



Childcare practice procedures

4.1a 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* - 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's and key person explain the need for settling in and agree a plan with the parents/carers. They write this down and both key person and parents/carers have a copy on the Family app. 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

- Start times for babies are staggered to allow sufficient one to one time with each child and parent/carers.
- 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 usually stay all day.
- If a child has been identified as having SEND then the key person/SENCO and parents/carers 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 visit, the parent/carers attend with the baby and does not leave for any time.
- One hour is sufficient for a baby and parent/carers to attend on any one day initially.
- On the first settle day, the key person shows the parent/carers around, introduces members of staff, and explains how the day is organised, making the parent/carers and child feel welcome and comfortable.
- The key person always greets the parent/carers and child.

- The parent/carer 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.
- At this time, the key person does not change or feed the baby but observes the parent/carer's handling of the baby and how the baby responds.
- The key person will engage the baby in eye contact but not rush to handle or hold the baby if this causes them distress.
- 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.

Promoting secure base

- If the baby is responding to the situation with smiles and eagerness to be held, then the baby is ready for the parent/carer 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/carer staying in the room, (out of session hours) but taking a 'back seat', while the key person spends time with the baby.
- When the parent/carer leaves, they always say goodbye and say they are coming back. Parents/carers should never slip away without the baby noticing; this leads to greater distress.
- Gradually, time out of the room is extended to however many minutes the child can handle without becoming distressed, but never longer than one hour to start.
- When the baby can comfortably cope with one hour, the key person and parent/carer plan the next stage.
- Parents/carers can be asked to bring in a recently worn tee shirt or scarf that smells of them. Babies will often settle if they can smell the familiar smell of the parent. Some parents/carers may agree to send in a recording of a song that they sing to get their baby to sleep, especially if it is in their home language.
- When the young child has experienced different times of the day, these are then fitted together to establish continuity of the day.
- If a baby is struggling to settle the parent/carer will attend with the baby for the more settle session times. During this time, the key person and parent establish how the baby is getting to know the key person. They note when the baby seems distressed and when the baby is happy and build on this.

Promoting dependency

- Attachment can be seen when the baby 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 baby 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.
- Parents/carers can now leave their baby for longer, until the baby can cope with a longer day.
- After 4-6 weeks, the key person reviews the settling in plan with the parent/carer 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

- Part-time babies have the same needs when settling in as full-time babies. However, part-time attendance means that there may be gaps between times the baby is in one week to the next.
- During settling in the baby and parent/carer attend every day, even on the days when they will not usually, until the baby is settled and comfortably attached to the key person. Then the normal pattern of attendance should commence.
- A settling in review takes place after 6 weeks for the key person and parent/carer to discuss how well the baby has settled, formed an attachment and adapted to the setting. Any adverse changes of behaviour at home (or in the setting) are addressed as a sign of separation difficulty.

When babies do not seem to settle

- It is not good for babies to be in a setting when they are acutely distressed and anxious. A baby 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 baby will need 1:1 attention consistently; their distress will upset other babies 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/carer.
- 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 baby or toddler still cannot cope without the parent, in some cases it may be appropriate to withdraw the place and help the parent/carer consider alternatives or to try again at a later stage. 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/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.

How Perranporth Pre-School settles children:

- Its important for us to know If the child has 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.

- Start times for all children are staggered to allow sufficient one to one time with each child and parent/carer.
- For the first visit, the parent/carer attends with the child and does not leave for any time.
- One hour is sufficient for a child and parent/carer to attend on any one day initially.
- On the first settle day, the key person shows the parent/carer around, introduces members of staff, and explains how the day is organised, making the parent/carer and child feel welcome and comfortable.
- The key person always greets the parent/carer and child.
- The parent/carer 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 three-stage approach involving *Proximity*, *Secure Base* and *Dependency/Independence* is applied to all children. 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 induction meeting with the setting manager or deputy and key person, a settling-in plan is drawn up. Where possible.
- Children and their families are invited into the setting to have a stay and play together for half an hour with their key person. This is done outside of setting hours.
- The next session the child attends will be in the setting with other children without their parents.
- Parents/Carers are welcome and encourage to stay on site with the Manager so if their child needs them they are there.
- This first session will last for however long the key person feels the child can cope, but never longer than 1 hour maximum.
- 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. We will at this time increase the hours a child attends, until the child can manage a whole session without the parent.
- After this session the key person chats with the parents/carers again to make a plan for the next visit, this may include increasing the hours spent at the setting.
 - We do not believe that leaving a child to cry will help them to settle. We believe that a child's distress will prevent them from learning and gaining the best from our setting.
- To settle in a child experiencing a setting for the first time, we will go through the same process of gradually increasing the time a child attends with a parent/carer during the proximity stage.
- If a child is not ready to be in the setting without their parent/carer, we will invite you to attend more stay and play sessions with your keyperson outside of setting hours and will be done every day for a maximum of two weeks, so you child can really establish a bond with their keyperson with their parent/carer present.
- If after two weeks the child will still not be left or has not formed a bond, we reserve the right to delay a child starting until they are ready.

- 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 child, 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 our setting.
- If you are EVER wondering how your child is doing during a session, please feel free to call us we really do not mind. 01872 573205

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.
- If the parent/carer 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/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.
- 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/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.

Settling-in for children with SEND

- Start times for children with SEND are staggered to allow sufficient one to one time with each child and parent.
- Children should at least be at stage 2 of settling before the key person begins settling another child.
- Where a number of children 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.

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