Supporting Parents and Carers with Transition in the Early Years

Top Tips

Top tips to support parents and carers and facilitate effective communication during transitions:

- **Create a welcome booklet** that includes essential information about routines, photographs of staff members, details about the curriculum, and organizational aspects. This provides parents with a comprehensive overview.
- **Host informal meetings** to share information about the child's new setting. These gatherings allow parents to ask questions, express concerns, and become familiar with the environment.
- **Display a photo board** featuring staff members. This helps parents recognize and connect with the faces of those caring for their child.
- **Assign a key person** to each family. This individual serves as a point of contact for parents, addressing any queries or providing updates.
- **Allocate one-on-one time** between the key person and the family. These personalized interactions allow for deeper discussions and understanding.
- **Create a welcoming environment** and provide opportunities for parents and carers to visit the child's environment. Familiarity with the space eases the transition.
- **Encourage parents and carers to meet and support each other.** These shared experiences and peer support can be comforting during this period.
- **Set up a worry box** where parents and carers can share any anxieties or concerns. This provides an outlet for their feelings.
- **Offer support** by connecting parents to relevant professionals, such as interpreters, health experts, and education services.

This section emphasises the importance of involving parents and carers in supporting children during times of transition. Research consistently highlights that when parents are actively engaged, we can better meet the needs of the children in our care. As a child's first educators, parents possess valuable insights into their child's development.

Transition moments, such as sending a child to a new setting or class, can evoke anxiety for parents and carers. To alleviate this, it's crucial that our educational environments are welcoming and approachable. When parents feel comfortable, they can relay positive messages to their children about these changes.

Parents' perspectives are central to the transition process. Regularly reviewing and refining transition arrangements, fostering open dialogue, and actively listening to parents' views are essential steps.

This section provides practical ideas and suggestions to help parents and carers prepare their child for the next stage of their learning journey.

Effective Communication

Effective communication with parents and carers is essential for ensuring a smooth transition.

Here are some practical strategies to enhance communication during transition:

Keep your messages simple straightforward and easy to understand.

Consider creating a simple leaflet or a welcome booklet that covers basic routine and timetable information. Include contact names and numbers for easy reference. Alternatively, develop a more comprehensive induction pack that provides details about staff, curriculum, and the role parents play in their child's learning journey. Remember to use parent-friendly language and avoid jargon or acronyms.

Host an induction evening where parents receive a balanced mix of curriculum and routine information. Keep it brief, engaging, and exciting. Provide a handout or leaflet that parents can refer back to if needed.

Compile a list of key messages / points that new parents should know about your setting. These key messages serve as a foundation—stick to them consistently and reinforce them whenever possible.

Be available to talk. Dedicate time to talk to parents and carers even if it's just 5 minutes. These brief interactions can make a significant impact.

Use a communication book to share information about their child's activities or those exciting "Wow" moments. This is especially vital if you rarely have direct interactions with parents. It helps keep the lines of communication open.

Organize regular parent meetings at convenient times. Use these opportunities to explore individual families' feelings, perceptions, and address personal concerns. Take the time to get to know each family—they're all unique.

Consider creating a regular newsletter summarizing upcoming topics and curriculum. Inform parents about any upcoming events and suggest ways they can support their child's learning at home in the coming weeks.

Display a photo board featuring staff members. This helps parents identify the adults their child may talk about.

Be flexible in meeting the individual needs of each child and their family.

Remember, clear and timely communication fosters a positive partnership between educators and parents, ultimately benefiting the children's learning journey.

Emotional Wellbeing

Transitions can be a stressful time not only for children but also for parents and carers. As educators, we play a crucial role in supporting families during these periods.

Here are some practical steps to foster effective communication support emotional wellbeing during the transition process:

Open lines of Communication: Keep communication open and welcoming during times of change. Simple gestures can make a huge difference. Remember that parents may be juggling routines, meeting new staff, and adjusting to new settings.

Understanding Parent Feelings: Have you ever asked parents how they feel? Actively listen to their responses. It's essential that parents feel heard and understood. Recognize that what works for one parent may not work for another.

Building Trust and Respect through getting to know parents individually. Building a relationship based on trust and respect is vital. Consider organizing a proper induction meeting—keep it relaxed and inviting. Inviting current parents to support new parents can also be beneficial. Additionally, consider implementing a buddy system for parents who may feel anxious or isolated.

Settling-In Plan: For young children or those with Special Educational Needs, develop a settling-in plan. Include background information about the child, their interests, and small step targets to help them settle. Regularly review and build upon this plan as the child gains confidence.

One-on-One Time: Offer parents and carers an individual appointment to talk without others present. This can take place at home or within the setting. Parents may share more sensitive information during these private conversations, and they'll feel reassured by spending quality time with you.

Remember, sensitive management of transitions lays the foundation for positive feelings toward future changes in a child's life.

Working in Partnership

Parents play a crucial role in the transition process, and building a successful partnership with them relies on effective communication and trust. Here are some steps to foster a strong relationship with parents:

Share Knowledge: Engage in conversations with parents about their child. Create a holistic picture of the child by actively listening to their insights. Consider using a questionnaire to gather responses.

Open Doors: Extend an invitation to parents to spend more time in the mornings. Designate specific mornings when parents can stay longer. Engage in conversations about their child, taking note of their insights. Use this information to plan the child's next steps.

