

Stepping UP

Change can be a daunting prospect, so how do we ease the process of transition throughout a child's early years? **Anjali Patel** of the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) explains...

Stability is vital in a child's early years, yet change is unavoidable for many young children and they will inevitably undergo a number of emotional and environmental transitions before they even reach school age. So let's embrace the opportunity to help children develop patterns of behaviour that they can draw on throughout life. By managing transition carefully, we can ease the process of adjustment, reassuring both children and their families.

Building relationships

Strong, respectful relationships between parents and practitioners lay the foundation for positive transition. For the practitioner, a genuine dialogue with parents provides information, affording opportunities to extend ideas and educational experiences within the setting. As importantly, parents draw comfort from relationships with those caring for their child, while easy, visible conversations between significant adults are deeply reassuring to children. Separation anxiety affects both parents and children, and warm exchanges between practitioners and family members are hugely significant in easing this process.

It's vital to plan handovers between practitioners to ensure that children's needs are well met and new attachments are strengthened. Without this we run the risk of children losing confidence, which can lead to a regression in previous knowledge and understanding. Allowing for special time with a new key person will instil a greater sense of security. This is important for Reception-aged children and those moving into Year 1, as these children still require the reassurance and guidance of a responsive adult to make positive transitions, and a key person can tune in to a child's emotional response to change and act accordingly.

Enabling environments

Environments and routines that encourage shared endeavour or special time in small groups are invaluable for children building new friendships and developing a sense of security following a transition. As children progress from home to setting, room to room, join another setting, or embark on their journey into school, it makes sense to provide them with familiar resources and experiences. They must feel safe and secure in order to continue to develop, and a homely, stable environment is central to this sense of belonging. If they need only make minor adjustments, children won't lose ground in their learning. They will be more receptive to new thinking and challenges if they have successfully adapted to the environment, expectations and routines.

Families need time to visit and interact with new surroundings, and opportunities to talk with children about what is recognisable and what is exciting. We send out a strong message to children when we make provision for their interests or strong schemas, and when we personalise resources. We are telling them that they are special to us, that we are keeping them in mind even when they are not with us, thereby strengthening new bonds.

Effective pedagogy

Play-based approaches used to extend thinking and develop ideas are fundamental to successful learning in the early years. Adults as co-thinkers and partners in play provide the support and challenge children need to initiate their own learning. However, as children progress through the Foundation Stage and into school, there can often be a move towards more adult-directed activity. Y1 teachers often say that independence is

a skill they feel children need in order to cope best with transition. Sadly, for young children, less opportunity to initiate learning can result in a loss of opportunity for independence and choice as they move through school. Whilst developing effective transition in one Enfield school, the lead teacher observed that Foundation Stage children, who were competent in activities such as recording ideas and even baking cakes from scratch, found the same activities were predominantly adult-led higher up the school. Children were losing the independence they had developed in the early years - the very skills most desirable in a primary classroom.

At the CLPE, we know that the creative, integrated approaches to learning that are best practice in the early years work for children of all ages. We put high-quality literature at the heart of all learning and when this literature-based approach is used from nursery upwards, there is little difference in pedagogy for those children making the transition into Reception and Year 1, other than appropriate challenge. Core skills are taught in fun ways, children are active, and artwork and role play is recognised as fundamental to deeper understanding of the world and self. Role play, outdoors, small world play, sand and water are cited by children as aspects of



the early years that they miss when they move through the school. Yet, if we use inspiring stimulus to help them to be active participants in leading their own learning, we don't have to dominate their experience with a desire for them to 'sit still and listen'.

Transition in practice

All children experience transitions throughout the day; we plan reassuring but flexible routines to help children cope, and rhymes and songs to inject a bit of fun. We can promote similarly positive experiences when guiding children through more significant transitions – try the following ideas:

- View transition as a process not an event; plan ahead and value the concerns of children and their families; make transition and the wellbeing of children a priority.
- Request welcome packs from the schools your children will move on to, distributing key dates and information to parents.
- Visit new settings with the children; invite visits from new practitioners and ensure at

least a phone call to hand over.

- Transfer assessments, progress reports and learning journeys in good time, and share vital information about a child's heritage, language and social skills.
- Ensure children develop independent self-care skills to manage in a setting with fewer adults.
- Role play experiences such as dressing up in school uniforms, busy playtimes, and lunchtimes.
- Remember that lunchtime is a quiet time in most settings, but at school the rowdy nature of playtime can be overwhelming and a total shift in routine.
- Focus on core skills such as reading for pleasure, early phonological awareness and number, which lay the foundations for lifelong learning.
- Ensure areas are made available for parents to meet and interact as they enter your setting.
- Gain all you can from home visits, small group play dates, liaison with the key person and relationships with parents; a baseline assessment will be more accurate if it relies less on the first few stressful

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TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Supporting Transition from Reception to Year 1

This course will focus on children's development and ways to support practitioners to understand the value of integrated approaches to teaching and learning throughout the Foundation Stage and into KS1. Ways in which settings plan for transition will be explored in depth. Opportunity will be given for teachers to deepen knowledge and understanding of the expectations in both the EYFS and National Curriculum.

Strengthening Home School Links to Support Children's Literacy

A course which aims to outline the key principles that form the basis of developing strong, effective, positive working relationships with parent/guardian/carers. The day will consider ways in which to engage parents to work in partnership with schools to support their children's engagement and attainment in literacy development.

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weeks in a new setting.

- Ensure 'special books' are continuously available to families and new practitioners.
- Build in special time in which small groups can be with their key person on a daily basis.
- Encourage children and parents to express themselves throughout the transition process; value their concerns.
- Focus on the language of similarity, not difference; there's a fine line between exciting and overwhelming.
- Approach coverage of new curriculums with equal creativity; play is a child's work.
- Engage practitioners in shared moderation and overlap professional development between settings – bridge the divide and knowledge gaps.



about the author

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