



## **Case Study:**

Evidence Informed Practice linked  
to Social and Emotional Learning  
(SEL) and Personal, Social and  
Emotional Development (PSED)

# What is SEL?





Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Weissberg, R. et al. (2015) 'Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future', in J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg and T. P. Gullotta (eds), Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice, New York, NY: Guilford (pp. 3–19).

# What does this look like in Early Years?

It's when children learn how to form and sustain positive relationships; experience, manage and express emotions.

A growing body of scientific evidence confirms that children who acquire a strong emotional foundation skill in the early years can better manage everyday social interactions later in life.

# Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage 2023

## **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

Children's personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is crucial for children to lead healthy and happy lives, and is fundamental to their cognitive development. Underpinning their personal development are the important attachments that shape their social world. Strong, warm and supportive relationships with adults enable children to learn how to understand their own feelings and those of others. Children should be supported to manage emotions, develop a positive sense of self, set themselves simple goals, have confidence in their own abilities, to persist and wait for what they want and direct attention as necessary. Through adult modelling and guidance, they will learn how to look after their bodies, including healthy eating, and manage personal needs independently. Through supported interaction with other children, they learn how to make good friendships, co-operate and resolve conflicts peaceably. These attributes will provide a secure platform from which children can achieve at school and in later life.

# Development Matters/Early Learning Goals

## Birth to Three

- Find ways to calm themselves, through being calmed and comforted by their key person.
- Establish their sense of self.
- Express preferences and decisions. They also try new things and start establishing their autonomy.
- Engage with others through gestures, gaze and talk.
- Use that engagement to achieve a goal. For example, gesture towards their cup to say they want a drink.
- Find ways of managing transitions, for example from their parent to their key person.
- Thrive as they develop self-assurance.
- Look back as they crawl or walk away from their key person. Look for clues about how to respond to something interesting.
- Play with increasing confidence on their own and with other children, because they know their key person is nearby and available.
- Feel confident when taken out around the local neighbourhood, and enjoy exploring new places with their key person.
- Feel strong enough to express a range of emotions.
- Grow in independence, rejecting help ("me do it"). Sometimes this leads to feelings of frustration and tantrums.
- Begin to show 'effortful control'. For example, waiting for a turn and resisting the strong impulse to grab what they want or push their way to the front.
- Be increasingly able to talk about and manage their emotions.
- Notice and ask questions about differences, such as skin colour, types of hair, gender, special needs and disabilities, and so on.
- Develop friendships with other children.
- Safely explore emotions beyond their normal range through play and stories.
- Are talking about their feelings in more elaborated ways: "I'm sad because..." or "I love it when..."
- Learn to use the toilet with help, and then independently.

## Three and Four-Year-Olds

- Select and use activities and resources, with help when needed. This helps them to achieve a goal they have chosen, or one which is suggested to them.
- Develop their sense of responsibility and membership of a community.
- Become more outgoing with unfamiliar people, in the safe context of their setting.
- Show more confidence in new social situations.
- Play with one or more other children, extending and elaborating play ideas.
- Find solutions to conflicts and rivalries. For example, accepting that not everyone can be Spider-Man in the game, and suggesting other ideas.
- Increasingly follow rules, understanding why they are important.
- Remember rules without needing an adult to remind them.
- Develop appropriate ways of being assertive.
- Talk with others to solve conflicts.
- Talk about their feelings using words like 'happy', 'sad', 'angry' or 'worried'.
- Understand gradually how others might be feeling.
- Be increasingly independent in meeting their own care needs, e.g brushing teeth, using the toilet, washing and drying their hands thoroughly.
- Make healthy choices about food, drink, activity and toothbrushing.

## Children in Reception

- See themselves as a valuable individual.
- Build constructive and respectful relationships.
- Express their feelings and consider the feelings of others.
- Show resilience and perseverance in the face of challenge.
- Identify and moderate their own feelings socially and emotionally.
- Think about the perspectives of others.
- Manage their own needs.
  - Personal hygiene
- Know and talk about the different factors that support their overall health and wellbeing:
  - regular physical activity
  - healthy eating
  - toothbrushing
  - sensible amounts of 'screen time'
  - having a good sleep routine
  - being a safe pedestrian

## Early Learning Goals

### Self-Regulation

- Show an understanding of their own feelings and those of others, and begin to regulate their behaviour accordingly.
- Set and work towards simple goals, being able to wait for what they want and control their immediate impulses when appropriate.
- Give focused attention to what the teacher says, responding appropriately even when engaged in activity, and show an ability to follow instructions involving several ideas or actions.

