

A handbook for practitioners to understand the importance of effective communication during transitions.



Figure 1: (Transition to school, Mater Dei Early Childhood Education, 2006)

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Introduction

The aim of this handbook is to inform Early Years Practitioners of the process to support child's transition between nursery and reception. It will provide information on child development and give practitioners an understanding of how to support children and their families through transitions by looking at theories and suggesting practical ideas to help smooth the process. It is important to consider the needs of the child, the role of the adults involved and other partnerships, and what interventions can be put in place to support children through transition.

What is transition?

Transition is a change or movement from one stage or position to another in a child's or young person's life. (Flying start, 2017) These can affect various aspects of the child's life depending on their situation or emotional resilience. In Early Years this is a significant change from nursery to reception.

Brooker (2008) states "Transitions as a way of life" explaining that from birth until death, there are many events in life that are due to change. Not only starting school but reaching puberty, getting a job, and becoming a parent (Childrens workforce council, 2010).

Transition is important because children need change to learn or develop. Children can easily outgrow their environment and a change of this can develop not just intellectually but also physically.

As a result of the introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) particularly Article 12 "Every child has the right to a voice on matters that affect them" there was a change throughout the 1990's in people's thinking, and policies and procedures were put in place for children to transition through significant events supported by an adult (Donaldson, 1992) with the knowledge of what was happening. This is supported by Dunlop and Fabian (2007) who suggest that children have their own knowledge and are experts of their lives.

Transitions can be a form of many things. Firstly, the biggest transition in a child's life will be change. From a developmental view which could include reaching physical milestones such as crawling and walking to environmental changes such as a new sibling or moving house (Birth to Five Matters, 2021). There are also horizontal transitions that occur from routine changes during the day such as snack time or going to the childminders after nursery (Vogler et al. 2008). These changes can be positive or negative and will depend on the child's ability to move through their environment. At first children may be unsettled but as they become more familiar with their routine, they should adjust and become settled and secure in their environment.

Transitions are unfortunately out of children's control, and they need strong relationships with people to support them. There are many benefits to smooth transitions for children as feeling safe and secure will lead to learning and thriving at school both socially and academically by building strong relationships between families and school (Be you, 2022). According to Birth to 5 Matters (2021) effective communication between settings and information sharing can build on the continuity of care for the child based on the needs and strengths of individual children.



Figure 2 - Stock image

Needs of the child

Maslow's theory of the Hierarchy of Needs is important to consider the needs of the child during transition. Maslow (1962) proposed that for a child to reach their full potential they must have their basic and psychological needs met first. For example, a child being warm, fed and well rested. If they do not get this, they will not thrive. When this has been achieved children can then progress up the pyramid where safety is next. This is an important part of transition as children who feel secure in their environment will explore their new surroundings confidently with the knowledge that an adult may be close by to provide attention or encouragement if needed. Children will find comfort in a routine which will then provide feeling of stability and order (Poston, 2009). The next level shows belonging which includes love and acceptance. Relationships need to be developed to show the child that other people, apart from their immediate family can show affection which, will gain the child's respect and allow for understanding that other relationships can be built with other adults and then peers. This will again allow the child to feel confident in their environment and can concentrate on their learning and development (Montessori, 1914). The fourth stage is building self-esteem which an adult can play a significant role in. As children are learning adults can support their self-confidence and self-esteem by giving praise and encouragement. Once these needs are met children then progress up to achieve self-actualization which is where they achieve their full potential.

