

Bringing an apprentice into your early years setting is an exciting yet critical time. The first month sets the foundation for their entire learning journey, so it's essential to establish clear expectations that support their teachearlyyears.com development, align with your setting's values, and comply with regulatory frameworks. If you're wondering how to create a strong, supportive induction that enables your apprentice to thrive, you are in the right place.

Drawing on best practices highlighted by industry leaders such as **Teach Early Years**, **Teachwire**, and **The Childcare Company**, this post will guide you through effective strategies for **setting expectations** during induction. We'll explore how to tie *workplace learning* directly to *daily practice*, embed safeguarding, wellbeing, and health and safety from day one, and ensure an operational understanding of child development and *EYFS principles*. Additionally, we'll introduce practical tools like **progress reviews** and **development coaching** to support continuous growth and effective **feedback routines**.



Why Setting Clear Expectations Matters

Beginning an apprenticeship can be overwhelming. Apprentices often enter their roles eager to learn but unsure of the practical demands and professional standards expected. If expectations are vague or unclear, it can lead to confusion, missed learning opportunities, and unintentional non-compliance with safeguarding or health and safety policies.

Setting clear, achievable expectations:

- Creates a positive learning environment.
- Helps apprentices feel supported and motivated.
- Ensures understanding of safeguarding, risk management, and wellbeing components.
- Aligns apprentice activities with the *Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)* requirements.
- Improves completion rates and quality of apprenticeship outcomes.

Key Themes to Cover During Induction

To set the right tone and expectations, your induction programme for apprentices should comprehensively address these core themes:

1. Workplace Learning Tied to Daily Practice

Effective apprenticeships integrate on-the-job learning with formal training. Early Years settings like those featured in **Teach Early Years** emphasise embedding knowledge into everyday room routines and interactions.

- Explain how each day's activities relate to the Early Years Educator occupational standards.
- Use real-life examples to show how theory links with practice.
- Encourage apprentices to reflect on how they apply new knowledge during observations, child interactions, and setting routines.

2. Safeguarding

Safeguarding must be a non-negotiable pillar of your induction. Apprentices must fully understand their responsibilities and the processes involved in protecting children.



- Introduce safeguarding policies, reporting procedures, and confidential handling of concerns.
- Use scenarios to help apprentices recognise signs of abuse or neglect.
- Reinforce this learning through regular progress reviews and coaching conversations.

3. Wellbeing, Health and Safety, and Risk Management

The health and safety of children, staff, and apprentices themselves is critical. Clear guidance on protocols protects everyone and reduces anxiety for your apprentice during unfamiliar situations.

- Outline daily health and safety checks, emergency procedures, and hygiene routines.
- Discuss how to identify and manage risks in indoor and outdoor play areas.
- Encourage apprentices to take responsibility for their own safety and that of others.

4. Child Development Knowledge Applied in Rooms

Apprentices need to move beyond theory into practical application. Sharing how child development milestones and observations inform planning and interactions helps make this connection.

- Guide apprentices in observing children's progress and identifying next steps.
- Link child development knowledge to EYFS learning goals and statutory framework.
- Empower apprentices to design relevant activities with the support of their mentor or supervisor.

5. EYFS Principles and Professional Practice

The EYFS principles underpin all early years education in England. Setting clear expectations about adhering to these standards is vital.

- Explain the four guiding principles of the EYFS and their practical implications.
- Highlight professional behaviours expected in registers, documentation, communication, and teamwork.
- Encourage apprentices to take initiative while respecting setting policies.

Practical Steps to Setting Expectations in the First Month

Use the following plan to structure your approach and ensure consistency in your messaging and support.

Week 1: Building Foundations

- **Orientation:** Introduce your setting, values, team members, and layout to help apprentices feel welcome.
- **Policy Training:** Deliver face-to-face or e-learning training on safeguarding, health and safety, behaviour management, and confidentiality.
- **Clear Role Description:** Share an apprentice role profile aligned to occupational standards and daily responsibilities.
- **Introduction to EYFS:** Discuss EYFS framework principles and how they shape your daily activities.
- **Set Initial Goals:** In collaboration with the apprentice, agree on short-term learning goals.

Week 2–3: Embedding Practice

- **Shadowing and Supervised Practice:** Pair apprentices with experienced staff in different rooms to observe routines and practice interactions.
- **Development Coaching Sessions:** Use coaching to reflect on experiences, identify strengths, and address areas for improvement.
- **Risk Management Walkthrough:** Conduct a guided tour focusing on potential hazards, safety checks, and infection control.
- **Child Development Application:** Provide opportunities to observe and record developmental milestones using templates or journals.
- **Feedback Routines Established:** Begin daily or weekly feedback dialogues to encourage open communication.

Week 4: Review and Adjust

- **First Progress Review:** Hold a formal meeting to evaluate progress against agreed goals, discuss challenges, and renew targets.
- **Celebrate Achievements:** Acknowledge successes to motivate continued development.

- **Plan Ahead:** Set clear expectations for months two and three, involving the apprentice in planning their learning journey.

Tools That Support Clear Expectation Setting

Using the right tools can make the process smoother and more effective. Incorporate these trusted systems into your apprenticeship framework.

Tool	Purpose	How to Use
Progress Reviews	Track learning progress, discuss challenges, set goals	Schedule monthly reviews; use a structured template aligned to the occupational standards; involve employer, apprentice, and assessor
Development Coaching	Facilitate reflective learning and problem solving	Hold regular one-on-one coaching sessions; use open-ended questions and active listening; focus on strengths and areas for growth

Real-life Inspiration from Early Years Experts

Teach Early Years emphasises that apprentices flourish when their learning is meaningful and immediately applicable in the setting. Tailoring induction to link learning goals directly to day-to-day practice ensures engagement and skill development.

Teachwire highlights the importance of strong feedback routines. Apprentices benefit enormously from consistent, constructive feedback in welcoming environments. This openness encourages them to ask questions, take risks, and develop professional confidence rapidly.

The Childcare Company shares case studies illustrating how safeguarding and health and safety training embedded during induction leads to apprentices who are vigilant and proactive in protecting children, an indispensable quality in any early years professional.

Summary: Best Practices for Setting Expectations in Apprentices' First Month

1. **Plan a comprehensive induction** covering safeguarding, health and safety, EYFS, and workplace culture.
2. **Tie learning directly to daily practice** to make knowledge relevant and usable.
3. **Establish clear, achievable goals** collaboratively with your apprentice.
4. **Use feedback routines and development coaching** to support continual reflection and growth.
5. **Conduct formal progress reviews** early and often to adjust expectations and recognise progress.

Setting clear expectations isn't a one-off event. It is a continuous dialogue of support, challenge, and celebration. With thoughtful planning inspired by leading organisations like Teach Early Years, Teachwire, and The Childcare Company, you can equip your apprentices to become confident, competent early years professionals from the very first month.