

# Early Support

for children, young people and families

## How to Use the Early Years Developmental Journal



## About Early Support and the Early Years Developmental Journal

**Early Support** is a way of working that aims to improve the delivery of services for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities and their families. It enables services to coordinate their activity better and provide families with a single point of contact and continuity through key working. Early Support ensures that service delivery is child, young person and family centered and focuses on enabling practitioners to work in partnership with children, young people and their families.

The first edition of the **Early Support Developmental Journal** was published in 2008. This version, renamed the **Early Years Developmental Journal** to reflect its focus on early development, has been revised in line with the updated Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework that was implemented in September 2012.

The **Early Years Developmental Journal** has been produced to help families find out more about early development and to track change and progress over time. It helps everyone involved with a child to share what they know and discuss how best to work together to support development and learning.

The **Early Years Developmental Journal** can be used in combination with other **Early Support** materials. To find out more about **Early Support**, visit <http://www.ncb.org.uk/early-support>

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## Introduction

The Early Years Developmental Journal is to help you record and celebrate your child's learning and development and to share what you know about your child with other people.

The Journal includes behaviours that most typically developing babies and children show from when they are born until around 5 years of age. These behaviours are categorised into four Areas of Development: personal, social and emotional development, communication, physical development and thinking. They are sequenced in 14 Developmental Steps. Most children, with or without a special educational need or disability, will pass through these Steps in order, but they may at times be further ahead in one Area of Development compared to other Areas. Progress through the Steps will vary depending on your child's particular disability or needs.

The Journal helps you notice and celebrate everything that your child learns to do, as time goes by. The material is particularly useful if you know or suspect that your child is unlikely to progress in the same way or at the same rate as other children – whether or not a particular factor or learning difficulty has been identified and given a name. When families find out that their child may need extra support and help, they often say they don't know what to expect. They're not sure how their child's progress will be affected, and what they can do to help. The Journal can help you see how your child is progressing and understand the patterns of development that practitioners (e.g. doctors, speech and language therapists, Portage home visitors, health visitors, early years practitioners) are looking for. This makes it easier for everyone to work together.

The Journal focuses on what children can do, rather than can't do, and builds a positive record of achievement over time. This is more important than the age at which the steps occur. However, it can also help you pick up on any changes to the way your child is progressing that might indicate more, or a different kind of, help is needed.

To summarise, the Journal is a flexible resource that can help in many different ways when it's clear that it may be useful to look in detail at how your child is learning and changing.



## Quick Start Guide

If you are starting to use the Journal shortly after the birth of your child, begin at Step 1.

If you are starting to use the Journal later in your child's life, you can use the Key Indicators chart to help you find out where to start. Take a look at the chart and find the Step that best represents your child's current developmental level and use this as a starting point. You may need to use different Steps for the different Areas of Development.

Read the Summary of Development for the Step to get an overall view of that period in development, to find out more information and to get ideas about activities you could do with your child to support development.

Take a look at the items. When your child is showing one of these behaviours, note down the date you noticed this emerging, developing or when it was achieved. Use the 'notes' space to jot down any examples of this ability or other important things you want to remember.

When your child has completed most items in an Area of Development in a Step, you can date this on the Developmental Profile and then move onto the next Step.

Please do send us your views using the feedback sheet at the end of this booklet.

## What is it for?

The **Early Years Developmental Journal** helps you track and understand your child's learning and development, and share information with other people, including any practitioners working with you. It helps you to:

- record and celebrate change and new achievements
- understand the significance of what your child is doing now, what they are likely to do next and how they can be helped to move on
- build up a record of the nature and sequence of development that can be shared with other people
- recognise the value of all new learning – particularly when it may seem that very little is happening.

The Journal follows the updated pattern and presentation of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), specifically Development Matters, the material used by people working with children under five in early years settings. It supports partnership working between you and the early years setting your child attends, because the material contained in the Journal can enrich discussion about how things are going and what is likely to happen next. It enables the delivery of 'personalised learning', which is a key component of the EYFS. It also supports the principles that underpin the EYFS, with the recognition that every child is unique and that they are competent learners from birth.

