What's New?

Supporting Children through Transitions in their Early Years

Barnardos

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ISBN: 978-1-906004-23-1

Published by: Barnardos Training and Resource Service, Barnardos, Christchurch Square, Dublin 8

Acknowledgements

Anne Conroy, National Manager, Barnardos Training and Resource Service.

Sinéad Lawton, Publications Coordinator, Barnardos Training and Resource Service.

We also wish to acknowledge a number of people who gave of their times and ideas and those who gave us permission to include photographs: Marie Willoughby, Geraldine French, Mary Corrigan, Mary Potts, Kayley Dunne, Casey Fitzgerald and Keith Gaule.

Barnardos supports children whose well-being is under threat, by working with them, their families and communities and by campaigning for the rights of children. Barnardos was established in Ireland in 1962 and is Ireland's leading independent children's charity.

Contents

Introduction

Well functioning transitions support a child's current and future capacities for learning and development.

Síolta Research Digest, 2007

Young children desire to move forward and the challenge of transition can be highly motivating for them. For this reason, we must see transition not as a problem but a challenge.

Bennett, 2006

Have you ever started something new? Perhaps you changed jobs, joined a class, moved to a new country or had to move to a new team in work. How did you know what was expected of you? How did you know where to go, what to do, who to ask for help?

As an adult, it can be difficult enough to cope with new experiences, places and things. For children, who have no previous building blocks of knowledge of experiencing new things, new encounters can be difficult. This is especially the case if they are handled poorly by the adults taking care of them, and in some instances this may lead to long-term behaviour and health issues.

The aim of this publication is to support educators in early years services, such as full day care, sessional services, playgroups, pre-schools, and those in after school services in making children's new experiences as smooth as possible and helping them to learn to cope well with change, now and in the future.

The guide gives an overview of the research and theories underpinning the topic of transitions, suggests sound foundations for good practice and gives suggestions, ideas and resources for managing many types of transitions. Many important areas relating to children, such as attachment and developmental issues, are discussed in relation to transitions. Each of these areas is worthy of further research on the part of early years educators in order to expand their knowledge of them.

Successful management of transitions in early years is the difference between the child having to adapt and fit into the routine of the service and having a service that is able, like a loving parent, to enfold each and every child, with their different identities, dispositions and personalities, under its wing and enable that child to truly be confident within themselves.

> *For young children's transitions to be successful, we must recognise that early childhood is a life phase carrying the same rights and importance as any other. It is not merely a training ground for becoming older, but a time for societies to help children cross new thresholds. Peers, families and communities play a critical role in priming children for their next steps in life.*
>
> (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2006)

Using this Guide

This guide gives both theoretical insights into how to support successful transitions and practical guidance as to how these can be translated into everyday work through the use of case studies and learning stories, exercises (both practical exercises and ones to provoke discussion or consideration) and worksheets.

Early years educators are encouraged to reflect on their practice. It is important that they stop and think, to question and to be open to change. This is called reflective practice and aims to provide children with a standard of care that will have long-lasting benefits. Managers should build a sense of trust with their teams that will encourage a willingness to understand, anticipate and respond to children's needs in a way that raises the levels of quality practice in their service.

The **Thinking Boxes** outline things you can be thinking about and considering while you read the text.

Case Study

Case Studies or learning stories can be used to understand the issues and to consider how you might react in such situations.

The **Worksheets** can be photocopied from this book or downloaded and printed from the CD that accompanies this book. They support the information given to you in this book and can be used repeatedly to check changes and progress in any of the areas covered. Each worksheet can be used by you on your own, with a colleague, a friend or with your supervisor. Worksheets start on page 104.

We use both of the terms 'educator' and 'practitioner' in this publication to acknowledge the growing recognition of the educative role of those working with young children.

Along with the worksheets there is a sample Transitions policy on the CD accompanying this book.

Learning About Transitions

1

This section will look at the following:

- **What are Transitions?**
- **Types of Transitional Experiences**
- **Understanding Transitions in the Early Years**

My World

- Imagine you are a child starting in your service. You are approaching the front door… what do you see… what does the door look like… are there any pictures on it?
- Who opens the door to you… what do they look like… what do they say… do you know them… do they seem nice/kind to you… what sounds do you hear?
- You go to your room… who brings you… where do you put your coat/bag… who is there to greet you… what do they say… do they talk to your mum/dad… what's happening in the room… what sounds do you hear… what does it smell like… does the room seem loud and busy or is it ok… what do you do next… are there lots of things to choose from and what can you play with… who do you play with… is your friend there yet?
- After free play time the room leader has things planned for you to do… what are you doing… are you enjoying it… what would you like to be doing instead?
- Its snack time… were you finished what you were doing… what do you need to do first… are you one of the helpers today… what jobs do you like best… do you wash hands… find your seat… who do you sit beside… are you hungry… what's for snack, is it something you like… do you have a choice of what you can eat… is it a fun time or do you feel rushed to get finished… what's being talked about… it's time to tidy up after snack, do you help with this?
- It's home time… do you help tidy up… what job do you like doing… what job do you like least?
- Your mum has arrived to collect you… are you happy to be going home… get your bag and coat… is your mum talking to the room leader… what are they saying… are they smiling… who says goodbye to you?

What are Transitions?

The term 'transition' is used to describe the process for a person of moving from one situation to another. This process is not considered complete until the person has fully settled into the new situation, both physically and emotionally. A transition should be seen, therefore, as a process rather than a point in time.

Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006) states:

> *Young children may experience many transitions in their lives; from home to an early childhood setting, between early childhood settings, from there to primary school and from one aspect of the daily routine to the next.*

For children, transitions can be defined as '…the continuity of experiences that children have between periods and between spheres of their lives' (Dunlop and Fabian, 2007). Therefore the process of transition means more than a physical relocation from one place to another. For a child, a transition marks a moment in their lives when things change, when they realise that they are taking a step into something new, and their awareness of themselves doing this leads to a change in how they see themselves. Children will become aware that, as a separate person, a unique individual, they are experiencing something particular to them, changing the future from how they have lived their life up to that point.

Encountering the unknown

According to Fabian (Dunlop and Fabian, 2007), transitions mean 'leaving the comfort zone and encountering the unknown'. For the young child:

> *…leaving one familiar arena with its specific social and cultural code, and moving into another one with a different set of values and ways of constructing meaning about what is important in the surrounding world is a complex and complicated process for most children.*
>
> (Johansson, 2007)

For children in their early years, 'encountering the unknown' captures the reality of what all transitions are about. Their response to such encounters is determined by many factors, not least of which is the child's own capacity to deal with the unknown.

Consider how you felt when you began your first job.

- How did you think it would be?
- Did you have butterflies?
- Were you prepared?
- What things were difficult?
- What surprises were there?
- Did it turn out like you had anticipated?

The idea of the 'unknown' also illustrates for early years educators the reality of the challenges children face when undergoing a transition, and the possible positive and negative outcomes that may ensue. Early years educators need to understand the challenge of a new situation, place or people for children, and the fact of accepting the new situation as part of their lives from now on. The effect a transition has on a child is dependent on various factors, the most significant of which is how they experience the full transition, the process of which begins some time before the actual event and ends when the child has completed this internal acceptance and response, which may not be right away.

Siolta refers to the concept of transitions as being a form of 'border crossing', stating that 'children need support to mark and successfully negotiate transitions' (Siolta Research Digest). Siolta discusses how transitions are often seen as a 'settling-in' period with short-term management implications whereas research shows that the full impact of transitions needs to be measured over time. (See Section 2 for more information on Siolta.)

- What do you understand by transitions?
- How would you define them?

Handling transitions

Transitions or changes for children, whether major ones, such as from home to an early years service, or apparently simple ones such as from one activity to the next, can either be handled well for children, leading to successful outcomes for the child and the adults in their life, or handled poorly, leading to problems that may not be always traced back to a poorly thought out transition. For any child, change will bring some level of stress, and recognising and managing this is an important element of the process. When the process focuses on continuity of experience for the child between their various worlds, this will lead to a gentler experience, allowing both child and family to move between these worlds with the minimum of stress.

In recent years, analysis of the literature, for example as conducted by Petriwskyj et al (2005), highlights the trend:

> *…towards more complex understandings of transition emphasizing continuity of children's experience, partnership with stakeholders, and system coherence across extended time periods.*

The principle of continuity of care for all children is common in much of the research that has been conducted. See Section 3 for more information on continuity of care.

Types of Transitional Experiences

> *Transitions occur as children move within settings - from one room or one area to another - from one type of activity to another (such as from active play to tidy up time to eating time) - and as they move between settings (from home to the early years centre, from the early years centre to school.*
>
> (Barnardos, 2008)

There may be various transitional experiences occurring simultaneously for a child. For example, as they begin in a pre-school not only will children have new experiences with their new peers and the people responsible for them there, there will also be changes within their own daily family routine. It helps to understand each and every transition process but, keeping simultaneous transitions in mind, it is also important to appreciate the complexity of the child's life and the need to handle each and every transition in the wider context of the child's lived experience.

There are three categories of transitional experiences:

1. First there are those categorised as **vertical or major transitions** linked to a child's growing older (Johansson, in Fabian and Dunlop 2007). These are the bigger, more visible events which deal with moves and changes between educational settings. For example, a child entering full-time daycare for the first time, having previously been cared for solely at home. The other main transition for children in their early years is when they go to school around the age of four to five, either directly from home or from having attended pre-school, a childminder or an early years service.

   These transitions connect to a particular point in time, an event which brings change in the life of the child and of their family. They frequently involve a long-term change of location to a new environment, and include when a child comes under the care and responsibility of adults outside the family circle. This can happen for some children when their parents enrol them in a crèche, perhaps as young as under a year old, or around the later age of three when they begin to attend a pre-school.

   The biggest transitions are those involving a move to a completely new physical and social environment (moving from home to pre-school, pre-school to school, primary to secondary school and beyond).

   (Sharp, 2010)

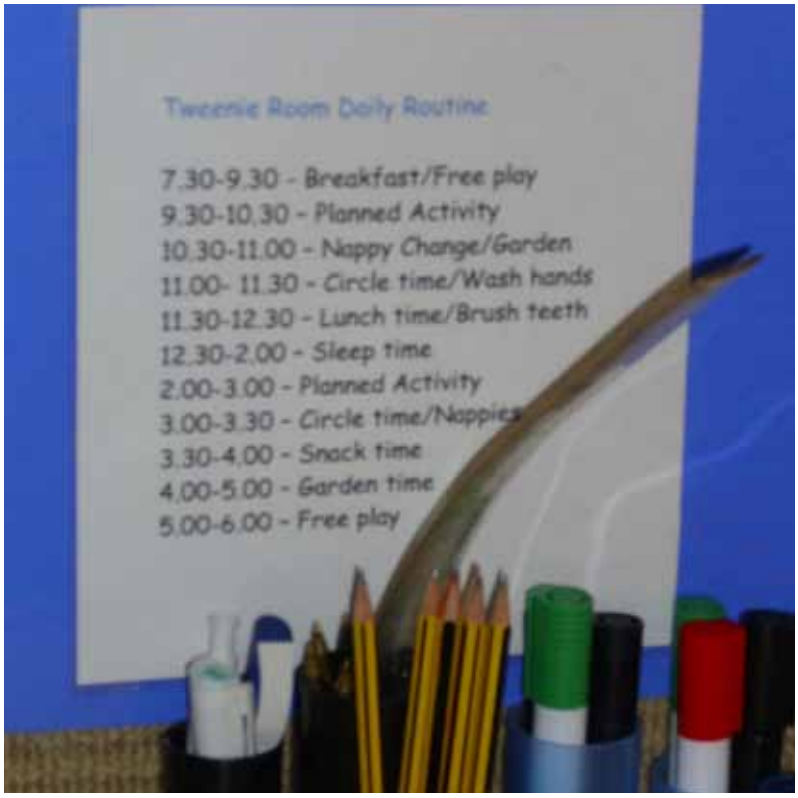
2. Then there are **horizontal or minor transitions**, which happen in the daily and weekly routine of a child and their family, such as a child going from home to a childminder and then on to pre-school in the same day.

   Horizontal transitions involve children's transition during their everyday lives between formal social networks in school and after-school day-care, and between these formal networks and home. These types of transition often involve frequent changes between settings within relatively short timeframes.

   (Johansson, 2007)

3. Finally there are the smaller, less visible **mini transitions** that young children experience within the daily programme of a setting outside their home, such as an early years service, as shown overleaf.

Sample routine for sessional service



Use **Worksheet 1 Routine Changes** to examine how you can reduce the number of changes required from children throughout each day.

See Sections 7 and 8 for the practical aspects of dealing with each of the transitions described above.

Multiple transitions

When examined in detail, all transitions, whether major, minor or the mini transitions within a routine, can present formidable challenges for a child. When a young child's life is analysed, the actual number of transitions through which they move can be considerable. It becomes apparent that many children are continually undergoing transitions, with some children having to manage a multitude of change in their lives each week.

Case Study
Adam

Adam (4 years) is availing of the free pre-school year on a term basis. His mum, Maura, a single parent, works shift hours in a major department store. Adam's weekly routine looks like this:

06.30	Wake up, have breakfast. Maura has early shift at 8am
07.10	Maura takes Adam to his Nana's house, a 20 minute walk away
08.45	Adam's Nana takes him to the childminder
09.25	Childminder takes Adam to pre-school
12.30	Childminder collects Adam
16.30	Maura collects Adam and goes home

When Adam's time is analysed further there are other transitions for him to handle. His childminder minds three other children and has to go to two local schools in the afternoon to collect them and on certain days drop some of them to afterschool activities. This means that Adam's time with the childminder varies from day to day and involves coping with the routines of the other children. In addition, the pre-school time has its own daily routine which is highly structured.

The weekends have a whole other routine, as do holidays, and when Adam starts school his routine will change again.

- What sorts of transitions are referred to in this story?
- Are there any other transitions that you can think of that Adam might experience?
- Are there ways for Adam to be given a voice in decisions about his day?

In the case study above, each person responsible for Adam throughout the day and the week is caring and responsive to his needs. However, when all of the transitions are taken into account, Adam is coping with a considerable number of transitions, each requiring him to demonstrate a capacity to cope with a large number of people and events. While Adam is informed when each change is to happen, he has little or no voice in the decisions that have been made.

The experiences of Adam, and children in similar situations, highlight the fact that life for young children nowadays can include a host of changes, both over time and throughout each day, as society has become more complex. As Brooker (2008) states:

> *We may rarely meet a child, entering school for the first time, who has experienced the secure and stable early existence which once was viewed as the norm.*

Transitions in children's lives therefore mean not only the major changes, but also the myriad of daily and weekly ones, as Adam's story illustrates. If all types of transition are handled well, children like Adam will learn to negotiate change with competence and confidence.

Understanding Transitions in the Early Years

The adult world has created a complex terrain for children to journey through as they grow and develop. The way in which adults support this journey needs to be informed by up-to-date research. According to Moyles (Foreword to Dunlop and Fabian, 2007) 'The issue of transitions is one that needs significantly more attention from schools policy makers, practitioners and parents than it currently achieves.'

In order to develop a better understanding of the transitions process and its effect upon children, we need to learn what factors impact upon transitions and determine in some detail how different children may be affected by these factors. Among these are the following (these are examined in more detail in later sections):

- An increasing number of children are experiencing change, often at an earlier age than in previous eras, due to policy and social changes.
- There are powerful benefits in the establishment of a strong relationship between parents and early years educators.
- Studies have increasingly shown the link between quality of early years experiences, including transitions, and children's long-term development.
- Research has led to a growing body of knowledge about children's development, their capacity to self-regulate and cope with the world around them.
- The cultural context for each child, their world, affects their management of transitions.
- The effects of change, particularly for the more vulnerable, are widely acknowledged.

The world children face today is filled with exciting opportunities and challenges, with a certainty of many changes, both big and small, throughout their lives. As Brooker (2008) says:

> *We must remind ourselves of the positive aspects for children of growing up in the 21st century… we owe this optimistic outlook to the young children in our care. For them the only certainty in life will be uncertainty.*

How have your knowledge and understanding of transitions changed since you began working with young children?

Summary of Key Messages

- **Transitions are a process that may last over a period of time.**
- **Early years educators play an important role in ensuring continuity of care for each individual child.**
- **Children encounter many types of transitions in their early years.**
- **Transitions may be stressful for some children.**
- **Children can be supported to manage transitions and benefit from the opportunities presented by new situations.**

Irish Social and Policy Context for Transitions

2

This section will look at the following:

The key legislative, policy and quality frameworks established in Ireland for early years work and their links with transitions:

- **Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations 2006**
- **Síolta – the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education**
- **Aistear – the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework**
- **Workforce Development Plan**

Promoting positive transitions is likely to be critical in securing continuous experiences that will in turn promote optimum well-being, identity and belonging for children. These goals are central to both Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, and Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

(Farrelly and Hennessy, 2010)

Policy and Social Change

Two of the external forces that impact upon transitions for children are policy and social change. Policy and social changes affecting young children in various countries mean that more children are affected by change than before and at an earlier age.

Since the 1960s, the change process in England relating to early years care and education (ECCE) has seemed to accelerate, as can be seen in the blossoming of the playgroup movement and the subsequent extension of pre-school provision.

> *In England, by the time the Conservative government left office in 1997, children were experiencing a kaleidoscope of provision, from short term to full day, and from excellent to awful, before they started in Reception in the months before their fifth birthday.*

(Brooker, 2008)

In the US, according to Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), 'early and extensive enrolment in childcare has become the norm in US society'. There is an economic imperative following on from such changes and investments to ensure that the initiatives are successful:

> *Suddenly, young children are part of the economic society, and transitions need to be effective in many ways, including economically effective, given the investment by national and international governments on ensuring quality early childhood services.*

(Moyles, Foreword to Dunlop and Fabian 2007)

In Ireland, there has been an increasing participation by women in the workforce. This has been assisted by the increase in the availability of childcare supported by the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme, which ran until 2008, and the more recent development of the Free Pre-school Year (often referred to as the ECCE scheme). Both of these changes mean that there has been an increase in recent years of children participating in early years care and education. For example, over 94% of children of the relevant age now participate in the Free Pre-school Year.

Have your enrolment patterns changed since the Free Pre-school Year was introduced?

Ireland has also been in a state of transition in terms of its approach to the provision of services for younger children. According to Hayes (in Aistear, 2007), it is moving from what was termed 'the Liberal Welfare State', which has weak childcare policies and split responsibilities for them, to that of the 'Conservative Welfare State'. The implications of this are that the earlier perception of early years services as being there to support working mothers is making way for the newer ideal of focusing on supporting children in developing foundations for literacy and numeracy. An example of this transition is seen in the change of the titles of the National Development Programme from Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme to the National Childcare Investment Programme. These ideals are hopefully heading towards the more advanced state of what is termed the 'Social Democratic Welfare Model', where children's rights to society's resources are recognised, and where:

> *Little difference is made between care and education and services and investment patterns across the age group 1-6 years are continuous and integrated.*
>
> (Bennett, 2005)

The implications of these changes are that early years practitioners are increasingly required to provide higher quality experiences, centred on the needs of the child, as expressed by and discussed with the child, and recognised through ongoing observations and reflective practice.

- Have you experienced many changes in working in early years?
- What changes have you welcomed, what changes do you disagree with?

Helping children to really feel that they belong and have a place in an early years service, and that they are important to the adults there, happens through deep reflection upon provision of genuinely rich experiences for children in your care.

> *Belonging is about having a secure relationship with or a connection with a particular group of people. When children feel a sense of belonging and sense of pride in their families, their peers, and their communities, they can be emotionally strong, self-assured, and able to deal with challenges and difficulties.*
>
> (Aistear Theme, Identity and Belonging)

This can lead those working with young children in Ireland to see the management of transitions as being at the heart of much of their practice, whether consulting with the children, planning programmes, looking at the effectiveness of the environment and how they interact with colleagues, or the depth and success of the involvement that they have with parents and families.

Irish Legal and Policy Framework

In Ireland, the area of transitions needs to be set in the context of initiatives aimed at improving overall quality within early years services as effective transitions are not only impacted by the actions and approaches of parents and early years educators. These initiatives include Siolta, the Workforce Development Plan, Aistear, the Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations and other various support mechanisms that have been established.

It is also important to consider the links between views of childhood (referred to in more detail in Section 5) and the frameworks of legislation, policy and quality if a child-centred approach is to be consistent, and is to be embedded in all areas of working with young children. This means that each of these elements will build from the vision of the child and integrate such an approach in all practices.

There are both local and national supports for improving quality. The Voluntary Childcare Organisations, such as Barnardos, the Border Counties Childhood Network and Early Childhood Ireland, provide support on a national basis. There are also local initiatives to support quality, such as the Childminders' Advisory services and the Development Officers with the City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs). Contact details for all of these can be found at the back of this book.

Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006

The Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations have been changed in recent years to acknowledge the qualitative elements of practice related to children's development rather than solely the more quantitative standards of previous years, which focused on the practical aspects such as the adult:child ratios and the premises. The Regulations have moved to a more holistic view of working with children, with Regulation 5 stating that:

> *A person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child and the child's cultural context.*

It is further stated, in Regulation 9 (3), that:

> *A person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that written policies and procedures are in place to deal with and to manage a child's challenging behaviour and to assist the child to manage his or her behaviour as appropriate to the age and stage of development of the child.*

Taken together, these Regulations place an imperative on early years' services to ensure all aspects of their work facilitate the child's individual needs, and have in place processes which enable and support the child.

