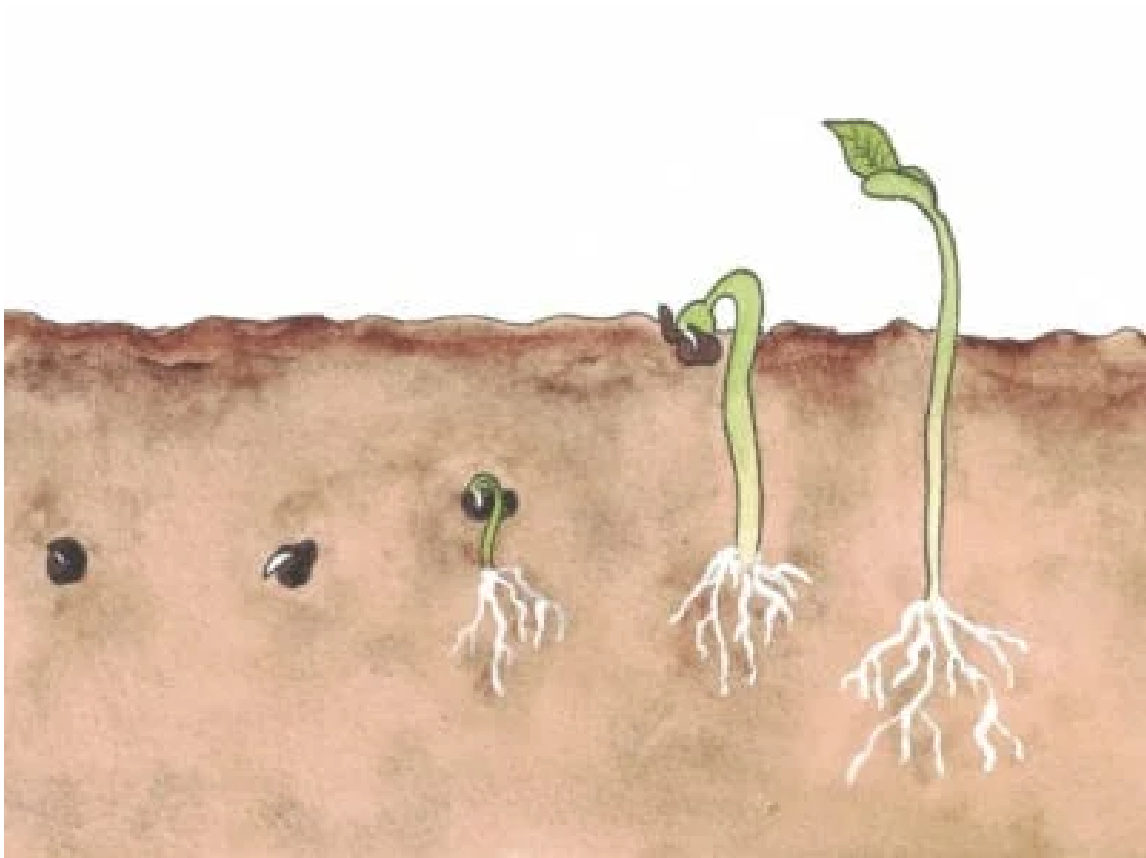


An Early Years Communication Handbook:

For the wellbeing of young children through
transitions



(Hamar, 2022)

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Contents

- Introduction: p2-5
- Role of the adult & Needs : p6-13
- Partnerships: p14-18
- Interventions: p19-20
- Proposed Outcomes: p21
- Reference List: p22-

Introduction

This handbook is for Early Years Practitioners who have a desire to understand the importance of developing their effective communication skills in regard to the transitions young children face. These transitions vary from social changes such as family breakdowns, parental marriages, moving house and getting a new sibling. Educational changes include a new key worker, staff movements, staff loss and staff long-term sickness.

However the Early Years Practitioners' understanding of how to communicate during these transitions in an effective way could create positive outcomes for the child, influencing their future coping skills during transitions and their overall resilience.

This handbook focuses on the communication skills needed during the transition of young children from home to a first childcare setting. This document acts as a guide to improve the quality of practice through deepening knowledge of the needs of the child and how to apply this knowledge practically giving the children a chance to excel in their well being outcomes.

“I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship.” (Louisa May Alcott, 1868)



(Bernard Blommers, n.d.) ‘The young navigators’

The term transitions is defined by Education Scotland (2023) as the various changes a child experiences throughout childhood. This includes the move from home to a setting, from that setting onwards to school and further education. As well as changes that make up everyone's normal lives. Transitions are recognised to involve an array of emotions including excitement and worry.

