making about how best to help babies and young children to make progress on their development journey.

To help develop a holistic picture of each baby and young child, we may wish to engage with:



## What do we assess as part of our day-to-day practice?

Following our first assessments, ongoing observation should be embedded in our daily interactions with babies and young children. Rather than focusing on fixed checklists or predetermined outcomes, we should take a responsive approach, ensuring assessment supports understanding of each baby and young child's unique starting points and reflects their current needs and experiences.

We carefully notice the small but meaningful changes in babies and young children's communication, movement, and actions as they grow. Development is rarely linear. As practitioners, our assessments help us recognise and celebrate babies and young children's growth, development and well-being. To support us in doing this in a child-centred, responsive way, we focus on the following areas of assessment:

- social and emotional development
- physical development
- speech, language and communication
- exploration and play.

These areas reflect what matters most in the earliest years of life. They are closely linked to the [Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Developmental Pathways for 0 to 3](#) – Belonging, Communication, Exploration, Physical Development, and Well-being – and build strong foundations for future learning. By focusing on these areas, we ensure our approach stays connected, consistent, and meaningful as babies and young children progress through the early years. They also act as important precursors to the areas used within the [Assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#), helping us to take a consistent, joined-up approach across early years practice.

By analysing our observations through this lens, we can focus on what's most relevant for each baby and young child at their current stage of development. Our insights guide responsive planning, helping us to shape learning environments and interactions that nurture curiosity, confidence, and connection.

Some babies and young children may attend more than one setting, so it's important to share relevant information where possible. Working collaboratively helps build a more complete understanding of each baby and young child's progress and ensures continuity in their care and experiences.

In **Section 4** of this guidance, we will find reflective questions for each area to help us think deeply about what we are noticing in our everyday practice. These questions are supported by examples of what we may observe as babies and young children play, explore, and engage in daily routines. These are not checklists, but prompts to support our professional thinking, conversations, and planning as we respond to each baby's and young child's unique needs and interests.

## How do we assess effectively?

Effective assessment begins with truly seeing and listening to babies and young children to understand their individual needs, interests, and well-being. Observing babies and young children is a privilege that allows us to embrace the wonder of their unique journeys.

Using a “Notice, Analyse, and Respond” (see page 18) approach naturally integrates assessment into everyday practice. Notice, analyse and respond means we pay close attention to what babies and young children show us through their actions and communication, reflect on what this tells us about their needs and interests, and gently adapt our care and experiences to support their ongoing development. Each interaction offers an opportunity to observe development, reflect on progress, and adjust our provision accordingly. Every expression, gesture, and emerging skill offers insights that help us plan experiences that spark joy, support learning, and nurture well-being.

Assessment is a continuous, holistic process, embedded within warm, responsive relationships and tailored to each baby and young child. By gathering insights through both informal and intentional observations, and reflecting on those “aha!” moments, we create joyful, meaningful experiences that follow their curiosity and developmental needs.

Working in partnership with parents/carers strengthens our understanding further. Sharing observations and insights fosters collaboration, ensuring families feel involved and empowered to support their baby and young child’s development at home.

Following these conversations with families, we may seek advice and guidance from additional professionals<sup>2</sup> to meet individual needs, when necessary. This collaborative approach creates nurturing, inclusive environments where every baby and young child can thrive.

## What do we do with this assessment information?

The things we learn from parents/carers, other practitioners and babies and young children themselves provides valuable insights – like little pearls of wisdom. By observing babies and young children and tuning in to their individual ways of communication and expression, we can plan high quality environments and meaningful experiences that help them grow.

Sharing our insights in team meetings or with others who support babies and young children makes sure we are all working together to help them thrive.

By reflecting on our discussions and analysing our observations, we can decide the best ways to support each baby and young child’s progress. This could mean working together to decide how to support the babies and young children – whether by changing how we interact, making the environment more engaging, or adding new experiences. By nurturing positive relationships with parents/carers, and sharing meaningful insights from daily observations, we can offer a fuller picture of each baby and young child’s unique strengths, needs, and progress while also providing parents/carers with valuable opportunities to learn and adopt best practices from the setting.

<sup>2</sup> For example Local authority leads/member organisations/health professionals

Through these ongoing conversations, we build a deeper understanding of the baby or young child, ensuring that both practitioners and families are working together to support the baby or young child's development in a holistic and collaborative way.

We can share information about:

- their baby or young child's well-being
- the progress their baby or young child is making
- how we will support progress
- how progress can be supported at home.

## How does assessment inform our planning and help us see things from the babies/young child's perspective?

Our planning<sup>3</sup> should be intentional, responsive and reflective, shaped by what we observe and learn from babies and young children each day. Assessment isn't just about looking for progress – it's about seeing the world through the baby or young child's eyes. By tuning into their cues – gestures, facial expressions, actions, and vocalisation – we begin to see play from their perspective. This helps us understand how individual babies and young children approach their play and learning.





## Assessment – Reflective questions

- How do I work with others to gather information to support babies and young children?
- How do I actively listen to and respond to babies and young children, including their non-verbal communication, to ensure they feel heard and respected?
- How does my assessment impact positively on my practice?
- In what ways do I ensure that my assessments focus on the present needs of each baby and young child rather than using a predetermined tick-list approach?
- How do I work collaboratively with parents, carers, and professionals to build a holistic understanding of each baby and young child's development, strengths, and needs?
- How does my practice ensure equity and inclusivity, consider each baby and young child's background, identity, culture, race, ethnicity, language, and abilities in our planning and interactions?



## Section 2: Observation

Observation is a natural part of what we do every day in Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care. By taking time to really watch, listen and connect with each baby and young child, we build strong, trusting relationships and get to know what matters to them. Observation helps us notice what sparks their curiosity, how they are feeling, what they enjoy, and how their skills are developing.

It also helps us spot when they may need additional support. By understanding and celebrating each baby and young child's unique journey, we can plan experiences that follow their interests, support their well-being, and help them take their next steps in learning and development. Observation sits at the heart of assessment and planning, helping us respond in ways that truly meet the needs of every baby and young child in our care.



## What is observation?

Observation is a key part of understanding and supporting babies and young children's play, learning and care. It involves watching, listening, and noticing how babies and young children explore, play, engage and connect. Through observation, we can develop a rich picture of each baby and young child's experiences, emotional well-being, their interests and learning journey.

Observation is a reflective process that encourages us to be present and responsive, using what we see and hear to shape our interactions, experiences and the environment in ways that support each baby and young child's development.

Observation also enables us to reflect on our practice, as encouraged in the [Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Reflective Practice Toolkit](#).

## What do we observe and when?

A baby and young child's earliest years are both relatively brief and highly significant to their overall development. Our observations should include reference to the unique knowledge and experience each baby and young child brings to the setting. It is important to value this period and to nurture the playfulness and curiosity of babies and young children. Development is rapid from birth to age five, as babbling becomes conversation and as physical movements become increasingly more complex and sophisticated. We should use this valuable information to inform our assessments. Our observations should be the catalyst for our planning of future learning experiences and environments.



*Deepen your understanding of child development by observing and noticing what babies and young children are doing, analysing what you have seen and asking yourself 'why is it important?', linking what you have seen to theory and best practice to inform a possible response.*



Observing babies and young children across a range of everyday contexts helps build a holistic picture of their development, guided by the areas of assessment (see pages 29-70) and aligned with the [Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Developmental Pathways 0 to 3](#). This helps us recognise patterns in their play, communication, and emotional responses. Observations need to be meaningful and have purpose. Not just written for the sake of it. They should be a snapshot- capturing the importance of development.

We observe babies and young children throughout the day in different situations, including:

- **Play** – indoors and outdoors, in both independent and supported play.
- **Daily routines** – mealtimes, nappy changing, sleep times, and transitions.
- **Social interactions** – with parents, carers, visitors, other children, and practitioners.
- **Familiar and new experiences** – moments when babies and young children explore something new, experience awe and wonder, or revisit favourite activities.
- **Children on their own and with other children** – daily routines, in play experiences, exploring the environment.

