

# **Attendance Guidance**

for the Early Years Foundation Stage

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## Purpose

Good attendance in the early years is crucial for children's social, emotional, and educational development. While attendance at early years settings is not statutory until the term after a child turns five, regular participation supports school readiness, builds routines, and fosters positive attitudes to learning.

At the very least, good attendance promotes better outcomes for children. In a small number of cases, good attendance may also lead to early identification of more serious concerns for a child or their family. Attendance may also play a vital part in keeping a child or other family members safe from harm.

This guidance outlines the expectations and responsibilities for early years providers, parents, and the local authority in promoting regular attendance across all funded early education and childcare places by:

- Promoting the importance of regular attendance in early years.
- Ensuring consistent practices across all early years providers.
- Identifying and responding to attendance concerns early.
- Working in partnership with families to remove barriers to attendance.
- To improve outcomes for children through increased access to high-quality early education. Ensure that children and families are supported effectively and undertake Early Help assessments or referrals into the Integrated Front Door (IFD) as necessary.

This guidance applies to all early years providers funded by the local authority, including:

- Maintained nursery schools and nursery classes
- Private, voluntary and independent (PVI) nurseries
- Childminders offering funded early education
- Pre-schools and playgroups

It covers all children accessing funded early education places:

- 30 hours 9-months to 4-years (working parents)
- Universal 15 hours 3- and 4-year-olds
- 15 hours 2-year-olds (families receiving additional support)

It is important that leaders do not mix up “statutory school age” (when a child must start school) with “statutory funding entitlement.” The “statutory” entitlement that parents are legally entitled to applies well before statutory school age.

## **Why good attendance is important**

Even for very young children, there are positive benefits to be gained from regular attendance, whatever the weekly pattern of childcare. This includes not only coming to every planned session but also being there on time. It is important that all staff understand the principles of good attendance practice and the importance of good attendance by children.

### **Consistency helps children feel safe**

- Young children thrive on routine and structure. Good habits in young children ensure that getting up and going to an Early Education provider is simply what you do.
- Children who attend every planned session develop a feel for the rhythm of the week and gain a sense of security from some regular elements, even when the actual pattern or focus of their learning or activity may vary widely from week to week.
- Going regularly means children know what to expect each day (e.g., story time, play time, snack time). Predictable routines reduce uncertainty and help children feel secure.
- If attendance is irregular, children may feel unsettled because they're not sure what to expect. Regular attendance builds familiarity, which lowers anxiety and supports emotional security. Feeling secure encourages children to explore, try new activities, and interact with others, knowing a trusted adult and familiar environment will support them if needed.

### **Supports social skills**

- Children build and sustain relationships with peers and adults when they regularly attend their childcare setting.
- Being around the same peers and adults on a regular basis gives children repeated opportunities to practice social behaviours such as sharing, taking turns, and cooperating. This consistency helps them feel more secure and confident in their interactions.
- Regular attendance allows children to form friendships and bonds with peers and educators. Over time, they learn how to initiate play, resolve conflicts, and understand others' feelings, key aspects of social development.
- Frequent attendance means children have more chances to practice language and communication with others. They develop skills like asking questions, expressing needs, and responding to others.

### **Builds independence and confidence**

- Consistent attendance allows children to settle and feel part of the setting. Children who rarely miss sessions at a setting and arrive on time are more likely to feel good about themselves.

- Children who regularly miss sessions or are generally late, can frequently experience a sense of having to try a little bit harder just to understand what is going on and what other children are talking about or doing.
- Being part of a group regularly builds children's self-confidence. They become more comfortable navigating social situations independently, without always relying on adults.
- Children often meet peers from different backgrounds. Regular attendance broadens their understanding of different perspectives, teaching empathy and respect.

