

## **Transitions into Nursery settings.**

### **A handbook for practitioners.**



Source: School Education Gateway

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## Introduction:

This handbook sets out to help practitioners and children to navigate the transition which occurs when children first attend nursery setting, to benefit the development of the child.

### **What are transitions?**

Transitions are periods of change a child experiences. A period of transition which was formally thought of as a one-time event, is now thought to last until the child is a fully integrated into the setting (Welsh Government, 2017).

A child navigates many transitions throughout their day (Dunlop and Fabian, 2007) this could be:

- home to wrap around care
- wrap around care to school setting (which may even take place within the same building)
- school to after school care, extracurricular activity, or home.

During these daily transitions, a child will need to re-adjust and become familiar with the routines and rules of each setting. These types of transitions are described as horizontal transitions (Welsh Government, 2017).

A child will also experience a transition during periods of greater change in their lives such as moving year-groups, moving home, parental separation or welcoming a new sibling. Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes these transitions as Ecological transitions while, more recently, Welsh Government (2017) describes these types of transitions as vertical transition and goes on to describes a link between the child's experiences of horizontal transitions and the successful navigation of vertical transitions. This highlights the importance of supporting the successful navigation of transitions to improve the child's wellbeing and experiences.

During these transitions, the changes to the setting and its environment, rules, unfamiliar adults, and new peers are all factors which can have an impact of how the child navigates transition which in turn can influence the child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

As set out within common core skill for the children's workforce supporting the successful navigation of transitions is a vital part of a practitioner's role to support the child's wellbeing and development. (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2010).

Birth to 5 matters (no date) states that every child is an individual with specific experiences and home life, such as their previous experiences of transitions or their parent's views being imparted on to them. These experiences can impact on how a child views a transition.

Brooker (2008) believes that children who navigate transitions positively develop resilience. Dunlop and Fabian (2007) also state that the successful navigation of transitions at an early age impacts their ability to navigate transitions positively as they grow which is supported by Birth to 5 matters (no date).



## **Relationships:**

Early Education (2011) encourages practitioners to build open trusting relationships with the child and their family, as well as respecting the relationship between the child and their family stating that collaborative working with families can improve the child's outcomes. Birth to 5 matters (no date) echoes this in saying that it is vital that practitioners build trusting relationships with the child and their parents and caregivers to assist with the smooth navigation of transitions.

### **Relationships with the child:**

Relationships are key to successful navigation of transitions and to the child's development (Education Scotland, 2016). Welsh Government (2016) outlines the need to encourage caring, secure relationships within settings.

Estyn (2020) states the importance of practitioners becoming familiar with the child. Therefore, it is vital that practitioners build a rapport with the child and that the child forms a relationship with the practitioner. Early Years Matters (2022) echoes this and says that attachments can help develop resilience and independence in children, two key skills to successful navigation of transitions. Early Years Matters (2022) further states that attachments can affect subsequent relationships, which evidences the need for practitioners to build those bonds with the child.

Tovey (no date) explains that Froebel believed humans have a fundamental need for connection with others, and through these connections create a feeling of wellbeing and acceptance. Therefore, it is important to remember that positive relationships with the child can improve their experience of the transition process.

Pacey (2014) states that good practice should include discussions with the child around the excitement and anticipation of the transition to come and to recognise their feelings as this can support the process.

Birth to 5 matters (no date) also discusses the importance of continuity between the settings in which the child accesses to provide high quality learning experiences. This can only be achieved with communication and trusting relationships. Therefore, it is important that practitioners value the voice of the parents as well as have open collaboration with previous settings and other outside agencies that may be involved with the child.

### **Relationships with the parents:**

A child will flourish when there is a relationship of mutual trust and respect between the setting and the family, Tovey (no date). As such it is important that practitioners also build relationships with the parents.

Dunlop and Fabian (2007) indicate the importance of partnership working with parents and good home-school links to increase knowledge of the child's developmental stage. Dunlop and Fabian (2007) further state that parents should be involved in the transition process and consulted to assess the interventions to support the transition. This is reiterated in Brooker (2008).

Donaldson (2015) emphasises the importance of two-way relationships and communication between parents with settings and places a value on parents being able to support their child's learning with clear information provided to them by settings. This is also the view of Siraj-Blatchford (2002) because of the findings of the REPEY project which found that children's outcomes improved with partnership working.

