

Triumphant Transitions in Early Years: The Criticality of Communication



(Source: Little Heath Primary School, n.d.)



(Source: Adapted from IYCF Image Bank, n.d.)

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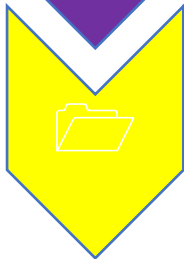
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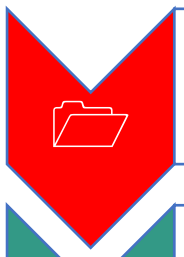
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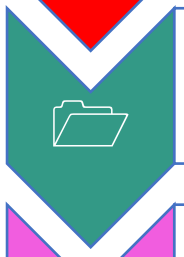
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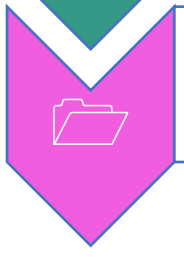
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Introduction

The objective of this guidance handbook is to educate and support key workers, in the management of effective transitions, within the early years. This handbook emphasises, how effective communication and partnership working, are both key in ensuring that relationship building is successful, and a child's transition within the early years is positive and runs smoothly.

According to Lev Vygotsky's theory, culture has a consequential influence on how children develop cognitive skills, such as communication and logical thinking. Vygotsky believed that there are three phases of learning: cognitive, motor, and sociocultural and adults can help children develop intellectually, by involving them in worthwhile and laborious activities. Vygotsky also maintained that children learn through observing others, therefore adults can transfer their knowledge and expertise to children, to help guide them through each transition process. (Structural Learning, 2022).

John Dewey promoted the idea that learning should be an active process, which is embedded in the community and culture of each individual child or learner, rather than focusing solely on imparting knowledge and performing assessments. In addition, Dewey emphasised the value of social interaction and believed that professionals from multi-agencies, should build strong relationships and collaborate, to ensure effective transitions and to support the children within their care and their families (Martin, 2021).

Transitions

What is a transition?

A transition is a series of actions or changes, which are essential to achieve an outcome, as opposed to an occurrence. Transitioning in early years is not just a transfer from one key stage to another, but an educational pathway between key workers and various environments, such as: place of residence, nursery, childcare, and playgroups (Birth To 5 Matters, n.d.).

The various forms of transition

Kegan (1998) believes that there are two types of transitions in early years, horizontal and vertical. Horizontal transition is a motion that children encounter, within various contexts, at a certain stage of their lives, such as moving from one environment to another. Vertical transition is when children transfer, from one programme activity to the next, during the day (Kegan, 1998).

Vogler *et al.* (2008) claims the third form of transition and overlooked by researchers, is Education-associated transitions, which are less official adaptations and transpire outside established organisations. Vogler *et al.* (2008) argues that although social transitions are slightly disregarded, they may in fact be vital to a child's development and health.

Why communication is key

Transition in the early years is a consequential period for children, families and key workers and is fundamental to the growth, education, and development of each child. Such times can be difficult, especially for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and can cause children, families, and carers to become agitated, anxious, and distressed. Effective communication is crucial to ensure smooth transitions and that children are comfortable and thoroughly supported throughout. Communication is also key to building strong, encouraging links between settings, as well as positive relationships (Devon County Council, 2022).

Devon County Council, (2022) also maintain that through efficient interactions, key workers can ensure that children receive supplementary and adaptable support

where required, transition programmes are organised, progressive and over a gradual period and that children's safeguarding and previous encounters within educational development, are respected and inclusive of their transition strategy.

According to unicef (n.d.) not only does your communication style help children to learn how to interact with others, but it also influences your child's emotional growth and future ability to form relationships. It is important for key workers to possess the necessary communication skills, to build and maintain trusting relationships with children, families, and multi-agencies.

Barriers faced within the transition process

The process of transition can be arduous and potential barriers could include the following: Children's anxiety, trauma and fear caused by the transition, limited communication skills and understanding, proportions of objects and the building itself, colour compatibility, disruptions within the curriculum, work-based activities, as opposed to play, which can make adhering to timetables challenging for children. Other potential barriers are inadequate funding, professional development, or materials, insufficient cooperation between key workers and families, and dissociation of parents from educational institutions due to mental health, or cultural differences. Key workers not being proactive, with regards to the support required for children, particularly those with special needs, could also be a potential barrier, and could affect cognitive function, conduct and academic achievement (Efthymia, 2018).

