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Young Children's Personal, Social and Emotional Development

4th Edition

SSAGE

ONE The Seeds of Confidence and Competence

- Confidence is a catalyst supporting early personal growth. The young child develops confidence through becoming aware of herself as a separate and worthwhile person, as well as having a realistic view of what she can achieve.
- Children gain their self-esteem initially from the love and recognition that they receive from their family and other significant people in their lives, including whoever is their key person.
- On moving to an early years setting they gain confidence if their questions and comments are understood and their interests are recognised and strengthened as schemes of thought. They also become aware of themselves, what they are capable of doing, and what is approved behaviour.

Early childhood is a momentous time of life. Gazing at a newborn baby we can never be sure of how she will develop – what potential she has within her – but we know that there is everything to play for. And watching her grow up it is impossible to separate the different strands of development, as they are all interrelated. Increased physical movement leads to possibilities for growing independence, which in turn mean that the baby extends her horizons and strengthens her curiosity to discover more. But studies strongly suggest that the catalyst for these amazing achievements is the child's growing confidence (1, 2, 3). The Early Years Foundation Stage includes self-confidence and self-awareness as goals in the Prime Area of Personal, Social and Emotional Development. By the end of

Reception year in school it is expected that children 'are confident to speak in a familiar group, will talk about their ideas and will choose the resources they need for their chosen activities. They say when they do or don't need help' (4). Helen Moylett and Nancy Stewart usefully offer a broader interpretation: 'Self-confidence and self-awareness is about personal development – how we come to understand who we are and what we do. Within the early years children begin to understand themselves as people which supports developing confidence and motivation to engage pro-actively in the world' (5).

Confidence is a characteristic valued by all and one that parents most want for their children. Parents may deliberately send their young children to certain settings or schools, or arrange for them to join clubs, 'in order to give them confidence'. Many parents believe that the main role of care and education is to help children to acquire social skills and become confident before entering mainstream school. A confident person is well equipped to deal with life, whether in school or work or in social situations. Conversely, under-confident people often find coping with these aspects of life difficult and painful. Above all, truly confident people are comfortable with them-selves and have insights into their own strengths and weaknesses. This distinguishes them from the over-confident who, although they think well of themselves, may lack self-insight and have a false sense of optimism with regard to what they can achieve. In a world that demands so much of them, children do need to become confident from an early age. It is neces-sary for their early success in life and also for the future. In a 60-year study of more than a thousand men and women of high intelligence followed through from childhood to retirement, those most confident in their early years were most successful as their careers unfolded (6). What then is required to achieve this precious personal attribute, and how can we help young children to develop it?

Inherited or Genetic?

An interesting question here is whether confidence is an inherited trait and whether some children are blessed with it at birth. To some extent the lat-ter might be true: young babies show clear signs of personality traits, for example sociable and shy behaviours. However, being outgoing does not necessarily connect with a good level of confidence, while low key and seemingly unassuming persons can be quietly sure of themselves. So although babies may inherit certain traits we cannot leave it at that. The neuroscientist Colin Blakemore suggests that 'nurture shapes nature' (7), meaning that an inherited personality is shaped through experiences and relationships. Thus young children's levels of confidence are coloured by their successes and failures, the thoughts they have about themselves and other people's reactions to them. As Katz suggests, perhaps it is not what

we are born with that counts so much but what we are allowed to do and who we are encouraged to be (8). Most people would admit that their confidence ebbs and flows according to the people they are with and the situations demanded of them. In this chapter I argue that a person's confidence is linked closely to three factors: becoming aware of oneself (self-concept); developing a view of oneself, either positive or negative (self-esteem); and getting to know one's strengths and weaknesses (self-knowledge). These all contribute to a child's growing sense of 'efficacy', which in simple terms means making a difference or having an impact. Children become aware of the first two at a very early stage; their experiences in a nursery will powerfully influence all three factors.