## What is our role, as the enabling adult, in observing babies and young children?

We should be intrigued by and support babies and young children's thinking during play, learning and care. We should ensure we have a good understanding of child development and use it to reflect on, and improve, our practice and provision.

Our observations should help plan for and use a child-centred approach to support all babies and young children to make progress. There will be times when we choose to pause, to observe and listen, allowing play to develop. We do this because we recognise that our involvement or intervention might be unwelcome and/or inhibit play. Sharing our observations with others within a safe and supportive environment will help us to learn from each other, drawing on each other's strengths and raising awareness of, and challenging, any unconscious bias we may hold.





## What is the Notice, Analyse and Respond Approach?

This approach helps us make thoughtful, everyday decisions that support each baby and young child's unique journey.

- Notice what captures a baby or young child's interest, how they engage, and what influences their involvement and well-being.
- Analyse what this tells us about their development, needs, and experiences.
- Respond by adapting our interactions, environments, and experiences to best support their growth.

This approach ensures our observations are responsive, child-centred practice that nurtures curiosity, confidence, and well-being. It works in harmony with the [Assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings for 3-4 year olds](#), supporting a seamless and connected journey for children from birth through to nursery.



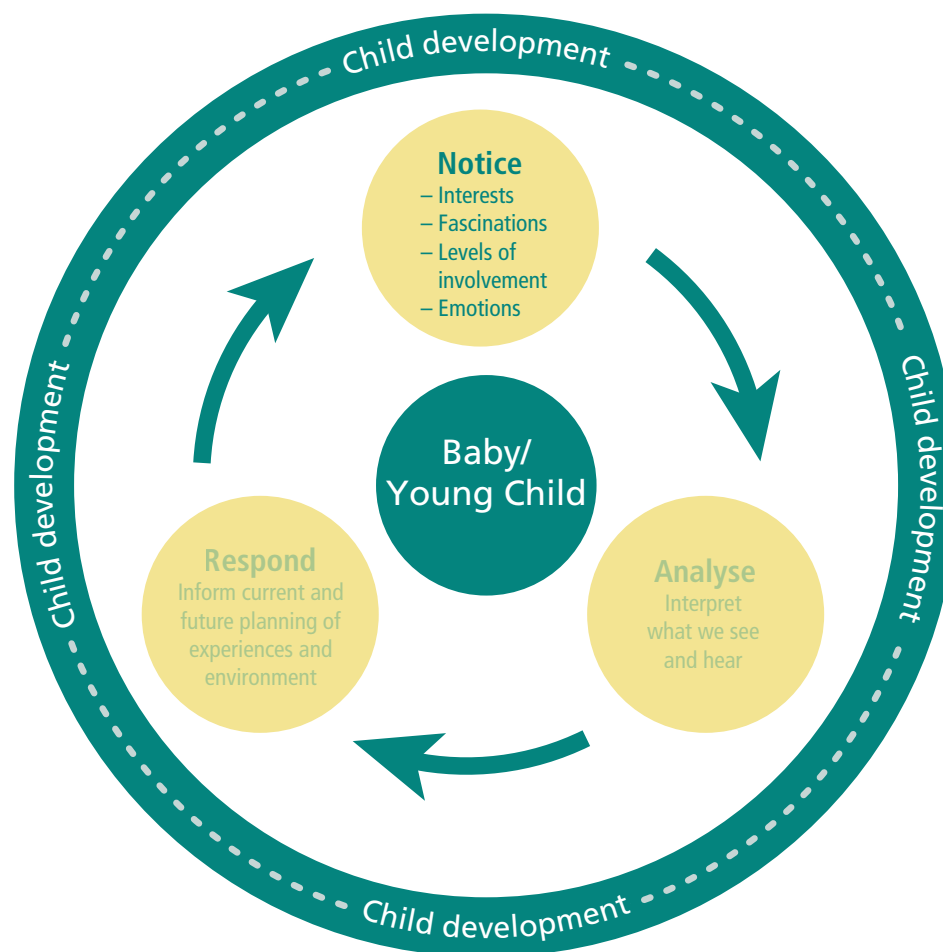
As enabling adults, our role is to:

## Notice

We observe with care and curiosity, tuning into how babies and young children develop, learn, and explore through play. We notice:

- their changes in their well-being
- what sparks their curiosity and excitement
- how they express themselves, whether through gestures, facial expressions, sounds, or words
- how they engage with their environment and the world around them
- their levels of confidence, resilience and independence as they engage in play and respond to everyday care routines
- how babies and young children manage transitions and change
- how babies and young children notice similarities and differences and how we as adults support their developing understanding race, culture and individuality of self and others.

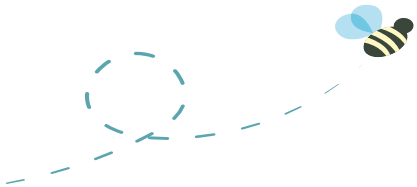
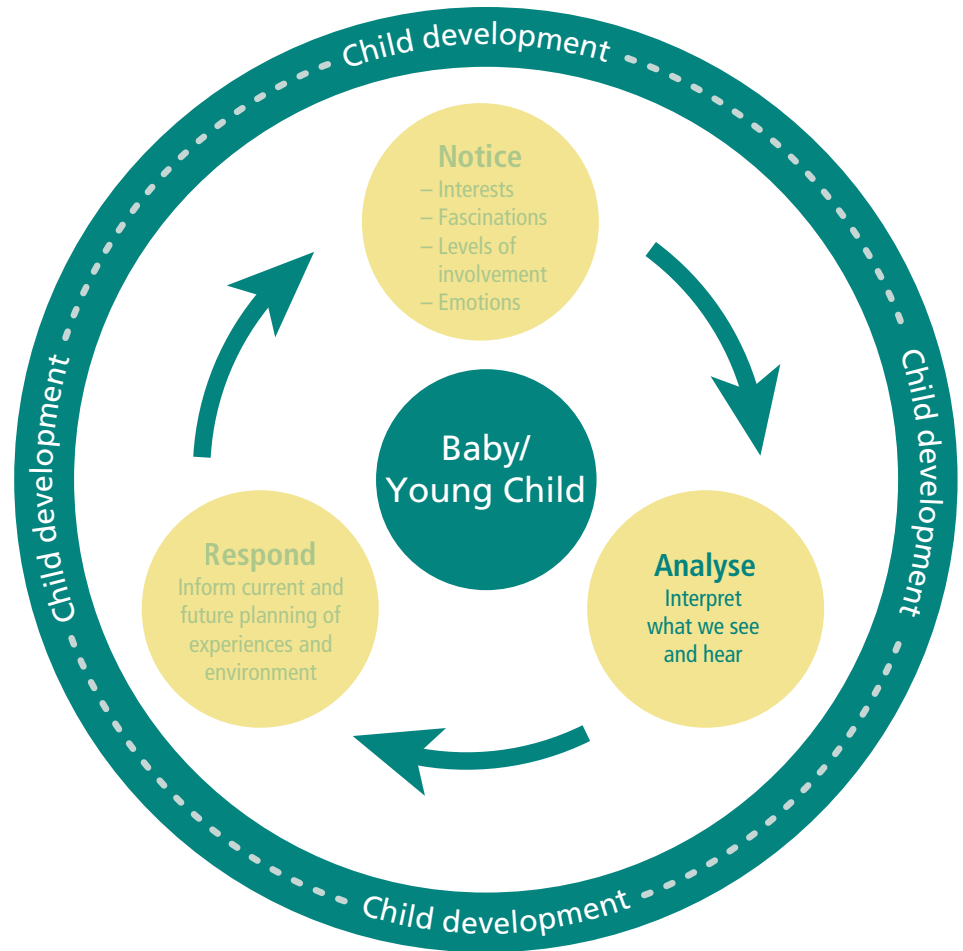
We observe by being present in their play, watching, listening, and sometimes joining in when invited – always respecting their choices and following their lead. Our observations help us build a full picture of each baby and young child, which we share with colleagues and families to ensure they receive the best possible support.



