

Child care practice

4.3 The role of the key person and settling-in

Policy Statement

We believe that children settle best when they have a key person to relate to, who knows them and their parents well, and who can meet their individual needs. Research shows that a key person approach benefits the child, the parents, the staff and the pre-school by providing secure relationships in which children thrive, parents have confidence, staff are committed and the pre-school is a happy and dedicated place to attend or work in.

We want children to feel safe, stimulated and happy in the setting and to feel secure and comfortable with staff. We also want parents to have confidence in both their children's well-being and their role as active partners with the pre-school.

We aim to make the pre-school a welcoming place where children settle quickly and easily because consideration has been given to the individual needs and circumstances of children and their families.

The key person role is set out in the Welfare Requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The procedures set out a model for developing a key person approach that promotes effective and positive relationships for children who are in settings.

The role of the key person is particularly important when feeding back information from each session. When a child starts with us we are aware of the need to share as much information, and to be as welcoming and approachable as possible, to every member of our key children's families.

Staff will be mentored and observed. The key person relationship underpins our work at pre-school and forms part of our good practice and therefore forms part of our performance management. Any concerns that are brought to our attention will be addressed with each staff member.

We also offer as many ways to share information as possible on an individual basis as we accept that all families have preferred communication routes, especially if other family members or friends are involved in their child's care.

Procedures

- We allocate a key person before the child starts.
- A home visit is carried out before the child starts and is done by two senior members of staff.
- On a session visit the key person is introduced to the child and parents/carers.
- The key person, together with all other members of staff, will help with the process of settling the child into pre-school.
- The key person offers unconditional regard for the child and is non-judgemental.
- Key persons support parents in their role as the child's first and most enduring educators.
- The key person acts as the key contact for the parents and has links with other carers involved with the child, such as a childminder, and co-ordinates the sharing of appropriate information about the child's development with those carers.
- A key person is responsible for completing relevant forms and consent forms, together with administration staff.
- Key people, and administration staff, are responsible for explaining policies and procedures to parents with particular focus on policies such as safeguarding and our responsibilities under the Prevent Duty.
- A key person is responsible for developmental records and for sharing information on a regular basis with the child's parents to keep those records up-to-date, reflecting the full picture of the child in our pre-school and at home.
- We will make all families aware of our bottles, cups and dummies procedure.
- We will make all families aware that we are an Operation Encompass setting for safeguarding children
- We will make all families aware of our water only policy for bottles at pre-school
- Parents complete relevant forms, including all necessary consents.

Settling-in

- Before a child starts to attend the pre-school, we use a variety of ways to provide his/her parents with information. These include written information (including relevant policies), information evenings and home visits.
- During the half-term before a child is enrolled, we provide an opportunity for the child and his/her parents to visit the setting to stay for a whole session.
- We allocate a key person to each child and his/her family before he/she starts to attend; whenever possible the key person welcomes and looks after the child and his/her parents at the child's first session and during the settling-in process.
- We offer a home visit to ensure all relevant information about the child can be shared.
- When a child starts to attend, we explain the process of settling-in with his/her parents and jointly decide on the best way to help the child to settle into the setting.

- We gather on entry information prior to the child starting from the parent's knowledge of their child, using the EYFS statements and our own expertise in child development. Children are "on track" or require "nurture" in specific areas and we plot a very simple on entry point after two weeks, subsequently measuring progress.
- We recognise that all children are individuals and some may take longer to settle than others and may need more parental support to enable them to settle.
- When parents leave, we encourage them to say goodbye to their child and explain that they will be coming back, and when.
- Photographs of key persons are displayed clearly and at child's height.
- The key person spends time daily with his or her key child to ensure their well-being.

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.
- 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.
 - On the session visit prior to starting, 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 parent is invited to play with their child and the key person spends time with them. As much time as possible is allowed for the key person to do this.
- Within the first four to six weeks of starting we start to create the child's Learning Journey, which is shared with parents.
- We give parents the opportunity to phone in and check on the progress of their child/children during their session. Parents may also receive text updates from us, or a phone call or photos when time allows, to up-date them in the first few weeks.
- If a child becomes distressed and their key person or other pre-school staff, are unable to distract them after a reasonable period of time, we will contact parents and agree a plan of action.
- We will share ideas for home learning with parents, we organise nurture groups and share that information with parents and we have notice and focus areas for individual children to work on.
- We create goals for some children and share these with parents at their parent consultation meeting.
- Our role is to support the whole family and we signpost families to universal support where needed.
- We commence a TAF (Team Around the Family) in situations where there are safeguarding concerns, SEN concerns or family worries and the key person will be able to share their view with the lead professional in advance of the meeting.

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 tour and session visit with the pre-school leader, deputy and key person, a settling-in plan is drawn up. A home visit is carried out for the same purpose.
- To settle in a two-year-old, the setting will go through the same process of gradually increasing the time a child attends with a parent/carer during the proximity stage.
- On the first day, the parent attends with the child, and stays for the morning as a session visit.
- It is evident that the child is developing a sense of secure base when he or she shows interest in activities and begins to engage with the key person and other children. Then the parent/

carer may gradually start to spend short periods of time in another room to see how the child responds, this time increases until the child can manage a whole session without the parent.

- 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.

The Progress Check at Age Two

- The key person carries out the progress check at age two in accordance with any local procedures that are in place and referring to the guidance A Know How Guide: The EYFS progress check at age two.
- The progress check aims to review the child's development and ensures that parents have a clear picture of their child's development.
- Within the progress check, the key person will note areas where the child is progressing well and identify areas where progress is less than expected.
- The progress check will describe the actions that will be taken by us to address any developments concerns (including working with other professionals where appropriate) as agreed with the parent(s).
- We will plan activities to meet the child's needs within the setting and will support parents to understand the child's needs in order to enhance their development at home.

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.
- On the first day, the parent attends with the child and stays for the morning (less if the child becomes tired).
- 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 him/her 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.
- When the child feels happy to spend time with the key person (secure base), the parent should spend time outside of the room.
- Progress with settling in will be done as with any other child; it just takes a little longer to reach dependency/independence.

Safeguarding children

The key person has a responsibility towards their key children to report any concern about their development, welfare or child protection matter to the setting manager and to follow the procedures in this respect.

Regular supervision with the setting manager provides further opportunities to discuss the progress and welfare of key children.

This policy was adopted at a meeting of	Cullompton Pre-School	name of setting
Held on	11 th May 2011	(date)
Date to be reviewed	May 2012	(date)
Signed on behalf of the management committee	Emma Jones	
Name of signatory	Emma Jones	
Role of signatory (e.g. chair/owner)	Chairperson	

This policy has an annual review period and, as such, will be reviewed and signed off at a management committee meeting of Cullompton Pre-School each year, as shown below.

Previously reviewed on:-	26 th February 2018	by	Owen Jones
Previously reviewed on:-	25 th February 2019	By	Alex Fox
Previously reviewed on:-	25 th February 2020	By	Alex Fox
Previously reviewed on:-	24 th February 2022	By	Jack Madge
Previously reviewed on:-	22nd February 2023	By	Hannah Tilley
Previously reviewed on:-	20 th April 2024	By	Jess Titcombe

Reviewed by Staff on:	March 2025
Reviewed by Committee on:	20.04.2025
Date of next review:	April 2027
Signed on behalf of the Management Committee:	Rebecca Collins
Name of Signatory (printed):	Rebecca Collins
Role of Signatory (e.g. Chairperson)	Committee Member

