

Effective communication during transition to Reception

A handbook for early years practitioners

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Introduction

This handbook is for all early years practitioners, to support their understanding of the importance of effective communication with children, their families, colleagues, and the wider multidisciplinary team, particularly during the transition to school. Kagan (1999) states that starting school is a “big deal”. Dockett and Perry (2001) agree with Kagan and discuss how the experiences children have of this transition, have a lasting effect on their future education. It is vital then, that we as practitioners manage this transition well, and afford all of our children the very best foundation for their future learning.

This handbook gives specific examples of ways to support individual children and their families, as well as general guidance on ensuring effective communication.

Effective communication with children is essential during the transition to school, to ensure that children quickly settle and feel secure in the setting, allowing them to progress with their learning and development. Similarly, effective communication with families is essential, to enable practitioners to support the individual needs and interests of children, and forge a strong partnership between the setting and home. Effectively communicating with colleagues and other professionals is also of paramount importance to ensure that the very best environment and curriculum is created for every individual child, and any special educational need or disability is quickly identified and supported.

According to Clark and Waller (2007, p.32) “The increased involvement of parents and children is recognised as a way to support children’s transitions in settings in England.”

As early years professionals, we must adhere to the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2023), as well as the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015).

These documents are the starting points for our policies and procedures to ensure the very best foundation for our children’s learning and development.

Best practice has been influenced by the work of various influential theorists, such as Bronfenbrenner’s theory about how social environments can affect child development. Davies, D. and Troy, M.F. (2020) discuss the evolution of child development, and how early models of child development were focussed on maturational theory, whereas later theories favour the transactional model of development.

What are transitions?

Transitions are a period of change, that can make children feel vulnerable, as they may have little control over the change, and be anxious about what is going to happen.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that every child, in accordance with their age and understanding, has the right to a voice on matters that affect them. Communicating with children about what is going to happen during a transition, can help them to anticipate the transition and feel supported to manage the transition, and express their own preferences, that practitioners should take into account. The Department for Education (2012) research examines how the quality of provision can be improved through effectively integrating children's perspectives.

Vogler et al. (2008) categorise transitions as vertical transitions that are key changes that occur, such as starting school, and horizontal transitions are regular occurrences that are less significant, such as moving from a less structured part of the day to a more structured part of the day.

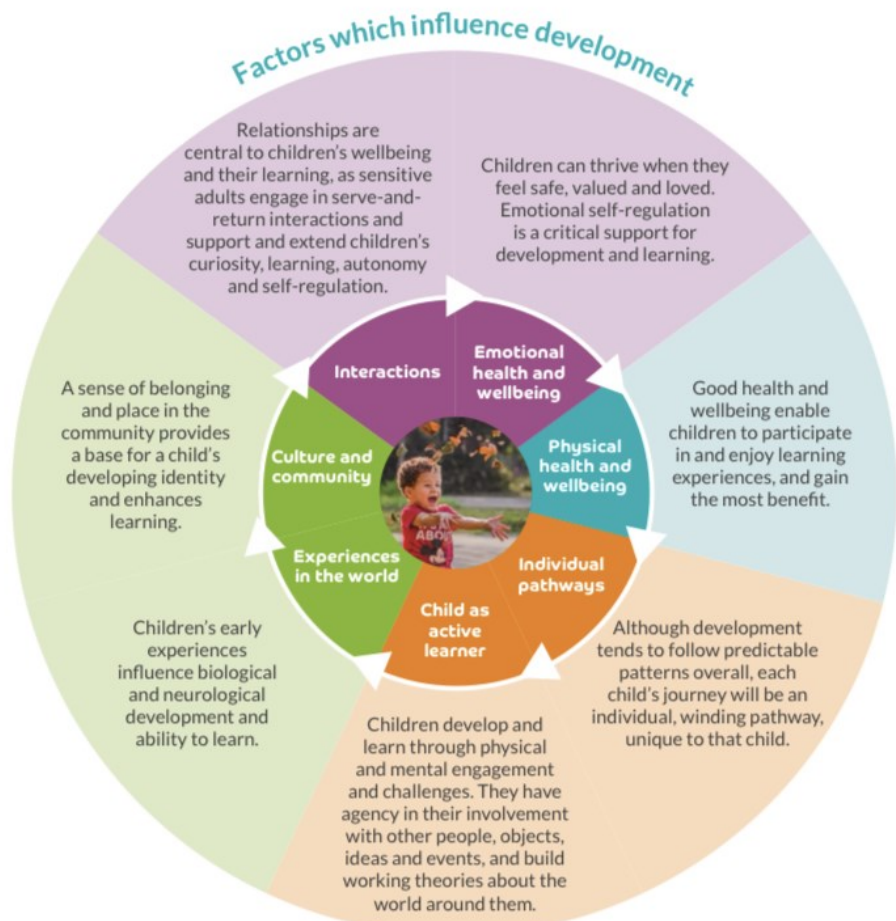
Transition is a process and not an event (Birth to 5 matters, 2021), so it is essential that practitioners plan how best to support children through transition, to enable them to continue to support children as they adapt to new situations.

