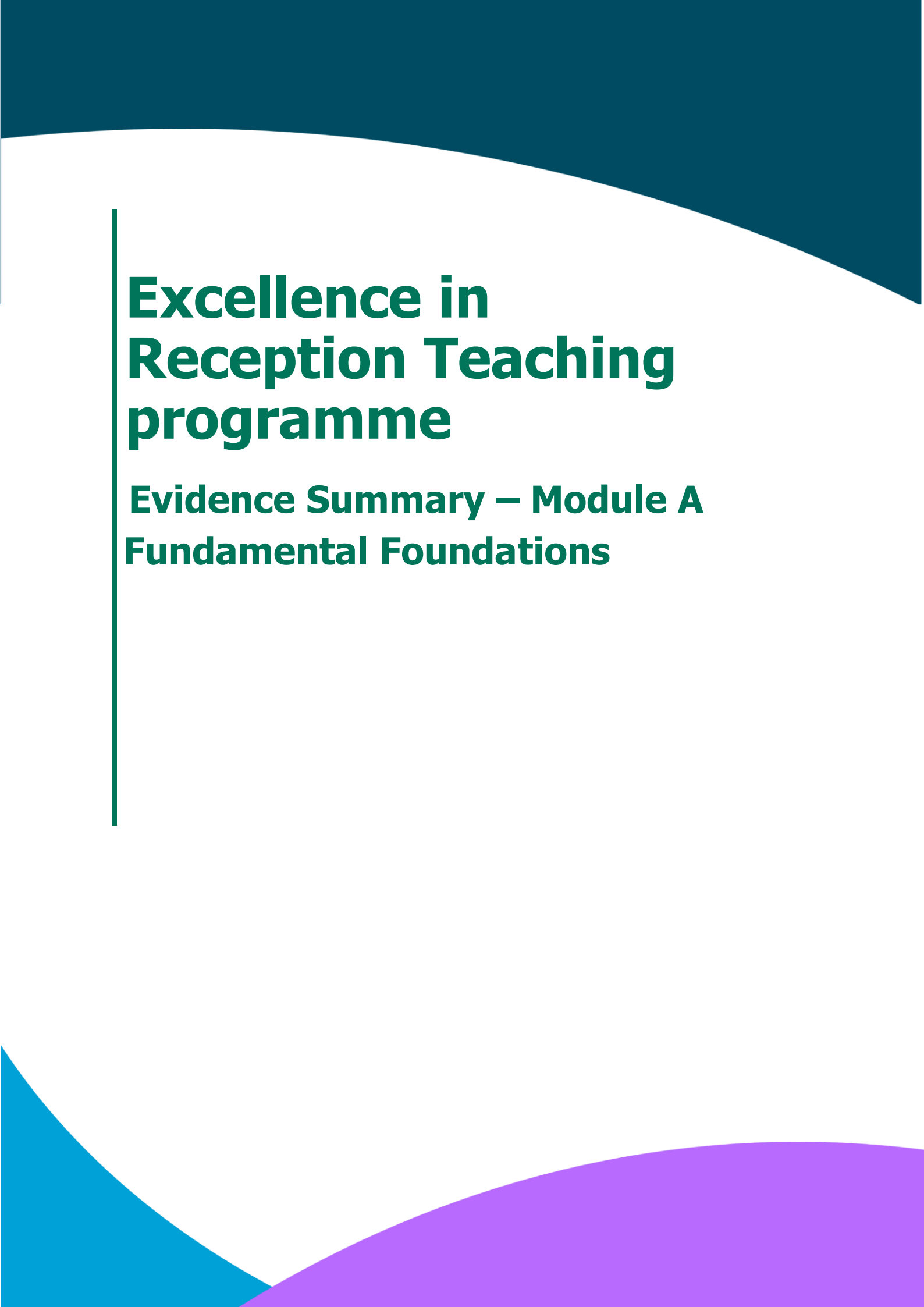




Excellence in Reception Teaching programme

**Evidence Summary – Module A
Fundamental Foundations**

How to use this Evidence Summary

As you've worked through this chapter, you will have read about how the evidence has been applied to different scenarios and seen how it can be put into practice in classroom settings.

In this section, you can explore what the evidence says in more detail.

Navigate to the key theme you wish to look at and select the evidence that you would like to review, drawing on your diagnostic and reflections to guide your decision.

Content	Page
Chapter 1: Personal, social and emotional development (PSED)	3
Chapter 2: Characteristics of effective learning	16
Chapter 3: Routines including transitions	27

Chapter 1: Personal, social and emotional development (PSED)

<u>Key theme 1</u>	<u>Key theme 2</u>
------------------------------------	------------------------------------

Key Theme 1: Early experiences matter, but do they do not fix a child's future

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Use your reflections and self-diagnostic to select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>Early experiences shape development</u>	<u>Development is rapid, but not uniform</u>
<u>Look across contexts</u>	<u>Relationships support participation</u>

Early experiences shape development

Children's experiences in infancy and early childhood can influence later learning, physical and emotional health and well-being. Cognitive, social-emotional and self-regulatory development are also interconnected, so progress in one area can support development in others (OECD, 2020) (1.3; 1.7; 1.8).

You may already recognise this interconnectedness in your own Reception practice. A child's growing confidence in a familiar routine may support their communication, relationships and willingness to participate in learning.

Birth to five is a period of particularly rapid development, when children's developing brains are especially responsive to experience (NSCDC 2007; Tierney et al 2009) (1.4). This gives Reception teachers an important role, but children's earlier experiences do not determine a fixed future. Brain development is dynamic and adaptive, with biological development and experience interacting over time (Stiles et al., 2010). Supportive relationships

and later experiences can also provide positive turning points (Evangelou et al 2009).

Experienced practitioners often avoid drawing conclusions from one response alone. A child's response gives useful information about what they may be managing now, but it should not become a fixed description of who they are or what they will achieve (1.5).

Compare "Minh lacks confidence" with "Minh often watches an unfamiliar routine before joining but participates readily once he knows what will happen."

You will likely recognise that the second description identifies Minh's response, its context and an existing strength. This may reflect distinctions you already make when observing children across different parts of the day.

Minh may be establishing what is expected, checking which adult is available or using observation to make the situation more predictable. Children may show different capabilities across people, routines and contexts, so one response should begin professional enquiry rather than complete it (Evangelou et al 2009) (1.5).

In many Reception classrooms, familiar routines and calm, responsive adults already help children feel secure enough to observe, explore and participate (Evangelou et al 2009; EEF 2025) (1.6; 1.d; 1.k). An adult might remain nearby and say:

"You can watch from here. They are choosing which animals will go in the shelter."

The adult pauses and notices what Minh does next. Support can then reduce as he becomes more familiar, confident and independent (EEF 2025) (1.f; 1.l).

Rather than asking "Why is this child not joining in?" a more useful question is "What might this response be helping the child understand or manage?"

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Development is rapid, but not uniform

Different capabilities develop over different timescales. Early childhood is a period of rapid development, but sensory, language, social, emotional and higher-order thinking processes do not all develop at the same point or pace. Learning also continues throughout childhood and later life (NSCDC 2007; Tierney et al 2009) (1.4; 1.5).

You may already see this when children manage one part of an experience more confidently than another. A child might identify that a story character is

sad but find it harder to explain why. Another might know a classroom rule but need support to apply it during an emotionally demanding interaction.

