

Supporting apprentices effectively is crucial to the success of early years settings, especially when an apprentice encounters challenges. With strong support mechanisms in place, nurseries can foster a positive learning environment that promotes growth, confidence, and professional development. Whether the struggle is academic, practical, or emotional, targeted support not only benefits the apprentice but also enhances the entire nursery team and the quality of care provided.

In this post, we explore strategies nurseries can use to support apprentices who may be struggling. We discuss workplace learning linked to daily practice, safeguarding, wellbeing, health and safety, risk management, and applying child development knowledge through the lens of EYFS principles and professional practice. Drawing on resources and insights from **Teach Early Years**, **Teachwire**, and **The Childcare Company**, as well as tools like progress reviews and development coaching, we offer actionable advice for nursery managers and mentors.



Understanding Why an Apprentice May Struggle

Early intervention support begins with the recognition that apprentices may face difficulties for various reasons such as:

- Adjusting to the balance between work and study
- Lack of confidence in practical caregiving or classroom management
- Gaps in foundational knowledge related to child development
- Emotional wellbeing and personal circumstances affecting concentration
- Challenges with safeguarding responsibilities and health and safety compliance
- Understanding and applying the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework

Nurseries committed to nurturing apprentices must approach these issues empathetically, using structured support tools like development coaching and progress reviews to tailor interventions.

Workplace Learning Tied to Daily Practice

One of the most effective ways to support apprentices is to tie their workplace learning directly into the nursery's daily practice. This <https://www.teachearlyyears.com/product-focus/view/what-should-employers-look-for-in-a-level-3-early-years-educator-apprenticeship> approach helps apprentices make links between theory and practice and builds their confidence through experience.

Strategies to Integrate Learning into Daily Practice:

1. **Shadowing experienced practitioners:** This offers apprentices real-time examples of effective practice related to child development, risk management, and safeguarding.
2. **Joint planning:** Involve apprentices in planning sessions to link EYFS principles directly to activities and routines in the room.
3. **Reflection sessions:** Encourage apprentices to reflect on their experiences, what they learned about child development or professional practice, and areas for improvement.
4. **Practical task coaching:** Offer immediate feedback and coaching as apprentices carry out tasks such as monitoring health and safety or carrying out risk assessments.

This embedded learning style is highly recommended by resources such as Teach Early Years and The Childcare Company, which highlight workplace learning as a cornerstone of apprenticeship success.

Ensuring Safeguarding, Wellbeing, and Health and Safety Understanding

Early years practitioners hold tremendous responsibility in safeguarding children and maintaining a safe environment. Apprentices struggling in these areas require focused, compassionate support to grasp these critical aspects fully.



Key Areas to Focus On:

- **Safeguarding:** Ensure apprentices understand policies, recognize signs of abuse or neglect, and know reporting procedures.
- **Wellbeing:** Promote awareness of children's emotional needs and support strategies to foster positive wellbeing.

- **Health and safety:** Train apprentices in maintaining hygiene standards, safe use of equipment, and emergency procedures.
- **Risk management:** Assist apprentices in conducting risk assessments correctly and applying mitigation measures.

Nurseries can use development coaching sessions to revisit safeguarding scenarios and health and safety routines. Roleplaying exercises or case studies sourced from platforms like Teachwire can deepen understanding and prepare apprentices for real-life challenges.

Applying Child Development Knowledge in the Nursery Room

Apprentices often struggle when they cannot connect theoretical child development knowledge with daily nursery practice. Building these bridges is critical for professional growth and quality experiences for children.

Best Practices to Support Apprentices:

- **Model developmentally appropriate interactions:** Demonstrate how conversations and activities support developmental milestones.
- **Use progress reviews:** Review apprentices' observations and assessments of children, giving targeted feedback on applying developmental theories.
- **Link to EYFS principles:** Help apprentices see how their work aligns with the four guiding principles of the EYFS (A Unique Child, Positive Relationships, Enabling Environments, and Learning and Development).
- **Encourage portfolio development:** Guide apprentices in documenting evidence of applied child development knowledge in their learning portfolios.

Both Teach Early Years and The Childcare Company offer excellent materials that nurseries can use to supplement apprentice training and inspire practical application.

Using Progress Reviews Effectively

Progress reviews are a vital tool in early identification and continuous support for apprentices facing difficulties. When done well, they ensure that apprentices, employers, and training providers stay aligned and responsive to learner needs.

How to Make Progress Reviews Work:

- **Schedule regular reviews:** Do not wait until formal checkpoints; use informal catch-ups as well.
- **Set SMART targets:** Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound goals support clear progression.
- **Involve apprentices actively:** Encourage self-reflection on strengths and areas needing development.
- **Engage mentors and assessors:** Have collaborative discussions that combine perspectives from the nursery and training provider.
- **Record actions clearly:** Document agreed actions and follow up rigorously.

Effective progress reviews enable early intervention support, preventing small issues from escalating. Teachwire often features advice on optimizing these reviews for apprentice success.

Development Coaching for Targeted Support

Development coaching provides one-to-one tailored support focusing on an apprentice's individual challenges and goals. It's a powerful approach to promote resilience, professional skills, and personal wellbeing.

Components of Development Coaching:

Coaching Element Description Benefits
Active Listening Coach attentively listens to apprentices' concerns and aspirations. Builds trust and uncovers root challenges.
Goal Setting Defines clear and achievable learning and behavioral goals. Focuses development on measurable progress areas.
Feedback & Reflection Gives constructive feedback and encourages apprentice-led reflection. Promotes self-awareness and continuous improvement.
Encouragement and Motivation Supports emotional wellbeing and confidence building. Increases perseverance and engagement.
Resource Signposting Directs apprentices to useful tools, training, and reference materials. Enhances knowledge and practical skills.

Nurseries can either use trained internal mentors as development coaches or collaborate with external experts, sometimes sourced via trusted partners such as **The Childcare Company**. This coaching complements progress reviews to form a comprehensive support system.

Creating a Culture of Support and Continuous Learning

Beyond isolated interventions, the best nurseries cultivate a culture where apprentice support is embedded in everyday practice. This includes:

- Open communication channels encouraging apprentices to voice concerns early
- Regular team reflective practices focusing on improving support and practice
- Training for mentors and managers on recognizing signs of apprentice struggle and providing development coaching
- Recognition and celebration of apprentice achievements, however small
- Use of resources and inspiration from professional education portals like *Teach Early Years* and *Teachwire*

This positive, nurturing culture benefits all staff and ultimately raises the quality of care and education the nursery provides.

Summary: Key Steps to Supporting Apprentices Who Struggle

1. Identify the nature and cause of the struggle early using open dialogue and observation.
2. Link learning to daily practice through shadowing, joint planning, and real-time feedback.
3. Ensure comprehensive understanding of safeguarding, wellbeing, health and safety, and risk management.
4. Apply child development knowledge practically, aligned to EYFS principles.
5. Use progress reviews to monitor progress and set clear, achievable targets.
6. Provide development coaching to give one-to-one tailored support.
7. Foster a culture of continuous learning, openness, and encouragement.

Supporting apprentices effectively requires commitment, resources, and skillful coordination, but the payoff in apprentice confidence, competence, and nursery quality is immense. Nurseries partnering with organisations like **Teach Early Years**, **Teachwire**, and **The Childcare Company** can access valuable resources to enhance their support framework.

If you're a nursery manager or mentor looking to boost your apprentice support strategy, consider integrating regular progress reviews and development coaching into your practice. These tools, combined with a workplace learning approach that ties theory to daily practice, can transform challenges into opportunities for growth and success.