> *In planning activities to support each child's development, which are reflective of the philosophy and ethos of the service, as provided for in the Explanatory Guide to Regulation 14 (1) (f) and 25(a) at (iv), each child's individual needs, interests and abilities should be considered.*

Síolta – the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education

Síolta is the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and is built upon twelve principles (see Appendix 1).

The Principle of Relationships, which is vital to successful transitions, says:

> *Responsive, sensitive and reciprocal relationships, which are consistent over time, are essential to the well-being, learning and development of the young child.*

The relationships that the child forms within their immediate and extended environment from birth will significantly influence their well-being, development and learning. These relationships are two way and include adults, peers, family and the extended community. Positive relationships, which are secure, responsive and respectful and which provide consistency and continuity over time, are the cornerstone of the child's well-being.

There are 16 Standards within Síolta; Standard 13: Transitions is outlined below.

Síolta Standard 13: Transitions (Síolta, 2006) explicitly seeks 'sensitive management of transitions', using key relationships, appropriate liaisons, consultation and written policies and procedures as tools to ensure that such sensitive management is established within each service. It states that

> *Ensuring continuity of experiences for children requires policies, procedures and practice that promote sensitive management of transitions, consistency in key relationships, liaison within and between settings, the keeping and transfer of relevant information (with parental consent), and the close involvement of parents and, where appropriate, relevant professionals.*

The Standard is broken down under a number of components. In the sessional services manual these are:

Component 13.1
Smooth transitions are facilitated and promoted through the provision of consistent key relationships within the setting.

Component 13.2
The setting promotes smooth transitions by ensuring there is appropriate liaison within the setting and between settings.

Component 13.3
Parents, children and relevant professionals are consulted and involved in ensuring that transitions are made as smooth as possible for children.

Component 13.4
The setting has written records of all policies, procedures and actions regarding transitions within the setting, and makes them available to all stakeholders.

Other Siolta Standards such as Interactions and Identity and Belonging are looked at in later sections.

Engaging with Siolta is a valuable step for early years services to take in ensuring that they are providing the best service that they can for children. This applies to services who are becoming more informed about Siolta in an informal manner and perhaps working with the Principles, as for example is required of those taking part in the Free Pre-School Year. It also applies to those who have decided to participate in the Siolta Quality Assurance Programme and are thereby aiming to develop a high standard of quality which will be validated. Educators who have engaged with quality will build upon and link all the standards of Siolta, seeing the integrative nature of these, recognising, for example, how parents and families play a key role in transitions.

How does your setting support key relationships for children?
(Siolta Thinkabout, Standard 13, Component 13.1.1)

Aistear – the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

> *Aistear is for parents and for all early years educators. The guidelines provide a framework to consider all aspects of the child's experience, such as transitions. Working with Aistear will support early years educators to understand and provide for all aspects of the child's experience that are affected by change.*
>
> (NCCA, 2009)

Aistear is the Irish word for journey. It was chosen as the name for the curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland because early childhood marks the beginning of children's lifelong learning journey. Aistear describes learning and development through the four interconnected themes of Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking. Four sets of guidelines, focusing on different aspects of pedagogy, describe how the adult can support children's learning and development across these themes.

These guidelines focus on:

- Building partnerships between parents and practitioners.
- Learning and developing through interactions.
- Learning and developing through play.
- Supporting learning and development through assessment.

In the development of Aistear, effective approaches from other countries were researched and examined. For example, a core influence is Te Whariki, the New Zealand Early Years Curriculum Framework, which has a holistic view of the child's development expressed through an understanding of five behavioural dispositions (in Brooker, 2008):

- Well-being (mana atua)
- Belonging (mana whenua)
- Contributing (mana tangata)
- Communicatuing (mana reo)
- Exploring (mana aoturoa)

The structure of Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

Well-being

Each of Aistear's themes impact on effective transitions. For example, the theme of Well-being has among its aims that:

Children will have positive outlooks on learning and on life.

(Aistear Theme Well-being, Aim 4)

Children will be strong psychologically and socially.

(Aistear Theme Well-being, Aim 1)

These positive outlooks and psychological strengths will be fostered and enhanced by effective management of transitions.

In partnership with the adult, children will

1. Make strong attachments and develop warm and supportive relationships with family, peers and adults in out-of-home settings and in their community.
2. Be aware of and name their own feelings, and understand that others may have different feelings.
3. Handle transitions and changes well.
4. Be confident and self-reliant.
5. Respect themselves, others and the environment.
6. Make decisions and choices about their own learning and development.

(Aistear Theme of Well-being, Aim 1, Learning Goals 1-6)

Exploring and Thinking

The theme of Exploring and Thinking examines change and developing positive attitudes.

Children will develop an understanding of change as part of their lives.

(Aistear Theme Exploring and Thinking, Aim 1 Learning Goal 3)

Children will have positive attitudes towards learning, and develop dispositions like curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, resourcefulness, and risk-taking.

(Aistear Theme Exploring and Thinking, Aim 4)

The aims of this theme will be given an excellent start by effective support and management of major transitions based on a child-centred perspective. Furthermore, encouragement through well-managed minor transitions in the daily routine will seek to support rather than inhibit children's natural dispositions.

The adult encourages toddlers to remember and reflect on things and events, to talk about things that are going to happen, and to develop planning and prediction skills, for example, 'When your sister comes home from school, we'll go to the playground. What are you going to do after you finish building your ship?'

(Aistear Theme Exploring and Thinking, Sample Learning Opportunity for Toddlers 'enables toddlers develop understanding of concepts like… time')

Benefits of working with Síolta and Aistear

As schools begin to implement Síolta and Aistear, which both cover children from 0-6 years, and apply them to the infant classes in primary schools, the transition process should become smoother, as the differences in approaches between settings are addressed. Some initiatives are already underway in this regard, with many primary school teachers attending Aistear familiarisation sessions. Projects such as some of those under the National Early Years Access Initiative are also addressing the issue of continuity of care. One example is the Ballyfermot project, the Early Years Language Learning Initiative, where infant teachers and early years practitioners are working together over two years to learn together about the use of Aistear and the links with Síolta.

Workforce Development Plan

Achieving quality in the Síolta Standard on Transitions requires that adults: 'Are encouraged and appropriately resourced to engage in a wide variety of regular and ongoing professional development.' This professional development needs to take account of the special elements that will provide the 'consistency and continuity' which will benefit each and all transitions that the child encounters.

The Workforce Development Plan (Department of Education and Skills, 2010) for the early years sector encompasses all aspects of professional development, including qualifications. It states that:

National and international research has established that the skills and qualifications of adults working with young children is a critical factor in determining the quality of young children's early childhood care and education experiences.

The following skills, particularly in relation to transitions and the related areas of quality, should be in all domains of learning for early years educators (Bloom, 1956):

- **Technical skills:** such as being able to set up a suitable environment and routine environment for children that will support ease of transition within and between activities.
- **Cognitive skills:** such as having knowledge of child development and the differing impact of transitions depending of the stage of development of the young child.
- **Affective skills:** such as having an empathic approach in working with young children, being sensitive to their varying responses to change.

These skills all form part of the early years educator's repertoire, and contribute to what is termed 'effective pedagogy' (French, 2007). Effective pedagogy occurs when:

In day to day interactions, practitioners draw upon a repertoire of strategies: from the provision of instructive environments for play and exploration, modelling, demonstration and direct instruction among other strategies. A distinction was made between pedagogical framing (behind the scenes work: planning for play, providing routine and resources) and pedagogical interactions (precise behaviours in face to face encounters).

(Siraj-Blatchford in French, 2007)

The Workforce Development Plan has the ultimate aim of:

> *… the availability of a skilled qualified workforce capable of delivering high quality ECCE services which in turn will ensure that all children in Ireland have access to the best start on their lifelong learning journey.*

Currently there are no plans to implement the Workforce Development Plan as a whole. However, implementation and achievement of this plan would support the gaining of qualifications and development of skills and experience. For those with existing experience but little or no previous qualifications, gaining the appropriate qualifications will ensure that they are up to date on the theory related to supporting transitions, and able to respond in the most effective manner to the needs of young children, especially when handling the sensitive area of managing transitions.

- What skills have you developed that are useful in helping children settle in?
- What knowledge have you brought from any courses that you have completed that has been helpful?

There is now an opportunity in Ireland to benefit from the dialogue and the research in other countries and build upon the Irish legal and policy elements that have been established. Bringing these elements together will help to generate a holistic approach to early years work, developing quality by facing one of the challenges that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Starting Strong III has identified, that of 'aligning [Early Childhood Care and Education] goals with goals of other levels of education or other child-focused services' (OECD, 2012).

This approach will help to move towards providing a seamless framework for children from 0-6 years, bringing continuity of care through each transition experienced by the child. For example the current moves towards incorporating Aistear into the infant classes in primary school will help children who have already experienced Aistear in the early years service that they have attended.

Summary of Key Messages

- **Policy and social changes in Ireland and elsewhere have meant increasing amounts of change for young children.**
- **The provision of high quality services for young children is seen as critically important.**
- **The Irish legal and policy framework has introduced a number of core elements to support early childhood care and education.**

Considering the Child and the Continuity of Care

3

This section will look at the following:

- **Continuity of Care and the Social and Cultural Context**
- **Children in a Social World**
- **Continuity of Care and the Cognitive and Emotional Context**
- **Attachment**
- **Cognitive Development**
- **Impact of Stress on Cognitive and Emotional Development**

Continuity of Care and the Social and Cultural Context

The environment provided by the child's first caregivers has profound effects on virtually every facet of early development, ranging from the health and integrity of the baby at birth to the child's readiness to start school at age 5.

(Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000)

When early years educators, together with parents and carers, support continuity of care by providing a safe, supportive in-between space for children, this will allow the child to move comfortably within both worlds. Children can learn to merge the social world and the culture of the new service with their familiar home culture, and truly be themselves. The process will be fluid, rather than rough and uneven.

The development of connections and interactions between the early childhood setting, parents, the extended family and the wider community also adds to the enrichment of early childhood experiences by reflecting the environment in which the child lives and grows.

(Siolta Principle)

By recognising the role played by a child's home and community and the influence these have on the child, educators can ensure that children are better supported to deal with each new experience and build a bridge of continuity of care. Building a clear picture of the child's life (see **Worksheet 2 Children's Interests Record**) will help in this process.

Early years educators need to recognise both social and cultural differences, such as differing parenting practices, which can affect the manner in which the child may respond to the new adults in their lives.

The white mothers preferred toddlers to balance autonomy and relatedness (playing at a distance…greeting mother happily on reunion) and they disliked clinginess (clinging prior to separation, crying continuously during separation and being unhappy on reunion). In contrast the Puerto Rican mothers preferred their toddlers display respect (sitting near mother, waiting for signal before playing with toys) and disliked highly active or avoidant behaviour (ignoring mother before, during and after separation).

(Harwood et al, in Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000)

- Do you have children from different cultures attending your service?
- Have you noticed any differences in parenting practices?

In addition to recognising varying parenting practices, whether from a different social background, such as an urban family moving into a rural setting, or from a different ethnic background, it is also useful to know what abilities parents from different cultures value in the development of their children. For example, in one study (All Saints, Brooker, 2008) parents from an English background 'all prioritized their children's ability to talk, chat, communicate' before starting school, while those from Bangladeshi backgrounds 'emphasised listening skills, and viewed this as a goal to work towards'. In some cultures, making direct eye contact is seen as disrespectful with the child expected to respond respectfully to adults by looking downwards.

The reverse side of this situation also affects each child. As well as educators understanding the child's cultural and family context, parents may have differing expectations of what the child will experience in the early years setting, and how the child will be treated and expected to behave. This may be based on their own upbringing, or their own experiences in such settings themselves.

Case Study Kath

Kath had had a difficult adolescence and been excluded from school before she became pregnant at 15… she seemed wary of professionals of every description. She was dedicated to [her] twins' well-being and achievement and directed a lot of time to supporting their education at home. Kath had her own understanding of 'readiness' and the prerequisites for starting school, and as a result had taught the children letters, numbers and colours from an early age…. She spoke appreciatively of the efforts made by teachers but felt her children were not 'learning as much as we did when I went to school'.

(Brooker, 2008)

Hohmann (in Brooker, 2008) calls the relationship between the family, the service and the child the 'Caring Triangle'. Expectations from all partners of this triangle may differ, depending on their role and their previous knowledge and experiences. For example, a mum such as Kath who may have had a fraught educational experience can begin the relationship with a distrustful attitude, perhaps feeling that there is a similar road ahead for her child.

> *Communication between parents and caregivers regarding children's needs and activities is essential in maintaining trust between the two parties.*
>
> (Drugli and Undheim, 2012)

For all transitions, and especially a child's first major transition, the main factor to consider is this continuity of care. This includes understanding parenting practices, developing partnership with parents (see Section 4), managing attachment and separation issues, and, most importantly, understanding the child.

Children in a Social World

Each child has his/her own set of experiences and a unique life-story. He/she is an active learner growing up as a member of a family and community with particular traditions and ways of life.

(Aistear, Principle 1, Children and their lives in early childhood: The Child's Uniqueness, 2009)

Children are 'situated in a social world' (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). This concept of a social world is outlined in more detail in Section 5. They come to early years services from their home environments where they have gradually learnt through their infancy and early years what happens in their family, the routines, the layout of their homes, their relatives. They know what to expect.

Case Study Tilly

Tilly wobbled from room to room in her home. She knew the feel of the floor underfoot, the change from carpet to lino. She knew the furniture, how she could grab the arm of the sofa and how the kitchen chairs moved when she grabbed them, where the dog's bowl was and how it spilt over when she grabbed it. That was fun! Tilly also knew the doorbell, which meant someone arriving that perhaps she did not know. She knew the change in tempo in the home as the day advanced and family came back from school and work. The family's world had a familiar rhythm which played daily in her mind and emotions.

Children's ability to demonstrate their knowledge and apply their skills is a function of their social environment. The question to be asked is not 'do they know it or don't they', but 'are they able to apply their knowledge in this setting?' a very different matter.

(Brooker, 2008)

When children come to a service, everything is brand new, perhaps strange. This world may have social differences from their home and there may be ethnic differences. It is different from what they have knowledge of up to this point and they may not have learnt the skills of transferring and using their previous knowledge. The social world in which children previously belonged may not fit in this new one, and care and support is required on the part of all of the adults in their lives to help them begin to fit.

Transitions involve a change in social relations and dynamics for children, and relationships between children/adults and children/children affect the ability to settle in quickly.

(Johansson, 2007)

When a good match between two settings is established, the potential for development as well as the child's happiness is enormous.

(Brooker, 2008)

Case Study

Joshua and Alina

Joshua came from a family where his older siblings had already gone to pre-school, and he and his parents were familiar with staff and the routine. Joshua's mum chatted easily with the educator, and he soon settled into this new area of his life, mixing with his peers with confidence and chatting with staff. He understood the routine quickly, and was comfortable with equipment and resources.

In contrast, Alina was brought to the pre-school by her Latvian mother, who spoke no English. Alina was an only child, and she and her parents lived with her grandparents, who also had limited English and few resources for a young child. The staff had heard from a home visit that Alina was very anxious about the transition. Alina did try to settle in, and made a small group of friends with other Latvian and Eastern European children.

The staff monitored both children for a time using Laevers Scale of Well-being and Involvement. Joshua scored highly on this scale from the start but Alina scored low on well-being, although her involvement was a little better. It took a long time and considerable support for Alina to settle in and for her educators to feel confident that her well-being needs were satisfied.

The difference between Joshua and Alina was that Joshua's background with his family through supportive and knowledgeable parents, a home environment with many books and opportunities for outdoor play and bringing older sisters to pre-school and school meant that his 'transition' was gentle, long and slow. The links built between the systems for Joshua were many and strong. He had a safe bridge between all aspects of his life. Alina on the other hand had had none of these experiences, spent much of the time in her grandparents' home and had limited exposure to the mainstream language of the pre-school, English.

(For more information on using Laevers Scale of Well-being and Involvement see Section 6.)

How aware are you of your own beliefs, values and attitudes to diversity?
(Siolta thinkabout, Standard 14.3.2)

Transitioning is a 'social process' (Brooker, 2008) and a child may not exhibit their true capacity until they are well settled in their new situation.

> *A child can sometimes have difficulties using knowledge learned in one setting, in another setting with a different culture and social practice.*
>
> (Johansson, 2007)

Practitioners' perceptions of children may be formed quickly in the first few weeks, however, and they may believe that their initial impressions give a complete picture of the child's capacities, whereas it may be that the child has not yet exhibited their true selves in this new setting. For example, a child who is totally at ease in the home environment with helping to set the table may respond by sitting passively if the practitioners do not encourage independence and ask children to help out. The child may give the impression that they have not yet mastered such a skill.

Did you ever find yourself at a loss in a situation where normally your skills and competence would be excellent, such as having to cook for strangers away from home?

Continuity of Care and the Cognitive and Emotional Context

> *Cognitive abilities are important determinants of socioeconomic success… So are socioemotional skills, physical and mental health, perseverance, attention, motivation, and self confidence.*
>
> (Heckman, 2011)

Learning to cope emotionally and cognitively with transition and change can play a positive role in building the competence of children, not only social competence, but also emotional, through confidence building. If a positive transitional experience is provided by the adults in a child's life, any potential negative effects on the child can be minimised. As children develop along the various developmental domains, transitions become a feature of their lives. These can be a trigger for new development and learning (Brooker, 2008), and a motivating challenge.

The cognitive and emotional contexts include the concepts of well-being and self-regulation, which are both affected by attachment issues. Each of these is explained below.

> *Negative transitions do not just affect children in the first few weeks of the new school year, but can have longer-term consequences for their attainment and mental health.*
>
> (Sharp, 2010)

What is well-being?

Laevers et al (2005) describe children who feel alright as 'like a fish in water'. Such children are able to express their positive feelings in various ways.

Enjoyment
The most obvious signal of well-being is enjoyment, having fun, taking pleasure in interacting with others and in activities. The children look happy, smile or laugh easily, engage spontaneously in chatting or even singing.

Relaxing and inner peace
Children who feel good give a relaxed impression. They do not feel threatened in any way. Their facial expression is open; there is no sign of tension or restlessness. Their muscles are relaxed.

Vitality
Another signal of well-being is energy and vitality. This can often be read from children's faces: the look is lively and expressive. They radiate. Their posture also gives a lot away: not shrunk or with hanging shoulders but upright, not afraid to take the space they are entitled to.

Openness
When children feel okay, they have an open attitude towards the world around. Whatever comes in, they are ready to experience it. They are also accessible, approachable to others. They are happy with the attention they receive: a hug, a compliment, a word of comfort, an encouragement or help.

Self confidence
There are more chances for well-being to occur when one feels strong. Self-assurance, self-confidence, a sense of self-value make one less anxious or stressed. This can be noticed in a posture expressing a certain pride, literally feeling 'big'. That positive self-image is the foundation of resilience. Children then do not allow others to walk all over them, they are assertive.

Being in touch with oneself
When a child does not suppress feelings but remains in touch with their emotions, they are not only able to enjoy, but the child will also recover more easily from difficult experiences.

The stage of development of a child and their previous experience when they encounter a transition will affect how their well-being is affected. For example, a child who is five and a half and is beginning school following a successful pre-school experience is likely to cope reasonably well with appropriate support. This child will have built up a pattern of managing transitions successfully, which builds positive connections in their brain. However, a two year old leaving home for the first time to attend a childminder, for example, will have less well-developed coping mechanisms, as they have not yet established a pattern of positive experiences, and their cognitive capacity is not well-enough developed to understand the change clearly.

Early maladjustments to settings form a negative pattern for future transitions.

(Keinig, 2002)

- What procedures do you follow when children are starting in your service?
- Do the procedures vary depending on the age of the child?

Successful management of the transition process can lead to well-adjusted children. However, when not well managed, transitions may be the cause of emotional distress for the child in the short term, perhaps resulting in problem behaviour. In the longer term, this distress may impact on the child's disposition towards change, and may affect their social and emotional development. Keinig has said that 'if a positive adjustment is not made within the first year, then it might affect their long-term social adjustment' (in Smith, 2003).

Case Study
Eoin

Eoin had just turned three when he began in playschool. He had never left his Mum before this, and clung to her when she tried to leave. After a few minutes he seemed to settle in, and she went home. Eoin didn't participate very much, despite the staff and other children endeavouring to encourage him. He sat near the door and half-heartedly played with jigsaws. This pattern continued for a week. At the start of the second week, his mum came in and said that he was waking up during the night, very distressed. It was decided that Eoin would not continue in playschool as it seemed to be causing him distress. On meeting Eoin's mum the following year, she explained that it took a long while for Eoin to stop feeling insecure, and that he hated his mum to leave him anywhere, this was only easing up a good nine months after his short week in playschool.

- What could the staff have done differently for Eoin?
- Was there anything his mum could have done?

Having an emotionally and physically present adult available to young children in their social context is critical to their well-being.

(French, 2008b)

Tús Maith

Tús Maith is a Barnardos early year's care and education programme for children aged 3-5 years. It integrates the High/Scope curriculum with the REDI programme in order to maximise the developmental outcomes for children.

High/Scope is a well established curriculum which is evidenced to achieve real and lasting outcomes for children including: positive self-esteem, achievement of their developmental and learning potential, improved and continued engagement with school, and economic independence as adults.

REDI is a programme which has been shown to enhance the High/Scope curriculum and achieve higher level outcomes in the domains of social and emotional competence and emergent literacy for 3-4 year olds. It addresses children's pro-social skills, emotional competency, self-control and social problem-solving.

Outcomes

The overall outcome of Tús Maith is that the child will develop the specific cognitive skills necessary for the transition to school.