## **Promotes learning and development**

- Regular attendance gives children the time, consistency, and support they need to develop skills across all areas: cognitive; physical; social and emotional, laying strong foundations for lifelong learning.
- Attending regularly means children don't miss key experiences, activities, and teaching moments. Skills build up gradually (like language, early maths, or motor skills), so consistency helps reinforce and extend their learning.
- Young children learn best through repetition. Regular attendance allows them to revisit activities and concepts, strengthening memory and understanding over time.
- Early years settings are designed to stimulate curiosity with resources and activities tailored to all areas of development, physical; cognitive; social and emotional. Frequent attendance ensures children benefit fully from these opportunities.
- Educators can better track children's progress if they attend regularly. This allows practitioners to plan next steps, provide targeted support, and identify additional needs early.
- Predictable routines help children develop self-regulation, concentration, and independence, all important foundations for future learning.
- Regular attendance increases children's sense of security and belonging, making them more confident to try new things, engage in play, and persist with challenges.

For all these reasons, good attendance and coming to a setting on time is important for every child, but especially those for whom specific factors make them more vulnerable to disengagement or underachievement. Most children are well supported by their families and continue to thrive, whatever their background or circumstances, however, there may be factors in children's lives which make it more likely that they could experience some difficulties. So, it is particularly important to pay close attention to the patterns of attendance for potentially vulnerable groups of children, including, for example:

- Children facing difficult family circumstances e.g., housing problems, bereavement, separation / divorce
- Children from families experiencing some degree of financial hardship, e.g., in receipt of benefits or EYPP
- Children with additional needs, learning difficulties or disabilities
- Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) or from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) families;

- Children about whom other agencies have raised concerns, including those supported through Early Help. If any child's attendance starts to cause concern, it should be discussed with any other staff who work with any of the child's siblings who attend the setting and with the manager. This helps establish whether there are issues only for an individual child or if the family may be going through a difficult time.

## **Expected attendance**

We expect all children to attend regularly and arrive on time for their scheduled sessions. While we understand that children can become unwell, attendance should be as consistent as possible.

**Good attendance is considered to be 95% or above.**

## Promoting, recording, and monitoring attendance

Keeping accurate attendance records is not just bureaucracy. Monitoring attendance is important for all children, but especially for those who are most vulnerable. When a child starts at the setting, parents and carers should be informed about the importance of regular attendance, with explanation of how the setting will monitor attendance and what steps they will take if there are attendance concerns.

- Providers should take a daily register and record reasons for absence. Having clear accessible attendance records helps identify children at risk and helps multiagency teams to understand, assess, and support the widest possible range of needs for a child and his or her whole family.
- To ensure that attendance records support the work of safeguarding young children and promote their learning and development, it is important for senior managers and staff at all levels to pay attention to the following:
  - Keep full registration details for every child, as specified in the EYFS or childcare provider attendance legislation.
  - Keep accurate information about parents, carers, and others who may accompany the child to and from the setting.
  - Have at least 2 emergency contacts.
  - Make clear and accurate entries, whether you are using manual or electronic registers.
  - Consistently and thoroughly investigate all absences for individual children and their siblings and keep good records of the family's explanations.
  - Put in place some routine monitoring of attendance by committees, area leads or the owner.
  - Put in place systematic and rigorous monitoring of the registers by senior leaders who are personally involved in ensuring accurate recording, identifying, and addressing attendance issues and engaging parents.
  - Being rigorous in monitoring attendance and in identifying and analysing patterns of absence (often called 'broken weeks') and the number of sessions missed.
  - Being rigorous and persistent in seeking and recording explanations for absence, however sensitively this is done.
  - Develop good relationships with the family, making sure that appropriate means of communication to meet family needs are always used.
- Attendance should be reviewed termly, with a focus on:
  - Children with <90% attendance.
  - Children eligible for 2-year-old funding.
  - Children identified as vulnerable (e.g., SEND, CIN, CP plans).
- Persistent absence (defined as <90% attendance) should be addressed via:
  - Initial conversation with parents.
  - Action plan for support if needed.
  - Referral to the local authority where there are safeguarding concerns or persistent barriers.

