

Supporting transitions in the early Years

A practical guide for practitioners
supporting 0-2's attending childcare for the
first time.



Source: ProProfs.com

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What are transitions?

“Transition [tran-zish-uhn] noun

movement, passage, or change from one position, state, stage, subject, concept, etc., to another; change: *the transition from adolescence to adulthood.*”

(Dictionary.com, 2022)

An understanding of the impact transitions have on a child is a recent occurrence (Trodd, 2013). Trodd explains that during war time Britain, evacuee children would have been sent away from everything they knew and loved, often without an explanation of what was about to happen or why. This was mirrored in other areas of a child’s life where it was historically commonplace not to prepare children for life changes and thus overlook the huge impact these changes could have on a child’s wellbeing.

However, Birth to 5 matters (2007) explain that with suitable methods in place the child’s well being can be supported and promoted during transitional periods.

According to Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead (2008) Transitions take many forms and can be described as both vertical and horizontal. Horizontal transitions are small changes that are often less noticeable and happen as part of the daily routine, such as leaving the bedroom to eat breakfast in the kitchen or getting in the car to go to the shop. Vertical transitions are those that are often thought of first when considering transitions, they often bring big changes and can cause significant impact on a child’s life, such as the arrival of a new sibling or starting childcare (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008).



How to use this handbook.

This handbook has been written to support the transition of children under the age of two years from the home environment to a childcare setting. By using this resource, early years staff, volunteers and students will gain a greater understanding of the effect of transitions on a child's wellbeing and how relationships can inform this. Practitioners will be given practical ideas on how to support transitions and the theory behind many of these approaches as well as their role in ensuring this is achieved in partnership with families ensuring the voice of the child is promoted.

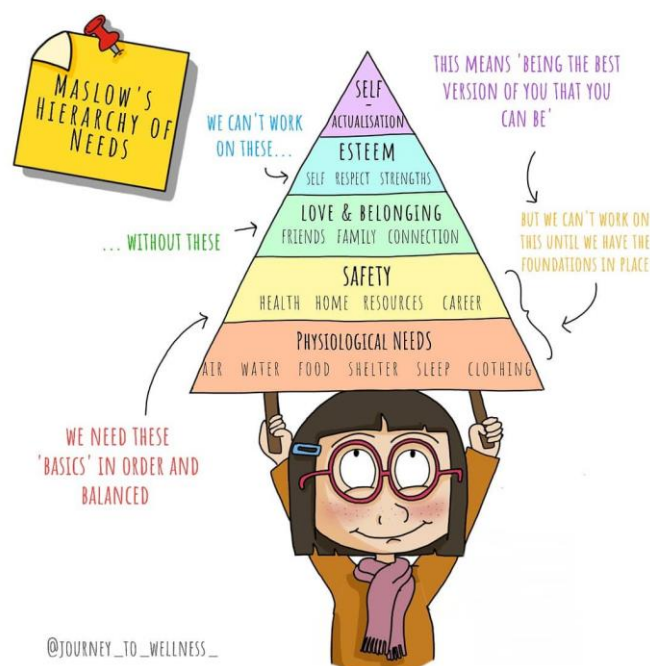
When transitions are well managed, the wellbeing of the child can be protected and promoted and foundations can be laid to aid a smooth journey through future transitions (Birth to 5 matters, no date).

The needs of the child

Bradshaw (2016) states that there is a great deal of research in to promoting a child's wellbeing and its effect on raising successful and productive adults. As a child grows emphasis should be put on concentrating on the child's current developmental stage and allow the child where possible to be an active participator in their lives. This is reflected in article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, which states that every child has the right to have their thoughts and feelings taken into considerations in matter which effect their lives (Unicef, 2019).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Cullen (2011) explains that Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs outlines the basic needs that every person requires to survive and to thrive. Cullen expands by explaining that at the bottom of the pyramid are the physiological needs, these are the minimum necessities that must be met for a child to survive. Maslow's theory is that to meet their full potential the needs on each layer of the pyramid must be met. Pichère (2015) clarifies that a child cannot be concerned about keeping the toy they are playing with safe if they have not eaten and cannot concentrate on anything other than their empty stomach, this is idea repeats at each layer, for example how can a child be the best version of themselves if they have no sense of self?



Source: Ballagh 2019

Environments

For children to gain any benefits from attending childcare they first must feel safe, it is therefore essential that one of the first steps in welcoming a new child to the setting is to ensure the environment is calm, welcoming, and relaxing for them (Golding 2013).