Emotional
Children can manage their emotions and regulate their behaviour. This will be evidenced by children being able to:

- Identify and name emotions.
- Be aware of their own/others' emotions.
- Understand and express emotions.
- Manage conflict and demonstrate empathy for others.

Social
Children will experience positive relationships with their peers and early year's staff. This will be evidenced by children being able to:

- Manage their emotions.
- Play cooperatively, participate and take turns.
- Solve problems.
- Share, make positive choices.

Language, Literacy and Communication
Children will have the necessary emergent language and literacy skills. This will be evidenced by children being able to:

- Express and comprehend language.
- Communicate effectively with peers and adults.
- Recognise letters, numbers and symbols.
- Demonstrate developmentally-appropriate fine motor skills.

Physical
Children will have healthy physical development. This will be evidenced by children:

- Having the ability to perform simple self-care skills.
- Having key gross motor skills.
- Eating a range of healthy food.

Attachment

Early studies of transitions and the emotional impact of separation, such as those by Bowlby (1978) and others, focused on the role of children's attachments, and have contributed strongly to the understanding that separation, especially for younger children, can be traumatic and needs to be well monitored and handled.

> *Under normal circumstances, young children form strong mutual attachments with their parents or primary caregivers… through these relationships children construct a personal identity and acquire culturally valued skills, knowledge and behaviours.*
>
> (Woodhead and Brooker, 2008)

The supportive links that are established as continuity of care between a child's ecological environments as outlined by Bronfenbrenner (see page 54) form a core part of managing the existing emotional and cognitive attachments that the child has with the old and the development of attachments in the new setting. These links help a child to feel that they 'belong' in each setting that they encounter. Considering whether these links are strong or weak is key for early year's educators, as is knowledge of Attachment Theory.

> [As an educator] *never pick up an infant unexpectedly into your arms in a way that is startling for him. Address him, look for his gaze. If he is asleep and you still have to pick him up, address him, gently caress his face, and wait until he stretchingly wakes up. Once eye contact has been established, tell him that he is going to be picked up. Yes, even with an infant only a few days or weeks old. Then reach out for him only afterwards.*
>
> (Tardos, 2011)

There can be attachment issues on the part of the parent, with some parents experiencing separation anxiety. These issues can have many causes, such as negative experiences during their own transitions when they were young, which have had long-term effects.

Attachment Theory has provided researchers with insight into the child's experience of separation anxiety and has also been helpful in understanding parental separation anxiety. Bowlby's (1969) contention is that the behavioural interaction between infants and primary caregivers leads to mental representations of attachment relationships formed in infancy. These mental representations subsequently influence how we interpret and perceive events in close relationships. Our responses to threats such as separation from a loved one are influenced by these perceptions and interpretations. Thus, our mental representations of attachment relationships contribute to the way in which we react, behaviourally and emotionally, to threats of separation from attachment figures throughout life (Bartle-Haring et al., 2002).

- Have you had parents who appear to be more distressed than others on leaving their child?
- How have you supported them?

Attachment Theory has contributed to the realisation of the importance of a key person for children. Key persons are important in establishing the strong link between these two parts of the child's life, home and the early years service. This system has come about in recognition of the 'emotional need for stability and continuity in a child's life' (French, 2008b). The key person system is described in detail in Section 7.

Cognitive Development

All children undergo rapid brain development in their early years. In their first years, for example, the brain is still forming, with many new connections or synapses being created, particularly up to the age of two.

> *The key finding from brain research is that the brain is uniquely constructed to benefit from experience and from positive care during the first years of life.*
>
> (French and Murphy, 2005)

Gradually these synapses begin to be pruned back (synaptic pruning), from the latter half of the first year, as the brain determines the useful and less useful ones based on the child's experiences with their primary caregivers. According to Shanker (2007) 'Synaptic pruning is regulated by baby's emotional interactions with her caregivers'. The adult's brain for the first few months acts as an external brain for the infant, supporting how the child's brain is wired for the future. When the child is supported by the primary caregiver through positive interactions they gradually begin to self-regulate.

> *The capacity for self-regulation, ranging from sleeping and settling in, in the earliest weeks of life, to the preschooler's emerging capacity to manage emotions, inhibit behaviour, and focus attention on important tasks, reflects young children's transition from helplessness to confidence.*
>
> (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000)

Self-Regulation

In the simplest terms, self-regulation can be defined as the ability to stay calmly focused and alert, which often involves – but cannot be reduced to – self-control. The better a child can stay calmly focused and alert, the better he integrates all of the information coming in from his different senses, assimilates it, and sequences his thoughts and actions.

There is a growing awareness among developmental scientists that the better a child can self-regulate, the better she can rise to the challenge of mastering ever more complex skills and concepts.

Whatever the circumstances, practitioners should ask themselves why a child is having a problem staying calmly focused and alert, and try to understand the source of the problem. For example, children may have trouble paying attention because they are anxious, and in many cases the cause of their anxiety might be a hypersensitivity to various kinds of stimuli. The more anxious the child, the more pronounced becomes the hypersensitivity, setting off a vicious circle effect.

For many children, the problem isn't that they can't stay regulated, but that in order to do so, they adopt a strategy that blocks out social interaction. These children find co-regulation difficult, whether with their early years practitioners or their peers, and they may find it difficult to control their behaviour in social situations because they are over-loaded by the presence of other children. But here, too, practitioners need to ascertain the reasons for these problems, which might trace back to problems in sensory regulation, problems in attachment or even problems in understanding the significance of non-verbal cues.

Self-regulation occurs along the following domains:

1. Biological (how well the child regulates her arousal states).
2. Emotional (how well the child monitors and modifies her emotional responses).
3. Cognitive (how well the child can sustain and switch her attention; inhibit impulses; deal with frustration, delay, distractions; sequence her thoughts).
4. Social (the child's mastery of rules of appropriate behaviour; how well the child can co-regulate and thereby develop prosocial attributes).
5. Reflective thinking skills.

(adapted from Shanker, 2012)

Impact of Stress on Cognitive and Emotional Development

Having an understanding of how cognitive functioning develops and is linked with emotional responses will help to guide the provision of support and the responses made to children. Having positive and negative experiences will affect the formation, or wiring, of the child's brain. For example, positive experiences will induce the production of adrenaline and establish healthy pathways in the child's brain, whereas negative ones will produce cortisol to handle the stress, with excess cortisol having detrimental effects on healthy brain development. This stress may be caused by something that is not obviously negative to an adult, such as a bright, bustling and noisy environment with little softness or quiet space, or without soothing activities such as water play, where the child can self calm.

> *Where centres are good quality, cortisol levels tend to be lower, and* [ECCE] *experience can decrease cortisol levels where there is parental stress or extremes of emotional expression.*
>
> (Mitchell et al, 2008)

High levels of stress in pre-school children have been identified in a number of studies (Gunnar, 2010; Mitchell, 2008). These studies indicate that it is crucial to help young children, particularly toddlers, to settle using highest quality practice, and to follow up to be sure they are well settled. This applies particularly to larger settings as evidence from these studies has found that younger children in full day care (usually of lower quality) may experience raised levels of cortisol, which indicates stress. This stress has been found to persist in the children for a long time after the initial stressors have changed.

Stress can particularly impact upon toddlers. The toddler is at an early stage of social and emotional development. They may have limited verbal communication and are often unable to clearly express their wishes. They may find it especially difficult when they are among a group of peers and there are a lot of interactions happening. They may not be able to handle the complicated negotiations that can be required in such situations as the development of social skills with peers is emerging.

> *From ages 1 to 2 years, there are tremendous strides in what children can do with one another. Bouts of interaction get longer and more complex...reciprocity ('you do it, I do it, you do it') reveals their developing turn-taking abilities.*
>
> (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000)

However, as Shonkoff and Phillips also state:

> *For toddlers, social play is hard, and play bouts are fragile experiences. A brief distraction, someone bumbling into your play area, a few miscues and the pattern is broken. For these reasons and others, how well adults structure play environments for toddlers makes a difference in how much and how well they can play together.*

In an exploratory study conducted in Ireland (Farrelly and Hennessy, 2010), the move from one room to another in an early year's service was examined, and the findings showed that over half of the children, including all of the boys, showed increases in behaviour coded as anxious when they were in their new room. This is illustrated in the field notes made on observing one child who made an unsuccessful approach to a peer in the new room.

> *Michael is playing in the shop alongside Audrey. He asks her where all the food has gone. She does not answer him. Audrey leaves and begins playing with blocks with a small group of children. A few moments later Michael wanders around the room, lies on the floor, and puts his finger in his mouth.*
>
> (Farrelly and Hennessy, 2010)

This finding links with the earlier mention of the importance of quality practices in transitions, especially in terms of social adjustment. According to Johannson (2007) 'well-functioning transitions, in particular, facilitate children's social learning.' Providing high quality support for all children, and especially for toddlers, will enhance their emotional and social development, and build the positive experiences required to wire healthy brains.

Reducing the possible effects of stress on the child during the transitions process is vitally important and in Section 7 the Stress/Distress/De-stress model is described to identify and handle distress when it occurs. Studies in the UK and Europe that have focused on the ways in which difficulties with transitions have affected later learning and development, such as in Brooker (2008), show that long-term insecurities and barriers to learning can result from situations where children's fears, ignorance or unhappiness were not responded to adequately.

> *If society intervenes early enough, it can raise cognitive and socioemotional abilities and the health of disadvantaged children.*
>
> (Heckman, 2011)

Analysing the transitions process through the lens of these domains of development helps in understanding the different elements from a child's perspective. It also helps to consider these domains in relation to the stage of development of each child and the relationship with the primary caregiver together with an understanding of their different social and cultural worlds. Using all of this knowledge, it then becomes possible for educators to monitor and support each child's adaption to the new situation, based on a deep understanding of each unique child.

Summary of Key Messages

- **The adults in a child's life should work together to provide the continuity of care through transitions that the child needs.**
- **Early years educators need to learn about the various social worlds inhabited by the child.**
- **It is important for early years educators to recognise that the duration of the transition process may vary considerably for each child.**
- **Attachment issues can be managed through continuity of care.**
- **Each child will respond to the transitions process in line with their stage of development and their own capacity for handling change.**
- **The factors that may induce stress in young children during transitions need to be recognised.**

Vulnerable Children and Transitions

4

This section will look at the following:

- **Children Experiencing Disadvantage**
- **Children with Special Educational Needs**
- **Immigrant Children and Children with English as a Second or Other Language**
- **Children from the Travelling Community**
- **Summer-born Children**

Well-managed transitions are especially important for the more vulnerable children in society. The main at-risk groups have been identified in studies in the UK as 'children from poorer backgrounds and children with special educational needs' (Sharp, 2010). Other vulnerable children include:

- Children born during the summer who enter school in September at a young age.
- Children from the Travelling Community.
- Children for whom English is not their first language.
- Children with low self esteem.
- Children with lower academic ability.

Vulnerable children can be anxious and sensitive to change, with particular worries about their ability to cope with the work demands, the making of new friends and the fear of bullying. An example of the long-term negative impact for vulnerable children in Ireland can be seen in some of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) findings on transitions:

> *An ESRI longitudinal study of transition from primary to secondary school and of the junior cycle showed how immigrants, Travellers and those with a poor primary school experience found more difficulty in adapting.*

(Harvey, 2011)

Children Experiencing Disadvantage

> *In order for you to understand and support me you need to understand my family background and community. This is especially important if I come from a disadvantaged or marginalised community.*

(Aistear, Principle 1, Children and their lives in early childhood: The Child's Uniqueness, 2009)

Children who are experiencing disadvantage in their home environment may not have access to the supports needed to develop their capacity to cope with changes and transitions. The home learning environment is one of the crucial influences on a young child and, if there are difficulties, parents and carers may not be able to respond adequately to the child's individual needs.

As Barnardos (2012) states in *Can We Help? A Guide to Supporting Children and Families in Early Years Services*:

> *While all children need support, the reality is that for some, their families and/or their communities may be a source of stress or a threat to their well-being.*

Early years educators, while they provide formal support, are also key people within the community, and are in a good position to take account of children's individual needs as 'they exist in the immediate world of children and families' (Barnardos, 2012).

Children with Special Educational Needs

When a child with additional needs, such as a physical disability, developmental delay or other learning need, is experiencing a major transition, practitioners need to recognise the extra tensions that this may bring to the child and family. It may be:

> *…. the first occasion when a child will be cared for by adults outside the home. It can be an emotionally challenging time for families, who may have to engage with a number of health and educational professionals to secure a suitable placement for their child.*
>
> *Practice in relation to integrating children with additional needs is informed by good practice in relation to partnership with parents and inclusive and antidiscriminatory practice, which promotes equal opportunities for all children.*

(Barnardos, 2012)

Early years educators need to be thoroughly prepared in such cases to ensure that the transition process begins as early as possible and that it continues as long as is needed. They also need to ensure that they have the knowledge to deal with the particular eventualities that may arise, and how to obtain the relevant additional supports if required.

Continuity of care: transition support

Case Study

Norfolk Children's Services

Norfolk Children's Services (in the UK) has developed a framework intended to enable all children with special needs to receive an equivalent level of support. The transition programme commences at least half a year before children are due to move on to mainstream school, with the completion of a child profile in which the child's current needs (medical, dietary, social and so on) are detailed, along with their strengths and difficulties in all areas of learning and behaviour. The child and parents, as well as the pre-school staff, contribute to this profile, which forms the basis for a Transition Plan. The plan involves all those who will be present during the transitions period – from teachers, parents and support workers to the child's friends and the driver who will escort the child to school. It includes arrangements for 'training', formal or informal for all these important individuals, who will each have a role to play in supporting the child in the new setting. It also identifies the key resources which will help the child (visits, maps, videos, farewell activities, photo albums) and clear principles which everyone involved must observe. The last of these principles could stand as a principle for all children's transitions, everywhere:

> *Transition systems have to work for every child – if they do not, it is our problem, not the child's problem.*

(Norfolk Children's Services 2006, in Brooker, 2008)

Immigrant Children and Children with English as a Second or Other Language

Every family can face challenges when settling into a new service, as each child must adjust from their home culture to the culture of the service. But children from different backgrounds and minority groups may face an extra challenge as they undergo this process. Their families will be introduced to a culture and educational approach generally based on the values and perspectives of the majority population. It is essential that such families feel confident that the settling in procedure will support and be appropriate to their child's needs.

(Office of the Minister for Children, 2006)

In recent times in the Western world, society has become more complex, with many changes dominating lives and affecting them deeply. For children who become asylum seekers, for example, the effects of changes can be long lasting:

For those involved, and especially for the youngest children, they may overturn all the predictability and security of daily life.

(Brooker, 2008)

Moving to a new country can have many challenges, and just as children within a country can have varied social worlds, children and their families coming from another culture can have great strengths but may need extra support during the transition process.

Zornitsa was a four-year-old girl who had recently come to Ireland from Bulgaria. Zornitsa spoke three languages, Bulgarian, Russian and Greek, but had little English so far.

Which of these introductions is the more effective to help Zornitsa make the transition into the preschool with ease?

1. Zornitsa doesn't understand English so we have to help her out as much as we can!

OR

2. Zornitsa can speak in three different languages! How many can you speak? Zornitsa is going to share words from these languages with us and we are going to share our English words with her.

Families from a different ethnic background may have concerns when they send their children to pre-school or a day care service.

- They may be concerned that the child will lose their own culture, and will be very strict about retaining this, forbidding the use of English and avoiding mixing locally.
- They may be afraid that the child will not learn English and they will forbid the child to speak their own language.
- There may be cultural issues when the early years setting is seeking to establish a partnership with parents.

Case Study
Phil

Phil was the manager of a pre-school in North County Dublin. She came to the local County Childcare Committee (CCC) with concerns that she was finding it difficult to build a relationship with many of the parents. The CCC was organising training in diversity in the area as many other services were experiencing the same concerns. Phil attended the training and learnt about the issues that parents had. She also learnt that in some cultures it was expected that the father would answer to callers, that the mother would not answer the door if she was alone in the house, and that she would not attend meetings held in the evenings.

Phil got information from speech and language therapists on the best way to accommodate English as a second language. She also arranged for meetings with parents to be held during the day and to be sure that all of her staff knew the respectful manner in which to contact the parents when needed. One other thing that Phil learnt was that some cultures were deeply offended when presented with the application forms at the first meeting with the service and she learnt to manage this differently when required.

The diversity and equality guidelines were published in 2006 by the Office of the Minister for Children (now Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs [OMCYA]). There are useful suggestions from the guidelines regarding the Settling in Process and Partnership with Parents in Appendix 2.

Children from the Travelling Community

The Travelling Community in Ireland is less transient than it used to be, with more Travellers living in group housing schemes and in some halting sites with better facilities than there were previously. There is, however, still much room for improvement in provision of facilities. The Department of Education has followed a process of integration and while there are still some pre-schools that provide services specifically to Traveller communities, other Traveller children are now brought by parents to integrated pre-schools in community settings, which give them a start alongside their peers from other parts of the local community.

For early years educators working in settings with children from the Travelling Community, an understanding of Traveller culture will be of assistance in helping the transitions process. For example, Travellers often live together in family groupings and there are strong family links as well as often strong religious beliefs. Early years educators should also be aware of the discrimination and disadvantage often faced by Traveller families.

As with any child, developing a partnership with parents is vital, providing parents with information and giving them the opportunity to make decisions regarding their children. Building trust and a rapport between all parts of Traveller children's worlds will supply the continuity of care that they need.

Summer-born Children

Children whose birthday falls in late spring or early summer can be placed in the position of making major transitions, such as to pre-school or to school, when they may be considerable younger than the other children entering at the same time. For example, a child beginning school who has just turned four years old may be joining a group of children who are well over five. If there is a good balance within the class, with a good number of other barely-fours, this may not be an issue. However, if the child is in a minority, even if cognitively bright and capable, then the other children may be exhibiting much more advanced social and emotional competencies which the younger child may find difficult to manage. For example, the other children may be highly independent and well-used to negotiating more complex group activities.

Case Study
Sharon

Sharon turned four in the spring, and was due to begin school in September that year. However, when her parents checked the enrolment for that year they discovered that most of the children would be over five or nearly five. Sharon's parents felt that Sharon would be considerably younger than the rest of the class, and that this would place her at a disadvantage. They decided instead to partake of the free pre-school year, and let Sharon begin 'big' school when she was five and a half rather than four and a half.

In examining each of these different areas of vulnerability, it is evident that it is essential to support children at their own pace and ensure that they have quality experiences. Through this, children can gradually understand and develop the skills they need to cope with change.

> *The most rigorous studies show that quality early education leads to lasting cognitive and social benefits in children, which persist through adolescence and adulthood.*
>
> (Sylva, 1993)

Summary of Key Messages

- Some groups of children need extra support to manage transitions effectively.
- There may be a challenging home learning environment in areas of disadvantage for some children.
- Children with special educational needs will require specific extra support during transitions.
- Early years educators need to develop understanding of the issues concerning children with differing ethnic backgrounds from that of the larger groups in attendance.
- A child's age needs to be considered carefully when making major transitions.

Transitions and Early Years Services 5

This section will look at the following:

- **The Role of Quality in Early Years Services**
- **Moving to a Rights-based View of Childhood**
- **Children's Rights**
- **Partnership with Parents**

The Role of Quality in Early Years Services

There is an increasing awareness of the fact that quality experiences in the early years make a difference. Developmental gaps for some children, such as poor social skills which can be indicators of serious problems in later years, can be addressed by high quality experiences.

> *Quality makes a difference to children's development. There was a significant relationship between the quality of a pre-school centre and improved child outcomes.*
>
> (Sylva et al, 2004)

In Ireland, Government initiatives towards improving quality include Síolta, the Workforce Development Plan, Aistear and the Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations as well as local support initiatives as discussed in Section 3.

Quality practice in transitions translates into early years educators having an understanding of effective management of transitions for children, and providing appropriate support based on knowledge of the child, their stage of development and their background.

The importance of an approach based on high quality provision, such as that established in Síolta, underpins all aspects of transitions, as well as all areas of children's development.

> *The positive relation between child care quality and virtually every facet of children's development that has been studied is one of the most consistent findings in developmental science.*
>
> (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000)

This finding is replicated in any research conducted into children's development, for example in longitudinal studies such as the ongoing EPPE (Effective Pre-School and Primary Education) Study in the UK. In the principles of *Supporting Quality* (2008a), French states that:

> *The perspective underpinning* Supporting Quality *is that young children should have a right to* [ECCE]. *Quality early childhood programmes contribute to the well-being, belonging and identity of young children. They also contribute to educational equity and social integration to overcome intergenerational cycles of educational disadvantage.*

Quality provision will ensure that educators fully understand the following:

- The role of continuity of care.
- The building of links between all aspects of the system for the child.
- The individuality of each child.
- The many other factors that affect each child, such as temperament, special needs and dispositions.

The essential nature of quality is evidenced by the growing body of research into children's development, which highlights the importance of effective quality interventions in the early years for their long-term benefit. This has been shown in various long-term studies such as the Abecedarian Project and the Perry Pre-school Project. These studies show the impact of early years services on children as they grow to maturity and demonstrate that with quality provision in their early years, children can go on to deal effectively with the many transitions that they encounter throughout life, such as successful progress through school, and managing a stable and successful adulthood.

There are various aspects to quality as shown in Siolta. Transitions are a core aspect of quality which links to others such as Children's Rights, Interactions, and Parents and Families. These impact upon one another in a dynamic manner and quality practice in one will aid practice in another.

