



Blog

Supporting staff well-being through trusting relationships *Staff need to feel safe to thrive*



Marion Samuel is the Head of Manor Park Children's Centre and Lead for A Bright Start Stronger Practice Hub at Sheringham Nursery School. She has worked in early years for over 30 years as a teacher, children's centre lead and Assistant Head in a primary school. Marion has a special interest in supporting practitioners to develop high quality early years practice through training and mentoring.

Having been a leader in the Early Years for over 30 years, I think a strong team needs a leader who prioritises building trusting relationships within the team. This will help staff to feel safe and respected at work.

These 4 points are fundamental to this:

- ***Practitioners need to know their leader will support them in difficult times.***

For instance, if the staff member has a temporary crisis at home allow them to leave early or arrive a bit later for a short period.

- ***Practitioners need to know that their leader will be honest and challenge them***

For instance, if a staff member is not meeting deadlines remind them of expectations and that it is their responsibility to ask for support if they need it.

- ***Leaders need to emphasise that most mistakes are useful learning opportunities***

This takes the pressure off having to 'get it right'. For this to work, the leader must acknowledge their own mistakes and show that they learn from them.

- ***Staff should have access to some form of supervision or work discussion.***

This includes leaders. Here they can talk through any concerns about the children and the families they work with and their practice.

As well as these 4 underlying principles, there are some simple, everyday strategies that help staff feel valued and positive about their work.

Strategies that nurture the wellbeing of staff:

- Be present in the setting, proactively giving positive feedback.
- Let the staff know a bit about yourself: this can help strengthen the relationship. However, it is important that you maintain your privacy and share only what you feel comfortable with.
- Encourage open communication. For example, be available to staff on a daily basis and value their opinions on aspects of practice.
- When introducing change, be aware that some staff will find it difficult. Being mindful of the way you introduce change will avoid unnecessary stress.
- Check in with staff regularly, especially if you notice that a member of staff doesn't quite seem themselves.

Offering additional support:

At times in their careers, practitioners may need a bit of extra support. This might be due to something going on at home or work. Leaders should try offer sensitive support that will help them to feel positive about their work and development.

Discussing difficulties with staff

Try to be available to staff as close to the time when they ask for your support or advice.

Meet in a confidential space where you will not be interrupted.

If there is a discussion that may upset them, think about the time of day you have it and check that they have a friend or colleague who will support them.

Listen actively and calmly, acknowledging their feelings and ideas (even if different to yours).

Challenge them in a sensitive way if needed.

Be honest if you get something wrong and explain how and when you will amend it.

Reflect with the practitioner on how you can work together to improve the situation.

If they ask something that you don't know the answer to, be honest and say something like, "I need to think about that. Is it OK if I get back to you?" - give a realistic time

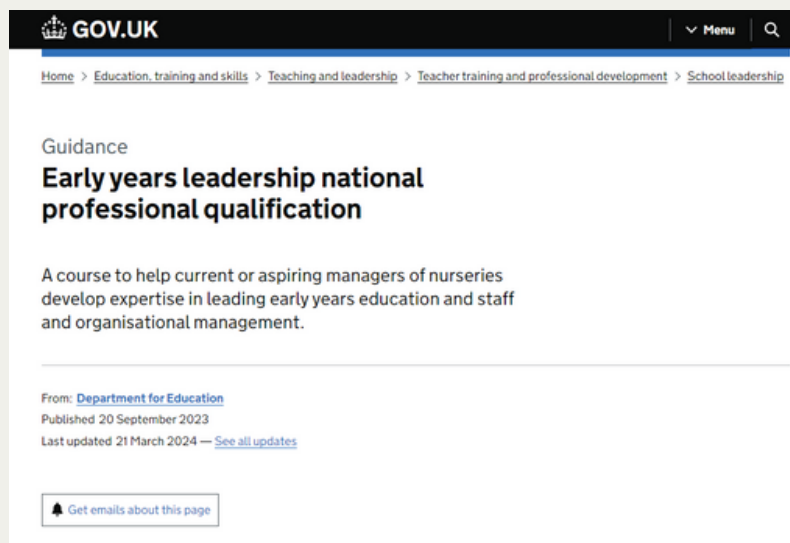
*Nurturing a strong staff team requires a lot of time, patience and understanding.
It is well worth it.*

By Marion Samuel

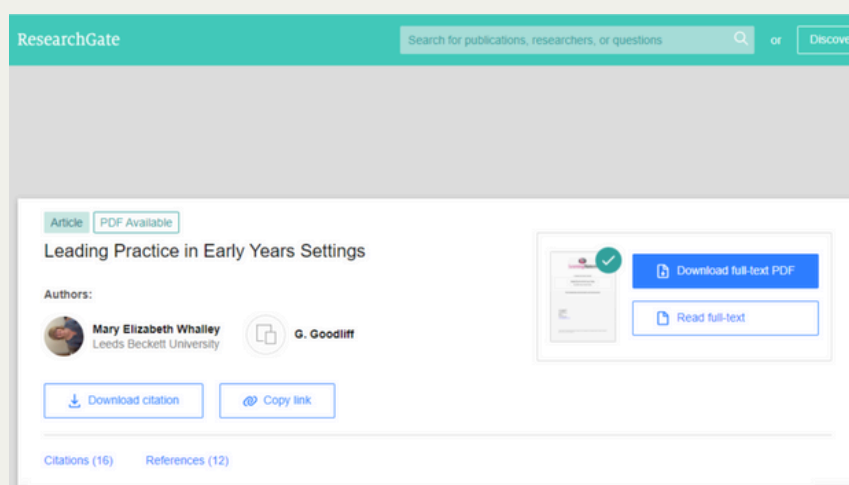
Further reading and study:

Find out more about the free [NPQEYL](#) (Early years leadership national professional qualification) which is for:

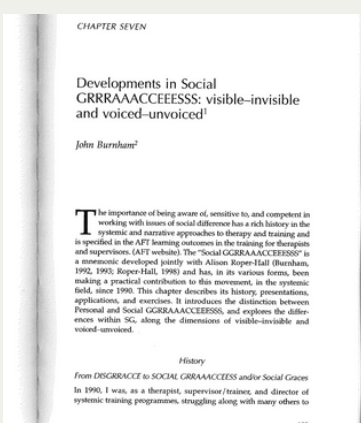
- managers of private, voluntary and independent nurseries
- headteachers or leaders of school-based or maintained nurseries
- childminders with leadership responsibilities
- other early years foundation stage leaders, such as reception class teachers or early years co-ordinators



Leading practice in early years settings (Whalley, Allen and Wilson)



Burnham.J (2013) Development in social GRRRAACCEESSS: visible –invisible, voiced-unvoiced. In: Krause (Ed) Cultural Reflexivity. London. Karnac



Framework of Effective Leadership Strategies (Whalley 1999: adapted 2005) in (2004) NPQICL Study Programme: National College for School Leadership