# A guidance handbook for Early Years keyworkers during childhood transitions.

Image Source: Bright young things 2018

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**Introduction: Transitions in the early years**

Transitions are the moves that children make from one setting to another, for example from home to a nursery setting or from a nursery setting to a primary school setting. It is a process which can take time and planning in order to make the transition a smooth and successful one.
According to Elizabeth walker transitions are extremely important in children's development and emotional well-being. She explains that children need to be fully supported during these times and that early years practitioners should plan for each one in an appropriate manner in order for the child to have a good experience with transitions, hence, they are more likely to cope with them in the future.
Good communication between staff and families is key during this time, in order for the child to experience a seamless transition.
Jane Drake explains that no matter how much a parent / guardian or caregiver tries to make the experience of a transition exiting for a child, they will still feel anxious and unsettled. She also explains that nurseries and schools should have ongoing links in order to be able to support the children during their transitions.
Communication between staff and children is just as important. The children should have opportunities to voice their concerns about their upcoming move to the new setting, where they can ask any questions they may have. This could ease their anxiety and help them settle easier in their new setting.

## How to use this Guidance Handbook.

This handbook is aimed at practitioners working in the early years setting, specifically practitioners working with children aged 3-4 who are transitioning from nursery to the first year of School.
The aim of this handbook is to give a clear insight on how to effectively help young children in their transition from a nursery setting to a school setting. It should be used by keyworkers to develop their knowledge and understanding of the importance and the effects of communication in times of transition.
It is extremely important for young children to have a smooth transition from one setting to another, this is so they feel comfortable. According to Oxfordshire county council it is essential that all parties involved (Practitioners, care givers and parents) should work together in order to provide the best possible transition for the child. Communication between all involved is important in children's' overall development during their time in transitions. When a child experiences a smooth transition, it is likely to contribute to developing their self-esteem and independence.

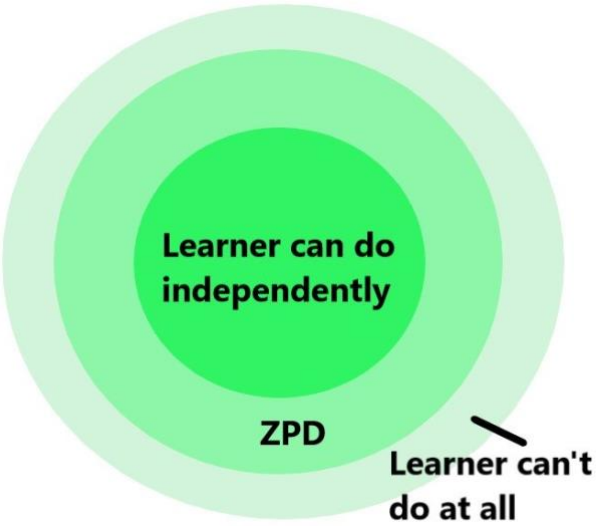
**The role of the adult**

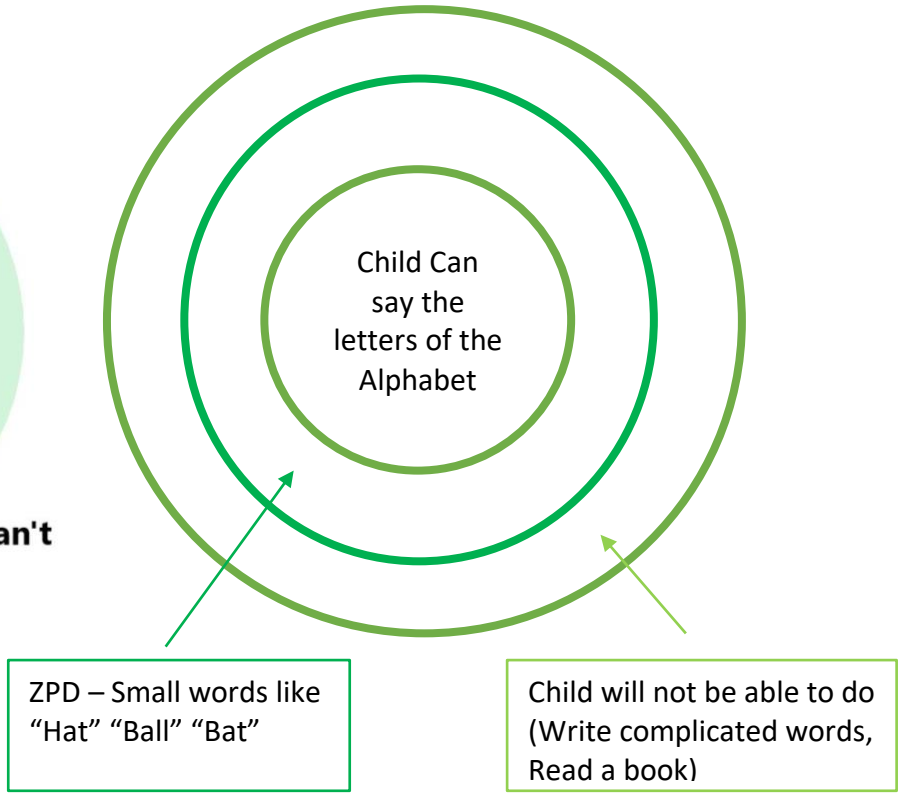
Starting school is a monumental moment in every Childs life. It is extremely important that all adults around the child work together effectively to create a smooth transition for the child.
According to Croner - 1 it is essential that parents/guardians and children are given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the new setting, they are able to do this by attending a school open day., allowing the children to play and familiarise themselves with the setting and equipment in a safe manner. Parents can also help familiarise the setting by taking their child on a drive by , or walk past, in order for their child to familiarise themselves with the route and area of the new setting. Visiting the new school and meeting the new members of staff is essential as new relationships can be formed. Bright young things suggest buying books which talk about children transitioning into a school setting, by reading this with the child it can help them to see that it is a normal process.
There are many things a parent can do at home in order to ease their child into the process of transitioning into a school setting. They can help their child to become more independent, for example by letting them complete various tasks by themselves, these tasks could range from putting on and taking off their coat to washing their hands, this will give them a sense of independence, pride and achievement, enhancing their well being. If they do not learn to do this at home, they may feel neglected, isolated, lowering their self esteem in school when they are expected to do it by themselves. Parents should also encourage the child to ask questions about the transition from nursery to school if they are able to do so.

