

A “Fish in  
Water”

The Child’s  
Voice

## A "Fish in Water": The Child's Voice

A child who feels like a 'fish in water' is comfortable in their surroundings, they have a feeling of belonging, familiarity and know what is expected of them.

Not all children's past experiences will be the same. It's important to acknowledge that these experiences or trauma will add another layer of complexity to transition.

Children's experiences and memories, views and feelings must be respected and responded to.

It is the adult's responsibility to tune into the child, taking their lead. This allows the child to feel a sense of security and control during times of change.



A 'Transitional Object' is a special toy or object and helps the child recall a sense of comfort and security at times of stress.

*Manning-Morton & Thorp, 2003*

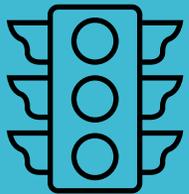
Security and a sense of belonging contributes to inner wellbeing, security and identity.

*Carr et al. 1996*

## The three main stages of transition

Gould (2012) outlines three main stages of transition;

1. The trying to let go stage
2. The being uncertain stage
3. The taking hold stage



### 'Trying to let go'

This stage occurs as children begin to prepare to leave a familiar situation. This can lead to feelings of sadness and confusion.

Children in this stage of transition may experience a re-emergence of habits such as thumb sucking or regression in toileting.

They are likely to experience difficulties in self-regulating resulting in strong emotional and behavioural responses.

### 'Being uncertain'

At this stage children may be unsure of what happens next, heightening their feelings of worry.

A child's brain is hypersensitive to perceived threats, such as being left by their caregiver.

During this stage, the role of a warm, nurturing and consistently available Key Person is paramount.

Being clear about routines of the day can also reassure children.

### 'Taking hold'

During this stage children need to be clear about what is expected of them, as well as receiving plentiful praise and acknowledgement.

Providers should focus on supporting children to gain confidence and become comfortable with routines and expectations.

Consistency at this point in the process is key.

“We can never remind ourselves too often that a child, particularly a very young child and almost totally dependent one, is the only person in the nursery who cannot understand why he/she is there”

*Goldschmeid and Jackson (1994)*

Effective and successful transitions support children to learn positive ways of coping with change. These children are more likely to cope well with change in childhood and throughout life.

*Gould (2012)*

“A young child on familiar territory at home or in a nursery is likely to feel secure and to be confident and competent. Any move means that a child is emotionally challenged”

*Dowling (2010)*

## In practice....

### Being held in mind

As children move onto something less familiar they need to feel secure and 'held in mind' by the adults around them. Practitioners can foster this sense of security by; building knowledge of the child during visits, introducing setting transition objects that can travel with the child, planning for Key Persons to be 'available' consistently during the initial stages of settling.

### Explore feelings with children

*How do you feel about the changes?*

*What are you most looking forward to?*

*What do you think it will be like?*

*Are you worried about anything?*

**Consider using Signs of Safety tools to capture children's thoughts and feelings.**

[Signs of Safety » Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership \(suffolksp.org.uk\)](https://suffolksp.org.uk)



### Counting down to new starts

Together with children create a 'timeline' to help them understand how many days are left until the start of something new. You could mark off each day – or even add fun things to do and see as the countdown progresses, building a sense of excitement and anticipation.

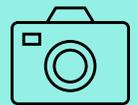


### Using visuals to support children's understanding of change

Consider introducing a visual timetable which includes pictures, symbols or photos of new routines, key adults, new environments. This can help children develop a sense of familiarity.

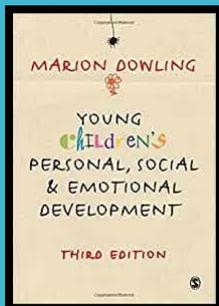
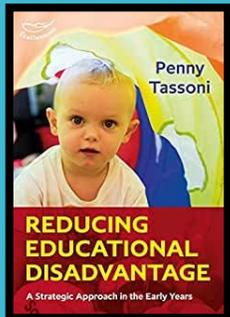
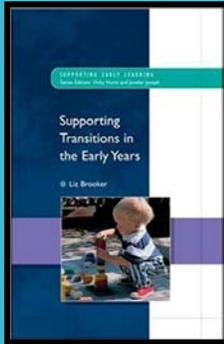
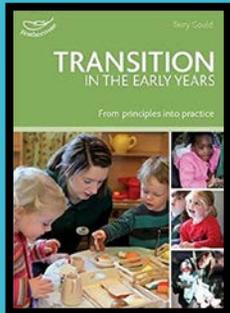
Visit for some further ideas

<https://connectability.co.uk/visuals-engine/>



## Pause for Reflection

For more information consider looking at the resources below.



Consider as a team.....what does transition feel like for a child in your setting?

The potential impact that poorly supported transition can have on children's learning and wellbeing.

What does being 'settled' look like? Does it look this way for every child?

The emotional responses children demonstrate through their behaviour during the initial stages of transition.

Your setting's expectations of how and when a child may 'settle'.

What does being the 'newbie' feel like?