

# All about... children's values

The values nurtured in the early years shape how children approach the wider world later in life. But which values are beneficial and how do we balance different interests? By *Marion Dowling*

PHOTOGRAPHS AT TRIMDON GRANGE INFANT AND NURSERY SCHOOL, BY GUZELIAN



In August, the then new education secretary Nicky Morgan made her first public statement. 'One of the most important roles of the education system is that it should prepare young people for life in modern Britain. I am clear that public money should not be used to support any school or early years provider that does not support this aim.'

It was made apparent that local authorities would remove funding from any early years setting that failed to meet this requirement. This followed an earlier and similar

requirement statement made to schools.

On the face of it, this declaration seems straightforward and not one to question. It arose following the 'Trojan Horse' scandal in some Birmingham schools – when, it was alleged, hard-line Islamists were planning to take over the governance of these settings – and is intended to prevent extremism in schools.

'British values' as set out in the Government's Prevent strategy involve democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and

**Learning to take turns and share are included in the Department for Education's early years values**

beliefs. These values apply to all school sectors. The Department for Education suggests that values in early years might be interpreted as 'learning right from wrong; learning to take turns and share; and challenging negative views and stereotypes'.

These early years values, of course, are stated in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), but here I want to explore values in a broader sense:

- What does the term values mean?
- How do we comply with the Government mandate but also include other universal values that children should acquire? ➤

## EYFS BEST PRACTICE

- Essentially, what values support young children's well-being and learning and help them to grow up as responsible and caring citizens in the world that awaits them?

### WHAT ARE VALUES AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

*'To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society'*  
– US president Theodore Roosevelt

Values arise from principles that influence and direct our behaviour. Although many of us don't have values at the forefront of our minds, inevitably we all have beliefs, prejudices and views that contribute to the ways in which we behave and live with others. Well thought out values help to steer our path through life.

Current values held in society seem to centre narrowly on achievement and earning well.

Those who gain good grades, frequently enter higher education and work in important, well-paid jobs are esteemed by others and often affect (for better or worse) our own self-esteem.

Other values seem to be less evident, although being able, successful and financially comfortable doesn't

necessarily lead to a happy and fulfilling life.

We may be guided in the values we adopt through religious or humanist precepts or by political affiliation, but essentially we must decide for ourselves what we stand for. It can be useful to take time to consider what is important and non-negotiable in our lives. For those of us who work with young children, our values will influence our role in supporting their development.

### Reflective activity

Working with a colleague:

- consider and jot down five or six of your most important values
- share these with your colleague
- give practical examples of how you demonstrate values in day-to-day life at work and in the home.

### PROMOTING UNIVERSAL VALUES IN CHILDREN

Values do not grow by themselves, and perhaps the most important task for those of us who live and work with children is to help shape and foster their growing ideas and beliefs.

### Positive influences

Strong, desirable values are instilled through a number of ways.

**Stories and play can help children make sense of situations**



1. Parents and other significant close adults who have warm, attached relationships with children.

A child who feels loved and cared for will develop and grow in a climate of security, develop self-confidence and look to close adults, who they want to be like.

A loving attachment means laying down boundaries for a child's behaviour. Children need these parameters in order to know where they stand





and this helps them to feel safe. Gentle and reasonable discipline should not restrict but rather be the precursor to self-discipline.

**2.** Close adults modelling desirable social, moral and cultural values rather than simply talking about them.

Young children learn a great deal initially through imitation. As Kellmer Pringle pointed out, it is what we really are and how we behave which matter, not what we say or believe we say<sup>1</sup>.

**3.** First-hand experiences. We know that children learn all sorts of things in situations that make sense to them. Any nursery and school programme should make the most of events that occur in daily activities and routines.

It is by helping to comfort a child who has grazed their knees or being generous to a younger child who has interrupted an activity that children learn how to behave. Discussion is also important. Insightful practitioners will skilfully turn a minor catastrophe into a lesson on values.

**4.** Second-hand experiences. Stories, screen-based media and popular culture are also potent influences in helping children make sense of situations. Through play, young children blend their understandings of reality with flights of imagination. Young boys at age four and five vigorously replay their versions of superheroes, goodies and baddies.

At this age children imagine how it might feel to be strong and powerful and acquire courage to overcome their fears by taking on superpowers. This play offers great scope to talk about the power of being kind, gentle and generous rather than violent and aggressive.

## CASE STUDY: WANG HOI

Four-year-old Wang Hoi was waited on heavily by his three older sisters at home. They tidied his toys and clothes and responded to all his demands. At nursery, however, Wang Hoi was encouraged to be self-sufficient, something he found very difficult, and resisted all attempts to encourage him to fend for himself.

