



Department
for Education

Progress check at age two

Non-statutory guidance
for the early years
foundation stage



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1

Introduction

What is the purpose of the check?

The progress check at age two has three main purposes

1. **Partnership with parents.**¹ While practitioners and other professionals can support children's development and wellbeing individually, they can achieve so much more by working together.
2. **Action for every child.** Writing down observations and sharing reports do not help children. Practitioners need to listen to the child, talk with each other and then plan together. Working together can make a difference.
3. **Early identification.** Some children need extra help for a while as they grow and develop – for example, with their communication. Other children may have long-term developmental needs. Some families may struggle and need support. Whatever the circumstances, sensitive early intervention can make a big difference. Children develop rapidly between the ages of two and three – practitioners need to be quick to support and identify help where it is needed.

About this guidance

This guidance will help early years practitioners to make an accurate assessment of children's development, health and wellbeing. This involves working closely with parents and other professionals involved in the child's life. After completing the progress check at age two, parents and practitioners can take appropriate actions in the best interests of the child.

It will also reduce unnecessary workload. Practitioners do not need to spend a long time away from the children to complete the check. The example format (Appendix 1) shows one way to complete the check without an excessive number of examples or 'tracking data'.

¹ 'Parent' is used throughout the document to refer to parents, carers and guardians.

This non-statutory guidance is for early years practitioners working with children aged between two and three, including:

- registered childminders
- practitioners in early years settings
- practitioners in nursery schools and nursery classes

As practitioners, the guidance can help us to:

- celebrate a child's development and progress – the focus is on the three prime areas of learning and development in the early years foundation stage (EYFS), but we might also comment on how the child learns and on the specific areas of learning and development in the EYFS
- identify any additional development needs and put in place appropriate support and intervention
- work with the child's parents and other professionals, such as speech and language therapists, physiotherapists and health visitors, to support the child's wellbeing and development.

The guidance informs, supports and offers suggestions.
It does not replace the professional judgement of practitioners.



Background and evidence

Research tells us that early development is not pre-programmed. The early years are critical to providing the foundations for future physical and mental health. Children who access high-quality early years provision are less likely to be identified with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the long run.²

Our work as early years practitioners is very important. The choices we make for young children are hugely significant.

Knowledge of the importance of the early years is low in our society. For example, only three in ten parents recognise that the first five years are the most important for health and happiness in adulthood. The scientific evidence tells us that the period from birth to two years old is the fastest for brain development. However, one in three parents is unaware of this.³

‘What to expect in the early years foundation stage: a guide for parents’ can support practitioners to help parents find out more about their child’s learning and development in the EYFS.

The progress check at age two provides a key opportunity for early years practitioners. We can use it to explain the critical importance of early development to parents. The large majority of parents want to find out more about how children develop. They want to know what they can do to support their child’s development and wellbeing. They are very likely to be receptive to this discussion.

It is important that the progress check is completed and discussed with care and sensitivity. Practitioners need to be mindful that some parents feel ‘judged’ by others. Research conducted by the Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood found that as a consequence of feeling judged, almost half of parents report an emotional toll. 15% say that the fear of feeling judged makes it difficult to ask for help and support for their child if needed. Supporting children includes supporting their parents.⁴

² British Educational Research Journal (2013): The influence of child, family, home factors and pre-school education on the identification of special educational needs at age 10

³ Ipsos Mori (2020): **State of the nation: Understanding public attitudes to the early years**

⁴ Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood (2021): **Big change starts small**

The evidence tells us that the early home learning environment is an important factor in children's success at school and in life:

- The home learning environment is an important factor in the development of early speech, language and communication. The child's experiences in the home learning environment not only have an impact on their development during this phase, but explain differences in children's outcomes at GCSE and A level. The benefits of early speech, language and communication flow into adulthood. Good communication enables children and adults to talk about their feelings and manage their emotions.
- The home learning environment is related to children's social and emotional development in the early years. The benefits of a stimulating environment can continue until age 16.
- The quality of the home learning environment is as important to intellectual and cognitive development as parental factors, such as occupation and education. This suggests that what parents do with their child is just as important as who they are.⁵

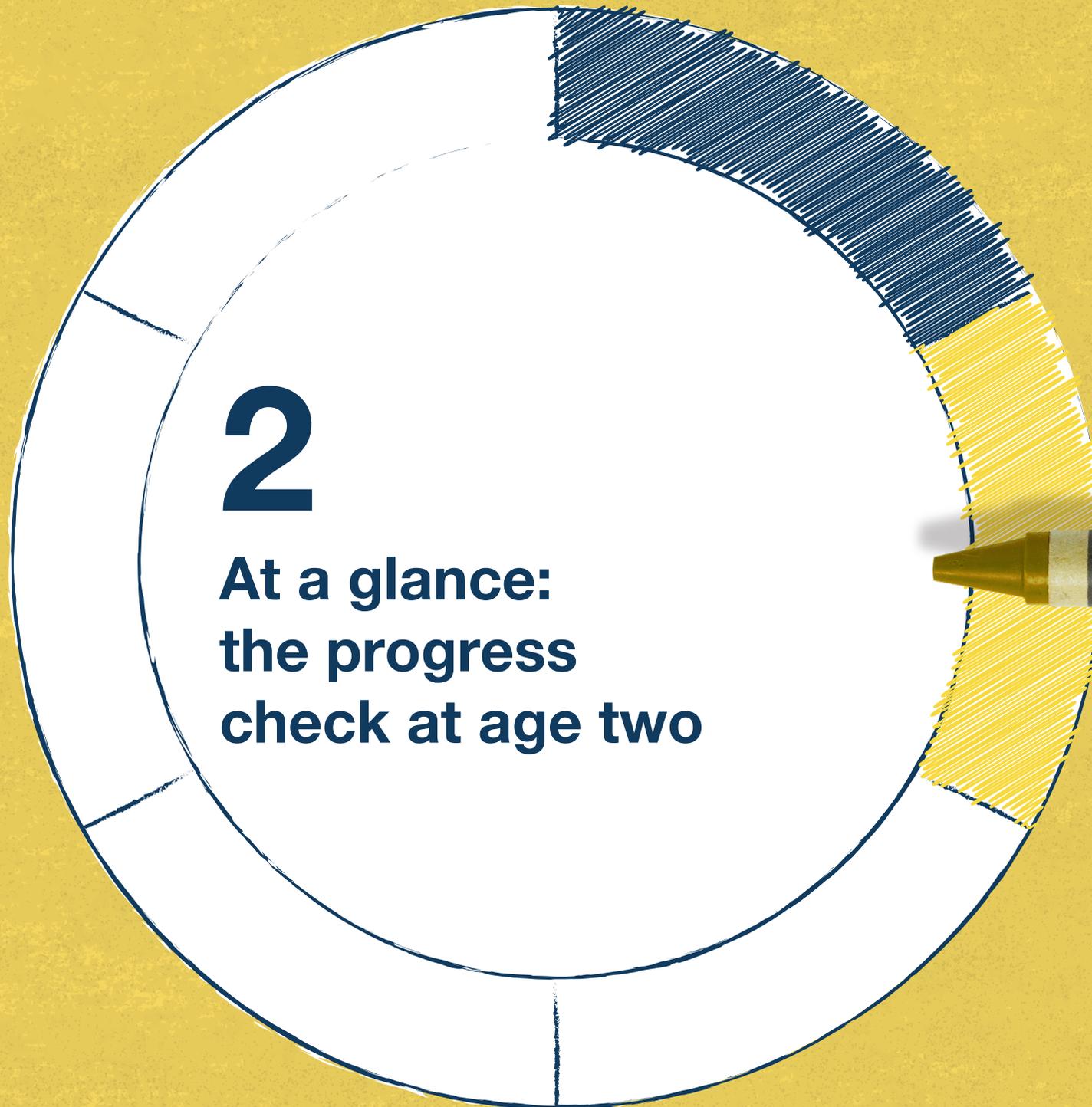
As practitioners in the early years, we are well-placed to help parents understand their child's needs. We can support parents to enhance their child's wellbeing and development at home. This can have lifelong benefits.

