

An Early Years Practitioners Guide: Transitions



(Source: NurseyWorld, 2019)

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Introduction

What is a transition?

A transition is defined as “the process in which something changes” (Collins Dictionary, ND).

Children continuously experience transitions in their early years. Whether the transition is horizontal (small), or vertical (large), they will be experienced frequently which is unavoidable.

Children will experience a range of these transitions including;

- Sleeping arrangements. For example; Moses basket to a cot or cot to a bed
- Teething
- Weaning from milk to baby food
- Potty training
- Starting school
- Nap times

(Iannelli, 2021).

Children may also experience more than one transition at a time. For instance, change of transport and change of school.

Early years practitioners should ensure that the child has full support through these transitions as change can be scary for a child. Practitioners should also understand that if the child doesn't experience these transitions in a positive way, it could affect all aspects of their development as well as have an impact on their well-being as a whole.

This handbook gives the necessary knowledge about these potential impacts as well as guiding practitioners in helping children through these transitions.

Guiding Children through transitions

Horizontal transitions

It is inevitable that all children experience small transitions throughout the day; they are inescapable. Although these small transitions may not affect a child as great as more significant transitions, it is still important for a practitioner to use their ability to guide children through them. It is also important to recognise that each transition may affect a child differently. What may be small to one child, may be big to another. Martinelli (2021), explains that even small changes such as leaving the playground for the day or switching activities may trigger behaviour like whining, complaining, or throwing tantrums.

According to CareForKids (2021), Practitioners could use the following strategies to help children transition through their day;

- Give warnings - Practitioners could use group announcements warning children about an upcoming transition. This could include telling the children that home time is in 5 minutes. These reminders may help the child prepare for the transition to come.
- Sing directions - Telling children directions in a fun way may help the child to see the transition in a positive way as opposed to a negative. It may also increase responses.
- Make transitions playful - All children love to play. Take advantage of this during transitions by making them into a game to make it more fun.
- Give visual cues - using bright and colourful visuals may help children to respond better. Visuals itself can give children better understandings of upcoming transitions. Using visual cues also ensures you are being inclusive to all children including those with

ALN, or impairments. Some practitioners find it helpful to use a daily timetable with pictures to show what is happening that day.

- Praise the children - it is significant to give the children plenty of praise for going through their transitions well. This will give the children more confidence to transition in the future.

Vertical transitions

As well as horizontal transitions, we can promote positive experiences when guiding through more considerable transitions in practice. Patel (N,D) states that practitioners can use the following ideas to help guide children's transitions in school;

- Offer welcome packs that include information about the school/class or key dates to the parents.
- Visit new classes or schools with the children - having a familiar face will make the child more comfortable when viewing their new setting for the first time.
- Role play experiences such as; dressing up in uniforms.
- Encourage children to express how they are feeling or what they are thinking through the transition process.

Supporting children through transitions will inevitably improve practice as children will feel less vulnerable and scared for change. This will create a warmer environment for children to develop and feel happy in the setting. Not only will it benefit the child, but the parents too. Especially during the transition of starting school, it is important to remember that for some families, this time can be traumatic. Some children have never been away from their primary carer before and may even experience separation anxiety (ILT, 2022). This can cause stress on both the child and the parent, and so it is crucial to work with the parents to ensure they feel just as supported. Campell (2019), published a survey from Kiddie Academy that found 63 percent of mothers have the hardest time with the first day of school showing that this transition can be difficult for parents too.

Practitioners should communicate with parents and ensure they feel included during this transition.

Practitioners can also recommend ways in which parents can help their child through this transition which include:

- Communicating - Start talking to your child about starting school as soon as their place is confirmed. Talk to them about the name of the school, where it is and any other information you may know so that the child can start to process it.
- Practise a school run - Take your child on a practice school run to get familiar with the journey as well as see the school. This can get them excited about starting.
- School Uniform - Let them try on their school uniform before starting. This can make your child feel excited. During this time, get them to practise fastening and unfastening any buttons or zips. When they start school and need to change or use the toilet, they will know exactly what to do which will save a lot of frustration.

(BBC, ND).

Needs of the child

“Children’s physical, emotional, social and intellectual needs must all be met if they are going to enjoy life, develop their full potential and grow into participating, contributing adults...it is the early years of life which are particularly vital to later development” - Pringle, 1975, pg 15.

