

# Caterpillars Preschool

## Birch

### Parent Handbook

### 2025 –2026



Welcome to Caterpillars Preschool, Birch.

This parent handbook has been compiled to provide you with all the information you may need whilst your child is at Caterpillars.

**Our telephone number:**

**079840 857592.**

This is a mobile number as we don't have a fixed telephone line into the Pre-school. You may leave a message or send a text and someone will contact you as soon as possible if required.

Email: [birch@caterpillarspreschool.org](mailto:birch@caterpillarspreschool.org)

Website: [www.caterpillarspreschool.org](http://www.caterpillarspreschool.org)

**Facebook:** look for Caterpillars Pre-School in Birch and click on Like.

**Our Address:**

Birch C of E School  
School Hill  
Birch  
Colchester  
CO2 0LZ



**Fees:**

Our fees from September 2025 are £8.50 per hour for all non funded hours plus the £3 per day consumables charge.

Invoices for all fees/charges are issued on a half-termly basis. Fees remain payable if your child is absent for a short period of time such as sickness or family holidays.

If your child will be absent for a prolonged period (over 3 weeks) please talk to Sarah Lawrence, our Preschool Administrator or Chrystal, the setting manager.

For your child to retain their place at our setting, fees must be paid in a timely manner (21 days from the date of issue).

Where children are in receipt of nursery education funding for two, three and four year olds, we will submit funding forms for eligible children each term. Where funding is not received, then the above fee rates will be applied to all hours your child attends.

From September 2025 parents of children over the age of 9 months can be eligible for up to 30 hours funding. To find out if you might be eligible and how to claim, please visit [www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk)



**Session times:**

Caterpillars is open for 38 weeks a year and term dates will be notified to all parents and are available on our website.

Sessions run Monday to Thursday from 9.00 AM and 12.30 PM and/or 9:00 AM– 2:45 PM. (over 3's only)

We would urge all parents to drop off and collect their child at the correct time. Late drop off does lead to disruption for the other children. Late collections will be charged in line with our late collection policy.



### **Our setting aims to:**

Provide high quality care and education for children.  
Work in partnership with parents to help children to learn and develop.  
Add to the life and well-being of the local community.  
Offer children and their parents a service that promotes equality and values diversity.

### **Parents**

You are regarded as members of our setting who have full participatory rights. These include a right to be:

Valued and respected

Kept informed

Consulted

Involved

Included at all levels

### **Children's Development and Learning**

We aim to ensure that each child:

Is in a safe and stimulating environment.

Is given generous care and attention, because of our ratio of qualified staff to children, as well as volunteer helpers.

Has the chance to join in with other children and adults to live, play, work and learn together.

Is helped to take forward their learning and development by being helped to build on what they already know and can do.

Has a personal key person who makes sure each child makes satisfying progress.

Is in a setting that sees parents as partners in helping each child to learn and develop.

Is in a setting in which parents help to shape the service it offers.

We welcome your support and contributions throughout your child's time at Caterpillars. Parents are invited to come in to watch sports day and other craft and social activities throughout the year.



### **The Early Years Foundation Stage:**

Provision for the development and learning of children from birth to five years is guided by the Early Years Foundation Stage. Our provision reflects the four overarching principles of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE September 2025):

#### A Unique Child

Every child is a unique child who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

#### Positive Relationships

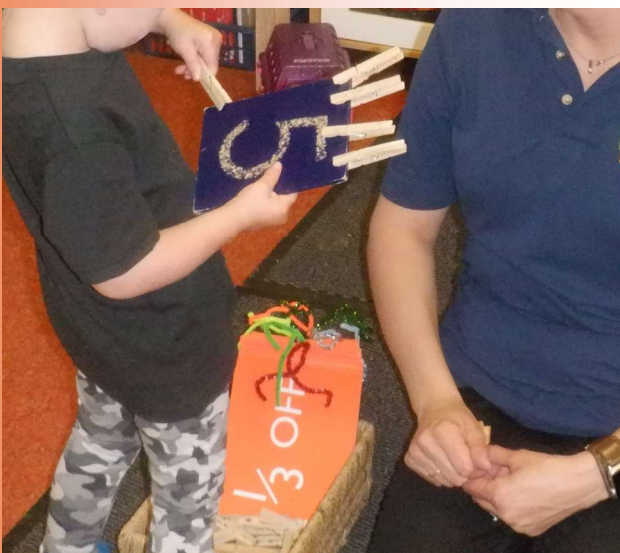
Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.

#### Enabling Environments

Children learn and develop well in enabling environments with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners, parents and/or carers.

#### Learning and Development

Children develop and learn at different rates. The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).



