

Do Building STRONG FOUNDATIONS

Social and emotional learning in the early years

I began my career in education more than twenty years ago as a childminder. Those early mornings, setting up play invitations, greeting little ones and their families, noticing who needed a gentle start and who was ready to dive into imaginative play, shaped my understanding of what truly matters in the early years. Over the decades, I've watched the sector navigate challenge after challenge: shifting policy landscapes, funding pressures, increasing administrative demands, and the complex needs that families bring to us. Through it all, my commitment to the transformative role of early years provision has only deepened. We don't just care for children. We create the conditions where character, confidence, curiosity, and compassion take root.

At Coram Life Education, through our SCARF resources and Harold our much loved giraffe, we centre our early years support on personal, social and emotional development (PSED), because PSED is not a bolt-on; it is the foundation. When young children learn to recognise and name feelings, to recover when things feel big, to consider another person's perspective, and to solve problems together, they gain the capacities that enable language, executive function, and rich, playful learning to flourish. In home-based settings especially, where relationships are intimate and everyday routines are consistent, PSED the texture of the day, not a separate activity.



Donna Hill

Words: Donna Hill, Head of Coram Life Education & SCARF





The evidence base of SCARF early years

Personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is grounded in decades of solid research and practical theory. Children learn and grow best in secure, connected environments. Responsive relationships build resilience and confidence to explore. Learning thrives through interaction, using language, shared stories, and co-regulation to develop thinking and emotional skills. Consistency between home and early years settings creates stability and coherence. Children also learn by watching. When adults model calm responses and guide conflict resolution, they give children real-time tools for managing emotions and relationships.

High-quality PSED in early childhood improves school readiness, reduces anxiety, and fosters long-term wellbeing. In home-based settings,

everyday moments like snack time or tidy-up transitions become opportunities for co-regulation and language-rich interaction.

What SCARF offers

SCARF - Safety, Caring, Achievement, Resilience, and Friendship - brings these principles into focus. SCARF Early Years aligns with the EYFS framework and places PSED and Communication and Language at the heart of practice. Across six themed units, practitioners can access flexible resources, interactive stories, role-play prompts, and targeted activities that make it easy to embed SCARF in daily routines. The aim is to help children manage feelings, build friendships, and develop resilience in ways that feel playful, relational, and achievable.

The SCARF pillars in action

Safety – Predictable routines, visual timetables (“My Day”), and warm

reassurance create a secure base.

Caring – Adults narrate caring actions, notice micro-moments of kindness, and use stories to invite empathy.

Achievement – Focus on effort over outcome. Celebrate small steps, use stickers or charts judiciously, and frame setbacks as opportunities.

Resilience – Teach age-appropriate calming strategies (balloon breathing, count-to-five, squeeze-and-release), establish a calm corner, and read stories about overcoming challenges.

Friendship – Practise turn-taking in circle time, set up cooperative play invitations, and coach conflict resolution language: “Let’s find a solution that works for both of you,” or “How can we make this fair?”





Looking ahead: a shared commitment

Our recent collaboration with Coram PACEY to deliver training to childminders across Wales marks an exciting step forward in supporting high-quality early years practice. This was our first joint project focused on equipping childminders with practical strategies to embed personal, social and emotional development (PSED) into everyday routines. Through interactive workshops and real-life scenarios, participants explored how to create nurturing environments, model positive behaviours, and

strengthen children's emotional resilience. We look forward to working collaboratively again to support even more childminders.

Welcoming Coram PACEY into the Coram group marks an exciting step forward. We're looking ahead to opportunities to work together. While SCARF doesn't yet offer a resource designed exclusively for childminders, this is something we'd love to explore. Our commitment at SCARF is clear: to ensure all children have the opportunity to develop the skills for life, because every child deserves the best start, and

every educator deserves tools that fit their unique practice.

I started working in education as a childminder and now lead Coram SCARF, my motivation remains the same: wanting all children to develop the skills they need for life and championing the adults who show up, day after day, to shape the social and emotional worlds of young children. Your work matters—deeply. CP

Resource

- To find out more about SCARF bit.ly/4kakeoy