> *When children make a good transition, it affects their well-being, motivation and attainment. It also helps them to develop the skills to face new situations with confidence – an increasingly important preparation for life in the 21st century.*

(Sharp, 2010)

These findings are echoed in the Siolta Research Digest (2007), which cites a considerable body of evidence to show the significance of smooth transitions for children, and how earlier success is a positive influence on later transitions. The relevance of these findings in relation to transition practices show that overall quality is crucial, and high quality factors, such as good staff interactions, consistency of care such as using the key person system (see page 79), good adult: child ratios, and a deep understanding of and response to the needs of young children will lead to high quality in transition practices.

Moving to a Rights-based View of Childhood

> *What constitutes a quality service will differ in a society that views childhood as a time of 'being' in and of itself compared with a society that views childhood as a process of 'becoming' (an adult), involving the preparation of the child for their future role.*

(Schonfeld, Kiernan and Walsh, 2004)

A brief overview of how childhood is perceived will provide an insight into the way in which issues such as transitions have been approached in Ireland and how these approaches have changed. Views of children have changed over time. For example, in the Middle Ages children were seen as mini-adults and treated as such, as can be seen in the artwork left. 'In medieval society the concept of childhood did not exist' (Ariés, 1962).

This view shifted over time, and gradually childhood came to be perceived as a period when children needed protection due to their perceived helplessness.

In the 21st century, however, a view is emerging that sees children as 'resourceful, competent and capable' (Bennie, 2011). Indeed the language used in Ireland in relation to young children reflects this shift. We have moved, with considerable debate, from using the term **childcare** to **early years care and education (ECCE)**. Recently, the term **early years education** has emerged, for example in the title of the Early Years Education Policy Unit in the Department of Education and Skills. These views can influence the way in which early years educators view and approach their work with children.

Ask a senior family member what attitudes were like when they were children. Were they ever told either of the expressions 'children will be seen but not heard' or 'children should speak when spoken to'?

Attitudes towards children have often been developed through an adult lens and these have shaped the world in which Irish children lived. However, Irish attitudes have changed, having been enlightened and informed by increasing knowledge and awareness of the capacity and strengths of children. We now know that:

> *Learning is a social process and that children, from the very earliest, are active participants in the shared construction of knowledge.*
>
> (French, Aistear Research Paper, 2007)

In your experience, how do you believe that children learn best?

As active participants, children have both rights and responsibilities. They can contribute usefully to decisions and actions that involve and affect them.

> *Children are citizens with rights and responsibilities. They have opinions that are worth listening to, and have the right to be involved in making decisions about matters which affect them. In this way, they have a right to experience democracy. From this experience they learn that, as well as having rights, they also have a responsibility to respect and help others, and to care for their environment.*
>
> (Aistear Principles)

Children's Rights

Having a child-centred perspective is a child's right. The United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1992) states that:

> *The best interests of the child be given paramount consideration.*
>
> (article 3)

> *States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*
>
> (article 12)

If you wish to refresh your memory of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child check out **Worksheet 3 The Rights of the Child**.

Brostrom (2011) argues that democracy has to begin in pre-school and states that:

> *In the sphere of legal relations the individuals use their legally universal rights, for example freedom of expression. Using oneself as an active member of society, a recognized autonomous acting subject, results in self-respect and self-esteem. In pre-school this is seen when the child uses his/her legal rights to be seen and heard, to participate and influence as promised in the Convention on the Rights of the Child given by United Nations (1989). When such rights are realized the individual gets a social integrity.*

Rights of the child in Síolta

The Siolta Principle of Children First – 'The child's individuality, strengths, rights and needs are central in the provision of quality early childhood experiences' – states that:

> *Children have the right to be listened to and have their views on issues that affect them heard, valued and responded to.*

Do the beliefs and values that underpin your practice fit with the Principles of Siolta?

The Siolta Standards begin with Standard 1: The Rights of the Child, which states:

> *Ensuring that each child's rights are met requires that she/he is enabled to exercise choice and to use initiative as an active participant and partner in her/his own development and learning.*

This Standard sets out a core philosophy and approach that underpins all the other Standards, including Transitions. Basing practice on this Standard enables those working with younger children to develop their practice in a manner that will underpin each aspect of their service, especially transitions. This will differ from a more adult led, perhaps traditional, methodology.

Case Study

Tiny Tots Play School and Blossoms Pre-school

1. Tiny Tots Play School has been in operation since the 1980s. They enroll children in the spring and summer of each year, taking names usually over the phone or in person. Each September, parents are told the start date and are expected to bring the child along, stay for the first hour and then leave. Parents are not encouraged to linger in the room after that, saying goodbye in the hallway. If children are upset, parents are allowed to sit in the corner for a while, but encouraged to leave as soon the child seems settled.

2. Blossoms Pre-school has also been in operation since the 1980s. They have observed over the years the importance of children getting off to a good start, and discuss how this can be achieved. They talk with children attending the service about what they like and dislike when they start the year, they ask parents what would help children to settle. This helps them to establish a policy for all transitions. Practitioners meet with new children in the spring, inviting parents to bring them along on a regular basis for visits in the weeks before they start. They give the new children photos of the staff and prepare a DVD for parents to share with their child which shows the different activities and environments in the setting. They ask children if they could visit them at home, and find out about what they like to do there and meet their siblings and any pets.

When the children start, they are encouraged to bring along their parent to stay for the first day and make sure that the child is comfortable with them leaving. Intake is staggered over three weeks to allow adequate time and space for settling in. They use a key person system, and the key person meets the child and family each morning, spending a few minutes talking with both about the previous day and what might be happening on this day. They ensure that the child knows who will be collecting them. During the year, parents are welcome each Friday morning for the first hour, when they can read stories with their child. They are also welcomed if they wish to drop in or share an activity.

- Which service has a rights-based approach?
- Do you think it is likely to be effective?

Early years educators can examine how their team uses a rights-based approach and how they demonstrate this in practice.

Partnership with Parents

Parents also have rights, including the right to participate in all aspects of their child's care and education.

Rights of Parents

It is the right of parents to participate actively and with voluntary adherence to the basic principles, in the growth, care, and development of their children who are entrusted to the public institution. This means no delegating and alienation. Instead, it confirms the importance of the presence and the role of parents, who have always been highly valued in our institutional tradition.

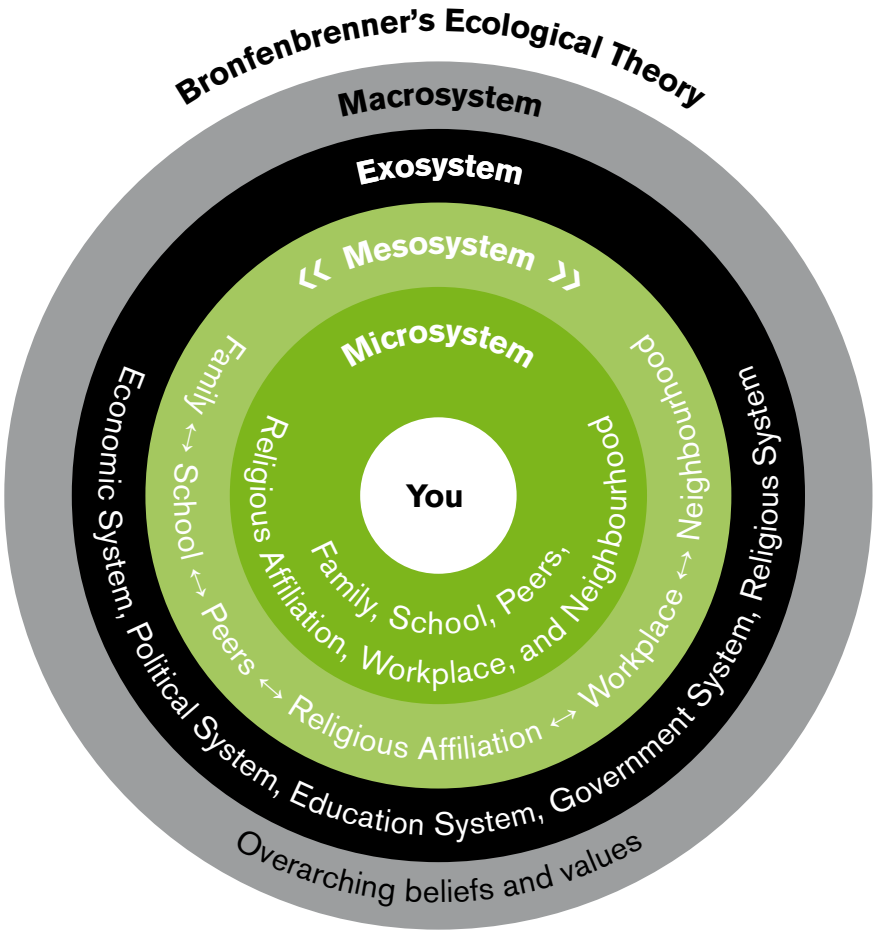
(sample from the Reggio Emilia approach)

> *The most effective settings shared child-related information between parents and staff, and parents were often involved in decision making about their child's learning programme. More particularly, children did better where the centre shared its educational aims with parents.*

(Sylva et al, 2004)

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1989), whose theory of an ecological environment is widely recognised, has shown that humans are participants in 'an array of interlocking systems' and that these systems have links. The systems are shown in the Model of Ecological Systems in the diagram overleaf.

Model of Ecological Systems



Brofenbrenner argues that the most important factor for a child's well-being is the set of links between the systems and that with more and stronger links, the child's experience will be positive and effective, rather than 'negative and detrimental'.

Each setting the child experiences – home, childminder's house, granny's house, nursery or school – is described as a microsystem, and each of these has a role to play in the child's development. The most important contribution to a child's well-being is the set of links between each microsystem and the link to the whole wider system – the mesosystem. Brofenbrenner views each link as fitting together in a manner similar to that of a Russian doll. Basically, the more supportive links there are, and the stronger these links are, the better the child's experience and outcomes are likely to be. However, it is important for all the links to be closely allied, reducing the likelihood of there being repetition, gaps and frustration for the family in dealing with too many differing elements of the system.

> *The developmental potential of a setting is increased as a function of the number of supportive links existing between that setting and other settings (such as home and family). Thus the least favourable condition for development is one in which supplementary links are either non-supportive or completely absent, when the mesosystem is weakly linked.*
>
> (Bronfenbrenner, 1989)

Establishing a good partnership, which involves parents, families and early years practitioners working together to benefit children, will smooth the way for the child to move successfully between both environments and to feel confident in being themselves in both. It will support the child to see themselves fitting into both worlds, and beginning to understand that they are still their own unique self, capable of learning the norms in new environments and of developing that sense of belonging in each environment.

Case Study Mai

Mai was nearly four. She came to pre-school each day with her mum, Chan-juan, who never spoke with the early years educators and kept her head and face covered with a scarf. Mai didn't speak or mix with the other children. Mai liked to follow another little girl around, Betsy, who had a developmental delay.

One day, the pre-school began a project using cameras. Mai became excited and began to use the camera to take pictures of Betsy. After a couple of weeks of the project, Mai's key person showed Chan-juan some of the pictures that Mai had taken, and showed her the camera. Chan-juan became excited – her English was very poor but she pointed at the camera and smiled. The next day, Chan-juan came to the pre-school and brought a similar camera and pictures of Mai at home with her cousin, who had a similar developmental delay to Betsy. For the first time Chan-juan had her scarf away from her face.

This was the beginning of a good partnership. Gradually the key person learnt that Mai's family were unsure of their status in the country (Scotland) and were afraid that they would be deported. The pre-school arranged for the local citizen's information service to support Chan-juan and her family to complete all the required paperwork, and regularise their position. Mai began to mix really well with the other children when she saw her mum happy with the other adults, and strong bonds were built on all sides.

A year later, the key person went on a long-planned trip to China. Chan-juan's family there arranged to bring her to the remote village where they lived, and to honour her for supporting their daughter and her family. Mai herself went on to school locally, and attended the afterschool at the centre and music classes, becoming a keen violinist.

- What assumptions about Mai and her mother might educators have made at the start?
- How do you think the camera project helped Mai and Chan-juan?

According to Aistear, 'Partnership involves responsibility on both sides' and ideally each recognises, respects and values what the other does and says. While Barnardos (2012) states: 'There is no universal agreement on what parental involvement is, or the forms that it can take', it acknowledges that 'Siolta endorses partnership and parental involvement as a core value in a setting.'

What does partnership look like in your setting?

Level 4: The Social Action Approach
Participation is visible, genuine; it is integral to the service.

(Staff and parents, with children, make decisions on important issues and take collective action to implement/solve them.)

Level 3: The Transformation Approach
Parents are aware that children benefit from their involvement; they are enabled to participate and contribute in various ways.

(Parents can participate in decisions being made in the service with genuine consultation taking place and policy and procedural changes allowing for all perspectives.)

Level 2: The Add-on Approach
There are some two-way exchanges, items are added without any real structural change.

(The service asks for photographs and news from home.)

Level 1: The Contributions Approach
This is very much top-down – staff tell parents/families news and information
(Newsletters, noticeboard, leaflets)

(adapted from Banks, 2001)

Early years services and parents may engage together in the early stages of the transition process, for example during the enrolment phases and the first days of settling in, seeing the transition as a one-off event. However, it is important for both parties to recognise the value of a longer term relationship. Parents and practitioners should both recognise that for each child the transition process may last for differing periods and that a true partnership will be of lasting benefit for all parties, establishing that important bridge of continuity of care, as referred to in Section 3.

- Can you think of a child you have worked with for whom the transition process seemed to last a long time?
- How did you support the child?
- How was the relationship between you and the child's parents?

In Standard 3, Parents and Families, Síolta advocates a partnership approach. This is crucial in developing quality practice in transitions, as without each partner having a deep understanding of the other; the child's perspective will be lost.

Case Study
Seán

Seán was a lively six month old baby. His mother Ger's maternity leave was drawing to a close and Seán would be starting with Mary, a childminder who lived about 20 minutes drive away from Sean's home. Ger saw Mary's advertisement in a local supermarket and phoned her to arrange to meet. Ger and her partner Peter went along, with Seán, to visit Mary one evening. Mary welcomed them in and they discussed how best to help Seán with this change in his life. It was agreed that Ger would come along with Seán for a few days and would stay for an hour. While there, the plan was that gradually Mary would, when Seán was comfortable with it, begin to provide some of his care while Ger was in the room.

Nearer the time for Ger to return to work, she left Seán with Mary for short spells, increasing the time each day. This seemed to work well, however Seán did seem unsettled, especially after waking up from his nap each morning. Mary, Peter and Ger discussed this, and used Aistear's ideas to help Seán. They put photographs of Ger and Peter and the family dog near the cot and also put photos of Mary near Sean's cot in his home. Mary had more photos from home in a folder for Seán to look through when he was with her. Ger also brought in a mobile similar to the one that Seán had in his own bedroom. Mary spent time each day going through the photos with Sean, and introduced new ideas for him such as a Treasure Basket. Sean really enjoyed exploring this, and looking through the folder at the photos. He settled in better and Mary, together with Sean's family, kept monitoring progress and sharing ideas.

Developing the 'Caring Triangle' between the setting, the child and the parents will take time and effort, effort which is well spent in the long-term.

> *Parental involvement is the participation of parents in the development and education of their children from birth onwards, in recognition of the fact that they are the primary influence in their children's lives.*
>
> (CECDE, 2007)

Summary of Key Messages

- **Quality in an early years service will have an impact on the child's development and life prospects.**
- **Children have a right to high quality provision of services and this is supported by the Irish early years frameworks such as Síolta and Aistear.**
- **Working from a child-centred, rights approach which includes children in decisions is important in early childhood care and education.**
- **Early years services need to work in partnership with parents.**

Foundations for Practice in Transitions

6

This section will support you with:

- **Good Practice in Transitions**
- **Transitions: Vision and Rights**
- **From Vision to Policy and Procedures**
- **Putting Procedures into Practice**
- **Professional Practice and Core Skills for Early Years Educators**
- **Keen Observation Skills**
- **Communication and Interaction Skills**
- **Reflective Practice**
- **Teamwork**

Good Practice in Transitions

> *At first, parents and other caregivers intervene directly to soothe or pacify the infant, organizing the child's experiences around routines that are manageable and predictable. These behaviours lend predictability to the infant's world, reduce the emotional demands of daily experiences, and scaffold the infant's own efforts at self-regulation.*
>
> (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000)

When early years educators build effective transition practices, these practices will 'reduce the emotional demands of daily experiences' and allow space for each child to begin to attain coping skills that will last them far beyond their early years.

The starting point for practicing successful transitions has two core elements:

1. **The service's vision of the child based on:**

- The Rights of The Child
- A child-centred perspective
- Child-led initiatives

2. **Using the legal and policy elements as outlined in Section 2:**

- Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations 2006
- Siolta – the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education
- Aistear – the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework
- Workforce Development Plan

The basic steps that serve as a foundation for successful transitions in an early years service begin with the rights of the child and build up to developing a common vision for the whole service. This vision will help to establish clear common goals in consultation with the children. The goals will then inform the development of policy and procedures, which will be shared with parents, families and all others who may be involved. Good practice will be built from these steps, using core skills supported by the resources provided within Siolta and Aistear.

Transitions: Vision and Rights

Developing a vision for working with children

The development of a service's vision of the child is the statement of their core belief and ideals for work with children. The vision, stemming from a rights perspective, will affect how appropriate support is provided, in particular in this area of transitions.

Does your service have a vision or beliefs statement for how you work with children, and has it been updated recently?

When early years educators have this good understanding of a rights-based approach, it will assist them in developing a vision for their service that is truly child-centred, giving a deeper understanding of the child's perspectives and needs in all areas. Such a vision will inform all areas of practice so that other integral aspects of quality work, such as interactions and partnership with parents, will also have rights-based, child-centred influences and approaches.

CD

Educators can work together to formulate this vision and realise it in their work with children. Using **Worksheet 4 Our Image of a Child** will challenge and support early years educators to work together to question and reflect on their current approach, and develop, with children, longer term goals for their service. You can also use **Worksheet 5 Our Goals for Children** to help your service to develop common goals. This process also links with Síolta Standard 8, Planning and Evaluation, and can form the cornerstone of practice.

How do you involve the children with whom you work in planning and decision making?

This child-centred vision will enable an approach that caters for each individual child, including children with special needs and children who may have experienced a different cultural upbringing, as identified in the research findings in Section 4. Each and every child, regardless of difference, will have equal opportunity and be equally supported to take those first steps in dealing with new situations.

Eli is two and a half. His French-speaking family has moved to Ireland from Vancouver and this is his first time to leave the home and be looked after by other adults.

How would your service go about making Eli and his family feel at ease and help Eli to settle in successfully?

From Vision to Policy and Procedures

A policy is a collective, agreed statement of beliefs and a commitment to their implementation.

(French, 2008a)

By developing a common understanding of their vision for the service, early years educators will be well-positioned to develop a policy on transitions. This policy will then require procedures for staff to follow and share, such as developing a key person system as described in Section 7. Considerations for developing a policy on Transitions for your service can be found in Appendix 3. **There is also a sample Transitions policy on the CD accompanying this book**. According to Síolta, 10% of pre-schools have a transitions policy.

CD

The transitions policy will link with other policies such as admissions, key person, arrivals and departures, parental involvement, communications and supporting positive behaviour. It can inform routines and allied practices, for example during mealtimes, and outline how sibling interaction is managed.

The HSE guidance notes (2011) to support compliance with Regulation 5 of the Pre-school Regulations suggest that compliance is demonstrated though the following:

- The relationships around the children were supported. Overall it was observed that staff demonstrated sensitivity, warmth and positive regard for the preschool children and their families.
- Sibling interaction is facilitated.
- The service has strong links with the local national school and public health nurse.

More information on developing policies can be found in Barnardos publication *A Practical Guide to Developing Childcare Policies* books 1 and 2 (2008, 2010).

In order to implement the policy on transitions, procedures need to be established. Suitable procedures will set out clear steps to guide staff responses and practices, and can cover all stages and aspects of transitions.

Educators need to develop procedures by looking not just at transitions, but at all aspects of their service. They also need to consider the areas that impact upon transitions. For example, when looking at the initial links with parents and families, procedures should cover areas such as:

- Establishing good relationships from the initial contact (see **Worksheet 6 Moments of Truth – Parental Involvement and Establishing a Relationship** to support this).
- Understanding the cultural context of the child's family.
- Learning about the community where the child lives (if not local).
- Appointing a key person.
- Understanding the child's temperament, disposition, habits.
- Beginning a family wall with the family and the child.
- Ensuring the family is familiar with the service's routine.
- Planning the settling in phase.

By examining current procedures, comparing with other practices and ideas, and being open to implementing changes, services will find that well thought-out procedures can assist them in achieving quality practice.

Putting Procedures into Practice

When procedures have been developed it is important to ensure that they are not left sitting on a shelf or on a computer hard drive. They need to become the tools for handling all situations, based on the beliefs that are built into their development.

> *Procedures are the practices by which the policies are implemented in the service - the way of doing things. The procedure is underpinned by the policy. The procedures should be developed in consultation with staff, parents, children and others, written down, and kept in an easily accessible file. Each member of staff, volunteers and students should read these on induction and they should be communicated to parents and children.*

(French, 2008a)

Siolta and Aistear provide useful frameworks for putting procedures into practice in relation to transitions. They both place great emphasis on the value of well-managed transitions at all levels. They also provide material that will support the development of good practice for transitions through many of the standards of Siolta and the themes of Aistear.

The components in the Siolta Standard on Transitions link directly with many of the other standards, and especially with those such as The Rights of the Child, Interactions, Identity and Belonging, Environment, Consultation, Planning and Evaluation and, crucially, Parents and Families.