Appendix 2 is an example letter template which explains the progress check at age two to parents.

Appendix 3 is an example of an infographic which sets out key research and explains how parents can further support their child's development.



⁵ GOV.UK (2018): **Improving the home learning environment: A behaviour change approach**



**At a glance:
the progress
check at age two**

The progress check at age two aims to:

- review a child's development
- celebrate areas where the child is making good progress
- identify any areas of concern or where progress is not as expected, so that parents, practitioners and other professionals such as speech and language therapists, physiotherapists or dieticians can put appropriate support in place
- help parents to understand their child's needs and enhance their child's development at home
- invite parents to share their unique knowledge about their child, family and culture

Both the setting and the family benefit from sharing information and resources. As practitioners, we can deepen our understanding of children's lives, families and communities and use this understanding to celebrate diversity through the resources and play activities we offer.

The child's key person, who usually knows the child best, should take the lead in completing the progress check at age two, which will be informed by:

- professional judgement and careful observation
- the voice of the child
- the views of the child's parents – parents are experts on their own child
- views of any other professionals such as GPs or health visitors, if appropriate

All children have the right to be listened to and valued in the setting. With the right support, children can identify what they have enjoyed or found difficult and assess their own progress. Very young children, including children with SEND, may tell us what they are thinking and feeling through words, or they might use gestures, actions and body language.⁶



⁶ For practical guidance, refer to [Listening to young disabled children](#) from the National Children's Bureau's Young Children's Voices Network.

The statutory requirements of the progress check at age two

This section explains what we **must** do as early years practitioners. These actions are legally required and are set out in the statutory framework for the EYFS. In addition, there are actions which we **should** take. These actions are not legally required but we need to be mindful of what we **should** do. We should only take another course of action if there is good reason for doing so.

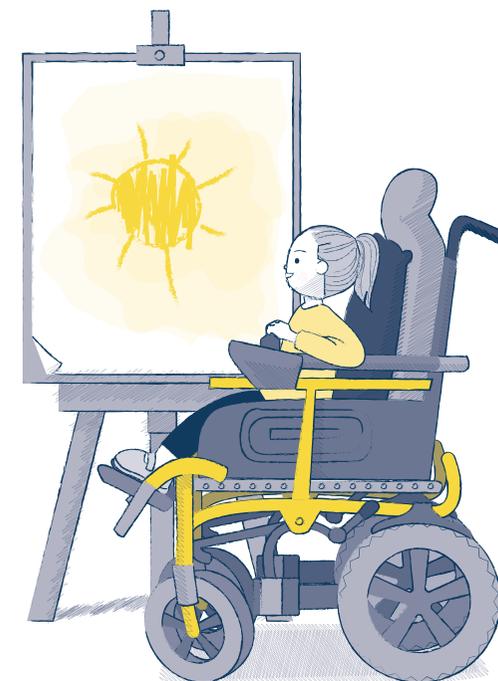
Practitioners **must** provide parents with a short, written summary of their child's development in the prime areas of learning:

- communication and language
- personal, social and emotional development
- physical development

Practitioners **must**:

- discuss with parents how the summary can be used to support learning and development at home
- describe the activities and strategies they intend to adopt in their setting to address any issues or concerns

Beyond these points, it is for practitioners to decide what the written summary document could include.



The statutory requirements

Practitioners and providers must:

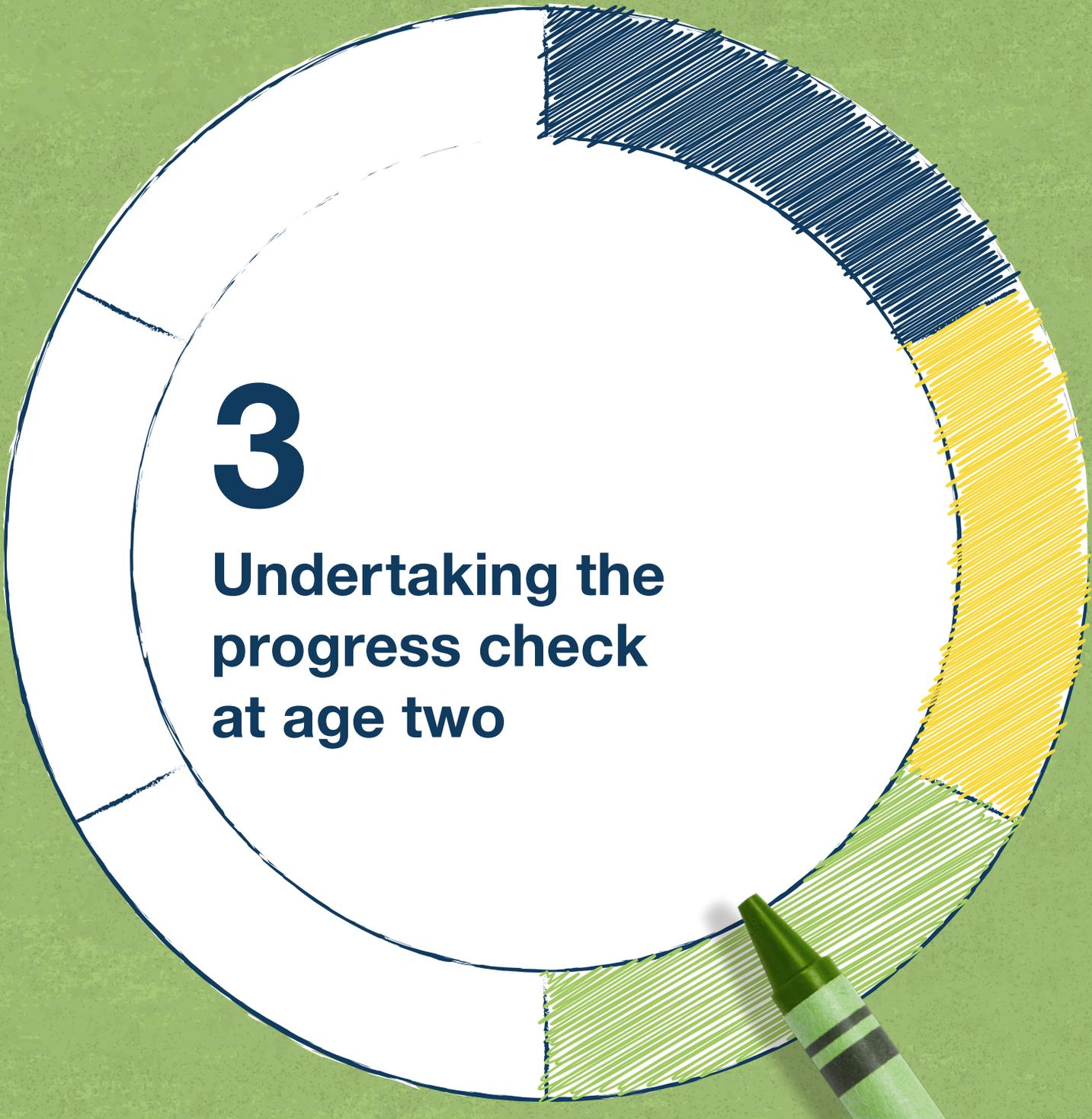
- review the child's progress, and provide parents and/or carers with a short written summary of their child's development in the prime areas
- identify the child's strengths, and any areas where the child's progress is less than expected – if there are significant emerging concerns (or identified SEND), practitioners should develop a targeted plan to support the child, involving other professionals such as the setting's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) or the area SENCO, as appropriate.