A unique child

One of the four guiding principles of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2023) is that every child is unique. This must be acknowledged and considered when supporting children through transition. Dockett, Perry and Howard (2000), discuss the need for diversity of transition programs to reflect the diversity of children. Some children will manage transitions with ease, where others will require more support. It is essential to develop secure attachments and an excellent knowledge of all children in the setting, to enable practitioners to best support all children.

Children arrive at our setting with differing experiences, which will affect how they view and manage transition. Our setting has a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils, who are eligible for pupil premium, including pupils who are looked-after children. Our setting also has a higher than average proportion of children who speak English as an additional language, as well as children identified to have a special educational need or disability (SEND). Communication difficulties will affect our ability to support a child through transition.

Children arrive at our setting at different points in their developmental journey. Child development can be influenced by various factors, including being identified as having a special educational need or disability (SEND), children's emotional health and wellbeing, and the quality of interactions that they have been part of. It is essential that we value all children and endeavour to best support them as individuals.



Birth to 5 Matters—A Unique Child , 2021 ,p. 18)

The Communication Trust (2015, p.5) states that more than half of children from areas of social deprivation, start school with delayed language. We must support our children with their communication needs, in order for them to be able to settle in the setting, manage transitions and to improve their future learning.

Children's speech and language is assessed during the first half term, using the WellComm assessment, and Speech and Language Therapy is offered by the SALT HLTA if required, in addition to class based interventions being planned to address any gaps in language identified by the WellComm assessment.

The needs of the child

There has been much research and many theories about child development. **Maslow** argued that human needs were arranged in a hierarchy, with it only being possible to meet higher needs in the hierarchy, if lower more basic needs had been met first. For example, children are only able to be confident and have self-esteem, if they first have their physiological needs met, such as being adequately fed and rested.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, CSA Education, 2003

In our setting, we ensure that each child's physiological needs are met by offering bagels on arrival to ensure that children are not starting their day hungry. Bagels are available at tables, where children can come and sit, to ensure that they are not walking around whilst eating, and reducing the risk of choking. Children also have access to their water bottles whenever they wish and do not need to ask. Children can freely use the bathroom, and children who need support to do this are identified during the home visit or through transition meetings with their previous setting, and suitable support is planned and communicated with the child and their family prior to coming into school. Water bottle trolleys and bathrooms are identified to children on their first visit. The importance of a good bedtime and morning routine is discussed during summer coffee mornings, and families are signposted to relevant information and advice. Quiet spaces are available if children are tired or feeling overwhelmed.

In addition to meeting basic physiological needs, it is essential to ensure that children's social and emotional needs are also met. The **theory of attachment** was first developed by a psychologist called John **Bowlby** (1958), who noticed that the relationship between an infant and their primary care giver, has a profound impact on their social and emotional development.

Practitioners must ensure that every child in the setting feels secure and develops a relationship or secure attachment with them. The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2023, p.28) states that every child must be assigned a key person to "offer a settled relationship for the child". The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2023) also mentions positive relationships, and adults being responsive to individual needs.

Talking to children about their emotions, will help them to understand and manage their emotions, and seek support when necessary. Practitioners should recognise and validate children's emotions and provide them with strategies, such as taking deep breaths, counting to ten, going to the calm corner or seeking adult support.



