

Children's Centre Leader

POLICY

Language is Gateway to Success

Susie Owen, Deputy Director Early Years: Quality, Outcomes and Providers, Department for Education, outlines Government plans for social mobility.

The early years are the cornerstone of social mobility – the foundations of talent and opportunity develop in the first years of a child's life, enabling them to access school and future career success. Thanks to the hard work of early years professionals across England, children's outcomes have been improving, with 71% of children reaching a good level of development at the end of reception in 2017, compared to 58% in 2014. During the

same period the attainment gap between children on free school meals and their peers at the same age has also decreased by 10%, from 19 to 17 percentage points.

However, too many children still fall behind early, and it is hard to close the gaps that emerge. Language is the gateway to success in school, and later life. Children with poor vocabulary at age five are more than twice as likely to be unemployed at age 34. We must tackle these gaps

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Welcome

Welcome to the September 2018 issue of Children's Centre Leader.

Susie Owen outlines Government plans for social mobility, Kate Freeman considers the story so far for the word gap (p4), Sharon Freeman shares her free resource for ESOL learners (p7), we hear from Southend-on-Sea - 30 hours team of the year (p10) and Jane Evans urges leaders to manage stress by example (p13).

As always, let us know what you think by emailing: cclr@hempalls.com

James Hempalls, OBE
Editor,
Children's Centre
Leader



at the earliest opportunity, to give all children the opportunity to thrive.

More than a quarter of children – 28% - finish their reception year without the early communication and reading skills they need to thrive. That is why the Secretary of State in a recent [speech](#), set out his ambition to cut that number in half over the next ten years.

This builds on the actions set out in [Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential](#), published last December, which included measures to close the word gap in the early years. As set out in the first chapter of that plan, we are working with partners across the early years sector and beyond, to build our understanding of what works and to support local authorities, health commissioners and the wider early years workforce to make informed, evidence-based decisions to better support disadvantaged children.

Our goals are three-fold:

- » to ensure that more disadvantaged children experience a language rich early environment;
- » to improve the quality, availability and take up of early years provision for disadvantaged children; and
- » to ensure a coherent 'place-based' approach to supporting children's language development in the early years.

Language-rich early environments

The benefits to children from attending high quality early education are well known. However, we also know that what happens at home is crucial – it is where children spend most of their time. In his speech in

“We will be investing £20 million to train and develop early years professionals...”
.....

July, the Secretary of State for Education set out his plans for making improving children's early language and literacy a society-wide mission, and is inviting business, broadcasters and a broad range of other organisations to be part of a coalition to explore innovative ways to boost early language development and reading in the home. The National Literacy Trust, as well as leading businesses and broadcasters (including WHSmith, British Land and KPMG) have signed up, and will attend a summit in the autumn, as will the BBC and ITV.

Together with the Education Endowment Foundation,

we are investing £5 million to trial in the North of England evidence-based home learning environment programmes that support early language development. We have also formed a partnership with Public Health England to help provide health visitors with additional tools and training to identify and support children's early speech, language and communication needs.

Improving quality and take-up

We must continue to prioritise making high quality pre-school education accessible to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Secretary of State has launched a capital bidding round of £30 million, inviting leading schools to come forward with projects to create new high-quality nursery places, demonstrating innovative approaches to closing the gap for disadvantaged children.

As well as investing in buildings, we must invest in people. We need to ensure that provision is high quality, and that our early years workforce has the skills and knowledge to support children's early language development. We will be investing £20 million to train and develop early years professionals, working with local authorities to set up over 100 early years professional development partnerships which will bring together

PVI and school early years settings in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the country. A national delivery partner will be appointed to deliver high quality training and professional to the partnerships. We expect the procurement of the delivery partner to begin in autumn 2018.

A 'place-based' approach

Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential also announced the creation of the Social Mobility, Early Years and Language Peer Review Programme, which we are partnering with the Local Government Association to deliver. Local services and local authorities sit at the heart of what a locality offers disadvantaged families and have an important role to play in coordinating the efforts of different partners

such as public health. High quality integrated services are essential if we are going to make a positive impact for those children and families most in need of support.