### Managing Self

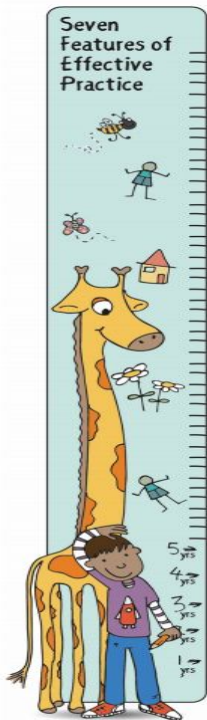
- Be confident to try new activities and show independence, resilience and perseverance in the face of challenge.
- Explain the reasons for rules, know right from wrong and try to behave accordingly.
- Manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs, including dressing, going to the toilet and understanding the importance of healthy food choices.

### Building Relationships

- Work and play cooperatively and take turns with others.
- Form positive attachments to adults and friendships with peers.
- Show sensitivity to their own and to others' needs.

# Seven Key Features of Effective Practice

## Seven Features of Effective Practice



### 1 The best for every child

- All children deserve to have an equal chance of success.
- High-quality early education is good for all children. It is especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- When they start school, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are, on average, 4 months behind their peers. We need to do more to narrow that gap.
- Children who have lived through difficult experiences can begin to grow stronger when they experience high quality early education and care.
- High-quality early education and care is inclusive. Children's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly. All children promptly receive any extra help they need, so they can progress well in their learning.

### 2 High-quality care

- The child's experience must always be central to the thinking of every practitioner.
- Babies, toddlers and young children thrive when they are loved and well cared for.
- High-quality care is consistent. Every practitioner needs to enjoy spending time with young children.
- Effective practitioners are responsive to children and babies. They notice when a baby looks towards them and gurgles and respond with pleasure.
- Practitioners understand that toddlers are learning to be independent, so they will sometimes get frustrated.
- Practitioners know that starting school, and all the other transitions in the early years, are big steps for small children.

### 3 The curriculum: what we want children to learn

- The curriculum is a top-level plan of everything the early years setting wants the children to learn.
- Babies, toddlers and young children thrive when they are loved and well cared for.
- Planning to help every child to develop their language is vital.
- The curriculum needs to be ambitious. Careful sequencing will help children to build their learning over time.
- Young children's learning is often driven by their interests. Plans need to be flexible.
- Babies and young children do not develop in a fixed way. Their development is like a spider's web with many strands, not a straight line.
- Depth in early learning is much more important than covering lots of things in a superficial way.

### 4 Pedagogy: helping children to learn

- Children are powerful learners. Every child can make progress in their learning, with the right help.
- Effective pedagogy is a mix of different approaches. Children learn through play, by adults modelling, by observing each other, and through guided learning and direct teaching.
- Practitioners carefully organise enabling environments for high-quality play. Sometimes, they make time and space available for children to invent their own play. Sometimes, they join in to sensitively support and extend children's learning.
- Children in the early years also learn through group work, when practitioners guide their learning.
- Older children need more of this guided learning.
- A well-planned learning environment, indoors and outside, is an important aspect of pedagogy.

### 5 Assessment: checking what children have learnt

- Assessment is about noticing what children can do and what they know. It is not about lots of data and evidence.
- Effective assessment requires practitioners to understand child development. Practitioners also need to be clear about what they want children to know and be able to do.
- Accurate assessment can highlight whether a child has a special educational need and needs extra help.
- Before assessing children, it's a good idea to think about whether the assessments will be useful.
- Assessment should not take practitioners away from the children for long periods of time.

### 6 Self-regulation and executive function

- Executive function includes the child's ability to:
  - hold information in mind
  - focus their attention
  - regulate their behaviour
  - plan what to do next.
- These abilities contribute to the child's growing ability to self-regulate:
  - focus their thinking
  - monitor what they are doing and adapt
  - regulate strong feelings
  - be patient for what they want
  - bounce back when things get difficult.
- Language development is central to self-regulation: children use language to guide their actions and plans. Pretend play gives many opportunities for children to focus their thinking, persist and plan ahead.

### 7 Partnership with parents

- It is important for parents and early years settings to have a strong and respectful partnership. This sets the scene for children to thrive in the early years.
- This includes listening regularly to parents and giving parents clear information about their children's progress.
- The help that parents give their children at home has a very significant impact on their learning.
- Some children get much less support for their learning at home than others. By knowing and understanding all the children and their families, settings can offer extra help to those who need it most.
- It is important to encourage all parents to chat, play and read with their children.

