National Portage Association

Partners with Parents and Children

National Portage Association Code of Practice 2025

Reviewed July 2025

© National Portage Association 2019

National Portage Association
Partners with Parents and Children

Contents

1. Portage Principles & Partnership Working 3

2. NPA Registered Portage Services 7

3. NPA Approved Early Years Settings 11

Please Note:

The National Portage Association (NPA) is committed to a system of ongoing review to ensure that this Code of Practice reflects developments in philosophy, practice and legislation relevant to the support of young children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families. As a result, the NPA reserves the right to amend the document at any time. The latest version of the Code of Practice can be found online at:

www.portage.org.uk

National Portage Association
Partners with Parents and Children

1. Portage Principles & Partnership Working

The National Portage Association (NPA) provides this Code of Practice as a framework for delivering Portage. The code is written for NPA-registered Portage Practitioners and NPA-approved Early Years settings to ensure that all Portage Practitioners have the information and guidance they need to enable them to deliver a high-quality service to children with SEND and families.

The Nature of Portage

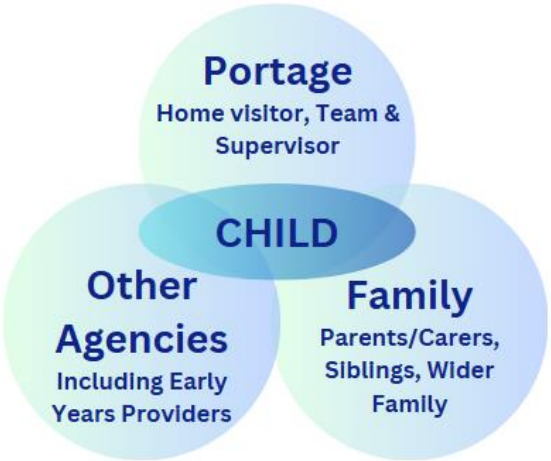
Portage is an educational support service for pre-school children (birth to five) with SEND and their families. Historically, Portage was defined as a home visiting service that is underpinned by a set of key 'Portage Principles'. Home visiting continues to be provided by registered Portage services across the country. However, Portage Principles can also be applied in Early Years Settings and the NPA now actively supports this approach through the Stamp of Approval scheme.

Portage aims to:

- work with families to help them develop a quality of life and experience, for themselves and their young children, in which they can learn together, play together, participate and be included in their community in their own right.
- play a part in minimising the barriers that confront young children with SEND and their families.
- support the national and local development of inclusive services for children with SEND.

Partnership Working

Partnership is a fundamental principle of the Portage approach. The NPA expects that all Portage Practitioners will work in partnership with parents and other agencies to ensure that planning and decision-making is always centred on the needs of the child and the family.



