

WHAT DOES CHALLENGE LOOK LIKE?

As early years practitioners, we are often asked...

How are the children challenged?

How do you know they are challenged?



To foster an environment where challenge has purpose and is embedded into activities, we have found that preparation is key.

This simple activity of junk model making is an example of challenge in action in our setting, Childhaven Nursery School, in Scarborough.

What are the key elements to support challenge in this activity?

- Everything ready so that children can make plans, **challenging & thinking**.
- Adults carefully preparing the possibilities, ensuring there are **no limits**.
- Adults planning the potential, expecting **concentration**.
- Different tapes, expecting **experimentation**.
- Different scissors, expecting **evaluation and perseverance**.
- A range of boxes and lids presented carefully so that children can see them and make a choice. Just enough, expecting **deep engagement**.

In addition to the above, an essential element is...

An adult who can step in and **model** a skill, **support** an idea, **challenge** in the moment, be **ready** to be a play partner, forever not knowing (on purpose) what the master plan is and **trusting** that our little learners hold the **magic** within them.



What does the evidence say?

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) evidence store presents key messages supported by research, providing evidence-based insights about the approach to creating and navigating challenge.

Key findings

- Creating challenge can **improve children's executive function in the early years.**
- Activities work best when educators **gradually adjust difficulty** based on the child's performance.
- Challenges should provide opportunities for children to test out different strategies themselves. To scaffold learning, educators should **provide support when introducing new challenges and when children struggle.**

Creating and navigating challenge in the early years is one of EEF's five key approaches that educators can use to develop the self-regulation or executive function of children. You can find examples of how to use challenge in your setting and read the full evidence store reports here:

Creating and navigating challenge: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years-evidence-store/self-regulation-and-executive-function?approach=creating-and-navigating-challenge>

Self regulation and executive function:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years-evidence-store/self-regulation-and-executive-function>



PAUSE AND REFLECT

- DOES YOUR ENVIRONMENT AND ROUTINE ENABLE CHALLENGE?
- ARE YOU AND / OR YOUR STAFF READY TO BE PLAY PARTNERS?

REMEMBER... 'DO A JOB THAT YOU LOVE AND YOU WILL NEVER WORK A DAY IN YOUR LIFE.'



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THANK YOU FOR READING.

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