McLeod (2023) suggests that to overcome these obstacles, key workers must collaborate and build positive, trusting relationships with parents, families, and multi-agency groups, to develop a thorough understanding of each child. This approach ensures that each child's needs are being met by professionals. McLeod (2023) also believes key workers should be mindful that every child matters and is unique, therefore they will need to adapt their approach when faced with the responsibility of the wellbeing and growth of children in their care. By truly listening to parents and children, communicating with them in an open and honest way, and gaining a comprehension of their views, interests and needs, key workers can meet expectations, help children and families to feel emotionally secure and ensure seamless transitions.

At what age does a child become an adult?

Purdum (2020) claims that according to government policy, a child develops into an adult at the age of 18, due to the following factors: their right to vote, their registration for selective service and the capacity to oversee their own well-being. However, Purdum (2020) argues that adolescent intellect, does not develop entirely until the approximate age of 25.

Childhood as a social construct

tutor2u (2020) believes that childhood is socially constructed because, there are so many distinct aspects of childhood that vary from person to person and that cultural differences via behaviours and beliefs, have an impact on how childhood is socially produced.

The Rights of the Child

unicef, (n.d.) state that all children have rights, regardless of who those children are, where they live, or any other status, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, or language skills. The four unique articles, known as the General Principles, are:

Article 2 – Non-discrimination. Every child has these rights and should be treated equally.

Article 3 – Best interest of the child. Adults should always put the needs of the child first, as a priority.

Article 6 – Right to life survival and development. Each child has an inalienable right to life.

Article 12 – Right to be heard. All children have the right to form and express their views and to be heard.

Role of the Adult

Effective Communication

It is critical to understand typical communication development and when it occurs, to support children's linguistic and interaction progress. Possessing such knowledge and understanding, assists professionals in determining if a child remains on course, or requires further assistance. Children's reciprocal interactions, lay the groundwork for their vocabulary and intellectual development. Professionals should look to increase their comprehension of interaction and dialogue, via relevant training, courses, and research. This ensures best practice and will assist key workers, in setting up a productive educational environment (Freeman, 2022).

Parents

Maria Montessori was renowned for her teaching approach, which builds on a child's natural learning style. Montessori believed that parents ought to assume complete accountability and engage in an equal manner in their children's education, as well as contributing to the growth of their self-worth and assurance. A parent is both, a mentor and a learner and should establish a setting for their child, which encourages self-reliance, investigation, inquisitiveness, accountability, and public engagement. Parents should also create an environment that is safe for their child and collaborate with key workers, to ensure their child's needs, as well as their own are met (Shkribliak, n.d.).

Key Workers

Nursery Resources (2019) claim that practitioners have a duty to safeguard and respect the children within their care, including their cultures and backgrounds. Independence and interaction should be promoted, and key workers should have a comprehension of each child's background and needs. Educational plans should include developmental activities which are appropriate for their age and abilities, indoor and outdoor play, and group collaboration, to ensure children improve their interaction and social abilities, assurance, and dexterity. It is crucial that practitioners

stay informed with staff training and protocol, to ensure professional development and best practice.

According to Birth To 5 Matters (n.d.) key workers should create an environment for children that promotes a holistic approach, to advancement and education. This approach will enable children to improve their communication and motor skills, generate original concepts and consider other children's concepts, collaborate to feel a sense of belonging, face challenges and consider solutions, to recognise what is effective and ineffective and to remain goal focused throughout.