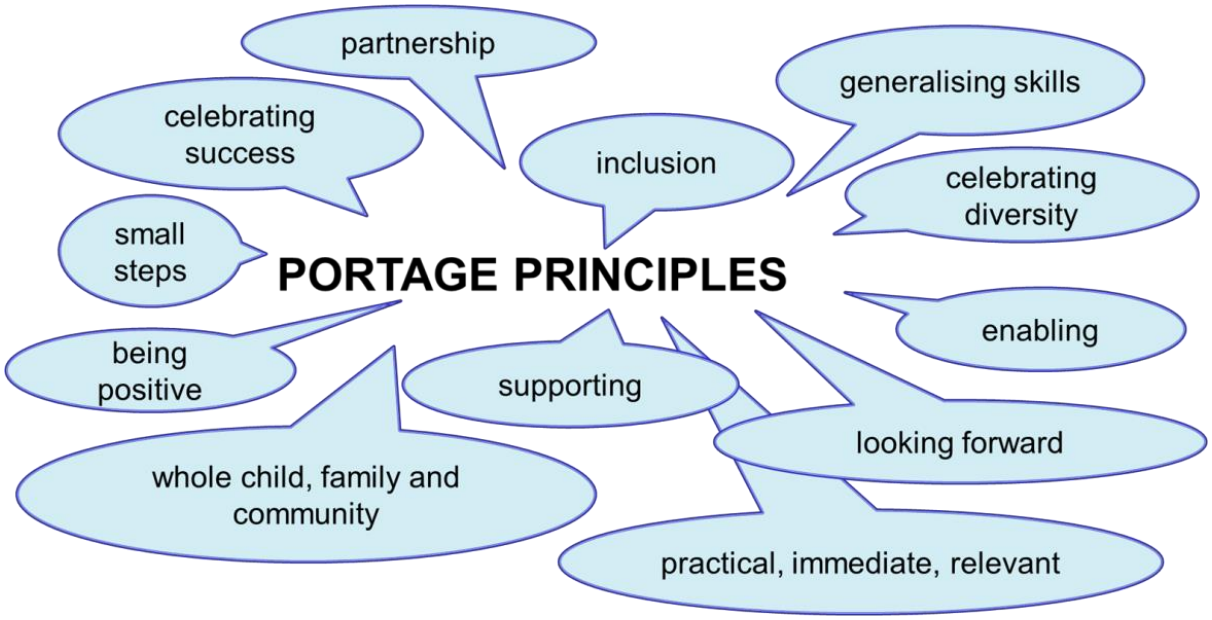
Working in Partnership with Parents

Portage Practitioners must work flexibly and sensitively to meet the needs of each individual family. **They should consider:**	• The frequency, location, timing and focus of visits • The number and complexity of activities planned for the child • The opportunities for embedding new learning and play within the daily routines of the family • Ways of working that respect and promote equality and diversity • Planning joint visits with other professionals involved with the child/family • Children's safety as the main priority in all aspects of their work
During their Portage experience, parents should be given the opportunity to:	• Play and practise planned activities with their child at home • Regularly review their child's experiences, successes and future needs and contribute to their progress reports • Contribute to the holistic assessment of their child and use profiles/developmental checklists that suit the needs of the child and the family • Record their child's experiences and successes using a method that is meaningful to the family e.g.: activity charts, diaries, photographs, video etc • Periodically review their wishes regarding the continuation of Portage. Families may ask to discontinue Portage support at any time • Have joint home visits, therapy session and review meetings with other agencies for their child • Find out about activities in the local community and networks they may wish to join • Plan and express their preferences for their child's transition from home-based learning and support to nursery/school provision
Parents' permission/consent should always be obtained when:	• Their child's goals/activities/progress are being shared with others, e.g.: during Portage supervision or through multi-agency working • Issues are raised on their behalf at team meetings or with other agencies • Images or video footage of their child are taken

The National Portage Association (NPA)

The NPA is a registered charity whose mission statement is to: *"Improve the learning of young children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and the skills of their parents, through the provision of quality training and support for Portage* Practitioners *and the Early Years workforce."*

Portage Principles



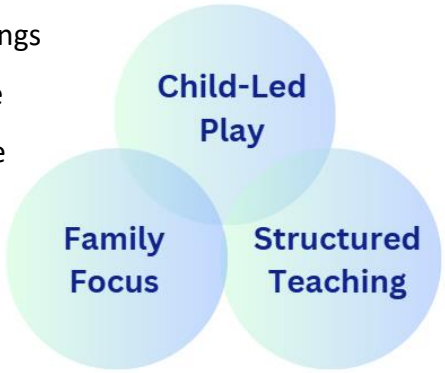
The NPA believes that all Portage Practice should be based on the following values and principles:

- every child and every family are of equal worth and has the right to be valued for their individuality
- every individual has the right to participate and be included in the community in their own right
- families have the right to make choices and decisions for themselves about things that are important to them now and in the future
- all children have the right to enjoy the widest range of play experiences, as these are the foundation of learning and development
- early childhood is the foundation on which children build the rest of their lives: it is not just a preparation for the next stage - it is vitally important in itself
- parents play the key role in supporting the young child's core development
- everyday contacts, relationships and activities are fundamental in nurturing development, quality of life and experience

- services for families are most useful when they support everyday living and are delivered within the child's natural environment
- all children are able to learn. Building on abilities and strengths, rather than focusing on difficulties, best supports their progress

The Portage Model

Portage home visits and work within NPA Approved Early Years settings should be based upon the three elements of the Portage Model. The model is flexible, and the time spent on each element during a home visit or within a setting will vary depending on the needs of the child and the family.



