

# The Use of Graduated Approach and Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) in Inclusive Practice

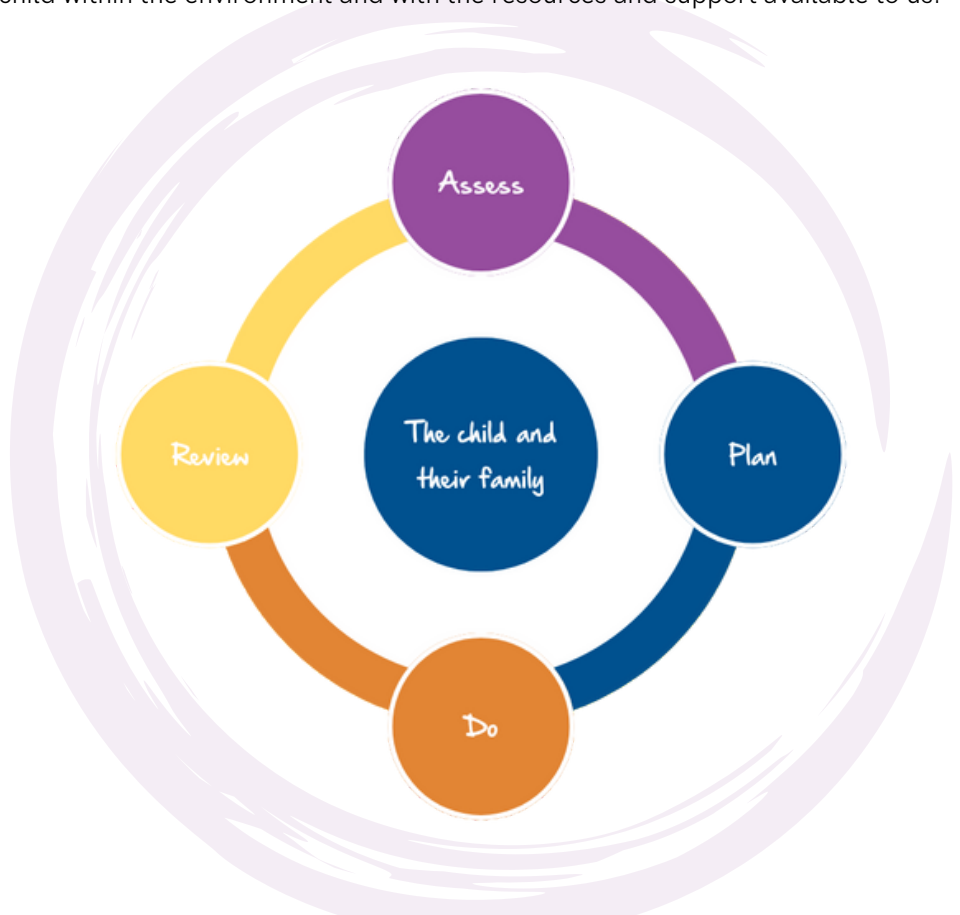


# In this handbook you will find

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# The Graduated Approach

At Dingley's Promise, to enable us to effectively progress children's learning, we use the graduated approach. With regular opportunities for observation and assessment within a cyclical process, we are able to best meet the needs of each child within the environment and with the resources and support available to us.



The graduated approach refers to the ongoing process of support through the Assess, Plan, Do and Review cycle which is used in all settings. All early years providers have an obligation to implement the graduated approach when working with children who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). When supporting children's development, it is important to think reflectively about what opportunities we are providing them and how this is impacting their learning.

For children with SEND who may learn through less common patterns, develop skills in a non linear way, or respond to different teaching methods, it is especially important to reflect on the impact of our teaching. The graduated approach is a simple reflective cycle that supports our thinking around the support we are implementing.

## **Stage 1 - Assess**

Taking what we know about the child is the first step in information gathering to determine current stages of development and what may be suitable for next steps to progress their learning. We must remember that development is not a linear process and each child will develop in a unique way.

The assessment must take into account all of your wider knowledge of the child as a specialist who observes them daily, as well as considering input from all those who work to support the child. It should also consider information provided by the family regarding the child's progress outside the setting. Through these conversations you can build a greater picture of the child's strengths, interests and differences in development.

