

Building Smooth transitions

Throughout our lives we make many transitions, the process by which we move from one condition to another. By the time we reach adulthood most of us have learnt mechanisms to cope with these changes. Many children really struggle with transitions and it's important that we get things right for them so that, not only are they happy throughout these periods of time in the setting but, that it starts to help prepare them for the next transition in life. Some of the biggest changes a child will experience are starting with a Childminder or nursery and then going into school. These are often the first experiences of spending time away from home and their primary carers. It is paramount that these periods are positive experiences.

Transitions are not an event, but a process that both Early Years (EY) practitioners and parents/ primary carers are involved in. If the process is managed effectively and with sensitivity the impact on the child's well-being is more likely to be positive and the ability to cope with future transitions greatens.

It is also important to note that transitions also effect the adults as well as the child. Preparation for a child starting in a new setting needs to be extended to the carers needs, as well as the child.

Key person

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) states "Each child must be assigned a key Person". Their role is to help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs, to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents. The key person within a childcare setting should get to know the child and understand their needs. This in turn will help the child to feel safe and secure and give them a base from which they can explore the world around them. By having a figure that meets their physical and emotional needs and is attentive and playful, gives the child confidence to know they are **'known'**.

Birth to five suggests, The key person role involves a **‘triangle of trust’** with the child and the family. This approach will ensure that all children and their families have one or more persons within the setting with whom they have a special, nurturing relationship. The presence of a key person helps the child to feel emotionally secure when away from home and provides a reassuring point to contact for parents.

The key person has responsibilities for building relationships with the child and their families. This will involve close personal care for the baby or child. It is vital therefore that, parents share knowledge about their child.

In childminding settings, where the childminder works alone, the childminder is the key person. In childminding settings where there are assistants or co-childminders, children will be allocated a key worker. When allocating a key worker in a larger setting the needs of the child should always come first and ideally should be able to choose their key worker.

Information sharing

As mentioned above, it is vital that the allocated key person for the child gathers as much information as they can from the child’s carers prior to the child starting in the setting. One popular method of information sharing is an “All about me” document. These are designed to gain written information about the child and a brief overview of the family. Photos can also be included, so that the key person can have a more visual comprehension of the families make up and background.

It is equally as important that the setting shares information with the parent to help prepare the child at home. This could be done in the form of a transition booklet which the parent can take home to share with their child. The booklet can contain pictures of the home / building, showing where children sleep, eat and play. It can show pictures of the Childminder and their family or staff in larger settings or people that visit on a regular basis and pictures of places that are visited.

There are many ways of preparing for a child to settle into a new Early Years (EY) setting. We must not also forget the impact this can have on the other children already

at the setting. They too need to be prepared for this transition. They need to know about the child and why they might be upset when they first start. The children can get involved with the transition by sorting toys and resources the new child may like or they could be involved by shopping and choosing a soft toy that can be specifically for the new child. We will talk more about this in comfort/ transition objects.

Settling sessions

Every setting will have a different settling policy and every child is unique and will take different lengths of time to settle. Some children will separate from their primary carer without looking back and others can be traumatized by the whole situation.

It is considered best practice to have a two – four week settling period, but it is vital to adapt this according to the child's needs. Some may need much more than this, but some even less. However, there will always be occasions where emergency circumstances prevail and there will be little or no time to settle the child at their pace. In these circumstances, it is important to have a two way conversation, and assure the parent that you will do everything in the child's best interest to settle in the time available.

To begin with, it is advisable that the parent visit the setting with the child for a couple of sessions without the leaving the child. Many settings now do home visits, which allows the key person to visit the child in their own surroundings and play with their own toys.

Once the child appears happy to be in the new setting with their familiar adult, then they can start leaving them for short periods. The parent/carers should always say goodbye to the child and explain they will be back soon. It is never advisable to 'sneak out' as this can lose the child's trust of parent and make matters worse in the long run, with a child not wanting to leave the parents side when they arrive as they anticipate the parent 'abandoning' them in a place they don't yet feel totally comfortable in.

