# A Handbook for key workers in early year's settings to promote their understanding of the importance of effective communication for young children's learning and development during transitions.

(source: Biological Beginnings, 2020)

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# Introduction

This handbook will help you gain knowledge and understanding in how adults and professionals can prepare children practically and emotionally to help support children in early years.

In the early years, from birth to five years old children have busy lives and will go through transitions. Transitions can be any form of change in a child's life, these transitions may not necessarily be a change of setting but can be as simple as a new person collecting the child from the setting or introducing new things or people. (Allingham, 2012)

There are three different types of transitions, vertical transition, horizontal transition and internal transition:

- **Vertical transition** - is when a child moves from early years into school.
- **Horizontal transition** - is an experience a child has on a daily basis.
- **Internal transition** - is when a child moves from room to room. (Libe prints 2020)

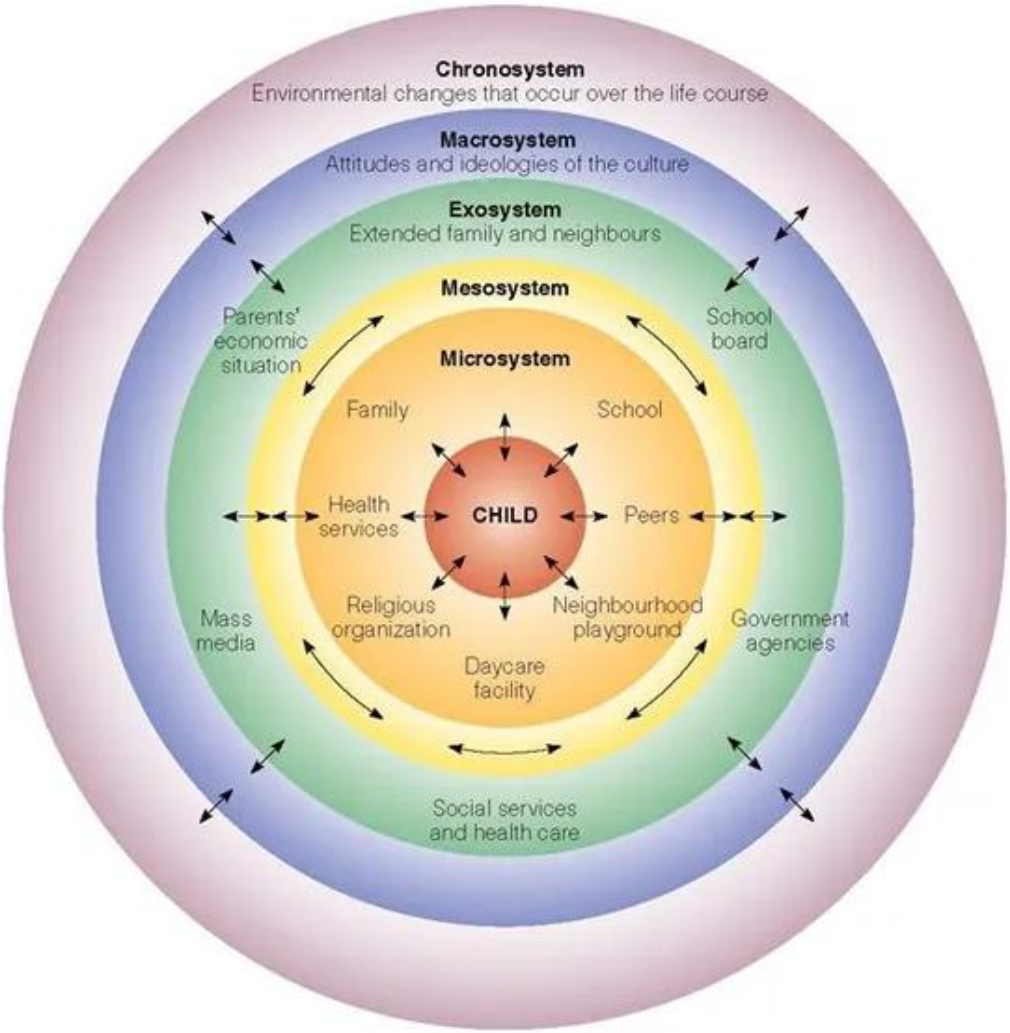
Children in the early years make vertical transitions into new environments. Vertical transitions is usually a move from places such as the child's home to pre-school or from pre-school to school. Transitions can be a very stressful time for children and they can become nervous and anxious. Practitioners can help children with their anxiety of transitions and help make the process as smooth and as stress-free as possible, this can be as simple as inviting the child and parents into the setting for a visit or two before the child's start date. This will help the child to be familiar with their new surroundings. Early Years Careers (2020)

