

An Early Years Practitioners guide for childhood transitions



(Source: Tops day nurseries, 2017)

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Introduction

Aims

The aim of this handbook is to guide early years practitioners through transitions that children go through throughout their lives. This handbook will cover the following, transitions and what are transitions, the needs of the child, the role of the adult, the environment in which the children learn in. It will also include the importance of partnership working, the interventions we as practitioners can put in place to ensure smooth transitions for children. Finally it will include the proposed outcomes. Throughout this handbook, there will be evidence and theorists to support the information. This handbook is aimed at staff who work with children that go through transitions whether this be starting a nursery or starting school for the first time.

Transitions

Transitions occur when something simply changes. These changes can be something as simple as moving house or even the arrival of a new sibling. They can also include times when children start a nursery or school for the first time which can sometimes be a big change for children and some may find it difficult to adjust. According to Early Education (2020), transitions are something that is part of every child's life and they happen quite regularly. Early Years Matters (2018) states that transitions are a process and are not a one-off event which means that not just the child should be involved in them, it should involve the child, the parents and the practitioners.

A change in environment can cause emotional distress for some children. Older children may be able to express feelings, however some children within early years are not able to express their feelings. Some children may not be able to explain what is happening but some may be non-verbal and they can become very frustrated that they can't express or explain how they are feeling. This is when it is important for parents to explain what is happening in that child's life that the practitioners may not know about such as moving house. It is important as an early years practitioner to understand what transitions the children are going through so that support can be provided. By providing support, the children's development may not be affected much.

According to The Educator UK (2017), transitions are important as they are key for children's development and their emotional wellbeing. The child's capacity to cope with change in short and long term depends on how the first transitions are handled. If they are handled in a positive and smooth way, then children will be able to cope with further transitions throughout their childhood. Elizabeth Walker, who is a lead commentator states that early years practitioners should ensure that children are fully supported through their transitions and that they are planned effectively.

An easy way of smoothing transitions is to do settling in sessions at the setting that the child will be attending. By doing this it allows practitioners to build a relationship with the child but also their parents and sometimes external sources such as social workers. The parents/guardian know the child the best so they would be the first point of call to know anything about the child. Another example of this is to do an all about me form which includes boxes for the parents/child to fill in to say things that they like doing and things like their favourite food and their favourite toy. As practitioners, we can find these forms useful as it helps us to identify the children's favourite toys that we can engage with them to help us support the child through their transition.

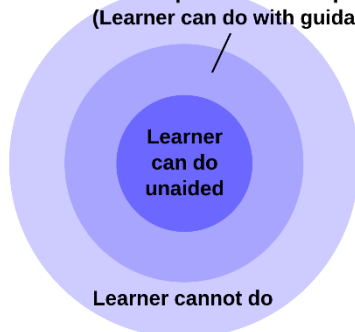
Role of the adult

Adults play a very important role during children's transitions, and they can vary from parents/guardians and early years practitioners. According to the Foundation Phase (2015), it is vital that close working between parents and practitioners takes place. This is as it can affect how quickly the children's needs are identified and a response to any difficulty can be given quicker whilst working together. As parents and families are key to a child's development, practitioners should support this by offering support for extended learning at home and by providing necessary information.

DES (1990) states that children's first and most important educators are their parents and therefore parents should be involved with their children's early years' experiences. Effective communication between staff during children's transitions is vital. This is because a positive relationship between parents and practitioners are the foundation for a positive transition for a child. This is according to Teach Early Years (no date). For a practitioner, by talking with parents they gain an overview of the child's likes or dislikes and gives the practitioner a chance to extend educational ideas/experiences.

According to Teach Early Years (no date), by talking effectively with parents, practitioners can help ease that separation anxiety that can occur in both children and parents. This is eased by the children seeing visible and honest conversations happening from both parties. Handovers between staff should be planned so that children's needs are met, and new relationships can be built with other staff members. Vygotsky was a social constructive and had previously said about the scaffolding theory. His theory of scaffolding was to provide support and resources to help children develop new skills but then gradually removing the

Zone of proximal development
(Learner can do with guidance)



support leaving the child with more independence. His theory of scaffolding was linked with the Zone of proximal development.