### How We Provide for Learning and Development:

Children start to learn about the world around them from the moment they are born. The care and education offered by our setting helps children to continue to do this by providing all the children with interesting activities that are appropriate for their age and stage of development.

The Areas of Learning and Development comprise:

#### Prime Areas

- Personal, social and emotional development.
- Physical development.
- Communication and language.

#### Specific Areas

- Literacy.
- Mathematics.
- Understanding the world.
- Expressive arts and design.

For each area, the level of progress that children are expected to have attained by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is defined by the Early Learning Goals. These goals state what it is expected that children will know, and be able to do, by the end of the reception year of their education.



We refer to non-statutory curriculum guidance to support our professional judgment as we assess each child's progress and level of development as they progress towards the Early Learning Goals. We have regard to these when we assess children and plan for their learning by creating a curriculum that is ambitious and meets every child's needs. Our educational programmes support children to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding they need for:

#### Personal, social and emotional development

Self-regulation

Managing self

Building relationships

#### Physical development

Gross motor skills

Fine motor skills

#### Communication and language

Listening, attention and understanding

Speaking

#### Literacy

Comprehension

Word reading

Writing

#### Mathematics

Number

Numerical patterns

#### Understanding the world

Past and present

People, culture and communities

The natural world

#### Expressive arts and design

Creating with materials

Being imaginative and expressive



## **Our Approach to Learning and Development and Assessment:**

### Learning through play

Being active and playing supports young children's learning and development through doing and talking. This is how children learn to think about and understand the world around them.

We use the EYFS statutory education programmes to plan and provide opportunities which will help children to make progress in all areas of learning. This programme is made up of a mixture of activities that children plan and organise for themselves and activities planned and led by practitioners.

### Characteristics of effective learning

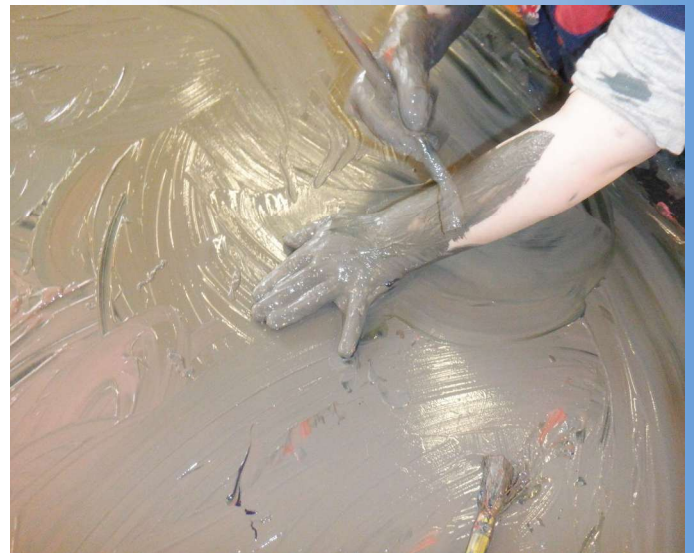
We understand that all children engage with other people and their environment through the characteristics of effective learning that are described in the Early Years Foundation Stage as:

Playing and Exploring - Engagement

Active Learning - Motivation

Creating and Thinking Critically - Thinking

We aim to provide for the characteristics of effective learning by observing how a child engages with learning and being clear about what we can do and provide to support each child to remain an effective and motivated learner.



### **Assessment:**

We assess how young children are learning and developing by observing them. We use information that we gain from observations of the children, to understand their progress and where this may be leading them. We believe that parents know their children best and we will ask you to contribute to assessment by sharing information about what your child likes to do at home and how you, as parents, are supporting development.

We may make periodic assessment summaries of children's achievement based on our on-going observations. These help us to build a picture of a child's progress during their time with us and form part of children's records of achievement—their learning journeys. We undertake these assessment summaries at regular intervals, as well as at times of transition, such as when a child moves into a different group or when they go on to school.

### **The progress check at age two:**

The Early Years Foundation Stage requires that we supply parents and carers with a short-written summary of their child's development in the three prime areas of learning and development - Personal, Social and Emotional Development; Physical Development; and Communication and Language. We use the information from on-going observations carried out as part of our everyday practice, taking account of the views and contributions of parents and other professionals.

### **How Parents Take Part in the Setting:**

Caterpillars recognises parents as the first and most important educators of their children. All our staff see themselves as partners with parents in providing care and education for their children. There are many ways in which parents take part in making our setting a welcoming and stimulating place for children and parents, such as:

- Exchanging knowledge about their children's needs, activities, interests and progress with our Staff.

- Contributing to the progress check at age two.