Assessment comes in many forms; you may use summative assessments at key points of a child's learning period with you to determine how they are working towards anticipated milestones, but it is also likely that every day a child is with you, you are also assessing and adapting your teaching methods to suit the child in the moment.

It is through these more informal assessments that you may initially consider whether a child may require different support, and you may then choose to use an assessment framework to determine where their differences in learning are most prevalent.

Dingley's Promise has developed Assessment Guidance in collaboration with the Department for Education, to help those working with children with a broad range of needs to identify possible emerging SEND needs and to track progress in smaller steps.

## Communication and interaction

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_ My key person is: \_\_\_\_\_  
My date of birth is: \_\_\_\_\_ My communication method: \_\_\_\_\_

| Interaction                                                  | Expressive communication                                                     | Receptive communication                                            | Communication focus                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I show excitement during one-to-one turn taking games        | I respond to interactions initiated by others                                | I can use my method of communication to demonstrate a need or want | I can join in with familiar rhymes, songs or books using my method of communication    |
| E S I                                                        | E S I                                                                        | E S I                                                              | E S I                                                                                  |
| I seek interaction through movements or vocalisations        | I can request more during a highly motivating activity                       | I can communicate my choice between two options                    | I can combine two or three words when communicating, this may include signs or symbols |
| E S I                                                        | E S I                                                                        | E S I                                                              | E S I                                                                                  |
| I demonstrate distress when left alone                       | I can complete a back-and-forth interaction using my method of communication | I can make some non-speech sounds                                  | I am learning new words or visuals or signs regularly                                  |
| E S I                                                        | E S I                                                                        | E S I                                                              | E S I                                                                                  |
| I react in the anticipation of familiar play or interactions | I can initiate the anticipation of others                                    | I can attract attention to express a want or dislike               | I can request support or communicate my need for help safely                           |
| E S I                                                        | E S I                                                                        | E S I                                                              | E S I                                                                                  |

(E) Emerging (1 mark) (S) Supported (2 marks) (I) Independent (3 marks)

## Social and emotional

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_ My key person is: \_\_\_\_\_  
My date of birth is: \_\_\_\_\_ My communication method: \_\_\_\_\_

| Social skills                                                                                              | Regulation                                                  | Awareness of self                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I recognise when others are engaging with the same experience as me                                        | I can initiate interaction with other children              | I can recognise strategies which support my emotional regulation |
| E S I                                                                                                      | E S I                                                       | E S I                                                            |
| I can initiate interaction with a familiar adult                                                           | I am comfortable engaging in a group of more than 2         | I seek comfort when emotionally dysregulated                     |
| E S I                                                                                                      | E S I                                                       | E S I                                                            |
| I look in the direction of the person or object I am interacting with (not necessarily making eye contact) | I can play alongside others or allow others in my space     | I demonstrate my emotions through my behaviour and actions       |
| E S I                                                                                                      | E S I                                                       | E S I                                                            |
| I show awareness of familiar people                                                                        | I can approach an activity where others are already playing | I react to the emotions of those around me                       |
| E S I                                                                                                      | E S I                                                       | E S I                                                            |

(E) Emerging (1 mark) (S) Supported (2 marks) (I) Independent (3 marks)

## Cognition and learning

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_ My key person is: \_\_\_\_\_  
My date of birth is: \_\_\_\_\_ My communication method: \_\_\_\_\_

| Play skills                                                                                     | Exploratory skills                                                             | Problem solving                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I can co-operate with a familiar person when playing, for example rolling a ball back and forth | I can focus on an activity of my own choosing for up to 2 minutes              | I show awareness of routines through reaction to visual and audio stimuli |
| E S I                                                                                           | E S I                                                                          | E S I                                                                     |
| I can copy the actions of others                                                                | I link ideas during play such as putting a teddy in a car and pushing it along | I can remember where preferred objects are and seek these out             |
| E S I                                                                                           | E S I                                                                          | E S I                                                                     |
| I explore new objects with interest                                                             | I can play with items in different ways                                        | I can look for objects placed near or around me                           |
| E S I                                                                                           | E S I                                                                          | E S I                                                                     |
| I recognise familiar objects and the joy they bring                                             | I repeat actions demonstrating cause and effect                                | I use my different senses to explore new objects and environments         |
| E S I                                                                                           | E S I                                                                          | E S I                                                                     |

