Working with colleagues

Key skills in childcare

- Roles and responsibilities
- Building good relationships
- Communicating with colleagues
- Supporting colleagues
‘Everyone has an important part to play in ensuring that children receive the highest level of care.’

**Introduction**

Working well with colleagues can help you to enjoy your work more. It also helps to improve the quality of care given to children and young people. In this workbook you will learn how to work more effectively with colleagues by improving your communication skills and how well you support others in difficult times.

**Roles and responsibilities**

It takes a lot of people to run an organisation effectively. Everyone has an important part to play in ensuring that children receive the highest level of care.

**Who do you work with?**

List everyone you need to work with in the table below, stating their job title and how closely you work with them. Include people such as social workers and educational psychologists. Decide whether you work with the person ‘frequently’ (F), ‘sometimes’ (S) or ‘rarely’ (R).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>How often do you work with this person?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F   S   R</td>
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It is easy to think of your colleagues as just the people you work with directly on a daily basis. You may have found that you work with far more people than you thought. You need to consider how well you work with all of these people.
Building good relationships

The key to working effectively with others is building good relationships. In order to do this, you must first show colleagues respect.

Respect

Respect means listening to people’s views and advice, even when you don’t necessarily agree with them. You need to earn respect too. One of the easiest ways to do this is to carry out your duties to a high standard and without complaining. However, people also respect colleagues who are not afraid to admit when they need some help. It is better to ask for help than to try to hide any mistakes you make because you cannot complete a task.

Empathy

Showing empathy with other people also helps to build good relationships. This means showing people that you understand their feelings, particularly if they have a problem or are upset. If you can do this, people will see you as a pleasant person to work with.

Trust

Trust is another important part of a relationship. Trusting other people can be difficult because we are often afraid that we will be let down. When you trust other people, you can ask for support when you have a problem that is affecting your work. This may help to relieve any stress you are feeling.

Trust can simply mean knowing that someone will turn up for work when they are due to be on duty. One of the first ways to earn the trust of your colleagues is to turn up for work on time and always inform people if you are going to be absent.

Think of a colleague with whom you have a good working relationship. What makes it a good relationship?
Communicating with colleagues

In order to work effectively with colleagues, you must be a good communicator.

Sharing information

One of the most important tasks you do every day is share information with your colleagues. This could be important information about a child’s daily activities or a message from a parent or carer. Whatever the information, it is essential that you pass it on accurately and in an appropriate way.

Urgent information needs to be passed on immediately by speaking to an appropriate person, as it may affect the well-being of a child or the safety of others. Urgent information includes:

• a child showing signs of illness
• a missing child
• a health and safety issue, such as a broken piece of equipment.

In these cases it is acceptable to interrupt a meeting or phone call in order to make someone aware of the situation immediately. You should then record the information you have passed on, in case anyone asks you about it later.

Writing messages

Another way of sharing information is through written messages, and most organisations have some kind of communication book, which staff can use to share information with others.

Follow the guidelines below when writing messages.

• Use clear, simple language and short sentences. Avoid unnecessary long words.
• Only use abbreviations and terms that you are sure the reader will understand so that there is no misunderstanding about what you mean. For example, if a child has been prescribed medication to be taken ‘2/d’, it would be better to write this as ‘twice a day’. A child’s health could be at risk if your colleagues did not understand the abbreviation you used.
• Make sure that what you write sticks to the facts and contains only relevant information.
• Don’t be tempted to use a term you don’t really understand because you think it looks more professional. If you use a term wrongly, it could be confusing for others, as well as potentially dangerous.
• It is also important to check your spelling and punctuation – getting these wrong could confuse the reader. If you are unsure about how to spell a word, use a dictionary or ask someone to help you.
This is a good message:

J’s mother telephoned today. She will collect J at 12.30 today and take him to the dentist. Please make sure that he has had his lunch and brushed his teeth. She will bring him back to Nursery after his appointment.

It is good because it contains only the facts that are needed, without any personal opinions. Everything is spelt correctly and short, simple sentences have been used.

Look at the following message.

