

# LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT

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# Introduction to Leadership

Successful teams are created by a leader who is dynamic, visionary, and intentional. Relationships are at the heart of leadership, with the team, the children, and families, as well as the wide range of other professionals that work within the early years and childcare sector. Leaders in early childhood, must create a climate of leading with others whilst being part of the team. Effective leaders will show good communication, confidence, and interpersonal skills in their interactions with others. Essentially an effective leader will be one who has the right vision and is committed to setting standards and expectations to influence others in the right direction. The dynamic faced by early childhood leaders and managers is difficult; early childhood organisations are made up of various individuals who range in age, experience, qualifications, diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds and who will all have different agendas and goals in their lives. The setting may have inexperienced staff who are taking training alongside very experienced staff who can draw on their own experiences which can make for challenging circumstances. As well as staff and children, it is important to recognise the role parents and families play, who all have different assumptions, expectations, and goals from the staff and the setting. Therefore, the leader needs to ensure the strategies are appropriate for managing the diverse range of situations that will arise from such a varied group of adults.

## Outstanding Grade descriptors for Leadership and Management

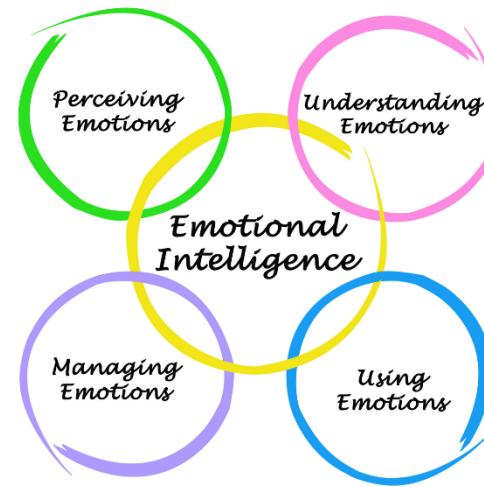
### OFSTED Early Years Inspection Framework

- Leaders ensure that they and practitioners receive focused and highly effective professional development. Practitioners' subject, pedagogical content and knowledge consistently builds and develops over time, and this consistently translates into improvements in the teaching of the curriculum.
- Leaders ensure that highly effective and meaningful engagement takes place with staff at all levels and that any issues are identified. When issues are identified – about workload – they are consistently dealt with appropriately and quickly.
- Staff consistently report high levels of support for well-being issues.

*“Leadership is best defined as a process of engagement; the leader engages fellow professionals in best meeting the needs of children and families.....in early childhood there is an expectation that leaders will be consultative in their approach.” Rodd (2010)*

**The key to effective leadership is the ability to interact with others in way which:**

- Offer inspirational and credible values, vision, and missions.
- Encourage open communication.
- Develop a team culture.
- Set realistic and achievable goals and objectives.
- Monitor and celebrate achievements.
- Facilitate and foster the development of individuals.



### Being an Emotionally Intelligent Leader

Emotional intelligence is defined as our capacity to be aware of, to control, and to express these emotions. The ability to connect emotionally with employees is essential for leadership effectiveness. In part, that's because the way a leader makes you feel can impact your engagement as well as your productivity.

Emotionally intelligent leaders have developed these four key skills:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-management
3. Social awareness
4. Relationship management

Building these skills requires increasing your self-awareness, strong active listening skills, and a willingness to learn and recognise our own emotional triggers.

### Reflecting on Practice

Ask yourself....

- *Do you have a clear vision for your setting which is shared with staff, parents, and children?*
- *Do your plans identify and prioritise future development that will lead to improved outcomes for children?*
- *Has your self-evaluation identified clear priorities, timescales and procedures for evaluation and monitoring of impact?*
- *Are performance management opportunities and regular supervisions carried out?*
- *Are there opportunities for staff to share concerns and share successes?*
- *Do you have high expectations of your staff?*
- *Have you got effective systems in place to support the safeguarding of your children and adults in the setting?*

# Supporting Effective Change

## Decision making

Having the responsibility of leading and managing an early year's provision comes with the need to make decisions. These decisions can and will impact the lives of children, parents, the staff, and the wider community. Some decisions can be made day to day with relatively little fuss, but others will be more challenging in nature and will require more thought. As the leader and manager is accountable for those decisions made in the setting, it is necessary to ensure an understanding of the decision-making process is in place.



