



GUIDANCE FOR CHILDMINDERS

Settling in and Developing Relationships

Starting with a childminder is a major life transition for both young children and their families, especially if it is the first time the child has been away from their parents for more than a few hours. Such a big change can be stressful for everyone.

It is really important for the child, both now and later in life, that their early experiences of big changes are good learning experiences.

The learning and care environment plays a major role in a child's development, and it significantly affects their later outcomes and life chances. As a childminder, how you support children, especially very young children, through such changes really matters.

It is also important that you respond sensitively to any anxieties parents may have as they move towards trusting you to take care of their precious child.

This resource offers guidance on how you can develop relationships with children and families to support children's transition into your care.

The Importance of Trust and Security

A child's reaction to the transition into your care is often related to their stage of development. Knowing about child development can help you to understand children's responses to the big change they are experiencing.

A baby's first key developmental task is to develop a sense of trust and security. This initially comes about through the consistent and responsive caregiving of their primary caregivers, usually their parents. Building on this important foundation of trust and security, the baby will then go on to develop communication and social skills, which, in turn, leads to a growing independence and a sense of competency ('I can do it').

It is essential that this sense of trust, which has been developing since birth at home, extends from home and family to you, as the child's new additional carer and educator. Older children will also need to develop trust and feel secure with you. For this to happen successfully, you need to develop a really good partnership with parents so you can work together to ensure the child feels safe and happy in your care.

By fostering a safe and secure relationship with children, you provide them with the confidence to explore, discover and learn about their new environment. Familiarity helps a child feel safe, secure and cared for.

The Importance of Attachments

An infant's brain is shaped by their early experiences (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard) and the quality of these experiences has a substantial effect on their development. Attachment theory is important because it provides us with a way to understand how secure attachments in early childhood can support children's brain development.

Attachments are the emotional bonds that infants develop with their parents and other key caregivers. These attachments are crucial for children's wellbeing and for their emotional and social development. They are particularly significant for babies and very young children.

Through research, we know that secure attachments with caregivers when children are very young prepare them well for positive interactions with other people throughout their lives, even the relationship they will have with their own children.

It is important that all those who care for and educate children understand attachment theory and have an awareness of how to promote the development of attachment relationships to support positive development.

The following are key to the development of secure attachments:

- Consistent and sensitive caregiving, especially in activities such as feeding, care routines and settling for sleep.
- Sensitive responsiveness to the child's emotional needs.
- The ability to think about a child's thoughts and feelings in your interactions with them and to let the child know that you are doing so.

Communicating with Parents

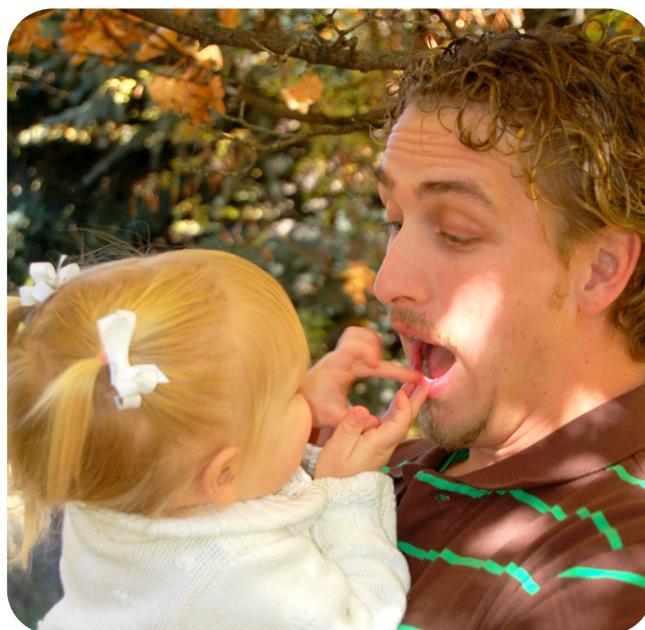
Your first meeting with the family is very important for everyone involved. You need to carefully plan for the child's move or transition from home in partnership with their parents well in advance of any change happening for the child.

One of the key ways to support the child to settle in and help them to develop their crucial sense of trust and

security as soon as possible is to keep the child's routine as close as possible to what they are used to at home. To do this, you need to prioritise the development of a strong relationship between you and the family through good communication and sharing of information.

When children see open and easy communication between the adults in their lives, they feel reassured. If parents are feeling anxious, children can notice this and it can add to their stress.

Ask parents how they would prefer to communicate with you day-to-day and how they wish to be involved in everyday decisions.



Encourage parents to share information

It is really important to welcome and encourage parents' involvement, and the information they share, in their child's settling-in plan. In order to match the routine to the child's home routine as much as possible, you will need detailed information on what works for the child at home and what their home routine looks like.

It is also important that you get to know as much as possible about the child before they start their time with you. Ask parents to tell you about:

- Their child's temperament
- What upsets and comforts them
- How they react to strangers, familiar adults and other children
- How they handle routines such as eating and sleeping

- Their child's likes, dislikes and interests
- Who is in their family as well as the family's traditions, habits, practices and values
- The child's previous experiences of different carers (if any)
- A brief developmental and medical history – social, emotional and physical skills, language development and whether they have any additional needs

You may need to reassure some parents of the benefits of sharing this kind of information. They need to know that supporting their child to develop a special relationship with you will not replace any attachments they have at home.