It is important to remember that parents need support during times of transition too, which is why it is equally important that partnerships are formed between parents, practitioners and new staff. According to Dockett, Perry and Kearney Communication is one of the most important elements in a successful transition, this is because parents are well informed and are able to explain to their children what to expect, creating trust between everyone involved. Children are able to sense how their parent/guardian is feeling, this is why communication and trust is vital between parents and practitioners. Practitioners could hold a parents evening in order for the parent/guardian to raise any concerns over their child's transition.

The practitioners need to know the abilities and the needs of the children in order to accommodate and make the child feel wanted in the new setting, by knowing each individuals abilities the staff within the new setting will also be able to offer more help and support to the children who need it. This links to Vygotsky's theory.
Practitioners could use Vygotsky's theory in order to help children learn while still keeping them in their comfort zone. Vygotsky believed that in order to help children learn they need to interact with other children who are more intelligent than they are. He also believed that children should learn within their 'zone of proximal development'.
The diagrams below explain this ; the inner circle is what the child can do on his/her own without adult help, the (ZPD) Zone of Proximal development is something a child would not be able to do on their own, but would be able to accomplish with the support and help of an adult. The outer circle refers to skills that the child cannot do yet. For example if a child is

starting to learn how to read and write, they know the letters of the alphabet but are unable to read or write words, they could start by learning short words like “he” “hat” “ball”. However they would not be able to learn to read or write more complicated words.




When the child learns to do something, they will gain self esteem and more confident that they would be able do it again with the support and reassurance of the caregivers.

**The needs of the Child**

Practitioners must acknowledge the fact that all children are unique and have different abilities and needs and learn at different rates. It is extremely important that the school setting and the early years setting develop a good working relationship with each other in order to accommodate and support the children during their transition. If both settings are able to communicate well with each other it will make the process of transitioning for the children a happier, easier and a much smoother one.

A child with Special educational needs may need additional planning and guidance when transitioning from nursery to a school setting. Early years providers should arrange a meeting with parents in order to discuss the added needs of the child before the child is due to start in the new setting. This is in order for any adaptations or special requirements of any form can be arranged beforehand. This way the child will feel safe, welcomed and wanted in the new setting during transition.

Some children like routine and structure to their lives in order to feel safe. In order to help these children to transition smoothly and effectively; the new setting , routes and routines need to be gradually introduced into their structured routine, for example they can meet their new teacher and familiarize themselves with the new setting at a slower pace, during quieter periods, which can be enhanced as they become more settled.
Children need to know that they are going to be safe and secure in their new setting. In order to do this, children need to form new bonds and relationships with the practitioners. Practitioners can aid in making these new bonds by giving the children affection, praise and encouragement, and by actively listening to them. Providing children with a caring environment aids greately in the development of the child.

If the child has a secure attachment to their primary care giver they may feel more confident, secure and have better self esteem.

