# Attendance guidance for Early Years settings

There are many reasons why we want young children to come regularly to their Early Years setting. As well as supporting their learning and development, we want to try to make sure that children are kept safe, their wellbeing is promoted and they do not miss out on their entitlements and opportunities. This is why attendance is included in the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Keeping Children Safe in Education’ statutory guidance, providers may also find it helpful to refer to this guidance. If providers have concerns about children's safety or welfare, they must notify agencies with statutory responsibilities without delay.

This guidance aims to help practitioners, leaders, managers, owners, voluntary committees and governing bodies. It offers information and practical suggestions about promoting, supporting, recording and monitoring the attendance of Shropshire’s young children.

The purpose of this guidance is to support further improvements in the wellbeing of children in the Early Years, especially in keeping them safe and supporting their learning and development.

At the very least, good attendance practice promotes good outcomes for children. In a small minority of cases, good attendance practice may also lead to the earlier identification of more serious concerns for a child or family and may have a vital part to play in keeping a child or other family members safe from harm.

We recognise many Early Years settings have good practices and procedures in promoting, supporting, recording and monitoring the attendance of children. This includes keeping accurate records of the daily times of arrival and departure for each child. It is clearly in the best interests of children and families that all Early Years settings are aware of effective practice.

This guidance has been developed to support leaders, managers, owners, and voluntary managed committees to review their procedures and identify any areas where their procedures and day-to-day practices could be improved. It is also designed to help them in taking action if any concerns emerge.

Good attendance is important, even for very young children; there are positive benefits to be gained from regular attendance, whatever the weekly pattern of childcare. This includes not only coming to every planned session, but also being there on time. Therefore, it is important that all practitioners understand why good attendance by children and good attendance practice among practitioners need to be maintained.

# Benefits include the following:

* Children who attend every planned session develop a feel for the rhythm of the week and gain a sense of security from the routine, even when the actual pattern or focus of their learning or activity may vary widely from week to week.
* The development of secure attachments and positive relationships with adults and other children
* Young children find it easier to build and sustain a range of social relationships when they regularly attend their childcare setting, according to the pattern agreed with the family.
* For some families, particularly at times of stress, the child’s regular attendance allows parents/carers to concentrate on other things and helps them enjoy spending time with the child, when he or she is at home.
* Children, who rarely miss sessions at their Early Years settings and arrive on time, are more likely to feel good about themselves. This is because they know what goes on and what to expect, feel more confident with the adults and the other children and have more opportunities to be valued and praised for their own special contribution.
* Children who regularly miss sessions or are generally late, can frequently experience a sense of having to try a little bit harder just to understand what is going on and what other children are talking about or doing.
* Regular attendance, on time, helps many young children to separate from their parents/carers at the start of the day and settle more readily into daily life in their Early Years setting.
* Practitioners carefully plan every session for each child in their care and want to take every opportunity to help them thrive. Experiences gained in one session are often developed further in the next session, whether or not this is the next day.
* Children learn in many different ways, through play with others and through being in the company of practitioners who actively support their learning and development.
* Under achievement is often linked to lower attendance. For some older students, this is linked to a steadily deteriorating trend in attendance that may be traceable right back to their first class in school (“Reception”), or even their Early Years setting.
* For all these reasons, good attendance and coming to their Early Years setting on time is important for every child, but especially those for whom specific factors make them more vulnerable to disengagement or underachievement. Most children are well supported by their families and continue to thrive, whatever their background or circumstances. However, there are some factors in children’s lives which make it more likely that they will experience some difficulty in staying safe, having good health, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and benefiting from economic wellbeing.

# Potentially vulnerable groups of children:

* where there may be safeguarding concerns in other areas of wellbeing (sleep, nutrition, cleanliness, emotional development etc.)
* whom other agencies have raised concerns, including those supported through the Early Help process or have been identified as *at risk*;
* facing difficult family circumstances e.g., housing problems, bereavement, separation/divorce;
* from families experiencing some degree of financial hardship, e.g. in receipt of benefits or claiming Free School Meals (FSM);
* with additional needs, learning difficulties or disabilities;
* with English as an Additional Language (EAL) or from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) families;

If any child’s attendance starts to cause concern, it is helpful for the Key Person to discuss this with the practitioners who work with any of the child’s siblings who come to the same setting. This helps establish whether there are issues only for an individual child or if the family as a whole may be going through a difficult time.

# Recording/monitoring attendance

Keeping accurate attendance records is not just bureaucracy. Monitoring attendance is important for all children, but especially for those in most vulnerable children.

