

Handbook

For Early Years Key Workers



Explore Learning, 2023

The Importance of Effective Communication throughout Transitions

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Introduction

This handbook is aimed at key workers in the early years setting. The purpose of this handbook is to provide a helpful and practical document to show practitioners the importance of effective communication and smooth transitions through children's development. The main transition that will be referred to throughout this handbook is the move from Nursery to the first year in Reception.

The importance of Transitions in early years will be explored using a variety of different sources. Transitions are a very common process in today's world, from transitioning into childminding to transitioning into nursery and then again into reception, however vertical transitions (such as moving from nursery into reception) are a substantial milestone which have an impact on children's development. Having a smooth transition into each setting the child moves to will help them to not feel so overwhelmed with the changes (Early Years Matter, 2023).



Oxford Owl, 2019

When creating a calm and safe environment it is important to remember that it will take some experimenting to figure out what works for different individuals. The children will need consistency after a big transition, so it is key to try and keep the routines the same whenever possible, to do so. When certain events change the routine, it can make a big difference to explain to the children what will be changing and why. This will stop them from getting overwhelmed or scared when they are still settling in according to Gosling (2023).

Transitions can be one of the hardest tasks for young children with additional needs to take on. They will require extra support to ensure they transition successfully. It can help some children to have a set plan in place for the day so they know exactly what will be happening and when (NCSE, 2023). It can be very daunting for children with additional learning needs to go through a big transition as there are new and unfamiliar adults and it is a brand-new environment that they aren't used to (Portsmouth Gov, 2023). In This handbook, ways that practitioners can support Children with additional needs during transitioning, will also be discussed.

What is a Transition?

A transition in the early years setting is a significant change or event in a child's life, for example moving from the Nursery setting and starting reception. This is known as a Vertical transition. It is suggested by researchers that there are two types of transitional situations, these are known as horizontal and vertical as stated by Flying start (2017). A vertical transition is a significant event in a child life whereas a horizontal transition is experienced daily by the child, for example going home after school or going to their swimming lesson (Rhondda Cynon Taf, no date).

Practitioners play a key role in ensuring that children have a smooth experience when going through a Vertical transition, as they can feel particularly sad or resistant when leaving a setting they have been going to for a while. The new setting should aim to offer the same positive transition experiences as the previous setting. This will make the child's experience easier as shown by Oxfordshire County Council (2017). Professionals have a role to ensure that children get the correct care they need after dealing with a significant transition in their life such as going from Nursery to reception. This is a key role as, decreasing the stress and worry for the children during this time will make them happier, healthier and will help them on their journey to becoming successful learners as stated by Trodd (2012).

Transitioning into the early years setting and getting used to the change can be a challenge for everyone involved, especially the children and their families. It is important to create a happy and safe environment where the families feel they can share their worries involving the children. This can be achieved through paying attention to the emotional needs and experiences of the children and their families as Scharer (2018) points out. It is understood that when working with young children, practitioners have a responsibility to ensure they keep a close eye on the children's physical health as well as their emotional well being as stated by Brooker (2008).

How can we help make this transition as smooth as possible as practitioners?

A key thing to remember is to act early and support the parents and children in their preparation for school. This could be on their visits to the school or setting before officially starting. One way to support the children would be to focus on the exciting things ahead of the transition as this will help calm the child's nerves and may help the parents and children look forward to this change as stated by The Blog (2016).

Some things which can help to support children with additional learning needs while transitioning would be using photobooks and going on visits to the school. It is important to encourage these techniques as it *will* make a difference to the child being able to settle in (Portsmouth Gov, 2023). A photobook is an activity which will help the children be able to visualise their new school by seeing all the pictures. It may also help to talk to the child about the things they may be doing in the school, so they feel prepared for the big change.

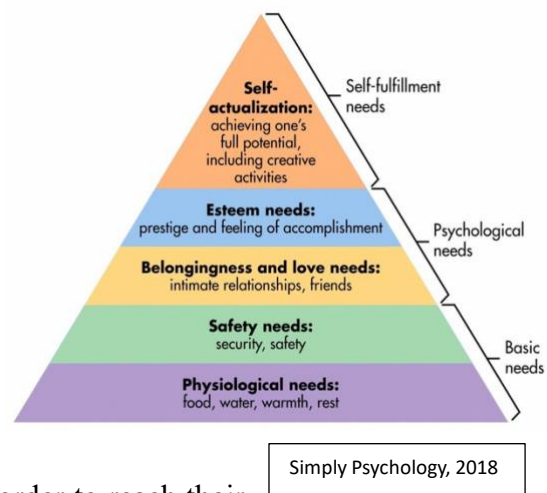
Needs of the child

During the transition from Nursery to reception, every child will have different emotions and handle it in their own way. John Bowlby developed attachment theory in the 20th century. He proposed that children are programmed from birth to make attachments to their primary figure, this was typically the mother however it could be any constant carer or parenting figure in their life (Wilson-Ali *et al.*, 2019).

