

A Guidance Handbook for Early Years **keyworkers during childhood** **transitions.**

“When a seedling is transplanted from one place to another, the transplantation may be a stimulus or a shock. The careful gardener seeks to minimise shock so that the plant is re-established as (easily) as possible”.

(Cleave, Jowett and Bate, 1982, pg. 195)



(Source: The University of British Columbia, 2018)

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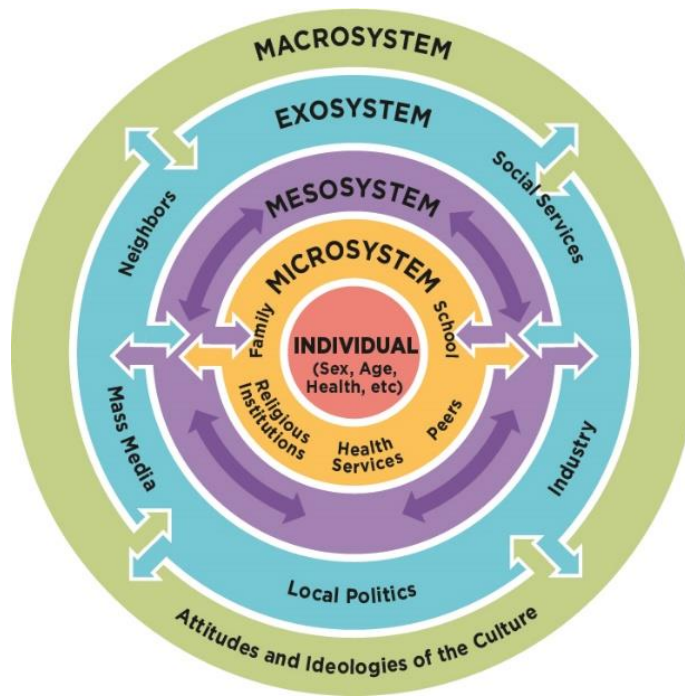
Introduction: Transitions in the Early Years

To begin it is necessary to discuss what a transition is in regard to early years. The true definition of transition according to the Cambridge dictionary is “the process of changing, or a change from one form or condition to another.” Transitions are made by children constantly and refers to the changing positions a child finds themselves in throughout their childhood and then through to their adulthood. Common transitions for children that are may be obvious are changes such as a two year old attending pre-school, this is an example of a transition as it alters the daily normal life for the two year old. Transitions could even be smaller, less drastic changes, such as a change of rooms for a child in their early years. Children are constantly taking in their environments and learning from what is around them; this is why transitions are so important for children in their early years. It encouraged their development by creating different environments and scenarios that the child has to adapt to.

According to Gina Crivello and Martin Woodhead (2008), children experience many extremely important transitions in the first eight years of their lives. They believe that these transitions develop a child’s sense of identity and allows them to grasp their place in social communities over both short and long periods of times. In other words, the transitions allow them to adapt to the environment they are put in; this becomes better with age and experience of changes happening in life. These challenges are said to be learning points according to Crivello and Woodhead (2008).

Bronfenbrenner’ theory suggests about how a child learns can be explained through levels. The individual remains in the middle as the influence from the environment around them moulds how they learn and develop. The closer the level to the child, the more influence they have. Closer levels and direct influences include parents, siblings and school whereas further slightly less significant indirect influences to the child include laws, culture and history. The practitioner needs to take into account the direct and indirect influences on the child by strong communication with parents or carers in order to adapt and accommodate to the child.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified the different aspects of life that effect a child; he grouped these in the categories of the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. Different social factors and aspects make up these separate categories. These can be explained in the diagram on the next page.



(Source: Bronfenbrenner, nap.edu)

Additionally, Douglass 2016, stated that “settings and practitioners who promote positive transitions support children’s development of resilience.” This means that, by key workers creating a welcoming caring environment that is easy for children to transition into it enables the child to become more confident and adapt to environments easier.

How to use the handbook

This handbook has been created based on children ages from 2-3 years old, who are transitioning into preschool settings. The aim of this handbook is to educate and inform key workers of the importance of transitions in a child's life. It sets out to highlight how key workers play a major role in the transitioning in the early years of a child's life. This handbook emphasises the need and importance of key workers for communication and provides guidance on how they can ensure children's transitions are smooth and seamless.