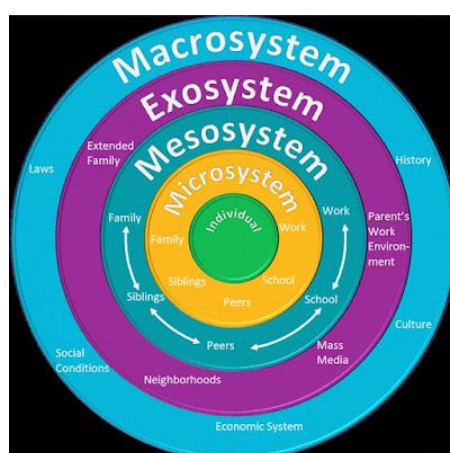
This evidences the need for effective communication with parents. To that end it is vital that parents feel they have their voices heard (Birth to 5 matters, no date) in order to build those trusting relationships. This is a view reiterated by Education Scotland (2016) who state practitioners must take notice of the views of the parents.

O'Farrelly and Hennessy (2014) explain that parents value practitioners who invite their feedback on the process of transitions as they unfold as well as having regular contact throughout the day between setting and parents. Although a small study, this supports Birth to 5 Matters (no date) and Education Scotland (2016) view of parents having a need to feel their voices have been heard.

However, Scharer (2018) discusses the impact frequent daily communications can have on practice as these can be time consuming. Therefore, it is important that practitioners find a balance and can discuss with parents in order that they have realistic expectations.

Pacey (2014) highlights the importance of establishing and supporting the parent with their feelings regarding the transition. It is possible that a parent who is leaving their child with a practitioner for the first time could have negative feelings towards leaving their child in a setting. This can be a feeling of grievance as they feel forced into leaving their child or sadness at the thought of their child growing up. Conversely a parent who has multiple children may feel calmer about the process.

### **Multiagency relationships:**



Source: Susan Marie (2017)

Bronfenbrenner (1979) indicates the importance of relationships and partnership working between the practitioner and the child to a child's development. This is not limited to the child and the practitioner, it also indicates the importance of

relationships between parents and outside agencies including any other settings they attend, and other stakeholders involved in their care and development as well as their family. Similarly, Pound (2006) discusses the methods and thoughts of Malaguzzi and the parent-led schools in Reggio Emilia, which exemplifies the benefits of relationships between the agencies around the child.

Likewise, Birth to 5 matters (no date) also states the importance of interagency relationships and open dialogue to gain information in relation to the child's experiences and development. This exemplifies the need for practitioners to communicate effectively with parents and the other systems/agencies around the child, ensuring that all available information related to the child is collected and shared effectively.

## Needs of the child:

Brooker (2008) discusses the importance of a child having their fundamental needs met and the difference that home lives and experiences can have on how a child navigates transitions.



Source: Research History (2012)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs depicts the layers of needs a person must meet reach the peak of the triangle which is self-actualization. Cullen (2011) discusses this pyramid and explains that Maslow's belief centres around every person having the same set of fundamental needs and that the pyramid works as steppingstones from one set of needs up to the next. As such the fundamental needs must be met before a person can begin to make connections and relationships and move to becoming confident individuals, a sense of achievement and mutual respect. Pound (2006) also discusses the need for the child to feel caring connections with the adults around them to flourish and reach their full potential.

It is therefore vital that practitioners ensure that the child has these basic needs met before they can develop to their full potential. This can be achieved through partnership working with parents and multiagency working, MacDonald (2016).

Open communication between settings and the children's families is vital to help the children to become embedded in the setting (Birth to 5 matters, no date). This is because these discussions allow practitioners to gain an understanding of the child from their primary carers. This information allows the children to feel that they are safe within the setting and that they belong, as within Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Article 12 and 13 of Unicef (no date) UNCRC states that all children should be able to give their views and feelings about their experiences and have their voices heard. This is also supported by Birth to 5 matters (no date) who suggest that the children and parents should be asked about their feelings towards the forthcoming transition. Scottish Transitions as a Tool for Change Project Group (2019) explains that through listening to the voice of the child they grow their sense of belonging within the setting. Therefore, it is vital that practitioners seek the views of the children, get to know their preferences and interests, and adapt their practice and settings accordingly.

These articles impress the importance of child centred practice. Brooker (2008) discusses how practitioners can find the views of the child without needing lengthy

discussions, through observation and careful, age-appropriate communication aids such as art and story time.

Unicef (no date) UNCRC article 31 states that children also have the right to play as such it is vital that practitioners allow time for play, offer environments which are conducive to play and realise the value of those play experiences in terms of development.



Source: Children and young people's commissioner Scotland.