There are multiple theories that emphasise how important it is for a child’s needs to be fully met in order for them to reach their full potential. Whether the theory focuses on physical needs or emotional needs, all state that if these needs aren't met, it would impact the child massively.



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

(Source: SimplyPsychology 2022)

Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs is a theory that suggests that if all 5 stages of the hierarchy are met, one will reach their full potential and be their best self. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is displayed as a pyramid. The lowest levels of this pyramid include the most basic needs whereas the higher levels of the pyramid are more complex needs (Cherry, 2022).

The lowest level is psychological needs.

This revolves around the needs that are generally vital to survival. It is the basic needs including; food, water, shelter and clothing.

Unicef (2019) published that Almost 2 in 3 children between six months and two years of age do not have access to the amount of food required to support their growing bodies and brains. Consequently, this puts them at risk of poor brain development and weak learning.

Cogan (2021) supports this statement and exclaims that hunger obstructs children's ability to focus and perform.

The second level includes more complex needs. Financial security, health and wellness and safety against accidents and injury are all examples of these needs. This level revolves around the child's environment also.

According to Kurt (2020), if the child witnesses parents arguing, addiction or if there is a lack of parental structure, the child will have difficulty learning as their basic safety needs have not been met. Kurt goes on to say that if a child lacks routine, or if there are factors that threaten their routine; they may feel unsafe and apprehensive.

Laura (ND), supports this by stating that a predictable routine allows children to feel safe. Structure and routines teach kids how to constructively manage themselves and their environments.

The third level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs include love, acceptance and belonging. At this level, there is a need for emotional relationships. Feeling loved and accepted helps avoid any feelings of loneliness and anxiety (Cherry, 2022).

Gov.wales (ND) emphasises this further and states that "love and affection are essential to a child's healthy brain development".

Esteem is the next need that must be met. This level involves self-esteem, respect, accomplishment and confidence. Some people often feel incompetent, unprotected and unimportant. In order to reach this stage, one can not be self-critical. They need to feel strong and capable.

The final level is Self- actualization. If this is achieved, one will become their best self.

Putting it into practice

To support children's needs using Maslow's hierarchy of needs practitioners can:

- Ensure all children have access to water and healthy snacks.
- Allow children to nap if they are tired
- Support their love and belonging needs by building a sense of community. For example, having a buddy bench, where a child can sit when they are looking for someone to play with (Panka, 2022).
- Ensure there is a routine within the classroom
- Help build a child's self esteem by helping them achieve goals, praising efforts, focusing on strengths and banning harsh criticism (Lyness, 2018).

Maslow's theory is often used in education to help children reach their learning potential however, some criticise this theory. Some critics say that people may pursue the needs in a different order. For example, some children may need high self esteem and confidence before gaining relationships with others (Gepp, 2022).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that the factors on the hierarchy are the main things that influence a child's development. However, other theories may suggest that it is a lot more complex than these factors. For example, Bowlby's theory of attachment states that children who are securely attached during their early years develop stronger self-esteem and better self-reliance as they grow. These children tend to be more developed and have successful social relationships (Cherry, 2022).

What is Attachment Theory?

The theory of attachment was first developed by John Bowlby. Bowlby researched the effects of separation between infants and their parents. Attachment theory focuses on relationships and bonds between a parent and child (Cherry, 2022).

“A feeling of love and need for another person” - Cambridge Dictionary (ND)

