A Guide for Transitions in Early Years – The Importance of Communication.

(Source: dreamstime.com, 2021)

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Introduction to Transitions

This handbook will look at what transitions are and what every child will go through in their early years. It is designed to help better a practitioner's understanding of the developing child and their needs and provide them with the skills they need to help support them through their transitions smoothly (Ferguson, 2020). The handbook will be looking at the role of the adult, as well as the needs of the child, the setting environment, importance of partnership working, interventions, and proposed outcomes. Furthermore, it will explore some theories that are associated with transitions in early years settings.

What is a Transition?

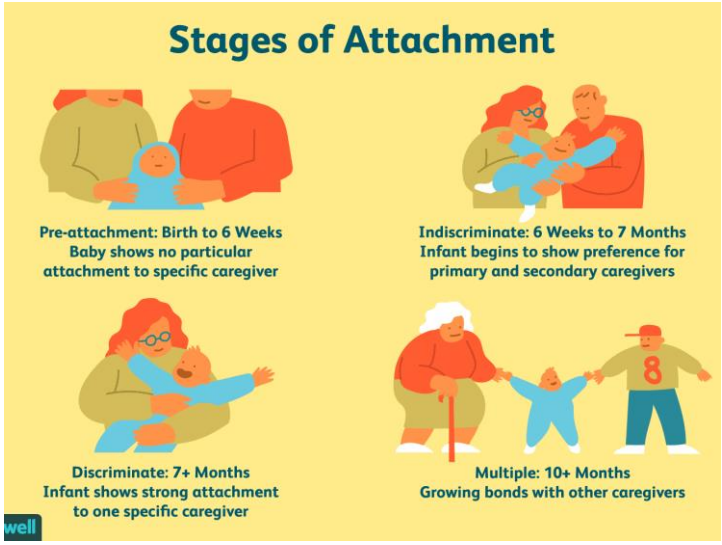
Early Years Matters (2021) states that for children, transitions are milestone events and can have an affect on their development. Transition affects all children in their early years, and many will have experienced several transition periods by the time they reach school age. These can include going from home to a day care, day care to a nursery, moving from room to room in the setting (Gould, 2012). Early Years Matters (2021) also go on to suggest that transitions should be viewed as a process and not a destination. Croner-i (2021) agree with this and add that it should involve the child itself, parents/care givers and practitioners. This handbook is a guide to practitioners on children transitioning from home into a nursery setting for the first time.

Our Family Wizard (2021) believes that adults and children feel safe and secure in surroundings that are familiar to them, like home or a close relative's home for example. However, any change to a child's routine could potentially be challenging mentally and emotionally. Children in the early years would not be able to express their fears or worries like an older child would. Therefore, it is vital that early years practitioners manage transitions effectively to ensure that all children and their parents will experience practical and emotional support through all transition stages and ensure that they have a positive experience of change (Welsh Government, 2017).

For children starting in an early years setting, they will be in a new environment with several new faces and face new experiences. Dowling (2010) believe that children will all have different experiences when it comes to transitioning. Even children who appear to be confident can often be intimidated by starting in a new setting. Dowling (2010) continues to state that a child will experience many different emotions when transitioning, and their early experiences will have an impact on how they deal with new experiences in the future.

Role of the Adult

From birth and during the very early years of every child's life they will form strong bonds with their parents/primary care givers. This is what we know as attachment theory. Bowlby suggest that the strongest bond of all is between mother and baby however, he did stress that strong bonds with multiple care givers is still possible (Yassin, 2020). Bowlby suggests that if a healthy bond cannot be established early on in the babies' developmental phase – it can lead to many emotional problems for them later on and make transitioning more difficult.



(Source: Very Well Mind, 2019)

Bowlby identified 4 different types of attachment:

- **Secure Attachment -** With the secure attachment style the child will develop the ability to form healthy relationships around them. This signifies a loving and warm bond between parent and child as the child will feel loved and cared for. They can also appear confident and are happier to explore.
- **Anxious-Ambivalent Attachment -** Anxious-Ambivalent children tend to explore their surroundings with trepidation rather than excitement. They have a fear of abandonment. They constantly seek approval from their care givers and can carry these traits into later life. They will often feel unloved and are unable to express love easily.
- **Avoidant Attachment -** Children that develop under the Avoidant attachment style often have their needs unmet. They can grow up to feel unloved and insignificant and find it difficult to understand emotions.
- **Disorganised Attachment -** Avoidant and anxious attachments combined create disorganised attachments. Children can often have behavioural issues and display intense anger and rage. Children will also have difficulties controlling their emotions.

