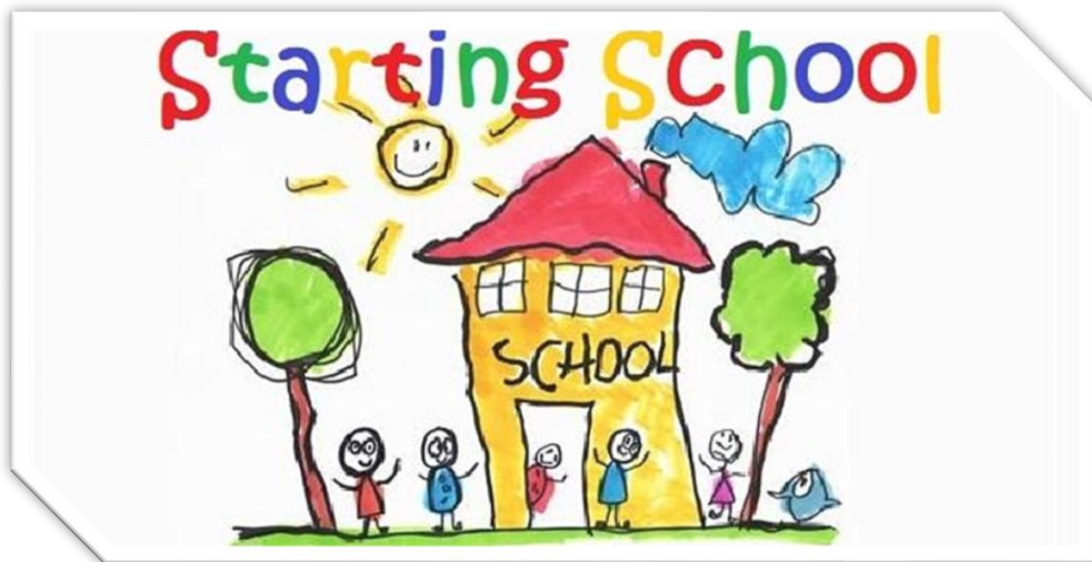


**A Handbook for
Early Years Practitioners
to support the transition
from Nursery to school**



(Source: Hardmoor Team, 2020)

**Effective communication for young
children's learning and
development during
transitions.**

Transition from Nursery to School

CONTENTS

The aim of this handbook is to assist Early Years practitioners with advice and support when supporting children with transitions between Nursery and Primary School.

This handbook will include the needs of the child and looking into theorists that have shaped how Early Years practitioner's practice.

We will demonstrate how the adult can help with these transitions giving practical help and solutions to these tricky times in a child's life.

We will investigate partnership with parents, other practitioners in the setting and working alongside other multi-agencies.

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INTRODUCTION

What is a transition?

The Oxford English dictionary (no date) define the word transition as a verb that is 'intransitive. To make or undergo a transition from one place, state, or system (to or into another); to change over or switch.'

Smooth transitions are essential for a child's emotional well-being and development, as abrupt or poorly managed transitions can be stressful for both children and their families. Birth to 5 matters (2021), state that 'When transitions in the early years are managed sensitively it lays the foundations for positive feelings towards the many other transitions children will face through life.' Transitions in childcare refers to the process of moving a child from one childcare setting or another. The Flying Start Guidance (2017 pg 3), note that transitions were seen as a one-off process of change for example - the first day of school, but now transitions are seen as a 'process that is shaped by social structures.' For example daily routines. 'A transition is a movement or change from one position to another. Transition skills can be big or small, are relative to age and ability, and can simultaneously impact various areas of development.' (Cadey. No date)

Transitions are stages in life or development, which can be as seen as simple, like going to the bathroom, but this may be tricky for others, it is important to have a holistic approach and see each child as unique and an individual.

Martinelli (2016), wrote that children often find it difficult to deal with change. Enabling the child to have smooth transitions will benefit the child's development: having a holistic approach recognises that children are complex beings influenced by various factors, transitions can have a significant impact on their development and wellbeing.



Source: Google image - Edmentum Blog

It is important to note that transitions can also have a negative effect on children if not dealt with correctly in the beginning. This can depend on the child's age, temperament, and the needs of the child such as autism. Some of these difficulties may include a regression in the child's development, challenging or disruptive behaviour and emotional issues.

