

# **Guidance for Early Years' Key Workers and Practitioners:**

## **Positive Transitions**



(Source: nordangliaeducation.com, 2020)

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# Introduction

What is a transition? What does transition mean?

A transition could be described as a change or movement from one position or circumstance to another. With its origins in the Latin 'transire' meaning 'to go across' passage through would be a more apt description (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Allingham (2012) tells us that a transition in a school setting can be defined as,

any kind of change that may alter the routines that the children, and sometimes the adults, are used to. This does not just mean moving from room to room or between settings. The change can also be something as simple as the introduction of a new staff member, a staff member leaving, an unexpected visitor to the group, or someone different bringing the child to, or collecting them from, the setting (Allingham, 2012, p3).

To date there are over 32,770 schools across the UK. Specifically, in Wales there are 1,569 schools, 9 nursery schools and approximately 1,238 primary schools (besa, 2020).

UK laws dictates "Children must get an education between the school term after their 5th birthday and the last Friday in June in the school year they turn 16" (gov.uk, 2020).

The education system is divided into Key Stages based upon age:

- Early Years Foundation Stage (ages 3–4)
- Primary Education (ages 5 to 10) which is subdivided into,
  - Key Stage 1 (KS1) Infants (ages 5 to 6)
  - Key Stage 2 (KS2) Juniors (ages 7 to 10)

Additionally, in Wales, the statutory national curriculum for all 3-to-7 year old's is called Foundation Phase.

Children enter Early Years Foundation, Foundation Phase or Nursery, on a part time basis, in the term after their third birthday. A full-time place is offered during the term of their fourth birthday.

All children that enter the education system can expect to experience a vast number of transitions into and within a new setting at a very young age and at every stage of their development.

When leaving home and transitioning into a new school, some children may embrace the change, thrive and explore the new environment with little to no apprehension or anxiety. Other children may take some time to feel settled and may require significantly more attention from parents, teachers and support staff to establish a feeling of security and sense of comfort in a school setting. The range of reaction to various transitions shows us every child is different, but the idealistic outcome is that of a settled child. When children are settled, they are happy and feel secure. Children need a sense of happiness and security to promote a positive learning experience (Symonds, 2015).

The Child Friendly Schools Manual published by UNICEF (2012) tells us,

Children often experience sharp differences when they transition from preschool to primary school, especially in relation to the structure of the setting and curriculum. In early learning programs, for example, children have the space to play; in primary school they may sit in rows and behind desks (UNICEF, 2012, p11).



(Source: nurseryworld.co.uk, 2020)

## How To Use This Handbook

This handbook has been collated to offer keyworkers, working with children in the Early Years or Foundation Phase setting, information and guidance on how to implement smooth transitions throughout the child's progression through the school system.

Although primary focus is on pre-schoolers entering full-time education, many of the strategies can be applied at any stage from leaving home and entering preschool, through foundation and key stage 1, up to key stage 2 and finally leaving primary education.

Taylor (2015) explains,

The earliest phase of life, from pre-birth to about eight years of age, constitutes a period of extraordinary developmental growth and of promise regarding human potential and opportunity.

These very early years are of intense interest to those engaged in social and educational policy because of the conviction, supported by research, that 'a good start in life' lays the foundations of wellbeing, health, learning and social care (Taylor, 2015, p160).



(Source: familycorner.co.uk, 2020)

The aim of the guidance is to promote understanding of the recognition of anxiety and how to facilitate positive transitions into and throughout the school. It will address your role as the adult keyworker in understanding the importance of effective communication. It will also look at the needs of the child, school partnerships, interventions and review proposed outcomes to ensure the holistic development of the child and enable continued physical, social, emotional and cognitive advancements through the primary school education system.

# The Role of the Adult

“learning is supported and promoted from the earliest moments of life” (Tayler, 2015, p161)

## What is a Key Worker/Key Person?

It is a legal requirement of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) that every child in a registered childcare setting must be assigned a Key Worker/Key Person. A child is assigned a Key worker regardless of how often they attend nursery.

