



A PRACTITIONER'S HANDBOOK.

Effective communication during transitioning to full time nursery school settings.



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How to use this handbook?

This handbook is for practitioners within Nursery settings, working with children from the ages of three to four years old.

The theory used within this handbook is also supported by many different forms of research and practical ideas that will help you effectively support children within your settings.

There are four different sections to use within this handbook to help improve practice and build relationships with children in your settings, their families and those you work alongside.

Introduction.

What is transition?

Education Scotland (2022) describes transitioning as changes that everyone endures. They believe examples of transitioning are those such as, transitioning from the home to early years settings, then into full time primary then secondary school, and then onto further education. Brooker (2008) suggests that transitions are now a part of a human being's character, she believes that children in settings not only have to transition into schools, but they are also transitioning through things such as, becoming refugees and asylum seekers. Trodd (2012) believes that these types of transitions may also be described as unpredictable times for children, and therefore they may require extra emotional support during this time to ensure they feel safe and cared for. For a child starting full time nursery within a school setting, the transition process is a constant feature due to factors such as new children starting at different times of the school year and changes to staff members (Ricciardi, 2013). Transitioning into early years settings such as full-time nursery school can be a very anxious and big step for young children, and due to reasons, such as parents work commitments and grandparents still in fulltime employment, it is a step that many young children are having to take (OECD, 2017).

What is effective communication?

Communication is a process of sharing ideas with others according to MTD training (2010). Thompson (2018) suggests that people communicate not only verbally, but also in the way they dress and their gestures. To become an effective communicator, there are certain skills required. The open university (2022) believes that an effective communicator is someone who is empathetic, a good speaker and must also have the ability to listen well. Rose (2012) believes that a practitioner must also understand the power of non-verbal communication within an early years setting. Non-verbal communication allows practitioners to connect with others, and Rose (2012) believes that children will often notice and attune with the body language of their caregiver. Effective communication involves more than just simply an exchange in conversation, it is having the ability to understand meaning of information within the conversation whilst feeling the emotions, and also allowing the speaker to feel understood and heard (University of Oxford, 2012). Emerson (2021) believes that practitioners should practice how to actively listen by asking open ended questions and being non-judgmental.

The Role of the adult.

Bailey, Hunter and Marsden (2018) states that practitioners can help promote smooth transitioning within settings by following article twelve of the UNCRC rights of the child, where every child has the right to express their needs and their views and that their needs are to be taken seriously (UNCRC 2017).

Practitioners working within the early years team are encouraged to form an attachment and a connection with each child in their care, it is believed that children who have positive starts and emotionally available adults early in their educational journey, may have better experiences and less chemical changes within their brains due to less anxiety and stress (Lindon, 2009).

Oxfordshire county council (2017) suggests that practitioners should involve parents and carers in the child's transition period as they know the child's likes and dislikes and can help practitioners create a comfortable environment, that can help them settle and feel safe. Lindon (2009) states that society has changed since Bowlby's theory, however, children have not. Attachments are now also formed in settings such as schools and day cares, not just at home, however Lindon (2009) believes that a child would suffer great distress if their attachments were disrupted.

Bandura's (1971) social learning theory suggests that children's behaviour and new patterns of learning could be acquired through observation, imitation and modelling those around them. Midwest Symposium for Leadership in Behaviour Disorders (MSLBD) (2022) refers to Bandura's research and Bobo doll experiment as ground-breaking. They believe that Bandura's findings suggest that from watching adult behaviour and mimicking violence that is portrayed on television or computer games can make aggressive behaviour seem attractive.

According to Western Governors University (2022) the four elements to Bandura's social learning theory include:

- Attention- Children are unable to learn if they are unable to focus.
- Retention- To learn something means to embed information so that a child can return to it at another time in a similar situation.
- Reproduction- Children will repeat learned behaviour when needed and will also rehearse responses internally, in order to improve future responses.
- Motivation- A child may feel driven to model good behaviour after witnessing another child being rewarded.



(Source: Gerard Friel, N.D)

Dunlop and Fabian (2007) believe that it is beneficial for practitioners to gain as much information on the child in order to understand their backgrounds and their needs. They believe that by actively involving and creating links with children, parents and any children's service that may be working in partnership with the families can be key to building a picture of the whole child.