The Early Years practitioner has a crucial role in supporting children in early transitions. Walker. E, researched transition in the Early years and noted that 'Early years practitioners should ensure children are fully supported through these key transitions and plan for them appropriately' (Admin n.d). This is supported by a journal (Yelland and Waghorn, 2020) that reports 'In order to develop effective transitions, each adult within the child's community plays a vital role in providing support and investing in their success'.



Source: Google image. KiS

THE ROLE OF THE ADULT

'Starting school is a huge step in any child's life and staff from both early years provisions and schools need to work together to support families in this transition.' admin (n.d.).

The adult must have effective communication skills with children, parents and carers, other staff in their setting, other professionals and stakeholders associated with the setting.



This image shows that there are seven ways ensure effective communication. Clear, correct, complete, concrete, concise, considered, courteous. (Sourced: WorldofWork, 2021)

The practitioner needs to establish open lines of communication with parents and carers to gather information about each child's individual needs, preferences, and any concerns. The practitioner needs to work alongside parents and carers as stated in many legislations such as The Plowden Report 1967, where they stated the importance of home school communication, The Children's Act in 1989 which acknowledged the partnership between adults and professionals in terms of safeguarding and the more recent legislation 'The Curriculum for Wales' (2021) where working alongside parents, carers and the wider community is emphasised.

The practitioner needs to build a relationship with the child and to form an attachment. 'Attachments are the emotional bonds that young children develop with parents and other carers such as their key person' (Early Years Matters, n.d). Practitioners can form an attachment by ensuring that children have clear, concise boundaries that are consistent, making sure that the messages the child receives are the same, this will make the child feel secure and less anxious. A secure attachment can be formed by enabling the child to have opportunities to gain confidence, to voice their needs, this can give the children lifelong skills. Having an emotional attachment with a key worker gives the child a sense of belonging, allowing the child to feel safe, and by doing this, the child will then be able to move freely around the environment trying out new experiences. A secure attachment has lifelong implications on how the child grows and develops.



Source: google image

John Bowlby developed an attachment theory that recognises the stages in relationships that a child needs to have during their life. For example when a baby develops a close bond with their mother, this can impact the way the child relationships later on in life. 'Bowlby suggested maternal deprivation disrupted the attachment process and could result in long-term emotional, social, and cognitive problems.' (Cherry. 2011)

Froebel, a theorist in transition, wrote that 'children thrive when there is a close connection between kindergarten and the family.' (Tovey 2020) The practitioner needs to encourage parents to engage in school-related activities which support their child's learning at home. For example sending in pictures for the child to tell the setting about. This will establish a close working relationship, getting to know the holistic child.

The role of the Early Years practitioner is to provide a suitable environment as this significantly impacts a child's overall development and well-being. A stimulating and enriched environment helps promote cognitive development by providing opportunities for learning and exploration. This lays the foundation for future success, supports the development of social and emotional skills, encourages physical activity and the development of motor skills. The environment should offer a variety of age/stage appropriate equipment and activities that promote both fine and gross motor skills and encourage communication, through books and listening skills. Birth to 5 Matters (n.d) say that 'A welcoming atmosphere in the setting should be evident from the moment an enquiry is made to a setting regarding their child, and it is essential that all families feel that they belong.' This statement is backed up by Wilson (2016) who says that 'The purpose to maintaining a parent-friendly environment is to encourage engagement with parents so that they have a sense of belonging to the setting and ownership.'

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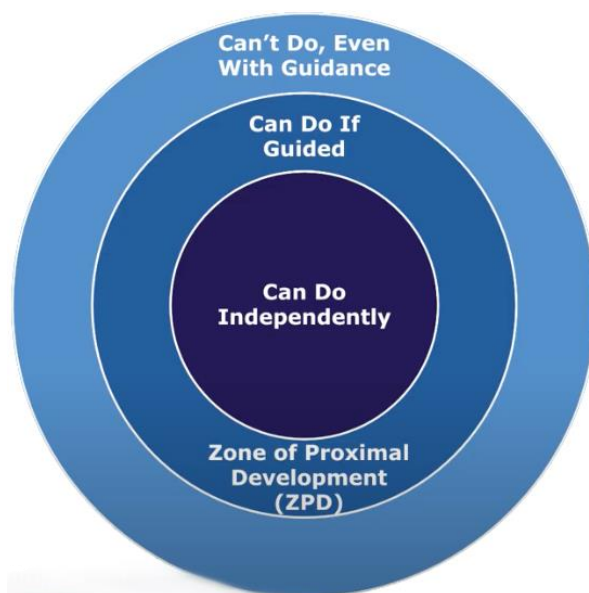
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The Early Years practitioner needs to follow their setting policies, for example the safeguarding policy, that outlines how children and parents are supported, how staff work together and share information to ensure continuity of learning and care, supporting children with Additional Learning Needs [hereafter ALN].

