



# CASE STUDY

## Teaching and Modelling Social Communication

My name is Sarah Smith and I have been an Ofsted Registered childminder for over 20 years, prior to which I was a class teacher in a nursery and Infant school. Achieving a Masters in Early Years Professional Practice led to a passion for raising the standards in early years. I have worked as an assessor and mentor on the Early Years Professional / Teacher Status and am currently an Area Lead on the DfE's Covid Recovery programme. Having spent most of my working life in Thurrock, in Essex, I now live and run my childminding setting in Buxton, Derbyshire.



The revised Development Matters guidance (July 21) contains seven key features of effective practice. The fourth of these is Pedagogy: helping children learn. Our pedagogy is the way that we want the children to learn. This is usually through a mixture of different approaches. Development Matters states "Children learn through play, by adults modelling, by observing each other and through guided learning and direct teaching." I am going to look at social communication in my childminding practice in the light of this.

The Ofsted Handbook (point 179) talks about us being teachers. For a childminder this can feel like a daunting prospect, but simply refers to the interactions that you have with the children during play and how you model language and behaviours for the children.

The Education Endowment foundation defines social communication as where "The child is taught to notice body language, spoken words and how to listen and respond in appropriate ways. [Through this] they learn how to become a helper and help seeker in relationships."

It is important therefore that we reflect on how we model this with the children in our care.

The children I care for currently range between 1 and 3 years old. For me, mealtimes are an important part of our daily routine and are something that childminders can do in a unique way. Within my setting, I provide all the food for the children, and we sit up at the family dining table, adults and children together, all eating the same thing. This is something that children may not have the opportunity to experience elsewhere, whether at home or in other settings. I feel that this is a very powerful opportunity for a teachable moment in social communication. It is possibly something that we do without even thinking about it. I usually have 3 or 4 children each day and they are with me for the whole day, all eating dinner before they are collected.



Our mealtime is a routine; through repeated patterns, the children have learnt that just before dinner time they are all involved with tidying up. I get involved with this so that I am **modelling the wanted behaviour**. I also give clear instructions about what I expect. For one child who sometimes finds tidy up time hard this might be to give them a choice: *"Would you like to put away the books or the building blocks?"* At this point I will also gesture to the books and bricks to reinforce what I am saying. To the 1year-old I might move a basket towards them, and then modelling putting the toys back into that basket, ask *"Can you help me put the people back into their basket please?"*

After tidying up, the children know from experience, they wait and take turns to wash their hands. They then go to the table.

At this point one of the children will often pass out the bibs and cups. They recognise the colours of these and so will know who to pass them to. Annie has said *"Here's the green bib, it's yours Ben"*. I always try to model please and thank you's myself and encourage the children to use them too.

**I also give specific praise for remembering, using the phrases; "Lovely manners Ben" or "Thank you for using your good manners, Annie".**



When sitting at the table I believe it is important to sit at the right height, and for this reason the children all sit on booster seats once out of a highchair. This means that they are better able to use their cutlery appropriately and are also in a position to see everyone else and make eye contact. Being comfortable will enable them to take a fuller part in the experience. Background noise is also a consideration; it is important that the children can all hear each other and me clearly.

During dinner there is an opportunity for me to develop relationships with the children and for them with each other. We discuss the day that we have shared and value each other's opinion, taking turns to speak. I also use it as an opportunity to celebrate events such as their birthdays, with a cake and candles. The children learn to understand the unwritten rules of mealtimes through modelling both from myself and their peers and through my reinforcement of them. These include using their cutlery appropriately and waiting for others to finish their meal.

**They may be heard encouraging each other: "Well done Ben you are using your fork to eat your dinner" copying something that I may have said at another time.**

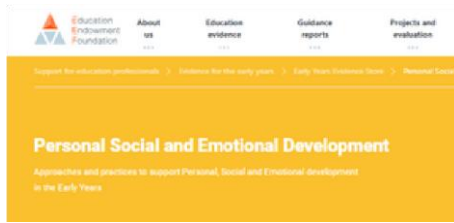
There will be lots of opportunities for non-verbal communication at the table too. **Facial expressions** are used to portray how the children are feeling about what has been said, or even whether they like their dinner or not! When I'm giving them instructions, I again use **gestures**. When asking if they would like more food, I will **point** towards it. If I am asking whether they would like help to cut their food or scrape their bowl, I will find myself **miming** these actions and this reinforces the understanding for the children. Simple sign language can work this way too. I have now found the children copying this which helps them communicate effectively before they have spoken language.

When Charlotte who is 1 has finished her meal, she will sign this to me and then gesture, by rubbing her hands together that she would like a wipe to clean her hands.



**By providing the children with the language and environment for better social communication, I have enabled them to develop their PSED skills, particularly their independence and cooperation.**

# references



[EEF Evidence Store - PSED](#)



[Development Matters](#)



[Early Years Inspection Handbook for Ofsted-registered provision](#)