If you would like to know more about the EYFS, visit <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/a0068102/early-years-foundation-stage-eyfs>



In particular, the Journal can be used as a shared basis for discussion at times of transition, for example when your child moves to a new early years setting, and when you meet new people for the first time and wish to discuss with them how to include your child and to encourage learning and participation in a particular setting, such as the nursery they attend.

If your child requires extra help in the form of a structured individual plan, using the Journal jointly with practitioners will make it easier to agree next steps or goals. It will also help to identify when new learning has taken place or new skills have been acquired.

Where many different people or services are in contact with you, the Journal can also provide a single, shared resource that helps everyone communicate better, using the same language and approach. It can also improve everyone's understanding of the developmental processes involved.

## What parents have said about the Developmental Journal

These are some comments that parents made about the first edition of the [Early Support Development Journal](#):

'It's a really good document that covers everything that's important to my child and my family.'

'It's definitely a helpful tool – it sets out the development of a typical child and helps you keep a record of how your child is progressing. It could be a negative thing if development is very slow, but the fact that the journal is broken down into very small steps makes it a positive thing in the vast majority of cases.'

'Small developments may seem insignificant to anyone else but they're really important to you as a parent. It's a positive record of where and when something new happened.'





## Finding your way around the Journal

### Areas of Development

The Early Years Developmental Journal describes typical patterns of child development under four Areas of Development:

#### Personal, Social and Emotional Development

This focuses on how children learn who they are, what feelings they have, how they behave and how their relationships develop. It's also about developing self-control.

#### Communication

Children communicate with other people in many different ways – for example, by looking, pointing, smiling and talking. This area also includes how babies and children pay attention to other people and listen to them, as well as how they understand and use language themselves.

#### Physical Development

This aspect of development focuses on how children develop their ability to move their bodies, hands, feet and fingers, and use their senses and movement to explore the world. It also includes self-help skills like feeding, dressing and hygiene.

#### Thinking

Babies are learning, right from the moment of birth. It may not be that obvious at first, but babies and young children accumulate knowledge at an astonishing rate. Understanding the world is greatly helped by lots of experiences and discussion about things that are going on around them. Thinking also involves the ways in which children learn to do things that they want to do. This is particularly important where the solution is not immediately obvious as it involves working out what they need to do, how things work and thinking through the possibilities.

**Personal, Social and Emotional Development**, **Communication** and **Physical Development** map onto the three 'prime' areas of learning in the EYFS. The fourth category of **Thinking** includes important items from different categories in the original Early Support Developmental Journal. While it's useful to chart progress under these headings, in real life, development in one area influences how a child learns everything else, so it's best to think about children's progress across all four areas. It's also helpful to remember that when children are very young, it's more difficult to sort behaviours under these headings. For example – when a young baby reaches out to grasp a toy, they're using and developing their physical and thinking skills at the same time, as well as communicating to people what they want.

### Developmental Steps

The Journal outlines a series of 14 Developmental Steps. Each Developmental Step is presented as a series of items from each of the four Areas of Development. These can be filled in when you notice your child doing something – particularly something you haven't seen them do before. There are no age norms attached – the Journal simply describes the characteristic pattern and sequence of learning seen in young children.

### Summaries of development

Each Developmental Step is introduced by a short summary of what's going on for children at that point of development, and some ideas about activities you could try with your child if you'd like to. The summaries are organised under the same four headings of the Areas of Development described above. Each summary is also referenced to the six phases of development described in the EYFS.



### Key Indicators

At each Developmental Step, and in each Area of Development, a **Key Indicator** has been chosen. These items have been chosen because they are particularly important for children's development. These are shown in bold in the Journal. There is also a separate Key Indicator table, which may be useful if you would like a quick way of showing your child's developmental profile.

In some instances your child's unique profile of strengths and needs may mean that it is not possible for them to achieve a specific Key Indicator. Where this is the case we suggest that you speak to a practitioner who knows your child well, to define what your child can do that is close to the achievement summed up in the Key Indicator and can be noted in the Step.

## Using the Journal

### Recording progress using the Developmental Steps

For each item listed for a Step, there are three columns that can be used to record the things that you see your child doing:

#### Emerging – Seen for the first time

Tick and date this column the first time you notice your child doing something that demonstrates a skill or behaviour, even if it's only an attempt.

#### Developing – Seen sometimes

Tick and date this column when you notice your child using a skill or behaviour more often or as they become more skilful at it.

