



Kathryn is a Maintained Nursery School Headteacher at Childhaven Nursery School in Scarborough,. The four times rated outstanding nursery school is the lead setting of the Yorkshire and Humber Together Early Years Stronger Practice Hub and holds several awards. In June 2025 the school became a Nurture School and has been developing its nurturing practices. In this four-part series, Kathryn considers the impact of nurturing practices, which focuses on adult to adult, and adult to child relationships. She will also explore the impact of using a nurture-based scale to monitor practice with our youngest children who might have SEND.

NURTURING MINDS



PART 1: Nurturing our early years practitioners

Never has it been a more challenging time to work as an early years practitioner. The workforce has been through considerable change. We are again amidst legislature changes for September 2025. This is coming at a time when we are in a recruitment crisis whilst at the same time being pushed to expand places and make our settings bigger or extend our age ranges. The pressures are like we have never known before and these are coupled with significant financial pressures that leave many of us on the edge of viability.



SO HOW DO WE ENSURE THAT WE HAVE ROBUST EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS TO NAVIGATE THIS STORM WITH US? HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THESE PASSIONATE ADVOCATES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?

In 2018 (before the onset of the pandemic and the present-day challenges could even be imagined)– it was already a worrying picture;

·25% OF RESPONDENTS WERE
CONSIDERING LEAVING THE SECTOR DUE
TO STRESS

·66% SAID THEIR PERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS WERE NEGATIVELY
AFFECTED BY WORK RELATED STRESS

·62% WERE WORKING REGULARLY OUTSIDE
THEIR PAID HOURS

·52% HAD NOT SPOKEN TO ANYONE AT
WORK ABOUT THEIR STRESS

As a Maintained Nursery School headteacher I came across the Early Years Love and Nurture Rating Scale (Grimmer & Bradbury 2024) quite recently. Having followed the work of Tamsin Grimmer and attending several of her high-quality training events, we put a webinar on emotional regulation into our CPD offer for our Stronger Practice Hub and this was very well received. We have also undertaken Emotion Coaching training (Emotion Coaching UK 2019) and were thrilled to find Tamsin delivering part of that training. As a newly accredited Nurture School in June 2025, (Nurture UK 2023), we are firmly developing nurturing practices, so the timing of this resource for us was perfect.

In this first part, I explore for leaders and managers the possibilities when considering adult mental health and adult – adult interactions. This gives us relationships as a critical starting point to enabling adults to have the strength to support children’s emotional well-being.

The Love and Nurture Rating Scale (Grimmer & Bradbury 2024) is a wonderful resource which includes 5 rating scales

- Belonging
- Becoming
- Being
- Believing
- Loving Interactions

Backed by scientific evidence spanning decades – there is clear evidence that nurturing practices are beneficial for children.

Happy and confident children who are able to access learning opportunities and challenge themselves

NEED

Happy, confident and secure staff who are fully available to give themselves to these children

KEY QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS TO CONSIDER

1) Love languages (Chapman & Campbell 2012) Do you know about love languages and what the love languages of your staff are? Does this influence any practice / interactions that adults have with each other?

2) Relational Practice – are your staff proactive or reactive? Is there an air of positivity around daily challenges or a reactive and negative tone? All adult behaviour also communicates a need.

(Grimmer & Bradbury 2024)

Are we meeting the needs of our adults?



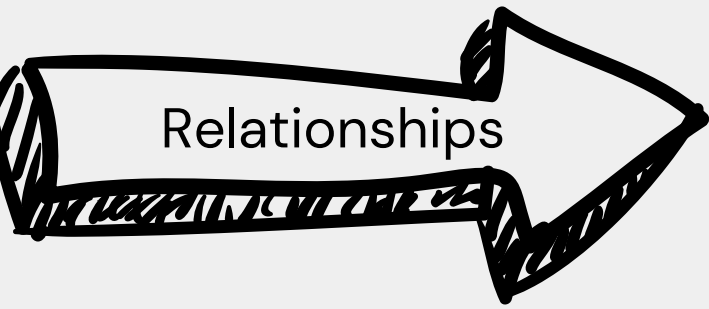
Do staff have access to personalised CPD? Can they choose their targets? Can they grow in different directions?



Do your staff have autonomy? Are they trusted to make decisions about what they are doing each day with children? Can they be flexible?



Do they have established lunch breaks? Is there a dedicated and comfortable staff room for them? Do you have systems for staff to access emotional support if they need it?



On a professional level how do staff relate to each other respectfully whilst with the children? How well do they support each other when they are studying / learning?

LEADERS AND MANAGERS:

TIME TO EVALUATE YOUR PRACTICE.....

ARE STAFF IN YOUR SETTING READY TO NURTURE CHILDREN?



Is there a sense of calm? Do staff say hello to each other every day? Is there a connectedness to prevent staff feeling socially isolated? Are family photos of staff families reflected anywhere in your environment? Do staff know each other well?

Do staff access higher and enhanced qualifications and is this encouraged by managers? Do more experienced staff support those who are less experienced sensitively?



How do staff talk to each other in the presence of children? Do they do so with empathy? Do they model respect and valuing each other?



Do staff have belief in each other? Do they seek advice about best practice from each other regularly?



If you were a visitor in your setting what would you hear if you listened to your staff? How are children included in **all** conversations? Are staff emotionally safe?



References

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