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The kids are oak-ay

By Karen Webber

Now more than ever, it's time for us to reconsider the way in which we live. In the face of growing concerns over climate change, real action is needed. But where to start?

For one Stockport dad, the answer is in front of us: trees! And taking action is simpler, cheaper and more fun than you might think.

Luke Cook is on a mission to grow and plant thousands of trees and he wants to inspire others to do the same. Luke is passionate about his local countryside and habitat and often litter-picks with his wife and 11 year old daughter, Grace. Grace's colourful signs around the local area remind people to take their rubbish home.

This combination of spending time outdoors as a family while having a positive impact on the environment gave Luke the idea for **The Acorn Project**.

From little acorns mighty oaks grow

Only one of the ten thousand acorns that mature oaks produce every year grows into a tree. Most acorns get eaten or fail to grow because the environment isn't ideal.

But what if we can give nature a helping hand?

Families can collect acorns and nurture them in pots until they are strong enough to withstand the elements and fend off hungry woodland creatures.

Luke has put together a website with step-by-step instructions to help families who'd like to join his mission. The site shows you how to collect acorns, test them for fertility, plant and protect



them.

Alone we can do little, together we can do lots

The Acorn Project has captivated imaginations across Stockport and beyond. Families were keen to add some excitement to their autumnal pandemic walks last year and schools jumped at the chance to give kids a hands-on experience of growing trees.

There were even some acorn pen-pals established, with germinated acorns sent to and from different areas of the country by keen planters.

This autumn, Luke hopes that more families will get involved in spending time outside together and trying their hand at growing oaks. He says: 'Now is the time to work alongside younger generations, so we can motivate and educate each other about the future and the importance of why we're doing what we do.'

Find out how to get involved at www.clean4thefuture.org/acorn-project



Your own acorn project

Start looking for acorns around mid-September. They can be green or brown, as long as they have no insect damage or holes or cracks from falling.

Your acorn doesn't need the cap in order to grow and it should come off easily.

Next, check if your acorns are fertile. Fill a clear container up with water and drop them in. Fertile acorns will sink. Non-fertile ones can be put outside for birds and squirrels (but out of reach of dogs, as acorns are poisonous for them).

Keep your fertile acorns in a cool, dark place until they sprout. When the roots start to appear, fill a small container with compost and some gravel. A yoghurt pot or plastic bottle cut in half, with drainage holes at the bottom, works well.

Make a hole and plant the acorn (about an inch below the surface). Cover with compost and put outside or in a dark spot until shoots appear (usually in the spring). You can cover the pot to create a mini-greenhouse, offering protection against birds and animals.



Trees for the future

Trees are our most powerful weapon in the fight against climate change, according to **The Woodland Trust**.

Simpler and cheaper than technology that reduces emissions, trees can capture and store atmospheric carbon for centuries. In fact, a hectare of young wood with mixed native species can lock up over four hundred tonnes of carbon - that's about the same amount you would produce if you flew from London to Edinburgh 2,631 times!

It's not just the trees that act as carbon vacuums. Their roots, leaves, deadwood, surrounding soils and associated vegetation all play a part. Woodlands also help prevent flooding and reduce pollution, while providing a safe habitat for many species.

In the UK, just thirteen per cent of the land area is covered by trees, while in the EU the average is thirty seven per cent.

We have lots of catching up to do. **Look around your local area to see where trees could be planted.** Council-owned parks, schools and hospitals are likely to be grateful for your saplings!

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Welcome

Can you believe it's back to school time already? After the long summer holidays and a good break for our children, it's a great time to refocus on their education. We have lots of support and tips for you in this issue, including informative articles about dyslexia and ADHD.

We also have information about the changes to the way early year's settings will operate going forward and ideas for gender-neutral toys as we start to approach the end of the year. Now school is back, Halloween will also be with us before we know it – check out our great suggestions for prank ideas!

Now that more and more events and activities are returning, don't forget to take a look at our What's On guide.

If you haven't signed up to receive our digital magazine and enjoy additional, interactive content and the giveaways on offer to celebrate our 30th anniversary year, there's still time! **Sign up at familiesmag.co.uk/go** to receive every issue free to your inbox!

Competition Winners from our May/June issue

Rebecca Sherrett whose family won an Away Resorts holiday.

David Morris, Jessica Li, James Parry, Kerry Lloyd, Simon, Neil and Ruth (no surnames) who each won a board game.

Lynne Ironmonger, Kim Dimant, Carol Evans and Kate Humphreys who each won a Disney Princess Wooden Toy set.

Colette Bruce, Julia Holcroft, Sarah Lavin, Diane Savin, Marie Catherine Luten, Katie Bainbridge, Katie-Anne Staples, Clare Cardoza, Rebecca Inman, Amelia Fernandez, Janine Caddick, Matthew Kermode, Hayley Thomas, Katie Hartless-Rose, Kati Whiteoak, Paul Green, Jackie Pritchard, Sonal Thakral, Ilaria Tosti, Stephanie Lawrence and Donna Leonard who each won an outdoor toy.

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SCAN ME

Age-appropriate reading for children

By Gail Hugman

Parents often ask how they can best encourage their children to move from one reading stage to the next during the primary school years.

When can I expect my child to read independently?

Children love 'to do' and will quickly move to reading independently when they feel the time is right. This can be as young as 5 years old or later, at around age 8. The majority of children will be reading **SOME** material independently by the beginning of Year 3.

How long should my child to read?

On average, by ages 5 to 7 years, children will enjoy a story together with you for fifteen to twenty minutes or spend five to ten minutes focused on a book by themselves - more if the pictures really grab them! Older children can sustain interest for longer. Some will even need to be prised out of the book.

When should my child move on from picture books?

Pictures offer vital clues to stories that new readers rely on. As a child's confidence grows, you can introduce books with fewer pictures. The **'Who Was'** book series is great transition material. But there are so many wonderful picture books for older readers that it's fine for your child to include them in a wide range of reading material until the end of primary school.

Can my child alternate between independent reading and being read to?

Absolutely! Ideally, primary aged children need to read daily so



many parents continue to read to them on this basis. Reading to your child builds their confidence and understanding and exposes them to more sophisticated books than they can manage alone.

