

Essential Handbook for Practitioners



(Source: Gstatic,2023)

Transitions in the Early Years- The Importance of Effective Communication



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Introduction into Transitions

Transition is defined by the Cambridge dictionary (2023) as a change from one form or type to another, or the process by which this happens.

The aim of this Handbook is to provide practitioners with the information, knowledge and skills needed, to enable a smooth process of transition for children starting nursery school for the first time. The importance of effective communications between all parties involved at the time of transition for the child and the key person involved is vital. The handbook includes the essential knowledge and areas of development of a child and the theories and guidance behind it.

Many people view it as a normal part of children's lives to experience new settings for the first time, move to various locations, start school, or transition to a new class. According to Early Years Matters (2022) transitions mark important milestones in a child's life and significantly impact their development. Pacey (2016) supports this and says it is crucial for every child to have a smooth transition, and it is not something that happens once. Transition should be seen as a gradual process involving children, practitioners, and parents working together, rather than as a singular event.

[Transition Tips on Vimeo](#) Here is a link to NPT (2023) top tips for transitioning.

Children during their first 5 years of their life undergo several transitions. These transitions are developmental milestones, environmental changes, and care and education transitions.

The Role of the Adult

First Day of School

The first day of school
Can be hard for Mom and Dad.
Part of you feels excited,
The other part feels sad.
For many years you've held their hand,
And have been their loving guide.
Now you know the time has come
To leave them by my side.
But it is only for a little while,
As your child will learn and grow.
And at the end of everyday,
They will share with you all they know.
So as you walk away
Don't worry anymore.
I'll take care of all those precious gifts
When you leave them at my door.

(source: Pinterest, 2023)

Caregivers and Transitioning

At points of transition, the practitioner needs to be fully aware that their role is vitally important in transition. Birth to Five Matters (2023) suggest that young children may be attending your setting for the first time and although they may be accustomed to being separated from their parents, they will be familiarising themselves with a unique environment and setting, this is supported by Pacey (2016).

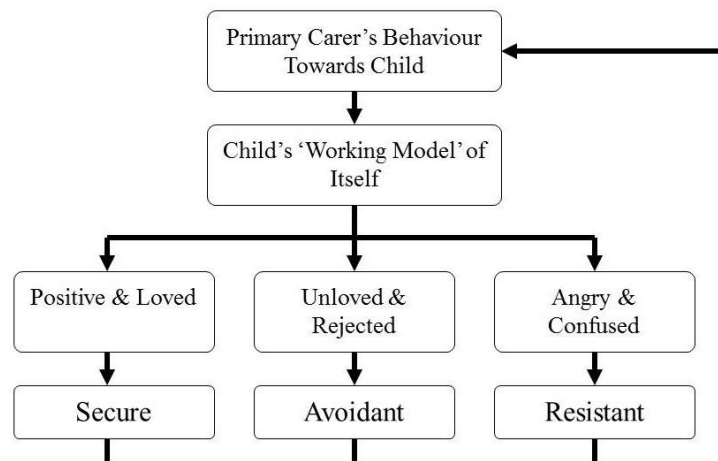
Flying Start - Annex Transition Guidance. (2017) believe that these new experiences, along with the parents' feelings of returning to work or separating from their child, can be an upsetting and challenging time for all the family. Creating a sense of trust by welcoming families into the setting and familiarising themselves with the unique environment and allowing time for a positive transitional period, will be able ease the move of transition again, supported by Pacey (2016)

Attachment Theories

A child needs to feel love and belonging, and this is fulfilled through family, friendships, and social connections. Positive interactions at this stage enables good emotional development and bonds are made supporting the child's well-being. Main (2023) cites Bowlby attachment theory (1944) which made observations that a child experienced intense distress when separated from their mother, and even when the child is fed by another care giver the child's anxiety couldn't be settled.

This theory highlights the importance of building secure attachments in the child's early years, which influences the child's ability to transition into nursery and enables them to explore and learn smoothly in school.

Their discoveries found three progressive stages of distress in the diagram below



(Source: Simply psychology, 2023)

Bowlby's attachment Theory

Subsequent researchers' understanding of attachment was influenced by Bowlby's (1944, 1956) theories, and his belief in monotropy (primary attachment to one care giver). Baker (2010) cites Harlow's research on monkeys in 1958 (video below) demonstrates how maternal deprivation causes distress and how the subject seeks comfort from a substitute.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrNBEhzjq8I>. Harlow's Studies on Dependency in Monkeys

Psychology Unlocked (2017) describes Mary Ainsworth Strange Situation study (1969) (video below) offers further proof that the theory of attachment is real. If a secure child has received sensitive, emotional care from its caregivers, they will establish a positive internal functioning primary attachment with these individuals. In direct comparison an insecure-avoidant child typically believes their caregiver to be unresponsive or emotionally unavailable Psychology Unlocked (2017).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_6rQk7jlrc Psychology Unlocked (2017).