When changing clothes to go outside, Wang Hoi would dangle his wellington boots in front of an adult. He also became angry and confused when asked to tidy away equipment and started to hide at tidy-up time.

When his key person discussed Wang Hoi's behaviour with his mother, they became aware of each other's different values and expectations. After that, they agreed that Wang Hoi should be helped to conform to nursery practices and his family would encourage him to 'do as his friends did'. However, his mother insisted that at home Wang Hoi would remain the 'little prince' and his sisters would continue to do things for him.

### COMMENT

The nursery and the family respected each other's viewpoint, although initially Wang Hoi found it difficult to adjust to these dual expectations. However, he carefully observed what other children did.

Three weeks later, Wang Hoi joyfully pulled one of the helpers to show her how he had stacked bricks away. After that, he appeared to enjoy the nursery routines and took great pleasure in learning how to cope for himself. Wang Hoi's mother laughed when she heard this and reported that his dependent behaviour was unchanged at home.

To encourage parents to understand and respect the values in the setting:

- ask parents what sort of a person they want their child to become during their time with you
- make clear the Government mandate on British values and how you meet this requirement
- suggest that they view your statement on values on the website or give them a printed copy of the statement (translated in different languages)
- keep parents informed through a newsletter of the current value that is being promoted with children and ask them to reinforce this at home
- invite parents to informal key groups/ assemblies to share in value-based discussions
- provide a book list that focuses on values and have these on loan to parents (see box on page 26 for ideas).

**5.** Reinforcing children's positive behaviour. All of us respond to encouragement; we should recognise when children show positive values such as honesty, helpfulness or patience and affirm this behaviour.

**6.** Working in groups. For years, we have accepted the need for children to be with other children, to play together and learn how to live together.



**Consider and jot down five or six of your most important values**

Now we recognise how important children's relationships are in assisting their thinking.

There are great opportunities for introducing and promoting values informally and in structured groups. Younger children in the EYFS will work with their key person in small groups; those in the Reception class will have assemblies. These occasions may be used to introduce a value, making it relevant and meaningful for the age-group and encouraging children to think how they can apply the value in their lives.

**7.** Encouraging children to be self-reflective. We should model values and steer children to adopt them, but can't force them to comply. While young infants will be keen to imitate close adults, the ultimate aim is for every child to learn to think for themselves and adopt their own value base.

### Negative influences

Desirable values are undermined when:

- 1.** Adult-child relationships are weak. If a new parent is unwell, suffering from mental issues or simply ➤

inexperienced, it can be a barrier to developing a close attachment with their child. Lacking that loving bond, a young child feels unloved, rootless and insecure. This is no basis to learn about positive principles of behaviour. **2.** Children are exposed to messages of consumerism and have too many material possessions.

The huge emphasis on acquiring goods can massively distract adults and children from valuing and enjoying the less tangible aspects of life. Busy parents, sometimes only too aware of the lack of time they spend with their children, try to compensate by buying material possessions, be they sweets or other goodies advertised by the media as essential to make every little girl or boy happy.

These good intentions may actually deprive a child of learning the important lesson in life of doing without. Asha Phillips, an experienced child psychiatrist, suggests that 'without this ability, the child will always be at the mercy of wants that can never all be satisfied. Having and discarding possessions easily also robs him of the feeling that anything is special'<sup>2</sup>.

**3.** Children have poor self-esteem, are anxious or angry. Children who have little regard for themselves or who live under stress are not in a position to think for themselves. It takes confidence to consider and adjust to a new idea; these children avoid the challenge of uncertainty and stick to the familiar where they feel relatively safe and know what to expect.

They do not question the behaviour of close adults who may be punitive, over-controlling and prejudiced, and children are at risk of being influenced by these negative values.

**4.** Children receive conflicting messages. One of the most confusing things for a young child must be to have regular contact with close adults who have different or shifting values. The former can happen when the home and setting/school have markedly different expectations or when the two sets of adults are not of one mind.

The latter is most likely to arise when adults act pragmatically, rather than considering what sense a child will make of the behaviour. It is all too easy when working under pressure to overlook one child hitting another or grabbing possessions for themselves. In more relaxed circumstances, close adults may intervene and consider



the consequences of their response for the child's future behaviour.

In cases where there is no single clear message about what is acceptable, children may eventually adopt double standards as they learn to use different behaviours approved in each situation. This, however, is no foundation for children to start to internalise moral values for themselves.

