



Learn & Grow Together

Early Years Stronger Practice Hub

Staffordshire | Stoke-on-Trent |
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Using Evidence to Strengthen Early Years Practice



Every day, early years practitioners make decisions that shape children's learning, development and wellbeing. Evidence-informed professional development helps us make those decisions with confidence by drawing on three important sources of knowledge:

1. Research evidence
2. Professional expertise
3. The experiences of children, families and communities
4. This approach sits at the heart of the support offered through Stronger Practice Hubs.

What Do We Mean by Evidence-Informed Practice?

Evidence-informed practice is not about replacing professional judgement or following research without question. Instead, it encourages practitioners to engage critically with evidence and consider how it applies within their own unique context.

Research helps us understand which approaches are most likely to support children's learning and development. Professional expertise helps us interpret that evidence through our knowledge of individual children, our settings and our communities. Together, they support thoughtful, informed decision-making.

Evidence-informed practice also encourages professional curiosity by asking:

- Why do we do things this way?
- What does the evidence tell us?
- Is there a better approach?
- How do we know this is making a difference for children?
- What Does This Look Like in Practice?



Evidence-informed practice often starts with a simple question or observation.

Communication and Language example:

- A practitioner notices that some children are reluctant to join conversations during play. Drawing on evidence about communication and language development, they increase opportunities for sustained conversations, model new vocabulary and use open-ended questions.
- Observations then help determine whether these strategies are improving children's confidence and communication.

The ShREC approach (Shared Attention, Responding, Expanding and Conversational Turns) helps practitioners make the most of everyday interactions to strengthen children's language development and communication skills. (E.E.F. 2025) [LINK HERE](#)



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Self-Regulation Example;

- A team identifies that transitions are challenging for some children.
- They review evidence, reflect on their routines and introduce visual timetables and more predictable transition cues.
- Staff then evaluate the impact and adapt their approach based on children's responses.
- In both examples, research informs decision-making, but practitioner expertise and knowledge of the children determine how the evidence is applied.

Why Stronger Practice Hubs?

Stronger Practice Hubs help practitioners access, understand, and apply evidence in meaningful, achievable ways.

Through shared, evidence-informed professional development, hubs support practitioners to:

- Explore current research and guidance
- Reflect on their practice
- Learn alongside colleagues
- Test and refine approaches
- Improve outcomes for children

The E. E. F. (2021) highlights that:

“Professional development is most effective when it is sustained, collaborative, and focused on evidence.”

The goal is not to tell practitioners what to do. It is to strengthen professional judgement by connecting evidence, experience and the voices of children and families.

When these come together, professional learning becomes more relevant, more responsive and more effective in improving outcomes for children.



Discover what your Stronger Practice Hub can offer. Scan here for news!



References

Birth to 5 Matters (2026)
Department for Education. Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (2026)
Education Endowment Foundation. 2025 ShREC Approach
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