Learn & Grow Together

Early Years Stronger Practice Hub

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Seen, Heard and Valued: The Heart of Baby Room Practice

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Home | Shiny Stars Partner of Learn and Grow Together EYSPH

When a family walks into our baby room for the first time, they bring their most precious little person—and all the hopes, questions and emotions that come with trusting someone else to care for them.

For a baby, everything may feel unfamiliar: the voices, the smells, the surroundings and the arms offering comfort. For parents, leaving their child can feel equally overwhelming.

This is where high-quality baby room practice begins: with relationships, understanding and the small, thoughtful things we do consistently.

At Shiny Stars, our ethos of "**Reaching High and Shining Bright**" begins with helping every baby feel safe enough to explore, confident enough to try, and secure in knowing that someone will respond. We want every child and family to feel **seen, heard and valued**.

We are settling a family



Settling into nursery is a shared journey. Before we think about how long a baby will stay, we need to understand who they are.

An "All About Me" form is a useful starting point, but the conversation brings it to life. Ask parents:

- How does your baby show you they are tired, hungry or overwhelmed
- What helps them feel calm? How do they like to be held and comforted
- What are their feeding and sleep routines?
- Do they have allergies, medical conditions or medication needs?
- Which songs, words or familiar objects reassure them?
- What would you most like us to understand about your baby—and what worries you about starting nursery?



Listen carefully to the answers. Record important information, agree any necessary care plans and make sure everyone caring for that baby understands them.

Build visits gradually, with the key person present wherever possible. Begin with time together, then introduce short separations and extend them according to the baby's responses and the family's needs.

There is no single settling timetable that suits everyone. A parent may need reassurance, an honest update or another opportunity to ask questions.



Trust grows when our words and actions match.

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Familiar adults and predictable days

Consistency gives babies something dependable in a world full of new experiences. A familiar practitioner learns the meaning behind a particular cry, notices when a baby is becoming tired and recognises the small changes that might otherwise be missed. In return, the baby begins to recognise that adult as someone who understands and responds.



A strong key-person approach needs a familiar supporting adult too, so relationships continue through breaks, absence and holidays. Thoughtful staff deployment and clear handovers help protect that continuity.

Consistent routines matter, but they must remain responsive. A predictable sequence—arrival, comfort, play, feeding, rest and outdoor time—can provide reassurance while still following individual hunger and sleep cues.

Care routines are rich opportunities for connection. During a nappy change, explain what you are doing. At feeding time, sit comfortably, respond to the baby's pace and enjoy the interaction. These everyday moments deserve our full attention.

1:3

Understanding the 1:3 ratio

In nurseries in England, the EYFS requires **at least one member of staff for every three children under two**, alongside requirements for staff qualifications, experience and training in baby care. This means one adult for three babies—not three adults for one baby.

Meeting the ratio is the starting point for planning safe, responsive care. Leaders also need to consider what is happening in the room: who needs feeding, who needs sleep supervision, who is distressed and how staff breaks will be covered.

The practical question is: **Do our staffing arrangements allow us to respond well to the babies in front of us?**

1:3

1:3

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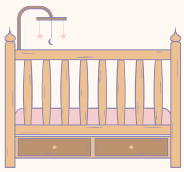
Safer sleep: clear expectations from the beginning

Sleep deserves a detailed conversation before a baby starts.
Ask where and how they sleep at home, what helps them settle and whether there are any relevant health needs.
Explain the setting's safer sleep arrangements sensitively, including where these differ from home. Under the current EYFS requirements in England, children under two must be placed on their backs in a separate, clear, firm and flat sleep space.



Babies aged 12 months and under must sleep in a cot, which includes an appropriate carrycot, Moses basket or travel cot; floor beds and sleep pods do not meet this requirement for that age group.

In everyday practice:

Use a firm, flat mattress with a waterproof cover.

Keep pillows, bumpers, toys, nests and loose bedding out of the sleep space.

Use suitable, securely tucked lightweight bedding or a correctly fitted sleep bag, following product instructions.

With blankets, place the baby feet-to-foot and keep their head uncovered.

Monitor temperature and clothing to avoid overheating; the recommended room temperature for babies is 16–20°C.

Babies under six months must have an adult in the same room throughout every sleep.