Trodd (2012) believes that as practitioners, supporting children and families throughout the transition process enables them to build resilience and enables the child to learn many new skills and coping mechanisms. However, if this is not the case and the adult within the setting feels that more support is needed then they must raise any concerns with line managers and listen to parents and families who can help with helping the child feel at ease.

Wilson (2016) suggests that there may be certain barriers that could cause working in partnership with parents difficult-

- Parents lack confidence to engage.
- Parents schedules may not coincide with opening times of the setting.
- Practitioners unable to be open-minded to change.

As practitioners the best interests of the child must be of the highest priority in any actions or decisions that involve or affect children within the settings (UNCRC, 2017).

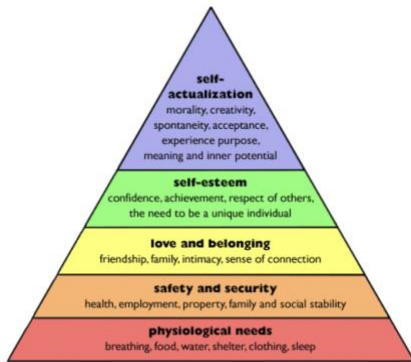
Working in partnerships also involves outside agencies that help support and protect children. By working in partnership with other agencies it helps ensure that the needs of children and their families are addressed and met (Gasper, 2010).

The WJEC (2019) believes that to ensure children and their families are being protected there are certain principles that should be adopted-

- Effective communication.
- Teamwork
- Rules are in place and are followed
- Trust
- Respect
- Realistic targets are set
- Confidentiality is always maintained
- Reflective practice- What worked/did not work
- All teams are working towards the same outcome

In order to gain a full insight to a child's life and situation practitioners must work in collaboration with other agencies such as social workers and educational psychologists as well as many others, practitioners are able to take the necessary steps to keep children safe (NSPCC, 2016)

The needs of the child.



(Source: Research History, 2012)

The hierarchy of needs model is separated into five separate categories:

- Physiological.
- Safety and security.
- Belongingness.
- Esteem.
- Self-actualization.

Stoyanov (2017) states that Maslow was of the opinion that humans were initially motivated to feed certain needs, beginning with the simplest yet most essential.

Kaufman (2020) suggests that Maslow did not believe that anyone can fully complete a stage of the hierarchy pyramid, therefore it is a tool that requires constant work that may not always have a positive outcome. A person could achieve wonderful things throughout their life yet still be left feeling unfulfilled (Kaufman, 2020).

However whereas Maslow believed self-actualization is achieved automatically when all other needs in the pyramid have been met, Carl Rogers the father of client-centred therapy, who is linked to Maslow, believed that supporting the person can also help achieve self-actualization (Aubrey and Riley, 2017, p.11)

Maslow's hierarchy of needs model starts from the bottom up, so for example, in order to reach self-actualization, a child's physical needs need to be met and they need to feel safe and secure in their surroundings (Lester, 2013, pg 1.)

Piché (2015) suggests that these needs can take on many different forms and each child will progress at different speeds, depending on the individual. He also believes that these needs may not appear in the same order for every child.

There have been many theories on understanding the social development of children. Research has shown that children imitate those around them to achieve the same goals. However, it is believed that a child's background or culture will play an important part in having an understanding on their socialization (Keenan, Evans and Crowley, 2016)

Attachment during transitioning within the early years is key to preventing disengagement and mental health issues such as separation anxiety disorders. A child having an emotionally available adult present during a transition period can then feel secure, gain confidence and also help their holistic development (Early years matters, 2022).

In 1951 attachment theorist John Bowlby believed that between the ages of around six months and two years old children should receive continuous care from caregivers, he argued that attachment experiences will mould children and their personalities and future relationships. Bowlby suggested that negative experiences with regards to attachment could cause irreversible mental health issues (Taylor, 2018).

The NSPCC (2021) states that practitioners should be aware of what attachment is and should be able to understand a child's behaviour and attachment style. As a care giver to the child, practitioners should have the ability be attuned and responsive to whatever needs the child may have.

The Anna Freud national centre for children and families (N.D) states that children with secure attachments are children who have parents or caregivers who are physically and emotionally available to their needs.