These Standards link closely with the research findings outlined in earlier sections. By using these Standards to guide how procedures are translated into practice, early years services will bring about quality working practices. For example, making the link with between Transitions and Standard 5: Interactions, the Siolta Research Digest says that:

> *Children's daily experiences contribute significantly to their feelings about themselves and about others, as well as to their individual styles of thinking and knowledge processing.*

Transitions are just such a daily experience, an important one, and if they are respectfully managed and handled with highly skilled interactions, then they contribute to a child's development of resilience and coping skills for many of the changes that life will bring to them.

Having living active transitions procedures that link closely with all aspects of practice will ensure the service has the capacity to support children by providing the continuity of experience that is of such importance.

Professional Practice and Core Skills of Early Years Educators

Bringing procedures into good practice also requires early years educators to have core competencies in working with young children. Good practices require staff to not only have knowledge, but to be able to translate that knowledge into skills that support children's needs.

What skills have you acquired through your continuing professional development that will help you to support children's transitions?

The profiles of experienced and expert practitioners, as set out in the Model Framework shown in the table opposite (French, 2008a), state the skills and attributes, the processes and the level of accountability expected at each level.

Occupational Profile	Intellectual skills and attributes	Processes	Accountability
Experienced Practitioner	• Broad range of core knowledge with greater depth. • Specialist theoretical knowledge in one area. • Ability to access, evaluate, compare and interpret information • Well-developed range of skills and ability to employ in complex non-routine situations.	• Ability to select from a broad range of skills appropriate to context. • Present information to audience.	• Ability to operate with full autonomy with broad guidance/ evaluation. • Responsibility for quality of services in accordance with specified standards. • Limited responsibility for work of others.
Expert Practitioner	• Mastery of complex theoretical knowledge. • Ability to critically evaluate knowledge, concepts, and practice. • Expertise in research, policy development.	• Ability to apply diagnostic and creative skills in a wide range of situations. • Ability to engage in planning, policy development, and management. • Ability to engage in research, publication and dissemination of knowledge and skills.	• Complete autonomy in professional activities. • Responsibility for achieving personal and group outcomes. • Accountability for all decision-making

Case Study
Donna

Applying a Sample Skill of an experienced practitioner: *the ability to employ a range of skills in a complex non-routine situation*.

Betty had worked with children for many years. A new child, Donna, who had started in the pre-school two months previously, had not settled in well. Donna would say goodbye happily to her parent, would usually take out some jigsaws or construction work and begin the day well. However, gradually her mood would get worse and she would begin to interfere with the other children's work, becoming more and more disruptive and bullying some of the children. Parents began to complain that their children were afraid of Donna.

Betty took time to observe Donna closely; she consulted with staff and followed the various events of the day. Gradually Betty came to realise that Donna became more uncomfortable as the group got bigger and the noise levels escalated. She also didn't seem to know how to share or react when other children tried to join her play.

Betty discussed this with Donna's parents and with the staff. Donna was an only child and had not spent much time with other children. She liked being with adults and was cooperative in helping and playing at home, and when there were few children in the service. Betty and the staff worked out a plan to reduce any pressure on Donna to take part in group activities and to support her gradually to practise cooperation with other children. Donna liked to help adults, so staff discussed her preferences with her and she began to regularly help with tidy-up time, break time and going outside. Betty helped staff to learn to anticipate the signs that Donna was overwhelmed with noise and numbers, and her parents began to invite one or two children to play with her at home from time to time.

Gradually Donna settled in well and after six months was able to play well with others and participate fully in all activities. Betty felt that Donna's transition was complete and used this experience to review the questionnaire that parents filled in to include questions about a child's place in the family and familiarity with peers.

Professional practice requires staff to put core skills into practice. Through education and professional development, staff will form a bedrock of knowledge. This needs to be combined with other skills, such as reflective practice, good communication and interactions, skilled observations and teamwork, which are fresh, current and well-honed. These are discussed further below.

Case Study
Brian

Brian had been identified with a syndrome which impacted on his speech and his capacity for learning. He came to pre-school on the recommendation of the public health nurse. His mother was anxious about him, and thought it necessary to do all tasks for him. He stood out from the other children each day as his mother stayed and fussed over taking his coat and settling him in. Brian was very happy and played well alongside the other children. Staff were sensitive to his Mum's anxieties while aware of the importance of Brian becoming less dependent. Eventually staff helped him learn to put on and take off his own coat.

The day came when his mother arrived to bring him home, and staff asked her to hold back for a surprise. Brian proudly put his belongings in his bag, put on his coat, and turned to his mother and said 'me just like them', pointing to the other children putting on their coats. His mother was deeply touched and, following that, encouraged Brian's independence as much as she could. Eventually Brian went on to sit a couple of Junior Cert subjects, and to work as an assistant on long-haul trucks.

Keen Observation Skills

Keen observation skills are crucial. This does not necessarily mean that continual assessments are required, rather that sensitivity and heightened awareness, a keen antenna to pick up on children's less obviously displayed emotions and issues, is acquired and developed. Good observers are free from bias, aware of their own prejudices and capacity to stereotype, and can apply their knowledge and experience in an individual manner to gain understanding of each child. They are able to think back and connect the child's actions over time based on noting and paying heed to what is going on for all the children.

How do you use your observation skills in your work with children?

Case Study

Darragh and Caoimhe

Áine worked in the playgroup room. Áine was Darragh's key person. Áine noticed Darragh punching Caoimhe on the arm and pushing her away from the easel. One of the other staff in the room went to Darragh and remonstrated with him, and put Caoimhe back at the easel. Áine was aware that the previous week, Caoimhe had torn one of Darragh's pictures that he was doing for his Nana, who was ill. Áine did not know why Caoimhe had done that, and decided to do some problem solving at a quiet time with the two children in order to hear and understand each child's perspective and restore harmony.

Good observations will support an educator's understanding of children's level of coping and will inform staff which children may need extra support and what form that support should take. One instrument that is particularly useful is the SICS (Self-evaluation Instrument for Care Settings) tool for determining Well-Being and Involvement, developed by Ferre Laevers et al in the Experiential Education Project in the University of Leuven (Laevers, 2005).

This observation tool is intended to be used over a period of time, and will help educators to build a clear picture of those children who have settled in well and those who may be experiencing difficulty. It also determines if there are particular times that are stressful for children. By monitoring when a child has fully settled in following a major transition, educators can determine if the child is what is referred to by Ferre Laevers as a 'fish in water', which refers to an ideal state of emotional and social well-being (see Section 3).

Communication and Interaction Skills

> *The adult's interactive style is focused on process as opposed to outcomes. It is balanced between talking and listening, offers the child a choice of responses and expanded use of language. It follows the child's leads and interests, and challenges the child appropriately.*
>
> (Siolta Standard 5: Interactions Component 5.4)

Educators can develop their communication and interaction skills, both with each other and with children, to provide a suitable model and to help them to make the right choices in the balance of talking and listening. It is important to understand when and how to enter into conversation with children and how to enter their play.

Case Study Pat

Pat noticed that Chrissie was struggling to stack blocks without them falling over and seemed to be getting frustrated. He was going to intervene, but remembered something he had heard in his FETAC class called SOUL. He moved closer, and sat on a chair nearby. Chrissie got the blocks stacked eventually, and looked around to tell someone. She noticed Pat and asked him to see what she had done. Pat was glad that he had not intervened earlier and spoiled Chrissie's sense of accomplishment.

SOUL stands for

- **S**ilence
- **O**bservation
- **U**nderstanding
- **L**istening

It is a simple tool to help you remember that it is not always necessary to rush into a conversation with a child, that standing back and seeing if, when and how to talk, or not talk, can be of great value.

Aistear provides a rich resource for suggestions on developing good communication skills and for adults to set up good experiences in the way in which they interact with babies and young children.

When working with babies, staff provide opportunities for babies to learn **language** from others. This:

- Enables babies to watch and listen to adults and other children.
- Encourages other children to speak to and play with babies so they hear sounds, words and sentences being used.
- Repeats the names of other children around babies and describes what they are doing.

(Aistear Theme Communicating, Babies' sample learning opportunity)

Aistear suggests that educators should engage with babies in a consistent, calm, caring and respectful manner. The educator:

- Knows babies well, responds appropriately to them and provides a secure base from which they can play and explore.
- Communicates positively with babies using eye contact, touch, and a soft tone of voice.
- Sets up relaxed routines for feeding, toileting, sleeping and play activities, and interacts with and talks to the babies during these routines.
- Has routines for change-over and transition times, for example waving bye-bye, placing a favourite toy in a 'special' place, saying the babies' names on arrival.
- Shares information regularly to get to know more about babies' home and out-of-home experiences.

(Aistear Theme Well-being, Babies' sample learning opportunities)

For babies

The adult interacts non-verbally with babies and uses appropriate and supportive techniques to encourage communication:

- Establishes and maintains eye contact with babies, speaks to them when interacting, and pauses giving them a turn.
- Repeats babies' sounds and uses infant-directed speech when talking to them (using a distinctly higher pitch, short phrases, simple words, a slow pace, and long vowels).
- Models non-verbal strategies to share feelings, for example using wide eyes to show amazement or wonder, smiling and clapping hands to show delight.
- Interprets and responds to babies' sounds, expressions and body movements, for example soothing babies, verbalising their intentions, responding to gestures with words, and pointing to things.
- Watches for signs that babies are concentrating on something they see, hear, feel, or taste, and models conversation by asking simple questions and providing answers.

(Aistear Theme Communicating, Babies' sample learning opportunity)

For young children

Asks open-ended questions and makes statements to encourage children to think aloud, wonder and explore possibilities with the adult.

(Aistear Theme Communicating, Young children's' sample learning opportunity)

Quality interactions such as these are part of good professional practice and require staff to consider children as equal partners, to model respect and support, and focus on the process.

What do you know of the children's opinion on positive interactions?

(Siolta thinkabout, 5.6.2)

Siolta states that 'the adult interactive style… is balanced between talking and listening'. This balance can be articulated in the procedures being implemented regarding the way in which staff will work with children.

Quality interactions are often about just sitting by a child, warmly. They can also be about allowing a child time to formulate a response, to find the words to express themselves.

How can you incorporate the following into your practice?

- Open-ended questions.
- Giving children time to think and reply.
- Encouraging children to name and share feelings and emotions.
- Sharing control of conversations with the child.
- Involving children in finding/choosing a solution to a problem.

(Siolta, Standard 4, 4.1.3)

Open-ended questions

Using open-ended questions such as 'would you like to tell me about....' will elicit a fuller response than questions that can have a 'yes' or a 'no' response. By helping children to name their feelings and emotions you can support them to find words to express the way they feel, words that they may only be becoming familiar with and not always think of using.

> *In partnership with the adult, children will use language to interpret experiences, to solve problems, and to clarify thinking, ideas and feelings.*
>
> (Aistear, Learning Goal: Communicating)

Children with special needs

Interactions that consider communication strategies for children with special needs are important, as change may be challenging in more or different ways for them. For example, children on the autistic spectrum may rely on the security of the predictable routine, and will need adequate communication and notification of change and what to expect next. Educators need to be familiar with particular needs and be able to respond appropriately.

Mikey (3) is deaf. There is one staff member with sign language.

How do you think Mikey's needs could be met adequately?

The adult, using pretend play, can encourage children to develop their interactive skills such as empathy. Practitioners can, for example, encourage children to experience sensory impairment through playful activities such as *Blindman's Buff*, wearing ear muffs, and empathising with people who have physical disabilities by using play resources, such as a doll-sized wheelchair, small world crutches, Zimmer frames, guide dogs (Aistear Theme Identity and Belonging, Young Children's' Sample Learning opportunity).

Communicating effectively enables staff to observe and learn about individual needs at times of transition, such as children having advance warning of change or when some children find lining up boring or even scary and intimidating, which can lead to behavioural issues that could be avoided with planning and effective two-way communication.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is a vital competency for those in early years work. The ability to regularly question oneself, to check to see that what is being done and practised is relevant and effective is one that can take time and self-awareness to acquire. It may mean tackling bias, which can be unconscious, being realistic about your own strengths and weaknesses, feeling assertive and being able to be an effective team member.

> *To develop self-awareness, we need to ask ourselves questions and uncover aspects of our personality and how we respond and react to situations. We can find out the things we do and what makes us tick, such as our personality traits, our values, habits, needs and emotions.*
>
> (Barnardos, 2010b)

The support and trust of a good manager will facilitate good reflective practice, and working on one's own personal and professional development will aid the process. Barnardos publication *Your Learning and Development: Continuing Professional Development in Early Childhood Care and Education* (2010) outlines the ways early years educators can learn and develop in their work.

There are various methods of reflecting and learning from your day-to-day work, some of these are:

- Keeping your own learning log (using **Worksheet 7 Thinking about What I Do and Becoming Reflective** will help with this).
- Critical Incident Analysis (see **Worksheet 8 Understanding Isolated Difficult Incidents**).
- Working with a mentor.
- Team reflections, perhaps using Action Learning Methods as outlined in **Worksheet 9**.

Teamwork

Teamwork is an essential component of an effective early years service, when each member knows that they are supported by other team members.

Case Study Mary

Mary was a key person for Carter. Carter had found it difficult to settle in. Mary would stay with him until he was happy to leave her each day. This sometimes was quite a while, and Mary was supported to meet Carter's needs by knowing that the other staff were aware of the importance of this and freed her to carry this out.

According to French (2008a) 'stable and consistent teams enable children to form the trusting relationships which are the foundation for healthy development'. Some of the characteristics of effective teamwork are:

- Climate – people know what is expected of them.
- Goal setting – practitioners work together to set goals.
- Communications – people are open and trust each other.
- Handling conflict – problems are recognised and dealt with openly and effectively.

(Hohmann and Weikart, 1995)

Early years educators, as professionals, should ensure that their core skills and knowledge are refreshed through ongoing professional development. They must bring their levels of skill and knowledge to a standard that will ensure that they are capable of meeting the challenges that working with young children can offer. This applies especially in meeting the challenge to provide the appropriate support for children in relation to transitions.

Summary of Key Messages

- Early years services can develop their vision, mission, policies and procedures based a child-centred, rights approach to their practice.
- By developing the recognised core skills they need for working with young children, early years educators will be able to better support children and support their needs during transitions.
- Using the tools provided in Síolta and Aistear will support staff in handling transitions.

Transitions in Practice – Major Transitions

7

This section will look at:

- **Preparation for the Transition**
- **Managing the Initial Separation with Parent and Child**
- **Continuity of Care and the Key Person System**
- **Encountering and Managing Problems**
- **New Daily and Weekly Routines: Moving from Daycare to Pre-school**
- **Moving On: Going to School from an Early Years Setting**
- **The Concept of 'School Readiness'**

Everything the child experiences from the moment s/he enters the early childhood setting will become part of what s/he learns... practitioners' provision of welcome reminders of home such as special teddies, blankets and soothers and the time taken to support the transition from home to childcare setting supports key experiences.

(French and Murphy, 2005)

Preparation for the Transition

Major transitions for children are affected by a number of factors, including the age of the child, their stage of development, their previous experience, the family context and the culture within the family, and the community. There are particular practical steps to consider in managing major transitions, including how continuity of care is ensured; ideas for managing the actual initial separation from the parent; and supporting the child in the new environment, especially in the early days of the transition process.

- Imagine Jack, who is 18 months old has just come to your setting. Do you know, for example, how Jack has his nappy changed at home? Does he usually lie across his mum or dad's lap? Is it on the floor? Is it on a bed?
- How do you help Jack bridge the gap between his home experiences and his experience of the changing station that is used in your service?

Establishing a relationship with parents – building trust, learning about their child and helping them to learn about the service – is an important early step in the practical management of transitions, especially major ones. Early years educators, through parents, have access to vital knowledge that will enable them to understand the child's needs more easily. According to Epstein (in CECDE, 2007):

> *Parents know about the home situation, their extended family, significant people in their child's life, culture, health, history, adversities and issues related to the individual child.*

Encouraging parents to approach services at an early stage is important so that this necessary close relationship can be established and built up from the earliest possible time (see **Worksheet 6 Moments of Truth**).

Case Study Ben

Ben attended Bluebells Pre-school. He was nearly three but his speech was delayed. Ben would apparently settle in each day, but then would cry and be upset without the staff understanding the reason. Following a good chat with Mum, staff realised that Ben was used to having his favourite toy, a small teddy, on a chair in the room in which he played and that he might be looking for it, which would upset him. The next day Ben brought his toy in and agreed to leave it on a staff chair, eventually keeping it in a little bag hanging from his coat hook. Staff noticed that at first he would go to it regularly and spend some time standing stroking it. The episodes of upset eased off rapidly.

Managing the Initial Separation with Parent and Child

Supporting the parent

In addition to preparing to manage the separation from the child's perspective, educators may need to consider any parents who may be anxious especially if this is the first major separation from their child. This will help the child too, as any anxiety on the part of the parent is likely to be transmitted to the child.

Ideas for supporting parents who may need reassurance include:

- Visiting in advance on a regular basis.
- Initially staying with the child, but sitting in a special spot so that the child gradually moves away from the parent rather than the parent leaving the child.
- Reassurance for the parent through video/webcams if used, or taking a picture of the child happily playing after the parent has left and emailing it to them.
- Sending text messages to reassure the parent that the child has settled.
- If the child is comfortable with it, another loved carer bringing the child such as a Nana or Grandad.

Supporting the child

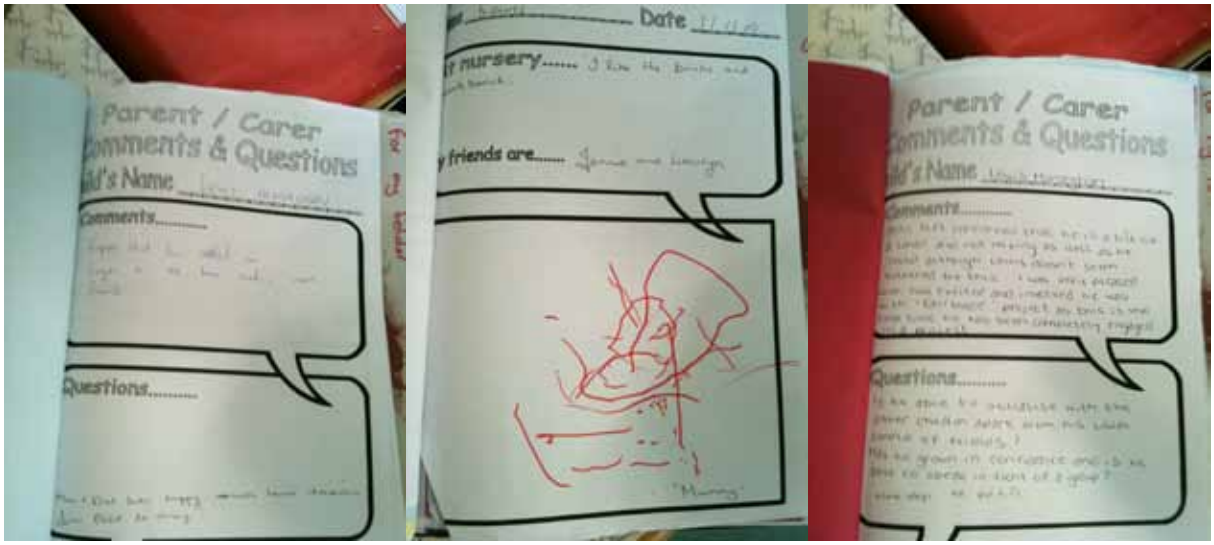
Case Study Jayne

Jayne's parents commented that one of the main benefits of attending the childminding service for them was the fact that Jayne could interact and have fun with her older brother when he came back from school in the afternoon. Jack attends the afterschool service provided by Lisa and she commented that 'Jayne's eyes light up every day when she sees him coming and she welcomes him in with a hug and a smile.' This childcare arrangement nurtures a fundamental sibling relationship and helps affirm Jayne's sense of security and belonging.

(Aistear, Jayne's Story, A Portraiture Study, 2007)

There are useful techniques and activities that support children in the early stages as outlined below:

- Staggering the intake over some days to allow smaller groups to settle in gradually.
- Shorter sessions for the first few days.
- Developing a Family Wall, with stories and pictures from home, and a home wall where children tell stories of their day, share photos and drawings with their family.
- An open door policy for parents to come and visit.
- Other links with home such as having regular reading sessions, where parents or extended family can come in and read with the children.
- Siblings having chances to be together, perhaps on visits to each other's rooms, at outdoor time or at lunch time.
- The child's use of comforters if already used.
- Bringing in a familiar item from home or 'minding' something precious belonging to mum or dad that the child knows is really important to the parent such as their wallet or handbag (removing credit cards, most cash or important documents first!).
- Beginning a Personal Learning Book for each child, with space for the child to include items, and for educators and parents to contribute. The photos opposite from Lewis's book, Bathgate Nursery, Scotland, illustrate such a book, showing how it can be used as an interactive communication tool supporting partnership between family, child and the nursery.



Continuity of Care and the Key Person System

Having gained an understanding of the child and of their family, an important factor in continuity of care for children experiencing their first major transition is having adults who are sensitive and experienced to work with them at this time. As part of this, consideration can be given to developing a key person system, as mentioned previously. According to Barnardos (2012):

> [the key person] *coordinates information about the individual child's needs and progress and shares this with parents/carers and other staff members to maintain consistency and continuity of care.*

Key Person Systems

- Each child and family is appointed a key person.
- The key person undertakes a home visit in advance of a child coming to the centre.
- The key person links closely with parents in helping to settle the child into the service.
- The following is achieved by the key person:
  - » Understanding the child/parent needs.
  - » Understanding cultural differences/key words from the child's own language.
  - » Bridging the worlds of home and service.
- The key person makes contact at the beginning and end of each day with the child and parent, and provides an update on progress and developments.
- The key person also takes part in reviews with the children.
- The children are encouraged to develop relationships with other staff at the centre. Key persons do not remain with the children all day, as they will have responsibility for a key learning area. This system provides for continuity of relationship without exclusivity.

