

# Caring for children: roles, regulations and practices



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## **Describing the role of the practitioner in caring for children**

The role and responsibilities of an early years practitioner follow a number of codes of practice which clearly state how practitioners and other staff

must conduct themselves. Chief amongst the codes presently in operation are those that govern special needs, safeguarding children, children's learning,

behaviour, working with parents, and data protection (Nutbrown and Clough, 2014). As Spodek and Saracho (2014) note, the early years practitioner has a clear set of designated responsibilities including: working to the principles of the sector and its codes of confidentiality; meeting the learning needs of each individual child by ensuring that issues of differentiation are met; providing and sustaining an environment that is warm, welcoming and stimulating;

working with parents and partners; and working as part of a team that provides a quality service for both children and parents. In addition, the practitioner may also, especially in cases of suspected abuse, have to work with an array of outside agencies and conform to issues of child safety (Daniel, Gilligan and Wassell, 2011).

In fulfilling their statutory duties, it follows that the practitioner must put the needs of children first because, as Bradshaw (2011) comments, this

helps to keep children out of harm, and by keeping them safe, a productive environment can be created in which they can maximise their potential. It is imperative that practitioners respect others' choices because failure to do so can cause friction between staff members and can negatively reflect on the setting and upset the children (Sylva et al., 2010). Further, there is a pressing need, as Willow (2014) suggests, to ensure that one always respects

issues pertaining to confidentiality. This is because it can help a child stay out of trouble, keep them safe, and help them to develop into responsible adults.

Seemingly of secondary importance, because it is removed from direct interaction with the child, but actually of just as much importance, is planning,

recording and reviewing the child's progress (Bradbury, 2014). This is important for two major reasons. First, the formal keeping of records allows the progress of children to be monitored and evaluated against national criteria (Bradbury, 2014). Secondly, it can help practitioners to be reflective upon their own strengths and weaknesses (Paige-Smith and Craft, 2011). This is not, however, merely an issue of internalisation, for such a process also

helps when one is undertaking activities because one can evaluate how well the event went well, and from that, make improvements to ensure that in future

events are even better planned. Indeed, such reflection is, as Paige- Smith and Craft (2011) contend, an essential function of effective practice.

It is also important, as Sims-Schouten and Stittrich-Lyons (2014) recommend, to demonstrate responsibility in the way that one conducts oneself at work, as

it helps the children to learn right from wrong. This is an important consideration because it is partly the responsibility of the professional (in co-operation with the parents) to teach the children and in this way one acts as a role model. The creation of a meaningful partnership with parents is also of pivotal importance as the latter can learn from the former as to what the child likes and dislikes - it also allows the parents to take a proactive interest and role in the raising of their children and may help them to ensure that the child's development is in line with national curricular expectations (Read, 2014).

Continuing professional development (CPD) is, as Sims-Schouten and Stittrich-Lyons (2014) explain, critical as it enables the practitioner to enhance their

existent skill set and further learn from best practice. It also shows others that the practitioner is interested in helping the children to be the best they can be and that they are dedicated to their role - which may also be useful when seeking promotion or a change of professional employer.

Observing children as a form of CPD also helps one to recognise the distinctive stages of a child's development and this can help with the prioritising of a child's needs, particularly with regard to where they may need additional support (Carroll and McCullough, 2014). Lastly, within this section it can be commented that working as part of a wider team helps to create a positive environment for everyone to work within; by making people feel valued, this may increase self-confidence and productivity (Pugh and Duffy, 2013).

### **Comparing the differing roles of statutory, private, voluntary and independent settings**

Many parents successfully adapt to changes in their lives and in so doing have the benefit of support from their family and friends to provide assistance

if it is required. A significant number of families, however, face issues that affect family life in such a manner that they require professional

assistance, or may be hampered by a lack of 'family and friend' support or a lack of internal ability to deal with change. Such factors, as

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Daniel, Gilligan and Wassell (2011) observe, include: financial difficulties, unemployment, divorce and separation, caring for others, bereavement, and social isolation.

If one looks at each of these in turn it is possible to comment further on the individual problems that each factor may entail. Thus, with regard to

financial difficulties it can be noted that problems faced are likely to be exacerbated where there is a low income family that cannot afford food or clothes or proper rent (Burchinal et al., 2010). Indeed, the rise in food banks within the UK gives a graphic illustration of this problem, as Sylva et al.