Booker (2008) says that research has identified that children going through transitions do not necessarily have a good and happy experience and that transitions could threaten a child's self-esteem and self-confidence. Booker (2008) also says that children may feel insecure during transitions.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) created the Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner identified that it is important to study children in different environments to help us understand their development. Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems theory is made up of five different levels of external influences starting with the child at the centre. The following lists the five levels;

- **Microsystem** - This involves relationships on a more personal level, such as family members, teachers, and caregivers. Bronfenbrenner believed that interactions with these people influence how children develop, he believed that the more nurturing and caring relationship the child has the more the child will develop.
- **Mesosystem** - This is the wider family and community such as playgroup, health care professionals, and friends. Bronfenbrenner believed that positive interactions within the Mesosytem would have a positive effect on the child. For example, a parent who has a positive relationship with the child's setting will have a positive outcome on the child and the child will continue to grow and develop in a happy and relaxed way. however, if the child's parents have a negative relationship with the child's setting this could cause conflicting emotions and may lead to a negative development.
- **Exosystem** - This is the extended family, neighbours, friends of the family, parents' workplace, and social welfare services. Bronfenbrenner believed that these people may not necisserily impact the child's life directly however may impact them indirectly, for example, a parent who experiences stress at work, from a neighbour or family member may take out their frustrations on the child in a negative way.
- **Macrosystem** - is the largest collection of people, however, although the most distant from the child it still has significant influences on how the child develops. Macrosystem is the child's culture and values, for example, children who live in a deprived area may experience a different kind of development to those who live in a more privileged area.

- **Chronosystem** - this is the final layer of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Sytems Theory. This consists of patterns of environmental events and transitions over the child's life. For example, practitioners should pay close attention to a child's behaviour if there has been a transition in their life, such as parents divorcing or the death of a family member. (The Psychology Notes Headquarters, 2020)




(Source: Simply Psychology, 2020)

## The needs of the child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is made up of 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's life. (Unicef UK, 2020) The UNCRC was made to protect children and to ensure that they are safe and can enjoy all of their rights. The UNCRC states that every child regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, language, or abilities has rights. The UNCRC also says that children have the right to speak up about anything that concerns them, article 12. (Unicef, 2020) It is important that all practitioners are familiar with the articles that make up the UNCRC.

Transitions have an impact on a child's life, this can be in a negative or in a positive way. How children react cope with these changes differ from child to child as no two children are alike. Children's support network plays a huge part in making transitions go as smoothly as possible.

The child is always at the centre of everything that we do in the setting and although no two children are alike Maslow believed that all human beings have the same needs. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that everyone has the same needs and these needs have a hierarchy. Maslow writes that the first stage is basic, such as food and shelter. he states that in order to move on to the next stage we must meet the needs of the stage before. (World of work, 2019)

(Source: Bing, 2020)

Practitioners can put Maslow's theory to practice, if the physiological needs of the child are met then practitioners can build a relationship with the child forming trust. Keyworkers play an important role in building trust with the child and also with the child's family.

## What is a Keyworker?

If you are reading this handbook then there is a good chance that it is you.

A keyworker is a practitioner that is responsible for a child or a group of children. The keyworker will help the child or children feel safe and secure whilst at the setting, doing this successfully the child will continue the journey through Maslows hierarchy of needs pyramid. The keyworker will also be the main line of communication between the setting and the parents or care givers.

