

Practitioners Handbook



Transition in the Early Years

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Introduction and Aims

This handbook supports early years practitioners with the fundamental structure of how children's transitions work and why they are important in child development. This handbook will analyse and provide answers to what is meant by a transition period? It will clarify the needs of the child, the role of the adult, working in partnership, and how this can have a positive impact on families that the setting operates with. Using practical strategies in practice to provide a smooth transition process. Therefore, achieving each child's individual desirable learning outcomes, for all children to reach their full potential. We will explore contrasting theories connected to the early years and how we utilise them in practice, utilizing holistic environments where children can learn, flourish, and achieve inclusively while feeling safe and have a sense of belonging.

What service do we provide?

Flying Start is a funded Welsh Government Early Years Program. Working with families and children aged 2-3 years. The program offers sessional care for families living within the eligible postcode areas. Providing a flying start to children in some of the most disadvantaged areas in Cardiff.

- Free quality childcare 12.5 hours per week.
- Enhanced Flying Start health visiting service
- Parenting support
- Support for speech and language
- For more information: <https://www.flyingstartcardiff.co.uk/>

The setting is registered with Care Standards Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

What is meant by a transition period?

Transitions include not just movement between one setting to another in a linear way, but movements “horizontally” from one room to another within the same setting, moving to a more structured part of the day such as a mealtime, or moving from home to a childminder, to nursery and back again all in the same day. A time in a child’s life where change occurs.

Birth to 5 Matters (2021).

According to (Vogler et al. 2008). There are two forms of education associated transitions.

Horizontal and Vertical.

Horizontal transitions are a part of everyday life and include daily routines. Such as travelling from home to school and back again. General routines like brushing teeth, mealtimes and visiting the local park then returning home. Therefore, there are less significant changes.

Vertical transitions are major key changes such as moving from nursery part-time to school full-time. Moving house to somewhere new and unfamiliar. However, horizontal transitions can impact children’s experiences of vertical transitions which can affect their well-being.

Why is communication so important during transition?

To communicate effectively with families is paramount, using our services improves professional relationships. To be a good communicator you need to encourage two-way dialogue. Promote conversation, build trust and respect. Once the foundations are established, parents and carers will feel that they are able to share even sensitive information. This will also promote a positive approach; this will enable practitioners to check in with families to share information about the child's progress, further transition arrangements and any concerns from the setting or the family.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) points out that, 'Creating a strong relationship between parents and the school or setting is a key starting point to any intervention. 'Strong partnerships between home and school can support positive family relationships and promote learning at home' (Stewart-Henry and Friesen, 2018). This statement affirms why communication is so important during transition and intervention.

Jane Drake (2006) believes that early year professionals need to support children through communication, listening to their views, reacting to them in the context of improving the quality of provision. Supporting children to make choices, providing access to resources and activities. The ability to co-construct with children enables the practitioner to enhance the activities and learning environment. This will develop children's understanding of their ownership which will influence learning, it will make the child feel liberated by being involved and give them a sense of purpose. Developing children's ability to be critical is needed and must be developed over time, by supporting children with the skills to promote confidence, provide opportunities and language to facilitate this. Embedding an inclusive ethos which encompasses the child's views and interactions are significant, this will promote a high-quality pedagogical provision.

Caroline Vollans (2023) supports this by pointing out the importance of affirming relationships with parents. Adults in life profoundly impact early brain development, which in turn affects ongoing learning. For most children, significant family members are the primary caregivers providing this important foundation.

How can we prepare a child and family to attend our setting?

The transition process needs to be a gradual, well planned out and inclusive. Ensuring it is not rushed, for the child and family to adapt to the new surroundings. The child and family involved will be warmly welcomed and feel a sense of belonging. Communication is significant, enriching connection with families and providing reassurance and trust in a non-judgmental relationship.

(Brook, L 2008) suggests that studies conducted by Hughes *et.al.* (1979), Jackson (1979) and Cleare *et.al.* (1982) considered the perceptual nature of transitions in the early years. They did this by looking into how children cope, face fears of uncertainty, adapt to rules, routines, and cultures. Well- being and separation anxiety can cause emotional stress, which can create long term insecurities and barriers for the ability to learn. Transitions can also provide opportunities to enrich and develop positive dispositions. Natural dispositions such as the curiosity to investigate, should be embraced by the practitioner. It must be encouraged and extended through positive communication and reflection.

