

The 'container' generation: how containers affect babies' physical activity

This case study focuses on physical development and specifically on babies in Range 1. There is a pressing need to limit the amount of time that babies spend in 'containers' such as buggies, car seats, highchairs, bouncers, bassinets, and restrictive clothing including footwear.

Links across Birth to Five

This case study links to

- the Characteristics of Effective Learning and to
- Physical Development
- Statutory ELG: Fine and Gross Motor Skills

The case study aims to demonstrate the importance of observing children. (Observation, Assessment and Planning)

A baby's sense of self begins with their experience of their own bodies. The case study demonstrates how babies need to be given freedom to move and highlights the importance of babies not spending lengthy periods of time in 'containers'. (Birth to 2)

The Case Study

Jason has recently become the Baby Room Leader and has noticed that many of the babies spend a great deal of time in 'containers'. He is concerned that the babies' physical development is being negatively affected because their movement is being restricted as they lack sufficient opportunities to move their bodies.

Jason decides to carry out observations to find out how much time babies spend in a 'container'. He focuses on one of the babies, Ezra, a 7-month-old who attends nursery full time, arriving as soon as the nursery opens and is picked up at 6pm.

Jason observes that Ezra is put into a car seat for the 30-minute journey to nursery. He is usually asleep as he is transferred from the car to his Key Person, so he remains in the seat until he wakes up.

Jason notices that Ezra usually wears layers of clothing, including socks and other footwear, and as Ezra is growing fast his feet and toes often appear constricted.

The setting is in the middle of an urban area with limited outdoor space, so the babies are taken out in buggies for a walk around the nearby park. On return, the babies are put in highchairs for a mid-morning snack and bottle of milk. Following this, it's nap time.

Jason realises that the lunch routine is a lengthy process with babies spending up to 30 minutes sitting in a highchair.

After lunch, Ezra's Key Person has a one-to-one play time with him. This is often while Ezra is sitting in a bouncer chair.

The afternoon routine continues in a similar way to the morning one, with a nap and teatime. At 5.45, following requests from Ezra's parents, he is put into a Babygro so that he is ready for bed at 7pm shortly after he returns home.

Connections to theory, research and the resources on the website

To find out more practical ways to provide opportunities for babies and toddlers to be physically active, please take a look at:

- Musgrave, J. Dorrian, J., Josephidou, J., Langdown, B. and Rodriguez-Leon, L. (2024) **Little Minds Matter: Promoting Physical Development and Activity in Early Childhood**. Abingdon: Routledge
- **Babies outdoors** [Babies Outdoors](#) website
- **Supporting Physical Development in Early Childhood** [Supporting physical development in early childhood | OpenLearn - Open University](#)

Reflective questions for practice

- How can Jason change the practice in the baby room to increase the opportunities for Ezra to increase his opportunities to be physically active?
- What changes to routines can Jason introduce?
- How can he ensure that all practitioners understand the importance of giving babies time to move freely?
- How can he introduce changes to the baby room routines?
- How can Jason work with Ezra's parents to help them understand the value of giving him ample time on his back, and also giving him freedom to move his feet?

Key points taken from Physical Development, Range 1 p 109

The Unique Child

Babies' physical development is unique to each individual. Many of the movements listed require babies to have freedom to move.

Proprioceptive and vestibular senses can be developed if babies have the opportunity to belly crawl, and to move backwards and forwards.

Positive relationships

From birth, babies need unrestricted movement.

Jason can share with parents the development value to Ezra having ample time spent on his tummy and back and the ways that this can be supported to gradually develop, and make suggestions of how the parents can provide these opportunities when he is at home.

Jason can explain to Ezra's Key Person and his parents the value of Ezra being able to have access to his bare feet, and the importance of not having restrictive clothing.

Jason can ask Ezra's Key Person to adapt his routine so that she has lots of opportunities to play with him on the floor in non-restrictive clothing and bare feet.

Enabling environments

Consider how the environment can be adapted to provide more freedom to Ezra. If possible, could outdoor opportunities include time spent on a blanket rather than only in a buggy? When indoors, give babies the opportunity to wear minimum clothing and a smooth surface on which to move.