- Helping at sessions at the setting,

- Sharing their own special interests with the children.

- Helping to provide and look after the equipment and materials used in the children's play activities

- Being part of the management of the setting, where appropriate.

- Taking part in events and informal discussions about the activities and curriculum provided by the setting.

- Joining in community activities, in which the setting takes part.

- Building friendships with other parents in the Setting.

### **Joining in:**

Helping at the session enables parents to see what the day-to-day life of our setting is like and to join in with helping the children to get the best out of their activities.

Parents can also offer to take part in a session by sharing their own interests and skills with the children. We welcome parents to drop into the setting to see it at work or to speak with the staff.



### **The Session:**

We organise our sessions so that the children can choose from, and work at, a range of activities that will challenge, excite and engage them.

The children are also helped and encouraged to take part in adult-led small and large group activities, which introduce them to new experiences and help them to gain new skills, as well as helping them to learn to work with others.

Outdoor activities contribute to all areas of learning and development, including their health and their knowledge of the world around them.

The children have the opportunity, and are encouraged, to take part in outdoor child-chosen and adult-led activities, as well as those provided indoors.





### Key Person and Your Child:

Our setting uses a key person approach. This means that each member of staff has a group of children for whom they are particularly responsible. Your child's key person will be the person who works with you to make sure that the childcare that we provide is right for your child's particular needs and interests. When your child first starts at the setting, they will help your child to settle and throughout your child's time at the setting, they will help your child to benefit from our activities.

### Snacks and Consumables:

Snack time is an important part of the Caterpillars morning sessions. As well as being a social activity for the children to sit together and eat, it also enables the children to get involved in the preparation, cutting, spreading etc which helps develop their independence and fine motor skills as well as providing opportunities to try a variety of foods in a shared experience with their friends.

Caterpillars will provide your child with a healthy daily snack. The snacks will be varied and we also link the food choices in with any festivals, celebrations or topics we are learning about throughout the year. Please tell us about your child's dietary needs, particularly any known allergies or food intolerance and we will plan accordingly.

The charge for snack forms part of the daily consumables charge of £3.00 per morning session your child attends. The consumables charge not only covers snack, but also any other food-based activities we arrange linked to various topics. It also covers the provision of nappies for younger children and sunscreen and small contributions towards extracurricular activities such as craft mornings, Mothers and Fathers day tea parties, sports day, and visits from external companies (such as Little City) for example. Your contribution really supports us greatly as we long to continue to provide the service we do.

The provision of a snack is not covered by your child's funding, but if your child is fully funded, then the consumables charge has to be requested on a voluntary basis. If you do not wish to support the payment of this charge you can then provide your child with a daily snack and choose which extracurricular activities you wish your child to participate in for which individual charges would then be requested. The consumables charge forms part of the invoices which are issued electronically on a half term basis the same as the invoices for fees.



### **Clothing:**

Please send your child in suitable clothing – we do provide aprons but cannot guarantee that clothes will stay clean from messy play and when playing outside. We want play to be the focus, not worrying about keeping clean.

As much as possible, children need to be able to manage their clothes – pushing up sleeves to wash their hands, taking themselves to the toilet, putting on and taking off outdoor clothing. Laces or tight clothing make it frustrating for a child learning to become independent. Shoes should be easy enough for your child to remove and replace when necessary and appropriate for running, climbing etc. No crocs or open toed sandals please.

Caterpillars uniform is advisable, but not compulsory. Wearing the uniform not only helps the children feel part of the Caterpillars community but also helps prevent home clothes becoming damaged

We use the outdoor area throughout the year. We recommend wellies and waterproof warm coats for winter, sun hats and sun cream in the summer. We do have sets of waterproofs, wellies and suncream should your child come to Pre-school without them.

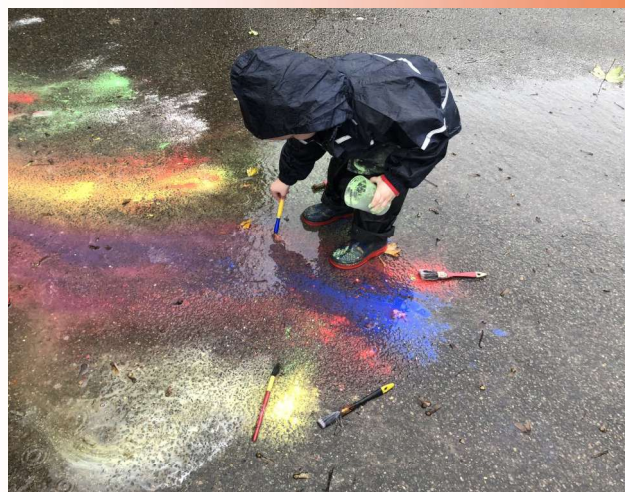
Caterpillars have a range on embroidered clothing that can be purchased for you child. Wearing the uniform can help children feel part of Caterpillars and also prevents home clothes from becoming spoiled during messy play.



