Develop and maintain positive relationships with children and young people

What you need to learn
- How to welcome children and young people to the setting.
- The communication skills you will need to use.
- How to communicate well with children and young people at different ages.
- Techniques for observing and listening to children.
- The effects of discrimination and how to counter them.

How to welcome children and young people to the setting

It is not only the environment that creates a welcoming and friendly atmosphere, it is also the people who are there. First impressions are important for parents and carers as well as the children and young people. As a playworker, you will need to develop a range of techniques and strategies for interacting with children and young people.

Techniques that you could use when children and young people come to the setting for the first time include the following:
- find out his or her preferred name; be sure you know how to pronounce it, and make an effort to use it
- show him or her around the facility or ask another child to do so. Remember to check that the child knows where the toilets are

Making eye contact with a child will help her feel welcome
explain any routines that you use
• go over the evacuation procedures in case there is an emergency
• ask him or her if they know any of the children or young people who are already attending
• ask the child if they have any particular interests that you can discuss
• talk to the child and find out what he or she likes to do
• explain any health and safety issues and explain the guidelines for behaviour
• show the child what activities you have available and ask if he or she has played them before
• introduce yourself and the other workers and children
• explain your policy for free play activities
• get the child involved in an activity, and observe him or her during the initial and following sessions to ensure the child is settling in well
• make eye contact when you speak to the child and listen to his or her reply
• try to ask open questions (those that cannot be answered with just yes or no)
• try to be at the same level (bend down for smaller children).

Whatever techniques you adopt, you must ensure that the activities are appropriate for the age and stage of development of the children and young people. Each child and young person is very different and may need to be treated individually, sometimes one-to-one, for example if you have a shy child you may guide them towards a one-to-one activity. You may need to monitor the noise levels in that particular area, and you should observe occasionally throughout the session to ensure that the child is settling in.

The communication skills you will need to use
The way that you communicate with children and young people will be determined by your personal approach. The method you choose will be the most appropriate for the child or young person and suitable for the specific situation. It may take the form of talking and listening or may involve other people, e.g. interpreters.

**Keys to good practice: Listening skills**

- Always listen attentively to what the child or young person is saying.
- Look interested and encourage the child to interact with you. It will be of great importance to him or her.
- Ask open questions (ones that cannot be answered with yes or no replies).
- Find topics of interest to you both.
- Use appropriate vocabulary to meet the child’s age and stage of development.
- Use humour appropriately; do not use sarcasm or put-downs.

**Non-verbal communication**

Your non-verbal communication, i.e. your gestures, actions and facial expressions, are as important as what you say. Children learn to interpret non-verbal communication at an early age. Think about how your face portrays your feelings.
Match the expression on the faces below with the following descriptive words:

- optimistic
- happy
- surprised
- anxious
- bored
- sad.

How did you decide which one to choose?
It may be that you need to communicate using other methods, e.g. using Makaton. This is a type of sign language where actions mean words or phrases. Some basic Makaton signs are shown below.

**ACTIVE KNOWLEDGE**

Research into Makaton signs and learn the one for welcome. Then teach it to the other staff in your setting, and the children and young people.

Learn a song or rhyme in Makaton and teach it to the people in your setting.

Whatever techniques you use, you should ensure that they are at an appropriate level for the child or young person in your care.
## How to communicate well with children and young people at different ages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age/developmental level</th>
<th>Technique</th>
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</table>
| 4–7 years               | Use language they will understand.  
                          | Listen carefully, show you are concentrating and interested.  
                          | Be patient, you may need to explain things more than once.  
                          | Use eye contact.  
                          | Have a friendly approach; smile, listen and generally be easy to talk to.  
                          | Do not assume they will not understand. |
| 8–12 years              | Encourage children and young people to express their opinions, ask them what they think and acknowledge their replies.  
                          | Give explanations to back up what you are saying.  
                          | Offer opportunities for them to express themselves, e.g. role-play, modelling, painting, drawing, writing.  
                          | Encourage self-help and independence.  
                          | Give them responsibilities.  
                          | Introduce and encourage new vocabulary.  
                          | Negotiate, listen to their side of disagreements, then come to an amicable agreement.  
                          | Make time for individual attention.  
                          | Show patience and understanding. |
| 13–16 years             | Find a common interest, e.g. video, music.  
                          | Challenge stereotypical or racial discrimination, inappropriate terminology and swearing.  
                          | Negotiate and look for compromises; listen to their reasons.  
                          | Use humour appropriately; do not use put-downs or sarcasm, laugh at appropriate things, be sympathetic and show empathy.  
                          | Give them space; use the correct supervision level, do not assume they always want an adult listening in.  
                          | Treat them like adults; do not patronise or talk down to young people, empower them to express their opinions freely.  
                          | Use communication to increase their vocabulary, discuss issues as you would with another adult.  
                          | Use a variety of games to engage them in conversation, e.g. quizzes, board games, etc.  
                          | Give them responsibility; let them take on regular interesting jobs, e.g. setting out an activity and not just clearing away. |

Playworkers need to respond to children as individuals, and by giving respect you receive respect. Children need to feel safe and secure both in the play environment and with the adults who work there.
Contribute to positive relationships in the play setting

Makes children feel welcome
Shows you consider their feelings
Boosts self-esteem
Helps develop confidence
Sets a good example

Keys to good practice: Interacting with children and young people

**Appropriate behaviour**
- ✔ Using correct terminology
- ✔ Responding honestly to questions
- ✔ Listening to problems and concerns
- ✔ Giving space
- ✔ Using appropriate touches
- ✔ Offering options and choices

**Inappropriate behaviour**
- ✔ Using slang/swear words
- ✔ Discussing own personal problems
- ✔ Sitting an older child on your knee/kissing them
- ✔ Giving advice that contradicts policies

Make time for individual attention
Techniques for observing and listening to children

By listening to children and observing their interactions, playworkers can show that they are interested in the children and value what they say and do. This will give each child a sense of security in the relationship he or she builds with you and will encourage him or her to seek you out to discuss issues and concerns, as well as positive experiences. It will also help you to:

- be aware of developmental delays in language and physical, emotional or social behaviour
- detect problems both within the setting and outside
- identify any health, safety and hygiene issues.