We have successfully piloted the peer review programme with Wigan and Cambridgeshire/ Peterborough; an experienced group of peer reviewers spent 3-4 days working with each authority to understand how effective their local services are at improving early outcomes for disadvantaged children at age 5, including the effective use of children's centres. Each peer review ends with a feedback session for the Director of Children's Services, followed by a report that the local authority can use to improve their practice. Over the next eighteen months we will work with up to 30

local authorities to support them to develop strategies to improve children's outcomes in the early years.

Through the programme, we will also work with local authorities that are effectively closing the gap on school readiness, and speech, language and communication needs, to understand what is already working and spread this learning back into the sector by sharing best practice.

Useful Links

[Unlocking Talent Fulfilling Potential: A Plan For Improving Social Mobility Through Education](#)

[Speech: Education Secretary Sets Vision for Boosting Social Mobility Education Endowment Foundation](#)

To find out more about any of the programmes mentioned in the article, or to register your interest, please get in touch with the team at earlyyears.socialmobility@education.gov.uk.

Closing The Word Gap: The Story So Far

Kate Freeman considers the word gap, evidence so far and asks what can be done to help disadvantaged children improve language skills.

What is the word gap?

The 'word gap' is the term given to the difference, identified in the Hart and Risley (1995) study, between the number of words heard by the average child growing up in a more prosperous family and those heard by the average child growing up in disadvantage. The study identified that the difference was approximately 30 million words by the time the children were four years old ie. three million words a year, versus eleven million words spoken by more advantaged parents to their children.

Although there has been some debate about how closely the Hart and Risley study reflects what is happening in the UK in 2018, it is clear that many children who grow up in more disadvantaged families have speech, language and communication skills that are not at the level expected of their chronological age: British studies show that in excess of 50% of children starting school in more disadvantaged areas are behind in the area of communication and language (Lee, 2012). This gap isn't fully closed by the time children enter school, with disadvantaged children trailing more advantaged children by sixteen months in

their vocabulary, a gap much larger than in their other cognitive skills (Waldfoegel and Washbrook, 2010). Moreover, this gap increases by an additional six months over the primary school years (Save the Children, 2014).

What impact does it have?

It is known that children with higher levels of vocabulary when they start school do better in SATs at year 6 (in both English and Maths), better at GCSEs (The Communication Trust, 2013) and have better outcomes in adulthood (Feinstein, 2003).

Children who have poor ongoing speech, language and communication skills, on the other hand, can struggle as adults to find employment, be in long-term relationships and may have mental health problems (I CAN, 2006). In fact, there is a higher proportion of people with speech, language and communication needs in the population of young offenders (between 66 and 90%) than in the general population (10%) (Bryan, Freer and Furlong, 2007).

Good speech, language and communication skills are cited as the key factor in whether children escape from poverty (Blanden, 2006).

What else do we know about it?

We do know that early intervention is important: Children whose speech, language and communication needs were resolved by the age of 5 and a half years old, went on to have the equivalent outcomes at GCSE as their peers who had never had such difficulties, in a study by Bishop and Adams in 1990.

Children whose language skills are supported pre-school or at school can make remarkable progress.

Who is helping?

The main focus of support for closing the word gap is in the early years:

In recognition of the role of communication and language in supporting social mobility, the Government has committed to a range of programmes that focus on early language learning in preparation for school. Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, has identified the word gap as a national scandal and has pledged to halve the number of children who struggle with early talking and reading skills by 2028.

The new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) early learning goals currently being piloted continue to reflect communication and language as a core part of the curriculum. Communication-related early

learning goals apply in the areas of communication and language; personal, social and emotional development; literacy; mathematics; understanding the world; and expressive arts and design.

National statistics continue to be collated to identify children who are at a good level of development at the end of the early years foundation stage. This provides a national picture of, not only those who achieve expected levels in the three prime areas, but those who achieve good levels of communication and language. Results can then be compared across demographic groups.

The reception baseline assessment (planned to be introduced in 2020 and currently being developed by the National Foundation for Educational Research) focusses on two key areas, one of which is communication, language and literacy.

Public Health England's programme 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life' includes priority areas for children being ready to learn at two and ready for school at five. Reducing inequalities in speech, language and communication development is identified as a Best Start in Life priority.

In addition, many local authorities are recognising the need to close the word gap in their area and are working on their own, or with key partners to develop area-wide strategies. These strategies can include access to training, provision of packages of intervention, work with parents and involvement of a range of professional groups

including speech and language therapists, health visitors, early years practitioners.

Do we know that it works?