Children with insecure attachments may be likely to develop mental health issues such as anxiety and depression and may also struggle to form healthy relationships with peers and future partners as a result of this. It is also believed that insecure attachment in early years may be less likely to be able to self-regulate their emotions and their social skills may suffer due to this factor (Kerns and Brumariu, 2018)

ATTACHMENT STYLES



1. SECURE

It is the emotional bond that is formed when a parent constantly responds to their child's every need and ensures that the child feels secure, understood, and calm.



2. DISMISSIVE AVOIDANT

It is formed when a parent fails to meet their child's needs emotionally. Often children with this attachment style are afraid of and incapable of tolerating true intimacy.



Attachment Styles

3. ANXIOUS/ PREOCCUPIED

It is associated with an inconsistent parenting style. A child with this style of bond with their parents tends to be anxious when they are separated from their parents.



4. FEARFUL AVOIDANT

Individuals belonging to this pattern believe that they are unworthy of love. This is mostly due to severe childhood trauma, emotional neglect, or abuse.

(Source: Mind help, N.D)

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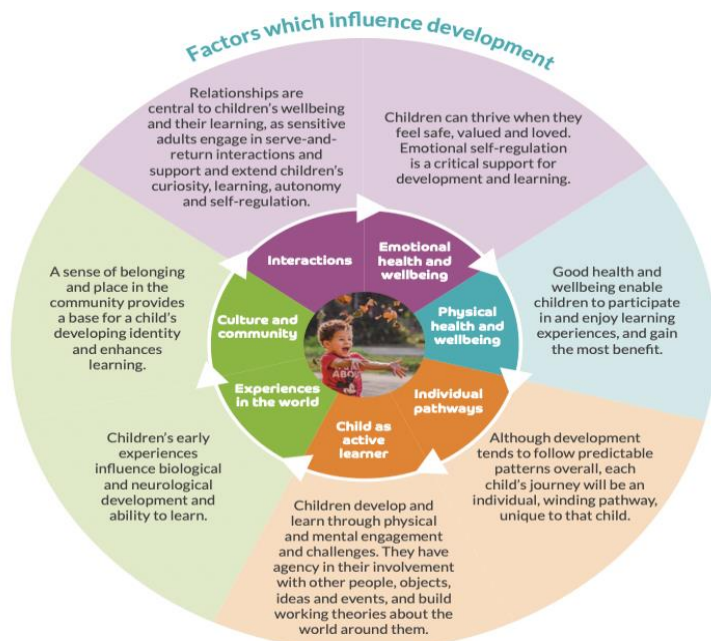
According to Birth to five matters (2021) children who are subjected to warm positive relationships with parents or care givers help to make them feel comfortable, respected and supported in uncertain and stressful times such as life transitions. Children will feel confident in knowing they are loved and well looked after. Birth to five matters (2021) also believe that every child is unique and will develop in different ways, and something that may work for one child may not work for all. Enhancement of learning and development appears when there are positive bonds and relationships between children and caregivers in the early years.

In line with article thirteen of the UNCRC (2017) believes all children have the right to be able to believe and think what they wish to, this could be their opinions on certain things or religions. Children should have the freedom of belief, religion and thought.

Birth to five matters (2021) suggest that the development process is a continuous process that could be influenced by a number of factors such as-

- Experiences.
- Culture and community.
- Emotional and physical health and well-being.

As stated previously article two of the UNCRC (2017) reminds practitioners that the best interests of the child must always be of the highest priority, therefore despite these influences, it is the child who is at the centre of a practitioners thoughts (Birth to five matters (2021))



(Source: Birthto5matters.org, 2021)

The learning environment.

Aubrey and Riley (2022) suggest that John Dewey thought school should be a place where children could form bonds and thrive with all children from all different backgrounds, regardless of race, religion or social backgrounds. Dewey is believed to have confronted the traditional ways of teaching and pushed for more practical life experiences to be taught. He believed children learnt more effectively when 'doing'. According to Williams (2017) Dewey believed that children learned best in natural environment and that today's classroom setting could be a barrier to learning for some. Dewey argued that learning should be an in the present process, reflecting on the experience, however, not preparing for the future.