When starting the process of leaving the child, this should be done very gradually. The first few times it is advisable that the key person, parent and child play together and then the parent announce they are popping into another room and return after a few

minutes. This slow pace can be built up gradually, until the key person and the carer feel the child is ready for their adult to leave the building. Each time the child attends for a settling session the time that they are left can increase. It is always best to arrange the first settling sessions at a time that the child is not tired or hungry.

Comfort / transition objects

A transitional object is something chosen that offers security and comfort to a child. The items are often soft and huggable like a soft toy or blanket. These objects help reassure a child when facing new situations or separation anxiety. They are a sign of independence and can help the child to feel safe. These objects will often smell of home and help the a child to adjust in new situations.

As mentioned previously, the new setting could buy a new soft toy which could become a 'transition object', that travels with the child between home and setting, creating talking points about the child's time in both and it will pick up smells from both which the child may find comforting. This could work particularly well, if a child does not have a particular favourite toy or comfort at home.

Unfortunately, the attitude to personal belongings being taken into settings can vary very much, but comfort objects should be encouraged, especially in those early days whilst the child is adjusting to the new surroundings. As a child matures, they will learn new coping mechanisms and will naturally leave the comfort objects behind, or store them in their dedicated place at your setting.

Transitions into School

Regardless of how well a child settled into an EY setting, starting school is a major transition. By this time, children have matured and started putting coping mechanisms into place in different aspects of their life. However, preparation will definitely be needed to approach the transition into school.

This is also a difficult time for the parents and practitioners (particularly key persons as some will have cared for the child since being a baby.) As in many cases strong bonds and trusts have been built and the emotional importance of those relationships coming

to an end can be very upsetting. It is important that parents and practitioners talk about this, so that each other knows how the other are feeling and can support each other.

The importance of **partnership is key!** There needs to be a strong channel of information sharing between the parents, the EY setting and the school. We often talk about a child being 'school ready' but, it is equally as important that the school is ready for the child! Practitioners who are key people should be discussing with parents how they are preparing their child for school and equally the key person should share with the parent what is being done and said in the setting.

Most schools have transition/settling sessions, where by the child can attend with their parent or carer. The more information a teacher receives about a child's background, the more they can plan and prepare for their arrival. Written transition reports, written by the EY setting with input from the child and their parents can help to do this. Settling sessions can help the child start to familiarize themselves with the environment of their classroom and their class teacher and Assistants and possibly some of the other children in their class. Parents can also use this time to gain information that will be useful about their child starting school.

Along with the parents, EY practitioners can start preparing the children by looking at school's website and talking about the building and the uniform etc. There are now so many books on the market about starting school and these can be shared with the children. Practitioners and parents need to encourage children to be independent with everyday tasks like toileting (unless there are additional needs that delay this), handwashing, putting shoes and coats on and off etc.

Children need time to prepare for separating from their Early Years setting. Their last day needs to be planned, acknowledged and marked as a celebration. All settings will do this differently. Some will opt for a graduation ceremony and others will perhaps opt for just a teddy bears picnic lunch. Whatever is chosen, it should be meaningful to the child.

Once the child has left the setting, parents could be encouraged to re-visit occasionally, this gives reassurance to the child, that their Childminder or nursery is still there and is

thought about. This is also important for the practitioners to know that those children are hopefully settling into their next stage of life. EY practitioners play such a crucial and integral role in child's early development and it needn't just end when a child starts school.

About Childminding UK

Childminding UK has been supporting childminders for over 30 years. Formed in 1991 by and for local working childminders in Northamptonshire, we now support childminders across the country. A registered charity, we are the only national organisation that solely supports childminders and we have recently achieved the Princess Royal Training Award for 'Ensuring high quality childcare through training and support'. All staff are experienced childcare professionals, and have been childminders themselves and our trustees are working childminders or have knowledge of childminding, so we have a good understanding of the sector.

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