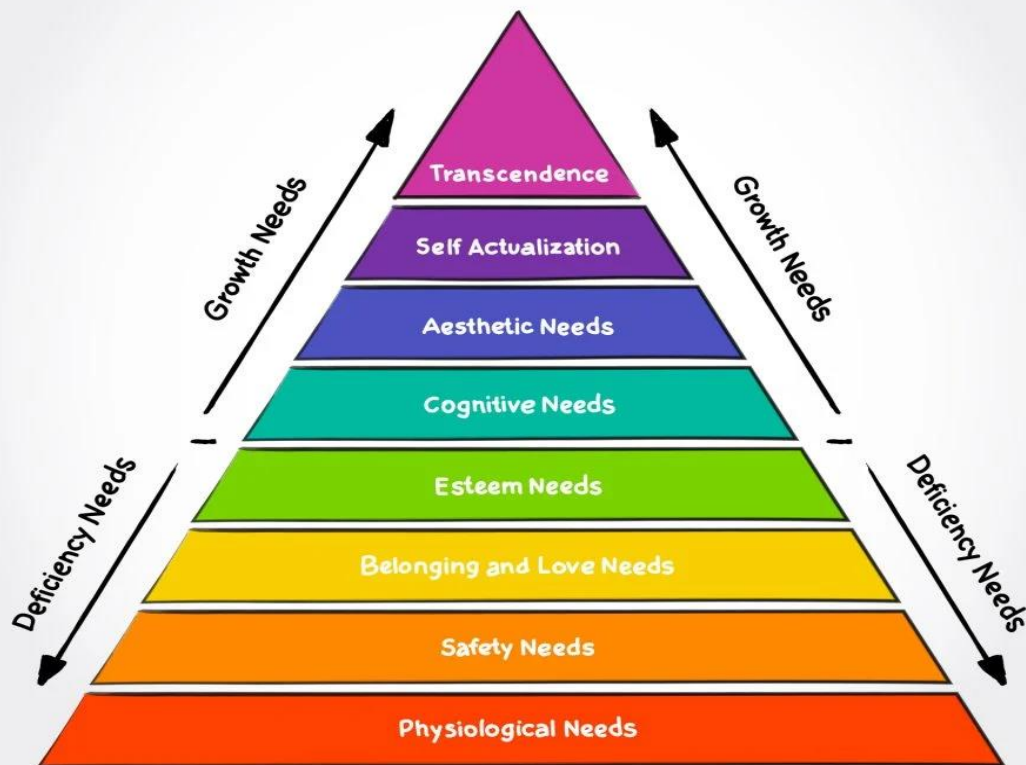
Management

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a diagram that shows the essential human requirements, for an individual to reach complete development and self-fulfilment. The hierarchy is represented as a pyramid, with the basic needs having been met before a person can progress on to more secondary needs (Channell, 2023).

Channell (2023) believes, by utilising Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it will enable managers to inspire individuals who in return, will respect their leaders, excel in their performance, and achieve professional contentment. The role of management is to recognise and meet the needs of their employees and children in their care, provide growth opportunities and relevant training, which includes National Occupational Standards, for staff to broaden their understanding and learn new abilities.

Management should also encourage a healthy work-life ratio, incorporate self-reflection, provide essential, constructive feedback on their employee's performance, and collaborate with staff, children, families, and multi-agencies, to create a positive environment and transition process. By valuing staff as individuals, investing time into their wellbeing, and providing opportunities to expand their knowledge and gain new skills, this enables key workers to be better equipped to meet the needs of each child and guide them professionally through transitions (Channell, 2023).

MASLOW'S MOTIVATION MODEL



(Source: McLeod, 2023)

