

The Early Years Foundation Stage: Parents as partners

The EYFS aims to raise the quality of education and care in all early childhood settings for children from birth to five (end of Reception). Individual practitioners and settings are required to examine practice and reflect on their work with young children and families in the light of a set of guiding principles and practice commitments. These are grouped into the themes:

- A Unique Child
- Positive Relationships
- Enabling Environments
- Learning and Development.

Principles	ideas/beliefs that underpin practice.
Commitments	describe how principles can be put into practice

The principles and commitments include the recognition that all areas of development are connected to each other and are equally important. Children learn from birth, in the context of loving and secure relationships, and develop in individual ways and at varying rates. Plans for learning and development should be based on careful observation of children's individual needs and interests. All children are entitled to safe, stimulating, inclusive environments, both indoors and out. They learn through active, purposeful play – with people, objects, ideas and events that engage and involve them – sometimes for sustained periods. They benefit from a balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities and from adults who provide rich experience and interact in ways that encourage the development of language, thinking skills and creativity.

Positive Relationships

The focus of PEAL is to look at the relationship between parents and practitioners within the theme of Positive Relationships – in particular Commitment 2.2 to view parents as partners in young children's learning and development.

The commitments to practice within this theme are:

2.1 Respecting Each Other: Every interaction is based on caring professional relationships and respectful acknowledgement of the feelings of children and their families.

2.2 Parents as Partners: Parents are children's first and enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in early years settings, the results have a positive impact on children's development and learning.

2.3 Supporting Learning: Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adults support children's learning more effectively than any amount of resources.

2.4 Key Person: A key person has special responsibilities for working with a small number of children, giving them the reassurance to feel safe and cared for and building relationships with their parents

Each of these commitments has a corresponding card containing additional information, key messages and prompt questions. The cards, along with the *Practice Guidance*, provide a starting point for reflection on how to put the principles into practice.

Statutory Framework

More detail in support of Commitment 2.2 is contained within the *Statutory Framework*. Here are two key extracts.

1.16 Introduction – A principled approach: Creating the framework for partnership working

The text reads:

Close working between early years practitioners and parents is vital for the identification of children's learning needs and to ensure a quick response to any area of particular difficulty. Parents and families are central to a child's well being and practitioners should support this important relationship by sharing information and offering support for extending learning in the home.

2.19 The learning and development requirements

The assessment arrangements

Practitioners should make assessments and plan for children's future development and learning through regular observation. The text reads:

Assessments should be based on practitioners' observations of what children are doing in their day-to-day activities. As judgements are based on observational evidence gathered from a wide range of learning and teaching contexts, it is expected that all adults who interact with the child should contribute to the process, and that account will be taken of information provided by parents. An essential feature of parental involvement is an ongoing dialogue, building on the partnership begun by any previous practitioner(s). Settings should report progress and achievements to parents throughout the EYFS.

In summary, to work in partnership with parents, early years settings should:

- Acknowledge parents as a child's first and most enduring educators.
- Assign a key person to each child who should work to form a warm, trusting, respectful relationship with that child and their family.
- Work with parents to enhance learning and development. Establish an ongoing dialogue with parents, share information, take account of parents' own observations of their child and support learning in the home

These then are the expectations of the EYFS. There is conclusive research and practice evidence that these commitments and requirements are central to improving the quality of education and care for all children.