*“A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader, a great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves”.*

(Eleanor Roosevelt)

## Confident Decision Making

Confidence comes, first in the success of your ideas, your approaches and in your convictions of the decisions you make. Communication to the staff should ensure delivery is understood to such a diverse range of learners. You will have to adapt your leadership styles to each person and be confident in doing this. The role carries an enormous responsibility of not only the quality of care for the children but also to support and lead the staff team and provide a service to the parents. If you have an idea about something or a view, or need to make a change, you should be able to share it confidently. This doesn't mean they agree, but you have confidence in your ideas and then be strong enough to follow them through. The most important skill to develop is self-assertion. It will come in useful to speaking to parents, expressing your opinions, setting parameters and being honest in a way that does not impact on self-esteem of the other person. There is a fine line in being confidently assertive and confident. Being assertive in a positive way can build and maintain relationships and build others self of worth.

## Time Management

By developing skills to manage your time effectively will in turn ensure you become a more successful and confident manager, guaranteeing you less stress and more time. One of the most difficult problems facing early years managers today must be insufficient time to complete the range of responsibilities that are associated with the care and service to young children and their families. Duty of care must be met regardless of time. On top of this leaders and manager need to often cover shifts, attend staff meetings, and meet with staff or parents and attend training outside their normal working hours. This can put pressure on work life balance. You can develop ways to manage your priorities and responsibilities of the role by evaluating the way you think and plan your day.



## Why is Change Important?

Change is inevitable in early years provision. Cohorts of children, staff, new legislation, and guidance to name a few changes that happen on an often-regular basis. Change is often needed and good however it can often be met with reluctance from others. Managing and supporting change is a vital component of the leader's role. And while this may look and feel like a long-drawn-out process, you can make your team feel valued and supported by engaging them in the process. One additional benefit to this will be that the whole team will feel empowered and therefore more likely to achieve the desired impact.

As with any project, it needs to be considered with careful planning, a clear programme of events that need to happen and involvement of others and with ample time allowed. Understanding the team individually and collectively can help you as leaders and managers identify a strategy to go forwards.

## Reflecting on Practice

Ask yourself....

- *Are your decisions correct and thought about/have you got a plan in place?*
- *Are all staff aware, on board and ready to implement your decisions?*
- *Is support available for everyone?*
- *Do you tend to put off tasks that challenge you?*
- *Do you manage time or does time manage you?*
- *Are you doing something that another member of the team could do?*
- *Do you attend too many meetings?*
- *Have you allowed yourself thinking and planning time?*
- *Do you know what wastes your time? Are you confident to voice your needs and concerns to ensure you can get on with your priorities?*

# Roles and Responsibilities

## The role of the Leader

- To oversee the operation of the setting to the highest standards, ensuring that the best possible environment and care are provided for young children.
- Inspire the staff team and build relationships with parents and the wider community.
- To lead the staff team in delivering high quality care following policies and procedures.
- To manage the financial sustainability of the setting with key measure of success
- To take responsibility for the effectiveness of the setting and wellbeing of children and staff



*“... there is no doubt that effective leadership and appropriate training for the leadership role is an increasingly important element in providing high quality provision for the early years”*  
Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007)

## Effective Supervisions

One of the key roles of a leader is to ensure that all staff have effective and meaningful supervision sessions. The focus must allow for reflection, critical analysis and problem solving throughout.

### What does the [EYFS](#) say?

3.28 - Providers must put appropriate arrangements in place for the supervision of staff who have contact with children and families. Effective supervision provides support, coaching, and training for the practitioner and promotes the interests of children. Supervision should foster a culture of mutual support, teamwork, and continuous improvement, which encourages the confidential discussion of sensitive issues.

3.29 - Supervision should provide opportunities for staff to:

- Discuss any issues – particularly concerning children’s development or wellbeing, including child protection concerns.
- Identify solutions to address issues as they arise.
- Receive coaching to improve their personal effectiveness



## Delegation - Sharing out Responsibility

One of the top priorities for leaders and managers is **delegation**. A word that can create anxiety in many however it is important to remember that no matter how skilled you are, there is only so much that you can achieve. With a team behind you, you can achieve so much more: that's why it's so important that you delegate effectively. Successful delegation starts with matching people and tasks, so first you need to know what your team's role and goals are and where individual strengths lie.



## What is succession planning?

One of the biggest risks to an early year's provision is one person knowing everything and having the key to everything. If you find yourself in this position, ask yourself: what happens if that knowledge and key is lost? Delegation can help ensure that the provision can run seamlessly when the leader and manager is not there.

