A guide to transitions in early years and the importance of communication.

(Source: Bing 2019)

‘What a child can do today with assistance, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow’

(Vygotsky, ND).

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Introduction to transition

The purpose of this handbook is to help guide practitioners into a deeper understanding of why effective communication is important during transitions and how it can impact our settings and create a higher standard practice. By the end of this handbook practitioners should feel they have been provided with the information and guidance to ensure transitions for children are smooth positive and always in the best interests of a child individually.

Childcare practitioners have an important role that includes understanding and showing respect in a professional manner that should allow children the rights to develop to their personal strengths and unique characteristics. Practitioners must implement and create age-appropriate care and education that enable this personal development. (Jones, 2014).

UNICEF (ND) states in article 6 that children have the rights to survival and to develop in the best possible way. In order to allow development, children must experience transitions. Scottish social services council (ND) explains that transition should not be seen as a destination but as a continuous journey that parents, caregivers and professionals should support. When children are supported through changes, they will begin to understand the world is a safe place and enable development and smooth transitions. (SSSC. ND).

What is transition?

We will be looking at transitions from age 0-3, giving practitioners a better understanding of what transition is, how it can be supported and the importance of effective communication and ways in which it can make a difference to children in settings.

Dictionary (2022) states that Transition is a time where something changes from one step or stage to the next.

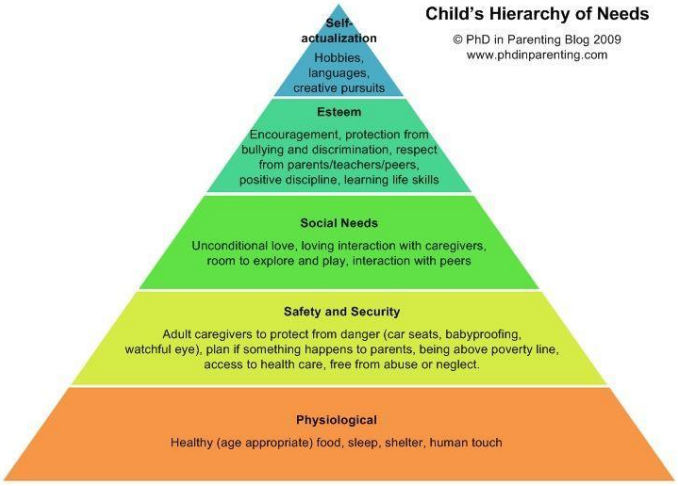
When a child moves from a home to a childcare or Early years setting, this is known as a transition. Transitions happen throughout a child's life starting from age 0-3 in a nursery setting and expanding to further education, including primary to secondary and beyond (Parent zone, 2022). Transitions can be a difficult and challenging part of life and children may need support to enable these changes to happen smoothly. (Nursery story, 2021).

In order to allow these changes to happen, Cherry (2022) explains Jean Piaget's theory of development. Infants must develop between the age 0-2 through sensory experiences and object manipulation. This is known as the sensorimotor stage. Piaget believed that object performance is an important part of development, creating the understanding that objects still exist even when they cannot be seen. (Cherry, 2022).

Object performance can be linked to how babies and infants may form attachments, which plays a part in the challenges of transition. Infants need to learn that when their carer or parent cannot be seen, they still exist. This will allow secure attachments with care givers to be formed. (Gepp, et al. 2022)

(Source: Pinterest ND)

The needs of a child.



(Source: Pinterest, 2009)

In order for children to thrive, not only in childhood but long term and into adulthood, children need their basic needs met. When a child is given the foundation to have their social, physical and emotional needs met, this will then give them the steppingstones they need to experience a positive happy childhood and allow them to develop to their full potential. (Flatley,2022).

The theory of Abraham Maslow is that for children to develop and learn, these specific needs should be met first. (Abbot 2020).

