



(Source: Coram: Better Chances For Children, 2022. Google search).

## A Handbook for Early Years' Settings: Promoting an Understanding of the Importance of Transitions on the Learning and Development of Young Children.

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## Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to guide and support staff, parents and carers whilst they support young children aged two to four years making the transition from home into the childcare setting. Parents and carers need support too as this has a huge impact on them. The children will have a positive experience provided the staff and their parents/carers communicate and form a positive relationship together to help them through the transition and make it as smooth as possible. According to Griebel and Niesel (2003) with correct planning and communication, there is the potential to form a single transition from home to childcare with parents/carers, Early Years Practitioners and children each being important and communicating and working together.

### What are transitions?

A transition is a period of change from one significant change to another. 'Transitions include not just movements between one setting and another in a linear way, but movements "horizontally" from one room to another within the same setting, moving to a more structured part of the day such as lunchtime, or moving from home to childminder, to nursery and back again all in the course of the same day.' Birth to 5 Matters (2021).

Meggitt (2006) notes that every child is unique and develops at a different rate. Stages and milestones of children's development are only indicators of trends in development in children. This is displayed during times of transition as children will not all behave the same way. This can cause a worry to parents/carers so it is the role of the practitioner to put parents/carers minds at ease and help them through the transition too.

Some children are more vulnerable during transition. These could include children who:

- lack confidence or have low-esteem
- who are summer-born
- are born prematurely
- are separated from parents/carers for the first time
- with additional needs
- with complex health needs
- for whom English is not their first language
- who have had a lot of change in their life
- who may have experienced loss in their life.

Emotional development and wellbeing should be prioritised for these children with the practitioners being warm and responsive and recognising that the challenging behaviour being displayed is possibly a manifestation of feelings. Birth to Five matters (2021)

There are three types of transition according to Vogler et al. (2008):

- Horizontal-less significant, sideways transitions, routine ones that are experienced daily such as going from inside to outside the setting.
- Vertical- key changes such as starting a setting which can shape the children's experience affecting their well-being.
- Education-Associated- can affect development such as swimming, new sibling, divorce. These are less formal, more social but can shape the pathways and experiences of the child.

It is the role of the practitioner to work with the parents/carers to make the transition into the nursery setting as smooth as possible for the child.

According to Perry (2001) children are more likely to have behaviour or emotional problems if they experience an adverse childhood experience when they are at an early age.

## The Role of the Adult

According to Dowling (2010), when a child is starting at a new setting the parents/carers need to be confident that the Early Years Practitioners are doing everything possible to help their child settle in and accommodating the needs of their child. Ensuring the practitioners especially the keyworkers spend time with the children and their parents/carers and getting to know them and what the child likes and dislikes, any additional needs, remove any barriers and basically as much as they can get to know about the child may avoid problems and anxieties arising later. Giving the parents/carers a one-page profile to complete so the setting can learn lots about the child helps too. By creating a welcoming, nurturing environment, the child is more likely to settle if their parents/carers are happy in the setting and with the practitioners. According to Birth to five matters (2021)

Understanding each child, their needs, their background and that each child is different is paramount to the setting developing the correct practices and policies for the children according to Rimm-Kauffman *and* Pianta. (2000)

How the child settles and responds has the potential to affect all future transitions and experiences and how the child deals with risk factors and vulnerability in future years so it needs to be done correctly and with all factors taken into account to make the transition as smooth as possible according to Dunlop and Fabian. (2007)

Transitions should be a meaningful experience for all the children and special care taken to support the children when a member of staff leaves such as a keyworker. Practitioners must remember that children do things at different times and ages and have their own stages of development because they are unique according to Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978)

The National Occupational Standards (NOS) are an essential tool which practitioners use to ensure high levels of services are delivered. They are used for the Early Years Practitioners Continuous Professional Development (CPD) so they are up to date with their role. National Occupational Standards (2022) (Accessed: 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2022)

According to Siraj-Blatchford *et al* (2002) the most effective practitioners are the ones who ensure there is a balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities.