Rapid development does not mean that children need more activities, specialist products or earlier formal instruction. Evidence about severe deprivation does not show that excessive enrichment accelerates development. Experiences need to be meaningful and appropriate to the capability children are currently developing (NSCDC 2007; Tierney et al 2009) (1.4; 1.d).

For example, rather than asking:

"Why is the character upset?"

an adult might begin:

"His head is down and he is holding the broken toy. I wonder if he feels sad."

The adult makes the emotional information visible before inviting the child to contribute. They might then ask "What do you notice?"

Naming, commenting and offering manageable prompts can help children take part without reducing the intended learning (EEF 2025) (1.5; 1.l; 1.r).

A useful question is "What part of this experience can the child already manage, and what support would make the next part accessible?"

Developmentally appropriate teaching maintains ambition while matching the form and level of support to what children can currently understand and use (NSCDC 2007; Tierney et al 2009) (1.4; 1.5).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Look across contexts

Children's social, emotional, cognitive, physical and language development are interconnected. Their progress may follow multiple, sometimes non-linear pathways rather than one simple developmental sequence (Evangelou et al 2009) (1.5).

It is likely that you often see children's capabilities appear differently across the day. A child may negotiate confidently during familiar role play but hesitate to enter a game already underway. They may communicate little during whole-class discussion but contribute more during small-world play, alongside a familiar adult or when given longer to respond (Evangelou et al 2009) (1.5; 1.r).

For multilingual children, what is visible in English at school may not represent the full range of their social, emotional or communicative capabilities. Family

knowledge and observations across different contexts can help adults build a fuller picture (Evangelou et al 2009) (1.5; 1.l; 1.r).

The professional task is not to reduce a child's development to one fixed judgement. Children may show different capabilities across people, activities and contexts, so adults need to consider where a capability is visible, when it becomes more difficult and what support changes the child's response (Evangelou et al 2009; EEF 2023b) (1.5).

This may reflect distinctions you already make when deciding whether a child needs modelling, additional time, a visual or verbal prompt, or an opportunity to observe before participating (EEF 2021; EEF 2025) (1.d; 1.f; 1.r).

Think of a child in your own setting and consider in which situations they participate with greater confidence, and what seems to make the difference? Comparing a child's responses across contexts can reveal which conditions or forms of support help them engage, rather than allowing one particularly noticeable moment to shape the overall judgement (Evangelou et al 2009) (1.5; 1.d).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Relationships support participation

Warm, responsive relationships can provide children with a secure base from which to explore, communicate and take part in learning (Evangelou et al 2009; EEF 2025) (1.6; 1.8).

You will likely be able to identify where your team make small adjustments that help children feel understood without taking over. This might involve moving closer, reducing the amount of language used, acknowledging an emotion, explaining what is happening or waiting before offering more help (EEF 2025) (1.f; 1.r).

For example:

Adult: "You are standing close while you watch. You can stay here while you work out what is happening."

The child moves nearer to the group.

Adult: "They are choosing animals for the shelter."

The adult pauses. The child picks up an animal.

You will have noticed that the adult in this setting has offered reassurance and made the situation more understandable while leaving the child free to decide what to do next. This is co-regulation: calm, responsive support in the moment

that helps children participate and gradually manage more independently (EEF 2025) (1.f).

Predictable routines and clear boundaries also strengthen children's sense of security. Predictability does not mean preventing change. It means using familiar cues, explaining what will happen and responding consistently when routines alter (Evangelou et al 2009; EEF 2025) (1.d; 1.k).

For example:

"We are going to the hall instead of outside. First, we will put on our shoes. Then we will line up. I will come with you."

Adults also help children communicate emotional and physical needs. Some may use phrases such as "Help me" or "Can you stay?", while others may need a gesture, symbol, visual prompt or adult modelling before they can express this independently (EEF 2025) (1.l; 1.r).

The purpose is not to remove uncertainty or difficulty. Responsive relationships help children approach challenge with an adult who can judge when to reassure, explain, co-regulate, maintain a boundary or step back (Evangelou et al 2009; EEF 2025) (1.6; 1.f; 1.k).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Key theme 2: Supporting self-regulation, relationships and increasing independence

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Use your reflections and self-diagnostic to select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>Notice self-regulation in learning, not only behaviour</u>	<u>PSED is woven through the Reception day</u>	<u>Teach the strategy, then support its use</u>
<u>Keep support precise and proportionate</u>	<u>Calm support includes clear boundaries</u>	

Notice self-regulation in learning, not only behaviour

Self-regulation is broader than remaining quiet, sitting still or immediately following an instruction. It includes children's developing ability to manage aspects of their behaviour and learning, including attention, impulse control, planning, persistence and reviewing what they have done (EEF 2023b) (1.7).

You may see these capabilities most clearly during meaningful play. A child who plans a construction, remembers what they intend to do and adapts when it falls is using self-regulation. The same child may still need considerable support to stop, shift attention or manage disappointment when the context changes (EEF 2023b; Evangelou et al 2009) (1.5; 1.7).

Self-regulation is consistently associated with successful learning, including early literacy, mathematics and problem-solving. Approaches designed to strengthen it show promising effects, although the Early Years evidence for particular strategies remains very limited (EEF 2023b) (1.7).

This means one difficult moment should not become a fixed judgement about a child's self-regulation. Instead, consider:

- which capabilities are already visible
- which demand becomes difficult
- what changes across contexts
- what support helps the child regain engagement

For example, a child may sustain attention during self-chosen play but find it harder to redirect that attention during a transition. The difficulty may relate to shifting focus rather than an inability to concentrate.

The distinction to notice is which part of self-regulation can this child already manage, and which part still needs support? Comparing children's responses across play, routines and interactions can help adults choose more precise support (Evangelou et al., 2009; EEF, 2023b) (1.5).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

PSED is woven through the Reception day

Personal, social and emotional development supports children to understand emotions, form relationships, communicate needs and participate confidently in learning (EEF, 2023a; EEF, 2025) (1.8).

You will likely recognise how social and emotional learning approaches can improve children's interactions, attitudes and emotional outcomes. They may also support early literacy and mathematics, although the security of this academic evidence is very low (EEF 2023a) (1.7; 1.8; 1.i).

PSED should therefore not be valued only as a route to higher attainment. It also matters because children increasingly learn to:

- manage feelings and behaviour
- join and sustain play
- negotiate and solve social problems
- ask for help or reassurance
- persist when something becomes difficult
- act with greater confidence and independence

(EEF 2025) (1.8)

Much of this development takes place within ordinary Reception experiences rather than a separate PSED activity. You may see this most clearly when adults in your setting model language during a disagreement, help children notice another person's response or support them to find a solution (EEF 2025).

Everyday self-care routines are also part of this learning. Washing hands, managing clothing or organising food and drink can require children to remember a sequence, communicate a need, persist and seek appropriate help. Adults can model steps, make resources accessible and reduce support as children become more independent (EEF, 2025).

Consider where PSED is already being taught through your routines, relationships and interactions, and where children may need more explicit support to use these capabilities.

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Teach the strategy, then support its use

Promising self-regulation approaches balance explicit teaching with scaffolded opportunities to practise (EEF, 2023b) (1.7).

