

Early years practitioners and nursery staff

General competency framework · Frontline / operational level · 5 competencies · approx. 75 minutes

How to use this guide

- Focus on these 5 competencies — the behaviours that matter most for this role — not a chronological career history.
- Ask every candidate the same core questions, then probe. Allow around 15 minutes per competency.
- Ask for real examples and use STAR — the Situation, the Task, the Action they took, and the Result.
- Stay neutral, capture what they say, and judge later. Gather evidence on one competency at a time.
- Rate each competency 1–5 against the positive and negative indicators, and note the evidence.

5 Outstanding 4 Good 3 Acceptable 2 Marginal 1 Poor

1. Customer Focus

Builds effective customer relationships to ensure needs and expectations are understood. Understands the importance of the customer to the business, seeking regular feedback whilst being prepared to say no when needed.

Why this matters for Early years practitioners and nursery staff: The Level 3 EYE apprenticeship standard centres the child and family — supporting children's learning and development through the EYFS, advocating for individual children including those needing SEND or EAL support, the key person role. Customer Focus captures understanding each child as an individual and adapting practice to their needs.

Tell me about a time you went out of your way to help a customer or member of the public.

- What did they need?
- What did you do?
- How did they react?

Describe a time a customer was unhappy or difficult. How did you handle it?

- What was the problem?
- What did you do?
- What was the outcome?

How do you know when you've done a good job for a customer? Give me an example.

- What do you look or listen for?
- Tell me about a time you got it right.

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Treats customers as a nuisance; unhelpful		Friendly, helpful and professional with customers
Doesn't take responsibility for a customer's problem		Takes ownership of sorting out customer issues
Doesn't really listen to what the customer needs		Listens and checks what the customer actually needs
Promises things that can't be delivered		Only promises what can be done; honest with customers
Doesn't see why the customer matters		Understands the customer keeps the business going

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____

2. Personal Leadership

Takes responsibility for their own actions. Proactively takes on additional responsibilities and drives their own performance. Lives their own values, actively acknowledges and seeks feedback from others.

Why this matters for Early years practitioners and nursery staff: The EYE standard explicitly lists care, compassion, honesty, trust, integrity, commitment, and non-discriminatory work as required behaviours. Safeguarding (Knowledge K2/K3) is foundational. Personal Leadership captures self-driven integrity and the visible modelling of values to very young children at a formative age.

Tell me about a time you took responsibility for getting something done, even when it wasn't strictly your job.

- What made you step in?
- What did you do?
- How did it turn out?

Describe a time something went wrong with your work. What did you do about it?

- Did you own up to it?
- What did you do to put it right?
- What did you learn?

Tell me about a time someone gave you feedback on your work. How did you take it?

- What did they say?
- How did you feel?
- What did you change afterwards?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Blames others or makes excuses when something goes wrong		Owens up when something goes wrong and puts it right
Does only what they're told, nothing more		Steps up and takes on extra without being asked
Gets defensive when given feedback		Takes feedback well and acts on it
Cuts corners when no one is watching		Does the right thing even when no one is checking
Waits to be told what to do		Uses their initiative

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____

3. Collaborative Working

Looks to understand others' perspectives and objectives. Respects different styles/approaches, whilst adapting their own style to enable them to work effectively with others.

Why this matters for Early years practitioners and nursery staff: EYE Skills S5 and S6 require effective communication and collaborative relationships with other professionals and parents. Multi-agency working with health visitors, social workers and SENCOs is routine. Collaborative Working captures the ability to coordinate across these relationships effectively.

Tell me about a time you worked as part of a team to get a job done.

- What was your part in it?
- How did you work with the others?
- What was the result?

Describe a time you had to change how you did something to fit in with the team or someone else's way of working.

- What did you change?
- Why?
- How did it work out?

Tell me about a time there was a disagreement or bad feeling in your team. What did you do?

- What was it about?
- How did you help sort it out?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Only wants things done their own way		Listens to others' views and finds common ground
Doesn't pull their weight in the team		Does their share and helps the team succeed
Clashes with teammates or is unhelpful in a group		Works well with others, even under pressure
Won't change how they work to fit the team		Adapts how they work to fit in with others
Makes disagreements worse		Helps sort out disagreements calmly

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____

4. Technical Capability

Has the necessary knowledge, skills and proficiency to conduct their role. Demonstrates mastery in their area of technical capability. Stays up to date with advances in their field and commits to their continuous development.

Why this matters for Early years practitioners and nursery staff: EYE knowledge components cover pedagogy, the observation/assessment/planning cycle, the EYFS curriculum, child development theory, and attachment theory. Technical Capability captures the breadth of pedagogical and developmental knowledge that distinguishes an effective EYE from a willing childcare assistant.

Tell me about the skills or know-how you need to do this kind of job well.

- How did you learn them?
- How do you make sure you do the job to the right standard?

Describe a time you had to learn a new machine, system or way of working.

- How did you get to grips with it?
- How long did it take you?

How do you keep your skills up to date for your work? Give me an example.

- When did you last learn something new for the job?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Lacks the know-how the job needs		Has the skills and knowledge the job needs
Struggles with the equipment or systems		Confident and capable with the tools of the job

Makes avoidable mistakes in the work		Does the technical parts of the job to a good standard
Lets their skills get out of date		Keeps their skills current and picks up new methods
Won't learn new equipment or ways of working		Willing to learn new kit and ways of working

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____

5. Organisational Skills

Establishes clear priorities and builds plans to ensure delivery on time. Works in a systematic manner and manages resources efficiently. Quickly adapts plans as circumstances require. Sees things through to completion.

Why this matters for Early years practitioners and nursery staff: EYE practice is built on rhythm — daily routines, observation cycles, structured planning, group activities, individual interventions. Organisational Skills captures the systematic priority-setting and planning that holds the setting together while remaining responsive to children's individual needs.

Tell me about a busy shift or day when you had a lot to get through. How did you manage it?

- How did you decide what to do first?
- Did you get it all done?

Describe a time you had to juggle a few different tasks at once.

- How did you keep on top of it all?
- What was the result?

How do you make sure you don't forget or miss things at work? Give an example.

- What helps you stay organised?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Gets overwhelmed on a busy shift		Keeps on top of a busy workload
Does things in a random order and misses tasks		Works in a sensible order and doesn't miss things
Often runs late or leaves things unfinished		Gets things done on time and finished
Can't juggle more than one thing		Handles several tasks without dropping any
Doesn't plan ahead		Plans ahead so the work gets done

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____