‘Monotropy’ is a concept developed by Bowlby. It is a term signifying one main attachment figure. Bowlby concluded that if a successful ‘monotropic’ bond has not been made, then negative consequences can occur (Yassin, 2020).

Croner-i (2021) suggest that when planning to support children’s transitions into foundation phase, practitioners/parents should always remember that the best preparation for smooth transitions is success in their current stage of development. Therefore, if the child is having their needs met constantly this will help with their development.

Practitioners must be aware of the knowledge and skills required to be successful in supporting and facilitating transitions in the early years (Allingham, 2012). Furthermore, planning and facilitating are key to Montessori’s approach that it is essential that practitioners are adequately qualified in education and child development to carry out their work successfully (Aubrey and Riley, 2016). It is the responsibility of the head teacher at the school to ensure proper procedures are in place and that National Minimum Standards (NMS) are being met. NMS are a set of mandatory guidelines that must be followed and put into practice (Care Inspectorate Wales, 2016).

There are a few key points within NMS for practitioners to follow to ensure transitions run as smooth as possible for children and their families. These include:

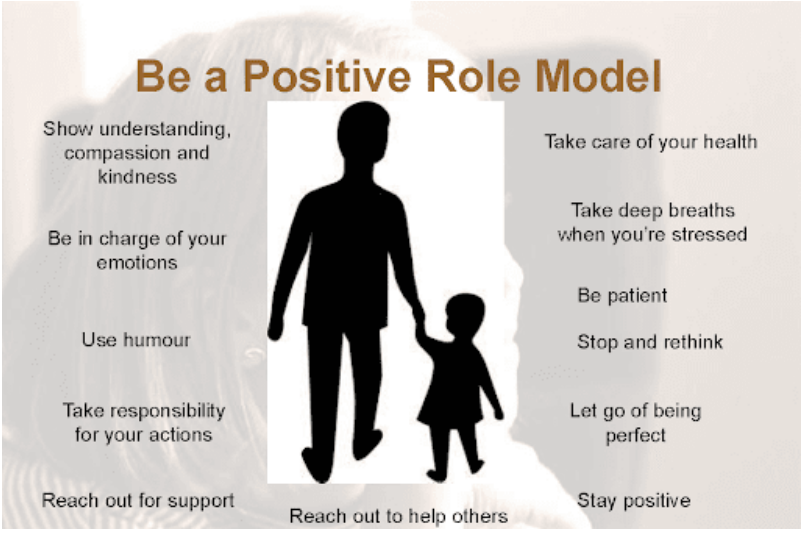
- **Assessment** – This involves gathering all relevant information on the child to help the practitioner understand the child fully and their needs.
- **Meeting Individual’s Needs** – This is the opportunity to make sure that any specific requirements for the child’s care can be met. For example, does the child have any special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)? Appropriate plans can be put in place ready for the child, ensuring all children have the same opportunities in accordance with Article 23 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 2021).
- **Working with Parents –** Practitioners should communicate effectively with parents/care givers to ensure they feel valued and build a good relationship with them and keep them up to date with the activities of their children. Parents/care givers will feel included in the decision-making process involving their children.
- **Nurture and Well-Being –** This standard enforces the importance of the practitioner’s role in making the child feel secure, happy, and comfortable in the setting. Practitioners to listen to the voice of the child and include them in any decision making in accordance with Article 12 the UNCRC (UNICEF, 2021).
- **The Key Worker –** The key worker system has become more widely accepted and put into practice in early years settings as a result of Bowlby’s theory. Bowlby developed the attachment theory. He recognised that when children are separated from their primary care giver, they experience anxiety and distress (Cherry, 2019). In addition, Boyd and Bee (2013) suggest that the attachment is merely a feeding relationship between the child and the

> caregiver. Therefore, the child becomes attached because the care giver feeds the child and provides nourishment. However, Henry (1996) states Erikson believed that individuals other than parents can meet the needs of children. In addition, he believes that children can form attachments with non-parental caregivers making smooth transitions into nursery settings achievable.