Much of this may already be visible in your setting, for instance when you teach children:

- words for describing feelings
- a phrase for entering play
- a way to resolve a disagreement
- a strategy for managing frustration
- a simple process for planning and reviewing

Stories, puppets and familiar characters can help children remember these strategies (EEF, 2023b; EEF, 2025).

However, recalling a strategy during a calm discussion is different from using it when emotions or demands are stronger. In the moment, children may still need an adult to help them regulate before they can access what has been taught (EEF, 2025).

Instead of immediately saying "Use your calming strategy," an adult might begin "You wanted to carry on. Stopping feels difficult. I am here."

The adult pauses, then adds "Let's take one breath together. Then you can tell me what you need."

The adult acknowledges the experience, co-regulates and brings the familiar strategy back when the child is able to engage with it (EEF 2025).

Support might move through a flexible sequence:

model → co-regulate → prompt → allow practice → step back

This is not a fixed script. Adults use their knowledge of the child to judge how much support is needed in that moment.

The goal is not simply for children to explain a strategy. It is for them to use it across real routines, relationships and learning with gradually less adult support (EEF, 2023b; EEF, 2025).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Keep support precise and proportionate

Children may show similar outward responses for different reasons. One child may resist a transition because they are deeply involved in play. Another may be uncertain about what happens next. A third may understand the routine but find it difficult to manage disappointment (Evangelou et al., 2009) (1.5).

The adult response therefore needs to match the barrier rather than the behaviour alone.

Evidence from primary education reinforces that placing children in a group does not itself make teaching responsive. The important feature is how the adult adapts teaching or interaction in response to what children show (Deunk et al., 2018).

You may already be aware that highly individualised approaches can be useful, but they can also increase workload. In addition, you may have had experience of how they risk reducing high-quality interaction if adults have to manage multiple separate systems. Strong shared teaching and routines should remain the foundation (EEF 2021).

Personalised does not have to mean separate. A child may need a small adaptation within a familiar routine, such as:

- an earlier cue
- fewer words
- additional processing time
- a visual reminder
- an adult acknowledging an unfinished intention
- one prompt before further help

(EEF, 2021; EEF, 2025).

For example, all children may receive the same transition cue. One child may then need an adult to move closer and say "It is nearly time to stop. Choose the final piece you want to add."

The expectation remains shared, but the support becomes more precise. Start with the strong universal routine. Then ask "What is the smallest adjustment that addresses this child's current barrier?"

An adult might choose to monitor whether the adjustment supports participation and reduce it when the child begins to manage more independently (EEF, 2021; EEF, 2023b) (1.5).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Calm support includes clear boundaries

You may already recognise that co-regulation does not mean removing boundaries or overlooking unsafe behaviour. Adults remain responsible for maintaining safety, responding appropriately and helping children understand how their actions affect others.

Warmth and clear expectations can sit together.

During a disagreement, an adult might say “You are angry that the car was taken. I will not let you hit.”

The adult maintains the boundary, then supports the child to communicate “You can say, ‘I was using that. Can I have it back?’”

This may reflect choices you already make in emotionally demanding moments. Acknowledging the feeling does not excuse the action. It helps the child understand what is happening while the adult protects others and models a safer response (EEF, 2025).

Children may also need adults to make social information more visible “Look at her face. She has moved away and is holding her arm.”

The adult can then help the child respond, repair the interaction or seek support (EEF, 2025).

Predictable rules and calm adult responses help children understand what is expected, particularly when emotions are strong (EEF, 2025). The precise response will depend on the child and the situation, but the shared principle remains: acknowledge the emotion, maintain safety and support a more appropriate next action.

The aim is not immediate compliance without understanding. It is to help children gradually:

- recognise emotions
- manage impulses
- communicate needs
- consider others
- resolve problems
- act safely and with increasing independence

(EEF, 2025) (1.7; 1.8).

The evidence may help teams articulate reasoning already present in their practice. Responsive support combines emotional understanding, clear boundaries and confidence that children can learn more effective ways to manage difficult situations.

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Chapter 1: Further reading

- Crasnow et al (2022) 'Personal, social and emotional development in the early years' Accessible from: [ffy_psed-for-early-years-pdf.pdf](#) [Accessed 03 July 2026]
- Ofsted (2024) 'Best start in life part 2: the 3 prime areas of learning' Accessible from: [Best start in life part 2: the 3 prime areas of learning - GOV.UK](#) [Accessed 09 July 2026]
- Sutton Trust (2019) 'Self-Regulation in the Early Years' Accessible from: [Self-Regulation in the Early Years - The Sutton Trust](#) [Accessed 03 July 2026]
- Windle D (2024) 'Supporting young children's emotional learning behaviours' Accessible from: [Supporting young children's emotional... | London South Research School](#) [Accessed 05 July 2026]

Chapter 1: References

- Deunk, M. I., Smale-Jacobse, A. E., de Boer, H., Doolaard, S. and Bosker, R. J. (2018) 'Effective differentiation practices: a systematic review and meta-analysis of studies on the cognitive effects of differentiation practices in primary education', Educational Research Review, 24, pp. 31–54. Accessible from: [Effective differentiation practices: a systematic review and meta-analysis of studies on the cognitive effects of differentiation practices in primary education](#) Accessed 2 June 2026.
- Education Endowment Foundation (2021) 'Teaching and learning toolkit: individualised instruction'. Accessible from: [Teaching and learning toolkit: individualised instruction](#) Accessed 6 May 2026.
- Education Endowment Foundation (2023a) 'Early years toolkit: social and emotional learning strategies'. Accessible from: [Early years toolkit: social and emotional learning strategies](#) Accessed 6 May 2026.
- Education Endowment Foundation (2023b) 'Early years toolkit: self-regulation strategies'. Accessible from: [Early years toolkit: self-regulation strategies](#) Accessed 6 May 2026.
- Education Endowment Foundation (2025) 'Early years evidence store: personal, social and emotional development'. Accessible from: [Early years evidence store: personal social and emotional development](#) Accessed 2 June 2026.
- Evangelou, M., Sylva, K., Kyriacou, M., Wild, M. and Glenny, G. (2009) Early years learning and development: literature review. Department for Children,

Schools and Families. Accessible from: [Early years learning and development: literature review](#) Accessed 2 June 2026.

- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007) The timing and quality of early experiences combine to shape brain architecture: working paper 5. Accessible from: [The timing and quality of early experiences combine to shape brain architecture: working paper 5](#) Accessed 2 June 2026.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020) Early learning and child well-being: a study of five-year-olds in England, Estonia and the United States. Paris: OECD Publishing. Accessible from: [Early learning and child well-being: a study of five-year-olds in England, Estonia and the United States](#) Accessed 2 June 2026.
- Stiles, J. and Jernigan, T. L. (2010) 'The basics of brain development', *Neuropsychology Review*, 20, pp. 327–348. Accessible from: [The basics of brain development](#) Accessed 2 June 2026.
- Tierney, A. L. and Nelson, C. A. III (2009) 'Brain development and the role of experience in the early years', *Zero to Three*, 30(2), pp. 9–13. Accessible from: [Brain development and the role of experience in the early years](#) Accessed 2 June 2026.