The role of the adult

The role of the adult is crucial during transition to school. **Positive relationships** are one of the overarching principles of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, as well as **enabling environments with support from adults**.

In our setting, we take time to get to know our children and their families before they start in Reception. Nursery and Reception have regular opportunities to get together in the outdoor provision, where Nursery children can become familiar with Reception staff, and Reception staff can begin to form relationships with children before their transition to Reception.

Children who are joining Reception from other settings, are invited in for play sessions with their parents or carers prior to transition days, in addition to coffee morning for parents and home visits or setting visits, where staff get to meet the children and their families.

Practitioners observe the current interests of children and consider this when planning the curriculum and enhancing the continuous provision. Practitioners also use information obtained by parents or from transition documents completed by previous settings.

A consistent daily routine is carefully planned to meet the needs of all children, and this routine is communicated to families and children, as well as a visual timetable being displayed.

Practitioners should be using adaptive learning to ensure that activities and areas are accessible to all children.

Practitioners should also be allowing children to express their opinions and have their voice heard.

(United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child)



Visual timetable, Llewellyn-Jones.E, 2022

Information is clearly communicated with families by Marvellous Me, and reminders are also given in person or visually displayed on the windows, such as parent workshops or story sessions, to ensure that all families are aware of events, and have the opportunity to attend.

First Aid is reported to parents by email through Evolve, and any more serious injuries are communicated to parents by phone call immediately.

Parents evening happens every term, in order to discuss the progress that children are making, and parents are also free to chat to staff at the end of the day.

Any incidents of poor behaviour that have been logged on CPOMS, are discussed with parents at the end of that school day, either in person or over the telephone.

Practitioners are encouraged to send Marvellous Me messages often, informing parents about what their child has been learning, and celebrating children's learning.

To aid transition, at the start of the academic year, parents are invited in to school to demonstrate how the various methods of communication detailed above are used and support is offered to set up accounts.

Working in partnership

Good communication is essential for effective partnership working. Dockett, S. , Perry, B. and Howard, P. (2000) state that "effective transition programs rely on reciprocal communication among participants".

Practitioners should consider information obtained through parents or previous settings, when planning their curriculum, and practitioners should seek advice or expertise from other agencies when required.

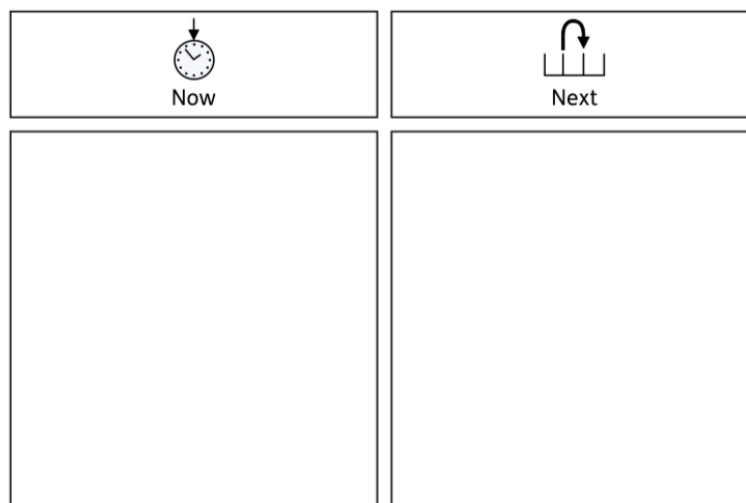
Practitioners should complete an initial concern on CPOMS if they are concerned about a child's communication or speech, to alert the Speech and Language HLTA to complete an initial assessment, and be able to offer advice or to contact outside agencies if necessary.

Any potential concerns about a child's learning and development should be discussed with the SENDCO, to ensure that all children are receiving the support they require.

