

5. Cultures of care

The ways in which we look after babies and toddlers are strongly shaped by cultural factors at the individual, setting and national level.

“meaningful pedagogy with very young children is a culturally-specific phenomenon”

(Cooper et al, 2022)



Look at the photo. Think about the values it reflects and what it makes you feel.



Cultures of care

What the research tells us

Cultural values can influence care practices in both homes and nursery settings.

- A study of care practices for one-year-olds in England, USA, New Zealand and Hong Kong found significant differences in pedagogy and practices across the four contexts. For example, Hong Kong settings often used more structured adult direction during everyday routines, such as mealtimes. In New Zealand, looser, child-led flexibility was prioritised ⁽¹⁾.
- Cultural values about nature influence care practices such as sleeping. In Finland for example, where spending time in nature is highly valued, it is common for babies to have their daytime sleeps outdoors ⁽²⁾.

- The organisational culture of early childhood settings can strongly influence how very young children are cared for and whether there are opportunities for relational, responsive care giving. Adult driven practice can overshadow young children's emotional needs and generate internal struggles for educators ⁽³⁾.

Find out more:

1. Cooper et al (2022)
2. Kemp et al. (2025a)
3. Guard (2023a)



Cultural norms and values may be passed on to babies and toddlers through care practices. It is therefore important to reflect on and question these everyday routines.

