Characteristics of effective learning

How children learn, not only what they learn. EYFS (England), from September 2026.

Playing and exploring

You might see a child who…

- has a go at something new
- explores with all the senses
- pretends and acts out ideas
- finds out by doing, not only watching

Ask: “What could we try next?” “What happens if…?”

Active learning

You might see a child who…

- concentrates for a long time
- keeps trying when it is tricky
- is proud of what they did
- bounces back after a setback

Ask: “What was the tricky part?” “What are you proud of?”

Creating and thinking critically

You might see a child who…

- has their own ideas
- links one idea to another
- plans, then changes the plan
- finds new ways to do things

Ask: “How could we do it another way?” “What is your plan?”

Prompts written by Colouring Nest. The three names are from the EYFS statutory framework, paragraph 1.18.