The aim for every child is to get the middle of the circle which indicates that the child can do that skill on their own, but guidance is needed from practitioners for the child to get to the centre of the circle.

(Source: Wikipedia, 2021)

The needs of the child

The need of the child is paramount for enabling a smooth and positive transition. Maslow (1943) had a theory of the Hierarchy of needs, and it is a pyramid, and its aim was to get all children to the top of the pyramid as soon as possible for positive transitions. The needs at the bottom of the pyramid need to be adhered to if a child is to move up the pyramid. At the bottom of the pyramid, we have what is called the basic needs which are made up of the physiological needs and the safety needs which every child should have. It states within the UNCRC article 19, that every child has the right to be protected from violence. If these basic

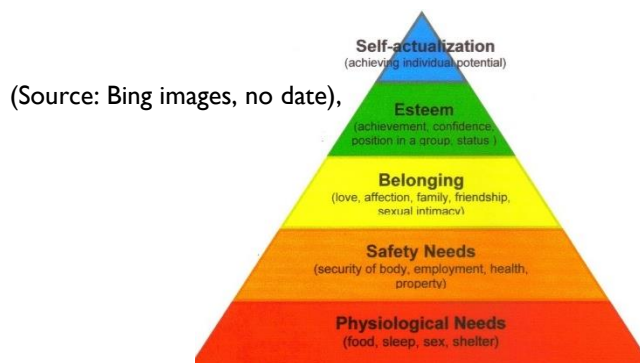
needs aren't met, then the child is unable to move to the next level which is the psychological needs which include the need for friendships and belongingness. Again, if these needs aren't met by communicating effectively with the children or them not feeling like they belong where they are, then the child is unable to reach the top of the pyramid which is the self-fulfilment needs which is where the child achieves their full potential and maintain self-esteem and self-growth. Vygotsky also has noted the importance of play for the children. Vygotsky believed that play for children was a central role in promoting brain development for children.

There is a good element of play and that is that children are showing their abilities without them realising it and due to them having fun, they will be more willing to do it more often states You are mom (2019). Play also teaches children about self-control meaning that all children must take on responsibilities for the game to work. An example of this is a footrace and the children understand that they cannot run unless someone says 'go'.

According to Health research funding (no date), John Bowlby created the attachment theory, his suggestion was that every child is born with programming that helps them to form attachments with other people. Bowlby suggested that children have a need to attach to at least one person which is usually the prime carer. Bowlby also suggests that a lack of attachment has effects on the child. It can cause problems such as increased levels of aggression as well as higher risk of experiences depression. When looking at the secure attachment that Bowlby focuses on, we would often see a child that is happy feels secure and willing to explore and try new things. During a secure attachment we also see that the prime care giver is responsive, sensitive, and consistent. The child will appear happy and settled as they know what to expect when they go home.

There are 3 types of primary attachments according to Mary Ainsworth. These are:

- Type A- attachments that caused the child to be insecure and avoidant
- Type B- attachments which are secure
- Type C- attachments which are insecure and resistant



During an avoidant attachment, the child believes that their needs will not be met, therefore the child would be withdrawn, quiet and is not willing to explore or try new things. The prime care giver during an avoidant attachment may be distant and disengaged and may appear to be neglectful. Donaldson, (2015) has stated that a child benefits from a secure base. An anxious or ambivalent attachment is when the child cannot rely on their needs being met therefore the child is anxious, insecure and may appear to be angry. The prime care giver during an anxious attachment may be that they are inconsistent, sometimes sensitive but sometimes may appear to be neglectful.

A lack of acceptance can result in low self-esteem and may reduce their ability to bond with others outside of the family and can eventually reduce their ability to empathise with others.

Play is part of every child's life and according to Smidt, (2011) it is different to every single one of us. Play can support holistic development. Within the UNCRC Article 31 states that every child has the right to play. Play is a way of helping children with transitions. It can be developed by knowing what toys/ games the child likes/dislikes. The practitioners will be able to build a relationship with that child by playing with their favourite toys. By playing with the children, the children's skills will improve as they will complete tasks and be more willing to join in with things when they are having fun.