All sleeping children must remain within sight and hearing of staff and be checked frequently.

Agree and record checks through a clear procedure reflecting individual needs. A monitor does not replace physical checks.

Every practitioner needs to understand and follow these arrangements. A written policy becomes meaningful through consistent daily practice.

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Familiar resources help babies become confident learners

There can be pressure to keep changing the environment or introduce something new every day. Yet babies need time to revisit, repeat and discover. A familiar container might first be explored with the hands and mouth.



Later, the baby may put an object inside, tip it out, repeat the action and eventually choose a different container to test an idea. **That repetition is learning**.

Keep a thoughtful selection of resources in familiar, accessible places.
Offer opportunities to:

- Fill and empty: use sturdy containers of different sizes with suitable objects.
- Post and retrieve: provide safe posting boxes so babies can explore where an object goes and find it again.
- Roll and follow: offer appropriately sized balls and clear space to explore movement.
- Explore textures: introduce safe, washable materials with different surfaces and properties.

Choose loose parts carefully for the youngest children, considering mouthing, choking, breakage and hygiene.
Small pom-poms and other small or compressible objects can present a choking risk and should not be offered to babies.
Supervision does not make an unsuitable resource safe.
Natural and authentic resources can support curiosity when they are carefully selected. Their appearance alone does not determine their suitability.
Offer manageable quantities. A few well-chosen objects can invite sustained exploration while leaving safe space for crawling, cruising and walking.
Continually notice when scattered resources are creating slipping or tripping hazards and reset the area sensitively.



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Be the interested adult beside the baby

The adult's presence gives an experience of warmth and meaning.
Get down to the baby's level. Notice what has caught their attention and offer simple language linked to their actions:
"You put it in."
"Out it comes!"
"The ball is rolling."



Speak clearly and slowly, then pause. Give the baby time to look, move, babble or gesture back. A running commentary is most useful when it leaves room for the child's contribution.
This reflects the spirit of ShREC: share attention, respond, expand and have a conversation. A conversation with a baby can happen through a glance, a smile, a sound or a movement.

Offer warm eye contact without demanding it. Respect babies who turn away or need a pause. Provide responsive cuddles and closeness, following their cues and individual preferences.

Sing throughout the day: familiar nursery rhymes, gentle songs during care routines and action songs shared face to face. Repeat favourites and pause for a sound, movement or expression. Babies can participate long before they can sing the words.

Listen to what behaviour is telling us

Crying, reaching, arching away, turning the head or pushing something aside are all forms of communication.
Pause and wonder: Are you tired? Hungry? Uncomfortable? Missing someone? Is this room too busy? Do you need me close?
Respond with calm reassurance and practical care.
A baby experiencing strong feelings needs an adult who helps them feel safe and understood.
Settling can take time, and progress may vary from day to day.
Familiar adults, predictable experiences and responsive care build security.
Persistent or unusual distress should prompt further discussion with the family and a review of the baby's needs.

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Take the relationship outdoors

Outdoor experiences can be simple and purposeful....
Pause beneath a tree.
Watch moving leaves.
Listen for birds or passing traffic.
Notice rain on a shelter roof.

Give babies opportunities for safe movement and exploration that match their stage of development.

A walk becomes a shared experience when we slow down:
“I can hear a bird.”
“Look—the leaves are moving.”
Allow time for the baby to notice and respond.



Plan for suitable clothing, weather, safe supervision and individual needs. Outdoor time can also offer a welcome change of pace for practitioners.

Caring for unsettled babies can be emotionally demanding, so leaders must provide support, breaks and opportunities to ask for help.

Small actions, lasting foundations

High-quality baby room practice lives in the everyday: a familiar welcome, a carefully prepared sleep space, a repeated song, an interesting container and an adult who notices. For your next team reflection, ask:

Does every baby have familiar adults who understand their cues?
Are our routines predictable while remaining responsive?
Can babies return to resources and develop their own ideas?
Do we give as much attention to listening and waiting as we do to talking?
How do families know that their knowledge and feelings matter?

When these foundations are strong, babies have the reassurance to explore their world and develop confidence in what they can do.

Being seen, heard and valued begins with us—and with the care we bring to every interaction.

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