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Early Years Newsletter

June 2026

We would like to thank all our settings who have hosted training, transition meetings and networks for us recently. Our meetings and networks are a fabulous opportunity to get together with other practitioners in the early years sector and pick the brains of your peers across the town. Our regular networks are the Baby Network, the 2 Year Old Network, the Good Practice Meeting and the SENCO Network. These are open to all our early years practitioners in schools and settings and free to attend. If you would like to host a network meeting again or for the first time, please let us know! We're always grateful for the spaces you provide. Contact earlyyearsteam@darlington.gov.uk to find out more or host a meeting.

Good Practice Meeting at St Mary's, Cockerton

Thank you to the staff at St Mary's who shared their journey to developing and establishing a new nursery class and transforming a small outdoor area for outdoor provision as well as introducing forest schools for their youngest children.

Fortunately the rain stopped and the sun came out for long enough for us to explore the woodland area!

You can find out more about the Forest Schools approach in this video.





Can you host a network? Contact your link officer to discuss or e-mail earlyyearsteam@darlington.gov.uk



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Safer Sleep

This guidance supports planned updates to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, which should be made in September 2026. Settings are encouraged to look at the guidance and adapt procedures where required.

Why safer sleep is important



It is important to provide babies and children with a safer sleep environment to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) in babies up to 12 months of age, and sudden unexpected death in childhood (SUDC) in children aged over 12 months.

SIDS is the sudden unexpected death of a baby where no cause is found and **SUDC** is the sudden unexpected death of a child where no cause is found.

Creating a safer sleep space can help avoid accidents, such as the risk of suffocating when sleeping from becoming entangled in soft bedding and/or getting trapped in soft furniture.

Providing a safer sleep space for babies and children under two years of age

Providers must ensure that:

- babies aged 12 months and under must only be placed to sleep in a cot - this includes carrycots, moses baskets and travel cots (you may find it useful to check whether products meet the British Safety Standards listed below)
- children are placed down on their back in their own separate sleep space on a clear, flat, firm surface such as a cot, bed or suitable mattress on the floor.
- sleep spaces should only contain a firm, flat, waterproof mattress and lightweight bedding which is firmly tucked in around the child no higher than their shoulders to prevent head covering - alternatively, a well fitted baby sleep bag may be used (check the manufacturer recommendations before using a baby sleep bag)
- where blankets are used, the baby should be placed feet-to-foot at the bottom of the cot, with blankets tucked in
- cots must not contain extra items such as toys, pillows, loose bedding, bumpers, wedges or straps
- children should not get too hot or cold - the recommended room temperature for babies (those aged 12 months and under) is 16 – 20℃.
- children's heads are not covered
- babies under six months of age must always have an adult with them in the same room for every sleep - all children must be frequently checked when they are sleeping
- children are always within sight and hearing of staff when sleeping

A baby monitor can be used for children over six months of age, and you must ensure it allows children to be seen and heard at all times.

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Safer Sleep—continued:



Evidence suggests that babies (those aged 12 months and under) are at a higher risk of SIDS if they have their heads covered. Some items added to their sleep space may increase the risk of SIDS and unnecessary items, such as cot bumpers and toys, can also increase the risk of accidents. Sleep comforters may be used for babies and children aged over 12 months only.

To check if a baby or child is too hot or cold, feel their chest or the back of their neck (hands and feet will usually be cooler, which is normal). If their skin feels clammy or sweaty, remove one or more layers of clothing or bedding. You should use your professional judgement during extreme temperatures.

Once babies can move from their back to their front and back again by themselves, they can find their own sleeping position. However, continue to place them on their back to sleep.

the lullaby trust
For every baby.
For every family.
Forever.

Please share safer sleep information with your parents and families.

There is a wealth of information and support from The Lullaby Trust.