### **Changes to Agreed Sessions & Notice Periods:**

If you need to reduce the number of sessions your child attends or find that their place is no longer required, then 4 weeks term time notice is required. If 4 weeks term time notice is not given, then the fees for the sessions your child would have attended remain payable for the duration of the notice period.

If your child receives funding and you wish to increase your child's hours after the 'headcount' date, then any additional hours your child attends would have to be paid for until the start of the next terms funding.



### **Learning Journey viewing:**

At the end of each term we welcome parents to view their child's learning journey and report. Parents can see what their child has been doing at Caterpillars, view their progress and be involved with their next steps of learning. You can take your child's learning journey home to share with your family and we value any comments made on the Learning journey report.

### **The Management of Our Setting:**

Caterpillars Preschool is a registered charity and as such is managed by a volunteer management committee - whose members are elected by the parents of the children who attend our setting. As a registered charity, without the parental involvement in the management committee, Caterpillars simply could not continue to operate. The elections to the committee take place at our Annual General Meeting. The committee make up the registered person with Ofsted and are responsible for overseeing :

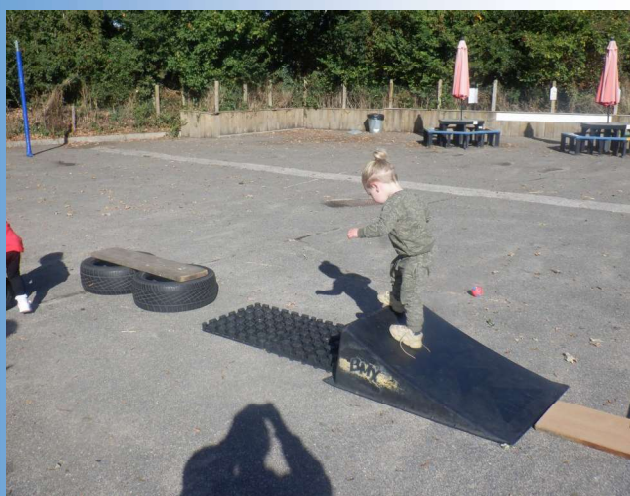
The management of our finances

Employing and managing our staff

Making sure that we have, and work to, policies that help us to provide a high-quality service

Making sure that we work in partnership with parents

The Annual General Meeting is open to the parents of all the children who attend our setting. It is our shared forum for looking back over the previous year's activities and shaping the coming year's plan.



### **Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)**

To make sure that our provision meets the needs of each individual child, we take account of any special educational needs a child may have. We work to the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015). Our Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) is Chrystal.

Chrystal is responsible for supporting the staff, children and the parents of children with Special Education needs and disabilities (SEND)

If you have concerns regarding SEND or if you wish to talk to someone about your child's development, please speak to your child's key person or Chrystal.



### **Fundraising:**

As a registered not-for-profit charity, we rely on donations and fundraising to pay for new and updated resources for the children and are always on the lookout for new fundraising ideas.

Throughout the year, we may be in need of extra support from parents, carers, grandparents or friends to spare a few hours to help run any parties coffee mornings, and other fundraising events.

Any help you can give is greatly appreciated.



### **Closure at short notice:**

On very rare occasions that we are not able to open, for example due to snow, lack of heating or staff sickness, every effort will be made to contact you prior to your arrival at Caterpillars. We will also text the number you have provided us with. There may be some occasions where we will not be able to contact you in advance and we have to notify you on arrival.

### Safeguarding Children:

Our setting has a duty under the law to help safeguard children against suspected or actual 'significant harm'. Our employment practices ensure that people looking after children are suitable to fulfil the requirements of their role and help to protect children against the likelihood of abuse in our setting and we have a procedure for managing complaints or allegations against a member of staff.

Our way of working with children and their parents ensures that we are aware of any problems that may emerge and can offer support, including referral to appropriate agencies when necessary, to help families in difficulty.

Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility, therefore, should you see something that concerns you in or out of at our setting, you can talk with Chrystal who is our designated safeguarding lead or Donna, who is the deputy designated safeguarding lead.

You can also contact NSPCC 0808 800 5000 or email- [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)



### Policies:

Our staff can explain our policies and procedures to you. Copies of which are available on our website and available in hardcopy in the setting. Our policies help us to make sure that the service we provide is of high quality and that being a member of the setting is an enjoyable and beneficial experience for each child and their parents.