There is good evidence around what works both with individual children (Broomfield and Dodd, 2011), with small groups of children in settings and on an area-wide basis. Programmes such as Stoke Speaks Out have managed to reduce the incidence of poor speech, language and communication at school entry from 70% to 54.5% in just a few

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“Children whose speech, language and communication needs were resolved by the age of 5 and a half years old, went on to have the equivalent outcomes at GCSE as their peers”

.....

years (Nursery World, 2008).

Small group interventions are available that accelerate children's communication and language skills by six months over a nine-week period (I CAN, 2015). The Communication Trust's [What Works](#) website has full details of evidenced programmes that make a difference to children's communication and language development and to those children who struggle.

England-wide research carried out by the children's communication charity, I CAN and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists identified a range of existing good practice and practical opportunities to make changes.

A dedicated [Bercow 10](#) website contains detailed information on key recommendations and how different individuals and organisations can support these to become a reality.

What can we do to help?

The first step is acknowledging the issue and being prepared to do something about it in whichever role you work in.

The various websites and contacts identified above will help and there are now many organisations who are working to close the word gap.

In addition, Hemsall's is running [a seminar for people thinking about what they can do to help](#). Whether you are a lead in a local authority, headteacher, early years head or work in a children's centre or early years setting, there will be an opportunity to hear the experience of Stoke Speaks Out, Warwickshire's Time to Talk programme, Bercow 10 and Bradford Better Start. There will also be plenty of time to network and to talk to the exhibitors, including the National Literacy Trust, Elklan, Easy Peasy and I CAN.

Each seminar participant will receive a free briefing paper identifying key considerations for developing your own strategy to close the 30 million word gap.

We look forward to seeing you at the seminar on 20 September.

In his 2011 report, Graham Allen stated that 'The traditional model – waiting until problems become apparent, paying for programme delivery and assuming good outcomes will follow – is no longer enough'.

Communication is crucial – what can you do to support the word gap?

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Kate Freeman is a qualified speech and language therapist with over 25 years' experience working directly with children and leading an education charity. She specialises in the early years and has provided expert guidance to create a large number of training programmes and activities for early years practitioners, teachers, SENDCos, managers and parents, including managing the national Early Language Development Programme.

Kate is currently working with Hempsall's and Children's Centre Leader, disseminating good practice with a focus on SEND and working with voluntary and statutory sector organisations.

ESOL Stepping Stones - First Steps For Mums and Babies

Sharon Freeman shares details of her project which gives children's centre staff the skills and resources to help non-English speaking parents learn English.

ESOL Stepping Stones is an ESOL* course designed by LuCiD* at the University of Manchester and funded by the ESRC. It enables staff or volunteers in children's centres, schools and other community settings, to deliver ESOL for mums and babies themselves. The project aims to empower staff in these settings by giving them the tools to provide much needed ESOL to parents in their communities. This uses their existing skills and experience, while developing staff too, without the need for a crèche or external agencies coming in to deliver basic ESOL.

The aims of the project are to deliver a course that:

- » Increases the English Language skills of non-English speaking mothers
- » Increases levels of confidence and assertiveness in the target group
- » Provides examples of language-rich activities which will be of benefit to the child (e.g. book reading, storytelling, singing and rhyme)
- » Signposts to, and increases the uptake of, key services by the target group due to improved language skills

and confidence

- » Adds to the skill set and resources of settings' staff by providing full training, materials and ongoing support

The course is a great way to engage with EAL*/ESOL families and provide support for mums new to English. This has implications in many policy areas including school readiness, social cohesion, isolation, integration and mental health of mums and is proving to have really positive impact with great outcomes for families. As we know, one of the main barriers to attending ESOL classes for mums is lack of childcare and our course is unique because baby comes too. It also aims to promote language development and interaction between mum and baby which is so important for child development.

