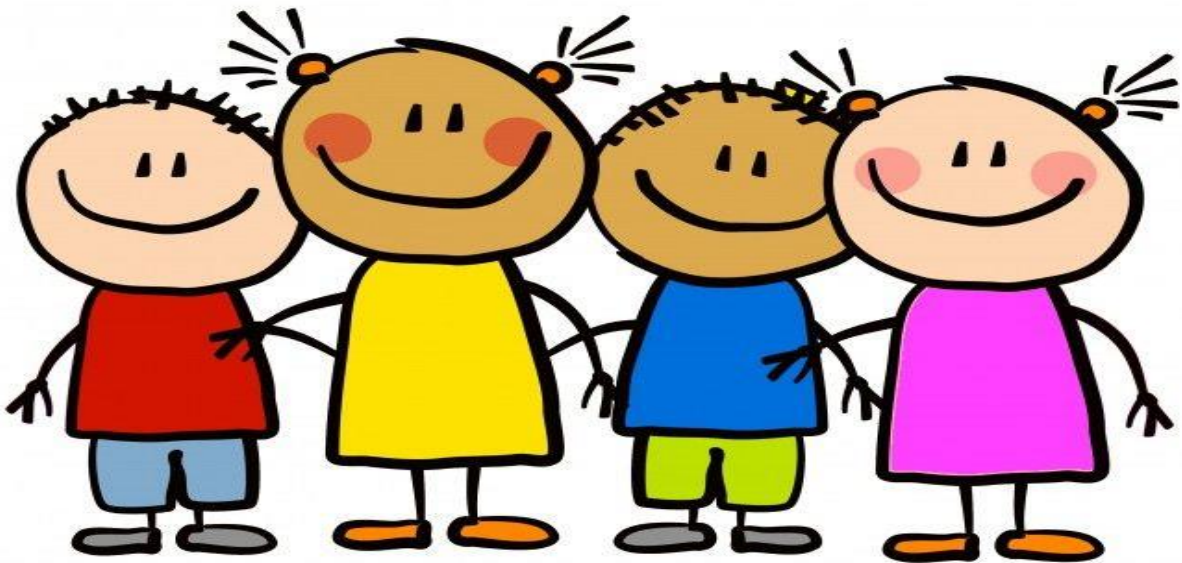


TRANSITIONS



(Pinterest, 2016)

A handbook for Practitioners

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Introduction

What is a transition?

Transitions are naturally occurring changes that happen in a person's life. In the first few years of a child's existence, they will move through many important transitions and how these are navigated can have a lasting effect on the outcomes for the child. One of the most important transitions in the Early Years of a child's life will be the move from home care to a group setting and this handbook aims to discuss this process and to support the practitioner as they in turn support the children in their setting through this journey.

It is widely accepted that, in order to develop, children need change, yet navigating these changes can be unsettling. How children are supported during these significant changes is vital to their ongoing developmental progress. Brooker (2008) indicates that much of the evidence gained from previous studies on transitions highlights the possible long and short-term problems caused by difficult and badly handled transitions, so it is important that we realise the gravity of the issue.

Practitioners accept that not giving children the time to adjust and adapt to transitions can make situations more difficult and can have a negative effect on learning and behaviour for life. Children cope better with changes when they feel consulted and provided with information (Trodd, 2013).

What is the purpose of this handbook?

Most children entering the Cylch will have never been left in a group setting before and this can make it difficult for parents and carers to predict how the child will respond to the separation (Trodd, 2013). It is the hope that this handbook can help to answer questions that arise and offer assistance to facilitate a smooth transition to the Cylch.

By following the advice and guidance in this handbook the practitioner can help the children in the setting to view their experiences as opportunities to grow rather than experiences to fear.

Role of the Adult

It is generally accepted that children who are offered the opportunity of attending a pre-school will benefit greatly upon the transition to school. A child forms strong bonds with their primary carer, usually the mother and when this happens it is known as attachment (Brooker, 2008).