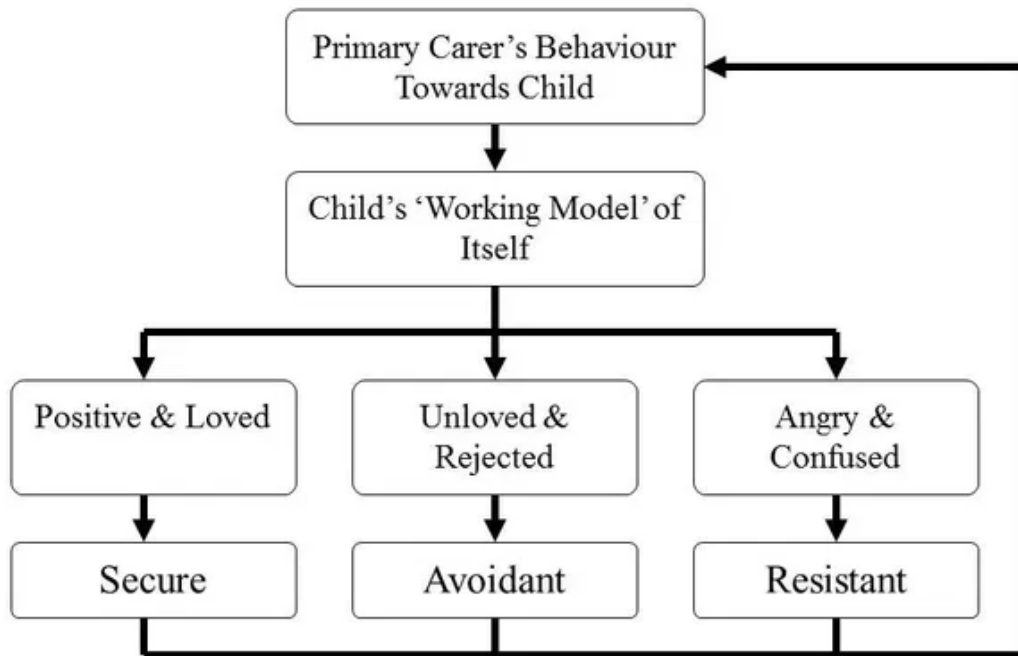
Bowlby believed that the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life (Cherry, 2022). Bowlby's attachment theory emphasises that if a child's need for a secure attachment bond is not met, the child will react. For instance, by crying. If there is no consistent stable bond in the child's life, the child can develop social, emotional and cognitive problems (TheAttachmentProject, ND).

Psychologist Mary Ainsworth expanded Bowlby's original work. Ainsworth published a study named 'strange situation'. This study revolved around the profound effects of attachment on behaviour. The study consisted of infants between the ages of 12 and 18 months. Each child was left alone and then reunited with their mothers (Cherry, 2022).

As stated by Ackerman (2018), Bowlby and Ainsworth's research showed that infants who experienced separation from their parents will generally react in one of three ways as soon as they reunited with them again:

- Secure attachment: Upon separation from their mothers, the infant would show distress. When the mother returned, the infant was easily comforted.
- Anxious-Resistant attachment (insecure): The infant would show even greeted distress upon separation. When reunited with the mother, the infant would seek comfort as well as attempt to 'punish' the parents for leaving.

- Avoidant attachment (insecure): Infants would show little to no stress when they were separated from their mother. Upon reuniting, the infant ignored the parents completely.



(Source: SimplyPsychology, 2017)

These are now classed as attachment styles. In later years, researchers Main and Solomon (1986) added a fourth attachment style. This was called disorganised-insecure attachment (Cherry, 2022). In this attachment style, there is no clear attachment between the infant and caregiver. This will be displayed when parents act differently from time to time. For instance, one day the parent may act apprehensive and another day reassuring. This will confuse the child and then may cause this kind of attachment. (Sincero, 2012).

Long term consequences of Secure and Insecure attachments

Attachment	Consequence
Secure	Sociable, independent, empathetic, high self-esteem
Anxious-Resistant, Avoidant, Disorganized	Few positive and supportive friendships, isolation, passivity, aggressiveness, lack of confidence

(Bee and Boyd, 2007)

Bowlby goes on to suggest that with this attachment, the infant will stay close to the mother. As a result, the child's chances of survival improves. This theory was influenced by Freud who recognised the deep emotional needs of young children and the damage that can be done if these needs are ignored (Beckett, 2002).

Bowlby emphasises a 'critical period' in which he argues that the early years of a child's life are most important. However, some argue that later experiences are equally as important as early ones (Beckett, 2002).

Separation anxiety

NHS (2021) states that separation anxiety is when babies and toddlers get clingy and cry if their carer leaves them, even for a short time.

Practitioners could experience attachment and separation in settings. This may be present when the child initially starts nursery. This transition is already very difficult for them. Those with separation anxiety or attachment may need extra support.

According to Bronwyn (2022), this can be done by:

- Being the primary point of contact: try and consistently be the person who greets the infant during the settling in period.
- On Arrival, offer the child options: Show the child different types of activities they could do. Try and communicate with carers before the first day to find out what the child is particularly interested in.
- Acknowledge the child's feelings - Be reassuring and remind the child that they are safe. This should be practised throughout the setting in order to adhere to Article 13 (Freedom of expression) (Unicef, ND).