<https://development-matters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Curriculum-Guidance-EYFS-V3.pdf>

# The Challenges in Early Years



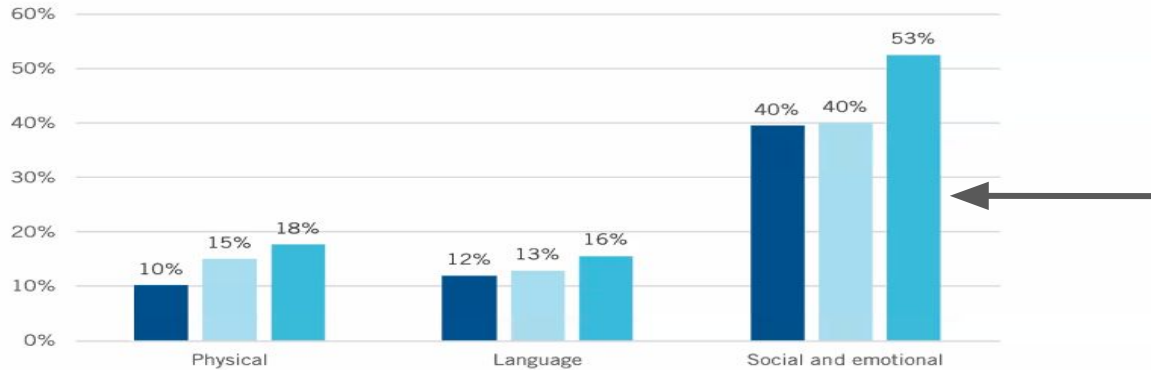


# The Figures

- This survey was conducted with parents in June 2020.
- Out of physical development, language and social and emotional, parents deemed social and emotional to have had the biggest negative impact.

## PSE a COVID recovery priority for early years

Figure 1. Parents reporting a negative impact on child development, by provider arrangements during lockdown



Source: YouGov survey of parents of 2-4 year-olds for the Sutton Trust, June 8th-15th

June 2020

# The Figures

- This was again reported in 2021 where 52% of parents surveyed said that their child's social and emotional development had been impacted negatively.
- This was significantly higher than language development at 25% and physical development at 20%.
- Some of the reasons parents reported was because their child wasn't able to play with other children or relatives, facilities being closed and being unable to attend nursery/childcare.



2. Do you think your child's development in each of the following areas has been impacted positively or negatively, or do you think it has had no impact? (Please select one option on each row)

3. Which, if any, of the following would you say have negatively impacted your child in ANY way? (Please select all that apply.)

## Physical development

Very positively	5%
Fairly positively	11%
No impact	60%
Fairly negatively	16%
Very negatively	3%
Don't know	5%
Net: Positively	16%
Net: Negatively	20%
Unweighted base	570

## Language development

Very positively	7%
Fairly positively	14%
No impact	49%
Fairly negatively	19%
Very negatively	6%
Don't know	4%
Net: Positively	21%
Net: Negatively	25%
Unweighted base	570

## Social and emotional development/wellbeing

Very positively	3%
Fairly positively	10%
No impact	29%
Fairly negatively	43%
Very negatively	9%
Don't know	5%
Net: Positively	14%
Net: Negatively	52%
Unweighted base	570

Being unable to play with other children	69%
Being unable to meet other close relatives	63%
Being unable to meet with other adults	37%
Being unable to attend a nursery, school or childcare provider	44%
Facilities (e.g. play areas, swimming pools, children centres, etc.), groups or activities being cancelled or made unavailable	67%
Having a lack of space at home during lockdowns	25%
Other	2%
Don't know	3%
Not applicable - nothing in particular has negatively impacted my child since the beginning of the first UK lockdown	9%
Unweighted base	570

Research and analysis

# Education recovery in early years providers: summer 2022

Published 20 July 2022

## Personal, social and emotional development

Many children were still further behind in personal, social and emotional development than expected.

Providers noted that social skills have been particularly affected. Children have continued to need support with sharing and turn-taking. Staff have recognised that although the pandemic has enabled children to have more time with their families, it has also meant that they have missed social interaction with their peers and the wider community. Some children are very shy when they start at a nursery or with a childminder. They are reluctant to join in or have little confidence when speaking to adults. As a result, providers have continued to focus on children's sharing skills, taking turns, listening, working together and developing children's patience. Self-confidence and social skills have been developed by providers through group games involving small numbers of children.