#### Achieved – Seen often

Tick and date this column when you see your child doing something often and with confidence in a number of different situations – for example, in different rooms or different houses, with different toys, in conversation with different people.

You don't have to use all three columns, all of the time. For example, you may only notice a new behaviour or skill when your child is using it quite a lot so you may describe it immediately as 'developing' or 'achieved', rather than 'emerging'. You may also prefer to have a colour-coding system, rather than writing dates in, for example using a green highlighter for one month, a yellow highlighter for the next month.



As each child makes their own developmental journey, you may find that sometimes they begin to do something that's one or even two Steps ahead of the other things that they can do. So it's worth looking through later Steps from time to time, to get an idea of what next Steps might be or what may be emerging next.

Remember that some skills take longer for children to master than others and so there may be a considerable time between them emerging and being achieved.

Use all three columns, and more than one Step, if this is helpful. Remember that it's not so important what your child can or can't do when you begin to use the Journal. The material is not a test or just a checklist. It comes to life as you use and discuss it with other people over a period of time. The idea is gradually to build up a picture of how your child is changing and developing over months and years – a picture that helps everyone notice and enjoy the new things they learn to do, and work out how best to help.

### Notes

The column on the right of the charts is for you to add comments, if you want.






You might describe what you've seen your child doing, which shows they're developing a behaviour or skill described on the chart – particularly if you see a number of different things that seem relevant. You also might want to note down any questions you have about what you've seen. This is also a good place to write something about any 'special' toys that are particular favourites or that seem to promote things you're encouraging your child to do.

It's helpful to write down particular examples of the things your child says or does. It's nice to have a record, and also these are things that practitioners may ask you about when you talk about your child with them.

Some families like to fill out the charts by themselves and then discuss them with other people. Others prefer to talk about everything first and then fill the charts in with the help of people who are working with them or ask someone else to do the paperwork. You can read more about this later, but it's important to understand right from the start that the material can be used in many different ways and that you can use it in whatever way you find useful.

A sample chart filled in for a real child is included overleaf, to give you an idea of what the charts might look like once you begin to use them.

## Communication

	Emerging Seen for the first time	Developing Seen sometimes	Achieved Seen often	Notes
Learns new words very rapidly and uses them when communicating with other people 	✓ Feb 2011			
Understands more complex sentences – for example, "Put your toys away and we'll read a book" 	✓ Nov 2011	✓ Feb 2012		Nov 2011 Picked up shoes when I said "Put on your shoes and we'll go out for a walk" First time!
Shows sustained engagement and interaction when sharing a picture storybook with an adult	✓ July 2011	✓	✓ Feb 2012	Feb 2012 Nate has his own 'book pile now'
Tries to repeat many things adults say, either saying the actual word or making a close match – for example, says "Um-beya" for 'umbrella'	✓	✓	✓ Feb 2012	Top it (stop it) Duffin dustbin Go now Bad doggie
Uses a variety of question words – for example, 'what', 'where', 'who' 		✓	✓ Jan 2012	
<b>Says three words together – for example, "go park today", "big red bus"</b> 	✓ Dec 2011	✓ Feb 2012		Dec 2011 'bikkies all gone' Feb 2012 'Nate go bed', 'want a cuddle NOW!'; 'Granpa go sleep'

## Using the Developmental Profile – getting an overview

There's a Developmental Profile at the front of the Journal to help you see the pattern of your child's progress as time goes by and they move through the Developmental Steps. It allows you to summarise what's going on, after you've filled out the more detailed charts, and gives you a 'bird's eye' view.

Once you have ticked 'achieved' for most of the items for an Area of Development in a Step, enter the date in the corresponding box on the Developmental Profile sheet. This summarises and celebrates progress over time. It helps you to see at a glance the areas in which your child learns easily. It also shows you the things that are more difficult and with which your child needs more help. For example, you may find that your child has moved on to Step 6 in the Personal, Social and Emotional area, but is still at Step 4 in the Communication area. Some people like to review events every three or six months, using a different colour to shade in the boxes each time, as well as ticking and dating entries.