(E) Emerging (1 mark) (S) Supported (2 marks) (I) Independent (3 marks)

## Sensory and physical

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_ My key person is: \_\_\_\_\_  
My date of birth is: \_\_\_\_\_ My communication method: \_\_\_\_\_

| Mobility                                                              | Life skills                                                                | Sensory                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| I can crawl, shuffle or roll from one place to another                | I can move in a variety of ways on two feet, with or without a support aid | I can drink from an open top cup without support           |
| E S I                                                                 | E S I                                                                      | E S I                                                      |
| I can move my arms or legs across my body, using an adult support aid | I can move around a room by cruising or using an adult support aid         | I can feed myself with some success using hands or cutlery |
| E S I                                                                 | E S I                                                                      | E S I                                                      |
| I can grasp objects within my reach                                   | I can put weight through my feet, trying new foods during mealtimes        | I co-operate with dressing                                 |
| E S I                                                                 | E S I                                                                      | E S I                                                      |
| I can move parts of my body in response to stimuli                    | I can sit using appropriate support                                        | I can open my mouth for feeding or drinking                |
| E S I                                                                 | E S I                                                                      | E S I                                                      |

(E) Emerging (1 mark) (S) Supported (2 marks) (I) Independent (3 marks)

## Stage 2 - Plan

Some children will show differences whilst with you in the provision whilst others may demonstrate further progress in their home environment, therefore we must ensure we are collating all points of view. Developing trusting relationships and working closely with the family are critical to successful next steps planning.

Should you have other professionals involved with the child, it is also key to involve them in any assessment review meetings or ask for an up-to-date report sharing their view on the child's development and learning at this time. All this information will enable you to set out relevant actions and support to continuation of the child's positive learning journey.

During this meeting, you should be discussing:

- The outcomes they are seeking
- The interventions and support which will be put in place
- The anticipated impact on progress and development
- A clear date for the next review

Plans should take into account the views of the child and they should include their interests and patterns of play.

Within the assessment toolkit, the planning stage is documented via a SAPP (Support and Achievement Play Plan) and Smart Goals.

SAPPs have long term goals to aspire to and from these, shorter term goals 'SMART targets' are set, these are to be worked on termly. These goals need to be realistic and achievable and take into account other goals set by supporting professionals.

## Support and achievement play plan

|               |                |             |                                  |
|---------------|----------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| Child's name: | Date of birth: | Funding:    | I have a one-page profile: Y / N |
| Setting:      | SENCo:         | Key person: |                                  |

Areas of need (please identify primary and secondary needs)

|                                |                         |                       |                       |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Communication and interaction: | Cognition and learning: | Social and emotional: | Sensory and physical: |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|

|                                 |               |        |             |
|---------------------------------|---------------|--------|-------------|
| I attend another setting: Y / N | Setting name: | SENCo: | Key person: |
|---------------------------------|---------------|--------|-------------|

The professionals supporting me are:

| Service | Professional | Job Role | Contact details |
|---------|--------------|----------|-----------------|
|         |              |          |                 |
|         |              |          |                 |
|         |              |          |                 |
|         |              |          |                 |
|         |              |          |                 |
|         |              |          |                 |
|         |              |          |                 |
|         |              |          |                 |

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## My SMART goals

|              |
|--------------|
| Plan number: |
|--------------|

| Date                      | Goal | How you can support me | Review               |
|---------------------------|------|------------------------|----------------------|
|                           |      |                        |                      |
| Parent sign and date:     |      |                        | Date:                |
| Key person sign and date: |      |                        | SENCo sign and date: |
| Date                      | Goal | How you can support me | Review               |
|                           |      |                        |                      |
| Parent sign and date:     |      |                        | Date:                |
| Key person sign and date: |      |                        | SENCo sign and date: |
| Date                      | Goal | How you can support me | Review               |
|                           |      |                        |                      |
| Parent sign and date:     |      |                        | Date:                |
| Key person sign and date: |      |                        | SENCo sign and date: |
| Date                      | Goal | How you can support me | Review               |
|                           |      |                        |                      |
| Parent sign and date:     |      |                        | Date:                |
| Key person sign and date: |      |                        | SENCo sign and date: |

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## **Stage 3 - Do**

The Do stage is where you implement the planned support elements, to gain a greater understanding of how the child learns. During this stage you consider whether there is a need to change your strategies to ensure that the support meets their individual needs.