The environment

The learning environment plays a vital part on how children learn and develop. Dowling, (2014) suggests that children will 'play out' their lives and their past experiences which enables us to see their lives from their perspectives.

Piaget believed that by exploring the environment around them children learn and develop. Piaget's theory of play is also known as the developmental stage theory and he suggested that for cognitive development to be fulfilled, it requires appropriate environmental stimuli within the setting environment. An appropriate environment also helps with the development of their language. The environment also should adapt to the children as they mature. Piaget also states that the better a child's learning environment is then the better they interact with the world and people around them.



(Source: Maryville University, no date)

Within Wales we currently have the Foundation Phase which lays out what the environment should be like for children. Across the world, there are different approaches on how the environment should be for the children to learn and develop. These approaches include Montessori and Reggio Emilia. Welsh government (no date) states that the environment should enable discovery and independence with emphasis on the outdoor environment being used as a resource for the child's learning. It has been seen during the Foundation Phase that the more the children play and learn outside, the more they want to be outside. Within the outdoor environment, children can experience nature as they experience the weather, plants, and animals. Welsh Government (no date) states that the environment should be well planned and organised for children to have rich and stimulating experiences.

Exploring your mind, (2020) explains Bronfenbrenner's ecological system's theory that the environment someone grows up in affects every part of your life. Bronfenbrenner noticed that the context that a child grew up in shapes the child's nature. Following on from this, he studied what factors has the most effect on a child's development. He considered that the environment was made up of four systems, he then added a further system later. He then went on to organise them in order of how much they impact the child's development. He stated that if the environment that the child is in changes, then the child will change. He

also suggests that if the child moved to another country with a different culture, then the identity of the child will change. The five systems are:

- Microsystem
- Mesosystem
- Exosystem
- Macrosystem
- Chronosystem

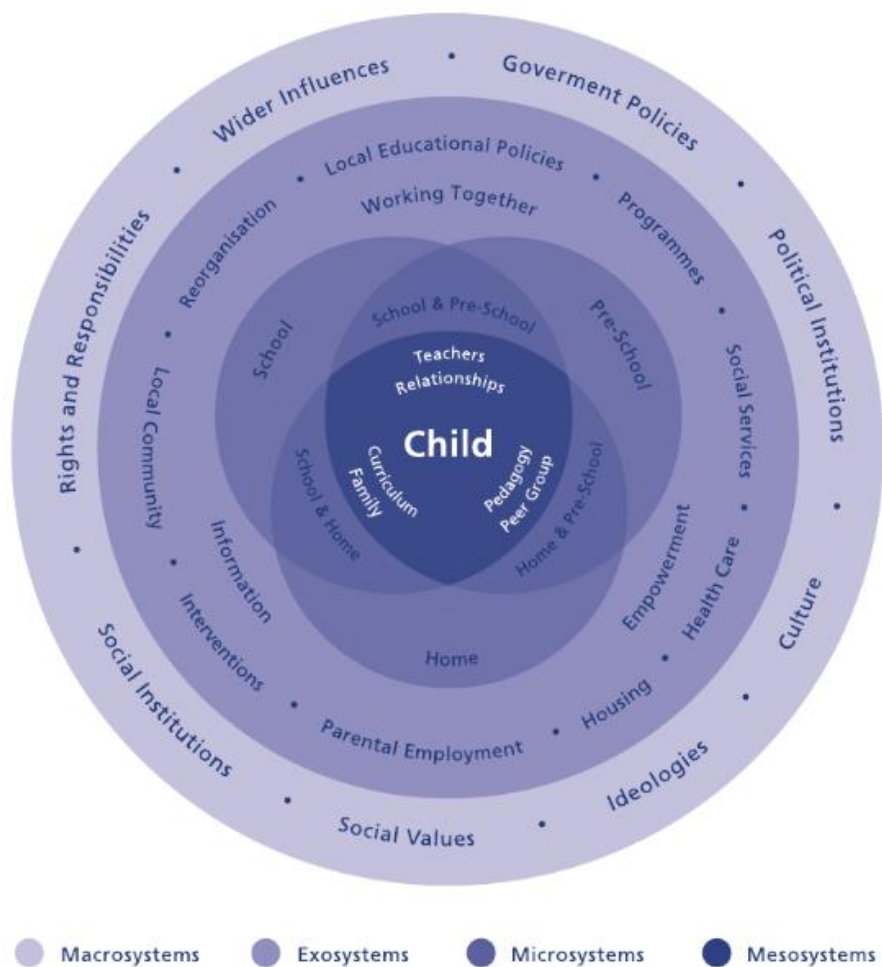


Diagram by A.W. Dunlop (2002), based on Bronfenbrenner's systems model

(Source: A.W Dunlop, 2002)

Partnership working

It is important that all agencies that are needed are involved within the child during their transitions. This can ensure that a clear and well-structured plan is in place for the child so that their transition goes as smooth as possible. These agencies can involve the parents/prime care giver as well as external agencies such as health visitors or social workers.



(Source: Laser short courses, 2019)

According to early years matters (2007), there are many benefits for partnership working. One of these benefits include all agencies being able to share information about the child's development although this information can only be provided on a need-to-know basis. By sharing the information, a plan can be put into place if the child requires further assistance. Partnership working within early years means that agencies come from health and education sectors to identify and help to meet the needs of that child. During transitions, partnership working is vital as parents know the child best and they will know what they like/dislike. The parents can help the practitioners and other external agencies provide a smooth transition for the child by sharing these likes and dislikes.

Interventions

In order to ensure smooth transitions, interventions are put in place. These can include things like welcome packs to gain information about the child before they attend the setting, home visits can also be arranged and settling in sessions. Below is an image as an example of a welcome pack, it includes information about the child by providing an all about me page but also provides the parents with information, so they know what their child is doing at what time. It also includes a sheet of what the child needs to bring with them for that setting.



(Source: Teacher's pet, 2019)

According to Tes, (2019) a home visit can be arranged for children due to start a new setting. The visits must fit around the family's lifestyle and at a time that suits them. It is important not to be judgmental when entering the family home, it is not an assessment or a test. It is also important to remember that the family may have had other agencies involved in their lives before which may not have been a pleasant experience. Taking a resource from the setting to the child's home such as a story sack can enable interaction between the practitioner and the child but also the parents or primary care giver. It is good to take a resource from the setting to the child's home because when they attend the setting, they will be able to find that resource and link it back to playing with it at home. Safeguarding plays a big part in home visits and must always be done in pairs to protect the staff and the family.

Parent and staff relationships are vital as an intervention in order to promote and ensure smooth transitions. The parent/carer is the child first point of call and they know their child best, so by getting all information that is essential, the relationship between the child and staff can grow as the child understands that the staff know details about them such as what toys and food they like or dislike.

Handovers are another form of an intervention/ at the end of each session, the staff member will give the parent/carer a brief overview of how the child has been during that session and what activities their child has done during that day. Handovers are a good way of identifying issues or behaviours within the setting.

Proposed Outcomes

A way of being able to tell if a child has had a positive and smooth transition is when the child appears to be settled. This may be evident through the child being less dependent on their keyworker. The child may appear to be confident and more willing to explore and try new things and this could be without the fear of getting things wrong. The child may also appear to be more sociable, not only with their peers but they may have also developed relationships with other staff within the setting. The child may start to become aware of the routines within the setting such as that it is snack time after tidy up time, or after story time it is home time.

In order to monitor the child's development throughout their time at the setting we can use observations. By doing observations, we can see if the child has varied emotions and is sociable with others but also we can use observations as a way to identify issues or problems. If the child has settled in well but then takes a step back and becomes really withdrawn where as they were previously confident, something may have happened to upset that child so support to the child and their families are vital throughout the child's time in the setting.



(Source: web stock review, no date)

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