PSED Understanding Emotions



An Early Years Curriculum Document

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

Understanding Emotions

Children's personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is crucial for them 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.

(Development Matters, 2021)

Self-regulation

Children's emotional well-being is the first necessity for effective learning. Only when children's primary need for emotional safety is met, they can relax, explore, take risks, make discoveries...

Adults can help children to feel confident and at ease by providing environments that meet children's need for tenderness and affection, relaxation, inner peace, enjoyment, openness, safety, and belonging.

Early relationships strongly influence how children develop and having close, secure attachment to their carers is important for children's wellbeing and the gradual development of self-regulation.

Developing self-regulation is not something children do by themselves. It is a process that grows out of attuned relationships where the adult and baby or child are closely attentive to each other and engage in sensitive, responsive exchanges.

Through co-regulation, children develop self-regulation, which involves children's developing ability to regulate their emotions, thoughts and behaviour to enable them to act in positive ways, make decisions, solve a problem and reach a goal.

For young children, co-regulation has both emotional and cognitive aspects. It includes the adult modelling calming strategies and naming and talking about feelings and ways to manage them.

This helps children learn to recognise their feelings and builds their cognitive awareness of strategies to reduce or manage extremes of emotion.

Supporting children in the Characteristics of Effective Learning such as making connections, choices, making links, facing challenges, thinking flexibly and critically and taking responsibility goes hand in hand with supporting their self-regulation skills. Self-regulation is an ever developing life skill.



0-2 Room

Babies start to communicate a range of emotions (e.g. pleasure, interest, fear, surprise, anger and excitement) through facial expressions, making sounds and moving their bodies. They express feelings strongly through crying in order to make sure that their needs are met.

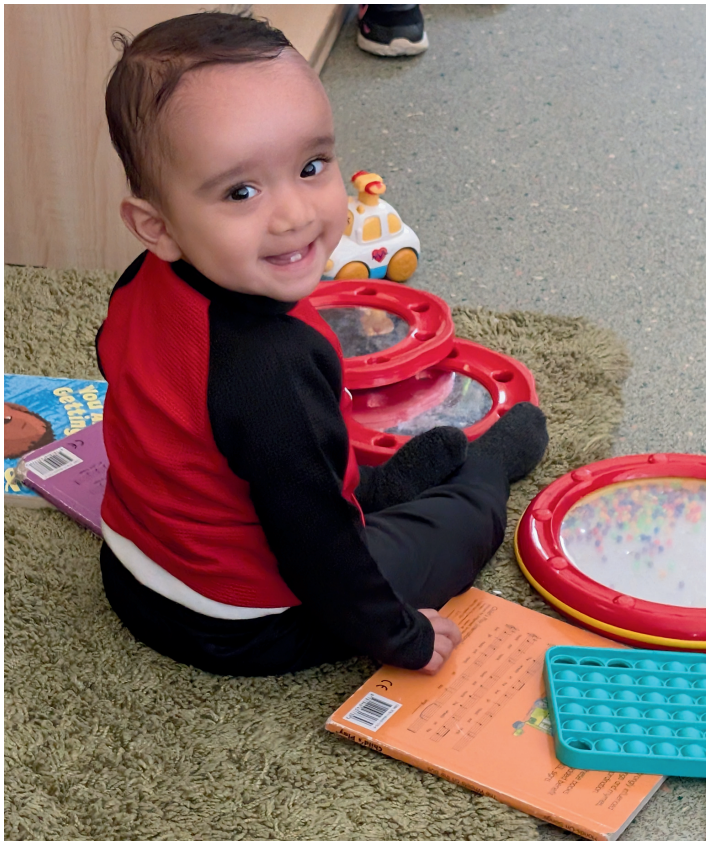
Babies seek physical and emotional comfort by snuggling in to trusted adults. They are comforted by familiar carers through voice, physical presence and touch, for example singing, cuddles, smiles or rocking. Practitioners will learn from parents about how their baby expresses their emotions and what they do to soothe them.

This is something that practitioners will find out during the Home Visit, so that we can provide the right comfort and reassurance for a baby when they start Nursery.

For example a baby might have a favourite song/rhyme that parents sing at home or a comfort object that helps them settle. Babies react emotionally to other people's emotions; smiling when smiled at and becoming distressed if they hear another child crying or see a blank unresponsive face.

Practitioners will "tune in" to a baby's emotions and respond calmly, gently and sensitively, being emotionally and physically available.

This must be consistent so that a baby learns not only that their needs will be met but that there is a caring and loving adult who will respond to their needs in a gentle and warm manner. As they grow, babies use a wider range of emotions as well as gestures and vocalisations to express their feelings.



Babies awareness of their feelings develops and they use familiar adults to share feelings such as excitement, and also for 'emotional refuelling' when feeling tired and anxious.

Practitioners will show babies that they are safe and loved by comforting them when they feel anxious and frustrated. Providing photos of their families and a familiar object will help children settle and make links with their personal experiences and what they already know.

