

DIR®/Floortime™

Practitioner Information Sheet



What is DIR®/Floortime™?

DIR®/Floortime™ is a **relationship-based, play-focused approach** that supports children's:

- Social and emotional development
- Communication (verbal and non-verbal)
- Regulation and attention
- Thinking and problem-solving skills

DIR stands for:

- **D – Developmental:** understanding where the child is developmentally
- **I – Individual Differences:** recognising each child's sensory, motor and communication profile
- **R – Relationship-Based:** learning happens through warm, responsive relationships

Floortime™ is the **practical method** – joining the child in play to build shared attention, interaction and emotional connection.

Who is DIR®/Floortime™ useful for?

DIR®/Floortime™ can support:

- Autistic children
- Children with social communication differences
- Children with developmental delay

- Children with regulation, attachment or emotional needs
- Children with emerging SEND (pre-diagnosis)

It is suitable for **everyday practice** in early years settings and does not require specialist resources.

Why use DIR®/Floortime™ in Early Years?

DIR®/Floortime™:

- Builds **engagement before expectations**
- Supports **regulation before behaviour**
- Encourages **communication through play**
- Helps children feel **understood, safe and motivated to learn**

It complements:

- EYFS
 - SEND Code of Practice
 - Ordinarily Available Provision
 - Inclusive, child-centred practice
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The Foundations: Child Development First

DIR®/Floortime™ focuses on **Functional Emotional Developmental Capacities (FEDCs)**. In Early Years, we particularly support:

1. **Regulation and attention**
Is the child calm, alert and ready to engage?
 2. **Engagement and relationships**
Can the child enjoy being with others?
 3. **Two-way communication**
Is there back-and-forth interaction (gestures, sounds, looks, words)?
 4. **Shared problem-solving and play**
Can the child stay in interaction for longer and solve simple problems together?
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What Does DIR®/Floortime™ Look Like in Practice?

1. Follow the Child's Lead

- Observe what the child is interested in
- Join their play rather than directing it
- Be curious, not controlling

"The child leads, the adult joins."

2. Get Down to the Child's Level

- Physically get down on the floor or at eye level
- Face the child so they can see your expressions
- Be emotionally available and playful

3. Build Circles of Communication

A **circle of communication** happens when:

- The child does something (gesture, look, sound, move)
- You respond
- The child responds back

Your role:

- Respond **immediately and meaningfully**
 - Pause to give the child time
 - Keep the interaction going as long as possible
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4. Add Just Enough Challenge

- Expand the play slightly (not too much)
- Create playful problems, e.g.:
 - Put an object just out of reach
 - Pause expectantly
 - Add a barrier that encourages communication

Support success without frustration.

5. Support Regulation First

Some children need help to feel calm and safe before they can engage.

Support regulation by:

- Matching the child's energy
 - Using calming voice and facial expression
 - Offering movement, deep pressure or sensory breaks (where appropriate)
 - Reducing language when the child is overwhelmed
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What Should Practitioners Be Doing?

✓ Do:

- Observe before interacting
- Be playful, warm and emotionally expressive
- Comment on what the child is doing
- Wait and give the child time to respond
- Celebrate small interactions

✗ Avoid:

- Over-questioning
 - Demanding eye contact
 - Taking control of play
 - Rushing or over-prompting
 - Seeing behaviour without considering regulation
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How Can DIR®/Floortime™ Be Used in the Setting?

- During free play
- In small-group interactions
- At transition times
- During care routines (snack, dressing, tidy-up)
- As part of targeted SEND support
- To inform observations and planning

It is **not a separate activity** – it is a **way of interacting**.

Working with Parents and Carers

- Share simple explanations of DIR®/Floortime™
 - Model strategies during play
 - Encourage parents to use Floortime in everyday routines
 - Focus on strengths and progress, not deficits
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Key Messages for Practice

- Relationship comes before learning
- Play is the child's language
- Regulation supports communication
- Small moments of interaction matter
- Connection builds development