

What is the Early Years Foundation Stage?

The [Early Years Foundation Stage](#) (EYFS) is a part of the National Curriculum and it applies to all children aged under five in England. It protects young children's welfare and sets out the areas of learning which should be covered.

Children's education is covered, at least in state schools, by the National Curriculum. You've probably heard of key stages – KS1 to KS4. These are the stages of learning for school children between the ages of 5 and 16. But what about preschool children and those in the reception year? Well, these are covered by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This guide will tell you everything you need to know about the EYFS.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is a framework created by the Government which sets out the areas of learning to be taught and the standards expected for children aged 5 and under. Seven specific areas of learning are covered and care providers must have activities in all of these areas. Children's progress can then be monitored and compared to the desired level.

Only care providers in England are obliged to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage guidelines – those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have alternate standards, set by their own governments, which they must comply with.

Which Carers have to Follow the Early Years Foundation Stage?

The Early Years Foundation Stage applies to almost all preschool childcare providers, and to schools too. There are a few exceptions – short-term crèches, nannies and mother and toddler groups are exempt. All other preschool childcare providers in England, and schools with attached nurseries and reception years, must follow the Early Years Foundation Stage.

How can I Check a Preschool Childcare Provider?

Apart from the exceptions listed above, all preschool childcare providers in England must be registered with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted for short). Each is given its own registration number by Ofsted which you can use to check their credentials. Ask playgroups, nurseries, childminders or other care providers for their number (known as a URN – Unique Registration Number).

Is Child Welfare Protected by the Early Years Foundation Stage?

The welfare of young children is of paramount importance and the Early Years Foundation Stage makes this the top priority. Childcare providers are regularly inspected and must meet the following requirements:

- Safety – All equipment and facilities must be suitable for purpose and safe for children to use
- Security – All staff must be checked and be found to pose no risk to children
- Quality – The surroundings should be of a high enough quality, for example, access to an outside play area and large enough playrooms

Which Areas of Learning are Covered by the Early Years Foundation Stage?

As well as protecting their welfare, the Early Years Foundation Stage also covers children's development and learning. Preschool children do not have lessons as such. Instead they learn primarily through playing - with one another, with toys and as a group.

There are seven areas of learning which must be covered in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are:

- Communication and language
- Expressive art and design
- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Personal, social and emotional development
- Physical development
- Understanding the world

Below we take an in depth look at each of these areas and detail exactly what they entail.

Communication and Language

Children must be given opportunities to develop their communication skills. They should be able to listen and pay attention, to stories and when others are speaking. They should also understand what they hear and be able to follow instructions. Finally, children should be able to express themselves and to describe events using past, present and future tenses.

Expressive Arts and Design

Children must be allowed to play with a variety of materials to create artwork. They are encouraged to use their imaginations and to share their ideas with others. Expressive art and design includes many activities besides drawing or painting - singing, dancing, music, dance and role-play are all explored.

Literacy

Reading and writing are the bedrock of education. Preschool children should be given access to an abundance of reading material, from books and poems, to worksheets and instructions. They should be able to read and understand simple words and sentences and have some understanding of phonics (how combinations of letters are pronounced). Writing is also encouraged and children should be able to spell simple words, and to write simple sentences which others can read and understand.

Mathematics

After literacy, mathematics is probably the most important skill for children to master. Preschoolers should be given plenty of practise with counting and doing simple calculations. They should also be able to recognise larger or smaller numbers and patterns. Shapes and units of

measurement come into this section and children should be able to talk about different objects' shapes, sizes and position, as well as understand distance, time and monetary units.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Personal, social and emotional development involves building a positive self-image and respect for others. Children are encouraged to try new experiences and to feel confident enough to speak to the rest of the class. They should be able to play cooperatively with others and be sensitive to their feelings. Behaviour comes under this section too and children should be aware that certain behaviour will not be tolerated. An ability to understand and stick to class rules is also expected.

Physical Development

Young children are still learning to control their bodies so they are encouraged to develop their movements, control and coordination. They should be given plenty of practise using tools such as pencils, paintbrushes and glue sticks. Health is also covered in this section and children should begin to understand the importance of exercise and a healthy diet.

Understanding the World

Understanding the world is a precursor to science, geography and history. Children should be able to talk about past and present events at home, and understand some of the differences and similarities between themselves and others. Differences and similarities in other areas too are explored – animals, plants, materials and places for example. They should also recognise that different technologies are used for different purposes, both at home and at school.

How are Early Years Foundation Stage Children Assessed?

Children are assessed twice during the Early Years Foundation Stage. The first of these assessments comes between their 2nd and 3rd birthdays and is carried out by either a health visitor or an early years practitioner. The assessment should identify the child's strengths along with any areas where they are struggling. If a disability or special educational need is found then a targeted plan must be made to help the child, the parents and teachers.

The second assessment comes after the child's 5th birthday and before the end of the school year. It's carried out by their teacher who bases it on what they've seen in the classroom, rather than any actual tests. The assessment will say whether the child is above the expected level, equal to it or has not yet reached it.

The report is shared with the child's future Year 1 teacher so that they can get to know each child's needs before the new term starts. That way they can plan next year's activities. Parents should also be given a copy of the report so they know how their child is getting on.

How can I Find Out how my Preschool Child is Doing?

Each preschool child is assigned a 'key person' whose job it is to discover their needs. They are usually responsible for several children, not just yours! Key people have several duties which include:

- Helping children to settle in and feel comfortable
- Providing emotional support if necessary
- Monitoring children's progress
- Communicating with children's parents

You should be able to speak with your child's key person if you have any queries or concerns. They will also come to you if there is anything they think you should know.

So, what is the Early Years Foundation Stage? It's a framework of guidelines which forms a part of the National Curriculum and applies to all children aged under five in England. It sets out the areas of learning which should be covered and the standards which children should achieve, as well as protecting young children's welfare.