Knowing when children have attended an Early Years setting provides vital information to keep children safe from harm and help tackle underachievement.

Having clear accessible attendance records helps identify children at risk and helps multiagency teams to understand, assess and support the widest possible range of needs for a child and his or her whole family.

To ensure that attendance records support the work of safeguarding young children and promote their learning and development, it is important for practitioners at all levels to pay attention to the following:

* Keep full registration details for every child, as specified in the Statutory Framework for the EYFS.
* Keep accurate information about parents/carers and any adults who may accompany the child to and from the Early Years setting (Remember, too, that it is vital to have up-to-date records of who does/ does not have a legal right of access to each child and to make sure that key people know the situation for each individual child.)
* Make clear and accurate entries, whether you are using manual or electronic registers.
* Consistently and thoroughly investigate all absences for individual children and their siblings and keep good records of the family’s explanations.
* Put in place some routine monitoring of attendance by governors, committees or the owner.
* Put in place systematic and rigorous monitoring of the registers by senior practitioners who are personally involved in ensuring accurate recording, identifying and addressing attendance issues and engaging parents/carers.

A wide range of elements combine to support and encourage good attendance. These include:

* having a positive and welcoming atmosphere;
* praise for good attendance & for arriving on time;
* being sensitive to and supportive of families from a range of cultures and backgrounds;
* building good relationships between children, families, practitioners;
* being rigorous in monitoring attendance and in identifying and analysing patterns of absence (often called ‘broken weeks’) and the number of sessions missed;
* being rigorous and persistent in seeking and recording explanations for absence, however sensitively this is done;
* being aware of additional factors in the setting’s relationship with the family (e.g., EAL, learning difficulties) and making sure that appropriate means of communication are used at all times;
* making sure (through induction and regular reminders) that all practitioners know what to do, and who to tell, if a child is absent/late; has a changeable or deteriorating pattern of absence or lateness; or a child goes missing.

# Taking action

All Early Years settings will have their own procedures for dealing with attendance issues. It is important that practitioners at all levels, including leaders/managers and Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL’s) know how to respond to different problems and where to access advice, support or whom to alert if concerns arise.

Ofsted will expect all practitioners to have a sound knowledge of the settings policies and procedures at the time that they inspect the setting.

Where you have concerns about a child’s pattern of non-attendance:

* the Key Person should discuss the situation with the settings Leader/manager/Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The Key Person should also make sure that there is an up-to-date record of contacts or attempted contacts.
* the Leader/manager/DSL should make every effort to discuss the matter with the family and take steps to encourage and support improved attendance; keep notes of any actions to help the family and a date by when attendance will be reviewed with the Key Person.
* the Leader/manager/DSL should make every effort personally to discuss the matter with the family and encourage and support improved attendance; maintain brief, up-to-date, records of contacts or attempted contacts with the family and the date when each action was taken.

# Non-attendance policy guidance

You may find it useful to consider the following points to support you to develop a written non-attendance policy and procedure for your setting that can be shared with parents/carers:

* Do you ask parents/carers to tell you if their child is going to be absent and provide a reason, for example because they are sick?
* Do you expect parents/carers to call you by a certain time on the first day their child is absent?
* Do you expect parents/carers to speak to you or do you accept a text, or email?
* How long do you leave it before contacting the parent if the child does not arrive and the parent has not contacted you?
* Who is responsible for calling the parent – leader/manager, key person? - Do you record this information?
* Do you call a parent and speak to them personally or do you send a text or email?
* What do you do if there is no reply when you call the parent and the child does not arrive at your setting the next day?
* If you are concerned about the welfare of the child what procedure do you follow? **Refer to your safeguarding children/ child protection policy.**
* Do you ask parents/carers to tell you about any planned holidays in advance?
* If you claim, Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) funding for a child you are required to keep attendance registers in respect of funded children and any concerns about a child’s pattern of non-attendance.
* Do you keep a record of the discussions and actions you have taken when following up non- attendance to demonstrate what steps you have taken to make sure that the parents/carers are aware of their entitlement and the attendance requirements at your setting?
* Do you tell parents/carers whether or not they have to pay fees when their child is absent? This information should be included in your parental contract or terms and conditions.
* Do you charge parents/carers if your setting closes due to unforeseen circumstances, such as a power failure, or heavy snow? This information should be included in your emergency closure policy.
* Do you charge parents/carers if you are open during poor weather conditions and they are unable to bring their child to your setting? Is this information in your *emergency closure policy*?
* If you provide a before or after school club and a child who is in does not show up, what do you do? Do you contact the school/class teacher and the parents/carers? You should never take the word of other children that the child did not attend school.