The summary must highlight areas where:

- good progress is being made
 - some additional support might be needed
 - there is a concern that a child may have a developmental delay (which may indicate SEND)
- describe the activities and strategies they intend to adopt to address any issues or concerns
 - have the consent of parents to share information directly with other relevant professionals

Practitioners and providers should:

- review progress in the setting where the child has spent the most time
- encourage parents to share information acquired during the progress check with other relevant professionals, including their health visitor and the practitioners of any new provision that the child may transfer to
- inform and support integrated working wherever possible, through the progress check and the Healthy Child Programme health and development review at age two (when health visitors gather information on a child's health and development) – this will allow health and education professionals to identify strengths and any developmental delays, as well as particular support that they or the child might benefit from



3

**Undertaking the
progress check
at age two**

The time between a child's second and third birthday is important for children and their parents. It is a period of rapid growth, learning and development in a young child's life, but also a time when the child or their family's need for additional support can become clearer. This support might come from the NHS or the education system, or from other organisations such as community or faith-based groups and voluntary sector organisations. Additional support can make a difference to a child's future learning, development and wellbeing.

Preparing to undertake the progress check at age two

It is important to set aside enough time to focus on the individual child and prepare for the process of writing the progress check. It is helpful to:

- speak to the parents of each child and provide them with any information about the progress check at age two in your setting – invite their contributions, seek any views on their child's development before the check, and consider how the child's voice will be engaged in the process
- review the documentation that you will be completing, thinking about the child – consider using the example format included in this guide, or another format that your setting or local authority has developed
- draft some comments or draw some initial conclusions, which may need adapting in the light of the discussion you have with the parents – a brief, accurate overview is best, so there is no need to include lots of examples or other written information
- have some prompts and questions ready, to help build a mutual understanding about the child's play and learning at home
- seek support from the setting manager or other professionals, as appropriate

The progress check at age two must be undertaken between the child's second and third birthday. Consider the following factors when determining the timings of the progress check.

- **When the child started in the setting:** Has there been enough time for the key person to build a relationship with the child? Do we know enough about the child and their interests?
- **Individual needs and circumstances:** Has the child experienced a period of ill health or another significant event (e.g. the arrival of a sibling, a bereavement or a family breakdown or transition)? In these cases, we might review whether the timing is appropriate and consider delaying the check.
- **Pattern of attendance:** If a child has a period of non-attendance or irregular attendance, you might delay the review. If a child only attends for a few hours each week, consider how much time to allow so that you know the child well enough before undertaking the check.

Some children attend more than one setting (e.g. a nursery and childminder). The setting where the child spends most of their time should complete the check. Consider how you can also include the views of the practitioners in the other setting(s).

The importance of effective communication with parents

Effective communication is crucial. It is how we establish and maintain positive partnerships with parents. It builds understanding and trust. It can take time, but it is time worth investing. Parents are experts on their own children. Practitioners, professionals and parents need to understand and trust each other. When we work in partnership, we get the best outcomes for every child. This is key to reducing inequality.

To develop a respectful partnership with parents, we need to understand families' diversity, choices and circumstances. It is important to:

- use ordinary, everyday language rather than professional jargon
- ask parents about their ethnic, religious and cultural identities, and avoid making assumptions
- work with interpreters if we speak a different language from the family we are working with
- give parents clear information and check that they can understand it
- use resources that reflect families from diverse backgrounds

Listening is key to effective communication. Listening carefully helps us to get in-depth information from parents about their child and their family. It shows parents that their experiences, ideas and opinions are valued, and that we take their concerns seriously. We should try to:

- show parents that we are listening, let them finish what they are saying before we speak, and then summarise what they have said to check that we have understood correctly
- check on the feeling as well as the content of what parents have said
- use open-ended questions to get more information, giving parents an opportunity to expand on what they are saying rather than just saying 'yes' or 'no'

Speaking to parents in a clear and considerate way helps us strengthen our partnership with them. We need to:

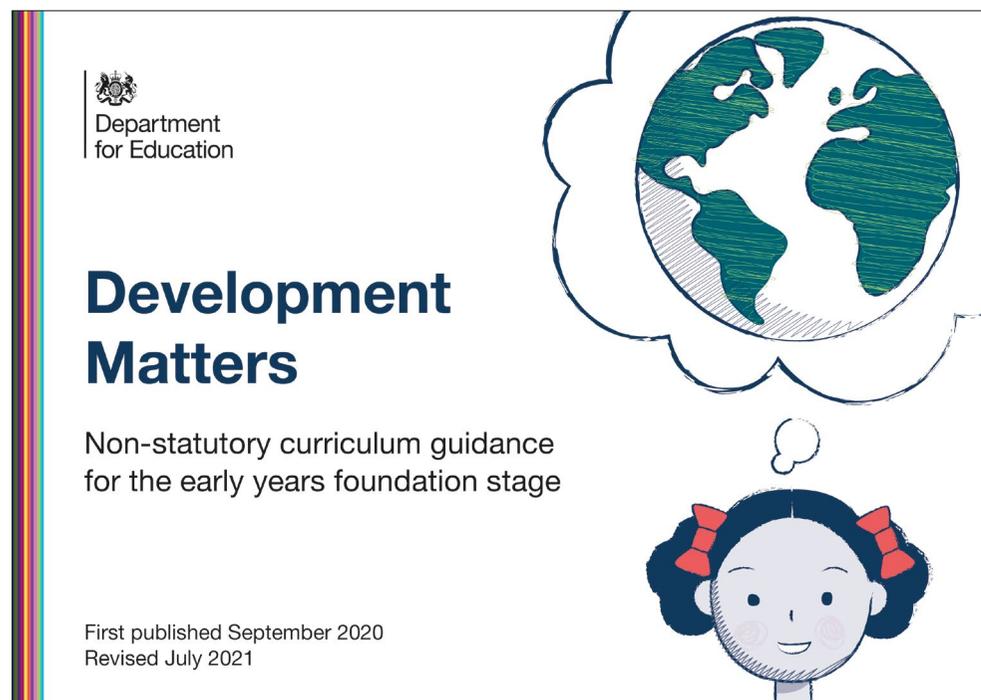
- find and share the positives about the child’s learning, behaviour and experiences – avoid any sense of judging a parent or making them feel they have failed to support their child
- be open and honest
- think before we speak, especially when we are talking with parents about difficult or sensitive issues
- ask for parents’ input
- let parents make informed decisions – we can suggest ideas and point to helpful suggestions in ‘**What to expect in the early years foundation stage: a guide for parents**’, but it is up to parents to decide what to do next.