Some providers have noted that it is taking longer than usual for toddlers and babies to settle. They noticed that some children were getting distressed when they were leaving their parents at the door. However, this may be a natural reaction for children who have spent longer with their parents, and less time in early education, as a result of the pandemic. Providers are having to use different strategies to settle children better so that they have a positive start to the day and their learning.

Some children do not interact as much as they could do with their peers, especially children who started early years provision after the national lockdowns. To develop children's interpersonal skills, many childminders have built up a social network with other childminders. They take children to groups to meet and play with other children of similar ages to gain those social skills.

# The Figures

## Key SEND National Statistics 2022-2023

- EHCPs 389,171 (increase in 9.5% from 2022).
- SEND support in schools (non-EHCP) 1,183,384 (increase in 4.7% from 2022).
- The most common type of need for those with an EHCP is ASD and those with SEND support is SLC needs.

# The Findings

Children are needing support with the following:

- Entering the setting
- Transitions
- Forming relationships
- Expressing needs, wants and feelings
- Playing
- Sharing
- Turn taking
- Expressing emotion
- Regulate their feelings
- Toileting
- Dressing
- Decision making
- Ability to follow directions
- Ability to follow rules and routines
- Independence
- Pretend play
- Bounce back after difficulties
- Persistence
- Attention
- Retain information
- Confidence
- Solve problems
- Deal with conflict



# The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)



# Approaches and Practices to support PSED in EYs

- The EEF have researched into PSED and developed 7 approaches and practices to support PSED.
- Evidence consistently shows that supporting young children's PSED is effective.
- There is a growing body of evidence to support individual PSED approaches.
- The EEF recommend that early years settings use multiple approaches to support children's personal, social and emotional development, for two reasons. Firstly, a significant proportion of the evidence supporting PSED approaches in the early years comes from evaluations of programmes which combine several approaches; when approaches are combined, it is not possible to establish which of the approaches involved leads to improved outcomes for children. Secondly, all the PSED approaches appear to support each other and target similar skills; they are mutually reinforcing.

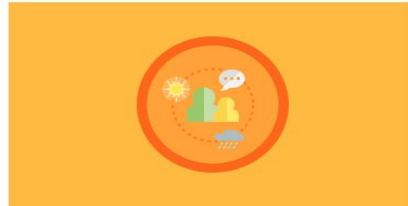
# Approaches and Practices to support PSED in EYs



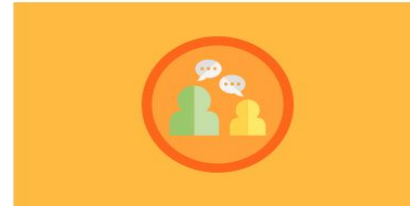
**Personal Social and Emotional Development Overview**



**1. Teaching awareness of emotions and feelings**



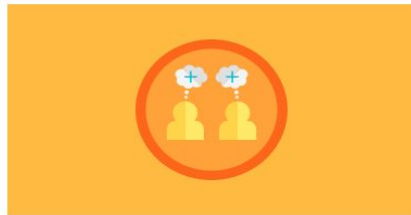
**2. Teaching and modelling managing emotions and feelings**



**3. Teaching and modelling social communication**



**4. Teaching relationship skills**



**5. Teaching how to sustain positive relationships**



**6. Promoting self-care**



**7. Teaching children to self-regulate**



# Approaches and Practices to support PSED in EYs

- If you click on each section, it gives you the approaches and how to implement them into action.
- It also includes several videos to bring the evidence to life.

## Practices

To show how each approach may be implemented scroll down to see the practices for each approach in action. These are exemplified using short 'spotlight' films and written examples.

**Labelling emotions and feelings:** Teaching key vocabulary and when to use it to name physical responses, feelings and emotions to build a shared language.

 Watch practice in action  View practice examples

**Discussing emotions and feelings:** Creating a culture in which children are taught how to talk about and exchange ideas or share experiences, in a learning environment where there are opportunities to make connections with others and build relationships.

 Watch practice in action  View practice examples

## Approach in action



### Story Talk

Watch how Louis teaches children about emotions and feelings during his story session.



### Call the Doctor Role-Play

Watch how Lois teaches a child to notice and respond to emotions.

# The Early Years Toolkit

The tool kit includes a summary on the evidence linked to SEL and self-regulation. It is low cost with an estimated impact of a 3 month gain if the strategies are used.