Interventions

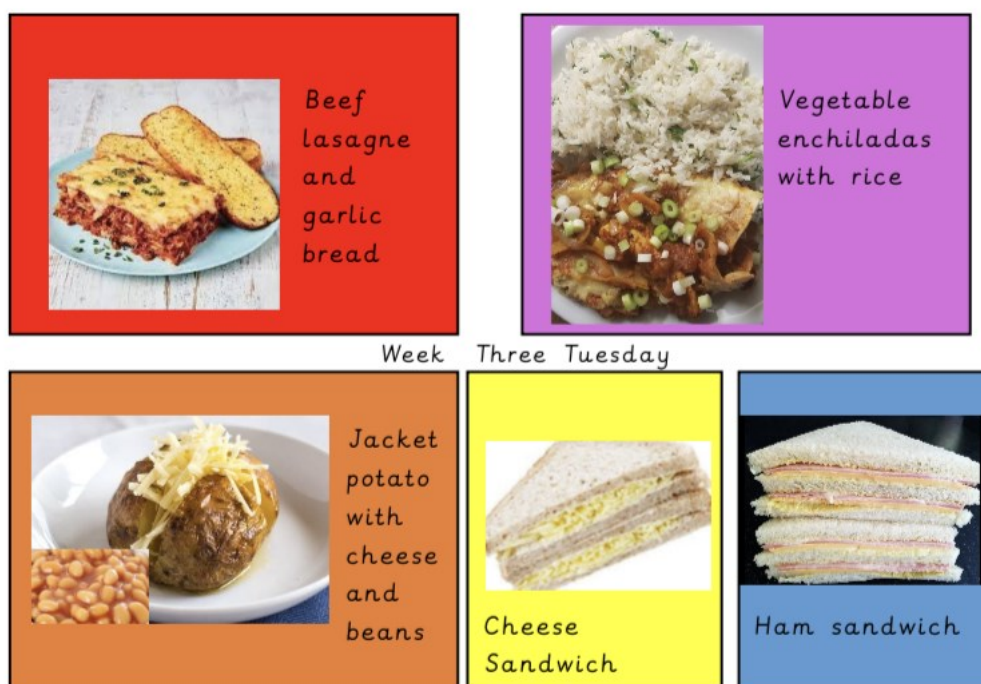
Children who are identified as finding transitions particularly stressful, can be supported by the use of a now and next board, to prepare them for upcoming transitions.

During home visits, families and children who speak English as an additional language are identified, and where possible, staff who can speak their home language are present to help with communication.



InPrint image

Menus are shared with parents, so they can help their child to select their lunch, and visual menus are used to enable children to see what is on offer and be able to choose by pointing, if they do not have the language to say what they would like to eat.



Visual menu,
Llewellyn-Jones, E.
(2023) created using
google images

Expectations, including how to keep safe, are shared with children in a way appropriate for their level of understanding. Sometimes visuals are used to make things clear to children who may not understand what is said verbally.



Families are asked to provide family photos to display in the setting, so children can be comforted by them, or assist children to communicate about their own homelife and family.

Pre-teach is used to support children with vocabulary or a new concept before it is taught to the class.

Information may be sent home in advance, to aid future learning.

Visual sand 'rules',

Llewellyn-Jones, E. (2021),
made using the InPrint program

WellComm assessments are undertaken to identify children who's speech or understanding is below that expected, and targeted interventions are then planned and delivered.

In addition to using the non-statutory guidance Development Matters (2023) and Birth to 5 Matters (2021), the setting also uses The Communication Trust's *Universally Speaking* guidance (2015) to support practitioners to spot children who are struggling with communication and know how to support them. This is particularly important during transition.

Proposed Outcomes

Transition is a process and not an event (Birth to 5 matters, 2021), so it is necessary for practitioners to continually monitor how children are managing transitions and adapt their practice accordingly. Children may require a lot of support to manage the transition to school initially, such as a reduced timetable, or children may make the transition to school with comparative ease. All children are unique, and their transition process will also be unique.

The best possible outcome is for the child to be happy to attend school, learning and displaying the characteristics of effective learning.

Practitioners can support transition in a range of ways;

- Adapting the daily routine
- Adapting the learning environment
- Reducing the timetable initially or allowing familiar objects to comfort the child
- Talking about what will happen and using visual timetables or now and next boards to help children to know what is happening and going to happen
- Talking about emotions, enabling and allowing children to express their emotions
- Opportunities to get to know children and their families prior to starting school
- Home visits and questionnaires to find out about the interests and needs of the child
- Partnership working with previous settings, other professionals and families
- Ensuring that practitioners form a secure attachment
- Being sensitive to the individual needs of every child

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