The physiologist Vygotsky suggests that children need to have experiences that are positive, and this will enable them to understand how the world works. He developed a theory on how children learn and the role of the adult, 'human development relies on social interaction and, therefore, can differ among cultures.' (Cherry. 2022) The adult needs to allow children to develop independence by providing opportunities for children to make choices and solve problems. This will help the child to have the confidence to try something new such as a transition. Vygotsky developed a 'Zone of Proximity' (see image below), the practitioner needs to develop the children's learning by giving them experiences that: one, they can't do without support of adults and two, they can do on their own. Vygotsky believed that it was the role of the staff to scaffold the activity, this is an important skill that enables the child to become independent thinkers.



Source: Let's Go Learn

It is the responsibility of the adult to facilitate opportunities for play, inside and outside. Play is a significant part of helping children through transitions by providing familiar experiences for them to explore and understand changes in their routine or environment. Play aids holistic development, children acquire skills to be confident and to explore their interests which builds a strong foundation for future learning and wellbeing. To illustrate this point, one may refer to theorists that have studied play, Erikson stressed the importance of learning social and developmental skills through play. Maria Montessori, another theorist in children's play, believed that children learn by doing, and by making mistakes they 'risk assess' and problem solve.

A child who feels confident will find it easier to adjust to changes such as a transition.

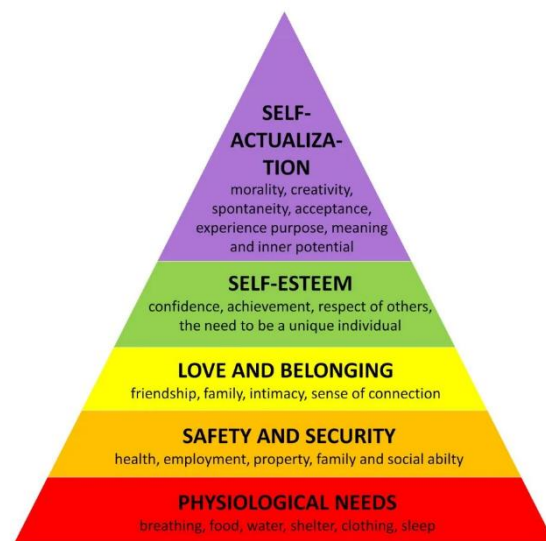
A role in Early Years settings is a key worker, this is a person who focus' on the individual children in their care and can see each child as unique, aiming to support their growth and learning in a personalised and nurturing way. The role of the adult is to build trusting relationships, this can help in transitions by providing emotional and well-being support.

'Professional love is not about becoming a surrogate mother but about building a professional relationship that complements the mother-child relationship in a way that always upholds the rights of the child as central to everyday practice.' (Teach Early Years Magazine. 2020)

The new curriculum of Wales talks about the word 'cynefin', cynefin means to belong, to feel like they are part of something. The role of the adult is to instil cynefin into the child's life, by having that key worker who will develop the child's holistic growth. If the child feels safe, they will feel confident to explore the environment.

Maslow developed a hierarchy of needs that looks at the holistic approach of the child, the practitioner needs to ensure that all these are met.

Maslow's hierarchy is a five-tiered model that shows the needs of a Child.



Source : Simply Psychology

To aid in transition the practitioner must teach the children values such as expected behaviour by setting a good example and emphasizing positive behaviours such as listening and taking turns.

THE NEEDS OF THE CHILD

'Each child and family is unique and this needs to be respected and celebrated, as each brings aspects of their own personal and cultural knowledge and values which enrich the whole setting.' Birth to 5 years (no date)

A holistic approach to the needs of the individual child recognises the child as unique and their needs have to be catered to. A smooth transition helps to understand physical, emotional and cognitive aspects of a child's development. Research by the Childrens commissioner for Wales has shown that there can be long term impacts if the child has gone through a negative transition. It can have long lasting effects on the child's learning, development and future. Early interventions in transitions will enable the child's future development and help the needs of a child. An action plan of this report (Building Blocks n.d.). stated that 'Head teachers should ensure they have established communication mechanisms with local early years settings, which enable the transfer of key information that will support a successful transition.'

