

A Guide for Parents

early years
the organisation for young children



**Settling Young Children
into Pre-School Settings**



The first few weeks when a child is settling into an early years setting is a time of crucial importance to their later happiness in the setting. All children are individuals and while some children will adjust fairly easily to the new environment and new routines, others will take longer to feel comfortable and secure.

Sometimes we can overestimate a young child's ability to cope with transitions and settle in and happily substitute a group of unfamiliar adults and children for their parents or main care giver. The lure of the toys doesn't always compensate! The experience can be overwhelming for some young children especially if they have not had experience of another form of care outside of the family.

As parents and as early years practitioners, we can take steps to ensure that the transition into the early years setting goes as smoothly as possible. Research shows that when the settling in period is positive for the child, it can not only impact on their happiness throughout their time at the

early years setting but also on how the child views future transitions.

Children who have a positive start to their new environment are more likely to feel comfortable, relaxed and valued, feel good about themselves as learners and have a sense of belonging to the pre-school community. Most children settle in without too many concerns but there are some children who need more time to develop trust.

Programme Consultant, Eleanor Mearns, has set out a few guidelines to support parents as they prepare their child for the transition into a new pre-school setting.

Guidelines for Parents

General awareness and good preparation

Separation anxiety is a healthy and protective emotion. It is the child's way of saying "You are my safe base and I need to develop trust and confidence in alternate carers."

Recognising that separation anxiety can sometimes cause problems is a good starting point. It means you can prepare for the event and turn it into an adventure, allowing both you and your child to feel stronger and empowered.

Attend information sessions and open days

Attend any information sessions and open days which the pre-school centre offers. This will provide you and your child with an introduction to the new environment, allow you both to meet the staff and make a positive start to the transition process.

Become familiar with the centre's 'Settling In Policy'

All early years settings will have a 'Settling In Policy' which will set out the centre's procedures for supporting children through the settling in stage. Policies should be written with the child's emotional well-being at the centre. It is important that you obtain a copy of this policy and familiarise yourself with it, as it will help you prepare for your child's transition into the pre-school setting and make any necessary arrangements.

Know the routines and activities

Most early years centres will give parents an Information Booklet which includes the types of activities provided for the children and the daily routines. It is good to familiarise yourself with this also as you can talk to the child positively about the sorts of activities they will be engaging in during their time in the setting. Like adults, children need reassured and it is good to talk through the daily routines and let them know when you will pick them up, for example, after story time.

Read stories to your child about starting pre-school

This again can help familiarise the child with what will happen at the early years setting before they start.

Chat to your child about any concerns they may have

Your child may be anxious to know what to do for example if they need to go to the toilet. Talk to your child in a positive way about these concerns.

Leaving children with family members and trusted friends

Preparing for separation can involve leaving your child with trusted friends or family members for short periods. This can then be followed by separation periods within the early years setting.

Staying confident, cheery and positive

Although you may be feeling as anxious and emotional as your child, try to stay cheery and confident as children will pick up on your feelings of apprehension.

Don't be tempted to slip away

It is important when your child starts the early years setting to let the child know when you are leaving. Tell your child you are going and will be back after an activity, for example story time. For some children this will work



while others need their parent or care giver to stay until they become familiar and comfortable enough in their new surroundings. These children may benefit from a gentle transition with visits to the centre with the parent/care giver followed by increasing periods of separation.

Although tempting, slipping away when your child is distracted can lead to the child becoming very anxious and not letting you out of their sight on the next visit.

Parents and practitioners working in partnership

Open communication between parents and the early years staff team is crucial. It is important to share information. Parents can give the staff information about the child and in turn the staff can talk to the parents about the child's experiences in the setting.

Practitioners will have a vast amount of experience in helping children settle into the pre-school setting and are aware of the difficulties that can emerge during this transition period.

If your child is taking longer to settle in than you had expected and you still have concerns, discuss these with a member of staff. Together you can agree on and put into place strategies to support your child during this time.

Helping your child to grow in confidence and independence

You are the safe base from which your child can branch out and explore the world, grow and learn and become socially and emotionally confident. Getting off to a good start will help you support your child through this very important period in their lives.

For further information or if you have any queries, please contact **Early Years** on +44 (0)28 9066 2825



Early Years Headquarters
6c Wildflower Way
Apollo Road
Boucher Road
Belfast BT12 6TA

T: +44 (0)28 9066 2825

F: +44 (0)28 9038 1270

E: info@early-years.org

W: www.early-years.org



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