## Analyse

Once we observe, we reflect on what we have seen and heard. This helps us:

- understand their preferred ways of playing and exploring (such as through movement, sensory experiences, or repeated actions)
- recognise new interests a baby or young child is developing
- identify babies and young children's progress
- identify areas where extra support, encouragement or further challenge might be needed
- consider how their experiences connect to their home life, culture and community.

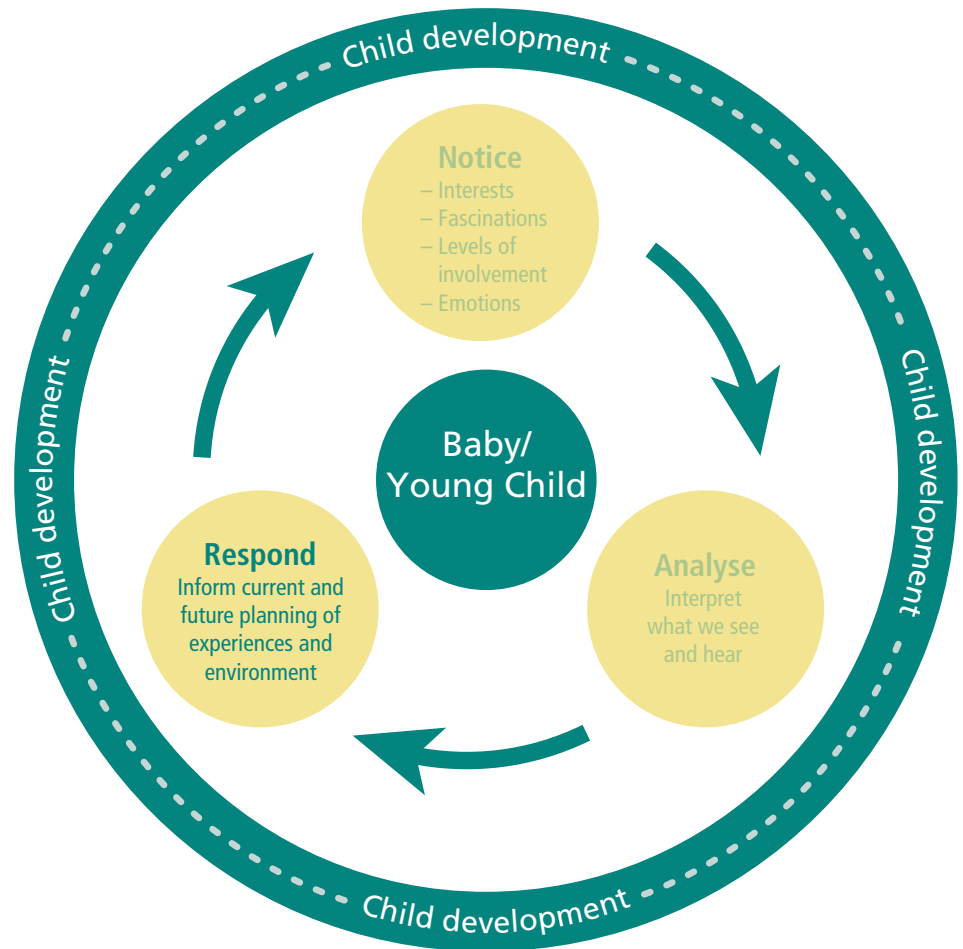


## Respond

Based on our observations and reflections, we:

- **adapt our interactions** – knowing when to step in and when to let play unfold naturally
- **enhance the environment** – offering new materials or changing spaces to encourage exploration and engagement
- **build on interests** – using baby and young children's fascinations to create meaningful play opportunities
- **offer reassurance and encouragement** – helping them feel secure, confident, and excited to try new things

Sometimes, we respond in the moment, taking advantage of rich play and learning opportunities as they arise. Other times, we step back and reflect (individually and with others) on how to adapt the environment or experiences to better meet their needs next time.





## What are the different ways we can observe?

Observing babies and young children should be a natural and responsive process, ensuring that we tune into their needs, interests, and development. Observations should be purposeful, manageable, and child-centred, rather than for accountability measures. The focus is on understanding each baby and young child's unique journey and adapting our interactions and experiences accordingly.

There are different ways we can observe to build a clear picture of babies and young children's learning and development:

- **Spontaneous observations** – Noticing and recording significant and aha/wow moments in a baby or young child's play or interactions.
- **Focused observations** – Watching a baby and young child for a set period or following their interactions and behaviours over time. (This may be referred to as timed observations)
- **Observations for developmental assessment** – Identifying milestones and recognising areas where a baby or young child may need support.
- **Planned observations** – Observing specific areas of learning or development to deepen our understanding of a baby and young child's progress.



*Using a range of observation methods will ensure that we obtain detailed understanding of each baby and young child.*

## How do we record and present our observations?

Observations can be recorded and presented in many ways and should be flexible and developmentally appropriate. They might include:

- **One-page profiles** – Providing a snapshot of a baby and young child's strengths, preferences, and support needs.
- **Sociogram** – A visual tool (like a simple diagram or map) that helps you see and understand the social relationships and interactions between babies and young children
- **Magic moments/brief jottings or sticky notes** – Recording significant moments in the baby and young child's day, including what they have said or done
- **Individual child choices** – Observing and recording the decisions a baby or young child makes throughout their day – like where they go, what they play with, and who they interact with – to better understand their motivations, learning style, and well-being.
- **Time sampling (choices)** – A way of observing and recording how often a baby and young child chooses certain activities or resources over a set period of time, helping practitioners understand a baby or young child's interests and preferences.
- **Time sampling (environments)** – A method to record what areas of the setting babies and young children use at specific times, giving insights into how the environment supports or limits play and learning opportunities.

- **Short narratives** – Noting key interactions, emerging skills, and progress over time.
- **Learning stories** – Capturing moments of curiosity, play, and discovery.
- **Long narratives** – A detailed written account of a baby or young child's play or experience over a longer period, capturing their language, actions, interactions and thinking to help practitioners reflect deeply on learning and development.
- **Developmental journals** – Documenting experiences through photos, notes, and reflections.
- **Digital apps** – Using apps or platforms to track and share learning with families.

If we choose to record observations, we should do so sensitively, ensuring it doesn't disrupt babies and young children's play. There will be times when we **step back to observe and listen**, giving play the space to unfold naturally. We do this because we understand that **our presence or involvement isn't always needed** and could disrupt a baby and young child's exploration. By sharing our observations with others in a supportive environment, we can learn from each other, celebrate our strengths, and reflect on any unconscious biases, ensuring we provide the best possible experiences for every baby and young child.

At times, observations will help us identify additional support needs. Where necessary, we may collate key observations over time to share insights with other professionals. These records can support discussions, referrals, and tailored interventions, ensuring that every baby and young child receives the right support to thrive.

## How do we use observation to inform our planning?

Observations should always be used to inform how we support babies and young children's play, learning and care, ensuring their needs are met. We can use the **areas of assessment** alongside the [Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Developmental Pathways 0 to 3](#) to:

- identify what a baby and young child can do now
- reflect on how they engage with interactions, experiences, and their environment
- recognise where they might go next in their development
- plan and adapt our practice and provision that respond to their interests and needs.



## Observation – Reflective questions



- How well do I implement/use a variety of observation methods?
- How do I ensure my observation processes do not interrupt babies/children's play?
- How well do I collate and summarise observations for each baby and young child?
- How do I use the "notice, analyse, and respond" approach in our daily practice to create meaningful and engaging learning opportunities for babies and young children?
- How can I use knowledge of child development to improve provision and practice?
- How well do I share my observations with parents/carers? Is it a two-way sharing process?