Becoming Aware of Oneself

We begin to recognise ourselves from early on. After about 18 months old a toddler will have a pretty good idea that the reflection shown in a mirror is a representation of herself. Shortly after that an infant will move from saying 'Dom do it' to 'I do it'. This heralds the early recognition of self. And even before that, babies will build a picture of themselves from the way in which they are regarded and treated, particularly by those people who are closest to them. Young babies will start to form this picture from their mothers, whose loving acceptance of them is the first signal that they are a person who matters. Rosemary Roberts describes this beautifully:

> *The mother's face and body are like a mirror to the baby. This very early mirroring process which can reflect the mother's acceptance, forms the basis of the baby's self-concept; the mother's responses are the first 'brush strokes' for the developing picture.* (9)

In order to establish a sense of identity it is crucial to have an image of oneself as a distinct person; this is most strongly established initially through ongoing contact with one person (see also Chapters 2 and 3). Selleck argues that only the presence of a parent or committed regular key person which is now required for every child in an early years setting can provide the continuity, attention and sensuous pleasure that a baby needs to make sense of her experiences and set in motion the process of mental development (10). For children under two years old, particularly those who are placed in daycare, their key person offers an essential warm attachment and the assurance that, despite being one of a number, that individual baby or toddler is special and unique. Young babies who have been institutionalised from birth and who lack regular contact with one carer may fail to recognise the 'brush strokes' described by Roberts. In certain circumstances a person's sense of 'self' can be eroded – for example, adults imprisoned in conditions of harsh confinement. Terry Waite wrote movingly of his long period in captivity and of the times when he wondered
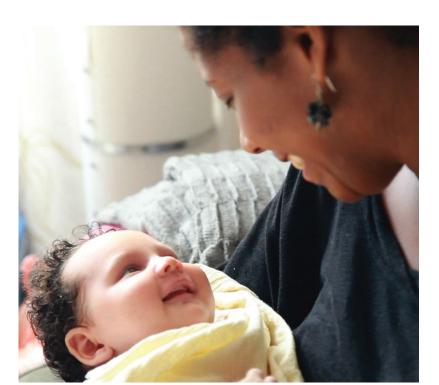
Figure 1.1   Loving Acceptance
© Siren Films

who he was: 'How I yearn with a childish, selfish longing to be understood and cared for. I am frightened. Frightened that, in growing up, my identity may slip away' (11).

Attachment relationships are discussed in Chapter 7 where they are linked to children's emotional development. However, sound attachments are fundamental to a child's overall healthy development; a baby gains confidence in her identity when a few loving and significant people recognise and respond to her. Maria Robinson describes this process as attunement. She stresses the importance of learning to interpret the baby's signals and suggests that the parent is then able to attune their own responses to those of the baby. This responsive affirmation helps the child learn more about mum or dad and strengthens her belief in herself (12). As the infant develops into the pre-school years, other people contribute to a broader view of her identity. Through their various behaviours these people will help a child to know who she is. For example, Alison knows that she is dad's little daughter and she makes him laugh; her baby brother's loving older sister when she cuddles him and gives him his bottle; her older brother's noisy little sister when she dances and sings to his records; and Alison the artist at nursery when her teacher admires her paintings. By becoming

aware of the way in which others view us we build up a composite picture of ourselves. We also learn to behave in character; we get a picture of how other people regard us and then adapt our behaviour to fit this picture. Because of their immaturity, a young child is both very open to and reliant on the opinions and views of other more experienced adults, particularly those adults who are familiar and loved, members of their immediate family, and later those others who care for and work with them. A child who recognises herself as distinctive feels that she belongs.

A stable family provides a child with a sense of personal continuity. Young children love to hear stories about when they were babies or to share recollections of past family events. They are also keen to share and listen to predictions of 'what will happen when you are a big girl'. These shared experiences and concerns help young children begin to have a sense of self within the larger family.

The family, then, has a powerful effect on each child's sense of identity, but when that child moves on to an early years setting the practitioners share this responsibility.