As a setting, this is achieved through an initial meet and greet session, followed by a series of settling-in sessions which increase over time. Giving parents and carers the opportunity to stay at the initial sessions to provide reassurance, support, and familiarity. This gives the practitioners an opportunity to make established relationships with the families before the child's start date. Becoming acquainted with the family is a valuable time.



(Bing Sourced: 23rd November 2023.)

The Role of the Adult

When we talk about the adult's role, we are not just referring to the practitioner.

From birth, a child will form an instinctual bond with their primary carer usually their mother, this is known as attachment. Attachment theory illustrates the purpose of the bond and close relationship between caregiver and child in relation to security, safety, and behaviour. A child who has a close warm bond to their primary carer has the foundations embedded to make it possible to explore, discover, problem solve and take risks in time to learn and grow. With the reassurance their carer is there to support and offer safety. The originator John Bowlby of the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1953). His argument was that children need a primary carer in their life (usually the mother) to form a relationship with. This creates a secure attachment, without this relationship, the child's separation and loss would affect social and emotional development and future learning.

When a child begins their journey at the setting, they will have to adapt and form bonds with unfamiliar people. Dowling (2014) states that young children need a familiar adult during transition periods. For some children, a form of separation anxiety is quite normative, decreasing over a brief time. When the child's realisation is made through repetition and routine, the primary carer will return.

All children are individuals, develop differently, have their own personalities, characteristics, abilities, skill sets, backgrounds, and experiences. They can find change and the transition process stressful and unsettling. This can affect their emotional well-being, positive interaction, and engagement with others. Some children will be better at coping with change than others. Children may respond with confidence, but for many transition experiences can be daunting and unsettling.

(Drake, 2006). All children are unique.

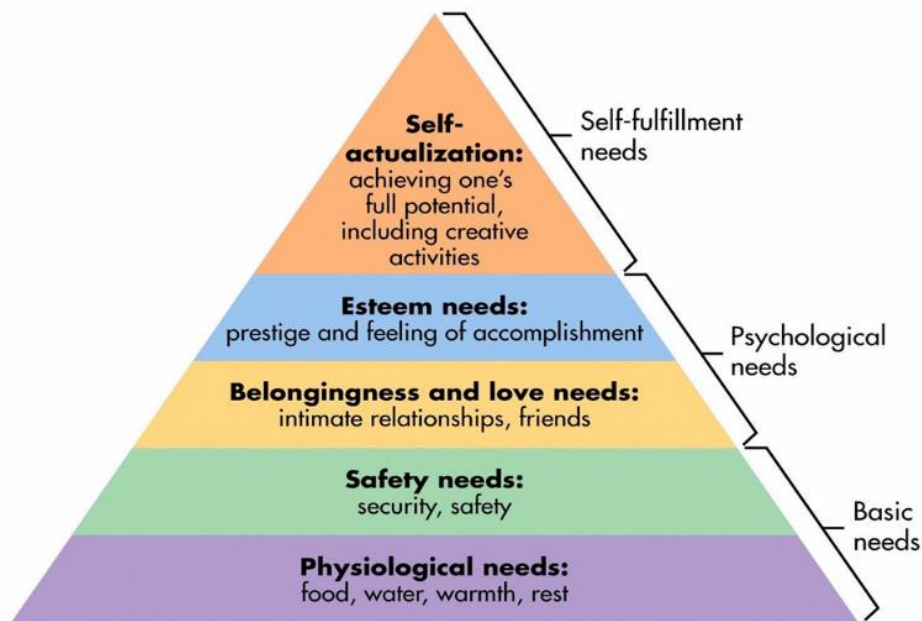
‘Emotional bonds to parents broaden to peer and teacher relationships and to the school setting, affecting academic progress’ (MacKay *et al.*, 2010:100).

This is where both parents and practitioners play an integral role in a child’s transition journey. If a child has had positive first-hand experience with secure attachment, they will find the process more enjoyable and an exciting experience. The child will feel comfortable and confident to explore their environment and adapt to change more naturally due to feeling safe, secure, and accepted. The child will feel happy around the practitioner and begin forming a bond due to enjoying the experience. However, a child that has experienced lack of acceptance by a primary carer that has formed an ambivalent attachment, may have low self-esteem with a feeling of failure, feeling they can never achieve. The child may be reluctant, affecting their ability to bond with another adult outside their family circle, or lack warmth and empathy towards others including their peers. Therefore, transition may not be as smooth, the child will be more anxious and have lots of negative thoughts. These need to be nurtured by practitioners, taking positive steps to be enhanced, praised, and recognised.