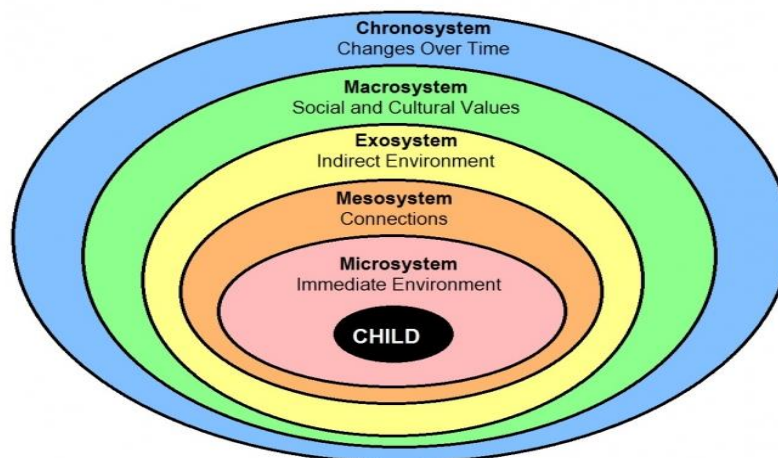
When the child moves in to the Cylch setting they will be required to form new bonds with different adults who provide their care. Bronfenbrenner (1979) discusses transitions in his study, *The Ecology of Human Development*, and describes the child as a centre of a series of interlocking systems, all of which have an impact on development.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological model of development contains four sections.

- **Microsystem** – This is the place where a child lives, it contains the child's family and peers as well as the activities and relationships that occur within the child's immediate environment.
- **Mesosystem** – The Mesosystem refers to the relationships that occur within the Microsystem, for example the links that are formed between the home, school, cylch or neighbourhood. The Mesosystem describes the various contexts in which a child is raised.
- **Exosystem** – An Exosystem is a broad social setting that will provide guidance and support for the child during their development. The exosystem does not directly involve the child but will still have an impact on their development. Examples of exosystems are community centres, parks, recreation centres and social support networks.
- **Macrosystem** – The macrosystem consists of the ideology, values, laws, and customs within a culture which can influence the child and have a powerful effect on the child's development.

(Keenan and Evans, 2009)

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (University of Aberdeen, 2017)

The role of the parent

As the primary care giver and the person who knows the child the best, the parent should be regarded as a vital and additional member of the team. Practitioners should recognise that the child has formed a strong relationship with their parents because of the work of John Bowlby in 1969 when he coined the theory of attachment. Attachment theory focuses on the relationship between the parent and child and the impact this has on psychological development. It examines the development of these affectionate bonds and the possible extension of these bonds to other care givers in a trusted capacity (Keenan and Evans 2009).

Excellent communication is required between the parents and the setting, and it is important to develop a relationship of trust and respect. Parents, carers, and staff alike should have a deep commitment to the child and there should be a connection of their roles and responsibilities in caring and educating the child. Both should be providing care and commitment to the child but at the same time maintaining a professional relationship with each other. The knowledge held by the parents is both valuable and incomparable and should be regarded as such (Brooker, 2008).

Most importantly teamwork between parents and setting staff is essential. Parents should respect the routines in place and have an understanding that 'belonging' to the cylch is important. This will in turn guide the child and provide them with a better chance of developing a sense of belonging.

The role of the key worker

The relationship between the key worker and the child is the most important aspect of a successful and positive transition. The core values of the key worker are essential, and they should demonstrate empathy and understanding for the range of emotions that can be displayed. The keyworker should be able to notice and respond to the needs of the child, especially when the child is unable to communicate verbally. The emotional well-being of the child is the most crucial factor for the key worker to consider.

It is common for professional practitioners to worry about children becoming too attached and fearing this attachment may damage relationships at home, however Pound (2005) suggests that children can manage a range of different close attachments at one time and states that attachment is not a simple one to one process.

Bronfenbrenner (in Brooker, 2008) describes how important two-way communication is. Information needs to be held by the home about the setting and by the setting about the home in order to be effective in ensuring all transitions run smoothly and to provide information and support to the child. Sometimes it can be important to use familiar objects to assist with keeping the parent close to the mind while in the period of adjustment. Jarvis, George, and Holland (2013) agree with this indicating the importance of establishing positive relationships when the child enters a setting and providing links to home through the use of toys, music, or objects for reassurance.