If you leave succession planning until last minute – it's too late.

When deciding how you are going to delegate, it can be useful to consider the three I's:

**Intent** – Why are you delegating?

**Implement** – How are you going to delegate?

**Impact** – What will this delegation mean for the team?

## Reflecting on Practice

Ask yourself....

- *Does the Deputy have time to fulfil their Deputy role?*
- *Do you have a plan in place so the setting can run without you?*
- *Are there jobs that you do that you could share out?*
- *Do you inspire and grow your team to enable them to fulfil their roles and their ambitions?*
- *How does the supervision process support practitioners to develop their own reflective practice?*
- *Can practitioners critically analyse their own practice and develop their own action plan*
- *How do you document supervisions?*
- *Do you refer to previous supervision notes to ensure actions have been met?*



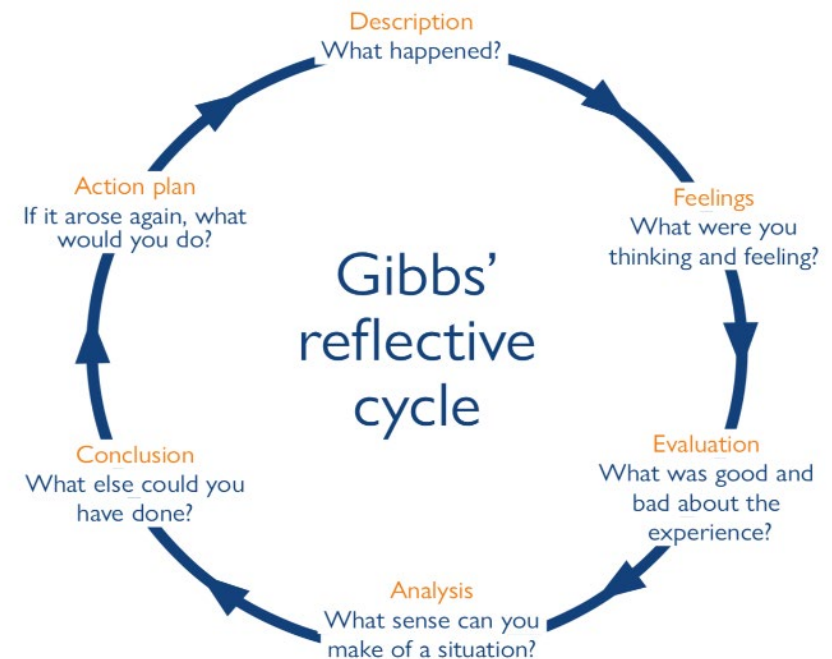
# Reflective Practice and Self-evaluation

*"We do not learn from experience; we learn from reflecting on experience." (John Dewey)*

With the pace and pressures of work and life, many those experiences that make us who we are as people and professionals, remain beneath the surface; unacknowledged and unrecognised. Firstly, and importantly, leaders must reflect on themselves and become more aware of their own values, beliefs, motivations, and strengths in a conscious way. There are very positive outcomes from doing this. The first is understanding yourself as a primary step in being able to better engage with and lead others (we must know and understand ourselves before we can listen to and try and understand others). The second, comes by appreciating and bringing together your own talents and values within a clear purpose. Leaders should know who they are, then they can find more fulfilment, a clearer vision and be further strengthened by applying them consciously and effectively. (Price and Ota, 2014)

**Gibbs' Reflective Cycle** was developed by Graham Gibbs in 1988 to give structure to learning from experiences. It offers a framework for examining experiences, and given its cyclic nature lends itself particularly well to repeated experiences, allowing you to learn and plan from things that either went well or didn't go well. It covers six stages:

1. **Description** of the experience.
2. **Feelings** and thoughts about the experience.
3. **Evaluation** of the experience, both good and bad.
4. **Analysis** to make sense of the situation.
5. **Conclusion** about what you learned and what you could have done differently.
6. **Action plan** for how you would deal with similar situations in the future, or general changes you might find appropriate.



