A Guide To Transitions For Early Years Practitioners: The Importance Of Communication

(SOURCE: Microsoft Word 2021)

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Introduction

This handbook is suitable for an Early Years Practitioner, working with children in their early years, with the intention of complimenting the existing knowledge that staff already have at early years settings and schools.

This handbook has been specifically created for keyworkers working with children from the age of three to four, that have Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and are moving from a mainstream school to a specialist school. This handbook has also been designed to provide help and guidance to schools on how to effectively plan a positive transition for children.

This handbook will:

- Synthesise research from neuroscience, attachment theory, early childhood development, and childcare approaches.
- Provide a platform for practitioners to empathise with children and families in relation to their own understanding of how change and transition affect them.
- Examine methods for reducing the number of transitions, such as the key worker approach.
- Provide direction and practical ideas for supporting children during transitions.
- Further into this guide there will be mention of partnerships and inclusion, interventions that have evidence to improve outcome for young children.

What is a Transition?

Flying Start (2017) define transition as a crucial situation or a process of change occurring over a certain period of time, and the duration it takes children to adjust or make change. Transitions are new opportunities and growth for children, as well as uncertainty. Uncertainty can be displayed as an unfamiliar surrounding or a different routine (Early Years Matters, 2021). Furthermore, Kirklees Council (2019) state that it is universally identified that if a child feels secure at the same time as and after a transition, it is probable that they are more likely to be involved in learning activities and their new environment in a positive manner.

Moreover, Collins Dictionary (2021) also suggest that a transition could be gradually moving from one activity to another or a change from one environment to another. A transition is a term that can be used to refer to moving from a home setting to pre-school, or from pre-school to nursery to and from one class to another.

Miller and Pound (2011) propose that for children, and thereby for practitioners that separation from an attachment figure is classed as a distressing event. Theorist D.W. Winnicott (2005) developed the concept of children having a transitional object or 'comforter' which would support the child during moments of stress and help them recall a feeling of safety and warmth during this time.

Moreover, transitions are particularly more challenging for:

- Children with learning disabilities.
- Children with low confidence or poor self-esteem, due to a lack of emotional resilience ability
- The younger children in their age group (O'Connor, 2018).

We are all unique

It is important to remember that everyone is unique and will react to transitions differently – whether it is how difficult the transition is, or the amount of time it takes for the child to reach the transition smoothly.

Starting school and moving into a different class is a course of action that many of children go through every year across the world, and it is a time when both the child and the parents or carer givers experience a range of emotions. It is usually seen as a normal moment in any child's life, and many children find the challenge of starting school to be a joyful experience. However, studies suggest that too many children face cultural shock when they first attend school (Kirklees Council, 2017).

Holistic approach

The interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit is recognised in holistic approaches to child development and learning. Children's physical, personal, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being, as well as cognitive components of learning, are all considered when practitioners adopt a holistic approach. When planning and analysing a child's requirements, it's critical to take a holistic approach. It allows you to assess the child as an individual and identify what they have accomplished and what they have not accomplished by looking at how the developmental areas connect and how achievement in one area affects progress in another (Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), 2021).

The Needs of the Child

Early childhood is the stage between infancy and approximately six years of age and over time there have been many human theorists researching different methods of child development with argument. Development can be defined as the process by which children learn and grow over the course of their lives, and it can occur in a variety of settings (Crowley, 2017).

Development can also take place in different areas of expertise, and there are arguments on whether the nature approach to psychology is better than a nurturing approach. Nativists support the naturalistic side of the debate, and they believe that genetic makeup determines the aspects of human development such as intellect and frame of mind. Whereas supporters of the nurture side of the controversy believe that intetelligence and personality are acquired or learnt (Conkbayir, 2017).

Why is Attachment Theory important in transitions?

Attachment theory focuses on the formation of those earliest sensations of emotional security, including how and why they must occur, as well as what happens if they do not.

The attachment theory was first proposed in 1958 by John Bowlby. It is still the topic of much investigation and controversy more than half a century later. Bowlby theorised those attachments to parents and caregivers was a mechanism that has evolved to protect infants from predators. In attachment theory, an attachment is a bond that develops from a child's instinctive need for safety, security and protection. Earlier thinking had been that this instinctive need was driven by the need for basic needs (O'Connor, A 2018). Bowlby identified that it did not have to be the child's parents they have a positive attachment with, and that the attachment did not have to be reciprocated towards the child. Bowlby identified four different types of attachment.