When can I phase out reading to them?

As children reach Years 5 and 6, parents need to be less involved in their child's reading. However, children can be 'fluent readers' but still lack comprehension skills - this is the greatest weakness I have found in SATs and 11+ exams. So, a few times a week, parents can definitely make a difference by listening to their child read aloud and then talking to them about what they've read, discussing new vocabulary and characters or settings.

Gail Hugman owns and runs Human at Core (www.humanatcore.com), which helps parents motivate and engage their children in developing a bright future. Human at Core works with children 1:1 online and offers tools, strategies and techniques that will boost parent's confidence and expertise.



Choosing reading material independently

With the choices now available, selecting books can feel overwhelming for children. Here's some thoughts on how to break down this process for your child.

Teach your child to think about the book cover and whether that attracts them. This can be the very first indicator of whether they want to read the book.

Show them the blurb (synopsis) on the back of the book.

Show them what it says on the inside sleeve.

Encourage them to read the first page or two. If there's more than four words that they find tricky, the book is likely to be too hard for them.

Ask their school to recommend good books for their year group.

Ask their friends what books they're reading.

Follow an interest your child has - sometimes football books or books about pets can be a good starting point.

Look for books by an author they've enjoyed in the past.

Look at different sections of the library or book shop and see what appeals.

Encourage them to give books a chance!



What about new and challenging material?

It can sometimes be tricky to encourage your child out of their reading comfort zone. My tips are:

Visit a book shop or library with your child and just browse.

Look at the different types of books available and point out the sort of material you enjoy.

Read the first section or chapter of a new type of book to your child. Remember, your reaction to the book will influence whether your child engages with it.

Help your child research books by authors you know or have heard about.

Choose a 'book of the month' to share with the family over a special tea or dinner and get your child to do the same.

Buy a children's book that appeals to you and share it with your child.

Encourage your older child to start or join a book club with friends and take turns to choose the type of book everyone reads.

Offer your child a broad range of reading material - comics, magazines, newspapers - **First News** is great for children.

Fun and games with maths

By Daisy Upton

There are a few different things that our kiddos will be learning when it comes to numeracy in their early school years and it really helps for parents to get up to speed with these and brush up on their own basics.

Firstly, what's the terminology?

Maths Glossary

A lot of maths terminology will be familiar but it's useful to have a reminder. And, as always, some things **HAVE** changed.

Multiple: This is the **ANSWER** number to times tables. So the multiples of 5 are 5, 10, 15, 20 etc.

Numeracy: This is a word that refers to using maths in real life, such as working out change in a shop. It's the term that lots of schools now use instead of simply 'maths.'

Number sentence: This is the phrase that has replaced the general word 'sum.' A number sentence is simply a mathematical sentence such as ' $3 + 2 = 5$ '

Number bonds: These are pairs of numbers that make a certain total number. For example, number bonds making 10 are 5&5, 1&9, 2&8, 3&7 and 4&6.

Tens and ones: In my day (I feel like a grandma when I say this!) we used to say 'tens' and 'units.' But now teachers tend to refer to 'tens' and 'ones,' so 27 has 2 tens and 7 ones.

I believe in mixing up tricky maths learning with a big dollop of fun. **Try this game.**



Bond Boogie

Have you ever played one of those dance games where you have to step on the arrows in time with the screen and music? I'm so bad at them but cannot resist playing because I'm guaranteed laughter. I've tried to incorporate the fun of that game into number-bond learning here. Whack the music up . . . !

1. On twelve A5 sheets of paper, write the numbers for your number bonds.
2. Place the numbers randomly in a circle around your kid.
3. Put on music that you can pause. When it plays, your child can boogie.
4. When you stop the music, shout a number. They have to put one foot on the number you've shouted and the other on the matching bond to make ten. So if you shout, 'Eight!' then they have to jump on eight and two.
5. Once they've got the correct numbers, start again. Or they can just jump on the paired bonds while the music plays.



Five Minute Mum: Time for School

Five Minute Mum, Daisy Upton, has recently published a new book, called *Five Minute Mum: Time For School*. Daisy told Families: 'I am hoping that my new book will act like a little bridge: a paperbound stepping stone between what happens in the classroom and what happens at home. I wrote it to help parents who are preparing their children to start school or have children in the first few years of education, so you can learn together as you go.'

The book is aimed at parents of children ages 4 to 8 and includes lots of fun games, including number games, that kids will enjoy playing. Daisy says: 'Fun is always the desired outcome for my games, so it's not crucial to play them daily. I hope that by playing them children's confidence with numbers will increase. I use these games myself to get back into the swing of times tables, mental addition and subtraction and all the other bits and bobs I regularly did my best to avoid at school!'

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Dealing with back to school anxiety

By Lisa Wander and Catherine Loble

A new school year can be an exciting time for children; equally, it can prompt feelings of anxiety. For most children, these worries are transient and fade quickly. For some, the anxiety may linger well into the school year, particularly during the current pandemic. **So how can we support our children with this?**

Most anxieties are rooted in fear of the unknown. A new school year brings change: classroom, teacher, routines, social and academic pressures and expectations. For those entering new phases, change can include new schools, new travel routes and new friends.

Establishing good practice and routines in advance of the new academic year will address some common worries, preventing them from becoming deep-rooted. Make preparations well in advance, make them feel exciting and involve your child. Discuss the school day and let them ask questions. Remind them of the great things about school and reassure them that they are not alone.

For children whose worries persist, this simple five step programme can help manage anxieties.

Take care of the basics. Ensure a good sleep routine, healthy snacks and regular exercise.

Provide empathy. Find uninterrupted opportunities to listen to your child's worries, expectations and fears. Car journeys, bath time and walks are all ideal times to talk. **Listen actively**, withholding judgement and advice and validate their feelings.

Problem solve. Discuss coping strategies, ideally led by your child. Showing confidence in their own problem solving abilities will nurture greater resilience.



Highlight the positives. Encourage your child to recognise fun elements and not fixate only on the negatives. Use questions like: 'What was your favourite thing for lunch?' 'Did you ask any interesting questions?' and 'What was the funniest thing that happened today?'