Eyes on the Baby

If your setting has not already completed the Eyes on the Baby training (Strand 2), please see the poster:



Darlington Safeguarding Board - Eyes on the Baby Training - Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) Prevention

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Healthy Early Years Award News

The updated Healthy Early Years Award aims to help early years settings create environments where healthy choices and routines become part of everyday life for children. It encourages a whole-child approach by combining nutrition, physical activity, and oral health into daily care.

Many childcare settings across Darlington champion healthy lifestyles, and the HEY Award recognises the fabulous work that is being done everyday in nurseries and by childminders. Whether you are starting out on the journey to achieve the Healthy Early Years Award or wish to renew and upgrade to reflect the recent changes, help is available. Contact andrea.brennan@darlington.gov.uk

Congratulations to both settings who have recently achieved the updated Healthy Early Years Award. They have shared their thoughts on the importance of healthy messages within early years.

"Over the past decade, we have proudly supported hundreds of families and have always placed a strong emphasis on children's health and wellbeing; promoting healthy eating by involving children in preparing their own snacks and giving them hands-on opportunities to learn about nutritious choices. We were also one of the first settings to introduce the tooth brushing programme as part of our daily routine, which is supporting families to build healthy habits and helping children to positively engage with oral hygiene. Our approach to development is holistic, and we incorporate activities like daily music and movement sessions to help children understand their bodies and build physical confidence. We also prioritise free-flow outdoor play and regular walks within the local community, giving children opportunities to explore, stay active, and connect with the world around them."



Clare Murray, owner of Pierremont Pre-School.

"I have over 20 years' experience caring for children, 15 of those as a childminder. I absolutely adore my job and all the children in my care are like extended family - giving them the best start is my main priority. Providing home cooked, healthy, and nutritious meals is a key part of what I do, and I make sure the children are actively involved in what they eat from helping to grow fruit and vegetables to meal prep and weekly baking sessions. We also enjoy various trips out to parks, the beach, woods and other local attractions. I am delighted to have achieved this award which recognises the real difference early years providers can make to the health and wellbeing of future generations." ***Laura Strickland, childminder.***



Sadberge Preschool have also achieved the updated HEY Award this month. The assessor was really impressed with the setting's commitment to championing healthy lifestyles.

If you are interested in applying to complete the award, please click on the link: Darlington BC - Apply for the Healthy Early Years Award

Transition Event 2026



Thank you to everyone who attended the transition event in May, and a big thank you to Harrowgate Hill for hosting the event. It was great to see so many schools and settings sharing valuable information about our children in Darlington transitioning from early years to reception.

Your feedback is much appreciated and helps us to improve the event each year. Thank you to all of the settings who also shared their children's thoughts on transitioning to school at the event. It was great to see how important the children's voices are within your settings.



''It is such a bonus to be able to share information in person which allows you to get the full sense of what the whole child is like, which is so important. It tells you so much more than a written record.'' Elizabeth – Polam

''The transition event provides a valuable opportunity for everyone involved to come together in one space and share the unique details about each child that are often difficult to capture in written form. Meeting face to face allows receiving schools to ask questions, gain a deeper understanding of the children, and build the knowledge needed to support them effectively, helping to ensure a smoother transition into school life.



As a pre-school, we are committed to making this transition as positive and seamless as possible for the children who have been with us for several years. We know their personalities, interests, and individual needs extremely well, and being able to share these insights in person helps schools to better support each child to thrive during this important stage of their educational journey." Gail – Eastbourne

''The transition event is a great opportunity to pass on knowledge regarding the children. Great to have time to talk to the teachers too.'' Georgina – DCCC

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY:

We will be hosting the event again on Wednesday 19th May, 2027. We look forward to seeing you there.

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Potty Training

Potty training is an important milestone in every child's development. All children develop at their own pace, but research shows it's best for a child's bowel and bladder health to stop using nappies, including reusable nappies, pull-ups and training pants, between 18 and 30 months but the process of introducing children to sitting on the potty can start as young as 6 months.