When I got in this mourning, I was a bit late because the bus got hold up in traffic. I went into Pre-school. N was really upset because she wasn’t able to go on the outing to the park yesterday and I said that I didn’t know anything about it Cos I weren’t there. I think she was being silly, but thought I better report it.

Now rewrite the message, following the guidelines.

Sometimes it’s good to talk

There will be occasions when you might not be happy about something that has been done (or not done) by a colleague. It is tempting to leave a message like this:

The wet play room was in a terrible mess this afternoon. I suggest that the person who left it this morning tidies up and leaves the room as they would expect to find it.
Because this message reads like a personal attack on your colleague, it is unlikely to have the desired effect. If you leave a message like this, you may upset colleagues and it could cause conflict. Worse still, your genuine concerns may go unnoticed because of the way you have expressed them. If you are unhappy about something that someone has done, it is better to speak to them directly. It is best to keep written messages for factual information only.

**Think before you speak**

Taking the time to think about how you speak to your colleague will ensure that your colleague feels more comfortable and you do not appear to be seeking a confrontation. You will be able to have an open and honest conversation, which will lead to better care for the children or young people. The following tips will help.

- When you speak to your colleague, you should ensure that you ‘own’ the feelings you have, using statements such as ‘I feel that...’ or ‘I find it difficult that...’
- Make sure that you speak somewhere private, where you can sit down and relax.
- Do not cross your arms or legs, as this can appear aggressive and look as if you are not prepared to listen.
- Show that you respect your colleague by asking for their opinions and listening to them carefully. Nod your head occasionally and maintain steady eye contact, as this will let your colleague know that you are listening. However, it is fine to look away occasionally – constant eye contact can make people feel uncomfortable.

**Supporting colleagues**

Everyone needs support sometimes, and members of a good team will always support each other, even at the busiest times.

**Offering help and advice**

There will be times when you need to offer a colleague some help with a task. Always offer help quietly and with a smile, so that your colleague does not feel undermined. Plan carefully with your colleague to ensure that you both know exactly what needs to be done, in order to avoid any confusion.

Sometimes you may need to offer advice to a colleague – for example, when they are not sure how best to deal with a child’s behaviour. You need to judge the way you give advice carefully so that you do not appear patronising, especially if your colleague is more experienced than you. However, if you offer advice with a genuine wish to help, then you are unlikely to offend anyone.
Asking for support

There will be times when you need support yourself, perhaps with a new task or when you have problems with an area of work. You should feel able to ask colleagues for support and it is important that you do this.

Who would you go to if you needed support?

Here is a list of issues that you may need support with. For each one, say who you would ask for support.

- You cannot cope with the number of hours you are working.

- You have broken up with your partner.

- You do not know how to use a steriliser correctly.

- A colleague always avoids doing babies’ nappies and leaves it to you and others.

Now think about the people you have chosen. What is it about these people that makes you feel you could go to them for help? What are their personal qualities? Do they display respect, empathy and trust in their working relationships?
Accepting help

Sometimes a colleague may offer you advice or help that you feel is unnecessary. It is best at the time to accept the support graciously. Later, you might discuss with your colleague why they felt it necessary to offer you help. It could be that they were just being kind or perhaps you had genuinely made a mistake without realising it.

Even if you still feel that the support offered was unnecessary, thank your colleague with a smile. People only offer support when they are comfortable and respect a colleague. This shows that you are a valued member of the team.

Taking your place in the team

As a young member of a staff team, you may sometimes find it difficult to establish yourself in the team. Following what you have learnt in this workbook will help you to earn the respect of your more experienced colleagues and help you to feel more confident in your teamwork. As you develop your skills, you will find that you are able to work more effectively with others to offer children and young people a better standard of care.

This workbook will help with the following parts of your qualifications:

- **NVQ in Children’s Care, Learning and Development**
  - Unit 201: Contribute to positive relationships
  - Unit 207: Contribute to the effectiveness of teams
  - Unit 301: Develop and promote positive relationships
  - Unit 338: Develop productive working relationships with colleagues

- **Key skills**
  - Communication: C2.1a and C2.3
  - Working with others: WO2.2

- **Skills for Life**
  - Adult literacy level 2:
    - Speaking and listening
    - Writing

- **Technical certificate**
  - Certificate in Children’s Care, Learning and Development