Bowlby, J (1907-1990) created the theory of attachment, he believed closeness between caregiver and child formed a significant attachment, these are normal and a comprehensive part of human life. Babies are born intuitive to seek out such attachments for safety. John Bowlby’s theory of attachment argued that a child’s emotional bond to their caregiver was a biological recognition that warrants survival. The quality of attachment influences the child to form trusting relationships. When an attachment between a child and adult has formed, attachment behaviour occurs which both adult and child are part of. The child will look for further physical closeness with the adult when they are anxious or frightened this will diminish when they feel safe and secure. As a child gets older the need for attachment decreases. Attachment behaviour will continue through adulthood, looking for comfort and reassurance.

In practice Flying Start values and implements the importance of children’s attachments within the setting and at home. Family links with the setting are integral to our practice.

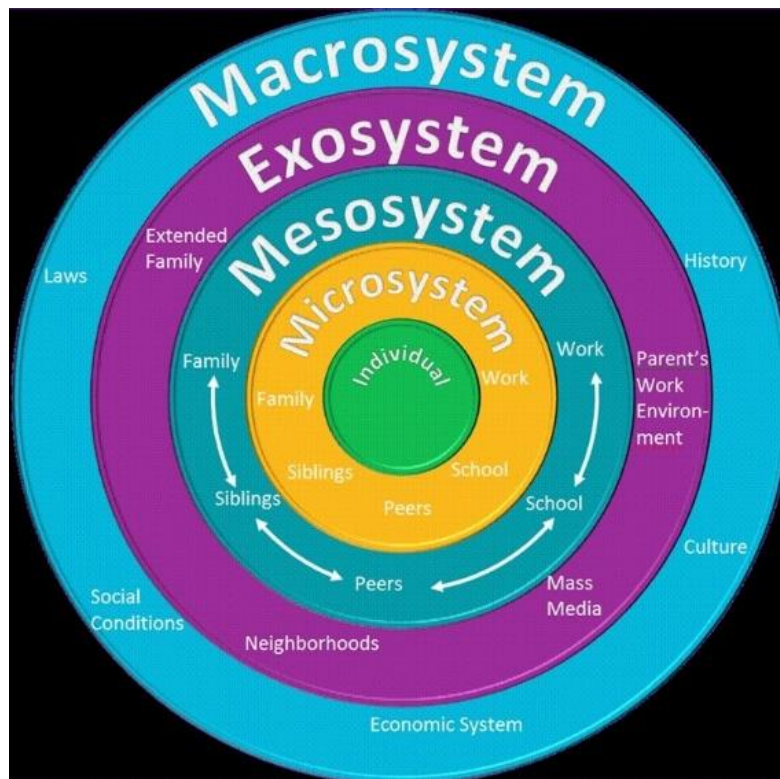
Maslow, A.H. (1943). Maslow Hierarchy of Needs also support the attachment theory, it demonstrates what individuals need to be nurtured to thrive and achieve. It shows how the hierarchy model must be satisfied before the requirements are met effectively.



(Source: Simplypsychology, 2020)

This theory is also relevant to practice as it looks at needs of the child. Physiological needs such as feeding a child, providing warmth and a place to rest where they feel safe and secure. These needs allow a child to feel safe both emotionally and physically. These are basic needs known as lower order. As you move up the hierarchy you reach the stages of higher order. These needs are forming relationships outside of the attachment circle. Esteem needs are extremely important in the hierarchy method, where a child feels they have a sense of belonging. They will grow in confidence and feel comfortable in their own skin, feeling accepted for who they are. The child's pinnacle achievement is to fulfil their full potential in all they do.

It is said that Bronfenbrenner's theory which makes up the ecological environment, which we all live, and grow is a foundation to good practice. according to (Brook L 2008). This theory also supports effective transitions. Bronfenbrenner's model (1976). Believed a holistic approach to child's development would be more beneficial. This ecological systems theory is an accepted interpretation of the influence of social environments in relation to human development. This theory argues that your environment will affect all aspects of your life.



(Source: SusanMarie, 2017)

This is relevant to practice; it shows us that interconnecting experiences in a child's immediate environment are beneficial to learning.

The Needs of the Child

Every child has a voice this must always be in forefront of our minds as early years practitioners, in every aspect of our practice this includes interaction and observation. To enhance communication in the early years we need to ensure we are using techniques such as the OWL technique observe, wait, and listen. To shared sustained thinking which involves engaging in activities and rich language conversation with adults and their peer group. children learn about the environment through verbal interactions. This improves children's critical thinking, communication skills, collaboration, self-esteem, and confidence, essential skills for future learning.