Child-led play	Family Focus	Structured teaching
• Time spent reviewing and planning opportunities for child's independent play • Observing the child's interests and motivators • Responding to child-led play • Generalising newly acquired skills • Discussing play with parents • Introducing new play ideas • Recording significant play observations • Planning play into family life	• Time spent sharing and addressing family priorities • Sharing daily experiences and routines • Addressing needs and looking forward • Sharing information • Signposting to other agencies and support available • Empowering parents • Promoting inclusion	• Time spent reviewing and planning teaching activities • Finding a child's baseline • Planning a sequence of small steps towards an agreed goal • Joint planning and practice of a teaching activity • Checking what has happened since the last visit/teaching session • Celebrating success • Deciding what to do next • Trying out a new activity and reviewing its success

2. NPA Registered Portage Services

NPA-registered Portage Services are characterised by:

- regular home visiting (on a weekly or fortnightly basis) from a Portage Practitioner using the Portage Model and Principles
- supporting young children with SEND with their development, play, communication, and relationships
- working together with parents/carers within the family, with them taking the lead role in the partnership
- helping parents/carers to identify what is important to them and their child and plan goals for learning and participation
- keeping a shared record of the child's progress and other issues raised by the family
- responding flexibly to the needs of the child and family when providing support
- Portage Practitioners accessing support through regular team meetings and supervision
- working closely with other agencies involved with the child/family

Home Visiting

Home Visiting is the core function of Portage Services. By visiting the family in their home and working with the child regularly, Portage Practitioners develop a partnership with parents based on a shared understanding of the strengths and support needs of the child and the family. The Portage Practitioner applies Portage Principles to all areas of their work and uses the three-circle model as an approach for each home visit.

- Families receiving Portage can expect regular visits from their Portage Practitioner at an agreed time. The NPA recommends weekly or fortnightly visits depending on the needs of each family.
- Home visits usually last a maximum of one hour and will include time spent on each of the three elements of the Portage Model (Child-Led Play, Structured Teaching and Family Focus) in a way that reflects the family's priorities at that particular time. Time is also spent on the visit writing up shared visit notes with the family.

- The caseload of the Portage Practitioner should take into account the number of hours worked, experience, visit preparation time, the number of families requiring visits, other teaching commitments (e.g. groups), supervision/team meeting time and travel time. Service Managers must consider all of these factors when determining caseloads within their team. Typically, services allocate up to three hours per visit plus supervision and team meeting time. For a full-time Practitioner this may equate to 12 home visits/teaching sessions per week, with maximum of 16/17 on the caseload, depending on travel needs and the locality of families. Reasonable adjustments should be considered and implemented, where required, for individual Portage Practitioners.

Holistic Assessment - 'Finding Out About Me'

Portage is a positive approach that considers the whole child and family and acknowledges the skills the child is already using in their everyday life. The Portage Practitioner and the family work together to build up a *'Finding Out About Me'* profile of the child. The profile is a holistic assessment that presents the fullest possible picture of the child's abilities and needs at a particular time. This is then used to inform planning and ensure appropriate goals are set.

Observation of my play	My Family	Looking towards the future	People who help me
• What is the child able to do? • How do they communicate? • What activities do they enjoy and what might they avoid? • How do they explore the environment? • Do they play alone or with others?	• What is the child good at and what do they enjoy doing at home? • What happens in the family's daily routine? • What do the family perceive as the main areas of need? • Does the child respond differently in different environments e.g. home/shops/setting? • What are the family's main priorities?	• Long term goals should be decided jointly with the family and supporting professionals • These goals should take into consideration the future outcomes and aspirations of the child and family	• What are the child's strengths and • specific areas of need? • How can the child best be helped and by whom? • What are we working on together now? • What are our future joint goals?

Portage Practitioners should have access to and use a **broad range of assessment materials** including observational records and developmental profiles/checklists. There are a range of useful materials available (both standard EYFS and SEND specific) that can support the process of developing goals for a child with SEND, for example the NPA Assessment Checklist, EYFS *Development Matters* and the Early Support Developmental Journals. These documents provide a framework for discussion with parents and carers about the child's individual strengths and needs in the context of the family's day-to-day life. However, they should always be used sensitively with parents alongside a range of other assessment approaches to ensure the small steps for learning are appropriate for the individual child.

The NPA recommend that long term goals for children should be **reviewed three times per year** and should seek to promote the child's:

1. Play and personal development
2. Learning, physical development and communication
3. Participation and inclusion within the day-to-day life of the family and the wider community

Record Keeping

Portage Practitioners are expected to keep shared records with the family of their child's progress during their Portage journey. This includes notes about home visits, planned activity records, progress reviews and reports. Portage services use a range of recording formats for planned activities. These may be open-ended or outcome-focused plans, depending on the nature and purpose of the activity and the preferences of the family.