It may be important for the child to have a link with home, such as a blanket or teddy. Cullen (2011) explains Donald Winnicott's theory and that it is believed that a transitional object may allow the child to self sooth and create a connection between home and the setting.

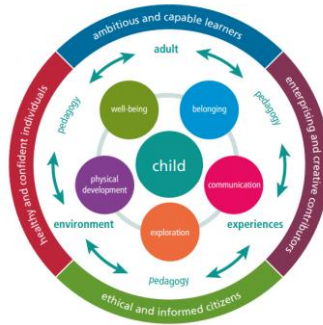
## Role of the adult:

There are many roles that practitioners will be required to fulfil for the child to navigate the transition as positively as possible.

Tovey (no date) discusses Froebel's belief that there is a need for practitioners who understand child development and practitioners who can ignite a spark of excitement and enthusiasm for learning, as well as practitioner that can build respectful relationships. This is re-iterated in Welsh Government (2022) who state that practitioners should provide settings that are stimulating and authentic, as well as model enthusiasm for learning and build on the child's natural desire to learn.

### The three enablers:

Welsh Government (2022) emphasises the importance of an enabling adult, environment, and experiences to create the most favourable settings where children can develop and learn to their fullest potential.



Source: Welsh Government (2022).

This is supported by Tovey (no date) who suggests that practitioners – the enabling adult - should offer exciting enabling environments, which are accessible to all and provide sensory learning opportunities and explains that Froebel believed that children's learning is heightened when it is provided within a hands-on approach, rather than through listening alone. This evidences the need for practitioners to offer environments rich in sensory activities and opportunities to explore and play.

Tovey (no date) goes on to discuss the child's need to access opportunities for meaningful play within settings - enabling experiences - as Froebel believed that play is also important to children's development.

Play allows for the development of communication and social skills, resilience, and self-reflection. Welsh Government (2015) state that play enables the child to build confidence, which is vital to navigating transitions positively.

Pound (2006) explains the importance of practitioners who understand the learning opportunities within play as well as practitioners who are not anxious around the unstructured nature of play, instead recognise the important building blocks to future learning that are provided within play.

## Key Person Role:

Early Years Matters (2022) discusses the role and positive influence of a Key Person, stating that they should be a known adult to both the child and their family and that as such they are required to build trusting relationships. Birth to 5 matters (no date) states that it is beneficial for a child to have a known adult with them whilst navigating the transition. Department of Education (2021) discusses the role of the Key Person providing the child with a comforting support.

Holmes (2006) indicates that separation anxiety can be limited with good foundations from a trusted adult. That is to say that with a strong attachment to a trusted adult who can give explanation and guidance, a child may navigate transitions with less distress. This exemplifies the need for communication with parents and communication and collaboration between previous settings and other outside agencies. It is important that the children are aware of the transition that is ahead and with good home-school links parents can inform their children accurately, which will ease the process.

## Signposting:

Bristol City Council (2022) explains the need for practitioners to become a point of contact and signpost parents and caregivers to help and advice either within the setting or to other outside agencies who may be able to offer advice, guidance and support to the child or their family.

Cambridge University Press and Assessment (2021) discusses the importance of effective communication with parents and the importance of practitioners who can communicate in an appropriate manner. It goes on to state that it is vital that practitioners communicate in a polite, precise, and understandable manner ensuring that the information is accurate and provided in full as depicted in the following image:



Source: The Open University (no date)

Donaldson (2015) suggests the requirement for practitioner observations to assist with early identification of needs to enable early interventions. This is exemplified in MacDonald (2016) where exceptional multiagency working and early intervention evidences a positive outcome for the child and their development.



## Interventions:

Birth to 5 matters (no date) suggest offering relaxed stay and play sessions for children and parents to come to the setting together, before the child is beginning at the setting. These are an excellent way for children to become familiar with the new setting and offer opportunity to improve relationships between parent and setting, and time to gather additional information relating to the children before they start at the setting.

Brooker (2008) explains that visits such as stay and play sessions exemplifies Bronfenbrenner's theory, explaining that these provide for good home-school links and information sharing opportunities which are key to the setting understanding the needs of the child.

Fabian and Dunlop (2002) further explain that when children recognise the setting and become comfortable within it that they are better able to adapt to the requirements and rules of the setting. With that in mind, welcome packs containing pictures or interactive welcome packs containing video tours enable the child to familiarise themselves with the settings layout and organisation.