Very young children will express their positive feelings such as joy and excitement and negative feelings such as anger and distress through their actions, behaviours and a few words.

Practitioners will understand the range of emotions that a child might be going through, show empathy and stay close to offer support and reassurance when a child is feeling anxious or distressed but also to share and join in when children express joy and happiness.

Even very young children will begin to show an awareness of the feelings, emotions of others and will show empathy by offering a comfort object or joining in other children's excitement.

Practitioners should use real life experiences to help children understand a wide range of emotions in others and themselves by talking about different emotions as they occur during play.

For example, practitioners should acknowledge and talk about when a child is crying by saying things like ’I know you are crying, because you fell and hurt yourself’ or ‘You are happy and smiling because bananas are your favourite fruit’.

Very young children are more able to adapt their behaviour and co-operation when they become familiar with and can anticipate routines with some clear boundaries. Routines provide a secure base from which children can seek challenges, initiate activities and take risks.

They may display frustration with having to comply with others’ agendas, change and boundaries so practitioners must be consistent in their responses to babies behaviours and feelings as they develop an understanding of boundaries and routines.







2-3 Room

Children begin to develop a wider range of emotions such as pride and embarrassment and can feel overwhelmed by intense emotions. This can lead to emotional collapse when a child is feeling frustrated, frightened or angry.

Adults need to support children to feel emotionally safe before they are able to utilise their advanced thinking and do things such as planning, problem solving or controlling impulses.

Practitioners understand that young children communicate their feelings through their behaviours and will respond sensitively by showing empathy and understanding. When practitioners know the children well, they will be able to understand their motivation and underlying reasons for certain behaviours and respond appropriately.

Using resources such as books, stories and puppets as well as creating calm spaces for retreat will help children regulate and begin to understand their emotions better. At this age children begin to think about their feelings as their brains start developing connections that help them to manage their emotions.

As children start to show an understanding of their own feelings and those of others, they can begin to regulate their behaviour accordingly which supports their emotional resilience and helps children face challenges and bounce back after difficulties.

As children develop a growing awareness of their own feelings, they become more aware of the feelings of others and will show empathy by offering comfort or being concerned when another child is upset.



They also start to learn that some actions can hurt and harm others and begin to develop the ability to stop themselves from doing something that they should not do.

As children's understanding of rules and boundaries grows, they become more responsive to cooperation. Practitioners should be consistent and fair when applying rules and boundaries with some flexibility as necessary.



3-4 Room

Children express a wide range of feelings in their interactions with others and through their behaviour and play, including excitement and anxiety, guilt and self-doubt.

Practitioners will create a listening culture and atmosphere which is calm and caring, where young children feel able to express their emotions. We will name and talk about a wide range of feelings and make it clear that all feelings are understandable and acceptable.

Practitioners will put children's feelings into words for them: 'It looks like you're cross about that.' Practitioners will use language to model how they manage their own feelings, e.g. I'm feeling a bit angry and I need to calm down, so I'm going to...'. It is important that we are fully aware of the children in our care who are new to English or have speech, language and communication difficulties. Beside the spoken word, we will use facial expressions and body language to describe emotions and support children's confidence.



Children will start to talk about how others might be feeling and respond according to their understanding of the other person's needs and wants, showing a deep drive to know more about people.

They are more able to recognise the impact of their choices and behaviours/actions on others and know that some actions and words can hurt others' feelings.

Practitioners will help children to recognise when their actions hurt others and not expect children to say sorry before they have a real understanding of what this means.

Instead, we will help children to suggest solutions to a conflict and solve a problem; when they are emotionally ready, asking children for their ideas on what might make people feel better when they are sad or cross. .

Children with developmental differences such as Autism Spectrum Disorders may need additional support in developing empathy.

Using role play opportunities, social stories or visual resources such as emotions fans or pictures and providing feedback, can help a child to recognise their feelings of empathy.

Children develop an understanding that expectations vary depending on different events, social situations and changes in routine, and in favourable conditions become more able to adapt their behaviours.

Practitioners will discuss rules and fairness with young children and show positive appreciation of young children's prosocial behaviours of kindness and helpfulness.

Practitioners will encourage children to listen to each other's ideas as they play, have fun, think and learn together

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

#18 - Dance

#02 - Where Am I

#20 - Mini Artists

06 - Rhyme Time

#21 - Giggle Box

#07 - Making Music

#23 - See it Live

#10 - Sharing Books

#37 - Show and Tell

#13 - Shout and Shhh

#44 - Fountains of Fun



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Absolute fantastic nursery school! Teachers and staff are very supportive, friendly and always their for parents and children. They provide fun activities indoors and outdoors. My son really enjoyed it here and it has build his confidence. Cant wait to put my daughter in nusery next Sept.
Thankyou 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
Approved By: Sian Hudson - Executive Headteacher
Next Review Due: 28th May 2029