Dewey believed that a child's habits, skills and interests should be adopted within the settings. Successful early years environments are unable to evolve unless the voice of the child is listened to and acted upon. Children do not only adapt to their environments, but their ideas and opinions can help reform them (Goldman, 2017)



(Source: Steemit.com, 2017)

According to Ord (2012) Dewey believed in a 'person centred curriculum', his intention was not to remove or disvalue the role of the 'experts', in this case practitioners but rather to allow children to learn and flourish in an environment that lets them learn about the things that interest them and lets them experience the learning first hand.

It is common that settings are quick to rush children's transition proves from leaving the comfort of their homes, caregivers, nurseries and childminders to full days at school. Early years settings such as day nurseries and child minders are having to adjust their settings to work alongside school settings to help the child transition. However, by schools collaborating with these earlier settings, experts suggest that instead of exposing children to these routines before they are ready, adapting school settings so the imitate the home settings can be more successful (OECD, 2017).

Hardy (2012) suggests the learning environment should be a place of nurturing, where children feel calm and safe and are able to for positive relationships with their caregivers and other children within the setting.

Creating a safe stimulating environment for children to learn in can be relatively easy. By following guidance from the county and learning authority and meeting health and safety needs and standards this is achievable. However, if the environment is not utilized correctly and the practitioner is unfamiliar with their surroundings then there are many things that can distract learners (Witters, 2020) -

- Sunshine.
- Lighting within the setting (too dark/bright).
- Overuse of desks and chairs.
- Noise levels.

An enabling environment should be an indoor or outdoor space which promotes stability and the physical, emotional and mental well-being of children within the setting. It should provide safety and support to help children thrive and understand their needs and rights (Hodgman, 2011)

Forest schools are now beginning to have an impact on children in Wales. Research shows that as children are given the freedom to explore in the outdoor forest area they are now beginning to gain confidence and are starting to take more risks. Communication skills are also being benefitted due to hands on sensory experiences and children are also beginning to learn about team work and participated in play (Forest research, N.D).



(Source: Ysgol yr Hendy Forest school session)

The new curriculum for non-maintained settings in Wales (2022) suggests that environments should be enriched with real, authentic items and offer the opportunity for the children to be able to explore, consider and appreciate the world around them. Settings should celebrate and welcome diversity and show inclusivity at all times.

Interventions.

Whitters (2020) suggests a number of interventions that can be put in to practice during an uncertain time of transition-

- Limit a public audience during emotional times- Remember it is a difficult time for children transitioning and the less people to witness this then the less the child may feel less pressured.
- Promote and encourage positive behaviour.
- Effective communication with the child or families such as- age-appropriate language, eye contact, coming to the level of the child and open body language.
- Discuss the routine of the day to the child and/or families so they are aware at all times of what comes next in their day.

School policies with a clear agreement of the roles and responsibilities of the school, child and parents/carers are useful to maintain effective communication between all parties. Ysgol Yr Hendy (2022) created a home-school agreement with the voice of the children at its core, thus ensuring that children are aware of their rights and what steps they can take to help themselves and others during transition periods.

According to Devon County Council (N.D), to support transitions practitioners should work in partnership with parents and children so that everyone understands what is expected and what will happen within the school day. They also believe that practitioners should be flexible and open-minded so that the needs of the children are met.

As Dewey (1934) suggested, It is believed that children would benefit more from a purpose-based curriculum, giving children more opportunities to experience and develop real life skills, therefor the new curriculum being rolled out to learners from 2022 can help children learn up to date skills that can help them flourish and confidently transition during latewr life. Schools are now given the responsibility to create and develop their own curriculums to suit their children's needs (Senedd Cymru, 2022).

Pacey (2016) believe there are many interventions practitioners can be put into practice to help the transition process-

- Practitioners to be positive thinkers.
- Ensure there is time to plan effectively.
- Be conscious about building secure attachments with children and families (consider children having key staff members.)
- Adequate training on the behaviour and development of children.
- Routine- keep daily routines the same or as similar as possible to help ensure smooth transitions.

Giving children enough time to process what happens within settings can help them settle well, ensure there are verbal and visual cues to assist with this. It is also valuable to remember that all children are unique and develop at different stages and at different times, ensure there is flexibility within policies and procedures and ensure practitioners are open-minded on the needs of children during transition (Child Care Bureau, N.D)



(Source: LINC, 2021)

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