There are lots of different ways to help children in the early years have an easier time while going through vertical transitions, however it will most likely take some experimenting to see what each child responds to. One method to help children while transitioning would be to use visual cues, being able to show children what to expect when they start school can make a significant difference in their feelings towards the change (Martinelli, 2023).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow was a psychologist who studied at the University of Wisconsin. Maslow created the Hierarchy of needs which suggests, children have basic needs which need to be met before the child can pursue their emotional needs as believed by Cherry (2023). It is thought that the things towards the bottom of the triangle need to be satisfied before the needs higher up the triangle can be attended to. Maslow has since corrected that statement as it gives off the impression that you are not able to move up the triangle until every section is 100% completed, which is not the case (McLeod, 2018). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs implies that for children to be able to focus in school on their learning they need to feel physically strong (eating enough food and getting enough sleep) and emotionally satisfied (getting enough love and support), in order to reach their potential and progress in their work (McLeod 2018).



Every child develops in a different and unique way however they need opportunities to interact and have positive relationships. It is key that we encourage engagement in communication and activities as this will enable the child to be successful in their learning (Early Years Coalition, 2021).

Role of the adult

The adults in a child's life such as practitioners and parents etc., have a responsibility to ensure the children are in good health and are fulfilling their potential. To understand a child's development and the way they act, we must look at their immediate environment and the interactions with adults around them as Bronfenbrenner implies (Guy-Evans, 2023). As practitioners it is key to be aware of the children and pick up on any problems they may be having. It is key to support the children wherever possible, one example is to encourage play and learning in a way that is unique to the child's interests as demonstrated online (Early Years Wales, 2020).

When communicating with children there are four main aspects to keep in mind, These are:

- Speech
- Language
- Literacy
- Communicative competence

These four aspects have different processes which encourage children to learn and experience new interactions with others. Being able to understand these key points can support practitioners so they are able to recognise the potential that every child will bring into the setting as believed by the education hub (2019). Being able to communicate effectively is key to developing positive relationships with the children and their families according to Brouet (no date).

Children's Brain Development

Children's brains start developing before they have even been born. Their development relies on how well the mother is taking care of herself as the foetus cannot do anything for itself at this stage. If the mother is eating well and getting enough proper nutrition as well as not getting exposed to toxins and infections, this will factor towards positive brain development (CDC, 2023). By the time the child turns three, 80% of synaptic connections have already been made. In order to ensure children are developing a healthy brain they need to be experiencing Nurturing from the people around them, a good nutritional diet and protection according to Twogood (no date).

Partnerships

Partnerships are key to the early years setting for multiple reasons. Working with organisations and other businesses where the school is located will enrich the curriculum, develop social capital and mean the schools can enjoy having shared resources. Working with the other schools in the area will also help with smooth transitions as well as sharing good practice (Welsh Government, 2016).

Involving parents and carers in the children's learning is a significant factor to the child succeeding in what they are doing. It is good to share information with the families and make sure they have access to the videos and photos of their child learning. This will enable the parents to further their child's development at home as well as in school as stated by GOV.UK (2023).



Early Years Alliance, 2019

Umbrella organisations play a significant role in supporting early years children and ensuring they have high quality experiences. It is believed that play and play-based learning are essential for early years children, the organisation works to enhance the child's experience through their services as stated by Early Years Wales (2023).

Key benefits to Partnerships (Pacey, 2023)

- Children are more confident and settled.

Children become much more confident and settled in the new environment, as well as their independence and wellbeing increasing.

- Parents feel more confident.

Families have reported that partnerships have made them feel more confident about their children making the transition to start school.

- Parents are more engaged.

Schools are reporting an increase in parent involvement in the curriculum sessions and with local resources such as the library and children's centres.

- Early years providers are working with schools.

Partnership working with early years providers and schools has given both parties a much better understanding of the unique role they have in helping children. For example, practitioners have a role to help the child achieve a smooth transition and build their confidence.