The key aim of this handbook is to promote positive transitions and to showcase the need for effective communication in these settings.

According to Early Years Matters (2020), for a transition to be successful there needs to be preparation completed between the two organisations: the two organisations being in this instance the primary caregiver of the child and the key worker or practitioner. They need to communicate about the child and what their needs are for the transition to be smooth and successful. A key worker is somebody who may be the first point of contact and help to the primary caregivers of the child. They are somebody who tries to help children feel safe and at ease in new settings. They feed information back and forth from the primary caregiver to the new setting vice versa, in this instance the setting may be a preschool (Family Corner, no date). Practitioners should aim to use this handbook in order to achieve this type of setting where children feel comfortable.

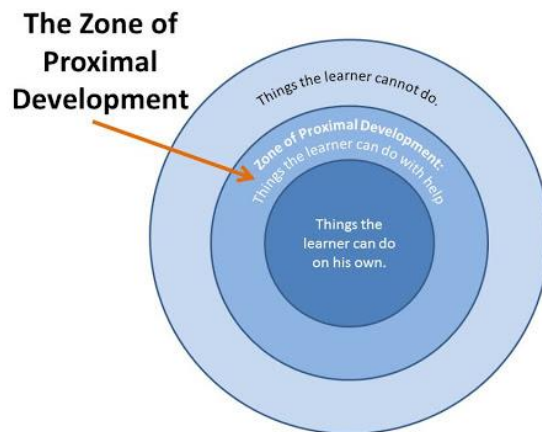
The role of the adults

There are many adults that are responsible for the easy transitioning of children in the early years of their lives. Children in the early years are heavily dependant on their caregivers to create safe, protected and nurturing environments for them as they cannot do so themselves. The children look for this for them to transition smoothly. Adults have a responsibility to create these environments for the children and encourage them to become well-rounded and more independent individuals in the future. The key worker has the responsibility to support the family of the child who is transitioning.

The key worker also has a responsibility of ensuring the safety of the child. The adult is expected to comply to safeguarding measures in order to protect the child and spot any issues or problems that may arise; they are expected to look for any potential signs of the child suffering from abuse, neglect or maltreatment in their home. Government of the United Kingdom (2018, p.8) guidelines in regards to safeguarding is that the focus should be on the child when making decisions about them and their lives; the keyworker would need to work in partnership with the family in order to make decisions about the child in order for the best outcome for the child in the end. The child's situation should be taken into mind but overall the wellbeing of them should play the biggest factor in decisions made; no decisions should be made that could potentially harm the child.

The first step in order to do is for the key worker to build a relationship with the parents or caregiver of the child. By building up a rapport with them it enables the child's need to be met fully due to the strength of communication between the practitioner and the primary caregiver. Key workers should aim to complete steps such as home visits. By taking this extra step it allows the two different settings to intertwine. The key worker is able to then meet and observe the child at home which is a comfortable and familiar place to them before they transition into a new and unfamiliar setting. They can also gather information from the primary caregiver such as the mother or father, on what the child's needs are and how they can help to ensure a stress free transition for the child. (Jane Drake, 2006)

Another role that the adult needs to take on is planning activities based on the child needs. According to Vygotsky (1978) there is a zone of proximal development; he says that between what a child can do unaided and what a child cannot do is a zone of proximal development. This zone of proximal development is what a child can do with support which is where an adult or peer plays an essential role. In a practical perspective, practitioners can encourage children to push boundaries of what they can do by supporting them in more challenging activities within their zone of proximal development. This means adapting their practice in order to accommodate the child at the right level; therefore, not making it too difficult but challenging enough. This is a role that an adult would need to take on in order to accommodate activities accordingly.



(Source: cuppacocoa.com, 2014)

By support from adults around them, who are key workers in this case, the child will learn more through the social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, making it the key workers role to help guide the child through transitions and learning in order for an easier process.

