

Early years key worker handbook

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Introduction

What is transition and why is it important?

Transition is the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another. "students in transition from one program to another" (Oxford Dictionary, 2018)

Transition can be vitally important to a child's development when a child has moved to a new learning environment. Transition is something that every child will experience whilst they grow in age and experience different stages of life. Children will continue to travel through transition well into their adult lives and beyond.

A positive transition for children can be instrumental to their developmental skills. Key workers should carry good knowledgeable skills to ensure that every child's transition is handled appropriately and sufficiently. A website called Croner-I supports this view and states that research suggests that transitions are central to young children's development and emotional wellbeing, and the way in which the first transitions are handled could have a significant impact on the child's capacity to cope with change in the short and long term. Early years practitioners should ensure children are fully supported through these key transitions and plan for them appropriately. (Croner-I, 2019)

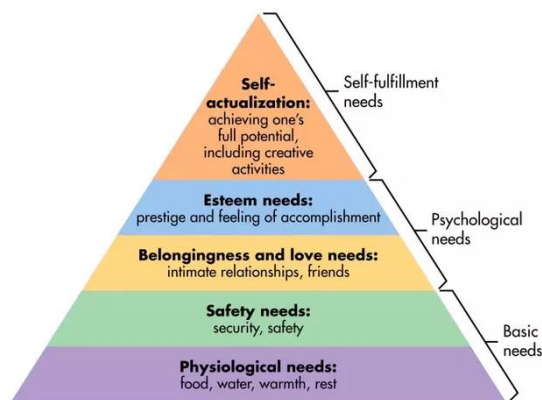
The transitional period between nursery and reception can be both overwhelming and daunting for a young child. Children transition from attending their educational setting of only half a day to full time which initially can be longer and more tiring for a child. Children are also faced with more advanced tasks and learning experiences and outcomes within reception when compared with nursery where learning is far less structured and intense. Good communication between children, key workers and parents is important to help combat these worries because children can benefit from the opportunity of being prepared to the new changes that they will face in reception. 3 Bridges Community.org argues the importance of a child being well prepared for school and its positive impact. Preparing your child for the start of primary school will help them feel more confident about the big changes that are about to happen and what to expect at their new school. In preparation for this important chapter, you can help your child to develop a love for learning, so the move is a happy and a positive one. (3bridgescommunity, no date).

The benefits of ensuring key workers provide a welcoming and happy environment can be crucial. Maintaining this goal will ensure children feel safe, comfortable and valued in their new environment. If a child faces a negative or distressing experience during transition it could potentially be detrimental to a child's development and cause regression in a child's ability. A holistic approach is key when promoting children's learning experiences within their new setting. This positive strategy will help construct positive and capable learners at an early age which can be advantageous to a child's development as they progress through different transitions and grow older. 90% of brain development occurs by the age of 5, so it is crucial that we provide

early years experiences that support the whole child. It is during this critical period when enriched environments and increased stimulation can have the greatest impact on brain development. (JMC, no date).

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<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html> (accessed 12.11.20)

Role of the adult

While working with children it is the adult's duty to ensure children continuously feel valued and comfortable. Adult's should ensure that the setting provides inclusion for all children and is a safe and secure environment for the child to grow and develop. Ensuring inclusion is maintained in a childcare setting, is pivotal as it avoids discrimination. Guaranteeing that inclusion is used throughout can be instrumental in changing of discriminatory views or actions. Adults working within a childcare setting need to maintain a diverse approach to all aspects. Diversity and inclusion link together strongly and struggle to work without each other, if this practise is exercised correctly, children will feel valued and carry a sense of belonging within the childcare setting that will drive positive progression and benefits.

Children and parents should have to opportunity to a 'key worker'. This person is normally the person in charge of taking care of the children. A key worker will facilitate communication and support for the child and their family. A child's key worker will ensure that relationships with each child is constructed positively. The key worker's objective will be to help and support the children and their families. It is important that the key worker builds a strong relationship

between themselves and the family as both key workers and parents will want what is best and most beneficial for the child. Before transition, it is favourable that a child is familiar with their key workers. The transition between being at home with parents most of the time, to attending school full time is huge and can create anxiety and worry for a child. A reception open day is most helpful for easing the transition for child as they gain an opportunity to familiarise themselves with their new environment and members of staff. This will hopefully promote attachments and relationships between the child and key workers. According to the Georgia Department of Human Service infants who are securely attached have learned they can trust other people to take care of them. (Georgia Department of Human Service (GDHS), no date). John Bowlby argues the importance of children feeling secure to develop. A reception open day would be reinforcing a sense of security and comfort for child as the familiarity will reduce stress and nerves within a child. Bowlby suggested that early attachment experience creates 'internal working models' — life-long templates for preconceptions of the value and reliability of relationships, close and otherwise. Attachment allows children the 'secure base' necessary to explore, learn and relate, and the wellbeing, motivation, and opportunity to do so.