Our staff and parents work together to adopt the policies and they all have the opportunity to take part in the annual review of the policies. This review helps us to make sure that the policies are enabling our setting to provide a quality service for its members and the local community.



### Attendance:

If your child is unable to attend a session for any reason, please inform us on 079840 857592. A text message or WhatsApp is acceptable.

We will contact you on the day if we do not hear from you. This is inline with our safeguarding policy. We will record your child's absence in our absence book.

It is important that any child suffering from diarrhoea or sickness should be kept away from preschool for at least **48 hours** after the last bout.

Any child suffering from contagious infection should not be brought to Caterpillars. Please inform us of anything that we can inform other parents to be aware of i.e. Chicken Pox, head lice. We will of course maintain confidentiality in such cases but as you can appreciate the spread of such outbreak can be minimised if parents are aware.

Consistent attendance in early years settings contributes to children's overall development, not just academic learning, but also life skills, social emotional development, friendships, and the formation of positive habits.

Research shows that consistent attendance correlates with higher academic achievement at all key stages, including early years.

## Our Staff

### **Chrystal**

#### **Birch Manager**

#### **Diploma in Childcare and Education (Level 3)**

SENCO

Paediatric First Aid

Designated Safeguarding Lead

Health & Safety

Food Hygiene (Level 2)

Chrystal has worked in Childcare since 1991 joining the Birch team as the Assistant Manager in September 2010.

Chrystal took on the Managers role in September 2013.

In 2016, Chrystal completed the level 3 award in the role of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)



### **Donna**

#### **Deputy Manager**

#### **Nursery Nursing Examination Board (NNEB)**

Equality Named Co-ordinator (ENCO)

Paediatric First Aid

Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead

Food Hygiene (Level 2)

Donna started her career in 1993 working in preschools and as a nanny as well as working at other local preschools before joining Caterpillars in September 2018.

Donna is also our ENCO.

Her role is to ensure that this policy is applied to all aspects of the preschool and that all children and their families are treated with respect and concern.



### **Sharon**

#### **Senior Early Years Practitioner**

#### **Diploma in Pre-school Practice (Level 3)**

Health & Safety Lead

Paediatric First Aid

Safeguarding (level 2)

Food Hygiene (Level 2)

Sharon started her childcare career at our Marks Tey setting as a regular parent helper which she enjoyed so much that it lead on to her completing her childcare qualification. Sharon moved to Caterpillars at Birch when it opened in September 2009.

Sharon's role as Health & Safety lead is to ensure risk assessments are completed and the welfare of children and staff is supported.



### **Michelle**

#### **Senior Early Years Practitioner**

#### **Diploma in Childhood Studies (Level 3)**

Child Psychology (Level3)

Paediatric First Aid

Safeguarding (level 2)

Food Hygiene (Level 2)

Michelle has worked in Early Years settings since 2000, initially as Preschool room leader, then Nursery manager.

Michelle also worked as a Learning Support Assistant in reception class for 4 years before returning to Preschools in 2020 and Caterpillars in 2022.

Michelle completed her Level 3 Child Psychology in 2017, giving her a great insight into supporting children's mental health & well-being.

Michelle is our 2 year old coordinator. Michelle ensures our 2 year olds are supported fully and have access to what we offer at our preschool.



Please note we ask parents/carers not to use mobile phones in the setting.

## Summary of Policies

### Safeguarding Children

We abide by Ofsted requirements all staff have Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS) to ensure that no disqualified person or unsuitable person works at the setting or has access to the children.

We take security steps to ensure that we have control over who comes into the setting so that no unauthorised person has unsupervised access to the children.

We have procedures for recording the details of visitors to the setting.

We work with the local safeguarding Children Board guidelines.

We ensure that all staff know the procedures for reporting and recording their concerns.

The layout of the rooms allows for constant supervision. No child is left alone with staff or volunteers in a one to one situation without being visible to others.

We believe in building trusting and supportive relationships with families, staff and volunteers in the group.

Parent's/Carers can report concerns of an **allegation against a staff member** to Chrystal manager or can contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Specifically, they should call the Essex Duty LADO telephone line. If the concern involves immediate safeguarding issues, the priority line at 0345 603 7627 should be used.

### First Aid

Caterpillars staff are able to take action to apply first aid treatment in the event of an accident involving a child or adult.

All staff are First Aid trained. This is updated every 3 years.

First aid box is accessible to adults.

No un-prescribed medication is given to children.

Parents sign a consent form for their child to receive emergency medical treatment by emergency services.

### Administering Medication

Children taking prescribed medication should be well enough to attend the setting.

