

Emotional wellbeing during transition

Wellbeing is not about just being okay, coping or surviving; it is about thriving, blossoming and flourishing.
Children's emotions need to be accepted and understood in close, consistent relationships.

Wellbeing in the Early Years, Julia Manning-Morton

Transition:

- Is a significant experience for all children, but especially the most vulnerable.
- Is a process that supports learning and development.
- Is not a one-off event, but a recurrent aspect in a child's life.
- Happens frequently, in most cases daily.

Transition involves:

- Leaving something behind (a place, a person, friends, a role, an identity, a comfort zone).
- Encountering something unknown (places, people, new roles, new routines, new expectations).

EYFS unique transitions guidance 2020 Covid-19 recovery phase (Bristol Early Years Teaching School Alliance)

The key person role is pivotal:

Providing secure attachment for a child involves responding sensitively and consistently to their needs, helping them to understand that they are loved, respected and understood. Not only does this have a long-lasting effect on the child's view of the world; it can mean higher self-esteem and emotional resilience as they grow older.

Studies have shown the stress hormone cortisol to rise in children when separated from their primary caregiver, even if a child appears to be calm. Two studies (Dettling et al. 2000 and Badanes et al. 2012) found that children who were able to build secure relationships with highly responsive childcare providers retained normal cortisol levels. "This acts as a buffer against stress in much the same way as does a sensitive parent," says Gerhardt. *(Why love matters.)*

Margot Sunderland, Director of Education and Training at the Centre for Child Mental Health, uses the example of a little girl who is cared for by emotionally responsive adults:

"When she is playing happily and seems fine, they give her the same attention as when she is crying or upset. They know that plenty of warm, emotionally responsive interaction and cuddles will help prevent her cortisol levels rising while she is separated from the people she loves." *(What every parent needs to know) (PACEY)*

How do we consider the two aspects of transition that children are facing -leaving behind, and encountering new?

Consider:

When you face a new experience, such as attending a training course at an unknown venue, or going to a social event where you know very few people, how do you feel physically and emotionally?

- *What are the stressors?*
- *What helps you to manage the situation?*

What information do we need to gather from the child and family about themselves before they start at the setting? What makes them unique? What information can the child's key person share about themselves as well?

All the 'new' aspects of the experience need to be considered in terms of expectations, routines, the environment, the people who the children will meet. These are to be explored with children and families before they arrive, including how the key person can best support the child's initial arrival at the setting. What will that first hour look like?

Which extra elements of the routine and setting experience (beyond the opportunity to view the environment and talk to key staff) can be shared before children start, for example, any songs that are used to support the routine, introduction to any special characters or mascots used at the setting?

Can a shared story be read at home in preparation for exploring again in the setting? Can other experiences be initiated at home and offered again, and built upon, at the setting? How can we prepare so that the child can find a comfort zone at the setting from which they can explore when they arrive, for example familiar music, stories, photos or resources?

Make sure that children's special people are known, as a result of virtual home visits. Ensure that photos, videos and other means of referencing them are in place in the setting from the outset.

Keep the channels of communication open with the family. A child may appear to have 'settled', but remember that we have only part of the full picture, their response at home may look very different.

... We will greet them with open arms and a sense that "we've been waiting for you". We will provide them with all they need, both in our softness and our attuned-ness, and with a structure and a strength that speaks of security.' CLF Education Team | Sally Apps