**Quality improvement is a continuous process through self-evaluation and reflective practice.**

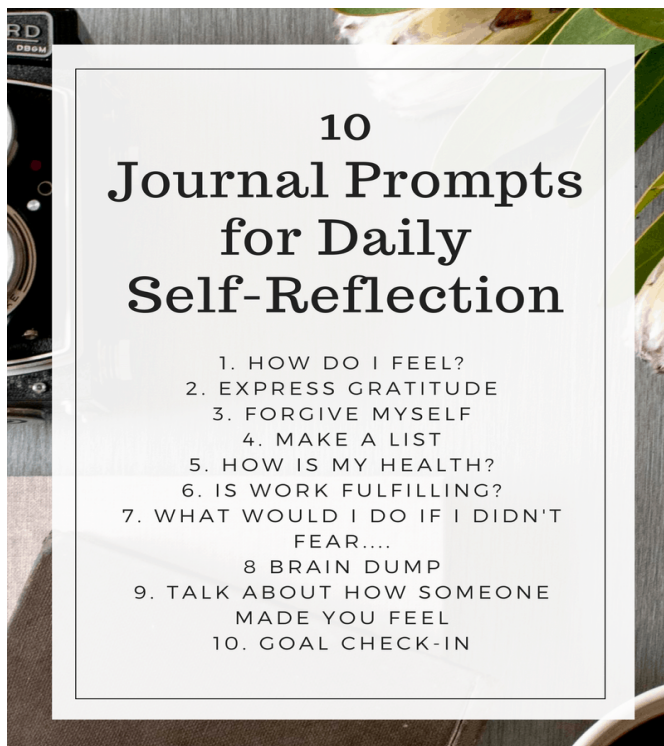
At a basic level, high quality early years provision can be defined as a provision which:

- improves outcomes for every child through high aspiration and effective pedagogy.
- provides personalised learning, development, and support – tailored to the needs of individual children.
- builds the foundations for future success, wellbeing, and lifelong learning.
- involves parents/families in their children's development and learning.

(Birth to Five quality improvement and leadership)

Ask yourself....

- *What are your current methods of reflective practice?*
- *How do you support staff to self-evaluate/learn from experiences?*
- *How do you incorporate the child's voice in your reflective practice and self-evaluation?*
- *Do you keep a journal to reflect and monitor your own practice?*
- *Do you provide opportunities for practitioners to evaluate and reflect?*
- *Do you feel comfortable admitting mistakes and celebrating successes?*
- *Do you use reflective practice to develop your setting?*
- *Do you create barriers to reflective practice?*



### Journaling for reflection

Keeping a journal is a good tool to support professionals in reflective practice.

### Benefits of keeping a journal

- Remember: things/dates/experiences
- Monitor your own practice.
- Provide different viewpoints.
- Clear your mind.
- Support good wellbeing.

# Managing Difficult Conversations

Understanding different feelings and emotions is key to becoming a skilful listener. Identifying and respecting people's individual feelings is incredibly important when entering difficult conversations. Identifying ways in which to manage your own feelings and emotions will be important so that you are able to remain professional throughout. Learning to control your emotions and feelings in the moment will allow you to view the situation in calm, well-rounded manner and give you opportunity to assess. Knowing your team and how they react will allow you to pre-empt some conversations. Think about how you approach these conversations, try not to seem dramatic or angry. How you start the conversation will determine a lot of how well you will engage your team. You may say the same sentence to all members of your team, but they will all respond differently so you may need to consider how you word things and how much time you need to allow for the news to sink in.

Consider individuals own personal circumstances and just as we don't always know what is going on beneath the surface for children – think of that iceberg model, that is the same for parents, carers, and staff.

## Plan your conversation

Most people can think of times when they have put off having that 'difficult' conversation. Most people will also recognise that putting off the difficult conversation alleviates short-term anxiety. However, constantly putting off difficult conversations often leads to feelings of frustration, guilt, annoyance with oneself, anger, a reduction in self-confidence and, ultimately, more stress and anxiety. As a leader and manager, you are in a position of responsibility and are also a role model to others. Being prepared is key and can help you feel in control of the situation.

- Decide on a suitable location (face to face is more effective)
- Room layout – sit next to them.
- Allow sufficient time – don't rush and allow for a break.
- Establish the facts beforehand.
- Reflect on what you know.
- Ask for support.
- Check and re-iterate policies.

*“Managers may need to develop awareness of their own nonverbal communication (body language) or practice talking clearly and in a straightforward way; they may need to practice delivering messages in a group situation or handling difficult conversations and how to be assertive rather than aggressive or passive.” (Price and Ota, 2014)*

Difficult conversations can be planned or spontaneous, consider the following in both cases.