Hodgman (2011) describes an enabling environment as a space that provides the child with challenges and stimulation based on the child's interests and needs. The environment should give the child opportunities to explore with areas for quiet reflection, and physical play. Hodgman explains that a safe environment with suitable emotional support should promote independence and a desire to learn, a well thought out environment promotes equality and a recognition and understanding of diversity.

According to Maria Montessori, a prepared environment is the key to the physiological development of children, the environment should be spotlessly clean and in order yet inviting and enchanting. Montessori believed in natural materials and neutral tones, with few distractions, no wall displays and that everything should have a purpose and a use promoting independence or developing specific skills (O'Donnell 2013)

Similarly to Montessori, Malaguzzi's Reggio Emilia approach puts a huge emphasis on the prepared environment as the 3rd teacher. The Reggio Emilia environment is flooded with natural light, living plants, natural materials, and treasures from nature. It is a space full of wonder where children learn through doing. However, in contrast with the Montessori approach the Reggio Emilia environment is filled with the displays of the child's work, beautiful, collected treasure crafted in to hanging mobiles and an abundance of loose parts and open-ended toys with no specific purpose giving children creative freedom (Hall *et al.* 2010)

Secure attachments

Bowlby's (2012) attachment theory specifies that when a child is scared, unwell or tired they will seek the assurance or comfort from a caregiver which they have a secure attachment to, this caregiver is usually someone who the child perceives to have a better understanding of the world. However, according to Boyd and Bee (2013) a child who has built secure attachments is more likely to have the confidence to explore their environment and move

away from the safe space of their carer, giving them a richer experience and more options for cognitive growth.

Separation anxiety

According to Boyd and Bee (2013) a child begins to develop a fear of strangers from around 6 months. This fear heightens over the following 6-12 months before beginning to tail off at approximately 2 years old. The fear of strangers appears to start at the same time as children begin to discover other fears, however the fear of separation (separation anxiety) seems to start a little later and last longer than the fear of strangers itself.

Bowlby (1998) explains that the anxiety felt by a small child when their main caregiver leaves the room, often causes the child to react in a way that ensures their care giver's return. However, Boyd and Bee (2013) describe that children who have built secure attachments are more likely to have the confidence to explore their environment and move away from the safe space of their carer, giving them a richer experience and more options for cognitive growth. This is backed up by Bowlby (2012) who explains that a child who has a secure base, where they are securely attached to two caregivers at home will be able to explore a world away from their base knowing that they have a safe and nurturing place to return to.

Although research suggests that children who are entirely raised at home are just as likely to develop separation anxiety as those who attend childcare settings, it is apparent that vertical transitions may heighten the separation anxiety response (Boyd and Bee 2013).

Insecure attachments

Where children do not receive the attentive and nurturing care they need for any reason it may be displayed through insecure attachment relationships, this may influence their ability to confidently move into the world outside their home. Insecure attachments can detrimentally impact on a child's emotional and cognitive development and their ability to build other relationships (Golding, 2013).

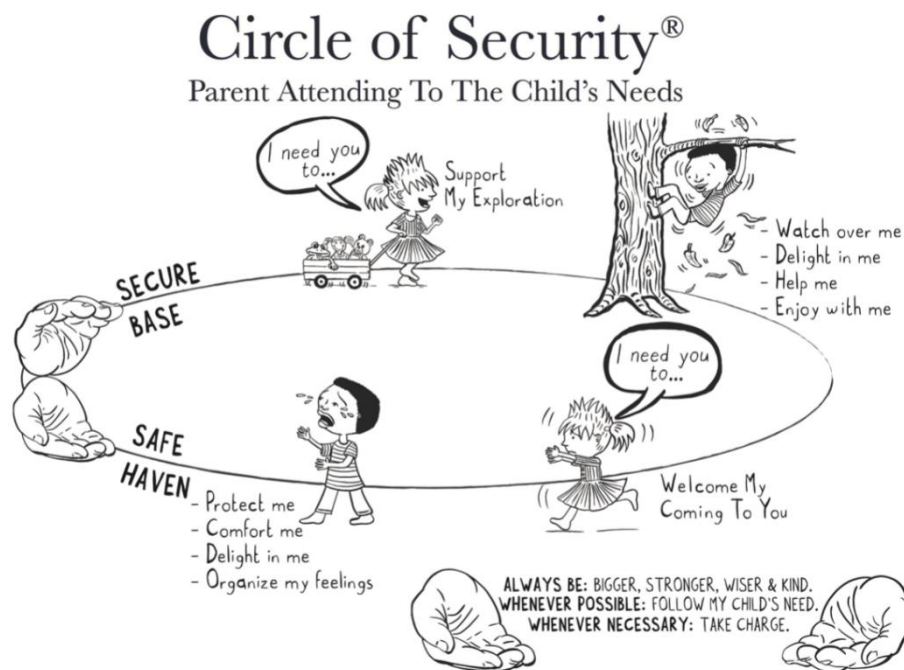
It is often assumed that children who struggle with separation anxiety and the ability to form relationships outside of their primary attachment figure do so because they are overindulged with love from their mother, however, Bowlby explained that this can often be