(2010) note. Poor housing may also lead to feelings of depression and declining health as a result of factors such as damp. With reference to unemployment, the loss of a job, and the resultant lack of income can, in addition to depression, lead to stress within relationships and may also result in other family

members, such as young mothers, having to go out to work (Shonkoff and Bales, 2011). Unemployment may also lead to a loss of child care as parents cannot

afford support whilst a mother is forced to work, possibly culminating in a separation of child from mother at a crucial stage of infant development (Read,

2014). Divorce and separation can also cause several problems which need addressing and assistance from trained professionals. The three major problems are

loss of income, smaller housing and cramped conditions, and a sense of guilt on the part of the child for a parent leaving (Bradshaw, 2011). Such issues can create tension and stress that can impact upon development and behavioural issues. In a similar manner, caring for other family members or caring for

someone with a long-term illness (such as elderly relatives) can result in additional costs and a perceived ' rationing' of care towards

children which can cause emotional disturbance (Pugh and Duffy, 2014).

Bereavement brings with it, as Read (2014) explains, emotional strain, and issues

pertaining to dealing with grief - which may also affect the internal dynamics of a family's daily life and routines. Finally, social

isolation, with its associated lack of communication, may cause health concerns to worsen which need additional support. In such scenarios, it becomes

clear, from the comments made above, that children and families may need additional support at certain times in their lives (Burks and Kobus, 2012).

There are many organisations and self-help groups that can provide this support. These include, the National Childbirth Trust, the National Association of

Toy and Leisure Libraries, the Child Poverty Action group, Home Start, Parentline Plus, Gingerbread, various elements of local authorities' services, and the National Health Service. In addition, as Shonkoff (2010) has commented, there are many different settings where children can be cared for,

including, but not limited to, respite care, holiday play schemes, parent and toddler groups, schools, workplace nurseries, child-minders, pre-schools, after school clubs, residential care, day nurseries and crèches. The suitability of the option chosen is likely to be influenced both by the specific issue that the family faces and their financial circumstances.

There are three different sectors that provide care and education for children. They are: the statutory (or state) sector, voluntary sector, and private

sector. The statutory sector is a sector that has to be there by law, such as local state-funded schools and hospitals. The age range that primary schools cover is from five years to eleven years old and they follow a set curriculum (Nutbrown and Clough, 2014). The aim of a state sector school or similar



facility is to provide opportunities for the education of every child and to support their learning (Pugh and Duffy, 2014). In so doing, they provide a safe and secure environment for children, which keeps them free from harm. Such schools also provide social opportunities for a child, which include learning to make friends, learning to socialise with people, learning the difference between adults and children, and learning to respect others. It may also provide opportunities for the families of children. This may be achieved by, for instance, new parents' evenings and sports afternoons, as well as the Parent and Teacher Association.

In contrast to the state sector, the voluntary sector is a sector in which people volunteer to organise and run specific facilities. A mother and toddler group (that is not aided by the state) or the Brownies and Girl Guides are examples of such organisations (Pugh and Duffy, 2013). Mother and toddler groups are usually aimed at children who are aged between two and four. Often these kinds of organisations are to be found placed in a church or community hall.

Such buildings have not been designed specifically for children and thus may contain hidden dangers (Bradshaw, 2011). Nevertheless, the staff are usually

parents themselves and the person in charge of the organisation must have at least a Level Three childcare qualification (or an equivalent). It would also be expected that people who are in positions of trust in such organisations will have been police checked so as to ensure that the children and parents are

safe. The organisation, in this case a mother and toddler group, may ask for a small donation each week, and this may range from 50p in some deprived areas

of northern Scotland, to approximately £5.00 a week in Surrey (Burchinal et al., 2010). This money is used to cover the basic cost of booking the hall and associated costs such as lighting and water bills. The area in which the organisation is situated may not have an outdoor area for the children to play

in and this can be seen as a disadvantage as keeping fit is an important consideration in the development of children (Marmot and Bell, 2012). It is also

to be expected that toddler groups should follow the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum so as to ensure that children may be taught appropriately and

their progress monitored from the earliest possible age (Shankoff, 2010). It is also likely that such groups will be Ofsted-inspected, which is important

as it gives the parents confidence as to the quality of education and opportunity being afforded to their offspring in voluntary toddler play groups (Willow, 2014). Whilst the main aim of a mother and toddler group is to provide short-term care to young children, it should also be remembered that such

groups also need to prepare the toddler for primary school by equipping him or her with the basic skills that he or she will need to excel in school. In addition such groups also provide social opportunities for the parent or carer (as well as the child) to meet new people and this can help to integrate marginalised groups within society (Barnett, 2011).