Be mindful of your own emotions and reactions. Recognise that they can create learnt behaviour. By staying calm and seeming positive, the message to our children is that they don't need to worry.

The golden ticket is **communication**. Making sure your child is comfortable and confident talking to you and knows that you are ready to listen, will help prevent anxiety spiralling out of control. If you feel that 'back to school' anxiety may be something more concerning, then speak to your child's teacher for advice and support.

Lisa and Catherine are co-founders of EmParenting (www.emparenting.co.uk), which works with schools and parents to strengthen children's core qualities of emotional intelligence, kindness and compassion and offers insights, skills and tools to nurture their development and wellbeing.



Mastering 'Active Listening'

Do we really **hear** what our children say? 'Active Listening' is the single most important skill you can have in your parenting 'toolkit' - letting your child know that you are 'with them,' aware of what they are saying, accepting of their perspective and appreciative of their situation.

To practise Active Listening:

- Give your full attention without interrupting;
- Ask appropriate questions to make certain you are clear about what is being said;
- Reflect or repeat back to show your understanding;
- Keep comfortable eye contact;
- Listen without judgement, being mindful of your facial expressions;
- Avoid offering opinions and solutions;
- Listen with empathy, showing you truly hear and understand.

Open and honest communication can help your children become resilient, responsible and caring people.



Anxiety and when to seek help

Some degree of anxiety is normal and helps children deal with new or unfamiliar situations, forming an essential part of their emotional development. For some children, however, anxiety can affect their everyday behaviour and thoughts, interfering with their school, home and social life. **So how do we, as parents, know when professional help is needed?** According to NHS UK, concerning signs to look out for can include:

- Difficulty concentrating;
- Interrupted sleep and bad dreams;
- Constant worrying and negative thoughts;
- Constant complaining of stomach aches or general malaise;
- Quickly becoming angry and irritable;
- Crying often for no apparent reason.

Whilst strategies such as mindfulness, calming apps and breathing techniques are useful, do seek professional support if these don't appear to help. Your GP and/or school SENCO should be able to direct you.

Top tips for a positive Parents' Evening

By Annabel Gray

Despite the sore throat and spinning head by the end of the event, as a teacher, I used to love Parents' Evening. Those ten minutes can make all the difference to a child's experience and outcomes at school.

To get the most out of those precious minutes, my biggest piece of advice to parents is: be prepared!

Attend. Yes, this may be obvious but it is vital that you make time to attend - be it in person or online - and to show your child that you value their learning. Personally, I always liked it when the children attended too; we are talking about them after all.

Smile. The teacher you are meeting spends just as much time as you do with your child and will know them very well. Make them feel at ease and create a positive vibe from the outset by being friendly.

Come armed with questions. The most productive meetings are when the parent brings all the queries they have to the meeting so they can be ironed out quickly. What do you want to know? Their level? Their test results? How they interact with others? How confident they are? What the homework is about? How to do long division? This is your chance! Don't waste it!

Celebrate their work. Pandemic-permitting, let your child take you round and show you the work they have done on display. Look at their books too. Most parents are surprised at the quality of the work their children do at school. Tell them they are great!

Focus on solutions. Sometimes there might be tricky issues to tackle, from either side of the desk. Try to focus on solutions rather than blame. Teachers want the best for your child as much as you do. If an issue can't be resolved, book a further meeting at another time.

Be proud. Your kids are amazing! Tell them that!

And that's it.

Think about how you can work these top tips into your parents' evening and I promise you'll feel positive, productive and informed by the end of it. Teachers love you to ask questions and to help them create a triangle of communication between yourself as the parent, your child and them.



Supporting learning

Supporting our children in their learning journey is key and will contribute massively to their attitude, enthusiasm and enjoyment of education.

Parents are naturally great teachers and it's proven that their involvement in their child's education makes a huge difference to their child's outcomes. But what kind of involvement?

Life is busy for most parents and they are often stretched for time. This means sitting down at a desk with your child and helping them with a worksheet doesn't always work out.

But don't worry! **You can easily incorporate the following learning activities into even the busiest of family routines:**

Read to them;

Talk about the time and the analogue clock;

Write letters to family members and put them in the post – or even send an email if that's easier!

Keep small change in a jar and encourage your child to take it out and talk with you about coin values;

Play board games – something the whole family can enjoy.

These tips create fuss-free ways to encourage learning – you'd be surprised how much they can help children progress.

Annabel Gray is the proprietor of Bella Learning. If you'd like to find out more about what your child learns at school and how to support them in their learning journey, visit www.bellalearning.co.uk

Online Parents' Evenings



These are surprisingly effective. There's no time spent travelling to the school, you can carry on making dinner if teachers are running late - plus you have total privacy.

Of course, an online discussion may be less nuanced than person-to-person, but you should still get the information you need.

If there is an online timer on screen, you can keep track of time. Be aware that some online systems actually do simply cut the connection between teacher and parents when the time is up!

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Understanding dyslexia

By Jane Constantine

The majority of people reading this sentence will do so with ease. But did you know that one in ten people in the UK struggle with reading because they suffer from dyslexia?

Most of us have heard of dyslexia but how much do we know about the condition and can we identify the signs?

According to the **British Dyslexia Association**, the **early signs of dyslexia** in pre-schoolers can include difficulty learning nursery rhymes, paying attention, sitting still and listening to stories, slow speech development, muddling words eg 'flutterby' or 'cucumber' and forgetting names of teachers and friends.

Signs of dyslexia in children ages 5 to 12 include speed of processing eg **slow spoken and/or written language**, poor concentration, forgetting words, confusion with letters which look similar eg **b/d or p/g**, poor handwriting, spelling a word several different ways in one piece of writing, slow reading progress, difficulty blending letters together when reading, confusion of numeric symbols eg **+** and **x** signs and difficulty remembering sequential order eg **days of the week/the alphabet**.

