

Introduction

This factsheet explores the different types of transitions that children go through, as well as how you can help your child settle in well to a childcare setting.

Key points

When your child first starts going to a childcare setting, it may be the first time they have been away from you and it can be a stressful time but there are things you can do to help your child settle quickly.

There are many types of transitions in a child's life. Big transitions such as moving house or starting childcare for the first time, and smaller ones during the day such as moving from an activity to snack or meal time. Transitions can be stressful for children and helping children cope with them and make them as smooth as possible will help their future resilience to change.

It's useful for you and your child to visit the setting a few times before your child is due to start, initially you stay with your child and then gradually you leave them for short periods of time, to help build their confidence.

It is likely your child will experience some level of separation anxiety. This is a normal stage of development for babies at around 8 to 14 months, but can also occur at different times in a young child's life. Your child may become distressed when you leave the room. The feelings are tied up with a very real fear that their parent or trusted adult will go away and not come back. This fear can feel like a physical pain, and it is helpful to acknowledge this.

All settings should have a plan for settling in new children and should give you and your child the time you need to feel comfortable and confident in the setting. Guidelines for early years settings recognise the importance of transitions and supporting children through times of change.

Each child is different and some will need longer to settle in.

What does this mean for me?

New experiences coupled with your feelings about going back to work, or leaving your child in a new place, can be a stressful time in a family's life, it is normal to feel anxious or even guilty.

It is important time is taken to plan carefully for any transitions or changes to ensure they happen smoothly.

Ask any questions you may have, it is important you feel confident about the setting as your child will pick up on your anxiety.

Spend time getting to know your child's key person, they will be your first point of contact at the setting.

Share information about your child with their key person before they start, the more information you can give them about your child's likes, dislikes, development and routines, the more they will be able to support your child.

Be reassured, a setting will contact you if your child cries for an extended period of time and cannot be comforted.

See it as an opportunity for you to make new friends, talking to other parents can help you feel reassured that you are not the only one feeling anxious.

What can you do to support your child?

Talk about up and coming change and transitions in a positive and exciting way, and acknowledge and help children express their feelings and emotions about the change.

Help your child celebrate memories of their current situation as well as look forward to the future.

A book of familiar photos that a child can take with them for the day may help if your child is experiencing separation anxiety. You could even add laminated photos to a key ring for the child to hold or have attached to clothing.

It is fine for your child to take and use familiar comforters such as a favourite toy or cuddly, with them to help soothe them.

It helps if you can say goodbye in a calm and brief manner and tell your child when you will be back. Never sneak out, as this can make your child feel abandoned.

Smile! You may feel like crying inside but try not to show it.

Talk about nursery or school in positive terms, as something exciting and enjoyable, even if your school days weren't exactly the best of your life. But don't belittle any fears your child may have.

Read stories about starting nursery or school, there are many to choose from.

For older children make dressing easy, put your child in clothes that are easy for them to pull on and off, especially if they're newly toilet trained. Shoes with Velcro fastening will make them feel more independent, as they won't need to ask for help tying the laces.

If your child is staying for mealtimes and you are providing packed lunches, include something you know your child likes or a little treat.

Statutory Guidance

England

Department for Education (2021) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*.

Wales

Welsh Government (2015) *Foundation Phase Framework*

Welsh Government (2016) *National Minimum Standards for Regulated Child Care for children up to 12 years of age*

Additional resources

My First Day at Nursery School by Becky Edwards.

I am Too Absolutely Small for school by Lauren Child

Goat Goes to Playgroup by Julia Donaldson

I want my Mummy by Tracey Corderoy

I'm starting Nursery: A pirate Pete book by Amanda Li

Lulu loves Nursery by Camilla Reid

Lucy and Tom start school by Shirley Hughes