[Click to return to Content page](#)

Chapter 2: Characteristics of effective learning

<u>Key theme 1</u>	<u>Key theme 2</u>
------------------------------------	------------------------------------

Key theme 1: Keeping expectations ambitious and responsive

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Use your reflections and self-diagnostic to select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>Begin with ambitious and responsive opportunities</u>	<u>Keep expectations open to revision</u>	<u>Notice how expectations influence interpretation</u>
--	---	---

Begin with ambitious and responsive opportunities

The Reception curriculum should offer meaningful and appropriately challenging opportunities through which children can experience success and build confidence. Open-ended resources, accessible environments and sufficient time can enable children to investigate, repeat actions, collaborate and become deeply involved in ideas that matter to them (DfE, 2023). Expectations matter because they can influence the activities, questions, resources and levels of challenge children encounter (Jussim et al, 2005; Rubie-Davies et al., 2014).

This does not mean giving every child a more difficult task. It means maintaining an ambitious learning intention while varying the support, challenge and guidance in response to what the child currently understands and can do.

You may already recognise this in your Reception practice. Children may explore the same mathematical or physical problem while adults vary:

- the modelling they provide
- the level of verbal or physical direction
- the materials available
- the time children have to respond
- the point at which they intervene

Children may sometimes benefit from trial and error, help from a peer, an adult model or a more supportive structure. Adults need to consider the child's confidence, previous experience and current engagement, taking care not to offer help before the child has had sufficient opportunity to think, repeat or correct an error independently (DfE, 2023).

Motivation research suggests that children and older learners are more likely to engage when activities feel meaningful, when the challenge appears achievable and when they believe their effort can lead to progress (Laskowski et al, 2016). Behaviour interventions that include rehearsal, role-play or an academic component also tend to have greater effects than approaches based only on correction or sanction (EEF, 2025a).

At times, children benefit from open-ended experiences they choose. At other times, a supportive structure established by an adult helps them access or sustain the learning. High-quality Reception practice provides both kinds of opportunity (DfE, 2023).

The adult therefore varies the route into the learning without unnecessarily reducing its ambition or taking over thinking that the child may be ready to manage.

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Keep expectations open to revision

Teacher expectations can influence outcomes through self-fulfilling processes, although the effects identified in research are usually small. Expectations may also predict outcomes because teachers have made accurate observations of children's current attainment or behaviour (Jussim et al, 2005).

However, repeated overestimation or underestimation across different teachers and school years may have additive effects on later achievement. A single judgement is unlikely to determine a child's future, but repeated expectations may gradually shape the opportunities and challenge a child experiences (Rubie-Davies et al, 2014).

You may already recognise the importance of keeping your understanding of a child open to revision. Children do not always show the same capabilities across whole-class teaching, guided activity, routines and child-initiated play. Their confidence, prior experience, motivation and familiarity with the context can all influence what adults notice.

Development Matters emphasises that children develop at different rates and that adults should adjust practice in response. It also highlights how open-

ended play can reveal children planning, repeating actions, correcting mistakes, sustaining attention and developing their own strategies (DfE, 2023).

Tyler's difficulty sustaining attention during a whole-class session should therefore not become a general judgement about his ability to concentrate, collaborate or solve problems.

Open-ended continuous provision may reveal strengths that are less visible during adult-directed teaching. The Harbour View outdoor activity allows Tyler to:

- revisit an experience
- test and revise an idea
- solve a practical problem
- collaborate with another child
- remain involved for a sustained period

You may already use these moments to build a fuller picture of what children understand and how they learn. The value lies in noticing whether expectations formed in one part of the day are limiting what adults anticipate elsewhere.

These observations can help Mrs Lane work with Tyler to identify an appropriate next goal and decide whether he needs additional time, a prompt, a model or a greater level of challenge (DfE, 2023).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Notice how expectations influence interpretation

Expectations can influence how adults interpret children's behaviour. The evidence identifies perceptual bias, confirmation bias, stereotyping and attributional bias as possible ways in which teacher expectations are formed and communicated through everyday interactions (Murdock-Perriera et al, 2018).

Experienced Reception practitioners will already know that the same behaviour can have several possible explanations. A child who watches an activity without joining might be interpreted as uninterested. They may instead be:

- observing how the activity works
- processing unfamiliar language
- waiting until they feel confident
- uncertain about how to enter the play
- managing sensory or emotional demands

Development Matters reminds practitioners to reflect on children's different rates of development and adjust practice appropriately. It also highlights the

importance of giving children time to explore, repeat actions, make choices and become involved before adults decide what support is needed (DfE, 2023).

The adult's interpretation affects what happens next. One explanation may lead to reduced challenge or withdrawal from the opportunity. Another may lead to additional time, careful modelling, a visual cue or a more accessible way to begin.

The value of professional judgement lies in keeping these interpretations open to review. Putting the child's experience at the centre of adult thinking means distinguishing between what has been observed and the meaning attached to it (Murdock-Perriera et al, 2018).

You may already make this distinction instinctively during play, routines and adult-guided learning. A useful next step is to make the reasoning more visible across the team, particularly when different adults support the same child.

Rather than asking, "What level is this child working at?", consider:

- What have I actually observed?
- What other explanations might fit what the child is showing?
- Where does the child demonstrate greater confidence, persistence or independence?
- Has an earlier judgement influenced the opportunity I am offering?
- Would more time, a prompt, a model or an adapted entry point protect the challenge without taking over?

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Key theme 2: Providing support that strengthens motivation and independence

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Drawing on your reflections and self-diagnostic, select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>Relationships create conditions for engagement</u>	<u>Use routines and interactions to support self-regulation</u>	<u>Balance intentional teaching with child-led response</u>
<u>Motivation is responsive to learning conditions</u>	<u>Balance care, monitoring and autonomy</u>	

Relationships create conditions for engagement

Teachers can influence children's wellbeing, motivation and behaviour through the relationships, routines and learning conditions they establish. Development Matters emphasises that secure relationships and supportive routines can help children feel confident enough to explore, respond and develop their own ideas (DfE, 2023).

You will already recognise that children's participation is shaped not only by what adults offer, but by how children experience the interaction.

Positive teacher-student relationships are associated with happiness, belonging and engagement. Older students who felt that teachers listened, treated them fairly, cared about their wellbeing and offered additional help were more likely to report feeling happy and included at school (OECD, 2015).

Research with older children also found that pupils who personally experienced greater teacher care and support reported higher life satisfaction. Their individual experience appeared more important than the average classroom climate reported across the class (Rathmann et al., 2018).

These studies are correlational and do not provide direct evidence about Reception-aged children. However, alongside Development Matters, they reinforce the importance of considering how children experience adult care, responsiveness, structure and choice (DfE, 2023).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Use routines and interactions to support self-regulation

Environments, routines and adult interactions can be organised to promote engagement, understanding, attention and self-regulation. Development Matters highlights the value of supportive routines, adult modelling and opportunities for children to practise, make choices and develop strategies with increasing independence (DfE, 2023).

You will have seen how Reception teachers already make many of these adjustments throughout the day, often through brief prompts, familiar language and repeated opportunities within play and routines.

Social and emotional learning approaches have positive effects on attitudes to learning, relationships and emotional self-management. They appear more likely to be effective when embedded in everyday practice, consistently modelled by adults and supported through staff development (EEF, 2025b).

Behaviour interventions also produce positive average effects when universal classroom approaches are combined with targeted support for children who need additional help. Approaches involving rehearsal and role-play appear particularly promising (EEF, 2025a).