Practitioners can also give the following guidance to parents:

- Leave something comforting with the child
- Make saying goodbye a positive time
- Practise short separations before nursery starts

(NHS, 2021).

Key person

Every child should be provided with a key person for their needs to be further met. The key person plays a significant role and supports all needs of the child, whether that is emotional or physical. The key person would be the person to respond sensitively to children's feelings as well as take the time to reassure them. They would also take care of physical needs such as nappy changing and dressing. The key person would be a familiar figure to the child and who builds strong relationships with the child and their parents (EarlyYearsMatters, ND).

Having an available key person is significant during transitions as the key person will make the child feel more safe and comfortable.

The role of the adult

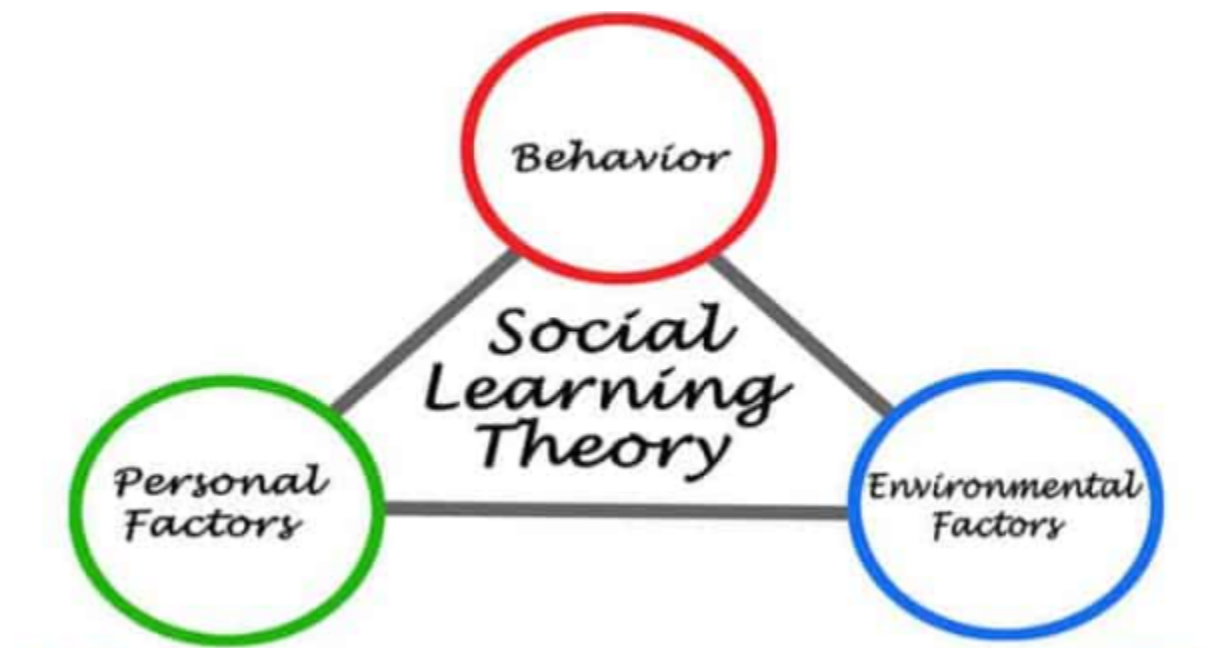
A role model

Bandura's social learning theory suggests that social behaviour is learned by observing and imitating the behaviour of others.

Children can start to imitate adults from birth. Some newborns can copy facial movements like sticking out their tongues. By 19 to 24 months, children begin to copy even more things they see in others (Sabater, 2022).

Bandura's social learning theory states that in order for a behaviour to be overserved and imitated, the observer must focus their attention on it. If practitioners were to use the social learning theory in practice by being a good role model, they must ensure they have the child's full attention (Loveless, 2022).

B.F Skinner also supported Bandura's theory and believed that behaviour is the result of what is learned from experience.



(Source: EducationCorner 2022)

Partnerships

According to Welsh Gov (ND), Research shows that the most important factor in enabling children to do well is involving parents.

Building a relationship and working in partnership with parents or carers is most important during the early years.

Practitioners can involve parents by:

- Making sure parents feel listened to - Starting school is just as hard for parents as it is for children, parent's feelings should be heard.
- Use social media or other resources - Apps like 'Classdojo' can be used in order to keep parents regularly updated. This will make the parents who may not be there to drop off or pick up the child feel just as included in updates.
- Do regular check in sessions.

