



## 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. This includes their **key person**, who provides a primary secure base, and the wider room team, who contribute to the child's sense of belonging and community. Through these relationships, children feel safe, valued and able to participate confidently.

Very young children, especially two- to three-year-olds, often approach separation from their parent with anxiety. Older children may understand 'people permanence' more securely but still require time, reassurance and consistency to adjust. It is the entitlement of all children to be settled comfortably into a new environment.

The setting manager and room leader explain the settling-in process to parents and agree a plan. This plan is written down, shared with parents and reviewed daily to ensure the child's needs are met.

#### **Shared Responsibility Within the Key Person System**

Although each child has a named key person who leads on their **learning journal, observations, reports, parent reviews** and overall developmental tracking, the setting operates a **shared-team approach** to settling-in.

This reflects the part-time working patterns of staff and ensures that children experience consistent, familiar care every day.

- All room staff contribute to the settling-in process, helping children build secure relationships with multiple trusted adults.
- Children become familiar with the whole team, reducing anxiety when their key person is not present.
- Staff communicate closely to share information about children's routines, emotional cues, interests and progress.
- The shared approach ensures continuity, emotional security and smooth transitions throughout the week.

This model aligns with Ofsted expectations that **all staff know children well**, contribute to their wellbeing and work collaboratively to support their emotional development.

## **Settling-In Procedures**

### **Starting a Setting for the First Time (Two-Year-Olds)**

- A two-year-old may have little or no experience of group care.
- During the first one-hour session, the parent remains in the room. The room leader gathers information about the child's previous experiences of non-parental care (e.g., grandparents, childminder) to understand how the child may respond.
- An *All About Me* form is completed with the parent.
- During the second one-hour session, the parent remains on site (e.g., office or staff area) to complete paperwork.
- The child's time in the setting is gradually increased based on their emotional readiness.
- A child is considered to be developing a secure base when they show interest in activities and begin to engage with the key person, other staff and peers.
- The child then begins to stay for longer periods, including lunch, with time extended gradually until they can manage a full session without significant distress.
- Parents are encouraged to always say goodbye and explain when they will return, supporting the child's developing sense of trust and security.

### **Three- and Four-Year-Olds**

- Some older children settle quickly and show confidence within a few days.
- After the parent attends an induction meeting with the manager or room leader (or a home visit where appropriate), a settling-in plan is created.
- Parents are encouraged to explain to their child where they are going and that they will return, supporting emotional readiness.

### **Children Learning English as an Additional Language**

- Settling-in may take longer for children learning English as an additional language, as they rely heavily on their parent to interpret and make sense of the environment.
- If the parent does not speak English, an interpreter is sourced where possible to support induction.
- The settling-in programme is explained clearly, emphasising the importance of the parent staying with the child and speaking in the home language.
- Through the interpreter, the key person gathers information about the child's home-language skills, interests and understanding.
- Staff work with the parent to create a list of key words in the child's home language, including phonetic pronunciation.
- Staff prepare for visits by offering familiar or preferred activities to support early engagement.
- Children are spoken to naturally, with gestures and facial expressions used to aid understanding.

- Progress follows the same pattern as other children, though the dependency/independence stage may take longer.

### **Impact of the Shared-Team Approach**

This shared-responsibility model ensures that:

- Children experience consistent emotional support even when their key person is not present.
- Staff working part-time do not create gaps in children's emotional security.
- Children build trusting relationships with multiple adults, strengthening their sense of belonging.
- The team works collaboratively to support each child's wellbeing, learning and smooth transition into the setting.