Identifying these early signs in your child can be very difficult, sometimes beginning with incorrect judgements being made about your child. **Two mums, Cate and Kate told me of their experiences.**

'Sebastian got through Reception and Year 1 with no problem' Cate told me. 'But, in year 2, his teacher kept telling me that he was lazy and task avoidant. As a teacher myself I was concerned but I couldn't put my finger on the problem - he certainly wasn't those things in my eyes.

'He started junior school and we were again told he was just a lazy boy who would catch up. I was confused, as his reading was good but spelling seemed to be an issue. With daily work on his spelling, he would pass the weekly test but not retain the words he'd learned.

'By year 4, I was working for a company which specialised in therapeutic approaches to learning. My line manager suggested a dyslexia assessment. At the end, I was told Sebastian was dyslexic but had specific issues around attention, working memory and processing. So we went into year 5 able to explain Sebastian's struggles and with detailed strategies to support him. My insistence that he have a reader and scribe for tests meant he went from 10/50 in Year 4 to 43/50 in Year 5 for reading. His spelling, punctuation, grammar and maths also improved - although not to the same level.'

Kate fought similar battles for her son, Rowan. 'In Year 1, I was



told it was too early to tell if Rowan had dyslexia and that he wouldn't be checked again until Year 3. However, I was told that he did have APD - auditory processing disorder. The dyslexia assessment didn't happen in Year 3 and finally, in Year 4, after the assessment, we started making progress with getting him some support.'

Due to funding issues, Kate feels Rowan didn't really get the support he needed until he reached secondary school.

'He's now allocated a laptop so he can scribe on that. He has 1:1 intervention for English, an allocated SEN team member and access to the SEN room when he's struggling. The school does assessments with him and allocate him a scribe in lessons, if needed. He's also allowed to do many assessments vocally.

'Since Rowan started at the school last September his reading and writing have gone from almost non-existent to a level where he can keep up at school!'

Jane Constantine is a writer and mother of two children living in Hampshire.

Tips from parents

Cate reports that Seb has struggled with his diagnosis, calling himself 'stupid.' The books '*Mission Dyslexia*' and YouTube videos that explain the condition visually, are starting to help him recognise he just uses different strengths.

Rowan has attended an emotional development course which has helped him with the frustration of being dyslexic.

Kate says: 'Rowan's very intelligent but it's locked inside him and the frustration of that is one of the hardest things for him to deal with.'

Dyslexia resources

Dyslexia Awareness Week is run by the British Dyslexia Association and takes place from 4 to 10 October. It raises awareness of the condition through various events, educational resources for schools, colleges, universities and the workplace. It also invites people with the condition to share their experiences with others.

The British Dyslexia Association offers a wealth of advice and support to dyslexia sufferers of all ages, supporting young people and their families into adulthood.

Find out more at www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

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ADHD – what parents need to know

By Ellie Malt

Being stuck inside during this winter's lockdown, along with the lack of sport, hit children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) particularly hard and made their symptoms worse. Homeschool also created a unique opportunity for parents to observe their child's learning behaviour. For some parents, it was the first time they really considered that their active and high-spirited child might actually have ADHD.

Consequently, there has been a huge increase in the number of parents referring their children for an ADHD assessment. Consultant Neurodevelopmental Paediatrician, Doctor Zoritch, who specialises in ADHD says: 'it became obvious to parents what the concentration difficulties were, how restless their children were and how difficult it was for them to focus on the work.' In particular, the number of girls being diagnosed is catching up with boys, as teachers and parents become more aware of how **girls tend to mask their hyperactive symptoms** and exhibit more anxiety and emotional problems instead.

A study* carried out in China during the pandemic found that children with ADHD who spent lots of time on digital devices suffered from **more severe negative emotions** than other children who spent an equal amount of time on devices, but had no ADHD. It concluded that 'supervision of digital media usage, especially video game and social media, along with increased physical exercise, is essential to the management of core symptoms and associated problems encountered with ADHD.'

ADHD is the most common childhood condition in the UK after asthma and, as awareness of the symptoms increases and the stigma decreases, it's likely the numbers will continue to rise. As Doctor Zoritch says: 'in every classroom there will be a couple of



children with ADHD.'

What is ADHD?

Brain imaging and clinical research show that ADHD is not a behaviour disorder, mental illness or learning disability. It's an impairment of the development of the brain's self-management system and it impacts eleven percent of children. Children with ADHD have trouble learning to control impulses, focusing and organising.

There are two types. The best known is where the child is **primarily physically hyperactive and impulsive**. The lesser known (and often overlooked) is the **primarily inattentive** type, where the child may seem dreamy and distracted by their thoughts. These children struggle with concentration and organising their belongings. Sometimes these two types overlap and a child may have symptoms of both.

Ellie Malt is a writer and mum of two daughters living in Surrey.

*Shuai, L., He, S., Zheng, H. et al. Influences of digital media use on children and adolescents with ADHD during COVID-19 pandemic. *Global Health* 17, 48 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-021-00699-z>



ADHD behaviours

Primarily Hyperactive-Impulsive type

- Fidgets with or taps hands or feet or squirms in seat;
- Often leaves seat when remaining seated is expected;
- Runs about/climbs in situations where it is inappropriate;
- Often unable to play quietly;
- Is often 'on the go,' acting as if 'driven by a motor;'
- Often talks excessively or blurts out an answer before a question has been completed;
- Often has difficulty waiting his or her turn;
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others.

Primarily Inattentive type

- Often fails to pay close attention to detail;
- Difficulty sustaining attention in tasks;
- Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly;
- Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork;
- Often has difficulty organising sequential tasks;
- Difficulty keeping materials and belongings in order;
- Poor understanding of time;
- Often loses things;
- Reduced skills in taking turns and sharing;
- Exaggerated emotions.



What should I do?

If you think your child has ADHD, contact your GP for a referral to **CAMHS** (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service). Educate yourself about ADHD and prepare a list of concerns prior to your appointment. Use the resources below to find out more. Having a child with ADHD will demand above average specialist parenting skills and many of these organisations will provide you with invaluable training and support.