owing to the child's primary carer treating the child as their own attachment figure due to anxious attachments in their own childhood. (Bowlby 2012)

A child with insecure attachments may struggle with-

- being away from their attachment figure.
- sharing their key worker with their peers.
- developing relationships with other children or show challenging behaviour towards other children.
- adapting to a more structured routine or environment

(Golding, 2013)



Source: Circleofsecurityinternational.com (no date)

The role of the adult

Every member of staff, volunteers and students will have their own unique role to play at the setting, it is important that everyone is aware of their role and understands and values the roles of every other individual and how each practitioner can support this. It is vital for the smooth running of a setting where the wellbeing of the child is paramount that working as a team can be achieved effectively (Burnham 2016)

Where practitioners lead the way in setting the emotional tone and supporting the child's emotional regulation the child will feel the most secure (Golding 2013).

Building relationships

Boyd and Bee (2013) explain that large scale studies performed in 1991 show that where a child's emotional needs are effectively met by their primary carer, secure attachments are unlikely to be detrimentally affected by attending childcare.

Knowing that a responsive attachment figure is available enables child to feel secure and enables relationships to develop further, however, evidence suggests that children will routinely choose their main carer as an attachment figure and seek them out in times of need, when this figure is not present child will accept another person, preferably someone they have already formed a relationship with (Bowlby, 2012)

The key to ensuring a child feels safe at childcare is to build relationships with them. As discussed in the previous chapter, where children have insecure attachments, this can be tricky, however there are some things the practitioner can do to facilitate relationships at the setting (Golding 2013). Burnham (2016) explains that one of the key aspects of forming relationships with young children is through effective communication. It is not enough just to offer children a relationship, it is essential that a child is able to learn the benefit of relationships and gains the ability to form secure attachments in the future (Golding 2013).

If practitioners take the time to communicate with children thus supporting them and developing their self esteem they will gain the confidence to communicate with others and learn to express their feelings before becoming overwhelmed and acting on impulse which is often shown as challenging behaviour (Burnham 2016)

However, practitioners should be aware of children's differences and how best to provide individual support, children who have not had their earliest needs met and are therefore insecurely attached may present more challenging behaviour and struggle with communication (Golding 2013)

Burnham (2016) states that active listening and participation in communication with a child gives them a voice and allows them to ensure their own needs are understood. For children to have the ability to build successful relationships and learn effectively, practitioners must be able to identify and meet their emotional needs (Golding 2013)

Key worker

The child's assigned keyworker will need to get to know the child before attempting to build a relationship (Golding 2013)

Burnham (2016) explains that the role of a keyworker is to ensure the child's needs are met and that the provision is tailored to do so. As the key worker has in depth knowledge of the child, they will be aware of the child's needs and through continuous observation and reflection can act on and support the child through any challenges they may face. The relationship with the keyworker will support the child's emotional regulation and the keyworker can act as the child's advocate, just as their parent would at home (Golding 2013). The keyworker will bridge the gap between the home and the setting, building effective working relationships with families and carers through effective communication and becoming a main point of contact (Burnham, 2016)

Working in Partnership with parents

Care inspectorate Wales' (2018) National minimum standards for regulated childcare sets out that as part of working in partnership with parents, settings must keep parents and carers informed and involved in their child's activities, achievements, and progress. This includes providing the parent with information about what the child has done during the day and ensuring there is a process in place to ensure any changes to the child's routine, development or care needs can be communicated.

Communication

Burnham (2016) suggests that communication is essential in building working relationships, to open up effective communication a practitioner must be approachable, open, empathetic and respectful. According to Petrie (2011) practitioner must ensure that their aims and values are always a consideration during communications, remembering that equality and respect are core values in all forms of communication.