Self-esteem

When a child establishes her identity she is simply becoming aware of how others see her. Once we talk about self-esteem we start to place a value on that identity. Children do not gain a clear view of their self-worth until they are around six years of age, but their early experiences within the family and in early years settings provide the basis for them to make a judgement about themselves. Self-esteem is not fixed; it can change according to the people we are with and the situations we find ourselves in. Alison's self-esteem is mainly secure as she recognises that she is valued in different ways by her father, by her baby brother, and in the nursery. However, her esteem is lower when she is with her older brother, who makes it clear that she is often intrusive and a nuisance to him. So the views of others not only help a young child to recognise herself as a person who is seen in different ways, they also contribute to the regard she has for herself. Self-esteem is learned and again it is the people who are closest to the child and have an emotional link who will have the most profound effect. These are described as 'significant others' and they include the family and primary carers, the key person and other practitioners who have early contacts with the child.

One of the most important gifts we can offer young children is a positive view of themselves. Without this gift they will flounder throughout life and be constantly seeking reassurance from others as they cannot find it from within. However, as Siraj-Blatchford points out, positive self-esteem depends on whether children feel that others accept them and see them as competent and worthwhile (13).

Case Study 1.1

Four-year-old Eva had poor eyesight and after three weeks in her new reception class she was prescribed spectacles to wear. Eva was extremely self-conscious about her glasses and that same day was found weeping in the cloakroom after one child asked her why she was wearing 'masks over her eyes'. From that moment all efforts from her teacher Anna and later her mum could not persuade Eva to wear her spectacles in school, although she clearly had visual difficulties with mark making and when looking at picture books.

Four days later Anna arrived in school wearing a pair of ornate spectacles (with clear glass in the lens as she had perfect sight). As she had anticipated the children noticed the difference and this interest gave Anna the opportunity she wanted. At story time she asked the children what they thought about her new purchase – all of them thought the new glasses very pretty. Anna stressed how pleased she was with the spectacles and how well she could see with them. She involved other children in the class who also wore glasses and said how smart they looked. Eva said nothing but was clearly listening. The following day she hesitantly came into the class wearing her spectacles. Anna complimented Eva on her appearance and Eva was delighted to be able to identify and describe some fine detail in the picture storybook they shared as a group.

Comment

Having to wear spectacles severely affected Eva's self-esteem as she felt vulnerable and different. Anna's sensitive move to show wearing spectacles in a positive light and to model this herself was clearly effective. Eva resumed wearing the spectacles because she no longer felt different, but was finally persuaded of their benefit when she realised she could now see things more easily.

Reflection Point

Rachael has 4-year-old Sam in her reception class who, she believes, has hearing difficulties. He finds any group activity difficult to access including listening to stories, and is restless and disruptive. Other children are starting to avoid him. More and more often he hides under a bush in the garden with his head in his hands. Sam's parents refuse to accept that there is any problem, saying that their son is like any other boy. What actions can Rachael take to support Sam, his parents and the rest of the class?

Consequences of low self-esteem

When children constantly demand attention or boast about their achievements this is sometimes wrongly interpreted as over-developed self-esteem.

However, we should recognise that self-esteem is not conceit and this type of behaviour is more likely to reflect a lack of self-regard and a basic insecurity. In an article which stresses that self-esteem is basic to a healthy life, Murray White looks at the possible problems in later school life arising from its lack:

> If teachers examine what causes bullying and other chronic misbehaviours – the showing off, the fighting and the failure which some children have adopted – they will discover that low self-esteem is at the root of it. These children behave as they do because of strong feelings of inadequacy and internal blame, a belief that they do not possess the ability or intelligence to succeed. (14)

Interestingly, although low self-regard can lead to problems later in life, it appears that this is by no means conclusive. Evidence from a longitudinal study shows that relatively low self-esteem:

- is not a risk factor for delinquency, violence, alcohol and drug abuse and underachievement;
- is a risk factor (although one of a number) for suicide attempts, depression and teenage pregnancy (15).