The Key worker has a multitude of responsibilities, most importantly forming a bond with the child to promote a sense of safety, ensuring the child can initially settle in the new environment and continue to develop through their learning (Curriculum for Wales, 2015).

The key worker is also the first point of contact for parents and is responsible for exchanging information such as medical needs or dietary requirements. Written summaries detailing progress and development are necessary for academic advancement however, daily verbal updates or ‘a quick chat’ during handover exchange is equally as beneficial (Foundationyears, 2008).

“children need to be led gradually and gently into abstract learning and that will happen best if children are allowed a range of experiences in settings which are familiar” (Smidt, 2007, p6)



(Source: Thelincoln, 2020)

It is important the key worker completes regular observations to highlight areas of progress in learning.

These observations will be documented and used in the future to plan activities that further challenge and advance the child's learning.

Along with noting substantive interactions with peers and recognising established relationships, the key worker must pay attention to what the child enjoys playing with. This will provide information for staff during future transitions, offering an understanding of what the child looks forward to doing in school and who they like to interact with (tda.gov.uk, 2010).

Easing the process of change and managing transitions, the key worker must establish a positive relationship and maintain informative dialogue with parents. This will ensure the needs of the child are met and that parents feel comfortable to discuss changes that may have arisen in the home setting (Early Years Wales, 2020).

# The Needs of the Child

## **Article 15 (freedom of association)**

**Every child has the right to meet with other children and to join groups and organisations.**

(Source: UNCRC, 2020)

### What is the Foundation Phase?

The Foundation Phase is the statutory curriculum in Wales for all 3-to-7 year olds.

It can be divided into 7 separate areas of learning,

1. Personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity.
2. Language, literacy and communication skills.
3. Mathematical development.
4. Welsh language development.
5. Knowledge and understanding of the world.
6. Physical development.
7. Creative development.

Children are encouraged to use their imagination, to explore the world around them, take part in engaging and relevant activities which promote understanding of how things work and develop idea sharing and problem solving via open-ended questions.

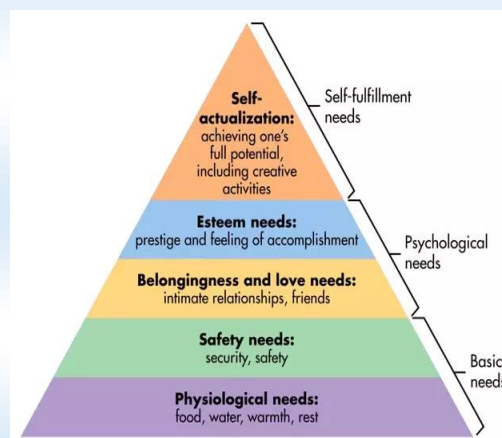
Learning primarily through play, the seven areas of learning of both practical indoor and active outdoor activities, vary experience and provide children with a range of learning opportunities (gov.wales, 2020).

## **Article 31 (leisure, play and culture)**

**Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.**

(Source: UNCRC, 2020)

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as a pyramid. The needs lower down in the pyramid must be fulfilled before the next level can be obtained.



(Source: simplypsychology, 2020)

Basic human needs need to be met from the bottom up, if a child is tired or hungry, they may feel unsettled and display clear anxious behaviours and as a result find interaction with peers difficult to initiate and engagement in activities unbearable. Basic needs need to be met before psychological needs can flourish (Pichère, 2015).

It is the role of the practitioner to observe whether these needs are being met daily. By establishing whether prior to starting school that day the child has had enough sleep or eaten breakfast, the keyworker could gain an understanding of any 'out of the ordinary' behaviours during times of transition.