Remember, when we’re not sure about what to say next or how to say it, we do not have to respond straight away. It is ok to say, “I’d like to think about that more. Can I get back to you tomorrow?”



Completing the progress check at age two

Each child is unique and develops and learns at different rates. The three prime areas of learning of the EYFS are the focus of the progress check. However, it is important to bear in mind that all seven areas of learning are important, both prime and specific. For example, when a parent and child share a book, it supports the child's communication and language, and their personal, social and emotional development. Singing and dancing supports both physical development and communication and language. The prime areas of learning underpin everything in the early years and are key to all future learning in school. Practitioners can find out more about how children develop and learn in '**Development Matters**'.



The following tables suggest prompts to help you to review and reflect on each child's development across the three prime areas of learning. They are intended as a guide. They do not replace your professional perceptions. You do not need to tick off the checkpoints or provide 'tracking data', written or photographic observations or evidence.

Communication and Language

EYFS statutory educational programme

The development of children’s spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. Children’s back-and-forth interactions from an early age form the foundations for language and cognitive development. The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is crucial. By commenting on what children are interested in or doing, and echoing back what they say with new vocabulary added, practitioners will build children’s language effectively. Reading frequently to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, will give children the opportunity to thrive. Through conversation, story-telling and role play, where children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher, and sensitive questioning that invites them to elaborate, children become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures.

Possible discussion prompts

“Does your child join in with play, sharing books or doing things around the house like helping you to load the washing machine?”

“This is how your child joins in and focuses on the same thing as an adult or another child... Is that similar to what you see at home?”

Checkpoints for guidance in Development Matters

By around two years old, is the child showing an interest in what other children are playing and sometimes joins in?

By around three years old, can the child shift from one task to another if you get their attention? Using the child’s name can help: “Jason, can you stop now? We’re tidying up.”

Possible discussion prompts	Checkpoints for guidance in Development Matters
<p>“Have you noticed your child is learning new words? Do they put those words together into short sentences? Can they understand and follow simple instructions?”</p> <p>“This is how your child talks in the setting with adults and other children... Does that sound like what you notice at home?”</p>	<p>Towards their second birthday, can the child use up to 50 words?</p> <p>Is the child beginning to put two or three words together, such as: “more milk”?</p> <p>Is the child frequently asking questions, such as the names of people and objects?</p> <p>Towards their third birthday, can the child use around 300 words? These words include descriptive language such as words for time (for example, ‘now’ and ‘later’), space (for example, ‘over there’) and function (for example, they can tell you a sponge is for washing).</p> <p>Is the child linking up to 5 words together?</p> <p>Is the child using pronouns (‘me’, ‘him’, ‘she’), and using plurals and prepositions (‘in’, ‘on’, ‘under’) – these may not always be used correctly to start with.</p> <p>Can the child follow instructions with three key words such as: “Can you wash dolly’s face?”</p>
<p>“What have you noticed about your child’s understanding of new words? Do people outside of the family generally understand what your child says, or do you have to explain?”</p> <p>“In the setting, your child generally understands ... Does that seem the same as their understanding at home?”</p>	<p>Around the age of two, can the child understand many more words than they can say (between 200 and 500 words)?</p> <p>Around the age of two, can the child understand simple questions and instructions such as: “Where’s your hat?” or “What is the boy in the picture doing?”</p> <p>Around the age of three, can the child show that they understand action words by pointing to the right picture in a book, such as: “Who’s jumping?”</p> <p>Note: Watch out for children whose speech is not easily understood by unfamiliar adults. Monitor their progress and consider whether a hearing test might be needed.</p>

Helping children to develop their communication

Research suggests that these are effective approaches:

- listening to children and having conversations with them ('talking with' and not just 'talking to' children)
- sharing books, especially with wordless picture books – use the book as a way of having a conversation: “What do you think is happening in the picture there?” or “Why do you think the boy is sad?”
- talking together while you play or do jobs around the house (getting food out of the fridge, sorting out washing, gardening or washing up)
- singing and saying rhymes together
- modelling a range of different types of words and phrases, rather than asking and ‘testing’ the child – for example, rather than asking “What are you doing?” or “What colour is that?”, try to model a useful phrase such as “You’re eating your dinner. It’s delicious” or “I love that blue hat”

Further information is available to help every young child to develop their communication. Refer to Public Health England’s **‘Best start in speech, language and communication’**. This includes the Early Language Identification Measure and Intervention tool for use with children aged two to two and a half.

English as an additional language

More than a quarter of children in early years settings are learning English as an additional language. It is important to note the following points.

- Bilingual and multilingual children may have a quiet phase at first, as they settle in and develop their confidence. Encouraging them to take part and become more confident is key.
- Children learn a language by speaking it. If a child is going through a long ‘silent phase’, find out from the parent if their home language is developing well. Check in case the child has a speech, language and communication delay.
- Practitioners and professionals should encourage families to use their home language. This is for linguistic as well as cultural reasons. Talk to parents about what language they speak at home, learn a few key words and celebrate multilingualism in your setting.

Personal, social and emotional development

EYFS statutory educational programme

Children’s personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is crucial for children to lead healthy and happy lives, and is fundamental to their cognitive development. Underpinning their personal development are the important attachments that shape their social world. Strong, warm and supportive relationships with adults enable children to learn how to understand their own feelings and those of others. Children should be supported to manage emotions, develop a positive sense of self, set themselves simple goals, have confidence in their own abilities, to persist and wait for what they want and direct attention as necessary. Through adult modelling and guidance, they will learn how to look after their bodies, including healthy eating, and manage personal needs independently. Through supported interaction with other children they learn how to make good friendships, co-operate and resolve conflicts peaceably. These attributes will provide a secure platform from which children can achieve at school and in later life.

Possible discussion prompts

“Have you noticed how your child wants to do things for themselves and make choices?”

“In the setting, your child can do these things independently... Is that similar to what you see with friends and family?”

Checkpoints for guidance in Development Matters

Around the age of two, does the child start to see themselves as a separate person? For example, do they decide what to play with, what to eat and what to wear?

Between the ages of two and three, does the child start to enjoy the company of other children and want to play with them?

Note: Watch out for children who get extremely upset by certain sounds, smells or tastes, and cannot be calmed. Also look out for children who seem worried, sad or angry for much of the time. You will need to work closely with parents and other agencies to find out more about these developmental difficulties.