Regarding educational transitions, Metzner, Wichmann and Mays, (2020) describe the term as significant changes from one educational system to another with significant stress factors, including social and academic concerns, symptoms of depression, emotional instability and anxiety. During this time, if a child cannot adjust appropriately they may be at risk of deteriorating well-being causing a number of educational struggles such as exclusion, aggressive behaviour and increase in depressive symptoms.

Davidson and Randhawa (2022) Describe how supporting transition in the Early Years is to assure children are 'on track' to developmental milestones. Although it is understood children develop at their own rate, it is important they show signs of readiness for transitions. In regards to transitioning a child from home to a setting, the impact of neglecting communication skills has been indicative of later life issues such as poor marital stability, income struggles, poor educational achievements, low employment rates, social anxiety and mental health issues.

Therefore stressing the importance of nurturing the communication needs of children through transitions.

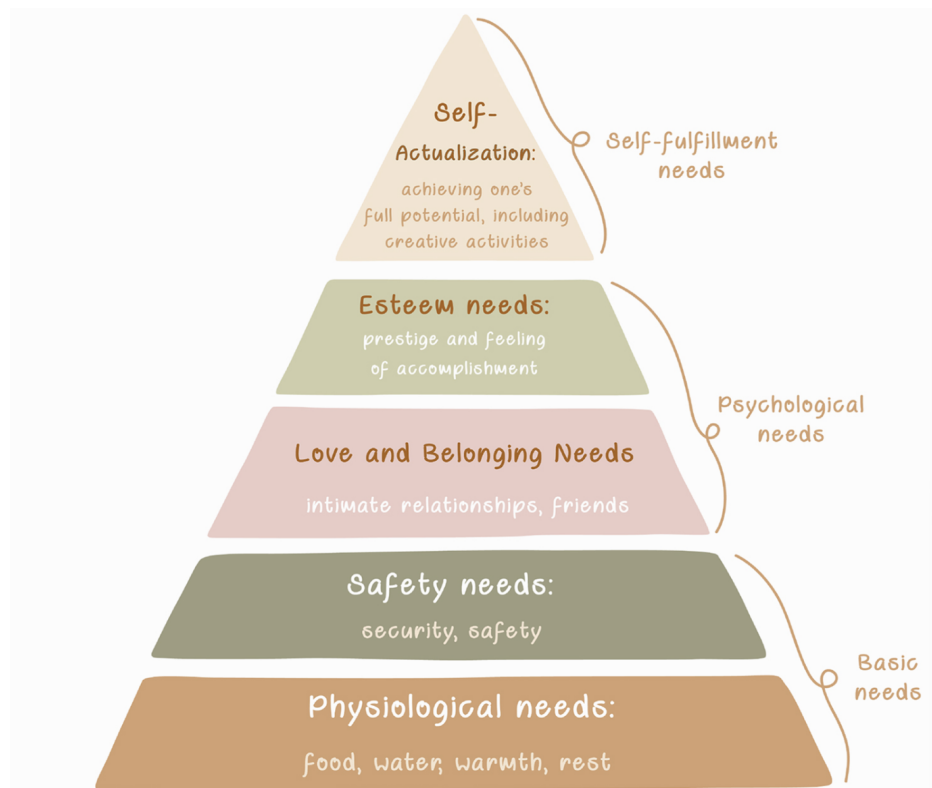


(Rensburg, 2020)

Role of the Adult & The Needs of the Child

The first adults in a child's life are their family. Their role is to support comfortable, safe and nurturing transitions. Making the most out of the resources, knowledge and support systems they have available. This can vary greatly due to socio-economic factors, causing adverse outcomes for the child of a lower socio-economic family. However, the nature of the child is also passed down through biology and culture. (Baxter et al., 2022, pp.1–19)

It could be helpful to familiarise yourself with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943).



(Haus & Hues, 2023)

Maslow (1943) describes a pyramid of needs which can only be met one after the other, if the lower level of needs are not fulfilled, then the higher level cannot begin. The pyramid allows practitioners to understand the importance of children's needs being met in the home, creating stability which aids in coping with transition.

Survival needs are the basic needs, they include food, warmth and shelter.

Second is security, including a need for predictability which can be formed by attending a setting regularly, for example, a childminder every week. This need for security demonstrates the importance of preparing children for transition, settling in sessions are a practical approach which allow children to understand that the new place is safe.