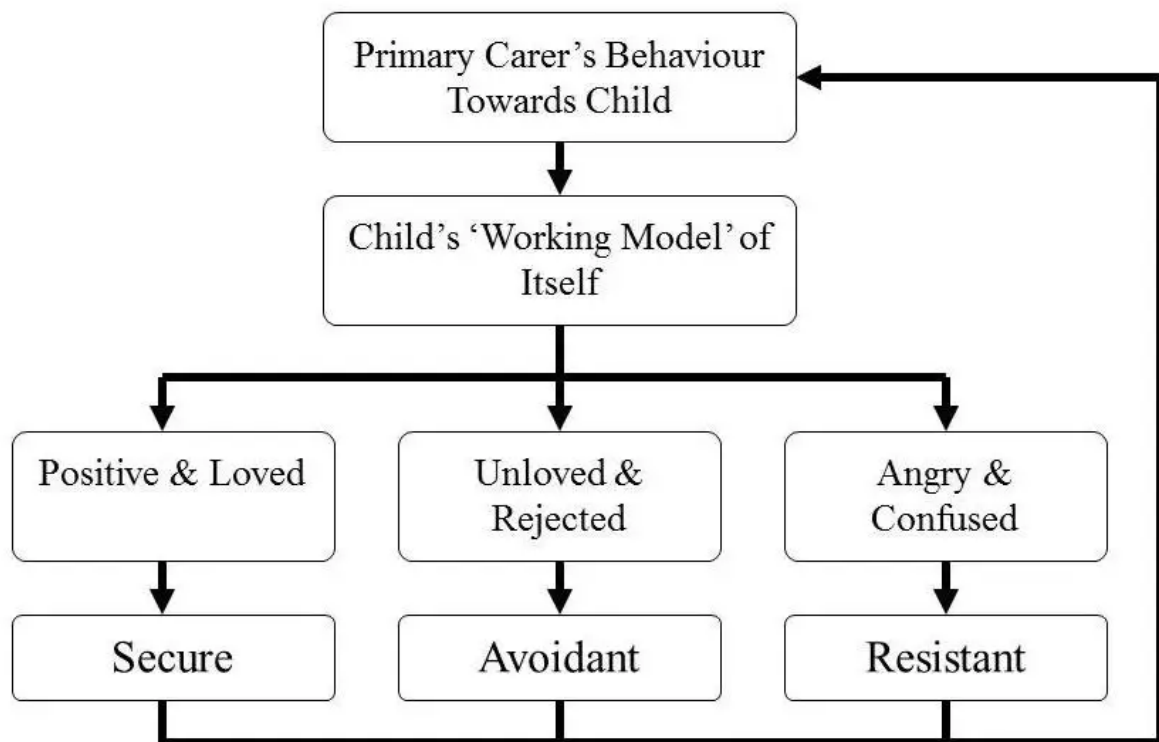
Role Model

John Bowlby's attachment theory emphasises the significance, of a child's emotional connection with their parent in the early stages, prior to their connection with key workers and believes that without this connection, it can impact a child mentally and emotionally, through adulthood. John Bowlby believes that role models should be equipped and capable to evaluate a child's connection type and respond to their needs accordingly (NSPCC, 2021).

Rudolph Shaffer and Peggy Emerson argue that a baby is able to form several attachments in the early stages, with various role models, as they claim that a baby does not develop a phobia of unknown individuals, until it is seven months old (Out Of Home Care Toolbox, (n.d.)).

According to American Academy Of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (2017), a role model influences others and leads by example. Role models, such as parents and key workers should modify each child's behaviour, via positive reinforcement, help them to make challenging decisions, and provide children with examples, of wholesome approaches to circumstances. Role models should also motivate each child to take part in activities, that mirror their principles, whilst being encouraged to embrace their individuality.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory



(Source: Main, 2023)

The Needs of the Child

Birth To 5 Matters (n.d.) state that all children are unique and even though key workers can gain some comprehension of each child's broad trends in development, advancement is erratic and manifests itself in unique ways for every child. To ensure the development of each child's health, wellbeing, educational growth, and security, it is vital for key workers to form strong bonds and close relationships with the children within their care. Professionals should also plan activities and a structured timetable, to enable children to feel secure, at ease and beloved.

Children require safe surroundings, audiovisual processing, indoor and outdoor play for the development of cognitive and motor skills, independence to control their emotions, ideas and actions, and the opportunity to learn from their experiences and put this newfound knowledge into practise (Birth To 5 Matter, n.d.).

Susan Isaacs argued that children find it difficult, to gain knowledge and understanding within a classroom environment, as they do not have the liberty to investigate or move around. Isaacs therefore believed that children should learn and develop through play, as this encourages each child, to communicate their emotions, concepts, and relations (Online Learning College, 2021). Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) supports the importance of play, and states that all children have the right to engage in play and participate in age appropriate, recreational activities (Play Wales, n.d.).

Stability and regime are key to ensure smooth transitions within early years, particularly for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). It is important for practitioners to give praise and encouragement to each child and look to incorporate uniformity into the transition procedure itself (Martinelli, 2023).