ESOL Stepping Stones was designed and developed last autumn before being successfully delivered in ten pilot settings earlier this year across Greater Manchester, including five children's centres, three primary schools and a community

centre. The course comprises twelve 45 minute sessions covering different aspects of family daily life, such as health, baby milestones, food, visiting the doctor and also aims to signpost next steps for the mums. Each session encourages interaction between mum and baby including songs and looking at books. All necessary course materials are provided. In the pilot phase, 74 mums plus babies enrolled across the 10 settings from 27 different home countries, with 20 first languages and mums resident in the UK between 3 weeks and 14 years. All the feedback from the facilitators in the settings has been very positive: "I've enjoyed delivering the course (something I would never have thought of doing myself)", "I have developed my confidence working with a group", "Very enjoyable!" and "It must be said that these are some of the clearest resources with high end production values that I have ever seen". Feedback from mums has been excellent too with many going on to attend different sessions, feeling more confident and forming

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friendships when before they were very isolated. One mum said: "I never had such a chance before", and another: "This course was an excellent opportunity for me and my child to socialise and gain confidence to speak English language." (translation)

After the success of the pilot, the programme is now available UK-wide through our website www.lucid.ac.uk/steppingstones. Our vibrant course materials are available in two formats to any setting either as a FREE download or as beautifully produced hard copies 'not for profit'. Feedback from settings is that these hard copies allow for a more 'informal' delivery which is less intimidating, without the need for technology, often in more family friendly rooms, such as a crèche room or similar. There will be a short

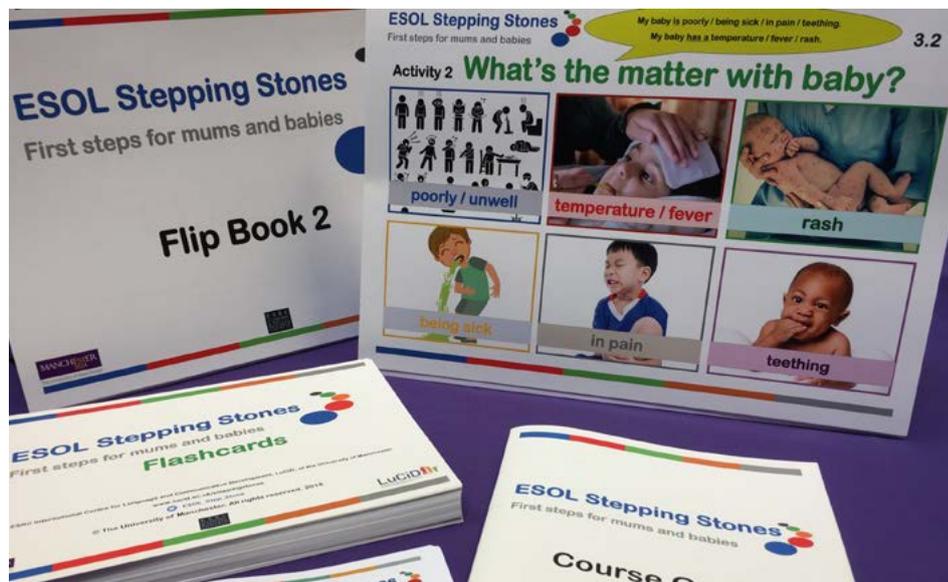
eTraining module available soon to support facilitators in familiarising themselves with the course and we are just writing our Evaluation Report of the pilot which will be available on the website soon.

Since the launch in June we have had interest from all over the country. There seems to be a real appetite for settings to take control and deliver what they know their communities need themselves. We have had great feedback from interested children's centres and schools so far; "This sounds like exactly what we have been searching for!" "This is a service worth investing in!" "There is a huge need." "Desperate to develop our ESOL offer" "What an amazing idea and a great way to integrate mums who would otherwise be forgotten"

More than 50 settings or areas have already downloaded or purchased the materials, including in Belfast, Birmingham, Bradford, Clackmannanshire, Coventry, Dublin, East of England Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme, Hounslow, Knowsley, Lancashire, Luton, Merton, Newham, Salford, Scotland VPRS, Stockport, Wigan, Wirral, with more every week.

We have also had interest from the Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration Directorate at the Home Office, and are working alongside the National Literacy Trust, the national ESOL Mapping Project, Refugee Action and Better Start Bradford to reach as many families as we can.

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Our next step is to investigate ways to create a sustainable model for UK-wide dissemination of the course long-term and to allow for further development. We hope to turn the project into a social enterprise with the help of the University's Intellectual Property department, which will allow us to bid for funds for further development, possibly including different versions, and to expand our reach. There is such a huge gap in ESOL provision for these mums, and with large cuts in ESOL funding nationally, this provides an opportunity to think differently and to try something new. What better way than to use the knowledge, skills

and experience of staff and volunteers already working in settings in these communities to deliver what is so desperately needed? By providing high quality course materials for settings to deliver ESOL themselves, we hope to reach many of those 'hard-to-reach' families by reducing some of the barriers they face in accessing the necessary provision and support.