Consistency is vital for a child going through a transition, they need to feel comfortable in their surrounding in order to learn and develop (Dowling, 2014). Key workers need to be experienced and use a plethora of methods to allow for a smooth transition into nursery. In addition, they will be in constant communication with parents/care givers to ensure they are well informed about the child in order to provide relevant care. Furthermore, the practitioner will ensure the parent/caregiver is reassured that their child's needs are being met and they will be cared for as an individual and listened too (Brooker, 2014).

Role Model

Practitioners working in early years settings can demonstrate good role modelling by being respectful, using appropriate language, being inclusive and showing compassion and kindness to others and showing curiosity. This is considered good practice as they are setting a good example for the children.



(Source: talismanian.com, 2018)

The Needs of the Child

An important part of meeting a child's needs is understanding that every child is an individual, therefore, so are their needs (Dowling, 2014). Furthermore, in order for practitioners to provide the best care they must get to know the child, what their interests are, their likes and dislikes and how they think.

Maslow's theory of Hierarchy of Needs is a model depicting the needs of an individual. The basic needs at the bottom must be met before the needs at the top can be fulfilled. It is essential that the children's needs are met in order for them to feel safe, build self-esteem and to develop fully (McLeod, 2018).

(Source: Simplypsychology, 2018)

Communication is vital when trying to build good relationships, this can be challenging when dealing with children in the early years. There can be many reasons why communication is difficult in these circumstances, for example children will often feel anxious or scared when transitioning, therefore they may find it difficult to communicate. Practitioners may be relying on body language alone to read whether a child is uncomfortable or not. Recognising when a child is overwhelmed or anxious is something all practitioners will be trained to do (Keenan and Evans, 2009).

A Schema is a pattern all practitioners should be able to notice in children. When observing their behaviour this should become apparent. A Schema is a pattern of behaviour that children may display. If children appear to be extremely active, running around, having the urge to throw objects, or kick this can be mistaken for poor behaviour. In fact, they are most likely experiencing the Trajectory Schema. There are ways in which practitioners can support the child to help, for example taking the child outside and providing them with opportunities to run freely and climb trees (Hapa Family, 2020). Some other types of Schemas are Connection, this involves joining things together or building something out of other things. Orientation is another type of Schema, this involves climbing on things and hanging upside down. Practitioners are encouraged to support the children through these Schemas and provide them with opportunities to explore further.

Play is a big part of a child's brain development and for their language and communication skills to mature. Keenan, Evans and Crowley (2016) state Bandura

believed that children, from an early age can learn and copy simply by watching others around them. Play consists of activities performed for self-amusement. Furthermore, it has behavioural, social, and psychomotor rewards. Play should be fun and engaging and allow children the opportunity to explore (Their World, 2021). In addition, practitioners should let play be child directed. See what interests the child and allow them to explore it, as play is whatever the individual wants it to be and is critical in enriching learning and contributing to their development (Hutt, 2002). Children will often 'play out' their own life experiences, this enables practitioners to understand things from their perspective (Dowling, 2014).

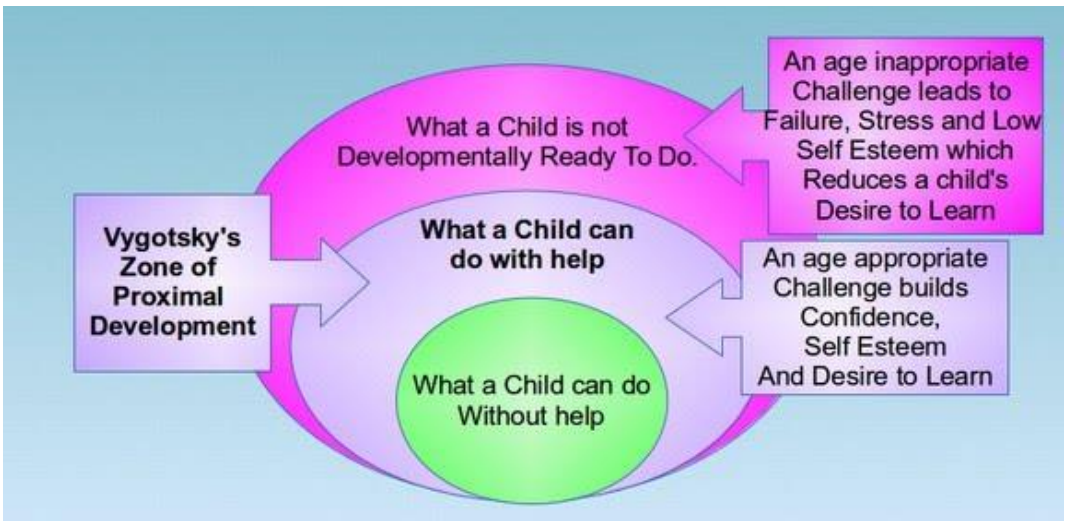
(Source: SouthLeedsLife, 2018)

