

other PEOPLE'S Babies



dear mummy & daddy

What information should practitioners be recording and reporting about the babies in their care? *TN* asked the experts...

For most parents who are using early years childcare, there really is no such thing as 'too much information' when it comes to what goes on while they're parted from their offspring. Discussions at handover times are vital, of course – but these can sometimes be rushed, and details forgotten. For pre-vocal infants especially, therefore, some kind of written record of the day's events can have an important role to play in connecting the daycare and home environments. But how lengthy should this be? What kind of information should be included? And is the 'first person diary' format a cute gimmick, or a way of encouraging a genuinely individual and baby-led report? We asked parents and practitioners for their thoughts.

THE CARERS

1

Mary Barlow, early years consultant and trainer

"Any form of record keeping – whether through a diary, profile, photograph or learning story – needs to be meaningful and a 'tool' to support effective care and education. You don't need charts and tick lists recording feeding, sleeping and nappy changing, which can take over from the reason we came into childcare – to play and work with the children. Talking to parents at the end of the day helps to build that trusting relationship needed through your interaction with them. You will not get that in a note or on a piece of paper.

Where practitioners, parents and children are involved in contributing to learning journals, however, the focus becomes on the child and his/her needs. The comments and evidence collected into the learning journal become the focus for discussion to the next steps of play and learning. Surely this is a better way of connecting with parents and children than a quick tick in a box in a daily diary?"

2

Sarah Steel, Managing Director, The Old Station Nursery Ltd

"All practitioners will have their own preference for how they fill out baby diaries for parents; some can be quite creative and with others it's a challenge to get anything written down at all. I do think there's a place for written feedback, as often one parent picks up and the other will like to read what their baby has been up to. However, at Old Station Nurseries, we try and make the child's learning journey the main focus for creativity and detailed comment, and keep the daily diaries fairly factual; although we encourage staff to remember to put in the more interesting things that each child has done during the day, at least one activity that they loved, one new thing that they tried or one thing that made them laugh out loud."

THE PARENTS

1

Helen (39) has twin sons (6), who went to nursery from six months until beginning school

"When the boys started nursery, I'd get a 'letter' from each of them at the end of every day they attended, full of details about how they'd had 'such fun' doing this, or 'really enjoyed' that. At first, I found this endearing, but it soon became repetitive, and I wondered whether it was the best use of staff members' time, especially as they were always happy to speak to me at length when handing the children over. To be honest, all I really needed on paper was what they ate, when they slept, and whether they'd been generally content."

2

Clare (34) has two sons – Samuel (3) and Jacob (10 months), who attend a private nursery for two full days a week

"Only Jacob has a daily diary, now that Sam has moved into the pre-school room. It's in sections: meals, bottles, nappies, sleep, general information, medical information, parent/carer comments. I think it's comprehensive and sufficient. The only information that we wish was there is how much liquid he drinks apart from milk. I'd still like to receive some sort of diary for Sam, as asking a three-year-old what he did that day can be a bit hit or miss!"

3

Kiera (23) has a seven-month-old daughter, Evie, who spends two days a week with a childminder

"Before Sara, our childminder, took Evie on, she asked us loads of questions about what we wanted, including whether we'd like a daily written record to take away. We said yes, as my husband usually does the pick up, and I like to know as much as possible about Evie's day. Sara includes the basic facts and adds detail about Evie's moods – she's great at understanding her, and that's the most important information for me by far."