

You Can... Use assessment strategies from the Early Years

You Can... Get the most from planned and impromptu observation

One of the core purposes of the Early Years is 'laying a secure foundation for future learning through learning and development that is planned around the individual needs and interests of the child, and informed by the use of ongoing observational assessment' (Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, 2008). It is from this core purpose that Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) across the country have developed creative and time-efficient observation strategies.

Thinking points

Observation, whether planned or impromptu, has always been a significant aspect of Early Years provision. In 2006 the *Early Years Foundation Stage Framework* stated that the:

'Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requires those who plan and deliver early years provision to put children first; to listen to them and their parents; to observe what they can do; and to make them the most important influence on planning, observational assessment, routines and staffing'.

'It is important that practitioners ensure that they observe closely what children can do, and use those observations as the basis of assessment and planning of the next stages of children's development (there must be no tests for children at any stage of the EYFS)'.

Significantly this was then reiterated in the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2008 almost word for word. It is the basis of all assessment and the conversations that should result from it.

Tips, ideas and activities

- Assessment must have a purpose and reflect the key areas of learning as stated in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.
- Ongoing observation of children participating in everyday activities is the most reliable way of building up an accurate picture of what children know, understand, feel, are interested in and can do. Practitioners should both plan observations and be ready to capture the spontaneous but important moments, such as discussion about snow falling or how they interact at an animal demonstration.
- All key adults should have a shared understanding about what to observe and how.
- Judgements of children's development and learning must be based on skills, knowledge, understanding and behaviour that are demonstrated consistently and independently.
- Effective assessment takes equal account of all aspects of the child's development and learning.
- Accurate assessment relies on contributions from a range of contexts, including both indoor and outdoor play. You may have a boy child who is reluctant to use a graphics table (even if a replica is placed outside). This requires some out-of-the box thinking, and clipboards by the sandpit or diggers may produce the early mark-making you require to complete an assessment.
- Assessments must actively engage parents in developing an accurate picture of the child's development.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework 2008 can be accessed at www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk.