

Frequently asked questions about nurture groups

Q1. What is a nurture group?

A nurture group is a small group of 6 to 10 children / young people usually based in a mainstream educational setting and staffed by two supportive adults. Nurture groups offer a short term, focussed intervention strategy, which addresses barriers to learning arising from social / emotional and or behavioural difficulties, in an inclusive, supportive manner. Children/young people continue to remain part of their own class group and usually return full time within 4 terms.

There are examples of nurture groups now in early years settings, primary and secondary schools, PRUs, Special Schools, after school clubs and in youth offending settings.

Q2. Do nurture groups work?

Yes. They have been in operation for over 40 years, with numerous evaluations evidencing their success. Pupils, parents, teachers, support assistants, the Inspectorate, Government reports, policy makers, researchers and authors all refer to nurture groups as an effective intervention strategy.

Q3. How do nurture groups actually work in practice?

Trained staff create an attractive, safe, structured environment usually within the context of a mainstream educational setting, with a number of areas and resources bridging the gap between home and school. Building trusting relationships are core to the approach. The children are carefully selected according to their individual, holistic profile of needs, particularly identified using the Boxall Profile and according to the establishment of a cohesive group. Individual and group plans are then formulated, with all targets thoroughly discussed with all involved including the pupil themselves. Staff then provide a variety of experiences, opportunities, approaches and resources to address these needs within a culture of trust, understanding and knowledge incorporating the 6 principles of nurture. Progress is closely monitored.

Q4. Do nurture groups support all children with SEN / Additional Support Needs?

No. They have been specifically designed to support children and young people whose barriers to learning fall into the category of social / emotional and / or behavioural difficulties (SEBD), who for a variety of reasons have not developed those necessary early skills, which are essential in order to develop: trust of adults; self esteem; empathy; cooperation skills; self control; positive relationships with adults and peers; language and communication skills etc.. However, these barriers to learning can effect and impact on pupils of all ability levels. Children can however have other additional needs, but for a nurture group approach their primary barrier to learning is expected to be social, emotional or behavioural.

An additional benefit of nurture groups is that, as the close relationship with child / young person develops it may enable other previously unnoticed underlying needs to be identified and then referred on to the appropriate agency / professional, for a formal diagnosis and the most appropriate intervention implemented.

Q5. Do they support Looked after Children (LAC)?

Yes. Nurture groups have had particular success in this area. Many LAC have not experienced or had sufficient variety of opportunities or consistency of approach to develop the necessary skills to cope with the demands of an educational setting. Given this lack of trust and attachment to a significant adult in their lives, nurture groups can provide the environment, staff, curriculum and social grouping to develop these skills whilst also developing resilience and enabling the children / young people to achieve their potential.

Q6. Are nurture groups suitable for children who have English as an additional language (EAL)?

No. This is not their prime purpose.

However, if the assessment profile of needs indicates that the individual's barriers to learning are as a result of missed early learning opportunities resulting in social / emotional and / or behavioural difficulties, then they will benefit from the approach as language development is central to the approach. Many resources, strategies and approaches are deployed within the nurture group to develop language and communication skills e.g. Nurturing Talk, SULP (Social Use of Language Programme). The educational establishment, as always, would make the final decision.

Q7. How are nurture groups funded?

This varies considerably from area to area.

Individual schools will often find the necessary funding from a variety of sources, or will deploy staff from within their own establishment resources.

Some councils do fully fund or partially fund.

There have also been pilots funded for example by the Scottish and Welsh Governments and other centrally funded government bodies.

Despite the plethora of funding sources, the often short nature of funding and the difficulties experienced by nurture groups in accessing funding, nurture groups have managed to continue to thrive and expand over the 40 year period, helping a considerable amount of children, young people and their families. This is mainly due to the evaluated positive outcomes and the enthusiasm, commitment and strong belief from staff and managers that this is an extremely effective, worthwhile approach.

However funding is and continues to remain an issue.

Q8. How many nurture groups are there?

The full number is not known, as sometimes they are called by other names and may not be registered with the Nurture Group Network, although they do adopt nurture group philosophies and practices.

The NGN is aware of over 1500 groups currently in operation across the UK, with others in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Malta.

Q9. Is it just younger children that nurture groups support?

No. The optimum situation is for nurture groups to be in place to provide early intervention and prevention. However the approach is becoming increasingly popular with older children and young adults, due to some problems beginning to manifest later in life or not having been adequately addresses at an earlier stage. Great successes are being reported with older young people.

Q10. Is there training available and is it accredited?

Yes. The NGN recommends that all nurture group staff complete the NGN course on the theory and practice of nurture groups, accredited by Edge Hill our partner University, prior to setting up a nurture group. In this way the underlying theories and practices are understood and implemented to ensure a consistent, quality resource is established. The necessity of high quality training is also endorsed by numerous evaluations progressed, including an independent study called "Making Our Experience Count", published by NGN. There are also a number of additional complementary courses available, with the flexibility to customise the training to suit individual requirements, e.g. whole staff training.

Q11. How can the training be accessed and where is it delivered?

Training can be accessed via the website or by contacting our Wigan office. All contact details are included at the end of this leaflet. Training will usually be delivered at a location reasonably close to you, as long as there are sufficient numbers to make the training viable, or can take place in our Wigan or London facilities.

Q12. Does the NGN only recommend a full time, classic Boxall group?

For children with a significant profile of needs, it is recommended that an 80% model is run in primary school settings, to ensure the needs are addressed in as short a time as possible. Experience shows that a quick, successful impact requires a regular, focussed intervention. This provides the correct amount of time necessary to ensure the required strategies have been fully adapted and internalised for successful transfer to other settings.

However the NGN has always recommended flexibility according to individual school and pupil needs. If the outcomes can be successfully achieved in a part time model, where a minimum of 4 sessions per week is provided for the children, then this too is good practice and often makes reintegration much easier.

Other settings, such as secondary schools, SEN schools, Early Years establishments, PRUs, youth groups etc. require a flexible approach.

Q13. What assessments are normally used to inform nurture group practice and monitor progress?

Central to nurture group philosophy and practice is **The Boxall Profile** or **Boxall Profile for Young People (BPYP)**. It provides a framework for the structured observation of children / young people to assess their barriers to learning arising from social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, whilst also identifying the individual strengths too. However, the Boxall Profile not only assesses need but also informs the planning process to address the identified needs, and monitor progress and outcomes.

"This Profile gives us a structure to look at young people's behaviour, to discuss it positively and to plan what we can do about it. We have not discussed our pupils as positively as this before."

(Teacher at a secure unit for adolescents)

Also frequently used alongside the Boxall Profile and along with observations and all other relevant information is Goodman's Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). As the name suggests, it assesses the individual strengths as well as difficulties.

Q14. Where can I purchase The Boxall Profile and SDQ?

The Boxall Profile is available for purchase from the NGN at a cost of £20 and our further publication The Boxall Profile for Young People costing £85, with extra inserts available for purchase as well. Also available from the NGN is training on its usage, which is invaluable in order to fully utilise and appreciate its potential.

Please contact orders@nurturegroup.org to purchase a copy or enquire about training opportunities at training@nurturegroups.org.

The SDQ is available free on-line at www.sdqinfo.com.

Q15. What age range is the Boxall Profile suitable for?

The Boxall Profile is standardised for children aged 3 to 8 years and the BPYP is standardised for young people aged 11 to 14 years. However it has been successfully used for younger and older children / young people. Training is also available from the NGN.

Q16. Are there other publications available to purchase from the NGN?

Yes. There are currently a range of other publications, which are extremely popular and found to be very useful and informative. See the publications section of our website for further details.

Q17. What is the underlying theory behind nurture groups?

Marjorie Boxall's central belief was simply expressed as "Satisfactory, emotional, social and cognitive development...is the product of adequate and attentive early nurturing care. It is...unitary learning process that centres in attachment and trust and has its foundations in the close identifications of parent and child and the interaction and participation in shared experiences that stem from this."

(All About Nurture: Marion Bennathan and Jim Rose. Published NGN, 2009)

Implicit in this statement is the concept of attachment which, since nurture groups began in 1969 has become widely accepted in the Western world as central to the understanding of human development. The rapid development of neuroscience has also given further support to attachment theory.

Q18. How does the approach support families?

Parental involvement is central to the nurture group principles and practices, with a no blame culture being established. Parents are treated with respect and are encouraged to become involved in helping their children to achieve their targets. As the children's behaviour, self worth and school achievements improve then this often impacts on their relationships with their family. Nurture group staff fully support this process.

There has been a huge amount of extremely positive comments from parents, including:

"You have given me my child back."

"I'm more able to help him now, I'm more confident. Before I couldn't get him to read, now it is a pleasure to help him."

In the Glasgow evaluation study of December 2006, one parent who had described their child at the start of attending the nurture group as shy, uptight and dependent, felt that by the second review that their child had become humorous, smart and mature. Another parent felt their previously destructive, hyperactive and temperamental child had become happy, out-going and a good listener.

