



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* - 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, 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* – 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 setting manager and key person explain the need for settling in and agree a plan with the parents. They write this down and both the key person and parents keep a copy. Each day they review the plan and agree what will happen the next day.

Settling-in children with SEND

- ❖ 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.

Two-year-olds starting a setting for the first time

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ The three-stage approach involving *Proximity*, *Secure Base* and *Dependency/Independence* is applied to two-year-olds as to younger children.

- ❖ Before a child starts to attend our setting, we use a variety of ways to provide his/her parents with information. These include written information within our Welcome Pack, Children's Welcome Pack, displays about activities available within the setting, information evenings, individual meetings with parents and access to our weekly Parent Update via email.
- ❖ During the half-term before a child is enrolled, we provide opportunities for the child and his/her parents to visit the setting for some taster sessions.
- ❖ After the taster session, the setting manager or deputy and key person, will draw up a settling-in plan with the parents.
- ❖ We have an expectation that the parent, carer or close relative, will stay for most of the session/s during the first week, gradually taking time away from their child; increasing this time as and when the child is able to cope during the **proximity** stage.
- ❖ When it is evident that the child is developing a sense of **secure base** when he or she shows interest in activities and begins to engage with the key person and other children. Then the parent/ carer may gradually start to spend short periods of time in another room to see how the child responds, this time increases until the child can manage a whole session without the parent.
- ❖ Separation causes anxiety in two-year-olds, as they have no concept of where their parents have gone. Parents should always say goodbye and tell them when 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.
- ❖ We recognise that some children will settle more readily than others, but that some children who appear to settle rapidly are not ready to be left. We expect that the parent will honour the commitment to stay for at least the first week, or possibly longer, until their child can stay happily without them.
- ❖ We do not believe that leaving a child to cry will help them to settle any quicker. We believe that a child's distress will prevent them from learning and gaining the best from the setting.
- ❖ We reserve the right not to accept a child into the setting without a parent or carer if the child finds it distressing to be left. This is especially the case with very young children.
- ❖ Within the first four to six weeks of starting, we discuss and work with the child's parents to begin to create their child's record of achievement.

Three- and four-year-olds

- ❖ Most children of this age can move through the stages more quickly and confidently.
- ❖ Some children take longer, and their needs for proximity and secure base stages should be accommodated as much as possible.
- ❖ Some children appear to leap to dependency/independence within a couple of days. In most cases, they will revert to the need for proximity and a secure base. It can be difficult to progress to true dependency/independence and this can be frustrating.

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 be clear about their role in interpreting in the play area.
- ❖ The settling-in programme is explained to the parent, and it is emphasised how important it is that they stay with the child and talk to him/her in the home language to be able to explain things.
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ The key person makes the parent feel welcome using smiles and gestures.
- ❖ With the parent, 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 and parents will be addressed with 'hello' and 'goodbye' in their language.
- ❖ The key person prepares for the child's visits by having a favourite toy or activity ready for the child to provide a means to interact 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 (secure base), 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.

When children do not seem to settle

- ❖ If all attempts have been made and the child still cannot cope without the parent, then the place is offered only with the parent attending. In some cases it may be appropriate to withdraw the place and help the parent consider alternatives. For a child 'in need' this may need to be discussed with the social care worker, where one is allocated to the child, health visitor or referring agency.

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

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

This policy was adopted by

Abinger Common Nursery

On

March 2024

Date to be reviewed

March 2025

Signed on behalf of the provider



Name of signatory

Mrs Emma Powell

Role of signatory (e.g. chair, director or owner)

Nursery Chair Person