ADHD Wise UK offers coaching and screening to families and schools. www.adhdwise.co.uk

ADHD Foundation aims to create better understanding and management of ADHD. www.facebook.com/adhdfoundation

Additude Magazine is a US based, online publication that also hosts webinars. www.additudemag.com

ADDISS (The National Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service) provides support and resources to parents and professionals, including local groups for parents and training in the Magic 123 course recommended for parents. www.addiss.co.uk

Changes to the Early Years Framework (EYFS)

By Emma Lewry

A new Early Years Framework has been trialled in the UK and becomes statutory in September 2021. So what does this mean for families with children attending Early Years settings and classrooms?

As an Early Years teacher and former head teacher, I don't think anyone could argue with the aim of the changes - to raise outcomes and to enable practitioners to spend more time caring for children. From my experience working with schools trialling the changes, there are many elements which will be brilliant for children and families.

Let's start by looking at what is staying the same:

Children learn best through play – playful experiences remains at the heart of the EYFS.

The curriculum is broad – the EYFS curriculum includes everything from reading and writing to understanding simple maps; from learning social skills to throwing a ball. There are new parts but children will still be supported to learn a wide range of skills and knowledge.

So what is different?

One of the biggest changes is the need for **children to be taught new words** and develop a love of reading. Teaching words has always happened but now it is being given centre stage to support children's communication and language development.



Supporting your child to learn new words

Supporting children to develop their communication and language and to use new words at home is easy to encourage. My three top tips are:

Share books with your child as much as you can. Sharing books is more than just reading. It means taking time to let children comment and ask questions about the book and the words. When you share books with your child, stop at new or unusual words and explain what they mean.

Use a comment instead of asking direct questions. When talking to your child about an object or a picture in a book, rather than asking a question like: 'What is it?' try using a comment instead. Start with an open-ended phrase such as: 'I wonder if...' Children are more likely to engage in a conversation this way than give one word answers.

Have conversations with your child. Back and forth interactions (chatting) is incredibly valuable for children. Try to use new or different words when talking and be excited when your child learns and uses them.



The second biggest change, and one which families who have a child in an Early Years setting already may notice, is the recommendation to **reduce recording of children's learning**. This means carers will be able to spend more time playing and supporting the learning of children. It might mean that you see fewer pictures or less written information about your child's learning but what is recorded and shared with you will be the really valuable parts - the new learning and the 'wow' moments.

The new framework includes some **other new learning** too, including supporting children to learn about equality, difference and communities and to develop positive relationships and attachments which help them understand their own feelings and those of others.

Staff will need a few terms to settle into using all of the new elements but, as with all things education-related, do ask your child's key workers, teachers and support staff if you would like to know how the new framework is being used in your setting.

Emma Lewry is a school leader, former head teacher and co-owner of Every Day's a School Day (www.edasd.co.uk) where parents can find support for matters relating to school and education.



Learning through play – what's that all about?

Early Years classrooms, including in nurseries, pre-school and Reception, all use play throughout the day. It's a wonderful way to enable children to explore the world, develop skills, problem solve and find things out for themselves. Early Years teachers are highly skilled at planning for all children to learn through play.

This means that when you see, for example, a tray with pom poms, bowls and tongs, you see the potential for a fun game. Who can grab the most pom poms with the tongs? But there's more to it. An activity like this will have been planned by teachers to help children develop their hand strength and hand eye co-ordination. Children don't even realise they are learning.

When your child comes home telling you they have been 'just playing' all day long, know that there is clever teacher wisdom behind all that fun!

Top tip: if your child starts school in 2022, join the Facebook group set up by Every Day's a School Day. Just google Facebook and 'schoolstartershut'!

Raising feminist sons in #Metoo era

By Tanith Carey

This year's revelations about rape culture in schools and universities have led parents to think more about how to raise their sons to become men who respect and treat women as equals. Of course, it's not boys who are the problem. It's the messages they get from our culture, which we, as parents, have to help them question and stand up to.

Allow boys ALL their emotions

Studies have found that boy babies cry just as much as girls. But then, unconsciously, we 'man up' our sons early, believing they need to be tough. By age 4, mothers use more emotional language with girls than boys, according to research. By age 7, if a boy hurts himself during sport, he gets praised more for not crying than a girl the same age. From this, our sons learn that the only emotion they are permitted without looking weak, is anger. Allow your son to express all his feelings including hurt and sadness.

Let boys play whatever they like

Before age 3, boys and girls play in roughly the same way. But after that, they start to get the idea that some games are more appropriate for boys than others. Encourage your son to play whatever interests him, without limits. Let him be the female characters in his 'let's pretend' games if he wants to explore this too. If he gets the feeling you disapprove, he will push this side of himself away.

Consider male stereotypes

Just as research has found Barbie dolls give girls ideas



about what an 'ideal' female body 'should' look like, gender-exaggerated superhero figures present boys with an image of males without any emotion, except anger. Similarly, if children read more stories in which boys are heroes and girls are invisible or passive, they internalise those messages. As your son grows, talk about some of the stereotypes he may see in video games and pop videos, which can portray men as sexual predators and women as less powerful objects.

Value equality

Show how equality can be just as good for boys as it is for girls, allowing all genders to reach their potential without limits on how they think or what they become. Have a family value that everyone is treated with dignity and courtesy, no matter who they are.

Tanith Carey is author of *What's My Child Thinking? Practical Child Psychology for Modern Parents*, with Dr Angharad Rudkin, published by DK and available from Amazon and Bookshop.org.



Talking about consent to young children

Give them control over their own bodies. It's never too early to teach kids about consent and boundaries. You can start teaching them valuable lessons by giving them control over their own bodies first and asking them if they want you to hug or kiss them.

Use play. If your child is playing 'let's pretend', introduce mutual consideration by saying things like 'Friends play games that both want to play.' If you hear your child say: 'I won't be your friend if you don't want to play,' help them respect their playmate's decision or show them how to work out an alternative both are happy with. Let them know it is okay for them and others to change their minds.

Teach consent like table manners. Just as you didn't sit down and tell your child how to behave at the table in one sitting, the same goes for consent. Have numerous small conversations in which you talk about mutual respect and consideration for other people's feelings.



How to talk to children about p**n

Understandably, no parent wants to talk about p**n to young children. But even before kids know what it is, you can start the conversation by talking about the importance of equal relationships.