- **Time** – Do I have enough time to dedicate myself to this conversation right now or do I need to consider allocating another time?
- **Environment** – Is the environment where this conversation is going to take place right? Is it picking up time where other staff, parents or children are present?
- **Evidence** – Do I have notes to support my reasons for this conversation so I can make sure I cover all I need to say?
- **Action** – Consider making a plan to resolve any actions that may come up throughout the conversation.



### Communications skills

- Approachable
- Active Listening
- Non-verbal communication
- Friendliness
- Confidence
- Clarity and Concision
- Open Mindedness
- Respectful
- Empathy

Sometimes no matter how prepared you are you cannot predict how the person may respond.

- Remain calm and control your emotions.
- Clarify whether this is a formal complaint.
- Seek advice or help.
- Take the problem seriously.
- Keep a record of everything said and done.

### Reflecting on Practice

Ask yourself....

- *What strategies have worked for you when having difficult conversations?*
- *Can you think of a time you put it off, then it only got worse (didn't go away)?*
- *What traits do you need to work on to develop confidence in having difficult conversations?*
- *How do you deal with your own emotions when preparing for a difficult conversation? How do you control your emotions afterwards?*
- *Have you space to have a conversation, away from everyone. How is this laid out?*

# Preparing for your OFSTED Inspection

Preparing for your OFSTED inspection can feel like an overwhelming task. It can cause anxiety in staff and volunteers, and this can impact on Leaders and Managers. However, being prepared for OFSTED will give you confidence when the time arises. There are several aspects to consider when planning and preparing:

- **Notification call**, the inspector will ask for information as mentioned in the EY Inspection Handbook and it is worthwhile having these ready.
- **Learning Walk** – The inspector will observe the setting and talk to children about what they are learning from the activities and experiences provided.
- **Observations** – of practice, care routines, play, activities, lunchtimes. During which they will ask **all staff questions**. An important point to remember is that you need to answer the question, even if you do not know the exact answer. For example, if the inspector were to ask, ‘*What would you do if a child went missing whilst attending the setting?*’, you might not know the specific procedure for this, but do you know where to find out? How would you proceed with answering their question?
- A focus is placed on **how well you know the children** including their interests, their levels of development, and how they are progressing.
- They will do a **joint observation** with a senior member of the team.
- A **Professional discussion** with Manager and Registered person will happen at the end of the inspection, the inspector will **feedback** to you and give the grading.

*“The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences. We must widen the range of topics and goals, the types of situations we offer and their degree of structure, the kinds and combinations of resources and materials and the possible interactions with things, peers, and adults.” (Loris Malaguzzi)*



## Learning Walk

During a learning walk, and when observing during the inspection, Ofsted Inspectors will want to see:

- A well-considered, flexible daily routine that meets the needs of the children on the day.
- All seven areas of learning in practice – planning does not need to be in writing if you can explain it.
- Knowledge and understanding of child development must support the teaching. Can you explain why you have the activities available?
- Observations which lead to individual planning – how do you scaffold children's learning, building on their starting points and leading to new learning?
- Children learning new things using all seven areas of learning. Not, for example, a maths table set up, but maths learning opportunities recognised and developed during play, music, and movement, reading etc.
- A focus on extending children's vocabularies through reading books and singing songs. You will need to talk about how book reading supports children's learning and when, for example, you plan a reading session during the day.
- Quality, carefully thought-out resources that engage children across all seven areas of learning. Resources should link to children's current interests as well as teaching them something new.
- Children's learning characteristics supported and developed. Children should be engaged, motivated and thinking throughout the inspection. If behaviour dips, the inspector will watch how you support the child, so they return to their play.
- Ongoing assessment to check children are learning what is being taught. No requirements for written assessment beyond the two-year progress check which must be in writing.
- Happy, engaged, confident and independent children who are playful and interact well with staff, each other, and resources throughout the inspection.

## Reflecting on Practice

Ask yourself....

- *How do you monitor the impact of your curriculum on children's learning?*
- *What strategies are in place to support children's behaviour?*
- *How do you complete your two-year progress checks?*
- *How are parents involved in the progress of children?*
- *How do you share observations and progress with parents regularly?*
- *How do you ensure children can build on their current knowledge?*
- *How do you support parent partnerships and home learning?*
- *Do all staff and the management team have regular and ongoing supervisions?*
- *Do you know your safeguarding and welfare policy? Is it available for all staff?*
- *Are staff confident in safeguarding practice?*
- *Have you completed a recent safeguarding audit?*



# Team Dynamics and Wellbeing

*“When you celebrate all of who you are and empower those around you to do the same, you connect as a team and belong, rather than just fit in.”*

## Team Dynamics

*“the unconscious, psychological forces that influence the direction of a team’s behaviour and performance”*

Having a good dynamic within the team is imperative. There are several stages of team development: **forming, storming, norming, performing** (created by Bruce Tuckman, 1965).

