



National Day Nurseries Association

★Brighter thinking
for early years

Factsheet

A photograph of a young child, likely a toddler, sitting on a carpeted floor and smiling broadly at the camera. The child is wearing a white long-sleeved cardigan with a small floral pattern on the chest. The background is a blurred indoor setting, possibly a nursery or playroom, with shelves and toys visible. A large purple semi-circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, and a purple semi-circle is overlaid on the bottom left corner, framing the title.

Supporting Transitions

Supporting Transitions

“It has become a truism that the only constant today is change.” (Bridges, 2009)

Transitions are an everyday part of our lives. We often go through transitions without realising the techniques that we are using to adapt and deal with change, using a range of skills to take us successfully through the process. Our previous experiences with transitions will determine how we deal with change, the strategies we put into place to support our decisions and our attitudes towards future transitions.

This factsheet will look at how practitioners can ensure that transitions are a positive experience and how to give children the skills they will need throughout their lives to cope with the many transitions they will make. It will help you to reflect on current staff skills and help you to plan for future team development in understanding and supporting transitions.

Babies and young children are in a continual cycle of transition e.g. babies move from lying on their backs to rolling over, from sitting up to crawling to walking, and young children move from gestures to verbalising their wants and needs. As they grow, each transitional change to their body and development will provide an individual experience of the change process and how to deal with both smaller and larger transitions e.g. moving onto a new room within the setting or moving on to school. Supportive adults are an essential part of this process.

Development tip

Try out this activity with your nursery team. Ask them to think about a small transition they have been through e.g. having a haircut/restyle and a larger one i.e. starting a new job. Then get them to consider the questions below to help them understand the impact that each process may have had on their own attitudes to transitions.

Key questions to consider when determining your own approach to transitions

- What transition in your own life do you remember most and why?
- What support did you need?
- Who was there to support you?
- What difficulties did you encounter when making the changes?
- What made it easier for you to cope or accept the change?
- How much information did you have?
- Was it a positive experience or negative experience?
- Were you involved with the process/were you consulted at any stage?

- What worked well and why?
- What would have made it easier?

When introducing new transitions to children, ensure that you consider your own experiences and feelings about transitions and that any negative feelings you may have about change does not affect the children.

A transition is 'a process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another.' Learning to deal positively with the change process at an early age will help children to use these skills successfully in the future, as they grow and develop and have to make more difficult and challenging changes.

Research has shown that children who have developed secure attachments will find this process easier than children who have not. Bowlby (1969) tells us that a child who has developed secure attachments, "is likely to approach the world with confidence and when faced with potentially alarming situations, is likely to tackle them effectively or to seek help." Having a secure role with a key person in the setting is essential to supporting transitions.

Types of transitions children may experience

- Stages of developmental progress i.e. learning to crawl, walk, talk
- Moving into a new room or group within the setting
- Change in family dynamics – separation/divorce of parents, new sibling/addition of step-family members
- Death of a family member or much-loved pet
- Absence of a prime carer for short/long periods of time - working away from home
- Making or losing new friends
- Starting a new setting or school
- Gaining a new key person/carers
- Moving home - which could involve a number of transitions e.g. new carer/new school/loss of supportive family members
- Changes at home, e.g. new bed, new pet, grandparent moving in.

The adult role

A supportive adult is essential in providing an experience that is successful and positive. A critical step during any change process is consultation with the children and parents who are to be going to be affected by the change. Practitioners can facilitate this to ensure that children and parents understand what is happening and to promote a positive approach throughout the process.

When new children start at your setting it is important to meet with the parents or the child's significant carers to gain as much information as possible about the child's previous experiences and to ascertain the level of emotional and physical support they may need to settle into their new environment. Consider how your setting supports new arrivals and how you may need to adapt these for individual children e.g. allow children to choose their own key person that they feel most comfortable with, be flexible with your routines, encourage parents to send in familiar objects from home or a photograph of family members to put up in the room.

Top tip

Create an 'our families' photo board that children can use to share family photographs. Ensure that it is at the child's level so the child can look at the photographs throughout the day and talk about their family.