Maslow's Hierarchy of needs could be applied in settings in the following ways-

- **Physiological needs** – infants and toddlers must have a sufficient amount of sleep and age-appropriate food that allows them to grow and become healthy and happy individuals. (Zuhlke,2012). Hanson (2020) suggests that as early years practitioners we can apply Maslow's Theory by offering hot healthy meals and snacks to children. It would be very difficult to advance to higher needs when sleep deprived and hungry.
- **Safety needs** – Infants need a lot of guidance in safety as they are naturally curious and can find themselves in unsafe situations. Babies are fully reliant on care givers and parents to provide them with safety measures that allow them to explore and develop in a safe environment. (Zuhlke, 2012). Hanson (2020) backs this up by expressing that in order to apply this stage of the hierarchy a safe learning space is essential for children.
- **Belonging and love** – Zuhlke (2012) suggests that when a child has a sense of belonging and love they are able to form relationships and attachments quickly. Hanson (2020) states that in settings the way we can make infants and toddlers feel a sense of belonging and love would be through effective communication and age-appropriate play.

- **Self-esteem**- Maslow saw self-esteem needs in two different ways, gaining respect from others and gaining self-respect. When toddlers are aware they are doing something that may please the people that surround them they may look for approval through nonverbal communication and how someone reacts to their accomplishments. (Zuhlke, 2012). Positive reinforcement should be applied in early years settings, praise such as 'well done!' and even a high five. (Hanson, 2020).
- **Self-actualization** – According to Zuhlke (2012) infants and toddlers are unlikely to be fulfilling this need as by the age of 12 months they are only beginning to become self-aware. However, they will be able to use a mirror to explore their appearance and this can lead them to the need of discovering and identifying who they are.

Adeona (2021) believes that when we are able to make children feel safe, secure and give them a sense of belonging we set up the foundations for transitions which enable children to develop, learn and provide better future outcomes. Help children live better (2022) also backs this up, they state that Maslow's hierarchy of needs is important for transitions as once a child is feeling safe and secure in an environment, they will naturally want to form relationships and seek love and belonging.

Communication is essential to enable children to build relationships, for example transitioning from nursery to school, it would be beneficial that teachers visit the nursery, or the children visit the school prior to a transition, as this would allow the child a familiar adult to support them and begin to communicate in a positive way to create a sense of security. (Dunlop, et al. 2002). Infants and toddlers are able to communicate from birth and need the interaction from adults to allow healthy brain development, which can also link to positive transitions. (Family information service, 2022). The family information service (2022) also explain that the environment you provide a child with has a huge impact on how children begin to communicate with adults. Pairing a child with a key worker enables them to begin to form a relationship in an unfamiliar setting. This will also provide a keyworker opportunities to evaluate through observations, ways in which the setting and activities can be adjusted to help a child settle into transitions and develop to their full potential. UNCRC (ND) article 29 states that while a child is in education, we should help children to develop to their own abilities and personalities.

(Source: raisingchildren.net.au)

The role of the adult.

It is a human tendency to imitate the people we admire and look up to. Children absorb all kind of information, including behaviours and personality traits of those that surround them. Role models are important to children as these are the people in their lives that either inspire or discourage them. Who children look up to begin to shape their personalities and who they are and will become in adulthood. (Apt parenting, ND).

According to Essex County council (2022) It is the role of all adults in setting to –

- **Support all children** – consider the individual needs of a child and their stages of development. UNCRC (ND) Article 3 supports this by stating we have a duty of care to work with children and ensure everything we do is always in their best interest.

- **Value children**- Respond effectively to children's needs, through effective communication. We must implement a high standard of inclusion in a setting. UNCRC (ND) Article 12 backs this up as it is written in the children's rights they must be heard, listened to and be provided with opportunities to give their own opinions and make choices.

- **Knowledge and understanding of children's development** – Having an in-depth knowledge to help support children through their developmental stages.

- **Providing support and the facilities for learning** – Respect children and their needs. It is important for adults to pace new experiences such as transitions. Practitioners should communicate effectively and use information provided by care givers and other professionals to ensure the appropriate needs of a child are met. This will allow smooth transitions to happen.