When considering the importance of the role of Early Years Practitioner it must be remembered that the most significant and influential adult in the child's life is the parent/carer and strive to form good relationships with them in order to provide further insight into each child's experiences before and beyond the setting. Tizard *et al* (1981) found that before 1960's parents/carers were not encouraged to be involved with their child's schooling.

## The Needs of the Child

The needs of the child come first. Transitions are dealt with sensitively as the children do not want to feel abandoned. He/she may feel abandoned if they cannot see something such as their parents/carers and may think they are gone forever.

Mackay *et al.*, (2010:101) developed an model of children and their prime carer to show the relationship of the effects of academic achievement and parental interaction. 'Emotional bonds to parents broadened to peer and teacher relationships and also to the school setting, affecting academic progress'. (Mackay *et al.*, 2020:100),

There are four types of attachment :

Secure parent-offering security, independence, love and attention and the child knows if they are worried that there is always someone there for them. The child is confident, the holistic development and academic effects are positive.

Ambivalent/anxious parent- is anxious, distracted, inconsistent, neglectful, angry and insecure. Child cannot rely on needs being met.

Avoidant-mother is withdrawn, distant, disengaged, neglectful. The child does not explore and may be withdrawn, cry, no self-esteem or motivation.

Disorganised – mother is frightened, passive, extreme, abused and the child picks up on it so is despondent, passive, depressed, angry, unresponsive and no strategy to have needs met.

Children need to be happy to enable them to thrive and develop in the setting. Their brains are rapidly developing and they need to be given the best opportunity to develop and grow. The child may visit the setting several times with their parents/carers to build a relationship. Transitions can be a worrying time for a child and Early Years Practitioners need to make the transition as easy as possible for the child by listening, communicating and giving them time.

According to Robinson (2009), consider

- the range of available activities
- extra practitioners to help with settling-in
- noise levels
- room layout to encourage independence but welcoming
- quiet areas

All needs of the child are catered for. The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) legislative framework is created by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (the ALN Act), the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021 (the ALN Code) and there are regulations made under the Act. Children with ALN, regardless of the severity or complexity of their learning difficulty or disability, will generally be entitled to an individual development plan (IDP) and will receive support called additional learning provision (ALP). This should be discussed prior to the child starting so that additional support can be put in place when the child starts but if areas of ALN are not identified prior to starting but are later then support should be put in place as above.

Children learn through play though exploring and experiences. Play is how children learn to make sense of the world around us and through experiences their play is very significant across the spectrum of learning.

A theory is a series of observations and it is recognised that children do different things at different ages and stages of development.

As stated by Isaacs (1954) 'The nursery school is an extension of the function of the home, not a substitute for it' and also Isaacs (1929) 'Play is indeed the child's work, and the means whereby he grows and develops' and both of these need to be taken into account in the setting. Play develops a child intellectually and socially and the child has to be at the centre at all times to ensure the development is holistic.

Pavlov (1927) developed the theory of classic conditioning which was rewarding positive behaviour and then with negative behaviour the children were reprimanded, a stimulus generated a conditioned response.

Bandura (1986) argues that learning does not need reinforcement and a child may learn that something is wrong by seeing another child being shown. They learn from each other via observing, imitating and modelling. This is called social learning or modelling.

Bruner (1966) promotes the three modes of representation which are enactive, iconic and symbolic, hence the Spiral Curriculum

Piaget (1962) focused on the development of logical thinking resulting in his findings that thinking develops over four stages which are the sensorimotor stage, the preoperational stage, the concrete operational stage and the formal operational stage as described below. He was the first Western theorist to consider that a child is more than a blank slate waiting to be written on. Piaget concentrates on the importance of play and children and interacting with the environment.

Freud (1923) focusses his theories on the development of personality and psychosexual development whereas Erikson (1950) focuses on his psychosocial study on identity and interactions between parents/carers and children.

These theorists all explore security, safety, meeting needs, attachment and exploring the world.

### Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development

| Stage                | Age range              | What happens at this stage?                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sensorimotor         | 0-2 years old          | Coordination of senses with motor responses, sensory curiosity about the world. Language used for demands and cataloguing. Object permanence is developed.                                   |
| Preoperational       | 2-7 years old          | Symbolic thinking, use of proper syntax and grammar to express concepts. Imagination and intuition are strong, but complex abstract thoughts are still difficult. Conservation is developed. |
| Concrete Operational | 7-11 years old         | Concepts attached to concrete situations. Time, space, and quantity are understood and can be applied, but not as independent concepts.                                                      |
| Formal Operational   | 11 years old and older | Theoretical, hypothetical, and counterfactual thinking. Abstract logic and reasoning. Strategy and planning become possible. Concepts learned in one context can be applied to another.      |

Source: PsychologynotesHQ 2021

Winnicott (1964) stated that a baby needs a relationship to develop, thrive and nurture and someone to care for them.

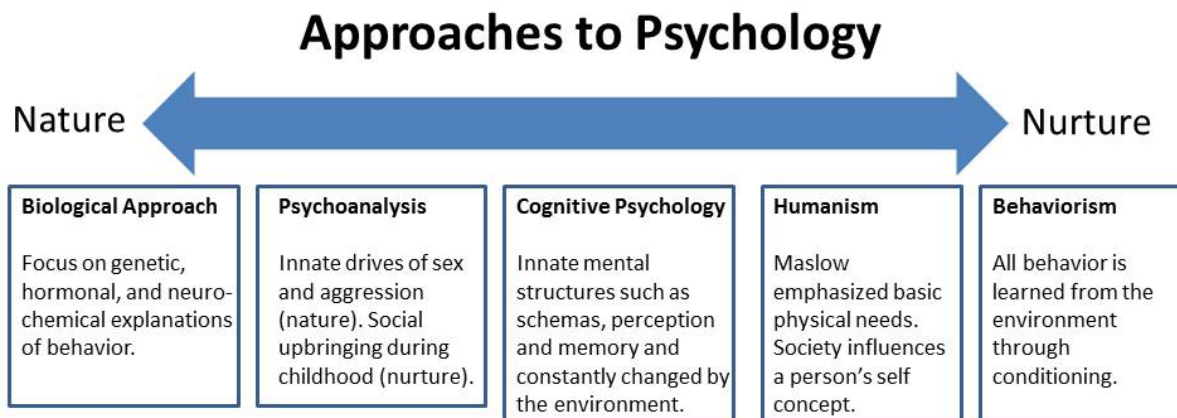
Dewey (1916) believed in child-centred childcare and wrote changes in pedagogy which supported the child's development in preparation for democratic life. He used reflective practice and talked about a 'continuing re-construction of experience'. He opposed authoritarian methods of education so children could make their own decisions.

Montessori (1912) believed each child was an individual and should be treated as one. The principles of the Montessori Method are that early childhood should be child-centred, activities should challenge the developing needs and build on them, indirect preparation should take place, the five disciplines considered (practical, sensorial, language, mathematical and culture), consider the seven periods during childhood, provide the children with direction and structure and allow children to determine their own rate of progression. She also promoted authentic play which is used in Planning in the Moment in settings today where children live in the here and now and when children show curiosity then the practitioners support their next steps. Ephgrave (2018)

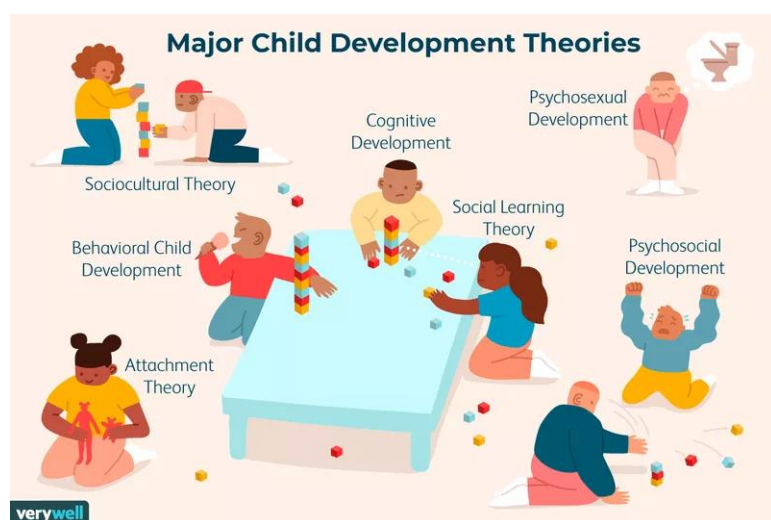
Steiner (1996) advocates the importance of spiritual growth and holistic education.