Strong and consistent values modelled and encouraged by close adults help protect children from peer pressure and temptations of consumerism.

### Reflective activity

Consider children in your setting and the factors, both positive and negative, that have contributed to their values.

### MEETING OFSTED REQUIREMENTS FOR BRITISH VALUES

From next month (January 2015), Ofsted will have powers to inspect providers and report on how British values are promoted both in schools and in under-fives provision.

There will be further clarification of Ofsted requirements, but in the meantime providers should consider ways in which they demonstrate that 'British values' are being promoted, as well as other desirable values. The following suggestions provide a good starting point.

### Provide public statements on your website

- Include a mission statement on your website about British values. This might be adapted from the Government wording, as follows: 'this setting/school actively promotes the fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual

respect and tolerance of those with different faiths or beliefs. These are interpreted for our youngest children as learning right from wrong; learning to take turns and share; and challenging negative views and stereotypes. 'We do not promote views and theories that are contrary to established scientific or historical evidence and explanations.'

- Highlight where British values are reflected in your personal, social and emotional development (PSE) policy and statements on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Publish a planned rota of universal values (including British values) promoted in the setting. A new value may be introduced and discussed every two weeks or so in small key groups or in class and school assemblies. In nurseries, these are best introduced using artefacts, stories and books (see box, page 26). The value should be offered in ways suitable to the stage of development of the children and always invite them to offer their views.



- Publish details of how British values – for example, democracy and the rule of law – are visible in the curriculum: through clear and negotiated boundaries of behaviour, and through the elections to a school council, or in nurseries by children exercising choices in their play and making shared decisions about use of resources.

### Establish and publish a shared view of universal values in your setting

- Consult children about their values: provide a list of desirable universal values, help children to understand what each one means and ask them to select those that they believe are most important (see box below).
- Ask each staff member to select up to 12 universal values (including British values) that they consider critical to introduce and promote with young children.
- Share and discuss these at a staff meeting, asking for examples of how each value is demonstrated in daily practice.
- Aim to compile an agreed and manageable list of values, which takes account of children's views.
- Publish this list on the website and review the values regularly to check that they are visible in the setting.

### Highlight responsibilities of leaders and managers

Ofsted will judge leadership and management by how well they ensure a broad and balanced curriculum which actively promotes British values. Senior staff should, therefore:

- monitor all subjects in schools to check that British values are strongly endorsed in the curriculum content and in methods of teaching – for example, that children understand what democracy involves: they learn about the need for tolerance and social equality and recognise the negative effect of any form of discrimination and segregation.
- monitor all areas of learning to check that British values are strongly endorsed in the EYFS – for example, in Personal, Social and Emotional Development, particularly in making relationships, managing their feelings and understanding appropriate behaviour in groups;



and in Understanding the World (People and Communities), particularly in observing the similarities and differences of the people in their families and communities that broadens children's horizons to value cultural and religious diversity

- address the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and ensure staff are familiar with them – even though an equal opportunities policy is no longer a legal requirement. Broadly, the act makes staff consider all the main aspects that lead to discrimination and exclusion, including age, sexual orientation, gender change, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity.

### Children's relationships with each other are important in assisting their thinking

Ofsted continues to monitor how inclusive settings and schools are in meeting children's individual needs.

In registered early years settings, inspectors consider 'how well practitioners demonstrate high expectations, enthuse, engage and motivate children' and assess 'how well settings help all children to make effective progress'<sup>3</sup>.

In schools, the inspection framework stresses the 2010 Equality Act when assessing whether a school and its governors 'promote tolerance and respect for people of all faiths (or with no faith), cultures and lifestyles'<sup>4</sup>.

By continuing to have and apply an equal opportunities policy, schools and early years settings will be supported to meet the requirements ➤

## VALUES IN PRACTICE: THINKING HOW TO BEHAVE

Values are abstract, often complex, concepts. So young children need to recognise practical examples of what they involve and how each value can steer their behaviour.

Practitioners should introduce every value through a story or an example of a person's behaviour in daily life. These examples will vary according to the child's level of understanding. Children should also be encouraged to offer their own examples and think carefully about how they have demonstrated the value.

For example, four-year-old Troy said he knew that it was important to tell the truth and had admitted to his dad that he had picked daffodils in their neighbour's garden. Troy understood that this was stealing.

In the case of older children, having shared and discussed the values, they should be encouraged to state which of the values they consider are most important. Some examples of these could be:

- being honest
- being brave
- being friendly
- trusting people
- appreciating what we have
- keeping on trying
- being kind
- understanding that sometimes we are different and sometimes the same
- sharing and taking turns
- taking responsibility
- being fair.