Golding (2013) supports smooth transition involving secure attachments, such as when a child starts nursery class and are allocated a key worker. The key worker should recognise that children starting nursery for the first time may have attachment difficulties and therefore building a secure attachment with the child is extremely important to enable social and emotional development for the child. According to the attachment theory secure relationships at school is vital for their care and education. (Pacey 2016).

'Observing children with attachment difficulties in school' is a book that supports this theory and is a useful aid for practitioners who will be the key worker to the child attending nursery who you feel may be demonstrating attachment challenges (Golding 2013).

[Attachment \(canva.com\)](#) useful information on attachment for parents. (NPT 2023)

Transitional Objects

The provision of a transitional object such as a comforter blanket, dummy or favourite item is a consideration to make during the child's transition into nursery class, according to Abram (2015). Abram studied Dr Donald Winnicott, a paediatrician who was amongst the first cohort of doctors to train as psychoanalysts in the late 1920's. He introduced the theory that a transitional object would link the child's inner world to external reality. It was Donald Winnicott's work (1964) that contributed to the understanding of early attachment in children.

Suitable Environment for transition

The process of transitioning for the child should ensure a routine that is consistent, familiar, and positive (Early years matters 2022). The key worker can make transitions more seamless by first visiting children in the setting in which they are known and are confident and comfortable (pre-school), (Birth to 5 matters 2023). Opportunities to build a relationship with the child begins with the child in their current settled environment (Langston 2014).

Visits from the parents, care givers and the child to the new setting should be welcomed and encouraged. Children need to have repeated visits to their new setting (nursery school) with a parent/ care giver, so their first experience of any new setting is with a familiar and trusted adult (Pacey 2016). This is supported by Flying Start (2017) ensuring the child and family become familiar with the new environment and the key worker, in which the child will come to recognise and begin the initial bond for a secure attachment (Bowlby 1969). These visits enable the child to explore the new surrounding and decide for themselves what they wish to explore (Bongiorno 2021).

During these initial visits key workers should gain information about the child from the parents as well as give information and answer any questions they may have. Early years matters (2022) suggest the keyworker is aware of, and responsive to the needs and concerns of each child and their family and is available with a warm welcome when the children enter their new setting. A child's key person will be the link between home and the new setting, and is vital in providing supportive, reassurance and initially building the close, ongoing relationships with families according to Langston, (2014).

Below is a useful link providing tips for parents to support their child with transition into school (Pacey 2015).

[Steps to starting school \(Pacey\)](#)

Communication

Communication, speech and language are vital to a child's well-being and development, particularly during nursery transition (Early Years 2022). Communication plays a huge part of building relationships with people and for parents the first conversation with a practitioner leaves an impacting base for trust. As practitioners and key workers, a variety of forms of communications are used with children, parents, colleagues and outside agencies. Practitioners need to be skilled communicators and listeners, using the 7Cs of communication strategies (diagram below). Communications need to be considerate and understanding, non-judgemental and unbiased. Additional Learning Needs (ALNs) of a child can be a difficult subject for parents, according to Brodie (2015) the language terminology used with parents needs to be considered. Practitioner needs to show understanding and empathy and offer a genuine ear to parents. Possible barriers in communication can impact on the ability to communicate such as hearing impairments and language barriers. Practitioners need to address these barriers quickly offering alternative arrangements, ensuring the needs are met.

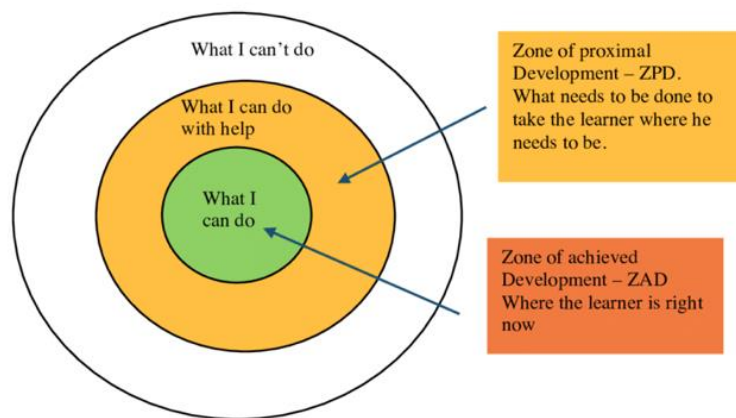


The 7 Cs of communication.