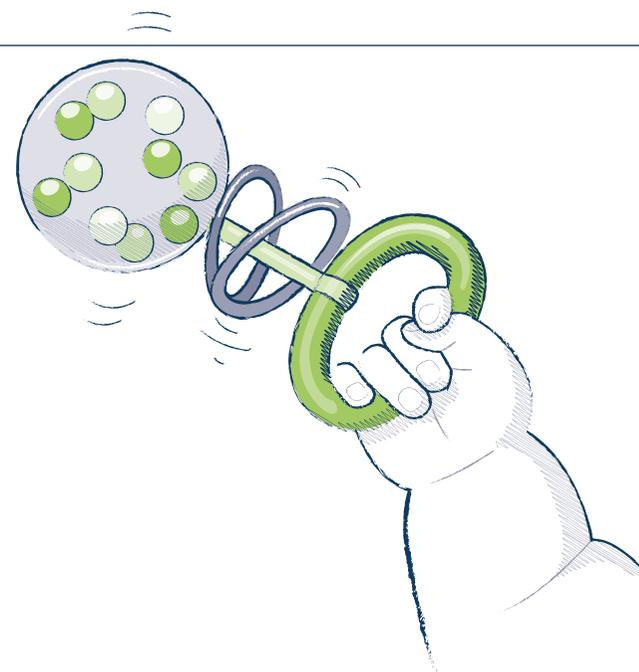
Possible discussion prompts	Checkpoints for guidance in Development Matters
<p>“What have you noticed about how your child settles into playing and doing things?”</p> <p>“In the setting, this is how your child is playing...”</p>	<p>Around the age of three, can the child sometimes manage to share or take turns with others, with adult guidance and understanding ‘yours’ and ‘mine’?</p> <p>Can the child settle into some activities for a while?</p> <p>Note: Watch out for children who seem worried, sad or angry for much of the time, children who seem to flit from one thing to the next, or children who seem to do the same thing for too long and become distressed if they are encouraged to do something different. You will need to work closely with parents and other agencies to find out more about these developmental difficulties.</p>
<p>“Can we talk about some important self-care and health issues?”</p>	<p>Note: Look out for children who appear to be overweight or to have poor dental health, where this has not been picked up and acted on at an earlier health check. Discuss this sensitively with parents and involve the child’s health visitor. Adapt activities to suit their particular needs, so all children feel confident to move and take part in physical play.</p>

Helping children with their personal, social and emotional development

Research suggests that these are effective approaches:

- responding to children in a steady and reliable way, with emotional warmth and sympathy
- encouraging children to communicate how they are feeling, which can be supported by modelling the correct language and labelling the emotion – for example, “I can see that you’re sad because you’re crying”
- using stories to explore how others might be feeling
- helping children to understand and co-operate with routines and rules
- encouraging children to manage ‘effortful control’ or patience, such as waiting for something they want or taking turns – if adults are too controlling, this may slow down the child’s development

Note: Some non-compliance is typical as two-year-olds develop their independence and autonomy. Tantrums, hitting and biting are also common: physical aggression in humans reaches its peak between the ages of two and three-years old. Young children want to express themselves, but they find it difficult. When they feel frustrated, they may express this as a tantrum. As we help children to talk more about how they are feeling, tantrums become less common. It is important for parents and practitioners to respond calmly and be clear and consistent. Children who are treated harshly are more likely to become aggressive.



Physical development

EYFS statutory educational programme

Physical activity is vital in children’s all-round development, enabling them to pursue happy, healthy and active lives. Gross and fine motor experiences develop incrementally throughout early childhood, starting with sensory explorations and the development of a child’s strength, coordination and positional awareness through tummy time, crawling and play movement with both objects and adults. By creating games and providing opportunities for play both indoors and outdoors, adults can support children to develop their core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, coordination and agility. Gross motor skills provide the foundation for developing healthy bodies and social and emotional well-being. Fine motor control and precision helps with hand-eye coordination which is later linked to early literacy. Repeated and varied opportunities to explore and play with small world activities, puzzles, arts and crafts and the practice of using small tools, with feedback and support from adults, allow children to develop proficiency, control and confidence.

Possible discussion prompts

“What sort of physical activities does your child like to do with family and friends?”

“In the setting, we’ve noticed...”

Checkpoints for guidance in Development Matters

Around their second birthday, can the child run well, kick a ball and jump with both feet off the ground at the same time?

Around their third birthday, can the child climb confidently, catch a large ball and pedal a tricycle?

Note: Look out for children who find it difficult to sit comfortably on chairs. They may need help to develop their core muscles. You can encourage them to scoot on sit-down trikes without pedals and jump on soft-play equipment.

Helping children with their physical development

Active children are healthy, happy, school ready and sleep better. Physical activity in the early years:

- builds relationships and social skills
- maintains health and weight
- contributes to brain development and learning
- improves sleep
- develops muscles and bones
- encourages movement and co-ordination

Research suggests that children aged two should spend at least 180 minutes (three hours) per day in a variety of physical activities at any intensity, including active and outdoor play, spread throughout the day – more is better

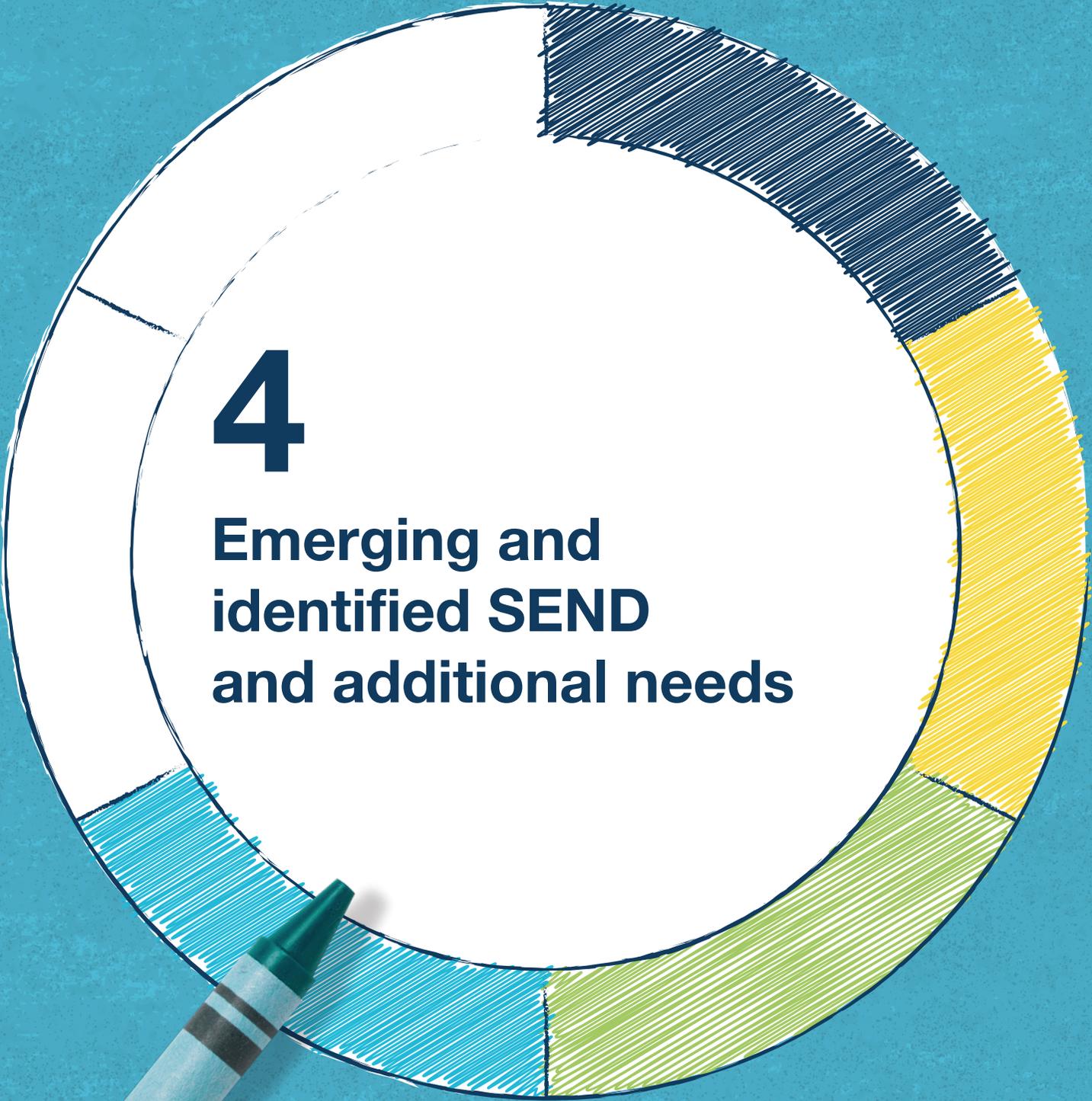
For more information, refer to the [UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidelines](#) for early years.