Benefits of parental involvement:

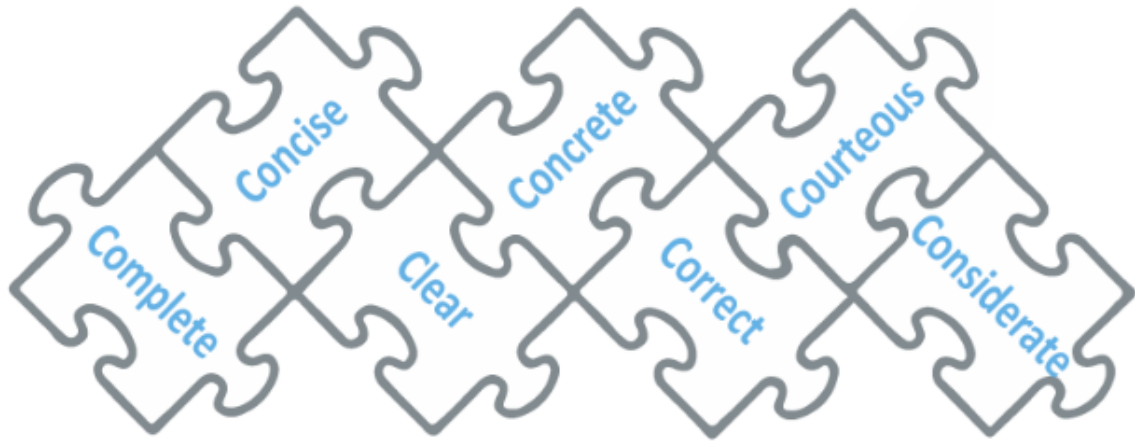
- For the child - Better school performance, settle better, feel valued, develop positive social skills through the observation of teachers and parents working together.
- For the parent - Sense of empowerment, less experiences of stress, feel valued and comfortable sharing concerns.
- For the Practitioner - Higher job satisfaction, experience less stress, can better tailor a child's needs.

(RaisingChildren, 2021)

Practitioners should also form partnerships with other significant adults such as, carers, childminders, support and social workers to help with smooth transitions.

Communication

Practitioners should effectively communicate with carers, children and all other involved adults.



(Source: Seyens, 2016).

Practitioners can use the '7 C's of communication' to help assist them with effective communication.

MindTools (ND) state that communication needs to be clear, concise, concrete, correct, coherent, complete and courteous.

1. Clear

Be clear about the message and goal

2. Concise

Stick to the point and keep it brief

3. Concrete

Factual and solid message

4. Correct

Ensure you're communicating the correct information

5. Coherent

Ensure what you're saying is relevant and consistent

6. Complete

Ensure the message is complete

7. Courteous

Be friendly, open and honest

It is important to recognise that there are different types of communication; verbal and non-verbal. Knowing how to effectively communicate in both types will improve practice and ensure all children can be heard.

Verbal communication:

- Tone of voice
- Language
- Dialect
- The words you say

Non-verbal communication:

- Body language - facial expressions, gestures
- Eye contact
- Visual aids

According to Unicef (ND), below are some tips to practise communication with a child;

1. Active listening

Listening actively helps children feel heard and understood. Engaging through eye contact and showing positive facial expressions will have an impact on the child. These gestures will make the child feel more safe and comfortable.