As noted previously, some children may not be able to show a specific Key Indicator behaviour, but may be able to do things that are equivalent, for example by communicating in a different way. If this is the case, simply note the achievement as an alternative to the Key Indicator. If there is a particular reason why a specific Key Indicator is not relevant for your child, it is fine to show a Step as 'completed' once the other items have mostly been achieved.

Some practitioners that you meet find the Developmental Profile useful, as it gives a quick, at-a-glance summary of everything that's going on that can be used by anyone who's trying to help your child. You can take the whole Journal or simply the profile with you to appointments as well as show it to practitioners when they come into your home.

## Special achievements and things to celebrate

At the end of each Step, there's a blank page for you to add information you'd like to record and remember. This space can be used to make the record more personal and to include things that aren't covered in the Developmental Steps. You could add photos, or record your child's likes, dislikes and interests – for example, favourite food and toys, the activities your child enjoys, the TV programmes or songs they like, things of cultural importance to your child and your family, the places your child enjoys going, what makes them laugh and so on. Add more pages if you want to put in more about your child and their life. It makes the material more attractive and can be good to look back on later.

The design for the rest of the Journal has been kept deliberately plain to allow you to personalise it in any way you want. There's plenty of space for you to make it as colourful as you like or you can leave it as it is.

The richer the description of your child, the more chance there is to tailor what people do to try to help learning, participation and enjoyment. So, using this section isn't only about making the Journal more fun – it's about sharing as complete a picture of your child as possible with other people.



## Questions you may want to ask

The Journal provides you with lots of opportunities to record new behaviours and skills in a positive way. However, things often aren't straightforward. Children can develop 'difficult behaviour'. At other times, it can seem like nothing's happening for a very long time. Some children start to behave in 'different' rather than 'difficult' ways – for example, wanting to play in repetitive ways with toys or objects for longer than is usual for other children. Parents tell us that they often forget to ask the questions they mean to at clinics or when people visit. It's important to discuss these things if they are becoming issues for you or if they simply puzzle you – this page is just to encourage you to note down any questions you have, so you don't forget to ask them the next time you meet with someone you can talk to about it. This is an important space in the Journal, because children tend to move forward more quickly if help and support can be given as soon as you notice things that are beginning to concern you.

## Do it your way

There are many different ways of using the Journal – so use it in whatever way you find most helpful. Some people use it from the early days of their child's life; others pick it up and begin to use it much later.

Families also like to use the material in different ways – some write a lot, others very little. Some families don't want to write anything at all, but find it helpful to use the Developmental Steps for reference when they're discussing what their child is able to do with other people – and may then ask other people to fill in the Steps for them.

There are no hard and fast rules, except that the material comes alive and is most useful when it's discussed with other people. In general, it's more important to share the information the Journal provides with other people than to fill out all the boxes (however you decide that you want to do that). It helps everyone involved with your child work as a team and talk with you about how best to support them. It also helps you to really understand your child's learning and development and what their next steps might be.



## When to get started

If you begin using the Journal early in your child's life, start at the beginning with Step 1. You'll soon become familiar with how to record new achievements.

If you start using it when your child is a bit older, you don't have to go back and fill in all the earlier material. For older children, we suggest looking at the Key Indicator table and thinking about which items your child can do in each Area of Development. This should help you find what seems like a good starting point. It might also be helpful to read the summary sections for the Steps.

You'll probably find that your child is developing skills that fall across several different Developmental Steps at the same time – for example, at any given time a child may be developing skills in the Physical section of Step 2, some skills in the Communication section of Step 3 and a few other things described in Step 4. So, flip backwards and forwards to look at the different sections in a number of different steps to find your way around and to get a general idea of where you are, before you start to write things down.

Whenever you start using the material, it's useful to discuss where and how to begin with practitioners who know your child. This helps you to use the opportunity to exchange information about what you've noticed your child doing.

## How often?

Most parents say they like to fill in the Developmental Journal regularly, so they don't forget all the small things that show their child has learnt something new. Doing this can also help to pick up any areas of difficulty which may be developing at an early stage. Some parents like to just jot down things as they notice them or may come back to the Journal when they want to check or celebrate something. We recommend filling the Journal in every month or so in the first year of life or when first diagnosed and then as seems most appropriate to you.

