

Childcare practice procedures

8.4 Settling in and transitions

To feel securely settled and ready to learn, children need to form attachments with the adults who care for them, primarily a key person, but others too. In this way they feel part of a community; they are able to contribute to that community and receive from it. Very young children, approach separation from their parent with anxieties, older children have a more secure understanding of 'people permanence' and are able to approach new experiences with confidence; but also need time to adjust and feel secure. It is the entitlement of all children to be settled comfortably into a new environment.

We follow a three-stage model of settling in based on three key needs:

1. *Proximity* - Babies and young children feel safest when a familiar adult, such as a parent, is present when they are getting used to a new carer and new surroundings. In this way they can become confident in engaging with those experiences independently later on.
2. *Secure base* – Because the initial need for proximity of the parent has been met, babies and young children gradually begin to feel secure with a key person in a new surrounding so that they are able to participate independently for small periods of time.
3. *Dependency* – Babies and young children are able to separate from parents' and main carers when they have formed a secure attachment to their key person who knows and understands them best and on whom they can depend for their needs to be met.

The manager and key person explain the need for settling in and agree a plan with the parents.

Settling-in for babies, children under two and those with SEND

- Children are settled in at the first session with a parent and then following sessions for a short time without a parent, extending the duration until they are ready to start
- Where a number of babies need to start – key persons can start settling one child in the morning and another in the afternoon. We start the settling visits a few weeks before the child's start day at no cost to the parent
- If a child has been identified as having SEND then the key person/SENCO and parents will need to identify and address potential barriers to settling in e.g. timings of medication and invasive procedures, specific routines and levels of support.

Promoting proximity

- One to two hours is sufficient for a baby and parent to attend on any one day initially.
- On the first day, the key person shows the parent around, introduces members of staff, and explains how the day is organised, making the parent and child feel welcome and comfortable. The parent completes our settling in forms sharing their knowledge of their child
- The key person, where possible, always greets the parent and child.

- The parent is invited to play with their child and the key person spends time with them. As much time as possible is allowed for the key person to do this.
- The key person will engage the baby in eye contact but not rush to handle or hold the baby if this causes them distress.
- The key person observes to see if the baby is recognising them, beginning to explore the environment (if able), noting what they seem to like and making sure it is available the next visit

Promoting secure base

- When the young child has experienced different times of the day, these are then fitted together to establish continuity of the day.
- When the parent leaves, they always say goodbye and say they are coming back. Parents should never slip away without the baby noticing; this leads to greater distress.
- Parents can be asked to bring in a recently worn tee shirt or scarf that smells of them. Babies will often settle if they can smell the familiar smell of the parent. Some parents may agree to send in a recording of a song that they sing to get their baby to sleep, especially if it is in their home language.

Promoting dependency

- Attachment can be seen when the baby shows signs that they are happy to transfer their need to be dependent onto the key person. Key persons look for signs such as the baby being pleased to see them, looking for them when distressed, holding out their arms to be held, establishing eye contact, responding to play, feeding and taking comfort from the key person.

Part-time babies and toddlers

- Part-time babies have the same needs when settling in as full-time babies. However, part-time attendance means that there may be gaps between times the baby is in one week to the next.

When babies do not seem to settle

- It is not good for babies to be in a setting when they are acutely distressed and anxious. A baby who is not securely attached and settled is overwhelmed with fear. They are unable to participate in any activity and do not learn. It is not in their immediate or long-term interest to attempt to prolong what is an agonising experience for them.
- A highly distressed baby will need 1:1 attention consistently; their distress will upset other babies and put stress on staff. If this is the case, the key person discusses with the manager or deputy.
- Attempts are made to reduce anxiety and distress through a planned approach with the parent.
- Particular triggers of distress are discussed to see what can be done to alleviate it.
- If all attempts have been made and the baby or toddler still cannot cope without the parent, then the place can be delayed and more settling visits are offered.

When a parent is unable or refuses to take part in settling in

- Information about the 'settling in' plan is given at the first visit and the reasons are explained.
- If the parent feels that this will be difficult – perhaps another close relative can come in instead.
- Genuine difficulties need to be handled sensitively, but generally speaking this is not an issue where the parent has a choice not to attend with their child. A parent who refuses to take part in settling in may have the offer of the place withdrawn.

Prolonged absences

- Parents are made aware of the need to 're-settle' their children and a plan is agreed.

Moving up from room to room

- Children are given the opportunity to visit the next room as part of a normal day and participate in play and join in at mealtimes, becoming familiar with adults, children and the environment. Where possible their current key person will stay with them
- The key person discusses the plan for the child moving up with the parents.
- The current key person will spend time with the child in the new group, liaising with the new key person and ensuring that the child is familiar with all the main times of the day. The current Key person will introduce the new key person to the parent
- The child gradually spends more time with the new key person until they can cope in their new room.
- Some children take longer, and their needs for proximity and secure base stages should be accommodated as much as possible.

For children whose first language is not English

- For children learning English as an additional language, settling in may take longer as the child is dependent upon the parents' input to make sense of what is going on.