Only prescribed medication is administered. It must be in date and prescribed for the current condition.

Children's prescribed medicines are stored in their original containers, are clearly labelled and are inaccessible to the children.

Parent's give prior written permission for the administration of medication.

A risk assessment is carried out for each child with long term medical conditions that require ongoing medication.

### Information sharing

We recognise that parents have the right to know that information they share will be regarded as confidential as well as be informed about the circumstances, and reasons when we are obliged to share information.

We are obliged to share confidential information without authorisation from the person who provided it or whom it relates if it is in the public interest. That is when:

It is to prevent a crime being committed or to prevent harm to a child or adult.

Not sharing it could be worse than the outcome of having shared it.

Parents are asked to give written consent to share information about any additional needs their child may have, or to pass on child development summaries, to the next provider/school.

## **Achieving Positive Behaviour – Well– Being, Self Regulation and Executive Function**

We acknowledge considerate behaviour such as kindness and willingness to share.

We support each child in developing self-esteem, confidence and feelings of competence

When children behave in inconsiderate ways, we help them to understand the outcomes of their action and support them in learning how to cope more appropriately.

We never send children out of the room by themselves, nor do we use a 'naughty chair' or a 'time out' strategy that excludes children from the group.

We never use physical punishment, such as smacking or shaking. Children are never threatened with these.

When children under three behave in inconsiderate ways we recognise that strategies for supporting them will need to be developmentally appropriate and differ from those for older children.

We recognise that very young children are unable to regulate their own emotions, such as fear, anger or distress, and require sensitive adults to help them do this.

Common inconsiderate or hurtful behaviours of young children include tantrums, biting or fighting.

Staff are calm and patient, offering comfort to intense emotions, helping children to manage their feelings and talk about them to help resolve issues and promote understanding.

If tantrums, biting or fighting are frequent, we try to find out the underlying cause - such as a change or upheaval at home, or frequent change of carers. Sometimes a child has not settled in well and the behaviour may be the result of 'separation anxiety'.

We focus on ensuring a child's attachment figure at Caterpillars, their key person, is building a strong relationship to provide security to the child.

We support social skills through modelling behaviour, through activities, drama and stories. We build self-esteem and confidence in children, recognising their emotional needs through close and committed relationships with them.

We help a child to understand the effect that their hurtful behaviour has had on another child; we do not force children to say sorry, but encourage this where it is clear that they are genuinely sorry and wish to show this to the person they have hurt.

We support social skills through modelling behaviour, through activities, drama and stories. We build self-esteem and confidence in children, recognise their emotional needs through close and committed relationships with them.

## **Valuing Diversity and Equal Opportunities**

Caterpillars pre-school is committed to anti-discriminatory practice to promote equality of opportunity and valuing diversity for all children and families.

We aim to provide a secure and accessible environment in which all our children can flourish and in which all contributions are considered and valued.

We seek out training opportunities for staff to enable them to develop anti-discriminatory and inclusive practices, which enable children to flourish.

The curriculum offered encourages children to develop positive attitudes about themselves.

We encourage parents/carers to take part in the life of the setting and to contribute fully.

### **Complaints procedure:**

(See policy documents for more details)

Complaints or problems should be brought to the attention of and discussed with the Preschool Manager.

If the outcome is unsatisfactory, complaints should be made in writing to the Manager and Chair of the Preschool Management Committee.

A meeting may be held with the Manager and Chair of the Preschool Management Committee. An agreed written record will be made with all parties required to sign and retain a written copy.

A mediator may be involved from the Early Years Learning Alliance for an individual parents meeting or joint with the Preschool management.

Parents may approach OFSTED directly at any stage by contacting: OFSTED Early Years Regional Centre on 0300 123 1231.

## British Values:

The fundamental British values of democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs are already implicitly embedded in the EYFS.

**Democracy** - making decisions together (through the prime area of Personal, Social and Emotional Development)

**Rule of Law** - As part of the focus on self-confidence and self-awareness Rule of law understanding that rules matter (through the prime area of Personal, Social and Emotional Development)

**Individual Liberty** - or freedom for all (through the prime areas of Personal, Social and Emotional Development, and Understanding the World) Children should develop a positive sense of themselves.

**Mutual respect and tolerance**, or treating others as you want to be treated (through the prime areas of Personal, Social and Emotional Development, and Understanding the World)

## A parent's Guide to Developing Independence

Why is independence important?

Independence is about learning to do things for oneself, which includes making decisions and taking on responsibility. These are hugely important skills for children to learn to cope with in adulthood. Helping children to become independent is seen as so important that it is a major focus of the Foundation Stage curriculum in England. This means that in your childcare setting there will be opportunities for them to develop independence.