## Section 3: Starting With You

Understanding each baby's and young child's unique development is central to nurturing their early experiences. When a baby or young child first joins us – whether that's at a nursery, playgroup, with a childminder, or even when moving from one room to another – it's important we take the time to get to know them really well. By observing how they play, communicate, move, and interact

and by learning about their interests, routines, and what helps them feel secure, we begin to develop a meaningful understanding of each baby and young child.

This isn't about measuring or comparing, it's about recognising where each baby or young child is on their learning journey, so we can provide care, play, and learning experiences that meet their needs from the very beginning.





## Why is building secure relationships so important before we start any assessments?

Starting in a new environment can be a significant step for babies and young children. Before we begin exploring their development, we must ensure they feel safe, valued, and supported. Secure, trusting relationships are the foundation for early learning, giving babies and young children the confidence to explore and engage at their own pace.

## How should assessment and observation be approached?

Assessment at this stage is not a standalone task, it is embedded in our everyday interactions. We tune in to each baby and young child during play and routines, using these moments to notice how they express themselves, explore their environment, and respond to others.

Rather than using formal tools or checklists, this responsive approach helps us understand development in real time and adapt our support accordingly. It also creates opportunities for rich professional dialogue within teams, ensuring a shared understanding of each baby and young child's progress.

## What developmental areas should we focus on during observation and assessment?

When observing and supporting babies and young children, we take a holistic approach – considering the whole child and how they develop across interconnected areas. This broad view helps us recognise each baby and young child's unique strengths, interests, and emerging skills, and ensures that our support is responsive and well-rounded.

These developmental areas below work hand in hand with the [Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Developmental Pathways for 0 to 3](#) and act as important precursors to those included in the [Assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#) – supporting a consistent and connected approach across the early years.

We begin building this understanding from the moment a baby or young child joins us – whether in a nursery, playgroup, with a childminder, or as they move between rooms or settings – by taking time to observe how they engage, communicate, move, and relate to others. These early insights are key to understanding the whole child and shaping meaningful support.

The four key areas are:

- **Social and Emotional Development** – Observing how babies and young children form relationships, express emotions, and develop self-awareness. This helps us understand their sense of belonging and emotional well-being.
- **Physical Development** – Noticing how babies and young children explore their surroundings, develop both gross and fine motor skills, and gain confidence in their physical abilities.
- **Speech, Language and Communication Development** – Understanding how babies and young children express themselves, from early sounds and gestures to emerging words and interactions.
- **Exploration and Play** – Valuing their curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving as they engage with the world around them through play and exploration.

These areas are not separate – they interact and influence one another. Together, they guide our ongoing observations and help us build a well-rounded picture of each baby and young child's development. This holistic, child-centred and responsive approach ensures we meet each baby and young child where they are, and plan meaningful experiences that nurture their learning, growth, and development in a supportive and thoughtful way.

## How can we involve families in supporting development and learning?

Families are a vital part of understanding each baby and young child's development and learning. By working in partnership, we gain valuable insight into a baby and young child's home experiences, culture, language, and routines. Regular, respectful communication with parents/carers allows us to co-construct support that is tailored, inclusive, and rooted in each baby and young child's life outside the setting.

## How can we identify if a baby/young child needs additional support?

Through careful observation and reflection, we can recognise when a baby/young child may benefit from extra support. Early identification is key to ensuring that tailored interventions are introduced promptly. These interventions are most effective when developed collaboratively with families and, when necessary, involve advice from external specialists or services.

## What is a holistic approach to development, early learning and care?

A holistic approach means that observation and reflection are part of everyday practice – not separate from it. It allows us to nurture babies and young children's well-being, learning, and development through warm relationships, meaningful interactions, and thoughtfully designed experiences.

Focusing on social and emotional development, physical development, speech, language and communication, and exploration and play helps us celebrate each baby and young child's uniqueness and support their full potential.



## Section 4: Areas of Assessment

The assessment arrangements for babies and young children (aged 0-3) focus on four key areas of assessment: social and emotional development, physical development, speech, language and communication, and exploration and play. These areas for assessment are drawn from and aligned with Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) Developmental Pathways for 0-3 year olds, ensuring a consistent and supportive approach to early development. They also create a strong foundation for progression into the assessment arrangements for 3 and 4 year olds.

We should use these arrangements, along with our knowledge and experience, to reflect and respond to the individual needs of the babies and young children in our setting. Some babies and young children may attend more than one setting and we should try to work closely with the other settings to share relevant information. Professional discussions contribute to our shared understanding of individual babies and young children's strengths, needs and interests. These should support us to make decisions about how best to help babies and young children to make progress.





## Areas of assessment: questions for us to consider as we observe babies and young children in our setting

The areas of assessment are presented below as a series of questions for us to consider as we observe babies and young children in our setting. On pages 32 to 70, these questions are further supported by examples of what we may notice, observe and record in terms of babies and young children's development and progress during play, exploration and daily routines. The descriptions are not exhaustive. We should use them to support our collective observations when making assessments of babies and young children's progress. We should analyse what we notice to inform our response and planning, which will support babies and young children to grow, develop and thrive in a nurturing environment.



*Remember every baby and young child's journey is unique, where progress and development is not always linear. Babies and young children's holistic progress may not fit neatly into only one developmental range. This means that as practitioners we should be aware of what comes before and after a particular stage.*

<b>Assessing Social and Emotional Development</b>	How does the baby/child show that they are happy, settled and content?	How does the baby/child respond to support in beginning to regulate their feelings/emotions?	How does a baby/child respond to routines and transitions?	How does the baby/child form relationships with others in the setting?		
<b>Assessing Physical Development</b>	How does the baby/child engage in physical play and challenge themselves physically?	How confident is the baby/child in their physical movement?	How does the baby/child express themselves through movement?	How does the baby/child show body awareness in their movements?	How co-ordinated are the baby/child's gross and fine motor skills?	
<b>Assessing Speech, Language and Communication</b>	How does the baby/child interact with you or others?	How does the baby/child make themselves understood?	How does the baby/child show that they attend and respond?	How does the baby/child show they understand language?	How does the baby/child engage with stories, songs and rhymes?	How is the baby/child building their speech, language and communication skills?
<b>Assessing Exploration and Play</b>	How does the baby/child show curiosity and interest in their surroundings?	How do the baby/child explore and respond new to new materials, people or environments?	How does the baby/child make connections through play?	How does the baby/child engage in problem-solving processes and respond to challenge?	How does the baby/child use play to express ideas, feelings, or understanding of the world around them?	

## Here I am! (0-12 months) – Assessing Social and Emotional Development

Feeling connected, secure and safe are key elements of positive well-being and can promote a strong sense of belonging and well-being. As soon as they are born, babies seek attachments. Developing strong, secure relationships with family members and keyworkers is crucial for babies to form positive attachments. These attachments can support babies to know with whom and where they belong, and to develop an awareness of their own identity within these relationships. As enabling adults, we have a key role to play in creating emotionally safe environments that support babies to show their preferences in relation to rest, care, comfort and nourishment. Adults or keyworkers who acknowledge and respond in sensitive, nurturing and timely ways, respecting cultural and racial backgrounds, can ensure babies develop a strong sense of belonging and well-being. It is essential we take time to get to know the baby and understand their unique background, including their linguistic background and culture as well as previous experiences, to build a holistic picture of each baby to ensure we can meet their social and emotional needs.

How does the baby/child show that they are happy, settled and content?

I may show physically my desire to explore.

I may respond positively when seeing familiar staff.

I may gently babble or make sounds to communicate joy.

I may show relaxed body and facial expressions.

How does the baby/child respond to support in beginning to regulate their feelings/emotions?

I may respond to soothing.

I may seek comfort from a familiar adult.

I may respond to objects of comfort.

How does a baby/child respond to routines and transitions?

I may show enjoyment in familiar routines.

I may show dislike to something new in the routine.

I may show I am settled in transitions.