(French, 2008a)

Key person systems will help the child to feel secure, bring about a sense of belonging, and foster their sense of personal identity.

> *Belonging is a two-way process. It is about a child's needs and rights being protected and provided for, about feeling cared for, respected and included.*
>
> (Woodhead and Brooker, 2008)

Practical steps in setting up a key person system involve discussing the possibility with the whole staff team and looking at the implications and the various ways in which it can be managed.

> [In our service] *there is a high emphasis on consistency of care so that children can feel confident about their carers. The key* [person] *system means that a particular member of staff builds up a strong relationship with their key children.*
>
> (Full Day Care Service, Self Assessment Statement Siolta QAP, validated with Level 4 rating achieved)

A useful illustration of how this can work in practice is given in *Once in a Lifetime* (French and Murphy, 2005), and is included in Appendix 4, Continuity of Care: Looping System.

> *To establish positive emotional health during this most sensitive period of brain development, it is absolutely essential that continuity of personalised caregiving is available to babies and toddlers at all times, either from their primary attachment figure or from a long-term secondary attachment figure.*
>
> (Bowlby, 2007)

Encountering and Managing Problems

Having a quality system in place that identifies and responds rapidly to individual children's distress in a less well-functioning transition is crucial. The earlier genuine distress is spotted and dealt with, the better the chance to turn what may appear to be a negative experience for the child into a successful one.

The SDD model outlined below provides a simple three-step process, which depends on highest quality practices among educators of advance planning and preparation, keen observations, quick response and the capacity to provide adequate support. The child who is crying each morning at the separation from the parents is easier to identify than the child who may become withdrawn, especially as the educators have not yet experienced such a child's true capacity. Use of Laevers' SICS Tool as mentioned in Section 6 may be useful in the early stages of a young child's transitions process.

The SDD Model for Supporting Child through a Transition

Stress	Distress	De-stress
Understand and identify how the transition may affect each child (planning, preparation, strategy of observation and monitoring of all children).	Recognise when an individual child is not coping with the transition and is distressed (identify this as quickly as possible, it may not be visible).	Support the child and family through an individual collaborative plan to remove the distress, cope more effectively with the change and support child's successful progress through the transition process.

Building this model or a similar approach into policies and procedures will help to highlight the importance of early diagnoses and remedying the situation.

New Daily and Weekly Routines: Moving from Daycare to Pre-school

> *Children are often required to make continual frequent transitions from one environment to another, and these environments themselves may also be in a state of continuous flux and change.*
>
> (Brooker, 2008)

Thought needs to be given when a complex move is planned for a child, such as when they are already settled in daycare, either in a centre or with a childminder, and they are also going to attend pre-school or another setting. The current carers and parents need to work together with the new pre-school to ensure that this new move is respectful of the child's needs and is treated as considerately as their original move to carers from their home.

- How can you get to know parents from the start and build trust?
- What practical ways of involving Jean would help Lisa in the case study below?

Case Study

Jean and Lisa

Jean is parent to Lisa, a 3-year-old girl who is quite tall for her age. Jean has been bringing Lisa to daycare since she returned to work when Lisa was one. Jean appears quiet and shy, and can be uncommunicative when educators in the service speak with her. Educators don't know very much about the family background. Recently, Lisa moved into the pre-school in the same building but has not settled in well so far, she has been aggressive with other children and has been uncooperative with staff.

Earlier suggestions will also be useful in these circumstances, and all parties can join to ensure that this change is as smooth as possible. Above all, the child needs to be clear about any changed arrangements, such as different pick-up arrangements, with parents being encouraged to involve the child in planning for these.

Moving On: Going to School from an Early Years Settings

How familiar are you with the local national schools into which children from your service move?

The high uptake of the Free Pre-school Year in Ireland means that most children are now making that first move outside the home at an earlier age, and the move to school is more likely to take place for the child in the context of coming from pre-school.

The Free Pre-school Year means that early years education is now part of the child's learning journey, and as such it is now imperative for all those involved with young children's learning, particularly infant teachers and early years educators, to establish links. This will ensure continuity of care and provide clear structures which will give the child a supportive transition zone.

Traditionally, any discussion of children's transitions was referring to the move by children to 'big' school. The policy and social changes that have impacted upon children have led to this transition being another milestone, albeit important, rather than the sole one in the lives of young children. This discussion has also led to a view held by many that pre-school or early years education is a stepping stone towards school rather than the crucially important stage that it is in its own right, which has been demonstrated in many of the studies mentioned (Abcedarian, Perry Preschool, EPPE and others).

The expectations and culture of a school for a child are likely to differ considerably from those of an early years setting.

- Schools may be more focused on the learning goals established through the national primary curriculum.
- Primary school is also more likely to be group focused rather than individually child-centred.
- The management of larger groups within each classroom can lead to more focused discipline rather than helping individual children to problem solve and develop independent self-control.

The Concept of 'School Readiness'

The early focus of studies relating to children making the transition from home to school has typically had an emphasis on the concept of school readiness. There has been the underlying assumption 'that school is immutable' (Petriwskyj et al, 2005), with children being expected to have the skills to adjust to school, rather than any other approach. This language of school readiness is still widely used today, for example, in *Ready for School: A Parents' Guide* the authors seek to help parents ascertain if children are 'ready for school' by setting out questions in a number of areas such as emotional readiness, academic ability and the ability to make friends (Horan and O'Brien, 2006).

These approaches focus on the child's preparedness and the necessity for the child to be capable of adapting and settling in. According to Brooker (2008), this view places the burden of responsibility with the child and puts the focus for the adults, 'whose task it is to prepare her or him for stepping up the educational ladder', on preparing the child for the change. Indeed, the first of the US National Education Goals stated 'By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn' (Brooker, 2008).

The idea that children need to be 'ready' can invoke a sense of failure for those children who are 'not ready', where parents and children can feel under pressure and stress and in some cases to blame for the supposed 'failure'. Moving away from this concept of readiness, seeing the value of continuity of care and placing children at the centre of practice while building links for children in an appropriate manner will benefit children.

> *The wishes and fears of the individual child may not be taken into account in large classrooms focussed not on the individual child or the child's agency but on reaching early learning standards. How often does one come across young children not excited and thrilled by their progression into school, but anxious about whether they will be allowed to 'pass' into school! The situation is not improved in systems where primary school begins at 5 or even 4 years.*
>
> (Bennett, 2006)

Supporting parents

The transition between an early years service and school is a holistic process, where all actors, including the child, the family, the early years service and the school, play a joint role in ensuring that all move through it gently and with as much support as each individual child requires.

> *Educational transition represents a major change in children's lives. It marks the fact that they are growing up, becoming less reliant on their families and increasingly capable of taking on new challenges.*
>
> (Sharp, 2010)

Parents will have had their own experiences and it is worthwhile for early years educators to support them through this new transition process. The process will begin for them with enrolling their child in the primary school and attending their first school meetings. Assuring them that the early years educators are also preparing for this and can answer questions about what to expect is helpful, as is linking with the school where possible, and discussing and preparing the child as well. This will help to build this new bridge for the family. If this transition is seen as a family transition, rather than just the child's move, it allows for a more comprehensive approach which will benefit all involved.

Do you have a relationship with the local primary schools?

Parents who might like ideas for supporting their child can be given the list on the following pages.

Preparing Children for 'Big School' – Tips for Parents

(O'Kane, 2011, used with permission).

Your child is due to start 'big school' in September, and naturally you want to support them in any way you can. So in what way should parents help to prepare their children for school? Teachers report that if children have good self esteem, can show some degree of independence in the classroom, if they have the social skills to interact well with each other and with adults, and if they have the language and communication skills to make known their wants and needs, then teachers can teach them the other academic skills they need to be successful in school (O'Kane 2007).

So, what does this mean for parents in terms of best preparing for the transition to school? Here are some suggestions on how to help children to develop the skills mentioned above. These tips are intended primarily for parents to implement at home, but it is important to note that a quality pre-school setting can also be the ideal place for your child to learn these skills, in fact the tips below are ones that your child's pre-school is probably already putting into practice in their own way. But continuity at home, with parents also supporting their child in these ways, will help smooth the transition for children.

Independence skills

- Talk about school, read them books about children starting school.
- Speak positively about school at all times, if you are nervous about them starting school, don't show it!
- Teach your child to put on and take off their coat themselves. (Ensure they recognise it!)
- Are they confident in using the bathroom? (Make sure that your child is wearing clothes that they can easily manage when using the bathroom.)
- Ensure they can open and close their schoolbag and lunchbox (let them practice this).
- Can they easily handle their lunch?
- Role play a 'pretend school lunchtime' with your child at home.
- Familiarise your child with the school, classroom and teacher before the big day.
- Make sure children are familiar with where the toilets are, the playground is, etc.
- On the first morning at school, do not linger too long in the classroom. Be positive with your child.
- If your child is anxious, try to engage them in an activity, or with a child that they know.

Social skills

- Encourage your child to mix with children outside of their own family.
- Introduce your child to any children living nearby who are starting in the same class.
- Teach your child tidiness and encourage them to tidy up after playing with their toys.
- Encourage them to say please and thank you and to apologise when needed.
- Help your child with turn taking. (Board games can be very useful in this regard.)

Self esteem

- Give your child chores to do around the house.
- Praise their good work and praise the effort they put in to a task rather than the outcome.
- Show an active interest in their activities but let them work at their own pace.
- Don't criticise your child's efforts.
- Allow them opportunities to explore and make mistakes.
- Spend quality time with your child; find activities that you enjoy to do together.

Language and communication skills

- Try to make time for daily reading sessions with your child – encourage them to take part in the process by turning pages for you.
- Talk to your child about their daily activities. Encourage them to talk about themselves/ their experiences.
- Give them time to discuss their world with you, and show them you value their opinions by listening to them.
- Discourage baby-talk – 'she is a big girl now'!

Concentration and listening skills

- Reading sessions, as noted above.
- Board games or card games help concentration.
- Encourage your child to finish jigsaws.
- Stick to activities they enjoy, don't try to force activities.
- Keep in mind that sometimes diet can be linked to concentration difficulties.

Academic skills

- There really is no need to teach your child to read or write before they enter school.
- Help develop their fine motor skills, with lots of colouring, using scissors, lego games, threading beads, etc.
- Help them to recognise size, shape and colour.
- Develop their vocabulary by asking them questions and talking to them about what you are doing.
- Use words that they will be using in school (e.g. more/less; higher/lower; bigger/smaller; over/ under) does your child understand these concepts?
- Help your child to develop a love of learning, this will stand to your child much more than trying to develop formal reading and writing skills at a very young age.

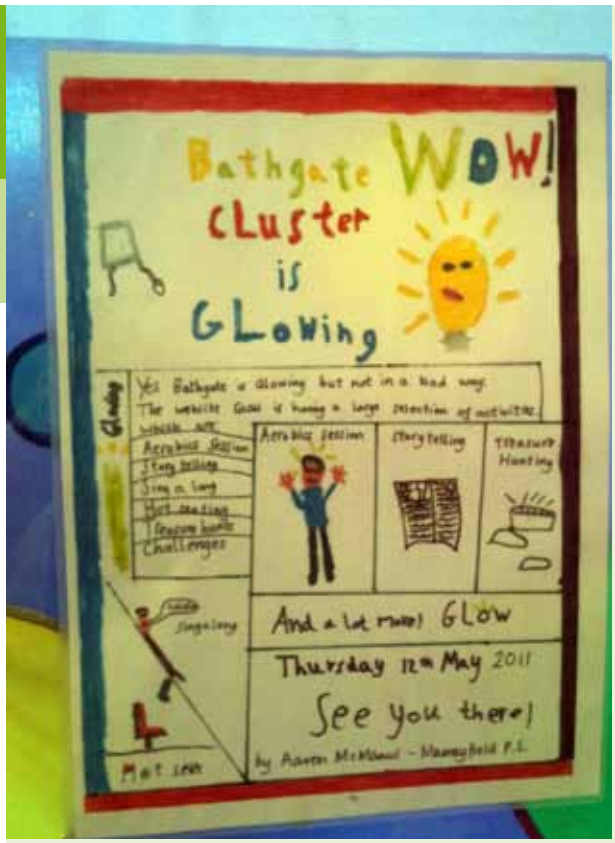
Remember once the child has developed the skill sets described above the academics will come more easily!

Good practice in supporting the transition to school

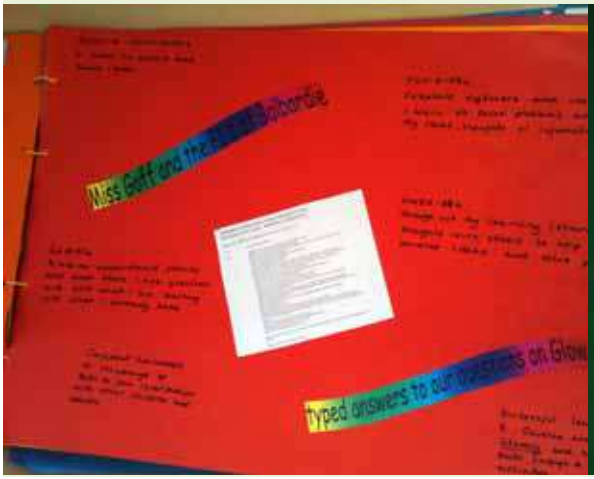
Tools have been developed to support the transition to primary school. Dr. Mary O'Kane, with the Centre for Social and Educational Research in Dublin Institute of Technology, has developed a useful 'Snapshot' tool which can be used by parents and early years services to profile the young child and help inform decisions about this transition. This is available in **Worksheet 10 Transition to School – Child's Snapshot Form** and can be used by services, parents and schools. There is also useful information as Gaeilge related to the transition to school in *An Traein* (Mhic Mathúna, 2011).

It may also be useful to consider actions used in other countries. In England and Scotland, projects are underway to help build continuity between schools and early years setting so that children have a smoother transition.

Case Study
GLOW



GLOW in Scotland is a technical project that links schools through technology. Students can have sessions using video and webcams. Some early years services are taking part in this, and the children preparing to enter school the next year 'meet' the children from the primary school over the internet. The older children read stories to the younger children, they share aerobics classes, the younger children ask questions of the older children about what to expect in school. Also, children who left the early years service and have already moved on to primary can talk with their friends back in the early years service. The photos shown are from Bathgate Early Years Centre, in Edinburgh, Scotland.



Transitions within the school day

For older children, research has highlighted the manner in which schools arrange the day into distinct blocks of time and space, which means that 'children [are] required to make a number of transitions throughout the day' (Skinner, in Brooker, 2008). Skinner argues that this 'over-differentiation' of time and place creates additional difficulties for some children, such as those with special needs. An example of effective handling of this is given in Section 6.

Value of positive feedback from teachers

Teachers may expect children to settle in quickly and become focused on learning. This can lead to the child receiving positive or negative feedback on their response to the transition. In a study conducted in the UK, the types of feedback were examined to illustrate the possible difference in feedback given between schools and early years settings:

> *…the study demonstrated clearly that children who had adapted well in their transition to school received high levels of positive ('rewarding' and' approving') feedback from their teachers, while children described by teachers as 'poorly adjusted' received mainly ('disapproving' or even' 'punishing') feedback on their efforts. One 'poorly adjusted' girl received 13 disapproving comments in her work during a single day, and overall more negative feedback was recorded than positive feedback.*
>
> (Brooker, 2008)

Positive feedback will reinforce those children who already have a degree of self-confidence and well-developed social and emotional skills. However, negative feedback may build a spiral of a belief that they themselves are at fault for a child who is already showing that they need more support. 'This belief leads them to attribute their difficulties to a defect in themselves about which they cannot do a great deal' (Black and William, in Brooker, 2008). This spiral may lead to later difficulties that may not be traced back to an ineffective transition.

Checking In: What is our Practice Regarding Major Transitions for Children?

- ✓ Have we developed our vision for children?
- ✓ What is our policy regarding children coming to us from home?
- ✓ Are there clear, agreed procedures that all staff use?
- ✓ What reflection tools do we use?
- ✓ How are these reflections used?
- ✓ Have we noticed any barriers to easing any transitions issues that come up, such as lack of time to plan and implement change?
- ✓ How do we resolve these?
- ✓ Are parents closely involved and supported?
- ✓ How do we know when the process of transition is complete for children?
- ✓ How do we prepare for children moving on to big school?
- ✓ What do we expect of these children in terms of becoming independent?
- ✓ Do we focus on teaching numbers, letters, Irish, rather than on the skills that will help a child cope on their own in the new setting, such as independence in self-care, and ability to problem solve with peers?
- ✓ Have we a planned programme to liaise with the feeder schools in the months preceding the move?
- ✓ How do we support parents?

Summary of Key Messages

- **Preparing for major transitions begins long before the actual date of the change.**
- **Early years educators can provide ample support and guidance for parents whose children will be undergoing a major transition.**
- **Understanding and providing a key person system will give continuity of care for each child through major transitions.**
- **Children need ongoing support though each major transition that they encounter.**
- **Children need to be consulted and included in decisions that affect them.**
- **Having clarity about practice helps to ensure that children are adequately supported through each major transition.**
- **Schools should be ready for all children rather than the expectation being on the child to be 'ready'.**

Transitions in Practice – Mini Transitions and Daily Routines

8

This section will look at:

- **Dropping Off Time**
- **Picking Up Time**
- **Transition within the Daily Routine**
- **Meal and Snack Times**
- **Personal Care Times**
- **Sleep and Nap Times**
- **Ideas for Between Times Transitions**

Transitions are a lifelong challenge for both adults and children; we all need strategies and support to negotiate transitions successfully.

(Evans, 2007)

Early years services will usually have a well-established routine or programme for daily activities, as described in Section 1. Seeing this routine in the context of the wider pattern of change in a child's life helps educators to appreciate the value of making the day run easily and smoothly, providing gentle and quiet transitions between each part of the day, whether in a full day care routine or in a stand-alone pre-school session.

Siolta Component 13.1 – sample descriptions of practice in a full day care centre:

- There is consistent staff cover for lunch times and only one staff member leaves the room at a time so that at least one staff member from that room is there at all times.
- When children are dropped into the centre in the mornings, staff are always the same in their room so they know who to expect.

There are many elements in the daily routine, such as pick-up and drop-off, commencing activities, any personal care needed, such as nappy changes for babies, a visit to the toilet or those arriving for breakfast, commencing play activities, snack times, and moves to outdoors. Services need to factor in adequate time for the transit between each activity, and consider how to minimise disruption and foster independence in the children so that they can be part of decision-making with adults and support for each other.

Transitions tend to be some of the most difficult and stressful moments in an early childhood [setting]... if you are feeling uncomfortable or frustrated during transition times, that is a sign that your current schedule may need to be revised to better meet the needs and developmental levels of the children.

(Gallick and Lee, 2011)

- How much time do children spend in transition?
- Count the number of transitions that occur through the day.
- How many minutes on average does it take for each transition?

Case Study

Snack Time

When reviewing observations carried out over the first few weeks of the new term, educators in the pre-school room noticed that there are a lot of tensions between the children just before snack time, when they have to tidy away all their work and educators clear space for snacks. They watch more closely and notice that some children are engrossed in activities and don't always hear snack time being announced.

At a team meeting, educators discuss this and decide to be flexible. They agree to have a table where the children who have finished with their work can begin their snack while the others are given more time to complete their work. They also enlist a child who is finished work to go around the other children with a picture representing snack time to let them know it is ready. They let the children gradually come to the snack table, and clear more space as it becomes available. This means that some children are finished before the others, and they are encouraged to move to the quiet corner where they can read or hear a story. Everyone gradually gathers there as they finish their snack and a much more relaxed atmosphere is seen. In this way, snack time becomes much more of a natural relaxed part of the daily routine.

Dropping Off Time

Joe is the dad of Kate who is two. Kate started with the service recently. Each morning, when Joe leaves Kate, both get very upset. Kate takes a long while to calm down after Joe leaves, and Joe often calls to see if Kate is OK.

- How are situations such as the one described above currently handled in a practical manner?
- What parental involvement procedures would you think useful to smooth these transitions for Joe and Kate, and other families?

The separation from parents in the morning is a potentially stressful situation for the young child, and in this situation it is important that both parents and caregivers adapt sensitively to the child's needs.

(Gunnar et al, 2012)

Children like predictability as knowing what to expect helps them to feel secure and safe. Many children, once the initial settling-in period is over, will happily run in with barely a backward glance at parents. Others need a lot of time to freely make the transition. Such children need their feelings respected and supported.

Services can help parents with this by informing them that this is normal for many children and by planning strategies to make it easy for both the child and the parent, who may be rushing to work or to care for younger siblings. It can help to look at the situation from the child's perspective:

- Young children often have single channel attention, or one-at-a-time thinking, up to about the age of seven. When presented with a busy entrance with lots of parents and children arriving, and staff greeting them, the overall busyness may overwhelm them.
- They may have some anxiety or insecurity that has not been addressed.
- They may not be fully awake if it is an early drop-off, or may be tired from a later bedtime than suits them.