If your children's centre would

be interested in learning how you can deliver vital ESOL for mums in your community [please get in touch](#). It would be great to hear from you!

*English for Speakers of Other Languages / *English as an Additional Language

*LuCiD: The ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development



For the last ten years, Sharon Freeman has worked in a Primary School in Old Trafford where 74% of children are learning through EAL. She is the EAL Lead and also runs a very successful ESOL class for our parents and community. Additionally, for the last year she has been working at the University on ESOL Stepping Stones, designing and developing the course materials to make them as easy to use and engaging as possible.

Southend-on-Sea: 30 Hours Team of The Year

Southend-on-Sea won the 30 Hours Team of the Year Award at the Childcare Works Awards in March 2018. They have a small dedicated early years team that is committed to maximising funding for children and their families.

When the 30 hours extended funding was announced, Southend Early Years took the initiative to actively involve multiple teams across the council to enable effective implementation. Early Years facilitated the development of the 30 Hours Implementation Team (30HIT). The team includes staff and managers from Early Years, Data & Performance, IT, Finance and Audit. This whole team approach resulted in the 30HIT holding regular process meetings since October 2016, working closely together on a daily basis to ensure that all the requirements of implementation are met. The commitment of the wider team has been inspirational and continues to strengthen.

The 30HIT managers prioritised workplans for the increased workload implementation has brought across multiple teams. Staff hours were re-prioritised to focus on developing new processes, exploring IT requirements and upgrades, ensuring effective payment systems and providing support to all providers. The

30HIT gave up their evenings to hold joint information sessions for providers.

The 30HIT worked together to submit a bid in January 2017 for 30 Hours Digital Accelerate Funding to link the Early Years funding portal to the ECS checker. Southend was awarded £8,625 in March 2017.

In partnership

The 30HIT worked in partnership with the Southend Borough Council Communications team to develop and distribute 30 hours and Tax-Free Childcare publicity materials including posters, leaflets and flyers and a social media campaign, using Childcare Choice resources.

Our childcare providers are a vital part of our wider team and the role providers played was integral to our successful implementation of 30 hours in Southend. The providers were kept informed during the months before implementation and the majority showed a commitment to embrace the extended hours and other

changes 30 hours would bring, seeing this as an opportunity to help families out of poverty. The 30HIT ensured that the providers had opportunities for consultation and feedback at every stage when developing guidance and new documentation for the funding offers. Feedback confirms that providers have felt informed and included along the journey to 30 hours.

A bid for more funding

The 30HIT then developed and submitted a bid to the DfE Delivery Support Fund. Southend was successful in being awarded 100% of funding applied for, and we are actively using the funding to support infrastructure across the 30HIT including enhancements to digital systems to support providers, and promotion of early years entitlements to parents including dedicated work to promote opportunities for parents of children with SEND.

The 30HIT has worked with JobCentre Plus, health visitors, social care and children's centres to ensure they understand the 30



Elaine Hammans speaking plus Vicky Wright and Joan Gibbons

hours offer and promote it to parents looking for work.

Sufficiency estimates show that there are sufficient childcare places in Southend for Spring and Summer terms and this is borne out by all parent enquirers having their needs met. Due to the DfE Capital Grant funds, three providers have been able to expand or extend their provision to offer an additional 82 places from January 2018.

Dispelling myths

The expert business strategy support sessions held during February 2017 dispelled the myths and perceived shortfall between funded rates and paid-for childcare rates. Many providers who had originally stated that they were

not going to offer extended funding revised their business and delivery models and are successfully delivering 30 hours. 100% of PVI providers, 76% of childminders and 7 out of 15 (47%) of school nursery classes are offering 30 hours places. Provider feedback has been that the portal system for validating 30 hour codes and recording children and hours used is clear and straightforward to use.

Nursery classes

Meetings took place with the 15 schools with nursery classes to explore the implications of 30 hours and whether to change their funded places delivery models to incorporate extended provision. Schools were able to access business

planning advice and the 30HIT delivered a bespoke programme of training on the Early Years Portal for school administration staff.