This aspect of a playworker’s role will help you develop your skills and understanding of children and young people. Asking questions and giving opinions is a development stage in life. Playworkers are in a useful position to help children and young people develop these skills. The reasons why we should encourage children to ask questions and give opinions are shown below.

Develop vocabulary  Maintain morale  Boost self-esteem

Find out what they require  Develop confidence  Check understanding

Increase knowledge  Respect the views of others  Verbalise thoughts

Increase life skills  Encourage children to ask questions and give opinions
Different ways of encouraging children and young people to ask questions and express opinions are shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of encouraging questions and expressing opinions</th>
<th>Appropriate responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Include children and young people in activity planning; set aside time for discussion of ideas.</td>
<td>Act on suggestions and ensure (whenever possible) that activities requested are carried out. Explain rationale for those suggestions not acted upon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use every opportunity for talking and discussing, especially at meal times.</td>
<td>Encourage adults to sit with the children in small groups and encourage discussion.</td>
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<td>Create a suggestions box.</td>
<td>Check suggestions regularly, discuss ideas and act on them where possible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a children and young people’s forum.</td>
<td>Set up a forum, encourage participation and act on suggestions and ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be non-judgemental.</td>
<td>Offer alternatives rather than set advice; show unconditional acceptance to children and young people, and their families.</td>
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</tbody>
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Encouraging children to ask questions and express opinions helps to show children and young people that they are valued. If a playworker were to ignore a child or young person and not follow up their ideas and opinions, the child would feel undervalued, and this could affect their self-confidence and esteem. They could then withdraw from making further suggestions.

**CASE STUDY**

Ahmel is 9 years old. She comes to the play scheme with her mother, who is enquiring about the scheme. Your supervisor asks you to show Ahmel and her mother around the setting and introduce Ahmel to some of the children.

1. What aspects of the setting would you show Ahmel and her mother first?
2. Who would you introduce Ahmel to?

**The effects of discrimination and how to counter them**

Discrimination is when one particular group or individual is treated unfairly.
Anti-discriminatory practice in your setting is very important for the following reasons:

- it sets a good example
- it creates a comfortable atmosphere
- it encourages children to see themselves and others as individuals
- it is necessary to abide by the polices of the setting
- the Human Rights Act (1998) requires it
- it will stop children feeling singled out
- it may boost self-esteem
- it helps children to respect one another
- it ensures everyone has the opportunity to enjoy themselves
it ensures equal opportunities
it ensures that children do not feel excluded.

The harmful effects that discrimination can have on children include the following:
• it makes them feel unwanted
• it creates low self-esteem
• they feel different and singled out
• they may become angry and aggressive
• they may become withdrawn
• they may feel isolated or inadequate
• it may encourage unwanted behaviour.

The ways to counteract different types of discrimination are shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discrimination</th>
<th>Action to counteract it</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys will not allow girls to play football.</td>
<td>Challenge the boys, explain why girls should be allowed to play, and then select mixed gender teams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys are not allowed to dress up in girl’s clothes and vice versa.</td>
<td>Explain that all children benefit from being allowed to participate in role play.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Only celebrating Christian festivals.</td>
<td>Research festivals, ask people from different cultures/religions for advice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child being teased because they cannot afford designer clothing.</td>
<td>Stop teasing immediately. Deal with the issue as a group. Explain how clothes don’t make the person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child who wears glasses being unable to participate in sports.</td>
<td>Adapt equipment and rules for children if necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children using inappropriate language to describe homosexuality.</td>
<td>Challenge immediately, and follow up with an explanation about how offensive that type of language can be. If necessary give correct terminology.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CASE STUDY**

1 Imagine you work at a summer play scheme in a community centre and a young person of about 12 years old comes and looks through the window. You have a group of young people who are playing pool, table tennis, listening to music, playing board games, etc. You glance across 10 minutes later and he is still there. He then appears at the door and asks what you are doing. Describe the actions you would take and the interaction that would occur.

2 Look at the pictures on page 15 and state when you would have intervened and why.

Discuss the strategies you would use to deal with the victim as well as the situation itself.
CONSOLIDATION

1. Recall an instance when you have dealt with a new child or young person. You may have introduced them to the setting and people there. Record the details, remembering to include what you did and your rationale (why you did it).

2. During your playwork sessions you will interact with children and young people. Use a diary to record instances when you:
   - communicate in a way appropriate to their age and development
   - encourage children or young people to ask questions, offer ideas or make suggestions
   - encourage children or young people to make choices and control their own play
   - actively listen to children
   - show respect for individuals
   - apply anti-discriminatory practice
   - give individual attention to children or young people that is fair to the child and the rest of the group
   - respect confidential information.

Remember to describe what you did and give details to enable the reader (your assessor) to gain a clear picture of each instance.