You must ensure any consistent strategies are being shared with all who work with the child, not just the SENDCo and key person, as the child will thrive in a consistent environment. If you have outlined specific resources to support the child, these must be made available and used regularly. For example if the child responds well to the use of sand-timers, these must be available and used consistently at every session.

Consistent support works best when the entire team are equally committed to making it happen, therefore communication amongst the team is key. This avoids disruption if the child's key person is for some reason not present, as other staff can use the detailed planning resources to implement the learning activities.

### **Recording the activities**

The learning activities can be recorded in a number of ways including:

- handwritten notes
- online learning journals
- capturing on video

When observing children with SEND, it is important to focus on the detail and your knowledge of the unique expressions which communicate the child's receptiveness and enjoyment, as these may be subtle.

## **Stage 4 - Review**

The SENDCo should support the key person in assessing the impact of the interventions and provide further support and advice on how to put them in place. The SENDCo oversees and coordinates, but it's the educators who need to be confident in delivering the support.

You should outline a formal review date for all support plans for a child. It is likely that you will also review in the moment as you are implementing support, considering how impactful what you are doing is and noting whether the child is or is not responding to your strategies.

## **Responding to outcomes**

If a child is making progress at faster rates than anticipated, it is important to bring review meetings forward, to discuss how you can further extend or challenge the child, or whether there are other areas of support that require focus.

It is also important to have conversations when you feel strategies are having no impact on a child. It may mean that you set target expectations unrealistically and need to break down the steps further, so that the child can make smaller steps of progress. Or that the method of support does not suit the child and needs adapting or adjusting to better meet their interests or learning styles.

Parents and other professionals should always be involved in reviewing a child's progress and after each review there should be a further set of anticipated outcomes for the child to work towards.

The Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle of support should be regularly repeated with parents to facilitate the best possible progress for the child and to ensure that the support is still relevant to their needs and learning styles.



## Case Study

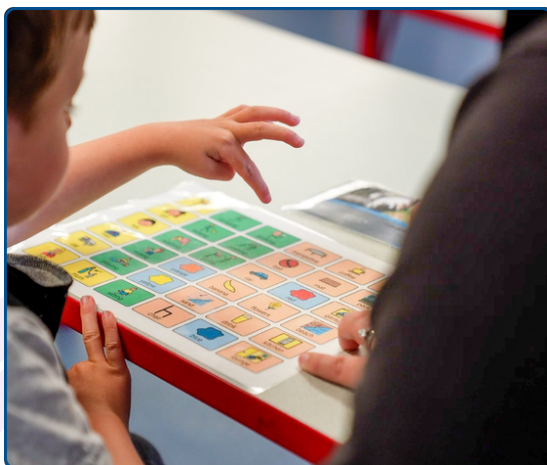
Jimmy is 3 years old and has been at Dingley's Promise since November 2024. He is awaiting an autism assessment. His main challenges are social communication, self help skills and regulation.

To assess starting points, we completed the DfE/Dingley's Promise Assessment Toolkit for Jimmy, this reflected that within 'Communication and Interaction' he can communicate when supported, but had very limited 'independent' communication skills. It shows that Jimmy responds better to a highly motivating activity and is more confident when activities are modelled to him first and he can replicate them.

On observation of his communication during snack time, it was clear that Jimmy required a form of communication board to support his ability to express his wants and needs. Without this, he became disorientated and frustrated and was not able to self-regulate, which could result in his avoidance of snack time. It could also create unwanted routines, which impact on his broader health and wellbeing, as well as his ability to focus his attention.

To plan next steps, we documented the observed responses and used our broader understanding of Jimmy's stage of development, to complete a Support and Achievement Play Plan. By completing this process, we look at short term actions, how we know they are being achieved and the actions and support strategies we will use for further development. We will use these later in the Assess Plan Do Review process, to assess the progress towards the desired outcomes.