The wise practitioner should understand that sometimes families struggle to meet these needs, showing willingness to support the family through educational opportunities incorporated into simple, calm and understanding discussions. If the needs continue to be unmet then the practitioner could raise safeguarding concerns following the correct procedure.



(Paint Your Life, 2023)

The third need in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) is love and belonging, if not met at home, the child will search for this in others. Meaning Practitioners need the ability to show 'professional love'. A term used to describe the care which a Practitioner must show whilst observing strict professional boundaries to maintain safeguarding. Actions to show a child they belong in your setting using communication skills include:

- Showing children their observations and discussing how well they did and why
- Working with families to bring together cultures within the setting
- Taking the time to learn useful words in EAL childrens' home language
- Planning in the moment using the child's likes, dislikes and ideas
- Singing nursery rhymes that are familiar to the child from their families
- Using key words that families use at home

When referring to bringing together cultures within the setting, this can be understood by the use of a 'life course approach' as described by Baxter et al (2022). This not only acts as a bridge between home life and childcare, but avoids any blocking of pathways along the life path. Here is a practical example of this:

An Early Years Setting takes on a child who has never been to another setting before. They are 2 years old. The child always takes their shoes off before stepping into the front door, however the setting doesn't have this rule. The child is constantly told off by staff in the setting for this behaviour. Upon conversations with the family, the staff understood this was the norm at home and that no shoes were worn in the home, because in their culture, this would be seen as extremely disrespectful. Because of this, the setting decided to bridge the gap between home and the setting. The child was allowed a pair of 'indoor shoes' that he kept at the nursery (such as sandals), these were only worn indoors. He switched shoes at the door and was no longer told off for this behaviour. The child would have been receiving mixed messages in the beginning, as he would have been encouraged to take the shoes off for his first 2 years of life, and seen every adult in his home apply this behaviour. He does not yet understand that there are cultural differences in the

world. Being told this is bad behaviour could have been stressful and unsettling. The bridge helps to combine the two cultures and work in partnership with families.

As demonstrated above, the use of good communication skills whilst working in parent/carer partnership aided the transition of the child from home to the setting.



(Mikealawill, n.d.)

The fourth need of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) are feelings of accomplishment and self esteem. According to Araujo (2023), a child with low self esteem may not play with others, refuse joining activities, allow others to treat them badly, be unable to defend themselves, give up easily and have difficulty coping with transitions.

Whereas children with good self esteem are able to keep trying when faced with difficulty until they succeed, have confidence and acceptance in themselves, which supports them to transition as they are able to stay strong and grounded.

To compare low self esteem and good self esteem, the table below demonstrates how these are caused during the transition period from home to the setting.

The scenario:

In the setting, during free play, the child made a piece of artwork from the scrap paper box. It was a few marks and a glued on sequin.

The child was very happy as she thought this was a good representation of the dog in the movie she watched at home last night.

	Low Self Esteem	Good Self Esteem
What happened next	The child showed the Early Years Practitioner her work. She was focused on another task with other children and had her back turned away from the child. She quickly glanced at the paper, making no eye contact with the child. She shook her head and said “Can’t you see I’m doing this activity? Go back to the art corner, I’ll come check on you later.” The practitioner forgot to check on her and the child was left in the art corner until	The child showed the Early Years Practitioner her work. She was focused on another task with other children but had positioned herself in a way that had a majority of the setting in view, this way she wasn’t turned away from any children. She eagerly looked up at the child with a smile, she exclaimed “Wow! That artwork is fantastic! Please come here and tell me all about it.” The child smiled back and sat next to the practitioner.

	tidy up time. She threw her work in the bin at tidy up time.	The practitioner knew she would need to take short breaks from the activity at hand, but the task was already risk assessed and it was safe for her to do so, as she knew it was important to offer every child the same amount of attention. The child told the practitioner this was a drawing of a movie she saw last night and they had a discussion about that movie. The other children joined in expressing interest in the movie. From the discussion the practitioner made a note of the movie to try and include some of the characters/themes in her activities. She asked the child if she could put her work on display for the whole setting to see on their display board. Which they agreed.
How the child felt	The child felt disheartened by this response. She was initially proud of her work but the practitioner completely dismissed it, making her feel	The child felt completely listened to, she was given the opportunity to expand on her thoughts which made her feel valued. The child felt she belonged as