Bowlby published three papers on the theory of attachment. He identified the early bonding that occurs in babies and recorded that children learn best when interacting with others.

Nature v Nurture – There is an argument as to what actually affects the child's behaviour. Nature is what is in the child's genes and nurture is what has been seen and learned.



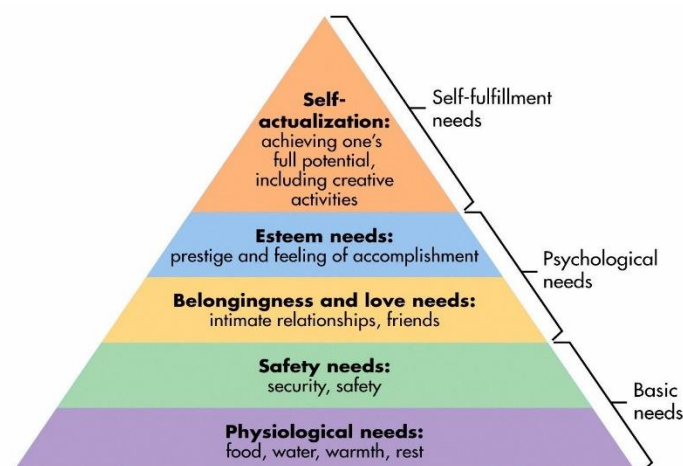
( Simply Psychology, 2021)



Source –Verywellmind 2022

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a useful way of conceptualising the needs of the child at various developmental stages. It can be used as a framework to support transitions. The keyworker provides the physiological needs and the safety needs which are the basic needs and form the positive relationship which underpins most theoretical frameworks in the Early Years.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs(1987)



Source – Simplypsychology, 2020

Children are encouraged to explore and are shown that mistakes are a learning experience. This develops the children's resilience. Children who do not have the above do not have a sense of belonging. They are unsettled and jump from one thing to another. When the children do have the above it gives them a self fulfilment and are able to meet their own needs. Children need to feel loved and have a sense of belonging.

There are 54 articles in the United Convention on the Rights of the Child and all are of equal importance and underpin everything that Early Years Practitioners do. Four especially need to be considered during transition:

Article 2 – No discrimination

Article 3 – Best interests of the child

Article 6 – Life, Survival and Development

Article 12 – Every child has the right to a voice on matters that affect them, and to have their views taken seriously, in accordance with their age and maturity.

The children's voice matters.

Children can become nervous, worried, apprehensive and over-whelmed at new experiences. Robinson (2011) states practitioners need to consider other transitions during the day including change:

- over of staff
- of activity
- of routine
- from one room to another, indoors to outdoors

Harris (1989) recognised the fact that they could use 'transitional' objects to aid themselves in regulating their emotions such as comforters or a favourite toy that they have chosen themselves.

When the children have warm, affectionate relationships with their parents/carers, according to Mortimer (2001) they tend to be better socially adjusted and able to achieve more academically and have a high self-esteem.

Children are referred to as a 'being' and a 'becoming' suggesting that the characteristics of both overlap so they should be thought of as both increasing their agency. Department of Education (2010)

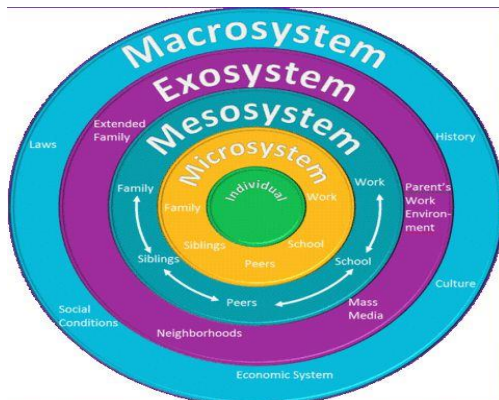
For children to move smoothly from one setting to another, the transition should be seen more as a journey.

