



Settling in, Attachment & Key person policy

Written in accordance with the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2017):
Learning and development requirements

A quality workforce focused on learning and development and health and safety

1.19 All children deserve high quality early education and care. This requires a quality workforce. A well-trained, skilled team of practitioners can help every child achieve the best possible educational outcomes. Children need to build an attachment with their key person for their confidence and well-being. The key person also promotes children's learning by developing a deep understanding of their individual needs and children can particularly benefit from their modelling and support. The requirements in relation to workforce training and responsibilities, including that of the key person, are outlined in Section 3 but they are equally important for children's learning and development as they are for their safety and welfare.

Key person

3.34 Each child must be assigned a key person. Their role is to help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs, to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents and/or carers. They should also help families engage with more specialist support if appropriate.

Settling in

We pride ourselves on having a successful settling in process, we believe that if children are fully settled somewhere then this is when they are able to form positive relationships and fully engage in their learning.

Our aim is for children to feel safe, happy, and engaged. Parents to have confidence in our ability to care for their child and their child's well-being, and feel confident that they are partners in their child's learning.

We give a minimum of 4 settling in sessions before the child's start date, with a home visit carried out prior to settling sessions starting. The number of settling in sessions depends completely on the child/parent. Every child is different and we will take this into consideration when settling them in.

The home visit will be carried out by a member of the team from the room where the child will be starting along with a senior member of the team, Kylie Jones or Kim Baker. Our aim from the home visit is to help us all start building relationships from the very beginning. Parents and their child feel much more comfortable and relaxed when in their home environment and the child will be able to see parents build a connection with the member of our nursery team; already building trust and understanding, which is essential for their settling in process. Home visits allow our team to observe your child within their home environment, already making a close observation of their interests, favourite toys, their personality, and confidence. Allowing the team to plan for the child's settling in process at nursery. During the home visit we will ask their parent to complete an all about me with us, this will encourage the parent to tell us as much information about the child as possible so that we get a good picture of the child.

After the home visit the in house settling sessions will begin the first one will be with the parent and the child, by the child seeing their parent in the room this will encourage the trust process, if the child see's their parent is comfortable and happy then they will feel more at ease and that this is a positive experience. This will help us to build a bond and meet their needs, following the all about me at the home visit if parents think of any additional information or questions they can share them in this session as seeing the environment may spark questions. We like it to be a home from home experience for the children so whatever their routine is at home we will mirror that the best we can here.

The second session will be for 2 hours, it is completely up to the parent whether they stay with the child or leave them to play. What we will not let happen is the parent 'sneak' out of the room while their child is playing, the reason for this is the child may feel abandoned as there has been no goodbye given to them. The best way to leave a child is to be positive, let them know that they will have a lovely time and that you will be back to pick them up later. If a parent show signs that they are upset or a little anxious about leaving, the child will pick up of this and feel that something is wrong. The quicker the separation the quicker they can focus on what we have on offer in the room.

The third session the child will stay for the morning and have some lunch with us. This will allow the child to experience what a lunch time is like here.

The final session the child will stay for the full session time, they will experience a whole day with us and hopefully feel a lot more settled about coming to play.

If the child/parent is showing signs that they may need a few more sessions then we will add these in before the official start date.

Attachment

Attachment is a clinical term used to describe "a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings"

John Bowlby was a pioneer of the attachment theory 1907-1990 his theory states that children have an innate need for attachment, this helps children feel safe and secure, particularly in the early years. This influenced the key person approach within childcare and educational settings. We fully support this approach and have seen the positive effects these attachments have had on children in our care.

A Key Person

At Little Squirrels every child has a key person, a key person is a member of the team who works closely with each individual child to support their development, and be the key point of contact for that child's parents or carers. A key person will be allocated once a child has settled in for at least 2 weeks, this is to establish who the child feels a connection and bond with.