# How to improve attendance

## Your setting

- **Build strong relationships** – Ensure children feel welcomed, valued, and safe every day. Greet families warmly at drop-off.
- **Positive communication** – Send friendly reminders about the importance of attendance through newsletters, posters, and parent meetings.
- **Celebrate good attendance** – Use stickers, certificates, or praise in class for children with good or improved attendance.
- **Make setting engaging** – Create exciting daily routines (e.g. morning songs, “special helper” roles) so children look forward to coming in.
- **Track and monitor** – Identify patterns of absence early and work with families before they become persistent.
- **Flexible support** – Offer a gradual start, extra settling-in sessions, or key person support for children struggling with separation.

## Engaging with parents

- **Clear expectations** – Share simple guidance on what “good attendance” looks like (e.g. 96%+).
- **Parent workshops** – Run sessions on building routines at home, sleep, healthy breakfasts, and the impact of attendance.
- **Support conversations** – When absence is frequent, hold a sensitive, solution-focused discussion with parents to understand challenges.
- **Practical help** – Signpost families to Family Hub support or health services if needed.
- **Celebrate improvements** – Thank parents when attendance improves, no matter how small the step.

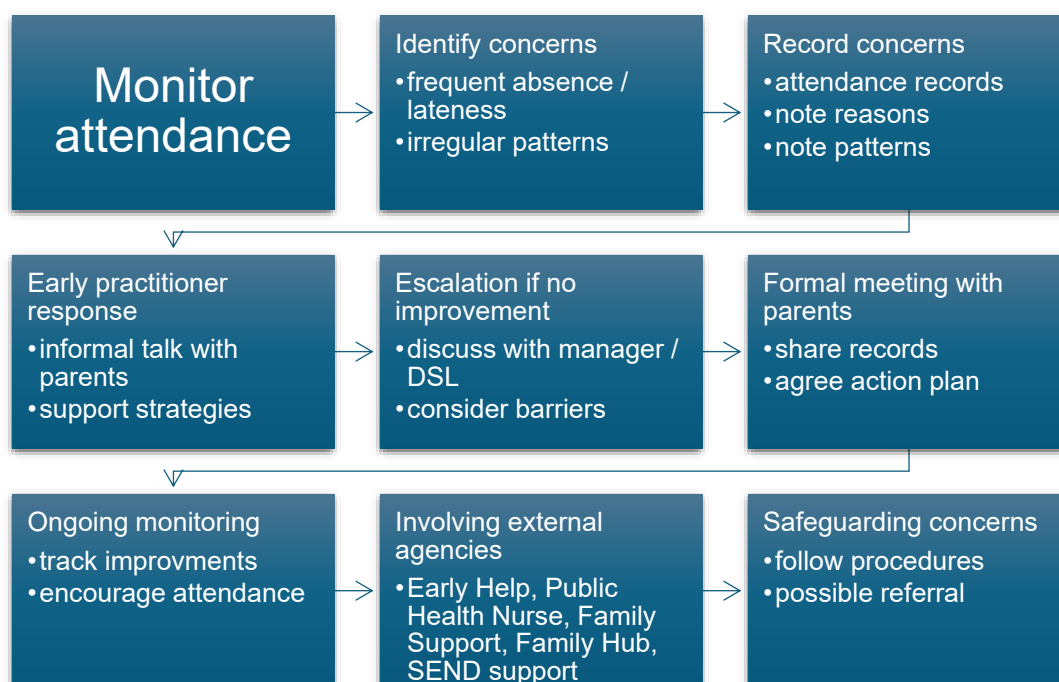
## Child-focused approaches

- **Reward effort** – Small rewards like “star of the day” for regular attendance. Systems should be employed which do not disadvantage children who need to access health services.
- **Friendship focus** – Encourage peer connections so children want to come and play with friends.
- **Safe routines** – Use consistent, predictable activities (e.g. morning storytime) that children don’t want to miss.
- **Personal connection** – Key workers or teachers can give a special welcome to children who have been absent.



## Taking action for children with attendance concerns

This flow chart demonstrates the graduated approach practitioners should take when addressing attendance concerns in early years settings. It begins with monitoring and recording attendance, followed by early conversations with parents to provide support. If concerns persist, practitioners escalate the issue through formal meetings and may involve external agencies. Where safeguarding issues are identified, the setting must follow child protection procedures and make referrals as appropriate.