Self-esteem in the Early Years Setting

The value that we place on ourselves is also affected by how secure we feel. Both adults and children are usually secure with people they know but also when they are in familiar situations. When we start a new job or a new course of learning, most of us feel very vulnerable being placed in the position of a novice. We do not even know where to get a cup of coffee, let alone really understand aspects of new work or how others will work with us.

Studies of young children at home show them to be comfortable and in control with mum or the main carer safely in sight. A 1-year-old is usually wary of anyone who comes between her and her mum and will use her parent as a secure base to explore wider territory (16). Tizard and Hughes' well-known study of 4-year-old girls conversing and questioning with their mothers gives a picture of children in a situation when they feel they are on sure territory (17). In nearly all families young children will recognise that there are loving adults who know them and care about them. This knowledge in itself helps children to feel secure.

Making a transition

When starting in an early years setting the young child faces new experiences including developing contact with people who are unknown to her and to whom she is unknown. She is placed in a similar position to an adult starting

a new job but has much less experience of life to support her. Consequently the move to a group setting can be a momentous event children's lives and for some can result in considerable self-doubt; even the most confident child can find this move intimidating. When they start school, children's expectations of what it will be like often do not match the reality.

Those with older siblings or those who play with pupils from school may have acquired some understanding of school values and systems vicariously. Within role play they may have developed 'script knowledge' certain beliefs while they were exploring make-believe school … However, for first-borns and many others, school will be a completely new experience. In presenting their picture of school, parents, siblings and friends shape children's thinking, but on arriving at school children may find the reality to be different (18).

The setting plays a key role in maintaining children's self-esteem when they are learning to work and play in a different environment from that of home. The size and type of setting can make a difference and there is specific evidence that moving into Reception at four years old is stressful. Barratt's classic study of children starting school in a reception class highlighted some of the feelings experienced by these new young entrants. By looking at photographs and in discussion children described feeling scared, fearful of getting things 'wrong', and not knowing what to do. Most of these feelings can be linked to not feeling in control (19). Although in many respects children are now better supported in their transition to school, a study from Bath University suggests that they still find the experience stressful and exhibit high levels of the stress hormone cortisol for three to six months beforehand. Most of the children in the study showed less anxiety and appeared to have adapted to school a few months later, but for some their cortisol level remained high (20). These studies show young children facing tremendous demands, both emotional and intellectual. Lately there have been genuine moves by schools to recognise the needs of their youngest children. Many settings and schools are now working closely together to ensure a gentle and phased transition into a reception class and from Reception into Year 1. Settings and schools are increasingly beginning to tailor-make a transition to meet each child's needs, rather than expecting every child to fit into one size of provision. It is now generally accepted that when young children make a transition they need easy access to a known adult (a key person) who can offer both reassurance and support that are tailored to each individual. This obviously requires a realistic number of staff to be available and is particularly important for infants under three years old. Findings from the 'Evaluation of the Graduate Leader Fund' show that these very young children need sufficient numbers of close adults to offer them bespoke care and support (21). Any attempt to increase the number of infants is highly likely to dilute the quality of adult attention. Dalli's international research and policy review supports this and concludes that 1:3 is the ideal adult-to-child ratio for infants under two years old (22). Fortunately, after a fierce debate with the government about increasing the number of children per adult, the ratio of 1:3 has remained mandatory (23).

The required ratios in Wales (24), Scotland (25) and Northern Ireland (26) are similar. However, all too often the staffing ratios in English reception classes remain inadequate. Try as they might teachers and assistants find it difficult to offer the bespoke care recommended in order to introduce each child to a multiplicity of new experiences gently and informally and interpret new requirements for them. The close involvement of parents in this process allows children to feel emotionally supported while they learn.