Each child needs individualised support which is tailored for their specific needs, strengths and vulnerabilities, taking into account personalities, temperament and past experiences. A study by Froebel's Trust (2019) investigated supporting children with Autism in transition from nursery to primary school developed social stories. These stories showed 'who' the children were, their likes, dislikes and were used to aid transition by informing new staff of a holistic representation of the child. A positive outcome from this study was that the staff felt that they were better equipped to make a difference in their practise and supporting the child in transition.



Source: bing image

An example of a social story

There have been many theories into the benefit of children 'playing'. Froebel (Early Education 2021) said that "play is the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child's soul." Erickson investigated the needs of a child and developed a 'Stage of Development' framework showing how children progressed through life. He said that children aged 3-6 are in the play stage where they must have opportunities to 'assert themselves more frequently through directing play and other social interaction.' (McLoed. 2023).

Another theorist, Robert Owen, investigated the environment around the child and stated the importance of how the environment is used a set up 'interaction with the environment to provide children with a more holistic education for overall health and wellbeing'. (Martian 2017). Owen encouraged settings to provide experiences that would have profound effects on the lives of children through play and the child initiating play around them.

For the child to develop, the child needs to have a suitable environment that they can explore and investigate. Along with Owen and Froebel, Susan Isaacs wrote that 'The nursery school is an extension of the function of the home, not a substitute for it. (Clough and Selbie, 2008, p.55). When talking about transitions, the holistic approach to the environment enables the child to have a foundation to explore the world around them. The child needs to feel safe in order for them to develop life skills such as a transition.

The child needs to develop a close bond to practitioners in their setting for them to feel safe. Cherry 2023 stated that when a child has learnt that their caregiver is trustworthy and they are able to depend on them, then this will enable the child to 'explore the world'. A recent study by The Royal Foundation 'Big Change Starts Small' agrees with Cherry saying that the brain will have protected and developed to enable the child to 'heal' easier from having a secure attachment (Royal Foundation, 2020)



PARTNERSHIPS

'Starting school is a huge step in any child's life and staff from both early years provisions and schools need to work together to support families in this transition.' admin (n.d.).

There are many different professionals that are involved in a child's life. These partnerships need to work together to support children in the early years by addressing various aspects of the child's development and future success by addressing their emotional, physical, cognitive and emotional needs.

Working with parents

A study by Nursery World claimed that the 'transition of starting school is more problematic for adults than it is for children' and that it is the role of the practitioners to build relationships with parents/carers to help them understand 'the importance of projecting a positive perspective' (Thomas, 2019).

The Government states that 'Working in partnership with parents and carers is central to the early years foundation stage' (GOV n.d). Working alongside parents, families and extended families is important to understand the child's home background. It is from this relationship that we can understand the child's culture or religion, the values and set up of the family and where support may be needed such as a single parent family or a child who has a different language.

Working in partnership with parents and carers helps to build a trusting relationship. This is important as if parents have any issues or concerns about their child, then having a good relationship will make them feel that they can seek advice and support. Sharing information such as a report or pictures will encourage the parent to be involved within the practice. Birth to 5 Matters (no date) states the significant impact that parents and carers can make in the setting 'Parents and carers make a crucial difference to children's outcomes.' As they know their child the most.

Working together ensures a good understanding of a child's needs, leading to appropriate provision within the setting and the possibility of supporting learning in the home. Birth to 5 Matters (no date)



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Working with other professionals

Professionals not only work alongside parents and carers they work with other multi-agencies such as speech therapists, social workers, occupational therapists and many more.

The National Society of the protection against cruelty of children (hereafter NSPCC) says that 'Multi-agency working is key to effective safeguarding and child protection' (Sidebotham et al, 2016). It is imperative that practitioners work together to make sure that nothing is missed, professionals must liaise and share documents that give an overall view of the child and their development and work collaboratively for further support.