The private sector is one in which people pay extra to get the best available opportunities for their child's education or health, as well as their own.

When a parent uses a private day nursery he or she is charged for using it, with specific charges depending upon the service delivered and the area of the

country in which the client resides. Though this may not be true in all such facilities, it is suggested by Burchinal et al. (2010) that the private sector usually provides hot meals for all children who use their services, as well as indoor and outdoor play areas for children to play in. The staff in such centres are likely to be highly motivated and to receive better remuneration packages than their state sector counterparts (Sims-Schouten and

Stittrich-Lyons, 2014). Though it may be the case that private day nurseries are not housed in purpose-built buildings, many are – and the private sector tends to pride itself on the quality of the resources that it provides (Walker et al., 2011). As with the state sector, Ofsted may inspect the facilities provided. It is notable that in the last few years a greater proportion of such facilities within the private sector have been rated as more consistently excellent than those in the state sector.

### **The main regulations that govern the care of children in different types of settings**

The following is a list of the primary legislation that relates to working with children in a children's centre:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Race Relations Act 1976
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Disability and Discrimination Act 2004

Within their day to day working, children's centres must, at all times, comply with the Data Protection Act, 1998. This can affect daily working practices as it places a duty of care on practitioners to ensure that records are kept in a safe and secure environment and not shared with third parties (Willow, 2014). In addition, through the provisions of the Disability and Discrimination Act 2004, it is assured that there will be, within such centres,

no discrimination against any person with respect to their opportunity for employment, the conditions of their employment or the delivery of services as a

consequence of their sex, marital status, race, or disability. Cumulatively, therefore, the laws noted above require children's centres to make sure that they perform their responsibilities in a timely and professional manner and, through so doing eliminate unlawful racial discrimination.

The centre should be responsible for and take all such precautions that are necessary to protect the health and safety of all persons employed by it and should comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and any other Acts or Regulations relating to the health and safety of employed persons (Human Rights Act 1998). It gives further effect in the UK to rights contained in the European Convention of Human Rights.

The Care Standards Act 2000 and the Regulations and National Minimum Standards set out the responsibilities of agencies and carers in promoting the health

of children who are looked after (Davis et al., 2012).

The Education Act 2002 regulates that local authorities and schools are required to protect, safeguard, and promote the welfare of children. This includes

health and safety, child protection and the overall well-being of children. The Every Child Matters guidance and the Children Act 2004 introduced a new duty (Section 10) to co-operate at a strategic level on local authorities, Primary Care Trusts and other relevant children's services partners. The focus

of these Acts and the ECM guidance is to protect children and promote the welfare and well-being of children. This encompasses elements such as: being

healthy - enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle; staying safe - being protected from harm and neglect;

enjoying and achieving - getting the most out of learning and life, and developing skills for adulthood; making a positive contribution - being

involved in community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour; and economic well-being - not being prevented by economic

disadvantage from achieving their potential.

Other legislation that helps the health and well-being of children includes the Children Act 1989, which provides care and protection of all children and young people in need, including those living away from home. Local authorities have a specific duty under Section 22 of the Act to safeguard and promote

the wellbeing of each child they look after. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 amends the Children Act 1989 and supports the care system, putting in

place the structures necessary to enable children and young people to receive high quality care and support.

## **Daily care of children**

There are many different daily routines for children that can help them develop, such as hygiene, including toileting, washing hands, bed time and teeth

cleaning; meal time routines, involving sitting at the table, using knives, forks and spoons; and sleep routines, to ensure that children acquire healthy sleeping habits that will stand them in good stead not only through childhood but in adulthood (Barnett, 2011).

Daily routines vary depending where the child is being cared for. Promoting and supporting a child's independence and self-care is important and a child's self-image and self-esteem are vital to their overall well-being (Marmot and Bell, 2012).

For the purposes of this essay, a focus is given on two particular learning activities: tying shoelaces, and dressing appropriately for the weather.