Practitioners also know that each child's self-esteem can be fragile. Self-esteem is not constant for any of us. As adults we can have a very positive view of ourselves in one circumstance only to have it knocked down in another. Given a new manager who makes unreasonable demands at work, an important project which proves to be unsuccessful or a failed relationship in our personal lives, our self-esteem can dip. A mature person with a sound self-concept should be able to cope with this over time and indeed seek out self-affirming situations in which she can succeed.

A young child does not have this ability. Her self-esteem is totally dependent on the people who matter to her and the situations that they provide. A young child will only really value herself fully if she knows that she has the unconditional love of a parent or carer. This knowledge is absolutely critical, and if for some reason it hasn't been acquired during the early years at home then the nursery practitioner has a heavy responsibility to demonstrate that love and care.

Knowing a child's thoughts and interests

Properly caring for a child means knowing about her, including how she thinks and what interests her. In order to feel comfortable and 'at home' in a nursery, a child needs to know that she is known and that her behaviour is understood. The first principle of the EYFS remains intact, emphasising that every child is unique, with their own particular personality and characteristics. Practitioners therefore need to have ways of tuning in to what lies behind children's thoughts, comments and actions. (Chapter 2 deals with the importance of closely listening to children.)

Practitioners can also start to understand children's interests by recognising 'schemes of thought'. Piaget claimed that children's patterns or schemes of thought are evident from babyhood in their early physical and sensory actions. These schemes are strengthened as children repeat their actions; through interactions with others they begin to make connections in their thoughts and so recognise cause and effect. Children's schemes or 'schema' are dealt with extensively in other literature (27, 28, 29).

Some children will have one schema while others will seem to have a number. Although around 36 schemes have been identified, Louis and colleagues have highlighted the most common ones. These are linked to straight lines (trajectory); circles (rotation); seeing things from different angles (orientation); joining things together (connecting); covering things (enveloping); creating and

filling a space (enclosing) and moving things from one place to another (transporting) (30). Young children will demonstrate an abiding interest in these patterns of movement through what they do and how they behave. We will see this unfold particularly clearly when children play with open-ended materials. In a beautifully illustrated booklet published by Community Playthings, open-ended is defined as 'not having a fixed answer; unrestricted; allowing for future change' (31). When using these materials children create their own scenarios and are in charge of their learning. The booklet further suggests that these powers are at risk when children are fed a diet of ready-made entertainment, a heavy emphasis on use of commercial equipment and access to electronic activities. If we believe that young children learn initially through first-hand sensory experiences, 'a wealth of open-ended play – with simple materials – can set children on the road to being confident individuals with a lively interest in life' (32).

Case Study 1.2

Daisy at 15 months was introduced to heuristic play (providing her with an array of natural materials and containers which she has time to explore and investigate freely). Her key person observed her on three separate occasions engaged in the following:

- wrapping her teddy up, placing him in a bag, and carrying the bag around with her;
- collecting fir cones and placing them in boxes, taking great care to replace the lid on each box;
- attaching dolly pegs in a circle to the lid of a circular wooden container;
- covering small play characters with shawls and blankets which were placed nearby;
- repeatedly attempting to attach a necklace around her neck.

Comment

Sue, Daisy's key person, felt that she had some secure evidence to suggest that Daisy had an enveloping schema. She supported this by providing more drapes and bags and moving a large cardboard box into the area which Daisy then used as a 'hidey hole'.

Reflection Point

Rose observing Rudi, one of her key children, over a period of time, recognised that his actions revealed a pre-occupation with transporting. She had provided some bags and buggies for him to utilise as a means of transport which he did so happily, but after six weeks Rose needed advice as to what to do next.

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Should she:

- give Rudi as much time as she needs to continue and deepen his current interest?
- talk with his parents to discover their son's actions and interests at home and build on these in the pre-school?
- attempt to interest Rudi in a different schema through providing additional resources and reading schematic related stories, e.g. *The Dirty Great Dinosaur* which covers an enclosure and different amounts inside it (33)?