In Reception, adults might explicitly model and rehearse how to:

- enter an established play situation
- ask for help or wait for a response
- negotiate over a resource
- return after disappointment
- try another strategy when an idea does not work

This is more than reminding children how to behave. It involves teaching useful language and actions, providing repeated opportunities to practise and reducing support as children begin to manage more independently (DfE, 2023).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Balance intentional teaching with child-led response

You will already recognise that children sometimes need intentional teaching, particularly when you are introducing knowledge, modelling language or drawing attention to something important. They also need opportunities to make decisions, test ideas and respond without every contribution being directed by an adult (DfE, 2023).

During a familiar story, you might:

- model expressive language

- invite a prediction
- offer puppets or props
- pause to give children time to contribute
- allow children to retell or adapt the story in their own way

You may then make the story available within provision so that children can revisit its language, characters and ideas with greater independence.

Development Matters highlights the value of combining adult guidance with opportunities for children to make choices, develop ideas and use their own strategies (DfE, 2023).

Interactive reading, repeated encounters with stories and space for child-led responses can strengthen children's engagement with books and language (DfE, 2023). Social and emotional learning evidence also suggests that deliberately supported interactions with adults and peers can strengthen relationships, engagement and attitudes to learning (EEF, 2025b).

The aim is not to remove adult guidance. It is to use modelling, questions and prompts in ways that open participation, while giving children enough time and choice to shape their own contribution.

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Motivation is responsive to learning conditions

You will already recognise that children's motivation can vary across activities, relationships and parts of the day. It should not be treated as a fixed characteristic within the child.

A meta-analysis across varied educational contexts found that interventions designed to influence motivation had positive effects on learning outcomes. This suggests that motivation can respond to changes in teaching, tasks and learning environments, although the evidence is not specific to Reception (Laskowski et al, 2016).

Children may be more willing to begin and persist when:

- the activity has a meaningful purpose
- the challenge feels achievable
- they know enough to make a start
- they have some appropriate choice
- adults respond constructively to effort, uncertainty and mistakes

Development Matters describes active learning through children concentrating, persisting when difficulties occur and taking satisfaction from achieving what they set out to do. It also highlights the value of meaningful experiences,

choice and opportunities to develop strategies rather than relying entirely on adult direction (DfE, 2023).

You may see this variation regularly. A child might persist during self-chosen construction but withdraw during a highly directed group activity. Another may contribute confidently with a partner but become quiet when asked to respond in front of the group.

Rather than concluding that a child is simply “unmotivated”, these differences can help you consider how the context is influencing participation. They can inform the individual goal, level of challenge or type of guidance most likely to help the child progress (DfE, 2023; Laskowski et al, 2016).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Balance care, monitoring and autonomy

Even when support is warm and attentive, children may experience the same adult approach in different ways.

The Rathmann study found that older children who personally experienced greater teacher care and autonomy reported higher life satisfaction. However, higher average levels of teacher monitoring across a class were associated with slightly lower life satisfaction, possibly because some pupils experienced close monitoring as pressure or reduced self-determination (Rathmann et al, 2018).

This class-level association was small and correlational. It does not suggest that Reception adults should withdraw supervision, co-regulation or responsive support.

Instead, it highlights a useful distinction between:

- support that helps a child feel secure and capable
- support that unnecessarily replaces the child’s choices and thinking

You may see how the same adult action affects children differently. One child may find a prompt reassuring, while another may experience repeated questions or close attention as pressure.

Development Matters emphasises secure relationships and responsive adult involvement, while also encouraging adults to give children time to make choices, develop ideas and attempt solutions without taking over (DfE, 2023).

Warm and responsive practice therefore involves noticing how support is received, not only how it is intended. This places the child’s experience at the centre of decisions about when to reassure, prompt, model, wait or step back (OECD, 2015; Rathmann et al, 2018; DfE, 2023).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Chapter 2: Further reading

- Birth To 5 Matters (2021) 'Overview – Characteristics of Effective Learning, and Areas of Learning and Development' Accessible from: [Overview – Characteristics of Effective Learning, and Areas of Learning and Development – Birth To 5 Matters](#) [Accessed 12 July 2026]
- Birth To 5 Matters (2022) 'How children learn: Characteristics of effective learning' Accessible from: [How Children Learn: Characteristics of Effective Learning – Birth To 5 Matters](#) [Accessed 11 July 2026]
- Ofsted (2024) 'Best start in life part 2: the 3 prime areas of learning' Accessible from: [Best start in life part 2: the 3 prime areas of learning - GOV.UK](#) [Accessed 14 July 2026]

Chapter 2: References

- Department for Education (2023) Development Matters. Accessible from: [Development Matters - Non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage](#) (Accessed: 16 July 2026).
- Education Endowment Foundation (2025a) Teaching and learning toolkit: behaviour interventions. Accessible from: [Behaviour interventions | EEF](#) (Accessed: 5 May 2026).
- Education Endowment Foundation (2025b) Teaching and learning toolkit: social and emotional learning. Accessible from: [Social and emotional learning | EEF](#) (Accessed: 6 May 2026).
- Jussim, L. and Harber, K. (2005) 'Teacher expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies: knowns and unknowns, resolved and unresolved controversies', *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 9(2), pp. 131–155. Accessible from: [Teacher Expectations and Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: Knowns and Unknowns, Resolved and Unresolved Controversies - Lee Jussim, Kent D. Harber, 2005](#) (Accessed: 2 June 2026).
- Laskowski, R.A. and Hulleman, C.S. (2016) 'Motivation interventions in education: a meta-analytic review', *Review of Educational Research*, 86(2), pp. 602–640. Accessible from: [Motivation Interventions in Education - Rory A. Lazowski, Chris S. Hulleman, 2016](#) (Accessed: 2 June 2026).
- Murdock-Perriera, L.A. and Sedlacek, Q.C. (2018) 'Questioning Pygmalion in the twenty-first century: the formation, transmission and attributional influence of teacher expectancies', *Social Psychology of Education*, 21(3), pp. 691–707. Accessible from: [Questioning Pygmalion in the twenty-first century: the formation, transmission, and attributional influence of teacher expectancies | Social Psychology of Education | Springer Nature Link](#) (Accessed: 2 June 2026).

- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2015) 'Do teacher-student relations affect students' well-being at school?', PISA in Focus, 50. Accessible from: [Do teacher-student relations affect students' well-being at school? \(EN\)](#) (Accessed: 2 June 2026).
- Rathmann, K., Herke, M., Hurrelmann, K. and Richter, M. (2018) 'Perceived class climate and school-aged children's life satisfaction: the role of the learning environment in classrooms', PLoS ONE, 13(2). Accessible from: [Perceived class climate and school-aged children's life satisfaction: The role of the learning environment in classrooms | PLOS One](#) (Accessed: 2 June 2026).
- Rubie-Davies, C.M., Weinstein, R.S., Huang, F.L., Gregory, A., Cowan, P.A. and Cowan, C.P. (2014) 'Successive teacher expectation effects across the early school years', Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 35(3), pp. 181–191. Accessible from: [Successive teacher expectation effects across the early school years - ScienceDirect](#) (Accessed: 2 June 2026).
- Valdebenito, S., Eisner, M., Farrington, D.P., Ttofi, M. and Sutherland, A. (2018) 'School-based interventions for reducing disciplinary school exclusion: a systematic review'. Accessible from: [School-based interventions for reducing disciplinary school exclusion: a systematic review - PubMed](#) (Accessed: 2 June 2026).

