

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 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. The key person and parents can discuss whether more time might be needed.

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

- Start times for babies are staggered to allow sufficient one to one time with each child and parent.
- Babies should at least be at stage 2 of settling before the key person begins settling another child.
- Where a number of babies need to start – key persons can start settling one child in the morning and another in the afternoon. In their first week, children who are settling in will not stay all day.
- 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.

Promoting proximity

- For the first day (one hour session), the parent attends with the baby and does not leave.
- One hour is sufficient for a baby and parent to attend on any one day initially.
- On the first day, 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.
- Over subsequent days, depending how the child is responding, the child is invited to attend on their own for one hour.
- At this time, the key person will spend time with the child.
- The key person observes to see if the baby 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.
- A two hour settling in period may be suggested if the child needs a little more time to adjust. This two hour session is chargeable and best discussed with the keyworker.

Promoting secure base

- The young child may be asked to settle in at different times of the day, these are then fitted together to establish continuity of the day. Manager may also suggest the same time to reduce transition anxiety.
- If the child is responding to the situation with distractions then they can continue with next day settling in on their own.
- When the parent leaves, they always say goodbye and say they are coming back. Parents should never slip away without the baby noticing; this leads to greater distress.
- Parents can be asked to bring in a comforter/favourite toy for the child.

Promoting dependency

- Attachment can be seen when the child looks for and needs their keyworker or familiar member of staff they are comfortable with.
- After 2-3 weeks, the key person reviews the settling in plan with parent if the child has not 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.

When child does 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- If all attempts have been made and the child cannot cope without the parent, then the place is offered will be reviewed. 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 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 and a plan is agreed.

Moving up from baby room to the main room

- One-year olds are not moved to the main room before their second birthday or before they can cope; they are given the opportunity to visit the main group as part of a normal day and participate in play and join in at mealtimes, becoming familiar with adults, children and the environment.
- When approaching 2.5 years, and when a vacancy arises, a new key person is identified. The key person discusses the plan for the child moving up with the parents.
- The baby room key person and the pre-school keyworker agree how the child will be settled; child will spend time with their new key person before the move takes place.
- The current key person will spend time with the child in the new group, liaising with the new key person and ensuring that the child is familiar with all the main times of the day.
- The child gradually spends more time with the new key person until they can cope in their new room.

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. Where possible, a one to one with the parents and new keyworker will take place.
- On the first day, the child will go straight to pre-school room and spend time with the staff and keyworker if the keyworker attends on the first day. (Not all keyworkers are in everyday, however they will be in for the majority of the child's sessions).
- 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/independence and 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.
- On the first day, the parent attends with the child and stays for an hour (less if the child becomes tired), on day two the child will spend an hour on their own and the next day child will stay until and including lunch (if full day care).
- If child manages half day session then a full day can be arranged as the next step. (Parents are able to collect their child anytime once agreed with staff, this allows them to leave before end of day gradually increasing to a full day).

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 when the child has the settling in sessions. It may be that the parent attends 1 hour sessions if needed.
- 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.

Reviewed Oct 2022 by A Chauhan & K Egan