



Meet Helen Haygarth

Early Years Leader

What job do you do?

I am a Early Years Leader.

How did you get into your role?

I left The Academy at Shotton Hall in 1991 to begin my A levels - this did not work out for me at the time but I had worked as a babysitter and helped in the local primary school so I redirected my course. I enrolled to do my BTEC National Diploma in Nursery Nursing. Since qualifying as a nursery nurse in 1994 I have worked in lots of different settings and with lots of different age groups.

As a Level 3 qualified practitioner, I knew I could not develop my role without further qualifications. Therefore I began studying part time whilst working, to gain my degree. I graduated last June with first class honours in education and curriculum studies which gave me the confidence to apply for new jobs and I now work as a family support worker - I don't think I will ever stop learning!

My hope for the future is to continue studying, researching and writing to help to make a difference to the next generation of early years practitioners and to make sure young children are allowed to learn through play with the highest quality of provision.

Tell us a little bit about your working day

A typical day in a nursery setting involves lots of preparation. I plan in advance for the week and

know what themes and areas of development we are focusing on. I make sure assessments are up to date and that every child's learning journal is completed. You need to be quite creative and be able to think of lots of new ideas to keep young children interested and use what they know to help them to develop. Areas and displays need to look attractive and inviting and need to be changed a lot!

Greeting the children and their parents/carers when they arrive is very important - being friendly and interested in them makes children feel special and important to support them in settling in and letting their parents leave. The day always begins with a hello song and a chat to help develop their language skills. The best resource within a nursery is not the toys but the staff. It is therefore important to make sure I am working the very best I can.

I prepare snacks and encourage social time sitting around a table - this is a chance to talk about healthy foods and encourage children to try new things. I encourage children to be as independent as they can be. I work closely with the other practitioners in the room and we share ideas and responsibilities - teamwork is crucial as we need to work together to make sure all of the tasks are completed fairly and to a high standard. We need to be good at communicating as we discuss children's development, behaviours and how we want the setting to run.

My favourite part of the session is always story time and music tasks. I am always singing with the children as this helps with routines, language development and often helps to calm and soothe them when they are upset or unhappy. Music/singing is a good skill to have and use. Some parts of the job are not easy such as potty training, snotty noses and there tends to be a lot of mess to clear up, but young children need adults to trust and learn from which helps you forget the yukky parts. My favourite age is definitely pre-school who attend nursery. Although it can be chaotic, children this age learn so much so quickly, it's a joy to watch the journey they make from starting nursery to being ready to start school.

What advice would you give to one of our students who is interested in your field of work?

Lots of voluntary work is incredibly useful, not only for experience and something to put on your CV, but to help you decide which area of childcare you want to work in.

Always read and keep up to date with changes and new ideas and approaches. Things change so fast in this field. Do not think childcare is an easy option! It is hard work.

Most importantly, always be prepared to have awe and wonder when working with children. I always try to remember this; "If we could see the world through the eyes of a child, we would see the magic in everything."