## **Activity One: Shoelaces**

The activity involves teaching children to tie their laces by making a personalised shoe that the children decorate themselves, with laces for them to

practice at home and at day-care.

In this, there are two primary roles: the adult role, helping children learn to tie their laces, and the child's role, which not only covers learning

to tie shoelaces, but practising doing so at home. This promotes independence because the children feel a sense of accomplishment in achieving a daily

activity that previously adults fulfilled for them. They are able to tie and re-tie their shoes at their convenience and it reduces the need for adult

intervention in dressing. The activity promotes intellectual, physical and emotional well-being (Bruce, Meggitt and Grenier, 2010). The decoration of the

'practice shoe' is fun and develops their artistic abilities. Targeted at the four- to five-year old, it is within their technical capability

(Bruce, Meggitt and Grenier, 2010).

## **Activity Two: Dressing appropriately for the weather**

This activity involves dressing up a doll in appropriate clothes for going outside to play, which will keep them warm and dry, or cool, depending on the

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weather. The adult fulfils a teaching role by helping the children learn how to dress first a doll, and then themselves, appropriately. The objective for the child is to understand how clothes are related to temperature, comfort, and the planned activity (such as playing outside, going to the beach, or walking to school in the rain) (Carroll and McCulloch, 2014).

This learning opportunity promotes independence by helping them to dress themselves for appropriate situations and weather. Ultimately, they will develop

the ability to choose the clothes that they want to wear within a range of acceptable options. The children learn to stay healthy by avoiding becoming drenched, cold, or sunburnt, and their reliance on adults is decreased (Moyles, Georgeson and Payler, 2011). This builds on their intellectual, physical,

emotional, and health-related skills (Bruce, Meggitt and Grenier, 2010). The use of the doll can help the activity be fun. The activity can be extended by considering holiday clothing, seasonal variations, and so on.

### **Key issues which enable multi-professional teams to work together**

A multi-professional team approach allows professionals to share knowledge about a family's needs so that the parents do not have to answer the same

questions over and over again (David, 2013). The professionals are aware of each other's roles in supporting the family so that conflicting advice can be minimised. It is essential that each agency communicates well and understands not only their role and responsibilities but those of the other agencies as well.

Parents/guardians are the most important people in a child's life, and carers recognise the importance of this. They have a responsible role that involves sharing care of the child with parents/guardians; listen to parents/guardians, as they are the 'expert' on their child (Sylva et al., 2010). Respect must always be shown for family traditions and childcare practices and when, for instance, there has been a bereavement, it may be important to engage the assistance of an educational psychologist to assess behavioural needs and bring about positive behaviour. Indeed, by adopting a multi-professional approach to working with children and parents the chances of the child being allowed 'to slip through the net' of negligence or abuse is minimised.

### **An understanding of diversity and inclusive practices**

Recognising diversity is about recognising that children can come from lots of different backgrounds and family structures (Burchinal et al., 2010).

Diversity means responding in a positive manner to differences, and valuing all people. The following, though not an exclusive list, can be seen as a solid foundation of 'checks' upon which professionals should base their approaches to both children and parents.

- All children are citizens and have rights and entitlements.
- Children should be treated fairly regardless of race, religion or abilities.

This applies no matter:

- What they think or say
  - What type of family they come from
  - What language(s) they speak
  - What their parents do
  - Whether they are girls or boys
  - Whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor
- All children have an equal right to be listened to and valued in the setting.

It follows that practitioners should aim to improve the physical environment when such improvements are needed. This might include the increased use of

physical aids to access education such as ICT equipment and portable aids for children with motor co-ordination and poor hand/eye skills. New buildings

should also be physically accessible to disabled pupils by making sure that they have access to existing buildings through the use of ramps and wider doors. Such improvements must be ongoing within organisations to ensure that no section of society is marginalised (Marmot and Bell, 2012). Improving the

delivery of information to disabled children at nurseries or schools is a very important objective. The information given (and the manner in which it is given) should take account of pupils' disabilities and parents' preferred formats. It follows that all children should be treated fairly regardless of race, religion or abilities. This applies no matter what they think or say, what type of family they come from, what language(s) they speak, what their parents do, whether they are girls or boys or whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor. Bradshaw (2011) stresses the importance of treating all people equally and with respect.