Working together, parents and staff can analyse the reasons for the difficulties in the morning as they relate to that individual child. It may be that arriving a little earlier when it is quieter will resolve the issue. Or using the key person system, where someone will know the child and build a close relationship responsive to that child. Talking with the child at a time when feelings are calm, using open-ended questions and working on a solution together may resolve issues for other children. Exchanging information will support the process. **Worksheets 11 and 12 Daily Routines Communication Sheets** will help you with this.

Having a 'separation plan' is also useful, an example of this is set out in Appendix 5.

Consider using a version of an 'in and out' board. Perhaps have a basket with each child's name on a lollipop stick, and their picture attached. The child can find this when they arrive in the morning, and place it in a designated place, such as the 'in' shelf where it can stand up in some plasticine or a small holder.

Using a planned and consistent arrival routine will help all children. The need to make a formal transition into the first activities can be reduced or eliminated by incorporating the choice of activity for children into the handover with parents.

Picking Up Time

Services should have clear procedures regarding the adults who collect children and the child should be aware of who this will be each day. Developing a set routine for collections will help each child. As in the drop-off period, reducing the need for a major transition will relieve stress. It may be possible, for example, to bring coats and bags into circle time so that children can just quietly leave as their parent or carer arrives. The parent may or may not join in the circle for a short spell. Alternatively, perhaps outdoor time can be planned at this stage so that coats are on already.

For children who find it hard to finish up and leave, having a discussion with them, acknowledging their feelings, and deciding on solutions together, may resolve this problem.

Appendix 6 Supporting your Child at Pick-up Time may help parents in this situation.

Transitions within the Daily Routine

Eily is three. Eily is quiet and doesn't mix readily with the other children in the playschool. You have been appointed key person for Eily, and have decided to encourage her to join the noisy group at the sandpit.

How would you set about this?

Allowing time for transitions and reducing them as much as possible has been mentioned above. The daily routine will cater for all the events that need to happen. It should be regularly planned and refreshed in consultation with staff and children so that it is always meeting the needs of the current group of children. When the transition becomes part of the routine itself rather than a separate event to be managed, life can be easier for all.

Children may not be familiar with using clocks, but other visual aids are helpful in marking the passage of time, such as picture cards that the child can help to prepare. These can be used to show children when it is tidy-up time, or when a snack is ready. They can also be used by children to show that they are using an activity or when a piece of equipment is unavailable so that other children will be aware that they need to wait or choose something else.

Meal and Snack Times

Meal and snack times are a wonderful opportunity to encourage independence in children. This applies to both younger children, who are developing the capacity to feed themselves, and older children, who are developing skills in managing complex tasks.

Case Study

Little Feet and Sunshine Daycare

Little Feet, a full daycare centre, has two main eating times each day. In the pre-school, they have snack time during the morning session, and lunch time at the end of the pre-school period before the afterschool children come in. For the snack time, children are ordered to sit in designated seats as they finish their earlier activity. They are then supervised by one staff member, who gets them to sit still while another staff member takes the children's bags, gets out the snack their parents have provided and puts it on plates. These plates are handed to children by staff, who sometimes tell them in what order to eat the foods provided. At lunch time, the transition again begins with the sitting-down procedure. Staff hand out pre-prepared plates of food to the children and tidy up after them. As children finish, they have to line up at the door to go outdoors, and stay in place in their line.

Sunshine Daycare also has two main eating times each day. For snack time, a rota is observed with different children having different tasks. Two children help to chop pieces of fruit and pile them on large plates, which are then passed around the tables by another child, with each child taking a portion. Milk and water are put into small jugs on the tables and children can pour their own. Staff top up the small jugs. After snack time, another team of children help to tidy up, collecting plates, cups and jugs in large basins and bringing them to the kitchen. As children finish, they quietly leave the table and go back to their earlier activity or to a new one, there is open access to outdoors and children get their own coats and head out if they wish.

- Which service has a rights-based vision for children, with procedures that clearly stem from that vision?
- How does your practice manage these transitions and activities?

Personal Care Times

Transition to personal care times is another event that occurs in all services each day. These may be nappy changing times, toilet visits for older children, or hand-washing time either before meals or after being outdoors or with pets. It is necessary in some services to plan for trips to the toilet, such as in community facilities where there is no direct access for the children, which is not an ideal situation and needs to be managed in a manner that recognises this fact.

Personal care should be just that: personal to each child. For example, each infant will have a different personal routine around nappy changing requirements, rather than changing all together because of staff timetables. Toddlers can help get out their fresh nappy and use special steps to climb onto the changing area, giving them independence during this personal care time (this also

supports staff as it minimises lifting). Trips to the toilet for older children are an opportunity to master hand washing, self-care on the toilet and using toilet paper, which primary school teachers will appreciate later on, as will the child's family.

Gaining independence through toilet training is a major transition for children, and good experiences prior to this with personal care will support this process. This is also an ideal situation for close involvement and partnership with the parents of the child who is ready to be trained – the service and the parents will be able to spot signs of readiness, and support the child together.

Case Study Simon

Simon was three, and was often quite wound-up and anxious. He enjoyed water play, and would get deeply engrossed in pouring and splashing, which calmed him. However, the crèche he attended was busy, with a tight routine, especially at mealtimes. Staff would be pressed for time and would hurry children up so that all the children, and the staff, would get their turn to eat. Simon often resented leaving his water play and would launch into full-on tantrums, stiffening his body and kicking and screaming.

- How aware are staff of Simon's needs?
- How could staff manage this transition for Simon each day?
- How could the crèche manage its routine to ensure less pressure on staff at mealtimes?

Sleep and Nap Times

Sleep and nap times are other occasions which should be as child-centred as possible. Young infants will each have a different sleeping pattern and having the environment laid out in a way that supports this will help to meet the child's needs while facilitating staff cover. For toddlers, it may be easier to establish a set sleep or nap time each day, recognising and accommodating the fact that children need different amounts of sleep.

Some children will fall asleep each day at a set time whereas others give up their naps at an early stage. It is possible to accommodate both by having a regular nap-time routine with built-in strategies for dealing with each situation. Darkening the room, preparing by setting out the sleep mats in the same place for each child each day, singing some winding-down type songs and making sure all are comfortable and warm and know what to expect will all help to ensure nap time is a pleasant experience. Familiarity with the child's home routine for naps will help, perhaps having their comforters available. Some children will like a stroke or back rub.

Being prepared for those who can't sleep is useful. Evans (2007) suggest having a routine which can include reading to children in a low voice, but making sure they know there will be no pictures or big chat about the books. This is a good opportunity to read a longer book with chapters, such as *The Hodgeheg* or *Babe* (by Dick King Smith) or other book suitable for younger children. The more alert children will become familiar with the routine and look forward to the next chapter. It is also useful to have enough staff available, as it is quite stressful to have one child just dropping off with a little back rub when another one needs attention.

Ideas for Between Times Transitions

Educators will have developed many suggestions and ways of managing between time transitions, such as those outlined above. Tidy up time, snack times and preparing to go outside are all daily occasions that require some planning to ensure that the actual transition respects each child, such as those deeply engrossed in an activity, and helps the daily routine to flow well. Call and Response songs, either composed by the children in the service or familiar ones of old are useful, as are signals using something like bells or chimes which children can take turns using.

Call and Response songs are an ancient tradition across many cultures. They are often used by adults to help them establish a rhythm in doing a difficult task, such as the sea shanties used on ships when furling sails. They involve a lead singer doing the 'call' and then the group responding with the verse while completing the task. Many services use one for tidy-up time. Ideas for these are widely available through the internet.

Music in general can be a valuable tool that is a pleasant way to mark change – perhaps children can choose a song to sing for waiting periods, such as 'Heads and Shoulders, Knees and Toes', which is active but also allows for staying in one spot. Playing CDs is something that can be used judiciously, never as background 'noise' (it can prove confusing for children whose oral language skills are developing as they can find it difficult when there are too many sounds to discriminate and sort). However, used for a specific purpose like transitions, CDs can be useful, perhaps to sing-along or scaffold earlier learning.

Case Study

Going on a Bear Hunt

On Monday at story time the children and their educator read *Going on a Bear Hunt*. The next day, some of the children were talking about it, and the educator asked them would they like to enact it when they went outdoors. Some of the children spent time getting things ready during the free play session: they got a torch, some rope, made sure there were enough wellington boots, got a big cardboard box for the cave and another for the house. They painted these. The children asked the educator if they could bring their snack outside to have on their hunt. When it came near time to go out, they played a CD of the Bear Hunt song while they gathered everything and lined up and then, when they went outside, they set up the whole hunt before having their snack. After the snack, they went on their bear hunt to great excitement. Afterwards, they sang the song again while tidying up.

A wonderful resource for daily transitions is *I Know What's Next!* by Betsy Evans (2007), which discusses and shows many different activities and strategies for managing these. Some ideas it includes for 'between times' transitions are:

- Plan fun ways to move from one space or activity to another, supporting children as active, whole-body learners.
- Vary transition strategies to maintain children's attention.
- Begin large and small-group activities without waiting for the whole group to assemble. They will quickly join in when they see fun things happening.
- Use visual or verbal signals before and at the start of a transition.

Waiting times

While the need for waiting times can be minimised, it is not always possible to totally avoid them, so strategies to deal with them are useful. For example, making a circle instead of a line means that there is less pushing and jostling, or sitting in a circle is also good. Ask the children how they might like to manage the waiting time, always acknowledging feelings such as 'I know you feel it is hard to wait', or plan this with them at another time. Have a list of suggestions on cards and use this if an unexpected delay comes up.

Clean-up time

Clean-up time is another period in the day that presents an opportunity for learning independence, but can be missed in planning sessions as staff feel under pressure to get the place tidy before everyone goes home. Seeing this time as a mini-activity in itself and engaging the children will benefit everyone.

Case Study
Aoife

Aoife and her staff had a lively, busy pre-school. They encouraged free play, and children had lots of choice and opportunity to experience a wide range of individual and group activities. However, the staff had a clean-up routine that consisted of the children being grouped into a corner while a CD was played for them, supervised by one staff member. The rest of the staff would tidy up, put the chairs on the table, clean the floor and not allow any further play. The staff were under pressure to lock up the service at a set time each day. The children would go home as each parent arrived. Some days this worked well, but on a lot of days different children would act up, some restless and bored, some just wanting to finish their earlier activities. It was the time more than any other that children seemed to be challenging in their behaviour.

Aoife was working on implementing Siolta and discussed this issue with the staff. They decided to involve the children. They had a planning meeting with the children, and discussed the problem for them as well explaining how the staff saw the situation. The children expressed opinions about not liking to wait and also said they'd like to help tidy up. Following this, the staff agreed a rota of helpers with the children, and the list of jobs that needed to be done. They organised some smaller brushes and pans, and small basins with cloths. The children made signs to be placed beside their names each day at tidy up time, depending on the job that they would do. Staff looked up some 'Call and Response' songs, and changed the words to suit their service. Staff and children agreed on a time for this and a plan for putting on all coats and having a sit down circle with either a book or a song before going home. They tried this out for two months, and found that once the routine was established that the children responded to it well, obviously enjoying some tasks more than others!

Checking In: What is our Practice Regarding Programme and Daily Routine Transitions for Children?

- ✓ How does our curriculum support good practice around transitions?
- ✓ Do we use play and fun to move from one part of the routine to the next?
- ✓ How involved are the children in aspects such as preparing snack time, cleaning up?
- ✓ How do we minimise waiting times?
- ✓ How do we minimise transitions through the day?
- ✓ How do we deal with times such as gathering together, either to visit the toilets or go outside?
- ✓ What reflection tools do we use?
- ✓ How are these reflections used?
- ✓ Have we noticed any barriers to easing any transitions issues that come up, such as lack of time to plan and implement change?
- ✓ How do we resolve these?
- ✓ Are children consulted regarding the programme and routine?
- ✓ How often do we refresh and check that our routine supports all children, including new children?

Summary of Key Messages

- **Transitions within the child's day need to be recognised and supported.**
- **Particular care needs to be given to each aspect of the daily routine.**
- **Unnecessary transitions need to be reduced and removed.**
- **Children can help to plan the daily routine and be actively involved in decisions.**
- **There are resources and ideas for refreshing daily routines.**

Final Thoughts

We must learn to use the transitions in children's lives far more positively, with greater insight into their potential, rather than seeing transitions as problematic for every child.

Bennett, 2006

From the evidence presented, it is clear that a wider recognition of transitions is crucially important, as it touches on so many areas of children's development, such as their emotional and social well-being, and their long-term ability to adjust to life's challenges.

The growing body of research available is a testament to the importance of transitions. It is hoped that by giving an overview of this research, early years educators will feel encouraged to study the topic more deeply, and to consider their own practice and how it can be brought into tune with children's needs. The ideas and suggestions for practice will hopefully serve as a useful starting point for services to go further and use creative ideas both for managing transitions and for involving children and their families in consultation and decision making.

The moves towards greater harmony through the establishment of common working practices for children aged 0-6 years, for example through the emerging implementation of Aistear and Siolta, whether in an early years service or in a school setting, will in the future bear positive rewards for children. The transition between these hitherto disparate settings will be made easier for young children through an increasing continuity of care.

There are many resources being developed in the area of transitions, and some of these can be found in the appendices and worksheets that follow. It is hoped that in the future there will be a wealth of Irish material developed from the quality practices of Irish early years services. This will ensure that young children have a future where adults have established an atmosphere and context that supports their well-being and development, and that effectively addresses the continuum of the transitions process.

Worksheets

Worksheet 1

Routine Changes

Imagine you have a magic wand which can give you unlimited space and resources. Using the sample routine below, decide how you would reduce the number of transitions listed. See how few transitions you can achieve.

Sample routine for sessional service

- 09.30 Arrive, coats off, say goodbye to parent/carer
- 09.35 Free play period
- 10.00 Small group activity
- 10.20 Line up for bathroom visit
- 10.30 Snack time
- 10.45 Outdoor period
- 11.15 Planned activity, outdoors or indoors
- 11.45 Free play
- 12.00 Story/circle time
- 12.20 Coats, prepare to go home.
- 12.30 Home time

As a starting point, consider environment changes, good staff ratios, ample equipment resources.

Suggested routine

Would some or all of this be possible in your early years' service?

How could you make it happen, what changes would be required to facilitate a new routine with fewer transitions?

Worksheet 2

Children's Interests Record

Child's First Name: ..... Pronounced .....

Child's Surname: ..... Pronounced .....

Date of Birth: ..... Date of Entry to Service: .....

Address: .....

What are the languages spoken at home? .....

.....

What are the names of other family members and other significant people close to child? .....

.....

Has your child any previous experience of early childhood services/toy libraries/parent and toddler groups? .....

.....

Is your child used to playing with other children and does s/he enjoy this? .....

.....

How does s/he respond to situations and people who are new to her/him? .....

.....

Does your child have any particular play interests at the moment, or particular toys s/he likes to play with? .....

.....

What other things does your child show interest in or talk about? .....

.....

.....

Does your child enjoy and get involved in imaginative type play and/or activities such as drawing, painting, puzzles, counting, and building? .....

.....

Does your child enjoy books and listening to stories? Does s/he have any favourite rhymes, stories, videos or tapes? .....

.....

Worksheet 2 Continued

Children's Interests Record

Do you think your child's language development is proceeding well?

Do you feel his/her physical development is what you would expect for his/her age? If yes, do you have a garden which your child can play in, or when you go to the park? What does your child like to do?

Do you have any concerns or worries about your child's development?

How do you comfort your child when s/he is upset? Does s/he need any comfort toys?

What can the child do for her/himself, for example, simple dressing and undressing, holding a spoon?

Does your child sleep well at night?

Is there any other information you would like us to know in order to help your child settle and be happy?

Is there any more information you would like to know about the service and what your child will be doing?

Worksheet 3

The Rights of the Child

This worksheet focuses on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It can be used in a team setting, with colleagues or with fellow students.

The aim is to encourage early years practitioners and students to reflect in more depth on the different rights contained within the Convention. It will initiate discussion which will help practitioners to gain a better understanding of what the rights signify and what it means to be deprived of these rights.

Resource needed

Convention on the Rights of the Child poster (simplified version) outlining each of the rights, see Appendix 7 on page 138.

Method

Staff should break into small groups of 2-3 people. Each group reads through and discusses the various rights, and then picks out the four rights that they think are most important.

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....
4. .....

Each group then discusses their choices with other groups, comparing and contrasting similar choices and those that are different. You can consider:

- What motivated your choices?
- What would it mean for children in your service to be deprived of this right?
- How does your service recognise and use a rights-based approach?

Worksheet 4

Our Image of a Child

How do you and your colleagues see the Image of a Child? What is your team's common vision for the children with whom you work?

Using the following steps, perhaps at a team meeting, work with your colleagues and develop a vision that reflects the beliefs and values that shape your attitude to children and determine how you work with them. It is a good idea to include ancillary staff in this exercise.

Each person should bring a picture or image of a child to the meeting.

Write down as many words or phrases that describe what being a child means to you individually.

Depending on the number of participants, discuss first of all in pairs or groups of three what statements you agree upon. Then, as a whole group agree a final list of words and phrases. Agree on one image of a child from the pictures. Develop a statement together that begins something like:

We believe that early childhood…

Display your vision statement, with picture if you wish, somewhere for all to see near your entrance, and include in your parents' handbook.

Worksheet 5

Our Goals for Children

(Adapted from HighScope Educational Materials)

To help your service develop common goals, it is important to work together on what you all see as the most important things for children to be as they grow. It is also important to consider the children's opinions, and to consult with them as well.

You can revisit this each year or when there are major staff changes. It will be useful in reviewing and planning.

Stage 1: What we wish children to achieve or become

As with Worksheet 4 Image of a Child, you may undertake this exercise as a team. It is a good idea to include ancillary staff in this exercise. First of all each person reads the following list, and quickly chooses the five most important words for them:

I would like children to be:

Happy	Have a sense of humour	Do what people expect
Secure	Is a visionary	Courageous
Peaceful	Considerate	Tolerant
Spiritual	Courteous	Critical
Adventurous	Desires to excel	Domineering
Content	Emotional	Fault finding
Friendly	Fearful	Healthy
Generous	Good academically	Polite
Safe	Intelligent	Independent
Brave	Obedient	Questioning
Well-read	Dignified	Negative
Athletic	Good about detail	Physically strong
Good communicator	Self-confident	Rebellious
Fun	Caring	Remembers well
Affectionate	Socially well-adjusted	Self-sufficient
Good to others	Timid	Sincere
Careful	Far-seeing	Talkative
Self-confident	Adventurous	Versatile
Empathic	Competent in basic skills	Altruistic

Then in pairs, agree a list of five together.

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....
4. .....
5. .....

Worksheet 5 Continued

Our Goals for Children

Then either finalise a list of five with all team members or, depending on your numbers, agree a list of five between four people, and then with the whole group.

1. .....
2. .....
3. .....
4. .....
5. .....

These are the goals towards which you as a service are working.

Stage 2: Consult with the children

Choose a methodology to discuss with the children what they would like for themselves as they grow up. For older children, a group discussion may suit, perhaps with drawings. For younger children they may draw what they would like as they grow up, and tell you about the drawing, which you can record in their words. You could support the children to take photographs of what they like to do. Another way may be to have a large selection of photographs or images from newspapers and magazines which they can freely select from to help them illustrate what they want in their future.

Stage 3: Bring it together

Examine both children's lists and adults' lists. Consider any differences and any similarities. Develop a final list, in consultation with children and all participants.

Stage 4: Prepare a mission statement

Your mission statement for the year sets out what your service, including this group of children, wants for their future. Children's drawings can of course be included. Develop this as a group, consulting with the children. Your joint mission statement for the year can then be displayed alongside your vision, and shared with parents and carers.

P.T.O

Worksheet 5 Continued

Our Goals for Children

Stage 5: How your vision and mission will be realised

You can use the vision and mission to set out a series of statements, which will show how you will work and the steps that you will take to achieve the mission for the year.

For example, you might have goals in your mission statement such as

'Children will be supported to become adventurous explorers.'

and this might then be achieved by steps such as

'We will provide a rich outdoor environment that offers challenges for children suitable for their stage of development.'

and

'We will support children to manage risk, while ensuring any hazards are clearly identified and dealt with by staff.'

What we will do:

We will support children to .....

.....

Children here wish to .....

.....

and we will support this by .....

.....

Stage 6: Policy and Procedures

Check your policies and procedures to see if any need to be revised or changed in light of your fresh mission and goals. Especially check how your Transitions Policy can contribute towards the vision and mission.

Worksheet 6

Moments of Truth – Parental Involvement and Establishing a Relationship

Note each point at which a parent/carer comes in contact with your service and check what you provide at that point.

1. How do parents hear or know of your service?

2. How do parents first make contact with your service?

3. If first contact is a phone call, what is the procedure for answering calls, what is the voicemail message, how are people followed up?

4. If first contact is a visit, how easy is access to your service – parking, directions, finding you?

5. On their first visit, how are people treated – who do they meet first when they walk in the door, where do they wait, what do they see?

6. On the first visit, what information is provided, how easy is it to understand, can they take anything away with them, who do they meet?

7. What is the follow up if they decide to enrol their child?

8. Are enrolment forms easy to understand, is support provided for those with literacy or language issues?

9. How are parents supported in introducing their child to the service?

10. How do parents get to know staff?

11. How do parents get to know other parents?

Consider what each point of contact is like from the parent's point of view.

Worksheet 7

Thinking About What I Do and Becoming Reflective

Today/this week

I noticed… .....

.....

I wondered how I could do ..... better

I tried… .....

.....

I learnt… .....

.....

I didn't understand… .....