Dowling (2014) suggests when researching the child's needs, it is important to understand every child is an individual, as to are their needs. Needing to establish a relationship that creates a warm bond, to get to know the child. How they think, what are their likes and dislikes, what interests them?

The brain of a child develops through experience. Neurological and physical development are completely linked. Practitioners, psychologists, and educators understand that children need to experience changes to develop effectively. Providing different environments offer children new developmental opportunities. Brain development in the early years accelerates as promptly as their physical growth. In the last 20 years brain research in the early years has reminded us of continual growth of new synaptic connections in young children's brains, this is an uncontrollable force which peaks during pre-school age, continues into middle school and further into adolescence. (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000).

Using clear concise communication skills when dealing with children in the early years is essential as this creates a solid foundation for a child to respond with confidence. Communication can be challenging for many reasons. The child may have additional learning needs (ALN) Speech and language difficulties (SALT) It is possible that mutism, speech impediments, tongue tie or other forms or speech delays would impact communication, however through Welcomm screening and support from Flying Start speech and language and Inclusion teams, strategies will be put in place to assist this and support the child's communicative skills and

learning. Inclusive practitioners possess extensive knowledge and experience recognising signs of when a child is in need or additional support is necessary. In these instances, families are posted to the appropriate teams. Supporting and working together in partnership with families using the same strategies within the setting and at home.

Half termly formal written observations will take place to monitor each individual child's developmental progress to reflect on their interests and needs. Adapting our 'in the moment' planning to enhance children's experiences and learning outcomes. Schematic play patterns known as 'Schemas' will also be incorporated into planning. Giving opportunity for children with schemas to embrace what they enjoy. (Louis S, 2021). Suggests an awareness of schemas will assist practitioners to describe in more detail how and why children are approaching learning the way they are. This will help practitioners better describe the children's complex play methods.



The importance of play

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) understood the importance of play and believed play was a way to learn. Children build on their understanding of the world through direct experiences. He saw childhood as a part of nature. In his words “Play is a child’s work.” Froebel had solid views on play and its place in child development, that it promoted enjoyment, positively stimulating emotional well-being. He believed that the education of young children was essential to their development as individuals and to social reform. (Accessed 26th November 2023)

Play can be meaningful where children can learn, develop, explore, and establish their ethnic identity through socially collected ideas. When children start their journey at an early year’s setting, they bring a wealth of cultural knowledge which they have gained from their home and local community. This can be acknowledged and developed from shared languages, beliefs, and values. Practitioners have a responsibility to have knowledge about children’s ethnic identities by communicating with parents and carers. Due to modern day society play has declined. Restrictive family life, school schedules, fewer safe public places to play, and the increase of technology are some of the reasons. Froebel’s teachings of freedom, unity and nature are more relevant than ever. Many practitioners, carers, and parents are looking at his theory to lead the way in their practice.

Article 31

It is important to ensure children are provided with space to play.

Article 12

It is every child’s right to have their voice heard in decisions that affect them.

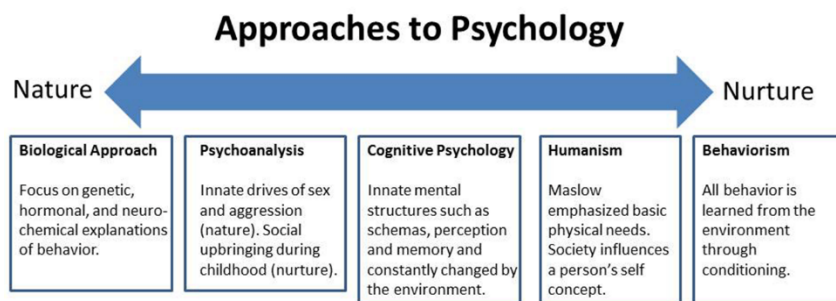
The Articles 31 and 12 are outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (UNCRC).

<https://www.unicef.org.uk> (Accessed: 19th November 2023).

Dowling (2014). agrees play helps children to learn and develop, it is also an underlying factor during transitions. Dowling (2014). States that children will ‘play out’ their own life experience which shows us things from a child’s perspective.

Nature explains the biological characteristics we are born with and tendencies in relation to certain traits. Nurture on the other hand has external influences that shape who we are. This encompasses relationships, culture and what we experience. The argument here is that genetics determine our personality development, this would be considered a natural approach.

Others view the environment is more influential. Receiving a nurturing upbringing could enhance a child’s personality. Both sides have valid arguments for their respective replies.