All children have an equal right to be listened to and valued in the setting and all children have a need to develop. These are natural parts of their life and they must be supported at all times within a given setting. This is especially true if there is a scenario in which children's development may be at

risk. For example, children who are disabled and those with special educational needs, those from socially excluded families, the homeless or those who

live with a parent who is disabled or has a mental illness, children from traveller communities, refugees or asylum seekers and those from diverse linguistic backgrounds may all face special challenges in their individual development. These must be assessed and catered for in an holistic manner to

ensure that every child reaches their own maximum potential. This is because, as Wall (2010) notes, all children are entitled to enjoy a full life in which

conditions are established by which they may take part in society and develop as individuals, Practitioners must therefore ensure that their own knowledge

about different cultural groups is up-to-date and that they consider their own attitudes to people who are different from themselves.

Children in the UK are raised in a society with many sources of cultural diversity (Carroll and McCulloch, 2014). Good early years practice needs to support this from the earliest months of babyhood. Practitioners need to work to create a positive learning environment. Play materials, books and other

resources can be offered in a helpful way by reflecting on how young children learn about culture and cultural identity. Such diversity and inclusion is

also linked to legislation such the Children Act 1989, Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, Rights of Children 1989 and the Race Relations

Act 1976. Children like experiencing food, music or dance forms that reflect their own family and neighbourhood experiences, as Gray (2014) elaborates.

Early childhood is a good time to offer opportunities that enable children to stretch themselves beyond that with which they are already familiar.

Children

can learn to appreciate cultural diversity in styles of art, craft, music and dance and all opportunities need to be well grounded in positive pride for styles common to every child's own background.

Meeting children's diverse learning needs means identifying needs, developing individual goals and objectives, selecting or designing appropriate supports

and services, and then choosing the best learning setting in which those goals can be realised, and ideally, exceeded. It logically follows, therefore, that the role and responsibilities of an early years practitioner should be cater to the individual child's needs, and to teach them what they need to know

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and to find out the right way to teach them. Thus, the practitioner must be well-versed in a range of different teaching pedagogies and apply the most appropriate one to the given child at all times (Spodek and Sarancho, 2014). Indeed, it is particularly important, in this regard, to understand different planning stages when planning activities for children and to understand a child's age and stage of development when planning tasks for them (Sylva et al., 2010). It is imperative, that the activities planned are stage-appropriate for them to increase knowledge. Setting appropriate tasks and initiatives helps practitioners meet the individual needs of children (Bruce, Meggitt and Grenier, 2010).

## **A discussion of two strategies for improving learning and performance**

There are many ways in which a person can improve their own learning and performance. Two are discussed in this section.

The first is being under observation. A member of staff could observe you and give you feedback on where you are doing well, and where you need to improve.

This could be a colleague, or it could be a formal inspection. The person observing can give you tailored feedback and ideally there should be plenty of

time to discuss their observation. This should lead to personal reflection and the setting of career development goals - whereby you can spend time working on improving those areas (observed) where you displayed weakness. The importance of this form of observation and subsequent career development is

noted by David (2013).

The second commonly used approach is to reflect on one's own practice and to use this reflection to inform further improvement (Paige-Smith and

Craft, 2011). This may involve a reflective practice model, such as Kolb's theory of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). I have frequently used his

reflective cycle - and by noting what has gone well and what areas need further improvement, I have been able to learn how to handle situations more

smoothly and to apply knowledge effectively.

Through combining both approaches I have gone through official 'professional development' sessions and have held protracted discussions with my

line manager and other practitioners. Through so doing we have all shared best practice and perceived improvements in our daily working lives with each

other and the way in which we plan activities for the children (David, 2013).

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## **A brief overview of how regulations can influence care provision**

Legislation plays a significant role in working practices within an early years setting but the primary aim is to safeguard and protect children and their families. Legislation, policies and procedures involve those relating to medicines, staffing and employment laws, child protection policies, health and safety, equal opportunities, behaviour management, special educational needs and working with parents (Shonkoff and Bales, 2011).

Children and young people should feel happy, safe, respected and included in the school or early years setting environment and all staff should be proactive in promoting positive behaviour in the classroom, playground and the wider community (Willow, 2014). Policies and practice help to make sure the safety and wellbeing of children is in place and it is this legislation, developed through many years and experiences, and even mistakes, that underpin the working practices that are used today (Shonkoff, 2010).

The owner of the workplace as a practitioner is t