If operational practicalities prevent you from doing home visits, then consider making a pictorial book all about your nursery with photographs of the environment, members of staff and some of the activities the children may choose to do. This book can support both the child and the parents and give the parents the opportunity to talk about the setting at home. This will also help to reassure parents as they too are experiencing change. You may also want to consider an online meeting using a platform suitable to the parents' needs and resources, such as Zoom or WhatsApp for a pre-visit chat.

Supporting a move into a new room

The very first thing to consider is whether the move is right for the child - it is important that any moves to a new age group are appropriate for each individual child, rather than moving due to pre-set age boundaries. This process should be agreed upon with a child's parent(s).

Keep parents informed about the transition process and the differences that may occur in the new room, highlighting the benefits of the new change and how this will support the child's development and learning journey.

When children are moving through to a new room/group within the setting, ensure that the new and previous key person meet together for a full handover introducing the child's:

- Likes and dislikes
- Current interests
- Stages of development
- Care needs
- Enjoyable experiences
- Parents, family and carers.

Plan a gradual introduction period, being flexible with the timescales and not putting expectations on individual children to conform to. Start slowly with short visits and gradually build the time spent in the new room. Plan activities they like to take part in and enable the new key person to have time to spend with the child doing their favourite activities. Encourage the child to bring favourite items from their previous room with them, invite the parents to one of the induction sessions so that they can become comfortable with the transition process. Give parents the time and opportunity to discuss any worries they may have so that they can be reassured and can keep a positive attitude to help support their child. For parents that do not come into your setting, think about creating a questionnaire you can send home seeking their views on the transition and identifying any concerns they think there may be for their child.

Links with schools

It is important to build links with the schools that surround your local area so that you can support the transitional process to school for the children attending your setting. Get in touch with the school(s) and find out the dates of their events, e.g. sports days, Christmas concerts etc. so that you can attend with the children throughout the year. Invite the reception teacher(s) from the schools into your setting. Children could create an invitation and deliver it to the school or you could bake a range of snacks and hold a tea party for the teachers, enabling them to share a relaxed social event to get to know the children in a familiar environment. Why don't you also invite parents to attend?

Practitioners will have a wealth of knowledge and information to share with the school(s) about individual children, it is essential to share this information with the new teacher to enable a smooth transition into a new environment.

As well as sharing individual learning journeys, practitioners may provide a transition document with summative information about the child's progress within their learning and development. This could be a one-page profile. Further information on how to develop this can be found in the factsheet called 'One Page Profile.'

During the school's induction process try to send the child's key person to one of the sessions with the children so that they can explore an unfamiliar environment with a trusted, familiar adult there to support them as and when they need it. You could also set up a display of the local school with a photograph of the Reception teacher, the indoor and outdoor environments; this will allow the children to become familiar with their new school. If the children are going to be wearing a uniform for the first time, why not ask the school if you can borrow a uniform for the role play area (which you could set up as the classroom) so the children can practice wearing this and playing role-play games.

Case study

Jamie joined the nursery and his parents attended all of the pre-start visits and sat with his key person to share information about his past experiences, his interests and some of his likes and dislikes.

The parents filled out a weekly planner for Jamie listing all of the carers he spent time with, the settings he attended and any groups or events that happened on a regular basis. This helped his key person to identify the regular transitions that Jamie took part in, to get to know his interests outside of nursery and helped to develop relationships with the other settings that Jamie attended. This enabled Jamie to receive a consistent approach to his learning and an understanding of his experiences outside of the setting.

Once Jamie began his regular routine, his childminder Mandy brought him to nursery each day. Jamie arrived at a very busy breakfast time and his key person did not always manage to catch Mandy, who was rushing off to drop other minded children at the local primary school. At the end of the daily session, Jamie was picked up by different carers on differing days depending upon which activity he was attending next and what shift pattern his parents were on.

Communication was proving to be difficult and some messages were not always being relayed back to Jamie's parents, which led to Jamie's mum and his childminder becoming very agitated with the setting with elements of blame being apportioned to different carers.