Any changes in the normal routine are often discussed during the handover period with the parent or care giver. Key workers need to remain non-judgmental during communication, getting to know each parent on an individual basis and accordingly tailor their approach. Understanding the background, recognising individual needs and ensuring all members of staff have relevant information about the family will aid in a positive transition into the school setting initially and continue to promote positive transitions within the setting (Anderson et al. 2017, p78).

### The Importance of Play

Over the past 150 years many theorists have shaped and guided how we teach children. Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky are two psychologists whose influences are still observed today around the world in education, health and social care. Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was born in Switzerland and studied epistemology, the study of knowledge. His observations and findings, primarily of his own children, influenced his research on child development and how human beings construct knowledge and form knowing.

Born in Russia, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was another constructivist whose work only received notoriety toward the end of the last century due to it being translated into English. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of language, dialogue and learning through instruction.

Both Piaget and Vygotsky acknowledge the importance of play in strengthening social relationships through learning (Mooney, 2013).

Play Wales (2020) tells us,

Playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing. Through play, children develop resilience and flexibility, contributing to physical and emotional wellbeing. Playing is important to all children no matter what their impairments or behaviour (Play Wales, 2020).

In support of this, The Welsh Government Play Policy (2002) states,

Play is the elemental learning process by which humankind has developed. Children exhibit a behavioural imperative and instinctive desire to play. It has contributed significantly to the evolutionary and developmental survival of our species. Children use play in the natural environment to learn of the world they inhabit with others. It is the very process of learning and growth, and as such all that is learnt through it is of benefit to the child (gov.wales, 2020)



(Source: child in the city, 2020)

Children learn primarily through play and it is one of the core values in all early years' settings. Through play children make connections with others and their environment, they make sense of their surroundings and are afforded the opportunity to advance physically, socially and emotionally as well as cognitively.

It is the role of the key worker to promote independence and ensure the child's right to play is protected as this will maximize experimentation, increase risk taking strategies and develop collaboration with peer groups.

Transition between activities can be improved with adequate time allocated for play and socialisation (Carr, 2014).

## Partnerships

“Educational provision for young children should be holistic with the child at the heart of any planned curriculum”  
(Gov.Wales, 2020)

In Wales, the education and training inspectorate for Wales (Estyn), has a vision to improve the quality of education, training and outcomes for all learners in Wales (Estyn, 2020).

In turn, every Early Years Foundation, Foundation Phase, Nursery or Primary school is accountable to their respective governing body.

Working partnerships with other settings might be necessary if the child is moving from another provider. In order to support the child through the transition into the new setting staff should gather relevant information and perhaps even visit the child at their previous setting if possible.

Throughout the education system professionals form a team around the child known as multiagency support. Working in partnership alongside teachers and key workers are the school nurse, health visitor and other support workers and professionals.

It is the role of the key worker to establish a positive working relationship with all professionals within the multiagency framework (gov.uk, 2020).



(Source: CEN, 2016)

“environments intentionally designed for child-directed play in nature have been shown to improve choice-making, problem-solving, and self-regulation” (Carr, 2014, p150)

The physical environment is often regarded as the third teacher and this partnership with nature is an integral part of childhood development. In a classroom setting much can be achieved with individual areas of learning to promote development, such as areas specifically for ‘messy’ or tactile play to and soft areas for quiet time or reading (Carr, 2014). However equally as important for cognitive advancement are outdoor play and the exploration of nature. The physical environment impacts on play participation and the types of games children play.

The primary play materials encourage investigative play and experimentation, leaves, sticks, rocks and insects are all critical for promoting self-expression, confidence and creativity. Other inquiry skills, observing, wondering and reflecting are optimally stimulated by play in nature and expand physical, social, emotional and cognitive development (Harvey, 2015).

## Interventions

“Each time a child encounters something new and interesting, the child explores the new object or situation, and as he or she does, connections between brain cells are laid down” (Smidt, 2007, p2).

There are several ways in which parents can prepare their child for full-time education or starting school.