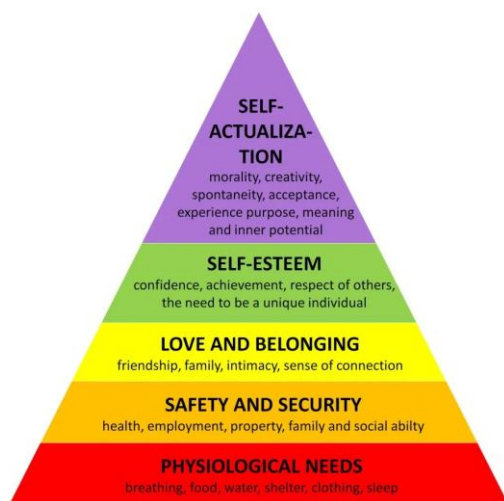


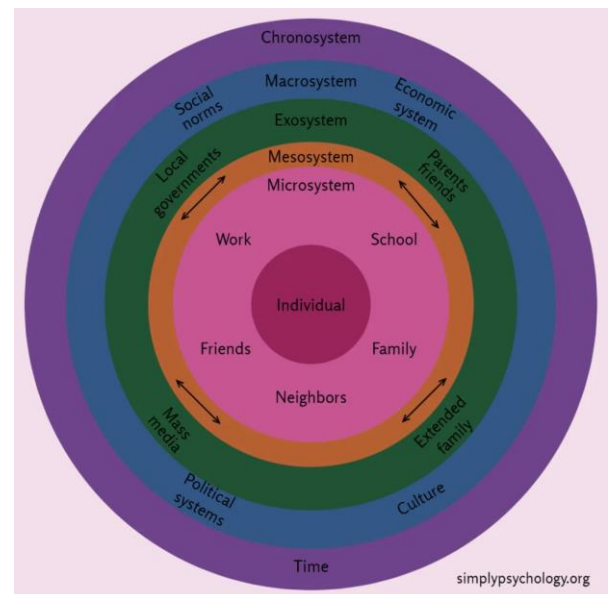
Figure 3: (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Simply Psychology, 2023).

Figure 4: (Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Simply Psychology, 2023).

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner (1979) supports Maslow's theory by stating how the child needs to feel safe. He developed Ecological Systems Theory as he thought that the child's development was affected by the surrounding environment. His theory focused on 4 systems and later 5, to suggest that throughout a person's life there may be factors that have an impact either directly or indirectly. The first system closest to the individual is the Microsystem in which the environment has the

closest contact. For a child, their microsystem is their home and relationships within the family. As the child starts to attend a setting, that becomes their microsystem too, joined by their teacher and peers. Children feel safe in such a small circle and these interactions with adults will develop autonomy. The next stage is Mesosystem which uses interactions between various parts of the microsystem. This can have a positive impact on children's development as systems are working together. Interactions between a teacher and parent show this (Early Years Matters, 2023). Bronfenbrenner claims that links between these systems can be increased by practitioners doing home visits and having meetings between parents and keyworkers to provide information about the child's needs and preferences. This is similar for the child to also bring familiar objects from home into setting to offer security whilst settling in.

Moreover, Petalozzi (1894) also considers the needs of the child with his theories believing that children should learn by following their own interests. Similarly, this is important for today's children as the Curriculum for Wales (2020) is now focused on learning through play and exploring the child's interests to learn effectively. Macblain (2018) agrees that practitioners in Early Years plan activities and learning to address the whole child focusing on supporting emotional and social development. This is done by taking time to observe



and listen to the children therefore placing importance on ensuring children are happy and promoting their well-being.

An equally important theory was Montessori (1907) who theorised that children learn through stages at their own pace which attends to their holistic needs, focusing on the child's learning through observations of their interests. Likewise, Pound (2008) explains that practitioners are encouraged to step back and observe the children to have a better understanding of their holistic learning and development. Therefore, encouraging children to be independent and take responsibility for their own learning which leans heavily to the Early Years Foundation Stage (2021) that is used in England currently.



Figure 5: (Home Learning Foundation Phase, Cilffriw Primary, 2023).

Role of the adult

Vygotsky (1978) whose theory of the Zone of Proximal Development is used to illustrate the difference between what a child can do independently, and with a supporting adult. This theory contributes to the present day understanding of the role of the adults in children's learning. Children now work in groups and adults use observation to inform practice. Vygotsky argued for differentiated teaching to cater for zones of development for individual children and considered the importance of play in child development (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). It was also suggested that children are able to learn through the guidance of others, particularly adults (MacBlain, 2018) and during play children copy the way adults conduct themselves and their behaviour and in doing so can create opportunities for learning.

Erikson (1963) believed there were a sequence of eight stages in an individual's life that were strongly influenced by adults and society. Infants are strongly reliant on caregivers as source of warmth, love, and stability which he thought promoted interaction with generations of the family. Between the ages of three to five children begin exploring and asserting control over their environment which leads to a sense of purpose and builds autonomy. With this in mind, practitioners need to develop a sense of trust with the children to allow them to feel secure. Children will need to be encouraged and supported in their independence to explore new surroundings which will eventually lead to children asserting control over their environment and thinking for themselves which should be evident in their play.



