**A picture containing text

Description automatically generated09 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.

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, 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 leader and key person explain the need for settling in and share our settling in plan with the parents. The settling in plan is reviewed on an ongoing basis dependent on the needs of the child.

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 2 sessions at least, the parent attends with the child and does not leave for any time.
* On the first day, the leader/deputy 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 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.
* Over subsequent days, depending how the child is responding, the parent is invited to attend other significant times of the day, including lunch and afternoon clubs.
* At this time, the key person does not change the child if in nappies, but observes the parent’s handling of the child and changing routine, and how the child responds.

**Promoting secure base**

* Before the child’s first day the leader/key person and parents will agree the support required for transition. This may include the parent entering the setting for a brief period or building up the time the child will be left.
* When the parent leaves, they always say goodbye and say they are coming back. Parents should never slip away without the child noticing; this leads to greater distress.

**Promoting dependency**

* After 6-8 weeks, the key person reviews the settling in plan with the parent and discusses how well the child has settled. They discuss problems that may have arisen and plan how they will be overcome. They plan for the next few weeks and set a time to review if necessary.

**When young children do not seem to settle**

* A highly distressed child will need 1:1 attention consistently; their distress will upset other children and put stress on staff. If this is the case, the key person discusses with the leader or deputy.
* Attempts are made to reduce anxiety and distress through a planned approach with the parent.
* The three stages of settling-in are reviewed and the plan is pitched back at the appropriate stage.
* Particular triggers of distress are discussed to see what can be done to alleviate it.
* If all attempts have been made and the child still cannot cope without the parent, then the place is offered only with the parent attending. In some cases it may be appropriate to withdraw the place and help the parent consider alternatives. For a child ‘in need’ this may need to be discussed with the social care worker, where one is allocated to the child, health visitor or referring agency.

**When a parent is unable or refuses to take part in settling in**

* Information about the ‘settling in’ plan is given during enrolment or 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 young children are absent from the setting for any for an extended period of time their attachment to their key persons may have decreased and may 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.
* The three-stage approach involving *Proximity, Secure Base* and *Dependency/Independence*is applied as above.
* After the induction meeting with the setting leader 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 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 1.5/2 hours (less if the child becomes tired). On day two, the parent stays for the full morning and on this day or a third settling in day if required, is offered the option to stay until, and including lunch if appropriate.
* 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. Then the parent/ carer may to spend short periods of time in another room to see how the child responds during their second/third settling in session. The leader, deputy or key person and parents will discuss the child’s initial sessions and if they feel the child will cope for an entire session without their parent, or if further settling in sessions are required. The time a child is left may also be built up over the first sessions/weeks
* 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.
* After the parent attends for an induction meeting with the setting leader or deputy and key person, (or in some circumstances a home visit), our settling in plan is considered and amendments/adjustments will be agreed.
* On the first day, the parent attends with the child and stays for 1.5/2 hours (less if the child becomes tired), on day two the parents attends with the child for the full morning, up until and including lunch (if agreed and appropriate and if the child can cope).
* If the child shows interest in the activities and is beginning to engage with the key person and other children, the parent spends time in the kitchen to see how the child responds.
* 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.
* 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 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 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.