Different child development stages require different needs and it is the adult role in order to recognise and fulfil these changing needs. The way these needs are fulfilled or ignored effect how the child will act and who they will become later on in life. (Erikson 1953, 1963)

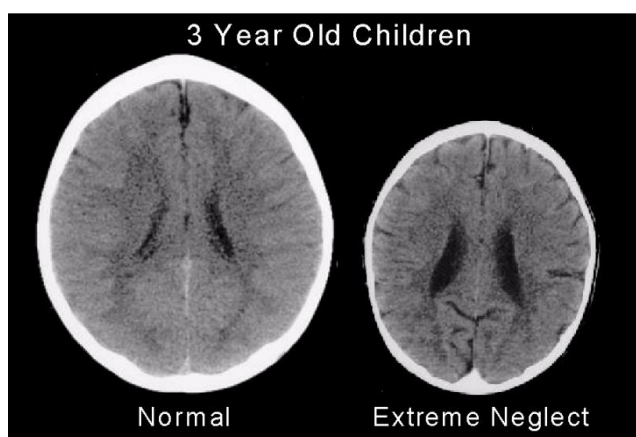
By recognising this zone of proximal development along with different development stages it will allow the child to feel understood whilst learning new skills and taking on new tasks. It will make it easier for the child to create bonds and attachments therefore, hopefully leading them onto correlating transitions to positive notions in the future.

The needs of the child

A child's needs can vary depending on age, environment and many other factors. From the day they are born they are extremely dependant on their caregivers to meet these needs. The important thing for the child is how these needs are met, the way that the caregivers respond to the demands of the child showcases the way the world works for that child. Children take in how the people around them care for them and make judgements on this; they may feel trust or distrust, loved or unloved and so on. (Terry Clark-Jones, 2018)

By the key worker portraying a caring, welcoming environment for the child it allows them to transition into their new environment much easier as it creates a warm and open space for the child. By key workers striving to reach this aim it fulfils the needs of the child by imitating that of what they know. John Bowlby implies that the child needs to make attachments to the adults around them therefore by key workers creating this environment, which is similar to home in this case, the child will then make their bonds and attachments to the keyworker in replacement of the mother or primary caregiver for the time that they attend the pre-school or likewise for the duration of the time they attend. A direct quote from John Bowlby book Attachment theory, Separation anxiety and Mourning (2015, p.10) states that "The unchallenged maintenance of a bond is experienced as a source of security and the renewal of a bond as a source of joy." This quote supports Bowlby's notion of children creating attachments and bonds to the adults around them in order to feel happier and more comfortable in new settings.

Sue Gerhardt (2014, p.81) talks about how problems that may arise later in life such as aggression, obesity, hyperactivity and many more are likely to have formed in the early years of life. She talks about how neglect in the early years can effect the development of the brain significantly.



(Source: childtrauma.org, 1997)

This image further develops Gerhardt's point of the development of the brain of neglected children. The study was led by Bruce D Perry, M.D., Ph.D. It highlighted the negative impact of neglect on a three year olds neurological development. Gerhardt commented on the photo, mentioning that the neglected

child's brain is "significantly smaller than average and has abnormal development of cortex (cortical atrophy) and other abnormalities suggesting abnormal development of the brain." The urban child institute states that the cortex in the brain is responsible for cognitive functions. Therefore, neglected children may lack skills such as attention, goal-driven behaviour and motivation. This links majorly to transitions as if a child is transitioning from a home where they may be neglected they will need a more support from the practitioners in order to transition smoothly, the transition may be harder for them as their neurological development is not the same as those children who come from loving homes.

The practitioner in the pre-school setting should aim to focus on the child, to incorporate their interests into their learning in order to accommodate a smoother transition from home life to this pre-school setting. By incorporating the child's interest into their learning it will enable them to become engaged into what they are doing and enjoy it rather than it being necessarily work. The effective provision of pre-school education is a project that investigated the education and care of children's development ages 3-7 years old. It aimed to evaluate and answer five questions.

- What is the impact of pre-school on children's intellectual and social/behavioural development?
- Are some pre-schools more effective than others in promoting children's development?
- What are the characteristics of an effective pre-school setting?
- What is the impact of the home and childcare history on children's development?
- Do the effects of pre-school continue through Key Stage 1 (ages 6 and 7 years)?