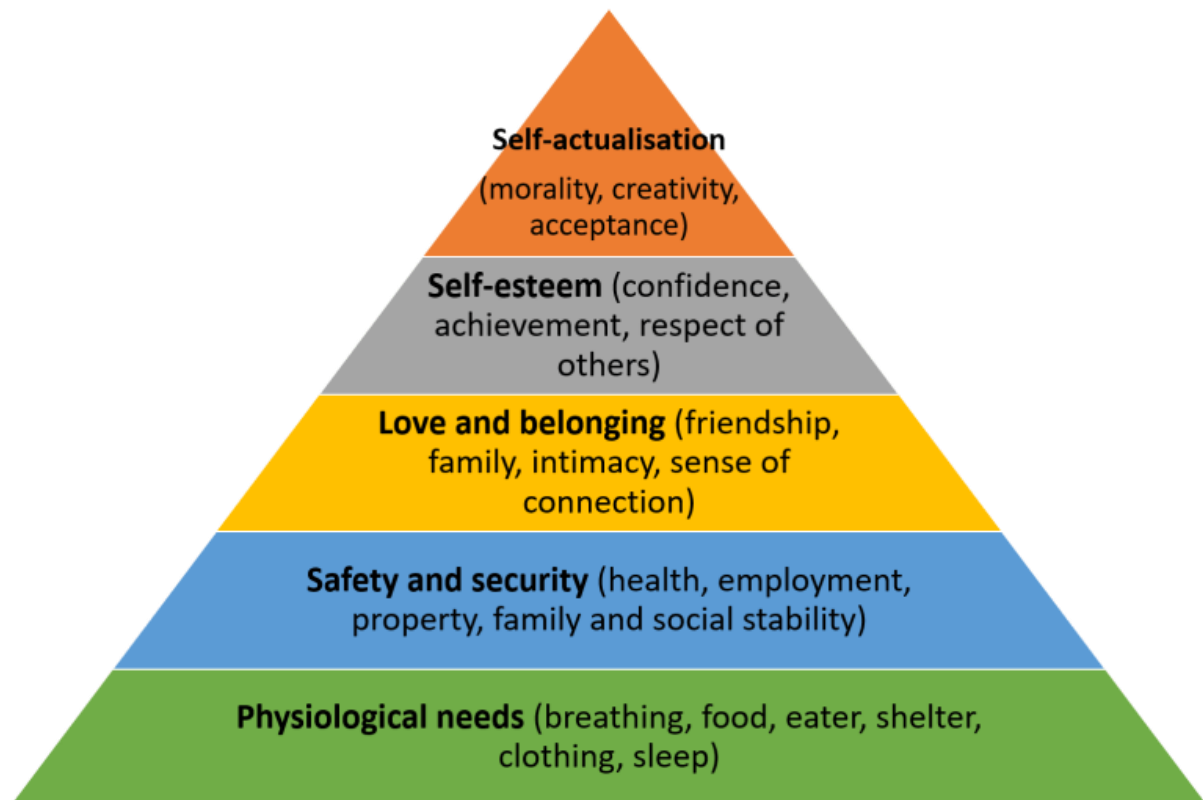
Members of staff must be flexible and responsive to the child's needs and how these may manifest.

Children learn from modelling behaviour, and it is imperative that key workers are excellent role models. The work of Albert Bandura (1977, 1989) demonstrated that children learn many behaviours from observational learning which we now sometimes refer to as modelling. Bandura recognised that children could mimic behaviours such as aggression, sharing and nurturing and can acquire skills even when no rewards are offered, by simply watching and listening to others in the environment. It is important that we realise that children are selective with their choices of who to imitate and will choose models who are warm and approachable or models who may possess desirable objects or qualities (Keenan and Evans, 2009).

The needs of the child

It is important that we take a holistic view when thinking of the developing child. When the practitioner views the child the practitioner should look at them as a whole. The needs of the child should be considered and what is required to foster development. A good practitioner should always be aware of the theories of child development that have shaped modern thinking and the way in which practice is undertaken (Lindon, 2010).

In order to be effective in this it is essential that practitioners are aware of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow directed our thinking to consider the path to personal fulfilment and suggested that in order to reach self-actualisation, all our other basic needs must first be met (Pichère, Cadiat, A.-C., & Probert, C. (2015) His model took the form of a pyramid and is shown below.



Maslow Hierarchy of Needs (Marieskelton.com, 2020)

It is important that the practitioner can communicate with the child, even when the child may be feeling upset or unsettled. Sometimes communication is difficult if the child is non-verbal or particularly young. It is important that through communication with home the practitioner understands what comforts the child or how they can be soothed. The practitioner should be trained to notice signals from the child if they are uncomfortable or upset.

It is important that there is consistency within the setting, and the practitioner can do this by linking the child to a key person. A key person is someone with whom the child and parents can form a relationship of trust and can establish a triangle of care (Brooker, 2008).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states in its Article Number 12 that children have the right to an opinion on what they think should happen when adults are making decisions for them (UNICEF, 2022), and the way in which the Early Years workforce interacts with children needs to reflect this.