Once the progress check at age two is complete

- provide a copy for parents and add a copy to the child's learning and development record
- put in place any agreed actions to meet the child's needs within the setting or at home
- consider any support needed from other agencies – for example, speech and language therapy

A useful approach to action planning for the child is the SMART approach. This means that the targets are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. For example, you might work with a parent to help their two-year old progress onto drinking from a cup over a period of six weeks. This is a specific and realistic aim, if everyone works together and only offers the child drinks in a cup. It will also improve the child's dental health and help them with speech development.

It is crucial to ask parents for their informed consent before sharing any information. Informed consent means checking that the parent understands what information is being shared, why it is being shared, who it is being shared with, and what will happen to the information.



4

**Emerging and
identified SEND
and additional needs**

All children have common needs. They need high-quality, emotionally warm care and stimulating early education. Every child's development is unique. At any point in time, a child may appear to be more developed in some areas than in others. Periods of rapid development are sometimes followed by a period of slower development. The progress check at age two must identify and celebrate the child's strengths. It also provides an opportunity to explore any areas where the child's progress is slower than expected.

The **SEND code of practice** requires us to monitor and review the progress and development of every child. We need to be alert to:

- a delay in learning and development
- instances where a child may be displaying difficult or withdrawn behaviour

These may or may not indicate that a child has SEND. For example, some children may show a delay in their language because they have not yet experienced lots of interaction and conversation with adults and other children. Some children may not have certain physical skills yet, because they have never used a spoon or played with construction toys. These children need extra support with their development, but it is not reasonable to conclude that they have SEND.

Two groups of children can be identified:

- those who have a significant developmental delay (or in some instances, profound and multiple learning difficulties). They may need a specialist curriculum to plan for their progress. We might use a specialist framework to plan for and discuss their progress. Children in this group will need ongoing support throughout their education.
- those who present with a developmental delay when compared with their peer group. We might plan for their progress using Development Matters, ensuring that they take part in a broad curriculum. They are included in the mainstream curriculum but need extra support to make progress. They may need additional opportunities for practice and repetition. They may need to have learning broken down into smaller steps. Many children in this group will soon catch up with their peers. For example, with the right support, 70% of children with a speech, language or communication delay at two years old are in line with their peers by the time they are five.

You can find more detailed guidance in '**A celebratory approach to working with children with SEND – Giving additional support in the early years**'.

It is important that the progress check at age two assesses children with identified or emerging SEND in ways which:

- take account of the nature of how they progress – those with identified or emerging SEND can often make progress in different ways to the majority of other children
- do not adopt a deficit model and focus only on what the child cannot do
- acknowledge the challenges of a ‘spikey profile’ that some children will present with (for example, they may show strength in some areas of development, but not in others) – celebrating a child’s strengths is important, while also acknowledging the child’s difficulties
- celebrate the whole child, not just the small, identified steps linked to teaching skills or completing a task

Contextual information

If there are any concerns about a child’s development, consider any relevant contextual information:

- Were they born prematurely?
- Have they experienced transitions such as foster care or adoption?
- Have they experienced an adverse childhood experience?⁷
- Has there been a change in family circumstances? For example: the arrival of a new sibling, the death of a parent or grandparent, the breakdown of a relationship or the arrival of a new partner.

Where children have experienced difficulties in their early years, their development may reflect those circumstances. It is useful to consider what further support might help the child and their family. The difficulties the child is experiencing may be temporary or long-term. Either way, early intervention is crucial. Helping children come through difficult times can make them more resilient.



⁷ Adverse childhood experiences include: abuse, neglect and household adversity (parental substance misuse, mental ill health, incarceration or separation, living in care or the presence of domestic violence). The Institute of Health Equity (2014): **The impact of adverse experiences in the home on the health of children and young people, and inequalities in prevalence and effects**

SEND support in the early years beyond the progress check at age two

It is important for practitioners, professionals and parents to share knowledge and experience. Then we can work together to support children's wellbeing, learning and development. SEND support in the early years that has a problem-solving approach at its heart will help:

- identify the challenges or concerns
- think creatively about solutions
- jointly evaluate the pros and cons
- decide on which intervention to try
- put the intervention into action
- review the solution after an agreed period

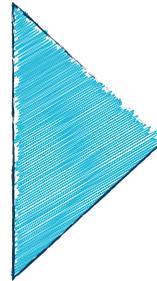
Testing out the intervention helps to judge whether it is an effective way to support the child. It can also help to clarify the nature of the child's needs. Interventions do not have to involve taking the child away from all the other children. For example, an intervention like a visual timetable can support a child to communicate.⁸ It can help them join in with play throughout their time in nursery.

This is the 'graduated approach', involving a four-stage cycle: assess, plan, do and review. This approach begins as soon as the setting identifies a child as needing additional support. It is not necessary to wait for the involvement of outside agencies. The SENCO in the setting oversees the cycle. Individual practitioners should not attempt to identify SEND on their own. Only professionals with specialist training should do this. Professionals working with local children's services teams, the NHS and voluntary sector organisations can help.

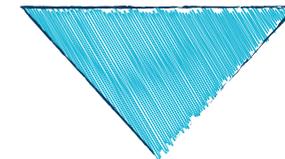


⁸ For more information, see [I CAN visual timelines factsheet](#).

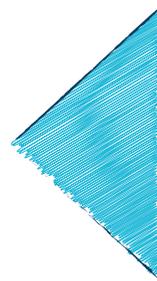
Assess: the key person, parent/s and SENCO work together to identify the child's needs as precisely as possible.



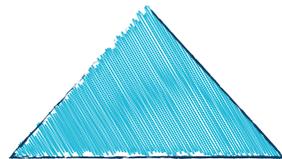
Plan: the setting and the parent/s work closely together to draw up a clear action plan. Everyone in the setting is made aware of the child's needs, the objectives of the plan, and the approaches that are required. Parents support the plan at home.