A structured bedtime routine will ensure the child has enough sleep. Being able to get dressed, eat and use the toilet independently will promote confidence and increase the likelihood of positive transition into school and throughout the school day.

Rawstrone' (2019) recommendations for parents or caregivers include,

- pointing out the building when you are passing it.
- allowing your child to try on their school uniform.
- chatting about any friends who will also be attending.
- discussing what they will do at school, focusing on the activities your child particularly enjoys.
- practising the journey to school (Rawstrone, 2019).

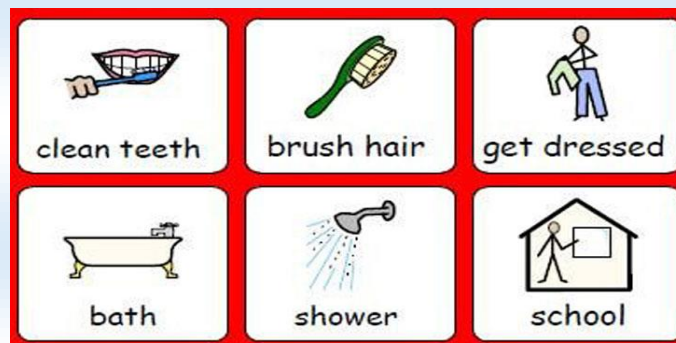
Basic preparations involved with starting full-time education can venture beyond the child having a basic comprehension of letters and numbers.

Every child is unique, and some may require more support during times of transition especially those children with a statement of additional needs. Transitional objects, such as a small toy or blanket can aid in smooth transition into school in the early stages of education by providing the child with a sense of familiarity and comfort.

It is also important to keep in mind that some children may begin to display signs of additional needs as they progress through the education system as the social and academic demands increase.

As well as expanded transition, where the child can visit daily to increase familiarity with key workers, staff and the setting, parents can also visit individually, rather than in a group, to discuss specific requirements for the child and further ease transition.

Transition meetings are held with the pre-school manager, health visitor and Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALENCO) to discuss development, progress, any concerns and how to successfully facilitate the transition into school (gov.wales, 2020).



(source: The National Autistic Society, 2020)

Visual aids such as age relevant 'now and next' timetables can provide a visual prompt for the child and help them to understand the structure of the school day. Traffic light, countdown and sand timers can allow the child processing time toward the end of an activity and allow the practitioner to implement the next activity whilst controlling potential outbursts of anxiety. These aids can be discussed, exchanged and implemented, prior to the child starting at school. This can help facilitate positive transition, reduce potential anxiety for the child and alleviate any concerns for the parents. This is particularly relevant for children diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) where changes in routine, differences or deviation can be even more difficult to contend with (Barrio, 2016).

## **Proposed Outcomes**

### Positive relationship between child and key workers

Remaining flexible and adapting their approach to meet the individual needs of the child are crucial strategies for establishing a lasting bond between key worker and child. Entering a new setting can be an unsettling time for both child and parent and some children have difficulty settling in at first. Transitions should be made at the child's pace, gently and gradually introducing learning through a range of varying experiences with an emphasis on play (Symunds, 2015).

### Communication with parents.

Providing information to parents, maintaining proactive and concise dialogue and encouraging parents to contact the setting are paramount in establishing a positive working relationship and facilitating a smooth transition into school. Providing parents with as much feedback as possible on the progress of the child serves to reassure them and clear information about the curriculum, timetable and structure of the school day will alleviate any concerns they may have over the future academic and social development of their child.

### Smooth transitions into and within the school setting.

By gathering as much information about the child as possible, and using it effectively, key workers can facilitate positive transitions into the new school setting.

Information about the child's likes and dislikes can be used to initially build a rapport and to form a relationship with the child.

From there, engaging the child in activities related to their interests can instil a sense of safety and belonging and allow the child to settle in and transition effortlessly within the new school setting (Anderson et al, 2017, p39).

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