Environment

The Learning environment plays a crucial role in supporting a child's needs during transitions. As mentioned previously, Our Family Wizard (2021) believes that children feel comfortable in surroundings that are familiar to them, like their home for example. Furthermore, if the learning environment was to include areas that resembled homes, then this could make a positive difference in children's transitions into nursery.

Vygotsky's theory largely surrounded his thinking that children's current abilities could not be fully developed without social interaction. He believed that cognitive development occurs through the interaction with others more skilled and intelligent. In addition, language plays a significant part of their cognitive development (Kurt, 2020).

Vygotsky was responsible for the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This theory is often known as scaffolding in early years. The theory demonstrates the interactions between experienced and less experienced individuals.



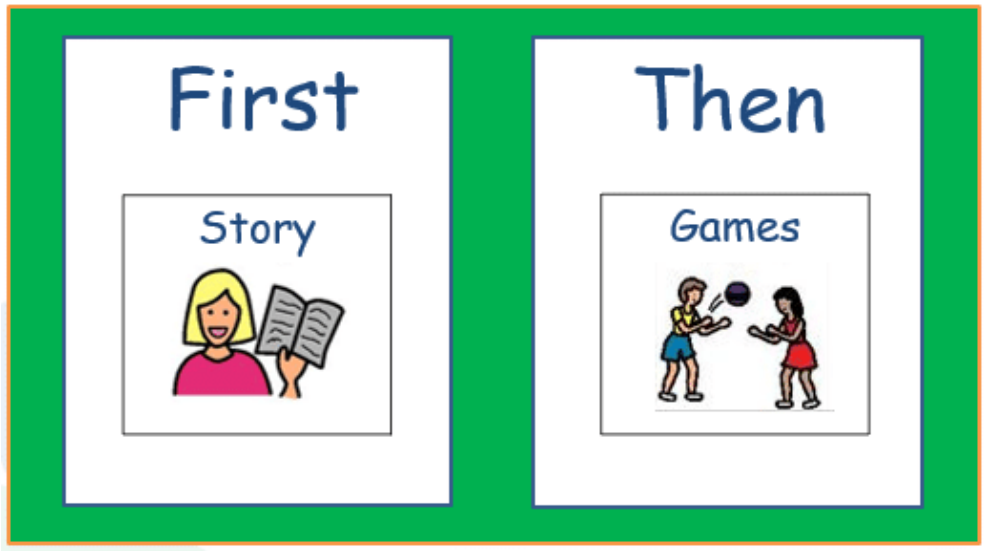
(Source: Sites.google.com, 2021)

Piaget's theory of cognitive development, in contrast to Vygotsky's, believed that children's development was more of an independent process. He believed that development was a result of an individual's tendencies to adapt to new situations. However, like Vygotsky, Piaget believed that children learn for exploring the environment around them. The theories of Piaget are incorporated largely in the Foundation Phase in Wales.

Waller (2009) suggests that having a well-planned curriculum allows children the opportunities to be creative in their own learning. It allows them to incorporate their own interests and what they already know to help actively promote cognitive development.

The Reggio Emilia approach has also influenced the creation of the Foundation Phase Curriculum. It allows children to develop a sense of identity by allowing them to explore new ideas and develop existing skills (Wurm, 2005).