[Click to return to Content page](#)

Chapter 3: Routines including transitions

<u>Key theme 1</u>	<u>Key theme 2</u>	<u>Key Theme 3</u>
------------------------------------	------------------------------------	------------------------------------

Key theme 1: Making familiar transitions work for more children

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Use your reflections and self-diagnostic to select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>What children are regulating during a transition</u>	<u>How predictable routines make participation more manageable</u>	<u>How adults teach and co-regulate within everyday routines</u>
<u>How adults adapt support without taking over</u>		

What children are regulating during a transition

Self-regulation helps children manage their thoughts, emotions and actions so that they can participate in learning and respond to what is happening around them. It draws on executive-function skills such as holding information in mind, focusing attention, thinking flexibly and inhibiting an immediate response (Ursache et al., 2012; DfE, 2023; EEF, 2025b; 1.7).

These abilities help children to plan what to do next, monitor their progress, adapt when something changes, manage strong feelings and persist when a task becomes difficult. Language is also important because children increasingly use words to guide their actions, recall expectations and communicate what they need (DfE, 2023; 1.7).

You may already recognise how much self-regulation an everyday transition can require. A child moving from outdoor play to the classroom may need to:

- stop an activity that matters to them

- shift their attention towards an adult
- remember more than one step
- manage noise, movement and waiting
- organise belongings while sharing space with others

Each part places demands on attention, working memory, emotional regulation and impulse control (Ursache et al., 2012; EEF, 2025b; DfE, 2023; 1.7).

Children's capacity to manage these demands is not fixed. It can vary according to their developmental stage, familiarity with the situation, motivation, emotional state, wellbeing and the level of demand in that moment (EEF, 2025b; DfE, 2023; 1.7).

This helps explain why a child may manage a routine confidently on one day but need more support on another. It also explains why knowing a routine does not always mean that a child can carry out every part of it independently (EEF, 2025b; 1.7).

In the St Cuthbert's scenario, Oscar may understand that the class is moving indoors but find it difficult to hold the full sequence in mind. Ben may manage the familiar routine but struggle to think flexibly when the entrance changes. Freya may know exactly what to do but have fewer opportunities to complete the sequence when adults act quickly on her behalf.

Your knowledge of the children helps you interpret these differences. Rather than viewing hesitation, distress or missed steps only as behaviour to correct, you can consider which demands the child is managing and where the routine may require more attention, memory, language or flexibility than is immediately visible (Ursache et al., 2012; EEF, 2025b; DfE, 2023; 1.7).

Self-regulation is therefore broader than compliance. The aim is not simply for children to move quietly or follow instructions quickly. It is to help them develop the skills and confidence to understand what is happening, manage their responses and participate with increasing independence (EEF, 2023a; EEF, 2025b; DfE, 2023; 1.7).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

How predictable routines make participation more manageable

Predictable routines can help children feel secure, understand what is expected and anticipate what will happen next. When adults use familiar sequences, cues and responses, children have less uncertainty to manage and can direct more of their attention towards participating (EEF, 2025b; EEF, 2026; DfE, 2023; 1.k).

Development Matters describes how young children begin to predict sequences because they recognise familiar routines and environmental cues. Over time, this can help them prepare for what comes next and take greater responsibility for their own actions (DfE, 2023; 1.7; 1.k).

You may already use sounds, objects, visual prompts, repeated phrases or changes in the environment to signal a transition. These cues are most useful when children understand their meaning and adults use them consistently across the different areas and routines children experience (EEF, 2026; DfE, 2023; 1.k).

Predictability does not mean that every routine must be inflexible. Changes are unavoidable in Reception. Weather, staffing, visitors and children's needs may all alter the usual sequence. Adults can preserve a sense of security by explaining changes in advance where possible, connecting the new sequence to what children already know and using familiar language or cues to guide them through it (EEF, 2025b; EEF, 2026; 1.k).

In the St Cuthbert's scenario, most children understand that outdoor provision will end and that they will return indoors. However, predictability may weaken when several instructions are given at once, the doorway becomes crowded or the class uses a different entrance. The broad routine is familiar, but some of its cues and steps may not be equally clear or accessible to every child.

A clear routine can also support positive relationships. Shared expectations help children understand how to use common spaces, manage resources and move alongside others. Adults can strengthen this by explaining why the routine matters, rather than presenting it only as a direction to obey (EEF, 2025a; EEF, 2026; 1.9).

For example, waiting near a doorway may help another child move safely. Returning outdoor equipment may allow others to find and use it later. Collecting belongings without blocking the route may help the whole group move calmly. Making this social purpose visible can support children to understand how their actions affect others (EEF, 2025a; 1.9; 1.k).

You and the other adults in your setting will know which routines already provide security and independence. The aim is not to replace these with a new system. It is to notice where a familiar routine may have become less predictable because of adult language, environmental demands or variation in how adults respond (EEF, 2026; 1.k).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

How adults teach and co-regulate within everyday routines

Children develop self-regulation through responsive relationships, explicit teaching, modelling and repeated practice. At first, they may rely on adults to help manage emotions and actions. Over time, familiar experiences can help them use strategies with greater independence (EEF, 2023a; EEF, 2025b; 1.7).

Co-regulation bridges the gap between what a child can manage alone and what they can manage with support. The level of help should reflect the child's development, previous experience and emotional or cognitive state in that moment (EEF, 2025b; 1.7).

Effective co-regulation usually involves:

- acknowledging what has happened and offering emotional support
- helping the child recognise, recall or apply a useful strategy (EEF, 2025b; 1.7)

For example, an adult might acknowledge a child's disappointment about ending play, then remind them of the first step in the transition. They might prepare a child for a changed entrance or use a familiar cue to support participation (EEF, 2025a; EEF, 2025b; 1.7; 1.k).

Adults can also selectively name physical sensations, emotions and actions, helping children understand what they are experiencing and what they might do next. Strategies are more likely to become useful when taught and practised in manageable situations, then recalled during play, routines or transitions (EEF, 2023a; EEF, 2025a; EEF, 2025b; 1.7).

Adult language also helps children understand how to wait, ask for help, communicate boundaries and move safely alongside others. Children should not be expected to infer these social expectations without support (EEF, 2025a; EEF, 2025b; 1.9; 1.k).

You may already see this in the brief prompts used by experienced adults in your setting. Consistency does not require an identical script. It means children experience coherent expectations, familiar cues and responsive support across adults and spaces (EEF, 2026; 1.k).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

How adults adapt support without taking over

Responsive support begins with noticing what a child can already manage and where participation becomes more difficult. Adults can then decide whether the

child needs more time, a prompt, a model, reassurance, an environmental adjustment or more direct help (EEF, 2025b; EEF, 2026; DfE, 2023; 1.7; 1.k).

The right response may differ between children and across situations. A child who usually manages independently may need more co-regulation when tired, upset or faced with change. Another may need adults to step back so they can practise what they are beginning to manage for themselves (EEF, 2025b; 1.7).

Development Matters advises adults not to offer help too soon. Children may benefit from trying again, watching a peer, recalling previous experience or receiving a carefully chosen prompt. This does not mean leaving them to struggle. Support should address the barrier without removing the thinking, communication or action they can manage (DfE, 2023; EEF, 2026; 1.7).