## Early Years Toolkit

A summary of the best available evidence on key areas for learning and development.

Watch the Toolkit explainer
Read our guide to using the Toolkit

## Social and emotional learning strategies

Moderate impact for very low cost based on very limited evidence

Implementation cost ⓘ



Evidence strength ⓘ



Impact (months) ⓘ

+3
months

What is it?
Key findings
How effective is the approach?
Behind the average
Closing the disadvantage gap
How could you implement >
Technical Appendix

## Self-regulation strategies

Moderate impact for very low cost based on very limited evidence.



## Social and emotional learning strategies

Moderate impact for very low cost based on very limited evidence.



### What is it?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies seek to improve learning and wider child development by improving children's social and emotional skills. They can be contrasted with approaches that focus explicitly on the academic or cognitive dimensions of learning. SEL strategies might seek to improve the ways in which children interact with their peers, parents or other adults and are often linked with self-regulation strategies and behavioural interventions.

The statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage includes early learning goals in Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED). SEL strategies are linked to this aspect of the framework and may support pupils to develop in PSED.

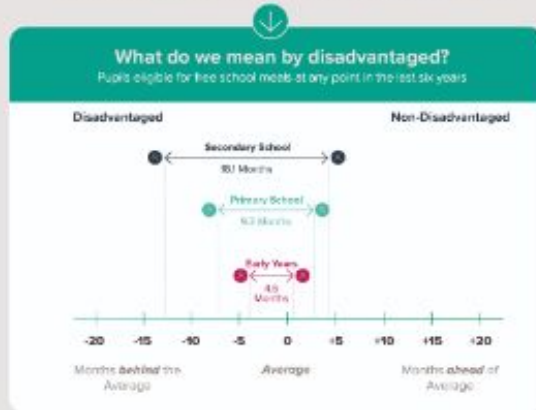
# Evidence Informed Practice at Town End Academy



# Our starting point!

It measures the number of months of academic progress disadvantaged children are behind their non-disadvantaged peers.

## The size of the disadvantage gap in 2019



## The size of the persistent disadvantage gap in 2019



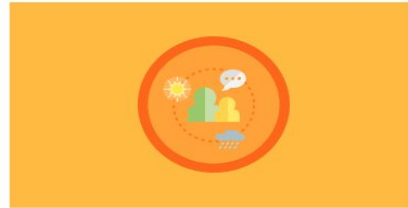
# Approaches and Practices to support PSED in EYs



**Personal Social and Emotional Development Overview**



**1. Teaching awareness of emotions and feelings**



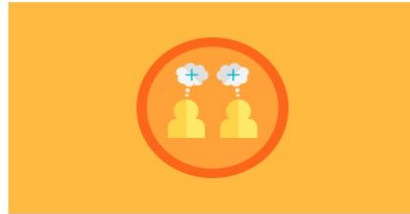
**2. Teaching and modelling managing emotions and feelings**



**3. Teaching and modelling social communication**



**4. Teaching relationship skills**



**5. Teaching how to sustain positive relationships**



**6. Promoting self-care**



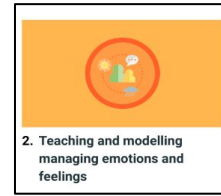
**7. Teaching children to self-regulate**

# What the evidence tells us...



- There is evidence that teaching awareness of emotions and feelings can improve children's understanding of emotions.
- This approach may particularly benefit children who are experiencing more stress or less support at home.
- Proactively and explicitly teaching children strategies for managing their emotions can be effective.
- This is effective through routines.

# What Town End put in place...



## Routines/Key Person Groups

- Key person groups have always been part of our morning entry routine and first and foremost we greet the children and check how they are feeling. The children's wellbeing is at the centre of everything we do.
- It is important to give the children a forum which they can share their emotions and discuss them and problem solve together so we can respond to them throughout their time in nursery.
- It is vital that the children have a safe environment where they can speak freely and know they will be cared for. Some children disclose sensitive information during this time and it's important that they build relationships with a key member of staff and know that what they say is valued and of importance and will be responded to appropriately.
- Before we ask the children to share, we model how we are feeling. This provides the children with a model of expression, also its important for them to recognise and respond to how staff are feeling that day.



# What the evidence tells us...



- Discussing emotions using books can support children's awareness of feelings.
- Managing emotions strategies might be taught through role play, puppets and stories.
- Many successful interventions use stories that are rich in emotion language as prompts for discussions. Practitioners may use questions to prompt pupils' reflections on their own experiences. During discussions, pupils may learn to label emotions using specific words, recognise facial expressions and connect events to the feelings they may provoke.