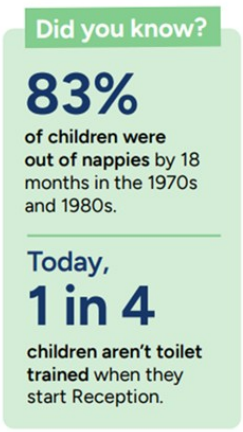
Potty training supports independence, confidence, and school readiness. The new guidance highlights clear messaging – that **it is better for children's bladder and bowel health to stop using nappies between 18 and 30 months, and children can start practising the skill of sitting on the potty or toilet when they can sit independently**. The new guide covers when to start potty training, and how to get all children enthusiastic about using the potty and toilet, with lots of practical advice and ideas.

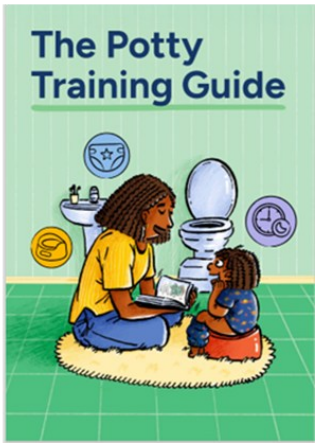
☺ Please share the The Potty Training Guide - Starting Reception with your parents

☺ For toileting support, please signpost parents to the too www.eric.org.uk/potty-training/ for excellent resources on bowel and bladder health

☺ Health visitors can also provide support to settings and to parents

☺ Further advice can be found on the Help for Early Years Providers site







The new CDDFT Childhood Injury Prevention webpage is now live and available for both families and professionals: https://www.cddft.nhs.uk/services/childrens-services/childhood-injury-prevention

The webpage includes:

- Evidence-based safety advice
- Bite-size video resources
- Trusted guidance and local support information
- Training opportunities for professionals

Share stories with me

What is Share stories with me?

Share stories with me is an A5 booklet designed for parents and carers of early years children.



This booklet contains:

- Simple ways for families to look at books and share stories with babies and children
- Examples of things to chat about when looking at books and guidance on how to make up stories together
- Explanations to support parents to understand the importance of looking at books and sharing stories with their babies and children

All content will support parents to create a high-quality home learning environment, helping children develop the literacy skills they need to thrive.

This also comes with a practitioner guide to support the use of the guide with parents and families.



Hopefully, we will soon see an increase in sunny days. The National Day Nurseries Association's Sun safety for children in early years - NDNA provides valuable information on sun safety measures to protect all babies and children when enjoying activities in the sunny weather.

Further specific guidance can be found at Looking after children and those in early years settings before and during hot weather: teachers and other educational professionals - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Dogs and children: some top tips on how to ensure they are happy and safe together

The relationship between a child and dog can be very special and bring happiness and fun to a family. Although families would never expect their own dog to bite, if they feel threatened or feel that they have no option, any dog can bite.

The Child Accident Prevention Trust Dogs and Children | Top tips to keep them safe and happy together has put together information, top tips and resources to support families to keep their child/ren and dog happy and safe together. More information can also be found at:

Dogs Trust
Dogs and children: living happily together | Dogs Trust

RSPCA
Children & Dogs - How They Can Live Together - RSPCA - rspca.org.uk

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Training Opportunities

SEND for new and aspiring SENCOs

This session will provide guidance on statutory responsibilities when supporting pupils with SEND, while also exploring inclusive practice in the early years. The role of the Early Years SENCO will be examined, making this session valuable for new and aspiring EY SENCOs.

Tuesday 15th September. 4 - 5.30pm via Teams

Early Years Teacher Degree Apprenticeship

The **Early Years Teacher Level 6 Apprenticeship at Teesside University** represents a vital opportunity to strengthen the quality, leadership, and sustainability of the early years workforce across Darlington. Designed to support both aspiring and existing practitioners, the programme combines academic rigour with practical, work-based learning, enabling apprentices to achieve **Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS)** while remaining embedded within their setting.