Following this initial stage of observation, the possibility of using a visual communication aid with Jimmy was discussed with his mum and the other team members. This was important to gain a consensus that this was the right support and the most effective type of communication aid to use.



It was agreed that we would now use a communication board for snack time at first, as food is a high motivator for him. We would observe the effectiveness of this approach before applying other communication boards to different activities and transitions during the day.

As a result of this observation and discussion, we planned to introduce a communication board with a supporting adult modelling its use, over the period of a few weeks until Jimmy was confident to use it independently.

Jimmy watched intently at the start where the fingers were placed and gradually copied actions to make choices of food items. This demonstrated that he is able to move to incorporate 'I want' and attempted verbal sound to develop his understanding of sentence development and structure. The introduction of the communication board was successful and could now be built on.

During the review process, we updated the assessment toolkit 'I can' statements, to reflect the progress made within Communication and Interaction. These demonstrated that Jimmy had made progress through his ability to select a choice of two options, he is beginning to combine two signs or symbols together 'I want' and 'Food'.

We recorded the assessment and observation of development and shared these with the family on a regular basis, as well as with other supporting professionals as relevant.

We also arranged a meeting with the parents to discuss the progress we have seen, and any other successes they are having at home, before moving on to planning the next steps of support that we all agree to put into place.

The graduated approach needs to be a repeated cycle to ensure complete awareness of changing levels of need and effective response to these, which in turn ensures consistent progress.

The power of the graduated approach lies in the ability to reflect and adapt to make the environment and teaching practices accessible for the child's needs. It encourages you to think about the child's strengths and interests and utilise these when planning your curriculum and how each child will best access it.

Combining the graduated approach with strong ordinarily available provision will create an environment in which children with SEND can be supported and included with a mainstream setting.

## Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are positive measures settings take to enable a child with SEND to participate in nursery and their educational journey. The term 'reasonable adjustment' applies specifically to changes made to support children with a disability, but it is often practically implemented to support all children with SEND.

As a setting you have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of children within your setting, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

The first requirement involves altering or adjusting provisions, criteria or practices, which encompasses mainly the way things are done within the setting.

This is largely addressed through effective Ordinarily Available Provision, however, you must also consider if the needs of a child are being met within your standard practices including:

- ratios
- rooms and staffing arrangements
- quiet spaces for children
- key person allocation
- visual aids
- training of you and your team

The second requirement is a duty to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of the building. You may need to build or purchase a ramp to support accessibility, adjust lighting to enhance visibility, or reduce flickering or ensure signage is clear. It is not sufficient to consider just the entrance and exit options, think about the whole environment and whether it is fully accessible for all children.

The third requirement is to provide auxiliary aids and services which includes the provision of equipment, advice or support. You can gain further advice from the specialist health professionals working with a child, about which equipment would be beneficial and where this can be sourced, this may also include the provision of one-to-one support. It is important to consider whether all staff know how to operate any specialist equipment.

Reasonable adjustments can be transformational to children with SEND, particularly those with physical needs. Children's needs change during their time with us, it is therefore vital that adjustments are made regularly as part of the graduated approach. It is important to reflect on your learning environment and use local authority ordinarily available provision, to audit play spaces and help plan areas of development.

It is also important to consider the individual needs of children, or cohorts of children, as this will also influence your environment. Any enhancements you make to your environment will benefit all children and don't need to cost lots of money. If purchases are identified as necessary, the setting can make use of additional funding such as EYPP and DAF.

# Ordinarily Available Provision

Ordinarily available provision, or 'OAP' should be the core of your standard practice benefitting all children and ensuring that as many as possible can access their entitlement. As part of your application of the OAP requirements, you should make any reasonable adjustments that may be necessary to deliver your universal offer.

Ordinarily available provision should consist of a range of strategies or interventions, which when paired with high quality teaching, will have a positive impact on the learning and development of all children, but particularly those with SEND. This may include teaching methods or actions of educators to promote engagement and interaction, considerations for the environment to reduce distraction, or being sensitive to sensory needs and making adjustments accordingly.

Local authorities should all have an OAP document. These are often directed more towards schools than early years, however some do have specific early years OAPs or elements which are transferrable to early years settings. It is important that you know where to find yours and take time to consider how you are delivering what is expected within your provision.

