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.

The setting manager and key person explain the need for settling in and agree a plan with the parents/carer.

Settling-in for those with SEND

- 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.

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.
- After the induction meeting with the setting manager or deputy and key person, a settling-in plan is drawn up. Where possible, 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.
- 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/independence and this can be frustrating.

- After the parent/carer 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/carers 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 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.