Preferred Communication: Discuss communication preferences with parents. Inquire whether they prefer phone calls, emails, or a communication book. Tailor your communication method to their preferences

Parent Contributions: Allow parents and carers to contribute to their child's assessments. Use parents' evenings to collect their opinions or distribute questionnaires.

Regular Meetings: Plan opportunities for parents to meet practitioners individually throughout the year. Consider home visits if appropriate.

🌟 Remember, a collaborative approach with parents enhances the overall experience for the child and ensures a smoother transition process.

SEND

Supporting parents and carers of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is crucial. Here are some considerations to keep in mind:

Empathy and Sensitivity: Recognize that parents and carers are presenting their child to the world at every transition. Be sensitive to their point of view and the unique challenges they face.

Understand that they have likely shared their child's story with various professionals and agencies. Assume that they expect information sharing among agencies and professionals.

Effective Communication: Ensure that parents and carers feel confident that you have made contact with those who work closely with their child and family. Clear communication is essential.

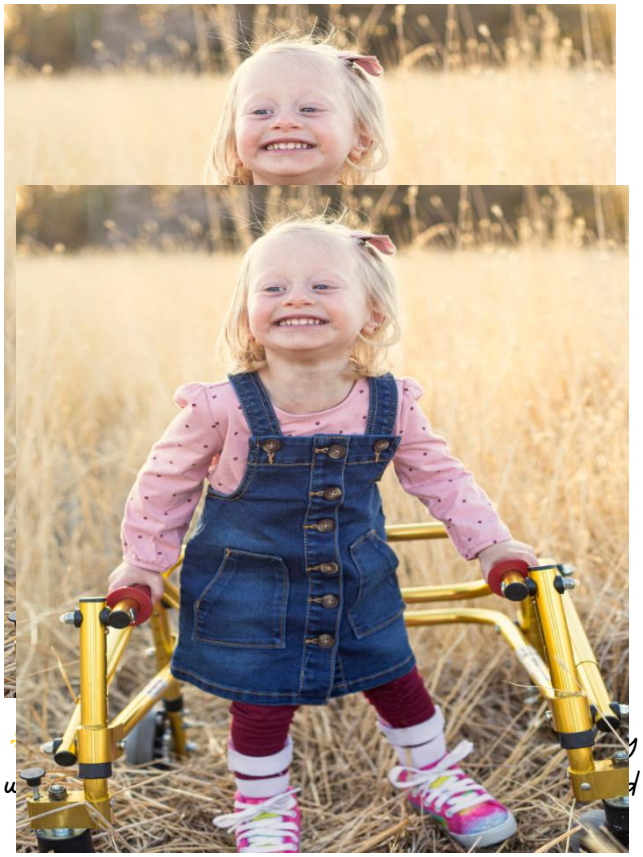
Engage parents and carers by encouraging their participation in the first or last part of the school day. This inclusion helps them feel connected.

Avoid Isolation: Be mindful that parents and carers may feel isolated at the school gate due to lack of confidence or remarks from other parents. Foster a supportive environment.

Create opportunities for parents and carers to connect with each other and build a sense of community.

Pre-existing Support: Children with identified needs before starting school may have benefited from effective Individual Education Plans (IEPs), differentiated activities, and support from outside agencies in their pre-school setting. Their parents have likely been partners in these arrangements and have valuable insights into their child's needs.

Inclusion and Collaboration: Invite parents to attend reviews of their child's progress. Encourage them to share their knowledge about their child and actively participate in developing strategies and activities.



A great deal of research supports the belief that we can only do our best for the children in our care if we involve their parents and families. We need to listen to what parents can tell us about their children and accept that as their child's first educator, they have a wealth of knowledge that we would do well to heed." Anne O'Connor, EYFS 2007

EAL

Supporting parents and carers during the transition to a new environment is essential, especially when English is an Additional Language (EAL). Here are some considerations to ensure effective communication and understanding:

Supporting parents and children during transitions to a new environment is crucial. Here are some key considerations to ensure a smooth process:

Extra Time for Parents with English as an Additional Language (EAL): Recognize that parents with EAL may need additional time to understand information. Their understanding of a language might be better than their spoken ability, so don't hesitate to communicate with them.

Communication: Share information about the friendships their children are forming.

Encourage previous EAL parents to share their experiences and help translate information for new parents and practitioners.

Understanding Background and Experiences: Spend time learning about the child's home background and experiences before they joined your setting. Home visits can also provide valuable insights into the family's cultural context.

Personal Interaction: Allocate dedicated time to get to know each family. Talk to parents in a quieter environment where they can comfortably share information. Arrange social evenings to foster informal connections.

Photographs and Visuals: Use photographs to share experiences with parents. Visual aids can bridge language barriers and enhance understanding.

Parent Evenings: When allocating slots for parent evenings, allow more time for parents with limited English proficiency. Translation may be necessary.

Respecting Parents' Wishes: When seeking help for translation, always respect parents' preferences. Some parents may not appreciate having a stranger or another parent translate information about their child.

Older Siblings as Resources: Older siblings can be useful resources for translation. However, consider the child's understanding of the conveyed information. Ensure accuracy and clarity.

Gestures and Non-Verbal Communication: Gestures play a powerful role in communication. Be mindful of non-verbal cues when interacting with parents and carers, especially if English is an additional language.

Video Introductions: Create a video introducing the new setting, share a link to this with parents so they watch this video at home with their child.

Remember, building positive relationships with parents and understanding their unique backgrounds contribute to successful transitions for both children and families.

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