

Vision

It is possible to observe a baby's interest in bright lights right from birth. The baby will turn towards the light, scan the near environment and at times fix their gaze. A baby looks with interest at the human face and begins to seek eye contact particularly when feeding. The home of a childminder must provide an environment with toys that encourage shape and colour discrimination and activities that are visually interesting. Older children should be provided with items such as magnifying glasses to examine closely the bark on a tree or a leaf formation.

Taste and smell

These two senses change and develop from birth, and increase with maturity and experience. You can help this process by being aware that babies and children are learning to discriminate tastes and smells and will be developing preferences during mealtimes and daily routines, such as favourite foods or hand-washing with soap.

Touch

Babies will explore the world through the sense of touch. Sensations of feeling through touch and contact occur throughout the body.

Girl eating



There are variations in cultural practice regarding the carer's role with regard to physical contact and comfort with babies and children. You should ensure that you are aware of the limits to physical contact that a child's parents might wish you to observe.

It is well known that babies explore the substance of objects by putting them into their mouths. Obviously, this may raise safety issues for the childminder. You need to ensure that objects the baby examines with their mouth are suitable. Older children need experiences of feeling a variety of materials: for example, rough and smooth, hard and soft.

Helpful Hints

Health and safety factors

- Parent's permission needs to be sought regarding food choices as a baby or child may be allergic to some foods.
- Supervision is necessary at all times. During water play a baby must not be left even for one second.
- Some babies and children may react to strong smells.
- You need to be aware that some children can develop an allergic reaction to a range of chemicals such as washing detergents.
- Be alert to poisonous berries and fungi etc. in the garden.

The five senses

The following activities are selected for their potential in developing the five senses at different ages. All the senses become increasingly refined as a child grows up.

Birth to three years

It is fascinating to think that the young baby emerging into the world can learn to walk, run, talk and understand so much about their environment within three years! Babies have a tremendous propensity to learn during these first three years and no opportunity for new areas of learning should be missed.

0–1 month

- The human voice: talking and singing, using a variety of pitch, tone, expression.
- The sound of carer's heartbeat can be comforting.
- Taped womb music can be useful for soothing and promoting sleep.
- Mobiles which stimulate sensitivity to colour and sound can be hung within the baby's field of vision.
- Milk and human contact provide the early experiences of taste and smell.