Effective adaptations are proportionate, informed by observation and reviewed over time. They should promote participation and independence rather than becoming fixed responses based on labels or assumptions (EEF, 2026; 1.k).

At St Cuthbert's, carrying Freya's belongings may speed up the transition but reduce her opportunity to practise. Preparing Ben for a changed entrance may support more independence than physically guiding him. A single visual or verbal cue may help Oscar more than repeating the full instruction.

Your knowledge of the children, alongside the observations of other adults, helps you balance safety, emotional support, participation and independence. It can be useful to agree:

- what the child already manages
- where the barrier appears
- which response to try
- what adults will notice afterwards

The aim is not to remove help quickly, but to adjust its type and intensity so that children remain secure and take increasing responsibility within shared routines (EEF, 2025b; EEF, 2026; 1.7; 1.9; 1.k).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Key theme 2: Supporting cooperation within shared play

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Use your reflections and self-diagnostic to select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

[How shared social routines support cooperation and positive relationships](#)

[How adults help children use routines for planning, negotiation and repair](#)

How shared social routines support cooperation and positive relationships

Children develop positive relationships not only through warm interactions, but through repeated opportunities to participate with others. Familiar social routines can help them understand how to join play, contribute an idea, share resources, respond to disagreement and return to an activity after a difficulty (EEF, 2025a; EEF, 2025b; 1.9).

You may already recognise these routines in your own setting. They might include how children:

- ask to join an established game
- listen before roles are agreed
- request or wait for a resource
- suggest a change to a shared plan
- communicate that they do not like something
- repair a disagreement and continue playing

These routines give children practical ways to behave positively towards one another. Children should not be expected to infer how to negotiate, take turns or communicate boundaries simply because adults have told them to cooperate (EEF, 2025a; 1.9).

Evidence-informed PSED approaches include explicitly teaching social communication and problem-solving. Adults may use stories, puppets, role-play, sentence stems or examples from previous play to make useful language and strategies visible (EEF, 2025a; 1.9).

The purpose is not to impose a fixed script on children's interactions. A familiar phrase or process can provide enough structure for children to express their

own ideas and respond to those of others. For example, a routine of hearing each child's idea before choosing roles may help prevent more confident children from making every decision.

Shared routines can also help children understand why expectations matter. Waiting for a turn, listening to another idea or returning a resource supports other children's participation, rather than simply satisfying an adult rule (EEF, 2025a; EEF, 2026; 1.9).

In mixed-age provision, you may notice younger or quieter children learning from more experienced peers. You may also see occasions when confident children dominate roles or when others join an activity without fully understanding its purpose. A light social routine can help protect meaningful participation without removing the benefits of child-led, mixed-age play.

Small-group creative play involving planning and negotiation may support aspects of self-regulation and executive function. However, the evidence is limited, and collaborative learning often forms only one part of broader programmes. It is therefore more appropriate to focus on the opportunities children gain to listen, remember a shared plan, communicate and adapt their actions than to assume that collaborative routines will produce particular outcomes by themselves (EEF, 2025b; 1.7; 1.9).

You and your colleagues are likely to have developed many effective ways of supporting cooperation. The useful question is whether children encounter these approaches consistently across adults, spaces and parts of the day. A routine that is familiar outdoors but not used during indoor provision, or supported by one adult but bypassed by another, may be harder for children to apply independently (EEF, 2026).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

How adults help children use routines for planning, negotiation and repair

Adults can help children apply familiar social routines when different ideas, roles or needs begin to interrupt shared play. Their role is to facilitate communication and problem-solving, rather than immediately decide whose idea should be followed (EEF, 2025a; EEF, 2025b; 1.9; 1.k).

You may already do this through brief questions or reminders that return children to a process they know. For example:

- "What was your plan together?"
- "Whose idea have we not heard yet?"
- "How could you include both destinations?"

Questions such as these can help children identify where their ideas differ and consider possible solutions without the adult supplying the answer (EEF, 2025a; EEF, 2025b; 1.9).

Adults may also need to model specific language. Children can be taught ways to invite another child into play, disagree safely, explain why an idea matters, request a turn or suggest a compromise. This gives them tools for managing relationships when emotions or competing intentions make communication more difficult (EEF, 2025a; 1.9).

Recalling an earlier experience can be particularly helpful. An adult might remind children how they previously shared a popular resource or combined two ideas. This supports children to draw on what they have already learned rather than treating each disagreement as an entirely new problem (EEF, 2025a; EEF, 2025b; 1.7; 1.9).

As explored earlier, the amount of support adults provide will vary. Here, the focus is specifically on helping children use a shared routine to work through a social problem. Some children may need the plan made more concrete, an invitation to contribute or support to express disagreement. The adult can provide this help while leaving decisions about the play with the children where possible (EEF, 2025b; EEF, 2026; 1.9).

Sensitive adult participation may sometimes be needed to restart communication or prevent a child from being excluded. However, assigning every role, choosing which idea should prevail or completing the shared project can reduce opportunities for children to practise negotiation and repair (EEF, 2025b; DfE, 2023; 1.7; 1.9).

Experienced teams often make these judgements quickly. Consistency does not require identical wording, but it does require a shared understanding of what adults are trying to help children learn. Adults might agree to:

- return children to the familiar social routine before solving the problem
- make space for each child to contribute
- model language when children do not yet have it
- avoid deciding the outcome when children can negotiate it
- notice whether children later use the routine with less support

The aim is not to eliminate disagreement. Differences are a normal part of collaborative play. Clear and adaptable routines can help children gain repeated experience of listening, negotiating, repairing relationships and continuing to participate positively with others (EEF, 2025a; EEF, 2025b; 1.9).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Key theme 3: Reducing barriers within shared routines

Evidence

Choose the evidence you wish to revisit

Drawing on your reflections and self-diagnostic, select which evidence summaries to revisit.

Click the link to revisit the evidence base:

<u>How routines and environments can create or reduce barriers</u>	<u>How adults build a fuller picture before interpreting behaviour</u>	<u>How timely adaptations are implemented consistently and reviewed</u>
--	--	---

How routines and environments can create or reduce barriers

Children do not experience a routine separately from the environment in which it happens. Their participation is shaped by the interaction between their individual characteristics and the spaces, activities, relationships, expectations and routines around them (EEF, 2020).

A calm, purposeful environment with clear and predictable routines can benefit all children. These conditions may be particularly important for many children with SEND because they reduce uncertainty and make the demands of participation easier to understand (Carroll et al., 2017; EEF, 2020).

Many Reception teams already think carefully about how children move between activities and spaces. The inclusive-practice question is whether the same care extends across every part of the routine, including shared areas and times led by other adults.

During a transition, barriers may arise from:

- noise, crowding or visual distraction
- several instructions being given at once
- waiting without knowing how long it will last
- sudden changes of pace or direction
- movement through unfamiliar or busy spaces

These conditions may affect children differently. A routine that appears straightforward to most of the group may combine sensory, social, physical and

organisational demands that make participation much harder for one child (EEF, 2020).

In Maya's case, the challenge is not simply entering the dining hall. She is managing scraping chairs, moving pupils, changing instructions, waiting and uncertainty about where she will sit. Looking closely at these combined demands helps the team consider what within the routine could be changed before asking Maya to manage more.

Universal behaviour and social and emotional approaches are more likely to become useful when they are embedded within everyday practice. Clear cues, calm adult responses and opportunities to rehearse the actual transition may prevent some barriers from developing (EEF, 2025c; EEF, 2025d).