Practitioners need to often take an imaginative leap into children's minds in order to keep in tune with them and make sense of their meanings. While this has always been good practice the statutory framework now requires that all provision made for babies and young children is based on practitioners' close observations of what they do on a day-to-day basis (34).

Supporting a child's behaviour

Although a child must be sure that she is loved at all times, part of the process of caring is also to help shape her behaviour (see also Chapter 11). A problem can arise where the expectations for behaviour differ from home to the setting. It may be that the basis for praise at home is 'to stand up for yourself and hit them back', or 'you make sure that you are the best in the class'. These are powerful messages for young children from people who are very important to them; all practitioners can do is attempt to modify these messages by presenting an alternative view and trying to provide the conditions in the nursery to demonstrate them. Hopefully, then, over a period of time a child learns to use language instead of fists to maintain her rights and to understand that every single person in the nursery community can be 'the best' at something. Again, a confident, bright and creative 4-year-old whose parents have encouraged her non-contingent thinking and activity may find it difficult to conform in any group setting; she will certainly find life extremely hard in a nursery which puts a very heavy emphasis on a narrow definition of correct behaviour. She risks being herself and receiving constant reprimands for her responses, or complying with the requirements and feeling herself to be in an alien and unreasonable environment in which she has no opportunity to show her strengths. In this situation self-belief will ebb away unless a watchful practitioner understands the behaviour that has been encouraged at home and is prepared to be flexible with the requirements in the setting.

Having a positive esteem for oneself is dependent on having a clear view of who one is; this is often difficult for children from minority groups. Tina Bruce points out that too often people from minorities are stereotyped into an identity with which they are not comfortable (35).

Case Study 1.3

Kofi was black and an adopted child. His younger two brothers were white as were his parents. Kofi was only aware of being the much loved oldest child in the family – his colour was incidental although he was proud of it. He was the only black child when he started at the nursery. When one or two children there started to call him 'black boy', Kofi was taken aback. He started to wash obsessively at home. After a week he asked his dad if he could have medicine to change colour. When the parents informed the nursery of their concerns the teachers realised that all the children needed help to see different aspects of their identities. Kofi, with others, was recognised as an important member of his family and the nursery community. Children were encouraged to describe each other in terms of their physical appearance and made a display of their differences and common features.

Comment

Kofi's teachers were initially not prepared for the children's reactions to a child of a different colour. They felt strongly that the comment 'black boy' was simply descriptive and therefore not discriminatory. However, the incident made them more aware of the need to avoid stereotyping, and they were careful to avoid any possibility of discrimination when, shortly afterwards, the nursery admitted a child with cerebral palsy.

Reflection Point

Some young children will react negatively to difference; as they grow up these attitudes may harden into prejudice.

In order to combat intolerance and discrimination consider how well you promote a culture of being similar and belonging?

Moving a child who does not appear to be thriving during the early years at school is not to be considered lightly, although this was eventually seen as the right decision for James. Andrew Pollard, in his social study of five children starting school, describes James who stayed at the local state primary school for the first two years of his school career, after which his parents transferred him to an independent school. James found the move to infant school difficult and his self-esteem suffered. He was not accepted by other children although he badly wanted friends; overall he could not adapt to the robust climate of school life. His teachers supported him, but perceived him as cautious and 'nervy'. There was a clash of culture between the school and the parents who were strongly supportive of James, had high academic aspirations for him, and provided him with home tuition. It was apparent that he could not meet the requirements of both school and home. When he started to be influenced by the other children at the end of the reception year, the parents became alarmed and described his new behaviour as 'rude' and

'cheeky'. Pollard suggests that this little boy's unhappiness sprang from the poor home/school communications. The parents had always aspired for James to move to an independent school where more formal teaching methods were seen to be in keeping with what they wanted for their son. Most importantly, James subsequently flourished in his new school, both in his learning and social life (36).