All information acquired by a Portage Practitioner during the course of working with a family should be treated as confidential and the data protection practices of the local authority/organisation should be strictly adhered to. Information should only be sought from or shared with other agencies with parental permission, except in the case of safeguarding concerns.

Supervision

To sustain high quality services for children with SEND and their families, Portage Services are required to have systems in place for regular supervision of Portage Practitioners (in addition to team meetings). All Portage Practitioners must have planned opportunities for supervision where discussion of individual children and Portage Practice should take place with an experienced Portage Supervisor/Line Manager. These should occur at least fortnightly and may be individual or group sessions. Those providing supervision to Portage Practitioners should have successfully completed a Portage Workshop delivered by an NPA-Accredited Trainer. The NPA strongly recommends that they also have experience of delivering Portage visits to families in the home environment.

Training and Development for the Portage Workforce

The NPA is committed to providing high-quality training and professional development for Portage Practitioners at all stages of their career, to enable progression and challenge for individuals and to sustain and develop a highly skilled Portage workforce. As such, the following guidelines should be followed by registered services:

- All Portage Practitioners must successfully complete a Portage Workshop delivered by a NPA-Accredited Trainer.
- Newly appointed Portage Practitioners are expected to complete an induction period; working through the NPA induction checklist with the support of their mentor/line manager.
- Portage Services must have at least three current members of the NPA (professional membership) within their team, or in the case of small services of four Portage Practitioners or less, 50% of the team must be members.
- The NPA Core Competencies should be embedded within the practice of the overall service and individual Portage Practitioners.
- Services should strive to ensure members of their team attend NPA regional networking days, regional meetings and the NPA Development Day.
- It is desirable to have members of the Portage team who have completed and passed or are working towards completion of Portage Professional qualifications (Level 3) or to have members of the team with a relevant degree.
- It is desirable for each service to have at least one NPA Accredited Trainer or someone who is working towards their Accredited Trainer Status.