A child's relationship with their key worker is a very important part of their learning and development. A key person has responsibilities for working with a small number of children and helps build and develop positive relationships with children and between parents, carers and staff.

Each classroom consists of two members practitioners, the benefits of this is that staff can build a relationship with all children not only their own key children, as it is unlikely that the key person will always be available every time a child is brought to or collected from the nursery. If a key person is away, ill, or on annual leave their key children will still have a relationship built with the other practitioner they are cared for by in their room to ensure their emotional well-being is supported.

Relationships with key children

- ♥ The key person provides a secure attachment with their key children in nursery.
- ♥ To have a key person who really gets to know them as individuals and their family and celebrates and facilitates their individual needs, interests and development.
- ♥ They help their key children settle in and become familiar with the setting.
- ♥ The key person meets the needs of their key children responding sensitively to their feelings, ideas and behaviour.

- ♥ The key person provides a 'secure base' for the children by being there to support them and allowing them to explore at their own pace.
- ♥ They are primarily responsible for their key child's care routines.
- ♥ Promoting their key children's development through their current interests and fascinations

Relationships with parents/carers

- ♥ Key persons should develop a good relationship with parents/carers, ensuring that the child is cared for appropriately at nursery and accommodating their individual needs within the daily routine.
- ♥ Changes in routine at home can affect your child's wellbeing so it is important that the key person forms not only a strong bond with the child but also with the child's family so that the sharing of information between the two can be done successfully, leading to the best possible outcomes for your child.
- ♥ The key person needs to develop a two way flow of information between themselves and the parent/carer to help them become aware of any significant aspects of family life that maybe important to the child.
- ♥ The key person has responsibility for sharing their key children's development profiles with parents during termly parent meetings and other professionals as required, in cases of children with additional needs or identified children in need they will be called upon to attend reviews and core group meetings with the support of a senior manager.

The role of the Key person

- ♥ The key person helps the child to feel known, understood, cared about, and safe.
- ♥ The key person role involves a triangle of trust with the child and family.
- ♥ An effective key person approach needs strong leadership and committed practice.
- ♥ Children benefit most when their key person has special qualities and dispositions.

Babies and children become attached to significant adults within reliable, respectful, warm and loving relationships which are essential in order to thrive. Babies and children experience wellbeing and contentment when their physical and emotional needs are met and their feelings are accepted. The key person approach, reflecting relationships within families, helps serve to meet these conditions. Early experiences of love and attachment have lifelong benefits.

The key person helps the child to feel known, understood, cared about, and safe. The key person helps the baby or child feel confident that they are "held in mind", thought about and loved. This experience of being cared for by reliable adults who meet their physical needs and remain attentive and playful, affectionate, and thoughtful allows children to form secure attachments. Such a grounding provides a "secure base" from which children feel confident to explore the world and form other relationships.

The key person role involves a “triangle of trust” with the child and family. A key person approach is a way to ensure that all children and families have one or more persons within the setting with whom they have a special, nurturing relationship. The presence of a key person helps the child to feel emotionally secure when away from home and provides a reassuring point of contact for parents. There are different ways to ensure a key person is always available (e.g. shared and paired caring, or support partner or buddy).

A key person has special responsibilities for supporting a specific group of children and building relationships with them and their families. The role will involve close physical and personal care for a baby or young child. It is therefore important that parents feel able to share vital information about their child’s intimate care preferences, likes and dislikes, motivations and interests, and how they feel about being away from home. Parents might want to talk about their child’s feelings or development. It is most helpful for a key person to attend the home visit with another colleague. This frees up opportunities for parents to talk while the key person makes playful connection with the child. If a home visit is not possible, adults can meet somewhere comfortable, with resources to encourage relaxed and playful introductions.