## Partnerships

Parents and practitioners should work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect within which children can have security and confidence. Effective communication is crucial for successful transitions. As a setting everything should be done to break

down any communication barriers and offer an inclusive setting. When necessary teachers from school, social workers, Family Information Service, Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCO), Speech and Language Therapists, Health Visitors, may become involved.

Bronfenbrenner (2000) used the ecological systems theory which views the child as developing within a complex system. Close and secure relationships are important to the child. The community where children live have an impact on the children. They are influenced by all that surround them in the diagram.



Bronfenbrenner diagram showing ecological theory.

(Source – SusanMarie, 2017)

## Interventions

Effective education requires practitioners understanding that children develop rapidly during early years physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially. For rich, stimulating experiences learning environments need to be well-planned and organised. Children should be observed and responded to in the appropriate manner to help them develop. Information is recorded and reflected on, to improve children's outcomes, based on evidence based research. Current research shows that children learn from play and when a child shows an interest or tries to do something, staff enhance the activity to promote the child's development. Ephgrave (2018)

The New Zealand early childhood curriculum Te Whariki (Ministry of Education, 1996) puts relationships together with holistic development, empowerment, family and community.

Prior to the child starting visits should be arranged with parents/carers so that the child can get used to the setting before they start and meet staff and the other children. It's useful to find out in advance anything the child really likes so that those activities can be ready for them on their first visit. They are welcome to bring any comforters with them or favourite toys.

If a schema is observed such as trajectory, rotation, enclosing, enveloping, transporting, connecting, positioning or orientation then practitioners should support the child and encourage them to develop it. Continue to build on what children already know and extend it, ensuring all children feel included, secure and valued.

Keeping in touch with the parents/carers during transition and carrying on afterwards for the stay of the child in the setting is important whether it be via a journal or through an online app such as Seesaw. Using these apps allows parents/carers to communicate at anytime during the session and photographs of their children can be sent to show them that their child is settled to put their minds at rest.

Providing the family with a handbook in advance telling them lots about the setting is useful so they can read and come with any questions on their visit.

Areas of calmness and comfort are always beneficial so the child can feel calm and sit and watch the others with their parents/carers if they would like too. A calm atmosphere is needed rather than a loud, busy time when the children first arrive.

‘ Leaders need to challenge staff in terms of how they interact with families; need to review existing beliefs and assumptions, especially if they hold a deficit view of families. Effective leaders place families ‘at the centre of school life and learning...’ Welsh Government (2014)

Ensuring the four purposes in the New Curriculum are being used throughout the sessions. Welsh Government (2019)

‘Wales needs a different kind of teacher who understands why and how to work with children (and how to work with their parents, who in turn support those children’. (Donaldson, 2015)

Maintaining fundamental, two-way, honest, respectful, inclusive and effective relationship with parents/carers, staff and children.

Maintaining a Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings to ‘Form positive relationships based on trust and mutual respect’. (Welsh Government 2022)

## Proposed Outcomes

A happy, confident child who has settled and developing well and meeting milestones and enjoys coming to the setting.

All children able to attend, no child is excluded or disadvantaged.

Opportunities for children to take part in what has been planned but also for the children to decide what they want to do and how they want to do it too and staff to support them in the process

Staff who observe and respond to children to help them develop further

For children to be having rich and stimulating experiences.

A well planned and well organised environment

Effective communication and positive relationships built between practitioners, parents/carers and children.

Happy parents/carers, children and staff.

Play is a fundamental part of transitions,

Good interaction between the child with the keyworker and other staff.

‘the ability to form relationships with caring adults and the ability to self-regulate behaviour and exercise self control were key skills in the Early Years in the reduction of problems in later life’. (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998)

According to Robinson (2011) reflecting on transitions enables practitioners to look at the connection between emotional well-being and behaviour. This is because how a child deals with ‘change’ is affected by how they have responded to and understood their overall experience of life. It is the experiences of how life at home affects life at the setting and how life at the setting affects life at home which support and strengthen the positivity and negativity of themselves.

Every child is a unique child and building positive relationships and having positive transitions, the correct interaction, routines and enabling environments = successful play, learning and development.

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