**Building confidence** -When independence grows a child's confidence also grows. As they master new skills or take on some responsibility, they begin to see themselves as being capable. This gives them added confidence and makes them more likely to try out new things.

Promoting physical development Learning life skills will also help your child's physical development, particularly their hand-eye co-ordination. Many everyday tasks, such as hanging up clothes, pouring out drinks and tidying away toys, all involve using physical co-ordination and make an excellent foundation for later skills such as handwriting and drawing.

### **How will my child learn to be independent?**

Most early years practitioners help children learn the skills through some of their everyday routines. This means that your child might be encouraged to hang up their coat or pour a drink.

You may also notice that your child is given plenty of opportunities to choose what to play with, which allows them to explore and learn independently. These activities are sometimes known as 'child initiated', as they are designed to let children learn and do things for themselves.

### **What can I do for my child at home?**

Home is an ideal place to practise becoming independent. Start by looking to see what your child can do already, and build on this. If your child can put their coat on, maybe they can have a go at doing up one of the buttons or pulling up the zip once you have started it off. Working alongside your child is often helpful so that they can learn skills by watching you. This does not have to be a formal lesson, as children often learn best by simply enjoying being with you and chatting. The kitchen can be a good place for this, as your child might want to choose and wash a few vegetables or get out some items from the fridge.

Allowing enough time Children do need extra time to manage even simple tasks, but gradually, they will speed up and become capable. It is worth ignoring the temptation to immediately take over a task if a child is struggling. Sometimes a little more time or a few words of encouragement are all your child needs.

**Helping your child to make choices** - Life is full of choices, and learning how to make good decisions is crucial. You can help your child by giving simple choices early on. You might ask them which game they would like to play or what jumper they would like to wear from a choice of 2.

It is important to respect children's choices, even if you feel that what they have selected is odd! We all need to be careful not to put children into situations where a choice is offered, but then is disregarded. This has the potential not only to cause conflict, but also to undermine the child's confidence.

Questions such as 'What would you like to wear?' may give children the impression that anything goes, while in reality the choice is between two or three outfits. Outlining exactly what is on offer or giving the child some criteria to make the selection is a good strategy to adopt.

## A parent's Guide to Settling into Nursery

Having a child is very much a journey. A key stage in this journey is the moment when your child goes to nursery, preschool or a childminder's for the first time. If children are carefully prepared they can settle in without much ado. So what preparation needs to take place?

A good starting point is to understand that young children are actually primed to stay close to their parents. From the age of around eight months onwards until three years and older, children react when their parents leave by crying and protesting. In evolutionary terms, it made perfect sense for youngsters to remain near their parents to avoid danger.

### **Settling in**

In order to prevent your child from becoming distressed when they first leave you, key persons will work with you to settle your child in. The chances are that you and your child will be invited to visit. Visiting before actually leaving your child is essential. It allows your child to become familiar with the new surroundings and get to know the key person and other members of staff. To help your child settle in, most nurseries and preschools use a 'key person' system that means that one person will take special care of your child.

### **Helping your child**

There are several ways in which you can help your child to settle in smoothly. First, it is important during visits to the setting that you are ready to take a step backwards and allow the staff to build a relationship with your child. Constantly playing alongside your child may mislead them into believing that in this new place, you will always be there to play.

Instead, your child needs to learn that this new place is one where she enjoys playing with other children and being with staff.

While it is important that you should stay during the visit, aim bit by bit to physically distance yourself from your child by, for example, wandering to the edge of the room and picking up a book or talking to another parent.

### **Taking the cue**

Children are programmed to pick up on our reactions. If children notice that we smile and are relaxed in the company of the staff, they will take this as a cue that it is fine to stay. They will also notice and react if we appear anxious, and may respond by becoming fearful and clingy. While most parents are naturally a little anxious about how their children will get on, try hard to remain calm and positive, as this too will rub off on your child.

### **Going at different speeds**

Most parents wonder how quickly they can leave their children. It depends on the individual child.

Children who are used to being left with relatives and friends may be quicker to settle, as they are used to being in the company of other adults.

Remember that this is not a race, however, the child who settles in gradually but without tears will have learned a valuable lesson that will stand him in good stead when he starts school. It can be useful once you start leaving your child to build up the amount of time slowly.

### **Sneaking off**

Finally, a word about sneaking off! This might seem like a good idea, especially if your child is happily playing, but in the longer term it can cause quite a few problems. When children stop playing and notice that their parent is no longer there, they can react by becoming increasingly clingy. It also means that in any future situations, instead of settling down to play, children keep a watchful eye on their parents. Aim instead to build a 'goodbye' routine so that your child knows that you are going, but is confident that you will always come back.