### REFERENCES

1. Mia Kellmer-Pringle (1974). *The Needs of Children*, Hutchinson
2. Asha Phillips (2008). *Saying No*. Faber and Faber, p138
3. Ofsted (2014). *Evaluation Schedule for Inspections of Registered Early Years Provision*, HMCI.
4. Ofsted (2014) *Ofsted School Inspection Handbook*. September, paragraph 152
5. 'East Anglian Patriots anti mosque demonstration in Lincoln', *Lincolnshire Echo* (2014)

of the Equality Act, Ofsted expectations and demonstrate that they promote British values.

### APPROACHING SENSITIVE TOPICS

A current pressing concern is that Muslim values and British values are often seen as being at odds with one another and there are fears in parts of the country that the Muslim culture is becoming dominant. For example:

- the East Anglian Patriots have protested strongly about plans for a mosque to be built in Lincolnshire<sup>5</sup>.
- some Muslim communities seem to be setting up their own justice systems including Sharia courts.

Conversely, many moderate Muslims feel powerless and depressed about being under pressure and suspicion as a result of conflicts in Syria and Iraq and atrocities carried out by extremist groups. British Muslims find it difficult when the media focuses on what makes them different.

Without trivialising these issues, when working as models for young children we must concentrate on similarities between the two cultures and how they represent universal values. We should not seek to demonstrate that British values are superior to desirable values from other cultures.

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams supports this view and recently quoted a heartening

example of coming together in Birmingham where a local parish and mosque combined to provide family services and youth activities.

We could start with helping our children to gradually become familiar with aspects of Muslim life and what Muslim children are taught to value.

This is, of course, much easier in mixed communities where children from different cultures naturally rub along together. Nothing can substitute direct contact, but all children need to understand how other people live. It is during the early years, when children are naturally curious and receptive to new ideas, that these understandings should take root.

### WORKING WITH PARENTS

If we accept that initially children derive their values, attitudes and behaviour from the adults closest to them, then dialogue with parents is hugely important.

Increasingly, practitioners respect the fact that parents may have clear views about how they raise their child. Consequently, the ultimate aim is for parents, practitioners and teachers to share an understanding of the desirable universal values that children should develop. However, we need to recognise that sometimes children face dual expectations. ■

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## BOOKS: REFLECTING VALUES

### Moral, social and cultural stories that reflect values for young children

- *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae and Guy Parker-Rees – at the Jungle Dance, the other animals jeer at Gerald the giraffe's attempts at joining in, but there is one who believes in him.
- *The Lion Who Wanted to Love* by Giles Andreae and David Wojtowycz – Leo would rather hug animals and be their friend than eat them. But will his friends help him when he has to leave the pride and finds himself in trouble?
- *Something Else* by Kathryn Cave and Chris Riddell – a small creature, 'Something Else', does his best to join in, but he is different and no matter how he tries he just doesn't belong. Then Something turns up and wants to be friends. But Something Else isn't sure he's like him at all.
- *Laura's Secret* by Klaus Baumgart – Laura and brother Tommy want to fly their home-made kite as high as the stars. But will they be brave and bold enough to ignore the horrible boys who laugh at it? See also *Laura's Star – Friends Forever*, in which lonely Laura rescues and mends a fallen star.
- *The Table Where Rich People Sit* by Byrd Baylor and Peter Parnall – a girl discovers that her impoverished family is rich in the things that matter in life, especially being outdoors and experiencing nature.
- *One Grain of Rice* by Demi – an Indian raja believes he is wise and fair, but every year keeps nearly all the people's rice for himself. Then a village girl devises a clever plan.
- *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson – a quick-witted mouse sees off his predators. See also *The Gruffalo's Child*, where baby mouse disobeys her father's warnings and ventures out into the snow.
- *What If Everyone Did That?* by Ellen Javernick – imagine what might happen if everybody broke the rules.
- *Assalamu Alaikum* by MS Kayani – join Abdullah and Aminah as they show how Muslims meet and share their daily lives with family, friends and neighbours. Aimed at children aged three and above.
- *The Story of Ferdinand* by Munro Leaf – a timeless classic, in which little bull Ferdinand likes to sit and smell the flowers. Then he is picked for the bullfights in Madrid.
- *Joseph and his Coat of Many Colours* by Sasha Morton – Joseph's brothers are jealous of the coat given to him by their father, so they sell him into slavery.