The longitudinal study claimed that the quality of care and education in the pre-school effected children a lot in the future. It claimed that children made all-round developments when they attended pre-school compared to those children who did not. In regard to disadvantaged children who may have been less developed than more advantaged children benefited significantly from good quality pre-school setting. (Kathy Sylva Edward, Melhuish Pam Sammons, Iram Siraj-Blatchford, Brenda Taggart 2004). By creating a high quality pre-school setting it will support children in their next transition from pre-school into key stage 1. Making this pre-school environment the best it could possibly be for the child and making their transition into it smooth is very important as it sets them up for later life; the transition from home to pre-school will set up their feelings for transitioning all together. According to Croner-i.co.uk (2019) the way that a child will go onto transition from pre-school to key stage 1 will affect how they deal with future change. If they have a bad experience, they will create negative connotations with change and transition. Therefore, it is extremely important for the environment in the preschool to be high quality along the setting being caring and welcoming.

Partnerships

Transitioning is not only a potentially scary time for the child but an anxious time for the parents or caregiver as well. A partnership between the caregivers and the keyworker is a key part of the transition for the child. This is as much for the parent or caregiver as it is for the child. If the parent is extremely anxious about the child transitioning from home to a pre-school setting it can transfer these nerves not the child. (Elizabeth Thomas, 2019)

The early years practitioner should understand that a major role of theirs is to ensure a positive transition and one way in which they can do this is through partnerships. By ensuring the effective communication and strong relationship between the key worker and the primary caregiver of the child it allows both child and caregiver to draw comfort. This is because if both caregiver and child are enthusiastic and comfortable in the setting it ensures a smoother transition. The strong relationship between the caregiver and the keyworker will encourage the child as they will observe the caregiver, who they are very familiar with, being comfortable with the key worker, who the child is not familiar with. This will encourage and comfort the child taking away some of the connotations of a stranger related to the keyworker. (Anjali Patel, 2020)

Interventions

In the early years of a child's life they learn a wide variety of knowledge and skills; such as how to walk, run, communicate, explore and the list goes on. They are all key elements of “school readiness”. (Government of United Kingdom, 2011)

By observing and valuing these school readiness skills practitioners allow the children to become the best possible learners and all-round individuals they can be; therefore, aiding them in easier transitions. Interventions should be made by key workers in order to aid the child further in their transitions. An ‘all about me’ page is a common intervention made by pre-school setting and in early years transitions. Practitioners should use the all about me page to get to know the child better in a fun, informal way for the child. The parent would help the child fill in the page. The all about me page can be used by the key worker to find out more information about the child such as interests, hobbies and family. This will allow the keyworker to understand the child more and how they work. This will aid towards a more positive transition into the setting as the child may feel more confident that where they are going is suited for them. Practitioners should take the time to make the child feel comfortable by including interests of the child that they will then know from the all about me page. The image below is an example of an all about me page.



(Source: modernhomeschoolfamily.com, 2020)

Another intervention key workers may choose to use are development journals. These can be used by the child, caregiver and the keyworker to document the development of the child. Any milestones or key turning points for the child can be documented in a journal or on resources such as a chart in order to encourage and aid the child in their development. This is something that can be taken with them from pre-school and into key stage 1 and so on. Therefore, this intervention aids in not only the transition from home to pre-school but from pre-school onto future transitions. This can be linked to Vygotsky (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development and Erikson (1953, 1963) theory of the a child's different development stages. By documenting the stages and development it enables the child to know what they can do easily, what they can do aided and what they cannot do at all yet.

Proposed Outcomes

Transitions are a difficult and anxious experience for most people. The handbook aims to support practitioners in their role in supporting children's transitions. With children, it's a new part of their life and it's the adults around them who should aim to help in the transition to make it as easy and stress free as possible. According to Earlyyearsmatter.com, each child is unique and takes on transitions in a different way; all children should be treated equally and protected. The young children build up their resilience when they are in a protected in a safe environment.

The proposed outcome of this handbook is to educate and secure the knowledge in practitioners that children need to feel safe, welcomed and suited to their setting in order for their transition to be the most positive it could be. It is to remind key workers that children should be placed into environments that help them develop and grow without pushing them and pressuring them. This handbook should enable practitioners to understand the importance of maintaining the well-being of children whilst ensuring a positive experience of change.

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