PSED-Sense Of Self



An Early Years Curriculum Document

The Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools' Federation, Bradford

Being sensitive and responsive to individual needs supports children's growing sense of self. Positive, loving adult-child attachment is at the heart of a healthy development of a sense of self. Attachment is a strong emotional bond that grows between a child and an adult who is part of the child's everyday life.

Children who have secure attachments to consistent adult caregivers develop a positive self-concept and are more likely to seek challenges and display a 'can do' attitude. In the Nursery very young children will be assigned a key person to facilitate this strong, meaningful attachment.

The key person is an important role model for the child who they can relate to and rely on, forming a secure attachment.

From birth, babies and young children are reliant on adults in their lives and the kind of attachments that they have with them will form an early picture of relationships, impacting on how they interact with others and how they feel about themselves.

This is why it is crucial that babies and young children develop a secure attachment with a caring, loving and responsive adult.



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 peacefully.

These attributes will provide a secure platform from which children can achieve at school and in later life.



0-2 Room

Babies create a sense of self within loving relationships. Each baby is a unique blend of innate characteristics. Some babies are easily soothed, while others are more particular about what soothes them. Slow down and tune in to babies. Look for the baby's responses to different sounds, sights, and textures. This will help you understand the babies and their way of adapting to the environment.

It also helps them feel secure and it begins the lifelong process of the development of self. Babies become aware of self as they imitate sounds and expressions that are mirrored back to them by familiar adults: laughing and gurgling during physical interactions. Just as you get to know a baby, the baby gets to know you.

They are very good at reading facial expressions. At around 2 months, babies offer a "social smile," the first social response to others. Their budding self is affirmed when you smile back. This makes babies feel good - When I smile, you smile with me! Babies learn how to engage with other people and do this through gestures, gaze and talk. They will use that engagement to achieve a goal.

For example, baby will gesture towards their cup to say that they want a drink. It is important that adults provide consistent and warm response. Babies will start to show growing confidence that their needs will be met by freely expressing their need for comfort, nourishment or company. Adults must provide consistent and predictable routines with flexibility when needed.

Adults should consult parents about individual children's experience of feeding, changing, sleeping and comforting before they take these tasks on themselves.

Children develop their awareness of themselves and others further and start using 'me, you and I' in their talk. They start to notice similarities and differences between themselves and others, becoming aware of their social identity, gender, ethnicity and ability. They are showing a deep drive to know more about people and their worlds.

Adults should recognise each child's social and cultural context by talking about the places children go to, celebrations they enjoy and the people they love. Children begin to show their growing sense of self through asserting their likes and dislikes, making choices and decisions and having ideas.

As they grow in independence children begin rejecting help ("me do it"). Sometimes, the desire to do something independently that a child is not quite ready to achieve, leads to feelings of frustration and tantrums. We will encourage children to express their feelings as we name them, using words like 'sad', 'upset, 'angry'.

We will be mindful of children new to English and learn words related to emotions in home languages too. This will not only help children understand but it will make them feel valued and accepted.



As they become more aware of themselves as separate individuals, very young children might show separation anxiety. They need comfort and care from a trusted, familiar adult. This could be a key person or another adult that the child has developed an attachment to.

The adult will describe and explain how baby is feeling, providing reassurance and some co-regulation strategies.

Children will begin to show an emerging autonomy in expressing their wishes, making choices and showing preferences such as liking a certain food and rejecting the one they do not like.

Adults will offer manageable choices for young children e.g. ‘do you want a green spoon or a red one?’ Their secure sense of self, of being loved in a special way by special people, fuels their self-directed explorations enabling children to show curiosity about objects, events and people.

Young toddlers need lots of opportunities to initiate and direct their own activities. Very young children start to show understanding that their own actions have an effect on others and will for example, clap their hands to initiate the game. It is important that adults respond to this and join in the play.

Children are beginning to be aware of and interested in their own bodies and physical characteristics and also those of others; pointing and naming features such as hair, nose, mouth.

They will experiment with what their bodies can do, setting themselves physical challenges.

It is important that adults provide opportunities for very young children to challenge themselves and take controlled risks engaging in new experiences and learning by trial and error.

As they grow, very young children show increasing awareness of themselves as individuals. They enjoy looking at themselves in the mirror but might not yet realise that the reflection is of them.

They enjoy finding their own nose, eyes or tummy as a part of interactive games and start to respond to their name. Very young babies learn about their physical self through exploratory play with their hands, feet and movement. They are learning that their body belongs to them.

Babies express awareness of their physical self through their own movements, gestures and expressions and by touching their own and other’s faces, eyes, and mouth in play and care events.

They start to learn that they are separate from others. Adults should support babies growing awareness of their bodies and what they can do by providing opportunities for free movement on a clean firm surface, offering commentary to babies about what is happening around them and what they are doing.



Two-year-olds' emerging language skills help them express themselves further. Their mantra becomes "Me do! Not you!" Their feelings are strong, but their sense of self is still fragile, so they need to assert themselves and protest limits.

The adults' role is to remain calm and to help children of this age to adapt to the demands of daily life. Consistency is helpful, but it is also important to remain flexible. Adults need to try to build a partnership with each toddler.

This way, the limits we set are reassuring, but don't stifle the toddler's growing sense of self. Children show an increasing sense of autonomy through their emerging preferences and particular interests, through making choices and having more of their own ideas.