The needs of the child

Children's needs are paramount and should always be the key workers focus. It is crucial that the child's holistic development is continuously supported, and their skills are developed and encouraged to grow and progress. Key workers should ensure that learning and play experiences are adaptable to each individual child. They should ensure that they are age appropriate and relevant. Observing a child during transition is important and vital to the promotion of the child's well-being and development. During observation key workers can identify children's interests and experiences, but also their strengths and weakness. These observations can help combat the areas of improvement and to encourage areas of potential involvement within the child.

During transition all reception children in Wales are assessed using 'The Foundation phase Profile' this program supports the assessment of children during their time at foundation phase. It is used to ensure that there is a national approach to assessment which will aid children to meet outcomes at the end of foundation phase. The foundation phase profile is designed to support and assess parallelly with health care practitioners. The assessments help key workers to identify any areas of concern within a child that can be supported appropriately and sufficiently. The assessment is made up of different ladders of skills in the main four areas of Learning, Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity, Language, Literacy and Communication Skills, Mathematical Development and Physical Development. This program is helpful for both children and key workers as it identifies appropriate areas of learning for each child reflecting upon their knowledge and understanding provided from the foundation phase profile. The Welsh Government argue that this strategy is instrumental to a child's individual learning needs being met. They state, through the use of observations and formative assessments, the profile supports practitioners to provide a developmentally appropriate holistic curriculum for all. (The Welsh Government, 2017).

As well as the importance of the child's development, it is critical that the child's emotional and social well-being is always met. Children that feel secure and comfortable within a setting show greater social skills, thus helping the child to exhibit better confidence and encouraging the child to build social relationships with their peers and adults. A trusting attachment between the child and key worker is instrumental to aid their emotional well-being. Forming attachment

encourages trust and security within the child. Secure attachment is associated with greater emotional regulation, social competence, and willingness to take on challenges as well.

Partnership

Well communicated relationships between key workers and the children's family can be beneficial for the child and their development. Children whose parents and key workers maintain a strong partnership, grow to develop greater social skills and fewer behavioural problems both at home and school. A healthy and positive partnership promotes a greater communication which is fundamental to the progression of a child's well-being. The collaborative involvement helps children exhibit confident social skills, a secure and positive attachment which leads to healthy holistic development within the child. Parents and key workers can share mutual priorities and construct plans to maximums area of growth within the child. Berger, 1987 state that a good partnership between parents and key workers is not only beneficial for children but for adults too as they feel supported by each other. They found from studies that the happiest and most successful teachers are the ones who regard parents as partners and friends in the program of educating young children. (Berger, 1987, Honig, 1979, Leeper Witherspoon and Day, 1984).

Parents and key workers can collaborate ideas together and offer blended interventions based on their own experience with the child, thus creating effective strategies to help combat any issues or to promote a child's holistic development. Jeffrey I. Gelfer strongly supported the importance of partnership. He stated that good partnership encouraged growth within children. Children's growth and development are more secure when home and schoolwork collaboratively together. (Jeffrey I. Gelfer, 2012).

Parental experiences of their child are instrumental when identifying issues within a child. Communicated partnership will provide opportunities for parents to share their concerns of a child. Before children start school, parents have a unique insight into the needs and tendencies of the child, this knowledge can help key workers to understand behaviours and habits of the child when they first start school. This understanding can help key workers to address and identify any areas of improvement within the child's development or any concerning factors in the most advantageous way. A successful partnership is effective for parents and the child's home life experiences as well. Key workers sharing their observations and experience of the child within a different setting can be helpful and insightful for the parents. These observations potentially could help parents understand their child's behaviour better and produce more effective strategies at home as well as school. The Plowden report found numerous studies, that when parents participate with a child's education and learning it provides them with a greater chance of success. (Plowden, B. 1967)

