



09 Early years practice policy

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.

Woodcote Pre-School Group CIO 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, 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/carers. Each day they review the plan and agree what will happen the next day.

Settling-in for children under two and those with SEND

- Start times for all children are arranged for the child to be brought in between 9.15-9.30am, to avoid the normal drop off time when it is so busy with all the other children and parents.
- 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 session, the parent/carers attend with the child and does not leave for any time.
- One to two hours is sufficient for a first session and then we will gradually increase the time.
- On the first 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.

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- 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.
- Over subsequent settling in sessions, depending how the child is responding, the child is invited to attend other significant times of the day, including lunch.

Promoting secure base

- When the child has experienced different times of the day, these are then fitted together to establish continuity of the day.
- If the child is responding to the situation with smiles and eagerness, they are ready for the parent/carer to spend short periods of time away either in another part of the building or to pop to the shops. If signs of distress are still apparent then the separation will be approached more slowly, starting with the parent/carer staying in the room, but taking a 'back seat', while the key person spends time with the child.
- When the parent/carer leaves, they always say goodbye and say they are coming back. Parents/carers should never slip away without the child noticing; this leads to greater distress.

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, establishing eye contact, responding to play, taking comfort from the key person.

When a parent/carer 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 children are absent from the setting for any long periods of time, their attachment to their key persons will have decreased and may need to be built up again.
- Parents/carers may be made aware of the need to 're-settle' their children and a plan is agreed.





18 month, Two-three and four year-olds starting a setting for the first time

- An 18month or 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.
- After the induction meeting with the setting manager or deputy and key person, a settling-in plan is drawn up.
- 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.

All children

- Some children take longer, and their needs for proximity and secure base stages will 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 during discussions with parent at the time of them to start.
- On the first day, the parent attends with the child and stays for the morning (less if the child becomes tired), on day two, less for the child and less for the parent and the next day the child stays until and including lunch if staying all day.
- If the child shows interest in the activities and is beginning to engage with the key person and other children, the parent/carer spends time in the parent/carer room (if available) to see how the child responds.
- 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.

