

Top Tips for

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH SEND

Supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in early years settings is of paramount importance. Early identification of SEND and appropriate rapid intervention can make a profound difference to a child's developmental trajectory, as well as to their overall wellbeing and learning.

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SEND EARLY

To recognise potential learning delays, early years professionals should have a sound understanding of child development. Tools such as Development Matters or Birth to Five Matters can help in this regard. Remember that children develop at different rates, so potential delays may not necessarily be an indicator of SEND. Share any highlighted learning delays with your setting's SENCO.



FOCUS ON THE CHILD'S STRENGTHS

Inclusive environments recognise that all children have unique abilities and contributions to make, promoting a sense of belonging and acceptance. Celebrating children's strengths makes them feel valued and cultivates a positive sense of self. Building on the strengths of children with SEND ensures early years professionals can plan meaningful, enjoyable learning experiences.



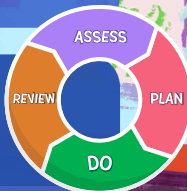
SPEAK TO YOUR SENCO

Your setting's Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO) will be able to support you with any aspect of working with children who have SEND. This should include providing training, advice and support to early years practitioners – enhancing their understanding of SEND and helping them to develop effective strategies for supporting children with additional needs.



TAKE A GRADUATED APPROACH

Follow a clear process to ensure that support is tailored to the individual child. Identify and assess the child's needs, using information from sources such as parents and specialists. Develop a personalised plan outlining learning goals and strategies. Provide appropriate support, resources and adaptations for the child. Review their progress regularly, making adjustments as needed.



PLAN TRANSITIONS CAREFULLY

Transitions across the setting or to another environment can be especially challenging for children with SEND. Plan them in advance, working with the child's family and other relevant parties (such as their new teacher) to provide consistency and a sense of security. Social stories, visual cues and a gradual introduction to new environments can help to minimise the negative impact of transitions.



SEEK EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Some children may require additional support from health care professionals, specialist teachers or speech and language therapists. They will be able to work with you and the child's family to provide specific expertise. Your local authority early years team can advise on sourcing specialist support, including making referrals or requesting an Education, Health and Care Needs assessment.



ADAPT THE CURRICULUM

Use visual aids, Makaton, social stories or alterations to the learning environment to adapt the curriculum for learners with SEND. Adaptations should be based on each child's specific needs and strengths. Be mindful that children with SEND may require further support to master new skills and concepts, such as using visual cues or breaking tasks down into smaller steps.



DEVELOP PARENT PARTNERSHIPS

Regularly share information, discuss progress and address any concerns with parents. This helps to establish shared developmental goals and expectations, building consistency by allowing strategies used at nursery to be replicated at home. Ideally, the level of engagement with parents should enable them to contribute to assessments, planning and reviews of their child's progress.



INVEST IN ONGOING TRAINING

Regular training enhances the knowledge and skills of early years professionals when supporting children with SEND. Training could be on statutory requirements, relevant policies and procedures, or specific intervention strategies employed in your setting. It may be available through your local authority or stronger practice hub – or could be delivered by your SENCO.



OBSERVE AND ASSESS REGULARLY

Observe and assess the child's progress to ensure their personal plan reflects their particular needs. Good quality observation provides detail on the child's strengths, interests and preferences. Regular assessment helps with planning appropriate activities, experiences and intervention strategies. Take information on board from parents and any other professionals involved.



REVIEW THE SEND CODE OF PRACTICE

The SEND Code of Practice contains invaluable information about the obligations of settings working with children with SEND. It also offers advice on ways to support children who have SEND, as well as guidance on additional support which is available from a range of professionals.



Meet Our Expert

LEYF (London Early Years Foundation) was formed as Westminster Health Society in 1903, a time of poverty and shockingly high infant mortality. Pre-dating the NHS, it promoted child welfare and family health – breaking new ground by offering professional childcare training, outreach and home visits, drop-in sessions and parenting classes.



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