When they get curious about sex around age 7, explain that sex is not just for making babies but also special way grown-ups have of showing love for each other. Reinforce this whenever you talk with your child about sex, reminding them of the emotional and not just the physical dimension.

When both boys **AND** girls get to an age when you think they might be exposed in some way to p**n - probably earlier than you think - talk about how, in the same way the action in adventure movies isn't real life, p****graphy isn't real sex. Emphasise that it is a performance designed to shock and make money and that there is no love or emotion involved. Explain the difference between this and the shared, mutually enjoyable act that making love should be in reality.

Making it okay for... boys to play with dolls (and girls with cars)

By Dr Amanda Gummer

Dolls are for girls and cars are for boys, right? This stereotype is ingrained into us. A walk through a toy store highlights these gender stereotypes with aisles full of pink, dolls and princesses, alternating with construction and action toys with boys on the box.

Balancing your child's play diet can be tough when there's pressure from advertising, the media, families and peers which encourages children to play with toys that match their own gender.

But when gender is targeted like this, boys and girls can be limited to set styles of play. For example, dolls encourage imaginative social play, while building blocks promote logic and problem solving. Early experiences build children's confidence in their abilities so it's easy to see how gendering toys like this may encourage girls towards caring and people-centred roles and boys towards STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths).

Gender neutral toys

So what does 'gender neutral toy' really mean? Aren't all toys gender neutral? Well, yes. Any toy can be played with and enjoyed by any gender, regardless of whether it is stereotypically for boys or girls. But, as already identified, that's not always how toys are marketed.

Some toys are considered more gender neutral than others though because they aren't traditional girls' toys or boys' toys.



These can allow your child the freedom to play without any pre-set expectations or worrying that they are playing with a toy that's meant for the opposite gender.

As your child's biggest role model, your attitude towards the toys they choose to play with is important. Your daughter might want to play with trains but she might also want to play with dolls. Your son might want to dress up as a princess or he might enjoy building.

Encourage your child to enjoy whatever they are interested in and be comfortable in their own skin, rather than guiding them towards toys to deliberately reinforce or fight stereotypes.

"It is time that we all see gender as a spectrum instead of two sets of opposing ideals." Emma Watson.

Dr Amanda Gummer is widely considered to be the UK's go-to expert on play, toys and child development. Founder of The Good Play Guide (www.goodplayguide.com) and The Good Toy Guide (www.goodtoyguide.com), her mission is to ensure that every child develops the skills to thrive and have a happy, healthy childhood.



Five ways to overcome gender stereotypes

Encourage your child to ignore gender stereotypes and make their own choices with these few quick tips:

Provide a mix of gender specific toys, toys that are classically for the opposite gender and gender neutral toys.

Whilst different genders naturally lean towards playing with different toys and types of play, 'pink for girls' and 'blue for boys' is learned. Give your child things they love in other colours - from clothes to cutlery!

Give your child time and permission to play in lots of ways with access to different toys and play spaces and appropriate clothing for them; for instance, encourage your daughter to be loud and scruffy and your son to be calm and focused.

Have playdates with friends/siblings of different genders. Encourage them to bring their favourite toys, so everyone can play with something different.

Whether you have a girl who loves princesses or likes to build, giving the choice back to her will help her grow up to be a confident individual, fully able to express herself.

Toys for girls AND boys

These gender-neutral toy suggestions have all been tested by children and approved by the experts at The Good Toy Guide:

Pretend Play

Pillow fight with the **Pillowfight Warriors® Medieval Range** (£11.99, 3-8 years).

Creativity

Get budding little bakers started in the kitchen with a **Baking Set from Galt** (£12.99, 3-5 years).

Games

Race opponents to complete **The Genius Square!** (£16.99, 7-9 years).

Construction

Enchant children with the magnetic construction system **Magicube Full Color** (£18.00-£35.00, 18-36 months).

Nature

See and hear the birds up close with the **Geosafari® Jr. Kidnoculars® Extreme™** (£22.50, 3-8 years).

Outdoor

Keep up with the progress of any mission with the **Discovery Adventures Digital Walkie Talkies** (£24.99, age 6-8 years).

Education

Build a gadget-packed treehouse with the **Peppermint Great Treehouse Engineering Adventure** (£35.00, 8+ years).

Junk modelling

Build an A.I. Bot, Teabot or Unicorn from cardboard with the **Smartibot Building Kit** (£55.00, 11+ years).



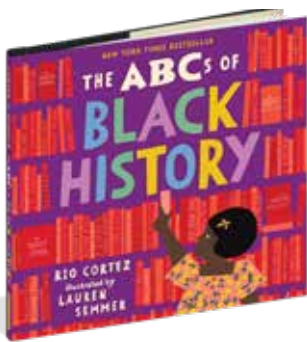
Kids' books that promote diversity

By Tamsy Ashman, a published author and mother living in Birmingham.

As conversations about race continue to dominate the headlines and we celebrate Black History Month in October, organisations and individuals have stepped up in recognising that we can celebrate our differences and embrace other cultures and races at the same time. So this is the perfect time to explore literature and texts from diverse authors with our kids.

Exposure to books featuring different backgrounds help shape children's views of the world positively in an inclusive, welcoming way. Reading about racial differences enables children to empathise with others and appreciate different ways of life whilst understanding that essentially, we are all the same and that is - human.

Here's a list of great books to get started.



The ABCs of Black History by Rio Cortez

A beautiful toddler-friendly introduction to black history. With its bright, vivid imagery, the book teaches the ABCs in an interesting and meaningful way. Letters represent: History - G is for the Great Migration. Culture - K for Kwanzaa. People and places - H is for Harlem and Zora Neale Hurston. Big ideas - like B for beautiful, bold, brave, brotherhood. Perfect for learning the alphabet and black history.

Suitable for ages 3+.

Available at www.bookshop.org



I Am Whole by Shola Oz

A delightful picture book celebrating children of mixed backgrounds and cultures. Written with love to embrace the differences that come with being multi-racial, it includes language, family and cultural traditions. This book encourages children to embrace their diversity and recognise that such differences make us whole.