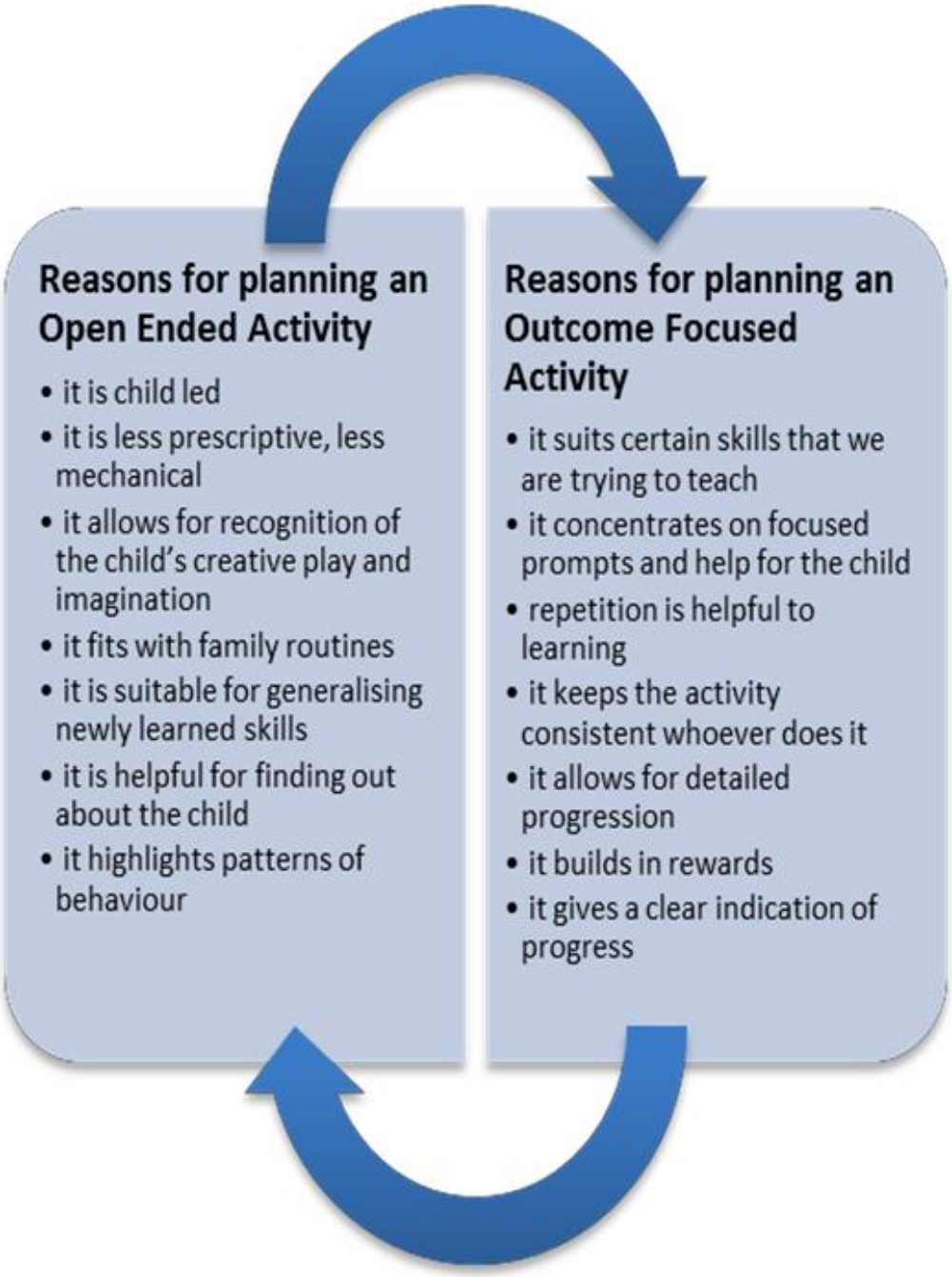
3. NPA Approved Early Years Settings

The NPA Stamp of Approval is an award given to Early Years settings and Childminders (registered with OFSTED) who have demonstrated that they deliver inclusive early years education based upon Portage Principles.

Early Years Settings are awarded the 'NPA Stamp of Approval' based on their ability to fulfil the following essential criteria:

1. **Portage Principles** are applied within the setting and underpin all aspects of their work with children with SEND.
2. The setting was **rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding'** in their most recent OFSTED report.
3. A **broad range of assessment materials** (including observational records, developmental profiles/checklists and advice from other professionals) are used with parents and carers of children with SEND to discuss their children's individual strengths and needs. This '**holistic approach' to assessment** ensures the fullest possible picture of the child is obtained and then used to inform planning and ensure appropriate goals are set. Checklists are selected carefully and used sensitively with parents to ensure the small steps for learning are appropriate for the individual child.
4. Children's plans and goals are reviewed with parents/carers at least three times per year and seek to promote the child's:
    - Play and personal development
    - Learning, physical development and communication
    - Participation and inclusion within the day-to-day life of the family & the wider community

5. **Shared records** are kept with the family to document their child's progress, other issues raised by the family, planned activities, progress reviews and reports. A range of recording formats may be used for planned activities. These may be **open-ended** or **outcome- focused** depending on the nature and purpose of the activity and the preferences of the family. Activity Plans are used flexibly; centred on the individual needs of the child (identified from a holistic assessment) and agreed with parents.



6. At least two Practitioners within the setting have successfully completed a Portage Workshop delivered by an NPA-Accredited Trainer (or for individual childminders/settings with three or less staff, one Practitioner has completed training).

7. At least one Practitioner within the setting holds professional membership of the National Portage Association.

   It is desirable that there are Practitioners within the setting who have completed and passed or are working towards completion of the Level 3 Award in Portage Skills Open Awards Level 3: The Portage Model - A Small Steps Approach to Learning for Children with Special Educational Needs | National Portage Association

Responsibilities of Approved Settings

- Settings are awarded the NPA Stamp of Approval for a period of one year and are expected to apply for renewal each year to maintain their status.
- Settings are expected to maintain the standards of inclusion achieved at the time of application throughout the duration of their award e.g. if a Portage-trained Practitioner leaves the service, settings should make every effort to seek out Portage training from a NPA-Accredited Trainer for other Practitioners to ensure this criteria continues to be met.
- Settings are also expected to maintain strong links with their local Portage Service (where possible); sharing good practice to benefit from each other's expertise. Early Years Practitioners should work in partnership with Portage Practitioners supporting children who attend the setting, using a small steps approach to learning to achieve the best possible outcomes for the child and the family.