	unimportant. The child felt like she didn't matter and that the practitioner was too busy to care about her. She then sat in the art corner and waited for the practitioner hoping she would come and give her a positive response to her work. But she didn't, therefore the child grew in anxiety whilst sat there. By the end of the free play session the child's upset turned to anger and she threw her work away as it felt like it was rubbish.	much as the other children as she sat down with them even though she wasn't involved in the task. When the other children expressed interest, she felt acceptance and developed her social skills. The child felt a sense of pride that her work would be displayed in the setting and that her ideas will be included in future activities.
What went wrong/right	The practitioner demonstrated poor communication skills, her body language was dismissive, she made no eye contact and shook her head in disapproval. She then told the child she didn't have time to care about her work and let her down by saying she would check on her work but not following through. The child will feel misunderstood, insecure, unhappy, unwilling to participate and not valued within the setting.	The practitioner used positive body language from before the scenario which helped to establish a positive communication basis in the setting. The practitioner engaged with the child using eye contact and facial expressions. She also used positive language to encourage the child and their ability. Including all of the children and creating a discussion was a brilliant communication skill. To listen to the child's likes and hobbies outside of the

		setting and include them in future activities supports the transition between home and nursery. The child will feel included, happy, safe and valued within the setting.
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(Ibid, page 6)

The final step in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) is Self Actualisation, which Maslow describes as something many do not reach. As it is unique to one's own passions. Self Actualised people have the access to be self-sufficient comfortably whilst also having the ability to chase the fulfilment they desire, such as helping the needy and pursuing artistic endeavours. Therefore, as Early Years Practitioners supporting transition through communication, it is only possible to lay the foundations for a child to reach self actualisation in the future.

Partnerships

The partnership of parents/carers and the setting is very important. As Education Scotland (2023a) explains, a setting should have a leader who wants the best for children, lots of discussion and engagement between adult and child, adults supporting interests of children, knowledgeable and approachable staff, clear information and staff listening and talking with children and families.

The setting should strive to meet the above criteria through various forms of communication. NSCC (2023) includes forms of communication such as:

Body Language

- Eye contact
- Posture
- Facial expressions
- Gestures

Written Communication

- Information displayed around the setting
- Emails
- Letters
- All about me forms
- Learning Journals
- Apps
- Observations
- Reports and Tracking

Verbal Communication

- Voice Inflection (the way you say certain words to convey a feeling)
- Telephone call

- Face to face conversation
- Video call



(Fisher-Price, 2023)

According to Bowlby (1951) the attachment of a child to their mother is crucial to their mental wellbeing. By age 7-8 months, babies are forming specific attachments to those

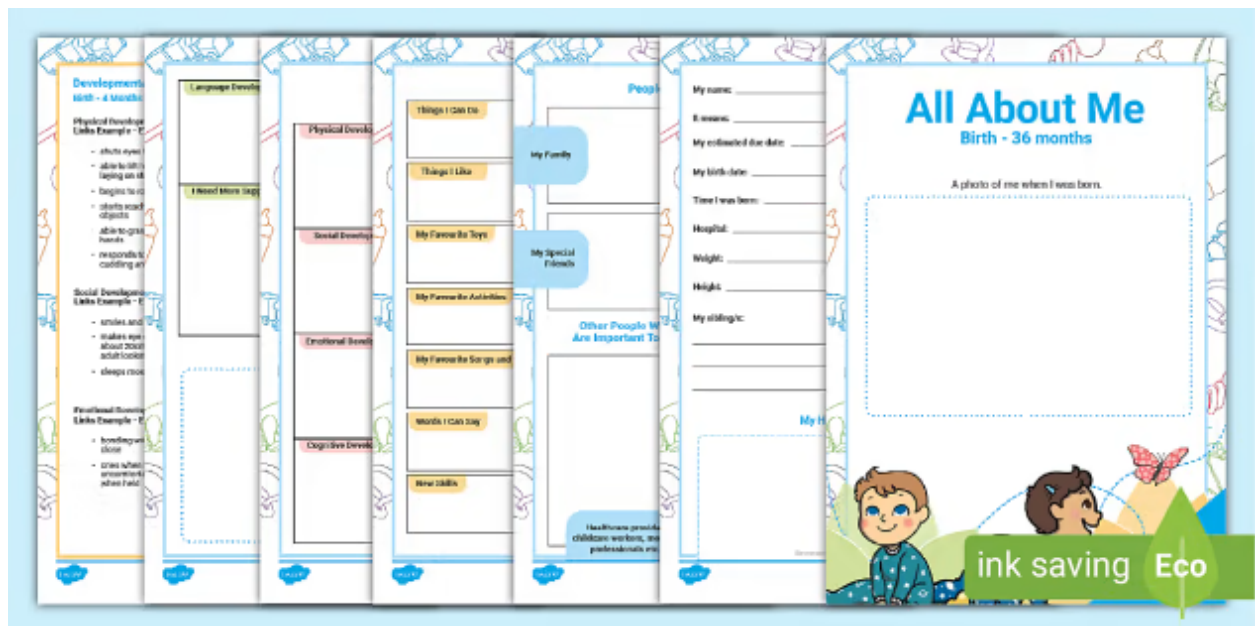
who are familiar to them. They may demonstrate separation anxiety when they are away from these people and around strangers. By 9 months and above they are able to start developing attachments to multiple people.