When the team is new or has a new member, the managers role is to support the **forming** stage, this may mean more hands on more direction and supervision, friendly checking up and observation. The next stage is **storming**, this is when there could be conflict and confusion. The manager now must mediate and remain open minded, but consistent in the approach to all. Find solutions by being rational and factual.

At the **norming** stage the team needs the manager to organise, motivate and keep the momentum.

The final **performing** stage is where the manager facilitates new ideas, sets new goals or targets, keep the team focussed on achieving and providing positive feedback.

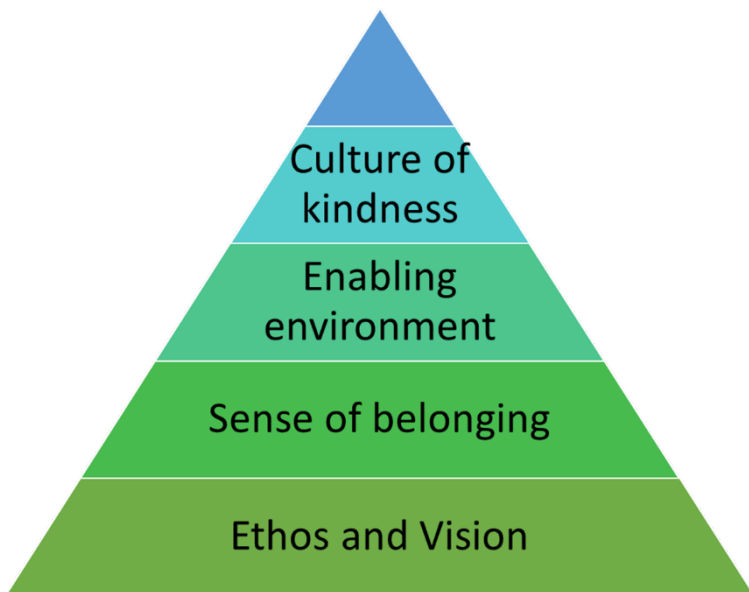
Leadership is the most important factor to team success.

## Tuckman Team Development Model



However, a vital component of team dynamics is the **wellbeing** of those within the team. When considering wellbeing, we need to do so holistically. Wellbeing is a concept that encompasses so much and whilst it matters on an individual basis, we must also recognise the collective wellbeing.

As a leader of a team, you are responsible for the collective wellbeing of the team. We need to feel part of something to invest in it and for us to ensure we give our best authentic versions of ourselves.



### How do we motivate?

- Set achievable goals.
- Teach new skills.
- Career opportunities/training
- Learn new things often.
- Opportunities to use skills/knowledge/experiences.
- Team effort – be part of something together.
- Do something different every day.
- Praise and thank you – it's always welcome

**Happy healthy, thriving staff = happy healthy flourishing children**

### Reflecting on Practice

Ask yourself....

- *Do you offer an open-door policy? Allow everyone the opportunity to talk?*
- *Do you identify individual personalities, strengths and weaknesses when developing your team?*
- *Do you have regular team/staff meetings?*
- *Do you consider what demotivates and motivates individuals, and look at how to change that?*
- *How do you manage change and support the team around this?*
- *What is your ethos for the setting? Is this shared by everyone?*
- *Is your vision shared by the team? Do you provide opportunities to discuss this vision?*

## Further reading and research

- [Acas guide to challenging conversations](#)
- [Difficult Conversations Made Easy | Joy Baldrige | TEDxUCCI](#)
- [Early years inspection handbook](#)
- [Early years staff wellbeing: a resource for managers and teams](#)

- Rodd, J. (2013). *Leadership in Early Childhood: The pathway to professionalism* (4th ed.). Routledge
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- Moxley, K (2022) *A Guide to Mental Health for Early Years Educators*. Putting Wellbeing at the Heart of Your Philosophy and Practice. Routledge
- Aubury, C. (2011) *Leading and Managing in the Early Years*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed) Sage

- DfE (2024) Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage – available from: [Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework - GOV.UK](#)
- OFSTED (2023) Early Years Inspection Framework available from: [Early years inspection handbook for January 2024 - GOV.UK](#)
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