(Source: professional academy 2023).

The Zone of Proximal Improvement (ZPI) is a concept according to McLeod, S. (2023) on Vygotsky's Theory that holds huge importance for all practitioners (see diagram below). It refers to the contrast between what a child can do without direction and what they can accomplish with the direction of a key worker/practitioner. By deliberately directing understudies through their ZPD, practitioners can upgrade instruction and improve learning results.

Zone of Proximal Development.



(Source: Main, P. 2020).

The Needs of the Child



(Source: Net mums,2021)

The Children and Young People's Plan published by the Welsh Government (2022) is committed to the standards of UNICEF (1989) The Rights of the Child and respect it in all the choices we make. We accept and believe all our children have the right to:

- Have the best start in life.
- Have an education.
- Enjoy a healthy life and be protected from harm abuse, neglect, and discrimination.
- To play, enjoy and have fun.
- Be treated with respect and to be listened to
- Have a place to live and community.
- Have sufficient money to support their needs.

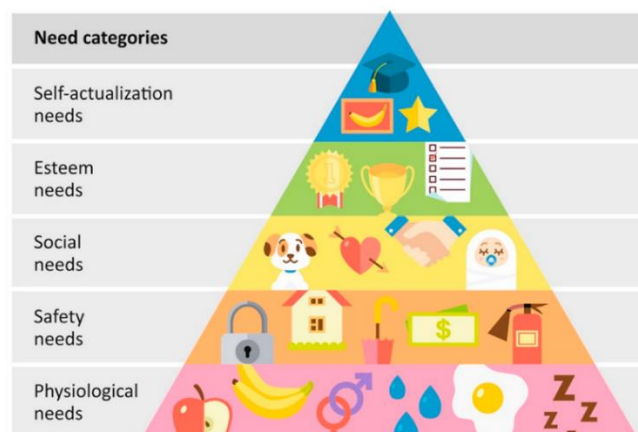
Maslow (1943) proposed that children need to follow a hierarchy, with basic survival needs at the bottom and self-actualization needs related to creativity and intellect at the top.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs asserts that there are five layers of human need. These four layers need to be met before the self-actualization which opens their full potential (Diagram below)

McLeod (2023) reflects the needs in the updated image alongside.



(Source: Maslow, 1943)



(Source McLeod, 2023).

A child needs a balanced diet and water to support growth and development. By September 2024, all children in primary school can enjoy Free School Meals (Welsh Government 2023).

A child needs a home where they feel safe and protected (Article 19 UNCRC 2022) with a comfortable living environment, and a bed to sleep allowing growth. Article 27 (UNCRC 2022) states these are the rights of every single child.

However, as children develop and progress their needs shift from basic physical survival such as food and comfort to more complex psychological and long-term desires (Maslow 1943). The research by Shapiro (2000) on Piaget (1929) who was a cognitive theorist, believed that a 3-year-old child sits within the 'preoperational stage' of development, which is the stage of the use of symbols and pictures to represent language. They have the need to use imaginative play; their language skills expand from words to sentences; their concentration abilities are focused on one thing at a time, and they struggle to see things from the perspective of others. Understanding their development helps their transition and learning and helps practitioners support with the appropriate activities.

Children have the need to play and the right to play according to Bongiorno and Quinn (2021) providing the opportunity for the practitioner to sit alongside and begin the foundation of their relationship, playing with the items that the child chooses for themselves (for example, play dough). This considers the voice of the child (Article 12 UNCRC 2022) which states a child's views and feelings must be considered. Avornyo & Baker's (2021) research has shown the importance of play in children's education however, there is a discrepancy between research findings and attitudes towards play. Bongiorno and Quinn (2021) providing suggests that children learn through their play. Play is healthy for their development and reduces stress and anxiety. Play and learning go together, they are not separate activities. Outdoor play is vital, come sun, rain and or shine. Learn through play (2023) also supports this.