So, optimal conditions to promote children's self-esteem include care and respect for their ways of thinking and an appreciation of difference, which enables children coming from different backgrounds and cultures to experience feeling good about themselves. Self-esteem is only likely to be fostered in situations where all aspects of all children are esteemed, including their gender, race, ability, culture and language.

Practical Suggestions

Observe

- Observe how babies signal their needs through crying, wriggling with discomfort, and responding to attention.
- Observe a child's emerging schema, demonstrated through her patterns of play, e.g. lining up small animals in a row, covering objects, wrapping herself in a blanket.

Get to know your children

- Consider your group/class and note how much you know about each individual child: their personal characteristics (likes, dislikes, interests, talents and learning dispositions). Ask yourself 'What is this child like and how do I know'?
- Fix a clipboard and pencil in all the areas of provision. Encourage all staff to note significant comments, questions and actions from different children as they work in these areas. At the end of the day, the key person can collect these observations in regard to his/her children, reflect on any noted behaviour that is significant, and decide on any implications for next steps.
- Plan a regular time at the end of each day/week when you meet as staff and share any other information about children that you have gathered.

Create a climate to promote self-esteem

- Consider how your spoken and body language can affect small children, e.g. pursed lips, a tensed body, toe tapping and an abrupt tone of voice communicate irritability; a genuine smile, relaxed body posture, eye contact, gentle touch and warm voice communicate approachability and friendliness; a tight smile and rigid body posture communicate a mixed message and can confuse.

- Demonstrate that you are interested in, and have time for, each child, e.g. bend down to their level when speaking and listening to them; give them time to talk; and try not to interrupt to cut across their thinking.
- Make each new baby and child feel special, e.g. ensure that babies are held in ways that they prefer and are soothed by tapes of rhymes and music that are familiar to them; ask each new child to bring in a photograph of herself and her family; display this on a large board and use it as a topic of conversation.
- Arrange for each new child to have their photograph taken and enlarged. Attach the photograph to a card and cut to form a jigsaw. Older children will enjoy working in small groups and sorting out their own photograph and those of their friends.
- Pronounce children's names correctly – if this is difficult, be honest with parents and ask for their help.
- Remember and refer to important details in the child's life, e.g. 'How is your new kitten, Isaac?', 'Did you enjoy the fair, Angelo?', 'I like your new haircut'.
- Provide mirrors in different parts of your environment to enable children to view themselves when working at different activities.
- Have artefacts and scenarios that reflect children's circumstances, e.g. books where the main characters look like them; dolls which resemble their colour and characteristics; domestic play scenarios which depict familiar contexts; posters and jigsaws which make people like them and their families appear important.

Help children to talk about themselves

- Ask children to do a painting/drawing of themselves and take time to listen to them talking about their picture.
- Ask children about their likes and dislikes about the food they eat, the clothes they wear and their favourite activities at home and in the nursery; these views can be scribed and displayed together with each child's self-portrait or made into individual books.

Provide for those children who are less secure

- Position coat pegs with each child's personal clothing so that they can see them during the day.
- Encourage children to bring a familiar toy to the nursery, in order to maintain a link with home.
- Support a child to separate from his parent/carer; suggest that he carries with him a personal memento that he can refer to during the session, e.g. a photograph of the parent or a personal item such as a scarf which carries a familiar perfume.
- Ensure that an adult is available to less secure children, particularly at vulnerable times of the day, e.g. the start and the end of the session; at transition times; when children are outside.
- Make it possible for these children to be physically near to an adult during group activities.

Professional Practice Questions

1. How do my daily routines make it possible for me to get to know and treat my key children as individuals?
2. How does my environment demonstrate to children that they are welcome in the setting?

Work with Parents

- Encourage parents to understand that the way in which they view their child will influence that child's self-image.
- Suggest how they can boost their child's self-esteem by praising him for achieving small responsibilities, e.g. posting letters, sweeping up leaves.

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