09 Early years practice procedures

**09.4 Prime times – 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, especially two- to three-year-olds, 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 carers 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 and other teachers 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/other teachers who knows and understands them best and on whom they can depend for their needs to be met.

The setting manager and/or key person explain the need for settling in and agree a plan with the parents. Depends on child’s needs they review the plan and agree what will happen the next day.

**Settling-in process**

* Parents and the child are invited for an induction visit. During a visit a manager shows the parents around, introduces members of staff, and explains how the day is organised, making the parent and child feel welcome and comfortable.
* Information about the ‘settling in’ plan is given at the first visit and the reasons are explained.
* A settling-in plan is drawn up individually for each child.
* 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.
* On the first day, the parent attends with the child (for no more then 3 hours) and stays in the setting for as long as a child needs it. Parent might be able to leave a child for a short period of time if the child feels confident in the environment. However parent needs to stay close to the setting and be able to come back to the nursery if needed.
* During the first days the parent needs to stay with the child as long as needed. The parent is invited to play with their child and the key person spends time with them.
* If the separation causes anxiety, the parent/ carer stays with the child and may gradually start to spend short periods of time in another room/outside the nursery to see how the child responds, this time increases until the child can manage a whole session without the parent.
* A two-year-old may have little or no experience of group care. As part of gathering information from parents, it is important to find out about the child’s experience of non-parental care, for example grandparents, or childminder; this informs staff as to how a child may respond to a new situation.
* Parents are encouraged to say goodbye and explain to their child where they are going, and that they will return. Patience with the process will ensure children are happy and eager to come to play and be cared for in the setting.
* Some children take longer, and their needs for proximity and secure base stages should be accommodated as much as possible.

**Prolonged absences**

* If children are absent from the setting for any for periods of time beyond two or three weeks, their attachment to their key persons will have decreased and might need to be built up again.
* Parents are made aware of the need to ‘re-settle’ their children and a plan is agreed.

**For children whose first language is not English**

* For many children learning English as an additional language, the stage of proximity takes longer as the child is dependent upon the parents’ input to make sense of what is going on.
* If the parent does not speak English, efforts are made to source an interpreter for induction; it will be helpful for them to see around the setting and to understand the settling-in programme.
* Through the interpreter, the key person will try to gauge the child’s level of skills in their home language; this will give the key person an idea of the child’s interests and levels of understanding.
* The need for the parent to converse in the child’s home language is important.
* Parents are encouraged to make a list of key words in the child’s home language (sometimes it is useful to write the word as you would pronounce it.) These words will be used with the child.
* Children will be spoken to as per any other child, using gestures and facial expressions to help.
* When the child feels happy to spend time with the key person and/or other teachers, the parent should spend time outside of the room.
* Progress with settling in will be done as with any other child; it just takes a little longer to reach dependency/independence.