St. Nicholas
Nursery & Preschool

Settling in and Transition Policy

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* - Babies and 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, babies and 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* – Babies and 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 manager and key person explain the need for settling in and agree a plan with the parents. This is renewed at any point and amended when demand necessary.

Settling-in for babies, children under two and those with SEND

Start times for babies are staggered to allow sufficient one to one time with each child and parent.

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

.On the first day, the key person 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 key person always greets the child.

The parent is invited to play with their child and the key person spends time with them at the first 'taster session'.

If a second taster session is booked, it is best to include a nap time or feed time, so the staff can provide intimate care.

The key person will engage the baby in eye contact but not rush to handle or hold the baby if this causes them distress on the first visit.

The key person observes to see if the baby is recognising them, beginning to explore the environment (if able), noting what they seem to like and making sure it is available the next day.

Promoting secure base

When the young child has experienced different times of the day, these are then fitted together to establish continuity of the day.

When the parent leaves, they always say goodbye.

Parents can be asked to bring in a recently worn tee shirt or scarf that smells of them. Babies will often settle if they can smell the familiar smell of the parent. Some parents may agree to send in a recording of a song that they sing to get their baby to sleep, especially if it is in their home language.

Promoting dependency

Attachment can be seen when the baby shows signs that they are happy to transfer their need to be dependent onto the key person. Key persons look for signs such as the baby being pleased to see them, looking for them when distressed, holding out their arms to be held, establishing eye contact, responding to play, feeding and taking comfort from the key person.

Part-time babies and toddlers

Part-time babies have the same needs when settling in as full-time babies. However, part-time attendance means that there may be gaps between times the baby is in one week to the next.

When babies do not seem to settle

It is not good for babies to be in a setting when they are acutely distressed and anxious. A baby who is not securely attached and settled is overwhelmed with fear. They are unable to participate in any activity and do not learn. It is not in their immediate or long-term interest to attempt to prolong what is an agonising experience for them.

A highly distressed baby will need 1:1 attention consistently; their distress will upset other babies and put stress on staff. If this is the case, the key person discusses with the manager or deputy.

Attempts are made to reduce anxiety and distress through a planned approach with the parent.

The 3 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 baby or toddler still cannot cope without the parent, then a review of the settling in process may necessitate starting again. 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.

Prolonged absences

If babies or toddlers are absent from the setting for any for periods of time beyond one or two weeks, their attachment to their key persons will have decreased and will need to be built up again.

Parents are made aware of the need to 're-settle' their children and a plan is agreed.

Moving up rooms

2 years olds are not moved to the room above before they can emotionally cope; they are given the opportunity to visit the group in the room above as part of a normal day and participate in play and join in at mealtimes, becoming familiar with adults, children and the environment.

When approaching their 'move up', and when a vacancy arises, a new key person is identified. The key person discusses the plan for the child moving up with the parents.

The baby room key person and the parents agree how the child will be settled via transition form.

The current key person will spend time with the child in the new group, liaising with the new key person and ensuring that the child is familiar with all the main times of the day.

The child gradually spends more time with the new key person until they can cope in their new room.

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 to two-year-olds as to younger children.

After the induction meeting with the setting manager 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 same process of gradually increasing the time a child attends.

It is evident that the child is developing a sense of secure base when they show interest in activities and begins to engage with the key person and other children.

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/independence and this can be frustrating.

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 them 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.

Progress with settling in will be done as with any other child; it just takes a little longer to reach dependency/independence.

This policy was reviewed by Anjana Shah in September 2026. Date of next review will be in September 2027.