# What Town End put in place...



## Books

- We use colour Monster to introduce feeling names.
- We then progress to reading a range of other stories which focus on a broader range of individual emotions and how we might deal with these feelings. This supports the children to widen their vocabulary and their understanding of a range of feelings.



# Approach in Action...



1. Teaching awareness of emotions and feelings



2. Teaching and modelling managing emotions and feelings



## Story Talk

Watch how Louis teaches children about emotions and feelings during his story session.



01:57

## Emotion Stones and Feelings Books

Watch how Beverley and Jayne teach young children about emotions and feelings.

# What the evidence tells us...



- Child and educator interactions are an important factor when children are learning to regulate their emotions, especially for children experiencing disadvantage.
- Showing children examples of positive social communication and talking to them about these examples can improve children's own social communication.
- Positive interactions modelled by educators and other children can build relationships and improve children's overall relationship skills.
- Oral language skills are an important part of sustaining relationships. Educators can introduce useful vocabulary or scaffolding scripts to support children with maintaining relationships.

# What Town End put in place...



## Practitioners are your biggest asset. At Town End practitioners...

- Interact
- Facilitate play
- Model and encourage turn taking and sharing
- Talk about feelings
- Teach children to self regulate
- Role model positive behaviour
- Develop relationships
- Teach children to cooperate, negotiate and collaborate with others and build relationships over time
- Develop independence skills and confidence



# What Town End put in place...



**Practitioners also ensure visual aids are in place teaching spaces and areas of provision to support PSED, SEL and communication...**

- Visual timetables
- Now and Next boards
- Symbols/pictures for children to express wants/needs



# What the evidence tells us...



Supporting children to self-regulate is a key part of educators' practice.

*EEF are currently scoping the full breadth of studies that have looked at how educators can support children's development of self-regulation before settling on, if or which, aspects of self-regulation may fit within the theme of PSED.*



# What is Self Regulation?

- Self regulation is the ability to cope with feelings/emotions.
- Behaviour comes from emotions.
- Stress system includes hunger, cold, lonely, frustration, desire etc and little children don't know how to deal with these emotions so we will see behaviour.
- High levels of distress can be caused by a clash of emotions and not knowing how to deal with them.
- If a child can't manage feelings on their own then they need help with it which is called co-regulation! We all need help calming when we get stressed and co-regulation helps to build up a robust stress system.
- 4 top tips to help with self regulation...
  1. It can really help by constantly naming feelings for children. Lots of talk especially if any behaviour is being demonstrated. Also talk about how that feeling feels. You've got to name it to tame it!
  2. Breath – Teach children to breath out – it helps the body to calm down. Make it an ordinary part of the day.
  3. Be aware of own emotional state. We need to be able to regulate our own emotional state, e.g. talk about how you are feeling and know when you need a break.
  4. Mirror neurons – model and children will copy, e.g. breathing.

# What Town End put in place...



## Sensory Space/Calming corner

- The sensory area has been crucial in developing self regulation and emotional wellbeing for our children.
- It is a safe space.
- Sensory lights create a calming effect.
- There is a range of sensory exploration resources.
- The children can access this freely and for timed focused interventions with the SEND children throughout their sessions to support them with their sensory regulation and to support them to then access the nursery provision.
- Some children require more frequent sessions and for longer periods.
- It's important to remember that each child is unique and we respond to each child individually.

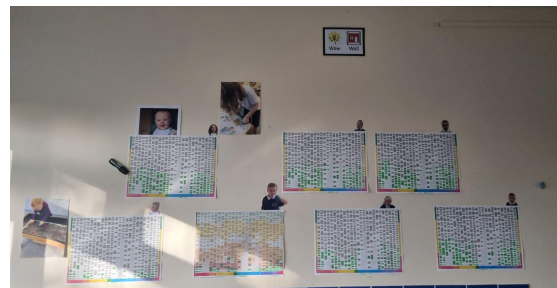




# What Town End put in place...



## Nurture Nest



# The Impact at Town End Academy



# The Impact

- Children are talking more about their feelings. They have a better awareness and understanding of their own and others feelings.
- There has been improvements in children regulating their emotions and independently self-regulating.
- Children are using the visual aids and/or language to express their wants, needs and feelings.
- Children are more calm, focused and settled.
- Children are forming positive relationships with adults and peers.
- Behaviour has improved across the cohort.