They are also becoming increasingly aware of their own unique abilities. Adults should support children's independence by involving them in tasks as often as possible, such as setting the table for snack or watering the plants.

The environment will be planned so that storage for coats, nappies and other belongings is labelled with individual children's photographs and names so they are supported to access them independently.

Children are developing an understanding and interest in differences of gender and ethnicity. The role-play area will be resourced with materials reflecting children's family lives and communities enabling children to make links and notice patterns in their experiences.

Mirrors and photographs of the children and their families and friends will reflect who they are and where they come from. We will involve parents and carers and learn about each child's home culture from them. To broaden children's knowledge and reflect an inclusive ethos we will also consider including resources reflecting lives that are unfamiliar.

Children will experiment with their own and other people's views of who they are through their play, trying out different behaviours and testing boundaries. Gradually they are learning that actions have consequences.

It is important that there are clear, consistent boundaries and expectations and that children know what behaviour is expected of them and of others. Adults will approach any dysregulated behaviour sensitively.

For example if one child has upset another, adults must acknowledge the feelings and address the emotions of both children explaining sensitively and clearly why we don't do certain things and offering a positive alternative for children to use next time.

Children need opportunities to experiment and explore, to pursue their play and learning and exert their growing independence. Periods of uninterrupted time to maintain focus on their activity with high level of involvement is essential.



3-4 Room

Although forming one's self-concept is a lifelong process, how children feel about themselves in the earliest years (positive or negative) can set a pattern for the rest of their lives. Because three to five year olds are growing so fast and developing in every way as they learn new skills and sharpen old ones, this is a critical time for experiencing success.

Skillful adults will offer challenge at just the right level, enabling children to learn, make progress and do well. We aim to support children to develop a 'growth mindset' or a belief that you can improve your abilities by practising, or by finding a different way to achieve your goal.

We offer specific praise that supports effort and persistence, not just the final goal. We ensure that we promote mistakes as learning experiences and encourage children to take risks, embrace challenges, play with possibilities and find new ways to do things.

Children need to be able to absorb information about how others respond to them in order to confirm how they feel about themselves. They need to explore their own potential to discover new things and in doing so develop their knowledge and interests.

To support children to achieve this we will offer a wide selection of experiences and opportunities, planned around children's individual interests. Patient and attentive adults will encourage children to make choices and support them to feel good about themselves and their choices.

Sensitive and thoughtful interactions with children will support their growing sense of themselves and crucially, their self-confidence.



Knowing each child well, their needs and interests and also how they learn, is the key to supporting them successfully. The environment should reflect this knowledge, supporting the interests of individuals and groups of children alongside their characteristics of effective learning.

We will offer continuity and consistency, enabling children to know where everything is, using the areas independently to play and learn. Children are becoming more and more independent.

For instance, as they are now exhibiting greatly increased fine-muscle control, young children are learning to confidently execute tasks they will need to perform throughout their lives e.g. brushing teeth, getting dressed, using the toilet and washing and drying their hands.

They are learning how to care for themselves and in doing so developing their increasing sense of self. Adults should show trust in young children's abilities by showing them how to use and care for materials, letting them try and noticing when they need help; offering support but not taking over.

A predictable routine is still very important at this age. Giving children advance notice that things are going to change helps them feel prepared. As well as to the children themselves, we will talk to parents and carers to prepare children for changes to their normal routine.

Adults should offer extra support to children in new situations or when they are feeling anxious or insecure by talking to them about what is likely to happen and the options that are available.

Many children begin to show more confidence in new social situations. They may display this confidence and self-esteem through being more outgoing towards others, taking risks socially, trying new things, representing their experiences or taking on a role in their play.

Children are becoming more able to express their needs and also to ask for and accept help when they need it. Adults must be aware of and respond to the particular needs of children, such as those who are learning English as an additional language or children with autism who often have difficulty in social situations.

Children are becoming more aware of being evaluated by others and begin to develop ideas about themselves according to the messages they hear from others. Therefore we will ensure that every child hears positive messages often - affirming their unique qualities and talents.

Adults will celebrate each child's uniqueness by openly talking with them about their individual characteristics and their similarities and differences with others in a positive way.

Adults will show that they value difference through genuine interest in all children's contributions. through listening carefully and providing opportunities for children to be fully themselves.





' I knew who I was this morning but I have changed a few times since then.'

Lewis Carroll

Links to '50 Things to do Before You're Five'

All 50 hashtags from '50 Things to do Before you are Five' contribute to children's Personal, Social and Emotional Development. Here are some examples:

#01 - Get To Know You

#02 - Where Am I

#03 - Treasure Time

#06 - Rhyme Time

#10 - Sharing Books

#13 - Shout and Shhhh

#18 - Dance

#21 - Giggle Box

#31 - Boing

#32 - Where Have I Gone

#40 - Happy History



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Absolute fantastic nursery school! Teachers and staff are very supportive, friendly and always there for parents and children. They provide fun activities indoors and outdoors. My son really enjoyed it here and it has built his confidence. Can't wait to put my daughter in nursery next Sept.
Thank you for everything x

This place is amazing, so inviting from the moment you walk down the street. Staff are lovely and friendly. The children are happy and smiling. The provision and activities are well thought through and educational. The children are learning all the time. Outdoor activity is ongoing in all weathers and staff never complain!
So many opportunities for parents to join in various activities. I love this place. And so does my son! 😊

50 things to do before you're five™

Scan the QR code below to view all activities

Last Reviewed: 27th Maj 2026
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