

Observation and assessment are the cornerstones of quality early years practice. For apprentices working towards Early Years Educator standards, mastering these skills ensures they can support children's <https://www.teachearlyyears.com/product-focus/view/what-should-employers-look-for-in-a-level-3-early-years-educator-apprenticeship> learning and development effectively, aligned with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. However, it's one thing to understand these concepts theoretically and quite another to apply them confidently in busy early years settings.

As an 11-year early years workforce and training lead, I have supported many apprentices, settings, and training providers to embed **quality observations** and **assessment practice** that truly benefits children. Drawing on experience, tools like *progress reviews* and *development coaching*, and insights shared on platforms such as Teach Early Years, Teachwire, and The Childcare Company, I'm sharing practical guidance to ensure apprentices learn observation and assessment properly in their workplace.

Tying Workplace Learning to Daily Practice

The first step is to ensure that learning observation and assessment is directly connected to the apprentice's everyday interactions with children in the setting. This approach makes theory relevant and immediate, boosting confidence and professional growth.

Embed Observation in Routines

Apprentices should be encouraged to weave observation into daily activities, such as:

- Snack times
- Play sessions
- Storytelling
- Outdoor explorations

Developing a habit of purposeful, focused observation helps apprentices notice subtle changes in children's behavior, interests, or wellbeing and gather meaningful evidence of learning.

Apply Child Development Knowledge Within the Room

Connect observations to knowledge about how children develop emotionally, socially, physically, and cognitively at different ages. Being able to relate real-time observations to expected milestones, as well as individual differences, strengthens the quality of assessment.

I've seen this play out countless times: made a mistake that cost them thousands.. Use trusted sources such as Teach Early Years and the the Childcare Company materials which often break down child development in practical terms for early years practitioners. Apprentices will benefit from these to deepen their understanding and apply it in observation records.

Utilising Tools: Progress Reviews and Development Coaching

Tools like **progress reviews** and **development coaching** sessions are invaluable in guiding apprenticeship learning and embedding observation and assessment skills.



Progress Reviews

Regular progress reviews with the apprentice and their workplace supervisor provide structured opportunities to:

- Review observation and assessment records together
- Reflect on strengths and any gaps in practice
- Set specific, measurable learning and development goals
- Discuss how these link to EYFS principles and occupational standards

Ask yourself this: this collaborative approach not only holds apprentices to account but also motivates continuous improvement and professional reflection.

Development Coaching

Coaching sessions support apprentices to go beyond “how” to observe, towards “why” and “what next.” This method fosters deeper thinking about:

- The purpose of observations and assessment within the child’s learning journey
- Identifying needs for additional support or extension activities
- Ensuring observations have enough evidence and cover all development areas

Coaches can leverage resources from Teachwire, which often features coaching tips and innovative strategies to enhance practitioner skills in early years settings.

Ensuring Safeguarding, Wellbeing, Health & Safety, and Risk Management Are Central

High-quality assessment practice must never overlook safeguarding and wellbeing. Apprentices need to understand these responsibilities deeply, as they are fundamental to ethical and professional observation.

Safeguarding

Train apprentices to observe any safeguarding concerns carefully, document them factually, and report through proper channels. Understanding signs of distress, neglect, or abuse and acting promptly is a non-negotiable principle embedded within EYFS and workplace expectations.

Wellbeing

Observation is not just about academic development but also monitoring children's emotional and social wellbeing. Apprentices should use observations to identify children who may be struggling to settle, feeling anxious, or not engaging with peers, ensuring that targeted support is promptly available.

Health, Safety, and Risk Management

Apprentices should develop confidence in spotting physical safety risks in the environment as part of their daily observational duties. This fosters a culture of risk awareness and management, ensuring children have a safe space to learn and explore.

The Childcare Company provides many practical case studies and templates to help apprentices develop skills in documenting these important aspects correctly while maintaining clear, concise evidence in the setting.

Applying EYFS Principles and Professional Practice

Observation and assessment must be firmly grounded in the **EYFS principles**, which emphasize:

- Every child is a unique learner
- Children learn best in enabling environments
- Partnerships with parents and carers are essential

Apprentices should be trained to observe holistically, considering the child's interests, personality, and context, while respecting confidentiality and demonstrating professionalism.

Quality Observations with Evidence in Setting

Ensure apprentices understand what makes an observation "quality": clarity, relevance, chronological detail, and linkage to developmental goals.

Quality Indicator Explanation Practical Tip Focused and Relevant Focus on child's learning, health, or wellbeing. Use observation templates from reputable sources like Teach Early Years. Factual and Objective Describe events without judgment or assumptions. Use clear, descriptive language avoiding vague terms. Linked to EYFS Areas of Learning Connect observations to prime and specific areas. Use EYFS development matters guidance for alignment. Actionable Includes next steps or ideas for adult support. Discuss observation outcomes during progress reviews. Consistent Recording Regularly updated and accessible in setting records. Encourage apprentices to schedule observation time daily.

Using Evidence to Inform Practice

Apprentices should not only collect observations but critically use this evidence to:

- Plan meaningful activities tailored to children's needs
- Identify children who may require additional intervention
- Communicate effectively with parents and other professionals

This reinforces the apprentice's role in driving quality early years practice and meeting the professional standards expected.

Where to Find Additional Support and Resources

Several organisations offer excellent training and resource hubs to support apprentices and settings embed strong observation and assessment practices.

- **Teach Early Years** – Comprehensive guidance and practical tools to develop early years pedagogy and assessment techniques
- **Teachwire** – A valuable source for coaching ideas, professional development tips, and innovative classroom strategies
- **The Childcare Company** – Helpful templates, case studies, and articles to support safeguarding, risk management, and evidencing practice effectively

Summary: Key Steps to Ensure Apprentices Learn Observation and Assessment Properly

1. **Integrate observation into daily routines** so practice becomes second nature and meaningful.
2. **Connect observations to child development knowledge** and EYFS principles.
3. **Use progress reviews and development coaching** to review evidence, reflect, and set goals.
4. **Embed safeguarding, wellbeing, and risk management** responsibilities in all assessments.
5. **Train apprentices to produce quality observations** that provide solid evidence and guide next steps.
6. **Support apprentices with reputable resources** from trusted sector organisations.

By combining workplace learning tied to real practice, guided support using coaching and reviews, and a strong foundation of safeguarding and EYFS-aligned knowledge, apprentices can confidently develop the skills to carry out observation and assessment with professionalism and impact.

This investment in quality early years workforce development benefits not only apprentices but most importantly, the children in their care.