You may recognise routines in your own setting that work well when led by one adult or in one space, but become less accessible elsewhere. The aim is not to remove every challenge. It is to ensure that avoidable features of the routine are not preventing children from engaging successfully.

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

How adults build a fuller picture before interpreting behaviour

A child's behaviour may be influenced by their wellbeing, relationships, environment and changes to familiar routines. Adults should therefore look beyond the child when considering why difficulty occurs (Carroll et al., 2017; EEF, 2020; EEF, 2025c).

Your knowledge of children across ordinary moments can help you compare what they show:

- in familiar and unfamiliar routines
- with different adults or groups
- in quiet and crowded spaces
- when a sequence remains predictable or changes
- before and after particular environmental demands

A child who struggles during one transition may participate confidently elsewhere. This variation can reveal the conditions that support security, communication and engagement (EEF, 2020).

Maya's confident classroom participation is therefore as important as her distress near the dining hall. Together, these observations invite the team to examine what is different about the lunch transition.

This does not mean delaying support or overlooking a possible additional need. Adults can act promptly while considering whether the difficulty reflects a:

- barrier within the routine
- temporary response to change or wellbeing
- pattern requiring further assessment or specialist advice

Family knowledge and the child's own communication can strengthen this picture. Maya's family recognise similar responses during busy gatherings and know that preparation and a predictable seat can help. This offers a possible explanation to test, rather than a fixed conclusion (EEF, 2019; EEF, 2020).

Experienced practitioners may already make these comparisons instinctively. The challenge is ensuring observations are shared across classroom staff, lunchtime adults and families, so that one context or interpretation does not define the child.

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

How timely adaptations are implemented consistently and reviewed

Inclusive practice combines accessible universal routines with additional support where a specific barrier remains. Targeted adaptations are more likely to help when they build on a clear shared routine rather than becoming a separate system for one child (EEF, 2025c; EEF, 2025d).

The team might first strengthen the lunch transition for everyone through:

- a clearer sequence
- less unnecessary waiting
- concise, familiar cues
- advance notice of changes
- rehearsal before the corridor becomes busy
- calm, positive adult responses

Maya may still benefit from entering earlier, using a quieter route, knowing her seat in advance or being met by a familiar adult (EEF, 2019; EEF, 2020; EEF, 2025c).

No single adaptation will suit every child. Support should be linked to the barrier identified and introduced promptly enough to improve participation (EEF, 2020; EEF, 2025c).

Adults need a shared understanding of:

- what the adaptation is intended to change
- when and where it should be used

- who is responsible
- how Maya and her family have contributed
- what will be noticed and when it will be reviewed

This matters when routines involve adults beyond the Reception classroom. If Ms Patel prepares Maya differently from the lunchtime staff, the transition may remain unpredictable. Consistency means keeping the purpose and key elements coherent while responding flexibly in the moment (EEF, 2019; EEF, 2025c; EEF, 2025d).

Review should look beyond whether visible behaviours reduce. The team might notice whether Maya:

- approaches the transition more securely
- anticipates what will happen
- enters without repeated direction
- continues to eat and interact with friends
- manages unexpected changes more readily

You may already use adaptations informed by detailed knowledge of children. Regular review helps ensure that support remains useful, is strengthened where needed and does not continue automatically after the barrier or the child's needs have changed (Carroll et al., 2017; EEF, 2020).

[Click to return to list of evidence](#)

Chapter 3: Further reading

- Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs (2025) 'The Power of Morning Routines' Accessible from: <https://www.strongerpracticehubs.org.uk/hubs/ne/great-n-eysph/resources/calm-start-power-morning-routines-ey> (Accessed 15 July 2026)
- NDNA 'Promoting Positive Behaviour Strategies in Early Years' Accessible from: [Promoting Positive Behaviour Strategies in Early Years](#) (Accessed 18 July 2026)
- Ofsted (2024) 'Strong foundations in the first years of school' Accessible from: [Strong foundations in the first years of school - GOV.UK](#) (Accessed 17 July 2026)
- Research Schools Networks (2020) Mathematical Routines in Year One' Accessible from: [Mathematical Routines in Year One | Research Schools Network](#) (Accessed 12 July 2026)

- Shotton Hall Research School (2021) 'The role of routines in behaviour for learning' Accessible from: [The role of routines in behaviour for... | Shotton Hall Research School](#) (Accessed 14 July 2026)

Chapter 3: References

- Carroll, J., Bradley, L., Crawford, H., Hannant, P., Johnson, H. and Thompson, A. (2017) SEN support: A rapid evidence assessment. Accessible from: [SEN support: A rapid evidence assessment](#) (Accessed 2 June 2026.)
- Chapman, R.L., Buckley, L. and Sheehan, M. (2013) 'School-based programs for increasing connectedness and reducing risk behavior: A systematic review', Educational Psychology Review, 25(1), pp. 95–114. Accessible from: [School-Based Programs for Increasing Connectedness and Reducing Risk Behavior: A Systematic Review | Educational Psychology Review | Springer Nature Link](#) (Accessed 2 June 2026.)
- Department for Education (2023) Development Matters: Non-statutory curriculum guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Accessible from: [Development Matters - Non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage](#) (Accessed 16 July 2026.)
- Education Endowment Foundation (2019) Improving behaviour in schools: Guidance report. Accessible from: [Improving Behaviour in Schools | EEF](#) (Accessed 2 June 2026.)
- Education Endowment Foundation (2020) Special educational needs in mainstream schools. Accessible from: [Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools | EEF](#) (Accessed 2 June 2026.)
- Education Endowment Foundation (2023a) Early years toolkit: Self-regulation strategies. Accessible from: [Self-regulation strategies | EEF](#) (Accessed 6 May 2026.)
- Education Endowment Foundation (2023b) Early years toolkit: Social and emotional learning strategies. Accessible from: [Social and emotional learning strategies | EEF](#) (Accessed 6 May 2026.)
- Education Endowment Foundation (2025a) Early years evidence store: Personal, social and emotional development. Accessible from: [EEF | Personal social and emotional development](#) (Accessed 2 June 2026.)
- Education Endowment Foundation (2025b) Early years evidence store: Self-regulation and executive function. Accessible from: [EEF | Self-regulation and executive function](#) (Accessed 2 June 2026.)
- Education Endowment Foundation (2025c) Teaching and learning toolkit: Behaviour interventions. Accessible from: [Behaviour interventions | EEF](#) (Accessed 5 May 2026.)

- Education Endowment Foundation (2025d) Teaching and learning toolkit: Social and emotional learning. Accessible from: [Social and emotional learning | EEF](#) (Accessed 6 May 2026.)
- Education Endowment Foundation (2026) Guide to inclusive teaching. Accessible from: [Guide to Inclusive Teaching | EEF](#) (Accessed 19 July 2026.)
- Ursache, A., Blair, C. and Raver, C.C. (2012) 'The promotion of self-regulation as a means of enhancing school readiness and early achievement in children at risk for school failure', *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(2), pp. 122–128. Accessible from: [Promotion of Self-Regulation as a Means of Enhancing School Readiness and Early Achievement in Children at Risk for School Failure | Child Development Perspectives | Oxford Academic](#) (Accessed 2 June 2026.)

[Click to return to Content page](#)