Welcome packs

Care inspectorate Wales' (2018) state as part of the working in partnership with parents that settings must make parents aware of policies and procedures, daily routines and the parents' duties and responsibilities in working with the setting to ensure the needs of the child are met. This can be achieved by creating welcome packs to be handed out to families at their initial meeting with the key person, as suggested by Burnham (2016). Burnham suggests that a welcome pack can include information to make the family feel more at ease including daily menus and routines, kit lists, ideas on how to support a child's development as well as essential paperwork such as links to policies and procedures.

Daily diaries

To ensure parents are kept informed with their child's day as required by Care inspectorate Wales the setting may choose to use daily diaries. These can be completed in the form of a simple handwritten slip, a notebook which can be sent home daily or an mobile app which can be completed with photos, notes and observations and accessed by families using an invitation link.

Interventions

These interventions are practical solutions which may support smooth transitions.

Settling in

Burnham (2016) suggests that as part of working in partnership with parents and to support smooth transitions, settling in sessions may be of benefit. Burnham explains that some settings may opt to send the key person on an initial home visit to get to know the family before any settling in sessions are carried out at the setting itself.

Bruce (2011) suggests settling in strategies can be used by parents at initial meetings and stay and play sessions but are just as beneficial for practitioners during further settling in sessions. Children can be supported by

- ensuring an adult who the child is familiar with stays close by.
- Getting down to the same level as the child.
- Making and encouraging eye contact.
- Following the child's interests and lead.
- Allowing the child to move away at their own pace.

To further encourage the child to settle as part of the group-

- Staff can visit the family before the child joins group sessions.
- Allow a member of the family to stay for the first sessions and withdraw slowly.
- Encourage the family to supply a comforter that the child is attached to.
- Support the child with access strategies above to help the child join in.

(Bruce 2011)

All About me forms

PACEY (no date) recommend as part of a child's initial settling in meeting to share an 'all about me' form. This is a simple form and can be adapted to your setting but allows parents to share important information about the child with their keyworker. An all about me form allows practitioners to get to know a child's likes and dislikes, things that are important to the child, things they can or cannot do such as sit up, use a potty or eat independently. The

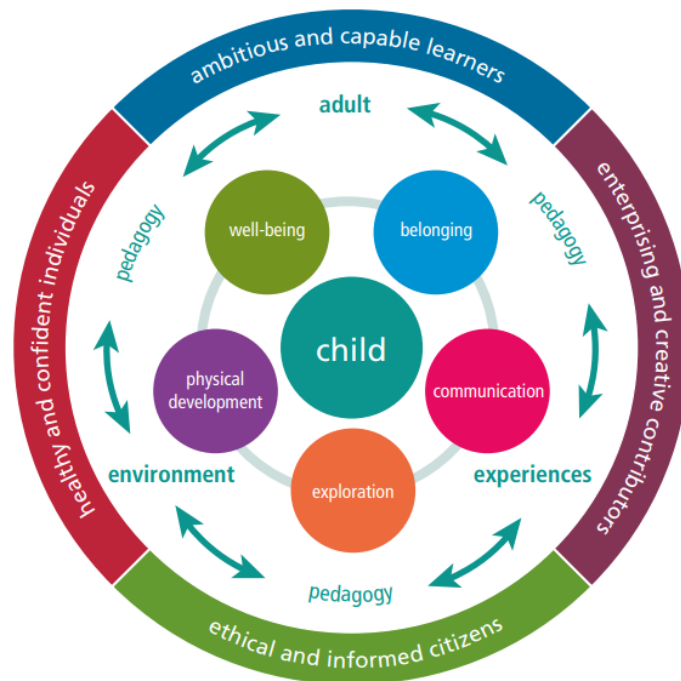
form may include songs that will sooth the child or idea to help them sleep. These will be invaluable in building relationships with the child.

Outcomes

The objective of this handbook was to facilitate a smooth transition for children under the age of 2 from a home environment into that of a childcare setting. The desired outcome of this is to ensure the wellbeing of the child and that they can continue to grow into happy resilient children and adults who are able to form positive relationships.

Welsh Governments (2022) curriculum sets out 4 core outcomes for the curriculum for Wales in non-maintained settings, the curriculum should promote the development of children who are-

- ambitious, capable learners.
- enterprising, creative contributors.
- ethical, informed citizens.
- healthy, confident individuals



Source: Welsh Government, 2022

The child is at the centre of this approach, with their wellbeing, sense of belonging, communication, exploration, and physical development all being factors in working towards the outcomes of the curriculum.

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