Figure 6 - Stock Image

Partnerships

The UK Government states that partnerships are essential in Early Years for settling children into a setting. There are several multi-agencies working alongside each other in Early Years. Reed and Walker (2015) states that working with other ensures that everyone is giving support to children and their families to meet their needs and ensure safeguarding if vulnerable.

Staff – enabling adults

The role of the adult is central for the Curriculum for Wales (2022). Practitioners create safe environments that support children to express themselves and learn. They pay attention to the interests of the child and plan engaging experiences to promote and facilitate learning.

Practitioners can form significant relationships with the child as a key worker to support transition and develop a sense of security (Patel, 2023). Childrens experiences can be enhanced when staff actively support children. Practitioners need to be engaging and listen to the child to make sure their needs are being met (Maslow, 1962). This will help to develop resilience, promote well-being and help children talk about worries that might be affecting them.

According to Bandura (1961) children learn through observational learning so adults need to be role models, demonstrating values and behaviour which are expected from them (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). Practitioners should have high expectations and provide a secure base for the development of trust to support transitions.

Bowlby (1969) proposed that children are preprogrammed from birth to develop attachments and maintain proximity to a primary attachment figure. In a setting primary caregiving involves an educator maintaining responsibility for a small group of children and places high value on interactions and care giving rituals including feeding and nappy changing. Practitioners provide a secure base for the child to support them to confidently explore the environment and develop additional relationships (Wilson-Ali et al. 2019).

Enabling environment and experiences

The environment, both indoors and outdoors are important for children to learn through authentic experiences where resources are of high quality and should accommodate

children's needs and interests (Early Years matters, 2023). The provision should allow children to make choices, solve problems and pursue interests during play which allow them to reflect and develop self-awareness (Tovey, no date).

Froebel (1887) was the first theorist to acknowledge the value of play and the importance of children's learning for social and emotional development. He also discussed the importance of children being active outside and learning through nature which allowed them to be active, creative and curious.

Outdoor play is equally important as it allows children to be free from the restrictions of being indoors. McMillan (1919) placed emphasis on access to outdoor play where children are free to run and become more engaged in activities and offers opportunity to work collaboratively. Outdoor play can also develop children's language further.

Parents

Having effective communication with parents can ease transition for all involved. When talking to parents, practitioners should be approachable and open in their conversations and provide support to ease parents' anxieties through this difficult time. Conversations between parents and practitioners can be reassuring for children to see as this will ease separation anxiety (Patel, 2023). A strategy that could help would be to provide stay and play sessions for parents to meet with practitioners and support their child in their unfamiliar environment by being close by (PACEY, 2016).

Communication

Communication is essential to a child's development as it builds a foundation of skills needed to learn, play and socialise (Curriculum for Wales, 2020). Practitioners can make the most of these interactions by supporting children and making them feel listened to and understood.

It is important for effective communication during a child's transition. Lots of people can be involved such as children, staff, parent/families, communities, other professionals, wider school, and multi-agencies. Communication is therefore needed to:

- Share information

- Learn
- Help others
- Enquire
- Socialise
- Direct

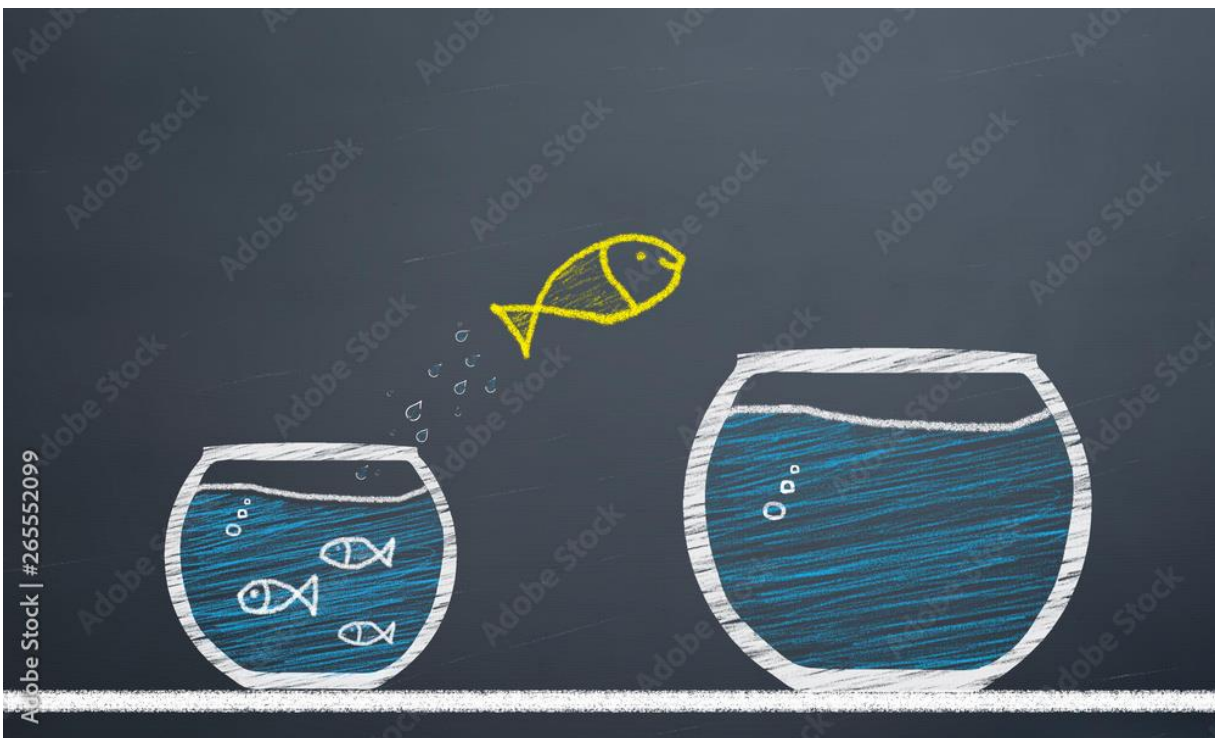


Figure 7 - Stock Image.

Additional learning needs

Transition with children with additional learning needs [ALN] will need to be carefully managed. If a child struggles with transition, it may affect their well-being or academic

achievement (Mentally Healthy Schools, 2020). Practitioners can ensure the following steps are taken to ensure a child is well prepared (Brodie and Savage, 2015).

- Communicate and engage with parents
- Support and reassure the child with positive language
- Liaise with multi-professionals involved in the child's care to ensure continuity of care through the transition.

It is important that at each stage of transition, the needs of the child are considered. A resource to help a child with ALN could be a social story to explain what is going to happen. This is a simple, personalised story to help explain transition using photos or drawings of them.