Practitioners need to be aware to introduce the child to the unfamiliar environment slowly and on the child's terms. Vygotsky believed that children learn primarily through their social interactions with other children and adults. This is known as sociocultural theory. Vygotsky is still referenced in current practice and practitioners should recognise that the development of children depends on the interactions that they experience and the environment they experience them within (Nutbrown and Clough, 2014).

Frederick Froebel also believed that children learned through play and that everything in the universe was connected. The way in which the Cylch practices takes inspiration from many Froebelian principles with the child having direct autonomy on their play and the respect practitioners have for the child as an individual. Froebel argued that "the spontaneous play of the child discloses the future inner life of the man" and relied heavily on the view that play is not a trivial process and has an important significance (Froebel Trust, 2022).

Jean Piaget believed that children need to be able to control their own learning and should be given the freedom to discover and build knowledge. He also stated that children should be observed closely when playing with their peers which would give a richer understanding of their intellectual development and could indicate where support could be needed (Pound, 2005).

The cylch continues to use behavioural observation in current practice, and it is considered a valuable resource when assessing child development (Keenan and Evans, 2009). Piaget, like Vygotsky believed that children built their understanding of the world directly from their interactions with it (Jarvis, George, and Holland, 2013).

Partnership working.

What is partnership working?

Partnership working is a key concept within the modern Early Years Sector. Partnership working means the professionals, agencies and individuals around the child working together to meet the child's needs and deliver more tailored and specialist care (Gasper, 2010).

In modern times, the outcomes for children, of agencies not working together have proved to be very dismal indeed and this only serves to highlight the importance of partnership working. Throughout dealings with parents, carers, external agencies, and all other professionals around the child, the practitioner should always remember that the child needs to be at the centre. Effective communication between all parties leads to properly supported transitions and successful outcomes for the children in our care.

Ongoing observations and Evaluations undertaken within the setting can lead to early intervention on issues found and appropriate help and support can be accessed.

The standard of partnership working within a setting can have a direct impact on how children view their role in the community. When a child feels that their parents are welcomed, respected, and listened to, they are more likely to feel valued (Lindon, 2016).



How we work in partnership (Bing images)

This diagram represents the triangle of care discussed earlier and the importance of working in partnership around the child. The transitional process is an opportunity for professional dialogue between parents, settings, and other professionals. Early Years Practitioners have a duty of care to the child and are required to ensure the child feels safe, welcomed, has a sense of belonging and is helped to settle comfortably (Birhtofivematters, no date).

Interventions

We can support transitions for the children within the setting by using various resources and techniques designed to provide information and advice and to offer guidance. These are tried and tested ways of ensuring the children and families are supported and building and maintaining lines of communication between home and the cylch.

One such intervention that is commonly relied upon is the use of a Welcome Pack for each new child. Before the start date each child is provided with a welcome pack which consists of all the relevant paperwork to be completed. This paperwork consists of the information required by law in addition to questions that provide an opportunity for the parents or carers to share relevant information about the child's specific wants and needs. Children are provided with a cylch t-shirt which they will wear when they attend. When the child attends for a settling in session they can see that all the children wear the yellow t shirt with the cylch logo, and all the staff wear the pink t shirt with the same logo, and this helps establish a sense of belonging.

Settling in sessions can also be provided. Children will attend for a shorter period for a number of sessions depending on how they settle. Children are received after registration, and stay and play for a brief period of free play before the rest of the children settle for the more structured part of the day. It is found that this helps the children to adjust to the unfamiliar environment with less upset.

At the end of the session the cylch leader will handover the child to the parents or carers and will discuss any issues which the key worker has raised during the session. It is also an opportunity for the parents and carers to have an informal chat if they have any questions or concerns.

One of the primary interventions used by the cylch is that of giving children a voice, listening to the child and genuine consultation of their wants and needs as a matter of routine. This shows the children that their opinion matters and that they are listened to and heard. Even incredibly young children can demonstrate their feelings in answer to questions, with using happy and sad faces in response or signifying their presence at registration with a visual symbol (Lindon, 2016).

