

09 Early Years Practice Procedures

09.04 Settling in and transitions

Our Aim

Creating warm, secure attachments helps children feel safe, confident, and ready to learn. All children—whether babies, toddlers, or older—deserve to settle comfortably into a new environment at their own pace.

Our 3-Stage Settling In Approach

We follow a clear settling model based on how young children form secure relationships:

Proximity

Children feel safest when a familiar adult stays close as they meet new people and explore a new place. This helps them build confidence gradually.

Secure Base

Once children trust their key person, they begin to feel safe in the new environment and can explore for short periods independently.

Dependency → Independence

Children begin to separate comfortably when they have formed a strong attachment to their key person, who understands their needs and supports them.

The manager and key person will agree a settling plan with parents/carers and check in daily to decide the next steps.

Settling In for Babies, Under-Twos & Children with SEND

- Start dates are staggered so each family receives personalised time.
- Babies should reach stage 2 before the key person begins settling in another child.
- Key persons may settle one baby in the morning and another in the afternoon.

- For children with SEND, the key person/SENCO and parents plan for any additional needs (e.g., medical routines, specialist support, additional comfort items).

Stage 1: Supporting Proximity

During the first sessions:

- A parent stays with their child and does not leave.
- 30 minutes is usually enough for very young children.
- The key person greets you, shows you around, and explains the daily routine.
- Parents are encouraged to play with their child while the key person gently builds familiarity.
- The key person avoids rushing physical contact and watches for signs of comfort, curiosity, and interest.

Stage 2: Building a Secure Base

When the child is ready:

- Parents always say goodbye and explain they will return — slipping away increases distress.
- Once the child can cope with 30 minutes, the next step is planned together.
- Comfort items can be brought in such as:
 - A worn t-shirt or scarf with a parent's familiar smell
 - A recorded song or lullaby, including the home language

Stage 3: Building Dependence on the Key Person

A child is progressing when they:

- Show happiness when seeing their key person
- Look for their key person when upset
- Reach out for comfort
- Make eye contact or enjoy shared play
- Accept help with feeding, play, or soothing

Parents can then leave their child for longer sessions.

A review takes place after 4–6 weeks, and then every 6 weeks, as children's needs change quickly.

Part-Time Children

Part-time children follow the same settling process.

Because they attend less often, longer gaps between sessions may mean a slower pace.

A review takes place at 6 weeks to discuss:

- Attachment
- Behaviour at home
- Confidence in the setting

When Children Struggle to Settle

A child who is highly distressed cannot engage or learn and needs 1:1 support. If distress continues:

- Parents are called to collect their child.
- The settling plan is reviewed and adjusted.
- Triggers of distress are explored.
- If a child cannot settle despite full support, the setting may discuss alternative arrangements.
- For a child known to social care, this will be discussed with the allocated worker/health visitor.

When a Parent Cannot or Will Not Take Part

- The settling-in plan is explained at the first visit.
- If a parent cannot attend, another close relative may support the process.
- If a parent refuses to participate, the offer of a place may be withdrawn.

Prolonged Absence

If a child has been away for a long time, attachments may weaken.

A new re-settling plan is agreed with parents.

Transitions Within Nursery (Moving Rooms)

When children move from babies → toddlers → preschool, we consider:

- Age
- Stage
- Development
- Space within the setting

Transition steps include:

- Short visits to the new room during normal playtimes
- Joining the new group for meals
- Meeting the new key person
- Parents attending a settling visit
- A new “All About Me” form completed
- The current key person supporting visits and sharing information
- Gradual increase in time spent with the new key person

Two-Year-Olds Starting Nursery

Two-year-olds may have:

- Little experience of group care
- A strong need for proximity
- Limited understanding of where parents go

We:

- Gather detailed information from parents/carers
- Use the same 3-stage settling model
- Encourage goodbye routines
- Follow a personalised plan made with parents/carers

Three- and Four-Year-Olds

Most older children:

- Move through stages more quickly
- Show confidence early on
- May initially seem independent but often return to needing proximity and reassurance

Process:

- Induction meeting with manager/deputy and key person
- Parent stays for half an hour on day one
- Child stays alone on day two
- Parents encouraged to explain where they are going and when they'll return

Children Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL)

For these children:

- Proximity often takes longer.
- An interpreter may support the induction.
- Parents are encouraged to talk in their home language during settling.
- Staff gather key words to support communication (e.g., hello, toilet, hungry).
- The key person prepares favourite toys and uses gestures, expression, and warmth.
- Progress with settling in will be done as with any other child; it just takes a little longer to reach dependency/independence.