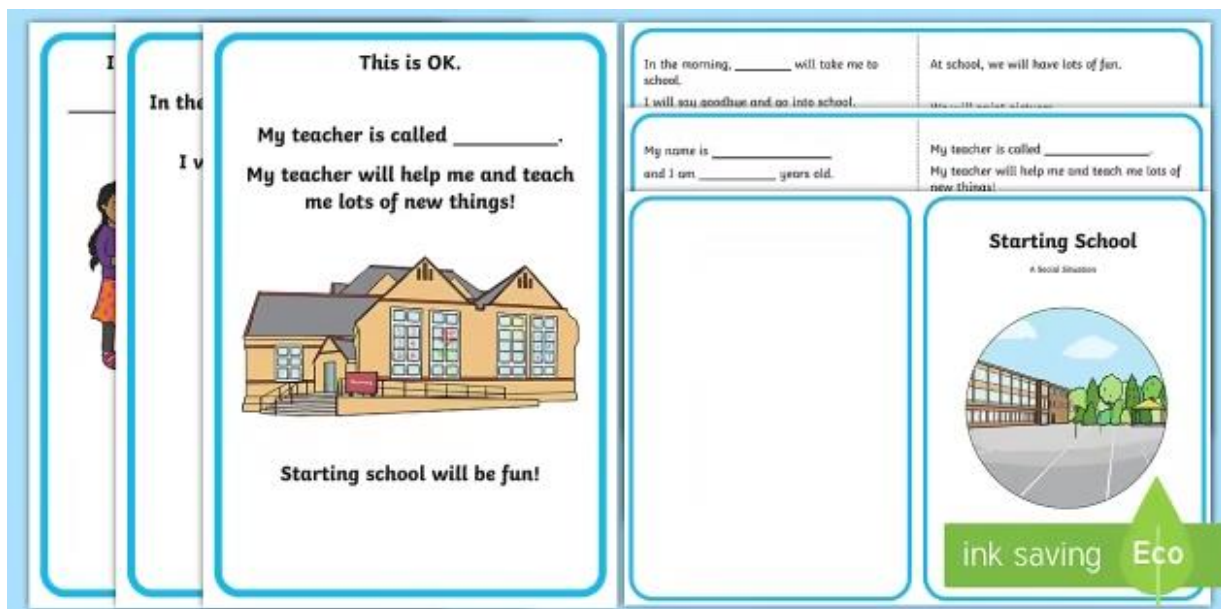


Figure 8: (Starting School Social Situation, Twinkl, 2023).

Interventions

Transitions that occur between one setting to another can be stressful for all involved. Therefore, it is important that everyone involved understand their role to help with the

smooth transition. This can be achieved by communicating information to parents about how to support positive transitions well in advance (Department For Education 2012).

For a child leaving nursery and entering reception, opportunities can be provided for the teaching staff to visit the child in their setting in which they feel emotionally secure. This enables the staff to liaise with key workers to share information. There may be a transition document to explain what developmental stage the child is at, their interests and any needs or additional support they, or their family receive. If these are completed before the child starts, it will smooth the process having that prior knowledge and to put procedures in place (Trodd, 2012).

If the child attends nursery in a cluster setting or attached to a school, an open day may be available for the child to attend school, meet the teacher, and explore their new surroundings. For the first experience it is recommended that the child attends with their parent or carer for a stay and play session. (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2020) Activities at the school would include lots of resources already familiar to the child such as Lego or painting to ease the process. Children need to feel safe and secure to continue to develop and build a sense of belonging. This is an ideal time to parents to ask questions and support their child in preparation.

For those who struggle with anxiety being separated from parents, transition booklets may be helpful. These are for parents to talk through the book with their child throughout the summer before starting reception. It would include pictures of staff, the environment, and a routine of what the day will be like. A home visit is provided for parents to also meet the teacher and discuss any concerns or addressing any anxieties they have sooner rather than later (Wilson, 2016). This can build trust with parents, and they will feel more comfortable in their own home to discuss any potential private issues.

If a child is showing signs of a change in behaviour this could be an indication of them being affected by transitions. Listen to the concerns of the parents and children and reassure them of what is happening. Practitioners will need to be sensitive to the needs of the child and often seeing things from a child perspective can be important for transition. Helping the child to build resilience to cope with change, understanding their new routines and developing self-esteem will build independence needed for a smooth transition. Parents can

assist and support the child in preparation for starting school and it is recommended that this starts as early as January in the year of starting school (Belfast Education and Library Board, 2011).

Proposed outcomes

The Curriculum for Wales was proposed in 2014 and has been rolled out to schools in Wales from 2022. It now contains the Four Purposes and is used to underpin all teaching and learning in Wales from aged 3-16.

Children will become:

- Ambitious, Capable Learners
- Enterprising, Creative Contributors
- Healthy, Confident Individuals
- Ethical, Informed Citizens

Foundation phase practice is currently influenced by other approaches from all over the world and share similar principles. Currently the Welsh Curriculum is inspired by the importance of play, the child's needs and the emphasis of their belonging in the world. In New Zealand their principles consider the whole child holistically looking at where the child is now, and the curriculum is based entirely on the child's needs. This was founded by Te Whariki (1996). The Reggio Emilia approach builds on the image of the child, their rich, exciting environment and relationships with others (Learning teaching Scotland, 2006). All these approaches have the child as central in common.

By creating a safe, secure and nurturing environment for children to transition from home or nursery to primary, the outcomes should see children as

- Happy and settled
- Confident and curious
- Able to make relationships with adults and peers
- Meeting developmental milestones



Figure 9: (Thinking about School Transition, The confident teacher, 2020).

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