## Children presenting with health conditions causing repeated or long-term absence

Some children will have medical needs which cause absence, these should be treated sensitively on a case-by-case basis; all efforts should be made to stay in touch with the family. Keep the child in mind in their key group.

## Reporting long term absence

If children in receipt of early years funding (working families, funded 2 year olds or universal 3 and 4 year old places) are going to be absent from the setting, for periods longer than two weeks (e.g. due to illness or extended holidays), providers should notify **Early Years Finance**: [earlyyearsfinance@bolton.gov.uk](mailto:earlyyearsfinance@bolton.gov.uk) who will advise if the child can be kept on the headcount to hold the place open at the setting.

In addition, if children are in receipt of SEN Early Years Inclusion Fund (SENIF), you should notify **Start Well Send Service**: [startwellsend@bolton.gov.uk](mailto:startwellsend@bolton.gov.uk).

## APPENDIX 1

Download a copy of the A4 sheet below to print and share with families: [How you can help your child attend their early years setting](#).

# How you can help your child attend their early years setting

## Why attendance matters

Regular attendance helps your child to:

- Build **strong routines** and feel secure.
- Make **friends** and develop important social skills.
- Take part in valuable **early learning** experiences to ensure they don't miss out on important early learning.



### Set routines

Regular bedtimes and wake-up times.



### Eat well

Give your child a healthy breakfast each day.



### Be prepared

Get clothes, bags and lunch ready the night before.



### Keep in touch

Let staff know if your child is unwell, worried, or unable to attend. You must contact staff if your child will not be attending.



### Stay positive

Talk about nursery positively and celebrate your child's efforts.



### Share information

Please tell us about any changes at home that might affect attendance.



### Plan

Book holidays and make appointments outside setting hours whenever possible.

## Remember

Children learn best when they come into setting **every day, on time**.

By working together, we can give your child the **best possible start in life**.

## APPENDIX 2

### EYFS Attendance Improvement Action Plan

| Strategy / Idea            | Responsible Person      | Actions / Steps  | Review Date | Notes   |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|--|-------------|---|
| Build strong relationships | EYFS staff              | Greet children and parents warmly each day; assign key person for each child | Monthly     | Track children who may need extra support           |
| Positive communication     | EYFS Lead / Admin       | Send newsletters, emails, and posters emphasizing attendance importance      | Monthly     | Include tips for parents on routines and attendance |
| Celebrate good attendance  | EYFS staff              | Certificates, stickers, praise in class for good attendance                  | Weekly      | Record attendance to track improvements             |
| Make nursery engaging      | EYFS staff              | Morning songs, special helper roles, fun learning activities                 | Weekly      | Survey children on favourite activities             |
| Track and monitor          | EYFS Lead / Admin       | Review attendance records; identify patterns of absence                      | Monthly     | Contact parents early if absence is frequent        |
| Flexible support           | EYFS staff / SENCo      | Offer gradual starts, extra settling-in sessions, key person support         | As needed   | Document support provided for each child            |
| Parent workshops           | EYFS Lead               | Run sessions on routines, healthy breakfasts, sleep, and attendance          | Termly      | Provide resources for families unable to attend     |
| Support conversations      | EYFS Lead / Staff       | Sensitive meetings with parents for frequent absences                        | As needed   | Focus on solutions and understanding challenges     |
| Practical help             | EYFS Lead / Admin       | Signpost transport, childcare, or health support                             | As needed   | Maintain list of local services                     |
| Reward effort              | EYFS staff              | Star of the day, stickers, verbal praise for attendance improvements         | Weekly      | Track participation and improvements                |
| Friendship focus           | EYFS staff              | Encourage buddy systems, group play, collaborative learning                  | Daily       | Monitor social engagement of children               |
| Safe routines              | EYFS staff              | Consistent daily routines such as storytime and circle time                  | Daily       | Ensure routines are communicated to parents         |
| Personal connection        | Key Person / EYFS staff | Special welcome for children returning after absence                         | Daily       | Record successful strategies                        |