Overall parents felt their children's skills had developed significantly in the following ways:

- Well organised
- Takes care of things
- Is a good listener
- Will keep on trying
- Has a good sense of humour
- Can describe an event well
- Can take turns
- Shows feelings for others
- Pays good attention
- Can control temper
- Is independent at home
- Is a good loser
- Can share with other children
- Can keep to the rules
- Can share attention
- Is friendly to other children

The above responses are echoed across the country.

Q19. How can nurture groups impact on anti-social behaviour, gang culture and the NEET group of young people (Not in Education, Employment or Training)?

- By giving the children / young people appropriate skills to form relationships, understand and express feelings, develop empathy and an understanding of appropriate behaviours they are then able to go on to become "Successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens" A Curriculum for Excellence, Scotland.
- When the barriers to learning are addressed within a groups setting where the development of positive relationships with peers and adults is progressed, pupils develop resilience and coping strategies which prevent them from seeking out safety, security and belonging within gangs etc.. Due

to their experienced success within education, there is little need for attention seeking and anti-social behaviour in the community. As we know confident, successful learners become confident adults with the necessary qualities to access employment and turn around the deprivation cycle.

Q20. Why do we need nurture groups?

With increasing statistics in drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, LAC, mental health issues including post natal depression, stress and trauma, family breakdown, children are often not consistently given the basic care needs in order to develop social and emotional competency. This can be cyclical, with some parents not having had the opportunities to sufficiently develop themselves in order to provide appropriately for their children. However, as the causes can be numerous and various, the way forward is ensuring all needs are addressed using proven, effective strategies such as are used in nurture groups.

Q21. Do nurture groups support other agendas such as Sure Start, Restorative Justice etc.?

Yes. Early intervention and working with other agencies to prevent adverse circumstances and support families and early years establishments is a key objective. Nurture groups also utilise all relevant approaches within their curriculum, according to the needs to be addressed e.g. through music, drama, art, outdoor education, Circle Time, SULP (Social Use of Language Programme), healthy eating, environmental studies, thematic learning, restorative justice practices etc..

Q22. Are nurture groups linked to health initiatives?

Yes. Not only do the groups incorporate movement, sensory development, healthy eating, hand washing, cleanliness, tooth brushing etc. into their routine, but a number of studies have indicated that the known "at risk" factors in early life go on to become statistics for poor mental and physical health in later life if not addressed. Nurture groups go hand in glove with a number of other strategies and offer proven evidence of success. Many departments of mental health have directly supported the development of nurture groups.

Q23. What are the main reports that have referred to the success of nurture groups?

- The Warnock Report, 1978
- Excellence for all Children: Meeting Special Education Needs, DfEE 1997
- Meeting Special Education Needs: A programme of action, DfEE 1998
- Social Inclusion: Pupil Support, DfEE and Department of Health, 1999
- The Steer Report, DfES, 2005 and 2009
- The Scottish Government, Schools Sept 2008
- HMIE Report on nurture groups, 2009
- Ofsted Report on nurture groups, July 2011
- Numerous positive inspection reports from HMIE, Ofsted and Estyn
- Numerous press and journal articles

Q24. What role does the Nurture Group Network play?

The Nurture Group Network is an organisation with charitable status, set up to promote the development of nurture groups through:-

- Effective practice
- Provision of high quality training
- Quality monitoring, including the Quality Mark Award
- Research
- Publications
- Information exchange

Q25. What does the Nurture Group Network consist of?

The organisation has three offices in London, Wigan and Glasgow. The organisation is overseen by a board of Directors / Trustees.

Q26. What are the contact details to request further information or a discussion with personnel who know about nurture groups?

The web site address is www.nurturegroups.org

The contact details for the office in Scotland, where Irene Grant the National Director is based are:-

Address - Unit 103 Embroidery Mill, Abbeymill Business Park, Seedhill Road, Paisley, PA1 1TJ

Phone Number - 0141 233 0471

E Mail - irene@nurturegroups.org

The contact details for the Wigan office, where Judith Bitcon and Lynne Griffiths are based are:-

Address - 1 Beecham Court, Smithy Brook Road, Wigan, WN3 6PR

Phone Number - 01942 303 201 / 3

Fax Number - 01942 829 478

E Mail - judith@nurturegroups.org & lynne@nurturegroups.org

The contact details for Helen Stollery, our National Training Officer regarding any training opportunities are:-

E Mail - helen@nurturegroups.org