

09 Early years 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.

At Little Acorns, we see each child and family as unique and therefore believe that each child's settling in journey will be as unique as them.

Because of this, we offer a minimum of two settling in sessions. The first session is where the parent and child stay and play in the setting. We encourage the parent to complete paperwork with the key person during this time to see if your child will begin to investigate their surroundings independently. The key person will spend time playing with your child and talking to you asking you to provide us with as much information as possible about your child to help make the settling in process as smooth as possible. The key person will discuss with you how you feel the settling in period will go and explain some possible options.

The second session is where we ask you to stay and settle your child for a while and then leave them with us for a short period of time. This could be for just 5 mins or up to 2 hours. You need to ensure that you say goodbye to your child so that they understand that you have gone but you should always tell them you are coming back. Depending on the outcome of this session determines the rest of the settling in programme. We will discuss and devise a plan, which we will review each session of attendance to see how it is going. There are many different options to settling in e.g. you can stay and play for a period of time, you can attend every day for a short period of time, you can be asked to bring in a recently worn tee shirt or scarf that smells of you, but all this depends on the child and your availability.

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.

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, especially if they haven't been with the setting for long, 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.

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.
- 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 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.

For children whose first language is not English

- 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.
- 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 sessions 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.