## Why have an OAP?

- The SEND Code of Practice says every local authority must set out what it expects to be available, including approaches to teaching, curriculum and environment. Therefore it is their legal responsibility to present this information to providers.
- Each local authority's local offer sets out in one place the information about provision they expect to be available across education and health and social care for children and young people in their area who have SEN or are disabled. This includes those who do not have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans.

- Whilst a local offer outlines what is available within areas and bordering local authorities, an ordinarily available provision document also demonstrates how this will be available. It should share expected processes, such as the graduated approach, strategies of support to be used in practice and anything else they feel relevant to the effective delivery of high quality practice.

### Who benefits from an OAP?

- **Families** - knowledge is power and understanding the support they can expect provides reassurance.
- **Settings** - strategies to support early identification will build knowledge and confidence in educators, and helps to clarify which activities are standard and will not receive extra funding. It also states which may be supported by the local authority, reducing unnecessary and time-consuming funding applications.
- **Schools** - a consistent approach improves the effectiveness of the information shared, creating more effective transitions.
- **Local authorities** - The documentation of applications and reports help to hold services to account for the standards of delivery and inclusion. A clear expectation on settings, allows the local authority to hold them to account and drive inclusive practice across the early years in their area. It also enables them to see which settings have really strong inclusive practice in line with the OAP, and they can then offer extra support as necessary if to settings with large numbers of children with SEND.
- **Health services** - The document clarifies the expectations of what will be done to support a child before specialist intervention is accessed.

## What can be found in an OAP?

### Considerations for effective inclusion

#### Policy and procedure

- Legal rights and requirements
- The graduated approach
- Inclusion and/or admissions policy

#### Strategies and support

- Role of the practitioner, such as: expectation of universal high quality teaching, consistent approach across teams, awareness of a range of communication strategies, adaptive teaching approach, use of now and next
- Role of the environment, such as: visuals, awareness of sensory input and sensory needs, physical layout of environment to enable access

#### Further support and linking with others

- How to contact your local early years/inclusion/SEND team
- Local referral systems, such as: speech and language therapy, occupational therapy
- Needs specific charity support
- Local authority training available

A number of local authorities focus on a **Universal**, **Targeted** and **Specialist** approach with clear links to early years practice.



- Universal - your everyday provision which promotes inclusion. This could include a labelled environment, educators using a range of communication strategies, a clear layout which is generally accessible and consideration of the sensory input into the environment.
- Targeted - the support strategies you put together for a specific child on their SAPP and My SMART Goals. These may be particular experiences they participate in, regulation strategies to be used in certain scenarios or adaptations to set up, such as bringing sand trays to a lower height, the floor, or raising an activity to promote standing.

- Specialist - these may be support strategies you implement with the aid of an external service, such as speech and language, or the introduction of a standing frame or chair from an occupational therapist.

### **How does OAP link with the DfE assessment guidance?**

It is useful to link to documents and services which can further support your planning such as the DfE Assessment Guidance and Toolkit. Also local authority service contacts and local charities who can offer guidance and support such as autism and speech and language charities, as well as those supporting specific conditions which settings may have limited information on.

OAP will outline a clear and consistent approach to supporting children with universal, targeted and specialist provision. Part of this provision may involve utilising assessment tools which are relevant and accessible for the individual child. OAP aims to ensure simple and achievable support is readily available for all children should they start the setting with clear SEND needs, or have emerging needs once they have started. Utilising the assessment tools will enable you to establish the areas of need a child has and to seek support from your OAP document to ensure you have made certain considerations, and implemented certain strategies to begin their process of support.

### **As an early years educator, what should my next steps be?**

- Locate your local authority OAP, it may go by another name such as a 'graduated approach toolkit'.
- Review your setting practice to ensure all OAP is offered and your team understand its importance.
- Use the OAP to ensure your funding applications do not include anything considered 'expected' as part of your core delivery.
- Share the OAP with families to build their knowledge and confidence.
- If you can't locate it, or don't feel confident applying it, contact your early years team and share your thoughts with them, outlining the importance of the OAP.

With a good understanding of the graduated approach and it's effective implementation, by continually reviewing your settings reasonable adjustments, and reflecting regularly on your local OAP document, settings can be confident of their inclusive approach and will see significant developmental progress as a result.



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