To stop this from happening in future and to maintain a good relationship with his parents and childminder, the key person spoke to Jamie's mum about introducing a diary in which all of Jamie's carers could share information. His weekly timetable was glued into the front of the book to encourage communication and information sharing. The diary supported the childminder, who did not have time to stay to chat in the mornings as she was able to record messages before bringing Jamie along to nursery. The parents were able to pass on information to both the childminder and the setting about the kind of night Jamie had and any important events that were happening for them all. Jamie's key person was able to record events from his day and highlight particular activities that he had enjoyed. Jamie's dance teacher also used the diary to remind his parents of upcoming performances. Jamie also got involved with his diary and began to draw pictures of activities he had enjoyed at home.

Understanding the impact of transitions

Some of the transitions that children experience will have an element of loss, it may be the loss of a special key person or a group of friends or moving away from much loved extended family members. It is important to acknowledge these feelings as you begin the transition process with a child.

Parents may be sharing a sense of loss during transitions they may also be facing the loss of family support networks; circumstances such as divorce or loss of a job may mean a reduced income and an increase in family stress levels. It is important that you consider and acknowledge these possibilities when welcoming new parents (through ongoing communication once they have started) and that you have support systems for families in place e.g. advice line and recommended professional bodies.

Children going through transitions may be feeling anxiety, sadness, anger, depression, disorientation or excitement. You should work with children and their families to provide a safe secure environment in which you can build up their trust and develop a secure relationship that will allow you to support their individual needs.

During a planned transition process, practitioners should ensure that they consult with children where possible. Preparing children for changes will support their emotional development, so that whenever possible they will know and understand what is going to happen/when it is going to happen and will have clear expectations. This will develop the skills they will need to deal with change in the future. Keep parents informed so that they can also prepare and support their child in feeling positive about upcoming change. Ensure that you think practically about consulting with the parents who do not come into your setting and think about how you will seek their views and give feedback.

You should be confident in supporting both internal and external changes and both planned and unplanned transitions, developing strategies to support parents in both of these areas.

Planned transition – a move onto a new room or starting school.

Unplanned transition – the absence of a best friend or key person.

For families working with other professionals, it is important that you build relationships so that you can all work together consistently in the best interests of the child.

Ways to support transitions

- Building effective communication with parents so they can share vital information about changes in their family, keep them informed and seek their views during any changes that may affect their child and family
- Five-minute warnings before tidying up e.g. tambourines/ rhythmic clapping

- Observing children so you build a full picture of any behaviour changes, areas of interest and friendships to support transitions
- Visual timetables, outlining your daily routine
- Flexible inductions into new rooms/groups
- Detailed handovers between key people
- Home visits during the induction to the setting
- Work with parents to develop a weekly timetable for each child so you can understand and support their weekly transitions
- 'About our nursery' booklet – a pictorial view of the setting/activities/staff for new children to take home
- Inviting local reception teachers into the setting to meet the children
- Find out key events the local schools are holding throughout the year to attend
- Visit the new settings/school together with the key person
- Stories/storyboard around the topic of change, i.e. moving home/new babies/step-families
- For children with English as a second language, learn key words and phrases so that you can communicate with the child and make them feel welcome. If parents speak a language other than English, or are building confidence in their English skills, you can arrange a translator – either through your setting or with the family's support.
- Consulting with children through each step of the transition process
- Build relationships with other professionals involved with the family and child
- Ensure your setting meets the individual needs of individuals, in regard to access, dietary requirements and cultural beliefs
- Record progress in individual learning journeys and share these regularly with the parents.

Observing children

Conducting regular observations of children is essential for understanding and supporting them emotionally through various transitions. Observing children will enable you to identify changes in behaviour which may indicate that a child is experiencing a difficult period or a challenging time.

Once you have identified a change in behaviour you should consult with the child's parents. They may be able to give you a reason for any changes that are currently happening. This will enable you to work together to support the child and develop strategies to support them throughout this process.

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Factsheet

Our factsheets are written by early years experts for the early years workforce. Most NDNA factsheets are free to our members.

NDNA is the national charity and membership association representing children's nurseries across the UK. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability, so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours.

We are the voice of the 21,000-strong nursery sector, an integral part of the lives of more than a million young children and their families. We provide information, training and advice to support nurseries and the 250,000 people who work in them to deliver world-class early learning and childcare.

See the full range of NDNA factsheets at www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets

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