Attachment type	Caregiver Behaviours	Child Behaviours
Secure	• React quickly and positively to child's needs • Responsive to child's needs	• Distressed when caregiver leaves • Happy when caregiver returns • Seek comfort from caregiver when scared or sad
Insecure – avoidant	• Unresponsive, uncaring • Dismissive	• No distress when caregiver leaves • Does not acknowledge return of caregiver • Does not seek or make contact with caregiver
Insecure – ambivalent	• Responds to child inconsistently	• Distress when caregiver leaves • Not comforted by return of caregiver
Insecure - disorganized	• Abusive or neglectful • Responds in frightening, or frightened ways	• No attaching behaviours • Often appear dazed, confused or apprehensive in presence of caregiver

(SOURCE: System Speak, 2019).

This table shows that there is just one secure type of attachment, and the others to be insecure. It also shows the behaviour of the caregiver will also determine the behaviour of the child.

Furthermore, a secure attachment is one in which a child is capable and can easily express their emotions and one in which the child is bold and self-sufficient. Whereas a child with an insecure attachment could show disruptive behaviour, have low self-esteem and find it difficult to interact with their peers (Aubrey and Riley, 2019).

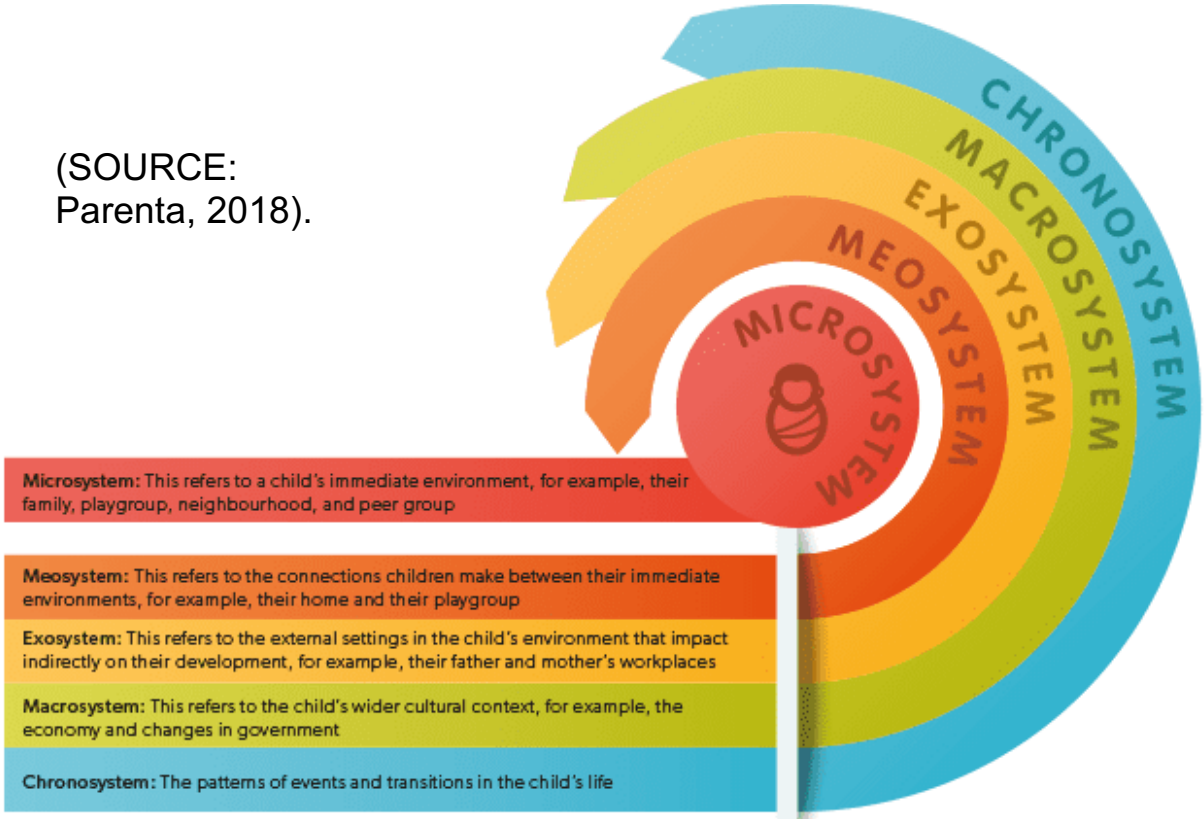
Ecological Systems Theory

It was Theorist Bronfenbrenner (1979) that discovered young children who made a smooth transition from home or nursery to school and had a favourable experience doing so were more likely to make successful transitions in the future (Hayes, O'Toole, and Halpenny, 2017).

