



Toddler Sense Case Study

Erica Scriven established her Toddler Sense Franchise in Stafford and Stone, Staffordshire in November 2017, and is a high performing franchisee. We are delighted to share her WOW story so far.

What was your background prior to establishing your Toddler Sense franchise?

I have always worked with children. I was a portage home teacher for special needs under-fives teaching the parents how to teach their children new skills. Then I worked in the team just under safeguarding, offering early help to families and with children with disabilities in the Physical Disability Support Service (PDSS) but in 2017 this service was decommissioned so I was made redundant.

Why Toddler Sense?

I was looking for a business I could run and be self-employed. I'd had enough of the council by this point. I wanted my own business that involved children under five and parents as this was all I knew. My sister's friend attended Baby Sensory Stafford and was coming to an end of their time, and she was told there was no follow-on programme in this area, so I started to investigate, and fell in love with the structure of free play and structured activities. It's different to anything else out there.

What does a typical week look like for you?

2024 looks very different to when I first started! I started out running six classes over three days all on my own, gradually taking on a helper to help me set out in the mornings then stay to help during the classes.

Between 2018 – 2023 – I grew to ten classes over four days with help most of the time setting up in class. Thursday was my change over day getting ready for Friday, which was my new week start, so if I had parties at the weekends then the van was packed and I only had the party props to worry about. I always use a helper for parties at weekends when mobile. Now in 2024, I am running twelve classes over five days. I have a helper in most classes except on a Monday afternoon and all-day Thursday. Saturday classes I run solo and in parties with over fifteen children I have a helper. I always leave 45 mins in-between classes to ensure I have time to chat to parents help if someone is upset or needs help with the baby. I like the fact I'm not rushing them out because I have another class in the next 20 mins. This way there is loads of time to chat and set out cleaning between classes as well. I also have extra jobs such as cleaning the mats, dusting and mopping the floors as well as admin time to plan, compile social media posts, mend items and shop for supplies.

What do you enjoy most about running Toddler Sense?

The children. Seeing their little faces every day and hearing them say WOW as they come through the door. Getting to know them when they come every week for three years. Parents coming back with a second child to your class gives a massive buzz, it meant they loved it but just didn't tell you.

If you started your Toddler Sense business again, what would you do differently?

Insisted I had the whole garage for storage at home and not just a third, would have made my life easier! To be honest I'm very happy with how it's gone and I'm not sure I'd change much at all if anything.

What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?

Class times – It's the hardest thing to get this right as everyone has a different routine and nap times.

Storage -do not underestimate how much space you need!! Managing customers -be clear and fair with your terms and conditions, taking each case as an individual. Managing behaviour in class – it really helps to have an extra pair of hands with a class helper to support the children who present more challenging behaviours.

Filling spaces – hold your nerve with bookings, you need to be consistent with your days and not pull the plug if you have poor numbers in a particular class. I remember running a class with one child in it back in 2017- my persistence paid off.

How has working with your Franchisor and the wider Wow network helped you in your business?

In the beginning my franchisor was there when I needed her, I spent time with her at her classes and spent a day with another lady who runs Toddler Sense in our team to find out what it was like to be mobile as my franchisor at the time was in a Permanent Venue. It's nice to have a small team to ask questions of as primarily you are alone working it out on day-to-day basis. Sometimes you just have the daftest question and need someone to ask. It's even better now as I work in the next room to Baby Sensory Stafford so we share equipment / run things past each other etc. It's fabulous having Workplace and using the Toddler Sense groups to ask for help and get ideas from. The supplies site is also good to pick up some extra kit.

What skills and characteristics are important to be a successful Toddler Sense Franchisee?

Massively organised to make sure you have shown the attention to detail. Tidy, calm natured, patient, outgoing.

What are your future plans?

2023 was the year I really grew my business and I'm happy here for now maintaining my Permanent Venue which I waited 6 years for due to trying to find the right location. I have run some Stay & Plays sessions this half term which have gone down well so more of these will be on the cards for Easter.

Longer term, as I reach the end of my five-year lease in my Permanent Venue I would like to find a class leader to run some classes for me as by then I will be 60!!

Finally, what advice would you give to someone interested in establishing their own Toddler Sense Franchise?

Do your research on location and what's already in your area, although Baby Sensory and Toddler Sense are the best and you will outshine anything else in the area once they have been to one of your classes. Link in with the local Baby Sensory franchisee and make friends with them. They are your key to finding your next customers. The first year is the hardest for business and getting your name out there. Be prepared to reinvest most your first year's profits by adding things to your kit. Once you have two years plans under your belt it's much easier because you have sourced all your props. After that, it's adding the WOW factor to your play area. Know your audience in terms of age range of children, and make sure the play area and activities are well paced and set out. Attention to detail is key, the look of the room as the parents walk through the door is so important; is it clean? Is your tablecloth ironed? Is the cloth straight on the table. Is the room safe? Does the play area look WOW? Have you enough space and enough toys out? Does it look different every week to WOW the parents? It's the parents you are winning over not the children. Chat to the parents. Listen to their worries. Know where to direct them to or if you don't know, find out and message them later. Play with the children, giving the parents a break.

Message parents if you've not seen them for two weeks and not heard from them.

Make yourself available, introduce lone parents to others.

Have a laugh, empathise with them.

The parents love the fact I bounce on a Rody, charge around on a wheelie car, and join in with everything.

And I could go on and on!

Erica Scriven, Toddler Sense Stafford and Stone