Embedded in strategic plans

The Head of Early Years ensures 30 hours is on the agenda at Department Management Team meetings and at Education Board (Schools Forum) meetings. 30 hours implementation is embedded in the Early Years Services Plan, the Learning Service plan and the 'Our ambitions for your child's education in Southend'. The ambitions document for parents and

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agencies across Southend includes contributions from the Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Councillor all of which demonstrate high level commitment to early years and 30 hours.

Southend hosted a visit in September 2017 from the DfE Finance team of 10. They were impressed to see the level of commitment and knowledge from teams across the council joining together as the 30HIT. This was an excellent two-way sharing of knowledge.

Addressing barriers

Southend participated fully in the Childcare Works programme of practical and effective support which provided guidance to address any barriers to implementation.

Autumn 2017 period saw 623

eligibility codes issued and 91% successfully validated.

The actual take-up was 491 unique children which represented 87% of validated codes. The remaining 13% are believed to be taking up their place in Essex – across the border; or keeping children with their preferred day nursery for only the 15 universal hours as all the 30 hours places are full; or are using one of the three Independent providers who do not offer 30 hours provision. The success rate shows the value of the 30HIT work with Communications to inform parents about 30 hours and Tax-Free Childcare and signpost them to Childcare Choices.

Spring funding period saw 933 validations of 30 hour codes and 924 children accessed

extended hours - success rate of 99%. This was well above the DfE indicative number of 739 children expected to access a place in Autumn 2017 and Spring 2018.

"Southend-on-Sea won their Childcare Works 30 hours team award for very many reasons," says James Hempsall. "They were fast off the blocks right from the start, and were inclusive and strategic across the local authority, and worked amazingly well as a team. They were excellent in the ways that involved providers at all stages, with information, support, and business concerns and considerations. Take-up was excellent as well. And one more reason; they have been enthusiastic, committed and practical – and this infectious energy has supported other local authorities and providers to rise to the challenge of 30 hours as well."

Childcare Works Awards 2018 Winners

The Provider Sharing Practice Award - Hindley Nursery School

The Partnership Award - Mel Negus, Childminder

The Local Authority Sharing Practice Award - Cambridge County Council

The Innovation Award - Northumberland County Council

The Sufficiency and Market Management Award - Buckinghamshire County Council

The 30 Hours Team Award - Southend-On-Sea Borough Council

The Two-Year-Olds Award - Cheshire West and Chester Council

Why regulation-educated leaders are vital to relieve stress overload for practitioners

Jane Evans looks at the impact of stressed practitioners on children and suggests that leaders make stress management a priority for everyone.

Last time I checked...

Caring for young children, and supporting their development, was not the most relaxing way to earn a living. It is often full on, or grindingly slow and repetitive. The children are what make it so worthwhile.

A small smile, first few steps, excitement at going down the slide "all by myself", that look when they see you. The knowledge that every day healthy bodies and brains are being built. Emotions are feeling valued, curiosity fostered and ignited into learning, confidence and competence nurtured. That's what makes early years an amazing profession and vocation.

What are early years professionals saying about their high levels of stress?

In June 2018, a report was published on stress in the early years workforce. Its findings should make all

leaders and policy makers' ears prick up. It was based on the [Pre-school Learning Alliance Minds Matters Survey](#) which received 2039 responses to questions about stress and mental health in the early years workplace.

Shockingly, 25% or 1 in 4 early years professionals said that they were considering leaving the sector due to stress or mental health issues. At a time of ongoing recruitment and retention struggles this should sound alarm bells. As should the amount of daily distress this equates to for each individual.

Other findings were that, 43.8% VERY OFTEN felt stressed about work or an issue relating to work in the past month.

Furthermore, in the past year, where work or work-related issues were a contributory factor:

53.2% experienced insomnia
56.9% anxiety
60.3% fatigue

What I share when I speak at early years conferences and events is how and why everything begins and ends, with self-regulation. Practitioners' mental and physical health, their capacity to be endlessly patient, compassionate and emotionally available to the children. Being focused enough to be able to get paperwork done, to look past children and parents' behaviours to see their needs, and to have something left for when they get home.

Times have changed, so must the focus in leadership

The question I always ask groups of practitioners is: "are you finding that children nowadays are more stressed and more easily overwhelmed?". Most heads in the audience nod. The sad reality is that in 2018, young children are more stressed than at any time in our history

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and they bring this with them into settings. It has a knock-on effect on their behaviours and capacity to be supported through life's ups and downs.