Hayes, O'Toole, and Halpenny (2017) also acknowledged that Bronfenbrenner's theory recognised that a child's learning result and capacity to become successful learners were influenced by the environment in which they transitioned and developed, and that the developing child should be studied within their own natural surroundings practising activities that are known to them with individuals they are familiar with, implying that the genuine nature of the child can be exposed via these interactions.

The greater the child's chances of growing, learning, and developing are, the more encouraging and loving these conditions and connections are. As a result, it is in the best interests of the child for the changes they undergo to be successful, as a negative transition can traumatise a child, causing them to fear all future change and transitions. (Aubrey and Riley 2019).

(SOURCE: Parenta, 2018).



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow, among other theorists, pioneered a new approach to humanistic psychology. Throughout his research, he examined the structure of basic human necessities and were later established in the shape of a pyramid by his audience. The Hierarchy of Needs model was expanded to include cognitive needs in the 1970's, then later on was adapted to include transcendence needs – assisting other in reaching their full potential (King, 2010).

(SOURCE: BBC World Service, 2013)

According to Maslow, we must first meet our most basic demands before moving on to greater ones. After the lower order requirements of bodily and emotional well-being have been addressed, we are solely concerned with the higher order goals of influence and personal growth. Moving up from one demand to another would suggest that the person is fulfilled (King, 2010).

Level 1 and 2 are basic life needs, where we consider what is needed for survival. Level 3 is classed as psychological need where we the require love and belonging, and where we develop friendships, intimate relationships, and relativity. Level 4 is also a psychological need where the esteem needs are considered, this includes the need for recognition, the person's status, and reputation. At the top of the pyramid, level 5 is a self-fulfilment need where personal growth and fulfilment is recognized.

Recent scientific study on the neurological development of newborns and young children's brains supports these views. The brain of an infant is like a sponge, ready to be given varied and positive experiences so that it can reach its full potential. These numerous experiences will form neuronal connections that will allow for optimal mental and physical development.

Play

Play is a crucial tool for teaching self-control, as well as boosting language, cognitive, and social skills. Play allows children to gain physical competence and enjoy the outdoors, as well as to comprehend and make sense of their surroundings, engage with others, express and manage emotions, develop symbolic and problem-solving ability, and practise emerging skills. (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2009).

Play is a great way for children to learn. Through play, children learn and develop their cognitive, physical, and social skills. Play is an outlet and helps children to grow emotionally by providing an escape for anxiety and stress (NAEYC, no date).

The Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy (2002) suggest that humankind has progressed through the fundamental learning process of play. Children have an innate drive to play as a behavioural imperative. It is the very process of learning and growing, and as such, everything the child learns as a result of it is beneficial to him or her.

West Sussex County Council (2020) suggest that the outdoors can be thought of as a conduit for the child’s learning, linking the child to significant learning opportunities over which the child has control. The environment is critical in creating physical, emotional, and social spaces for learning and agency through connecting children with adults and other children within a shared community space.

Children who are encouraged to ask questions, seek answers, and learn how to communicate their ideas with others grow up to

be critical, intellectual, and possibly transforming adults (Smidt, 2009).

The Role of the Adult

Role Model

Practitioners can consider providing children with models of learning and behaviour. Frequently, the practitioner is a model for others. This is accomplished through a variety of daily activities, including reading to children, writing for them, being helpful, kind, consoling, and polite, and employing pencils, pairs of scissors, and other tangible instruments, among others. Every time a child sees an adult doing something, they are witnessing the actions of a skilled reader, writer, user of resources, and human being. It's also crucial to remember that children learn from one another, and that most of this learning happens through play (Smidt 2010).

Babies are born with the ability to interact from the moment they are born; they need to communicate with the outside environment in order to transmit their requirements to adults. This is accomplished via crying. Parents, particularly mothers, frequently discuss the importance of recognising their baby's specific cries. Given this intrinsic desire to communicate, practitioners must recognise the importance of their role in language modelling through the variety of first-hand experiences they provide to these early communicators (Clare, 2015).