You may also find that your use of the Journal changes over time. There are times when you may want to use it very often, because your child seems to be changing a lot, or because there's some sort of crisis and it's helpful to observe more closely what they're doing. On the other hand, if there's a medical problem or something happening in your family that slows development down, it would be fine if you decide to put the Journal away for a bit and come back to it later.



## Using the Journal with other people – one set of materials for everyone to use

The Journal is most useful when you talk about it with other people, for example family members and practitioners. The material is particularly useful when many different people are trying to help with different aspects of a child's health and development, as it provides one set of information that can be shared and used by everyone involved. The Journal is best used as a core part of regular, on-going relationships between you and the people you meet with most often to discuss how best to help your child. This can be particularly helpful to practitioners and yourself when reports have to be written.

Communication is important, and particularly so when lots of different people are involved, and families sometimes say they find the words used by practitioners working for different services confusing. The Journal encourages everyone involved with your child to use the same language. It also promotes partnership working, by valuing what everyone knows about a child, and keeps you at the heart of discussion and decision-making about your child.

The Journal can also help when you have many appointments to attend and children have many assessment procedures to undergo. The fact that everything's written down and to hand can reduce stress and help everyone understand where the child is. This may be particularly important at first meetings with new people when you have been waiting a long time for an appointment or when talking about your child's situation is difficult.

Many assessments take place in the first five years of a child's life. The Journal provides information that informs, supplements and enriches the results of more formal assessments undertaken by practitioners at particular times in clinical or early years/classroom settings. If you have concerns about the results of assessments or how they match up with what you know your child can do, the Journal can help everyone to have a clearer picture of your child's capabilities in everyday life.

The Journal helps anyone new to your child to understand what they can already do, what they find difficult and how best to help. This is particularly useful at times of transition – for example, when your child begins to attend nursery or playgroup, culturally important developments, when you move house to a different area or when a different practitioner becomes involved in supporting your child.

If your child has particular learning needs, it's important that everyone works in partnership to provide support. The Journal can inform early discussions about what will be needed to include your child in early years settings and how best to encourage development and participation. The Journal deliberately uses the language of the EYFS and refers to this material throughout, as this is what practitioners working with young children use. The Journal can therefore be used to support observation of your child in early years settings and as an integral part of planning appropriate play and learning based on your child's interest, culture and needs.

Many of the items in the Early Years Developmental Journal correspond to items included in the EYFS Development Matters framework. These items are indicated with an icon. The Journal also includes items that map onto the Personal Child Health Record (red book). These items are indicated with an icon.







## Summary

### **In summary, the Journal can help you:**

- notice more about your child
- understand the importance of what your child is doing as they learn new things
- share what you know about your child
- understand what practitioners may be looking for and how they think about development
- ask questions
- know what to expect next
- discuss how things are going and agree what to do next to help your child.

### **It can help practitioners:**

- work in partnership with you and with each other
- communicate more effectively
- build up a more accurate picture of what your child is able to do and therefore give better advice
- discuss and agree shared goals so that everyone working with your child is focused on the same development priorities
- identify important issues early.

## Individual children and rates and patterns of development

All children show variation in their progress in different Areas of Development, especially in the area of language development. There are also some differences between boys and girls; boys tend to take longer to reach milestones than girls, but this is not true for all areas, or for all children. It's normal for children to make faster progress in some areas than others. The way the Journal is organised helps you see where this is the case and where your child may need extra help.

The EYFS reminds us that:

- every child is a unique individual, with their own characteristics, temperament and identity
- rates of development vary from child to child and from time to time
- many factors affect a child's development, for example, low birth weight, a recent move or their family being under stress
- what children can do is the starting point for learning.

The only risk associated with using the Journal is that you may focus too much on particular Developmental Steps or Areas of Development, rather than seeing your child as a whole. It's important for everyone to keep reminding themselves about all the ways in which you and your child are succeeding and developing, and to celebrate success and progress whenever and however it happens.



## Learning more than one language

If your child is learning more than one language, i.e. they are bilingual or multilingual, you might like to have multiple copies of some pages, especially for 'Communication' and fill this in for each language your child is exposed to. Alternatively you could use different colour pens on the same sheet. You may also want to make additional notes, such as whether they can tell the difference between the different languages they hear.

If you use a different language at home to the English which is used in your child's early years setting, you might like to ask your early years practitioner for help with completing the Developmental Journal for your child's English language ability.

