

09 Childcare practice procedures

09.4 Prime times – Settling in and transitions

To feel securely settled and ready to learn, children need to form attachments with the adults who care for them, primarily a key person, but others too. In this way they feel part of a community; they are able to contribute to that community and receive from it. Very young children, especially two- to three-year-olds, approach separation from their parent with anxieties, older children have a more secure understanding of 'people permanence' and are able to approach new experiences with confidence; but also need time to adjust and feel secure. It is the entitlement of all children to be settled comfortably into a new environment. Please note that the settling-in process will depend on each child and their needs.

We follow a three-stage model of settling in based on three key needs:

1. *Proximity* - young children feel safest when a familiar adult, such as a parent, is present when they are getting used to a new carer, which is why we visit you in your home, to start the attachment process.
2. *Secure base* – Because the initial need for proximity of the parent has been met, young children gradually begin to feel secure with a key person in a new surrounding so that they are able to participate independently for small periods of time.
3. *Dependency* – young children are able to separate from parents' and main carers when they have formed a secure attachment to their key person who knows and understands them best and on whom they can depend for their needs to be met.

The setting manager and key person explain the need for settling in and agree a plan, which they discuss with the parents. Each visit they review the plan and agree what will happen the next day/session.

Settling-in those with SEND

- If a child has been identified as having SEND then the key person/SENCO and parents will need to identify and address potential barriers to settling in e.g. timings of medication and invasive procedures, specific routines and levels of support.

Promoting proximity

- This starts with the home visit.
- During the induction the parent and manager/supervisor will go through the paperwork while the keyperson and child spend time together.
- One to two hours is sufficient for a child to attend on any one day initially.
- On the first day, the key person shows the child around, introduces members of staff, and explains how the day is organised, making the child feel welcome and comfortable.
- The key person always greets the parent and child on the first couple of visits. (Shift patterns may need to be adjusted when settling in.)

- Over subsequent days, depending how the child is responding, the time they stay in the setting will be extended.

Promoting secure base

- When the young child has experienced different times of the day, these are then fitted together to establish continuity of the day.
- When the parent leaves, they always say goodbye and say they are coming back. Parents should never slip away without the child noticing; this can lead to greater distress.
- Gradually, the time the child attends is built up.

Promoting dependency

- Attachment can be seen when the child shows signs that they are happy to transfer their need to be dependent onto the key person. Key persons look for signs such as being pleased to see them, looking for them when distressed, establishing eye contact, responding to play, and taking comfort from the key person.
- Parents can now leave their child for longer.
- After 4-6 weeks, the key person reviews the settling in plan with the parent and discusses how well the child has settled. They discuss problems that may have arisen and plan how they will be overcome.

Prolonged absences

- Toddlers are absent from the setting for any periods of time beyond one or two weeks, their attachment to their key persons will have decreased and will need to be built up again.
- Parents are made aware of the need to 're-settle' their children and a plan is agreed.

Two-year-olds starting a setting for the first time

- A two-year-old may have little or no experience of group care. As part of gathering information from parents, it is important to find out about the child's experience of non-parental care, for example grandparents, or childminder; this informs staff as to how a child may respond to a new situation.
- The Key person and another member of staff will do a home visit where the key person spends time with the child to start the attachment process, while the other member of staff goes through the paperwork and starts forming the partnership with the parent(s)/carer(s) and a settling process is discussed.
- The parent then attends for an induction meeting with the setting manager or supervisor, to go through paperwork and the settling-in process, while the child visits the setting with the key person.
- To settle in a two-year-old, the setting will go through the same process of gradually increasing the time a child attends.
- On the first day, your child will stay for a short period, while you wait in the centre café, or nearby, on day two, your child will stay longer and so on.

- It is evident that the child is developing a sense of secure base when he or she shows interest in activities and begins to engage with the key person and other children.
- Separation can cause anxiety in two-year-olds, as they have no concept of where their parents have gone. Parents should always say goodbye and tell them when they will return. Patience with the process will ensure children are happy and eager to come to play and be cared for in the setting.

Three- and four-year-olds

- Most children of this age can move through the stages more quickly and confidently.
- Some children take longer, and their needs for proximity and secure base stages should be accommodated as much as possible.
- Some children appear to leap to dependency/independence within a couple of days. In most cases, they will revert to the need for proximity and secure base. It can be difficult to progress to true dependency/independence and this can be frustrating.
- The Key person and another member of staff will do a home visit where the key person spends time with the child to start the attachment process, while the other member of staff goes through the paperwork and starts forming the partnership with the parent(s)/carer(s) and a settling process is discussed.
- During a pandemic or epidemic the parent will attend an induction meeting with the setting manager or supervisor, while the child visits the setting and key person instead of a home visit.
- On the first day, your child will stay for a short period, while you wait in the centre café, or nearby, on day two, your child will stay longer and so on.
- Parents are encouraged to explain to their child where they are going, and that they will return.
- If by the fifth day, the child is able to spend more time without the parent, the child may be ready for a short day or session the following week, progressing to a full day or session very soon.

For children whose first language is not English

- For many children learning English as an additional language, the stage of proximity may take longer as the child is dependent upon the parents' input to make sense of what is going on.
- If the parent does not speak English, efforts are made to source an interpreter for induction.
- The settling-in programme is explained to the parent, during the home visit and it is emphasised how important it is that the parent explains that they will be attending pre-school in the coming days.
- Through the interpreter, the key person will try to gauge the child's level of skills in their home language; this will give the key person an idea of the child's interests and levels of understanding.
- The need for the parent to converse in the child's home language is important, therefore it is important to talk to your child in both your home language and English.
- The key person makes the parent feel welcome using smiles and gestures.

- During the home visit or induction, the manager with the parent, will make a list of key words in the child's home language; sometimes it is useful to write the word as you would pronounce it. These words will be used with the child and parents will be addressed with 'hello' and 'goodbye' in their language.
- The key person prepares for the child's visits by having a favourite toy or activity ready for the child to provide a means to interact with the child.
- Children will be spoken to as per any other child, using gestures and facial expressions to help.
- Progress with settling in will be done as with any other child; it may just take a little longer to reach dependency/independence.