Interventions

Story telling

One of the ways that Practitioners can intervene and help with smooth transitions is through story telling. This is a way of encouraging positive experiences and can be helpful with children who have behaviour issues. Story telling in the early years setting can also build self-esteem and inspire creative thoughts and activities in the setting. It also gives the practitioner time to connect with the new children and build relationships with them, so they feel more comfortable in the setting (McNicol and Kirkpatrick, 2005).



Pacey, 2022

Photographic books

Photo books can help with transitioning as the children can create books with pictures of the school building or the playground to feel familiar with the setting before fully transitioning. Another way to use to photograph book is to leave the books around the environment and listen to some of the children's questions about the setting. This can help them feel more comfortable exploring and will also help them feel happier about speaking to the practitioner in the future (NCCA, no date).



Early Years' Service, no date.

Communication

Practitioners can support children by using social communication and interactions during their transition. This will hopefully help to reduce stress and anxiety by supporting them and taking the time to listen and understand their worries. Some common behaviour to see when children first enter a new setting is disengagement, frustration, crying and difficulty being away from parents/carers. Staff can help the children let go off some of these feeling by staying calm and approachable as well as having Clearly labelled spaces and areas which are easy to locate for the children (Metropolitan Borough Council, 2020).

Proposed Outcomes

Practitioners want children to have the best start in life that they possibly can. In the early years setting children develop quickly so it is key that practitioners do the job correctly and give the children everything they may need to help with the transition as stated by Early Education (2012). Children will take time to settle into their new environment. Building relationships with the child will help them to feel safe and secure which will help them to shine in their learning. If the children don't feel happy or safe due to the environment, they will struggle to be able to continue with their development as they will not be engaged in the learning as pointed out by Patel, (no date).

What are some characteristics of effective learning? (Early Education, 2012)

Engagement

- Taking part in activities.
- Expanding on what they know.
- Exploring and finding new things out.
- Playing and discovering.

Motivation

- Keep on going, keep on trying.
- Being able to concentrate on the current activity.
- Getting involved.
- Enjoying what they choose to do.

Thinking

- Making the links between things.
- Coming up with their own ideas.
- Choosing how to do things for themselves.

How will it be clear if the child has had a successful transition?

There is not a set time when children will officially be transitioned, it will be an ongoing process. Here are some of the things to pick up on, to know if the transition is going well. Firstly, practitioners should know each of the children individually, including what they like, what may upset them, their needs and some of the things they are interested. As the transition is going along Practitioners should be forming relationships with the family so there is a level of trust between them. The final point to look out for would be that the children seem happy in their new environment and have made friends with some of the other children as stated by Ephgrave (2023).

Key Themes

The most significant way to ensure children have a smooth transition from Nursery to Reception is by having good relationships and communication. Although it is key to communicate with the children correctly, so they don't get overwhelmed with the change of transitioning, it is also the practitioner's role to help develop the child's communication skills. It makes a significant difference if the setting is communication friendly as this will affect how the children feel and behave as stated by Cooper (2010).

Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory was proposed by Albert Bandura, he has four main processes, each of which determines whether imitation is developed upon exposure to a model or not. The four processes are attention, retention, reproduction and motivation (McLeod, 2023).

Attention

To form a representation of behaviour the children need to pay attention to what they do and its consequences. For children to imitate something it must grab their attention. Attention is therefore significant in whether others choose to imitate a behaviour (McLeod, 2023).

Retention

The next step to observational learning is retention which is learning to memorize the behaviour they have seen. If a child does not choose to memorize the social behaviour, then there is less of a chance they will imitate the classroom behaviour as stated by Main (2022)

Reproduction

Once the child has watched the model and given their attention to it, it is time to see if the information has been retained. When the skill is performed it is unlikely, they will get it straight away so further practice will lead to improvement (Main, 2022).

Motivation

Finally, the child will need to be motivated in order to be able to imitate the behaviour which has been modelled. Watching these behaviours can motivate children to try themselves however, if it is not the right sort of behaviour then consequences can play an important role. For example, if they see another child being told off for doing something mean then they could most likely get put off doing it themselves as they will not want to get told off (Main, 2022).

Getting to know some of the children before they transition, if possible, will enable the practitioner to be prepared to support the children and be welcoming. An important step is to involve parents and careers as much as you can. This will help the family feel more comfortable leaving their child in the practitioner's care. Finally, the best preparation for ensuring a smooth transition would be identifying each individual child's needs and then supporting them through each day (Early Years Send, 2023).

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