Bowlby's studies suggest that children require an intimate, caring, loving and secure attachment to their mother from 6-30 months. Without this he concluded children would develop into adults who operate from a scale of affectionless behaviours to psychopathy. Therefore, in the Early Years, working with the primary caregivers will allow the setting to achieve a familiarity for the child, reducing separation anxiety and the risk of severe future outcomes. This can come in the form of familiar settling techniques, songs, white noise, pictures of home, pictures of the primary caregiver and blankets or comforters that smell like home. (Tizard, 2009)

Using advice from GOV.UK (2023) there are methods which practitioners can implement to allow for successful, high quality partnership with parents and carers. Welcoming the family into the setting involves creating a warm and inviting setting beforehand. This can be done with inviting decor and comfortable spaces to have family partnership meetings. Greeting the families with a happy demeanour is of utmost importance. These methods of communication are demonstrated from the initial visit, beginning the transition from home to setting. However there may have been previous communications through email or phone calls where the parent/carer reached out to the setting to enquire about a childcare place.

Once this has been completed, the family could be invited for another meeting when they have decided their child is signing up to the setting.

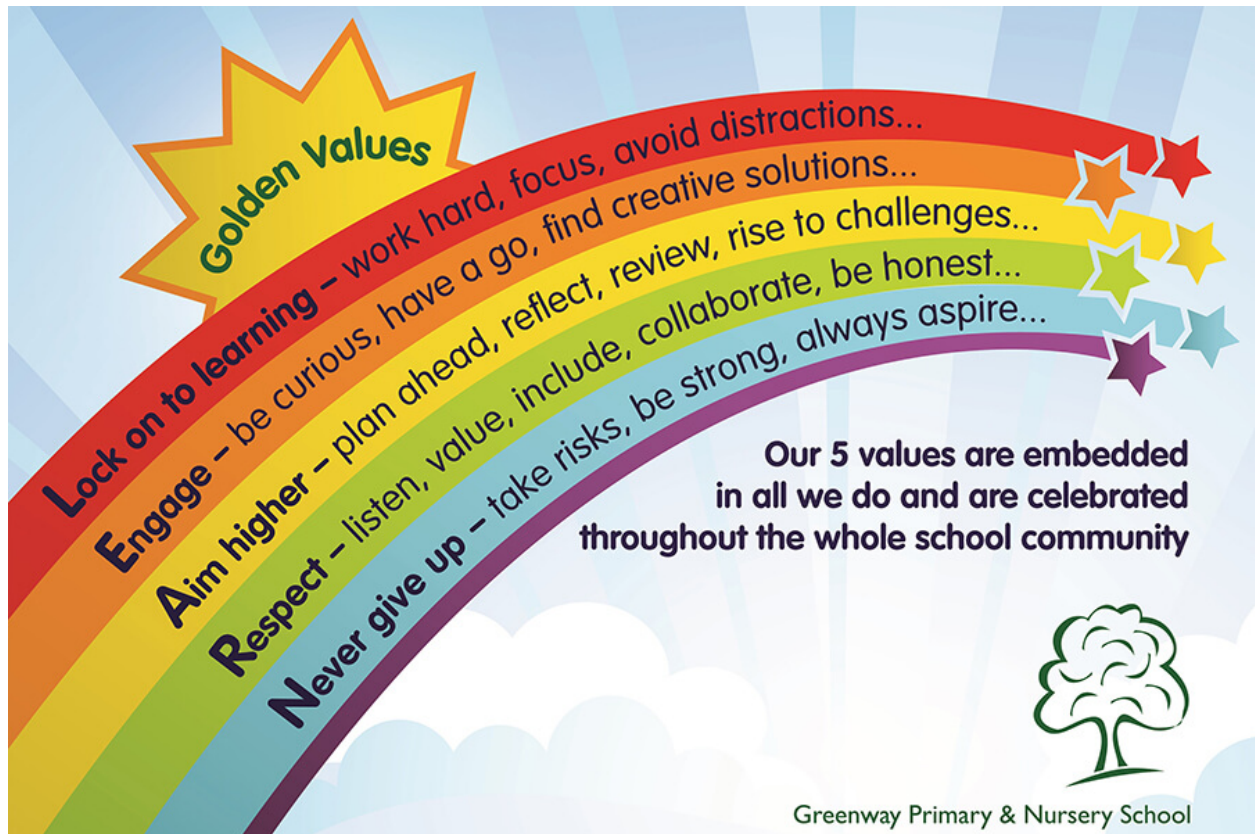
During the next meeting, the family could be encouraged to tell you all about their child, this is where 'All about me' documents may be used. These documents give practitioners a detailed look into the child's personality and development. They also act as an ice breaker between families and settings.