The keyworker will also ensure that the child's individual needs are met, this could be anything from religion, dietary requirements to sensitivities. The keyworker will relay any important information on to other practitioners such as the person pouring the milk for example, if a child has a milk allergy then other practitioners will need to know. (Early Years Careers, 2020)

As every child is different and their needs differ the transition will also differ from child to child. The child's well-being and learning are at the heart of everything practitioners do. To ensure transitions are done well practitioners must ensure that plans are well thought out, these plans could include;

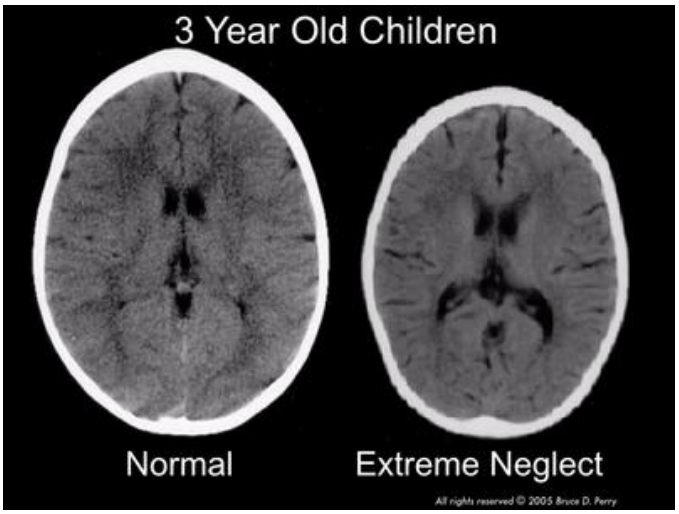
- The child's learning journey
- The delivery of the foundation phase
- partnerships with parents
- policies and procedures are understood and practiced.

Early-education (2020) tells us that failing to do this successfully will have a negative effect on the child.

research has shown that a child a child who has been neglected or has experienced some form of abuse can develop poor attachment. NSPCC (2020) states that a child who has or is experiencing neglect can become clingy, aggressive, withdrawn, anxious, they may have low self esteem or have developmental delays.

Children who experience neglect may have brain developmental problems. Centers for disease control and prevention (2020) explains that the brain grows at a fast rate starting before birth and continues to grow rapidly into early childhood. CBC (2020) says that the first eight years of brain development is the foundation for future learning and adulthood. CBD (2020) continues to say that if parents, caregivers support the child's needs in a caring, supportive and nurturing way from birth and into early childhood it will have a positive effect on how the child's brain will grow and will help the child to reach their full potential.

NSPCC (2020) says that neglected children who may have brain development problems could have issues building relationships and this could even impact the relations they have with their own children. Health line (2020) believes that treatment for children who have been neglected can break the cycle and prevent it from happening again.




(Source: Bing, 2020)

## Why is play important?

The Foundation Phase is a curriculum developed for three to seven year olds. Wels Government (2020) describes the foundation phase as a creative, imaginative and a fun way to learn. The foundation phase had seven areas of learning;

- Language, literacy and communication skills.
- Mathematical development.
- Welsh language development.
- Knowledge and understanding of the world.
- Physical development.
- Creative development
- Personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity.

Play allows children to develop their language and communication skills. Learning through play allows children to explore, be creative and to investigate both indoors and outdoors. Welsh government (2020) also says that learning through play tests children's abilities without the risk of failure, this will allow children to take risks confidently.

(Source: Google images, 2020)

## The role of the adult

Bowlby's theory of attachment showed the effects of separation between children and their parents or caregivers. Bowlby believed that children with a secure attachment and feel safe and secure enough to do things on their own but would feel confident in knowing that they can go back to their parent or caregiver at any given time. Bowlby also says that children who do not have secure attachments are likely to be disruptive and may have attachment problems through adulthood. (Positive psychology, 2020)

Research on Bowlby's theory of attachment showed that children separated from their parents in an unfamiliar situation usually react in one of the following;

A. Secure attachment: Where the child can be easily comforted
B. Anxious-resistant attachment: This is when a child seeks comfort but also want to punish the parent for leaving
C. Avoidant attachment: This form of attachment is when the child shows no stress or disruption when the parent leaves and returns.

The role of the practitioner or keyworker is to make the child feel safe and secure enough to get the best outcome of their learning. Starting the journey of education can be very daunting  not only for the child but for the parents too. Practitioners must take a sensitive approach to transitions to reassure all involved.

A home visit can be of great benefit, meeting the child and parents in the comfort of their own home where they are relaxed and the child feels secure. At the home visit the keyworker will help the parents complete a 'Dyma fi' booklet. This booklet is all about the child, their likes and dislikes. The booklet will also give the keyworker a clear understanding of the child's background, religion, allergies, and fears.

