

# Diversity

Diversity refers to the differences between children. Discrimination is unequal treatment of a person or group based on prejudice. Early years practitioners work with people from a wide range of social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, including people of different genders, people with disabilities or people who have different cultural traditions. Early years practitioners have a responsibility to embrace and value diversity in order to meet the individual needs of children and their families.

## Embracing diversity

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All children are unique individuals. In early years settings, practitioners must ensure that each child is valued equally by actively celebrating differences, embracing diversity and exploring the rich culture we live in (see *Inclusive practice*) so that all children feel valued and respected. They might include specific activities to promote a positive attitude towards diversity, for example by:

- ▶ providing dolls from different ethnicities and musical instruments from different countries and traditions
- ▶ displaying positive images that embrace diversity, including children with disabilities and both boys and girls from different countries
- ▶ sharing stories that explore and celebrate differences between people
- ▶ celebrating special days connected with a range of faiths, including traditional food and customs
- ▶ providing dressing up clothes representing different ethnic or religious cultures, such as a sari, hijab or yarmulke
- ▶ learning Makaton or other sign language with all the children in the setting



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- ▶ adapting the physical environment of the setting so that children of all abilities or disabilities can access the facilities easily
- ▶ showing equal respect for all children, parents and families who visit the setting.

### **Discrimination and prejudice**

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Diversity is not welcomed or celebrated by everyone and this can result in discrimination. This may happen because of a child's skin colour, physical characteristics, disability, social background, religion, culture or way of life.

Prejudice is often the cause of unfair discrimination. A prejudice is an opinion or attitude of dislike towards another individual or group of people and is often based on inaccurate information. Early years practitioners must avoid prejudice by being knowledgeable about different cultures, acknowledging diversity and discouraging stereotyping.

### **Challenging discrimination**

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Discrimination can be very damaging to children and their families. Early years practitioners should actively challenge any incidence of discriminatory practice that they witness, including:

- ▶ Intervening when children, families or other staff use discriminatory language or behaviour and being clear that it is not acceptable
- ▶ Providing accurate information to enable individuals to use appropriate language and behaviour
- ▶ Providing support for children who have been subjected to discrimination.

Early years practitioners have to work within a framework of legislation, policies and procedures that are designed to promote equality and prevent discrimination (see *Policies and procedures*). The Childcare Act (2006) and The Equality Act (2010) actively promote anti-discriminatory practice, protecting individual rights and banning unfair treatment.

## Summary

Acknowledging diversity, confronting prejudice and challenging all forms of discrimination are important aspects of professional practice in early years settings. Equality for all children and families requires a commitment to anti-discriminatory practice and an awareness of situations that may lead to a lack of fairness. Early years practitioners have a responsibility to meet the needs of all children and families through inclusive practice and the provision of equal opportunities, regardless of their different needs.

# Early intervention

'Early intervention' is the term used to describe the process of identifying potential problems in children's development as early as possible. The purpose of intervening early is to prevent problems developing or to reduce the severity of problems that have started to emerge. It might include referral or signposting to other services and can occur at any point in a child's life.

## Reasons for early intervention

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There are many situations where early intervention can have a significant impact on children's atypical development (see *Atypical development*), such as:

- ▶ Health problems
- ▶ Communication difficulties
- ▶ Social, emotional or behavioural difficulties
- ▶ Learning difficulties or special educational needs (see *Special educational needs*)
- ▶ Concerns about children's safety or welfare (see *Safeguarding*).



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Children may be referred to more than one specialist for assessment or services. For example, a child with Autistic Spectrum Disorder might be referred to a speech and language therapist, an educational psychologist and a behavioural support specialist.

If potential problems are identified at an early stage, then action can be taken to prevent more serious difficulties occurring. The Common Assessment Framework helps practitioners to make a holistic assessment of children's needs and identify what support is needed (see *Multi-agency working*).

## The referral process

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A referral is a recommendation for an individual to receive specialist care or services. In the early years sector, this usually involves a professional making a request for a child to be assessed or to receive more expert care. For example, a health visitor may have concerns about a child's speech following a routine developmental assessment. This information needs to be shared in order to provide the best support for the child and their family (see *Multi-agency working*).

## Case in point

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Mrs Jones is concerned about the developmental progress of her son, Ralph, who is fifteen months old. He can sit up without support and crawl around, but he has made no attempt to pull himself up or try to walk. Ralph communicates by babbling. The health visitor at the local Children's Centre carries out some developmental checks on Ralph and discusses Mrs Jones' concerns. She decides to refer Ralph to the specialist child development unit at the children's hospital for a full physical examination and assessment by a paediatrician. He will also have a hearing test at the audiology clinic and a speech and language assessment by the speech and language therapist. All the professionals involved will share the results of their investigations with each other and with Mrs Jones. As a result of this referral, a plan will be developed to provide specialist services to support Ralph and his family.

This early intervention could minimise further developmental problems for Ralph and prevent more serious speech and language difficulties, which could affect his future development and learning.

### Summary

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The early intervention process enables professionals to identify children's specific needs, highlight areas of difficulty and initiate any specialist treatment or care that may be required. Research has shown that intervening early can make a significant difference in reducing the incidence of more serious problems and improving outcomes for children and their families.