

Big Change Really Does Start Small: Let's Talk about Early Years

The 'early years' refers to the period of childhood from conception to 5 years of age



Why is this such an important time?

- "The early years represents one of the best investments we can make for the long-term health, wellbeing and happiness of our society" [Centre for Early Childhood](#)
- "Early childhood experiences literally build brains" [Nancy Stewart](#)
- "What happens early in life has an impact later in life and it should be the most exciting time of their lives, full of curiosity, awe, exploration and laughter" [Early Years Team Member](#)
- "The successes individuals achieve during their adult life can be predicted by the level of cognitive and noncognitive skills they possess on their first day of school" [Frank Field](#)
- "When you work with a child in the early years, you have the opportunity to help change the whole direction of their lives" [Early Years Nursery Manager](#)

How do young children learn?

- "Babies are born learners and from their very first beginnings they develop and learn with all of their senses. Within weeks they are starting to use complex skills and solve problems" [Siren Films](#)
- "Young children learn new skills and attitudes by watching and listening to adults, so they need positive interactions and someone who will help when things get tricky" [Early Years Team Member](#)
- "Young children are often described as sponges for learning - it is vital therefore that the 'water' around them is anti-racist regardless of the ethnic make-up of their environment. This can range from representation, acknowledging racialised differences (not silencing them), openly discussing racism and being anti-racist ourselves" [Anti racist Cumbria](#)
- "Communication is at the core of everything we do...strong language and communication skills lay the foundations for personal, social and emotional development, enabling us to regulate our behaviour and understand emotions" [The Communication Trust](#)
- "Every child is unique and will develop at their own pace, so it's not about treating all children in exactly the same way but treating each child fairly and paying attention to their individual interests and needs" [PACEY](#)

What about families and other relationships?

- "Healthy attachment allows children to explore and learn from their surroundings, secure in the knowledge that they have a safe person to return to. It is also important for their developing self-confidence and independence - based on the work of" [John Bowlby](#)
- "The quality of a young child's environment is shaped by his or her parents, carers or other guardians and the wider context - grandparents, neighbourhood, the quality of services, cultural and socio-economic factors, as well as global factors such as climate change, pandemics and war" [Nuffield Foundation](#)
- "Parents of children in the early years are often juggling many life pressures, including financial worries, mental health issues, relationship problems and supporting the many needs of their child. Adopting a whole family approach by offering the right help, in the right place and at the right time is key to ensuring that children have the best start from early years onwards" [0-19 Child and Family Support Service](#)

Statistics that support the importance of the early years



Brain Power

- “In the first years of life more than one million new connections are formed every second in a baby’s growing brain” [The Parent Infant Foundation](#)
- “Our brains are approximately 80% of their adult weight by the age of two” [Centre for Early Childhood](#)

Laying Foundations

- “Science tells us that a child’s experiences from conception through their first five years will go onto shape the next fifty” [The best start for life: a vision for the first 1001 days](#)
- “Language development at the age of two years predicts children’s performance on entry to primary school” [Department for Education](#)
- “By the age of two, children can become aware of racial and ethnic differences and use these to define themselves and others. From age three, they can develop negative attitudes and prejudices towards others. All young children benefit from anti-racist practices” [Anti racist Cumbria](#)
- “High quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children” [The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education \(EPPE\) Project](#)



Poverty and disadvantage

- “Whilst social mobility is a complex issue, there is a strong consensus that supporting children in their early years can improve educational outcomes for children and therefore can support social mobility” [Penny Tassoni](#)
- “37% of families where the youngest child is under five are living in poverty. Rates of child poverty are higher for children from Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups and for children living in families where there is a disabled adult or child. Almost half (48%) of lone parent families are living in poverty” [Nuffield Foundation](#)