09 Childcare 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* - 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* – 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.

**Settling-in for those with SEND**

* 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 settling in session, the parent attends with the child and does not leave for any time.
* One hour is sufficient for a child 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. As much time as possible is allowed for the key person to do this.
* Once the child has done a settling in session with the parent, they may do another settling in session for one hour without the parent being there if the child is confident enough to do so. Once they are able to leave the parent, they can they attend their sessions in the settling. It is important to remember that some children settle straight away and some may need more time to settle.

**Promoting secure base**

* 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.
* Children are allowed to bring in comforters from home (unless there is a pandemic etc)
* The key person ensures that they spend time with their key child playing and talking to them, helping them if need be and introducing them to the other children and staff.

**Promoting dependency**

* Attachment can be seen when the child 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 child being pleased to see them, looking for them when distressed, holding out their arms to be held, establishing eye contact, responding to play and taking comfort from the key person.
* Parents can now leave their child for their sessions.
* After 4-6 weeks, the key discusses how well the child has settled. They discuss problems that may have arisen and plan how they will be overcome.

**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.
* 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.
* On the first day, the parent attends with the child, and stays for one hour.
* 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. The second settling in session allows the parent/carer to spend an hour away from the child to see how the child responds this time increases until the child can manage a whole session without the parent. If the child is fine, they may officially start. If not the parent may need to stay with the child for 30 mins and then leave for 30 minutes. A plan between the key person and the parent will determine what is best.
* 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.
* On the first day, the parent attends with the child, and stays for one hour.
* 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. The second settling in session allows the parent/carer to spend an hour away from the child to see how the child responds this time increases until the child can manage a whole session without the parent. If the child is fine, they may officially start. If not the parent may need to stay with the child for 30 mins and then leave for 30 minutes. A plan between the key person and the parent will determine what is best.
* 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.
* 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 (if needed), 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 away from the child.
* Progress with settling in will be done as with any other child; it just takes a little longer to reach dependency/independence.

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| **Policy:** | 09.3 Prime times- Settling in and transitions |
| This policy was reviewed on: |  |
| Date to be reviewed: |  |
| **Signed on behalf of the provider:** |  |
| Name of signatory: |  |
| Role of signatory: |  |

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