Individuals need assistance with settling into new environments, especially during the process of separating from their parents. It is crucial that professionals form robust attachments with children, for effective transitions to take place. Key workers must also look to tailor any transition strategies, to the holistic requirements of the child (Nursery Story, 2021).

Sue Gerhardt argues that children in their early years, are best cared and provided for by their parents, as this prevents separation anxiety, improves brain development, and provides children with sound emotional support. Sue Gerhardt believes that without this initial attachment, it can have a catastrophic impact on a child's welfare (Gale, 2013).

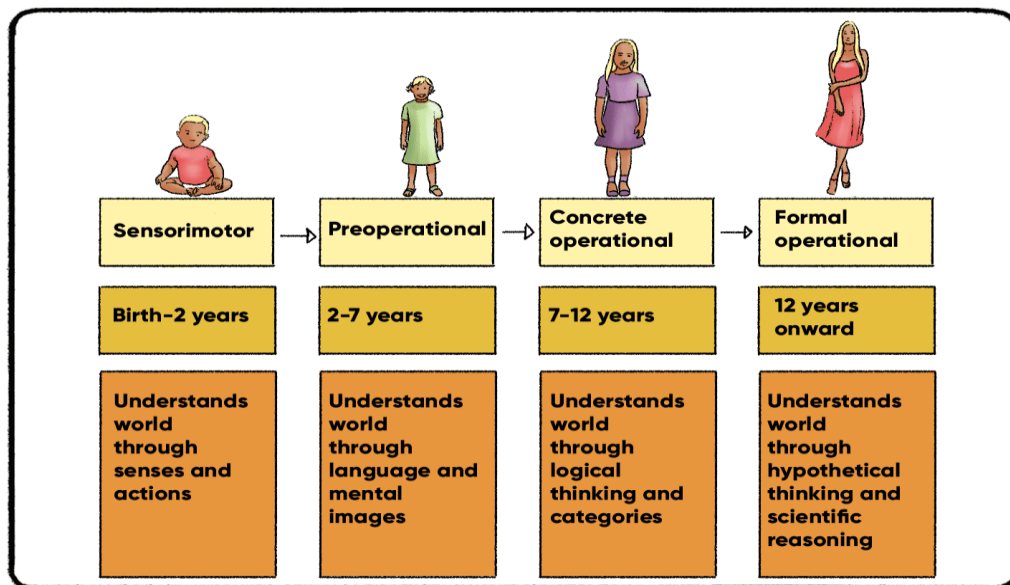
Piaget's Theory

Piaget believes that children use their experiences, to build their conception of the world and it is through interactions with their surroundings, that a child builds conceptual models of the world. Such conceptual models are called schemas (StudySmarter, n.d.). Children can be faced with the challenge of various transitions at any age, such as potty training, transitioning from a cot to a bed, school inception, gaining driving experience, or attending college (Verywell family, 2021).

Harman (n.d.) maintains that all children are unique and learn differently and at varying rates, both academically and emotionally. Consequently, during the course of various transitions, practitioners need to be aware of this and modify their approach to meet the needs of each child. When preparing individuals for any kind of transition, professionals should have a thorough understanding of each child's background, behaviour, inspirations, and passions. They should also keep in mind that some children will find the process more difficult than others and may be facing more than one transition at a time.

According to Piaget, there were four stages to development: sensorimotor stage (the primary objective is recognising that an object exists, even when it is hidden or difficult to see), preoperational stage (having the ability to use language to give objects meaning), concrete operational stage (beginning to resolve issues in their minds, which is known as operational thought) and formal operational stage (being able to consider a variety of factors and formulate theories, based on prior information). Key workers can assist in the development of each child's schemas, by offering opportunities for experimentation, promoting critical thinking, establishing routines, permitting them to actively engage with a range of objects and examine fictitious scenarios, encouraging growth and learning and ensuring a smooth and effective transition. Based on the available data, key workers may find Piaget's

theory useful, in assisting individuals of all ages, to navigate various transitions (Marcin, 2018).