It is important to know that children, including disabled children and those with other additional needs, can benefit from learning multiple languages. In the long-term there is no evidence to suggest that this harms their language development and there is evidence that it can benefit their thinking skills.

## Sensory and physical impairments

Your child may have a physical impairment or a sensory impairment, such as deafness or a vision impairment, which means that some of the items in the Early Years Developmental Journal may not be suitable for them. You can change these items so they become appropriate for your child – you might like to do this with a practitioner. You may also choose to miss some items out. This Journal is for you to use in the way that is most helpful for you.

It is also important to match your input to your child's needs, so you may need to modify some of the advice given in the step summaries. For example, when this suggests talking to your child about a particular topic such as their emotions, you might need to sign to your child about this instead if this is their primary mode of communication.

## What to do when progress seems to get stuck

Sometimes it may seem that your child is not moving to the next Developmental Step in one or more area. If this is the case, there are several things that you could do:

- talk to a practitioner to find out what they think
- think about backing off from a particular activity for a while. Your child may simply have become bored or their interests may have changed
- choose a different area from the four Areas of Development to concentrate on
- think about what is happening around your child. Have there been changes in their environment?



## What to do if your child stops doing things that they were previously able to do

It is quite common for a child to stop doing something that they were previously able to do. This may simply mean that they have moved on and a behaviour has changed and developed into something else. For example:

Lily used to flap her left hand up and down in response to a particular piece of music played on her CD player. Her mum described this as Lily's favourite music. However, a few months later Lily suddenly stopped doing this. Her mum was really worried and thought that perhaps Lily was having problems with her hearing. However, one day when the music was playing she noticed that Lily was making a very quiet 'uuh, uuh, uuh' sound in time to the music. So, although Lily had stopped using one skill, she had substituted another. This showed she was still responding to the music, albeit in a different way.

There may be times when there are other reasons why your child has stopped doing something that they were previously able to do. For example, if Lily had not substituted another behaviour for her hand flap response to her favourite music, then her mum's concern about the possibility of a hearing problem may have been justified. In this case, Lily's mum would need to speak to a practitioner and make arrangements for her hearing to be tested.

It is worth discussing any unexplained loss of a skill or behaviour with a practitioner. Remember too, that the reason might not be something to do with your child - it may be because something in the environment has changed.

## Feedback on the Early Years Developmental Journal

My name and contact details (leave blank if you wish):

I am a:

☐ a parent/carers

☐ a practitioner (role: \_\_\_\_\_)

The basis of my experience with the journal is:

The most positive aspect(s) of the journal:

The most negative aspect(s) of the journal:

The amount of content in the journal is:

- ☐ too much                      comment:
- ☐ about right
- ☐ too little

The guidance on using the journal is:

- ☐ very useful                      comment:
- ☐ of some value
- ☐ insufficient

The amount of detail in the journal is:

- ☐ too much                      comment:
- ☐ about right
- ☐ too little

The language level of the journal is:

- ☐ too high                      comment:
- ☐ difficult in places
- ☐ accessible to most

The amount of help that I/the parents I support need in using the journal is:

- ☐ a lot                      comment:
- ☐ moderate
- ☐ very little

## How to Use the Early Years Developmental Journal

How useful is the journal for enhancing communication among the team around the child:

- ☐ very useful                      comment:
- ☐ moderately useful
- ☐ not very useful

How fully do I/the parents I support complete the journal:

- ☐ much or all                      comment:
- ☐ about half
- ☐ just a few parts

How regularly do I/parents I support make entries in the journal:

- ☐ often                      comment:
- ☐ variably
- ☐ occasionally

Using this in a web or app based format would be:

- ☐ an improvement                      comment:
- ☐ acceptable
- ☐ problematic



What improvements do you think should be made:

Thank you for taking the time to give us your views. Please return this feedback sheet to:

Developmental-Journal@open.ac.uk  
FELS ChDL, Briggs Building Level 2, The Open University,  
Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK

# Acknowledgements

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# Early Support

for children, young people and families



The Open  
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National **Portage** Association  
Partners with Parents and Children

Copies of this resource can be downloaded from  
[www.ncb.org.uk/early-support](http://www.ncb.org.uk/early-support)

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