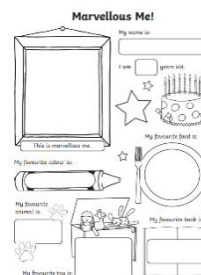
Working with other agencies is a great way to share knowledge and expertise which can then develop their own skills and be put into their own practice. There can be challenges when working with people outside of your practice such as communication skills. Not everyone uses the same form of communication and people have other commitments, this could mean a delay in matters arising. Working alongside other professionals enables the practitioner to share knowledge and expertise which will help to achieve the best results for the children.

According to the report 'The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on early years transition to school', working together between settings enabled a smoother transition, it was said that having 'Mutual support and cooperation between practitioners were seen as a helpful factor when planning for transition as was the value of teamwork within settings.' (Bakopoulou, 2020).

INTERVENTIONS

Below are some practical ideas and activities that the practitioner can implement to assist children with the transition from nursery to school.

- ✂ 'All About me' information sheet to be sent home for parents to complete with children. In this it should include details about the child such as: likes/dislikes, hobbies, family set up, dietary needs.



- ✂ Keep up to date records of development, observations, and assessments to share information with the new setting.



- ✂ Arrange a meeting with new the setting to liaise about the children, explaining needs, Individual Educational Plans, or any other issues regarding an individual child.
- ✂ Provide a handbook which advises parents ways to help their child prepare for school. This could include early writing such as mark making in the mud, sharing toys, manners, becoming independent with toilet needs and getting dressed.
- ✂ Share photos of the new setting to familiarise the children, this will also benefit children with ALN or children who speak a different language.
- ✂ Plan dates to visit the new setting. Some children need more visits to transition smoothly and to feel comfortable.



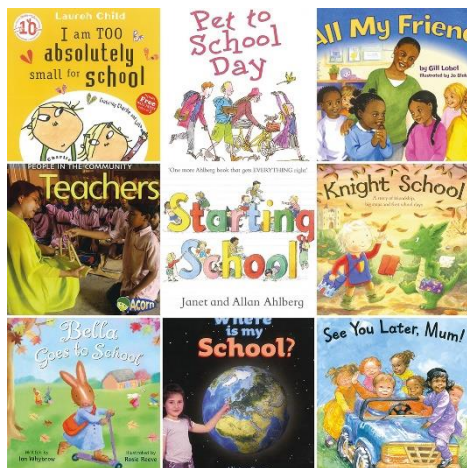
- ✂ Social stories can be a useful tool for those children who struggle with change, these can be tailored for a specific need of a child such as children with ALN or Autism.

Visual supports in these social stories help to give the children confidence, to familiarize themselves of the new environment.

- ✂ Create a school role play in the setting for children to act out their feelings that can then be addressed.



- ✂ Read books about attending school



PROPOSED OUTCOMES

The role of the adult in the Early Years practise is to get the children ready to take a big step into the next phase of their life. They can do this by:



Emotional readiness

Teaching the children to be independent in routines such as toileting, social skills and how to manage their emotions by problem solving.



Knowing the new environment

Children will be more confident in the transition if they are familiar with their new surroundings and environment. Children will benefit from having met the new teaching staff and be familiar with where things are in the classroom.



Routines

Practicing routines as these can help children to feel safe and more secure when in the new setting. The children also need to know rules and expectations from the school.



Working together with other settings

Sharing information with the other setting will enable the new staff to be aware of each child's individual needs, strengths and interests.



Involving Parents

Parents need to aware of how they can support their child in the transition process.

Communication with parents and establishing a partnership between the home and the setting can be beneficial to the children. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system talks about the people surrounding the children and the importance contribution they can make in a child's life (Cherry, 2011)



Plan the transition

Transitions need to be suited for each child's individual needs, some children need longer in the process than others, such as a child with additional learning needs. Children need time to adjust and to prepare themselves.

For children to have an effective transition children need to have experienced some form of attachment to someone in their life. John Bowlby's theory on attachment looked at children being separated from their primary caregiver, other theorists like Freud thought that children formed attachments from a source of pleasure like a mother because she provides food. Bowlby observed that children formed attachments to people who gave physical care and that this was significant in terms of the child's holistic development. This was backed up

by Mary Ainsworth who observed how toddlers felt when left in an unfamiliar room with a someone they didn't know, therefore children need to form an attachment with someone in the setting.

In conclusion children need to have a positive transition as this can have an impact in the child's future, the COVID study by Bakopoulou agrees with this statement, in the conclusion of the report it was confirmed that there was 'socio-emotional outcomes and well-being with sustained long-term benefits' (Bakopoulou, 2020).

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