

THRIVING LIVES TOOLKIT FOR EARLY YEARS

GENERAL GUIDANCE

developed by CREC on behalf of the SCiP Alliance



THRIVING LIVES TOOLKIT FOR EARLY YEARS: GENERAL GUIDANCE

The Early Years Thriving Lives Toolkit provides a structured, evidence-informed framework to support Early Years providers of all types and sizes to recognise, reflect on and strengthen their practice in meeting the needs of young children from Armed Forces families. It brings together established principles of high-quality early years provision with a specific focus on the lived experiences of Armed Forces children and families.

The Toolkit is designed to enhance, not replace, existing early years approaches. The principles and reflective questions are rooted in inclusive practice that benefits all children, while offering a sharper lens on the experiences of Armed Forces families, such as mobility, separation and transitions. With this child-focused (rather than system-focused) approach in mind, the Toolkit has been deliberately designed to sit alongside any early years curriculum or statutory framework, and to be used by any provider (childminder, setting or school) working with children from birth to five years across the United Kingdom.

Early Years providers will have different approaches to quality improvement, data collection and record-keeping. Practitioners are encouraged to integrate the Toolkit within existing self-evaluation, planning and review processes where this feels most appropriate. Alternatively, providers may choose to use the Toolkit as a standalone reflective resource, supporting structured discussion, action planning and later review of impact. There is no expectation that all elements are addressed at once; providers are encouraged to engage flexibly, focusing on the principles most relevant to their context, children and families at any given time.

The purpose of this process is to support meaningful reflection on what is already in place, to make visible the often unseen strengths of practice, and to identify areas for development. Through a deepening commitment to inclusive pedagogy, reflective practice and strong partnerships with parents and carers, the Toolkit is intended to support providers to strengthen their curriculum, inform professional learning and strategic planning, and improve experiences and outcomes for all children, particularly those from Armed Forces families.

We hope that this Toolkit provides an accessible, practical and action-focused framework that empowers practitioners at all levels to build confidence, knowledge and pride in their work with Armed Forces families, and the strengths and experiences that they bring. By supporting thoughtful, developmentally appropriate practice in the early years, the Toolkit aims to help ensure that children leave early years provision as happy, healthy and confident learners, ready to take the next step in their educational journey.



The Framework

The Early Years Thriving Lives Toolkit is structured around seven interconnected principles that highlight key considerations for early years providers working with young children and their Armed Forces families. Each principle is accompanied by a shared vision of practice, alongside prompts and examples to support reflection and action.

The principles are numbered to support navigation and ease of use; however, there is no hierarchy or prescribed order. Each principle is equally important, and providers are encouraged to engage with them in ways that best reflect their setting, capacity and priorities. The Toolkit is designed to be used flexibly and revisited over time, supporting continuous improvement rather than one-off completion.

How to Use the Toolkit:

The Toolkit is intended to be used in practical, manageable ways that fit within the realities of early years practice. Providers may choose to work through it individually, as part of leadership reflection, or collaboratively during staff meetings, training sessions or supervision. It is not recommended to attempt to work through all the principles at the same time.

Many settings find it helpful to start with a light-touch review of current practice, using the reflective questions or RAG-rating approach to identify strengths and gaps. From this, one or two priority principles can be selected to focus on at a time. Action planning can be built into existing systems, such as weekly planning, improvement plans or professional development discussions.

Any resources, prompts and examples within the Toolkit guidance can be shared with staff as needed, rather than all at once, and progress reviewed at agreed intervals. Used in this way, the Toolkit becomes a practical working document that supports ongoing reflection, discussion and improvement, rather than a one-off task.



How to Assess Your Practice - Rating Framework for Early Years Providers

To help assess your current practice, the toolkit includes a rating framework that can be applied to each reflective question. Early Years providers are encouraged to reflect and self-assess their current practice against each principle using the following three levels: Emerging practice; Developing Practice; Embedding practice. These assessments of practice are for your own use and should be considered through open and honest reflective discussion. We would anticipate that even high quality, highly experienced providers would identify some areas of 'emerging practice' and have some elements of 'embedded practice' that can be refined. The real benefit is gained through a continual process of reflecting and improving practice rather than seeing this as a tick-list.

Emerging Practice	Developing Practice	Embedding Practice
<p>Some initial actions, but limited or informal support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited awareness of children from Armed Forces families and their needs. No formal policies, but ad-hoc or individual support may be available. Identification of children from Armed Forces families is inconsistent or not actively used to shape support. Child voice and family voice is rarely sought or built upon. Little or no resources exist to promote awareness with staff. 	<p>Some structures in place, but not yet fully embedded or consistent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of the needs of children from Armed Forces families exists, but practices vary across the setting. Some policies or initiatives exist, but they are not widespread or fully implemented. Some staff resources and partnerships with outside organisations exist, but engagement is limited. Child and family voice and experience is occasionally sought, celebrated and utilised in decision-making 	<p>Well-established, strategic, and monitored approach.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of the needs of children from Armed Forces families exists, and high quality, individualised support is offered throughout the setting. Policies identify and promote Armed Forces families, and these are fully implemented. Dedicated staff roles exist (e.g., Armed Forces Champions) and resources for staff are available to ensure they understand needs. Child and family voice and experience is actively sought, celebrated and utilised in decision-making.



THRIVING LIVES TOOLKIT FOR EARLY YEARS: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Armed Forces Families

Families where one or more parents or carers serve in the Army, Royal Navy or Royal Air Force, including Regular and Reserve service.

Service Children

A person whose parent, or carer, serves in the regular armed forces, or as a reservist, or has done at any point during the first 25 years of that person's life.

Child Wellbeing

A child's emotional, social and mental health, including how safe, settled and supported they feel.

Child Voice

The ways children share their thoughts, feelings and preferences, and how adults listen to and act on what children communicate.

Developmentally Appropriate

Practice that is suited to a child's age, stage of development and individual needs, rather than their chronological age alone.

Inclusive Practice

Ways of working that make sure all children and families feel welcome, valued and supported, and that remove barriers to participation.

Transitions

Times of change for a child, such as starting or leaving a setting, moving rooms, changes in routine, or relocating due to military life.

Deployment and Separation

Periods when a parent or carer is away from home because of military service, which can affect a child's emotions and behaviour.

Reflective Practice

Taking time to think about what you do, what works well, and what could be improved to better support children and families.



Action Planning

Agreeing clear, practical steps to improve practice and deciding who will do what, and when.

RAG Rating

A simple way to review practice using Red (emerging), Amber (developing) and Green (embedding).

Continuity of Care and Learning

Providing consistency in relationships, routines and learning so children feel secure, especially during times of change.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) (most commonly used in England and Northern Ireland (SEN))

Additional Support Needs (ASN) (most commonly used in Scotland)

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) [most commonly used in Wales)