Birth to 5 matters (no date) encourages practitioners to visit the children in their home, this is because this is where the child will feel the most relaxed. Not only does this allow for relationships to be forged between the practitioner and the parents but it will offer opportunity for the child to get to know the practitioner on their own turf. The child will be able to observe their parent or caregiver engage in a relaxed relationship with the practitioner and start the vital process of building a relationship with the practitioner themselves, in a place that they feel safe and secure.

Pacey (2014) suggests documents such as 'All about me' forms which will allow practitioners to gather the information in an organised fashion. This could include information such as:

- My family/pets
- My friends
- My favourite toys
- My favourite book/song
- My dislikes

Below is an example of such a document:

|                                                                                                             | Things I like | Things I don't like |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
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| <b>To eat</b><br>        |               |                     | <b>My communication skills: Please tick</b><br><table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td>I let people know my needs by talking</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>I let people know my needs by pointing</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>I let people know my needs by writing</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>I can hearing, repetition</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>I can hearing, PECS</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>I can pointing, or pictures, or photos</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>I can say some words and phrases</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>I can speak in full sentences</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">People who don't see me every day can understand what I say</td> </tr> </table> | I let people know my needs by talking |  | I let people know my needs by pointing |  | I let people know my needs by writing |  | I can hearing, repetition |  | I can hearing, PECS |  | I can pointing, or pictures, or photos |  | I can say some words and phrases |  | I can speak in full sentences |  | People who don't see me every day can understand what I say |  |
| I let people know my needs by talking                                                                       |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
| I let people know my needs by pointing                                                                      |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
| I let people know my needs by writing                                                                       |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
| I can hearing, repetition                                                                                   |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
| I can hearing, PECS                                                                                         |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
| I can pointing, or pictures, or photos                                                                      |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
| I can say some words and phrases                                                                            |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
| I can speak in full sentences                                                                               |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
| People who don't see me every day can understand what I say                                                 |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
| <b>To visit</b><br>      |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
| <b>To play with</b><br>  |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |
| <b>To comfort me</b><br> |               |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                       |  |                                        |  |                                       |  |                           |  |                     |  |                                        |  |                                  |  |                               |  |                                                             |  |

Source: Education Authority (no date).

As suggested in Cullen (2011) a transitional object may link home and setting and although this will be an object from home to setting at first, as the emotional dependency on this reduces a school to home teddy may eventually provide the link between settings.

Welsh Government (2017) discusses handover meetings between current childcare providers and new nursery settings to share information to ease the transition process as exemplified in Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Co-construction of classroom rules to gain an understanding of what is expected within the first days of transition. (Dunlop and Fabian, 2007) This is a view also supported by Brooker (2008) who further states that there is a great deal of importance in setting clear rules and boundaries for the child to successfully navigate transitions.

## Proposed outcomes:

A period of transition continues until the child feels secure Dunlop and Fabian (2007). This will become evident when the child is happy, keen to attend, confident to play and interact with others and has a strong relationship with the practitioner. However, this may look different for every child and so this reinforces the importance of observation. Allingham (2012) explains how different children become familiar with, and adapt to, attending settings and goes on to discuss what being confident and comfortable may look like for them. This can be very individual so it is important to be mindful that every child is unique and will develop at their own pace however signs that the child is settled will be evident.

These signs might include observing a child:

- Arriving at setting more settled and relaxed
- Engaging in activities
- Increased independence
- Confidence
- Building relationships with peers and practitioners

This is supported by Brooker (2008) who states that a practitioner may observe a child displaying signs of contentment in their non-verbal communication, for example smiling or laughing. Holmes (2006) provides The Attachment Behavioural System while discussing Bowlby's attachment theory. Although this is used for a child up to the age of 3, the child will have only recently celebrated their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday upon accessing rising 3s, and so this will remain a useful tool to assess a child as they settle into the setting. This shows the results of a positive attachment being the playful, happy, social child who is happy to explore their setting.

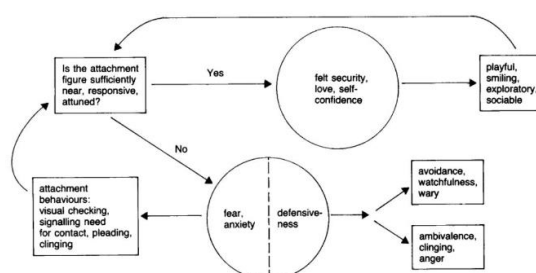


Figure 4.1 The attachment behavioural system

Source: Holmes, J (2006).

The Attachment Behavioural System (Holmes, 2006) also identifies the behaviours of a child who has not formed positive attachments and so will not be settled into the setting. These include being introverted or angry.

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