Suitable for ages 0 to 7.

Available on Amazon.

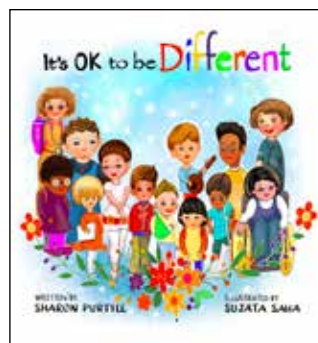


In the Know: Inspiring Black Figures by Tamsy Ashman

The aim of my book is to spread knowledge of black individuals who have impacted and revolutionised our world. It encourages a well-rounded view of history and brings to the fore lesser-known black inventors. It also encourages children to think of what career they may have in the future and consider how they want to impact the world.

Suitable for ages 5+.

Available on Amazon.

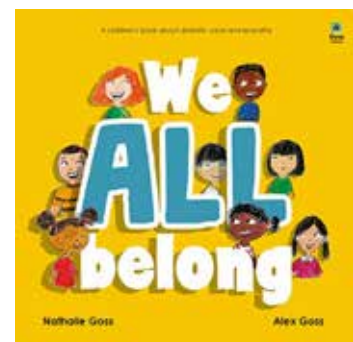


It's OK to be Different by Sharon Purtill

This book encourages kids to be kind and befriend those who are different from themselves, showing young children that they don't have to look alike to engage and interact with others and promote racial tolerance. By highlighting the ways kids are different from one another, it helps children to accept themselves and others as the unique individuals that they are. The book includes a short survey for children about kindness and is a fantastic way to start a conversation about diversity.

Suitable for ages 2 to 8.

Available at www.bookshop.org

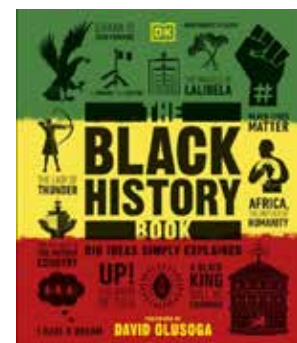


We all Belong by Nathalie & Alex Goss

A beautifully written and illustrated children's picture book that recognises and celebrates diversity in children. It's a rhyming poem about inclusion, whatever the colour of our skin, with excellent representation of different cultures. The book includes an activity at the end, to help children appreciate how we are all similar in some ways and different in other ways too.

Suitable for all ages.

Available on Amazon.



The Black History Book by DK (Author)

A great book featuring profiles of key people, movements and events, which brings together accounts of significant ideas and milestones in Black history and culture and how it has influenced the world. This vital and thought-provoking book presents: modern Black communities such as Windrush migration, Civil Rights, Black feminist movements and Black Lives Matter.

Ages 10+.

Available at www.bookshop.org

Winter proofing your home

By Jo Behari

As we prepare to tidy our summer clothes away and put our jumpers back on, we need to ensure our homes are as ready for winter as our wardrobes. Here are some key things you need to do to avoid the winter weather taking a toll on your home.

Firstly, heating. Your boiler has had a small rest over the warmer months so you need to check the pressure before cranking up the heat.

Find the dial on the front of your boiler or check the digital display. The pressure should be 1-2 bars; if it's below this you need to 'top it up.' This essentially involves filling up the water. Most modern boilers have a series of taps or levers underneath that allow you to do this easily. Check your manufacturer's instructions to find out how to top up yours.

It's also a good idea to bleed your radiators. You can do this yourself with a radiator key or a flat head screwdriver and a rag. You must do this when the heating is off and you may need to top up the pressure in the boiler after.

I would also recommend servicing the boiler with a Gas Safe Registered plumber at this point in the year to stave off any problems that may arise when you really need it. A boiler service should cost you £80 to £100 but could save you a costly repair.

Periods of extreme cold can cause costly burst pipes in your home but you can avoid this with a simple lagging. Lagging is like putting a winter coat on your pipes.



Focus on the pipes that are external or in unheated spaces and wrap them in insulated pipe lagging that costs a few pounds per length. And, if it gets really cold, keep a very small drip running on the tap - it's harder for moving water to freeze.

Finally, to ensure your heating is working efficiently, spend a bit of time draught proofing your home.

Identify where draughts are coming in by slowly moving a candle around the window or door frame. Where the flame flickers is where air is coming in. Use draught proofing strips to block these holes up.

If you have furniture in front of your radiators, pull it away to allow the air to circulate. Otherwise you are just spending money heating your sofa and not the room.

Jo Behari (www.jobehari.co.uk) is an entrepreneur, DIY expert and TV presenter.



Top tips on bleeding a radiator

When your radiators are gurgling or not heating up properly, it means there is air blocking the path of the water and you need to 'bleed' that air out. This is a simple job - you don't need a plumber. You will need a radiator key which you can buy for a few pounds from a hardware store or if you have a groove in the radiator valve, you can use a flat head screwdriver.

Ensure the radiators are off (you may scald yourself if they are on).

Put the radiator key in the valve at the top of the radiator and turn anti-clockwise. Air will come hissing out. When you see water shut the valve off. Have an old cloth or rag to hand to catch any water that may come out.

Repeat on all your radiators.

If the radiator is still not heating up and it's cold at the bottom, this means there is a sludge build up and the system needs to be power flushed by a professional.



Ten ways to reduce energy bills and keep warm

Draught proof windows and doors with brush or foam strips; Use a draught proofing roll in front of doors to stop the hot air leaving and cold draughts coming in;

Use rugs on floors with floorboards;

Double up your curtains by pinning a blanket to the back of them;

Use a reflective piece of card behind your radiators to reflect the heat back into the room (you can make one yourself by wrapping tinfoil around card);

Pin a tea towel over cat flaps and letterboxes to stop the draughts coming in that way;

Install TRV's (thermostatic radiators valves) on your radiators to allow you to control heat in each room individually;

Shut the doors to any rooms that aren't being used;

Turn the dial down on your heating thermostat but keep the heating on longer. This could save you ten percent on your heating bill each year;

And don't forget that simple advice your granny gave you. Put on another jumper!