I may show preference to aspects of the routine.

How does the baby/child form relationships with others in the setting?

I may respond to warm interactions from an adults.

I may seek connections from other children.

I may seek connections from adults.

I may express discontent if adult attention is elsewhere.



## Here I am! (0-12 months) – Assessing Physical Development

As their bodies grow, babies progressively strengthen their muscles and are better able to control their bodies. Physical skills are an important part of baby's holistic development and affect all areas of their growth and development. Physical development consumes the interests of babies as they practise learned skills and seek to develop new ones. We should be confident in our knowledge of progress within physical development so that we can accurately assess babies' physical skills. It is especially important when observing and assessing a baby's physical development that we consider the impact it has on their emotional, social and cognitive development. Babies need time, space and freedom to explore and develop their skills in a range of indoor and outdoor contexts. By offering a wide range of physical development opportunities, we support babies to develop their resilience, confidence and independence and stimulate and encourage the development of gross and fine motor skills.

How does the baby/child engage in physical play and challenge themselves physically?

I may engage in a range of physical movements e.g. turning, punching/waving, kicking, pushing/pulling etc.

I may show awareness of my physical actions.

I may begin to make intentional movements.

I may engage in physical play for longer periods.

I may persevere and/or show frustration in my movement.

How confident  
is the baby/child  
in their physical  
movement?

I may observe other  
children before  
I move.

I may show  
awareness of my  
capabilities.

I may show  
eagerness to move  
and be physical.

I may show and test  
my capabilities and  
seek support  
if needed.

How does  
the baby/  
child express  
themselves  
through  
movement?

I may use my body  
and movements to  
show like or dislike.

I may gesture  
to show interest  
or as means of  
communication.



How does the baby/child show body awareness in their movements?

I may respond to sensory input using movement.

I may show awareness of the size of my body (developing proprioception) e.g. crouching through a tunnel.

I may overcome obstacles by changing my physical movement/direction.

I may show body awareness through repetition of movement.

How does the baby show co-ordination in gross and fine motor skills?

I may show increasing balance e.g. lifting/holding head, sitting unaided, pulling myself up, standing unaided etc.

I may co-ordinate both sides of my body e.g. crawling, clapping.

I may put/attempt to put objects in my mouth.

I may reach for things using both hands, including crossing the central line.

I may co-ordinate head, eyes, hands, fingers to explore physically.

## Here I am! (0-12 months) – Assessing Speech, Language and Communication

Communication, both verbal and nonverbal, is key to development and building relationships. Babies express needs through crying, body movements, eye contact, sounds, and gestures. Effective assessment should identify early skills in communication, as babies begin to imitate sounds and intonations. Supportive adults respond positively, tuning into individual needs. accurately assessing and supporting progress. We should be confident in our knowledge of early communication and language skills and the risk factors that may impact a baby's long-term speech, language and communication needs. We should consider a holistic view of the baby's communication and language skills, so that we make an informed decision about the next steps for each individual.

How does the baby/child interact with you or others?

I may make sounds  
e.g. babbling,  
gurgling, cooing.

I may use hand gestures  
and pointing.

I may respond to  
familiar sounds  
and voices.

I may use my body  
to express feelings/  
emotions.

How does the baby/child make themselves understood?

I may use sounds and begin to use words e.g. ba-ba, mama, no etc.

I may physically move to show preferences.

I may use different cries to communicate different needs.

I may use my body or objects to communicate my wants/needs.

How does the baby/child show that they attend and respond?

I may turn my head and look at objects or sounds.

I may recognise familiar faces and voices.

I may respond to facial expressions e.g. copying a poked out tongue or smile.

I may respond to cause and effect games e.g. peek-a-boo.

How does the baby/child show they understand language?

I may use gestures and show objects.

I may show association of words and objects/people e.g. mam, ball.

I may respond to familiar words with accompanying actions.

I may show preference in response to language used e.g. excited for snack, disappointed to go inside.

How does the baby/child engage with stories, songs and rhymes?

I may locate sounds and respond.

I may engage through eye contact and facial expressions.

I may use vocalisation.

I may mimic facial movements, gestures and actions.

I may use movement to express my feelings.

How is the baby/child building their communication and language skills?

I may show anticipation in response to familiar sounds, gestures and objects e.g. Excitement upon hearing the start/suggestion of a song.

I may recognise my name.

I may take turns in conversation (babbling) e.g. serve and return.

I may recognise my emotions and emotions of others.

I may show intention in my communication e.g. making a noise and pointing at something I want.



## Here I am! (0-12 months) – Assessing Exploration and Play

Babies are naturally curious about the environment and are keen to explore. They are fascinated by themselves, others and the world around them. As babies explore through play, they experiment with new sounds, sights, objects and activities. They explore who they are and what they can do by using their body. They can focus on things that have caught their attention for brief periods of time. They begin to repeat and refine movements as their exploration develops. We should observe babies during their play as they engage with open-ended, authentic resources to support their understanding of everyday life and routines. We should use our observations to inform teachable moments (both indoors and outdoors), which may include increasing babies' opportunities for exploration. We should support babies to work through the process of problem-solving and allow them the time to observe, explore, investigate and experiment. This problem-solving process should be valued as an end in itself and may not always result in an outcome or answer.

How does the baby/child show curiosity and interest in their surroundings?

I may use my senses, including mouthing objects.

I may begin to show intention with my movement e.g. turning something over.

I may begin to move physically to explore the environment e.g. turn head, reach.

I may observe and focus on things.

How does a baby/child explore and respond to materials, people or environments?

I may be willing to explore alongside my care-giver.

I may show fleeting attention, which may grow with familiarity or age.

I may explore given objects or those I find independently e.g. grasp, move or manipulate.

How does the baby/child make connections through play?

I may show an understanding of objects use and/or object permanence.

I may seek additional objects to include in my play e.g. Pram for doll, stacking cups.

I may experiment with cause and effect.

I may engage in repeated actions in my play and/or seek opportunities to re-visit.

How does the baby/child engage in problem-solving processes and respond to challenge?

I may show confidence in engaging in risky play.

I may attempt actions after observing others.

When faced with challenge, I may look to care givers for support and reassurance.

I may engage in trial and error to investigate.

I may show perseverance when exploring.

How does the baby/child use play to express ideas, feelings, or understanding of the world around them?

I may show preferences in my play, including environments for play and/or rest.

I may begin to show self-awareness in my interactions with living things and objects.

I may begin to make choices.

I may share their joy and enthusiasm, or frustration in my play.

## I'm exploring! (1-2 years) – Assessing Social and Emotional Development

Feeling connected, secure and safe are key elements of positive well-being and can promote a strong sense of belonging and well-being. As young children become more self-aware, they begin to develop a stronger sense of who they are and what they can do. When young children feel safe, they express their feelings and are supported to co-regulate what may be sometimes overwhelming feelings. Young children with secure attachments and relationships are relaxed, and have a strong sense of well-being, which enables them to show their preferences in relation to rest, care, comfort and nourishment. With our support, young children can begin to make their own choices. When they feel loved, nurtured and valued, they begin to feel important within the different groups to which they belong. Young children may respond to familiar routines and objects from home, to help them feel safe and ease transition. Young children who enjoy good health and well-being are innately curious. They have a zest for life that results in their taking advantage of opportunities to grow and develop.

How does the child show that they are happy, settled and content?

I may engage with the environment/ experiences with growing independence and confidence.

I may seek and begin to share familiar resources that reflect my family, culture and community.

I may respond positively when seeing familiar staff and approach independently.

I may be able to communicate my likes and dislikes.

How does the child respond to support in beginning to regulate their feelings/emotions?

I may respond to soothing and calming.

I may respond to reassurance from a familiar adult.

I may seek comfort from a familiar adult.

I may respond to objects and words of comfort.

How does the child respond to routines and transitions?

I may show anticipation in familiar routines e.g. respond to objects of reference, songs and/or actions.

I may show I am settled in transitions.