Interventions

Transitional periods can sometimes be distressing and uncomfortable for a child when they are experiencing feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. It is important that these issues are addressed accordingly and quickly to avoid the child experiencing any unsettling feelings. Children who feel uncomfortable and stressed tend to lack motivation and the willingness to learn. From research, researchers believe chronic activation of the HPA axis and the influence of stress hormones like cortisol on other biological systems (described below) have important implications for children's academic functioning as well as their capacity to develop constructive relationships with peers

and adults (Thompson, R, 2014). It is crucial that all key workers approach everything in a uniform and collaborative way. It can be detrimental if situations are dealt with in a different way, potentially causing regression. All key workers should be well equipped with a mutual knowledge and strategies when engaging with children. This consistency can help children understand boundaries and respect disciplines that are set out throughout the setting.

It is important that the child feels comfortable and secure with key workers, ensuring that children are aware that key workers can offer them support in all aspects of the setting is instrumental. Key worker must ensure that child is listened to and made to feel valued and wanted within the classroom. Staff should ensure they are nurturing towards children when it is needed and continuously encouraging activities surrounding the promotion of their well-being. Key workers should ensure that 'check in time or check in stations' are available for children to talk about how their feeling and why they are feeling that way. This strategy will improve the children's trust within adults and their peers while also promoting the children's empathy skills and encouraging the children to be more confident, thus developing social and emotional skills. A hugely important (but frequently overlooked) stage in the process of building a child's emotional awareness, is the one to develop their ability to recognise, identify and verbalise their feelings. Until students can master this fundamental step, any attempt to introduce strategies and coping skills simply will not work. (Emma Shackleton, 2017) The benefits of 'check in' will also be fundamental in constructing a positive attachment between key workers and children. British Psychologist John Bowlby argued his theory of attachment, highlighting the importance of attachment and its benefits to a child's well-being and development. A growing body of literature suggests these outcomes are influenced by the quality of the relationships and early childhood experiences in early years settings (Bowlby, 2007) and highlights the importance of children's relationships with consistent educators to ensure they feel safe and secure in their caregivers' absence (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007).

In some circumstances, key workers may identify some concerns from observations and experiences about the child during the transitional period. If necessary, key workers may seek advice or support from internal or external agencies that can offer different strategical interventions. If a key worker felt that this was the most beneficial course of action then it would be vital that the child and their family were informed, and this intervention would be discussed in greater depth before pursuing any potential strategies. Key workers must ensure they seek parents' consent for further intervention. Parental consent is required where it is viewed that a child is incapable of understanding the implications of taking part in a study or where the child is regarded as incompetent to consent. (National Children's Bureau, 1993) The child's opinion and the voice of the child being encouraged is also just as important when making decisions. It is law that the child has been afforded the opportunity to share their views, concerns and opinions when a matter is regarding themselves. Key workers must ensure this adhered to, as this is respecting and following the right of the child, in particular article 12. The UNCRC states that all rights should be always met, Article 12 (respect for the views of the child) Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. (UNCRC, no date).

Proposed outcomes

During transitional periods all children will respond differently. No two children carry the same experiences or attributes as each other so it would be uncommon for children to behave the same during a transition. The educational setting should ensure it offers a diverse and adaptable environment for each individual child that aids their development positively. When

children transition to reception to nursery it may potentially feel very different and alien for some individuals but like nursery, reception is also within 'foundation phase'. The basis of learning within foundation phase is through play. The Foundation Phase is built on the principles of learning through play and is an essential attribute within the educational curriculum. From evidence we can understand that learning through play is a powerful mechanism thus helping children to develop and extend their language and communication skills. Learning through play allows children to be creative, to investigate and explore different materials while providing them with opportunities to experiment and predict outcomes.

Lev Vygotsky argued that his theory of learning through play was fundamental to the growth of child's development and furthered their capability. In play, a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself. (Lev Vygotsky, 1896-1934).

The proposed outcome is to ensure that all children are felt supported throughout their transitions and that their needs and development is effectively addressed. It is vitally important that children feel safe and secure within the educational setting. Key workers should ensure children are healthy while also being resilient and capable learners. Setting out the outcomes that we want to achieve for all children in the early years in Wales focuses us on what it is we are all working towards. Everyone should be able to see the contribution that they are making to influencing these outcomes. Not one single policy or programme will change the outcomes, but the combined efforts of everyone across the sector. (The Welsh Government, no date)

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