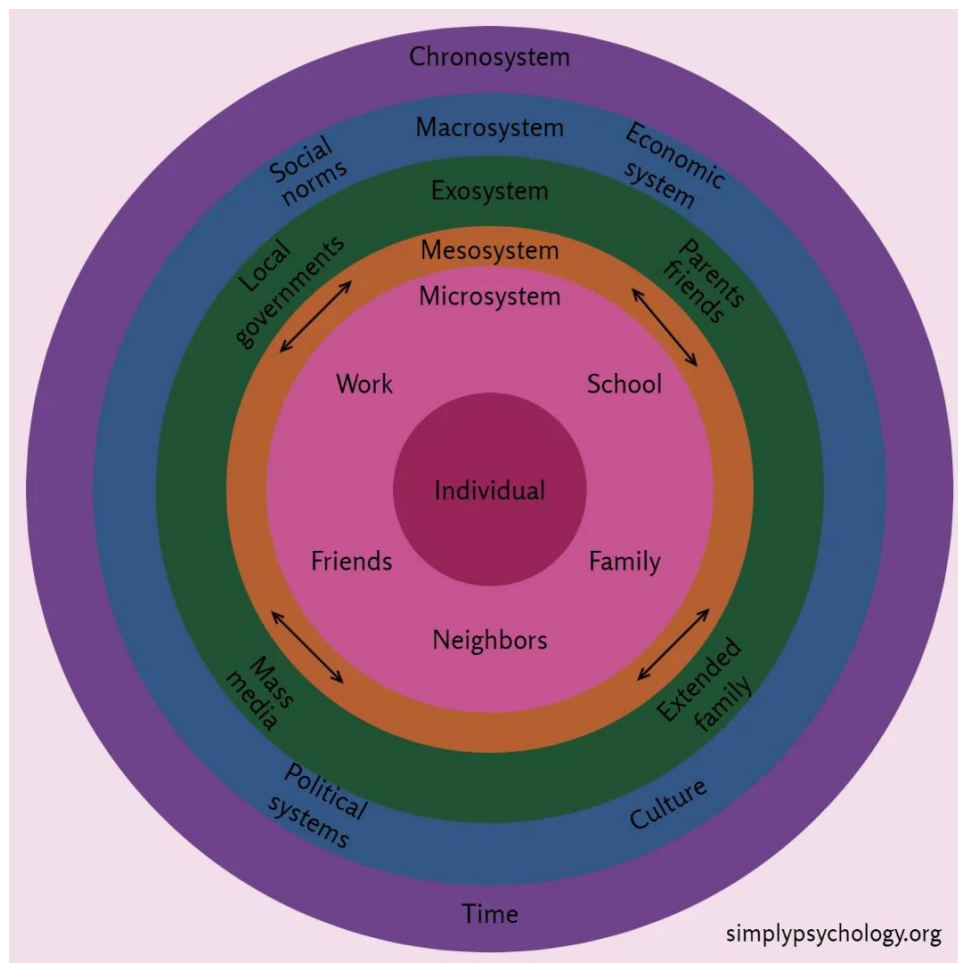
Partnerships

It is valuable for the practitioner to gather the perspectives and knowledge of all those who have worked with the child such as other childcare providers, multi agencies, such as speech therapists, health visitors, and educational psychologists and the care givers and family. These perspectives enable all those involved with the child to plan effectively for their individual needs. Flying start's transitional guidance (Welsh Government 2017) supports these transitional strategies.

The child and their family are placed at the centre of transitions planning, and by adapting strong partnerships between parents, care givers, educators and any outside agencies involved, in which the transition into school becomes a shared effort as suggested by Flying start (2017). Sharing personal information is crucial for partnership and integrated working, as well as for early identification of need or risk. (Safeguarding Wales, 2023) It is especially important when there are concerns about the well-being of a child.

Professional dialogue and continuity of experience are crucial during transitions. A key role for the practitioner is gathering perspectives from various professionals to plan for a child's individual needs. This is the work of Bronfenbrenner 1977 cited by Susan Marie (2017). Visiting children in their known setting and involving parents in the process is beneficial. The key person plays a vital role in creating supportive relationships. Continuity of learning methods is important during transitions. Feeling "known" and ensuring continuity between home and settings is essential. (Birth to 5 matters, 2022).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), a child's surroundings are made up of interconnected components that are one attached within another. He arranged them according to the degree to which they affect a child's development (Diagram below). According to this theory Bronfenbrenner (1977) argues the practitioners, parents and care givers should maintain effective communication with each other and work together to benefit the child. Practitioners always need to be mindful of situations that arise in families.



(Source: Simply psychology, 2023)

Children transitioning from a flying start setting may have a transitioning officer and a one-page profile which is vital documentation (PCR Welsh Government 2015) to communicate key factors of the child's current development; their individual needs; their likes and dislikes, and possible areas of concern, which the practitioner must use in the transition into the nursery setting (Flying start, 2017).