The key person’s role includes, but goes far beyond, administrative and operational activities such as keeping records or communicating about the child with parents or other professionals. It is an emotional, reciprocal relationship. As children grow, the key person may not always be present at the setting. Despite this, the child should still feel “held in mind” when they are apart. The key person approach is statutory throughout the early years phase, including in Reception. The role may look very different in a large class of children with often only two adults, but the principles remain the same. A teacher can retain overall knowledge of the children in their class and benefit from particular knowledge that other people working with them might have. The stronger the relationships are, the more supported the child (and their family) will feel about subsequent transitions, including to Key Stage 1.

An effective key person approach needs strong leadership and committed practice. Leaders should have a good working knowledge of the key person approach and be able to implement it to maximise consistency and continuity for the child and family, while offering the best possible support and supervision for practitioners. Although there is legally no minimum qualification to be a key person, leaders can support less experienced staff, including careful thought about the pairing (or mentoring) so that all can benefit from wide expertise. Key persons communicate with a wide range of people involved with the child, including those in other settings the child attends, health visitors, paediatricians, Portage, physiotherapists, social services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, bilingual support, children’s centres, and others such as dinner staff.

The role of the key person involves building a relationship of “professional love”, with specific and potentially heavy demands. It is important to have professional support and supervision in order to share the challenges of the role. It is also a joyful and privileged position to share

in the care of a baby or young child, so having opportunities to celebrate and share those joys are equally important.

Children benefit most when their key person has special qualities and dispositions. Ideally, a key person:

- ♥ Has passion for their work and sees the value and rewards in being a key person
- ♥ Is empathic and understands the different ways of creating a family
- ♥ Appreciates and respects the cultures, identities and diverse backgrounds of the children and families with whom they work
- ♥ Is able to draw on their own informal knowledge of childcare practice from within their own experience and reflect on how best to use or build on it
- ♥ Is able to reflect on and understand the influence of their own attachment experiences on their work with children and families, with the confidence to know when to ask for support and further training
- ♥ Is willing to research and reflect on the concept of “professional love”, so that they can see its relevance to their work as a key person
- ♥ Finds effective ways to connect with families, such as developing digital technologies while continuing with as many opportunities for face-to-face connection as possible
- ♥ Is not judgemental and has the skills to communicate with other agencies and settings involved with the child and their family
- ♥ Is well qualified, and/or has wider knowledge and understanding of, for example:
 - ♥ Child development
 - ♥ Attachment theory, including social and biological factors that might affect a child’s capacity to form attachments
 - ♥ Co-regulation and self-regulation
 - ♥ Neuroscience (brain development and how it links with all the Prime areas as well as self-regulation and executive function)
 - ♥ Pedagogy of effective, relation-based practice
 - ♥ Bias and prejudice, how it affects the children and families they work with as well as themselves, and strategies to challenge this
 - ♥ How to identify and support children in a range of circumstances, including those who are vulnerable, looked after, with visible and invisible special educational needs and disabilities
- ♥ Recognises that it is a personal as well as a professional relationship which brings with it much joy, as well as challenge.
- ♥ Works collaboratively with other practitioners, to ensure consistency for the child, and supports transition as an ongoing process, not just an event.

Records

- ♥ The key person is responsible for observational records of their key children, using these to inform next steps, tracking progress development, individual in the moment planning, IEP’s and completing development profiles for each of their key children.
- ♥ Where a child is supported by another member of staff who is not their key person e.g. SEN support record keeping then becomes a joint responsibility.

Welfare and Safeguarding

- ♥ Key persons are responsible for the welfare of the children in their care monitoring patterns of absence, injury and development referring them on where necessary.

Transition

- ♥ The key person plays an integral role in the transition, aiding this by introducing the children and their parents/carers to their new key person and helping them to become familiar with their new environment.
- ♥ The Key person will organise dates and times for their key child to spend some time in their new room.
- ♥ It is the responsibility of the key person to pass on records during transition and to ensure that these records are all up to date.
- ♥ In the case of a practitioner's absence, it is the responsibility of a secondary key person to cover the role of the primary key person.

Policy updated by Kylie Jones, Kim Baker and the Little Squirrels team March 2026