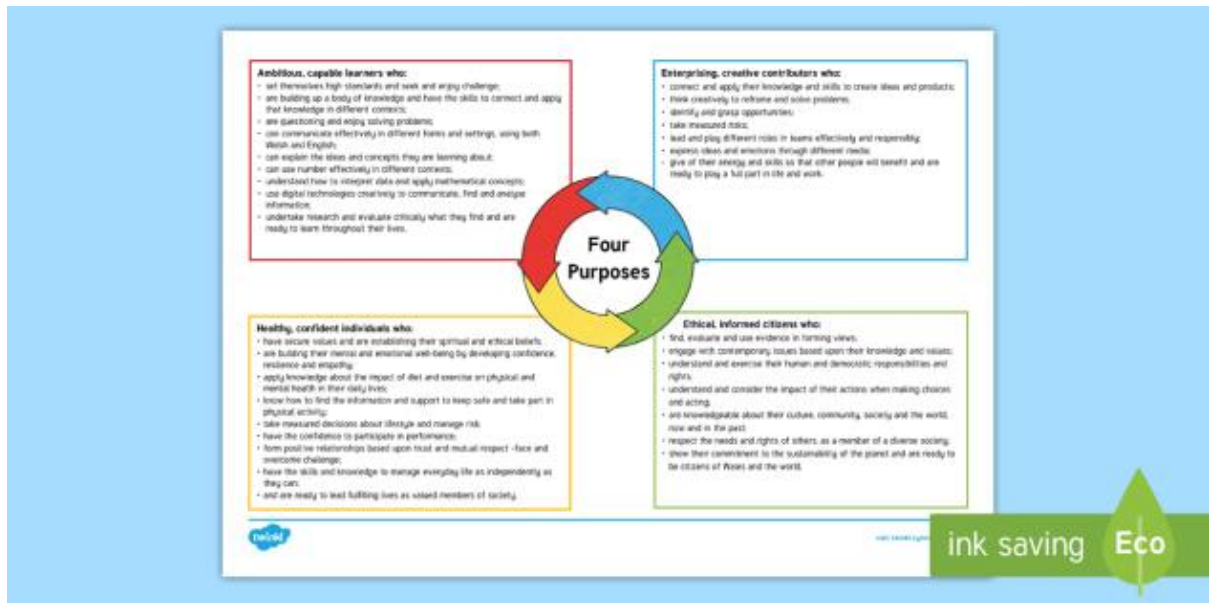
The importance of play

The value of play as an intervention and an effective learning tool must not be overlooked. Children learn through play. Play is an open-ended process with no required outcome to achieve. Children need to be able to explore and to interact with materials and other people. This is how children gain new knowledge, skills, and language. Play also encourages creativity and feeds imagination. Children face challenges in every area of their learning when they play, and they consolidate prior learning as they investigate (Pound, 2005).

The Welsh Government agree on the importance of play on children's learning and development and demonstrated this with the implementation of the play policy (Welsh Government, 2002). The policy aims to provide children with rich stimulating environments and exciting play opportunities and recognises the value of children within our society.

Outcomes

The Welsh Government's commitment to the outcomes for the children of Wales is demonstrated in this poster.



Four purposes for the Curriculum for Wales (Twinkl, 2022).

Within it, the Welsh Government states that with successful provisions and interventions the hope is that every child in Wales will become

- Ambitious and capable learners
- Healthy and confident individuals
- Enterprising and creative contributors
- Ethical and informed citizens

(Welsh Government, 2022).

The Curriculum for Wales is a shared vision and encompasses twenty-seven statements of what matters for a child's education. It has been developed by practitioners, for practitioners and is an amalgamation of practical experience, research, and fact-based evidence (Welsh Government 2022).

Successful transitions are demonstrated by the child showing that they feel settled. A happy, settled child will begin to become more independent and make steps to venture further from the key person. Relationships will start to form between peers and with other adults within the setting. A settled child will begin to show that they are growing in confidence and independence.

Indeed, the construction of several different curriculums designed to support the child while educating them has put emphasis on the need for positive outcomes for children. Loris Malaguzzi, the creator of Reggio Emilia nurseries designed his curriculum around the potential of the child and

based his theories on the work of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky. His work noted the importance of connections around the child and highlighted the benefits of solid partnerships with parents and using the child's environment as a learning tool (Pound, 2005).

Likewise, the work of Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952) has influenced early years education and how we prepare children and try to achieve the best possible outcomes for them. Montessori developed a set of principles which she based on her observations, and which could be applied to all children. She specified that learning would happen through repetition, concentration, and imagination (Nutbrown and Clough, 2014).

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