Brodie (2015) argues that every single child needs to feel and be included. Langston (2014) supports this, saying the diversity of individuals and communities should be valued and should be respected. Every single child should be included and not discriminated against. Listening to the voices of children and recognising these are expressed in a range of ways, including non-verbally, is central to inclusive practice. (Birth to Five Matters, 2022).

Some children start school with multi agencies involved and for others the process may begin once the child has started in the nursery. If a child is not making adequate progress, it is possible that the child has ADLs and requires specific provisions in place (ALN, 2020). It is important that settings are aware of children that start school with ALNs and communications with the multiagency surrounding that child as Bronfenbrenner (1977) argues is vitally important. This is supported by Neath Port Talbot (NPT) Strategic Change Programme (2023).

Interventions

Ti a fi

The transition into nursery should be over a process over time. Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (2022) runs a Ti a Fi, mother and child session suitable from birth-3 years old. It gives mothers/care givers and their children the opportunity to meet in the setting of the Cylch Meithrin (2021) or School Meithrin class YGG Cwmnedd(2020). They have the opportunity in these sessions to familiarise themselves with the new environment with the parent/ caregiver, as their secure attachment, supporting transition when they are at the age to start Cylch Meithrin and School nursery. Ti a fi is held on the school grounds of YGG Cwmnedd(2020). The children enjoy, singing, socializing and story time through the medium of Welsh.

Cylch Meithrin

The aim of the Cylch Meithrin(2021) is to promote the education and development of children from two years old to school age. At the Cylch Meithrin your child will have the opportunity to enjoy, learn through play with a great team of staff. The Cylch meithrin regularly visits the school setting for story and rhyme sessions which helps children transition into the school nursery class. They become familiar with the class and the staff whilst happy and content with their current setting staff. It has been proven that this has helped children settle quicker into the school nursery class at YGG Cwmnedd (2020). Teachers also visit the children in the Cylch Meithrin setting, working on building the initial relationship with the child within their own setting. (Meithrin, 2021)

For further information regarding Cylch and Ti a fi -Meithrin (2021)

<https://meithrin.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Llyfr-Piws-Diogleu-Plant-26.03.20-llai.pdf>

Stay and play days

Nursery school classes arrange settling in days that are planned for children, parents and caregivers as they are recommended by Early years Matters (2022). They get the opportunities to meet the staff, meet their key worker, familiarize themselves with the classroom and the layout of the new environment which they will be going to.

Settling in process

The settling in process varies for each individual child. The introduction to your setting needs to be gradual and Pacey (2016) suggests using the following process:

- Child plays with key person while the parent is alongside.
- Child plays with key person with parent alongside at first and gradually parent moves in and out of sight.
- Parent leaves for a few minutes then returns.

Repeating these steps increasing the length of time the parent leaves then return. Eventually, build this up to the child attending for a full session or day.

Written information packs

There are 'all about me packs' with information related to the child, one page profiles and home school link booklets for transition into nursery class provided by YGG Cwmnedd(2020). A settling in policy is also available.

Outcomes

The new Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020) has a new vision that the children will succeed in becoming.

- Ambitious, capable learners
- Enterprising, creative contributors
- Ethical informed people
- Healthy, confident individuals as valued members of society

These are known as the four purposes.

Kennedy, Sean and Greene (2012) suggest that transition experiences from home, or an early year setting, to school, have a significant impact on later outcomes for children. A transition is best understood as an interactive cultural, ecological, and dynamic process. Making collaborative decisions, as well as providing continuity of teaching and learning, will lead to good outcomes for the child and hopefully a successful learner (The Welsh Government 2022).

The Curriculum for Wales guidance (2021) is set out for all learners aged 3 to 16, ensuring schools cover the same core learning and provide consistency for learners across Wales. A defining feature of the framework is that it allows schools to design their own curriculum and assessment that best suits the school which supports the theory of Pappas (2023) and Dewey (1859-1952), that planning should be based on the interests of the child.

Practitioners that have used this handbook as a resource should begin to understand the information, knowledge and skills needed, to enable a smooth process of transition for children starting nursery. Creating a safe, happy, secure and nurturing environment with age-appropriate activities and resources, define the outcomes for children (Pacey 2016). Children that are happy and settled, that are developing well, learning and progressing and engaging in the activities are proof of a good transition (Early years matters, 2022). Children that are beginning to build secure relationships will be confident and curious learners that are aware of their own values as a unique individual (McLeod 2023). Children should be able to approach staff, and know that there are safeguarding members of staff within the school that they can go to with any concerns (Safeguarding Wales 2023) Ultimately, they should feel included in their learning and be able to voice their ideas (Brodie 2015).



(Source : Pinterest, 2023)

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