

Children's Emotional Needs

This factsheet provides information about exploring the importance of supporting children's emotional wellbeing

Applicable to

Early Years Practitioners, including teachers that are involved in children's transitions into school

Key points

Well-being refers to feeling at ease, being spontaneous and free of emotional tensions and is crucial to secure 'mental health'. Involvement refers to being intensely engaged in activities and is considered to be a necessary condition for deep level learning and development. (Laevers, F. 2005)

Children need to develop a positive sense of themselves and others and a positive disposition to learn.

Children's emotional well-being helps them to know themselves and what they can do.

Ensuring that children's well-being is supported upon their transition to school (as with other key events in their lives) is important.

What does this mean for me?

Starting school may be the first time that a child and parent(s) are to spend a significant time away from each other. For some children it may be the first time that they are to spend time in a large group situation. For others starting school may mean them leaving their familiar childcare setting, starting school and starting a new childcare setting offering wrap around care. Whatever the child's situation may be you can help children through separation anxiety by having a key person assigned to each child/family. The EYFS (2014), p21 3.27 states that 'Each child must be assigned a key person. Their role is to help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs...' As the EYFS also includes children until they start in Year 1 at school careful thought needs to be given to these key person relationships. They will include a key person in school, this maybe the reception class teacher or other staff working in reception class. Additionally for children who attend some kind of wrap around care there will be a key person for you in that childcare setting.

Supporting both parents and children in managing their feelings about starting school. For some parents this can be an anxious time, for others not so. For some parents this might be their first child going to school, so the school build, rules and systems will be new to them. For other parents they may have been through this before with an older child. In either case parents might need your support, understanding and advice helping children settle. Remember that parents' anxiety can transfer to their child.

Understanding child development – what behaviours manifest themselves at certain ages, why and what strategies we can share with parents to help.

Supporting children to achieve a sense of self and appreciating each child as an individual.

Ensuring that transitions are managed sensitively and effectively by working with parents/carers and the school.

Ensuring that children's familiar routines are followed to provide security and stability.

Consider providing a visual timetable for children. This will help young children to see what comes next in their day. It will also be supportive of those children with communication difficulties, additional needs or with English as an additional language.

Providing consistent boundaries and ground rules, ensuring that children know what behaviour is expected of them.

Ensuring that the environment is safe and secure but at the same time allowing the children to take small risks in a safe way to extend their development. The aim is for children to be confident to access resources as they choose. When they are in a new environment they may not feel confident to try and explore new experiences. We also aim for the children to have the confidence to ask questions – again in a new environment for some children this will be a challenge.

Providing support, encouragement and appropriate praise to support children in their play, development and learning.

Supporting children in expressing their feelings in an appropriate way e.g. it is okay to be feel sad. Talk to children why they are sad about things that can make them happier.

Supporting children to communicate and help them to develop language providing extra support for those children who have English as an Additional Language.

Understanding/learning about cultural differences so that individual support can be given to help children and families learn the British cultures and values if necessary.

Ensuring the environment is warm and accepting of everyone (Early Years Foundation Stage, Practice Guidance Cards, 2008)

How will you know that children's emotional well-being is fostered?

- Children show enjoyment, they are having fun and taking pleasure in interacting with others and in activities.
- Children show curiosity and use their senses to explore the world around them.
- The children look happy, smile or laugh easily, engage spontaneously in chatting or even singing.
- Children are relaxed with no visible signs of tension. They initiate activities, seek challenge and show a 'can do' attitude.
- Children have energy and vitality. Children are lively and expressive. They radiate. They move around the room with confidence.

- Children are comfortable around the adults and other children. They have a good sense of humour and will laugh and share a joke.
- Children show pride in what they have accomplished.

Resources to support children with their emotional development

- Puppets
- Persona dolls. These dolls feature different personalities, features and cultural backgrounds.
- Books and stories reflecting feelings, different lifestyles, specialised subjects such as bereavement and other key events in children's lives including starting school.
- For settings helping children with their transitions to school you could try a 'school' home corner and include book bags and items of school uniform for the children to try on.

Reflective task

Imagine you are a 4 year old. You have already been to two different childcare settings, most recently a nursery (which you really enjoyed) and now you are about to start school and will be leaving your nursery as they do not provide wrap around care. What would you be feeling? How could you support this child?

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Additional resources

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