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

**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/carer 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/carer has a choice not to attend with their child. A parent/carer who refuses to take part in settling in may have the offer of the place withdrawn.

**Prolonged absences**

* If babies or toddlers are absent from the setting for any for 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/carers are made aware of the need to ‘re-settle’ their children and a plan is agreed.

**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.
* To settle in a two-year-old, the setting will go through the same process of gradually increasing the time a child attends with a parent/carer during the proximity stage.
* 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.
* Separation causes anxiety in two-year-olds, as they have no concept of where their parents/carers have gone. Parents/carers 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.

**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 secure base. It can be difficult to progress to true dependency/independenceand this can be frustrating.
* If the child shows interest in the activities and is beginning to engage with the key person and other children, the parent/carer spends time in the parent/carer room (if available) to see how the child responds.
* Parents/carers are encouraged to explain to their child where they are going, and that they will return.
* If by the fifth day, the child is able to spend more time without the parent/carer, the child may be ready for a short day or session the following week, progressing to a full day or session very soon.

**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 parent/carers’ input to make sense of what is going on.
* The settling-in programme is explained to the parent/carer, 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.
* 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/carer to converse in the child’s home language is important.
* The key person makes the parent/carer feel welcome using smiles and gestures.
* With the parent/carer, 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/carers 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/carer 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.