Parents responsibilities

Ward (2013) states that over 70% of a child's life is spent at home with parents, care givers and the wider community. This means homelife should be considered and recognised as an important learning environment. It is a parent's role to play a part in making decisions based on their child and their education. (Ward. 2013). In order to have a successful early years' experience and transitions that meet a child's individual needs, parents should communicate effectively and honestly with practitioners. Parents who feel well informed by practitioners, particularly their child's key worker, are more likely to develop stronger relationships enabling parents to feel they can talk more openly. (Nursery Resources, 2019). Ways in which we can ensure parents feel informed can be through a variety of platforms such as, newsletters, social media, stay and play visits, open door policies and regular communication with their child's keyworker.

Key worker responsibilities.

When a child is able to form a loving and secure bond, this allows them to thrive. These relationships are usually formed with parents but in practice can be provided and formed by a child's keyworker. (Longstan. 2013). According to Early learning HQ (2012) in order to develop these positive relationships with children, communication from a child's key worker is vital. Communicating well is not always conversation based, especially in the age range 0-3. We must remember other means of communication are just as effective. In order to develop strong communication with key children, we must provide a child with good eye contact, be aware of body language, listening and taking account of a child's individual needs. (Early learning HQ, 2012).

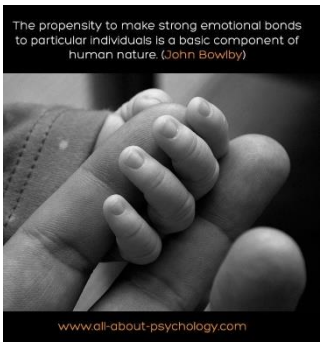
James-Margarint (2021) talks about a strategy called the '**OWL**' this stands for **observe**, **wait** and **listen**. When we use this strategy, it can allow you a better understanding of the needs of a child. When we '**observe'** we are able to tune into a child, what are they looking at? What are their facial expressions? This can give us a deeper understanding of what they may want to communicate. When we '**wait'** we are giving the child a chance to process information they have been given and we should wait patiently for an outcome and be ready to respond. When we **'Listen'** we are giving a child full attention and respect, we must remember not to interrupt but look for clues at what they may be communicating with you, this will give them confidence and motivation to continue to try and communicate with you and allow you to form a relationship that will help the process of transition and development. (James-Margarint, 2021).

Early years matters (2022) believes that being a key worker includes responding to children in a way that suits them as individuals, this can include –

- Responding sensitively to feelings and emotional needs
- Supporting transitions
- Supporting a child's well-being
- Supporting personal needs such a toileting and nappy changes
- Communicating effectively with parents

The united nation convention on the rights on the child (ND) article 12 backs this up by stating that children should always be listened to and be involved in any decision making that involves them. Key workers are able to adapt a child's needs to suit them as individuals through these relationships based on a foundation of trust and security, these trusting relationships include both child and parents. (Early years matters, 2022).

(Source: Bing. 2017)



Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment stated that when an infant is placed in an environment that is unfamiliar and they separate from their parents, keyworkers should consider and observe the one of three ways a child reacts upon separation and reunion in order to develop further understanding to what support a child may need–

1. **Secure attachment –** when a child shows distress when initially separated but easily comforted upon parents return.

2. **Anxious resistant attachment –** This is when a child shows a higher stress level when leaving parents and seek comfort when reunited, occasionally showing frustration almost to punish parents for leaving them.

3. **Avoidant attachment-** when a child shows no stress, or very little while separating and ignoring parents upon being reunited or avoiding them. (Mooney-Garhart. 2009)

When keyworkers are able to understand the attachment theory the steps to creating important aspects of transition can take place, providing a secure, safe space and emotional resilience. Bowlby (1969) believed that the way in which we view the world is based on the quality of our attachment relationships. (O'Connor. 2018).

Partnerships

As children begin a transition it is vital that we recognise children as being unique and we agree as partnerships that we should always aim to meet a child and parents needs during these important changes. Some families will need more reassurance, and some may have no concerns regarding the transition. Respect and communication across the board of partnerships will enable these transitions to be a smoother and happier process and in the best interest of the child. (Thomas. 2019).

(Source: Bing. 2018)

When working in Partnerships we should continue to communicate effectively to ensure everyone is on the same page and that the child is central to decisions and choices. We must ensure we are listening to a child's needs in order to provide successful transitions. (Singhal, ND).