Trainees will be able to achieve a BA(Hons) in Early Childhood Studies as well as achieve Early Years Teacher Status without a student loan and employers will receive a bursary of £8236, to release the trainee to University each Wednesday.

Please see the link to our course page for this programme here: Early Years Teacher Level 6 Apprenticeship (EYTS) at Teesside University

Teesside University's next cohort for the Early Years Teacher Level 6 Apprenticeship is scheduled to launch in **September 2026**, with the **application deadline set for the end of July 2026**.

To register your interest or find out more, please contact **apprenticeships@tees.ac.uk**.

Dingley's Promise
Transforming the Early Years for children with SEND

Dingley's Promise is a charity that supports early years professionals across the country to develop their skills and build confidence through a range of high-quality training courses. In partnership with the Northern Lights Stronger Practice Hub, several fully funded courses are available, with a focus on inclusive practice. These courses are designed for anyone working in the early years sector.

Funded courses available include:

- Introduction to Early Years Inclusive Practice
- Early Years SEND Transition Training Course
- Behaviours That Challenge Training Course
- The Voice of the Child Training Course
- Having Difficult Conversations With Families Training Course

For further information, please see Training - Dingley's Promise and select Darlington.
Or to explore further courses and resources, please see Training Home - Dingley's Promise

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One Point Panel Dates 2026—27

Deadline for Form A **TO BE SUBMITTED BY 5PM**	One Point Panel Date **9.30—11am**
25th June 2026	9th July 2026
23rd July 2026	6th August 2026
24th September 2026	8th October 2026
29th October 2026	12th November 2026
3rd December 2026	17th December 2026
24th December 2026	7th January 2027
21st January 2027	4th February 2027
18th February 2027	4th March 2027
1st April 2027	15th April 2027
29th April 2027	13th May 2027
27th May 2027	10th June 2027
24th June 2027	8th July 2027

Wraparound Network and Training

Last year we launched our Wraparound Network for professionals who lead and deliver wraparound provision. In April we provided two wraparound training courses which explored both before and after school provision. The training considered the important role of staff who deliver high quality wraparound provision, as well as exploring and understanding strategies to support children's self-regulation. It was also a valuable opportunity to work together and share good practice across Darlington. Thank you to all who attended!

Do you know we also have a Wraparound Xtra page?

The Darlington Xtra Wraparound page features a toolkit with a range of information and resources, including the recently recorded training sessions to support the delivery of wraparound provision. The page can be accessed via Darlington Xtra - Wraparound Childcare

Should you wish to be part of the Wraparound Network or for further information, please email Claire.allred@darlington.gov.uk

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Networks, briefings and training: Autumn Term

Date/Time	Network/Briefing	Contact to Book Place
Thursday 24th September 2026 4—5pm, via Teams	Early Years Lead Network	catherine.monaghan@darlington.gov.uk
Wednesday 7th October 2026 1.30—3pm, via Teams	PV Briefing	dionne.evers@darlington.gov.uk
Tuesday 13th October 2026 6 —8pm, Hullabaloo	Childminder Briefing	andrea.brennan@darlington.gov.uk
Wednesday 14th October 2026 4—5.30pm, via Teams	EY SENCO Meeting	claire.allred@darlington.gov.uk
Tuesday 20th October 2026 5—6pm, Venue TBC	2 Year Old Network	dionne.evers@darlington.gov.uk
Thursday 12th November 2026 4—5pm, Venue TBC	Good Practice Meeting	catherine.monaghan@darlington.gov.uk
Postponed to Autumn Term In person—time and venue TBC	Baby Network	andrea.brennan@darlington.gov.uk



The Early Years Team now has a dedicated space in the Darlington Xtra Toolkit for Early Years Training and Resources. At present you can find the following here:

- Dates of the next briefings
- Dates of the next network meetings
- Our training offer
- Links to free online training from other providers
- Past newsletters
- Links to useful resources

We will continue to develop the page and add more information in the coming months.