(Source: Practical Psychology, 2019)

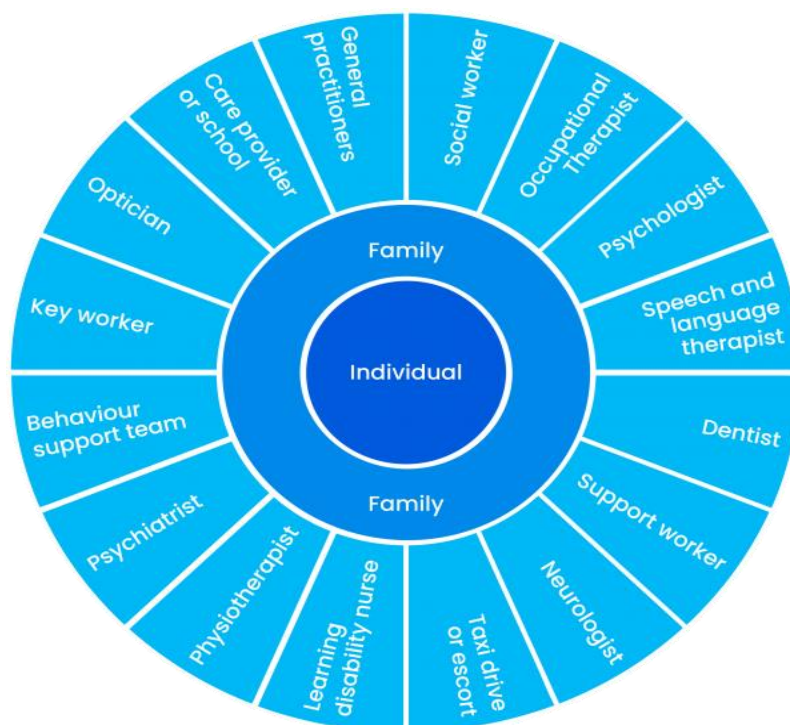


(Source: My teaching cupboard, n.d.)

Partnerships

Thomas (2019) believes that despite the difficulties of relocating to a new environment, key workers need to gain parent's understanding of the importance of presenting a positive image and allowing their child to enjoy the transformation process. To ensure a positive and smooth transition for each child, it is also crucial that professionals have a mutual respect and comprehension for one another, to build strong partnerships based on support and candid discussion (Thomas, 2019).

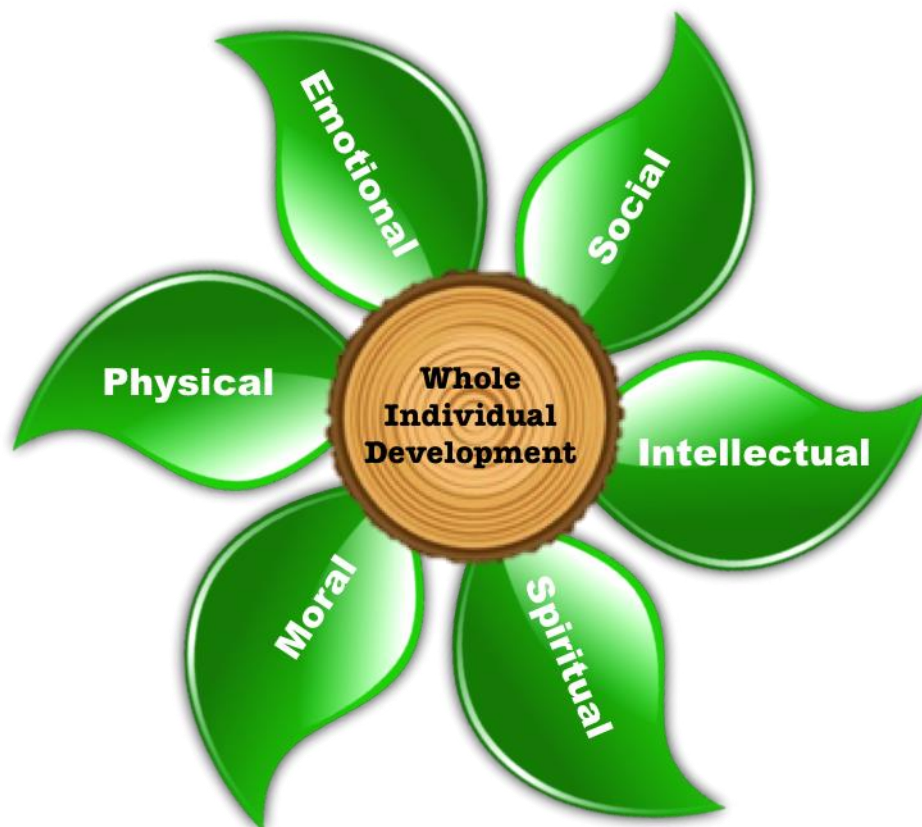
Effective partnerships between professionals are vital within early years, to support the frameworks for childcare and manage relationships effectively. Such partnerships also ensure the safeguarding and protection of each child, the offer of support and guidance to each other, and the sharing and utilisation of concepts and best practice. It is of the utmost importance that the following professionals collaborate, to guarantee commitment and investment in each child's development and the transition process: key workers, parents, families, health visitors, social workers, local authority early years advisors, area SENCOs, speech and language therapists and children's centre workers (pacey, n.d.).