Key Worker

In addition, it is important to firstly identify when children may be going through Transitions and how as a Practitioner you can provide support – Practitioners may be able to recognise changes in a Child's behaviour and attitude or have listened to a child expressing their concerns. Through managing the transition process in a timely manner and supporting the child to make choices of their own will contribute in achieving positive results, which will result in the child developing more confidence in their

own decision making (Children's Workforce Development Council 2010).

Finding ways to learn from the process of reflection is crucial. Educators and practitioners can benefit from previous experience if they:

- Establish connections between minute details and the broader picture; take a fresh or different perspective; try to see the world through the eyes of others in order to comprehend their perspective.
- Understand how feelings and emotions influence what others say, think, and do.
- Delay decision making and continue to find answers (Jones and Pound, 2008)

Smidt, 2010 suggests that being an early childhood educator necessitates a high level of sensitivity, the capacity to pay close attention to what children do and say, true respect for children and the work they do as they make sense of and act on the world, and a desire to learn. Furthermore, we know that children's brains grow rapidly, and synaptic connections develop rapidly during their early years, implying that they learn a lot in a short period of time. Practitioners should also be:

- Responsive, taking notice of what children are interested in and paying attention to, and engaging in dialogue with them about it when appropriate.
- Intersubjective, identifying what children are paying attention to or experiencing, and also respecting the children is required to help form a true two-way relationship.
- Interactive, in order to engage with the children as they play seek the lead given by the playing child.

Once a rapport has been established between the family and the professional, the relationship proceeds to parental engagement and collaboration with the parent's element of the hierarchy. Within these areas, the nurse's role changes to that of a teacher to parents/caregivers and a partner in the care of the child. (Warner, 2006).

These concepts, pedagogy, and best practises will not only ensure a smooth and successful transition for the child and family but will also improve children's long-term outcomes.

Inclusion

This section will consist of research based on the value of including children at various stages of development in early childhood settings, and the role of the adult/keyworker as well as collaboration with parents are also discussed.

Inclusion is a process through which all students have equal access to shared opportunities in ways that are appropriate to their needs and ensure that they are fully integrated into the school community. Inclusion necessitates the active participation of all parties involved. It puts the responsibility on schools to change their structure and ability to respond to suit the needs of all children and young people in all aspects of school life while also valuing their growth. Inclusion of students entails much more than simply placing a child or young person in a regular or special school. It necessitates an inclusive curriculum as well as steps to raise awareness of inclusive learning and equity problems among teachers and other personnel (Welsh Government, 2016).

Moreover, under Article 31 on the Save The Children Rights, all children have “the right to rest, play and take part in cultural and artistic activities.”. Therefore, children with ALN have the same rights as a neurotypical child. Warner, 2006 suggests that education is a procedure that allows impaired children to gain their rights and entitlements, as well as a sense of accomplishment that will boost their self-esteem and confidence. Teachers and others involved in school education must be trained in disability awareness to deliver this.

Children, parents, and carers can all be involved in the design and implementation of services and decisions that affect them through effective communication. It is critical to consult those who may be affected and to consider their ideas and viewpoints right away (Children’s Workforce Development Council 2010).

Interventions

Many therapies have been implemented to help young children manage transitions and are aimed at establishing and sustaining close relationships with families and children, which begin before a disabled child would start a new school.

Settling in sessions/phased entry

Lack of information of the surroundings can impede a child from accessing learning opportunities if they are unfamiliar with the rules of the setting. Grant (2016) suggests that structure is necessary for children with ASD because, despite their numerous variances, they all lack motivation to engage, learn, and play. They have inflexible and repetitive cognitive patterns, as well as talking and playing patterns, and are frequently motivated to maintain the sameness. Therefore, settling in sessions can help with the child's transition as they can study the routine in the new setting before attending and prevent feeling overwhelmed. To provide reassurance, a parent or caregiver may be encouraged to stay with their child, then spend some time alone from each other after a period.

Transition plan- reference

Even if the school has already received information from a previous setting, when the child begins a new school, the school is likely to assess the child's levels of achievement.