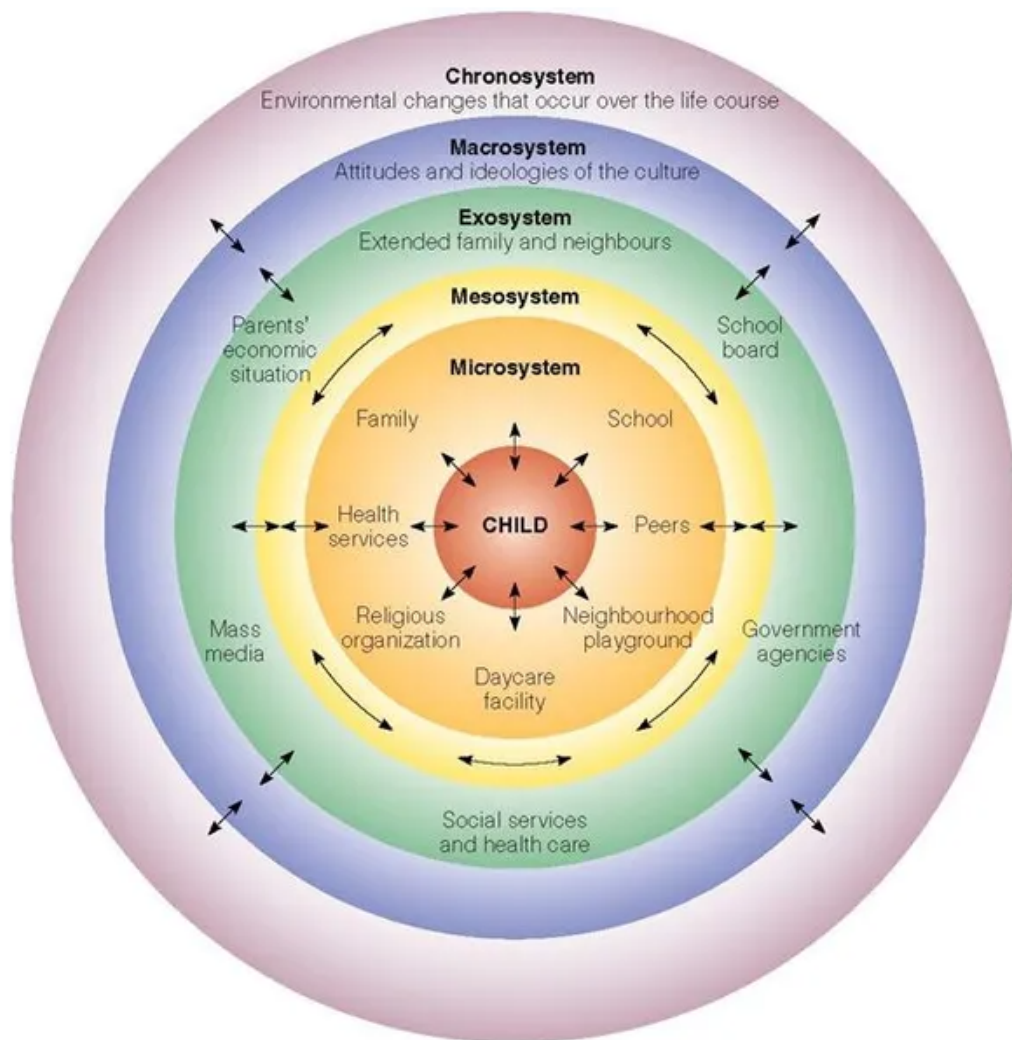
2. Reflective listening

Repeat back what they say to show the child that you are paying attention.

3. Speaking clearly

Use language that the child understands. It needs to be appropriate and clear.

It is important to set the best example to the child. Bronfenbrenner believed that everything around the child influences them. This is a contradiction to Bandura's theory as he focuses on everything around the child. Bronfenbrenner identified systems that would have an impact on how children grow and develop.



Bronfenbrenner's model can be useful to help understand children's learning environment and to establish quality learning environments (Intasc Principle, nd).

Interventions

As previously mentioned, there are multiple things practitioners and parents can do to help a child through the transition of starting school.

Below are further activities and things parents and practitioners can do at this time.

1. All about me

Parents can work with their child to create an 'all about me' page ready for their first day. This will include the child's likes and dislikes and a brief overview of any family, pets and interests. This would be really useful for practitioners to get to know the child. It will also be a fun activity for the child to complete at home.



(Source: Weebly, ND)

2. Home visits

Practitioners can schedule home visits during the summer holidays before the child starts school. This visit provides an opportunity to meet the child and parents and establish a relationship with them. When the child starts school there will be a 'friendly face' making the transition a lot easier (Breathnach, 2019).

3. The importance of play

During school hours it is important to let the child play freely. Playing with what they are interested in makes them excited for school as well as settle in faster. Children also learn through play and even express their emotions through it too. A child may communicate their feelings through play without claiming it as their own. Play also helps children cope with intense emotions (PALS, 2020).

Proposed outcomes

Using and following this guide will influence children's development and wellbeing positively.

Being communicative and inclusive to all to ensure the child's needs are met will increase the quality of practice and the child's opportunities.

If the practitioner keeps a calm, tidy, peaceful and nurturing environment, children will feel safe and secure. This will reflect on how they behave in the setting (Hunter, ND).

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