Life IS very different for children now; many of the world leaders in children's development, are talking about how the lack of emotionally available adults in daily life has a range of negative impacts. In a nutshell, it causes children to become overly stressed. Especially if the adults who are around have their own stress challenges.

Dr Bruce Perry, an internationally-recognised authority on children in crisis, [tells us](#):

"It is through patterned, repetitive neural stimulation provided by consistent, nurturing, predictable, responsive caregivers that the infant's brain receives what is needed to develop the capacity for healthy attachment and self-regulation capabilities. The caregiver becomes the external stress regulator for the infant."

Perry, and others, are deeply concerned about the isolated lives children are experiencing, where

face-to-face, heart-to-heart connection with caring adults is limited. Screens, work pressures, adult emotional distress, a permanently-on global world, are all factors.

Do you check your energy?

The other thing I always ask everyone who works with children is:

"Most days, having got yourself up, your children up, dressed, washed, fed and with PE kit, homework, lunch and all the other bits and bobs together, out the door, delivered to school. Do you take a few breaths and ground yourself before the children in your setting arrive?"

I am often met with blank looks, or mumbled comments about "needing to get yoga/ mindfulness in." In reality, few practitioners are supported to regulate themselves BEFORE, during or after their time around the children.

After I talk about how and why regulation is the key to their wellness and resilience, and of course the children's, many become interested in it. Once I've offered insight into the neuroscience, neurophysiology and neurobiology of stress and

how to become, stress-intelligent, there is a will to use this knowledge in their practice at home, and at work. This is where clear leadership is crucial as not much will be carried forward or sustained without leaders making adult regulation a priority, rather than a team day activity.

Do as I say...

It's human nature to watch what those in positions of power do, either so as to model it, or criticise it. Staff and children notice how the leaders around them behave. What they repeatedly say and how they say it. Are they good at calming everything down, which is different to telling people to calm down or not to stress out? How do they move about - rushing, slumping, rarely settling for long? Do they have a tone? Talk at or over others, say very little, smile or frown a great deal. Is their energy high, impatient, low, absent?

Powerful stuff which can be the foundation for creating more stress-intelligent environments. If leaders are modelling how to become grounded, to regulate stress, to stay on task, be good listeners rather than fixers and to meet all situations with compassion,

it impacts everyone.

Leadership on mental health means embracing beliefs and habits so that they become second nature.

For example, regularly:

- » Pausing to take three deep long breaths
- » Saying, "I feel a bit overwhelmed, I just need to take a breath"
- » Taking short breaks to stand up, stretch, walk about
- » Modelling feeling grateful for simple things
- » Doing one or two simple exercises to connect with the body e.g. - placing one hand on the heart, the other on the stomach, breathing in deeply, and letting the shoulders drop on the out breath.

Change must come soon

There are no signs that policy, beliefs and behaviours are about to change anytime

soon. People remain distracted by their phones, which leaves them unavailable to naturally emotionally and physically regulate their children. In fact, children are increasingly given phones and tablets as substitutes for human interaction, hence their stress-levels.

There is a strong focus on both parents working as much as is possible, leaving them tired and absent in the early years when brain development is most rapid. Family time is impacted by this unless parents are super-human.

Children don't get enough mucking about time as increasingly their lives are scheduled to the max. It is not what nature intended and makes caring for children more stress-laden. Therefore, early years leaders have to

address this first, as their staff's mental and physical wellbeing depends upon it. Individuals need to be supported to do their bit too but embedding simple practices in settings would go a long way to help.

The greatest beneficiaries would, of course, be the children. Having access to emotionally available and balanced adults would feel wonderful. It creates a sense of safety on every level. Ultimately, this is what will enable children to relax, be curious, feel real joy, form friendships and develop healthy bodies and brains.



Jane Evans has worked with children and families for 25 years. She is a childhood anxiety and parenting coach, an inspirational speaker on early childhood trauma, author and media expert. Jane makes neuroscience accessible to everyone, even children. As shown in her bestselling story book, [Little Meerkat's Big Panic](#), where triune brain theory becomes a simple story about a meerkat getting in a panic. Also, in her TED Talk, [Taming and Tending Your Meerkat Brain](#).

www.thejaneevans.com

janeevans61@hotmail.co.uk

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Editorial team:

Managing Editor: James Hempalls, OBE

Editor: Mel Parks

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