Do: additional support is provided during the child's session so they can access all the learning on offer (the curriculum). Any one-to-one or small-group support helps the child to gain the skills they need to join in with the curriculum.



Review: the setting and the parent/s meet together regularly. They update each other and review the impact of the additional support. The voice of the child is included in this review.



Communicating with parents whose children have emerging or identified SEND

Early years practitioners are important people in parents' lives. We are often the first people to suggest to parents that their child has a special educational need. How we do that is crucial. A parent, reflecting on being told their child had a disability, said:

“Every word is important because you are hanging onto everything they say, it sticks in your mind. They need to really plan their sentences and their words.”⁹

Parents' reactions vary enormously. It is hard to predict how they will respond to concerns about their child's development and progress.

- Prepare for conversations about difficult issues. Parents can feel really upset and stressed by these conversations. Think ahead about what needs to be said and the most sensitive and respectful way to say it.
- Where and when is important. Discussions of a sensitive nature with parents should always be conducted somewhere private. Try and make the discussion as comfortable as possible in a space where there will not be any interruptions. Make sure that there is water and a box of tissues to hand. Try to schedule a time when parents are most available. Suggest that the parents come together or have a friend or family member accompany them.
- Raising concerns about a child with their parents requires skill and experience. If the child's key person is a less experienced practitioner, they may need support. This could come from a more experienced colleague, a professional organisation or the local authority.

⁹ **Informing families of their child's disability: National best practice guidelines**

In the meeting, we should:

- be as open and as honest as possible and celebrate all the child's strengths
- listen to the parents first, and ask them how they feel about their child – this provides them with the opportunity to talk about any concerns that they have, which could help them feel empowered in the process
- use simple language and be as precise as possible with parents about exactly what our concerns are – try to have some examples that we have gathered over time to support what we are saying
- avoid speculating about particular conditions or disorders, diagnoses or labels – this adds to parents' worries and can cause unnecessary anguish if it turns out to not be the case, but do try to answer parents' questions as honestly as possible
- allow parents the time for the information to 'sink in' (give them time to reflect on their response and consider any questions, try not to rush the conversation and accept that there may be periods of silence) – parents will appreciate a conversation that gives them time and space, as they will not want to leave a meeting feeling that they have been bombarded with information

At the end of the meeting, we should:

- reiterate and celebrate the child's strengths
- give clear information about what we plan to do next and what, if anything, we would like parents to do – provide parents with the opportunity to add anything else about their child or ask you any further questions
- explain that consultation with specialists such as a paediatrician may be necessary
- reassure parents that there will be further opportunities to meet and talk – tell them how they can contact us if they have any further concerns or questions





5

**Integrated health
and education reviews**

At present, there are two checks of children's development between the ages of two and three:

- the EYFS progress check at age two
- the health and development two-year-old review

Since 2015, the government has encouraged local authorities, health visiting services and early years providers to work together on an integrated education and health two-year-old review process. This can give a more complete and accurate picture of the child by drawing together:

- parents' views and concerns about their child's progress
- the early years practitioner's detailed knowledge of how the child is learning and developing
- the health professional's expertise in the health and development of young children

Integrated reviews take a variety of formats. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. The separate parties may share information in a co-ordinated review. Or there may be a joint meeting between parents, health and education practitioners, and with the child present, in an integrated review. Whatever their format, they should support health and education professionals to identify:

- strengths
- any developmental delay
- any particular support or service from which they think the child/family might benefit

To be successful, there must be:

- clarity about how each child is reviewed, by whom and the follow-up support that is available
- understanding about how and when the impact of any support is evaluated, so that no children 'fall through the net'

The child's Personal Child Health Record (PCHR) is commonly referred to as the 'Red Book'. It is an effective tool to record and share information between all parties. It can help with the planning of referrals or interventions, when additional support is required.

An evaluation of integrated review practices identified the following benefits:¹⁰

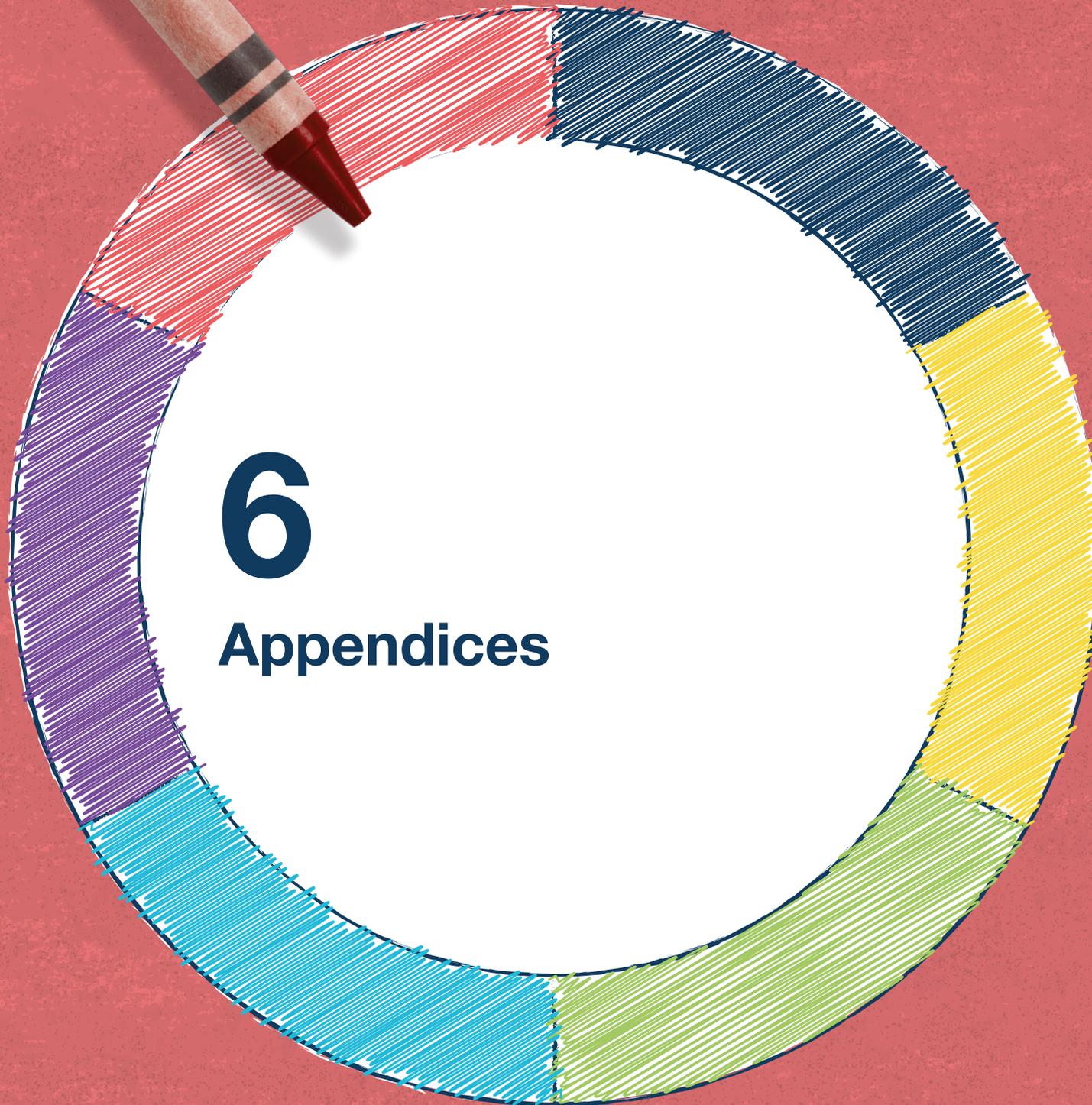
- earlier identification
- avoidance of duplication
- clear and consistent messaging to parents from both education and health professionals
- increased communication and better relationships between healthcare providers and early years practitioners
- saving professionals' time on duplicated work – this can allow more time for health visitors to offer targeted family support, reducing inequalities

As practitioners working in schools and settings, we should explore and develop ways of working with colleagues in the NHS.