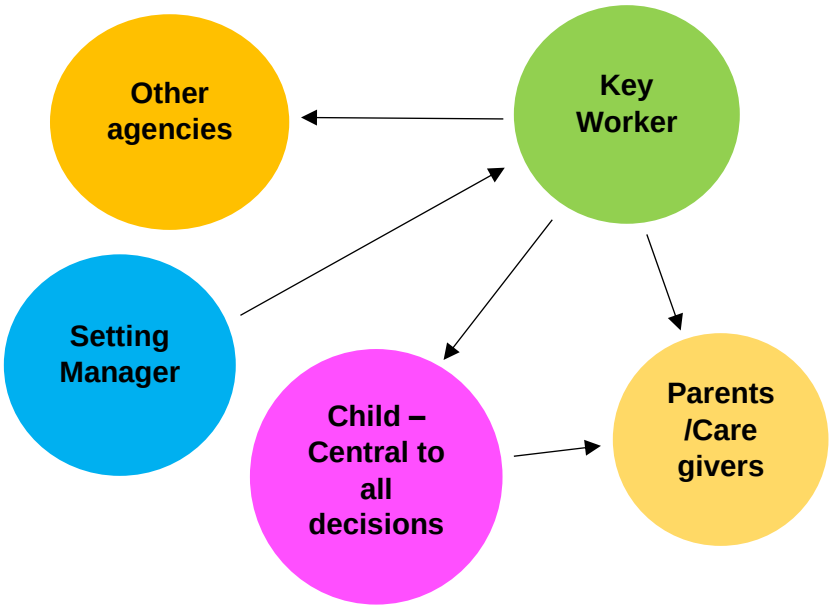
The importance of inclusion is vital in any early years setting, it allows all children, no matter what their capabilities are the right to the same education (Waller, 2009). It is worth taking on board the needs of the child when planning out the environment or the curriculum as this will ensure all children are able to learn and develop. It will also allow a practitioner to provide additional help or equipment to support the children. Children who struggle to communicate may benefit from a 'Now and Then' board. This is a board with pictures of all areas of the setting on including tables for work time, different areas for play time, the dinner hall for lunch time and so on. These are beneficial for children with additional needs as it helps them know what to expect next (Frost, *et al.* 2012).



(Source: Teacherspet, 2019)

Partnership Working

Hostettler Scharer (2018) Suggest that a relationship-based approach to transitions is beneficial in ensuring the child is at the centre of all decisions made between education professionals, parents, and any other care providers. When there is clear communication between all parties, it ensures there is a solid plan set out for the child to help with their early transitions. There could be many people a practitioner will need to build good working relationships with such as, parents, staff from other settings, and social services. If there are children with additional needs in their nursery then they may need to liaise with speech and language specialists, specialist nurses, or occupational therapists. Building good relationships and being able to communicate effectively with them will only benefit the practitioner and most importantly, the child.



The multi-agency approach is dependant on the quality of the collaborative partnerships formed between all parties. As well as continued observations and evaluations of the child in the setting, practitioners are ensuring all the children's needs are being met (Cheminais, 2013).

Interventions

When practitioners are maintaining close links with families and other care agencies, that then allows them to intervene when necessary. When a child starts nursery for the first time many settings offer visits for the child and parent/caregiver before the child starts. This can be beneficial for all parties involved. The child may associate this new setting as safe because their parent/caregiver are there with them. The parent/caregiver has a chance to see their child in this setting and have a chance to relay any necessary information on the child to the key worker. In addition, the setting staff will be able to meet the child and their parent/caregiver and establish a relationship, allowing them to communicate effectively in the best interest of the child and ensure they transition as smoothly as possible.

When identifying potential problems or struggles a child might have, Early Intervention Foundation (2021) suggests that early intervention prevents problems from occurring or tackling them head on when they do. There are many ways in which a practitioner can demonstrate early interventions, these include home visiting programmes to help support vulnerable parents or school-based programmes to help improve children's social and emotional skills. Some argue that early intervention may have a stronger impact when offered in a child's early years (Early Intervention Foundation, 2021).

(Source: Preemie Resource Blog, 2012)

Proposed Outcomes

By creating an environment that is safe and nurturing for children, the outcomes are likely to be children that are:

- Happy and settled
- Confident and curious
- Open to building relationships with their peers
- Feel listened too
- Understand the daily routine

In addition, parents/caregivers will feel:

- Content knowing their children are having their needs met
- Confident to approach staff with any concerns
- Included in their children's learning and development

Welsh Government (2021) state that the new curriculum for Wales sets out four purposes that will encourage children to be:

- Ambitions, capable, and ready to learn
- Enterprising, creative contributors
- Ethical, informed citizens of Wales
- Healthy and confident individuals

In the current Foundation Phase, Welsh Government (2019) places emphasis on the importance of play in helping children's development. It builds their self-esteem and their place in the world. The current Foundation Phase will allow children to develop a positive attitude towards learning, develop self-motivation and independence and be able to make mistakes without the fear of failure (Welsh Government, 2019).