(Source: The Challenging Behaviour Foundation, n.d.)

Interventions

Preparing and appraising a child's needs in the early years demands an holistic development approach, to encompass their physical, social, emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. When a child's parents, teachers, and other caregivers adopt a holistic approach, they prioritise and stimulate all of the child's developmental domains, which will enable children to link learning and transitioning to positive experiences (twinkl, n.d.).



(Source: Learning in the Leaves, n.d.)

Effective Transition Strategies

Singing

Music not only helps children to reduce their anxiety and stress, but it is also fun and engaging. Directives could be sung to a well-known song, to assist with the reinforcement of key concepts and to relax children during the transition process (Greutman, 2023).



(Source: Greutman, 2023)

Sensory Breaks

Allows children the time to receive the sensory information their bodies require, to remain focused, awake, and on task. Sensory breaks also facilitate situational changes and encourages the capacity, to control and plan responses to sensory information (Leicestershire County Council, 2022).



(Source: Leicestershire County Council, 2022)

Visits

Creates opportunities for children, parents, and other members of society, to visit and explore their new setting and interact with key workers, which will help individuals to cope with the challenge and trauma of transitions (Hadfield Nursery School, n.d.).



(Source: Tassoni, 2016)

Funded Projects

Offers a cutting-edge model of collaborative working, where key workers exchange industry standards, research and strategies that can be expanded upon in the future. Funded projects promote a child's assurance and welfare (pacey, n.d.).



(Source: pacey, n.d.)

Proposed Outcomes

O'Donoghue (2020) believes, positive and effective transitions, result in each child adapting to school swiftly and advancing from the outset. Children are given the scope to become more confident and resilient, to help sustain emotional and mental stability and to view challenging situations as learning opportunities. It is important to remember, individual's domesticity, fortitude, and disposition impacts them in various ways, therefore it is vital that key workers consider each child's unique risk and protective factors, when planning effective transition strategies (O'Donoghue, 2020).

UK Trauma Council (n.d.) is of the opinion that a child's brain development is greatly influenced by their initial connections, which lays the groundwork for future relationships. The environment a child grows up in can have a significant and lasting impact on brain growth, therefore through play, stimulation, and curiosity, caregivers can help each child discover that they have power over their surroundings and the transition process. The development of a child's communication skills and cognition can also be facilitated by key workers, who can help them regulate and comprehend their own and others' mindsets (UK Trauma Council, n.d.).



(Source: Child Care Resource & Referral of Central Iowa, 2019)

Each child is more likely to flourish, if they feel at ease in their surroundings, therefore it is vital that key workers provide opportunities, for individuals to experience familiarity in the form of visits, regimes, and educational provision, to enable children to enjoy the transition process. Contented children make accomplished students (Bryce-Clegg, 2017). It is also crucial for professionals to collaborate with children in a comprehensive way, and that each child's voice, concepts and preferences are not only heard, but valued and included in transition strategies (unicef, n.d.).



(Source: Parenting Special Needs, n.d.)

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