

9 Early Years Practice Policy

9.5 Settling In and Transitions

Alongside associated procedures in 9.1 to 9.17, this policy was adopted by You and Me on the 8th December 2025 by the Committee.

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 can 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 can 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.

You and Me Pre-School follow a three-stage model of settling in based on three key needs:

1. *Proximity* - 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, 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* – 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.

Settling-In For Children With SEND

If a child has been identified as having SEND then the key person/SENCO and parents/carers 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.

Prolonged Absences

If children are absent from the setting for more than one or two weeks, their sense of security and attachment to their key person may lessen, and may need to be re-established.

Parents and carers are informed of the importance of a 're-settling' period, and a supportive plan is agreed to help the child feel comfortable, secure, and reconnected with their key person and the setting.

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.
- To settle in a two-year-old, the setting will go through the process of gradually increasing the time a child attends.
- It is evident that the child is developing a sense of secure base when they shows interest in activities and begins to engage with the key person and other children.
- Separation causes anxiety in two-year-olds, as they have no concept of where their parents/carers have gone. Parents/carers 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.

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.
- Parents/carers 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 parent/carers' input to make sense of what is going on.
- Through the parent/carer, 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/carer to converse in the child's home language is important.
- With the parent/carer, 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/carers will be addressed with 'hello' and 'goodbye' in their language.

- Children will be spoken to as per any other child, using gestures and facial expressions to help.
- Progress with settling in will be done as with any other child; it just may take a little longer to reach dependency/independence.