.....

I wasn't happy about… .....

.....

It occurred to me that … .....

.....

I wondered who could help me to … .....

.....

I want to find out more about … .....

.....

I felt .....

..... a lot of the time

I … .....

.....

.....

Worksheet 7 Continued

Thinking About What I Do and Becoming Reflective

Tomorrow/next week

I will try out… .....

.....

.....

I will look up .....

..... on the internet

I will read… .....

.....

I will watch… .....

.....

I will ask ..... about .....

.....

I will show… .....

.....

I will explain ..... to .....

.....

I will tell… .....

.....

I will think about… .....

.....

.....

I will learn… .....

.....

I will not be afraid to… .....

.....

Worksheet 8

Understanding Isolated Difficult Incidents

This worksheet can be used by you alone, with a colleague or with your manager to understand and learn from difficult events.

What happened? Describe the incident.

How did I respond right away?

What was the immediate outcome of the incident?

What did I do afterwards?

How did I feel during it?

How did I feel afterwards?

Were there any other later outcomes, perhaps with other people who weren't involved? How did I feel about these?

What were the possible causes of the incident?

What could I have done differently?

Am I clear about responsibilities in this incident?

What have I learnt from this incident?

What would improve things in the future?

What improvement action[s] can I plan, such as changing way of working, helping develop better policies and procedures for such events?

Worksheet 9

Action Learning – Method for Reflective Practice

Each member of the team or group describes a problem (1) and explains what they need from the group (2). Each page is then passed around the group, so that everyone gives a suggested solution to everyone else (3). These are discussed, and each person then lists what they will try out from the list (4). Results can be shared at the next team or group meeting.

1. Describe the problem, issue or question briefly (this is work related, could be some issue with a child or other work issues).

Describe anything you have tried so far?

2. What do you want to solve or have answered, what would be useful to you?

3. Ideas from group:

4. What ideas do you think you will use or try?

This Links with Siolta: (Standard Component)

Worksheet 10

Transition to School – Child's Snapshot Form

(O'Kane, Hayes, 2010 used with permission)

This form is to record the achievements and abilities of children making the transition from pre-school to primary school.

Name of Child: .....

Date of Birth: .....

Name of Pre-school: .....

Contact Phone Number: .....

Section 1: Language and Communication Skills

I can speak clearly and confidently: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can listen to and enjoy stories: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can use a good range of vocabulary: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐
I am able to speak up at news/circle time: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I make eye contact when speaking: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can recite rhymes and songs: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐
I enjoy pretend play with my friends: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can ask questions and ask for help when needed: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can answer the questions that I am asked: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐

Any comments you would like to add on this child's abilities in these areas: .....

.....

.....

.....

Worksheet 10 Continued

Transition to School – Child's Snapshot Form

Section 2: Social and Emotional Skills

I have the confidence to speak to visitors: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I am comfortable about showing my feelings: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can take part in activities: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐
I can mix and play happily with other children: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can co-operate and take turns with other children: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I get along well with my teachers: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐
I can share and solve problems with my friends: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I understand rules and routine: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I take pleasure in my own success: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐

Any comments you would like to add on this child's abilities in these areas: .....

.....

.....

.....

What do you want to solve or have answered, what would be useful to you? .....

.....

P.T.O

Worksheet 10 Continued

Transition to School – Child's Snapshot Form

Section 3: Independence and Self-help Skills

I can finish a task by myself: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can choose my own activity: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I am happy to try new things: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐
I can follow directions: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can use the bathroom and wash my hands: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I look after my things: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐
I can manage my lunch well: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I tidy up after myself: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can happily work alone or with friends: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐

Any comments you would like to add on this child's abilities in these areas: .....

.....

.....

.....

Worksheet 10 Continued

Transition to School – Child's Snapshot Form

Section 4: Thinking Skills

I can recognise my name: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I know my colours: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I know my shapes: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐
I can count to 5 or more: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can complete jigsaws: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can hold a pencil properly: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐
I can remember songs and rhymes: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I understand matching, sorting and ordering: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I am happy to learn: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐

Any comments you would like to add on this child's abilities in these areas: .....

.....

.....

Section 5: Fine and Gross Motor Skills

I have good hand-eye coordination: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can use a pencil or crayon to draw and write: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can thread beads and work on peg board: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐
I can use a scissors: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I enjoy sand and water play: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I have good balance: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐
I can run and ride a trike Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can hop and dance: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐	I can catch and throw a ball: Yes ☐ Still Developing ☐

Any comments you would like to add on this child's abilities in these areas: .....

.....

.....

Worksheet 11

Daily Routines Communication Sheet: Family Information

Child's name: .....

Date: .....

When did your child wake? .....

.....

When did your child last eat? ..... What and how much? .....

.....

Last nappy change? .....

.....

Have there been any recent changes in the family or child's routine? Give details. .....

.....

.....

How would you describe your child's mood? .....

.....

Special instructions or other information? .....

.....

.....

Do you have any news about your child OR have you noticed any changes in your child? .....

.....

.....

What can you report about your child's reactions to people? .....

.....

What is your child's favourite game to play? .....

.....

Worksheet 12

Daily Routines Communication Sheet: Staff Information

Child's name: .....

Date: .....

Routines:

Nappy changes/Toileting				Sleeping		Eating		
Time	Wet	BM	Dry	From	Until	Time	What	How much

News and activities:

Emerging language: .....

.....

Motor development: .....

.....

Reactions to stimuli and people: .....

.....

Favourite activities today: .....

.....

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Principles of Síolta

- Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right.
- The child's individuality, strengths, rights and needs are central in the provision of quality early childhood experiences.
- Parents are the primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her/his well-being, learning and development.
- Responsive, sensitive and reciprocal relationships, which are consistent over time, are essential to the well-being, learning and development of the young child.
- Equality is an essential characteristic of quality early childhood care and education.
- Quality early childhood settings acknowledge and respect diversity and ensure that all children and families have their individual, personal, cultural and linguistic identity validated.
- The physical environment of the young child has a direct impact on her/his well-being, learning and development.
- The safety, welfare and well-being of all children must be protected and promoted in all early childhood environments.
- The role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences is fundamental.
- The provision of quality early childhood experiences requires cooperation, communication and mutual respect.
- Pedagogy in early childhood is expressed by curricula or programmes of activities which take a holistic approach to the development and learning of the child and reflect the inseparable nature of care and education.
- Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child.

Appendix 2: Settling Children In

(from the *Diversity and Equality Guidelines*, Office of the Minister for Children, 2006)

Points to keep in mind when looking at the settling-in process

- First impressions are very important.
- Treating children with equality does not mean treating all children the same.
- Many families face daily discrimination and may fear that their child will have a similar experience within the service.
- It is not sufficient to consult with one member of a minority community to understand the needs of the whole community. Individual needs will be different.
- Communication barriers can affect the settling process for families and children. Non-verbal communication can mean different things in different cultures.
- If the environment shows diverse family backgrounds, languages and cultures, families will feel welcome and the first steps will have been taken in building trust.

Points to keep in mind regarding partnership with families

- Discrimination must be understood from the viewpoint of the person experiencing it. The cumulative effect of everyday discrimination is very damaging to the self-esteem and wellbeing of families and children.

Getting started

- Host information and discussion sessions with families on diversity, equality and anti-discrimination issues. Ensure meetings are family friendly, accessible and culturally sensitive (in terms of time and days chosen, language, literacy, refreshments served, accessibility of information, etc)
- It may be necessary to create safe settings for families to have the opportunity to raise issues.
- Find out and use correct terminology when addressing people. If unsure, ask individuals or representative organisations which term is preferred to describe a minority group (e.g. deaf, black, Traveller etc).
- If you have identified family issues, seek their input. For example, ideas on how their child's culture, religion or language can be represented and supported. Families may not wish the service to depict their religion or culture.
- Ask families if there is anything in your work with them that could be altered to support communication or participation.

Appendix 3 Developing a Transitions Policy

The following is useful when thinking about what all those involved with an early years service need from a transitions policy.

What is the Goal?	Sensitive planning and management of transitions, consistency in key relationships, liaison within and between settings and the close involvement of parents to ensure continuity of experiences for children (Siolta Standard 13). Relationships and routines which are consistent, predictable and responsive to support each child's sense of trust, security, and identity.
What are the External Requirements Under: ***Legislation?** ***Guidelines?** ***Best Practice?**	• Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 and Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) (Amendment) Regulations 2006 • Siolta Standard 13 • Siolta Research Digest Standard 13 • Supporting Quality Book 2 (Barnardos)
What Do the Children Need from this Policy?	Children need consistent key relationships, carefully planned introductions to all new settings, routines and experiences to help ease any anxiety they may have associated with change They need continuity and similarity of approach in the ways in which the important adults in their lives behave and interact, not only with them but also with other adults who are involved with them. They need individualised routines and practices to support their needs.

What Do Parents/Carers Need from this Policy?	Parents need to have their involvement in easing transitions for their child welcomed and supported. They need frequent sharing of information and goals and strong connections between them and the service to help ease transitions for their child.
What Do the Early Years Educators Need from this Policy?	Staff members need to ensure that parents are aware of the need to be involved with them in easing transitions for their children. They need frequent communication from parents about the child's routines, temperament, reactions, likes, dislikes, culture and ability to adapt to change.
What Does the Management Need?	Management needs to ensure that sensitive care and attention is given to planning and ensuring smooth transitions.
Related Policies	• Records and Record Keeping Policy • Parent Involvement Policy • Key Person Policy • Admissions Policy • Arrivals and Departures Policy • Interactions Policy

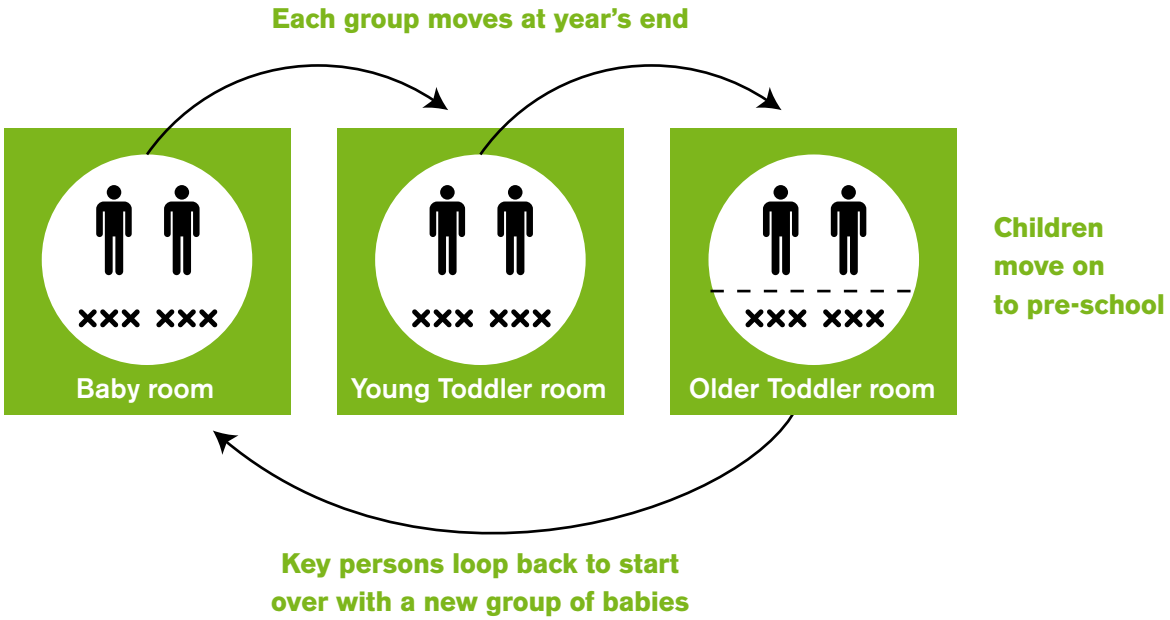
There is a sample Transitions Policy on the CD accompanying this book. This can be used as a template but should be adapted to suit your own service.

Appendix 4:
Continuity of Care: Looping System

(Adapted from Post and Hohmann, 2000)

Option 1: Multiroom with Looping

(Three 2-person teams, 3 rooms, 3-year looping)



This service has a baby room, a young toddler room, and an older toddler room.

Each room has a two-key person team with six young children of about the same age.

Each year, as the children in a given room grow older, they and their key person move on to the next room (for example, the former young toddlers move on to the older toddler room with their two key persons).

At the same time, children who have been in the older toddler room move on to pre-school, and their key person team then loops back to the baby room to begin caring for an incoming group of babies.

Appendix 5: Making a Separation Plan

(Used with permission – Evans, 2007 [Betsy Evans is a HighScope Consultant and Conflict Resolution Specialist, for more information see www.kidsandconflict.com])

Leaving parents at the beginning of the school day can be difficult for any child, no matter how loved and secure the child feels. Here are some ideas you can use to make this transition smoother for you and your child:

- Help your child anticipate what will happen each day of school. If your child is returning for a second or third year in the programme, let him or her know that there will be new children as well as some old friends in the group. Create a 'separation ritual or plan' to follow with your child each day as you drop him or her off. Keep your plan simple (for example, a story together followed by a wave at the window or a few minutes together at the breakfast table). The teachers will be glad to help you decide on a ritual, if necessary.
- Be consistent about following your plan. If your child is having a particularly difficult time, adding 'one more story' at the last minute will not ease these feelings; in fact, your child's sadness or anxiety may become stronger.
- If difficulties continue, reassess your plan with the teachers. Ask the teachers for suggestions and support – they have been through this many times with other children. Ask them what they do to support your child after you have left, making sure that your child's feelings are being fully acknowledged. Ask them what activities happen right after you leave so you can go over this with your child at home. (If you are still worried about your child after you leave, you can always call the school from your workplace to see how your child is doing.)
- Acknowledge your child's feelings yourself, both as you leave (if there are strong emotions) and at home when you discuss it. 'Acknowledge feelings' means to make simple statements that label the feelings. For example, say, 'It's really hard when we have to say goodbye at school. You feel really sad when I leave' or 'It makes you mad when I leave you at day care.' As you talk to your child, use a soft, calm voice and touch your child gently, to communicate that you understand.
- Pause and wait for your child's response. It is important to show you accept your child's feelings, even if his or her outbursts are upsetting to you. This acceptance will let your child know it is okay to have strong feelings about your leaving. With your encouragement your child will fully express feelings of sadness or anger – this usually helps children 'let go' of the feelings and begin to adjust to the new friends and environment.
- If your child is not upset, avoid pressuring him or her to be sad that you are going. Instead know that your child cares very deeply about you and that you can take pride in your child's independence.
- Know that your child cannot begin to cope with your leaving until you actually leave. After your last goodbye, it is important that you leave without further ado. Children become confident that they are okay only after they have experienced their own ability to carryon without you in the new setting.

Above all, show confidence in your child's ability to adjust by saying goodbye as planned. Do not sneak away while your child is distracted. This will make your child distrustful of the whole separation process.

Following these simple suggestions will ease this daily transition for most parents and children. If you need more help with separation problems, please feel free to talk with the educators.

Appendix 6:
Supporting Your Child at Pick-up Time

(Used with permission – Evans, 2007 [Betsy Evans is a HighScope Consultant and Conflict Resolution Specialist, for more information see www.kidsandconflict.com])

On most days, arriving to pick up your child at the end of the programme day is a happy, easy occasion. Your child has had a busy day and is eager to share what has happened or is tired and ready to go home right away. However, there are likely to be days when the transition does not go smoothly. Sometimes children are so engaged in a favourite activity that they refuse to leave. At other times, they may be so tired that they fall apart as soon as they see a parent. When your child is having trouble leaving, it may help to remind yourself that he or she – rather than being 'bad' – may just need some extra support and flexibility.

If your child is resistant to leaving, take a few moments to notice a project he or she made or hear about something that happened that day. This can help your child adjust to the need for leaving and depart without an upset. If your child greets you by dissolving in tears, keep in mind that this doesn't necessarily mean he or she is unhappy at the setting or has had difficulties during the day. This outburst tells you he or she feels secure enough to 'let go' now that you are there.

If your child is crying hard, give your full attention to his or her feelings by giving physical comfort and simply naming them: 'You're feeling really sad.' Avoid asking lots of questions; in particular, avoid asking the classroom adults if your child had a 'good' or 'bad' day. Your child's day has been filled with many activities – some may have been challenging and some have been fun and adventurous. When your child has calmed, ask the adults: were there any events today that are important for me to know about?

If you arrive to pick up your child and he or she is resistant to leaving, consider trying some of the steps listed below:

Six Steps for Solving Departure Problems

1. Be prepared for those times when your child is happily engaged and not ready to leave. When this happens, stay calm, and strive to be patient and see what is happening for your child.

2. Notice and name feelings that you see: 'You are really having a good time on the swing.' Or, 'It's hard to leave when you've had such a fun day.'

3. Observe carefully what your child is doing, taking in information about what is causing the departure problem. Ask the child about his or her activities. Say, 'We need to leave soon. What's the problem? What's making it so hard to leave?'

4. State the problem from both your perspective and the child's: 'We have a problem to solve - we need to leave soon, and you're having a really good time on the swing.'

5. Ask your child to help solve the problem and be willing to negotiate in whatever small way is possible: 'What do you think we can do to solve this problem, since we do need to leave soon.' Listen to your child's ideas. Be prepared to acknowledge feelings again: 'I know you'd really like to stay for a long time, and we do need to go soon.' If the child doesn't suggest an idea that can be negotiated, like 'I'll swing two more times' or 'Give me three more minutes,' give a suggestion: 'Can I tell you my idea?' Wait for your child to say yes - he or she will then be more apt to really listen to your idea. You might say, for example, 'My idea is that we will sing 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' while you are swinging and when the song is over, we will leave. Shall we sing that song or another one?'

6. When you and your child agree on a solution, encourage and support this with a simple and enthusiastic descriptive statement: 'Wow, we figured out the problem together! We each had ideas and now we've agreed on a solution!'

Sample Parent-Child Discussion

If departures are a persistent problem, discuss the difficulty you are having with your child's teachers and see if they have any insights. Then discuss the problem with your child in the morning or at the end of the day when your child is rested . and not distracted by other activities (rather than during the departure time). The goal of the discussion is to give your child's feelings a thorough listening. The discussion may also result in a specific idea for a solution, but sometimes the solution is just that the child needs to know you understand what is he or she is feeling at these times.

The discussion might sound something like this:

{*At a neutral time, not during pickup time.*}

Jamie's dad: {*in a calm voice*} Jamie, I've noticed that when I come to pick you up at the end of the school day it's really hard for you to leave. Sometimes you become quite upset about leaving. What is happening for you? {*He pauses to listen for Jamie's description of the problem.*}

Jamie: Well, I don't like to leave 'cuz I'm having fun.

Dad: I am so glad that you're having fun at school. You really seem to like it there.

{*They discuss what Jamie likes to do at school for a few more minutes.*}

Dad: So it's hard when I come to get you, because you're still having such a good time and I need to leave quickly to pick up your sister. What do you think we could do to make pickup time easier?

Jamie: Let someone else pick me up.

Dad: But Mom is still at work, so there's nobody else who can come.

Jamie: Maybe I can have five more minutes.

Dad: Okay, five extra minutes of play time after I get there, then we'll leave quickly. That's how we'll solve the problem?

Jamie: Yep.

Dad: And, is there something we can do to make it more fun to leave? {*He pauses, waiting for Jamie's ideas. Jamie does not respond.*} Hey, I have an idea, do you want to hear it? *Jamie nods yes.* There are different ways we can go to the gate. We can walk to the gate holding hands and skipping, or we can race to the gate. What would you like to do?

Jamie: Let's race!

Dad: Yes, let's try that tomorrow!

Appendix 7: Rights of the Child

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

In Child Friendly Language

"Rights" are things every child should have or be able to do. All children have the same rights. These rights are listed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Almost every country has agreed to these rights. All the rights are connected to each other, and all are equally important. Sometimes, we have to think about rights in terms of what is the best for children in a situation, and what is critical to life and protection from harm. As you grow, you have more responsibility to make choices and exercise your rights.

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Sources of Further Information

Barnardos' Training and Resource Service
Christchurch Square, Dublin 8
T: 01 4549699
E: resources@barnardos.ie or training@barnardos.ie
www.barnardos.ie

Border Counties Childhood Network
M:Tek Building, Armagh Rd, Monaghan
T: 047 72469
E: info@bccn.ie
www.bccn.ie

Childminding Ireland
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T: 045 880400
www.hse.ie (See local telephone directory or www.hse.ie for the HSE authority in your area for relevant numbers)

High/Scope Ireland
c/o Early Years, 6c Wildflower Way, Apollo Road, Boucher Road, Belfast, BT12 6TA
T: 0044 (0) 289 0662825
E: Margaretf@early-years.org

Irish Refugee Council
2nd Floor, Ballast House, Dublin 2.
T: 01 7645854
E info@irishrefugeecouncil.ie
www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
24 Merrion Square, Dublin 2
T: 01 6617177
E: info@ncca.ie
www.ncca.ie

Pavee Point (Traveller's Centre)
46 North Great Charles Street, Dublin 1
T: 01 8780255
E: info@pavee.ie
www.paveepoint.ie

Pobal
Holbrook House, Holles St, Dublin 2
T: 01 5117000
E: enquiries@pobal.ie
www.pobal.ie

Contact details for City/County Childcare committees can be found on www.pobal.ie/childcare

Details on Childminders' Advisory Services can be found at http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find_a_Service/Children_and_Family_Services/Pre-school_Services/CHildminder_Advisory_Service_/

design_www.reddog.ie

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