Together, we can work to integrate the checks and offer timely support and intervention to families who need it most.



¹⁰ Local Government Association/City of York Council (2020): Implementation of integrated reviews for two-year-olds in England



6

Appendices

Appendix 1: Example format for the progress check at age two

Settings may choose to use this format, use an integrated format from their local authority or create their own.

The EYFS progress check at age two focuses on the three prime areas of learning:

- communication
- personal, social and emotional development
- physical development

My early years setting has lots of fun activities in these three prime areas of learning (their curriculum). Sometimes I play independently. Sometimes the adults sensitively get involved to develop my play and learning, or teach me something new.

Communication
How I am speaking and listening:
How the adults are helping me to develop my communication:
Personal, social and emotional development
How I am playing with other children, starting to share and take turns, and getting more independent:
How the adults are helping me when I am sad, angry or feeling shy:

Physical development

How I am using my large muscle and my small muscle skills:

How the adults are helping me to be physically active, like running and scooting, and develop my co-ordination, like kicking a ball or using a paint brush:

(If applicable)

My early years practitioner would like to talk about this checkpoint (from Development Matters) with you:

My early years practitioner would like to talk to you about giving me extra help:

My early years practitioner would like to bring in another professional to help me:

(If applicable)

I have the following special educational need or disability:

This is how my early years practitioner is helping me to take part in all the play and learning (the early years curriculum):

- Changes to the room or special equipment for me to use:

- Extra help or special programmes for me to take part in:

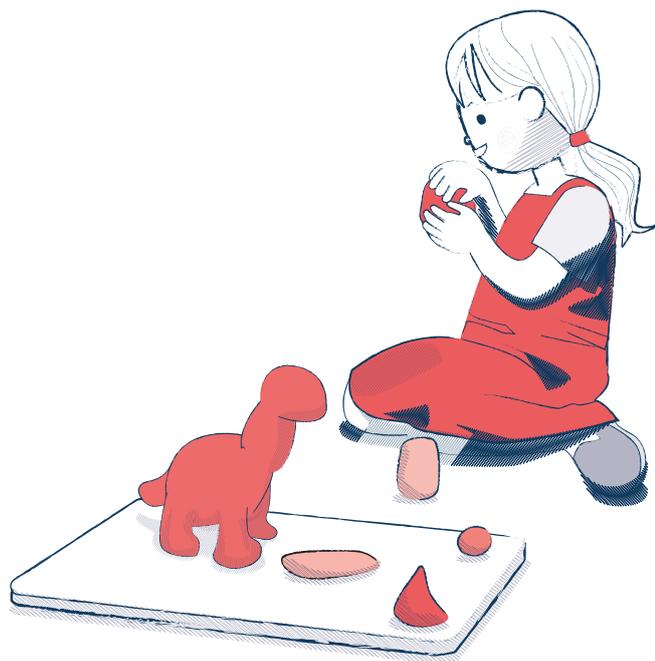
Comment from the child's parent or carer

Right now, it is important for me to:

This is how my early years practitioner is going to help me:

This is how my parent or carer is going to help me:

Review date



Health summary for parents to fill in

Is your child:		
Registered with a GP	Registered with a dentist	Under the care of any other health professional

Do you have any concerns about your child's:				
Walking	Talking	Hearing	Sight	Happiness

Would you like help with your child's:			
Eating and healthy weight	Toilet training	Hearing	Sight

Early help: stopping small issues from becoming big problems			
Would you like:			
Advice from your early years practitioner	Advice from your health visitor	Referral to your local Sure Start Children's Centre	Referral to your local Family Hub

Appendix 2: Example letter format

Dear parent or carer,

This letter is about your child's progress check at age two. This check is a requirement in the early years foundation stage and takes place between your child's second and third birthday.

This is not the same as the check that health visitors carry out. Sometimes both checks are carried out together. If they are done separately, please share the health check with your early years practitioner. That helps to create a rounded picture of your child's health and development.

Early development isn't pre-programmed: what parents and early years practitioners do makes a difference.

That is why your early years practitioner is going to meet with you to complete this check. Having a strong and respectful partnership is important. It sets the scene for your child to thrive in the early years. The check is carried out with you, not just for you.

The partnership includes listening to your views and giving you clear information about your child's progress.

The completed check will be shared with you. It will include your views. It will set out how you and your early years practitioner will work together to help your child's continuing development. If your child is having any difficulties with their development, or has a special educational need or disability, it will set out the additional help your child will receive.

Find out more about the early years foundation stage

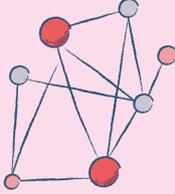
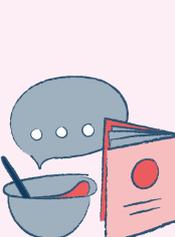
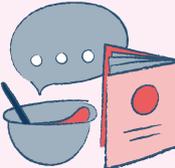
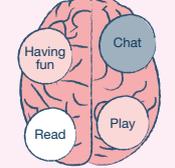
Search online for 'What to expect in the EYFS'



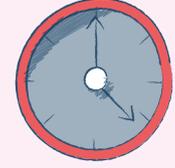
Appendix 3: Example infographic for parents

The progress check at age two can support you with ideas to help your child’s development at home. Research tells us that what parents do is crucial. The first five years are the most important years for health and happiness in adulthood. What does your child need?

To help me thrive, feed my brain

	When you chat, play and read with me, my brain forms more than a million new connections every second.
	My brain is already about 80% of its adult weight.
	I like it when we play and have fun – I don’t have to feel like I’m ‘learning’.
	I don’t need you to set a time.
	You can chat, play or read with me on the way to nursery, while you’re making a meal or even in the supermarket.
	I don’t need pricey books or toys.
	It all goes in.

Let me be active

	When I’m active, I’m happy and healthy – and I sleep better, too.
	I love to play with toys, walk, jump, run, dance and scoot.
	Aim for at least three hours across everyday.

Help me with my emotions

	I am learning to talk about how I feel. “I love it when...” “I’m sad because...”
	I am beginning to understand how to wait for my turn. I am learning to control my feelings when I want something.
	I am learning how to make friends with other children.

What happens early matters for a lifetime

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