

## Learning dispositions

Learning dispositions = learning styles = schemas in younger children = the ways different children learn = the characteristics of a child's learning.

Learning dispositions used to feature in PSED in the old (2008) Development Matters guidance if anyone remembers back that far like me! They have always been part of observations and used in planning to make sure we offer activities and experiences we know children will enjoy - but their importance seems to be taking on more prominence for Ofsted and Local Authority advisors.

Learning dispositions are now found in the 'characteristics of effective learning' as part of the Development Matters guidance - I know a lot of childminders struggle with them so I thought I would look at them in a little more detail.

Learning dispositions / characteristics are NOT the same as children's skills and knowledge. I find it useful to think of them as similar to the child's personality - the ways the child learns. Sometimes they can be positive - the child loves playing in groups and learning from friends; sometimes they might sound a bit negative - the child gives up really quickly when faced with a puzzle or problem.

If you think about your own learning dispositions / characteristics and how you tackle challenges, you will find that you are exactly the same! Are you a leader or follower? Do you start new things with enthusiasm or worry about them? Can you explain yourself verbally or do you prefer to write it down? Do you read books or prefer to listen to spoken versions?

A child's learning dispositions / characteristics can be used when you are planning. For example - Child A is an auditory learner, preferring to listen to music using headphones and really enjoying books and other toys that make noises.

Your planning for Child A would be to include different types of stimulation in his environment and to also focus on his love of noise!

Another example -

Child B is learning through a rotation schema. This means that Child B is fascinated with things that go round and round - he can often be seen spinning in circles.

Your planning for Child B will cover all areas of learning and development, as you plan for every child in your provision. However, you would also add some activities for Child B using spinning tops, spinners in the wind etc to follow his particular learning interest / disposition.

I like examples -

Child C gets very upset whenever anything doesn't go exactly to plan... if he cannot do a jigsaw or climb a wall or run as fast as his friends he has a big meltdown.

You will obviously keep planning challenges for Child C but you will also be aware of his disposition to get upset. You will be prepared to give him some extra support when you know he is in a potentially tricky situation.

One more example...

Child D is a daydreamer. She will quite happily sit and look out of the window, lost in her thoughts.

This is how Child D is learning and we must not rush to stop her from being alone or constantly call her over to join in group games. You will include opportunities for group learning in her day but you will respect her learning dispositions and enjoyment of being alone as well.

Noting learning dispositions / characteristics means watching and listening to the child (observing) and thinking about how the child is learning and interacting with the world around him.

Think about the child's -

- Self confidence
- Curiosity
- Ability to communicate in a group
- Level of independence
- Resilience when things go wrong
- Concentration
- Level of optimism
- Ability to take risks
- Enjoyment of sensory experiences
- Ability to listen
- Level of wellbeing in the provision, at home and elsewhere - a child with low wellbeing will not use a range of learning dispositions because he will be too unhappy and disrupted internally to engage with what is going on around him.

### **Developing learning dispositions / characteristics**

Our brains are not fixed - we are constantly learning new things - we learn through the experiences we are offered by others and by our own, self motivated learning. Children learn in the same ways and can be supported to enhance their play experiences.

For example, new learning dispositions can be taught. If you work closely with a child (over a period of time) who cannot sit and concentrate for longer than a few moments the child will learn to concentrate on tasks for longer... if you help a child to share and take turns through lots of modelled play and turn taking activities he will learn acceptable behaviour in group situations... if you praise a child for trying as well as succeeding (and don't make a big thing about failures) he is more likely to want to keep trying...

Learning dispositions cannot be taught in one go! It takes a lot of time, effort and collaboration with home and other settings to support a child to develop the skills they will need to achieve their full potential at school.

However, some learning dispositions will stay with children throughout their lives. Some children might always have a preference for playing on their own even if they are able to tolerate a group with support... some children will always give up on challenges rather than keep trying... some children will be leaders and others will follow... some children will fail if a teacher makes them 'copy from the board' but will succeed if the teacher recognises their preferred learning disposition / characteristic and records the information onto a tape!

This is just like the child's personality - the ways they deal with life. However, while it is up to us to support the child to learn in different ways and we can support dispositions and help to mould a confident, assured child - we cannot change a child's personality!

Childminders also need to remember that we are not solely responsible for every part of the child's learning and development experience. We can only work with them during the time available to us. Their dispositions are also shaped by their home, family, community and other setting lives, over which we have no control.