(Source: Simply Psychology, 2021)

Looking into other theories, it is very apparent these have influenced the structure of the Foundation Phase Curriculum. Regio Emilia (1860-1963). Believed that a self-guided curriculum allowed children to express themselves in diverse ways as they develop. Children are seen as a valued member of the community exploring, questioning, and interpreting the world during their early years. The practitioner will collaborate rather than instruct the children. It is an inclusive village-style approach based on collaborative learning.

Montessori (1870-1952). Method differs where each child is taught as an individual. Scheduling large blocks of time. Providing children with responsibility. Allowing children to take risks. There is no separation from the outdoor and indoors. Montessori believed knowledge through outdoor experiences with nature and the change in seasons were an integral part of learning about the natural world.

Working in Partnership

The provision will collaborate with multi-agency teams. Conduct wellbeing and involvement screening that is sent to Welsh Assembly Government.

We also have occasions where we need to contact the Multi- Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for advice or make a Multi-Agency Referral Form known as a (MARF) if a child is at risk or significant harm. Following safeguarding policies and procedures. All staff have the Safeguarding app downloaded to their personal devices and understand the correct pathways.

<https://safeguarding.wales>

Practitioners need ensure a rapid response to any child is in clear difficulty with.

“Respectful educators will include all children; not just children who are easy to work with, obliging, endearing, clean, pretty, articulate, capable, but every child- respecting them for who they are, respecting their language, their culture, their history, their family their needs, their abilities, their name, their ways, their very essence.” (Nutbrown, 1996)



Interventions

Before any child starts at a Flying Start playgroup, many interventions have been put in place.

Meet and greet session. This gives opportunity to visit the setting and meet the staff. This initial meeting is getting to know the child and the family answering any concerns they have.

Collaboratively completing an 'All About Me' sheet. This gives us lots of information about the child and parents. The provision provides a warm welcome which is inclusive, non-judgemental and offer an open-door policy.

Staff use traffic lights to help with the transition of routine, the use of traffic lights are inclusive to all children.

We have a Facebook page where all parents are informed of up-and-coming events and can view photographs of the children enjoying activities. We also print a newsletter each 1|2 term.

Staff communicate to parents or carers at the end of each session.

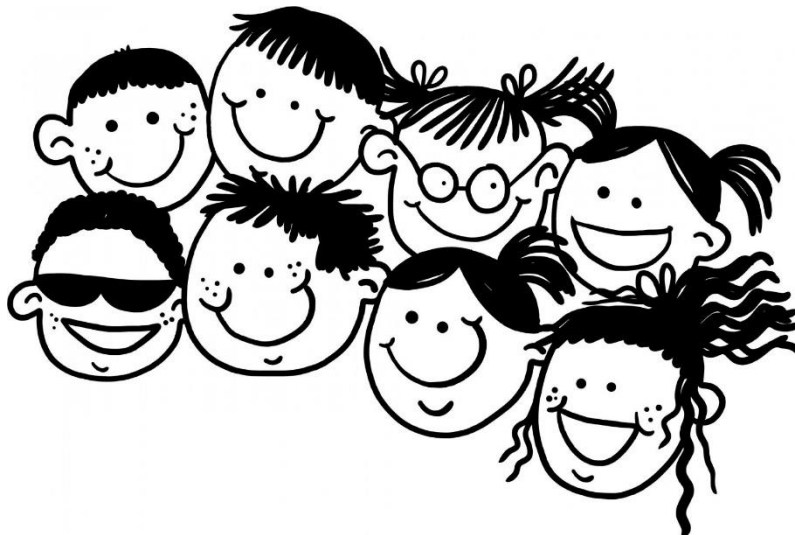


Proposed Outcomes

How do we know as practitioner a child has successfully achieved desirable outcomes during a transition period?

The child will be happy on arrival when greeted by the practitioner. They will potentially walk in independently or wave at the door to their parents or carers. The child will make eye contact or use physical contact with the practitioner. The child will be content in exploring independently and begin to play parallel. They show interest in what others are doing and may even join in play. The child will demonstrate a sense of contentment. They will confidently approach practitioner's when they need something or want to ask a question? Building friendships with their peers, using rich language and vocabulary that has developed through play and interaction with others. They will thrive and gain confidence, taking risks and exploring environments that did not appeal to them initially. They will voice opinions and make choices. The child will adapt to routine and comprehend the concept of boundaries.

Interaction between adult and child creates security. The connection between relationship and experience makes us who we are.



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(Source: Simplypsychology, 2020)

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