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* - We have offer a stay and play experience for all parents who are on our waiting list and looking to join us the following year. 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*– When a child has been allocated a space for the following term, we invite the families in to meet the child’s keyworker, play and fill in a very in depth all about me and registration which the keyworker goes through with the parent in order for us to assess the child on entry based on parent’s comments. It also provides us with more information about the child, theirs needs and how to comfort them so the keyworker can provide a smooth transition. 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.
3. *Dependency* – The role of the key person is to form positive relationships with the parent and children as their partners. The parents feel confident with the key person and the child remains settled and happy in their new environment. 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. They write this down and both key person and parents keep a copy. Each day they review the plan and agree what will happen the next day.

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

* Children should at least be at stage 2 of settling before the key person begins settling another child.
* 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.
* A risk assessment will be made by the parent and key person/SENCO.

# Promoting pproximity

* On the first day or during their stay and play’s, 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 key person always greets the parent and child. (Shift patterns may need to be adjusted when settling in.)
* 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 observes to see if the child is recognising them, beginning to explore the environment (if able), noting what they seem to like and making sure it is available the next day.

**Promoting secure base**

* During this time, the key person and parent establish how the child is getting to know the key person. They note when the child seems distressed and when the child is happy and build on this.
* If the child is responding to the situation with smiles and eagerness to be held, then the child is ready for the parent to spend short periods of time away in another part of the building. If signs of distress are still apparent then the separation will be approached more slowly, starting with the parent staying in the room, but taking a ‘back seat’, while the key person spends time with the child.
* When the parent leaves, they always say goodbye and say they are coming back. Parents should never slip away without the child noticing; this leads to greater distress.

**Promoting dependency**

* Attachment can be seen when the children 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 children 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.
* After 4-6 weeks, the key person reviews the settling in plan with the parent and discusses how well the child has settled. They discuss problems that may have arisen and plan how they will be overcome. They plan for the next few weeks and set a time to review. As babies and toddlers grow and change so rapidly, meeting every 6 weeks is recommended.

**Part-time babies and toddlers**

* A settling in review takes place after 6 weeks for the key person and parent to discuss how well the children has settled, formed an attachment and adapted to the setting. Any adverse changes of behaviour at home (or in the setting) are addressed.

**When children do not seem to settle**

* It is not good for children to be in a setting when they are acutely distressed and anxious. A child 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 and the parents will be called after 5mins of crying and if we are unable to settle the with the resources we have agreed on with the parent.
* A highly distressed child will need 1:1 attention consistently; their distress will upset other children and put stress on staff. If this is the case, the key person discusses with the manager or deputy and the parents are called immediately.
* Attempts are made to reduce anxiety and distress through a planned approach with the parent.
* The three stages of settling-in are reviewed and the plan is pitched back at the appropriate stage.
* Particular triggers of distress are discussed to see what can be done to alleviate it.
* 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. A TAF meeting may be needed to try to understand the bigger picture and explore their emotional context with more information.

**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 – 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 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 are made aware of the need to ‘re-settle’ their children.

**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.
* After the induction meeting with the setting manager or deputy and key person, a settling-in plan is drawn up. If needed, a home visit is carried out for the same purpose.
* 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.
* If needed, on the first day, the parent attends with the child, and stays for the morning (less if the child becomes tired). On day two, the parent stays longer and on day three stays until, and including lunch.
* 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 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.

**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.
* After the parent attends for an induction meeting with the setting manager or deputy and key person, (or in some circumstances a home visit), a settling-in plan is drawn up.
* Parents are encouraged to explain to their child where they are going, and that they will return.

**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 and 2D/3D visuals to aid their communication skills.
* 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.