(Twinkl, 2023)

In some 'All about me' documents, such as the one photographed above, the EYFS is included to support development tracking. The practitioner is able to refer back to the 'All about me' document whenever needed, as a guide to supporting the child.

It may also be helpful to offer the family written communication about the setting, this can come in the form of many documents, flyers, information sheets, posters, images and infographics. Striving to show the ethos of the setting through many means of communication will support family partnership as it recognises that different families respond well to different forms. Assuring all families are inclusively taken into consideration.



(Greenway Primary School, n.d.)

GOV.UK (2023) also recommends cultural inclusion which was discussed on page 7 of this handbook.

Offering regular workshops may be a tactic that settings want to use to include families in the transition of their child from home to setting. ‘Stay and Plays’ are useful as when children see their primary caregiver feels comfortable and safe in the setting, they feel the same too.

Upon collection the key person of the child could use their communication skills to describe the child’s day. Including lots of positives and delving into their knowledge of the EYFS and Early Years, whilst praising the child. Parents/carers will be pleased to understand how their child achieved, this will build a strong partnership and rapport.

Interventions

Interventions come in many forms, from the list of ways to encourage belonging in the setting on page 7 of this handbook. To the table of self esteem cultivation on pages 8-11 of this handbook.

Interventions are best tailored to the unique child, Early Years Matters (2023) describes the way children understand communication. They listen and watch others, imitating what they say. They use imitative play to understand situations, using and responding to words and sounds. They join in with rhymes and music. It is noted that children understand far more than they can communicate back.

These ideas resemble those of Piaget's Cognitive Development theory (1936-1950). Piaget's ideas are still used in the EYFS, especially around the basis that children actively seek out play to learn. Tailoring interventions to each stage of development could support the practitioner in understanding how the child will transition best. (Reynolds and Sherrell, 2023)

Stage of Development (Up to Early Years age)	What it means	Intervention
Sensorimotor (birth - 2 years old)	Understanding the world through senses and actions.	The Practitioner should create a cosy and caring environment with lots of sensory stimulation for the child. This could include items from home that could smell of the primary caregivers (such as a

		blanket). The actions of the Practitioner should be soothing, gentle, comforting and represent the familiarity of the family.
Pre-operational (2 - 7 years)	Understanding the world through language and mental images.	The Practitioner can create a sensory tray which reminds the child of home, this could include cultural items. Including expressive body language the practitioner will tell the story of a child who travelled a great adventure to arrive at their safe and magical setting. Allow the child to listen and explore.

(Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, 2016)



(Magic Breaks, 2023)

Proposed Outcomes

This handbook proposes that children who are nurtured with communication skills throughout times of transition (mainly the move from home to an Early Years setting) will thrive in their future endeavours. The handbook holds the belief that Early Years has an everlasting effect which is carried through into adulthood. Supported by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943).

The outcomes for a child who is given the opportunities outlined in this handbook, include the ability to show resilience in times of transition and high self esteem which involves self assurance and belief in themselves. The child who experiences this will be equipt for a world that is ever changing, where self esteem is at its lowest and symptoms of depression are on the rise in children. (Place2Be, 2022)

The practitioner who weaves the ideas from this handbook into their work, will be delivering high quality childcare to the next generation. Passing down the positive attributes to generations far beyond the practitioners understanding. It would be a wise practitioner who understands the importance of these outcomes. (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008)



(Gloucestershire CC, 2023)

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