After the home visit is done the child and their family are encouraged to visit the setting, this could be a 'stay and play' session where the child and parent would stay together and interact in activities with the keyworker. This helps the child to become familiar with the new surroundings and help make their transition a positive one. Visiting the setting will not only help the child become familiar with staff and the surroundings it is also a great opportunity to explain to the parents of the routines, policies, and procedures that are embedded in the day to day running of the setting.

## How to be an effective keyworker

- Help the child settle in the setting.
- feed back to parents.
- form a strong relationship with the child.
- Always remain professional.
- Practice safeguarding.
- communicate effectively with parents.
- Communicate with other practitioners in the event of the keyworker is absent.
- observe, assess and plan.
- Involve other professionals when necessary. (Royden early years, 2020)

## Partnerships

It is important for practitioners to be able to identify any developmental delays as soon as possible for the child to get the support and care that they need, early intervention focuses on helping children develop their skills early on. One of the areas where a child may have learning/development issues is communication, this area is vital to a child's development for the child to communicate effectively. It is the practitioners duty to observe and make note of any concern that they may have and work in partnership with the child's parents or carers to form a plan of action to help the child.

It is important that professional partnerships working together trust each other and have an open line of communication. When a professional has their own agenda and is willing to listen to other professionals about what is the best possible outcome for the child, the child's learning goals may never be reached. Regular communication and information sharing between all who are involved is very important. When communication breaks down the information may not be shared with the relevant professionals. When working together all professionals working in partnership must remember why, why are they working together? for the child. The child's needs must be at the centre of everything. (early years careers, 2020)

Partnerships can include;

- Health visitors.
- Educational psychologists.
- colleagues.
- parents.
- SALT (speech and language team).
- Design to smile.
- Healthy pre-school.
- Flying start.

It is the keyworkers responsibility to work with the multi agencies and to keep the parents informed and involved throughout the process.

The NSPCC (2020) says that to have good information sharing then the following should be considered;

- Be clear about what you are sharing.
- Follow up with written documentation.
- Be specific with language.
- Acknowledge information that has been shared, this helps people feel that their opinion or concerns are valued. (NSPCC Learning, 2020)

(Source: Google, 2020)

## Interventions

There have been many theorists used in the past and at present as the foundation by which early childhood educators use to improve children's learning and development. In early childhood education, theories of childhood development have served as the prevailing foundation for children's learning based on the belief that early childhood education should be directly derived from a theoretical perspective, on child development and research.

The Reggio Emilia approach was founded by Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994), in a region of Italy called Emilia-Romagna. Children within the Reggio Emilia environment encounter an emergent, child orientated curriculum, where children and teachers are encouraged to learn and discover alongside each other in co-construction.

Another key feature of the approach is the documentation and display of children's project work. The documentation of children's work not only is a tool by which to inform and link to the community by illustrating what the children have been doing but also a tool by which children themselves can re-assess and re-address their own development. (Education.gov.scot, 2020).

Settings use the Reggio approach today in learning to work in partnership with parents and the community, by taking learning into the community children will extend their learning through developing their imagination and creativity.

## Proposed outcomes

The importance of attachment in the early years should not be underestimated, it forms the basis of psychological development. Research has provided information about the factors which form the foundations of secure and insecure attachments that have implications on children and how they cope with transitions. (encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020) Bowlby says that the care a child receives in the first year determines how they will develop socially and emotionally, as well as how they cope with future relationships.

Bowlby's theory of attachment is used today in early years education, Practitioners who recognise attachment issues in young children can work towards a better outcome for the child.

The best outcome for children during transitions should be a happy one. It has been said already in this handbook that no two children are alike and require different forms of support from their keyworker, however, relating back to Maslows theory of hierarchy of needs the children's basic needs are the same and should be met for them to move onto the next stage. Children who are given a support through transitions experience a smooth and successful transition.

To help children achieve a successful future practitioners must put the child in the centre of all that they do. The new curriculum for Wales (Welsh Gov, 2015) comprises of four purposes;

- Ambitious capable learners.
- Enterprising, creative contrubutors.
- ethnical, informed citizens.
- Healthy, confident individual.

These four purposes if achieved correctly will enhance the child's learning and well-being engaging the child in a fun, educational rich environment.

In short, attachment influences a child's immediate all-round development and future relationships. If a secure attachment is achieved then the child's future will be an emotionally successful one.