Settling In Takes Time

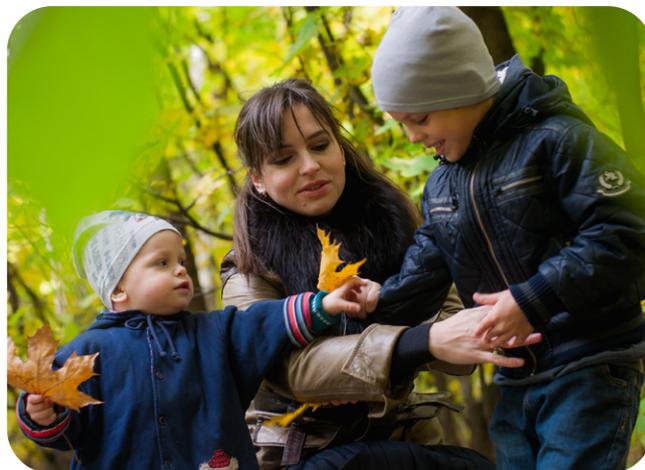
Settling in happens gradually and both you and the child's parent need to understand this and be patient. While some children adjust easily to a new environment, others may need more time.

Children adapt to change in different ways depending on their stage of development and also on individual differences. Some have more sensitive neurological systems than others so may become distressed more easily. Children will also show their distress in different ways, it may not always be through crying. Some may appear to be settling or settled and may act as if nothing has happened but they may actually be withdrawn through fear. Other children will act out or even have physical symptoms. Sometimes a child may appear to settle quickly and then a few days later start to show signs of distress.

Young children don't have the words to explain how stress is making them feel, so it is important to be tuned in to any signs of distress and work closely with their parents to help alleviate it. You need to talk a lot with parents to know how their child normally behaves at home to be able to recognise how the child may be feeling and if they are distressed.

You can support older children to manage their big emotions by being sensitive and responsive to their attempts to communicate their feelings and by giving them words to express their feelings. You can also help them find ways of self-soothing or coping, such as

taking long deep breaths or drawing a picture to take home. Older children will be better able to cope with change when they are prepared for what is coming next so establish predictable routines, help them explore the new environment and be realistic in your expectations.



Plan a phased settling-in period

It is really important that you and the child's parents plan together for a gradual and phased settling-in period. This should take the form of shorter visits, shorter days and fewer days to begin with. The length of time that this settling-in phase needs to take will depend on each individual child's age and stage of development, their temperament, disposition and their own particular needs.

A young child can be traumatised by a badly handled start in a new care setting and the effect of this can be lasting. The child's needs and rights must be given priority over the adults' needs in the planning.

Don't overwhelm children

Provide relaxing and engaging activities during waking time and keep the number of new people the child meets during the first days as few as possible. A baby or young child will likely be overwhelmed if they are meeting too many new people at the same time so introductions need to be gradual. If there are already other children in the household (either your own and/or children from other families), it is essential that you give them equal consideration when a child is first being introduced.

Let children know what is happening

Children need to be able to trust their parents and caregivers, and a definite and predictable leaving and returning routine with lots of reassurance is key in this learning to trust. Advise parents against sneaking out to avoid their child crying. It is better to let the child know what is going to happen and for parents to reassure them that they will be back after some event that the child will clearly recognise, for example, 'I will be back right after you have your morning snack'. Explain to parents how important it is that they do come back when they say they will.

Encourage comfort objects from home

As well as talking to the child about their home and family while in your care, real reminders of home are particularly important for babies and very young children. They provide emotional and psychological support when they are moving from their own home to yours, especially during the first days and weeks. Children may have a special toy, a 'blankie' or a special soother/dummy. Even if a child doesn't have an attachment to any particular item, photographs of special people in their lives may help them to feel more comfortable in a strange place with a strange person or persons.

Remember, by communicating with parents, planning carefully to support the child to settle in and taking enough time you can help to ensure that the child will be happy, confident and secure and off to the best start.

Further Information

Useful books

Barnardos. (2014). *Quality Adult-Child Interactions in Early Years Services*. Dublin: Barnardos.

Johnson, T. (2018). *Understanding the emotional needs of children in the early years*. Routledge.

Lee, A. (2014). *How to be an Outstanding Childminder*. Bloomsbury Education.

Lindon, J. (2012). *The key person approach: Positive relationships in the early years* (Revised edition). Practical Pre-school Books.

O'Connor, A. (2018). *Understanding transitions in the early years: Supporting change through attachment and resilience* (Second edition). Routledge.

Useful weblinks

[Tusla Quality and Regulatory Framework](#)

[Aistear Siolta Practice Guide](#)

[Attachment in the Early Years \(free online course\)](#)

For parents

[First 5 Resources for Parents](#)

[Your Young Child's Behaviour: How You Can Help](#) (Barnardos)

[Learning Together: A Parent's Guide to Early Childhood Learning](#) (Barnardos)



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