Starting a business – the practicalities made easy

By Riina Trkulja

Starting your own business is incredibly exciting. Nevertheless, many people are unclear about the legalities and structures they require. Here are the considerations.

Company structure

The most common legal forms your business can take are sole trader or limited company. A company is a separate legal entity from you and liability will be limited by shares, so if someone sues you, the company will be liable and your personal assets are protected. Whereas, as a sole trader or partnership, you are personally liable, meaning if someone successfully sues you, any personal assets you own, including your house, could be used to repay business debt.

Because limited companies offer the above personal protection, they must disclose accounts and a confirmation statement annually to Companies House, where they can be accessed by anyone for free. They must also submit a corporation tax return to HMRC annually. This is not made public. Bear in mind that the deadline to file a return is 12 months after the year end but **the deadline to pay is only 9 months and 1 day after the year end.**

A sole trader is required only to disclose its income and profits on a Self-Assessment tax return due by 31 January annually. This information isn't public.

In terms of tax payable, there's little difference between sole trader and limited company on income levels up to £50,000.



Other considerations

VAT. You must register when your VAT-able turnover exceeded £85,000 over the last 12 months or if you expect your income to exceed £85,000 in the next 30 day period. Sometimes it might be useful to register earlier or speak to a specialist about one of the many VAT schemes.

Insurance. Service providers usually have Professional Indemnity insurance and Public Liability insurance is necessary if you are servicing the public in your building. Speak to an insurance broker to get specific advice for your business.

Data protection. If you collect and process people's personal data, you will need to register with the ICO. To find out more, visit www.ico.org.uk or get specialist advice.

Becoming an employer. Even if you are a sole director of your limited company, you will have to register as an employer if you decide to pay yourself a salary. Find out more at www.gov.uk/register-employer

Riina Trkulja is founder of Accounts Assistants (www.accountsassistants.co.uk) which offers quality book keeping, accounting and financial advice for small businesses.



How to set up a limited company

There are tonnes of companies out there that provide the service of setting up your limited company but it is easy to do it yourself and only costs £12 if you follow the steps at www.gov.uk/limited-company-formation

When you register a limited company with Companies House, you will be asked to provide an address which will be publicly available alongside your full name and month and year of birth. If you do not want your address with Companies House and you are not yet renting office space, you could get a virtual address for £70 upwards a year. Some virtual address companies even offer meeting rooms that can be rented which is helpful if you need to meet clients.

If you are not planning to trade straight away and may keep your company dormant for a while, you can set it up as such, as you do not have to file Corporation Tax return for a dormant company. When you do start trading, you must inform HMRC.



Bookkeeping – do I need an accountant?

Bookkeeping is simply tracking all your incoming revenue and outgoing expenditure regularly and matching them to the bank statement. You can do it using Excel (or similar) first, depending on the amount and type of transactions. Or you can select an accounting programme like Xero or cheaper alternatives. If you have a limited company, it's best to speak to an accountant before you choose.

Retain your receipts and invoices from suppliers and the invoices you issue to clients. It is a legal requirement to keep track of your records if you are operating a business but if you have a cloud-based drive and keep all your records digitally, then there is no requirement to keep paper records.

If you are concerned about spending valuable start-up capital on an accountant, bear in mind that having one doesn't mean spending lots of money immediately. You can do your bookkeeping and basic admin yourself and get your accountant to manage the annual accounts and tax return, which are due nine to twelve months after the year end.

Top Halloween pranks for families

Over the years, Halloween has become a fun celebration embraced by many but it doesn't have to be all about the treats! It's also a great time to play some fun tricks on your family. So check out these ghoulish ideas and get ready for the most spooktacular season of the year!

Skeleton fun

Pranking your family with a skeleton is both easy and creative. Your family won't expect a skeleton at the dinner table, in the passenger seat of your car or in the shower. Glow in the dark ones are a particularly great and unexpected surprise!



Glowing eyes

Looking to spook your family at night? Try making some glowing eyes to put in your garden. Simply draw some eyes onto the tube of a toilet roll, cut them out and place glow sticks into them. Some carefully placed ones could also spook the neighbours too...



Fake treats

We all know Halloween is synonymous with treats, so, with this prank, you get the best of both worlds. You can cover fruit or vegetables in chocolate to make them look like a tasty treat and watch your loved ones grimace when they take a bite! Popular options are Brussel sprouts, onions or chocolate covered grapes wrapped in sweet wrappers.

Gory Food

This may require a little more creativity, but making sausages look like chopped fingers (don't forget the ketchup!) or Rice Krispie treats look like brains is usually something kids relish. Another idea is to peel green grapes – the texture and look of the inside of the grape is surprisingly similar to an eyeball...



Spooky insects

It's not Halloween unless fake creepy crawlies are involved! You can hide them in beds, the bathroom or even freeze them in ice cube trays. It's an easy scare and relatively low cost.



Mirror Messages

Use a little bit of liquid soap on your finger and write on the bathroom window. When your unsuspecting victim gets in the shower and fogs up the mirror, they will see your secret message. It could be their name or something more in tune with Halloween like 'I'm watching you.' Or something simple like 'Happy Halloween' or 'Boo!'

Guess the Body Parts

The idea is to blindfold your kids and get them to feel food and guess which body part it is. You can use foods like spaghetti for a brain, sausages for fingers, jelly for a heart or perhaps pickled onions for eyes. The options are endless and it is so much fun to see the look on their faces when you reveal the truth at the end.

Spooky Noises

These days, finding sound clips on YouTube can be the answer to scaring people when they least expect it. Especially when you can connect your phone to devices such as speakers or an Alexa. Have a search to find ghost noises or perhaps creaky floorboards, then play your prank when your victim least suspects it. (But make sure it isn't when someone is driving, using the stairs or wielding sharp objects - safety first!).

Bloody Handprints

A simple but effective decoration. Simply find some removable fake blood, place it on your hands or on some plastic gloves and get creative. Maybe try putting bloody hand prints across the window or on a floor - definitely not one for the carpet though.

Remember, Halloween isn't for everyone; so only visit houses decorated with a pumpkin or decorations and don't play pranks on people you don't know.

By
Claire Winter