Learn & Grow Together

Early Years Stronger Practice Hub

Staffordshire | Stoke-on-Trent | Telford and Wrekin | Shropshire

To find out more, scan me!

Communities of Practice in the Early Years

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are a powerful way for Early Years practitioners to learn, develop their skills, and feel supported in their work. They bring people together to share ideas, discuss challenges, and learn from one another in a safe and supportive environment.

For Stronger Practice Hubs, Communities of Practice are more than just meetings. They help improve practice, reduce professional isolation, and support practitioners to use research and evidence with confidence.

This blog explores what Communities of Practice are, why they matter, and how they can support high-quality Early Years provision.

What Are Communities of Practice?

A Community of Practice is a group of people who share a common interest, challenge, or area of work and meet regularly to learn from one another.

Wenger (1998) explains that Communities of Practice are formed when people with a shared interest or area of expertise regularly come together to learn from each other and improve their practice.

In Early Years settings, a Community of Practice might focus on areas such as:

- Child development
- Communication and language
- SEND
- Behaviour and self-regulation
- Curriculum development
- Leadership and management

For example, a group of practitioners may meet monthly to discuss communication and language development, share successful strategies, and reflect on how these approaches have worked in their own settings.

Supported by Ambition Institute

Supported by Department for Education

BEST START IN LIFE

Learn & Grow Together

Early Years Stronger Practice Hub

Staffordshire | Stoke-on-Trent | Telford and Wrekin | Shropshire

To find out more, scan me!

Why Do Communities of Practice Matter?

Early Years practice is rewarding, but it can also be challenging. Practitioners work in different settings, with different children and families, and often face complex situations. Communities of Practice provide opportunities to learn together and support one another.

Reducing Isolation

Some practitioners work in small teams or independently, particularly childminders. Communities of Practice help people feel connected to a wider professional network. Nutbrown (2012) highlights the importance of professional relationships, suggesting that practitioners learn most effectively when they feel supported and connected to others within the sector.

Strengthening Professional Knowledge

Discussing practice with colleagues helps practitioners reflect on what they do and why. Grenier (2021) argues that collaborative professional learning helps practitioners develop a shared understanding, leading to more consistent, reflective practice.

Supporting Evidence-Informed Practice

Communities of Practice provide opportunities to explore research and consider how to apply evidence in real-life settings. According to the Education Endowment Foundation (2021), professional development is most effective when it happens over time, involves collaboration, and is informed by evidence and research. Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek (2017) emphasise that children benefit when practitioners use research and evidence to inform their decisions about learning and development.

Improving Outcomes for Children

The ultimate goal of professional development is to improve outcomes for children. When practitioners share knowledge, reflect on research, and develop their practice together, children benefit from more effective teaching, stronger interactions, and better learning experiences.

Supported by Ambition Institute

Supported by Department for Education

BEST START IN LIFE

Learn & Grow Together

Early Years Stronger Practice Hub

Staffordshire | Stoke-on-Trent | Telford and Wrekin | Shropshire

To find out more, scan me!

What Happens in a Community of Practice?

Networks are ideal places for members to come together because they share an interest in the same topic or area of practice.

A Supportive Community

Practitioners build relationships, share experiences and support one another's learning.

Shared Practice

Members develop resources, strategies, and approaches they can apply in their own settings.

Activities within a Community of Practice might include:

- Discussing real challenges from practice
- Sharing examples of successful approaches
- Exploring research together
- Trying out new ideas and reflecting on the results
- Visiting other settings
- Creating shared resources

This ongoing cycle of learning, trying new approaches and reflecting on outcomes helps practitioners improve their practice over time.

Expert Facilitation

Opportunities for Reflection

Access to Specialist Knowledge

Sector-Wide Improvement

When Communities of Practice are well supported, they can lead to:

- Increased practitioner confidence
- Stronger professional relationships
- Greater use of evidence-informed approaches
- More consistent practice across settings
- Improved curriculum development
- Better outcomes for children

For these reasons, Communities of Practice continue to play an important role in the work of Stronger Practice Hubs and in supporting a skilled, reflective and connected Early Years workforce.

Supported by Ambition Institute

Supported by Department for Education

BEST START IN LIFE