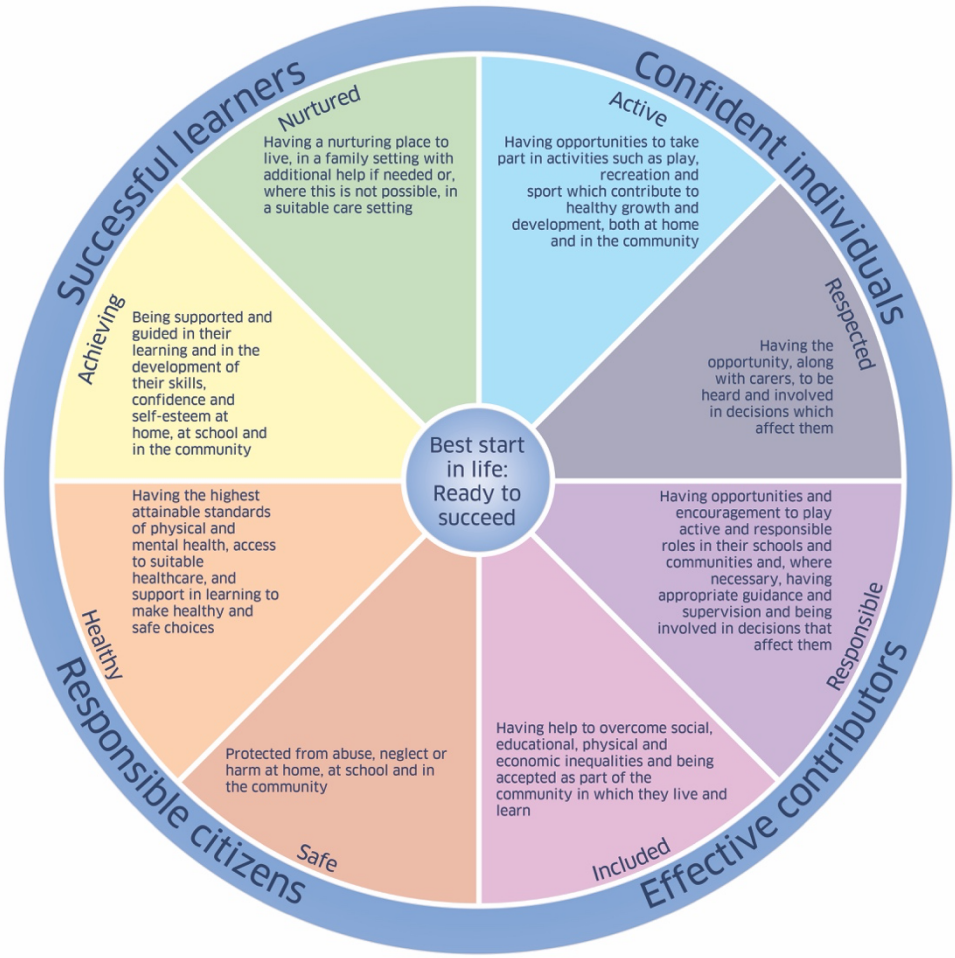
Considering some autistic children and young people find it difficult to transfer some talents to various contexts, it's critical to establish communication channels. They may also have complicated sensory issues and get uneasy in the school setting as a result of varied odours, noises, and lighting. Parents of caregivers may enquire at school if they are able to take in calming and familiar smells to assist them manage. Sunglasses or earplugs may aid persons who are sensitive to bright lights or noise.

Communication

Parents or caregivers should share information about the child's needs, likes, dislikes, abilities, struggles, and what makes them anxious with the professionals at the new school. Effective communication among parents, the child, the authorities, the school, and any support services will make a difference (National Autistic Society, 2021).

Observing

- What is this child paying attention to or interested in? How does the practitioner know or how can they find out?
- What experience does the child have of this? Who might need to be consulted?
- What does the child already know about this?
- What does the child feel about this? (Smidt, 2015)



(SOURCE: SSSC,2021a)

Proposed Outcomes

Taking into consideration that all children are unique and develop at different rates, putting the interventions in place and taking note of the keyworker approach will contribute to the child having a smooth transition.

Inclusive education is essential to develop a more inclusive society. The Welsh Government has recently conveyed toward an education system that includes everyone, rather than forcing disabled children to fit into a system that is not designed with their needs in mind, with the introduction of a policy for increased inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools (Welsh Government, 2020).

Vygotsky 1978 defined Sustained shared thinking as an event that occurs when two or more individuals work together to solve a problem. This will almost always be between an adult and a child, but it might also be between children if one of them is a "more knowledgeable other". Sustained Shared Thinking can take place in small groups as well as one-on-one talks. The term 'work together' emphasises the importance of it being a collaborative and team effort (Brodie, 2014).

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