I may show preference to aspects of the routine.

I may show enjoyment in familiar routines.

I may show dislike to something new in the routine.

How does the child form relationships with others in the setting?

I may seek connections from adults in a variety of ways.

I may express discontent if adult/peer attention is elsewhere.

I may respond to warm interactions from an adult.

I may seek and/or refuse connections from other children.



## I'm exploring! (1-2 years) – Assessing Physical Development

As young children grow, their determination to master movement, balance and gross and fine motor skills develops. Physical skills are an important part of a young child's holistic development. We should be confident in our knowledge of progress within physical development so that we can accurately assess children's physical skills. It is especially important when observing and assessing a young child's physical development that we consider the impact it has on their emotional, social and cognitive development. Young children need time, space and freedom to explore and develop their skills in a range of indoor and outdoor contexts. At this stage, young children may like and need to be on the move or be moved. Their natural inquisitiveness is now extended and they begin to make connections with the world around them. By offering a wide range of physical development opportunities, we support young children to develop their resilience, confidence and independence and stimulate and encourage the development of gross and fine motor skills.

How does the child engage in physical play and challenge themselves physically?

I may engage in a range of physical movements e.g. turning, punching/waving, kicking, pushing/pulling etc.

I may show awareness and control of my physical actions.

I may engage in physical play for longer periods and/or engage in repetition.

I may make intentional and co-ordinated movements.

I may seek out and engage in a range of physical movements with objects and/or the environment.

I may persevere and/or show frustration in my movement.

How confident  
is the child in  
their physical  
movement?

I may observe other  
children before  
I move.

I may test my  
capabilities, respond to  
encouragement and seek  
support if needed.

I may be eager to  
explore what I can  
do with my body.

I may show  
awareness of my  
capabilities.

How does the  
child express  
themselves  
through  
movement?

I may gesture  
and/or move to show  
interest or as means  
of communication.

I may use  
movement to support  
my emotions e.g.  
finding joy in  
big action songs.

I may use body and  
movements to show  
like or dislike.

I may respond to stimuli  
by moving e.g. games,  
songs or rhymes.

How does the child show body awareness in their movements?

I may manoeuvre myself in relation to my physical ability and to the space and resources in the environment e.g. different surfaces, using steps, developing proprioception.

I may look at my reflection, explore my body and experiment with movement.

I may show awareness and caution in relation to my movement.

I may move my body in and around environments with increasing co-ordination.

I may overcome obstacles by changing my physical movement/direction.

I may observe movement in others and attempt to imitate.

How does the child show co-ordination in gross and fine motor skills?

I may co-ordinate both sides of my body e.g. walking, climbing, using vehicles.

I may show intention with putting objects to my mouth e.g. feeding or drinking.

I may co-ordinate my body and sequence movements to explore physically.

I may use both hands/feet, including crossing the central line to explore physically.

I may show increasing balance e.g. jumping, kicking/throwing a ball.

## I'm exploring! (1-2 years) – Assessing Speech, Language and Communication

Communication, both verbal and nonverbal, is key to development and building relationships. As young children's communication progresses, adults should recognise that young children may understand more than they can communicate. Young children should feel their verbal and nonverbal communication attempts will be valued and responded to. Young children should have opportunities to notice things and use simple words, gestures or signs and some short phrases. We should provide familiar objects and add a word when young children recognise the object. We should introduce a range of different words, signs or gestures to improve children's understanding of communication. Daily routines, such as eating together and nappy changing, provide valuable opportunities for conversations. It is important that throughout the day young children experience and join in with a variety of songs and rhymes. We should foster a love of reading through sharing books and telling stories. Being able to experiment with mark making is integral to the journey of written communication and should be valued. As new communication skills are learned, young children should have opportunities to use them in a variety of contexts with each other, or with adults.

How does the child interact with you or others?

I may watch others closely and begin to play alongside them.

I may understand and respond to familiar words and phrases.

I may use my body and physical movements to gain your attention e.g. make eye-contact, touch your arm.

I may greet familiar adults/peers and begin to use names when interacting.

How does the child make themselves understood?

I may use familiar words in the correct context.

I may begin to use sounds, vocalization and some words to show enjoyment and curiosity.

I may use non-verbal communication to express my wants/needs and likes/dislikes.

I may begin to use sounds, vocalization and some words to communicate.

How does the child show that they attend and respond?

I may focus my attention on things that interest me.

I may be curious or notice unfamiliar sounds, signs and objects within my environment.

I may take turns in simple games, stories and rhymes.

I may respond to familiar sounds/objects to shift my attention.

I may engage in responsive interactions.

How does the child show they understand language?

I may follow and anticipate simple routines.

I may make choices in response to language used and/or objects shown e.g. options given at snack time.

I may respond to familiar words and phrases with accompanying actions.

I may respond to simple questions and instructions.

How does the child engage with stories, songs and rhymes?

I may show enjoyment and preference e.g. favourite story.

I may recognise and respond to visual and audio cues e.g. book covers, objects.

I may join in and mimic facial movements, gestures and actions.

I may engage with stories and songs to relax and settle.

How is the child building their speech, language and communication skills?

I may understand more words than I use.

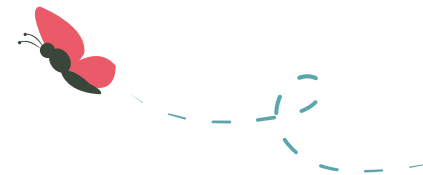
I may recognise my emotions and emotions of others.

I may try to use familiar sounds/ words in different contexts.

I may experiment with mark making, using tools or my body e.g. footprints, painting.

I may show intention in my communication.

I may take turns in conversation when given enough time to respond.



## I'm exploring! (1-2 years) – Assessing Exploration and Play

Young children are natural problem solvers, testing boundaries and taking risks. At this stage, young children actively seek exploration further afield as they develop. We should be partners in young children's play, delighting in and celebrating young children's curiosity and exploration. As young children engage in repetitive play (schema), we should provide opportunities for them to experience, discover and create. We should know when to intervene in their play and when to encourage independent exploration. We should observe young children during their play as they engage with open-ended, authentic resources and use our observations to inform teachable moments (both indoors and outdoors). We should support young children to work through the process of problem-solving and allow them the time to observe, explore and investigate. This problem-solving process should be valued as an end in itself and may not always result in an outcome or answer.

How does the child physically show curiosity and interest in their surroundings?

I may show focus on something of interest and can shift my attention with support.

I may use my senses, including mouthing objects to explore my surroundings.

I may spend extended periods focusing on investigating the environment and resources.

I may show an interest and move physically to explore the environment and resources.

I may show intention with my movement and present objects of interest e.g. passing a book to an adult.

How does the child explore and respond to materials, people or environments?

I may be willing to explore independently, with an adult nearby.

I may show increasing confidence to use my body and/or resources creatively e.g. musical instruments.

When presented with something new, I may show attention, which may grow with confidence, interest or age.

I may explore given objects or those I find independently, coordinating eyes, hands and fingers to manipulate and experiment.

I may respond to people when it suits my play.

How does the child make connections through play?

I may exhibit play that seems nonsensical e.g. hide and find things for myself repeatedly, tip things out, knock things over.

I may be able to define everyday objects by their use e.g. all cups are for drinking from.

I may engage in repeated actions in my play and/or seek opportunities to re-visit, sometimes in a new context.

I may experiment with cause and effect, drawing on my previous experiences.

I may follow pattern and/or recognise symbols within my play e.g. match and sort objects.

How does the child engage in problem-solving processes and respond to challenge?

I may show increasing confidence in engaging in risky play.

I may attempt actions after observing others.

I may show perseverance when exploring and I might want to do things for myself.

I may engage in trial and error to figure out how things work and may revisit.

When faced with challenge, I may look to an adult for support, reassurance and comfort.

How does the child use play to express ideas, feelings, or awareness of the world around them?

I may express my thoughts and ideas in play through my actions and making choices.