While thinking of the childs needs, practitioners should refer back to Maslows higherarchy of needs. These needs are psychological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization. According to Maslow, physiological needs should be met first. This means eating, drinking and all other. He stated that one can not meet the next need until the lower ones are met. Children for example will be unable to learn if they are cold or hungry.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Elizabeth Hopper (2020)

When thinking about the needs of the child, we must consider Bowlby's attachment theory. Bowlby believed that the bonds that are created between caregivers and babies have a substantial impact on children throughout their lives. The term attachment means an emotional bond with another person, for example a baby would feel a strong emotional attachment to its mother, who provides food, love and warmth. Bowlby suggests that an attachment needs to be formed before the baby turns 2.5 years old, he explains that if an

attachment has not been made by then, then it may not happen at all. He explained that if they do not make an attachment at an early age, it will not just affect them as babies, but in later life , as they may be unable to bond and form stable relationships in later life. If a chid has a secure attachment they will appear to be happy, secure and content, however If the child does not have a secure attachment they would appear to be Anxious, Insecure and anrgy.

**Partnerships**

Partnerships can be formed with parents and guardians, multi disciplinary agencies such as health visitors and social services, and other settings such as childminders, nurseries and schools..

Partnerships between all adults are an important aspect of helping children transition from one setting to another.

A partnership between the parents / guardians and caregiver ensures that the parents/guardians are kept up to date with any changes or progression that has been made during the Childs day in nursery.

According to early years network's research children's school achievements, social skills and adaptation skills all improve when teachers and parents have a good partnership.

It is an essential role of the practitioner to communicate effectively with the child in order to build a stable relationship to ensure the child feels safe and secure. This way the child will not lose any confidence during the transition process. It will also give them a sense of security.

Early learning network stresses the importance of establishing a healthy parent, teacher relationship.

For many children, their teacher is one of the most significant adults in their day to day lives. After creating these partnerships, most children will settle in easily at their new school. When children have positive relationships, they are more likely to engage in activities and follow their interests and explore their curious nature and are more likely to try new skills.

It is not only essential that parents and new teachers create good partnerships, but partnerships should be formed with the Childs previous settings, making the transition as smooth as possible.

It is important that all practitioners communicate with practitioners from other settings, this is so they can share all relevant information.

Bronfenbrenner's created the ecological systems theory, this is a theory explaining how the environment influences how the child grows and develops. There are five different levels of development in the theory, the levels are made up of the microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and the Chronosystem. The most intimate level is the Microsystem which is made up of people that are close to the child.

It is important that care givers and parents work together in order to provide the best childcare environment.

Children may display different behaviour in school or at home so it is crucial that parents and caregivers communicate in order to discuss and for everyone to be fully aware of the child's behavioural changes.

**Interventions**

Helping a child settle into their new setting is extremely important. In order to help the child settle learning could be encouraged through play as this is a familiar activity for the child. There is a vital connection between play and learning, children learn best through play without realising that they are learning. Singing songs and nursery rhymes also enhance children's learning in a fun way.

Children have instincts to play, they use play in the natural environment to learn about what's around them and their own capabilities and limits. According to Family lives "Play is one of the main ways in which children learn and develop. It helps to build self-worth by giving a child a sense of his or her own abilities and to feel good about themselves. Because it's fun, children often become very absorbed in what they are doing."

As they play children develop in many ways, it is extremely beneficial they develop physically, emotionally and socially.

Some emotional and behavioural benefits to playing are:

- Reduces fear
- Reduces anxiety
- Reduces stress and irritability
- It creates joy and self esteem
- Increases the Childs' ability to deal with change and surprise (Like a transition from a nursery setting to a school)
- Can heal emotional pain

Some social benefits to playing are:

- Teaches children to have compassion
- Teaches them to share
- Improves their verbal and non verbal skills
- Increases their attention span

Some physical benefits to playing are:

- Decreases signs of stress
- Decreases fatigue
- Releases endorphins
- Increases hand /eye coordination
- Increases Balance
- Increases flexibility and agility

Through the power of play a child can learn all of these essential life skills. Its extremely important that learning is fun at this age.

Another intervention that can be used to help a child in transition is to use a gradual approach to transition, this is known as the 'settling in period'. Using this strategy gives children time to adapt to and familiarise themselves with their new surroundings. It also

gives the child more comfort in knowing that they are only there for a short amount of time.

**Proposed outcomes**

It is important to think of children as individuals who all develop at their own rates and who all have different needs, backgrounds and abilities. No child is the same.
Transitions have a significant effect on the way a child copes with change. This is why it is extremely important for the child to feel safe and secure in the new environment.
When a child experiences a seamless transition, they will likely be more confident and happier and they will find it easier to make friends in the new setting.
I think that play is an effective intervention because it is a natural learning pathway and children do not feel like they are there to learn, transitioning to a new school could become a fun experience for them if done properly.
However, If a child has a negative experience with transition, it can cause the child to feel negative emotions like feeling distressed and anxious. Having negative experiences can also have long term effects on the children's development. It can affect their academic performance in a negative way. Children may be less likely to have a positive outlook towards the future and they may develop low self-confidence. Negative transitions can potentially have short term effects and long-term effects, some of these short term effects can include:

- Outbursts of anger
- Withdrawal
- Tantrums
- Difficulty sleeping

Some long-term effects can include:

- Lack of concentration
- Low self confidence
- Lack of self-esteem.

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