## Risky play keeps children 'safe'

If nurseries fail to provide opportunities for risky play, children can either become very quiet or make their own opportunities for adventurous play, the director of Play England has warned. 'Children create risks if there are none provided for them', said Catherine Prisk.

Ms Prisk said that without risk in play, children can become bored, 'scaredy cats', or develop a lack of control. Whereas exposing children to risk can improve their confidence, make them more resilient, increase their creativity and help develop their social skills.

'The best way to learn about risk is to experience it. If children risk climbing a tree then they might risk reading aloud,' Ms Prisk told delegates at the NDNA conference.

Ms Prisk referred to a parent's blog which claimed that her child would not have broken her arm in the playground jumping up and down on the equipment had there been a climbing frame which was taller or more challenging, as she wouldn't have needed to put herself in that position.

The former nursery deputy head also claimed that allowing children to play fight, which some settings put a stop to, is physically important to help them understand how far they can push the boundaries.



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## Useful Websites

[Birch - Caterpillar Pre School](#)

Talk Listen Cuddle [Home - TLC](#)

Essex family well-being service » [Berechurch Family Hub](#)

Toilet training support <https://shortbreaks.essex.gov.uk/short-breaks-resources/toileting/>

[NSPCC | The UK children's charity | NSPCC](#)

[Tiny Happy People](#)

[Child's Progress checker - Speech & Language UK](#)

[Home - ERIC](#)

### **Lunch Box Suggestions**

We are often asked for healthy eating suggestions so we have devised a list should you be looking for ideas.

Munching, crunching and chewing really promote mouth muscles (good for developing language skills) good teeth, gums and healthy bodies.

The children are encouraged to open their own lunch boxes, pots and wrappings etc to support independence.

Lunch boxes should be manageable for your child. A lunch box too full can be overwhelming and off putting.

1 sandwich. This may be even as little as 1 slice of bread folded in half or cut in to shapes for fun/ 1 small roll/ 2 crackers/ small pot of pasta/rice/peas/cous cous.

Child size yoghurt/fromais frais

Cheese – size of a match box/babybel (or shops own)

1 or 2 vegetables – carrot/cherry tomatoes/cucumber/peppers/ etc. You may wish to add a dip such as houmous/tzatziki

1 or 2 small pieces of fruit. This should ideally be no larger than the size of your child's fist. (not the banana J )

A bottle of water. (children use their water bottle to have with their lunch)

**NB All grapes & cherry tomatoes must be cut in quarters. These foods will be returned if uncut. Please refer to attached guidance.**

**All lunch boxes should have a freezer pack included. We do not have access to cold storage so this is necessary to keep the lunch chilled.**



**Please read below a section taken from our Food and Drink Policy**

#### **Packed lunches**

Where children are required to bring packed lunches, we:

Ensure perishable contents of packed lunches contain an ice pack to keep food cool;

Encourage parents to provide sandwiches with a healthy filling, fruit, and milk based deserts, such as yoghurt or crème fraiche.

We discourage sweet drinks and can provide children with water.

Discourage packed lunch contents that consist largely of crisps, processed foods, sweet drinks and sweet products such as cakes or biscuits.

We reserve the right to return this food to the parent as a last resort

Ensure that adults sit with children to eat their lunch so that the mealtime is a social occasion.

## Count

Understanding numbers will help me in all areas of maths.

I will learn maths, but first I need to...

## Sort and match

Understanding same and different will help me classify.

## Measure

Measuring will help me understand the concepts of height, length, weight, time and money.

## Pattern

Making and recognising patterns will help me make maths predictions.

## Explore

Exploring will help me to understand spatial terms like in front, behind, left and right.

## Recognise shapes

Recognising 2D and 3D shapes will help me in all areas with geometry.



### Look at books

I need to be interested in words and books to read.

**I will learn to read,  
but first I need to...**

### Rhyme

I need to recognise the sounds that letters make before I can read.

### Build

I need to use my fingers and hands independently to hold books and turn pages.

### Talk

I need an extensive vocabulary to understand what I read.

### Do puzzles

I need differentiate size, shapes and directions to read.

### Track

I need to follow objects with my eyes to read.



Play with letters and sounds

I need to be interested in letters, sounds and print in order to write.

I will learn to write,  
but first I need to...

Imagine

Making up stories when I paint and create will help me to write.

Manipulate

Using brushes, crayons, scissors, pencils and playdough will help me to write in the future



Scribble and draw

Making marks and shapes to convey my messages will help me to write.

Build

I need to use my fingers Independently in order to write.

Climb

I need strong arm and body muscles to sit up and write.