I may begin to show awareness of the emotions of others (including animals) and mimic actions through my play.

I may return to familiar places, people and objects within my play.

I may show preferences within my play e.g. environments to explore and/or rest.

I may begin to recognise similarities between myself and others.

I may share my joy, enthusiasm, or frustration within my play.

## Look at me now! (2-3 years) – Assessing Social and Emotional Development

Feeling connected, secure and safe are key elements to developing a strong sense of belonging and well-being. When they are young, children begin to develop a sense of how they fit in to the many groups to which they belong, and of their importance within them. A sense of Cynefin can bring positive feelings of connection with the home and the setting and can expand to the community, Wales and the wider world. Young children begin to recognise and manage their feelings and behaviour in positive ways. They also begin to understand that actions have consequences. Young children with secure attachments and relationships can feel confident in themselves and are therefore better able to make choices, show greater resilience and independence and participate positively in everyday experiences. Young children who are physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively engaged and involved in play will have higher levels of well-being and will develop their feelings of self-worth and confidence. Young children who enjoy good health and well-being are innately curious. They have a zest for life that results in their taking advantage of opportunities to grow and develop.

How does the child show that they are happy, settled and content?

I may respond positively when seeing familiar adults and approach independently.

I may engage with my environment with growing independence and some experiences with curiosity.

I may seek and begin to share familiar resources and stories that reflect my family, culture and community.

I may show growing confidence in communicating my preferences, likes/dislikes, and choices.

How does the child respond to support in beginning to regulate their feelings/emotions?

I may begin to recognise when to seek comfort and support from a familiar adult.

I may respond to and show preferences in self-regulation and calming.

I may begin to show an awareness of my emotions and the emotions of others.

I may follow some rules or challenge boundaries with support.

How does the child respond to routines and transitions?

I may show confidence, enjoyment and/or ownership in daily routines.

I may separate from my parent/carer with encouragement from a familiar adult, child or transitional object.

I may show anticipation and preference to aspects of my daily routine.

I may communicate like/dislike to something new in the routine.

How does the child form relationships with others in the setting?

I may form close relationships and seek warm interactions with adults.

I may form relationships with children who enjoy the same interests and/or experiences.

I may seek/and or refuse connections from children and adults in a variety of ways.

I may seek familiar resources that reflect my family, culture and community and begin to share with others.



## Look at me now! (2-3 years) – Assessing Physical Development

All young children have a natural need to move, or be moved, and to move or manipulate objects, often repeatedly, as part of their development. As young children grow, their determination to master movement, balance and gross and fine motor skills develops. These motor movements can become more refined and smoothly co-ordinated with time and opportunity. Physical skills are an important part of a young child's holistic development. We should be confident in our knowledge of progress within physical development so that we can accurately assess young children's physical skills. It is especially important when observing and assessing a young child's physical development that we consider the impact it has on their emotional, social and cognitive development. Young children need time, space and freedom to explore and develop their skills in a range of indoor and outdoor contexts. Physical activity has multiple benefits for the developing young child. Movement is linked to cognition and learning, and engaging in physical activities can enhance young children's levels of concentration, motivation and memory as well as support healthy bone and muscle development.

How does the child engage in physical play and challenge themselves physically?

I may seek out and engage in a range of physical movements with objects and/or the environment e.g. turning, punching/waving, kicking, pushing/pulling etc.

I may make intentional and controlled movements.

I may show an interest in specific aspects of physical play, for example riding a bike, digging or kicking a ball.

I may show perseverance in my physical play.

I may use physical play to test myself and take risks.

I may engage in physical play for longer periods and/or engage in repetition.

How confident  
is the child in  
their physical  
movement?

I may be eager  
to explore  
independently in my  
physical play.

I may  
experiment and/or  
observe other children  
before I engage in  
physical play.

I may test my  
capabilities, respond to  
encouragement and seek  
support if needed.

I may  
show awareness of my  
capabilities and celebrate  
in my achievements.

How does the  
child express  
themselves  
through  
movement?

I may  
use my body and  
movements to express  
a range of thoughts,  
feelings and emotions.

I may respond to  
stimuli by moving  
e.g. games, songs  
or rhymes.

I may seek physical  
movement that brings me  
joy e.g. spinning around,  
hanging upside down,  
jumping off things.

How does the child show body awareness in their movements?

I may move my body in and around environments with increasing co-ordination and purpose.

I may manoeuvre myself in relation to my physical ability and to others, the space and resources in the environment.

I may look at my reflection, explore my body and experiment with movement.

I may observe movement in others and attempt to imitate with increasing control.

How does the child show co-ordination in gross and fine motor skills?

I may use both hands/feet, including crossing the central line to explore physically.

I may co-ordinate both sides of my body e.g. walking, climbing, using vehicles.

I may co-ordinate my body and sequence movements.

I may show increasing balance e.g. jumping, throwing, catching, kicking, walking on a narrow surface.

I may demonstrate my co-ordination skills through everyday actions e.g. helping to prepare snack, pouring myself a drink, dressing myself.

## Look at me now! (2-3 years) – Assessing Speech, Language and Communication

Communication, both verbal and nonverbal, is fundamental to young children's development. It is vital to the foundation of relationships and essential for learning, play and social interaction. As young children are growing, they develop their ability to understand and make themselves understood, which supports them to learn more effectively. Communication involves developing listening, attention and understanding skills alongside the development of expressive language, both verbal and nonverbal. The amount and type of communication young children experience can have a marked effect on their communication development. An environment that is communication rich should provide young children with opportunities to express and communicate their needs, thoughts and feelings verbally and nonverbally. As new skills are learned, young children should have opportunities to use them in a variety of contexts with each other, with adults, in very small groups or on a one-to-one basis. Regular and frequent opportunities to participate in stories, songs and rhymes support communication development. Developing effective communication skills is important to self-expression, to the development of strong social relationships and to a young child's learning more generally.

How does  
the child  
interact with  
you or others?

I may watch others  
closely, show an  
interest in their  
play and begin  
to join in.

I may talk with familiar  
adults/peers, talk about  
things that interest  
me and begin to ask  
questions.

I may respond verbally or  
non-verbally to comments  
from adults showing  
an interest in  
my play.

I may use my body and  
physical movements  
to gain your attention  
e.g. pull you towards  
something.

How does the child make themselves understood?

I may use verbal and non-verbal communication to express my wants/needs and likes/dislikes.

I may use familiar words in the correct context, including a range of types e.g. nouns, verbs.

I may use sounds, some words and short phrases to show enjoyment and curiosity.

I may keep trying and find new ways to make myself understood e.g. gestures, objects or vocalisations.

How does the child show that they attend and respond?

I may look towards you when you call my name or show me something.

I may be curious and ask/respond to 'who', 'what' and 'where' questions.

I may show an interest in others and join in with their play.

I may take turns in simple games, stories and rhymes.

I may show attention to things that interest me for longer periods.

How does the child show they understand language?

I may respond to and use everyday words and phrases with accompanying actions.

I may follow simple instructions e.g. going to get my coat or shoes.

I may show an understanding of simple sentences and concepts e.g. baby in the pram.

I may make choices in response to simple questions e.g. options given at story time.

How does the child engage with stories, songs and rhymes?

I may recall and share stories and rhymes with you, with the support of pictures.

I may ask you to read my favourite stories or sing my favourite songs.

I may mimic facial expressions, gestures and actions.

I may recognise when stories, songs and rhymes represent me and support my well-being.

I may show enjoyment using body movements, actions or sounds.

How is the child building their speech, language and communication skills?

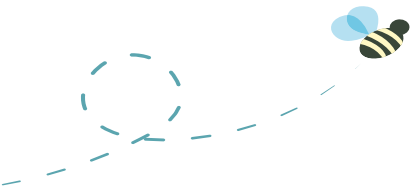
I may begin to use simple words to describe my emotions and emotions of others.

I may use simple sentences or sounds in different contexts.