As early years practitioners, you will likely work with multi-agencies at some point in your setting. Whether you need to ask for support or children transition into the Early years with multi-agencies already in place. Multi- agencies provide support and there will be a variety of professionals that form a team based around a child, this is to ensure necessary support is at hand. We as practitioners must communicate factually and effectively with these multi-agency professionals and parents. (Kelly, 2015). Cambridge English (2021) agrees by stating in part of the seven C's of communication we must be 'clear' leaving no doubt of the purpose of communication. 'correct' ensuring all information is correct and consistent.

(Source: Bing 2016)

Interventions

In order to become a setting with positive intervention strategies we as practitioners can follow the national occupational standard, also known as 'NOS'. These strategies can be used in the workplace to provide practitioners the opportunities to work towards qualifications, training, performance management and professional development. (Social care Wales, 2022) When staff have access to regular training and ways to improve practice, we are able to support families and children more effectively. By using NOS, we are able to improve the lives of young children through giving staff a deeper and more knowledgeable understanding of their requirements, allowing practitioners to become more competent in their job roles. (Gov.UK,2014).

Brodie (2013) believes in order for practitioners to use their training and experiences towards transition and development, observations should be undertaken, these observations should be documented and adapted to suit children's individual needs, allowing them personal goals and outcomes. For example, some children may thrive from learning in a group environment and some children may need a more one to one approach and a quieter area to complete a task, despite children needing or wanting to learn in different ways this does not mean they are any less capable. It is our role to observe and find the most comfortable way for children to reach their goals. Some of Reggio Emilia's 7 principles agree with this, stating that children's learning should be documented, and children are capable of constructing their learning. (Reggio Emilia early learning. 2021).

Penn state extension (ND) explains that when a child goes though transition it requires a lot of effort physically, mentally and emotionally. As practitioners we should aim to be prepared for all type of transitions and their outcomes, this can include:

- Being supportive and nurturing
- Being aware of a child's development
- Know or be prepared to know children as individuals
- Know yourself and look after yourself
- Prepare an environment that supports all transitions

According to Ofsted (2021) we need to create positive environments for children, where they can live and learn and enable staff to interact positively with children. The environment you provide will apply to all children, however we must remember to pay particular attention to how we adapt an environment to support children who may have communication needs or special educational needs. For example, we should have extensive use of pictured lanyards and visual timetables. These types of visual aids will allow staff opportunities to work alongside children and help them to develop skills that can contribute to understanding and responding effectively to their own behaviours and feelings, linking into supporting transitions through alternative means of communication. (Ofsted,2021).

Proposed outcomes

The Queensland Government believe transition is seen as complete or almost complete when children begin to make progress in ways such as leaving a caregiver more confidently, spending more time away from their keyworker, beginning to build friendships, independence and explore their surroundings.

Transitions will not happen in a day; it is a process that continues until children adapt to these relationships and new environment. In time they will find their sense of belonging. (Queens land Government, 2022)

Piaget believed that even when social situations are influencing children, they learn and think naturally because they have the innate ability to do so (McLeod, 2018). However, Siegler and Ellis (1996) say that Vygotsky believed that learning takes place through interactions and learning from more knowledgeable others. The similarities of these theories focus on cognitive development being at the centre of the theory, and that children are active participants in their own learning and development. Vygotsky and Piaget both believed language and communication plays a part in the process of communication. (Study queries, ND).

When we look into both theorists, we can highlight the important similarities that we can use and help with transitions whether we believe Vygotsky's theory or Piaget's the foundation is the same and will allow us to be confident in letting children take the lead in knowing what is best for them, let them teach us how to adapt to them, and not children adapting to us. Allow them a voice and honour all their rights.

When we follow a child's rights through transition it can help us to provide the environment and safe space, they need to form relationships.

(First discoveries, 2022) When a transition has been successful in setting, we will see signs such as:

- A child accepting being left by a parent/guardian
- Forming friendships
- Engaging happily in activities
- Building a good relationship with their keyworker

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