I may use simple describing words in my play.

I may join in conversations and take turns, jumping from one topic to another.

I may engage and respond to mark making opportunities, using a range of resources.



## Look at me now! (2-3 years) – Assessing Exploration and Play

Young children are natural problem solvers, testing boundaries and taking risks. At this stage, young children are beginning to communicate and engage others in their exploration. As young children develop and their skills increase, their opportunities to explore and investigate purposefully expands. Young children can be absorbed in their exploration as their perseverance and resilience develops. Play becomes more complex and meaningful. The opportunities to repeat, return and revisit become increasingly more important to the young child. As a young child's confidence increases, they may lead the play and adults should facilitate this and share in the young children's joy and excitement. We should know when to intervene in their play and when to encourage independent exploration. We should observe young children during their play as they engage with open-ended, authentic resources and use our observations to inform teachable moments (both indoors and outdoors). We should support young children to work through the process of problem-solving and allow them the time to observe, explore and investigate. This problem-solving process should be valued as an end in itself and may not always result in an outcome or answer.

How does the child physically show curiosity and interest in their surroundings?

I may use my senses and move physically to explore environments and resources, with growing independence.

I may spend more time in environments that interest me and may require further support to explore others.

I may move and use objects in creative ways.

How does the child explore and respond to materials, people or environments?

I may explore and experiment with resources and environments in order to understand how things work.

I may wish to share my discoveries with others.

I may find new ways to explore in my play, including testing boundaries and taking risks.

I may respond to people and/or invite others into my play, when it suits me.

How does the child make connections through play?

I may build upon previous learning to develop my play, making it more complex and meaningful.

I may show connections with my home and community when I play.

I may recognise cause and effect, drawing on my previous experiences.

I may recognise symbols and patterns that are familiar to me.

I may seek opportunities to re-visit or repeat actions to develop my understanding of simple concepts.

How does the child engage in problem-solving processes and respond to challenge?

When faced with challenge, I may ask for help and reassurance.

I may engage in different trial and error methods to figure out what works.

I may show perseverance when exploring for extended periods.

I may watch and copy others to problem solve.

How does the child use play to express ideas, feelings, or awareness of the world around them?

I may exhibit creativity through my play.

I may show awareness of the emotions of others (including animals) and mimic actions through my play.

I may share my joy, enthusiasm, or frustration within my play.

I may express my thoughts and ideas in play through my actions e.g. drawing, dancing or small world play.

## Section 5: Glossary

English	Welsh	Definition
Self-regulation	Hunanreoleiddio	The ability of a child to understand and manage their emotions, behaviors, and attention in ways that are appropriate for the situation.
Holistic development	Datblygiad cyfannol	Is the process of nurturing all aspects of a baby and young child's growth – physical, emotional, social and intellectual – to support their overall well-being and help them reach their full potential.
Belonging	Perthyn	A child's sense of being accepted, valued, and included in their environment – whether at home, in a childcare setting, or in the wider community.
Authentic play	Chwarae dilys	Play that is child-initiated, meaningful, and deeply engaging, allowing children to explore, create, and learn in ways that are natural and relevant to their lives.
Teachable moments	Cyfleoedd dysgu digymell	Unexpected or unplanned events or experiences that offer opportunity for learning. They provide meaningful contexts for adults to introduce or expand on something that arouses the curiosity of the child.
Unconscious bias	Rhagfarn ddiafwybod	Non-deliberate prejudice or unsupported judgements in favour of or against one thing, person or group as compared to another, in a way that is usually considered unfair.
Spontaneous observations	Arsylwadau digymell	Observations that happen naturally and are unplanned, capturing a child's behaviour, actions, or interactions as they occur in real-time.

English	Welsh	Definition
Planned observations	Arsylwadau wedi'u cynllunio	Observations that are scheduled and intentional, often focused on specific behaviours or developmental milestones.
Additional Support	Cymorth ychwanegol	Additional support tailored to help give a child who may face barriers to learning or development, ensuring they have equal opportunities to grow, engage, and succeed.
Transitional object	Gwrthrych pontio	Something that provides comfort and reassurance to a child as they transition from one place to another, for example a doll, teddy bear or blanket.
Mouthing	Gwefuso	Mouthing is a developmental stage where babies and young children put objects in their mouths to learn about their texture, taste, temperature, and other properties. It's an essential part of their sensory development and helps babies and young children understand the world around them.
Proprioception	Propriodderbyniaeth	Proprioception is the sense of body awareness and spatial orientation that allows us to perceive and control our body movements. For babies and young children proprioception plays a critical role in motor development and sensory integration, helping children improve their balance, co-ordination, and overall body control.
Object permanence	Sefydlogrwydd gwrthrych	Describes a baby or young child's ability to know that objects continue to exist even though they can no longer be seen or heard. For example, the game "peek-a-boo" is an example of this
Accountability measure	Mesur atebolrwydd	Tools used for collating data for local authority reporting purposes that record if children are making progress and whether settings are meeting expected standards.

English	Welsh	Definition
Linear	Llinellol	Progressing in a straight, predictable and orderly line, where each stage follows neatly and sequentially after the previous one. (Babies and young children's growth, learning and development can be uneven – with spurts, pauses, regressions and leaps. Babies and young children may develop different skills at different times or in different orders.)
Attend and Respond	Sylw ac ymateb	<p>Refers to a two-part process that is the foundation of two-way communication. 'Attend' means the baby or young child noticing or paying attention to something or someone. E.g. Turning their head or eyes toward a voice or sound, looking at a person's face when they speak, watching an object, showing interest in another child's actions or a story being read aloud.</p> <p>'Respond' means the baby or young child reacts or communicates back in some way. E.g. Making eye contact, smiling, babbling, or making sounds, using gestures, such as pointing or waving, using words or short phrases to reply, imitating what someone else says or does.</p>
Tune into	Tiwnio i mewn	To pay close attention to and be aware of what babies and young children are feeling, needing or showing through their behaviour and communication. Noticing subtle cues like facial expressions, gestures or tone of voice and responding appropriately.
Transitions – both big and small	Pontio – mawr a bach	<p>Refers to any changes in a baby's or young child's life or routine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• big transitions might include starting at a new setting, moving rooms or settings, or a new sibling being born</li> <li>• small transitions could be daily changes like moving from play to mealtimes, waking from sleep or settling in after a weekend at home.</li> </ul>
Equity	Tegwch	Making sure every child is treated fairly and has access to opportunities, support, and resources that are tailored to their individual needs.



English	Welsh	Definition
Cynefin	Cynefin	The place where we feel we belong, where the people and landscape around us are familiar, and the sights and sounds are reassuringly recognisable. Cynefin is community, culture, heritage and identity. It is a holistic concept that encompasses the physical, social, cultural, spiritual and economic dimensions of a place.
Schema	Sgemâu	Patterns of repetitive behaviours that can be seen in children's play.
Aha/Wow Moment	Achlysur Aha/Wow	A spontaneous and observable instance in which a child demonstrates a new understanding, insight, skill, or emotional expression. These moments may include sudden realisations ("aha") or notable displays of creativity, achievement, or personal growth ("wow"). They are key indicators of cognitive, emotional, or developmental progress and highlight individual strengths and meaningful learning experiences.
Risky Play	Chwarae llawn risg	Risky play refers to exciting and challenging physical activities that allow young children to explore their limits, test their abilities, and learn how to manage risk in a safe and supportive environment. It's not about putting children in danger, but rather giving them opportunities to develop important skills like confidence, resilience, and problem-solving.
Symbols	Symbolau	A baby or young child beginning to notice and respond to shapes, patterns, or images that have a meaning within their play – such as pairing a picture of an animal with a toy of that animal, or recognising that certain shapes match.
Objects of reference	Gwrthrychau cylch gorchwyl	The use of 'objects' as a means of communication. Objects can be used alongside words. For example; a book for story time, goggles for swimming, stethoscope for doctor.